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PUBLIC OPINION IN WAR TIME

BY GEORGE CREEL,

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Now more than at any other time in history the importance of public opinion has come to be recognized. The fight for it is a part of the military program of every country, for every belligerent nation has brought psychology to the aid of science. Not only has Germany spent millions of dollars on its propaganda, but it has been very vigorous in protecting its soldiers and civilians from counter-propaganda. We are highly honored by having both Austria and Germany establish a death penalty for every representative of the Committee on Public Information, and imprisonment and execution are visited on everyone who is found in possession of the literature that we drop from airplanes or that we shoot across the line from mortars, or that we smuggle into the countries by various means.

Any discussion of public opinion must necessarily be prefaced by some slight attempt at definition. Just what do we mean by it? A great many people think that public opinion is a state of mind, formed and changed by the events of the day or by the events of the hour; that it is sort of a combination of kaleidoscope and weathercock. I disagree with this theory entirely. I do not believe that public opinion has its rise in the emotions, or that it is tipped from one extreme to the other by every passing rumor, by every gust of passion, or by every storm of anger. I feel that public opinion has its source in the minds of people, that it has its base in reason, and that it expresses slow-formed convictions rather than any temporary excitement or any passing passion of the moment. I may be wrong, but since mine is the responsibility, mine is the decision, and it is upon that decision that every policy of the committee has been based. We have never preached any message of hate. We have never made any appeal to the emotions, but we have always by every means in our power tried to drive home to the people the causes behind this war, the great fundamental necessities that compelled

a peace-loving nation to take up arms to protect free institutions and preserve our liberties.

We had to establish new approaches in a great many respects to drive home these truths. We believed in the justice of our cause. We believed passionately in the purity of our motives. We believed in the nobility and the disinterestedness of our aims, and we felt that in order to win unity, in order to gain the verdict of mankind, all we had to do was to give facts in the interest of full understanding. It may be said that there was no great necessity for this—that this war was going on for three years before America entered it—but I cannot but feel that on April 6, 1917, there was very little intelligent understanding of fundamentals, for those three years had been years of controversy and years of passion—two things that are absolutely opposed to intelligent public opinion. You had your pro-Allies, you had your pro-Germans, you had your people who thought war was a horrible thing and who shrank from it without grasping the great significances involved; and so on the day we entered war we had a frazzled emotionalism, with people whose sensibilities had grown numb by very violence. We had to approach people to try to drive home to them some great truths.

Now, the press did not lend itself to our purposes in any large degree, because the press by its very constitution is not an interpretive or educational factor. The press chronicles the events of the day—it dies with the day that gives it birth—and so as far as historical record is concerned, so far as interpretation is concerned, so far as educational needs are concerned, we had to establish a new medium. So we called together three thousand historians of the country for pamphlet production, to set down causes in black and white, to put it so simply that a child could grasp just what we meant by democracy, just what we meant by freedom of the seas, and just what we meant by international law; so that people can read it and understand, and instead of being filled with a cheap and poisoning hate, they may be filled with a tremendous resolve, a great determination, that will last, not for a day, not for a week and not for a year, but until such time as a settlement is won as will forever safeguard our liberties and our aspirations.

There was also the spoken word that had to be organized. We had to try to substitute for the passions of the curbstone the logic and the reason of the platform, and so we formed the Four

Minute Men campaign, so that today 50,000 of them are receiving budgets of material and going out through moving picture houses all over the land preaching the gospel of America's Justice. We organized the speaking of the country, trying to bring some order out of oratorical chaos. We have brought men of every nationality from the trenches to speak to the people, and we have sent men from coast to coast, so that people might be brought face to face with the truth, not by controversialists, but by those who had seen, by those who actually knew what war meant, those who knew what defeat meant, and those who knew the necessity of victory. These were the fundamentals of the case, of which we tried to build foundations upon which to erect our house of truth.

Then there was the necessity also of giving people information. There has been nothing so distressing to me as this absurd assumption on the part of a large number of people that the Committee on Public Information is a censorship and interested in suppression rather than expression. We do not touch censorship at any point, because censorship in the United States is a voluntary agreement managed and enforced by the press itself. The desires of the government with respect to the concealment of its plans, its policies, the movement of troops, the departure of troops, and so on, go to the press upon a simple card that bears this paragraph: "These requests go to the press without larger authority than the necessity of the war-making branches. Their enforcement is a matter for the press itself." I am very glad and very proud to be able to say that this voluntary censorship has a greater force than could ever have been obtained by any law.

At every point we have tried to stimulate discussion, even to organize discussion. Aside from the disclosure of military secrets of importance, aside from any protest that is liable to weaken the will of the country to continue this war, or that may interfere with the prosecution of this war, we stand for the freest discussion that any people in the world ever had. I can conceive of no greater tragedy than that, out of stupid rages, out of the elevation of the mob spirit above reason, discussion should be stifled.

Just as we assembled historians to prepare pamphlets, trained speakers to form the Four Minute Men, so did we gather together the artists of the country to draw posters, and under the leadership of Charles Dana Gibson, the billboards of the country are filling

with posters as beautiful as they are effective. We mobilized the advertising experts of the nation, and today every great advertising man in the United States is working for the Committee on Public Information, preparing the matter that goes into periodicals and on the billboards, and contributing millions in free space to the national service.

We have realized the necessity for specialized service. It was soon seen that we had to devise departments that would prepare matter for the rural press, for the religious press, for the labor press, for the magazines, and so on. We had to gather together the essayists and the brilliant novelists of the land—it was a proposition of touching up the high lights—to lay before the people the truth. Today 50,000 men and women are giving their time without money, without thought of reward, to the service of the government. Whenever the Committee on Public Information is attacked I think of these thousands of volunteers who are giving so freely of their service, and any slur at them is a blow in the back, a cowardly assault upon those who are serving behind the lines with as much devotion as the soldiers in the trenches.

Aside from the English speaking people of the United States, we have had to pay attention to the foreign language groups. Somebody once said that people do not live by bread alone; they live mostly by catch phrases. For long we have had the theory in this country that we could dismiss our responsibilities to the foreigner by glib references to the melting pot, but every man of intelligence knows that the melting pot has not melted for years. Foreigners came to this country with their eyes upturned to the flag, with the hope that they were coming to a land of promise, and we let them land at the dock without an outstretched hand to meet them. In one month that I remember, twenty thousand agricultural workers drifted into sweatshops in industrial centres near the seaboard, while all the rich acreage of the west called to them. No aid was given to them whereby they could buy railroad tickets to help bring them in touch with opportunity. They were simply dumped into the Ghettos of the big cities. We let sharks prey on them, we let poverty swamp them, we did not teach them English, and we forced them to establish their own foreign language church and their own foreign language institutions, and today when we need them and call upon them, we find we are called upon to pay for the utter neglect of the last twenty-five years.

We lost Russia. Why? Because thousands of people went back from the Ghetto of New York to Russia, and all they ever knew of America was the wretchedness and sordidness of the East Side, and they told them in Russia that America was a lie, a fake democracy, that there was no truth in us. They described America as they saw it, never having had a chance to come in touch with the bright promise of the land.

It was our task to repair the blunders of the past. We went into every foreign language group—among Hungarians, among the Greeks, among the Poles, among the Jugo-Slavs, the Cyecho-Slovaks, and a score of other nationalities that were seldom heard of before until this war came.

We organized loyalty leagues in these groups. We had to get speakers in their own language. We had to go into the factories and hold noon meetings. We had slips put in their pay envelopes, and in a hundred other ways we had to drive home the meaning and purposes of democracy. We have pointed out that democracy was not an automatic device but the struggle everlasting; that there is no evil in our national life that cannot be cured at the polling place; that the ballot was their sword, their remedy for every injustice; that all they needed to bring about the 100 per cent perfection for which we struggle was intelligence and education; and that if there were failures it was just as much their fault as it was the fault of the American born. The remedy for everything lies in a better and finer appreciation of the duties of the citizen. While we are driving home the truths of the war, this great Americanization work that we are carrying on is building foundations under the union. That is the thing to do—bring them into closer touch with American life.

What we are doing in this country we are doing in practically every other country on the globe. We are trying to "sell" America to the world. We have been the most provincial people that ever lived, the most self-satisfied people; we have always been sufficient unto ourselves, and the very fact that other people did not speak our language was accepted at once as a proof of inferiority. We had little touch with other countries, knew very little of them, and they knew less of us. All Europe ever knew about us was our earthquakes and our cyclones and the fact that we lynched darkies in the south—that we were a race of dollar grabbers, a race of money

makers. So we had to begin to develop communication with them, to get in closer touch with them.

Our work has been educational and informative. Much has been said in praise of German propaganda, but from the first our policy has been to find out what the Germans were doing, and then not to do it. Rottenness and corruption and deceit and trickery may win for awhile, but in the long run it always brings about its own inevitable reaction. What we are doing in foreign countries is being done openly. What we are trying to do is to bring home to them the meaning of American life, the purposes of America, our hopes and our ambitions.

We go in first with our news service. I found that the wireless here was not being used to any large extent and immediately began sending a thousand words a day of American news. We send it out from Tuckerton to the Eiffel Tower, and from France it is sent to Switzerland, to Rome, to Madrid and to Lisbon. We send to London and from London to Russia, to Holland and to the Scandinavian countries. From Darien it is flashed to the countries of South America. It goes from New York by telegraph to San Diego, and from San Diego by wireless to Cavite; from Cavite to Shanghai, from Shanghai to Tokio. So we cover the whole world today with our American news. That is the best propaganda possible because it tells them what we are doing and what we are thinking.

We have sent to all these countries great motion picture campaigns, putting them out through the established theatres, or hiring our own theatres. These motion pictures set forth the industrial and social progress of the United States, our schools, condition of labor among women and children, the houses where our working people live, our sanitariums, the way we take care of the sick, our schools, and women voting in enlightened states like Colorado. We show them our war progress, how a democracy prepares for battle, all its thousands of youngsters coming from their homes, clean-eyed, straight-limbed, walking into training camps, and the splendid democracy of it. We show them our factories, our grand fléet, our destroyers and submarines, and we send those pictures all over the world.

We have our representatives trying to find out what the people are most interested in in America, and then we send people from America to these countries to make speaking tours. We find out

what pamphlets will appeal to them and then we send those pamphlets from house to house, and we use airplanes in dropping messages in enemy countries. We had three printing plants in Russia at one time getting out material in all dialects of Austria-Hungary and sent it across by planes and by messengers to all the oppressed nationalities of Austria-Hungary.

So that the work that is carried on by the Committee on Public Information is not a censorship and never has been a censorship. It is a medium of expression. It is the medium through which the government is trying to bring home to all the people of the world what America means and what we fight for.

We do not want a public opinion that is based on the happenings of the moment. We want a public opinion that springs from the heart and soul—that has its root in the rich soil of truth. And this fight is going to win because it is a fight for truth, because we have nothing to be ashamed of. The other day, when asked the question, I said I had no sympathy with the conscientious objector, because I thought this war was holy enough to enlist the devotion of every man, whatever his religion. We waited three years, going to the very ultimate of humility, to prove our devotion to peace, and we drew the sword only when the seas were filled with our dead, when international law was set aside, when torch and bomb were applied to our industries, and when it was seen that the German government was dead to honor and decency. Having drawn the sword, being confident of the high motives for which we stand, we will never sheathe it until the heights of our determination are gained.

We are perfectly willing to have peace discussed. We are never going to shut our ears to peace, but there cannot be mention of any peace that savors of compromise. You can compromise questions of territory, questions of commerce and economic disputes, but you cannot compromise eternal principles. President Wilson's motive for entering this war was to establish certain solemn rights of ours for which every man of us must be willing to die and should be ready to die. This fight we are making all over the world today, this fight for public opinion, is a fight that is not going to be won until every man, woman and child in the United States here at home is made to realize that they are called to the colors as much as the sailor and soldier,

This is an irritating time in American life; it is the hour of preparation. We have not known the glory of the firing line yet to any extent. All we have known is the sweat and drudgery of getting ready. There have been failures and discomforts and inconveniences, but there is this to remember; we are here safe at home. While thousands of boys, our best and bravest, are going to France to offer their lives on the altar of liberty, the worst any of us can know is irritation.

When people complain about the annoyance of wheatless days and the fuel situation, and how intolerable it is to have to give up this or that, and how the trains are not running on time, how everything is going wrong, and all like pettinesses, let them remember Belgium and Serbia, and realize that unless we stand together shoulder to shoulder, heart to heart, in one tremendous brotherhood, big enough to look over every little, rotten thing, big enough to rise over peevishness and meanness, we are going to know the same fate as Belgium and Serbia. What we want in this country today is not the careless indifference that will overlook defects, for criticism is the most wholesome corrective in the world. But let care be taken that the criticism is constructive and that it is not put forward to conceal partisanship and other unutterable meannesses.

As for the censorship on free speech, it is not imposed by Washington, but by the intolerances and bigotries of individual communities. The government is not responsible for mobs that hang innocent men, that paint houses yellow and that run up and down the country trying to crush honest discussion. Norman Angell and E. K. Radcliffe, two of the brightest minds of all England, have been here all winter telling truths about England from the extreme radical viewpoint, and yet you do not find those men figuring on the front pages. The censorship that stops them is not of the government but proceeds from the prejudices of the press.

It is very easy to talk about the absurdities of censorship. In our voluntary agreement with the press of America, we asked that the arrival and departure of ships be not announced, because as far as able we want to try to protect them from the submarine. That may be a foolish way, but we are going to stick at it until we get a better way. Not even for the satisfaction of a news item are we going to endanger American lives. We ask also that they shall not mention the arrival of foreign missions and their train movements

while in this country, in order to protect our guests as far as possible. The German government does *not* know how many men we have in France. It is all very well to say "the enemy knows, anyway," but there is no use in putting information on his breakfast table. We may be stupid about these things, but where lives of men are concerned we are not going to put news items above those lives, the lives of those men over in France. Certain items have been stopped by the able censorship from going abroad. And there will be others stopped, because while it is one thing to let the people of this country have all the information it is another thing to give aid and comfort to the enemy. When they say that our war preparations have broken down, let the facts be stated and debated here at home; but we do not want that sort of talk to get into Germany. When any man declares that "the war progress of the United States has stopped; everything is a failure, and we cannot come to the aid of the Allies in any degree, and everything that has been done is futile;" and such statements are put in the papers of Germany it is worth a million men to them, and they are not going to obtain them if we can help it. I am in favor of having all possible condemnation heaped on failures—but do not let us use every failure to tear down the whole structure of accomplishment.

If we have had failures we have also had our splendid victories. Nobody ever says one word about the fact that in less than a month after the declaration of war we overturned the policy of one hundred and forty-one years by the enactment of the selective service law; nobody says a word about our enrolling 10,000,000 men without friction, or a word about the wonderful record of the exemption boards; nobody says a word about the completion of the cantonments within 90 days after the driving of the first nail; nobody says anything about there being no scandal with regard to the food furnished our soldiers; nobody says a word about our medical service—how we gathered 12,000 doctors that give these men finer care than they ever received as individuals; no, nobody says a word about all this—just the failures are talked about. Nobody says a word about the difficulties that had to be overcome when we began sending our men over to France; how after they arrived, there was not a dock to give them and not a train to use.

That is no criticism of France or England. Their own tasks absorbed every energy and resource. Our men had to build their

own docks; they had to build hundreds of miles of railroads; and they had to go into the virgin forests and cut down trees in order to make their barracks. They had to mobilize engineers, foresters, railroad men and construction men as well as soldiers—all this tremendous machinery of industry had to be created over there so as not to interrupt the war preparations of France or England; and the stream of men going across the Atlantic today exceeds the expectations of England and France and is a source of amazement to them.

People will tell about our failure to produce guns here in America at once, but they do not say anything about the fact that we selected the best foreign models, and gave contracts for their production in English and French factories so that we could give them money and give them work, and how we went to work in the meantime and produced the best machine gun in the world today—the Browning. They do not say a word about these tremendous accomplishments—how a nation is straining every energy to help in a great way and to the very best of our ability, but they take the aeroplane situation, where certain inefficiencies were shown, and they harp on it in order to throw doubt and confusion upon every other war preparation. Let us go after the failure, let us remedy it, let us have criticism, but let us not tear down the whole structure of achievement when we have to replace a defective brick.

FREEDOM OF DISCUSSION IN WAR TIME

BY NORMAN ANGELL,
London, England.

I propose to deal with one phase only of the problem of the mobilization of the public mind. It is this: "What degree of freedom of public discussion will best fit a democracy to wage war effectively?"

It is not merely, or perhaps mainly, a governmental question, but one which confronts newspapers and bodies like universities and churches; one of its most important aspects is that of personal relationships. I shall not enter into the discussion of any proposed legislation, nor touch in any way on the attitude of the government.