

THE GOVERNMENT TRIES PROPAGANDA

THE COMMONWEALTH of the Philippines has adopted a queer weapon—the strangest so far in its armory—to fight unrest and bring about peace and contentment among the masses. Americans harshly label it as propaganda. Germany's Dr. Goebels qualifies the like of it as the "proper presentation of the truth." Our own officials use neither term; to them it is nothing but a *campaign* to bring the government closer to the people.

Propaganda Vs. Unrest

A large and competently staffed Information Board handles one end of this enterprise for the government; a squad of constantly travelling department secretaries, and the President, bent on seeing to it that the Commonwealth is published in the right way, take charge of the other end.

Radicalism in the island is being fought relentlessly today by the government—terror with terror, force with force, propaganda with propaganda.

Five cabinet members, armed with orders from the President, take turns—sometimes jointly—in pushing through the propaganda campaign.

If you are a poor tenant, and you have taken the notion that something somewhere is wrong—particularly with regards to the present order of society—or you have allowed yourself to be banded with fellowtenants for a common cause, very likely you have heard of the government propaganda already.

You probably have attended no less than three public

meetings already and in all three meetings you have been told that President Quezon is magnificent statesman, that the Commonwealth under his capable administration is a success, that you should place explicit faith in him that he has the interest of the common tao at heart, and that everything will be all right with you.

You have been told, too, that since the Commonwealth was inaugurated, quite a number of laws have been enacted by your National Assembly and promptly signed by your President, to ameliorate the lot of the poor. The sum of ₱1,000,000 has been placed at the disposal of the poor people who may want to go to Mindanao to secure their own landholdings; the tenancy law has been modified to suit your needs, and so on.

Soothing Words

Well paid orators of the government, appointed in the capacity of public defenders and confidential men, harangue your kind everywhere. If you have been bold enough in your denunciation against those who oppress the poor in the past, you have, most likely, been visited by special government investigators right where you work. Most likely also, he had out-talked you. You were not aware of it, perhaps, but you were actually witnessing how the propaganda machinery of the Commonwealth works.

All this may confuse you, at first. You have never had the occasion to witness the likes of it before; there are no candidates, and this is no

election time. And yet, hardly a month passes without a silver-tongue orator walking up the platform at the plaza of your town. At times the speaker is introduced to you as a Department Secretary, at other times it is the provincial governor or a government investigator. You can always be sure, however, that the theme of the speeches is the same throughout. It is about His Excellency the President and his excellent administration of the affairs of your country, and about the nice things which the government is doing for you.

No Escape From It

The Commonwealth is bent on the publicizing itself and when so powerful an institution as the state decides to do that, one can be sure it will be thorough and effective.

There is no escaping that propaganda. If you are a radio owner, you are bound to be interrupted in your readings any one night, and told what Mr. Quezon, *your* leader, is doing in America, what *your* assemblymen are doing or planning to do to make better *your* lot. Questions, mostly those that bring out some splendid services or undertaking of the Commonwealth or of its officials, are answered over the radio and hammered into the public consciousness.

Dramatizations of the labors of "our President" are staged on the air, with some good hired speakers taking the role of President Quezon. Even Hon. Felipe Buencamino, answering questions supposedly asked him by his in-

quisitive colleagues in the Assembly, was dramatized on the air recently, under the auspices of the National Information Board. The purpose was to inform the public that although it is costing the government much money for trans-Pacific radiophone service and cable charges, the Quezon trip to Washington is really worthwhile. The speaker who played the role of Buencamino very effectively concluded in Tagalog: "...and our President is coming home with one hundred million pesos—think of that, one hundred million pesos—secured by him from the treasury of the United States government."

Printed Sheet

Like the platform and the air, a portion of local press has been commandeered by the Commonwealth in its drive for self-publicity.

President Quezon's fight for the rejection of the HHC law was effectively aided by a section of the local press. His coalition movement received a similar support and so was his election for the presidency. When he finally assumed the presidency, he did not lose sight of the press in his campaign to win the people to the side of the government, and did everything to win the press to his side.

Publicity Office

With a ₱100,000-appropriation freely granted by the National Assembly, the Commonwealth organized a publicity office known as the

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The Government...

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National Information Board. The Board, staffed with able writers weaned away from the newspaper profession, is headed by Ex-Editor Mauro Mendez. The board arranges radio programs, books commemorating the progress of the people under the Commonwealth government, pamphlets telling the masses what the Commonwealth is doing for them. Informative leaflets, translated into the different dialects, on how to acquire homesteads, on the relations between tenants and landlords, and containing all legislative enactments designed to improve the lot of the masses, are printed under the auspices of the Board. These are circulated in the provinces free of charge.

The board's latest move to fight restlessness will soon be evident in the form of a news organ published in English and in Tagalog. The news sheets, which is being printed by the government printing office, will soon be distributed free of charge. It is gossipy and is patterned after the *Sakdal*, or similar radical papers. It will, however, have a different end: to sell the government to the people and answer attacks hurled by radical newspapers against the government.

An example of the need of information on government affairs may be had from recent press discussions about the necessity of the President

having a private chapel at Malacañang and of having a yacht like the *Casiana*. Any one whose motive is to arouse popular hatred against government officials, and against our leaders, can go very far—if there is nobody in the government to answer back and enlighten the public on government necessities.

Choice Speakers

A policy handed down recently with regards to the choice of government investigators, confidential men, and public defenders, lends strength to the view that the Commonwealth will persistently push the publicity campaign. Preference, it has been gathered in government circles, is given to "good public speakers" of the appointment of public defenders, government investigators, and confidential men. Thus, if a lawyer is to be appointed public defender, he should have a sweet tongue, and a good command of sugarcoated words. The purpose, of course, is clear: the government wants to utilize their services in the publicity campaign.

By now, the public will have noticed how arduously Department Secretaries have taken to the task of pacifying the masses and of publicizing the government. Such campaigns were quite unknown during the pre Commonwealth era. A comparison between the kilometrical speeches being delivered by our Department Secretaries in their provincial

inspection trips today, and those of the members of the cabinet of any American Governor-General, will give anyone an idea of the extent of that campaign.

Benefits—But Where?

President Quezon is not the first executive to employ propaganda to win the people to his administration.

Not less than 100 newspaper men have been established behind the Rooseveltian breastworks to serve out New Deal ammunition in the United States. Every branch of the U. S. government, almost every bureau of each department, reveals T. G. Joslin, Hoover's former secretary, has at least one former Washington correspondent on its pay rolls.

The propaganda, for the Commonwealth is as yet too young to be judged. One disconcerting the fact about it however, in the opinion of observers, is that while so much is being done by the government to inform the people of what it is doing for them, so little is being received by them in the form of tangible relief. They are told of their improved conditions and of the government aids being given them. But they ask: where are those and in what form are they given us?

Propaganda: Dangerous Tool

In a young country like the Philippines, the dangers of propaganda cannot be overlooked. The dangers become even more apparent when such a propaganda is coupled

with a gagged press and bans free speech which, fortunately, is not yet the case locally.

There is obviously need here for a campaign of information, particularly if that campaign is limited to enlightening the masses on their rights, and on their opportunities for improving their lots in life. It is the observation, however, that side by side with that campaign, should be some workable schemes to improve the conditions of our masses.

In Italy, Germany, and Russia, people have been made to forget what they want or what they need. Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin—all three did it through propaganda. One former head of an European press bureau revealed that in many places in Italy, and in Germany, the people, although persecuted and spied upon by fellowmen, think that they enjoy greater freedom than any other people on the earth. They look upon American democracy as a failure and as a land of riot, lynching, strikes, gangsters, and public enemies. While many of them suffer from want, they think they are happier than other peoples. Propaganda made them feel that way.

Are we to have an equal of that in the Philippines? The President has already made clear his desire to have a government-controlled radio station to broadcast government information to the people. Where is this leading to?

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