

## THE ABC OF PUBLICITY

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The word "publicity" means making something public. Therefore, when we want to publicise a certain commodity, we are in reality trying to put it before the public, in such a way as to have the public discussing it. But that is not enough.

About 200 years ago a fellow in Dublin bet another fellow that he could compose a new word which would be accepted within one night and morning. They laid down a large sum of money on the bet. And that night the man who had laid the bet went, not to bed, but all around the city. He wrote the word "quiz" on walls, doors, streets and roads. He kept writing until daybreak. Of course, he succeeded. He got the publicity he wanted, because the public kept using the new word and talking about it for a long time afterwards. Eventually, the public gave it a meaning, something like the meaning it has today.

That was enough for that particular man, as he had only a very limited objective. But it would not suffice if he had to promulgate a certain message, gospel or good news. It is clear, therefore, that a certain type of trick is part of publicity. But, usually, information is also necessary. What is being said must be explained.

The majority of us are well acquainted with the best place where things are explained: the home. Right from when we come into the world, our mother, particularly, but also our father, relations and our nearest neighbours explain things to us. Later on, when we go to school, we get more information. If we are aware and interested we keep on increasing that information until the day we die.

There is nothing complicated about that much, but we must consider it so that we can come to an understanding of what publicity is about. The basic simplicity of what we have said needs to be stressed for two reasons: firstly, because a certain class of people love to make a sort of mystery out of publicity; and secondly, because many people nowadays tend to think that the motto is enough, for example something like "Release the Political Prisoners" written on walls or roads. The motto must be written, of course, but we must explain what are the political prisoners and why they ought to be freed.

plenty of money is available to publicise the commodity which is intended to be "sold" to the public, there is usually no problem, especially as long as freedom of speech is fashionable. All that is required is to place the "business" in the hands of a firm whose business is publicity.

We in the Republican Movement, however, have not that much money: and, as well as that, freedom of speech for us is diminishing by the day because the authorities and their lackies are nervous on our account. That is no wonder, since we want to change the system and they want to keep it as it is.

"He who isn't strong must be clever" says the proverb. We will not be strong until the public is a hundred per cent for us. That day will not come until the public thinks that we have worthwhile ideas, that the present system is not there for the public welfare, that it is essential that it be changed, and that the methods we are recommending are fair, reasonable, and practical.

Here in Ireland we have the most conservative public in Western Europe or, perhaps in all Europe. That is how it was, anyway. For the last few years, however, it is obvious that the public is changing, that the conservatism is going, that the public wants a new system of one type or another. We have evidence of this, and it is clear that some of the changes are not for the good of the people. A society which has been dominated for a long time tends to imitate the dominator. Usually, however, it is rather the bad points than the good ones which are imitated. That is how the slave always was in the history of the world. It is desirable, therefore, to lay stress on practicality, although we ought not to forget that the people live not on bread alone.

The events of the Great Strike of 1913 are a good example of this truth. Many good people of that time thought that the money which had been collected to relieve the workers' families, ought to be spent on Irish goods, in Ireland. But when Larkin had considered this, he reached a different conclusion. He recommended that the money be spent in England ..... much of the help had come from workers in England .... because the public lacked poetry to build up their spirit. He said that a big ship

her flags could be seen entering Dublin Bay , full of food. That was the type of poetry which was needed to strengthen courage. He had another purpose , of course. That is , to lay stress on the brotherhood of the workers. With one another's support the people live , particularly the workers.

Dame Britannia has long been trying to persuade us that emotion is a stupid thing. We must be rational , as the English are. Of course , the English are as emotional as any public which are in any way free. But it does not suit the Empire to have a subsidiary society on the same level as those who are free. Therefore, emotion is a dangerous weapon. The leaders of Ireland kept the vision alive among the Irish through poetry and music. That was a weapon which gave the people the spirit to rise out again and again against the greatest Empire which history has seen. But as the world realises , it was the Irish who dealt the first blow to the very same Empire. Therefore, one can be too rational . A society can be smothered by rationality. Publicity must be based on realism - on the truth - but also on feeling. The human being has both a body and a soul.

What are the ways to talk to the people ? The Cumann is there , and it ought to be very much to the fore in every parish. When all is said, example is the best publicity of all. The Cumann ought to be concerned with every problem the public has. The Cumann must be active on behalf of the people. But it ought not to be too advanced. Neither ought it be lagging behind the people.

If we can envisage the public and the leaders as a train , the leaders are the engine and the public the coaches , tied together , and the engine in front. It becomes clear that the leaders ought not to be divided from the public in any way.

The Cumann will work up an understanding with the public by meeting them often, through public meetings , through selling and distributing material to them , through publishing notices on walls , newspapers , radio and television , through demonstrations on their behalf , through conflict with the authorities , one way or another. Conflict starts from disagreement.

It could be developed to the stage of war, the most extreme kind of politics. But the effort will not succeed without the support of the people. Often, it is through their sweat and heartbreaking labour that the leaders of the public earn their respect.

One person at least ought to be elected as publicity officer in each Cumann. That person will have the responsibility for publicising the work of the Cumann. He will also have a keen eye to note the mistakes the enemy makes ; to note also , the wrong being inflicted on the people , either directly or indirectly , and to draw attention to that in every way he can.

Letters to the newspapers are among the cheapest and most effective means of publicity. The letters ought to contain the truth : - the facts should be carefully checked beforehand - objective , reasonable , direct , logical and sharp. Most of us are not very inclined to read long letters. We tire of complaining. We like humour and hope. Each letter ought to be looked upon as a battle - or an ambush. That is the way to prepare them. If I say this, what answer will he have ? and what answer will I give ? Picture it , if you wish , as a chess-game. And don't shoot every round in the first letter. Have a series in mind. Give him rope to hang himself and be present to apply the coup de gras.

It can perhaps be said that this is the age of the press release and we are all tempted to send a press release to the newspapers etc., on the least excuse. That merely makes the newsmen tires of us , and reduces our credibility in their eyes. The press release ought only to be used when it is very necessary , and when there is no other way.

All the following questions should be answered in the press release: who ? how ? where ? why and what ? Give a phone number, signature , name of Cumann, adress and, if possible , have it types on one side of the paper with a good space between the line , as well as a two -inch margin on the left hand side. If you cannot type it, write clearly and legibly.

have it too long. Have the news - or the blow - in the first line or the first paragraph. It is better to bring it into the office, and to hand it personally to the news editor or to the person who deals with politics. It is advisable to develop friendship with the journalists - your type, and the information which you can give them, both within and without press releases, are their livelihood.

If you cannot hand it in personally, call the office later to see if they received the release or if you can help in any way, to clarify some aspect or to answer questions. Always be courteous and patient. Perhaps the journalist with whom you were dealing was not to blame for not publishing it.

If the press release was not published and you consider it important, call the editor and put your case to him. Newspapers depend on the goodwill of the public, and no editor wants the public to think he is a dictator who forces his own opinions on them. In fact, he would rather like them to consider the system of communication which he looks after to belong to the public, in a sense. Therefore, he is generally careful, not to mention cute. If he is a good editor he will be willing to listen to whatever section of the public wants to say.

He will often, however, throw the press release into the basket if he thinks that he can get away with it, because he himself, as well as his paper, is part of the status quo. There are two points, therefore involved. First, that he would not be over willing to give publicity to a group who are going against the system. Secondly, that he would be afraid of it becoming known that he does not give everybody a fair deal.

The press conference is one of the most difficult things to prepare and to make a success of. Again, it ought not to be called without reason. The story must be important enough. If possible, drinks should be available, but the Cumann cannot always afford this. If so, nobody should be ashamed. The excuse should be offered with dignity. The story should be imparted to the journalists, and the information ought to be exact when the attack comes, that is, the questions. It is very important not to get angry or sarcastic, but to remain quiet spoken and rational. The newsmen are always in a hurry, start the conference in time and don't let it become monotonous or too drawn out.

Leave the answering of the questions to those most able and sensible in the Cumann. Usually these will be young, and not men only, but also women. If photographs are required, do not forget the dignity of the cause by doing a "favour" for the camera man so that he can take an "enticing" shot. Will that help the image of the Cumann or the Movement in the eyes of the public? Let the honest answer to that question be your guideline.

of the press conference is dangerous, by way of self-discipline or ignorance, the interview or radio or television is worse still. The person who is surly, without humour, often loses out here. The person who <sup>h</sup>souts does damage to the Movement's image in the eyes of the public. One must be humble, truthful, quiet-spoken, natural, honest. Often on radio or television, those in charge of the programme are looking for a "Show", rather than the truth. To bring that about, they will revert to insults, lies, injustice, bad manners. Anybody who saw Ruairi O' Bradaigh on a recent edition of "7 Days" will understand what I mean. But Ruairi succeeded eventually, because of his affability, sincerity and good manners.

Unfortunately, one must sometimes be "cheeky" to get publicity. In that case, the objective, the method, and the results must be carefully examined. Is it worth six months in prison? Is there any other way? What is the public looking for? Sometimes, there is no second choice but to accept the challenge of the state in order to earn the respect of the public. But he who is not strong must be clever.

More basic, perhaps, than all these things is the basic thing, the notice. If it is a pamphlet or a leaflet, it ought to be direct, something which will stop a person, make him curious, make him laugh.

If it is a newspaper advertisement, it must be enticing nowadays. For example, if famous speakers are to be speaking, let Sean Keenan or Frank McManus top the list: Sean Keenan and Frank McManus will speak tonight in the Square at a Sinn Fein public meeting starting at 8 p.m. That ought to suffice to bring an audience, and neither will it cost too much.

If it is a poster, only have a few words noticeable: Sean Keenan in the Square at 8 p.m.

The sympathy of the public can often be got through the mottos on the pickets being humorous. For example - Sir Jack? Duke Jack? Up the Jacks. Humour or satire has always been the keenest weapons in the Irishman's armoury.

A final word: one would sometimes think by surveying Republican occasions that there is no Irish language, or that the public do not understand it. A large number of people do. Let it be heard and seen to be heard. We will have no freedom until we have our own language.

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Ends.