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Editorial

Propaganda

SOON after the publication of the last number of "Review," a Minister of the Crown, in a statement to the press, referred to it as propaganda for political purposes. This statement was clearly intended to throw doubts on the integrity of the material that appears in "Review" and on the motives of the Institute itself. To those who read "Review" conscientiously the matter in it will, we believe, provide good and sufficient answer. With those readers who are not so conscientious; or, whose political and economic preconceptions lead them to approach "Review" with some suspicion, the Minister's statement may carry weight. In any case a few observations on the subject of propaganda—in these days a vitally important one—and on whether the published material of the Institute can fairly be said to merit that description will not be out of place.

By no means all propaganda is corrupt. Indeed, from the standpoint of strict dictionary definition, propaganda is a word with an entirely honourable meaning. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that modern usage has invested the term with a sinister and unwholesome connotation. If we wish to dismiss an article, a broadcast, an advertisement, as of no serious account we refer to it contemptuously as "propaganda." By that we mean that it is something to be suspected, something whose content is at worst grossly inaccurate and dishonest, or, at best, deliberately misleading. Much present-day political pleading, regrettably, must be said to fall within this description.

The methods of a great deal of modern propaganda are exaggeration, distortion, and, not infrequently, unblushing



falsification of the truth. Its purpose is to win support for an idea or cause by making claims which are not in accordance with fact or reason, or by exciting the passions or arousing the prejudice of the public against an opposing idea or cause.

The immense and apparently ever-swelling stream of propaganda, to which the people of the democracies are in these days subjected, constitutes, in our view, a serious threat to the good health and even to the survival of democracy itself. For if democracy is to function effectively, the people must be accurately informed on the central public issues of the day. Moreover, they should be able to contemplate and pass judgment upon those issues in a calm, dispassionate, and tolerant frame of mind, free from undue bias and prejudice. But a vast proportion of modern propaganda is not conducive to that kind of mental and emotional climate in which the public is most likely to arrive at sound decisions on the great matters affecting its welfare. Indeed, some of the attempts to mould opinion in the democracies today are only one whit better than the methods of compulsion used in the totalitarian state. As Stephen Leacock has astutely observed: "Even if freedom of thought and liberty of belief are fully granted, they may be attacked again by the newer method, not of trying to compel people to believe, but of cheating them into believing. This is called propaganda."

If propaganda is defined in the sense conferred by much present-day usage, then the articles appearing in this publication are most certainly not propaganda. There are no sinister intentions or motives in the work of the Institute. All the material in "Review" is the product of careful research and conscientious analysis of the facts. And where an article is primarily an essay in persuasion rather than a factual analysis, then, so far as possible, we attempt to state our argument in moderate and tolerant terms, free from gross over-statement or undue exaggeration. Of course, we have a cause to promote, and our work no doubt suffers from the unconscious bias common to all those who believe with fervour and conviction in what they are trying to do. Nor are we so naive as to suppose that the weapons of emphasis, of irony, of apt and forceful allusion or colourful illustration, have no honourable and useful part to play in the trade of economic and political journalism. Nevertheless, our constant endeavour is to preserve a reasonable impartiality, a moderate tone, and an unswerving concern for the true facts.

Where we fail in this, we do our cause no good. For, by and large, private enterprise is strong enough to stand up to the most exacting critical scrutiny. Private enterprise will seldom suffer from public disclosure of

the facts on which must rest a large part of its claim to survival as an integral and vital part of our economic organisation. It has, on the other hand, suffered disastrously from insufficiency of factual economic knowledge, and from its own failure, arising either from apathy or from misguided reluctance, to make known its achievements and its views to the public.

It has also suffered in the past, and is suffering in the present, from the activities of some of its well-meaning advocates, who appear to think that it is through publicity, and only through publicity, of the propagandist variety, that free enterprise can ever hope to survive the socialist menace. The Institute believes that incalculable damage can be done to free business enterprise by those who grossly exaggerate its virtues, who are unable to acknowledge any faults capable of correction, who resolutely refuse to see any vestige of good in the views of its opponents, and who fondly imagine that, in the long run, the public is so gullible as to be misled by wild assertions or unqualified generalisations.

The Institute has consistently emphasised its view that, in the final summing up, business will primarily be judged by its deeds, not by its words; by its performance not by its protestations. We adhere to this view.

The job of preserving free enterprise is much more than that of exposing and countering the numerous lies and half-truths and insinuations about business which are circulated every day—though that is important. The job of business is to strive to do the right thing, the right thing economically and the right thing morally. An eminent American philosopher has said: "A great society is one in which its men of business think greatly of their functions." In this conception, in rational constructive argument, and not in tawdry, cheap and unwholesome propaganda, lies the way to the preservation and advancement of free enterprise in this country.*



Chairman, Editorial Committee.

*If any of the supporters of free enterprise doubt this they would be well advised to consult an article in the May, 1949, number of the leading American business journal, "Fortune," entitled, "Business is Still in Trouble."

