An Historical Analysis of the Organized Labor Movement's Influence on Corporate Public Relations Theory and Practice

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by
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Influence on

Corporate Public Relations Theory and Practice

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An abstract of a thesis by
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The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of organized labor on corporate public relations theory and practice. Many other forces have influenced corporate public relations, but this paper focuses on some of the general and specific effects caused by organized labor. The central contention of this paper is that 20th century corporate public relations has, in part, evolved in response to the activities of organized labor, and it will continue to do so in the future. In this paper this evolution is traced through three phases: The roots of American unionism and public relations from 1850-1918, the influence of the legislation of organized labor from 1918-1953, and the effects of union decline from 1953-1980s. The method adopted to support this contention is the juxtaposition of an historical reconstruction of the development of both organized labor and corporate public relations from the mid 19th century to the present.
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Introduction

Public relations definitions vary from person to person, ranging from complex and technical business communications methods to straightforward manipulation. Each definition contains some semblance of validity. For this reason, one could argue that public relations practice has existed for thousands of years. After all, men have been manipulating each other for thousands of years.

Such an historical view of public relations is a little too broad with respect to the development of the public relations profession in general and corporate public relations in specific. Academicians and practitioners alike commonly accept the mid 19th century as the beginning benchmark of corporate public relations history. There is one aspect this narrower view shares with the broader historical view. Both are haunted by the stigma of manipulation and consequently the stereotype of unethical practice. Throughout its history, corporate public relations has suffered from severe image problems and criticism, much of it warranted. Since the mid 19th century, the profession has progressed a great deal. Unfortunately, several stumbling blocks restricted the positive developments of corporate public relations theory and practice.

A variety of political, economic and social factors produced these stumbling blocks. They are too many and too complex to mention in this paper, but it must be noted that the historical development and interpretation contained in this paper functions in the context of these unmentioned factors and events. Of course, some political, economic and social events are considered extensively in this paper. It would be impossible to perform this historical research without assessing these elements. Furthermore, the contents of this
paper, namely the development of organized labor and corporate public relations, evolved in a world political, economic and social context. Put simply, the contents of this paper must not be considered independently.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the effects of organized labor on corporate public relations theory and practice. Organized labor has been one of the most important factors that has influenced corporate public relations, and yet it has been one of the least acknowledged. As previously noted, many other forces have influenced corporate public relations, but this paper focuses on some of the general and specific effects caused by organized labor. Apparently, no other literature juxtaposing these two histories exists. Consequently, this paper sifts through a great deal of information and establishes an historical interpretation of organized labor's effect on corporate public relations. The central contention of this paper is that 20th century corporate public relations has, in part, evolved in response to the activities of organized labor, and it will continue to do so in the future. In this paper this evolution is traced through three phases: The roots of American unionism and corporate public relations from 1850-1918, the influence of labor legislation from 1918-1953, and the effects of union decline from 1953-1980s. The method adopted to support this contention is the juxtaposition of an historical reconstruction of the development of both organized labor and corporate public relations from the mid 19th century to the present.

An overview of the chronology encompassed in this paper is, briefly, as follows: During the 19th century and early 20th century, the American labor movement fought for recognition and power, achieving little of either. Simultaneously, corporate public relations developed to achieve the regulation and monopolization objectives of the railroads and utilities. After World War I, executives increasingly used public relations tactics to counter the organized labor movement, but they did not organize a major anti-union campaign
seemingly because their own financial and physical power significantly reduced the threat of organized labor. The Great Depression radically altered circumstances for labor and management. Management responded by implementing a major public relations offensive against the union movement. The economic climate proved more powerful, however, resulting in Roosevelt's rise to power and the subsequent passage of the new labor law.

The legalization of unions shaped corporate public relations extensively. Executives continued to use public relations to fight labor, but the law severely restricted these efforts. So, they began to use public relations to help handle new management relationships with unions, negotiators and government watchdogs. Labor, then, was dealt a severe blow with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which reinstated some management prerogatives and provided for union decertification. This gave new purpose to public relations, namely, de-unionizing America. The government gave public relations professionals additional fuel for their efforts when it passed the Landrum-Griffin Act of 1957, an effort to expose and clean up union corruption.

At that point unionism reached its zenith and began its decline. As this decline progressed, internal public relations departments began filling the communications void left by exiting unions. Furthermore, the union movement promoted management reform that manifested itself in corporate America during the late 1970s and early 1980s. These developments opened the door for public relations to join the management scene.

The first three chapters in this paper track this historical evolution. The format of each chapter is as follows: Section one of each chapter describes the development of organized labor. Section two describes the development of corporate public relations. Section three contains my interpretation of the influence organized labor had on corporate public relations for that particular period of time.
The fourth and final chapter contains projections about future public relations theory and practice stemming from that interpretation. It is often difficult and even pointless to discern actual cause and effect relationships between organized labor and corporate public relations. In this paper, I deal briefly with such relationships. More importantly, I reveal some and more broad relationships through my historical interpretation, focusing on specific events while retaining a broad view of any particular decade or period of time. From this, I draw on the past to understand the present and anticipate the developments of the future.
Chapter 1
The Roots of Organized Labor and Corporate Public Relations

Section One
The Development of Organized Labor: 1850-1918

As the industrial revolution took off in the 19th century, the workplace became more complex and experienced change more rapidly than ever before. By the mid century mark, industry's magnates and robber barons began to take their positions in history, positions that were incredibly profitable and extremely influential. At an early stage in this transitional period, an industrialist remembered,

I knew every man...I could call him by name and shake hands with him...and the door was always open. When I left active management...we had...some thirty thousand employees, and the men who worked...would have just as much chance to get in to see anyone with his grievance as he would to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.\(^2\)

What this industrialist witnessed was an irreversible transformation of labor relations in America. Through the efforts of men like J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie, Jay Gould, William Vanderbuilt and John D. Rockefeller, these trends soon magnified and created the harsh reality of the workplace. "Mechanization, the giant scale of business organization, systematic administration, and, finally, labor management, each in its own way diminished the worker and cut him down to fit the productive system."\(^3\) Those industrial leaders used bribery, trusts, force and violence, among other tactics, to build their personal fortunes.


\(^3\)Ibid, p. 13.
Handling their work force was their own personal business, so they used whatever means they felt necessary.

Workers tried desperately to organize and establish labor unions so they could gain a voice in reforming working conditions. Immigrant artisans from England and Germany brought with them the skills crucial for the emergent industrial economy. Theirs was a shaping influence on working class culture and institutions, trade unions included, in the 19th century.\(^1\) The fledgling trade unions of the day regulated their trade, excluded non-union workers and set their own terms of work. Union influence did not, however, end at the factory gate. "There was a potent social component to the craft identity."\(^2\) Members stood behind motives of self-improvement, insurance and quality of trade. Leisure was likely to center on union activities, too, including everything from baseball leagues, picnics, lectures, and funerals. Strong unions were a major force in the community. "On the job and off, the union was an encompassing element in the life of the union working man."\(^3\) As a result, trade unions of the 19th century became somewhat exclusive, accepting only skilled workers.

The unions' particularism to be independent and emphatically held apart from the "unskilled" would prove to be detrimental, because the failure to recruit unskilled workers slowed membership growth. The philosophy held fast, though, primarily through the efforts of Samuel Gompers, the early leader and founder of the American Federation of Labor, or AFL. Early on, Gompers' efforts strictly adhered to his narrow view of organized labor and affirmed the AFL's confined position. Only through the AFL could a union be officially recognized, leaving thousands of unskilled workers unrepresented. Furthermore, Gompers told laborers not to seek help through the government, personally limiting his organization's political objectives and lobbying. "The force of events did, of

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\(^1\)Ibid, p. 15.  
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 22.  
\(^3\)Ibid, p. 23.
course, induce some change, but not nearly enough to make the labor movement a formidable contender against hostile industry and an indifferent state."¹ This gives rise to the AFL’s other primary defect, an inability to achieve any measure of cooperation with industry and the state.

With no legal framework to support it, the AFL had to struggle for power and fight for recognition against suspicious industrialists and an indifferent state, both formidable opponents. Internally, union growth was strong around the turn of the century. Building trade union memberships grew from 67,000 in 1897 to 391,600 in 1904. Transportation union membership more than tripled, from 116,000 in 1897 to 446,300 in 1904, and mining union rosters exploded from 447,000 to 2 million during the same period.² While unions grew, employer groups like the National Metal Trades Association sprang up as well. Union leaders encouraged this development for bargaining purposes, but "a deadly reaction followed. Employers had not counted on what seemed to them violations of agreements, or an unremitting flow of fresh demands, or strikes and rank-and-file militancy."³

Employer groups felt their managerial power slipping, so they broke with the unions and began to battle them on every front. They provided member employers with skilled scabs, guards and spies. Stunned, labor leaders reacted defensively in an effort to gain economic leverage. "Union efforts to regulate output and shop practice seemed wholly fatal to the managerial quest for efficiency that was going into high gear after 1900."⁴ It was a skillful yet costly attempt to increase union power. In a sense, this calculated risk both succeeded and failed. Unionism had indeed gained some ground by 1900, but it had also solidified the opposition. For instance, as part of an anti-unionism campaign, the United States Steel Corporation, a

¹Ibid, p. 27.
⁴Ibid, p. 25.
"steel trust" of many small steel companies, formed in 1901. Such powerful opposition made it quite difficult for organized labor to progress. By 1908, Gompers tried to counter the employers' efforts by increasing political action through the endorsement of the Democratic ticket. He also gave more freedom to the national unions by allowing them to include selected non-skilled workers, partially because it was becoming difficult to distinguish between skilled and non-skilled workers.

Gompers' change of philosophy came too late for the union movement of the early 20th century, however.

The history of one union after another was a record of defeats and sometimes desperation, to the point where simple survival became the abiding goal. When strikes broke out, they were frequently accompanied by violence and bloodshed. Despite labor's setbacks, its crusading spirit continued to be strong.1

Continued cycles of prosperity and depression early in the 20th century exacted a toll on organized labor, but these cycles did not completely crush the movement. At the same time, employers fought hard against the recognition of unions as a legitimate bargaining agent for workers. The sweatshops of the New York garment industry, the Eastern coal mines and the Midwest packing plants typified the horrible and inhumane treatment of labor by employers.

Between 1909 and 1916, unions swelling with unskilled workers went on strike with varying degrees of success. In 1912, nearly 150,000 men and women garment workers shut down the entire New York industry. The strike led to an arbitration system which later gave way to a more conventional collective bargaining system in 1916. In most other industries, however, "the weight of advantage lay with management, and, for all the blood spilled and sacrifices made, the unions mostly went down to defeat."2 In general, the

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2 Brody, p. 31.
decade prior to World War I was not a favorable environment for unions, but the war brought new life to organized labor.

During World War I, the AFL supported the war effort and joined forces with the government to fight socialist influences. This cooperative effort led to a strong AFL voice in political policy, and nurtured a greater understanding of organized labor on the part of government. In fact, the government began to accept labor's right to organize as a matter of national policy. The establishment of the National War Labor Board was the first governmental effort to control labor negotiations. It led to an expansion of union influence, but also encouraged the employee representation movement, negotiating directly and indirectly with employees with no outside representation. Union leaders wanted greater recognition and a prominent place in labor negotiations. The NWLB didn't help much in this respect. Board members did require management to negotiate with its employees, but this was, in part, simply to relieve itself of a heavier case load. While it lasted only during WWI, the NWLB was a stimulus for collective bargaining. Once employers had agreed on some form of collective representation, even if only employee representation, it was difficult to revert to individual bargaining.

Finally, organized labor had made some headway with the government and subsequently with management, though it was still a reluctant management, with plans of its own. Eventually, labor leaders would realize the merit of political influence. But at this historical juncture, big business held a strong upper hand in the political arena.

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1 Ibid, p. 42.
Section Two

The Development of Corporate Public Relations: 1850 - 1918

The history of public relations for this particular period is somewhat more simple, but no less eventful or influential than that of organized labor. Public relations of the nineteenth century was primarily undeveloped and, in most business circles, formally non-existent. "The laissez-faire economic liberalism that had prevailed in the preceding period continued to the end of the century." American businessmen like Morgan, Gould, Carnegie, Rockefeller and Vanderbilt disregarded the needs of the public, trampling anyone who got in the way of their interests. They used bribery, trusts, force and violence, among other tactics, to accomplish their corporate objectives and build their personal fortunes. And yes, they used public relations to orchestrate their scheming plans. The use of public relations by the railroads is perhaps the best example of its development in the 19th century.

Around 1850, the railroads were looking for money to fund several projects, so they began to use public relations techniques to get federal funds. Illinois Central officials "developed a rationale that would be heard many times thereafter: The railroad line would be expensive to construct; it would open up new land for rapid economic development; without subsidy, the line might not be built; with subsidy, the public interest would be served."

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The argument, then, was to select a program, justify it as essential to the public good, and thereby convince the federal government to fund the project. To this end, Illinois Central officials staged an enormous and successful public relations campaign.

Lobbyists such as George Billings and Robert Rantoul, Jr., played on the growing concern about an eventual civil war by arguing that a nationally funded north-south railroad would bind North and South 'together so effectually that even the idea of separation' would become unthinkable. They were wrong, of course, but they were not proved wrong until the subsidy was history.¹

The Illinois Central officials were not alone in their successes. "Between 1852 and the financial crisis of 1857, Congress made grants to 40 railroads."² Originally, the railroads strived to justify particular grants, but soon, the rationale was no longer that specific projects served the public interest, but that federal subsidies and grants to railroads in general served the public interest. As the practice caught on, railroad officials argued that, "Whatever was good for the railroad industry was good for America."³ Executives found, too, that a cooperative effort among the railroad leadership afforded them more power, influence and results. This opened the door for "pooling," or collaboration, to the highest degree.

The late 1800s were full of the two "Ps," "pooling" and "PR." Pooling was an anti-competitive agreement between railroads in which the collaborating railroads would proportionally divide up freight traffic and gross earnings according to fixed price percentages. Both practices were designed to keep prices up by eliminating rate competition.

The development of pooling practices made public relations essential, because 'pools' were lightening rods for criticism. Executives realized that if rates were to be maintained by collaborative means, the anti-cartel public mood would have to be changed. The defense of pools, syndicates, trusts and

²Olasky, Journalism Monographs, p. 3.  
³Ibid, p. 4.
holding companies...would not be easy, but public relations-minded railroad executives thought it possible if the press could be brought along.¹

Controlling the press, an important societal force, or at least manipulating it in one way or another, was essential to railroad public relations. The chosen methods were often less than honorable, but, for the pragmatic executives, they were effective. At the time, that was all that mattered. As a result, the first step toward using the press for public relations purposes was the straightforward bribe. "Payment of fees for favorable newspaper notice - puffery - became so common that a Chicago reporter satirized the practice by publishing his rates."² Bribery is a good example of public relations' seamy roots. "Deadheading," a more sophisticated method of press agentry, involved the provision of free tickets to reporters accepting puffery. The rationale for deadheading was that "reporters had to be free to cover news wherever it happened, and that railroads were acting in the public interest by providing transport."³ Justification, you see, was the name of the public relations game. Whoever did it best, no matter how they did it, got the job done.

While these early methods of press agentry were rather crude, the concepts of message control that were developing planted the seeds for complex public relations concepts. During the 1870s and 1880s, railroad executives gained public relations sophistication after the earlier emphasis on simple press agentry. They began to realize the importance of monitoring public opinion and channeling that opinion to decision makers. Through manipulation of public information, railroad public relations in the 1880s sold the idea of the federal government in a position of allowing collaborationism for public welfare. Naturally, neither the government nor the public wanted to express opposition to programs initiated for social good. It should be noted, however, that federal regulation was the

¹Ibid, p. 5.
²Ibid, p. 5.
beginning of the end of railroad prosperity.\(^1\) Furthermore, big business could not fool everyone. Plenty of opposition remained to fight further manipulation.

"As the 1880's moved into the 1890's, the battle lines between big business and the opposition were being drawn more closely. Both sides were using public relations techniques without any real concept of public relations as we know it today."\(^2\)

More often than not, the opposition was organized labor, a consistent straggler in the public relations race to this point. But the media, perhaps the most volatile variable in the public relations equation, began to play a more important role in the formation of public opinion, and, "As the 20th century got under way, there was a conscious recognition of various national abuses in the United States."\(^3\)

Muckrakers, writing for popular magazines and newspapers, collectively attacked the abuse of business and other forces. Media people worked long and hard to research and investigate the questionable activities of big business. Their objective was to expose illegal and inhumane management policies. The public, in turn, rewarded their efforts by generating influential public opinion, public opinion that called for a response by big business. The activities of the muckrakers and the public response compelled business to recognize how vital public opinion was. Consequently, big business mounted a counter offensive through a type of public relations that was principally whitewash.\(^4\)

"Thus, the age of public relations was ushered into our nation - to help defend business interests against the muckraking of the early 1900s and government regulations of a more or less severe nature."\(^5\) As noted previously, however, the public relations of this era can best be described as whitewash. Public opinion did not succeed in changing the nature of

\(^{1}\) Olasky, *Journalism Monographs*, p. 4.
\(^{2}\) Bernays, p. 56.
\(^{3}\) Ibid, p. 63.
\(^{4}\) Ibid, p. 64.
business practice. Businessmen merely instructed publicity men to paint an attractive picture of business by presenting favorable facts to the media and the public. Power figures in industry defined public relations as a function that "determines what the public should be interested in and what information they should receive," and as a tool used in "heading off causes of unpopularity as fast as they may appear."¹ Eventually, the battle between big business and the muckrakers grew into a free-for-all fight for control of public opinion.

Amid all this tension, a number of businessmen still held a "public be damned" attitude, making no strategic effort to conceal their appetite for continued social and economic dominance. Their stubbornness caused the press to increasingly side with the growing organized labor movement of the time. In turn, public opinion moved overwhelmingly to the side of the workers. As organized labor grew in power and public opinion gained greater influence, business leaders rejecting public relations efforts suffered setbacks. A few, however, not only took full advantage of public relations, but developed innovative public relations concepts. Samuel Insull, leader of the Chicago Edison Electric Company, was just such a businessman.

Insull, when he took the lead at Chicago Edison around the turn of the century, argued that utility monopoly and 'franchise security' could best be secured by the establishment of government commissions which would present the appearance of popular control. Insull suggested that the way to sell such a plan to the public would be through the emphasis on the commissions' power to fix rates.² He assured utility owners that rates would be slightly lower than what they would prefer to charge, but they would be higher than what full competition would allow.

Insull's concepts of monopoly and regulation followed directly from the established practices of the railroads in the late 19th century. His public relations tactics were,

¹Ibid, p. 50.
²Olasky, Journalism Monographs, pg. 16.
however, slightly more complex than those of the railroad executives. To manipulate public opinion, utilities used the press, dispatched managers to become leaders of community groups, produced ghost-written articles, and altered school textbooks. Insull began to develop public relations strategies that allowed him to influence both the government and the public in a coordinated effort to achieve specific objectives. Never before had such complex or complete methods been used in the field of public relations. But Insull didn’t stop there. His messages to the public were as complex as the channels used to communicate them.

The intelligent utility executive made sure his messages were thoroughly mapped out before releasing them to the public. When the strategy was complete, Insull and others began making speeches against open competition. Since most Americans favored a competitive market, Insull promoted regulated monopolies as preventers of socialism, rather than stiflers of competition. He encouraged companies to establish public relations departments and use them to heighten fears of socialism.¹ This intricate method of message formation gave Insull and others the ability to divert public attention from the real issues so they could achieve their own personal objectives of monopolization. Meanwhile, in the governmental arena, utility executives lobbied heavily for regulatory commissions so they could develop favorable relationships with commission members. Insull made sure he never attacked his political friends when they attacked him publicly because he wanted regulators to appear as severe watchdogs. The plan required men of skill to achieve successs. Insull and other utility executives constantly looked for the right men to develop and implement their public relations tactics. Their search brought them to Ivy Lee, who they found to be the best man for the job.

Lee worked to convince other business leaders and the public that a demise of competitive enterprise was both inevitable and socially useful. Lee’s sophisticated understanding of both economics and popular psychology

¹Ibid, p. 16.
allowed him to choose facts artfully while twisting interpretations, and in that way machinations with talk of cooperation in the public interest. He anticipated modern talk of corporate 'social responsibility,' and even implied that businessmen who emphasized competition do not love their neighbors and are only out for a buck.\textsuperscript{1}

So, while Lee made full use of the most sophisticated public relations techniques of his time, he also perpetuated the less than honorable pragmatic philosophy behind those techniques. In fact, his practices were downright deceptive. He used factual accuracy to make false impressions by presenting interpretations that fit his intentions, the opposite of the outlandish statements made by press agents with no facts. But Lee's use of facts convinced editors to listen to him when they wouldn't listen to the press agents. Thus the age of the public relations counselor was introduced into American business.

Lee counseled executives to play on the emotion of the public by fertilizing the imagination and organizing the will of the crowd. He stated that, "The crowd craves leadership," and "since crowds do not reason, they can only be organized and stimulated through symbols and phrases."\textsuperscript{2} This academic approach to public relations was unique to the budding profession, but then Lee had a personal agenda to bring new ideas and growth to public relations. Not only did he want to sell business to the public, he wanted to sell public relations to business. The spread of his techniques soon proved his ability to accomplish his goal. More counselors joined the party and more executives as well, most notably, Theodore Vail, then president of American Telephone and Telegraph (AT&T).

Vail accepted Lee's public relations concept, "The public be informed," and argued that, "The only way to correct misunderstanding or lack of knowledge on the part of the public was by publicity and full disclosure."\textsuperscript{3} However, in Vail's case, just as Lee's, publicity and full disclosure could not be construed as openness and honest interpretation. Justification was important as it had been for the 19th century railroad executives, but the

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid, p. 25.
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{3}As cited on Bernays, p. 71.
telephone and utility public relations managers went beyond the railroad model in that they left nothing to chance. For Vail and others, "The goal of twentieth century public relations became the manufacturing of new opportunities."¹ Methods of manufacturing those opportunities were soon to develop quite rapidly. At the same time, Edward L. Bernays, often called the father of public relations, arrived at the principle that public opinion was heavily influenced by group leaders and opinion molders. His ideas would become fuel for academic thought for years to come. Just as these concepts began to develop, though, they were quickly interrupted by the world events of the time, in particular World War I.

After the war broke out, President Woodrow Wilson set up the United States Committee on Information to offset German propaganda through the use of propaganda. This was to have a negative effect on public relations because the public soon began to equate propaganda with public relations. During the war, "Ideas and their dissemination became weapons and words became bullets."² Everyone, including industrialists and labor alike, had to focus their attention on the war.

¹Olasky, Corporate Public Relations, A New Historical Perspective, p. 37.
²Bernays, p. 71.
Section Three

The Effect of Organized Labor on the Development of Corporate Public Relations: 1850-1918

The historical relationship between organized labor and public relations for this period can best be described as a rather uneven struggle for attention. At the mid 19th century mark, both movements were young and generally disorganized. Organized labor had no legal foundation and public relations was almost unknown. "Exceptions occurred, but the American style of political economy prior to 1850 emphasized private relations." The desire on the part of railroad executives to acquire federal funding and regulation ended the era of private relations. At the same time, organized labor was struggling for recognition, recognition that was not to materialize for decades to come.

Labor organizers and public relations-minded executives didn't simply crave attention. They wanted the attention and cooperation of the two most important groups necessary for success, the government and the press. The fight for attention was uneven for two reasons. First, big business started the battle with more strategy and ammunition. Executives had virtually unlimited resources, or money, and political access, or power, to use at will for whatever purposes deemed proper. Secondly, labor leaders did not realize the necessity of political influence until after the turn of the century. Obviously, the balance was weighted heavily in favor of big business. Resources in hand, executives needed only plan how to use them. Labor leaders, on the other hand, not only lacked resources, but the ability to acquire them as well. The result was a completely lopsided confrontation between the two groups, allowing executives the freedom to crush the labor movement physically, while increasing their profits and influence through public relations efforts.

For all their weaknesses, unions were very strong internally, commanding at least some recognition through sheer numbers. Certainly, employers could not completely ignore

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1Olasky, Journalism Monographs, p. 35.
them, and by the turn of the century, unions had managed to arrange negotiations with some employer groups. Their demands for change backfired, though, as they tried to gain too much too fast. Business leaders, a little shocked, dug in for a long, hard battle. Fortunately for the organized labor movement, Samuel Gompers, the head of the AFL, decided about the same time that increased political action would be beneficial. It was a positive move that would eventually pay substantial dividends to the movement. The strike did, however, remain the primary weapon of the unions. Similarly, management's decisive actions were almost always violence and bloodshed, albeit some businessmen unknowingly used public relations to counter the movement. Iron-fisted management policies proved effective as long as the general public did not get vicariously involved. Fortunately for labor, a number of journalists reached the same conclusion and turned their talents against the abuses of big business. These muckrakers revealed the corrupt side of American business and the subsequent labor abuses. Publicity of this nature significantly raised public consciousness with respect to national labor unrest and other management/labor problems. "The thesis that public relations was called into being to defend business against increasing journalistic and political attacks has the support of numerous scholars."1

As the first decade of the century moved into the second, the pressure on management from labor was recognized by the muckrakers, who began to sway public opinion. This reality forced executives to realize the importance of controlling public opinion. They increased their public relations efforts to counter organized labor through whitewash and press agentry.

Between 1900 and 1920, American business and organized labor struggled to influence the role government would play in labor-management relations. Aware of the importance of public opinion in this struggle, business developed new organizations and a labor ideology to discredit unions and

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enhance its own position in the public eye...This common ideology enabled business to portray organized labor as a threat to the fundamentals of social order while advancing management as the definer and defender of democracy, property rights, and the American worker.¹

This ideology was reflected in the business press of the time and began to filter into the efforts of the public relations counselors as well. The emergence of counselors like Lee and Bernays prior to World War I set the stage for the immediate future of public relations. Soon, public relations was to become a primary weapon to fight organized labor, and the counselors certainly gave big businessmen the edge in this public relations battle. Their innovative concepts of message formation and control gave more substance to the public relations profession, but its credibility still suffered for many years to come. As for labor leaders, they too had only setbacks in their immediate future.

In summary, the organized labor movement did not have as much effect on public relations in the 19th century as did the greed-centered strategists of the railroads. Relying on public relations to pasify both the government and the public, railroad executives achieved their goals of public funding and regulation. Throughout the latter half of the century, newer and more complex strategies spawned growth in public relations, growth that provided the impetus for 20th century utilities to continue the crusade for regulation and monopolization. In a sense, public relations found its roots in a move by the industrialist elite to protect their markets. It had not been necessary for them to use public relations to ward off the threat of organized labor, at least not yet. With virtually no political influence and limited public voice, the movement was too weak to attract too much attention. But as the century mark passed, political action by the AFL and sheer size increased the threat to big business. Additionally, the muckrakers graphically illustrated the plight of workers in the garment industry sweat shops and the Chicago meat packing

plants. Descriptive essays, exposing deplorable working conditions, churned up public sentiment and motivated public support for the organized labor movement.

As the threat grew, executives saw the wisdom of using public relations to combat the AFL and keep labor in check. A wartime economy and post-war profits temporarily interrupted that thought, however. It seems soaring profits kept the industrialists in power and the labor movement temporarily in check.

On a practical level, public relations counselors and press agents experimented with a number of different strategies and tactics, some planned and organized and some accidental and disjointed. A few practitioners knew exactly what they were doing, but many of them did not. On a theoretical level, public relations developed rapidly by World War I. Utility executives added sophistication to the 19th century model of railroad model of public relations. Counselors contributed a great deal in this respect as well. They established an academic approach to message formation and dissemination that set the foundation for future public relations theory and practice.

A press agent/publicity model of public relations emerged between 1850 and 1900. After 1900, that model changed to a public information model. The first model reflects the unethical efforts of the early press agents and publicists. They created their own messages and distributed them by any means possible, usually through a straightforward bribe. The second model, public information, differs from the first primarily with respect to the counselors' efforts to use factual information to manipulate the public. They realized that by twisting the facts, they could achieve their objectives and a slightly higher level of credibility.

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Chapter 2

The Great Depression and Labor Legislation

Section One
The Development of Organized Labor: 1918-1953

Following World War I, labor leaders had reason to feel good about some of their accomplishments. They had achieved a certain level of cooperation with the federal government, and their ranks were rapidly growing in number. "In all, union membership, doubling in four years, stood at five million in 1920."\(^1\) It seemed as though the labor movement had finally laid a foundation firm enough to sustain itself. Had the dream of widespread recognition come true? The ensuing events of history responded with a resounding "No." Instead of being the decade of a new beginning, "the 1920s were probably the most depressing decade in its history for the great enemy of the hegemony of big business, organized labor."\(^2\)

The end of the war brought with it the end of much of the government cooperation with labor. It had been necessary to unite for the war effort, but the victory had been secured and harmony among government, business, and labor leaders was no longer essential. Consequently, employers once again fought for control by physically crushing organized labor, causing massive strikes throughout the early 1920s. Even large scale strikes were no match for the unrelenting executives, though, and "when the smoke cleared, the labor movement had lost 1.5 million members."\(^3\) So devastating was the climate that the union movement fell back into its confined pre-war position. Forced to its knees, the AFL advanced a new doctrine of labor-management cooperation. "The cooperation approach

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\(^1\) Brody, p. 44.
\(^3\) Brody, p. 45.
signified labor's deep sense of impotence in the 1920s. The movement might progress only with industry's consent, not by the force of labor strength.\textsuperscript{1} Naturally, industry leaders had no intention of allowing the organized labor movement to progress. In fact, executives expressed no desire in loosening their grip on the paralyzed effort. Their primary interests were in the booming economy of the post-war roaring 20s. Ironically, this was the first decade that saw the passage of labor legislation in favor of collective representation, the Railway Act of 1926. The act recognized the right of railway workers to negotiate, through representatives of their choice, and the duty of railway management to negotiate exclusively with the employees' representatives on rates of pay rules and working conditions. Unfortunately for labor in general, the act applied only to railroad workers, because the Supreme Court's definition of interstate trade recognized only the railroads as an activity under the exclusive authority of the federal government. So, what was a firm victory for a few was no gain at all for most laborers. Meanwhile, management held a comfortable position, resisting efforts for change in the workplace. Not every executive held progressive ideas in check, however.

Charles Schwab, veteran head of Bethlehem Steel, preached a new method of management, welfare capitalism, requiring benevolence and a slightly looser pocketbook. Many thought this was an idea whose time had come. Schwab himself stated, "If this system does not enable men to live on an increasingly higher plane, if it does not allow them to fulfill their desires and satisfy their reasonable wants, then it is natural that the system itself should fail."\textsuperscript{2} Well, it did fail. With the stock market crash of 1929, welfare capitalism collapsed as well. This unique concept had promised to transform the country's labor relations, "based chiefly on the expectation of cooperation between workers and management."\textsuperscript{3} Even the most ardent supporters of welfare capitalism, though, realized

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid, p. 45.  
\textsuperscript{2}Ibid, p. 48.  
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid, p. 49.
there was too little to give and too many in need after the crash. Some employers tried their best to fulfill the needs of employees, but the devastated economic climate restricted their efforts to do so.\(^1\) Within a few years, the bitter 30s issued a system of labor relations resting on collective bargaining, not the benevolence of management.

Collective bargaining was a term that would forever change the employer-employee relationship in the United States. With Franklin Roosevelt in the White House, policies in hand, the rules of the labor game were about to change. "At the coming of the New Deal, American organized labor was an arrested movement."\(^2\) It had not breached the industries characterized by the giant firm, by multi-plant operation, and by a work force composed predominantly of unskilled workers. All that changed radically with two significant events occurring in 1935, namely, the passage of the National Labor Relations Act and the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

The National Labor Relations Act, or Wagner Act, created a legal charter for unions' rights and the National Labor Relations Board to enforce those rights.\(^3\) The Wagner Act actually took effect in 1937 when the Supreme Court upheld it as constitutional. It gave employees the right to form unions and engage in collective activities, including strikes, it prevented management from interfering with union activities, and it required management to recognize and bargain with unions.

The political situation - the Wagner Act aside - was heavily weighted on the side of labor...The Norris LaGuardia Act limited the use of injunctions that had in the past hindered union tactics. A federal law prohibited the transportation of strikebreakers across state lines. The Thornhill decision (1940) declared that anti-picketing laws curbed the Constitutional rights of free speech.\(^4\)

\(^1\)Ibid, p. 74.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 82.
\(^3\)Bernays, p. 71.
\(^4\)Brody, p. 105.
The reelection of Roosevelt, rank-and-file enthusiasm, economic pressures on
management, and the political condition significantly complemented the favorable events
following the Wagner Act. Clearly, labor's time of success had come to fruition. "A
decade later, most of the mass production industries had experienced thorough
unionization."1 However, bona fide collective bargaining could not be enforced by law
and took place only through the interplay of non-legislative forces. In the Supreme Court's
opinion on the Wagner Act, it stated, "From the duty of the employer to bargain
collectively...there does not flow any duty...to accede to the demands of the employees."2
Many large companies did bargain sincerely, but some, like Ford, Goodyear,
Westinghouse and Republic Steel, did not, continuing to ignore workers' rights altogether.
In fact, companies employing unskilled workers benefited from the AFL's refusal to
organize non-craft employees. Employers were not afforded this luxury for very long.

The second significant event of the 1930s, the formation of the CIO, also boosted the
labor movement into rapid expansion. Because the AFL would not represent or organize
non-craft workers, John L. Lewis, a leader in the AFL, formed the CIO and organized the
mass production industry. "The rise of new organizations in steel, automobiles, rubber,
electrical appliances, and other core industries and the emergence of a new national
federation, the Congress of Industrial Organizations, truly transformed the labor
movement."3

Organized labor had experienced surges of growth in the past, but the 1930s upsurge
was different because it encompassed every geographical area and every trade and industry.
Lewis and the CIO had finally given the movement what it needed for monumental growth,
mass unionization of unskilled workers. This event, coupled with the new labor laws,
catapulted the labor movement into a much brighter future. Big businessmen like Henry

1Ibid, p. 82.
2Ibid, p. 110.
Ford, however, continued to undermine union efforts. More often than not, he did so through his violent security force. After the Wagner Act, though, deaths and serious injuries in labor disputes became rare. The 1930s were indeed a time of rapid and tumultuous change. "Throughout the decade, workers were uncommonly militant. They resisted further erosion of their standards and struggled to create and sustain organizations to buttress their position and safeguard their working conditions and pay packets."¹ Union members and leaders alike had achieved their primary goal and now prepared for unparalleled growth, growth that can be to a large extent attributed to World War II.

As American isolationism became more unpopular and direct U.S. intervention in the war inevitable, industrial output soared to new heights. During the early 1940s, unions grew enormously, "first in the defense production phase (1939-1941), and then even more so in the heyday of American belligerency (1941-1944)."² Union organizers took full advantage of the economic boom. As long as demands on the economy were so great, laborers, unionized or not, were a valuable resource. The result was a dramatic heightening of the impact of strikes, providing organized labor with previously unheard of power. In 1941 alone, 2.3 million workers participated in 4,200 strikes nationwide.³ Employers had neither the time nor, in some cases, the desire to resist or wait out strikes. The new labor laws and a strained wartime labor force did not easily afford industrialists the resources for strikebreakers and scabs. The pressure was on to keep workers happy and fill orders.

Many of the stubborn corporations of the 1930s finally succumbed to the unions, especially in the steel and auto industries. Even Ford fell, but not without a struggle:

Henry Ford, nearing 80, relied heavily on a swaggering little Navy veteran named Harry Bennett for what passed in the chaotically-run company as "labor policy." With a paramilitary force of over 3,000 men, Bennett extended

¹Ibid, p. 27.
³Ibid, p. 64.
Ford's repressive policies to every plant and department. Workers hated Ford's frantic work pace and its below-standard wages. But it was the degrading, violent discipline meted out by Bennett's so-called Service Department that made Ford notorious among auto workers.  

Others carried on Ford's repressive tactics, but the federal government, especially after Hitler overran France in June, 1940, intruded increasingly into collective bargaining. Laborers had gained the upper hand and from June, 1940, to December, 1941, they also gained about 1.5 million new members. Labor leaders enjoyed the same negotiating leverage and political cooperation as they had during World War I, but this time legal rights protected their wartime gains. Contracts during this period began to reflect sophisticated approaches to work rules, grievance handling, and employee benefits. Incidentally, unprecedented government intrusion into the labor arena gave unions strength, but it also caught them as never before in an intricate web of bureaucratic regulation. Organized labor became more and more immersed in the nation's political-administrative structure.

Throughout the war, economic growth brought union growth. With a strong economy, employers became more relaxed about costs. These economic factors combined with government support set the scene for union membership to expand from 10 million to nearly 15 million during the war.  

But as the war drew to a close, unionists grew concerned over reduced overtime, lagging wage rates, and declining weekly income. They sought to resume normal collective bargaining to protect the gains made under the stimulus of the pressurized wartime economy. Despite their efforts, though, they were dealt a severe blow when Congress passed the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, better known as the Taft Hartley Act. The law imposed restrictions on unions, strengthening managerial prerogatives. Among other things, it limited the right to strike and, perhaps most significantly, it provided for decertification proceedings so workers could oust their union by majority vote.

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1 Ibid, p. 66.
2 Ibid, p. 68.
3 Ibid, p. 84.
The presidential election of 1948 both confirmed and revealed the limits of organized labor's gains.

The immediate post-war months, racked by strikes and bitter controversies over labor legislation, seemed a resumption of the politics of the 1930's. Increasingly, however, the issue of Communism - both on the world scene and within American institutions, including the labor movement - came to dominate public attention and shift it from the concerns of the New Deal-Popular Front decade. Truman's triumph in 1948, followed by the CIO's retribution against affiliates that consistently hewed to the pro-Soviet line, established the boundaries of American politics for a generation. After 1948, ideological radicalism disappeared from public debate, but the labor movement committed itself to unprecedented political action that supported Democratic liberalism and carried forth the uncompleted New Deal agenda into the 1950's.¹

Union leaders found themselves in a peculiar position. They experienced unprecedented growth and a severe legislative setback simultaneously. Caught a little off guard, they decided they needed to get more involved in the political arena to retain government support. To do so, they gave up the struggle to form a third party and joined the Democratic party. Political action was to be the mainstay of union influence for many years to come, years full of national unrest and world strife. With the advent of the McCarthy era and the outbreak of the Korean War, the rights of labor, the battles of the unions, and the crusading sense of struggle and commitment that had permeated American life in the 1930s and 1940s faded.² At the same time, internal union strength grew and organized labor reached its membership peak in 1953 when almost 36 percent of the private sector employees were union members.³ That figure has declined ever since. In retrospect, Taft-Hartley was a prominent factor in the decline of American unionism. The 1950s were, in a sense, the best and worst of times for the organized labor movement.

¹Ibid, p. 100.
Section Two

The Development of Public Relations: 1918-1953

As the propaganda image of the post-war era carried over into the 1920s, the battle for public opinion grew more and more fierce. "The woods were full of professional propagandists, press agents, publicity men, and public relations counselors anxious to persuade the public to their clients' point of view by airing certain facts."¹ Meanwhile, the public demanded still greater social responsibility on the part of men in power, men who had a strong desire to use public relations as a means of presenting their case "in terms of the self-interest of the recipient."² regardless of any change in business practice. The security of post-war profits kept the pressure of public demands at a minimum. Progressive businessmen didn't mind the pressure. They wanted to supply the public with information through publicity, but publicity usually became propaganda, eroding the foundation of the public relations profession. "Little men as well as big men, shysters as well as honest craftsmen, got into the act."³ Honest practitioners produced quality information and shysters produced puffery. Most of the time no one could distinguish between the two.

Men calling themselves public relations counselors multiplied in number and began to refine the tools of their trade. There was money to be made in this growing craft, and by capitalizing through dishonest tactics, the press agents and flacks of the crowd perpetuated the negative image of public relations. Consequently, the general public frowned on public relations practitioners, their dishonest practices and powerful bosses. Simultaneously, more businessmen and a variety of organizations came to the conclusion that they needed public consent and that they could harness the public to their cause through public relations.

¹Tedlow, p. 29.
²Harlow, p. 51.
³Ibid, p. 51.
It seemed as though this growing need for practitioners would only continue to preserve the bad image. Nonetheless, public relations did continue to develop as a legitimate profession during the 1920s. The public utilities continued to serve as the primary arena for this development.

Theodore Vail, then president of AT&T, pressed for further regulation and legal monopolization of the telephone industry. To protect AT&T's grip on the industry, executives decided to convince the government to guarantee their markets. "To succeed, they would have to manipulate public opinion to create the impression of popular dissatisfaction with competition among utilities. Then they could persuade the government to step in and set their companies up as monopolies. They did succeed. They did persuade."\(^1\)

Public relations in the 1920s had evolved to the point where the equation of creating popular support to elicit governmental action became commonplace. It didn't stop there, though. During this unique decade, Arthur Page became vice president of public relations for AT&T. His position represented, in theory and practice, a monumental step in the evolution of internal corporate public relations departments. "The secret of his success was in firing up his top management with the belief that all business...begins with the public's approval."\(^2\) Page's ideas, the advent of the corporate public relations department as well as the growth of counseling firms helped practitioners broaden definitions of their profession. Their activities began to spill over into other management areas, most notably, labor relations.

While thriving in utilities, public relations broadened in the fight against organized labor. Many corporations had won public approval for their anti-union approach by using the same tactics the utilities did. "And yet, the big businessmen still had no established

\(^2\)Harlow, p. 51.
standards of practice for dealing with the press and public opinion.\textsuperscript{1} The 1920s brought the necessity of establishing such standards because of new ideas about attitude change and opinion formation. For counseling firms, "it was beginning to mean advising the client on the development of attitudes, directions and even policies."\textsuperscript{2}

For the first time, some firms and internal departments used their skills to realize good will and social objectives, but there was still little understanding of public relations on a broad basis. As a result, some counseling groups initiated ground rules and acceptable definitions. The Counsel on Public Relations was established and produced the following definition:

A counsel on public relations directs, advises upon, and supervises those activities of his client which affect or interest the public. He interprets the client to the public and the public to his client. He concerns himself with every contact with the public wherever and whenever it may arise. He creates circumstances and events in advising a client upon his public activities. And he disseminates information about circumstances in helping his client to make his case known to his public.\textsuperscript{3}

This was the first broad-based definition promoted as a standard for the public relations profession. In future decades, this definition was to undergo a number of revisions. As the 1920s came to a close, disorder, dishonesty and inefficiency were much in evidence, but there was a noticeable shift away from emphasis on publicity and propaganda as tools of public relations, especially propaganda.\textsuperscript{4}

The 1930s brought the onset of the Great Depression and with it, a radical reduction in the economic power of many industries. As a result, business lost influence and realized that in addition to selling its products under the conditions of economic decline, it needed

\textsuperscript{1}Tedlow, p. 28.  
\textsuperscript{2}Bernays, p. 82.  
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid, p. 94.  
\textsuperscript{4}Harlow, p. 52.
also to sell itself to the public and explain its contributions to the entire economic system.\(^1\) Executives felt a strong need to protect the power and position of business against the New Deal and organized labor. They wanted to "sell the American way of life to the American people."\(^2\) It was to this call that a growing public relations establishment rallied. To this point, organized labor and corporate public relations developed relatively independent of each other. As more industries used the utilities' public relations tactics to fight labor, however, the two movements came together and interacted more and more.

To achieve their objectives, executives formed the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM). Soon after its inception, the NAM mounted a major public relations campaign against organized labor. Robert Lund, then NAM president, stated in a memo:

\begin{quote}

The problem of public relations must have an active consideration that the association has never been able to give it. The public does not understand industry, largely because industry itself has made no real effort to tell its story; to show the people of this country that our high living standards have risen almost together from civilization which industrial activity has set up. On the other hand, selfish groups, including labor, the socialistic minded and radical, have constantly and continuously misrepresented industry to the people, with the result that there is a general misinformation of our industrial economy, which is highly destructive in its effect.\(^3\)

\end{quote}

Lund wanted to increase the effectiveness of the NAM's publicity staff and use strategic planning to reach the public through every possible channel. To this end, the association used a speaker's bureau, distributed a poster series and a newsletter, and even produced a motion picture. Perhaps the most innovative tactic used was "The American Family Robinson" radio program. The show exemplified situations of conflict between labor and management in which management always came out looking good. To reinforce these

\(^1\)Bernays, p. 101.
\(^2\)Tedlow, p. 59.
\(^3\)Ibid, p. 62.
public relations tactics, NAM members were encouraged to patronize with their advertising only the papers that were clearly pro-business.\(^1\)

Fighting the government and the unions was the most important task of public relations during the Depression. However, "anti-union industries succumbed to the CIO in spite of the promises of public relations men that such unpleasantness could be avoided through well-funded manipulation of public opinion."\(^2\) Indeed, the public relations efforts of the NAM had come too late. The effects of the Great Depression were more than the discouraged executives could handle. As long as Roosevelt was in power, they had significantly reduced influence on the government and, as a result, the burgeoning labor movement.

Just how much influence they lost became evident when Roosevelt began pushing his social programs through the legislature. Before the decade ended, Congress gave labor the right to organize and bargain collectively through the Wagner Act. Congress also set up the National Labor Relations Board to enforce the new labor law. The NAM's public relations campaign came too late. Furthermore, the Depression simply left many employers in too weak a position to resist. With these developments came new and vital groups for management to contend with, unionized workers, negotiators, union leaders and the NLRB. "So business was only too glad to turn to public relations for help, asking that business' needs, purposes, activities and achievements be made favorably known to the government and the public."\(^3\) Practitioners were only too glad to do so.

Just prior to World War II, public relations counselors and corporate executives "cautioned that unless public relations were vigorously pursued, labor unions and left-wing politicians would win the battle for public opinion with catastrophic consequences."\(^4\) During the war, the NAM epitomized this conservative view, pushing public relations to

\(^1\)Ibid, p. 60.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 104.
\(^3\)Harlow, p. 53.
\(^4\)Tedlow, p. 111.
greater prominence. In addition, awareness spread of the importance of routine public relations work, such as courteously answering letters and encouraging employees to present a smiling face to the community. Furthermore, there was a heightened sensitivity to the threat to worker loyalty posed by union activity. "Keeping the working man loyal to his employer rather than to some organization operated by 'outside agitators' and winning his loyalty even after unionization had taken place was an ongoing problem to which corporate public relations devoted itself."¹

Fredrick Crawford, president of Cleveland's Thompson Products and of the NAM in 1943, took a paternalistic approach to win his employees' favor. He humanized management, set an open-door policy for workers to approach managers, submitted financial reports to employees in language they could understand, and localized his efforts by communicating news of company meetings and financial information to the local press.² Likewise, the General Foods Corporation hired a man solely responsible for personnel relations, standardized personnel records and recruitment policies, created a performance evaluation system for supervisors, developed a method to communicate ideas to employees and handle grievances, and produced an employee newsletter.³ These revolutionary developments added credibility to public relations, credibility that would later change the face of the profession.

Flacks abounded, but the public relations counselors of the 1940s tried desperately to establish themselves as legitimate practitioners, creating broader and more responsible definitions of their trade. They stated,

We bring about harmony of understanding among people, groups and organizations...build pride of employees in themselves, their work and their company.

Public relations is a guide to social conduct, it is social and political engineering, an operating technique, a process, a practice, a creative force, a program; it is a social power

¹Ibid, p. 125.
³Ibid, p. 135.
directed toward developing good will, a management
function, a builder of public opinion, a motivator, a
researcher, a persuader, a clarifier, an innovator.¹

These definitions provided a foundation for further professionalism and theory not
previously found in the public relations field. Honest professionals finally had a strong
foothold; even so, efforts toward social responsibility faced a long struggle against
unethical practitioners. Through deception, some flacks claimed, one could pull the wool
over the eyes of both the organization represented and the public. In their eyes, everyone
was a sucker to be played for all he was worth.

In 1947, the Public Relations Society of America organized to counter this negative
image and further advance the professionalization effort. At the same time organized labor
gained power, the number of practitioners continued to grow and many businesses set up
large internal departments. These developments exemplified progress through the decade
but, "the fact is that even toward the end of the 1940s, there was widespread confusion
about public relations."²

That confusion subsided somewhat during the 1950s as educators and practitioners alike
planted the seeds for a more modern perception of public relations. No longer would press
agents be able to find countless suckers to fall for their deceptive tactics. The media and the
public as well as business leaders learned more about the theory, function and potential of
public relations. Even the government found public relations more and more useful,
though officials did not like the "PR" label, opting instead for "public affairs." Countless
bureaus and departments, while actively maintaining the machinery and personnel to keep
the public informed, or at least "sold," refused its communicators the "PR" label. "The
edict passed out was: Not a dollar for public relations."³

While the government juggled terms, most theorists defined public relations from a
business perspective. One theorist, Thomas Gonser, defined public relations as a

¹Harlow, p. 54.
²Bernays, p. 119.
³Harlow, p. 57.
"reciprocal process of listening and telling coupled with a willingness to make the business what the public wants it to be, rather than trying to convince them that they should like the business for what it is." ¹ To a large extent, the definitions and perceptions of the future would follow Gonser's concept. His model took into consideration the public's need and the ability of business to adjust to it. Future theory and practice would apply this concept to multitudes of business, government and other organizational relationships. Many of those relationships were new ones that had evolved from the new labor scene. Obviously, the achievements of the organized labor movement forced employers and managers to face a variety of complex relationships and situations.

¹As cited in Harlow, p. 56.
Section Three

The Effect of Organized Labor on the Development of Corporate Public Relations: 1918-1953

Just as in the past, the relationship between the two movements can best be described in terms of a struggle for attention. Both organized labor and corporate public relations wanted to gain the support of the government and the public. During this period, they both realized that this was possible through favorable public exposure. They both needed the press.

A clear understanding of the period beginning after World War I and ending with the Korean War is essential to the understanding of organized labor's historical effect on public relations. During this period, business leaders and labor leaders jockeyed for positions of power and influence in society. Corporate America experienced a shift from a commanding position to a weakened position and then a position of compromise. Organized labor began this particular era heavily weakened, quickly shifted to power and then, just as corporate America, was forced to compromise. These power shifts, caused by the labor movement, shaped public relations in a variety of ways. First, public relations was thought to be business' savior from unionization. Second, when this saving effort failed, executives looked to practitioners to help deal with their newly created labor relations environment. Finally, after the Taft-Hartley Act took effect, public relations took the lead in the decertification efforts. This rocky period for both the organized labor movement and public relations began immediately after World War I.

Unfortunately for corporate leaders, public relations had a very negative image immediately following the war. For this and other reasons, executives were not able to exploit their power enough to crush the labor movement. Government cooperation with organized labor ended after the successful war effort and labor leaders were forced to cooperate with management. It seemed as though labor would never again pose a
significant threat to the corporate power structure. At this point, industrialists probably could have dealt labor a fatal blow through the employment of a unified public relations effort. They did no such thing on a broad scale. Perhaps they did not react because public relations was not yet developed enough, or because it carried with it the bad image of the press agents, flacks, propagandists and money grovelers. Most likely, post-war profits reduced the organized labor threat in the eyes of management. To many employers, an all-out campaign against labor may not have seemed necessary. Whatever the reason, the industrialists did not seize the opportunity to finish off the paralyzed union movement. In fact, a handful of executives did just the opposite, spreading their wealth to labor during the short-lived welfare capitalist era. This is not to say that public relations was not used to make business look good and organized labor look bad, nor that public relations did not develop during the 1920s. "Thomas Cochran has speculated that ascendancy in public relations was a significant factor in making business popular in the 1920s. A look at the efforts of unions in this realm shows that business did far outstrip its competitor."  

Industry leaders realized the need to control public opinion through public relations. Labor, though weak, still had plans for the future. After all, labor was an integral part of the public at large, the same public whose opinion was so valued by union leaders and management alike. This persistence by labor often made it difficult for businessmen to enjoy their power. The Railway Act of 1926 is an excellent example of labor's remaining influence. It gave railroad employees the right to negotiate contracts. The development of public relations theory and practice was alive and well in the boardrooms of the utilities and the offices of the counseling firms. Men like Lee, Bernays and Page further developed their methods, concepts and definitions of public relations. In fact, their concepts of message formation and control were poised and ready to be used against the labor

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movement. Apparently, though, as long as the profits rolled in, manufacturers could not
commit themselves to a joint effort against labor. The Great Depression changed all that.

The Depression facilitated a shift in public opinion against management, magnifying the
importance of public relations as the savior of corporate dominance in American society.
Sustained by a booming economy in the 1920s, management was able to put the union in
the position of the aggressor through accusations of un-Americanism. The loss of financial
control made this much less plausible. When the stock market crashed in 1929, so did
welfare capitalism and the ability of executives to manipulate the government and the
public. Big businessmen no longer had the clout afforded them by their wealth and
previously soaring profits. Out of necessity, big business turned to public relations to stem
the tide of negative public sentiment and the resulting support for organized labor.

Finally, business leaders formed the NAM and mounted the first cross-industry public
relations campaign against organized labor. The campaign contained innovative public
relations tactics ranging from a speaker's bureau, poster series and newsletter to a motion
picture, radio show and publicity barrage. But it was too late. The economy was
crumbling, and millions of hungry citizens felt little sympathy for the bewildered
executives. They were subjected to public scrutiny as never before and public relations
could not save them, even though practitioners claimed it could.

The election of Roosevelt merely made the industrialists' failure more complete, for the
New Deal brought with it government support for organized labor. It was this support that
produced the Wagner Act, the single most important piece of legislation in labor history.
The act revealed just how much management's power had slipped. True, many employers
did not bargain in good faith, but the fact remained that workers had the right to organize
and bargain collectively. Furthermore, John L. Lewis' newly formed CIO brought
unionization to millions of unskilled workers throughout the country. As the depression
progressed and unionization spread, executives continued to use public relations to fight
labor, but now they had a new problem to contend with, an "outside force" influencing their employees, with the legal right to do so.

Labor relations were forever altered. Management had to contend with union leaders, negotiators and alienated employees. Never before had management been expected to deal with so many uninvited outside forces. Managers found themselves in a unique situation that they often did not know how to handle. Indeed, they were overwhelmed by the demands of the union leaders and contract negotiators. Furthermore, they felt as though they had lost control of their work force. Workers had taken refuge behind their chosen representatives. Increasingly, management had to explain itself to the its own workers and subsequently the public. To do this, business leaders needed to keep constantly informed of the new demands of the public, a task they deemed well suited for public relations.

Business leaders wanted to know as much as possible about public sentiment on issues so that executives could react swiftly and retain some control of public opinion. Not only did they tap the public for information, they actually began to adjust policies to appease some of the public's demands. Industrialists no longer had unlimited power over employees or the public. Their strength could now be found in winning over public confidence.

These developments brought greater recognition to the legitimacy of public relations. Business had to adapt and effective communication was the only way to properly achieve that objective. America became more aware of the nature and importance of public relations as the profession was recognized more and more by the press, social scientists, research organizations and political parties. Organization within the profession grew as well.

"Workers in the field agreed that they influence public opinion; plan and engage in activities that produce good will; help management keep employees and stockholders fully informed
on company operations; help managements demonstrate social responsibility along with profit responsibility.\textsuperscript{1}

Perhaps it was only natural that the scope and list of public relations activities should grow steadily through these years. This was particularly obvious when support for organized labor increased. Often, employee loyalty split between the employer and the union. It was a peculiar situation, but one that had to be dealt with skillfully or an employer could lose control of his work force. Since public relations had become management's tool to sway opinion, executives began to aim their efforts at employees. Employees, understandably skeptical, gave such intra-company campaigns a cool reception. It should be noted that management could not use many public relations tactics directly in their anti-union activities. The Wagner Act severely restricted any management interference with employees' right to organize. Management found itself pinned between a hostile work force and an unsympathetic government. In fact, were it not for the depression and industry's subsequent loss of government support, the labor movement may never have taken hold as it did.

The combination of government support and the economic boom of World War II was the fruition union leaders' dreams. They had legislative support, economic leverage, and, as a result, soaring membership. "Increasingly, the political instruments forged in the 1940s became labor's primary vehicle for advancing their goals."\textsuperscript{2} Ironically, the early labor successes can be attributed more to the political and economic climate than the planned efforts of union leaders. In fact, unionization spread so fast that labor leaders had a difficult time handling it. The AFL didn't establish a public relations department until 1942. Even into the 1950s when virtually all large companies had organized public relations programs, often with the counselor given the vice-presidency, the union effort

\textsuperscript{1}Harlow, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{2}Zieger, p. 123.
was spasmodic and disorganized.\textsuperscript{1} Arguably, this may have kept organized labor from achieving and sustaining the levels of dominance in the U.S. as it has in other industrial countries. Management, on the other hand, did use public relations. This not only affected the realities of labor relations, but the progressive nature of public relations as well.

Several factors and events during this turbulent period of time molded subsequent public relations theory and practice. The Wagner Act and the Great Depression provided public relations practitioners with new problems to solve and relationships to manage. Were the labor situation left unchanged after World War II, unions might be stronger and public relations weaker today. However, the situation was not left unchanged. Through lobbying, a public relations activity, executives convinced Republican leaders to modify the Wagner Act and restrict organized labor. The passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947 gave management more freedom in its employee relations activities during union drives. The act affirmed that unions were not co-equal with employers and that workers had rights apart from those of the union and the union leaders. Perhaps the most significant right workers had was the right to decertify a union. At this point, management had a new glimmer of hope to regain some control over the work force it was supposed to manage. This brought new life to the fight against organized labor and new opportunity for public relations. At the same time, the manner in which some managers dealt with their employees also molded the future of the public relations profession.

Progressive management policies implemented through public relations strategies added socially redeeming qualities to the profession, qualities that ultimately guided the profession to a position of respect. After World War I, some leaders of giant corporations implemented token employee programs to achieve the tacit consent from employees necessary for teamwork. They established employee welfare and counseling programs whether or not management was actually concerned about employee welfare. As long as

\footnote{Tedlow, p. 133.}
the worker thought management cared, that is all that mattered. After the depression, the progressive programs of men like Fredrick Crawford and the leadership at General Foods were much more genuine. Their open door/open communication policies won employee loyalty and gave public relations flacks something to think about. The age of socially responsible public relations had arrived.

Union decertification and progressive management policies were a sign of things to come. Decertification gave the public relations profession the niche it needed to grow in corporate America. Progressive management planted the seeds for the contemporary proactive nature and professionalization of public relations. It may have been coincidental that the P.R.S.A. was formed in 1947, the same year Taft-Hartley passed, but it was also fortuitous for the future of public relations.

By the mid-fifties, organized labor had reached its peak with respect to the percentage of the work force unionized. Actual membership continued to grow, but the percent of unionized workers in the work force has declined to this day.\(^1\) Public relations had just begun to mature in dealing with managements' new publics. It would be years before one could identify the former's effect on the latter for this particular period of time, because unions appeared to be quite strong. No one knew that organized labor had begun its decline. Industrialists were not as dominant or powerful as they were in the 1920s. Neither were they as weakened as they were during the 1930s and 1940s. Conversely, organized labor was not as weak as it was in the 1920s or as strong as it was during the 1930s and 1940s. Unions appeared to be very strong in the 1950s, but Taft-Hartley was a potent compromise. Indeed both big business and organized labor held a position of compromise during the 1950s, a delicate balance that could be tipped by public relations. In fact, the public relations profession entered the late 1950s with new potential for growth and progressive development.

\(^1\)Zeiger, p. 26.
On a practical level, public relations tactics were more polished. The public relations of the 19th century reflected the press agent/publicity model. Then, the early 20th century reflected a public information model. Between 1920 and 1960, a two-way asymmetric model developed.¹ During this period, business leaders felt it necessary to be informed about public opinion. They did this primarily to respond to the public sentiments with messages that might sway public opinion. It is a two-way model because executives listened to the public, but it is asymmetric because they did not adjust to the public need. They simply molded messages to appease the public.

¹Culbertson, p. 22
Chapter 3
The Decline of Organized Labor

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Section One
The Development of Organized Labor: 1953-1980s

According to the most estimates, the proportion of non-farm workers belonging to
unions hit a peak of not more than 38 percent in 1953 and 1954, and has declined ever
since.¹ Labor rebounded from its post-war political setbacks to achieve security and
affluence of unprecedented proportions. Collective bargaining gains transformed workers'
lifestyles in the shop and in society. In fact, real weekly earnings for production workers
rose 70 percent between 1950 and 1970. By 1969, a survey of labor leaders showed 50
percent of union members living in suburbs. Indeed, the post-Korean War era began with
a great deal of promise for the union movement.

The joint AFL-CIO convention of 1955 saw the end of 20 years of civil war between the
two organizations. Labor leaders predicted monumental surges of growth after the CIO
reunited with the AFL. The results proved very different. When the AFL and CIO got
together, one in three workers were members of a union; 30 years later, that ratio had
dropped to fewer than one in five and is still dropping. In reality,

For all the exuberance of the 1955 convention oratory, most of the union chiefs in both camps suffered from tired blood. They were less interested in organizing the unorganized than in making sure that no other union would steal the members they already had or muscle in on the jurisdiction that, by character, represented their sovereign turf, however slack they might be in representing their flock or seeking to enlarge it.²

Despite internal problems, unions continued to grow, but the problems, including corruption, were destined to erode labor's power. Union ranks and coffers swelled, but the movement was paying a high price in lost public esteem for the refusal to crack down on corruption. In response, AFL-CIO President George Meany orchestrated the ouster of the Teamsters Union from the federation in 1957. Accused of corruption and ties with organized crime, the Teamsters simply thumbed their noses at Meany and continued to flourish. This supreme act, on Meany's part, earned few favors on Capitol Hill. "The 1959 Landrum-Griffin Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, establishing a bill of rights for union members and giving federal authorities extensive powers over the internal affairs of unions, was passed over the federation's vehement objections."¹ Its passage ended the federation's enthusiasm for enforcing its ethical practices codes. However, junking its self-monitoring machinery did not blind the federation to the damage its affiliates suffered from corruption and mob influence. Union officials received some relief when hundreds of thousands of public employees flooded their ranks in the early 1960s, but this turned out to be somewhat cosmetic in the long run. Even with continued growth, organized labor represented a shrinking percentage of the labor force. Labor leaders simply did not handle their successes or failures well.

Increasingly, conservatives began to publicize union corruption. Meanwhile, the changing nature of the work force created additional difficulties for labor leaders. The new composition of the labor pool was not conducive to unionization. Service, clerical and government employment steadily increased as traditional blue collar ranks declined. As early as 1950, 40 percent of all adult women held paying jobs. Agriculture and mining jobs, making up one quarter of the labor force in 1940, disappeared, embracing only one in 20 workers by 1970.

In 1940, the U.S. Census Bureau classified about thirty percent of the workforce as 'white collar', meaning

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¹Ibid, p. 15.
professional, managerial, clerical, and sales workers. By 1950, the figure had risen to 37 percent and by 1970 to 48 percent. In contrast, the 1960 census found that blue collar employment had declined to just under 40 percent, putting it behind the white collar category for the first time.\(^1\)

In retrospect, what should have been the golden age of organized labor, 1950 to 1970, was actually its demise. Corruption had severely damaged the union image. Organizational disarray and in-fighting snatched long-term success from the clutches of labor leaders. Equally detrimental was organized labor's inability to deal with a changing workforce. The unions were even denied the credit for improvements experienced by workers. Many commentators argue that workers' gains stemmed from sheer economic expansion. In fact, in 1970 just as in 1950 the poorest one-fifth of the population received less than 5 percent of national income while the top one-fifth enjoyed over 40 percent.\(^2\)

By the 1970s, "Lawyers, accountants, economists, health and safety experts, and investment analysts joined union payrolls, giving organized labor the same sort of bureaucratic cast that characterized other large-scale enterprises in a paper-shuffling society."\(^3\) The public began to perceive unions as just another self-perpetuating element of the establishment. The 1970s and 1980s have not been kind to the organized labor movement either.

While there are notable exceptions, many on both the right and left now doubt the social relevance and value of America's organized labor movement. The widespread, one might say textbook, picture of United States unions today is of institutions adept at advancing their own interests at the public's expense.\(^4\)

Union leaders failed to anticipate this development and therefore were not prepared to deal with it. In a 1972 interview, AFL-CIO President George Meany said, "Why should

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\(^1\)Zieger, p. 139.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 141.
\(^3\)Ibid, p. 153.
we worry about organizing groups of people who do not appear to want to be organized."¹

In a few short years, that all changed, and Meany was fighting for legislation to make it easier to organize all workers. Meanwhile, a U.S. News & World Report poll that ranked institutional leaders according to honesty, integrity, and dependability, listed union leaders second to last.² Steadily, union difficulties were manifested in declining membership.

Union leaders reacted by implementing more organizing drives, but the payoff in new members continued to shrink considerably. Several factors contributed to their dilemma.

The new worker comes from greater affluence, is better educated, and does easier work for shorter periods. His isn't a class struggle. More likely, his is a struggle for recognition, for independence, for individuality. Unions can't help toward achieving those aims.³

Not only had the employee changed, management was changing as well. The oppressive "management by fear" style of the past was being replaced with a supportive management style, treating employees as a valuable resource.

By the dawn of the 1980s, the bloated labor costs forced upon many leading American industries left them vulnerable to a complex set of new competitive pressures that challenged their ability to survive. Japan, Western European nations and Far East nations made inroads into U.S. markets and jobs. Furthermore, deregulation policies of Presidents Carter and Reagan demolished the protected positions many companies and unions had enjoyed. "Burgeoning, aggressive new companies began to operate without unions...in construction, steel, mining, and other fields that had once been near-monopolies for unionism."⁴

²Ibid, p. 73.
⁴Lipset, p. 9.
By 1984, "Folk singers, economists, poets, women's rights advocates, black activists, clergy, historians - all agreed that for the first time in half a century there is a real possibility of the de-unionization of America."¹ Statistics charted failed organizing campaigns, decertification of established unions and widespread disapproval of organized labor:

- From 1954 to 1984 the percent of the labor force enrolled in unions dropped from 38 percent to 19 percent.

- Eighty percent of that decline occurred since 1960.

- Organizing elections that had once experienced a 70 percent success rate, dropped below 50 percent.²

- In 1945, 14 million of the 40 million people in the workforce were unionized. Today, less than 17 million of 96 million are union members.³

These facts, coupled with management's new crusade to develop a positive employer-employee relationship through communication, have radically altered labor relations. "Of all the forces and conditions that influence the course of business leadership, communications is the one thread that can make the difference."⁴ More managers are giving employees open access to honest facts because they have realized that it does not do a company or an employee any good to function in a restrictive atmosphere. By opening up information access, managers establish ties with employees and, as a result, solve productivity problems and meet employee needs. For years, employees have felt a need and a right to share in the majority of their organization's information. Many new managers feel an obligation to respect both the right and the need.

This does not imply that a company must fully disclose all information to its employees, but many are revealing much more than they have in the past. For example, the

¹Zieger, pp. 193-194
management of Sears has two major guidelines that reflect the historical change in management style. The first is that everyone has the right to be treated as an individual and respected as a person. The second is that everyone has the right to fairness and justice in all their relations with colleagues and supervisors. Additionally, many companies are giving employees more decision making powers and autonomy. All of these factors, increasing communication, instilling a sense of value and respect, and increasing employee responsibility, leave today's unions with a completely different situation to deal with than the unions of the past. It is a far cry from the 19th century "public be damned" industrialist attitude.

Fifty and one hundred years ago, the majority of corporate managers thought only about the bottom line, not the employee. Today, some managers even feel they have failed as managers if their employees need someone else to represent them. They feel that unions impede their freedom to manage their business, and employees' ability to communicate with management. To satisfy workers and keep unions out, some managements have developed programs, "including periodic surveys of employee attitudes, training programs to upgrade skills, complaint airing sessions, worker participation in decision making, and formal systems of step-by-step hearings modeled on union grievance procedures."

Changes in employee attitudes and management styles in recent years has put organized labor on the defensive. Ben Swartz of the United Steel Workers has spent years trying to organize the Armco Steel Corporation and claims he has been unsuccessful because, "The company treats me like a gentleman. In fact, it kills me with kindness." This kind of treatment only compounds the problems of unions today, but of course, not all companies are killing unions with kindness.

1Ibid, p. 17.
3Ibid, p. 56.
4Ibid, p. 56.
The law says that both unions and employers are free to persuade employees with regard to unionization. At J. P. Stevens, a Southern textile manufacturer, unions and management alike have been fighting a persuasive battle for years. Union signs read: "Stop the J. P. Stevens spider. J. P. Stevens devours American labor by illegal and indecent labor practices and inhumane working conditions."¹ Through these accusations, the union revives the cause of the early American unions. The company argues,

It cannot be a cause because the unionism it seeks is not a legitimate end in itself. It is a legitimate means - but only one of several - to bring about what everyone agrees is valid and just: A decent job, a fair wage, good working conditions, a free exchange between employer and employee.²

The union, in turn, makes further accusations, and the fight goes on, each side quoting the desires of employees supporting their cause. Obviously, the days of hard-fought union battles are not over in the United States. Union leaders have reacted to the developments of the past 15 years with some rather unique strategies.

The current environment has forced unions to become very image-conscious. Consequently, the majority of new union strategies are image-oriented activities. During the past 10 years, the 750,000 member American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) has developed million-dollar advertising campaigns to soften hostility toward public employee unions. Unions are "borrowing the techniques of big business to get their messages across in sophisticated advertisements."³ It is difficult to sell, though, when a television advertisement comes on proclaiming the virtues of unions just as a strike occurs and the garbage piles up. The International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) has also joined the advertising action, spending two and a half

²Ibid, p. 49.
million dollars in just one year for advertisements. The ILGWU claims it can make statements subliminally on television with slogans like, "Look for the union label."\footnote{Ibid, p. 74.}

Television seems to be a popular medium for unions to use in their image campaigns. The United Auto Workers union (UAW) wants to start its own television stations. The UAW has applied for permission to run 11 low-power stations in as many cities, and it will apply for more.\footnote{"Can Low Power TV Shine the UAW Image?," Business Week, (December 4, 1978), p. 63.}

Other union strategies are more directly involved with the collective bargaining process. "United States unions up to now have shown little interest in gaining 'codetermination' with management in running companies, as European unions have. But some unionists think that a groundswell could develop in that direction."\footnote{"What Put Labor On The Defensive?", p. 63.}

This would arm organizers and unions with a new cause to add to their list of goals. Union leaders feel that this new cause may be the ammunition they need to regain their losses and surge into prominence once again. It would reverse organized labor's defensive status and once again put big business on the defensive.

One other, and perhaps the most effective, union strategy is exemplified in the J. P. Stevens case. Union strategists' plan was to isolate Stevens' management from the mainstream of American business. They urged hundreds of union, church and liberal allies to send angry letters to companies that had directors who were also on Stevens' board. As a result, the threat of harmful publicity lead to the resignation of three of Stevens' board members.\footnote{Ibid, p. 63.} This kind of pressure tactic holds true to the fundamental strategies of the union activities of the past. In any case, unions are in trouble and they are fighting to get back on top if they can.
Section Two

The Development of Public Relations: 1953-1980s

By the mid 1950s, modern public relations theory and practice was forming throughout corporate America. The depression and the Wagner Act exacted a heavy toll on big business, but for public relations, as a business, bad news was good news. When the industrialists held positions of social omnipotence, they could choose to use or not use public relations. With the old infrastructure of the industrial revolution crumbling, however, executives required public relations counsel to deal with a new role in society, that of social responsibility. Of course, this did not happen overnight. The process began years before and continues to this very day. Edward Bernays planted the seeds, in theory, for this development already in the 1920s.

In 1922, while Ivy Lee was still referring to himself as a publicity advisor, publicity expert, or publicity director, Bernays was describing himself as a public-relations counsel, and that is the title that caught on. But Bernays did something more important: He gave public relations practitioners pride in their activities.¹

Bernays wanted to bring order out of chaos in society. He stated that, "Pulling strings behind the scenes was necessary not for personal advantage but for social salvation."² He sidestepped traditional ethical restraints by replacing them with this positive statement. It was permissible to manipulate the public for the social good. Bernays' ideas, while not completely understood in theory, fit very well the practical needs of business from the mid 1950s on. Many executives began to realize Bernays' key points. First, survival depended on public support. Consumerism had made society a highly powerful voice in business operations. To go against society's wishes would be suicidal. Second, business must be able to change with the public interest. Because the public was so fickle, adapting to and

¹Marvin N. Olasky, Corporate Public Relations, A New Historical Perspective, p. 80.
²Ibid, p. 83.
tracking attitudes was a necessity. Third, society had to be convinced that there was a place for business. This was especially indicative of the social responsibility theory. Business needed to operate in the public interest and to make sure that this was well known. Finally, business realized public relations could handle these duties.¹

The alterations of the 1960s primarily focused on the ability and necessity of business to adjust its policies and practices. In this light, many business leaders expressed the desire to develop the predictive powers of public relations. They wanted practitioners to sense, even anticipate, the changing temper of the times before a problem or crisis would arise, and provide the plan, program or machinery to deal effectively with the situation.²

Additionally, there was much discussion of the ethics, qualifications and professionalism of practitioners, as well as further development in corporate staffs.

"Business organizations in particular expanded their public relations staffs whose heads were made up of top management officials."³ And so the stage was set for modern public relations that we know and experience today.

Modern public relations has finally succeeded in attaining a more positive than negative image. In the early 1970s, public relations definitions became more situational.

"Adjustment, in many instances readjustment, both in thought and practice, was made to meet the requirements of the new day. And so the practitioner was inclined to define the public relations function accordingly, and more or less independently of fellow practitioners."⁴ Those requirements of the new day dealt predominantly with issues of social responsibility, issues that received increased attention by management in general. Consequently, much of modern theory focuses on corporate public relations and its role in society.

¹Bernays, p. 104.
²Harlow, p. 58.
⁴Ibid, p. 60.
Within the corporation, practitioners' responsibilities have multiplied to include decision-making and planning activities. Practitioners enjoy this corporate role because they "generally see themselves as the social conscience of the corporation, with the dual obligations of continually monitoring the internal and external environments." ¹ The size of most corporate public relations staffs has increased to a large extent to deal with management responsibilities regarding these environments. Arthur Page advocated a philosophy of being sure a company's deeds and words matched. An important issue was to make sure that employees were aware of what those words were. In the years since Page's day, public relations professionals have been sensitive to match deeds and words. This somewhat explains the growing emphasis on filling some management and decision-making positions with public relations people. Unfortunately, practitioners are not always able to effectively fill these positions, because many educational institutions tend to define public relations too narrowly.

Traditionally, public relations education has concerned itself with the theory and practice of communicating organizational messages via the mass media to a variety of publics. The employee public is usually considered in a listing of traditional publics, but the literature in the field has only recently given substantial consideration to programming for this public.²

Employee relations appears to be perhaps the strongest growth area for the public relations profession during the next few years. In a 1976 survey of the nation's top Fortune 50 companies, public relations officers were asked if their respective departments were actively involved with internal organizational communication and programming. One hundred percent of the respondents answered "yes". Eighty-two percent thought that the

internal communications area would expand in the future. They cited union and employee information demands as reasons for expansion.¹

As qualified practitioners enter the market, public relations sends its roots deeper and deeper into the corporate management structure. The public relations role model has changed a great deal through history. E. W. Brady identifies four different models:

A press agent/publicity model, which originated between 1850 and 1900; a public information model circa 1900 to 1920; a two-way asymmetric model developed in the 1920's; and a two-way symmetric model, which evolved in the 1960's and 1970's.²

The two-way symmetric model reflects management's efforts to genuinely respond to the public demand for social responsibility. Executives began to listen to the public and adjust policy accordingly. Theorists primarily differentiate between the later models in terms of purpose, specifying that the former is dedicated to scientific persuasion while the latter is oriented toward mutual understanding. James Grunig and Todd Hunt propose a continuing view of the four models. They claim that each is appropriate in specific contemporary situations.³ This leads one to believe that models are added and changed but not subtracted.

The present open systems model allows for two-way communication, along with policy and attitude adjustment on both sides. This model has matured at a healthy rate in internal relations departments during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Internal relations people speak both to and for management and employees. The presence of labor unions in this relationship produces a rather unique situation and some questions about the future for internal public relations. This scenario becomes even more intriguing as organized labor continues to decline and the public, employees included, continues to look to corporations as exhibitors of social responsibility.

¹Ibid, p. 72.
³As cited in Culbertson, p. 22.
Section Three

The Effect of Organized Labor on the Development of Corporate Public Relations: 1953-1980s

The earlier struggle for attention between the two movements solidified during this period. This occurred primarily because corporate public relations and organized labor increasingly experienced direct interaction. By the 1970s, they were both involved in intensive lobbying and public relations activities.

Organized labor affected corporate public relations in two fundamental ways during this period. First, unions stepped up their own public relations activities, creating a public relations battle with corporations. They did so because they suffered from image problems, even at the height of their success.

Revelations of chronic corruption in several unions, notably the huge International Brotherhood of Teamsters, led to harsh regulatory legislation and tarnished labor's public reputation. Even unblemished unions came under criticism for having become stodgy and bureaucratic, evermore remote from the concerns of a younger membership.¹

Second, unions forced corporate America to accept a position of social responsibility with respect to the public and employees. Of course, the unions always wanted to remain the catalyst with regard to corporations' responsibility to employees. Through decertification and declining membership, however, many employers found themselves once again in charge of employee welfare, with the same social mandate to fulfill. In a sense, employers have had to replace unions with in-house labor relations machinery. Indeed, the relationship between organized labor and public relations has created some unique developments during the union decline. These two, the public relations efforts of unions and the corporate social responsibility mandate, exemplify the general influence of labor on public relations.

¹Zieger, p. 147.
The organized labor movement could have benefited from public relations long before the 1970s and 1980s. Unions suffered a great deal from corruption and the subsequent passage of the Landrum-Griffin Act in the late 1950s. In addition, the AFL trashed its own cleansing practices, leaving it fully exposed to government scrutiny and public ridicule. Despite these events, unionism enjoyed its heyday during the 1950s, 1960s and even the early 1970s. By the late 1960s, "Unions no more needed justification than did motherhood or the Golden Rule. Union membership on the job was like citizenship at the polling place - a means of participating in the central activities of a democratic society."\(^1\) By the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, this kind of pro-unionism became rare. People began to view union wage achievements as advantages for the minority at the expense of the majority. Furthermore, they began to think unions impeded productivity and encouraged inefficiency; special interests seeking the narrow concerns of members.

Unions responded through public relations and advertising efforts. They did everything from implementing million dollar advertising campaigns and producing films, to purchasing low-power television stations and beefing up public relations staffs. These strategies were not terribly successful, however, mostly because the negative union image was much stronger fuel for corporate public relations than any slogans were for the union campaigns. The union image simply deteriorated too rapidly for labor leaders to react effectively. Ironically, it was similar to business leaders' experience in the 1930s. Public relations campaigns could not save them, either.

Understandably, employers took advantage of the situation by implementing public relations programs of their own. It was not difficult. Employers needed only to funnel negative union information to the press and publicize their own labor relations efforts. Labor leaders did not realize it at the time, but organized labor was permanently on the defensive. It was not difficult for the public to accept corporate America's apparent

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\(^1\)Ibid, p. 197.
commitment to handle its work force in a responsible way, or reject the social relevance of unions. Whether refuting the relevance of organized labor or praising corporate America's newfound commitment to social responsibility public relations fit the situation and functioned quite well.

Certainly, corruption alone didn't destroy the labor movement. A changing work force, a failure to retain government influence and the development of pro-active management policies all took their toll. Of course, Ronald Reagan's ascension to power in 1981 only exacerbated labor's problems.

Yet labor's critics, duly noting all these tribulations, pointed fingers at the unions themselves. Radicals accused entrenched union leaderships of lack of responsiveness to the black, Hispanic and female workers who increasingly occupied the low-wage rungs most in need of vigorous union organizing. Neoconservatives and neoliberals decried labor's attachment to the politics of the New Deal era, with their stress on regulation of business, government intervention in the economy, and interference in the creative magic of free markets. Observed one commentator, "The association of unionism with industrial decline is no accident; unions stand accused of having rendered American industry uncompetitive through exorbitant wage demands and rigid work rules."¹

Reagan's pro-business, pro-America policies only served to reinforce this opinion nationwide. The generation joining the workforce in the early 1980s saw a labor movement under fire and shrinking. Even though unions were on the decline, however, their existence forced corporations to act in a socially responsible manner. While they held a position of dominance, unions pointed out the abuses of management to the public. The public, in turn, demanded that corporations more closely follow the will of society. Bernays pointed this out as a necessity in the age of consumerism.² It is perhaps even more important to note what happened to labor relations as unions disappeared.

¹Ibid, p. 196.
²Bernays, p. 104.
The main objective of union leaders was to protect the rights of employees. They wanted to insure the socially responsible treatment of employees by management. To do so, unions set up the necessary machinery for contract negotiation and grievance procedures. Union decline and decertification left a void in this respect for a number of companies nationwide. It became necessary for management to fill this communication void. Once again, public relations got the call.

Today, public relations practitioners are filling countless positions in corporate employee communications departments. Indeed, the unions are no longer there in many cases, but the employee needs are still there. It is ironic that today's public relations practitioners find themselves performing some of the same functions as unions once did, the same unions their predecessors fought to destroy.

The history of public relations is, in reality, more complex than some of my statements would indicate. In fact, the many subtle effects of the organized labor movement on corporate public relations are too vast to ever completely assess. Certainly, countless other forces, organizations and events come into play. I have tried to sift through some of them and distinguish the general effects of organized labor on corporate public relations. A summary of my historical interpretation is as follows:

First, the railroads and utilities developed public relations to control their markets. They did so by manipulating public opinion and, in turn, government policy. Press agents multiplied, coercing the public to fulfill corporate America's wishes. By World War I, though, men like Bernays were developing more socially responsible models of public relations, models obscured by a very negative public perception of public relations. Before the Great Depression, executives began using public relations tactics to keep organized labor in check, but because they held such a commanding position, they felt it unnecessary to orchestrate a major campaign. Labor had no legal rights and could be more easily deterred through physical, often violent, force. The depression and the Wagner Act changed the course of history for organized labor and subsequently for public relations.
After the Wagner Act, workers had legal rights protecting them from the abuses they previously suffered. Management, its iron fist in check, turned to the potent pen of public relations practitioners.

But even public relations tactics were restricted, for the Wagner Act spread a security blanket over labor, prohibiting almost every form of direct interference by management in the unionization process. Taft-Hartley, on the other hand, restored some management prerogatives, allowing more direct access to employees and the possibility of decertification. This act gave public relations new purpose, and at the same time, progressive management policies gave it new spirit. Public relations, as a profession, began to shed its unethical heritage, opting for a more socially responsible image.

During the decline of American unionism, executives continued to use straightforward public relations tactics to counter organized labor and respond to the public's demand for social responsibility. The decline also left a void in employee communication which public relations then filled. Today, public relations people perform a broad range of functions from management and crisis planning to employee relations and corporate philanthropy. They represent the corporate conscience, explain company policy to the public and relate the public interest to management. Theoretically, this is best understood through the two-way symmetric model of public relations described in section two of this chapter. These trends direct the public relations profession toward further growth and diversification in the future.

In the next, and final, chapter I assess the implications of my interpretations for future public relations theory and practice. Those implications stem directly from the historical development and interpretation I have presented.
Chapter 4

Implications and Conclusions

The Future of Unions:

Future Public Relations Theory and Practice

I believe the trends charted in my historical interpretation of organized labor's influence on corporate public relations will continue into the future. The struggle for the attention the government, the public and the press continues between the two movements to this day. Today, unions are losing that struggle for attention and beneficial exposure. Unions will remain in a state of decline and, by so doing, continue to shape corporate public relations. Current opinion projects a rather bleak future for organized labor. "Indicators of its health show it is very ill. The only debatable point is whether the illness is terminal or simply represents another of the down cycles from which the union movement has suffered during its lifetime."¹ Labor's woes are best illustrated by its declining membership. Recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that union membership has fallen from 23 percent of the workforce in 1980 to 18.8 percent in 1984, representing a loss of 2.7 million members.² Several factors continue to facilitate the union decline. Some of the most prominent are:

Changes in the type and location of work. Employment is declining in the highly unionized manufacturing industry and growing in the less-unionized service sector. This shift is a result of the transition of our business world to a service economy...

Activities of management. Management is working harder now than in the past to remain non-union. It does this in two ways. One is by trying to provide a work place

²Ibid, p. 293.
that employees believe is fair and appropriate - one in which they do not perceive a need for a union... The other method is by more vigorously opposing union organizing campaigns...

Protections being provided by law for all employees. The federal government's increased protection of employment rights through legislation has provided an alternative source of employee protections...

Bad publicity for unions. In recent years, much of what has been said about unions has been unfavorable. Internal corruption has been highly publicized and the legitimate successes of unions have sometimes been seen as not in the interest of the country.¹

Perhaps the two most prevalent of these factors are "bad publicity for unions" and "management activities." Bad publicity, pervasive in the news media, is exemplified in television news commentary and television magazine programs. For example, in an April 2, 1987, Nightline program, Ted Koppel opened the show with the following list of union failures:

- 1985: A bitter divisive union strike against the Hormel Meat Packing Plant in Minnesota featured violent demonstrations, mass arrests, and eventually a war within the union ranks over strike tactics. When it was over, the strikers had been replaced.

- The longest steel strike in the nation's history began in August, 1986. It was settled 170 days later, when the United Steel Workers Union agreed to pay concessions.

- In May, 1986, striking TWA flight attendants gave up and voted to end their walkout, but management had already filled most of their jobs with newly hired employees.

- In the spring of 1987, the Writers Guild of America strikes ABC and CBS after the two networks demanded the union give up seniority rights, the lifeblood of any union.²

Expose's like this are common, as are portraits of the "New Management" activities. Unions are not the only institutions threatened these days. "The changing environment has

made its impact on the viability of many businesses themselves and on the way in which they are managed. In fact, management's actions in adjusting to an altered environment have constituted further threats to the health of unions."¹ Some managements, viewing unions as an encumbrance to competing in a global economy, resort to anti-union tactics with increased intensity, sophistication and success. More important, management is trying to create a new way of managing. "This new approach to managing includes greater responsiveness to employee needs for involvement, responsibility and meaningful work...These organizations accept responsibility for creating a positive and motivating work environment for their employees. In doing so, they discover that the result is a stronger, more competitive enterprise."²

Union leaders find it difficult to handle these new management practices. In fact, obstacles to job enrichment often come from the suspicion and resistance of unions. At a recent Upjohn conference of labor leaders, management people and academicians, the central topic was the problem of job enrichment. "Most of the proposed solutions came from the management side."³ Labor leaders present were very upset over this fact. Such anxiety reveals their suspicions of an analysis that challenges the fundamental precepts of the union movement. "When you suggest that the basic problem has to do with the nature of the job and the ways the plant is structured, rather than wages, fringes, and other things basic to the bargaining process, the union representatives understandably get nervous."⁴

Realistically, management has to change to compete globally. The pervasive attitude among critics is that management, labor, the government and financial institutions should find common ground and work away at that. "Management is saying, and some labor leaders are agreeing, that strikes and confrontation are universally damaging, that what is

¹Lawler, III, and Mohrman, p. 293.
²Ibid, p. 293.
needed now in the face of foreign competition and a devalued dollar is a new strategy based
more on cooperation and mutuality of interest." The bottom line is making employees
more productive. The only way to achieve this may be by making workers feel more
important, more involved, and more a part of the decision-making process.

Liberals suggest workers' self-management is the key.

Workers' self-management refers to the collective process of
self-governance and democratic management within an
organization that produces goods or services. It eliminates
employee-employer relationships and provides an extension
and reinforcement of democratic principles fundamental to
modern Western thought. Workers' self-management refers
to an environment that encourages human growth by
stressing cooperation and participation by all those actively
engaged in the productive process.²

This, however, is a radical approach that probably will not catch on in the long run. More
likely, management will continue to instigate less extreme progressive change.

I contend that unions, through decline, coupled with progressive management activities,
will influence future public relations theory and practice in three ways. First, some
corporations will continue to use public relations tactics, traditional and non-traditional, to
fight organized labor. Second, other corporations will progressively use public relations to
work with and develop better relationships with unions. Third, public relations will
continue to fill the communications void left by exiting unions, presenting a unique position
of mediator for future public relations professionals.

The first projected effect, the use of public relations to counter union efforts, is the least
striking of the three. As long as unions exist, management will continue to resist
organizing campaigns through traditional and non-traditional public relations tactics. Non-
traditional programs include efforts to please employees as opposed to traditional programs
of attacking unions. One such non-traditional program, grievance handling procedures,

¹Nightline, April 2, 1987, transcript, p. 2.
²Christopher Eaton Gunn, Workers' Self-Management in the United States,
will continue to develop in corporate America. In a 1979 study, 69 percent of non-union companies had formal complaint systems. Furthermore, it appears that the more a company favors union containment, the more likely it is to have instituted a non-union complaint system.¹

The other two projected effects raise much broader and more striking implications for public relations theory. They both involve a system of cooperation through communication facilitated by public relations. "Management priorities and policies are influenced by the extent of union presence and 'power' in relationships. The spectrum runs from union prevention in essentially non-union companies, to adjustment and accommodation in heavily unionized firms."² One is a model of cooperation between management and the union, the other is a model of cooperation between management and employees. The former will develop in industries firmly entrenched in unionism, while the latter will develop in industries losing union status or never having union status.

"Union-management relationships in the United States have traditionally been adversarial, with unions consistently taking the position that this is the best way to accomplish their objectives."³ For years, management perpetuated this adversarial relationship. Managers are beginning to realize, however, that firmly entrenched unions may as well be used in a positive way to improve the work environment and productivity. Of course, a number of managements still try to ignore trade union officials, "but this is a very short-sighted policy, for by keeping in touch with them and seeing that there are opportunities for mutual discussion, much misunderstanding can be avoided."⁴

Public relations professionals are trained to handle the necessary communications functions that will facilitate positive union-management relations. For the system to work,

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²Ibid, p. 4.
³Lawler, III, and Mohrman, p. 293.
several elements must be evident. First, if management is going to institute a cooperation policy, a decision must be made to refrain from anti-union tactics. One management source describes the co-existence policy as follows:

"It is practically impossible to build a satisfactory union-company relationship if union officials feel that the company is out to 'get' them, or to destroy the union. Once we have made up our minds that the union is here to stay, it is best to recognize the political aspects of union leadership. We cannot afford to behave one day as though we want to destroy the union and its leaders and then try to obtain their cooperation the next day. We must consistently recognize the role of the union as the legal and proper representative of employees in a certified bargaining unit. This can be done while at the same time requiring acceptance by the union of management's responsibility to manage the business."\(^1\)

It may be easier for management to make the decision to cooperate than for the union leaders to accept that decision without suspicion. But in the face of widespread union decline, they will be able to accept it. A second element in this process requires even more effort on the part of the union. It must go beyond traditional collective bargaining and become involved in quality worklife programs for employees. To do this, unions must increase their internal competence and exert more effort in employee programs. It is more than negotiating a contract; it is a continuous commitment to employee welfare. "A successful program requires strong and enthusiastic support, encouragement, and guidance from the top down on the part of both unions and management."\(^2\)

The final ingredient, communication, ties the other forces together and helps them function in reality. I theorize that public relations will fill that role more and more in the future. It is a difficult and unique role. Public relations, or in this case labor relations, professionals will have to establish the confidence of both union and management. It is vital to develop new and effective methods of communicating and consulting with unions.

\(^1\)Freedman, p. 58.
Trying to manipulate, influence or persuade union officials or shop stewards is fundamentally a waste of time. The labor relations atmosphere will necessarily be a delicate one, requiring the utmost care and genuine spirit in communications planning. Labor leaders can certainly represent their members, "but they cannot be positive carriers of a management message to the workers without themselves becoming identified with management."¹ Labor relations people, on the other hand, can and will function in that capacity. It will be a peculiar relationship that will take time to develop. Co-existence requires a large ingredient of company initiative and control. The labor relations function can provide that initiative and control through an accepted position of mediator and facilitator, if it is given the opportunity to do so.

In a sense, labor relations people will speak for management to unions and employees. They will in turn, carry messages from union leaders and employees back to management. As one public relations theorist put it: "It is not a question of putting the unions out of business - but of putting management back into it...Communication is really all about the understanding of a common purpose which aims at the creation of wealth in the widest sense of that word."²

Public relations professionals will have to play a similar role in employee relations situations where unions have left or never existed. This, my final projected effect of organized labor on corporate public relations, will influence future public relations theory the most. I believe further public relations involvement in management-employee relations will influence educational, practical and ethical aspects of the profession. The most apparent difference between this model and the union-management co-existence model is the obvious absence of an employee representative. Therefore, a given company's labor relations department will have to represent employees as well as management. In the past,

²Ibid, p. 82.
"The need for change and for employees to have a greater say in changes have led increasingly to the establishment for the trade union as the chief or sole channel of representing employees' views, ideas and interests to management."\(^1\) This is no longer the case, and if union decertification continues, it will become even less common. Furthermore, many of today's workers have new horizons beyond the traditional goals of wages, hours and benefits. The potential for them to achieve their new goals of work fulfillment does exist. Contemporary industry is an immensely complex social tool for achieving popular aspirations for better living.\(^2\)

In my estimation, the public relations function will better facilitate that representation and fulfillment in the economy of the future. A key factor in this theory is the public relations person's ability to establish himself as a separate entity of sorts. He will be required to function as a representative for management and labor. He will speak both to and for management and labor in a unique position of neutrality. The public relations member of management will need to assume the role of innovator, catalyst, conscience and the inward and outward seeing eye.\(^3\) The most difficult part of this communication role will be establishing positive contact between management and employees. The public relations manager "must be able to perform the dual function of identifying himself with the company's interests and at the same time, withdrawing to a distance from which he can observe the whole company from the same distance as the public sees it."\(^4\)

Indeed, the public relations function, providing the communications channel between employers and employee groups, is extensively involved on both sides of the relationship.\(^5\)

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To fulfill employee needs, companies will require an entity that has an open communications channel with employees and management, one that understands both employees and management. In the future, that entity will progressively be the internal corporate public relations department. "When workers and management cooperate, a monumental tool for material well-being becomes available."¹ Public relations professionals can and will facilitate that cooperation.

What, then, are the implications of these theories for future public relations theory? Above all, practitioners must continue to professionalize. They must develop a greater understanding and appreciation for management practices and high ethical standards. Public relations education must focus less on the mechanical function of the practitioner and more on his professional role in society. Furthermore, the public relations professional of the future should be prepared for negotiation and mediation, a further progression in the current two-way symmetric model of public relations theory. "A mediator has no power to impose a settlement; rather, he or she facilitates bringing both parties together...How a mediator intervenes is not clear-cut...no mediator can function without the trust, cooperation and acceptance of both parties."²

Whether dealing with union-management co-existence or management-employee relations, public relations people should understand unions, collective bargaining, current management practices and communications methods. Today's labor relations problems are opportunities for the future public relations professional.

The solution seems to be to concentrate on breaking down large workforces into smaller, self-aware teams, with a leader through whom communication is possible. An important element in this is the avoidance of decision-making in remote headquarter offices with which workers feel little sense of contact. Involvement in decisions, and

¹Rukeyser, p. 115.
understanding of the reasons for them, need to be passed as far down the organizational hierarchy as possible.¹

We will always have a need for unions. They have accomplished a great deal throughout their history. In fact, improved working conditions for their members have spread to the workforce in general because of labor legislation and non-union employers' attempts to avoid unionization. There remains work to be done by unions. The fact is, we will always have bad management and consequently abused employees. But in general, it is the union decline that will continue to open new doors for public relations theory and practice.

Future public relations theory and practice will become more and more a management function. Currently, we are experiencing the transition from the public relations "practitioner" to the public relations "manager." The public relations profession will become less a technical function and more a managing function. Professionals will need to understand more about the publics they deal with. Public relations professionals must strive to create and maintain team efforts and programs in American business. They must do this through unique and effective communications programs. Whether dealing with unions, management, employees or any combination of these, public relations professionals must achieve higher levels of cooperation and promote programs rooted in a "common purpose."

For American business to compete worldwide, cooperation and common purpose will have to become pervasive themes in business philosophy. Industrialists, managers, union leaders, employees and public relations people alike share a desire for well-run productive business operations. Optimum productivity and job satisfaction simply cannot be achieved through confrontation and in-fighting.

It has taken many years for the public relations profession to come within reach of a position to influence corporate cooperation and social responsibility. While the social

¹Black, p. 82.
responsibility theory of public relations has existed for a long time, public relations practice has lagged behind. Finally, after a history racked with unethical and illegal practice, professional practice has caught up with professional theory. We will always have flacks and unethical practitioners, but increasingly they will be outnumbered by the respected public relations professional, a professional with a purpose.
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