



School of Law

THE NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING COMMITTEE FOR HOOVER 1932

Ross E. Davies, George Mason University School of Law

Green Bag Almanac & Reader, 2008, pp. 111-119

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THE NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING COMMITTEE FOR HOOVER 1932

Edward Bernays had the pleasure of counseling a winner when he did some PR work for Calvin Coolidge in 1924 (see page 75). It wasn't the same story in 1932, when Bernays was called in to help the Herbert Hoover campaign convince the electorate that the American economy was on the rebound. "I suggested the formation of a committee I would advise," Bernays recalled many years later. "Leaders of groups would be asked to support him." In due course, a "Non-partisan Fact Finding Committee for Hoover sent telegrams to leaders in various occupations, asking them to support Hoover."¹ The results were mixed. One of those solicitous telegrams is reproduced on the next page, followed by responses from scholars at Amherst, Buffalo, Dartmouth, Harvard, Minnesota, Northwestern, Stanford, and Virginia.² We especially enjoyed the note scribbled at the bottom of the letter from Dartmouth College president Ernest M. Hopkins: "Don[']t use."

How much has public intellectual culture changed since Bernays served Coolidge and Hoover? Compare the letters on pages 113–119 with the coverage of "Historians for Obama" at Inside-HigherEd.com. What would Barack Obama's historians — or Fred Thompson's law professors, or John Edwards's economists, or John Kerry's Nobel Prize winners — say if they thought about the roots of their own behavior? One view is that "groups of citizens, self-defined by occupation or ideology or ethnic group or

¹ Edward L. Bernays, *Biography of an Idea* 644-45 (1965).

² Edward L. Bernays Papers, Part I: Book File, Box I:300, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

religion or gender, have been doing this since the late 19th century,” and scholars publicly plumping for presidential candidates are simply carrying on this important tradition, “in which voluntary associations thrive and take the obligations of citizenship seriously.”³ But for good or ill this academic politicking also perpetuates a powerful 20th-century tradition: the presentation of carefully selected academic opinions as expert consensus for the purpose of swaying public opinion. Bernays’s PR genius lives on.

Charge to account of Edward L. Bernays, 1 Wall Street, NYC

CLASS OF SERVICE DESIRED		1213 A													
<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">DOMESTIC</td> <td style="width: 50%;">CABLE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>TELEGRAM</td> <td>FULL RATE</td> </tr> <tr> <td>DAY LETTER</td> <td>DESP. P. D.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NIGHT MESSAGE</td> <td>NIGHT LETTER</td> </tr> <tr> <td>NIGHT LETTER</td> <td>WEEK END LETTER</td> </tr> </table> <p><small>user should check class of service desired; otherwise message will be transmitted as a full-rate communication.</small></p>	DOMESTIC	CABLE	TELEGRAM	FULL RATE	DAY LETTER	DESP. P. D.	NIGHT MESSAGE	NIGHT LETTER	NIGHT LETTER	WEEK END LETTER	<h1 style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">WESTERN UNION</h1> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; margin: 0;">NEWCOMB CARLTON, PRESIDENT J. C. WILLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">CHECK</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">ACCT'G INFMN.</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">TIME FILED</td> </tr> </table>	CHECK	ACCT'G INFMN.	TIME FILED
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Send the following message, subject to the terms on back hereof, which are hereby agreed to

September 16th 1932

**WILL YOU AS A LEADER IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS
 LET US HAVE BY WIRE COLLECT YOUR AUTHORITATIVE
 VIEWPOINT ON GOVERNOR ROOSEVELTS FARM RELIEF
 PROGRAM ANNOUNCED SEPTEMBER FOURTEENTH STOP
 DO YOU FEEL THAT HE HAS SPECIFICALLY GRASPED
 THE BRDAD PRINCIPLES THAT YOU HAVE FREQUENTLY
 OUTLINED AND THAT HE HAS DEALT WITH THE PROBLEM
 AS REABISTICALLY AS IS DEMANDED BY THE SITUATION
 TOP YOUR FIFTY TO ONE HUNDRED WORD STATEMENT
 TOGETHER WITH THAT OF OTHER LEADERS WILL BE
 USED FOR PUBLICATION TO EDUCATE PUBLIC OPINION
 AT THIS TIME**

**HERBERT WACHSMANN, Secretary
 NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING COMMITTEE
 FOR HOOVER
 799 BROADWAY
 New York City**

³ Scott Jaschik, *Historians Team Up to Back Obama*, insidehighered.com, Nov. 27, 2007 (quote is from a follow-up comment by Michael Kazin of Georgetown University); hnn.us/articles/44958.html; www.johnedwards.com/news/press-releases/20080102-economists/, Jan 2, 2008; fredfile.fred08.com/ lawyers/, Jan 2, 2008; www.gwu.edu/%7Eaction/2004/kerry/kerrynobel062104.html, June 21, 2004.

NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING FOR HOOVER 1932

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
UNIVERSITY FARM, ST. PAUL

DIVISION OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

September 19, 1932

Mr. Herbert Wachsmann, Secretary
Non-Partisan Fact-Finding Committee for Hoover
799 Broadway
New York City, N. Y.

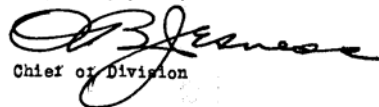
Dear Mr. Wachsmann:

Your wire asking for a statement of my views relative to the farm relief program outlined by Governor Roosevelt has been received. Because I have no desire to express opinions which will be employed for political purposes I have not followed your suggestion that I wire you a statement of this kind.

The prevailing tendency in campaign consideration of economic problems appears to be that of being more concerned with popularity of the expressions rather than with their soundness or adequacy. This tendency by no means is monopolized by any one candidate or party. There is need for greater recognition and better understanding of fundamental facts and consequences involved in problems affecting agriculture such as, for instance, problems of international trade, tariff, international debts, credit, taxation, price levels, production control, marketing and land policies. I am also wondering if there is not room for greater admission of the limitations of political and governmental action in the solution of these problems. The tendency seems to be one of being long on promises and short on fulfillment because promise is so easy.

Under existing conditions, a person whose interest is primarily that of trying to find and understand facts and to analyze and reason clearly would not seem justified in attacking the program of one candidate or one party merely for the purpose of rendering aid to another whose pronouncements may be equally subject to criticism.

Very truly yours,



Chief of Division

OBJ:FK

GREEN BAG ALMANAC & READER 2008

THE UNIVERSITY OF BUFFALO
SCHOOL OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

CROSBY HALL

September 22, 1932

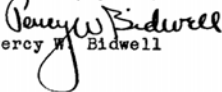
Mr. E. E. Hunt
799 Broadway
New York City

My dear Hunt:

Naturally I am much flattered that your Committee wants a statement from me on business conditions, and if I were a specialist in this field, I should be glad to give you one hundred words. However, since I am not, I think I had better keep my opinions to myself.

With best regards,

Cordially yours,


Percy W. Bidwell

PWB:KT

NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING FOR HOOVER 1932

INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
THE UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
UNIVERSITY, VIRGINIA

September 22, 1932

Dr. E. E. Hunt
799 Broadway
New York City

Dear Dr. Hunt:

I have your telegram of September 21st and I wish that I might conscientiously give you the sort of statement which you request. While we do believe in this part of the country that there are some signs of economic recovery, the impression is widely prevalent that a great deal of the stock market improvements, as well as of the recent signs of renewed activity in industrial enterprise are, in considerable measure, the results of propaganda methods.

My field of particular interest is that of agriculture. If cotton prices could again reach and continue the levels of some three weeks ago, there would be a great improvement in agricultural conditions in the South. However, it is a tragic situation when farmers pay nine per cent more for things they buy than they did in pre-war times and receive forty-three per cent less for what they have to sell. I had hoped that President Hoover would institute policies calculated to remedy this serious disparity. His achievements along such lines have been largely negative in nature, if not positively harmful, and I am forced to the conclusion that agriculture will fare much better under Franklin D. Roosevelt than under President Hoover. Quite frankly, I think it would have been in very much better shape under Ex-Governor Alfred E. Smith than it has been in the administration of President Hoover.

I am certain that you will understand the frankness with which I have spoken in this regard.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Very sincerely yours,


WILSON GEE

GREEN BAG ALMANAC & READER 2008

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CALIFORNIA
September 23, 1932.

Mr. E. E. Hunt
Non-Partisan Fact Finding Committee for Hoover
799 Broadway, New York, N.Y.

Dear Mr. Hunt:-

In reply to your night letter of September 21st
I wired you last night, collect, as follows:-

"Underlying American economic conditions have unquestionably improved since spring. Economic confidence and stability have been fostered by various agencies set up by the government upon non-partisan lines. Ascertain facts thus at first hand is essential to intelligent, timely action. Gratifying that present situation is no worse in view depressed, disturbed situation abroad along with usual seasonal dullness and aftermath speculative orgy at home. The London Economist states editorially that our worst is past. Business barometer, past fortnight record actual betterment. A sudden spectacular improvement would be fatal to healthy recovery, but a potential groundwork for business amelioration has been laid."

Very truly yours,

Eliot G. Mears

Eliot G. Mears
Professor of Geography,
and International Trade

NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING FOR HOOVER 1932

AMHERST COLLEGE
AMHERST, MASSACHUSETTS
TREASURER'S DEPARTMENT

CHARLES A. ANDREWS, TREASURER
H. W. KIDDER, COMPTROLLER

September 17, 1932

Mr. Herbert Wachsmann
799 Broadway
New York, N. Y.

Dear Sir:

I am no authority on agricultural economics and I have no views on the subject that I consider at all worth publishing. You have given me a totally underserved complement.

Yours very truly,

H. W. Kidder

Comptroller

PATRONS ARE REQUESTED TO FAVOR THE COMPANY BY CRITICISM AND SUGGESTION CONCERNING ITS SERVICE 1932

<p>CLASS OF SERVICE 17. This is a full-rate Telegram or Cablegram unless its deferred character is indicated by a suitable sign above or preceding the address.</p>	<p>SEP 22 4 30 PM '32 22 BWAY CONQUIN 4-907</p>	<p>WESTERN UNION</p>	<p>1932</p>
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NKWOBB CARLTON, PRESIDENT J. C. WILLEVER, FIRST VICE-PRESIDENT

The filing time as shown in the date line on full-rate telegrams and day letters, and the time of receipt at destination as shown on all messages, is STANDARD TIME.

Received at 3113CC SK 77 DL COLLECT 1.44

MINUTES IN TRANSIT	
FULL-RATE	DAY LETTER

AY CHICAGO ILL 230P SEP 22 1932

NON PARTISAN FACT FINDING COMMITTEE FOR HOOVER
6 700 THROUGH E E PRINT 799 BROADWAY NYL
RECENT ECONOMIC CHANGES UNMISTAKABLY POINT TO MORE HEALTHY
BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL ACTIVITY GENERALLY HAD MADE DISTINCT
GAINS THE BANKING AND CREDIT STRUCTURE IS STRENGTHENED BOND PRICES
HAVE RISEN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BUSINESS LEADERS AND INVESTORS HAS IMPROVED
AND THE INTERNATIONAL SITUATION APPEARS SLOWLY BUT SURELY TO BE
CLEARING STOP THE PUBLIC SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN HEART AND BELIEVES THAT
CONDITIONS ARE IMPROVING THEY ARE NOT MISTAKEN IN THIS RESPECT
HORACE SECRET NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY

GREEN BAG ALMANAC & READER 2008

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS

CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
September 19, 1932

Mr. Herbert Wachsmann, Secretary
Non-Partisan Fact-Finding Committee for Hoover
799 Broadway
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Wachsmann:

I have on my desk this morning your wire asking for a statement concerning Governor Roosevelt's farm relief program as outlined in his Topeka speech.

I do not believe that I can make any statement that will educate public opinion at this time. I have found conditions much better for education on such matters after election than before. It may or may not be information for you that the six points in Governor Roosevelt's specifications for making farm relief effective exactly fit the Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan introduced into Congress by Republican Congressman Hope of Kansas and Republican Senator Norbeck of South Dakota. I am enclosing a copy of Congressman Hope's statement concerning this plan. I expect that Governor Roosevelt had this plan specifically in mind when he outlined his six specifications.

Yours very truly,

J. D. Black

J. D. BLACK

JDB:KT

Dictated by Dr. Black
but signed in his absence.

NON-PARTISAN FACT-FINDING FOR HOOVER 1932

DARTMOUTH COLLEGE
HANOVER, N.H.
Offices of Administration

THE PRESIDENT

November three
1932

Non-Partisan Fact-Finding Committee for Hoover
799 Broadway
New York, New York

Gentlemen:

In reply to your telegram just received I most emphatically will not make such a statement as you request.

I am a Republican and expect to vote the Republican ticket but I take exception in maximum degree to the tactics of those who are undertaking to win the election by picturing all of the wisdom and all of the patriotism as monopolized by the Republican party. I think on the whole that there is more wisdom and more genius and more experience perhaps among the Republicans than elsewhere at the present time but I consider it fundamentally disloyal to the country, to say nothing of its being highly impolitic from the point of view of expediency, to wage the campaign that the Republicans have been waging and that you ask me to endorse in a statement that the country is in real danger from a change of administration. I do not believe that it is.

Yours truly,

Ernest M. Hoffman

D. M. Hoover