

That Plague of Spots From Madison Avenue

GORDON COTLER

BECAUSE spot commercials are the mortar with which radio and television time is put together, only the nimblest dial twisters were able to escape generous exposure to a brand-new use of spots during the closing days of the Presidential campaign. These were the spot commercials to sell Presidential candidates. The first well-laid plan for them came from Rosser Reeves, a partner in the advertising firm of Ted Bates & Company. Reeves, no mere theoretician, wrote the "Eisenhower Answers America" spot campaign, which put the General on what was estimated to be between \$1.5 and \$2 million worth of air time during the fortnight before Election Day.

A dapper and personable man whose speech is heavy with the diphthongs of his native Virginia, Rosser Reeves looks altogether too youthful to be a partner in an advertising firm with billings of about \$35 million a year. Bates's clients include the makers of Kool Cigarettes, Colgate Dental Cream, Minute Maid Frozen Juice, and Carter's Little Liver Pills. The Bates agency is extremely spot-conscious; \$17 million of its billings go into spots—more than any other agency handles.

The Bates agency did not go looking for the Republicans with radio spots. The way Reeves likes to tell it, three Republicans were at a Rhode Island golf club one day last summer soon after the Conventions when they heard President Truman use the line "You never had it so good" in a speech. The three agreed that this was a very effective slogan, and they tried to think of one to combat it. Not being advertising men but, respectively, a metals manufacturer, an independent oilman, and an investment

banker, they finally conceded defeat, put in a long-distance call to their friend Rosser Reeves, and asked if he could devise an effective counter-punch. Reeves advised the trio that the Truman slogan was a tough one to combat directly, and it would probably be best to approach the problem of boosting the Eisenhower cause from another angle. He promised to give the matter some thought.

A few days earlier, Reeves had shown a random audience of five hundred people a movie of MacArthur's speech to the Republican Convention. The purposes of the showing had been non-political. Reeves had followed the movie with a new spot commercial that he wanted to test for what the



Bates people call penetration—that is, the capacity of the radio commercial to "penetrate the brains" of the audience. He was pleased to learn that ninety-one per cent of the audience was able to return what had been said in the one-minute spot. He was also interested in the discovery that only eight per cent could make sense out of MacArthur's forty-five-minute speech.

Reeves now added to the MacArthur

speech-penetration test other pertinent considerations: that Chester Bowles, in whose advertising agency Reeves had worked some years ago, had saved himself from certain defeat in his bid for the governorship of Connecticut by a last-minute spot campaign; that the spot can deliver more listeners for less money than any other form of advertising; that even an important political speech is lucky to draw a Nielsen rating of 5; and that a message completely comprehended by only eight per cent of an audience made up of five per cent of a *potential* audience is hardly worth delivering.

Reeves concluded that concentration on spots might turn the trick for Eisenhower. He met with the golf threesome and said he would provide a campaign if they could raise the money to put it on the air. He proposed a campaign to consist entirely of radio and television spots featuring General Eisenhower ("He was the product," Reeves has since pointed out), and to be aired only in key markets the last two weeks before election. Since spots carry three times the impact of network shows, Reeves said, the expenditure of \$2 million for the saturation program that he suggested would be the equivalent of the purchase of an annual, national, regular network-time campaign worth at least \$200 million. The golfers told him to prepare the plan; they went out to look for the money.

'Saturation Programming'

Reeves asked a friend and former Bates man, Michael Levin, now Director of Radio and Television Creative Production for Erwin, Wasey and Company, another advertising firm, if he would prepare a market analysis for a spot campaign for Eisenhower. Levin started attacking the problem on a

Friday and came up on Monday with sixteen closely typed pages and ten appendixes. The gist of Levin's report was that the Republicans would win if they could take forty-nine counties in twelve key states from the Democrats. This plan, amended many times before Election Day, was presented to the Citizens for Eisenhower in the Hunt Room of Twenty-One, a New York restaurant, in mid-August, and was enthusiastically received. Through Governor Sherman Adams it was then taken to Eisenhower. When the General gave his whole-hearted endorsement, Ted Bates & Company was officially retained by Citizens for Eisenhower.

While Reeves set about mapping the plan of action, Jock Whitney and other top Citizens set out to raise the \$1.2 million believed to constitute the minimum needed for "saturation" programming—in this case, exposing the average listener to four or five spots a day. A confidential memorandum prepared for fund raisers urged them to face up to the fact that large contributions would have to come from capital. "One has to SELL STOCKS," the memo adjured. "This program cannot be effective if it is dependent on available income because there just 'ain't none.'"

Every evening for a month, after his day's work on Bates's regular accounts, Reeves repaired to a room at the St.



Regis to struggle with Eisenhower copy. He received volunteer help from a number of top ad men, including Barry Ryan of Ruthrauff & Ryan; C. L. Fitzgerald and H. M. Dancer of Dancer-Fitzgerald and Sample, Fred Rudge of Fisher & Rudge; and Julien Field of Grey Advertising.

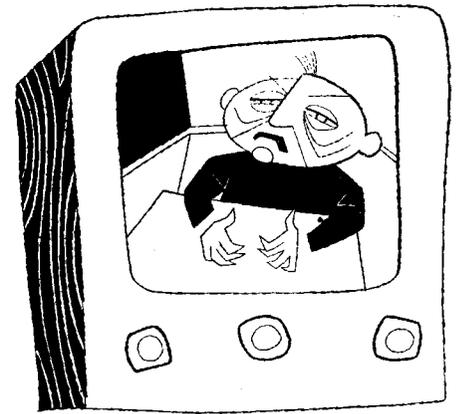
Reeves's main difficulty was in keeping each spot to one idea. It had long been established to his satisfaction that the simple theme "It cleans your breath while it cleans your teeth" was an extraordinarily successful way to sell Colgate toothpaste. "I think of a man in a voting booth who hesitates between two levers as if he were pausing between competing tubes of toothpaste in a drugstore," Reeves has since observed. "The brand that has made the highest penetration on his brain will win his choice, and the nature of the human brain is such that a one-minute or thirty-second speech, expertly crystallized, gets a maximum penetration on its content."

REEVES prepared all forty television spots and twenty-nine radio spots on three themes: the war in Korea, high taxes and high prices, and corruption in Washington. The copy demonstrated mainly that the General was aware of these problems.

General Eisenhower spent a day in September shooting the television shots at Transfilm, Inc., in midtown Manhattan, and the next morning he made the radio spots. Citizens for Eisenhower decided in the end to buy its air time through local advertising agencies around the country. Ted Bates's billing was for fifteen per cent of the \$60,000 production costs of the spots—barely postage money for a firm that rarely accepts business accounts of less than a million dollars a year.

'All Real People'

A few days before the election I waited in Reeves's office for him to finish some business, after which he was going to screen the "Eisenhower Answers America" television spots for me. After questioning a lady field researcher on whether women had a better understanding of "normalizes the hair" as against "naturalizes the hair" in an ad for a new shampoo, he turned to me. "You know," he said, "we advertising people are skilled propagandists in the best sense of the word, and this



country is missing something by not making better use of our methods in the Voice of America and other propaganda media. I like to tell how Calvin Coolidge came up behind a farmer who had been listening to a politician for an hour and a half and asked, 'What's he talking about?' and the farmer took the piece of straw out of his mouth and said, 'He don't say.'"

Reeves took me to Bates's board room. The Eisenhower spots had been spliced onto a single reel, which a girl was threading into a projector. "The day we filmed Ike was one of the roughest I've ever had," Reeves said. "Richard de Rochement was our producer and did a magnificent job. I thought we would complete perhaps ten spots, but the General was intent on finishing the lot. He performed so beautifully there were few retakes, and we went through all our usable material in short order. I wrote new copy like mad, Milton Eisenhower checked it for his brother, and nine or ten artists were sprawled all over the studio transferring the copy to large cue cards so the General could read it without his glasses.

"The General wrote one spot himself, the best of them, although he had to rework his copy a bit to make it fit the twenty-second limit. We had already filmed some of the questions using Eisenhower supporters we picked up around town, people with different regional accents. The new questions were filmed afterward, also with volunteers. These are all real people you're going to see, speaking their own words. No actor could convey what those faces show, or those voices either. This is completely authentic."

The lights went out. When they came on again fifteen minutes later, I was saturated.

Pride and Prejudice: The Fourth Estate

ROBERT LASCH

IT is a quasi-religious belief among American newspapermen that the editorial page of a newspaper belongs to the publisher and editor and to whatever causes they cherish, but that the news columns are the preserves of truth and impartiality. That credo received quite a battering in the political campaign recently ended. There have been embarrassment, recriminations, red-faced self-defenses, and demands for an investigation.

One grave charge is that in a good many pro-Eisenhower papers it was for a time virtually impossible to tell the news columns from the editorial pages. Republican apologists contend that this is only one of the natural confusions to be expected when a campaign is fought as a crusade. However, the complaints of much of the working press have concerned multiple bias,

blue-pencil mayhem, Machiavellian omissions, and the crafty juggling of space and headlines.

That the press in its editorial views predominantly favored the Republican side was not in itself especially significant or startling. It had been predominantly Republican before, and in previous campaigns—particularly in the Roosevelt ones—Republican editorial opposition had been more of an asset than a handicap to the Democrats. It was in the news columns, apparently, that things were so different this time.

A number of independent journalists spoke their minds about this in the course of the campaign. Roscoe Drummond, correspondent for the pro-Eisenhower *Christian Science Monitor*, wrote in mid-campaign that the Democratic nominee was getting “consider-

ably less than an even break in news columns of daily newspapers across the country,” and that the press in its “marked one-sidedness” had committed “a serious offense against its readers.” Drummond urged that one of the research foundations set itself the task of surveying the performance of the press in the 1952 campaign.

Eric Sevareid of CBS extended similar criticisms to cover not only the daily press but the great news weeklies and picture magazines. Over CBS Sevareid said: “Nearly all the great weekly publications such as *Time* and *Life* are not only for Eisenhower in their editorials, but some are unabashedly using their news and picture space as well to help his cause, by giving him the predominant play week after week. But they are fairness itself compared to some big midwestern and western dailies where Stevenson is reported as if he were a candidate for county clerk.”



So Much To Tell . . .

The Republican defense might be that there were a great many events in the Republican campaign to report, and very little space to report them in. Nixon's saga of the poor-boy Senator fighting for his home and mortgage was such an event. And then there were other providential events which came daily to lighten the burdens of those Eisenhower papers which were uneasy about the General's endorsement of certain Senators. The Democratic Pat McCarran was a providential gift to the Republicans, simply because he was McCarran. Even though Stevenson finally read him out of the party, he apparently helped some of the more sensitive Eisenhower papers to swallow Senator McCarthy.

The tribulations of the anti-McCar-