

I'm Signing Off

A Radio Announcer Betrays His Profession

ANONYMOUS

SOME TIME AGO, under the usual pressure, thru the good offices of an influential friend, and with no previous experience in the business, I entered radio station XXX as announcer and utility man. I am, I suppose, of average intelligence and sensibilities, of a typical American background and adequate education. Additionally I own to a decent general knowledge of music and a proficiency at the piano and in singing. I am—I confess it reluctantly—the average young man. Station XXX [not a thousand miles from Fifth Avenue] is correspondingly average, representing the typical large American broadcasting station.

I arrived, much flustered and slightly apprehensive. The business manager, Mr. A., told me to "look around for a day or so and get the hang of it." And for three days I did nothing more than that, observing what Milton Cross, one of the better known announcers, termed in a New York *Herald Tribune* article "the very highly specialized activity" of the "art" [his word] of radio announcing.

I observed how the microphones, condenser, and carbon were placed in their varying relations to instruments, singers, speakers, and announcers; observed the effects of certain wall surfaces upon microphone reception; listened to voices that "blasted" and produced "peaks," and to voices that did not. I learned something of the mechanism and management of the mixing panel. I learned the necessity of programs that ran smoothly and on time, and of average quick thinking on the part of the radio staff. I learned that an "artist" was anyone who entered the studio in a professional capacity.

Then abruptly I added to my stock of knowledge. The business manager informed me that I was to go on the air this evening, I was to get in there and show 'em how it was done, I was to put that smile into my voice, give 'em that winning personality. And so he came finally to his peroration: "Now, B., I know you're a college man . . ."—I was, along with five million others—" . . . well, don't show it! I'm educated myself,

but I don't even let the fellows here know it. They don't like it. Public don't like it. Give 'em what they want when you announce. Way to make good!"

I should have been prepared for this information, but I wasn't. And it staggered me. I had assumed that my business, since it had to do with English speech, with a wide range of knowledge, and with the entire library of music, would make unlimited demands on my mental furnishings. I was to learn later that the only virtue proper to the great announcer is showmanship.

The daily program—First of all there was the run of the day's work. Did it suggest art in content or arrangement? Was it wellbalanced, varied, amusing? Did it rise occasionally to the plane of normal intelligence, taste, and cultivation; did it at seemly intervals bear the blazon of the vaunted educational institution which the majority hold the radio to be?

Well, from seven to eight in the morning was the children's hour, and as such quite legitimate and laudable, filled with much ringing and clattering of bells, buzzing of clockworks, mechanical hoots, and the other effects which, all program directors are convinced, children love. Included also was an adventure yarn by "Captain Bert," which was advertised as having been drawn from his actual experience. Captain Bert, tho wellqualified for his post, hard-working, and absolutely dependable save when overtaken by *la crise juponnière*, was pressed for time. So I undertook the writing of true adventures for him to sponsor. I remember with a little mortification and with great pleasure his exploits in Borneo, for example. Borneo, by the time I had done with it, was as savage and thrilling as a circus poster, and Captain Bert was a hero cased in triple brass. One morning he engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with two full-grown orangutans—and did them in, what's more.

Following the Captain's epic doings came jazz and allied popular music from eight o'clock to ten. From ten to ten-thirty, home economics. The purpose behind this program was commendable: in theory, the women of the city profited, as did the station and the sponsoring grocer.

But unfortunately the "Kitchen Kourse" was as new as my presence in Station XXX. And the woman in charge, while she had the requisite elocution teacher's "vocality," was otherwise inexperienced and furthermore busy. So I stepped into the breach. My first paper—on pies—was interesting if not sound. It was in fact definitely lyric; by hewing closer to Shelley than to Fanny Farmer I managed to avoid flare-backs from knowledgeable housewives and at the same time to win the omnipotent business manager's approval.

From half-past ten to eleven I played the piano and I sang . . . and I began to learn many things about music from my audience of a million as well as from Mr. A. Such as: that the C-Sharp Minor Prelude is good for a down any time; that the march from Prokofieff's *L'Amour des Trois Oranges*—as fine a piece of musical humor as ever was written—is "terrible"; that Shutt's *À La Bien Aimée* is "a good deal highbrow"; that the public wanted *good* music and that I'd better sing *Somewhere in Old Wyoming*. Thereafter I sang *Somewhere in Old Wyoming* and told comic stories, cherishing one invaluable truth that by process of trial and error I had discovered, namely, that my public liked the better music only when a recognizable and famous man executed it, or when by dint of weary repetition the music itself had become familiar and therefore acceptable. Exceptions may be taken, I know; but the rule holds.

For the next half-hour, a program devoted to the selling of a fraudulent electro-therapeutic machine. And then thirty minutes of old-fashioned church services, to the material profit of both the organizer and the station.

By that time it was noon at XXX and we settled into our paying stride. To be sure, stray wedges of the clock were given over to bridge forums, historical reminiscences [whatever they were], travel talks, epi-Guestric poets, and critics. But the stock commodity for the afternoon was this: ten minutes of market reports, five minutes of police alarms . . . and sponsored dance music.

Somewhere between six and midnight an hour's tribute was paid to the sober-

sided muse. An orchestra played, or, more likely, a string trio for cheapness' sake. This is a typical offering:

Twilight Friml
The Garden of My Heart Ball
In Elizabethan Days Kramer
Serenade Schubert
Scarf Dance Chaminade
Kamennoi Ostrow Rubenstein

The final number here, Rubenstein's bell-ringing exercise, shared honors with *À La Bien Aimée* as the peak of "highbrow stuff."

A tenor sang—usually this sort of cup-shotten program: *Somewhere in Old Wyoming—Promises—Forgive Me—Until We Meet Again, Sweetheart—So Beats My Heart For You.*

It is possible, of course, that since the radio has rendered musicianship unnecessary the "artists" were themselves deceived. They may have thought that they were recreating a profusion of masterpieces. Yet I credit most of them with the knowledge that their repertoires were depraved and dull. In the dark outside lay some monstrous primitive carnivore, OUR PUBLIC, slightly confused with the official who signed the checks, ready to crunch the bones of their reputations if they made a single false step. I say they knew better. But had they done better they would have fared worse.

With trio and with vocal soloist, gravity was ushered in and out. The city's merchants would have none of it, and therefore neither would Station XXX. For the rest of the evening there was usually a "drama," in which the villain and the English language were struck down simultaneously. And there was dance music, some of it good, some bad, all of it jazz.

The programs of the contributing orchestras were wonderfully simple in plan: they were practically identical. To assure myself of this fact, I drew up a sort of frequency chart a few months ago. During one week the following musical numbers were played not less than five times a day, not more than eight, at our station:

The King's Horses—You're Driving Me Crazy—Three Little Words—Fine and Dandy—Walkin' My Baby Back Home. And they continued to sound as frequently for weeks after. It seems like months.

This is not quite all of the day's labor. We at Station XXX make one truly remarkable effort that is worthy of special notice. On Sunday "Uncle Tim" holds his Kiddie Karnival. Under the yellow shimmer of uncle's teeth the usual theatrical

minors perform for an hour and a half; the usual piercing and uncertain notes are struck, blown, and wrenched from instruments. Thru some kind of magic, music which would be atrocious if played by a visible adult becomes charming when played by an invisible child. Verses are recited or audibly forgotten to an accompaniment of toys drawn across the floor of the studio, because confusion and inadequacy are dear to the nursery heart. Uncle Tim reads the comic strips in a suitable treble. He makes kind, avuncular fun of his Kiddies. Merry childish laughter bubbles up continually to the microphone, under the watchful and expert baton of the uncle.

The next day I saw the resulting letters from the adults for whom this infantile circus was operated; not so many letters, of course, as we would have taken in a few years ago, but still baskets of them. They criticize, suggest, condemn. And for all their mistakes and their pencil smudges, we give them consideration, because thru them speaks the voice of God—disguised, naturally, as the potential customer. We listen, too, when the divine utterance employs the telephone. Once during my apprenticeship I informed the microphone that to my way of thinking a certain notorious mammy-singer was a foul comedian and small potatoes compared with Groucho Marx. Within three minutes we had seven telephone calls beginning thus: "Say! Who does that announcer think he is, anyway! Callin'—no good! Are you goin' to let him get away with that sort of stuff?"

The presiding geniuses—So much for the events of the day at our temple of the muses. I need only say of it that I found room for thought, those first few weeks at XXX. Undoubtedly we made money here and were a thriving business. But were we also good entertainment, high art, higher education? I could find no justification here for Mr. Cross's lofty attitude. Indeed, the moments came more frequently when I looked upon the microphone as a malefic talisman capable of extreme perversion, capable of transforming princesses into scullery maids, full of pernicious charms and brazen in the use of them.

I examined further into my profession. I went from our programs to our managers and announcers. Surely, I thought, if radio is an instrument of enlightenment and the humanities, I should be able to reveal very special qualifications in its high priests, altar ministrants, and acolytes.

The president is a shrewd business man

whose reading list is headed by *V. V.'s Eyes*, and who once when I was practising Bach—for very private reasons—informed me that he *liked* Chopin.

Our vicepresident is likewise a shrewd man of affairs; and in addition he has a tact which is lacking in his superior, for he is content to deal with the finances of the station. Tho he does not acknowledge his ignorance of simple radio technic, of music, and the art of English speech, he at least does not attempt to interfere with our operations.

Not so the production manager. Shortly after I came here he told me that he too was a "college man"! He toils thru the difficulties of our mother tongue like a disabled oyster barge thru a heavy sea, and he once referred to that famous English poet, Coolidge. His ignorance of music is exaggerated in its scope; he fails to distinguish between a Strauss waltz and a military march, between a "major" and "minor," a duet and a quartette. But he superintends production, because he has "a good business head" and "knows how to handle men."

In Mr. A., the business manager, we have what is generally called a dynamo: that is to say, his voice is sharp, his movements brisk, his personal appeal to merchants potent, his capacity for error theoretically *nil*. I found that he is the most significant figure in our station, because he is its most adept salesman and because he believes in and enforces his personal tastes. It is admitted that his selling ability is an excellent thing. But his preferences in speech and music, while wonderful, are not excellent. When he corrects good orchestration into bad, good balance into bad, good continuity, voice manner, and pronunciation into bad, I occasionally protest. His answer is, "You're right, but the public don't know what you mean. Maybe 'lingerie' is what *you* call it, but 'lawn-ju-ray' is what the women buy on the counters. So give 'em lawnjuray!"

Thru Mr. A., D. & T. Maiers, Clothing Merchants, buy half an hour on the air and thereafter feel privileged to dictate every detail of their entertainment. If they say that the word is "en-sem-bul," or that such-and-such is too slow or too soft or too dull, then it is all of those things. If they want the six current numbers played—and they always do—then the six are played. If they say that an announcer with a barytone voice must coo in a tenor fashion like the great Joe Blank at Station YYY, then the announcer takes a gargle and coos. Unquestionably the brothers Maiers have sound

mercantile instincts, and thanks to them Station XXX is a thriving concern. But I do not find it in the Gospels that a business man is necessarily a compendium of all taste and knowledge.

Next to the Maiers in authority comes the gallery of our production staff and announcers—men who have been courteous and generous to me, for whose sake my station and I must remain anonymous in this article. We have had various backgrounds: one of us was formerly a real estate agent and longshoreman, another was in the Coast Guard, another a professional baseball player, another an engineer, and so on. That none of them has had a formal education is irrelevant. But that they have not acquired knowledge informally, that they have never undergone the severe testing which develops a sure taste, that they have no reading, no musical appreciation, that they lack the equipment which should figure most importantly in our profession—this is strictly relevant and a little tragic. These men, whether they will it or not, are powerful agents in formulating the taste, speech, and habits of mind among a million people. Mr. Cross wrote that “announcers must be ever alert about their diction, enunciation, inflection of syllables, and may we say, voice humor.” He even added that “there are scholars among us.” Therefore I thought it fair to expect an inoffensive use of English and a wellgroomed manner, if nothing else, from my fellow barkers. I rarely heard it.

On the other hand, I frequently did hear Uncle Tim, whose type is common in the radio world. Like so many of us announcers, he was once an actor, having spent fifteen years elaborating minor rôles in a Tom-show. The results are astonishing, tho not unique. There is a great deal of the zoo in Uncle Tim, a trait which is shared by almost all radio “uncles” and “captains.” Before his microphone he is full of a soft, childish laughter, and of charming conceits and fantasies; he plays a great deal, so to speak, with his verbal tail, cracks nuts, eats straw, chatters excitedly, and so on. The tempo of his speaking is afflicted with an extraordinary *rubato*, which may be represented thus in musical terms: *sforzando accelerando—sostenuto—accelerando subito—largo largo*. “Down . . . in the . . . well there was . . . [very quickly] the cutest little mou-ou-ou . . . [pause, then a gasp] . . . sie and when he was at . . . home he . . . was . . . in-a-we-e-ell.”

To a layman this may not immediately suggest the human voice, but Uncle

Tim’s manner is popular and leads many merchants to Mr. A.’s office. The rest of us do not hesitate to imitate him, since we too must sell. We are radio’s high-pressure salesmen, and must poke the rabbits down the gullet of that reluctant anaconda, our public. The trouble is that radio’s only staple product is amusement, which is not the result of violence.

Radio authors—Last of all I came to those masters of the lean and racy or the fat and colorful prose—the writers of continuity. By the terms under which I drew my very respectable salary I was also of their number. Continuity, I learned, falls into two divisions—“commercial” and “sustaining.” The former is high-pressure ad-writing, and the latter is that vivid matter which introduces and interrupts all programs, whose function is gracefully to cushion the radio mind against too abrupt an impact with music, ideas, and oral sounds.

I learned what everyone these days is aware of, that the advertising announcements are viciously long and in consequence are a contributing cause of radio’s ill health. For a number of our half-hour sponsored programs I have written scripts eight or ten minutes in length. A certain featured “entertainment” at our studio regularly alternates two minutes of paid speech with two minutes of music.

I further learned that “air-ading” has to be written, not untruthfully of course, but . . . well, forcefully. I can honestly say that in Station XXX I have not invented a single concrete textual lie, having found such technic to be childishly inefficient. In place of the lie we put misrepresentation; with due regard to the penal code we state a low-grade truth, a safe generality. So far, so good. There is something too lamblike, however, in a simple truth. And the dominant flavor of advertising is wolf rather than lamb. So by heaping up illogical inferences, implications, slippery suggestions, and repetition we raise the low-grade truth to a proper selling plane—as necessarily we must if we are to inflate our patrons’ desires up to and beyond the size of their pocketbooks before delivering them over to our clients. But unfortunately for me, I have the sort of mind that is unable to see the difference between a trap set for a creature’s leg and a trap set for his subconscious self.

Sustaining continuity is another thing again, quite removed from the market place. Here the *littérateur*, the gifted Englisher of thoughts, the maker of dreams and creator of atmosphere—here the verbal genius of the radio hits

his stride. And here, I thought, is a line which Messrs. the talented business men will not overstep.

They didn’t. But another force did, a special tradition of taste which rules in all broadcasting studios and which in my opinion is on a level with the idealism of the tabloids. Under its tutelage I am forced daily to write English prose that is indescribable. The trick is easy, and I hereby place the secret at the disposal of any continuity writer who may wish to win the backslaps of his manager and the hearty approval of his “radio family.” Overstate all emotion, violate all laws of restraint, use the tritest phrases, the most extravagant similes, the most drenching sentimentality. Strain for cheap verbal effects, employ commonplaces once the property of Chautauqua lecturers and politicians. Walk heavily and use a big stick. In short, write as wretchedly as you can. I quote an example:

When you look into the heart of a great diamond, unearthly glory flickers up into your eyes. But when you read its story, you can see the broad ribbons of blood that flow thru its lovely current. When you pronounce the names of the great stones, the air throbs with harmony, and you seem to hear the waves of poetry breaking with a crystal sound over the far shores of romance. But, reading of their adventurous lives, you shudder as you hear the laughter of the demons that watch over these blazing beauties.

One important use of continuity is to interrupt. Never allow your announcer to say: “Next you shall hear . . .” or, “The song that follows now is called . . .” Exaggerate! Force! Be puerile! Give the script a horse-drench of virile showmanship. Like this: “The *baton* of our *chef-d’orchestre* [pronounced in various ways] presents now for your musical consideration . . .” or, “With bows for brushes and notes for pigment our instrumentalists paint a picture for you of that old sweetheart of yours, *Somewhere in Old Wyoming*.”

My proud stomach does not revolt too fiercely when as announcer I salt down the jazz programs with excrescences such as these for the words and music are mated to each other and to the audience. But I am sickened when I am obliged to ballyhoo Schubert and cheer him on as if he were a famous quarterback doing a broken-field run. I should rather like to hear honest music honestly presented, listen to the play of honest minds, away from this sticky, hypocritical fug of emotion, fellowship, and uplift, barren intellects, and conceited ignorance.

I should enjoy telling the people

that the six current jazz tunes they are about to hear are poisonous after a week of repetition; that this political speaker has called his audience gullible idiots just five minutes before going on the air; that this continuity which I pronounce should be hissed off as stuff of ill effect; that the prize jars of mayonnaise will *not* go to the writers of the first one hundred letters received at the station but will be scattered about where they will do the most good; that this critic and book reviewer has the literary tastes of an hyena and the critical equipment of a beach-comber and that a chain bookshop is "obliged to him" for puffing its particular list; that the air is full of miasma and dullness and they'd best come out of it.

I imagine that after saying these things I should be short on job but very long on self-respect.

And the national chains?—Perhaps conditions at another station would be more tolerable, but I doubt it. I have visited many of them, have met, talked with, and listened to many announcers, attempted to speak with directors of programs and music; I know as dinner companions one or two heads of the business not utterly unimportant. And I venture to say this: that where there is but small flint, tinder, and fuel, one does not look for a bright fire.

Concerning radio at large, my experience and observation have furnished me with three propositions that to me seem almost axiomatic.

First, that broadcasting is by its nature inevitably an educational and a cultural agent.

Second, that as long as the present staff of men is in and above the studios any educational or cultural shift must be a downward one.

Third, that, given the weakness of public protest, radio will not be forced to mend its ways or alter its current methods of milking the public cow.

The very widest possible view of national broadcasting has not led me to abate the edge of these contentions. It is a macrocosm of which Station XXX is an elemental and model part. The analysis which I have tried to make of my own studio may be applied with identical results to the largest one. The national chain announcers share the defects of their lesser known brothers: instead of displaying whatever small enlightenment is theirs, they exploit their illiteracy over the air. They are quite at

home, for instance, with the pronunciation of tongue-twisters and the hard ones out of McGuffey. Dictionary in hand, they can deal with "disestablishmentarianism"; they know their etiquette when faced with peacock brains and beccaficos. But serve beans, and they eat with their knives. Within the past two days I have heard a noted altar ministrant in one of our metropolitan fanes deliver himself of "impotent," "pictewer," "often"—and, in imitation of an aspiring provincial dowager, "lond," "ond," and "monner." That is not the lack of higher education; it is the complete lack of any education whatsoever.

Happily for their peace of mind, the great announcers are preserved from the thought that they are imperfect. Most of them are too busy aping a crowd of gentlemen talking at ease to speak at all naturally—from Lower-Oxford-on-Upper-Ohio they bring an Oxonian accent that would make Buddha blink. And they are so absorbed in the blossom of their own perfection that they touch things which they should not dare to handle: one of the hearty-bluster school, for example, presumes to broadcast events at a boat race when he cannot rightly distinguish a rowing slide from third base.

As for the continuity that these men read, it would be an unpleasant and useless task to set down examples here. The national chain programs they announce are no better. To be sure, we may hear a few good programs, some of them extraordinarily so, and they hang like rich jewels in an Ethiop's ear. The fact is, I suppose, that while an hour of excellent entertainment justifies itself, it cannot justify a whole week or month of tripe. Pleasure in music is not, like truffles, to be taken at the long end of a pig's nose; nor is an oasis of any real benefit to a man if he dies in the desert trying to reach it.

Conscious that isolated periods of decency do not make amends for insufferably long stretches of maladroitness and pseudo-entertainment, the two national chains have during the last six months made strenuous efforts, in the news columns, to improve conditions. Famous concert names and bureaus have been merged with them, and the air was full of promise. But the results have been negligible so far. The genuine artists have disappeared, overwhelmed by the mass of "artistes," or their programs have been shorn of interest by the advertiser. Perhaps something will arise later from this official union of talent with commerce. Meanwhile, in our great depression, the

many questionable hours return handsome profits to the stations.

The station managers, of course, defend themselves by saying that they must give each class what it wants. If so, then their position is indeed an unhappy one, for the air policy of SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE threatens to result in NOTHING FOR ANYONE. And so arises an amusing paradox. They are able neither to understand and accomplish the function of leadership nor to dismiss it. Like a man with a live wire in his hand, they can neither use it nor drop it.

Let us be fair. The blame does not rest entirely with the radio executives. Above them are the advertisers, grimly determined that the people *shall* desire, *shall* buy. In order to impose their will they threaten the air-men with no physical violence; they merely flourish a check—and the air with its public attached is sold to them. The advertiser has bought an hour on the air as he would buy a pound of cabbage. He owns it. And what he says goes! Add public apathy, and the list of evils is complete. The abuses are almost traditional by now, and under their influence radio, like Disraeli's statesman, having been for seven years a bore, is now become an institution. It may be that, in spite of the honest effort being made in certain quarters, its further course must remain unaltered.

Yet I have imagined an ideal broadcasting station. Its owner [myself] will be a man who does not have to make money every hour of the day. Its announcing and production staff will be men of education who will have undergone special training in the arts of speech, music, and restraint. Its continuity writers will be few, their output limited, and the quality of it inconspicuously good. Its advertisers will have the power of suggestion but must leave the command to those who know more about the business in hand than they do. There will be no hypocritical pretense to public service; the programs will make no attempt to present something for everyone—they will be aimed frankly at and above a presumptive upper-middle class; they will accept Broadway standards only in comedy and dance music.

If the quality of these programs cannot be maintained eighteen hours a day, then the station will be on the air for half that period. If under these conditions the station cannot be successfully operated, it will be closed. The public and the advertiser will find the tabloids and the billboards sufficient to their cultural and commercial needs.

The Problems of Radio Education

TRACY F. TYLER

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RADIO EDUCATION, tho a comparatively new field—or perhaps because it is a new field—is right now facing many problems. How these problems are solved may have a revolutionary effect on education in this country in the next ten or fifteen years.

The first problem which must be attacked is one of conservation. Radio has many technical limitations. One of these is that only a limited number of broadcast frequencies is available—a fact which opens radio to monopolistic tendencies. As in the case of many of our great natural resources, there is a limit to radio channels. Ninety-six are available for broadcast use in the United States today. A gentleman's agreement, entered into a few years ago, designated six of these for exclusive use by Canadian stations, while eleven were to be used jointly and with limited power by both Canada and the United States. Mexico was not invited to participate in the conference, and no provision was made for stations in that country. The remaining seventy-nine frequencies are reserved for the exclusive use of stations in this country.

Were this a technical, scientific paper, it would be permissible to point out many other engineering difficulties which radio faces. Radio engineers tell us, for instance, that two stations on the same frequency with five or more kilowatts power cannot operate in this country at night without seriously interfering with each other, while the distance separation necessary in the case of even one-kilowatt stations permits the simultaneous night operation of only three. This is caused by the effect of sound waves carrying the programs we hear many times farther than the distance within which these same programs may be received on our radio sets. This so-called nuisance area is one of the factors limiting the total number of broadcasting stations which can operate in the United States without produc-

ing intolerable conditions of reception. Close students of radio pretty generally agree that a reduction in the number of stations, which now total over six hundred, would be desirable.

CONCERNING RADIO AT LARGE, my experience and observation has furnished me with three propositions that to me seem almost axiomatic.

First, that broadcasting is by its nature inevitably an educational and a cultural agent.

Second, that as long as the present staff of men is in and above the studios any educational or cultural shift must be a downward one.

Third, that, given the weakness of public protest, radio will not be forced to mend its ways or alter its current methods of milking the public cow. —From "I'm Signing Off—A Radio Announcer Betrays His Profession," an anonymous article in *Forum*, February, 1932.

Some percentages — According to records of the Federal Radio Commission less than fifty radio broadcasting stations are in the hands of educational authorities. If these are rated in terms of power and operating hours allotted to them, they occupy about 6 percent of the radio facilities in use in this country. The other 94 percent is largely in the hands of commercial interests and is used mainly for advertising purposes.

While none would object to the commercial use of any tool of this kind, provided there existed a sufficient quantity for all of the other uses to which it might be put, there seems to be a general agreement on the part of educators, and others who have thought deeply on this subject, that sufficient radio facilities should first be set aside for educational needs. If there

is then a surplus, probably no objection would be raised to its use for commercial purposes.

In most European countries, radio has become a cultural and educational tool. There is no advertising problem, for in but few countries is radio advertising permitted. This makes it possible to use the hour best adapted to the program as well as to the group to be reached. Since educational authorities are in charge of educational radio programs, no question of their suitability for educational purposes can be raised. On the other hand, with the exception of a few college and university stations, operating generally on poor frequencies, with low power, and insufficient or undesirable hours, the bulk of the radio facilities in the United States are sacrificed on the altar of commercial gain. It was this fact, and the further fact that the Federal Radio Commission was gradually reducing radio broadcasting assignments to educational authorities, that led to the formation of the National Committee on Education by Radio.

The NCER—This Committee was formed at a meeting of representatives of educational organizations and groups held in Chicago late in 1930. Its nine members represent the following educational bodies:

The American Council on Education
The National Education Association
The Association of Land-Grant Colleges
The National Association of State Universities
The Nat'l Council of State Superintendents
The Nat'l Catholic Educational Association
The Jesuit Educational Association
The Nat'l University Extension Association
The Association of College and University Broadcasting Stations

The Fess Bill—As a first step in conserving radio for the uses of education and culture in this country, the Committee is sponsoring S.4, a bill introduced in the present session of the Senate by Simeon D. Fess of Ohio. If this bill becomes law, 15 percent of the radio facilities will be available for assignment to educational

Delivered at the general session of the Southern Wisconsin Teachers Association, Madison, Wisconsin, February 13, 1932.

I AM INCLINED TO THINK that sooner or later, unless the power gets away from us, we will have to break in on this great, big, high-powered hook-up service in the interest of minor service.—Representative Albert Johnson of Washington, *Congressional Record*, February 10, 1932, p3797.

institutions. Altho insignificant, this percentage would at least be a start in the direction of making better use of our limited radio facilities. It would provide a margin of 9 percent over the present assignment of 6 percent now in the hands of educators.

Financial problems—The second problem facing educators now is the financing of radio broadcasting. Considerable money is required to construct a radio station that will serve an entire state, and the operation of such a station also requires a sizable budget. *These costs are nowhere near the amounts commercial interests would have us believe, however.* In the first place, much of the expense of commercial operation is put into elaborate reception rooms, waiting rooms, studios, hostesses, and so on, for the sole purpose of impressing advertisers and the public. Such expenditures contribute nothing to the actual programs broadcast and would of course be unnecessary in connection with a station operated by educational authorities. Suppose it does cost fifty thousand or even a hundred thousand dollars to set up, and an additional fifty thousand dollars a year to operate, a station powerful enough to cover a state? Could not the expenditure be justified? Do we not sanction the expenditure of several times that amount when one of our universities or colleges must provide for an increase of a few hundred students? When we consider the hundreds of thousands served by radio, the per-person cost amounts to a few cents only.

In these times of restricted budgets, arranging for new services which call for increased expenditures may be hard to justify. This condition is certainly of a temporary nature only. Because business has suffered a little, we must not close our eyes while such a tool as radio slips thru our fingers. As a matter of fact radio might fill in, during times of stress, where other services have broken down. In one of the Canadian provinces, where crop failures and low prices of farm products have deprived many boys and girls of the opportunity to go to high school this winter, lessons are being sent to them by radio so that they will not suffer from lack of educational advantages. No one would argue that these children are getting as much from their broadcast as they would from their school lessons, but the radio is of great educational assistance to them during an enforced absence from school.

Someone has conservatively estimated that the increased efficiency which could

be attained by coordinating radio with the work of the teacher is worth \$100,000,000 a year to the schools of America. This estimate is drawn from a conclusion

YOU CANNOT GRANT NEW LICENSES; there are already too many licenses, already too many radio stations. They ought to be reduced. I have said repeatedly that the Radio Commission ought to have the courage to make the necessary reductions. The reductions should come in the cleared channels and high-powered stations as a general proposition.
—Representative Ewin L. Davis of Tennessee, *Congressional Record*, February 10, 1932, p3800.

that radio can increase a teacher's efficiency 5 percent. When we consider the advantages of radio in the various fields of education, will we not see to it that the problem of adequately financing educational broadcasting is correctly solved?

The problem of control—The third problem, closely related to the problem of *conservation* of facilities, is that of the *control* of facilities. It has been said by representatives of commercial radio interests that all broadcast facilities should be left to them, and educators could then secure time for cultural programs on these commercial stations. On first thought this would appear to be an ideal arrangement since educators would have little investment or operating expense to provide. Some institutions, operating under this arrangement, have been well-satisfied. Usually in these cases the commercial station has furnished free time, and where the institution and the station are located in the same city, no expense has been required to provide studios or rent telephone lines. However, the dangers inherent in this plan have convinced educators that owning their own stations is the only satisfactory plan.

Wisconsin's difficulty—A group of eleven commercial broadcasting stations in your own state of Wisconsin proposed that the State Department of Agriculture and Markets at Stevens Point and the University of Wisconsin at Madison abandon their radio stations and allow this group to donate free time for broadcasting educational and informational material originating at the University and

the Department of Agriculture and Markets. Of course it is evident that this offer is not sincere. It is but another of many attempts to remove all educational stations so as to clear the air for the exclusive use of advertisers.

In the first place this commercial group requests the state to pay the cost of connecting the stations with Madison and Stevens Point by means of telephone lines. A conservative estimate would place this cost at \$100,000 a year. It is strange that after all these years none of the commercial stations involved has ever been interested enough to broadcast the educational programs of these two state stations to their listeners. The way always has been and still is open, if they are really interested in educational broadcasting. What they want is free service—paternalism—state-support of commercial enterprise. In the second place, will all of these stations give all the time the university requires for its programs? Will they accept all speakers and all subject-matter receiving university sanction, regardless of the policy of the station itself? Finally, by using these commercial stations will the state save the large sums claimed by the proponents of this plan? On the contrary, and quite properly too, use of the radio extends the services of the state, and by reaching more people and creating more needs, necessitates the expenditure of more money.

Surely sound principles of education would suggest the desirability of further extending the radio facilities of these state agencies, an extension which means improving the facilities under state control. The people of Wisconsin would not abandon their university in favor of commercial enterprise—why abandon an educational tool like the radio?

Censorship—The first danger in using commercial stations is one of censorship either of material or speakers. Representatives of one of our great land-grant colleges were refused the use of a commercial station because they told the farmers the truth about certain types of feeds and fertilizers which conflicted with statements of advertisers using the same station. Relations between the institution and the station ended right there. Certainly no educational institution worthy of the name could submit to censorship exercised by men of commercial viewpoint owning all radio stations.

Insidious advertising—The second danger is that of getting advertising into our schools. Educators are united in the belief that advertising must be kept out of educational institutions at all costs.

Commercial control of all broadcast facilities would bring the danger of advertising inserted into programs intended for school use. During the past summer the promotion manager of the *Louisville Courier-Journal* evolved a scheme to use Kentucky schools for advertising purposes in connection with radio work. Educators killed the plan after it had been outlined to Joy Elmer Morgan, editor of the *Journal of the National Education Association*. This case and many others show that educators must ever be on the alert to head off any attempt to use the schools for advertising or propaganda purposes.

Costs—The third danger is that if commercial stations ever have entire control of all broadcast facilities they will charge educational institutions such a high price for use of the air that it would be cheaper for the latter to maintain their own stations than to buy time. At present many institutions secure these facilities without cost, but there is no guarantee that this plan will continue indefinitely.

Time-on-the-air—The fourth danger is that of not being able to secure sufficient and suitable hours. Institutions using commercial radio facilities now broadcast anywhere from fifteen minutes a week to a half-hour or an hour a day. When they begin to meet their responsibilities for all classes of persons in need of education by radio, they will require several hours each day. Can any commercial station be found that will yield a large percentage of its radio time to an educational institution? Is not the best time for reaching the adult male population also considered best by manufacturers to advertise their products? Even if institutions pay for this time, will not competition for its use with the advertising groups have a tendency to raise the cost to an exorbitant figure?

Programs—Finally, there remains the problem of programs, resolving itself into many parts. First, there are many groups for whom provisions must be made in any complete program of radio education for an entire state. Each of these groups must be carefully studied to determine how radio can contribute to make their work more effective. For instance, consider the one-teacher rural

school. The possibilities of radio in supplementing the varied demands made on the rural teacher are almost unlimited. Relatively, the rural teacher in most

CONSCIOUS that isolated periods of decency do not make amends for insufferably long stretches of maladroit advertising and pseudo-entertainment, the two national chains have during the last six months made strenuous efforts, in the news columns, to improve conditions. Famous concert names and bureaus have been merged with them, and the air was full of promise. But the results have been negligible so far. The genuine artists have disappeared, overwhelmed by the mass of "artistes," or their programs have been shorn of interest by the advertiser. Perhaps something will arise later from this official union of talent with commerce. Meanwhile, in our great depression, the many questionable hours return handsome profits to the stations.—From "I'm Signing Off—A Radio Announcer Betrays His Profession," an anonymous article in *Forum*, February, 1932.

states is imperfectly trained. She is often paid a niggardly wage. She receives an entirely inadequate supervisory service and accepts the first opportunity to teach in a village, town, or city school. Usually the turn-over among this group of teachers is exceedingly large each year. Frequently required by necessity to teach all subjects in all grades of the elementary school, the rural school teacher finds many subjects in which she is scarcely competent to give instruction.

To this group may be brought instructors highly qualified in the many subjects lending themselves to radio teaching. Probably no single subject has been pre-

pared and presented for school use more than music. Many persons have thought that music is about the only subject which could be presented effectively over the radio. In many quarters a feeling existed that such subjects as arithmetic could never be taught except by the classroom teacher. Superintendent R. G. Jones of Cleveland had a different opinion, however, and for a year he proceeded quietly to experiment with arithmetic lessons thru the use of a public address system in one of his schools. Cleveland children, in buildings now wired for radio, receive part of their arithmetic instruction under the master radio-teacher, Miss Ida M. Baker. They receive music lessons in the same way. Lessons of this kind could be prepared for use in rural as well as in city schools. Many other subjects prepared for use in certain elementary grades could be used by both rural and urban children. There are many subjects, tho not all, which can be prepared on junior and senior high school and college levels. Materials for use in the social sciences, health, physical sciences, literature, drama, debates, speech, and foreign languages are examples. Broadcast instruction in the languages of France, Spain, Germany, and Italy is most valuable when given by natives of those countries. Regardless of size, few high schools employ native teachers in any of their modern language departments. However, a state university can offer language lessons by native teachers so that many schools secure the superior technical knowledge of the language which only a teacher of this kind, speaking the language perfectly, can give.

Practical examples—Already many of you are saying, "This sounds interesting, but is it all theory? Where are there examples of school broadcasting? How successful are they? What connection is there between all this and the teachers of southern Wisconsin?"

I have mentioned radio in connection with teaching arithmetic and music in Cleveland. It has proved its value to such an extent that its sponsors are willing to pay for the six periods a week they are now using. This, of course, is temporary. Gradually as more subjects are prepared for radio use, Cleveland will have to seek

ALLOW ME TO SAY TO YOU, do not take the government too far away from the people, and do not force people, who are not able to do so, to come here to Washington and pay high-priced attorneys to defend their rights. Let them test their rights in the courts of their own jurisdiction.—Representative John N. Sandlin of Louisiana, *Congressional Record*, February 10, 1932, p3806.

other facilities because commercial stations will be unable to give them all the time they will require.

Ohio—Another example is the Ohio School of the Air, sponsored by the Ohio State Department of Education. These programs, which began on January 7, 1929, use an hour each school day broadcasting such subjects as nature study, geography, story plays and rhythmic, current events, our government, general science, history, dramalogs, botany, guidance, physics, health, literature, stories, citizenship, art appreciation, and modern adventure. In addition to classroom broadcasts occasional programs have been provided for teachers, parent-teacher associations, and home listeners.

North Carolina—The North Carolina State Department of Education is now in its second year preparing broadcasts for schools. The station broadcasting this material does not reach the area, nor does it devote as much time to programs as the Ohio station, but splendid work is being done, and it is being well-received by North Carolina teachers.

And others—I haven't time now to tell you about the educational radio programs in Kansas, Iowa, and California, in Chicago and Louisville, or those offered by the New York State Department, the modern language department of Ohio State University, nor the Damosch and American School of the Air programs.

Abroad—I might tell you of school broadcasts in England which are more comprehensive than anything found in this country. Their programs for classroom use total eight hours and twenty-five minutes each week and include such subjects as world history, stories for younger pupils, French readings and dialogs, nature study, music, French, talks and debates for older pupils, biology and hygiene, English literature, history, speech training, German dialogs and

readings, rural science, geography, Friday afternoon stories and talks, concerts, and dramatic readings. Without doubt the success of the English broadcasts is

THE FIELD OF WORK in which you are engaged is undoubtedly a most important one. Your fearlessness in exposing the danger of a broadcast monopoly is admirable. Freedom of speech is indeed to be safeguarded and for this reason air monopoly is to be avoided. Freedom might else develop into license that would endanger the country's welfare. I shall be delighted to cooperate with you to any extent possible in your splendid work. —One of many similar letters received by the National Committee on Education by Radio.

largely due to the fact that British broadcasting is not a tool of high pressure advertisers but is maintained as an educational and cultural agency. Its school broadcasts are directed entirely by responsible educators and are not in any way connected with propaganda. Their programs of adult education occupy the most desirable hours—those hours which in our own country are largely devoted to nauseating sales talks. The English programs enjoy an immense following among individuals and discussion groups under local leaders. Listeners are provided also with a substantial amount of entertainment of high quality which has no advertisement connected with it.

At home—But why talk of other countries and states? In Wisconsin, your own state station WHA here in Madison, is providing two fifteen-minute periods each school day for use in schools. Within

reach of radio-equipped schools in this area valuable supplementary material is broadcast in such subjects as geography, occupations, stories for little folks, music, dramatic moments in history, art appreciation, nature study, the girl of today, health and rhythmic, and citizenship and conduct. After fifteen weeks of operation Mr. Harold B. McCarty, program director, has received reports showing that 10,850 pupils are regular listeners and some 8000 are occasional listeners. Probably there are schools using these radio lessons which did not report. It would be impossible to estimate the number of adult listeners outside of school who found an interest in these programs.

Increasing value will be given to, and greater use will be made of these programs by close cooperation between radio authorities of the university, the state department of education, and the state teachers association. Most important, however, is the aid individual teachers can give both in preparing lessons for broadcasting and in suggesting ways of making broadcasts more effective.

Conclusion—Radio in education is a new enterprise. It needs master teachers effective in the presentation of radio subjectmatter which will instruct not thirty or forty but thousands of children.

Radio cannot be expected to provide for individual differences, but by providing certain general materials it will give the individual teacher more time to help those pupils who are either below or above average ability. It will be of great assistance to ear-minded pupils, and will certainly provide poor and mediocre teachers with examples of good teaching.

In conclusion, may I predict that radio will never replace the work of local teachers and thereby create problems of unemployment. Rather it will serve as a supplementary agency which will materially increase the effectiveness of classroom teachers.

E DUCATION BY RADIO is published weekly by the National Committee on Education by Radio at 1201 Sixteenth Street, Northwest, Washington, D. C. The members of this Committee and the national groups with which they are associated are as follows:

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