

# An Appeal to Canada

LEE DEFORREST

I HAVE BEEN INTIMATELY CONNECTED with radio for more than thirty years. After fundamental technical work, which laid the foundation for the modern radio industry, I began broadcasting. In New York as early as 1910, by means of a temporary radio-telephone transmitter on the top of the Metropolitan Opera House and a microphone placed among the footlights of the stage, I put the living voice of Caruso on the air. In 1916, four years before Westinghouse gave the public a similar service, my Highbridge station broadcast the returns of our presidential election. We also maintained at that time a thrice-weekly concert service, using the records of the Columbia Phonograph Company.

The war, of course, interrupted private broadcasting, but we resumed in 1919 and moved our transmitter downtown to the heart of the theatrical district where artists could be easily brought to the microphone. We had hardly gotten under way in the new location when the federal radio inspector of that district cancelled our license on the bizarre theory, then current in official circles, that there was "no room in the ether for entertainment." So our transmitter took another journey and, finally installed in the stage loft of the California Theater in San Francisco, daily broadcast orchestral concerts. I am, therefore, no novice in radio.

It is not unnatural that, having fathered broadcasting, I should, like any parent, cherish high hopes for my offspring. In 1923, on the occasion of Station WOR's first anniversary, I hailed this new instrumentality as a beneficent force in civilization with potentialities which could only be compared to those initiated five centuries ago by the art of printing. I saw it as a noble agency for the diffusion of education and culture. I saw it as a boundless source of pleasure for the multitude. I saw it as a means of uniting the nations of the earth in closer bonds, as the herald of worldwide peace.

So much for the dream. The reality you know. Within the span of a few years we in the United States have seen broadcasting so debased by commercial advertising that many a householder regards it as he does the brazen salesman who tries to thrust his foot in at the door. Under what the present masters of radio are pleased to call the American Plan—which is no plan whatsoever but a rank and haphazard growth that has sprung up in default of proper regulation—broadcasting

is regarded as a nuisance by uncounted thousands. Radio sets here are a drug on the market. In many a home the cabinet gathers dust. Thinking people resent the moronic fare that is mostly offered them. They resent the fact that the rights of education on the air have been steadily curtailed by the insistent advertiser. They are in revolt against the policies, rooted in greed, which have made the ether a marketplace. They demand that this huckstering orgy be curbed, that they, the owners of receivingsets, whose financial stake in radio is vastly greater than that of the station owners, shall no longer be fobbed off with a vulgar, cheapjack show designed solely to coax dollars out of the pockets of the public.

I well realize that good programs must be paid for, that the cost for adequate artists, network transmission, and station maintenance is expensive. But it has been abundantly proven here in America that the programs of the highest quality are accompanied by the least sales talk or ballyhoo. Almost invariably this is the case. And yet such wise and efficient business organizations as the Standard Oil Company of California, Atwater Kent, and a few others, have found thru years of experience that their highclass musical programs are abundantly paid for by the mere sponsoring notices which introduce and terminate these programs. This fact clearly offers, in my mind, a just and practical solution; just to the public and profitable to the sponsoring organization.

Let legislators therefore be directed along this line—to prohibit all direct sales talk from broadcasting—permitting brief sponsoring notices only.

The deplorable conditions which overwhelmingly exist in the United States are known to you in Canada. May I voice a hope that many Americans share? We trust that you, our neighbors across that undefended boundary line which, for a century or more, has been the world's noblest symbol of peace, will strengthen our hands. We have faith that you, who have in so many ways set a lofty example in selfgovernment, will point the way to a wiser use of this scientific boon that we have let fall into unworthy keeping. We look to you in Canada to lead radio in North America out of the morass in which it is pitifully sunk. May Canada fulfil my early dream!—Proceedings of the Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting, Canadian House of Commons, April 13, 1932.

**T**HE RADIO INDUSTRY has maintained that broadcasting in this country is impossible without income from advertising. ¶The fact is that about thirty stations are maintained by state-supported and private colleges and universities without advertising and that at least two college stations have received considerable amounts in contributions from listeners. ¶How many of the commercial stations which claim to be giving the public what it wants would dare to suggest that the public pay them for broadcasting the programs they do! The American public never has shown any unwillingness to pay for anything that it wanted and since the broadcasting industry seems afraid of any suggestion to make broadcasting dependent on public financial support, there must be some question in the mind of the industry as to whether it is really giving the public what it wants. What the American buying public needs is not radio advertising but an impartial factual agency.

## University Broadcasts Opera

THE SUCCESSFUL BROADCAST of opera by Station WLB of the University of Minnesota bespeaks the ability of educational stations to match the best efforts of commercial stations in this field. Station WLB's broadcast of the overture and a portion of the first act of the comic opera, *Robin Hood*, direct from Northrop Memorial Auditorium, Minneapolis, probably marks the first time that any radio station in the Northwest has ever endeavored to broadcast an opera from the stage. The university station may be credited with a worthy achievement. Reports from listeners have been enthusiastic and indicate that reception was unusually good. The chorus work came in perfectly and all dialog could be heard.

The music from the orchestra pit, the dialog, and the singing on the platform were all picked up thru two condenser microphones placed on the front edge of the stage. In order to make the pick-up successful, it was necessary to borrow special remote control equipment. The technical details in both the auditorium and studio control room were handled by student operators, Fred Shidell, Lyman Swendsen, and Vir James.

Difficulties in broadcasting such a program from a stage as large as that in the Northrop Auditorium can readily be imagined and the operators deserve credit for their efforts. Details of the program could have been picked up more completely with additional microphones and other equipment, but an exceptional broadcast resulted with the equipment at hand.

The success of this broadcast indicates the possibilities of WLB, and other educational stations. Operas and other lengthy programs which commercial stations could not broadcast because of commercial restrictions can be handled successfully by university stations if the proper equipment is available.

The university pursued its pioneer work in broadcasting with a unique program in answer to its own question, *What Does the Radio Public Want?* This was the first of a series of programs given from 8 to 8:15PM on seven consecutive Tuesday nights from Station WLB.

The series simulated an atmosphere resembling that which surrounds after-dinner coffee conversation. A dialog was carried on by the hostess, her friend the professor, and two other guests. Mrs. M. S. Harding, managing editor of the University of Minnesota Press, arranged the programs. Other topics discussed were: *Can Character Be Read At Sight?*; *Can A Third Party Survive in American Politics?*; *The Prairie Pioneers—Heroes Or Ne'er-Do-Wells?*; *Should College Students Earn Their Expenses?*; *Are The Classics Dead?*; *How Can Minnesota Birds Be Saved?*

IF EDUCATION is going to get its place on the air, it will have to fight for it very strenuously. The interests that are now controlling radio facilities are organized and if they are to be combatted they will have to be met by just as carefully organized a situation.—Levering Tyson in *National Association of State Universities*, Vol. XXVIII, p145.

## Service or Profit?

I DO NOT THINK educational institutions should maintain and operate radio stations," said the editor of one of the radio-broadcasting magazines in a recent letter to the director of Station WCAJ. Other conclusions reached by this spokesman of commercialism in radio were that "None of us has yet found a proper solution of the educational problem . . . stations should be required to assign specific hours for educational purposes . . . it is uneconomical for anyone to operate a radio station partime . . . a greater audience will be available to educational institutions by using the regular established commercial stations . . . perhaps stations are overdoing advertising now . . . so far educational institutions have not been able to make any kind of satisfactory arrangement with stations . . . sometime or other, the owners of commercial stations will be forced to sacrifice some of the hours which are considered most valuable for advertising."

"Do you know of any institution of higher learning that is being run for profit?" wrote Professor Jensen, director of Station WCAJ, in reply. "Why should a college or university expect to make dividends from its broadcasting station any more than from its department of English or mathematics? Is there any more reason why an educational institution should be prohibited from reaching its constituents thru the radio than for preventing it from publishing 'faculty studies' and research papers over its own name? . . . What guarantee have you that any better arrangements would be forthcoming once the large commercial stations got a complete monopoly of broadcasting facilities?"

"Granting that the legislation was passed requiring each station to set aside a certain number of satisfactory hours for educational purposes, how could you guarantee that rival stations would not vie with each other to obtain schoolroom listeners by injecting cheap humor and cheaper music into their features? Suppose for example that the NBC is putting on one hour of educational programs each morning from 9 to 10AM. What guarantee have we that the Columbia system will not put on a competing series with better comedians, but with correspondingly less time given to the serious work in hand? Who will decide for the rural teacher which of these programs her children shall listen to? Granting that both programs were placed in the hands of dry-as-dust pedagogs so as to eliminate nonsense and competition, what will prevent these companies from running up to the very beginning of the nine o'clock period with an attractive tobacco program, and beginning sharply at ten o'clock with a chewing gum advertisement before the teacher can get it tuned off?"

"Why should the commercial broadcasters insist that they are better prepared to do educational work than the educators themselves in radio any more than in the work of the classroom? Everyone knows the answer, namely, that radio pays dividends, and the commercial group wants those dividends regardless of the consequences to educational forces."

[It will be recalled that WCAJ has had considerable difficulty with a commercial station with which it shares time, and is hesitant about mixing education with commerce.]

# The Radio and the American Future

GLENN FRANK

*President of the University of Wisconsin*

WITH THE IMPROVEMENT in the Stevens Point radio station, and the improvement we are about to make in the university radio station, hereafter to be the voice not only of the university but of other departments of the state government as well, Wisconsin takes another step forward in the betterment of the means of contact between her people and their agencies of government, information, and education.

I have an exalted conception of what radio can mean to the American future. I think the invention of the radio equals in significance the invention of the printing press. Specifically, the radio promises to render two important services to the American future: [1] it promises to unify us as a people, and [2] it promises to debunk our leadership.

The radio is potentially the most important single instrument we have for gaining and guaranteeing national unity. This vast nation, with its 123,000,000 people, faces a dilemma. It must not iron itself out into a dull sameness. It must resist the forces that seek to impose an extreme standardization upon its thought and life. It must, at all costs, maintain the color, the character, the charm, and the creativeness of its various regions and classes. But it must, at the same time, play for national unity.

This is a difficult order for a vast territory and a vast population. All history shows that far-flung empires have sooner or later failed because they could not maintain the necessary unity of mind and purpose. They fell apart because they lacked the cement of a common vision of their problems and of their possibilities. The Greek republics began to slip when they grew beyond the city-state stage in which the whole population could at once have access to the counsels in which public policy was being shaped. The Athenians gathering *en masse* at the Acropolis had an ideal agency of unification. They could all listen at once to their peerless leader, Pericles.

Until radio was invented America lacked her Acropolis. Her Pericles, when she has been lucky enough to have one, had had to make the swing around the circle if he wanted to speak to the people of America face to face. And even then he could touch only the strategic centers. The masses had to "hear" him at second hand as they scanned the reports of his speeches in the next day's press. With radio, an American Pericles can have his Acropolis and speak to all America at once.

As a medium for the discussion of political, social, and economic issues, the radio promises also to have a profound influence towards a more rational consideration of problems by our leaders. The microphone is the deadly enemy of the demagog. Two-thirds of the appeal of the rabble-rousing of the old-fashioned shyster lay in the hundred and one tricks of posture and voice that caught on when the crowd was massed together and the speaker was looking in its eye.

Even the most average of average men are more critical listeners when they are not part of a mass meeting. The slightest trace of pose or of insincerity shows up on the radio. A new type of leader is likely to be developed by the radio. Ideas must stand on their own feet without the benefit of the crutch of emotionalized crowd-reactions. Long and involved sentences must go. And the realization that millions may be listening to him puts the speaker on his mettle. He has an added compulsion towards accuracy. When the speaker resorts to demagogic tricks over the radio, there is likely to drift back to him the thought that here and there and yonder in quiet rooms thousands of Americans are laughing derisively.

In WLBL and WHA stations, Wisconsin is perfecting agencies thru which her departments of state can maintain intimate contact with and seek to serve the people of Wisconsin in the following half-dozen ways:

[1] To serve the agricultural interests of the state by furnishing technical and market information, and sound guidance in economic organization.

[2] To serve the households of the state by furnishing technical counsel on the construction, care, and conduct of the efficient home.

[3] To serve the adult citizenry of the state by furnishing continuous educational opportunities.

[4] To serve the rural schools of the state by supplementing their educational methods and materials, by sending over the air the best teaching genius we can muster.

[5] To serve public interests and public enterprise by providing them with as good radio facilities as the commercial stations have placed at the disposal of private interests and private enterprise.

[6] To serve the interests of an informed public opinion by providing a statewide forum for the pro and con discussion of the problems of public policy.

The state of Wisconsin, by long tradition, is interested in the safeguarding and promoting of a free and full discussion of the problems of the common life of the commonwealth. And these state-controlled radio stations may enable Wisconsin to recreate in this machine age the sort of unhampered and intimate and sustained discussion of public issues that marked the New England town meeting and the Lincoln-Douglas debates. If Wisconsin could demonstrate the practicability of recreating the New England town meeting with the state for a stage, it would render a national service. It is our eager hope to realize thru these two stations a state-wide forum in which issues of public policy may be threshed out.

Permit me, then, to say again how gratified we should be that, in these improved radio stations, Wisconsin is perfecting an important social agency for the unification of its people and the rationalization of its public discussions.

## ***A Winning Issue***

Already young and able men are preparing to run for Congress on the issue of free speech on the radio and the rights of the states to have broadcasting channels for use by their educational institutions. The people are not ready to barter away the precious right of free speech, won thru centuries of struggle. Men who have the vision to appreciate the magnitude of this issue and the courage to take the lead in radio reform are certain to win. The people will not place freedom of teaching in America at the mercy of privately-appointed committees in New York.