

# NBC Changes Policy

CONSIDERABLE INTEREST HAS BEEN CREATED in radio circles by recent statements which give the impression that the National Broadcasting Company has made a definite change in policy. Previous public pronouncements by its officials had convinced the man in the street that the company did not believe in the support of broadcasting from any other source than the sale of time to advertisers. It is now reported on good authority that a new source is to be tapped, namely, listener contributions. The scheme does not provide that all receivingset owners shall pay fees of sufficient size to support broadcasting but will follow the novel but extremely successful plan now used in the Netherlands of asking for voluntary contributions.

There is one essential difference between the new arrangement which is proposed by the NBC and the system now in use in Holland. This small European country does not permit radio advertising yet the two broadcasting organizations report substantial profits over and above the cost of operation. The NBC on the contrary, tho claiming to be operating in the public interest, evidently proposes to force the listeners to pay for every program peculiarly prepared to serve the public interest.

Let no one be misled. The National Broadcasting Company has not decided to cancel its advertising contracts. As a matter of fact an official of the company recently stated that in his opinion there has been an increase rather than a decrease in the number of hours sold during the past year or so.

The reports of the change in policy arose as a result of the following letter sent to a select mailing list:

15 Broad Street, New York, April 3, 1933

*Confidential*

Dear —:

The Walter Damrosch Music Appreciation Hour, which is being heard each week by more than six million school children [*This is an extremely exaggerated estimate*] and two million adults over the largest regular radio hookup of any program, commercial or educational, faces abandonment after its final program of the present season, April 28.

The National Broadcasting Company, which has presented the Damrosch Hour for the last five years, at a cost of approximately \$100,000 a year, has found that it can no longer make this expenditure.

A group of music lovers who feel strongly that the Damrosch programs should continue, without any impairment in quality, have asked me to form a special Damrosch Hour Continuation Committee. To obtain representative opinion on the possibility of raising the funds necessary to provide the Damrosch Hour for three years, a few questions have been shaped. Your answers would greatly aid me in reaching a decision as to future plans for the Committee.

Please accept my personal appreciation of your kindness in answering these questions. Sincerely yours,

John W. Davis

- [1] Do you believe that the Damrosch Hour should be continued? [2] Do you think many of your friends and associates would like to see the Damrosch Hour continued? [3] Do you favor the proposal that a special Damrosch Hour Continuation Committee sponsor an effort to raise a fund of \$300,000 to assure continuance for three years? [Any funds so raised would be turned over to the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education, a non-profit-making organization of which the eminent scientist, Dr. Robert A. Millikan, is president, to administer.] [4] Would you be willing to take part in raising the fund for continuance of the Damrosch Hour? [5] Can you recommend any organization in your locality that would lead and sponsor the project locally? If so, please provide name of person with whom we might communicate. [6] Do you believe that philanthropic foundations should contribute to a fund in behalf of the Damrosch Hour? [7] Would you be willing to contribute to the fund for continuing the Damrosch Hour? [8] Other remarks?



MARTIN HEGLAND, director of radio station WCAL, head, department of religion, and college pastor, St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota. A graduate of St. Olaf College, Dr. Hegland holds an M. A. degree from the University of Minnesota, and a Ph. D. from Columbia University. WCAL, which derives its support from the contributions of listeners, enables St. Olaf College to render a distinctive educational, cultural, and religious service to listeners in that area—large numbers of whom are of Norwegian descent.

It has been evident for a long time that sooner or later the break would come. It was only a matter of time before a disgusted, intelligent, and discriminating radio audience would insist upon the maintenance of such current programs as are worth continuing; the presentation of a greater amount of high-grade microphone material; and the curtailment if not entire elimination of radio advertising. Conceding that the present haphazard plan will not continue long, NBC would now place the burden of providing *good programs* on the shoulders of the audience and at

the same time line its pockets from the programs of the advertisers given over the protests of the listeners.

It is significant that this movement to throw the support of the Damrosch programs upon the listeners should be headed by a man wellknown as one of the leading attorneys for the big power companies, which dominate radio broadcasting.

However, there is a brighter side to the picture. The demand for a congressional study of radio along the lines of the bill introduced by Congressman H. P. Fulmer of South Carolina is gaining ground. Such a thoroughgoing and impartial study would unearth many inconsistencies in the present type of radio operation in this country. It would furnish the foundation for a system of broadcasting in the United States which would avoid both the evils of government systems in certain other countries and of our commercialized American system. Conditions in America are unusually favorable for broadcasting. There is no reason why the United States should not have the best system in the world at the least cost to the individual.

## Advertising Securities by Radio

**M**R. PRESIDENT, just a day or so ago, before the Committee on Banking and Currency, it was developed that Halsey Stuart & Co., one of the greatest houses of its kind, if not the greatest, in the United States, had hired a professor out of a university to talk over the radio to the people of the United States. I have heard him, and I suppose all senators have heard him, telling how to invest money. They call him "*the Old Counsellor*." He was a professor from a university. They paid him, I understand, \$50 a week. He did not prepare his addresses; Halsey Stuart prepared them. They got them up for him, and all he did was to read them, and that is one of the ways they operate. That looks a good deal like the methods the public utilities companies have used to control the public during all the years that have passed.

Here were men and women with some money, savings, perhaps the proceeds of a life-insurance policy to a widow from a dead husband, wanting to invest the proceeds, and they were talked to by "*Old Counsellor*," hired by Halsey Stuart & Co., paid by them, talking their words, not his, over the radio, giving this advice. They would naturally suppose he was a professor in a university, an economist, an honest man, and that he was giving his own ideas. When simmered down, the advice was that the securities they were advised to buy were securities which Halsey Stuart & Co. had for sale and which afterwards became practically worthless.—Senator George W. Norris of Nebraska, *Congressional Record*, February 23, 1933, p4928.

## Utopian Radio

**I**T IS A STRIKING FACT that the radio should be such an abject failure in the one field where the greatest success was once prophesied—news broadcasting. One reason is that during much of the day, time on the air is completely sold to advertisers, so that it takes much effort and long advance notice to clear the airways. Yet the most important news, by definition, is that which is sudden and unexpected. Again, the broadcasters deliberately slight this function in the endeavor to keep the goodwill of the daily press and get its announcements of programs printed. The newspapers are already rather hostile to radio, which is an extremely important competitor for the advertiser's dollar. It is now apparent that on the basis of present inventions, radio will never be a substitute for the daily paper, which can be read at your convenience, with complete selectivity, at any rate of speed you wish, and can be filed for reference. In Utopia, of course, radio would be infinitely more useful than it is now. There would be about four stations, each of which would broadcast one type of material only, all day long—news from one, serious talks from another, light music from a third, good music from a fourth. But that is Utopia!—*The New Republic*, March 15, 1933.

## Opposes Radio Advertising

**A**T THE PRESENT TIME, I am opposed to radio advertising from two quite definite points of view. First, from the listener's, whose reaction to the program would naturally influence my second, the advertiser's point of view.

If I buy a wireless set, I pay an annual license fee to be entertained, not instructed as to what goods I ought to buy. Were a canvasser or a commercial traveler to force his way into my house and thrust his goods upon me, I should consider it an unwarrantable intrusion. But I consider it no worse than that I should be expected, when I switch on my radio receiver to hear the entertainment to which I am entitled, to have to listen to a similar salesmanship. The obvious argument is that I have no need to listen. I can switch off. But why should I? What have I bought a radio for? What do I pay a license fee for? Not to "switch-off" but to "switch-on," to whatever form of entertainment appeals to me.

Another small, but nevertheless irritating, detail—I do not wish to hear a program "by the courtesy of" anyone. I don't want it given me as a favor when I know very well it is my due.

With the listener holding this point of view, it is hardly to be expected that the advertiser's verdict will be a favorable one, as every listener is a potential customer.

The advertiser or the advertising agent, who if possible must be still more careful in choosing his media, has neither the guarantee that the sales talk, which follows the "sponsored program," will be listened to [it is more than likely that as soon as it begins, the listener will switch off], nor the knowledge that the people who do happen to be listening are the people to whom his product appeals, nor the assurance that even if they are, they are not being antagonized by the method of approach.—Sir Charles Higham in British Broadcasting Corporation *Year-Book*, 1933, p59-60.

**P**ERSONALLY, I FEEL THAT RADIO is rich in possibilities as an educational instrument in the schoolroom. The greatest handicap to its usefulness is the possibility that the broadcaster, if he is not a thoro educator, may be satisfied to put on the air, for the schools, the kind of programs that he would prepare for adults. It is absolutely essential that the programs mesh into the curriculum of the schools.—W. W. Charters in *Education on the Air*, 1930, p134.

**A** COMMERCIAL BROADCASTER who recently sold his station and went to Europe to visit stations there writes:

"I listen-in all hours of the day and night and am more than pleased at the music one can hear. The best music seems to come from Holland, Poland, and Prague, but it's all so much better than the rotten 'jazz' and 'blah-blah' in the United States that there's no comparison."

**T**HE COMMERCIAL MONOPOLY CHAINS, after the practise had been established by the educational stations in the various states, were obliged to make some such provision for the discussion of public questions by the national legislative body. In making such an arrangement one company selected an hour unfavorable for listening on the eastern seaboard which is the center of our population and turned over the responsibility for program making to one of the local Washington newspapers.

# Radio in the Wisconsin Legislature

HAROLD A. ENGEL

Station WHA, University of Wisconsin

WISCONSIN LAW-MAKERS are now using the state's radio stations to keep the citizens in close touch with legislative activities in Madison. Each day a broadcast direct from a studio in the capitol building features a message by a legislator who is prominent in the news of the day.

At the beginning of the present session every senator and assemblyman was invited to use the radio to keep his constituents informed of his activities and interests. He was asked to choose his own topics for discussion. So many have grasped the opportunity to extend their services to the people "back home" that it has been necessary to double the original time allotment for as much as a week at a time.

The "State Capitol" series was opened by Cornelius Young, speaker of the assembly at the age of twenty-five, who laid the groundwork for the talks to follow. Later broadcasts are featuring discussions of pending legislation, explanations of laws enacted, and weekly summaries of the activities of the legislature.

Each speaker is allowed a free rein; no censorship is suggested. Even in the most controversial of problems there have been no cases of indiscretions or ungentlemanly conduct. The solons have accepted the opportunity as a part of the plan to acquaint the citizens with the complex problems of this time of economic distress. Listeners, in turn, are eager to know what is being done in their behalf. A better understanding is the result.

Into the microphone the legislator speaks his mind. His voice is heard and he is understood as he intended. He welcomes the freedom from misinterpretations and distorted reports which have been known to come from the press, especially when the political affiliations of the speaker and the press do not coincide. The radio brings into the home the friendly warmth and assurance so vital to stability in turbulent times. It helps the legislator to maintain on the part of his constituents the confidence which elected him.

Important legislative events are put on the air as they occur. Since the first of the year the inauguration of the governor and other new state officials, the opening session of the legislature, and the much-awaited governor's budget message have been heard. Broadcasts of vital matters can be arranged on short notice thru the maintenance of a wire connection with the legislative chambers.

The Women's Legislative Council of Wisconsin finds it possible to extend the scope of its activities by using the WHA-WLBL hookup. Each week at a regular time it gives a summary and explanation of the more important developments at the capitol. Legislators themselves take part, broadcasting from the capitol studio. Matters of special interest to women are featured.

Continuing its program of political education, started during the election campaigns in the fall of 1932, a series of broadcasts has been arranged for candidates for the supreme court in the April election. Time was again distributed equitably

among the aspirants for office by the drawing of lots. *There is no charge to any speaker for the use of these radio facilities.* It is an educational project for the enlightenment of voters, and candidates are urged to use the time judiciously.

The state stations, WHA operated thru the University in Madison, and WLBL of the Department of Agriculture and Markets, are linked by wire and broadcast many important features jointly. More than 90 percent of the people of Wisconsin are within the service area of these two stations.

Wisconsin has begun to demonstrate a few of the ways in which the radio is a powerful force in the extension of opportunities to its citizens. Recognized as a leader among states in matters of politics and government, it continues to pioneer in the public interest. In the words of Governor Albert E. Schmedeman, "It is quite fitting that Wisconsin, the birthplace of WHA, the world's oldest educational broadcasting station, should take this position of leadership in the development of state-owned radio facilities."<sup>1</sup>

## PTA Writes Protest

AS THE GROUP OF PERSONS most interested in the welfare of children, the Rochester Central Council of Parent Teacher Associations wishes to call to your attention the undesirable features of your radio program coming at 8PM on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

If ever children and young people should have high ideals held before them, it is now. Recreation they need, and wisecracks, and nonsense and fun; but never a portrayal of crime that will give them not only the idea itself, but all the lurid details of its execution as well. The radio voice has become a background against which a modern child can think and act, but let that background be decent and uplifting, rather than degrading. Eight-thirty is the average hour for bedtime for school children; does it seem fair to them that their last half hour before being sent to bed should be filled with the shrieks of murdered men and the wails of betrayed women? If you must have these things, let it be after ten o'clock when children are in bed, or during the morning when children are in school. If you persist in undesirable programs during the evening the result will be the turning off of all radio entertainment during the evening.

Intelligent parents are becoming so annoyed at the type of radio advertising that is emphasized daily from five to nine, resulting in urgent demands from the children to buy XYZ toothpaste and ABC cereal, etc., that an organized resistance is growing up; parents are steadfastly refusing to buy any product advertised over the radio by over-emotional and too highly stimulating appeals.

We sincerely hope that you will consider our protests in behalf of our children.

Very truly yours,

<sup>1</sup> Inaugural address celebrating linking of state stations by wire, January 21, 1933.

## Who is to Blame?

SOME TIME AGO, following the sensational murder by a young schoolboy, one of our Chicago dailies carried an editorial laying the blame for such conditions on parents and teachers. Of course we are the custodians of children, but are we wholly responsible for their actions?

Often a broken home is responsible, because it creates an emotional unbalance in the child deprived of the love and security it needs for normal development. For instance, that particular boy was deprived of his mother in childhood and the evidence showed that he was "shifted from one relative to another" during his childhood when he needed love and security. Then too, there are people who should never be parents.

But how often the community is to blame for conditions it permits *outside* the home and school. This morning I read of a school boy who killed a policeman, and to my amazement the blame is put on the movies he saw just before committing the crime. The accusation was considered, seriously enough, for theater owners were actually called in. That boy did not see crime in his home, but *he was shown all kinds of crime in the movies, sponsored by the community.*

We are one of the most backward countries in the world regarding the safeguarding of our youth. Not even Turkey and Russia allow their children to witness films of crime.

And even our newspapers, do they set a good example? At the time of the murder mentioned above, I wanted to get my son's reaction to what he was reading in the paper that came to our home every day. I was amazed and oh, so pleased with his answer. He said he had not read any of the details. "For that matter," he added, "there is very little worthwhile to read in the paper."

Are you, Mr. Editor, pleased with that reaction from a fourteen-year-old boy?

Again, I noticed an article recently by the radio editor of the *Chicago Daily News*. He said: "Crime and horror have become a large part of broadcasting—and *mothers* don't like it. That stuff over-stimulates a child, and if improperly or poorly done, may give him the dangerous idea that the gun is the answer to life's problems and the laws of man and nature not important." That sounds as if mothers were on the job, and fighting the people who have charge of the recreational hours of youth. This brings vividly to my mind the fact that I called up this same newspaper one evening, protesting against a horrible crime story that they had just sponsored over the radio.

Perhaps someone else besides parents and teachers is responsible for the crimes of youth.—A Chicago Mother.

## Group Listening

SO FAR AS IS KNOWN, some 168 listening groups have been formed in various parts of the country to follow the series of addresses on "God and the World thru Christian Eyes." The method of listening is varied. In some cases the groups hold their discussion immediately after hearing the broadcast; in others it is held after a day or two's postponement; while in yet other cases the actual listening is done individually, but the group meets for discussion during the subsequent week. Since some of the talks are closely packed with ideas and are not easy to absorb at first hearing, this latter method has something to recommend it. . . . In one case, at St. Cuthbert's Parish Church, one of the principal churches in Edinburgh, the average attendance at the group meetings has been 300. We believe that there are many listening groups of which no record has yet been received, and the British Broadcasting Corporation would be grateful if the organizers of any such groups not already in touch with a regional station would communicate with Broadcasting House.—*The Listener* [London], March 29, 1933, p483.

## 1933-34 Debate Topic

**R**ESOLVED: *That the United States should adopt the essential features of the British system of radio control and operation.*—This statement has recently been adopted by the wording committee of the Committee on Debate Materials and Interstate Cooperation of the National University Extension Association. It will therefore be the subject in the national contest and will be debated during the year 1933-34 by the majority of the high-school debating teams thruout the United States. In view of the increasing amount of dissatisfaction with the present American system, it is expected that the nationwide debate of this subject will bring out a great many facts with which few people are conversant.

**T**HE MOST IMPORTANT THING in America is the youth of America. Don't help railroads and neglect boys and girls. Save the railroads; save the banks; save the insurance companies; take steps to save the building and loan associations; do anything to save the farmers, but always keep in mind the little generation. We can rebuild anything that is lost in America except the lapse of interrupted or denied education. Give attention to the one greatest need of our country—the need of education.—Aaron Sapiro, attorney-at-law, New York City.

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