



"Takes the Resistance Out of Radio"

Editorial Offices, 96-98 Park Place, New York, N. Y.

THE BROADCAST SITUATION

By HUGO GERNSBACK

DURING the past year, a curious but important situation has developed in the broadcast field that deserves the thoughtful attention of the radio industry. When radio was young and took the country, nay the world, by storm, everyone seemed bent to shout radio's praises from the roof-tops. Loudest of all in praise, was the daily press, the newspapers vying with one another to give radio a tremendous amount of publicity. During the years between 1921 and 1926, the newspapers featured radio in a way nothing else had ever been featured before. Pages upon pages of space were given over by the newspapers, not only to current radio developments, but to programs as well. Many progressive newspapers in the large cities issued complete radio sections, some of them running regularly from 32 to 48 pages in length.

Gradually, as radio became better known, the newspapers particularly felt the need of curbing the publicity, and began to devote less and less space to radio. Most of them, however, still continued to carry radio programs as a seemingly necessary feature in the daily and Sunday editions; but when radio grew up, it became a threat to the newspapers themselves. The press, particularly in the smaller cities, began to devote less and less space to radio programs, until about a year ago; when action was taken by newspaper publishers to discontinue radio programs entirely. Indeed, in the middle part of 1931, the newspaper publishers got together and voted to discontinue radio programs entirely. There was a certain amount of justification in this; because the newspapers rightly claimed that most radio programs are nothing but advertising, and there would seem to be no reason for the press to sponsor such advertising.

Of course, not all radio broadcasting, as it is done today, is advertising. Many of the numbers on the air are purely "sustaining" features; in other words, such features are originated by the radio stations and for which they, themselves, must pay. When the National Broadcasting Company places the Metropolitan Opera on the air, or the Columbia network puts its weekly Overseas Programs on the air, the broadcasting companies themselves have to pay a tremendous amount of money for such features without receiving anything in return.

But the broadcast stations are in this nowise different from the newspapers. A newspaper must pay a large sum of money for its own sustaining features (which, of course, are the news and text of the paper) while the advertiser naturally pays for the advertisement. The parallel between broadcasting stations and newspapers is, therefore, quite close; and the newspapers rightly feel that there is no reason why they should give publicity, particularly to the sponsored advertising features that are now on the air.

The newspapers maintain that broadcasters should pay if they wish their programs published. But so far, there has not been any cooperation between broadcasters and newspapers with a view to publishing complete programs as a paid feature in the newspapers.

The broadcasting companies feel that even their sponsored features are still excellent entertainment; and that they should not be compelled to pay the newspapers for publishing such program service. The newspapers, on the other hand, can't see it that way; and more and more of them are cutting out radio programs or reducing the programs in such a way

that, in the average newspaper, one cannot compare a radio program published three years ago and one published today.

Of course, it is also true that a number of national advertisers, who are using the several broadcast chains, freely advertise the broadcast features in the newspapers in order to draw the readers' attention to such programs; but so far, there has not been a very large amount of such newspaper advertising.

The broadcasting companies evidently seem to think that radio broadcasting today has "arrived"; and that it is sufficiently powerful in itself to get along without the programs published in the newspapers.

Of course, another grievance, and perhaps the main grievance of the newspapers, is that the broadcasting companies are seemingly taking money out of their pockets. They claim that many national advertisers, who previously spent millions of dollars in newspaper advertising, have now quit the newspapers and gone "broadcast." The broadcasting companies counter this argument by saying that the newspapers haven't lost anything that they wouldn't have lost because of the depression. They say that, if there had been no broadcasting in 1931 and in 1932, the newspapers would not have any more advertising than they have now. They also maintain, with a good deal of logic, that broadcasting has created new business which indirectly comes back to the newspapers. Take, for instance, radio-set advertising, which could not exist if there were no broadcast stations. It is well known that the majority of radio-set advertising is done today through the newspapers.

All in all, it would seem that the honors are about even; and it is quite possible that in the future, broadcasters and newspapers alike can get along nicely without either suffering unduly.

Of course, the crux of the entire matter may perhaps be found in the reckless advertising now going out over the broadcast stations.

Many observers seem to feel that the broadcasters are "killing the goose that lays the golden eggs" by allowing too much advertising of a flagrant type to go on the air; and that, if there had not been so much "raw" advertising over the air, the newspapers would still be publishing radio programs.

No doubt radio broadcasting companies must shoulder their lot of the blame when it comes to this point, because unquestionably, the public is surfeited with the mass of injudicious advertising foisted upon it these days.

Broadcasting companies themselves are not in too happy a situation; because they must have an income, and that income can only be derived from the advertisers. No advertiser will spend the tremendous amount of money now required unless he gets something in return. Yet, many observers feel that the problem can still be solved if the advertising blurbs were not as "raw" as they are today. No one would object, if at the end of a program, a credit or by-line were given over the air in, for instance, such a way as: "This program has been given by the courtesy of the XYZ Company of Detroit."

It takes a tremendous amount of courage, and salesmanship of the highest order, to convince an advertiser, who spends a half a million dollars a year, that the present method of advertising over the air is detrimental to him. Yet, in time, I confidently predict a revolution in radio advertising that will make it possible for all concerned to be happy, and to get the most out of the wonderful instrumentality of radio.