

Wisconsin's Struggle to Prevent Complete Commercial Control of Radio Broadcasting

A THREATENING SITUATION presents itself to the state of Wisconsin at the present time. Thru the full daytime operation of its two state-owned radio broadcasting stations, the state is pioneering in the discovery and development of the civic and social possibilities of radio. These two stations are the 1-kilowatt university station WHA located at Madison and the 2-kilowatt station WLBL of the department of agriculture and markets at Stevens Point near the center of the state. These transmitters are connected by leased broadcasting circuits and all parts of the state save the extreme northwest and certain small pocketed regions receive with fair volume the programs originating in the state departments at the capitol and in the departments of the university. The continuance of this development is threatened by an application to the Federal Radio Commission advertised in the *Capital Times* and the *Wisconsin State Journal* of June 22. This is an application filed June 16 by the Badger Broadcasting Company, the stock of which is owned, 67 percent by the *Capital Times*, former sole owner of the Madison station WIBA, and 18 percent by the *Wisconsin State Journal*.

In this application, the owners of WIBA request to be assigned one-half time operation on the 720 kilocycle frequency with a power of 25 kilowatts so that WIBA and the *Chicago Tribune* station WGN will have equal broadcasting privileges on the 720 kilocycle channel. *The applicant also requests the elimination of the two state stations WHA and WLBL.*

The granting of the application as it stands would, of course, mean the non-renewal of the licenses of WHA and WLBL and the scrapping of the state's radio plant and service. The threat is not that the Federal Radio Commission will fail to continue the licenses of the two state stations. One of the most vital questions confronting both the Federal Radio Commission and the Congress is this: *How can the entire monopolization of the radio broadcasting facilities of the nation by private interests, to the exclusion of public enterprise, be prevented?* The service to public enterprise rendered by Wisconsin's state stations is unique and is being followed with much nationwide interest. It promises to make such a contribution to the solution of this vital question that there need not be the slightest fear

that the Federal Radio Commission will deny to the state the right to continue the operation of its stations.

The threat in the filing of WIBA's application is this. It has been filed at a strategic time. The day of adjournment of the 1933 session of the Wisconsin legislature approaches and there is still pending the bill carrying the appropriation for the operation of station WHA for the coming biennium. The operating expense is small, 0.6 of one cent per citizen per year, 0.6 of a stick of chewing gum per citizen per year. It is in large part an employment expense for the salaries of the transmitter and studio operators, announcers, and program director, since the state stations find it unnecessary to pay for the educational, informational, and musical programs. But expressed in dollars, the \$18,000 per annum looms large to a legislature and to the new administration confronted with the budget problems of today.

The application challenges the principle expressed in these words by former Secretary of Commerce Hoover:

Radio communication is not to be considered as merely a business carried on for private gain, for private advertisement, or for entertainment of the curious. It is a public concern impressed with a public trust and to be considered primarily from the standpoint of public interest to the same extent and upon the same general principles as our other public utilities.

It remains to be seen whether the filing of the WIBA application will re-

sult in the selling of the state's birthright for a mess of pottage. The birthright is the state's *right*, at its own expense, to be free and unhampered in discovering, developing, and using the resources of the radio in the interests of the commonwealth. The mess of pottage is the permission to use, with no direct expense to the state, such hours on the commercial station as the owners may see fit to grant, for the broadcasting of programs of the type and in the fields which the owners and their supporters, the advertisers, may see fit to approve.

This is not the first attempt to hamper or hamstring the state in the development of its radio resources. Light is cast on the situation, both state and national, by the following brief history and statement of costs.

Wisconsin state stations pioneered—The state of Wisconsin has pioneered in the use of the radio to serve the public interests and enterprises of the commonwealth as contrasted



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with private interests. Its university station WHA started telephone broadcasts in the fall of 1920, the same fall in which the first privately-owned telephone station, KDKA, started its broadcasts. For the decade following 1920, the annual budgets for the operation of WHA were extremely meager, and the construction and continued operation of WHA were possible only because of the vision, devotion, and determination of the late Earle M. Terry, his student assistants and operators, and those members of the faculty and community who furnished the programs. WHA is heralded as the world's first educational radio station.

The radio broadcasting station WLBL of the department of agriculture and markets was first licensed for the broadcasting of market and agricultural information in 1922. The transmitter was originally located at Waupaca but in 1924 was moved to Stevens Point.

Neither of these state stations has ever sold time for advertising, yet both have pioneered in a number of state services.

Under the Kohler and La Follette administrations—The two state stations WHA and WLBL are limited to operation during daylight hours. The development of these stations and the state service they render, to such a high plane that the state might obtain the license to a cleared high-powered channel to which Wisconsin is entitled under the Radio Act, was strongly fostered during the administrations of Governors Kohler and La Follette.

As the first step toward obtaining a cleared channel station for serving the public interests of the state of Wisconsin, the regents of the university and the commissioners of the department of agriculture and markets in January 1930, authorized consolidation of the two stations into a single higher-powered station to be located as centrally as the operating funds would permit. The regents voted funds to construct a 5-kilowatt station provided other state departments using the radio facilities to broadcast educational and informational material would join in meeting the greater operating expenses of a higher-powered rurally-located transmitter. In consultation with Governor Kohler and the budget director the following departments pledged funds for the operating budget:

University of Wisconsin
Department of Agriculture and Markets
State Board of Health
State Department of Education
State Highway Commission
Conservation Commission

Accordingly, in April 1930, Governor Kohler signed a joint application from the regents and the commissioners of the department of agriculture and markets to the Federal Radio Commission for a license to consolidate the two state stations WHA and WLBL into a single 5-kilowatt station to be located on the state farm at Hancock, some 70 miles north of Madison and 25 miles south of Stevens Point.

While negotiations were pending with the Radio Commission in Washington, the editor of the *Capital Times*, which at that time owned and operated the Madison station WIBA, called up the chairman of the Wisconsin congressional representatives in Washington opposing the granting of the license.

The congressional representative of the Stevens Point district saw members of the Federal Radio Commission and

opposed the granting of a license for the consolidated station for any location save Stevens Point. To eliminate the political opposition from Stevens Point, the pledge of \$2500 additional operating funds per annum was obtained and the application was amended to locate the station at Stevens Point instead of Hancock.

Partly as a result of this opposition, the Federal Radio Commission held the state's application under advisement from April until June and then set the date for a formal hearing for November 1930; and finally in June 1931, some fourteen months after the filing of the joint application, it denied the application. The strongest ground for the denial of the application was that the applicants [for lack of funds] had not made full use of the facilities already granted by the Commission.

While the application was pending before the Federal Radio Commission, Governor La Follette succeeded Governor Kohler, and in the preparation of the university budget, which was submitted to the legislature in January 1931, provision for the operation of radio station WHA was omitted from the university budget with the definite understanding that a separate bill carrying an appropriation would make provision for the operating expense of the prospective consolidated 5-kilowatt state station. The legislature adjourned before the Commission reached its adverse decision, with the result that the regents of the university found it necessary to continue the operation of WHA during the greater part of the fiscal year 1931-32 from the "Regents Unassigned" fund.

At this point the Federal Radio Commission issued several new general orders requiring among other things more continuous operation of its licensees. This made it necessary to remove the transmitter of WHA from its location on the top of the physics building on the university campus to a rural location to avoid interference with the electrical researches carried on in that building.

When the situation was presented to the emergency board consisting of Governor La Follette and the Chairmen Mueller and Beggs of the finance committees of the senate and house, the board released moneys appropriated by the legislature of 1927 for radio towers, provided funds to move the transmitter to a rural location and to increase its power from 500 watts to 1000 watts, and also provided funds for the operation of the rebuilt station WHA during the fiscal year 1932-33.

As a result of this support, the state of Wisconsin possesses in WHA, a 1-kilowatt radio station equal to any 1-kilowatt transmitter in the state, built at a cost to the state of \$15,000. This is only 40 percent of the cost of a 1-kilowatt transmitter as given in the "Report of the Advisory Committee on Engineering Developments of the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education."

At about this same time plans to add additional stories to the Hotel Whiting in Stevens Point made it necessary to move the towers and transmitter of WLBL from the roof of this hotel. As a further step in the building up of the state's radio facilities, Governor La Follette approved plans by the commissioners of the department of agriculture and markets to rebuild this transmitter for the increased power of two kilowatts on a rural location, and to provide it with leased wire

connections to the studios in Madison so that the programs originating at the university and the departments and commissions at the capitol might be received thruout the state. For the past six months the 1-kilowatt station WHA at Madison and the 2-kilowatt station WLBL have been connected by leased wires, and, as previously stated, all parts of the state save the extreme northwest and certain small pocketed regions have been able to receive the state sponsored programs with fair volume.

Costs and examples of service rendered—The appropriation bill whose passage is jeopardized by the WIBA application and the representations of the commercial stations carries an appropriation of \$18,000 per annum for the operation of WHA. This covers the entire budget for operating and maintaining the 1-kilowatt transmitter of WHA and the studios at the capitol and university. It includes all wages and salaries for program director, operators, announcers, and other assistants. To meet the federal requirements, the station broadcasts nine hours per day. The computed cost at the lowest quoted card rate of leasing this amount of time from the 1-kilowatt Madison station WIBA, which has a smaller service area than WHA, is \$200,880.

During the last primary and election campaign in Wisconsin, those entrusted with developing the policy of the two state stations, in conference with the campaign managers of all parties having a place on the ballots, reached an understanding by which the facilities of the stations were made available without charge at noon and near sunset for a period of 30 days before the primary and 30 days before the November election to the candidates for state offices or other speakers designated by the parties. The time thus used for political broadcasts from the WHA transmitter if paid for at the card rate of WIBA would have cost \$5160. This pioneer experiment is the most significant step which has been taken to solve the problem of excessive use of money in political campaigns.

The following is a partial list of the agencies which have participated in the WHA broadcasts during the past year:

- University of Wisconsin
- Madison Public Schools
- Wisconsin State Medical Society
- Wisconsin State Dental Society
- Wisconsin Historical Society
- U. S. Forest Products Laboratory
- Wisconsin 4-H Clubs
- Future Farmers of America
- Women's Legislative Council
- Wisconsin Parent-Teacher Association
- Wisconsin Library Association
- Friends of our Native Landscape
- Wisconsin Humane Society
- Wisconsin Council of Agriculture
- Wisconsin State Bee Keepers Association
- National Cheese Producers Federation
- Wisconsin Cranberry Growers Association
- Door County Fruit Growers Union
- Wisconsin State Horticultural Society
- Wisconsin Live Stock Breeders Association

State Departments:

Highway Department	Insurance Commission
Health Department	Industrial Commission
Conservation Department	Public Service Commission
Public Instruction	Board of Control
Agriculture and Markets	Tax Commission
Bureau of Personnel	Normal School Regents

Radio stewardship—Thru the radio the state can serve its citizens whenever the need arises. Wisconsin has been faithful in its stewardship and is continually improving its radio service. The state broadcasting stations in Wisconsin are being used:

- [1] To serve the agricultural interests of the state by furnishing technical and market information.
- [2] To serve the households of the state by furnishing technical counsel on matters of health and conduct of the home.
- [3] To serve the public schools of the state by supplementing their educational methods and materials. [During the winter of 1932-33, more than 23,000 children were reported listening in classrooms each week.]
- [4] To serve public interests and public enterprise by providing them with radio facilities as good as the commercial stations have placed at the disposal of private interests and private enterprise.
- [5] To serve the interests of an informed public opinion by providing a state-wide forum for the pro-and-con type of discussion of labor problems, of economic principles and problems, of the problems of taxation and regulation, and of the many other problems of public policy.

Monopolization of the nation's broadcasting quota—The percentage of the nation's quota of radio broadcasting facilities which is in the control of institutions or corporations whose primary interest in the radio is in using it for the purposes described above is becoming vanishingly small. A study printed in *Education by Radio* showed the distribution in the fall of 1931 to be as follows:

	Quota Units	Percent
NBC and its affiliated stations.....	184.	43.
CBS and its affiliated stations.....	108.	25.
All educational stations.....	26.	6.
All other broadcasters.....	112.	26.
	430.	100.

A survey of the facilities of the 71 land-grant colleges and state universities of the nation in the spring of 1932 showed that the quota units assigned to these institutions amounted to only 3.5 percent of the national quota. This had fallen to 1.8 percent by 1933. He who runs may read: *The nation's limited and invaluable radio resources are almost, but not quite, 99.41 percent purely under the control of commercial interests for the extraction of private profit.*

It is this situation which has led the groups represented on the National Committee on Education by Radio to watch with so much interest the substantial evidence of the growing appreciation by previous state administrations in Wisconsin of the part which radio can play in the growth and development of the commonwealth. These groups are:

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

To these associations, the relinquishment of the state's radio rights as an economy measure by the new and sorely tried legislature would be a blow.

It is not a choice between paying or not paying for radio service. It is the choice between paying for radio service directly [1.5 cent per citizen per year for the operation of the state chain] and then controlling the service, or paying thru the noose of private commercial censorship and taking what the advertisers choose to give.

British Adult Education

LISTENERS HAVE BEEN HEARD to express the opinion that it might be difficult in the future to maintain the high standard set by last winter's "Changing World" program of talks, in providing stimulating and controversial subjects for treatment in broadcast talks; but such doubts will surely be set at rest when particulars of the new series of talks arranged for the first three months of the New Year—which were approved in principle at last week's meeting of the Central Council for Broadcast Adult Education—are published. We are promised, indeed, a bold treatment of some of the most fundamental topics of discussion and controversy of the present day. For example, we are to have on Sundays a series of talks surveying the whole problem of "A Future Life." The method of treatment is to be partly historical and partly analytical. The first six talks will review the gradual evolution thru the ages of man's conception of life after death. Then will follow six individual "Points of View," in which the agnostic and the sceptic will come to the microphone as well as the representatives of positive belief, both in its Christian and non-Christian forms. Other red-letter days for the listener who delights in controversy will be Wednesdays, which are to be occupied by an examination of modern ideas about the state, the individual, and the social groups which lie midway between the two. Here, again, the method of treatment to be followed is to be also partly historical and partly analytical. Six informative talks on the history and development of the organization of society, given by an eminent political scientist, will be followed by a symposium of six debates or discussions in which individual speakers will put forward their own theses as to the best basis for society and will answer pertinent questions addressed to them by critics. Since this symposium is to include speakers who will put forward expositions of Fascism, Communism, Imperialism, internationalism, and constitutional government, it is likely to be extremely illuminating and thot-provoking for the listener who has not made up his mind which, if any, of these theories command his allegiance. But these two courses of talks by no means exhaust the stimulating fare which we are promised after Christmas. For instance, twelve talks are to be given on "Makers of the Modern World," among whom are likely to figure such centers of controversy as St. Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Darwin, Karl Marx, and Nietzsche. Each of these great men will be expounded by a speaker who is in sympathy with the ideas which he represents. Finally, we are to be offered also a series on "The Application of Psychology and

Biology to Social Life" which raises as many burning questions as any economic or political subject. Under this heading will probably come such topics as the psychology of the sexes and of religion, problems of race and eugenics, and the connection between biology and politics. On the face of it, it appears as tho there ought to be a rich crop of wireless discussion groups in the early part of next year, for never yet have such groups had a better opportunity of suiting their needs or a wider choice of subject and speaker—*The Listener*, British Broadcasting Corporation, October 26, 1932, p584.

* Radio Listeners Interest *

AN INVENTIVE RADIO LISTENER has fitted up for his own use a device which permits him to cut off the receiver, no matter in what part of the house he may be, whenever the announcer begins the advertising.

This listener has simply carried to a little greater length the action of countless thousands of set owners who by habit now either cut off the set entirely or detune it during the period when the announcer is extolling the merits of coffee, breakfast food, gasoline, patent medicines, cigarettes and such like.

Unfair tho it would be to program sponsors, a perfected device to take the advertising completely out of radio would undoubtedly find a big market in the United States today.

It is a fact which radio executives would do well to face that while millions of persons are listening to their programs infinitely fewer set owners are hearing the oftentimes offensively lengthy advertising spiels.

It is noteworthy that Americans who have studied European radio programs invariably make favorable comment on the widespread absence of the advertising tie-up which features the system as employed in the United States. While few go so far as to recommend seriously the complete abandonment of the American plan, there is almost universal agreement that radical changes must come in the length of time allowed for advertising in proportion to entertainment rendered, as well as in the character of the announcements.

Observers have made the significant comment that, apparently, the poorer our programs in entertainment value, the greater is the proportion of time devoted to sheer and blatant advertising. *Such programs of course represent an absolute waste of money insofar as the advertiser is concerned, because listener interest is at an irreducible minimum.*

It is recalled that the presentation of a large and splendid symphony orchestra was accompanied by the simple announcement, at very infrequent intervals, of the name of the sponsoring company. Needless to say, such a program gained a tremendous audience and one wholly sympathetic to the advertiser.

None will gainsay the justice of giving favor to the company or individual sponsoring a wholesome period of radio entertainment. But companies or individuals should recognize that in overdoing the advertising tie-up they defeat their own and definitely reduce listener interest.

It can be revived only by a reversal of policy.—Editorial in *Christian Science Monitor*, December 5, 1932.