

LISTENER

Incorporating N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday Price Threepence

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Mr. Savage

IT is not possible to say in three hundred words what the life and death of Mr. Savage meant, and still mean, to New Zealand. Even if we had the space, we could not make a final estimate. Time inflates some reputations, deflates others, and it will happen to Mr. Savage as it happened to every leader New Zealand has ever had.

But whatever happens to the statesman, the man will remain where everybody placed him once he became Prime Minister and a national figure. Until all those who knew him intimately have themselves become a memory he will remain the man we knew last week: kind, above all things; simple; honest; unassuming; unselfish; always a human being. Partly because he was one of the people, partly because he arrived in the broadcasting age, he was known to more of his countrymen than any leader who ever took the oath of office. If there had been any meanness in him, anything crooked or petty, the whole country would have known about it. But that kind of criticism was never heard. Many people disliked his policy; some criticised his leadership; a few complained of his loyalty to old friends. No one ever questioned his sincerity or his selflessness. They attacked the Prime Minister. They never even wished to attack the man invested with the Prime Minister's authority.

Time, we said, will have the last word. It will judge his methods, pass sentence on his achievement. Time will also deaden the feelings aroused by his illness and death. But it will not do that to-day or to-morrow. Neither their own anxieties nor the continuing worry of the war will prevent thousands of people all over the Dominion—more thousands than such an event has ever stirred before—from feeling that they have lost a personal friend; and that, in the meantime, is his monument.

A BROADCASTING PRIME MINISTER

He Created A Radio Revolution

IT is difficult, with a man so human as Mr. Savage always was, to separate one public activity from another. Politics to him always meant social service, and social service was expressed in a hundred day-by-day activities that may have seemed to have no relation to one another, but were in fact the expression of a single personality.

There is no difficulty in seeing the man behind the frequent visits to the sick, for example—far more frequent than even his close friends sometimes suspected; or in his many manifestations of pity for the poor. Most people knew that he was interested in, and attracted by, children; that he never forgot old friends; and that his responsiveness to the friendship of men and women in the mass was largely his own friendliness returning to him. All these things have been told, and emphasised, in other articles in this issue.

But one fact that has not been sufficiently appreciated, that coloured all his later life, and in some respects explained it, was his interest in broadcasting.

It is hardly going too far to say that if he had not lived in the age that saw broadcasting encircle the earth, he would have been a different man, and a vastly different statesman. It was significant that he never really surrendered the broadcasting portfolio even though absence from the Dominion, the pressure of other duties and then his final illness compelled him to leave the routine administration of the service to one of his colleagues.

Broadcasting was not merely a State function to him and a public utility. It was a social and political miracle which he never ceased to think about. Only a fortnight before his death, when he was visited by the Acting Minister of Broadcasting, who is also the Minister of Defence, and who expected, if current problems came up for discussion, that they would be war problems and not problems of broadcasting, the Prime Minister inquired closely into the activities of the Broadcasting Services, and showed all his old interest in possible developments of the future.

Shortwave For New Zealand

It is not perhaps as well known as it might be—though he more than once said so publicly—that Mr. Savage devoted a great deal of thought during his years as Prime Minister to the possibility of a two-way service in New Zealand. One of his plans for the early future was a shortwave installation that would enable New Zealanders to tell their own story to the world as well as to receive the news of other countries. The war, of course,

put an end to that plan as an immediate, or even early, possibility, but neither the war nor the shadow of sickness drove it from the Prime Minister's mind. He wanted New Zealand to be heard as well as to hear, not for a cheap advertisement, or to keep himself in the limelight, but to ensure that what was good in New Zealand would be more widely known and that any merely foolish traditions we follow and cling to should be more rapidly destroyed.

Broadcasting of Parliament

It was also true, of course, that he valued broadcasting as an instrument of Government. He felt, and frankly said, that the people were entitled to know what the Government wished to tell them, and that broadcasting gave them a fuller chance of knowing. It, in fact, always astonished him that newspapers either questioned this or complained of it.

When he decided on the broadcasting of Parliament, and carried it out, he created a radio revolution. But he could never think of it as a revolution, or even as something sensational. It was just commonsense to him, and common justice. Parliament fixed the conditions of life. Its members represented the people. To say that the people should not know what was being done to them, and in the long run by them, was about as reasonable to him as saying that people should eat in the dark. He did not understand that argument, or wish to understand it. The facilities for listening were there. Let everybody listen who had ears and cared to use them.

Appeals to the People

And as it happened, he lived to see not merely the advantage but the absolute necessity of broadcasting in another field. The war depressed him, as it depressed everybody else. He saw it as a tragedy of weakness and folly and of decent things left undone. But he saw also that the shortest way out of it was to rally all the resources of the nation, and that the only way to do this was to appeal to all the people all the time. This meant speaking to them by air, and no one will forget the earnestness with which he did it. If it was heart-breaking that his last public address was an appeal to young men to offer themselves for war, and to other men to honour them, it was a great consolation that since it had to be done, the means were there to do it.

When much of his life has been forgotten, Mr. Savage will be remembered as the Prime Minister who first saw what broadcasting meant in our national economy, and laboured without ceasing to convert it to its full use.