

Radio Matters Ventilated in Auckland

Company, Government and "Radio Record" all Condemned

Dealers Repudiate Destructive Criticism and Support Quality of Programmes.

FOLLOWING a deal of propaganda in the Auckland Press, Mr. William Goodfellow, a director of the Radio Broadcasting Company, gave an interview on the position a few days prior to the public meeting.

He stated that in his opinion a great deal of unnecessary and entirely misleading publicity had recently been given regarding certain decisions of the general manager of the Radio Company. He had personally looked into these matters very carefully, and had no hesitation in stating that the management had taken the only possible action under the circumstances. It was very regrettable that a small section of Auckland listeners seemed determined to use every possible pretext in an endeavour to discredit the ability and sound judgment of the general manager.

NOT MONEY TO BURN.

Continuing, Mr. Goodfellow stated that he had, within the last few weeks, visited all the leading cities of the Dominion, and on every hand heard nothing but praise for the broadcasting services. It was generally recognised that a very marked advance had been made during the past year. Referring to the question of finance, he stated that the impression had been created that the company had money to burn. Such was not the case. The total income for the past year was under \$40,000 for the maintenance and operation of four stations, and during several months the expenditure had actually considerably exceeded the revenue. This could be readily realised when he stated that one station—3LO Melbourne—had now a revenue of nearly \$100,000, and this station was the standard the New Zealand Company apparently was expected to equal. The expense of running four stations was very great. For instance, the payment of copyright alone ran into thousands a year.

NO UNDE CONTROL.

Dealing with the question of management, he said that it had been stated that there was undue control of the Auckland station by the head office. This was not correct. Each station was treated as a unit. A station director was expected to use initiative and to keep in intimate touch with local conditions. He was solely responsible for his programme and was expected to recommend for engagement the best available talent. The station director was further expected to use tact and influence in persuading artists to give the class of performance which the public demanded. Interference from head office merely implied that the work was not satisfactorily performed by the station, and that, therefore, assistance had to be given. A local station director had, in fact, power to deal with all routine matters, and it was largely questions of policy which were dealt with by the head office at Christchurch, which was just as satisfactory as Wellington for administrative purposes.

"THOUGHTLESS CRITICISM."

The broadcasting company claimed to have engaged the leading artists and performers available in this country, and these artists were working with enthusiasm at the big task of providing daily concerts, while at the same time keeping in view the necessity for an excellent standard of performance. The thoughtless criticism which was being indulged in by a few individuals can only have the result of weakening that enthusiasm and seriously handicapping the efforts of the performers.

In conclusion, Mr. Goodfellow stated that neither himself nor Mr. Harris would attend public meetings, but at all times the management would be pleased to receive constructive and helpful suggestions for the benefit of the large and increasing number of radio listeners throughout the Dominion.

THE PUBLIC MEETING

UNITY Hall, Owen Street, was filled with about 300 people on the evening of Monday, March 19, on the occasion of the Listeners' League meeting. Major H. S. Robinson presided. Mr. A. C. Jacob, president of the league, said he would like to let them know what the league had done. They had had a memorable meeting at Scots Hall about the beginning of June, but they were up against rather a brick wall, especially in the general manager, who was endeavouring to carry out in New Zealand what a big body of men and an Advisory Board in England found great difficulty in doing. He could only say that, as far as he could see, "Mr. Harris was either one of the greatest egoists of this world, or he did not realise the responsibilities of his position." Soon after the Scots Hall meeting the "Radio Record" came out with a leader calling for the closest co-operation between the listeners and the company. As they were asked to co-operate, they naturally tried to co-operate; they met Mr. Harris in July, together with the dealers, at IYA, and asked him to do certain things. Mr. Harris said he would like to do those things, but they had no money. They offered to float the balance of the capital, and asked that listeners should have representation with regard to programmes, but Mr. Harris didn't want that. "I don't know what he wanted. As far as I can see he didn't want co-operation, he wanted isolation." However, he said if we would submit a scheme he could consider it. We sub-

mitted a scheme, which was, briefly, that, as far as IYA programmes were concerned, they should be governed by a committee of three—we suggested the station director, a member of the Government, and a representative of the listeners—and that this committee should be advised how much money was allotted to IYA and spend it. Mr. Harris would not agree to this. If he had, they were prepared to circularise listeners with the request to co-operate with the company and endeavour to undo the "shake-up" we gave them in May. We were prepared to appeal to

AUCKLAND has enjoyed quite a field week on radio. Arising out of the change in the directorship of IYA, the executive of the Auckland Listeners League called a public meeting, the ostensible object of which varied according to the quarter in which the announcement was made. The executive's letter to the general manager gave the object as "dissatisfaction both with the programmes from IYA and the whole system of broadcasting." The secretary's telegram to us gave the object as "to discuss the years operations and future of broadcasting." The president, in a letter elsewhere, declares it was a protest against lack of co-operation.

WE freely and courteously published, as requested, the secretary's notice of the meeting and, although not invited, decided to attend because of our interest in radio. To our surprise we found, on arrival, that amongst other subjects for condemnation was the "Radio Record." We will not express any opinion on the secretary's action in using our columns as he did and not advising us of the intention to attack the "Radio Record." It does not square with the pious declaration of League speakers that "they do not attack without giving the opportunity for defence."

IT is probably correct to say that the mainspring of action in relation to the meeting was the staff change mentioned. It was a former staff change, that in relation to Mr. Prentice, which we believe was largely responsible for the formation of the League. Then, following a provisional meeting which elected the promoters to the executive, a public meeting was called and, by using the names of Mr. Harris, Mr. Goodfellow and Mr. Prentice as having been "invited" to speak, there was attracted a large gathering.

On this occasion the same tactics were employed. An "invitation" to attend was graciously given the general manager, the secretary to the Post and Telegraph Department and the late station director. In our contact with public life we have invariably found it regarded as courteous to secure an acceptance before using a public man's name as a "draw," but these small details were ignored. It may at least occur to the public, however, that, as on the two occasions when the League has staged a public meeting, none of the "lions" whose names were used as "bait" has attended, and the League executive has then used the opportunity to push through ready-made resolutions, some guarantee should be required on any future occasion as to the bona fides of the announcements made. On their face, the League's record is not too good.

THE great use made by the league in its publicity of the "invitation" extended to Messrs. Harris, McNamara and Stringer, carried with it, we think, an obligation in courtesy to explain to the meeting its failure to produce the "invited" speakers. No such attempt was made. Although they had dragged in the name of a high Government official, no explanation was made to the disappointed

audience of his absence. Although the League had a letter in reply from Mr. Harris it was not read, nor was it announced that he requested the League to give details of the alleged "dissatisfaction with programmes and the system of administration" and had offered to meet the executive. Such action would have been fair but it was not done.

WHILE obviously the prime inspiration of the meeting was the change in staff, it is very significant that that matter was not even brought before the meeting. Apparently those responsible had become wiser in the interval following their call for publicity. In the alternative, attention was concentrated on programmes, although even here, the League weakened from the secretary's original wholesale condemnation to one of admitting appreciation of the artists but demanding "more variety," and slightly longer hours on Sunday transmissions. With these points we can quite agree, but were they important enough to warrant all the stir?

THE most interesting part of the meeting was, we think, that in which the "Radio Record" was attacked as being "prejudicial" to broadcasting. We found this quite entertaining and took the opportunity to speak, although we had not been invited or informed of the prospective attack. We will not pay the League's executive the compliment of taking it seriously on this point. When it is recollected that three members of the executive of the League are the radio writers of Auckland papers, and that we have recently had very good cause indeed to write very strongly about the utterly unfair criticism emanating from Auckland and being deliberately spread throughout the country; that, in fact, we were forced, in the interests of radio, to expose a definite concerted plan to pinprick broadcasting by a gentleman who boasted of his "pull" with the Press—no more need be said. There is no room for argument in our view that the worst enemies of broadcasting in New Zealand have been those who have persistently written down broadcasting and have refused to give credit for the very marked advances made in recent months.

IF the Auckland Listeners' League is in reality concerned with furthering broadcasting its most effective means of doing immediate good is to exercise such restraint as is possible over the lucubrations of its executive Press members and, while not in the slightest checking deserved and reasonable criticism or suggestions for betterment, repudiating the utterly unreasonable attitude adopted of late in some articles. The fact that Auckland dealers who are concerned with fostering sales have been at last impelled to declare their considered view that "the consensus of public opinion was that the programmes as a whole compared more than favourably with those given by Australian stations, especially in view of the restricted amount of local talent available," should show that the Press campaign mentioned has been a hindrance and not a help to radio.

other societies to co-operate in regard to programmes and send out 10,000 addressed envelopes to listeners; and, finally, we had in mind a Radio Olympia to give radio a boost. The whole of that went "phut" because Mr. Harris would not consent to disclose how much money Auckland station would get for programmes. Thereafter Mr. Harris said he would submit a scheme. This came along in November, but it was puerile.

AUCKLAND WANTED MORE MONEY.

The speaker went on to refer to the listeners' conference held in Wellington and the representations made to the Secretary of the Post Office at the conclusion of that conference, particularly with regard to the reconstitution of the Advisory Board. At that time Auckland had far the bigger majority of listeners, and they considered there was no reason why they should not get more money for their programmes. They said they were tired of keeping Christchurch and Dunedin going on Auckland money. Mr. Harris remained in Christchurch, and they never saw him, and his answers to their letters were usually very short.

"Coming nearer home," said Mr. Jacob, "we may complain that, perhaps, the programmes of IYA are not changed a great deal, but we cannot say the same of the staff; it is always the same story: the company is always in the right, and the people who are dismissed are always in the wrong!"

Dealing with programmes, Mr. Jacob said: "We appreciate our artists, and when we are criticising our programmes we do not mean anything personal against our artists." He did not know why the league should have "all this abuse hurled at us for daring to hold a meeting." They certainly gave Mr. Harris and Mr. McNamara plenty of warning. They also gave an open statement of facts to the papers, and what was the result? They had had a rather low-down attack on Auckland and its meeting through the "Radio Record." That was what they got for calling the people together at the end of two and a half years of broadcasting!

MR. TIARK COMES FORWARD.

Mr. Tiark opened his speech by moving that, while the control of broadcasting was in the hands of the present inefficient administration, no real improvement in broadcasting could be expected, and after eight months' experience the meeting reaffirmed its lack of confidence in either the capacity or good intentions of the Radio Broadcasting Company.

Mr. Tiark proceeded in rather a melodramatic style to speak in support of his resolution. He inveighed against the "monopoly" given the company, criticised the articles of association as being the most extraordinary he had ever seen, and the "most colossal piece of impertinence," etc. Being of a "Nosey-Parker disposition," he had recently made a legal search and found that certain alterations had been made in them to permit of shares being transferred. [These alterations are quite formal, we understand, and designed merely to permit of shares being transferred in the event of death, etc.—Ed.] Mr. Tiark continued that they had been accused of pin-pricking. This

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