

# Mr. Howard and His Thirty Shillings

## Was it an Original Method of Payment?



ONE of the most extraordinary and amusing newspaper articles that we have even read was that appearing in the Christchurch "Star" recently from the pen of Mr. E. J. Howard, M.P., on radio matters. We have read the article twice, but still cannot fathom the real reason why it was ever written. Perhaps the most charitable construction which we can put upon the effusion is that Mr. Howard desired to earn 30s. by a little free lance work in order to pay the radio license fee due on April 1. It is not our place to say whether the article is worth 30s. or not, but for Mr. Howard's sake we sincerely hope he gets it!

Pathetically philosophical is Mr. Howard's opening as he propounds this subtle psychological quotation used as a question: "Why is an individual sometimes aware of the complexes determining his thoughts and action and sometimes not so aware? Why does a complex in one instance express itself simply and immediately, in another by those devious routes which we have termed indirect?"—Hart."

From that opening Mr. Howard went on to say that all the week while thinking over various matters in a subconscious way he had had the idea of this article running through his mind; and "now trying to analyse why I want to write on this subject, I suddenly realised it is because on the 1st of April I must pay up my 30s. or become a criminal." So a "subtle complex" suggests to Mr. Howard's mind, "Write a screed for the 'Star' and earn the thirty bob!"—So, to it!

Thus wondering upon "the complex machinery of the human mind," Mr. Howard passes trippingly over an Os-

car Wilde story (without any special point) to complain about radio in various forms. First, no technical progress had been made in New Zealand. Certainly, new things had come to the Dominion from abroad, but it was lamentable to think that the inventive genius of this Dominion had not produced in the year any epoch-making radio discoveries! This, in the writer's view, was because "we set out with a policy to hold back rather than help on!" How naughty!

Next, Mr. Howard breathed remorse about the "excessive regulations." "We in New Zealand think we are Moses," he confessed, "and we are continually trying to write new laws." Well, if Mr. Howard wishes to imitate Moses he and we must, we suppose, put up with the consequences, more's the pity. But, in heaven's name, why did he become a law maker?

Finally, with his article three parts gone—and his 30s. in sight—Mr. Howard begins to insinuate rather than make a direct outcry about radio, and its administration in the Dominion. He quotes the license figures in relation to those of Australia. Actually this comparison on a population basis computed with regard to the density of population in certain areas is in favour of the Dominion, and shows that relatively speaking the Dominion is not "out of step with Australia." Mr. Howard somewhat patronisingly says, "To sum up, the Radio Broadcasting Company has to a large extent kept faith with their agreement with the

Government, but the Government gave too much away in their agreement with the company, and have failed to keep their agreement with the people. . . . The people have not been treated fairly."

As indicated in our opening, we have never read a more ineffective and rambling article than this one by Mr. Howard, but if he managed to sell it to the "Star" for 30s. in order to pay his license fee, we heartily congratulate him on his success. Doubtless other listeners wish they could secure the money for their license fees as easily. At no point is Mr. Howard clear, concise, and emphatic, as we would like to see articles genuinely concerned with the betterment and advancement of radio. Criticism of constructive and informative character is welcome, but let it be straight and to the point, and calculated to do good by correcting evils, if any. The only trend we could discern in Mr. Howard's article was an encouragement to listeners not to renew their licenses. We are surprised that any person possessing a sense of responsibility should have written as Mr. Howard has. Truly, that 30s. must have weighed sadly on his mind, and we sincerely hope he will feel brighter for having unburdened himself as he has!

### The Company's Reply.

REPLY to Mr. Mr. Howard was made by the Radio Broadcasting Company in the following letter, which we quote in full, because it emphasises in its concluding part, points of value to listeners:—

"Mr. Howard states that the cause of his writing the article is the payment of the radio license due in two weeks' time. His article is involved and contradictory in many ways, but the general trend of his remarks is to convey the impression that there is something wrong in having to pay for a radio license, and that those who do not pay are more or less justified in their action.

"It is most extraordinary that Mr. Howard, to whom, as a member of Parliament, one should look to help maintain law and order, should foster breaches of that law and order so essential in the public interest. He states that the Government, with its police, its courts and its magistrates and judges, is being used in the interests of a private company. This is sheer political poppycock, as the company's license, its memorandum and articles as approved by the Minister of Telegraphs, the Post and Telegraph Amendment Act and the Broadcasting Regulations define exactly how the revenue is to be expended, and limit the company's dividend to 7½ per cent. interest on its capital, that is, the company's own capital, which it subscribes to provide a broadcasting service for the Dominion. Mr. Howard's inference is an exaggeration and a gross injustice.

"Mr. Howard further states that if a user does not pay his telephone account

he does not find a policeman sitting on his doorstep the next week. This is correct as far as it goes, but Mr. Howard does not mention that the telephone can be, and is, cut off if payment is not made, and that in connection with the radio service this is not practicable without affecting the man who does pay. Does Mr. Howard infer that when some do not pay their radio license fees they should be treated the same way as in the telephone service, and that the broadcasting service should be shut down and everyone made to suffer, or does he infer that the listener who does not pay should be allowed to use the service at the expense of the listener who does pay? Mr. Howard must realise that someone has to pay for the service, and, as the policy adopted in this country is the same as that adopted in most countries, where those listeners who receive the service are called upon to subscribe a nominal amount, why should the honest listener be penalised for the dishonest one?

"If Mr. Howard had the public interest at heart, and the working man's cause to plead, as he so often avers, he would realise that broadcasting offers a greater medium of service for such people than any that Mr. Howard, during the many years he had been one of our politicians, has been able to bring forward. He should realise that additional licenses accrue with the interest of listeners entirely, and that for a nominal annual fee of 30s., a £30,000 service is now available to every individual listener. He would further realise that his continual criticism of broadcasting since its introduction is directly contrary to the interests of that portion of the public which he professes to serve, and that even a greater service than that already given is possible if he would open his eyes to the fact, instead of blinding himself with party politics, which obviously is the factor that has so warped his ideas, as is shown in the sweeping statements he has seen fit to make in his article on the present broadcasting service.

"Commencing with a service of twelve hours weekly, as stipulated under the minimum requirements of the Broadcasting Regulations, the company is now giving an average service of over thirty hours from each of its four stations, all for the original fee of thirty shillings per annum, and hopes that, with the steady increase of licenses and the monetary assistance of some of the unlicensed listeners whose cause Mr. Howard seeks to champion, to increase and improve the service still further, and without any additional cost to the individual listener.—We are, etc.,

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