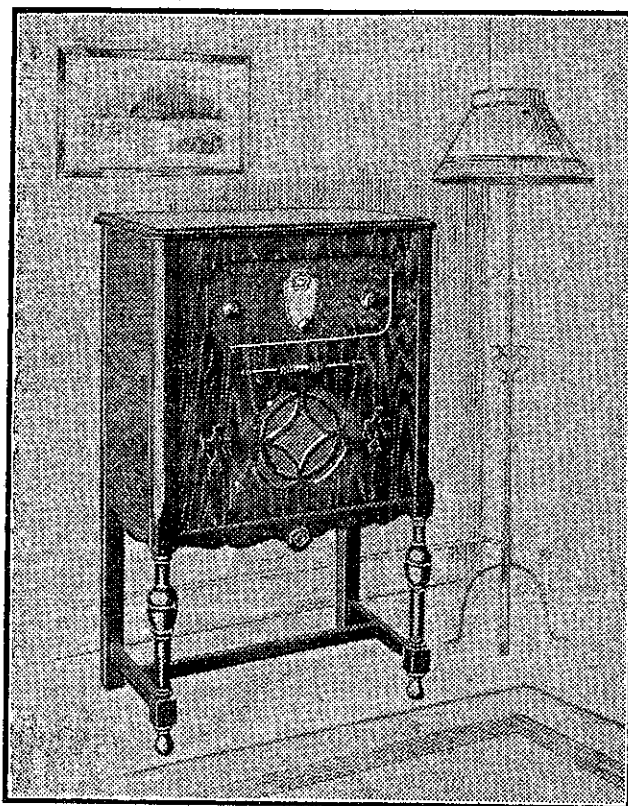


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Radio and Wars of the Future

A Powerful Preventive

THE invention of radio is probably one of the most powerful preventives of war now operating in the world to-day. Unfortunately its influence in this sphere is at present largely unrealised, but when it is, and it certainly will be in the near future, international action will probably be taken to foster and develop the enormous potential possibilities which broadcasting undoubtedly possesses as a factor for the maintenance of a permanent and world-wide peace. Nevertheless, for the time being at least, the possibility of a future war cannot be ignored, and it is interesting to speculate what would be the effect of such an event upon broadcasting. A summary of an imaginative article by Stephen King-Hall on this subject (published by "Radio Times") appears below.

The last war, and, one might add, the last ten years of peace, proved conclusively that the weapon of propaganda has become a most subtle, deadly, and far-reaching instrument of national policy, and with the net of popular education spreading its meshes over an area of ever-increasing dimensions, a belligerent Ministry of Propaganda, suitably camouflaged under some respectable title such as Bureau of Information, will be a key Ministry.

In that Ministry the national broadcasting organisations will occupy many floors. Expert broadcasters, men of persuasive voices, artful talk-writers, will not be allowed to risk their bodies in the fighting lines; the nation will need their voices at the microphone.

The air forces of the belligerents will naturally make every attempt to seek out and bomb the enemy broadcasting centres, which, however, will probably be located underground in anticipation of such an invasion.

In the late war, if broadcasting had existed, it is certain that Dutch loudspeakers would have transmitted many talks spoken in Dutch into British and German microphones. In order to gain the neutral ear, it will be necessary to sugar the pill, and a first-class orchestral concert may be the framework which will enshrine a passionate statement of war propaganda, artfully interpolated into the intervals between items on the programme.

The best way of gaining access to the enemy loudspeakers will be by broadcasting news which the enemy Government is trying to suppress. Each belligerent will probably broadcast in the appropriate language a daily bulletin for the express benefit of the enemy public, and if it is accurate (though it will of course be confined to bad news), it will be sure of attention, even if the listeners curse as they listen to its chilling tale. They may curse it, but the average listener will curse still more the patriot who oscillates in order to upset the enemy news, for in war people yearn passionately for the truth since they know their own Government will never tell all the truth. It is for this reason that in wartime fantastic rumours gain credence.

The importance of broadcasting from a military point of view will be particularly great in those critical moments just previous to the outbreak of war, when a Government, having decided that hostilities are unavoidable, finds it essential to rally public opinion to the support of its policy. For this purpose, as soon as war broke out, the State would assume complete control of the nation's broadcasting system.

A Government at war would use broadcasting chiefly for three purposes. Firstly, to hearten and inform its own people; secondly, to influence neutrals; thirdly, to discourage the enemy.

The first use is obvious, and will consist of broadcasting favourable news, important public announcements, and appeals. Government loudspeakers will probably be established outside every village post office and in public places. Though it is almost certain that in a future great war there will eventually be no neutrals, they will only be dragged into the inferno after a certain interval, partly as a result of economic pressure and partly by propaganda. Broadcasting will play its part in this business, and special talks, appeals, threats, and menaces will be sent out in many languages.

Portable sets will be common amongst the fighting forces, and men in gas-infected, shell-torn, and ravaged areas, burrowing in the ground to escape the death that flies and the death that crawls mechanically, will hear through their loudspeakers sounds of the life of civilisation they once knew, and to which they hope one day to return. It is unlikely that there will be running commentaries upon battles, for this would give useful intelligence to the enemy, but on special occasions the commanders-in-chief may broadcast heartening talks.

A peculiarly unpleasant consequence of broadcasting in war will be the possibility of listening to great religious services appealing for victory being simultaneously conducted from several national cathedrals. In the late war we could, had broadcasting been in use, have listened to an English and a German Archbishop both expounding the essential righteousness of their national cause. One may be thankful there are no loudspeakers in Heaven, for hell is the spiritual home of war.

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