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—AND—

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RADIO PUBLISHING COMPANY OF NEW ZEALAND, LTD.,
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WELLINGTON, FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 1930.

SELLING A "DUMMY" TO THE PUBLIC.

POSSIBLY the best way to describe the latest offer of the Management Committee of the New Zealand Rugby Union, in connection with the broadcasting of the British matches, is to say that it is an effort to sell a "dummy" to the public and side-step the issue. The problem is not a forced charity from the Radio Broadcasting Company. It is the plain, common-sense proposition of giving the public what it wants, viz., the broadcast of the important British matches.

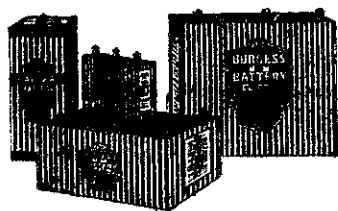
WE imagine that the public clamour has sufficiently demonstrated that distinct unpopularity will attend the refusal of the Rugby authorities to permit those matches to be broadcast. The refusal was first based upon the ground that the financial returns of the outside unions would suffer through their public staying at home instead of attending their club matches. The public has interpreted this as a fear on the part of the authorities that the gates of its own matches would suffer because of the broadcasts. It is pleasing to have the assurance of Mr. S. S. Dean, chairman of the Management Committee of the Rugby Union, that this is unjustified—that they admit that their own financial returns will not suffer "one iota" because of the matches being broadcast. Their concern is wholly based upon regard for the gates of the outside unions. Curiously enough those outside unions do not share the fears of the Management Committee. So far as Press reports show, we think a majority want the broadcasts and are not afraid of them. Possibly they take the view—which we think the right one—that the prime purpose of the touring team is to improve the standard of Rugby play in New Zealand, and that this purpose will be best served by securing that the largest possible number of both players and supporters shall follow the course of the matches, either visually or by means of radio. It goes without saying that those who can see the stirring contests will do so. There remain those who cannot see the matches.

Radio is their best servant. A running description will convey the course of the play, the finesse, the results, far more quickly and more effectively than any other means. Are the people to be denied that privilege?

THE suggestion that the right to broadcast the Rugby matches should be dependent upon a forced donation to charity by the Radio Broadcasting Company is not, we think, fair. From the Press reports of the Rugby authorities' suggestion, it is not clear how extensive a donation is expected. The statement was made that a donation should be asked to equip the hospitals and charitable institutions throughout New Zealand with receiving sets. We can scarcely credit that that suggestion is to be taken literally. Examination of the Year Book shows that there are 132 general hospitals and sanatoria, 104 charitable and benevolent institutions, 305 private hospitals, and seven mental hospitals, housing a total of about 22,000 people. To equip these 548 institutions with radio, having regard to their scattered situation throughout the country and their consequent need of high-class equipment, could not be done at a lower average than £150 apiece. This will absorb a capital of £81,000. That figure in itself shows, we think, the merit of the proposal.

THAT objection in itself meets the situation, but there is a further objection, viz., the principle that is involved. Why should radio be singled out of all the means of publicity for a demand for monetary payment? Apparently it is because the service of the Radio Broadcasting Company is paid for by the listener. But the newspaper reader also pays for the service he gets from the daily Press. The daily Press makes its profit by supplying its readers with news and the sale of advertising space. Unquestionably reports of football matches contribute to the revenue of the Press. But is the Press asked to pay for the privilege of reporting those matches? If the Rugby authorities wish to be logical, we suggest that they put all publicity means on the same level and ask the Press to pay handsomely for the privilege now given them. Such a course would be illuminating in its reactions. It would be quickly shown that the service rendered to the cause of sport by the Press is very considerable; that the Press can exist without the sport, but the sport can hardly thrive without the Press. The analogy may be extended into radio. It is demonstrable that sports thrive in direct ratio with the publicity given them. The most illuminating example is boxing. The Sarron-Donovan fight at Kilbirnie Stadium attracted the huge attendance it did partly because of the thrilling nature of the broadcast of the fight at New Plymouth previously. That description whetted the appetite of those who heard it and who could not attend. Hence the Kilbirnie Stadium was crowded out. Radio thus directly contributed to the monetary reward of the Wellington Boxing Association for staging the fight. We have not, however, heard that the Radio Broadcasting Company has asked for any share of those profits. Neither, we imagine, will the Broadcasting Company suggest to the Rugby Union that the union should pay for the broadcast publicity it will receive over the air—provided the matches are broadcast—although those broadcasts will unquestionably whet the appetite of distant listeners and make them insistent upon seeing their local matches.

THE policy of the Radio Broadcasting Company is to broadcast matters of public interest where there is sufficient public demand for the service. It is a medium of transmission, and cannot undertake the responsibility for promoting or supporting sports events. It is simply in the position of a reporter of events already organised. If those controlling those events wish them broadcast, and they are of sufficient public importance to warrant being broadcast, then the Broadcasting Company is prepared to give that service. The issue in this matter lies between the Rugby authorities and the general public. The Company has made it plain what its attitude is: it is prepared to render the service if permission is granted. If that permission is not extended, the Company, in duty to its listeners, will naturally provide the best service possible as an alternative. With that statement of the position, we think the public may well ignore the "dummy pass" about charity. More particularly as, if taken literally, the proposal of the union means that they will deliberately deprive all those inmates of hospitals and kindred institutions of the privilege of listening-in to the British matches, unless the Broadcasting Company equip all other institutions similarly. In other words, they are prepared to penalise many hundreds of sick and suffering people in a vain endeavour to put the Broadcasting Company in a false position.



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