

# Profits before Programmes

## American Advertising Abuses

## Result in Listeners' Revolt

by Bolton Woods

**W**E live and learn. Anyone who thinks that the question of exploiting the air for advertising in the Dominion is a remote issue, would be amazed at the solidarity of a certain section which is working to bring about conditions that would lay the ether open to the mercy of brazen commercialisation by advertising announcements.

The system is American in origin, and in that country it flourishes like the green bay tree. There, various broadcasting organisations sell programme hours to commercial firms for the purpose of advertising. The following is a fair example of the kind of thing that our American cousins more or less cheerfully submit to day in and day out, night after night, and year after year:

The studio announcer parks his vanity case and starts off something like this: "I am sure you will all enjoy the Underwear Orchestra and their exquisite rendition of Bachoven's immortal Nocturne in A Flat, which you are about to listen to through the courtesy of Backhouse and Legge, makers of shirts and shorts for men." Once more we are transported—albeit in imagination only—to the land of fair vaseline, heroine of Shortfellow's celebrated lyric pome on that and kindred topics. Once more—through the courtesy of Backhouse and Legge, makers of shirts and shorts for men—we enjoy the rich and melodious texture of Bachoven's immortal composition—a texture only less rich than that found in Backhouse and Legge's shirts and shorts for men. You will, I am sure, recognise the supreme artistry with which this artist utilises the harmonic principle of invertible counterpoint, which in this instance finds expression in a felicitous transposition of three minor melodies above and below the principal melody—as you will of course recognise.

"This is the Underwear Hour. Whenever you change your underwear, be it now or later, think of Backhouse and Legge, makers of shirts and shorts for men."

"A post-card addressed to Backhouse and Legge, makers of shirts and shorts for men, in care of the studio, will bring a richly illuminated souvenir self-measurement chart, suitable for framing. This is the Howler Advertising Company (Reginald Ladidah announcing). Please stand by for further station announcements." The most infuriating thing about a radio announcer of this type is the fact that you can't answer back—what remedy have you against a human voice? This doesn't happen anywhere else. If you disagree with



*"Unless broadcast advertising is prevented we are headed straight for Government regulation with taxation, possible censorship, and all the evils and all the benefits of Government control."*

*DR. LEE DE FOREST, president of the Institute of Radio Engineers, inventor of the radio valve as we know it, is strongly opposed to radio advertising.*

an editor you can stop reading and cancel your subscription to the paper. You can "tell off" a man at the other end of a telephone even if you can't land him one in the eye. The printed word that cannot be answered is bad enough—but the radio-protected human voice is the worst of all. And we run the risk of the air becoming polluted by these advertising announcements if we are not very careful—"the adman will get us if we don't watch out." But even the worm will turn—if one may liken the hundred per cent. live-wire American to any individual of the phylum Vermes. We learn that the American listener is not only in revolt, but for some time past has been in revolt against what Radio Commissioner Ira E. Robinson calls an "overdose of ads." The action of the Argentine Government in suspending a broadcasting station for too much advertising prompted a statement from the Radio Commissioner. He reiterated also his prediction that a "revolution of listeners" will result from the "excesses of the broadcasters in their greed for commercial gain."

Advertising over the radio can be properly done without disgusting the public," the Commissioner asserted. "Assuredly it is not so now, and if the present overdose continues no returns from advertising by radio will be received. The method is simply killing the goose that lays the golden eggs."

The official report to the Commerce Department stated that a station in Buenos Aires had been closed for eight days because it was transmitting up to 250 words of advertising matter between successive numbers on its programme (250 words makes a slightly lengthier announcement than my innocent example quoted above). In his report the attache of the department said that "this supports the oft-repeated charge that Argentine programmes are overburdened with advertising matter. Many claim that sales of receiving sets would increase if there was more attention paid to the artistic feature of the programmes and less to advertising."

Judge Robinson cited as an example of excessive advertising in America the broadcasting of the recent election returns, where "more than one station interrupted and ruined its giving out of election returns by throwing in commercial advertising. A number of listeners present with me became disgusted and left the audience. That illustrates the sentiment that is developing countrywide against commercialisation of the radio."

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