

The New Zealand Radio Record

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Home Journal

(Incorporating the "Canterbury Radio Journal.")

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WELLINGTON, FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 1931.

THE PRESS AND RADIO.

A SOMEWHAT provincial and narrow mind is revealed by the Hawera "Star" in an editorial published recently, discussing the respective services of broadcasting and the Press, following on the Hawke's Bay earthquake. In our issue of Friday, February 20, we took the opportunity to pay tribute to the special services rendered to the public by Station 2YA in connection with the disaster, mentioning particularly two points: First, the use made of the broadcasting station by many organisations, such as the Post and Telegraph Department, the Railway Department, the Transport Department, the Salvation Army, the Y.M.C.A., the Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, the Wellington Automobile Club, and others, for broadcasting their needs to the public and instructions to their staff and helpers for facilitating rescue work; secondly, the services rendered to both sufferers and the public by the station broadcasting inquiries for missing friends and relatives, thus enabling the restoration of family and friendly ties at the earliest possible moment. The discharge of these social services imposed a great strain upon the staff of the station. That strain was met with unswerving patience, loyalty and enthusiasm for helping others. Throughout those early days, when the attention of the whole community was concentrated upon the earthquake and gratitude was being expressed on all sides to the YA stations for their work, and when the daily Press itself, of course, was full of earthquake news, scarcely a word of praise or recognition of the definite aid rendered by radio was given by the Press. This point was commented upon in more quarters than one by the general public, and we deemed it but fair to the cause of radio to pay our tribute to that modern marvel and to the staff of 2YA for their services. We think we were justified.

THE Hawera "Star," however, apparently detecting in radio some danger to the might of the Press, saw fit to question our editorial, and advanced a specious and parochial plea for the Press on points we did not raise. The "Star," in point of fact, defended the Press as the only reliable medium for the dissemination of news, and cast aspersions upon the reliability of radio news, claiming that the Broadcasting Company was not organised for news gathering. We never claimed that it was, and the Hawera "Star," if it will exercise its intelligence, knows very well why it is not so organised and why the authorities have in essence confined radio to the entertainment and educational fields. As one of the "Star's" own correspondents states in reply to this editorial: "If radio were in competition with the Press they could put the news of the world into practically every house in the country while the press was still banging the linotype." We could not put the position better, so that the "Star's" jibe may be allowed to pass.

BUT when the "Star" goes on to say that "all sorts of rumours were floating about, most of them attributable to radio," and to claim that it was not until the mighty Press Association got to work that the public knew where it was, we definitely join issue. We were in the studio of 2YA throughout the night of the earthquake, and can definitely state that nothing about the earthquake was put over the air that was not officially received from the Secretary of the Post and Telegraph Department, the then only source of official information. Rumours a-plenty were in circulation throughout that evening, but the announcer and authorities of 2YA were most meticulous in using only official information, and we challenge the Hawera "Star" to prove its assertion or do the gentlemanly thing and withdraw the charge so far as it affects 2YA. Listeners in general, who listened that evening and on subsequent evenings, will appreciate that the YA stations throughout, under definite instructions, adopted the uniform policy of giving in the first instance only official news; and if on subsequent occasions, after the first stress was over, Press statements were used, their authorship was given, so that those Press writers who, as the "Star" itself admits, may have been guilty of irresponsible and hysterical stories could have the full credit for their ingenuity and skill.

AS at present constituted and planned, radio is not a competitor in the news-gathering field, and the Hawera "Star" can take what pride it finds occasion for in the performances of the Press and its attitude to radio. We would, however, venture the observation that through radio and contact with short-wave enthusiasts within the Dominion, the Sydney papers gave their readers a definitely better service in the early days of the earthquake than did the New Zealand newspapers. Listeners to Sydney radio stations on the evening of Wednesday, February 4, heard news and estimates of the killed and injured in Napier and Hastings that were not available to New Zealand newspaper readers till the Thursday. We do not charge this deficiency against the New Zealand Press Association or the New Zealand Press people. They were working under difficulties with which we quite sympathise, but radio, working from the centre of the disaster, did excel and give Sydney its priority. Where time counts, radio obviously is invaluable, and it was because of the instantaneous character of its appeal that 2YA was able to render such outstanding service. Without radio the rescue services and their organisation, and the discovery of the fate of loved ones, would have been sadly delayed. These were the points upon which we accorded radio praise in our editorial, and paid our tribute to those responsible. It would have been, we think, much more generous and dignified, not only for the Hawera "Star" (and for that matter for the Press in general), to have recognised this, and not to have raised the bogey of the alleged failure of radio in a field in which it is permitted only limited entry. So far as the "Radio Record" is concerned, we were struck very early by the value of the amateur radio transmitters in conveying news to the outside world and calling for assistance, and we dispatched two members of our staff to secure their story, first hand from the transmitters concerned. That story and a considered summary of the disaster was published in our issue of February 13, with a tribute to Mr. Tyler, of Napier, Mr. Mills, of Hastings, and Mr. Hands, of Gisborne. Listeners will appreciate that they are entitled to the recognition given them.

IN conclusion we feel bound to say that the editorial of the Hawera "Star" appears to be rather selfish special pleading, apparently occasioned by concern as to the future of the Press in face of a possible rival. For the satisfaction of such nervousness, however, we would like to say that in our view the Press has its place and radio has its place. They are not in essence competitors: they are supplemental to one another in the services they can render humanity. In some phases radio is superior; in others the Press emerges supreme. The Press is required, and always will be required, because of the more permanent nature of its record and the selection of time and place readers are enabled to bring to perusal of its contents. Radio has the ability to disseminate news over a wide area faster than any other possible agent, but because of the inability of a whole population to remain in range of a loudspeaker till each individual secures the news he requires, the Press is necessary and always will be necessary. The Press, by virtue of its established prestige, its long services given to the public, and the continued need of the public for its services, can well afford to be a little more generous in its attitude to radio, and on occasions such as that through which we have passed give unstinted recognition to the social services rendered by it.