

THE FOUNDATION AND BROADCASTING

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On June 30, 1937, Foundation expenditures under humanities program

in radio totaled \$288,870. Under the terms of that program the primary purpose of these expenditures was to advance cooperative efforts of educators and broadcasters that are directed toward making radio more educationally and culturally effective.

In general, the broadcasting industry has shown itself ready to cooperate with educators whenever it could do so without serious loss of listeners. But relatively few educators are as yet equipped to take full advantage of the opportunity thus opened up for utilizing radio in the interests of education and cultural diffusion.

The present situation may be briefly summarized by excerpts from a confidential report submitted to the officers by Mr. Charles Siepmann, Director of Program Planning for the British Broadcasting Corporation. Mr. Siepmann makes these comments after having had three months in the United States to make a study of American broadcasting practices under Foundation auspices.

"If we consider education from the point of view of men's needs as human beings, we are likely to be forced to surrender a good many a priori assumptions about what constitutes culture... Forced as we are in broadcasting to a study of the listener's capacity and readiness to hear, we find ourselves concerned with the determination of a priority of interests which correspond to his most urgent needs as a human being and citizen. We are forced, in fact, to a consideration of the immediate needs of people in terms of the immediate present... Culture conceived and valued by people who have acquired it under privileged circumstances has but small relevance to the majority of men now, nor indeed has itself the prospect of survival unless and until the intermediate needs of men are intelligently provided for... The universities have been slow to recognize and cater for this new priority in the order of men's needs. A mere

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projection into the field of adult education of the methods and subject matter of the classroom is neither apt nor adequate... Education has failed to recognize the new circumstances which condition the nature of the required supply. The academic world, whence theory of education emanates, is out of touch. The privileged circumstances under which men pursue knowledge come to be assumed as a right without corresponding obligations. Scholars, whose function it is also to be teachers, prefer the pursuit to the communication of knowledge."

Foundation expenditures in broadcasting are calculated to bear directly on the situation which Mr. Siepmann summarizes.

At the outset it appeared that education lacked a chance to explore for itself the possibilities that radio offers. Hence \$171,000 of the total mentioned went to the support of two agencies with facilities for such exploration: the University Broadcasting Council of Chicago, operating locally through commercial stations and nationally through the three networks; the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation, reaching a national and international audience through short-wave station WLXAL at Boston.

Both these agencies now have the services of staffs that are on the whole well-equipped. Both are now succeeding in planning and producing programs that attract and hold a growing audience. Both are making definite progress in helping men from the universities and colleges in learning how they can relate their special knowledge and insight to the needs and interests of listeners.

Yet experience with these two agencies has clearly shown that such exploration of radio's possibilities is alone not sufficient. In the first place, their staff members, though carefully selected in respect to educational and cultural qualifications, were lacking in practical knowledge of radio as a medium. This lack is being remedied in part by fellowship appoint-

ments which give members of their staffs an opportunity to study the best practice of the industry in this country and of the British Broadcasting Corporation in England. These appointments were among the sixteen made up to June 30, 1937, at a total expenditure by the Foundation of \$11,500, and approximately the same amount by the General Education Board prior to January 1, 1937, when appointments of this kind were taken over by the Foundation.

But useful as such trained personnel will be, experience also shows that cooperation between broadcasters and educators cannot fully succeed until another lack has been remedied, namely, the lack of knowledge of what the needs and interests of listeners actually are. As yet the industry has hardly studied its audience, except as a body of prospective purchasers for products advertised by radio. Little or nothing is known of why the public listens - apart from the general desire for entertainment - or, further still, of the basic needs and interests which might lead it to listen to types of programs not now on the air.

The Foundation has now contributed a total of \$81,000 to the support of two studies designed to extend and deepen the present scanty knowledge of these factors. One of these was concerned exclusively with listeners' interests in music -- of special importance because of the fact that approximately 65% of all broadcasting time is devoted to music. The second study, to be carried on at Princeton University, is expected to open the way to still more general knowledge. There during the next two years a well-qualified staff of social psychologists will attempt to devise methods of answering such basic questions as: Who listens? - (in terms of age, sex, occupation, education,

cultural, and racial background) - When do the various groups, thus determined, listen? What do they listen to? And finally, so far as it can be ascertained, Why do they listen?

As progress is made under these three main headings of exploration, training, and studies of listeners' interests, other opportunities for Foundation aid will undoubtedly materialize. One such opportunity appeared in the spring of 1937 in the field of Latin-American relations. The result was the grant of \$12,800 to the Pan-American Union that provides for an experiment in the use of broadcasting as a means of bettering cultural relations among the Pan-American nations. It is worth noting that the Union placed this experiment in the hands of a man trained on Foundation fellowships, and further, that the experiment involves close cooperation with the World Wide Broadcasting Foundation, the programs in question being sent out through the short-wave station WLXAL at Boston. The series began on October 15, with Secretary of State Hull as the principal speaker.

Grants-in-aid and allocations from the Fund for Studies, Surveys and Conferences (to a total of \$12,550 on June 30), are the means of exploring other opportunities that seem to be of promise. One timely example is the grant-in-aid to the American Council on Education toward the expenses of the Second National Conference on Educational Broadcasting to be held in Chicago in late November. The success of the First National Conference held in Washington last year gives grounds for expecting this second conference to contribute substantially to the clearing up of some of the misunderstandings and differences between broadcasters and educators which in the past have seriously handicapped their effective cooperation.