

MARK BECOMES A RADIO FIGURE

XVII

Mark

In the Fall of 1937, ^{Mark} plunged into the problems of radio because the Bingham's station, WHAS, a CBS affiliate, and the whole radio industry were in serious trouble. The American Musicians Federation (AFM) was threatening radio with a nationwide strike.

James C. Petrillo, the militant president of the Chicago branch of ^{AFM} ~~AMF~~, was the catalyst. On December 19, 1936 he had slapped a ban on the broadcast use of records and of transcriptions by the Chicago radio stations. The purpose behind this move, he announced, was "to put back to work in the theatres, radio stations, and other places of amusement musicians rightfully entitled to that employment."

Petrillo emphasized the seriousness of the ban by calling together the representatives of transcription companies and dictating the rules for recording in Chicago: the companies could furnish their transcriptions only to those stations ^{that} which employed the same number of musicians on their ~~stations~~ staffs as were employed in the making of the recordings they played on their stations.

A few months later on June 19, 1937, the AFM at its annual convention under the prodding of Petrillo took steps to make the ban nationwide. On July 13th, a letter from Joseph W. N. Weber, president of the ~~AMF~~ AFM, was received by the network broadcasters advising them that members of the AFM would "cease to render services at any broadcasting station from August 14, 1937, on unless radio networks, corporations,

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bottom

or broadcasting systems, and the American Federation of Musicians have meanwhile agreed to the regulation of the indiscriminate use of phonograph records or electric transcriptions for profit."

Two days later Weber instructed all local musician unions not to sign any contract to make records or transcriptions after August 14, and to hold themselves ready for a strike call of that ~~date~~ date.

Mark at this point decided it was time to stop the threat of Petrillo and AFM. He didn't know much about the radio business, he had devoted his life to newspapering, but he could learn. He realized immediately that the industry needed a strong, fighting, national organization to stand up to the AFM and the Federal Communications Commission and other forces. The radio stations had an association, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB), but it was ineffectual, riddled with dissensions, and asleep on the job. As he said, it ~~wasn't~~ "didn't amount to a hill of beans."

Being the head of an affiliate station, Mark called a meeting of all affiliates to New York and set in motion a revolution in the industry. The trade magazine, Broadcasting, ^{which Sol Taishoff had edited for fifty years} ~~edited for the past fifty years~~ by Sol Taishoff, said in the February 15, 1938, issue: "At ~~IRNA~~ ^{IRNA} ~~Independent Radio National Association~~ ^{IRNA meetings...} ~~Mark~~ ~~Association~~ Mark Ethridge, unknown to radio, but highly regarded in the field of journalism, stepped into the breach. He soon found himself

from "JRN" NA

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catapulted into the forefront of industry affairs. His general-
ship, his ability to compose differences calmly and ~~in~~ dispassion-
ately, and his engaging personality won the spontaneous confidence
of the network officials....."

~~Mark~~ ~~was~~ ~~named~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~representative~~ ~~into~~ ~~the~~ ~~Independent~~ ~~Radio~~
(IRNA)
~~National~~ ~~Association~~ ~~of~~ ~~Radio~~ ~~Artists~~ ~~and~~ ~~the~~ ~~Association~~ ~~was~~ ~~appointed~~
a Negotiating Committee to meet with Petrillo and Joseph Weber,
President of the ~~AFM~~ ^{Musicians} and other officials of the Federation and
work out a settlement that would ^{halt} ~~prevent~~ ~~the~~ ~~strike~~ ~~against~~ ~~the~~ ~~radio~~ ~~stations~~. Samuel Rosenbaum, president
of ^{Station} WFIL, Philadelphia, was chairman and Mark was an ex-officio ~~member~~
member.

Petrillo arrived at the first meeting wearing a gun in a
shoulder holster. When Mark protested, ^{Petrillo} ~~he~~ said, "The gun is for
those "boids" in Chicago who have threatened to kill me", but
he took it off and laid it on a table with his coat.

After many stormy sessions, the two sides reached a fairly
satisfactory settlement. The ~~most~~ biggest concession of the
~~radio industry~~ ^{affiliates} was their agreement to spend "not less than
their allotted quota for staff musicians during each of the
next two years."

^{On the other hand, it was agreed the affiliates ~~had~~ were given}
The affiliates achieved "The Right to use staff musicians
for commercial as well as sustaining programs"; ¹⁾ Reasonable
assurance that affiliates ²⁾ would not be ³⁾ compelled to accept
incompetent musicians ⁴⁾ and 3) ^{The right to} "Affiliates retain control over program
material and station operations."

(P)
(2)

need
The ~~had~~ to discuss the settlement, ~~and~~ the newly organized IRNA and the overhauling of NAB forced a special convention of NAB in New York October 12 and 13, ~~1938~~ 1937.

In presenting the provisions of the contract, Mark characterized the musicians' demands harshly. ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~,,, "no member of the committee (INRA) and no member of our convention (^{IN}IRA) has taken any position except this is an ~~an~~ arbitrary, high-~~handed~~ handed, blackjacking demand. There has been ~~no~~ on the part of no member of our committee any feeling that this is a good deal. There has been ... [no] feeling that we have done a smart job. The only feeling is ~~that~~ that something had to be done and this was probably the best that could be done... ~~very~~"

When it was time to ~~to~~ discuss the rejuvenation of NAB, Mark laid down an ultimatum. ~~the~~ NAB must remodel "from scratch" the old organization into a ~~verile~~, efficient, national association worthy of the industry or the newly formed ^{IN}IRNA would become a separate, permanent organization, ~~and do the job.~~

"We have not considered ourselves a group outside of NAB," he said. "I know I speak for the great element of those within the Network Affiliates when I say I hope it will not be necessary for the Network Affiliates to set up an organization designed for their own protection... ~~very~~"

The convention quickly, ~~to get the revamping of~~ NAB ~~underway~~. It appointed an ~~recommending~~ reorganization ~~committee~~ with Mark again and ~~ex-officio~~ member, committee, to go to work immediately. The committee had a plan ready to present to a special/^{NAF} convention in Washington on ^{February} Feb. 3rd, 1938. The plan provided (1) a ¹250,000 war chest; (2) an executive set-up equipped to cope with every phase of public and trade relations; (3) a big-leagued president to be paid between \$25,000 and \$~~350,000~~^{150,000} a year. The plan ^{was} passed

unanimously.

~~the importance of the position to him and the importance of the position to him~~
~~25,000 and 150,000~~

Until the organization could find the right man for the job, it elected Mark president. At first he protested; he had plenty to do in Louisville running the newspapers and other Bingham properties, and he had no intention of resigning from them; but after considerable pressure was brought to bear, he did agree to serve without pay during the search for a permanent president.

ok for any earlier refs such properties

The newspapers and magazines, especially the house organs of the industry, proclaimed his elevation in exaggeratedly big headlines: "Ethridge Czar of Ether" and "Ex-Meridianite is Radio Czar." And the stories beneath the headlines compared him to Will Hays of the moving picture industry and Judge Kenesaw Mountain Landis of baseball. This designation of "czar" delighted the children and me. We named a puppy we had just acquired "Czar" in Mark's honor. (Some months later ^{it} proved to be a czarina, but we ^(continued to) called her Czar ~~right on.~~ ~~However,~~ ^{however,} Mark, objected vigorously to the appellation. He declared in interviews he had no intention of being a "czar"; he intended simply to look after the business of the organization, nothing more until he could turn it over to his successor.

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Ethridge
1945

Time explained the job: "When an industry wants to put its best foot forward, it is likely to hire a man with a knack for public relations. The man the newspapers will refer to as TSAR.... But despite the inevitable newspaper headlines, no Tsar is Mark Ethridge....Mr. Ethridge's chief duty will be using his charming Southern accent to reason Mr. McNinch away from some of his notions."

OK?
not a
sentence

9 | Mr. Mc Ninch, ~~was~~ a member of the Federal Communications Commission, ~~who~~ had recently suggested that the Commission might start investigating radio ^{now} and then told friends of the ^{he had} Mark ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~only~~ one amusing experience/during

his presidency. One day he received a pitiful letter from a distressed owner of a radio station, ^{who} ~~The owner~~ said he was in BIG trouble and needed the NAB to help him. One of his employees had complained to the Federal Communications Commission that there was no toilet in the radio station, and ~~that~~ the FCC was threatening to take away his license to operate.

On investigating, Mark learned that the employee on a Sunday morning had put a long, religious record on the turntable and had gone down the street to a filling station to relieve himself.

~~And~~ while he was gone, the record got stuck and

similar
phenomenon
queried
somewhere
1.35 -
10

played over and over, "Christ Almighty....Christ Almighty...Christ Almighty." Instead of its sounding religious, it sounded godawful; indeed, blasphemous. The town flew into an uproar and the employee, ~~was~~ humiliated, ~~He~~ had protested to the FCC ^{about} at the distance he had to walk to find a toilet. The radio owner wanted to know what he could ~~do~~ ^{Mark, with him, with} do except to put in a toilet. Since then Mark has claimed ^{that} his supreme accomplishment as president of NAB was to see that every radio station had a toilet.

After four months, the NAB selected ^{as president} Neville Miller, who ^{had been} ~~was~~ mayor of Louisville during the flood and had gained national recognition for his efficient handling of the disaster, ~~as president~~

^a and Mark, with ^a sigh of relief, stepped aside, and

The association had a big farewell dinner for ^{him} ~~Mark~~ in Washington, ^{They also} ~~and~~ presented him with a platinum watch almost as thin as a wafer, along with a platinum watch chain for evening, and a platinum knife. After the dinner ~~was over and~~ several of the radio managers were sitting about having nightcaps, ^{and} Scoop Russell, vice-president of CBS in Washington, seeming to feel that Mark hadn't shown sufficient appreciation for the gifts, asked him rather belligerently, "Do you know what that watch we gave you cost?"

"No," Mark answered quite truthfully, for he had never seen anything like it.

"Well, I do. I was on the committee that

bought it. It cost fifteen hundred dollars.

A good many years later Mark was ^{very pleased to be} chosen ~~as~~ ^{as the third man} ~~the announcement expressed it,~~ "to receive one of the highest awards of the radio and television industry." ¹⁴ ~~It was~~ the Keynote Award of the National Association of Broadcasters and Television. ~~He was the third man to receive it.~~ The other two had been General David Sarnoff, board ~~chairman~~ of Radio Corporation of America and of the National Broadcasting Company, and William S. Paley, chairman of the Columbia Broadcasting System Inc. Mark was chosen for his work (to quote ~~again~~ the announcement) "in reorganizing the old National Association of Broadcasters during an internal crisis in 1938." ~~Mark was very pleased.~~

You would have thought, when Mark was no longer president of the ^{NAB} ~~National Broadcasting Association~~, he could have retired from the ^{radio} spot ~~light of radio~~, and so ^{he} did for a year or more.

~~But~~ then Mr. Roosevelt decided to reorganize the radio industry and asked Mark to make a study in depth on which he could base his revisions.

There were two main networks then, CBS and NBC, ^{although} ~~the latter~~ ^{the latter} However, NBC's network had two chains, the Red and the Blue. The President disliked what he considered the monopolistic trend of the industry.

~~See last
page~~

~~Television
added
when?
see p.
192~~

~~See p. 192
where
to be
correct~~

Note
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a
study -
but no
longer
"part
of"
the
radio
industry.
See?
p. 198

See?
p. 192

He felt that NBC, ~~with its Red and Blue networks,~~ had too many affiliate stations and should be broken up. He promised, though, that he would make no moves until Mark had made the study and reported to him.

Mark set to work, ~~and~~ ^{using} carried ~~on~~ conversations with innumerable people in the business and invited ^{ing} memoranda from many sources; but he had scarcely scratched the surface when, ~~suddenly~~, James Lawrence Fly, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, ^{and ed/} issued an antimonopoly report, ^{ordering} drastic revisions of the broadcasting business. It ^{made} Mark furious, and he complained bitterly to the President, saying he was going to denounce Fly and the FFC at the convention of the National Association of Broadcasters, which was to be held shortly in St. Louis.

President Roosevelt tried to hush ^{Mark} him up. He even sent Lowell Mellett, Director of the Executive Office of the President and a former newspaperman, to Louisville to urge Barry to shut him up. Barry didn't do anything except to tell ^{Mark} ~~him~~ about Mellett's visit. Mark went ahead and made the speech at a dinner, with Fly sitting just three seats away from him, ~~He~~ ^{ing} looked ^{ing} angry and busily scratched away at notes.

would a "report" order such revisions?

OK?
Television not part of title yet?
see p. 196

Louisville plan?

date of speech?
see?
p. 199

Mark repeated in that speech what he had enunciated many times before, ~~and that was~~ that the great majority of broadcasters believe "the air belongs to the people and the government is merely the trustee for the people in issuing licenses. And if this be true, there is one test and one test only that should be made to determine who shall have them: those who can best use them in the public interest. But nobody would ^[pretend] protest that test had always been applied. All too frequently licenses have been issued upon a basis of what appeared, at least, to be political pull.

wording?
OK here!

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"I have felt, ~~Mark said,~~ "along with the radio industry, that we have been the victims of an outworn law and of bad administration. I have felt that the Commission has gone beyond any powers conferred upon it by law and that it has been prejudiced and frequently punitive.

see? below re "we"?

"The mere recognition of the thesis that the air belongs to the people, ~~he pointed out,~~ "implies the recognition that we in the radio industry not only have, but should have, regulation as an industry." Then Mark said that in his study he had found ~~out~~ the radio owner ~~was~~ willing to take his chance with the most stringent sort of government regulation if he could be assured of

"we" was Mark then in the radio industry? wrong yes know of current status

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two things: that the regulation was honest and intelligent and that he had the assurance that what was done was not ~~done~~ ^{designed} to produce chaos, to further the eventual taking over by the government, but was done in pursuance of sound policy.

It is ^{he said} "tragic that an industry that depends so much for its development upon creative imagination should have to devote so much of its mental faculty to worrying about where the next blow from the Commission is coming from."

That speech, Mark insisted ^{ed} with passion until he died, could be appropriately given at a dinner any night. In ^{forty} ~~thirty-eight~~ years the caliber and actions of the Commission haven't improved enough for anyone to notice. The antagonism between the Commission and the industry continues to this very hour.

check?
date of speech
See? p. 197

A little later ^{it} was before Frank Stanton ^{it} Mark was offered the presidency of CBS, at a salary far beyond what he was making with the Bingham properties; but after discussing it with me and ^{having} a few hours consultation with himself, he turned it down. Mary Snow, ^{Mark} Jr., and Georgia, who were in their teens, and Mark and I were supremely content with life in Louisville. And our fourth child, David, who was born ⁱⁿ on December, 1938, was

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or add specific date

flourishing in the Kentucky countryside. More important, though, in Mark's decision was the fact that he was a newspaperman; newspapering was the profession he knew and loved. Why change to a medium he didn't know half so well and didn't care deeply about? Money, Mark declared emphatically, wasn't that important.

speeches
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