

# WIRELESS'S "BUTT-IN"

## Radio Telephony's Annoying Invasion of Private Conversations—"Listening In" on President Harding and Others

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IT is just as easy to purchase a radio telephone today as it is to buy a toothbrush. It is an equally simple matter to use one, and almost as many people do. A tremendous flood tide of popular favor has carried wireless telephony, newest of the sciences, to success as sudden as it is astounding.

Shops of every description, from a drug store to a dry goods emporium, have wireless sets for sale at prices ranging from \$15 to \$200 and more. Persons of high and low degree are buying them, too—hundreds and thousands every day. The air is ours. Now comes the question: "What are we going to do with it?"

Just a little over a week ago the President of the United States, who has had a radio receiving set installed in the White House, and who is reported to have become an inveterate wireless fan, was addressed personally on the ether waves broadcasted from a great station near Newark, N. J. It was the first time in the history of our country that a man, unsolicited, unannounced, and unknown, spoke directly to the President. Here is what happened:

Sandwiched between orchestra selections, a brass band concert, weather reports, a song by a well-known vaudeville comedian, and a speech by an almost equally well-known Supreme Court Justice of New York, President Harding heard George B. Muldaur, representing fire insurance underwriters, thank him for refusing to permit lighted candles to be placed in the windows of the White House last Christmas. Clear and distinct came the words, traveling through the night with the speed of a thousand winds:

"Mr. President, I trust you will permit me to voice the sincere appreciation, &c., &c."

And a hundred thousand men, women, and children, in addition to the President, heard and wondered.

What are we coming to? Is the radio telephone to put an end to all privacy? Is it going to break down the traditional isolation of the sacrosanct? Are the great, hitherto inaccessible, their ears carefully shielded from all conversation save that to which they are deliberately hospitable, to be assailed by the humble and the scheming? Has the time come when a cat may talk to a President, or a plain citizen to a king?

Why not? Providing the man you wish

is on the same ether lane you are; in other words, has his receiving set tuned to your wave length; and providing you are not drowned out by a band concert or an opera selection from a more powerful station, there is nothing to prevent your telling anybody in the world anything you wish. Of course, your listener has the privilege of "getting off the air." He may hang up on you, as it were.

Just imagine the future tribulations of some of our most prominent people when they tune their radio telephone to catch the 360 meter wave-length broadcasting programs of grand opera arias and comic songs, sermons and speeches, lullabies and fairy stories. The night winds may also bring to their ears some such appeal as this:

### Charity by Wireless.

"Hello, hello, hello, hello. Mr. Rockefeller, do you hear me?" I understand it is your custom to be on the air every evening at this time. I am George O. Nuisance and I have tried many, many times to see you at 26 Broadway. I have a little proposition that can't lose. But I need just \$40,000,000, and if you will lend it to me. . . ." Here Mr. Rockefeller switches off.

Or perhaps there'll be this:  
 "Mr. Morgan, I am speaking on behalf of the Amalgamated Order for Helping Everybody Everywhere. We have 3,000,000 widows and orphans, all without shoes, and very hungry. Please mail your check to our association at Cashgetsit, Massachusetts. Sorry to butt in, but your people at the office won't let us see you personally."

There are other uses of the radio that may need a bit of restriction in the days to come. The Reds have been forced to discontinue their active propaganda throughout the world. They may take it up again, by radio, on a scale undreamed of even in their philosophy. For example, they could set up a powerful station somewhere in this city and let go with everything they want to say about the defects in organized Government and the benefits to be derived from disorganized society.

Run the risk of detection? Of course, they would. But not nearly so much as on a soap box on the corner, and, by wireless, they reach tens of thousands of persons, young and old. Or they might load a radio on a ship, sail up to almost the three-mile limit and spread their

gospel along the upper reaches of the ether clear to San Francisco.

For such misuses of the air there are several antidotes. In the first place, where the illegal operator is within our national limits, he can be located by directional wireless, his apparatus confiscated, and, if a Red, he himself may be sent on the long, long trail blazed a year or so ago by Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman and their ilk.

There is another way, even more effective, perhaps, because it is quicker. The Government may be driven to maintain at certain broadcasting stations well trained and fully equipped brass bands. The minute a lawless operator is heard in the neighborhood violating rules of the ether, one of these bands can unlimber "There'll Be a Hot Time in the Old Time Tonight" or "Stars and Stripes Forever" or "El Capitan," and Mr. Lawbreaker will find his position, so far as effectiveness goes, similar to that of the man who tried to halt the Twentieth Century Limited by whistling at it.

Incidentally, in reprisal for Red propaganda, this country might ring up Trotsky or Lenin, after they get their big station at Moscow equipped for receiving the spoken word as well as the dot and dash of the telegraph spark, and bring a pang to the hearts of those eminent sons of the Soviet by translating into savory Russian some of the menus of the restaurants of New York.

In discussing the illegal use of the ether, we must not forget the adaptability of the air to slander and abuse. Is the poison pen to be superseded by the poison wave-length?

### Chattering Amateurs.

Radio is going to give Presidents and Premiers a simple and accurate gauge on the sentiments in their various countries. All they will have to do will be to "listen in" every night to some of the amateur chatter, and they will understand what the so-called common people really desire from their Governments. There will be no further need to filter these desires through politicians and parliaments. It is possible that there would have been no World War if some German burgher had had a radio telephone on which he could have felt perfectly safe in calling Wilhelmstrasse and telling the Kaiser just how much the German people did not want to fight the rest of the world.

Some of the traditional bumps may even be taken from true love's course by the radio. No matter where he is, the lover will be able personally to send to the lady of his choice his love and devotion. Frowned on by hostile parents, he can still reassure her of the eternity of his affection. She will be able to hear his ardent protestations, though she sit in the midst of her family.

Is this all fanciful? Of course it is. But it is, at the same time, entirely within the realms of possibility, as the radio telephone has developed. It is possible because of the simplicity that is an outstanding feature of the new science. Just as anybody can buy a wireless set, so anybody can use one. A little black box, a couple of wires, and you are in touch with the known and the unknown world. The air you breathe is full of messages borne to you from the ends of the earth and beyond.

To install a receiving set is as easy as putting a graphophone in your living room. If you dwell in New York you must first get permission from your landlord for the location of aerial wires or antennae on the roof. You will have to prove to him that their presence does not constitute a fire hazard, and that they are an ornament rather than a desecration of the chimney-studded scenery. Then go downtown and buy your apparatus. Remember that your antennae must be above the roof, and should, if you put up only one wire, be from 60 to 100 feet long. Remember, also, that to cross a street in this city with a wire permission must be obtained from the Department of Water, Gas and Electricity. If you live where you can construct your wireless station on your own land, just fasten the aerial between your roof and a tree or pole. It should be carefully insulated from all supports.

Do not forget a lead-in wire from the antennae to your instrument, and remember to connect the instrument to the ground by means of a wire attached to a water pipe. This done, you are ready to get "on the air."

### "Regulate the Traffic."

A sending set is a bit more complicated, although American genius is making it simpler every day. Just at present the uninitiated need help to install one. A license to operate must be obtained from the Government. The operator has to have some knowledge of the international code, enough to send and receive ten words a minute. He must also understand the theory of the working of his set.

With the number of wireless sets already in use in homes, churches, schools and offices in the United States fast approaching the million mark; with all sorts of communication, varying from the crashing transatlantic wireless telegraph spark to the amateurs' experimental transmission of music and poetry, the ether lanes above us are becoming as congested as the corner of Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. Professionals and amateurs are dining at the Government to "regulate the traffic." Therefore, Secretary Hoover called a conference at Washington last week and went over the whole subject. Committees of experts were appointed to study the situation and find some means of relief.

A solution is indicated in the trend of improvements on wireless apparatus being constructed in the laboratories of the great manufacturing concerns. Instruments are being made so delicate as to eliminate all but the messages for which they are particularly tuned. It is said that eventually man will be able to "hear ants talk." Increasing the selectivity of receiving sets in this way will, it is hoped, do away with interference or congestion to a large extent. Amateurs will then be able to continue their fascinating experiments and bring to the science all that their devoted brains and hands can contribute. The work of commerce and Government, carried on the pathways of the wind, can also go on undisturbed.

The layman can only stand and gasp at the progress of the wireless. The radio is finite and at the same time infinite. Restrictions and regulations are necessary. But who is going to draw up the regulations and how are restrictions to be enforced?