

INDEPENDENT LOCAL RADIO FOR LONDON?

Yes! there is a strong possibility if the G.L.C.'s local radio Bill is passed by Parliament.

David Prewett, our Vice-Chairman, and myself attended a meeting held in the London Chamber of Commerce on Monday 20th January 1969, at which Mr. Leslie Freeman the Chairman of the G.L.C.'s General Purposes Committee outlined the local radio bill.

Mr. Freeman started off his speech by stating that it was two years since the G.L.C. first expressed its support for local radio. He recalled that it was local radio that began radio broadcasting in this country, with 2LO. But as the B.B.C. expanded, so did the station, and it became national.

The main theme throughout Mr. Freeman's speech was the fact that the B.B.C. had a monopoly in Sound broadcasting. He said that it was wrong that there should be a monopoly, and he would like to see the local stations set up with similar independence and freedom as the newspapers have. "Competition is good," he continued, and "competition cannot take place in a monopoly."

He was not in favour of the local stations which are currently being operated by the B.B.C. In fact, he went on, "the G.L.C. previously rejected the opportunity of running a local station for London", the main reason for the rejection being that it was proposed that the financial responsibility would be borne by the ratepayers.

Mr. Freeman was only willing to support a move to have local stations provided they conformed to the two conditions that firstly the Council would have no control in the running of the station, and secondly that there would not be a monopoly.

Mr. Freeman suggested that a Greater London Radio Authority should be set up to control the running of the stations, and that the G.L.R.A. would be formed on not dissimilar lines to the Independent Television Authority.

There were two other speakers at the meeting, Mr. Dan Ingman O.B.E., for the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising, and Mr. E. Starkey, representing the Incorporated Society for British Advertisers. These two speakers put over the advertisers' point of view. Mr. Ingman stressed that the advertisers did not want to dictate the programme policy, nor did they want to actually sponsor programmes. All they wanted, in fact, was spot advertisements.

Mr. Ingman went on to draw comparisons on the cost of a thirty-second commercial on different stations. Radio Luxembourg, for instance, who claim a 4½-million listening audience every night, charge between £10 and £90 for thirty seconds, depending on time segment. However, Radio Manx, which is the only legal commercial local station in this country, serving the Manx community, were only charging £1. The total amount spent on advertising in 1967 was £447 million, some of which could go to local radio.

Mr. Ingman's speech was followed by Mr. Starkey's, who pointed out that the Advertisers will only buy 'time' if the stations' audiences, time, cost, etc. are right, and this would have to be carefully considered. He said there was a definite need for the introduction of local commercial radio stations, and this point was proved by the size of the listening audiences of Radio Luxembourg and the 'pirates'.

Calming the fears of local newspaper proprietors, who would have fears of losing their advertising to the stations, he said that the local weekly is complementary to radio. That is, what one hears on the radio would be enhanced by reading it in the newspapers, and it is a more permanent form of communication.

Mr. Starkey finished his speech with the hope that the G.L.C. local radio station would be the forerunner of a national network of stations.

After the speeches, Mr. Freeman answered various questions put to him by members of the audience.

He was asked whether his Council's Bill has any chance of success during the current life of Parliament; Mr. Freeman said that since the matter had been proposed, he had had no opposition, in basic principle, to the move. In fact,

he had been inundated with support (including the N.C.R.M.). He mentioned that various producers had met him individually, who claimed they were very tightly restricted, and 'hamstrung' by the monopoly. He said the Government had said they will oppose the Bill, but as public support is very much in favour of it, the Government could be persuaded to change their attitude.

Asked whether the stations would be all 'pop' music, Mr. Freeman replied that the stations would have their own types of programmes, but it would not have continuously all one type. He would not like to see a station continually "churning out" pop, or news, or high-brow music.

One final question: he was asked what support he had from London M.P.'s. Mr. Freeman admitted that he had not canvassed them, but he said "there is a whip", which statement raised a great deal of laughter from the audience.

The N.C.R.M. welcomes Mr. Freeman's moves. It does have reservations about the lack of a national plan for Commercial radio. We can foresee the evolution of unconnected regional radio stations, operating ideally under licence from a national Radio Council.

Mr. Freeman stressed that he had received massive support from everyone, which therefore indicates the public demand for an alternative choice to the B.B.C. We are trying to ensure that you, the public, are not disappointed with the result.

MARTIN ROSEN

Hon. Press & Public Relations Officer

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