

More than 'Make Believe'

IT does not demean any of their company to say that 4,000 disc jockeys can afford to assemble in Miami this week because of two men and a rival medium. There would be no Second Annual Programming Seminar and Disc Jockey Convention, or indeed a first one, if it had not been for Martin Block, Ted Husing and television.

Mr. Block made disc jockeying pay, Mr. Husing made it respectable, television made it essential.

Many of the delegates to the Miami convention, the second to be sponsored by the Storz Stations, are too young to remember the three crucial moments in the history of their craft. The first occurred Feb. 3, 1935, when Mr. Block went on WNEW New York with the pioneer version of what was to become his *Make Believe Ballroom*.

Others had played records on radio before, but it remained for Mr. Block to make an art of it. In an age when network radio was flooding the air with live performances of the best musicians and singers that money could attract, Mr. Block succeeded in mesmerizing audiences with nothing more than a stack of records and a resourceful line of chatter. In a few years he became one of the biggest money earners on the air.

Among other performers in radio, however, Mr. Block's talent was not immediately esteemed. He was thought of as a pitchman (as in fact he had once been) operating a transient stand that some morning would be gone.

It took some time for radio to adjust its standards to those of Mr. Block. The adjustment was hastened when Ted Husing resigned as the respected sports director of CBS in October 1946 to become a disc jockey on WHN New York. In his first year at WHN he earned \$130,000, or about \$100,000 more than he had been earning at the network. Hearing of Mr. Husing's fortunes and noticing he was still admitted to the better restaurants, other name talent turned to disc jockeying. Within a year Paul Whiteman and Tommy Dorsey had platter shows.

Then came television, the decline of network radio and the coincidental rise of independent radio operations like those of Todd Storz. The craft of disc jockey became a basic craft of radio.

There is a fourth factor that accounts for the presence of 4,000 disc jockeys in Miami this week. It is the public's trust in radio.

This trust was won and is maintained by many things, by the reliability and speed of radio news, the depth of its special events coverage, the divertissement of its many, many entertainment shows including those presided over by the delegates to the Storz convention. It is a trust not to be ignored by any one with access to a microphone.

Front page (circa, 1959)

WITH each passing week there are more abundant signs that editorializing on the air is paying off in recognition and prestige.

The American Civil Liberties Union, which for a decade had inveighed against expression of editorial opinion on the air, has reversed itself. It based its change in policy on the need "in today's turbulent, complex world for the fullest exchange of information and opinion, a need which the radio-tv industry is uniquely able to fill."

An infallible barometer of public opinion is the *Congressional Record*, official compendium of the Congress. Over the years the appendix to the *Record* has been used by members of Senate and House to reprint editorials from newspapers or other publications.

Now one finds in the *Record* the same reprinted edi-

torials. But members of Congress are also having reproduced "by unanimous consent" editorials broadcast over their local stations. When politicians begin to appreciate the potency and value of broadcast editorials to this degree, it is recognition indeed.

Recognition came to broadcast journalism in another way last week. Westinghouse Broadcasting Co. announced it had become the first news entity to receive permission to set up a news bureau in Red China.

By degrees broadcasters are overcoming their journalistic inferiority complex. There is nothing in the whole field of communications that broadcasters cannot do better and infinitely faster than the printed page.

Vicious tax bite

LAST week we reported (page 70) that a ruling by a West Coast Internal Revenue Service office on amortization of feature films purchased for tv performance may prove costly to broadcasters. This was understatement. If this ruling is sustained and applied nationally, it would run into millions in back payments.

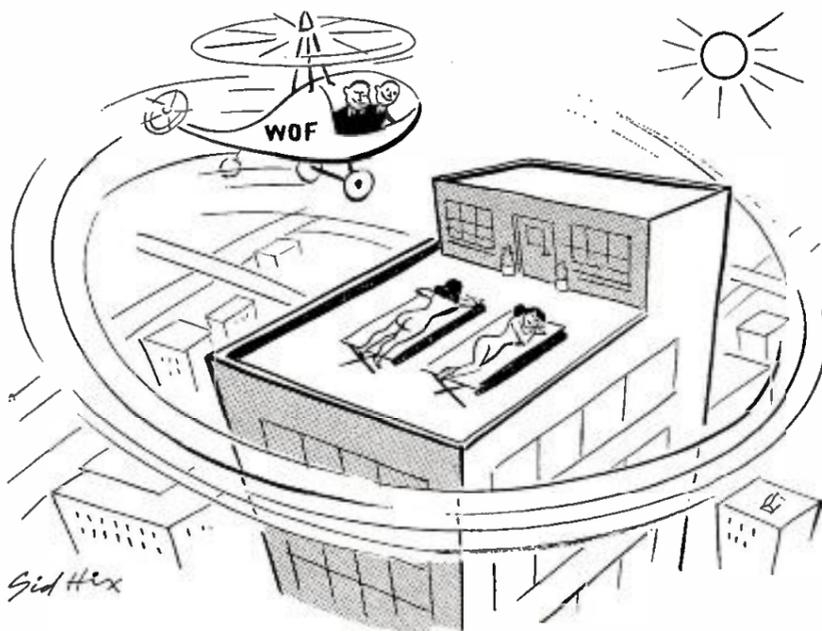
It has been the practice, inherited from motion picture exhibition, to amortize the first run of a feature film at 60% of the lease rental. The regional office ruling holds that amortization is to be computed by dividing the cost of the package by the number of plays the contract permits.

This ruling collides with a Dept. of Justice requirement that feature films be leased individually to prevent distributors from packaging a lot of undesirable films with desirable films. On the other hand, the IRS ruling holds that a station must nevertheless amortize on a package basis. The example cited was that if there are 500 films procured from one producer which can be performed five times during the lease period, only 1/2,500th of the total lease cost can be amortized for each individual showing.

The telecaster who received this ruling a fortnight ago told us it could be ruinous. Under the statutes, the IRS could go back three years in assessing returns.

It is not unusual for rulings of regional offices of IRS to be circularized to bring about uniformity. With the tax squeeze always on, it can be expected that the West Coast ruling will permeate the IRS national organization.

To save his rights (and those of all telecasters), we hope the West Coast broadcaster will promptly seek a conference with tax officials. All telecasters should meet this issue head-on and they should be joined by those in feature film leasing and syndication.



Drawn for BROADCASTING by Sid Hix
"Say, these traffic news assignments aren't so dull after all."