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From: Charles Ballaro <willyd@willyd.com>
To: A7.A7(NETMSGS)
Date: 4/19/98 2:18pm
Subject: Comments to Commissioner Ness

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Charles Ballaro (willyd@willyd.com) writes:

There was a time when radio stations served in the communities best interests and necessities. There was a time when these stations employed and cared for those who lived in the community. There was a time when the community spoke out on issues that concerned them, and a time when stations were owned, programmed, and produced locally by hard-working people who loved the business.

Sadly, that time has passed. With the brave exception of a select few , many stations have chosen to "take the money and run," selling their communities down the river to greedy conglomerates so they can poison the airwaves with syndocated garbage, put thousands of people out of work without notice, and leaving the communities they're supposed to serve out of the know.

I have been involved in radio for over ten years and have hosted nationally-syndicated talk shows. And I have seen the industry I loved turn into a wasteland of bad music, bad talk shows, and bad programming.

The reasons for this sad state of radio are numerous. The main reason is the incompetant (or is it) 1996 Telecommunications Act that, among other things, allow major corporations to essentially own as many stations as their wallets will allow. Once, a company was only allowed to own a select few stations that covered a small portion of the population. Now, the conglomerates gobble up stations like M&Ms all over the country. These stations then try to cut their losses by firing anyone employed with the station that has an FCC license and replace them with sub-standard, inferior sounding syndication. The complaints are never heard, and if you change the station, the station you turn to is probably owned by the same company.

If you're lucky, this conglomerate, out of the kindness of the hearts, will broadcast a minute or two of local news between segments of Rush or Stern. Opinions are no longer rendered, The local slant is no longer aired. Serving the community has been replaced by greed. The conglomerates are satisfied with syndication and the mediocrity it brings.

This sets a dangerous precedent because it violates constitutional law protecting us from monopolies. Dealing with radio companies is now like dealing with the public utilities. It's the only game in town, and there are two things you can do about it; nothing and like it. This has allowed companies to have a "let them eat cake" mentality with their listeners, who they no longer have to answer to, and their employees, who they have

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gotten so arrogant with that they laugh about cutting people loose, saying it's "all a part of radio" as if to justify it. The only thing that matters is money.

Most significantly, it violates our right to free speech. No longer can a community speak out against issues that concern them without waiting in line for three months to get through. No longer can announcers (what's left of them) express their creativity. Now, they must follow formats so strict they can't even pick their own music or have their own personalities. This is indeed very dangerous, and must be stopped.

Who is to blame? You can start with the FCC, who have created this ruling for one reason; so they can control the airwaves by having only a select few run stations. There is no way the FCC couldn't have seen this coming when they instituted the Telecommunications Act of 1996. How could they not see the greed and the countless thousands of people who lost their jobs by the passing of this bill. It is obvious the FCC is looking for state-controlled radio ala the BBC in England with a select few doing their bidding. They want the power, they need the power, and now they have it!

You can also blame the conglomerates who, when given an inch, took a mile. They were spurred on by greed and nothing else. And the people who suffer the most are the people.

Lastly, we must blame ourselves. We allowed this thing to go too far and we let the conglomerates take control.

But it's not too late. The time has come to take back our stations by whatever means necessary, whether it be by boycott or legal action. It's time to kill the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and declare it unconstitutional. I am more than willing to lead the way in the fight to take the airwaves away from the Gestapo-like FCC and the greedy owners who have taken away our right to be informed.

The future of radio is at stake. The conglomerates had better listen. For in time, the battle cry may soon become the words immortalized by The Who:

"We forsake you; gonna break you; Let's forget you better still."

Chuck Ballaro
Shelton, CT

Chuck Ballaro is a staff writer for the Connecticut Post newspaper in Bridgeport and author of the fictional novel about radio called Willy D.

The following letter was sent to virtually every major paper in the country. I hold you and the few congolmerates personally responsible for the decay of an entire radio industry. Your agency claims to act in

the interest of the public. You claim
to encourage competition. But you only
serve yourselves. Your words are hollow
and hypocritical. And it makes me sick t
o think that a huge entity like
yourselves can be allowed so much power.
The Telecommunications Act of 1996 has
destroyed the industry, putting
countless thousands out of work or
denying them work, leaving a select few
companies in charge of stations and
leaving the peope they're supposed to
serve without a voice and underinformed.
I demand the Telecommunications Act of
1996 be rescinded because it is
unconstitutional. It restricts the first
amendment and encourages monopolies. If
it is not done, legal action is a very
real possibility.
I went into radio and received my FCC
license because I wanted to inform and
entertain the public. Because of your
rulings, I can't anymore. If you would
like to speak with me in person, call me
at (203) 929-4547 or E_mail me or send
me a round-trip ticket to Washington or
your personal jet or whatever. If this
continues, the death of radio will be
on your hands.

Peace,
Chuck Ballaro

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