Ray Tucker

‘The Power To License Is The Power To Destroy’

Editor's Note: Ray Tucker is devoting this space to a column by R. C. Hoiles, president of Freedom Newspapers, Inc., which publishes ten newspapers in California, Colorado, Texas, New Mexico and Ohio.

One of the hazards of newspaper work was demonstrated in a recent issue of the Washington column by Ray Tucker which appeared on the editorial pages of the newspapers of the Freedom organization.

The column was concerned with the fight in Washington between various air lines to obtain "certification" for certain air routes throughout the world. Of our immediate concern, however, was a telegram received by our organization from John A. Creedy, public relations manager of Pan American Airways, who attempted to pressure us against running the Tucker column, since it was critical of Pan Am.

In his wire, Creedy wrote: "Pan American understands that you may be planning to publish a column by Ray Tucker, distributed by McClure Syndicate for August 18 release, containing numerous scurrilous references to Pan American. We feel it our duty to tell you that we believe a number of these statements to be libelous. You may wish to take into consideration the columnist's obvious bias against the air line that has earned for the United States first place in world air transport."

PUBLISHERS' DECISION—Such a wire was an obvious attempt to frighten our newspapers and other newspapers from publishing the column on the threat of a libel suit. Though we read the column carefully to determine in our best judgment whether the statements in it were libelous, our opinion is not final, for any libel action must be decided by a court. In this instance, it was our belief that there was nothing libelous in the column.

It now seems to be obvious that a newspaper that could be frightened by the threat of such action would not be performing a proper service for its customers — the subscribers. A newspaper that was financially insecure, or one that has not established principles upon which it operated, would be likely to be frightened into not running a column such as this particular contribution of Ray Tucker's.

COLUMN'S SECOND LESSON—The Tucker column is also useful for another lesson it teaches and which was not touched upon by Tucker: that is, the example of what can happen to private industry when it seeks the favor of government or permits government to interfere with its operation.

All the furor and stewing in Washington over Pan Am's is the result of TWA and other lines seeking to obtain from the Federal government a "certificate" to operate certain routes in certain areas of the world. Of course, there should be no question of whether the government of the United States issues a certificate or not and TWA ought to be perfectly free to operate such a line if it sees fit and to blazes with the government and the line's competitors. But TWA and all the other commercial air lines are not in a position to tell the government to jump in the river and go ahead on their own. Because they have the hand of government on them through the granting of special subsidy in connection with hauling government mail and other items, they dare not offend the mighty bureaucrats.

Even if they were willing to do so without any government subsidy interfering as concerns a direct government contract, they would still have to obtain a Civil Aeronautics Authority "permit" for the operation of the line, certificates, licenses, etc., or find themselves in violation of a flock of laws designed to cripple or interfere with a free competitive market.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATION—In virtually all these instances it has been the air lines that went first to government seeking some sort of special consideration, rather than government moving in and taking over operation of the air lines. And now this short-sighted policy is beginning to pinch. Now they are beginning to find out the truth of the statement that the "power to license is the power to destroy." Once the government has been given the opening wedge in taking over control of an industry or an individual right, there is no stopping it short of the elimination of the government. By the very nature of government it feeds upon itself and must ever expand and engulf more and more, or it will perish and the people as individuals who benefit from government will be forced into open and natural competition with their fellow men — a situation that is in general repugnant to any bureaucrat.