

"MR. SPEAKER, I WISH TO..."

How New Zealand's Parliament Is Broadcast

"YOU are listening to Mr., Member for....."

When you hear a radio announcer say something like that every quarter of an hour or so, he may be referring to any one of 80 people. These are the 80 who, while discussing the country's affairs, are able to let everybody with a radio set know how they contribute to the business of the House of Representatives.

Broadcasting of Parliament started in New Zealand in 1936. Before the equipment was installed the technical staff of the NBS made many inquiries and discussed details with members of the House. One of the most important things was the placing of the microphones. Some members favoured a microphone for every desk but that made speeches sound as though they were delivered in a studio and the assembly atmosphere was destroyed.

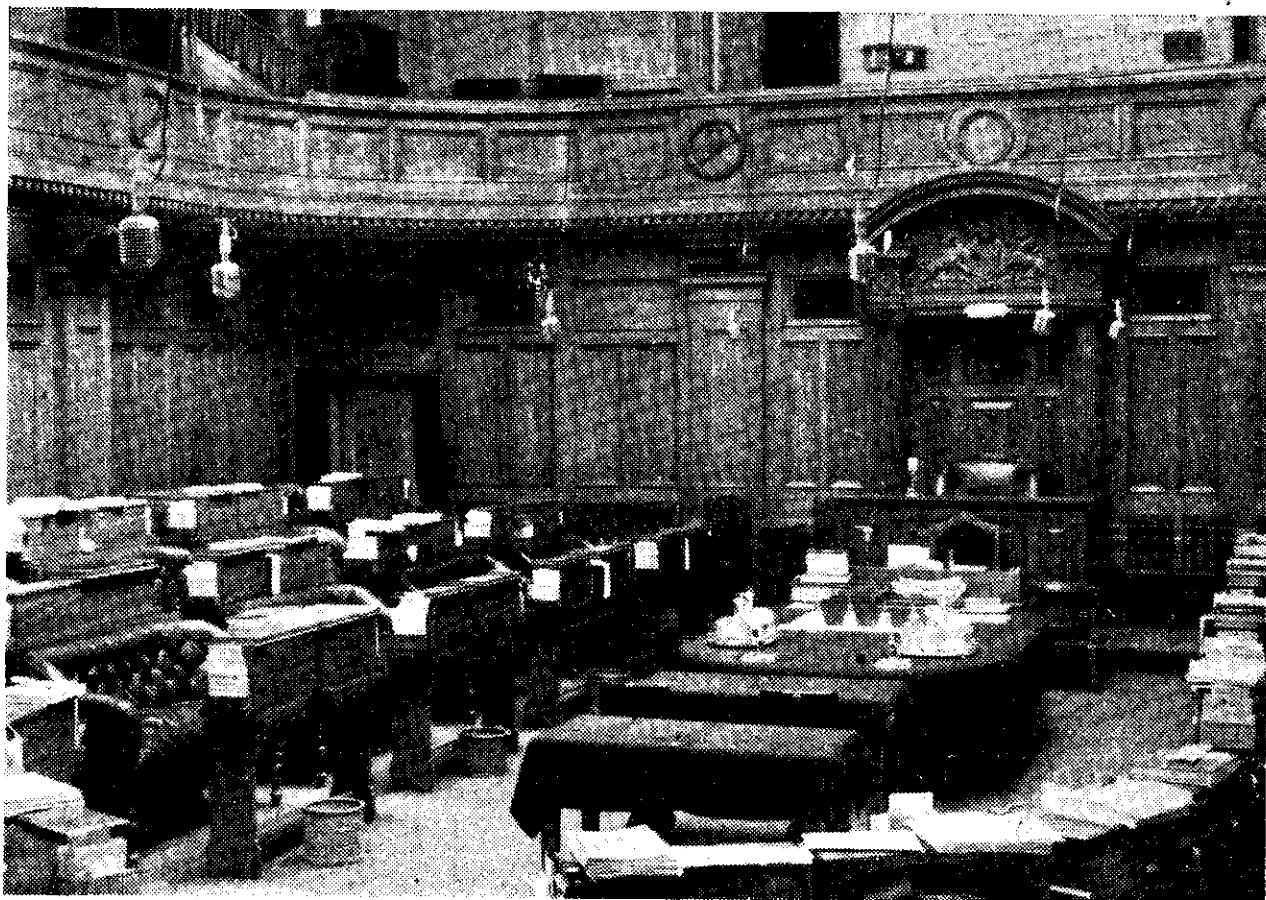
Trial and error brought Parliamentary broadcasting to the position it now holds. At first only four microphones were used; now there are ten. Seven are for the members, one is for the Speaker, one for the Chairman of Committees and the other for the engineer in charge of House broadcasts, K. G. Collins. Directional and semi-directional types were tried but the uni-directional type worked best, with a 45 degree angle of pick-up.

Blind on One Side

The instruments are strung on wires above the members' heads. Each microphone is blind on one side so that the sound comes from only one sector at a time. When bi-directional microphones were tested they caught and sent out voices from every part of the House and twice the amount of background noise, resulting in a jumble of sound.



K. G. COLLINS, NBS engineer in charge of Parliamentary broadcasts, at his control panel on the floor of the House.



It is absolutely forbidden to take photographs of the House of Representatives while it is in session, and even this view of the empty Chamber is a rarity; but special permission was given "The Listener" by the Speaker for it to be taken. It shows the placing of the microphones above the Members' benches and the Speaker's desk.

The present system gives a better picture of Parliament for broadcasting. When more equipment is available further experiments will be made with the idea of installing a substantially permanent system.

Listeners may wonder how interjections are broadcast and how speakers on different sides of the House follow on one another with continuity. When a member is speaking, the microphone covering his sector is the only one alive. Others are brought into action to catch the interjections.

These microphones are so sensitive that all noises, as well as speeches in

the sectors they serve, are greatly amplified. Listeners hear even more clearly than the members themselves; even private conversations between members have gone over the air.

Originally the NBS broadcast only selected debates, but this system was dropped because it was impossible to anticipate what would be of broadcast interest. And a debate might be half-way through before it was realised that it was leading up to something well worth sending over the air.

The broadcasting engineer who, by special privilege, has a desk on the floor of the House, listens on headphones through a standard receiver, hearing the broadcast as it comes from the transmitter at Titahi Bay. The Speaker has no control over the radio apparatus, but uses a system of signals to the engineer when he considers the House should, or should not, be on the air.

Some listeners tune in after a debate has started; some are able to listen to part of a debate only. It is for them that every quarter of an hour the announcer gives the names and constituencies of the speakers. The NBS has received many letters to this point. Some say there is no need to give the names so frequently, if at all, for the voices are well known to them. An almost equal number ask that the announcer should break in more often with information. The NBS tries to strike a happy medium.

Generally the announcer (the engineer in charge) waits for a pause in the speaker's remarks, so that he can give the name without interfering with the speech. Occasionally a member pauses slightly, giving the announcer the impression that there will be time to slip in the name, and then carries on. The

result is two voices. That cannot always be avoided. If announcements are not made, the station quickly receives a host of telephone calls asking for the member's name.

Listeners have asked, too, why names of speakers are not announced in advance. That may be possible during Budget debates for the names are supplied by the two Whips; but in ordinary debates it is impossible to forecast who will speak and what order they will follow.

Another listener's query is: Why does the broadcast continue when it is announced that the House is in committee? The answer is that the term "in committee" does not mean, as in the case of a meeting of a local body, that confidential subjects are to be discussed, but that the Committee of the whole House is in its working stages, dealing with Bills.

The Speaker's Responsibility

Throughout the war, censorship was important. Special precautions were taken to see that nothing of value to the enemy went over the air. The sole responsibility rested with the Speaker who could signal to the engineer to cut out a remark, a whole speech or a whole debate. When a member was on dangerous ground as far as broadcasting was concerned, the relay stopped, to be resumed when the dangerous passages were over.

The Speaker, in fact, had to anticipate what was in members' minds or occasionally ask for an outline of what a member proposed to talk about. Gradually the whole House became used to the procedure, members themselves asking to be cut off the air when they had something confidential to say. A red light over the Speaker's chair told