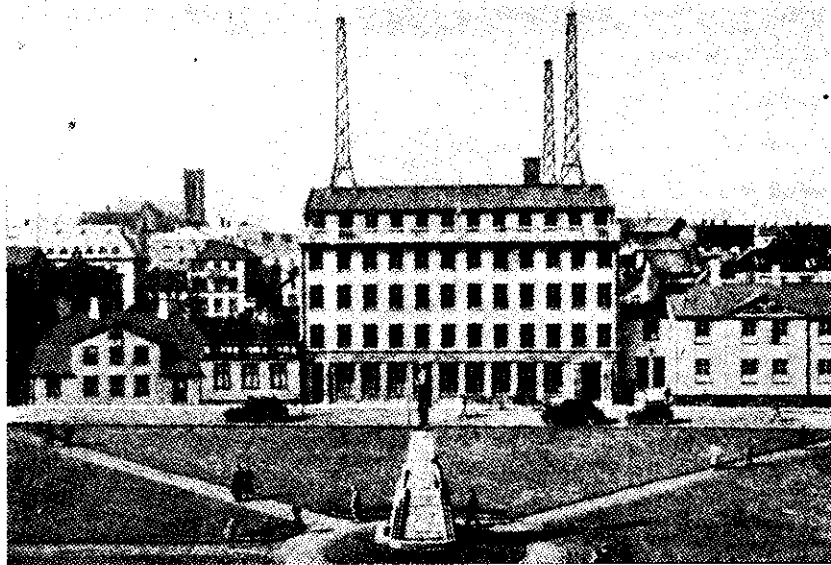


# REPORT FROM REYKJAVIK:

IN June of last year, as our readers may remember, we published an article on broadcasting in Iceland, written by Dave Driscoll, a New York radio man who had been there. It made mention of the broadcasts direct from the Althing (Iceland's Parliament, and the oldest Parliament in the world), and this prompted us to write to the Director-General of the Iceland State Broadcast Service (Ríkisutvarpid) with ten questions about political broadcasting there. We now have the reply, with answers to all our questions, from Jonas Thorbergsson (the Director-General). He has also sent us a booklet in English called "Broadcast in Iceland," from which we have taken the illustrations on this page.



THE TELEPHONE and Broadcast Building in Reykjavik. The two top floors are occupied by the Iceland State Broadcast Service

MR. THORBERGSSON, writing on November 13, 1945, said he was convinced that "although we Icelanders have not reached as far as you have done in New Zealand, we show in this respect more liberalism and broadmindedness than most or all European countries do."

## Iceland Began First

Some of the main points from Mr. Thorbergsson's reply are these: Iceland was broadcasting its Parliament six years before New Zealand began, but not the entire proceedings. Regulations lay down what sessions of the Althing are to be broadcast, and the political parties can ask for the broadcasting of other debates not specified in the regulations.

The broadcasts displace all ordinary programmes, but "no other programme material enjoys as much popularity." The Icelandic politicians do tend to address their voters when the Althing is on the air, but interjections are not commoner, as all debaters have to mount a tribune (with a microphone), which makes interjections less effective. Organised debates between the parties are a feature of the lecture campaigns.

For the details of these and other points, we refer our readers to the full text of questions and answers, as follows:

## The Regulations

Our first question was "Are the full normal proceedings of the Althing broadcast, or only selected parts? If separate debates are selected for broadcasting, who does the selecting, and on what basis?" The answer to this was as long as all the other nine answers together, being a summary of the regulations covering broadcasts from the Althing. Here they are:

The opening and closing sessions of the Althing shall always be broadcast. The opening speech on the Budget Bill

by the Finance Minister shall be broadcast and also, if requested, 30-minute speeches by other political parties, in which case the Minister has a right to a further 15-minute reply.

When debates are broadcast, the political parties shall have equal time at their disposal and the Speakers arrange that the parties take their turns. At these debates the Ministers have no special rights as to freedom of speech. Independent members (who stand outside the political parties) have also a right to take part in the debates, but each such member shall only have half the time allotted to each party, and if there are more than two, then they shall divide between themselves such time as is allotted to each party.

At the continuation of the first debate on the Budget Bill, speeches in the first round shall not be longer than 60 minutes, followed by three rounds of 30-minute speeches and three rounds of 15-minute speeches, with which the broadcast debates on the Budget Bill come to a close. The same rule applies to debates on vote of confidence.

A debate-round comes to a close when a member of each party and all independent members have spoken.

When broadcasting other debates than above mentioned, there are two rounds with 45 minutes for each party. Such debates can be restricted beforehand to three hours, in which case the speeches are curtailed accordingly.

If a political party wishes a debate to be broadcast, its leader makes an application to the Speaker, who passes it on to the leaders of the other political parties for their consideration. Debates are broadcast if unanimously agreed upon by all parties. If an agreement is not arrived at, the Speaker gives advice to that effect to the applicant. If the application be repeated, then the debates shall be broadcast.

The scheduled time of broadcast debates shall be duly announced in the radio as well as in the Althing.

Debates shall be broadcast in the same succession as applications were made, subject to other regulations of Althing. The Speaker can make exemptions from this rule when necessary. In broadcast debates the leaders shall represent their parties towards the Speaker. The Speaker decides all matters relating to broadcast debates which are subject to doubt or controversy.

## Our Questions Answered

And here are our nine other questions, with Mr. Thorbergsson's answers:

Q: During election campaigns, are public discussions broadcast, or simply separate speeches by candidates? If political debates are broadcast at these times, who organises the gatherings of opposing parties?

A: Some time before elections, whether municipal, to the Althing, or national vote, debates of the political parties are usually broadcast. The Programme Council and the representatives of the political parties decide when and how these debates take place, and the broadcast time is equally divided between all the recognised parties. The parties themselves select their orators and drawing of lots decides their row. There are usually three rounds, first long opening speeches and the shorter speeches; the debates sometimes last two evenings. Independent candidates are usually allowed to make one speech on the air.

## Ordinary Programmes Displaced

Q: Do the broadcasts from the Althing displace ordinary programmes, or is the balance of alternative musical programmes retained during sessions of the Althing?

A: Broadcasts from the Althing displace all ordinary programmes.

Q: Does the Iceland State Broadcasting Service send its recording vans and portable recorders out to meetings and public discussions of

general interest? Or does it report on subjects of a non-controversial character only?

A: Broadcast news of political meetings are subject to certain rules and give the following details:

- Name and/or names of persons or parties who hold the meeting.
- Scheduled time and attendance.
- Names of chairman and secretary.
- Main points of regulations.
- Names of orators and subject of discussion.
- Proposals and resolutions or extracts from same.
- Vote.

Resolutions from meetings of the various political parties are published if the News Bureau finds them of interest. While Althing is seated no appeals to the legislative body are published in the radio except those made by municipal or rural authorities, agricultural and fish-industry congresses or other similar congresses, and important public meetings.

## Effect Upon M.P.'s

Q: Does the character of debates in the Althing change when the Althing goes on the air? Do politicians tend to use Althing broadcasts as an opportunity to address their voters? Are interjections commoner or less frequent during the hours when the debates are being broadcast?

A: The character of the debates in the Althing changes when the Althing goes on the air. The speeches are shorter and more concise. The politicians tend to use Althing broadcasts to address the voters. Interjections are not commoner during broadcast hours. All debaters must deliver their speeches from a tribune, which renders interjections less effective.

Q: Have you any indication whether broadcasts from the Althing are popular with listeners? Have you any "Listener Research" organisation such as that which the BBC operates for discovering listeners' preferences?

A: We have from time to time investigated what the wishes of our listeners are as regards programme material, but not with special reference to the political debates. It is a matter of no doubt, however, that no other programme material enjoys as much popularity as these debates.

## Semi-Circular Seating

Q: How many members are there in the Althing? What is the shape of their meeting place? How many microphones are used?

A: The Althing consists of two Houses, the upper and the lower. There are 52 members in all. The upper House has 17 members, who are elected by the joint Althing after every election, and the remaining 35 members are in the lower House. Bills are presented in both Houses, are first examined by special committees and later discussed three times in each House. If the Houses are not agreed the matter is taken up in joint Althing. The Budget Bill is only discussed in the joint Althing. The seats of the members form a semi-circle in

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