



GREEN LIGHT for AUSTRALIAN TV

The Menzies-Fadden Government has promised—if returned at the Federal General Elections this Saturday, May 29—to implement without delay the recommendations of the Television Royal Commission whose report has just been published, said the Australian Postmaster-General, Hon. H. L. Anthony, when he released the report in Canberra. We summarise below the recommendations of the Commission, along with extracts from the evidence of special witnesses on such questions as children's programmes, religious and political programmes, and the televising of race meetings.

homework and reading. The Commission's report said: "There is no doubt about the unfortunate effects upon children of the wrong kind of programme, or even of excessive viewing of television programmes in general."

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All National and Commercial stations should therefore be obliged, said the Commission, to transmit special children's programmes. In areas where there were no National stations, the Commercial stations should be required to transmit a recorded children's programme which would be sent to them from the National stations. A minority report by two members recommended that there should be a compulsory break in transmission for one hour after the conclusion of children's programmes.

Evidence submitted on the use of television in schools suggested that it was unsuitable as an education aid. Professor G. S. Browne, who in 1953 made a survey of television in America, said that its introduction into the school classroom would "stereotype" the school timetable and diminish the activities of the pupils. Enquiries from England showed that television would not be a satisfactory classroom aid until more research has been carried out. The great disadvantage of television as contrasted with film is that all schools must view the telecast at the same moment. This causes timetable difficulties. The Commission urged, however, that experimental work should be carried out which would take advantage of the experience of other countries in this matter.

Political Broadcasts

The ABC should have full and unrestricted power to determine what political and controversial matter would be televised on National stations, the Commission said. Every commercial station which transmitted political or controversial matter should be obliged to give reasonable opportunities for the presentation of opposing views. The extent to which commercial stations carried out their obligations in the televising of political, controversial and religious matter would be taken into account when their licences were renewed. There should be a ban on the "dramatisation" of political affairs.

"The presentation in suitable form of religious services and other religious matter is one of the important obligations of television stations to the

public, and should be discharged in co-operation with the Churches and other religious bodies," the report said. "The ABC should in general apply the same principles to the allocation of time for religious broadcasts and other religious matter as has proved applicable and acceptable in the field of broadcasting."

Local Talent and Censorship

There should also be an obligation, the Commission thought, to make the best use of Australian talent. Quotas for the Australian content of programmes could, however, only be determined after experience. Checks should be set up against the televising of objectionable material, but any attempt to censor "live" programmes would not be practicable. The report also said that imported television programmes should be subject to censorship in the same way as imported films are. As a result, the chief film censor, J. O. Alexander, has recommended that the States should refer their local film censorship powers to a central authority, so that the standard of television programmes throughout Australia would be uniform.

The chairman of the Australian Jockey Club, A. G. Potter, told the Commission that "the regular televising of race meetings would be accepted if the clubs were paid adequate compensation." He thought that minor races should not be televised.

Comments in Australia on the recommendations of the Commission have been on the whole favourable. In Syd-

ney, a Presbyterian member of the World Council of Churches, the Rev. T. McDougall, said: "Television, like radio, is not harmful as long as it is used with discretion. There must be some strict control of programmes so that the mental development of the community's children is not retarded or distorted." The president of the New South Wales Teachers' Federation, H. F. Heath, said: "Commercial television will be unfortunate. We are opposed to it, and we told the Commission so." The Rev. Cuming Thom, president of the N.S.W. Council of Churches, said: "We are very happy to know that the place of religion and religious televised broadcasts is to be preserved." He added, however, that he thought sponsored television entertainment would need to be of the highest standard if the tastes of the listening and watching public were not to be debased.

The Australian Royal Commission on Television began its sittings on March 11 last year under the chairmanship of Professor G. W. Paton, Vice-Chancellor of Melbourne University. The five other members were R. G. Osborne, chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Control Board; C. B. Bednall, a newspaper executive; R. C. Wilson, a member of the N.S.W. Graziers' Association; N. S. Young, a public accountant; and Mrs. Maude Foxton, president of the Western Australian branch of the Country Women's Association. The Commission heard evidence from 122 witnesses, and its report occupies 251 pages.

WIDESPREAD comment has been aroused in Australia by the recommendation that National and Commercial television services should be established there without delay. The report of the Royal Commission also recommended that the Australian Broadcasting Commission should be responsible for National television programmes, and that the ABC Control Board should advise the Minister on the licensing of privately-owned commercial stations. Stringent safeguards were favoured to prevent the debasing of public taste by television, and the report gave special attention to political and religious and children's programmes, and the proportion of advertising in commercial programmes.

The Australian Government has promised to act on the report as soon as possible, but experts estimate that it will be 18 months or two years before television stations can begin operating. The Royal Commission has recommended a gradual introduction of television, with the first National station in Sydney and a second in Melbourne. Four commercial stations should also be set up to start with, two in Sydney and two in Melbourne. Further National and commercial stations would then be gradually established throughout the country, but there should be a limit set on the number established in the early stages.

The ABC estimates that it would cost about five and a half million pounds to establish a National television network, and that a licence fee of £5 would need to be charged annually. Television sets are estimated to cost about £150 each.

The Royal Commission recommended that all television stations should provide special programmes for children, and that the Broadcasting Control Board should set up special committees to advise on children's programmes and religious programmes. It said that the objective of all stations, from the first, must be to provide programmes that would raise standards of public taste.

Children's Programmes

Expert witnesses said that where young children were concerned nervous disorders might result from the viewing of programmes featuring sadism, brutality, or horror. They said that excessive viewing was undesirable for physical reasons, as it discouraged activity in outdoor sport. The witnesses said that even where programmes were reasonably good, viewing was a "passive experience" which tended to depress mental activity. It also interfered with



BBC photograph
"There is no doubt about the unfortunate effects upon children of the wrong kind of programme . . ."