

Is The British Radio System Better Than The American?

YES, says Stephen King-Hall

NO, says Earl Reeves

A FUNDAMENTAL mistake made by foreign students of the British broadcasting system is to suppose that it is governmental. It bears no more relation to the Continental systems of government-controlled broadcasting than it does the American system of private broadcasting. The British Broadcasting Corporation is one of the most interesting examples of a type of constitutional development which shows signs of extending in Great Britain. It is a public corporation. By this I mean that it is neither a public utility service, operated by civil servants for the benefit of, and at the expense of the whole community, nor is it a private commercial undertaking operating for its own profit and at its own risk.

The theory underlying such a public concern is briefly this: There are certain services which are considered to be of such vital importance to the welfare of the whole community that it is undesirable that they should be left entirely in the hands of private enterprise whose policy, naturally enough, would be based very largely on purely financial considerations. At the same time it is recognised that certain great advantages, such as the maximum incentive to economical management, are derived from private enterprise. The B.B.C., which has a Royal Charter for 10 years dating from 1926, is ruled by a board of governors and a Chief Executive (Sir John Reith, the Director-General). The board is responsible to the Postmaster-General, who is the B.B.C.'s spokesman in Parliament. The Director-General is responsible to the board for the general conduct of the services. The income of the B.B.C. is derived mainly from license revenue, supplemented by the proceeds from various publications. Every owner of a radio set pays a license fee of 10 shillings a year, of which approximately four shillings goes to the B.B.C. and six shillings to the Post Office. The balance-sheet for 1932 shows that the B.B.C.'s net income from the sale of radio licenses was £1,200,000, and its revenue from publications was £320,000. On the expenditure side the cost of the

(Continued in column one next page.)

NO more democratic institution has existed than the American broadcasting system. Only about a decade ago a gadget which boys of all ages had put together in the attic, came down into the living-room. Promptly technical discoveries began revolutionising the gadget itself; and a growing and vociferous demand for good programmes created a second bewildering problem. The early masters of broadcasting did not know where they were going, or just how they were going to get there. But the American public was astoundingly vocal from the very beginning about the free entertainment which was thrown in with every radio set. Broadcasters had plenty of written and verbal evidence that the public did not want this problem thrown into Uncle Sam's lap, to be solved by creating a Federal entertainment system. Thus various proposals for private licensing, with a certain charge for the programmes received, were thrown into the discard, simply because John Citizen wouldn't like that.

Basically, John and his wife and children have been the bosses of broadcasting ever since. It has become what the public wanted it to be. The public didn't wait to be asked for its vote. It has delivered its opinion daily, by telegraph, by telephone, by letter. As the cost of ever-expanding programmes and stations mounted and mounted, and broadcasting had to reach out into the world of commerce for more and more money, the struggle to measure public taste and meet public demand became almost

franzied. Little wonder! Broadcasting in the United States to-day costs more than £20,000,000 a year; and it is a structure having no foundations except popularity, public approval and goodwill. It is the goodwill of 80,000,000 American citizens around nearly 18,000,000 sets—having available at the turn of a knob far more broadcasting programmes than all the rest of the world combined. This broadcasting is alert, abreast of the times, free from political censorship, and non-partisan. Its directors, driven by competition between chains and between advertisers, must

(Continued in column two next page.)

Arguments That Interest N.Z.

ON this page two broadcasting authorities, Commander Stephen King-Hall, of London, and Mr. Earl Reeves, of New York, set out their views on the broadcasting systems in operation in their respective countries. In view of the recent controversy in the "Radio Record" on the merits and demerits of the British and American systems of broadcasting, the arguments put down here should be of especial interest. The New Zealand Broadcasting Board is operating its service along lines very similar to the service being given to Empire listeners by the

British Broadcasting Corporation and, for this reason readers may apply many of Commander King-Hall's arguments to our own system. The Australian system, on the other hand, bears a marked similarity to American

broadcasting, where the programmes are paid for and controlled by big advertisers. There are certainly non-commercial stations in Australia, operated by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, but there are a great number of powerful B stations whose sole revenue is derived from the handsome sums paid them by radio advertisers.



Sir John Reith, Director-General of the B.B.C., and one of the greatest figures in the broadcasting world.

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