

# Broadcasting Amendment Bill

## Members Look Closely into New Zealand Radio Programmes

During last week a considerable amount of discussion took place in the House of Representatives concerning the Broadcasting Amendment Bill. The following are views expressed by some of the Members in reference to the Bill. An outline of the Government's broadcasting policy was given by the Postmaster-General, Hon. A. Hamilton, when moving the second reading of the Bill in the House of Representatives.

Mr. Hamilton stated that during the three years the present board had been in existence an endeavour had been made to lay the foundations of a policy. The board had really blazed the trail. Both it and the advisory council had done good work. It was proposed now to abolish the advisory council. The policy they proposed to adopt was mainly on the lines of the B.B.C.'s policy, which was generally recognised as the best in the world. The American and Australian systems were not to be compared with it. In Great Britain the only revenue received by the corporation was from listeners' fees. In that sense they were endeavouring to follow the B.B.C. policy, rather than the American and Australian systems, under which maintenance depended upon advertising, and revenue from other services. In the speaker's opinion, those countries would be glad to revert to the British system if they could. He understood that there was a desire in some quarters that the personnel of the board as proposed in the Bill should be reduced from seven to five, but it was necessary that there should be wide representation, and he considered the appointment of seven members would satisfy that need.

Mr. E. J. Howard (Lab., Christchurch South) suggested that the Bill would mean the end of the B stations. He considered the Government was following England too slavishly. A weakness of the Bill was that there was no provision for the election of members of the board. There should be one board for the North Island and another for the South Island, as the problems of the two islands were totally different.

Mr. R. A. Wright (Ind., Wellington Suburbs) criticised the proposal that the board should be composed of seven members. He considered that a great deal of money would be taken up by their travelling expenses, and it was almost certain that they would be men with two or three other jobs. In his opinion, the personnel of the board should be reduced from seven members to three—one who understood the technical side of broadcasting, one who was qualified or who could become qualified in selecting suitable entertainment for the radio, and a third who would be a direct representative of the listeners. The money thus saved, he suggested, should be used to encourage local talent, which at present was more discouraged than otherwise. He believed that in a recent poll, 95 per cent. of the listeners

plumped for the B stations. If that was true, surely the B stations were entitled to consideration, but the Bill simply gave a monopoly to the YA stations.

Mr. A. S. Richards (Lab., Roskill) also urged for direct representation on the board for listeners. He knew that if listeners did not get what they wanted from the Minister, they would bring to bear all the means in their power to achieve their object. Mr. Richards interpreted the Bill as being the beginning of the end of B stations. The B stations were popular with the public, which feared that the standard of programmes would deteriorate if the B stations disappeared.

Mr. W. A. Veitch (Ind., Wanganui) considered that broadcasting should not be a monopoly. If broadcasting was left to a few stations, listeners would not receive the programmes they desired to listen to. The minor stations would give listeners a greater choice of programme. In his opinion, as the chairman of the board received £650 a year, he should give all his time to the position. There were very many competent men who would be very glad to take such a job at the money.

Mr. J. A. Nash (Govt., Palmerston) considered that no matter what action might be taken by the new board, unless more sympathetic treatment was accorded the B stations, there would be a storm of protest from one end of the country to the other. The enlarging of the board from three to seven members would be a distinct advantage, but much would depend upon the men appointed. He considered it was only reasonable that the listeners who provided the revenue should be given some representation. If they had at least one representative on the board they would feel they had an interest in the concern.

Rev. C. L. Carr (Lab., Timaru) suggested that the control of broadcasting might well be dealt with by a committee of the House—men who had been elected to deal with matters of that kind—and considered that this was especially necessary, when regard was taken of the enormous increase in the number of listeners in New Zealand during the past few years. Nearly everybody had a wireless set now, and he hoped the time would soon come when everyone would be able to take advantage of the benefits broadcasting offered. Mr. Carr stated that he would rather listen to the American or

Australian stations than to any of the YA stations. He stated that all personality, variety and charm had been cut out of the YA stations, and that they were the most soulless he had come in contact with.

Mr. R. McKeen (Lab., Wellington South) stated that had the New Zealand Broadcasting Board adopted the same attitude as the B.B.C. it would have allowed broadcasts by such people as Krishnamurti, Professor A. Sewell and Mr. H. D. Dickinson. The "Friendly Road" was an undenominational body, and it had rendered valuable service in the Auckland province. That B station should be allowed the freedom it had to-day, but under the Bill it was to be wiped out. The board would have absolute control, and would be responsible to no one. In his opinion that was wrong.

Mr. E. T. Tirikatene (Ind., Southern Maori) and Mr. H. Holland (Govt., Christchurch) hoped that nothing would be done to curtail the activities of the B stations.

Mr. A. E. Ansell (Govt., Chalmers) was satisfied that if the public was to receive high-grade programmes the B stations were necessary. He also advocated the encouragement of local talent. He expressed the opinion that the removal of the advisory council would definitely break the link between the board and the listeners.

Mr. M. J. Savage (Leader of the Opposition) considered that the Government should never unload its responsibility on to any board that was not directly responsible to the people. The Government should be prepared to accept the responsibility of laying down a definite broadcasting policy, and have it administered without fear or favour. Nothing should be done of a harsh nature that would have the effect of closing stations that were giving a satisfactory and useful service. Seeing that the listeners provided all the revenue it seemed reasonable that they should have representation on the board. It might be that the radio trade should also have some representation. The broadcasting service should be part and parcel of the Post and Telegraph Department.

An Auckland deputation waited upon the Minister at Parliament House on Friday afternoon, and expressed the view that the Government was using the Bill to obliterate the B stations. The deputation was from the United Listeners' Club, Auckland. It sought direct representation for listeners on the board. The suggestion was that there should be two members, one for each island.

The Minister considered the deputation's request to be reasonable. However, he did not think it wise to have an elective board, but he would do his best to see that the listeners had representation.

