

Broadcasting In France Is Very Different



BROADCASTING in France is not a Government monopoly. The Government owns and works a number of broadcasting stations, but there also exist a number of private stations as well, which, although they have to hold a license from the State, are ordinary commercial concerns.

The tendency is to restrict the number of these private stations and gradually to bring the entire system of broadcasting into Government hands as existing licenses expire; but the private stations are many, some of them are important and long-established, and it may be prophesied that a considerable time will elapse before the last of them disappears.

Among the most important private stations are, in Paris, the Poste Parisien (which is connected with the "Petit Parisien" newspaper), the Poste de l'Ile de France, Radio, L.L., and Radio Vitus. In the provinces there are Radio Toulouse and Radio Lyon (which must not be confused with the Government stations of Toulouse-Pyrenees and Lyon-La Doua), and there is Radio Sud-Ouest at Bordeaux (which must not be confused with the Government station of Bordeaux-Lafayette).

There is also Radio-Luxembourg, which is, of course, not really a French station at all, but whose programmes and advertisements are obviously addressed to French listeners. On the other hand, there is the French Radio-Normandie, which lies nearest to Great Britain of all these commercially-run stations, and no doubt for that reason gives a considerable part of its publicity in English for the benefit of listeners who cannot receive publicity from the B.B.C.

It must not, however, be assumed that if a French station is heard to giving out publicity it is necessarily a private station. For until January of this year all the Government stations consented to increase their revenues by accepting advertisements, and even now there are only the three Govern-

ment stations of the Paris district which refuse it.

GOVERNMENT broadcasting is still regulated by a decree which was issued in 1926; for although various Ministers of Postes and Telegraphs have since issued other decrees—or, strictly speaking, have placed other decrees before the President of the Republic for signature—they cannot alter the decree of 1926 except by a Bill which must pass the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. For the 1926 decree, having been issued when Parliament had given M. Poincaré's Government authority for a time to legislate by "decree-laws," can only be abrogated by a new law.

So the decrees of the various subsequent Ministers of Posts only have force of law within the limits of the 1926 enactment. Moreover, the decree of each Minister is liable to be cancelled by his successor.

The present position of Government broadcasting is that there are in Paris three stations speaking to France and Europe—Radio Paris, P.T.T., and the Eiffel Tower—the wavelength of the last of which was reduced to 206 metres on the first of the present month in accordance with international agreement. There is also Radio Colonial, which is usually not heard in France, but speaks, on a very short wavelength, to the distant French colonies, one after the other, on different days of the week.

In addition to these, there are in the provinces eleven stations, each of which covers what is, for broadcasting purposes, an administrative district. These stations are Lille, Strasbourg, Rennes-Bretagne, Limoges, Lyon-La Doua, Alpes-Grenoble, Bordeaux-Lafayette, Toulouse-P.T.T., Montpellier, Marseilles and Nice. The twelfth district is Paris.

These districts have been created in order to introduce a certain degree of democratic control—although critics say it is only the semblance of democratic control—into the management

of the broadcasting stations and especially into the choice of their programmes.

FOR nearly a year listeners have been called upon to pay an annual tax of fifty francs for every receiving set. The promise was given that the money thus collected would be spent upon the improvement of broadcasting, both in respect of its technical quality and in that of its programmes. A law recently passed requires all private users of electrical machinery to adopt instruments for abolishing, or at least reducing, the interference which they cause to listening by the dissemination of parasites. The State has an organisation—not yet technically very efficient or well chosen, in the opinion of some people—for detecting the origin of these parasites.

On the other hand, the law of 1926 created certain advisory associations, which were to assist in the choice of programmes and in other matters connected with the efficiency of the service. From these associations are chosen committees to carry out the work.

What is new in the Mandel decree is that fifty per cent. of the members of these committees will in future be representatives of listeners. Anyone, man or woman, who can produce the receipt for his payment of the tax can demand to be made a member of the association for his district, and, as such, can have a vote in the choice of the ten elected members of the committee which will manage the Government broadcasting of the station in question.

Incidentally, it may be remarked that the first of these elections, which took place in May, was also the first occasion upon which women have taken part in an election under Government auspices in France.

Moreover, there is to be a "Conseil Supérieur de la Radio diffusion" for the whole country, which, although it only has advisory functions, the Minister of Posts will be bound to consult, particularly when it is a question of appointing or removing a chairman of one of the district managing committees. This body will contain a certain number—although a minority—of representatives of the associations of listeners, but they will be nominated by the Minister of Posts and not elected.