

The New Zealand Radio Record

—AND— Home Journal

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THE CONTROL OF THE BROADCASTING SYSTEM

THE Postmaster-General by now must be thoroughly well convinced that the Dominion does not want the broadcasting system to be placed under Government control. When the Minister first mooted this idea some twelve months ago he was promptly told by Parliament that it desired to have a say in the matter, and the Minister was constrained to promise that, before taking action, he would prepare his scheme in detail and submit it to Parliament. That promise may be expected to be fulfilled in the comparatively near future. It will be interesting to see what scheme is finally evolved. The Minister has been given the privilege of a long period of incubation, and listeners will await the production of the completed scheme with definite interest. Listeners, the Press, Chambers of Commerce, and finally dealers have allied themselves in opposition to the idea of Government control. The main speaker of the Dealers' deputation told the Minister that their opinion was that the administration of the service by a Government Department was not feasible through "lack of flexibility and the danger that the whole thing would be tied up with red tape and officialdom." Also, it was thought that the Minister in charge would be subjected to pressure and influence. This was straight talking, and could not have been pleasant hearing to the Minister and his Departmental officers. Although it was not mentioned, the deputation had before it the example of the Railways and the measures that have been necessary to remove the administration of that service from the demerits of political influence.

IT was admitted that the dealers had experienced much difficulty in reaching a decision as to the ideal scheme for the control of broadcasting. The motion advanced proposed that a Board should be established to consist of not more than five members, this Board to be representative of the Government, the dealers and the listeners, final appointment being in the hands of the Government. It was stressed that this Board should be entirely removed from political control. That objective is very desirable, but we fail to see how once the Government finds the necessary cash for the establishment of the business and

appoints the personnel of the Board, it can then be expected to completely step aside and disassociate itself from influence. The Board as proposed is really only one step removed from pure politics. This the deputation recognised, as evidenced by the emphasis laid upon the necessity for removing the administration of the Board from political influence.

THE claim was made by one speaker that the motion submitted to the Minister had "the unanimous backing of the trade in New Zealand." Our information is at variance with this claim. We are informed that at Auckland in a meeting of nine the motion was carried by a bare majority. In Wellington the minutes of the Association show that in a meeting of 8, 7 voted on the resolution, 4 being in favour and 3 against. We publish in another column a letter from a prominent radio dealer definitely denying that the resolution had the "unanimous backing of the radio trade in New Zealand," or that, as the Minister affirmed in his reply, "it represented 95 per cent. of the capital invested in the radio trade." In the face of this evidence the claim made by the spokesman of the deputation is very seriously discounted.

SOME members of the deputation also arrogated to themselves the right to speak for listeners. To a question from the Minister as to the feeling of listeners, Mr. Nimmo, with a modesty for which perhaps no one who knows him will blame him, said that he was in a better position to answer than anyone in the room. He had seen certain correspondence, and was prepared to assert that "the listeners were overwhelmingly in favour of a change." We are informed that a similar question was addressed to other members of the deputation, but they declined to take the responsibility for venturing to assert what the feelings of listeners were on the matter. In this they were wise. Against the confident opinion expressed by Mr. Nimmo as to the views of listeners may be set the considered opinion of a responsible society of real listeners, viz., the Taranaki Radio Society's decision of the week preceding. In a full-dress debate on the control of the broadcasting system, this Society passed a resolution condemning Government control, and urging that the contract with the present operating company be extended for a period and the matter further investigated. That attitude is more entitled to weight as representing the views of listeners than the assumptions of Mr. Nimmo upon the limited evidence available to him.

THE truth is that no one is in a position to assert what the views of listeners are upon this subject. Opinion only can be expressed in line with the experience of the individual making the statement. The people who are primarily concerned in the issue are listeners themselves. If any change in administration is contemplated they should be able to express their views upon the respective merits of the schemes to be advanced. Listeners have had some six years' experience of the Company's administration. Before they are asked to place themselves unreservedly at the mercy of a new authority, they should be entitled to express their views upon the prospect before them. The right course in our view would be for the Minister to finalise his scheme as quickly as possible, and submit it to Parliament and listeners. In face of mere assertions from this person or that person, a definite plebiscite should be taken of listeners themselves. On the one hand they know what they have had and can have by adequate development, on the other, they should be told what they are going to have, and allowed to make a definite choice. Such a plebiscite could easily be arranged, and would set at rest the arguments that now exist.

THE ADVERTISING MENACE.

IN another column we publish a number of letters from listeners dealing with the question of advertising and "B" class stations. These listeners are quite entitled to express their views, and we freely give them the hospitality of our columns. It might be timely to make quite clear our attitude to the "B" class stations. We have no antagonism toward them whatsoever, but we have felt it to be our duty to point out to listeners exactly what is involved in the establishment of a "B" class system on certain lines. As far back as January last we wrote as follows: "At times we have felt called upon to oppose phases of the development of the 'B' class movement. This was because of the fear, for which there was justification in views occasionally expressed, that demand sooner or later would be made by 'B' class stations for some share of the revenue provided by listeners for

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