

Radio Record

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Home Journal

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WELLINGTON, FRIDAY, JULY 17, 1931.

THE FUTURE OF BROADCASTING IN NEW ZEALAND.

IN another column we give space to the views of Mr. R. H. Nimmo upon the course which should be taken in determining the future of broadcasting in New Zealand. Facing the facts as they exist at the moment in view of the Government's necessary restrictions upon advertising over the air and their effect upon the revenue of "B" stations, Mr. Nimmo urges that consideration of the position which arises from expiry of the Radio Broadcasting Company's contract should involve regard for the position of these stations. That is fair in the circumstances. Last week we pointed out that the "B" class stations, equally with the "A" class stations, "must be considered in connection with a comprehensive national broadcasting scheme, and the lines made clear upon which they shall work." Mr. Nimmo's suggestion now is that the central "B" stations should be co-ordinated and worked in co-operation with the main YA stations by whatever authority is entrusted with the administration of the radio broadcasting service. That is in line with our own thought. We have always contended that there is room in New Zealand for only one definite radio service, and we have indicated that it has been unfair on the part of the Government to permit up to 30 "B" class stations to commence operations, invest their capital and undertake a service, without any real guarantee of continuity or source of revenue. It was plain that those stations giving that voluntary service, sooner or later, would be unable to continue the financial burden, and that appeal would be made either for a subsidy from the listeners' funds or for permission to secure revenue from advertising sources.

THE desirability of reticulating the Dominion with radio broadcasting stations supplementary to those in the main centres has long been apparent. To cover that situation a scheme was submitted to the Government over two years ago for distributive relay stations. Nothing was done with that scheme. Instead, licenses were granted to traders, one after the other, to establish what are now known as "B" stations, until there exist in the country approximately 30 active "B" class stations. The effects of that action by the Government are now becoming apparent, as we repeatedly warned they would. In the situation in which they now find themselves, those stations, although their owners took a definite financial risk, are entitled to sympathy and consideration.

MR. NIMMO'S proposal is that those that reach a certain standard in the four main centres shall be subsidised from the listeners' funds; that others in selected provincial towns shall also be co-ordinated in the main service and, where possible, linked in as relay points from the main stations. To effect this, his suggestion is that a subsidy

of £10,000 should be paid from listeners' funds in respect of city and provincial stations. By this means listeners would receive desirable alternative services at a cost which it is represented would pay for itself in its attraction of new listeners. Restrictions for the control of those supplementary stations are outlined, notably among them being a commendable limitation upon profit-earning capacity.

DECISION as to the practicability of such a proposal involves knowledge of technical and financial factors. Up to the present such a course has obviously been out of court. Whether the revenue is yet sufficient to contemplate such a payment, we have not at hand the means of determining, and therefore can do no other than suspend judgment. It is also a matter for discussion whether the capital expenditure involved would best be made by one authority or spread over the stations responsible individually. Upon the general desirability, however, of the fullest co-ordination in listeners' interests between all stations wishing to serve the radio public, there can be no two opinions. Our view all along has been that in such a relatively small country as New Zealand, where such a comparatively small sum has been available for the conduct of the service, the most economical means of supplying that service must be adopted. Obviously the fullest efficiency would be afforded by only one management, one overhead, and one set of administrative and supervisory costs. If it is possible for the operating authority, whoever or whatever that may be, in the future to co-ordinate the service along the lines suggested by Mr. Nimmo, then consideration would be shown on the one hand to those who have sought to render service in their districts, and to listeners on the other. Not all "B" class stations would be required in such a co-ordination, and that gives point to our regret that the Government has allowed them to invest finance that may be lost.

MR. NIMMO is wise in realising under existing circumstances in the Dominion that there is room for only one co-ordinated broadcasting service. While co-operation may be effected now, ultimately the control must be unified and individual. That has been our contention all along. And we have emphasised that point consistently in the interests of listeners, who after all are the prime and only main consideration. The question as to who shall administer that radio service is also raised. Mr. Nimmo favours a Board of Control. In the circumstances obtaining in New Zealand we think private enterprise, under definite restrictions, is preferable, for a Board of Control would be but one step removed from Government control. The question as to what company shall be chosen to administer the service is also another matter. What listeners require is that the company concerned shall be efficient and responsible and capable of giving the service needed. On that point merit alone should be the determining factor.

"Perhaps"

Radio Assembly

IN dictating our editorial last week we relied upon our memory of Mr. Nimmo's remarks to the Postmaster-General, and quoted him as saying "he was in a better position to answer [a question about the views of listeners] than anyone in the room." Mr. Nimmo used the qualification "perhaps," as our report correctly showed, and that gives a different sense to his reply. We regret any injustice occasioned by our omission.

With regard to our tribute to his modesty, Mr. Nimmo very sportingly admits there might be something in it, for, he says, there is no Scot worth his salt who does not think well of himself; and we, not to be outdone (and by virtue also of a modicum of Scottish ancestry) will give Mr. Nimmo the further admission that he may well be justified!

SIR JOHN REITH, the Director-General of the British Broadcasting Corporation, is to attend the first general assembly in New York of the United States National Advisory Council on Radio in Education. He has been invited to take part in this important conference because it is felt in America that an authoritative account should be given of British aims and methods on the subject of wireless and education.

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interesting information.
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