

Suggested Broadcasting Control

Bill before the House

Terms of the Broadcast Bill

THE Postmaster-General (the Hon. J. B. Donald) introduced on Thursday last the Broadcasting Bill embodying the Government's proposals for the future control of broadcasting. The Minister briefly outlined the Bill, the provisions of which are set out in full elsewhere on this page.

Mr. H. M. Campbell (Ref., Hawke's Bay): Will there be any members of Parliament on the Board?

Mr. Donald: No, this is not a State department. It will be run by a board outside the State altogether.

Mr. W. L. Martin (Lab., Raglan): Can you let us have the names of the members of the board?

Mr. Donald said he could not give the information. He had already had applications for positions on the board from about 200 people. So far no one had been appointed.

Mr. Martin: Is it true that provision has been made for two superannuated Public Servants?

Mr. Donald: I do not know of it.

Mr. E. J. Howard (Lab., Christchurch South): You do not know anything, then.

Mr. H. G. R. Mason (Lab., Auckland Suburbs): How many members?

Mr. Donald: Four, but there are no members of Parliament. (Cries of "Oh!")

Mr. D. G. Sullivan (Lab., Avon): You want business men, eh?

Mr. Donald said the board would carry on the work of the present company, and he hoped it would do better than the company.

A Labour voice: How much will you have to pay the company?

Mr. Donald: It is anticipated it will cost about £30,000.

Mr. Sullivan: Do you intend to buy out the existing stations?

Mr. Donald: Yes, the present stations will have to be bought out. He added that the total annual payments to the board members would be £1350.

A Protest Entered.

Mr. H. M. Campbell (Ref., Hawke's Bay) said he wanted to enter an emphatic protest against the whole proposal.

Mr. G. C. Munns (U., Roskill): Of course you would.

Mr. Campbell said the Government was proposing to take a most serious step. At the present moment the Special Economic Committee was searching for ways and means to rehabilitate the country and to save expense, and in face of this the Government was bringing down proposals for the annual expenditure of £1350, apart from other expenses that would be incurred if the scheme were carried to a conclusion. In addition, it would spend £30,000 on the purchase of the present system.

Mr. W. B. Barnard (Lab., Napier): But there is money in it for the country.

Mr. Campbell said he wanted to state quite definitely that the present was not the time for the Government to go in for fresh enterprises. There were too many State activities. The Government was struggling along in an attempt to make both ends meet, and yet it proposed to make a new outlay. He thought the cost of buying the equip-

THE terms of the Bill may be summarised as follow:—

The Board, to be known as the New Zealand Broadcasting Board, is to consist of four persons to be appointed by the Governor-General-in-Council. The chairman, whose salary is to be £600 per annum, is to be appointed for a period not exceeding five years, but each subsequent such appointment is to be for a period not exceeding three years. Three other members are to be appointed, with a salary of £250 a year each; one not exceeding four years, one not exceeding three years, and one not exceeding two years; all subsequent appointments not to exceed three years.

The Board is to be a body corporate in perpetual succession and a Common Seal, and is to be capable of holding real and personal property, and of doing and suffering all that bodies corporate may do and suffer.

Contracts of a nature usually signed and sealed are to be made under the Board's seal, with the exception that verbal contracts involving payments not exceeding £20 may be made.

Members may be removed from office for disability, insolvency, neglect of duty or misconduct, and vacancies may be filled by the Governor-General-in-Council. Any member of the Board who becomes in any way concerned or interested (except as a member of a company with more than 20 members and of which he is not the general manager) in any contract made by or on behalf of the Board, whereby he becomes entitled to receive money or valuable consideration, may be removed from office. Publication in the Gazette of notice of appointment or removal is conclusive evidence of such action. In the event of any incapacity by reason of illness, absence or other cause, substitutes may be appointed to fill members' places at such remuneration as may be determined by the Board.

Members of the Board are to be paid such travelling allowances and expenses as may be approved, all such payments being made out of revenue.

The Board shall determine its own time and place of meeting; three members, of whom one shall be the chairman, to constitute a quorum. The chairman is to have a deliberative vote, and also a casting vote if required.

THE Board is empowered to appoint such officers and servants as it deems necessary for the efficient exercise and performance of its functions and duties. It may also appoint for such purposes and on such conditions as it may decide, standing or special committees, including district committees, to advise the Board in matters affecting the broadcasting service or operations and affairs of the Board.

The members of the Board and staff are not to be deemed permanent officers of the Public Service or subject to the Public Service Act, 1912.

THE Board is constituted to carry on a broadcasting service within New Zealand on and after January 1, 1932, and to develop and improve such service from time to time. To do this the Board may obtain licenses under the Post and Telegraph Act, 1928, and may enter into agreements with the Minister for the payment to the Board of portion of the fees received in respect of licenses. The Board is to have authority to carry on in connection with such broadcasting service any subsidiary business that, in the opinion of the Minister, is ancillary to the carrying on of such a service, and shall have all such other powers not inconsistent with the Act as are reasonably necessary for the effective performance of its duties and functions.

It is further provided that the Board shall, if and when required by the Minister, acquire from him, at such price and upon such terms and conditions as he thinks fit, any broadcasting stations, plant and assets that the Minister may acquire pursuant to any agreement in force at the passing of the Act.

The Board is restricted from holding a dealer's license entitling it to deal in wireless apparatus. The Board is further restricted from seeking any concession, right or privilege from any Government other than the New Zealand Government except with the consent in writing of the Minister.

Further, the Board shall not borrow any money or mortgage or charge any of its property or rights except with the precedent consent in writing of the Minister. Further, the Minister may, for the purpose of enabling the Board to commence its functions, advance to the Board any moneys required for the payment of any preliminary or general expenses, including the salaries payable by the Board before it has sufficient revenue for the payment thereof. The accounts are to be subject to audit as if the moneys of the board were public moneys.

As from January, 1933 (twelve months after taking control) the Board is required to present to the Minister a report upon its proceedings and operations during the preceding year. This report is to contain a balance-sheet and profit and loss account and such information as required.

The Board is authorised to establish a depreciation reserve, to which may be charged any depreciation in the value of the Board's assets and any loss involved in the destruction of or injury to those assets, and any expenditure involved in the replacement of assets. The Board may establish other reserves as deemed necessary and may appropriate this from its revenue with the Minister's consent. Any moneys can, with the approval of the Minister, be invested in New Zealand Government securities.

ment would be nearer £50,000 or £60,000 than £30,000.

Representation of Listeners.

Mr. E. J. Howard (Labour, Christchurch South) protested from another angle—against the method of setting up the board. "We have at present," he said, "a Meat Board, a Dairy Board, a Fruit Board, a Honey Board, and a Highway Board, and all these boards are set up by people interested in the affairs they have to administer." Under the Bill the broadcasting system would be owned by the listeners-in. They would have to buy the stations and pay for the whole outfit, and yet they were not to have one word in the appointment of the members of the board. "I protest," he said, "against the Government giving into the hands of four people, whom it has to select from its friends, a concern which belongs to the people who pay for it." Once the board took charge there would be less control over its actions than there was over the private company to-day. At present questions could be raised in the House about the broadcasting system. The listeners-in would have no redress against the board. It was a shameful proposition, and Mr. Howard said he would prefer the present company's proposal to the Government's proposal.

Mr. A. E. Ansell (Reform, Chalmers) asked what representation the listeners-in would have.

Mr. Donald: "The Government intends to see that they have representation."

Mr. Ansell said that a proportion of to representation on the board, but so far the House had no indication that they would have a voice at all.

The Prime Minister, Rt. Hon. G. W. Forbes, said Mr. Howard had worked himself up, but he asked him to possess his soul in patience until he had seen what was proposed in the Bill. He felt that when members knew what was proposed they would welcome the Government's scheme, and he felt sure that listeners would agree that a step in the right direction had been taken. He felt confident that the system would be improved as a result of the steps proposed. The system would be based on the B.B.C., which had proved entirely satisfactory. It was acknowledged that there would always be complaints about the quality of music, but after all that depended upon one's set and upon one's views about music. In the past the boards set up by the present Government had been the best that could be got, and there would be no exception in the present instance.

Mr. F. Waite (Ref., Clutha): Are you making arrangements for the broadcast of our debates?

The Prime Minister: Well, I hope not for the sake of those who are listening-in.

Full Consideration Necessary.

The Leader of the Opposition, Rt. Hon. J. G. Coates, said it was questionable whether the Government was justified in taking on further responsibilities at the moment. They knew that the outlook was not good, and under the present conditions he would ask the Government to give very careful consideration to any proposal that