

# Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, Mar. 11, 1932

WE are glad to learn that the suggestion advanced two weeks ago that a plebiscite be taken to discover listeners' views on certain aspects of broadcasting has been under consideration by the Radio Broadcasting Board for some time past, and that the decision has now been reached to take such a plebiscite during the forthcoming period for the renewal of licenses. An official statement to that effect is made in another column. Throughout the period March 15 to April 30 each listener on renewing his or her license at any post office in the Dominion, will be supplied with a printed sheet on which is set out in question form the information desired by the Board. This form, on being completed by the listener, is to be posted back to the Board (postage being borne by the Board on delivery of the document), when the replies will be tabulated and summarised. We congratulate the Board, not only upon its decision to undertake this questionnaire, but upon the comprehensive series of questions that has been drawn up. The ground covered in the issues put to listeners is most comprehensive, and undoubtedly, on being properly analysed and summarised, the replies will provide a definite basis of valuable information upon which the Board can formulate its programme policy for the future. The printing of the questionnaire is now in hand, and next week we will be in a position to publish details for the benefit of readers. In the meantime it is sufficient to say that in our opinion this effort to secure a real interpretation of the views of listeners is the most comprehensive that has ever been made anywhere. That claim is based, not of course upon the number of people that will be involved, for that in relation to the millions of listeners in overseas countries will be quite insignificant, but upon the breadth and scope of the questions submitted. We do not know of any plebiscite or vote taken anywhere in the world in relation to radio that has provided so comprehensively for the expression of the views of listeners. Some detailed criticism might be made by special enthusiasts upon one point or another, but in general we are sure the questionnaire will be received with satisfaction and listeners will, we believe, respond cordially to the invitation extended to them to indicate to the Board their tastes and desires.

IN Britain the British Broadcasting Corporation, owing undoubtedly to the immensity of its audience and the reaction of size into labour in analysing any comprehensive questionnaire, made no effort, to the best of our knowledge, at any time to ascertain by a plebiscite the desires of its patrons. Several newspapers, however, did interest themselves in the matter, with interesting results in the particular fields covered. The first paper to conduct any major plebiscite was the "Daily Mail," which in February, 1927, submitted a voting paper to the determination of its patrons. The outcome of that vote was an indication of the popularity of certain features of programmes. For the sake of historical interest it will be valuable to record the preferences shown in that vote. The result was:—

1. Variety and concert parties.
2. Light orchestral music.
3. Military bands.
4. Dance music.
5. Talks—topical, sport and news.
6. Symphony concerts.
7. Solos—vocal and instrumental.
8. Opera and oratorio.
9. Outside broadcasts.
10. Short plays and sketches.
11. Talks—scientific and informative.
12. Glee, choruses and chauties.
13. Chamber music.
14. Revues.

SOME three years later a further voting paper was issued to the British public by the "Daily Express." In general the same classes were submitted, except that the additional feature of religious services was incorporated. This class of broadcast, it is interesting to note, proved so much in demand that it came next in order of preference in the list to vaudeville items. Again, for purposes of comparison, this list is given:—

1. Vaudeville.
2. Religious services (not in the "Daily Mail" February, 1927, list).
3. Orchestral.
4. Talks.
5. Military bands.
6. Lunch-time music.
7. Plays.
9. Queen's Hall concerts (orchestral).

10. Gramophone records (unspecified).
11. News.
12. Children's hour.
14. Outside broadcasts.
15. Operas.
16. Epilogue.
17. Violin recitals.
18. Running commentary.

A LITTLE later in the same year, December to be exact, the "Daily Mail" returned to the question of the B.B.C. programmes, and once more invited its readers to indicate their preferences. On this occasion the issues submitted were limited to five, and the result of the vote was shown in the following table of popularity:—

1. Vaudeville (238,489 votes)
2. Plays.
3. Popular music (including dance).
4. Classical music (including opera).
5. Talks.

The last appeal to the public on the question of which we have knowledge was conducted by the "Daily Herald" throughout February, March and April of last year. This questionnaire was more comprehensive than that of the "Daily Mail" in the preceding year, and resulted in the following indication of comparative popularity:—

1. Vaudeville (variety).
2. Dance music.
3. News.
4. Light opera.
5. Military bands.
6. Opera.
7. Symphony concerts.
8. Gramophone records.
9. Concert parties.
10. Talks.
11. Sports commentaries.
12. Plays.
13. Chamber music.
14. After-dinner speeches.

ONE interesting point in these straw votes may be made, and that is that they were returned by newspaper readers, and not exclusively by radio listeners. Many of the voters might not have actually possessed sets, although doubtless they would be more or less frequent listeners. In our case the system that is being adopted makes it certain

that only actual licensed listeners will express an opinion, so that a true reflection of the views of those concerned with, and actually paying for, the maintenance of the service, will be secured. In the period of six weeks during which the vote will be taken some 50,000 forms will be issued. At the moment licensed listeners exceed 70,000, but experience shows that there is a definite "lag" in renewals at the beginning of the radio year, and, allowing for that fact, the provision made should be ample to secure finality. A closing date is fixed for the plebiscite, it obviously being impossible to leave the issue open indefinitely. We look forward with much interest to the final summaries that will be secured. A clear-cut indication of the relative weight of public views will be attained, and this will undoubtedly strengthen the hands of the administrators in their determination of the fare to be given. In that respect it is satisfactory to have this indication of the desire of the Board to learn and interpret the wishes of listeners. Thus armed, the Board will be equipped to reply with weight and effect to the representations of special interests. Further, a comparison between the preferences shown by listeners in New Zealand to those revealed by the British votes will be most interesting.

IT is satisfactory to know that the Coverage Commission, comprising Mr. A. Gibbs and Dr. M. A. F. Barnett, is now at work. An invitation was extended to radio societies and others interested to make representations to the commission, and as a result communications came from a number of quarters inviting the commission to visit the localities concerned. Due attention is being paid to all such representations. While the commission will be required to cover the whole ground for itself, it must not be thought that it will be tackling the subject *de novo*. It may be permitted, we think, to reveal that the Post and Telegraph Department has long concerned itself with reception factors in different districts and one of the duties required of its engineers in different parts was to report upon conditions attending reception of all stations available in their area. Mr. Gibbs, as head of the technical side of his department, will thus have had a good grounding on the general question, and will be able to supplement that basis of information with per-