

Government Radio Control—Once More

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ON July 24th Secretary of the Navy Daniels addressed a remarkable letter to the speaker of House of Representatives, which is reprinted in full on another page.

We had thought that Government radio control was at a rest for a while when certain radio bills defeated last year. It seems however to be a pastime in Washington to sponsor Government Control radio every month or so, at least so it looks to us. The writer has pointed out in his previous articles that the Radio Act of 1912 has been found ample for all requirements, be they Government, commercial or amateur. Daniels speaks in his letter of “*assigning certain belts wave lengths for the exclusive use of these services.*” He immediately corrects himself by saying that “*as a of fact such allotment of wave length is coming about thru International Agreement.*”

Aside from this, there has been practically no interference before the war because the commercial stations, by agreement, operated on certain wave lengths and got very well. Further down, Mr. Daniels says “*standardized practises are being worked out so that a ship of any in the world will work without difficulty with the shore station.*”

If all this is so, why does Mr. Daniels desire radio control at all? Again the Secretary reminds us that “*during periods of strained relations, as well as during the war, direct Government control and operation would be only safe and effective control and operation, as the personnel would be subject at all times to Government supervision and discipline.*”

We heartily agree with Mr. Daniels, and the past has shown that the Navy Department certainly knew business when it took in hand the entire radio situation the United States, BUT THIS WAS DONE WITHOUT GOVERNMENT CONTROL, and this phase was fully covered by Radio Act of 1912. If there were another war, the present radio law would again work as well as in the past war.

After carefully perusing the Secretary’s communication we fail to find any new argument in favor of ownership, or control of radio communication in the United States. The same ground was gone over very carefully last December, and the

committee who then investigated the radio situation found that the Radio Act of 1912 was ample in all its provisions and that new legislation was required nor wanted.

As the Radio art progresses, laws to regulate the art become of less and less import, and if radio cannot work out its own salvation, it certainly will never amount to much. When the telephone first appeared, there was more interference than there is today in Radio. It was found that wires running parallel to each other, due to induction, caused untold interference; it was then almost to talk to anyone ten miles away without hearin six seven people all talking at the same time. Placing wires in a small cable was an impossibility. Suppose the Government had then stepped in and said, "The telephone situation is intolerable. There is too much interference and to do away with it, the Government proposes to take over all wires!" The Government could readily have done so, but wisely refrained The telephone art worked out its own salvation and today there is no interference.

In radio exactly the same situation prevails As far as the bug-a-boo interference is concerned, radio will work out its own remedies. Great strides have been made in the past few years, particularly during the war, and the next ten years will certainly show a complete revolution. The word "interference" will he laughed at.¹

The whole radio situation is so obviously simple at the present time that we cannot comprehend why the powers that be in Washington do not realize this and forget all about Government radio control for a while. The amateurs are using the lowest step in the wave-length ladder. Next come the commercial stations covering small distances After them come the long distance trans-oceanic stations with their long wave lengths necessary due to the great distances. There is now very little interference between all of these, and what interference there is is mainly due to inefficient personnel, or inadequate apparatus, or both.

As to Government control of radio, we are certain that the country wants none of it at present after its unsatisfactory experiment in Government ownership of the telegraph, telephone, and cable lines just returned. And after its more or less disastrous experiment in Government control of the railroads of the country, we believe our legislators will think twice before attempting radio Government control at present.

If the country is sensitive about anything, it certainly is so to a high degree of radio, which has such unlimited possibilities, and which has caught the popular fancy more than anything else in recent years. We are certain that when the radio fraternity reads Secretary Daniels' letter an instant bowl of distress will go up and Washington will be deluged with letters of protest, the same as happened last year when amateur radio was threatened with extermination.

¹See the editorial two months later, "The Freedom of the Ether," (Nov. 1919) on the resolution of this situation. If it's as nicely worded, included, but otherwise, it's enough to cite here and leave it at that.

And exterminated the amateur surely will be if Mr. Daniels has his way.

As for ourselves, we feel not disturbed as to the future outlook. We addressed a communication to the Senator from New York, Hon. J. W. Wadsworth, Jr., and his answer to our inquiry as to the next step of the Government re Mr Daniels' recommendation was as follows:

The Committee on Merchant Marine of the House of Representatives, to which Secretary Daniels' letter was referred, does not expect to take any action on radio control in the immediate future.

We sincerely trust that this may be the case, and we hope to report before long the abandonment of Government control of radio.