

FARMER DIRECTS AUSTRALIAN RADIO

Interview With Chairman of Commission

IT is not unheard of that a farmer should be a preacher or a preacher a footballer or boxer. There was a farmer in our recently disbanded War Cabinet who had passed through a Theological College, and a recent Governor-General was a world authority on pigs. But prepared as we are in New Zealand for versatility in high places, it was a surprise last week when R. J. F. Boyer, Chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, walked into our office after participating as a delegate in a Conference of religious workers, and confessed before he left to a University Degree in Arts and the Presidency of Australia's National Council of Graziers. Of course we pounced on him with pad and pencil and wish we could now tell our readers all he told us. But men in high places may not often speak in raised voices, and our readers must be content with a few of the crumbs that fell from the table.

ONE of our first questions was about Church broadcasting. We told Mr. Boyer it was a live issue here at the moment. How did Australia go about it?

"Well it's done in Australia mainly as you do it here, by relaying ordinary services. But we have a Religious Director, Kenneth Henderson, whose job is to look after the programming of religious broadcasts, and also to prevail on the Churches wherever he can to develop a special technique for radio. In my view, if you're going to broadcast a service, then you need a special service. At first the Churches resisted the whole idea. They just wanted us to stick a microphone in a church while a service was going on. But now they've got to the stage of being enthusiastic about either of the two alternatives that are possible—a studio service, or a specially modified service in a church with the ordinary congregation. They're not merely reconciled—they're actually enthusiastic about it now. Henderson goes round and persuades them to keep in mind what goes well on the air and what doesn't. I talked on this subject at Christchurch this morning actually—only a few hours before, Mr. Boyer had been speaking at the National Conference of Churches in Christ's College—"and I proposed a third approach to the question: the possibility, or rather, the necessity, of putting over a spiritual message in non-ecclesiastical terms. We've had some series of talks by laymen, some of the best brains in Australia, Walter Murdoch, Dr. Carrington, and others. There was one series 'Life Means This to Me,' and later we had one called, I think, 'Death Means This to Me' and so on."

Controversy on the Air

"Do the Rationalists get their share of broadcasting time in Australia?"

"Well we take the view that a really representative group, if it has something to say, has a right to say it, and we put them over just the same. But the rationalists do not take their turn with the Churches. They get their chance in our controversies of the air. Have you heard our 'Forum of the Air' by any chance?"

It happened that we had not only heard of it, but a member of our staff had listened to one session that had proved very controversial, in which Dame Enid Lyons, Colin Clark (an economist and a Catholic), and Dr. Norman Haire had discussed in public and on the air the

whole question of birth control. Mr. Boyer laughed when we reminded him of some of the things we had heard said.

"Yes, there was a hot subject for you," he said. "Well last week we had one, 'Is the atomic bomb the end of civilisation?' and this week I think it's to be 'Is Full Employment the Road to Serfdom?' There's another one."

Mr. Boyer played with his cigarette a moment, then went on.

"Well we think it's a service to the people to get some of the best minds in the country to open themselves out



Spencer Digby photograph
R. J. F. BOYER

"We don't discourage criticism . . ."

on topics that are right in the public's own mind at the moment. Many people are reading *Full Employment* just now while others are reading *The Road to Serfdom* and we try to give them a good lively argument about a live issue."

"Do you find opposition to the principle of the thing—to the use of the air for controversy? Or do your listeners demand it?"

Mr. Boyer seemed genuinely surprised at the suggestion that people might oppose the idea.

"We only get into hot water," he said, "if we appear to lean one way. But we're as careful as we can be. And we put both sides on the air at once, and the public are present—they can even interject, and that goes over the air too. Some of the Forums have been held in comparatively small auditoriums,

but others have been in the big Town Halls."

Mr. Boyer, among the several things he can be called, is a grazier. He was president for a term of the Graziers' Association of Australia. We asked him therefore if farmers in Australia look to the radio for instruction.

"First of all they look for the news. That's very important. Many of them are very far from newspapers, and when they get their printed news it may be several days old. So they're very keen on our news services. And they make a lot of use of our educational services too. But there's a real problem there. A great deal of the inland is too far from us to get adequate reception on medium wave—lots of them, if you look at that map on the wall there, may be almost as far from our medium wave transmitters as you are from them here in Wellington. So they need our shortwave stations. We have twelve major stations, two in each main city, and a number of regional transmitters, which don't originate programmes—they merely relay the State programme or the National programme. And then we have shortwave stations in Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth. And how those lonely bush dwellers live on it! That's why our news service is so important."

"There is harmony now with the newspapers over the question of the supply of news?"

"Pretty well. No final agreement yet, but the papers have now realised that radio news is not a threat to printed news at all."

Land Settlement

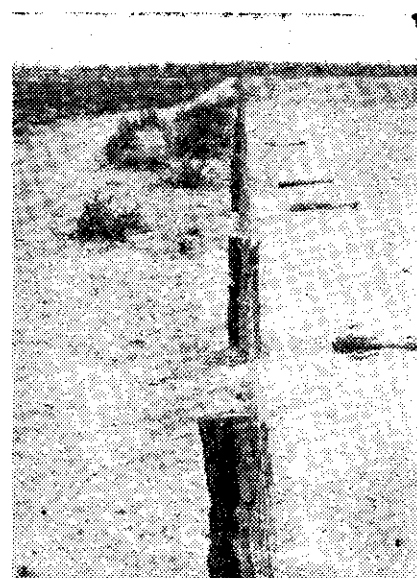
We turned again from Mr. Boyer, Chairman of the ABC, to Mr. Boyer, past president of the Graziers' Association. We wanted to know something about post-war land settlement for returning men.

"Well—there are lots of schemes. But it's very hard. We had a pretty bad doing after the last war. In all the semi-arid areas there's no return from the land for perhaps years. I know; I went through it. I started off from the jump 500 miles inland."

"Is there still a chance for the right kind of man by his own efforts to become a farmer?"

"Yes. There are places where that is possible. What's to be done with the northern territory I don't know, but there's some good tableland unoccupied there that could be made useful if some big developmental work was done first. But the success of such schemes anywhere would depend largely on water conservation. Probably the best prospects for the man with little capital lie in intensive cultivation. Still, the door isn't by any means closed to a man with limited capital who's prepared to bend his neck and get into the job. But it might be years before he gets any return for his labour and they may be heartbreaking years of drought."

We asked about schemes for turning water inland that now flows out to sea.



Poor Australian farmland: "In all the semi-arid areas there's no return for perhaps years"

Could there be anything in these? Mr. Boyer shook his head gravely. He hadn't heard such plans seriously discussed. Anyhow he had no faith in them. Some water that now flows east could be made to flow west, but it would soon disappear.

Did wells offer no possibilities?

"No. You can't irrigate with wells. There's a terrific evaporative factor inland—12 to 15 feet a year in some places. So to work an irrigation scheme you'd have to supply about three times as much water as you expected to use."

Radio and Education

When we had finished with our land questions, we came back to the Chairman of the ABC with some more broadcasting queries. Those back country radio listeners—was there any form of University Extension in operation for them?

"Nothing specifically directed to inland listeners, but we make a feature of talks on economic and social issues. They all come in the category of what you could call 'Adult Education.' And there are discussion groups with pamphlets printed for them in advance. We also have a Youth Session—catering for the young folk who have just left school. As a matter of fact in January next we're to have a nation-wide conference in Canberra on radio and education. We'll discuss both the possibilities and the limitations—the latter are just as important. Music, history, the teaching of drama, all these, from the kindergarten upwards, will come up for discussion."

We had another question ready: "Do you get any criticism for importing overseas artists at big figures?"

"Some. But there's so much appreciation now of the effect of these imported men on local conditions that criticism is disappearing. Men like Sargent, for example, who's conducting there now, do such a lot of good by stimulating interest that the Australian musicians have realised that visiting artists create more chances for them. The more interest there is, the more chances for our own

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