

FROM CALM TO TEMPEST

Hurricane Progress of International Radio

"AT a time when so many nations are eager to engage in international broadcasting, let us remember that cultural democracy is a part of political democracy. If programmes are honest and well done, a multiplicity of voices is better than a few."

THAT statement was part of the opening address by William Benton, United States Assistant Secretary of State, when the International High Frequency Broadcasting Conference started its sittings in Atlantic City, U.S.A., a few weeks ago. This conference, which is still going on, is subsidiary to the International Telecommunications Conference at which 68 countries are represented. Two officers of the New Zealand Post and Telegraph Department are delegates at the International Telecommunications Conference. They are H. W. Curtis (principal of the Telegraph Division) and T. Clarkson (Engineer, Radio Division). They are also representing the NZBS at the High Frequency Broadcasting Conference.

William Benton, whose talk was called *Voices Across the Seas*, said that it was not too much to say that the future of international broadcasting—the future of the world's most potent instrument for advancing understanding among peoples—could hinge upon the wisdom, persistence and patience of the conference.

Growth of Shortwave

"In less than two chaotic decades international broadcasting has grown from a speck on the horizon to a hurricane that surges through the heavens. Seventeen years ago there were only three shortwave transmitters in Europe devoted to international broadcasting. By 1934 the German shortwave station at Zeesen was receiving 10,000 letters a year from listeners scattered throughout the world, and fewer than 30 per cent. of them in the German language. By 1938 several other countries, notably the United Kingdom, Italy, the Soviet Union, and Japan had entered the field of international broadcasting. Not till 1942 did the U.S. enter the field in anything but a minor scale.

"The war gave international broadcasting its greatest impetus. Since high frequency broadcasting was the only medium of information, or of propaganda, not subject to control at frontiers, or at battlefronts, all of the warring nations tried to make the fullest use of it to influence neutrals, to sustain morale in occupied countries, and to break down the morale of the enemy. The number of shortwave transmitters in operation at the peak of the war was perhaps as high as 800.

Radio as Instrument for Peace

"Many military leaders have testified to the power of broadcasting as a weapon. And we have only to remember the thousands of men and women who were executed for listening to 'verboten' transmitters to sense again the



WILLIAM BENTON

drama of those days, and the life-and-death value put upon sending and receiving foreign broadcasts. Yet it is not the mushroom growth of international broadcasting during the war that is the most significant part of our story. The significant decisions for us here assembled came after the war, with the realisation that broadcasting can be an unprecedented instrument for peace.

"There has been no substantial reduction in the volume of international high frequency broadcasting since the war's end. There were, on August 1 this year, 739 high-frequency transmitters in operation around the globe. We in the United States State Department estimate that there are to-day 28,700,000 receiving sets outside the U.S. capable of receiving shortwave signals.

No Restrictions

"Radio is not hampered by such familiar barriers to the flow of printed or pictorial material as remoteness from urban centres, restrictions on monetary exchange, shortages of paper or film stock, tariffs or international cartel arrangements; or even by the barrier of illiteracy. . . . No less important is the fact that radio is not subject to censorship at national boundaries.

"We are not unmindful that international broadcasting has been and can be used for spreading lies and distortions and for engaging in international slander; this we deplore. Because they are so scarce, broadcasting channels differ from all other media of mass communication. If printing presses or motion film projectors are used to spread misunderstanding on a world scale, the number of presses and projectors can be multiplied indefinitely, and the bad effects of one can be offset by the good effects of others.

"But when an international broadcast frequency is debased and polluted all of us are infected and the disease is hard to combat. I adjure this conference, as it proceeds with its task, to remember, when the issues seem complicated and difficult, or when they seem overly technical, or even trifling, that the work you are doing is one of the noblest efforts men can make—to help to lay a foundation for the structure of peace, and to lay it for that noblest of structures, the peace that springs from understanding."

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