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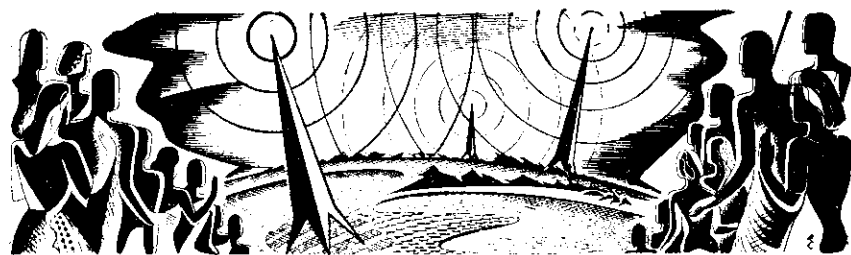
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CLEARING THE AIR

International Convention on Wavelengths

SOMETHING a little different
in international conferences
has just closed after three
months of continuous negotiation
in Denmark. Twenty-five coun-
tries have signed a new conven-
tion laying down the wavelengths that
may be used for broadcasting by each
country, and the power of the trans-
mitters that may work on those points
on the dial. The conference was dis-
tinguished by the fact that the U.S.S.R.

has signed up (al-
though there were
frequent threats to
success because of
east-west differ-
ences particularly between the occupy-
ing powers over the radio coverage of
Germany), and it is curious to read
that the dissenting powers were the
small voices of Austria, Egypt, Ice-
land, Luxembourg, Sweden, Syria, and
Turkey. But the overcrowding of the
usable waveband for broadcasting is not
a thing that can be settled by bearish
non-co-operation because the interferer
is himself interfered with to his own
extent. Hence presumably this exem-
plary agreement. The Post Office
describes it as a "considerable achieve-
ment in international co-operation."
That may be flattering it; it was a case
of co-operate, or else—however, that is
as may be.

Perhaps radio owners who are
accustomed to the free and easy ether
over the Pacific and the Tasman Sea
will hardly appreciate the necessity for
this kind of thing until they have some
idea of what happens when you twist
a dial on your radio in England. For
one thing, the neat and spacious plac-
ing of stations on round figures—540
kilocycles, 650, 720, 800 and so on, is
not possible here. Between 4YZ and
the projected Rotorua station, for
instance, a New Zealander waking to
find himself in Europe would discover
something like this on his radio:

722 kc. Hilversum (Holland), Leipzig,
Lisbon.
731 kc. Monte Carlo, Seville, Tallinn
(Estonia).
740 kc. Munich.
749 kc. Marseilles, Leningrad.
758 kc. Warsaw, Istanbul, Madrid.
767 kc. Scottish Regional, Paris, Stalino
(U.S.S.R.).
785 kc. Leipzig.
795 kc. Barcelona, Jerusalem.
804 kc. Welsh Regional, Salonika.

Now it's plain that where stations
double up on one frequency, they have
been far apart; but the frequencies
themselves are close, and many of the
transmitters are very powerful. In the
south-east corner of England you are as
close to Paris, Brussels, and Amster-
dam as Christchurch is to Wellington—
and the transmitters there are all fairly
powerful. So you get them well in the
daytime.

But daylight goes, and a natural
phenomenon occurs—a thing known as
the Heaviside layer comes down in
altitude, making radio waves bounce
better and go further, and the nightly
lowering of this curtain reproduces a
microcosm of world affairs. A wave-
band that was spacious and clear by day
—when the BBC, Holland, Belgium,
Paris, and Hamburg, are all wide apart
and clear as 2YA—becomes, as you
twiddle over it, a howling dissension of
tongues.

By Airmail — Special to
"The Listener" from London

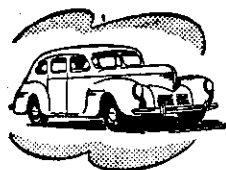
In the brief list
given above, Hilver-
sum, Munich, and
both of the Leipzig
stations are at pre-
sents recorded as using over 100 kilowatts

(2YA uses 60). The Paris station which
shares Scotland's wavelength is lower in
power, but obviously no amount of plan-
ning can get round the nightly problem,
"international co-operation" or not.

The last effective allocation plan was
made at Lucerne in 1933, and some
nations were then technically behind-
hand. Now they have caught up, and
every nation's actual needs exceed what
can be granted without chaos. "Con-
sequently," says *The Times*, "agreement
has been made possible only by nations
from all parts of Europe accepting less
than their full requirements."

The new agreement does not take
effect until March, 1950, which will,
presumably, give everyone time to
make technical adjustments—if techni-
cal adjustments are the only ones the
nations of Europe are making in 1950.

The U.K. at present has 11 wave-
lengths including one on the "long"
band that New Zealand does not even
need to use—from 540 kilocycles down
to 150. English radio sets are equipped
to receive on this band, and the Light
programme, for instance, is on it. One
characteristic is that a station on it
spreads out wide, over almost a whole
twist of the knob, on some sets. The
new agreement will give the U.K. 14
wavelengths (still including one long).
But the BBC has already had to "take
into temporary use" (in the words of
The Times—the Russians would have
another word for it) two wavelengths
that were allotted to other countries in
1933. So the nett gain will be one
wavelength. In some cases increased
power may be used. The chief effect, it
is hoped, will be that the Third Pro-
gramme will become audible in all parts
of the country. The Copenhagen confer-
ence was not concerned with shortwaves,
or ultra-shortwaves (television and FM
radio). These are to be discussed at
Mexico City next month.



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