



LEFT: Creed teleprinters at the Chief Post Office, Wellington. The operators are, alternately from left to right, senders and receivers

or telegraph from the outlying polling places to the district returning officers, who send on progress totals at intervals to the Chief Electoral Officer in Wellington. The progress totals telegrams, absentee vote telegrams, and press messages, are received in the Wellington instrument room, a chattering hive of a place full of teleprinters, swathes of teleprinter tape, and a kind of casual, accustomed air of concentrated activity. One man types like lightning while two more lean over him and talk quietly, their voices inaudible to the unpractised ear against the continuously high noise level of the machines.

The Electoral Department officers stationed in the Wellington Post Office, to whom the results go first, are ambitious only to be good public servants, efficient and anonymous. On election day the Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for about four thousand polling places, with a total staff of fifteen thousand, tied back to seventy-six returning officers. Each returning officer sends perhaps six progress results during the evening, and a final result, making in all about six hundred telegrams.

#### FIRST BROADCAST

THIS is enough to keep at full stretch the fifteen Broadcasting Service people who will be on duty in the Post Office. Nowadays announcers work half-hour shifts on this assignment, but Clive Drummond, who has been broadcasting election results since 1926, has on several occasions worked right through the evening on his own, talking almost continuously for nearly five hours. Mr. Drummond thinks the system is now about as efficient as it could be. "The Post and Telegraph Department think of everything," he said. "Last time they fastened back all the doors in the rooms where we were, so that the microphones wouldn't pick up any slams. As a result we were sitting in tearing draughts, and most of us got the 'flu.'"

In 1926 there was practically no organisation, but plenty of enthusiasm. Mr. Drummond set up his microphone on the verandah of Fuller's Theatre, where one of the newspapers had a result board. The transmitter he used was built in their spare time by some keen Post and Telegraph people, working to plans provided by Professor Jack, of the University of Otago Physics Department. As broadcasters they had no official position, they represented nobody but themselves. They did it for fun, and the gear they used was more than a little crude. Mr. Drummond, filling in a quiet period with a description of polling booths, pointed out that in the suburbs they were often located in churches or schools, but in the country they might be on the verandah of a private home. He had occasion to say "booth" several times, and a few days later received a letter from an outraged voter who considered it scandalous that when a poll on licensing was being held, a radio announcer should openly advocate having the booze in schools, churches, and the

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## THE WORKING MINORITY

ON Election Night it is by now a socially accepted custom to place the base of the spine in an armchair, elevate the feet comfortably against the mantelpiece, support the head and neck with a soft cushion, and still the body completely except for the tongue which plays a continuous obbligato round the theme of the Results coming over the radio.

In order that the mass of citizens may assume such a relaxed position on November 30, a minority will give up all thought of ease between the hours of seven and midnight, or later, on election evening. The centre of this violent minority activity will be the second floor of the Wellington Chief Post Office, and the man who sees that the activity is purposeful is R. S. Clarkson, the Assistant Principal of the Telegraph Division.

Elections are Mr. Clarkson's speciality. By the end of this year he will have wound up his organisation three times in twelve months, once for the gaming and liquor poll, once for the referendum on compulsory military training, and once for the parliamentary elections. He will have wound it up, stood by while it ticked regularly and precisely, and then taken it to pieces and stored the moving parts for future use.

Mr. Clarkson ordinarily has his desk at one end of a large room where there are many other desks. Hanging within easy reach of the occupants of the lesser

desks are bundles of red and green tape (in the proportion of about 75 per cent. to 25 per cent. respectively) for all the world like fanciful horses' tails detached from the horse. But the election night organisation Mr. Clarkson has set up is elastic, easily adjustable, and most unlike the average citizen's conception of anything tied together with red tape.

Mr. Clarkson's organisation collects results first for the Chief Electoral Officer, and secondly for the radio and the press. The Electoral Department will have a staff of 24 clerks on the second floor of the Post Office. One team of clerks is assigned to recording progress results as they come by phone from Wellington electorates, and a second team collects and notes the telegrams sent by returning officers from electorates outside Wellington. Each man in the teams deals with a group of electorates arranged in alphabetical order. Copies of the advice dockets these clerks make out are passed on to the Broadcasting Service, the press, the officers on the



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result board, and to Ministers who may be in the building at the time.

#### FOR WHOM THE TOLL BILLS?

THE staffs of the country's two thousand post offices expect to handle about a quarter of a million words on election night. Messages are sent by phone