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How A Feature Programme Is Compiled

THAT very successful and popular English broadcaster, Vernon Bartlett, tells that when he was doing a series of weekly broadcasts on world affairs for the BBC, there were people who said to him, "What a marvellous job, a nice fat cheque and only a-quarter of an hour's work a week." The truth was that the compilation of this weekly broadcast took him twenty hours of reading and preparation. Of course, there are no people in New Zealand quite as unintelligent as this, but probably few outside the business understand how much preparation is required for radio talks and programmes, just as you need to have been behind the scenes to realise what precedes the production of a stage play.

There was a particularly good illustration of this in the "Year at War" programme which the NBS broadcast on September 2, the eve of the first anniversary of the declaration of war by Britain against Germany. This programme, by the way, has drawn many compliments from listeners. One of the members of the staff of the NBS who was concerned in preparing the programme was struck by the amount of work involved, and made a calculation of the number of hours that were worked. To the uninitiated it may seem almost incredible.

First the Idea

Let us just trace the steps in preparing a programme like "A Year at War." First of all there's the idea. Somebody proposes that the Service should mark the first anniversary with a review of the war events of the year. This is put forward at a staff conference and preliminaries discussed. The general form that the programme will take is agreed upon. There will be a prologue covering the events leading up to September, 1939, and then a long programme covering the war in dramatised form. When we say "dramatised," we do not mean invented—the script-writers are to stick strictly to historical fact.

Then the Frame-Work

The next step is to get a frame-work for the script-writers to build upon. One member of the staff sets to work to construct this frame-work by putting down what he thinks are the most important events and dates for the years preceding the war, right up to the time of writing. Having followed the diplomatic history of the pre-war years and the struggle itself, he is able to draw upon his memory for a good deal of this skeletonised review, but of course he has to look up a large number of references. He attempts to keep a sense of proportion in his choice of war events. Well, this preliminary work takes ten or twelve hours. Following this there are one or two more conferences, and the skeleton review is handed to two script-writers. Meanwhile a start is made with the choice of recordings to be used in the programme. The writer of the summary consults with one of the keepers of the records and chooses recorded speeches by Mr. Chamberlain and other leaders for incorporation in the story. This, by the way, is a fairly slow process. You may want, say, one minute from a statesman's speech, and you may have to play the whole recording over before you get it.

Now the Script-Writers

The script-writers get to work on what is to be the finished product. They work

on the summary supplied them and consult the compiler of it, but their work is highly detailed. They have before them a newspaper file for the year and files of weekly journals covering the war. Every now and then they want to know something, and they ask their colleagues. What, for example, was the exact text of President Roosevelt's neutrality proclamation just after the war started? A member of the staff goes up to the American Consulate and is courteously supplied with the information in a few minutes. Another point may be settled by reference to one of the libraries in the city, and so on. The recordings made of war speeches both in England and here are filed and indexed by the Service, and the script-writers and their assistants delve into these for material. Listeners will remember that a feature of the programme was the careful selection of passages from historic speeches.

108 Hours

How long do you think this writing of the script took? Well, it took these two writers fifty-four hours, that is 108 hours of individual work. They finished up by working right through one night. If you don't believe this, here is one fact—another member of the staff was asked to find a particular passage in one of J. B. Priestley's talks from England. He spent an hour and a-half in playing over Priestley recordings for the sake of one brief extract of about thirty words.

And Still More

But this was only half way, so to speak. The script has to be revised, checked up, submitted to the censor, and re-typed for production. Then it has to be recorded. Preparations for the recording mean choosing a cast for the various voices, getting suitable music and effects, and marking the script for production. The producer and his assistant spent thirty-six hours doing all this, which is seventy-two individual hours, and this did not include all the time spent in typing. The actual recording, with a cast of fourteen, took nine hours, which, assuming that the fourteen were there all the time, is another 126 individual hours. Then there's the time of the technicians on the recording staff, say another 28 hours.

In short, some twenty-five people did a total of about 350 hours' work in order to provide a programme of one hour and a-half for New Zealand listeners.

Land-Tax Now Due

The Commissioner of Taxes draws the attention of taxpayers to the notification appearing in to-day's issue that the due date of payment of Land-tax for the current year is on Tuesday, October 1, 1940, and that the demands will be posted on or about September 24.

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