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Australia Remodels Her Wireless System

SPECIFICATIONS for the tender for the right to purvey programmes over the Australian Radio system have now been issued by the Commonwealth authorities and are reviewed in the article below by a writer in the "Sydney Morning Herald." The proposals are far-reaching and will have a definite interest for New Zealand listeners.

THE specification issued by the Post Office Department for tenders for an entertainment and news programme for all Australia contains some provisions that will lead to the improvement of broadcasting, but there are others of a doubtful character. The results, in the long run, may justify the new experiments, but there is also a possibility that they may not.

In the proposed new financial arrangement, the Post Office Department has the big end of the stick. The allocation of listener's license fee of 24/- each under this contract will be as follows:—To the contractor for the provision of programmes and copyright fees, 12/-; to the Post Office Department for running the "A" stations and the relay stations, 8/-; and for administration expenses in the collection and disbursement of the license fees, 1/-; and to Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia), Limited, for royalties for the use of its patents, 3/-.

UNDER the present system of private ownership of stations, the cost of maintenance and engineering expenses does not average more than from 3/6 to 4/- per license in New South Wales and Victoria. The amount would be slightly higher in the other States, owing to the smaller number of license holders. The proposal of the Post Office Department is that in addition to the present "A" stations, there are to be eventually 16 additional relay stations. The cost of the relay stations and the provision of the land lines linking the relay stations with

the "mother" stations in the different capital cities, is to be provided by the Post Office Department out of that 8/-.

It is realised that the relay stations cannot be fully operative for at least three years from now. The specification states that "the tentative constructive programme, if realised, will make available three relay stations for the first year, six more in the second year, and seven further in the third year." In the interval the cumulative effect of the 8/- per annum will be considerable. There are at present nearly 300,000 licensed listeners in Australia. It is anticipated that this number will be exceeded when the new contract becomes operative. That will give the Post Office Department £180,000 a year for the provision of broadcasting stations throughout the Commonwealth. The proposal at the outset is that the present "A" stations shall be rented by the Department. On the basis of present charges, the Department should make a profit of at least £100,000 out of the hire of the transmitting equipment of existing stations for the first year, and probably £75,000 for the second year, and £50,000 the third year. The cost of running the relay stations is at present problematical, but there is a fear that the Department, to safeguard its own interests, has ruthlessly curtailed the cost of providing satisfactory entertainment programmes.

Curtailment of Hours.

ONE of the most serious matters, from the listeners' standpoint, is that the periods for broadcasting from the two

"A" stations in Sydney are to be seriously curtailed, as from July next and from the two Melbourne stations from August next. On the existing schedule 2FC and 2BL conjointly are on the air for about 8600 hours a year. Under the new contract the two stations combined need only broadcast for a period of 5840 hours. This is a reduction for Sydney of 2760 hours per annum, or almost one-third. The two "A" stations in Melbourne are on the air about 7000 hours yearly, so that Victorian listeners will lose 1260 hours annually.

Owing to the reduced payment for the provision of programmes it may be taken for granted that the new contractor will give listeners the number of hours' broadcasting specified for in the contract, and no more. Sydney and Melbourne listeners are being sacrificed for the sake of prospective listeners in other States, seeing that in Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth, and Hobart the average number of hours' broadcasting is to be extended to ten daily. The difficulty in those cities in the past has been that it was not possible to get local talent for ten hours' broadcasting daily, and to put phonograph records on the air for the intervening periods would have run the copyright fees higher than the revenues of the respective stations justified.

The New Programmes.

STRINGENT conditions are provided in the terms of the proposed contract to ensure that programmes of merit and variety are put on the air. In each State

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