

Two Years of Empire Broadcasting

A Survey of the Progress of the Empire Broadcasting Service Since 1932

The B.B.C. Empire broadcasting service as we know it to-day, celebrated its second anniversary on December 19. The seeds of the present service, however, were sown many years ago.

ON November 5, 1927, largely as the result of requests from many hundreds of listeners throughout the British Empire, the B.B.C. inaugurated a series of daily transmissions from an experimental short-wave transmitter at Chelmsford (G5SW). By 1929 a considerable number of reports and data with reference to these transmissions had been received, which led to the conclusion that an immediate expansion of the existing facilities was desirable and the need for a more adequate and comprehensive programme service to the Empire was becoming increasingly urgent.

THE inadequacy of the experimental service from G5SW was largely due to two factors:—

1. This station was capable of transmissions on one wavelength only.
2. The times of transmission, which were limited, made regular reception in many parts of the Empire—owing to difference in time between transmission and reception—impracticable.

In 1931, therefore, the B.B.C. decided that in view of the urgency of the problem, they must assume the financial responsibility of the venture and proceed with the establishment of an Empire broadcasting service along more concrete lines. Two high-power short-wave transmitters were, therefore, erected at Daventry, which were capable of transmission on a series of different wavelengths. Thus the reception of British programmes in all parts of the globe was ensured.

On December 19, 1932, the new Empire broadcasting service was in-

augurated. A separate Empire programme department was established, which was responsible for the creation and execution of programmes at all hours of the day and night to ensure reception at convenient hours for local listeners in all parts of the world. A daily service of five separate transmissions now provides reception in the following parts of the world during the evening hours (local time):—

Transmission 1: Antipodes and Pacific Islands.

Transmission 2: Malaya and Far East.

Transmission 3: India and the East.

Transmission 4: African Continent and Near East.

Transmission 5: Canada and American Continent.

At the same time it is appreciated that many listeners receive programmes which are not specifically intended for reception in their area.

The success of the new service was almost immediately apparent, and during the last two years the Empire programme department of the B.B.C. has grown beyond recognition. To-day an Empire programme director is responsible to the director of Empire and foreign services for the creation and execution of all programmes transmitted from Daventry. His staff includes an assistant, a producer, a music director, who controls the B.B.C. Empire Orchestra, two news editors, and announcers, whose voices have been specially trained to insure their satisfactory transmission and reception on short wavelengths. Another section of the department is responsible for handling the enormous overseas correspondence involved, and an Empire information officer with an assistant and staff is responsible for the transmission of all information relative to the Empire broadcasting service, not only to the Press throughout the world, but to all interested organisations.

Last, but not least, there is a staff of engineers who are constantly engaged not only in the operation of the two transmitters at Daventry and the studio facilities at Broadcasting House, but in the collection and collation of reports on reception from all parts of the world, which provides the basis for all experiments toward the perfection of transmission and reception. Reports on reception and appreciations of the programmes have been received from almost every corner of the globe. During the past nine months alone, over nine thousand communications of this nature have been received.

The Empire programmes are distinct from those transmitted to British listeners, although the more im-

portant programmes broadcast in Great Britain are relayed to the Empire and, where the times of the Home broadcasts do not coincide with the Empire transmissions, recordings of them are reproduced at convenient times for overseas listeners.

In addition to the news bulletins, market news supplied by the intelligence branch of the Imperial Economic Committee is broadcast weekly. A special feature is made of talks of interest to the Empire, and visitors from overseas are frequent contributors to this important part of the programmes.

IN addition to the very large audience of direct listeners, the following important broadcasting organisations throughout the world, among others, have relayed the programmes of the Empire service for local audiences:—The Australian Broadcasting Commission; the New Zealand Broadcasting Board, the African Broadcasting Company, the Indian State Broadcasting Service, the Post and Telegraph Department of the Government of Ceylon, Cables and Wireless Ltd. (Nairobi), the Government of Southern Rhodesia (Salisbury), the National Broadcasting Company of America, the Columbia Broadcasting System of America. In addition, wireless exchanges situated at Sierra Leone and in the Falkland Islands regularly relay the Empire programmes when practicable.

The Empire broadcasting service is operated at the expense of the B.B.C. without any contribution from the British Government, or, as yet, from the overseas listeners. In addition, no revenue is derived from the transmission of advertisements, as is the practice in other countries. In short, the cost of operating the Empire Broadcasting Service falls directly on the British license holder, who alone contributes to the revenue of the corporation. It may, therefore, be asked what is the practical justification for the Empire Broadcasting Service and what are its objectives? These may be summarised as follows:—

1. Now that the practicability of long-distance wireless transmission has been proved, the B.B.C. has recognised its obligation to provide an adequate broadcasting service to listeners in isolated parts of the Empire. This view has recently been confirmed by the provision of similar services by foreign countries for the benefit of their nationals overseas.

2. It is felt that the time has now been reached when reciprocal broadcasting facilities should be available between Great Britain and all parts of the Empire. Through the medium of the British Empire Broadcasting Service it is now possible for broadcasting organisations in all parts of the world to relay the British programmes, and it is hoped before long that programmes originating overseas will regularly be incorporated in the programmes broadcast in Great Britain. In this connection, programmes from the following centres have already been broadcast to British listeners and relayed by the Empire broadcasting stations to all parts of the Empire:—Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa, Cape Town, Victoria Falls, Sydney, Wellington and Bombay. The co-operation of the Dominion and colonial broadcasting organisations in this connection has been wholehearted.

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