

12 EXCITING MONTHS

By
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*Man Who Once Asked What
Is 1ZB And Soon Found Out*

ALMOST out of the blue, commercial broadcasting came to New Zealand. How it arrived is now history, but the facts are worth briefly recalling.

There was a station in Auckland called "The Friendly Road," run by a man, Mr. C. G. Scrimgeour, who had the biggest personal following in New Zealand of anyone outside the Prime Minister.

On October 2, 1936, "The Friendly Road" was taken over by the Government as 1ZB, the first unit of a commercial broadcasting service in New Zealand.

Early in October the Prime Minister said: "The commercial service in New Zealand will be on the air on October 28."

It was on the air on October 28.

ONLY six months later Station 2ZB was on the air . . . the headquarters of the service were established . . . Station 3ZB was opened. . . Station 4ZB.

All this in the space of twelve months.

It amounted to this: that in twelve months a new Dominion-wide industry had been set up; in eighteen months a revolutionary change, liked by some and disliked by others, had been made in the lives of every person in the Dominion.

Whether liked or disliked, there is one thing that is beyond dispute. The speed of the whole operation had been unparalleled in any other Government service in the country before.

THE problems to be faced were entirely new; there were

no precedents in New Zealand to which the officials in charge could refer. It was a moment for quick thinking and accurate thinking, and long term thinking.

Each problem had to be solved not only in the light of to-day but in the light of things a year ahead. For the service was building just as much for to-morrow as for to-day.

Last week I got some idea of the hectic days of eighteen months ago, on the accounting side, from the business manager of the Commercial Service, Mr. W. J. Crowther.

EIGHTEEN months ago Mr. Crowther, member of the Treasury Department in New Zealand, had just come back from three

THIS is the story of the men who looked after the pounds, shillings and pence side of commercial broadcasting. They found themselves in a strange position for Government officials. But they too, on the accounting side, helped to play a part in the gigantic task set the Controller and his officers of establishing a Dominion commercial network in the astonishing space of 12 exciting months.

years' service in Samoa. He took a New Zealand magazine while over there.

In it he remembers he once saw an article about the jamming of "The Friendly Road" and a photograph of

Mr. Scrimgeour. That was all he knew about this side of radio in New Zealand at that stage.

He was very soon to know a lot more.

MR. CROWTHER came back to the Treasury Department early in 1937, and one day he was called in to a conference.

"We want you to go to 1ZB," they told him.

"What is 1ZB?" asked Mr. Crowther, in all innocence.

He found out in the first fortnight he was up there. 1ZB was the embryo out of which was evolving the first Commercial station of the new Commercial service.

THE new business manager found himself plunged into a whirlpool of activity, in which there was little time to come up for breath.

He was a trained accountant and a Treasury official. He was used to careful planning before equally careful acting. He found himself in a situation in which there were accounting problems that had to be dealt with at once, and on the spot.

In all Treasury undertakings organisation comes first and institution comes second. In Commercial broadcasting, institution had come first and organisation had to follow.

He saved himself, so he says, by adopting one strong line of procedure. He argued against everything. When anyone came to him with a suggestion that came under the jurisdiction of his department, he immediately took the negative.

And when they could bring an idea to him and prove in the face of his opposition that it was good, he untied his moneybags.

WITH the other responsible officers in the service, from the Controller down, he worked hard. He worked harder than ever before, but such was the stimulation of the work—the battling with new problems and the joy of finding out how to overcome them—that his health was good (Continued on p. 44.)



W. J. CROWTHER.

... Business Manager to the Commercial Service.