

What the R.B.C. Proposed

A Detailed and Economical Scheme Submitted Last Year

Economic Proposals.

BASED on closer examination of the data concerning population and technical factors, the conclusion was reached that the provision of 100-watt stations, having a high-grade service range of 4 miles, and a rural service range of 27½ miles, and operating on land lines from the main centres as required, would have the effect of expanding the service sufficiently to give a high-grade service to approximately 750,000 people, and a fair service to practically the whole population of the Dominion. It was suggested that these 100-watt stations should be established at the following centres, the figures in parentheses showing the population brought within the range of high-grade service:— Hamilton (19,000), New Plymouth (16,000), Palmerston North (23,000), Wanganui (28,000), Gisborne (16,000), Invercargill (27,000), Timaru (19,000), Greymouth (5000), Nelson (12,000), Rotorua (4000).

In the case of Napier and Hastings (38,000 people), it was proposed to establish a 500-watt station, with a high-grade service range of 10 miles, and a rural service range of 65 miles, on account of their special position. In the case of Greymouth, while a relay station was not justified from a commercial point of view, consideration was suggested because of the screening effect of the Southern Alps. Erection of the stations at Rotorua and Nelson, it was proposed, should be suspended until completion of the others, when further investigation might be made.

Construction to be Spread.

IT was proposed that the scheme should be spread over a construction period of five years for technical as well as economic reasons. From the technical point of view it was recognised that reliance would need to be placed upon the Post and Telegraph Department for the provision of land lines between the main studios and the subsidiary relay stations, capable of transmitting musical programmes, and the provision of these would probably prove more difficult and protracted than the erection of the actual relay stations themselves. Progress was, therefore, dependent upon the capacity of the Post and Telegraph Department to provide transmitting media.

The full success of the scheme was estimated to require not less than 120,000 listeners, which total would only be attained progressively as the service was expanded and maintained at a satisfactory standard.

The company, having submitted this report of the requirements for the provision of a fully satisfactory national scheme, capable of economic operation, was prepared to find the capital necessary for same under a rearrangement of its contract term.

Comparison of Proposals.

THE scheme, as briefly indicated by the Postmaster-General, now favoured by the Government, discards the modest power of 100-watt relay stations operated by land line from central stations, in favour of the establishment of 500-watt independent stations at seven provincial centres. This scheme is obviously more expensive than that originally proposed by the company. Independent stations responsible for their own programmes will require greater building and staff accommodation than subsidiary stations. Their capital cost will be greater, their annual charges greater, and moreover, their copyright charges greater, through royalties being based upon transmissions of independent stations whereas relays count but as one transmission.

In view of the Minister's promise that the Government scheme will be clarified and submitted to Parliament before financial commitments are entered upon, it is unlikely that concrete proposals will be released by the department till next session. Meantime, however, the situation is of sufficient interest, not only to radio listeners, but to taxpayers in general, to warrant full examination. The scheme propounded by the Radio Broadcasting Company was upon a more economical basis than that suggested by the Minister. The company estimated that 120,000 listeners would be required to secure financial stability. The Minister suggests that a more ambitious scheme could be satisfactorily financed upon 100,000 listeners. Having regard to general experience of Government operations it would seem likely that the taxpayer will thus become involved in contributions to the radio service unless a degree of economy not usually obtaining in State operations, is observed.

Editorial Condemnation.

WRITING on the second statement of the Postmaster-General, the New Zealand "Herald" said: "Now the whole scheme has been cast into the melting-pot, Mr. Donald should not be surprised if his conflicting statements lead to a further inference that the original announcement was made before it had been sanctioned by the Government, and that consternation has been caused by his undertaking to involve the State in this hazardous experiment. Even if it be granted that the department's technicians are fully qualified to attend to the technical work at the stations, much remains to be explained. How much capital is to be absorbed by the proposed elaboration of the broadcasting apparatus, and who is to provide it?"

"If the service is to be conducted by private enterprise, will the department give its technical services free, or make a remunerative charge for them? What will be the attitude of the Government if the Broadcasting Company prefers to rely on its own technical staff?"

"Finally, if the State is not to establish a monopoly, is the present Broadcasting Company to be refused a further license and, if so, on what grounds is it to be evicted?"

"Obviously, all these questions should have been considered and answers to them prepared before the Postmaster-General announced changes which he has now cast back into a general confusion out of which it is impossible to discover what the Government or the department proposes to do, or, indeed, whether either of them knows itself what can or should be done."

THE nature of the proposals submitted to the Postmaster-General early in 1929 by the Radio Broadcasting Company was outlined in an article in "The Dominion" during the week. The article read:—

The scheme put forward by the Minister is understood to be an adaptation of a proposal submitted to the Government by the Radio Broadcasting Company in March of last year. The company then pointed out that the existing stations in their situation and power were inadequate to provide perfect national coverage; that extensions were necessary, but that it was prepared to undertake those extensions, provided protection was given for its investment of capital.

When the original proposals for the erection of 500-watt stations in each of the four centres were submitted by the Radio Broadcasting Company to the Western Electric Company (now Standard Telephone and Cables Limited), that company suggested, to make a complete broadcasting scheme for the Dominion, four additional relay stations, situated at New Plymouth, Wanganui, Napier and Invercargill, with an aerial rating of 50 watts and connected by land lines with the main stations, should be provided. These recommendations from so experienced a source led to deeper inquiry.

Subsequently the Post and Telegraph Department reached the conclusion that Wellington, as the centre of the Dominion, should have a station of a power greater than 500 watts, and opened negotiations which led to the establishment of 2YA at a power of 5000 watts. This move was justified by results.

When the time came for raising 4YA to the standard of the other stations, the company, it is understood, verbally offered to make the station of 1000 watts power if radio licenses were established on a point-to-point basis, instead of terminating at March 31 each year.

That proposal was not accepted by the department, and the company in due course proceeded in terms of its contract to establish a 500-watt station at Dunedin.

Effective Range of Stations.

EXPERIENCE throughout the Dominion showed that the rural districts and towns and centres next in importance to the four main centres were not adequately served by the four main stations, simply because of the limited effective range of those stations. From the radio point of view supplementary service was necessary. Experience gained in America showed that stations such as 1YA, 3YA, and later 4YA, of 500-watt power, gave high-grade service up to 10 miles distance, and service sufficient for rural needs up to a distance of 65 miles. Stations of 5000 watts (such as 2YA) gave high-grade service up to 30 miles distance, and rural service up to 160 miles distance.

Examination of the population in the high-grade service area, in New Zealand towns and cities outside the main centres, showed that separate broadcasting stations, with their own studio and individual programmes, were not economically sound, as the revenue from the proportion of listeners likely to be secured would not be sufficient.

The erection of local stations to pick up and rebroadcast the main stations, while commercially practicable, would not, it was considered, give technical efficiency. The preferable course was held to be to establish relay stations operated by land lines from the stations erected in main centres, thus combining technical and commercial possibilities.