

The New Zealand Radio Record

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Home Journal

(Incorporating the "Canterbury Radio Journal.")

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WELLINGTON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 24, 1931.

THE RADIO BOARD.

AT long last the personnel of the Radio Board has been announced by the Postmaster-General, the Hon. A. Hamilton. The Board is to consist of Mr. H. D. Vickery, public accountant, Wellington (chairman), Mr. G. R. Hutchinson, company director, of Auckland, and Mr. L. R. C. Macfarlane, farmer, of Culverden. It will be seen that territorial considerations have been given due weight in arriving at the constitution of the Board. The capital city has been given the chairman; Auckland, with its weight of population in the northern part of the island, has been given a representative; South Island interests will be watched by Mr. Macfarlane.

THE delay that has beset the appointment has been unfortunate from many points of view. The legislation was passed early in November, and had immediate action then been taken it would not have been too soon to permit the Board to investigate the situation to some extent and have a measure of organisation in hand for taking over the service as from January 1. As things have developed, however, one delay after another occurred through pressure of more important national affairs, and the appointment within a fortnight of the end of the year leaves the Board an impossible task in formulating material plans in anticipation of the change over. From the Board's own point of view, possibly this will be somewhat of an advantage, as listeners will be aware from the outset that no dramatic or spectacular change can well be expected. The Board will obviously require a period for the close and considered investigation of the whole service before embarking upon a reorganisation.

IT is of moment to inquire what are the major problems with which the Board will immediately be confronted? Initially it is to be noted that the Board is entrusted with the whole broadcasting service in the Dominion. That creates a different position from anything that has obtained in the past, in that the Board, in addition to administering the YA stations, is required to formulate a policy for the control of the "B" class

stations. This creates an interesting situation, and one which will cause much interest to be focused upon the Board until its policy is formulated.

THE major problems awaiting the Board may perhaps be roughly classified as falling into three phases. First, there is the question of expanding the service. This involves decision as to whether new stations will be erected in provincial centres, either linking with the main centres or working independently of them. Related to that problem is the question of whether those stations will co-operate with or supplant existing "B" class stations, and whether those "B" class stations will be restricted; developed or eliminated. Of those stations there are now some 30. Some give excellent service, using fine equipment to do so. Others are not so well equipped or organised. That problem is one which in itself will involve a great deal of investigation, backed by technical experience and guidance.

THE second major problem may be cited as the programme service itself—whether that is to be extended in the matter of hours and improved in relation to quality. The question of finance will be important here. Listeners have been led to expect an improvement in the quality of the programmes. We trust that that will prove possible, but frankly, except possibly in minor matters, we will be surprised if over a period a really noticeable improvement in quality of the programmes as provided by the talent available in the Dominion can be shown and maintained. It might be possible for the Board to show enterprise by importing artists from abroad, or with the aggressive development of an Empire broadcasting service, as foreshadowed from Britain, there may be an opening for advantageous co-operation with the B.B.C., and the use of programmes either relayed from Britain or recorded and reproduced within the Dominion.

THE questions of expanding the service and improving the programmes are closely involved with finance. At the present time there are some 70,000 listeners yielding a gross revenue of £100,000. The ideal is entertained of reaching within the near future no fewer than 100,000 listeners. In providing the service to reach new centres of population effectively, regard must be had to finance that it be not strained, or that appropriation in capital expenditure does not unduly cripple current allocations for programmes.

IN the third field of problems awaiting the Board are such matters as patents, copyrights, and the current ostensible ban upon the use of gramophone records. This last still awaits determination, and obviously, in view of the notice given, the gramophone companies and the Board must shortly enter upon a parley in the effort to reach an agreement satisfactory to both sides. Certain agreements in relation to patents upon which royalty is paid also, it is understood, expire in the relatively near future, and problems may arise there requiring the close consideration of the Board.

FROM the foregoing brief summary of the problems awaiting the Board, it will be seen that their task is to be no sinecure. High regard for the capacity of the personnel of the Board—particularly that of the chairman—is warranted on the records of past service. On behalf of listeners it can be stated that they enter upon office with the greatest of goodwill from the whole body of listeners, and with high expectations of satisfactory service being rendered. It is realised that time will be required for investigation, clarification of ideas, and the formulation of a constructive policy that can be sustained over a period to show steadily cumulative benefits to all. The fact that the economic position is not at the moment flourishing does not directly affect the Board, in that it still has a satisfactory assured revenue. Nevertheless its measures must have due regard to the economic position because the increase in new listeners that would have been expected from progressive enterprise in normal times might not be attained. 1932 bids fair to be a memorable year in many ways. We trust that from the radio point of view it will mark the inception of a new era in broadcasting which will give satisfaction to the greatest possible number.

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