

## THIRTY YEARS OF RADIO AUSTRALIA

Australia's overseas broadcasting service began on 20th December, 1939, about two months after the outbreak of the second World War, in which Australia had decided to fight on the side the Allies against the Axis powers. An advance party of Australian and New Zealand troops had embarked for the Middle East a few days before, and a larger force was to sail in the following month. It was a strange period in the war; armies were poised for battle, but there were no battles, only preparations for battle. Only the war of words, the attack on people's minds was going on vigorously and in this shortwave radio was proving to be a very effective weapon. Germany was particularly well equipped for this kind of "Psychological warfare", as it came to be called. Her strong transmitters reached across the world, even to Australia. Here were two reasons for the Australian Government's decision that Australia, too, should make its voice heard in the world through shortwave broadcasting. One reason was the need to send out news of home to Australian soldiers, sailors, and airmen serving overseas. The second was the belief that Australia, speaking with an independent voice, could present the Allied point of view effectively, especially to the people of neutral countries, and so help to counter enemy propaganda. As the then Prime Minister of Australia, Mr (now Sir Robert) Menzies put it in the speech he made when opening the national shortwave service "The time has come to speak for ourselves".

"Australia Calling" was the name chosen for the new service. In the beginning it was operated by the Australian Department of Information's Broadcasting Division in Melbourne, which was responsible for policy and talks and news, in partnership with the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which in Sydney provided announcers and translators and controlled the presentation of programmes in English, Spanish, German, Dutch and French. The technical and transmission facilities were in the hands of the Australian Post Office. In 1941 total control passed to the Department of Information in Melbourne. Then, less than a year later a Cabinet decision put the A.B.C. in over-all control and there the service remained until April 1st, 1944, when it reverted to the Department of Information.

The changes in administration did not disturb in any significant way the operations of Australia Calling. Change was determined rather by developments on the international scene. By June, 1941, the only foreign language broadcasts were directed to French and Dutch speaking people in Asia and the Pacific Islands. The dropping of other foreign language broadcasts indicated the first significant change in policy; growing concentration on reaching the peoples of Asia and the Pacific.

When the war moved to the Pacific in December, 1941, psychological warfare became Australia Calling's major preoccupation. In May, 1942, a daily session in Japanese began, and soon after transmissions in Thai, Indonesian and Madarin Chinese were introduced. Australia Calling analysed and answered enemy propaganda, spoke about Allied preparations for a counter-offensive, and gave actual, objective news—no matter how bad from the Allied point of view—about the progress of the war. As a result, when the tide turned, listeners in the Asian and Pacific areas believed Australian radio, when it was able to report mounting Allied successes.

When the end of the war, policy had necessarily to change once more. The aim then was to help in repairing the damage the war had done to international relationships and to seek to cultivate friendship and understanding. Naturally, the need to take sides was not altogether past; conflicting ideologies remained, and Australia naturally used its voice to explain and defend the kind of democratic thought and political institutions it had been prepared to defend with arms during the war. However, the chief emphasis was on the projection of Australia, its history, geography and economy and the way of life of its people.

To mark the transition from war to peace the name Radio Australia was introduced in November, 1945. By then new high powered transmitters had been installed which made it possible to extend total broadcasting time, and so there was room for more entertainment and more general talks, documentaries and actuality programmes.

On April 1st, 1950, with the abolition of the Department of Information, Radio Australia returned once more to the A.B.C. and it has remained under the Commission's control ever since. At the same time, programmes were directed more towards nearer neighbours in Asia and the Pacific. The number of Asian language transmissions increased progressively. The biggest growth has been since 1965; early in that year Radio Australia has three foreign language services: one-and-three quarter hours daily in French, one hour daily in Indonesian, and one hour a week in Thai. There were eight people on the foreign language staff. Today there is six hours daily in Indonesian (to be increased this year to nine hours), three hours in French, two-and-a-half in Mandarin and one hour each in Cantonese, Thai, Japanese and Vietnamese. The foreign language staff has grown to 54 in a total R.A. staff of 154.

One of Radio Australia's basic preoccupations is still Australia itself: how Australians live, what they think; what their country produces, the techniques of production and the scientific and industrial research that go along with it, indeed ahead of it, and the arts.

The air, when talking about these essentially Australian matters, is to make it all as "actual" as possible. Reporters and commentators survey, on the spot, events which illustrate, which are indeed shaping, the Australia of today and point the way to the future. In this, Radio Australia draws extensively on the A.B.C.'s Home Service, which keeps a sharp eye on all that goes on from day to day. At the same time, Radio Australia's own programme staff make their contribution. They cover events of national and international significance, go out to survey the current scene; they select the Home Service material that is right for Radio Australia and see that it is presented in proper perspective.

Each year more than 200 visitors to Australia from Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world who are studying or working in Australia speak from Radio Australia in talks and interviews giving their ideas on Australia and Australian Listeners' queries about Australian history and geography, education, politics, way of life and similar subjects are the basis of many programmes.

Portrayal of the international scene is given especial prominence, since in many places radio affords the only sure and immediate means of learning what is going on in the world. In Asia, the Australian broadcasts have the advantage—partly it is a geographical advantage—that they are generally heard more clearly than others.

In addition, Radio Australia has a reputation for fair reporting. The basis is a reputable news service, supplemented with explanatory background commentaries by Australian journalists and academics on international affairs and by A.B.C. correspondents in the world's main news centres.

In order to achieve the fullest use of the current affairs material, transcripts are taken and distributed for translation to appropriate foreign language sections. In addition, current affairs reports and commentaries are sent by special correspondents in the Indonesian language from Djakarta, Singapore, London and New York, and in Chinese from Singapore, Hong Kong, Washington and London.

Radio Australia broadcasts 44 news bulletins every day, including thirty-three directed to Asia: twenty in English, six in Indonesian, two in Mandarin and one each in Cantonese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai and French. The flow of bulletins begins at 4 a.m. each day and ends 23½ hours later, at 3.30 a.m.

In the past ten years Radio Australia has received an average of 200,000 letters a year from its listeners in all parts of the world, and especially in Asia. They write, many of them, simply to say how much they enjoy the programmes. Or they write, as they would to any friend, to tell about themselves, their work and interests and their families. Many are students, seeking information about Australia, and indeed about anything at all in the world, and beyond it. Only a small proportion of these questions can be answered on the air in the various Mailbag and Question Box session. By far the greater number are answered by letter, often after consulting the appropriate authority on the subject.

There is so much to be said about Radio Australia that we have not time to tell you about here. One thing, however, that must be mentioned is Radio Australia's function as a teacher of English. Thousands of listeners tune in the series of lessons especially designed for Indonesians, Thai and Vietnamese and follow them with the help of lesson books which are distributed free of charge.

During the war Radio Australia had to work with four low power transmitters, that had been built not long before. It was not until the war was almost over that more powerful transmitters were available at the new station built for Radio Australia at Shepparton. These were one of 50 and two at 100 kilowatts. These installations have since been supplemented so that Shepparton now has seven transmitters, four of 100 kilowatts, two of 50 and one of 10 kilowatts. And now, at Darwin, which is Australia's closest point to South-East Asia. Radio Australia has two powerful new transmitters, designed to give certain transmissions from Shepparton a power lift before sending them on their way to regions to the North and North-West. The transmissions leave Shepparton with a power of 100 kilowatts and leave Darwin with the power increased to 250 kilowatts.

Radio Australia has many plans for the future as it builds upon the achievements of the past thirty years...yet greater transmission strength, still better programmes, altogether better service for our listeners. We wish you all many years of happy and profitable listening to Radio Australia.