

• "Irresponsible" radio messages

Help was enlisted from Post Office

THE Commissioner of Police (Mr. Fletcher) had enlisted the support of the Post Office to suppress irresponsible messages over mobile transmitters, so evident on the day of the great fires.

The Director of Posts and Telegraphs (Mr. R. R. Gilson) said this yesterday, replying to questions from Mr. E. A. Beard, who wrote to "The Mercury" on the use of amateurs to help civil defence communications on February 21.

Mr. Gilson said the Post-

master-General recognised the Government appointee — the Commissioner of Police — as the supreme authority in the emergency.

The commissioner had not surrendered any of his authority on February 21. No civil defence emergency had been declared.

The commissioner had also confirmed that on that day he had ample communications available in all areas of the State.

In fact — in addition to his own facilities — the Army was helping the Signals unit in the Nugent area.

Irresponsible messages had spread alarm and despondency, and had hampered fire-fighting.

Mr. Gilson said the P.M.G. fully supported the Government in its endeavours to have an orderly and efficient organisation for emergencies.

It consequently supported the commissioner in his request to help eliminate unlawful and misleading reports over mobile transmitters.

Any action necessary during future emergencies would be taken in conjunction with appointed authorities.

Mr. Gilson added that the P.M.G. had played a significant part in determining the communications scheme for the Civil Defence Organisation.

Invaluable help by radio operators

WE would like to add weight to the complaint of Mr. E. A. Beard, as regards the conduct of the P.M.G.'s. Department, towards the amateur radio operators, during the recent bush fire crisis.

Being attached to the Civil Defence Organisation, we were able to gain a first hand knowledge of the services performed by these people with their radio equipment.

Some of the readers may not be aware that after the fire had raced through outlying districts, there was no communication by means of P.M.G. wires — they had been burnt to the ground.

However, by a deal of foresight and the strategic placing of radios and operators at such places as Colebrook, Richmond, Woodbridge, Mt. Rumney, Mt. Wellington, and a host of other vantage points, communication with stricken areas was maintained throughout the critical stages.

We, personally, went into many of these areas and saw for ourselves the magnificent work these amateurs were doing.

Sometimes their vigil lasted for 36 hours, often without sleep and with little food. Sometimes it was a lonely

vigil on a little, fire-blackened hill out in the middle of nowhere, just acting as a repeater station, if required.

When we personally visited such a lonely spot and inquired from the operator as to how long he intended to remain there, we were simply and honestly told, "Until a replacement arrives."

We earnestly appeal to all the people in those areas served by the amateurs, particularly Colebrook and Richmond, to give us their whole-hearted support and backing in making public the magnificent effort of these, as yet, unsung heroes.

We feel sure, that if another such emergency arose, the services of these people would again be of untold value, as indeed they were on this occasion.

Hobart. LITTLE BOYS BLUE.

Colebrook praises work of radio amateurs

THE residents of Colebrook would like to add their praise and thanks to the amateur radio operators for the work that they did in Colebrook in the days following the fire.

Colebrook was left without food, clothing, power, and any communication whatsoever. There was very little drinking water. Seventy-four families had lost all or some part of their living. The nearest telephone was eight miles away, and we had to travel to this several times to order our most urgent food replacements.

The situation could have turned to chaos, but for the timely help of the radio operators, who through a link with Richmond, obtained our needs from Central Control.

Lowdina.

M. EDDINGTON.

Like C. K. Spiegel I am not going to enter into the argument on whether or not the P.M.G. Department should have given permission for the use of amateur radio operators, if required.

But as an outsider I would like to comment on "Enlightened's" remarks.

Though not conversant with all the articles in the amateur radio operators' code, I do know that such a code exists. A reading of the code would be sufficient to indicate that there is no room for irresponsible amateur radio operators. It is assumed that "irresponsible messages" are passed by irresponsible operators.

Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems to me that this is the reason why Mr. Cordell was able to state that, although "all messages did not go through his control room," no irresponsible messages had been passed by his members. The

public is waiting for evidence to substantiate the claim of irresponsibility.

I understand, also, that during last year these same operators were addressed on the way in which they could assist in time of an emergency—be it fire, flood, or some other catastrophe. Therefore, I doubt that they would have "rushed off willy-nilly" as has been suggested.

"Enlightened's" irony appears to indicate that when accused, individuals, or groups of individuals have no right to defend themselves.

How many of us knew who and what amateur radio operators were before the correspondence in "The Mercury"? Is it then just a publicity stunt on their part? I don't think so.

We are hearing of them and from them now, because in the event of another such crisis "if" amateur radio operators are called on for assistance, the public will know they are reliable receivers and transmitters.

ALSO ENLIGHTENED.

Lenah Valley.

TODAY'S TEXT

*GRACE to you and peace from
God our Father and the Lord Jesus
Christ.*

II Corinthians 1: 2.

Use of radio in emergency

IT would be appreciated if the Director of the P.M.G. Department would answer the following matters through the Press.

On Tuesday, February 21, his department was approached for permission to use amateur radio frequencies to assist Civil Defence Communications, if required, in the Strickland, Elderslie and Nugent areas.

The reply which was, I believe, a directive from the director, was that "amateur frequencies are not to be used under any circumstances" — despite the fact that he was informed that a state of emergency still existed and that the radio vehicles he offered as an alternative would not suffice or, in fact, be available.

His suggestion of using the Army communications was not practical as in the main outbreak an Army unit was assisted by a mobile radio unit belonging to and operated by a radio amateur.

The director was informed also of the seriousness of the situation.

Further, as a counter to the request I believe he personally contacted the Controller — Inspector Fletcher — and offered him the use of the radio vehicles.

Does this mean that if, in the unforeseeable future, another emergency eventuates, radio amateurs will be prevented from assisting communications in this State?

Why, then, are they permitted to assist in emergencies in N.S.W. and Victoria, when alternative communication facilities are more plentiful than in Tasmania?

It is understood that the P.M.G. has been co-operative to civil defence before this.

Lindisfarne.

E. A. BEARD.

Lack of co-ordination in emergency communications

I DO not intend to buy into the argument on whether or not the P.M.G. Department should have given permission for the use of amateur radio frequencies and operators, if required, on February 21.

This, I feel, is a matter for the Civil Defence authorities and the Director of Posts and Telegraph to sort out between themselves, together with the Commissioner of Police.

There appears to be a certain lack of co-ordination between these three departments, if the Civil Defence people ask the P.M.G. for permission to use the services of amateur operators and frequencies, which the Commissioner of Police states, were not required. It is hoped that "Black Tuesday" has given all of us enough experience of a real emergency to enable us to get all available services co-ordinated for the best possible use in future.

I must, however, comment on Mr. Gilson's statement which implies that amateur operators during the State of Emergency following "Black Tuesday," transmitted "irresponsible," "unlawful" and "misleading" reports.

As one of the amateur operators who

provided emergency communications between Colebrook and Hobart during that time, I must ask Mr. Gilson either to substantiate these charges or apologise to the members of the amateur service.

The amateur operators provided only "Point-to-Point" communications and the traffic handled consisted of messages between responsible members of the Civil Defence, Police, P.W.D., Health Department, and other similar organisations.

Additionally the amateur communications took place on frequencies on which very few "outsiders" could lis-

ten-in, apart from the people actually handling the messages. It is, therefore, difficult to understand that these amateur operations had "spread alarm and despondency and had hampered fire-fighting."

There were other mobile radio services operating during that period and I would request Mr. Gilson to state whether his allegations, which were made in reply to a letter about amateur operations, did, in fact, refer to amateur operators, or to some other service.

Sandy Bay. C. K. SPIEGEL.

It is obvious from reading the Press that the radio amateurs are a dedicated group of people. We have read how they have sprung to attention in the emergency at the risk of life and limb, proceeded to fire-devastated areas, and have passed messages to—where we have not been told. In fact, Mr. Cordell, admitting that all messages did not go through his control room, on one hand denies that irresponsible messages were passed but on the other hand says that if they were, they were accepted in good faith.

This is surely dedication calling for irrational rationalising by playing it both ends and the middle, and having a bet each way. But their utmost dedication, of course, comes in their public display of self-aggrandisement.

After Black Tuesday the president of the institute said how wonderful the amateurs had been. In the more recent correspondence and over the air the amateurs themselves have said how wonderful they are.

Surely if a little more dedication had been displayed in offering their services to the Police Commissioner on the day of the fire, instead of rushing off willy-nilly, these would-be Magis of the radio waves would have indicated a finer sense of duty to the community.

West Hobart. ENLIGHTENED.

THE toll of Black Tuesday's fires was 1,446 buildings, worth \$6,342,499.

This figure includes 1,085 homes, 233 cottages or shacks, and 128 other buildings including factories, shops, and service stations.

Despite false reports in newspapers outside Tasmania, including one about a dynamite factory exploding and levelling a suburb, the great fire of February 7 will go down in history as the most disastrous fire tragedy in the Commonwealth.

Even now, only estimated costs may be gained about the devastation.

The many barns and outbuildings have not been tabulated, but estimates which have been prepared show most of the appalling picture of the tragedy in Southern Tasmania.

Seven timber mills, the Cascade brewery and cordial factories, the Safford fish cannery at Margate, the placing churches is \$250,000.

BUILDINGS...

Fourteen municipalities had fire losses. Hobart lost 475 buildings, costing about \$3,123,144.

Individual municipality losses were:—

Glenorchy, 76 buildings costing \$254,600.
Clarence, 45 buildings, \$116,990.
Sorell, 55 buildings, \$224,103.
Tasman, two buildings.
Richmond, 42 buildings, \$137,140.
Kingborough, 440 buildings, \$1,592,702.
New Norfolk, 59 buildings, \$216,830.
Huon, 83 buildings, \$234,830.
Port Cygnet, 41 buildings, \$130,450.
Esperance, 79 buildings, \$123,200.
Bruny Island, two buildings, \$3,100.
Brighton, 43 buildings, \$173,500.
Green Ponds, two buildings, \$7,750.
Oatlands, four buildings, \$4,150.

DEM Sat Mar 4 '67

The Mercury

Hobart: March 16, 1967

Emergency network

QUITE a deal of the chaos and confusion during the bush fires disaster was occasioned by the breakdown of normal means of communication and the lack of a properly co-ordinated, alternative emergency system.

The seriousness of this situation was only too evident in the metropolitan area and country districts alike. With communications disrupted, essential co-operation between citizens and the authorities proved impossible. In the absence of a pre-arranged, co-ordinated plan for an emergency of this magnitude "wastage" of both manpower and equipment was inevitable.

In quite a number of instances, however, amateur radio operators stepped into the breach, especially in country areas, in a praiseworthy effort to provide vital communication links. Since then, the diverse opinions expressed in both official and unofficial circles have been so conflicting that, not surprisingly, the public is now confused as to the success or otherwise of their efforts, no matter how worthily motivated.

At this stage, the expression of conflicting opinions, and indulgence in recriminations, as has occurred in some instances, will serve no useful purpose. Only by a thorough, calm and reasoned review of what was done in an attempt to provide at least some alternative means of communication can those responsible hope to evolve a co-ordinated system that will stand the test of a civil emergency, be it major or minor.

With this in mind, there will be general public accord for the suggestion that a conference of communications authorities and official and amateur radio experts be called immediately. Not only would this permit discussion of the co-ordination of their services, but it would enable plans to be made for a workable communications network which could be implemented immediately in any emergency.

Communications in fire emergency

I HAVE followed with interest and concern the verbal battle via Press and TV about the non-co-ordination of radio services during the recent emergency.

It would seem strange that when communications play such an important part in our daily life that no plan exists to co-ordinate these services in an emergency.

There are many questions that the taxpayer can and must ask so that in the event of any further disaster full use can be made of them.

Why was the national station off the air on the day of the fires? Is it a fact that this station owns its own emergency power plant, but this cannot be switched on without permission from Melbourne? Is it a fact that this equipment is situated in the middle of a marsh and thus was away from fire danger?

If the P.M.G. officials are now so concerned about technical infringements of regulations during the emergency we must ask them what plan did they have for the use of amateur and other radio services and what action to implement this plan was taken on the day in question by them?

Who authorised Hobart radio to close down at its normal service time of 2000 E.S.T. and why was not use made of this station for the clearing of telegraphic traffic during the evening hours?

We read that H.M.A.S. Derwent was sent down from Sydney "to serve as a communication centre." Whilst I do not intend to disparage the action of the naval authorities in this gesture, may I ask why those in authority did not arrange for the use of the radio equipment on board the four merchant vessels in port for links to Mainland capitals? I am assured this is completely feasible and two links could have been used for governmental business about emergency assistance required and the other two to assist relieve the burden from the P.O. links.

The cables could have been collected and runners used to and from the vessels being used as transmitting stations. If my memory serves me correctly a merchant vessel's radio was used during the Napier earthquakes to keep contact with other cities till the N.Z. Navy arrived at the scene.

In respect to the Derwent, of course, there was the usefulness of her crew in fire-fighting and cleaning-up work, but I am concerned with the communications aspects of the disaster.

If, as I believe, the low-powered walkie-talkie sets were of little value during the fire-fighting, what steps are being taken to obtain higher-powered units for our police, fire and civil defence authorities?

We trust that Hobart will never experience a day such as Black Tuesday again, but the answer to these questions and the calling of a meeting of radio authorities to discuss co-ordination of services for emergency use is vital and should be ordered by the Premier without further ado and public name-calling by amateur and official radio alike.

Hobart.

SMOKE SIGNAL.