

TELEPHONE-EXCHANGE SERVICES

NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBERS

During the year the number of telephone subscribers increased from 209,505 to 222,504, or 6·2 per cent., compared with the previous year's increase of 6·7 per cent. (See also Table No. 6 in Appendix.)

TELEPHONE DEVELOPMENT

The shortage of telephone equipment and congestion in telephone cables are still factors limiting the number of new subscribers that can be given service. This applies particularly at the four main centres and some of the larger towns, but there is also a number of small towns where the underground cable system requires to be extended before any further lines can be joined to the exchange switchboard. The slow delivery of poles, both from New Zealand and overseas sources, has also been a factor contributing to delay in furnishing telephone service. It was only by extensive improvising and by adding more connections to existing lines where this was practicable that a net increase of 12,999 new connections for the year was achieved. There is a limit to what can be done by improvising, however, and the connection of new subscribers in any number in future is dependent upon the completion of large-scale cabling and line construction works, the installation of extension equipment in existing exchanges, and the establishment of entirely new exchanges in city and rural areas.

The provision of telephone service in rural areas consumes very large quantities of poles and wire and involves many thousands of hours in labour. As both material and labour have been in short supply for some years, the extension of telephone service in country districts has been seriously retarded. As the supply position becomes easier, a special effort will be made to make up the leeway in country areas, particularly in areas that are at present poorly or sparsely telephoned. To this end plans are being formulated for the erection of new rural telephone lines throughout New Zealand and also for the opening of many new exchanges. A small automatic exchange has been specially developed overseas for use in country areas. Orders have been placed in the United Kingdom for a supply of these equipments, and a small number has already been received. Ultimately, it is proposed to install rural automatic systems in all country districts where new exchanges are required, but owing to the delay in supply some of the exchanges will need to be established on a manual basis at the outset and converted to automatic working later.

Of the 41,292 applications on hand for telephone connections, 29,136 are in respect of service at automatic exchanges, the remainder (12,156) being applications for service at manual exchanges and in country areas where no exchanges exist at present. The time within which the waiting-lists can be liquidated is dependent upon the availability of labour and the supply of equipment and materials on order. The Post Office is making strenuous efforts to overcome the lag in supply. In terms of the New Zealand Telephone Equipment Supply Agreement (1946-50), whereby the Department is to obtain from British manufacturers the major part of its future requirements, large orders have been placed for such items as manual telephones (46,200), automatic telephones (111,700), private branch exchange equipment (13,300 lines), manual exchange equipment (29,000 lines), and automatic exchange equipment (20,230 lines).