

RADIO AS POLITICAL EDUCATOR

Australia Tries A Forum of The Air

NEW ZEALAND listeners who tune in to Australia may have heard from Melbourne an experimental session called "Forum of the Air." We call it experimental because it may not continue, and has not yet been going long enough to show what its possibilities are. But the first two sessions will have made those who heard them wish for more.

FORUM of the Air takes the form of a public debate on some topic of national importance. Four speakers debate the subject, and the audience is invited to submit questions.

The session runs fortnightly. The first broadcast from the Assembly Hall, Melbourne, featured the Prices Commissioner, Professor Copland, and Dr. Lloyd Ross, Chief Research Officer of the Post-war Reconstruction Department, versus Sir Herbert Gepp, managing director of Australian Paper Manufacturers, Ltd., and Vernon Smith, general manager of the Shell Co. of Australia, Ltd., in a debate on the subject of Free Enterprise versus Public Enterprise.

Birth Rationing was the subject of the second broadcast — an extraordinarily

frank and often heated discussion on the subject of birth control. On this occasion the chief speakers were Dame Enid Lyons, Dr. Norman Haire, and the economist, Colin Clark.

The session runs for one hour and is divided roughly into 10 minutes each for the two opening speakers, seven minutes each for the two second speakers, and 15 minutes for question time. Each of the leading speakers then has another three minutes, and finally the chairman sums up the arguments.

The Only Censorship

Speakers are men and women who are authorities on the particular subject under debate. As far as possible they are chosen to represent different types of temperament; one in each team, for instance, may have a showy and emotional

approach, while the other is logical and quiet.

As the Forum is being broadcast "live" and impromptu, for National Security reasons questions submitted by the audience must be in writing. The only censorship imposed is on the score of giving information to the enemy. This is the reason for "vetting" questions before a member of the audience is allowed to walk up to the microphone and put over his own question. After each debate the full text is printed in pamphlet form, and offered to the public at threepence.

"Experiment in Democracy"

"The idea behind *Forum of the Air* is not to stage a contest in oratory, but to discuss issues of national importance from all angles, so that listeners can clarify their own ideas," says the *ABC Weekly*.

"*Forum of the Air* is a practical experiment in democracy which makes articulate one of the oldest democratic

(continued on next page)

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