

MARCH 9, 1945

## Plans for Germany

**P**LANS for Germany are plans for Europe, and thus for the whole world. Therefore we do not apologise for filling so much of our space this week and last with opinions about the shape of things to come. That shape has, of course, emerged with much clearer definition as a result of the Crimea Conference: we are no longer completely in the realm of speculation, as the people whose opinions we have quoted were when they uttered them. But that does not mean that such speculation is now without value. Although peace must wait for victory, thinking about peace must not; and, although the man in the street does not find it easy to isolate enough facts for firm opinions, it is his questions and demands in democratic countries that give shape to national policy. It is true that the opinions we have reprinted in these two issues are the opinions not of ordinary men but of several men and one woman who are professional propagandists. Upton Sinclair, for instance, is a writer of books with a revolutionary aim. Sir Walter Layton is a journalist-economist who controls a group of newspapers. Robert Boothby is a front-bench member of the House of Commons. Not one of them is the kind of person London's bus drivers or dock workers or school-teachers or shopkeepers are likely to know intimately, but they all either make or influence the opinions that those others think they hold. And they influence, and should influence, New Zealand opinions too. In every case they approach the subject high-mindedly. If some are more severe than others, some more revolutionary, the purpose is never vengeance, and the aim always a freer and happier world. Hitler would of course say the same, and the Premier of Japan has already said it. But democracy is a defence against platitudes as well as against tyranny, and it is our duty as well as our privilege to ask ourselves how much of this we believe.

## LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

### THE NEW ZEALAND SHORT STORY

Sir,—I wonder what is reader-opinion of the modern New Zealand short-story writer? I mean the type of literary masquerader sometimes fostered by *The Listener* and enjoying such a carnival of success elsewhere.

Everybody knows the dearth of good short-story tellers in our time. The art of telling a story well, even if it survives in speech, is somehow being lost for writing. And in this famine of talent a clique of literary opportunists have muscled in with a low-grade substitute.

Patently incapable of carrying on the tradition, the pretenders are superlatively able at turning out something that might be taken for a literary sketch if it did not have the capital defect of being almost totally obscure. The obscurity is probably unintentional; forgive it as the collapse of an attempt at subtlety. But deliberately to turn one's back on such elements of a story as construction and climax is to forsake the very heart and soul of it, besides hinting rather suspiciously of the narrator's lack of ability to attempt them. Fortunately there is an academic air about these stories. It warns the reader. He is quick to sense that he is reading something by a person with a rage for writing and no talent for telling a story.

It really doesn't matter what the innovators turn out: a fine story will always be a yarn; and in spinning a yarn de Maupassant was never above telling it simply, or O. Henry never too experienced to overlook the value of a plot.

The short story in our country is in the hands of a coterie of snobs who believe that the sham artistry of a conscious literary style is the sole stock-in-trade of a storyteller.

T. V. HINDMARSH (Wellington).

### A WELSH COMPLAINT

Sir,—I was very surprised, and, I must confess, somewhat annoyed, to find that no provision was made in your programme for St. David's Day on March 1. This day is as dear to Welsh people as St. Andrew's Day is to the Scotch, or St. George to the English, and one cannot help feeling that at least 15 minutes might have been given to the relaying of some of the delightful Welsh music of which the people of Wales are so rightly proud.

Although Wales is only a small country, her people are scattered far and wide over the face of the earth and especially so in the British Empire. Her sons are fighting on all fronts in this war for freedom and liberty, and it was with deep regret that I noticed this omission on Cymru's National Day.

MAURICE RICHARDS (Taumarunui).

### ECONOMIC CONTROL

Sir,—The following is in reference to a sentence culled from Bertrand Russell under the title "Communism and Reaction." When we analyse his analysis of Communism and Reaction it is, to say the least, nothing but a mass of confusion. The sentence to which I refer is the one where he speaks of the "power that has hitherto been divided between

the politicians and the capitalists." But I would like to say: Why the necessity for any division? Who were those "hitherto politicians" with a power supposed to be independent of and different from the power of the capitalist class? There were, and still are where capitalism prevails, bourgeois politicians whose duty is to function exclusively in the interests of the capitalists. In other words, they act in this capacity as their executive. To claim that the power between the capitalists and the politicians was divided is tantamount to saying that the power of the executive of a labour organisation is different from and does not represent the interest of the rank and file. It is the one, indivisible power, the economic power of the capitalists. The functions of the "hitherto politicians" were to defend the interests of this class. They have done the job well.

E. J. BARRON (Rewanui).

### EDUCATING BACKBLOCKS CHILDREN.

Sir,—May I say a few words on the above subject, in reference to your interview with a visiting teacher. I live on a backblocks farm. I have young children to educate. My husband gave his life for this good land of ours. In return, I receive a small pension. I am told I shall have to educate my children by "Correspondence Lessons." I am told they are excellent, and self-explanatory. An ex-teacher, who has used them for years says, on the contrary, "it is almost as much trouble to teach with these lessons as without them." And that seems to be the opinion of all the parents I have questioned on the subject. Everyone admits that the lessons, as set out and arranged, are probably the best possible correspondence lessons, but to say they are self-explanatory, especially to young children, is sheer nonsense. How many children, left to themselves can, or will, work? Actually the mother does the teaching — of course without pay. She also attends to various other matters, such as milking, feeding calves, gardening, cooking, washing, cleaning, sewing, etc., etc. She comes in tired from the milking shed and must begin supervising lessons, the washing up must wait, and often does, until near lunch time. This, month after month, and year after year.

Now, these visiting teachers. They are kind, and, as the one you interview points out, tactful. They are generally clever. But do they help much—these so brief visits? Certainly they make a pleasant link between the School in Wellington and the children; and the teachers no doubt do their best in the very short time at their disposal. But at best the system is a poor one. Cannot the able man who runs it devise some more modern and helpful method?

I am told the Correspondence School costs a great deal. The best housekeeper is not, of necessity, the one who spends the most money! In any case, it is the comparatively small number of people on the land who produce most of its wealth.

There is, or will be at the end of this season, almost five million pounds in the Meat Pool Account. That money belongs by moral right to the men and women who made it. Could it be better

spent than on improved facilities for the education of backblocks children? Surely they have as much right to the best as city children have? Correspondence lessons are a poor second best, and, besides, the teaching of their own children is an intolerable burden to country mothers, when it is added to the innumerable number of duties they must perform, especially in these war years, when farm labour is unusually short and inadequate.

I notice that the "visiting teacher" you interview says her work is "frightfully tiring." Well, well. Would she like to add to it, daily, the heavy tasks—all of them—of a backblocks mother? I shall be glad if you can find space for this letter. The matter is important, urgent, and very far-reaching in the life and future of our country.

WAR WIDOW (Havelock).

[At the suggestion of Dr. A. G. Butchers, principal of the Correspondence School, we referred this letter to Mrs. H. A. Corrigan, Hon. Secretary of the Correspondence School Parents' Association, who comments as follows:

"I can speak with long personal experience as a mother and supervisor of Correspondence School pupils, as well as in my capacity as Hon. Secretary of the Correspondence School Parents' Association, the members of which almost all combine home duties with the supervision of their children's studies. The Correspondence School has over 4,000 students. These possess probably just the same range of talents and industry as other New Zealand girls and boys who are in actual attendance at the public schools, both primary and post-primary. There is in every school a proportion of pupils whose progress is below average, due to a variety of causes. It may be due to a lack of ability or of diligence (or both) on the pupils' side; or to a lack of discipline and understanding (or both) on the parents' side; or to some other cause or combination of causes not always easily determined. There pupils and parents do constitute problems for the Correspondence School as they do for any other school, and it is largely to find a solution for such personal problems that the visiting teacher service was instituted, and has proved of such inestimable value. Let me advise 'War Widow' to take her courage in her hands, disregard hearsay and second-hand experience, and make a personal trial of the Correspondence School service for her children. I shall be surprised if she does not become as enthusiastic in praise of the School as she is now diffident about enrolling her children among its pupils."

### MILITARY SERVICE FOR MARRIED MEN

Sir,—Can you answer these questions? My husband was called for military service over two years ago, but exempted as a carpenter. Recently he was called again and an appeal by his employer has been dismissed, and he now awaits orders to proceed to camp. We have two children, and we expect a third within six weeks. We have no appeal on the grounds of personal hardship, and are making no complaint. But has it not been announced by the Government: (1) that all the carpenters it can find are necessary to overtake the housing shortage, and (2) that men with three children or more will not be taken into the Army?

"THREE SOON" (Hutt Valley).

[These questions were referred to the Minister of Defence, who replies as follows:

(1) Though all carpenters will doubtless be needed for post-war building, it has obviously been found possible to make some of them available for military service in the meantime.

(2) Men with three children are still liable for military service at home or overseas, but it is the Government policy not to call on men of this class if it can be avoided.]