

Radio Under Fire

IT is nearly always beneficial for a public service to come under fire; especially if the shooting is straight and the bullets are clean. This has happened to the National Broadcasting Service in a booklet written by Ormond Wilson. Mr. Wilson has had experience of broadcasting from the inside in London and (mainly) from the outside in Wellington, and a comparison of policies in the BBC and NBS has left him unhappy and critical. So he has exercised his right as a free New Zealander, and accepted his responsibility as a leisured one, by putting his complaints on paper. *What's Wrong with Broadcasting?** is a series of sharp but not unreasonable questions to which he is fair enough to give his own answers. It is well written and well argued and will do a great deal of good. In the NBS in particular it will be felt as a contribution to the consideration of several difficult problems and as a relief from the ill-informed, irrational, and usually pointless criticism that fills so many letters of complaint. But Mr. Wilson should have given a little more thought to his title. It can hardly have been his purpose to suggest that there is nothing right with broadcasting in New Zealand, or even that it is seldom right, but the effect of such a title on most people is to suggest just that. It is a blanket question which either means nothing at all, since there is no answer to it except from omniscience, or it means far too much to the ill-informed and ill-disposed. What is wrong with broadcasting in New Zealand is what is wrong with it everywhere, fundamentally: it is a new technique which the world does not yet know how to use wisely. We have done one or two things with it in New Zealand which are new, and broadly successful; but we have also made some pretty bad blunders. It is certainly not true, however, as Mr. Wilson's title will encourage the foolish to think, that broadcasting in New Zealand is doing nothing right or even reasonably well, or that broadcasting in other countries has no problems or critics.

*WHAT'S WRONG WITH BROADCASTING? A Plan for Radio in New Zealand. By Ormond Wilson. Paul's Book Arcade Ltd., Hamilton.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

COMPULSION OR PERSUASION?

Sir,—I suggest that the second sentence of your editorial in *The Listener* of March 29 should have indicated that the cynics would find much wisdom rather than "amusement."

Whatever illusions the Church may be labouring under, she is certainly under no illusion as to human nature and she showed commendable realism in urging that there should be compulsory reduction of rations to help the hungry overseas.

On the other hand the Trade Unions (several of which have delayed food ships for weeks) are at least consistent in their reluctance to accept social responsibility. It would be as difficult to "persuade" the people to make voluntary reductions as it would be to persuade Trade Unions (or employers) to see beyond their own noses and over-developed corporations to the desperate need of the hungry and starving thousands overseas.

They, and we, should be grateful for the Church's realism.

WILFORD (Auckland).

N.Z. PIANISTS

Sir,—May one inquire why comment upon broadcasts by outstanding New Zealand pianists is so rarely seen in *The Listener*? Lack of encouragement to our native young performers must be as galling to them as it is inexplicable to outsiders. I have in mind particularly the broadcasts given by Rhona Thomas (3YA), Margaret Boulton (2YA) and Raymond Windsor (2YA), on February 15, 17 and 21 respectively. The first-named artist's playing of Chopin's F sharp Impromptu was, interpretatively, fully equal and technically superior to Ignaz Friedman's recording of the same work; Miss Boulton played the "Danse d'Olaf" (Pick-Mangiagelli) in a style reminiscent of Eileen Joyce; and Raymond Windsor showed musicianship and executive skill of the highest order in a couple of Schubert's Impromptus. Yet, so far, no notice of these exceptional achievements has appeared in the official organ of the New Zealand Broadcasting Service, though considerable space has been devoted to matters of—in my opinion—lesser musical worth. I cannot see what object is served by such broadcasts unless they are officially recognised by competent authority. L. D. AUSTIN (Wellington).

(It would have been more candid of our correspondent to say plainly that he teaches one of these neglected performers. Obviously we cannot depend on interested listeners for information about outstanding broadcasts, but we pay competent musicians who are not teachers to draw attention to them.—Ed.)

BETTER PROGRAMMES, PLEASE

Sir,—When I find time to write to your excellent journal I usually do so to criticise something or other. This letter is, I regret, no exception, but first may I congratulate *The Listener* on its interesting and well-written articles and also upon your managing to print more and more of the radio programmes.

Unfortunately the NBS seems to be well and truly bogged down under the

dead hand of bureaucratic control in some respects. I suggest that too much time is still given to broadcasting of overseas news. And why are the evening programmes still interrupted for 25-40 minutes at 9.0 p.m. for a local re-hash of the news? Surely this could be lived up by putting over headlines only in a snappy manner (within five minutes) by using two announcers to read alternate items. This would give our long-suffering programme organisers a little more scope. As for the Pacific news, why bother to inflict this on 2YC listeners? Why not leave it to ZLT—the Pacific Islands could still hear it.

Then why put current ceiling prices over the ZB Stations on Saturday nights at 9.0 p.m.? Who wants a Saturday evening's entertainment interrupted by such information? And as for those bucolic broadcasts of the weather! Some fluency, please!

Although radio plays—commonly known as "soap-operas"—were originally invented by some bright American sales-

More letters from listeners will be found on pages 18 and 19

men to sell soap and other goods and 15-minute instalments or less were and still are sufficient for their nefarious purposes, why must the NBS have its plays chopped into small pieces also? Admittedly something is being done in this direction—a few full-length plays are being broadcast, but not sufficient, and also the type of plays generally is bad. In nearly every instalment of a play someone is either being murdered, intimidated or wronged, shot or tortured—no wonder the world is in the state it is! English literature does possess a wealth of dramatic art—cannot more of it be broadcast in place of all the penny dreadful stuff we hear?

Let us have more variety and flexibility in our broadcasting even at the risk of arousing storms of criticism which would at least show that people were listening instead of saving electricity.

SPICE OF LIFE (Kelburn).

RADIO'S ROUND TABLE

Sir,—I am in hearty agreement with "Discussion" regarding the interest which is taken in 3ZB's Sunday session "Off Parade at Radio's Round Table." Although this session lasts only half-an-hour, its repercussions extend into Monday morning trams and frequently well into the week! One of my friends told me that he has hurried the family home from picnics so that he would not miss the session, and my own opinion is that there is no session to touch it anywhere on the air.

As I see it, the Members of the Round Table do not set themselves up as experts on the subject discussed, but bring to bear commonsense viewpoints from a variety of angles. Prominent physicians, psychologists, musicians, writers, artists and university professors have expressed their views at the Round Table from time to time, but I think the regular members with their own definite personalities provide the meat which makes the session really first-class.

We could do with more of this sort of thing on the air, and a bit less of the "canned" music which has become a stable diet in recent years.

"SQUARE MEAL" (Christchurch).

THE HIGHEST RADIO STATION

Sir,—May I be permitted to make some slight correction to your paragraph (Page 23, April 5), regarding station HCJB, Quito, Ecuador. The station is situated on the slopes of Mount Pichincha to the north of Quito, and is operated and controlled by the "World Radio Missionary Fellowship," not by the British and Foreign Bible Society. This Fellowship is a non-profit organisation incorporated in the State of Ohio. Among the members of the Home advisory council of the station was, until recently, Dr. Thomas Buchan, of Glasgow, Scotland, but otherwise the Council was of U.S. residents. For those of your readers who may be interested the station may be heard in New Zealand on 12.5 megacycles between 2.0 p.m. and 3.30 p.m. on Sundays. The station is the pioneer missionary broadcaster, and has grown from a 200-watt transmitter for local work opened on Christmas Day, 1931, to the present 10,000-watt short wave station opened on Easter Sunday, 1940, by the President of Ecuador. A. MITCHELL (Wellington).

"TOP TUNES."

Sir,—It's about time someone put in a word about 2ZB's Sunday session, "Top Tunes." Firstly why are there so many American tunes? They're all so very much of a muchness—or they make them so. As far as I can see, they've developed a very irritating, whining sort of accompaniment. They alter a tune hopelessly. Take for instance, the quite pleasant "Just a Little Fond Affection." I think it was Joe Loss who used to play it. Then Kate Smith got hold of it, whined it out, and there it is, a "Top" tune. Besides, are these songs really any good? I love modern music, but far more pleasant and really beautiful tunes are played in the average morning and afternoon sessions. Picking a few at random, aren't "Something to Remember You By," "What's New?", "The London I Love" and countless others, far more rhythmical than "Some Sunday Morning," "Now I Know," "It Isn't a Dream Any More"? Then why are these songs unfairly popular? Because they are played when most people have a chance to listen, and vice versa with the others. Personally I never hear Dinah Shore, Dick Haymes, The Inkspots, those annoying Mills Brothers, and several others without a desire to melt all their records down to make fruit bowls.

Yet they're played far more than, for instance, Bud Flanagan and Chesney Allen (those two very genuine and refreshing stars), Frances Day, Donald Pears, Dick Todd, Anne Shelton, Harry Kaye, Alan Breeze, and so many others who really deserve popularity.

"HI-DE-HI" (Masterton).

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS
"Music Lover" (Dunedin): Thanks. Suggestion noted.

"Curious" (Invercargill): The only person who would have the right to answer your question would be the speaker himself. But he probably wouldn't: in cases like this professional ethics usually make anonymity essential.

Marc T. Greene: Too personal.

D.X. (Auckland): Thanks. See Page 18, this issue.