PORTRAIT OF A MAN WITH SOMETHING TO SAY

NORMAN CORWIN, American radio writer producer and director, is the first winner of the One World Award established by two American organisations—the Common Council for American Unity and the Willkie Memorial of Freedom House—to recognise and encourage contributions to the idea of One World, particularly in the fields of mass communication such as the press, radio and motion pictures.

THERE is nothing indecisive about Norman Corwin; he walks as if he means to go somewhere, he speaks as if he means to say something, he looks —head thrust forward a little—as if he means to see something. First I saw him walking—into the customs office at the air terminal after the flying-boat arrived in Auckland from Sydney. His suit was brown, in a small check, his hat had an out-of-doors look, a downright man's downright hat, big enough and heavy enough to stay where it was put. Next I saw him looking out the window through his green glasses heavily horn-rimmed (later he wore black-rimmed plain glass ones) through the window of the customs office. Next I heard him speak.

"Lee, there's a mighty fine picture there, did you notice it?" Lee Bland, his assistant from the staff of the Columbia Broadcasting System, swung his camera-hung height across the room and looked too. Then they both went outside and Lee Bland took a photograph of Norman Corwin under the Empire Flying-boat signpost with its list of exotic names —Sydney, Singapore, Calcutta, Hong Kong, Alexandria, Durban, London.

* * *

THERE were four reporters to interview Norman Corwin and one of them had the right opening: he had been in New York on duty during the war and had seen Mr. Corwin at work on "The Lonesome Train."

"Is that so? The original show or the one for the recording?" asked Mr. Corwin. It had been the recording.

"That's a pity. I wish you had seen the original show. You know there was a vast difference. Between the original and the repetition for recording there's all the difference that there is between the first night and the third night of a stage performance. That's a strange thing but you do lose that original spontaneity."

At this moment the customs, the police and the luggage people all wanted information. After that our discussion continued with Mr. Corwin giving a rapid survey of the radio set-up in the States —in which he mentioned very particularly the radio courses established at most universities and the very good radio shows put on by some of them.

Figures Are Big

"What about foreign language broadcasts?" someone asked.

"Yes, of course, there are stations switching from one language to another all the time—you may be hearing Italian one hour and Spanish the next. But you have to remember that stations of that kind in New York are broadcasting over a radius of twenty miles to a listener population of a couple of million. Figures are big."

"And are payments to artists and writers big too?"

"Well, of course, not big enough. But to be serious, they vary enormously—they can be very very big or they can be quite small."

"And are they paid by the proprietor of the soap or whatnot or by the broadcasting company?"

"*Never* by the proprietor of the soap! You don't imagine the proprietor of a soup or a soap would soil his hands by paying me direct do you? Usually they're paid by the agency handling the advertisement."

* * *

WE looked at the publicity sheets that Mr. Bland gave us and counted a few of the names of countries Mr. Corwin had visited since he left New York on June 15. For the 16 weeks he had averaged more than one country a week. When we reached Copenhagen in our recital he stopped us to say something he had just remembered.

"You know, we're apt to think we've got the last word in everything to do with radio in the States. But I must tell you that I've seen in odd corners of the world on this trip some very fine things in radio. For instance in Copenhagen I saw a radio station that was the best equipped technically, the most artistic, the best architecturally, the most satisfactory from every practical point of view I've ever found."

"And what about Moscow?"

"Yes. We spent two weeks there. The equipment is good and there's a keen lot of people. I'd say that the standard of news broadcasts is very very high, the standard of dramatic and variety broadcasts very low. They regarded me as a strange creature. I gave two lectures to technical students and they asked most interesting and intelligent questions. I got the feeling that they were just ready to go ahead—I don't mean at all that they were stimulated by my visit but that they were just ready to go ahead experimenting."

"Having been a bit busy up till now?"

"Well, yes. I don't think they have the same idea about radio. I talked to writers and editors and they just don't think of radio as the artistic medium that I like to believe it is. At any rate they haven't up till now."

* * *

AN official of the NZBS took Mr. Corwin and Mr. Bland by car to Rotorua for the week-end. They were due back on Sunday evening in time for the broadcast at 9.30, but when I rang the hotel just before six I was told Mr. Corwin was working at the studio. I called him at 1ZB and asked him if he could spare twenty minutes before the broadcast for a few questions I should like to ask him.

"I wonder if you'd mind making it twenty minutes *after* the broadcast," he said. "I'll be working right ahead on it till it's time."

"You seem to be putting in some hard work on this talk."

"Yes ma'am," he said, with a very short vowel a. "Wouldn't you?" He said it as if he expected a serious answer; going around the world in 16 weeks and talking to a half a million people from a small radio theatre in a small city in a small country to add some footnotes to a journey—yes, I had to agree, it was still a job to be done well.

* * *

IN the 1ZB radio theatre Hilton Porter stood by the microphone waiting for the light and Norman Corwin leaned against a desk with his hands in his hair. It was the attitude but not the picture of dejection: it was the picture of a man about to do a job and thinking about it with concentration.

" . . . and the Long Thoughts"

Hilton Porter introduced him and he began. A simple statement: "I am in New Zealand on the last leg of a world flight which is already longer in miles than the circumference of the earth." Then a list of countries by way of which he had come here; and after the second breath, poetry: "The faces I have seen and the words I have heard, the flashing impressions and the long thoughts" these he could only suggest as a man tracing a small-scale map might point to a range of mountains in brown or to oceans in blue.

I began to take notes but soon gave up and listened with every ear I have, the one for the meaning, the one for the flow of the language, the one for the music of pauses, the one for unusual stress and accent and the one for a strange pronunciation: "I have come to realise," he said, "that the way *to* One World is not as easy as the way around it; for the rubble of war lies many times across the going, and blood is still wet on the pavements." Sure, he went on, the world is in a spot; there are those who say it will be ten years or five years or two years till our life expires in a series of uranium blasts—he quoted three friends who gave these figures: "but one of them recently bought a new house, another is expecting to become a father in December and the third has put some hard-earned money into government bonds which take twelve years to mature."

The radio craftsman began to speak: "I happen to believe there is nothing to be gained by despair and everything to be gained by getting out and working for the better world . . . We're looking for a plan. Not the Why, but the How. The method, the manner, the technique."

What bright colour in his phrases: superb techniques, he said, have given tyrannies their staying power . . . "but in the past the technicians of social good have been too few, the support of them too shallow, their lives, alas, too brief, their effect too sporadic." Now, however, the phrase One World "makes no local stops . . . it makes the same intelligent and appealing sound as a phrase like 'bread and peace.' But it means more. For without One World there can never be enough bread, or any lasting peace." I found that phrase "makes no local stops" made me sit up even more than his talk had done to that point: maybe it wasn't the first time he had used it, maybe even it was not all his own work, but it was a good phrase with a clear meaning.

So were his phrases in his summing-up of the man who tells you he is not interested in politics: "he just floats in air, like a prop in an Indian rope trick . . . at least the fence-sitter knows there is such a thing as a fence." He then told us what politics is, such as "the roof over your head . . . the clothes you wear . . . the roads you ride on . . . Like it or not, you are the creature of politics and of society: certificates are issued for your birth, vaccination, education, marriage, and death."

Here he leaned close over the script stand, lifted his left hand to the height of his shoulder, the thumb and the forefinger pressed together, and pushed aside the non-political man: "The man who never takes sides, who never votes, never signs a petition, never speaks his mind, *is a civic drone*. Panics, depressions, and wars come to him like weather. He suddenly peers out of his window and says, 'Look, it's warring!'"

"Unity, like charity, begins at home," he said, and the concern of all nations

"If you look out of the window to-night you will see that it is not warring"

(continued on next page)