

NOVEMBER 29, 1946

What Listeners Want

WE don't know how many of our readers saw a recent London message summarising the results of a long period of listener research conducted by the BBC. Those who did see it, and think about it, may have come to the conclusion that what the BBC had discovered was what it must already have known, namely, that easy listening is more popular than hard listening and that art has no chance at all against variety. It never had; and if the two were necessarily in conflict the case would be hopeless. But broadcasting is not reduced to a foolish issue like that. It never has to decide which section of the community will get all its attention or even which section shall get earnest and which perfunctory attention. Its task is to serve all sections earnestly, all with the same degree but never the same kind of forethought and knowledge. This task no service pretends to understand fully after only one generation of trial and error. The most the BBC ever claims, all anyone has ever claimed in New Zealand, is that there is never a day when the reasonable demands of the public are forgotten or deliberately ignored; that no section is played off against any other section; that if the balance tips sometimes on the side of what people want and sometimes on the side of what someone thinks they should get the fixed policy always is to find the safe social balance between these extremes; and that far more hard, and honest, and enlightened thinking is going on than critics commonly imagine. To say that anyone knows what the public want would be dangerous nonsense; but it is not nonsense to say that those who are pondering on a problem day and night are more likely to understand it than those who give it no thought at all until something happens to annoy them. A man who cries out when he is hurt may do so with reason and to good purpose, as the history of most reforms amply proves; but he may also do so to bad purpose, and it would never do to surrender the control of broadcasting to mere noise and selfishness.

LETTERS FROM LISTENERS

VOTES FOR WOMEN

Sir,—May I protest against Dukie's remarks on women's voting (*Listener*, Nov. 15). If, like his women friends, there are other women who care nothing about politics it's time they woke up to the fact that politics can influence the backbone of their home life, Dad's pay envelope—whether they will be kicked out of their home—whether their sons will be killed in a war—whether in fact Dad can and for what reasons divorce her, and so on.

I know many men who haven't the intelligence of a guinea pig. If they can vote why shouldn't women? If Dukie's women friends are echoes of their husbands, I know plenty who aren't, and plenty without husbands to do their thinking for them.

Maybe Dukie was trying to be funny, but while women look after men, from the cradle to the grave, and often bring home a large share of the bacon as well, it's time Dukie and all his type realised that whoever "pays the piper calls the tune"—until women are sheltered useless dolls; and until men do all their work for them, they have a right to vote—a democratic right to be valued and zealously guarded against all attacks, whether direct or the more pernicious pseudo-funny attacks of nit-wits.

MUM (Wellington).

STUDIO AUDIENCES

Sir,—I may be wrong but I understood radio programmes were for licensed radio listeners. If that is correct then I don't quite see why 150 persons (who may or may not have paid license fees) permitted on sufferance to the studios, should be allowed to mar the effect of the item by sudden, almost antipathetic and vociferous applause. This nullifies the point of a quip, joke, repartee, or full appreciation by listeners on the radio of the item, which the audience, plus vision, can appreciate more instantaneously than can radio listeners. One is led to presume that a visible audience, or the "gallery," must be played up to. There should be a notice writ large and insisted upon, to this effect: "Audiences here are requested to stifle, or at least delay, vociferous applause."

FRED C. S. LAWSON (Matakana).

CORWIN OR BEETHOVEN?

Sir,—An Auckland listener has been driven to protest because a favourite musical item advertised in the programme was displaced by Norman Corwin's talk on "One World." It is regrettable that "Freude" missed hearing a piece of music to which he had apparently been looking forward, but even more is it to be regretted that "Freude" found this subject of "One World" of "merely topical interest." To him in his noble (?) isolation the distress of this post-war world and men's efforts to find a means of relieving it may seem very trivial matters. But to anyone who listens even with half an ear to the news, it is obvious that the world situation requires urgent attention and speedy solutions to its many problems if the rather shaky peace we have achieved is to be maintained. Hence it is (to my mind) imperative that we should, as many of us are able, consciously strive towards a world-wide

brotherhood of men. And for this reason I welcome Mr. Corwin's timely and stimulating address. If "Freude" will bother to read it, now that *The Listener* has so kindly published its full text, he will find in it much useful food for thought. And perhaps next time we are privileged to listen to such a fine speaker "Freude" will more willingly forgo any musical treat he had promised himself and listen with rather more attention than he appears to have done on this occasion.

A. D. SOMERVILLE (Raetihi).

Sir,—It is a pity "Freude" didn't take the trouble to listen to the "topical talk" by Norman Corwin. He (or she) was one of those to whom Mr. Corwin was specially speaking.

It is a long time since we have been privileged to hear such a fluent, colourful speaker, one with a wonderful value of words and surely Beethoven himself would have pardoned the intrusion from a man who can make "music" from words as can Mr. Corwin. Everyone I have spoken to regarding the offending broadcast was only sorry Corwin didn't speak longer, and we thank *The Listener* for printing his address in full. The poem, also, was well-worth listening to.

Our only wish is that the talk has been recorded so that from time, or even on "rare occasions," we may hear it again just as "Freude" will no doubt hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. After all it takes all kinds of tastes and cultures to make "One World."

E. ASHDOWNE (Auckland).

(We have had several other letters along similar lines, but can find space for only these two.—Ed.).

POTPOURRI

Sir,—Entertainment must match the moods of the public. Those who are in the mood for grand opera are not likely to be pleased with variety even as an interlude, and vice versa. Some people may be in the mood for a symphony to-night and comedy to-morrow night, but to be in a mood for both on the same night would be a little unusual. This fact led the theatre to develop programmes accordingly—comedy, tragedy, variety, etc.—offering each person entertainment suited to his mood.

How absurd it would be if (being in a mood for an evening's light entertainment) we had to go to the Royal Theatre at 8 p.m. to catch 15 minutes of humorous items before it turned on excerpts from grand opera, then on to the Imperial to catch 15 minutes of chorus singing preceding a band concert, then on to the Presidential to catch a one-act comedy; and so on.

To-night, a little weary from work, I am in the mood for an evening's light entertainment lasting till about 10 p.m. The first programme I look at offers me light variety for half-an-hour, but this is followed by a dissertation on literature which I am not in the mood for. This lasts for 15 minutes. Then 20 minutes of dance music. I don't feel like dancing, but perhaps the people for whom the literature was intended do want dance music to follow.

Is it too much to hope that one of these days someone will "discover" that some people are in the mood for an evening's dance music, crooners, and

hill-billies; others are in a mood for light entertainment (which is rather different from dance music and does require to be light); others are in the mood for more serious recitals; still others for orchestral concerts, etc. That discovery might even be followed by a more momentous one—that people who are in the mood for dance music don't really want a talk on the poets or a galaxy of damp weather reports thrown in. Could one even dare to whisper to somebody that such astounding discoveries might be just round the corner?

A WEARY HUNTER (Wellington).

CONGRATULATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Sir,—I want to offer congratulations on the steady improvement in the standard of the programmes, over the YA stations especially. However, there is one form of entertainment that we rarely hear which would be greatly appreciated I feel sure, and that is Ruth Draper's sketches. Gertrude Lawrence and Seymour Hicks and John Gielgud are also seldom heard, which is a great shame. Perhaps we could do with a little less of Tauber and Vera Lynn and the Andrews Sisters, but please don't cut out any serious music.

"SOMETHING NEW" (Seatoun).

SECURITY AND THE PRICE

Sir,—In your issue of October 18 you maintain that "America maintains rugged individualism at a price." I would like to point out that to describe the United States as the home of rugged individualism is somewhat of an overstatement. It must be remembered that the Democrats have been in power there for almost 14 years, and if one were to believe the constantly reiterated statements appearing in the Republican Press, the socialistic enactments, and the general drift to socialism, is their constant cry against the Administration. The New Deal was claimed to be Bolshevism in a thin disguise, and the TVA its unabashed appearance. It would take up too much space to enumerate the widely extended enterprises undertaken by the Federal and State Governments, or to enumerate or describe the communal activities and social services throughout the United States. It is true that large corporations operate over a wide field, but it is doubtful if these can be claimed to be individualistic in the true sense, as their management and direction are generally in the hands of high-salaried executives representing a very small amount of the stock. Where individualism ends and socialism begins would be a very fine point; most advanced countries to-day endeavour to find the right mixture of both. Even Russia, according to reports, uses the profit motive among the masses, as it is stated that more than 80 per cent of the workers are on piece work. To find rugged individualism in its purest form one would have to go to some backward area of the earth such as the Balkans or Rumania, certainly not the U.S.A.

JOSEPH STEPHENS (Mosgiel).

NOTICE TO CORRESPONDENTS

Cricket Fan (Christchurch): By now you will have seen the information on pages 20 and 44 of last week's issue.

G.H.D. (Greenmeadows): You may, or may not, be right in what you say, but it isn't helpful to say it in such inflammatory language.