

# IS PRIESTLEY RIGHT?

**I**N our last issue we printed a summary of an article by J. B. Priestley in which he affirmed his allegiance to the principle of political democracy, but attacked what he termed "cultural democracy" — the theory that the ordinary man or woman is the best judge of everything. The issue raised by Priestley is a significant one, and "The Listener" has been at some pains to gather responsible New Zealand comment on it. Last week we published the views of writers and dramatists, this week publishers and librarians discuss the issue. A summary of Priestley's article appears on the opposite page.

## PUBLISHERS

**O**N Mr. Priestley's remarks about radio, picture-going or commercialism I cannot comment. My listening hours do not total ten a year (I am at present footsore from following the NZBS Orchestra over the "Antrim Hills"); I rarely go to the pictures; and I try to avoid reading advertisements.

But I have been asked to comment as a publisher. While the world remains largely dominated by money, there will always be the inducement to produce shoddy books. I would like to see more sympathetic treatment for established publishers of cultural books (query: which are cultural books, on whose say-so?); but I do not think it is in the

ability of any Government, even in times of shortage, to say what shall or shall not be published. I often inveigh against the waste of paper on race-books; but if people would rather have them than, say, Shakespeare's Sonnets, that's their choice — and their loss.



Free publishing produces a number of evils. But we must allow people to read what they like, in the pious hope that they will thresh out a few grains from the chaff. The Clammy Hand lies heavily enough across our brows without any attempt, state-inspired, to produce uplift. One should expect nothing

more cultural than an income-tax demand from any Government. The public taste has always been low. How else would we few, we happy few (and Mr. Priestley), be so superior? But I should deprecate any kind of cultural hegemony, whether presided over by Mr. Priestley or another. Nobody forces, or can force, me to read books or listen to radio if I don't want to. The farm-hand hearkening to Mr. Priestley on books or plays might legitimately yawn like a ditch: farm-hands I have listened to (on books, politics, music), have often proved more interesting, if less "correct," than professors.

New Zealand is in some danger of public apathy from government efforts which prefer to direct rather than unobtrusively encourage. There is too much zealous talk by the half-educated about

"educating the public." (I feel irritated, not edified, when the Health Department tells me DON'T BE A SLOUCH. I will if I want to).

Sometimes I think we have a poor cultural appetite. But it is better than cultural indigestion.

—Denis Glover

**J.** B. PRIESTLEY has put into words a feeling that must be in the minds of a great number of people in democratic countries. His definitions of "political" and "cultural" democracy ring true to present-day conditions, and one feels grateful to him for having defined his ideas so tersely.

As a publisher who has made some contribution to the arts, I can say that what Mr. Priestley admires — political democracy — and what he deprecates as cultural democracy seem to me to be as true in New Zealand as it appears to be in England.

Anyone who tries to publish any independent cultural publication (other than an educational authority) in this country has a hard row to hoe, and must not expect much public support. In my experience, a publication devoted to the art of music was only

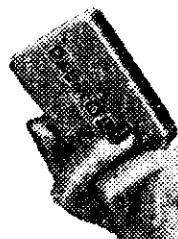


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