

A PROBLEM OF PROPERTY

PROUDHON, who said that property is theft, would probably have joined the recent correspondence in *The Times* on the Albert Hall seats if he had had the opportunity. It all began with a letter signed by Sir Adrian Boult, P. Raymond Cooper (Secretary to the Bach Choir), Harold Holt (the concert promoter), and Thomas Russell (Chairman of the London Philharmonic Orchestra). They said that when the acoustic screens are in position, only 5,000 seats are available for a musical concert, with standing room for 1,000, and that of these, 1,300 (or more than a quarter) are privately-owned and beyond the reach of those who rent the hall, so that people who are turned away from "sold out" concerts afterwards learn that many seats were empty.

They were allotted a century ago to people who put up the money for the building, and now (said the four signatories) some were in private hands and were being sold in competition with the concert promoters. It even happened that at charity concerts members of the audience who had bought very expensive seats were putting money into the hands of speculators, not of the charity they meant to help.

"This would seem a suitable moment to reconsider the propriety of continuing to allow a quarter of the seating capacity of the only full-sized concert-hall in London to be governed autonomously by a group of private citizens," their letter ended.

It was followed at once by one from Dr. G. F. Herbert Smith, who is on the Albert Hall Council. He supported the letter and even said the private rights were relatively more extensive than the signatories had made it appear. And he suggested that the hall ought to be governed now by a public authority, subject to reasonable compensation to the

seatholders. He hoped that "the Government may be disposed to take appropriate action, since it is too much to expect that the seatholders will voluntarily surrender their rights."

"Dangerous Doctrine"

Then followed the case for the defence. Seatholders wrote to *The Times*, saying that they always made their seats available to the box-office if they weren't using them, or that they gave them to deserving individuals; and one said that he "almost always" surrendered his tickets for charity concerts.

The essential point in the case for the defence came of course from those who pointed out that there would not even have been an Albert Hall to-day but for the subscribers who made its erection possible; that their rights, which they got in return for a subscription of £100 or more, and which they renewed by an

annual payment of £3 to the hall council, had been granted by an Act of Parliament, and could only be abrogated in the same way.

The suggestion that because the original holders were dead their successors held only a shadowy right was described as a "dangerous doctrine," applicable to things of greater importance than seats in the Albert Hall.

As the defence stiffened, the attack was pressed. Steuart Wilson wrote a letter naming a company known as Seat Venture Ltd., which had stated its objects on August 21, 1945, as being (among other things) "to carry on business as owners, proprietors and managers of seats, stalls and accommodation in the Albert Hall and as ticket agents, etc., at other theatres."

And someone gave the figures which showed the difference in takings when a charity concert was given on two days, one of which was one of the 10 days in the year when seatholders may not exercise their rights. The charity benefited by a much larger sum on the day of the "free let," as it is known — when seatholders could not claim their seats.

The brightest letter came from Charles B. Cochran, who trotted out the old joke about the Albert Hall echo ("In some seats practically nothing can be heard; in others, every note is heard twice, so that many people have the satisfaction of hearing two concerts without any extra charge"), and said that when he was manager of the hall he had sought legal opinion about the seats. Learned counsel had informed him that seatholders could cart their seats home with them if

Written for "The Listener"
from London



"Boxholders might live in their boxes, or convert them into bathrooms"

YOUR BUSTLINE IS YOUR



For fashion's favourites only one line is permissible—the smooth, unbroken bosom-to-hip line of beauty. And here it is—in a classic foundation garment that ensures a youthful bustline by support from above and below. Satin uplift and elastic shoulder straps give smartness and comfort. In back and underbust, there's light, firm boning. Elastic panels are "grip-knit"—just the best we know. Invisagrip suspenders lie ever-so-flat. It's yours for a charming figure.

Stocked by all stores.

Manufacturers:
J. Steele Ltd., Auckland.
"The Corset Specialists"

Steeles

✦ FORM FITTING FOUNDATIONS

The World's Great Thinkers

Edited by Saxe Commins and Robert N. Linscott. Four books that together comprise the essence of great philosophical thought over the ages.

MAN AND THE UNIVERSE: THE PHILOSOPHERS OF SCIENCE. Man's relation to the physical universe as evaluated by twelve great scientific thinkers from Lucretius to Einstein.

MAN AND THE STATE: THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHERS. The evolution of a free society as it is affected by political ideas. The eight authors range from Hobbes to Marx.

MAN AND THE SPIRIT: THE SPECULATIVE PHILOSOPHERS. Fourteen great thinkers, from the Oriental philosophers onwards, consider the relationship of man to the world beyond reality.

MAN AND MAN: THE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHERS. Representative selections from Aristotle, Plato, Epicurus and others up to John Dewey.

Price of each volume, 20/- posted.

WELLINGTON CO-OPERATIVE BOOK SOCIETY LIMITED.

MODERN BOOKS 48A MANNERS STREET, WELLINGTON, C.1., N.Z.