

HERE IS THE NEWS...

BBC Division Now Under New Zealander

(By Air, from "The Listener's" London Correspondent)

THE BBC's News Division, which employs 300 men and women and is responsible for 65 news broadcasts in English every day, recently came under the administrative control of a New Zealander when Tahu R. P. Hole was appointed Controlling Editor. Since Mr. Hole took up his new post, the Division has undergone another change—it is now housed entirely in one building for the first time, after working for 16 years in separate places. These changes seemed to provide the occasion for a visit on behalf of *The Listener*, and I was this week shown over Egton House, a building of four floors and a basement tucked in behind "B.H." (as everyone in the BBC calls the main building), on the corner of All Souls Place.

The appointment of a New Zealander to a high level job in the BBC might be called a "departure." It is the first time a man from the Dominions has been in a position of such responsibility. But within the organisation it is regarded as natural and proper nowadays, when a BBC news broadcast is something more than merely the voice of London, and when there is probably just as much sense of ownership towards it in the extremities of the Commonwealth as there is in England itself, that there should be some recognition,

in the administration, of shared responsibility.

The consolidation of the whole Division in one building also marks a step forward. Like broadcasting services in all other countries (including New Zealand) the BBC grew between the two wars at a pace faster than any sound plan of building could attempt to imitate. In the years of trial and discovery, it worked in what premises it could find and adapt. Then the war came, not many years after Broadcasting House had been built, and even that bold building was found to be only a beginning after all. While home entertainment programmes were being heavily reduced, the BBC's function as a mouthpiece for addressing the rest of the world suddenly became vastly important. News Division was in the new front line. Nevertheless it was forced to do its vital work under enormous difficulties. Physical separation between different sections was the chief of these.

"It's like trying to produce a newspaper with your reporters in one build-

ing and your sub-editors in another," Mr. Hole told me. "Or rather, it was."

War-Time Expedients

For a time, during the war, both Home and Empire News bulletins were broadcast from Broadcasting House itself, but the celebrated bomb (which went off during a news bulletin) put an end to that. Empire News (which has since become "Overseas News") went out to Evesham, about 100 miles from London, and worked by landlines from a

country mansion. After 18 months it came in to Aldenham, only a dozen miles away, and then after six months more it came in to Oxford Street, where the large department store of Peter Robinson's had retrenched and closed its men's shop. This building, 200 Oxford Street, was far from ideal—for instance, regulations forbade the insertion of complete partitions so that the noise of all the sections that were scattered over the wide floors was free to mix at the ceiling and return—but at least it was an improvement on the "country seat" arrangement.

When an announcer was in Evesham and a speaker was engaged in London to give a commentary, anxious moments were inevitable. And Mr. Hole remembers that the only time he missed a broadcast during the war came, not with the bomb, but with a snowstorm, that prevented him from reaching Aldenham. He was stuck, in a car in a snowdrift, and he had the only copy of the script.

War brought changes to the big Oxford Street store—counters and carpets went out, and fibre-board partitions went in. Control-rooms and minute stuffy studios were installed in the basement, with microphones and jugs and tumblers, and red lights; and overseas news was written and read there, down the street and round the corner from B.H. instead of miles away and all but out of ken. It came from there until a few weeks ago, through the flying-bomb period, and the V2's.

It was one of those changes caused by the war from which there is no return. Now that Overseas News is out of 200, Peter Robinson's are not going back. It was announced recently that the building has been bought by "the Co-op," and presumably there will be a co-operative store there in several years' time—a change that will probably remind people who remember Oxford Street in other days of the time the first Woolworths moved in.

For the BBC News Division the new building, Egton House, is also a sign of new times. More is known now of



BBC Photograph

PREPARING an edition of Radio Newsreel. Left to right: John Cordeaux, narrator (foreground); Doreen Peppercorn, secretary; Mary Maclaren, recorded programmes assistant; Tony Bristow, programme engineer; Matthew Norgate, scriptwriter (standing); Anthony Marr, producer.



BBC Photograph

THE BBC NEWSROOM in the new building, Egton House. In this room are prepared the news bulletins for the BBC's Home and Overseas Services