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same time to test the knowledge (or expose the ignorance) of the victims. The brains trust works in the less definite field of ideas and opinions.

We are led on, from this point, to another negation. Is it the purpose of a brains trust to provide listeners with answers to knotty problems of ethics, aesthetics, and other speculative fields of knowledge? To some small extent, yes. But consider the thing soberly. Let us imagine that somebody sends in this question: "In politics, does the end justify the means?" Now, the philosophers of all the ages have sweated over this question. Books have been written about it, in which the most distinguished minds have set down their views, after giving it profound thought over a long period of time. Before publishing their views they have had time to go over them and revise them. Would it not be a little unreasonable to expect Dr. —, or Mr. —, members of the brains trust, to give us an impromptu answer that was completely satisfactory? And would it not be a little presumptuous for the brains trustees to claim any sort of genuine authority? If people are looking for guidance on this and similar questions, they may be lucky enough to gain something by listening-in; but they should not omit to do some solid reading of books that are in every library.

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AFTER the first broadcast we did in Auckland a friend wrote to me and said he thought these sessions were an excellent idea. "To paraphrase Wilde," he said, "their merit is that by giving us the views of the uneducated, they keep us in touch with the ignorance of the masses." Beautifully put, you will agree. We brains trustees cannot afford to spurn bouquets of any kind, whether they be made up of orchids or withered parsnips. There is an appalling amount of truth in it, too. It is only when you get up in front of a microphone and have half-a-dozen questions fired at you from the undergrowth—questions dealing with anything and everything—that you begin to feel really uneducated.

Fortunately, however, the limitations of brains trustees (even of the fabulous Joad) don't conflict seriously with the objects of the session. When you listen to a brains trust you mustn't expect to get reliable information; any more than you would expect the world's record for a hundred yards to be broken in an egg-and-spoon race. The chief aim, necessarily, is to provide entertainment. The entertainment, when you get it, is obtained from hearing four or five people put on their mettle, and compelled to discuss, as intelligently as possible, questions they probably haven't thought about for years. If they tend now and then to brawl politely, so much the better.

Sometimes a brains trust discussion may help to illuminate some dark corner of a listener's mind. But if those taking part were to set out with that sole aim in view, they would no doubt end up by talking to themselves. It is an excellent thing for a brains trust to engage in a certain amount of serious discussion. But it would be regrettable if the listeners did not have the feeling,

for a good deal of the time, that they were watching a game of blind-man's buff, or a pillow-fight, or a sack-race.

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AND now, to enlist the sympathy of listeners, let me touch on a few of the difficulties brains trustees have to cope with.

A good deal depends, of course, on the questions. If somebody asks, "Are women treated fairly in the modern world?" the trustees are in a jam immediately. It is as if someone had tossed them a lump of kapok the size of a house and asked them to do a juggling turn. Treated fairly in what respects? And by whom? And in comparison with what? The thing is so vague. And don't forget that their wives may be listening in.

Then there is this sort of question: "What is the coefficient of expansion of gun-metal?" If there happens to be a scientist on the panel, we may get an answer. Otherwise there will be a blank silence, during which the Questionmaster tries desperately to do a bit of gagging. The question is one for a quiz session, not for a brains trust.

My own view is that questions (and the discussion of them) ought either to be quite serious, and as concrete and definite as possible, or completely frivolous. The "middle-brow" sort of questions, such as "Do you think Democracy has failed?" is not likely to result in either entertainment or enlightenment. The same question put in some tighter form might give the trustees something to bite on. In that vague and abstract way it exposes them to the temptation to be solemn. With even *The Listener* commentator chucking a brick at us for knitting our brows too much, we shudder gently whenever the "Elephant and Society" situation threatens to arise.

There are many small difficulties to be faced. To avoid talking one another down, and at the same time to avoid awkward gaps in the conversation, calls for a good deal of alertness and self-control. The Questionmaster is usually at fault when these things happen. Then one must remember not to strike a match too near the microphone (it sounds like an atom bomb test to the listener), and not to edge up too close or lean back too far. There is also the little problem of studio-claustrophobia, which is more acute in hot weather.

I don't want to create a false impression. These difficulties are superficial, and the trustees enjoy the sessions. It's nicer work than carrying coal. If the listeners enjoy them as much, there's no more to be said—except this: that I hope I haven't put anybody off sending in a question. They're always welcome, and even if, for any particular reason, they are unsuitable for discussion, we're still grateful to those who go to the trouble of thinking them out, writing them down, and posting them.

NATIONAL FILM UNIT

"FIORDLAND Expedition, 1949," is the subject of a full-reel Weekly Review from the National Film Unit; it will be released throughout the Dominion on May 27. When the American-New Zealand scientific expedition went into the uninhabited fiord country of South Westland a National Film Unit cameraman accompanied the party, stayed some weeks and obtained a most interesting record of the research work being done by zoologists, ornithologists, geologists, and other specialists—against a background of the grandest scenery in New Zealand.



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