



LEFT: Dr. J. C. Beaglehole, the Rt. Hon. Walter Nash, Sir Stanley Unwin, and (at right) J. D. Pascoe, the New Zealand alpinist and author—a photograph taken recently in Wellington.

THE IMPORTATION OF BOOKS

DURING the recent visit to Wellington of Sir Stanley Unwin, the Talks Department of the NZBS recorded two "Books Brains Trust" discussions in which the principal speakers were Sir Stanley Unwin and the Rt. Hon. Walter Nash. The first of these, which dealt with a variety of questions, was broadcast by 2YA on June 13; the second, in which the discussion was confined to the importation of books, was heard on June 27. We reprint below a full transcript of that second discussion. The third speaker taking part was Dr. J. C. Beaglehole, and the chairman was Roy Parsons.

CHAIRMAN: Why do those in the book trade give themselves cultural airs? Aren't books just another commodity?

UNWIN: Well, all I can say is I can only speak for some of the people in the book trade I know. They don't give themselves any cultural airs. I always make it perfectly clear that I'm uneducated. I've had to earn my own living since I was 15, and am therefore completely uneducated except as a result of doing a little foreign travel which does I think help to educate anybody. As to the question of whether books are another commodity, surely there is no difficulty in stating categorically at once that books are not just another commodity. Books are the mental and spiritual food of a nation. If you restrict them in any shape or form, or treat them as just another commodity, you are limiting knowledge. You are, if you treat books as if they're just any other commodity—whether it be nylon stockings or pianos, or cement, or anything else you like—like Sir Kingsley Wood, who couldn't distinguish between books and boots. Why, you are actually condemning the nation to a form of malnutrition. And I think that no nation, especially one that's geographically isolated, can possibly afford

to impose any limitation on the nutrition of its population.

NASH: I think there's a lot of applause for that, Mr. Questionmaster. I heard Sir Stanley Unwin say that we ought not to have any pulp magazines or pulp books in this country. How does he distinguish between good books and bad books? Does he say that all books ought to be read and that they are all nutritious, or ought there to be some standard in determining what books are imported into a country and from where?

UNWIN: I have no hesitation in saying that I am an enemy of censorship. I do not believe in censorship. On the other hand, there comes a moment sometimes in the economic life of a nation—it has come in the case of most nations to-day—when because of currency difficulties you've got to shut out certain things. There is a case to be made out in such circumstances—not in other circumstances—for excluding pulp fiction when you haven't got the dollars to import all that is necessary from America, and I would point out that most of the pulp fiction that is so deplorable does come from the United States of America. A very small proportion of it comes from Great Britain. Therefore, if you ask me what my position is, in principle, I'm against censorship. If you ask me what

action should be taken when there is an acute shortage of dollars, and you have got to select what you can afford to buy, it seems to me quite legitimate to exclude pulp fiction of a kind that has no cultural value whatever.

NASH: Then, Mr. Questionmaster, if Sir Stanley suggests that when you haven't the currency to import the books that he talks about, you at that point must have some limitation—if then there are other currencies that you haven't enough of, would he imply at that point that you should restrict the importation of books from any country when you're not sure of having sufficient to pay for them?

UNWIN: I should always make books Priority Number One. I should not regard them as just another commodity, and if I were short of funds I should say the first thing you have to deal with is food for the body. New Zealand is well provided with food for the body. The next thing you have got to provide for is mental and spiritual food, and that is best provided for in the form of books, and I should put that as priority number one for New Zealand.

NASH: I think you've got to have shops and buildings to determine the distribution of books and foodstuffs. One thing we're more short of at the present time in this country than anything else is

cement. Next to that is steel; next to that is equipment for making the commodities that we send overseas to buy other goods; next to that is foodstuffs; and next to that is the replacement of obsolescent plant to ensure that our production is maintained. Would Sir Stanley think that all those things ought to come in, irrespective of whether we can pay for them or not, or should they only come in after books?

UNWIN: They should come in after books. The amount involved in regard to books is quite trifling. If they were perfectly free to come in, the amount involved—that is the additional amount involved—would not exceed a quarter of a million.

NASH: My answer at that point, Sir Stanley, is that you do not know what you're talking about.

UNWIN: Thank you.

NASH: You do not know what you're talking about, because it isn't possible in this country to determine a limitation of any one commodity without an unanswerable logic. With somebody coming along and saying that this commodity, this food, this citrus fruit, this dried fruit, this sago, this rice, this cement that we want to get for the purpose of building some more and better cow-yards, and so on, this steel, this clothing, these medical supplies, these drugs—before you know where you are all your money's gone with unlimited licenses for certain commodities.

UNWIN: I have no wish to prescribe any course in regard to other commodities. They may have to be limited—they're an affair for local discussion. I do say this, that books should be priority number one, and—

NASH: I think medical supplies would be before books.

UNWIN: Well, there may be a case for medical supplies. Personally, I should doubt very much whether there is anything more important to the community than books. That is my own particular view, and I may be prejudiced, but, you see, I've been through all this battle before. I went through this battle with Sir Kingsley Wood. Now Sir Kingsley Wood was not nearly as intelligent a Chancellor of the Exchequer or Finance Minister as you have in New Zealand, and he took the line, exactly the line, that your Finance Minister is taking to-night, and he could not distinguish between books and other commodities. Well, the result was very interesting. All the better elements in Great Britain rose in wrath. Sir Kingsley Wood suffered an ignominious defeat, and I had the pleasure of listening in the House of Commons to Sir Kingsley Wood admitting that books had to be distinguished from other commodities, and therefore they were to be exempted.

NASH: I think that's right. I think you have to distinguish books from other commodities in the same way that you have to distinguish medical supplies and food and all the other things. But your contention originally, that books stand unique—on the evidence, before food then. On . . .

UNWIN: No, I said food . . .

NASH: All right, on the evidence, before medical supplies?

UNWIN: Yes. . . . What medical supplies? (continued on next page)