

# VISITOR FROM THE BBC

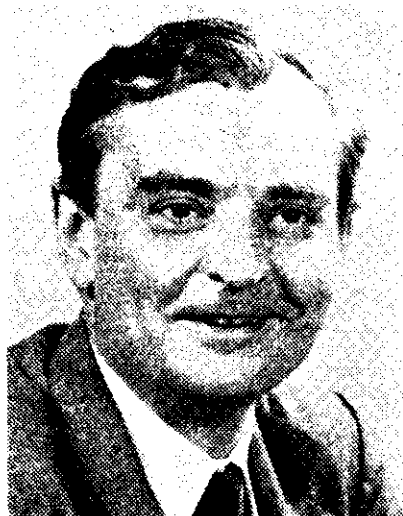
WHEN E. Tangye Lean called on *The Listener* the other day half way through a trip round the world he told us that he had set out to make a series of routine visits to overseas offices of the BBC, then added, "But perhaps I shouldn't say 'routine' as I've never been out of Europe before and I wanted to take the chance of educating myself a little." A relaxed but very alert Englishman in his middle forties, Mr. Lean is Assistant Director of External Broadcasting for the BBC. That means, he explained, that he is concerned with what the BBC sends out to Europe and other parts of the world through broadcasts and transcriptions and with what it takes in through the monitoring service.

Mr. Lean has been associated with the BBC for about 14 years. When he left Oxford, where he edited *The Isis* in 1932 and 1933, he became junior leader writer and later leader page editor of the *News Chronicle*. Then he had a short spell working for the British Government in England and Scandinavia before he joined the BBC as Talks Assistant in the German Service in 1941—the first of a series of posts connected with services to Europe. Before becoming Assistant Director of External Broadcasting he was Controller of European Services. Mr. Lean is author of a number of books, the most recent of them *A Study of Toynbee*, and he has contributed to such English journals as the *London Mercury* and *Horizon*. He describes his choice of recreation as "taking a long view, preferably from Greece." A brother, David Lean, is one of the most notable British film directors.

## Editing "Under Milk Wood"

Since he is closely concerned with the Transcription Service of the BBC, Mr. Lean was specially interested in the criticism made to *The Listener* of the edited transcription version of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood*. He said right away that he found it difficult to believe it had been expurgated. Clearly the Transcription Service had cut it to a length which would make it acceptable to the greatest number of broadcasting services and so give it the maximum impact in the world. Very few stations in the world were prepared to run a play of 1800 lines with any frequency.

"The requirements of stations which use our transcriptions do conflict," said Mr. Lean. "Different stations want programmes of different lengths—they give us information about the playing time they have found most acceptable—and we have to bear the majority in mind all the time. It's unsatisfactory, of course, but we can't have a Transcription Service for every country." The output of the Transcription Service was continually subject to review to meet the needs of other broadcasting services—that was a primary consideration. A second and less



N.P.S. photograph

E. TANGYE LEAN

Foreign affairs are his province

pleasant kind of review had to be made in financial terms when the Musicians' Union increased their rates by a large amount, as they had recently, or when there were difficulties with Actors' Equity. That sort of thing affected the use of the more important programmes.

Mr. Lean said that BBC transcriptions were widely used in the United States, where there were innumerable small stations—such as those attached to universities—with specialist audiences. "There's a strong demand for the more serious type of output—the sort they may not do a great deal of themselves," he said. However, considering the special type of audience that listened to them, the large number of hours these programmes were broadcast did not represent the same impact as they would in a country like New Zealand. The ordinary American listened to the bigger stations. Mr. Lean said in answer to a question that *Take It From Here* was now being broadcast in America, but as a sustaining, not a sponsored programme.

## Foreign Services Cut

Broadcasts by the BBC to listeners outside Britain aim to form a 'friendly link of information, culture and entertainment, to give news of world-wide importance as it is known in Britain, to show what the British nation as a whole is thinking about the news, and to reflect the British way of life. Mr. Lean told us that the whole of these external services are paid for by a grant-in-aid from the British Treasury, and along with others the BBC had been affected by the recent cut in foreign service. Increased grants over the years had not been enough to maintain the level of service, so that the general story since the war had been one of reductions. Giving concrete examples of these Mr. Lean said that some of the European services had been cut badly, some altogether; and the Latin-American service had been cut by half. "We've tried not to cut our friends more than we can help," he said, "but the amount of money available for the General Overseas Service is less than it

used to be, and we haven't been able to increase the Transcription Service budget enough to meet rising costs. Then we have the burden of the cold war on our hands."

## Iron Curtain Audience

The BBC maintains a service to all Russia's European satellites and broadcasts four times a day to Russia. "These are all heavily jammed," said Mr. Lean, "and to combat that requires a big technical effort. To that extent it is met by a special grant from Parliament. These services are very different in character from services to the Commonwealth. In the first place they're much more political in character and don't in any way attempt to provide an alternative to the home services of these countries. For one thing it would be very difficult to run a home service type of programme in, say, Bulgarian; and it wouldn't come in with a home service standard of reproduction partly because it would be on shortwave and partly because of jamming. A second reason is that audiences in these countries have a very political turn of mind. In East Europe they listen in circumstances of some danger to themselves, and they appreciate a very brief political commentary rather than, say, a violin sonata."

Mr. Lean said there was evidence of a very big audience indeed in East Europe, as distinct from the Soviet Union—every one capable of getting the BBC at one time or another tuned in. Where there was reliable evidence from researchers it showed that listening to the BBC was comparable in quantity to listening to the home service in these countries. Censorship, of course, made the banned product very attractive. Listening was very difficult, but those who wanted to listen would put up with a good deal to

do so, and as there were about 20 frequencies it was a job to blot them all out. In the Soviet Union shortwave listening was widespread because distances in that country were so great. The number of sets was not much in excess of 10,000,000, which was not very great for a country of that size; and whereas in the satellites the pull of nationalism was on the side of broadcasts from the West, in the Soviet Union nationalism worked against them. "You may not be an ardent Communist," said Mr. Lean, "but you tend to feel it's an un-Russian activity."

When *The Listener* asked Mr. Lean about the effect of television on the BBC's external services, he said that the Corporation was already sending out a considerable number of so called tele-recordings, especially to Canada, and as soon as differences with the unions had been settled this was likely to expand a good deal. They also hoped in the near future to be transcribing dramatic productions. The prospect for television in external broadcasting was limited by the effective range of a television transmitter, which no one could see how to extend further except by relay stations. "So we can't foresee the point at which live television will be broadcast overseas," said Mr. Lean. "Even if we could the language difficulties would present very great obstacles. A second obstacle is that in most countries the development of TV is not going to be very rapid. The strain it puts on a national economy is such that as far as we can foresee majority listening will be on radio in Europe and in most parts of the world—perhaps outside Britain and the United States. And even there radio will continue in a healthy state. In an emergency condition particularly there will always be a very big radio audience."

Mr. Lean explained that the monitoring service was concerned with listening to overseas stations and that the information received was fed into the BBC and Whitehall. It was also available to the Press for a small subscription. "If you want to find out what Moscow Radio is saying this is one way you can do it calmly," he said. This work occupied a staff of about 300. Of course a number of foreign languages were involved.

Mr. Lean came to New Zealand by way of India, Pakistan, Malaya and Australia and said he would go home through the United States and Canada. "In most countries many people like us more or less but also dislike us more or less," he said, speaking of the reception given to the work of the BBC. "It's a wonderful experience to come to a country like this which is so pleased to see you and has such a high opinion of the BBC."



BBC photograph

RECORDING A BBC TRANSCRIPTION