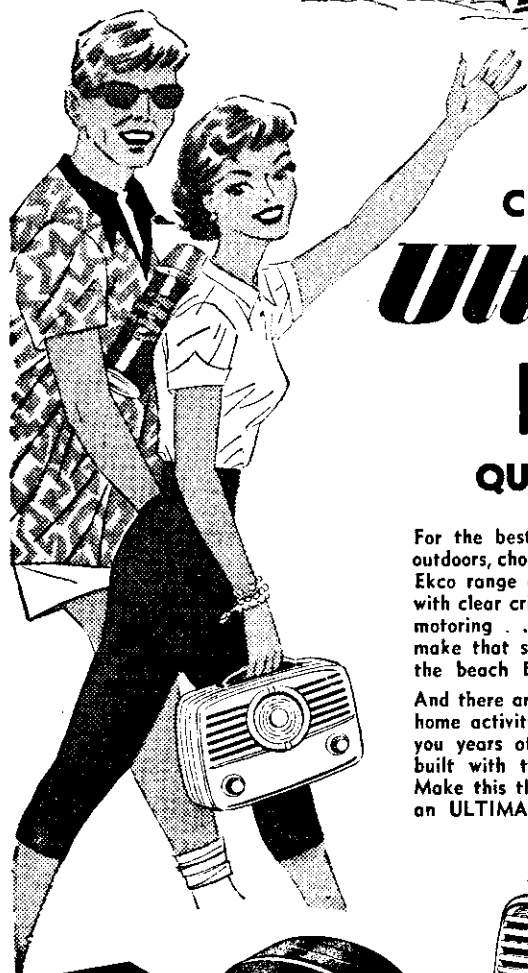


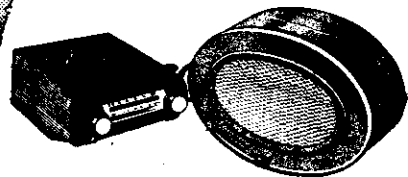
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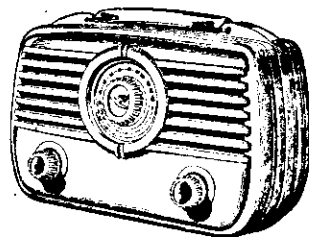
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INCORPORATING N.Z. RADIO RECORD

Every Friday

Price Sixpence

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## The Dreaming Islands

**M**R. DAVID GOLDBLATT, whose somewhat peculiar views on liberalism were widely published during a visit to New Zealand, was reported on his return to London to have expressed himself on certain aspects of life in this country. What he said may arouse only languid interest: the weather is too warm; it seems silly to become heated over one more traveller's tale. We are now quite used to being described as dull, uniform in our habits, over-fond of leisure, and untroubled by dreams of empire. But eyebrows may be raised here and there at his reference to New Zealand "scenery." We do not possess the landscape, any more than we own the climate; and although we have left some ugly footprints up and down the country there are still places which cannot be reached by bulldozers. It has been so usual for visitors to speak highly of the hills and farmlands, the lakes and forests, that Mr. Goldblatt's reaction is almost refreshing—until, alas, he explains himself.

It is all (he thinks) "extremely ordinary" and "not according to the brochures of the shipping companies." There is something disarming in the innocence of one who expects a travel brochure to correspond in any real way with a living countryside: it is rather like expecting a film star to look like a glossy print when she is taking breakfast on the patio. Still, the comment suggests what Mr. Goldblatt was looking for. The "scenery" most likely to appeal to him could probably be found in the backdrop for a musical comedy—or a Fitzpatrick travel film in technicolor, with music from a Wurlitzer rising like an exhalation of cheap scent in the background. Yet oddly, very oddly, Mr. Goldblatt also finds it "eerie," a quality not often associated with the "ordinary." To be ordinary is to be commonplace, not above the usual; and the usual is what people are accustomed to. It must therefore be supposed that Mr. Goldblatt found himself in landscapes which set up a gentle prickling on his scalp, and yet could see little in them that did not remind him of home. Perhaps he was thinking of different times and places. There are parts of New Zealand where the native-born steps carefully, and is aware of strangeness. But even the countryside—"somehow . . . not yet settled," as Mr. Goldblatt reminded us—could scarcely seem ordinary to a visitor from England.

The paradox can possibly be explained by the "shanty towns" which troubled Mr. Goldblatt as he passed with appraising eye along our roads and railways. If he identified the country with its people, "ordinary" then becomes everything that in his opinion is rude and uncultured; and although he described us with the kindest intention as "Nature's gentlemen and gentlewomen" (which takes us a little closer to the jungle than some of us might be prepared to go), it is clear that he disliked our way of life. The country that stays most vividly in his memory is its inhabited parts, the cities that are empty at weekends, the suburbs where citizens indulge their "nice, gentle mediocrity," sadly unaware of the need to be up and doing in the cause of freedom—a freedom, that is, to enter unrestricted competition. If only New Zealand "understood her function," says Mr. Goldblatt, "she could be the Great Britain of the future." As things are, he fears that New Zealanders "might yet go the way of the Maoris and become happy-go-lucky." We are not sure what New Zealand's "function" is, though we suspect it is rather different from what Mr. Goldblatt thinks it should be. These islands may indeed contain some dream for the future, perhaps even a dream of human dignity which will have truth and validity for the new world that is replacing the old. In the meantime, and in summer weather, it need not be surprising if the village is a little drowsy, and dreams of ordinary things.

—M.H.H.

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 15, 1957.