



## HURRICANES *are now in season*

YESTERDAY morning brought news of the death and destruction left by the first hurricane of the season in the Gulf of Mexico, and gave us a grim reminder of the fact that, with all our modern equipment and our scientific method, we have a long way to go before we can control Nature in its wildest moods. Because they are capricious and unreliable, they are given girl names, and the recent one is named Audrey, the capital letter A denoting that it's the first of the season—the next will be a B, and so on. The forces generated vastly exceed the energy released by any atomic explosion. Of course, hurricanes begin in a small way, and build up energy as they develop and move away from their source regions, in the humid tropical seas, and they eventually decrease in violence as they reach cooler latitudes, having left behind them a terrific trail of destruction if their course happens to take them on shore.

As a matter of fact, we seem to be in the throes of a particularly bad spell of hurricane violence in recent years. Fortunately for us, New Zealand is on the outer edge of the region likely to be crossed by them south of the Equator, but the last year or two in the Western Pacific and the Western Atlantic have been among the worst hurricane years on record. In Eastern

THIS is the text of a talk broadcast from the Main National Stations of the NZBS by R. G. LISTER (right) as background to reports of the destruction caused in southern Louisiana by the first hurricane of the 1957 season

Asia they are known as typhoons and tremendous damage is done on the China coast and across Japan every year as they pass northward in a curved trail essentially similar to the tracks across the West Indian waters to the Eastern States. Just why the last few years should have seen more violent and destructive hurricanes than before is not at all clearly understood, but it has been suggested that there is a connection with sunspot activity (not with atomic bombs) and that 1957 is the year of peak sunspot intensity after 40 years of increasing incidence—after which a decline is expected for the next few decades. It has been claimed that the strong and regular westerly winds moving across northern latitudes are affected by the sunspots, to the extent of causing a more northerly swing across the continental areas, so opening up a more northerly path for hurricanes to follow from the south. This is no more than intelligent guesswork at present.

However, the alarming damage and destruction in the United States and in Japan has drawn public attention to the need for action over the whole matter.

The first international conference on typhoons has been held in Tokyo, and programmes have been launched in both countries to improve methods of detection and forecasting. It is hoped eventually to reach a deeper understanding of the nature of hurricanes, their origin and movement, and this in turn may even indicate ways and means of modifying their development and direction. Mastery of the menace of hurricanes is an inspiring goal.

In the United States, the immediate cause of official action was the loss of life and property in the populous and most fully built-up industrial areas of New England, damaged in 1955 and again in 1956—regions further north than those anticipating occasional hurricane devastation. This provided the impetus to establish the National Hurricane Research Project—a joint effort by the Weather Bureau and the Defence Department, financed by a sum of half a million dollars, to be spent on research and investigation, including setting up a chain of special radar stations and new weather stations around the Caribbean and in the southern States. Their observations on the ground will



be supplemented by the findings of three specially equipped research aircraft, which will make two or three flights weekly across the Gulf and Caribbean areas where the hurricanes are born. Already, ever since the war, the Air Force has run routine hurricane reconnaissance flights from Florida and San Juan, and the Navy flies its own aircraft, too. Once an incipient hurricane has been located all three special research aircraft will have the hazardous task of flying in daily to obtain data at various levels up as far as 45,000 feet. These aircraft have precision navigation aids for accurate locating; they

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