



RADIO & TV IN THE U.S.

RADIO in the United States has adapted itself with striking success to meet the competition of television, the NZBS Supervisor of Talks, J. H. Hall, found when he was in America for three months recently. Radio was making more money, and more sets were being sold, than ever before, Mr Hall said, and according to surveys as many people as ever were listening. But it was a very different sort of listening from what New Zealanders were used to, or what Americans had known only a few years ago.

Mr. Hall, who visited America under the U.S. State Department International Exchange Programme, made an extensive tour under the guidance of the American Council on Education. "I wanted to see not only the biggest organisations but the smallest places that could get by with television, and I did that in Vermont, and to a lesser extent in Iowa," Mr Hall said. Starting from Washington, he went first through five Southern States, north to New England, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and New York, west through Ohio, Michigan, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado and Arizona, to California, as far south as the Mexican border, and as far north as Canada.

"Both the State Department and the Council on Education could not have been more helpful and co-operative," he said, "and I also had the co-operation of broadcasting and television people in both the commercial and non-commercial fields."

Mr Hall said there were 91,000,000 home radio sets in the United States, and from Monday to Friday daytime radio reached almost 70 per cent of all homes at some part of the day. Listeners were more numerous than viewers

during the day (from 6.0 a.m. to 3.0 p.m.), though there wasn't much between them from 12 noon until 1.0 p.m. or from 3.0 p.m. until 5.0 p.m. After that viewing leapt ahead. Individual radio programmes did not reach large audiences by television standards—the highest was about 2,000,000 homes between 8.0 and 9.0 a.m.—but an advertiser buying 10 seven and a half minute segments of various shows—with two selling messages a segment—reached 27,000,000 families a week, more than 35,000,000 individual listeners.

Turning to the pattern of listening and programming, Mr. Hall said that outside homes which didn't have television, continuous listening had almost ceased. "An exception is the morning serial—which advertisers now prefer to call 'daytime drama' rather than 'soap opera.' This still has its hold on the housewife at home, and is used by three of the four networks. One argument in favour of retaining it is the result of a survey of listening habits to morning television serials held not long ago. Eighty per cent of the women approached said they were not in the same room as the television set when 'watching' their favourite serials—in fact, they were using the television set as a radio set."

The fourth and smallest of the four radio networks, said Mr Hall, had given up serials in favour of a Music-News-and-Sport type of programme that had become very popular, and very profitable, with independent local stations. As he had heard it at its simplest from a Portland, Oregon, station, Music-News-and-Sport simply took the latest popular recordings and the old-time favourites asked for by listeners and played them all day long. Apart from commer-

cials, which filled every available spot, the only interruptions were for a half-hourly news broadcast, mainly local, and an occasional baseball result. Once each evening the news was varied to become a sort of editorial commentary. The same 40 top tunes were played without change for a month.

Mr Hall said it was towards such simpler forms of listening as this that American radio was moving as the number of homes with radio but without television became fewer and fewer. As the number of television sets grew the pattern of radio programmes changed to keep pace. All the time they had two audiences in mind: those who relied on radio and those who used it as a secondary medium of entertainment—who were ready to hear an occasional programme but looked on radio mainly as a medium of information, a sort of link with the outside world. The backbone of this information service was a news summary on the hour (or half-hourly) throughout the day, or large portions of the day. Then in an attempt to hold a continuous audience in the evening large magazine type programmes were presented—drama, music, news and talks all dressed up in the form of entertainment. There was also a tendency for the networks to provide at night for minority tastes, and especially for those not satisfied with television. "Over all," said Mr Hall, "there is a pretty courageous attempt to give those who still have radio only something like what they had been used to, and at the same time there's a delaying action against the onslaught of television. But it's pretty certain that the radio pattern will change in the next few years."

Discussing the tendency for home radio listening to fall but for the out-of-home audience to maintain the total amount of listening at something near the 1948 level, Mr Hall said the greatest factor in this was the number of people who listened in cars. One survey showed that at times the automobile audience added as much as 64 per cent to the home audience. Practically every car was sold with a radio, and the driver was a pretty good mark for the radio advertiser. Another factor in the out-of-home audience was the new transistor pocket radio, and this would no doubt stay the decline in radio listening as the number of automobile listeners reached their maximum.

"On an average day 116,000,000 people view television in the United States—one-eighth as many again as read newspapers," Mr Hall said. "A typical home views five hours a day. Between 8.0 p.m. and 10.0 p.m. five people are viewing for every one listening, and on Saturday and Sunday every third person in the United States is watching. Even after nine o'clock on those evenings one-seventh of the viewers are children, who will watch anything and everything they're allowed and can be almost mesmerised by television. Over all homes children spend an average of about three hours a day viewing, but on Saturdays and Sundays many children watch for eight or 10 hours."

Science fiction and Westerns were most popular with children of seven and eight, situation comedy and comedy variety with nine and 10-year-olds, said Mr Hall. Children over 12 were less keen on Westerns, but situation comedy and comedy variety kept their hold. Children did not follow quiz shows as

much as adults, and television as a whole had less hold on girls after 13 and on boys after 14. There were many good children's programmes which youngsters supported till they were about nine. After that general programmes attracted an increasing child audience. Many of these were, of course, intended for a family audience, and didn't need more than a child's mind to follow. Here Mr Hall remarked on the growing popularity of the Western, and said he had heard an adult Western described as "one where as much lead flies, but the heroes have girls, and so on." Along with Westerns, quiz and general variety shows were most popular at present.

"Television has been expensive by radio standards from the start, and costs—especially talent costs—have been climbing ever since," Mr Hall said. "It's getting to a stage where it's beyond the reach of more and more individual advertisers." The big networks had only a few hundred sponsors among them, and the higher costs rose the fewer there were who could afford to advertise. Mr Hall quoted, as an instance of the comparative cost of radio and television advertising, rates charged by a station in a city of 800,000 people, where an advertiser could sponsor six quarter-hour programmes with three commercial announcements in each for the cost of one television spot of eight seconds. With such high costs, an advertiser using night-time network television must almost always commit the major part of his advertising budget—seldom less than 50 per cent—to television. This year TV advertisers were spending 1,500,000,000 dollars.

Mr Hall said another effect of high costs was that sponsors could not afford to take risks with new, experimental programmes—the fact that 6,000,000 people might watch it was not satisfying if 10,000,000 were watching a rival programme. This explained the repetitive pattern of programmes. There were three exceptions to this unwillingness to experiment. The networks themselves produced new types of programmes and carried them as sustaining programmes for prestige purposes, or in the hope that they would win an immediate audience and find a sponsor. Some big advertisers, notably the oil companies, whose advertising was almost all prestige, would venture with new types of programmes or perhaps sponsor an orchestra or a long play. The third exception was the so-called educational television stations—only 26 out of about 480 stations throughout the country—and these were hampered by lack of funds.

Commenting on some aspects of television which had impressed him, Mr Hall mentioned first the staggering rate at which it devoured film—much faster than it was yet being produced. His own most favourable impression was of its usefulness in bringing news pictures into the home, and this was the element he had found had the biggest pull of all. He had also been impressed by the spectacular shows—*Cinderella*, *Snow White*, and so on—which he had seen. They were even more impressive on colour television. About half the stations in America, he added, could now transmit network colour programmes, and 38 could transmit their own colour, but so far there were only about 250,000 sets that could receive it. The National total of television receivers is now more than 40,000,000.