

BRITAIN TAKES TELEVISION SERIOUSLY

AFTER several months abroad looking at television developments, and especially at technical standards on which any New Zealand service might be based, two NZBS engineers are now back home. They are N. R. Palmer, supervising engineer, and S. W. McDonald, development engineer. In Australia, Britain, Holland, France, the United States and Canada, they met authorities and manufacturing interests, discussing television with all who were likely to be of help. At Geneva they met world leaders in this field of broadcasting. Now at work on their detailed report to the Minister-in-Charge of Broadcasting, they paused long enough the other day to give *The Listener* some highlights of their tour.

"Our business in Geneva was to attend the sixth plenary assembly of the International Radio Consultative Committee (CCIR), an organisation primarily concerned with setting up standards in the radio communications field," the engineers said, after referring briefly to their Australian visit. "We acquired, in particular, a very valuable background to the CCIR television standards. These standards, though accepted as desirable, have not been adopted by all countries.

Indeed, they could not be adopted by countries which already have television systems unless these systems were changed. However, the conference agreed to record the existence of four standards—its own and those of Britain, France and the United States—hoping there would be no new departures and that eventually all might have a common standard."

Mr. Palmer and Mr. McDonald divided their time in Britain between the BBC and manufacturing companies. They spent much time with BBC research, design, installation and operating engineers, and on visits to the 60-acre research station at Kingswood Warren, where they were able to study forward-looking work being done in such fields as television, aerial design, acoustics and sound recording.

British Network

"Most television broadcasts in Britain originate in London," Mr. Palmer said. "The old Alexandra Palace studios are still used, and new ones, with better facilities and more modern equipment, are being brought into use in former film studios at Lime Grove. The BBC is doing much outdoor television broadcasting and plans to do even more. Another popular item is a broadcast every Sunday night of a play—always of good quality, well cast and produced, and making the most of television as a medium."

The original 1937 BBC television transmitter was still high-powered by world standards, said the engineers. This serves the London area—and wherever you went in this area the directional television aerials on the rooftops told you where Alexandra Palace lay. The Midlands had a transmitter at Sutton Coldfield, near Birmingham, linked by cable cir-

cuit with London; and shortly after the NZBS engineers left Britain the Holme Moss transmitter, near Manchester, began to serve the north of England. The next step would be a Scottish transmitter at Kirk o' Shotts. These stations took the main part of their programme from London in the same way as the BBC regional sound broadcasting stations.

Mr. Palmer and Mr. McDonald agreed that Britain was the only country that had seen the tremendous educational possibilities of television—and it was starting to do something about it. One series that interested them were the popular lectures of the Royal Society of Arts. The proper function of television as a service rather than as a pure entertainment medium was being more seriously looked at in Britain than in any other country visited.

The Radio Exhibition at Earl's Court, the engineers found, was dominated by television receivers. The standard set for everyman, with a screen about 10½ inches by 8 inches, cost about £70, including 66 per cent purchase tax. Others ranged up to £200. Television was going ahead rapidly in Britain, with about a million licence-holders already.

Experimental television transmissions were seen in Holland, where the flat landscape will make it possible for the first station to cover quite a large proportion of the densely-populated areas. Transmissions were also seen in France, where two standards are used.

Discussing their American visit, Mr. Palmer and Mr. McDonald said that Radio City, New York, had been virtually lost to sound broadcasting. "Something like 40 theatres have been taken over by various broadcasting systems as television studios," they said. "Quite a lot of television broadcasting is done with audience participation. In the NBC Radio Centre Theatre you can either watch the show or a television picture of the show on a screen the size of a motion picture screen above the stage proscenium arch. And once you get interested in the performance rather than in the technical details of production you find yourself watching the screen exclusively—you see it more clearly there. Most of the people who attend these audience participation shows are visitors to New York who get their tickets through travel agencies."

U.S. Coverage

Television networks in the United States now gave a fair coverage of the major populated areas. There were already 107 stations, though no new licences had been issued for about two years, pending a decision on the best way to allocate them to the great num-

ber wanting them. Individual stations were now beginning to show a profit after running for many years at a loss, though the networks were still not paying their way. All the stations were commercial. They operated long hours—in New York from not later than 10.0 a.m. till the early morning in some cases. Four of the five stations in New York would soon be operating from aerials mounted on a 200-foot mast on top of the 1250-foot high Empire State Building. There were now about 14 million television receivers in the United States. A low-priced table set with a screen about 10 inches by 12½ inches cost about 200 dollars—and there was no licence fee.

Mr. Palmer and Mr. McDonald saw something of what is being done to start a television service in Canada. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is already installing Marconi equipment in its station at Montreal and Toronto, and expects to be broadcasting in a few months. Canada already ranks third among the nations for the number of television receivers in use, as there are about 60,000 in cities near the United States border, viewing programmes from United States stations.

The NZBS engineers' American visit ended at San Francisco, where they found a good deal to interest them in the operations of stations which have grown up apart from the eastern networks. These stations were working in some cases with facilities less ambitious than those found in London and New York—in fact, in conditions somewhat closer to those found in New Zealand.



BBC photograph

HOLME MOSS, the third BBC television station, and the second high-power station to be completed under the Corporation's post-war plan. The station is 1700 feet up on the Yorkshire moors, and the mast rises 750 feet above that



N. R. PALMER



Spencer Digby photo
S. W. McDONALD

Senior Service Wife

NOWADAYS a naval wife, if she's lucky, can meet her sailor in nearly every port. It involves, of course, a certain amount of travelling with the risk that when she arrives he will have sailed for another part of the world, but naval wives, having married the Navy as well as their husbands, learn to accept such things philosophically. Most of them accept as well the business of bringing up a family single-handed, looking after the garden, settling accounts, and occasionally packing up the entire home and moving off to another corner of the earth. They find it makes for a full life. For Margot Campbell it wasn't full enough. She felt that, as she was constantly being abandoned, she ought to find something stable and positive to do. Consequently she began to write. At first, with her mother, Harriet Campbell (a writer of thrillers) she collaborated on two or three plays. Then she started work on a novel of her own. It was published at the end of the war. The second was also published, and the third is at the publisher's now.

Mrs. Campbell, who has come to New Zealand with her husband for two years, N.Z. LISTENER, JANUARY 11, 1952.



Spencer Digby photograph
MARGOT CAMPBELL

has made a slight deviation from being a novelist, and has written and recorded for the Commercial service a series of four talks on the trials of Senior-Service wives. Her talks, under the title of "Paddling Your Own Canoe," will be heard weekly in Women's Hour, beginning from 42B and 32B on January 18, 22A and 1XH on February 22, and 22B and 12B on March 21.