

BROADCASTING THE ROYAL TOUR

THOUGH the Royal tour is still several months off, plans for NZBS coverage are going steadily ahead, and when *The Listener* called at Head Office the other day it found Gilbert Stringer, who will be NZBS liaison officer with the official party, and Norman Johnston, engineering liaison officer for the tour, talking over some of the details. They agreed that it was not too early to give a hint of what is to come; so here for listeners is the first broad outline of the way in which



N.P.S. photograph
GILBERT STRINGER

clear that both the National and Commercial stations would make the greatest possible use of the material broadcast and recorded by those covering the successive stages of the tour, and the closest co-operation between the two divisions of the service would be maintained by tour committees to be formed by the station managers in the four main centres.

Experience gained in covering the Empire Games at Auckland was very valuable in tackling the Royal tour as a broadcasting job, Mr. Stringer added. The tour was, of course, a bigger job, but it was similar in a number of ways.

It seemed to us that the Royal tour might easily be a difficult job from an engineering point of view; so we first asked Mr. Johnston if we were wrong about this.

The sort of things the engineers would be expected to do were not specially difficult, Mr. Johnston said; but they would have to be done with the greatest care. For instance, there would be some commentaries from running cars. Though this had been done before, it required careful planning to do it perfectly and without risk of a hitch. Equipment would have to be duplicated and any chancy sort of operation rehearsed technically.

"Remember," Mr. Stringer came in, "an unexpected failure of even ten seconds can be a serious matter for the people back at the studio."

"The mainstay of the coverage will be prepared relay points, say, at street corners or on the tops of buildings, to which telephone lines will be run," said Mr. Johnston. "At these points staff will, of course, be on duty, and there will be duplicate outside broadcasting equipment, duplicate microphones, duplicate power supplies. And if, for example, we're broadcasting a commentary on a procession from a series of these relay points, each of the commentators will hear the whole of the broadcast, and they will call one another in. You've probably heard this done quite often by the BBC."

"But about this broadcasting from moving cars," *The Listener* asked—still

fascinated by the unusual—"will there be much of it?"

"To a limited extent there will be commentaries from moving cars with very high-frequency mobile transmitters," Mr. Johnston replied. "We'll have to go over the routes well in advance to make sure there are no dead spots—spots from which our broadcast wouldn't be heard. That doesn't matter very much in a communication circuit—say from a taxi to its base—but in a broadcast it would be disastrous. We would have a small transmitter in the car and a receiver as close by as possible—perhaps at a half-way point on the route of the car. This receiver would be fed into a telephone line to the nearest station."

Mr. Johnston said that the NZBS receiving station at Makara would have an important part in receiving programmes from the main centres and the nearer small stations for use in national broadcasts. Reception at Makara was unusually good, and it would be a very useful collecting point. From the more distant stations land lines would be used extensively.

These land lines are, of course, controlled by the Post and Telegraph Department. Knowing the close co-operation there is between this department and the NZBS, we asked Mr. Johnston about it.

"Yes, we'll be very dependent on co-operation with the Post Office," he said. "There will be heavy calls on them during the tour, and at their busiest time they'll be asked to provide lines for us to all sorts of places. So you can see that close liaison with the Post Office will be of the greatest importance. However, we've worked together so closely for so long that they know pretty well what we want and we know what they can provide. We don't expect any difficulty."

Mr. Johnston said that for the recording work that would be done the Service would largely depend on magnetic tape recorders of both the fixed (studio) and the portable types. There would probably be several cars equipped with portable tape recorders. With its

own commentator and technical staff such a unit would be capable of recording anywhere.

"But our mainstay for recording outside the main centres will be our two large mobile recording units," he said. "Each of these is equipped with two high quality tape recorders, a number of microphones, very long microphone cables, and facilities for 'mixing' the microphones and recording from them while at the same time feeding them into a number of telephone lines. One of these units was used during the Em-



N.P.S. photograph
NORMAN JOHNSTON

the tour will be broadcast and a quick look at some of the technical aspects.

The first point Mr. Stringer made was that during the tour as much work as possible would be done by local stations. "We'll keep centralisation down to the minimum," he said. "Local stations will take care of activities day by day, while the network will cover the arrival of the Royal party at each of the four main centres and their departure from New Zealand. A small team of NZBS writers, commentators, and technicians will travel with the official party."

"Of course, this doesn't mean that stations as a whole will broadcast no day by day news of the tour. Each night, shortly after nine o'clock, a Royal Tour Diary up to half an hour in length will be broadcast through the country. This will consist of national news, extracts from local broadcasts, and items of local colour received during the day and arranged by a special editorial unit in Wellington. Activities for the day later than the deadline for this Diary will be included in a morning preview, which will probably be heard shortly after 7.15 o'clock. This will also announce broadcasting arrangements for the day and information about the tour."

Mr. Stringer said the intention was to bring stations covering the tour on the air at 6 a.m. whether or not they usually started broadcasting at that hour. This would make it possible to give essential broadcasts, such as Weather Forecasts and News for Farmers, early in the day, specially for those who wanted to attend Royal Tour functions. When the Royal party was in their district, stations would maintain essential services and otherwise probably concentrate on programmes of a carnival nature. Mr. Stringer made it

pire Games, the second has just been completed. They are very adaptable indeed—in general we can do anything in them that we can do in a normal studio recording room. In fact, they're practically a complete studio building. And these units were designed and built by our own engineering section."

The Listener was beginning to feel a little sorry for the technical people who would have to see this big job through, and said so to Mr. Johnston. He agreed that the tour would place a considerable strain on station staffs everywhere—and not only engineering staff. Though equipment was normally kept in practically perfect condition it would have to have a major overhaul before the tour.

"However, we're far better off for staff and equipment than we were when the tour was originally planned," Mr. Johnston said. "The difficulties we had after the war have been overcome. We also have more stations—there's one at or near every centre at which the Royal party will be staying. Advances in radio since the war will make our job easier—specially the use of tape recorders, which are much more stable and untemperamental than portable disc recorders."

"And speaking of recording," Mr. Stringer remarked to Mr. Johnston, as they resumed the conference which *The Listener* had interrupted, "our recording studios in the four main centres have now been reserved exclusively for Royal tour work for the duration of the tour. . . ."



National Publicity Studios photograph

NEW MOBILE RECORDING UNIT: "Practically a complete studio"

Letters from Listeners are printed this week on pages 12 and 13