

B Class Stations --- Pros and Cons

Are they Justified?

A correspondent last week expressed appreciation of our article, "Ready to Raid Listeners' Funds," in which we disclosed the plans of owners of "B" class stations to endeavour to secure subsidy from the Government or listeners for their stations. That correspondent said: "Your article is timely, and, to my mind, puts the case very fairly, and I believe you will receive the backing of all unprejudiced listeners."

This week a correspondent takes the opposite point of view, and considers our article "unsportsmanlike." In pursuance of our policy of affording the fullest opportunity for frank discussion of this question, we are publishing this correspondent's letter below, and make such comment on the arguments as we think is desirable. In our view it will be advantageous for listeners to have a full appreciation of the factors involved in the proposed agitation for "B" class stations being subsidised from funds provided by listeners for the broadcast service.

We also publish an important letter from another "B" station owner suggesting a new method for the development of such stations, without subsidy, in the present or future, from listeners' funds. We deal with this letter editorially.

I wonder what New Zealand would say if all the public services closed down on Christmas afternoon? I may say I have no interest whatever in any Z station, beyond the pleasure they afford me, at present gratuitously, and I don't see why they should not receive a small modicum of the increasing licenses, as an earnest of listeners' appreciation, and the radio clubs should be treated the same, as they, unlike sports clubs, are providing others with entertainment. Be a sport and let the Z stations live peacefully until they actually tread on Y's corns.

I would like to congratulate 4YA on their Christmas night entertainment, as being the best of the four stations, and also 2YA on their excellent dance programme on Boxing night, better than relays from noisy cabarets.—G. S. PAXTON (Dunedin).

IN our view our correspondent does not display a full and proper grip of the subject he discusses. Nor has he been perfectly fair to ourselves in traversing our article. For instance, he says, "Yet you suggest selling time to the proprietors of the Z stations by the R.B.C. to advertise their wares." That statement is not correct. What we said was, "The objective of furthering radio would have been attained more completely by co-operation than by competition. It was open, and still is open, to the owners of these B class stations, seeking publicity and the furtherance of radio, to purchase time from the Radio Broadcasting Company, and invest their money in longer hours of operation and—if they have the talent available—better programmes than have been given. Such programmes could be sponsored by the firm concerned, and full credit given them for their enterprise and initiative." This passage shows, we think, that it was not our thought that the time purchased should be devoted to advertising, but to the provision of those "better programmes" which it was suggested the B class stations could give.

Our correspondent further suggests that "Buying Y stations' time would be more expensive than running their own plant." This strikes us as rather a foolish suggestion, as no basis of purchase has been suggested nor a quotation asked. To a business mind it would seem extremely unlikely that the

purchase of part time from an existing organisation would be dearer than the establishment of an entirely new plant, with all the expenses of capital outlay, rent, etc., apart from actual operation. Having regard to the value of split overhead, a business mind would not support our correspondent's suggestion. The suggestion that the Z stations do not need bigger audiences is also, to our mind, somewhat feeble, seeing that the very purpose of their existence is publicity, and "the bigger the better" must surely be their motto.

We have no objection whatsoever to being a "sport" and letting the Z stations live peacefully on their present basis, as suggested by our correspondent. The trouble, however, was that they were not content to remain on their present basis. They promulgated a suggestion for raiding listeners' funds or seeking a subsidy for a service voluntarily entered upon by themselves for their own special purposes. This proposal to our mind involved the welfare of radio itself, as the splitting of the funds for broadcasting to give each of these small stations, as suggested by our correspondent, "a modicum," would simply lead to diffusion of effort and inefficiency. Experience elsewhere is definitely against the superfluous stations. A listener can enjoy one only at a time. If longer hours of transmission are desired, that end is more likely to be gained satisfactorily by conversation of the funds available, than by diffusion of those funds in duplicating plant and equipment.

A sounder view of the position regarding B stations is advanced by Mr. W. A. Sunderland, of Port Chalmers, who writes:—

"About the B stations, there are some who broadcast to improve their radio trade; there are some who do it for the love of it, but I have not yet heard of anyone asking them to broadcast. It is either for business improvement or for the love of it, and when either party is not satisfied I should say the simplest way out is to go off the air and not try and unload it on the listeners-in, or the Broadcasting Company of New Zealand. I should think the Broadcasting Company can spend all the license fees for keeping up their stations and paying their very fine artists. So the simplest way out for the B stations, I should think, is for them to go off the air when they are not satisfied, and not try and unload on either the Broadcasting Company or the listeners-in."

Some Other Factors

WILL you please allow me a little space in which to reply to a letter by J.L. (Hastings) in the "Radio Record" of January 4. In the first place I would like to have seen J.L. sign his full name under a letter like that. In the second, it is quite evident that your correspondent is not the proud possessor of too efficient a receiving outfit; if he was, he would certainly not have criticised the Radio Broadcasting Company to the extent which he did. J.L. states that "Aussies" are inaudible and therein, I claim, lie heaps of reasons for criticising his outfit, and if J.L. does not possess a very efficient set how can he reasonably claim the privilege of pulling the present broadcasting service to pieces. As for getting mostly mush, fading and distortion, well, this statement is absolute rot and leaves J.L. open to considerable personal criticism in consequence. I am running a 6-valve set with one of the latest moving coil speakers and it strikes me very forcibly that it would do J.L.'s heart good to hear this outfit and to realise just what real pleasure can be got out of the present service. In regard to subsidising the B class stations, it seems to me that if any payment is made to one it must be made to the lot and what is paid to them cannot be spent on improving the present service given by the YA stations. And who in Hades, in my district, anyway, is willing to sanction a portion of their license fee

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OUR article "Ready to Raid Listeners' Funds" in December 21st's issue is surely rather unsportsmanlike, and I firmly believe the majority of readers will have disapproved of its sentiments.

Ever since the inauguration of Z stations, listeners have questioned why they received no subsidy out of license money, because they provided extra entertainment when Y stations were not on the air. Now that they are well-established, and giving reliable service, why should they not form an association among themselves, without you endeavouring to blast them in listeners' minds? I venture to say that these Z stations have been beneficial to the R.B.C.'s finances, in that they have largely helped to increase the number of licenses issued, for it is they who have been on the air during the shops' best radio-selling hours (12-2 p.m.), when the Y stations have almost totally been silent.

You say radio advertising is contrary to the spirit of the regulations, and would be foreign to listeners, yet you suggest selling time to the proprietors of the Z stations by the R.B.C. to advertise their wares, which they do not at present any more than the Y stations, who also acknowledge the loan of records by So-and-So. Moreover, I venture to say buying Y stations' time would be more expensive than running their own plant. They don't need bigger audiences by virtue of the greater power of the Y stations; people buy in their nearest home town; no Aucklanders would send to Dunedin for a good record he heard from there, he would procure it in Auckland. And besides, surely the Z stations get big enough audiences? We hear all of them in Dunedin, so I suppose they can all be heard in Auckland too.

You point to Australian conditions of over-crowded ether not being desired in New Zealand, and you endeavour to frighten crystal owners at least that if the Z stations are over-subsidised out of licenses that there will be such a jumble of jarring jingles in their sets that listening-in will be an abomination instead of a delight. Z stations are not on the air during Y hours so far as I know. Certainly the Z stations will be well advised not to ask to be on the air, more than one at once in one centre, as their wavelengths are close.

The Z stations, in my opinion, give licensees extra value, and are to be encouraged along present lines rather than being swallowed up into a monopoly, or starved out of existence.

A vivid case in point occurred on Christmas afternoon. It was dull, wet and blowy, unenticing to go outside the house, and one turned to radio to provide an interest. Dialed 1, 2, 3, 4 Y station in turns, all closed down. Luck was in after all, 4ZM on the air with an extra good selection of gramophone records, and 3ZC with a special session for hospitals—carols and an inspiring and heartening message for both infirm and well by some gentleman. I was so absorbed by these two stations that I didn't dial on to the 1 and 2 Z's, but probably they, too, were on the air, unselfishly foregoing their Christmas relaxation for listeners' pleasure.