

Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, Jan. 22, 1932

SIGNS are not wanting that requests speedily will be made to the Radio Board, on behalf of "B" class interests, for subsidies toward their running cost. In the earlier days of broadcasting, when the revenues of the central authority were limited, we were frankly opposed to proposals for subsidies being diverted from the funds of the central stations for competing or subsidiary services, and therefore opposed the undue licensing of "B" class stations, as we foresaw the demands that ultimately would be made. To-day's position must be faced. The stations are there and give an appreciated service. But even to-day with the enlarged revenue of 70,000 listeners subsidies can be paid to organisations other than the four main stations only if the revenues available to the Board, in its opinion, are sufficient to maintain the central stations adequately, and leave a margin for outside stations. The interests of the central broadcasting service must be regarded as paramount. Decision on that point can be made only by the Board itself after consideration of detailed estimates covering the whole of its programme.

CERTAIN aspects of the situation likely to arise in the future may, however, be traversed with some advantage. For the purposes of illustration, the position as it obtains in Wellington may be reviewed. Here, in addition to 2YA, there is Station 2ZW. This is an independent "B" class station which, by the vigour and enterprise of its conduct, together with the resources in recorded music that are available to it, has established itself with the public as a prime favourite. That is unquestionable. Full credit must be given to the organiser responsible, and to the use he has made of the resources at his command. It must, however, in fairness be mentioned that those resources are extensive, and that certain advantages accrue from the free hand with which he is at liberty to use those resources. The management of 2YA feel it to be part of their duty to listeners and the service generally to encourage talent within the Dominion. No such obligation rests upon Station 2ZW. Therefore, where Station 2YA uses even high-class local professional talent in direct transmission over the air, it is placed immediately in competition with the very best of the world's artists in recorded form from Station 2ZW. These

records are the most perfect examples of their art. Monitoring and production are in every way correct. No matter how good 2YA's transmission may be, an original voice production must at times compare unfavourably in monitoring and detail with a perfect recorded production. Another factor is that 2YA's programmes are arranged in advance and duly published. No such limitation restricts 2ZW. With the advantage of knowledge of the competing programme, individual programmes can be arranged, if desired, to excel or out-rival those of 2YA.

WE are discussing this situation perfectly frankly, as it must needs be discussed to secure a full understanding. Concerned only with giving their listeners the best of entertainment, and without the restrictions which lead 2YA to use local talent and give certain national services to those seeking information as well as entertainment, 2ZW has been giving good service. While the objective of 2ZW may have been to show the value of an alternative service of their own merit, the situation may arise that they may over-prove their case, and by outdoing 2YA in entertainment value demonstrate the necessity, not for two stations, but for one station only!

THAT situation applies so long as both stations work along competing lines. There is outstanding need for co-ordination and control rather than indiscriminate competition. It was because of the undesirability of costly competition that we in the past consistently emphasised the point that there was room in New Zealand for only one co-ordinated service. That does not exclude the possibility and desirability of alternative programmes, but those programmes, however provided, if efficiency is to be gained, must be supplied upon a co-ordinated and organised basis.

THE whole position in regard to "B" class stations, however, is subordinated to the question of coverage—i.e., the problem of mak-

ing radio programmes available to listeners throughout the whole of New Zealand. As we indicated briefly last week, a plan for the provision of numerous subsidiary stations was drawn up formerly by the Radio Broadcasting Company. Up till recently that plan was in accord with the best radio thought of the day. Now, however, technical thought has developed along a new line, and it is a question whether experts to-day would approve of that scheme. Recently in America the proposal was seriously advanced that the whole 600 stations serving that country should be abolished, and replaced by four monster central stations, from which programmes could be broadcast, to cover the whole country working on different wavelengths. A proposal along somewhat similar lines has been made in Britain, even though the regional scheme of the B.B.C. has but just been completed.

ANOTHER factor bearing upon this change in thought is the discovery of the efficiency of ultra-short waves for radio transmission. It is thought by some experts that the use of these waves will be so effective as to displace feeder lines. If that is so, then that fact, together with the changed technical thought as to the best means of providing coverage, constitutes a radical departure from past beliefs, and involves close consideration of all factors before the Radio Board embarks upon its future policy. For instance, the suggestion was made here recently that one monster station should be established in the centre of the North Island, designed to cover the whole of the area. If ultra-short wave transmissions prove as effective as it is thought they might be, then it would be possible to provide such an all-powerful transmitting station in the centre of the North Island, and from the studios in Auckland, Wellington, and on occasion from the concert platforms of other centres, transmit on ultra-short waves programmes to the central station for general broadcast. That conception necessarily involves close examination by technical experts.

IT is plain, however, even on this brief citation of the position, that many factors must be considered in relation to coverage before the Board can reach a final decision upon the requests that have been, and will be, made to it for subsidies by "B" class stations. That question of coverage cannot be decided in a minute. It will involve, in our view, the closest inquiry by the most capable technical experts in the country. We mentioned last week the capacity of Mr. A. Gibbs, Chief Electrical Engineer of the Post and Telegraph Department. No one in the Dominion has a knowledge of all phases of radio superior to his. In the Department, also, are other highly-qualified technicians, who have kept themselves well informed of the trend of radio events overseas. Although we have no warrant for the suggestion, it would not be surprising to us to find that the Radio Board, as a first step toward informing itself of the technical problems involved in the business, were to appoint a commission, consisting of the best technical men available, to draw up a report upon the situation. This might take the form of laying down a three or five-year plan of development to which the Board might work. It seems to us likely that some such course will be taken by the Board before it will feel itself in a position to decide finally upon the requests made to it for financial assistance. In the meantime we appreciate the desire of the "B" stations to impress the Board with their capacity to serve the public by giving good programmes. Their very efficiency, however, if uncontrolled, may affect the capacity of the main stations to serve those who are paying for the service. As a stop-gap proposition, pending final determination, we would suggest, in the interests of listeners themselves, that some policy of co-ordination might be adopted forthwith between "A" and "B" class stations, particularly those in Wellington and Auckland, so that at one and the same time two programmes of the same type might not be put upon the air. A little co-ordination in this respect would add materially to the value of the service given to listeners, and enable both stations to increase the pleasure of the public. It should be possible for the organisers concerned to lay down a schedule for programmes of contrasting types from each station.