

# Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, Feb. 12, 1932

THE attention of listeners at the moment is concentrated upon the "B" class station problem and the attitude of the Board thereto. This has arisen because at the meeting of the Board last week representatives of two such stations—3ZC, Christchurch, and 2ZW, Wellington—waited upon the Board to prefer requests for financial and other assistance in running their stations. The Board's reply was that the whole issue was involved in the two problems of coverage of the Dominion and its own financial resources, and that until it was able on the one hand to secure a complete picture of the technical and financial questions wrapped up in coverage, and on the other to know what its finances were going to be, it was unable to determine to what extent, if any, it would be able to aid such of the "B" class stations as were deserving of assistance. The necessity for such a preliminary investigation was recognised by both advocates, and they asked as an alternative that in the meantime some financial contribution be made toward their running costs, in order that the alternative and supplementary service they are rendering to the public might be maintained. The Board could not see its way to hasten decision, but intimated that a commission of experts would be appointed to investigate the question of coverage in relation to finance, and that in about a month's time it hoped to be able to make a preliminary announcement regarding "B" stations. Arising therefrom, statements were made to the daily Press by both stations 2ZW and 3ZC—both of which appear elsewhere in our columns—setting out their disappointment at the decision, and stating that they would be compelled to curtail their services and might possibly be obliged to close down altogether. To the listening public which has benefited by these alternative services that announcement will unquestionably cause much concern, more particularly as later decisions by both stations indicate definite reductions in hours. 3ZC will henceforth operate for only two days a week, and 2ZW, although details of time cuts are not available, is reducing staff.

THE case advanced for the particular "B" stations concerned is that they render services to radio which definitely increase the sale of radio licenses, and thereby swell the Board's revenue. They do this in two ways. First, by operating at hours other than those covered by the local YA stations, as well as, of course, at hours which duplicate the YA service; and secondly by providing a choice of programme from the YA services. By using well-selected records of overseas performers these stations have given a quality of programme which has attracted a very wide audience. In the case of 3ZC special efforts have always been made to provide programmes which contrast in type and character with those given by 3YA, so that listeners always know they can get something "different" if they want it. In Wellington Station 2ZW has unquestionably won a big following, not only by its range of selected items, but also by the vigour and character imparted to its administration and the splendid social service rendered by it. By reason of this service it is claimed that 2ZW has been a material factor in causing the number of licensed listeners in Wellington to swell. "Therefore," the directors of Station 2ZW and 3ZC, and doubtless certain other stations, urge in effect "our station is entitled, in equity, to some financial assistance from those funds which we earn for the Board to counter-balance that loss which we are suffering in running the station, more particularly as since we established it, the regulations in regard to advertising have been so tightened as to materially reduce that earning capacity which existed at the time of establishment. Without some assistance we will be unable to carry on, and must either reduce or close down."

THAT is the case for the station. The case for the listener is that he naturally does not wish to lose services he has had. 2ZW in particular, the listener says, has shown what a live station can do; it instituted longer hours of operation and has given a pleasant and vital service. If it were practicable many would possibly like to direct their license fees to their favourite station. That not being possible, they would like

to see the Board give support to ensure continuance of the service they like. From the trade point of view certain "B" stations have been of definite advantage. They have given traders that daylight service which they had long urged as a desirable adjunct to the sale of radio sets. The trade will certainly suffer by diminution of this service unless adequate alternatives are provided.

AND what is the Board's case?

The Board's case simply is that it must see the picture as a whole before it can determine its policy. It refuses to make a piecemeal decision. It has to serve the whole of New Zealand, and must lay down a policy for the whole before nibbling at special localities, important though they may be. Many districts throughout the country, unlike the city centres with their alternative services, have no radio facilities, and the Board is required in equity to so administer its funds as to give radio facilities to the whole community; to spread the radio service, which may now be regarded as a necessity, over wide areas, and not foster duplication and possible luxury in limited areas. Therefore the Board's view is that it must secure, first, a comprehensive technical report upon the best way to serve the whole of the Dominion; and, secondly, it must know something of what its financial resources will be. To that the reply of the advocates concerned is that time is pressing with them, and secondly that the best way of increasing the Board's revenue is to secure continuance and expansion of the popular city services; to increase service in order to attract licenses. In other words, to adopt a progressive and aggressive development of service, even in these times, will be the best way of securing the necessary finance. A further feature in the Board's outlook is that the "B" stations concerned, while giving service to the public, have an independent commercial objective in stimulating the sales of the businesses with which they are associated.

FOR our part, while we have in the past given warnings against the dangers inherent in an undue expansion of "B" class stations, we do

hope very sincerely that the Board will be able ultimately to adopt a sympathetic policy of co-operation and possibly financial assistance to those "B" class stations which are rendering useful service to listeners. We forecasted, however, some weeks back that in our view it would be impossible for the Board to reach a speedy decision on this problem. The Board is not technically-minded. It is essentially an administrative body. On technical issues it must secure technical guidance, and balance desirable programmes of development, as drawn up by experts, against its financial resources. The Board alone, when it has secured the necessary evidence, can make that decision. The difficulties it is encountering in getting action are outlined in the chairman's interview. We join the admittedly large circle of listeners who hope that the Board will be able to arrange continuance of necessary supplementary services. In the meantime patience must be exercised. In the days of the Company there was always pressure for expansion, and the reply of the Company that finances would not permit was sometimes derided. Today the position is not essentially different. The Board replaces the Company, but finance is still the over-lord of the situation. With the increased stability, however, secured to the Board as against the Company by reason of its legislative backing, it should be possible for a long-term campaign, conceived with the vision of expanding the service as the best bait for increasing revenue, to be adopted and vigorously prosecuted, without too close a regard in the early stages for an immediate balance, although with that end steadily in sight. In the interests of listeners we sincerely hope that vision of the future will inspire the Board to progressive expansion. The Board, however, must know where its feet are before it embarks upon its plans for development. That, we take it, is the Board's present position. It has just begun to function. Two meetings only have been held. At those meetings a great deal of groundwork has been done, and plans laid for the future. Those plans must be given the opportunity of maturing. Listeners, however, are quite entitled to express their very earnest hopes as to what the Board will do, and the Board will unquestionably do its very best to interpret the wishes of listeners, having due regard to the finances that are available or are in prospect.