

Question of "B" Class Stations

Financial Assistance Sought from Radio Board

Statement by Board Preliminary Investigation by Commission:

Difficulties Outlined

Policy announcement in month's time

THE New Zealand Broadcasting Board concluded its second meeting on the evening of the 4th instant. It is understood that many important matters were discussed and dealt with. Considerable attention was given to the "B" station question, which it will be generally conceded is a vexed one and one not capable of hurried settlement.

The chairman of the board, Mr. H. D. Vickery, in the course of an interview with a representative of this paper, stated that many "B" stations had applied for assistance and some appeared to think that their applications should be granted forthwith. The board, however, was in the peculiar position of not being able to budget, even approximately, for the year 1932. This is due to the fact that the board has not the remotest idea of the amount it will be required to pay to the Postmaster-General for the assets of the Broadcasting Company. Just so soon as an approximation of this amount can be ascertained the board can set about the preparation of a rough budget.

It will be apparent to listeners that the "B" station question is a most important one. It is not only the larger stations in the four centres affording alternative services that have to be considered. There are a number of small stations in other places rendering the only available service to listeners in their respective localities.

These, in the opinion of many, are entitled to first consideration. It is admitted that most "B" stations are rendering service in varying degrees, but it has to be remembered that most of them were established primarily as commercial undertakings. The board's duty is to utilise the revenue derived from listeners' fees to the best possible advantage. It does not intend to dissipate any of the listeners' money by entering into commitments without full and careful inquiry and a survey of the position.

The board instigated inquiries immediately on appointment, but the information yet available is insufficient to warrant a definite line of action being indicated. Within a month, however, it is expected that the preliminary inquiries will be completed, and the board will then be in a position to consider what attitude it should adopt towards "B" stations. The larger question of permanent coverage has to be investigated by experts, and this work naturally will occupy some months.

The "B" station question and the coverage problem are by no means the only important matters being dealt with by the board, but at this juncture it is perhaps undesirable to mention others. Listeners can rest assured that

A FULL meeting of the Radio Broadcasting Board, lasting for two days, was held last week. One of the principal subjects discussed was the question of "B" class stations. Representations were made on behalf of Stations 2ZW and 3ZC for financial assistance of a temporary nature to meet running costs until such time as the Board could formulate its main policy.

To these requests the Board could not see its way to accede, and intimated that it had decided to obtain the best possible expert advice as to the proper method of obtaining Dominion-wide coverage. The investigators will be called upon to recommend alternative schemes as a basis for future development consistent with the likely financial resources of the Board. At the present time the Board is not in the position of knowing its immediate capital commitments, as the purchase price to the Government of the Broadcasting Company's assets has not yet been determined.

The Board has devoted considerable time to the "B" station question, and has come to the conclusion that this question is inseparable from the larger one of coverage, and can, therefore, only be adequately dealt with after the receipt of expert advice. The Board hopes to be able to indicate its attitude toward "B" stations in about one month's time.

the board is doing its utmost to promote and conserve their interests.

FOLLOWING upon the foregoing statement being made in the Press, statements were issued by Stations 2ZW and 3ZC suggesting curtailment of their services was inevitable.

Station 2ZW

THE directors of Station 2ZW, after considering the position, issued the following statement:—

"The statement of the Broadcasting Board's intentions regarding the investigation of coverage is in a form which has caused grave concern to those associated with 'B' class broadcasting stations," said Mr. R. H. Nimmo, chairman of directors. "The board has recently been requested to give the B class stations, or some of them, financial assistance to enable them to continue the service they have been giving the listeners, which service is widely recognised as a highly valuable and necessary supplement to that of the YA stations.

"The reply given by the board to a deputation from the directors of Station 2ZW was most discouraging, and was such as to indicate that the board was entirely unappreciative of the value of the service given, either from the listeners' point of view or that of its effect upon the revenue of the board. We were left with the conviction that the board was apathetic.

"The public will not need to be reminded that during the campaign for the establishment of the Broadcasting

Board, and especially in the course of the Parliamentary debates, it was repeatedly indicated that provision would be made for the assistance of B class stations, or at least such of them as were providing a worthy service. It is not too much to say it was the apparent intention of Parliament that this should be done. If I remember rightly, it was even urged in the House that the Bill should be modified to provide for this.

"In view of this, the directors of 2ZW were encouraged to continue their service. In our case this has meant continual and heavy financial loss, and our request to the board was in effect that until the question of national coverage was determined, a contribution should be made toward this station's running expenses, in view of the fact that we were, by encouraging the popularity of broadcasting, strengthening the board's finances.

"It is now evident that we cannot expect any assistance for some time to come, and there is no guarantee that any will be forthcoming. In those circumstances there is no inducement for the directors to continue. They have, therefore, been compelled, very reluctantly, to determine upon an early curtailment of the service, and it is possible that the station will have to close down altogether."

Case for 3ZC

MR. C. F. WOODHEAD, general manager of Station 3ZC, which has been operating in Christchurch since

1927, reviewed the situation as follows:—

"In September of last year the Government made representations to the Radio Broadcasting Company, and requested them to formulate a scheme for co-operating with "B" class stations. At the same time it intimated to the company that, at the expiration of the existing license, a morning service would be required in each of the main centres. As a result of that communication from the Government, the Radio Broadcasting Company approached Station 3ZC and suggested a comprehensive arrangement providing for the continuation of 3ZC's service if the Radio Broadcasting Company was granted a renewal of its license. The arrangement was to be retrospective to October 1, 1931. Pending final determination, the Radio Broadcasting Company as from the period mentioned undertook to provide every reasonable facility in the use of relay lines, gramophone records, and general co-operation for the improvement of 3ZC's service. This comprehensive proposition was accepted by Station 3ZC, and for the closing months of 1931, 3ZC drew approximately 400 to 500 records per week from the head office of the Broadcasting Company.

In the upshot the company was not granted a renewal of its license through the decision of Parliament, but in spite of that the company continued to provide the existing facilities, as arranged with 3ZC, up to December 31 last.

On the appointment of the board in December, Station 3ZC communicated with it and informed the board that it was financially impossible for the station to carry on indefinitely, and that, while they appreciated the difficulties that beset the board, they thought it would be a reasonable thing if they paid the station in the meantime a sum each month for their actual out-of-pocket expenses; this arrangement to continue until such time as the board was able to prepare a definite policy. In asking for this assistance, it was pointed out that if it was not for Station 3ZC, Christchurch would be without any radio service at all until 3 p.m. every day of the week, and would have a completely silent day on Tuesdays, and that such a condition of affairs was absolutely contrary to the requirements of listeners and of the Government itself. Simultaneously, with the foregoing application, 3ZC applied for a continuation of the gramophone record and other facilities (not necessarily to the original full extent), and 3ZC has since offered to the board to pay all expenses of transport and any sum deemed reasonable by the board to cover wear and tear on the records.

The Board's answer to these requests has been that they were all questions of policy, and that the Board would not be in a position to consider any questions of policy until it met again in approximately six weeks' time—that was to say, at the end of January. The

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