

Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, Feb. 26, 1932

OF late much space has been devoted by some Christchurch newspapers to radio matters. Following the decision of the Board that it could not take immediate action on the request of Station 3ZC for temporary financial assistance, that station felt obliged to curtail its hours. This deprived Christchurch of morning and luncheon services, and created the situation that no radio reception was available in the City of the Plains until the YA station came on the air at 3 p.m. It is true that 2YA was available to those with suitable receivers who were well situated, but in general it is found that reception in the day time within the centre of the city is not satisfactory because of local noises. Strong comment upon the situation created accordingly has been made and the Board attacked on two grounds. First, for its alleged failure to provide morning and luncheon-hour services from either the local "B" station by giving financial assistance, or directly through its own local YA station; secondly, because it is claimed that the programmes given from 3YA have deteriorated, a particular complaint being the disappearance of the international programmes. While we sympathise with Christchurch residents in the withdrawal—temporarily only, we hope—of those morning and luncheon sessions to which they have been accustomed, we do not see that the Board can be held blameable for the immediate situation. We have pointed out already that the Board is still unaware of its capital commitments on the one hand, and on the other awaits that technical advice upon the best means of covering the whole area of the Dominion, which is an essential pre-requisite to consideration of the whole problem. The commission of inquiry into coverage has a big task ahead of it, and its report is vital to the Board before even a partial decision can be made on the related problem of financial assistance to "B" stations. The charge that the programmes from 3YA have deteriorated since January 1 is hardly one that can be sustained. A check of those programmes, and any comparison over any preceding period, will show two things: First, that the calibre of the local artists employed has definitely risen; and secondly, that a wider range of recordings has been given. It is true that the "international" programmes have disappeared. These programmes consisted of recordings from American radio stations. Some

of those items were good, but others on their intrinsic merit failed to appeal to many. Merit apart, however, the comment may be permitted that it is somewhat surprising to find the suggestion seriously advanced in these days of increasing Empire sentiment that American repetitions should be preferred to well-chosen British recordings.

IT is pleasing that radio matters are commanding popular attention in Christchurch. The more radio-conscious the community becomes, the better for the service. Criticism, so long as it is fair and with a constructive bias aiming at greater efficiency, is wholly desirable. At the same time that criticism should be permeated with sympathy and knowledge of the facts and circumstances surrounding the case. The interest being shown in Christchurch demonstrates the value now attaching to the radio service, and the keenness with which listeners in general discuss the Board's plans. On that point it is material to secure the fullest possible expression of opinion from the public, and as the period for the renewal of licenses is in the immediate offing, we suggest that the Board would find it profitable, both from a material and a policy point of view, to adopt the proposal advanced by many in the past, of taking a definite plebiscite upon radio matters. This task is one of magnitude, not only in the distribution and collection of the requisite forms but in analysing the replies to interpret the desires of listeners. It should be possible, however, to prepare a questionnaire which would yield much valuable information. Amongst the issues that could be submitted are: What is your favourite station? What type of receiver do you use, crystal or valve? What is your favourite session? What is your favourite type of item and, coming to a detailed analysis of programme items: What is your order of preference for the various classes of fare submitted? That information, duly analysed, would give a picture of desires in their proper proportions that would be of tremendous value to the Board in formulating its future policy.

NO plebiscite on any fully comprehensive basis has ever been taken in any Australian State. The task has been attempted and completed in European countries, and has given a reliable guide to the authorities on programme matters. The population of the Antipodes is wholly different in character, constitution and taste from that of countries in the Old World. Conditions are different; standards of education are different. How far those differences translate into variations in radio taste is a question that never yet has received a comprehensive answer. The programmes given to-day from all stations are simply based upon conceptions of taste. That they do achieve a great measure of popularity is a tribute to the excellence of the judgment with which they have been compiled. That is not to say, however, that an analysis of the actual predilections of the public would not reveal trends of taste which would make alterations desirable and effect a definite improvement in the service as a whole and its appeal to the listener.

THE time is opportune for such an inquiry. The Board is just entering upon its task. It is required to take a long view in formulating its policy. It would be wholly justified in endeavouring to secure a detailed analysis of the tastes and viewpoints of listeners before determining its procedure. Listeners would appreciate the opportunity of indicating their taste and offering their co-operation. Licenses are to be renewed at the end of March. There is time for a suitable form to be prepared, printed, and issued by the licensing authorities to each listener on his taking out his license. Promptly filled in and returned through the post office by a given date the ground would be laid for a useful analysis. It must be remembered that the preparation of such a questionnaire would in itself involve difficulties. It would be impossible to satisfy all tastes in the range of information desired. Broad schedules will have to cover classes where some enthusiasts would seek meticulous detail. Whatever schedules are submitted will be subject to criticism in some detail. In

the main, however, tastes could be accurately recorded. Analysis and subdivision of the thousands of papers returned would be a costly and possibly a lengthy job. Once done, however, the foundation would be laid for the future, and the Board placed in an impregnable position in determining its programme policy. If such a plebiscite can be taken, we are satisfied it would be welcomed by listeners, and would enable the non-vocal listener, like the silent voter at elections, to indicate his real preferences. As things are, it is possible for a vocal minority to secure undue expression of its opinion through the Press.

Advisory Council

Appointment Wanted

A PROTEST at the delay in setting up a radio advisory council has been forwarded to the acting-general manager of the Broadcasting Board by the North Taranaki Radio Society in the following terms:—"This executive views with concern the delay in the setting up of an advisory council as provided in the Broadcasting Act; the society is of opinion that such delay is prejudicial to the best interests of listeners, and submits with deference that the appointments as required by law as embodied in the Broadcasting Act should be made forthwith so that the council may function at the earliest possible date."

The society is also sending a letter to the board advocating a resumption of international musical programmes, which are considered better than "much that goes over the air from the YA stations under the guise of music or humour." The society considers that much of the criticism of recorded programmes comes from a critical metropolitan minority.

[As our editorial last week showed the delay lies in political circles, and not at the door of the Board. We understand the Council's appointment is expected at any time now.—Ed.]

England Wins the Four Million Race

SOME time ago we stated the number of listeners in England and Germany, which in both these countries was approaching four millions.

Owing to the recent hunt for non-registered and hence non-paying radio listeners organised by the English postal authorities the number of English listeners increased to such an extent that the four millions were soon surpassed, and Germany was even ousted with 200,000 listeners.