Editorial Notes

Wellington, Friday, April 29, 1932

THE fact that the licenses of "B" class stations have been extended, not for twelve months, but only to the end of June, indicates that the field is being left clear for the Broadcasting Board to determine its plans for the future development of the broadcasting service in the Dominion. As is well known, the Coverage Commission is at work securing data from all districts regarding reception and coverage. The report of that Commission will necessarily largely determine events, for the Commission is required to make recommendations for the progressive development of the service in the future. It will then be for the Board to determine how far it will adopt those recommendations and the rate at which it will develop them.

* * *

IN the meantime the future of the "B" class stations is uncertain. It will be remembered that applications were made to the Board on behalf of certain interests for a subsidy. That question was deferred pending fuller inquiry into the question of coverage. The short-term license now given "B" class stations indicates that the whole matter is in the melting-pot. The "B" class stations divide into two main classes: First, those which seek a certain amount of revenue from sponsored programmes; and, secondly, those which do not care greatly whether they receive revenue from that source or not. It is an open secret that, since the application for subsidy from the Board was deferred, certain "B" stations have actively developed the sponsored programme as a feature of their business. This, it is understood, has led to certain pressure from interested quarters, and, it is believed, warning not to overstep the mark. This seems to be a case where over-development might have far-reaching consequences. Those "B" stations which do not concern themselves much with sponsored programmes are mainly situate in country districts.

UNTIL the Coverage Commission summarises its information and presents its considered recommendations, it is impossible to assess the bearing of its proposals upon the future of the broadcasting service. All that can really be stated now is that the "B" station system, as it has been allowed to develop, is entitled to a certain amount of consideration in respect of the service it has given. A definite volume of gratitude is, we believe, felt by many listeners for the service of certain "B" stations. These services have covered two main fields. In the cities, services alternative to those provided by the main YA stations have been given with a considerable degree of acceptability to city listeners. In the country districts, local stations in many instances have helped their areas by providing radio where reception of the main stations was not good. To those enthusiasts the gratitude of both listeners and the trade is due.

* * *

IN view of the economic difficulties of the times and the necessity for concentrating the funds of listeners upon the progressive development of the main stations, we would not be at all surprised to find the Board's decision to be that it is unable to subsidise any "B" stations. If the Board finds that it is able to extend some subsidies, so much the better; but, looking at the question all round and having regard to the financial obligations of the Board, we can envisage the possibility that the Board will feel its duty to be concentration and not diffusion.

* * *

IN the event of no subsidy at all being available, decision will still have to be reached upon the terms on which the "B" stations will be allowed to continue operations. Some of the existing stations — exceeding thirty in number—may be deemed to be superfluous in relation to the Board's scheme. It may, however, we think, be assumed that none will be definitely closed down without effort being made to at least maintain the existing standard of service. The whole question is a knotty one, to the final decision upon which many factors will contribute. Until the essential evidence is available, the problems arising can only be mentioned. We feel, however, that we will be expressing the view of many listeners in saying that, so far as it is possible in line with finance and developmental plans, sympathetic consideration to the claims of the "B" stations will be welcomed by their public. Just how big their public is is a matter upon which the questionnaire now nearing completion is likely to throw an illuminating beam. Analysis of the questionnaire, with its indications of the popularity of various stations and the districts served, will prove a useful supplement to the report of the Coverage Commission.

American Broadcasting System

Proposed Government Control

THE American Senate has passed a resolution directing the Federal Radio Commission to inquire into the broadcasting situation, with particular emphasis on the feasibility of Government ownership and operation.

Far from being perturbed over this resolution, the National Association of Broadcasters has stated that it welcomes "any fair and impartial investigation as an opportunity to demonstrate that the American plan of competitive broadcasting, in the hands of private industry, is immeasurably superior to the system prevalent in Europe."

Senator Couzens, who introduced the resolution, said:—

"I am convinced that the whole radio industry is being irreparably damaged by the amount of time given to advertising on the radio, and if the industry is to continue to meet popular opinion either advertising must be discontinued entirely or limited to a single statement concerning sponsorship of the programme. Senator Couzens added that he was not committed to any particular scheme, but desired a guide when the matter comes up in Congress, which is highly improbable in this session because of the approaching Presidential campaign and the press of other major problems.

Longwave Broadcasting

Possible Solution to Difficulties

THE investigations of the Coverage Commission set up by the Broadcasting Board will, according to the chief engineer of Philips Lamps (N.Z.) Ltd., doubtless include a survey of the possibilities of 1500 or 2000-metre broadcasting as a solution to New Zealand's national coverage problem.

The failure of 2YA to give the service expected of it, in certain areas, is well known.

There has recently been a revival of technical interest in broadcasting on wave-lengths around 1500 metres. Broadly speaking, the aerial energy of a transmitting station produces pressure waves which travel to the reception point by two different routes—one following approximately the contour of the land, and known as the ground wave, while the other is launched into space at an angle above the horizontal plane, and only reappears on the earth's surface again due to reflection and refraction from the Heaviside layer.

The ground wave provides the useful energy in localities near the transmitter, while the space wave becomes of the major importance in very long-distance reception. At certain distances, and under certain conditions, ground wave and space wave interfere with one another badly and cause severe fading and distortion.

The space wave coming by the devious route is more subject to disturbances and distortion; it is only because of its usefulness at comparatively great distances that it is tolerated. It is impossible to secure consistent first-class reception when relying on the space wave.

The area covered by the ground wave of station is more a function of wave-length than of power, and there is more or less definite mileage limit (for a given wave-length), which increases of power will not appreciably extend.

It so happens that the possible effective ground wave radius is considerably greater for a 2000-metre wave than for, say, a 400-metre wave, so that by adopting a long wave-length it is possible to bring a greater number of listeners within the zone of assured reception free from the distractions of fading and distortion. In general, it may be said that 200-600-metre wave-lengths have greater claims for reception at extreme distances, particularly at night time, while 1500-metre waves give more consistent and reliable reception at moderate distances—reception under daylight conditions is also considerably improved.

It is in these respects that long-wave broadcasting is now engaging the attention of radio engineers in various parts of the world.

WGY, the famous station of the General Electric Company at Schenectady, N.Y., celebrated its tenth birthday on February 20 last. The station has been notable as a pioneer in broadcasting technique. For example, it was the first to use crystal frequency control, the first to use a condenser microphone, and the first to use a power so high as 50 kilowatts. Recently, in special tests, 200 kilowatts was used.