

NLRB will take on AFTRA over strike at WPGC stations

Labor board will press charges of illegal secondary boycott as union threatens agencies

The Baltimore regional office of the National Labor Relations Board has decided to prosecute the Washington-Baltimore local of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists for using allegedly illegal tactics in a strike against WPGC-AM-FM Morningside, Md.

The NLRB regional office was preparing a complaint last week against AFTRA based on WPGC charges alleging that the union maintained illegal "hot cargo" agreements and has run an illegal secondary boycott against the stations.

The decision to file a complaint and begin court proceedings against AFTRA was cheered by the stations, which have argued—along with the National Association of Broadcasters (BROADCASTING, June 20)—that if the union's strike tactics went unchallenged, AFTRA would have invented a weapon that might imperil any station being struck, and even a network.

"The whole broadcast industry is going to be the beneficiary of this," Marshall Berman, the stations' attorney, said.

But AFTRA's attorney, Tom Powers, challenged that assertion, saying the dispute "is purely local. It's never been done nationally."

The dispute revolves around the AFTRA local's orders to its member artists and to local advertising agencies that support the union to withdraw from the

stations commercials they had produced or helped make. WPGC filed affidavits with NLRB alleging that 10 agencies that had signed "letters of adherence" with the AFTRA local had been threatened with suit by the union if they failed to follow the order.

AFTRA defended the action as constituting a primary boycott. Playing the commercials with the AFTRA members' recorded voices was the same as the AFTRA members crossing the picket line at the station, it said, and the members had a right to prevent that. It added that the boycott did not prevent the agencies from continuing to produce ad copy for live presentation at the station.

The stations argued, on the other hand, that AFTRA was putting economic pressure on businesses dealing with the stations, which amounts to a secondary boycott prohibited by law. The stations also charged that "letters of adherence" the advertising agencies signed with the union local, agreeing in part to support boycotts by the union's members, violates the law against "hot cargo" agreements between a union and secondary business.

The case will now go before an NLRB administrative law judge, and, if appealed, before the NLRB board. Mr. Powers said if the union loses, it will appeal.