

Supply—Secretary of State

Mr. Pickersgill: I wonder would the hon. gentleman let me make a very brief comment on what he has said. This is of course a matter entirely within the jurisdiction of the C.B.C. and I did not know anything about it until I heard a rumour the day before yesterday that the hon. gentleman was going to raise this matter in debate. I then consulted the regulations of the C.B.C. and was rather surprised to discover something I had not known, and which would have been quite useful to me to have known when I was in opposition, namely that the C.B.C. was willing in these areas where there were no private stations to let members of parliament broadcast to their constituents. I could have used that in Gander and Grand Falls myself if I had known, but the hon. gentleman seems to be more alert and better informed than I was, and for that I give him full credit.

I am merely speaking here as another member of parliament, because I have no responsibility in this matter, when I say I think it is rather an invidious thing for an organization like the C.B.C. to attempt to censor the speeches of politicians or anybody else. They have an editorial function, of course. They have the responsibility under the laws of libel, and certain other laws, to scrutinize in advance what is read, and to make certain something obscene or illegal is not broadcast. I am not one of these people who are much worried about partisan speeches, even when made by my opponents. But I thought there was one point raised by the hon. member which made a great deal of sense. Perhaps the hon. member quoted me—I am not quite sure—

Mr. Nielsen: I did.

Mr. Pickersgill: —but he said something about “full debate and without free debate”. It does seem to me that perhaps the board of broadcast governors should take a look at the regulations of the C.B.C. and give consideration to these remote areas where the private stations do not exist, where the C.B.C. is the only outlet and where therefore the service of broadcasting reports from parliament hill by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters, which is given to most of the rest of us, does not exist. I certainly would not want to see hon. members deprived of that privilege. I say that in these remote areas there should be an opportunity for the people to hear full and free debate. If only the elected member is to be heard, it does seem to me these people do not have much opportunity to get that full and free debate of which the hon. gentleman himself approves so much.

Perhaps the board of broadcast governors would look at this matter and see whether

some arrangement could be made whereby various political views could be expressed in the area during the period of a session of parliament. I think that might be helpful. I am told that the C.A.B. are thinking of doing that. In the province in which I was elected, all the members are Liberal. I think it would be a good thing if we had some Conservative broadcasting in that area, because up to now—to put the matter on a low political plane—they have not made much impression. In Saskatchewan nobody is elected but supporters of the Leader of the Opposition. I think it would be a really good idea to have a little fresh air injected into that province.

I think the hon. gentleman may have done us all a service by raising this matter, and perhaps the board of broadcast governors, which under the Broadcasting Act has the jurisdiction, would look at these regulations and see that these reports from parliament hill give more than one point of view in all parts of Canada, including the Yukon.

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Chairman, I should like to say just a brief word here. The board of broadcast governors has made provision for the situation described by the Secretary of State. I read from the most up to date copy I have of the “Political and Controversial Broadcasting Policies” of the board of broadcast governors issued by the authority of the board and as revised to March 1, 1960. On page 3 they say, amongst other things:

The right to answer is inherent in the democratic doctrine of free speech.

I say, give it, for heaven's sake. Let the Liberal party in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories get sufficiently organized so they can answer. As the Secretary of State said, it would be like a breath of fresh air to have the other side of the story put before the people. I would ask the Secretary of State, when he is asking the board of broadcast governors and the C.B.C. to take this matter into consideration, to have them look at page 3 of this document, where they set out in such pious terms:

The board does not exercise censorship.

I say, Mr. Chairman, that the treatment accorded to me, in good faith by the official concerned with it, is in effect censorship because I was prevented from making that broadcast to my constituents. Then this document says:

It does not restrict the nature of material to be broadcast, except to see that such material conforms with its printed regulations.

How bureaucratic can regulations and interpretations get? Then it says:

The policy of the board, with regard to controversial broadcasting, is based on the following principles: