

Broadcasting

to proceed. The board of broadcast governors immediately stepped in and took it off the air not only in Vancouver, where it originates, but in all private stations that carry the program across Canada.

"Town Meeting in Canada" has attained such a reputation that on two occasions it was carried over the entire N.B.C. network in the United States. On two outstanding occasions it received the Columbus award at the international institute for education by radio of Ohio state university of Columbus, Ohio.

The basis of the cancellation was that one party that agreed to appear did not turn up and therefore there could not be a public airing of the issue involved. I maintain that this is basically a denial of free speech. This serious matter means that one party can kill this type of program by agreeing to participate and then at the last moment failing to appear. The interpretation placed last year by the board of broadcast governors on the regulations concerning controversial broadcasts is such that it now denies the right of the public to have any public airing of important issues. This is a serious problem of vital concern to us all.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member permit a question? Is the hon. gentleman aware that the cancellation was made by the radio station itself and by neither of the political parties? Is the hon. member also aware that in another broadcast when another political party representative did not appear, the moderator of the program decided on his own initiative not to put the broadcast forward?

Mr. Winch: I am aware of all of that. I have all the details in front of me at the present time. Every statement I have made is accurate and is supported by a statutory declaration sent to the board of broadcast governors giving complete information as to what transpired hour by hour and day by day, and even noting the exact time at which it became known that one party would not turn up.

The radio station did raise this matter. They would be responsible if they had not drawn the matter to the attention of the board. However, it is the interpretation of the board and its action in which I am most interested. All the supporters of this program that I know in British Columbia feel that if this interpretation is maintained it will wreck what I maintain is a marvellous and remarkable broadcast.

In order to indicate that I am not merely expressing my own opinion with respect to this program I will read portions of a letter

sent to the board of broadcast governors under date of October 24, 1960.

Mr. Drysdale: Who wrote the letter?

Mr. Winch: I will give the hon. member that. I will read only the important passages of this letter:

We should also make it clear that it is our opinion, as it is also the considered opinion of the management of "Town Meeting in Canada", that the program cannot survive if the present construction which the board has evidently placed on the doctrine of equal opportunity is to prevail.

The real issue is the interpretation to be placed on the meaning of "equal opportunity", or as regulation 6 (1) which you quote in your letter of October 4th, 1960 expresses it "on an equitable basis to all parties and rival candidates." Assuming for the moment that this regulation was intended for application to the public discussion or forum type of radio program not directly connected with political campaigns, we submit that on the facts relevant to the September 30 incident, "equal opportunity" was provided to both sides. The situation there was that the one party did not take the opportunity which was offered to them. Surely the doctrine of equal opportunity cannot be carried so far as to cover a situation where the opportunity is provided but not used.

If this construction is to be followed it must have the necessary consequence of allowing any party to a controversial topic to stifle discussion and kill debate through the simple expedient of declining the opportunity to participate. Surely this is the direction from which the real threat to free speech and discussion would arise.

The undersigned are requesting from the board a clarification of the construction and interpretation they are going to place on this rule in the future. If the program cannot be broadcast because one side of the issue is not represented by reason of their refusal to avail themselves of the opportunity, then clearly the program cannot survive.

We shall be looking forward to receiving your reply.

Who wrote that letter? The representatives in British Columbia of the four political parties interested in this program.

Mr. Drysdale: Would the hon. member provide us with the names of those persons?

Mr. Winch: Their names are as follows: D. A. S. Lanskaill, Liberal; Bert Price, Social Credit; William Dennison, C.C.F.; and Raymond Hull, Conservative. These people are all interested in the broadcast. They represent four different political parties. Although they hold differing political views they have maintained a long and lively interest in this program.

Mr. Drysdale: Will the hon. member permit a question? I appreciate the point of view he has taken with respect to those particular circumstances and, as I emphasized earlier, the objection did not come from any of the political parties. Does he feel that the moderator should have the discretion to decide whether a particular program should