

The NBC News Division develops, supervises, and presents all of NBC's news programs—regularly scheduled hard news reports and analysis, special event and political coverage, news interview programs, and documentaries.

This totals a massive amount of varied programing, on the air many times a day on NBC-owned stations, and on our radio and television networks. It represents almost 25 percent of the NBC Television Network's total schedule and calls for a staff of more than 900 people.

I myself have worked in the news business for over 20 years as a reporter, writer, editor, producer, and administrator. I started with a newspaper and since 1950 I have been with NBC News.

I have been asked to discuss the theory and application of the Fairness Doctrine from the point of view of a working newsman. It is one of the limitations of language that anyone questioning the Fairness Doctrine or how it is administered sounds as though he is against fairness. No doubt a different impression would be created if we called it the "Government Interference Doctrine" or the "News Regulation Doctrine," and perhaps this discussion would move better if we used a term like "Doctrine X," that did not prejudge the matter by its name.

We could then consider whether "Doctrine X" was a good idea to start with, whether it is being productively followed, and what are its prospects. It was first enunciated to insure fairness in a public medium of great reach and influence. Has it?

That's a hard question. Even before we reach the details we get hung up on the wisdom or desirability of taking judgment of journalistic standards in the treatment of controversial issues away from trained journalists, and giving the supervision of such judgment to a Federal agency. Government is a community. Journalism is a community.

The community of American journalism—and this may be its most important function—is charged with keeping an eye on government. There is a logical flaw in having a part of government judging how it performs this function.

In my view, increasing Federal enforcement of a Fairness Doctrine in broadcasting will create more serious problems than leaving these judgments to the broadcast news organizations and to the reactions of the public they seek to serve.

I reach this conclusion on several considerations.

First is the fact that the judgments involved are intricate and complex, calling more for the skills and sensitivities of the professional journalist than those of the Federal regulator, who must regulate in terms of rules, definitions, and precedents.

This consideration is fortified by the tendency for regulation to start out on a broad and generalized basis and then to get more and more detailed, rigid and restrictive. This has been true of the administration of the Fairness Doctrine.

Second is the diversity of the broadcasting medium. There are far more separate voices in radio and television than in the newspaper or wire service fields, nationally and in individual communities. Broadcasters do not speak with one voice, and the competition and variety in ideas and presentations in broadcasting are certainly no less than in any other news medium.