

November 14, 1939

Coughlin

Neville Miller, President  
National Association of Broadcasters  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Miller:

May we congratulate the National Association of Broadcasters on its recently adopted code? It is a step in the right direction, an example of internal self regulation that is the best assurance against the necessity for any possible intrusion on the right of free speech.

The Massachusetts League of Women Voters has always been a staunch defender of the rights of free speech, free press and free assembly but it has at times been worried by the misuse of these privileges on the air. We refer particularly to radio speakers with large personal followings who have been known to disregard the truth in their broadcasts. Too often no correction has been made and even when a correction of fact is made the original listeners seldom hear it.

You now have a code which is thoroughly American and one which is not the subject of legitimate criticism. The test of this code will, however, lay in its enforcement. If the stations and networks that make up the NAB do not comply with the spirit as well as the law of the new code, there is still danger ahead.

We in New England are pleased to note that Mr. John Shephard of the Colonial and Yankee Networks has finally announced compliance with the code. We do, however, feel that Mr. Shephard is circumventing certain aspects of the code in allowing a sustaining program such as Father Coughlin's to engage in commercial "plugs" for Social Justice Magazine as was the case in Father Coughlin's broadcast of Sunday, November 12.

Assuming that the Shephard Network gave free time to Father Coughlin for his broadcast, as was announced to the press, it is our belief that no commercial advertising should be allowed on a sustaining program under the terms of the code of the NAB. We call this to your attention because we feel that the rigid enforcement of the code by your organization is the public's guarantee that the airways will not be abused and that the government, in the exercise of its police power, will not have to take any action that might be faintly construed as a form of censorship or suppression.

We should appreciate hearing from you as to whether you do not think that the inclusion of commercial advertising on a sustaining program is a violation of the code and we should be pleased to hear of the steps taken by you in the enforcement of your entirely praiseworthy self regulation.

May we again reaffirm our belief that the code is an extremely fine manifestation of self regulation for the public interest, a perfect demonstration of democracy in that it regulates but does not suppress in the interest of a common good.

Very truly yours,

copies to James Lawrence Fly,  
Chairman, Federal Communications Commission  
Washington, D. C.  
John Shephard,  
Colonial Network  
Boston, Mass.