
**CANADIAN BROADCAST STANDARDS COUNCIL
WESTERN REGIONAL COUNCIL**

**DECISION CONCERNING
THE CFRN-TV (EDMONTON) NEWS REPORTS
OF NOVEMBER 11, 12 AND 13, 1992
92/93-0051**

February 18, 1993

FACTS OF THE CASE

On November 11, 12 and 13 1992, CFRN-TV aired a series of news reports concerning employees of the City of Edmonton.

The CRTC received a complaint, dated December 1, 1992, about the series, and referred the complaint to the Canadian Broadcast Standards Council (CBSC). The complainant felt that the news reports suggested "that the City Employees are not doing the good job that most Edmonton residents think they are," and that the reports were "misleading" in that they "grossly ... (misrepresented) ... City Employees and the work they do for the City of Edmonton and its citizens." The complainant added that the station had "allowed a misleading series of reports to enter the public domain without regard for the damage it would cause thousands of public sector workers" and had "shirked its responsibilities as a corporate citizen in smearing the City of Edmonton."

The CBSC Secretariat sent the letter to CFRN-TV for response.

In its response, dated December 14, 1992, CFRN-TV indicated that the series was not critical of all city employees, but "only those workers who were abusing or taking advantage of the system and not putting in a full day's work." In addition, the broadcaster affirmed that "the series was fair and balanced in that throughout the series we interviewed several knowledgeable participants including the City Manager ... former city auditor ... city workers on the job, and representatives" of the union of city employees, and offered a local president "the opportunity to discuss the topic in a forum with a local business person."

The complainant, unsatisfied with the broadcasters response, wrote to the CBSC to request that his complaint be referred to the CBSC's Western Regional Council. The regional council considered the complaint on February 4, 1993.

CODE AT ISSUE

The CBSC Secretariat determined that the complaint could be considered in light of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters' Code of Ethics, clause 6 -News, which reads:

It shall be the responsibility of member stations to ensure that news shall be represented with accuracy and without bias. The member station shall satisfy itself that the arrangements made for obtaining news ensure this result. It shall also ensure that news broadcasts are not editorial. News shall not be selected for the purpose of furthering or hindering either side of any controversial public issue, nor shall it be designed by the beliefs or opinions or desires of the station management, the editor, or others engaged in its preparation or delivery. The fundamental purpose of news dissemination in a democracy is to enable people to know what is happening, and to understand events so that they may form their own conclusions.

Therefore, nothing in the foregoing shall be understood as preventing news broadcasters from analyzing and elucidating news so long as such analysis or comment is clearly labelled as such and kept distinct from regular news presentations. Member stations will, insofar as practical, endeavour to provide editorial opinion which shall be clearly labelled as such and kept entirely distinct from regular broadcasts of news or analysis and opinion.

It is recognized that the full, fair and proper presentation of news, opinion, comment and editorial is the prime and fundamental responsibility of the broadcast publisher.

CBSC DECISION

The regional council analyzed the content of the news reports and the specific issues raised by the complainant as they might relate to this code. The council decided that the news reports were not misleading and did not constitute a misrepresentation of city employees. As well, the council decided that the news reports were represented "with accuracy and without bias", that the reports were not editorial, and that the news was not "designed by the beliefs or opinions or desires of the station management, the editor or others engaged in its preparation or delivery." Thus, the broadcaster was deemed not to have contravened the code.

Because the regional council decided that the broadcaster had not contravened the code, the broadcaster has the option of airing the decision. It will also be released to the regional media.