

Mr. Fortier: ... if there had been a press council?

Mr. Giguère: That is exactly what I am trying to say. We have never had problems or libel suits, or the like.

Mr. Fortier: In the area of news and information?

Mr. Giguère: Only in that area, which we share with the print media.

Mr. Fortier: What are you doing today at Télé-Métropole to ensure that when an important issue is being publicly debated, Canadians will hear both points of view? I am thinking of things like the letters-to-the-editor and readers' columns in the print media. More and more newspaper space is being given over to what we might call dissent. What are you doing in this area as far as television is concerned?

Mr. Giguère: First, our producers, announcers and programme hosts have been warned about being objective. That is what we aim at when we deal with an issue. But if you ask whether we present both points of view on every controversial subject we handle, I will say no, because it would take twice as much time.

Mr. Fortier: Twice as much money?

Mr. Giguère: But what I do, for example, in support of our claim to objectivity, we have never refused any group or individual asking for air time to express his or their views. I can assure you of that. I am going to give you a specific example. You know there have been some very controversial political issues in Quebec, during the last two years, particularly. We did our duty as broadcasters and presented the facts. On one occasion, with Bill 63—and heaven knows, there was a good deal of protest over that—after presenting the facts, we were criticized by those who did not share our attitude at all, and we gave them equal air time at our expense. Things like that.

Mr. Fortier: That is a good example.

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The Chairman: I want to terminate this session so that we can turn to the next witness in a few minutes. I am not saying we do not want to ask more questions. Of course, we do, but I would like the Senators to be mindful of that. I know Senator McElman has some questions and I think Senator Smith has some questions.

Senator Smith: That is alright. Most of mine have been answered.

Senator McElman: On this subject you are just speaking about, Mr. Giguère, I would like to put this question, not in the context of your station but all broadcasters generally in Quebec. It is very obvious that there is quite a bit of discontent in Quebec.

Do you believe that broadcasters generally in the province have led public opinion here, participated in public opinion or simply reflected public opinion, or is it a combination? Can you give us your view on that.

Mr. Giguère: Well, I cannot generalize, Senator. Let us say that I could not say that at our own stations, we wanted to lead people into thinking one thing instead of another. We have worked on the assumption that by presenting the facts, and trying to be very, very close to the reality that we are giving our audience an opportunity of making up its own mind.

I would not want our station labelled black or white, you know. I do not think that is basically the job of broadcasters. I think our basic job is to tell what is going on, informing them, without any bias.

To go a little further. We do not editorialize on our stations. We have commentators. We have people who are invited to comment and they are of all allegiances. They are invited to comment and we make it a point to try very hard to see that all points of view are presented. But it is an opinion of a man and we say so because then we really get involved in active journalism. Even though it is the function of a broadcaster to present information, their other functions are very important.

You know, the basic function of a newspaper is to inform people. News is the essence of a newspaper, let us face it, but news is not the essence of a television station. It is important, mind you and I am not minimizing the importance of news and public affairs and so forth; but let us say that there is quite a nuance in specifics of each media; and that is why I say, speaking for ourselves, we have not tried to lead people in any way shape or form.

We have made a tremendous effort in trying to present the realities and to reflect realities and then it is up to the people.

Senator McElman: News presentation, I would say, immediately is changing of late but news presentation over a long period of