

are discussed, reasonable efforts are made to present significant points of view either in the same programme or other programmes within the period of current interest in breach of section 24 (1) (e).

It was also alleged that the items were in breach of certain broadcasting rules. Mr Curran claimed that the Corporation should have upheld his complaints.

Mr Curran, incidentally, was unhappy at the wording of paragraph 2 of the Corporation's findings. He was not concerned about the showing of the programme but noted the failure of television to give coverage of an event three or four days previously when a self-confessed member of the U.V.F., an illegal protestant terrorist organisation, had received 16 life sentences for a bomb attack in which 15 people had been killed. He felt the Corporation had not fully grasped the terms of his complaint or they would have found that it was "unbalanced in its omission of any reference to the criminal activities of the illegal protestant groups operating in Northern Ireland."

It is the general failure of the Corporation's television coverage of Northern Ireland to show that terrorism is carried out by protestant groups and to name those groups that concerns him as he considers it leaves the impression that the only terrorist organisation is the I.R.A. He also considers there to be some anti-catholic anti-Irish bias which we will refer to later.

In his submissions to us he summed up his dissatisfaction as follows:

- a. The Corporation finding that my "complaint in its overall form could not be sustained."
- b. The Corporation's failure in making its finding to answer any of the substantive issues raised in that complaint.
- c. The Corporation's failure after finding that the World Watch programme, of 10 September 1978 was unbalanced to take any effective steps to redress that imbalance.
- d. The Corporation's continued failure since that time to ensure:
  - (i) That the presentation of its television news broadcasts dealing with events in Northern Ireland has been objective and impartial.
  - (ii) That the presentation of other television programmes relating to those events (plays, documentaries etc.) has maintained a balance by presenting significant points of view on controversial issues of public importance.

The Tribunal was not aided in dealing with this complaint by the attitude adopted by the Broadcasting Corporation. We were given no information about the television channels' treatment of Northern Ireland matters. The Corporation indicated that it did not wish to add anything to its findings except "perhaps to point to the difficulty it faces in dealing with information that originates from overseas sources—particularly a troubled area like Northern Ireland." No arrangements were made for the Corporation to be represented at the hearing of the complaint on behalf of the Corporation.

At the request of the Tribunal, the Editor of T.V. 1 news, Mr Eckhoff, kindly appeared at short notice to give what assistance he could to the Tribunal which appreciated the trouble he went to. Mr Eckhoff gave the Tribunal information in two main fields; one was the way in which television news is obtained from overseas, selected and edited for presentation in New Zealand. In this respect it is clear that the basic supply of overseas news film is by way of a ten-minute daily satellite feed, the basic selection being made by Visnews in London. Visnews is a co-operative enterprise involving a number of news organisations and coverage in respect of Northern Ireland news comes mainly from the B.B.C. and sometimes from N.B.C.

Mr Eckhoff also investigated some particular news items referred to by Mr Curran and was able to inform Mr Curran that on a number of the occasions he referred to, where he considered television film coverage should have been given, no such film was received from London.

It is fair to say that Mr Curran is convinced that there is a pattern of broadcasting conduct ranging right across from the New Zealand *Listener* to the selection of plays and local productions that portrays catholic Irish interests adversely. The Tribunal finds no grounds for sharing that view.

It is also true that he brought to the attention of the Tribunal a number of significant news items in which protestant terrorist organisations or the protestant extremist element would have appeared (in his eyes, adversely) which were not reported in television news items.

Mr Curran is however, somewhat selective and is inclined to omit or give less weight to, items which do not fit in with his theory of television bias.

It was therefore not possible for the Tribunal to rely entirely on his analysis of balancing items as there were at

least two instances, one relating to drama and one news item (reporting the Rev. Ian Paisley disturbing the sitting of the European Parliament) which he did not mention although he had brought a number of items to our attention that were outside the period of his complaint.

On the other hand there was a difficulty as far as the Tribunal was concerned in that the Corporation, despite the number of complaints made by Mr Curran had not apparently instituted any method of keeping tallies of Northern Ireland coverage.

We intend to deal with the matters in the order in which he set out the issues in his submission to us.

- (a) We do support Mr Curran's contention that the Corporation's finding that his "complaint in its overall form could not be sustained" was an unsatisfactory method of delivering its decision on his complaint. In fact, the Corporation did find that there was a lack of balance in a World Watch programme and should have clearly upheld his complaint in part unless there was evidence of balancing material. We do not however find that there is sufficient evidence to sustain the view that the Corporation's television coverage generally is in breach of the statutory standards. The Corporation has the ability to find out if that was the position. It did not do so.
- (b) The Corporation could well have provided information from its television services as to the items in which Mr Curran specifically had some interest but apparently no attempt was made to give him the information as to the availability of certain news items to television which has now been obtained in part by Mr Eckhoff at our request.
- (c) Television Two should have taken reasonable efforts following the complaint to have balanced the material shown in the World Watch item. There is no information before us that any attempt has been made to do so. The finding of the Corporation has therefore had little practical effect from Mr Curran's point of view.

Several items referred to by Mr Curran as unpublished appear likely to have been available to television, but the Tribunal does not consider it appropriate to make a judgment that they should have been inserted in any particular bulletin without full knowledge of the news situation on that day and the other items available for presentation. There were some reports published and we can understand that it is difficult for a news organisation to appreciate Mr Curran's dissatisfaction with a news item which was heavily unfavourable to protestant elements but which did not name the organisations under which they operated in their terrorist activities and therefore did not meet his criterion for satisfactory reportage.

- (d) It must be remembered that the volume of wire service news into New Zealand far exceeds the capacity of even a newspaper to publish. Selections therefore have to be made but we think it is important in relation to issues such as Northern Ireland, the Arab/Israeli conflict and similar issues which arouse controversy in this country as well as overseas to keep some record of the treatment given and to review it from time to time. We do not know whether there was a breach of the statutory standards and we do not consider that the time and effort that would be involved in attempting to establish this would be justified. But neither does the Corporation know. The Corporation can, however, ensure that balance is achieved and that the proper efforts are made to do so. We are concerned that there is (at T.V. 1 anyway) no regular procedure for ensuring objectivity and impartiality in the treatment of overseas controversial issues. It should be possible to detect undesirable trends in coverage and to take positive steps to redress balance when necessary.

Mr Eckhoff told us that a watch is kept for distortion by too much coverage of one event and less of another in all news broadcasts, but only in certain matters such as New Zealand election campaigns is a tally of coverage kept in review. There is daily contact with Visnews editors in Sydney and through them contact can be made to London; sometimes there is direct contact with London. It is possible to supply a specific brief for coverage on particular topics. The general brief to Visnews as to coverage of Northern Ireland might need to be revised.