

which is clearly lacking in impartiality and balance. It is not possible to write down all spoken words."

He went on to reiterate his allegations of lack of impartiality and balance.

On 22 August 1988 the acting secretary of the Corporation acknowledged the complainant's letter of 5 August to the Corporation, explained what had occurred as far as the Corporation was concerned, advised him of his right to refer the complaint to the Tribunal and explained again that, for the Corporation to treat the complaint formally, specific detail of the broadcasts and complaint would be required.

On 27 August 1988 Mr Watson replied to the acting secretary that he had provided the name of the programme, its approximate date and what he objected to in previous correspondence. He had not kept a note of dates of other earlier newscasts but said that the Corporation's sources should be able to provide them. He rejected the interpretation that his formal complaint referred to programmes *not* broadcast. He went on to say that, as his complaint had not been replied to within 15 working days of receipt, he had referred it direct to the Tribunal.

#### *Broadcasting Corporation's Response to the Tribunal*

The Broadcasting Corporation responded to the Tribunal on 30 November 1988 and submitted that the Corporation did not have a case to answer. Full and adequate responses had been sent to the complainant at each stage.

The Corporation also noted that the complainant had taken exception to the referral of his correspondence to the Director-General of Television New Zealand, demanding that statutory procedures be followed.

The Corporation said the grounds of complaint—impartiality and balance—had been clarified. However, the complainant referred to potential subject matter not broadcast and, apart from one bulletin item which Mr Watson originally claimed was broadcast on 10 June 1988 but appeared in all probability to be an item carried on 11 June, the Corporation could not properly measure these allegations relating to impartiality and balance.

The Corporation strongly rejected the allegation that its television news coverage of Korean events was designed to show Korea in an unfavourable and prejudiced light.

The Corporation did point out that, in the period leading up to the Olympics, TVNZ broadcast news and current affairs programmes backgrounding items on South Korea which gave a broader perspective of the Korean scene than the organised student unrest.

As far as jurisdiction is concerned, the Corporation pointed out that the original complaint had been addressed to the public relations officer of Television New Zealand, not to the secretary of the Corporation as required by the Act. When it was realised that he wished to invoke the statutory procedures, the complainant was invited to give more explicit detail which he failed to do.

#### *Decision*

The Tribunal did not find it either necessary or appropriate to hold an oral hearing.

The Tribunal finds that the complaint cannot be determined on the basis of the complaint originally made to the secretary of the Corporation. The complaint was not sufficiently precise to identify the aspects of the particular news items about which the allegations of bias were made.

We have observed before that it is not appropriate to level generalised and widespread allegations of breaches of standards without identifying the programmes referred to, in order to allow a proper response to be made under the Act.

We therefore find that the Corporation was justified in not proceeding formally with the complaint without further information.

It is appropriate however that we should address the substance of what was concerning Mr Watson because it is an important issue and we can do so without the need to examine the programmes complained of.

Much of the concern relates to the very nature of television news, which tends to be brief and relate to specific events, many of them with negative connotations. Specifically, coverage of disasters, demonstrations, unrest and conflict are common. The broadcast of a news item, or several items, about a country cannot depict the whole state of that country. Frequently such coverage leaves the viewer with an impression that is different from how that country is seen by its inhabitants. An impression can be gained that the events depicted are more widespread or of greater significance to the residents of that country than is actually the case. Furthermore, other positive aspects of life in and of the nation are not necessarily covered.

This view of the world, or any part of it, is not going to be readily corrected by complaints to the Broadcasting Tribunal or any of its successor bodies in New Zealand. The fact is that we are not in a position to adjudicate on general complaints where the accuracy of the items themselves is not challenged but the criticism is that other more positive news items about that country are not being delivered to the viewer.

It may be otherwise in current affairs or documentary coverage and it may be that a particular documentary can be criticised as being in breach of the standards if it does not recognise some of these features. But that depends on the purpose of the programme. The broadcast of a news item about some event in the Republic of Korea does not necessarily require other aspects of or events in Korea to be reported.

We have previously dealt with situations in South Africa and Northern Ireland where criticisms have been made that the emphasis has been on unrest or that items have focused on particular groups in ways that did not give a true perspective of the whole country concerned.

While noting that, in the case of Korea, the broadcasting body claims that subsequent programmes have given a wider view of the country, the Tribunal is not in this case able to determine either the specific or general issue raised because of the lack of precision about the programmes complained of and our finding that the complainant was not justified in referring the complaint to the Tribunal.

Having failed to establish specific detail of Mr Watson's complaint, the secretary of the Corporation referred Mr Watson's letter to the director-general of television for "a substantive reply".

While Mr Watson objected strongly to this referral, we consider it was the appropriate manner to consider this general concern. It may well have occasioned review at a senior level of the pattern of news and current affairs coverage of Korea, which does appear to be the most reasonable interpretation of Mr Watson's general concern and what he was seeking.

If individuals (or pressure groups) wish to challenge what they consider errant media assumptions or practices, they must expect to engage in dialogue and not reject such opportunities out of hand. The detail of "a substantive reply" can be analysed and monitored and may then, if necessary, provide the basis for a specific formal complaint.

We would also indicate for Mr Watson's benefit that we do consider the Corporation was justified in its interpretation that he was in fact complaining about programmes or items that had not been broadcast (but which he would have liked to have seen broadcast) and not about programmes that were. His allegation appeared to be not that there was bias or a failure of impartiality in the items concerned but merely that the broadcast of only those items led to the lack of impartiality and balance.

The Tribunal hopes that its remarks might be useful in the