

Review: Report about PEI government loan to local cookware manufacturer

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May 13, 2011

**REVIEW**

The CBC Charlottetown nightly newscast, *Compass*, carried a scripted report March 25, 2011, on a Prince Edward Island provincial loan to a locally based cookware company.

*It said: "The PEI government has approved a three-million-dollar loan to Paderno cookware. The money is for improvements to the manufacturing facility in the West Royalty Industrial Park. It's the first major expansion for the plant in about 30 years. Company officials say it means they'll be able to produce more cookware on PEI."*

The complainant, J. Dan Aiken, said the script failed to note that Sean Casey, then a Liberal candidate in the coming federal election, had once owned the company. Aiken asserted Casey was now a director of the firm and noted Kathleen Casey, his wife, was a P.E.I. member of the legislative assembly.

"Such an omission, particularly given the timing, is a blatant disregard for the available facts," he wrote. "I believe that ignoring such a relevant fact represents a bias, in contradiction to fair journalistic practices."

Donna Allen, the executive producer for the program, wrote Aiken on April 7, 2011, to defend what the report said and what it didn't.

"Television news requires reporters and editors to telescope a lot of information into the few seconds or at most minutes available," she wrote. "Even complex events and their significance must be conveyed quickly and clearly and, of course, fairly. Inevitably, some things are left out, but that does not mean the story is 'biased'."

She added: "By definition, news is about what is new. Enough basic information about a story is included to make that clear, but reporters cannot reasonably be expected to include all the information available in every story."

Allen said that Casey was no longer a director of the company and that his wife, speaker of the assembly, reportedly recused herself from discussions involving Paderno.

Aiken wrote April 7, 2011, to say the omission of information remained noteworthy. He asked for a review.

[CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices](#) call for accurate, fair and balanced reporting. Measures relating to elections call for equitable treatment over the course of campaigns.

## CONCLUSION

It is important that journalism provide necessary context in order to help the audience determine the meaning of events. Even in short stories — briefs in newspapers or scripted stories in broadcasting — relevant background shouldn't be left out and excused away because of spatial limits. That doesn't make for high-quality work.

But there is also a line to draw on what is excessive and what isn't required in order to tell a story most economically. There needs to be a demonstrable connection between an event and any backgrounding. Adding available morsels of information without purpose doesn't make for high-quality work, either.

Sean Casey is the former CEO and president of Padinox Inc., the firm that produces Paderno cookware, and a former party president of the Prince Edward Island Liberals. He took over the company his parents acquired and ran.

While he possesses preferred shares in the firm, he asserts he no longer has any day-to-day involvement in the company and hasn't had any for three years. With no evidence to the contrary, his word must be taken on this matter.

Had Casey been directly involved in the operation of Padinox Inc. when the provincial loan was discussed or provided, it would have been highly appropriate to include that information in any report. There would have been obvious relevance: Casey was at the time a candidate for the federal election. (He was elected May 2.) Not insignificantly, his wife was speaker of the provincial assembly.

But, given he no longer operated the company, there was no need for CBC to mention his earlier involvement as background in order to satisfy its policies. The inclusion of his background was not relevant; indeed, it would have appeared provocative and served as innuendo.

I note that on April 19, CBC.ca [carried a report](#) on NDP signage in the riding that suggested impropriety in the awarding of the loan. CBC provided fair treatment to the allegation and to the defence. In this instance, the discussion of the background was relevant because it involved an election campaign tactic. But I also note that Casey's NDP opponent rescinded the advertising once Casey clarified his detachment from Padinox.

It is an Ombudsman's role to examine content and apply what was done or not against the policies that guide standards and practices. In this instance of this complaint about the scripted story, I am satisfied that the additional background would not have been relevant.

There was no violation of CBC Journalistic Standards and Practices.

Kirk LaPointe  
CBC Ombudsman