

Peter Mansbridge at UPEI

by Wendell Blacket

Television news, is it merely only a glamorizing of the violent nature of mankind? Or is it a responsible body which attempts to give facts and attempts to mirror life as it is? This was the focus of a talk given to a capacity filled Duffy Ampitheatre, by one of Canada's leading figures, anchorman of the National, Peter Mansbridge, who despite a cold, gave a vigorating defence of television news.

Mansbridge noted that the subject matter bothered him that some people believe the idea that all television news is a "Mindless excursion into the cheap thrill." One of the main thrusts of his defence of Television journalism dealt with the actual length of time of a given news cast. The National runs for 22 minutes, as do the other major newscasts when the commercials are taken into consideration. In deciding what will be told in that 22 minutes a great deal of the news must be left out. Roughly 2000 stories appear on wire machines, plus hundreds from various networks, and the National has their own generated stories. It is thus an impossible task to be able to pull all on a news cast.

With this in mind, Mans-

bridge admits that there will be mistakes made, and it is difficult to prepare for tough decisions. He noted several incidents where there was a serious moral dilemma on whether or not a certain shot would be put on the air. One incident dealt with a New Years eve fire in Quebec a few years ago where more than 40 people had died. The local news station was nearing the end of a news cast and there was a massive rush to give the first pictures of the event. In order to make this deadline several minutes of unedited footage was roled over the air. Horrifying scenes were shown, and one even thought it was crucial to have the first pictures on the newscast, Mansbridge noted that there was a sense of trepidation by the people involved as to whether or not the proper decision was made.

Mansbridge noted a survey done by the CBC which indicated that many people did not want to see violence on television. 20% felt violent scenes should not be shown at all, while 30% believed that violent scenes should not be shown before 11 p.m. Mansbridge finds it very difficult to accept this idea. He believes that people should see this so they can

understand what life in many areas of the world is really like. He notes BBC anchorman, Michael Burke, who when discussing violence on television news stated, "Grown up people with sheltered lives should see this."

Mansbridge noted that the CBC has apologized when they know they have made an error in showing something which offended a family member of the victim of a tragedy. Far from being totally contrary to the numbers of people who believed much of television news glorifies violence, Mansbridge noted that many networks in the United States have inferior news casts for the benefit of trying to maintain a high rating. However, he noted that while the National is willing to take criticism, "Those who ridicule speak from ignorance."

Following Mansbridge's talk, a vigorous question and answer session followed. Much of which dealt with last Novembers election campaign, and the idea that the media played a greater influence than necessary. Other questions ranging from one persons believe that the CBC shows a left wing bias, to the focus on Joe Clark's errors in public were fielded by Mansbridge.

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