Shake-up At CTV

A dispute over editorial integrity and control from the top has shaken CTV's news and public affairs department. It has resulted in the demotion of two senior CTV news executives and left the reputation of Tom Gould, a network vice-president, in a somewhat battered condition.

Gould is head of CTV's news and public affairs operations. He also is featured week nights on the CTV Backgrounder following the national news. He reportedly makes $35,000 a year for presenting an analysis of current events for the Bank of Commerce and Imperial Oil, which share sponsorship of the backgrounder. (Although Gould presents the backgrounder as if he wrote them, they are actually scripted by Martin Dewey.)

The trouble at CTV started in January when the network's prestigious W-5 programme did an item on the state of the oil industry in Canada. Among other things, the item cast a bad light on Imperial Oil. It showed how Canada's largest oil company uses a film, prepared by the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency, to teach its employees how to manipulate newsmen and lie to the media. The item also attacked the oil industry, and Imperial Oil, for the pseudo-political type of advocacy advertising it does on CTV and elsewhere.

Close to its scheduled viewing time Gould screened the piece and ordered it dropped from that Sunday's show. This led to a revolt by W-5 staffers including Joan Donaldson, Barry Dunsmore, Carole Taylor, Jack McGaw and Don North. Also involved were Don Cameron, Gould's second-in-command, and Craig Oliver, the producer of W-5 and a number of other CTV shows.

A meeting held between the staff and Gould to clarify the situation broke into a shouting match between Oliver and Gould. Oliver accused his boss of putting his loyalty to Imperial Oil before his support for editorial integrity. Gould countered that the item was unfair and that he didn't like the way the story had been put together. The W-5 staff supported
Oliver and, according to one person at the meeting, Oliver literally drove Gould from the confrontation.

Oliver also received support from Murray Chercover, the president of CTV, who attended the meeting. Chercover decided that the item was to be used and it was aired the next Sunday. But as one W-5 staffer put it, "we only won the battle and certainly lost the war."

Soon afterward Gould, citing the need for a reorganization of his department, demoted both Cameron and Oliver. Cameron was stripped of much of his administrative power including the right to hire and fire public affairs personnel. He also lost several network documentary shows which were under his wing. Oliver suffered an even worse fate. He was sent to Ottawa as the administrative manager of the CTV parliamentary operation with responsibility for the Montreal bureau as well.

Meanwhile, back in Toronto the daily media accepted Gould's version of the administrative shake-up and printed a few small items on the changes. None of the television columnists reported on the dispute behind the demotions. And the word around CTV is that Gould will stop doing his backgrounders for the Bank of Commerce and Imperial Oil when his current contract with them ends later this year. But some CTV staffers say that they'll believe that when they see it happen.

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