

Reporter disciplined under pressure from Canadian Prime Minister's Office - Exposed Chretien government's role in suppression of APEC protests

Our reporter
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Under pressure from the office of Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chretien, Canada's state-owned television network has disciplined the reporter principally responsible for bringing to light the Chretien government's role in the suppression of lawful protests against last November's Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Vancouver.

Veteran CBC reporter Terry Milewski was suspended without pay for three days Tuesday and ordered to appear before a CBC disciplinary hearing later this week. The CBC also instructed Milewski to make no public comment about the controversy surrounding his reporting of the APEC affair until its news department and ombudsman have completed their respective investigations. CBC management is reportedly divided over whether Milewski should be fired.

The CBC initially responded to a complaint from Chretien's communication director, Peter Donolo, about its coverage of APEC by removing Milewski from the story, but rejected Donolo's charge that Milewski is 'biased.' The Prime Minister's Office, however, soon made clear that it was not ready to let the matter rest. Donolo reiterated his complaints about Milewski; then called on the CBC's ombudsman to investigate his reporting of APEC.

The pretext for Tuesday's disciplinary action was the appearance that morning of a newspaper op-ed piece by Milewski entitled 'Who's Next?'. The CBC claims that in publishing the comment Milewski violated a ban on reporters working for the CBC's media rivals. In fact, the CBC action has only underscored the substance of Milewski's article: the PMO is mounting a vigorous

campaign aimed at silencing critical media coverage--a campaign which 'if successful will tie the hands of many other reporters.'

The PMO's charges against Milewski are completely spurious. That Milewski made a facetious reference to the PMO and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as 'the forces of darkness' in a private e-mail with one of the APEC protesters is being construed as proof he distorted the APEC affair.

As Milewski himself says in his op-ed piece, he has been the victim of a 'dirty tricks' operation. His correspondence with his sources is legally private. When an RCMP lawyer tabled his e-mails at the RCMP Police Complaints Commission inquiry into the APEC affair, they were ruled irrelevant and ordered stricken from the record. 'Their exposure,' writes Milewski, 'was engineered and exploited by the targets of my investigation: the RCMP and the PMO. It was an old-fashioned dirty trick designed to reveal that I had a personal opinion about the APEC story-which I do. It's as though the government made my vote public, and used it to indict me for bias.'

The disciplining of Milewski has dismayed many journalists and caused concern over government control over the CBC, especially as parliament is now debating legislation that would change the status of the CBC president to an 'at-pleasure' government appointment. 'I am afraid that it appears now that we are more accountable to the PMO than to the public,' said a union official representing CBC employees.

Meanwhile, a *Globe and Mail* column by Jan Wong has shed light on the CBC's true attitude to negative

commentary on the government. Wong reports that in September, before Donolo had complained about coverage of the APEC affair, the CBC insisted she delete from a television commentary on the APEC affair any reference to Chretien's family ties to sections of Canadian big business with significant interests in Asia. Chretien's son-in-law, Paul Desmarais, is a member of one of Canada's wealthiest families and chairman of the Canada-China Business Council.

The Liberals' parliamentary opponents and sections of the media have sought to exploit the APEC furor for their own purposes. But had it not been for Milewski's persistence the Chretien government's wanton disregard for the APEC protesters' civil rights and its felicitous attitude toward the now-deposed Indonesian dictator Suharto would never have been exposed.

Craig Jones, the APEC protester with whom Milewski is accused by the Prime Minister's Office of having 'secretly conspired,' was arrested during the APEC summit, which was held at the University of British Columbia. His crime? He refused to take down two placards from his dormitory that read 'Free Speech' and 'Democracy.'

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