

2018-72: Dawson vs National Post

January 16 2019 – *for immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has mediated and resolved a complaint about identification of a photo in the November 27 2018 edition of the National Post.

The complainant, Donald Dawson, argued that the photo in the online article, “Party for one? Inside Maxime Bernier’s quest to build a new political movement”, appeared to be manipulated but was not identified as a photo illustration rather than a news photo.

A photo illustration, in contrast to a news photo, can be manipulated for artistic or editorial purposes. However, the news media organization must take care that illustration is identified as such so that the reader is not misled.

In this case, the image showed MP Maxime Bernier, leader of the People’s Party of Canada, speaking to an empty House of Commons while a janitor vacuums the carpet. The complainant stated that the image appeared ‘doctored’ but was not identified as such, and raised concern that the omission would create perceptions of misinformation in a trusted national news organization.

The news organization responded by confirming its policy of identifying a photo illustration as such, and that the policy was followed in the case of the print version of the photo illustration in question. It noted, however, that a template flaw meant the same identification was not made in the online version.

Citing a commitment to transparency and crediting the attention drawn by the complaint, the newspaper corrected the error by adding ‘NP photo illustration’ to the online version and modifying the identification process to prevent future errors.

In view of the above, the NewsMedia Council is of the view that corrective action has been taken by the news media organization. In this case, the corrective action was undertaken in exemplary fashion in that the news organization responded fully to the complainant and the Council as it acknowledged the error, explained why it happened, and described the steps taken to prevent a similar error in future.