

PACIFIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

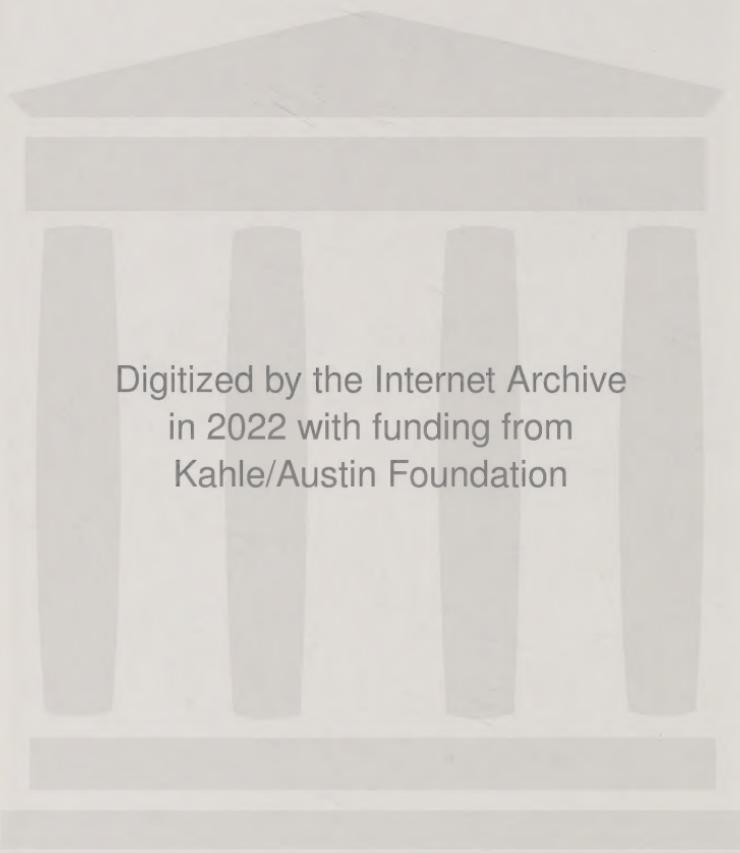


3 5369 00225 0437

LILLIANNE SCHULTZ

# REVIVING THE FOURTH ESTATE

DEMOCRACY, ACCOUNTABILITY  
& THE MEDIA



Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2022 with funding from  
Kahle/Austin Foundation

<https://archive.org/details/revivingfourthes0000schu>

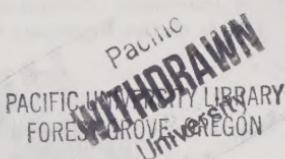




# REVIVING THE FOURTH ESTATE

Democracy, Accountability and the Media

JULIANNE SCHULTZ



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK <http://www.cup.cam.ac.uk>  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA <http://www.cup.org>  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Julianne Schultz 1998

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without  
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 1998

Printed in Australia by Ligare Pty Ltd

Typeset in Baskerville 10/12 pt

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*National Library of Australia Cataloguing in Publication data*

Schultz, Julianne, 1956-  
Reviving the fourth estate: democracy, accountability and  
the media.

Bibliography.

Includes index.

ISBN 0 521 62042 2.

ISBN 0 521 62970 5 (pbk.).

1. Mass media. 2. Mass media – Political aspects. 3. Journalism.  
4. Journalism – Political aspects. 5. Democracy.  
I. Title. (Series: Reshaping Australian institutions).

302.23

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Schultz, Julianne, 1956-  
Reviving the fourth estate: democracy, accountability, and the  
media/Julianne Schultz.  
p. cm. – (Reshaping Australian institutions)  
Includes bibliographical references and index.  
ISBN 0-521-62042-2 (hb: alk. paper). – ISBN 0-521-62970-5 (pb:  
alk. paper)

1. Mass media – Political aspects. 2. Journalism – Political  
aspects. 3. Mass media – Ownership. 4. Democracy. I. Title.

II. Series.

P95. 8. S377 1998

302.23-dc21

98-4049

ISBN 0 521 62042 2 hardback  
ISBN 0 52001 62970 5 paperback

## *Contents*

<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction: Paradoxes of the Bastard Estate	1
1 Redefining the Fourth Estate	15
2 The Fourth Estate: A Changing Doctrine	23
3 The Idealised Watchdog Estate	47
4 The Other Estates Question the Fourth	69
5 Contests to the Institutional Legitimacy of the Fourth Estate	95
6 Accepting the Ideal	117
7 Testing the Ideal	136
8 From Reporting to Investigating	166
9 Challenging Power: Reporting in the 1980s	195
10 Reviving the Fourth Estate	230
<i>Appendix</i>	239
<i>List of References</i>	277
<i>Index</i>	293



## *Tables*

6.1	Importance of objectivity	133
7.1	Personal preference for an impartial or advocacy news system	138
7.2	News you prepare significantly altered by another to improve its political balance	139
7.3	Frequency that news you prepare is altered by another to give it a political slant	140
7.4	Political issues deserve more news coverage than policy initiatives	141
7.5	Report main issue positions of political parties more or less as presented	141
7.6	Define party conflict by revealing where each party actually stands	142
7.7	Journalists should ensure they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcomes of party political conflict	143
7.8	Importance of influencing the public as an aspect of the job	143
7.9	Importance of influencing policy decisions as an aspect of the job	143
7.10	Obligation to down-play views of extremists whose ideas threaten democracy	144
7.11	Importance of distortions from personal bias, as a limitation on the work	144
7.12	Journalists should not cover issues on which they have strong convictions	144
7.13	Very important and quite important limitations and pressures on ability to do the job	147

7.14 Frequency of copy changed by another person in the newsroom to increase its audience appeal	148
7.15 Journalism aims to inform an audience or capture its attention	148
7.16 Environment or economic growth should take precedence when in conflict	149
7.17 Third World problems caused by exploitation by industrialised western nations	149
7.18 Government should do more to provide good jobs and incomes for economically disadvantaged people	150
7.19 Excellent mechanisms for expressing public opinion	152
7.20 Journalists and the public have similar attitudes on most issues	153
7.21 Journalists should not promote ideas rejected by public	154
7.22 Very important sources of guidance in decisions about what news to cover and what issues to highlight	155
7.23 Agenda-setting determined by journalists or officials	155
7.24 Rate national media reporting of politics, news and current affairs	161
7.25 Very important factors in low public perception of Australian journalists	162
7.26 Attitudes towards journalists' rights and responsibilities	163
7.27 Moral responsibility for policy failure as a consequence of editorial campaign	164

## *Acknowledgments*

This book has had a long gestation. The first seeds were sown two decades ago when as a young journalist I tried to put the idealised notions of the media that I had learnt about at university into practice. This was not always an easy fit, but I was lucky to work with people who took the gap between the rhetorical ideal and the practical reality sufficiently seriously to talk about it and try to produce exemplary journalism.

As a journalism educator I saw students mulling over the same dilemma: how could the commercially driven news media fulfil a role as an independent quasi-political institution, the Fourth Estate? As an academic researcher I was keen to explore the way Australian journalists dealt with the gap between theory and practice.

Then I began the research that led to this book. I interviewed many leading investigative journalists, with the assistance of grants from the NSW Law Foundation, the University of Technology, Sydney and the Australian Research Council and found that most of them found a rationale for their work in the rhetoric of the Fourth Estate.

Although the ideal of the Fourth Estate may have taken a battering as the media industry became larger and more powerful, it remained relevant to the aspirations of many journalists. As the media is a political institution of some importance, the capacity of journalists to reshape media practice was of interest to the Reshaping Australian Institutions project at the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University, and I had many useful discussions with colleagues there.

I then attempted to answer the question of whether the ideal of the Fourth Estate could be revived at the end of the late twentieth century and whether journalists could be capable custodians of the ideal. That

question formed the core of my University of Sydney doctoral thesis which has now become this book.

As this long gestation suggests I am indebted to many friends and colleagues for their patience and encouragement, and my editors at Cambridge University Press who helped refine the argument and make it more accessible.

I am also grateful to my parents, Noel and Cynthia, who showed by example that education need not stop in youth, my husband, Ian, whose support has not wavered, and the tolerance of my children, Isabelle and Carl, to whom I can at last say, ‘Yes, the book is finished.’

## INTRODUCTION

### *Paradoxes of the Bastard Estate*

Long since most people have forgotten – if they ever knew – what the first, second and third estates were, there is general understanding that the Fourth Estate is another name for the news media. By a curious process of hype, self-promotion, definitional flexibility and being a good idea, the Fourth Estate has survived.

Just.

The ideal of the news media successfully fulfilling a political role that transcends its commercial obligations has been seriously battered. Its power, commercial ambitions and ethical weakness have undermined its institutional standing. There is now a widespread, and reasonable, doubt that the contemporary news media can any longer adequately fulfil the historic role the press created for itself several hundred years ago. Then it created itself as an institution of political life designed to act on behalf of the people and report on and give voice to those in positions of political, corporate, economic and social power. In the intervening decades the news media has itself become a source of real and significant power and influence, an industry prepared to exercise and pursue self-interested commercial, political and cultural agendas.

The press was the bastard estate of the eighteenth century. At a time of limited suffrage, but growing literacy, the press became a crucial political institution, intimately connected to the concerns and preoccupations of its readers. By pursuing an institutional ambition the press created itself as more than another business. It created the wont which it supplied. Innovation and willingness to pursue technological developments later enabled the press to grow and diversify to the point where newspapers are now a small part of the news media. This business has flourished to become, at the end of the millennium, the most pervasive global industry. The original imperatives of the press – to

retail news and information and provide entertainment – have remained, but the methods and scale of the contemporary news media are vastly different. Its tentacles reach into the lives of almost every man, woman and child on earth: from the rich, media-saturated societies of the west to the shanties of the developing countries, where television cables hang above rooftops and international news crews descend in voracious waves to capture images of famine, flood, war and genocide, before bouncing them back off international satellites, into millions of sitting rooms a world away.

The connections between this global industry, which drip-feeds a diet of pacy news, flashing images, instant analysis and entertainment, and the hand-printed, densely written, black and grey news-sheets of the past seem remote. The magnitude of the global news business is overwhelming, the profits staggering, the values questionable and the power, which can be cynically exercised, immense.

Yet at its core, at the news-focused centre of the media business, remnants of an ideal remain. This ideal is grounded in the notion that among the checks and balances that ensure that the powerful are held accountable, the media has an essential, and highly political, role to play. The process of finding, distilling, and analysing the information that is the media's commodity also ensures its political role, the core of its self-definition as the Fourth Estate.

The Fourth Estate has proven to be a remarkably flexible concept. Its meaning has changed over the centuries that it has been in regular use; ranging from a description of the space where reporters sat while documenting the proceedings of the House of Commons, to more nebulous ideals connected with the task of scrutinising those in positions of power and influence. The process by which the Fourth Estate changed from being a place to an idea, has its genesis in the arguments about the importance of freedom of expression two centuries ago. While these arguments were propounded from soap boxes, in meeting halls and newsletters, the most active advocates of freedom of expression saw a place for the press to become the means of such expression. At the time strict laws and taxes regulated publication in Britain, so that the task of becoming the conduit for political speech first demanded the removal of these restraints. The campaign to abolish censorship and stamp taxes, permit defences against libel and allow journalists to report, not just record, had succeeded in Britain by the mid-1800s, somewhat later than in America and Australia.

Once this freedom was won the press began to exercise a role as an independent institution in the political system. It asserted a right to speak with its own voice, not merely to echo the voice of the parliament or the executive government. By finding its own voice, most famously

in an editorial published in *The Times* in 1852, the press asserted its autonomy and a unique place in the process of government.

In the years that followed, the meaning of the Fourth Estate varied in response to changing political and economic circumstances. Whereas in its earliest manifestation the press was considered another elite, which could relay the views of other elites to the population to help garner public support, by the end of the nineteenth century the popular press was well established. With it the definition of the Fourth Estate changed. It maintained the core idea of reporting those in positions of power and influence and exercising its own voice in commentary and analysis, but moved to incorporate a more activist role, scrutinising the consequences of actions and decisions on ordinary people and consciously representing the interests of the disadvantaged and down-trodden. As the Fourth Estate became less an agency of other elites, the dictum that the role of the press was to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted emerged. This change demonstrated the semantic flexibility of the term, flexibility which continued throughout the twentieth century. During this century the press evolved into the diversified news media and commercial success became a more fundamental objective than it had been in the days when the arguments about freedom of expression were first articulated in small journals.

For much of the twentieth century the idealised Fourth Estate was regarded with some disdain, as a form of misplaced knight errantry at odds with the commercial priorities of the news media. If it were just another business, the media not only jeopardised its political influence, but also risked regulatory intervention. In the latter decades of the century, then, the commercial and political advantages to be gained from advocating public service helped revive the ideal. News organisations were pleased to claim the political immunity that institutional status offered and to exercise the power that it provided. Social responsibility became a buzz word in journalism and after the 1970s pursuing the Fourth Estate's watchdog role became central to the mission of many news organisations. This ideal was enthusiastically adopted by journalists who saw in it the possibility of more challenging work, greater professional self-esteem and enhanced status in public life.

Of all the checks and balances built into representative democracies – elections, parliaments, independent judiciary – the press was the only one whose success was measured commercially. This gave the press a unique standing – it could appeal directly to its audiences who paid for it and underwrote its independence from government. But it also depended on commercial viability, and newspaper owners, who wished to maximise profits and pursue personal gain, could easily

dispose of expensive Fourth Estate responsibilities. The commercial nature of the press made it a curious, hybrid political institution – a bastard estate.

Even when the news media succeeds in its most idealised form to expose corruption, malpractice and dishonesty, it is generally operating in a random fashion. As such it is a flawed watchdog, one that has now been supplemented by a network of statutory organisations with an explicit brief to scrutinise those in positions of power, by legislation granting access to official information and a raft of international covenants and conventions. Commissions against corruption, answerable only to parliaments, have sprung up in many countries. These commissions, many created after revelations in the news media disclosed corrupt practice, have formally assumed the role that was once the informal province of the Fourth Estate. The media is now more likely to augment this function, by reporting competing views or amplifying the concerns of aggrieved individuals, interest groups and lobbies who feel that their perspective and concerns have been inadequately addressed. Its role as the principal ‘feedback mechanism of democratic system management’ (Kunczik, 1989) has been supplemented.

The need for checks and balances, and scrutiny of those in power is greater than ever, but the task is beyond the scope of the media industry which is itself constrained by competing imperatives. The media is now a vast international business increasingly suspected of exercising self-interested political and economic power rather than acting as a disinterested check on the abuse of such power by others.

The news media is increasingly driven by the expectations of entertainment. Even news is now often judged on its entertainment value. Television audience meters measure the responses to individual news items and increase pressure to deliver more of those that rate high and fewer of the unpopular ones. Newspapers, radio and television have always considered entertainment an important part of their function, but now entertainment values help shape news decisions. It is not just a matter of getting the mix right between news and entertainment, personalities and issues, but inserting the values of entertainment into the news. This leads to saturation coverage of public figures, revealing intimate details of their lives with the moral certainty of an afternoon soap. The saturation coverage is rationalised by the argument that understanding the character of a public figure will aid understanding of his political decisions. This argument may be comforting, but it is often misplaced, masking another way in which entertainment values have swamped public life.

The commercial nature of the news media is a source of both strength and weakness. The strength comes from the independence that profits alone can buy. A news media that is profitable has much

greater autonomy, its managers can say no to those who would seek to buy its patronage. Financial success can insulate a news organisation from the demands of politicians, lobbyists, advertisers and merchants. Greed can, however, corrode this autonomy. In the desire for that next dollar, deals may be made and the independent soul of the news organisation sold to the highest – or most opportunistic – bidder. The lure of profit may obscure sight of less tangible Fourth Estate roles if pursuit of the next dollar overwhelms. So the commercial success of much of the media produces an ambiguous burden. The *New York Times* captured this reality well in its advertising slogan: ‘From Fourth Estate to Real Estate’. It covered the lot and profits accrued.

The tension between commercial and quasi-institutional obligations is not confined to advertisers, or marketing departments which may seek to tailor content to enhance their message. It takes a more insidious form within news organisations that are themselves part of vast diversified empires. Only in the most conscientiously managed organisations will it be possible to ensure that the cross-promotion of the company’s diverse interests does not distort news judgements. Journalists are very conscious of this pressure and many find it hard to make a distinction between news and commerce – so if the organisation makes movies, they are likely to be promoted; if the organisation owns a football team, that is likely to be promoted. The zip of self-censorship will similarly close debate to ensure that issues not favoured by the corporation are ignored.

The publicly funded media faces a different challenge when asserting a role as independent scrutineer of power. When governments provide funds, governments will attempt to shape content, beyond the predictable way the media gives succour to those in power. Where direct intervention over content in the public sector media was once accepted as the norm, it is now trenchantly resisted. Journalists and producers in the public sector media, free of commercial constraints, have become sufficiently emboldened to critically analyse prevailing established viewpoints even of the government of the day. The public sector media in Australia has asserted and won increasing autonomy over content since the 1970s, despite the opposition of Labor and Coalition politicians and repeated cuts to levels of funding. An uneasy truce developed and was maintained during the 1980s and early 1990s especially after the ABC won three-year funding commitments in 1989. This was challenged after the change of government in 1996 and Prime Minister John Howard’s government cut the ABC’s budget for the following year. A review of the corporation in 1996 seemed to have its genesis in political antipathy towards the public broadcaster. The cuts, which had not been foreshadowed during the election campaign earlier that year, were widely interpreted as a form of political pay-back

because of a perception by senior Coalition ministers of a pro-Labor bias by ABC journalists and producers. By taking seriously many of the issues that the Prime Minister questioned as 'politically correct' – multiculturalism, reconciliation, anti-discrimination, environmental issues – the ABC was considered biased. Labor government ministers had also considered the ABC was biased against them, and reduced funding but had not sought to punish the corporation so blatantly. Critical scrutiny of those in power frequently leads those under the microscope to complain of bias, and the clearest explanation of the Howard government's rationale for the \$55 million cut came in a comment from a senior adviser; 'They're our enemies talking to our friends.'

The process of asserting editorial independence has taken various routes in the public and private media and in different countries over the past two centuries. Since the mid-1970s this movement has gained momentum as journalists have pursued their work as a vocation. Paradoxically at a time when media companies are bigger, global in reach and more diversified than they have ever been, journalists and editors have become more aware and assertive about their role. The jostle for power requires journalists and editors to grasp any power ceded by owners and managers. It is a David and Goliath struggle, but one that is being quietly waged in many newsrooms around the world.

Journalists and editors remain the most insistent advocates of the news media as the Fourth Estate: watching, questioning, analysing and informing, often despite the opposition of their managers who would prefer a more compliant, more entertaining and less critical approach. The movement is incremental. The pendulum swung towards editorial autonomy and critical journalism especially during the 1980s. Evidence of this could be seen in the interest in investigative journalism, in the attempts by journalists to win charters of editorial independence and to stretch the boundaries of autonomy. At the end of the 1990s, the pendulum has swung back, but journalists remain the most insistent advocates of the media's Fourth Estate role and many of the gains they made in the 1980s will not be easily revoked.

There is urgency in rethinking the power of the media and the role of journalists. The public is becoming increasingly sceptical of the methods and standing of the news media. This was remarkably clear following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. The rush to blame the paparazzi for pursuing the glamorous young princess to her death took many in the industry by surprise. Many journalists and editors felt little responsibility, convinced instead that Diana had been a willing participant in a game that delivered her fame and influence, them sales and audiences, and the public glamour and vicarious pleasure and pain. In the rush of blame, many media executives cautioned that those in glasshouses should beware of throwing stones. Nonetheless,

criticism of media intrusion, even as people watch and read in record numbers, is a serious issue which may rebound on the industry's public standing and profitability. It may inhibit the capacity of journalists to make any claims to custodianship of the Fourth Estate.

As the scale of the global media increases, the balance of power between journalists and editors, and owners and managers will also change. The large media companies will undoubtedly get bigger, diversifying into more outlets and a range of new mediums. The primacy of entertainment may prevail and may change forever notions of news and presentation. It remains to be seen how the Internet will alter the information balance and the relative roles of content producers, distributors, managers and owners. Many in the industry predict that the role of the established news media will diminish as people are able to pick and chose from the vast array of information – often unverified – available on the Internet. Others argue that by providing information which has been checked and substantiated according to traditional methods of journalism, the established news media will be able to maintain its primary reputation as a provider of reliable information. Certainly it is possible to see a way in which the Fourth Estate ideal could be reinvigorated via the Internet, although the process of winning the weight of a political institution will be problematic in this more anarchic medium.

In ruminations about the global media industry, the complexity of contemporary political and public life, and the alarming concentration of media ownership, it is easy to lose sight of the reality that the news media is at its most influential when it is local. The global media may swamp us with homogenised stars, heroes, villains, disasters and crises that provide a rapidly changing backdrop for the more prosaic, yet no less urgent, reality of our lives. At the level of the city, state or nation the best of the news media is able to explain us to ourselves, highlight our shortcomings and provide the insights that enable new solutions to emerge.

One of the paradoxes of the global industry is that at a time when the scale of the news media has never been vaster, its reach greater and its timing quicker, control is no longer be held so tightly. Despite teams of managers and executives, control is no longer as direct or certain as when cabals of media owners and politicians could dictate the news. But the new ways may be just as effective: the tools of control have moved from the ink-stained hands of owners interfering on the newsroom floor to the cooler, more dispassionate, methods of spreadsheets, marketing plans and circulation drives.

Another paradox is that despite monopoly newspapers in towns and cities around the world, there is now more diversity of information than would have been considered possible in the mainstream media

even two decades ago. This is partly, but not solely, a result of the plethora of new information and entertainment outlets – print, broadcast, digital. In part monopoly demands greater internal diversity of news and views. The competition over ideas and perspectives has now been brought inside single publications with news, features, columns, photographs, illustrations and op-ed contributions jostling for the attention of readers. Mirroring the increasing openness of society, subjects that were once considered taboo are now routinely reported. The greater openness of society has been an important element in broadening the boundaries of the subjects the news media addresses, but it is not a sufficient explanation.

Journalists and editors in Australia have, somewhat belatedly but nonetheless quite convincingly, got a taste for editorial independence. They have been willing to take industrial action to maintain their small victories, and mobilise public campaigns in support of themselves and the diversity of information they produce, an important counter-balance to the mundane routines and priorities of daily news production.

News organisations remain hierarchical, surprisingly untouched by many of the principles of modern management, but there is more freedom than was once thought possible. This independence is not, however, absolute, nor is it unassailable. So when the ownership or management of a newspaper, television or radio station changes, the limits of editorial independence are again tested, just as they are when a government changes and tries to settle old scores by reducing funding to public broadcasting.

Most importantly, the assertion of independence by journalists and editors must not be an end in itself. This is often overlooked by its most strident advocates who have the commitment of zealots to their vocation. Whatever independence journalists have, it is exercised on behalf of others – in the public interest. As is shown in this book Australian journalists are happy to invoke the public interest, but remain somewhat disdainful of their audiences and therefore ill-equipped to fulfil the public role to which many aspire.

The public has responded to this disdain and seen in it evidence of abuse of power. Despite widespread and increasing use of the media, public opinion polls repeatedly highlight a very critical attitude towards journalists and the media. The popularity of programs such as the satirical *Frontline* and nitpicking *Media Watch*, tap into a deep-seated antipathy about the intrusive and cavalier methods of journalism and the self-serving ambitions of the media companies. Public scepticism about the industry is also readily exploited by politicians who seek to bully and blame journalists and the media to deflect attention

from their own poor public standing. While the excesses of unethical practice remain commonplace, journalists and the media remain easy targets.

There is, however, an ambivalence in public attitudes towards the media, an ambivalence that was graphically demonstrated in the overwhelming public response of more than 10 000 submissions to the Mansfield Review of the ABC in 1996. The majority of these submissions argued for the maintenance of adequate funding and explained the unique and highly valued role of the ABC. Similarly, public campaigns around media ownership have developed momentum because of satisfaction with the tone and approach of particular publications, anxiety about reducing options, and concern about what a more commercially driven media may produce. It is possible to see this as an alliance of elites, and to some extent it is – certainly the disaffected and alienated are as likely to blame the media as any other powerful group. But the social capital provided by a conscientious media percolates through the whole society, 'turning the level of civilisation up' not down.

There is a powerful alliance waiting to be built between media consumers and those actively involved in media production. The first tentative steps have been taken, but a two-way relationship between information provider and audience is notoriously difficult to cultivate and nurture. Developments in what is known as public journalism, whereby closer links between a community and its media are established, are one route to building links and reinvigorating social capital. Another is by the more traditional route of investigative, disclosure and advocacy journalism, where the news media confidently takes a place at the vanguard of social change. Both of these approaches may carry costs, the former risks becoming a public relations activity, and the latter of demonstrating a prescriptive arrogance, whereby the media knows best and will brook no interference in pursuit of those it has deemed undesirable. Both of these methods involve challenging existing assumptions about the nature of news and role of the media.

Over the past three decades Australian journalism has changed profoundly. Still far from perfect, it is now more inquisitive, more investigative, bolder, more intrusive, demanding and sceptical than it once was. It has won greater political and operational autonomy. But this has come at the cost of public cynicism, as insufficient attention has been paid to ethical standards and public accountability.

Independence – the key to reviving the ideals of the Fourth Estate – must have a price tag of accountability firmly attached. This can be measured by acceptance of ethical codes; meaningful public accountability; providing more diverse and challenging information; the

methods by which it is obtained, presented and pursued. Without greater accountability, the media is little more than another powerful elite, detached from the public interest which gives it legitimacy.

Journalists and editors who have won a few skirmishes in the battle for greater independence from their owners are unlikely to be enthusiastic about greater accountability. But without it, there is little hope of a meaningful revival of the core good idea of the Fourth Estate.

A revived Fourth Estate must be accountable and responsive to the audience, ethical in its dealings with sources, honourable in its intent. There is no reason for it to be boring, worthy, dull or unprofitable. The Fourth Estate that most Australian journalists say they accept as an ideal is important, but in the end it is not central to the interests of the vast media conglomerates. It is, however, crucial for the professional and personal self-esteem and integrity of journalists. By reclaiming and reviving the Fourth Estate, journalists may be better able to explain us to ourselves, expose cobwebs in dark corners, address process and methods and put a floor of informed understanding beneath an increasingly fractured, complex, sceptical and confused community.

### **A personal note**

The contemporary relevance of the Fourth Estate is an issue that has dogged my career as a journalist and journalism educator for more than 20 years.

As an undergraduate student of journalism and government in the mid-1970s, I was schooled in the traditions of liberal political science, concepts which were then transferred, unproblematically and uncritically, to underpin a university education in journalism. The role of the news media as the Fourth Estate was accepted as a given, and the issues of concentration of ownership, regulation and representation were, to the extent that they were addressed at all, seen as problems caused by the lack of professionalism of journalists, the nervousness of editors and timidity of politicians.

At the same time the journalistic excitement inspired by the willingness of the *New York Times* to publish the Pentagon Papers revelations, the *Washington Post's* Watergate reporting, thalidomide and other investigations by the *Sunday Times*, the Robert Greene led investigations by *Newsday* and the nascent *Age* insight team inspired confidence in the watchdog role of the news media in a representative democracy.

Reform movements were also galvanising newsrooms in many western countries. Journalists were beginning to demand a say in the decision-making, to assert that the views of readers were not narrowly homogeneous. In Australia this movement found its voice and articu-

lated its agenda in the magazine *New Journalist*. The optimism and urgency of these developments in the newsroom were counterbalanced by the apparent abuses of power by news media owners and managers, for overtly partisan political purposes, such as the anti-Labor campaign in the mid-1970s and nagging concern that four corporations owned almost all Australia's news media.

This framework of understanding was inadequate, but my experience was not unique. My research has subsequently found similar attitudes underpin the practices of many Australian journalists, although frequently tinged by a cynicism that grew from the frailty of these ideals under commercial pressure. Whatever the weaknesses of the news media as an institution, many journalists – especially opinion-leading journalists – maintain a faith in the liberal ideal, casting themselves as the inheritors of a tradition of civic duty. Data presented in this book show that many journalists accommodate the dichotomy between the ideal and reality – although frequently at some personal cost. As the nineteenth century 'new journalist' W.T. Stead wrote a hundred years ago, 'Before I was an editor and a journalist I was a citizen and a man' (1886b: 667).

When I was a young journalist on a national business newspaper in the late 1970s, my colleagues and I were reminded that our job was essentially that of 'information packagers'. The editor likened the task of writing articles to other process work by referring to it as information packaging. In doing this he stressed the importance and value of information for the smooth functioning of modern political and commercial life, and rejected suggestions that we operated with about the same amount of autonomy and independence as the average factory worker. Journalists exercised independence, judgement and autonomy, they were capable of pushing out the boundaries of what were acceptable stories and the ways of telling them, the worst crime was to limit yourself by self-censorship or by too narrow a definition of what was acceptable.

As the newspaper targeted the business and finance community, we were also told that our audience was best served by information which was accurate and hard-hitting, even critical. We were reminded that working for a specialist daily newspaper was rather like being admitted to a club where the truth could be spoken frankly, without fear of the consequences, so that, if necessary, remedies to improve efficiency and profit could be found. The 'facts' and 'truth' could be spoken within the club, although a more guarded conversation would necessarily occur elsewhere.

This view of the role of journalism was unusual, but it was also completely compatible with the liberal ideals I had been schooled in. In my

experience conflict with the ideal occurred only when writing about the business activities of the company which owned the newspaper. Then the truth could not be spoken so directly, but rather needed to be couched in terms of acceptable publicity.

This approach subsequently informed my teaching of journalism, where along with the nuts and bolts of story structure, interview techniques, research methods, law, policy and ethics, I drew on an enhanced liberal role of the journalist, for which British editor W.T. Stead could have written the manual in 1886.

To give utterance to the inarticulate moan of the voiceless is to let light into a dark place; it is almost equivalent to the enfranchisement of a class . . . All that, it will be said, is idealistic, visionary, utopian; but it is something to have an inspiring ideal, and it is well to be reminded of the responsibilities that attend upon the power which has come to the journalist . . . to be both the eye and ear of the community is a great privilege . . . I have not yet lost faith in the possibility [that] some of our great newspaper proprietors may [develop] his newspaper as a engine of social reform and as a means of government . . . to found a newspaper for the service, for the education and for the guidance of the people. (Stead, 1886a: 670–71)

From my personal experience it seemed that the institutional role of the media as the Fourth Estate was flawed: concentrated ownership clearly limited diversity; skewed representation of individuals, groups and ideas was both morally wrong and commercially short-sighted; and the political power and influence of media owners was disproportionate.

Journalists could, however, make a difference. While rejecting the idea of the journalist as hero, I told my students that they could have an influence, they could strive to push the boundaries of what was acceptable reportage, that between the rhetoric of freedom of the press and the reality of commercial news media production, there was scope for resilient, determined, shrewd and civic-minded reporters.

Like much of the discussion about the role of journalism this entreaty tended towards hyperbole, but it did highlight the contradictions between the freedom of the press rhetoric and the reality of media practice and locate journalists as important players on this field. As Professor Noam Chomsky has commented: 'As institutions the media are parts of the system of ideological control and they couldn't function otherwise. Nevertheless there are people in those institutions struggling against those functions' (*Australian*, 13 January 1995: 13).

My interest in the role and autonomy of journalists, in their willingness to 'struggle', has shaped much of my subsequent research and this book explores the antecedents and current attitudes and practices of Australian journalism.

To do this I address the ideal of the Fourth Estate, its various meanings and the issues attaching to it. Although the term 'Fourth Estate' is frequently invoked, it is generally poorly defined and its standing either rejected or used for little more than rhetorical effect. It seemed important to examine in greater detail the relevance of the Fourth Estate to contemporary Australian journalism.

I explore the relevance of the Fourth Estate to Australian journalism by reviewing the way the ideal was originally conceptualised and has subsequently developed, changed, been interpreted and adapted to fit and also shape the practice of journalism, and the structure of the news media as a major industry.

The next three chapters outline the way in which the ideal of the Fourth Estate has evolved over the past two hundred years. These chapters look at changing definitions of the Fourth Estate, the changing status of journalists and the emerging emphasis on the watchdog elements of the ideal. Chapter 4 considers the uneasy relationship between the news media and what were once considered the other estates – the judiciary, parliament and executive government. Chapter 5 assesses the contemporary relevance of the Fourth Estate to the corporate news media of the late twentieth century. The five core components used to measure the viability of the Fourth Estate ideal are political purpose and independence, commercial priorities, the importance of public opinion, the diversity of information and viewpoints presented, and accountability. The media industry is found to be a flawed embodiment of the ideal, although it can still legitimately claim an institutional role. In chapters 6 and 7, I examine the relevance of the Fourth Estate as an ideal in the behaviour and attitudes of Australian journalists. This is based on an assessment of the attitudes of journalists revealed in the lengthy 'Media and Democracy' survey of 286 Australian journalists. The survey, conducted in 1992, is reproduced in the Appendix. Using the data obtained from this survey I evaluate the commitment of Australian journalists to the Fourth Estate ideals and their capacity to accept custodianship of the concept.

In chapters 8 and 9 I track the application of these ideals in practice. In chapter 8 I examine the development of reporting styles and techniques and identify the key milestones in the increasing independence of Australian journalism as a result of the development of new magazines, newspapers and television programs and the pivotal role played by a number of key individuals.

The legacy of this increasing independence came to fruition in the 1980s with the flowering of a more assertive, and far-reaching, style of investigative journalism. The 1980s was a transformative decade in Australian journalism. The investigative and watchdog journalism produced during these years profoundly tested the Fourth Estate

ideals. During this decade increasingly assertive journalism progressed through three phases. By the end of the 1980s, the Australian news media had made a transition from being a co-operating servant in the political process to exercising a role as an equal contender, arguably a true Fourth Estate.

The case-study of the journalism produced in the 1980s is pivotal to the argument advanced in the following pages, that journalists in Australia increasingly saw themselves as custodians of the Fourth Estate. They defended the critical reports they produced in the language of the Fourth Estate and on the basis of acting in the public interest, although they were at times quite disdainful of the public they were claiming to represent. Nonetheless, they demonstrated considerable courage in exercising this custodianship through the articles and programs they produced and through more general demands for greater autonomy and independence within news organisations.

The final chapter examines how the pendulum has swung back from the gains made during the 1980s, with investigations less likely to address powerful people and institutions and more likely to name the (little) guilty man. In the 1990s Australian journalism reverted to a concentration on entertainment, the predictable moral certainty of goodies and baddies and the manufactured figures of popular culture. Regardless of this partial debasement of the high-minded – if sometimes flawed – ambitions of the 1980s, the media continued to assert a role as an equal contender in the political process. Public criticism of the media's arrogant intrusiveness increased, as the victory of becoming an equal contender in the political process seemed to be exercised as an end in itself, not for or on behalf of the public interest.

Despite the corporate, political and commercial challenges to the Fourth Estate ideal, it remains resilient and relevant and its revival is both necessary and desirable. Responsibility for the preservation and development of the ideal has moved and now lies most insistently with the content producers who must find direct methods of buttressing claims for independence with greater public accountability.

## CHAPTER 1

### *Redefining the Fourth Estate*

'Somewhere along the line the Fourth Estate became just the media.'

*David Solomon 1994*

For nearly two centuries the idea that the press plays a central role in the management and maintenance of a representative democracy has framed debates about the media. The eighteenth-century claim, that the press was entitled to its own independent standing in the political system, as the Fourth Estate, has become an ideal which continues to influence the attitudes of those working in the late twentieth century news media, as well as politicians and citizens. The press, in the words of Jürgen Habermas was the public sphere's 'pre-eminent institution' (Habermas, 1992: 181) and despite profound changes to society, communications and political life, the modern news media, and those engaged in its production, continue to embrace this institutional role.

The role as the public sphere's 'pre-eminent institution' was not conferred, but won during the political, economic and social transformations of the Enlightenment. At a time of limited suffrage, but increasing literacy, 'the press' – in the words of George Reeve editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, who in 1855 penned a classic formulation of the Fourth Estate – 'created the wont which it supplies' (Reeve, 1855: 470). As Rupert Murdoch observed 106 years later, before he became the owner of one of the largest media empires the world has ever known: 'Unless we can return to the principles of public service we will lose our claim to be the Fourth Estate. What right have we to speak in the public interest when, too often, we are motivated by personal gain?' (Mayer, 1964: 51).

The legitimacy of the contemporary news media in continuing to claim this institutional role is now under question. Implicit in the question is the extent to which responsibility for the Fourth Estate role has passed from the news media as an institution to journalists, editors and

producers. The press of old – ‘the bastard estate’ – has become the vast contemporary news media, yet continues to claim a place at the table of public life. The news media is now an enterprise central to national economic, social and political well being and one of the most important industries of the global economy. It may still be ‘the bastard estate’, but its influence and that of those who produce it are no longer underestimated. A former editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Melbourne Herald* described the stakes:

The issue is power. Real raw power that derives from owning or controlling the most effective instruments of influence within a democracy, outside the parliamentary system – newspapers. For it is the nature of this power, were it ever to be widely understood, that would turn the debate about newspaper ownership . . . into a mainstream polemic about the instruments of democracy and whether or not they are functioning properly. If you have ever seen, as I have, the sweating palms and shaking glass of one of Australia’s most senior politicians after an unsatisfactory audience with a powerful newspaper proprietor, you would begin to understand something about why Australian politicians will never enter into this debate unless it is forced on them. (Beecher, *Age* 7 October 1990)

The exercise of power may be a sufficient end for some, but for most media proprietors it is only part of the appeal of media ownership; the media is also very profitable. As an industry the news media is unequivocally commercial and guided by principles which may be at odds with the independent political purpose of the Fourth Estate rhetoric. Senior executives in major media companies tend to conflate the national interest with their own commercial interests. Then executive chair of News Corporation Ltd in Australia, Ken Cowley, told a parliamentary inquiry in 1991,

We take the view, as simple as it is and as corny as it sounds, that what is good for your country is good for your business and what is good for your business is good for the paper, its readers and our employees. (House of Representatives Select Committee into the Print Media, 1991: 481)

Journalists engaged in news and public affairs reporting, however, continue to define their work by referring to the public purpose of making information publicly available and uncovering information by scrutiny and investigation.

I am intrigued by the way the Fourth Estate ideal has become, in the late twentieth century, a synonym for watchdog journalism. It is my view, that journalists are principally responsible for keeping the ideal of the news media as the Fourth Estate alive, despite significant and sustainable challenges to the industry’s independent institutional

legitimacy. This is a responsibility some journalists find onerous, irrelevant and burdensome. For others it holds the key to professional and public esteem.

By emphasising the importance of disclosure and information provision to an informed representative democracy many journalists, especially during the 1980s, saw a way of reinvigorating confidence in the institutional role of the news media. Much of this aspiration was captured in the rhetoric of investigative reporting, as an American journalist argued, 'Sound investigative reporting is needed to restore the public faith in the credibility of the press and to make the press a more reliable and more effective monitor of the problems of government' (Mollenhoff, 1981: 5).

'Sound investigative reporting' may have this effect, but investigative reporting may also be salacious, commercially driven and trite, and thus further undermine public faith in the press. A constant diet of exposure without sufficient context may also erode public confidence in political institutions and simply encourage cynicism, anxiety and an insatiable demand for conspiracy and titillation.

I am not suggesting that all journalists are motivated by high ideals and an esoteric commitment to public service – clearly they are not – but liberal ideals about the role of the news media continue to shape the attitudes, values and practices of journalists, editors and producers, particularly opinion leading reporters and editors. And although the relationship is fragile, journalists have become increasingly willing to appeal directly to their audiences for support in defence of these concepts of which they see themselves as guardians. On other occasions, however, when journalists' methods and motives are questioned – as in the rising public anger about media intrusion and lack of respect for privacy – those in the industry may be quite disdainful of public attitudes. Journalists are also critical of the shortcomings of the media. Their capacity to make a difference is central to this book.

Australian journalists like the ideal of the Fourth Estate. But its appeal to them must be juxtaposed with the reality of the news media as an expanding industry operating in global information and capital markets, constantly exploring new technologies and searching for new audiences. The news media is increasingly driven by the priorities of the entertainment industry, of which it is considered a less profitable subset. The search for new markets, minute-by-minute plotting of audience responses to gauge future demand, now shape many news agendas. The need to get 'the mix' right with stories that will appeal to women, men, young people can often be most readily satisfied by drawing on the heavily promoted figures of popular culture – movie stars, sports heroes and the iconic stories of good and evil. The idea of

disclosure, of investigative journalism that gets below the surface of events, remains a profound challenge to the accepted methods. In the age of information management, the need for disclosure is a great as ever.

Journalists have 'consistently been the strongest proponents' of watchdog journalism (Harrison and Stein, 1973: 12) and Australian evidence from the 1980s, documented in the following chapters, confirms this. The questions of why and for what purpose remain. As journalists cling to the principles embodied in the Fourth Estate ideal they confront the contradictions between liberal ideal and the commercial reality. This is starkest in the popular media, newspapers, magazines, current affairs and infotainment. Sylvia Lawson tellingly described this as 'the flickering farce – screaming headlines, titillation and pseudo crises – is no mere circus; it does carry political meaning. It engenders a dangerous indifference. Junk journalism forms a huge swamp in which too much articulate resistance is submerged' (Lawson, 1989: 52).

Like junk food, junk journalism is immediately available, inexpensive to produce, satisfactory for most palates and quickly filling. Like junk food, junk journalism provides little nourishment and is instantly forgettable, unless the levels of additives are such to create cravings. Before junk journalism swamped the media, investigative and watchdog journalism was one way of attempting to bridge the gulf between the liberal ideals and the commercial imperatives of the industry. But whether this bridge can survive depends on more than journalistic intent. Relatively few media organisations are prepared to embrace the costs, as well as the benefits, of watchdog journalism that moves beyond the clichés and myths. Part of the explanation for the cynicism of many journalists, high drop-out rates from the occupation and the widespread public scepticism, lies in the gap between the rhetorical ideal and the practical realities of commercial news production.

Australian journalists attempt to accommodate the Fourth Estate ideal, while working in a pressurised environment which does much to undermine it. The tension implicit in this fundamental dichotomy was articulated by an associate editor of the *West Australian* more than thirty years ago, and is more relevant today:

When those engaged in journalism are compelled to acknowledge to themselves that the principal object of a newspaper is to get itself sold, then the press will have forfeited its right to be regarded as one of the great institutions of the country. A newspaper should be much more than an ordinary marketable commodity. If the ideal of service were to be entirely subordinated to the idea of profit, I should much rather be associated with the production of soap or sugar than with the production of a newspaper. Then at least one would not be a party to an organised hypocrisy. (Mayer, 1964: 51)

Confidence in the ideal has, however, been sustained and nurtured despite the growing commercialism of the news media (Kelly, 1994), principally because of the increasing professionalisation of journalism, commitment to a broadly defined civic role and enthusiasm for watch-dog journalism.

During the 1980s there was an unprecedented flowering of such reporting, which changed the way journalism was done in Australia. These reports addressed abuses of power and influence by prominent individuals in positions of public trust, including corruption. In part as a consequence of them and the royal commissions and inquiries they triggered, and the weaknesses revealed, several new public watch-dog institutions were established, including the Independent Commission Against Corruption in NSW, the Criminal Justice Commission in Queensland, the National Crime Authority and the National Securities Commission.

At the zenith of the disclosures of investigative journalism in Australia in 1989, then Governor-General Bill Hayden suggested that the declining confidence in the media could be explained by such a link:

I might say that I suspect the very qualitative improvements in journalism, especially in investigative and analytical reporting, have generated some of the resentment from groups who in earlier years would have been fairly confident that their actions would have been too remote and shielded to be the subject of public reporting. (Hayden, 1989)

During the 1980s, a transition occurred as journalists pursued prominent people – who once would have been considered untouchable while alive – in the name of their ‘Fourth Estate obligations’. As the confidence of journalists and editors increased, they were more likely to assert independence and challenge the authority of parliament and the judiciary. During this period an unprecedented number of journalists were jailed for contempt of court and cited for contempt of parliament. The defences they used – often considered inadequate by critics on the left and right (Brown, 1987: 20; Baker, 1985: 34) – were largely drawn from the liberal rhetoric of the news media as the Fourth Estate. The practical and intellectual challenges to the idealised Fourth Estate were rarely acknowledged by journalists seeking public legitimisation for their professional actions.

As a consequence of deliberately applying Fourth Estate ideals to the practice of journalism, the permissible limits of Australian journalism were stretched and the Australian news media progressed along the path from being a ‘co-operating servant’ to becoming ‘an equal contender’ in the political system (Merrill, 1974: 24). This transition was driven by journalists, editors and producers, many of whom were

fervently committed to their place in a news media that behaved like a formal Fourth Estate.

### The Changing Political Context

If as John Merrill claims a ‘nation’s journalism cannot exceed the limits permitted by the society; nor lag very far behind’ (Merrill, 1974: 24), Australia in the 1980s must have been a society ready for change. During this decade Australian journalism became significantly and consistently more investigative than it had been. Challenges to major institutions and individuals of high standing were given substantial voice, inquiries were established at an unprecedented rate and as a result transformations of major public institutions and systems were implemented. To paraphrase Greg Sullivan QC, ‘bending the law to oblige a friend’ ceased to be widely tolerated.

To survive within such a changing framework, and function effectively, editors and journalists need to be acutely in tune with society to discern the permissible limits of the general political environment. Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser (1975–83) had prided himself on his ability to get politics off the front page, and during the first years of his leadership he succeeded. Towards the end of his term however, political conflict – and the reporting of it – reached new heights (Schultz, 1985).

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, in a prelude to the investigative reporting which flourished later in the 1980s, journalism played a role in changing the political environment, as demonstrated in chapter 8. This was a time of highly charged politics. The dismissal of the Whitlam government in 1975 revealed deep tensions in Australian society. When the Hawke Labor government was elected in 1983, ‘consensus’ became the new guiding principle. Many of those involved in major disclosures during the 1980s were sceptical of the self-serving harmony embodied in notions of consensus; cautious of cosy networks looking after their own interest at considerable cost to the whole society. The limits of acceptable reporting began to be tested. Coincidentally royal commissions and official inquiries began to examine organised crime, tax avoidance and the criminal justice system. During the 1980s the number and scope of these inquiries increased following further revelations in the news media. Subsequently, new investigative and regulatory agencies were established to address corruption and organised crime. Corruption became a major subject of public and political debate, a defining issue in election campaigns and a matter of intense interest for the news media, which continues to resonate.

In this dynamic political environment, many journalists became increasingly uncomfortable with being, what John Merrill described as, 'cooperating servants', and sought, instead, to become 'equal contenders'. By analysing the investigative reporting produced in Australia during the 1980s, it is possible to identify three phases in a transition that moves in this direction, as the 'permissible limits' of journalism also changed. During these three phases (examined in detail in chapter 9), articles and programs challenged prominent individuals and institutions with increasing confidence, and journalists and editors asserted a right to do so as defenders of the public interest.

In the first phase from March 1980 until the beginning of 1983 the limits of tolerance of disclosure were tested, without fundamentally challenging the legal framework. In this phase although the disclosures became increasingly substantial – and had serious consequences for individuals and within news organisations – the articles and programs were developed within the established norms of news gathering techniques, and most importantly did not demand modifications to the accepted practices of legal vetting.

In the second phase, until the beginning of 1984, the disclosures and allegations implicated more prominent figures, but most importantly there was a growing willingness to test the limits of the legal framework. Lawyers, editors and journalists began working together prior to publication or broadcast, to anticipate and prepare for the likely legal consequences. Greater attention was paid to constructing possible defences, and building them into the articles and programs. While particular stories might have been recognised as defamatory, this was not, of itself, an immutable barrier to publication. Despite the expectation of legal action and the willingness to test truth and public interest in the courts, confidential legal settlements were reached which obviated the need to implement the test cases which had been planned. The readiness of news organisations to settle these cases out of court was not welcomed by the journalists involved.

The third phase, from 1984 until 1987, continues to inform journalistic practice in Australia. During this time disclosure of corrupt practice implicated individuals of the highest public standing, and journalists and editors were increasingly likely to defend their work and methods by arguing that they were acting in the public interest. This put them in conflict with the law and led to charges of contempt of court and parliament. Six journalists were found guilty of contempt of court, three of contempt of parliament. By arguing that they represented the public interest, these prominent journalists and editors asserted that they had a responsibility which transcended the authority of the courts and the parliament. The 'permissible limits' of journalistic practice

were challenged, and contributed to political and structural changes that 'reshaped society'. This supports the media systems paradigm which postulates that, 'special factors or social factors interact in unique ways to create a national media system that is used to perform a variety of functions that eventually participate in reshaping that society' (Hiebert, Ungurait and Bohn, 1982: 39).

Bill Hayden observed that as the quality of journalism improved those who had once felt immune from inquiry became subject to scrutiny and some became vociferous critics of journalism and news organisations, managers and owners. At the same time official inquiries continued to peel back the onion skins of corruption, resulting in criminal charges being laid against prominent individuals in every state.

Coincidentally journalists were seeking, and to some extent winning, greater independence within news organisations. This further challenged the permissible limits. Some journalists, particularly at Fairfax and the ABC in Sydney, became advocates, prepared to take action to ensure that their work was published or broadcast, even if this put them in conflict with owners or managers. The strongest example of this was the industrial action taken by journalists employed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* over attempts by the company's receiver-manager to ensure that a particular line was taken in an article in the business pages of the paper. The journalists on the paper went on strike for 24 hours over editorial interference and argued their case for a charter of editorial independence on national television and radio and before the Federal Industrial Commission (Ryan and Burge, 1992: 89).

As will be shown Australian news and investigative journalists regard willingness to undertake investigative reporting as the crucial test of the news media's commitment of its Fourth Estate responsibilities. They consider that the investigative reporting produced in the 1980s contributed to a politically healthier society. *Canberra Times* editor Jack Waterford said in a speech in 1986, 'Sunlight is the best disinfectant, and fear of exposure in the press ... acts as some sort of check on corruption becoming institutionalised' (Waterford, 1987) – a definition of a revived Fourth Estate in action.

## CHAPTER 2

### *The Fourth Estate: A Changing Doctrine*

'The paradox of the Fourth Estate, with its head in politics and its feet in commerce can, however, only be understood if it is appreciated that the whole idea of the Fourth Estate was a myth. A myth can combine fact and fiction without any uneasiness existing between the two.'

*George Boyce 1978*

Recognition of the importance of information, to economic and social well-being, predated general acceptance of the idea that citizens should have access to a wide range of information, to enable them to form opinions and make responsible political judgements. The demand for access to information has had a long history in social and intellectual thought, often accompanied by the idea of providing information for profit (James, 1991: 37–41). As the power of the monarchy, aristocracy and church splintered, challenged by revolutions, and social and political movements, the press emerged and assumed greater power (Stephens, 1988: 170). The press intruded itself into the political system, to become the principal agency for the provision of information to facilitate political choices, and the relationship between the media, politicians, government and citizens encapsulated in the shorthand description, the Fourth Estate, developed. In 1855 George Reeve traced the development from:

slight beginnings . . . it has overshadowed and surpassed the other estates. It has created the want which it supplies. It has obtained paramount influence and authority partly by assuming them, but still more by deserving them . . . taken in its history, position and relations, it is unquestionably the most grave, noticeable and formidable phenomenon . . . of our times. (Reeve, 1855: 470)

The process by which the press achieved this independent and privileged status – with the freedom to criticise and scrutinise other sources of power – took different routes in different countries (Keane, 1991: 7–8). The ideas underpinning the development and its application are principally those of the Enlightenment: faith in science, belief in the fairness of the market, confidence that freedom is more important than equality.

In the fifteenth century, profit, not influence, motivated most printers (James, 1991: 37). Following the invention of movable type, governments throughout Europe were confident they could control what was published by granting favours and privileges, but as this system eroded sanctions were applied. As a result, the struggle for freedom of the press from government control, was the companion of printing for centuries. Printers and writers reacted against a maze of restrictions designed to ensure control and compliance, from censorship to more sophisticated mechanisms, including taxation, libel laws, bribes and co-option.

It is not surprising that the distinctive public role of the press was shaped by the times in which it was won. What is surprising is that the language used to defend the institution nearly two hundred years ago should still resonate. When in 1852 John Thadeus Delane, editor of *The Times*, penned his interpretation of the meaning of the phrase, the Fourth Estate, in practical terms for the practice of journalism, he could not have anticipated that his words would echo for centuries. Although sometimes criticised for their 'declamatory, pompous, self congratulatory and sentimental' tone (Tunstall, 1971: 72), Delane's words continue to be cited by journalists, editors and politicians in an attempt to delineate a relationship and ascribe power (e.g., Bornhorst 1994; Clark, 1994; Burton, 1994; Bray, 1965). Two centuries later the ideal of the press as Fourth Estate, 'a power, a branch of government with inalienable weight in law-making' (Cater, 1907: 164) was well established.

In February 1852 Delane wrote two editorials, on successive days, following criticism of *The Times*' 'gross irresponsibility' in comments about Louis Napoleon. Lord Derby, who was about to become the British prime minister – albeit briefly – said if the press wished to maintain influence it should adopt a tone of moderation and respect (Williams, 1957: 7). Derby's outburst provoked Delane to attempt to define the relationship between the press and the parliament, beyond the structural issues of who should sit where in the House of Commons. *The Times* was then at the height of its influence and Delane argued for the separation of the responsibilities of journalism and statecraft:

We cannot admit that a newspaper's purpose is to share the labours of statesmanship or that it is bound by the same limitations, the same duties and the same liabilities as the Ministers of the Crown. The purpose and duties of the two powers are constantly separate, generally independent, sometimes diametrically opposite.

The dignity and freedom of the press are trammelled from the moment that it accepts an ancillary position. To perform its duties with entire independence, and consequently to the utmost public advantage, the press can

enter into no close or binding alliances with the statesmen of the day, nor can it surrender its permanent interests to the convenience of the ephemeral power of any government.

The first duty of the press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of the events of the time and instantly by disclosing them to make them the common property of the nation. The press lives by disclosures . . .

The duty of the press is to speak, of the statesman to be silent, we are bound to tell the truth as we find it without fear of consequences – to lend no convenient shelter to acts of injustice and oppression, but to consign them to the judgement of the world . . . The duty of the journalist is the same as that of the historian – to seek out truth, above all things, and to present to his readers not such things as statecraft would wish them to know, but the truth as near as he can attain it. (Cook, 1915: 277).

Delane wrote this now famous editorial nearly two decades after Lord Macauley first acknowledged the presence of reporters in the House of Commons and described their location with the grandiose title the Fourth Estate; and sixty years after the American founding fathers approved the First Amendment to their Constitution in 1791 guaranteeing freedom of expression. This amendment, the result of impassioned arguments preceding the American War of Independence, was designed to protect freedom of expression from restraint prior to publication (Levy, 1988: 196, 212). This principle had been accepted in Britain by 1769 (Blackstone, 1769). Although it has been argued that the framers of the First Amendment had ‘no very clear idea . . . what they meant by the freedom of speech or the press’ (Levy, 1963: xix), they immortalised freedom of expression and the independence of the press by declaring: ‘Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech or the press, or the rights of people to peaceably assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.’

For the American democrats freedom of the press was one of the ‘great bulwarks of democracy’ which should be inviolable. Enthusiasm for an unfettered press was not, however, without reservation.

... the American printers fought great battles for freedom of the press. After the Licensing Act expired in England in 1694, the Crown attempted to license the press in colonial America, and several 18th century journalists and printers deliberately violated the law and went to jail rather than submit to what they considered unjust and illegitimate legislation. Colonial juries refused to convict them of such crimes as seditious libel. In 1765 Parliament levied a stamp tax on newspapers, and not a single newspaper in the American colonies paid the tax.

These newspapers had been fighting for the three great pillars of freedom – the right to publish without license, the right to criticise government officials and the right to report on matters of public interest. They did not draw the line at armed insurrection and rebellion, and so moved into the vanguard of the radicals calling for a War of Independence against England.

After independence was won, the newspapers were instrumental in the adoption of a Bill of Rights for the new Constitution. (Granato, 1983: 28)

In colonial Australia the process of gaining some measure of press freedom, which had taken centuries elsewhere, was collapsed into several decades. Even by the time of Delane's influential editorial, the press in all Australian colonies was unlicensed, distributed post-free and uncensored – and had been for more than two decades. It was however, actively and effectively restrained by laws of libel which resulted in the incarceration of several editors, and protracted struggles between the colonial administrations and publishers.

### **Emergence of the Fourth Estate**

Lord Macauley declared the right of journalists to report on the House of Commons, then after disputes space was made available when a new parliament house was built in 1834. Over the next two decades in Britain the remaining official restraints on press freedom were eliminated, leading to a profoundly different relationship between the government and the press. During this time, the wide range of newspaper taxes were reduced and eventually eliminated, the laws of libel were reformed and clandestine payments for favourable coverage ceased. As George Reeve wrote in 1855:

Thus by gradual steps and through much tribulation, the newspaper press in England has attained to the mighty influence which it now exercises. That influence it is scarcely possible to exaggerate. Journalism is now truly an estate of the realm; more powerful than any of the other estates, more powerful than all of them combined if it could ever be brought to act as a united and concentrated whole. (Reeve, 1855: 477)

The emergence of this political role for the press, as the Fourth Estate, followed its establishment as a profitable business providing economically useful information

Despite the consolidation of liberalism during the eighteenth century, and the erosion of the absolute authority of the king, the press was still taxed, seditious libel laws regulated publication, suffrage was far from universal and less than half of the population was literate. It was, nonetheless, a time when the contest over ideas was feverish, pamphlets and news-sheets were the principal methods of dissemination.

By the early nineteenth century, the arguments about press freedom and the right to report on the activities of the House of Commons were played out in an environment where memories of these impassioned claims for the freedom of expression – which had been made for two

centuries – were still fresh. Freedom of the press was central to the reforms that were demanded and became a popular toast at Whig banquets. As John Keane graphically portrays in his description of the trial *in absentia* of Thomas Paine for the publication of *Rights of Man* (Keane, 1991: 2–6), this demand was not restricted to one class or social group. Major milestones in achieving press freedom in Britain occurred over several centuries following the end of press licensing in 1694, the introduction of Fox's *Libel Act* in 1792 – which limited the rights of arrest and seizure, and introduced juries for libel actions – and finally the abolition of stamp taxes between 1853 and 1861.

Similar movements in North America and France had also led to the abolition of stamp taxes, licences and censorship. In France, a free press asserted its power and is generally acknowledged as a major force in the overthrow of the Bourbons in 1830.

As British colonies, the settlements in Australia were similarly influenced by the arguments. The colonial governors initially permitted the establishment of newspapers principally as a means of distributing government announcements. The relationship between the press and the colonial administrations was bound by the complexities of this arrangement, which ensured that the earliest papers were characterised by their obsequiousness. The press was unable to provide 'the more varied journalistic representation' that the young colonies, marked by 'vigour, confidence, heterogenous and conflicting interests' demanded, but could not afford. The abolition of censorship in 1826 'did not mean that the press was free . . . merely that there was now an opportunity for it to become so'. Governor Arthur in Tasmania was, however, particularly tyrannical in his opposition to press freedom which he believed was inconsistent with order in the penal settlement, declaring, 'It seemed to me but reasonable, that a free constitution should precede a free press' (Green, 1964: 71–82).

Governor Arthur's attitude highlights how closely freedom of the press was linked to other political demands. The political influence and role of the press shaped the discussion everywhere.

### *The Political Dimension*

Between 1789 and 1815 in Britain, for instance, the taxes on paper, advertising and the newspaper security bond (to ensure the settlement of libel actions) had risen 266% and pushed the price of papers beyond the means of most people. This created an enormous market for a radical, unstamped press, which kept costs down by not paying the taxes. Between 1830 and 1836 despite 1000 prosecutions, the radical press survived and won two million readers in London alone (Curran and

Seaton, 1991: 14). The size of its audience made the radical press a real political challenge.

The unstamped press had significant political influence and gave voice to a wide range of views. It was, however, illegal. Its success also threatened the viability of mainstream newspapers, whose publishers warned that they were losing so many readers that they would be forced either to close, or also refuse to pay the taxes. The 1836 reduction of the taxes (down 75%) and the increase in the penalties for tax avoidance was described by the chancellor of the exchequer as a way to 'put down the unstamped press'. It succeeded dramatically and according to James Curran, by 1837, the clandestine radical press had virtually disappeared.

Although the reduction of the taxes in Britain has frequently been described as a victory for freedom of the press, it also enabled the mainstream papers – particularly *The Times* – to dominate. As the stamped press was more likely to support the status quo, reducing the taxes had a dual advantage. Boyce, in his critical reappraisal of the Fourth Estate, notes for instance that James Mill argued against the stamp tax by suggesting that it was 'not good policy to give the power of teaching the people exclusively to those violating the law' (Boyce, 1978: 20).

After the 1836 reduction of taxes, the campaign for their elimination drew on a rich body of diverse philosophical thought which had been developed by John Milton, John Locke, Tom Paine, Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill among others.

John Stuart Mill had argued for the abolition of all taxes to ensure 'the freest scope for publication and utterance not only for deists, agnostics, atheists and political revolutionaries' (Acton, 1972: xx). In 1848 a broad parliamentary lobby group, 'with a narrow social base', began a campaign to abolish all taxes and bonds. As a result, duty on advertisements was abolished in 1853, stamp duty in 1855, paper duty in 1861 and the security system in 1869. With the final abolition, *The Times* began to lose what Reeve saw as its 'extraordinary and dangerous eminence'.

Before the *Stamp Tax Act* was repealed on 30 June 1855, the first popular daily newspaper was published in London. Selling at first for two pence and then a penny, the *Daily Telegraph*, with short human interest stories and prominent headlines, was the first British example of the penny press pioneered in America, where the commercial mass press had emerged several decades earlier.

The process by which the press was able to interpose itself and become the means through which free speech was channelled is an interesting study. The distinction between the radical and mainstream

press clearly delineated the choice for the British government, and led to policy changes which advantaged the mainstream press. The intellectual arguments that were developed also provided the framework which made it possible for the press to become the 'agency through which private citizens are reconstituted as a public body exercising informal supervision of the state' (Curran and Seaton, 1991: 277).

The task of establishing the legitimacy of the press as the agency charged with a sensitive and crucial political function, at a time when it was held in generally low regard, was problematic. James Mill saw a clear role for the press, but recognised that it first needed to establish its legitimacy, its capacity to deliver what it claimed it could – in other words, to assert the authority of an institution. As part of this process it is significant to note, that James Mill's treatise on freedom of the press, first published as a supplement to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, began with an examination of the necessary scope of the law of libel. The detail and length of his consideration of the need to identify remedies available to those whose reputations had been damaged by the press indicates the importance of these matters; the power to charge printers and authors with seditious libel was one of the state's main instruments of control.

In Australia after the abolition of censorship, and following the short-lived attempts to license newspapers, the laws of libel and defamation were the state's principal means of control. They were used readily and led to the repeated incarceration of prominent editors for seditious libel.

The process by which the press was able to create a legitimate space and assume the authority of the Fourth Estate was a remarkable exercise in political lobbying and marketing – an object lesson for other industries seeking to reinvent themselves as institutions.

The legitimate press believed that, to survive and to thrive, it must take its place in political society, and must cease to be regarded as either a pariah or as a dangerous and revolutionary force. It must have its place in the sun, its recognised role to play in political life; it must occupy some kind of middle ground, between revolution on one hand and subservience on the other. And to establish such a role, the press and its advocates devised a series of practical arguments concerning the role of the press. They described a 'political society destined to be created in future . . . told for the purpose of encouraging men to hasten its advent'. In other words, they invented a political myth.

In that ideal political society, the press would act as an indispensable link between public opinion and the governing institutions of the country . . . the advocates of a free and independent press were sure that they knew what public opinion was and how it could be expressed. (Boyce, 1978: 20)

The legitimacy of the argument supporting an independent press as an organ of public opinion was quickly established, so that by 1859, when John Stuart Mill wrote *On Liberty* he regarded the case for an independent press as self-evident:

'The time, it is to be hoped, is gone by when any defence would be necessary of the 'liberty of the press', as one of the securities against corrupt or tyrannical government. No argument . . . can now be needed against permitting a legislature or an executive, not identified in interest with the people, to prescribe opinions to them, and determine what doctrines or what arguments they shall be allowed to hear. This aspect of the question has been so often and so triumphantly enforced by preceding writers, that it needs not be specially insisted on in this place. (Acton, ed. 1972: 78)

### Applying the Ideal

The rhetoric developed to reduce stamp taxes and to institutionalise freedom of speech also became the language of press freedom. The arguments crafted in the nineteenth century to shape these nascent, but vociferously demanded, rights continue to underpin similar debates today. It was argued then that the three key political functions of the press were to provide a public forum for debate about the issues of the day; to articulate public opinion and to force governments to consider the will of the people. The other political roles of the press identified in the nineteenth century included education, channelling political communication between groups and championing the individual against the abuse of power (Curran and Seaton, 1991: 277). These elements remain central to contemporary definitions of the role of the press today despite the overweening expectation of entertainment, amusement and titillation.

In practice, in the countries influenced by the Fourth Estate ethos the press did not confine itself to these relatively politically neutral roles of information provider, conduit for public opinion and education. The press quickly asserted a right to engage in active criticism of the government of the day and to pursue campaigns against government policies and actions with vigour. It was also not long before the political role was supplemented by a range of additional, less high-minded purposes and functions, as George Reeve noted with characteristic hyperbole:

Not only does it supply the nation with nearly all the information on public topics which it possesses, but it supplies it with its notions and opinions . . . It furnishes not only the materials on which our conclusions must be founded: it furnishes the conclusions themselves, cut and dried – coined, stamped,

and polished. It inquires, reflects, decides for us . . . it does all the thinking of the nation; saves us the trouble of weighing and pretending, of comparing and deliberating; and presents us with ready-made opinions clearly and forcibly expressed. (Reeve, 1855: 477)

Editors and journalists were not reluctant to exercise the role accorded them and frequently used overblown language to describe their unique authority. That an institution which had recently been seen as scurrilous, dependent on bribes and subject to frequent charges of seditious libel could be transformed into a paragon of public virtue was hard for some to accept. The high-minded and self-serving justification of the independent press attracted critics. Anthony Trollope satirised the grandiose language and claims in his 1855 novel *The Warden*, describing the newspaper press as a 'self-nominated, self-consecrated' pope capable of making 'you odious to your dearest friends and turn you into a monster to be pointed at by finger' (Auchincloss, 1966: 92–8).

#### *The Australian and American campaigns*

The first steps towards press freedom in Australia occurred in the penal settlement of Tasmania with Andrew Bent's attempt to assert editorial control of the *Hobart Town Gazette* (1816–36) by including 'criticisms' of Governor Arthur which progressed from the 'mild and vague' to 'violent'. In the colony of New South Wales a less obsequious press was born when Robert Wardell and W.C. Wentworth founded the *Australian* (1824–48) without first obtaining the permission of the colonial authorities. The paper was published 'in the interests of self-government against autocracy' and aimed 'to convert a *prison* into a *colony* fit for free men' (Green, 1984). In this campaign Wardell was joined by Edward Smith Hall, publisher of *Monitor* (1826–38), who was particularly vociferous in his attacks on the autocratic rule of Governor Darling, who was eventually recalled, partly in response to Smith Hall's criticisms.

The tone of the free newspapers was not merely vigorous and independent; it was often unrestrained to the point of violence: the desire and need for criticism, particularly of governmental institutions and administration whose development did not keep pace with the rapid change from convictism to free settlement had banked up and now burst free. The new papers were filled with indignant complaints against the imperial authorities for the slow instalment of free institutions, against their local representatives on the ground of their hidebound and autocratic conception of their derived power and against officialdom generally on the grounds of corruption and tyranny. They were also filled with attacks on one another by the various

elements of the population . . . A certain measure of dignity and respect for the office of Governor was usually though not always preserved in the leading articles, but this cannot be said of some of the Letters to the Editor. (Green, 1984: 84)

Following the abolition of censorship and the short-lived attempt to impose licence fees the press played an important role in the emerging political and economic communities in Australia and continued to exercise an activist role through this period until Federation.

The pragmatic founding fathers in the USA had welcomed an independent uncensored press – indeed Jefferson provided generations of editors and journalists with one of their most cherished rationales when he declared that he would ‘not hesitate for a moment to prefer’ newspapers without government to a government without newspapers. The democratic impulses in the United States found a central place for the press, as Alexis de Tocqueville observed, ‘Newspapers become more necessary in proportion as men become more equal’ (Williams, 1957: 111). The independent press imagined by Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and George Washington and others was not, however, the press that emerged. The expectations that a free press would maintain the same political ambitions as the founding fathers was unjustified and both Jefferson and Washington subsequently modified their enthusiasm for a free press. Jefferson’s ‘abstract endorsement of a totally free press was in dangerous collision with his practical concern with developing the kind of society he considered necessary to build a new nation’ (Altschull, 1984: 29).

The legitimisation of the press as a quasi-political institution occurred against a background of a partisan press, and involved a transition to claims of political independence which, while frequently honoured in the breach, remains an important element of the dictum. It is reasonable to assume that many of those who had argued for a free press anticipated that the press would support their political ambitions and class interests. That this did not necessarily occur caused disillusion between politicians and publishers. So Jefferson railed against the Tory press and Derby castigated *The Times*. Paradoxically, this tension gave the press a veneer of independence and therefore new authority.

The dividing line between journalism and politics remained blurred. The political ambition of the press was clear and prominent writers not only advocated the legitimacy of this role but also argued that the press, in its ability to tap into public opinion, could become a supra government (Stead, 1886). In the middle of the century George Reeve argued that the press provided a conduit for political life, acting as a ‘safety valve’ to vent public dissatisfaction and as a means of communication by government (Reeve, 1855: 481ff). The press had grown out of a partisan political background and many of those most active in

newspaper publishing were themselves active in politics – if only behind the scenes. The editors and printers, for instance, who campaigned to abolish taxes in Britain willingly engaged in active political lobbying. The political activism and the clandestine partisan funding of many newspapers, which continued into the twentieth century, meant that in some instances the press, rather than being a check on the political system, was 'an extension of the political system . . . inextricably mixed up with these institutions. Government was not government by journalism . . . but government by politics with journalists acting as go-betweens, advisers and occasionally opponents of the practising politicians' (Boyce, 1978: 29).

In Australia during the colonial period the press was vigorous and played an active role in economic and social development; as the *Sydney Gazette* noted in 1836, 'the newspaper is the sole fountain of information, the leading topic of discourse, the one source, and centre of feeling' (Walker, 1976: 57). In the earliest days the newspapers were clearly an adjunct to the process of government, colonial information management and economic development. Although the authorities continued to use printing contracts and advertising as rewards for 'good conduct' (Pitt, 1946: 21), there was a growing and increasingly robust appreciation of the legitimate role of the press. There was a reading room in Sydney for a short time, although 'every public house has a tap and every tap must have a newspaper' (Walker, 1976: 57); distribution remained a problem as did payment for subscriptions and advertising. The authorities, however, recognised the contribution the press could make in an emerging society and in 1835 permitted newspapers to be carried post free, and without a stamp tax. The press then accounted for 90% of the mail delivered and won a large audience beyond the urban settlements.

Much of the information published in the early Australian papers came from material sent from Britain and USA, first by ship, and then after 1877, by telegraph. The problem remained 'that there wasn't much news to report in the small and socially monotonous cities and towns of colonial Australia' (Lloyd, 1985: 16). Circulation figures were, however, high and continued per capita to be higher than in Britain; residents in the Australian colonies were also voracious consumers of British periodicals.

### The emergent journalist

The protection enshrined in the First Amendment attached to the institution of the press and not the practice of journalism. These 'rights devolved to the institution, while the autonomy of the working journalist remained quite limited' (James, 1991: 32). Similarly the Fourth

Estate rhetoric applied to the press rather than to journalists and editors.

While the press was produced by editors who were also printers, there was no need for a distinction between the commercial and editorial functions – the paper was essentially the product of the individual responsible for its publication. Newspapers, which had, until the beginning of the nineteenth century, been produced essentially by printers who published what was written for them and also undertook limited editorial tasks, were transformed by the emergence of full-time editors. As journalists began to be paid for their work, a flaw emerged in the rhetoric enshrining the institutional role of the press. What was the role of journalists and editors in the Fourth Estate, technicians or protectors of the institution?

Journalists and editors became an increasingly influential group during the nineteenth century. Where they had once been regarded as hacks or demagogues, their status increased. They had taken an active role in the campaign to abolish stamp taxes in Britain, to abolish censorship and licensing in Australia and to lobby for the First Amendment in the USA. Journalists, especially in Britain, were presumed to be impervious to radical ideas because of their ‘comfortable’ background and social position – ‘two or three degrees above the labouring class’ (Curran and Seaton, 1991: 29). The conservatism of most journalists and editors was well entrenched, despite some notable radical exceptions. The author of *The History of British Journalism to 1855*, Alexander Andrews, for instance, described the journalist’s mission to ‘educate and enlighten those classes whose political knowledge has been hitherto so little and by consequence so dangerous’ (Curran, 1991: 28).

Although journalists played an increasingly important role in the production of newspapers during the eighteenth century, the first independent editor, who did not have financial control of the publication, was appointed in 1817 in Britain, following the trend already begun in the USA. In this environment, markets and audiences became more important and a paper could no longer be bought (by bribe or secret supply of information) because it ‘was always chasing after its readers’ (Smith, 1978: 148). Journalists increasingly began to assume the responsibility Delane later wrote of, acting as an agent for truth on behalf of the population.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the struggle for authority and legitimacy by journalists paralleled the bigger struggle for press freedom. Journalists had sought to establish their impartiality since the English Civil War. A key element in proving impartiality was to be able to establish the accuracy of reports. A major breakthrough in achieving this came with the development of shorthand. Shorthand transformed reporting into a technical skill and enabled reporters

to assert their skilled autonomy and establish journalism as an honourable profession and unique career.

By the 1820s the fifteenth edition of James Gurney's brachygraphy was in use, affording authenticity to reports of parliament and the courts. Shorthand (which is still discussed today in debates about journalist training) was central to establishing a distance between printers and journalists.

More importantly it signalled the emerging professionalisation of journalism. Gone were the 'mere hack writers', replaced by what George Reeve described as 'men of fixed opinions, of consummate knowledge and deliberate purpose'. Reeve suggested that the journalists of the middle of last century were most likely to be barristers waiting for practice, young politicians of unusual promise but limited means, and 'men of trained and cultivated minds who have chosen literature as a profession and politics as a favourite pursuit'. Through Reeve's rose-coloured glasses, the contemporary press was free of dishonour, corruption or venality, 'it would be as impossible to buy a journalist as to buy a member of Parliament' (Reeve, 1855: 484–5).

This view of the high professional standing of journalists and editors was not universally shared. Their willingness to produce scandalous, politically inflammatory stories and to seek political influence, while protected by the cloak of anonymity, led republican France in 1850 to require the use of by-lines on all articles of political or philosophical discussion or personal criticism. This initiative generated considerable discussion in Britain where the general view was that articles 'gave utterance to the sentiments and opinions of a body rather than an individual writer' and was dismissed despite the recognition of possible abuses (Reeve, 1855: 488ff). In Australia the demand for by-lines to identify authors of political articles began in the 1880s and finally became law for political articles published after the issuing of writs in an election in the Commonwealth *Electoral Act* of 1911.

Journalists and editors were not held in high esteem in the United States either. Charles Dickens wrote scathingly of what he saw as their unscrupulous and scurrilous nature in 1842, describing the press as 'a frightful engine poisoning American society' and Alexis de Tocqueville described American journalists as being 'generally in a very humble position with scanty education and a vulgar turn of mind'. De Tocqueville devoted a section of his famous *Democracy in America* to freedom of the press and famously observed:

The characteristics of the American journalist consist in an open and coarse appeal to the passions of his readers; he abandons principles to assail the characters of individuals, to track them into private life, and disclose all their weaknesses and vices.

This low standing of journalists and the perception of their poor education generated interest in the need to adequately train those whose writings played such an important part in the democratic system. In Britain and the USA, the professionalisation of journalism developed momentum. Professionalisation placed greater emphasis on the education and training of journalists and led to the establishment of the first journalism course in 1869. Interest in education and training as a key to developing professional responsibility and accountability also emerged in Australia:

There were frequent expressions of disquiet about lack of journalistic training and the absence of any professional basis on which journalists' right to instruct and inform the public might be based . . . There were frequent calls to raise the professional status of journalism to give journalists a better education to inculcate in them a finely attuned sense of honour and respectability, to instil ethical principles . . . The *Victorian Review* advocated the establishment of a university Chair of Journalism and the conferring of certificates of competency in the various departments of journalism. (Lloyd, 1985: 18–19)

By the 1890s Australian journalism was becoming a more respectable profession dominated by those who had been trained on the job. Thereafter the professionalisation of journalism was actively encouraged. The Australian Institute of Journalists was formed in 1892 and by the end of that year 92 members and associates had been elected, with branches in Victoria and the other colonies (Lloyd, 1985: 33). The organisation only survived for five years, but was the first of several organisations which prepared the ground for the establishment of the Australian Journalists' Association, with its unique combination of professional and industrial concerns, in 1910. The idea of educating journalists, first expressed in the mid-nineteenth century, regained momentum in 1914 following a sponsored visit by Walter Williams, dean of journalism at the University of Missouri, who convinced several Australian universities of the need to educate journalists.

### The Evolution of the Fourth Estate

As journalists strove to develop a more professional ethos during the nineteenth century, so the nature of what was reported and the style of reporting changed. The transition can be seen as having several distinct phases. Developments in the style of reporting were coupled with enhancements in the technical ability to produce and distribute newspapers and transmit information speedily, and the emerging independence of the reporters and editors. The decision by *The Times* in 1834, for example, to cease accepting advance political information

was a landmark, as were decisions to send reporters to cover battles, revolutions and civil wars. Reporters went to *look*, rather than reporting what they happened, by chance, to *see*.

Extended verbatim reports of debates in parliament during the mid-nineteenth century also enabled the press to establish itself as an institution, 'making possible the existence of a political power which was not physically contained within parliament' (Smith, 1978: 190). Shorthand provided the tool which added the essential mystique to an emerging profession and enabled journalists to authenticate as accurate reports of public events.

The final abolition of the paper duties in Britain in 1861 marked a new beginning for the newspaper business, it was already an extremely profitable industry in France. With this commercialisation came a tacit change in the definition of the Fourth Estate. A new style of journalism emerged, one which was less interested in education, informed public debate or criticising public policy than packaging news, entertaining and diversion. The press began a transition from being an institution that had helped 'cool the tempers of politics' and enable social change to 'proceed through argument and debate' (Smith, 1978: 189) to being a business that was more activist and driven by audience demands. It began to craft a synergy between its political and non-partisan roles. This transition was marked by a division between its quality and popular press. The predominantly political role of the press, implicit in the earlier definitions of the Fourth Estate, eroded. As entertainment became central to the popular press, the role of the serious press to 'provide a forum for communication among elites' became clearer (Schusdon, 1991: 156).

### *The New Journalism*

The marriage of the commercial and the public functions of the press acquired new momentum in the 1880s with the development in Britain of what was described as the 'new journalism'. This journalism was more interested in human interest stories – it sought to go beyond the 'essence of the real' as captured by shorthand and find the 'real story ... behind the account of any event, it lay somewhere in the minds of men' (Smith, 1978: 193). In its serious intent it remained different to the more popular press which was also emerging concurrently. Yellow journalism had already begun to flourish in the United States, and the human interest press quickly found favour with British readers. A popular press which had emerged in Australia between 1826 and 1842 was revived in 1867 and consolidated in the twentieth century when the Sydney *Sun* first put news, not advertisements, on the front page (Mayer, 1964). In Australia, North America and Britain

the increasing commercialisation of the press, the types of stories pursued, and the 'Northcliffe revolution' profoundly changed the style of journalism (Stephens, 1988; Habermas, 1989: 186).

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, when confronted with what was potentially a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of the Fourth Estate the concept was reinvented. In the *Contemporary Review* in 1886 a founder of the 'new journalism', W.T. Stead, reinterpreted the classical Fourth Estate arguments by extending the scope of the press. He observed that the constituency of the newspaper was considerably wider than that of the politician at a time when only one in seven British residents and one in 100 in the British empire could vote. Hence 'everything that is of human interest is of interest to the press':

A newspaper, to put it brutally, must have good copy, and good copy is oftener found among the outcast and the disinherited of the earth than among the fat and well-fed citizens. Hence selfishness makes the editor more concerned about the vagabond, the landless man, and the deserted child, than the member (of parliament). He has his Achilles heel in the advertisements, and he must not carry his allegiance to outcast humanity too far . . . It is the fashion among those who decry the power of the more advanced journalism of the day to sneer at each fresh development of its power as mere sensationalism . . . Sensationalism in journalism is justifiable up to the point that it is necessary to arrest the eye of the public and compel them to admit the necessity of action. (Stead, 1886a: 669–71)

The definition outlined by Stead was important in the perpetuation of the Fourth Estate ideal. Most importantly it also provided a recipe for commercial success. By elevating the watchdog role, the Fourth Estate was redefined and driven by greater awareness of audience, both as consumers and citizens, as well as by a genuine – if convenient – concern for the outcast.

For W.T. Stead and a generation of journalists and publishers in Britain and North America, the press was not just a forum for political debate, but a channel for defending the weak against the powerful, while at the same time generating audience interest and revenue. Advertising and growing audiences were the essential new elements in this mix, providing additional income which increased the resources available for news gathering, and ensured the financial viability and political independence of the press.

### *Advertising*

The transition from a partisan press to independent commercial publishers is generally attributed to the growth of advertising, coupled

with the reduction of official inhibitions. Advertising provided the money to finance the transition and elevated allegiance to the desires and interests of the audience. Advertising generated income that made it possible to pay journalists, gather news and cultivate large audiences which in turn fostered neutrality and a story-driven approach. It also held the seeds of a new form of distortion.

Advertising, although seen by many historians as the midwife of the free (commercial) press, was not universally welcomed. In North America the power of the major corporations and the major advertisers in many newspapers (indeed the newspaper companies themselves) faced increasing opposition at the beginning of the twentieth century. In a continuing theme of media criticism in the USA, the power of advertisers to determine which stories were published provided fuel for muckracking journalists who sought to expose the questionable practices and dealings of major companies. Advertising was one of the major targets, 'the main handicap on American journalism in its search for truth'. In a fifteen-part series in *McClure's* magazine, for instance, Will Irwin decried the influence of advertising and its capacity to subvert newspapers and editors. He contended that advertisers bought the silence of the press. For the muckrakers, the use of the press for private profit was a fundamental abuse of power.

#### *Advocacy vs establishment*

The period leading up to Federation in Australia was a time of heightened argument and political debate which was reflected in the press, notably the *Bulletin* (Lawson, 1987) and John Norton's *Truth*:

Instant muckraking and attempted sedition were not the only hallmarks of *Truth*. Important social issues were discussed week after week: discussed Australia's vulnerable position as a thinly populated white appendage in the Asian region . . . fought for cleaner capitalism and in favour of greater protection for the weak and oppressed – slum dwellers, exploited workers, women and children . . . it delighted in exposing religious charlatans and spiritualists . . . there was scarcely any important social issue which was not raised in *Truth* at one time or another and upon which the paper did not take a remarkably enlightened stand. Its language may not have suited more respectable journals, but it struck home to many thousands of lower-class readers living at the base of the social pyramid . . . Most other newspapermen, their lives spent in defending the interests of the prosperous classes, might well envy the way in which John Norton was idolised. (Cannon, 1988: 11)

In 1919 *Smith's Weekly* assumed this mission with an irreverent Australian accent – at any one time it was:

seeking to be a number of things – the public conscience, a crutch for the fallen, the champion of the underdog, an *amicus re in tempora incerta*, a vehicle of entertainment, both dramatic and comic, a belter of hell out of the mean, the wicked and the pompous, the voice of the Digger and anything else that the editors happened to think of from day to day. (Blaikie, 1966:2)

Investigations by *Smith's Weekly*, in relation to the treatment of returned soldiers, among other sensitive subjects, led to formal inquiries and policy revisions (Lloyd and Rees, 1994).

During the postwar and Depression years the press in most western countries was closely aligned with the establishment, although labour movement newspapers continued to be produced. The mainstream press tended towards political conservatism and was widely regarded as 'part of the establishment', 'blindly adhering to the economic orthodoxy' (Lloyd, 1988: 90). Melbourne journalist Geoff Sparrow noted:

The depression of the '30s was appallingly covered . . . when you consider what a social and economic landmark it was . . . We reported the miserable end results, the unemployment, the evictions and hunger marches, and pretty inadequately at that . . . but we did little to help the people understand why it was all happening to them or whether the government was right or wrong. (Lloyd, 1988: 91, NLA TRC 125)

Rather than being a protector of the down-trodden, or a critical check on arbitrary power, the Australian press in the 1930s, as described by P.R. Stephenson, was a 'foe to liberty, no longer its guardian':

The press is no guardian of liberty now, it is merely venal, crudely subservient to commerce . . . Nowadays freedom of the press means freedom for the press to bamboozle and hoodwink the general public in the interests of a special minority. In most countries, there are at least some old-fashioned journals which will truckle to no special interests, tell their readers the truth, criticise encroachments upon public rights and these journals make and unmake governments and national policies. In Australia there are no such journals. (Stephenson cited by Pollak, 1990: 12)

Stephenson's confidence in the existence of a more independent and critical press in other countries was somewhat justified, but in both Britain and the United States the newspaper industry was a profitable and influential business, close to the establishment, and criticised for political bias, trivialisation and sensationalisation of news. It was also criticised for abusing its political power and for its limited accountability.

As competition – and news diversity – were reduced by mergers, closures and takeovers during the Depression, the limits of the 'libertarian' view of the press became apparent. Criticisms of the newspaper

industry in the United States coincided with the introduction of New Deal reform and regulation, designed to ensure that industry accepted greater social responsibility. Nervousness that such regulation may extend to the news business led Henry Luce to establish the postwar Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press. Although its report was not warmly embraced immediately, it marked the beginning of what became known as the social responsibility model of journalism, which has been an essential precondition for the rise of watchdog journalism in the late twentieth century.

### *Impartiality*

In the middle years of this century an impartial style dominated journalism in Australia, USA and Britain with inevitable national variations. This style reached a certain nadir during the 1950s. The ideological fears of the Cold War imposed great restraint on the mainstream press which generally shared and perpetuated the assumptions and fears of the dominant world view. In Australia Clem Lloyd notes that Prime Minister Robert Menzies dominated the press as absolutely as he dominated the 'Liberal Party, the parliament and the electorate'. Gradually 'the overwhelming effect of the long Menzies hegemony on political journalism was one of passive enervation' (Lloyd, 1988: 174).

In the United States the limits of a neutral style of journalism and its capacity for effective management were clearly demonstrated during the McCarthy period, when the news media became a sometimes unwitting agent for the distribution of questionable information of people accused of communist affiliations (Bayley, 1981). The readiness of the press to accept the parameters of the Cold War and target (left) enemies using apparently neutral language, highlighted the limits of a libertarian press and sowed the seeds for a more activist model.

Social responsibility in journalism gradually demanded more scepticism and accountability. Although the newspaper industry on both sides of the Atlantic continued to resist the social responsibility model advocated by Hutchins and the first British Royal Commission into the Press in 1949, it began to move toward it (Boylan, 1967). But before the argument was won, the idea of the news media fulfilling a public purpose was widely criticised by those at senior levels in the industry. Hence, William Peter Hamilton, publisher of the *Wall Street Journal*, said:

A newspaper is a private enterprise owing nothing whatever to the public, which grants it no franchise. It is therefore affected with no public interest. It is emphatically the property of the owner, who is selling a manufactured product at his own risk. (Siebert et al., 1974: 73)

*Reinventing the Fourth Estate*

Similarly in Britain in the mid-1950s, following the first royal commission into the press, the very idea of the Fourth Estate was ridiculed. The *Concise Oxford Dictionary* of the time described the term Fourth Estate as a 'satirical term for the press'. In 1955 the *Times Literary Supplement* urged the press to forget its 'romantic knight errantry', and attachment to the idea of the Fourth Estate, which it described as a relic of a bygone age. The idea of the press in permanent opposition to the status quo was anathema to the editorial writer, who clearly found the status quo quite satisfactory. The press was mistaken to place itself 'in perpetual and necessary collision with the other three estates', the *TLS* maintained, and should instead 'concentrate on performing a function as useful to society as the daily delivery of milk' (18 November 1955).

When the Fourth Estate was discussed without vitriol, it was frequently viewed as a branch of government – the communications and publicity branch, albeit one which selected and defined what was news (Cater, 1959: 13). Douglass Cater identified the conflicting objectives of reporters and policy-makers and suggested that the growth in big government and sophisticated news management had fundamentally changed the relationship between the institutions at considerable cost to democracy:

It is a failure for democracy when government fails to explain itself clearly and candidly to the citizens. It is equally a failure when the press fails to communicate intelligibly the news of government or when that news becomes a propaganda weapon employed by self-seeking interests to frustrate effective leadership in a democracy. (Cater, 1959: 21)

The symbiotic relationship between the news media and government has made each dependent on the other. But if the news media acts essentially as the medium for the communication of government information, it becomes an adjunct – assisting in the dissemination of official views, helping to garner public support for the government of the day and its policies, amplifying the announcements made and generally acting as the publicity branch of government. This may be an important role in the effective governance of a democratic society, but it denies the media the activist role central to the Fourth Estate ideal. It also eliminates all notions of conflict between the state and the news media and eliminates the capacity of the news media to ensure the accountability of those in positions of power and influence. Without a plethora of overtly partisan news outlets, it is impossible for the news media to be both a part of the government process and a supervisory critic, seeking to disclose abuses of power and influence (Merrill, 1974: 116).

In Australia by 1965 the idea of the Fourth Estate was tentatively coming back into fashion. Sir Theodore Bray, editor-in-chief of the *Courier-Mail*, noted this in a major speech in which he described the five key functions of the press as providing news, background, opinion, commercial information and entertainment. Bray was adamant that the press had a role which went beyond acting as a conduit for information to the governed. He noted that although the press had no special privilege, right or protection, it had particular responsibilities:

At the risk of being called precious, even pompous, I would maintain that to be the Fourth Estate is still one of the main functions of the press . . . To survive a newspaper has to serve in a unique way. This is as a guardian of the people's fundamental right to free expression of opinion. It has also to be a watchdog of civil liberties and a protector against the petty tyranny of bureaucrats and all those clothed with or assuming authority against the common man. Readers, praise be, still think of their newspapers as the ordinary man's last court of appeal, as his protector and champion . . . Newspapers clearly have a function beyond mere reporting and recording – a function of probing behind the straight news, of interpreting and explaining and sometimes of exposing. In the words of Delane, one of the world's great editors, 'The press lives by disclosure'. (Bray, 1965: 13–14)

The limits of neutrality and passive objectivity in journalism, and the need to interpret, explain and expose became increasingly apparent during the social and political upheaval of the 1960s. The growth of internal opposition movements within most western countries provided the impetus for a new, more critical, even adversarial, style of journalism. The importance of the opposition to American and Australian involvement in the Vietnam war cannot be underestimated in the changes to the style of journalism it forced. For the war correspondents, the discovery that they were not being accurately briefed by the military caused a major rift, as did the impact of television in bringing pictures of the war's consequences into millions of living rooms. The coverage of opposition movements in the home countries also challenged prevailing norms of journalistic practice (Boylan, 1998).

### *The new watchdogs*

By the late 1960s and 1970s a watchdog style of journalism regained favour in newsrooms around the world. This was apparent when the *New York Times* published the Pentagon Papers in June 1971, which revealed the dishonesty of the government's public statements about the Vietnam war. The *Washington Post*'s coverage of Watergate, which contributed ultimately to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, was particularly important both in the USA and internationally. In

Britain, Harold Evans, as editor of the *Sunday Times*, encouraged a new style of investigative and disclosure journalism, justifying the investment of time and resources with a reinterpretation of the Fourth Estate, which echoed Reeve and Stead:

It is not only by diversity of opinion that the press can defend its claims. The press has important investigative functions – no intelligence system, no bureaucracy can offer the information provided by competitive reporting; the cleverest secret agents of the police state are inferior to the plodding reporter of the democracy. (Evans cited by Boyce, 1978 : 39)

The clearest manifestation of this approach to journalism in Australia was at the *Age* which formed an investigative team during the 1970s. This group of reporters was given a broad brief and pursued a range of stories which may not otherwise have been covered. The early investigations by the Insight team, while significant at the time, did not achieve the status of the investigations undertaken in Britain, USA or later in Australia. By the end of the 1970s, however, its investigation of improper land deals by politicians and public servants had major political ramifications.

There is a necessary distinction to be drawn between the press as watchdog, scrutinising the conduct of the powerful, and an adversarial and oppositionist press fuelled by partisan ambitions. The existence of an oppositionist press has been an important element in all political movements, just as the mainstream press buttresses the status quo in most societies. The power of information and ideas is essential to any political change. Those editors and journalists who have played a role in seeking political and social change generally have quite different objectives to those who work within a mass, commercial environment.

One aspect that makes the rise of watchdog and investigative journalism in the late twentieth century interesting is that it has been adopted by the mainstream media and by journalists and editors who claim that their reporting is devoid of political motivations. The professionalisation of journalism and the commitment to the importance of the public's right to know, and the journalists' right to disclose, have combined to revive an earlier definition of the Fourth Estate.

If muckraking is defined as using the press to battle entrenched power, it was not a new phenomena . . . Where the crusading failed to coincide with prevailing belief it was unsuccessful, for the powerful were able to muffle the opposition press through intimidation, persuasion, bribery and incarceration. The opposition press in all cases was part of a social movement directed by individuals who were enemies of those in power; the establishment press,

on the other hand was directed by individuals determined to remain in power. Where the opposition was able to overturn the establishment, the 'watchdog' press was applauded as a cause of the overthrow, often by itself, as in the Watergate example. (Altschull, 1984: 73)

This independent status was often tenuous, but now, editors and journalists counted as proof of the importance and independence of their role the number of royal commissions, committees of inquiry and policy changes produced after their reports sounded alarm bells. In the revived Fourth Estate, Stead's definition of the press as protector of the outcast and the inquisitor of those in power continues to resonate. This marriage between the commercial and political functions of the news media is again elevated to create an idealised role of the Fourth Estate as the protector of the down-trodden and scrutiniser of the powerful, although some of those 'protected' by the press may be excused for being sceptical and suspicious of its motives.

### Conclusion

The Fourth Estate ideal developed in response to very specific social, economic and political influences. While the right to vote was limited, the press was able to exercise a significant role in societies which were no longer governed autocratically by a monarch. The development of a political role for the press was pursued with vigour in Britain, USA and France. As a nineteenth-century colony, the Australian settlements also sought press freedom – it was one of the defining ideas of the times. Most early governors were reluctant, pointing out that freedom of the press was a misnomer in a society which was not itself free. While the defamation laws were used with vigour to suppress critical publication from the earliest days of white settlement, licence fees were short-lived in Australia and for many years newspapers were despatched post free.

The way that the news media was able to intrude into the political system to become an institution of public importance, while maintaining a commercial focus, has been a remarkable example of creating an institution. The ideal, with all its paradoxes and tremendous capacity for reinterpretation, has been sustained for two centuries.

Like all ideals, the Fourth Estate is a mix of ambition and reality and survives in part because of its ability to accommodate a range of definitions, changing emphasis and meaning over time. The definition of the Fourth Estate has adapted in response to changing political, economic and social times. The paradox of holding its head in politics while its feet are grounded in commerce remains central, and provides the

resilience which makes it possible for the concept to value disclosure and criticism when the climate was right and at other times to present as an ostensibly neutral transmission belt for information.

Although the Fourth Estate, and the First Amendment to the American Constitution, apply to the news media as an institution, rather than to those who produce it, the ideal has been sustained and nurtured by journalists, producers and editors. Developments in the professionalisation of journalism have seen these groups claim custody of the Fourth Estate ideal which is currently focused on disclosure and scrutiny.

## CHAPTER 3

### *The Idealised Watchdog Estate*

'A man without a newspaper is half-clad, and imperfectly furnished for the battle of life. From being persecuted and then contemptuously tolerated, it has become the rival of organised governments. Will it become their superior?'

*W. T. Stead, 1886*

'People were reluctant to confer on newspaper its fully idealised role. The newspaper could act as watchdog of government, but the government also was asked to be a watchdog of the press.'

*Denis McQuail, 1976*

By claiming a public and essentially democratic purpose, which shapes its other imperatives, the news media has been able to define itself as an institution with a public political, social and cultural role. As a 'business affected by public purpose' (Hutchins, 1947: 90), the media has asserted influence across a wide range of endeavours. Indeed it has been argued that the media is central to 'determining the level of the civilisation in which it operates. Freedom of the press . . . means freedom to turn that level up or down' (Hocking, 1947: 45). The contemporary news media has spun the dial in both directions at different times.

The claim to this central, independent status is based largely on the liberal arguments of the Enlightenment, which led to the successful creation of the notion of the press as the Fourth Estate in nineteenth-century Britain, and as an institution of such importance to the democratic process that it must not be limited in the United States. It emerged formally in other countries as well – the Fourth Power in France and Spain, the Third Estate in Sweden with constitutional guarantees of press freedom since 1766, and even, for a time, as the Seventh Power in the former Yugoslavia. For the press to be recognised as the Fourth Estate it needed both to be independent of government, as stipulated in the First Amendment of the American Constitution, and to assume a political role within a democratic system. Over the past 150 years questions of ownership, partisanship and accountability became more crucial as the news media became more than the representative of an

unenfranchised population, in the face of unaccountable power. It became a source of independent power.

For two centuries the notion of the news media as the Fourth Estate has been idealised. The ideal has proved to be remarkably resilient. Like all ideals it has elements of truth, but did not emerge fully developed or by immaculate conception. Most importantly, its meaning has changed over time.

The press emerged as the Fourth Estate by the practical application of the principles of freedom of expression that were vigorously sought in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. There is, however, a small but essential step between proclaiming the importance of freedom of expression and the press asserting itself as its custodian. The press began to emerge as an independent power at a time of great political change, when representative democracies were acquiring their defining characteristics. By asserting an independent role in public life, and the centrality of freedom of expression, the press began to legitimise itself as the conduit for public discussion and take that crucial step towards becoming a source of power in political life. The claim to public purpose by a commercial enterprise is unique. It characterises what Frances Williams describes as the 'Janus face' of the press, Les Carlyon as the 'corporate face of free speech' and George Boyce as an institution with 'its head in politics, its feet in commerce'.

While the genesis of the Fourth Estate owes much to the particularities of the times and the dominant political, philosophical and public personalities of the day, its longevity is due more to semantic flexibility. Those self-appointed custodians of the power of the Fourth Estate have also been determined not to see it devalued. The power, influence and profitability of the contemporary news media depend in no small measure on this independent standing. It is scarcely surprising then that media owners, editors, managers, journalists and producers are such determined advocates of the idealised Fourth Estate. Without it, the media would be just another business and its status significantly devalued. This is clearly demonstrated in those countries where the news media is another arm of the state, and by the disdain for junk journalism which has no aspiration to public purpose.

While the Fourth Estate is a flexible term, shorthand for the news media and its idealised role, it has changed relatively little over two centuries. What were once considered the other, more legitimate, estates – the monarch, the clergy and the parliament – are now no longer thought of in such terms. The major institutions of representative democracy are the executive, the parliament and the judiciary, supplemented by a vastly expanded bureaucracy and a network of social, economic and regulatory institutions.

The legitimacy of the press as the Fourth Estate has been vociferously disputed. The concept has always attracted the pompous and self-important, so even among its earliest proponents, the Fourth Estate has had a long and parallel life as a term of abuse and mockery. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes for instance that when Thomas Carlyle in 1841 attributed the term to Edmund Burke, he observed that Burke had used it as a derogatory reference to the self-importance of parliamentary reporters in 1787.

Over its 200-year life, the ideal of the Fourth Estate, has assumed different guises for press barons, politicians and journalists. It has been transmuted over time to incorporate a wide, and at times contradictory, set of meanings. Widely used but seldom precisely defined, these meanings range from: the news media as an adjunct of the political process; as an independent source of power; as an industry which must not be regulated, for fear of compromise or co-option; as the watchdog of powerful institutions and individuals on behalf of the public; as the permanent political opposition; as the neutral agency for conflicting political messages; as the agency for securing public consensus for political, economic and social change.

Whether describing the physical location of the parliamentary reporters, the press as information provider, watchdog or protector of the unenfranchised, Fourth Estate has been sufficiently flexible to accommodate these meanings. Now it is best considered as an ideal, consisting of elements of truth, multiple meanings and lashings of ambition.

This wide range of meanings meant that the notion could be adapted to fit the media systems of the twentieth century, with almost as much ease as it became the dominant ethos of the very different nineteenth-century press. Already by 1947 it was clear, as William Hocking observed, that the twentieth-century news media:

... is not the press of John Milton, nor yet the press of Jefferson or of John Stuart Mill. There is a continuity; there are also sweeping changes ... I am thinking of the varied contents of the press today, the extraordinary congeries it serves, its enormous reach, its entanglement with the economic and cultural life of the community, with politics and education. (Hocking, 1947: 40)

The media systems of the late twentieth century – characterised by concentrated, global ownership, a plethora of mediums – are different again to the press described by William Hocking in his work for the Hutchins Commission in 1947. Despite initial opposition to the Hutchins Report, its call for a socially responsible media helped reinvoke the idea of the news media as a publicly accountable and

responsible Fourth Estate in America and elsewhere. Acknowledgment of the public's right to information has long informed liberal political theory, but in the second half of this century it became a defining ethic for journalists and editors. Henry Luce, publisher of *Time* magazine, commented in 1962 that journalists 'would no more go around without our cloak of responsibility than a lady would be caught without her mink'. The mink may now be safely mothballed, but the sentiment continues to resonate. Whether the Fourth Estate is able to adapt sufficiently to remain a meaningful synonym for the global media of the late twentieth century or will depend more on journalists and editors than on any other group.

### The Rise of the Watchdog

When considering the contemporary role of the Fourth Estate it is important to recognise that different times make different demands and raise different expectations about the role of the news media. In the late twentieth century, when people have grown cynical and suspicious about the motivations and integrity of those in positions of power, the news media has gained remarkable momentum as watchdog, even as public scepticism about the integrity of the media and its power grows.

International surveys show that journalists and editors accepted the watchdog role with enthusiasm during the 1980s (Sparkes and Splichal, 1990; Rigert, 1990). Belief in the importance of investigative journalism became an article of faith among journalists in Australia, and in many other western and developing countries. As one American editor said, 'It gives the reporters a reason to get up in the morning.'

Comparing the commitment of Australian journalists to an idealised Fourth Estate with the practical realities of working in the news business was a central part of the Media and Democracy survey in Australia. This was assessed by comparing the views of 247 news journalists with the opinions of 39 leading investigative reporters, editors and producers. They responded to 178 questions (see appendix) on ideals, work practices and values, many specifically addressing the role and nature of the Fourth Estate and investigative journalism. In the survey the Australian respondents were asked (question D19) whether they personally favoured the notion of the media as 'an independent and critical watchdog of government'. They were reminded that some critics argue that by 'exercising considerable commercial and political power this role had been compromised'. The 7-point scale invited them to locate their personal preference for the media strongly as a Fourth Estate, through a neutral view to a strong personal preference for the media as just another business. Seventy-nine per cent of the

news journalists and 87.5% of the investigative journalists favoured the idea of the media as the Fourth Estate. Only 5% of the news journalists and 2.5% of the investigative group had any conviction that the media was just another business.

The respondents were then asked to assess the 'actual situation in Australia today' (1992) (question D20). In answering this question they showed less certainty about the media as the Fourth Estate. Only 21% of the news journalists and 12% of the investigative group believed with any conviction that the media fulfilled its role as the Fourth Estate. At the other end of the scale, an almost equal number, 22.5% of the news journalists and 20.5% of the investigative group were convinced that in reality the media was 'just another business'. Despite this emphasis, the overall figures for each group showed that 42.7% of the news and 41% of the investigative group thought that the actual situation included at least some elements of the Fourth Estate. This compared with aggregate totals of 39% of news and 35% of investigative journalists who thought that the actual situation was tipped in favour of an emphasis on the commercial.

The idea of the news media as a watchdog is central to this idealised role but is itself problematic, as Bill Hayden suggested. It raises questions about the autonomy of journalists and the *Realpolitik* of power between a society and its media. As Tom Baistow commented in his critical review of the British press:

leader writers never tire of quoting Delane's dictum, that the business of the press is to disclose, whenever their newspapers unearth – or more frequently a mole presents them with – the makings of a good scandal . . . the blend of self-righteous moralising and minatory comment may reek of hypocrisy, yet the watchdog role, however, selectively played, however partisan, remains a basic function of the press. (Baistow, 1985: 4)

Interest in watchdog journalism accompanied and gave voice to widespread public disillusionment with political processes and institutions especially during the 1980s. As faith in central political institutions eroded, eager journalists were ready to disclose shortcomings and mal-administration in the name of public accountability.

News organisations have also changed dramatically since the 1970s, becoming larger, more profitable, global enterprises and continuing sources of power. The commercial advantages of investigative and disclosure journalism have been recognised by some news organisations, but in general corporate enthusiasm for investigative journalism has been mixed and remains limited.

The Fourth Estate ideal at its most basic holds that the role of the news media is to act as a conduit for information, ideas and opinions to

assist in the good governance of society; to act as a check on the powerful, by reporting, analysing and criticising their actions on behalf of the public, which lacks direct access to information or power. The ideal casts the media as the handmaiden of democracy. More than a century ago W.T. Stead described the press – with its constituency wider than suffrage – as a necessity of life, the chamber of initiative, and journalism as the interrogator of democracy:

The press is at once the eye and ear and the tongue of the people. It is the visible speech, if not the voice of democracy . . . There is no such democratic debating-place as the columns of the press.

. . . The duty of the journalist is the duty of a watchman . . . A man's duty is to do all the good he can and to prevent all the evil. (Stead, 1886a: 656, 667)

This moralistic hyperbole continues to be echoed by journalists, editors and journalism educators a century after Stead reformulated the Fourth Estate ideal in 1886 in two remarkable essays in *Contemporary Review*. He articulated an expanding role for the commercial press as a political agency, and claimed the press was better equipped than parliament to understand the will of the people:

Parliament has attained its utmost development. There is a need for a new representative method not to supersede but to supplement that which exists – a system which will be more elastic, more simple; more direct and more closely in contact with the people . . . And when the time does arrive . . . government by journalism will no longer be a somewhat hyperbolic phrase but a solid fact'. (Stead, 1886b: 678)

Stead had earlier argued that because the interests of the press were wide it was well equipped for this role, if only for selfish motives:

Everything that is of human interest is of interest to the press. A newspaper, to put it brutally, must have good copy and good copy is oftener found among the outcast and the disinherited of the earth than among the fat and well-fed citizens. Hence selfishness makes the editor more concerned about the vagabond, the landless man, and the deserted child, than the member. (1886a: 670)

Much of what Stead wrote, modified for tone and phraseology, could be a manifesto for contemporary journalism. Those whose self-definition is shaped by notions of public service may take comfort from Stead's description of a career in journalism as providing unrivalled 'opportunities for public usefulness . . . the humble interrogators of democracy' (Stead, 1886b: 678). American journalism scholar Everette

Dennis used similar words a century later when he talked about journalists as 'professional problem solvers and public sense makers' (Dennis, 1989: 182). The ideal retains remarkable resilience. The potential of the new media for 'democratic system management' (Kunczik, 1989) continues to be widely recognised.

The Media and Democracy survey sought journalists' views on the importance of investigative journalism and the obstacles that prevented it. An overwhelming percentage of both groups – 92% of news and 97% of investigative journalists – considered that a willingness to undertake investigative reporting was an important measure of a news organisation's commitment to an idealised Fourth Estate (question E1).

Both groups considered that objective and subjective obstacles inhibited such reporting. The ranking of obstacles was the same for each group (question E3, 4). The most significant objective obstacle was considered to be legal restrictions, followed by state secrecy, journalistic constraints, economic constraints and pressure from owners. The most important subjective obstacle was commercial considerations, followed by perceptions of owners' views, political considerations, personal privacy, danger to staff and finally national interest. This ranking highlights the importance of perception in inhibiting pursuit of investigative subjects, and the ease of self-censorship.

Despite these cautious assessments 68% of news journalists and 77% of investigative journalists considered that their news organisation fulfilled this watchdog role (question E5). Similar percentages, 63% news, 72% investigative felt that journalists were encouraged to undertake such reporting (question E6).

The strongest form of encouragement emerged from the ethos of the organisation (question E7). Those who felt a lack of encouragement were most likely to attribute this to the organisation's ethos, while access to (question E8) material, staff and personnel support were important indicators of support. Journalists who were not encouraged to investigate felt they had insufficient resources, or inadequate skills.

While the respondents considered investigative journalism an important element of a news organisation's commitment to a Fourth Estate obligation, they also reported a high degree of resistance to staff undertaking investigative projects. Nearly three quarters (71%) of investigative journalists felt that there was resistance (question E12) and just over half the news journalists (52%) shared this view.

Despite this negative assessment only 21% of the news journalists and 38% of the investigative group reported that they had been put under any pressure to stop doing such journalism (question E9). This pressure was most likely to come from legal actions (question E10),

from commercial considerations or internal threats. The respondents who experienced this pressure claimed that they were most likely to fight it or ignore it (questions E11, 12); only a very small proportion considered resigning (4% news, 14% investigative) or reducing the amount of investigative journalism they were pursuing (16% news, 7% investigative).

Both groups found the greatest resistance to investigative reporting came from management (question E 13), although the investigative group also named colleagues. Both groups ranked the other most likely sources of resistance as politicians, advertisers, editorial staff, and the board. Consumers and shareholders were not considered significant opponents. That editorial managers are considered the greatest opponents of investigative reporting highlights the importance of the role that individual journalists assume as advocates for it within news organisations.

### *Whose Watchdog?*

The limited accountability of the news media, to its public and the broader political system, also raises the dilemma of whose agency the news media accepts when it assumes a watchdog role. In his rebuttal of the Fourth Estate ideal, American journalism philosopher John Merrill found it an intolerable conflict for the commercial media:

The press is a 'watchdog', we are told. But just what does that mean? To whom does the watchdog belong? Whom is it watching and for what reasons? If the press is a watchdog, presumably it is protecting something. Just what is that? Is it the people's watchdog, watching the government, and keeping the government from doing harm, or violence to the people? This must be the core of the concept. But the question arises: Who gave the watchdog this mission? Did the people buy the dog for this purpose? If so, then the press belongs to the people, they own it and they have a perfect right to expect it to protect them against their own government. But, on even superficial analysis we can see that this is not the case. The people do not own the press, it cannot therefore be their watchdog . . . It has no specific duties – except those which the press people themselves want to accept . . . not serving as watchdogs on government, checks on government or critics of government. Some in fact tend to be apologists for government. They do not consider themselves watchdogs of anybody, or if they do, they see themselves as dogs belonging to no master and having no leashes. (Merrill, 1974: 118)

From a different perspective it is argued that despite the watchdog rhetoric, the media more often operates in a symbiotic relationship with the government and other sources of power:

Once it is accepted that the press is an agent of power and not an independent force, it can be seen that the press is no more watchdog, adversary or

agenda setter, than it is a disinterested, objective observer. The relationship between the press and power is indeed symbiotic . . . in the contemporary world, political (and economic) power needs the mass media, just as the media need the power of the leadership. They are not adversaries since they need each other. They may (and do) watch each other, not for the purpose of interfering with the behaviour that nurtures them both, but to avoid the kind of abnormal behaviour that threatens the biological system in which both live. It is together that they live and/or die, so it is together that they disseminate information, or that they set the public agenda. (Altschull, 1984: 195)

Much of this argument is based on the economic power of the media; indeed Altschull suggests that the media is the economy. Without the media to generate demand for products, to provide the information on which economic decisions are made, national and global economies would collapse, or quickly find alternate means of information exchange and delivery.

From this perspective the watchdog function is an important element of a 'media myth' whereby occasional reports temporarily disrupt the symbiotic relationship between the media and power. The symbiosis demands investigative journalism that is not, however, fundamentally challenging. This leaves room for suspicion about whose interests are really served by investigative reports. It suggests that in many cases journalists and media organisations are at best the passive, or at worst the active dupes, of those with real economic or political power. This argument maintains that by concentrating on individuals rather than institutions, the media's real agenda – commercial success and maintenance of the status quo – is revealed. Investigative reporting that implicitly demands social change presents a 'ticklish association with the commercial needs of the media in which it normally appears. To profit from advertising dollars, to build and maintain audience acceptance and simultaneously to advocate social change is a formula for conflict' (Harrison and Stein, 1971: 21).

Despite the reluctant accountability of the news media, and the conflict implicit in the news media assuming a watchdog role, most of those involved in the industry relish the opportunity to scrutinise government and other sources of power, as the survey results showed. Part of the process which Walter Lippmann described as 'signalling events' involves alerting the public to misdeeds, questionable practices, inconsistencies and dishonesty by the powerful.

The watchdog role has become central to contemporary understanding of the Fourth Estate by journalists and editors, although the watchdog may seem more like an unleashed mastiff to those outside the industry. To many of those working in the media, however, the role of watchdog is a key element of exemplary professional behaviour,

rewarded with prizes for excellence in journalism, and providing W.T. Stead's 'unrivalled opportunities for public service'.

The ideal of the Fourth Estate has widespread currency, promoted not only by the news media and journalists in their own defence, but widely accepted in education and politics. Australians, despite universal suffrage and compulsory education, remain remarkably ill-informed about political institutions, but most accept the importance of freedom of information and the press with almost knee-jerk faith (Macintyre, 1994: 156).

### **Information management versus disclosure**

There is a paradox at the heart of the desire by many journalists to produce assertive, critical and investigative journalism. Blue pencil censorship is a thing of the past in most western countries and freedom of speech and expression are generally regarded as desirable. But never before has so much time, effort and money been spent to shape and distort public discussion. Attempts to 'manage' the public information agenda have been remarkably successful – for instance research has shown that about half of the articles published in major Australian newspapers began as press releases (Schultz, 1990a; Zawazi, 1994), and public figures have become adept at using the media to get *their* message across irrespective of the questions asked.

While news management has a history as long as the history of the press, the sophistication of the process has increased. This has profoundly changed the nature of journalism, turning the news media from news merchants to dealers in public opinion and making citizens information consumers. This has led to suspicion that the words uttered by public figures cannot be taken at face value; made journalists anxious that they are dupes of clever information managers keen to reveal only part of the story and seriously corroded confidence in the public sphere.

One of the most compelling reasons for the pursuit of watchdog journalism is recognition of the increasing sophistication of information management and a desire to get below the surface of this expensively massaged information business. The much-awarded Australian investigative journalist Chris Masters commented, 'Investigative journalism is a tautology, all journalism must contain a component of investigation, otherwise it is just recycling press releases' (Masters, 1992). Much journalism does simply recycle press releases. Some is crude, but many apparently comprehensive reports accept the line and language of the spin doctors with little real attempt to provide context, background, analysis or insight.

The process of information management, and the subsequent revelations of misstatements and dishonesty, have heightened public suspicion about the honesty and integrity of those in positions of public trust. To some extent, journalists are culpable of complicity in the corrosion of public debate, by perpetuating the myths generated by information managers and by making disclosures that wilfully ignore context, relevant qualifiers and complexity. Almost inevitably, national heroes created in public relations departments and amplified in the news media are found to have feet of clay, often by other journalists who are prepared to dig beneath the carefully created image.

As the process of information management has become more sophisticated, many journalists have found themselves unwitting agents for the distribution of commercially prepared information. In response, a growing number of Australian journalists are aware of the need to focus less on the transmission of information prepared by others, and more on uncovering the 'truth' that underpins the sanitised information machine.

The growth of the public relations industry and the increasing sophistication of methods of media management not only distort the information available but also undermine claims to journalistic freedom and autonomy. Journalists with experience of peeling back the layers of a story are acutely aware of the constraints and methods used to capture them. Their cynicism is a powerful factor in shaping public attitudes. Peter Manning, one of the more influential Australian journalists, commented:

Too many reporters generally have become too close to the main proponents in industrial relations, in big business, in politics, in police rounds and so on. There needs to be a greater distance, a greater scepticism, so that we start to get some of the real stories in those areas rather than those simply being pumped out on a daily basis. At the moment too many journalists allow themselves to be spoon-fed the official agenda. The chooks are being fed too much by the ACTU, the CAI, the federal and state governments, the green lobby. (Stannard, 1991: 33)

The distortion the professionalisation of information management has caused to communication within representative democracies has been addressed by official inquiries in many countries. In Australia during the late 1980s, the impact of information management on a state's political culture became one of the issues underpinning the royal commission headed by (now Justice) Tony Fitzgerald QC into allegations of official corruption in Queensland. Fitzgerald reported in 1991 that the system of information management by the Queensland government had fostered a culture of acquiescence by the news media

in the state, reducing its capacity for critical scrutiny. This issue was previously addressed in the controversial UNESCO report, *Many Voices One World*, which noted:

The press has been described as the Fourth Estate because full and accurate information on matters of public interest is the means by which governments, institutions, organisations and all others in authority at whatever level are held accountable to and by the public. Nevertheless those in authority often tend to conceal that which is inconvenient, or likely to arouse public opinion against them. Hence one finds denial of access to information, overt or covert censorship and deliberate attempts by official spokesmen to mislead. (MacBride, 1980 : 234)

The sophistication of this process has increased so much in recent years, that it threatens to undermine the health of the political system.

### Defining Investigative Journalism

Lord Northcliffe, one of the great press barons, declared with certainty that news was information someone wanted suppressed. The growth of information management in the latter years of this century has made his dictum a truism, which now informs most definitions of investigative journalism.

Robert Greene, an eminent American journalist, who headed *Newsday's* investigative team for many years, devised a three-pronged operational definition of investigative reporting. Greene argues that investigative journalism goes beyond Northcliffe's dictum and must be distinguished by disclosure; deal with matters of public importance and be the result of effort and initiative by a reporter (Ullmann and Colbert, 1991: vii). He argues that reporting leaks of publicly significant, but suppressed documents, while important, is not investigative, because it does not involve substantial original work by the reporter.

Greene's definition begs a number of questions: who assesses the public interest; how is the public interest served by publication or broadcast; how is the definition of public interest distorted by commercial publication or broadcast? Greene's definition relies on an assumption that absolute truth is buried somewhere. Faith in the news media as a classic Fourth Estate is essential for meaning.

Greene's definition works only if one has confidence in the capacity of the news media to exercise independent political agency on behalf of the public. His definition would be meaningless for those who see the news media as an agent of a homogeneous status quo, whose main function is to garner public compliance and consent for the decisions and actions of the elites (Chomsky, 1988; Altschull, 1984). If the status

quo is seen as a matrix of competing interests, the investigative journalist's impact, in advancing the interests of one group at the cost of another, becomes clearer.

For the purposes of my argument, that the production of watchdog journalism is a crucial element in the contemporary manifestation of the Fourth Estate ideal, I define watchdog journalism more broadly than investigative journalism. For instance while Greene specifically excludes the publication by the *New York Times* of the Pentagon Papers as an example of investigative journalism, it was an important milestone in the history of watchdog journalism. To suggest that only original inquiries by journalists can be defined as investigative, undermines the reality that many reports depend on the confidential supply of information. While documents may be leaked for a range of personal, political or strategic motives, by competing factions, power blocs and interest groups, the publication or broadcast of leaked documents, subsequently verified by journalists, is an important element of watchdog journalism. This often requires considerable journalistic initiative and effort and can carry far-reaching legal and political consequences.

Confidence in the curative impact of watchdog journalism is not confined to reporters and editors. Its importance as a component of the media's Fourth Estate ambition is widely accepted. This is clear from official reports and the mission statements of major media organisations. For instance in a personal comment in his report for UNESCO Sean MacBride noted, 'As it is the people who in the final analysis have to decide policies for them the fullest freedom of information is essential. The role of the investigative journalist is paramount and must be protected' (MacBride, 1980: 239, # 2).

In Australia the 1994 Senate Committee report on the rights and obligations of the media, *Off the Record*, devoted a chapter to the Fourth Estate, accepting that the media had a role to enable 'the public to keep the government and public institutions generally, accountable for their actions', and 'that without investigative journalism, the media and its news would be generally bland and their utility to the public truncated. The Committee does not wish to see this kind of journalism diminish' (Cooney, 1994: 47).

An even more explicit statement of the importance of investigative journalism to the media's Fourth Estate role was included in the mission statement, legislation and guiding editorial principles of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1985. The policy statement, *The Role of a National Broadcaster*, noted:

Inherent in the obligation to maintain an independent news and information service is a responsibility to be inquiring and if necessary, controversial;

to not be afraid of pursuing the truth . . . The ABC cannot simply report; its legislation clearly implies that it should also work within the best traditions of investigative journalism. The ABC has made major contributions through its investigative journalism. While it remains independent of sectional interests it will be well placed systematically to pursue issues of public concern through innovative and reliable journalism: to contribute uniquely to the freedom of information that is essential to a democratic society. (ABC, 1985: 12–15)

This element of the ABC's manifesto became particularly important during the 1980s. The public broadcaster actively encouraged investigative journalism in television and radio, supporting reporters with researchers, producers and legal back-up. The independence of the ABC gave it the scope and authority to broadcast reports which presented fundamental challenges to major institutions and individuals, including federal and state governments, trade unions, political parties and major corporations. Although the ABC was not dependent on commercial support, the vigour of its investigative reporting on radio and television had an impact on relations with the government on which it depended for its annual budget. It was only in 1989 that the ABC was allocated triennial funding which better underpinned its independence. The maturing of the journalistic mission of the ABC, implicit in the 1985 policy, shifted the balance of power between the federal government and the corporation. As has been well documented, government ministers had tended to regard the ABC as their outlet and until the mid-1970s rarely hesitated before demanding editorial changes, and threatening to withdraw funding unless the broadcaster acceded to political demands. By asserting that the ABC was obliged to investigate issues of public concern, the range of journalism pursued by the national broadcaster was significantly expanded – in the name of 'democracy'.

### **Costs and benefits of watchdog journalism**

It was not only public-sector media which seized on the importance of investigative journalism; commercial media outlets recognised not only the important function of such journalism, but also its capacity to attract large audiences. The history of watchdog journalism highlights the ambiguous relationship between disclosure and commercial success. In a clear parallel with today's television current affairs, the muckraking American magazines at the beginning of the century were forced to modify their reporting to survive. The wide public appeal of disclosure journalism was implicit in W.T. Stead's 1886 pronouncements and continues in popular mass journalism. There is however an

ever-present danger that the public would weary of major disclosures, or that the disclosures could become commercially perilous for the news organisation. Investigations then become more predictable, of less genuine public interest, focused instead on 'safe topics guaranteed to arouse indignation, such as trusts, organised crime, or pollution without assigning specific responsibility or proposing harsh remedies' (Harrison and Stein, 1971: 21).

The commercial benefits of investigative and disclosure journalism have been recognised by some organisations, as one news director commented, 'It's a social responsibility and it gives us a competitive advantage' (Abbott, 1988: 16). In 1989 Rupert Murdoch, chairman of News Corporation Ltd, urged his Sydney editors to produce more campaigning, investigative reports, having learnt that major campaigns which touch widespread community concerns have the capacity to dramatically increase circulation (Shawcross, 1992: 187-8). Proprietorial enthusiasm for a style of investigative journalism that goes beyond the exposé designed to entertain and titillate, or as an audience-building campaign, has, however, been mixed and remains limited. As David Banks, the editorial director of Mirror Newspapers in London, commented in 1995: 'The first casualty of a circulation war is accuracy, the second is investigative journalism, because it takes time, costs money – it's expensive.'

Although many editors and news executives once confidently believed that investigative journalism was best done by newspapers and magazines, television claimed this style of journalism as its own during the 1980s, notably with the ABC program *Four Corners* and Channel 9's *60 Minutes*. The accepted wisdom at the beginning of that decade divided news by medium: radio was best for instant news, reporting on major and minor disasters, doorstop interviews with politicians; television added a visual dimension to news of this nature, elevating accidents, demonstrations and events with visible conflict, humour or sentimentality to a higher slot on the news list; newspapers and magazines were best placed to concentrate on the background behind the electronic headlines, with explanation and increasingly, comment. Under this rubric it was argued that newspapers were best suited to major investigative stories. As Sir Larry Lamb, a former editor of the *Australian*, declared, 'Television is no good at all at the big investigative type of story' (*Bulletin*, 9 February, 1982).

The flaw of this assessment quickly became apparent as Channel 9 pioneered *60 Minutes*. By 1982 this big-budget program began to profoundly change Australian journalism. Not only were the reporters treated as 'stars', personalities in their own right and paid accordingly, but they were also given more scope and resources than had hitherto

been made available to television current affairs in Australia. When *60 Minutes* began in 1979, it also devoted more resources to investigative journalism than any Australian newspaper was prepared to spend. In its first years it broadcast a number of stories that were essentially investigative – reports on the causes of the deaths in the Appin underground coalmine disaster in New South Wales and Sydney's Chelmsford Private Hospital which took months to research and produce. By 1983 when *Four Corners* produced 'The Big League', about corruption in the administration of rugby league in New South Wales, after six months research, it was apparent that television could do the 'big investigative type of story', with explosive public consequences.

Slickly produced watchdog current affairs, *60 Minutes* was consistently the highest rating television program throughout the 1980s and consolidated Channel 9 as the dominant commercial station. Channel 9 built on this success by reviving *A Current Affair* and launching the up-market *Sunday* and *Business Sunday* programs. These programs were later emulated, with varying degrees of success, by other commercial networks.

Investigative journalism in Australia has tended to be preoccupied with crime and corruption. During the 1980s it stretched beyond these well-trodden areas to their intersection with political and economic power. It also began to address these issues more systematically. By the end of the 1980s, the existence of a plethora of television programs with an explicit investigative agenda suggested that the public was receptive to such reporting and would support it.

This was a short-lived preference and, following the dramatic changes of ownership and economic stability of the industry in the late 1980s, many of these programs failed – to be replaced in the 1990s with a style of watchdog journalism which owed more to the titillation of women's magazines and sensational tabloids focusing as it did on 'safe topics, guaranteed to arouse indignation' and ultimately ensure a short lifespan (Harrison and Stein, 1971: 21).

Despite this early commercial success and a personal commitment to producing watchdog journalism, the costs may exceed the benefits. The costs are not confined to large budgets, but can be measured in terms of audience reaction and high level political and commercial pressures. Recognition of this can be seen in the assessment of the journalists surveyed in 1992 that news media managers were the strongest opponents of investigative journalism.

Denis McQuail argues that while the ideal of watchdog journalism is fervently held as one of the most important elements of journalism, it is among the least fulfilled. This could be because of the cost of investigations, the sense that the audience is not particularly interested, political

and legal pressures, commercial considerations and the identity of interest between powerful media organisations and the other agencies of power which may become the target of investigative reporters. Then too there is internal resentment and jealousy that can trail reporters chosen for this work.

If the topics of watchdog journalism go too far beyond the prevailing established viewpoints, the stories are less likely to be pursued or are more likely to be jettisoned as the pressures increase. This may explain the frequency of investigative reports about small-time shysters, and even corrupt police, and the relative scarcity of reports about more important institutions and individuals. The demands of reaching larger audiences may mean that even as journalists maintain that they are engaged in watchdog journalism, the disclosures become more banal and trite. These pressures make it harder to find the money and the will to support investigative journalism that stretches the boundaries.

In this context the 'heroic journalist', who is prepared to take personal and professional risks, is important in the maintenance of the Fourth Estate ideal. It is individual journalists who are most likely to pursue the stories which stretch the parameters, thereby putting flesh on the ideal. Indeed it could be argued that the rhetoric of freedom of the press depends on journalists and editors who are prepared to step beyond the limits, to 'buck the system':

Nothing gratifies the individual journalist more than a successful challenge to power, even as Don Quixote rejoiced in tilting at windmills. There is built into journalism the possibility of inducing change and of helping to create a world that is more just and more peaceful. It is this possibility that has fired, and continues to fire, the imagination of journalists everywhere on earth. Political and especially economic reality, however, severely circumscribes these possibilities. And to make sure of a substantial measure of satisfaction among journalists, it is almost always necessary for power to permit a limited volume of success to its critics. (Altschull, 1984 : 273)

In this environment, the watchdog journalism interested in the disclosure of complex abuses of power in an increasingly complex world may be displaced by an investigative journalism whose primary attributes are a strong foot, for placing in the door, and a hidden camera to record the banal foibles of relatively insignificant wrongdoers. This is a fundamental issue and begs the question of who the journalist represents now that, unlike the 1800s 'the market is not as differentiated as the electorate', and who 'Directs the attention of the reporter from one arena to another?' (Smith, 1978: 196).

Public attitudes towards watchdog journalism appear to be mixed. Research in the USA and Britain, analysed by Denis McQuail,

suggests considerable public opposition to investigative journalism in the local media. The research suggests not only that commercial considerations tell against investigative journalism, which is expensive and not necessarily successful in gaining new audiences, but also that people 'were reluctant to confer on newspaper its fully idealised role. The newspaper could act as watchdog of government, but the government also was asked to be a watchdog of the press' (McQuail, 1976: 29).

It has been argued that the media system which develops in any state mirrors the political system, and that insights into one can be gained from examination of the other (Siebert et al., 1974). If this is the case, the flowering of investigative journalism in Australia during the 1980s suggests that the political system was undergoing a catharsis – seeking to eliminate corruption which had become entrenched. During this period opinion polls showed that the state with the highest regard for watchdog journalism was Queensland, at the time when the media-triggered Fitzgerald inquiry into police and political corruption was daily yielding revelations about the nature of corruption in that state, and leading eventually to significant political change.

### **Professionalisation of Journalism**

In the late twentieth century, the news media is unequivocally commercial and the nature of its power has changed. The perpetuation of the ideal of the Fourth Estate now owes much to the professionalisation of journalism. Journalists remain resolutely attached to the idea, although their commitment to a romanticised definition of public purpose often runs contrary to their knowledge that the media industry frequently ill deserves its institutional status.

The creation of a caste of journalists who believe in the importance of disclosure and a critical, at times adversarial, relationship with power can be traced from the muckrakers at the turn of the century to the underground press of the 1960s and on to the less partisan, more professionally independent journalists of the 1980s. They are part of a long tradition; W.T. Stead suggested that John Bunyan's 'man with a muckrake' has many a prototype of the press (Stead, 1886a: 664). Two decades later American president Ted Roosevelt popularised the term 'muckrakers' when he used it to describe journalists and writers on popular magazines in 1905 who were committed to exposing corporate wrongdoings.

The crusading journalists who were the muckrakers at the beginning of the century were themselves part of a larger social and political movement; similarly the journalists who produced the underground press in the 1960s were part of a political movement. The investigators

of the 1980s, however, were primarily motivated by a sense of public purpose and an idealised commitment to an independent role for journalism – they were less aligned to particular political parties, although many were the indirect product of earlier political and social movements. Instead they established a movement of their own: journalism as a vocation. Altschull argued that the American investigative journalists of the 1970s and 1980s who replaced the underground journalists of the 1960s were fundamentally different:

Whereas the motto of underground editors and reporters was the quest for truth, the objective of investigative journalists was to unearth evidence of wickedness in high places and to publish such scathing indictments that the evil perpetrators would be brought to justice either in the courtroom or in the court of public opinion. The quest was no longer for truth, but for victory over evil. The adversary culture had arrived . . . (Altschull, 1984: 204)

This distinction is repeated among the Australian investigative journalists who were not partisan. The 39 investigative journalists I surveyed wanted their reports to have an impact but were adamantly non-partisan, yet they adopted a generally critical, adversarial position.

This critical approach is not so widely shared, although an adversarial style is. The journalism movement has gained impetus in many countries, often as a reaction against the corporate pressures of a global media business. As a result, those interested in reforming and revitalising the media began to direct their attention at journalists rather than the large media corporations. The power of journalists may be limited, but it is not inconsequential.

Journalists' roles have been recognised by international agencies such as UNESCO and with varying degrees of enthusiasm in countries in the developed and developing world. The role of journalists within the news media along with their power to shape news agendas and approaches, have become a matter of considerable interest. After UNESCO's failure to gather international support for the New World Information and Communications policy, the international agency focused attention on the role of journalists to ensure that the news media fulfilled its idealised Fourth Estate obligations.

UNESCO commissioned a number of research projects relating to journalism practice; two of the most significant were the study of the teaching of principles of the Fourth Estate in journalism education (Sparkes and Splichal, 1990), and the collection *The Vigilant Press*. This monograph surveyed the professionalisation of journalism internationally, and examined the impact of watchdog journalism on political systems. This strategic change of direction enabled UNESCO to take an active interest in media policy, but avoided the problem of

recommending an institutional transformation of the world's media. Through its emphasis on the role of journalists, the communications division of UNESCO gave tacit support to the flowering of investigative journalism which occurred during the 1980s.

By 1990 Joe Rigert, international co-ordinator for the University of Missouri-based Investigative Reporters and Editors, collected examples of investigative work in 33 countries, two-thirds in the developing world. The capacity of investigative reporting to reach beyond the safe, titillating subjects will test its capacity to reinvigorate the ideal of the Fourth Estate.

The assertion of journalists' responsibility for the public interest as a quasi-professional value was not confined to Australia. The International Federation of Journalists sponsored a conference in 1990 on the issues raised by globalisation, concentration of media ownership and the role of journalists. The conference endorsed what became known as the Sydney declaration which asserted the importance of the institutional role of the news media.<sup>1</sup>

The ideal of this role resonates with many journalists, even as they recognise the paradox implicit in it. While a responsibility model of

<sup>1</sup> The Sydney declaration said:

A free, independent media reflecting diversity of opinion is a precondition of democratic societies;

The free flow of information is the lifeblood of communities whether they be based on geography, ethnic origins, shared values or common language;

Transnational multi-media enterprises threaten the diversity of information sources necessary for the practice of democracy at the level of the individual, the community, the nation or the world;

Information and cultural material that recognise the worth of national identity should be protected from attempts by transnational media companies to promote global integration of language, culture and information. New media technologies should promote diversity;

The treatment of news and information as a commodity must not over-ride the duty of journalists to inform their audience;

The commercial activities of transnational media enterprises have increased pressure on journalists to reflect corporate objectives in their work. This leads to forms of censorship, including self-censorship. Journalists must ensure that the media is not used by proprietors for their own narrow political advantage.

Therefore the International Federation of Journalists calls upon other trade unions, the United Nations and its agencies, consumer and public interest groups, political parties and individual citizens to:

- Recognise that the dissemination of information is a unique commercial activity carrying with it a duty to the public interest
- Preserve professional standards and ethics among journalists
- Protect the right of journalists to act according to their conscience
- Defend full trade union rights for journalists and other media workers
- Guarantee diversity of written and audio visual information media
- Maintain media systems outside the framework of the commercial funding, for instance, public broadcasting.

Since being endorsed by the IFJ it has also been endorsed at a number of international trade union forums and by United Nations agencies.

journalism provides journalists with a rationale for professionalisation, the competing commercial reality is ever present.

The status of the press as a democratic institution depends upon the alertness of its journalists to current events and the freedom they have to interpret, criticise, and present their views for public scrutiny . . . In this sense, therefore, journalism is an industry within an industry. And the fact that newspaper journalists must practice within the framework of a commercial enterprise means that some degree of conflict between the ideological and commercial interests of the press is unavoidable. (Hart, 1981: 268)

Freedom from restraint is important, but double-edged once won. Freedom gives rise to criticisms that journalists have become a law unto themselves, writing about their own preoccupations and concerns with scant reference to the interests of the audience, exercising power without responsibility. Although perceptions of internal freedom are an important element of the rhetoric of press freedom and Fourth Estate practice, journalists generally work within bureaucratic structures which favour the production of certain types of information. There is evidence (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991) to suggest that during the 1980s the real levels of freedom journalists were able to exercise in the United States declined – as the commercial pressures of news production overwhelmed the quest for journalistic autonomy.

### Conclusion

The rise of the idealised watchdog estate was a consequence of a changing political environment in which the citizens of many countries became increasingly suspicious and sceptical about the integrity and honour of those in positions of power. As the news media mirrors the political system in which it exists, this public cynicism and disillusion has been reflected in a news media increasingly willing to undertake a critical and supervisory role.

This role which has both commercial costs and benefits for the media industry has struck receptive ground among journalists who became increasingly assertive and willing to demand the 'role of the watchman' during the 1980s. Their actions ranged across the spectrum of public institutions and led to the reports which challenged the authority of people and institutions in positions of trust and power. As a consequence the Fourth Estate increasingly asserted its own voice, and was certainly not just an echo of the Third Estate.

The Fourth Estate described the news media in toto, rather than those who produced it – hence the Fourth Estate historically referred to the institution of the press and its largely anonymous editorial content rather than ascribing a particular role to journalists or editors.

Similarly the First Amendment protection in the United States attached to the press as an institution and failed to delineate a separation of institutional and editorial roles.

In the last 25 years, journalists in Australia and elsewhere have, however, attempted to assert that they, and not the media companies, should be the custodians of the Fourth Estate. Journalists have claimed custody of the public interest role ceded by owners whose focus has shifted elsewhere. The assertion of journalistic independence in Australia occurred as the news media industry became both increasingly concentrated and global in its reach, and as the information and news management industries increased in sophistication and subtlety (most notably diminishing journalistic autonomy in the United States).

The revival by journalists of the news media as an idealised watch-dog is linked, therefore, to growing public scepticism about political institutions. It is also bound to attempts by journalists to assert an idealised role while the institutional role of the news media as the Fourth Estate is challenged by the structural and economic reality.

## CHAPTER 4

### *The Other Estates Question the Fourth*

'The mass media have become a political power which no longer merely reacts, but acts substantially, and by defining the scope of what is politically possible, as a power in their own right, co-govern indirectly.'

*H.M. Kepplinger, 1973*

In defending its standing as the institutional Fourth Estate the Australian news media has sought to assert a role central to what one network's corporate lawyer described the 'maintenance of our democratic society'. This role is not recognised in the Australian Constitution, and indeed the question of whether the Constitution even implies a right to freedom of political expression was only resolved by the High Court in 1994 and has since been subjected to continuing legal debate. Nonetheless James MacLachlan, general counsel for Channel 9, articulated a widespread view when he told a parliamentary committee that the news media played a central political role in representative democracy 'acting as a watchdog and providing a forum for accountability of the exercise of public and private power' (Cooney, 1994: 37). Given the Constitution's diffidence on freedom of expression, some reluctance by the judiciary, executive and parliament to allow a watchdog media industry to become MacLachlan's 'fourth link in the estate' would be understandable. The other institutions – once also considered estates – accept the aspirations and actions of the news media cautiously.

The strongest Australian public advocate of the democratic purpose of an unfettered press is, somewhat ironically, an academic lawyer: David Flint, professor of law at the University of Technology, Sydney, long-time chairman of the Australian Press Council who in 1997 became chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Authority. Flint advocates, virtually without qualification, the democratic purpose of a free press, constitutionally empowered to act as the Fourth Estate. He regularly

argued for a referendum to constitutionally guarantee freedom of speech and the news media. In a typical example he wrote:

It is also a mistake to suppose that the [US] constitutional guarantee was to merely ensure the press would be a neutral forum for debate, a marketplace for ideas, a kind of Hyde Park for the community. There was a deliberate intention to create friction and competition. The primary purpose of the constitutional guarantee of a free press was a similar one: to create a fourth institution outside the government as an additional check and balance on the three official branches. When we wrote our Constitution our founding fathers were impressed by the argument that, compared with the leading civil law countries in Europe, the common law was on the whole a more effective guarantor of freedom. And that was true at the time. Now as we approach the 21st century, the great step forward in the US Constitution of guaranteeing freedom of speech and of the press could become a significant check and balance in our Constitution. If we want openness in government and public life, the only way to ensure that is through a free press and media. (*Flint, Australian*, 20 February 1995a:11)

In the United States, where rights to freedom of the press and expression and individual rights are explicitly stated (but not absolute), the news media has used its constitutional authority to add force to the argument that it should operate unfettered. In countries such as Australia and Britain, where there is no constitutional acknowledgement of the right to freedom of speech and the press, the Fourth Estate authority of the news media is informal and depends on custom, practice, and the common law. As a result the outcome of contests between major political institutions is less predictable and the need to find a balance between competing areas of authority and legitimacy subject to ongoing renegotiation.

Such a renegotiation, shaped somewhat by antipathy between the judiciary and the news media, began in Australia during the mid-1980s and has yet to be resolved. At that time, several factors combined to trigger an informal realignment of power between the media and the judiciary, parliament and executive. This was initiated by a major change of media policy, in which the Australian media companies were effectively given the choice, in the words of then Treasurer Paul Keating, of 'being queens of the screen or princes of print'. By establishing cross-media ownership limits, executive government responded to longstanding community and political concern about the concentrated and oligopolistic ownership of the Australian media. The consequence was, however, dramatic and the ownership of most media outlets changed, paradoxically increasing concentration of ownership within sectors of the media while also providing opportunities for some new corporate participants.

The renegotiation of power between the media and other political institutions, which this policy change signalled, was also influenced by other factors including: greater assertiveness of journalists and editors and readiness to pursue stories dealing with prominent individuals, organisations, parliamentary and judicial institutions; a less timorous attitude by media organisations to the possibility of legal action, even when publication was likely to result in contempt charges or protracted legal action; a new willingness by state and federal governments to consider liberalising and standardising defamation laws; and increasing concern by the judiciary about damage to the legal process by pre-trial publicity.

High Court judge, and chair of the International Commission of Jurists, Justice Michael Kirby has repeatedly expressed his reservations about the consequences of this realignment, arguing that the news media's desire to trivialise, hunger for conflict and need to make a dollar, has the capacity to seriously erode other institutions:

In Australia since 1992 there has been unprecedented media criticism of the judiciary. Much of it has been focussed on alleged gender bias, conservatism and the need for change. Like any institution the judiciary is probably improved by such criticism. The old days when such critics were suppressed by the law of contempt of court and scandalising the court have gone. But more lately the attacks on the judiciary . . . have turned feral.

Informed and thoughtful criticism of the judiciary is a positive blessing in a free society. But personalised media campaigns, generalised opprobrium, inaccurate stereotyping and dismissive attacks on vital institutions all threaten judicial independence.

And if public confidence in the judiciary is destroyed, what will be left? Evidence has it that politicians in all western democracies are no longer generally trusted and respected as a group. The church has lost its influence. The academics have retreated into their ivory towers. Royal families and presidents are denigrated and pulled down. The bureaucracy is derided.

What then is left to defend our liberties? The investigative journalist! Alas with a short attention span. Usually with a ferocious requirement for entertainment. And often with an insistent need to bring in the big bucks. (Kirby, 1994a: 20)

During more than two hundred years of European settlement in Australia the executive, parliament and the judiciary have shown only cautious willingness to accept the news media as a legitimate institution, 'ideas of free speech are . . . weakly rooted in Australian experience' (Pullan, 1994: 194). Yet the links between the news media as a political institution and the other 'estates' is clear, illustrated by the number of journalists and editors elected to high public office. Journalists and editors have frequently been elected to Australian parliaments; in 1898, for instance, they made 12% of the New South Wales Legislative

Assembly, prompting historian Robin Walker to observe, 'the Fourth Estate gained a voice in the third' (Walker, 1976: 192). A century later, both the premier and the opposition leader in New South Wales were former journalists.

The Australian Constitution does not include formal guarantees of freedom of expression, or definitions of the political role of the news media, as is explicitly stated in the constitutions or bills of rights of many other representative democracies. Australia is, however, a signatory to international conventions and treaties, which recognise these rights, most notably the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights which includes the guarantor of free speech, Article 19, which states: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.'

Arguments put at the Australian Federation Conferences, in the 1890s by advocates for the incorporation of guarantees of freedom of speech and religion, meant that those responsible for the drafting of the Constitution were aware of such protection elsewhere. They opted instead for a minimalist approach, with freedom of speech and the press grounded in common law alone. As the eminent jurist Sir Owen Dixon observed:

The framers of the Australian Constitution were not prepared to place fetters upon legislative action, except in so far as it might be necessary for the purpose of distributing between the states and the central government the full content of legislative power. The history of their country had not taught them the need of provisions directed to the control of the legislature itself. (Dixon, 1965: 102)

As a result, freedom of expression was implied, but not stated, its application dependent on interpretations of the common law. The rights to freedom of expression continue to be a matter of dispute, although a majority of High Court judges have in judgements in 1942, 1994 and 1997 concurred that a right to freedom of political speech exists. As is discussed in greater detail in chapter 5, the debate about freedom of political expression, which absorbed the attention of the High Court in the early 1990s, does not centrally address the rights of the news media, except in so far as it is the primary medium for political communication.

Despite the lack of constitutional guarantees, and stringent defamation laws, an international survey of press freedom in 1994 ranked Australia ahead of Britain, USA and Canada, as one of a group of countries – including Belgium, Denmark, New Zealand and Norway – that

enjoyed the greatest press freedom. This was measured in terms of freedom from restraint by laws and administrative rules, economic influence, political pressure and overt repressive actions against reporters (Sussman, 1994: 10).

In this chapter, I consider the attitudes of the judiciary, executive and parliament – once considered the legitimate estates – towards the news media as the Fourth Estate. This examination concentrates on significant parliamentary reports, legal judgements and matters of policy and politics pursued by the executive during the 1980s. While the focus is on the national government and the High Court, this study also draws on the actions of some state parliaments, courts and governments. In a single chapter I can only hope to look at the key areas of contest and negotiations between these institutions in contemporary Australia. Hence, although these institutions must negotiate with the media industry in its totality from provider of news and information to the medium of entertainment, amusement and titillation, for the purposes of this book I am concentrating on the news media which accepts an unequivocal role in public life, principally the major newspapers and news magazines and those radio and television programs which concentrate on news and current affairs.

The principal of checks and balances between institutions becomes more complicated when the relatively unaccountable news media is included in the system. The news media asserts that it has the right to oversee each of the others, watching and demanding accountability from each. At the same time the news media interacts with them in a wide range of situations and is subject to varying degrees of control by the judiciary, executive and parliament. Yet, the rationale still relied on by the news media draws on the early promulgators of the Fourth Estate, who argued that the press was the people's forum – the interrogator of democracy – and the first line of defence against abuse by the other 'estates', or institutions of representative democracy.

The acceptance of universal franchise, the principle of innocence until guilt is proven, jury judgements, and the ability of parliament to check the power of the executive, as well as the changing nature of the news media itself, have modified this idealised role. The news media must now operate with a series of increasingly complex relationships with the other institutions. These complex relationships can be characterised as occurring in three dimensions – legal, operational and policy.

The capacity of the media to create a court of public opinion is now reaching unprecedented levels, with polls second-guessing juries in sensational cases subjected to blow-by-blow coverage. Such saturation coverage may present a fundamental challenge to the traditional

checks and balances. The news media is subject to the laws of general application, but its special place depends on its acceptance of the rule of law and of the need to help ensure that such rule proceeds without fear or favour. There are well-established conventions and procedures which apply to the media designed to ensure that accused individuals receive a fair trial. These restrictions include prohibitions on pre-trial publicity, on publicity about prior offences, the requirement that court reports be full, fair, accurate and contemporaneous, guarantees of anonymity for jury members (in most Australian jurisdictions) and acceptance of the superior authority of the court. Many of these practices have been challenged by the news media in recent years, and have, as a result become matters of dispute, leading judges and lawyers to express concern about media intrusion and distortion of the legal process.

The laws of defamation apply primarily to the media and are designed to ensure that those whose reputations are damaged by publication or broadcast have adequate means of redress. The antecedents of these laws can be traced to 1275. In Australia the laws of defamation have been actively used to help ensure the compliance of the press since European settlement. The very real threat of imprisonment, fines or protracted legal actions have served to make colonial and contemporary editors mindful of the need for moderation.

As investigative reporting increased during the 1980s Australian media organisations began to consistently employ lawyers to work with journalists and editors to find ways of making potentially defamatory statements. Much more attention was paid to the imputations in articles and programs, and the standard of legally admissible proof available to reporters and their news organisations. Editors, journalists and lawyers worked together to find ways of saying things in a manner which was less likely to be defamatory or which could be defended in court. This was an important change of tactic, as prior to the 1980s the more usual response of a media organisation's legal office, or editorial managers, to a potentially defamatory item would have been to drop it and allow journalists to complain privately about the way in which the defamation laws inhibited publication. By taking an aggressive approach not only was more material published, but the courts were eventually forced to consider – at least in relation to political discussion – the relationship between freedom of expression and the right to reputation.

Defamation has become an increasingly complex and costly area of the law, although as a legitimate business expense it remains tax deductible. It can nonetheless have a dampening effect on political debate and discussion. These factors have led to concerted attempts since the 1970s to make Australian defamation laws uniform. The key

differences between the states are: in Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory, truth is a complete defence; in New South Wales, the defendant is required to establish substantial truth and that the imputation relates to a matter of public interest or is published under qualified privilege; in Queensland, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory, the defendant must establish truth and public benefit.

In the late 1980s a national code was very nearly accepted by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General but its acceptance is now considered highly unlikely although it came back onto the political agenda in 1997 after the High Court judgement in *Lange v ABC* (145 ALR 96). In the meantime public concern about the integrity and veracity of the news media has reduced popular support for liberalisation of the defamation laws and the linked draft bills lapsed in state legislatures.

The legal framework within which the media operates does not solely concern the operations of the law itself, but also includes the policy-making process which culminates in legislation and shapes the way the industry is conducted. Although the print media is relatively unencumbered by a legislative and administrative framework, the broadcast media has always been subject to extensive regulation. The legislative framework, under which the broadcasting industry operates, was initially justified in terms of the scarcity of the electro-magnetic spectrum and the potential influence of the material broadcast. Some British media historians also suggest that the political will to regulate broadcasting was a reaction against the excesses of the press barons, who exploited a libertarian Fourth Estate model for their own advantage in the early years of this century.

As the news media has grown in significance as an industry, media policy has become more central to national economic and social priorities. The increasing power of the industry has enabled it to exercise influence across a range of areas, and to use the publicity capacity of newspapers, magazines, radio and television to advance corporate and commercial interests. As will be shown, the media policy-making process has been particularly fraught in Australia, frequently subject to political deals and favours (Walker, 1980). Major changes in media policy have, however, had a significant impact in reshaping the industry. The way many policies have been introduced and amended highlights the close relationship between the Fourth Estate and the executive.

At an operational level, relations between the news media and the other 'estates' have been shaped by the 'symbiotic relationship' between them (Clark, 1994: 26). In this there is a recognition that each institution needs the other to fulfil its functions and advance its position. Major inquiries by the Commonwealth and Queensland

parliaments in 1993 and 1994 concluded that close and unaccountable relationships between the executive and the news media could lead to abuses of power and influence, to the cost of the entire community.

In practice the relationship between the three key political institutions and the news media operates on two fronts – with separate, but overlapping, relationships between them and the news media as an industry and also between the editors and journalists responsible for producing the content. This dual relationship has become more complex as editorial workers have sought to assert greater autonomy. The power and influence of the media industry, and of the content producers employed in it, inspires caution in the executive when making policy decisions. The parliament, while also cautious about this power, is a more ready guardian of the Fourth Estate's role, rights and responsibilities. The judiciary, which has until recently been the least exposed to media attack, has tended in contemporary Australia, to be less equivocal in its recognition of the democratic role of the news media.

The early history of Australian journalists challenging the authority of political institutions, and accepting the consequences of imprisonment and fines was revived in the 1980s. As chapter 9 shows, Australian journalists during this decade demonstrated growing independence and autonomy in three distinct phases. Journalists and editors became more assertive, publishing and broadcasting investigative reports which challenged institutions and individuals of high public standing. This was accompanied by a greater readiness to defend their reports in courts and other forums. In one notable case, involving the publication of confidential information about High Court judge Lionel Murphy, and presented to a Senate Committee, the journalist and editors involved were subsequently charged with contempt of parliament. Although there had been two previous instances of journalists being charged with contempt of the Commonwealth parliament since the Second World War, this case was unusual because those involved said that they published the report knowing it may place them in contempt. They argued that they had a responsibility to the public interest which exceeded their responsibility to parliament (Childs, 1985: 11–12). Although the committee found that a serious contempt had been committed, the proposed range of punishments were not considered before both houses of parliament were dissolved in 1987 (Reynolds, 1994: 5).

In 1985 and 1986 Melbourne radio presenter Derryn Hinch made three broadcasts about a Catholic priest who was running a youth organisation, and had convictions for child sexual assault. The priest was due to be tried within a year on similar charges. In May 1986 Hinch was found guilty of contempt of court for prejudicing the priest's chances of a fair trial, and was sentenced to six weeks imprisonment.

Hinch emerged from jail unrepentant and went on to identify other alleged child molesters in his subsequent career as a television current affairs host.

Between 1989 and 1993, a further five Australian journalists were charged with contempt of court for failing to reveal confidential sources. Three journalists were jailed, one was fined and a suspended sentence community service order made against another (Cooney, 1994: 22–30). The frequency of these cases suggests that journalists are become more willing to undertake assertive reporting and accept its consequences.

To suggest that journalists alone were responsible for challenging the other 'estates' would be misleading, ignoring as it does the commercial pressure under which they operate. Jana Wendt, then an influential television presenter, observed in 1993,

It's all hard, all about competition, and also all about business. And when those things are combined with journalism, it really is a cocktail and it's very difficult to disentangle the strands. Somewhere or other there has to be some set of guidelines for people to operate on. (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1993)

Some of the challenges to the other 'estates' emerge directly from this pressure. It is at its most marked in the reporting of crime and matters before the courts. Sensational trials have been a staple part of the diet for the popular press since it first emerged in the nineteenth century. The willingness of media organisations to pay handsomely for exclusive access to the stories of the accused, the relatives and victims, and the ability to saturate the airwaves and news pages with details of these cases has, however, changed the way the most sensational cases are conducted and altered the balance between the judiciary and the news media.

In Australia a new era was marked by the reporting of the disappearance of baby Azaria Chamberlain from a campsite at Uluru and of the allegations of impropriety and subsequent charges against High Court judge, Lionel Murphy. In the Chamberlain case, which excited national attention for a decade, journalists actively challenged the veracity and integrity of the claims made by the child's mother and the findings of the Coroner's Court. The court of public opinion played an extra-judicial role and found voice in books and movies. When Lindy Chamberlain was eventually acquitted, released from jail and paid significant compensation, news organisations were still not satiated and continued to pay substantial sums for exclusive access to her story. The willingness of media organisations to pay for these stories threatened to undermine the idealised Fourth Estate, but chequebook journalism has since gathered pace. The Murphy case was the first of several trials

in the 1980s and 1990s of people who had once held high public office and were charged with corruption-related offences. The vigour with which the news media pursued the allegations against Justice Murphy was widely regarded as having an impact on the ability of the judge to receive a fair trial.

Chequebook journalism and celebrity court cases have now become common media fare, as the publicity accompanying the trial of O.J. Simpson demonstrated. The determination with which the news media pursues these cases implicitly challenges the authority of the courts. The different roles of the judiciary and media are sharply revealed by these cases although the line between these competing responsibilities is blurred by media organisations arguing public responsibility while seeking profit. The gap between these two competing views leads, not surprisingly, to charges of contempt of court. This was clearly demonstrated in 1994 when the Time Inc publication, *Who Weekly*, was found in contempt, and fined \$100 000, for publishing a cover photograph of Ivan Milat, the man who at that stage had only been charged with murdering seven backpackers in the Belanglo forest south of Sydney. The New South Wales Supreme Court found that such pre-trial publicity could prejudice Milat's chance of a fair trial. The magazine's American publisher sought to appeal to the High Court, arguing that the contempt laws were outdated and unfairly inhibited freedom of expression. The court declined to hear the appeal and restated its interpretation of freedom of speech as applying to political communication. After Milat was found guilty in 1996, his lawyers signalled their intention to appeal, arguing the trial had been prejudiced by publicity.

### Judiciary

While formal recognition of the news media as the Fourth Estate may be lacking in the Australian Constitution, *de jure* recognition of the rights to freedom of expression and the news media has been long-standing. The courts in Australia had been moving towards more formal acknowledgment of these rights for a number of years before the landmark High Court judgements were presented in 1992 and 1994. The first High Court cases tested the validity of two acts of parliament, one which mandated that there should be no criticism of judges in the Industrial Relations Commission and the other which outlawed paid television advertising during election campaigns. In each of these cases the court found faults in the law, and argued that the implied freedom of political expression required the capacity to criticise judges and the need for citizens to have information to make political choices. The

subsequent High Court cases drew on these findings. The defendant newspaper companies' lawyers effectively argued that a new defence had been created in the tort of defamation, an implied constitutional freedom to 'publish material in the course of discussion of government and political matters'.

These cases derived from two defamation actions, one resulting from a letter about Labor MHR Andrew Theophanous' fitness for office published by the *Melbourne Herald*, and the other from an action against the *West Australian* over articles which included claims that an overseas trip by six politicians was a 'junket of mammoth proportions' undertaken without parliamentary knowledge. The Chief Justice asked the High Court to decide whether the then recently articulated right to freedom of political speech was inhibited by the operation of the laws of defamation. In what was seen as a major breakthrough, a majority of the judges agreed that there was an implied freedom to publish political material and that political speech should not be subject to the laws of defamation, provided the news organisation could establish that it was unaware of the falsity of the material, did not publish the material recklessly and that publication was reasonable under the circumstances (*Theophanous v HWT*, 12 October 1994, FC 94/041; 124 ALR 1).

Between 1992 and 1994 freedom of political speech was therefore articulated and entrenched by a series of majority rulings by the High Court of Australia.<sup>1</sup> These rulings significantly expanded the understanding of the rights to freedom of political expression and by implication extended greater legitimacy to the central role of the news media in political debate. Although this freedom was diminished somewhat by the *Lange v ABC* (145 ALR 96) judgement in 1997 the principle remained intact. This authority had been accepted by the High Court in a much more limited way at least since 1936.

In reaching their conclusion, the majority of the judges drew on a reading of the nature of representative democracy – the cornerstone, for the majority, of the Constitution. In a series of interlinked statements the judges revisited the principles of representative democracy to conclude as Justice Sir Gerard Brennan noted:

To sustain a representative democracy embodying the principles prescribed by the Constitution, freedom of public discussion of political and economic matters is essential: it would be a parody of democracy to confer on the

<sup>1</sup> These cases include *Nationwide News Pty Ltd v Andrew Garry Wills*, August 1992, 108 ALR 681; *Australian Capital Television v Commonwealth of Australia*, August 1992, 141 ALR 1; *Andrew Theophanous v Herald and Weekly Times*, October 1994, 124 ALR 1; *Tom Stephens v West Australian Newspapers*, October 1994, 124 ALR 96.

people a power to choose their Parliament, but to deny the freedom of public discussion from which the people derive their political judgements. (Brennan J, *Nationwide News v Wills*, FC, 1992a: 28)

This principle underpinned the judgements in each of the four cases, although in *Theophanous v HWT* the court was asked to decide the constitutional question of whether the laws of defamation unreasonably inhibited political discussion. In his dissenting response, Justice Brennan drew a line between personal and institutional rights and freedoms. While the rights of individuals to engage in political discussion and debate were accepted by the judge, the role of the news media was not under consideration, except in so far as the defences which could be used for publishing defamatory material were considered by the court.

Justices Toohey and Deane noted that freedom of communication operated on two levels – between the citizens and their representatives and institutions, and between citizens.

Justice Brennan observed that freedom of political speech fulfilled two primary functions: to stimulate high performance in public office and to provide the information needed to form political opinions (Brennan J, *ACT v Cwlth*, FC, 1992: 40). In the subsequent judgement, about the constitutionality of defamation law, the majority of judges agreed that publication of critical comments about a member of Parliament:

clearly falls within the concept of political discussion. Indeed, criticism of the views, performance and capacity of a member of parliament and the member's fitness for public office, particularly when an election is in the offing is at the very centre of political discussion. (Mason CJ, Toohey J, Gaudron J, *Theopanous v HWT*, FC, 1994:7)

While in these judgements the court was happy to accept the importance of criticism to the political process, the High Court had in the past expressed serious reservations about any implication of freedom of expression being read into the Constitution. Nonetheless the idea of the news media fulfilling an important and independent role as the Fourth Estate in Australian society has received de facto recognition since the abolition of press censorship and licensing in colonial Australia in 1822. Licensing was abolished after the Chief Justice of the colony of New South Wales, Justice Francis Forbes, found that Governor Darling's proposed impost was illegal. Forbes felt that Darling wanted to use licensing to control the press, and concluded that the 'real object was to diminish or destroy the circulation of newspapers' (Walker, 1976: 13). As this was contrary to the law in Britain at

the time, Forbes rescinded his approval for the impost. By outlawing the stamp tax, Justice Forbes began a tradition in which the judiciary has been prepared to take a broader, more philosophical view of the legitimate role of the news media in the political process.

This view is not universally shared by the judiciary, members of which are among the news media's harshest critics, but the importance of the news media as an institution to provide checks and balances is generally recognised. This is complemented by efforts to protect the freedom of the judiciary from executive encroachment. The principle of separation and independence is central to the checks and balances implied in the model of the four estates. The judiciary readily remind the executive of these classical distinctions between the estates as Justice Brennan observed in 1988: 'Freedom of speech may sometimes be a casualty . . . but [it] can hardly be an incidental casualty of an activity by the executive government to advance a nation which boasts its freedom' (Brennan, 1988, 166 CLR 79: 116).

### Executive

The press in Australia began as a agency of executive government. The *Sydney Gazette*, first published in 1803, essentially piggybacked on the publication of official government notices. The authority to publish the scanty newspaper was a means of enabling the editor, who was paid a modest stipend by the colonial authorities, to increase his income. This prevailed until 1826 and gave the colonial administrators – effectively the executive government – considerable power over the press. Although the arrangement eventually collapsed, and other papers were published from 1824 in New South Wales without official patronage, the relationship between the press and executive government continued to be close and subject to both economic and political sanctions. The close relationship continues today, although it could be argued that the balance of power has now changed.

The economic relationship between the executive and press, which characterised the earliest days of the Australian press continued in a range of guises – for instance, the official Tasmanian parliamentary Hansard was published by the Hobart *Examiner* well into the twentieth century. The form of state subsidies to the press have also changed over the years, but were estimated to be worth more than \$3 million a year (Brown, 1986), and state governments continue to use the withdrawal of advertising as a means of disciplining non-compliant news organisations. This tactic was used against the *Age* in 1862, the *Melbourne Herald* in 1877–78 and was revived in a spectacular fashion by the Wran government in New South Wales in 1984, when it

withdrew its pages of classified job advertisements, worth \$1.5 million a year, from the Fairfax publications and placed them in the News Ltd papers. Although the public announcement which accompanied this decision attributed it to cost-saving, it was widely seen as a means of punishing the Fairfax press for its critical coverage of the state government. Similarly the conservative Bjelke-Petersen government in Queensland withdrew advertising from the *Courier-Mail*, then the state's dominant newspaper, after it published a series of uncharacteristically critical articles, and diverted the state's multi-million dollar advertising budget to the short-lived *Brisbane Sun*. In 1996 another conservative Queensland government again threatened to withdraw advertising from the monopoly daily paper, although that threat subsequently lapsed.

These examples are highlighted to demonstrate that the relationship between the executive and the news media does not occur in a vacuum. It is tinged by a series of interconnecting preoccupations, some economic, some about power and influence, and only a few about the constitutional relationship between the executive and the news media. The 30-year secrecy rule that applies to Cabinet documents, to ensure the confidentiality of the process, means that contemporary accounts of the relationship between the news media and executive government cannot be complete. The importance of the relationship between the executive and the news media ensures, however, that it will be subject to speculation.

The nature of that relationship is clearest when the formation of media policy in Australia is examined. The tensions, pressures and backflips in this area over the past 30 years merit more comprehensive examination than can be done here. It can, however, be shown that the formation of media policy has long been influenced by the power of the owners of the news media who were prepared to trade uncritical coverage for favourable policy decisions (Walker, 1981: 128). Sufficient instances have been documented to underpin the widespread view that media policy has been unduly affected by the power and influence of a small number of media owners. Faith in this view is virtually assured in Australian folklore.

Former Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser conceded the reality of this pressure when, in his evidence before the parliamentary inquiry into the print media in 1991, he said:

I think the pressures were probably all in conversations and lobbying and the sorts of activities that politicians are all very much aware of. Because it exists, because we live in this kind of world and it cannot be stopped, if that pressure is coming from one or two extraordinarily dominant media owners it can get very difficult. (House of Representatives Select Committee into the Print Media, 1991: 952)

Fraser claimed that he had been able to resist this pressure, in part because of the marginally greater diversity of media ownership during his years as prime minister from 1975 to 1983. During these years, however, decisions were taken which established a pattern for executive interaction with media owners which was followed throughout the 1980s. While Fraser was prime minister, the rules of foreign ownership were changed to accommodate the non-Australian residency, and then non-Australian citizenship, of Rupert Murdoch; Kerry Packer's campaign to launch a domestic satellite succeeded and the *Trade Practices Act* was altered to reduce the test of market dominance. These decisions were the essential precursor to the changes of media policy made by the Hawke Labor Government in the mid-1980s (Schultz, 1992c: 64).

In 1986 the federal government acted on longstanding Labor Party policy to reduce the concentration of ownership of the Australian media. Ten years earlier, when in Opposition, Paul Keating had declared that it was imperative that the government break up the media empires – to permit them to operate in one medium only and not across all three. The aggregation of power that had resulted from four companies owning most of the nation's media, was, Keating asserted, contrary to the national interest. Just over a decade later as treasurer, Keating helped to introduce new media ownership laws which created a distinction between print and broadcast media. Although the newspaper industry was beyond the regulatory net, it was possible for the government to use its legislative control over broadcasting to limit ownership of the press because the same companies owned television and radio stations.

The policy announcement by the Minister for Communications in November 1986 triggered a period of extraordinary changes in the Australian media: most notably, the ambitious acquisition of the Herald and Weekly Times empire by News Limited; the creation of television networks; and the ill-fated buy-out of the Fairfax company by the scion of the family. For several years the Australian media industry was in turmoil. At the time it was widely believed that the government was partially motivated by favouring those media owners it regarded as 'mates'. The special pleading of mateship and the market combined in a way which many saw as being contrary to the public interest.

Before the industry settled, each of the three commercial television networks changed owners at least once between 1987 and 1993. Rupert Murdoch's News Limited moved from being the smallest newspaper company to publishing more than 60% of the nation's newspapers and holding a monopoly in four capital cities. Australia-wide, News Limited owned two-thirds of capital daily newspaper circulation and a majority of suburban and regional papers. Fairfax, after an extended period of uncertainty and receivership, was acquired by a consortium headed by Canadian media mogul Conrad Black (both Kerry Packer and Rupert

Murdoch maintained small shareholdings in the company). Another Canadian company, Canwest, bought the Ten Network, while Kerry Packer sold and then regained Nine, and acquired a small interest in Fairfax, and News Limited acquired interests in the Seven Network. In 1993 Telecom and News Ltd formed a pay television consortium, Foxtel, and Packer's Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd acquired a stake in the rival Optus Vision.

The process by which the executive manages its relationship with the news media (by granting or denying preferential policy changes) is the flashpoint in the relationship between the four 'estates'. Many involved in executive government must hanker after the days when relations between media owners, managers and editors were more amenable to direct manipulation. An insight into the relationship between media organisations and the Labor government of the mid-1980s was revealed in a Fairfax board minute prepared by editorial executive Max Suich, following a five-hour meeting with Treasurer Keating in late 1986. Suich reported that Keating told him he had briefed both the Murdoch and Packer organisations about the proposed ownership rule changes several months before the change was announced. Keating reportedly told Suich that he had not informed Fairfax or the Herald and Weekly Times of the impending changes because of his objection to the editorial line taken by the newspapers in these groups (Souter, 1991: 175 ff).

The possibility of abuse of power – by the executive dispensing favours or by the news media promoting the party most prepared to meet its needs – underpins considerable public scepticism about the political process. This was clearly demonstrated in early 1995 when Kerry Packer challenged the cross-media ownership rules and expressed his support for the leader of the opposition (*A Current Affair*, 16 February 1995). This led to weeks of political argument in which Prime Minister Keating accused the leader of the Opposition, John Howard, of 'doing a deal', promising to abolish the cross-media ownership rules, to ensure the support of Packer's media organisation in the next election campaign. When the newly elected Howard government announced a review of the cross-media rules in October 1996, Rupert Murdoch suggested the outcome would be 'whatever Kerry Packer wants ... he seems to have very close links with central ministers in this government' (*Courier-Mail*, 11 October 1996). During its first 18 months in government, the Howard government floated a number of options to abolish the cross-media ownership laws which it considered anachronistic. Each of these proposals met with strong opposition from media owners who considered that they would lose as a result of the changes. Campaigns were organised to galvanise public opposition

and backbench members of the government became increasingly nervous about the electoral consequences of any significant change. In spring 1997 John Howard halted months of speculation when he announced that, despite the pre-election commitment to scrap cross-media ownership laws, reforming media ownership laws was no longer a priority for the government. It would be on the second term agenda instead.

Members of the executive must establish close working relationships with the news media; however, there are fewer guarantees that this will result in favourable coverage than there once were. The top-down model, whereby senior managers stipulate the editorial line confident that their direction will be obeyed, can no longer be relied upon, as journalists assert independence from arrangements between media owners and senior politicians. As Conrad Black said when describing a conversation with Prime Minister Keating:

He was more concerned with the performance of journalists. He had the view that Fairfax journalists, some of them, have historically been gratuitously hostile to him, and what he was hoping was – and I think he said this to his Caucus at the time that he championed our move from a 15 to 25% allowable ceiling – that we would assert a discipline in favour of fairness – not partisanship, and he was never asking for that.

His view I think would be – as he had expressed it to me – that if the editors do not do their jobs, some journalists . . . will tend to allow their own biases to creep into their reporting. But his view was that the whole process of augmenting our shareholding would be easier if in the abstract, in a non-partisan, non-political way, we were perceived as champions of professionalism and balance in precisely that sense: that we had editors who required the separation – as much as is possible . . . of reporting from comment. (Alston, 1994:114–115)

Conrad Black's comments highlighted the possibility of abuse of power and influence and became the subject of a Senate inquiry. The committee examined whether the prime minister had sought special favours when he suggested that he would look favourably upon a request by Conrad Black to increase his shareholding, if he ensured that the Fairfax papers provided 'fair and balanced' coverage of the Labor Party during the 1993 election campaign. The majority report, by the Opposition-dominated committee, found that the prime minister had abused his position. The government senators disagreed strongly, saying that there could be no suggestion that when the prime minister asked for balanced reporting, he was really requesting biased coverage.

The process of managing news coverage has increasingly preoccupied executive government. As so much of politics is conducted vicariously through the news media, the temptation for the executive to

attempt to manage the flow of information to best advance its own interests must, at times, be overwhelming. British author James Margach described the process by which the British executive cultivated the news media,

As they go a wooing there is 'rape' in their hearts. Their approaches are ostensibly part of the process of open government . . . But this is grand illusion. The reality is that they are manipulating the press using all the arts of statecraft. (Margach, 1978: 3)

A new phase in this process in Australia was begun during the late 1970s in New South Wales when advisers to the soon to be elected premier of the state, Neville Wran, developed a sophisticated system of news management (Dale, 1986; Steketee and Cockburn, 1986). Wran was said to be influenced by James Margach's book as he consolidated methods of media management. The media creation of Neville Wran as 'the man' for the state set new benchmarks in political image management in Australia, techniques which have since been emulated and built on. Other state premiers, notably Victorian Jeff Kennett, adopted a more aggressive approach, willing to ignore, dismiss and override the news media, refusing to engage with those he considered critical and dispensing access and news-making interviews to those he considered more amenable.

The slickness of Wran's approach, however, created its own backlash, especially in those news organisations which did not benefit directly from the cross-over of commercial and political opportunities that characterised his government's style and in those news organisations with less biddable journalists, notably at Fairfax and the ABC. This is not to suggest that the relationship between the executive and the Fourth Estate is solely motivated by the pursuit of self-interest and partisan advantage, although Jeremy Bentham's argument that a free press helps to curb the 'habitual self preference of those who govern' (Keane, 1991: 16) remains apposite. Members of the executive are more prepared to defend the rights and role of the news media in a general sense, especially far from home, or in those countries where freedom of the press does not exist.

There was a striking exception to this general trend when Prime Minister Hawke complained about the ABC coverage of the Gulf War in 1991, particularly the use of Dr Robert Springborg whom Hawke considered hostile to the western view of the conflict. After the prime minister's complaint, the ABC re-examined its approach and Dr Springborg was used less frequently. This intervention failed abjectly as a clandestine exercise of power by the executive and became a matter of considerable public debate. Since then, concern about political

influence of the ABC has been largely confined to questions about the partisan backgrounds of appointees to the corporation's board and overarching funding decisions.

The executive has increasingly been prepared to leave editorial control of the ABC to those appointed to manage the independent statutory corporation. (When the newly elected Howard government announced substantial cuts to the ABC's budget – cuts which were widely perceived as having their genesis in long-term dissatisfaction by conservative politicians with what they considered the ABC's bias – many feared that the independence of the ABC was again under direct attack.)

The complexity of the daily relationship between the senior politicians and journalists, editors and the news media, leaves few opportunities for a statement of a commitment to the democratic role of the news media. Indeed, members of the executive are likely to be among the most scathing critics of the Fourth Estate.

### Parliament

The parliament has attempted to balance the approaches of the executive and judiciary towards the news media, while asserting its own authority. The parliament as an institution has a less operational relationship with the industry, although individual members of parliament have close and frequent contact with journalists. While members of parliament may seek to curry favour with particular journalists or news organisations, and may on occasions feel their wrath, the institution of the parliament is relatively immune from institutional contact. Direct contact revolves around parliamentary privileges and in arguments about the extent of permissible broadcasting of parliamentary debates, speeches and question time.

Parliament's assertion of authority over the news media is seen most clearly in the rules regulating the coverage of debate and its committees in which elected members can act as 'judge, prosecutor and jury' (Pullan, 1994: 203). The Senate and the House of Representatives each have privileges committees which have charged journalists and editors with contempt of the parliament for breaches of these rules. In 1955 Sydney suburban newspaper journalists, Frank Browne and Raymond Fitzpatrick, were jailed for three months for contempt of the House of Representatives for suggesting in the *Bankstown Observer* that a member of parliament was being paid to obtain land permits for illegal aliens. After a secret examination by the committee the two were jailed. As Lloyd (1988) has shown, the privileges committee continued its vigilance over the following decades although the punishments became

less draconian. In 1981 when Laurie Oakes suggested in the *Daily Mirror* that a member was drunk, he was criticised by the committee, but no other action was taken. In 1984 Wendy Bacon, Brian Toohey, Max Suich and the Fairfax-owned *National Times* were found to be in contempt of the Senate for publishing in-camera evidence given before a Senate committee. Although the committee subsequently recommended a range of punishments, they were not applied. Other less spectacular contempts have also been investigated by the committees in recent years, but the emphasis has moved to managing the breach at its source (Reynolds, 1994: 5–6).

The operational relationship is closely tied to the range of rules governing the behaviour of journalists within the parliamentary buildings. This operational relationship is not, however, the sole form of contact between the two institutions.

Despite the longstanding commitment to the separation of powers between political institutions, over the past fifteen years state and federal parliaments have initiated several inquiries into the news media. These inquiries have examined questions of ownership and control, rights and responsibilities. Each report has explicitly addressed the role of the news media as the Fourth Estate, and in at least three volumes entire chapters have carried this title and been devoted to the complexities of this relationship (Queensland Electoral and Administrative Reform Commission (Solomon, 1993), the Queensland Parliamentary Committee (Clark, 1994) and the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (Cooney, 1994). The readiness of the parliaments to initiate such inquiries has not been premised on an attempt to control the media, although media executives have protested that they feared this may occur. Rather these reports have reiterated the independent, democratic function of the news media within the political system. Michael Hoy, a former deputy chief executive of Fairfax, articulated the concern that the parliament was attempting to exercise oversight of the news media by these inquiries in his evidence to the Senate Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Foreign Media Ownership when he said:

‘I felt that this was a dangerous inquiry to be forming.’

‘Why did you use the word dangerous to describe the committee?’

‘Because it is a free society and a free media and it should be kept at arm’s length from politics.’ (Hansard, 1994: 195; Carr, 1994: 37)

Australian parliaments appear willing to accept the idea of the news media as the Fourth Estate with fewer qualifications than the executive

or the judiciary. Parliamentary rhetoric frequently emphasises the importance of a diverse, independent news media. This was demonstrated most graphically in 1991 when a petition signed by 137 of the 224 members of the Commonwealth Parliament – from all political parties – was tabled. The petition to the prime minister addressed the sale of Fairfax and asked him 'to oppose the sale of the Fairfax Group to any individual or consortium that would result in a greater concentration of media ownership and thus a diminution of competition in and diversity of information sources in Australia' (Schultz, 1992c: 54). Similarly when the Howard government stepped away from modifying the cross-media ownership laws in a way that might benefit particular media owners, it was in large measure due to the opposition of backbench members of the governing parties.

While Australian parliaments have been sensitive to the independence of the news media, they have not shied away from the issue, and this formed part of the process of renegotiation underway in recent years. Although a royal commission into the news media had been a part of the ALP's manifesto for many years, such an inquiry was generally regarded as politically impossible. With the exception of the Norris inquiry into media ownership in Victoria in 1981, there had been no Parliamentary inquiry into the print media until 1991, when the Commonwealth parliament established a House of Representatives Select Committee to examine ownership, diversity and independence. This inquiry was established as a result of intense lobbying at the Australian Labor Party conference, by journalist, consumer and public interest groups concerned about the increased concentration of media ownership.

The inquiry was held at the height of the negotiations for Fairfax between the would-be purchasers, receivers and government. Although its terms of reference were broader than the ownership of Fairfax, the committee focused on this question, to the exclusion of other issues related to the concentration of print media ownership (Schultz, 1992c). It was a high-profile public inquiry, with the table-thumping evidence presented by media owners and executives broadcast live on national television. Despite the publicity and political nervousness which accompanied it, by the time the committee reported in March 1992, the ownership of Fairfax had been resolved and several other capital city newspapers had closed. The committee's cautious recommendations made almost no impact, and Hon. Michael Lee MHR won sufficient industry support for Prime Minister Keating to appoint him Minister for Communications eighteen months later.

Whatever the weakness of the Lee Committee's report and recommendations, it did put media issues more firmly on the parliament's agenda. The subsequent parliamentary inquiries formed an important

part of the renegotiation of rights, roles and responsibilities between political institutions which was described at the beginning of this chapter.

During 1993 the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, chaired by ALP Senator Barney Cooney, embarked on a broad-ranging inquiry into journalists' and the news media's rights and obligations. Towards the end of that year a Senate select committee, chaired by Liberal Senator Richard Alston, was established to examine relations between the prime minister and Fairfax owner Conrad Black and to investigate the process by which foreign investment approval was given for Black's acquisition of Fairfax.

The inquiry by the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs had extremely wide-ranging terms of reference and was triggered by the increasing frequency with which journalists were found to be in contempt of court for refusing to reveal their sources of information. Cooney's initial report focused on the competing need for journalists to be able to guarantee confidentiality and the need for the courts to determine the merits of a case. Cooney canvassed a range of possible solutions and drew comparisons with the promises of confidentiality available in other occupations. The report suggested that there was a need for greater responsibility and accountability by the media and journalists if such privileges were to be accepted by the community.

The challenge by journalists and the news media to the authority of the courts also demonstrated the renegotiation between political institutions. Contempt of court goes to the heart of relations between the judiciary and the increasingly assertive news media. Journalists' readiness to claim an ethical or public responsibility which transcends the authority of the courts, has met 'a trend of hostility on the part of the judiciary towards journalists' claims to confidentiality' (Cooney, 1994: 21). The argument developed by then Chairman of the Australian Press Council, Professor David Flint characteristically asserted the public benefit of investigative journalism and the need for protection of confidential sources to achieve this:

We have learned of bad administration, broken promises, unpopular proposals and corruption, not from press releases but from journalists. It has been journalists, and not lawyers or law enforcement agencies, who have triggered the great exposés that have been such landmarks in our recent history.

Fundamental to the very concept of such reporting is the journalist's confidential sources. Whistleblowers and dissidents, aware of the facts and even aware of wrongdoing are central to this monitoring role that the press must have if it is to serve the public . . .

Did we ever intend to give powers to bodies like the Independent Commission Against Corruption, to be greater than those of our courts, to use against journalists and the media – the very institution that has done more in the initial exposure of defects in public life than any other? (Flint, 1993: 3)

Although the Cooney Committee's brief was broader than contempt, its sympathetic suggestion that judges be given greater flexibility when dealing with journalists' claims to confidentiality, in return for greater responsibility and accountability, showed that the parliament was prepared to accept the news media acting as the Fourth Estate.

The Senate inquiry established to examine the sale of Fairfax to Canadian publisher Conrad Black addressed (among other subjects) the limits to the relationship between executive government and the news media, and the rightful role of the parliament in seeking public accountability in that relationship. Because the Keating government did not have an absolute majority in the Senate, this inquiry was initiated and chaired by the Opposition's Senator Richard Alston. The majority report was scathing in its criticism of Prime Minister Keating at the time, finding:

...that Mr Keating's request of a *single* newspaper proprietor to provide 'balanced coverage' is at odds with the whole history of media regulation and with the overwhelming trend of democratic governments throughout the years, which has been to protect the diversity and plurality of the print media as a whole. (Alston, 1994: xxv)

The government senators on the committee dissented from this view and prepared a minority report suggesting that there was nothing untoward in Prime Minister Keating's conversation with the publisher. They reiterated the need for a complete separation of powers and responsibilities between the news media and executive government, and concluded that the 'inquiry has been a pointless and expensive exercise in deliberately misunderstanding the trivia of public life at the tax payer's expense' (Carr, 1994: 51).

Two state parliaments have conducted substantial examinations into the media. In Victoria, an inquiry was established in 1980, headed by Sir John Norris, to address the increasing concentration of ownership of newspapers in that state. The incoming Cain Labor government failed to act on Norris' recommendations and during its term, the concentration of newspaper ownership in Victoria increased significantly. Towards the end of its term, the Labor government became the subject of sustained attack by the News Ltd-owned *Herald Sun*. The politicians who had failed to act on media ownership when first elected then

bitterly and publicly rued their caution. Race Mathews MLA, who had been responsible for this area in the first Cain government, chaired a committee to re-examine the issue of media ownership after he ceased being a minister. His report to the attorney-general recommended ways of arresting the concentration of newspaper ownership and ensuring diversity in future. The draft legislation his committee prepared was jettisoned before the 1992 state election campaign, when the besieged Labor administration considered that it would be political suicide to attempt to curtail media ownership immediately prior to an election. Mathews later commented: 'I regard the draft legislation as having been entirely practical and constitutionally sound, and the failure to proceed as having stemmed purely from political considerations' (Clark, 1994: 72).

In Queensland, the parliament's concern about the news media has focused less on concentration of ownership and more on questions of performance and institutionalised news management. There was a widespread view articulated by (now Justice) Tony Fitzgerald QC, in his inquiry into corruption in that state, that the failure of the media to adequately report the nature of the exercise – and abuse – of power in Queensland had enabled corruption to develop and flourish (Coaldrake, 1989; Whitton, 1993; Orr, 1994). Although Fitzgerald, and the parliament to which he reported, had no capacity to direct the media to behave in a less compliant fashion, the royal commissioner recommended structural reform of most of the state's institutions. Fitzgerald specifically recommended that the relationship between the government information agencies and the state's media should be scrutinised. He saw danger in government media units being used as propaganda agencies to control and manipulate the information obtained by the media and disseminated to the public. In another recommendation touching on media practice, he urged an examination of the relationship between whistleblowers, the state and the media.

The Queensland Electoral and Administrative Review Commission examined the relationship between government information agencies and the media and published a substantial report in 1993. This was subsequently reviewed by the commission's supervising parliamentary committee, which concluded that the symbiotic relationship between government and the news media benefited both, but included the possibility of abuse. The parliamentary committee restated the public interest and the democratic purpose of the news media—and made recommendations which it hoped would 'increase the accountability of the media so as to strengthen community confidence in its role as the Fourth Estate' (Clark, 1994: iii).

### Conclusion

As George Reeve noted in 1855, the press in the nineteenth century ceased to be merely the voice of the Third Estate, and found its own voice. This century the media has asserted its right to be more than an echo chamber for other political institutions. The news media, journalists and editors have engaged in a process of debate with the judiciary, executive and parliament to establish, test and stretch the limits of its role, responsibility and conduct in relation to each.

The relationship between the news media as the Fourth Estate and the judiciary, executive and parliament continues to be a matter for negotiation in Australia. Despite international treaties protecting freedom of speech and the press, and liberal interpretations of the Constitution by the High Court, the news media is not formally recognised as the Fourth Estate in Australia. Custom and practice have, however, accorded it this role. The High Court has affirmed the right to political speech, as an essential element of representative democracy. The High Court implicitly addressed the role of the news media, but remained silent on the role of journalists and editors, beyond establishing a series of tests which must be satisfied if political speech is not to be defamatory.

The relationship between the four 'estates' will continue to be a matter for negotiation as journalists assert their idealised role as defenders of the public interest. The parliament, judiciary and executive have responded to this assertiveness by suggesting that journalists and editors should accept greater responsibility and accountability for their role and methods. This has raised new tensions in the relationships, particularly between the judiciary and the media. Judges have reacted angrily to increased media scrutiny and criticism, and complained that the media tries to act as judge and jury, without sufficient regard to legal processes and the presumption of innocence. In response some judges have been increasingly willing to use suppression orders, and other devices, to limit media coverage of sensitive cases. An apparently insatiable appetite for salacious and titillating cases has presented new issues for managing the relationship between the Fourth Estate and the judiciary.

The executive continues to attempt to influence the news media by a combination of information management and policy decisions. This relationship is extremely volatile, and has also been influenced by the increasing assertiveness of journalists and the reduced ability of media managers to guarantee control of the content of their papers and bulletins. The statutory independence of the ABC, from the executive government, illustrates how this 'hands-off' approach has become the

norm in news media management. Even in the commercial media there is some evidence of greater editorial independence than there once was.

The parliament has become increasingly willing to address the shortcomings of the news media, even while members of parliament are aware of the political pressures they may face from a hostile press and broadcasting industry. As the number of owners of Australian newspapers has declined, the number of publications, and the levels of public dissatisfaction with the media increased, parliaments have been more willing to intervene and reiterate the role of an idealised Fourth Estate in the maintenance of representative democracy. There appears to be willingness by parliaments to countenance greater recognition of the role of the news media in a representative democracy, in return for evidence of greater accountability by the news media, journalists and editors.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Contests to the Institutional Legitimacy of the Fourth Estate*

'Somewhere along the line, the epistemological justification for freedom of the press – the search for truth by autonomous, rational individuals – was lost.'

*Beverly James, 1991*

'By implication, media conglomerates are not independent watchdogs serving the public interest, but self-seeking, corporate mercenaries using their muscle to promote private interests.'

*James Curran, 1991*

The ability of the Fourth Estate to accommodate a wide range of operational definitions may demonstrate the flexibility of the ideal, but it also ensures that the operation of the news media is based on a fundamental paradox. Of the institutions which emerged to provide checks and balances, to ensure that the political system was subject neither to the arbitrary authority of a capricious monarch, nor the tyranny of the majority, the press was the only one whose survival depended on, and was measured by, commercial success.

Commercial success helped to ensure independence, but also made the press' Fourth Estate ambitions vulnerable to owners seeking to inflate profit by tantalising audiences. Profit bought a ticket to independence. But it also held the seeds of the press' undoing as a political institution. While the press demanded and won the right to play a central role in the conduct of political life, its independence relied on the interest and goodwill of private owners. As Habermas observed, the transformation of the press into a commercial operation provided 'the gate through which privileged private interests invaded the public sphere' and newspaper publishers changed from being merchants of news to dealers in public opinion (Habermas, 1989: 182–5).

This transformation established the preconditions which made it possible for the widely varying definitions of the Fourth Estate, already outlined, to emerge and develop. The attempts to accommodate what may at times be a diametrical conflict between the dual obligations of a political institution and an industry (public information and profit) set

the framework for a series of contests over the meaning and implications of the Fourth Estate. As has been shown the adaptability of the ideal has enabled the Fourth Estate to survive as a concept, although not without serious challenges at both a fundamental and practical level, as British communications scholar Nicholas Garnham has pointed out:

. . . the problem with liberal free press theory is not just that the market has produced conditions of oligopoly which undercut the liberal ideal, or that private ownership leads to direct manipulation of political communication (although it does). The site of the problem is the fundamental contradiction between the economic and the political at the level of their value systems and of the social relations which those value systems require and support.

Within the political realm the individual is defined as a citizen exercising public rights of debate, voting etc, within a communally agreed structure of rules and towards community defined ends. The value system is essentially social and the legitimate end of social action is the public good. Within the economic realm, on the other hand, the individual is defined as a producer and consumer exercising private rights through purchasing power in the market, in the pursuit of private interests, his or her actions being co-ordinated by the invisible hand of the market. (Garnham, 1990: 110)

Out of this tension between the political and the economic, major challenges to the legitimacy of the idealised yet institutional Fourth Estate emerge. The commercialisation of the media developed momentum and explored new opportunities, not long after the legitimacy of the Fourth Estate had been established. Commercial success initially helped ensure the independence of the press, but profit is now more important than independence. (In this it is not unlike other professions, where money-making has the potential to overwhelm the ideal, but as the scale of the media is so vast, the political impact greater, and the professional autonomy of employees more limited, the consequences are more significant.)

The commercial drive threatens to undermine central elements of the ideal. These elements are: political independence; commercial priorities; the importance of public opinion; the diversity of information and viewpoints presented; the degree of accountability. These factors were all identified by the earliest writers – those who established the legitimacy of the Fourth Estate – and must now be re-examined from the perspective of the late twentieth-century news media. In this chapter I address these critical areas in relation to the news media as an industry; in chapter 7 I address the same criteria from the perspective of journalists, editors and producers.

Before considering these specific areas, it is worth noting that some journalism and media scholars, from both libertarian and marxist perspectives reject the ideal completely, as it applies to both news organisations and editorial workers. As has already been noted, the Fourth

Estate has been subjected to criticism and interpretation almost since the concept was first defined. Despite the long tradition of press freedom in the United States and the early constitutional importance of individual freedom of expression, Merrill in his treatise *The Imperative of Freedom* (elements of which he subsequently modified) disputed the relevance of the Fourth Estate to North America:

What seems to have started these myths was a reference to the reporters' gallery of the English Parliament as the 'fourth estate' by Edmund Burke or Thomas Macauley. So from a casual reference by an Englishman, whoever he may have been, the myth arose, crossed the Atlantic to America where estate became branch and we now live with the belief – fuzzy as it may be – that the press is a kind of fourth branch of government, checking on the other three branches – the executive, legislative and judicial as each of these supposedly checks on one another. (Merrill, 1974: 116)

But even Merrill conceded that the idea of the news media as an industry with public functions has assumed a significance well beyond the throwaway line of a half-remembered Englishman. Merrill observed that the watchdog and disclosure elements of the Fourth Estate have infused journalism education and informed the aspirations of many journalists. The question is whether this can translate into the hard reality of the commercial media.

Merrill's difficulty with the Fourth Estate underestimates the political and institutional authority the press has won and asserted in many countries. If freedom of expression is central to any democratic society, amplification of this expression as communication through the news media gives it its full potential. When the press assumed the role of the Fourth Estate, it developed its own voice. With this it assumed the right to criticise, condemn, praise and support. It is this voice – even when it is abused – that makes the news media unique. Others argue that the voice and power of the media is not independent or neutral, but serves the interests of those who own and control it, 'it is not of itself capable of remedying abuses of power. It can participate in the remedy, but cannot be the causal agent' (Altschull, 1984: 71).

Effective participation in 'remedying abuses of power' depends on an ability to successfully distinguish between the objectives of the corporation and the priorities of content producers.

Whatever the limits of influence, if profit alone measures success the question is begged – how is the news media held accountable? Other political institutions have, at best, ambivalent attitudes towards the news media, its authority and ability to act as a check on its practices and power. Perceived abuse of authority, and limited accountability, do much to undermine the Fourth Estate, as is now explored in greater detail.

Walking the tightrope between high public expectations and disillusioned cynicism, while at the same time seeking the sale of a product with the potential, as the Hutchins Commission noted, to influence the 'level of civilisation', is not easy. The 1949 British Royal Commission into the Press stated the dilemma elegantly: 'Purposes are seldom single and motives seldom unmixed; the desire to make money, the desire to make opinion and the desire to make a good newspaper can and do insensibly blend' (Williams, 1957: 194). This 'blend' means that the news media occupies a unique terrain between politics and commerce. As a result the disputes about whether the Fourth Estate exists and how it should be defined, supervised and anointed have been joined by politicians, political scientists, historians, media scholars, journalists and editors among others. By the early twentieth century, when the weaknesses of the libertarian model of the press were becoming apparent, several books criticising the role of the press were written (Siebert, 1974: 78). Now at the end of the century, media criticism sustains a small industry.

Tension between the paradoxical ambitions of the media – profit and public good – are played out in a range of ways within news organisations, between the news media and other political institutions and society in general. As will be shown in chapter 7, journalists, editors and producers influence this balance. In some situations the decision to pursue a role of greatest public good – for instance, by producing a newspaper of record and diverse opinion – may be shaped by a view that this is the key to greatest commercial success (Schultz, 1992: 53).

Such an easy coincidence is, however, rare. It is a fascinating irony then that the media, which claims institutional status as the Fourth Estate, should become the power-house of economic activity at the end of the twentieth century:

... a fundamental presumption, [is] that the media do serve the 'public interest' or 'general welfare', whether by design or chance. This means, in practice, that mass media are not the same as any other business or service industry, but carry out some essential tasks for the wider benefit of society, especially in cultural and political life. For this reason, the media can legitimately be held accountable for what they do or do not do and be liable to some claims that they do things which they might not choose to do. This presumption is, to some extent, invited by the media themselves which often, albeit selectively, claim to exercise a significant public role. (McQuail, 1991: 70)

The central paradox of the news media as a political institution, which measures its success by the criteria of profit and audience numbers is highlighted by the five elements central to the rhetoric and philosophical justification of the Fourth Estate. For the ideal to maintain continued legitimacy, the five defining elements – political purpose

and independence; commercial priorities; the importance of public opinion; the diversity of information and viewpoints presented; the degree of accountability – must be maintained.

### **Political Purpose and Independence**

The rhetoric used to establish the legitimacy of the press, as an agency of political life and one of the informal checks and balances in a representative democracy, assumed its principal focus was politics, scrutinising sources of elected and unelected power and providing the opportunity for news, ideas and opinions to be expressed. Party and electoral politics remains the bedrock of reporting by the news media, but politics is no longer the sole – or even defining – preoccupation. The notion of the press as a political agency is nonetheless common to much historical, sociological and political analysis of the media. As James Curran and his colleagues have argued, however, this is ‘seriously misleading and ignores the basic reality of the press as an entertainment industry, subject to the economic pressures of commodity production’ (Curran et al., 1981: 289).

The assumption that the press should be primarily engaged in the reporting of politics, both as it was played out in the House of Commons and more broadly, was central to the arguments used to establish the legitimacy of the press as democratic institution: at a time of limited franchise the press not only represented the views of those without the right to vote, but also provided information to enable informed political choices to be made. Political theorists and prominent editors justified an institutional role for the press on these grounds. A popular press quickly emerged in the nineteenth century, suggesting that the somewhat pompous and utterly serious designation of the Fourth Estate is grounded neither in history or practice as Henry Mayer observed in 1968: ‘The uniformly serious and political press in Australia, as in England, lies in cloud cuckoo land, and nowhere else’ (Mayer, 1968: 24).

Confusion of purpose has long characterised discussions about the role of the news media. To ascribe a serious and exclusively political purpose is quite misleading. Entertainment has always been important, despite high-minded discussions about the role the media should play to ‘inform the general population in ways that arm them for vigilant citizenship’ (Dennis, 1989). As journalism historian Michael Schudson wrote:

I am sympathetic to this as the one goal the news media in a democracy should try to serve, but I do not think historically it is a very good approximation of what role the news media have played – anywhere. The most

important problem with this model is that the news media have always been a more important forum for communication among elites (and some elites more than others) than with the general population. (Schudson, 1991: 156)

The need for communication between elites was one of the essential rationales which gave those arguing the case for press freedom additional ammunition, confident that this role was important and would not be abused. Both George Reeve and W.T. Stead describe the importance of communication to opinion leaders as a short-cut to understanding and influencing public opinion. As the commercialisation of the press developed, this interest in communication between elites waned as papers sought to develop a mass audience; the trend escalated with the development of broadcasting in the twentieth century. With this came the tendency to distinguish between popular and quality, which has been maintained in broadcasting. Both the serious and the popular news media, however, continue to exercise both political and partisan roles.

The partisan nature of the news media has been a constant frustration for politicians. The news media in most western countries has however tended to become less partisan as the market has fostered monopolies. In the Scandinavian countries, though, the partisan allegiances of newspapers have been maintained by an elaborate system of press subsidies, designed to ensure that a diverse range of political views continues to be published. In Australia the trend towards monopoly in the press has continued, with only limited regulatory resistance; party alliances have become less rigid, while a readiness to accept the agenda of the government of the day generally prevails.

Historically the Australian press has been an active, and sometimes partisan, participant in political life. The owners of the major news organisations have been ready to assert their influence in relation to individual politicians and in the formation of policy. Labour newspapers and radio stations have had a long history in Australia, providing a voice of opposition to the generally conservative mainstream press. But the market has not been kind to these alternative voices, and they generally languished after the Second World War. The Australian press has almost always taken a conservative stand. In the eighteen federal elections between 1955 and 1990, metropolitan daily newspapers published 340 election editorials; forty-four supported the Australian Labor Party, but 183 favoured the Coalition. Conservative governments were in power for all but ten of these 35 years (Lee, 1992: 258–9).

The idea of government by journalism, which flourished briefly at the end of the nineteenth century, evaporated as the quest for profit

increasingly drove the press, and the struggle for market share became more intense. Owners sought to increase the size and reach of their papers, establishing the pattern of newspaper closures, mergers and takeovers that has run like a talisman through the twentieth century.

The relationship between the news media, journalism and politics has changed in the current era of vast and diversified media organisations and increasingly sophisticated news management. The possibilities for abuse of the power – particularly in the cross-over between the political and the commercial – is considerable. Politicians are fearful of criticising media owners, although they have fewer inhibitions about castigating journalists, editors and producers. They prefer to seek an accommodation with media owners. The vigorous attack by former Prime Minister Paul Keating on Kerry Packer in February and March 1995, in which the prime minister suggested that Packer was engaged in questionable practices to further his own interests, was a notable exception.

The reality of the political power of the news media has been acknowledged in many political forums including by parliamentary committees. West Australian Premier Richard Court summed up the dynamic:

Every day I've got to live with a monopoly newspaper in this state. I would love to say a lot of things about that newspaper. But I realise the strength, the position they have in our community . . . and I don't win a lot of points by complaining about that particular newspaper. But that's the media situation I have to live with in this particular state. (*Australian*, 29 June 1994: 14)

The possibility for abuse in the close relationships between politicians and the news media was clearly shown nearly a year after Premier Court's statement, when the editor of the *West Australian* Paul Murray was effectively dismissed (later reinstated) following alleged political pressure by the premier on members of the newspaper company's board. The premier maintained that the monopoly newspaper had too much power and was 'dangerous to the state' and, although he acknowledged he had communicated with the board, and made his hostility towards the editor clear, he said he had not tried to influence the board. Nonetheless he reiterated his desire to see another newspaper established in the state (*Australian*, 4, 5, 6, 13 May 1995).

Instances such as this highlight the fundamental paradox the commercial news media regularly confronts—as an institution and a commercial industry. This is a paradox from which the public sector media is insulated so long as it is able to assert and maintain both editorial and financial autonomy.

The contemporary news media is, therefore, a far from perfect political agent: its political intentions are poorly defined and measured and as a result its legitimacy is questionable.

Despite limits on the news media's political independence and purpose, it continues to exercise an important institutional role within the political system, as the medium through which much political life is conducted.

### Commercial priorities

Before the press asserted a political role, publishers and printers measured the success of their work solely in terms of the money they were able to earn from the sale of the information (James, 1991: 37). The elevation of the philosophical ideal of the Fourth Estate muddied these clear commercial waters and over time introduced other considerations to the measurement of success: responsibility, accountability, fairness and diversity. Applying these considerations increased the power and influence of the press, and its owners, but also carried costs.

The costs and benefits of the news media's institutional role continue to be weighed. At different times, media owners are likely to adopt the rhetoric of the marketplace or the independent political agent, whichever fits best. In 1961, shortly after he had acquired his first newspaper in Sydney, Rupert Murdoch was reported as asking: 'What rights have we to speak in the public interest when, too often, we are motivated by personal gain?' (Mayer, 1964: 51). Nearly thirty years later, Murdoch headed one of the largest media empires the world has ever known, and his then Australian chief executive Ken Cowley found an easy fit between corporate gain and public interest:

We take the view, as simple as it is and as corny as it sounds, that what is good for your country is good for your business and what is good for your business is good for the paper, its readers and our employees. (House of Representatives Committee into the Print Media, 1991: 481).

While media executives may argue, as Ken Cowley did, that there is a congruent interest between the aims of the company and those of its employees and the nation state, others including some News Limited editors are more sceptical (Schultz 1995a). As media businesses have become larger and more economically significant, the contradictions between these priorities will increase. Rupert Murdoch provided a striking example of this in his response to criticism of the *Sunday Times* for publishing the forged Hitler Diaries in 1983. Publication of the diaries was a great scandal that damaged the reputation of the paper Murdoch had relatively recently acquired. But the media magnate was

surprisingly sanguine: the money spent on acquiring the diaries was repaid, and circulation of the paper increased significantly as a result of the controversy. 'After all, we are in the entertainment business,' he said (Shawcross, 1992: 261).

Irish jurist Sean MacBride clearly identified the tension between these expectations in his report for UNESCO:

The freedom of a citizen or social group to have access to communication both as recipients and contributors, cannot be compared to the freedom of an investor to derive profit from the media. One protects a fundamental human right, the other permits the commercialisation of a social need. (MacBride, 1980: 18)

The news media's desire to profit and to maintain an independent political role results in a potent brew of commercial and political interests and ambitions. This has been clearly demonstrated in Australia over the past decade, particularly at the level of state politics. Chapter 4 addressed the questions that were raised following the decision by the Wran Labor government in New South Wales to award the contract for the state's lottery to a consortium which included two of the three largest media proprietors in the state – News Limited and Australian Consolidated Press. This decision provoked outrage from Fairfax, which was not a member of the consortium, and raised questions about political patronage facilitating commercial advantage. In that situation the implied conclusions became the subject of gossip and innuendo.

In a case involving the Queensland Premier Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen and then owner of Channel 9 in Brisbane, Alan Bond, an alleged abuse of power was investigated by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in 1987. The Tribunal considered whether Bond was a fit and proper person to own a television network, after he publicly acknowledged, in an interview on one of his network's programs, that he had paid \$400 000 to settle a 1983 defamation action brought by Sir Joh against Channel 9. It had been a way of buying the political favour necessary to do business in the state, Bond said. Although a final answer was not determined, this behaviour was generally regarded as stepping out of the shadows of the grey area between commerce and politics. The tribunal considered that there were questions that needed to be answered, but they were not finally resolved before Bond lost control of the network (Barry, 1990: 311–18).

The tension between the public purpose of the media and the commercial reality also heightens dilemmas for journalists, editors and producers. Although most media workers have a strong, professional sense of the need to keep the commercial interests of the organisation separate from content, in practice most believe that the media and its

related business are reported more extensively and more sympathetically than other industries of similar scale. It is ironic and out of keeping with this general principle that Alan Bond made the revelation which led to the inquiry by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal on *A Current Affair*, the nightly flagship of his Nine network. He told the show's host Jana Wendt, 'Sir Joh left no doubt that if we were going to continue to do business successfully in Queensland then he expected the matter to be resolved' (Barry, 1990: 314).

As the commercial interests expand the possibilities and pressures for self-censorship also increase:

Censorship can . . . echo within us, take up residence within ourselves, spying on us, a private amanuensis who reminds us never to go too far. The internal censor warns us that too much is at stake – our reputation, our families, our career, our jobs, legal action against our company. It makes us zip our lips, tremble and think twice, with a smile. It succours prevailing opinion. (Keane, 1991:39)

A survey of Australian business journalists found that while the majority were strongly committed to a separation between editorial and commercial interests, one-third said that they 'would not pursue a story that was potentially damaging to my employer's commercial interests as actively as a story about an unrelated company' (Schultz and Matolcsy, 1993: 25). The pressures reached new heights for News Limited journalists in 1995–96 when the company initiated the rugby league competition Super League. The conflict between reporting the company's business and seeking to put the best construction on news events weighed heavily on many journalists who often fell into line by putting the most positive spin possible on the company's position in the ongoing campaign to reshape rugby league in Australia.

Revived intellectual interest in the relationship between the media and democracy has been one way of countering the scope of an increasingly global media. The conflict between the economic and the public purpose of the media is sharply highlighted as it changes from being a relatively small industry, to one of the world's largest. This growth, which has escalated over the past decade, is likely to continue, and raises other questions about the news media's capacity to fulfil its role as the Fourth Estate. As its power and wealth have increased, the likelihood of the media acting to advance its own interests is enhanced. The capacity for cross-promotion within diversified media conglomerates is enormous. So newspapers and magazines promote books and films produced by other parts of the organisation. In this environment readers and viewers will be considered primarily as consumers rather than as citizens. Diversified commercial activities by media companies

also expand the possible intersections with government regulators. This undermines the industry's claims to uniqueness and the demand for independence from government agencies. It also increases the points of possible conflict and the possibility of using the news media to advance unrelated commercial activities. The capacity for regulatory agencies to act against these organisations may also be curtailed.

The early idea that commercial success would help to guarantee the independence of the press has been distorted by the scale and profit of the news media, and the capacity for advancing other corporate interests through cross-promotion by these diversified conglomerates. As such the commercial priorities of the news media present a considerable challenge to the continued viability of the Fourth Estate ideal.

### **Understanding Public Opinion**

The power of public opinion and the ability of the press to discern and reflect it is one of the cornerstones of the original conception of the Fourth Estate. The press developed legitimacy as public opinion gained supremacy over autocracy. Journalism became the instrument by means of which the aggregate intelligence of the nation criticises and controls them (governing classes) all' (Reeve, 1855: 487). George Reeve argued that discerning public opinion was central both to the press and the political system:

It supplies . . . the people with a safe channel for the expression of those feelings which might else find a vent in overt acts of discontent and insubordination, and it keeps . . . the government cognisant of popular sentiments and passions which it is most essential it should understand and be early made acquainted with. It would be very difficult for the best intentioned administration to be thoroughly well informed as to the state of feeling and opinion in the nation, except through the medium of the various and discrepant organs of the daily and weekly press. (Reeve, 1855: 481)

The means of discerning public opinion presented a challenge in the nineteenth century as W.T. Stead observed, 'the journalistic assumption of uttering the opinion of the public is in most cases a hollow fraud' (Stead, 1886b: 664). Arguing that no attempt was made to ascertain 'what Demos really thinks', Stead proposed an elaborate system of feedback to measure and test the views of opinion leaders. By proposing a system to distil the views of the elite, Stead addressed the process of opinion formation and provided the rationale for the 'quality' press, which measures success by the 'type' of readers it attracts rather than the raw numbers of circulation.

In the nineteenth century the ability to measure public opinion was a much less exact science than it is today. Woodrow Wilson

commented in 1912, 'In a democracy public opinion is everything' (Rivers, 1970: 2). Now the problem of knowing public opinion has been inverted, with polls measuring the opinions of people on many subjects almost constantly, leading to what Jacques Derrida has described as 'the tyranny of shifts in opinion' (Derrida, 1991: 86). The public sphere in which political discussion and debate is conducted has also been transformed by the publicity and public relations industry which has profoundly altered the premises on which public debate and discussion are founded, just as technology has altered its methods and immediacy.

The news media has been instrumental in the growth of the public opinion business. Sir Keith Murdoch was responsible for the first polls conducted in Australia. He sent *Herald* finance journalist Roy Morgan to the USA to study the methods of Dr George Gallup and recreate them in Australia. The first Morgan poll was held in 1941, and concerned equal pay for women – a proposition favoured by most of the respondents. It was published in the *Herald* and like many polls published in the paper it had a direct political impact. Thirty years later Rupert Murdoch established Australian National Opinion Polls to provide surveys for the *Australian*, and this company ended Morgan's monopoly. Several years later Rupert Murdoch again started another polling company – Newspoll. Australian media organisations continue to have close relationships with companies that conduct public opinion polls even as the industry has grown and diversified.

The abstraction of public opinion is given shape and definition through the news media as it reports, comments and advocates particular perspectives and elevates subjects as those deserving an opinion. (Public opinion also becomes a tool in measuring the commercial success of the news media.) It is easy to overlook the way the news media shapes and selects which news and opinions are legitimised. This throws into question the process by which some opinions are amplified, and which public the news media represents.

Research into the selection of news identifies four major models by which news is selected: with journalists and editors acting as gate-keepers; captives of a process of information management; actively supporting the status quo; or influenced by ownership. Elements of each no doubt apply, although the process model most persuasively explains day-to-day operations: stories are selected on traditional measures of news – timeliness, conflict, proximity, scale, prominence – from a basket of possible items identified by a range of routine encounters, many manufactured by public relations practitioners, and determined by the space or time available, and the understanding of the nature of the existing audience and the audience that is being wooed.

Early this century, before the process of information management achieved its current sophistication, interest in the limits of public opinion emerged. Walter Lippmann's classic, *Public Opinion*, written with insight borne of managing public opinion and political communication during the First World War, pointed to the weakness of the press in judging, interpreting and fostering public opinion. Among Lippmann's preoccupations was a concern that the institution of the press was frailer than democratic theory permitted:

If the press is not so universally wicked, nor so deeply conspiring . . . it is very much more frail than the democratic theory has yet admitted. It is too frail to carry the whole burden of popular sovereignty, to supply spontaneously the truth which democrats hoped was inborn. And when we expect it to supply such a body of truth we employ a misleading standard of judgement. We misunderstand the limited nature of news, the illimitable complexity of society, we overestimate our own endurance, public spirit and all-round competence. (Lippman, 1922: 228)

While ascribing the press a crucial role in the democratic system, Lippmann was keen to show that it was 'no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about bringing one episode and then another out of the darkness and into vision' (Lippmann, 1922: 229). The very episodic nature of news reporting, the countless number of decisions that are made each day about what to report and how, inevitably restricts the capacity of the media to truly understand or reflect public opinion – in another of Lippmann's famous phrases it can only 'signalise events'.

Lippmann was concerned that the flood of words which engulfed people – already at the beginning of the century – made it difficult to comprehend the significance of the events on which they were expected to form opinions, and make electoral, economic and social choices. Democracy could only work, Lippmann argued, if we escape the 'intolerable and unworkable fiction' that everyone must acquire a competent opinion about public affairs. Journalism could at best clarify events, and this remained for Lippmann its most important function in a democracy, although no society could be governed by the 'episodes, incidents and eruptions' elevated by journalism. The difference between news and truth was too great, Lippmann argued, to expect journalists who were captives of their own stereotypes, preconceptions, prejudice and the propaganda of others, to be able to know the truth.

Lippmann's writings on this subject had a significant influence on the rationales which underpinned the production of the newspapers, and later broadcast news and current affairs, and the development of professional routines and practices (Carey, 1989: 75). These weaknesses in

the link between public opinion and the news media remain apposite and point to a fundamental flaw in one of the central precepts of the Fourth Estate.

Modern techniques of opinion polling have made public opinion easier to define, categorise and quantify. The information gathered in opinion polls is reported as news itself and contributes to the shaping of the political debate. The information gathered from other market-based opinion research is also used to better identify audience demands and expectations. The principles of marketing then intrude as news organisations seek to maximise their audiences in a way that is commercially advantageous. There may be no commercial advantage in attempting to reflect the full diversity of views and opinions. For news organisations that measure success in terms of the largest possible audience, the key to interpreting public opinion may be in 'pandering to the lowest common denominator'. For those seeking to influence the elites, a different set of factors will influence the evaluation of public attitudes. Just as politicians adapt their messages to those which the polls suggest the public will tolerate, so the news media selects and evaluates news, informed in part by an assessment of its public.

Although its role as an agent of public opinion is one of the central rationales of the news media as the Fourth Estate, the contemporary news media is selective in which opinions it chooses to reflect and amplify. Public opinion can now be judged in such fine detail that it runs the risk of turning political life into a forum distorted by the ephemera of constantly changing, instantly measured, opinion. Of what value are opinions that are ill-informed, even if they are constantly measured?

The claim that the news media is the principal forum for public opinion is still made and with more justification than was once the case – the rise of talkback radio with its opinion forums is the best example. While talkback radio provides insights into the views of listeners, the representativeness of these views remains open to question. Similarly the growth of opinion pages in major newspapers provides the opportunity for a wider range of views than may be available in news reports, but these pages rarely provide opportunities for the expression of a full range of opinion.

The processes of news selection have eroded confidence in the 'purity' of the news media as a public forum. The ability to measure a news organisation's success in understanding public opinion in terms of circulation or ratings is effective and swift. But it may undervalue the broader rationale of the Fourth Estate as the agency of public opinion. If the news media becomes a captive of the cliché rationale of 'giving the people what they want', with limited accountability mechanisms and the only countervailing pressure being profit, its ability to reflect a

full range of opinion will be inhibited. Instead it may prefer to manipulate public opinion to manufacture outrage. The ability to discern, evaluate and provide a forum for public opinion remains central to the news media as both a commercial enterprise and political agency.

### Diversity

One of the principles underpinning the Fourth Estate is its capacity to provide a forum for a wide range of views and opinions. For those arguing for the institutional role of the press, this seemed a relatively straightforward concept. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the number of publications was considerable, as was the range of political opinions expressed and the size of the audiences. Diversity was one of the essential elements of the Fourth Estate and the plethora of publications ensured a range of views were available, although some publications always attracted larger audiences.

Already in nineteenth-century England when diversity was a central rationale of the Fourth Estate, there was concern that the final abolition of the stamp taxes might stifle this range and lead to the absolute dominance of one newspaper. In his 1855 article George Reeve expressed grave concern about the dominance of *The Times*, which he described as 'notorious' having reached 'this extraordinary and dangerous eminence' (Reeve, 1855: 494). Reeve anticipated that the abolition of stamp taxes would deliver it a virtual monopoly. He predicted that the other London-based national papers would not be able to compete and that the locally circulating penny press

cannot possibly succeed, and will probably be discontinued almost immediately, and that not above one or two of the cheap provincial papers will be able to survive when the excitement of war and the craving for instantaneous intelligence which it creates shall be over (Reeve, 1855: 496).

Reeve's nervousness about the possible impact on the newspaper market of a policy decision is echoed in responses to changes in media policy today. Although *The Times* did not maintain its absolute supremacy and the penny press flourished, the tendency towards dominance in newspaper markets continues. Throughout this century ownership of the media has tended towards oligopoly. The newspaper industry has been particularly susceptible to these pressures. In those countries where there has not been any active attempt to ensure that a wide range of publications continues to be published – by means of subsidies and other forms of intervention – the newspaper market has tended towards monopoly.

This trend has been particularly marked in Australia since the 1980s in which all the capital cities except Sydney and Melbourne now have a

monopoly newspaper. The pattern of closures, takeovers and consolidations has, however, had a much longer history, and has been replicated in most other western countries. No comprehensive study has been undertaken in Australia about the impact on the diversity of content as a result of newspaper closures, although some inconclusive work has been done in North America. Certainly studies of the content of commercial television news bulletins have shown that competition does not necessarily produce diversity of content.

Consolidation of ownership has not been confined to the press. Those companies involved in newspaper publishing were quick to become actively involved in broadcasting, and are now emerging as major players in the electronic information sector. As media corporations have become larger and more diversified they have tended to acquire interests in a wide range of media and non-media activities. In many countries governments have sought to limit cross-media ownership because of concerns about possible reduction of diversity of news and opinion, and disproportionate power of these companies.

It is now clear that the barriers to entry for new publishers and broadcasters are extremely high and are unlikely to be reduced. Innovative technological developments, including the Internet, may create new products and new markets, but it is likely that the profitable media corporations will gain the most from these innovations as they have the scope to develop and market new products. Without active intervention by the state, a remote possibility in most western societies, new media outlets are unlikely to flourish. The preference for deregulation and market decision-making precludes intervention to increase the diversity of news outlets in a country such as Australia. While it can be demonstrated in Australia that public broadcasting can operate independently of the government of the day, the rhetoric of an independent media makes direct intervention to ensure greater diversity improbable. The reluctance of the executive and parliament to act decisively to encourage greater media diversity was addressed in the previous chapter, although the problem has been identified by the federal parliament:

Some members of the Committee concluded that there was a connection between the unprecedentedly high concentration of media ownership and the lack of diversity of information and ideas in the Australian press, and that the former is likely to be a significant cause of the latter. However, a majority of the Committee considered that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the current high level of concentration in the Australian print media has resulted in biased reporting, news suppression or lack of diversity. All members agreed that concentration of ownership is potentially harmful to plurality of opinion and increases the potential risk that news may be distorted. (Lee, 1992: xxii)

This quote from the inquiry into the print media highlights the political ambivalence about the impact of the market on media diversity. Although the committee found that there was potential reason for concern as a result of concentration of media ownership, it recognised the economic imperatives that were leading to concentration and proposed limited mechanisms to curtail further mergers. The committee then expressed hope that the eventual collapse of the media dynasties and technological innovation would lead to greater media diversity of both ownership and content, in future. Within a week of the committee's report being tabled another daily newspaper had closed in Brisbane. During the six months of the inquiry in 1991–92 and its immediate aftermath, Brisbane and Adelaide joined Perth, Darwin, Hobart and Canberra as capital cities with monopoly newspapers.

A wide range of media outlets have proliferated throughout most of the western world in the second half of this century and as a corollary to this growth the print media has tended towards monopoly. Newspapers have responded to this by applying the principles of social responsibility and attempting to present a wider range of views in the pages of one paper, rather than the more overtly partisan tone which could be tolerated when there was a range of publications to choose from. While newspaper ownership may not directly restrict the diversity of information available it is likely to limit it, just as space is limited. Monopoly ownership is important, as it threatens to impinge on the diversity of information available in a community. It also enhances the relative power (and wealth) of the news organisation and its owner in relation to the city or state.

The domination of the media market by a small number of companies not only has an impact on the range of information available to the public, but also accentuates the power of those who own and operate the media. There is now a wider range of different media outlets than there has ever been, but it is arguable that the media owners – by a combination of economic and strategic importance – are at least as powerful, and possibly more, as they have ever been. Given the considerable barriers to entry for new mainstream media outlets, diversity is now most likely to emerge at the fringes of the media landscape or to a limited extent be fostered by strong editors operating with proprietorial patronage, within media conglomerates.

### **Accountability**

The other institutions which ensure checks and balances in a representative democracy have inbuilt accountability mechanisms, principally through the electoral process. The judiciary remains accountable only to itself, although a judge who fails to meet the expected standards can

be removed by the parliament. For the media, accountability is theoretically implicit in the commercial relationship with its consumers, whose dissatisfaction can be demonstrated by ceasing to buy. But in another of the paradoxes of the news media, the information it sells has a direct role in the political and social system suggesting that other methods of accountability are required.

The media industry has been able to use the arguments of the Fourth Estate very effectively to exclude itself from the regulatory oversight which has characterised most other industries for much of the twentieth century. While it is true that the broadcasting industry has been subject to regulations in most countries, this developed essentially because of the finite radio spectrum available for broadcasting and concerns about the uniquely persuasive effects of the electronic media on the population. Innovations in technology have expanded the spectrum available for broadcasting until it is now virtually infinite and even broadcasting is increasingly being exempted from regulatory regimes.

In the years following the Second World War public dissatisfaction with the press was high and redressing it became a matter of political priority. There were two areas of primary concern: that the press was unfair and biased in political coverage, and that it published trivia, gossip and trash, rather than useful information. As a result, in both USA and Britain, major inquiries considered the role of the press and how it might better serve the democratic system.

In the USA the independent Hutchins Commission on the press was established in 1946 immediately after the end of the Second World War, with funds provided by *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Henry Luce, the head of Time Inc. By financing the commission, Luce acknowledged the increasing public and political criticism of the press and recognised that although the media had been exempted from the regulatory regimes implemented in many other industries during the New Deal this situation might not last (Altschull, 1984:179). Robert Hutchins, Chancellor of the University of Chicago, chaired the twelve-member commission which reported in 1947, concluding that freedom of the press was in danger because of the increased prominence of the press, its concentrated ownership, remoteness from public concerns and its willingness to 'engage in socially condemned practices'.

In 1949 the first British Royal Commission into the Press came to similar conclusions, and recommended the establishment of a Press Council to monitor the industry. Although the specifics of the concerns on either side of the Atlantic varied, they could be encapsulated by the industry's 'bigness, fewness and costliness' (Siebert et al., 1974: 101). If size, expense and uncompetitiveness were not to undermine the public

standing of the press, and its important and legitimate function in society, both the Hutchins and the British Royal Commission concluded a socially responsible press, with adequate accountability mechanisms, needed to emerge.

Hutchins described a socially responsible press, and said that the public had a right to expect five basic services: accurate, comprehensive news coverage; a forum for exchange of comment; a means of projecting group opinions; a method of presenting and clarifying goals and values; a way of reaching everyone.

Although Hutchins' report was published as a supplement in Time Inc.'s *Fortune* magazine, the initial reception was far from enthusiastic. Many editors were annoyed about being told to learn to understand and serve the expectations of the public and resented being told that they could do their job better. The initial reaction to Hutchins was 'cool if not hostile'. Yet, within a generation its principles had been accepted within the United States and in other countries. Indeed by 1965 when Sir Theodore Bray, the editor of the *Courier-Mail*, publicly considered the role of the newspaper he identified the same five key points as the measure of a good newspaper.

The work of the Hutchins Commission and the British Royal Commission were important in developing a climate in which the century-old definitions of the Fourth Estate could be recast. In *Four Theories of the Press*, published in 1956, Theodore Peterson defined the press described by Hutchins as 'socially responsible' and by identifying this approach as a theory of the press – which could be distinguished from the authoritarian, libertarian, and communist models – Peterson provided a practical, contemporary application and reinterpretation of the previous libertarian concept of the press. It has been on the basis of this theory that journalists and editors have accepted a greater degree of accountability and in some cases embraced an independent watchdog role with new enthusiasm.

One of the indicators of a socially responsible news media is its willingness to accept self-regulation and establish codes of practice and councils of review. These have now become common features of the news media, although they were not implemented without resistance. In Australia in 1944, responding to criticisms similar to those that had led to the establishment of the Hutchins Commission and the British Royal Commission, the Australian Journalists' Association incorporated a code of ethics which was generally accepted four years later, despite bitter legal challenge by the publishers (Sparrow, 1965: ch. 20).

The language of the Fourth Estate has, as has already been noted, given media organisations a powerful weapon for arguing against government oversight, regulation or intervention. Accustomed to immunity

from oversight, the media organisations were reluctant to accept the establishment of press councils and other accountability agencies suggested by Hutchins and the British Royal Commission. In Australia the newspaper industry was opposed to such accountability mechanisms. The Australian Press Council was only established in 1975 after the government began preparing legislation to create a statutory press council. News Ltd was one of the media organisations reluctant to join the council at first, but by the mid-1980s (before the official journalist representatives resigned), self-interest had ensured that the council had acquired a reputation as an articulate defender of the principles of the Fourth Estate. As a result, it has been frequently criticised for being a captive of industry. Even the chairman of Australian Consolidated Press, Kerry Packer described it as 'window dressing' in his evidence before the parliamentary inquiry into the print media in 1991.

Although these accountability mechanisms have been established, it would be wrong to suggest that they have been embraced enthusiastically by Australian media organisations. While some media managers and senior editors acknowledge that to play a role in the political system requires a willingness to accept public accountability and social responsibility, most would prefer to be left to operate their businesses without any inhibitions. Recognition of the need for greater accountability by the media has remained the central issue in discussions about its role in a modern democracy. This issue has been given greater urgency by concentrated ownership, barriers to entry and the costs to content of the commercial importance to entertain, titillate and amuse.

Accountability did not rank high on the list of attributes of the nineteenth-century Fourth Estate. The failure to incorporate accountability mechanisms beyond the market into the operation of the press led, with a certain inevitability, to the collapse of a libertarian model of the press during the twentieth century. Its replacement with a more socially responsible model of the news media has required that the industry accept greater public responsibility that goes beyond commercial success. Moves towards greater accountability have emerged slowly and with considerable reluctance. The fear of external regulation has, however, triggered greater willingness to develop codes and methods of self-regulation.

### Conclusion

The Fourth Estate has survived for two centuries, although the notion of an impartial news media which plays an active and independent role in the conduct of political life has been severely tarnished. The ideal is

still resonant despite a central paradox: that the news media is the only quasi-institutional check in a representative democracy, whose achievements are measured by commercial success.

Implicit in any surviving ideal is the capacity for meaning to be reinterpreted. This has occurred with great success, as the news media has twisted the meaning of the Fourth Estate ideal. At different times and in different places various meanings have attached to it. In a broad sweep through two centuries and three countries a pattern emerges of alternating neutrality and activism, criticism and elite leadership. The Fourth Estate was once described as the place where reporters sat while covering the activities in the House of Commons. Yet, it expanded to permit the press to assert its own voice and amplify the voices of sections of the enfranchised elite. In this it acted as an independent source of political power.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century it was transformed again. A commitment to disclosure increased, providing an outlet for the voices of the unenfranchised. In this manifestation the press was able to generate market share while at the same time amplifying the voices of the dispossessed and the underprivileged. Later the ideal flourished as muckrakers addressed the wrongdoings of those in power. For much of the twentieth century the dominant interpretation of the ideal was as a neutral agency for the transmission of political and social messages. Then late this century it assumed the mantle of disclosure willingly, adopting an adversarial role in some outlets while in others it reached new levels as a bland agency for amusement and entertainment.

These reinterpretations have all been able to be accommodated within the Fourth Estate rhetoric, yet the mass media today is fundamentally different to the nineteenth-century press, or even the popular press at the beginning of this century. Its scale is vast and it has a large range of diversified economic and political interests.

The idealised concept of the Fourth Estate is difficult to maintain in such a diversified and powerful industry. It asserts tremendous political and economic power. The media industry today may exercise some of the precepts which originally underpinned the Fourth Estate rhetoric but it is more frequently seen to act in its own interests rather than on behalf of the public interest (whatever that may be). Using knowledge of public opinion to enhance economic growth is a fundamentally different use of public opinion to that conceived by those who argued that, because of the press' capacity to present diverse public opinion, it deserved the status of the Fourth Estate.

In each of the transformations of the Fourth Estate, journalists and editors have moved with the new directions. The professionalisation of

journalism and the acceptance of the idea of the public's right to know and the journalist's responsibility to find the truth, has continued to give the ideal a life, which it would not otherwise retain.

Both journalists and media owners recognise that they have a great deal to lose if the media is seen as just another business. But that is what the media industry now is. If the Fourth Estate ideal is to continue, journalists, editors and producers will need to accept responsibility for it. Principally this involves ensuring that a clearer distinction is made between the editorial and commercial roles of the industry. Asserting such a responsibility may at times place journalists and editors at odds with the commercial demands of their organisations. There are, however, commercial benefits to be reaped from the application of the ideal.

Journalists have been particularly reluctant to jettison the idealised Fourth Estate role, because it provides the bedrock of their claims to professionalism. This grants them an important role in public life.

The news media industry has used the Fourth Estate rhetoric to achieve greater power and influence than it may otherwise have enjoyed. Tension between the commercial demands and the public role threatens to undermine the continuing relevance of the Fourth Estate ideal, unless journalists and editors are prepared to assume greater responsibility for it.

## CHAPTER 6

### *Accepting the Ideal*

'It has been rare for a journalist to recognise the anomaly of working inside a commercial enterprise and taking the rewards therefrom, while at the same time condemning the very commercialism that is providing him or her with those rewards.'

*Herbert Altschull, 1984*

'The ideology of professional responsibility has found numerous celebrants for a variety of reasons, not all noble. But at its core is a seductive idea – professionalism means that the journalist's first duty is to serve the public.'

*James Curran, 1991*

If, as has been argued in the previous chapter, the late twentieth-century news media industry is a flawed embodiment of the Fourth Estate, the question remains whether journalists, editors and producers, desire, or are able, to muster sufficient intellectual authority to stake a meaningful claim to custodianship of the ideal.

In this and the following chapter I examine empirically the attitudes of Australian journalists towards the Fourth Estate. This is done by describing, evaluating and comparing the information gathered from the Media and Democracy survey of two groups of Australian journalists

The data provides a snapshot of the attitudes of the Australian journalists surveyed in 1992 towards their work and its place in public life. The full survey, its methodology and results are set out in the appendix.

The data provides a springboard to consider of the roles, practices, methods and attitudes of Australian journalists and to test whether the contests to the Fourth Estate, examined in chapter 5, can be sustained from the perspective of the journalists surveyed. The contests to the contemporary legitimacy of the Fourth Estate analysed in the previous chapter – political independence, commercial priorities, understanding public opinion, diversity of information and viewpoints, accountability – are now considered from the perspective of the journalists surveyed.

Journalists' attitudes towards, and understanding of, professionalism are central if responsibility for the Fourth Estate is to be accorded to them. Professionalism is, however, an 'ambiguous' concept, laden with a wide range of culturally and organisationally specific meanings (Curran, 1991: 100). Attitudes towards professionalism and its related tool, objectivity, are addressed later in this chapter.

Journalists are not held in particularly high public esteem in Australia, in part because they lost some of their limited, intellectual authority with the increasing commercialisation of the press. Whether Australian journalists now wish to accept responsibility for the maintenance of the ideals of the Fourth Estate, and whether they demonstrate sufficient autonomy and professional authority to be entrusted with it, is central to any attempt to revive the Fourth Estate.

### **Who are the journalists?**

Australian journalists, unlike their counterparts in the USA, Britain and Germany, have rarely been studied. Quantitative research prior to the 1990s tended to focus on occupationally or geographically defined groups. This limited quantitative research was paralleled by limited qualitative research. The attitudes and values of journalists have however, been explored by interview (Tiffen 1989; Wilson and Grabosky; 1989; Edgar, 1979; National Library of Australia interviews) and historians (including Walker, 1976; Walker, 1980; Souter, 1981; Lloyd, 1985; Lloyd, 1988; Souter 1991). Most of this research has addressed particular issues: work organisation, news selection, research methods and role definition, making it difficult to reach representative conclusions about Australian journalists.

A comprehensive profile of Australian journalists working for major national and state news media can be drawn from the information gathered from the Media and Democracy survey. Australian journalists working for the major news organisations tend to be more middle class than the general Australian community – better paid and educated than the national average. As such they are members of the elite and many see their role as communicating principally with other elites (questions A3, A4, H1–15).

The Australian news journalists and the investigative journalists surveyed are strikingly similar in terms of background. On fifteen indicators of the working environment and personal socioeconomic factors, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups. There were no statistically significant differences between them in relation to age, gender, country of birth, first language, years in journalism, prior employment, friends in politics and journalism,

highest educational attainment or schooling. Comparable proportions worked on newspapers, radio and television and for public and privately owned news organisations. They also held similar perceptions of their audiences.

A statistically significant ( $p = < .05$ ) difference emerged on four socio-demographic indicators: income, journalism training, experience in political reporting and family background. These differences were explained by the relatively higher occupational status of the investigative journalists, editors and producers who participated in the study. The investigative journalists were likely to spend more time on political reporting (question A5); considered they would be less likely to accept such an offer of a government or political job (H4); were generally better paid (H14); and were more likely to have had university rather than newsroom based training (H9). They were also more likely to come from professional or managerial family backgrounds (H11), than the news journalists surveyed.

Overall the similarities and differences between the two groups suggest that the investigative journalists may be considered the vanguard – opinion leaders – of the broader sample of Australian news journalists.

### **Journalists and the watchdog Fourth Estate**

Australian journalists surveyed embrace the Fourth Estate (question D19, 79% news, 89.5% investigative), as was shown in chapter 3. They also acknowledged that the ideal was flawed, particularly by commercial demands (questions D20, E4, E10, E12, E13) By distinguishing between ideal and reality they implicitly acknowledge the power of ideals to shape practice and values, and state a clear personal preference. The scepticism that they have about the viability of the Fourth Estate may have a personally and professionally corrosive effect, or it may provide the essential defence for the rhetoric–practice gap that they encounter in their work.

Ideals can be the bridge between practical reality and rhetorical possibilities. The Fourth Estate ideal is valuable to journalists, editors and producers for at least two reasons – as a goal of model behaviour to be striven for, and as a legitimising rationalisation for established practices, especially when confronted with criticism.

The ability of journalists to recognise the idealised nature of the Fourth Estate claims was clearly revealed in the responses to the questions – as was the determination of the respondents to cling to it, as in the assessment of the commercial pressures on investigative reporting. Exploring the impact of commercial priorities on news judgements (questions D11–13,) the journalists felt that media companies should

not be able to exclude information that was potentially commercially damaging. Two-thirds of the news journalists and 71% of the investigative group claimed that they would pursue stories that were potentially damaging to their employer's interest with similar vigour to other subjects.

They also expressed a willingness to accept responsibility for the ideal when it was in conflict with the commercial demands of the news media, as an industry. To determine attitudes towards the Fourth Estate and its practical reality, the Australian respondents were asked whether they personally favoured the notion of the media as the Fourth Estate, and what they considered the actual situation and how they would pursue stories that could impinge on the ideal.

About 90% of the news and investigative journalists maintained an optimistic personal faith in the ideal of the Fourth Estate; very few expressed personal ambivalence about the concept or hostility to the idea (D19–20).

The respondents were more divided, however, in their assessment of the actual situation. Although more than 40% of each group were confident that the 'actual situation' mirrored the ideal, nearly the same percentage considered that in reality the media was 'just another business'. Nearly a fifth of each sample was uncertain about the 'actual situation'. There was no statistically significant difference between the news and investigative journalists on either of these questions.

There were, however, significant differences between the two groups about whether the purpose of press freedom was to allow the news media to communicate what it considers important, or to enable competing groups to express their views. Just over 60% of the news journalists expressed a preference for an impartial system of news compared to 44% of the investigative group.

The investigative journalists were more divided than the Australian news journalists, and other international respondents, about the purpose of freedom of expression (D21). More investigative journalists (27%) than news journalists (19%) consider the purpose of freedom of the press is to provide more opportunities for expression through the media, of the views of a range of interest groups, than to give the news media the opportunity to articulate its preferred opinions itself. Forty per cent of the investigative journalists and 50% of the news journalists favoured a notion of freedom of the press as being a way for the news media to 'communicate information and opinions they deem important'.

The findings show that although the role of the news in holding the government accountable is most important for a significant proportion of those surveyed, this key Fourth Estate role is subsumed by the more

encompassing task of keeping the public informed. The Australian journalists agreed (E1, 92% news, 97% investigative) that 'a willingness to undertake investigative journalism is an important measure of the media's commitment to its watchdog role'.

Sixty-three per cent of the news group and 72% of the investigative respondents felt that journalists in their organisation (E6) were 'encouraged to do investigative journalism'; however, a majority of both groups also felt that there was resistance (E12) to journalists undertaking major investigative projects. The investigative journalists (71%) were more likely to feel that there was resistance than the news group (52%).

Interesting differences between the two groups were apparent in response to question E13. Identification of management, advertiser and staff resistance to investigative reporting highlights the tensions that exist in many news organisations. The investigative journalists were more likely to detect resistance from their colleagues, while the news journalists considered politicians more oppositional. This difference is explained in part by the experience that the investigative journalists have had when undertaking major projects that remove them from the demands of daily news production. Interviews with journalists and editors whose organisations were not accustomed to undertaking major investigative projects reinforced this, and described the considerable hostility towards a reporter who was perceived as receiving special attention from other staff. The perception of the news journalists that politicians were likely to be significant sources of opposition is probably related to the swift, vociferous and generally hostile way in which Australian politicians are likely to respond to the disclosures of investigative reporting.

### **Editorial Ideals Confront Commercial Realities**

The responses to the questions about the viability of the Fourth Estate also suggest that Australian journalists recognise that responsibility for the Fourth Estate, particularly the watchdog elements implicit in the ideal, have begun to be accepted despite some opposition from management.

Further evidence of this could be seen in the responses to questions that asked them to distinguish between editorial and commercial imperatives, and the extent to which commercial priorities influenced editorial decisions.

The journalists surveyed asserted the importance of separating commercial and editorial interests in this series of questions specifically addressing the interface between the commercial priorities of media

organisations and the editorial priorities (questions C1, 5, 7). For instance, the journalists overwhelmingly supported the action of the Fairfax journalists in 1991 to assert editorial autonomy, denied media companies the right to exclude commercially damaging stories and asserted that they would not indulge in self-censorship (D11).

The journalists surveyed asserted editorial autonomy, even when it placed them in conflict with the commercial priorities of their organisation (D12, 13). These values are shared by both groups, there was no statistically significant difference in the attitudes between the news and investigative groups.

The investigative journalists (15%) were, however, more reluctant to pursue a damaging story about their employer than the news journalists (7%) (D13). This is consistent with the views of business and finance journalists who were asked the same question earlier in 1992 (Schultz and Matolcsy, 1993: 25). More than a third of the business and finance journalists, and nearly a quarter of the investigative journalists, said that they would not pursue a story that was likely to damage their organisation's commercial viability with the same vigour that they would pursue a similar story about an unrelated company. These proportions highlight the selective nature of decisions about which subjects to pursue. The significant proportion favoring caution is a frank and informed assessment of the real conflicts that are likely to arise as a result of pursuing a story damaging to one's employer.

Notwithstanding this slight caution, it is therefore reasonable to assert that the values of editorial independence, and necessity of separating commercial and editorial functions are strongly held by the Australian journalists.

### **Professionalism and Objectivity**

It is in their understanding of professionalism that the capacity of journalists to accept responsibility for the Fourth Estate ideal must ultimately reside. For professionalism to be sufficiently robust to support the additional baggage of public service, understanding of the concept must encapsulate attitudes towards objectivity, neutrality, advocacy and work practices as well as the role of journalists within news organisations.

For nearly two centuries journalism has been dogged by discussions about professionalism. Its advocates have held great hopes for the capacity of professionalism to ensure a more diverse news media (Henningham, 1991: 154). Even those critical of the notion that professionalism can enable journalists to ensure that the news media achieves

its democratic potential, such as James Curran, acknowledge that the argument, at its core, is a 'seductive idea':

That means a journalist's first duty is to serve the public, acting as a counter-weight to forces, internal and external that threaten the integrity of the media, a philosophy of empowerment rather than control – professional self interest appears to coincide with the public interest. (Curran, 1991: 99)

The nature, definition and desirability of 'professional journalism' has been a vexed issue, while generally regarded as a 'good thing' (Allison, 1986: 5). Professionalism is, however, an 'ambiguous' term, rather like the Fourth Estate, meaning 'different things to different people, and indeed different cultures'.

This has certainly been the case in Australia where the meanings of professionalism are arguably different to those commonly understood in USA and Britain. There have been attempts to 'professionalise' journalism documented in Australia since the 1860s when the *Victorian Review* advocated establishment of a university chair of journalism, 'to train up a race of journalists impressed with the responsibility of the profession they embraced and competent to discharge it' (Lloyd, 1985: 19).

Similar strategies were advocated and implemented in other countries, as 'a social development centrally involved with independence' (Birkhead, 1986: 38). Attempts to establish codes of professional practice, were accompanied by recruitment of a 'better class' of journalists marking an important milestone in the recognition of the press as an independent political institution. Barbara James (1991) has argued, however, this was a relatively short-lived phenomenon unsettled by the rapid commercialisation of the press.

Attempts to establish journalism as an autonomous occupation failed, but a debate about occupational autonomy began and continues. Although lip-service is paid to these professional aspirations, journalistic autonomy and authority are legally recognised in few countries. The different attitudes towards objectivity, autonomy and accountability held by members of the two groups of Australian journalists point to the need to redefine professionalism, and address the underlying issues of occupational power and autonomy (Allison, 1986: 15).

Arguments for professionalism in Australian journalism have traditionally emphasised the increased status, pay and prestige that journalists could acquire if they achieved this standing (Sparrow, 1965). Education and training were considered the keys to this, just as education has been central to the claims of other would-be professional occupations (Lloyd 1985: chs 1, 9, 13).

In the last 30 years, however, arguments about professionalism have changed to become more firmly grounded in the 'public service' role of journalism. Former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (then leader of the Opposition) argued this at the Third Summer School of Professional Journalism in 1967:

Few professions carry the responsibility that yours does. Your employers, mainly for industrial reasons and partly for policy reasons, are reluctant to acknowledge or promote the importance of your profession. But you owe it to yourself, and more importantly to the public, to do all within your power to raise the competence, independence and effectiveness of your profession. I feel that this is the most productive way of pursuing that nebulous, but all important thing, called 'freedom of the press'. Through increased professionalism you can best serve society. (Whitlam, 1967: 12)

The quest for professionalism was generally opposed by the publishers, who saw journalistic autonomy as a threat to newsroom control. In the final years of the 1980s when journalists employed by Fairfax organised public campaigns about newspaper ownership and editorial independence, the potential dangers of increasingly assertive professional journalists became even clearer to employers (Ryan and Burge, 1992: ch. 8; Wilson, 1991). Journalists argued publicly against media proprietors, who objected to the direct plea to the public, concerned that journalists who claimed to represent the public interest might be less compliant (Stannard, 1991: 29).

In this debate – just as in the arguments about creating a code of ethics in the late 1940s – journalists claimed to be defenders of the public interest, against the proprietors who were portrayed as defending only their commercial and class interests. The process by which the journalists publicly defended the ideals of the institution they worked in may appear a role reversal – as Lincoln Steffens observed in 1913, 'The journalist has been building someone else's property' – but it was an important stage in claims by Australian journalists to defend the Fourth Estate ideal that they personally valued.

The readiness of Australian journalists to argue that they were acting in the public interest, when opposing their employers, is one sign of the development of a distinctly Australian version of professionalism. This has not only shaped discussions within the industry, but also influenced political approaches to media policy formation as has been demonstrated. Claims to represent the public interest were made by journalists in campaigns on media ownership, and as an argument to justify source confidentiality, the public defence of unpopular stories and readiness to take industrial action over control of content as well as

wages and conditions. While it could be argued that these campaigns were motivated by self-interest, my assessment of them convinces me that in most cases the leaders of these campaigns were genuinely motivated by idealised notions of the public interest.

The Media and Democracy survey invited responses on a range of questions exploring the relationship between journalists and the public. As is shown in chapter 7 – in response to questions evaluating the attitudes of journalists towards public opinion; attitudinal similarities between journalists and the public; sources of influence in decision making about news; public standing of journalists; and rights and responsibilities – a substantial proportion of the journalists surveyed are quite disdainful of the public.

These findings highlight a paradox in the professionalisation of journalism. Journalists have used claims of representing the public interest to advance their own standing, to seek greater media diversity, and to argue for greater freedom of information and speech, but in their disdain for public opinion, it would appear that these arguments are used primarily to advance self-interest. This suggests that the claims to professionalism by Australian journalists fit a 'power' model of professionalism.

The occupational status of journalism may have risen in the postwar years (Daniel, 1991), but the public remains critical of the veracity, reliability, integrity and ethical standing of journalists. This is revealed in occupational surveys year after year (Schultz, 1994: ch 3). The news media has become more pervasive, slicker and prepared to fulfil a classic Fourth Estate watchdog role, but the public remains sceptical. Market research suggests that most Australians consider that as a political institution, the news media is doing a fair or poor job (for instance *SMH*, 8 July 1991).

Critics from a wide range of perspectives argue that freedom of the press has been conflated with journalistic freedom. The insights into occupational attitudes gleaned from the Media and Democracy survey suggests that this may be correct. Confusion of purpose may be a sign of an occupation in transition, or it may be the inevitable outcome of professionalisation. As journalists more confidently assert their standing as professionals, they face the possibility that professionalism – especially without adequate accountability mechanisms – may not automatically carry public esteem and respect. Rather it may exacerbate the poor regard in which they are held. Established professions have a tendency to become 'inward-looking, self-serving and innately conservative' (Boreham et al., 1976), leading to accusations of arrogance and insularity, and calls for statutory regulation. The prickliness with

which journalists and editors defend themselves may be a sign of their changing status:

Professionalisation often tends to persuade journalists and editors of their importance to society, which can lead to a sense of their own self-importance. It also leads to a highly developed sense of professional solidarity, with a concomitant determination to defend the profession from outside pressure. Indeed, nothing unites like a common enemy. (Raaum, 1989: 21)

### Aspiring to professionalism

In an age in which almost everyone claims to be professional, most Australian journalists confidently assert that they too are professionals, not practitioners of a craft as most once believed (Henningham, 1993a). Common usage defines a professional as an individual paid to do a competent, or specialised, job. This understanding of the term is likely to overwhelm the older notion of the professions as the occupations of the elites. It is not surprising therefore, that the idea that journalists are members of a trade has been jettisoned, even as the main method of organisation remains a trade union.

The unique status of journalism was recognised early in the century by Justice Isaac Isaacs, who, in April 1917, described it as an occupation *sui generis* (Lloyd, 1985: 121). Journalists as individuals and a group, do not comfortably fit the well-developed functionalist definitions of professional, but it may well be that journalism in this regard also resists categorisation.

The desire for professionalism has been articulated in many countries, but it is 'neither a universal nor value neutral' concept (Donsbach, 1981: 64). Penn Kimball considered that professionalisation occurred despite the 'newsman's occupational aversion to pretension' as an almost inevitable 'human process' (Kimball, 1965: 243, 258) and Boyd-Barrett suggested that it was 'as much about feelings as rules and regulations' (Boyd-Barrett, 1970: 183). Norwegian scholar Odd Raaum was more high-minded when he described professionalisation as:

the result of a natural development and part of a concerted effort on the part of editors and journalists. Their goal has been to enhance the autonomy of journalists *vis-à-vis* their sources as well as with regard to media owners. (Raaum, 1989: 21)

The quest for greater autonomy, from sources and owners may not have been cost free, and may possibly even have been counter-productive. Merrill (1974) has argued that professionalisation has reduced autonomy and forced individual journalists to subordinate their ideals to those of the group. For journalists in the United States, a general

movement towards greater professionalism appears, somewhat ironically, to have been accompanied by a reduction of editorial autonomy (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991: 214). Patterson has argued that reduced diversity of news and views published and broadcast is a direct consequence of the uncritical acceptance of professionalism by American journalists, resulting from 'professional' judgements of the newsworthiness based on norms of timeliness, proximity, prominence and significance (Patterson, 1992: 10).

Despite the critics' concerns, the process of professionalism has generally been regarded as a worthy aspiration, and one which is widely held. Distinctions about the role and purpose of professionalism can be drawn between the continents. In North America the link between objectivity and professionalism is strong and has led to a sustained critique. In Australia, more emphasis has been placed on public service. In Britain a critique of the structural functionalist compartmentalisation of professionalism has shaped the discussion (Sparkes, 1990; Schlesinger, 1987; Elliott, 1972). In Europe the debates around professionalism have focused more on the use of power (Donsbach, 1981).

Much study of journalism is a subset of the sociology of the professions. Professionalisation may generally be seen 'as a good thing, the traditional literature tends to avoid . . . exactly what an occupation has to gain by professionalising' (Allison, 1986: 5). She suggested that the field could be divided into two approaches: structural functionalism, which included Greenwood (1957), Moore (1970), Wilensky (1964), Vickers (1974) who effectively developed a guidebook on professionalism and established benchmarks for measuring it; and on more critical approach (Lieberman, 1970; Oppenheim, 1975; Faia, 1976; Watson, 1976; Ritzer, 1977; Klegon, 1978; Child and Falk, 1982) which examines the same attributes, but concentrates on the power, prestige and autonomy exercised by the occupational group, for its own (rather than public) advantage. This second group of scholars argues that claims to professional authority and autonomy are often based on 'myths', designed to bolster the public perception of an occupation.

These scholars have played an important role in establishing the legitimacy of occupations as professions, by identifying the key criteria that need to be satisfied for professional standing to be bestowed. These characteristics are essentially drawn from the 'old' or 'true' professions – law, medicine and the clergy. The five characteristics generally considered essential are: unique knowledge; control over entry to the occupation; a commitment to public service; operating autonomy; codified and enforced ethical standards.

Much of the argument about whether journalism can be categorised as a profession has revolved around discussion of these characteristics (Henningham 1990: 129–54). This is well-trodden, and somewhat

sterile ground, that provides a context for analysing the professional self-definition of Australian journalists.

It can be demonstrated that there is an expert body of knowledge about journalism and media practice, but this is not so highly sophisticated that a specialised course of learning is essential. There are now, however, more than 20 university-based courses in journalism offered in Australia. These courses attract large numbers of students, but only a proportion find employment as journalists (Schultz, 1994: ch. 12). Only a small percentage of the Australian journalists surveyed for this study had completed journalism or communications degrees. Arguably then this criterion is not met – although such specialised knowledge exists it is rarely formally accessed. Journalists do not control entry to the occupation in individual workplaces. They exercise influence over the minimum standards of entry through the award system, which stipulates criteria for employment at different levels.

Autonomy is important, and the respondents to the survey reported a reasonable level of freedom, but it was by no means absolute. Weaver and Wilhoit (1991) highlighted a decline in the operational autonomy as American news outlets were absorbed into chains and conglomerates. A tendency towards reduced autonomy is not, however, unique to journalism. The nature of work in other recognised professions – law, medicine, academia – is also increasingly bureaucratic and routinised.

Commitment to public service is one of the ‘feelings’ Boyd-Barrett described as being held by journalists – but as has been shown these feelings are poorly integrated into Australian journalists’ attitudes and actions. Despite the lip-service paid to the importance of accountability, the survey results suggest that it is not widely accepted. Critics of professionalism, such as Colin Sparkes, have conceded that ‘to the extent professionalism encourages public accountability it is a good thing’ (Sparkes, 1990: 34).

The nature of the professional-client relationship in journalism is complex. Journalists have two key clients: the public audience and private sources. The relationship between journalists and the public is weak, but the relationship between journalists and sources is strong. Despite ritual claims to represent the public, many journalists’ relationships with audiences – as consumers and citizens – are distant, tinged with hostility and condescension. The contact with sources is closer and can be more easily characterised as a traditional professional-client relationship. On the basis of a public service role, journalists have sought professional privilege to protect the confidentiality of the relationship.

Journalists in Australia have accepted ethical guidelines for almost 50 years. The Code of Ethics devised in the 1940s – and subsequently

revised – was praised by the courts for its clarity and forcefulness (Lloyd, 1985: ch. 11). This has not been equalled by the forcefulness of its implementation. Widespread public disquiet with the effectiveness of the code led to the establishment of an independent committee of review and a Senate inquiry into the rights and obligations of the media. It could be argued that Australian journalists – most of whom are now members of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance – satisfy the ethical requirement of professionalism, but weak enforcement undermines the significance of this claim.

Australian journalists fit awkwardly into structural functionalist definitions of a professional. This awkwardness is not unique, possibly because this approach is too narrow, unduly emphasising the wrong characteristics. If professionalism is examined in terms of the 'societal tasks set for an occupational group' (Donsbach, 1981: 63), different conclusions may be reached. This fits Allison's 'power' model of professionalism, which considers many of the same criteria as the structural functionalists, but examines them from the perspective of 'how that attribute, or the appearance of it, will serve the professional community' (Allison, 1986: 7).

Allison's approach makes it possible to distinguish between the professional aspirations of individuals and occupational groups. Weak occupational organisation in many countries has led structural functionalist researchers to focus on the professional aspirations and behaviour of individual journalists. This sidesteps some of the theoretical problems and emphasises the 'feelings' of individual journalists. Allison noted archly that 'power advocates might argue that this approach is particularly useful for journalists who have autonomy, authority and prestige to gain by being legitimised as professionals' (Allison, 1986: 9).

In Australia the relatively high level of union organisation, and the quirk of history that located journalism within an industrial framework, strengthens the authority of the power model. Emphasising the power an occupation is able to exercise in society, or in relation to individual clients, is a useful way of considering the political role of the news media, particularly the relationship with the public. 'Social power without responsibility and without legitimacy is contrary to the norms of a democratic society . . . Competence is indicated by a willingness and capacity to accept responsibility for the consequences of one's own professional actions' (Donsbach, 1981: 57).

The capacity of journalists to exercise responsibility for their actions is limited by their status within increasingly large bureaucratic organisations. As employees their ability to exercise responsibility may be limited in an organisation that does not value professionalism, or public accountability. In organisations that value these qualities, and see a

commercial or political advantage in them, the power that journalists are able to exercise is likely to be enhanced. Most of those surveyed were prepared to accept moral responsibility for the consequences of their journalism. As the campaign by Fairfax journalists to secure guarantees of editorial independence highlighted, and as the role journalists played in expanding the role of the Australian news media in the political system in the 1980s discussed in chapter 9 shows, these constraints are not absolute.

This recent Australian experience may be limited, but in situations where high quality is considered the key to commercial success it may become more common. A more pessimistic and widely held view is that journalists are coming to realise the limitations of their influence over the policies and outcomes of the organisations they work for. 'The freedom they exercise is bound by the confines of a regulated routine. Journalists are beginning to comprehend how their expertise and understanding of news happens to serve so fastidiously and efficiently the industry that profits from their service' (Birkhead, 1986: 43). Australian journalists, the Media and Democracy survey shows, are well aware of this gap between the ideal and the reality.

### Defining Objectivity

The informal nineteenth-century process of raising the standards of journalism by education and recruitment was important in the process of consolidating the press as an institution. This was quickly followed by attempts to bolster institutional authority with claims to scientific objectivity in the selection and presentation of news. It was a world in which the quest for facts guided scientific and artistic endeavour, hence objective observation, analysis and classification were what the public, 'tired of preachers and sermons' (Schudson, 1978: 72-3), demanded.

What was to become the dominant ethos of modern journalism – objectivity – was shaped by these empiricist times. It also complemented the emerging commercial imperatives of the press, and paradoxically undermined claims to professionalism and autonomy for journalists in the English language press if not in Europe where scientific empiricism did not overwhelm partisan publications with 'objective' ones.

After the First World War Walter Lippmann sought to characterise objectivity as the *method* used rather than the *content* of what was written (Lippmann, 1921: 256; May, 1986: 28). By this means the notion of objectivity gained greater resilience, and maintained relevance for many years. Objectivity became central to claims of professionalism, autonomy and authority, providing both a rationale and a guiding moral philosophy. This commitment has been sustained despite criticism and

recognition of the limitations of the method (Schudson, 1978: 10).

Objectivity, as a method of journalism rather than a measure of content, was enthusiastically embraced in Australia, Britain and North America. As a method of journalism, it became a more sophisticated version of the empiricism that had predominated since the 1890s (Schudson, 1978: 7). Objective reports which sought to present information in a pared down fashion, presenting contending sides but with an emphasis on neutrality, made it possible for the publications to reach the widest possible audiences, without alienating readers with differing politics. This facilitated higher circulation and advertising rates, and marked the first major consolidation of the newspaper market (Mayer, 1964; Schiller, 1980; Baker, 1994: 28–30).

By early in the twentieth century, objectivity had irrevocably changed journalistic practice. It became a defining professional characteristic and continues to provide the bedrock of claims to professional standing. While it is insufficient to ‘insulate’ journalism from public criticism, it remains essential to claims of authority and autonomy and a camouflage for power (Schudson, 1987: 159).

By demanding the juxtaposition of opposing opinions the method of objectivity also made the routinisation of news production easier, thereby increasing newsroom control (Birkhead, 1986: 41). The educated men who had been sought in the nineteenth century to raise the standard of journalism were no longer ideal journalists – such educated men were likely to have opinions of their own and a desire to express them in a format which may not be accommodated by the ‘who what when where why’ of the inverted pyramid into which objective journalism was fitted. This marked the beginning of a process by which journalists moved from ‘critic to technician’ (Carey, 1965). Furthermore, as a moral philosophy the detachment that the method of objectivity presupposed was restrictive, and constrained the journalist’s ability to confidently judge good from evil.

In Australia this transformation in the style and method of journalism was marked by the first industrial award, and coincided with the establishment of the first, ill-fated, university courses in journalism early this century. Justice Isaacs’ legal decision that established benchmark industry practices drew on the emerging expectations of journalistic practice – including an attachment to objectivity.

Most of the journalists questioned in the *Media and Democracy* survey are committed to objectivity, which operates both as a practical guide and a ‘strategic ritual’ invoked as a defence and against criticism (Tuchman, 1977: 660 ff.). Objectivity persists as a set of conventions that ‘reduce the extent to which reporters themselves can be held responsible for the words they write’ (Schudson, 1978: 186). The investigative and news journalists surveyed held different definitions of the

concept, while remaining attached to it. The iconoclastic American journalist and editor, and influential role model, I.F. Stone, summed up this ambivalent attachment: 'Objectivity is fine if it's real . . . Every society has its dogmas and a genuinely objective approach can break through them. But most of the time objectivity is just the rationale for regurgitating the conventional wisdom of the day' (quoted in Haartsgard, 1984: 65–6).

Confidence in the truth of 'facts' has eroded as information management has developed. There is an increasing realisation that 'facts' may not be sufficient, that journalists are subjective creatures and the world increasingly complex. Schudson has documented how Henry Luce's approach of blending fact and comment – 'Show me a man who thinks he is objective and I'll show you a man who's deceiving himself' – accelerated this process in the United States early this century (Schudson, 1978: 149).

One way of dealing with this challenge was to create space for the interpretative journalist who made no particular claims to objectivity, but this was a marginal activity. The method of objectivity, in which the subjective judgments of competing interests were quoted, was the more generally embraced strategy. This saved the journalist from making judgments – beyond identifying those who could credibly be quoted (Bayley, 1984). With the elevation of this method, objectivity empowered journalists and provided a ritual defence (Tuchman, 1977). While the method acknowledges the subjectivity of value judgments of sources, it also tends, as I.F. Stone observed, to align journalists with credible authorities, reducing them, at worst, to stenographers for the powerful.

The limits of the method of objectivity have generated sustained criticism for several decades, principally because of the difficulty of applying the beliefs in fairness, accuracy, clarity and completeness, that are implicit in it. This criticism developed momentum in tandem with the debate about objectivity that occurred in the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s. Schudson (1978) has documented the process of challenge as journalists and editors became increasingly aware of the readiness of governments to lie to win compliance, and the need for journalism 'which was neither a permanent opposition nor a mouth-piece for government . . . neither a cynical attitude which suspends judgement nor a critical approach which trashes everything is an adequate response to the need to provide a defining new ethic' (May, 1986: 30).

Respondents to the Media and Democracy study overwhelmingly considered it very important that a journalist should endeavour to be as 'objective as possible' (C40) (see table 6.1). Although both Australian groups overwhelmingly agreed with the importance of objectivity, a

**Table 6.1** Importance of objectivity

Question C40	Very %	Somewhat %	Slightly %	Not at all %
Australia	88	12	0	0
Investigative	79	18	3	0

statistically significant difference emerged between the news and investigative journalists, highlighting the extent to which the investigative journalists questioned traditional notions of objectivity as an essential method.

As objectivity provides a framework for defining work practices and values, and emphasises neutrality in approaches to news gathering and reporting, it underlines both the strengths and weaknesses of claims to professionalism. Definitions of the concept range widely. Respondents were asked to choose from a list of five statements (C33–37) the one closest to their understanding of objectivity. The five statements highlighted subtle differences in the methods and outcomes of journalism and therefore provided a useful opportunity for self-definition.

Clear differences emerge between the news and investigative group in response to questions on objectivity. The investigative journalists surveyed adopt a significantly more activist approach towards their work. They are unequivocal in considering, uncovering and publicising problems, influencing the public and policy decisions, and championing particular values and ideas as very important elements of their work. In their definitions of objectivity, statistically significant differences from the news journalists also emerge. The desire of the investigative journalists to have an impact – while not detracting from information provision roles – helps explain their different definitions of objectivity.

Although the investigative journalists are willing to question objectivity, they have arrived at a definition that permits an activism that increases their power in relation to sources and audiences. The investigative journalists can therefore be seen as a group with a highly developed sense of professionalism, but with limited external accountability. This is revealed from their self-defined role and their relationship with audiences and sources.

The link between professionalism and objectivity is clearly strong, but also subject to varying definitions. The investigative group has a different view of objectivity than the news group and it would be expected that their professional values would also reflect this difference.

### Conclusion

The professionalisation of journalism is incomplete. Journalists themselves lack the ability to restrict access to the occupation, their autonomy is limited, they have a poor record of self-regulation. They would strongly resist the statutory registration which applies to other professions, because of their commitment to the Fourth Estate ideals of the news media as a watchdog, and necessarily independent of government.

Almost all the Australian journalists surveyed considered the Fourth Estate to be a desirable ideal. They recognised that the corporate and commercial reality of the contemporary news media presents substantial challenges to the maintenance of this ideal, but the commitment remains. Both groups of Australian journalists also considered investigative journalism an important element of the ideal. They regarded willingness to undertake investigative reporting as a measure of the commitment of the news media to the Fourth Estate role. Although a substantial proportion of those surveyed considered that journalists in their organisation were encouraged to do investigative reporting, they also identified the management of news organisations as the major source of resistance to this.

This demonstrates that Australian journalists recognise that the ideal is constrained by the commercial reality. The stated willingness of the respondents to take action to defend editorial autonomy against competing commercial priorities and their preparedness to confront internal resistance to investigative journalism indicated that they had begun to assume responsibility for maintenance of the Fourth Estate ideal.

Those who have advocated the increased professionalisation of journalism as a means of producing a 'media which is more credible, reliable and capable of presenting a deeper multifaceted representation of the truth' are now beginning to see journalism taking the path of other more established professions – becoming 'inward looking, self-serving, arrogant and detached from the real information needs of the community' (Henningham, 1990: 154). This paradox could be a sign of an occupation in transition. As journalists achieve a more robust professionalism – with more effective self-regulation, higher entry standards, greater autonomy and a more clearly defined sense of public service – the nobler aims of professionalisation may be realised, but this is by no means assured. The evidence suggests, however, that as journalists become more successful at asserting their occupational autonomy they become further removed from the public they claim to serve.

This highlights some of the complexities in understanding professionalism and its role in journalists' responsibility for a revived Fourth Estate.

Equating professionalism and objectivity is too limited. The professional method may have reduced the diversity of news and its moral authority, as journalists became occupationally detached from judging good and evil (Birkhead, 1986: 43), but it has also provided the tools of empowerment and the language for a crucial argument.

The linked developments of objectivity and the creation of codes of ethics initially demonstrated the authority and reliability of the words and pictures produced by journalists. They also provided the basis for occupational autonomy, but marked a distance from the political society journalism was designed to serve. As a result the process of professionalism, defined by the quest for autonomy may have left journalists unaccountable and 'cut adrift from their moorings in the political system' (Patterson, 1992: 10).

Testing this argument underlines the essential paradox of professionalism: that as journalists have become more assertive of their professional standing and status, public esteem for the occupation and the product it produces has fallen. The poor accountability of the news media as an institution is mirrored by the weak accountability of journalists and their generally low regard for the public.

Objectivity and claims to represent the public interest have been useful tools used by journalists seeking increased autonomy. Claims to professionalism are limited by organisational factors, restricted operational autonomy and journalists' somewhat disdainful attitudes towards the public. This suggests that the extent to which journalists claim professional standing – and responsibility for a revived Fourth Estate – may simply mask a quest for power. Journalists may claim to be acting in the public interest while aggregating more influence for themselves. This is tested by considering journalists' responses to the structural challenges to the Fourth Estate.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Testing the Ideal*

'A newspaper has two sides to it. It is a business like any other . . . but it is much more than a business, it has a moral as well as a material existence and its character and influence are determined by the balance of these two forces.'

C.P. Scott, 1921

The Australian journalists surveyed express considerable personal faith in the ideal of the Fourth Estate and their responses indicate that this faith influences approaches to their work. They demonstrated a readiness to distinguish between the commercial objectives of the organisations that employ them and the editorial principles they value. Recognition of the tension between these competing elements is important. It is not sufficient, however, to establish that the Australian journalists surveyed fully accept the obligations imposed by the principles that underpin the ideal of the Fourth Estate.

In this chapter I test the validity of the journalists' assertions about the idealised Fourth Estate using the information gathered from the survey. The five contests to the Fourth Estate examined in relation to the corporate news media – political purpose and independence; commercial priorities; understanding of public opinion; diversity and accountability – are evaluated on the basis of the information gathered from the two groups of Australian journalists.

#### **Political Purpose and Independence**

The political purpose and independence of the news media are important elements of the Fourth Estate. This principle implies that the news media will fulfil a political function and accept a serious purpose. Those advocating an institutional role for the press in the very different political and economic environment of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries argued that the news media would demonstrate political independence.

Questions must be raised about the commitment of the news media to these central issues. As an industry whose survival depends on maximising audiences, the news media is not solely, or even primarily, a serious, political institution; the Australian media organisations have also historically shown limited commitment to political choice, consistently favouring the conservative parties in elections.

From the perspective of the reporters, editors and producers who generate the content of the news media, the political purpose and independence of those journalists surveyed must be considered. This is done by examining the seriousness with which they regard politics; their personal political preferences (F12); commitment to balance (D15); perceptions of bias (D10); compatibility with the political preferences of their organisations (F9–11); desire to influence the political process (B19, 21); and preference for journalistic impartiality or advocacy (D14).

The political purpose of journalists and the journalism they produce has been a matter of intense interest since the advent of modern journalism. In recent years the field has polarised between those who argue that journalists display a distorting liberal bias and those who argue that in their news selection decisions, journalists are ideological agents of the status quo. Outside this polarity are those who argue that the professional detachment of journalists fosters cynicism which disconnects them from the political process.

#### *Political purpose*

The selection of the Australian journalists surveyed deliberately tilted the sample towards those who are actively involved in reporting politics. It was to be expected therefore, that the participants in this study would be more likely than all Australian journalists to consider the political purpose of the news media as central. This expectation is reinforced by the socio-demographic data that showed that those participating in the survey were quite likely to have worked in political jobs, have close friends employed in government and would consider taking a political job if it were offered to them. Just over a quarter of each group had worked full-time in government, politics or public service at some time in their careers (H3). Forty-one per cent of the news journalists and 26% of the investigative journalists said that they would 'probably take' a 'suitable job in government or public service that offered greater opportunities' than their present job (H4). Thirty-six per cent of each group identified 'one or two of their closest friends as working full-time in politics, government or public service' (H16).

*Political independence*

Both the news and investigative journalists expressed a preference for political independence, although independence from partisan allegiances was more important for the investigative respondents (H7). The investigative journalists' preference for political independence was reflected in their identification of the political party they were closest to. Forty-five per cent of the investigative respondents said that they were 'closer to no party', whereas 38% of the news group indicated that they were politically neutral. As one investigative respondent scribbled, 'I always vote for the opposition'.

The readiness of such a substantial proportion of the respondents to embrace political independence should not be equated with political indifference. The investigative journalists revealed that they wanted their journalism to have an impact on the political process, public attitudes and policy formation. It is of relevance to this contest to the Fourth Estate that the investigative journalists were less committed to a neutral and impartial news media than the news journalists (D14) (see table 7.1).

Most of the Australian journalists preferred an impartial model, although 22% of the investigative journalists felt more comfortable with media advocacy than impartiality.

*Political position*

A series of questions (F9–12) explored the political fit between the journalists surveyed and the news organisations for which they worked – using a 7-point scale, they were asked to locate the political position of their organisation in terms of its editorial position, news reporting and audience. They were also asked to locate their own political position on the same 7-point scale.

The largest proportion of Australian news journalists locate their organisation (40%), coverage (56%) and audience (38%) as being in the centre. A smaller proportion of the journalists (32%) also located themselves at the centre. This assessment of the audience, when correlated with the self-assessment, highlights a trend that journalists regard themselves as opinion leaders, whose views are not necessarily shared

**Table 7.1** Personal preference for an impartial or advocacy news systems

Question D14, %	Impartial	Uncertain	Advocacy
News	84	10	6
Investigative	67	11	22

by the wider community. For instance 41% of the Australian journalists surveyed considered that their audience was politically to the right of centre, whereas only 12% of the journalists located themselves on the right.

The journalists did not consider that these differences impeded their work. The apparent disparity is accommodated by the journalists through their commitment to objectivity.

### *Political autonomy*

Political independence, and the right of the Fourth Estate to develop its own voice and not simply act as an echo chamber for others, is an important aspect of most definitions of the Fourth Estate. As has been argued, the commercial imperatives of the news media tarnishes this independence. The extent to which journalists are limited in their exercise of political autonomy by the economic and political expectations of news organisations, media owners and managers, was therefore explored.

In questions C3, and C4, respondents were asked how often 'the news they prepare was altered' to 'improve its political balance' and to 'give it a political slant'. These questions reveal the political autonomy of journalists, help clarify the decision-making process and the extent to which the journalists are themselves responsible for the political content of the news media. These issues are important when considering journalists' Fourth Estate role within news organisations, because if the copy they prepare is frequently changed for overtly political reasons their role is demonstrably diminished.

The Australian news journalists reported high levels of political autonomy (C3) (see table 7.2). The investigative journalists (18% occasionally) were more likely to have their work significantly altered to improve its political balance than news journalists (39%). The different experience of the two groups was statistically significant. Despite this difference, the experience of having their work altered for political reasons was rare for most. Seventy per cent of news and 55% of investigative journalists said that the copy they prepared was 'never' altered by someone else to improve its political balance. Eighty-one per cent

**Table 7.2** News you prepare significantly altered by another to improve its political balance

Question C3, %	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
News	0	3	27	70
Investigative	0	18	26	55

**Table 7.3** Frequency that news you prepare is altered by another to give it a political slant

Question C4, %	Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
News	1	4	14	81
Investigative	0	5	21	74

of news journalists and 74% of investigative also reported that their copy was 'never' changed to give it a political slant (see table 7.3).

Australian journalists have considerable autonomy in determining the political balance of their work, and a relatively high degree of political autonomy compared to journalists in other countries. These proportions are similar to journalists in Germany and the UK, but suggest less autonomy than journalists in Sweden and considerably more than journalists in the USA and Italy.

Another way of reading these findings would be to ask whether the Australian journalists surveyed have been so inculcated with the values espoused by their news organisation that intervention is not necessary. 'We tell them to think before they start to write,' News Limited editor quipped.

#### *Political role*

Defining political issues and disputes is an important element of the news media's political role. The journalists' attitudes towards this were sought in questions that asked them to define their approach to political reporting, and what they considered the subjects most worthy of news coverage. On several of these questions, clear, statistically significant differences emerged between the two groups of Australian journalists surveyed, but on others the difference was muted.

There has been a great deal of public criticism of the way journalists approach the reporting of politics in Australia. This criticism centres on perceptions of a preoccupation with leadership, election timing, speculation, and statistics related without a context – evaluating and speculating on the theatre of politics, rather than addressing the substance of policy (Horne, 1994). The respondents were asked to address this by registering the strength of their agreement with the proposition, that political issues (disputes, strategies, blunders) were more news worthy than policy issues (F7) (see table 7.4).

The Australian journalists (29% news, 20% investigative) were more likely than journalists in several of the other countries to claim that the dramas of politics – disputes, strategies, blunders – were more worthy of coverage than policy issues. The Australian response may have been

**Table 7.4** Political issues deserve more news coverage than policy initiatives

Question F7, %	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
News	29	16	55
Investigative	20	22	58

**Table 7.5** Report main issue positions of political parties more or less as presented

Question D16, %	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
News	64	12	24
Investigative	49	8	44

influenced by the widespread public criticism of political reporting that was being made at the time that the survey was being completed.

The journalists' assessment of the role of the news media in presenting and influencing partisan conflicts is another indicator of their political role (D16) (see table 7.5). Respondents were asked whether they 'should make sure that they report the main issue positions of the political parties, more or less as each presents the issues' and whether journalists 'should try to define party conflict for the public by revealing where each party actually stands' (D18).

On the first question (D16), there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Sixty-four per cent of the investigative journalists disagreed with the proposition, rejecting its implicit passivity, with many favouring an active examination of the issues. The Australian investigative journalists (44%) were also more likely to disagree with this proposition than the journalists from any other country except Sweden, where 62% disagreed. A quarter of the Australian news journalists also disagreed with reporting issues as presented by major parties, a percentage similar to the journalists in the other countries surveyed.

On the related question, of journalists' responsibility to 'define party conflict for the public by revealing where each party actually stands' (D18) (see table 7.6), there was less difference between the respondents within Australia and internationally. Strong agreement ranged from 82% (Italian journalists) to 62% (Americans), with Australian news journalists at 70% and the investigative at 67%. The Australian journalists surveyed regarded this as a particularly important role in relation to party politics. The strong agreement by 70% of news journalists highlights that the journalists surveyed see their role as activist and evaluative.

**Table 7.6** Define party conflict by revealing where each party actually stands

Question D18, %	Strongly agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
News	70	26	2	4
Investigative	67	28	2	3

### *Political influence*

In a number of questions (B19, 21; D4, 15) reporters, producers and editors were asked their attitude towards the political influence they could exercise, and whether they considered this influence to be an important and legitimate function. This issue was approached in several ways, addressing both the perception of influence, and the desire to influence.

For both groups of Australian journalists, but particularly the investigative sample, influencing the public and policy formation is more important than it is for journalists in several of the other countries surveyed. Nearly a quarter of the investigative group, and 16% of the news journalists, considered having an influence as very important.

Both groups of Australian journalists considered that it was important that journalists be perceived to be neutral (D15) (see table 7.7). The investigative journalists (76%) tended to consider that the perception of neutrality was somewhat less important, than the news journalists (86%). The questions (B19, 21) about the importance of influence in their job satisfaction highlighted a statistically significant difference between the investigative and news journalists (see tables 7.8, 7.9). Both groups regarded influencing the public and public policy decisions as an important aspect of their work, but this aspect was significantly more important for the investigative group (B19). Having an influence on public policy decisions was also more important for the investigative journalists surveyed than the news journalists (B21). The investigative journalists (21%) regarded influencing outcomes through their work as more important than the news journalists (16%) who were somewhat more diffident, reluctant to be seen to be seeking to have an impact.

Again, influencing public policy decisions is significantly more important for Australian investigative journalists than it is for the news journalists surveyed. The Australian news journalists, however, considered this to be more important than the respondents in any of the other countries. These findings reinforce the assessment that political purpose is an important aspect of the work for Australian journalists. On the basis of these findings, and in relation to the groups of journalists

**Table 7.7** Journalists should ensure they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcome of party political conflict

Question D15, %	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
News	86	7	10
Investigative	76	15	8

**Table 7.8** Importance of influencing the public as an aspect of the job

Question B19, %	Very	Quite	Slight	Not
News	16	34	33	17
Investigative	23	54	20	3

**Table 7.9** Importance of influencing policy decisions as an aspect of the job

Question B21, %	Very	Quite	Slight	Not
News	16	38	29	18
Investigative	21	56	15	8

studied, the contest to the Fourth Estate ideal that questions the political purpose of journalists cannot be sustained.

The journalists surveyed expressed a firm commitment to freedom of speech and faith in the resilience of democracy to accommodate competing views (D4). When asked whether they had an 'obligation to down play the activities of political extremists whose ideas are a threat to democracy', both Australian groups explicitly rejected the proposition (see table 7.10). In this they demonstrate a different attitude to the European journalists.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Personal political bias*

The capacity to deliver political independence, beyond personal and party preferences, is a central contest to the Fourth Estate. This is highlighted by the ability of journalists to distinguish between personal

<sup>1</sup> It was interesting to note that the Italian and British journalists are most ready to accept this obligation – at the time of the survey the British government had stringent prohibitions on reporting the activities of the Northern Irish Sinn Fein party, and in Italy the Mafia was responding to anti-corruption investigations with a terrorist campaign of bombings and other attacks on public officials and anti-corruption campaigners. Such political extremism is virtually unknown in Australia which has managed to negotiate sweeping changes in social attitudes over the last decade largely by consensus.

**Table 7.10** Obligation to down-play views of extremists whose ideas threaten democracy

Question D4, %	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
News	22	17	61
Investigative	23	13	64

**Table 7.11** Importance of distortions from personal bias, as a limitation on the work

Question C14, %	Very	Quite	Slight	Not
News	1	4	34	61
Investigative	0	16	32	53

**Table 7.12** Journalists should not cover issues on which they have strong convictions

Question D10, %	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
News	19	20	60
Investigative	10	10	80

preferences and occupational responsibilities. To determine whether the respondents considered that personal preferences affected their independence they were asked whether 'distortions from my personal biases' limited their work (C14), and whether 'journalists should not cover issues on which they have strong convictions' (D10).

A tendency towards a statistically significant difference emerged on question C14 (see table 7.11), as 48% of the investigative journalists considered that distortions from personal biases may impose some limitations on their work, a view shared by only 39% of news journalists. There was a more significant difference between the investigative and news journalists on D10 (see table 7.12) with 80% investigative journalists adamant that personal convictions should not be a barrier to reporting an issue, while only 60% of news journalists felt they should be able to cover issues on which they had strong convictions.

The Australian news journalists (61%) were less likely to recognise distortions arising from their personal biases as a limitation on their work than either the investigative journalists (53%) or the journalists from any other country, except Britain and USA. This suggests that they either have a greater faith in their ability to maintain a separation between their personal beliefs and their work or that they do not recognise the extent to which their reporting is influenced by their own value structure.

*Summary*

The data shows that the political purpose and independence of the Fourth Estate is an important element of the occupational self-definition of these Australian journalists. Although there are some differences between the two groups of Australian journalists, these differences do not undermine their commitment to a political purpose in their work. The desire to have an impact is a clear measure of this, as is their perceived role within party political disputes. There is also ample evidence to show that these Australian journalists pursue their work with political independence.

Although the media organisations lack political independence and their political purpose is questionable, the journalists surveyed demonstrate both qualities in abundance. Therefore this contest to the validity of the Fourth Estate cannot be sustained from the perspective of the Australian journalists surveyed.

**Commercial Priorities**

As has been argued, the commercial nature of the news media raises questions about any claims to be considered the Fourth Estate. The capacity of the news media to generate substantial profits helps to ensure its independence, survival and responsiveness to the public, but the requirement to maximise profits also threatens the ability of the news media to exercise authority as a political institution. There is at best a tension, and at worst an impediment, between the commercial and public interest goals of the politically engaged news media. The question that arises when the two goals conflict is which priority is most important: maximising profit or fulfilling the Fourth Estate obligations, as an independent agency within a representative democracy. In the dance of the giants that characterises the corporate news media in the late twentieth century, maximising turnover, profits and scale is the primary obligation and itself the key to political influence.

The challenges presented by the galloping commercialism of the industry revolve around the need to distinguish between corporate self-interest and the public interest – and at times national interest. Despite claims by senior media executives, such as News Limited's Ken Cowley, that the interests of the company are the same as the interests of the journalists and the public, this is demonstrably not the case, as editors may claim in candid moments, 'The interests of the journalists on the paper are not the same as the interests of the company'.

British communications scholar Nicholas Garnham has argued compellingly that there is a fundamental conflict between the economic and the political, between the citizen and the consumer, that tends to be obscured in discussions about press freedom and the Fourth Estate.

The need to generate substantial market scale; the tendency towards monopoly; distortions produced by dependence on advertising; likelihood of self-censorship and the potential for political co-option raise serious challenges to the ability of the media to fulfil the Fourth Estate function.

The responses of the Australian journalists to many of these challenges is unequivocal: they express a strong desire to assert editorial autonomy and resist the pressure of commercial priorities. This desire may be compromised, but the data shows that journalists are able to insulate themselves to some extent from the commercial pressures that impede realisation of the Fourth Estate ideals. In the data a strong sense emerges that the respondents regard journalists as the responsible defenders of Fourth Estate obligations. It is interesting to note that on the basis of correlations no significant differences in attitudes emerge between the journalists surveyed who are employed by public or private sector, broadcasting or print, news organisations.

To address the contest to the Fourth Estate presented by the news media's commercial objectives, I draw on the responses to three sets of questions: those relating to the pressures under which journalists work; the requirement to maximise audiences; and the interrelationship between the commercial and public interest demands of major media organisations. After examining these questions, the general attitudes of the respondents towards business, capitalism and government are presented.

The need to maximise audiences is central to the commercial success of the news media. In the newspaper industry the tendency towards monopoly is well established in Australia. This is reinforced by the structure of ownership of the news media, competition from radio and television and the requirements of the advertising industry, which underwrites the costs of news production. Prominent television journalist Jana Wendt has described the mix of journalism and commercialism as a 'potent cocktail' and the former editor-in-chief of the *Australian* Paul Kelly has stated that demands for commercial success are having a negative impact on quality journalism (Kelly, 1994).

#### *Audience pressures*

The Australian journalists surveyed in 1992 were very conscious of the need to meet the demands of the audience and described attempts to capture audience attention as a significant pressure (C15). The need to capture the attention of the audience rated as the fourth most important impediment for the news journalists, after the pressures of space, daily deadlines, and limited research resources (C5–14). The investigative

**Table 7.13** Very important and quite important limitations and pressures on ability to do the job

Questions C5–15, %	News	Investigative
Insufficient space or time	70	61
Pressure of daily deadlines	61	50
Limited research resources	53	61
Pressure from senior editors	29	15
Lack of government documents	44	77
Limited access to public figures	41	59
Limited access to private figures	45	69
My incomplete knowledge	37	55
Pressure from management	14	13
Personal biases	5	16
Need to capture audience attention	46	42

journalists regarded the pressures that arose from attempting to engage the audience as less important (C15). (See table 7.13.)

Commercial decisions determine how many resources will be allocated to research and the news gathering process, just as commercial decisions will influence the proportion of space and time devoted to news and the amount available for advertising. The journalists surveyed considered that these factors placed significant pressures on their work. These economic realities of the industry can present impediments for journalists.

It is interesting to note that both groups of Australian journalists, and the respondents from each of the other countries, considered that the pressure arising from the need to capture audience attention was greater than the pressure from editors and management. This may be interpreted in a number of different ways: that journalists are always aware of the commercial imperative of appealing to the public and consciously seek to address it; that journalists accept a particular obligation to the public that they attempt to realise despite economic impediments; that journalists receive more limited feedback from the public and therefore find the obligations of appealing to the audience more onerous than the expectations of editors and managers from whom they receive more direct feedback.

#### *Audience appeal*

The importance of maximising audiences is clear. The Australian news journalists (34%) indicated that their 'copy was changed by someone else in the newsroom to increase its audience appeal', somewhat more

frequently than the European journalists. The percentage of Australian journalists whose copy was never changed (C1) was comparable to the journalists in other countries who report much greater autonomy (see table 7.14). The investigative journalists (42%) reported more experience of having their copy changed to increase its audience appeal, possibly because the articles and programs that they produce are generally longer, more complex and more likely to be subjected to intense pre-publication scrutiny. There is, however, no statistically significant difference between the two groups.

This data suggests that the Australian journalists consider that the demands of their audiences limit their autonomy. This confirms both the anecdotal and theoretical observation that commercial considerations shape what journalism is produced – which stories are selected, which sources are legitimised, and that notions of audience are limited.

#### *Audience responsibility*

That copy is altered to increase audience appeal is at odds with the definition by the journalists of the aim of their work. When asked whether their journalism was designed to inform an audience or attract its attention (F30) (see table 7.15), the respondents again preferred an idealised representation of their work.

The gap between the ideal and the reality is clearest for the Australian investigative journalists who regard their principal responsibility as to inform (56%), but report higher levels of interference with their copy to increase its audience appeal (42%).

**Table 7.14** Frequency of copy changed by another person in the newsroom to increase its audience appeal

Question C1, %	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
News	7	27	39	27
Investigative	5	37	42	16

**Table 7.15** Journalism aims to inform an audience or capture its attention

Question F30, %	Attention	Unsure	Inform
News	21	21	58
Investigative	11	32	56

*Values*

The values of the journalists towards business, government and capitalism can, to some extent, be gleaned by analysing responses to a series of questions about the interrelationship between business, public policy and politics (F2-4). These responses reveal a somewhat adversarial relationship with business.

The Australian journalists are likely to adopt critical attitudes in response to questions, about whether economic growth should take precedence (F2), whether the problems of the Third World are the result of exploitation (F3) and whether governments should play a bigger role in income support (F4). There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups of Australian respondents.

The investigative journalists were more adamant that economic growth should not override environmental protection (F2) – none indicated that economic growth should take precedence if there were a conflict between growth and environment (see table 7.16).

Australian journalists were more diffident than the Europeans about blaming the industrialised world for the problems of the Third World (F3). While the largest proportion of Australian news (40%) and investigative (46%) journalists agreed with this proposition, they were noticeably less strident in this assessment than the European respondents (see table 7.17).

Both groups of Australian respondents agreed to increased welfare (F4) – news 56%, investigative 53% – less strongly than the European respondents. An explanation may lie in the strongly entrenched welfare states in the European countries surveyed, or it may reflect the Australian journalists' relative satisfaction with the success that their government has had in targeting income support systems (see table 7.18).

**Table 7.16** Environment or economic growth should take precedence when in conflict

Question F2, %	Economic growth	Neither	Environment
News	10	32	59
Investigative	0	29	71

**Table 7.17** Third World problems caused by exploitation by industrialised western nations

Question F3, %	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
News	46	30	24
Investigative	40	34	26

**Table 7.18** Government should do more to provide good jobs and incomes for economically disadvantaged people

Question F4, %	Agree	Unsure	Disagree
News	56	26	17
Investigative	53	39	8

### *Summary*

This data shows that the journalists are critical of the pressures and demands of the commercialism of the news media. They identify a conflict between the responsibilities of the Fourth Estate and the requirements of commercial success. Despite this critical stand and the attempts by the journalists surveyed to demonstrate independence from the commercial and economic demands of the news media in practice, they succumb to most of these demands. As a result, the contest to the Fourth Estate ideal presented by the news media's commercial priorities diminishes the ability of journalists to defend the Fourth Estate ideal. These findings reinforce the idealised nature of the Fourth Estate and highlights that commercial priorities actively intrude on it.

### **Understanding of Public Opinion**

The role that the press could play to provide a forum for public opinion was one of the strongest early rationales of the Fourth Estate. The importance of this role could not be underestimated in a political environment with limited suffrage, but by the end of the nineteenth century in Britain, the capacity of the press to determine and represent public opinion was already under attack.

In the late twentieth century, the opinions of members of the public are expressed almost ad nauseam; developments in opinion polling have made public attitudes on every conceivable subject available to those who wish to know; opinion pages have proliferated and opened up.

As was argued in chapter 5, an understanding of public opinion is essential to the success of media organisations. The level of understanding necessary for such success may not necessarily equate, however, with the level necessary for the news media to determine and represent public opinion, one element of its Fourth Estate obligations. While it is possible to assess success in the market by measuring audience size, ratings and circulation figures, this procedure only answers which product people choose from the available choices. Questions – whether

the available range is sufficient and whether the news media adequately provides the information citizens need, to make their electoral, economic and lifestyle choices – remain.

In this context the responsiveness of the media to the real information needs of the public needs to be examined. That this is an issue can be seen in the continually declining real circulations of newspapers and the critical public attitudes towards the news media more generally.

The role the media can play in shaping public opinion is one of its greatest powers – the aphorism that the media may not tell us what to think, but what to think about, remains apt. Its ability to do this without the taint of self-interest remains central in testing the continued validity of the news media as the Fourth Estate. It begs the questions: How does the media know public opinion? How does it decide which voices, issues and perspectives to amplify?

The capacity of reporters, editors and producers to understand public opinion must also be tested. Like the organisations that employ them, journalists cut adrift from the preoccupations of public opinion will fail. Over the last two decades a critique of journalism that suggests that journalists are detached from the real information needs and pre-occupations of their audiences has gained momentum. Glib assumptions that the interests of journalists and the news media coincide with the interests of the public need to be tested. The editor of a major regional US newspaper articulated this concern in 1975:

Readers look at newspapers , and what they feel in their gut is this: This has nothing to do with me. This newspaper is not in touch with life. It is in touch only with journalism and journalists. Nothing in it has been validated by anything I have seen or observed in my own life. I do not believe it. They express this feeling in angry letters to the editor in which they cannot articulate what they feel. (cited in Merrill, 1977: 18)

In the Media and Democracy survey respondents were asked how they discerned public opinion (C24–32) and which sources of information provided them with the best guide. They were also asked how they regarded the public (F8), whether they felt that their attitudes and those of the public were similar (D8). The agenda-setting role of the media was also explored in a question about the relationship between journalists and sources (F31) and in a series of questions about the influence of a range of sources on decisions about which stories to pursue most actively (B2–5).

#### *Discerning public opinion*

The journalists were asked to indicate how good a range of agencies were at providing them with an expression of public opinion. Responses to the question provide a good insight into the mechanisms

used by journalists to assess and test public opinion. The questions (C24–32) asked how good various mechanisms are as an expression of public opinion, including: letters to the editor, demonstrations, election results, editorials, parliamentary debate, poll results, judgement of well informed people, news reports, and pressure group activity.

Overwhelmingly the best indicator was considered election results; after election results respondents from each country regarded the informal means of distilling the judgements of well-informed people as a better indicator of public opinion than poll results. The content of the news media – letters to the editor, editorials, news reports – were considered by few respondents to be an excellent indicator. (See table 7.19.)

While the journalists from every country regarded election results as the best indicator of public opinion, American, German and British journalists were more likely to regard poll results as an excellent indicator of public opinion than Australian news (6%) and investigative (3%) journalists. More investigative journalists considered the judgement of well-informed people a better guide to public opinion than opinion polls (C30), which were considered not much better than the other sources.

Given the major role played by Australian news organisations in the creation of the public opinion polling industry in Australia, the attitudes of those surveyed towards the reliability of polls is striking. The Australian journalists considered that poll results (6%) were not much better than news reports (7%), parliamentary debate (12%), demonstrations (11%) or pressure group activity (4%). More investigative journalists considered the judgement of well-informed people (8%) a better guide to public opinion than opinion polls (3%).

Australian news journalists (21%) considered letters to the editor one of the best indicators of public opinion (C24). This view was not shared

**Table 7.19** Excellent mechanisms for expressing public opinion

Questions C24–32, %	News	Investigative
Letters to the editor	21	3
Demonstrations	11	3
Election results	40	39
Editorials	1	0
Parliamentary debate	2	3
Poll results	6	3
Judgment of well-informed people	7	8
News report	7	3
Pressure group activity	4	6

by the investigative respondents (3%) and a statistically significant difference between the two groups emerged. All the journalists surveyed regarded news reports as one of the better indicators of public opinion, but editorials ranked last or near to last for all the journalists. The reluctance of respondents to identify other excellent mechanisms for judging public opinion begs a question: how are decisions made about what to report that makes news reports such a good indicator?

The higher rank of news reports than editorials is an important measure of journalists' assessment of the news media's claim to Fourth Estate status. By elevating news reports as a measure of public opinion, the respondents suggest that journalists are skilled at measuring public opinion. By downgrading editorials, however, they suggest that the official voice of news organisations is detached from public opinion.

#### *Similarity of views*

The debate about whether journalists are out of touch with public opinion was addressed by asking (D8) whether journalists should 'not promote ideas and values that have been rejected by the public' and whether 'journalists and the public have similar attitudes on most issues'.

Few investigative journalists (13%) felt that journalists and the public share similar attitudes (F8) (see table 7.20). This sense of difference is one of the characteristics of the investigative journalists, who do not consider themselves as having a great deal in common with the public. They clearly regard themselves as members of an elite whose attitudes may be quite opposed to those of the public. To a lesser extent, this attitude is also shared by the larger group of Australian news journalists.

Willingness to accept a degree of insularity is also demonstrated in the responses to the question whether journalists should continue to promote ideas that have been rejected by the public (D8) (see table 7.21). Again the two groups of Australian respondents are reluctant to be tied to public opinion and are willing to promote ideas that have been publicly rejected.

A statistically significant difference emerged between the two Australian groups in response to the question (D8) that asked whether

**Table 7.20** Journalists and the public have similar attitudes on most issues

Question F8, %	Agree	Neither	Disagree
News	18	34	49
Investigative	13	31	55

**Table 7.21** Journalists should not promote ideas rejected by public

Question D8, %	Agree	Neither	Disagree
News	12	16	72
Investigative	5	5	90

journalists should not promote ideas that have been rejected by the public. More investigative journalists (90%) disagreed with the proposition than the news journalists (72%). Despite the differences between the two groups of Australian respondents, however, few journalists in any of the countries surveyed felt under any obligation to stop reporting ideas and values that had been widely rejected by the public.

This reinforces the attitude expressed earlier, and establishes that the journalists surveyed do not see themselves as being beholden to public attitudes. While this may equip them with admirable independence of mind, it also reduces the credibility of claims to understand public attitudes and to defend their work by claiming to act in the public interest. The role of the news media as a forum for public opinion is also diminished by the untroubled insularity of journalists.

### *Agenda-setting*

The decisions about which articles to write and which programs to make are central to consideration of journalists' ability to understand, evaluate and reflect public opinion. It is in this agenda-setting role that journalists and the news media are seen to exercise considerable influence. In the myriad decisions taken every day, about what to cover and how, journalists exercise considerable influence in shaping public opinion. It is at this point that it is possible that the preoccupations and interests of media workers may distort the information that is made available to the public.

In an attempt to assess the influences in the process of news selection the respondents were asked to rank the importance of other media organisations in decision-making processes (B2-5). Just as journalists are happy to acknowledge their difference with the public, the news media feeds off what is published and broadcast elsewhere. These questions were designed to assess the impact the media has on shaping news agendas. The respondents were asked to consider the importance of wire services, leading national media, colleagues and competitors in determining what news was covered. (See table 7.22.)

Colleagues are consistently the most significant source of guidance for the journalists surveyed. This finding demonstrates how the insularity of journalists is reinforced. This then adds to the perception that

**Table 7.22** Very important sources of guidance in decisions about what news to cover and what issues to highlight

Questions B2-5, %	Wire services	National media	Colleagues	Competitors
News	7	17	18	8
Investigative	6	22	23	9

**Table 7.23** Agenda-setting determined by journalists or officials

Question F31, %	Journalists	Unsure	Officials
News	62	17	22
Investigative	46	32	22

journalists are members of an elite whose primary reference point is other journalists.

Australian journalists are least influenced by news services, as there is only one major wire service, Australian Associated Press, which is a back-up service for the major news outlets.

A statistically significant difference between the investigative and news journalists emerged on the importance of national media (B3). The investigative journalists (22%) were significantly more likely to regard the leading national media as an important source for determining which stories to pursue than the news journalists (17%).

The Australian journalists were divided, to a statistically significant extent, on the question that asked them to evaluate who held the greatest power in determining the editorial priorities of the news media (F31). Using the 7-point scale they were asked whether journalists or public officials had the most influence in determining the news agenda for their organisation. The responses indicated that the investigative journalists were less confident about their role, with nearly a third – more than in any other country – expressing uncertainty. The news journalists (62%) were much more confident that they and not public officials set the agenda. (See table 7.23.)

Clear differences emerge between the respondents on the extent of news management by public officials. The Australian investigative journalists shared a more cautious view about their autonomy.

### *Summary*

The results presented in this section highlight the limits on news gatherers' ability to know, understand and represent public opinion.

The results also suggest that the claims to professional autonomy by many of the journalists surveyed have not been accompanied by efforts to enhance responsiveness to the public. Indeed the process of communicating with the public was considered by many of the respondents as an onerous aspect of their work. Conversely many of the journalists surveyed demonstrated that other news media organisations and journalists had a major impact in their understanding of public opinion and their decisions about what to report and how.

From these results, it is possible to argue that the assertion of professional autonomy by journalists has limited their responsiveness to the public and reduced their capacity to understand public opinion. This was clearly demonstrated in the data that showed that the respondents considered news reports to be a better indicator of public opinion than polls or other external indicators, and the importance of other news organisations and journalists in decisions about news coverage. The journalists were also quite unapologetic about differences between their views and those of the public.

These results demonstrate the success that the news media and journalists have had at developing their own voice. This begs the question of the role of journalists as the custodians of the Fourth Estate if they are so dismissive of public opinion. These results suggest that the challenge to the Fourth Estate, in terms of journalists' willingness to reflect public opinion, should be sustained.

### Diversity

That there would be a plethora of diverse publications and a range of opinions expressed through the press was one of the clearest early assumptions that informed widespread recognition of the press as the Fourth Estate. This presumption has been almost continually challenged since the later part of the nineteenth century. Commercialisation of the press was a precursor to the development of a mass media that sought to maximise audiences. That this was best achieved by not alienating either any sector of the public or potential advertisers helped to foster bland reportage, with most opinions catered for and few alienated.

With the globalisation and increasing concentration of ownership in the late twentieth century, the commercialisation of the news media has gained new momentum. There is widespread concern that the media diversity envisaged as part of the Fourth Estate ideal has been reduced. In Australia, while there are numerous media outlets, the most significant are owned by a few companies.

The question remains therefore, whether those working in the news media are able to bring sufficient diversity to the content that

they produce to counter the reduction in diversity caused by globalisation and concentration of ownership. It has been argued by some, and to some extent substantiated by the results in the public opinion section above, that journalists and editors have become preoccupied with their own interests. While this may be dressed up as public interest, it is unlikely to adequately expand the range of news and views presented through the news media.

To evaluate the commitment of the journalists surveyed to media diversity I consider attitudes towards the public; tolerance of news systems that favour neutrality or advocacy; judgements in a series of hypothetical news situations; and the assessment of the respondents of the adequacy of the coverage of a range of interest groups.

### *Limitations*

Many news organisations have attempted to achieve diversity by presenting a range of views within the one paper or program. This effort is limited by the space and time available, a pressure the journalists found particularly intense. The journalists surveyed found the limits imposed on them by the size of the 'news hole' to be quite onerous (C5–15). An unpredictable amount of space determined by advertising seriously inhibits the ability to present a wide range of competing views. This would suggest that the capacity to produce editorial content that is truly reflective of diverse opinions and interests is limited.

The extent to which one outlet can accommodate a range of views without jeopardising audience support is a finely judged editorial and commercial decision. The journalists surveyed were asked to comment on this issue by indicating whether they preferred a media system in which each outlet strove for impartiality and balance within its news list, or a media system in which outlets were able to advocate particular positions with balance being provided across the entire media system. Both groups of Australian journalists were strongly committed to an impartial news system (D14). A statistically significant difference between the investigative and news journalists emerged, suggesting that the investigative journalists would be more comfortable with a news system that encouraged advocacy.

This effectively tested the commitment to diversity. It is important because it reveals that the majority are extremely cautious about a media system that would privilege diversity – they find the impartial system with which they are most familiar quite congenial. This result suggests that most of the journalists surveyed have accepted with equanimity the consequences of commercialisation, even to the extent that it reduces news media diversity and therefore undermines an element of the Fourth Estate ideal.

*Editorial judgements*

Whether journalists and editors are better able to achieve diversity in the articles and programs they produce as a consequence of a commitment to professionalism is an issue central to this contest. It has been argued that professionalism may encourage journalists, producers and editors to produce media content that is 'credible, reliable and capable of presenting a deeper multi-faceted representation of the truth' (Henningham, 1990: 154). On the other hand, professionalism may lead to 'inward looking, self-serving and innately conservative' behaviour (Boreham et al., 1976). Thomas Patterson (1992) has argued that the commitment to professional values in the selection of news – timeliness, proximity, notoriety, and significance – has worked against diversity. To some extent this can be tested by examining the responses to a series of hypothetical questions included in the Media and Democracy survey. In these questions the respondents were asked to assess four scenarios for newsworthiness and to nominate how they would follow up and present the story, by choosing headlines and pictures (G1–12).

It was anticipated that there would be considerable bunching in the responses to these scenarios, and this proved to be the case. There was relatively little difference in the news judgements of the two groups of Australian journalists, suggesting that editorial decisions are shaped by similar factors. Only two statistically significant differences emerged between the Australian news and investigative groups on one question of newsworthiness and suitable people to interview in a follow-up report (G7–9).

The limited statistically significant differences between the two groups of Australian respondents in their evaluation of the newsworthiness of hypothetical situations shows the uniformity of news judgements among the two groups of Australian respondents. This partially explains the perception that there is a lack of diversity in the content of the Australian news media, and this may be primarily due to journalists, producers and editors, rather than media owners.

The attitudes of the respondents towards news diversity can also be gauged from their responses to a series of nineteen questions (G15–34) that asked 'how fully' the 'views of the following groups are represented in your news organisation's coverage of politics and public affairs'. Those listed were: consumer groups; working people, Liberal-National Party; major advertisers; the rich; intellectuals; business; ALP; unions; religious institutions; environmental groups; military; public servants; police; Aborigines; ethnic minorities; young people; the poor; women; Australian Democrats.

There was general agreement between the two groups of Australian

respondents about this list. Statistically significant differences emerged only in relation to the coverage of the rich and unions. The investigative journalists felt that the views of the rich were reported more adequately than did the news journalists, whereas the investigative journalists felt that unions were less fully represented than did the news journalists.

The hierarchy of representation that can be distilled from the responses to these questions reveals that those associated with political and economic elites, and well-established interest groups, were most likely to be fully represented in the news media. Minorities and the relatively less powerful were unlikely to be reported as fully, in the assessment of the Australian journalists surveyed. The groups that they considered to be least represented were major advertisers; environmental groups; the military; religious institutions; young people; the poor and the Australian Democrats.

### *Diversity of journalists*

The information gathered in the survey reveals that the diversity of the journalists themselves in terms of their socioeconomic backgrounds is more limited than the diversity of the community as a whole. The respondents were better paid and educated; more likely to come from middle-class households; to be Australian born and have English as their first language. These backgrounds may suggest that the journalists surveyed would be less familiar with the range of views, opinions and experiences of the broader public. This may limit their world view and the range of news and views that they are likely to recognise and present. The narrower range of backgrounds of the journalists may, however, be offset by their awareness of interest groups and acknowledgment that their opinions and attitudes may be different to the general public.

### *Summary*

The expectation implicit in the Fourth Estate ideal, that the news media will provide a full and diverse range of information and views, is therefore challenged by journalists' attitudes towards diversity. The respondents revealed a relatively limited range of news choices, with their decisions being shaped more by the requirements of their professional values than by an abstract commitment to diversity. There is little evidence to suggest that the Australian journalists surveyed would make news choices informed by a desire to encourage diversity in the news media. This is reinforced by the data which highlighted the importance of colleagues and other news organisations in the news

decision-making process. These results therefore, tend to uphold the contest to the validity of the Fourth Estate raised by the reduction in diversity. Neither the journalists surveyed nor the corporate news media seem to value the importance of diversity highly.

### **Accountability**

The institutions that emerged during two centuries ago to check the power exercised by the state included mechanisms to ensure that they themselves remained accountable. These mechanisms were generally linked to the electoral process, and helped to perpetuate citizen sovereignty. As has been argued, the news media, as the only institution whose success is measured principally by the commercial market, lacked formal accountability mechanisms. Its limited accountability has fostered one of the fundamental challenges to the contemporary relevance of the Fourth Estate.

To some extent the media organisations themselves recognised this challenge and in Australia, as in most other western countries, the industry has established self-regulatory organisations. These agencies were generally only established following political threats or alarming declines in public confidence.

Nonetheless, limited accountability remains a challenge to the news media's capacity to fulfil the ideals of the Fourth Estate. There is conflict between the ideal's competing requirements of independence from the state and accountability adequate to guarantee public confidence. Media organisations in most western countries have exploited this conflict to ensure that they are not subject to legislative oversight. Weak and ineffective self-regulatory mechanisms, however, also weaken claims to Fourth Estate status.

In Australia the newspaper companies reluctantly established a Press Council in 1976, and the broadcasting industry only adopted codes of practice and conduct in the early 1990s. Although Australian journalists have been subject to ethical codes enforced by self-regulation since 1949, this accountability mechanism has rarely been regarded as much more than window dressing.

The journalists surveyed were asked a series of questions about ethical standards and accountability in an attempt to gauge how seriously they considered this issue. The journalists' views on public interest and how well journalists are able to represent it, and their moral responsibility for decisions they have advocated, are also considered in an attempt to evaluate the willingness of the journalists to accept accountability. Before examining these aspects, journalists' assessments of the quality and accountability of the media are considered. The critical

assessment of the job that the media is doing by a substantial proportion of the Australian respondents tends to support the argument that there is a need, in the view of the journalists surveyed, for greater public accountability.

#### *Rating the media*

Public opinion polls show that the media is not highly regarded as a political institution. The journalists were therefore also asked to assess overall the 'job the media is doing reporting news of politics and current affairs'. Most of the Australian respondents felt that the media was doing a good or fair job (B14). More than half of the investigative journalists, however, ranked the performance of the news media as only fair (see table 7.24). This was the harshest assessment by any national group of respondents, except the Italians who were overwhelmingly critical. The difference between the two groups of Australian respondents was anticipated from the generally critical demeanour of the investigative group, but the extent of the difference also proved to be statistically significant.

#### *Journalists' standing*

A series of questions (C16–23) asked the respondents to rank some possible reasons for the low public esteem of journalists in Australia. A varied but clear trend emerged. The news journalists considered poor training of journalists, sensationalist and inaccurate reporting as the three most important reasons. The investigative journalists concurred on the reasons, but ranked sensationalist and inaccurate reporting ahead of poor training. Both groups also agreed on the three least significant factors: adversarial style of journalism, a lack of public knowledge of ethical codes and journalists' reluctance to reveal their sources. (See table 7.25.)

A statistically significant difference between the two groups emerged on only one question (C23) – the power of media companies. Despite their critical assessment of the media's performance, the investigative

**Table 7.24** Rate national media reporting of politics, news and current affairs

Question B14, %	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
News	11	55	29	5
Investigative	3	40	58	0

**Table 7.25** Very important factors in the low public perception of Australian journalists

C16–23, % ranking very important	News	Investigative
Unwillingness to reveal sources	16	10
Sensationalist reporting	64	74
Inaccurate reporting	62	72
Poor training of journalists	67	41
Journalists with preconceived ideas	31	36
Adversarial style	29	23
Lack of public knowledge of ethical codes	23	15
Power of media companies	37	26

journalists were less likely than the news reporters to consider the 'power of media companies' as an important factor in the low public regard for journalists. Overall then, the journalists did not consider that their own limited accountability was an important factor in the low public regard.

#### *Public interest*

The respondents' readiness to down play the importance of accountability in shaping public attitudes was reiterated by their response to questions asking them to consider the importance of confidentiality and legal redress. In a series of questions (D1–6) that asked about the rights and responsibilities of journalists, respondents were asked to indicate on the 7-point scale their strength of agreement or disagreement with the propositions that:

- journalists should have full access to any government document not restricted by national security or personal privacy;
- sources promised confidentiality should be able to sue for breach of promise if the journalist breaks the promise;
- journalists should be required to reveal confidential sources in court;
- courts should make it reasonably easy for public officials to win libel suits;
- private citizens who are falsely criticised by the media should have a legal right to reply.

The journalists from each group and country overwhelmingly agreed that they should have immediate and full access to government documents. Both Australian groups and the international respondents agreed that a journalist who breaks a promise of confidentiality should be vulnerable to legal action for breach of promise. The investigative

**Table 7.26** Attitudes towards journalists' rights and responsibilities

Questions D1–3, 5, 6 % agreeing	News	Investigative
Full access to government information	89	84
Sue if confidentiality breached	75	58
Reveal confidential sources to court	13	5
Easy to win libel suits for sloppy reporting	43	41
Legal right to reply for criticised public	76	72

journalists and the respondents from USA were, however, less certain about this potentially punitive measure. The Australian and American journalists were also more reluctant than the European journalists to accept a court direction to reveal a confidential source. Neither group of Australian journalists was keen to make the possibility of successful libel actions any easier, even if the public official implicated had been harmed by careless reporting. (See table 7.26.)

The disparity between the two groups of Australian journalists was clearest in their responses to whether private citizens who were falsely criticised in the media should have a legal right of reply. The investigative journalists (72%) were less willing to grant this right of reply than the news journalists (76%), with a statistically significant difference between the two groups.

Australian journalists were less adamant about demanding unfettered access to government documents (D1) than the journalists in other countries. They are more strongly opposed to an extension of legal authority, but more willing to consider a public right of reply. These differences can probably be accounted for by the intensity of the arguments in Australia over the last decade about defamation law reform. Most Australian journalists surveyed fervently believe that defamation and contempt laws act as a major impediment to freedom of speech and investigative journalism (E3, 10), and therefore to the capacity of journalists to fulfil Fourth Estate obligations. This makes them reluctant to consider any extension of legal powers to enhance accountability. The relatively greater willingness of the Australian journalists to accept a mandatory public right of reply suggests that they are not opposed to specific mechanisms designed to increase accountability and redress inaccuracy and sensationalism.

### *Morality*

Accountability cannot be confined to legal devices or structural mechanisms designed to provide redress for particularly egregious wrongs. Such regulatory mechanisms, although important, can be seen to be

**Table 7.27** Moral responsibility for policy failure as a consequence of editorial campaign

G35, %	News	Investigative
Morally responsible should acknowledge	67	58
Morally responsible should not acknowledge	0	0
Not responsible	32	42

little more than window dressing, especially if rarely implemented. If accountability is to be deeply embedded in occupational practice, moral responsibility for the consequences of editorial decisions and judgements must be accepted. In an attempt to evaluate the moral responsibility the respondents accepted for their work, they were asked to imagine a case in which a local paper lobbied for change which when implemented proved ineffective (G35).

Those journalists were asked whether editorial writers: were morally responsible for the failure and should acknowledge this; were morally responsible, but should not acknowledge it; or were not morally responsible.

The importance of accepting moral responsibility for the consequences of editorial decisions was accepted by most of the Australian journalists surveyed (see table 7.27). But the Australian respondents, particularly the investigative groups, were noticeably more reluctant to accept this moral responsibility than the German, Italian and American journalists. It is interesting to note that almost none of the respondents favoured the second option, conceding moral responsibility but failing to acknowledge it.

The reluctance of a substantial proportion of the journalists surveyed to accept moral responsibility reveals their limited personal accountability for the consequences of their work. A rationalisation of this may be found in the view expressed by Altschull (1984) that as the media cannot be responsible for change, it cannot be expected to accept responsibility for outcomes.

As has been shown, however, the investigative journalists surveyed are keen to have an impact on the public and on public policy formation. The gap between the aspiration and readiness to accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions suggests that the journalists surveyed have not sufficiently developed notions of public accountability to be entrusted with representing the public interest. This disparity is particularly marked for the investigative journalists. Although the investigative journalists have a clear sense of professional values, they are reluctant to be held accountable to the public, government officials or media organisations.

*Summary*

The data shows that the journalists surveyed are reluctant to accept accountability mechanisms that may intrude on their professional judgement and the exercise of their duties. Although the journalists surveyed conceded that public accountability contributed to low public regard of them and the news media, they were reluctant to accept any mechanisms (except a legal right to reply) that may reduce their autonomy. These results suggest that the limited accountability of both groups of journalists reduces their claim to represent the public interest as is implicit in the Fourth Estate ideal.

**Conclusion**

The contests to the validity and viability of the Fourth Estate have now been examined on the basis of the data gathered from the respondents to the Media and Democracy survey. These results reveal that in relation to three of the five contests to the validity of the Fourth Estate – understanding of public opinion, diversity, accountability – journalists are flawed in their capacity to defend the ideal. In relation to the other two contests – political purpose and independence and commercial priorities – the journalists surveyed are better able to accept responsibility for the ideal. In relation to commercial priorities, the results suggest that although the aspirations of the journalists surveyed were high, their ability to realise these objectives was limited.

The information gathered from the questions asked in this survey highlights the idealised nature of the Fourth Estate. It remains, however, a resilient ideal for the journalists surveyed. The results of this survey suggest that although the journalists studied may not be perfect in their capacity to defend, and accept responsibility for the Fourth Estate, they are better placed than the corporate news media to do so.

## CHAPTER 8

### *From Reporting to Investigating*

'News is a statement of fact. Once anything speculative or in the nature of comment creeps in, diverging from the relation to strict fact it ceases to be news.'

*Fairfax centenary publication, 1931*

'The reporter realises quite early in his career that he cannot create news just by being a reporter. Certainly, there is a field for the astute reporter to dig a little deeper, to add new facts to those with which he began, to look at new angles to enrich his original information. But he begins with facts, which he did not originate and over which he has no control.'

*Graham Perkin, 1965*

Australian journalism has changed significantly in the last fifty years, to become much less constrained. It is no longer restricted to reporting verbatim the public pronouncements of prominent men. It has become more investigative and more independent of politicians and owners, more able to pursue Fourth Estate ideals. This is evident in the attitudes of journalists, as has been shown, but can also be seen in the types of stories pursued and the methods used. In this chapter I trace the process by which Australian journalists have become more expansive in their editorial expectations, in a transition which can be characterised as a move from reporting to investigating.

In this chapter I identify key individuals, events and institutions as signposts on the road of transition. The evolving commitment to pursuing Fourth Estate ideals is examined by analysing some major breakthroughs in the form and content of Australian journalism since the late 1950s. It is argued that this transition occurred in a series of steps marked by publication of *Nation*, the *Australian* and *Australian Financial Review* in the 1960s; innovation in television led by *Four Corners* and *This Day Tonight*; and depended on the influence and leadership of key individuals, including Graham Perkin.

For much of its history a great deal of Australian journalism has been 'by and for the privileged classes' (Gaylard and Hart, 1992: 4). The political conservatism of the major newspapers has been well documented and is demonstrated not only by the overwhelming preference

for coalition governments in pre-election editorials, but by the close alliances between newspaper proprietors and politicians.

Although journalists and editors have long aspired to professionalism in Australia this has had relatively little impact on the journalism they have produced – beyond entrenching norms of news selection. The history of Australian journalism this century is overwhelmingly shaped by the complex set of negotiations and allegiances between employees and the owners of the major news organisations. The loyalty to particular proprietors has been strong and has shaped both the style and occupational expectations of many. The dominance of several major proprietors relegated journalists to a role as ‘technicians’. The power relations were encapsulated in the description of the role of senior managers in the Fairfax centenary publication:

There sits one man, and in his hands are gathered up, taut and responsive to his every touch, the strings that operate every part of the complex whole. A word from him, the action springs that may reach the uttermost ends of the earth. He is the General Manager – the supreme executive authority over every aspect of the paper’s activities, literary, mechanical, advertising and all else; and behind him, representing the family that owns the paper, is the Managing Director – ultimate authority for every vital decision on all matters whatsoever affecting the policy, contents and conduct of the HERALD. (Souter, 1981: 153, 625)

Throughout this century and particularly in the years after the Second World War, the Australian media and political worlds were shaped to a large extent by several dominant personalities, including Sir Frank Packer, Sir Warwick Fairfax, Sir Keith Murdoch, Rupert Henderson, Ezra Norton, Brian Penton among others. In these environments the norms of good reporting were set and maintained from the top of the organisational hierarchy. Proprietors had a direct impact on the style and content of the news and comment pages, and loyalty was highly rewarded. This style gave way by the 1960s to a more bureaucratic, less actively engaged managerial culture dominated by accountants more focused on the business of growing larger news organisations than content. An analysis of the editorial content of Australian newspapers on a ten yearly interval since 1907 demonstrates the strength of the profit motive. Over time the proportion of space devoted to advertising consistently increased, reducing the amount of space available for news, features and comment (Western and Hughes, 1983: ch. 3, n. 48). As David Love, a Fairfax journalist recalled:

In the late 1950s Fairfax was run by a group of ageing, grasping small-minded businessmen and journalists were on the whole a forelock pulling bunch who doffed their caps to politicians and deferred to the business world. (quoted in Newton, 1993: 114)

Indeed the *Sydney Morning Herald* had maintained a separation of responsibility between the news and editorial pages until 1965 when, as a condition of accepting his second appointment as editor, John D. Pringle, who had said he could not 'accept responsibility without power', was given editorial authority for the entire paper (Souter, 1981: 427). By the 1980s the bureaucratic style of management in which accountants were dominant came under pressure as a new era emerged, one characterised by professionalised management and increasingly assertive journalists.

### Defining News

The task of defining news – while generally reduced by scholars to its components of timeliness, conflict, proximity, prominence and scale or measured by its effects – remains in most news organisations the responsibility of the person who establishes the culture which privileges particular perspectives, and who has final authority for what is published or broadcast. 'News is what the editor says it is,' the editor-in-chief of the *Courier-Mail* declared in 1995. For most of this century in Australian journalism the person with this authority was the proprietor (or his representative) of the news organisation. This is clearly revealed in Gavin Souter's history of the Fairfax organisation, where the intertwining of editorial and managerial control is detailed, decade after decade (Souter, 1981: 259–61, 382, 405).

Souter's work records the internal workings of a news organisation that clung to ideals of quality and political neutrality. In the strongly competitive newspaper environment, however, control of other Australian organisations also resided with the owner or most senior manager. Despite differences of style the definitions of news remained similar. The news was facts, and objectivity provided the key for finding and presenting them. The prevailing definition of news which was generally favoured for much of this century was clearly spelt out in the Fairfax centenary publication:

. . . it is often, like precious metal, found only with the greatest difficulty, and by the exercise of resourcefulness, energy and imagination. News is a statement of fact. Once anything speculative or in the nature of comment creeps in, diverging from the relation to strict fact, it ceases to be news . . . the news element would reside in the fact that a responsible man had made the statement, and not in the statement itself, which might or might not be true . . . it is no part of a paper's responsibility in its news columns to judge the accuracy or otherwise of a statement by a responsible personage. (Fairfax, 1931: 749)

While the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s style and content in the 1930s may have been characterised by 'Dickensian . . . appearance and professional

behaviour' (Souter, 1981:160), other papers, notably the *Daily Telegraph*, strove to avoid dullness and pomposity, eager for scoops and adventure. Competition such as this forced changes in the type of news published even in the self-consciously quality newspapers, and triggered revised definitions about suitable subjects and the appropriate methods to pursue them.

The Second World War provided opportunities for a new approach to news reporting – particularly from overseas – just as the official regime of censorship and newsprint rationing presented different challenges. Australian journalists were prolific and highly regarded war correspondents in both the European and Asian theatres and as a result by-lines began to be more frequent, even in the papers which had vigorously resisted personal identification in the past. During this period all the major Australian newspapers finally made the transition to devoting the front page to news. The industry remained intensely competitive, but the news organisations overcame their hostility towards each other sufficiently, to collude to challenge the scope of wartime censorship. Their success in reducing the censor's grasp marked the beginning of a period in which the newspaper owners were willing to act in unison on industrial and legal matters (Souter, 1981: 237 ff, 255; Penton, 1947).

In the post-war years, however, the 1931 definition of news continued to hold. Donald Horne, who worked as a reporter for the *Daily Telegraph* described his first posting as a full-time parliamentary reporter in the mid-1940s:

We really went for any sensations that might arise in question time, or in speeches on the adjournment . . . However, if a particular 'debate' on a bill or a motion was judged as newsworthy it would usually get a speech-by-speech cover, minus repetitions . . . One also kept out an eye for 'incidents' . . . we were a rather humble crowd, turning what happened in parliament into 'stories', reporting interviews with ministers and opposition leaders . . . reporting administrative announcements, . . . very occasionally giving some idea of what was happening in a government department and sometimes through a leak, trying to give some idea of what was going on behind the scenes. Stories were sometimes unfairly slanted, perhaps more than now, but in each bureau . . . there was at most one pundit and days could go by without any of the pundits punditting. These days the meanest minor reporter seems to have full pundit rights. (Horne, 1994: 73–4)

The division between news and comment immortalised in C.P. Scott's 1926 dictum, 'Comment is free; facts are sacred', was embodied in the separation of authority on the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and remained widely accepted, as Horne's experience on the *Daily Telegraph* suggests. In the competitive newspaper world of the 1950s, however, while the quality papers – where this separation was most

rigidly enforced – were frequently dull and pompous, the popular press was lively, not only blurring the lines between news and comment, but between truth and fiction:

Some newspaper managements tended to wink at how stories were obtained, whether they were properly sourced, or even if they had any basis in fact. Some material that appeared in Sydney evening newspapers in particular during the 1950s and 1960s was just as much fiction as the novels of Dickens and Balzac . . . Many journalists favoured a red-blooded approach to news gathering and writing stories as a means of rapid advancement, often pushing initiative and vivid imagination at the expense of an over-zealous adherence to ethics and facts. (Lloyd, 1985: 235)

During the 1950s, while ‘quality’ journalism was somewhat ener- vated, the media industry began a pattern of growth and diversification, in which greater emphasis was placed on the business of news than on the news itself. In 1955 crucial decisions about the introduction of television were taken, and the first commercial licence was allocated to interests associated with the dominant newspaper group (Chadwick, 1989: xxviii). Partly as a result, the major news organisations became increasingly bureaucratic and impersonal, and many of the ‘quality papers’ became dull and pompous and lost circulation. These developments began to reshape acceptable reporting by the end of the 1950s. Influenced by the Hutchins Commission and the British Royal Commission, adherence to narrowly objective reporting began to erode in Australia as elsewhere (Bayley, 1984; Boylan, 1986).

In 1965 the Australian Journalists’ Association published the first Australian textbook for young journalists. The book, *The Journalist’s Craft*, clearly demonstrated the changing attitudes towards journalism within the industry and increasing public expectations. Graham Perkin, who as editor of the *Age* was transforming that paper, contributed the chapter on news. It clearly demonstrates the transition that was occurring in terms of news definitions and approach. Perkin wrote:

News always begins with a set of facts. The set of facts invariably happens of itself. It becomes news only when a reporter searches it out and communicates it to other people. The reporter realises quite early in his career that he cannot create news just by being a reporter. Certainly, there is a field for the astute reporter to dig a little deeper, to add new facts to those with which he began, to look at new angles, to enrich his original information. But he begins with facts, which he did not himself originate and over which he has no control. (Revill and Roderick, 1965: 56)

The best journalism, then as now, depended on persistence, resourcefulness and ingenuity, was most likely to be exercised in out-smarting reluctant sources, or colleagues. This is clearly shown in the memoirs of retired journalists and in their private papers. A typical

example of the genre is Tom Prior's recollections of his life as a crime and police reporter, full of details about stories he covered, some remorse 'about some of the things I did', but virtually no reflection on his style of journalism:

Looking back it was a different country, not simply a different era, in Australia in the 1950s . . . We followed the baddies' adventures as though they were the heroes of a TV series. Gangster films were extremely popular and a *Who's Who* of the Melbourne underworld would always attend the opening session . . . Not only gunmen, but top police regularly attended. (Prior, 1993: 79)

A useful guide to the journalism that was most highly valued, by journalists and editors, can be found in the winners of the Walkley Award for journalism. The Walkley Awards have been granted each year since 1956, the winners selected by a panel of journalists, editors and public figures. The Walkleys are the pre-eminent award for journalism in Australia, and provide a good guide to prevailing definitions of the best journalism. The winners for the first fourteen years demonstrated abundant persistence, resourcefulness and ingenuity. Police reports – murders, robberies, shoot-outs – provided most of the early winners. In these choices the Walkley Award for news reporting often honoured the techniques and ingenuity of the reporters more than the final stories, which were frequently quite slight (Hurst, 1988: 21–70).

That the most valued characteristics of journalism had begun to change became apparent when in 1970 Evan Whitton won his second Walkley, for an article in *Truth* detailing Dr Bertram Wainer's allegations of police extortion from Victorian abortion clinics. Whitton's report led to an inquiry into the allegations and later, as a result, three police were jailed.

Prior to Whitton's win only one Walkley winner had demonstrated an overtly investigative approach. Arthur Richards, of the *Courier-Mail*, won the Walkley for best news story in 1961, for his five-part series on Queensland's public hospitals. After a one month investigation, triggered by a statement by the president of the state's medical association – and contrary to official assertions – Richards found that the state's hospitals provided an inadequate service, were seriously understaffed and faced financial crisis. The government subsequently increased hospital funding, but claimed that its decision to do so had not been influenced by the newspaper reports.

In 1961, the *Sydney Morning Herald* also published a series of reports alleging cruelty by staff against patients at that city's Callan Park Mental Hospital. A royal commission substantiated the allegations and recommended that charges be laid against staff (Steketee and Cockburn, 1986: 42). (This approach to investigative reporting

remained somewhat unusual, although the popular papers had begun to report the links between crime and official corruption. Stories on scams involving tow truck operators and horse race fixing figured prominently. In 1953 a few months after the *Sun Herald* was formed by the merger of the popular *Sunday Sun* and broadsheet *Sunday Herald*, police raided the newspaper office at the direction of New South Wales Labor Premier Joe Cahill following reports of graft and corruption in the Labor-dominated Sydney City Council (Walker, 1993).)

Bob Bottom, who achieved fame and notoriety during the 1970s and 1980s for his role in the reporting of organised crime and police matters, symbolises the emergence of investigative reporting in contemporary Australia and is, himself, a bridge between the old and new styles of crime reporting. He considers the new era began in the late 1960s, when Australia graduated 'from old-style racketeering to sophisticated syndicated organised crime' (Bottom, 1984: 27):

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* under the late Sir Frank Packer had led the media crusades in exposing organised crime. Journalists in his pay tended to feel secure because Packer of all the Australian press barons, knew how to use the power of the press – and everybody knew it, not least the underworld . . . It was incredible then, and still is, just how much some journalists do know about Australian gangsters and their operations . . . Criminals can fear journalists more than the police. Exposure sometimes can smash a racket, or break the power of a crime figure, more effectively than a police charge. (Bottom, 1984: 28)

The new breed of crime reporters including Bob Bottom and Tony Reeves began to report in the *Telegraph* about the 'criminal takeover' of Sydney nightclubs at the beginning of the 1970s, culminating in an article in July 1972 headed 'The Night the Mafia Came to Australia'. The constant drip of articles – accompanied by threats from the 'Mr Bigs' of organised crime – increased the political pressure in New South Wales. In 1973 the first royal commission into organised crime commenced, headed by Justice Athol Moffitt. Both Bottom and Reeves, who were also officials of the Australian Journalists' Association, volunteered to give evidence, and were provided with federal police protection. In his book, *Without Fear or Favour*, Bottom provides an insight into his desire to have an impact as a result of his journalism:

Having played a role in the media crusade that brought about the Commission, it seemed to us natural that we should assist, but some journalists who had dined out for years on reputations for knowledge and courage in reporting crime assumed the lowest profile of all. There may be some validity to the observation that . . . the charge is sometimes made that journalists live for their work and neglect their citizenship. (Bottom, 1984: 32)

From the beginning of the 1970s the Walkley Awards for best news stories increasingly reflected the growth of investigative techniques in reporting, with the award less likely to be given to someone who happened to be in the right place at the right time, albeit equipped with abundant ingenuity and resourcefulness. This change of emphasis in defining what constituted the best news story was finally consolidated in 1991 when the categories for the Walkley Awards were reorganised and investigative reporting was recognised with its own award.

Investigative reporting was defined not just by the techniques used, but could also be measured in outcomes and recognised in an attitude, with a more critical perspective becoming apparent in the selection of suitable topics – in the definition of news itself. By the end of the 1970s the pronouncements of ‘prominent men’ were more likely to be scrutinised and analysed, rather than simply reported verbatim. Powerful institutions and individuals also increasingly found that they were subject to critical examination. The private and professional dealings of senior politicians and powerful private individuals came to be examined in greater detail than they could have anticipated in the old days when investigative reporting was reserved for gangsters. As Robert Pullan noted in his history of the ABC program *Four Corners*:

Most of the issues which dominated . . . news through the 60s, 70s and 80s were not on the agenda of public debate in August 1961. Sex and drugs were not, ‘sexual politics’ was a phrase devoid of meaning and ‘sexism’ was a non-word, ‘land rights’ for Aborigines were not spoken of and viewers of black and white television were still innocent of images of black Australians. Rebellious undergraduates muttered darkly about the most potent lobby group in Australia, the Returned Services League, but the RSL remained out of camera range. Abortions, illegal in every State, were hurting desperate women in every State, but abortion was not on the agenda. The rich, vivid life of the Sydney underworld, with its connections to boardrooms and Cabinet ministers, made teasing appearances in tabloid headlines about ‘Mr Big’ and ‘Mr Sin’ – but political corruption was not on the agenda. (Pullan, 1986: 12)

The range of subjects that moved onto the news-lists by the 1970s presented a more comprehensive portrait of Australian society than had previously been published or broadcast. The broadening of agendas, and the increased willingness of journalists and editors to look behind closed doors to discover deals and relationships, shed new light on the way Australian society functioned. In Australia, as in the United States, this process was inextricably linked to the social change that accompanied opposition to involvement in the Vietnam war. Australian news organisations – with exceptions at the *Age*, *Australian* and some sections of the ABC, after the My Lai massacre in 1967 (Burns, 1969) – were slow

to heed the growing internal opposition to the war and the magnitude of the changes implicit in the challenge. They were particularly reluctant to confront the possibility that the allies might not win (Souter, 1980: 429). But journalists were closer to popular opinion and the changing political climate began to have an impact on their work as well.

This climate legitimised an approach to journalism that was generally more sceptical. This approach developed in the 1970s, but became firmly entrenched during the 1980s.

### A Climate of Change

Australian journalism did not change its ethos or modus operandi overnight – it was a protracted process, and the result of an interaction between strong, innovative individuals; broader social and political pressures; and institutional realignments. By the late 1960s all these factors were at play, building on a momentum that had begun earlier in the decade. Particularly significant innovations had been the publication of the independent fortnightly magazine *Nation* in 1958, the broadcast of *Four Corners* by the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1961 and the launch by Rupert Murdoch of the *Australian* newspaper in 1964. In a radio broadcast in February 1984, Brian Johns, now the managing director of the ABC, commented:

Many of the best things in today's media can be traced in the late fifties to the mid sixties. The fortnightlies – the *Observer* on the right, *Nation* on the left, the *Financial Review* and the national daily the *Australian*. Donald Horne's *Observer* and Tom Fitzgerald's *Nation* with probably no more than a total circulation of 20,000 between them, set standards and directions in journalism to an extent never achieved in Australia since the advent of the *Bulletin* in the 1890s. With tiny staff resources, [they] tapped writers in the rest of the media, in the universities and in the intellectual community, who in profile and articles examined our institutions, our business and artistic communities at a depth quite unfamiliar to the conventional media. The innovations . . . were institutionalised in a specialised way by Max Newtown first as editor of the *Financial Review* and then as the founding editor of the *Australian* in 1964. Fundamental to the changes to the whole face of journalism wrought by the *Review* and by the *Australian* was the style of their journalists. In a traditional sense many of their key writers lacked professionalism, which is to say they had not come up through the ranks of cadetships and newspaper rounds, like reporting the courts or police. The *Financial Review* in particular broke with the traditional prejudice against university graduates in journalism . . . now in the eighties there is a far greater acceptance of the need for specialist reporting, analysis and simply, good writing. (ABC Radio, 25 February 1984)

These new outlets had the effect of creating the space, enabling fresh ideas and approaches to find voice. There is little doubt that Tom Fitzgerald's decision to publish the *Nation* in 1958, after six years

editing the finance pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was a major turning point in the development of contemporary Australian journalism. In his 1989 review of *Nation's* impact, Ken Inglis notes that part of Fitzgerald's motivation came from his 'conflict with the bosses of the *Sydney Morning Herald* over the limits of his freedom as "Financial Editor" to speak his mind in their pages' (Inglis, 1989: 1, Souter, 1981: 403). Fitzgerald wanted his contributors to be 'free to say anything they wish as long as it is substantiated by facts or backed by argument' (Inglis, 1989: 1; Souter, 1981: 386 ff). Fitzgerald, like the investigative journalists of the 1980s, was not motivated by a partisan's faith in politics; he was neither a socialist nor politically neutral, as he wrote in an editorial in 1971, 'In Australia the liberal has no party and should never forget that' (Inglis, 1989: 7).

*Nation* was characterised by a style that could not have been tolerated on the pages of the major daily newspapers in the late 1950s. Quirky, opinionated columns – by named journalists and under *noms de plume* – filled the pages of the magazine. In this format ideas were allowed to flourish, writers were given 'the space to grow on the page', with longer opinionated and discursive articles. Subjects not reported in the metropolitan papers were investigated and covered, before subsequently being pursued by the dailies. Fitzgerald pursued a quietly investigative style in his reports in the finance pages of the *Sydney Morning Herald* as well, as Souter noted,

He wrote about company news and economic affairs, but also made excursions into the financial underworld with a forthrightness that brought the *Herald* numerous writs of defamation, not one of which ever succeeded. Four subjects of his attention, who issued stop writs, were eventually all in gaol at one time. (Souter, 1981: 386)

In 1959, Ken Inglis wrote an article about the impending execution in Adelaide of Rupert Max Stuart, for the murder of a nine-year-old girl at Ceduna. After reading this piece, Tom Farrell of the *Sydney Morning Herald* flew to Adelaide to persuade Father Thomas Dixon to make a statement 'which turned the affair into a national issue'. Inglis continued to cover the subsequent royal commission and the eventual commutation of Stuart's death sentence.

Although *Nation* was, by virtue of its restrained tone, principally a fortnightly of ideas, it adopted an investigative approach. This was due in large measure to the role played by George Munster, the paper's day-to-day editor and manager. Munster has been likened to the iconic American journalist I.F. Stone in his dogged pursuit of official documents and his readiness to highlight the inconsistencies, omissions and errors in them. When he died in 1984 an obituary commented that Munster 'believed completely without self-consciousness, that good

journalism made its contribution to debate and ideas as much as any other area of intellectual endeavour' (Souter, 1981: 211).

The quietly and seriously investigative approach *Nation* adopted led to it 'being showered with writs for defamation'. The sub judice rule, which restricts reporting of a subject before the courts – even if the anticipated day in court was in the distant future – had the effect of silencing further reports for up to two years. *Nation* responded aggressively to these 'stop writs', contesting them in the court and editorialising against the defamation laws. This outspokenness about the censorious impact of the law was unusual as most editors were more cautious about pursuing and publishing stories likely to attract writs.

Another essential element of *Nation's* style which reflected tellingly on the climate in which journalism was practised in Australia in the late 1950s and 1960s was the need to use *noms de plume*. Over the fourteen years that the magazine was published these became an essential characteristic of the fortnightly. The conditions of daily employment for most journalists made disguise necessary, as Inglis noted:

Journalists wore masks to prevent recognition by their employers: *Nation* and the *Observer* were both attracting newspapermen mentally under-employed, because the bosses believed that what they would write by choice was not what the mass reader was fit for. And writing in disguise was fun. The author of a piece about the newspaper for which he worked confided that it had 'caused dark, suspicious looks around the office at anyone who might have done it'; the touch of mystery, he thought, 'helps to keep them talking and thinking about it'. (Inglis, 1989: 22)

Tom Fitzgerald finally left the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1970 to become, for a short unhappy time, editorial director of News Limited. *Nation* had been losing contributors and circulation for some years. In 1971 after an unsuccessful attempt to buy *Nation*, Fairfax began publishing the *National Times*, which played a crucial role in the 1980s. In 1972, Australia elected its first Labor government for twenty-three years, and *Nation* merged with the spirited and iconoclastic *Sunday Review* to become, *Nation Review*, a paper closer to the interests of the postwar generation. *Nation Review* eventually closed in 1981. The *National Times* built on the tradition and approaches that had been pioneered by *Nation* and its successor *Nation Review*, and survived until 1988.

Tom Fitzgerald's motivation in publishing the *Nation* was different to Rupert Murdoch's in launching the *Australian* in 1964, but both papers grew out of similar dissatisfaction with the existing news organisations and stifled public debate. This can be seen in Murdoch's decision to hire many *Nation* contributors to write for the new daily, and was acknowledged in the two-page advertisement – the only two-page

advertisement ever to appear in the fortnightly magazine – to announce the launch of the *Australian*. The advertisement, featured a photo of the smiling young proprietor and stated that the paper would:

... 'be a newspaper of intelligence, of broad outlook, of independent spirit, dedicated to the attainment of the highest standards of reporting and analysis'... The *Australian*'s first editor, Maxwell Newton, had used *Nation* as a nursery, knowing that people who had enjoyed there a freedom to treat readers as equals, to be investigative, to grow on the page, would be attracted by Murdoch's promise to let them do all that for the first time in a newspaper. Before long Murdoch was complaining that the *Australian* was too much like a daily *Nation*. (Inglis, 1989: 125)

Brian Johns, who had been a regular contributor to *Nation*, was the first journalist hired by Maxwell Newton, the inaugural editor of the *Australian*. Johns recalled that at that time, 'journalism was basically moribund, conventional and tired. Newton changed all that he recruited unconventional people and encouraged them to write in an unconventional way' (Newton, 1993: 142).

Henry Mayer reflected the enthusiasm of many intellectuals when he wrote contemporaneously of the impact of the *Australian*:

The appearance of a national quality daily, the *Australian*, since July 15, 1964, is the best thing that has happened in Australian journalism for a very long time . . . For the first time in many a decade here is a paper some of its readers feel they really like, and which they are willing to defend . . . Second, the paper does now offer a choice in competition with the established morning dailies . . . It has made a serious and persistent effort to cover culture, education, changes in business structure, automation, the arbitration system, to some extent the civil service and more selectively, some of the science news . . . It is generally less stuffy than its rivals and publishes in its letters column, much more criticism of itself than any other paper here. (Mayer, 1968: xvi-xvii)

The early impact of the *Australian*, of opening a window in the musty cupboard of 'quality' Australian journalism, was profound. During its thirty-four years the *Australian* has not, however, always been a source of innovation and has occupied a variable, if unique, place in political life. It was conspicuously absent from any participation in the investigative reporting of the 1970s and 1980s, when its editors favoured a narrower, more conservative political agenda. In the 1960s the paper was quite different. Murdoch recalled it as:

... an idealistic effort. You've got to look at the *Melbourne Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* and all those papers at the time we did it. They were being ground out by managers. Very poor papers. It was a way to open it up, to have a national debate. (Shawcross, 1991: 121)

In biographer William Shawcross' assessment, Murdoch hoped that the paper would give him a seat at the debating table of Australian political life, 'which it did'. The position that Murdoch sought to take in this debate changed, as his ambitions grew and his horizons expanded, and his new perspective pitched him into conflict with his editors and journalists. Adrian Deamer was dismissed as editor of the *Australian*, essentially over differences of opinion about the conduct of the war in Vietnam. In his report of Adrian Deamer's dismissal, Shawcross noted that while Murdoch admired Deamer's talent, technical skill and appeal to younger journalists, Murdoch also saw Deamer as a threat to his own organisational control:

He began to worry that he could not depend on Deamer any more ... Deamer was too strong, too independent, a loose cannon, a journalist's editor, not a proprietor's editor ... Murdoch increasingly felt that he needed men on whom he could rely – men whose judgement would not be different from his own. And thus over time he came more and more to appoint rather colourless editors who would not disturb the outposts of empire. (Shawcross, 1992: 160)

The ambitious young proprietor clearly applied this lesson and, until the late 1980s, the editorship of the *Australian* – and other quality News Ltd papers – changed so often that it seemed that the chair must be caught in a revolving door. During this time the paper moved from being a breath of fresh air to becoming a conservative backwater of Australian journalism. Under the direction of editor-in-chief Paul Kelly from 1991–96 the paper rediscovered some of its earlier vigour and independence, and played a deliberately leading role in public debate.

*Four Corners*, the final member of the trio of journalistic innovations that helped to irrevocably change Australian journalism, was designed to break new ground for television – broadcast a weekly round-up of major news events, but with a different perspective to that in the press. Founders Michael Charlton and Bob Raymond shaped the idea for the program with knowledge of the current affairs programs then being broadcast in Britain and North America. But to communicate its ethos to uncertain managers, they described it in print terms, as a 'quality Sunday newspaper' (Pullan, 1986: 11 ff).

The new current affairs program was broadcast despite the opposition of senior ABC managers, particularly Walter Hamilton, then the director of news. Hamilton reportedly said that the program, which he saw as at best duplicating what news did – or more sinisterly as implying that the news department was not adequately doing its job – would be broadcast 'over his dead body' (Pullan, 1986: 20). That it went to air at all was due to the personal support of Sir Charles Moses, the ABC's director-general. The less than enthusiastic support Charlton and

Raymond received from ABC management was demonstrated by the resources they were allocated – six staff and a weekly budget of \$960 – and an unenviable timeslot for its first broadcast: 10.30 pm on Saturday night. A couple of months after its first broadcast on 19 August 1961, *Four Corners* was moved to an 8.30 pm time slot, but still on Saturday night where it remained until 1986, when it was moved to Monday night.

Although Charlton and Raymond were influenced by the BBC program *Panorama* and Ed Murrow's program on CBS, the early description of *Four Corners* was vague, a grab bag of topics and approaches, much like a broadcast newspaper:

In April 1961 the program concept . . . was: 'A forty-five minute program . . . it would run items like the personality of the week; 'an interview with a man or woman in the news, at home or overseas, 'what do you think?'; the man [woman] in the street's views of the day's headlines; world issue of the week; television's coverage of the world's major issue . . . preferably a segment of the relevant *Panorama* from the UK; telephone calls from far places: these would be taken live or recorded just before the program to get the latest reports and comments from the world's capitals; *The Sydney You Don't Know*: filmed items on the kind of topics suggested by the title; forgotten anniversaries; items both light and serious . . . Departments – Aviation, Science, Sport, Books, Medicine, the Universities, the Arts (the lively as well as the serious) the Stock Market and the Financial World. (Pullan, 1986: 18)

This description highlights just what a new concept television current affairs was in Australia in 1961, and how constrained the producers were by the available technology. The first program, although innovative for the time, had 'nothing in it [to make] watching [newspaper] editors reach for their telephone or jot a note for Sunday's news conference' (Pullan, 1986: 21).

Within a month, however, *Four Corners* showed promise of the agenda-setting, investigative program it was to become. After reading a brief report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in which the Bishop of Newcastle was quoted as saying that the Aboriginal reserve at Box Ridge near Casino was a 'living cemetery', *Four Corners* visited the settlement. Raymond recalled arriving at 'this dreadful reserve':

Everyone's familiar with them now, but in 1961 news crews didn't go to Aboriginal reserves. Nobody knew what they looked like. We didn't know. . . One of the Aborigines remarked, 'This is not democracy.' Sitting on a shed step, the old man told Charlton; 'An Aboriginal kiddie born here is not a citizen of Australia. The child of a migrant, born here, is an Australian citizen. There's something wrong here.' . . .

When they put the twenty-five minute report to air on Saturday September 9, 1961 Raymond said it caused 'shock waves'; the NSW Cabinet discussed it at a special Cabinet meeting on Monday morning. (Pullan, 1986: 26)

It was another six years before Aborigines became Australian citizens, and won the right to vote. The *Four Corners* program was not, of course, the first time the media dealt sympathetically with Aboriginal issues: in 1958 for instance Douglas Lockwood had won the Walkley award for his Melbourne *Herald* feature on the living conditions of Aborigines. But the power of television to show living conditions triggered a greater reaction. This was acknowledged in a somewhat self-conscious report in 1994 when *Four Corners* returned to Box Ridge to re-examine the living conditions of the Aboriginal community. This program used extensive segments of the 1961 report, and again featured a tall, fair man looking uncomfortable and sounding somewhat patronising.

The visit to Box Ridge was the first time *Four Corners* left Sydney, and the first time it caused community outrage, by making public what was previously hidden. It marked the beginning of a tradition it has carried for more than thirty years.

### The Melbourne Influence

The innovations of *Four Corners*, *Nation* and the *Australian* were all generated from Sydney (the *Australian's* first editions were produced from Canberra, until distribution problems forced a relocation to Sydney) and although that city is now without doubt the media capital of Australia, the individuals who were to open the door to the next round of journalistic innovation were based in Melbourne. Until the mid-1960s, the Melbourne *Age* was fully owned by a trust of members of the Syme family. But as a result of a negotiated agreement, Fairfax progressively acquired shares in the company from 1965, until by 1972 it held the majority.

There were notable similarities between the *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Both were longstanding serious broadsheets, which dominated the classified advertising market in each city; 'natural affinity to tradition, readership, editorial content and advertising volume' existed between them. The papers were, however, both losing circulation – the *Age* more precipitously than the *SMH*. They faced strong competition from more vigorous, popular tabloids, and had failed to attract younger readers as their loyal readers grew older.

From its earliest days the *Age* had had a radical agenda, goading the colonial bourgeoisie of Victoria as it advocated full (male) suffrage, no compensation for squatters, free and secular education for all and industry protection. David Syme had used the paper as a political pulpit from which he preached long and closely argued sermons on economic and political issues. But the paper's radicalism eroded during the twentieth century as it became yet another conservative daily newspaper.

By 1965, eight years after the closure of the *Argus* (which had inflated sales of the *Age* by 20 000), the circulation of the *Age* was only 180 000, 100 000 less than that of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. The new relationship between Fairfax and Syme injected capital into the newspaper; Ranald Macdonald, the great grandson of David Syme, became chief executive of the paper and the process of transforming it into a competitive, modern newspaper began. Macdonald appointed the paper's most prominent feature writer, Graham Perkin, as editor in 1966 a position he held until his death, aged 45, in 1975. Under Perkin's editorship, the *Age* became a quite different paper to any other in Australia – by-lines were routinely given, emphasis was placed on the quality of writing, political allegiances were less predictable and the division between news and comment was no longer sacrosanct. The *Age* began to be routinely counted among the best papers in the world.

The newspaper environment in the two major cities was quite different. Sydney journalism was to a large extent dominated by the popular tabloids, the *SMH* was the only broadsheet in a city with three daily tabloids. The *Age* was one of two broadsheets – the other the phenomenally successful afternoon *Herald*, which had been built up by Sir Keith Murdoch during his leadership of the Herald and Weekly Times group from 1920 to 1949. Its sister paper, Melbourne's other morning newspaper the *Sun News-Pictorial*, was the largest selling newspaper in Australia, and in tone a serious yet popular tabloid, quite unlike the racy, sensational Sydney tabloids.

In Melbourne, the role of the sensational tabloid was filled by the *Truth*, a national weekly based in the city and known for its salaciousness. In the late 1960s both the *Age* and *Truth* were edited by men who had been influenced by the emerging British style of investigative journalism. *Truth*, which had begun life nearly a century earlier under the editorship of John Norton, was continued by his son Ezra, until it became part of Rupert Murdoch's emerging empire, when he acquired Norton's publications in 1960.

Murdoch appointed Sol Chandler, a former managing editor of the London *Daily Express*, and production editor of the *Australian*, to edit *Truth* in 1966. Under his editorship the paper's circulation rose from 220 000 to 400 000 in less than a year. In large part this circulation growth was due to a renewed emphasis on sex and pictures of 'well-proportioned women in various states of undress' (Hurst, 1988: 37). Sex, scandal and smut were not the only tactics Chandler used to increase the circulation of *Truth*; he also encouraged his reporters to expose 'deceit and dishonesty by people in public life'. In encouraging this, Chandler was 'prepared to take greater risks in publishing stories which, because of the threat of libel other newspapers would not touch

with a barge pole'. Evan Whitton, who first made his reputation as an investigative reporter at *Truth*, remembers Chandler as the best newspaperman, in a technical sense, he ever encountered:

... he had 'an unrivalled capacity for both finding the form of words to get difficult material into print and for projecting that material'. For these reasons Whitton knew he was not wasting his time persisting in his investigation of what became known as the abortion protection rackets. (Hurst, 1988: 38)

Chandler's willingness to encourage reporters to uncover deceit and dishonesty and then to publish it, with sensational flair for a large readership, helped create a climate that made it possible for the *Age* to establish a team of investigative reporters. Harold Evans, editor of the London *Sunday Times* established an investigative unit in 1968, which included several Australian journalists. In Evans' words the Insight team had a mission to reflect W.T. Stead's functions of the press – its 'argus eyed power of inspection' (Evans, 1983: 36).

Graham Perkin and Ranald Macdonald pre-empted the *Sunday Times* by creating an investigative team, of feature writer John Larkin and reporter John Tidey, in 1967. For Perkin an investigative approach was a means of demonstrating what newspapers should and could do. He was particularly critical of 'newspapers that wrapped truth in pale pink fairy floss, newspapers that ignored discomfort, disregarded injustice, lived with administrative incompetence and governmental dishonesty and generally let society off more lightly than it deserved' (Barr, 1977: 72). Shortly afterwards Ben Hills, a young Tasmanian reporter, joined the team:

... that whole exercise of the Insight team starting at the *Age* would never have been possible without quite a unique conjunction. Graham Perkin, as probably the best editor we've seen since the war, Ranald Macdonald, as a proprietor, and myself as a youngish reporter looking to make a name and finding that I had a bit of a bent for scurrying around in dust filled basements looking for yellowing bits of paper. So without that combination of three ... it wouldn't have come together. You've got to have a conjunction of interests right the way from the ownership through editorial management down to the reporter....

In London Harold Evans was editor of the *Sunday Times* and he'd just started off the Insight team, which was really cutting up the turf, exploring areas that hadn't been explored before. They started off the thalidomide thing, which was probably their most famous ... but they did all sorts of other stuff, ... they were doing books on it, and they were really making the *Sunday Times* into a great newspaper, whereas before it had been a bit stuffy or boring.

Perkins sent me over to work with them ... for a few weeks in 1971 ... Murray Sayle was working there ... 'Well,' he said, 'there are only two kinds

of investigative story, Ben, when you boil it all down. Arrow points to defective part and we name the guilty man.'

It's not a bad one line summary actually. So I worked with them . . . came back to Melbourne and Insight on the *Age*. Obviously it wasn't the first investigative reporting that ever went on in this country . . . but it was the first formal investigative unit to be set up. There was myself and Graham Willingham, another young reporter there, and Phillip Chubb. We had four years of the most rewarding sort of trouble-making journalism you could imagine. It was a terrific time. (interview 24 April 1990)

The *Age* Insight team in the early years of the 1970s began to report what had previously been considered unreportable, much of it in the style of 'arrow points to defective part and we name the guilty man'. But over the following years, increasingly complex financial, political and social arrangements came under the scrutiny of the reporters, who were given ample time, space, and support. Perkin's editorship of the *Age* was significant in redefining the way that journalism was practised in Australia, not least because of his willingness to speak out. 'Journalism suffers greatly from the fact that so many of its principal people are silenced by the companies who employ them,' Perkin told a political science conference in 1975 (Major, 1976: 29).

Perkin one of Australia's greatest newspaper editors saw the role of the press as one of permanent opposition, as watchdog over . . . government, since he claimed 'no-one else represents the public'. He encouraged and defended investigative journalism – muckraking in sensitive areas – on behalf of the public who had a right to know. The *Age*, according to Perkin, had long attempted to influence as well as inform, and was a crusading newspaper with pride in editorial courage. (Fuerst, 1978: 1)

Perkin's influence was felt throughout the country, and internationally. The publication of the *Australian* had provided a spur to more competitive reporting, and increased the scope for interpretation. Now the *Age* and *Australian Financial Review* not only took up the challenge, but pushed it in new directions. Fairfax had begun publishing the weekly *Australian Financial Review* in 1951 and it became the first national daily in 1963. Under the editorship of Max Newton and then Vic Carroll, the *Australian Financial Review* also questioned the prevailing norms of political and economic reporting. Its national perspective also challenged the prevailing 'states' rights' view within the Fairfax organisation, dominated as it was by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. As the company grew and acquired interests in more newspapers, it was impossible for control to be so tightly held by senior management. Different papers served different audiences, who demanded different perspectives. Vic Carroll saw in this development, which the *Australian*

*Financial Review* triggered, the beginning of the cult of editorial independence 'which grew to become a virtue . . . papers with strong and independent editorial positions . . . it was no longer a monolith' (NLA transcript 2872). Carroll's influence was considerable. He was widely regarded as an important figure who helped to foster a new generation of political reporters on a range of publications.

The changes underway were most noticeable in the reporting that began to emerge from the Canberra press gallery. Until the 1960s the Canberra press gallery was small, with about twelve members, most well into middle age, and the bureaux had formal agreements to share articles and informal arrangements operated between reporters, as a means of protection. This may have prevented career-threatening scoops from competing papers, but also ensured a predictable uniformity in the reports. Perkin encouraged greater competition and the *Age*'s Canberra bureau chief Alan Barnes began to demolish some of the prevailing complacency. At the *Australian Financial Review*, Canberra correspondent Max Walsh, and his editors Peter Robinson and Vic Carroll, responded to this challenge and began producing longer, more interpretive and analytical reports than had previously been the style of press gallery reportage (Edgar, 1979: 94 ff).

Another significant individual in this process of change was the charismatic but erratic, Maxwell Newton, who, after leaving the *Australian Financial Review* essentially as a result of disagreements over editorial policy, became the inaugural editor of the *Australian*, a position he held only for a little over a year (Shawcross, 1992: 117). Again disagreements over editorial policy lead to his departure and he returned to Canberra and commenced publishing a weekly economic and political newsletter, *Incentive*. Newton's mastery of economics, his commitment to free trade and his extensive contacts in the bureaucracy soon led to him receiving significant leaked documents. The leaked documents he published enraged senior politicians, and in 1969 they directed the Commonwealth Police to raid his home and office to search for the leaked material. Newton's successful challenge of the legitimacy of the warrants inhibited the ability of the Commonwealth Police to 'go on a fishing exercise'. According to Newton's daughter and biographer, Sarah, this raid was pivotal in her father's subsequent collapse (Newton, 1993: 179 ff).

Although the process of politicians and public servants leaking documents had been established well before Newton's return to Canberra in the late 1960s, his ability to attract and use leaked documents developed it into a highly refined, if questionable, art form. According to interviews Patricia Edgar conducted with press gallery journalists in the early 1970s, the process of currying favour and cultivating leaks led to selective reporting. Newton's outspoken opposition to protectionism

no doubt influenced the leaks he received, but the inside information this gave his subscribers was highly valued. In turn this influenced the behaviour of other journalists, who also became more willing to publish leaked material. The use of leaked documents was not welcomed by all journalists: many had reservations about this style of journalism, arguing that it made them little more than a conduit for competing factions within the bureaucracy:

Whatever the motives of the individual leaking information, the impact through the press can be very significant in altering the pattern of political events . . . the 'leak' if he or she is skilful, can use the press for political ends, because the journalist is not concerned with those ends; the desire to have the story first is an overriding factor and that holds, regardless of a journalist's political leanings. (Edgar, 1979: 93)

The use of internal reports became even more significant in the 1970s and 1980s when leaked national security reports, police surveillance tapes and confidential royal commission documents underpinned some of the most significant investigative reports, and inspired the title of a collection of some of this journalism, *The Book of Leaks* (Toohey and Wilkinson, 1987). While this approach opened previously closed files to public surveillance, it was not a technique as unproblematic as some journalists and editors suggested. David Bowman considered that the promise of 1970s investigative reporting had, by the 1980s, been swamped by 'leak journalism':

Newspaper leaks are as old as newspapers; what is extraordinary in recent times is their volume and importance. To some extent . . . this may be accounted for by the current practice of parading a leak as a leak; not long ago journalists preferred to be more circumspect . . . leaks provide newspapers with the comfortable illusion that they are doing a job of digging into society. Actually the leakers are doing the job for them. (Bowman, October 1984a: 35)

### Time for Change

By the time the Labor government was elected in late 1972 these factors were beginning to influence how journalism was practised in Australia. The election of a reformist government and the appointment of large numbers of former press gallery journalists to positions as media advisers and public relations officers for ministers significantly changed the Canberra press gallery, as one journalist reflected:

. . . the problem with a reform government . . . is that you have to take it seriously. You can treat any conservative government as a joke until they start putting you into jail, but with a reform government you have to treat it

seriously because they are doing serious things, important things, that affect a hell of a lot of people. But the gallery in Canberra is simply not geared to do it. You can't, you just don't have the facilities, the talent, anything else. (Edgar, 1979: 100)

Although the election of the Whitlam Labor government was welcomed by many members of the Canberra press gallery, editorially most of the newspapers in the country were opposed to the Labor government. Both the *Age* and the *Australian* initially supported the Whitlam government's election, but this support dissipated during the government's second term. Coincidentally a newly assertive style of investigative journalism emerged during 1974–75 as the government tried unsuccessfully to maintain a reformist agenda, despite rising inflation, internal political divisions and bureaucratic opposition. This more assertive style was most in evidence in the pursuit of the 'Iraqi Loans Affair'.

The Loans Affair erupted as an issue at the end of 1974 when Minister for Energy and Resources Rex Connor sought Cabinet approval to raise \$4000 million from Arab petro-dollars to finance a 'buy back of Australian mineral resources', to make 'Australians the shareholders in and the beneficiaries of Australian resources' (Whitlam, 1985: 252ff). The authority to raise these funds was granted to an Iraqi citizen, Tirath Khemlani, who was engaged to secure the money. Khemlani's weak reputation in this field, combined with concerted opposition from the Treasury Department and Reserve Bank, led to the authority being revoked. Despite this revocation and the direction to cease, Connor continued to deal with Khemlani, and when this was revealed in the *Herald*, he was dismissed from the ministry. This issue became one of the pivotal matters that led to the eventual dismissal of the government by Governor-General John Kerr on 11 November 1975 (Toohey and Wilkinson, 1987: 20–61; Whitlam, 1979).

From the beginning of 1975 when Khemlani was actively pursued by journalists from several news organisations, the so-called Loans Affair began to emerge as a major story. In July 1975 *Herald* investigative reporter Peter Game established contact with Khemlani's daughter, then with him. Over a period of several months Game interviewed Khemlani at length and gained access to the documentation supporting his claims to be acting on behalf of the Australian government. The first of his stories was published in the *Herald* on 8 October, it ran for 2000 words and began:

Tirath Khemlani said today that he still has the go-ahead from the Australian Minister for Minerals and Energy, Mr Connor, to raise US \$8 billion for the Australian Government. He is basing this on a March 22 letter

from Mr Connor. Mr Khemlani says it is still valid. Mr Connor tabled the letter in parliament on July 9. Mr Khemlani said he had been in touch with Mr Connor in the past ten days and Mr Connor still wanted to meet the Middle East representatives Khemlani plans to bring to Australia soon. (Hurst, 1988: 49)

This, and subsequent articles, led to Connor's dismissal and Game's award of the Walkley Award for Best News story in 1976. In these highly charged political times the winners of national prizes for journalism were likely to have a political edge. In 1975 Evan Whitton won his fifth Walkley, for a 26 000-word three-part feature series on the genesis of Australia's involvement in Vietnam. Whitton wrote the series after fifteen months of work, which traced the genesis of Australian involvement in the Vietnam war ten years earlier. It was published the day before the last Americans left Vietnam. Whitton had visited Saigon, interviewed key protagonists, and obtained access to a review of foreign affairs documents ordered by Prime Minister Whitlam. This research was supplemented by information obtained under American Freedom of Information by the paper's New York correspondent Adele Horin. The article contradicted the *Sydney Morning Herald*'s view of the war, questioned the logic of Australian participation and documented the way the Australian government encouraged the USA to escalate its involvement. The articles outraged the Fairfax board, the chairman wanted to sack everyone involved with them. The executive editor described them as 'totally unacceptable. Tendentious, abusive and emotional' and he vetted the subsequent articles and arranged for a rebuttal to be published (Souter, 1981, 489–494).

Whitton's 1975 Walkley Award signalled the beginning of a new trend in investigative journalism which was pursued with increasing vigour over the following decade. The style of research and writing that Whitton adopted in his series became a hallmark of the *National Times* style: it was characterised by the extensive use of documents, including frequently leaked or once confidential, government records; use of international sources, particularly from the USA, where access to government information made substantiation easier; teamwork and long articles constructed using some of the devices of the 'new journalism' – narrative, description, dialogue, detail and point of view (Pullan, 1985).

The intense politics of the mid-1970s had an impact on many journalists and the journalism they produced. This can be seen in their attitudes towards news organisations, and in the stories they pursued. The political temperature remained high following the dismissal of the Whitlam government, coming as it did after a decade of internal dissension about involvement in the Vietnam war and international

interest in the role of the American Central Intelligence Agency in destabilising national governments (Combe, 1982; MacAdam, 1983; Toohey and Wilkinson, 1987).

This highly charged political climate had a dramatic consequence at the *Australian*, where journalists went on strike over editorial interference in the reporting of the 1975 election campaign. The journalists cited numerous examples of editorial interference which had skewed the coverage against the Labor Party, which the paper had supported in 1972. The journalists argued that Rupert Murdoch's bias against the Labor Party was intruding into the news pages, and affecting story and photo selection, headlines and placement. After two days the journalists returned to work, but numerous resignations quickly followed and were accompanied by a Labor Party boycott. This was followed by a sharp decline in circulation. In subsequent years, the paper became increasingly conservative and more than ten years passed before circulation was back up to the levels of the early 1970s.

It should not be concluded from this that Australian journalists were uniformly partisan and supportive of the Whitlam government. Insofar as it is now possible to measure, it is probably safe to assume that journalists as a group were as politically divided as the rest of the country in the early 1970s (Edgar, 1979). Although reporters and editors had left newsrooms in record numbers to join the government's staff, many returned to journalism or moved into public relations, and some claimed to have felt personally betrayed. The tissue of lies that became apparent in the reporting of the Loans Affair was profoundly discomforting for many, and had long-term consequences which will be addressed in the following chapter. The late senior journalist Robert Haupt observed: 'The Whitlam Government was found to be lying and this produced a new hostility in the government-media relationship, and, in the attitude of journalists towards government lies' (interview, 16 May 1990).

### Television sets news agendas

Innovation was not confined to the press; television also began to emerge as a more significant medium for news and current affairs. *Four Corners* had shown the power of television to set news agendas and to open debates, but when the ABC decided to establish *This Day Tonight* in 1967 as a nightly current affairs program, it signalled the beginning of the modern era of journalism in which the press no longer dominated.

*This Day Tonight* had its own staff and the freedom to pursue its own agendas without reference, or deference, to the news hierarchy. Its conflicts with ABC managers, uncomfortable with the non-conformist,

outspoken style, and politicians, who objected to its critical tone and assertive interviews, became infamous. The assertive independence of the program established new benchmarks.

It was 'the first news or current affairs program on Australian television to present news or current affairs . . . regularly in a popular and readily digestible format' (Lloyd, 1988: 238). Over the following decade it spawned a plethora of current affairs programs on commercial television including: *A Current Affair*, *Monday Conference*, *Federal File*, *Face the Nation*, *Nationwide*, *7.30 Report*, and *Carlton-Walsh Report*.

In 1977 for the first time, commercial television news programs were consistently beating soap operas in the nightly ratings battle. Within a decade it was accepted as a fact of television life that the key to a night's audience was winning the ratings for the news, but in the late 1970s this truth had not yet been widely recognised (Harris, 1989). As this notion became more widely accepted it fundamentally changed the style and norms of journalism and the equations that were done to finance it.

By the end of the 1970s the newspaper business was in crisis, confronting an uncertain technological, industrial and commercial future. In the diversified and oligopolistic Australian news organisations, television was generating profits, newspapers costs – with declining circulations, increasing production costs, militant printers and restive journalists.

Despite considerable population growth, newspaper circulations failed to keep pace. The *Sydney Morning Herald*'s circulation was falling even more alarmingly – readers appeared to be dying off more rapidly than the New South Wales population as a whole. This situation was repeated in each state; the afternoon papers were especially badly affected and were, at the beginning of the 1980s, reportedly losing millions of dollars each year. Only the *Melbourne Age* began the 1980s with its circulation higher than it had been a decade earlier (Macklin, 1982).

The four dominant media groups at the beginning of the 1980s (John Fairfax and Sons Ltd, Herald and Weekly Times, Australian Consolidated Press and News Ltd) all had extensive interests in print, radio and television. Newspapers, although they remained influential, had come to be regarded as the least profitable activity, cross-subsidised by television. Fairfax published operating accounts for each of its divisions during the 1970s, but consolidated its financial statements in the 1980s, making it difficult to determine the degree of cross-subsidisation.

Attempts to redress this situation were cloaked in pessimism about the long-term future of newspapers; executives speculated about the death of the press and the emergence of electronic information. The

generally held expectation was that the press would not only need to overcome its cost pressures and distribution problems, but would also need to find a new niche, possibly backgrounding the news which was provided with greater immediacy by radio and television. The old prohibition on comment and interpretation eroded, as Max Suich, chief editorial executive of Fairfax observed, 'We have to be more analytical ... comment is a very important part of the paper now' (Macklin, 1982: 51).

Generally these problems were addressed by twin strategies: introducing computerised technology to substantially reduce production costs, and developing marketing strategies designed to hold existing audiences and attract and maintain the interest of new readers. The electronic technology that was introduced in the late 1970s had significant teething problems, provoking sustained industrial action by printers and the first national strike by journalists, in June 1980. The computer systems bought by most of the Australian newspapers were badly flawed and caused immense production problems, leading to even earlier deadlines than had applied previously.

The marketing strategies fell into two categories: 'give aways', characterised by the bingo games embraced by many tabloid papers, and the move towards sectionalising newspapers so they would better address particular interests of demographically favoured groups of readers (and advertisers). The production of higher quality journalism, which may have been achieved by employing more journalists, paying them more, training them better and providing better research back-up, barely figured in the strategies proposed to address the malaise affecting newspapers at the time.

The implementation of these strategies varied. Fairfax embarked on a campaign to revive the *Sydney Morning Herald*. After a change of management, new editors were appointed in 1981 and the paper redesigned and targeted at readers under forty. The paper began a metamorphosis which cost millions, and took five years before it began to be reflected in higher circulation (Souter, 1991: ch. 3). During the 1980s News Ltd also committed significant resources to a rescue of a floundering daily newspaper, when it absorbed losses of \$13 million a year in an attempt to revive the *Melbourne Herald*, which it acquired in 1987. This exercise failed, however, and within several years the *Herald* and the *Sun* were combined into the tabloid *Herald-Sun*. Earlier in the decade News Ltd had demonstrated its faith in the future of newspapers when in 1982 it launched the *Sun* in Brisbane. Against the trend this paper established itself as the second morning paper in the third largest city, but four years after News Ltd acquired the *Courier-Mail*, the *Sun* also closed.

By the beginning of the 1980s newspapers in the Herald and Weekly Times group which, with more than 60% of circulation, dominated the newspaper market, was generally regarded as complacent – its virtual monopolies in key markets had eroded its competitive edge. The drop in circulation of the afternoon *Melbourne Herald* was symbolic: it fell from 450 000 to 325 000 in the ten years to 1981. Chief Executive Lyle Turnbull was quoted as saying that as much as he regretted this fall, increased dependence on television news meant it was happening everywhere. The newspaper losses were offset by profits from the company's television interests, but not sufficiently to save the company.

Cross-subsidisation of print by television also occurred at Australian Consolidated Press, which owned suburban and provincial newspapers as well as large numbers of magazines, but television became increasingly significant. This was measured not just in profits, but also in the prestige its high rating news and current affairs programs generated for the company. Innovative approaches to news and current affairs programming garnered both credibility and profits and consolidated Nine as the leader of commercial television.

It was in the context of declining newspaper circulations that media company executives discovered the power of television news and current affairs. Learning from trends established in the USA some years earlier, Australian television managements embarked on a change of programming strategy. Rather than the news and current affairs being quickly produced by minimal staffs, and slotted in between the serials and the game shows, news became the key to audiences and ratings. The pattern which is now well established, of devoting considerable resources to the production of network-defining news services, emerged with gusto.

This also influenced the type and style of journalism produced elsewhere. Television news required a different set of priorities – action, drama, conflict, short comments, impressions, and immediacy were important. In a market in which they had lost the upper hand, newspapers could either follow television or find a new niche. The accepted wisdom at this time proposed a division of roles by medium. The widely held view was that radio was best for immediate news, reporting disasters, quick interviews with politicians; television added a visual dimension to this news, featuring accidents, demonstrations and events with visible conflict, humour or sentimentality; newspapers and magazines were best equipped to concentrate on the story behind the electronic headlines, with explanation, analysis and comment. Under this division it was also argued that print was best suited to major investigative stories.

The flaw of this assessment became strikingly clear, when Channel 9 launched its new, multi-million dollar current affairs program, *60 Minutes* in 1979. This program changed the rules of television journalism and marked the beginning of a new era. *60 Minutes* experimented with innovative ways of telling stories and jettisoned the verities of newspaper journalism which had previously shaped much television news and current affairs. The program's executive producer, Gerald Stone, who had learnt about the potential of television current affairs while on *This Day Tonight*, taught his staff of 'experienced journalists how to unlearn some of the basic conventions of their craft. Where most editors would demand more facts, Stone wanted less, so as not to overtax the viewers. Everyone found the learning process difficult' (Little, 1994: 10).

By 1982 *60 Minutes* was changing the world of journalism in Australia. Not only were its principal reporters treated as 'stars', who were paid and promoted accordingly, but they were also given more scope and more resources than had hitherto been made available for producing journalism. At the same time as editors at the *Sydney Morning Herald* were saying that they could not afford a team of three investigative reporters, *60 Minutes* was prepared to let producers and researchers work on major items for several months – devoting more resources to investigative journalism than any Australian newspaper had ever been prepared to. Reporter George Negus described the program's early formula:

Up to 1975 with the Vietnam war and the change of government, all a program had to do was stay on its feet. You had ready made current affairs. Now trying to get good social issue stories is like trying to get blood out of a stone . . . Take consumerism. It's hard to think of a rip-off story that would surprise anybody any more. So you do exposé stories. If you get busy exposing something subtle and subterranean, then people get interested again. There's a place for investigative stories and we can do them because we can afford the luxury of the research. (Hall, 1979: 58)

While in its first couple of years *60 Minutes* broadcast a number of stories which were essentially investigative, many were not. But the occasional blockbuster bought credibility for the program (Little, 1994). It was a challenge the ABC could not ignore and, after several changes of management in the first years of the 1980s, *Four Corners* re-emerged as the leading outlet for investigative journalism. By 1983 when *Four Corners* produced 'The Big League', after six months research, it was apparent that television could not only produce the 'big investigative type of story', but produce them extremely well, with explosive public consequences.

The consequences were also explosive within the industry. Newspaper and magazine journalists and editors, who had made their name as writers and looked down on television, were wooed by the offer of high salaries and higher public profiles. So Max Walsh and Laurie Oakes appeared on Nine; Marian Wilkinson, Robert Haupt, Derryn Hinch and Jennifer Byrne made the transition from print to television, as did Michael Pascoe, Neil Mercer, Quentin Dempster, and Lyndall Crisp and many others (Hywood, 1985). This pushed up the salaries of the highest paid journalists and fostered television's star system in newspapers. Ranald Macdonald, managing director of the *Age*, was reported in 1982 as saying that the 1980 journalists' strike had demonstrated the talent of non-writing executive journalists and as a result he reassigned people like Peter Smark and Peter Cole-Adams to reporting.

It was ironic that the discovery by television managers of the ratings potential of news and current affairs was instrumental in raising the public standing of journalism. When the Morgan Poll's survey of professional standing distinguished between print and television journalists for the first time in 1987, television journalists ranked ahead of newspaper reporters and have consistently retained higher regard. Rather than being relegated to an exclusive diet of quick, dramatic news, which many in the media industry had considered television's only forte, television producers and journalists expanded the definition of what television could do well. The willingness (and capacity) of television managements to pay journalists better and provide them with more research resources was one of the catalysts for the dynamic journalism produced during the 1980s. Newspapers lost any claim to a natural monopoly over investigation, background or informed comment, and instead were likely to emulate television's need to personalised.

### Conclusion

Australian journalism has changed profoundly in the last fifty years. These changes can be seen in the way the news organisations themselves have developed from companies utterly dominated by one man, or family, into broadly based media conglomerates run by professional managers. The changes are apparent in evolving definitions of news, which are now more likely to encompass a wider view of society. Furthermore, the approach to news adopted by journalists, producers and editors is likely to demand research, inquiry and scrutiny rather than the stenographic notation of the comments of prominent men.

This transformation has accompanied significant changes in the nature of Australian society, from a narrow, inward-looking

Anglocentric country to a multicultural, technologically advanced, internationally focused one. In journalism, as in the society at large, these changes have been made possible by a series of incremental steps whereby the boundaries of accepted practice were extended. In journalism these steps included the publication in the 1960s of *Nation*, the *Australian*, *Australian Financial Review* and the transformation of the *Age* in the 1970s. The initiatives taken by *Four Corners* in the 1960s were then built on by *This Day Tonight* and then substantially expanded by *60 Minutes* in the early 1980s. These innovations created an environment that enabled investigative journalism to flower in Australia in the 1980s, and to be produced by journalists who were increasingly willing to assert their independence and right to discern, and act in, the public interest and accept the responsibilities of the Fourth Estate.

## CHAPTER 9

# *Challenging Power: Reporting in the 1980s*

'We can only be suspicious that the law was bent . . . to oblige a friend, a common, but tolerated, source of trouble in this community.'

*Greg Sullivan QC, NSW Solicitor-General, 1984*

The innovations during the 1960s and 1970s set the scene for profound change during the 1980s. During this decade, Australian journalism moved to assert its place as an equal contender in the political process.

The development of this standing occurred in three distinct phases. Much of the reporting focused on disclosing official corruption. Journalists adopted a critical attitude towards public figures and elected officials. This was far removed from the approach described as appropriate in the 1930s, in which news was the statement of facts by responsible men which journalists had no responsibility to judge. By the 1980s, position afforded little protection, and journalists and editors routinely made judgements about veracity. Many of the journalists who came to prominence during the 1980s had formulated their approach to journalism during the politically turbulent 1970s.

While a number of the major articles published and broadcast in the 1980s built on work that had been done before, the more assertive investigative reporting of the 1980s did not develop in a simple linear fashion. The crafting of news stories and the practice of journalism does not lend itself to such certainties: the quest for sources and confirmation is more chaotic. Articles published during the 1980s particularly by the *National Times*, *Age*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, *Bulletin* and *Courier-Mail*, and broadcast by *Four Corners* and *60 Minutes*, built on what had been reported before, but took it to new levels of significance. Aggregating these articles and programs reveals what is arguably the most substantial and far-reaching body of watchdog journalism ever produced in Australia. The late Robert Haupt, who was a senior editor with the *Age* and *Times on Sunday*, during the 1980s described the change: 'When I look back at what was being done in the 1970s it was

pretty penny ante stuff – like *The Investigators* now – it certainly wasn't naming High Court judges, like we were doing in the 1980s' (interview Haupt, 16 May 1990).

### Corruption – The Twisted Thread

Although official corruption and the links between the police, politicians and business were not the only issues raised in the wave of 1980s investigative reporting, these topics provided the bedrock for much of it. Dozens of articles, television and radio programs identified individuals in positions of power, frequently detailing or alluding to kickbacks, special favours and other illegal or unethical behaviour. Allegations of this nature had previously fuelled rumour mills, but rarely made it into the press or onto television or radio. This reporting was distinguished by the level of substantive detail.

The process by which official corruption came to feature on public and media agendas was not solely, or even principally, the result of journalistic initiative, although it played a part. It is beyond the scope of this book to comprehensively document the full panoply of sources and factors which shaped this period and led to the production of this unusual body of work. Pointers to key factors, including individuals and institutions, that helped to shape the period in which the political and police debris that had accumulated over the previous decade was publicly aired, through royal commissions and committees of inquiry, are documented here. In this chapter I discuss the journalism that marked the parameters of each of the three phases. I will consider in detail the three or four most significant articles or programs from each phase, although dozens of others were also produced.

The journalism produced in these phases helps to measure the increasing assurance with which journalists and editors claimed to act in the public interest, to fulfil a Fourth Estate role. Political responses to these reports included royal commissions, committees of inquiry and parliamentary committees were established. There was also considerable backlash against this reporting.

Just as individuals, institutions, social and political changes were important in the transition from reporting to investigating, a similar range of factors influenced the 1980s. These included changing organisational, and journalistic, cultures particularly within the ABC and Fairfax; competition between state and federal police forces; the election of Labor governments federally and in most states; an international economic climate which encouraged deregulation; the maturation of festering issues after a long gestation, and key individuals in news and law enforcement organisations.

Investigative reporting in Australia until the mid-1970s was quite limited; however, reports published during this decade set the tone

for what followed, in terms of issues and structures and expectations within news organisations. The establishment of investigative teams within newspapers had become more common, and for a short time an article of faith in newspaper management (Bowman, October 1984a). *60 Minutes* and *Four Corners* later demonstrated that television was also adept at investigative reporting.

Sydney journalism has had a long, almost romantic, attachment to crime reporting. However, the nature of crime was changing, as the 1973 Moffitt Royal Commission into organised crime and Sydney nightclubs revealed. Over the following eight years several royal commissions examined organised crime, its connection with the sale and supply of illegal drugs and links to the intelligence community. As a result issues relating to organised crime, the administration of justice and institutionalised corruption, which may once have been brushed under the carpet, began to be published in substantive detail, creating what influential crime reporter and activist Bob Bottom described as 'the new style of crime reporting'.

By the late 1970s several articles provided an early indication of this emerging style of journalism. During the late 1970s Bottom published a series of articles in the *Bulletin* which ventilated some cases which came to greater prominence later. At the same time the *Age* published a damning series of articles which implicated politicians and public figures for receiving kickbacks from property developers in Melbourne.

In 1978 the *National Times* published a photograph of the NSW Chief Stipendiary Magistrate Murray Farquhar at the races with George Freeman, a 'notorious Sydney crime figure'. This picture and the accompanying article hinted at a pattern of inappropriate association which was to haunt New South Wales public figures in the following decade. A source of this information was Bob Bottom, who in 1976 had ceased working as a tabloid crime reporter to become a political adviser. Over the following decade, Bottom became one of the most important sources for much of the investigative journalism produced in New South Wales and Victoria and the most important broker of confidential police information.

The role that Bob Bottom played in establishing the climate which elevated crime and corruption as serious issues cannot be underestimated. His reports helped trigger the establishment of the Moffitt, Woodward, Williams and Stewart royal commissions into organised crime, drugs and intelligence, between 1973 and 1981. Bottom has been described by Evan Whitton as 'an exemplary reporter'. But this opinion is not universally shared – Bottom has been widely criticised for his simplistic, white knights and black knights, approach. He was also frequently vilified by politicians and police, but has responded, in his numerous books, with the self-righteous assurance of a man willing to be a martyr for his cause.

Certainly Bob Bottom was a highly motivated and well-connected opponent of institutionalised corruption, courageous and single-minded in his determination to see it eliminated. His motives and connections, however, single him out for further examination, not least because of the crucial role he played in informing other journalists and brokering police information throughout the 1980s. As he wrote:

For honest police I was a catalyst, the repository for files not acted upon. When I did release information, most times I was never mentioned. Journalists in all areas of the media lived off what became the nerve centre for countless disclosures, often with some journalists telling their editors they got the information themselves, direct from police sources. (Bottom, 1984: 92)

As will be shown, Bob Bottom is a key figure in each of the three phases of investigative reporting discussed in this chapter. His devotion to the elimination of corruption saw him move backwards and forwards across the boundaries of journalism, advocacy and politics. His faith in Jeremy Bentham's curative power of publicity was unbounded. In what he described as the most important speech of his life, Bob Bottom told the National Press Club in Canberra in 1984:

I am apolitical. I have been accused by some of being involved in a conspiracy. But I believe it is up to the public to decide when they have been provided with the facts before them. Naming names is very difficult, not so much in the naming but in the targeting by authorities. Matters would not have come to fruition in Watergate without press exposure. In California the authorities have set up Operation Exposure, to institute an exposure campaign leading to the ostracism and downfall of targeted individuals. When I get the information I am often just the catalyst for other people who have the information, who only come to me when they cannot act on it . . . While the authorities do so little, exposure will be made. What really annoys me is the way the media promotes people as acceptable ocker characters of Sydney when they are in a position to get people murdered. It is a bit off. (National Press Club, 30 May 1984)

### **Creating a Culture**

The reports prepared during the 1980s were produced in the context of changing cultures in some news organisations, influenced by several key individuals. At the beginning of the 1980s, journalists were becoming more assertive and willing to defend professional issues, and two of the most important organisations for the journalism produced during this period, the ABC and John Fairfax Ltd, were experiencing fundamental management changes.

In 1981, an official review of the ABC mapped out new directions which allowed more assertive and increasingly independent editorial policies to flourish.

The flagship television current affairs program *Four Corners*, under the leadership of Jonathan Holmes and later Peter Manning, became increasingly committed to producing investigative journalism. Holmes had been schooled in the tradition of quality British current affairs television, which specialised in in-depth background reports and disclosure. His brief as executive producer was to rescue a program that had lost direction and was being seriously challenged by *60 Minutes*.

Under Holmes' leadership *Four Corners* made its mark as the leading investigative program. He was followed as executive producer by Peter Manning, who had worked for ABC television on *This Day Tonight* in the early 1970s and again in the early 1980s, after editing the *Nation Review* and a community newspaper. He had also written for the *Sun Herald* and *Bulletin*, and been an influential founding member of the journalism reform group which published the *New Journalist*. In 1989 Manning was promoted to director of news and current affairs for ABC television before leaving the ABC in 1995 to pursue a career in commercial television.

Several of the most influential editors and journalists at Fairfax had also worked their way up in an organisation that began a process of rapid change when James Fairfax became chairman in 1977. James Fairfax overturned the interventionist style of his father and adopted a more hands-off policy, shaped by 'motherhood' policies:

Belief that newspapers, no matter who owns them or controls them exist as a service to the public. A newspaper should therefore inform the public as accurately and impartially as possible. The service a newspaper offers is not only to record the facts, but to provide a commentary on them. Since this commentary is intended to influence the actions of those who read or hear of it, it should have no other aim, but the welfare of the community. (Souter, 1991: 89)

In 1980 some of the more outspoken and independently minded journalists and editors at Fairfax, including Max Suich, Vic Carroll and Chris Anderson, were appointed to positions of senior editorial responsibility. Suich's appointment, in Sir Warwick Fairfax's view, broke the 'Fairfax tradition' of 'acceptable risk'. In a memo to the board Sir Warwick expressed his reservations about Suich, while acknowledging that he had contributed to the company's success in the 1970s, Suich had caused 'embarrassment . . . deeply shocked us and done us harm with important sections of readers':

Had this been due just to the exuberance of youth, it would not have been so difficult to deal with. But it was not. It was due to a different point of view, held sincerely but obstinately, no contrition seemed to be felt and discipline was accepted with very bad grace and, indeed, sometimes completely defied.

This was partly because of a firm conviction, very often held nowadays, in the rights of editors and executives controlling newspapers to determine their own policy. I do not know what the evidence is that Suich has abandoned this. (Souter, 1991: 81)

Despite Sir Warwick's reservations, the board proceeded with the appointment, and over the following decade Suich became embroiled in damaging disputes with several editors over the scope of their control and freedom to determine the policy and contents of the papers that they edited. Nonetheless, in the environment fostered by Suich and general manager, Greg Gardner, editors and journalists on the Fairfax papers had more scope than ever before to pursue complex and sensitive stories.

This presented a challenge and an opportunity, which was taken up with particular enthusiasm by the *National Times*. In the late 1970s under the editorship of Max Suich and later Evan Whitton, its forte had been the reporting of social issues and its circulation consistently topped 100 000. During the 1980s when it was edited successively by David Marr, Brian Toohey and Jefferson Penberthy, with the board's support and encouragement the paper focused on corruption and networks of influence. In Gavin Souter's assessment:

This was rather like urging a bloodhound to improve its scent. During its first ten years it had led the pack . . . henceforth it was to set an even faster pace, sniffing busily for fresh spoor and baying with renewed zeal after more formidable quarry. It was hard going, with no guarantee of a trophy at the end of the hunt. There might be a kill – imprisonment for a corrupt minister of the crown, a Senate inquiry into the conduct of a judge – or there might be nothing more than carefully lawyered innuendo, leaving an impression of guilt, perhaps well deserved, but not proven. Certainly the kills served a high purpose. So too did some of the misses, by raising public awareness and intimidating scoundrels . . . Apart from the fury of wounded tigers, the *National Times* also risked being regarded as a self-appointed Nemesis, obsessed with wrong doing and retribution. Such a perception could blind readers to the rest of the papers and was unlikely to do much for circulation and advertising revenue. (Souter, 1991: 146)

Despite the strength of its reports, during the 1980s its circulation rarely reached 100 000 and advertising support was sluggish. The leanly staffed weekly newspaper had a strong voice, but it was not profitable, losing on one estimate \$12.8 million between 1971 and 1986.

During the 1980s the paper's dominant influence was Brian Toohey, who had joined the *National Times* in 1981 after several years as the *Australian Financial Review's* Washington correspondent, where he had pursued interests in defence and intelligence. Toohey's reputation as a driven man, with 'highly developed suspicion, great staying power and

the ability to keep a seemingly endless supply of leaked documents coming his way' preceded him (Souter, 1991: 149). *National Times* staff were uncertain how they would adjust to his flamboyant style. Within a short period, the adjustment was complete and Toohey's style became that of the paper, as he hired and encouraged independent, critical journalism.

Toohey provided an insight into his journalistic philosophy when he appeared before the Senate Privileges Committee in September 1984 facing a charge of contempt of Parliament:

I believe that journalists, when they get hold of information and can prove to their satisfaction that it is correct, and that it is important, should publish it with as little delay as possible. Otherwise they leave themselves open to the accusation that they may be playing politics, that they may be trying to drop the information at some time what would advantage someone whom they like, or disadvantage someone else whom they do not like that they have held up information and waited until an election campaign or that, in some ways they are being manipulative. I think the best way around those accusations is to be very straightforward – when you get information, when you are certain that you have it correct, as quickly as you can you should publish it. (Hansard, 26 September 1984: 54)

Finding a comfortable fit between the *National Times'* watchdog journalism and the consumer interests of its affluent readers was never easy. This was further complicated by struggles between the paper's editors and the company's chief editorial executive, Max Suich. Despite the rhetorical separation between advertising and editorial in Australian metropolitan newspapers, advertisers did not like their products surrounded by investigative journalism, yet the paper's low circulation made it particularly dependent on advertising. In 1986 it was relaunched as the *Times on Sunday*, but closed two years later.

The rise of investigative journalism in Australia during the 1980s was not an isolated national phenomenon. Similar developments were occurring in many parts of the world. Most of the prominent Australian investigative journalists readily acknowledged the influence of North American investigative reporting. Toohey's exposure to American journalism immediately after Watergate profoundly influenced him (Pollak, 1990: ch. 12). Adoption of an American approach and modus operandi also provided a rationale and defence for publishing critical articles, including those which questioned the bona fides of close friends of prime ministers: 'It would be unthinkable in American terms, for example, that journalists didn't background who were the friends of someone standing for the Presidency, as a clue to the sort of person and what that person's values were' (Toohey interview, 19 February 1990).

One of the chief tools of American investigative journalists is access to official documents. In the Australian political tradition, based on the secrecy provisions of Westminster, government documents have been regarded as confidential, and public servants could be dismissed for making even innocuous material public. The introduction of Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation had been a part of the political platform of the Whitlam government, but it took ten years before it was introduced. A year later it was adopted in Victoria. Similar legislation was also introduced in New South Wales, but did not become operational until the Liberal government of Premier Nick Greiner was elected in the late 1980s. The *Age* and the *Canberra Times* led the way in recognising the potential of FOI for access to hitherto confidential government information and devoted staff, time and money to developing expertise in its use. The value of developing expertise of reading company balance sheets and corporate financial and legal documents, also began to be recognised by editors and journalists, who tapped this paper trail when documenting complex articles and programs.

The closer working relationship with lawyers which developed during the 1980s also made journalists and editors aware of the tools of legal investigation, and the rules regarding admissible evidence, which they would need to satisfy in subsequent legal action. As journalists and editors endeavoured to ensure that the articles and programs they produced were both compelling and legally defensible, the range of research methods routinely used in Australian newsrooms became more sophisticated.

### Phase 1: Assessing the Boundaries

The themes for the investigative reporting of cronyism and corruption which was to characterise much of the 1980s was set with a series of articles published between March 1980 and October 1981 in the Sydney-based national weeklies, the *Bulletin* and the *National Times*. These reports stand out as icons of the nascent investigative reporting of the time, although in this first phase the reports were also characterised by legal caution.

#### *The Federated Ships Painters and Docker's Union*

On 11 March 1980 the *Bulletin*, the public affairs flagship of Kerry Packer's Australian Consolidated Press group, began a four-part series by Melbourne-based freelance journalist, David Richards. The articles explored the allegedly illegal activities of the Federated Ships Painters

and Dockers' Union and focused on the criminal records of many prominent members of the union, highlighting illegal employment and industrial practices. The first article – 'Exclusive, Australia's Most Dangerous Criminal Tells All' – was drawn from taped interviews, 'smuggled out of Pentridge', with convicted murderer, Billy Longley, a one-time aspirant to the union presidency. Longley used the article to assert his innocence of the murder of union secretary Pat Shannon and as 'his best chance of getting a re-trial and perhaps ending the prospect he faces of spending the rest of his life in prison' (Richards, 11 March 1980: 48).

The second article – 'How the Government Condones Waterfront Graft' – examined the process of 'ghosting' by waterside workers on 'government owned' Australian National Line ships in Melbourne. Richards claimed he saw twenty workers collect thirty-nine pay packets, and said that there was documented evidence of equipment theft from the docks. The article included denials from company executives and observed that no police charges had been laid: 'Like the ANL, the authorities seem prepared to accept the union's rule of the docks, despite overwhelming evidence of criminality' (Richards, 18 March 1980: 63).

Subsequent articles explored the presence of union members at naval facilities and questioned the union's adherence to the industrial law. The series culminated in the demand for the deregistration of the union and stronger action 'on [the government's] frequently voiced concern for industrial law and order' (*Bulletin*, 1 April 1980: 59). Although the *Bulletin* considered that the situation was 'not one which calls for an inquiry', the Fraser government was sufficiently disturbed to establish a royal commission, largely at the urging of Alan Reid, elder statesman of the Canberra Press Gallery and then the *Bulletin's* chief political reporter and long-time political go-between for the Packer family (Costigan, 2 November 1984; Whitton, 1987: 122). The terms of reference were based on the principal findings of the *Bulletin's* reports, but the scope of the inquiry grew as details of union involvement in a wide range of illegal activities were uncovered.

Frank Costigan QC was appointed by the federal government, in conjunction with the Liberal Victorian government, to head the Royal Commission in 1980. The former Labor candidate was assisted by barrister Douglas Meagher QC, who set about building the most extensive computer database of information relating to criminal activities in Australia. This became one of the largest assets of the Royal Commission and established a method of data collection and analysis that was subsequently emulated by other inquiries and by some news organisations.

Within a short period this inquiry intersected with an investigation into tax avoidance by accountants McCabe Lanfranchi, which had previously been established by the Victorian government in 1978. Tax avoidance had flourished in Australia during the 1970s and among the schemes was one which became known as the 'bottom of the harbour', because that was where documents relating to the taxation liabilities of sham companies were finally lodged. The Royal Commission directed its attention to the involvement of members of the Federated Ships Painters and Dockers' Union. The experience members of the union had obtained in providing false identities for men 'in trouble with the law' was profitably applied to providing bogus directors for accountants offering tax avoidance schemes. The union's reputation for violence also acted as a deterrent to government taxation investigators.

This link between the tax avoidance industry and the criminal milieu provided the trigger for a significant expansion of Costigan's brief. He reported periodically, finally producing eleven volumes, six of which remained confidential. These confidential volumes were alleged to track networks of crime and influence and provide the basis for further investigation into the affairs of several prominent Australians, including Kerry Packer, owner of the Australian Consolidated Press and publisher of the *Bulletin*. At the time of the release of his report, Frank Costigan said, 'To the extent that Mr Packer warrants investigation I recommend that it be done, to the extent that he warrant prosecution I urge that it be done' (*AFR*, 2 November 1984). The irony that the owner of the media organisation that had triggered the establishment of the Royal Commission should be then investigated by the inquiry was not lost, and disclosure of the Royal Commission's allegations against Packer in late 1984 was an important element of the third phase.

#### *Phone tapping*

The second emblematic article in 1980 also appeared in the *Bulletin*, written by staff writer Bob Bottom. In late 1978, after three years as a political adviser to conservative and Labor politicians on issues relating to crime and corruption, Bottom returned to his vocation. Over the following two years he wrote a series of major articles for the *Bulletin* on a wide range of crime-related issues. But in October 1980, shortly after he had completed another period as a special adviser to a conservative politician, he wrote a one-page article which appeared to be a straightforward report of a public plea by the Victorian Commissioner of Police, Mick Miller, for the power to tap telephones. There was a simple choice he said, 'between using electronic aids to intercept communications or allowing organised crime to flourish' (Bottom, 21 October

1980). Miller had made his demand in a 'carefully prepared statement' published in *Police Life* and Bottom went on to explore the laws relating to the interception of telephone conversations:

Although it is seldom acknowledged NSW already has a Listening Devices Act, enacted in 1969, which empowers NSW police to use listening devices when authorised by a 'prescribed' officer of police . . . [who] is satisfied that it is necessary for the conduct of an investigation into an offence that has been committed or where an offence is about to be committed, or is likely to be committed. Use of the Act has been in question since 1974 . . . (Bottom, 21 October 1980: 32)

Bottom outlined the legal debate about the validity of the act, which had followed a statement by federal Attorney-General Lionel Murphy in 1974, that the New South Wales act was inconsistent with the federal law. Bottom concluded with Miller's plea: 'Unless positive action was taken to give police power to intercept communications they would be unable to cope with professional criminals involved in organised crime.'

Although he did not reveal it, at the time he wrote this article Bottom was aware of the extensive telephone interceptions which had been conducted by the New South Wales police since the mid-1970s. Transcripts and tapes from this operation became public four years later, when they became key source materials for major reports in the second and third phases of investigative reporting. Bottom has since acknowledged that he had been aware of the police tapes and said that since 1979 he 'was receiving information and transcripts day-by-day' (interview 27 April 1990; also National Press Club, 30 May 1984). Bottom used information from the tapes to write several articles, including one on what became known as the Cessna Milner case in 1979 in which the intervention of the police commissioner resulted in drug charges being heard in a lower court with reduced sentencing capacity (Bottom, 1984; Whitton, 1987a, 1987b).

#### *Sir Robert Askin*

The third emblematic story of this period appeared in the *National Times* the day before the state funeral of the former New South Wales Liberal Premier, Sir Robert Askin (1965–75). This article by David Hickie was the result of several years research and involved a close examination of the workings of one of the principal 'crime families' in New South Wales, headed by Perc Galea.<sup>1</sup> The article alleged that

<sup>1</sup> For further details on Askin and the Galea organisation see Hickie, *The Prince and the Premier* (1985) and *High Climbers* (Sydney: Ferguson, 1989) by Geoff Reading which challenges Hickie's work.

Askin had received substantial payments from those involved in SP and illegal casino gambling, and that he had taken money in return for recommending candidates for imperial honours. The allegations were shocking, although rumour and gossip had long implicated Askin in the growth of organised crime.

In some ways the allegations were less spectacular than the timing of their publication. The editor of the paper David Marr defended this decision in print by noting that under New South Wales defamation laws a dead man could not sue:

Only now that Askin is dead can the recent history of NSW be explored publicly. It is not a time for holding back, despite the distress these revelations may cause Askin's colleagues and family. Such are the laws of defamation in this country, that only a royal commission or parliamentary debate could fully protect public discussions about the Askin years while the man lived. (*National Times*, 13 September 1981)

The article was published without the knowledge of Fairfax Chairman James Fairfax, who was appalled by the 'bad taste' of publishing the allegations, so soon after Askin's death and immediately prior to the funeral (Souter, 1991: 145). A memo from Max Suich conceded that he may have erred in the timing, but noted 'while the facts had never been published they were well known to a wide range of members of the community, particularly within the political world'. When the Board considered the article at its meeting four days later the discussion moved quickly from 'the lapse of taste in the timing of the publication to the lack of diligence in getting the story earlier'. The Board unanimously decided that:

... the investigation of such stories is an important part of the work of all the Fairfax papers ... The *National Times* is to put the maximum available resources into following up the story and publishing the facts not only about Sir Robert Askin, but the corruption of other politicians and police – particularly those still living and working in Sydney. (Souter, 1991: 146)

With this directive providing authority and a guarantee of resources, the *National Times* embarked on one of the most vigorous periods in its twenty-five years. Over the following five years the paper tested the limits of tolerance within the company, outraged much of the business community, incurred the wrath of politicians of the left and right, became involved in landmark legal actions over its right to publish classified government information, saw staff charged with contempt of parliament and raised questions of propriety and legality about several of the most prominent business leaders in the country.

In this first phase, this mandate led to long articles on politicians and criminal figures, many written by Marian Wilkinson, who had joined the paper in 1978 and quickly 'got to know the Sydney scene better than anyone before or after her', according to Bob Bottom. Wilkinson developed a style of research that was unusual in Australian journalism at the time (before the introduction of FOI legislation): she supplemented information obtained from her sources by drawing extensively on public record sources and documents. George Munster had pioneered this style of journalism in Australia, adapting the approach used by I.F. Stone in the USA. Evidence presented to royal commissions became important material as Wilkinson applied the skills of historical research she had learnt at university to journalism, and attempted to track networks of influence and association, travelling to the United States to use the more extensive public information sources available from government agencies there.

Officers of the Australian Federal Police were an important source for Wilkinson, just as they were to become for Chris Masters, Lindsay Murdoch, David Wilson and other leading investigative reporters (Bottom, 1984; Whitton, 1989; Masters, 1992a; interviews with Wilkinson (28 February 1990), Masters (17 April 1990), and Wilson, Smith, Bottom (27 April 1990). Federal police information provided a way of testing and checking state police information and was an important element in the verification of articles. The untested nature of the information in police files, however, became a matter of dispute in later court cases. One experienced reporter observed, 'I used to love the shit behind the scenes, the first police files I got I thought were marvellous . . . now if I were offered one I would throw it in the bin'.

Articles written about former transport magnate, Sir Peter Abeles, demonstrate the way information was gathered in police files, and how it subsequently came to public attention. Sir Peter Abeles had excited considerable interest because of repeated rumours of an association with the Mafia in the USA. Marian Wilkinson substantiated these claims in a long article in the *National Times*, in 1982, drawing in part on federal police files.

The police information was in part based on reports prepared by Bob Bottom when he was attached to Premier Wran's office as a special investigator. Bottom used the information he gathered in this role in one of the first major articles he wrote when he joined the staff of the *Bulletin* (Bob Bottom interview, 27 April 1990).

Wilkinson's article was important in the first phase of investigative reporting, as it suggested for the first time that the network of organised crime may have reached prominent mainstream business leaders.

She told a class of journalism students at the New South Wales Institute of Technology in 1985:

Then after numerous phone calls and assurances, introductions and finally two police contacts agreed to meet in a Sydney hotel. With them were the FBI reports on the Abeles, Tham, Fratiano meetings, the trips by Riley, Csidi and others, plus the debriefing of Fratiano on his meetings with Abeles and TNT executives. I was not allowed copies, but was thoroughly briefed and it assured me that the information I was given verbally in San Francisco was in fact correct. A few days later I was telephoned by one of these police contacts and a copy of a crucial telex showing Tham's early role with TNT was sent to me.

Wilkinson did not depend solely on Federal Police files; she supplemented them with extensive research in USA, drawing on court, regulatory and law enforcement agencies and public records, and as a result produced an article that went much further. Wilkinson also wrote articles about Abe Saffron, reputed to be one of the 'Mr Bigs' of organised crime in New South Wales, who was subsequently found guilty of taxation offences and incarcerated. She also detailed the trip by New South Wales Police Deputy Commissioner Bill Allen to Las Vegas as the guest of one of the major gaming companies, which led to his early resignation. The role of the Australian Federal Police in pursuing evidence of corruption in other police forces was a crucial element in the disclosures of these years (Steketee and Cockburn, 1986: 282 ff.).

### Phase 2: Pushing the Limits

The next phase of investigative reporting was characterised by a quantum leap in the significance of the revelations, and an increasing willingness by journalists (somewhat reluctantly supported by their news organisations) to take further steps towards being regarded as an 'equal contender'. The reporting of this phase was marked by longer periods of research, the expectation of higher standards of proof to enable legal defences to be factored into the initial report and, by comparison with the third phase (in which articles and programs were tightly focused), a somewhat scattergun approach to subject areas.

#### *'The Big League'*

It was clear that a new phase had begun when *Four Corners* broadcast its most sensational program on 30 April 1983. The program – 'The Big League' – alleged high level involvement in the miscarriage of justice in New South Wales and suggested (incorrectly) that this occurred with the complicity of Premier Neville Wran. It was explosive television suggesting, by dramatisation, that the former Chief Stipendiary

Magistrate, Murray Farquhar acted at the direction of Premier Wran when he told other magistrates in 1977 that the executive director of the NSW Rugby League, Kevin Humphreys, should be found not guilty of misappropriating \$50 000 from the Balmain Leagues Club.

The program was the result of three months of work by Peter Manning and Chris Masters, who had recently joined the staff of the premier current affairs program, after a journalistic training in regional offices of the ABC and some experience in filmmaking. Manning and Masters had initially embarked on a somewhat unfocused investigation into corruption and sport. The focus on the abuse of influence and miscarriage of justice emerged only after several weeks of inquiry. Bob Bottom was once again a central source, triggering and helping to shape the inquiry. Manning remembered:

Chris and I were at Bob Bottom's place ... and we were there for some time talking off-the-record about a whole lot of things to do with sport and organised crime. At some point Bob said, 'You know of course about what happened with the Humphreys case?' I suspect I didn't know anything about it whatsoever, and he then gave us a version that was pretty broad with a fair number of implications and allegations. He made it clear that it was . . . the gossip . . . of Macquarie Street and Phillip Street. At the time it didn't seem terribly relevant to the program . . . On the other hand, it broadly fitted into sport and rorting . . . Then we focussed on rugby league and referees, administration and in turn on Humphreys and in turn the case. It was a guilty secret. We later discovered with the magistrates that pretty well all of them knew about something that had happened with the Humphreys case. (interview Manning, 12 March 1990)

Over the following two months Manning and Masters pursued the story until they found two former magistrates, Wally Lewer and Hal Waller, who were prepared to corroborate the allegations (Masters, 1992: ch. 2; Pullan, 1986: 105 ff). Their public standing and first-hand recollection of the events provided the producers with the information they needed for the re-enactments. Their statements, even though they were not made on camera, provided a central element of the program's legal defence, as the script noted that they had 'collected statements from a number of people including senior and experienced magistrates whose office and stature makes them specially credible witnesses. We believe what they told us is true'. The re-enactments showed Farquhar telling other magistrates that the premier had phoned and told him that Humphreys should not be committed.

The allegation that the premier had directed a miscarriage of justice was explosive, not least because of the possibility of 'enormous damages' in any defamation settlement, and because the ABC depended on federal government funding. The producers recognised that the claims 'could bring down the Government' (Pullan, 1986: 112).

The program was only broadcast after explicit board approval had been given, as each individual in the ABC's chain of command passed responsibility for the decision to his superior. Premier Wran had refused to be interviewed for the program, arguing through his lawyer that 'damage is done immediately an allegation is made . . . regardless of denials on his part'. Within a week of the explosive program being broadcast, Wran had stepped down to enable a royal commission to investigate whether there had been a miscarriage of justice and whether this had occurred at his direction. The program makers were reluctant to cooperate with the Street Royal Commission, annoyed by the narrowness of the terms of reference. Most, but not all of the sources for the *Four Corners* program reiterated the information they had given the producers, under oath at the Street Royal Commission. Chief Justice Sir Laurence Street found that there had been a miscarriage of justice, but not at the behest of the premier. As executive producer Jonathan Holmes observed in a memo to staff: ' . . . (the allegations) were found to be true by Sir Laurence Street: Farquhar did intervene, his intervention was effective, and he had claimed the authority of the Premier. In all these respects, the program got it right' (Pullan, 1986: 119).

In October 1983 Humphreys, who had resigned as executive director of the Rugby League two days after the original broadcast, was convicted, fined the maximum of \$4000 and placed on a two-year good behaviour bond. Murray Farquhar was convicted and sentenced to four years jail in March 1985. Less than a month before, the former chief magistrate was incarcerated. Without consulting Manning, Holmes or Masters and despite legal advice that the case was winnable, the new ABC board, in February 1985, settled Wran's outstanding defamation action. The ABC agreed to pay Wran's legal costs and accepted 'unreservedly' that the premier was not involved in perverting the course of justice and regretted the 'embarrassment to the Premier that resulted from these telecasts'.

This decision infuriated the program's producers, who had built a legal defence into the program. Manning felt that the program makers had been ambushed when, quite unexpectedly, the decision to settle the case was announced. Chris Masters said, 'I was not happy, but I respect their [the board's] right to make these judgements' (Masters, 1992a: 41).

#### *The AUSTEO Papers*

'The Big League' set the scene for a new level of disclosure journalism and, within a week of its broadcast, there was further indication that a

new phase had begun: on 7 May 1983 – only six weeks after the election of the Hawke Labor government – the *National Times* published the first instalment of extracts from confidential intelligence documents, providing ‘a remarkable insight into Australia’s defence, intelligence and foreign policies’. These documents, known as the AUSTEO Papers – ‘for AUSTRalian Eyes Only’ – went to the heart of Australia’s intelligence relationship with neighbouring countries and allies. The first three articles alleged that ASIO had betrayed Australia to the USA, that the Americans had withheld crucial intelligence from Australia in 1979 and that Australia had not had access to intelligence produced by a joint USA–UK spying operation against China. Brian Toohey, who wrote the reports based on ‘tens of thousands of classified government documents’ promised that more revelations would be published in following weeks.

The Hawke government reacted with alarm. It sought and won a High Court injunction preventing further publication of the documents, demanding their return and the identity of the source. In the view of the government, the leaks were, ‘the most massive breach of security in Australia’s history’. The government alleged that the paper had breached copyright and that any further publication was likely to damage national security. Brian Toohey and Max Suich maintained that publication was in the public interest, and the board directed that the case be vigorously defended. Toohey recalled:

I could never work out what the Hawke Government was on about. It was in no way harmful to them. It was critical of things that had happened under the Fraser Government . . . Hawke was enormously concerned to get his credentials in the security area up with the United States. He felt that was one of the things that Whitlam had stumbled on and he was determined to be more loyal than anyone in the history of Australia, and I think that’s what was driving him . . . I suppose that when you put at the end of the article, Next Week More, they feel obliged to act. I think it’s more important that Australians know that one of their security bodies is handing over information about Australians who’ve committed no crimes nor done any damage to Australia, to a foreign intelligence agency, who may harm them in various ways. I think there’s a national security interest involved, certainly, and that’s the interest of having Australians protected against organisations such as the CIA. (interview Toohey, 19 February 1990)

After the first High Court hearing the injunction lapsed and was replaced by a series of ‘understandings’ negotiated between the government, the company and the editor. These ‘understandings’ included the right of the government to vet subsequent articles – which had at that stage not even been written – before publication. When the second instalment was published on 20 May 1983, after changes which Toohey

maintained were minor and technical, the Attorney-General continued to dispute the truth of the allegations, but claimed, 'they are not damaging to our national security simply by being untrue' (Granato, 1983: 26).

The publication of these articles was greeted in the Australian news media as a victory for the *National Times* and freedom of the press. Characteristically the news reporting focused on the personal conflict between Toohey and the federal government rather than the substance of the revelations. However, in his comparative assessment of this situation and the *New York Times'* response to the injunctions by the American government to prevent further publication of the Pentagon Papers, Granato concluded that Fairfax's willingness to accede to the demand of prior vetting characterised the Australian media as a 'cooperating servant' rather than an 'equal contender' (Granato, 1983: 27).

The AUSTEO Papers were not the first time that major leaks of intelligence documents had been published in Australia. In late 1980 the federal government had sought an ex parte injunction to prevent extracts from a book, *Documents on Australian Defence and Foreign Policy 1968–1975*, being published in the *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald*. In that situation the editors responsible for the papers proved elusive, and the injunction was not served until the first editions had been printed, although the extract was deleted from later editions. Copies of the book already sold into bookshops were distributed, but the court maintained that the book breached copyright and it was banned. A modified version, *Secrets of State*, was published two years later (Walsh and Munster, 1982: vii ff)

But just as Manning and Masters had accepted the agreement to settle Wran's legal action against the ABC, Toohey also accepted the understandings reached between Fairfax and the High Court in the AUSTEO Papers case. Both these settlements, although minimal, cast the news organisations as 'cooperating servants'. But both 'The Big League' and AUSTEO Papers signalled that the 'servant' had moved towards liberation. Neither of these cases, which were important milestones in the renegotiation between the 'estates', were reported elsewhere as though there had been a major government victory.

#### *Rex Jackson; police tapes*

The third milestone in this phase of investigative reporting was marked by two articles in the *National Times* in late 1983 by Marian Wilkinson. The first – 'Why Jackson resigned: Eight questions that led to a political crisis' – reported on questions that Wilkinson had presented to the New South Wales Minister for Corrective Services Rex Jackson. The questions which were drawn on information obtained

from Australian Federal Police surveillance revealed that Jackson had misled Parliament. He resigned on the same day. Jackson was later found guilty of conspiracy for his involvement in the early release of prisoners, in exchange for money, and was sentenced to more than nine years' imprisonment (Steketee and Cockburn, 1986: 306 ff).

Wilkinson's second contribution to this phase was a report which drew extensively on the secret police tapes. This article was published 26 November 1983. This was the first explicit public airing of the information on tapes that the New South Wales Police Department's Bureau of Criminal Intelligence had been making, under a questionable legal authority, since 1974. The somewhat enigmatic article – 'Big Shots Bugged' – provided a cautious paraphrase of information obtained from taped conversations in early 1980 between a Sydney solicitor, 'reputed to be a "Mr Fix-It" for organised crime', and the 'big shots' under surveillance, who were not named but were identified as a judge, solicitor, public servant, an organised crime figure and a former magistrate, police officer and Liberal politician among others. The article described several 'scenarios' drawn from the tapes, in a cautious and cryptic manner. It noted that as a result of the joint New South Wales–Federal Police operation, 'senior police officers and public servants were moved sideways or forced to resign and various individuals were charged and convicted with minor offences.'

The scenarios sought to highlight a network of influence that crossed organised crime and public life. Wilkinson added significance to the claims by concluding, 'But some police officers feel that the positions of some of those named in the report made them untouchable.'

Wilkinson was well aware that what she was writing was 'political dynamite' and that publishing the information was akin to opening Pandora's box (interviews with Wilkinson, 28 February and 28 May 1990). She had obtained some of the tapes and transcripts of the joint New South Wales–Federal Police surveillance from her police contacts. Once again Bob Bottom was involved, as he also had access to the tapes, and had made some transcripts available to the Australian Democrats as part of the posturing that was going on about the establishment of the National Crime Authority (Bottom, 1984: 130). It had been planned that the article would be jointly written by him and Wilkinson, but on the eve of publication Bottom withdrew, appealing to Max Suich to 'hold' the story. Brian Toohey recalled:

Bob rang me, I'd say ten minutes before the absolute deadline, the paper was about to go to the presses and asked that the story be pulled out. For one, it was impossible in terms of time to do so. Two, it didn't cross my mind to pull the story out. I could see no reason whatsoever. I never really got to

the bottom of what his concern was. It wasn't that the information was wrong or anything like that. It was all a matter of timing I think. He wanted to try and alter the timing of when this information came out. That didn't interest me. (interview Brian Toohey, 19 February 1990)

Despite the drama associated with its publication, the article virtually disappeared into the ether, and the identity of the 'big shots' remained secret. Although the senior staff on the paper were well aware of the explosive nature of the information they had published, it was not pursued elsewhere in the media, nor was it pursued by politicians. This response was later described by Toohey as 'dilatory, timid and often downright evasive' (Hansard, 26 September 1984: 37; *National Times*, 28 September 1984: 16).

### Phase 3: Confronting Power with Public Interest

#### *The Age Tapes*

Knowledge that the New South Wales Police had been engaged in wide ranging telephone surveillance exploded into public consciousness when on 2 February 1984 the *Age* published the first in a three-part series of articles drawn from information on the tapes and transcripts obtained from Bob Bottom. The weekend after the Marian Wilkinson 'Big Shots Bugged' article had been published in November 1983, Bottom had left New South Wales for Victoria, where he developed his association with the *Age* police reporter Lindsay Murdoch.

In its subsequent reports on the contents of the tapes, the *Age* also focused on the networks of influence, and the cross-over between organised crime and public administration in New South Wales. As a Victorian paper, it was particularly interested that a federal judge appeared to have been implicated. Its first front-page story was headed 'Secret Tapes of Judge'. The paper did not name the judge, but it had gone to unprecedented lengths to test the authenticity of the tapes, to seek proof of his identity, and had made the tapes available to the federal Attorney-General on the eve of publication (interview Robert Haupt, 16 May 1990). Within a few weeks Justice Lionel Murphy's identity had been revealed under the protection of parliamentary privilege, in Queensland.

The publication of these articles by the *Age* marks the beginning of the third phase of investigative reporting in Australia in the 1980s. During this period not only were prominent individuals implicated in improper or unethical practice, but the news media pursued them with considerable gusto. This phase is also characterised by greater determination of journalists, editors and producers to claim to be

acting in the public interest, and willingness to accept the consequences of this assertion.

In many ways what became known as the *Age* Tapes was the defining story of this period and its ramifications continued for years in the Parliament and courts as the allegations against Justice Murphy – that he had abused his position to pervert the course of justice – were investigated. He was eventually charged and tried twice, first being found guilty and subsequently not guilty. The reporting of the *Age* Tapes was one of several examples of investigative journalism which had profound public consequences during this period. Later in 1984 the *National Times* published extracts of confidential volumes of the Costigan Royal Commission. Several years later *Four Corners* broadcast its program 'The Moonlight State', which led to a wide-ranging royal commission into corruption in Queensland, and ABC Radio broadcast a documentary which revealed that the doyen of medical research, Dr William McBride, had falsified his research and, after a protracted legal process, this led to his deregistration and the closure of the charitable foundation which bankrolled much of his research.

When the allegations against Justice Murphy emerged following the publication of the *Age* Tapes, journalists and editors did not let the story die, but, somewhat uncharacteristically, actively pursued it. Within weeks of the *Age*'s February article, the *National Times* was speculating on the possibility of impeaching the as yet unnamed judge: 'whether the judge's behaviour affects his suitability to hold judicial office' would be a matter of dispute, according to reporter Wendy Bacon (17 February 1984 : 4).

The *Sydney Morning Herald* had decided against publishing an article on the tapes in consort with its Melbourne sister paper, even though the allegations were central to the administration of justice in New South Wales. The decision not to publish the story was influenced in part by reservations about the veracity of Bob Bottom, and concerns about the authenticity and legality of the tapes (Souter, 1991: 151). This decision divided the most senior editors on the *SMH* (interview Eric Beecher, 26 April 1990) and was bitterly resented by the police reporter, Neil Mercer, who had been working on the story in tandem with the *Age* for some time (interview, 12 March 1990). Over the following weeks the *SMH* attempted to regain the initiative by forming a 'crime unit' to pursue this and related stories, but it never caught up with its stable-mate the *National Times*, which pursued the story with remarkable zeal.

The political debate around the *Age* Tapes focused on the authenticity and legality of the tapes. Those arguing for further examination of the issues demanded a royal commission in which the police officers

involved in making the tapes could be provided with immunity from prosecution. No royal commission eventuated; instead there were a series of Senate and special inquiries.

By reporting in-camera evidence given to the first Senate Select Committee on the Conduct of a Judge, the *National Times* incurred the wrath of the Parliament. The in-camera evidence of Chief Stipendiary Magistrate Clarrie Briese and Detective David Lewington of the Australian Federal Police provided new allegations against Justice Murphy, which were to lead eventually to criminal charges. When at the beginning of June 1984 Wendy Bacon wrote an article based on this confidential evidence, her legal education made her aware that she may be in contempt of parliament as a result (Hansard, 26 November 1984: 102). She was already facing a contempt of court charge in New South Wales for another article in the *National Times*.

When Wendy Bacon, Brian Toohey and Max Suich appeared before the Senate Privileges Committee in September 1984 to defend the publication of the article, and several follow-ups, they argued that they had been acting in the public interest. As Bacon told the committee:

It is my firmly held view that until either the Federal or State Governments develop the political will to do something about these matters we, as journalists, have a responsibility to publish allegations, particularly when they come from a person such as the Chief Magistrate, Clarrie Briese. (Hansard, 26 September 1984: 100)

Although Suich had not been involved in the decision to publish the article, he had no reservations about Toohey's decision, telling the Senators that despite the respect that Fairfax had for the Senate and its committees, the media organisation 'must also have regard to its own responsibility to inform the public about matters of great public interest . . . the overwhelming responsibility to the public justified publication, notwithstanding the risk' (Hansard, 26 September 1984: 7).

Much of the evidence given to the Privileges Committee by the Fairfax trio revolved around the question of defining the public interest. Toohey and Bacon were adamant that the information that they had published went to the heart of the administration of justice in Australia and was therefore of great public interest. Toohey engaged in a combative exchange with members of the committee, one of whom disparagingly referred to him as 'such an embodiment of public interest' (Hansard, 26 September 1984: 70).

Toohey and Bacon also argued that had they not published the in-camera evidence, it was likely that the Senate Select Committee would not have referred to the claims of these witnesses in its final report. This assertion was rejected by most of the members of the Select Committee, although ALP Senator Nick Bolkus agreed that the

publication of the evidence by the *National Times* had influenced the content of the committee's report.

The Senate Committee eventually found that Toohey, Bacon and Suich were in contempt of parliament for publishing the in-camera evidence of the Select Committee, although not for their adamant refusal to identify their sources, the prime reason other journalists were found in contempt of court in subsequent years (Childs, 1984). Despite the finding, and talk of a massive bond being required from the Fairfax organisation, which would be forfeited if any of the papers in the group again breached the rules of the parliament, the Senate was dissolved before it could consider imposing charges against the trio.

Lawyer Michael Sexton observed at the time that the committee faced an almost impossible task in determining an appropriate punishment for the contempt even the accused agreed had been committed. Sexton concluded that there were three options, the first, a fine could well be unconstitutional, and the other two were unpalatable:

It could send the journalists in question to jail . . . This seems an unlikely response by the Committee in 1984. The spectacle of journalists and publishers climbing into prison wagons outside Parliament House with television cameras whirring is one to make even the most resolute politician think twice . . . If the Committee were simply to make a finding deplored the conduct and leave it at that, . . . The problem for the Senate in this situation is that the journalists have refused to apologise and indeed have insisted that they were performing a public service in disclosing the in-camera evidence. In these circumstances, failing to impose any penalty might seem to the Committee a loss of face . . . all in all, then the Committee probably wishes that the matter had never been referred to it. (Sexton, 1984: 43)

The failure of the Parliament to effectively penalise the journalists or the media organisation demonstrated that the journalists and the news media had become an 'equal contender' in the political process.

The *National Times'* vigorous pursuit of Justice Murphy had lost it a lot of support amongst its traditional readers, many of whom continued to regard Murphy as a great reforming attorney-general and High Court judge. In an attempt to rebut criticisms of the paper Wendy Bacon wrote:

The Murphy case turned into a test of political reliability for the left. In my case, people whom I had known for more than a decade walked past me as if I did not exist . . . The material in the *National Times* about the Murphy case was just a small part of a much bigger body of work on the illegal tapes, organised and corporate crime and political corruption in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. The journalistic techniques used were similar throughout this body of work. No one, including the police themselves decided to target Murphy. He simply turned up, along with a number of other public figures, on the illegal tapes. (Bacon, 1986: 17)

*Kerry Packer; Costigan Royal Commission*

In the period between publication of Bacon's contentious articles and the Senate hearing, the *National Times* published two articles which further tested the limits of investigative journalism. Reports detailing the allegations against Kerry Packer, the owner of the *Bulletin*, which had been investigated by the Costigan Royal Commission, were made public. The first article by Marian Wilkinson was a detailed 5000-word feature which documented the allegations against Packer including his withdrawal of \$1 million in \$50 notes from a Sydney bank, his business dealings with a Brisbane property developer Brian Ray, and the suicide of a Brisbane bank manager. Publication of this article on 3 August 1984 had been delayed for several weeks by the absence of Max Suich, who urged caution and dispassion in the placement and tone of the article. Suich was concerned that the article would be seen as vindictive, as the Fairfax company was in dispute with Packer over a joint business venture.

Four days after the management-edited article was published, Max Suich informed the staff, who in his view had developed a 'siege mentality', that Jefferson Penberthy had been appointed managing editor of the paper. For only the second time in Australian newspaper history, the journalists on the paper went on strike over a professional issue. They stayed away from work for 48 hours over the apparent demotion of Brian Toohey, but returned in time to produce the next week's paper. Penberthy reassured the staff that he would continue publishing 'hard' investigative stories and the Fairfax board reaffirmed its commitment to the paper's style of journalism (Souter, 1992: 157-9).

Several weeks later the *National Times* published a series of extracts from 42 confidential case summaries which the Costigan Royal Commission had recommended as needing further investigation by the National Crime Authority. The five cases were masked by *noms de plume*. One dealt with the allegations against Kerry Packer, codenamed Goanna, which included questions about the delivery of hashish to Packer's office, which Suich had deleted from Wilkinson's earlier report. On 28 September, two weeks after publication, and in the face of intense speculation, Kerry Packer identified himself as the Goanna and trenchantly defended himself, attacked the *National Times* and the Costigan Royal Commission and signalled his intention to sue Fairfax. His 5000-word rebuttal was published in full in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Six months later, after lengthy negotiations, the Fairfax organisation apologised to Packer and publicly stated that it had no evidence to support the allegations made in the Costigan summaries (Souter, 1992: 161; Ryan and Burge, 1992: 205 ff). This apology implicitly acknowl-

edged the limits of disclosure journalism based on publishing leaked information which is almost impossible to independently verify adequately. The weakness of disclosure journalism, as with most journalism, is that the credibility of the report depends in large measure on the reliability of the source.

The Packer settlement was one of the few successfully negotiated legal actions against the paper during this period. Souter notes that during the first half of the 1980s the *National Times* received an average of six legal claims a year, in 1985–86 there were eleven and in 1986–87 a further eleven. Five of these cases were settled on confidential terms. Only four of the claims during this period were resolved by substantial financial settlements. The paper, however, incurred legal costs of \$1 782 500 during this period, an only slightly disproportionate amount of the total legal bill for all the Fairfax publications (Souter, 1992: 165).

As the apology to Packer was being finalised, the dispute between Fairfax and Packer involving the joint ownership of a printing press escalated. Several months later Suich reluctantly agreed to publish a report on the destruction of property and a Fraud Squad investigation in the paper's business pages. By this time, Toohey's relationship with Suich was irrevocably flawed. When the paper was relaunched as the *Times on Sunday* in January 1986, Toohey ceased to have major editorial responsibility, but remained on the staff as a contributing editor. He survived until April 1987 when he resigned over the decision by Suich's successor, Chris Anderson, to prevent publication of a polemical essay he had written – 'The Death of Labor'. The paper's editor Robert Haupt also resigned over this intervention (interview Haupt, 16 May 1990). Haupt continued to be employed by the company, but Toohey departed to establish an independent magazine, *The Eye*. In its first issue Toohey made good his slogan, of publishing 'stories the big boys won't', and the first issue featured the controversial essay (Pollak, 1990: ch. 12).

#### *'The Moonlight State'*

During this period *Four Corners* was also in its prime. The program was compelling viewing each Monday night as it tackled diverse subjects. It ranged much broader than the administration of justice and organised crime, which had come increasingly to preoccupy the *National Times*, with negative consequences in terms of circulation, readership and organisational support.

*Four Corners* on the other hand was rating well. It had adopted a production model similar to that used by *60 Minutes*, with a researcher and producer working with the reporter on each segment. The energy, skill

and resourcefulness of these journalists enabled the *Four Corners* to address a wide range of subjects focused on particular 'stories'. As well as the predictable areas of criminal justice and corruption, *Four Corners* cast new light on business practices, social relations, intelligence and health issues (Pullan, 1986; Masters, 1992a).

*Four Corners* reports had triggered a wide range of official inquiries, but in May 1987 it broadcast a program which was to have almost unimaginable political consequences, and become the most celebrated example of Australian investigative journalism – 'The Moonlight State'. Within days the Queensland government had appointed the relatively unknown Tony Fitzgerald QC to head a royal commission designed to investigate the claims in the program and related matters (Dickie, 1989: 179 ff). Two years later, after more than two decades in power, the National Party Government was swept out of office, largely as a result of the revelations during this inquiry.

Royal commissions had increasingly become part of the armament of government during the 1980s – particularly after damaging media disclosure – but the Queensland government, headed by Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen, had resisted the trend. Allegations about unethical, corrupt and authoritarian practices by the Queensland government had been reported with almost monotonous regularity since the mid-1970s. But with the government dominated by a premier who successfully used bluff and bombast to dismiss criticism, allegations failed to achieve broader political significance. But the allegations, and the method of presentation, of 'The Moonlight State' were different. The broadcast of the program also coincided with the absence overseas of the premier. As Fitzgerald noted in his final report that this inquiry had been forced by investigative journalism:

During December 1986 and January 1987, the *Courier-Mail* newspaper published a series of articles concerning vice and police inactivity which were written by a young journalist Mr Philip John Dickie. There was nothing particularly unusual about this. Similar controversies had surfaced and subsided from time to time for many years. The spokesman for the Police Department routinely ground out stereotyped denials and hit back at critics. . . . However on 11 May 1987 the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Four Corners* program telecast 'The Moonlight State' a television documentary compiled by another investigative journalist, Mr Christopher Masters. Events which had been filmed raised the possibility that the Police force was lying or incompetent or both. On the day following 'The Moonlight State' telecast, the Acting Premier Gunn, announced there would be an inquiry. (Fitzgerald, 1989: 2)

Early in January 1987 the *Courier-Mail* had published a story, without a by-line, which detailed some of the brothels operating in Brisbane.

This article, by Phil Dickie, helped encourage the *Four Corners* team to change direction and concentrate on prostitution, and this and subsequent reports by Dickie helped to establish a climate which made what he described as the 'thunderclap' of the Moonlight State much louder.

The first story was published 'a trifle apologetically', on the front page of the *Courier-Mail* without promotional fanfare, or even Dickie's by-line, while he was on holidays on Monday, 12 January 1987. The paper did not accompany the report with a demand for an inquiry, nor did it have follow-up stories ready for subsequent days. That this reticence, which would normally kill a story, did not do so in this case was largely due to Dickie's persistence, and the support by the paper's recently appointed editor, Greg Chamberlin. Eventually the impact of *Four Corners* brought the slow simmering pot to a boil.

In the months after Dickie's article appeared, the *Four Corners* team of Chris Masters, producer Shaun Hoyt and researcher Debbie Whitmont began the laborious and time-consuming task of interviewing, reading, searching official titles and company records. They were looking for specific instances of corruption and people who would be able to talk about it, credibly, and on-camera. They were also attempting to establish a pattern, to understand the history and the context in which the corruption had developed and flourished. To do this they interviewed former police officers, public officials, lawyers, bouncers, journalists and many others. They found many who had been burned by the system in the past and despaired of any changes occurring.

After six weeks of methodical research, 'the breakthrough' came when the team was introduced to Nigel Powell, a former member of the Queensland Police Force's Licensing Branch, who had also worked as a police officer in Britain and Hong Kong. Powell was angry about the corruption he had observed in the Queensland Police Force and was prepared to say so publicly. He was also happy to work with the team as they assembled the material for the program. The turning point for Powell, which moved him towards the role of whistleblower, had come when he responded to a claim by the Police Minister Bill Gunn that there was 'no prostitution in the massage parlours' (Masters, 1992a: 62).

After Phil Dickie's article was published, Nigel Powell had sent a thirteen-page letter to the *Courier-Mail* detailing his allegations of corruption. Although a reporter was assigned to interview Powell, the issues raised were not pursued by the state's 'journal of record'. When Dickie returned from holidays he was eventually told of the letter, and met Powell and interviewed him in the staff canteen. The journalist and his source agreed that it would be counter-productive to write a human interest story based on the disillusioned observations of one

former police officer, which had been the paper's preferred approach in the past. Powell and Dickie feared that such a story would set up Powell and lead to him being publicly castigated – as had happened to other whistleblowers. Instead they agreed to work together (Dickie interview, 16 March 1990; Powell interview, 15 March 1990). This marked the beginning of Powell's close working relationship with Phil Dickie. Although Powell also worked with *Four Corners* this was not known to Greg Chamberlin, who after the program was broadcast asked Dickie, 'Why haven't we got him?' (interview, 15 March 1990).

Despite Chamberlin's ignorance of Powell's involvement he was acutely aware of the presence in town of *Four Corners*, and anxious that his newspaper not be 'shown up' by the out-of-towners, with the reputation for investigative reporting. Prior to his appointment as editor, he had built a reputation as an investigative reporter himself. The *Four Corners* group deliberately positioned themselves as outsiders while they were making their inquiries. They refused to use official channels to formally request interviews, although their presence was noted in the relevant circles as the notes in Police Commissioner Terry Lewis' diary later revealed. The journalists from both organisations recognised that if the story was to make an impact, it was better for them both to work on it. Although this subsequently caused tensions, during the early months of 1987 it provided some reassurance and protection and ensured that the story did not disappear into a dark hole. Co-operation of this nature was not traditionally one of the hallmarks of Brisbane journalism (Grundy, 1990: 35). As Fitzgerald commented two years later in his report:

The media played a part in exposing corruption, and two media organisations contributed to the setting up of this Inquiry. Unfortunately, it is also true that parts of the media in this state have over the years contributed to a climate in which misconduct has flourished. (Fitzgerald, 1989: 141)

Over the following months the researching, reporting and interviewing by *Four Corners* were shaped by an acute awareness of the capacity and demands of television. If one breakthrough came from meeting Nigel Powell, the other came from the titles office searches. After chasing one company as it led to another and to the property transactions of key figures, Whitmont came across a 'real estate contract showing the exchange of a property from the possession of Gerry Bellino and Vic Conte into the hands of a man known as Jack Reginald Herbert' (Masters, 1992a: 66). Herbert had been found not guilty when charged with corruption in 1976, but when he accepted indemnity in return for providing evidence to the Fitzgerald Inquiry, he

emerged as a central figure in the network of corruption that enveloped the Queensland Police Force and extended to the highest figures in the state.

Discovering this contract made it possible for *Four Corners* to link the illegal activities to police corruption. This took the story a major step further than the *Courier-Mail* reports, which had detailed the existence of illegal brothels and casinos, but had not been able to implicate the police in their continued operation, beyond showing a pattern of inaction (*Courier-Mail*, 13 and 18 April 1987).

By this time *Four Corners* producers knew they had a good story, one that went beyond chronicling the vice industry towards implicating police and other public figures. The practical demands of television to find a way of telling the story were also solved by using those sources prepared to go public, on camera, with obscured presentations from others. Most significantly, the producers decided not just to talk about prostitution, but to go some way towards showing it. Footage of strip shows was used extensively, intercut with film of the premier singing 'Onward Christian Soldiers' in his local church. This method dramatically highlighted the hypocrisy of the government. After extensive negotiation with the ABC's lawyers, and heavy promotion, the program went to air on Monday, 12 May 1987, beginning:

There is another side to the Sunshine State. Despite some wholesome attempts to pretend otherwise, the Queensland Government has not managed to stop the devil at the border. Competition in Queensland's vice industry is actively discouraged. There is a co-operative of ownership of management of the unlicensed night clubs, the massage parlours, the escort agencies and the illegal casinos. There is a strong case to show that instead of prosecuting these people the police prefer to protect them.

Both Hoyt and Masters had had experience of working in Queensland as journalists and knew the way that the states' political and media machines could combine to stifle critical reports. They also realised that Queenslanders did not absorb the criticisms that were made with 'a snide tone' by journalists from the southern states.

I think I understood the Queensland system pretty well, because of my time there. One of the things I can remember was when I did a fairly good dig about the monopoly in a mining town and watching it go to air and listening to the silence of the telephone. You know I thought the world would break open and it didn't. So I think that from that time on I began to calculate, subconsciously anyway, a method of making the Queensland public angry and getting that right – sort of making a program that said, 'this is about us' rather than 'this is about you', was a subtlety I think I sort of worked on for years. (Interview Masters, 17 April 1990)

'The Moonlight State' was a program calculated to cause a reaction. After nearly six months of exhausting and emotionally draining research, the last thing either Hoyt or Masters wanted was for the program to sink without trace. As Masters said five years later, 'If journalists believe in anything at all, it seems to me, it should be that people will take notice of what we report. It was terrific . . . to have that faith [in the value of journalism] restored' (Masters, 1992b: 34). Both Hoyt and Masters wanted the program to force at least an inquiry and hopefully changes in the administration of the state, and constructed the program to enhance this possibility.

When I was interviewed ad nauseam after the program I was saying things like, as loud as I could, 'Why don't they for once, for Christ's sake, do a proper inquiry?' And the other thing was that, having held back Burgess and having held back on naming other individuals I had a bit of coloured paint that I could splash on the whitewash, if indeed that was what they did, and I made them aware of that too. So they're not going to be able to do the whitewash when they know you've got information that can prove that it is a whitewash, so they are obliged to do it reasonably properly. (interview Masters, 17 April 1990)

Although Masters had been disillusioned by the process of royal commissions in other states, the Fitzgerald Inquiry was different. Peter Manning, the executive producer of the program, said:

The Street Royal Commission had been a very cynicising process for me . . . you suddenly realised how royal commissions may well not find the truth. Until Fitzgerald I thought royal commissions are forever going to be thus. I think Fitzgerald actually restored some faith. (Interview Manning 14 March 1990)

Not only did *Four Corners* provide background information for the commission's investigators, but the ABC instructed legal counsel to be present during the inquiry. By this action it was clear that the ABC had convincingly become, in Merrill's terms, an 'equal contender'.

### **Backlash, Consequences and Outcomes**

The journalism produced during this decade had far-reaching public and political consequences and, as Merrill suggested, tested the limits of what was permissible. Much of the reporting was the result of the initiative and inquiry of reporters, but a considerable amount of it depended on information that was first gathered by others. The journalistic skill with this form of disclosure journalism lay in gaining access

to the material and making it comprehensible and more generally known. The danger with the disclosure journalism, which depended in large measure on leaks, was that it ran the risk of serving, often without acknowledgment, the agendas of other, unidentified, individuals and agencies.

In his defence before the Senate Privileges Committee Brian Toohey, who was the undisputed master of this style of journalistic revelation, stated that he saw that his responsibility was to publish the leaked material that came his way, not to play politics with its timing. That others may have played politics in timing the leak was not an issue pursued by the committee, as it was not strictly relevant to its inquiry. Wendy Bacon adopted a similar rationale in her defence of the corruption and the administration of justice articles she pursued with such vigour while at the *National Times*. She interpreted the suggestion that journalists should evaluate the genesis and impact of the information they discovered as censorship. Just because the disclosure did not accord with a journalist's personal political views was no reason to adopt different standards of scrutiny. She argued that disclosure was the most important element of public interest journalism.

The extent to which the investigative journalists separated their personal political beliefs from their pursuit of stories was discussed in reference to the survey results (see chapter 7). Masters acknowledged that it was often thought that investigative journalists were pursuing a political agenda, when he told the National Press Club in March 1992, 'It is very difficult to persuade people that we [don't operate a political agenda] or don't always or don't often.' Many of the journalists involved in the items discussed in this chapter accepted the consequences and paid the personal price of lost friendships as a result.

Lack of a personal political agenda does not obviate the reality that the most significant investigative reports would be deemed a failure if they did not have a major political impact – indeed the most significant reports contributed to governments losing office. The desire to have a political impact was one of the motivating influences revealed by the survey of the investigative journalists. The investigative journalists may not have had a partisan agenda, but they clearly wanted to have an impact as a result of their reporting, as Chris Masters demonstrated with his approach to 'The Moonlight State'.

The task of substantiating and verifying information, and packaging it in a way which emphasises certain aspects of the report, is the essential skill of journalism. As has been shown this essential skill is not neutral. The discipline of selecting, gathering and packaging information for palatable consumption by a mass audience adds another level of

interpretation to the process. A critique of the *National Times'* coverage of the Lionel Murphy allegations by legal scholar David Brown noted:

The journalists most influential in the media prosecution of Lionel Murphy have persistently argued that journalistic practice is purely descriptive. Their task is that of discovering and revealing 'facts', conversations, incidents, associations, events etc. These are understood as possessing a truth and a meaning that already resides in them, prior to being 'reported' . . . journalistic accounts are a representation, a process of social construction involving both the primary sources and the existing body of knowledge and understanding, journalistic forms of production and work process. Not mere description. (Brown, 1986: 16)

Brown argued that by claiming to act in the 'public interest' and resisting criticism with generalised claims of 'free speech', 'the public right to know', 'the facts and truth' journalists and editors evaded 'serious and specific issues of media accountability' (Brown, 1986: 20). As has been shown, journalists' views of public interest are rarely coupled with developed notions of, or a commitment to, media accountability. They are more likely to see themselves as the innocent questioner, inquiring on behalf of the even less informed public, as Chris Masters observed:

Investigative journalism is still a narrow stream activity . . . and the most successful investigative reporters are likely to be compulsively naive people like myself . . . They must be to be constantly sticking our head down the sewer or worse – it does help to be innocent and curious. The innocent curious questioner is a thing of danger . . . We work our way through layers of truth, the more time we have we get closer to a purer truth, but there are no absolutes. (Masters, 9 March 1992)

The emphasis on associations and networks of influence which was conveyed in several of the most significant reports produced during the 1980s highlights a frequently observed flaw in investigative reporting. While it is no doubt true that organised crime is a networked activity, to focus on this aspect suggests that there may be an all-encompassing conspiracy awaiting disclosure by an enterprising journalist. Jack Waterford of the *Canberra Times* observed:

Naivety is itself one of the dangers. Some of the people most besotted with ideas about the potential of investigative journalism . . . actually believe that there is a massive conspiracy out there . . . an organised conspiracy lurking behind every corner. (Waterford, 1986: 189)

Locating and pursuing the tentacles of conspiracies and networks of influence may be exciting, but frequently the complexities of life are more mundane. By identifying the central role that Bob Bottom played in broking police information to journalists I am not suggesting

another conspiracy. The point of tracing Bottom's role as an information broker is to demonstrate that what may appear to be a vast and unrelated series of revelations was closely linked to – although not determined by – the motivations, access to information and actions of one man. Bottom's role simply highlights one element of the process by which journalists were able to pick up on matters of concern to one section of the law enforcement community. Bob Bottom was an evangelist for a corruption free society, his homespun philosophy encapsulated by his belief, 'It all boils down to this, there is still right and wrong you know' (interview, 27 April 1990).

As Bob Bottom noted in his speech to the National Press Club, it was sometimes necessary for those charged with law enforcement to embark on publicity campaigns. Once the detailed allegations of corruption and organised crime became public, they also became matters of political importance. The publicity helped facilitate the establishment of a range of regulatory and investigative agencies including the National Crime Authority, the Independent Commission Against Corruption and the Criminal Justice Commission.

One of the dangers of the approach that seeks to understand the process is that it is often necessary to target the behaviour of individuals. As Premier Wran noted in his refusal to be interviewed for 'The Big League', simply making the allegations diminishes reputation, irrespective of response. The danger of McCarthyist smears has been addressed by civil liberties groups as well as by those individuals aggrieved by misrepresentation. This was a theme taken up with particular enthusiasm in the *Bulletin*, by Trevor Kennedy who as editor had first provided Bob Bottom with a national forum, and who after the allegations against Kerry Packer by the Costigan Royal Commission was keen to redeem the reputation of the magazine's proprietor.

The news and investigative journalists were adamant that the disclosures as a result of the watchdog journalism of the 1980s had on balance contributed to the creation of a politically healthier society. They did not consider that it had fostered a climate of witch-hunts and suspicion.

The reputations of many of the journalists involved in the 1980s investigative reporting were enhanced by their approach and impact. Many won prizes, public and professional recognition and promotion to positions of greater authority and influence. Some who were seen as stepping beyond the permissible limits found their career options within mainstream media organisations curtailed. The evangelistic approach they adopted at times did not fit comfortably with the more cautious and dispassionate nature of most news organisations. Their legacy was their instrumental role in nudging Australian journalism from being a 'co-operating servant' towards becoming an 'equal contender'.

### Conclusion

Over the decade of the 1980s Australian journalists produced an extensive body of investigative reporting. Much of this reporting addressed issues that had lain dormant for some years. Over the period of the three phases identified in this chapter the journalism became increasingly revealing, dealing with high profile public figures and networks of association. As their research techniques increased in sophistication, journalists and editors became more confident in claiming to act in the public interest. Most importantly this claim was supported by a reinvigorated approach to extending the parameters not only of what was permissible in the nation's journalism, but what was legally defensible.

While this chapter has concentrated on a handful of outstanding examples, the lessons learned during this decade have not been forgotten. As the survey of journalists showed, the willingness to undertake investigative reporting remains for many an indication of the willingness of news organisations to accept the responsibilities of the Fourth Estate. Australian journalism is certainly not uniformly investigative in its approach, but similar reports continue to be produced. Changes of ownership, political climate, institutionalised anti-corruption agencies, the reduction of competition in the newspaper industry and fashion have had an impact on the quantum and quality of the investigative journalism produced in the 1990s. It has diminished, but has not been completely abandoned. There is no sign that the media is retreating from its hard-won position as an equal contender to again become a co-operating servant.

Just as importantly, the arguments about the role of journalists to represent the public interest, advanced with such fervour if limited intellectual sophistication, appear to have now become a central part of the occupational culture of Australian journalism. This can be seen most clearly in the willingness of journalists from a range of organisations to assert that their ethical responsibilities may place them at odds with the law, and accept the consequences. The initiative and most insistent confidence in this approach resides with journalists, producers and editors.

While it is possible to track, through the journalism that was published during the 1980s, a process by which Australian journalism moved from being a 'cooperating servant' towards becoming an 'equal contender', this occurred with only the tacit support of the news organisations, who often found journalists' positions uncomfortable. Journalists, not managers drove the development. News organisations were more likely to seek an accommodation. Investigative journalism can have troubling commercial and political consequences. This

assertiveness continues to force renegotiation between the media and other political institutions, in which it is essential to differentiate the interests of the news organisations from the interests of the journalists they employ.

During the 1980s as a consequence of the increased assertiveness of journalists and editors in key organisations arguing that there was a need to publish, revelations about the exercise of power and influence became public. It was the determination of the journalists, who are the most insistent advocates of investigative reporting, that pushed the news organisations into a different position – even though this status had commercial consequences for companies whose fortunes were influenced by government policy.

As a result journalists became the strongest advocates and defenders of the Fourth Estate role of the news media. Their readiness to argue that they were doing this in the name of the public interest gave them in a unique role, although their reluctance to accept greater accountability continues to deprive them of the full authority of public interest.

## CHAPTER 10

### *Reviving the Fourth Estate*

'Unless we can return to the principles of public service we will lose our claim to be the Fourth Estate. What right have we to speak in the public interest when, too often, we are motivated by personal gain?'

*Rupert Murdoch, 1961*

The heady optimism of the possibility of journalists reclaiming responsibility for the Fourth Estate ideal lingered well into the 1990s. A backlash was nonetheless building, which, by the end of the decade, had debased many of the principles that propelled the earlier movement. Audiences grew weary of disclosure and moral certainty, managements tired of the costs and journalists found their attentions directed towards small-time shysters, and populist campaigns designed to 'name the guilty man', and swamp public figures with saturation coverage. Just as had happened at the beginning of the century when the popularity of the American muckraking magazines reached into the mainstream before disappearing, the investigative journalism popularised in the 1980s progressed along a similar path.

At the beginning of the 1990s there was a plethora of programs and publications with an overtly watchdog agenda, most notably in commercial television current affairs. For a time the disclosures on the programs propelled ratings and set news agendas in what had become a highly competitive business. But the need to churn out product and keep the ratings high made it hard to sustain substantial investigations. The focus moved back towards consumer rip-offs, small crimes, law and order, the century-old standbys of popular journalism. The people meters that shaped much television programming dictated that this was what the audience wanted. As news and current affairs had become the key to television's profitability, popular audience appeal in news, not just entertainment, was crucial. Television news and current affairs chewed up stories like a hungry beast, with an insatiable preference for personalities, glamour, goodies and baddies, once the fare of soap operas and television dramas.

In this mix, time-consuming, revealing investigative reports on substantial subjects became easier to bypass. They demanded more effort, resources and often involved political risks which carried a commercial penalty. They could bore audiences. The degree to which this caution shaped commercial decision-making became clear in 1996 when Channel Seven in Melbourne declined initially to broadcast a report alleging conflicts of interest between prominent business and political figures and the Crown Casino in Melbourne. When the presenter Jill Singer publicly defied management and later collapsed on air, she highlighted the tension between journalists' attachment to fulfilling Fourth Estate obligations and management's caution about causing offence. When the program was eventually broadcast, it rated highly, at least in part because of the publicity Singer's stand had generated. The staff associated with the controversial report found that their contracts were not renewed and they left the network convinced that in its current commercial manifestation the media had become just another business, with no commitment to Fourth Estate ideals.

The impediments to investigative journalism were not confined to the managements of the commercial media. During the 1980s lawyers and editors had increasingly begun to work together to find ways of reporting statements that may at face value be defamatory. As a result subjects were publicly addressed which would once only have been topics of gossip and rumour. Despite the defences that were built into these reports, legal action continued and took a toll. The *Four Corners* program 'The Moonlight State' had a profound impact on the state of Queensland, triggering some of the most far-reaching changes in the sunshine state's political culture. Yet more than a decade later, the case was still before the courts. Chris Masters who was responsible for the report wondered whether the cost was not too high, whether it was worth making such challenging programs if the result would be years dominated by legal processes, and whether if he had known what the consequences of the report would be he would have proceeded at all. Anyone with even a passing interest in public life would argue that it was indeed worth making, that it demonstrated the media performing its classic Fourth Estate function, but in a complex world the opposition and points of conflict are great. There is little room for naivety in journalism.

The temptation was to accede to the entertainment values and forget the Fourth Estate. Entertainment made money, kept people amused, provided journalists with interesting lifestyles and could even occasionally go some way towards explaining us to ourselves. After doing the sums that revealed he was not out of pocket, Rupert Murdoch coped with the humiliation of publishing the fake Hitler Diaries in

1983 by declaring, 'After all we are in the entertainment business' (Shawcross, 1992: 261). The Fourth Estate is a harder task master – watching, explaining, providing context, making judgements are more challenging and demanding than reporting the lives of the famous.

In the 1990s entertainment became the guiding principle of journalism, and undermined many long-held values. The world was becoming more complex, but much of the journalism that was favoured reduced issues to simple cardboard cut-outs, a shadow play of good and evil.

Some high profile journalists became increasingly uneasy about this trend and were prepared to speak out about the corrosion of values. Television personality Mike Willesee declared on national television in 1998 that the pendulum had swung too far (ABC, 2 February 1998), Jana Wendt argued that journalism had been swamped by entertainment values and lost its way (14 November 1997). The need for journalism to provide scrutiny, context and insight, to explain us to ourselves at the same time as it watches those in positions of power (including these days the media industry itself) is as great as ever. The ease of access to information, rumour and gossip, the way information is managed and massaged increases the need for journalists to accept responsibility for the Fourth Estate ideal, but it makes the task harder.

### **Reinventing the Fourth Estate, again**

The Fourth Estate is a remarkably resilient concept, which will no doubt reinvent itself in the changed circumstances of the beginning of a new millennium. It has influenced the practice of journalism, the nature of the news media and the conduct of democratic politics for nearly two centuries. Acceptance of the idea that the press should play a part in the political system, to act as one of the checks on the exercise of power, was won in the vastly different political, economic and social circumstances of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The press of old – 'the bastard estate' – has become the very different, vast contemporary news media, which continues to claim a place at the table of public life. Indeed at a time when most people are hard pressed to identify the other estates, the Fourth Estate remains a somewhat tarnished synonym for the news media.

This book has considered the legitimacy of the contemporary news media in continuing to claim an institutional role, within a modern representative democracy, and the extent to which responsibility for the Fourth Estate ideal has passed from the news media, as a corporate institution, to the journalists, editors and producers, who produce the content of the news media.

The independent standing of the news media as the Fourth Estate in Australia is recognised by custom and practice – if not constitutionally – and its right to exist and its core prerogatives have been well established. The precise nature of the relationship between the news media and the judiciary, executive and parliament is subject to ongoing contest and renegotiation, but the principle has been explicitly accepted.

The news media is now a vast business with its own economic, political, technological and social priorities. The scale and power of the news media threatens to undermine its continued viability as the Fourth Estate. If the ideal is to retain contemporary relevance, the locus of the struggle must become a contest within news organisations over editorial independence, commercial priorities, political relevance and the public interest.

The ideal of the Fourth Estate continues to be cherished and nurtured by journalists. Most of the 286 Australian journalists who responded to the Media and Democracy survey, reported in this book, were committed to the idea of the news media as the Fourth Estate. The commitment of these journalists to the Fourth Estate is, however, highly idealised; what they do in practice does not always match the theory. Most of those surveyed recognised that the capacity of the news media to accept responsibility for this institutional and political role is constrained by commercial realities.

The contemporary news media thus is a flawed embodiment of the nineteenth-century ideal of the Fourth Estate. The capacity of journalists and editors to accept custodianship of the ideal remains the central question. Evaluation of the attitudes and values of Australian journalists, surveyed for this research, the increasingly assertive and investigative style of journalism produced, and demands for editorial independence, indicated that Australian journalists are eager custodians of the Fourth Estate. But they too are constrained in their ability to accept responsibility for it.

The press won the status of the Fourth Estate in Britain and Australia during the nineteenth century informally and without formal constitutional protection. In the USA, amendments to the Constitution guaranteed freedom of the press and freedom of expression, within that country's political framework. The different processes by which the central role of the press in political life was recognised are important because they point to continuing differences of status and role.

In Australia the failure to establish constitutional guarantees of freedom of speech and the press has often been criticised. But acceptance of these rights has been established by custom and practice. This may have made freedom of the press and expression less certain, but it

has also provided opportunities for renegotiation, and required that journalists and editors continue to fight for them.

When the press won its standing as the Fourth Estate, it 'created the wont which it supplied'. This position was won in the vastly different society of the nineteenth century, with limited franchise, literacy and technology. In the twentieth century the news media is an enormous, profitable and pervasive activity reaching every corner of the nation, which is inhabited by people who are required to vote and expected to be literate and have opinions on most subjects.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the meaning of the term 'Fourth Estate' has changed over time. What once described the ability of journalists to report on the debates in the House of Commons has transmuted in response to different political, technology, economic and social conditions. These meanings have ranged from a narrow definition of providing information and comment about the activities of the parliament and executive, to a more encompassing contemporary definition of scrutinising those in all positions of power, not exclusively in elected office. Reporting of politics remains important, but it is now enveloped by a broader watchdog brief.

In the late twentieth century, at a time when many people are sceptical about the veracity and integrity of those in positions of power, the watchdog role of the news media has become synonymous with the Fourth Estate. Although this is only one of a number of possible meanings, it is the one I have used to test the contemporary relevance of the ideal. In exercising a watchdog role the potential for conflict, not only with the other agencies of political life, but also with the commercial imperatives of the news media itself, is greatest.

I am especially interested in the way the Fourth Estate ideal became, in the late twentieth century, a synonym for watchdog journalism. I have argued that journalists have been principally responsible for keeping the ideal of the news media as the Fourth Estate alive, despite significant and sustainable contests to the industry's independent institutional legitimacy. By emphasising the importance of disclosure and information provision to representative democracy, many journalists see a way of reinvigorating the political role of the news media.

The relevance of the news media to contemporary political life itself needs to be reconsidered because of the changing nature of the news media, the methodology of politics, information management and expectations of journalists about what makes news. This book has concentrated on the watchdog role of the news media as the Fourth Estate and argued that this encompasses a range of activities from the reporting and interpreting of events and issues, to more substantial examinations of misconduct and abuse of power. This is undertaken by

journalists who are not satisfied with acting as stenographers for those in power.

The news media's power has, in the late twentieth century, gained a new urgency and created new sources of conflict and tension for the Fourth Estate ideal. The willingness of the news media and journalists to undertake watchdog journalism is often more rhetorical than practical. It has been distorted by the commercial requirements and, as Thomas Patterson (1992) has suggested, by the constraints to professionalism.

It is central to an examination of the contemporary relevance of the news media as the Fourth Estate to consider the strengths and conflicts that have resulted, and will continue to result, from the commercialisation of the press. When W.T. Stead penned his reconceptualisation of the role of the press as the watchdog Fourth Estate in 1886 this process was just beginning. During the nineteenth century the 'professionalising' of journalism began, but in the new millennium the role of the individual 'professional' journalists was increasingly subsumed under the demands and expectations of the press as a business (James, 1991). The assertion by journalists and editors of independence from proprietors and sources is essential if authority for the Fourth Estate is to remain relevant by passing from the corporate news media to reporters, editors and producers.

To assess the continued legitimacy of the Fourth Estate I identified five central elements that needed to be satisfied within the wide range of definitions of the ideal – political purpose and independence, commercial priorities, understanding of public opinion, diversity and accountability. I constructed each of these as a contest and considered whether they could be sustained from the perspective of the news media as an industry, and from the perspective of the journalists surveyed for this study.

The news media as currently constituted is a flawed embodiment of the Fourth Estate. The need to return profits, while ensuring an admirable degree of independence, has influenced, affected and distorted each of the other elements. Rupert Murdoch's rhetorical question, 'What right have we to speak in the public interest when too often we are motivated by personal gain?', can be answered with a simple 'very little'.

The relevance of the Fourth Estate ideal to Australian journalists was evaluated and found wanting. The journalists surveyed had a high commitment to an idealised Fourth Estate, actively involved in investigative reporting. The contests to the continued legitimacy of the corporate news media as the Fourth Estate were considered in chapter 5 from the perspectives of the journalists. The data showed that they were able to demonstrate political purpose and independence, and to

resist, to some extent, commercial pressures. However, their ability to accept custodianship of the ideal was reduced by their limited desire to understand public opinion, their reluctance to accept accountability and their intolerance of diversity. They also reported significant levels of opposition to investigative reporting from managers and journalists within news organisations.

The similarities and differences between the Australian news and investigative journalists surveyed for this research underpinned this study. The sample of investigative journalists surveyed included most of those responsible for the journalism produced in the 1980s that reinvigorated the ideal of the Fourth Estate in Australia. The data generated from these reporters, editors and producers was compared and contrasted with the information derived from the larger sample of news journalists. These comparisons revealed important differences between the two groups, particularly in terms of the preferred outcomes for their work, and in their attitudes towards objectivity, political neutrality and accountability. These findings distinguished the investigative journalists as more activist than the news journalists, but the two groups were not dramatically different, reinforcing Weaver and Wilhoit's observation that journalists increasingly embrace a plurality of roles and methods (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1991: 116).

After establishing the extent of commitment to an idealised Fourth Estate, I examined the way the watchdog ideal of the Fourth Estate has been applied in Australian journalism.

The process by which the news agenda was broadened and became increasingly investigative was considered by surveying major developments in the practice of journalism. The role played by particular individuals, organisations and events was highlighted. Since the 1960s Australian journalism has become increasingly independent and investigative. By the beginning of the 1980s a new style of journalism was beginning to be established, in which journalists and editors became more assertive about the sorts of stories they pursued, the methods used and their willingness to defend them in legal, parliamentary and public forums. Three phases were identified in this process, with the perimeters of each phase marked by the substance of the articles and programs and by the readiness to defend the claims in legal and other forums.

Although the amount of overtly investigative journalism produced has arguably declined in the early years of the 1990s, the approach to journalism entrenched during the 1980s has had a lasting impact on the culture of Australian journalism. Journalists have become more willing to defend their work by arguing that they act in the public interest. One measure of this can be found in the increased frequency with

which Australian journalists have been jailed and fined for contempt of court. Another indication came in the strong, and publicly supported, campaigns organised by Fairfax journalists to win commitments to editorial independence and autonomy. These campaigns are having a lasting significance as they reach beyond Fairfax and the ABC where they were initiated and sustained. There is evidence, for instance, that even News Ltd is beginning to recognise the political importance and economic value of editorial independence in its newspapers (Schultz, 1995).

The ownership changes of the Australian news media in the last decade have had a profound impact on the nature of the journalism produced, not all of it negative. Investigative journalism is costly and likely to be jettisoned in times of economic constraint. The recession at the beginning of this decade took a toll, but did not destroy either the desire by journalists to undertake investigative reporting or the subjects in need of examination. While there may have been fewer 'blockbuster' investigative reports, the methods of this style of journalism have been more widely adopted.

The idea that by investigative reporting the news media can make and break governments has become an article of faith among journalists following Watergate. As Michael Schudson has shown, the myths of Watergate have overwhelmed the reality. For many years it was accepted in Australia that 'Watergate could not happen here', because of the laws of defamation and contempt. What the 1980s showed, however, was that although Watergate was unlikely to be replicated in this country (or anywhere else), the news media could play an important role as a watchdog in the conduct of public life.

In Australia there has been little celebration of the role of investigative journalism, although it has been an important factor in the creation of many royal commissions, committees of inquiry and in the establishment of a number of regulatory agencies. These inquiries and agencies were not created by the news media, but if journalists had not pursued a watchdog role, and brought matters to public attention, it is unlikely that they would have been established. Not all the articles and programs that triggered inquiries relied solely on original journalistic investigation, many drew on investigations by other agencies. Nonetheless, these reports had a profound impact on the conduct of public life in Australia and a lasting impact on the methods of journalism and the accepted role of the news media.

A causal link between the role of the news media and changes in government is almost impossible to prove, and while it is true that for much of the time the government, executive, judiciary and other political and economic institutions co-exist with the news media in a

symbiotic, comfortable and co-operative relationship, the capacity to exercise authority as a watchdog remains important. By investigating and elevating issues they may become matters of public concern.

Australian journalists are committed to the ideal of the Fourth Estate, and in many ways are well-placed to accept responsibility for it, but are constrained by their capacity to control the output of their organisations, and by their limited notions of accountability, diversity and the public interest.

By pursuing far-reaching investigative reports, and campaigning for editorial independence during the 1980s, Australian journalists reinvigorated the ideal of the Fourth Estate. The capacity for the ideal of the Fourth Estate to continue to be relevant to the practice of Australian journalism will depend on the continued vigilance and insistence of journalists and editors, their willingness to accept a greater degree of accountability and attempts to understand public opinion. It will also depend on the extent to which the owners and managers of Australian news organisations are prepared to give the journalists and editors who demand it the scope to pursue these responsibilities.

It is harder for journalists to assert themselves in an industry driven by marketing, audience ratings and profit maximisation. But it is not impossible. If journalists were able to build more meaningful, reflective alliances with their audiences they could become a more significant democratic force. This has been seen with the alliance between audiences and journalists over media ownership, and although more complex, it also has potential in relation to content. After all, audiences have the power to turn off and stop buying if they feel that the media is not fulfilling the obligations and responsibilities it promises.

The ideal of the Fourth Estate remains ambiguous and subject to contest. It is also resilient and the key to defining the news media's democratic role, if it is to continue to have one.

## APPENDIX

### *Measuring the Relevance of the Fourth Estate in Contemporary Australian Journalism*

The data presented in this appendix is drawn from the survey of Australian journalists conducted under the auspices of the Media and Democracy project. Six hundred journalists involved in daily news and current affairs production around Australia were sent the questionnaire in June and July 1992. Forty-one per cent completed and returned the self-administered 178 question survey. The survey was also sent to 50 opinion leading investigative journalists, producers and editors, who had taken a prominent role in the production of the investigative and watchdog journalism published and broadcast in Australia during the 1980s. Nearly 80% of this sample responded.

This survey has also been administered in five other countries, in one of the most ambitious cross-national studies of journalists ever undertaken. To ensure that the Australian survey adequately addressed the issues central to my preoccupations, I added 35 questions explicitly addressing the news media's Fourth Estate role, and an entire section on investigative journalism. Journalists selected to participate in the survey were chosen at random. The method of selecting the sample varied from country to country, depending on the available information. In Italy for instance the sample was drawn from the national directory of journalists; in Britain, Sweden, United States and Germany it was drawn from a sample of news rosters from selected news organisations; in some cases individuals were selected by news editors and others directly by correspondence.

#### **Overview of methodology**

In Australia I worked directly with the Australian Journalists' Association (AJA), an organisation I was a member of, and had a history of collaboration with, on previous research. As the AJA represented about 95% of journalists working in Australia, access to its lists of members was the best option for selecting a nationally representative sample. Furthermore, by actively involving the association in the research I was able to maximise publicity for the survey and establish its authority in the eyes of a sample which is instinctively suspicious of the motivations of those asking questions. Articles about the survey appeared in the association's monthly newspaper, *The Journalist*, and respondents were

told that the preliminary results of the research would be published. This report was published as a four-page supplement to the October 1992 issue of *The Journalist*.

To further ensure that the respondents could not be identified from the lists provided, the AJA provided two mailing labels for each journalist and the reply paid envelope ensured that the survey was sent directly to Quadrant Market Research which was engaged to codify, collate and compile the data.

In each country the sample was stratified in two dimensions – 50% of those surveyed were newspaper journalists and 50% worked in the electronic media. Of the broadcast journalists, 70% worked in television and 30% worked in radio. These proportions were maintained for the Australian sample.

The sample was also stratified to represent journalists working on local and national and local media outlets. Half the sample was to come from the national category and half from the local. Although, as project directors Wolfgang Donsbach and Thomas Patterson conceded, the designation of news organisations as local or national is somewhat arbitrary, some news organisations are clearly of greater national significance than others. The importance of this stratification was related to the issues of political influence. The survey was sent to 600 potential respondents in each country with the following stratification in Australia:

#### **Newspaper journalists (50%)**

Nationally important	<i>Age, Sydney Morning Herald, Australian, Australian Financial Review</i>
150 (25%)	
Locally important	<i>Herald Sun, Daily Telegraph Mirror, Hobart Mercury, Adelaide Advertiser, Canberra Times, Illawarra Mercury, Albury Border Mail, West Australian, Northern Territory News</i>
150 (25%)	

#### **Television journalists (35%)**

Nationally important	Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra bureau staff of ABC, SBS, <i>Channels 9, Ten, Seven</i>
105 (17.5%)	
Locally important	Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Hobart, Darwin and regional centres staff of ABC, SBS, <i>Channels 9, Ten, Seven</i>
105 (17.5%)	

#### **Radio journalists (15%)**

Nationally important	ABC, Macquarie and 2UE network journalists in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra
45 (7.5%)	
Locally important	ABC and commercial networks, Brisbane, Adelaide, Hobart, Perth, regional
45 (7.5%)	

Of the 600 Australian journalists selected to participate in the survey, 247 replied, a response rate of just over 41%. This rate compared favourably with that in the other countries which was 30% in Britain, 40% in United States and nearer 50% in Italy, Germany and Sweden. The respondents to the Australian survey matched the percentages selected from newspapers, radio and television.

Because of the stratification of the sample and the methods of selection used, and the fact that the questionnaire was to be self-administered and returned by mail, it may be possible to question the representativeness of the survey in relation to all 8000 self-described journalists in Australia, or the 3000 journalists employed by major news organisations. By explicitly excluding all those

working for magazines and non-daily news outlets, a substantial proportion of journalists working in Australia were not eligible. This eligibility criteria did not for instance attach to Henningham's telephone survey of journalists conducted at the end of 1992 for which the sample was randomly drawn from all journalists in Australia (Henningham, 1993a).

These limitations may somewhat reduce the ability to claim that the survey results are representative of the attitudes of all Australian journalists. By concentrating on news journalists, especially those working for the leading national media and the most significant state news media, the sample was shaped to represent those centrally concerned with politics and public affairs reporting and is therefore an ideal sample for considering journalists' attitudes towards the Fourth Estate. These journalists are most likely to regularly and actively interface with politics, public life and current affairs. These journalists are also among the most prominent. Furthermore, in Australia the industrial relations system has privileged those working in the areas selected for this sample, as the pay, working conditions and professional practice issues are set by the lead award agency of the Metropolitan Dailies Newspaper Award.

For these reasons, I am confident that the sample selected for this survey is representative of the attitudes, values, socio-demographics of the most significant group of journalists in Australia.

The second part of the survey research in Australia inverted the exercise undertaken by a number of scholars studying journalists who have sought to categorise them into groups with high and low professional values (McLeod & Hawley, 1964; Janowitz, 1975; Johnstone, Slawski & Bowman, 1976; Weaver & Wilhoit, 1991; Henningham, 1988). Rather than dividing the groups after the data had been collected, I selected the opinion leading group on the basis of their journalism. I hypothesised that it would be possible to identify different attitudes towards professionalism, journalistic practice and attitudes towards the Fourth Estate and a free press between the two groups. This proved to be the case.

The investigative journalists chosen for inclusion in the survey were selected on the basis of their professional practice over the preceding decade. I identified these individuals on the basis of other research I had conducted during the 1980s and from my experience as a journalist and journalism educator. I chose those individuals who had demonstrated a commitment to investigative journalism during this period. This was done principally on the basis of my knowledge of the journalism produced by leading Australian journalists during the 1980s. I sought to ensure that a mix of print, radio and television journalists were included in the sample, and endeavoured to include individuals from each state. Editors, producers, researchers and reporters were included in the sample. A list of 50 individuals was compiled (I had previously ensured that none of these individuals received the identical questionnaire sent to the general national sample of news journalists). Although there may be some questions about the inclusion or exclusion of certain individuals, I am confident that a similar list would be compiled by another researcher.

As I was known to all of these individuals, I contacted each personally by telephone and invited them to participate in the survey. Almost all agreed immediately, several said that they would consider the request when they received the questionnaire and only one refused, expressing suspicion about all surveys. Three subsequently wrote saying that they preferred not to participate in the survey for a range of reasons. A further three, who had played an important role during the 1980s, were in 1992 assigned to foreign postings, so

I sent their questionnaires directly without first making telephone contact. Ten of the respondents were in positions of senior editorial or managerial responsibility at the time and were asked to respond to the questions about detailed editorial practice as if they were still engaged in daily news production.

The questionnaires were dispatched two weeks after the first mail-out to the news journalists, and two weeks later a reminder was again sent to each of the selected respondents. They were asked to send their completed questionnaires in a pre-paid envelope directly to Quadrant Market Research, the commercial research company which was compiling, and collating the data for both samples. Of the 50 approached, 39 completed and returned the survey, a response rate of 78%.

Differences between the group of investigative reporters and the national sample are discussed and analysed in considerable detail in chapter 7. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups of respondents as measured by medium or ownership. In terms of the survey design, the only statistically significant difference of note was between the two groups in the proportion of time they spent reporting politics, with the investigative group most likely to spend all or almost all their time on this activity  $t(281) = -4.04, p=.000$ .

## MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY PROJECT

*Australia • France • Germany • Great Britain • Japan • Sweden • Spain  
• United States • Italy • Ireland*

This survey of journalists is being conducted in ten countries. The Australian study is being co-ordinated by Associate Professor Julianne Schultz, School of Humanities, University of Technology, Sydney, in conjunction with Quadrant Research Services and the Australian Journalists' Association.

Your assistance in taking 15 minutes to complete this confidential survey is greatly appreciated. Please tick boxes, circle numbers or write answers as appropriate. Use the reply paid envelope to return the form.

We would like to begin with a few questions about your work. Please tick the appropriate response.

Questions	News	Investigative
<b>A Work Profile</b>		
A.1 What is your news organization's medium of communication?		
	n=244	n=38
1. Newspaper/?	117	21
2. Radio	35	3
3. Newspaper	92	14

## A.2 What is your news organization's form of ownership?

1. Public (ABC, SBS)	n=244	n=39
2. Private, chain or group owned	73	16
3. Private, independently owned	136	19
4. Institutional (union, church)	35	4
	0	0

## A.3 What is the primary audience of the news you prepare?

1. A national audience	n=242	n=39
2. A state audience	81	17
3. A local audience	130	21
	31	1

## A.4 How do you regard the education level of your audience?

1. Tertiary educated	n=240	n=37
2. High school educated	102	25
3. Lower than average	111	10
4. Not known	8	1
	19	1

## A.5 What proportion of the news that you personally work on deals with politics and public affairs?\*

1. Nearly all	n=245	n=39
2. Most	82	25
3. About half	43	8
4. Some	66	6
5. Hardly any	38	0
	15	0

## A.6 How many years have you worked full-time in journalism?

1. 0-3 years	n=245	n=39
2. 3-5 years	12	0
3. 5-10 years	18	0
4. over 10 years	50	13
	165	26

## A.7 Do you think you are appropriately paid for your work?

1. Yes	n=240	n=39
2. No	113	21
	127	18

*Notes:*

1. This appendix includes a copy of the Media and Democracy questionnaire, including the frequencies of responses for each group.
2. Reformatted for purpose of displaying frequencies for each group of Australian respondents
3. Questions revealing a statistically significant difference between the two groups, or a tendency towards such a difference are marked with an asterisk\*.
4. Additional Australian questions indicated by grey shading.

Questions	News	Investigative
<b>B Work Organisation</b>		
B.1 What proportion of the news about national politics and public affairs reported by your organization is provided by sources outside the organization, such as wire services?*	n=244	n=38
1. Nearly all	23	0
2. Most	23	2
3. About half	51	5
4. Some	72	17
5. Hardly any	75	14
Each day, journalists must make difficult decisions about what news to cover and what to highlight. When making these decisions, please indicate how important each of the following sources of guidance is to you:		
B.2 Wire services	n=238	n=36
1. Very	16	2
2. Quite	64	9
3. Slight	88	19
4. Not at all	70	6
B.3 Leading national media*	n=240	n=37
1. Very	40	8
2. Quite	102	22
3. Slight	80	7
4. Not at all	18	0
B.4 Other journalists in my newsroom	n=240	n=35
1. Very	43	8
2. Quite	86	12
3. Slight	77	10
4. Not at all	34	5
B.5 Our leading competitors	n=237	n=35
1. Very	18	3
2. Quite	70	13
3. Slight	100	14
4. Not at all	49	5
B.6 Making general decisions	n=241	n=37
1. A lot	85	9
2. Some	118	19
3. Not at all	38	9
B.7 Assigning staff to news stories	n=237	n=37
1. A lot	33	0
2. Some	55	15
3. None	149	22

## B.8 Making content decisions about news other journalists produce

	n=239	n=37
1. A lot	50	7
2. Some	66	10
3. None	123	20

## B.9 Making layout decisions about news presentation

	n=241	n=38
1. A lot	50	8
2. Some	66	20
3. None	123	10

## B.10 Preparing reports based on personal observation and investigation

	n=241	n=38
1. A lot	127	24
2. Some	61	9
3. None	53	5

## B.11 Preparing reports based on material provided by other sources, e.g. wire services\*

	n=240	n=38
1. A lot	23	1
2. Some	109	14
3. None	108	23

## B.12 Writing editorial commentary

	n=240	n=12
1. A lot	18	1
2. Some	56	18
3. None	166	19

## B.13 Presenting the news on air

	n=236	n=36
1. A lot	25	6
2. Some	43	5
3. None	168	25

## B.14 In overall terms, how would you rate the job that the media in your country are doing in reporting news of politics and current affairs?

	n=244	n=38
1. Excellent	26	1
2. Good	135	15
3. Fair	70	22
4. Poor	13	0

## B.15 In overall terms, how would you rate the job your own news organization is doing in reporting news of politics and current affairs?

	n=243	n=38
1. Excellent	47	7
2. Good	119	21
3. Fair	65	8
4. Poor	12	2

Questions		News	Investigative
How important to you are the following aspects of your work as a journalist?			
B.16 Imparting information to others	n=246	n=39	
1. Very	226	37	
2. Quite	20	2	
3. Slightly	0	0	
4. Not at all	0	0	
B.17 Uncovering and publicizing problems*	n=244	n=39	
1. Very	175	34	
2. Quite	53	5	
3. Slightly	11	0	
4. Not at all	5	0	
B.18 Being among the first to know what's going on	n=244	n=39	
1. Very	122	17	
2. Quite	82	12	
3. Slightly	31	7	
4. Not at all	9	3	
B.19 Influencing the public*	n=242	n=39	
1. Very	38	9	
2. Quite	83	21	
3. Slightly	81	8	
4. Not at all	40	1	
B.20 Being in the public eye*	n=243	n=39	
1. Very	11	4	
2. Quite	26	7	
3. Slightly	83	12	
4. Not at all	123	16	
B.21 Influencing public policy decisions*	n=245	n=39	
1. Very	38	8	
2. Quite	94	22	
3. Slightly	70	6	
4. Not at all	43	3	
B.22 Championing particular values and ideas*	n=244	n=39	
1. Very	19	9	
2. Quite	66	13	
3. Slightly	77	12	
4. Not at all	82	5	
B.23 Expressing myself	n=242	n=39	
1. Very	40	8	
2. Quite	39	6	
3. Slightly	78	18	
4. Not at all	85	7	

## C News and Objectivity

C.1 How often is the news you prepare changed by another person in your newsroom to increase its audience appeal?

	n=244	n=38
1. Often	17	2
2. Occasionally	66	14
3. Seldom	96	16
4. Never	65	6

C.2 How often is the news you prepare changed by another person in your newsroom to improve its factual accuracy?

	n=244	n=38
1. Often	3	1
2. Occasionally	31	6
3. Seldom	131	22
4. Never	79	9

C.3 How often is the news you prepare significantly altered by another person in your newsroom to improve its political balance?\*

	n=244	n=38
1. Often	0	0
2. Occasionally	7	7
3. Seldom	67	10
4. Never	170	21

C.4 How often is the news you prepare significantly altered by another person in your newsroom to give it a political slant?

	n=243	n=38
1. Often	2	0
2. Occasionally	10	2
3. Seldom	34	8
4. Never	197	28

Journalists work within the limits of a fast-paced and demanding job. How important is each of the following limitations on the work you do?

C.5 Insufficient news space or airtime n=245 n=38

1. Very	93	15
2. Quite	79	8
3. Slightly	52	11
4. Not at all	21	4

C.6 The pressure of daily news deadlines n=244 n=38

1. Very	74	10
2. Quite	75	9
3. Slightly	65	9
4. Not at all	30	10

C.7 Insufficient resources for research and investigation n=244 n=38

1. Very	57	9
2. Quite	72	14

Questions		News	Investigative
3. Slightly	79		8
4. Not at all	36		7
C.8 Pressure from senior editors	n=244		n=39
1. Very	23		1
2. Quite	26		5
3. Slightly	102		17
4. Not at all	93		16
C.9 Insufficient access to government documents*	n=242		n=39
1. Very	51		16
2. Quite	55		14
3. Slightly	71		8
4. Not at all	65		1
C.10 Insufficient access to important public figures*	n=241		n=39
1. Very	39		8
2. Quite	59		15
3. Slightly	97		15
4. Not at all	46		1
C.11 Insufficient access to powerful private individuals, such as corporate executives*	n=242		n=39
1. Very	44		13
2. Quite	66		14
3. Slightly	82		11
4. Not at all	50		1
C.12 My incomplete knowledge*	n=244		n=38
1. Very	21		6
2. Quite	69		15
3. Slightly	110		11
4. Not at all	44		6
C.13 Pressure from management	n=243		n=38
1. Very	13		0
2. Quite	21		5
3. Slightly	69		12
4. Not at all	140		21
C.14 Distortions resulting from my personal biases and stereotypes*	n=241		n=38
1. Very	1		0
2. Quite	10		6
3. Slightly	82		12
4. Not at all	148		20
C.15 The need to capture the audience's attention	n=241		n=38
1. Very	49		4
2. Quite	61		12

3. Slightly	69	11
4. Not at all	62	11

Why do you think that the public perception of journalists is so low?

C.16 Unwillingness to reveal sources	n=245	n=39
1. Very	39	4
2. Quite	23	2
3. Slightly	89	19
4. Not at all	94	14
C.17 Sensationalist reporting	n=243	n=38
1. Very	155	28
2. Quite	64	9
3. Slightly	13	1
4. Not at all	11	0
C.18 Inaccurate reporting	n=244	n=39
1. Very	151	28
2. Quite	62	9
3. Slightly	26	2
4. Not at all	5	0
C.19 Poor training of journalists*	n=243	n=39
1. Very	67	16
2. Quite	101	13
3. Slightly	58	10
4. Not at all	17	0
C.20 Journalists with preconceived ideas	n=244	n=39
1. Very	75	14
2. Quite	98	14
3. Slightly	63	11
4. Not at all	8	0
C.21 Adversarial style of journalism	n=242	n=39
1. Very	70	9
2. Quite	89	15
3. Slightly	70	11
4. Not at all	13	4
C.22 Lack of public knowledge of ethical codes	n=244	n=39
1. Very	57	6
2. Quite	61	11
3. Slightly	85	15
4. Not at all	41	7
C.23 Power of media companies*	n=244	n=39
1. Very	90	10
2. Quite	88	11
3. Slightly	56	13
4. Not at all	10	5

Questions		News	Investigative
In principle, a democracy rests upon the wishes of the governed. However, it is not easy to determine precisely what the people want. In your judgement, how good is each of the following as an expression of public opinion?			
C.24 Letters to the editor*	n=245	n=36	
1. Excellent	51	1	
2. Good	80	12	
3. Fair	83	18	
4. Poor	31	5	
C.25 Protest demonstrations*	n=245	n=36	
1. Excellent	28	1	
2. Good	83	7	
3. Fair	106	20	
4. Poor	28	8	
C.26 Election results	n=245	n=36	
1. Excellent	98	14	
2. Good	100	15	
3. Fair	45	6	
4. Poor	2	1	
C.27 Editorials	n=245	n=36	
1. Excellent	3	0	
2. Good	29	2	
3. Fair	102	14	
4. Poor	111	20	
C.28 Parliamentary debate	n=245	n=35	
1. Excellent	4	1	
2. Good	31	5	
3. Fair	114	18	
4. Poor	96	11	
C.29 Poll results	n=245	n=35	
1. Excellent	15	1	
2. Good	94	12	
3. Fair	112	19	
4. Poor	24	3	
C.30 Judgement of well-informed people	n=245	n=36	
1. Excellent	16	3	
2. Good	102	14	
3. Fair	114	17	
4. Poor	13	2	
C.31 News reports	n=245	n=36	
1. Excellent	17	1	
2. Good	105	15	
3. Fair	102	15	
4. Poor	21	5	

C.32 Pressure group activity		n=243	n=36
1. Excellent		10	2
2. Good		52	7
3. Fair		123	22
4. Poor		58	5

We would like your opinion on what makes for good news reporting. Please indicate how much you agree with each of the following statements.

C.33 Good news reporting requires an equally thorough questioning of the position of each side in a political dispute.		n=246	n=38
--	--	-------	------

1. Strongly agree		190	30
2. Agree		32	4
3. Sort of agree		11	1
4. Neither		6	1
5. Sort of disagree		1	2
6. Disagree		4	0
7. Strongly disagree		2	0

C.34 Good news reporting goes beyond the statements of the contending sides to the hard facts of a political dispute		n=244	n=38
--	--	-------	------

1. Strongly agree		184	30
2. Agree		33	7
3. Sort of agree		13	1
4. Neither		8	0
5. Sort of disagree		1	0
6. Disagree		1	0
7. Strongly disagree		4	0

C.35 Good news reporting expresses fairly the position of each side in a political dispute		n=245	n=38
--	--	-------	------

1. Strongly agree		192	26
2. Agree		35	5
3. Sort of agree		4	5
4. Neither		7	0
5. Sort of disagree		1	1
6. Disagree		3	0
7. Strongly disagree		3	1

C.36 Good news reporting makes clear which side in a political dispute has the better position.		n=245	n=38
---	--	-------	------

1. Strongly agree		30	2
2. Agree		17	5
3. Sort of agree		25	2
4. Neither		57	6
5. Sort of disagree		27	3
6. Disagree		69	15
7. Strongly disagree		69	15

Questions		News	Investigative
C.37 Good news reporting does not allow the journalist's own political beliefs to affect the presentation of the subject.*		n=246	n=38
1. Strongly agree		180	22
2. Agree		24	2
3. Sort of agree		8	4
4. Neither		11	4
5. Sort of disagree		4	2
6. Disagree		6	2
7. Strongly disagree		13	2
C.38 Please look again at the five statements about good news reporting. Which comes closest to your understanding of the term 'objectivity'?*		n=240	n=37
1. C.33		49	9
2. C.34		50	12
3. C.35		77	14
4. C.36		2	0
5. C.37		62	2
C.39 Is the political news in your news organization presented with too much, too little, or about the right amount of objectivity?		n=244	n=37
1. Too much objectivity		9	2
2. Too little objectivity		48	9
3. About right amount		187	26
C.40 In your view, how important is it that a journalist try to be as objective as possible?*		n=243	n=38
1. Very important		214	30
2. Somewhat important		28	7
3. Slightly important		0	0
4. Not at all important		1	1

## D Rights and Responsibilities

Now we would like your opinions on journalists' rights and responsibilities. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

D.1 Journalists should have, upon request, immediate and full access to any government document that is not restricted for bona fide reasons of national security or personal privacy.	n=246	n=38
1. Strongly agree	174	27
2. Agree	33	4

3.	Sort of agree	.	13	1
4.	Neither	.	10	2
5.	Sort of disagree	.	2	1
6.	Disagree	.	5	2
7.	Strongly disagree	.	9	1

D.2 A news source who is promised confidentiality should be able to sue for breach of promise if the journalist breaks the promise.

		n=246	n=38
1.	Strongly agree	119	13
2.	Agree	42	8
3.	Sort of agree	23	1
4.	Neither	35	14
5.	Sort of disagree	8	0
6.	Disagree	8	1
7.	Strongly disagree	11	1

D.3 Journalists should be required to reveal confidential sources if a court determines this information would provide important evidence in a trial.

		n=245	n=39
1.	Strongly agree	20	1
2.	Agree	7	0
3.	Sort of agree	4	1
4.	Neither	15	3
5.	Sort of disagree	17	2
6.	Disagree	31	4
7.	Strongly disagree	151	28

D.4 The media have an obligation to downplay the activities of political extremists whose ideas are a threat to the democratic way of life.

		n=245	n=39
1.	Strongly agree	14	1
2.	Agree	17	2
3.	Sort of agree	23	6
4.	Neither	42	5
5.	Sort of disagree	22	4
6.	Disagree	32	2
7.	Strongly disagree	95	19

D.5 The courts should make it reasonably easy for public officials who have been seriously harmed by false and careless reporting to win libel suits.

		n=246	n=39
1.	Strongly agree	41	5
2.	Agree	28	5
3.	Sort of agree	37	6
4.	Neither	50	2
5.	Sort of disagree	20	4
6.	Disagree	15	2
7.	Strongly disagree	55	15

Questions	News	Investigative
D.6 Private citizens who are falsely criticized by the media should have a legal right to reply through the news organizations that led the criticism.	n=245	n=39
1. Strongly agree	115	11
2. Agree	48	9
3. Sort of agree	23	8
4. Neither	24	5
5. Sort of disagree	8	2
6. Disagree	13	1
7. Strongly disagree	14	3
D.7 Government officials should have the authority to stop the publication or broadcast of a news story they believe is a grave threat to national security.*	n=246	n=38
1. Strongly agree	26	1
2. Agree	16	1
3. Sort of agree	19	3
4. Neither	46	2
5. Sort of disagree	20	5
6. Disagree	34	2
7. Strongly disagree	85	24
D.8 Journalists should not promote ideas and values that have been rejected by the broad public.*	n=243	n=38
1. Strongly agree	12	0
2. Agree	10	0
3. Sort of agree	6	2
4. Neither	39	2
5. Sort of disagree	23	2
6. Disagree	39	7
7. Strongly disagree	114	25
D.9 Journalists should not delve into the personal lives of public officials.*	n=242	n=39
1. Strongly agree	21	0
2. Agree	12	3
3. Sort of agree	19	2
4. Neither	26	3
5. Sort of disagree	22	4
6. Disagree	40	4
7. Strongly disagree	102	23
D.10 Journalists should not cover issues on which they have strong convictions.*	n=244	n=39
1. Strongly agree	20	3
2. Agree	10	0
3. Sort of agree	16	1

4. Neither	50	4
5. Sort of disagree	28	4
6. Disagree	47	8
7. Strongly disagree	73	19

D.11 At Fairfax last year journalists challenged the receiver's request for reporting of the company's business to be done in a certain way. Journalists should be editorially independent of management.

	n=244	n=39
1. Strongly agree	199	32
2. Agree	19	2
3. Sort of agree	1	2
4. Neither	13	1
5. Sort of disagree	1	1
6. Disagree	4	1
7. Strongly disagree	7	1

D.12 As a matter of policy media companies have the right to exclude stories about their organisation which may damage their commercial interests.

	n=243	n=39
1. Strongly agree	15	2
2. Agree	5	1
3. Sort of agree	5	1
4. Neither	16	0
5. Sort of disagree	11	0
6. Disagree	21	3
7. Strongly disagree	170	32

D.13 I would not pursue a story that was potentially damaging to my employer's commercial interests as actively as a story about an unrelated company.

	n=242	n=39
1. Strongly agree	14	3
2. Agree	5	3
3. Sort of agree	19	3
4. Neither	33	1
5. Sort of disagree	9	1
6. Disagree	25	4
7. Strongly disagree	137	24

D.14 A democracy depends upon the free expression of opposing ideas and opinions. The news media can contribute to this process through an impartial or advocacy approach. In the impartial system each news organization tries to present a balanced version of all significant points of view. In the advocacy system each organization promotes its own particular point of view, and balance is provided across all the media.

To what extent *do you personally* favour either the impartial or advocacy news system as a means of promoting the free exchange of opposing ideas and opinions?\*

	n=236	n=36
1. Strongly agree	144	16
2. Agree	41	4

Questions	News	Investigative
3. Sort of agree	13	4
4. Neither	24	4
5. Sort of disagree	5	4
6. Disagree	4	2
7. Strongly disagree	5	2

Issue conflict in a democratic country takes place in part through political parties. The following statements express positions that journalists might take in relationship to partisan conflict. Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

- D.15 Journalists should make sure they are not perceived as trying to influence the outcome of the conflict between political parties over issues.

	n=242	n=38
1. Strongly agree	169	21
2. Agree	24	6
3. Sort of agree	14	2
4. Neither	17	6
5. Sort of disagree	7	1
6. Disagree	6	2
7. Strongly disagree	5	0

- D.16 Journalists should make sure that they report the main issue positions of the political parties, more or less as each present the issues.\*

	n=244	n=39
1. Strongly agree	89	11
2. Agree	36	1
3. Sort of agree	30	7
4. Neither	29	3
5. Sort of disagree	18	3
6. Disagree	22	8
7. Strongly disagree	20	6

- D.17 Journalists should make sure that conflict between the parties over issues is presented in interesting ways. Journalists should do all the usual things to make the news interesting

	n=241	n=39
1. Strongly agree	102	13
2. Agree	45	9
3. Sort of agree	36	8
4. Neither	40	6
5. Sort of disagree	4	1
6. Disagree	6	0
7. Strongly disagree	8	2

- D.18 Journalists should try to define party conflict for the public by revealing where each party actually stands on the issues

	n=172	n=39
1. Strongly agree	172	26
2. Agree	51	10

3.	Sort of agree	11	1
4.	Neither	4	1
5.	Sort of disagree	1	0
6.	Disagree	2	0
7.	Strongly disagree	3	1

D.19 The Australian media defines itself as the Fourth Estate, the independent and critical watchdog of government. However as the media companies exercise considerable commercial and political power some argue that this role has been compromised. Do you *personally favor* the notion of the media as the Fourth Estate, or do you believe it should be thought of as just another business.

		n=241	n=38
1.	Strongly agree Fourth Estate	144	26
2.	Agree Fourth Estate	47	8
3.	Sort of Fourth Estate	21	1
4.	Neither	14	1
5.	Sort of just another business	3	1
6.	Just another business	5	1
7.	Strongly agree just another business	7	0

D.20 What do you think is the *actual situation* in Australia today.

		n=243	n=39
1.	Strongly agree Fourth Estate	21	2
2.	Agree Fourth Estate	30	3
3.	Sort of Fourth Estate	53	11
4.	Neither	44	9
5.	Sort of just another business	40	6
6.	Just another business	34	8
7.	Strongly just another business	21	0

D.21 Freedom of the press is a fundamental condition of democracy. Yet, there are differing views on the main purpose of freedom of the press. One view holds that freedom of the press is intended primarily to enable the *news media* to freely communicate the information and opinions they deem important. An alternative view holds that freedom of the press is intended primarily to enable the many *groups* in society to freely express the beliefs and values they deem important.

Which view, free expression for the media or free expression for groups, is closer to your own view of freedom of the press?\*

		n=240	n=37
1.	Strongly favor free expression for media	89	7
2.	Favor free expression for media	31	5
3.	Sort of favor expression for media	18	4
4.	Uncertain	45	9
5.	Sort of favor expression for interest groups	12	2
6.	Favor free expression for interest groups	11	2
7.	Strongly favor free expression for groups	34	8

## Questions

News      Investigative

**E      Investigative Journalism**

- E.1 A willingness to undertake investigative journalism is an important measure of the media's commitment to its watchdog role. How important do you regard investigative journalism?

	n=239	n=39
1. Very important	174	33
2. Important	47	5
3. Sort of important	13	1
4. Uncertain	3	0
5. Not important	0	0
6. Quite unimportant	0	0
7. Absolutely unimportant	7	0

- E.2 Do you think the investigative journalism published in the Australian media tends to concentrate on. *Please circle all relevant numbers:*

1. Errors of individuals	192	29
2. Errors of institutions and companies	187	34
3. Failures of social system	72	11
4. Failures of economic/business	129	23
5. Failures of political system	121	18

- E.3 In your opinion what are the *objective obstacles* to the media playing a watchdog role. *Please circle all relevant numbers:*

1. State secrecy	149	30
2. Political pressure	79	16
3. Legal restrictions	214	35
4. Pressure from owners	66	15
5. Economic constraints	115	26
6. Journalistic inadequacies	125	32
7. Other, please specify	15	0

- E.4 In your opinion which *subjective factors* lead the media to limit their watchdog role of their own accord. *Please circle all relevant numbers:*

1. National interest	44	5
2. Personal privacy	75	12
3. Danger to staff	49	8
4. Political considerations	76	16
5. Owners' views	98	17
6. Commercial considerations	114	25
7. Other, please specify	23	0

- E.5 Does your organisation fulfil this watchdog role?

	n=227	n=35
1. Yes	154	27
2. No	73	8

E.6	Are the journalists in your organisation encouraged to do investigative journalism?	n=243	n=36
1.	Yes	153	26
2.	No	90	10
E.7	<i>If yes, how is this encouragement given? Please circle relevant boxes:</i>	n=153	n=26
1.	Ethos of the organisation	101	21
2.	Freeing them from other duties	90	17
3.	Providing economic and staff support	45	19
4.	Providing supportive and experienced editors	55	18
5.	Other, please specify	4	0
E.8	<i>If no, why not? Please circle relevant boxes:</i>	n=90	n=13
1.	Not the ethos of the organisation	27	4
2.	Concern about political pressure	9	1
3.	Concern about commercial pressure	9	2
4.	Irrelevant to the role of journalism and the media	0	2
5.	Insufficient resources (staff, money time)	84	13
6.	Inadequate skills of journalists and editors	44	9
7.	Other, please specify	2	0
E.9	Have you ever been put under any pressure to stop doing investigative journalism?*	n=242	n=39
1.	Yes	52	15
2.	No	143	16
3.	Not that I'm aware of	47	8
E.10	<i>If yes, was the pressure?</i>	n=52	n=15
1.	Internal, a threat to budgets, staff numbers etc.	13	6
2.	Political, directly from those with political power	9	4
3.	Legal, defamation, contempt proceedings, injunctions etc.	32	13
4.	Commercial, from within the organisation, not in its interests	13	5
5.	Other, please specify	9	0
E.11	How did you respond to this pressure?	n=55	n=14
1.	Ignored it	18	2
2.	Fought it	26	9
3.	Considered resigning/resigned	2	2
4.	Reduced the amount of investigative journalism undertaken	9	1
E.12	Do you believe there is resistance to journalists undertaking major investigative projects?*	n=236	n=38
1.	Yes	123	27
2.	No	113	11

Questions	News	Investigative
E.13 If yes, from whom do you think this resistance comes from. Circle relevant numbers.	n=123	n=27
1. Editorial staff	43	17
2. Politicians	50	13
3. Shareholders	6	5
4. Board	19	7
5. Management	56	17
6. Consumers	8	2
7. Advertisers	39	11
E.14 What skills and qualities do journalists need to undertake investigative reporting properly. <i>Please circle relevant numbers:</i>		
1. Knowledge of society	164	30
2. Journalistic skills	218	35
3. Personal courage	152	21
4. Sense of responsibility	172	26
5. Being critical/independently minded	218	36
6. Political commitment	9	3
7. Other, please specify	14	0
E.15 What, in your opinion, would need to be done to enable media to do this better? <i>Please circle relevant numbers:</i>		
1. Change defamation laws	188	36
2. Political independence	43	10
3. Commercial independence	80	17
4. Journalistic standards	149	30
5. Journalist education	117	20
6. Legal guarantees to protect sources	152	22
7. Other please specify, more media orgs	12	27
E.16 Do you think that the costs, in terms of lost reputations, reduction of confidence in public and political institutions etc outweighs the benefits of investigative journalism?	n=240	n=37
1. Yes, costs greater than benefits	13	4
2. No, benefits greater than costs	227	33
E.17 Do you think that the increase in investigative journalism over the last decade made Australia. Please circle all relevant numbers.		
1. A morally better society	37	7
2. A more fearful society	6	1
3. A better informed society	206	32
4. A more cynical society	153	18
5. A society given to rumor mongering and witchhunts	29	3

6.	A more honest society	36	12
7.	A politically healthier society	94	18
8.	A more open society	73	8
9.	Made no difference	8	1

**F Values and Modus Operandi**

F.1 In seeking out news, journalists should conduct their own inquiries rather than relying on close or routine associations with official sources.\*

		n=244	n=39
1.	Strongly agree	130	29
2.	Agree	49	5
3.	Sort of agree	35	1
4.	Neither	20	4
5.	Sort of disagree	5	0
6.	Disagree	2	0
7.	Strongly disagree	3	0

F.2 Economic growth should take precedence over environmental protection when the two are in conflict.

		n=244	n=38
1.	Strongly agree	5	0
2.	Agree	7	0
3.	Sort of agree	13	0
4.	Neither	77	11
5.	Sort of disagree	16	6
6.	Disagree	39	8
7.	Strongly disagree	87	13

F.3 The problems of Third World countries are largely the result of exploitation by the industrialized countries.

		n=23	n=38
1.	Strongly agree	35	4
2.	Agree	35	6
3.	Sort of agree	41	5
4.	Neither	72	13
5.	Sort of disagree	23	1
6.	Disagree	17	4
7.	Strongly disagree	20	5

F.4 The government should play a larger direct role in providing good jobs and incomes for the economically disadvantaged.

		n=242	n=38
1.	Strongly agree	44	7
2.	Agree	39	6
3.	Sort of agree	53	7
4.	Neither	64	15
5.	Sort of disagree	18	2
6.	Disagree	8	0
7.	Strongly disagree	16	1

Questions		News	Investigative
F.5 The best way to deal with problems of crime is to impose long prison sentences on those convicted of serious crime.*		n=242	n=38
1. Strongly agree		18	0
2. Agree		14	0
3. Sort of agree		26	1
4. Neither		46	8
5. Sort of disagree		21	4
6. Disagree		41	7
7. Strongly disagree		76	18
F.6 Broadcast journalists should have the same rights of free expression as print journalists.		n=239	n=38
1. Strongly agree		184	27
2. Agree		20	4
3. Sort of agree		5	1
4. Neither		23	4
5. Sort of disagree		4	1
6. Disagree		2	0
7. Strongly disagree		1	1
F.7 Political issues, such as political disputes, strategies, blunders, and the like, are generally more worthy of news coverage than policy issues, such as pending legislation, social conditions, and the like.*		n=243	n=36
1. Strongly agree		21	0
2. Agree		29	3
3. Sort of agree		21	4
4. Neither		39	8
5. Sort of disagree		36	3
6. Disagree		38	2
7. Strongly disagree		59	16
F.8 Journalists and the public have similar views on most issues		n=243	n=38
1. Strongly agree		9	2
2. Agree		16	3
3. Sort of agree		18	0
4. Neither		82	12
5. Sort of disagree		38	10
6. Disagree		43	6
7. Strongly disagree		37	5
News organisations are sometimes classified politically in terms of left, right and centre. Where would you place:			
F.9 Your news organisation in terms of editorial position		n=240	n=38
1. Very left		3	0
2. Left		10	0

3.	Sort of left		48	15
4.	Centre		99	12
5.	Sort of right		43	6
6.	Right		20	3
7.	Very right		17	2
F.10	Your organisation in terms of news reporting	n=241	n=38	
1.	Very left		3	0
2.	Left		6	0
3.	Sort of left		40	15
4.	Centre		141	16
5.	Sort of right		38	5
6.	Right		10	2
7.	Very right		3	0
F.11	Your organisation in terms of its audience	n=239	n=37	
1.	Very left		7	0
2.	Left		5	0
3.	Sort of left		36	6
4.	Centre		91	18
5.	Sort of right		54	6
6.	Right		33	5
7.	Very right		13	2
F.12	Where would you place yourself	n=241	n=38	
1.	Very left		13	0
2.	Left		50	9
3.	Sort of left		67	17
4.	Centre		80	10
5.	Sort of right		21	1
6.	Right		7	1
7.	Very right		3	0
In overall terms where would you place? Complete <i>only</i> for those you are familiar with.				
F.13	The Sydney Morning Herald	n=189	n=38	
1.	Very left		4	0
2.	Left		11	0
3.	Sort of left		63	11
4.	Centre		49	17
5.	Sort of right		40	6
6.	Right		16	4
7.	Very right		6	0
F.14	The Age	n=198	n=38	
1.	Very left		4	1
2.	Left		20	1
3.	Sort of left		67	13
4.	Centre		57	17
5.	Sort of right		34	6
6.	Right		11	0
7.	Very right		5	0

Questions		News	Investigative
F.15 The Australian*	n=226	n=39	
1. Very left	2	0	
2. Left	2	0	
3. Sort of left	14	0	
4. Centre	33	2	
5. Sort of right	66	11	
6. Right	77	18	
7. Very right	32	8	
F.16 ABC TV news	n=233	n=39	
1. Very left	13	1	
2. Left	31	4	
3. Sort of left	87	16	
4. Centre	88	15	
5. Sort of right	11	2	
6. Right	2	0	
7. Very right	1	1	
F.17 AM/PM	n=215	n=39	
1. Very left	8	1	
2. Left	25	4	
3. Sort of left	85	16	
4. Centre	83	15	
5. Sort of right	7	2	
6. Right	4	1	
7. Very right	3	0	
F.18 Channel 9 News	n=204	n=33	
1. Very left	1	0	
2. Left	4	0	
3. Sort of left	13	1	
4. Centre	55	4	
5. Sort of right	60	17	
6. Right	56	7	
7. Very right	15	4	
F.19 Four Corners	n=223	n=39	
1. Very left	12	2	
2. Left	50	10	
3. Sort of left	89	17	
4. Centre	61	10	
5. Sort of right	6	0	
6. Right	2	0	
7. Very right	3	0	
F.20 The Bulletin*	n=202	n=37	
1. Very left	1	0	
2. Left	5	0	

3.	Sort of left	17	1
4.	Centre	29	2
5.	Sort of right	58	14
6.	Right	57	12
7.	Very right	35	18
F.21	Telegraph Mirror*	n=158	n=32
1.	Very left	5	0
2.	Left	3	1
3.	Sort of left	7	0
4.	Centre	20	1
5.	Sort of right	44	7
6.	Right	47	17
7.	Very right	32	6
F.22	Herald Sun*	n=150	n=33
1.	Very left	4	0
2.	Left	2	1
3.	Sort of left	5	0
4.	Centre	28	2
5.	Sort of right	33	5
6.	Right	37	9
7.	Very right	41	16
F.23	Courier-Mail*	n=120	n=32
1.	Very left	1	0
2.	Left	0	0
3.	Sort of left	5	1
4.	Centre	22	0
5.	Sort of right	27	6
6.	Right	42	19
7.	Very right	23	6
F.24	Adelaide Advertiser	n=112	n=27
1.	Very left	1	0
2.	Left	0	0
3.	Sort of left	5	0
4.	Centre	15	1
5.	Sort of right	33	9
6.	Right	39	11
7.	Very right	19	6
F.25	Canberra Times	n=107	n=32
1.	Very left	0	1
2.	Left	1	0
3.	Sort of left	27	6
4.	Centre	40	17
5.	Sort of right	18	7
6.	Right	15	1
7.	Very right	6	0

Questions	News	Investigative
F.26 West Australian	n=111	n=25
1. Very left	1	0
2. Left	6	0
3. Sort of left	8	0
4. Centre	28	6
5. Sort of right	31	9
6. Right	23	7
7. Very right	14	3
In making their decisions, journalists must sometimes choose between alternative forms of news reporting.		
F.27 One choice is between news reporting where the facts are left to speak for themselves and news reporting where the journalist interprets the facts for the audience. To what extent is factual or interpretive reporting typical of your work?*	n=239	n=37
1. Factual	42	4
2. Quite factual	43	1
3. Somewhat factual	26	3
4. Uncertain	34	8
5. Somewhat interpretive	44	4
6. Quite interpretive	39	14
7. Interpretive	11	3
F.28 Another choice is between news reporting that advocates a particular point of view and news reporting that presents an impartial account of events. To what extent is advocacy or impartiality typical of your work?*	n=239	n=36
1. Advocacy	5	0
2. Quite advocacy	13	2
3. Somewhat advocacy	23	10
4. Uncertain	25	14
5. Somewhat impartial	26	1
6. Quite impartial	84	6
7. Impartial	63	3
F.29 Another choice is between news reporting that takes a critical posture toward political leaders in order to protect the public from abuse of power and news reporting that takes a constructive posture toward political leaders in order to help them communicate with the public. To what extent is a critical or constructive posture typical of your work?*	n=235	n=36
1. Critical	17	9
2. Quite critical	57	8
3. Somewhat critical	51	10
4. Uncertain	71	8
5. Somewhat constructive	16	1
6. Quite constructive	13	0
7. Constructive	10	0

- F.30 Another choice is between news reporting that is designed to get the attention of a large audience and news reporting that is designed to inform an audience. To what extent does your work seek to get an audience's attention or to inform an audience?

	n=239	n=38
1. Get attention	9	1
2.	18	1
3.	23	2
4. Uncertain	50	12
5.	40	7
6.	48	8
7. Inform	51	7

- F.31 There are different views of who really determines the agenda of day to day news reporting. One view holds that it is mainly the journalists. Another view holds that it is mainly public officials who determine the news agenda.

As regards your news organization, to what extent do you think the news agenda is determined by journalists or by public officials?\*

	n=242	n=37
1. Journalists	40	5
2.	61	2
3.	50	10
4. Uncertain	42	12
5.	33	3
6.	13	4
7. Officials	3	1

## G Hypotheticals

A few hypothetical news situations are presented below. We would like you to read each situation and then judge its potential as a news story.

**Situation 1:** At the party's convention today Liberal leaders proposed a national employment policy that has as its major component a substantial reduction in business taxes. 'The lesson of the last decade,' Dr Hewson said, 'is that better paying and more plentiful jobs depend on policies that stimulate business productivity.' He added: 'The answer to income security cannot be found in higher levels of government welfare spending.'

- G.1 Newsworthiness: How would you rate this situation in terms of its newsworthiness?

	n=242	n=39
1. Low	2	3
2.	15	3
3.	21	1
4.	27	2
5.	54	6
6.	76	13
7. High	47	11

Questions	News	Investigative
G.2 Heading: How would you rate the following as a possible heading for a news story based on the situation?		
LIBERALS OFFER SOLUTION TO LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT PROBLEM	n=243	n=39
1. Unacceptable	92	17
2.	47	9
3.	29	5
4. Uncertain	27	5
5.	20	2
6.	20	1
7. Acceptable	8	0
G.3 Follow-up story: Suppose an editor decides to do a follow-up story and asks you to get a reaction to the situation from an individual. If the following persons were available for a reaction, what would be your preference among them. <i>Please rank your preferences from 1 (first preference) to 4 (last preference).</i>		
Rank (those selecting each first):		
• An unemployed worker*	89	36
• Union leader	37	9
• A university economist	63	10
• A corporate executive*	54	10
Situation 2: Government documents reveal that administrators with the Department of Corrective Services suppressed information last year about the effectiveness of longer prison sentences as a deterrent to crime. The suppressed information was contained in an independent study that the department had commissioned. However, the department deliberately omitted the information from its annual report.		
The situation became known today when several members of Parliament called a press conference to demand that the suppressed information be made public. Departmental officials acknowledged that the independent study had included data that indicated that longer prison terms were not deterring crime. However, the official said that the findings of the independent study were inconsistent with more complete and up-to-date information the office had gathered from its own field staff.		
G.4 Newsworthiness: How would you rate this situation in terms of its newsworthiness?*	n=242	n=39
1. Low	0	0
2.	4	0
3.	5	2
4.	17	0
5.	45	2
6.	83	12
7. High	88	23

- G.5 Heading: How would you rate the following as a possible heading for a news story based on the situation?

## PRISONS DEPT COVER-UP ALLEGED

	n=241	n=39
1. Unacceptable	15	0
2.	9	2
3.	18	2
4. Uncertain	15	4
5.	42	8
6.	75	11
7. Acceptable	67	12

- G.6 Follow-up story: Suppose an editor decides to do a follow-up story and asks you to get a reaction to the situation from an individual. If the following persons were available for a reaction, what would be your preference among them. *Please rank your preferences from 1 (first preference) to 4 (last preference).*

Rank (those selecting each option first):

• A criminologist	161	29
• A crime victim	41	6
• A social worker	26	0
• A prosecuting counsel/barrister	12	3

**Situation 3:** The World Bank reported today that, despite record foreign aid disbursements by the Bank and the advanced industrialized countries, developing countries were so encumbered by debt last year that they paid \$50,000 million more to creditors than they received in new aid.

In a prepared response to the World Bank's report, the developing nations said that it was imperative that a major part of their foreign debt be forgiven. They also said that without debt reduction the world could not expect help from the developing nations on issues such as global warming and population control.

A high-ranking Australian official with the bank said that it was unrealistic to expect lender countries and banks to forego the payments they are currently due. He pointed out that developing countries had already been forgiven millions in debt obligations.

- G.7 Newsworthiness: How would you rate this situation in terms of its newsworthiness?\*

	n=241	n=39
1. Low	3	0
2.	17	2
3.	23	2
4.	36	3
5.	66	10
6.	64	9
7. High	32	13

Questions	News	Investigative
G.8 Heading: How would you rate the following as a possible heading for a news story based on the situation?		
DEBT BURDEN OVERWHELMING DEVELOPING COUNTRIES	n=241	n=39
1. Unacceptable	8	2
2.	15	3
3.	12	1
4. Uncertain	28	3
5.	41	9
6.	76	9
7. Acceptable	61	12
G.9 Visual: Suppose an editor asked you to select a visual to accompany a story based on the situation. If the following visuals were available to you, what would be your preference among them. Please rank them from 1 (first preference) to 4 (last preference).		
Rank (those selecting each option first):		
• A photo of the press conference at which an Australian official rejects the idea of forgiving millions in debt obligations	6	1
• A graph that shows debt payments exceed new aid among Third World countries	144	25
• A graph that shows the total of loans made to Third World countries and the total of debt payments they have made	25	6
• A typical photo of Third World poverty	68	7
<b>Situation 4:</b> Broad government regulations aimed at eliminating thousands of tonnes of air pollutants at chemical plants each year were put into effect today. The regulations, developed under authority of environmental protection laws, were put into effect despite company arguments that the cost of plant modifications to meet the new standards could cripple the industry.		
A chemical industry spokesperson contended that the rules could cost more than \$100 million over the next decade, although environmental officials have estimated the cost to be much lower. The chemical industry has also asserted that the new rules would have little effect since companies are already removing more than 90 per cent of the pollutants at issue.		
G.10 Newsworthiness: How would you rate this situation in terms of its newsworthiness?	n=242	n=39
1. Low	1	1
2.	4	0
3.	10	0

4.		35	4
5.		67	11
6.		82	15
7. High		43	8

G.11 Heading: How would you rate the following as a possible heading for a news story based on the situation?

CHEMICAL INDUSTRY PREDICTS HIGH COST AND LITTLE EFFECT FROM NEW REGULATIONS

		n=242	n=39
1. Unacceptable		37	5
2.		40	2
3.		41	6
4. Uncertain		31	3
5.		29	12
6.		47	9
7. Acceptable		17	2

G.12 Visual: Suppose an editor asked you to select a visual to accompany a story based on the situation. If the following visuals were available to you, what would be your preference among them. Please rank them from 1 (first preference) to 4 (last preference).

Rank (those selecting each option first):

• A photo showing dark smoke emerging from a plant's smoke stacks	95	15
• A photo of the chemical industry spokesperson at the press conference called to protest the new regulations*	11	0
• A graph that shows the decline in air pollution over the last ten years	26	4
• A graph showing the projected improvement in air quality as a result of the new regulations	109	19

G.13 Below are four statements associated with the importance of news to society. Rank them from most important (1) to least important (4).

	n=245	n=39
• The news is a means by which government officials can be held accountable for their actions	9	3
• The news is a means through which individuals and groups can express and promote their interests and opinions	4	0
• The news is a means by which the general public is kept informed about current events	231	36
• The news is a means through which political, economic and social leaders effectively	1	0

Questions		News	Investigative
G.14 As the basis for the most recent news story on which you worked, which sources of information were used? (Tick as many as apply. Please respond in terms of your most recent story, even if it was not typical.)			
1. Eyewitness interviews	99	19	
2. Opinion poll	5	2	
3. Man in the street interviews	19	5	
4. Back news files	113	21	
5. News release	66	5	
6. Reference book/source	54	23	
7. News conference	54	1	
8. Wire service story	36	5	
9. Talk with politician(s)	86	24	
10. Personal coverage of event	127	10	
11. Talk with an expert(s)	128	24	
12. Talk with a group spokesperson	95	10	
13. Talk with a journalist(s)	40	12	
In your judgement how fully are the views of the following groups represented in your news organisation's coverage of politics and public affairs?			
G.15 Consumer groups	n=239	n=38	
1. Very	75	13	
2. Somewhat	159	24	
3. Not	5	1	
G.16 Ordinary working people	n=239	n=37	
1. Very	48	8	
2. Somewhat	149	24	
3. Not	42	5	
G.17 Liberal/National Party	n=241	n=37	
1. Very	142	20	
2. Somewhat	98	16	
3. Not	1	1	
G.18 Major advertisers	n=240	n=36	
1. Very	12	3	
2. Somewhat	82	11	
3. Not	146	22	
G.19 The rich*	n=239	n=37	
1. Very	26	8	
2. Somewhat	152	24	
3. Not	61	5	
G.20 Intellectuals	n=241	n=37	
1. Very	47	11	
2. Somewhat	161	23	
3. Not	33	3	

G.21	Business	n=241	n=36
1.	Very	131	17
2.	Somewhat	108	19
3.	Not	2	3
G.22	Labor Party	n=240	n=37
1.	Very	149	20
2.	Somewhat	90	16
3.	Not	1	1
G.23	Unions*	n=242	n=37
1.	Very	126	13
2.	Somewhat	112	22
3.	Not	4	2
G.24	Religious institutions	n=237	n=37
1.	Very	15	3
2.	Somewhat	178	30
3.	Not	44	4
G.25	Environmental groups	n=240	n=38
1.	Very	107	16
2.	Somewhat	125	20
3.	Not	8	2
G.26	The military	n=241	n=37
1.	Very	8	0
2.	Somewhat	130	22
3.	Not	103	15
G.27	Public servants	n=240	n=36
1.	Very	39	5
2.	Somewhat	146	29
3.	Not	55	2
G.28	The police	n=240	n=36
1.	Very	103	12
2.	Somewhat	122	22
3.	Not	15	2
G.29	Aborigines	n=240	n=37
1.	Very	60	12
2.	Somewhat	140	21
3.	Not	40	4
G.30	Ethnic minorities	n=239	n=37
1.	Very	36	7
2.	Somewhat	146	25
3.	Not	57	5
G.31	Young people	n=237	n=37
1.	Very	23	4
2.	Somewhat	158	28
3.	Not	56	5

Questions		News	Investigative
G.32 The poor	n=239	n=37	
1. Very	22	3	
2. Somewhat	153	24	
3. Not	64	10	
G.33 Women	n=240	n=33	
1. Very	56	5	
2. Somewhat	170	23	
3. Not	14	2	
G.34 Australian Democrats	n=239	n=36	
1. Very	29	1	
2. Somewhat	172	28	
3. Not	38	7	
G.35 Imagine the following case: Through its editorials, the leading local paper for years demanded a major change in the way local government services are handled. In response to the newspaper's constant criticisms, the local government made the change that the paper had been demanding. Within a short time it is evident that the new policy was ill advised: local services are now substantially more costly and less effective			
Do you think that the editorial writers of the paper:	n=239	n=36	
1. Are morally responsible for the policy failure and should acknowledge this responsibility in editorials	161	21	
2. Are morally responsible for the policy failure but should not acknowledge this blame in editorials	1	0	
3. Are not morally responsible for the policy failure	77	15	

## H Background

Finally we would like to ask a few background questions:

H.1 Your age:      years	n=243	n=37
Under 30	50	4
30-39	106	19
40-49	60	12
50+	27	2
H.2 Your sex:	n=245	n=38
1. Female	82	9
2. Male	163	29
H.3 Have you ever worked full time in government or politics	n=243	n=38
1. Yes	65	10
2. No	178	28

H.4 If you were offered a suitable job in government or politics that offered greater opportunities than your present job, what is the likelihood that you would take it?\*

	n=241	n=38
1. Would probably take it	98	7
2. Would probably not take it	97	22
3. Would definitely not take it	46	9

H.5 Of your three best friends or acquaintances, how many of them are journalists (circle the number)

	n=167	n=38
0	79	7
1	93	13
2	55	12
3	19	6

H.6 How many of the three work in politics or government?

	n=246	n=39
0	150	25
1	69	8
2	21	6
3	6	0

H.7 Generally speaking which political party are you closer to?

	n=241	n=38
1. Liberal Party	32	1
2. National Party	1	0
3. Labor Party	107	16
4. Australian Democrats	7	2
5. Closer to no party	92	17
6. Other party (please specify)	2	2

H.8 What is the highest level of schooling you completed

	n=244	n=38
1. No qualifications	5	1
2. Leaving Certificate	16	0
3. HSC	40	3
4. Some university/college	74	12
5. Bachelors degree	95	18
6. Masters degree	13	4
7. PhD	1	0

H.9 What is your educational training\*

	n=245	n=39
1. Journalism cadetship	116	18
2. Journalism degree	33	3
3. Communications degree	23	0
4. Law /economics/commerce	18	7
5. Social sciences	37	10
6. Natural sciences	7	1
7. None (please specify)	11	0

Questions	News	Investigative
H.10 What type was the last secondary school you attended?	n=245	n=39
1. Public (state)	134	26
2. Private	111	13
H.11. Your father's occupation (or mother if primary income earner)?*	n=243	n=39
1. Manager or administrator	54	9
2. Professional	64	16
3. Paraprofessional	17	2
4. Tradesperson	48	3
5. Clerk or sales	17	5
6. Labourer	25	0
7. Other	18	4
H.12 Were you born in Australia?	n=245	n=39
1. Yes	177	25
2. No	68	14
H.13 Is English your first language?	n=243	n=38
1. Yes	233	38
2. No	10	0
H.14 Please indicate your salary range (total incl. overtime, benefits etc.)*	n=245	n=39
1. Up to \$30,000	13	1
2. \$30,001-\$40,000	44	3
3. \$40,001-\$50,000	63	10
4. \$50,001-\$60,000	56	8
5. \$60,001-\$80,000	51	4
6. \$80,001-\$100,000	12	6
7. More than \$100,000	6	7
H.15 Where do you expect to be working in five years time?	n=235	n=37
1. Journalism	200	32
2. Politics, public service	4	0
3. Small business	17	5
4. Other business	9	0
5. Public relations	5	0

That's it! Thank you for your persistence, we know how busy you are, and are extremely grateful for the time you have given us.

The results of the survey, and international comparisons will be published in *The Journalist* later in the year.

Please return the questionnaire in the enclosed post paid envelope.

## *References*

- Abbott Stan, 1988, 'Critics question staying power of investigative journalism', *IRE Journal*, Winter: 15-17
- Acton H.B. (ed.), 1972, *John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government*, London: J.M. Dent
- Allison Marianne, 1986, 'A literature review of approaches to professionalism of journalists', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, Spring: 5-16
- Alston Richard, 1994, *Percentage Players: The 1991 and 1993 Fairfax Ownership Decisions*, Senate Select Committee on Certain Aspects of Foreign Ownership in Relation to the Print Media, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia
- Altschull Herbert, 1984, *Agents of Power*, New York: Longman
- Anderson David & Peter Benjaminson, 1976, *Investigative Reporting*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press
- Article 19, *Information Freedom and Censorship*, *World Report*, 1991, London: Library Association Publishing
- Auchincloss Louis (ed.), 1966, *Anthony Trollope, The Warden and Barchester Towers*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 1985, *The Role of the National Broadcaster in Contemporary Australia*, Sydney: Corporate Relations Department, ABC
- Australian editorial, 1994, 'Growing up with "The Oz"', *Weekend Australian*, 23 July
- Avery Robert & David Eason (eds), 1991, *Critical Perspectives on Media and Society*, New York: Guildford Press
- Bacon Wendy, 1984a, 'The judge and the phone taps, what the issues are', *National Times*, 17 February
- , 1984b, 'Solicitor-General calls for follow up on tapes affair', *National Times*, 24 February: 7
- , 1984c, 'What's up on corruption', *National Times*, 9 March: 6ff
- , 1984d, 'The High Court judge and the magistrate', *National Times*, 8 June: 3-5
- , 1984e, 'A right magisterial muddle', *National Times*, 13 July
- , 1984f, 'Chief magistrate says he was leaned on', *National Times*, 27 July: 3 ff
- , 1984g, 'Untangling the Briese affair', *National Times*, 3 August: 4
- , 1984h, 'Neville Wran's crisis deepens', *National Times*, 17 August: 3 ff
- , 1984i, 'Behind the Murphy affair', *National Times*, 31 August: 4ff

- , 1984j, 'The tapes – unexplored questions', *National Times*, 2 November
- , 1985a, 'The heroin coast', *National Times*, 6 December: 9–15
- , 1985b, 'Murphy the High Court judge with a case to answer', *National Times*, 19 April
- , 1985c, 'Murphy versus the Crown', *National Times*, 28 June
- , 1985d, 'The amazing Lionel Murphy show', *National Times*, 5 April
- , 1987, 'Awkward Silences', *Australian Left Review*, 101, October: 16–24
- Bacon Wendy, Brian Toohey & Alan Ramsay, 1985, 'His honour the prisoner', *National Times*, 12 July
- Baistow Tom, 1985, *Fourth Rate Estate: An Anatomy of Fleet Street*, London: Comedia
- Baker C. Edwin, 1994, *Advertising and a Democratic Press*, Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Baker, Ken, 1985, 'Four Corners: the pattern of bias', *IPA Review*, Winter: 34–42
- Baldastay Gerald, 1992, *The Commercialisation of News in the Nineteenth Century*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- Barker Geoffrey, 1984, 'Costigan's bleak view of society', *Age*, 2 November
- Barr Trevor, 1977, *Reflections of Reality: The Mass Media in Australia*, Adelaide: Rigby
- , 1991, *The Rise and Fall of Alan Bond*, rev. edn, Sydney: Bantam/ABC Books
- Bayley Edwin, 1981, *Joe McCarthy and the Press*, New York: Pantheon
- Becker Carl L, 1953, *Freedom and Responsibility: In the American Way of Life*, New York: Alfred Knopf
- Beecher Eric, 1990, 'Print power and 'democracy', *Age*, 7 October
- Birkhead Douglas, 1984, 'The power in the image: professionals and the communications revolution', *American Journalist*, Winter: 1–14
- , 1986, 'News media ethics and the management of professionals', *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 1(2), Spring/Summer: 37–46
- Blackstone William, 1966 [1769], *Commentary on the Laws of England: Book the Fourth*, London: Dawsons of Pall Mall
- Blaikie George, 1966, *Remember Smith's Weekly*, Melbourne: Rigby
- Blankenburg William, 1981, 'Structural determination of circulation', *Journalism Quarterly* (58): 543, 548
- Bogart Leo, 1989, *Press and the Public*, 2nd edn, Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc.
- Bonwick James, 1890, *Early Struggles of the Australian Press, 1817–1906*, Melbourne: Gordon and Gotch
- Bornhorst Pamela, 1994, Column on government–media relations, *Brisbane News*, 8 June
- Bottom Bob, 1980a, 'Police chief calls for telephone tapping', *Bulletin*, 21 October: 32
- , 1980b, 'Secret Victorian crime report exposed as hoax', *Bulletin*, 19 August: 22–3
- , 1980c, 'Woodward's tougher stand on Australia's drug peril', *Bulletin*, 26 August: 24–8
- , 1984, *Without Fear or Favour*, Melbourne: Sun
- , 1988, *Shadow of Shame*, Melbourne: Sun
- , 1989, *The Godfather in Australia: The Book That Started It All*, Melbourne: Matchbooks
- , 1991, *Inside Victoria: A Chronicle of Scandal*, Melbourne: Pan

- Bowman David, 1984a, 'In praise of muckrakers', *Australian Society*, October: 34–5
- , 1984b, 'The boxing of Four Corners', *Australian Society*, December: 37–9
- , 1986, 'A light on the hill?', *Australian Society*, December 1986: 33–6
- , 1987a, 'The death of the Times', *Australian Society*, June: 5–7
- , 1987b, 'Media casualties', *Australian Society*, October: 5–7
- , 1988, 'The legacy of Martin Dougherty', *Australian Society*, March: 18–19
- , 1989a, 'Where are all the journos?', *Australian Society*, March: 10–11
- , 1989b, 'The serious and the silly', *Australian Society*, July: 12–13
- Boyce George, 1978, 'The fourth estate – a reappraisal', in Boyce, Curran & Wingate (eds), *Newspaper History*: 19–40
- Boyce George, James Curran, & Pauline Wingate (eds), 1978, *Newspaper History: From the 17th Century to the Present Day*, London: Constable
- Boyd-Barrett Oliver, 1970, 'Journalism recruitment and training problems of professionalisation', in Tunstall (ed.), *Media Sociology: A Reader*: 181–201
- Boylan James, 1967, 'The Hutchins Report, a twenty year view', *Columbia Journalism Review*: 8–20
- , 1986, 'Declarations of Independence', *Columbia Journalism Review*, November: 30–45
- Bray T.C., 1965, *A Newspaper's Role in Modern Society*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- Brennan J., 1992a, 'Nationwide News Pty Ltd vs Andrew Garry Willis', *High Court of Australia*, 28 August 1992, FC 92/032: 14–42
- , 1992b, 'Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd and ORS and the Commonwealth of Australia; The state of NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 30 September 1992, FC 92/033: 28–48
- , 1994, 'Andrew Theophanous and Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 12 October 1994, FC 94/041: 25–47
- Brennan, Gerard CJ, 1995, 'Towards a true people's court', speech to Deakin Law School, *Australian*, 27 July
- Broadcasting Services Act* 1992, no. 110 of 1992.
- Brown Allan, 1986, *Commercial Media in Australia*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- Brown David, 1987, 'Interrogating the interrogators', *Australian Left Review*, 101, October: 16–20
- Brown David & David Neal, 1984, 'The gang of twelve', *Australian Society*, February: 10–14
- Bryson John, 1985, *Evil Angels*, Melbourne: Viking
- Buckridge Patrick, 1994, *The Scandalous Penton*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- Burton Tom, 1994, 'Why Hewson's taking it so hard', *Australian Financial Review*, 20 May: 27
- Cannon Michael, 1981, *That Damned Democrat: John Norton, an Australian Populist 1858–1916*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- Carey James W., 1969, 'The Communications Revolution and the Professional Communicator', *Sociological Review Monograph*, University of Keele, 13, January: 23–38
- , 1974, 'The problems of journalism history', *Journalism History*, 1(1): 2–5
- Carlyle Thomas, 1907, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, London: Chapman & Hall

- Carlyon Les, 1982, *Paper Chase: The Press Under Examination*, Melbourne: HWT Books
- Carroll V.J., 1990, *The Man Who Couldn't Wait*, Sydney: William Heinemann
- Cater Douglass, 1959, *The Fourth Branch of Government*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Chadwick Paul, 1989, *Media Mates: Carving up Australia's Media*, Melbourne: Macmillan
- , 1991, *Charters of Editorial Independence: An Information Paper*, Sydney & Melbourne: Communications Law Centre, July
- Charlton Peter 1992, 'The Media in Post Fitzgerald Queensland: Failing Better', in Andrew Hede, Scott Prasser & Mark Neylan (eds), *Keeping Them Honest: Democratic Reform In Queensland*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press: 66-76
- Chase Denis, 1971, 'The aphilosophy of journalism', *Quill*, September: 15
- Clark Lesley, 1994, *Review of Government Media and Information Services*, Parliamentary Committee for Electoral and Administrative Review, April 1994, Report Number 22, Legislative Assembly of Queensland
- Coaldrake Peter, 1989, *Working the System*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- Cochran David, 1990, 'I.F. Stone: in memoriam', *IRE Journal*, Spring: 22
- Cockburn Milton, 1984, 'Hawke hits at tactic of guilt by innuendo', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 October
- Cockburn Stewart, 1979, *The Salisbury Affair*, Melbourne: Sunbooks
- Cohen Stanley & Jock Young, 1973, *The Manufacture of News*, London: Constable
- Coleman Robert (ed.), 1970, *Reporting for Work*, Melbourne: HWT Press
- Coleridge Nicholas, 1993, *Paper Tigers*, London: William Heinemann
- Columbia Journalism Review*, 1970, 'Is muckraking coming back?' 9 Fall: 12
- Commission on Freedom of the Press, 1947, *A Free and Responsible Press*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Cook Sir Edward, 1915, *Delane of the Times*, London: Constable
- Cooney Barney, 1994, *Off the Record: Inquiry into the Rights and Obligations of the Media*, First Report, Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia
- Costigan Peter, 1984, 'After the fury, it's the crime that counts', *Herald*, 2 November
- Cryle Denis, 1989, *The Press in Colonial Queensland*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- Curran James, 1990, 'Culturist perspectives of news organisations: a reappraisal and case study', in Marjorie Ferguson (ed.), *Public Communication: The New Imperatives*, Beverly Hills: Sage
- , 1991, 'Mass media and democracy: a reappraisal', in Curran & Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society*: 82-117
- (ed.), 1978, *The British Press: A Manifesto*, London: Macmillan
- Curran, James, Angus Douglas & Garry Whannel, 1981, 'The political economy of the human interest story', in Smith (ed.), *Newspapers and Democracy*: 288-316
- Curran James & Michael Gurevitch (eds), 1991, *Mass Media and Society*, London: Edward Arnold
- Curran James & Jean Seaton (eds), 1991, *Power Without Responsibility: The Press and Broadcasting In Britain*, 4th edn, London: Routledge
- Dahlgren Peter & Sparks Colin (eds), 1991, *Communication and Citizenship*, London: Routledge

- Dale Brian, 1985, *Ascent to Power*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Daniel Ann 1990, 'Public Ratings of Journalists', in Henningham (ed.), *Issues in Australian Journalism*, Melbourne: Longman
- Dawson J, 1992a, 'Nationwide News Pty Ltd vs Andrew Garry Willis', *High Court of Australia*, 28 August 1992 FC 92/032: 65-72
- , 1992b, 'Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd and ors and the Commonwealth of Australia; The state of NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 30 September 1992, FC 92/033: 57-83
- , 1994, 'Andrew Theophanous and Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 12 October 1994, FC 94/041: 72-8
- Dawson G., 1922, *The History of the Times*, London
- Deamer, Adrian, 1972, 'Journalists' self-censorship', in Keith and Elizabeth Windschuttle (eds), *Fixing the News*, Sydney: Cassell: 41-7
- Deane J, 1994, 'Andrew Theophanous and Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 12 October 1994, FC 94/041: 49-71
- Deane J & Toohey J, 1992, 'Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd and ors and the Commonwealth of Australia; The state of NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 30 September 1992, FC 92/033: 49-57
- Dennis Everette E., 1989, *Reshaping the Media: Mass Communication in an Information Age*, London: Sage
- , 1992, *Of Media and People*, London: Sage
- Dickie Phil, 1989, *The Road to Fitzgerald and Beyond*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- , 1990, 'The media, a lot to answer for' in Scott Prasser, Andrew Wear & John Nethercote (eds), 1990, *Corruption and Reform: The Fitzgerald Vision*: 49-57
- Dixon Owen, 1965, *Jesting Pilate*, Melbourne: Law Book Company
- Donald Bruce, 1992, 'The media and the legal system, the continuing tension', *Journalism and the Law*, Sydney: Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, UTS: 27-37
- Donsbach Wolfgang & Thomas Patterson, 1992, 'Journalists' roles and newsroom practices: a cross-national comparison', International Communication Association/ World Association for Public Opinion Research, 42nd conference, May, Miami, Florida
- Donsbach Wolfgang, 1981, 'Legitimacy through competence rather than value judgements: the concept of journalistic professionalisation reconsidered', *Gazette*, 27: 47-67
- Downie Leonard, 1976, *The New Muckrakers*, Washington: New Republic Books
- EARC 1992, Issues Paper No 19, *Review of Government Media and Information Services*, Brisbane
- Edgar, Patricia, 1979, *The Politics of the Press*, Melbourne: Sun
- Electoral and Administrative Review Commission, 1991, *Review of Information and Resource Needs of Non-Government Members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly*, Brisbane: Goprint
- Electoral and Administrative Review Commission, 1993, *Report on Review of Government Media and Information Services*, Brisbane: Goprint
- Electoral and Administrative Review Commission, 1992, *Transcript of Proceedings, Public Seminar on Review of Government Media and Information Services*, 26 June, Brisbane: Goprint
- Electoral and Administrative Review Commission, 1992, *Issues Paper Number 19*, Brisbane: Goprint

- Elliott Philip, 1972, *The Sociology of the Professions*, London : Macmillan
- Epstein Edward Jay, 1973, *News from Nowhere*, New York: Vintage Books
- Evans Harold, 1983, *Good Times, Bad Times*, London: Coronet
- Fairfax James, 1991, *My Regards to Broadway*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson
- Fairfax Warwick, 1931, *A Century of Journalism: The Sydney Morning Herald and its Record of Australian life 1831–1931*, Sydney: Fairfax
- Fitzgerald Tony 1989, *Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct*, Brisbane: Goprint
- Flint David, 1993, 'Protecting sources', *Australian Press Council News*, August: 3
- , 1995a, 'Press provides vital watchdog', *Australian*, 20 February: 11
- , 1995b, 'Measure media dominance on the "share of voice" test', *Australian Financial Review*, 28 June: 18
- Forbes Cameron (ed.), 1981, *The Best of the Age, 1980–81*, Melbourne: Nelson
- Frank Dixon, 1975, *Inside the ABC: A Piece of Australian History*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson
- Franklin Marc, 1977, *The First Amendment and the Fourth Estate*, Mineola, New York: Foundation Press
- Fricke Graham, 1986, *Judges of the High Court*, Melbourne: Hutchinson
- Fuerst Alex, 1978, Edwin Graham Perkin, unpublished honours thesis, Department of Journalism, RMIT, Melbourne
- Gabowsky Peter and Paul Wilson, 1989, *Journalism and Justice*, Sydney: Pluto
- Gans Herbert, 1979, *Deciding What's News*, New York: Pantheon
- , 1985, 'Are US journalists dangerously liberal?', *Columbia Journalism Review*, November/ December: 29–33
- Garnham, Nicholas, 1986, 'The media and the public sphere', *Intermedia*, 14(1): 28–33
- , 1990, *Capitalism and Communication*, London: Sage
- Gaudron J, 1992a, 'Nationwide News Pty Ltd vs Andrew Garry Willis', *High Court of Australia*, 28 August 1992, FC 92/032: 73–6
- , 1992b, 'Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd and ors and the Commonwealth of Australia; The state of NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 30 September 1992, FC 92/033: 84–108
- Gaylard Geoff, 1991, *One Hundred and Fifty Years of News from the Herald*, Melbourne: Portside Editions
- , 1992, *The Moreton Bay Courier to the Courier Mail, 1846–1992*, Melbourne: Portside Editions
- Granato Len, 1983, Australia's Pentagon papers, *Australian Journalism Review*, 5(2), July: 21–9
- Green H.M., 1984, *A History of Australian Literature*, vols 1 & 2, revised by Dorothy Green, Sydney: Angus and Robertson
- Greenwood Frederick, 1897, 'The Newspaper Press', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, clxi, May: 704–20
- Gross G. (ed.), 1969, *The Responsibility of the Press*, New York: Clarion
- Grundy Bruce, 1992, 'The Reform Process and the Media: Good News and Bad News', in Andrew Hede, Scott Prasser & Mark Neylan (eds), *Keeping Them Honest: Democratic Reform In Queensland*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press: 43–53
- , 1990, 'Who sets the news agenda: the turkeys or the chooks?' in Prasser, Wear, & Nethercote (eds), *Corruption and Reform: The Fitzgerald Vision*: 27–36
- Gurevitch Michael, Tony Bennet, James Curran & Janet Woollacott, 1982, *Culture, Society and the Media*, London: Methuen

- , 1986, *Culture, Society and the Media*, 3rd edn, London: Routledge
- Habermas Jürgen, 1989, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, translated by Thomas Burger, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Halberstam David, 1979, *The Powers That Be*, New York: Dell Books
- Hall Sandra, 1979, 'Television: now it's the current affairs spectacular', *Bulletin*, 13 February: 54–60
- , 1994, 'Highly polished Stone', *Weekend Australian*, 25 June: 3 ff
- Hansard Transcript, 1984, *Senate Privileges Committee*, Australian Parliament, Canberra, 12 and 26 September
- Harrison John M & Harry H. Stein (eds), 1973, *Muckraking*, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press
- Hayden Hon. Bill, 1989, Address by the Governor-General to launch the *Independent*, 5 July, Sydney
- Henningham John, 1982, 'Television journalists: participant and neutral values', *Australian Journal of Communication*, 1: 1–13
- , 1988, *Looking At Television News*, Melbourne: Longman
- , (ed.), 1990, *Issues in Australian Journalism*, Melbourne: Longman Cheshire
- Herman Edward S & Noam Chomsky, 1988, *Manufacturing Consent*, New York: Pantheon
- Hertsgaard Mark, 1988, *On Bended Knee*, New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux
- Hess Stephen, 1984, *The Government/Press Connection*, Washington DC: Brookings Institution
- Hickie David, 1989, *The Prince and the Premier*, 3rd edn, Sydney: Angus & Robertson
- Hiebert Ray, Donald Ungururait & Thomas Bohn, 1982, *Mass Media III: An Introduction to Modern Communication*, New York: Longman
- Higgins Hugh, 1969, *Muckrakers to New Deal*, London: Faber
- Hirsh Paul, Peter Mille, F.G. Kline (eds), 1978, *Methodological Strategies for Communications Research*, Beverly Hills: Sage
- Hocking William Ernest, 1947, *Freedom of the Press: A Framework of Principle*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Hoffman R.J.S. & Paul Lerack (eds), 1946, *Burke's Politics Selected Writings*, New York: Knopf
- Horne Donald, 1994, 'But that's not the issue', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Not Just Another Business*, Sydney: Pluto
- Hurst John, 1988, *The Walkley Awards: Australia's Best Journalists in Action*, Melbourne: John Kerr
- Hutchins Robert, 1947, *A Free and Responsible Press*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Hutton Geoffrey & Les Tanner, 1979, *125 Years of Age*, Melbourne: Nelson
- Inglis K.S., 1983, *This is the ABC*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- , 1988, 'Eight million words of Nation', *Australian Society*, September: 34–7
- , (ed.), 1989, *Nation: Life of an Independent Journal of Opinion*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- IPA Commentary, 1985, 'Media – who watches the public watchdog?' *IPA Review*, Winter: 6–7
- James Beverly, 1991, 'Press Participation as a civil liberty: the model of academic freedom', *Journal of Communication*, 41(1) Winter: 31–52
- Janowitz Morris, 1975, 'Professional models in journalism: the gatekeeper and the advocate', *Journalism Quarterly*, (82)4: 618–26
- Johns Brian, 1984, Journalism: better, worse or much the same? broadcast on ABC radio, 25 February

- Johnston Robert (ed.), 1990, *160 Years of the Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney: John Fairfax Group
- Johnstone, John; Edward Slawski, William Bowman, 1976, *The News People*, Urbana: University of Illinois
- Keane John, 1991, *Media and Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Kelly Paul, 1993, 'Bound for disappointment, on the highway from heaven to hell', in Schultz (ed.), 1994, *Not Just Another Business*, Sydney: Pluto
- Kennedy, Trevor, 1984a, 'Trial by journalism', *Bulletin*, 24 June: 23–4
- , 1984b, 'Packer and the new McCarthyism – a bill of rights is needed', *Bulletin*, 9 October: 26–7
- Kenny Chris, 1993, *State of Denial*, Kent Town: Wakefield Press
- Kimbal Penn, 1965, 'Journalism: art, craft or profession?' in K.S. Lynn (ed.), *The Professions in America*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Kirby, Justice M., 1994, 'Judges under attack', address to Fifth International Criminal Law Congress, Sydney, 25–30 September
- , 1995, Address to the 'Editor's roundtable on ethics training', organised by UNESCO and UN Centre for Human Rights, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 27 January
- Klaudman Stephen & Beauchamp Tom, 1987, *The Virtuous Journalist*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Koch Adrienne & William Peden (1944), *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, New York: Modern Library
- Kunczik Michael, 1989, *Concepts of Journalism*, Bonn: FES
- , 1990, *Images of Nations and International Public Relations*, Bonn: FES
- Laski Harold J., 1936, *The Rise of European Liberalism*, 4th edn, London: Unwin Books
- Lawson Sylvia, 1983, *The Archibald Paradox*, Melbourne: Penguin
- , 1988, 'Intelligencer – journalism and Neil Ascherson', *Australian Society*, December 1988: 52–6
- Lee Martin A & Norman Solomon, 1990, *Unreliable Sources*, New York: Lyle Stuart
- Lee Michael, 1992, *News and Fair Facts: The Australian Print Media Industry*, House of Representatives Select Committee on the Print Media, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia
- Legge Kate, 1994, 'Prime manipulator', *Weekend Australian*, 21 May 1994: 24
- Levy Leonard W., 1963, *Freedom of Speech and Press in Early American History: Legacy of Suppression*, New York: Harper Torchbooks
- Lichtenberg Judith (ed.), 1991, *Democracy and the Mass Media*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lichter Robert, Stanley Rothman & Linda Lichter, 1986, *The Media Elite*, Maryland: Alder and Alder
- Lindsay A.D. (ed.), 1967, *Utilitarianism: Liberty, Representative Government*, incl. J.S. Mill, 'On Liberty', London: Everyman
- Lippmann Walter, 1922, *Public Opinion*, New York: Free Press
- , 1955, *The Public Philosophy*, London: Hamish Hamilton
- Little John, 1994, *Inside 60 Minutes*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Lloyd Clem, 1985, *Profession Journalist*, Sydney: Hale & Ironmonger
- , 1988, *Parliament and the Press*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- , 1989; 'Honest graft? Aspects of Queensland's Fitzgerald report', *Politics* 24(2), November: 125–33
- McAdam Anthony, 1983, 'The National Times, Hawke and the CIA', *Quadrant*, May: 57–60

- MacBride Sean, 1980, *Many Voices One World*, London: Kogan Page
- McBride William, 1994, *Killing the Messenger*, Sydney: Eldorado Publishing
- McDonald Ranald, 1983, Address to National Press Club, 29 November, Canberra
- McGuinness Padraig P, 1990, *The Media Crisis: Ownership of the Media and Democracy*, Melbourne: Schwartz & Wilkinson
- McHugh, J., 1992a, 'Nationwide News Pty Ltd vs Andrew Garry Willis', *High Court of Australia*, 28 August 1992, FC 92/032: 77-7
- , 1992b, 'Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd and ors and the Commonwealth of Australia; The state of NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 30 September 1992, FC 92/033: 109-30
- McHugh J., 1994, 'Andrew Theophanous and Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 12 October 1994, FC 94/041: 79-90
- McQuail Denis, 1991, 'Mass media in the public interest', in Curran & Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society*, London: Edward Arnold
- , 1975, *Communication*, New York: Longman
- , 1976, *Review of Sociological Writing on the Press*, London: HMSO
- Macintyre Stuart, 1994, *Whereas the People . . . : Civics and Citizenship Education, Report of the Civics Expert Group*, Canberra: AGPS
- Macklin Robert, 1982a, 'Static sales put pressure on the press', *Bulletin*, 9 February: 48-55
- , 1982b, 'The press gallery catches the Canberra disease', *Bulletin*, 16 February: 36-43
- Major G. (ed.), 1976, *Mass Media in Australia*, Australian Institute of Political Science 41st Summer School, Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton
- Mander A., 1944, *Public Enemy the Press*, Sydney: Currawong
- Manning Peter, 1988, 'The truth for a change', *Australian Listener* 10, 1-7 Oct.: 3
- Margach James, 1979, *The Abuse of Power*, London: W.H. Allen
- Marr, David, 1984a, 'Foord alleged to have used Murphy's name in Ryan case', *National Times*, 28 September
- , 1984b, 'The amazing Senate hearings', *National Times*, 15 October
- Marr, David & Bacon, Wendy, 1984, 'The Murphy affair: judge vs judge', *National Times*, 7 October
- Mason Sir Anthony, CJ, 1992a, 'The independence of the bench: the independence of the bar and the Bar's role in the judicial system', keynote address, English, Scottish and Australian Bar Associations, July, London
- , 1992b, 'Nationwide News Pty Ltd vs Andrew Garry Willis', *High Court of Australia*, 28 August 1992, FC 92/032: 1-13
- , 1992c, 'Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd and ors and the Commonwealth of Australia; The state of NSW and the Commonwealth of Australia and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 30 September 1992, FC 92/033: 3-27
- , 1993, 'Contract and its relationship with equitable standards and the doctrine of good faith', Cambridge lectures, July, Cambridge
- Mason CJ, Toohey J & Gaudron J, 1994, 'Andrew Theophanous and Herald and Weekly Times Ltd and Anor', *High Court of Australia*, 12 October 1994, FC 94/041: 1-24
- Masters Chris, 1990, 'Tackling corruption, some strategies', in Prasser, Wear & Nethercote (eds), *Corruption and Reform: The Fitzgerald Vision*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press
- , 1992a, *Inside Story*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson
- , 1992b, 'Investigative journalism and the Queensland media', in

- Transcript of Proceedings, Public Seminar on Review of Government Media and Information Services, 26 June, Brisbane: Goprint*
- , 1992c, Speech to National Press Club, August, Canberra
- Mathews Committee, 1990, *Report to the Victorian Attorney-General of the Working Party into Print Media Ownership*, 24 December, Melbourne
- Mayer Henry, 1968, *The Press in Australia*, 2nd edn, Sydney: Lansdowne
- , 1983, 'Rethinking media diversity', *Regional Journal of Social Issues*, 12 (May): 8–18
- Merrill John Calhoun, 1974, *The Imperative of Freedom*, Communications Arts Book, New York: Hastings House
- , 1977, *Existential Journalism*, New York: Hastings House
- , 1989, *The Dialectic in Journalism*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press
- , 1991, 'Best Newspapers in the World', *Sydney Morning Herald*, November
- Merrill John C. and Jack Odell, 1983, *Philosophy and Journalism*, New York: Longman
- Mill James, 1986 [1825], *Essays on Government, Jurisprudence, Liberty of the Press and Law of Nations, Supplement to the Encyclopaedia Britannica*, New Jersey: Augustus Kelley, Fairfield
- Mill John Stuart, 1976 [1825], *Law of Libel and Liberty of the Press*, Westminster Review III, Sussex: Harvester Press
- Miller E. Morris, 1973, *Press Men and Governors*, rev. edn, Sydney: Sydney University Press
- Mollenhoff Clark, 1981, *Investigative Reporting*, New York: Macmillan
- National Times editorial, 1984, 'Contempt charges brought against the *National Times*', 7 September: 16
- Newton Sarah, 1993, *Maxwell Newton*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press
- Nicol Bill, 1989, *McBride: Behind the Myth*, Sydney: ABC Books
- Nixon Raymond, 1945, 'Concentration and absenteeism in daily newspaper ownership', *Journalism Quarterly*, 22(2): 97–114
- NLA AAA National Library of Australia Oral History Collection
- NLA Don Angel, TRC 121/37
  - NLA Bob Bottom, TRC 1500/1999
  - NLA Ross Campbell, 735–6; 9509–531
  - NLA Vic Carroll, TRC 2878, 2872
  - NLA Peter Cole-Adams, TRC 558, 19.7.77
  - NLA Gay Davidson, TRC 2051
  - NLA Adrian Deamer TRC 2984
  - NLA Robert Drewe, TRC 1023, 18/10/1977
  - NLA Mary Durack 1913–1994, DeB 933–934
  - NLA Tom Fitzgerald, TRC 2247/ 1–17
  - NLA Des Gillette, TRC 121/85
  - NLA Harry Gordon, TRC 558 1182, 20/9/80
  - NLA Al Grassby, TRC 4900/18
  - NLA Henry Gullett, TRC 121/1
  - NLA Les Haylen TRC 121/84, 1976
  - NLA Clem Lloyd, TRC 121/64
  - NLA Mungo MacCallum TRC 4051, 1988
  - NLA Robert Macdonald, 1938–, TRC 1544
  - NLA Robert Macklin, 1941–, DeB 1077
  - NLA Chris Masters TRC 4277
  - NLA Frank Moorhouse, 1938–, DeB 775–776

- NLA Cyril Pearl, 1906–1987, DeB 364  
NLA John Pringle, DeB 199–200  
NLA Ray Robinson, TRC 391/59  
NLA Gavin Souter, DeB 589  
NLA Neville Wran on NSW press, TRC 579/A  
Nordenstreng Kaarle & Topus Hifzi (eds), 1989, *Journalist: Status, Rights, Responsibilities*, Prague: Ioj  
Norris J.G., 1981, *Report of the Inquiry into the Ownership and Control of Newspapers in Victoria*, Report to the Premier of Victoria, 15 September, Melbourne  
O'Boyle Lenore, 'The image of the journalist in France, Germany and England 1815–1848', *Comparative Studies in Society & History*, 10: 290–317  
Parker Derek, 1990, *The Courtesans*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin  
Patner Andrew, 1988, *I.F. Stone: A Portrait*, New York: Doubleday Books  
Patterson Thomas, 1992, 'Irony of the free press: professional journalism and news diversity', *American Political Science Association*, September, Chicago, Illinois  
Pauly J.J., 1985, 'Ideological origins of an independent press', American Journalism Historians Association Annual conference, Las Vegas, October  
Peach Bill, 1992, *This Day Tonight: How Australian Current Affairs TV Came of Age*, Sydney: ABC Books  
Pearl Cyril, 1958, *Wild Men of Sydney*, London: W.H. Allen  
Penton Brian, 1947, *Censored*, Sydney: Shakespeare Head Press  
Perkin Graham, 1965, 'News', in Revill and Roderick (eds), *The Journalist's Craft*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson  
—, 1975, 'What revolution?' in *Communications Revolution*, Paris: UNESCO  
—, 1976, 'Introduction' in G. Major (ed.), *Mass Media in Australia*, Sydney: Hodder & Stoughton: 29–32  
Perkins Kevin, 1994, 'David Halpin, reporter with a fighting approach', *Australian*, 25 May  
Petersen Neville, 1993, *News Not Views*, Sydney: Hale & Ironmonger  
Picard Robert G., 1984, *The Press and Decline of Democracy*, Connecticut: Westport  
Picard Robert G., Winter, McCombs and Lacy (eds), 1987, *Press Concentration and Monopoly*, Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex  
Pollak Michael, 1990, *Sense and Censorship*, Sydney: Reed  
Powell Nigel, 1990, 'Blowing in the wind', in Prasser, Wear & Nethercote (eds), *Corruption and Reform: The Fitzgerald Vision*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press: ??  
Prasser, Scott, Rae Wear & John Nethercote (eds), 1990, *Corruption and Reform: The Fitzgerald Vision*, St Lucia: University of Queensland Press  
Prior Tom, 1993, *The Sinners' Club*, Melbourne: Penguin  
Pullan, Rob, 1986, *Four Corners: Twenty-five Years*, Sydney: ABC Books  
—, 1994, *Guilty Secrets, Free Speech and Defamation in Australia*, 2nd edn, Sydney: Pascal Press  
— (ed.), 1985, *The Way We Are: A National Portrait by the National Times*, Sydney: Unwin  
Reeve George, 1855, 'The newspaper press', *Edinburgh Review*, c ii: 470–98  
Revill Lindsay & Colin Roderick (eds), 1965, *The Journalist's Craft*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson  
Reynolds Margaret, 1994, (Report) Senate Committee of Privileges, Canberra: Parliament of Australia  
Richards David, 1980a, 'Australia's most dangerous criminal tells all', *Bulletin*, 11 March: 48–55

- , 1980b, 'How the government condones waterfront graft', *Bulletin*, 18 March: 56ff
- , 1980c, 'Like Nelson the navy turns a blind eye and pays up', *Bulletin*, 25 March: 44ff
- , 1980d, 'The unions who ignore the Arbitration Act', *Bulletin*, 1 April: 58ff
- Rigert Joe, 1990a, 'Investigative journalists unite', *IRE Journal*, Spring: 6
- , 1990b, 'Journalists want network to expand world-wide', *IRE Journal*, Spring: 25
- Roberts Eugene, 1988, 'The finest reporting is always investigative', *IRE Journal*, Winter: 12-14
- Royal Commission on the British Press*, 1949, London: HMSO
- Ryan Colleen, 1990, 'Half News Corp profit comes through Caribbean tax havens', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December: 40
- , 1991, 'Packer paid nine cents in the dollar tax', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 February: 27
- Ryan Colleen & Glenn Burge, 1992, *Corporate Cannibals*, Sydney: William Heinemann
- Sabato Larry, 1991, *Feeding Frenzy*, New York: Free Press
- Salisbury Harrison, 1980, *Without Fear or Favour*, New York: Times Books
- Saulwick poll, 1991, 'The sad truth about politics', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July
- Schiller Dan, 1981, *Objectivity and the News*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press
- Schudson, Michael 1978, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers*, New York: Basic Books
- Schudson, Michael 1991, 'The sociology of news production revisited', in Curran & Gurevitch (eds), *Mass Media and Society*, London: Edward Arnold
- , 1992a, 'Watergate: a study in mythology', *Columbia Journalism Review*, May/June: 28-33
- , 1992b, *Watergate in American Memory*, New York: Basic Books
- Schultz, Julianne, 1985, *Steel City Blues: The Human Cost of Industrial Crisis*, Melbourne: Penguin
- , 1989, 'Failing the public, the media marketplace', in Helen Wilson (ed.), *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere*, Sydney: Macmillan
- , 1990, *Accuracy and Australian Newspapers*, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, Working Paper No. 1, Sydney: University of Technology
- , 1991, 'Why is the media on the nose?', in *Seminar Papers No. 1*, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, Sydney: University of Technology
- , 1992a, 'Where are the alternative views?', in D. Horne (ed.), *The Trouble with Economic Rationalism*, Melbourne: Scribe
- , 1992b, 'Investigative reporting tests journalistic independence', *Australian Journalism Review*, 15, December
- , 1992c, 'Encouraging competition and diversity without offending the monopolists', *Media Information Australia*, 65, August: 16-32
- , 1992d, 'The hidden impact of the law on reporting', *Communications Law Bulletin*, 11(4), March: 11-13
- , 1992e, 'The gentrification of Australian journalism', special four-page supplement on 'Media and democracy project', *The Journalist*, September
- , 1992f, 'Ideas, the press and the public', 24 Hours, April
- (ed.), 1993a, *Reporting Business*, Australian Centre for Independent Journalism, Working Paper No. 5, Sydney: University of Technology

- , 1993b, 'Reporting business: a changing feast', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Reporting Business*: 1–8
- (with Zoltan Matolcsy), 1993c, 'Business boosters or impartial critics', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Reporting Business*: 9–32
- , 1993d, 'Princes of print or queens of the screen', in J. Najman and J. Western (eds), *The Sociology of Australian Society*, 2nd edn, Sydney: Macmillan: 584–612
- (ed.), 1994a, *Not Just Another Business, Journalists, Citizens and the Media*, Sydney: Pluto Press
- , 1994b, 'Media convergence and the fourth estate', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Not Just Another Business*: 15–33
- , 1994c, 'The paradox of professionalism', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Not Just Another Business*: 35–51
- , 1994d, 'Reinventing journalism education for journalists and citizens', in J. Schultz (ed.), *Not Just Another Business*: 207–23
- Semmller Clement, 1981, *The ABC: Aunt Sally or Sacred Cow*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- Senate Committee of Privileges, 1994, *Possible Improper Disclosures of Document or Proceedings of Migration Committee*, 48th report, June, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra
- Senate Select Committee, 1984, *Conduct of a Judge, Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 14, no. 168, August, Canberra
- Senate Select Committee, 1984, *Allegations Concerning a Judge, Parliamentary papers*, vol. 23, no. 271, October, Canberra
- Sexton Michael, 1984, 'The Senate and the *National Times* contempt case', *Weekend Review*, 2 November: 43–7
- Shawcross William, 1992, *Rupert Murdoch*, London: Chatto & Windus
- Siebert Fred, Theodore Peterson & Wilbur Shramm, 1956, *Four Theories of the Press*, (1974, 9th edition), Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Siebert Frederick, 1952, *Freedom of the Press in England, 1476–1776*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press
- Smith, Anthony, 1978, *The Politics of Information*, 2nd edn, London: Macmillan
- , 1980, *Goodbye Gutenberg*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Smith, Anthony (ed.), 1981, *Newspapers and Democracy*, Cambridge: MIT Press
- Snoddy Raymond, 1992, *The Good, the Bad and the Unacceptable*, London: Faber and Faber
- Snow C.P., 1964, *The Two Cultures and a Second Look*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Solomon, David, 1992, 'The wisdom of Solomon', *Sunday Mail*, 20 December
- Souter, Gavin, 1981, *Company of Heralds*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- , 1991, *Heralds and Angels*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press
- Sparks Colin & Slavko Splichal, 1988, 'Journalistic education and professional socialisation', 16th conference, International Association for Mass Communications Research, Barcelona, 25 July
- , 1990, 'Journalism education and the role of the media as Fourth Estate', paper to International Association for Mass Communications Research assembly, Bled, Yugoslavia, September
- Sparrow, Geoff (ed.), 1960, *Crusade for Journalism*, Sydney: AJA Jubilee Committee
- Stead W.T., 1886a, 'Government by journalism', *Contemporary Review*, xliv, Jan.–June: 653–74

- , 1886b, 'The future of journalism', *Contemporary Review*, xl ix, November: 663–78
- Steketee Mike & Cockburn, Milton, 1986, *Wran: An Unauthorised Biography*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Stephens Michael, 1988, *A History of News*, New York: Penguin
- Stephenson Percy Reginald, 1986, *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*, 2nd edn, Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Stone I.F., 1964, *The Haunted Fifties*, London: Merlin
- Sykes Trevor, 1984, 'The new McCarthyism: trial by smear', *Bulletin*, 13 November: 26–32
- Temby Ian QC, 1984, Report of the Special Prosecutor into the Age Materials, 20 July 1984, *Parliamentary Papers*, vol. 14, no. 172, Canberra
- The Vigilant Press, 1989, a collection of case studies, Paris: UNESCO
- Tiffen Rodney, 1987, 'Quality and bias in the Australian press', *Australian Quarterly*, Spring–Summer: 329–44
- , 1989, *News and Power*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin
- Times Literary Supplement*, 1955, 'A free press', 18 November: 689
- Toohey J, Deane J, 1992, 'Nationwide News Pty Ltd vs Andrew Garry Willis', *High Court of Australia*, 28 August 1992, FC 92/032: 43–4
- Toohey Brian, 1984a, 'The Premier and the National Times,' *National Times*, 17 February
- , 1984b, 'Delays over Costigan's controversial recommendations', *National Times* 14 September: 3–6
- , 1984c, 'Playing with the tapes: how Wran and Evans go about a serious investigation', *National Times*, 24 August: 8
- , 1987, 'Fairfax and the new establishment', *The Eye*, October
- Toohey Brian & Wendy Bacon, 1984, 'How a civil libertarian Attorney General eased Abe Saffron's customs problems', *National Times*, 10 August: 3ff
- Toohey Brian & Marian Wilkinson, 1987, *The Book of Leaks*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson
- Transcript of evidence presented before the House of Representatives Select Committee on the Print Media, 1991, September–December 1991, Canberra
- Trollope Anthony, 1946 [1855], *The Warden*, London: Chatto & Windus, ch. 14
- Tuchman Gaye, 1978a, *Making News*, New York: Free Press
- , 1978b, 'Professionalism as an agent of legitimisation', *Journal of Communications*, 28: 106–13
- , 1972, 'Objectivity as strategic ritual: an examination of newsmen's notions of objectivity', *American Journal of Sociology*, (77): 660–79
- Tunstall, Jeremy, 1971, *Journalists at Work*, London: Constable
- , 1977, *The media are American*, London: Constable
- Tunstall, Jeremy & Michael Palmer, 1991, *Media Moguls*, London: Routledge,
- Tunstall Jeremy (ed.), 1970, *Media Sociology: A Reader*, London: Constable
- Ullmann John & Jan Colbert (eds), 1991, *The Reporter's Handbook*, New York: St Martin's Press
- Ullmann John, 1995, *Investigative Reporting*, New York: St Martin's Press
- UNESCO, 1989, *The Vigilant Press*, UNESCO, Paris: Communications Division
- United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Commission on Human Rights, 1990, 'Sub commission on prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities', 41st session, 18 July

- Ure-Seymour Colin, 1974, *The Political Impact of Mass Media*, London: Constable
- Walker R.B., 1976, *The Newspaper Press in NSW 1803–1920*, Sydney: Sydney University Press
- , 1980, *Yesterday's News: A History of the Newspaper Press in NSW from 1920–1945*, Sydney: Sydney University Press
- Walker Frank, 1993, 'We're 40, your family newspaper celebrates', *Sun Herald*, 10 October: 14–15
- Walker Jamie, 1995a, 'Editor questions Court's conduct', *Australian*, 5 May: 2
- , 1995b, 'Court turns up heat in newspaper feud', *Weekend Australian*, 6 May: 8
- Walker Martin, 1982, *Powers of the Press*, London: Quartet
- Walsh Richard & George Munster, 1982, *Secrets of State*, Sydney: Angus & Robertson
- Walsh Max, 1977, 'Walsh on the media', in Keith and Elizabeth Windschuttle (eds), *Fixing the News*, Sydney: Cassell: 32–3
- , 1983, 'The media – minefield for politicians', *Bulletin*, 8 March: 46–50
- Waterford Jack, 1984, 'Does a missing file, justify a demolition job on Packer?' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 November
- , 1985, 'NSW Appeal finds misdirection of law', *Canberra Times*, 29 November
- , 1987, 'Investigative journalism and government illegality', in P. Gabowsky & I LeLievre (eds), *Government Illegality*, Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology: 187–92
- , 1992, 'Government and the media', in *Transcript of Proceedings, Public Seminar on Review of Government Media and Information Services*, 26 June 1992, Brisbane: Goprint
- Whitlam E.G., 1967, 'The responsibilities of journalism in an advanced democratic society', in *The Role of the Specialist in Journalism*, 3rd Summer School of Professional Journalism, Canberra
- , 1985, *The Whitlam Government, 1972–1975*, Melbourne: Viking
- Whitton Evan, 1987a, *Amazing Scenes*, Sydney: The Fairfax Library
- , 1987b, *Can of Worms II*, rev. edn, Sydney: The Fairfax Library
- Wilensky Harold, 1964, 'The professionalisation of everyone?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 70: 137–58
- Wilkinson Marian, 1982a, 'Who is Abe Saffron?', *National Times*, 9 May: 8–11
- , 1982b, 'The Gruzman letters', *National Times*, 19 December: 34–6
- , 1982c, 'Sir Peter Abeles and TNT's brush with the Mafia', *National Times*, 12 December: 3–9
- , 1983, 'Big shots bugged', *National Times*, 26 November: 3–5
- , 1984a, 'Après Buckets, the deluge', *National Times*, 3 August: 5
- , 1984b, 'Kerry Packer and the Costigan Commission', *National Times*, 3 August: 10–15
- , 1985, Revisiting Sir Peter Abeles, lecture to journalism students, NSW Institute of Technology, August, Sydney
- Williams Geraint L., 1976, *John Stuart Mill: On Politics and Society*, Sussex: Harvester Press
- Williams Francis, 1946, *The Press, Parliament and People*, London: Longman
- , 1957, *Dangerous Estate: The Anatomy of Newspapers*, London: Longman
- , 1969, *The Right to Know*, London: Longman

- Williams Paul, 1978, *Investigative Reporting and Editing*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall
- Williams Raymond, 1968, *Communications*, London: Penguin
- Wilson Helen (ed.), 1989, *Australian Communications and the Public Sphere*, Sydney: Macmillan
- Winans R. Foster, 1984, *Trading Secrets*, New York: St Martin's Press
- Windschuttle Keith & Elizabeth, 1981, *Fixing the News*, Sydney: Cassell
- Woodward Robert & Carl Bernstein, 1974, *All the President's Men*, London: Secker & Warburg
- Wran Neville, 1986, Speech to Canberra Press Club, December 1986
- , 1994, Evatt Foundation Annual Dinner address, NSW Parliament House, 29 April
- Zawazi Clara, 1994, 'Sources of news – who feeds the watchdogs?' *Australian Journalism Review*, 16(1) January–June: 67–72

# *Index*

- ABC  
advocacy and, 22  
changing culture in, 196, 198–9  
current affairs programs of, 188–9,  
192, 199, 208–10, 215, 219–20,  
222–4  
executive government and, 6, 86–7  
funding of, 5–6, 9, 60, 87, 209  
independence of, 60, 93–4  
investigative journalism and, 59–60, 61,  
62, 192, 208–10, 212, 215, 219–20,  
222–4  
Mansfield Review of, 9  
perceived bias of, 6, 86, 87  
public opinion on, 9  
*see also Lange v ABC*  
Abeles, Sir Peter, 207–8  
Aboriginal issues, 179–80  
accountability, 2, 9, 10, 36, 40, 41, 42, 47,  
49, 51, 54, 55, 58, 59, 69, 73, 90, 91,  
92, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99, 108, 111–14,  
120, 128, 133, 135, 160–5, 166, 226,  
229, 235, 236, 238  
activism, 133  
adversarial journalism, 43, 44, 64, 65,  
115, 161, 162  
advertising  
election campaigns and, 78  
executive governments and, 33, 81–2  
history of, 38–9  
investigative reporting and, 121, 201  
pressure and, 5, 39, 146, 147, 157, 167  
state governments and, 81–2  
taxes on, 27, 28  
*see also* commercialisation  
advocacy, 9, 22, 54, 122, 138, 157  
advocacy vs establishment, 39–41  
*Age*, 10, 44, 81, 170, 180–1, 182–3, 184,  
186, 189, 194, 195, 197, 202, 212  
*Age* Insight Team, 44, 182, 183  
*Age* Tapes, 214–17  
agenda setting, 154–5  
Allen, Bill, 208  
Allison, Marianne, 127, 129  
Alston, Richard, 90, 91  
Altschull, Herbert, 55, 65, 164  
America *see* United States  
American War of Independence, 25  
Anderson, Chris, 199, 219  
Andrews, Alexander, 34  
Appin coalmine disaster, 62  
*Argus*, 181  
Arthur, Governor, 27, 31  
ASIO, 211  
Askin, Sir Robert, 205–6  
audience appeal, 147–8  
audience maximisation, 146, 147–8  
audience pressures, 146–7  
audience responses, 17, 37, 38, 55, 62  
AUSTEO Papers, 210–12  
Australia  
accountability and, 113, 114, 160–5, 166  
advocacy vs establishment in, 39–41  
by-lines and, 35  
censorship in, 32, 80  
changing political context in, 20–2  
climate change in, 174–80  
colonial period in, 26, 27, 29, 31–2, 33,  
74, 80–1  
commercial priorities and, 102–5,  
119–20  
ethical codes and, 113, 128–9  
executive government of, 69, 73, 75,  
76, 81–7, 88, 91, 93–4

- freedom of expression/press in, 26, 27, 31–2, 33, 43, 72, 78–9, 80, 93, 233–4
- freedom of information in, 202
- government control and, 27, 29, 31, 33, 80
- independence in, 26, 27, 76
- information management in, 57–8
- journalist politicians of, 71–2
- journalistic training in, 36, 128
- journalists standing in, 8–9, 36, 118, 161–2, 165
- judiciary of, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76–7, 78–81, 89, 91, 93
- libel laws and, 29
- media policy in, 75, 82–6, 89, 91, 93, 94, 124
- Melbourne influence and, 180–5
- new journalism in, 37
- objectivity and, 131, 132–3
- parliament of, 69, 70, 73, 76, 79, 87–92, 93
- political purpose/independence and, 100–2, 137, 138–45
- power negotiations and, 70–2
- professionalism and, 123–6, 127, 167
- public opinion polls in, 106
- reporting to investigating transition in, 166–94
- sensationalism in, 77–8
- style changes in, 9, 19–20
- see also* ABC; corruption; defamation; diversity; investigative journalism; Media and Democracy survey; media ownership concentration; public sector media; television; trade unions; watchdog journalism *and under state e.g.* New South Wales
- Australian* (1824–48), 31
- Australian* (1964– ), 106, 166, 174, 176–8, 180, 183, 184, 186, 188, 194
- Australian Associated Press, 155
- Australian Broadcasting Commission/Corporation *see* ABC
- Australian Broadcasting Tribunal, 103, 104
- Australian Capital Territory defamation law, 75
- Australian Consolidated Press, 103, 114, 189, 191, 202
- Australian Constitution, 69, 70, 72, 79, 80, 82, 93
- Australian Democrats, 158, 159, 213
- Australian Federal Police, 207, 208, 213
- Australian Federation Conferences, 72
- Australian Financial Review*, 166, 183–4, 194
- Australian Institute of Journalists, 36
- Australian Journalists' Association, 36, 113, 170, 172
- Australian Labor Party, 6, 84, 85, 86, 89, 100, 158, 185–7, 188, 196
- Australian National Opinion Polls, 106
- Australian Press Council, 114, 160
- authority, 97, 118, 123, 129, 130, 131, 135
- autonomy, 5, 6, 11, 12, 51, 57, 76, 96, 101, 118, 122, 123, 124, 126–7, 128, 129, 130, 131, 134, 135, 139–40, 146, 148, 156, 165
- see also* independence
- Bacon, Wendy, 88, 215, 216–17, 225
- Baistow, Tom, 51
- Banks, David, 61
- Bankstown Observer*, 87
- Barnes, Alan, 184
- Belgium, 72
- Bellino, Gerry, 222
- Bent, Andrew, 31
- Bentham, Jeremy, 86
- bias *see* ABC; political bias
- 'Big League', 62, 192, 208–10, 212
- Bjelke-Petersen, Sir Joh, 82, 103, 104, 220
- Black, Conrad, 83, 85, 90, 91
- Bolkus, Nick, 216–17
- Bond, Alan, 103, 104
- bonds, 27, 28
- The Book of Leaks*, 185
- Bottom, Bob, 172, 197–8, 204–5, 207, 209, 213–14, 215, 226–7
- bottom of the harbour schemes, 204, 207
- Bowman, David, 185
- Box Ridge Aboriginal reserve, 179–80
- Boyce, George, 28, 48
- Boyd-Barrett, Oliver, 126, 128
- brachygraphy, 35
- Bray, Sir Theodore, 43, 113
- Brennan, Justice Sir Gerard, 79–80, 81
- Briese, Clarrie, 216
- Brisbane Sun*, 82
- Britain
- executive government of, 86
  - freedom of the press in, 72
  - impartial style in, 41
  - independence in, 34, 40, 47
  - investigative journalism in, 181
  - mainstream press of, 29
  - new journalism in, 37
  - opinion poll results of, 152
  - political autonomy in, 140
  - political extremism in, 143 n.1
  - professionalisation in, 36, 127
  - radical press of, 27–8

- taxes of, 27–8, 33, 34, 37, 109  
watchdog journalism in, 44, 51, 63–4  
*see also* England
- British Royal Commission into the Press (1949), 41, 42, 98, 112–13, 170  
broadcast media regulation, 75, 83, 87, 112  
broadcasting, 110, 160  
*see also* radio; television
- Brown, David, 226  
Browne, Frank, 87  
*Bulletin*, 39, 174, 195, 197, 202–3, 204, 207, 227  
Bunyan, John, 64  
Burke, Edmund, 49, 97  
business journalists, 122  
*Business Sunday*, 62  
by-lines, 35, 169  
Byrne, Jennifer, 193
- Cahill, Joe, 172  
Cain, John, 91, 92  
Calwell, Arthur, 167  
Canada, 72, 84  
Canberra press gallery, 184, 186  
*Canberra Times*, 202  
Canwest, 84  
*Carlton-Walsh Report*, 189  
Carlyle, Thomas, 49  
Carlyon, Les, 48  
Carroll, Vic, 183–4, 199  
Cater, Douglass, 42  
censorship, 2, 24, 26, 27, 29, 32, 34, 56, 58, 66 n.1, 80, 104, 169  
*see also* self-censorship
- Central Intelligence Agency (US), 188  
Cessna Milner case, 205  
Chamberlain, Azaria and Lindy, 77  
Chamberlin, Greg, 221, 222  
Chandler, Sol, 181–2  
Channel 2 *see* ABC  
Channel 7, 84, 231  
Channel 9, 61, 62, 84, 103, 104, 191, 192  
Channel 10, 84  
Charlton, Michael, 178, 179  
Chelmsford Private Hospital, 62  
chequebook journalism, 77, 78  
Chomsky, Noam, 12  
Chubb, Phillip, 183  
circulation figures, 33, 131, 151, 170, 181, 188, 189, 191, 200  
class *see* social class  
closures, mergers and takeovers, 40, 101, 110, 111  
codes of ethics/practice, 113, 123, 124, 128–9, 135, 160  
Cold War, 41  
Cole-Adams, Peter, 193
- colleagues guidance, 154–5  
commercial advantages, 3, 4–5, 39, 61  
commercial disadvantages, 5, 39, 54, 57, 66 n.1, 77  
commercial interests, 1, 16, 17, 18, 40, 53, 54, 55, 57, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 75, 77, 96, 101, 103, 104, 105, 116, 121–2, 124, 130, 134, 139, 160, 234  
commercial priorities, 99, 102–5, 119–20, 121–2, 145–50, 165, 233, 235, 236  
commercial success, 3–4, 5, 38, 60, 62, 96, 98, 105, 115, 130, 150  
commercialisation, 19, 37, 38–9, 40, 45, 52, 53, 55, 64, 67, 95, 96, 100, 103, 117, 118, 119, 122, 123, 145, 146, 156, 157, 231, 235  
Commonwealth government *see* federal government  
communication  
    between elites, 100, 118  
    with public, 156  
competitors, 154, 155  
confidential information/sources, 59, 76, 77, 82, 90, 91, 124, 128, 162–3, 202, 211, 212, 218  
Connor, Rex, 186–7  
consensus, 20  
conservatism, 34, 40, 100, 137, 166–7  
Constitution *see* Australian Constitution; United States Constitution  
Conte, Vic, 222  
*Contemporary Review*, 38, 52  
contempt charges, 71  
contempt laws, 163, 237  
contempt of court, 21, 76–7, 78, 90, 216, 237  
contempt of parliament, 19, 21, 76, 87, 88, 201, 216, 217  
Cooney, Barney, 90, 91  
corporate empires, 5, 7, 11  
*see also* media organisations; media ownership concentration  
corruption, 4, 20, 21, 31, 57–8, 62, 63, 64, 78, 92, 171, 172, 173, 195, 196–8, 200, 202–4, 205–6, 207, 208–9, 212–24, 227  
Costigan, Frank, 203, 204  
Costigan Royal Commission, 203–4, 215, 218–19, 227  
*Courier-Mail*, 82, 195, 190, 220–1, 223  
Court, Richard, 101  
court reports, 74, 77  
Cowley, Ken, 16, 102, 145  
crime, 62, 76–7, 171, 172, 197, 203, 204, 205–6, 230  
*see also* corruption; organised crime  
Criminal Justice Commission (Qld), 19, 227

- criminal justice system, 20  
 Crisp, Lyndall, 193  
 cronyism, 202, 204  
 cross-media ownership rules, 70, 83, 84,  
     85, 89, 110  
 cross-promotion, 104, 105  
 Crown Casino, Melbourne, 231  
 cultural agendas, 1  
 cultural role, 47  
 Curran, James, 28, 99, 123  
*A Current Affair*, 62, 104, 189  
 current affairs programs, 178–80, 188–9,  
     191, 192, 230  
     *see also under name e.g. Four Corners*
- Daily Mirror*, 88  
*Daily Telegraph* (London), 28  
*Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 169, 172  
 Darling, Governor, 31, 80  
 Deamer, Adrian, 178  
 Deane, Justice, 80  
 defamation, 45, 71, 72, 74–5, 79, 80,  
     103, 163, 176, 206, 210, 237  
 Delane, John Thadeus, 24–5, 26, 34, 43,  
     51  
 democracy, 3, 4, 10, 15, 16, 17, 25, 32,  
     42, 44, 47, 48, 52, 53, 60, 66 n.1, 69,  
     73, 76, 79–80, 92, 93, 94, 99, 104,  
     106, 107, 111, 114, 115, 143, 145,  
     232, 234  
 demonstrations, 152  
 Dempster, Quentin, 193  
 Denmark, 72  
 Dennis, Everette, 53  
 Depression, 40–1  
 Derby, Lord, 24, 32  
 deregulation, 110  
 Derrida, Jacques, 106  
 developing countries, 2, 50, 65, 66  
 Diana, Princess of Wales, 6  
 Dickens, Charles, 35  
 Dickie, Philip John, 220, 221–2  
 disclosure, 9, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 43,  
     44, 46, 51, 57, 58, 60–1, 63, 64, 97,  
     115, 121, 195, 210, 219, 224–5, 227,  
     230, 234  
     *see also* public interest; social  
         responsibility  
 disclosure vs information management,  
     56–8  
 distribution, 33, 36  
 diversity, 99, 109–11, 125, 127, 156–60,  
     170, 235, 236, 238  
 Dixon, Sir Owen, 72  
*Documents on Australian Defence and  
     Foreign Policy 1968–75*, 212  
 drug trade, 197  
 economic climate, 196  
 economic growth, 149  
 economic power, 55, 62, 98, 115  
 Edgar, Patricia, 184, 185  
 editorial autonomy, 76, 122, 127, 130,  
     134, 146, 184, 200  
     *see also* autonomy  
 editorial functions, 34, 122  
 editorial ideals vs commercial realities,  
     121–2  
 editorial independence, 6, 8, 10, 22, 36  
     *see also* independence  
 editorial interference, 22, 53–4, 140–1,  
     147–8, 188  
     *see also* self-censorship  
 editorial judgements, 158–9  
 editorial power, 155  
     *see also* power  
 editorials, 152, 153, 167, 168  
 education/training of journalists, 36, 65,  
     97, 119, 123, 128, 131, 161, 162  
 educational role, 30, 34, 37  
 election results, 152  
 elections, 100, 137  
*Electoral Act (Cwlth)*, 35  
 England  
     diversity in, 109  
     freedom of expression in, 2, 24–5,  
         26–7  
     press and parliament in, 24–5  
     *see also* Britain; stamp taxes  
 Enlightenment, 5, 23, 47, 160  
 entertainment, 2, 4, 7, 17, 30, 37, 43, 73,  
     99, 103, 115, 231–2  
 environmental protection, 149  
 ethics, 9, 36, 125, 127, 128–9, 135, 160,  
     161, 162, 228  
 Europe  
     confidential sources and, 163  
     freedom of the press and, 24  
     journalists' values in, 149  
     political extremism and, 143, 143 n.1  
     professionalism in, 127, 130  
     *see also* Britain; England  
 Evans, Harold, 44, 182  
*Examiner (Hobart)*, 81  
 executive government, 48, 69, 70, 73,  
     75, 76, 81–7, 88, 91, 93–4, 97, 110,  
     233, 237  
     *see also* parliament  
*The Eye*, 219  
*Face The Nation*, 189  
 fair trials, 74, 76, 78  
 Fairfax, 22, 82, 83–4, 85, 86, 88, 89, 91,  
     103, 122, 124, 130, 167, 168–9, 176,  
     180, 181, 183, 187, 189, 190, 196,

- 198, 199–200, 206, 212, 216, 217, 218–19, 237
- Fairfax, James, 199, 206
- Fairfax, Sir Warwick, 167, 199–200
- Farquhar, Murray, 197, 209, 210
- Farrell, Tom, 175
- Federal File*, 189
- federal government  
media policy of, 75, 82–6, 91, 93, 124  
news media inquiries of, 88, 89–90, 91  
watchdog institutions of, 19  
*see also* cross-media ownership rules; foreign ownership rules; royal commissions and inquiries
- Federated Ships Painters & Dockers' Union, 202–4
- finance journalists, 122
- Financial Review*, 174
- Fitzgerald, Tom, 174–5, 176
- Fitzgerald, Tony, 57–8, 64, 92, 220, 222
- Fitzgerald Inquiry, 222, 224
- Fitzpatrick, Raymond, 87
- Flint, David, 69–70, 90–1
- Forbes, Justice Francis, 80–1
- foreign ownership rules, 83, 88
- Fortune* magazine, 113
- Four Corners*, 61, 62, 166, 173, 174, 178–80, 188, 192, 194, 195, 197, 199, 208–10, 215, 219–20, 221, 222, 223–4, 231
- Four Theories of the Press*, 113
- Fourth Estate defined, 3, 15–22, 24, 37, 38, 44–5, 95, 115
- Foxtel, 84
- France, 27, 35, 37, 47
- franchise, 38, 45, 73
- Fraser, Malcolm, 20, 82
- freedom of expression, 2–3, 25, 26–7, 43, 48, 56, 57, 69, 72, 74, 78–9, 97, 120, 233–4
- freedom of information, 59, 60, 125, 187, 202
- freedom of speech, 25, 28, 56, 70, 72, 78, 80, 93, 125, 143, 163
- freedom of the press, 2–3, 23, 24, 25, 26–7, 29, 30, 31–2, 34, 40, 45, 47, 63, 67, 69, 70, 72–3, 78, 79, 96, 97, 100, 112, 120, 124, 125, 130, 212, 233
- Freeman George, 197
- Frontline*, 8
- Galea, Perc, 205
- Gallup, Dr George, 106
- gambling, 206
- Game, Peter, 186, 187
- Gardner, Greg, 200
- Garnham, Nicholas, 96, 145
- gatekeepers, 106
- Germany, 140, 152, 164
- globalisation, 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 16, 17, 49, 50, 51, 65, 66, 104, 156, 157
- government *see* executive government; federal government; parliament and under state e.g. Queensland
- government by journalism, 100–1
- government control/intervention, 24–5, 27–30, 33, 41, 54, 81, 110  
*see also* political pressure
- government funded media  
*see* ABC; public sector media
- Great Britain *see* Britain; England
- Great Depression, 40–1
- Greene, Robert, 10, 58, 59
- Greiner, Nick, 202
- Gulf War, 86
- Gunn, Bill, 220, 221
- Gurney, James, 35
- Habermas, Jürgen, 15, 95
- Hamilton, Walter, 178
- Hamilton, William Peter, 41
- Haupt, Robert, 188, 193, 195–6, 219
- Hawke, Robert, 20, 83, 86, 211
- Hayden, Bill, 19, 22, 51
- Henderson, Rupert, 167
- Herald (Melbourne)*, 79, 81, 106, 181, 186, 190, 191
- Herald and Weekly Times group*, 83, 84, 181, 189, 191
- Herald-Sun*, 91, 190
- Herbert, Jack Reginald, 222–3
- Hickie, David, 205–6
- High Court, 69, 72, 73, 75, 78–80, 93, 212
- Hills, Ben, 182–3
- Hinch, Derryn, 76–7, 193
- Hitler Diaries, 102–3, 231–2
- Hobart Town Gazette*, 31
- Hocking, William, 49
- Holmes, Jonathan, 199, 210
- Horin, Adele, 187
- Horne, Donald, 169, 174
- Howard, John, 5, 6, 84, 85, 87, 89
- Hoy, Michael, 88
- Hoyt, Shaun, 221, 223, 224
- human interest journalism, 37, 38, 39, 40, 52  
*see also* public interest
- Humphreys, Kevin, 209, 210
- Hutchins Commission, 41, 49–50, 98, 112, 113, 170

- ICAC, 19, 91, 227  
 ideals, 16–17, 18–19, 30–3, 38, 46, 48, 49, 51, 56, 63, 115, 117–35, 136–65, 234, 235, 238  
 impartiality, 41, 138  
*The Imperative of Freedom*, 97  
 inaccurate reporting, 162, 170  
*Incentive*, 184  
 independence, 4–5, 6, 8, 9–10, 11, 19, 22, 23, 24–5, 30, 32, 36, 38–9, 45, 47, 48, 64, 65, 68, 76, 80, 89, 93–4, 95, 96, 103, 105, 124, 136, 138, 144, 145, 160, 166, 194, 233, 235, 237, 238  
*see also* autonomy  
 Independent Commission Against Corruption (NSW), 19, 91, 227  
 industrial disputes, 22, 124–5, 188, 190, 193, 218  
 Industrial Relations Commission, 78  
 influence, 1, 7, 26, 34, 97, 116, 130, 142–3  
 information  
     access to, 7–8, 23, 58, 162, 163, 232  
     importance of, 23  
     police sources of, 207–8  
*see also* confidential information/  
     sources; freedom of information;  
     leaked information; political  
     information  
 information management, 56–8, 92, 106, 132, 234  
 information provision, 17, 55, 148, 151, 234  
 Inglis, Ken, 175, 176  
 innocence, 73, 93  
 inquiries and royal commissions, 19, 20, 45, 57–8, 75–6, 82–3, 88, 89–90, 91–2, 98, 111, 112–13, 129, 171, 172, 175, 196, 197, 203–4, 207, 210, 215–16, 224, 237  
 institutional legitimacy, 95–116  
 institutional role, 66, 99, 102, 109, 136  
 institutionalised corruption, 197, 198  
 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 72  
 International Federation of Journalists, 66, 66 n.1  
 Internet, 7, 110  
 intrusion, 7, 17, 74  
 investigative journalism, 6, 9, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 44, 50, 51, 53–4, 55, 56, 58–60, 61–2, 63, 64, 65, 66, 74, 76, 90, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 133, 134, 137, 138, 139–40, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146–7, 148, 149–50, 152, 153–4, 155, 157, 158, 159, 161–2, 163, 164, 166, 171–4, 175, 179, 181, 182, 185, 186, 187, 194, 195, 196–7, 201, 207–27, 228, 230, 231, 233, 235, 236–7  
*see also* Media and Democracy survey; official corruption  
 Investigative Reporters and Editors, 66  
*The Investigators*, 196  
 Iraqi Loans Affair, 186–7, 188  
 Irwin, Will, 39  
 Isaacs, Justice Isaac, 126, 131  
 Italy, 140, 141, 143 n.1, 164  
 Jackson, Rex, 212–14  
 James, Barbara, 123  
 Jefferson, Thomas, 32  
 John Fairfax & Sons Ltd *see* Fairfax  
 Johns, Brian, 174, 177  
 Jones, Clem, 41  
*The Journalist's Craft*, 170  
 journalists' standing *see* occupational status  
 judiciary, 48, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 76–7, 78–81, 89, 91, 93, 97, 111–12, 233, 237  
 junk journalism/media, 18, 48  
*see also* muckraking  
 juries, 73, 74  
 Keane, John, 27  
 Keating, Paul, 70, 83, 84, 85, 89, 91, 101  
 Kelly, Paul, 146, 178  
 Kennedy, Trevor, 227  
 Kennett, Jeff, 86  
 Kerr, John, 186  
 Khemlani, Tirath, 186–7  
 Kimball, Penn, 126  
 Kirby, Justice Michael, 71  
 Lamb, Sir Larry, 61  
*Lange v ABC*, 75, 79  
 Larkin, John, 182  
 law, 74–5, 78  
*see also* cross-media ownership rules; defamation; foreign ownership rules; judiciary; legal actions; libel  
 Lawson, Sylvia, 18  
 lawyers, 21, 74, 202, 231  
 leaked information, 58, 59, 184–5, 201, 210–12, 219, 225  
 Lee, Michael, 89  
 legal actions, 21, 53, 71, 162, 202, 219, 231  
 legal investigation, 202  
 legal pressure, 63  
 letters to the editor, 152–3  
 Lewer, Wally, 209

- Lewington, David, 216  
Lewis, Terry, 222  
libel, 2, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 162, 163, 181  
liberal ideals, 17, 18, 47, 50, 96, 175  
Liberal-National Party, 5–6, 84–5, 87, 100, 158  
licences, 25, 27, 30, 32, 34, 45, 80–1  
limitations, 157  
Lippmann, Walter, 55, 107, 130  
Lloyd, Clem, 87  
Loans Affair, 186–7, 188  
Lockwood, Douglas, 180  
Longley, Billy, 203  
Love, David, 167  
Luce, Henry, 41, 50, 112, 132
- Macaulay, Lord Thomas, 25, 26, 97  
MacBride, Sean, 59, 103  
McBride, Dr William, 215  
McCarthyism, 41, 227  
*McClure's* magazine, 39  
Macdonald, Ranald, 181, 182, 193  
MacLachlan, James, 69  
McQuail, Denis, 62, 63  
Manning, Peter, 57, 199, 209, 210, 224  
Mansfield Review, 9  
*Many Voices One World*, 58  
Margach, James, 86  
marketing, 108, 190  
Marr, David, 200, 206  
Masters, Chris, 56, 207, 209, 210, 220, 221, 223, 224, 225, 226, 231  
Mathews, Race, 92  
Mayer, Henry, 99, 177  
Meagher, Douglas, 203  
Media and Democracy survey  
accepting the ideal and, 117  
accountability and, 160–5  
aspiring to professionalism and, 126–30  
commercial priorities and, 145, 146, 147–50, 233  
defining objectivity and, 131, 132–3  
diversity and, 157, 158–60  
idealised watchdog estate and, 50–1, 53–4  
investigative journalism and, 53–4  
journalists surveyed for, 118–19, 240–1  
political purpose and independence and, 136–45  
professionalism and objectivity and, 122–6  
questionnaire for, 242–76  
understanding public opinion and, 151–6  
watchdog Fourth Estate and 119–21
- media criticism, 98, 101, 112, 125, 140, 151  
Media Entertainments and Arts Alliance, 129  
media integrity, 50  
*see also* occupational status  
media intrusion, 6, 7, 17, 74  
media organisations, 51, 53, 57, 63, 65, 101, 102–3, 104–5, 119–20, 122, 129–30, 138–9, 145, 160, 161–2, 189  
media owners(hip), 3–4, 11, 12, 16, 47, 48, 49, 62, 70, 82–5, 89, 91–2, 96, 100, 101, 102, 109–10, 111, 116, 124, 167, 168, 169, 237, 238  
*see also* cross-media ownership rules; foreign ownership rules  
media ownership concentration, 7, 66, 70, 83, 89, 91, 92, 100, 101, 109–10, 111, 112, 114, 156, 157  
media policy, 75, 82–6, 89, 91, 93, 94, 124  
media systems paradigm, 22  
*Media Watch*, 8  
*Melbourne Herald*, 79, 81, 106, 181, 186, 190, 191  
Melbourne influence, 180–5  
Menzies, Robert, 41  
Mercer, Neil, 193, 215  
mergers, closures and takeovers, 40, 101, 110, 111  
Merrill, John, 20, 21, 54, 97, 126, 224  
Milat, Ivan, 78  
Mill, James, 28, 29  
Mill, John Stuart, 28, 30  
Miller, Mick, 204–5  
Moffitt, Justice Athol, 172  
Moffitt Royal Commission, 172, 197  
*Monday Conference*, 189  
*Monitor*, 31  
'The Moonlight State', 215, 219–24, 225, 231  
morality, 163–4  
Morgan, Roy, 106  
Morgan polls, 106, 193  
Moses, Sir Charles, 178  
muckraking, 39, 44, 60, 64, 115, 183, 230  
Munster, George, 175–6, 207  
Murdoch, Sir Keith, 106, 167, 181  
Murdoch, Lindsay, 207, 214  
Murdoch, Rupert, 15, 61, 83–4, 102–3, 106, 174, 176, 177–8, 181, 188, 231–2, 235  
Murphy, Lionel, 76, 77–8, 205, 214, 215, 216, 217, 226  
Murray, Paul, 101

- Nation*, 166, 174–6, 180, 194  
*Nation Review*, 176  
 National Crime Authority, 19, 213, 218,  
   227  
 national media influence, 154, 155  
 National Securities Commission, 19  
*National Times*, 88, 176, 187, 195, 197,  
   200–1, 202, 205–7, 211, 212, 215,  
   216, 217, 218, 219, 225, 226  
*Nationwide*, 189  
 Negus, George, 192  
 neutrality, 41, 43, 122, 131, 133, 138,  
   142, 236  
 New Deal, 41, 112  
 new journalism, 37–8, 236  
*New Journalist*, 11  
 New South Wales  
   colonial period in, 33  
   defamation law of, 75, 206  
   executive government of, 81–2, 86  
   freedom of expression in, 31–2  
   freedom of information in, 202  
   government control in, 81  
   investigative journalism in, 62  
   journalist politicians of, 71–2  
   media management in, 86  
   official corruption in, 172, 212–14  
   organised crime in, 172, 206, 213, 214  
   phone tapping in, 205  
   political patronage in, 103  
   prisoners early release scheme of,  
     212–14  
   watchdog institutions of, 19  
   *see also* *Age Tapes*; 'Big League'; official  
     corruption; Sydney journalism  
 New World Information and  
   Communications policy, 65  
*New York Times*, 5, 10, 43, 59, 212  
 New Zealand, 72  
 news, 168–74  
 News Corporation Ltd, 16, 61, 82, 83,  
   84, 91, 102, 103, 104, 114, 176, 178,  
   189, 190, 237  
 news journalists, 50, 118, 119, 120, 121,  
   122, 133, 135, 137, 138, 139–40,  
   141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 147–8,  
   149–50, 152, 153–4, 155, 157, 158,  
   159, 161–2, 163, 164, 227, 236  
   *see also* Media and Democracy survey  
 news organisation growth, 51  
   *see also* globalisation  
 news packaging, 37  
 news reports, 152, 153, 156  
 news selection, 154–5, 157, 158, 159–60,  
   167, 173  
 news services, 154, 155  
*Newsday*, 10  
 newspaper owners *see* media  
   owners(hip); media ownership  
   concentration  
 newspaper security bond, 27  
 Newspoll, 106  
 newsworthiness *see* news selection  
 Newton, Max, 174, 177, 183, 184–5  
 Nine Network, 9, 61, 62, 84, 103, 104,  
   191, 192  
 Nixon, Richard, 43  
 Norris, Sir John, 91  
 Norris inquiry, 89, 91–2  
 Northcliffe, Lord, 58  
 Northcliffe revolution, 38  
 Northern Territory defamation law, 75  
 Norton, Ezra, 167, 181  
 Norton, John, 39, 181  
 Norway, 72  
 Oakes, Laurie, 88, 193  
 objectivity, 118, 122–6, 127, 130–3, 135,  
   139, 168, 236  
*Observer*, 174, 176  
 occupational status, 3, 23, 34, 35–6, 48,  
   67, 118, 125–6, 129, 135, 161–2, 165  
*Off the Record*, 59  
 official corruption, 4, 20, 21, 31, 57–8,  
   62, 63, 64, 78, 92, 171, 172, 173,  
   195, 196–8, 200, 202–4, 205–6, 207,  
   208–9, 212–24, 227  
 oppositionist press, 44  
 Optus Vision, 84  
 organised crime, 20, 172, 197, 205–6,  
   208, 213, 214, 226, 227  
 Packer, Sir Frank, 167, 172  
 Packer, Kerry, 83–4, 101, 114, 204,  
   218–19, 227  
 Paine, Thomas, 27  
 parliament, 48, 69, 70, 73, 76, 79, 87–92,  
   93, 110, 112, 233  
   *see also* executive government  
 parliamentary debate, 152, 169  
 parliamentary privileges, 87–8  
 partisan allegiances, 75, 100, 103–4, 111,  
   138, 139, 143–4, 167, 188  
   *see also* cronyism; political pressure  
 Pascoe, Michael, 193  
 Patterson, Thomas, 127, 158, 235  
 Penberthy, Jefferson, 200, 218  
 Pentagon Papers, 10, 43, 59, 212  
 Penton, Brian, 167  
 Perkin, Graham, 166, 170, 181, 182, 184  
 Peterson, Theodore, 113  
 phone tapping, 204–5, 213, 214–17  
 police corruption, 63, 64, 171, 196, 206,  
   220, 221–3

- police sources, 207–8  
*see also* telephone tapping
- political agendas, 1, 55, 100, 196, 225
- political autonomy, 139–40
- political bias, 143–4  
*see also* partisan allegiances
- political context changes, 20–2
- political deals and favours, 75  
*see also* partisan allegiances
- political dimension, 27–30
- political extremism, 143, 143 n.1, 144
- political freedom, 2–3, 24, 25–7, 32–3, 36–7, 79
- political image management, 86, 92, 93
- political information, 23, 36–7, 42, 45, 57–8, 92
- political lobbying, 33, 82, 89
- political power, 4, 5–6, 12, 24–5, 35, 37, 40, 48, 54–5, 62, 81, 85, 101, 102, 115  
*see also* official corruption
- political pressure, 62, 73, 81, 84, 86–7, 94, 101, 121, 146, 172, 174  
*see also* government control/intervention
- political purpose and independence, 99–102, 136–45, 235
- political reporting, 119, 140–2, 169, 186
- political role, 2, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32–3, 37, 42, 45, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54–5, 64, 69, 72, 95, 99, 100–2, 103, 129, 140–2, 187–8, 195, 234
- politicians *see* executive government; official corruption; parliament; power
- Powell, Nigel, 221–2
- power
- judiciary and, 70
- news media and, 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 11, 23, 24, 26, 48, 51, 54, 65, 67, 70–1, 76, 97, 101, 104, 111, 116, 127, 129, 130, 131, 135, 161, 162, 172, 233, 235
- politicians and, 4, 5–6, 12, 24–5, 30, 41, 50, 55, 62, 70, 76, 85  
*see also* economic power
- power challenges, 195–229
- pre-trial publicity, 71, 74, 76–7, 78
- press councils, 114, 160
- press releases, 56
- Pringle, John D., 168
- printers, 24, 34, 35
- Prior, Tom, 171
- prisoners early release scheme (NSW), 212–14
- privacy, 17, 53, 162
- professional-client relationship, 128–9
- professionalis(m)ation, 19, 35, 36, 44, 46, 64, 64–7, 65, 67, 103, 115–16, 117, 118, 122–30, 131, 133, 134–5, 158, 167, 235
- profit, 4–5, 16, 23, 24, 39, 78, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100–1, 103, 108, 145, 191, 234, 235, 238
- prostitution, 221, 223
- public confidence, 17, 57, 71, 92
- public esteem *see* occupational status
- public figures, 4, 71, 76, 78, 173, 195, 197
- public information management, 56–8, 92, 106, 132, 234
- public interest, 3, 8, 10, 15, 21, 25, 40, 44, 52, 55, 58, 60, 66, 68, 76, 92, 98, 102, 115, 123, 124–5, 135, 145, 146, 157, 160, 162–3, 194, 196, 211, 215, 216, 225, 226, 228, 229, 233, 235, 236–7, 238
- public journalism 9, 44
- public opinion, 8–9, 17, 29, 30, 57, 64, 73, 77, 96, 99, 100, 105–9, 115, 125, 150–6, 174, 235, 236, 238
- Public Opinion*, 107
- public opinion polls, 106, 108, 150, 152, 161
- public relations industry, 57, 106
- public right of reply, 162, 163, 165
- public sector media, 5–6, 9, 60, 81, 87, 100, 110, 209  
*see also* ABC
- public service/purpose, 3, 15, 17, 41, 48, 52–3, 55, 56, 60, 61, 65, 98, 103, 116, 121, 124, 127, 128, 217
- publicity, pre-trial, 71, 74, 76–7, 78
- publicity industry, 106
- Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd, 84
- Pullan, Robert, 173
- Queensland
- defamation law of, 75, 103
- executive government of, 82, 103, 104
- information management in, 57–8
- inquiries of, 57–8, 75–6, 88, 92, 171, 220
- news media inquiries of, 88, 92
- official corruption in, 57–8, 64, 92, 103, 104, 215, 220–4
- parliament of, 92
- public hospital investigations in, 171
- watchdog institutions of, 19
- watchdog journalism in, 64  
*see also* 'Moonlight State'
- Queensland Electoral Review Commission, 92
- Raam, Odd, 126
- radical press, 27–8

- radio, 4, 22, 60, 61, 75, 76, 83, 100, 108, 112, 146, 190, 191, 196  
 Ray, Brian, 218  
 Raymond, Bob, 178, 179  
 Reeve, George, 15, 23, 26, 30–1, 32, 35, 44, 93, 100, 105, 109  
 Reeves, Tony, 172  
 reform movements, 10–11  
 Reid, Alan, 203  
 reporting style, 36–45, 131, 166–94, 207, 237  
 representative democracies, 3, 10, 15, 48, 57, 69, 72, 73, 79–80, 93, 94, 99, 111, 115, 145, 234  
 research methods, 202, 207  
 responsibility, 50, 66–7, 78, 90, 91, 116, 117, 118, 120, 121, 124, 129–30, 141, 162, 164, 165, 216, 233, 238  
*see also* social responsibility  
 Richards, Arthur, 171  
 Richards, David, 202, 203  
 Rigert, Joe, 66  
 right of reply, public, 162, 163, 165  
 Robinson, Peter, 184  
 role  
     of judiciary, 78  
     of news media, 2, 3, 5, 6, 15, 17, 19, 26, 29, 30–1, 33, 34, 37, 43, 45, 47, 50, 51–2, 55–6, 59, 65, 66–7, 68, 69, 78, 88, 93, 99, 104, 113, 116, 122, 124, 130, 150, 151, 235, 237  
*see also* educational role;  
     entertainment; institutional role;  
     political role  
 Roosevelt, T., 64  
 royal commissions and inquiries, 19, 20, 45, 57–8, 75–6, 82–3, 88, 89–90, 91–2, 98, 111, 112–13, 129, 171, 172, 175, 196, 197, 203–4, 207, 210, 215–16, 224, 237  
 rugby league, 62, 104, 192, 208–10  
*7.30 Report*, 189  
*60 Minutes*, 61–2, 192, 194, 195, 197, 199  
 Saffron, Abe, 208  
 Sayle, Murray, 182–3  
 Scandinavia, 100  
 Schudson, Michael, 99–100, 132, 237  
 Scott, C.P., 169  
 Second World War, 169  
 secrecy rule, 82  
*Secrets of State*, 212  
 seditious libel, 25, 29, 31  
 self-censorship, 5, 53, 66 n.1, 104, 122, 146  
 self-interest, 4, 104, 115, 123, 125, 151, 157  
 self-regulation, 113, 114, 134, 160  
 self-regulatory organisations, 160  
 sensationalism, 38, 40, 77, 161, 162, 163  
 Seven Network, 84, 231  
*7.30 Report*, 189  
 Sexton, Michael, 217  
 Shannon, Pat, 203  
 Shawcross, William, 178  
 shorthand, 34–5, 37  
 Simpson, O.J., 78  
 Singer, Jill, 231  
*60 Minutes*, 61–2, 192, 194, 195, 197, 199  
 Smark, Peter, 193  
 Smith, Anthony, 106  
 Smith Hall, Edward, 31  
*Smith's Weekly*, 39–40  
 social change, 44, 55, 196  
 social class, 34, 124  
 social pressures, 174  
 social responsibility, 3, 41, 43, 61, 111, 113, 114  
 social role, 47  
 societal openness, 8  
 Souter, Gavin, 168–9, 175, 200, 219  
 South Australian defamation law, 75  
 SP bookmaking, 206  
 Spain, 47  
 Sparkes, Colin, 128  
 Sparrow, Geoff, 40  
 Springborg, Dr Robert, 86  
 stamp taxes, 2, 25, 27–8, 30, 33, 34, 81, 109  
 status *see* occupational status  
 Stead, W.T., 11, 12, 38, 44, 45, 52, 56, 60, 64, 100, 105, 182, 235  
 Steffens, Lincoln, 124  
 Stephenson, P.R., 40  
 Stone, Gerald, 192  
 Stone, I.F., 132, 207  
 Street, Sir Laurence, 210  
 strikes, 22, 188, 190, 193, 218  
 structural functionalism, 127, 129  
 style of reporting *see* reporting style  
 sub judice rule, 176  
 Suich, Max, 84, 88, 190, 199–200, 201, 206, 211, 213, 216, 217, 218, 219  
 Sullivan, Greg, 20  
*Sun* (Brisbane), 190  
*Sun* (Melbourne), 190  
*Sun* (Sydney), 37  
*Sun Herald*, 172  
*Sun News-Pictorial*, 181  
*Sunday*, 62  
*Sunday Herald*, 172  
*Sunday Review*, 176  
*Sunday Sun*, 172  
*Sunday Telegraph*, 172  
*Sunday Times*, 10, 44, 102, 182–3

- Super League, 104  
suppression orders, 93  
*surveys see Media and Democracy survey*  
Sweden, 47, 140, 141  
Sydney City Council, 172  
Sydney declaration, 66, 66 n.1  
*Sydney Gazette*, 33, 81  
Sydney journalism, 180, 181, 197  
*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22, 168, 169, 171, 175, 176, 180, 181, 183, 187, 189, 190, 192, 195, 212, 215, 218  
Syme, David, 180  
Syme family, 180, 181  
  
takeovers, mergers and closures, 40, 101, 110, 111  
talkback radio, 108  
Tasmania  
colonial period in, 27, 31  
defamation law of, 75  
executive government and, 81  
freedom of expression in, 27, 31  
tax avoidance, 20, 28, 204  
taxation, 24, 26, 27–8  
    *see also stamp taxes*  
technological developments, 1, 17, 36, 106, 110, 111, 112, 189, 190  
Telecom, 84  
telephone tapping, 204–5, 213, 214–17  
television, 2, 22, 43, 60, 61–2, 75, 77, 83, 84, 89, 146, 166, 170, 178–80, 188–93, 194, 195, 196, 197, 199, 222, 223, 230–1  
television audience meters, 4  
television news, 191  
Ten network, 84  
thalidomide, 10  
Theophanous, Andrew, 79, 80  
Third World problems, 149  
*This Day Tonight*, 166, 188–9, 192, 194  
Tidey, John, 182  
*The Times*, 24, 28, 32, 36–7, 109  
*Times Literary Supplement*, 42  
*Times on Sunday*, 201, 219  
Tocqueville, Alexis de, 32, 35  
tolerance of disclosure, 21  
Toohey, Brian, 88, 200–1, 211–12, 213–14, 216–17, 218, 219, 225  
Toohey, Justice J., 80  
*Trade Practices Act*, 83  
trade unions, 66 n.1, 126, 129, 159, 202–4  
training/education of journalists, 36, 65, 97, 119, 123, 128, 131, 161, 162  
transitional phases, 21–2, 37–45, 166–238  
transnational multi-media enterprises, 66 n.1  
  
*see also* foreign ownership rules; globalisation; media organisations  
Trollope, Anthony, 31  
*Truth*, 39, 171, 181–2  
Turnbull, Lyle, 191  
  
underground journalism, 64, 65  
UNESCO, 58, 59, 65–6, 103  
unions *see trade unions*  
United Kingdom *see Britain; England*  
United States  
advertising in, 39  
autonomy in, 128, 140  
AUSTEO Papers and, 211  
commercial mass press of, 28  
confidential sources and, 163  
freedom of expression/press in, 25–6, 27, 32, 67, 68, 70, 72, 233  
freedom of information in, 187, 202  
Hutchins Commission of, 41, 49–50, 98, 112, 113, 170  
impartial style in, 41  
independance in, 40, 41  
investigative journalism in, 65, 201–2  
media criticism in, 39  
New Deal of, 41, 112  
occupational status in, 35  
opinion poll results of, 152  
professionalisation in, 36, 126–7  
relevance of fourth estate to, 97  
underground journalism of, 65  
Vietnam War and, 187  
watchdog journalism in, 43, 63–4  
yellow journalism in, 37  
    *see also* Pentagon Papers; Watergate  
United States Constitution, 25, 26, 33, 34, 46, 47, 68, 70, 233  
unstamped press, 27–8  
  
value systems, 96  
values, 133, 140, 144, 149–50, 232, 233  
Victoria  
    defamation law of, 75  
    executive government of, 86  
    freedom of information in, 202  
    Norris inquiry of, 89, 91–2  
    parliament of, 89, 91–2  
    police corruption in, 171  
    *see also* Crown Casino; Melbourne influence  
*Victorian Review*, 123  
Vietnam War, 43, 173–4, 178, 187  
*The Vigilant Press*, 65  
  
Wainer, Dr Bertram, 171  
Walker, Robin, 72  
Walkley Awards, 171, 173, 180, 187  
Waller, Hal, 209

- Walsh, Max, 184, 193  
 war correspondents, 37, 43, 169  
 Wardell, Robert, 31  
 Washington, George, 32  
*Washington Post*, 10, 43  
 watchdog institutions, public, 19, 91  
 watchdog journalism, 3, 4, 10, 16–17, 18,  
   19, 38, 41, 43–5, 47–68, 69, 97, 113,  
   119–21, 183, 195, 227, 230, 234,  
   235, 236, 237, 238  
 Waterford, Jack, 22, 226  
 Watergate, 10, 43, 45, 237  
 welfare support, 149, 150  
 Wendt, Jana, 77, 104, 146, 232  
 Wentworth, W.C., 31  
*West Australian*, 79  
 Western Australian defamation law, 75  
 Western countries, 2, 40, 43, 50, 56, 71,  
   100, 111  
*see also under country e.g. Britain*  
 whistleblowers, 90, 92, 221, 222  
 Whitlam, Gough, 20, 124, 186, 187, 188,  
   202  
 Whitmont, Debbie, 221  
 Whittton, Evan, 171, 182, 187, 197, 200  
*Who Weekly*, 78  
 Wilkinson, Marian, 193, 207–8, 212,  
   213–14, 218  
 Willesee, Mike, 232  
 Williams, Frances, 48  
 Williams, Walter, 36  
 Willingham, Graham, 183  
 Wilson, David, 207  
 Wilson, Woodrow, 105–6  
 wire services, 154, 155  
*Without Fear or Favour*, 172  
 World War 2, 169  
 Wran, Neville, 81–2, 86, 103, 208, 209,  
   210, 227  
 yellow journalism, 37  
 Yugoslavia, 47













PACIFIC UNIVERSITY LIBRARY  
FOREST GROVE, OREGON

# RESHAPING AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTIONS

## Reviving the Fourth Estate

### Democracy, Accountability and the Media

*'Unless we return to the principles of public service we will lose our claim to be the Fourth Estate. What right have we to speak in the public interest, when too often we are motivated by personal gain?'*

Rupert Murdoch posed this question in 1961. This book investigates the issues raised, and suggests some answers.

Schultz observes that the Fourth Estate has proven to be a remarkably flexible concept. What was once described as the space where reporters sat while documenting the proceedings of the House of Commons, the Fourth Estate later described the more nebulous ideals connected with those in positions of power and influence. Traditionally, the news media acted as the watchdog of democracy, but varied in meaning in response to changing political and economic circumstances. Today, it is also a major global industry.

Julianne Schultz considers the ramifications of this intersection by analysing the role of journalism in Australia, the scope of its democratic purpose and the relationship of the Fourth Estate to the other 'estates': the judiciary, the executive and the legislature. She finds that, while the ideal of the Fourth Estate is still upheld by most journalists, the reality has been seriously impaired by the increasing concentration of media ownership in Australia and by political, ethical and career interests.

Schultz argues for a revival of the Fourth Estate founded on journalistic independence and political autonomy. But, she cautions, the media must be accountable and responsive to its audience and ethical in its dealings. This groundbreaking book makes a major contribution to debates about the media and public interest in Australia.

JULIANNE SCHULTZ is a journalist, academic, writer and librettist. She has unique experience as both a journalist and a journalism academic. She has been Associate Professor of Journalism at the University of Technology, Sydney. She has worked for a number of media organisations and has been published in a wide range of newspapers and magazines, most recently as a contributing editor with the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*. Her books include *Not Just Another Business*, *Reporting Business*, *Accuracy and Australian Newspapers*, *Steel City Blues* and, as co-author, *The Phone Book*.

Cover photograph: Denise Nestor

Cover design: Ruth Grüner



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

ISBN 0-521-62970-5



9 780521 629706