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**The "Manufacture" of News  
in the 1993 New Zealand General Election**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the degree of PhD in Human Resource Management  
at Massey University

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1995

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Frank Sligo and Professor Philip Dewe, for their continued support and assistance during the research project. The study would not have been possible without the help of Annette King, the Member of Parliament for Miramar, and the former Labour leader, Mike Moore, who allowed me inside their organizations.

Annette King allowed me to use her as an action research "guinea pig" and her enthusiasm for the project motivated me throughout the research.

Sue Foley and Paul Jackman, Mr Moore's press secretaries, provided valuable feedback and explained the context of much of the election campaign roadshow. Thanks must go, too, to Lloyd Falck, Labour Party strategist and research adviser to the Leader of the Opposition. Piet de Jong, Liz Brook and Alister Browne all helped with the action research in Miramar.

Dr Ted Drawneek provided invaluable help with data analysis in the content analysis sections of the research and I acknowledge the secretarial assistance of Christine Smith. I am grateful to John Harvey for his advice about contemporary journalism and for his unstinting encouragement and support.

Marianne Tremaine encouraged me to submit the chapter on "new" news to an overseas journal and Margie Comrie has provided useful observations about the breadth and scope of the research.

## ABSTRACT

The news media's role in general election campaigns in New Zealand remains mysterious because few indigenous research antecedents inform the debate about the democratic function of journalists reporting election campaigns. This study analyses the creation of news by reporters during the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign and examines the relationships between journalists, politicians and third party sources which impact on political communication. The analysis leads to a discussion of the role of the news media in reporting election news.

The notions that news is created by journalists and through relationship between journalists, politicians and third party sources are central to the study. The concept that news is "manufactured" or socially constructed is explained in the introductory chapter and linked to theoretical perspectives in the literature review in Chapter Two. The two broad research questions which the study answers are:

1. how was the news manufactured during the 1993 New Zealand election campaign?
2. what does this mean for the "dialogue of democracy" (Taylor, 1992)?

The manufacture of news is examined from three perspectives in the research. These can be called the "doing" perspective which employs action research methodology, the "watching " perspective which uses participant observation methodology and the "measuring" perspective utilising content analysis. The research notes the failure of "any particular holistic paradigm" to sweep the field of political communication and employs "ground-up paradigm building" by carving out broad research problem areas and examining them through the use of appropriate research methodologies (Bennett, 1993, p.182).

The objectives of the action research project were twofold. First, to assist an individual political candidate contesting the election to develop systematic processes to use the news media to raise the candidate's profile. Second, to increase the level of understanding by the political candidate of news media processes and news concepts such as newsworthiness, candidate accessibility and news angles so she could utilise the knowledge to generate news and photographic opportunities. The findings revealed that the political candidate perceived that her level of understanding of news processes

was enhanced through the action research. The study found, too, that a systematic process of source relationship was cultivated between the political candidate and journalist, which in principle enhanced the democratic function of the news media as a platform for political debate. The action research project, was, however, bound by the prevailing climate of political rhetoric with all its shortcomings.

The participant observation methodology explored the nature of the contest between the triumvirate of political candidates as sources, journalists and third party sources such as "spin doctors". A second research question examined whether reporters seek to reassert their role in such a way as to influence the news when traditional journalistic autonomy is threatened. The findings showed a complex, shifting contest for control over knowledge and power in the making of news. This contest was characterised by features such as the increased sophistication of third party sources actively intervening in news processes, by strategic utilisation of "new" news formats by politicians and by journalists vigorously defending their status and enlarging their role. The impact of the findings on democratic journalism were examined using Golding's (1990) suggestion of a revival of the notion of citizenship, "to what degree and in what ways are people denied access to necessary information and imagery to allow full and equal participation in the social order?" (p.98).

The third methodology, content analysis, tested Edelstein, Ito and Kepplinger's (1989) theory of news content using a cognitive construct, the problematic situation. The results confirmed a larger interpretive as opposed to purely descriptive role for metropolitan newspaper journalists reporting news in the 1993 general election campaign in New Zealand. Over 70% of election campaign issues in the period sampled were defined problematically and negatively with a high reliance on references to **loss of value** and **conflict**. The findings have implications for how political candidates could and should tailor their political messages.

Overall the results taken together have fundamental implications for the "dialogue of democracy" (Taylor, 1992). They disclose a powerful dilemma about the manufacture of news in the 1993 New Zealand general election. The expanded influence of the news media has not been accompanied by a reassessment of what it *is* the news media should be doing in election campaign reportage. Reformative suggestions are made in the final chapter of the study and the implications for political journalism in a democracy are discussed.

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# THE "MANUFACTURE" OF NEWS IN THE 1993 NEW ZEALAND GENERAL ELECTION

## CHAPTER ONE: SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

### 1.1 Introduction

While it is impossible to conceive of a general election campaign without the news media playing a pivotal part, the news media's role in New Zealand's political processes remains mysterious. Few research antecedents inform debate about the nature of political journalism during contemporary election campaigns in New Zealand. The news media, in general, is under-examined in this country (Comrie & McGregor, 1992), and the reporting of politics in particular is largely unexamined. It is timely that the reporting of election campaigns by the news media is scrutinised for two reasons. First, election campaigns provide an opportunity for all voters once every three years to connect with political processes, in which the news media play an increasingly powerful and central role. The pervasive nature of the news media in informing the public about candidates and policy issues demands that society scrutinises news media processes and journalistic practices. Second, the prospect of electoral reform through proportional representation in New Zealand provides an opportunity for a stocktake of news media performance and of society's expectations of the news media's role in political discourse.

### 1.2 Elevating the study of political journalism

The study makes a claim for elevating the importance of research which examines the news media in political processes. It does so partly in answer to the call by McChesney (1993) that critical communication scholars "need to frankly *privilege* journalism as a form of discourse" (p.102). He states it must be privileged because many other forms of communication cannot claim such a central role in the political processes of a democratic society.

Hence, if we are serious about participatory democracy we must be serious about journalism and its relation to democracy. We must examine why journalism does not serve democratic ends at present and what needs to be done so we may have a more democratic journalism in the future (p.102).

In part, too, the research is motivated by Zelizer's (1993) suggestion that communication scholarship has not adequately explained journalism or journalistic authority. She states the commonly held view of journalism as a sociological problem means we may have missed much of journalism's essence. Zelizer states, "and considering journalism's central role in explaining general communicative practice, this may mean we have missed much of the essence of communication as well" (p.85). McChesney (1993) and Zelizer's comments are referred to in more detail in Chapter 10, in relation to the field research, and picked up again in the conclusion, Chapter 22.

A rich tradition of news media research has examined political journalism in the election campaign context overseas (Johnston, 1990) and these studies inform this scholarship. As Negrine (1989) states, "few events typify the concern over the political importance and effect of the mass media more than coverage of general elections (p.179). Many of these studies are referred to in the following chapter, Chapter Two, Literature Review.

### **1.3 The manufacture of election news**

The title of the research with its emphasis on the word "manufacture" is intended to locate the study within the broad tradition of the social construction of reality perspective of the news. While this theoretical perspective is explored in greater depth in the following chapter, Chapter Two: Literature Review, the social construction of reality view of news suggests that news is created and is not inherent in an event. The perspective challenges a common conception of the news, which is that if it happens it is news. The notion that the news is manufactured is well expressed in the oft-quoted statement of former journalist Curtis MacDougall (1968):

At any given moment billions of simultaneous events occur throughout the world...All of these occurrences are potentially news. They do not become so until some purveyor of news gives an account of them. The news, in other words, is the account of the event, not something intrinsic in the event itself (p.12).

There is nothing new about part of the title of the research, *The Manufacture of News in the 1993 General Election Campaign*. The idea of the "manufacture of news" is borrowed from the title of Stanley Cohen and Jock Young's edited book of the same name first published in 1973 and reprinted numerous times allowing generations of students to examine the central thesis which connects mass media studies on the one hand, with the sociology of deviance and social problems on the other. The title of this study captures the idea that news is created or made, and the research focuses on the process of news creation in an election context, as well as on the news content which is eventually published and broadcast.

#### **1.4 Research strategy and choice of methodologies**

This research aims to examine the manufacture of news in the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign using three methodologies to provide breadth and depth to the inquiry. The methodologies were chosen in line with Tuchman's (1991) urging that "the old rule remains valid: the method one should choose when approaching any topic, including news, depends on the question one wants to answer" (p.79). Two of the methodologies, participant observation and content analysis, are traditionally associated with news media scholarship. The third methodology, action research, has been utilised often in education, developmental and organisational contexts, but seldom in a communications context. The research then combines conventional methods of collecting data with an inventive application of a research method. Each research methodology has both strengths and weaknesses and it is anticipated that the use of three methodologies will help minimise the limitations of research which employs one methodology only.

The use of multiple methods looking at the same broad research site is a distinct tradition in the literature on social science research methods (Jick, 1983) and encompasses a number of research strategies. The strategy used in this study is the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies to provide a different optic in each case on two general research questions. It is based on the premise that qualitative and quantitative methods should be viewed as complementary rather than opposing streams of research inquiry. The complementary nature of qualitative and quantitative research methods is referred to in chapters of the research which discuss the specific methodologies employed.

The strategy sees the study employ a corroboratory mode of inquiry by which the results of one methodology supports, confirms or disproves the findings of another to a greater or lesser extent. The research aims to provide a holistic and contextual account of New Zealand political journalism during a contemporary election campaign by utilising this corroboratory mode. A mix of news media including both print and electronic media operating at different levels of publication and broadcast, from the community level to a national audience, is utilised in the study. The wider choice of news media examined aims to minimise the strictly linear approach of research which relies, say, on print media analysis and then on one level of print media only in a specific context.

### **1.5 Research questions**

The methodologies provide different perspectives of how the news was made in the 1993 election campaign. The research findings have fundamental implications for the role of political journalism in participatory democracy. The broad site of the study is the research questions:

1. how was the news manufactured during the 1993 New Zealand election campaign?
2. what does this mean for the "dialogue of democracy"? (Taylor, 1992).

Each of the three methodologies answers additional, specific research questions and a number of major themes emerge from linkages between the findings. The study provides discussion of the inter-relationship between the theoretical frameworks used to underpin the research. Of necessity, the research relies heavily on overseas research precedents and draws from contemporary scholarship into the nature of political communication from United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia, countries with ethnocentric similarities and differences to New Zealand. The scope of the three methodologies employed is examined in turn.

### 1.5.1 Action research

In the New Zealand political context the typical political candidate in a general election campaign must rely on his or her own initiative and resources in building relationships with the news media. Because of the statutory limits placed on the amount of expenditure by candidates in the course of the campaign, amateurism rather than professionalism prevails at the electorate level in the development of news media contacts. At one level the comparative absence of economically differentiated "news media spends" by candidates in New Zealand aids and abets democratic discourse. In theory such an environment should allow all political candidates to provide information through the news media to the public about policy positions so citizens can make well-informed, intelligent decisions. At another level, though, the sophistication and dominance of the news media in political processes marginalise candidates who are naive about the media-centric nature of politics.

The action research component of the study explores whether an individual political candidate can utilise the news media through the active development of source relationships with journalists and through an increased level of understanding of fundamental precepts about contemporary political journalism.

Following French and Bell's (1978) typology, research questions which underwrite most methodologies are reformulated as goals or objectives in action research. The objectives of the action research are to:

1. develop a systematic process to maximise the effective utilisation of the news media by an individual political candidate, the Hon. Annette King, in the Wellington electorate of Miramar, during the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign.
2. critically evaluate the nature of the news creation process in electioneering, with a focus on a particular electorate.

The action research project involves the candidate in attempting to form regular source relationships with journalists through formal professional contact and informal socialisation, and in increasing her level of understanding about concepts such as newsworthiness, candidate accessibility and the angling of news to generate news and photographic opportunities.

In this section of the research the focus is on news media at a local level such as community newspapers, local radio stations and the daily newspapers which service Wellington.

### 1.5.2 Participant observation

Contemporary communications scholars are questioning the current basis of journalistic research as too narrow. Zelizer (1993), for example, suggests the focus of news media enquiry as a "sociological problem" needs to be supplemented by alternative frames to consider journalism (p.80). Schlesinger (1990) criticises the "excessive media-centrism of much existing research" (p.60). He points to a "major lacuna in the existing literature; namely, the failure to look at source-media relations from the perspective of the *sources themselves*" (p.60).

The participant observation methodology addresses this lacuna. It looks not only at source-media relations from the perspective of the sources themselves but examines that part of the manufacture of news which is typically unseen by the public, the influence of "third party" sources on news creation. The broadening of the field research from the nexus between two sets of situated individuals (politicians and journalists) to three, (media advisers known as "spin doctors") acknowledges criticism by Turow (1989) of research that ignores the role of public relations in structuring news.

Tactics and strategies used by a political leader, Labour leader the Hon. Mike Moore, his spin doctors as third party sources, and their relationships with journalists are examined in this section of the research. This examination involves scrutiny of some of the organizational contexts involved and of the competing goals of the three sets of actors (politicians, journalists and spin doctors).

The participant observation began with two tentative hypotheses. These are:

1. the contestation between political candidates as sources and journalists for the control over the manufacture of news is determined by third party sources, and
2. when traditional journalistic autonomy is under threat reporters will seek to reassert their role in such a way as to influence the nature of news.

The participant observation methodology focused on television news, and the "new" news such as radio talk back and audience participation television, in addition to the print media.

### 1.5.3 Content analysis

McQuail (1987) distinguishes at least four kinds of theory concerning mass communication which are relevant to the manufacture of news. These are the *social scientific* theory derived from systematic observation and evidence, *normative* theory about what the news media ought to be doing to conform to or promote certain social values, *working* theory which encompasses the body of knowledge which is developed and maintained by journalists themselves and *commonsense* theory, referring to "the knowledge which everyone has, by virtue of direct experience in an audience" (p.5). Communications researcher, Alex Edelstein, has promoted what he calls a *testable* theory of the news to answer the elusive question of "what is news" in a meaningful way. This testable theory is applied in content analysis of the news.

Content analysis methodology complements the previous research strands. Essentially it is research that focuses on the finished product, and examines what is published or broadcast after the complex inter-play of relationships between sources and journalists

which influences news creation. As a research process, content analysis typically describes the content of news media against prescribed categories to determine the adequacy of the news media's account or version of the mediated reality. Evaluations are then made about the nature of the content, often in terms of bias or the proportion of a particular subject area of the news against, say, its statistical occurrence in real life. An example is the crime news content analyses which suggest murder is over-reported in relation to its statistical occurrence in official police statistics (Roshier, 1973; McGregor, 1993).

However, the content analysis employed in this research goes beyond topical descriptive coding and employs an additional interpretive dimension. It follows the methodology of Edelstein, Ito and Kepplinger (1989). They utilise content analysis to test their theory of media content which suggests that journalists perform an interpretive role in the construction of mediated reality. Edelstein *et al* utilise a cognitive structure called the problematic situation in their content analysis and they state this cognitive structure provides an equivalence of meaning of news to both producers and consumers of it.

The problematic situation, which covers a number of conditions of discrepancy such as **loss of value to an individual or society, or need for value, or conflict** at an individual or societal level, is drawn from problem-solving literature, and this is referred to in more depth in Chapter 17: The Problematic Situation in the News. The problematic situation is set up as a number of categories in content analysis against which topical election campaign issues are measured. For example, coders look to see if tax, covered as an election campaign issue, was defined in the news story by reference to a problematic definition such as **loss of value?** The topical category typically used in content analysis is tax, the additional interpretive category is the problematic definition.

The research questions of the content analysis section of the research are:

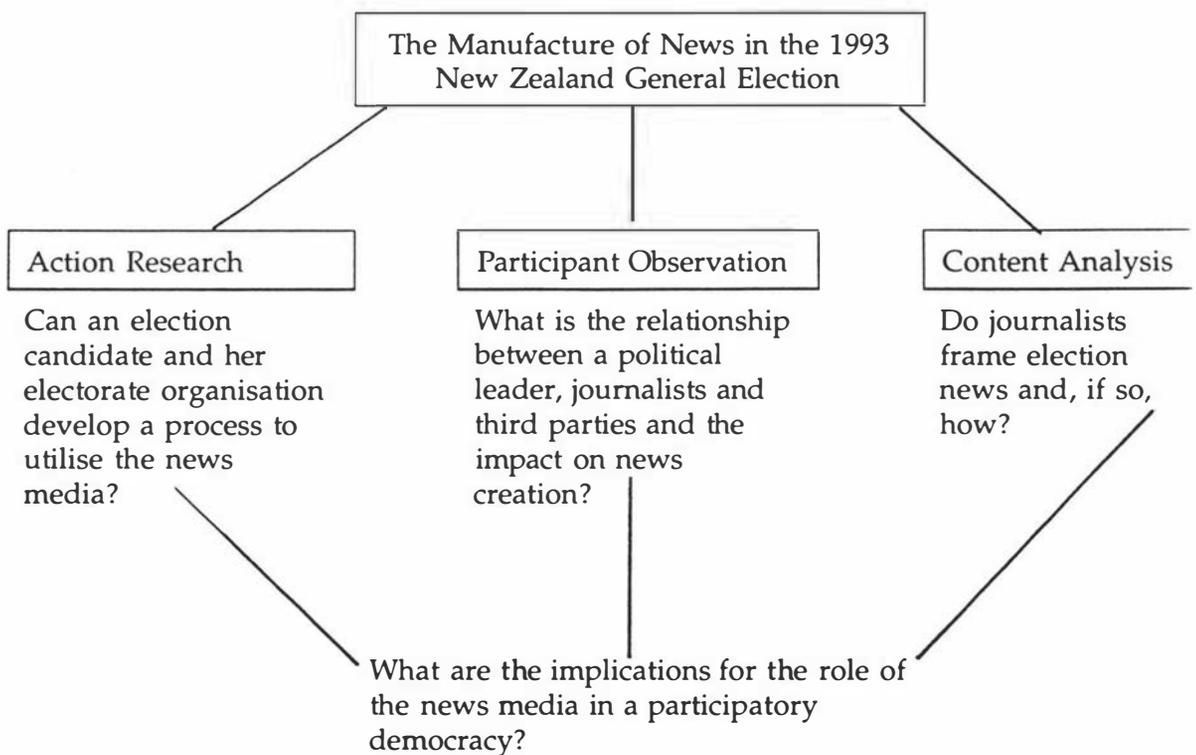
1. did journalists define topics in the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign context as problematic situations for readers, and,
2. if so, what was the distribution of problematic situations?

3. what implications for the making of news emerge from an analysis of the journalistic definition of topics in stories?

The media examined in this section of the research are the five metropolitan newspapers in New Zealand.

### 1.6 Research project plan

The scope of the research utilising the three methodologies is presented here figuratively in a research project plan.



**Figure 1:** Research Project Plan

## 1.7 Theoretical frameworks

A number of theoretical frameworks underpin the research. The first theoretical perspective which informs the study is the intrusion of the news media into politics, which generally posits that the news media have become increasingly negative, disruptive and intrusive. In the participant observation section of the study (Chapters 10 to 17) this perspective is explored in relation to media manipulation and the political journalist asserting his or her autonomy. In addition the study integrates aspects of the theoretical perspective known as the "social construction of reality" (Davis, 1990). The third perspective is Altheide and Snow's (1991) theoretical framework of "media logic" which suggests the work of news itself is a major organization form for interpreting the world of experience. All three methodologies utilised in the study test aspects of Altheide and Snow's theory. For example, both the action research and the participant observation methodologies examine the influence of experts skilled in the knowledge, techniques and ways to manipulate activities to fit news media procedures. The content analysis tests the point that the news media perspective will be considered-and usually played to-in pursuing public statements or action. Further detail about these theoretical frameworks is contained in the next chapter, Chapter Two: Literature Review.

The research, too, wrestles with an epistemological dilemma which haunts news media scholarship and is expressed in Phillips' (1976) view that news as a form of knowledge is non-theoretic in the sense that it is neither formal, systematic nor abstract. Phillips' comments are debated in Chapter Nine: Action Research Evaluation. The study challenges Phillips' contention by exploring what Edelstein, Ito and Kepplinger (1989) describe as a **testable** theory of news in answer to the elusive question, "what is news?" The content analysis section of the research, Chapters 17-21, explores this debate in depth.

The other theoretical influence on this study concerns the role of political journalism in a participatory democracy. Normative theory about what it is the news media ought to be doing is referred to. McQuail (1991) states that normative theory is important because the media carry out essential tasks for the wide benefit of society and serve

the public interest, whether by design or chance. He says that in "democratic societies the media should do or not do some particular thing, for reasons of wider or longer term benefit to society" (p.70).

Gurevitch and Blumler's (1990) normative standards are used to examine the influence of the "new" news, talk back radio and interactive television programmes, during the 1993 general election in Chapter Fifteen: The "New" News. And Golding's (1990) belief that we revive the notion of citizenship to help answer the question of what is it that political journalism should be doing in an election campaign is explored in a number of sections of the study.

### **1.8 Structure of the research report**

The research is reported so that each methodology is examined in general terms before discussion of its specific application in this study. This manner of presentation was employed for two reasons. First, it is important to examine fully the current debate in research literature about the nature and characteristics of action research, an innovative methodology in communication scholarship. Second, the additional interpretive dimension involved in the particular application of content analysis needs thorough explanation before findings are reported. The methodologies are arranged in a chronological sequence although the action research project and the participant observation section had overlapping time frames. The content analysis research was conducted after the election had concluded. At the end of the three methodologies a concluding chapter, Chapter 21, examines the implications of the major findings for democratic journalism.

The next chapter comprises a literature review which looks at political communication as a field of study, at some theoretical perspective in news media scholarship and then focuses more particularly on the election campaign context. Overseas studies are referred to and New Zealand research is discussed. Recent writing which refers to the role of the news media in democratic society is also critically reviewed.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

**The problematic character of the field of communication research is also a sign of vitality and a promise of discoveries still to be made.....McQuail (1990, p.151).**

### 2.1 Introduction

Political communication is a robust site of communication research. Its boundaries have been defined by Nimmo and Sanders (1981) as a "process intervening between formal governing institutions and citizen voting behaviour (p.13). In 1981 in their preface to the *Handbook of Political Communication*, Nimmo and Sanders described political communication as a field of investigation in its infancy.

It is our contention that political communication is such an emerging field. Its piecemeal origins date back several centuries, but a self-consciously cross-disciplinary focus is of more recent vintage (p.12).

Nearly a decade later in their 1990 volume, *New Directions in Political Communication*, the growth of political communication as a field of inquiry is revealed by Anne Johnston's selective review of research in the field in the 1980s in which she scanned 600 works published in the interim period. She states:

Those works make it clear that political communication remains a field where interdisciplinary approaches and perspectives are common and even encouraged (p.329).

Johnston states that the emphases of political communication research traditionally include election communication, the relationship between news media and government, the rhetoric of political speeches, broadcasts and debates. But the evolution in political communication research means a number of researchers have broadened the scope of their inquiry to study the total communication environment of an election campaign.

This research is concerned primarily with how the news was manufactured in an election context, with the images and content eventually presented, and the implications of the way the news was sought, selected, broadcast and published for both news media and electoral systems. These objectives, outlined in Chapter One, relate to two types of research on the news media identified by Cohen and Young (1984). The research, too, examines the manufacture of news as a complex and shifting contest over knowledge of politics in acknowledgement of Craik's (1987) point that "elections are a specific monitor of the shifting terrain of political knowledges" (p.67). The implications of these research strands are debated in relation to normative theories of the press, a debate which comes clothed more as a series of questions than answers in this research. One of these questions is, what is it that the news media should be doing to promote the dialogue of democracy?

The literature review focuses on those aspects of scholarship which address the principal research questions and problem areas. Clearly this focus does not allow a broad sweep of all the theoretical and epistemological strands of political communication. But it does embrace the suggestions of two communication researchers, Craig (1993) and Bennett (1993) looking for a way forward for communication scholarship. Craig in his aptly titled article *Why Are There so Many Communication Theories?* states:

However broadly the *discipline* is understood, however confused about theory we may collectively be, each of us who works at communication theory must do so in some specific way, according to some relatively definite, even narrow, notion of theory. Even so, we may also hope that our work might speak to the larger problems of the discipline (p.32).

Bennett (1993) advances what he calls a "policy research paradigm for the news media and democracy"(p.180). He notes the failure of "any particular holistic paradigm" to sweep the field of political communication and urges what he calls "ground-up paradigm building" (p.182). He states:

Here is a more modest proposal for building broader analytical perspectives adequate to the task of studying the real world: simply carve out broad problem areas, and put together the research pieces necessary to say something important about them. It is unlikely that scholars actively doing interesting research are all going to run to the same paradigm, no matter how useful it might be. However, they might be persuaded that they are all studying important parts of the same problem... (p.182)

The scope of the literature review and the research is framed by several assumptions. The first concerns the definition of what constitutes "politics". As Mayer (1990) notes, "what is and is not 'politics' is itself a contested notion" (p.37). Pilger (1992), for example, argues that the British media's definition of politics is limited to "that which takes place inside, or within a short cab journey of the Palace of Westminster" (p.13). Similarly the definition of politics in this research is a narrow one, limited to the politics of an election campaign. The second assumption is borrowed from Craik (1987), who states that:

"media" and "politics" cannot be seen as separate entities--the former a reflection of the latter; but rather, the media now constitute a political force where "politics" is seen as sets of practices, institutional arrangements and conventions of behaviour that cross-cut various arenas (p.65).

The study of the making of the news occurs within a specific context, the 1993 general election campaign in New Zealand. Election campaigns are at the cutting edge of the process of intervention between governing institutions and the electorate referred to by Nimmo and Sanders (1981).

British researcher Ralph Negrine (1989) states two separate sets of issues, in their quite different ways, hint at the media's political importance. The first is the effect of media presentation and coverage of political contestants on voter behaviour. The second set of issues concerns journalistic practices and the impact these have on the nature of the political struggle and political debates. This research is concerned with the second, the inter-relationships between politics and journalism.

The literature review moves from the general to the specific. Differing opinions on the value of the election campaign setting for research are explored first, then the theoretical perspectives in news media scholarship in which the study is grounded are outlined by reference to leading writers. Next the review critically examines relevant news media scholarship from America, Great Britain and Australia on political journalism in relation to contemporary election campaigns and then refers to several, relevant comparative studies. This is followed by a review of the available New Zealand scholarship which refers to political journalism and the election context. Current writing about the role of election campaign news in a democracy is referred to at the end of the review. The literature review has as its particular focus contemporary election campaign contexts from the 1980s onwards, although reference is made to earlier benchmark news media scholarship.

## 2.2 Why election campaigns?

Opinion collides head-on in news media scholarship about the value of election campaign research. Sless (1993) in his provocative, personalised piece following the 1993 Australian general election states that:

As researchers, we should also be bored by our continual recycling of the same issues. Communication research on elections has essentially been a commentary on the status quo - researchers have become spectators of spectators (p.64).

Sless (1993) asks whether the inevitable academic papers about such issues as how the media manipulated the campaign or how politicians manipulated the media will add anything fundamentally to our understanding of election campaigns. He states:

I think not. Like election campaigns themselves, research merely provides the reinforcement of whatever view we already hold. And perhaps spectator research has merely reinforced the trend that turns us into bored spectators (p.64).

Partly to overcome the criticism of "spectator research" the research project employs action research as one of three methodologies. The research also concludes, Chapter 22, by suggesting reformative measures about the reporting of election campaigns in the hope debate about the future of political journalism will take place in the public sphere in New Zealand. In the opposing camp to Sless (1993), Chaffee and Jamieson (1994) offer a pragmatic rationale for the election campaign as a communication research setting in an overview to a collection of studies looking at the 1992 United States presidential election campaign. They refer to the precedent of more than a half a century of innovative research in campaign settings. They indicate the general predictability of an election allows for systematic research planning. And the particular novelty of each election campaign, and the innovation the novelty generates, makes it worth studying election campaigns.

Putting aside the convenience of election campaigns for research, it is Craik (1987) who is persuasive about election campaigns as a site for study. She states that "elections constitute a bounded space--both temporally by the duration of the campaign, and spatially by the rules of campaign conduct and the mechanics of electoral practice--which necessarily produces, through consolidation and compromise, political positions" (p.66). The election campaign also provides valuable data not available between elections about the way in which politicians, news media and the public prioritise issues. And, in terms of political practice, election campaigns have a decisive outcome in the production of a government. "They are not just another event on the political calendar, yet, equally, the campaign does not 'produce' the outcome in any simple way" (p.67). The prospect of electoral reform in New Zealand meant the 1993 election offered a timely opportunity for a clear and informed view of the manufacture of election news particularly in view of the absence of indigenous research into election journalism.

### **2.3 Some theoretical perspectives in news media scholarship**

A number of theoretical perspectives inform this research which are discussed and assessed in this literature review. The writing of the review occurs against a scholarship panorama of continuing "ferment" about communications research. While acknowledging the ferment, the report adopts O'Keefe's (1993) position which is that:

There is little justification for the continuing search for a unifying theoretical consensus. Even if there were frameworks available with the requisite broad-based appeal (and I have argued that there are not), the field is better served by promoting theoretical and methodological tolerance and disciplinary cohesion (p.81).

A secondary point needs to be made about the contexts of news media scholarship as it has been developed and refined. Studies in a variety of contexts, such as that of crime and deviance, industrial relations, protest groups, as well as overtly political arenas such as election campaigns, have formed a basis for theoretical development. Different contexts have provided different emphases. For example, the symbiotic relationship between journalists and elite sources, a prominent research theme, is perhaps more dramatically expressed in accounts of the relationship between the police and the press than in reports of the nexus between the news media and political leaders. The theoretical perspectives which underpin news media scholarship about the creation of news in an election campaign have often been developed, refined and modified from other contexts. The contextual diversity reflects the inter-disciplinary nature of news media scholarship which typically acknowledges contributions from a wide variety of disciplines, including sociology, criminology, psychology, political science, education and journalism. In discussing theoretical perspectives, contexts other than election campaign studies are additionally referred to.

Davis (1990) in his useful analysis of the development of research on news and politics identifies a number of theoretical perspectives on news that have emerged in the last two decades. Those relevant to this dissertation are the British cultural studies perspective, the intrusion of media into politics perspective, the social construction of reality perspective, and the commercial rational perspective. In addition to those identified by Davis, the review discusses Altheide and Snow's (1991) theory of media logic. Two additional theoretical strands, relating to the organization of the content of news stories and their structures, and the conceptual debate about what it is that constitutes news, are also referred to.

### 2.3.1 The British cultural studies perspective

Essentially neo-Marxist, this perspective sees the news media as covertly and subtly supporting the status quo political order and establishment institutions by focusing public attention and concern on a narrow range of issues. Popularised by researchers at the University of Birmingham in the 1960s and 1970s, the theoretical perspective sees the news media as cultivating a consensual or hegemonic view of the world marginalising and shutting out alternate issues or viewpoints. Elite spokespeople are presented as the "accredited" representatives with access to comment and expressing legitimate and effective viewpoints. Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts (1978) in their examination of the news media's coverage of the phenomenon of mugging describe this in the following way:

One such background assumption (about what society is and how it works) is the *consensual* nature of society: the process of *signification*-giving social meanings to events-*both assumes and helps to construct society as a 'consensus.'* We exist as members of one society *because-it is assumed-we share a common stock of cultural knowledge with our fellow men: we have access to the same 'maps of meanings'.* Not only are we able to manipulate these 'maps of meaning' to understand events, but we have fundamental interests, values and concerns in common, which these maps embody or reflect. We all want to, or do, maintain basically the same perspective *on* events (p.55).

Hall *et al* (1978) state that events as news are regularly interpreted within frameworks which derive in part from this notion of the consensus as a basic feature of everyday life. In this perspective journalists believe themselves to be neutral and objective reporters, and this helps to mark off this perspective from earlier forms of Marxist theory where journalists were seen as simply reinforcing the dominant ideology in society. In the cultural studies perspective this systematic and overt control is rejected in favour of the thesis of subtle influence which perpetuates the status quo while the journalist retains a self-image as impartial.

The concept of "moral panic" developed by Stan Cohen in his study of the Mods and Rockers in 1972 is used by British cultural studies researchers. For example, Hall *et al's* (1978) analysis of mugging asserts that the phenomenon was over-reported in proportion to its statistical reality and this provoked an official reaction out of

At least two questions have been raised about the British cultural studies perspective, particularly as it relates to the notion of "moral panic" employed by Hall et al in the study of mugging. Negrine (1989), states the study "makes the erroneous assumption that the media mirrors, or ought to mirror, a statistical reality." And further he states:

It could be argued, then, that in conveying this 'reality' as well as commenting upon it, the media were voicing concern--shared by the public--at the occurrence of such crimes and the defenceless status of the victim. The media may have therefore been articulating and feeding on public concerns rather than creating them (p.149).

The objection is a powerful one. Negrine implies that both the news media's own conception of their role as well as public expectations of the news media's function do not necessarily accord with presenting a "statistical" reality, whatever that may be. And Downes and Rock (1988) state that while the reality of the "moral panic" is most skilfully analysed by Hall et al (1978) the "grounds for asserting that the official reaction sought to promulgate such a panic for larger ideological and political ends are not established." This criticism exposes a weakness in the Marxian sociology of Hall *et al* (1978) because the nature of the correlation is not proven and the theory "over-predicts" social control (p.263).

The cultural studies perspective has been influential in British research traditions spawning a vast array of work by sociologists, criminologists and political scientists including the Glasgow University Media Group's research into industrial reporting. Despite its influence on British news research, Davis (1990) states it has had a restricted influence only on American research although it clearly influenced work by Tuchman (1978) and Gitlin (1980). In the New Zealand context, though, where there is not a strong tradition of news media scholarship, the concept of "moral panic" has been employed by Kelsey and Young (1982) in a study of gangs and in an unpublished study by McGregor (1990) of the over-reporting and sensationalism attached to the disappearance and murder of two Swedish tourists.

### 2.3.2 The social construction of reality perspective

Davis (1990) describes the social construction of reality perspective as a "second important influence on modern news research" (p.159). For most of us the news media provide us with our picture of topical events. For example, few of us directly experience criminal activity either as perpetrators or as victims. And yet a study of crime news in New Zealand's five metropolitan newspapers in 1992 (McGregor, 1992) shows that 16.44 per cent of hard news in these major newspapers over a month was crime news. The picture the readers of the newspapers receive is one of a constructed social reality. So perceptions of crime in the community are derived not from a "factual" reality experienced directly but from a constructed social reality. This perspective shares many of the assumptions about the role of the media with the cultural studies perspective. Davis defines the perspective in the following way:

Social construction of reality theory is grounded on the premise that we live in a fundamentally ambiguous social world--a world in which persons, objects and actions have no inherent or essential meaning. If meaning is not inherent, then it must be created--imposed on action, events or things through human action (p.159).

This perspective again acknowledges the role of elite groups who dominated the constructed reality process. To take further the crime analogy, clearly the police enjoy an inherent advantage in imposing their frames of meaning on news situations and controlling the flow of information. Chibnall (1977), Reiner (1985) Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987), Grabosky and Wilson (1989) and Surette (1992) are among researchers in the crime news area who have utilised themes from the social construction of reality perspective and who write about the symbiotic relationship between journalists and the police and the characteristics of crime news which are produced as a consequence of the relationship.

Tuchman (1978) is a researcher whose observational studies of news organisations incorporate both the cultural studies and social construction of reality perspective. In her introduction to *Making News* she describes news as frame.

But, like any frame that delineates a world, the news frame may be considered problematic. The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard (p.1).

In particular, Tuchman (1978) in her analysis of groups which enjoy an inherent advantage in determining meaning in the news in the process of social construction of reality relates how feminist groups suffered what she termed "symbolic annihilation" and were trivialised and marginalised by the news media.

Davis (1990) states the social construction of reality perspective rejects the notion of meaning as universal and not grounded in social context.

This misconception appears to be rooted in a fundamental principle of human perception: Once meaning has been learned we tend to act upon it without continual reassessment and without awareness of the context that induced it (reification) (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Thus, once definitions of the social world are acquired, we "take them for granted" and they become part of a set of "typifications"(Schutz, 1967) or a "stock of knowledge" that we routinely use to "frame" or interpret our everyday experience (Goffman, 1974) (p.160).

The perspective acknowledges that while we actively impose meaning on our world this is unstated and such meaning is "institutionalized" (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). It is clear the perspective has what Davis (1990) describes as profound implications for the interpretation of the role of news.

News cannot be merely a vehicle for objective facts about remote political events. The very fact that some events are communicated to us while others are ignored implies much to us about the structure of the social world. The labels and relationships used in news stories will alter or reinforce the definitions we have learned. News can furnish us with new typifications or it can reinforce existing categories (Adoni and Mane, 1984). News serves to reify certain labels for persons, events, and situations (p.160).

Davis (1990) indicates the limitation of the perspective when he states that the perspective recognises the utility of everyday knowledge in orienting individuals to the social world but it does not provide a means of assessing such knowledge except to imply that some forms of knowledge may orient individuals in more useful ways than other forms of knowledge. It is the individual basis of the social construction of reality perspective that its critics take issue with.

### 2.3.3 The intrusion of the media into politics perspective

This third perspective has come largely from political science and from journalistic accounts of the relationship between the news media and politics. Seymour-Ure (1987), who has made a significant contribution to the literature analysing British elections and the media, talks of the "growing intrusiveness of media" when examining political leadership, for example (p.3). Davis (1990) states the perspective suggests the media are part of a social equation and because they are themselves a social institution they should be expected to support political institutions such as government and political parties. It focuses largely on the arena of the political campaign and posits that the media have become increasingly negative, disruptive and intrusive.

Research strands which provide this perspective include the work done by Patterson (1980) which shows that reporters cover election campaigns as dramatized "horse races". This emphasis sees increasing personalisation with coverage of private lives and characters of political candidates, and stories relating to campaign strategy, but minimal attention paid to campaign issues. The news media's human interest orientation and the fact that winning and losing can be inextricably tied to access to news media publicity means that candidates cannot afford to base campaigns on issues. Nor can they assume the news media will provide an educative role about political issues or a systematic assessment of candidate worth.

Some recent research applications have considered the emphasis on the party leaders (Mayer, 1990), the increased importance of what Davis (1990) terms "media crises" including leaks and gaffes (Tiffen, 1989) and exaggerated accounts of seemingly minor episodes all of which fall into the ambit of the intrusive media perspective. So, too,

does pack journalism (Crouse, 1973; Tiffen 1989), the practice of "spin doctoring" (Bruce, 1992) and the competition between the news media and political consultants and government-funded media managers (Golding, 1990; Bruce, 1992). Levy's (1990) concept of "disdaining the news" to describe the growing tendency for journalists to "send up" or expose what they see as efforts by politicians to enhance their public image is another manifestation of media intrusiveness.

A valuable Australian account which integrates a number of themes of the intrusion of the news media into politics perspective is Tiffen's (1989) analysis of news and power based on case study and ethnographic methodology. Tiffen refers both to "overt manoeuvres" and "covert manoeuvres." In terms of public relations politics one illustration he uses of overt manoeuvres is the hi-jacking of reporters by the engineering of occasions which involves them in travel away from home base. The 1992 so-called "good news" media tour by Prime Minister Jim Bolger, in which journalists were invited to stump the country with the Prime Minister reporting pre-arranged visits to successful businesses, is an apposite example in New Zealand of Tiffen's description. In relation to "covert manoeuvres" he refers to the practice of leaks and the discrediting of political opponents.

Media intrusiveness as a theoretical perspective has prevailed more recently. It offers a systematically negative commentary on the role of the news media which suggests that the news media has failed politics. Patterson (1993), however, challenges the perspective with the view that the news media should not be expected to do the job of political parties and electorate organizations. Let the press be the press, he urges.

#### 2.3.4 The commercial rationale perspective

This perspective arises from the many examinations of news organisations conducted by social scientists, in particular sociologists, researching the news. The central thesis is that of the commodification of the news media. The news media are commercial products which need to be manufactured and marketed and the strength of the product is measured by its commercial appeal in terms of the audience generated and the profits earned. Included in most analyses of the commercial rationale of the news media is the

notion of bureaucracy. News is designed to standardised "recipes" or specifications, news is produced by routinized work practices and organisation constraints impinge on news manufacture (Tuchman, 1978). Davis (1990) states the commercial rationale of the news media is an extension of the intrusion of the media perspective. But it is central to the contemporary tension in journalism between the balance between pragmatic business considerations about a market driven news media and traditional journalistic considerations which encompass the desire to educate and inform as well as entertain (Underwood and Stamm, 1992). The dilemma posed by the "high" and "low" dual roles of the news media has, of course, always existed, note McGregor and Comrie (1995). They state that what makes it more acute for modern journalism is the "intersection of these dual roles with the broad sweep of technological innovation, complex media market competition, and a changed socio-political climate" (p.5). For this reason the commercial rationale perspective deserves a distinct focus, while acknowledging an inter-relationship with the intrusion of the media into politics perspective.

Ironically, in so far as journalists are aware of any of the insights offered by recent news media scholarship, they appear to be least sceptical about the commercial rationale of the news perspective. From my experience as a newspaper editor the commercial rationale of the news gives journalists an adequate explanation of the constraints that necessarily limit the effectiveness of their work and it provides them with the rationalisation that changing work practices would be difficult, if not, impossible. The constraints of deadline, resources, the imperfect and random nature of news, are, too, all external to the individual journalist and allow them to temporize in the face of calls for reform.

### 2.3.5 The media logic perspective

Altheide and Snow (1991) who have developed the concept of media logic, a theoretical framework for explaining the relationship between mass media and culture, extend both the commercial rationale of the media and the notion of the intrusion of the media into politics. They state that particular organizational considerations of newswriters promote a distinct media logic.

*Media logic* consists of a form of communication, the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Format consists, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication (p.ix).

In particular they analyse the power of political news coverage by dissecting the news media's coverage of the rise and fall of American politician Bert Lance. Altheide and Snow make 10 general points about news and politics. These are:

1. Public presentations increasingly demand knowledge of media and especially *news* media, logic, and techniques,
2. The media perspective will be considered - and usually played to - in pursuing any public statements or action,
3. "Experts" skilled in the knowledge, techniques and ways to manipulate activities and events to fit media procedures will become more important and influential in their respective organizations,
4. Skilled public performances are increasingly demanded from all individuals and organizations who depend on mass audiences for legitimacy and approval,
5. Any performance that is not approved of by the mass media is not only doomed to failure, but the "actors" in that performance are themselves likely to become objects of publication, allegation, and attack,
6. The truth or accuracy of a report has virtually no bearing on the consequences for the individual, activity, organization, or institution involved - only the presentation matters,
7. The growing significance of news power in our society will make any criticism of its role either futile or a target for counterattack,

8. More public presentations and related tasks will adopt the media perspective, and, in the process, public life will be less a reflection of private life,
9. More bureaucratic, organizational, and governmental actions and decisions will (1) take place behind "closed doors", and/or (2) be sufficiently benign to avoid the wrath and potentially destructive application of the news perspective,
10. An attempt to delineate the nature and significance of the mass media and particularly the news perspective for social life, public acts, and official information will be denounced with moral vigor and will be treated as a major threat to our society's heritage, freedom and future (pp.159-160).

Newswork then, in terms of the media logic concept, is "a significant context of meaning that transforms experience and substance into workable news forms" rather than being based on the assumption that the news process is "inconsequential for how events occur, are defined, selected, transformed, and then presented" (p.163). Altheide and Snow (1991) state, "the work of news, then, is not an organizational mirror for the world, but is in itself a major organization form for interpreting the world of experience" (p.163).

The notion of media logic appears to extend previous theoretical perspectives, and may subsume aspects of the concept of intrusion into politics and of the commercial rationale of the media perspective. However, the organization of the theoretical perspectives in this literature review as discrete and individual strands tends to emphasize their differences rather than their apparent similarities or areas of overlap. As Swanson and Nimmo (1990) have put it, the theoretical perspectives have been arranged "along fault lines of discontinuity rather than continuity" (p.11). The research proper as reported in the following chapters, on the other hand, synthesises several of these theoretical perspectives and incorporates and integrates themes from the notion of media intrusiveness, the social construction of reality theory, the media logic perspective and the commercial rationale of the news media which help shape the organizational routines of news making. The study follows Bennett's (1993) call for "ground-up paradigm building" exploring broad problem areas (p.182). It integrates appropriate

concepts from identified theoretical frameworks but does not promote a unifying theoretical consensus.

### 2.3.6 The call for reassessment of journalistic writing

No analysis of news manufacture would be complete without reference to the distinct way news is written. Theories of news which examine news story structure or the organization of content of news also inform this research. The essence of journalism is the ability to organize factual information "gathered at the scene of an ambiguous event into a coherent narrative" Davis, 1990, p.166). The nature of this organization in terms of story structure has led to a body of research about journalistic genre. For example, Bennett and Edelman, 1985, analyse the structure and function of journalistic reports in terms of news as narrative. Davis (1990) suggests "narrative theory assumes that socialization to the practice of journalism involves learning a stock of standardized story structures that can be used to organize virtually any set of factual information" (p.167). Journalists are guided by a number of considerations when employing these structures.

One of the structures is the inverted pyramid style of news writing created for "hard" news, described by Hohenberg (1978) as the "undiluted record of immediate events written in an impersonal style" (p.226). The inverted pyramid structure assembles a news story as a hierarchy of facts with the most important first and with the rest of the facts arranged in descending order of importance. The label "soft" news is often attached to feature writing in which human interest factors prevail and a greater degree of subjectivity is evident. While traditionally the function of "hard" news is to inform, the function of "soft" news is to entertain. The inverted pyramid structure has helped to sustain one of the enduring myths of modern journalism, the assertion that news stories can be objective, neutral and value-free. The fallacy of objectivity in the news is debated in Chapter Eight, and the distinction between "hard" news and "soft" news is examined in the content analysis section and discussed in Chapter 21.

In an important reassessment of the content and structure of news stories, Wyatt and Badger (1993) argue for a new typology for journalism and they state that, "a typology emphasizing the continuity between journalism and other forms of writing could have a positive effect on journalism education" (p.4). They argue that while the old division and labels of news, opinion and editorials have become enshrined along with the news-

opinion continuum as the explanation of journalistic writing, the boundaries between them were "fuzzy and misleading and are continually crossed in practice" (p.3). Wyatt and Badger urge that the traditional news/feature/editorial trichotomy be subsumed into a model derived from rhetorical theory. The model divides the types or modes of composition into five categories according to their method of discourse and intended purpose. The five categories are description (which might cover the old "hard" news), narration (which might include feature journalism), argument (used in editorials), exposition (often employed in news analysis) and criticism (a feature of reviews). Wyatt and Badger's suggested new typology is referred to in the content analysis section of the project Chapters 17-21.

### 2.3.7 What is news anyway?

Another set of theoretical perspectives connects to this research from the field of news media scholarship which examines "what is news?" A research debt is owed to the seminal work of Lippmann (1922) about the nature of news as "obtrusion" or news as discrepancy, and to Galtung and Ruge (1965) for their no less significant theory of newsworthiness. In this theory they list a number of criteria, such as negativity and immediacy, and state that the more an event satisfies the criteria the more likely it is to become news. While neither of these theoretical perspectives is "modern", they have not been significantly challenged by contemporary academic writers. Far from it, Lippmann's writing about news is enjoying a renaissance of interest (Patterson, 1993) and researchers such as Edelstein, Ito and Kepplinger (1989) incorporate elements of both Lippmann and Galtung and Ruge's perspectives into their own theories about the creation of news. Galtung and Ruge's theory is referred to in the action research section of this report, Chapters Three to Nine, and Lippmann's concept is discussed in the report of the content analysis at Chapter 17. Edelstein *et al*, too, provide a rebuttal to Phillip's (1976) suggestion that the nature of news as knowledge is non-theoretic with their creation of what they call a "testable" theory of the news (p.103). Phillips' work is referred to in the action research section of the study which follows the literature review and Edelstein *et al* are examined in Chapters 17-21.

## 2.4 Election campaigns

### 2.4.1 The widening of scholarship

An array of writing provides insights into the making of news during election campaigns. Two extra elements supplement traditional scholarship and are included in this review of the literature. Academic writing about political journalism in election campaigns is supplemented by popular literature and "insider's" views of journalists and others (McGinness, 1970; Crouse, 1972), generally published in book form with memorable titles (*The Selling of the President*; *The Boys on the Bus*). In addition, as Patterson (1993) states, "there has been a tremendous growth of forums, foundation-sponsored research and conferences" looking at American political journalism (p.181). The work of research foundations in the United States such as the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Television and the Campaign of 1992 adds value in two ways. First, it provides a forum for informed and opportune debate about the news media's performance in the 1992 presidential campaign in time to influence news practices and policies before the next campaign. Second, the Task Force produces valuable background papers by leading academic writers (Patterson, 1993; Jamieson, 1993 and Auletta, 1993) more speedily than publishing through the time-honoured means of refereed journal. Such a forum speaks, too, to a public as well as an academic audience and, as such, is less interior and self serving. Docherty and Tracey (1993), in a well argued article about the need for communication researchers to take their work into the public sphere, warn of the "irrelevant culture of the cloister" (p.231).

And a review scanning the literature on political journalism in election campaigns must acknowledge the legacy of British journalism itself. A proud tradition of media watching is a feature of the quality press with almost every national newspaper carrying media columns in reviews and features sections. The *Guardian's* weekly Media Page, the *Sunday Times'* regular media watching column and regular features on the media in the *Independent* and the *Observer* provide regular forums for news media commentary. News and feature magazine journalism (the *New Statesman*, the *Spectator* and even the satirical forays of *Private Eye*) promote dialogue about political journalism which ranges from ironic puncturings of journalistic and political ego to profound observations about news processes. Also Docherty and Tracey (1993) state that the research departments of the major broadcasting organizations in Britain have been

vitaly important in nurturing mass communication research. He states, "there was, and, remains a highly developed public discourse about media issues in the United Kingdom in ways that have never existed in the United States" (p.236). A widened notion of scholarship can only strengthen research into news processes particularly if its more public nature, its timeliness and its "real world" relevance motivate journalists to open up to discussion about their policies, practices, roles and responsibilities.

#### 2.4.2 The good news and bad news debate about news coverage of election campaigns

While opinion is not unanimous there is a large measure of agreement about the importance of research into the news media role and performance in election campaigns. Nimmo and Sanders (1990), for example, in their advocacy of new directions for political communication talk of the "unicentric campaign touchstone." And they state:

Campaigns properly continue to be the subject of a great deal of increasingly sophisticated and valuable scholarly work that must be encouraged and attended to closely. And we recognize the practical reasons why particular researchers might want to preserve a campaign-based contextual definition in order to confine the field of study within manageable limits (p.12).

Negrine (1989, too, identifies election campaigns as central to political communication. He states "few events typify the concern over the political importance and effect of the mass media more than the coverage of general elections" (p.179).

Johnston (1990) states that of all the areas of election communication, the influence of media coverage of political campaigns is probably the one that has received most attention.

At the most general level of research and theorizing, there has been increased speculation about how media coverage has transformed the election process. Several scholars have attributed such phenomena as the decline of political parties, the emphasis on "television competent" candidates, and the restructuring of campaign events to media coverage of elections (p.330).

But scholarship is divided on the nature of the news media's performance and the way it makes political news during election campaigns. A positive/negative dichotomy is evident in discussion of the central role of television news. For example, Sabato (1992) excoriates contemporary political reporting as "junkyard-dog journalism - reporting that is often harsh, aggressive and intrusive" (p.128). Critics such as Sabato tend to see election campaigns as media theatre, trivial and irrelevant and to assert they have become less substantial in the television era. Popkin (1992), on the other hand, defends election campaigns, dismisses the influence of news media manipulation, debunks media critics urging a different sort of coverage, and says the challenge to the future of campaigns and to democracy is "how to bring back the brass bands and excitement in an age of electronic campaigning" (p.163).

The missing link in this current dichotomous debate, which has been a game of serve and return among a handful of American commentators in particular, is relevant and redirected study about what it is that journalists should be doing when they create news in an election campaign. Are the normative standards which have flowed from the 1947 Commission on Freedom of the Press in the United States, and which have evolved from the Reithian conception of broadcasting in Great Britain, and to which the news media commonly pay homage, vigorous and relevant enough to sustain modern political reportage? Vague presumptions of democracy only underwrite today's political reportage. If there is a failure of scrutiny by news media researchers looking at the creation of political news it is significant in this area. Bennett (1993) states, "the normative question... becomes how to supplement existing, reasonable normative standards with other guidance systems to create a more uniformly high standard of political debates in the news" (p.187). He acknowledges, though, that this means change not only by journalists but by academic researchers too, so that scholars "will develop new ideas about productive research questions and theoretical formulations" (p.188).

The paucity of indigenous research means a reliance in this review on overseas scholarship about news making in election campaigns. Caution is exercised, however, about the assumption that political communication in different Western, developed nations is the same activity. Many generalisations are not justifiable and not transferable because different influences are immediately apparent, such as distinct

political systems, specific election campaign traditions, and particular organizational procedures for the news media. For example, New Zealand has no preliminary contests other than candidate selection, nor does it have a lobby system relying on unattributed sourcing operating in political journalism. These disparate, ethnocentric influences clearly prescribe the usefulness of cross cultural comparisons. At the same time many valuable theoretical and empirical concepts are transferable and many similar trends and patterns of political communication outlined in contemporary studies overseas are applicable to the New Zealand context. For example, the strategic use of talkback radio by New Zealand politicians in 1993 allows for reference to and discussion of American scholarship about electronic populism. The literature review now examines relevant contemporary writing in United States, Great Britain and Australia and looks at several cross cultural studies before canvassing New Zealand scholarship.

#### 2.4.3 American studies

Earlier American scholarship on the news media and the reporting of election campaigns, Graber (1971, 1976) and Stempel (1961, 1965, 1969, 1981) utilised a comparative approach in which studies were replicated, and new research questions were added, to see if patterns and trends of coverage differed or were confirmed. Stempel and Windhauser (1981) saw "value in being able to compare coverage by the same newspapers over a series of elections" (p.49). Many of these studies were concerned about questions of bias and were measuring equality of space allocated by the news media. And in the 1970s the focus of American scholarship widened to include electronic media in addition to a focus on print. Meadow (1973), for example, noted the striking uniformity in presidential campaign coverage across media sources.

Graber (1971) looked at press coverage patterns of election campaign news in the 1968 presidential race and concluded that the origins of campaign news were surprisingly uniform, with 56% of all campaign news directly linked to the campaign efforts of the presidential and vice presidential contenders. Graber found that "common socialisation", more than the identity of encoders of news messages, accounted for the uniformity in campaign coverage. Newspaper personnel apparently shared a sense of what is newsworthy and how it should be presented, Graber stated. The nature of the coverage also received attention in this study and Graber found that a shallow portrait

of candidates appeared from the news media based on personality traits. Revisiting news coverage patterns in the 1972 presidential campaign, Graber (1976) predicted and found continued uniformity of news media coverage, and a change in the pattern of coverage in an election involving incumbents. Graber stated there was a moderate shift in news media attention away from heavy emphasis on personality attributes of candidates to greater emphasis on professional qualifications because of the incumbency factor.

In the 1970s Crouse's (1972) book, *The Boys on the Bus*, provided powerful insights into day to day reporting by heavyweight political journalists covering the campaigns of Richard Nixon and George McGovern. The book popularised the notion of political reportage as a "pack hunt". Windhauser (1973) is another scholar who found the news media were more interested in the candidate as a person, on "what a candidate is instead of what he says". Windhauser concludes:

Editors on the various metropolitan newspapers tended to publish issues concerning the qualifications, experiences, abilities, endorsements and testimonials of candidates, and their supporters rather than the candidates' views on community problems and actions. As a result, the issue coverage was directed toward identification and image-building of the candidates and their parties....(p.339).

Stempel and Windhauser (1981) state that Stempel's studies of coverage of elite American newspapers (the "prestige press") of the three Presidential campaigns in the 1960s found that equal space seemed to be the norm. Press bias was not found. In addition, those studies also indicated that the amount of space devoted to the Presidential campaign declined in that period. In the study of the 1980 presidential campaign the authors said they specifically wanted to see if the tendency toward equal space remained and the trend toward less coverage continued. The campaign also allowed an opportunity to study the effect of a third-party candidacy. The study found that the 1980 campaign received less coverage by the elite newspapers than any of the three campaigns in the 1960s. The authors noted the significance of the growth of television in the 1960s and noted that the role of television in political campaigns as a factor. Campaign staffs could be shaping their activities with an eye to television rather than to newspapers. Stempel and Windhauser raise the question of the decline of coverage as a "problem".

Whatever the reason, the decline in the amount of coverage should be a matter of concern, particularly in light of the fact that the percentage of those of voting age who cast ballots for President also has been declining in the same period (p.55).

This is a theme which has been explored since by journalism educators and scholars who make connections between the loss of voters and low election turnouts with lack of coverage and a decline in the level of public discourse and a rising level of distrust with politics. The anxiety about the quantity and nature of coverage and its connection with civic participation in politics has led to newspaper activism in the United States, described as the public journalism movement. Shepard (1994) describes experiments in "community connectedness" which are popping up at a handful of American newspapers including the *Wichita Eagle* whose "Voter Project" introduces readers to innovations in political coverage, and in the *Charlotte Observer*. The *Eagle's* managing editor has described the goal of the project as generating new interest in the political process and reversing decades-long declines in voting behaviour, not to mention newspaper reading. Shepard states that "according to the gospel of public journalism, professional passivity is passe; activism is hot" (p.29). Non-believers worry that public journalism will damage news media credibility by turning journalists into players rather than chroniclers.

A spirited discussion of television and the nature of visualness in election campaign news is Schram's (1987) analysis of what he calls the "great American video game" in relation to Ronald Reagan's reliance on visual images in the 1984 campaign. The power of visualness is a constant theme in analysis of television news in election campaigns. In this study the theme is addressed in Chapter 14 in particular, which discusses the primacy of television and the power of visualness in the context of the New Zealand General Election in 1993.

Patterson's (1980) comprehensive study of the media in the 1976 presidential election revealed some significant patterns. The "horse race", and the game and strategy of the campaign process, in conjunction with the style and image of the candidates, received consistent coverage. But campaign issues, leadership attributes and candidate qualifications were systematically under reported. Congruence of media coverage was

a feature and over all the media studied, between 51% and 58% of election news was about the campaign contest process, compared with only 28% to 32% of election news about the substance of the presidential election. The "horse race" factor is referred to in the content analysis section of this report, Chapters 17-21. And in an influential analysis, Bennett (1983) described news as the "politics of illusion" in which the journalist operates by objectifying life and society and being part of the process, rather than being a conscious observer. The reporter dramatizes the news, takes it out of context, and fragments it, then reconstitutes it to normalize it and thus make it knowable but meaningless.

It is the 1988 presidential election, however, which has prompted the most vigorous debate in contemporary American political history about news creation, the role of the news and journalistic practices. Rosen (1992) states:

The 1988 presidential campaign, widely denounced as one of the worst in modern memory, led many journalists to the conclusion that something was wrong in the reporting of politics. A good number thought it was the press, and not only the candidates, who had failed the country (p.4).

The report of the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Television and the Campaign of 1992 states, "negative politics, attack advertising and rough press coverage seemed to reach a new level of pervasiveness during the 1988 campaign" (p.vi). Sabato (1992) refers to "two cases of attack journalism in the 1988 presidential elections" referring to coverage of Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis and Republican vice presidential candidate Dan Quayle (p.141). He states, "attack journalism has major repercussions on the institution that spawns it - the press - including how it operates, what the public thinks of it, and whether it helps or hurts the development of productive public discourse" (p.142). As Rosen (1992) states, disgust with the 1988 coverage brought with it an "unusual number of conferences, panel discussions, and in-house critiques" with some sections of the news media and media-watchers engaging in a considerable amount of self analysis and introspection about what went wrong.

Opinion amongst news media scholars is divided on whether the 1992 campaign was an improvement. The Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Television and the Campaign of 1992 acknowledges improvements, "particularly by the nightly network news programs, which instituted reforms that limited the influence of political handlers and that gave more attention to substantive campaign issues" (p.4). The Task Force listed less reliance on photo opportunities, longer sound bites, increased issue coverage, and the benefits of the "new" news as some of the improvements.

Rosen (1992) on the other hand sees change between the two elections as "marginal rather than fundamental: more televised debates, less attention to photo opportunities, de-emphasizing the ritual of the campaign plane, and effort to focus on voters instead of handlers....some better background pieces on the candidates. These are welcome adjustments, but they do not reflect a radically new approach to campaign coverage" (p.4-5). The two features which distinguish 1992 for most commentators are what Rosen (1992) calls the "spectacular return" of the "feeding frenzy" mentality in the press apparent in the reporting of Gennifer Flowers's allegations and the so-called character issues surrounding presidential candidate Bill Clinton in the early stages of his campaign, and the use of "new" media like radio talk back and television call-in shows which allowed politicians to electronically side-step reporters to communicate directly with voters. (The "new" news is debated in greater depth in the New Zealand election campaign context in Chapter 17.)

For Altschull (1992) the most fascinating sidelight of the 1992 post mortem of press coverage of the campaign was the "fact that so many members of the media joined the politicians and public in criticizing themselves and their colleagues" (p.1). Rosen (1992) produced a sample of some of the provocative comments during the 1992 campaign by prominent journalists. He quoted Thomas Oliphant of the *Boston Globe* who said one inescapable conclusion could be made from the mass of press material about presidential contenders. It was that:

...none of these people deserves to be president because they are all fools, liars, cheats, crooks and failures. The truth, of course, is that they are all human beings with defects and strengths, good ideas and bad ones, accomplishments and flops; but in the distorting, supermagnification of modern media, the defects, the bad ideas, and flops are news (p.6).

#### 2.4.4 British studies

Craik, writing in 1987 about elections, states "the number of works specifically devoted to the relationship between media and elections are few" (p.65). She states the "situation has been partially redeemed by the collections of Worcester and Harrop (1982), and of Crewe and Harrop (1985)" (p.65). Both collections looked at political communications with Worcester and Harrop concentrating on the general election campaign of 1979 and Crewe and Harrop examining the general election campaign of 1989. Craik states that "perhaps the strongest single contribution has been that of Seymour-Ure" (p.65). Seymour-Ure published his *The Press, Politics and the Public* in 1968 and the *Political Impact of Mass Media* in 1974. Seymour-Ure (1974) considered the difference the mass media made in general elections between 1945-1970. First, they integrated the campaign, "giving it a spurious impression of order or logic and relating the parties to each other in a dialogue which otherwise would not exist" (p.233). Second, there was a changing partisanship of the media. "In the press this consisted of a decline in papers' unwillingness to recognise merit in opponents and fault in their own party. In broadcasting it was a decline in the completeness of neutrality" (p.234). In his more recent book, *The British Press and Broadcasting Since 1945*, Seymour-Ure explores the "intrusion of television" into the media-politics relationship and states:

TV... was no longer an instrument to be applied to politics: it was part of the environment *within* which politics was carried on. Whether it was 'bigger' than politics is a complicated and perhaps fruitless question...TV had become, in a general sense, a forum of political accountability (p.176).

At least two factors differentiate British political journalism. The first is referred to by Seymour-Ure, and it is the tradition of overt press partisanship by which newspapers were openly aligned to political parties. The second distinguishing characteristic, which has attracted vigorous academic and journalistic scrutiny, is the Lobby. The Lobby is a clandestine, parliamentary-bound system of political reportage which specialises in "off-the-record" reporting. Attracting strong criticisms and spirited defences by both journalists and politicians the Lobby has been scrutinised by Hennessy and Walker (1987) who state, "the Lobby makes journalists, their newspapers and their readers-

likewise broadcasters- parties to the management of news by the government" (p.128). A highly entertaining and readable account of the workings of the Lobby in the days of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher comes from Harris (1994) in his unauthorized biography of Bernard Ingham, her Chief Press Secretary and "good and faithful servant". Of the Lobby, Harris states, "nods and winks, kite-flying and speculation are the stock in trade of a system which is non-attributable" (p.804). Both partisanship and the Lobby, though, influence the creation of political news in Britain and rub off on election coverage.

The BBC as a specific research site has traditionally informed the British tradition of news media scholarship. For example, Blumler (1969), in his observational study examined producers' attitudes towards television coverage of the 1966 general Election, and Schlesinger (1978) gave us a more general insider's view of television newsroom routines. Docherty and Tracey (1993) refer to the strong research traditions associated with units attached to broadcasters.

A sophisticated analysis of the contemporary relationship between politicians and the press is that of Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) who drew heavily on research of British elections during the 1970s. In their examination Blumler and Gurevitch reject two theoretical perspectives, that of the adversary model and the exchange model, which underpinned much of the conceptual discussions of politicians and the news media. The authors said these models were only partial in focus and misleadingly posed as rivals in contention over the same ground. Instead Blumler and Gurevitch outline an expanded theoretical framework as an alternative. They state:

Media-disseminated political communications derive from interactions between (1) two sets of mutually dependent and mutually adaptive actors, pursuing divergent (though overlapping) purposes, whose relationships with each other are typically (2) role-regulated, giving rise to (3) an emergent shared culture, specifying how they should behave toward each other, the ground rules of which are (4) open to contention and conflicting interpretation, entailing a potential for disruption, which is often (5) controlled by informal and/or formal mechanisms of conflict management (p.477).

This theoretical framework provides insight into the creation of news during an election campaign. The notion of mutual dependence and mutual adaptation between politicians and journalists is outlined by Blumler and Gurevitch (1981). They state:

...each side to the prospective transaction is in a position to offer the other access to a resource it values. The mass media offer politicians access to an audience through a credible outlet, while politicians offer journalists information about a theater of presumed relevance, significance, impact and spectacle for audience consumption (p.476).

Within this transaction, however, are variables such as the finite nature of resources which sees each side competing for them thereby increasing the process of mutual adaptation, conventional limitations on space and time, what has been called the "threshold of tolerance" the medium's audience is assumed to exhibit towards political messages and the varying quality of such messages. Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) state this political communication is not negotiated by unsocialized individuals but by individuals in roles; journalists located in particular organizational settings and politicians who, when they function as communicators, are acting out certain role prescriptions. Both sides have an emergent shared culture of mutual trust within defined norms, which could be criteria like fairness, balance, objectivity and some shared notion of what is newsworthy, as well as a level of behavioural propriety in interaction. In relation to the sources of conflict which underlie the relationship, Blumler and Gurevitch state:

Post mortems after uninspiring election campaigns, for example, often show each side disclaiming responsibility and pointing the finger of censure at the other: Journalists decry the politicians' evasive rhetoric; politicians deplore the journalists' reduction of their rivalry to a horse race (p.487).

The researchers state the conflict rests on contradictions between several perceptual tendencies. These are journalists and politicians presenting themselves to others in roles which are in some sense sacred. Politicians cloak themselves in their representative capacity while journalists retreat to the shrines of freedom of expression and the public's right to know. When each side evaluates its role and performance it takes full

account of the constraints limiting its ability to realise goals and each side often treats deficiencies in the electoral audience as justifying the compromises it has had to make. The third perceptual tendency is the uncharitable view by each side of the contribution to political communication by its counterpart. The gap between role performances and role professions is regarded by each as evidence of hypocrisy, state Blumler and Gurevitch (1981). The researchers state there are both formal mechanisms and informal ways of managing this conflict.

Blumler (1990) in an important article, *Elections, the media and the modern publicity process*, explores the "greater centrality of the mass media to the conduct of political conflict and its outcomes" (p.103). He talks of the emergence of what he calls the "modern publicity process" (p.103), which is used as a conceptual framework in the participant observation section of the research and is referred to in greater detail in Chapter 11.

British researcher Ralph Negrine (1989) looks towards a model of political communication in his analysis of politics and the mass media in Britain, and echoes other commentary on news source-politician relationships. He states the process of news-making involves what he describes as "strategic bargaining, as between the sources of news and the news media" (p.17). He states:

Each feeds off the other, each informs the other and the subsequent reactions are reciprocal and continuous rather than unilinear and in one direction. The product of this interaction or bargaining is the media content to which the public at large attend (p.17).

Negrine (1989) asks the question: what changes have the media brought upon the nature of politics and the political process itself during election campaigns?

Inevitably, such questions take it for granted that of all the existing media, it is television that has had the greatest impact...speeches are arranged for the benefit of television: walkabouts and photo-opportunities are set up to catch the television camera and even leaders are moulded to suit the television medium (p.181).

He also looks at the problems broadcasters have with respect to election news items. Should they be judged, for example, on their inherent newsworthiness competing with other available news items? Such a news judgment policy might lead to election news items being rejected on the basis of inferior newsworthiness. Or should conventional news values, those professional imperatives of journalists, be abandoned and election news items regarded as a special category of news and granted coverage irrespective of the intrinsic worth of each item?

The problem of what is news during election campaigns is discussed by Negrine (1989) who refers to two features of election campaign coverage. One is the "walkabout" providing film and photo opportunities for television and press alike of politicians in particular settings which provide "positive" images to be created of them. Negrine's point is that these are "pseudo events," created specifically for the news media, features, too, in Tiffen's (1989) analysis. "Walkabouts" and "photo opportunities" may have dubious newsworthiness but Negrine's analysis of the 1983 British elections and television coverage showed they took up a substantial proportion of election news coverage. Journalistic conventions of balance, as well as statutory requirements relating to broadcasting, force the news media to balance the un-newsworthy "walkabout" with the opposition parties' similarly unnewsworthy "walkabouts." The devising and staging of strategic events and settings to "create" news have clear implications for news manufacture. They affect editorial judgement and the allocation of journalistic resources and they have consequences for what has been described as the "pack hunt" syndrome of reporting and the degree of homogeneity of news across the media.

The second of Negrine's (1989) points, also has implications for news manufacture. He refers to television's "infatuation with personalities and, in particular, political leaders" (p.17) and indicates that in the 1983 British elections Margaret Thatcher scored 48% of Conservative Party coverage on television news while Michael Foot secured 43% of Labour's coverage. This gives the election campaign coverage a particular predictability with a concentration on a handful of personalities whose personality and character aspects dominate the discourse. Again, there are implications for the manufacture of news in relation to news orientation towards personalities rather than issues, the allocation of resources and again the degree of homogeneity of news.

#### 2.4.5 Australian studies

In 1982 Philip Bell, Kathe Boehringer and Stephen Crofts published one of the landmark studies in Australian political communication. The book *Programmed Politics: A Study of Australian Television* investigated television news and current affairs coverage of the 1980 national election, employing content analysis as one methodology. Thirteen years later in a special edition of the *Australian Journal of Communication* devoted to analysis of the 1993 national election, Bell and Boehringer compare major themes of the 1980 election with the 1993 national election. In 1980 they concluded that television powerfully alters conceptions of politics through a complex discursive structure. Within this discursive structure are factors impacting on the making of political news such as the mediation of all political discourse by media professionals who place a premium on entertainment values of spectacle and drama, elite leadership, competition and social-economic managerial skills. The celebrity emphasis is another factor and policies, mandates and issues are less significant than images, themes and popularity. In 1993 they state:

...the thirteen years since the 1980 election analysed in *Programmed Politics* have seen a consolidation and extension of the processes to which we drew attention at that time. In 1993, however, political 'issues' as represented through the public voices of the unemployed or various lobby or interest groups, were even less audible. Cynical economism has become fatalistic and the discourse of mediated politics increasingly narrow and present-minded. If 1980 was seen as a sporting contest, with 'credibility' the issue, 1993 was even more removed from the public sphere - a computer game without the audience (p.12-13).

Bell and Boehringer (1993) note that the paradox of the contemporary media-politics relationship is that the media are increasingly like a political party themselves. "Hence the media are *anti*-partisan rather than bi-partisan and continually set themselves 'above' politics which is seen as a cynical game" (p.11). And they state the progressive detachment of the mass media from the party system has been "confounded by the mutual rivalry between professional politicians and professional communicators" with their competing claims to legitimacy (p.12).

Any analysis of Australian scholarship about political journalism needs to acknowledge the influence of Henry Mayer. Writing about the images of politics in the press, Mayer (1990) analyses the obsession with "hard news". He states that "hard news operates with an apparently knowing and supposedly no-nonsense but in fact infantile, nondiscriminating and indefensible notion of politics as the realm of the most naked and visible self" (p.38). This makes selfishness and a very narrow concept of self-interest central notions. Mayer says hard news tries to "explain" processes such as getting elected in terms of a "self-centred drive for perks and power" (p.38).

Mayer criticises the invocation of "principles" in politics by newspapers without the press describing or explaining what they are or might be. He also states that very dubious assumptions underwrite the news media's acceptance of the party-generated focus on the "creation, maintenance and promotion of the leaders' image" (p.43). One of these is the link between "strong" communications and "strong" leadership when there is "nothing desirable per se about strong leaders" and that "personality aspects and public behaviour as such do not enable you to make judgments about policy" (p.43).

It is, perhaps, Tiffen's (1989) work, *News and Power*, which yields greatest insight into the making of news and political journalism in Australia, both inside and outside the election context. Case studies and interviews with over 200 senior journalists are used by Tiffen, a political scientist, who explores and elaborates on several central propositions, two of which are centrally relevant to the manufacture of election news. The first is that the news cannot be seen in isolation and that "news should be understood as the product of institutional demands and processes" (p.3). The second proposition concerns the news media as a site of contest, "that the news media are a central political arena, and so news must also be understood in relation to the interests and opportunities that different political groups have to influence its content" (p.4). Tiffen is referred to at different stages in the following chapters of this research.

#### 2.4.6 Comparative studies

An interdisciplinary team of researchers has compared the British campaign (1987) and American (1988 presidential campaigns) to reveal the extent to which politicians control the media agenda (Semetko, Blumler, Gurevitch, Weaver, Barkin & Wilhoit, 1991).

Semetko *et al* state that an impending election is heralded by the onslaught of a fiercely competitive battle to control the mass media agenda not only from candidates and parties but also political campaign managements and newsroom managements. The study found that news stories were more often media initiated in the American than the British coverage, and American journalists engaged in a greater level of what Levy (1981) has called "disdaining the news". In both countries candidates and their organizations were able to initiate the majority of visuals seen by viewers. Many of the visuals were, of course, positive and the researchers said the implications of the power of the pictorial component of campaign coverage warrant more research. Soundbites were longer and there was more discussion of substantive issues in British than in United States coverage.

Another comparative study relevant to this research is Major's (1992) examination of the United States newspaper and newsmagazine coverage of the 1988 United States and French presidential election campaigns. Major's study examined whether journalists translate campaign issues into problematic situations (as defined in Chapter One) for readers. The results show support for the work of Alex Edelstein (1989) and other researchers that reporters did perform a role as analysers of social problems and "interpreted" the news, rather than simply described the news, in a majority of news stories. Detailed reference is made to the work of Major and Edelstein *et al* in Chapters 17-21 of this research.

#### 2.4.7 New Zealand writing

This section of the literature review is a broad brush examination of New Zealand writing about political communication. A wider approach is necessary because systematic searches of political science and media-related journals throughout the research period revealed very little material relating to the way in which journalists operate and the news is manufactured during election campaigns. More has been written about the impact and influence of the media in New Zealand electoral processes (Milne, 1958; Cleveland, 1980; Leitch, 1991; Rudd, 1992). The review discusses many of the major debates in New Zealand about political reporting and looks at who is involved in the dialogue.

Paradoxically, it is politicians rather than journalists or academics who dominate the debate about political journalism in New Zealand. Three reasons can be advanced for this. The first is that it reflects the traditionally high level of political intervention in broadcasting policy in New Zealand. Within the past decade the Government has lifted almost all state controls on broadcasting exposing a model based heavily on public service principles to the competitive chill of de-regulation. As a consequence New Zealand has one of the most de-regulated broadcasting environments of developed Western nations. This has led to a marked differentiation of political ideology between those who hanker after some form of re-regulation or "active political intervention" (Atkinson, 1994(a), p.67) and movement back to Reithian principles (Winter, 1994), and those attached to market liberalism who see ratings and revenue as the "purest form of regulation there is" (Slater, 1994, p.126). As a consequence of the swift and decisive de-regulation of broadcasting, politicians have had plenty to say even if it is generally within an ideological, and occasionally self-serving, context. The nature of the political intervention and the fact that politically inspired policy change has been such a constant feature of broadcasting in New Zealand has retarded discussion by broadcasters themselves. Certainly the British and American traditions of a free flow of debate between practitioners, their guardians and their audiences are not a feature of this country's broadcasting environment.

Politicians tend to dominate by default the debate about political communication in New Zealand, simply because the political voice is often the only one heard on the way the news covers political processes. Journalism education in New Zealand has been, for too long, focused on skills-based vocational training which has done little to motivate critical scrutiny or academic news media scholarship. While there is a slow metamorphosis from journalism training to journalism education, and broader media studies and communications courses are now established in New Zealand universities, there remains a relatively weak tradition of scholarship about the news media. There are few indigenous journals motivating theoretical, empirical and critical inquiry and only a handful of scholars devoted to the study of journalism. Few, if any, newspapers carry regular media-watching columns and at the time of writing there are no television

programmes and only one national radio programme devoted to scrutinising the performance of the press in this country. Magazines such as the *Listener*, *Metro* and *North and South*, and the financial newspaper, the *National Business Review*, have attempted to provide media commentary which varies in standard according to authorship. There have, too, been intermittent attempts to raise the standard and tempo of debate about news media performance, such as the establishment of the *New Zealand Journalism Review*, produced in the late 1980s from the Canterbury School of Journalism. Sadly, this publication was not sustained and was last published in 1992. It is hoped the *New Zealand Journal of Media Studies* which began in 1994 will help foster news media scholarship.

Debate about broadcast news in New Zealand in recent years has been dominated by an increasingly polarised and fractious debate between a tiny number of academics (Atkinson, 1994(b), Winter, 1994) and Television New Zealand executives about the changing nature of television news. In the absence of substantial empirical data to serve as a common foundation for argument this debate tended to obscure the issues and hardened ideological polarity as both sides "dug in". An initiative to re-invigorate debate about standards of broadcasting news was undertaken by the statutory watchdog, the Broadcasting Standards Authority, in 1994, with a seminar involving broadcasters, researchers and academics about the Codes of Broadcasting Practice. While the seminar and the publication of proceedings which followed were of a general nature, they led to research commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Authority and the programme funding agency, New Zealand on Air. The research canvassed balance and fairness in broadcasting news in the last decade (1985-1994) and a comprehensive study of political reportage was undertaken as part of the study (McGregor & Comrie, 1995). This results of this research will be referred to later in this section of the literature review.

The third reason for the absence of a rich vein of scholarship and the lack of critical self-scrutiny by the news media is related to the legacy of New Zealand's formidable contemporary politician, former Prime Minister Sir Robert Muldoon. While the suggestion will find little favour with journalists, a hallmark of the Muldoon years

(1975-1984) was a dispirited and quiescent news media. It is submitted that Sir Robert Muldoon directly and indirectly contributed to the low level of commentary about political journalism. In the British context Margaret Thatcher is acknowledged as the politician who elevated to a new level of sophistication adroit use of media management techniques through her "good and faithful" servant Bernard Ingham (Harris, 1994). In the New Zealand context, Robert Muldoon single-handedly developed his prodigious ability to manipulate and intimidate the news media. He recognised earlier than any of his contemporaries the pervasiveness of television and the power of the medium which could be exploited through turning directly to the camera against studio advice and delivering cryptic, pithy and often brutal "Muldoonisms", sound-bite encryptions aimed at the constituency which he affectionately labelled "Rob's mob". He utilised talkback radio to sidestep journalistic intervention electronically a decade before the rest of his political colleagues woke to the populist appeal of unmediated radio. He introduced a disconcerting form of media surveillance by systematically tape-recording all media interviews of himself so that he could swiftly complain to news managers and media owners of misquotation or difference of emphasis.

While in power and in opposition, he blacklisted both individual journalists (Tom Scott of the *Listener*, Richard Long of the *Dominion*) and specific newspapers under particular editors (*Sunday News*, 1984-6, Judy McGregor) for real or apparent sins of omission or commission to which he took objection. While out of power, he remarked that he was a great Leader of the Opposition because although he may not have always got it right, he always got it on the front page. Finally, Sir Robert used the strategy of litigation, very often against the news media themselves. He boasted, "during my political career I have been involved in 18 prospective or actual libel cases with an outcome of 14 wins, two losses and two draws" (Comrie & McGregor (1992) p.75). Only after his death, when the threat of defamation had evaporated, were the news media collectively courageous in appraisal of this powerful leader who dominated New Zealand's contemporary politics and controlled the relationship between the news media and politics. It is suggested that Muldoon's influence severely inhibited the news media's will to be self-scrutinising about their role in the dialogue of democracy and that the news media are only just reasserting their autonomy.

These three factors then, coupled with the absence of an ingrained constitutional role for the news media and the relatively "modern" history of news media in New Zealand, has resulted in limited commentary. And because much of the writing about politics and the news media in the New Zealand context is general this commentary will be referred to first before the literature review examines the small holding of available scholarship about specific election campaigns.

A recent collection of writings about the news media in New Zealand (Comrie & McGregor, 1992) contains four contributions about politics and the news media, three from leading politicians. Sir Robert's contribution is an irascible view of the parliamentary press gallery in which he praises the quality of journalism of female gallery reporters and dismisses the "old lags" with the following comments:

...we still have a very small number of male journalists who are, on the face of it, still doing exactly what they did a quarter of a century ago. I also have to say, in the kindest possible way, that their standards of journalism are no higher than they were 25 years ago, although their prejudices which are very apparent to an old-timer such as myself, are much more deeply embedded (p.77).

He defends his media surveillance by tape-recorder, criticises the pace of deliberation of the Press Council, and dismisses the sycophancy of politicians seeking to ingratiate themselves with the press gallery. Two of his comments reveal something of the Muldoon media philosophy. He states:

Communication between politician and constituent is an art which involves an understanding of the way the news media operate and the means by which the message can be made to reach the voter, *not just through but in spite of the deficiencies of the media* (my emphasis added) (p.78).

And to conclude he wrote:

I believe that a wise politician will keep the news media at arm's length rather than deal with them on a basis of intimacy. But as the day of the mass public meeting fades into history, it is a wise politician who knows the value of the news media if dealt with intelligently (p.80).

In the same collection, another former Prime Minister, the Rt Hon Mike Moore (1992), acknowledges the reporter-politician relationship as symbiotic. He states his belief that New Zealand has moved from a parliamentary democracy to a "telecratic" one with public attention focused on personalities rather than policies. The business perspective of the news media with an emphasis on entertainment is noted by Moore, who states, "these days it is often better politically to have performed successfully on the *Holmes* show than it is to deliver a good speech in Parliament" (p.82).

Within this collection it is the contribution of former media studies lecturer and Member of Parliament for Palmerston North, Steve Maharey, which yields greater insight into the relationship between politicians and journalists in New Zealand. Maharey (1992) believes the relationship is "dangerously close to collapse - partly because of changes in the nature of politics and partly because of changes in the nature of the news media" (p.91). Both will have to lift their performance, he believes. After a year in Parliament, Maharey said he had reached three conclusions about the politician-journalist interface. The first is that it is essential to make news releases if he is to appear effective as a politician because his presence in the news media is seen in his electorate as a barometer of how well he is doing. Political effectiveness, then, is indexed to news media visibility. The second observation made by Maharey is the difficulty of constant media attention because of the political competition for news media profile. Maharey states that, "to beat the competition, a politician must be prepared to produce his or her own news stories, tailored to fit the journalist's format, news values and work habits. News must be anticipated, planned for and, where possible, made" (p.93). It is Maharey's third conclusion, which echoes Mayer on leadership, which is his most profound. He

states that "media coverage adds nothing to the performance of a politician, yet it is vital to modern politics. The coverage does not ensure the politician develops better policy, nor does it make for better legislation" (p.94).

Ironically, it is a recent former Labour Prime Minister, Sir Geoffrey Palmer, who provides the most comprehensive diagnosis of contemporary political journalism. The irony is that Palmer appeared to be one of the least comfortable with journalists of modern New Zealand leaders. He bluntly indicates that, "I don't regard politics as a kind of show business. That is not a modern view. It is not a fashionable view. But it is my view" (McMillan, 1994). Palmer (1992) himself refers to cartoonist Tom Scott's graphic verdict on his media relations. Scott pictures in his cartoon Palmer walking through a parliamentary corridor against a backdrop of journalists hanging themselves in the press gallery. The speech bubble from the caricature of Palmer reads, "I'm going to check out these absurd rumours that the press gallery has become bored and depressed since I became Prime Minister".

Palmer's (1992) thesis is that New Zealand's constitution is in crisis and that the media's performance is part of the problem. "When I was in a position to know what was actually going on, it too often seemed to me that the media was an ever-bubbling spring of endless lies, misrepresentations and distortions. They were not usually lies in the sense of deliberate falsehoods, but falsehoods nonetheless" (p.200). The constitutional lawyer asks whether the media provide the information and the range of opinion which allow the free market in ideas to flourish - the media's constitutional role. Or, states Palmer (1992), "in terms of modern political theory, do they provide adequate linkages in the political system?" (p.202). He reaches the conclusion that serious criticisms can be made of the New Zealand media's treatment of government and politics. Palmer defines the constitutional role of the media as:

1. providing the public with information about the functioning of government, "the decisions it takes, the inputs to those decisions, the public debate surrounding them, and the consequences" (p.203),

2. reporting what is said and done in Parliament,"the work of select committees, scrutinising government legislation, policy and expenditure" (p.203),
3. providing the public with information on the activities of political parties, their caucuses, party organisations in policy making, and the selection of parliamentary candidates.

The former Prime Minister then goes on to list the areas of shortfall which are a synthesis of much contemporary complaint about the news media. He is critical of the merging of fact and opinion in both television news and political journalism, and the "increasing television dominance for the political system in New Zealand" (p.205). He criticises the increased commercial rationale of electronic media facing technological and policy change with de-regulation of broadcasting. New pressures have increased the commodification of the news with its emphasis on entertainment and image rather than information and substance.

Palmer (1992) details examples when he was in power of the news media publishing factually inaccurate accounts and of their reluctance to recant when in error. Turning his attention to the parliamentary press gallery he describes the range of reporting activities undertaken by gallery journalists as "impossibly broad" (p.215) but laments the absence of specialisation. He states that it is in analysis of the political system that "New Zealand political journalism is at its weakest" (p.215). Palmer says, "there is little quality analysis. The people in the gallery lack the intellectual capacity, the experience, the time and the incentives to write it. Their employers do not ask for analysis.." (p.215). He notes the "pack hunt" tendency of gallery journalists and strong socialisation of journalists entitled to drink at Bellamys within Parliament with, or without, Members of Parliament as drinking companions. He notes too the strong organizational and professional norms of gallery journalists who turn to each other for acceptance and self-esteem about their work. Palmer states that by and large gallery journalists ignore the legislative process as a source of copy and fail to note the importance of select committee work.

Both Palmer (1992) and Maharey (1992) point to similar necessary reforms to improve political journalism. Both acknowledge the lack of investment by media proprietors in the creativity of journalism (as opposed to newsroom technology) and the constraints placed on reportorial resources following bouts of redundancy and restructure of the New Zealand news media industries. Both want an urgent improvement in the standard of education for journalists, and in career structures to attract and retain qualified and discriminating intellects.

Palmer (1992), too, wants "an appropriate system of public broadcasting" which he states is "necessary for the health of the political system" (p.226). To his credit he notes the irony of pushing for public broadcasting in light of his involvement as a senior Government minister in a government which decisively de-regulated broadcasting in New Zealand. His third suggestion for reform of political journalism is aimed at the Government which he believes needs to loosen its stranglehold on the provision of information to the public. "It has an obligation to provide information about its many activities in a systematic, readily accessible form free from political stunt. The Official Information Act and the access it provides is not enough" (p.226). Palmer urges a proactive information policy by the Government. He concludes that "no doubt a better media does not guarantee a better political system but it would surely help" (p.227).

The analysis is an important one because it moves beyond self-serving criticism of the news media by a political figure. It provides a constitutional context for the news media and offers an incisive dissection of the foibles and deficiencies of parliamentary gallery journalism. But while Palmer (1992) attempts to provide future directions for the role of political journalism, he overlooks a fundamental issue. It is questionable whether the news media in New Zealand, as currently constituted, are capable of performing the constitutional role he ascribes to them. Take the print media. Current news media structures are characterised by concentration of press ownership and increasing overseas shareholding of our newspapers. This aggregation is a non-policy area and successive governments have whittled away at legislative protection which regulates monopolistic

trends and "public interest" factors (McGregor, 1992). Two afternoon metropolitan newspapers have closed, one Sunday newspaper has merged within the past decade, and newspaper circulations generally are soft.

The de-regulation of broadcasting in New Zealand has been swift, decisive and there appears to be little discernible public or political mandate for re-regulation. Early in 1995 Television New Zealand introduced changes to their main nightly news programme and anecdotal and impressionistic evidence only, (Edwards, Public Radio, Saturday morning show, February 25, 1995) suggests there have been improvements in such things as the length of sound bites. But more research is needed to see if the nature of the news has substantially altered. Also, it is too early to tell whether regional television will deliver on the promise of quality local news. While this de-regulation has spawned an "extraordinary growth" in the number of radio stations in New Zealand which has doubled to 140 in the past five years, the growth has been characterised by syndication (Lealand, 1994). Lealand also states, "the increased automation of commercial radio outlet also poses a threat to conventional news gathering and transmission" (p.13). The remaining public radio structures are like a precarious island: substantially under-resourced and lapped by the tide of the prevailing orthodoxy of market liberalism. All of this occurs without adequate constitutional protection. Even the guardian of press performance in terms of standards, the *New Zealand Press Council*, has been criticised as a "toothless tiger" (McGregor, 1990). The other guardian, the *Broadcasting Standards Authority*, established by statute, must allow broadcasters the initiative in setting their own standards, while, to its credit, it is more robust in its adjudication of alleged breaches of standards. Against the prevailing mediascape then, Palmer's (1992) proposed reforms are welcome suggestions but they may not be fundamental enough to radically improve political journalism in New Zealand.

Another New Zealand politician who has seriously explored the way politicians and journalists talk about the issues is the Minister of Science, Simon Upton, whose 1993 speech to the National Press Club in Wellington perhaps predictably did not receive the

exposure it deserved. Upton (1993) describes the speech as the most important he will give in the current parliamentary term and perhaps the most important of his 12 years in the House. He talks of the dislocation of public debate primarily caused by the radical course of events worldwide in recent years. The period between 1945-1989 provided certainties of debate between left and right with the appeals being moral and not technical. But suddenly one ideological pole, socialism, was revealed as a failure, and there "can be no doubt that public debate and discourse has yet to find new ideological foundations" (p.2).

Because of the collapse of the old left/right ideological debate politicians have had to resort to technical issues to sell policy whereas it is value issues that drive people. "Most people aren't interested in technical details. They want the ethical debate. And that is where most interest groups and the media have seriously let them down" (p.4). Nor do these technical details fit news media formats, Upton (1993) suggests. He accuses television of presenting news coverage to its audience in a way that makes a non-rational appeal. "It is the simple, emotional hooks of story telling rather than the crisp narration of facts interspersed with analysis that used to govern news-reading" (p.5). Upton states the conflict between market liberalism and State-sponsored socialism which could be located at the heart of most political debate allowed strong bi-polar dialectic story model focus. Now a new type of conflict has supplanted the old- conflict at the personal level or "victim" television which portrays issues in a way in which debate is sharpened so a premium is attached to insults and allegations which fit the soundbites. The impact of ratings and commercialism on the news impacts on the nature of news covered, Upton states. Being all things to all people is important for a "complicitous, calculatedly intuitive strategy. The results is an extraordinary preoccupation with the strange and outlandish" (p.6). He says:

Whether it's little girls trapped in the bottom of wells in Texas or pandas copulating in foreign zoos, we're all enthralled by this revolving gallery of freaks, mutants and fairy godmothers that rank with the GATT talks, superannuation summit meetings and the war in Bosnia (p.6).

Upton (1993) notes that television news mimics television soaps, the transformation of news hosts into larger than life celebrities and of journalists into in-house experts. And he asks, "what has been the response of politicians?" (p.8). Upton states that "fairly predictably, politicians have had to resort to much the same techniques that are used (and often used against them) by the media. They have perceived a need to clothe their messages in emotional terms to highlight human interest and the potential for conflict" (p.8). The minister analyses political press statements and says they are filled with language which makes strong, simple claims and are stripped of anything cerebral. Anything self-critical or self-doubting or any attempt to provide the strength and weaknesses of a political argument is omitted. Upton plots the rise of the television celebrity politician equally at home on current affairs or quiz games such as former Prime Minister, David Lange, and analyses the rise of populist politicians like New Zealand First leader, Winston Peters, and their exploitation of the news media. He talks of his dislike for "soft core political propaganda as it has been practised for years" and notes that "both politics and journalism are increasingly corrosive of the people involved" (p.10).

Both the media and politicians seek to "package themselves in presentationally impregnable terms. A tactical battle grinds on as each seeks to take advantage of each other", says Upton (1993) (p.11). Politicians try to break into the news, journalists try techniques like ambush interviews or surprise revelations to throw politicians off balance. Politicians exploit news deadlines and manipulate the news media with honed press releases delivered with immaculate timing. Journalists respond by failing to check so non-stories become two stories - one attack story followed inevitably by a counter attack account. All of this is "a far cry from the communication of information and the prosecution of public policy debate that many of us earnestly want to see returned to our screens and newspapers (where the tradition still lives on in an attenuated way)" (p.11). Upton says he sees no point in blaming either politicians or members of the media because of the interdependent nature of their existence. "All we know is that a symbiotic relationship has been poisoned and with it the public's trust" (p.15).

The minister warns it would be a grim irony if the "intolerance and emotionalism" generated by current news media techniques "engendered a mood which turned not just on politicians and the institutions of representative democracy but on the organs of a free press as well" (p.16). Considering the quality of his diagnosis of media-politician sickness, it is perhaps a surprise that Upton (1993) stops short of prescribing any sort of remedy. Instead he expresses a somewhat sentimental optimism in the discernment and powers of discrimination of the electorate at large in relation to public discourse about politics.

A small number only of New Zealand journalists refer in passing to contemporary political journalism in writings about the New Zealand political system. McMillan (1993), a news agency journalist, in his book *Top of the greasy pole* about recent New Zealand Prime Ministers, reports the critical opinions of six Prime Ministers about the fourth estate and states that the "media should be concerned that a succession of Prime Ministers should perceive shortcomings" (p.103). McMillan notes the "burgeoning work pressures" which confront press gallery journalists, and the dramatic changes since the 1960s in the reporting of Parliament, with daily news conferences, the rapid deployment of media staff by politicians, more intense competition for news space and the dozens of ministerial and Opposition press statements issued every day. McMillan states "perhaps the most significant feature in today's relationship between journalists and politicians is diminished respect for each other" (p.109). And political journalist and commentator Colin James (1993) mentions the influence of "spin doctors" in National's co-ordinated publicity team which used ministerial press secretaries. He states that former *Dominion-Sunday Times* journalist, Tim Grafton, "in particular seems to have made the transition from journalist to proselyte with considerable competence" (p.201).

A more comprehensive discussion of the current state of political journalism by a journalist comes from former *Dominion* columnist, Alastair Morrison, now chief reporter of the *Evening Post*. Morrison contends that the introduction of proportional representation in New Zealand would "catch journalists with their pants down" (p.2). Morrison states the present, two-party, first past the post system contributes to a simple

view of the journalistic process because the simple conflict model of politics feeds the simple conflict model of journalism. "Balance, fairness and impartiality are simply discharged by balancing one side against another" (p.5). Third parties disturbing the status quo are largely ignored by the news media, dismissively treated or covered by reference to the personalities involved (Bruce Beetham of Social Credit, Bob Jones of the New Zealand Party and Winston Peters of New Zealand First).

Morrison (1993) then discusses the impact of proportional representation on political journalism which he believes will need to radically reform to meet the challenge. Morrison's views on the challenge of proportional representation are discussed in the concluding chapter of this research, Chapter 22. The senior journalist states that a different electoral system in New Zealand will require a "much higher standard of political journalism" overall (p.15). He disagrees with Palmer's (1992) belief that journalism tends not to attract the best minds and says his involvement with selection for journalism training indicates the standard is extremely high and competition fierce. "Many are travelled, widely experienced, well qualified and intelligent. I look around the industry and wonder where the hell they have gone" (p.15).

He sees the wider journalistic environment as the main impediment to the development of quality political journalism. He states:

Bright people do not shine through in journalism. Not in their basic craft. The standards demanded do not allow it. The political process and the method of reporting it does not allow it. The way most newsrooms are managed, with strict vertical lines of control, does not allow it. There is good newspaper journalism around, but it is against the odds and the exception rather than the rule. That means that if the brains are there, they are not well-honed....Currently, journalism does not encourage the development of such practitioners on any scale near that needed for it to act as an effective fourth estate (p.15).

Morrison (1993) believes that until there is a vigorous debate about what it is journalists are really doing there can be no sensible discussion about what they ought to be doing. In the absence of debate within the industry, accountability will have to come from the public. The news media, states Morrison, is in need of an independent, consumer watchdog to force accountability. He rejects state intervention, or establishment of a quasi-government agency and states the watchdog must be consumer-led to set standards and hold the news media accountable to them. "An organisation with status and credibility in the community that dished out bouquets and brickbats would not be easily ignored" (p.17). Morrison says its functions would extend beyond regular critiques of the media's performance and might include:

1. raising and discussing ethical and industry issues,
2. monitoring and researching the impacts of news media ownership and cross-ownership in New Zealand,
3. lobbying on government issues related to the news media,
4. supporting the retention of a strong, non-commercial public broadcasting network with news and current affairs coverage.

Morrison states he does not know where the commitment, resources and expertise to create the watchdog will come from but he is certain such an organization is needed. Given the lack of a tradition of media consumerism in New Zealand, Morrison's suggestion of a watchdog is unlikely to be activated, despite its potential value to improve journalistic performance.

Recent academic commentary includes the benchmark broadcasting study, looking at a decade of news (1985-1994) across prime time radio and television programmes in New Zealand (McGregor & Comrie, 1995). Political news stories were one of four subject areas examined in the content analysis with a particular focus on political sources used

in news. The analysis of source speaking time allowed for comparison of Government and Opposition voices as sources in the news and the concept of political incumbency as a factor in news balance were explored. The sample period covered periods when both Labour and National parties were the Government and in Opposition. For the purpose of the comparison third party sources were excluded from the data. Over all the broadcast media analysed, twice as many Government sources as Opposition sources spoke on air. Government sources spent almost twice as much time talking on air as did Opposition sources, and the average speaking time for Government sources (cumulative within a news story) was longer at 98.1 seconds than for Opposition sources as 87.2 seconds.

The strong bias towards incumbency in New Zealand broadcast news held true for almost all programmes surveyed. For New Zealand's main television news programme, TV One News, the disparity between Government voices and Opposition voices in political news appears to be increasing. The study states, "the question of political bias in broadcast news is complex and multi-faceted and this aspect of the study has measured only the quantitative variable of source speaking time by Government and Opposition voices" (McGregor & Comrie, p.46). The issue is whether the bias towards the Government "results primarily by virtue of incumbency and is therefore predictable and acceptable or whether there are other systematic news selection processes which disadvantage the Opposition" (p.46). The research also revealed distinct change in the proportion of news by subject matter across the years studied. The amount of political news across two competitive television channels appears to be on the wane with proportionally less political news screened, while crime stories increased proportionately to other subject areas studied.

Both findings have implications for political discourse. The bias towards Government suggests a reduction in the level of debate in the news and reliance on the "news as announcement". And the increasing reliance on entertainment formats for television news suggests crime news may better fit the standardised recipe than political news. This poses the question of whether the "logic" of broadcasting news will see politicians further adapting their presentations to allow entertainment formats to prevail.

There are few published studies of the news media's coverage of recent New Zealand elections and some of the available commentaries are largely impressionistic. For example, political scientist Raymond Miller (1994) provides a benign view of media coverage of the 1993 general election. He states that, "despite its sullied reputation, the media generally performed its task well in 1993, and under difficult circumstances" (p.29). To support his contention, Miller cites the reaction of "influential sections of the media" who looked upon Prime Minister Jim Bolger's Heartland tour and Opposition leader Mike Moore's campaign roadshow with "condemnation bordering on contempt" (p.30). Miller states that "apart from being staggeringly dull, a point made by news sources time and again, they were seen as a frivolous use of taxpayers' time and money" (p.30). He uses a small number of reports from the *Dominion* and the *New Zealand Herald* to support his opinion.

Miller (1994) refers to the news media's willingness to report low public turnouts of the major parties and higher audiences for third parties and the electronic media's attempts to "re-engage the public by including them in media-sponsored campaign events" (p.30) with studio audiences, as positive signs of an improved news media performance. Also the news media's decisions to run with politically unpopular stories such as poverty amongst New Zealand children, stories of unfairness and indifference to sick and poor individuals by key government departments, and internal Labour Party wrangling are cited as evidence of "some independence and maturity on the part of news organisations concerned" (p.31).

While Miller (1994) does not suggest the media's election campaign performance is faultless, criticising television news' "inclination for the dramatic" and extravagant language by some print media outlets, those "proved to be the exception rather than the rule in 1993" (p.31). He states that perhaps the most important change in the media's coverage compared with previous elections was the seriousness with which it treated third parties. Miller states, "indeed it can be argued that, in terms of media coverage, the 1993 election was the first genuinely multi-party campaign of the modern era"

(p.31). Despite New Zealand First's leader Winston Peters' assertion that there was a media conspiracy against his party, most news sources "gave extensive and generally sympathetic coverage of the third parties" (p.31).

A number of serious objections can be applied to Miller's (1994) thesis. First, while the news media made disdainful remarks about the campaign roadshows, analysis of news media coverage undertaken in this research shows the news media disdains the roadshow as a distancing technique to show they disapprove of the pseudo nature of the campaign, but at the same time they provide systematic coverage of the roadshow, participate in its theatre and choreograph its dramaturgy. The role of the new media in coverage of the 1993 campaign roadshow was far more complex and ambiguous than Miller suggests. The news media variously disdain, reflect, create, participate and promote elements of the campaign in separate news accounts and very often contrive to do all of these within the one news account.

Second, the news media's attraction for the inherently negative means concentration on divisions within major political parties or shortfalls in Government departmental performance are regular ingredients in the recipe of political journalism and are not necessarily unique to the 1993 general election. They reflect, too, the traditional accountability function of the news media, holding politicians and public officials to account.

It is perhaps Miller's (1994) optimistic elevation of news media performance as a result of third party coverage in 1993 which puts him most at odds with other commentary. For, as in other years when third parties disturbed the two-party status quo in New Zealand politics, the news media in 1993 did *not* focus necessarily on the policies or substance of alternative visions, but rather on the personalities and rhetoric by which they were represented. As Morrison (1993) notes, "it is very hard to find anything that seriously analyses the policies or political significance of third parties in any sustained way. The coverage is invariably personality based" (p.5). A feature of news media

representation of alternative parties in recent New Zealand political history is that the charisma of the leader (Bruce Beetham, Social Credit; Bob Jones, New Zealand Party; Winston Peters, New Zealand First; and Jim Anderton, Alliance) has been the defining characteristic of the quality and quantity of news treatment. The coverage is proportionately indexed to the charisma and populist appeal (often disguised in rhetoric about leadership qualities), rather than to a new-found political maturity assumed by the news media about representations of third party politics. Unfortunately, this study indicates 1993 was no different. Miller has also been taken to task by Cutler (1994) for suggesting "traditional" styles of election campaigning are more honest and meaningful than modern media styles, a point taken up in Chapter 22 when discussing possible reforms of political journalism.

The research which follows examines many of the contemporary themes and issues referred to in overseas scholarship and local commentary. It takes up Morrison's call to study what it *is* New Zealand journalists do to make the news in an election campaign context, so that informed debate can follow about what it is the news media ought to be doing.

## 2.5 The democracy debate

British researchers are concerned at a conceptual level about the role of the news media in democracy. Keane (1991) presents an influential and original contribution to the discussion as he revises a new order of the public service model of the media and profoundly debunks the market liberal case for press and broadcasting freedom.

Keane (1991) concludes that:

In democratic societies, the scope and meaning of 'liberty of the press' and the process of representation will always be contentious, whereas a society that is drugged on either money or political authority, and which contains no controversies over freedom of expression and representation, is a society that is surely dying, or dead (p.191-2).

Golding (1990) advances the concept of citizenship, or full membership of the community, as an antidote to the socio-economic barriers to political communications. He explores barriers such as class, economic differentiation in the ownership of communications hardware, and the major growth of information management by the state. This concept is referred to in more detail in Chapter 16 and again in Chapter 22. More recently, in response to the perceived crisis of confidence about political journalism in the United States, writers such as Rosen (1992) are preaching the gospel of what is called public journalism (Shepard, 1994) and which fits what McQuail (1987) calls "democratic-participant media theory" which "has to do with the right to relevant information, the right to answer back, the right to use the means of communication for interaction in small-scale settings of community, interest group, sub-culture" (p.122)

Normative theories of the news media, what it **should** be doing, are examined in the research by reference to McQuail (1987, 1991) and by reference to Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) who have identified eight normative standards for the media in democratic societies. These are discussed in Chapter 15 which explores attempts by politicians to side-step the traditional function of journalists to hold public officials accountable. In the final chapter, Chapter 22, the performance of the news media and potential reforms are discussed in the context of political journalism as the "dialogue of democracy" (Taylor, 1992).

## **2.6 Literature review conclusion**

All of the scholarship referred to in this literature review has informed the research project on the making of news in a specific election context. While the notion of searching for a unifying theoretical consensus is not justified, appropriate concepts from identified theoretical frameworks and points derived from news research are incorporated and integrated into this study. The manufacture of news is examined from three perspectives which can be called the "doing" perspective of action research, the "watching" perspective of participant observation and the "measuring" perspective of

content analysis. The action research project is outlined and discussed in Chapter Three to Chapter Nine. Chapters 10 - 16 outline the participant observation research and Chapters 17 - 21 cover the content analysis methodology. Two of the methodologies, action research and participant observation, are "insider" methodologies. Content analysis is an "outsider" methodology. The use of three methodologies provides breadth and depth to the analysis and an opportunity for "disciplinary cohesion" (O'Keefe, 1993).

The first section of the research which begins in the next chapter employs action research methodology involving the researcher with a candidate and an electorate organisation in the Wellington seat of Miramar. The action research section explores whether an individual election candidate can systematically influence news manufacture. The following chapter, Chapter Three begins with introductory comments about the "inside" nature of action research, discusses how "scientific" the methodology is, and refers to the diversity of action research. A rationale for the use of the particular methodology is advanced, as is the definition of action research adhered to in this study.

## CHAPTER THREE: ACTION RESEARCH: THE DEBATE

### 3.1 Introduction: the "insider"/"outsider" debate

Two methodologies utilised in this research, action research and participant observation, are examples of "insider" research. This chapter looks at the historical division between "insider" and "outsider" research, canvasses the debate and contemporary scholarship surrounding action research, its "scientific" nature, and its diversity of use. The rationale for choosing to use the methodology and a definition of action research complete the chapter.

The "insider"/"outsider" dichotomy posed by these methodologies is part of a larger epistemological debate. For example, Aguilar (1981) discusses the ethnography of the debate about the insider researcher in the context of social anthropology and talks of the long standing debate engaged in by some social scientists over the issue of "insider" research, the study of one's own society. He acknowledges that critics of "insider" research have characterised such knowledge as mere subjective involvement, a deterrent to objective perception and analysis. But he says the debate has occurred against a background of polemics concerning epistemological, practical and normative issues.

For example, some advocates of insider research argue that because outsiders lack member knowledge--existential participation in a society's covert culture of implicit rules and ineffable sentiments and orientations--their research results are necessarily superficial (p.15).

The principal objection to research which involves any element of being "within", such as action research, is that it can be characterised as inherently biased. It can be further argued that because the main research goal of researchers is the promotion of a particular group interest or activity, rather than an impartial search for truth, these researchers act not as scientists but as advocates (Bennett & Oliver, 1988). Instead of a rigorous commitment to the technical norms of social science, these researchers start from a position of "being there" and immersion rather than detachment or neutrality (Evered & Louis, 1981).

But a number of arguments can be presented to support the role of the insider. Aguilar (1981) states that:

Bias is the human condition, a danger for both insider and outsider researchers. Whereas the insider might labor under a biasing chauvinism, all outsiders, by virtue of their primary socialization in one society, must make efforts to overcome ethnocentric bias (p.22).

Elsewhere he states, "it must be agreed that the problem of bias is general in scope: A lack of unfailing commitment to objectivity is not a quality exclusive to insider researchers in general" (p.23). And Aguilar makes the important point that the argument about "insider"/"outsider" research has rested on assumptions that researchers are either absolutely inside or outside, whereas no researcher participates in all segments or at all levels or shares all ideas, beliefs and opinions and cultural assumptions.

The attractions of action research have been described by Beynon (1988) as both strategic and emotional. Problems of access and acceptance are minimised because of the emphasis on the instrumental value of the research to the organization. Such approaches had been widely used in relation to community groups (Freire, 1972) and, more recently, local authorities and non-governmental development organizations (Brown, 1993). In Scandinavia action research has been employed in rural economic development in Norway (Levin, 1993) and in network development associated with implementing national work reform strategy (Engelstad & Gustavsen, 1993).

In describing his use of action research inside industrial organizations, Beynon (1988) acknowledges the approach was not without its problems. Identification with "one side" in an industrial context eased problems of ambiguity in conflict situations, but it raised other problems. One of the most fundamental "has to do with the nature of social scientific research, and the kinds of knowledge it produces" (p.30).

Supporters of action research have tended to assume that 'knowledge' is not value-free but strongly linked to values and interests and that a strong correspondence (even an identity) will exist between the projects of the group and

the researchers themselves. There are problems with this notion, however. A strong commitment to the 'value-saturated' view of truth can easily work against the very processes which are vital to 'scientific research' into social organization (p.30).

Evered and Louis (1981) state a different set of epistemological assumptions attach to "insider" inquiry from those of inquiry from the outside.

Fundamental to it is the belief that knowledge comes from human *experience*, which is inherently continuous and *nonlogical*, and which may be *symbolically representable*....The danger here is normally considered to be that the findings could be distorted and contaminated by the values and purposes of the researcher.... This bias has been referred to by Russell (1945) as the "fallacy of subjectivism" (p.389).

The question of perspective is addressed by Anderson (1987) who calls for those evaluating research to "honor the perspective of the social construction" of that research (p.354). Qualitative research methodologies should not be evaluated without acknowledging the nature of the methodology involved. Writing of evaluative principles in relation to participant observation Anderson states:

If an author happens to comment that the social act of signing one's name requires a pen, she should be able to expect that the reader will not jump to material determinism arguing that, of course, people can sign their name in pencil....On his side, the reader will rightfully expect that the author has entered into a genuine exploration of the member-held meanings which constitute the practiced selection of writing implement in the social action of signature. The claim, therefore will not be simply the reflection of the analyst's a priori beliefs but the product of a systematic effort in coming to know another (p.354).

This "incommensurability of perspectives" referred to by Anderson (1987) is relevant to discussion of action research (p.355). Criticism of action research must be relevant to its character which essentially consists of the following aspects; a goal, and an action or procedure for achieving the goal, coupled with the researcher's involvement in the action process. Anderson's statement of evaluative principles relating to participant

observation is equally as valid for action research. He states, "to criticize this effort for its lack of objectivity, random sampling, statistical measures of reliability, deductive logic, and the like is inane. Such criticism simply establishes the ignorance of the critics" (p.355).

Examining the alternative perspectives, Evered and Louis (1981) state "inquiry from the inside and inquiry from the outside can both serve research purposes, but in different ways and with different effects" (p.387). In "insider" research "knowledge is validated experientially" (p.389), and the researcher's role is that of an actor immersed in a real situation. In addition the analytical categories emerge through an interpretive, iterative process rather than being imposed by pre-selection. The aim of the inquiry is not to generalize from the particular to universally applicable theory but is directed towards the situationally relevant or historically unique situation. The type of knowledge acquired is particular as opposed to universal.

### 3.2. How "scientific" is action research?

The question of the scientific rigour of action research has prompted a variety of opposing perspectives from critics and advocates. Neilsen (1984) who provides a model for action research analysis states, "while the action research approach is problem oriented, it is by no means devoid of theory" (p.114). Lewin (1946) states that action research by no means implies that the research needed is in any respect less scientific or "lower" than what would be required for pure science in the field of social events.

Bennett and Oliver (1988), on the other hand, suggest the objectivity of scientific research is diluted within action research. They make a distinction between conventional research which is "arms-length research" and action research which is "arm-in-arm research." They state that in action research:

The roles of researcher and practitioner are blended. This dilutes the ideal rigour and objectivity of scientific research but gives a real advantage in gaining powerful insights into real situations, in bringing about change and in helping to solve "here and now" problems faced by practitioners (p.3).

French and Bell (1978) discuss the elements of the action research model that link it to the scientific method of inquiry. They state that both scientific method and action research methods rest on John Dewey's (1933) five phases of reflective thinking: suggestion, intellectualization, hypothesizing, reasoning and testing the hypothesis by action.

This approach to problem solving is translated into the scientific method steps as follows. First the scientist is confronted with a *problem, obstacle, or new idea* that he or she wants to understand (Dewey's suggestion phase). The scientist identifies the problem, intellectualizes about it (what we usually call "thinking"), and arrives at the point where a *hypothesis* about the problem can be formulated. (A *hypothesis* is a conjectural statement positing the relations between two or more phenomena, usually referred to as a "cause" and an "effect.") The next step, a critical one, consists of the scientist *reasoning or deducing the consequences of the hypothesis*. The final step consists of *observing, testing or experimenting* to see if the relation between the two phenomena expressed in the hypothesis is verified or disconfirmed (p.92).

These steps for the scientific method are *identical* with the steps outlined in this research as the essential ingredients of action research. The additional features incorporated by action research include its collaborative nature, and the notion of feedback from the group or organization being studied. In addition, as Rapoport (1970) notes, action research is a type of applied social research differing from other varieties in the immediacy of the researcher's involvement in the action process.

Whyte (1988) describes as a conventional wisdom the notion that no other research strategy can match the standard model for rigour. Whether or not this is true depends on the definition of rigour. He then promotes the scientific rigour of participatory action research as an advantage not fully realised in standard models of academic research.

In the standard model, the subjects of our studies have little or no opportunity to check facts or to offer alternative explanations. If we feed back our research reports and publications to members of the organization we studied, they often argue that we have made serious errors both in our facts and in interpretations. If the

standard social science researcher hears such criticisms, he or she can shrug them off, telling colleagues that the subjects are just being defensive--defensiveness apparently being a characteristic of the subjects but not of social scientists themselves (p.32).

Participatory action research forces researchers to go through a rigorous process of having the facts checked by those with first-hand knowledge of those facts, before any reports are written.

Six characteristics of action research are advanced by Susman and Evered (1978) which provide a "corrective to the deficiencies of positivist science" (p.529). First, they list action research as future-oriented which recognises human beings as purposeful systems whose actions are guided by goals, objectives and ideals. Second, they reinforce the collaborative nature of action research. They also note that action research is related to systems development. They state it:

encourages the development of the capacity of a system to facilitate, maintain and regulate the cyclical process of diagnosing, action planning, action taking, evaluating, and specifying learning...The aim in action research is to build appropriate structures, to build the necessary system and competencies, and to modify the relationship of the system to its relevant environment (p.529).

Fourth, Susman and Evered (1978) counter criticism of the absence of theoretical underpinning and state that in action research, theory provides a guide for diagnosis as well as for generating options. In addition, action research contributes to the development of theory by taking actions guided by theory and evaluating their consequences. Fifth, action research is agnostic and the objectives and methods must be generated from the process itself because the consequences of selected actions cannot be known ahead of time. Finally, the researchers reinforce the situational nature of action research and state the appropriate action is based not on knowledge of the replications of previously observed relationships between action and outcomes. Instead, in collaborative or participatory action research, it is based on achieving a consensus about a situation so that planned actions will produce the intended outcomes.

Weisbord (1987) implies the question is not so much one of how "scientific" the methodology is. He states:

So action research became the opposite of scientific research, on which protocol it originally was based. Instead of standing outside the experiment, watching what happens and writing up your findings, you become a learner in a situation you helped devise. You develop a stake. You assume responsibility. A hypothesis (unproved theory) is not a neutral statement of possibility: it is a statement for or against a preferred discovery (p.190).

Rapoport (1970) who discusses three dilemmas in relation to action research, talks of "goal dilemmas" which arise from the two task masters of action research; the scientific or academic community and the client system or organisation group in which the action research is located. He states:

There are advantages and disadvantages from a purely scientific point of view of getting oneself involved in a helping role within the very system one is studying: on the one hand one sacrifices a degree of detachment and independence (perhaps impossible because of the situation anyway) but on the other, one may gain a sense of sympathy and identification which may produce more valid information than what might have been gathered from a more detached vantage point (p.506).

He discusses the problems of action research projects which are purely service oriented and which have little social science value other than the accumulation of information useful only within the context of the immediate, problem-solving context.

From the literature about the "scientific" basis of the research it becomes clear that supporters see action research as a legitimate research methodology. Its philosophical foundation, however, is different from that used to ground positivist science. And there are unresolved epistemological issues. Reason (1993) criticises journal contributors to a special edition on action research who he says "do not address fundamental questions concerning the nature of science and of research" (p.1256). He states that features of action research, such as participation, are at odds with the orthodox scientific

worldview which, in direct contrast, is concerned with objectivity, reductionism, and empiricism. There is a break with the traditional scientific model, an inevitable move toward a "new paradigm" of inquiry" (p.1267). Further he states:

If researchers are going to be "scientific", to do "research" within a participative, systemic, and emergent worldview it behoves them to say what they mean by science and by research. If these questions about the nature of knowledge are not addressed we are left with methodologies which break traditional canons of scientific methodology but which nevertheless appeal to "science" for their justification, which simply does not make sense. There are no criteria against which to assess the research endeavours. Science then becomes an unreflective dogma and the spirit of critical inquiry may be lost (p.1257).

Reason (1993) says he is committed to breaking with the orthodox scientific worldview and suggests action research can be "one of the primary arenas in which a new epistemology can be forged" (p.1258) but is less specific about the features of this new epistemology. He talks of "an important shift" from "reliance on *method* as the basis of knowing to reliance on the *human person* and the *human community*" (p.1259).

The traditional scientific approach aimed to ensure validity by ruling out the influence of the researcher through experimental or other positivist method; a self-reflexive methodology in contrast *embraces and aims to enhance* the human capacity for critical understanding. This means we need to develop an epistemology based on personal and communal self-reflection, and in the end on a more integrated form of consciousness (p.1259).

In the debate which has followed the special issue of *Human Relations* on action research, Ledford and Mohrman (1993) state they are uncertain whether they agree with Reason's alternative philosophy of science, without more detail, but they support his call for further scholarship on the issue. The debate has been further revived by Aguinis (1993) who argues that action research has more in common with traditional scientific methods than many of the proponents of action research realise and that they are not necessarily different and incompatible forms of inquiry. Aguinis's primary bases of comparison address the nature of causality, the implementation of field and laboratory experiments, and the use of qualitative data. He concludes that "action

research may be conceptualised as an application of the scientific method to a specific setting - organizations - and to a specific purpose - organizational change" (p.426). Aguinis's article led Alderfer (1993) to ask, "why both sides of the action research versus basic research split have been so invested in seeing their preferred modes of inquiry as incompatible with the other" (p.390).

### 3.3 Diversity of action research

The sheer diversity of action research contributes to the on-going debate about its nature. Reason (1993) states:

Action research is evidently a huge field, with applications in all the social sciences. Within that field are enormously diverse practices, from those based on orthodox models of experimental research, to those which would aim to radically revise our notions of science and inquiry. At every point these practices raise questions about epistemology, methodology, ideology, the nature of participation, building networks, different levels of system, validity, the personal and political skills required of action researchers, and on and on (p.1255).

The heterogeneous nature of action research is evident from Chein, Cook and Harding's (1948) enumeration of four varieties of action research. These are diagnostic, participant, empirical and experimental. This research is grounded in participant action research which French and Bell (1978) define as research:

in which the people who are to take action are involved in the entire research action process from the beginning. This involvement both facilitates a carrying out of the actions once decided upon and keeps the recommended actions feasible and workable (p.96).

But elements of diagnostic action research where the researcher "enters a problem situation, diagnoses it, and makes recommendations" which are "intuitively derived not pretested" and derived from the researcher's experience or knowledge, were also present in the research programme (p.95). And the research did involve elements of empirical action research in the sense the researcher kept "systematic extensive records" of action and its effects (p.95).

The opportunity for learning from participatory or participant action research is emphasized by Whyte (1988) who says participatory action research (PAR) is a strategy designed to maximise the opportunities for practitioners and academics to learn from each other, as they learn from the research process itself.

Clearly participatory action research can incorporate some of the features of the diagnostic model of action research in that the researcher may enter a problem situation and be involved in the diagnosis of it, but these processes are conducted in a collaborative or participatory context. The concept of participation in relation to action research refers to two related aspects. It refers to the process of those involved mutually influencing one another in reaching decisions, and it also refers to the problem, situation, issue or piece of action about which they influence one another.

Greenwood, Whyte and Harkavy (1993) warn against imposing the label participatory action research on a project in advance. They state:

No one may mandate in advance that a particular research process will become a fully developed participatory action research project. Participation is a process that must be generated. It begins with participatory intent and continues by building participatory processes into the activity within the limits set by the participants and the conditions. To view participation as something that can be imposed is both naive and morally suspect (p.176).

Greenwood *et al* (1993) treat participatory action research as an emergent process and talk of a continuum ranging from "expert research" to participatory action research. "In the "expert research" model, all authority and execution of research is controlled by the expert researcher. In participatory action research, authority over and execution of the research is a highly collaborative process between expert researchers and members of the organization under study" (p.176).

Brown (1989), in an autobiographical account of his research action, credits Paolo Freire (1972), who used adult education and literacy training to "conscientize" the poor and oppressed, as a major influence in participatory action research. Brown states that participatory action research "stresses the importance of researchers being aware of their

own values, ideologies and political and economic interests in the social systems in which they collect data" (p.377).

The diversity of projects within a model adds to the heterogeneity of action research. As Whyte (1988) comments, it can be carried out in a wide variety of forms and focused on a wide variety of problems. Weisbord (1989) states:

Every action-research project is different. You can't expect to repeat my procedures and get my results. Why? First, my procedures are not repeatable - exactly. They change with the people, facilities, history, local traditions, unique problems. Real life is not a chemistry lab where all the beakers are the same. Second, you may change the sequence in which you approach a problem, or involve other people, or collect information. Since you can't just change one thing, the first change changes everything. Third, the itch you scratch will always be your own. If you try to scratch my itch, nobody will believe you. In action research you are part of the action. You cannot stand outside as an objective observer, telling people what's going on and what to do (p.188).

The diversity and heterogeneity of action research is underpinned by both its situational relevance and the fact that action research is agnostic, to use Susman and Evered's (1978) term.

Elden and Chisholm (1993) develop this further by examining the contextual focus of action research. They state:

Another contrast between conventional social science in the sense of laboratory experiments and action research is that action research is "context-bound" inquiry (Susman & Evered, 1978) in part because the action researcher is concerned with solving "real world", practical problems. Since these problems usually are defined by system members who experience them, action research is inherently interdisciplinary and theory/practice oriented. In contrast to most conventional social science, action research is not based in a particular discipline and does not operate in the intellectual cause - and - effect world of a single discipline (p.127).

It follows that the usual progression of theory to practice for planning research is reversed. Elden and Chisholm (1993) state:

And "theory" here might be the cause-and-effect explanations of participants in a given context or what has been termed "tacit knowledge" or "local theory" rather than "general knowledge" or "scientific theory." Problem definition is not limited to the concepts, theories, and epistemology of a particular discipline but rather is grounded in the participants' definition of context (p.127-8).

In action research then, inquiry may rest on one organization or community group, on one level in a system and span a relatively short period of time. This raises the issue of the use of action research within communication research.

Jensen and Jankowski (1991) in their handbook of qualitative methodologies for communication research acknowledge the contribution of action research within mass communication research. A variety of forms of action research methodology have been employed in relation to the development of community based media. Jankowski (1991) describes how a component of action research was included in the research design of a project involving one of six community television organizations in the Netherlands which had been selected to participate in a government-funded experiment with cable transmission of locally originated radio and television programming. Jankowski and Wester (1991) state that participatory research specifically has been applied to mass communication, both in communication development projects and in studies of local radio stations in Latin America.

Despite references to the use of action research within mass communication, little scholarship is available in this area. Exhaustive searches of library computerised data bases in New Zealand, Australia and United States for this study in 1993 yielded little or no published material in the field of action research and political communication as it relates to news media processes. Additional help sought from the librarian at the Tavistock Institute in London during a visit in March 1994 confirmed the dearth of published material. This difficulty is not confined to this area of action research.

### 3.4 Action research scholarship

The diversity of action research has not translated into a rich vein of scholarship for researchers to tap seeking exemplars. Ledford and Mohrman (1993) defending the special issue of *Human Relations* on action research, state that the critical commentators on the key journal articles missed their "most important contribution" (p.1350) which was the significant expansion in the universe of published action research cases.

Although action research has been described and practised for about five decades, publication of research based on this approach has been surprisingly limited. There is no question that action research has become well established as a way of generating action in organizations, and indeed many organizations and even many consulting firms ably practice something akin to action research. However, we do not see action research as an especially vibrant tradition in the *research* literature. Rather, it is a splinter movement in the social sciences (p.1350).

### 3.5 Choice of action research methodology

The reporting of this research aims to increase understanding of the use of action research in a particular communication context—that of the manufacture of news by, and for, an aspiring politician during a general election campaign. The choice of action research as a methodology notes the recent call by Schlesinger (1990) to move from the excessively "media-centric" approach of much existing journalism scholarship which has tended to promote a linear approach focused on the end product of journalism; the printed word or broadcast item. The interdisciplinary nature of action research addresses the urging of Zelizer (1993) for a more interdisciplinary approach to research into journalism moving it on from the narrow focus of journalism as a "sociological problem" (p.80). The use of action research at a local level during the 1993 campaign addresses, too, a research priority identified by Blumler (1990) who states more scholarship is needed on the organization of *local* political communication systems. Their neglect by academics until recently is curious at a time when trends in both the electoral and media systems suggest that "local politicking could be growing in importance" (p.111).

Action research in the area of political reportage is timely. Golding (1992) talks of the "growing interest in the contribution of the media to the quality of democratic processes" (p.503). Whether journalism is serving democratic ends or debilitating and trivialising democratic dialogue and the relationship between politics and the news media is at the forefront of this debate (Rosen, 1992; Taylor, 1992). The reportage of elections and the manufacture of election news is more often explored from examination of what is published or broadcast, what could be termed "end product" research. But it is inquiry into the processes of the news media which may better reveal the contribution of journalism to the exercise of democracy. Action research as both an approach and a process answers, too, the special nature of the research, working with a political candidate to maximise effective utilisation of the news media during an election campaign, defining problems in particular situations and developing theory from the given context. In addition, action research methodology provided the opportunity for self development by *all* participants involved, not just the researcher.

### 3.6 Definition of action research

Action research has been defined and applied in many different ways by researchers since it was suggested as a mode of social research by Lewin (1946) to overcome some of the shortcomings of positivism (Baburoglu and Ravn, 1992). Hult and Lennung (1980) state that a survey of literature has revealed not only a variety of definitions and emphases but also rather distinct traditions. And they state, "it is also evident that different meanings have been attributed to the concept over the years" (p.240).

In order to conceptualize an approach to action research and to develop a valid definition, Hult and Lennung (1980) examined descriptions of action research and broke it down into constitutive elements. These were then summarized and integrated into a new comprehensive definition. This research project follows Hult and Lennung's approach and in addition refers to other scholarship to develop the following definition of action research to be used in this research. In the following presentation Hult and Lennung's definitions are identified in italic script. Where there has been addition or alteration to their definition this is acknowledged with reference to relevant scholarship. *Action research simultaneously assists in practical problem-solving and expands scientific knowledge* (Hult & Lennung, 1980, p.242).

In its broadest context, action research applies scientific method to practical problems. It is concerned with using research methods and approaches to solve problems and implement change. French and Bell (1978) state the action research model is, "a data-based, problem-solving model that replicates the steps involved in the scientific method of inquiry" (p.88).

*Action research is collaborative* (Hult & Lennung, 1980, p.243).

It is essentially collaborative and participatory and what Weisbord (1987) describes as "democratic". Hult and Lennung (1980) state the action researcher and the group they are working with are mutually dependent on each other's skills, experiences and competencies and the success of the action research is of mutual benefit to both parties. They also acknowledge a division of labour within the collaborative process as long as this does not counteract problem-solving or relevant competence-enhancement.

They state, "this requirement of a cooperative social situation does not exclude a rational division of labour based on distinct individual competences. Neither must all parties engage in all elements of goal realization" (p.536).

*Action research is aimed at improving the competencies of those involved* (Hult & Lennung, 1980, p.242).

Lewin's (1946) notion of action research as social action implies a learning process. Hult and Lennung (1980) state the project environment provides a learning environment in which those involved learn from the actual investigation and from its theoretical implications, "but also, from the process of a collaborative problem-solving strategy" (p.243).

Baburoglu and Ravn (1992) combine Susman and Evered's (1978) description of the effects of action research, which is that the intervention of the action researcher in the problem situation is aimed at improving the self-help and "action-taking" competencies of the individual, with that of Argyris and Schon (1978), who state it additionally facilitates learning at the level of the organisation.

In this research the organisational members are a parliamentary candidate standing for the Labour party in the Wellington seat of Miramar and members of her election campaign committee. In this action research context they participate both as subjects and as co-researchers in the research process as a part of an effort to improve their utilisation and understanding of news media processes during the election campaign. They learnt from their actual investigations, from the theoretical implications which arose and from the process of collaborative problem solving.

*Action research requires the involvement of the researcher.*

A fundamental difference between some other forms of applied social research and action research is what Rapoport (1970) has described as the "immediacy of the researcher's involvement in the action process" (p.499.) The action researcher carries out research activities *within* the social system being studied, takes part in implementation, feedback, evaluation and iteration.

*Action research models have common ingredients, despite the lack of prescription as to methodology.*

A variety of models of action research is used but most have the common ingredients identified by French and Bell (1978, p.86) of:

1. a preliminary diagnosis or clarification of goals and assumptions,
2. the collection of data,
3. the generation of options in collaboration with the group,
4. taking action,
5. evaluation or feedback,
6. iteration.

Hult and Lennung (1980) state:

The choice of techniques and methods is contingent upon the nature of the problem. Any valid and reliable method for diagnosis, model-building, deduction, data collection, data analysis and evaluation may be used. Action research, therefore, is not distinguished by choice of method, but rather by the way these methods are employed (p.538).

*Action research is both an approach and a process.*

French and Bell (1978) state, "Action research is both an *approach* to problem solving-a model or a paradigm, and a problem-solving *process*-a series of activities and events" (p.88).

As a process, action research qualifies on two counts. It is a sequence of events and activities within a cycle (goals, data collection, option generation, action, feedback) and that cycle itself is iterated. Sometimes the same problem is treated in the cycle, sometimes there is a progression to different problems in the cycle. French and Bell state both point to the on-going nature of action research.

*Action research is situation specific but it is aimed at a holistic understanding of a given social situation.*

Susman and Evered (1978) state that action research, as a social science, does not aim to formulate universally true laws. Instead it yields situation-specific insights. Hult and Lennung (1980) state that in action research there is a deliberate endeavour to relate phenomena to the environment which give them meaning. Rather than study isolated factors, an action researcher (in collaboration) looks at inter-relationships and the dynamics of a given situation. Situational and historical contexts need to be considered to provide a picture of the totality in action research.

*Action research is concerned with the process of change.*

The action research method involves the researcher in a deliberate contribution from within to the introduction of planned change in a social system or in relation to social structures. Often the nature of the intervention is aimed at effecting improvement, a change in the status quo towards a realisable goal.

*Action research should be undertaken in a mutually acceptable ethical framework.*

Hult and Lennung (1980) state that ethics in relation to action research have received scant attention in the literature. And they describe "a minimal ethical requirement for an action researcher" is the necessity to "state clearly the value premises" of the action research (p.247). Rapoport (1970) believes an adequate definition of action research must also include reference to the ethical context. He reformulated action research as follows, "Action research aims to contribute *both* to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to the goals of social science by joint collaboration within a mutually acceptable ethical framework" (p.499). Ethical dilemmas arise in a number of ways at different stages of typical action research projects and, "first there is the issue of whether or not a client is acceptable to the researcher" (p.503)

Referring to the experiences of the Tavistock Institute in action research, Rapoport (1970) states that Churchman and Emery (1966) formulated the notion of working within a value framework which is acceptable to both parties.

It is important here that the value framework be located in a recognizable sanctioning institution and not be too abstract. As the action research enterprise was seen as a collaboration between two parties with interests that were different, there had to be a search for an area of overlap. This was not always easy to find and it frequently shifted in the course of the work. However, finding it and keeping it in awareness became an increasingly important aspect of the enterprise (p.504).

Rapoport (1970) referred to tobacco research in which the tobacco group had a different interest in the project, primarily that of tobacco sales, to the interests of the researchers concerned with developing new models of analysis, but they both shared an interest in studying how individuals react to the stresses of life and the part tobacco played in this. Rapoport suggests there needs to be a balance between an overly purist reaction leading to the rejection of all sponsored research and overly expedient attitude by which the research becomes captured by the client group or organisation. In drawing the line, Rapoport state, "for the most part it is accepted that the leading institutions in our society have sufficient social sanction to be considered worth helping in the public interest" (p.504).

However, this is clearly not an entirely unproblematic guideline for action research. Hult and Lennung (1980) refer to research by Greenbaum, Rogovsky and Shalit (1977) on the use of social science techniques in a combat unit. The research paper did contain a section labelled "ethical issues" and discussed the problems of confidentiality and of working with commanders. But state Hult and Lennung, "no reference is made to the fact their model is developed to facilitate the wounding and killing of fellow human beings" (p.540).

Because this action research project is grounded in the context of political communication it was felt necessary to establish and outline a "mutually acceptable ethical framework" for the study. The methodological implications of the ethical framework will be referred to in Chapter 4.4, *Ethical framework established*. The mutually acceptable ethical framework acknowledges any areas of divergent as well as concordant interest between the action researcher and the sanctioning organisation. For this research the ethical framework was constructed, too, with a view to factors which influence political communication.

Blumler and Gurevitch (1981) note that while journalists and political candidates share certain goals such as addressing and sustaining credibility with large audiences their purposes are in some tension as well. Journalists see their purpose as in some way alerting, informing and entertaining their target audience, while politicians are primarily trying to persuade audiences to adopt a certain view of themselves, their stances or parties. The action researcher who is working within a communication group participating in intervening in the politician-news media process in a bid to manufacture news has an additional purpose which centres on the reconciliation of this tension so that "good news" for the politician is enhanced, and "bad news" or news which may reflect negatively on the candidate is minimised.

The ethical framework for action research needs also to acknowledge what Greenwood *et al* (1993) describe as the "assumptions and commitments" (p.176) which underscore the research activity. Several of their views are relevant for this action research project. First, the belief that the social sciences exist to assist society in solving social problems. Second, the fact that participatory action research strongly encourages continuous learning on the part of the professional researchers and the members of the organization

involved. Third, the notion that participation encourages self-management which has values worth promoting. In addition Greenwood *et al* state,"participant action research encourages integrative, interdisciplinary social science based on both local knowledge and social science expertise. This multidisciplinary synthesis has proved quite elusive in standard research approaches" (p.177).

This chapter has provided a general introduction to the action research debate. The following chapter describes the specific action research methodology employed in the research project.

## CHAPTER FOUR: ACTION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Introduction

The question of access to the political organization by the researcher and the ethical framework established with the political candidate, Annette King, and her electoral committee are discussed at the start of this chapter. Then the action methodology employed in the research is outlined using a diagrammatic model adapted from Bennett and Oliver (1988). The model describes both the elements of action research and the process. Finally an overview of the Miramar electorate and of Labour's electorate committee at the start of the campaign period in 1993 is presented in terms of a situational analysis, the first step in the action research process.

Traditional reporting of the academic social science model follows a traditional theory-to-practice sequence and a rigorous separation of methodology from results and discussion. This research, in general, follows the conventional model of reporting and differentiates the methodology from the results, but it is acknowledged that action research reverses the usual sequence for formulating research and follows a practice-to-theory cycle. Evered and Louis'(1981) description of action research as a "messy, iterative groping" (p.387) through which a picture of the organizational system was built up is relevant here. So, too, is their observation that:

Organizational inquiry is currently characterized by two broad approaches. One is methodologically precise, but often irrelevant to the reality of organizations; the other is crucially relevant but often too vague to be communicated to or believed by others. We need to find ways to improve the relevancy of the one, and to improve the precision of the other (p.392).

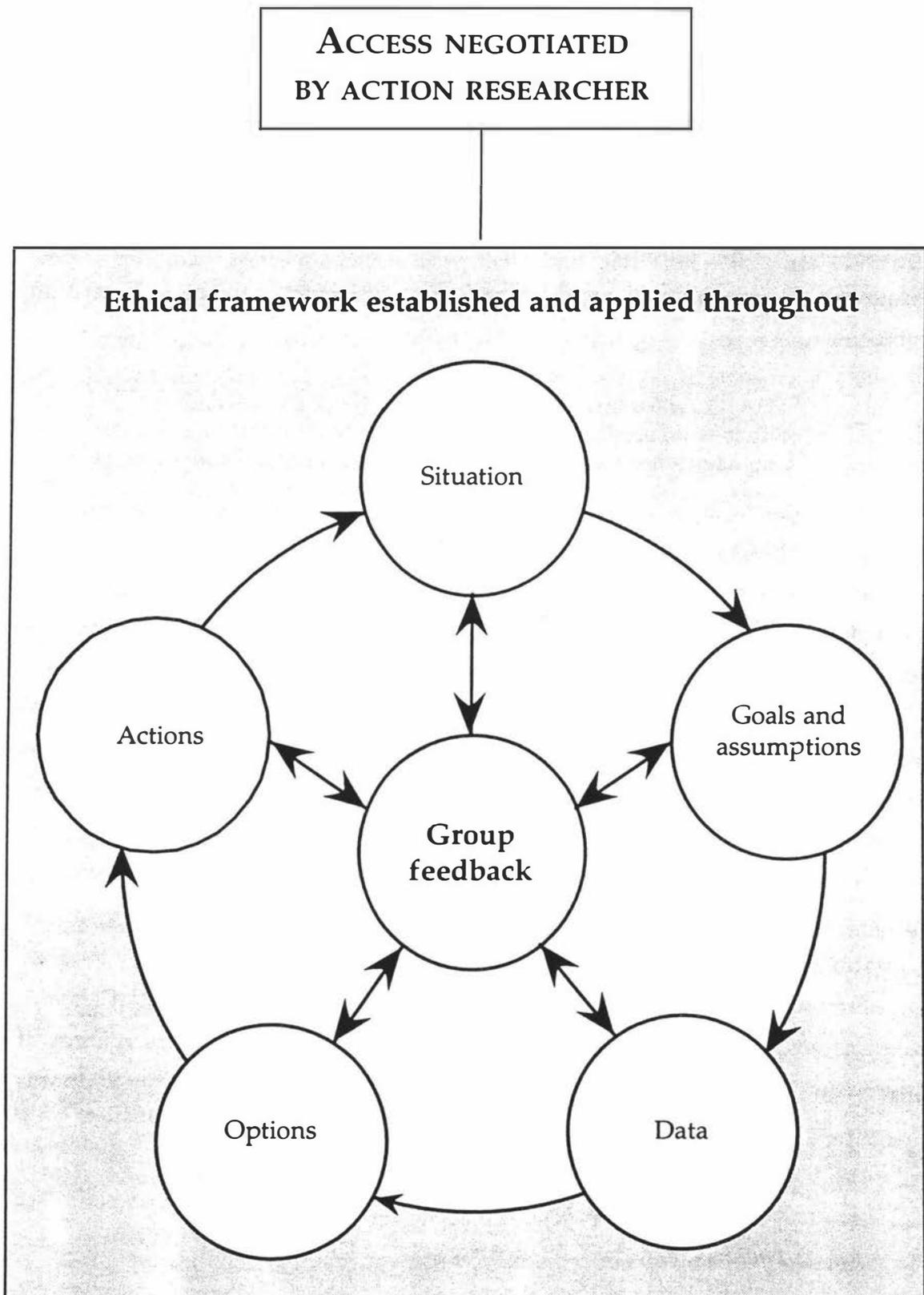
The reporting of action research in this study attempts to be precise about the division of methodology, how it was done, from the results, what was done. A narrative style is used, though, to tell "the story" of the action research and to communicate its flavour

and relevance. The telling of the story involves an integration of results and discussion. The difficulties of reporting action research is referred to again later in Chapter Nine, *Evaluation*, at 9.7.1.

#### **4.2 Model of the action research process**

While various models of action research, (French & Bell 1978; Shepard, 1960; Susman & Evered, 1978) have been diagrammed, this research adapts the simple diagrammatic representation formulated by Bennett and Oliver (1988). Its depiction as a circular process encapsulates the iterative nature of the methodology. The linkages to group feedback at each stage emphasise the collaborative nature of action research and the continuing process of evaluation and refinement anticipated by action research. Bennett and Oliver state that on some projects researchers will probably go around the cycle several times, while other projects will require once around only.

The adaptations by this researcher to Bennett and Oliver's (1988) model (Figure 2) include the concept of an ethical framework for the action research project being established and applied throughout. In addition to the group feedback which provides an evaluative reference point at each stage, this research attempts, too, to provide observations evaluating the action research project in a holistic way against the goals set. The model is referred to at various points in the reporting of the action research project and provided a framework for the elements and the process of the action research.



**Figure 2:** Model of action research used in the Miramar research project. (Adapted from Bennett and Oliver, 1988).

### 4.3 Negotiating access

Prior to action research the researcher needs to negotiate access to the sanctioning organisation, which in this case was a Labour Party electorate campaign organising committee. Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman (1988) claim negotiating access to organizations for the purpose of research is "a game of chance, not skill." They recommend an opportunistic approach and offer five specific pieces of advice on negotiating access.

First, allow for this to take time. Second, use friends and relatives wherever possible. Third, use non-threatening language when explaining the nature and purpose of your study. Fourth, deal positively with respondents' reservations with respect to time and confidentiality. Fifth, offer a report of your findings (p.56).

In the first instance an opportunist approach was employed using the personal friendship between the political candidate and the action researcher to gain admittance to the electorate committee. While Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman (1988) have not weighted their five points, the nature of the organization involved in this action research, an electorate campaign committee, meant a premium was placed on the aspect of confidentiality. Concern about the politically sensitive nature of election campaigns make political party organizations hostile to outsiders despite the need for volunteer participants, particularly those with relevant skills. The committee's need for secrecy about strategy and campaign funding meant I could not have gained access without an offer of reciprocity. So a sixth point can be added to Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman's advice about gaining access and that is, offer something of value as a form of reciprocity. This reciprocal value is in addition to the report of the findings. In this research the reciprocal value arises from:

1. journalistic experience as a reporter and then editor of a tabloid newspaper which had endorsed the Labour Party (1972, 1975, 1978), and;

2. previous experience working on Labour Party candidate publicity in election campaigns. This encompassed involvement in television commercials for Norman Kirk in 1972, producing a broadsheet newspaper and arranging news media publicity for Mike Moore in 1975, and involvement in boosting the print media profile of David Lange in 1988;
3. knowledge of the journalist's professional norms, networks and contacts.

In addition to helping the researcher gain admittance, reciprocity is part of the collaborative relationship which is a feature of action research.

Schatzman and Strauss (1973) also indicate that *entree* to organizations is a "*continuous* process of establishing and developing relationships, not only with a chief host but with a variety of less powerful persons" (p.21). They state the experienced researcher recognises entering is a process which will be engaged in long after "permission" to enter has been granted. Schatzman and Strauss say:

The continuity is assured on two counts: first, to the extent that anyone in the organization has autonomy and some options on co-operation, *each person*, theoretically, must be negotiated with: second, relationships that are initially established naturally do change--and not always for the better (p.22).

Glidewell (1989) writing about the entry problem in the context of consultation, uses the phrase "goodness of fit" which is relevant to this research. So, too, are some of his "significant dimensions" to be "fitted." These include:

1. perception of need, in terms of the extent of consensus in the total system that an immediate need exists, and importance of the need as measured against the ultimate values of the total system, and
2. perception of appropriateness of role allocation by those empowered to allocate roles, in terms of the criteria that the needed resources are not available in appropriate persons within the system, and the needed resources are available in the prospective consultant (researcher) (p.53, brackets added).

The question of "emotional interchange" between the researcher and the organization is also a question of fit, Glidewell states. Further reference to emotional interchange is made in the *Limitations* section in Chapter Nine at 9.7.2.

#### 4.4 Ethical framework established

The ethical backdrop for this study was framed by the political candidate and the action researcher analysing their divergent and common interests and reaching an understanding about the boundaries of the action research. The interest of the political candidate and campaign committee in the project rested on the election of the candidate. The interests of the research lay in developing a systematic process to maximise the effective utilisation of the news media by a political candidate during the 1993 general election campaign. The action research had the additional goal of critically evaluating the nature of the news creation process in electioneering with a focus on one electorate. Both parties shared an overlap in their common interest in the empowering of the public by ensuring a free flow of information about political policies, issues and candidates during an election year.

The notion of empowerment through news media communication roughly equates to the theory of social responsibility of the news media credited to the 1947 Commission on Freedom of the Press or Hutchins Commission in the United States. Social responsibility meant the news media should provide a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism, should provide a representative picture of the constituent groups in society, and provide full access to the day's intelligence (Sandman, Rubin & Sachsman, 1982). This action research project takes place at a time of increasing criticism of and complaint about the nature of political reporting by the news media in election campaigns both overseas (Negrine, 1989; Oliphant, 1992; Ornstein, 1992; Patterson, 1993; Russert, 1992; Sabato, 1992; Speckman, 1992; Tiffen, 1989) and within New Zealand (McGregor, 1993(b); Maharey, 1992; Moore, 1992; Morrison, 1993; Palmer, 1992; Upton, 1993).

Those involved in the action research also acknowledged that the results of the action research project would not be owned by the political organisation, but would be available to other groups if requested. In fact, the electorate committee's campaign documentation, including the preliminary communications reports, were used by the Labour Party at other electorate retreats around New Zealand, including in the electorate of Manawatu. So, too, were many of the creative and design features of publicity material developed within the course of the campaign as part of the action research project.

In developing a mutually acceptable ethical framework the candidate, her organisation and the action researcher had agreed that denigration of political opponents by reference to their personal lives and attributes would not be undertaken within the context of the action research project. This agreement did not, however, exclude the prospect of robust politicking via the news media. Nor did it exclude critical comment in relation to the political and public performance of opponents.

#### **4.5 Situational analysis**

Essentially action research revolves around an issue or problem which needs to be resolved in collaboration with the organization in which the problem is located. Clearly there needs to be identification of a problem area about which there is sufficient concern to want to take some action. The researcher needs a clear idea of the nature of this problem, what the situation is and what the issues to be studied are. Clarification can come out of talking informally with other people in the organization or through a process of feedback with the researcher's perceptions of the situation being fed back to a group of people and then incorporating their ideas. Before the organizational issue or problem can be focused on, however, there needs to be some analysis of the organization concerned, in this case the 1993 Miramar electorate campaign committee.

##### **4.5.1 Situational analysis-methodology**

This research uses ingredients from Neilsen's (1984) roadmap for analysing an organization to provide the conceptual framework for the situational analysis required. While Neilsen's work is rooted in an organizational development approach, his model

is useful for conceptual reference. Neilsen based the roadmap on the assumption that any organization has to perform, or get performed for it, four basic functions to survive (p.115). These are:

1. The organisation has to adapt to its environment to obtain resources and knowledge to produce, and to reward members for their contribution. Neilsen called this the *technoeconomic function*.
2. The second function identified embraces the idea that no organization can survive without continuously identifying and pursuing particular sets of goals acceptable both to the surrounding community (the voting public in the electorate) and its members (the campaign committee). Neilsen states, "identifying goals and mobilizing support for them is referred to as the *goal-setting function*" (p.115).
3. What Neilsen describes as the *regulatory function* covers the organization's discovery of ways to integrate its members into legitimate and stable participation through legal and regulatory mechanisms imposed by government and through social, financial and legal contracts with other organizations.
4. The *human resource* function, the fact the electorate committee needs people to exist and to function, requires the committee to consider who is available to work for it, and the required human resources.

The situational analysis incorporates dimensions of Neilsen's (1984) roadmap relevant to a voluntary, electorate organization which is community rather than corporate-based. Data collection is fundamental to a reliable situational analysis and Susman and Evered (1978) discuss data collection at different phases of action research. They state, "contemporary applications of action research can use different techniques for data collection especially in the diagnosing and evaluating phases" (p.588). Those with a background in psychology tend to use questionnaires while action researchers with backgrounds in other disciplines tend to prefer direct observation and/or in-depth interviewing. In addition, action researchers may also retrieve data from the records,

memos and reports that the client system routinely produces. A "client system", state Susman and Evered, is the social system in which members face problems to be solved by action research.

Data were collected for the situational analysis in a variety of ways. Ethnographic material was collected through participation and observation at regular electorate campaign committee meetings. Field notes were recorded in a research diary during these meetings and systematically written up on the same day as the meetings. A series of structured and unstructured interviews was conducted with the candidate, committee members, sitting Members of Parliament and Labour Party officials. Archival material, in the form of written documentation gained from the Labour Party research unit and from the election campaign strategists, in addition to Hansard proceedings and questions and answers in the House of Representatives, was utilised.

#### 4.5.2 Situational analysis-results

From the situational analysis conducted for this research the following picture emerged. In the 1990 Parliamentary election the Labour Party's sitting candidate, Peter Neilson, lost the Miramar seat to National's Graeme Reeves by 552 votes. The loss occurred within the context of an average 9.9 per cent swing against the Labour Government. Neilson had held the Miramar seat for nine years and had previously been re-elected with increasing majorities. In 1990, however, the swing against Labour in the Miramar seat was 12.2 per cent.

In a review of the 1990 Miramar election campaign by a campaign committee official, the external political and socio-economic environment were considered to be major factors in the loss of Miramar by Labour. This review states that New Zealand had been in recession for two and a half years at the time of the 1990 election. A rise in unemployment and a drop in business confidence saw job loss in Miramar coupled with a large number of redundancies at Wellington airport situated within the electorate and at a large manufacturing plant. While Miramar's level of unemployment was lower than the national average, "this issue above all others probably caused Labour to lose the seat. Labour was seen as an ineffective and arrogant government and it deserved to be punished", according to the campaign committee official.

The review also identified a number of communication difficulties during Labour's election campaign in Miramar which attributed to the loss of the seat. These included:

- late canvassing of voters and lack of party workers to do the canvassing
- insufficient followup (call backs) to possible Labour supporters identified during canvassing
- only two pamphlets accompanied by targeted direct mail to "soft voters" from Labour's candidate sent out to the electorate
- inadequate news media publicity
- poor internal communications.

The action research project began after the Hon. Mrs Annette King was selected as Labour's candidate for the Miramar seat in the 1993 general election. Mrs King had been a Cabinet Minister in the fourth Labour Government holding the seat of Horowhenua which she lost in 1990. Mrs King had lived in Miramar for 12 years and commuted to the Horowhenua electorate during the time she held the seat. She decided to stand for the electorate in which she lived in 1993.

A Labour Party Miramar campaign retreat was held on 31 January 1993 in Wellington attended by local electorate workers, Members of Parliament and party officials. Referring to Neilsen's (1984) human resource dimension, the "salient demographic characteristics" of the electorate workers who formed the 1993 Labour Miramar electorate committee included their voluntary status. All, bar one party paid official who was also the electorate's Labour Electorate Committee (LEC) chairman, were volunteers united by either personal support for the candidate, Mrs King, or by their membership or support of the Labour Party. In return for their services the electorate committee workers sought no financial reward, but instead identified during the retreat that reward in terms of a sense of achievement would come from involvement in a successful campaign and the election of their candidate. In addition, one of the electorate workers, the director of canvassing, Peter Benson, expressed his desire that those working on the campaign "have fun" by socialising at the end of meetings and activities. In the draft discussion paper circulated at the retreat by the campaign organiser, Peter Eales, reward through social involvement was emphasized.

The day long retreat was aimed at planning the 1993 election campaign strategy for the Miramar electorate. Dr Michael Cullen, Labour's finance spokesperson, provided an important overview of the current political environment at this retreat. It is worth noting the major points from his comments taken from field notes recorded during this retreat and diaries for later analysis.

1. The Labour Party felt the election would need to be fought on two fronts-- the critical Auckland urban seats, and the rest of the country.
2. For the first time in New Zealand's modern political history the existence of a left-wing third party, the Alliance, meant the 1993 election would be what Dr Cullen described as "a two-front war." While Labour needed to regard the National Party and the National Government as "the enemy" in conventional political terms, Labour's strategy must additionally include tactics to "wind back down" the Alliance vote which had been evident in recent local body elections. Alliance gained valuable support from older voters in the 50 plus age group, or the "golden generation" referred to by Dr Cullen. The Labour Party needed to work on the credibility of the Alliance and ensure the third party did not get a "soft ride".
3. The Labour Party felt its campaign strategies needed to include regaining traditional Labour voters, and not alienating the "middle ground" of the New Zealand electorate. "We need to get the vote out", Dr Cullen said. The election campaign strategy would be to push a positive message in relation to jobs, growth and fairness.
4. The analysis of polling at this stage showed that the electorate was largely "anti politics"; negative, depressed and cynical about the political process. The polling analysis, though, showed where there was some "uplift" in confidence, voters tended to support Labour and not the Alliance. Dr Cullen said Labour needed to "talk up" the promise of the future, and policy release during the election campaign would provide this opportunity.

The retreat was also addressed by Lloyd Falck, a Labour Party strategist and research adviser to the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Mike Moore. Falck was a member of the Representation Commission and had previously served as campaign manager to Mrs King in the 1990, 1987 and 1984 Horowhenua elections. He indicated that Miramar was the fourth most marginal electorate in New Zealand, behind Lyttleton, Titirangi and Horowhenua. With recent boundary changes which saw parts of the Wellington suburb of Mount Victoria incorporated into the Miramar electorate, Labour's analysis showed that a point six per cent (0.6%) swing would be needed to return the seat to Labour. The National candidate's election night majority had been reduced to 243 votes by this boundary change.

Falck indicated the marginality of Miramar had resource and funding implications for the Labour Party. Labour's analysis was that Miramar was "winnable" because of the boundary changes, the small majority enjoyed by their political opponents, the perceived "weakness" of the incumbent Member of Parliament, the selection of a strong candidate in Mrs King, and a strong electorate campaign organisation. While there had been a 9.9 per cent swing against Labour overall in the 1990 general election, the swing recorded against Mrs King in the Horowhenua seat was 5.5 per cent. Falck said these factors meant the Labour Party could risk not allocating resources and funds in Miramar which were needed in other electorates.

Falck outlined communication processes such as the purchase of computer software which allowed electronic auditing of canvassing against the electoral roll, the weekly conference call between Labour leader Mike Moore and political candidates, and the electorate visits of sitting Members of Parliament during the election campaign. He also provided contact points for head office support personnel. But he also indicated to the electorate campaign committee that Miramar would be largely "on its own" in terms of resources and funding. "There would be no point in having a huge success in Miramar and losing the rest of the country."

An assessment of the Miramar electorate was circulated at the retreat. In terms of funding it showed that the total electorate assets stood at \$1,254 while the level of indebtedness, primarily as a result of unpaid levies to the Labour Party from local membership, stood at \$9000. In Miramar the Labour Electorate Committee (LEC)

consisted of 34 current delegates from branches and affiliates. There were six branches, Hataitai/Roseneath, Seatoun, Kilbirnie, Miramar, Women's and Mt Victoria. On average, approximately 12 members attended each meeting. The Labour Party membership overall in the electorate stood at 274. The retreat also received a financial budget detailing about \$17,000 worth of required expenditure during the election campaign. It was estimated that this would probably increase to \$20,000. Details of the statutory requirements relating to the limitation on spending by political candidates in the last three months of the election campaign were also outlined.

Neilsen's (1984) identification of the regulatory dimension involves first an analysis of the organizational environment. The Electoral Act, local government rules and regulations impinging on campaign activities, and aspects of communications law such as defamation had particular application. Local bodies prescribed publicity placement, particularly in relation to hoardings and posters, and formal permission was necessary for activities such as the siting of the electorate's mobile information caravan used by Mrs King for Saturday morning electorate surgery. In addition to the organizational environment, the electorate campaign committee itself had constitutional, formal and informal relationships regulating conduct and activities with the New Zealand Labour Party, the LEC and a grouping of Labour's Wellington candidates. The LEC representative on the electorate campaign committee, for example, had as his principal function ensuring effective liaison with branches. And individuals within the organization, the electorate campaign committee, were regulated by a portfolio structure covering finance, fund-raising, publicity and public relations, canvassing, computing, distribution, campaign fundamentals, LEC contact and Pacific Island liaison. A status hierarchy was also imposed via a campaign committee executive comprising the campaign chairman, the candidate, the campaign organiser and the LEC representative. The executive was charged with resolving by consensus any conflicts and responding to urgent campaign issues.

Roles and functions to be undertaken within the portfolios were suggested in the campaign retreat document and formally endorsed at the meeting. A number of reports were presented verbally by campaign committee members assigned these portfolios relating to canvassing in the electorate, distribution of publicity material, the computer system, a strategy to encourage Pacific Island voters to get on the electoral roll, funding raising, and campaign administration.

A communications strategy paper was presented at the meeting by the researcher and a Palmerston North-based writer, Piet de Jong, who volunteered to help in the communications area. We worked individually on communications reports and then met together with the candidate to develop a communications strategy encompassing all aspects of publicity and promotion during the election campaign. The action research project involved work within this communications strategy, and in particular focused on the candidate's relationship with the news media.

Susman and Evered (1978) state that an infra-structure of ad hoc and permanent face-to-face is generally developed within a client system to conduct action research. The infrastructure relevant for this action research concerned a permanent face-to-face group involving the candidate Mrs King, other publicity advisers and myself who met in Palmerston North at least once a week, sometimes more, from February 1993. The candidate also made telephone contact every day with the researcher. In addition, the election campaign committee met monthly in Wellington in February, March, April, May, June, and July, fortnightly in August and September, and weekly in October and November 1993. This provided an extra forum for debate and wider collaboration.

On 10 February 1993 Mrs King and I met with the leader of the Labour Party and Opposition leader Mike Moore; his executive assistant (communications) Geoff Mein, and a journalist working for Mike Moore's office, Sue Foley, at Mr Moore's parliamentary office in Wellington to discuss promotional ideas for the election campaign. During this meeting Mr Moore confirmed the funding difficulties faced by the Labour Party with respect to publicity activities. He indicated the party could not afford to employ a designated advertising agency during the 1993 election campaign. This meant Labour had to maximise the use of "free" media, such as news, features and current affairs in print, radio and television as well as talk back radio, and letters to the editor columns.

In summary the situation analysis revealed that the "problem" for the candidate and the electorate committee was to effectively utilise free media to establish the candidate's profile and credibility at the expense of an incumbent politician representing the Miramar electorate. Bennett and Oliver (1988) state the main starting point for action research is the situation "you are in. What problems, issues, challenges, opportunities

does it contain?" (p.31). They state that the issue or topic selected as the basis for the action research topic cannot be trivial but must be something that requires systematic study and investigation that can lead to useful, performance-related change. The major problems associated with the project were the financial position of the campaign organization, the level of media awareness of the candidate and the electorate committee, and the lack of systematic news media-candidate relationships. The problems represented challenges and opportunities for the action researcher and the organization.

The next chapter examines how the goals were formulated for the action research project in collaboration with the candidate and the electorate committee, and the goals which were eventually set. The method of collection of data and the implications of the data collected are also described. The method of generating options for action is discussed and the options which were generated is outlined.

## CHAPTER FIVE: ACTION RESEARCH GOALS, DATA AND OPTIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

Following the situation analysis and using the action research framework outlined in Figure 2, the next stage in the process was to set the goals of the action research project. This was followed by data gathering in connection with the goals and the generation of options for action. All three stages involved collaboration and feedback between the researcher, the candidate and her electorate committee, and are described in this chapter. In addition to the setting of goals and the generation of data and options, the chapter discusses the concept of group feedback which is central to action research and the cyclical process of iteration involved.

### 5.2 The method of setting goals

The selection of a particular problem leads to the setting of goals which allow the researcher to decide what needs to be achieved from the research. Some action research models incorporate the formulation of hypotheses or predictions. French and Bell (1978) state that each of these action research hypotheses has a goal, or objective, and each has an action, or procedure for achieving the goal. Other models establish research objectives or goals. Bennett and Oliver (1988) state that the researcher will also need to establish what assumptions need to be made. For example, can the researcher make the assumption the current structure of the organization subject of action research will remain the same during the research? Goals and assumptions can again be fed back, checked and refined during the group feedback process.

In this study the goals were set in collaboration by the action researcher, the candidate and the campaign publicity committee following the first campaign retreat in January, and after analysis of the available documentation and on hearing from Labour Party leader Mike Moore about the party's overall situation with respect to publicity. Several

meetings were held in February and March 1993 to discuss goal setting and the setting of objectives became a formal procedure for the publicity committee. Minutes were taken of decisions reached and the goals were referred to throughout the action research project.

The mechanism used for goal setting followed Neilsen's (1984) road map approach. The wider constituency demands of the political party and the strategic constraints and opportunities were noted along with formal party philosophies and available policies. The interest group concerned, the electorate committee and the publicity group had particular objectives which were tabled. The personal aspirations of the candidate, the publicity group and the action researcher were also disclosed.

### 5.3 Goal Results

The goal setting process of this study identified that the general problem concerned the news creation process. It was clear from the situational analysis that because of the Labour Party's parlous finances, expenditure on paid political advertising would be minimal, and that because the particular electorate had been identified as winnable without significant party involvement it would receive only limited central party resources for campaigning. This meant a heavy reliance on "free" news media publicity generated by, and on behalf of, the candidate to establish Mrs King's profile in Miramar. But without an understanding of, and expertise in, the news creation process neither the candidate nor her supporters could effectively utilise the news media to create a profile for the candidate within the electorate. Poor utilisation of the news media, and consequent lack of profile, had been identified as factors in the loss of the electorate to the National Party.

The action research project was an exploration of the nature of the news creation process in electioneering in New Zealand with a focus on the Miramar electorate in 1993. The principal goals established during the action research project were:

1. to develop a systematic process to maximise the effective utilisation of the news media by an individual political candidate, Annette King, in the Miramar electorate during the 1993 general election campaign.

2. to evaluate critically the nature of the news creation process in electioneering with a focus on the Miramar electorate.

These goals incorporated the demands of implementation and of scholarship. They can be reformulated using French and Bell's (1988) typology as the following objectives:

1. A systematic process to maximise the effective utilisation of the news media can be developed if:
  - a) the candidate, Annette King, develops a regular source relationship with a number of journalists through formal and informal socialisation.

The development of source relationships through action research allows critical evaluation of how source relationships between journalists and an election candidate influence the creation of news.

- b) the candidate develops a thorough understanding of news processes, and news concepts such as newsworthiness, candidate accessibility and the angling of news, so she can utilise this knowledge to generate news and photographic opportunities.

The education process through action research allowed an analysis of the professional imperatives and journalistic norms which influence the news creation process in electioneering.

Each of these objectives has a goal (developing a systematic process to maximise effective utilisation of the news media) and each has an action or series of actions, or a procedure, for achieving the goal. They can be systematically tested (implemented) one at a time and evaluated for their effects, in relation to the news creation process in electioneering, through data collection (French & Bell, 1988). The goals, then, were set to provide for both systematic study and for performance related change.

## 5.4 Data collection

### 5.4.1 Introduction

Data collection is a major aspect of action research (Bennett & Oliver, 1988). From the data collected flows the identification of problems and issues, the recognition of opportunities, and the identification of possible solutions and actions. The collection of data is a function of both what data are needed and the goals of the research. Once the data has been analysed the analysis should again be fed back to the group.

### 5.4.2 Methodology

At several meetings in February, March and April 1993, the action researcher, the candidate, the publicity group and the wider Miramar campaign committee were involved in deciding what data was needed, to achieve both the goals of the research and for Mrs King's campaign. Care was taken not to rely on one source of information only in the data collection process and the need to focus on the key points of the research was acknowledged by those involved in data collection. A variety of methods was used to gather this data including questionnaires, interviews, observations, reference to archival material and topical references, and meetings. There was a continuing process of data collection from February to November 1993, the period of action research.

It was decided by the group involved in data collection that information needed to be gathered about five issues or areas:

- The candidate's perception of her own level of preparedness for dealing with the news media,
- The perceptions of a reference group about Mrs King's level of preparedness for dealing with the news media,
- The news media servicing the electorate (processes, resources, deadlines, distribution, circulation, journalists and editorial policy),
- The appropriate ways of developing source relationships with journalists,

- The relevant strategies for selecting electorate and national issues which could be worked into potential stories for the news media by the candidate, and which would provide topics for letters to the editor.

The bulk of the data was collected by the action researcher with help from the publicity committee. Two questionnaires were used both at the data collection and evaluation stages of the research in relation to the candidate's perception of her media awareness and of the perception of others about Mrs King's level of preparedness in dealing with the news media. The questionnaires allowed for comparative analysis at the start of the action research project and on its completion to measure perceived change.

One questionnaire measured the candidate's self perception of competence and understanding of aspects of the news creation process. The other survey instrument measured the reference group's perceptions of Mrs King's competence and understanding. Both employed bi-polar scaling. (Further discussion about bi-polar scaling is contained in the evaluation section, Chapter Nine: *Evaluation* (9.4.1). Bi-polar scaling.) The reference group comprised three people; a professional journalist, a campaign organiser and a former member of Parliament. They were chosen for their proximity to Mrs King and their understanding of news media processes. It was considered the reference group would be able to make informed judgements.

The self perception questionnaire (Appendix A) asked Mrs King how competent she perceived herself to be in initiating contact with journalists about stories; about news sources; in negotiating with journalists about story content; and in identifying angles for news stories. In addition, the questionnaire asked Mrs King what level of understanding she felt she had of the concept of newsworthiness; of the news production process in print media, in radio, and in television; and of how a journalist thinks about news construction. She was also asked how confident she felt in complaining when necessary to a journalist about story content. The questionnaire asked Mrs King to use some key words to describe her feelings as a political candidate towards the news media.

Similar questions were asked of the reference group in relation to their perception of Mrs King's competence, understanding and confidence in relation to aspects of the news media creation process (Appendix B).

### 5.4.3 Data results

The results of the five issues or areas in which data were collected during the action research project are referred to individually.

#### **Candidate's self perception of her confidence**

One goal of the research was to allow the political candidate, Mrs King, to develop a thorough understanding of news processes. But it was clear from preliminary meetings that Mrs King lacked self confidence in relation to the news media. Information was collected to establish the degree of perceived self confidence in particular aspects of the news process. A questionnaire exploring how Mrs King perceived her levels of competence in, and understanding of, aspects of the news process was completed by Mrs King at the end of March 1993. The same questionnaire was completed again in November 1993 and the second questionnaire will be referred to in detail in the evaluation section in Chapter Nine. At the end of March 1993 Mrs King scored herself towards the incompetent end of a seven point scale measuring competence (with one as competent and seven as incompetent) and similarly towards the low end of scales measuring understanding of various aspects of the news process and measuring the level of confidence (Appendix C).

To questions, "how competent do you perceive yourself to be in initiating contact with journalists about stories?" and "how competent as a news source do you perceive yourself to be?", Mrs King scored four. To questions, "how competent do you perceive yourself to be in negotiating with journalists about story content?" and "how competent do you perceive yourself to be in identifying angles for news stories", Mrs King scored herself at five and four respectively. Asked "what level of understanding do you have of the journalistic concept of newsworthiness?" Mrs King scored herself higher at three.

To three questions asking her what level of understanding she had of the news production process in print media, radio and television Mrs King scored print media and radio at four, and television at five. Asked how confident she felt she was in complaining when necessary to a journalist about story content Mrs King scored herself at four.

Mrs King was asked to use some key words to describe her feelings as a political candidate towards the news media. She used three words, "apprehensive", "aggressive" and "suspicious".

### **Reference group's perceptions**

While Mrs King's own view of her understanding of news creation revealed low self confidence, information was needed to measure whether this self perception was shared or whether Mrs King's level of understanding and preparedness was regarded differently by those with a professional interest in the news media and political reportage.

Four questions in the survey of the reference group related to their perceptions of Mrs King's competence in relation to initiating contact with journalists, as a news source, in negotiating with journalists about story content, and in identifying angles for news stories (Appendix B). Four questions asked the reference group their perceptions of the level of understanding the candidate had of the news production process in print media, in radio, and in television, and of how a journalist thinks about news construction. In addition the reference group was asked "How confident do you feel Annette King is in complaining when necessary to a journalist about story content?"; "Rank your perception of Annette King's understanding of how news is created"; and "Rank your perception of Annette King's utilisation of the news media as a political candidate".

The results of the first questionnaire of the reference group showed congruence (Appendix D). All three respondents scored Mrs King towards the high end of the scale (between 2 and 2.6) on the competence questions, similarly in relation to the questions concerning level of understanding, confidence in complaining, and utilisation of the news media as a political candidate.

The results indicated that while Mrs King ranked herself middle to low in terms of competence, understanding and confidence, those near to her perceived her as being very able in terms of understanding and dealing with the news media. The reference group completed the same questionnaire again in November 1993 and the second questionnaire will be referred to in detail in the evaluation section of the research. The implications of the results of the two questionnaires suggested that boosting Mrs King's media confidence and source relationships with journalists was more important than improving skills, which the reference group felt she already largely possessed.

### **Data about the news media**

The publicity committee needed information about the news media servicing the electorate to decide which media should be targeted. Data produced by the Newspaper Publishers Association showed that the Miramar electorate was served in terms of the local press by two daily, paid for newspapers, *The Dominion*, and the *Evening Post*, and by the community newspaper, *Eastern News*. It was delivered free of charge to 13,625 homes in the Wellington suburbs of Hataitai, Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay, Melrose, Miramar, Oriental Bay, Roseneath, Rongotai, Strathmore and Seatoun. *Eastern News* was published by Capital Community Newspapers, which is a Wilson and Horton subsidiary. Capital Community Newspapers is a group of free community newspapers in the wider Wellington area.

Because the *Eastern News* was the only print media distributed to every household in the electorate it provided the greatest opportunity for Mrs King to reach her target audience, voters in Miramar, free of charge. However, both Mrs King and members of her campaign committee perceived the *Eastern News* as indifferent, if not hostile, to the news initiatives of successive Labour candidates, both Peter Neilson when he was the sitting member, and Mrs King as a contender. Several campaign committee members regarded *Eastern News* as anti-Labour. So the data collection phase allowed the publicity group to focus on a potential problem of access and on possible solutions to this problem.

Data gathering was not confined to electorate-specific information about the news media. The action researcher also provided information to the group about the role played by different types of news media in informing the public about politics. Popular perception, fuelled by television's own self promotion, pays homage to the power of television as a news conduit. A study by Leitch (1991) of the 1990 New Zealand election found television to be the most popular source of news with 72% of voters claiming to watch news programmes, compared with newspapers as the second most popular source at 60%. Leitch's study compares with a National Party survey during the 1990 election reported by former party official, John Collinge, that 67% of the electorate regarded television as the most effective medium compared with 13% who nominated newspapers. But after these and other research results were shared with the publicity committee, the print media (both paid direct mail and unpaid news media) were established as the priority for the candidate and the committee to concentrate on during the election campaign. These media were considered to be the most accessible and cost-effective at a local level. Graber (1988) looked at the role of political communication and states:

The role played by different types of news media in informing the public raises some intriguing questions. Televised news, which requires listening and observation skills, is easier to master and remember than printed news, which requires literacy skills. But once audiences overcome the hurdle of mastering reading, abstract concepts can be extracted more readily from newspaper and magazine stories than from the typical television telecast...although pictures are rich sources for evaluating people and for gaining realistic views about the physical world, the politically relevant information that they convey has been denigrated by most analysts in the past (p.264).

Stempel (1991) in an important study debunked earlier research on where people get most of their news. His study made it abundantly clear that most people did *not* get most of their news from television. They did use television more for national news, "but clearly it is newspapers they turn to for local news" (p.8). Stempel states:

That may raise the question of which is more important. The extent to which people use other people as a source gives one answer to that question. The news people are most likely to talk to other people about is local news (p.8).

Mrs King was a local candidate who needed to generate local political discussion. For this reason the local newspaper became the principal focus of news media activity for the action research project. People talking to each other about politics remains significant in political communication. Rudd (1992) states, "the growing importance of television as a source of political information has not...totally eliminated the political conversation" (p.125).

Research by Golding (1992) and Deacon and Golding (1991) on the British Government's failure to win the public relations battle over that country's poll tax introduction credits the potency of the regional press as a major factor. Golding (1992) cites research by the Independent Broadcasting Authority in Britain stating the press massively outweighs other media as a source of local news. "The power of the local press for local agenda setting is manifest" (p.512). In the New Zealand context, Kelleher (1993) reports McGregor stating community newspapers at a local level are currently the only area of true newspaper growth with 105 newspapers publishing more than two million copies per issue in 1993, up from 1.85 million copies per issue. This expansion occurred at a time when metropolitan and provincial newspaper were in general contracting in subscriber base. The nature of the community press as free to subscribers means for an increasing number of households these local papers are the only newspapers received by the household.

### **Source relationships**

Critical to the action research project was the development of source relationships between the political candidate Mrs King and journalists. Information was needed about both the appropriate methods of developing source relationships and about the journalists Mrs King should cultivate.

Data were collected by the publicity committee about individual reporters most likely to write stories about the Miramar electorate. These included political reporters from the two Wellington daily newspapers, the *Evening Post* and *The Dominion*, the group editor, the reporter and the photographer of the *Eastern News*, political reporters for TV One and Television Three. As the election campaign progressed a new entrant in the news media stakes entered into calculations, the community newspaper *City Voice* and information was gathered on reporting staff.

A process of formal and informal socialisation in addition to professional contact were considered to be the most fruitful methods of developing source relationships with journalists. It was decided the professional contact should be wider than a relationship based solely on the traditional nexus between journalist and a political candidate. Mrs King should, if possible, also foster professional contact by passing on information and news "tips" which lay outside her immediate political interests. Formal socialisation would occur through invitation to journalists to attend lunch and electorate events, and informal socialisation would take place as an extension of professional contact and of formal socialisation.

### **Strategies for selecting events to become news**

If a systematic process was to be developed to maximise news manufacture then information was needed about what events from the vast panoply of possibilities were likely to become news. MacDougall (1968) states:

at any given moment billions of simultaneous events occur throughout the world...All of these occurrences are potentially news. They do not become so until some purveyor of news gives an account of them. The news, in other words, is the account of the event, not something intrinsic in the event itself (p.12).

In addition, strategies for linking the candidate to particular issues and events needed to be developed. Data were collected at the start of the campaign about all forthcoming electorate events which could generate news media interest. These included visits to the electorate of other Labour politicians and Members of Parliament, Labour Party branch activities, fund raising events, and joint Meet the Candidate meetings.

Important cultural, social, sporting and administrative events (such as the Wahine Day commemoration) within the electorate were also recorded. In addition, information was gathered about the dates and timing of policy releases, the manifesto and other Labour Party publications. This information was recorded at the candidate's house on a giant whiteboard which listed every day of the campaign and the relevant activities for that day.

Details were sought from campaign committee members living in Miramar at each of the campaign meetings, particularly in relation to the topical electorate issues which concerned Miramar voters. These regular meetings also canvassed any local intelligence gathered about the campaigns of Mrs King's political opponents. Information about issues of the day and relevant strategies as to potential news stories were also discussed during telephone calls made daily throughout the election campaign proper between the candidate and the action researcher. This allowed the exchange of valuable inside information about Labour's overall campaign strategy and how the timing and content of an individual news story might mesh with, or impact on, policy. This daily data gathering and exchange exercise allowed the candidate to initiate contact with the news media or to react to an issue of the day in an informed manner. For example, the emergence of unemployment as a key issue during the campaign saw Mrs King divert publicity attention to both generating stories espousing her party's policy and attacking her opponent's record on job growth.

The data gathering exercise produced a large amount of information. While this description of its collection suggests the researcher had a coherent mass of material presented in an orderly fashion from which to generate options, the reality of the process was often messy and ambiguous. Contradictory information or more complex issues had to be talked through before information was integrated so options could be generated.

## 5.5 Option generation

### 5.5.1 Introduction

Bennett and Oliver (1988) state after the action research group's diagnosis from the available data, options need to be generated which decide on "useful, meaningful and valid action to improve performance" (p.10). In keeping with the collaborative nature of action research key people (the candidate, the action researcher and members of the publicity group) were involved in selecting the most appropriate action from the options generated with the aim of improving performance and creating the necessary change (Bennett & Oliver).

### 5.5.2 The method of generating options

Deciding which options to pursue involved the action research group in strategic decision making. Mintzberg, Raisinghani & Theoret (1976) analyse the structure of "unstructured" decision-making. They define a *decision* as a specific commitment to action, *unstructured* "refers to decision processes that have not been encountered in quite the same form and for which no predetermined and explicit set of ordered responses exist in the organization", and *strategic* "simply means important, in terms of action taken, the resources committed, or the precedents set" (p.246).

Several of the characteristics of strategic decision making identified by Mintzberg *et al* (1976) are useful in analysing the decision making process of the publicity group as they considered and selected options. Mintzberg *et al* adopt Witte's (1972) observation:

We believe that human beings cannot gather information without in some way simultaneously developing alternatives. They cannot avoid evaluating these alternatives immediately, and in doing so they are forced to a decision. This is a package of operations and the succession of these packages over time constitutes the total decision-making process (p.180).

Mintzberg *et al* (1976) state they "find logic" in delineating various phases in the strategic decision process but not in "postulating a simple, sequential relationship between them" (p.252). They define these phases as *identification*, *development* and *selection*. The identification phase of decision making comprises *decision recognition* in which opportunities, problems and crises are acknowledged and prompt "decisional activity" and *diagnosis* during which the group seeks to comprehend the evoking stimuli and determine cause-effect relationships for the decision situation" (p.253).

In this action research project the generation of options took place against a volatile political backdrop, the need for reactive and proactive strategies, and within an active stream of communication. Mintzberg *et al* (1976) state:

Most strategic decisions do not present themselves to the decision maker in convenient ways: problems and opportunities in particular must be identified in the streams of ambiguous, largely verbal data that decision makers receive. The need for a decision is identified as the difference between information on some actual situation and some expected standard (p.253).

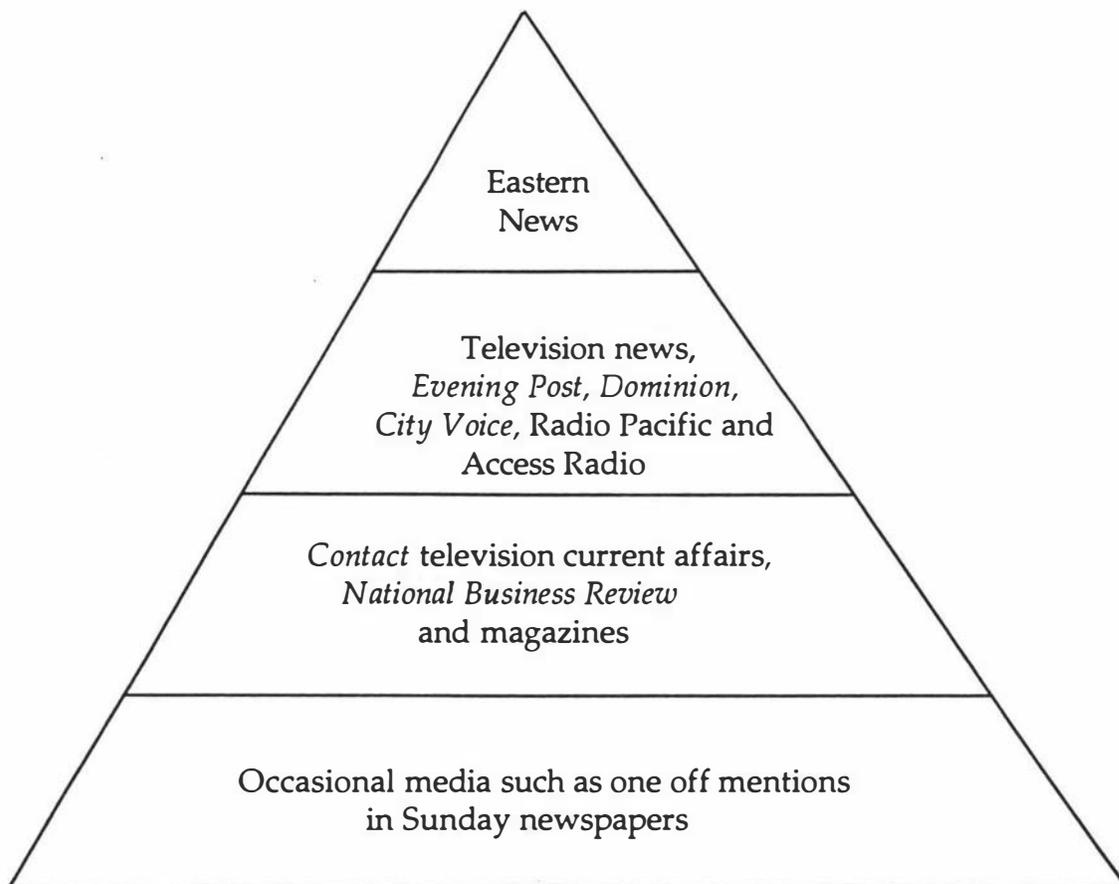
In this case a number of strategic decisions were both problems matched with opportunities. Mintzberg *et al* (1976) state that the "heart of the decision-making process is the set of activities that leads to the development of one or more solutions to a problem or crisis or the elaboration of an opportunity" (p.255). Two basic routines, search and design, can be used to describe development according to these researchers. In this phase of the action research the design routine to develop a custom-made solution is relevant.

...the design of a custom-made solution is a complex iterative procedure, which proceeds as follows: the designers may begin with a vague image of some ideal solution. They factor their decision into a sequence of nested design and search cycles, essentially working their way through a decision tree, with the decisions at each node more narrow and focused than the last. Failure at any node can lead to cycling back to an earlier node. Thus a solution crystallizes, as the designers grope along, building their solution brick by brick without really knowing what it will look like until it is completed (p.256).

The selection phase of the decision process involves three sequential routines according to Mintzberg *et al* (1976). These are the determination of criteria for choice, evaluation of the consequences of alternatives in terms of the criteria, and the making of a choice. This, too, is described as a "typically, multistage, iterative process involving progressively deepening investigation of alternatives" (p.257). The selection of options in the action research project described generally followed the characteristics of criteria determination, choice evaluation and choice making.

### 5.5.3 Option results

From the collection of data which were fed back to the publicity group several key issues emerged. The first was; Which of the news media should Mrs King focus on in an attempt to "make" news and maximise her exposure? The limited resources available to the candidate in terms of publicity (such as all press releases being written by either the candidate or the action researcher) meant not all the news media which serviced the electorate could necessarily be targeted. The option generated was to create a hierarchy of the news media (Figure 3) servicing the electorate, and to place a premium on targeting the free, community newspaper *Eastern News* which had blanket distribution in the electorate.



**Figure 3:** Hierarchy of News Media to be targeted during the Miramar campaign

The second issue to emerge which impacted on option generation was the level of Mrs King's self confidence in dealing with the news media. The candidate's self perception of competence and understanding of the news media process was well below the perceptions recorded by the reference group. Experienced political journalists, such as Oliver Riddell of the *Christchurch Press*, in conversation with the action researcher expressed surprise at Mrs King's lack of self confidence about the news media and indicated that she had "telegenic" qualities which meant she was photogenic in television appearances, she was a forceful politician in argument, and generally well liked by parliamentary press gallery journalists despite keeping her distance. In short, Mrs King had the indefinable "human touch" which expressed itself in news media appeal.

Part of Mrs King's self doubt about the news media sprang from nervousness about the prospect of attack journalism in relation to being a "recycled" politician seeking to come in from the cold and a carpetbagger to boot, and her previous identification with Rogernomics as a Cabinet Minister in the fourth Labour Government which decisively embraced *laissez faire* economic policies at odds with traditional socialist philosophies. The political danger in being symbolised as "recycled" or a "retread" (another fashionable news media epithet) was the larger association in the public mind of those concepts with the notion of broken political promises. "Recycled" politicians were those who had "let the public down" in the past.

Several options generated seemed appropriate in this context. One was to school and train Mrs King in hard and difficult subjects (such as the Rogernomics association) so she would not be thrown by these questions and would be able to express fluent answers in an interview context. The second option combined avoiding contexts in which such associations could be made by the news media, or confronting such references by the news media head on when they occurred (such as writing a letter to the Letters to the Editor column disputing the label "carpetbagger" after having lived in the electorate for 12 years).

The third major issue to emerge went to the heart of the challenge of Mrs King's campaign and the action research project. This was the development of source relationships between Mrs King and pivotal journalists so she could both make news

and make the news to enhance her visibility to voters. Again, the options generated relied on the hierarchy model (Figure 3). Mrs King would systematically foster contact with particular journalists by initiating contact on a daily, twice weekly, weekly or occasional basis with potential leads, reaction or tip-offs. She would not necessarily foster contact with other journalists but be available to them on a convenience basis.

Option generation was an on-going iterative process during the action research project. Almost daily, options as to publicity initiatives, and the tenor and style of publicity, were subject of group feedback before a particular course of action was implemented. This option generation is referred to in the course of the research.

## 5.6 Group feedback

### 5.6.1 Introduction

At the centre of the framework (Figure 2) for action research used in this study is the notion of group feedback by which all of those involved in the organization become part of the research process. Group feedback and collaboration between the researcher and members of the organization is continuous during the action research. Hult and Lennung (1980) state the action research procedure requires the use of participative methods for data feedback. The creation and use of what they call a "diffusion channel" (p.536) is an important part of action research strategy. Without such a channel there is the danger that findings will not be applied or applied when they are no longer topical. It needs to be noted that feedback to the collaborative group involved in action research inevitably involves evaluation of action research as a process and evaluations of particular pieces of action. There are then several levels of evaluation involved in action research; the continuing evaluative process that goes on in interaction with the participating group, and the overall evaluation of the action research project in light of the goals set. This particular section of the research looks at the continuing evaluative process as the action research project developed. Chapter Nine describes and discusses evaluative processes and techniques used in the project including the overall evaluation of the action research project in light of the goals set.

### 5.6.2 Methodology

The diffusion channels which existed in the action research project were the regular contacts between action researcher, candidate and publicity and campaign committees. Data were fed back during the regular informal, daily contact and more formally when the publicity committee met and reported to the campaign committee.

It was vital such diffusion channels existed, both to improve the understanding of news processes by the candidate and the campaign committee, and so that local electorate knowledge possessed by campaign committee members could be fed back into the action research. An example of local knowledge was the building of public concern about proposed use of "green space", Crown-owned land in the Fort Dorset area. Only those living within the community would be able to identify Fort Dorset as a local issue so that it could be incorporated into the news media strategy as a possible press release subject. But identifying the angle which might make it newsworthy came out of improving the candidate's and the publicity group's understanding of news processes which involved the action researcher's guidance and expertise. Both elements, local knowledge possessed by the members of the publicity committee, and knowledge of news media techniques which could be imparted to the candidate, were critical to the collaborative process.

## **5.7 Iteration**

Action research is by its nature on-going. It aims to develop the self-help competencies of people facing problems (Susman & Evered, 1978) and this quest can be a continuing one. Its collaborative nature and what Whyte (1988) describes as "continuous mutual learning" processes also differentiates the action research model from standard models of research which have a prescribed start and finish. The cyclical nature of this model of research means there is both a sequence within an iteration and there can be repeated iterations of the cycle. French and Bell (1978) describe action research as a process and state:

..it is a sequence of events and activities *within* each iteration (data collection, feedback and working the data, and action based on the data); and it is a *cycle* of iterations of these activities sometimes treating the same problem through several cycles and sometimes moving to different problems in each cycle (p.89).

In this action research, for example, the same problem (the development of source relationships between the candidate and journalists) is treated through several cycles and these will be referred to in Chapter Six.

## CHAPTER SIX: ACTION RESEARCH RESULTS: SOURCE RELATIONSHIPS

### 6.1 Introduction

The next three chapters report on results of the action research project. This chapter deals with the development of source relationships between the election candidate Mrs King and journalists, Chapter Seven looks at action to build the election candidate's self confidence and understanding of news media processes, and Chapter Eight describes the relevant strategies employed by the researcher, the candidate and her electorate committee to manufacture news. Chapters Six, Seven and Eight incorporate both description and discussion of the results to enable the "story" of action research to be told. Reference to relevant news media scholarship is included in the description and discussion. Iterative activity relating to the development of source relationships directly follows in the relevant chapter to help provide conceptual and chronological linkage. This chapter describes the results of action taken in developing journalist-source connections.

Bennett and Oliver (1988) say taking action follows the selection of the most appropriate action from the options generated with the aim of improving performance and creating the necessary change. The collaborative nature of the process with the group involved occurred not only in selection of which course of action to pursue but also in some stages of implementation. During this phase the action was monitored to accumulate evidence to determine whether the goals of the project were met. Corey (1953) states a significant element of a design for action research includes, "the inference from this evidence of generalizations regarding the relation between the actions and the desired goal" (p.41).

The descriptive accounts of the "action" in this research incorporate both a summary of activity and appropriate theoretical concepts from news media scholarship. A number of the options discussed earlier were employed in the action as the project developed. The implementation of the "action" was primarily carried out by the action researcher

and the candidate, although other members of the publicity and campaign committees were involved with specific activities. In part, this reflected the voluntary status of campaign workers, the need for urgency in response both in relating to the making of news by a political aspirant and in reacting to news of the day as a candidate challenging a sitting Member. At times, however, the action researcher was not involved in the actual implementation of particular activities as the political candidate negotiated individually with journalists. These activities, where the candidate was solely involved, were in general preceded by planning and practice sessions.

## 6.2 Significance of source relationships in news media processes

The manufacture of news is inextricably entwined with the struggle between journalists and their sources, a struggle over power, over knowledge and over image. Ericson *et al* (1989) state, "sources and journalists do not merely report on politics, they constitute the news media as a political institution (p.11).

News is made largely as a result of the relationships journalists forge with sources and from the flow of information which is a consequence of those relationships. These relationships between journalists and sources can be seen as a continuum. At one end of the spectrum there is mutual trust between the two while at the other end of the spectrum the relationship is characterised by either hostility or sycophancy. In between are degrees of dependence (such as the symbiotic relationship between police and press which characterises crime reporting) and a variety of power relationships. The degree of need for publicity and the relative strengths of the parties influences the relationship between reporter and source, a relationship which can be transitory or continuing.

The nexus between reporters and the sources they receive information from on which stories are based has, in general, been examined in news media scholarship through content analysis or observational studies. But sources in the news are not always evident or explicit in content. Ericson *et al* (1991) state:

Sometimes the only 'voice' is that of journalists, even though the knowledge they are using has been obtained from elsewhere, for example, from other news stories, wire copy, news releases, and individuals who remain off the record (p.181).

Ericson *et al* (1991) state that only observational studies of journalists and sources involved in news production can reveal the nature and extent of practices in this regard and they refer to their own previous studies (Ericson, Baranek & Chan 1987, 1989). Action research is an additional methodology which offers the opportunity for insight into the relationship between journalists and sources. Both action research as a process and action research as an approach help to elucidate the nature of the negotiation process between sources and journalists and the practices employed by each group in the contest over power, knowledge and image.

### 6.3 General background

In her previous electorate of Horowhenua, Mrs King had easy access to the local provincial newspaper, the *Levin Chronicle*, in the period 1984-1990. The newspaper had a paid circulation of 6,630 in 1990-1991, according to the *Information about newspapers* booklet produced by the Newspaper Publishers Association in 1991. In Mrs King's words, the newspaper "printed almost everything I offered them." Mrs King's status during that time as a Cabinet Minister and as an incumbent Member of Parliament for Horowhenua increased her "newsworthiness." She wrote a weekly column called "Annette Says" for the *Weekly News*, a community newspaper associated with the *Levin Chronicle*, in her capacity as the local elected representative.

### 6.4 The notion of incumbency and the news

Political incumbency as a factor influencing news media coverage was analysed by Graber (1976) in relation to coverage patterns in the 1968 and 1972 American presidential elections. Graber concluded that there were substantial differences between 1968 and 1972 campaign coverage patterns which were attributable to the fact that the 1972 election involved an incumbent team. The analysis disclosed a greater emphasis

on professional images, professional capacities and personal ideologies in the later election. Emphasis on personal qualities and style was somewhat reduced, but remained prominent.

Tiffen (1989) comments on the publicity advantages of political incumbency and states that, "Governments enact decisions and because action is more consequential than criticism they are inherently more newsworthy than Oppositions" (p.129). Tiffen states that Governments enjoy more initiative in their media relations and can help focus the news agenda into particular areas. They also have advantages as the custodians of the administrative and ceremonial roles of the state. Governments also have an interest in reducing the Opposition's visibility where this is possible. Many of the same advantages Governments enjoy over their political opponents in the national press, apply equally to individual politicians in the local press. Mrs King was an incumbent in a largely rural electorate going into the 1990 election, but her status had changed to that of a contender in an urban electorate in 1993.

The notion of incumbency heightening a politician's newsworthiness is a popular concept with contemporary commentators. During the debate over Tauranga Member of Parliament Winston Peter's political future after his ousting from the National Party in March 1993, political scientist Alan McRobie speculated on Radio New Zealand's national news at 7 am on 8 March 1993, that it was unlikely that Winston Peters would resign his seat suddenly and cause a snap by-election in the Tauranga constituency. If he chose that course of action Mr Peters would lose his communication privileges enjoyed as a Member of Parliament (MP) and suffer reduced newsworthiness, according to McRobie. The political scientist was subsequently proven wrong about Mr Peter's resigning. The Tauranga member quit on 17 March 1993. But the notion that Mr Peters was more "newsworthy" as an incumbent National MP, albeit a rebel MP, persisted in political commentary. Political scientist Nigel Roberts stated on the television news programme *Prime Time* on 17 March 1993 that Mr Peters needed publicity "like a fish needs water." He further linked incumbency to the parliamentary privilege which attaches to statements made by MPs while in the House of Representatives and speaking during Parliamentary sessions. Winston Peters, no longer an incumbent, would not enjoy the protection of parliamentary privilege, which had previously allowed the Tauranga member to make claims which were highly "newsworthy." He

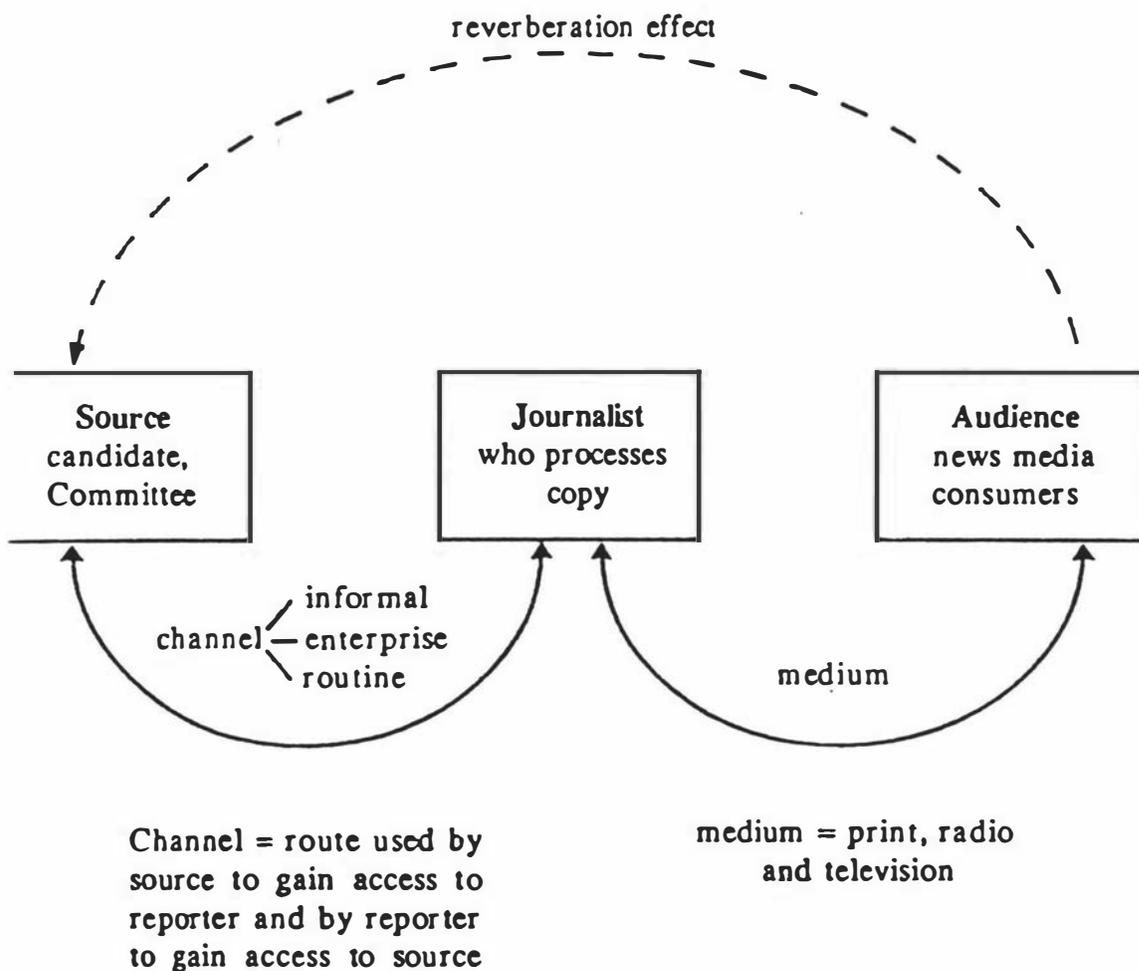
would now have to be more constrained in his allegations relating to political, social and financial issues, Roberts said.

The implications of political incumbency in terms of news media processes for Mrs King as a contender in the 1993 general election, as opposed to her previous status as a political incumbent, were profound. First, the ritualistic and ceremonial functions (opening the bowling club, addressing service organizations, receiving public deputations etc) which attach to a sitting member in an electorate and which attract regular and continuing publicity were enjoyed by her main political opponent, the National MP for Miramar, Graeme Reeves. Second, the news media's affection for sources of elite status came into play. Graeme Reeves, as the local MP, had a greater legitimacy, in terms of status by virtue of his incumbency, than Mrs King. On top of these factors was the acknowledgement by Mrs King of the need to "toughen up" in dealing with a different news media in a new environment now she no longer enjoyed the comfortable and systematic attention she had formerly received from the *Levin Chronicle* as a Cabinet Minister representing an electorate with a more rural focus.

#### 6.5 Source relationship and the *Eastern News*

While Gans (1979) states that there is no single or simple explanation of the news out of the handful of explanatory factors he states that those governing the choice of sources are of prime significance. In late January 1993 Mrs King visited the *Eastern News* offices to provide information for a news story that a community centre in the electorate remained unused a year after it was opened by the municipal authority, the Wellington City Council. Mrs King provided to the reporter basic facts which were previously unknown to the reporter, the names of contact people who would express comment and opinion about the facts, points of reference for the reporter, and her own comments on the situation from which the reporter could construct a story. Mrs King provided the story detail in the expectation she would be identified and utilised as a primary source (person quoted in the story) in the story's construction and publication. The reporter had no prior knowledge of the facts of the story before Mrs King's visit, and it was unlikely that the reporter would receive a "tip off" through other routine newsgathering activities such as the reporter's own news contacts, or coverage of regular "beats" or "rounds".

Mrs King's visit to the newspaper was the channel to use Sigal's (1973) typology, or the path by which information reached the reporter. It was an informal channel, under Sigal's classification, as distinct from an enterprise channel which may have involved initiative such as independent research from the journalist concerned or a routine channel involving official proceedings, press releases or press conferences. The communication process as it relates to the news media is shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: The News Media Communications Process Using Sigal's (1983) Typology.**

## 6.6 Marginalisation of the source

When the story was published, as a front page lead, February 1 1993 (Appendix E) Mrs King was not used as a source in the story's construction. Instead the reporter stated in the last paragraph of the story:

Miramar's Labour candidate Annette King is writing a letter to the Mayor Fran Wilde about the centre after tenants told her of their concerns when she visited the flats recently.

The marginalisation of Mrs King as a source in a story which she provided to the newspaper raised the issue of the relationship between journalists and their news sources. This relationship has been debated in a variety of contexts. Sigal's (1973) study of sources and channels looked at Washington-based newspapers and concluded that reporters relied mainly on routine channels to get information. He states that, "The routine channels for news gathering thus constitute the mechanism for official dominance of national and foreign news in the two papers (p.125).

Brown, Bybee, Wearden and Straughan (1987) "recalibrated" Sigal's (1973) study regarding the nature and diversity of news sources and news channels and concluded that little had changed in the intervening decade. They state, "our analysis of channels of information reveals a heavy overall reliance on routine reporting. These findings lend credence to Sigal's... suggestion that newspapers have relinquished control of news to their sources" (p.51).

Other researchers, (Chibnall, 1977; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke & Roberts (1978); Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1989) have examined the source relationship in the context of crime news. These researchers, looking at news as a social product, are divided between those who see reporters as subordinate to their sources (Chibnall; Hall *et al*) and Ericson *et al* who state journalists do have some relative autonomy from their sources in spite of the many signs of their dependence. Hall *et al* state that dependence on powerful institutional representatives as sources by the news media leads to an over-reliance by the media on certain sources. Those in powerful and privileged institutional positions systematically over-access the media. The news media "stand in a position of

structured subordination to the primary definers" (p.59), who are representatives of these institutions.

In contrast, Ericson *et al* (1989) prefer the concept of negotiation of control between sources and journalists.

...it is not a straightforward matter to answer the question "Who controls?" Much of the recent research literature has argued that the news media are very dependent on source organisations... However, as our research documents, from the perspective of sources the news media are very powerful, in possession of key resources that frequently give them the upper hand (p.395).

Altheide and Snow (1991) looking at television politics as "sound-bite" campaigning, make the point that the distinction between "source"(person(s) quoted in the story) and "channel" (path by which the information reached the reporter) is no longer appropriate for television. Altheide and Snow state that journalist Michael Deaver, in a *Washington Post* editorial, articulates how the "source" and the "channel" are no longer separate. "The world of one has entered that of the other, and both are transformed. From a politician's perspective, "long live journalism" (p.88). Altheide and Snow state this merging of source and channel signals the death of organized journalism as professional image makers learn from the media how to produce an image and then use the codes, languages, logic, and formats of the news media. While this thesis can be accepted with respect to television, the traditional distinction between *source* and *channel* remains valid for newspaper journalism. If Ericson *et al*'s (1989) argument about negotiation of control is applied to this instance, it is clear the *Eastern News* maintained the upper hand. Gans (1979) wrote, "sources, journalists and audiences coexist in a system, although it is closer to being a tug of war than a functionally interrelated organism" (p.81).

A number of explanations can be offered for the marginalisation of Mrs King as a source in the story. These explanations are linked to the decisions made about what constitutes news and most of them involve what Brown *et al* (1987) have described as, "the modern prerequisite of routinization in order to produce news efficiently from the infinite number of possible stories that occur each day" (p.45).

Journalists themselves offer explanations as to "what is news?" by insistence that news selection, construction and presentation is based on the professional norms and news judgments of journalists. Brown et al (1987) state, "organizational explanations focus on how story and source selection are influenced by the commercial needs and structural arrangements of news operations. Other explanations stress technological, economic and ideological factors outside the news organization" (p.46).

### 6.7 Journalistic appropriation

No one explanation covers the complex interplay of factors influencing the decisions about what is news. In this case Mrs King's information was clearly considered to be news and was presented as the lead story. The problem for Mrs King was her reduced status as a source, moving from the initiator of the story *before* publication to a one paragraph mention *on* publication. This marginalisation could be explained in a number of ways. It could be a consequence of news filtering through the sub-editing process on the journalist's copy, it could result from the existence of either overt or covert rules and policies relating to political coverage by the community newspaper, or it could stem from the desire by the journalist to appropriate and "own" the story and present it in a form which emphasised the journalistic role and voice, as opposed to reliance on a source. This last explanation is a likely one. The introductory paragraph and the following two paragraphs of the story which set the scene are presented as fact without any source attribution. They read:

Tenants at Hobart Park Flats in Miramar are furious their new community centre still lies empty and useless a year after it was opened. The community centre, part of a \$205,000 project which included three new pensioner flats, was opened by Wellington City Council in February last year. Council built the community centre so pensioners, most of whom live in small bedsit flats, would have a place to meet and have a cup of tea.

Journalists traditionally cultivate the mystique of news "discovery" and often present stories which emphasize the reportorial role in newsgathering even when the information may have been provided fortuitously and the reportorial role is related to gathering and processing copy rather than "discovering" or uncovering the news.

## 6.8 Group feedback

The failure of Mrs King to be acknowledged as a source in the Hobart Park flats story led to a debriefing between the candidate and campaign committee members working with her on publicity. This was part of the group feedback phase of the action research project. The analysis showed that Mrs King had not sufficiently negotiated with the journalist any reciprocity, in this case the desired source acknowledgement, for her role as a provider of the story. She had not secured any overt or tacit understanding that the information was being provided as a *quid pro quo* for source acknowledgement. The result of this failure to secure a source role meant marginal publicity for her in a context which had offered maximum publicity potential for a political candidate.

It was considered by the group the options available to Mrs King as a consequence of the "shutout" of her as a source were to:

1. withdraw from an on-going source relationship with the journalist and the *Eastern News*;
2. negotiate some understanding of the source-journalist relationship with the journalist and the *Eastern News*;
3. complain about the presentation of the story to the *Eastern News* senior management;
4. accept the status quo of *Eastern News* at their convenience marginalising Mrs King after utilising story leads and ideas provided by her.

In deciding which option(s) to pursue it should be noted that Mrs King had rung the journalist concerned to protest at her marginalisation and had been informed by the journalist that the presentation of the story in the form it was published had been the "editor's decision." The *Eastern News* is one of a number of small Wellington community newspapers which share a group editor. This group editor is based outside the electorate at Johnsonville. Early in 1993 there had been a change in personnel in the position and the new group editor was a former senior daily newspaper journalist with parliamentary press gallery experience. It was anticipated by Labour that new personnel may bring a change to the indifference or hostility perceived by the party to be a problem in association with the Wellington community newspapers previously.

The option of withdrawal was never fully considered because *Eastern News* was the one "free" newspaper circulating throughout the electorate, and the one medium which circulated to every residence. To have withdrawn from a source relationship with the newspaper would mean heavier reliance on alternative media to communicate with the electorate, media that would need to be paid for by an indebted campaign organisation. The option of accepting the status quo of marginalisation as a source and relinquishing autonomy as a source allowing the newspaper to "control" was rejected also, on pragmatic grounds. There would have been no point in Mrs King utilising human resources and her network of contacts to provide story leads without visible, tangible publicity spin-offs for her candidacy.

It was decided by Mrs King, her group and this researcher that her response should be a combination of options. She would negotiate the source/journalist role and voice her concerns about the specific story to the editor. The visit to the new group editor would also be an information gathering exercise about editorial policy. It would enable the group editor to explain his editorial policy in relation to coverage of stories initiated by political hopefuls in the run-up to the election, and in respect of the election campaign period proper later in 1993.

Mrs King, accompanied by Trevor Mallard, Labour's candidate for the Pencarrow seat in Wellington, lunched with the editor in February 1993. Prior to the luncheon Mrs King was schooled for her approach to the meeting. She was counselled to avoid linking advertising and editorial concerns by implying that she would be a potential advertiser. This would have provoked the traditional journalistic antipathy to the concept of advertisers "buying" stories. Instead, the emphasis should be on discovering the basis for editorial judgments, and on gathering information about editorial policy for the election, as well as indicating concern about the treatment of an individual story. The fourth aim of the meeting was socialisation.

Reporting back after the luncheon meeting to the publicity group, Mrs King said that, as predicted, the editor stated "newsworthiness" was the basis for news selection and presentation in the *Eastern News*. Mrs King felt she was satisfied the editor had listened to her complaint about source marginalisation and acknowledged her points. She felt confident in the editor's assurance that if stories were "newsworthy" they would be

printed and that in future if she was a principal source in a story previously unknown to the journalist, she would be acknowledged as such in the story as a matter of normal journalistic practice. The editor also stated that there would be no prescription in terms of candidate or election coverage, (such as the notion of perceived balance in space between political candidates which sees some newspapers equalling out the square centimetres of copy regardless of the "newsworthiness") until at least June 1993, five months before election day.

### 6.9 Iteration: Budget cuts and the fire service

The development of source relationships became an iterative process, both as a sequence within an iteration and as repeated iterations of a cycle of activity. Mrs King further developed her relationship as a source by negotiating with the *Eastern News* over a story about budget cuts and the fire service. During her electorate work which included visits to fire service personnel, Mrs King learnt of New Zealand Fire Service's proposal to cut staff from a specialised vehicle used for aircraft fires at Wellington Airport. The proposal followed the call for a two per cent cut from the fire service budget by the Minister of Internal Affairs. Working with the publicity team Mrs King negotiated by telephone and facsimile machine with the reporter that she would provide story details *on the condition* that the story acknowledged her role in bringing the matter to public attention. In this case, Mrs King reversed the principle of reciprocity and did not reveal her information until she had received what she felt was sufficient guarantee of specific source attribution. Vague expressions of reportorial goodwill were not considered to be explicit enough. The newspaper had no knowledge of the story until approached by Mrs King. In her negotiation as a source with the reporter Mrs King on this occasion offered the *prospect* of a good, potentially front page story, *on the condition* that she received acknowledgement and prominence. Only when she had received an assurance from the reporter did she "trade" the detail which featured as the front page lead story. In this iteration of a cycle of activity (the development of a source relationship) Mrs King incorporated learning from previous experience, confirming Whyte's (1988) suggestion of continuous mutual learning from the action research process.

Again, the newspaper in its presentation of the story (Appendix F) emphasised journalistic autonomy by using the information as a framework from which an angle (public safety) was extracted, accredited sources (union and management) sought out and then arranged as A versus B with differing viewpoints. The lack of source attribution in the first few paragraphs of the story confirms the newspaper's desire to reinforce journalistic autonomy. Mrs King's role was subject of a secondary story underneath on the front page (Appendix F). While the story copy itself accurately indicated Mrs King had brought the matter to public attention, the headline read, "King responds" which emphasises the newspaper's desire to appear to be the "news breaker." The headline misleadingly suggests her role was a reactive one in the process of negotiation between source and journalist. The story itself, however, does acknowledge the story was "brought to light" by the Labour candidate. The pattern of the prominent use of stories initiated by Mrs King, but a comparatively grudging acknowledgement of her role as a primary source, confirms the concept that journalistic autonomy relates not to the initiation of stories, but is confined to their processing and presentation. The journalist's role in "discovering" or uncovering political news can be seen as a limited one. In both cases front page stories were triggered by supplied leads. In both cases the concrete particulars on which the stories were based were fed into the news and not witnessed or "uncovered" by the reporter. News has been manufactured in these cases by the source initiating the news process and by being dominant in the story gathering.

The story's presentation gives readers the impression of journalistic initiative, and emphasises the reportorial role in news gathering. This is despite the fact the reporter did not "discover" the news but merely processed the copy, by communicating back and forth between sources, checking facts, and writing the final story into a news format, *after* the lead for the story had been fed to him.

#### **6.10 Iteration: the Hodgson visit**

The development of source relationships became an iterative process, both as a sequence within an iteration and as repeated iterations of a cycle of activity. During this period the campaign committee was preparing for an electorate visit to Miramar by a sitting Member of Parliament. Electorate visits are used by campaign organisations and

election strategists primarily as publicity opportunities, in addition to meeting sections of the public within a particular electorate. They are usually one-day visits and electorates vie for "high profile" Members of Parliament, or party leaders. The strategy of electorate visits supports the view of several commentators (Tiffen,1989; Seymour-Ure,1974) that electioneering is contingent on the news media, rather than the news media being incidental to the process. Tiffen states:

There is an unacknowledged irony in news coverage of election campaigns: the media maintain the pretence that they are reporting a campaign which exists independently of them, when in fact the primary purpose of those campaign activities is precisely to secure favourable news coverage (p.127).

The Miramar electorate had been told by the Labour Party that because of the resource difficulties and the need to concentrate on Auckland electorates, the number of these electorate visits to Miramar would be low. There was a need to maximise publicity from the few visits Miramar would receive. The electorate campaign committee and the candidate Mrs King decided the visit of the Member of Parliament for Dunedin North to the electorate on 19 February provided an opportunity to generate a number of news media "angles" involving the Member of Parliament and Mrs King which would enhance her profile as well as that of Mr Hodgson.

On 10 February 1993 Mrs King and I met with Mr Hodgson, Labour's research and technology spokesman, at his parliamentary office in Wellington. Because of the short time available to Mr Hodgson for his Miramar visit on 19 February 1993 it was decided there would be three core activities; a visit to a local school to run an environmental workshop, a visit to the Ministry of Agriculture's Mahanga Bay hatchery and Greta Point marine research laboratories, and a flying visit to the *Eastern News* to deliver a press release and allow time for a photograph.

Mr Hodgson has been at the forefront of an Opposition campaign to embarrass the National Government over the amount of money spent by Government on promotion and publicity purposes. Mr Hodgson has asked numbers of parliamentary questions eliciting information about Government expenditure on publicity and issued numerous press releases criticising both the expenditure and the absence of easy access to the information. An example of the questions are those asked by Mr Hodgson for written

answer in Parliament by the Prime Minister the Hon. Jim Bolger and the Minister of Finance Hon. Ruth Richardson.

**Peter Hodgson (Dunedin North) to the Prime Minister:** What is the total amount budgeted for the new unit in his department to co-ordinate and develop government publicity?

**Rt. Hon. J.B. Bolger (Prime Minister) replied:** Four hundred and forty thousand dollars has been appropriated in the 1991-92 Estimates for the Communications Unit.

And,

**Peter Hodgson (Dunedin North) to the Minister of Finance:** How much is budgeted to be spent by the Government in 1991-92 on publicity, media studies, public relations, public affairs and corporate relations, broken down into total spending on these items by each department?

**Hon. Ruth Richardson (Minister of Finance) replied:** No figure for the total government is available. To obtain information on individual departments the member should direct his questions to the Ministers responsible.

In February 1993 Mr Hodgson had received replies to a number of parliamentary questions which embarrassed Government on the issue of publicity expenditure. Public spending on public relations has traditionally been a highly "newsworthy" issue. First, public relations has a bad image and journalists perceive that their audiences will become indignant that public money is being spent on propaganda to "sell" policies, issues and programmes that politicians have been unable to convince the electorate about through basic policy exposition. This perceived "newsworthiness" is heightened by the traditional hostility of journalists towards public relations and public relations practitioners. Spicer (1993) states the authors of a special report on terminology in public relations (Public Relations Society of America [PRSA] 1987) found that public relations practitioners are adopting a plethora of new titles (e.g., corporate communications, corporate affairs, and investor relations) in an effort to distance themselves for the perceived negative connotations surrounding the term *public relations*.

It was decided at the meeting with Mr Hodgson attended by Mrs King, myself, Mr Hodgson, and a Labour Party parliamentary researcher, Chris Spence, that a

"newsworthy" angle for Mr Hodgson, in light of his successful campaign against public expenditure on "propaganda", would be to break down the gross figure spent by Government to a cost for each Miramar elector. This information would be provided as a press release prepared by Mr Hodgson's staff as a local "angle" to the community newspaper. Further, a photo opportunity could be made out of the information with Mr Hodgson taking with him to the newspaper office a Kleensak of all the parliamentary questions and hundreds of pieces of written information which had been required to uncover information relating to expenditure on publicity over the past three years. It was anticipated this Kleensak could be emptied by Mr Hodgson and Mrs King to provide an action picture. On the day of the electorate visit, Mrs King, went a step further and purchased a garden wheelbarrow for \$129. She considered the wheelbarrow was a good photographic prop and the Kleensak of documentation could be poured into it for a "jacked up" photographic opportunity. A photograph was taken by the *Eastern News* reporter and the press release delivered to him.

However, the next issue of *Eastern News* carried no story relating to the cost to Miramar electors of Government publicity and did not mention Mrs King at all. On page six of an eight page edition (Appendix G) there was a small four paragraph story, headlined *More support needed*, relating to Mr Hodgson's visit to Ministry of Agriculture facilities. The story was sandwiched between the Trade Directory classified advertisements and an advertisement headed, *Having a Baby?*, on behalf of the Wellington Homebirth Midwives Collective. The story resulted from the journalist's own initiative in asking questions of Mr Hodgson about his visit to the facilities and did not follow from supplied press release material.

A number of factors could have contributed to non-publication of the publicity expenditure angle. The 1 March 1993 issue had restricted pagination and a very tight advertising to editorial ratio and so a number of stories would have been "squeezed" out. In addition, the group editor, whom Mrs King had made contact with, had been absent during the week of publication at a Community Newspapers Association biannual conference in Rotorua. Timing of the news and the newspaper's deadline were not conducive to publication. The weekly deadline is Wednesday for the following Monday's publication, which meant a Friday electorate visit was well out of the newspaper's time frame making the "news" nine days old. The principal reason for non-publication advanced by the reporter when approached by Mrs King was that the

story was too "overtly political." The decision had been made by the group editor and the reporter indicated to Mrs King he had asked the group editor to ring her and tell why the story was not published to avoid the reporter becoming "piggy in the middle."

Evaluating the non-publication, the candidate and her publicity team concluded that the story did not fit the style and tone of the community newspaper. It was noted that the *Eastern News* carried very little national political material preferring local body politics, and that by and large the newspaper followed the trend identified by many news media commentators of being events rather than issues-orientated (Chibnall, 1977; Molotch & Lester, 1974). A principal factor in the story's exclusion was its characteristic as a political "stunt" which had been identified in the editorial process and used as the basis for rejection. It was decided that future offerings to the *Eastern News* would better suit the newspaper's deadline, that "spot news" would be preferred and that it should be community-focused. It was felt that the story had probably been correctly rejected in terms of editorial judgment. The cost to electors of the Government's expenditure on propaganda was, in effect, a national story with a local "peg" only, rather than arising from a genuinely community-based circumstance. In this analysis, it was decided by the group that radio rather than the "parish pump" community newspaper may have been a more appropriate medium for the story.

#### 6.11 Iteration: Hobart Park Flats

Another cycle of iteration treating the problem of source relationship between candidate and journalist began at this stage with the action research team returning to the story of tenants of the Hobart Park flats and their empty community centre. Mrs King received a reply from Wellington's mayor Fran Wilde which indicated that the centre's closure was "totally inappropriate."

The publicity group working with Mrs King considered the mayor's letter, which acknowledged the futility of a community centre not being utilised for those it was built for, constituted a legitimate news followup. Follow-ups are a routine and traditional type of specialized stories within the print media. Fedler (1984) states that follow-ups are often called developing stories and they report the latest developments in stories that have been reported earlier. The mayor's letter was considered a legitimate news

follow-up because it was a new development, because the language used in the letter with the phrase "totally illogical" was inherently newsworthy and the status of the mayor gave the letter authority, and because the last paragraph of the original story, while marginalising Mrs King as the source of the information, implied to readers that there was "more to come."

It was clear, too, from publication of the original story that the *Eastern News* considered the issue legitimate community news by its standards of newsworthiness. After consultation with the publicity group Mrs King approached the newspaper who indicated they were keen to follow up the story. She then met with the reporter and a photographer on 24 March 1993 which was within the newspaper's deadline time frame for publication on 29 March 1993. Mrs King in her feedback to the publicity group indicated she felt she had negotiated a source relationship with the journalist by indicating that she was providing follow-up material such as the letter from Wellington's mayor on condition she was quoted as a source in the story. Mrs King also spoke later to the journalist on the telephone providing further information which had come from a second letter from the mayor detailing what the council intended to do about the community centre.

The 29 March issue of *Eastern News*, however, did not carry the follow-up story. The journalist phoned Mrs King to state he was "holding it over for a week" and that he needed more information from the council to include in the story. Mrs King stated in her feedback to the publicity group after the conversation with the journalist said she had the distinct impression the journalist was "walking away" from the story. To compound the effect of the omission in the 29 March issue of the newspaper, in Mrs King's eyes, was the front page story from her political rival Graeme Reeves relating to a local issue.

The absence of the story in the 29 March and in the next issue 5 April of the community newspaper marks one of the difficulties of action research dealing with the creation of the news; that of the unpredictable and haphazard nature of the news creation process, and of the difficulty in explaining its random and complex features to those in the publicity group without journalistic training. This problem is referred to in detail in the evaluation section of the research, Chapter Nine: *Evaluation*.

Mrs King's response to non publication of the story in the 29 March and 5 April issues was one of bewilderment and concern at non-coverage. She felt she acknowledged she had not negotiated her role in the original story and had worked to improve her own role in the reporting of a legitimate followup story. In addition, she had acquired some understanding of the "rules" of coverage with the group editor and followed them without a satisfactory result.

Mrs King also began to be concerned about her constituents' attitude towards her level of activity as a political candidate. For, as Maharey (1992) states, it is essential to make media releases if political candidates are to appear effective.

My presence in the media is seen as a measure of 'how well I am doing'. An appearance on television means 'I am doing very well.' If I am compared with another politician by constituents it is always with someone who has a high media profile and I am asked gently why my own profile is not higher (p.93).

Maharey's comments echo the views of Blumler and Gurevitch (1981):

...there may often be a close connection between a politician's public image and his internal communication-role definition. Certainly impressions of politicians' qualities as communicators have become increasingly important features of their public images in recent years--and so, presumably of their internalized communication roles as well (p.480).

Three weeks later, however, the story with a photograph featuring Mrs King and a group of Hobart Park flat tenants finally appeared in a special, combined Easter issue of the *Southern Eastern News* on 13 April 1993. Easter holiday break deadlines meant an alteration to production schedules for the community newspapers and a combined issue covering southern and eastern suburbs of the city, including the whole of the Miramar electorate, was distributed. The wider circulation of the combined issue meant there was potential for the story featuring Mrs King to be read by all her constituents, including those living in Mt Victoria and Oriental Bay, rather than simply those in the eastern suburbs.

The story began in the reportorial voice:

Tenants at the Wellington City Council's Hobart Park Flats in Miramar may finally get to use their community centre a year after it was built.

The fourth paragraph of the story clearly acknowledged Mrs King's role and credited the candidate with positive action. It read:

Tenants had complained to council, but nothing was done until Labour's Miramar candidate Annette King, complained to Mayor Fran Wilde in February.

The last paragraph of the story again acknowledged Mrs King's role.

Annette King says she received confirmation from the Mayor last week about the promises (relating to the community centre).

The photograph pictured a number of elderly tenants with Mrs King outside their community centre.

Mrs King and members of the publicity committee regarded the tone of the publication as positive. In addition, Mrs King had not been marginalised as a source. The nature of news copy being "held over" was discussed by the publicity group in an evaluative session to try and increase awareness of the haphazard nature of news presentation.

The eventual publication was an example of the fact that news selection and presentation is not a systematic process but depends on a number of organizational routines and constraints within news organizations, in addition to professional norms and source relationships. A newspaper may "hold over" a story because of factors such as; reduced newshole and pagination, the follow up nature of the story which reduces its immediacy appeal, the fact that a more topical, or newsworthy story has pushed the story out, or that the reporter's own story priorities meant the story was processed by the journalist as "holdable" material, rather than for a particular, urgent deadline. The processing and developing of the accompanying photograph may also have influenced the timing of the publication. This particular community newspaper group employs only one photographer for all its publications.

## 6.12 Some comments on iteration

Iterations have been reported here as separate activities, but they were part of on-going, fluid processes of communication and relationship-building throughout the action research project. To iterate, either within a sequence, or in repeating a cycle of activity, decisions have to be made as a consequence of feedback about the previous activity. A continuous process of decision-making is integral to iteration.

Mintzberg *et al* (1976) note that dynamic factors are a distinguishing feature of strategic decision making and that decision processes are not a "steady, undisturbed progression from one routine to another; rather, the process is dynamic, operating in an open system where it is subjected to interferences, feedback loops, dead ends, and other factors" (p.263). Mintzberg *et al* identify six groups of dynamic factors: *interrupts*, which are caused by environmental forces, *scheduling delays* and *timing delays and speedups*, which are effected by the decision maker, and *feedback delays, comprehension cycles, and failure recycles*, which are largely inherent in the decision process itself (p 263). The publicity group encountered interrupts caused by the environmental factor of non publication within a scheduled time frame (next issue) and feedback delays in which the action research group awaited the results of the previous action taken.

These dynamic factors led to the publicity group, during weeks of non-publication, of the Hobart Park flats story in particular, revisiting the options available. The options in relation to the source relationship between candidate and *Eastern News* journalist remained the same; withdrawal, negotiation, complaint or acceptance. This time, however, the option of withdrawal of a source relationship or at least scaling down reliance on that particular source relationship was considered by the publicity group. This meant considering a previously unacceptable solution. It was considered that Mrs King should not rely on the local community newspaper alone but initiate source relationships with other journalists such as those on *The Dominion*, the *Evening Post*, radio, television and magazines in addition to reliance on her source relationship with the *Eastern News*. This meant a partial withdrawal from a source relationship, but development of alternative relationships with other journalists which occurred during the remainder of the project.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ACTION RESULTS: BUILDING THE POLITICAL CANDIDATE'S SELF CONFIDENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter continues the report of the results of the action research process and describes and discusses the action taken to build the candidate's self confidence with the news media. Reference is made to relevant news media scholarship and iterative activity is included in the analysis of action taken.

While the reference group perceived Mrs King's level of preparedness for dealing with the news media and her competence as generally high, the candidate herself had a lower self perception of her level of competence in, and understanding of, the news process, and of her own confidence in dealing with journalists. The three key words used by Mrs King to describe her feelings as a political candidate towards the news media, "apprehensive", "aggressive" and "suspicious", indicated the need for intervention aimed at improving Mrs King's self confidence, to improving her confidence and therefore her competence as an interviewee and improving her ability to negotiate control as a source. Activities aimed at improving Mrs King's self confidence rested largely on developing the level of understanding of the candidate, and others in the action research group without journalistic training, about the nature of news.

### 7.2 Results of action aimed at improving the political candidate's self confidence.

Three sessions were held with Mrs King during the election campaign to prepare for specific interview contexts. These three interview contexts embraced a training interview, a television interview and a print media interview. Specific interviewing techniques explained and practised during these sessions were the need for adequate interview preparation in relation to subject knowledge, the art of refocusing questions, and how to answer negative questions with positive answers. Time was spent also on

the pace of reply, pitch of voice and emphasizing particular points. In relation to the television news practice of editing "soundbites" of seven and nine seconds of a source speaking, Mrs King worked on sentence structure and delivery so she could not be edited mid-sentence. The candidate also watched video film of bad interviewee techniques in contemporary political interviews. The candidate and the action researcher spent time, too, on Atkinson's (1988) suggestion that the language of politics is enhanced for the news media when messages can be packaged as contrasts and three-part lists.

During these sessions model answers to negative questions about being a recycled politician, her status as a carpetbagger, her association with Rogernomics, and her former portfolio as Minister of Employment were rehearsed by the candidate. For example, in relation to being a recycled politician Mrs King explored a variety of approaches with the help of the action researcher and other members of the publicity committee. First, part of the answer drew on the analogy of recycling as environmentally friendly, then Mrs King referred to her experience as a politician by reference to her former Cabinet status, then she emphasised her candidacy indicated her level of commitment to politics. The possibility of particularly aggressive questioning on this issue was explored during these practice sessions with the strategy of Mrs King deflecting attention to the journalist's own work record and the transitory nature of journalism. The carpetbagger tag was considered by the publicity group and the candidate to be an unjust epithet carried over from one piece of "newspeak" to another, so it had become perceived wisdom to the news media. Mrs King practised emphasizing that she had lived in the Miramar electorate for 12 years, that she had never owned a house anywhere else, and that her daughter had gone to school locally.

One of three interview contexts which required preparation was an interview conducted for training purposes. Early in the run-up to the 1993 election campaign Mrs King was approached by a Wellington Polytechnic journalism tutor, John King, to be subject of an interview for teaching purposes to be conducted by veteran reporter and *Dominion* columnist Alastair Morrison. The interview audience were journalism students watching, listening and learning about news interviewing. Initially, Mrs King declined the request indicating there was "nothing in it for me", but was encouraged by the action researcher and the journalism tutor to reconsider on the basis the mock interview

would provide good practice in fielding tough questions from a skilled interviewer who was also a well informed senior journalist interested in both the political process and news media issues.

The interviewer did in fact ask Mrs King the inevitable tough questions about "abandoning her previous electorate", and about whether she was a "power junkie" and about the interface of being a "recycled" politician and public trust. In a question and answer debriefing session with the interviewer, the journalism students and the journalism tutor which was taped for later use in training, Mrs King said she had expected the questions because they reflected conventional public opinion. She acknowledged the tough questions were good practice and had "hardened" her up.

The debriefing session also revealed something of Mrs King's philosophy in relation to dealing with the news media when she acknowledged that she preferred a policy of open, full disclosure in terms of public explanation and the opportunity to correct misinformation. "I like to answer questions, people have suggested I shift questions somewhere else but I have not been able to train myself" (to refocus questions). "I believe in trying to answer and being up front. If you are straight I think you will get a better deal in terms of fair reporting."

The second interview for which Mrs King prepared was conducted by the television channel, Television Three, and profiled the former politician on the comeback trail. The questions were softer in tone than anticipated by the candidate although the question of public suspicion about recycled politicians was raised. Mrs King adopted a conversational style and spoke about the "seductive" attraction of political life. Reporting back, Mrs King said she had enjoyed the interview and felt she handled it well and was able to answer spontaneously.

The third interview was a print media interview for the publication *City Voice*. The community newspaper was perceived as supporting the third party, the Alliance, and Mrs King was wary of the newspaper's editorial direction. Other Labour Party candidates had been interviewed previously and Mrs King prepared for the interview with the background knowledge of questions they had been asked. As predicted, Mrs King was questioned about her support while a Cabinet Minister for the Reserve Bank

Act, a piece of legislation critics of the "new right" associate with the embracing of *laissez faire* economic policies by New Zealand. The Reserve Bank Act is regarded by those disaffected with Labour's performance as being critical to the economic and social direction and policies of the country. Mrs King answered the question by referring to her short tenure as a Cabinet Minister at the time a raft of legislation, including the Reserve Bank Act, was introduced.

In feedback sessions Mrs King indicated that her preparation as a candidate for difficult news media contexts had improved her level of self confidence which impacted on her performance. Anticipating tough questions, preparing answers for them, and articulating answers confidently were factors in Mrs King's perception of improved self-confidence.

### **7.3 Results of action aimed at raising the level of understanding about the manufacture of news.**

One of the challenges for the action researcher in this project was raising the candidate and the publicity group's understanding of the mutable, fragmentary nature of news and the *ad hoc* news creation process in the absence of a simple, unambiguous definition of "what news is" which could be readily translated into a recipe for profile-enhancing publicity.

Sigal (1973) states:

One big trouble with news is that nobody knows what it is. The other trouble is that nobody knows what it means. That nobody knows what news is implies the absence of universally shared criteria for distinguishing news from non-news (p.1).

He went on to say that no single criterion was sufficient to delineate the boundaries between news and non-news and often the criteria used by journalists are "mutually, if not internally, inconsistent" (p.1). The non-theoretic basis of news suggested by Sigal (1973) was examined by Phillips (1976) and is referred to in the evaluation section of

this research, Chapter Nine. It is challenged in the content analysis section of the research, Chapters 17-21, where a theory of news is outlined and argued for. The problem of the theoretic basis of the news (as opposed to the news process cycle described in Figure 6, which is intuitively reasonable and which can be physically observed) compounded the challenge of increasing understanding about "what is news?".

A process of trial and error was employed in the project to attempt to increase understanding of news manufacture. The action research team actively attempted to generate "news" for the candidate and then would evaluate the consequences of the activity in terms of publication or non publication, building into the next activity lessons learnt from the previous attempt at "news" generation. Those involved quickly adopted the measure that "news" was only "news" when it was published. The myth of news, that if it happens it is news, was quickly dispelled. The action research group affirmed the comment of MacDougall (1968) that news is not news until an account of it is published or broadcast. Consciousness-raising with Mrs King and her electoral committee about what makes the news was a cumulative and sequential process. To describe the process a particular sequence of news activities is reported in this study relating to the publication by the publicity committee of a tabloid newspaper, *Miramar News*.

In March 1993 when a budget was prepared for publicity purposes money was allocated for 16,000 copies of an eight page tabloid newspaper to be distributed to every household in the electorate in the last week of the election campaign in November, 1993. The news generation, writing, photography, sub-editing and editing of the newspaper was to be produced by members of the publicity committee and the candidate with the help of the action researcher and other professional journalists.

The project differed from other news generation activities in that it involved personal responsibility by members of the action research group for the entire news process cycle, not simply the generation of news possibilities to be picked up and manufactured into news by professional journalists in the mainstream news media. In other activities the group had generated what they thought was news and then were delighted or disappointed to see their judgments vindicated by publication without any real

conception as to why one activity had become news as opposed to another. But in this exercise the decision as to "what is news" was not a matter of external judgment.

Instead the publicity committee was responsible for the entire news cycle: news generation, news selection, the writing and editing of copy, sub-editing and layout and overseeing production and distribution of the tabloid newspaper.

The rationale for the tabloid newspaper was that it would be distinctive from the traditional candidate's direct mail pamphlets at a time of letterbox clutter. It was decided it must be readable, that it should as much as possible resemble a real newspaper and not have the appearance of party political propaganda, and that it should accentuate human interest characteristics of the candidate in association within the electorate.

The issue of "human interest", and the related notions of personification of the news and personalisation, are at the heart of the controversy about the nature of contemporary political reporting. The concept of personification in the news was described by Galtung and Ruge (1965) in their work on news values which underpin the selection of news. Describing some culture-bound factors influencing the transition from events to news in the developed world, they state that a pivotal factor is, "The more the event can be seen in personal terms, as due to the action of specific individuals, the more probable that it will become a news item" (p.56). They state:

The thesis is that news has a tendency to present events as sentences where there is a subject, a named person or collectivity consisting of a few persons, and the event is then seen as a consequence of the actions of this person or these persons. The alternative would be to present events as the outcome of 'social forces', as structural more than idiosyncratic outcomes of the society which produced them (p.57).

Galtung and Ruge (1965) offer five different explanations for what they do concede is the problematic notion of personification in the news. First, they suggest personification is an outcome of cultural idealism whereby individuals control their own destinies and events can be seen as the outcomes of acts of free will. Second, it is suggested personification is a consequence of the need for meaning and consequently for

identification, "persons can serve more easily as objects of positive and negative identification through a combination of projection and empathy" (p.57). Next, state Galtung and Ruge, personification is an outcome of what they call the frequency factor of the news, "persons can act during a time-span that fits the frequency of the news media, 'structures' are more difficult to pin down in time and space" (p.57). The idea that the more an event concerns elite people the more probable it will become news suggested by Galtung and Ruge influences their fourth explanation. They suggest personification can be seen as a direct consequence of elite concentration but as distinct from it. Fifth, it is suggested that "personification is more in agreement with modern techniques of news gathering and news presentation" (p.57) in the sense it is generally easier and more cost effective to take "newsy" photos of a person than a structure, and quicker and cheaper to write a person-centred news story where the person might be the primary source of facts than to write about issues where the shades of grey in contextual detail need research and reflection.

While Galtung and Ruge (1965) talked of personification, Chibnall (1977) writing later refers to the concept of "personalisation" and relates it to the commercial rationale of the news. He states:

The more that news enters the market place of entertainment the more it is obliged to recognise and promote the cult of the star. The consequence of this is...that issues increasingly become defined and presented in terms of personalities, catering for the public desire for identification fostered by the entertainment industry. Events are to be understood not by reference to certain structural arrangements and social processes but either (a) as the work of individuals or (b) through their effects on individuals (p.26).

In the period since Galtung and Ruge (1965) isolated their criteria of newsworthiness, increasing commercial pressures and technological imperatives have buffeted political journalism. The visualness of television has dramatically heightened the concept of "human interest" in the news. Increasingly, too, the concept of personification is raised in political journalism within the context of whether news coverage should concentrate more on policies and issues and less on people, and whether there should be in the news media, what Rees-Mogg (1994) describes as, "some doctrine of division between private and public life" (p.7).

This debate flourished in England with respect to the news media's coverage of the Royal Family and in the United States in the wake of the 1992 presidential campaign. Media commentators (Oliphant, 1992; Russert, 1992, Ornstein, 1992; Sabato, 1992; Arterton, 1992), among others, dissected what many saw as excessive coverage of the Bill Clinton-Gennifer Flowers affair so soon after the press promised self-correction following the 1988 presidential campaign. An extreme view of the extension of personification in the news by the media is provided by Sabato in his description of what has become known as "attack journalism".

Since about 1974, political reporters have engaged in what I would call junkyard-dog journalism-reporting that is often harsh, aggressive, and intrusive. The news media, both print and broadcast, have sometimes resembled piranhas or sharks in a feeding frenzy. Mere gossip can reach print, and every aspect of a person's private life potentially becomes fair game for scrutiny as a new, almost anything goes philosophy takes hold (p.128).

It is the extension of the concept of personification as the basis of newsworthiness and the consequent impact on the dialogue of democracy which so alarms media critics.

While the action research group acknowledged the need for "readability" of their tabloid newspaper to achieve audience effect, there were differing degrees of understanding of newsworthiness and "human interest" through personification and personalisation, by those working on the project. The professional journalists had a clear view of the threshold required for an event to become news, and also of how personification should be introduced, whereas non-journalists and the candidate had hazier understandings of newsworthiness and of "human interest" factors.

Two activities are described to illustrate raising the level of understanding as to "what is news" during the action research project. Journalists develop their instinctive feel for newsworthiness by a process of experiencing some socially constructed event (listening to someone, witnessing a "happening") and reconceptualising the data in terms of professional norms and techniques. This instinct is honed by the process of journalistic socialisation which sees stories edited, accepted or rejected in the news process.

Mrs King experienced an event and identified its potential as news during the search for copy for *Miramar News*. During the election campaign a 92 year old Miramar pensioner, Arthur Brady, wrote to the leader of the Labour Party, Mike Moore, offering advice on campaigning techniques. Mr Moore passed the letter on to Mrs King for constituency action. The elderly were identified as a target audience during the 1993 election campaign and Mrs King's visit was considered to be potentially newsworthy. Both the action researcher (acting in the capacity of a reporter) and a photographer accompanied Mrs King to see Mr Brady and the interview with him was published in the tabloid newspaper (Appendix H).

The nonagenarian embodied the notions of "human interest" and personification as addressed by Galtung and Ruge (1965). He enjoyed elite status because of his longevity and his age. He was a colourful personality, dressing himself in a dressing gown and pom-pom hat to receive guests and sitting in a dark, cluttered dining room surrounded by books including a complete set of vintage, leather-bound *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His animated expression allowed for strong photographic appeal. He was articulate and spoke colourfully so he was quotable in sentence structures which allowed for direct attribution. He projected empathy and positive identification and provoked a sense of wonder at his prodigious memory and story-telling facility, and at the pragmatic political advice offered in the context of historical perspective.

Mrs King emerged from the two-hour interview, (the socially constructed event) invigorated, and alert to its news potential. She indicated she could see how quotable the subject had been, what strong photographic images could be presented and the "human interest" appeal which could be generated by presenting the event as "news". Publication of an interview with Mr Brady had additional political appeal because it allowed for a profile of a representative of a target audience, without wrapping such presentation in unacceptable political rhetoric. By being part of the interview process the candidate began to develop the instinctive feel for the news, the ability to determine newsworthiness, and an understanding of the criteria that marked one interview off from another as constituting news. Mrs King's belief in the newsworthiness of the story was confirmed for her by positive feedback from readers on publication.

It is suggested here that experience of a salient, socially constructed event, and the identification of its news potential, is the first point in developing an understanding of "what is news". If this thesis is correct it tends to undermine Hall's (1984) widely-quoted observation that, "'News values' are one of the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society. All 'true' journalists are supposed to possess it: few can or are willing to identify and define it" (p.234).

The second activity which illustrates the process of consciousness-raising about the "human interest" factor of the news, and "what is news", involved the publication in the tabloid newspaper of a page of human interest photographs. The page, headlined "This is her life" featured eight photographs of the candidate from the time she was a baby through dental nurse training as a teenager, to becoming a politician and achieving Cabinet Minister status (Appendix I). The decision to make Mrs King's photographs "news" was fortuitous and spontaneous emphasising the random nature of news manufacture.

The photographs generated some tension between the professional journalists involved in the project and Mrs King and tested the group feedback process of the action research project. In a coffee break during a tabloid newspaper production session one of the journalists involved was idly looking at Mrs King's family photos in an album box and facetiously suggested they would make a "good spread" and suggested the theme "This is her life", after the television programme of the same name. Other members of the publicity group were enthusiastic about the idea, but Mrs King was dubious. She wondered whether their publication would make her appear less credible, self-promoting, and "big headed."

After a roundtable discussion Mrs King went along with the consensus view that it would "humanise" the newspaper, add visual appeal, and add a lighter touch to some of the heavier written material addressing policy issues. But throughout the production phase she remained tentative about the idea and vetted the range of photographs chosen for use, rejecting several originally picked out. When bromide proofs of the newspaper pages were produced at pre-press stage, Mrs King spent more time debating whether the photographic page should be published, than on any other aspect of the tabloid newspaper.

The candidate sought reassurance from other members of the publicity group, in particular the journalists involved, that reader reaction would not be negative and that it was "appropriate" for inclusion in the newspaper. It was clear that had publication been an individual decision for the candidate she would have rejected the photographic diary. The decision to publish highlighted the level of consensus decision-making and of trust reached within the publicity group after about eight months of working together. While Mrs King reluctantly accepted that the photographs would appeal on "human interest" grounds, it was clear her acceptance rested on trust in the professional judgment of others.

The increased level of understanding about why such photographs were newsworthy came to the candidate retrospectively. The page had immediate appeal to readers, to the candidate's family and friends. The distribution of the newspaper was scheduled to coincide with canvassing and door knocking to maximise the publicity initiative. Mrs King and her canvassing team received only favourable comment about the photographs which became the significant feature in feedback received about the tabloid newspaper. Mrs King reports that one elderly voter had the newspaper page in her hand when she opened the front door and said, "I've just been looking at you and reading about you."

The random nature of what becomes news lay behind selection of one of the photographs which was pivotal in Mrs King's eventual acceptance of "This is her life". The photographs chosen for inclusion were selected, among other criteria, on size and whether they could be enlarged or reduced to fit the page layout. Simply because it was an appropriate size, a photograph of the candidate on a horse captioned, "Annette on Dusky Boy at the Nelson District Trials, 1964" was chosen from a number of alternatives. After distribution of the newspaper in the last week of the election campaign, Mrs King found a telephone message on her campaign answer phone machine from a woman who said she was a floating voter, but also a horse lover. The caller indicated that the photograph of Mrs King on Dusky Boy and its signification that Mrs King was a horse-lover had persuaded her to vote for the candidate. While the call provides a somewhat depressing commentary on the political process, it converted the candidate from scepticism about the power of electoral photography to an acknowledgement of human interest criteria in the manufacture of news.

The choice of the horse photo typifies the ad hoc nature of news selection, but reaction to it affirms Barthes'(1973) comment that:

Needless to say the use of electoral photography presupposes a kind of complicity: a photograph is a mirror, what we asked to read is the familiar, the known; it offers to the voter his(sic) own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type (p.99).

While it is not the intention of this study to examine audience effects, and while it is acknowledged that feedback received by publicity committee members is anecdotal, the issue here is the increased level of understanding which emerged about what "makes the news". Mrs King acknowledged during feedback sessions that she recognised the linkage between "what is news" and personification as a result of the positive feedback. Hall (1984) states:

Regularly, newspapers make news values salient by *personifying events*. Of course people are interesting, can be vividly and concretely depicted in images, they possess qualities and so on.....Photos play a crucial role in this form of personification, for people—human subjects—are *par excellenc*e the content of news and feature photographs (p.236-7).

It is worth noting that while the professional journalists involved in the project believed the photographs to be newsworthy and were prepared to back their instinct, they, too, were surprised at the level of positive feedback generated by the page. It indicates that candidates can benefit from publicity material which breaks from conventional content which is serious, literal and political in nature.

The next chapter is the final chapter reporting action research results and examines the activities aimed at selecting and implementing strategies to manufacture news.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: ACTION RESEARCH RESULTS: RELEVANT STRATEGIES

### 8.1 Introduction

The third results chapter examines activity taken to select events and issues which could be worked into potential stories for the news media. Central to the action research project was the selection and implementation of strategies aimed at making the news. Three strategies are described in this chapter. The first extends the concept of developing source relationships by examining balance and who controls the nexus between journalist and source. The second is predicated on a fundamental tenet of the manufacture of news, that of events orientation. The third examines the strategy employed by the action research team of reinforcing campaign publicity by using specific items of publicity as pegs to make news or gain wider distribution, creating a ripple effect.

### 8.2 Balance

During the meeting between Mrs King and the group editor of *Eastern News*, the candidate was told that after June 1993 the notion of balance of news coverage would prevail with candidates receiving equal space. The promise of balance led to further negotiation between Mrs King and the editor in relation to photographs of candidates. Photo opportunities are a staple ingredient of election campaigning. As Tiffen (1989) and other commentators have noted the election campaign exists primarily to provide staged opportunities for the news media to photograph, film or report staged, "pseudo" events. Tiffen states that one of the factors pivotal to understanding news process during election campaigns is:

The profusion of public performances and the scarcity of other sources of news. Campaigns consist overwhelmingly of public performances and statements, while access to more private information is more limited than normally (p.130).

Visits to the electorate of high status political visitors, such as party political leaders, well known Members of Parliament are primarily staged as media opportunities, and have a secondary function as events to boost the profile and "mana" of the candidate. During the 1993 campaign Mrs King's electorate was visited eight times by seven Members of Parliament. On each visit a reporter from the *Eastern News* attended the event and often took photographs, or the candidates and Mrs King went into the newspaper office making themselves available for interviews and photographs, or press releases were provided to the newspaper by the publicity committee. Apart from a photograph featuring Labour leader, The Hon. Mr Moore, deputy Labour leader Ms Clark, Mrs King and several Miramar residents at the Suitcase Clinic at Strathmore Community Base before the launching of Labour's social justice policy at Parliament, there were no other photographs published from these electorate visits by mid October, several weeks before the election date.

The incumbent MP, Graeme Reeves, on the other hand, regularly appeared in published photographs in the *Eastern News*. For example, the September 20 edition featured on page 5 a photograph of the Miramar MP chatting to Prime Minister Jim Bolger at the MP's campaign launch. The photograph accompanied the only news copy on the page which was headlined, "Reeves confident of holding Miramar." The photograph itself had little inherent newsworthiness in terms of graphic appeal. At least a third of the photograph was dominated by the back of Mr Reeves' wife Michelle. It fitted Tiffen's (1989) description of "obligatory" but "dull in terms of normal news values" which is so often the case in relation to election news coverage (p.131). Again, on October 18, on page 3, Mr Bolger was featured in a photograph captioned, "Prime Minister Jim Bolger is swamped by school children when he hit the campaign trail in Miramar MP Graeme Reeves' electorate last Wednesday." The photograph had greater visual appeal because it appeared to be less posed, contained action and expression. It remained a campaign event photograph.

Both Mr Reeves and the Prime Minister Jim Bolger enjoyed the advantage of incumbency. But the uneven number of photographs published contradicted the editor's assurance to Mrs King in February that once the election campaign proper began balance would become the prevailing news judgment. And visual identification for a political candidate, the notion of the public attaching the face to the name, is well recognised in enhancing a candidate's profile.

Hall (1984) and Barthes (1973) both claim extra levels of signification in news photographs over words. While Hall acknowledges that the text is still an essential element in the modern newspaper and the photograph an optional element, he goes on to state "Yet photographs, when they appear, add new dimensions of meaning to a text" (p.226). And Barthes states, "pictures...are more imperative than writing, they impose meaning at one stroke, without analysing or diluting it". In his essay on photography and electoral appeal, Barthes writes:

Needless to say the use of electoral photography presupposes a kind of complicity: a photograph is a mirror, what we are asked to read is the familiar, the known: it offers to the voter his own likeness, but clarified, exalted, superbly elevated into a type. This glorification is in fact the very definition of the photogenic: the voter is at once expressed and heroized, he is invited to elect himself, to weigh the mandate which he is about to give with a veritable physical transference: he is delegating his 'race' (p.99).

There is, too, an additional dimension of facticity about news photographs which increases their appeal in the battle for political publicity. Hall (1984) describes it this way, "News photos witness to the *actuality* of the event they represent. Photos of an event carry within them a meta-message: 'this event really happened and this photo is the proof of it'" (p.241, emphasis added).

The notion of journalistic "balance" is tied to the creed of objectivity. Objectivity is commonly regarded as the guiding principle of journalism. Morrison and Tremewan (1992) refer to popular descriptions of objectivity by contemporary New Zealand commentators who describe it in reverential terms.

Sir David Beattie, in a speech given at the opening of the Press Club in 1989, said: 'accuracy in reporting and objectivity are expected and held as the cornerstone of the journalistic craft'. Former *Evening Post* editor, now Independent Newspapers Limited executive, Rick Neville, wrote in the October 1990 edition of *The Word*, published by the journalists' union, that: 'journalists are trained to be objective, dispassionate and balanced.' And in an August 26, 1991 column in the *Dominion*, Labour MP and former Prime Minister David Lange wrote, 'informed and objective reporting is essential to a democracy' (p.115).

In these accounts objectivity encompasses impartiality and balance which are traditionally assumed to underwrite the media's construction of news. But as numbers of New Zealand and overseas commentators and scholars have observed (Morrison & Tremewan, 1992; Harvey, 1992; Avieson, 1991; Hurst, 1991) these notions should, however, be more properly regarded as technical aids in a journalist's craft rather than principles which are absolute. Wyatt and Badger (1993) talk of the subjective-objective conundrum which has been used to assign roles to journalism (objective/detached), and to arts and literature (subjective/emotional). They refer to recent scholarship, which in general suggests that journalistic objectivity is a fallacy, as the "post-modern' critique of the notion of objectivity" (p.3).

While objectivity is regarded by journalists as a fundamental moral tenet, it is "an ill-defined description of what journalists do" (Morrison & Tremewan, 1992). The New Zealand Journalists' Code of Ethics for print media journalists, for example, pays homage to "fairness" and "balance". And the Codes of Broadcasting Practice for Radio and Television state for both radio and television media that the "news must be presented accurately, objectively and impartially." But, as Hurst (1991) observes, in relation to similar phraseology within the Australian Journalists' Association's Code of Ethics on the need for reporting to be fair and balanced, there is no attempt to define what is meant by these vague and elusive terms. Hurst states, "thus, what objective reporting means in practice is left largely to the commonsense and consciences of journalists to decide what to report" (p.23).

There is a well recognised tension between journalists and academics over the notion of objectivity. Avieson (1991) in his restatement of the concept in journalism states:

The concept of objectivity in the practice of journalism lies at the interface of academe and the media. The concept, which is taught on the job to every generation of journalists, can be restated to academics in their own terms as deterministic theory, as a model which both prescribes the behaviour of journalists and explains their behaviour. It is an exclusive theory, allowing no room for alternative theories (p.15).

While the notion of balance underpins all journalistic activity, the concept of objectivity comes into even sharper focus during election campaigns. Arbitrary and artificial selection decisions are made in the name of balance, which, as Windschuttle (1985) observes, fly in the face of the notion of newsworthiness and decision making based on journalistic judgment as to what is or is not a "good" story. Windschuttle describes the equivalence policy as an "abdication of its (news media's) responsibility to exercise its own editorial judgment in an independent way" (p.318). Such a policy amounted to putting the news media's relationship with political parties ahead of audience demand and the policy of even-handedness "compromised the principle of the freedom of journalists to exercise their own judgement, unfettered by any policy formula laid down by management" (p.318).

The concept of balance during an election campaign sees sections of the news media counting centimetres of space, stories and photographs, and monitoring film clips and radio items to ensure a semblance of quantitative equivalence is maintained. Statutory requirements relating to the "balance" in terms of time allocated to party political broadcasts during election campaigns further entrenches the artificial notion of "balance" in political communication generally in the New Zealand context.

In light of the promise of balance the publicity committee and the candidate again reviewed the options of negotiation or complaint with the group editor of the *Eastern News*. This review process took the form of discussion of the consequences of complaint and Mrs King's need for a positive publicity profile at a critical stage in the campaign. Complaint to senior news management about journalistic practice exposes political candidates to the risks of damaging goodwill with reporters. Reporters resent dialogue with their superiors which questions or damages either their credibility as craftspeople or their autonomy in news gathering.

Ericson *et al* (1989) state:

Seeking a remedy for unreasonable publicity carries other risks. The news organization retains the ultimate power, the last word. A complaint may antagonize the journalists concerned, leading to retaliation in the form of negative coverage and/or no access regarding other matters of importance to the source (p.380).

Candidates such as Mrs King, with limited paid media budgets, are dependent on the news media to reach their constituents. To be frozen out of news coverage or to suffer bias by omission two weeks from polling day by the only print media distributed to every voter in the electorate would seriously affect positive publicity for an election candidate.

Outweighing these considerations were factors which impinged on source relationships, the concept of notional balance of election news, and the previous commitment to balance by the group editor. By the time the question of non-representation in photographs became an issue for the candidate it was clear from market research polling within the electorate that Mrs King had an excellent chance of wresting the seat from the incumbent. So in addition to being a good provider of genuine news tips, Mrs King was likely to change in status as a news source from being a transitory source (political hopeful in a general election process with a three year cycle) for the reporter to a regular source (incumbent local Member of Parliament). The prospect of her enhanced status presaged a change in what Tiffen (1989) describes as "the relative balance of power between journalists and sources" (p.38). The balance of power sees journalists treat transitory sources in a different manner to regular sources who must be cultivated to keep open the supply lines of news. There is little incentive for journalists and news managers to respond to complaints about occasional promotional activities not being photographed because the news process is not dependent on continuing access and goodwill. But if Mrs King was to be the electorate's next MP then there was an incentive for the *Eastern News* to maintain a continuing relationship and goodwill by reporting in ways that the source, Mrs King, regarded as fair.

The previous commitment by the group editor that balance would be the guiding principle of news selection after June was a major determinant in the decision to register a complaint about lack of balance. News managers, in general, avoid articulating news selection policies because this can open the door to negotiation with sources which undermines journalistic autonomy. It was decided that Mrs King should approach the group editor and complain about the absence of balance with respect to photographs. Again Mrs King was schooled in her approach to the group editor, that the tone should be friendly but firm and that she should refer to the previous commitment made by the group editor to balanced coverage.

Mrs King rang the editor who was unavailable and left a message for him to contact her. On ringing back the editor took the initiative and asked Mrs King if she was ringing about photographic imbalance before she had time to register a complaint. He said he had looked back over editions of the newspaper and acknowledged the lack of photographic equivalence and promised to restore some balance in the next edition, October 25. Mrs King referred the editor to the photograph taken by the newspaper of Mrs Tirikatene-Sullivan and herself during an MP's visit to a local kohanga reo. In addition the newspaper had shot film that week of Mr Moore's visit to a Miramar primary school. As a consequence of this conversation, the October 25 edition of *Eastern News* carried a photograph of Mrs Tirikatene-Sullivan and Mrs King on page six. Mrs King's complaint to the group editor had successfully resulted in publication of a photograph and this was regarded by the publicity committee as a successful intervention which reasserted influence over the news media.

In this case news was made not as a result of topicality (the photograph related to an event which had occurred several weeks earlier) nor because it had been considered essential or inherently newsworthy by the reporter and subeditor of the *Eastern News*. Instead, the photograph became news as a result of pressure exerted on the news process by a source and in the name of journalistic balance. This further erodes journalistic autonomy with respect to the making of news, undermines the justification of inherent newsworthiness of events or issues which makes them news as opposed to other events or issues which are not news, and highlights the way in which news can be made and managed as the result of pressure from an elite source. Control was negotiated by the source and the news became as Ericson *et al* (1989) describe, "a product of transaction between journalists and their sources" (p.377).

### 8.3 Events orientation of the news

#### 8.3.1 Introduction

Several commentators such as Galtung and Ruge (1965), Chibnall (1977), Tiffen (1989), Tuchman (1978), have referred to the notion of the "events orientation" of the news by which incidents or events cross over the threshold of newsworthiness and become news more easily than issues. Events, also, fit the operational routines of newsgathering.

Electorate visits during election campaigning perfectly fit within the concept of "events orientation" even if they are what Boorstin (1962) describes as "pseudo-events", events which are held or occur primarily because of the image they present. Altheide and Snow (1991) in their analysis of news and politics suggest that it is the media perspective (the opportunity for a photograph or interview) of any given election event, such as an electorate visit, which is played to and which dominates the nature, timing and context of such visits. So, for example, the effect on morale of local party workers by the visit of Labour's leader Mike Moore, or the notion that he might be accessible to voters at a local level in an electorate, is secondary to the concept of him pursuing public statements or actions for the news media and this public presentation becomes a media presentation subsuming all else.

### 8.3.2 Electorate visits

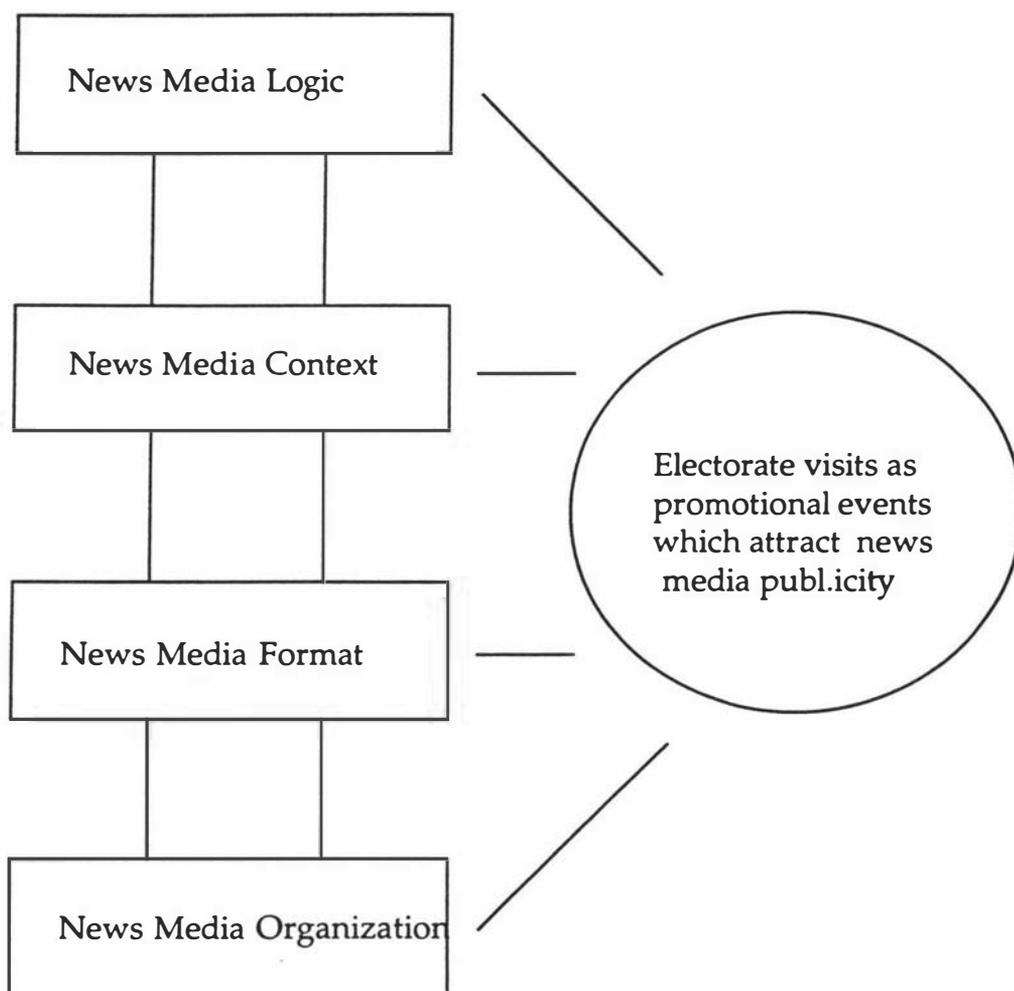
A total of eight electorate visits took place in Miramar during the 1993 election campaign. Two visits were made by Labour's leader, Mike Moore. In addition to the visit of Peter Hodgson, housing spokesperson Paul Swain, deputy leader Helen Clark, broadcasting spokesperson Steve Maharey, Wellington Central member Chris Laidlaw, and the Member for Eastern Maori Hon Whetu Tirikatene-Sullivan also visited. News media publicity was associated with six of the eight electorate visits. Only the visits of Chris Laidlaw and Steve Maharey to Miramar resulted in no news media exposure, while the Hodgson visit resulted in minor publicity only, of marginal benefit to Mrs King. All the other visits attracted either stories or photographs in the *Eastern News*, while the visit of Mr Moore on his last visit to the electorate attracted national publicity from television, radio and the metropolitan newspapers.

Before each visit the candidate, the action researcher and the publicity committee would canvas local issues which could generate news media interest and be linked to the visiting politician. For example, during the visit to Miramar of Labour's deputy leader and health spokeswoman, Helen Clark, it was decided there should be a focus on health as a news media issue. The programmes for electorate visits included arrangements for the visiting politician to go into the offices of the *Eastern News*. In other cases a reporter covered events during the visit.

At the end of July the *Eastern News* published a story headlined *Outcry halts plan to move nurses* which featured the deferral of plans to relocate two Miramar based public health nurses to Wellington Hospital after protests from staff and community groups. This health-related issue provided a context for Ms Clark as Labour's health spokeswoman to "make" news at a local level. The possible relocation of the nurses also provided a predictable media format, negative reaction, in which Ms Clark could frame a response. In this case Ms Clark, accompanied by Mrs King, went into the newspaper office to make comment that the move was a "backward and shortsighted step" which was included in the story.

A meeting of tenants was arranged as an opportunity for news media publicity during the electorate visit of Paul Swain, Labour's housing spokesman. A story published in *Eastern News*, September 13 1993, headlined *Labour promises rent reductions* referred to a political pledge by Mr Swain that Housing New Zealand's commercial focus would be replaced by a renewed commitment to house people, particularly those with serious need. In addition to the predictable political rhetoric reported in the story, the opinion of tenants was also canvassed and the story reported in a positive tone, "Tenants who attended the meeting were generally satisfied with Labour's policy" (p.7).

Electorate visits were strongly event-orientated which fitted the routines of news gathering. But the extent of coverage from electorate visits to Miramar underscores the strength of source interests in making the news. The promotional activities of Mrs King and Labour politicians, as sources seeking publicity, became news because they were packaged to fit the context, format, organization and logic of the news media. This is shown in Figure 5.



**Figure 5:** The concept of "fit" using Altheide and Snow's (1991) typology.

The *context* relates to the linkage of the visiting Member of Parliament to the local issue (for example, a tenants' meeting addressed by the visiting politician who is the Opposition spokesman on housing). The *format* emphasises the need to devise a format which fits news media formats such as casting remarks in negative or positive reaction, uttering pledges, committing promises or issuing challenges, or providing photographic opportunities through stunts or ceremonial functions. The *organization* involves arranging electoral visits around news media routines. Timing for nightly television bulletins or for early week deadlines to make community newspapers, or early in the morning for afternoon metropolitan newspapers etc. *Logic*, following Altheide and Snow's (1991) theoretical construction, means the news perspective must be considered and played to in pursuing any public statements or action.

### 8.3.3 Stunts

Increasingly in a mediascape where competition, commercialism and entertainment values dominate, the news media's appetite for events is whetted by stunts. Stunts are pre-arranged events which the news media are aware have been manufactured primarily, if not exclusively, as media opportunities. Prior knowledge of the pre-arrangement does not necessarily lead to a rejection of the stunt as news. It may become news for a number of reasons such as the pragmatic consideration of filling space or, more compellingly in political reporting, because the news media do not dare risk breaking with the pack hunt and risking the consequences of non-coverage. As Tiffen (1989) has noted this leads to a homogeneity of news and is the antithesis of the competitive ethos which drives the media.

At the time the action research team was concerned about coverage by the *Eastern News* a new, free independent newspaper, *City Voice*, declared itself in the market and advertised delivery to 21,000 homes and availability from 60 central locations from 15 April 1993. The free delivery included a number of suburbs within the Miramar electorate such as Mt Victoria, Oriental Bay, Roseneath and Hataitai. *City Voice* in its advertising material stated that it "will provide the only comprehensive listings of what is happening in the city. It will question the status quo. And it will be a paper that truly reflects the views of its community." In particular the new newspaper wanted information on meetings, demonstrations, performances and exhibitions, providing an

opportunity for Mrs King's campaign activities. In addition the new publication offered a Write Back column for readers to have a say about current issues in letters or articles which she could utilise as an outlet for opinion. The newspaper's masthead proclaimed its philosophy as "news you can use." The editor of the new newspaper, Simon Collins, a former political and economics editor of the *New Zealand Herald*, was known to Mrs King and to members of the publicity team. He expressed interest in any news Mrs King had to offer.

This action research project had as an objective the integration of publicity activities via the news media into campaign activities. This involved developing a process of gaining news media exposure for appropriately newsworthy publicity activities. This process of seeking to publicise publicity activities acknowledges the role of the mass media in creating and reinforcing awareness/knowledge (Rogers & Storey, 1987). It also reflected an urgent need on behalf of the candidate's election campaign team to raise Mrs King's profile in the electorate. In mid-March the Labour Party had conducted a telephone poll of 600 people in the Miramar electorate and had recorded 320 valid responses. While the results placed the Labour Party well in front of its opposition within the electorate, recognition by respondents of Mrs King's candidacy was low even after an introductory candidate's pamphlet had been delivered to every household. (It should be noted that the recognition of Mrs King's political candidate, the sitting Member of Parliament Graeme Reeves, was also very low in this poll).

The publicity group decided to use the release of its paid-for publicity material to generate additional profile for Mrs King via the news media. The release of publicity material was to be devised and staged as strategic news events in an attempt to create news. Members of the electorate would not only receive copies of the publicity material itself, but also be exposed to news media publicity about that material. This strategy acknowledged that "doings" or events are more inherently newsworthy to the news media than "sayings" and placed a premium on the arrangement of stunts.

The publicity group had developed a range of print media car bumper stickers for Mrs King's candidacy which made ironical use of her name, *A. King*. These bumper stickers were similar in design and concept to those designed by the advertising agency, Saatchi and Saatchi, for Wellington's Mayor Fran Wilde during her mayoral campaign at the

end of 1992 which had utilised the message: *Wilde about Wellington*. The publicity group working for Mrs King created three bumper stickers employing the *A. King* concept. These were: *Miramar needs A. King*; *Vote for A. King*; *I am voting for A. King*. (Appendix J). The bumper stickers were designed to be used sequentially with each message lasting two months building to the election campaign. It was considered the release of the bumper stickers with their "fun" appeal provided a light, human interest news and photographic opportunity for Mrs King which the editor of the new newspaper expressed interest in Mrs King's daughter, Amanda, agreed to pose for a photograph delivering Mrs King's pamphlets to constituents in Oriental Bay, wearing one of the bumper stickers. The suburbs of the Miramar electorate receiving *City Voice* were Mt Victoria, Oriental Bay, Hataitai and Roseneath. These suburbs were perceived to be among the wealthier suburbs in the electorate and it was decided that the photograph possibility offered to the new newspaper needed to be "stylish." This decision follows Rogers and Storey's (1987) comment that audience segmentation strategies can improve campaign effect by targeting specific messages to particular audiences. The publicity group tried to build into this publicity initiative homophily (similarity) between photographic subject and the receivers of the message, a factor that Rogers and Storey (1987) suggest improves response to the communicated information.

One member of the publicity team wrote a press release about the bumper sticker to provide a peg for the photograph. The editor of *City Voice* in a telephone conversation with Mrs King about the press release indicated that while he admired the "clever writing" of the press release it was unsuitable for publication because he considered the item was too overtly political. The newspaper was still interested in a photograph, he said, although he wanted an unposed photograph of the bumper sticker on a car, as opposed to the suggested option. The photograph was duly taken. The first issue of *City Voice*, however, did not carry the photograph. The editor telephoned Mrs King to state it had been held over for a subsequent issue. Again, it was "holdable", non urgent copy in the journalist's opinion and could wait for a subsequent edition. In the evaluative discussion about the delay in publication it was clear the publicity group had developed a greater degree of understanding and acceptance about the haphazard nature of news production and the notion of copy being "held over."

An item about the bumper sticker was finally carried in the third edition of *City Voice* in a gossip column entitled "City Litter". A photograph of the bumper sticker was published and the following words:

Meanwhile, ex-MPs still hungrily eye those Beehive seats. Over in Miramar, Roger Douglas fanette and ex-MP for Horowhenua Annette King is planning her comeback.

The "Voice" hears that this bumper sticker is the first of a series designed to catapult King into Miramarian consciousness. But rather than see it as a call for royalist sentiment in the eastern suburbs, office consensus seems to favour the "Miramar needs aching" message. Peter Neilson, Graeme Reeve (who?), Annette King ?? Haven't they suffered enough?

Mrs King and her supporters regarded the item as negative, snide in tone and gossipy. While they had achieved their aim of publicity through the stunt, it had rebounded and the group perceived it as "bad publicity" in that it did not enhance Mrs King's profile. Mrs King was fearful throughout the campaign of public denunciation of her association as a Cabinet Minister in the previous Labour administration, and of negative public perceptions of her associations as a "Rogernome" and an associate of Roger Douglas. Much of Mrs King's political strategy was aimed at presenting herself as an energetic, competent and committed candidate who was positioned in the centre of the Labour Party, rather than as a recycled "New Rightist" politician and former Cabinet Minister in the Roger Douglas mould.

The group felt they had provided the bumper sticker as a photographic opportunity in good faith and that this faith has been undermined by the tone of the article. It underlined again for the group the random nature of news. Their perception of the negative tone of the article also provided the group in evaluation with an insight into the lack of autonomy sources of news have in relation to the final presentation of news. Journalists may not be autonomous with regard to source relationships and there may be negotiation over supply of content in news stories. But the area in which journalistic autonomy certainly does prevail is in the presentation of news and the format of publication and broadcast. Processing of copy is a journalist's prerogative and those

outsiders seeking to influence the creation of news to enhance a particular profile must accept the risks inherent in this journalistic autonomy, and in being unable to influence the final presentation of a story.

#### 8.3.4 Creating ceremonies

It is clear that the events orientation of the news clearly favours incumbent politicians because they are able to use the ceremonial function of their job (ribbon-cutting, openings, presentation of awards and honours, visitations etc) to attract photo opportunities. It was considered important that Mrs King should attempt to counter the incumbent Mr Reeves' official activities as Miramar Member of Parliament by staging her own ceremonial events. A list of events which could be arranged as ceremonial functions for Mrs King was prepared by the action researcher and the publicity committee as a strategy to attract publicity. Press releases were prepared in advance both advising the news media of these events so they could be diaried in the expectation that newsroom resources would be allocated to covering them, and in the hope of pre-publicity through news stories about an upcoming event. These events were in general soft news events, safe and predictable occurrences which are the staple diet of community newspaper journalism. A Suffrage Year happening, for example, was packaged as a news media event by the writing of a press release quoting Mrs King predicting that tough times lay ahead for New Zealand women. This release was used as the angle for a story published by *City Voice* on 1 July 1993, while the *Eastern News*, 2 August 1993, used the local involvement of Mrs King and others as the introduction to the story.

Simple doings which provide photographic opportunities and human interest appeal fit comfortably within the events orientation of the news. The presentation of a gold badge by Mrs King to a Miramar resident who had been a member of the Labour Party for over 50 years was an obvious event which could be orchestrated to fit the news media format. It provided a caption story for the *Eastern News*, 21 August 1993, and epitomised the parish pump style of local journalism. The photograph and story reinforced Mrs King's status as a political candidate and identified her with loyal oldtimers within the party.

#### 8.4 Reinforcing campaign publicity

The strategy of reinforcing campaign publicity was implemented through several activities. First, reinforcement was attempted in the context of a news story becoming a publicity event for a wider audience than that normally reached through traditional distribution and circulation. The second action reported here was the reinforcement of direct mail pamphlets by using them as a peg on which to hang a news item.

A human interest profile story was published in an airline magazine, *Southern Skies*, about Mrs King and her political aspirations. The magazine is distributed to readers who fly on the airline's aircraft so readership is confined to air travellers. The publicity committee considered ways in which the profile article, which was "soft" in focus and positive in tone, could be distributed more specifically to potential voters within the Miramar electorate.

The publicity committee asked the airline for overrun copies of the magazine and secured 150 copies. The publicity committee then used its computerised data base providing information about voters including occupational groupings to identify 150 businesspeople and corporate leaders living within the Miramar electorate. These 150 businesspeople were then targeted as recipients of the magazine containing the profile article. A copy of the magazine, and an accompanying letter from the electorate chairman indicating a profile of their electorate candidate for Labour featured inside, were then hand delivered to the relevant addresses of the targeted businesspeople. This activity was based on the realisation that securing news media publicity is only part of the equation in terms of profile building for a political candidate, although the complex issues relating to audience effect are not the focus of this research. It needs to be acknowledged, though, that after the news has been made, it then needs an audience.

The distribution of Mrs King's second direct mail pamphlet, "Annette King on Jobs", provided additional news media publicity and confirmed the theoretical perspective of the events orientation of the news, that "doing something" creates news. Mrs King's pamphlet was distributed by campaign workers to 16,000 constituents in the Miramar electorate. After its release the National MP for the electorate Graeme Reeves issued a press release to the *Eastern News* challenging Mrs King to disclose the source of her

information that there were 3,000 unemployed people in the Miramar electorate. The press release also referred to Mrs King's six point plan to reduce unemployment and combined conventional politicking claims about the previous Labour Government's performance. The reporter contacted Mrs King for comment and a series of negotiations followed over the figures. Mrs King and the publicity group provided a counter press release and attached the source of the figures used.

This resulted in a series of negotiations between the reporter and Mrs King about the figures. The reporter acted as an intermediary going between the original source of the story, Graeme Reeves, and the secondary source Mrs King, who had been challenged to verify her figures. Both parties were involved in claim and counter-claim via the reporter as conduit of information. The eventual publication in the *Eastern News* on 24 May 1993 as page three lead story was presented as a conflict between adversaries entitled, "Politicians row over unemployment figures" (Appendix K). Galtung and Ruge (1965) note that negativity is an important news value. They state, "the more negative the event in its consequences, the more probable that it will become a news item." The conflict orientation of political reporting fits Galtung & Ruge's analysis of "negative consequences." And it fits with research by Major (1992) which indicates that journalists translate news topics and define them as problematic situations for readers, referred to in Chapters 17-21.

The journalist had distilled the various press releases and telephone calls made in association with the story and presented the story in a conventional news format, that of antagonistic interests (A versus B) pitted against each other. Tiffen (1989) states formats actively shape content," the story format favours resolution over doubt, the concrete over the abstract, the narrative recounting of recent, finite events over the analytical account of continuing conditions" (p.65).

So while the two candidates did not at any stage discuss the figures themselves or have any contact which makes the headlined "row" somewhat mythical, the story was presented as a series of quotes from opposing sides with the journalist playing a "straight bat" and preserving the notional reportorial "balance". Epstein (1972) has referred to the A versus B nature of reportage as the "dialectical story model." This "objective" format allows the journalist to preserve distance and yet secure a story which can be distilled into conflict.

In addition the issue of employment as a social problem within either the electorate or New Zealand society was not debated within the context of the story. Instead of the issue being subject of the news content of the story, the story is presented in terms of "right" or "wrong" and as springing from an event, the release of a pamphlet. The story began:

A row has broken out over the number of unemployed in the Miramar electorate between sitting MP Graeme Reeves and Labour's candidate Annette King since the release of a pamphlet on jobs recently. In the pamphlet, Annette King on Jobs, Mrs King claims there are 3,000 unemployed people in the Miramar electorate.

The story's presentation as one politician being "right" at the expense of the other reflects another of Galtung and Ruge's (1965) news values, that is the less ambiguous the event or situation the more likely it is to be news. Political conflict, one adversary against another, is relatively unambiguous. The element of ambiguity inherent in the story, which is an independent employment official indicating the impossibility of providing accurate figures because of overlapping electoral boundaries, is recorded but not allowed to influence the format and presentation of the story. This information is at the end of the story after the A versus B format and does not disrupt the headline which features a "row."

In the evaluation session Mrs King and the publicity group also analysed the item and perceived the story as positive in tone for Mrs King. Their perception was that the story publicised the bad employment news in the electorate which reflected negatively on the performance of the incumbent MP Graeme Reeves. It was felt by the group that the exact number of unemployed, whether it was 2000 or 3000, was incidental to the idea that many people in Miramar were unemployed. The story also publicised Mrs King's release of a pamphlet reinforcing the campaign strategy of attempting to gain news media publicity from its own promotional activity.

While the dialectical story model is a principal form of story presentation by the news media it is by no means the only one. The random approach to what is news, the subjectivity of journalistic selection and the tempo of news gathering which means an insatiable need for news to fill newspapers, can often see the news media accept without

discussion supplied press release material and publish it without seeking opposing viewpoints and with little journalistic verification of the facts presented. An example is the story published on page ten of the *Eastern News*, October 4, 1993, entitled *Unemployment in Miramar too high-King*. The reporter has committed stenographic journalism, simply processing material from a press release written by the action researcher and delivered to the newspaper. The reporter has paid no part in initiation of the story, has not negotiated with the source, has not "put it to the other side" and opposed source A against source B, nor even "created" the quotations or chosen the phrases and words used. While there is reportage from the New Zealand Employment Service National Office about the method of collection of unemployment statistics the tenor of the story (politicking for Mrs King) remains undisturbed in this stenographic process which presents a single perspective on unemployment.

Unemployment was to become the major issue of the campaign and candidates fought for news media space in connection with this issue. The events orientation of the news sees the news media not only using an event as peg on which to hang or angle the news, but also using the event in a wider context as a type of news coathanger from which can be hung reaction, opinion and comment in relation to an issue. Events such as the release of the Budget and candidates' meetings were used by the *Eastern News* to revisit the major election issue--unemployment.

In relation to the Budget release, reaction was sought by the newspaper from both Mr Reeves, Mrs King and Alliance candidate Jody Hamilton and a typical election/reaction story published under the headline, *Budget means more jobs--Reeves*. Similarly, the newspaper has used the event of a candidates' meeting as the reason to revisit the jobless issue and present it as a *Candidates battle over statistics at election meeting*.

Linking identified election issues to events to capitalise on the events orientation of the news media was another strategy employed to attempt to boost Mrs King's exposure. The environment was a defined election issue of heightened interest in Miramar because of the geographical features of the electorate and the heightened public interest in "green" issues. These "green" issues included the controversy over the Queen's Chain and the implications for Wellington's coastline and associated green areas, Wellington's airport with the problem of noise and the issue of airport extensions, and the long

standing Moa Point sewage debate. It was decided by the candidate and campaign committee supporters that the establishment of a new "green" branch of the Labour Party would both create news as a "happening" and would provide a political focus for environmental issues during the election campaign. The establishment of the branch and the election of officers provided an angle for the *Eastern News* who published a story headlined *Green branch sprouts in Miramar* on 6 September 1993, which quoted Mrs King as stating, "There is a strong need for an environmental perspective in the Miramar electorate". The basis for the story came from supplied press release material.

The "happening", the establishment of a new party and the election of officers, allows the newspaper to justify the story's publication, whereas press release material provided on the same environmental issues no matter how socially significant would probably not count as news. The news media may even be aware that the happening has been artificially constructed so it becomes a news event, but there is usually an assumption that the reader is naive about the arranged nature or pseudo basis of much news. To conclude the results section of the action research it is argued that all three activities, the building of source relationships, improving Mrs King's confidence and understanding of news processes and the identification of relevant strategies to "make" the news influenced the manufacture of news at a local level in the Miramar electorate during the 1993 election campaign. In the following chapter of the study the results of the action research are evaluated against the research objectives set in Chapter Four in relation to Goals.

## CHAPTER NINE: ACTION RESEARCH EVALUATION

### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter which describes the evaluation processes completes the action research section of the project. The limitations of action research and future research directions are also discussed. The evaluation processes covered aspects of the manufacture of news in a particular electorate setting involving action research as a process and an approach. The evaluative goals of the project related to:

1. the development of a systematic process to maximise effective utilisation of the news media through a political candidate developing appropriate source relationships with journalists and,
2. increasing the political candidate's understanding of relevant news processes.

Susman and Evered (1978) state that contemporary applications of action research can use different techniques of data collection in the evaluation phase. In this research the evaluative processes were multi-faceted and several levels of evaluation were undertaken during and after the project. These multiple types of evaluation were used to minimise bias. Bias is discussed in this chapter at 9.2. Minimising bias. The levels of evaluation were:

1. the on-going evaluation, or group feedback as Bennett and Oliver (1988) describe it in their model, which was a continuing process and is referred to earlier in this research and again in this chapter.
2. the use of a range of formal evaluation methods as semi-structured and unstructured interviews, self perception questionnaires and content analysis.
3. a holistic overview of the action research project, looking at the goals set and linking the evaluation to news media scholarship and theoretical concepts.

This chapter describes and discusses these levels of evaluations.

## 9.2 Minimising bias

While acknowledging the universality of Aguilar's (1981) comment that "bias is the human condition, a danger for both insider and outsider researchers" (p.22) action research as a mode of inquiry requires particular consideration. This rests in part on the unique degree of researcher immersion in the system under study. The researcher was both experientially and existentially immersed in the political group as it related to tasks, the people, the culture, the rewards and the emotional exchanges. It was, to use Evered and Louis' (1981) description, a "multi-sensory, holistic immersion" (p.387).

The bias dilemma posed by action research is that those who will not acknowledge Anderson's (1987) "incommensurability of perspectives" will be predisposed to consider that the findings could be distorted and contaminated by the values and purposes of the researcher who has been physically and psychologically immersed in the organizational setting, the political group, under study. In this regard it is useful to refer to Evered and Louis' (1981) distinctions between the two modes of inquiry—inside and outside—with special relevance to action research. They state the researcher's relevance to the setting in action research is that of immersion rather than detachment and neutrality which characterise outside research. The validation basis is experiential for action research as opposed to measurement and logic, and the researcher's role is that of an actor/actress in action research rather than that of an onlooker. The source of categories is interactively emergent in action research rather than *a priori*, and the aim of inquiry is that of situational relevance as opposed to universality and generalizability. In action research the type of knowledge acquired is particular and idiographic rather than universal and nomothetic and the nature of the data and meaning is interpreted and contextually embedded as opposed to factual and context free (p.389).

Potential bias in the action research project related to whether a systematic process of effective utilisation of the news media by the political candidate was achieved. The difficulty faced by the researcher arose from the dual role of the action researcher as a researcher and as a journalist within the scope of the project. Journalistic self esteem is inexorably bound up with the finished product, seeing the story in print or hearing and/or seeing it broadcast. Journalists are strongly socialised within the newsroom

culture that a good journalist is one whose story is published or broadcast. This is acknowledged by the "byline ethic" whereby journalists are rewarded, and engage in self promotion, by the attachment of their name to specific pieces of reportage.

Evaluating whether a systematic process of news utilisation had been developed could be coloured not merely by the ego of a professional whose advice and skills had been tapped in an action research context, but, in addition, by the powerful nature of journalistic self esteem related as it is to an "end product" result. For this reason, a quantitative methodology, content analysis, adopting a basic frequency count procedure was added to the range of formal, evaluative methods used. It allowed the researcher to minimise bias and counter the possible contamination of potent journalistic self esteem and to measure what was published or broadcast and to standardise and categorise data. In action research it appears the notion of the researcher's immersion poses the need for additional safeguards against bias. Quantitative content analysis was the most appropriate technique of data collection in the evaluative phase. Further discussion about the use of content analysis in action research occurs later in this chapter, 9.5. Evaluative techniques: content analysis.

### 9.3 Continuing group feedback

The nature of the action research project meant a reliance on interviews, on direct observation and on retrieval of information from written documents in the group feedback phase. Unstructured interviews with the candidate about her negotiations with the journalists concerned were pivotal. Because of the continuing contact with the news media detailed records needed to be kept of each of the negotiations between candidate and journalist about every potential story. This meant a reliance on the candidate's self perception of these negotiations. This was unavoidable given the traditional hostility of journalists to any interference with their professional judgments and the norms of their craft.

Journalists jealously proclaim their autonomy from overt external manipulation in relation to story construction, even though a reporter's story may be subject to alteration and editing by gatekeepers higher in the news hierarchy. This part of the journalist's

creed, independence from outside manipulation, prevented the action researcher from being directly involved in the negotiation process over story content and the fate of a particular story. Had the action researcher's hand been declared to the journalist, this disclosure could have inhibited or prevented further publication of stories involving the political candidate. Clearly, too, the journalists concerned would not have communicated or negotiated with a candidate's advisers in the manner in which they communicated and negotiated with Mrs King. Mrs King did not disclose the nature of the help she was receiving.

This non-disclosure is an accepted part of public relations news management between political parties and the news media. It does, however, pose constraints for action research when the nature of the intervention is aimed at creating and managing the news when the news media are traditionally suspicious and watchful about such news management and are jealous of their autonomy. The tension between the two roles has been referred to by Altschull (1992). He likens election campaigns to football games, contested between the offence-the "image makers"-and the defence-the "image busters" (p.15).

The traditional empathy between journalists and those acting in a public relations capacity has been referred to by Spicer (1993) who states that twenty years of research indicates that journalists hold a negative, often antagonistic, attitude towards public relations and public relations practitioners. This hostility prevented the action researcher's direct, personal involvement in the dialogue of negotiation between source and journalists. Aspects of the involvement of the action researcher in Mrs King's relationship with the news media and her publicity strategy were necessarily covert.

Zima (1983) defines interviewing as a communication transaction, involving two people, one of whom has a definite purpose, and both of whom speak and listen from time to time. Sligo (1988) states there are three general objectives of an interview. These are:

1. to give and get information,
2. to produce changes in attitudes or behaviour,
3. to solve problems.

Unstructured interviews occurred in daily contact between the candidate and the action researcher, either face-to-face or by telephone. The daily contact was a mixture of formal business about Miramar interests, informal conversation and gossip exchange about the progress of the national election campaign, and personal socialisation. The roles of interviewer and interviewee were interchangeable.

Semi-structured interviews involving the action research team generally occurred in the context of gathering specific, task-related information for publicity initiatives. Examples were interviews between the action researcher and the union liaison officer of the campaign committee to gather information about trade union publications which could be targeted with press releases, and the series of semi-structured interviews which took place with printers, production workers and electorate workers handling distribution of the four direct mail pamphlets and the tabloid newspaper produced during the action research project.

The limitation of physical distance needs to be acknowledged in relation to the interview process. The action researcher, very often the interviewer but also often the interviewee, in the group's continuing evaluation of bits of action, lived in Palmerston North and the candidate and many of the campaign committee lived in Wellington. Much of the interviewing took place within the context of the business and confusion of action research compounded by difficulties of distance and time, hardly an ideal interviewing environment. While the action researcher relied on field notes, at times of heavy activity these were abbreviated.

#### **9.4 Evaluative techniques: self perception questionnaires**

An objective of the action research project was to raise the candidate's perception of her confidence in dealing with the news media during the election campaign. To measure whether the interventions during the action research project influenced self perception two instruments were used. One questionnaire measured the candidate's perception at the start and the finish of the project using bi-polar scaling in the survey instrument (Appendix A) A second measured the perceptions at the start and the finish of the project of a reference group of three people: a professional journalist, the campaign organiser and a former Member of Parliament (Appendix B).

#### 9.4.1 Bi-polar scaling

McCroskey and Richmond (1989) state that measures such as bi-polar scales:

...typically are designed to probe such things as feelings, perceptions, attitudes, and/or beliefs which people have. They may be self reports of one's own internal feelings, beliefs or attitudes. They may be self-reports of one's perceptions with regard to something or someone in the external environment. An example of the former would be Jack reporting how competent as a communicator he perceives himself to be. An example of the latter would be Jack reporting how competent as a communicator he perceives Bill to be (p.155).

The opposite words, or bi-polar adjectival scales as Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum (1957) call them, were selected after pre-testing on two subjects-a journalist and a politician chosen because the concepts to be differentiated by use of the bi-polar scales involved journalistic terms and concepts and political reference. McCroskey and Richmond state:

Actually, the only way to be sure that words may be used appropriately to form bi-polar scales is to be certain that research subjects, like those with whom the completed instrument will be used, will respond in opposite ways to the words (p.160).

Mrs King, and the reference group completed similar measurement instruments in mid April, 1993. They were re-tested at the end of the campaign in November 1993. These subjects were provided with a number of concepts to be differentiated, and the bi-polar scales against which to do it. The task asked of the subjects was to indicate for each item (pairing of a concept with a scale) the direction of the subject's association and its intensity on a seven-step scale. This process is similar to Osgood, Tuci and Tannenbaum's (1957) semantic differentiation, but in this case only one adjectival scale is used to differentiate the concept, as opposed to a set of bi-polar adjectival scales.

McCroskey and Richmond (1989) state:

There are two major advantages to the use of measures based on the bi-polar scaling approach. First, they tend to be highly reliable and valid if properly developed. Second, they consume little subject time so that more items can be measured at one sitting without exhausting the subjects (p.165).

In the instruments used, ten concepts to be differentiated by Mrs King and the reference group were similar (Appendices A and B). In addition, one unstructured question was included in the measurement instrument completed by Mrs King. This was the question: What are some key words to describe your feelings as a political candidate towards the news media? (Appendix A). The reference group was asked two additional questions. They were asked to rank their perception of the candidate's understanding of how news is created and of Mrs King's utilisation of the news media as a political candidate (Appendix B).

#### 9.4.2 Results of the questionnaires

A dichotomy emerged from the results of the two questionnaires. The perceptions of the reference group from the two questionnaires administered at the start and at the finish of the project showed congruent results (Appendix D). In general, the reference group perceived Mrs King positively in terms of her competence in dealing with the news media, her level of understanding of news media processes, her confidence and her utilisation of the news media as a political candidate. This positive perception did not alter.

On the other hand Mrs King's perception of her own competence, understanding and confidence as measured by the two questionnaires changed with Mrs King recording more positive scales in the second survey (Appendix C). Mrs King's perception of her improvement is revealed by the key words she used to describe her feelings as a political candidate. In the first questionnaire Mrs King wrote, "apprehensive, aggressive, suspicious". In the second questionnaire Mrs King segmented the news media, indicating an understanding of the targeting process attempted during the action research project, and wrote, "disappointed--print media (local); satisfied--print media

(national daily); confident and improved performance--television)". Mrs King also marked her perception of negotiation with, and complaint to, journalists about stories and her understanding how journalists think about news construction, two scales more positively in both cases.

The results suggested Mrs King's self confidence in dealing with the news media improved during the course of the action research project. They also indicated that Mrs King may have undervalued herself in relation to dealing with the news media, which was reflected in the results of the surveys of the reference group. This is intuitively reasonable and reinforces observations made by trained media personnel in relation to Mrs King's media performances.

## 9.5 Evaluative techniques: content analysis

### 9.5.1 Introduction

The use of quantitative methodology within action research has been discussed in the recent debate in the journal, *Human Relations*. Ledford and Mohrman (1993) state it is the use of quantitative methods which is the controversial issue among action researchers. They state:

Some...view quantitative methods as invalid and even morally unacceptable. They view quantitative methods as the handmaiden of orthodox social science, and therefore unacceptable. Our position is that the use of quantitative methods can be an integral part of the action research process (p.1357-8).

A similar position is adopted in this study. Detailed comment about content analysis as a quantitative methodology outside the context of action research is contained later in the research. The definitions of content analysis adopted are those offered by Berelson (1952), "Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (p.18). Krippendorff (1980) states content analysis is a "research technique for making replicable

and valid inferences from data to their context" (p.21). To the need for objective and systematic inquiry, Holsti (1969) adds the need for *generality* allowing considerations of theoretical concerns.

A welter of material was published relating to Mrs King's candidacy in Miramar during the action research period. Many of the published/broadcast items have not been referred to so far in discussion of the action research process. In particular, the daily newspaper articles have not been referred to, with comment concentrating on community-based publications or television. Content analysis allowed consideration of this additional material.

A principal goal of the project was to help the publicity committee develop a systematic process of making news. Content analysis as an evaluative technique allowed the researcher to measure what *was* published or broadcast and to standardise and categorise data. This provides a quantitative framework from which to theorize about the implications for the manufacture of news (thereby minimising the "no effort to theorize" limitation of the methodology noted by Ericson *et al*, (1991), and to make some observations about the action research process.

The sample selected for analysis included all known-about material published about Mrs King during the action research period (excluding letters to the editor and the tabloid newspaper produced for Mrs King) and the unit of analysis was the story published or broadcast. The tabloid newspaper was eliminated from the sample because, while it contained news, the news had been manufactured specifically for the candidate and would distort the sample. The unit of enumeration used was a frequency count.

Content was organized in substance categories (Berelson, 1952) including directionality, whether the overall tone of the publication or broadcast was positive, negative or neutral. Categories related to the first contact made about potential news, negotiation over content, the nature of the story possibility, whether material was supplied and used, in which media the material was published or broadcast, the nature of the printed or broadcast material and its prominence and position. Several categories related to sources, the tone, and whether the content basis was issues or personality based.

Finally, one category organized the nature of the action research intervention and another looked at iteration (Appendix L).

### 9.5.2 Results of content analysis

A total of 40 stories were analysed, 27 published in two community newspapers with the majority in the *Eastern News*, four stories in daily newspapers, two magazine articles, two radio items and five television items. Some general, preliminary observations can be made from the data.

Of the 40 stories 12 related to the *process* of the election campaign. These were predictable stories with a low level of public information often stenographically reported. Two stories several weeks apart even carried the same headline, "Candidates to speak", referring to upcoming meetings Mrs King and others were to address. Such process stories allow the news media to acknowledge the election campaign as news while preserving political neutrality. Process stories are not resource intensive. A total of 28 stories referred to the *substance* of the election campaign. Included in this category were the inevitable poll stories used by the news media to generate election news in zero sum contest terms of one candidate winning at the expense of others losing.

In 13 stories Mrs King was the primary source, while in 17 stories she was a secondary source, generally in stories adopting the dialectical model of presentation, A versus B. In ten stories Mrs King was simply mentioned. Mrs King initiated negotiation over content in half, 20, of the stories. The journalist initiated negotiation in eight stories, in nine cases there was a process of joint initiation and in three cases stories were published or broadcast with no negotiation with the candidate. In 23 stories, supplied material of some description was used.

The predominant channel, route by which information reaches the reporter, using Sigal's (1973) typology, was a routine channel involving official proceedings, press releases or press conferences, followed by informal channels, with enterprise channels involving initiative by the journalist featuring in a small number of stories (seven) only. A total of 31 stories were considered to be positive in tone, six were neutral and only three were coded as negative.

Several observations can be made. First, the predominance of routine channels of newsgathering, the use of supplied material, and the candidate's negotiation of content support the "fit" concept. This is the contention that the closer the "fit" of potential news to the logic, context, organization and format of the news media the more likely it will become news. Altheide and Snow (1991) developed the thesis to suggest that the logic of the media subsumes and drives the political process so that media logic becomes the logic of political appearances. While this research accepts the "fit" concept, these results do not necessarily support the notion that the media subsumes the political process.

The second observation which can be made from the content analysis relates to candidate perseverance in making contact with the news media. A systematic process of making news means a political hopeful must work the system. The content analysis indicated Mrs King's perseverance resulted in publications and broadcasts which were predominantly positive in tone, and which would not have been generated through journalistic enterprise alone or because events were inherently newsworthy. From Mrs King's standpoint, then, the action research achieved its aim of increasing her profile through news stories which decreased her need to pay for advertising and publicity in other media.

## 9.6 Theoretical considerations and general evaluation

Throughout the action research project one problem consistently emerged which impacted both on the development of a systematic process of making news and on increasing levels of understanding about news manufacture. The problem was the dilemma of "what is news?" and how can it be understood by non-journalists. The candidate and the electorate committee often expressed frustration that they did not understand what it was that made the news. This difficulty encountered by the action researcher in collaboration with an electorate publicity committee is central to an overall evaluation of the action research project.

The problem is compounded by the lack of any universal agreement about what news is. Bennett (1992) in his paper on "white noise" discusses the perils of mass mediated

democracy and states it is "impossible to define just what the news is, beyond the technologies, organizational routines and market forces that drive its production" (p.404).

Henningham (1992) in a powerful inaugural lecture at the University of Queensland about journalism's threat to freedom of the press, relates a parable about a professional media scholar who worked in a university constructing elaborate computer-based models to simulate the flow of news, and developing a complex set of hypotheses about relationships between variables concerned in the processing of news. The scholar was invited by a newspaper executive to spend some time at a newspaper, which he did, and he "marvelled at the helter-skelter, organised chaos which marks the production of a daily newspaper."

At the end of the night, when the first edition was gone and the editorial staff slaked their thirst over a beer, the newspaper executive asked the scholar what he thought of the whole process. "Remarkable, truly remarkable," was his reply. "But I am certain that, although it may work very well in practice, it would never work in theory" (p.2).

Phillips (1976), a former journalist and one of the American researchers who conducted participant observation studies in newsrooms in the 1970s, offers a reason why a model of "what's news" is elusive. She states that as a form of knowledge, news is nontheoretic in the sense that it is neither formal, systematic, nor abstract. She came to this conclusion after 13 months watching the nature of daily newswork, "(e.g., the cutting up of "reality" into bits called news items; the emphasis on visual accuracy and detailed description.)"

To explore the daily newsworker's epistemological stance, let us compare it to the theorist's perspective. When scientists or philosophers look at a discrete fact or event, they 'see' it through concepts which are usually derived from a theory. In contrast, journalists concretize. When they witness or hear about an event, the concrete particulars become the foci of interest, and these concrete particulars are not conceptualized in their general bearings.

True, journalists make inferences (e.g., is it a conspiracy, a communications breakdown, or Freudian drives that lie behind a Mayor's latest folly?). But such inferences are based on quasi-theories, *ad hoc* explanations, not scientific evidence, reflection, or a broad conceptual framework. (p.89-90).

Later in the research, Chapters 17-21, Phillips' view of news as non theoretic is challenged and a theory of news as discrepancy is tested through content analysis. While the nature of news has proved difficult, it is possible to provide a broad, conceptual framework of the news process cycle in the form of the following model (Figure 6). This acknowledges Tiffen's (1989) point that, "a genuine exploratory approach to news content must give primary attention to understanding the processes by which it is constructed" (p.4).

It needs to be noted that this cycle is generally iterative and the same story can be "followed up" either as a continuation of the factual scenario, or a variation of the facts, or a different perspective. And while the model presents the news process as a coherent cycle it is, in fact, characterised by breaks in the linkages and different starting and stopping points. Some stories are initiated, for example, because a source provides a reporter with information or because a reporter sees or hears something which will be selected as newsworthy but the story may not proceed to the news gathering stage because either a news superior does not agree with the initial judgment as to newsworthiness or because a better story is initiated. Stories with a higher threshold in terms of criteria such as topicality and newsworthiness can take priority.

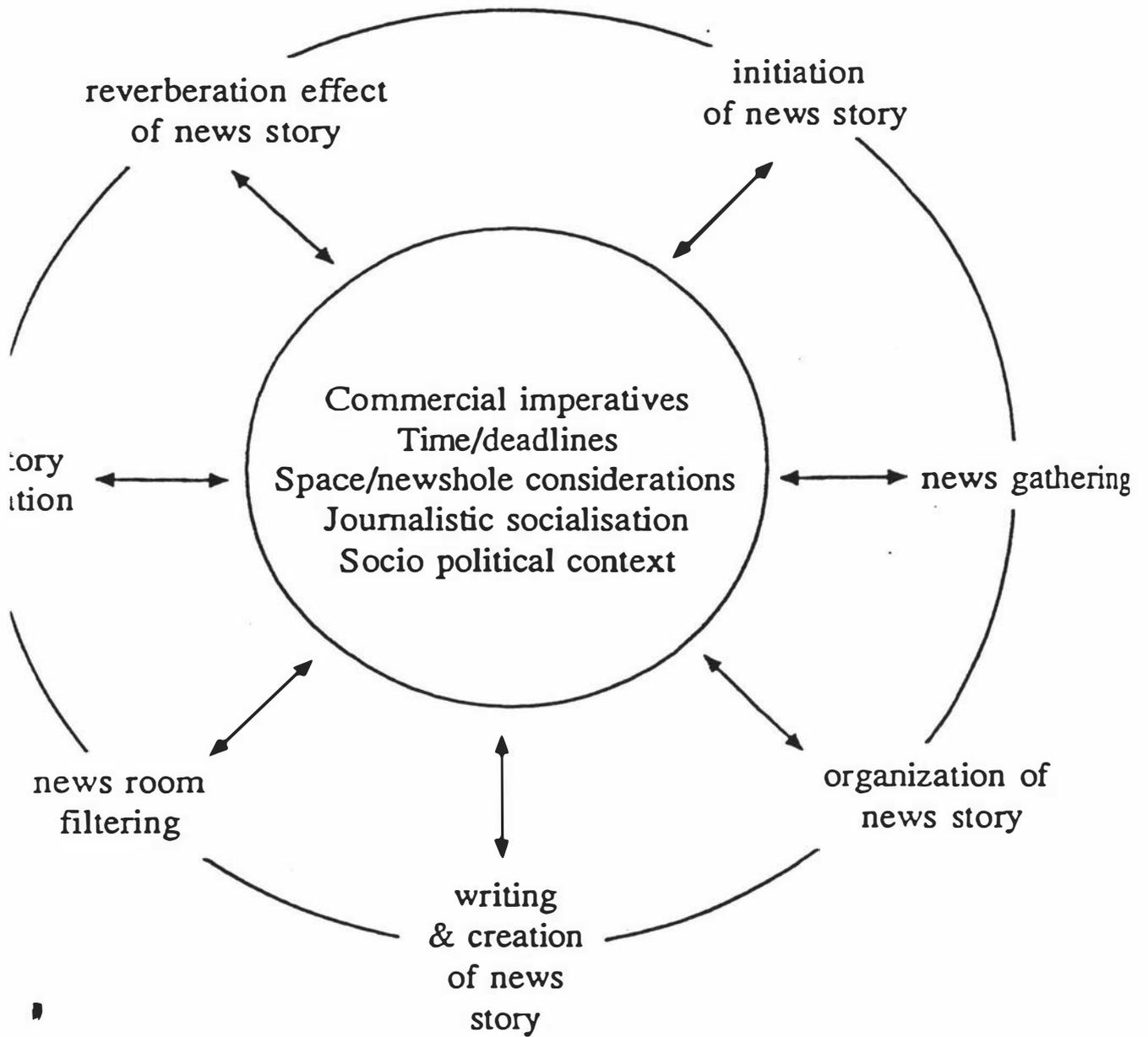


Figure 6: Model of the News Process Cycle.

A news story can be *initiated* by either a source contacting a journalist or vice versa; or by a journalist hearing or seeing something which may constitute news. At this stage or at other times in the cycle the story can be assessed in terms of its potential newsworthiness by a news superior. This judgment will be based on pragmatic factors such as the resources needed to gather, organize, write, edit and publish the story as well as journalistic considerations as to whether it is a good story in terms of newsworthiness. *News gathering* involves fact and information gathering which sees journalists and their sources both exchange information and negotiate control over it.

The *organization of the news story* involves the journalist in selecting the news angle or peg, a subconscious judgment which usually answers the question: "what makes this story different?" Notional balance is generally sought by the journalist at this stage of the process by seeking opposing positions from sources. The *creation and writing* of a news story encompasses the imposition of journalistic language, style and conventions according to the medium being used. For example, a newspaper reporter writing a hard news story (spot news of the day) will follow the inverted pyramid convention of news writing with all the relevant facts in the first few paragraphs. On the other hand, a television reporter will be conscious of "soundbites" and the visualness of the stories and what pictures exist to accompany the script. A radio journalist may write a story to include actuality and the voice of the source.

*Filtering* of the news story occurs when it passes from the reporter for vetting and editing. This can involve the reporter negotiating over the story in relation to content, language, the angle employed, sourcing, its headline or presentation. The filtering process involves some form of editing for both substance and style. The story is *presented* by publication or broadcast and the priority of the story is established by journalistic convention through position, placement, tenor and tone and by comparison with, and proximity to, other news stories.

Inevitably there is a *reverberation effect* associated with the news story which can lead to an iterative process of follow up stories. The reverberation effect can involve ongoing developments in the physical world which make a continuation of the story inherently newsworthy, or a reaction to the original information from a new source which provides a different or opposing perspective. Alternatively, the reverberation

effect can consist of repetitive and consonant material from elite sources expressing approval, often called "cheer-leading" stories by journalists. Complex issues of audience effect, as well as journalistic evaluation of the story's presentation, influence the reverberation effect.

All of the steps in the news process cycle are influenced by the interplay of the *commercial imperatives* of the particular medium, *time* constraints expressed as deadlines, and *space* considerations. This interplay is underscored by the inevitability of news production; the paper *needs* to come out, there *will* be television news at a designated time, regardless of the unpredictability of the constituent elements of the news. The wider *socio-political environment* impacts on the process and the pervasive nature of *journalistic socialisation* is at work in the making of news in this news process cycle.

The model acknowledges that news is a socially constructed reality and not an unproblematic "mirror to the world." It rejects, too, the notion that news systematically presents one individual's views, or some singleminded ideology, what is sometimes referred to as the "conspiracy theory" of the news. It suggests the making of news is complex, dynamic, mutable, fragmentary and that news is essentially political not only because it is influenced by institutional imperatives but also because it represents the outcome of negotiations between stakeholders.

Relating the model of the news process cycle to the action research project aimed at helping Mrs King both make news and make the news, it is clear that the process can be influenced by the source at the initial stages, initiation of the news story and news gathering. The source can be marginally influential only in the organization of the news story, while journalistic autonomy generally prevails at the stages of writing and creating a news story. It is apparent news room filtering can be manipulated by intervention as shown in battle for photographic balance. Again the source can be involved in the reverberation effect with followup comment or reaction such as the ongoing dialogue which developed in the electorate over unemployment statistics. Often, too, the reverberation effect results from influences and developments outside the original source. If these observations are correct, then it is clear that a systematic process of making news was developed in the action research project, particularly in relation to story initiation, news gathering, influencing the filtering process and manipulating the reverberation effect.

The necessity for a model of the news process cycle to help explicate the nature of news emerged during the action research project and was used after development with the action research group members. It is acknowledged that the model would have been useful at the outset, both to try and influence levels of understanding and in development of a systematic process of making news. The action researcher perhaps over-estimated the base level of news knowledge amongst participants. It was only when the puzzle of "what is news?" emerged and was repeated that the option of model development was implemented.

Spilka (1993) discusses the value of a flexible, cautionary approach to data gathering in qualitative research. She suggests new insights in the middle of a study may cause alteration to research design, which occurred in this case. The researcher's assumption that intervention needed to concentrate on the process of manufacture of news was refined to include considerations of what news is and the construction of a model to work from. One of the advantages of action research is that it offers periodic phases of data analysis and evaluation from start to finish which allow researchers to be receptive to unexpected findings.

## 9.7 Limitations of the action research project

The limitations section refers to problems or constraints both with the process of action research and the substance of the project. These related to the dilemma of presentation of action research, the degree of emotional involvement of the research, and the nature of the election campaign as political contest.

### 9.7.1 The dilemma of presentation

The reporting of action research is problematic. The strait-jacket of scientific rigour requires separation of methodology from results, the "how we did it" from "what happened when we did it." But this approach does a disservice to the essential nature of action research as a process and an approach. Mangham (1993) alludes to the dilemma:

What action researchers need to do is to invent a *way* for talking about the *what*. A *way* which captures the essence of the activity--explorations around and construction of a new social reality. It does not seem to me that pretending to be natural scientists, aspiring to honor by association, adopting a kind of Olympian perspective, is that *way*. The richness of the *what* all too often is lost as it is strained through the sieve of scientific rigour (p.1247-8).

Ledford and Mohrman (1993) take up this debate when examining the use of quantitative versus qualitative methods in action research. They state action researchers face a greater challenge than other researchers in the use of qualitative methods

Consider the difficulty of telling a 25-page story about a 5-year change effort in a large, multi-site system or set of systems with thousands of employees...This is more difficult than organizing targeted qualitative data about a narrowly defined research issue. We believe there is considerable work to be done in defining standards for the reporting of action research cases. (Emphasis added, p.1357).

This difficulty is compounded by the absence of clear examples of the genre of action research. How do you refine old standards or define new standards for the reporting of action research without a coherent tradition of presentation? Ledford and Mohrman (1993) state that before the special issue of the journal *Human Relations* in 1993 devoted to action research "the number of solid examples of action research in the literature has totalled far less than one per year during the last 50 years" whereas "normal" social science articles fill numerous journals each year (p.1350).

The dilemma of how to present action research was resolved in this study by adopting the formula of separating methodology from results so readers could distinguish the methods employed. Results and discussion which are traditionally separated were, however, integrated to adequately "tell the story" of a nine month project aimed at developing a systematic process of self-help by a political organization in relation to its utilisation of the news media. Where iteration was reported it was clearly defined as such in the presentation to help provide a chronological sequence.

While this led to a merging of styles and approaches in the reporting of the action research in an effort to preserve its integrity and its flavour as an approach and a process, it should be noted that the descriptive accounts relate often to discrete, atomized events, whereas the activity they describe was part of the "blooming, buzzing, confusion", to borrow James' (1918) term, of action research (p.488). From the welter of data it has been necessary to impose a reductionist approach simply to describe and record the main spheres of activity. It is acknowledged that this presentation may appear ahistorical and without connection to the socio-political context within the election campaign or to linkages with other activities which formed part of the action research.

McLennan (1988) makes the point that intervention accounts (accounts of the action) are a sub-species of the general field of history, in the sense that they are writings about the past. But reporting action research in the social science tradition of separating process from result does not easily allow action research to reveal itself as both an approach and a process, referred to by French and Bell (1988). For this reason this research attempts to combine aspects of the academic/scientific approach with the historic/descriptive.

### 9.7.2 The degree of emotional involvement

McLennan (1988) has written of the emotional interchange in action research and while he describes a client/consultant context, his comment that an action researcher from the start of the intervention "attends to both overt, manifest, conscious data, and covert, latent, unconscious data, with particular reference to feelings and emotions" (p.379) is relevant here. He urges researchers to be in touch with their feelings if they are to be useful action researchers.

There was heightened emotional interchange in the study, not because of conflict between the parties or negative reception to action research, but as a consequence of the strong friendships and personal relationships which intensified during the project period. The candidate and the action researcher were in contact daily for nine months and the researcher shared the stress not only of success or failure of publicity initiatives but of the election campaign itself, predicated as it was on a zero-sum basis of political

contest with Mrs King being either a winner or a loser. The personal triumphs and successes were shared and the disappointments, to some degree, were transferred to the action researcher.

The intensity of feeling and the emotional linkages posed difficulties with respect to what Schein (1969) describes as "disengagement" or reduced involvement with the organization. He states the process of disengagement is generally characterized by three features: the disengagement is mutually agreed rather than being a unilateral decision by one party, that involvement does not stop altogether but may continue at a very low level, and that the door is always open for further work. The action research project covered a finite period ending with the general election on 6 November, 1993. But involvement of the action researcher continued at a reduced level with Mrs King and her political communication in Miramar. It is acknowledged that the continuing involvement is grounded as much in emotional interchange as it is in the instrumental needs of the organization.

### 9.7.3 The election campaign as political contest

A second limitation relating to an overall assessment of the action research project lies in the nature of the election campaign as political contest. Some of the evaluation necessarily rests on self-perception of those involved, and yet there is no doubt this self-perception was coloured by the context of whether Mrs King was "winning or losing" not just the media battle, but the wider political contest. For example, the candidate and other project members often expressed hesitation or negative feeling about a publicity initiative when there was bad news for Labour in the polls or as a result of a leak or a gaffe which impacted on Labour's credibility. A similar publicity initiative, though, would be perceived quite differently when Labour's fortunes rode high. So while the action research interventions might be similar, emotional interchanges fluctuated according to the external political environment (among other factors).

This has implications for an overall assessment of the action research project and process, and whether the aims were achieved. Mrs King's eventual victory with a 2400 plus majority at the polls, and subsequent celebratory activity, inevitably colours assessment of whether the action research intervention affected social change. The

candidate and those involved in the action research project rate the interventions as remarkably successful and that the models, techniques and understandings are generalisable in election campaign contexts. Would there be such a perception, though, if Mrs King had lost? The issue of the influence of the overall election outcome and Mrs King's victory on perceptions of the action research needs to be acknowledged.

### 9.8 Strengths of the action research study and future research directions

Despite these caveats, it can be cautiously stated that collaboration between the local election candidate, an action researcher with communications training, and committed local campaign workers utilising action research methodology, achieved the principal goals of developing a systematic process of making news and of increasing understanding of news manufacture. Loftier claims for the action research project in improving "democratic dialogue" are, perhaps, harder to sustain. In making the news, the action research was caught in the prevailing climate of political rhetoric, with all its shortcomings. Nonetheless, using action research in a journalistic context goes some way to answering the call by McChesney (1993) for critical communication scholars committed to democratic communication to work with activist groups and the public at large "to help them decode the media critically, use the existing media systems to best effect, and produce their own communications". He states:

There is an enormous need for this kind of expertise and it is the special mandate of critical communication scholars to fill the role. In addition, this type of practice also keeps critical communication scholars from getting too wrapped up in their own academic verbiage and too concerned with only academic feedback to their work (p.102).

While it is often claimed for action research that it provides situational knowledge as opposed to generalisable knowledge, it is contended here that a number of generalisable points can be made about the manufacture of news as a result of the study. The first relates to negotiation between sources and journalists for "control" of the news process. This research suggests that, in general, journalistic autonomy prevails only at the latter end of the news process cycle and that journalists appropriate stories to make news

from sources far more than is acknowledged. The mutually exclusive camps of scholarship, that embrace either the domination of elite sources or the journalistic control of sources, is rejected. Rather, negotiation between journalists and sources should be seen as a continuum characterised at some point by journalist appropriation of story creativity. Very often the story has its starting point not as a result of journalistic initiative but because the source has drawn to the reporter's attention some socially constructed reality. This view emphasises journalists as processors of information and de-emphasises an enterprise role for journalists as creators of news. It enhances the role of sources in activating the news process.

A second observation relates to scholarship suggesting news values are so opaque that they cannot be popularly acknowledged, defined or understood without journalistic socialisation. It is accepted that journalists are notoriously defensive about articulating newsworthiness and are content to allow it to remain an elusive concept. But this study suggests the mystique of news values is a myth. The fabled news instinct *can* be developed by non-journalists who experience a socially constructed reality and make intuitive, common-sense judgments based on their own cognitive frames of reference, that the event, incident or experience has news potential. These frames of reference are doubtless influenced by the vast store of accumulated knowledge people consciously or unconsciously absorb from personal media consumption patterns.

The last point relates to the argument over the theoretic basis of the news. It appears that the epistemological dilemma referred to by news media scholars over what news *is* has arisen from the assumption that the "news" should be examined from the traditional "body of knowledge" perspective. Instead, the action research study suggests a more insightful approach to explaining the making of news is to search for its origins, and explicate its features, as a process. News, then, is made according to a cyclical process by which a socially constructed reality is converted into a story (another socially constructed reality). The conversion is influenced by the initiation and negotiation between journalists and sources, by journalist socialisation, by organizational routines, by commercial imperatives, socio-political factors and physical constraints. The cyclical process has its own logic, context and format.

As a process, news manufacture can be defined, and modelling developed which allows for a generalisable conceptual framework which can be used more widely. Such modelling has utility for other organizations seeking to understand or influence the manufacture of news. A major benefit of the action research project was the development of models and understanding about political communication and news manufacture within a local electorate context. A future research direction could be replicating the use of the model of news media processes within other local electorates to confirm its utility. Action research, which connects researchers with communication skills and typical election candidates, provides better use of existing media systems and an opportunity for candidates to produce their own communications. Economic differentiation between wealthy and poor candidates can be minimised through effective action research. This factor may have significance in the context of electoral reform in New Zealand.

The next section of the research, Chapters 10-16, reports on the second "insider" methodology used in the study of the manufacture of news in the 1993 general election. Participant observation was undertaken of the relationship between journalists and the Labour leader Mike Moore. The field work was conducted during the second week of the four week general election campaign in October 1993.

## CHAPTER TEN: FIELD RESEARCH

### 10.1 Introduction

The problematic notion of the manufacture of news in a political context is examined in this research by using various methodologies with the purpose of "adding breadth and depth to our analysis" (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, p.33). This section of the research, Chapters 10-16, reports on field research utilising participant observation undertaken during the 1993 New Zealand general election to shed insight into the manufacture of news.

The field research occurred against a backdrop of debate about news media scholarship which impinged on any study of the making of news. Contemporary communications scholars have questioned the current basis of journalistic research. First, there is criticism by some researchers that news media research is too narrowly focused. Zelizer (1993) contends that "journalism researchers have allowed media power to flourish by not addressing the ritual and collective functions it fulfils for journalists themselves" (p.80). She argues for a more interdisciplinary approach to journalism scholarship in order to provide a fuller account of media power and as a necessary corrective to our commonly held view of journalism. She suggests the narrow focus of news media research as a "sociological problem" should be supplemented by the "notions of *performance, narrative, ritual* and *interpretive community* as alternative frames to consider journalism" (p.80). And Schlesinger (1990) promotes a rethinking of the sociology of journalism and criticises what he describes as the "excessive *media-centrism* of much existing research."

Second, there is continuing debate about the news media's role in the political process and in the exercise of democracy (Bennett, 1992; Golding, 1990; Keane, 1991; McChesney, 1993). For example, McChesney criticises the "low regard accorded the practice of journalism" in current communication research and argues for its elevation as a field of study (p.101). He states:

Indeed, critical communication scholars need to frankly *privilege* journalism as a form of discourse. It must be privileged because it is virtually impossible to conceive of a democratic society without journalism playing a central role in the political process. The same cannot be said about many other forms of communication. Hence, if we are serious about participatory democracy we must examine why journalism does not serve democratic ends at present and what needs to be done so we may have a more democratic journalism in future. In fact, in a more sane world, journalism would be among the most prestigious fields in the academy (p.102).

Golding (1990) states that, "at the heart of political communication research must be enquiry into the contribution of information flows and media institutions to the exercise of democracy" (p.98). In suggesting future research directions Golding provides a useful conceptual framework for such empirical study. He urges a "resurrection of the concept of citizenship as a critical benchmark of enquiry in communication research" (p.100). "To what degree and in what ways are people denied access to necessary information and imagery to allow full and equal participation in the social order?" (p.98).

This section of the research attempts to address some of the concerns raised by widening the focus of journalistic scholarship in examining the manufacture of news and by addressing issues related to the role of news in the political process. In particular, the making of news will be examined from a research site in which three main sets of actors prevail; the leader of the Labour Party, his media advisers, and journalists. The social actions of three sets of situated individuals will be examined in the making of news, as opposed to the traditional line of inquiry into the nexus between only two sets of situated individuals, politicians and journalist. The field research addresses Zelizer's (1993) criticism of a strictly linear approach which revolves around the finished product. Instead the process of negotiation in the making of news will be described and discussed with secondary reference only to the finished product.

The research site was broadened from simply a binary process of "pull and push" between journalists and politicians to acknowledge criticism by Turow (1989) of research that ignores the role of public relations in structuring news. The action research project focused on the struggle between sources and journalists to determine

the frames that would be used in news stories. In the next three chapters the field research aims to open the lens aperture to include a wider optic, that part of the manufacture of news which is typically unseen by the public and which does not necessarily reveal itself in the finished product. How these "third party" sources contribute or influence the making of the news is commonly described as media manipulation. Generalised concern about the performance of the news media in political reportage relates to the increasingly pervasive influence of public relations on journalism.

A broadened research focus allows some scrutiny, too, of the dynamics of what Seymour-Ure (1974) describes as the "growing intrusiveness of media" in politics. This research analyses the contours, characteristics and intensity of such media intrusiveness and its impact on the making of news in a political context.

## 10.2 Methodology

### 10.2.1 General

During the 1993 general election campaign I went on the hustings trail to observe aspects of the news media's coverage of the Leader of the Opposition, Mike Moore. In particular, I was interested in how the news was "manufactured" during this period. I spent five days in the second week of the month-long election campaign between Saturday 16 October and Wednesday 20 October travelling and watching as Mr Moore made whistle-stop visits, called "doorstopping" in Auckland, Wellington and Palmerston North. I also observed his formal press conferences during this period held in the Opposition caucus room at Bowen House, Wellington, and spoke with Mr Moore's press secretaries and media advisers. In addition, I watched newsroom practices in relation to resource allocation and election coverage at Palmerston North's provincial newspaper, the *Evening Standard*, on Thursday 30 September when three political leaders visited. Again with reference to resource allocation, I observed the news media working at the Labour Party's Wellington regional headquarters in Miramar on election night, Saturday, November 6, 1993.

### 10.2.2 Purpose of participant observation and the choice of methodology

Janowski and Wester (1991) describe the primary purpose of participant observation: is to describe in fundamental terms various events, situations, and actions that occur in a particular social setting. This is done through the development of case studies of social phenomena, normally employing a combination of data-collection techniques (p.61). They state that "participant observation is best suited for case studies and life histories(incidents and histories)" (p.60). And Janowski and Wester say, "participant observation is best suited, in comparison with survey or experimental designs, for interpretive inquiry into social interaction from the perspective of the people involved" (p.62).

The choice of participant observation as a methodology was dictated by the problem under investigation which was how politicians, journalists and third party sources interact to "make" the news. This interaction is revealed by specific incidents which result either in the manufacture of, or non-manufacture of, news. The problem studied involved the "process" of news manufacture and this correlates to the strengths of participant observation as a methodology. Newcomb (1991) states, "the strengths of *participant observation* are rooted in its actual "on the ground" observation of *process*. Researchers are able to observe actual work routines, in the course of observation recording decision-making processes, conflict, negotiation, and compromise.." (p.100). As Newcomb (1991) suggests, the exercise of power in the negotiation process inherent in the contest between politicians, journalists and third party sources, is an observable process. Observation can be made of the methods of negotiation between the three parties, of the resolution of the contest, of the application of decisions and of the final outcomes.

### 10.2.3 The nature of participant observation

One difficulty of participant observation lies in designing the research so it contributes to the domain of theory. Anderson (1987) states, "the twin demands of creating an independent research text and providing for a contribution to theory are a dilemma" (p.289). The participant observer as an analyst can anticipate but not define. Anderson states in designing the study the move from "the documented story of the scene to a

contribution to the domains of problem solving or theory development" can be anticipated but that the move is a delayed one occurring after the researcher has "accomplished a holistic understanding of the scene" (p.287).

In this research two crafts, to use Anderson's (1987) terminology, were applied. These were capturing scenes in participant observation which is a "far ranging social performance" and critical analysis which is a "more an intellectual exercise" (p.290). Anderson states that he makes no pretence of providing an ideal method of participant observation for the would be researcher to follow. Each researcher develops individual strategies and "then responds improvisationally to the demands of the situation." (p.295).

Participant observation is inductive research. Mintzberg (1983) states that he sees two essential steps in inductive research, "the first is *detective work*, the tracking down of patterns, consistencies. One searches through a phenomenon looking for order, following one lead to another. But the process itself is not neat" (p.108). His second step in induction is the *creative leap*. Mintzberg (1983) states, "The fact is that there would be no interesting hypothesis to test if no one ever generalized beyond his or her data. Every theory requires that creative leap, however small, that breaking away from the expected to describe something new" (p.109). In his defence of detective work and creativity, Mintzberg (1983) links inductive research to a certain line of researcher vision. "Peripheral vision, poking around in relevant places, a good dose of creativity—that is what makes good research, and always has in all fields" (p.109).

Denzin (1989) in his discussion of the essential features of participant observation states, that, "participant observation is deliberately unstructured in its research design so as to maximise the discovery and grounding of theoretical interpretations. The attempt is to continually revise and test emergent hypotheses as the research is conducted" (p.158). Denzin describes analytic induction as the formulation of an initial, tentative hypothesis which is reformulated when negative cases force revision or rejection of the initial hypothesis. In this research the participant observation began with two tentatively formed hypotheses. The first was that the struggle for control over the making of news between journalists and politicians was determined by the generally invisible hand of

third party sources. The second hypothesis was that when traditional journalistic autonomy is under threat reporters will seek to reassert their role in such a way as to change the nature of news.

#### 10.2.4 Participant observation as a tradition in news media scholarship

Tuchman (1991) states it is not surprising that the most significant work on news employs qualitative methodology and says, "theoretically the most interesting questions about news and news organizations concern either process, such as the general relationship between news and ideology, or the specific processes by which news reproduces or alters ideology" (p.79).

A rich tradition in news media research of participant observation studies provides exemplars for scholarship. Several of these studies have been conducted by former journalists-turned-researchers. American social scientist Robert Park (1922), who looked at the purpose of news in cities, was a former journalist. In the 1950s Chicago sociologist Morris Janowitz (1967), acknowledged as one of the fathers of communication research, studied the community press using both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and many of his University of Chicago graduate students were trained in participant observation. Tuchman (1991) states that "studies of news have always been responsive to political conditions" (p.83) and participant observation studies in the 1960s and 1970s reflected social and political concerns. Some of these included Gans (1979) prompted by the Cuban Missile Crisis, Epstein's (1972) work (the civil rights movement) and the Vietnam War (Gitlin, 1980; Tuchman, 1978). Tuchman states:

Many of these emphasized how the processes of making news resulted in embedded ideological meanings. Within the decade, racism (Hall *et al.*, 1978), the way in Northern Ireland (Schlesinger, 1978), anti-unionism (Glasgow Group, 1976), and conservative views of deviance (Chibnall, 1977; Cohen and Young, 1984; Fishman, 1980) prompted more participant-observation studies with similar conclusions (p.83).

More recently Ericson *et al.* (1987, 1989, 1991) employed participant observation, as one methodology, in a trilogy of publications, *Visualising Deviance* (1987), *Negotiating Control* (1989) and *Representing Order* (1991), in which the politics of knowledge between journalists and news sources was examined. Tuchman (1991) suggests there is special significance in a number of more recent participant observation studies, including her own work, linking the "news process to ideology" (p.86). In general, these studies, including Ericson *et al.*'s work, argued that news organizations "necessarily developed special ties to legitimated and centralized sources of information" (p.86).

Political reporting, and election campaigns in particular, have spawned a genre of popular writing which employs what can be described as a combination of journalistic techniques and rudimentary participant observational skills. The best known is perhaps Timothy Crouse's (1972) book *The Boys on the Bus*, a first hand look written by a *Rolling Stone* magazine journalist, which analyzed from the inside the journalistic heavyweights travelling on the 1972 McGovern-Nixon presidential campaign trail.

While participant observation has been used extensively overseas in studies of the making news, there is a weaker tradition of news media scholarship in New Zealand. Searches of electronic data bases and library searches in 1993 and 1994 revealed no recently reported studies looking at election journalism and the making of news employing participant observation.

#### 10.2.5 Definition of participant observation

A workable definition of participant observation is that offered by Becker & Geer (1958) who state, "by participation observation we mean that method in which the observer participates in the daily life of the people under study, either openly in the role of researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said, and questioning people, over some length of time (p.28). Anderson (1987) looking at the nature of participant observation says of participation:

This participation is having a member's knowledge. It is knowing the right thing to do and the right time to do it. In its most developed form, it is the participation in the negotiation, maintenance, and evaluation of the network of meanings that define the right act and the right time for it (p.295).

And, of the observation, he states it begins with the "careful recognition of the details surrounding the objects and actions which constitute the scene" (p.295). He describes the primary activity as "the recognition of the meaningful significance of those objects and actions in those critical instances in which these meanings are displayed" (p.296). Anderson describes participation and observation as both competitive and complementary because while they must be done separately one supports the other.

It is important for a researcher to define the level of participation she is engaged in. Babbie (1992) in his discussion of field research describes the various roles of the observer and quotes Gold's (1969:30-39) continuum of roles that field researchers may play in this regard: complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant, and complete observer.

At one end the complete participant is described as someone whose true identity and purpose in field research are not known. The complete participant, then, is seen only as a participant, not as a researcher. Babbie (1992) states the complete observer at the other end of the continuum watches the social process without becoming part of it in any way. The subjects of the study might not realise they were being observed because of the unobtrusiveness of the researcher. In between, the role of the participant-as-observer is adopted by the field researcher who would participate fully with the group under study but who would make it clear research was being undertaken. Gold's (1969) terminology of observer-as-participant refers to the researcher who interacts with participants in the social process but does not pretend to be actually be a participant. On this continuum I would place myself near the observer-as-participant role in that I interacted with the news media following Mr Moore, but did not participate in their news gathering. Rather, I watched how they gathered and created the news and the contest over the making of news.

Newcomb (1991) states the "degree of success in participant observation is related, in some cases, to the level of participation" (p.101). And he says, "in this regard, the more knowledgeable researcher has advantages. If the researcher knows little or nothing of the technical processes involved, observations will be limited, narrowly directed, or simply incorrect" (p.101).

In this case the researcher brought twenty years of previous experience as a journalist and editor and an understanding of the journalistic practice and of the technical process of news production to the study. Anderson (1987) warns the researcher against ignoring "the wealth of first-hand knowledge available in past experience and present involvement" (p.317). He adds the caveat, "a warning, however: Scientific knowledge requires the analyst to take special steps to ensure the distance necessary to observe what the expert knows to be true...First-hand knowledge does not guarantee (and may indeed impede) a useful contribution to science" (p.317).

#### 10.2.6 Pragmatic considerations

Three pragmatic concerns may affect the selection of a research design strategy: feasibility, convenience and cost-effectiveness, and at least two of the three are relevant to this research. Cost-effectiveness influenced the selection of which days to choose to accompany the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Moore, on the campaign trail. The Labour Party formulated a campaign diary for the election campaign which involved Mr Moore flying to various destinations by helicopter to save travelling time. As a consequence there was no geographical coherence about campaigning. On the one day Mr Moore might be in Christchurch, Auckland, Tokoroa and Wellington. The Labour Party did not pay for the travel costs of the accompanying news media or associated personnel. For the research to be cost effective I chose a group of days in which I could keep up with Mr Moore without flying by helicopter. The convenience factor saw me choose the second week of the election campaign to gather data, a week in which my on-going action research commitments, were light. Anderson (1987) states the "personal resources of the researcher have to play a significant role in selecting the scene" of the study (p.287). And he states the scene must be accessible in terms of time and money. The researcher's schedule must be able to meet the schedule of contacts.

#### 10.2.7 Ethics

Babbie (1992) poses the ethical question of field research as: is it ethical to observe people you are studying in the hope that they will confide in you as they will not confide in an identified researcher? Do the interests of science-the scientific values of the research-offset such ethical considerations? Babbie suggests the norms to be

followed remain somewhat ambiguous when applied to specific situations, and this research confirms that ambiguity.

He talks, too, of the scientific considerations which accompany the ethical issues. Researchers do not deceive their subjects for deception's sake but rather in the belief that the data will be more valid and reliable if they do not know the researcher is collecting data. Subjects who know they are observed might modify their behaviour in a variety of ways such as rejection or expulsion of the researcher, a modification of their speech and behaviour to normalise or become more respectable. In addition, the social process itself might be radically altered (p.289).

Miller (1977) notes that the implementation of any research design strategy in a given circumstance may involve the researcher in any number of ethical concerns.

However, it would seem to be the case that no given degree of ethical acceptability adheres in principle to the different design strategies. Rather, the implementation of any strategy may involve ethical questions, and those questions at best seem resolvable only on a case-by-case basis (p.574).

In this research the ethical concerns related to the extent of disclosure of my research role. How much should I tell the subjects of my study about the research? I could not be unobtrusive as a researcher on the hustings. The Labour leader had been asked and had assented to my observation on the trail and his media advisers, Paul Jackman and Sue Foley, were interviewed and talked freely about their perceptions of the success and limitations of various media strategies used during the period of observation. One of the political reporters I would observe at work on the campaign trail I had previously employed when a newspaper editor. Another former colleague, Patricia Herbert, a reporter for the *New Zealand Herald*, quizzed me on the third day of my observations about the research and followed up the next day with a defensive account of the difficulties journalists were encountering covering the campaign. Political commentator, Colin James, once described by former Prime Minister David Lange as the press' pack leader, asked me about my research during a Bowen House press conference. In particular he wanted to know if my research would include an analysis of "spin doctoring" (a form of media manipulation) during the election campaign.

Compounding the ethical concerns about disclosure to journalists was the knowledge of journalists' attitudes to news media criticism. One of the ironies of the news media is that while journalistic curiosity is regarded as an inherent and professional characteristic it does not extend to introspective analysis. Journalists themselves are exceptionally defensive and nervous about examination of their own practices and behaviour. Comrie and McGregor (1992) state in the New Zealand context, that this results in a "thin-skinned reaction to complaint and a general tendency to minimize responsibility for their own deficiencies" (p.9). This defensiveness is not confined to New Zealand. Zelizer (1993) states, "journalists ignore criticism leveled at them in journalism reviews, academic conferences, books and the alternative press trying to maintain a stance of autonomous indifference both vis-a-vis the events of the real world and that world's most vocal inhabitants, their critics" (p.81).

But the fact journalists do not invite or appreciate criticism is compounded in New Zealand by a low level of debate about the condition and practices of the news media. This vacuum of interest creates difficulties for any researcher who wants to "watch" the making of news in that there is no tradition of and less acceptance by journalists of media "watchers".

The ethical dilemma posed by the research was whether to tell journalists who asked the complete purpose of the research and risk either the subjects of research modifying their behaviour or journalistic practices as a consequence of being watched. A second risk was that of reduced access. I did not want to be "shut out" or prevented from attending Mr Moore's press conferences which could have occurred had the reporters known I was observing how the news was manufactured during an election campaign. For example, access to Mr Moore's press conferences at the Opposition's caucus rooms at Bowen House, traditionally the preserve of members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery only, could have been imperilled by complaints about my presence. As Mr Moore and his retinue, accompanied by the news media with television camera crews, reporters, radio and print media journalists, swept through factories, flea markets and alighted at street corners for meetings, I needed to be an inconspicuous member of the crowd.

In these circumstances, I adopted the ethical norm of limited disclosure of my research purpose. I acknowledged to inquirers that I was conducting research without being specific about the exact nature of the field work. I attempted to remain as unobtrusive as possible, but inevitably became a participant on occasions when journalists wanted to talk about their operational constraints and when Mr Moore's media minders sought opinion about different media events. Because of my action research involvement with a Labour candidate in the Miramar electorate, and because of previous media work with Mr Moore, I had access to the Opposition's media unit and talked freely with the press secretaries about strategies and tactics. Both press secretaries, Paul Jackman and Sue Foley, confided in me at different stages of the week on the hustings with candid observations about the media's role, and with personal opinions of the quality of political reporting. This research, then, follows Babbie (1992) who states:

Realize in all this that your decisions-in-practice-may be largely determined by the purpose of your study, the nature of what you are studying, observations you wish to pursue, and other such factors. Previous field research offers no fixed rule-methodological or ethical- to follow in this regard (p.291).

#### 10.2.8 Observing

Adopting Anderson's (1987) formula, participant observation involves "careful attention, interpretation and the creation of an extended record" (p.326). He states:

Observing is the process by which we make explicit the experience in which we are participating. It marks the continuous flux of experience with reference points and carves it up into discrete events. It is the process by which we make sense of what is going on about us (p.326).

The standards of performance, according to Anderson, is that the participant observation should be *intentional* in that it is deliberately conducted within the time frame of the social act, it should be *intensive* in the level of effort expended and the layers of action which must be observed, it needs to be *extensive* in that events continue

to emerge over time and settings and in needs to be *documented* in notes and in other ways. "That documentation should be close to the observation and regularized in its performance" (p.327).

#### 10.2.9 Documentation

Denzin (1989) states the basic forms of participant observation share common features which include the use of multiple methodologies. In this research several methodologies were employed such as behavioural observations recorded in field notes, unstructured interviews and documents. Two principal methods of collecting and documenting data were used in this research, note taking and interviewing. This section refers in greater detail to note-taking. Two types of note-taking were undertaken during the research. Observation notes were made at the scene and field notes were written up after the event. Anderson (1987) states "observation notes should be regarded as markers which will guide the reconstruction of the experience in one's field notes" (p.328).

Following Babbie's (1992) suggestions for recording observations a notebook was used, and journalistic note taking skills employed in the midst of the social action. These note taking skills involved an individualised shorthand which allowed for a more thorough documentation and where necessary verbatim reports of conversation or observation.

Anderson (1987) states that field notes are written after the researcher has become disengaged from the social action. Field notes involve the "creation of an extended narrative in a reflective examination of what went on" (p.328). Data was therefore collected during the event of interest and expanded on after the event of interest had occurred. The notes included both empirical observations and interpretations of them, recording what I "knew" had happened and then what I "thought" had happened. Anderson and others state that field notes should be written within hours of the field experience. In this research the participant observer followed the same daily schedule as the Labour leader used in his day's campaigning. On several days this meant extended 12 hour days without a break in the schedule. Observations on these days could not be expanded into an extended narrative until nighttime.

Some of the important observations were anticipated while others were unanticipated. A chronological record of observations was formed from observation notes. These then formed the basis of field notes. The field notes were used in this research to construct analysis which describes both the low-level politicking, or the minutiae of daily life on the hustings, and critical instances which demand an extended interpretation arising from interaction between journalists, politicians and third party sources.

#### 10.2.10 Interviews and documents

Interviewing is integral to participant observation and in this research unstructured interviews with the journalists whose social action was being observed, and Mr Moore's press secretaries, provided a stock of what Anderson (1987) describes as "member explanations" (p.331). He states, "when the researcher is knowledgeable of the action, the explanation can be analyzed for what gets presented as givens, what gets emphasized, public terminology, and forms of language--all of which deepen the analyst's understanding" (p.331).

Documents collected during the research included itineraries, policy statements, press releases and published news items.

#### 10.2.11 Limitations

A disadvantage of participant observation as a methodology which applied to this study is that the observation was limited to the duration of the researcher's access and as Newcomb (1991) states, "it is difficult to generalize from 'snap-shot' experiences" (p.101). Denzin (1989) cautions that, "it is incumbent on the participant observer to demonstrate that the case studied is representative of the class of units to which generalizations are made" (p.171).

A second disadvantage is the nature of an election campaign, a concentrated and intensive period of time in which politicians make a high number of public performances, as the site of participant observation. As Tuchman (1991) has noted lengthy periods of daily observation are tiring" (p.85). On several days I began at 7.00 am and finished late at night when Labour leader Mr Moore's official campaigning finished. Writing extended field notes late at night when I was tired was not ideal.

### 10.3 Chapter structure

The results of the participant observation are reported in the next five chapters, Chapters 11-15. Chapter 11 looks at several episodes of low level politicking which comprise the day to day activity on the hustings. Chapter 12-13 look at several critical incidents involving media manipulation. Chapter 14 examines the journalist's role, the primacy of television and the allocation of news resources, while Chapter 15 analyses the use and impact of the "new" news. Chapter 16 comprises the conclusion section of the field research.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION RESULTS

### 11.1 Introduction

Anderson (1987) suggests that what a participant observer is trying to look for are those "*critical instances* when the underlying meanings of the action are revealed" (p.327). And he states, "critical instances are recognizable after the fact because they stand out from the routine. To see them, then, the analyst must become intimately familiar with the minutiae of the everyday" (p.327). Much of the week on the hustings consisted of low level politicking (the minutiae of the everyday of a campaign) normally associated with the second week of a general election campaign. It is worth describing three typical, low level hustings occurrences and discussing press behaviour in relation to them, before this chapter takes a more detailed look at several specific episodes which form critical instances and which occurred in the week of observation on the campaign trail. These critical instances illuminate more vividly the making of news.

### 11.2 Low level politicking-"door stop" meetings

Low level politicking was predictable, mundane and routinized. So, too, was the news coverage of this everyday minutiae. It consisted of activities such as the bleak street corner meeting outside the Merton Road fish and chip shop in Wellington's Heretaunga electorate on October 18. Labour's advance guard arrived and distributed to small children who could be mustered pink stickers with black lettering reading "I like Mike". Then a portable sound system was erected on top of a party car festooned with banners and hoardings and through crackle and distortion the small crowd was treated to repeated versions of the Labour Party song. Mr Moore's party helpers scuttled around the shops and surrounding footpaths urging the several dozen bystanders to come closer to the microphone and form a coherent huddle on the pavement. The Labour leader's mini bus arrived, two diplomatic protection squad leapt out to survey the raggle-taggle assembly. Yvonne Moore, the indefatigable campaigner, smiled and

nodded at the neighbourhood gathering and Mr Moore spoke for ten minutes. Well rehearsed themes were aired. National would pursue a secret agenda if it won. Finance Minister Ruth Richardson had only just begun and National would effectively destroy the public health and education systems and the accident compensation scheme if re-elected. Mr Moore could not resist several Moore-isms, unconnected quips or "aaha" thoughts which popped uncontrollably from the Opposition leader and which some commentators regarded as Mr Moore's principal political liability. He referred to Housing Minister John Luxton as a "flash guy from Matamata who hasn't done a stroke of work in his life."

An hour later a repeat performance was held in Petone, where a group of Pacific Islanders playing volleyball reluctantly interrupted their game to be cajoled by Moore's travelling road show into boosting numbers. The second street corner meeting in the same evening featured many of the same actors, much the same rhetoric with some additional flourishes about the danger of voting for third parties and an anti-wealth aside about many of those supporting National who possessed "high salaries and low IQs".

### 11.3 Low level politicking-factory and school visits

School visits and factory visits were the other staples of the Labour leader's electioneering in 1993. During the week I observed the hustings Mr Moore visited St Pat's School in Kilbirnie, Wellington, where nine and ten years from Room 5 had just completed an election project in which they had conducted their own campaign and held a mock election. The winner Chanelle Rodgers, aged ten, from Own Mini Parliament (OMP) had headed off a challenge from a representative from Parliament Kids in the pupil's ballot. The pupils asked Mr Moore what it was like to lose an election and he used the analogy of marathon running to describe election loss. In 1990 he had not been fit but had "given it a go." Giving it a go and providing competition were what courage and democracy were about. "You must run." The youngsters also quizzed the Labour leader about taxes. As taxation was a topical issue and Labour was perceived by political commentators to be vulnerable on the taxation issue, this inevitably became the news peg or angle for the news media covering the visit. Routine

electioneering such as the school visit was generally accorded soft, magazine-style treatment by the news media. The *New Zealand Herald*, for example, used a photograph of Mr Moore with one of the pupils, Chanelle Rodgers, and carried five paragraphs of copy as the lead item in their regular 'Election Notebook' column carrying snippets written in ironical or humorous fashion. The item read:

"You always get the toughest questions in schools," the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Moore, observed at St Patrick's Primary School in marginal Miramar yesterday. He had been asked whether Labour would raise taxes, where Labour was going to get jobs, if he had ever made promises he had not kept, and if he had nightmares after his loss in 1990. The school had earlier run its own mini-election. Ciaran O'Brien, aged 10, who had run last, attributed his poor showing less to his manifesto than to the "stupid answers" he gave on the campaign trail. "I know, I know," groaned Mr Moore.

Television One in its main news programme at 6 pm (19 October, 1993) used film of the school visit as a visual backdrop to introduce an item on Labour's claim that Government had a "secret agenda". The news story began with reporter Linda Clark's "voice-over": "Another day on the hustings for Mike Moore means more questions about taxes". The film showed Mr Moore in a classroom answering children's questions. A school pupil is shown asking the question of Mr Moore, "But Jim Bolger says you will raise taxes?". Mr Moore is filmed replying, "he has to say that because he's already raised them hasn't he?" The story then moves on from the soft focus to the main theme of the story of Labour's claims about the Government's "secret agenda" in relation to health and other policy if re-elected.

Factory visits were typified by the Labour leader's whistle-stop visit to Manawatu Knitting Mills in Palmerston North during the week of observation. The marginal seat was targeted for leader's visits during the campaign and Mr Moore revelled in politicking in the environment of "good-news" firms representing an enterprise culture, particularly those in the export business, because of his expertise in overseas trade. The local Labour candidate Jill White waited with the news media for Mr Moore's retinue who were late because Palmerston North's airport was closed due to bad weather. The local candidate had brought with her two elderly female Labour Party stalwarts who

simply wanted to "shake Mr Moore's hand". The visit was characterised by Mr Moore asking the television crew if they would refrain from filming while the official party ate sausage rolls and club sandwiches for morning tea, and Mr Moore's energetic promotion of the local candidate, a reticent campaigner. Between official engagements at the knitting mill the Labour leader rushed up and down rows of female machinists handing out the local candidate's calling card. The factory presented Mrs Moore with a fluffly, white Angora cardigan on her departure. The visit was marked, too, by some testiness over Mr Moore's lateness and the political nature of the visit.

#### 11.4 Low level politicking-reportorial response

Reporters covering the "doorstop" or street corner meetings, as the fleeting forays into shaky constituencies were called, huddled together and ate crisps or gossiped amongst themselves. Their attendance was ritualistic. No attempt was made to explore the small crowd, hunt for human angle stories, or ask why locals had come out. If a potential story existed amongst those who attended it would not be told. Nor was reaction gauged from those who attended. Any "verdict" on Mr Moore's address, his credibility, his sincerity and the accuracy of his remarks was a journalistic one.

Similar journalistic behaviour was exhibited at other electioneering activities. The news media fraternised with each other and displayed no entrepreneurial breaks from each other's company through random engagement with the public (except if it was to check the spelling of a name or collect predictable story detail). The reporters covered the particular election event as an obligatory assignment calling for no reportorial initiative. Some reporters displayed their irritation with the undoubted tedium of electioneering in the stories. An example is Stephen Bell, *The Dominion's* Palmerston North correspondent, who wrote a story for the following morning's edition, October 21, which concentrated solely on the process rather than the substance of electioneering and the difficulties faced by journalists in gaining access. The story began:

Bad weather, a policeman and the management of a local factory sought to limit the political mileage Labour leader Mike Moore was able to make of his visit to a Palmerston North firm yesterday. Manawatu Knitting Mills customer services manager Stephen Murray told *The Dominion* the management had "made it clear we were not offering a political platform for him to launch his campaign." (p.2).

The rest of the story consisted of an account of how bad weather forced Mr Moore's flight to be cancelled into Palmerston North, how journalists had to wait for an hour, and how there was a mix up over press access to the factory which was rectified after intervention from Mr Moore's staff. The one paragraph of a fourteen paragraph story which referred to the substance of Mr Moore's electioneering was the last paragraph of the story which read:

After walking round the factory shaking hands with workers at their machines and giving each one of his cards Mr Moore and wife Yvonne were each given a jersey as they left (p.2).

This, then, is the grist of electioneering, the political backdrop which each day makes fifteen centimetres of copy on page two of a daily newspaper or provides visuals for a reporter's "voice-over" on television. Much of election news is published and broadcast in defiance of normal conventions of newsworthiness, simply to acknowledge the campaign and in accordance with journalistic notions of "balance".

Tiffen (1989) states that election campaigns present news organisations with potential dilemmas, because substantial coverage is almost obligatory but a lot of election news is dull in terms of normal news values. The public expect news organisations to make a strong commitment to covering the campaign because of its democratic significance, and because their news rivals will be covering the campaign. Tiffen states the wish of news organisations to sustain their professional reputations and the investment in staff resources and travel expenditure during campaigns ensures coverage. "These almost dictate that correspondents' copy will be used irrespective of its intrinsic newsworthiness." (p.131). Stephen Bell's account of the Manawatu factory visit fits the description of copy used irrespective of its inherent newsworthiness.

### 11.5 Critical instances: Introduction

In addition to the routine tedium of electioneering copy, there are the big stories which spill into the public arena as a consequence of the unexpected: whether it be a leak, a gaffe, the result of robust politicking or even landing in a reporter's lap by serendipity. More rarely, journalistic initiative prevails in uncovering a previously unknown incident. It is these big stories which prompt the competitive struggle between source, journalist and third parties as they attempt to influence and control the frames of reference of the news story.

Schlesinger (1990) in his call for a rethinking about the sociology of journalism states there is a "major lacuna in the existing literature; namely the failure to look at source-media relations from the perspective of *the sources themselves*" (p.61). And elsewhere he states the key issue at the "heart of the study of sources is that of the relations between the media and the exercise of political and ideological power" (p.62). Three "big" stories broke during the week of observation and one of them, the tax issue, became a decisive issue of the campaign. The critical incidents focused enquiry on source-media relations and the exercise of power.

A description and discussion of the contest between the Labour leader, his media advisers and journalists follows in this chapter. The tactics and strategies used by the politician and third party sources seeking news media attention, and their relationships with journalists were examined including scrutiny of some of the organizational contexts involved and of the competing goals of the three sets of actors. The tentative hypothesis that the contestation between political candidates as sources and journalists for the control over the manufacture of news is determined by third party sources was also examined. In addition the second tentative hypothesis explores Seymour-Ure's (1974) notion of media intrusiveness and suggest that when traditional journalistic autonomy is under threat reporters will seek to reassert their role in such a way as to influence the nature of news.

## 11.6 Conceptual framework: the "modern publicity process"

A conceptual framework linking the description and analysis of the participant observation section of the research is provided by Blumler's (1990) notion of the "modern publicity process" (p.103). Much of the contemporary anxiety about the role of the news media in reporting politics and the making of political news acknowledges what Blumler describes as "the greater centrality" of the news media to "the conduct of political conflict and its outcomes." Blumler talks of the emergence of what he calls "the modern publicity process" which "involves a competitive struggle to influence and control popular perceptions of key political events and issues through the major mass media" (p.103). Blumler draws two master propositions from the definition, one concerning consequences and side effects and the other relating to cross cultural implications. The first of Blumler's master propositions is that, "as the 'modern publicity process' takes over, other sub-processes are likely to advance in its wake" (p.104).

Three of Blumler's (1990) sub-processes relate to the participant observation section of the research and to the struggle for power and knowledge between journalists, politicians and third party sources. These sub-processes can generally be described as news-management, personalisation of the news, and the battle between third party sources and the news media. Each of these sub-processes is defined below.

News management involves the recognition by politicians that they need to engage in attempting to control the news media by the allocation of resources to media management strategies. Blumler (1990) states:

there is the need for would-be political actors to devote more thought, energy and resources to media strategies and tactics. As Seymour-Ure (1987:20) has put it, 'any Leaders in the 1980s who do not actively try to manage their communication show either a blind spot about the intrusiveness of media into politics or a blind optimism about their public image' (p.104).

The second sub-process is the ascendancy of political personalities over issues and policies leading to the acknowledgement that modern politics requires presidential-style campaigns. Blumler states, "a leader-seeking media system promotes a leader-elevated political system" (p.106). The ascendancy of personalities over issues, is of course, not confined to political reporting and embodies Galtung and Ruge's (1965) criterion which was; the more likely an event can be seen in human terms the more likely it is to become news. But personalisation is most pronounced in modern political reporting, of all reporting genres. The consequences of the personalisation, when they are seen in the context of eroding or degrading political discourse, may be the most extreme.

The third sub-process referred to by Blumler (1990) is the sharpened conflict between political candidates as opinion advocates and journalists, with the "former seeing themselves as engaged in a competitive struggle not only with their political opponents but also with the press itself" (p.107). Blumler talks of the adversarial model of press-government relations whereby reporters regarded politicians as antagonists when seeking information and news being turned on its head. "The modern publicity process implies that an adversarial attitude towards the media among holders of and contenders for political power is at least equally appropriate" (p.107).

There are dozens of examples of this conflict in different settings in the contemporary political arena. In February 1994 British Prime Minister John Major was under pressure over his "back to basics" campaign derailed by a succession of sex scandals involving politicians and over his colleagues' performance at the Scott Inquiry investigating weapons sales to Iran. One columnist suggested that Mr Major was performing creditably but was having to fight six editors and nine columnists (the force of Fleet Street). Matthew Parris writing in *The Spectator* said he had returned from holiday:

to find the nation-which is to say half a dozen editors and about nine columnists-in a traditional frenzy over a traditional concern-a theme for so long the refuge of commentators with reputations to hone that it should perhaps be set as a permanent examination question at journalists' colleges: the future of John Major (p.18).

And Labour's Opposition leader, Mike Moore, indicated both publicly and privately that he saw himself in competitive struggle with both the news media *and* his political opponents during the 1993 election campaign. His flirtation with "new media" such as talk back radio, which will be referred to later in this research, reflects Mr Moore's belief that he did not get a fair deal from the conventional, mainstream media. And during the post-election period the Labour leader in part blamed the news media for a wave of anti-Moore feeling after Labour's narrow election loss which eventually precipitated a Labour leadership tussle which saw Mr Moore lose out to Hon. Helen Clark, his deputy.

The second of Blumler's (1990) master propositions is the "comparative observation" that the modern publicity process "will tend to be more advanced in certain societies than others, depending on differences among them in how relationships between their media systems and their national cultures, economic arrangements and political systems are organized" (p.109).

This cultural caveat is important in the New Zealand context. In the absence of vigorous indigenous media scholarship there is a temptation for researchers to import theoretical constructs and frameworks and apply them without proper consideration of socio-political and cultural contexts.

For example, the apparent deterioration of political discourse and anxiety induced by the decline among politicians, journalists and media critics, reached a high point in American politics after the 1988 presidential elections. The angst about the role of the news media in the so-called degradation of political coverage has prompted continuing critical self-examination by watchers of the American news industry. It is clear that the United States represents the apotheosis of the modern publicity process. But if the modern publicity process can be re-conceptualized as a continuum, then it is suggested that New Zealand is only halfway along the path. This reflects the country's smaller population density, its Westminster-style of government, and its legacy of the public service broadcasting ethic which has seen television more recently only adopting "infotainment" formats by which news is selected and presented according to the logic of entertainment rather than information or education. In addition electoral legislation has limited the amount general election candidates can spend on their campaigns which

has clear implications for media management. Nonetheless, the trend towards what Tiffen (1989) describes as "public relations politics" (p.73) is pronounced in the New Zealand context, while it may not have reached the extremes of Australian or American "public relations politics".

### 11.7 The growth of news management

Blumler (1990) refers to a different level of sophistication which has emerged from the process of news management, one of the sub-processes in the modern publicity process. He says a "significant degree of 'source professionalization'" has emerged from the news management imperative.

By this is meant the deeper, more extensive and pervasive involvement in political message-making of publicity advisers, public relations experts, campaign management consultants and the like. Such 'source professionals' are not only assiduous and gifted at fashioning messages for media consumption; they also immerse journalists in what appears to be an increasingly manipulative opinion environment (p.104).

The growth of news management in American politics has prompted a fertile, and generally critical scholarship. Jamieson (1993), for example, writes of the "inside" knowledge of former election campaigners turned journalists, and vice versa, and the impact of these role reversals on the making of news. She writes, "the revolving door turned both ways. Reporters who gave up pen or mike for government appointments carried into the bureaucracy an insider's understanding of how the news could be shaped" (p.39).

Growing acknowledgement of the pervasive nature of news management is evident in England. Brendan Bruce, the former communications director for the Conservative Party in Britain, writing in the *Sunday Times* just before the 1992 British general election, claims that image makers are now the new political force. He talks specifically of the news management strategy of "spin doctoring" which often involves the use of third party sources influencing the relationship between politician and reporter. He states

that, "spin doctoring is now commonly used in Britain, for example after important speeches. The spin patrols haunt the press room at party conferences, helpfully pointing out key passages and significant phrases to journalists who are hard-pressed to deliver their copy" (p.12).

And A.A. Gill, in an acerbic commentary on the prevailing contempt for politics in the same newspaper in 1994, wrote:

The 30 seconds of off-the-cuff reaction and the four minutes' light-hearted banter....have become so crucial to MPs' view of themselves that a whole shadowy industry of spin doctors, speech therapists, appearance stylists, media analysts, personal managers and bon mot minders have grown around the body politic like soothsayers and wizards around a potentate's court (p.7).

In the Australian context Tiffen (1989) writes the "resources devoted to influencing news content and to image engineering have grown exponentially" (p.73). He states:

Beyond the enormous, quantifiable growth in resources allocated and people employed, decision-makers and political operators seem more centrally and calculatingly concerned with the media and 'image' aspects of their own activities. The reasons behind the rise are both promotional and defensive. The primary impetus is the massive presence of the media, its centrality as a conduit to the public and the need to reach an institutional accommodation with it—better to have the journalist arriving at the front door than peeping through the key hole (p.73).

News management in the New Zealand general election context has not attracted scholarly attention, although there has been persistent political and public criticism of the growth and development of the Government's public relations apparatus. Campbell (1992) in a *Listener* article headlined *Media Clobbering Machine* reported on attempts by the Government's public relations machine to target particular journalists and news organisations expressing scepticism at stage-managed "good news" events. The targets included National Radio's *Morning Report*, Radio Pacific's Pam Corkery and Television Three's Bill Ralston (p.19-20).

### 11.8 The notion of "spin doctoring"

A characteristic of media management is the notion of "spin doctoring". Spin doctoring is central to the preliminary hypothesis that the struggle for control of the making of news between politicians and reporters was determined by the generally invisible hand of third party sources-the spin doctors. Tankard and Sumpter (1993) point out that the widespread use of new media terms such as "soundbite", "photo opportunity" and "spin doctor" have become part of the lexicon of media commentary on how the news media works. In particular, the growth of spin doctoring is of concern to media critics whose objections are rooted in the filtering of the news from source to journalist by third party manipulation. Spin doctors put a complexion on the news. The term spin doctor was apparently first used in an editorial in the *New York Times* on October 21, 1984, commenting on the Reagan-Mondale televised debates (Tankard & Sumpter). The spin doctors referred to were senior advisers to the candidates who appeared in press rooms after debates to express opinions to reporters about how the candidates fared. Tankard and Sumpter state:

Spin doctors engage in spin control. Spin control is the process of providing certain interpretations of events in the hope that journalists will use them and the public will accept them. It is a technique for manipulating the media to get across certain slants on issues or events. In many ways, spin control is a synonym for media manipulation and spin doctor is a synonym for media manipulator (p.2).

In their study of the way in which the news media has used the term, Tankard and Sumpter (1993) note that initially spin doctor was used in a pejorative way, but while there has been a dramatic increase in the use of the term in the news media it has become attached to a more generalized meaning of media manipulation rather than referring to specific activity. And the researchers are worried by the change of emphasis because rather than "pointing the finger at media manipulation, as the term did when it was first used, the effect has become one of trivializing media manipulation" (p.9).

In New Zealand the term spin doctor is less common than the notion of public relations, or of media advisers and media minders. And fewer resources mean the distinctions Bruce (1992) made between types of media minders; advance guard minders, spin doctors, speechwriters and wordsmiths are less relevant in the New Zealand context where politicians' press secretaries are called on to fulfil a variety of roles. Nonetheless, the term was used to describe one of Mike Moore's press secretaries, Paul Jackman, in a small profile by the *Evening Post*, which read:

Paul Jackman is not the strategist behind Mike Moore's campaign. He'd probably see himself as the "spin doctor"--the advance guard and the mop-up merchant for Moore's public forays. As Moore's press secretary Jackman is, for journalists, the public front of the campaign. He's one of the many former press gallery journalists who have switched to the other side. On Radio New Zealand he had a reputation as a somewhat cerebral reporter more interested in high concepts than ambulance chasing. But with Moore, he appears to have developed a taste for politics as a blood sport. But he's still really a concept man. He's prone to see every story, every photo opportunity, as a clash between the Tory monsters and the working class hero. He is an enthusiast, like his boss, and often appear as frenetic and unguarded. The two allegedly get on very well (p.2).

The notion of spin doctoring accurately reflects the process of attempted influence of the press by the press secretaries in the two accounts of contestation over the making of news reported in the next chapter, Chapter 12. The concept of spin doctoring as both an "overt" and "covert" manoeuvre, to use Tiffen's (1989) terminology, is adopted in this research as the focus of the news management which was observed by the researcher during the election campaign.

The central problem of the participant observation, developed as a preliminary hypothesis, was whether spin doctoring determined the contest over news making in politics. This is explored in the following chapter, Chapter 12, by reference to two episodes of spin doctoring which were critical incidents in the research. Blumler's (1990) theoretical framework of the modern publicity process with the sub processes of source professionalisation, news management, the ascendancy of political personality and adversarial politician-reporter relationships were used as the conceptual foundation for critical analysis in this section of the research.

## CHAPTER TWELVE: BACKWARDS SPIN DOCTORING

### 12.1 Introduction

The critical instances written up in this, and subsequent chapters, are reported as episodes in a chronological sequence. Anderson (1987) states, "writing episodes is a method of constructed analysis which initiates the move from the more private knowledge of field notes to the more public knowledge of an objectified text" (p.345). And he says that episodes contain not only the sequence of events and acts but also an extended interpretation of the action in context. In answer to the question how many incidents make an episode Anderson says one and sometimes more. "The character of the episode is in the compelling nature of its interpretation, not in the number of incidents which can be subsumed beneath it" (p.348).

Anderson (1987) states the ethnographic argument, which is the contribution to public knowledge made by the participant observer, can be "explicitly drawn or presented implicitly in the narrative of the action" (p.348). This narrative describes the processes involved, and the consequences of, the relationship between journalists, the politician, and third party sources in the making of news. In this chapter the preliminary hypothesis, that the struggle for control over the making of news between journalists and politicians is determined by third party sources, is tested. In addition, the ethnographic argument presented examines theoretical constructs in relation to the conceptual framework of Blumler's (1990) modern publicity process with particular emphasis on spin doctoring. In a subsequent chapter, Chapter 14, the second preliminary hypothesis will be tested. This hypothesis asserts that when traditional journalistic autonomy is threatened reporters will seek to assert their role in such a way as to influence the news.

## 12.2 Backwards and forwards spin doctoring

Two types of spin doctoring were observed in the week of observation. These can be called backwards spin doctoring and forwards spin doctoring. Backwards spin doctoring occurs when the nature of the news manipulation has as its principal purpose the non-publication of story material considered potentially damaging by the politician and his/her media advisers. Backwards spin doctoring manifests itself by spin doctors trying to prevent outright publication or broadcast or by attempting to deflect reportorial attention from an episode, event or issue. Backwards spin doctoring is essentially rolling back the news, a defensive media strategy typified by damage control exercises often encountered in electioneering.

Successful backwards spin doctoring relies on a number of complex factors influencing the contest for news frame. These include:

1. the strength of the third party's alternative "news" offered by the third party source, the spin doctor,
2. the degree of recognition by journalists of the manipulation,
3. and the level of their desire to establish their independence from it.

Forwards spin doctoring occurs when the manipulation has as its principal purpose the publication or broadcast of a news story which is slanted in a positive way for the politician. Forwards spin doctoring may take the form of alerting a reporter to a news opportunity over which the politician has control, painting a complexion on the news by the third party source highlighting issues seen to be of relevance to the politician, providing advice as to the significance of the potential news, and attempting to create a competitive climate around a particular news episode so as to encourage what Crouse (1972) described as "pack hunt" reporting by even the most tentative or sceptical reporters. Crouse states, "campaign journalism is, by definition, pack journalism; to follow a candidate, you must join a pack of other reporters; even the most independent journalist cannot completely escape the pressures of the pack" (p.15).

Forwards spin doctoring is a predominant feature in the modern publicity process as it applies to election campaigns. Most media strategies are built around forwards spin doctoring, while they may not be acknowledged as such by their creators. Forwards spin doctoring is aggressive and it can be entrepreneurial. The success of the strategy depends largely on anticipation and on planning, and on winning the contest for dictating how the news will be made. Forwards spin doctoring depends on the manipulation by the spin doctor securing the ascendancy of the politician over the journalist with respect to the particular story and winning control of the news agenda. The characteristics of backwards and forwards spin doctoring outlined here are by no means exclusive and an iterative process of backwards and forwards spin doctoring is likely to occur at any one time during election campaigns. The week of observation began with an example of backwards spin doctoring which is reported here as a critical incident by which the preliminary hypothesis, that spin doctoring determines the contest over news-making in politics, was tested.

### 12.3 The taxation story and backwards spin doctoring

Sunday, 17 October, 1993, saw Labour leader Mike Moore politicking in West Auckland, one of the urban Auckland seats critical to the party regaining Treasury benches. He used the presentation of a Suffrage medal to a women's refuge co-ordinator Heather King as the occasion for a brief, door-stop meeting at a suburban West Auckland house where friends and relatives of Mrs King were gathered. Tiffen (1989) observes that "there is nothing inherently wrong or false about parties staging events primarily for media coverage. However, the media's general shyness about acknowledging their purpose can lead to inane reporting" (p.133).

Suffrage medals were controversial in light of criticism of the Prime Minister Jim Bolger's personal acceptance of a similar honour for "services to women". The selection of this particular door-stop meeting, held primarily as a photo-opportunity for the news media and television in particular, could be regarded as newsworthy. The furore over male political figures accepting Suffrage Centennial Year medals for overtly political reasons had prompted some recipients of the honour to refuse to accept the medals ceremonially. Second, domestic violence is a topical, social concern, and thirdly Refuge

Co-ordinators, in general, shun news media attention as personalities because of feminist commitment to egalitarian organizational structures which means that anonymous representatives of the movement are usually quoted. Here, a refuge co-ordinator was identified and personalised, the essence of human interest reportage. But despite these apparently inherently newsworthy features, the presence of several journalists and film crews, and the fact that Mr Moore used colourful language during the ceremony; "behind the venetian blinds, the horror goes on " and that his media unit had issued a press release to aid processing, not one mention of the doorstep meeting appeared either on television or in the daily press.

Three news media outlets were represented at the West Auckland meeting. A *Radio New Zealand* journalist, a *Television New Zealand* reporter, Kim Webby, who was accompanied by a film cameraman, and a reporter from the *New Zealand Press Association*, Grant Bradley. In conversation waiting for Mr Moore's retinue to arrive Grant Bradley indicated the prevailing press verdict on the campaign so far was that it was a "dull campaign" enlivened only by the spontaneous outburst of independent candidate and former prison inmate, Luke Donnelly, when Gisborne candidates launched their campaign on the East Coast of the North Island.

Kim Webby, in casual conversation while waiting for Mr Moore at the West Auckland address, talked about *Television New Zealand's* election campaign coverage. She indicated that the notion of balance was one guiding principle of news judgment. "We look over the coverage and if we haven't had Anderton (third party, Alliance leader) for a while in the 6pm news then we'll have film of him in the next news bulletin". Significantly, Webby indicated that she and the film cameraman were only present at the West Auckland address "in case something happens or in case he (Moore) deviates from the speech." She indicated that *Television New Zealand's* presence was "protective cover only." No matter how inherently newsworthy the medal ceremony was or was not, it did not reach the threshold of news required by *Television New Zealand*. Resources had been deployed by television simply as defensive cover and Webby made no attempt to interview Heather King or Mr Moore about the election event itself.

Two points emerge here. At one level the non-coverage looks to be a triumph for journalistic autonomy, in the sense that the electioneering "jack-up" arranged primarily as a news event was rejected by the news media. Another interpretation is that the non-coverage provides a disquieting glimpse of centralised influence over reportorial initiative which appears to have the consequence of individual reporters out in the field not seeking for angles or leads for potential stories. Further comment on the issue of journalistic resources and initiative follows later in the study in Chapter 14.

For both *Television New Zealand* and the *New Zealand Press Association* the story of the day involving the Labour leader lay not in domestic violence but in taxation and discord among the Labour Party, the classic conflict syndrome of the news.

Taxation was to develop as one of the critical issues for the Labour Party in the 1993 election campaign. It exposed policy fissures, highlighted personality divisions, revealed the fragility of the political ego, and threatened to destabilise the presidential-style election campaign run by Mr Moore. During the previous fortnight National had tried to pin on Labour the "high tax party" label. Typical of this politicking were costings undertaken by National on Labour's spending plans which the Prime Minister Jim Bolger claimed would require an extra \$1.4 billion of spending in its first year. Finance Minister Ruth Richardson indicated the only options for Labour were to raise this money by extra taxation in some guise, either an increase in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to 17.5 per cent, or by a rise in the top income tax rate by 17.5 cents in the dollar, or by a rise in the bottom rate by 21.5 cents in the dollar, or by an increase in the business tax rate by 21.5 cents in the dollar.

This had forced Labour onto the backfoot with Opposition finance spokesman Dr Michael Cullen dismissing National's figures as "lies". Dr Cullen put a global figure on Labour's spending plans, saying \$250 million would easily cover the cost, with \$180 to \$200 million going on social spending. These costs could be met without raising taxes if economic growth picked up by 1 per cent. If growth did not pick up to 4 per cent, spending commitments would be phased down. Dr Cullen refused to rule out tax increases, saying no finance spokesman would wish to box himself into a corner on that issue. The skirmishing over the tax issue which forced Labour into a defensive, reactive role was decisive in the judgment of media commentators who felt Labour had not

sufficiently taken the initiative during the early days of the election campaign. In the zero-sum basis of such judgments Labour was not only not "winning", it was not doing enough to force National to "lose".

On top of such generalised political rhetoric about taxation came the speech from former Labour Prime Minister David Lange on Saturday, 16 October, 1993, the day before Mr Moore's West Auckland visit. In the speech Mr Lange expressed support for a progressive tax system, saying it was not a burden and "for the great majority of people it's the road to liberation." It is worth quoting relevant excerpts from Mr Lange's speech.

I think it would be a disaster for the Labour Party and a disaster for New Zealand if we tried to get into power by setting ourselves up as some kind of centre party and forgot our history as the party of the poorest and least powerful in the community.

The trouble with any party which puts itself in the middle and tries to be all things to all people is that it ends up standing for nothing.

Labour has to be a party not just for middle New Zealand but also for the people who right now are being squeezed out of the mainstream. I mean the people who are barely surviving on benefits, the people who believe right now they'll never get a decent job and their children and grandchildren will never get a decent job.

The Labour Party can't leave people like that to the flakies. We can't leave them to parties which wallow in their suffering without offering them any practical answer to it. We can't leave them to parties which offer them charismatic personalities and empty promises. (Later in the speech he spoke of low and middle income earners who could not do much with the "few dollars" they saved as interest rates fell, of a man who needed \$20,000 for a privately performed heart operation but who couldn't work because of his condition, of people made redundant, and of the "bright kids" from low and middle income families. "Where are their parents going to find \$12,000 for the last year of a physiotherapy course?")

The only answer to those problems is to fund the social services publicly and make them free to everybody.

What I'm saying is that progressive income tax isn't a burden. For the great majority of the people it's the road to liberation.

On the Sunday morning when Mr Moore flew from his home in Christchurch to the West Auckland appointment he was able to read the Sunday press's accounts of Mr Lange's speech during the flight. The Sunday newspaper presentations reported Mr Lange's speech as a broadside to Mr Moore personally as leader. After all, Mr Moore was portraying Labour as the middle New Zealand party and he did see himself as a charismatic leader, a self-perception bolstered by his consistently high rankings in public opinion polling on political leadership. Mr Lange's speech was also seen as a major tilt at Labour's taxation policy, revealing the party split over taxation had not healed. In September, 1993, the former Labour Prime Minister, speaking on an Australian television programme eventually shown in New Zealand, said Mr Moore's leadership would be under threat if he lost the election. He had also earlier not ruled out a leadership comeback himself, and at the Labour Party's conference attended by the researcher Mr Lange indicated to me personally that he disagreed with Labour's media strategy and tactics which centred around a presidential style and Mr Moore.

During the West Auckland visit by Mr Moore, the New Zealand Press Association reporter, Grant Bradley, indicated in conversation that he had been instructed by his news desk to get "reaction" as a "followup" to the *Sunday Star* story. Bradley, in conversation with the researcher, described Mr Lange as "yesterday's man" and said that he "didn't make much of the story myself." He was acknowledging then, that in his own personal news judgment, there was not a follow-up possibility but that his news superiors were directing his coverage.

While Mr Moore was chatting to Mrs King and her supporters after the short medal ceremony, Kim Webby was called by the film cameraman to the Television New Zealand vehicle for a conversation with the news desk via a car phone. There Webby, too, received instructions from her news superiors to tackle Mr Moore about Mr Lange's speech. Instead of approaching Mr Moore personally, Webby spoke to the Labour leader's media adviser, Paul Jackman, telling him she wished to speak to Mr Moore.

While the medal ceremony was in progress Jackman had been in a flurry of excitable activity on his mobile telephone talking to Mr Moore's other press secretary, Sue Foley, who was trying to create a news event, which he acknowledged to me was aimed at deflecting news media attention from Lange's speech. Jackman told Webby that Mr

Moore would "do it (answer her questions) at the next stop." He then provided details to the news media on the next press doorstep, outside Auckland Hospital's main entrance at 2.30 pm.

Then in a somewhat extraordinary acknowledgment of his role as a spin doctor he told the reporters, "we've got a stunt for you...it'll make a nice 'grab' for the evening news." Asked what the press conference was about, Jackman refused to say, and later acknowledged privately that his aim was to "get them (the press) there", in the first instance. Had Jackman disclosed the nature of the conference he could "kill" interest in it.

Neither the *Television New Zealand* nor *New Zealand Press Association* reporters tried to intercept Mr Moore as he left West Auckland to put their questions. Jackman, the spin doctor, was used as the broker in terms of access to the Labour leader. In part this reflects the status of the reporters concerned who were junior to middle level reporters who may have been nervous about a direct approach to Mr Moore. But using Jackman to brokerage access to the politician provided the press secretary with advance knowledge of the arena of contest. Journalistic initiative would have been better served by surprise questions to Mr Moore, rather than by allowing the Labour leader and his spin doctor to set the scene by dictating the time, the place and the agenda for the next press conference. Both reporters, then, were directed by news desks to the "story" which was a reaction and followup to Mr Lange's apparent disaffection both with the Labour leader's personal style and to Labour's taxation policy. The centrality of news direction to reporters is in evidence here, further emphasising the reporter's role as a processor of news rather than a creator of news relying on entrepreneurial journalistic skill to seek out a news angle at the scene.

Of course, the irresistibility, in terms of story potential, of a Labour disagreement, and one involving heavyweight figures such as the current and former Labour leaders, needs to be acknowledged. The story confirms Blumler's (1990) description of "the dominant values of a news driven polity: journalistic predilections for bad news" (p.109). The coverage of election campaigns as a contest is also relevant. Tiffen (1989) states:

Covering the campaign as a contest has several advantages for news organisations. In the highly wrought atmosphere of an election, covering a contest is less dangerous and controversial. It neutralises some of the risks of appearing partisan, and the charge of imposing their own priorities and preferences. Not only is it the path of political safety, it is also more attuned to media ideas about audience interests. Policy expositions and debates are seen as boring, abstract, complex and static, while a contest is tangible, personal fluid and simple (p.132).

Election campaigns are covered not only as contests between political parties and party leaders, but also as contest between leaders and contenders where internal party disagreement is evident.

Traditionally news media representations of ideological difference within Labour has received stereotypical treatment. The libertarian concept of tolerance of divergent viewpoints within a general rubric of Labour politics (the notion of a continuum on the left whereby individuals might be left left, middle left, or right left) is not ascribed to, nor even acknowledged by the news media. Instead ideological difference is portrayed more as evidence of an essentially flawed polity riven by disaffection and is presented through personalities representing the left, middle or the right who are either "winners" or "losers". In the language of news these ideological differences are "rifts", "schisms", "tiffs", "battles", "struggles" or "challenges."

The news media who assembled at Auckland Hospital included the *Television New Zealand* reporter and cameraman, the *New Zealand Press Association* reporter, a reporter and photographer from the *New Zealand Herald*, a *Radio New Zealand* journalist and a reporter from *Independent Radio News*. In the socialisation before Mr Moore's arrival journalistic chit chat covered informalities such as journalists asking after each other's partners, talk of one journalist changing jobs, and another talking about painting his house and the paint specks which he had been unable to remove from his hands.

When the socialisation turned to professionalism, the senior journalist from the *New Zealand Herald* indicated that he had no knowledge of the stories of the day and asked the *New Zealand Press Association* journalist what the current issues were and if he had

any idea of the subject of the forthcoming press event. The journalist acknowledged that he had not read that day's Sunday press or listened to any news broadcasts. He was simply a reporter assigned to cover an 'event'. The lack of basic research or preparation suggests that the reporter would be devoid of contextual background material to enable him to interview Mr Moore on issues of the day. He could rely on journalistic techniques, speed reading of any press material handed to reporters at the scene and quick off-the-hoof questions in relation to the material or the subject of the press conference. But, at best, the reporter would be able to make news in a stenographic fashion only, unless his copy was embellished in the editing process by others involved in the news process cycle with additional socio-political background knowledge.

The media strategy employed by Mr Moore and his media advisers to try and deflect attention from the taxation row and Mr Lange's tilt at Mr Moore's leadership related to another major issue of the campaign, health policies. At 2.30 pm Mr Moore's minibus swept up to the main entrance of Auckland Hospital and Mr Moore, accompanied by Labour's Papakura candidate, Nancy Hawks, held a press conference outside the hospital's main doors watched curiously by a gaggle of patients in wheelchairs who had pushed themselves outside the hospital building for a cigarette, and their friends and family. As the press conference began, Jackman issued to the news media press release material relating to the press conference.

The basis of the press conference aimed at diverting press attention related to a pamphlet put out by the Papakura candidate warning of National's plans to "privatise, corporatise and Americanise our health system". The pamphlet featured a public hospital with a for sale sign under the National Party logo. Mrs Hawk's campaign manager had received a letter from the National Party's lawyers, Hesketh Henry, requesting that the pamphlet be withdrawn, as it used the National Party's logo without their permission. The letter from Hesketh Henry claimed the use of the logo without permission breached the National Party's intellectual property because of the protection afforded the logo by the Trade Marks Act.

Mr Moore used the lawyer's letter about the logo as an issue of freedom of expression and as *entree* to a wider attack on the Government's health policies. He told the assembled press the National Party was attempting to use the law to muzzle free expression. He then said that Labour had received information that if the National Government was re-elected the Papakura Hospital in South Auckland would become a community trust, "it will effectively be cut loose from the crown health enterprise and the community could be required to make it survive as best they can." The pamphlet put out by Labour's Papakura candidate carried a photograph of the exterior of the hospital with a realty sign in the foreground stating "For Sale or Lease; Our hospital; Foreign bids especially welcome, National Real Estate, apply J Bolger or R Richardson after the election." The word National carried the stylised N logo used by the National Party. In addition the pamphlet had a page entitled National Agenda, again using the logo, which claimed six prospective actions such as the reintroduction of hospital bed charges, the selling off hospitals and privatising the Accident Compensation Commission. All of these six points were displayed with the disputed logo.

The news media who attended the press conference asked few questions about the health-related issue. In part this reflected the short period of time they had to absorb and critique either the material handed out or its consequences in terms of health issues or the campaign itself. But more importantly it was clear from journalistic behaviour that the diversionary media strategy was not going to succeed. The strength of the alternative, potential story did not outweigh the story in hand, a negative, conflict-based story of Labour schisms over policy with the added factors of personalisation and elite status, featuring a former Prime Minister and the current Labour leader.

As Mr Moore was moving towards his car after answering a few perfunctory questions about the health story he was obliged to field the inevitable questions about his response to Mr Lange's speech. In a measured manner, Mr Moore, who had enjoyed ample time to rehearse his response, replied to questions from Television New Zealand reporter, Kim Webby, in which he said Mr Lange was an important person "in the past", even though he still sat on Labour's front bench. Mr Moore was able to limit his exposure to the Lange questions from the news media by both moving towards his waiting vehicle and the fortuitous intervention of a patient in a wheelchair with a leg in a plaster cast who had been watching the press conference in a bemused fashion.

The patient yelled out his good wishes to Mr Moore and said he would be voting for him. Mr Moore was able to use the diversion as a physical means of avoiding more questions and by jumping back into the mini bus.

That evening the "tax tiff", as Television New Zealand promoted it, was the second lead item on the 6pm news. It lasted for two minutes, was the major political story of the day and was presented in dialectical story model of A versus B with the emphasis on a split within Labour from which the Government was making political capital. News reader Tom Bradley told the audience, "Just when it looked like the tax issue was dying away it surfaced again today, this time from inside of Labour ranks. Former Prime Minister David Lange put in a plug for a progressive tax system one which would see tax rates rise for the wealthy. Leader Mike Moore dismissed Mr Lange's remarks but not before the Prime Minister made more capital out of the issue. Kim Webby has the story".

Reporter Kim Webby told the audience that "Mike Moore campaigned in Auckland today while the Government made mileage out of the apparent divisions within Labour over taxes." Mr Lange had spoken out in favour of a progressive increase in tax saying that for many it was not a burden but the road to freedom, the reporter said. Kim Webby then stated that the Prime Minister Jim Bolger had "seized" on the comments as evidence of a split. The news story then featured Mr Bolger stating to camera, "it's very, very damaging to Labour and Mike Moore. Mike Moore is endeavouring to say Labour won't put up taxes and David Lange is saying that's not correct." Reporter Kim Webby followed with voice-over stating, "actually, David Lange didn't exactly say taxes will rise but he did go on to say after the election Labour would have to think long and hard about who and what the party stood for."

The news story then featured Mr Moore who "played down the significance of the remarks" by stating in film shot outside the hospital that "Mr Lange and Mr Douglas (former Finance Minister) were important people in the past. We have a manifesto and our commitment to tax is absolutely clear." Labour's finance spokesman Dr Michael Cullen was also featured on film indicating Mr Lange was not at odds with party policy. Dr Cullen stated that the present direct tax rates were passed by Mr Lange when he was Prime Minister and he "could only presume" that Mr Lange's comments

meant he supported the present progressive tax system. The news story returned again to feature the Prime Minister stating "you cannot have 100 expensive promises without putting up taxes." The news story ended with Kim Webby telling her television audience, "as for the man who rekindled the tax debate, he wasn't commenting today."

The *New Zealand Herald's* coverage of the story was provided not by the journalist who attended the press conference at Auckland Hospital and who had admitted he was unprepared for the assignment. Instead John Armstrong's byline was carried over a piece wrapping up the taxation row as politically embarrassing for Labour under the headline, "Red-faced Labour says Lange man of the past." Armstrong was one of the newspaper's Wellington Parliamentary Gallery reporters. Reaction from Mr Moore in the wrap-up story was brief and sourced not from interaction between journalist and politician. Instead the newspaper borrowed the source from television. The story stated in the text, "Mr Moore, on television last night, said that he did not consider Mr Lange's speech a wilful or determined attempt to undermine him but, "I regard that as David doing his thing."

The coverage showed the attempt by Mr Moore's spin doctor at backwards spin control was resisted by the news media who sought to establish journalistic autonomy. The news was not to be made by arranging a visual "grab" on the steps of Auckland Hospital with supplied material about pamphlets and logos. Instead, the news media constructed the news from apparent conflict between two politicians of the same party apparently at odds over taxation. The new material arranged by the Labour Party was not deemed to be sufficiently newsworthy to allow the reporters concerned to ignore instructions from their news superiors about what the story of the day was— the spectre of Labour's division over taxation policy and Mr Moore's vulnerability if Mr Lange was serious about a leadership bid.

#### **12.4 Analysis of the attempt at backwards spin doctoring**

Analysis of why the attempt at backwards spin doctoring by the Labour Party's media advisers failed needs to acknowledge the relative strengths of the news offered by Jackman as spin doctor to deflect press attention. The story spun at the news media to

attempt to divert them from Mr Lange's progressive taxation remarks was a localised story, featuring a relatively unknown South Auckland candidate who was a non-elite source in campaign terms for the national news media in campaign terms. Her pamphlet featured a somewhat insignificant intellectual property skirmish which represented run-of-the-mill electioneering unlikely to reach the amplitude required to climb over the threshold of newsworthiness necessary to interest the news media. Inherently, the potential news offering did not contain sufficient diversionary power. It was a covert and transparent attempt to manipulate the news media which was recognised by the news media and resisted. The potential story did not amount to a major, "breaking" story. A stronger potential news story may have suffered the same fate simply because the compelling nature of Labour's embarrassment over taxation was such a quintessential election campaign story.

Mr Lange versus Mr Moore fulfilled contemporary news media criteria of newsworthiness: playing on conflict, representing bad news for Labour's cohesion, and personalisation enhanced by the elite status of the actors involved. In addition, Galtung and Ruge's (1965) concept of consonance and prediction comes into play. This is that the more an event, the prospect of more taxation for some and reduced taxation for others, can be predicted the more likely it is to become news.

The taxation issue continued to make news for several days and the news media were central actors both in the conventional manner of the manufacture of follow-up and reaction stories, and featuring in story content. For example, as the Labour Party attempted to repair the appearance of a rift in the ranks, both Mr Lange and Mr Moore blamed the news media for the presentation of the story by the news media as a major embarrassment for the party. *The New Zealand Herald*, Tuesday 19 October 1993, reported Mr Moore as stating Mr Lange had been victim of a "beat-up", reference to the news media's treatment of the story. Mr Lange, too, in the same news report complained that his remarks had been taken out of context. *The Dominion*, Tuesday 19 October 1993, reported Mr Lange "strenuously maintaining he had been misinterpreted by incompetent journalists." The newspaper also stated, "Labour leader Mike Moore, who on Sunday infuriated Mr Lange by referring to him as a figure from the past, said yesterday he had spoken to Mr Moore and realised now Mr Lange had been misquoted and had not been advocating tax increases. Mr Lange had been advocating a fairer deal for the poor."

Television New Zealand's reporter Kim Webby acknowledged in her story that "actually, David Lange didn't actually say taxes will rise but he did go on to say after the election Labour would have to think long and hard about who and what the party stood for". But this passing comment did not prevent television or the other news media from presenting the campaign as a two-way contest, a contest between traditional political opponents, the party leaders, and a contest within Labour which was both a contest of personality and of philosophy.

The consensus amongst Mr Moore's strategists who worked to minimise the damage of Mr Lange's remarks was that whatever the public protestations of the two men, Mr Lange had deliberately destabilised Mr Moore's campaign with his progressive tax comments. It was suggested that any other explanation displayed an unlikely degree of political naivete about the timing and nature of the comments from a former Prime Minister, who it was acknowledged possessed a remarkable degree of media sophistication. Mr Moore's strategists privately acknowledged that any ambiguity in the remarks was deliberate so Mr Lange was able to tilt at Mr Moore without mounting a direct challenge to Labour's taxation policy or the party's leader. Public posturing after the event between the two and the anti-news media comment was part of the process of minimising damage caused to electoral support during an election campaign.

The critical instance described and analysed here provides negating evidence of the preliminary hypothesis that the struggle for control over the making of news between journalists and politicians was determined by the generally invisible hand of third party sources. The failure of the backwards spin doctoring to divert news media attention from that "tax tiff" is a victory for journalistic autonomy. In this case the journalistic autonomy expressed itself in centralised news decisions by broadcast and print media that the political story of the day would be the tax story. Additional characteristics of the manufacture of the news included the allocation of journalistic resources at West Auckland and the hospital as "defensive cover" only, and that reporters were not expected to independently forage for news at the scene of election campaign events arranged by politicians and their spin doctors.

## 12.5 News media acceptance of spin doctoring

A feature of the unsuccessful attempt at backwards spin doctoring was the admission by Jackman of his role as a media manipulator and the apparent acceptance by the news media of spin doctoring as a legitimate part of the election ritual. Jackman told reporters, "we've got a stunt for you...it'll make a nice 'grab' for the evening news". His "stunt" remark indicated the pseudo-nature of the news conference outside the hospital, something arranged and "jacked-up," as opposed to something happening spontaneously which was inherently newsworthy. The comment that it will "make a nice 'grab'" acknowledges that the pseudo event was being packaged with television presentation in mind; timed for television and formatted for the camera, an example of media logic at work. There was no response from journalists to Jackman's comments made at the West Auckland venue and all of the news media attended the Auckland Hospital press conference.

Tankard and Sumpter's (1993) study of the use of the term spin doctor indicates that "journalists may be becoming more and more accepting of spin doctors." They state, "this is disturbing when you think about what spin doctors do. Essentially they try to determine the slant, angle, or frame that will be used in news reports. That would seem to be the job of the journalist and not a source with a vested interest" (p.10).

## 12.6 Reformulating the hypothesis

The negative case forced a reformulation of the preliminary hypothesis. While there was acceptance by journalists of spin doctoring as part of the election contest, the third party source did not determine the struggle for control over the making of news between journalists and politicians. Instead, journalistic autonomy, dictated by centralised news management, had prevailed.

In rethinking the nature of spin doctoring after the "tax tiff" it became clear there was a fundamental difference between backwards and forwards spin doctoring relating to the ability to wrest the initiative in the news process. In backwards spin doctoring the third party source's role is to deflect or divert news media attention from a story in

hand. The interference in the news cycle occurs not at the start of the process but during the manufacture of news, after the agenda has been set and journalistic processes are underway. Such interference is more likely to be resisted because it collides with the notion of journalistic independence subscribed to in newsrooms. A strong element in newsroom socialisation is the idea of resisting interventions aimed at non-publication of a story or at influencing the content of the story by outsiders. It was clear that the strength of the alternative news, a minor copyright skirmish involving a non-elite political candidate, was not newsworthy enough by comparison with the "tax tiff." The journalists recognised that the hospital press conference was an attempt at news manipulation, and while they acknowledged the role of spin doctoring as part of the election campaign ritual, the journalists resisted the manipulation inherent in the alternative news offering. Journalistic independence was established and the contest for control over knowledge was secured by the news media. The contest involved an unsuccessful bid to divert press attention at a mid point in the news process cycle, after centralised news decision making as to what the news would be.

The preliminary hypothesis was therefore reformulated to distinguish between backwards spin doctoring and forwards spin doctoring. Forwards spin doctoring is defined as occurring when the manipulation has as its principal purpose the publication or broadcast of a news story which is slanted in a positive way for the politician, as opposed to intervention which aims to prevent "bad news" for a politician.

The revised formulation rejected the notion of primacy of third party sources in the contest over news between politician and reporter. Instead the reworked hypothesis acknowledged the shifting interplay between the triumvirate of politician, reporter and third party source, and distinguished between the essentially reactive nature of backwards spin doctoring and the entrepreneurial characteristics of forwards spin doctoring by which third party sources and politicians go on the offensive in news making. The new hypothesis to be tested was that forwards spin doctoring, which has the manipulation or intervention occurring at the start of the news process cycle, is more likely to prevail over journalistic autonomy in the manufacture of news. Forwards spin doctoring is examined in the next chapter, Chapter Thirteen, by looking at a second critical instance.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: FORWARDS SPIN DOCTORING

### 13.1 Introduction

The division within Labour exposed by the taxation rift, and the ensuing political capital made of it by National politicians, had a major impact on the morale of Labour Party candidates and their supporters over several days. Privately, Labour Party candidates and strategists acknowledged on Tuesday 18 October 1993, that if the news media continued to gnaw at the bone of taxation and to portray Labour as a party riven by disaffection, then this would have a major impact at the polls. One candidate gloomily predicted to me that "Labour will be dead" if the taxation issue dominated the front page for another day.

The reverberation effect of the tax story was prolonged by the serious resource considerations which impacted on press coverage of the election campaign. The timing of the story which broke into the public arena in the weekend was unfortunate for the Labour Party. Cost constraints and journalist staff reductions have affected the New Zealand news media severely in the deregulated economy of the late 1980s and 1990s. This general media milieu compounded with the tradition of fewer staff working in the weekends meant Monday's coverage in the daily press was thinner than it might necessarily have been had the story been published during the week when full reportorial resources were allocated to a comprehensive coverage. So, for example, the *New Zealand Herald's* coverage on Monday morning was a cobbling together of bits and pieces in a centralised Wellington bureau by a political reporter who had been nowhere near the "action" and had seen neither Mr Lange nor Mr Moore personally and had not asked either man questions to flesh out the reportage.

This type of journalism can be described as pastiche journalism, a collage of words drawn from news service wires, watching television, reading the journalism of others, making some telephone calls and interwoven with the reporter's opinion. The absence of direct quotation arising from the traditional journalistic interview format is

unavoidable because the journalist is not present to ask questions of the politician. Increasingly, as less capital investment is spent on journalism as the creative function of the news media process, and more is spent on technological interfaces and entertainment formats for the news, there is likely to be an increase in pastiche journalism representing a serious challenge to conventional political journalism and to the quality of democratic discourse.

The resource considerations evident in Sunday and Monday's coverage of the taxation story ironically prolonged the reverberation effect of the story. It stayed as news in the public arena longer because political journalists working conventional Monday to Friday weeks felt the need to cover the story in a comprehensive manner. So on Tuesday the *New Zealand Herald*, the country's biggest circulating newspaper, led with the story angling it on the Labour Party moving to repair a "tax rift". The story offered readers little that was new other than the day's reaction to the weekend disclosures. But its presentation as the front page lead story and the treatment of the story indicated that the newspaper was acknowledging the story's significance which weekend resourcing meant they had not done on Sunday for Monday morning's edition.

### 13.2 Media strategy revised

The prolonged reverberation effect of the taxation story forced Labour to take its cue from the news media in relation to its media strategy and accelerate the release of a major news initiative initially reserved for later in the campaign. This acceleration and the events surrounding its release to the news media at a press conference on Tuesday, 19 October, 1993 illustrate an attempt at making the news by forwards spin doctoring.

Forwards spin doctoring occurs when the media manipulation by the spin doctor has as its principal purpose the publication or broadcast of a new story which is slanted in a positive way for the politician. In the critical instance described in this chapter the forwards spin doctoring was characterised by alerting the news media to a story opportunity, presenting them with detail which had a particular complexion by way of news release and by creating a competitive climate so that the "pack hunt" conditions applied which saw journalists pressured to submit copy to keep pace with their professional colleagues who were also submitting copy.

Sabato (1992) describes "pack journalism" as the result of "intense competitive pressures which cause reporters (as well as editors and producers) to move forward together in essentially the same story direction rather than on different tracks" (p.131). He says "pack journalism" prompted former United States Senator Eugene McCarthy to liken it to blackbirds on a telephone wire: when one moves to another wire they all move. "Pack journalism" is characterised by conformity of content and by reporting according to formula. The result of this reportorial groupthink is homogeneity of content across print, radio and television with similar angles being selected for stories.

In addition, the example of forwards spin doctoring described in this chapter was amplified by Labour leader Mike Moore aggressively attacking the news media representatives and dominating the journalist-politician interface by dictating access, limiting question time and "beating up" on television at the press conference. The influence of his behaviour as a source of the manufacture of the news is examined. The spin doctoring example described and discussed below also reveals something of how random and spontaneous and fortuitous factors can operate in news manufacture.

The acceleration of Labour's major media strategy took place at Labour's caucus rooms at Bowen House, Wellington, at a time when Labour's media advisers were re-thinking the policy of major releases announced at pre-arranged times on the trail during the election campaign. Sue Foley, who accompanied Mr Moore as a press secretary and spin doctor throughout the campaign, privately confided that Labour was worried about the opportunities that whistle-stop meetings, where the Labour Party leader dropped in for brief visits to street corners, factories, and schools, provided for third-party Alliance supporters, National supporters and disaffected members of the public to disrupt meetings and divert publicity from Mr Moore as the central actor and from Mr Moore's messages. The Labour camp was particularly disgruntled by coverage of a whistle-stop meeting in Auckland in the first week of the campaign where an Alliance supporter, who had apparently been drinking, had won news media attention at the expense of Mr Moore during a visit to a marginal North Shore electorate.

The revised media strategy revolved around Mr Moore's aides controlling the scope of news media coverage by confining Mr Moore's public appearances to press conferences at Bowen House, the Opposition's caucus rooms in Wellington. These public

appearances were vital to the news media to allow them to preserve the artificial notion of balance which prevailed during the campaign. By controlling the nature of the public appearances and the physical environment, spontaneous interruptions and distractions could not divert the television cameras away from Mr Moore towards hecklers, political opponents in the audience or members of the public. Instead the focus of concentration would be Mr Moore and his message. In addition to this revised strategy about public appearances the spin doctors were to carefully arrange safe, outside venues with limited public access to allow the news media to record Mr Moore mixing with the public, the shaking hands and kissing babies routine of electioneering.

### 13.3 Accelerating the "secret agenda"

A principal focus of Labour's publicity during the 1993 election campaign was the concept of the Government having a "secret agenda" to hasten the pace of privatisation and social change shifting the emphasis from the public sector to the private sector in critical areas such as health, education, housing and power. A major plank in the party's news media strategy was to release material aimed at strengthening public perception of a "secret agenda". A sheath of documents (some of them new and others obtained by use of the Official Information Act), which Labour claimed showed the Government had a "secret agenda" involving radical change to health, education, housing and the Accident Compensation Commission, had been compiled for release to the news media. The original strategy called for material to be released later in the four week election campaign. But Labour's spin doctors were forced to take their cue from the media frenzy over taxation. In a bid to dislodge Labour's embarrassment from the headlines it accelerated the release of the material at a press conference on Tuesday, in the second week of the four week election campaign.

The news media who attended the press conference included a *Television Three* cameraman, and a reporter, Steve Christianson; *Television New Zealand's* political reporter Linda Clark who was assigned to follow Mr Moore in the second week of the election campaign, reporters from *Radio New Zealand*, the *New Zealand Press Association*, the *Dominion*, the *Evening Post*, the *New Zealand Herald*, Barry Soper from *Independent Radio News*, and Colin James whose political columns appeared in *National Business Review* throughout the campaign.

While the press waited for the press conference to begin several journalists who had just come on duty, including a reporter who had just returned from holidaying in Australia, asked each other "what's been in the news?" One of the reporters expressed gentle cynicism about Mr Moore's often-repeated theme about "free milk in schools" which for the Labour leader clearly symbolised the erosion of social policy under National, while for the news media who heard it every whistle-stop speech it had become a tired cliché. "He's been on about free milk in schools, the ACC (Accident Compensation Commission), jobs and health. It's hard to take anything seriously," the reporter said.

With the arrival of Colin James in the room journalistic socialisation turned to banter with Paul Jackman over the *Evening Post's* profile of him as a "hack turned flack" and as a "spin doctor." Jackman lightheartedly described himself as "Dr Googly", using the spin doctoring concept as a cricket analogy. James picked up on this and jocularly warned Jackman that Pakistani bowlers had a certain type of spin which was not only invisible, it was irreversible. "You can't see it coming and you can never get out of the spin." Jackman was quite happy to be referred to as a spin doctor. He acknowledged to me during private conversations that the *Evening Post* profile had "got me about right."

Just prior to the Labour leader's arrival at the press conference Jackman issued to the assembled press an eleven page document entitled *10 Point Secret Agenda* plus two press releases, one of which predicted a re-elected National Government would require a mini-budget before Christmas to initiate its secret agenda plans. A number of Labour Party press office and research workers also attended the press conference, including one of Mr Moore's staff who taped the proceedings.

Jackman orchestrated the press conference by walking out of the press conference venue along to Mr Moore's office, indicating to the Labour leader that the news media were assembled and accompanying Mr Moore back into the room. He then stood at the back of the room while the press conference was in progress. Mr Moore began by reiterating many of the points he had previously made on the hustings and was launched into what amounted to a campaign speech. The press rifled through the distributed material assembling their questions, while at the same time keeping a wary ear on Mr Moore. During Mr Moore's peroration he attacked the Prime Minister Mr Bolger for his attitude

to the press stating that the news media were not allowed to have a press conference and instead, "one by one, the chosen few are called in and spoken to". He railed against the then Minister of Social Welfare, Jenny Shipley, for her attitude towards foodbanks and the growing need for emergency food agencies in New Zealand. He then criticised the Minister of Education Lockwood Smith who was too "terrified" to attend university campuses for speaking engagements. Mr Moore's verbal acuity was demonstrated during this session by one vintage Moore-ism. "Some become politicians," said Mr Moore, "some become journalists, and some go straight."

While Mr Moore stopped short of a direct challenge to the role of the news media in election reporting in his comments, it was clear that the beleaguered Labour leader was attempting to wrest the initiative away from the media and his opponents over the taxation issue. After these remarks Mr Moore noticed Jackman at the rear of the room gesticulating with his hands to the politician to "wrap it up". I had observed Jackman orchestrating, guiding and signalling in this fashion at previous press conferences. Jackman was attempting to signal to Mr Moore to wrap up his speech and allow the assembled news media to ask questions. Mr Moore, however, misinterpreted the cue and concluded the entire press conference by telling the press he understood they needed time to digest the weighty evidence which had been distributed to them. He then walked briskly from the room with his stunned retinue not far behind.

An angry press broke into a hubbub of noisy disgruntlement at the Labour leader's exit without allowing time for journalists' questions. Colin James parried, "spin that one, Paul" at a bemused Jackman. Barry Soper began to loudly remonstrate with the press secretary, "What's the logic behind no questions. You can't hold a press conference without questions". Steve Christianson said "we were here for a lecture not a press conference, the answers are secret". Another disgruntled reporter yelled "so much for Bolger." Both Jackman and Foley tried to restore some equilibrium by explaining to the press they would have an opportunity for questions later, at either a National Press Club luncheon Mr Moore was addressing or later in the day. But *Television New Zealand's* political reporter, Linda Clark, was not mollified. She warned several of Mr Moore's staff as she left, "imagine what tone can be put on this. You can just imagine how this will look. We need to start treating them like they treat us."

Mr Moore's staff were anxious about their leader's performance because they feared the consequences of Clark's hostility and the anger displayed by other media representatives as they left the Opposition caucus rooms. Like the news media, some of Mr Moore's press and research staff, other than Jackman, assumed the Labour leader had closed off the prospect of questions from the press as a deliberate tactic. One said to me, "I'm worried.. he's never done it before. The news media have always had access to Mike and he's always answered questions."

After the departure of the press from the Opposition caucus rooms Mr Moore summonsed Jackman and it became apparent in their debriefing that Mr Moore had misinterpreted the cue from his spin doctor. The closure of press access had been a spontaneous, ad hoc, and unpremeditated reaction by Mr Moore based on a misunderstanding. Talking about the incident later Jackman referred colloquially to "the conspiracy theory versus the cock-up theory" of the press, often advanced by critics of the news media to support particular ideological positions. "This vindicates the cock-up theory of the press, doesn't it?" Jackman said. The incident confirms the notion that the manufacture of the news is often influenced by random, chaotic factors which can fortuitously (in the case of the patient who intervened outside the hospital) or unexpectedly (such as prematurely winding down a press conference before the first question had been asked after a misunderstanding over hand signals from a press secretary) influence the flow of information from source to journalist.

Following the debrief between the Labour leader and Jackman after the incident, Jackman returned to his office and began to ring around the news media and inform them a second press conference would be held back at Bowen House at 2.30 pm, after Mr Moore had attended his lunch time speaking engagement. When the press re-assembled it was clear a new mood was evident. Instead of the casual, relaxed socialisation and trivial chit chat which prevailed at previous gatherings I had observed, there was an air of expectancy and tension. And throughout the second press conference, the Labour leader was abrasive and combative, and indulged in "beating up" journalists (a phrase used by the news media to connote attacks on their reportorial skills and journalistic judgments).

Mr Moore's more aggressive attitude was attributable to several factors. First, he had been irked by news media coverage of the first week of the election campaign. He felt buoyed by public reaction when he was "on the road" and he perceived that voters were very interested in campaign issues but that the news media was not conveying the enthusiasm he felt from audiences he spoke to during electioneering. The disparity between Mr Moore's perceived reality of life on the hustings and the mediated reality as presented by the news media to the public clearly rankled the Labour leader. In particular he had been irritated by *Television New Zealand's* weekly summation on *Prime Time* on Friday night at the end of the first week, and prior to the taxation row, when *Television New Zealand's* chief political reporter Richard Harman had described Mr Moore's performance as "ho hum" and that he had not done enough for Labour to wrestle the initiative from the Government. By comparison, Linda Clark, the television reporter who had accompanied the Prime Minister Jim Bolger concluded on the same programme that Bolger had "not put a foot wrong all week." Mr Moore's irritation was partly justified in the sense that both leaders had been on a par during the first, rather predictable week of campaigning in urban and rural constituencies.

Second, the Labour leader's acute political instincts told him a change of tactics in dealing with the news media was called for, despite advice given to him by his press advisers on a "softly, softly" approach. The continuing audit of news media coverage conducted by Mr Moore, his strategists and advisers on a daily basis which monitored radio bulletins, morning and afternoon press reports and in particular, television news and current affairs, showed that a media strategy in which Labour displayed deference to the news media was not working to Labour's advantage in terms of content of the news or its complexion.

At the second press conference Mr Moore welcomed back the news media, only some of whom had attended the first conference at which Mr Moore had not allowed questions. Some comment about resource allocation and the lack of continuity of reporters covering the election campaign will be made later in the research. Mr Moore acknowledged that at the previous meeting there had been no opportunity to ask questions and the opportunity was now being provided. In the meantime, he said, the news media had been able to gauge response from the Government to the Labour Party's secret agenda claims. Radio reports between the two press conferences had run

dismissive comment from Mr Bolger in the intervening period. Mr Moore described Government's response as "evasive" without mention of the plans for the Accident Compensation Commission or for Trans Power. Mr Moore repeated Labour's claim that if re-elected National would need a mini-budget within weeks and that Labour's release of the secret agenda documents was "not some academic exercise, not ping pong" but about central issues which every New Zealander should be concerned about.

After several soft preliminary questions from reporters about whether the secret agenda documents really represented anything new which Mr Moore parried, questioning turned to Labour's policy on Trans Power. The *New Zealand Herald* reporter, Bernard Orsman, asked Mr Moore to clarify Labour's policy on Trans Power. Mr Moore had previously said National's club ownership plan for Trans Power was a "Trojan horse" for privatisation. The remarks followed assurances the day before by the Prime Minister Mr Bolger that National would not privatise the Electricity Corporation, New Zealand Post or accident compensation. But Mr Moore when reminded of this said this was "not a good enough answer to New Zealand." National had indicated Government's long term plan for Trans Power was club ownership which would lead to private investors buying shares. Orsman asked Mr Moore to confirm that Labour supported a similar club ownership proposal. When Mr Moore knocked back the question Orsman rephrased it and asked the question again this time asking Mr Moore to confirm that Labour's then spokesman on energy David Caygill had favoured a similar scheme in the past.

In all, Orsman rephrased his question to Mr Moore four times. Increasingly abrasive, Mr Moore told the reporter he had asked his question "four times and I have answered the question four times." Several questions on other subjects were asked of Mr Moore before *The Dominion* newspaper reporter, Simon Kilroy, returned to the subject of Trans Power and said he was not sure how Labour's plan differed from that of National's. It was clearly evident that Kilroy was acting in a support role for Orsman in the adversarial contest between politician and journalist. The parliamentary gallery reporters were acting in a pack because they correctly scented a whiff of uncertainty from Mr Moore on energy policy. Mr Moore had another attempt to satisfy the journalists by stating that the difference between National and Labour was "the way in which the club works" before Orsman began his line of questioning again. A testy Mr

Moore than said, "you've asked the question seven or eight times, that should be enough even for a *New Zealand Herald* reporter. Please get this right. Now do not argue with me, I know my policy. Please, I will not privatise Trans Power. The National Party will." Mr Moore then invited questions "about everything else."

The Labour leader then became embroiled in a short skirmish with *Television New Zealand's* reporter Linda Clark who asked a loosely worded and imprecise question about the fact Labour and National's policy on means-testing the under 25s and the unemployed was similar. The nature of the question allowed Mr Moore to needle the reporter first and the browbeat her for the implication of the question. "I totally object to that," said Mr Moore, "it's deeply insulting." Mr Moore referred to National's secret agenda which he claimed would see the Government if re-elected introduce means-testing for the parents of under 25-year-olds applying for the unemployment benefit. Then he sarcastically referred to the reporter's previously broadcast verdict on the first week of the election campaign, by referring to Mr Bolger's attitude to youth unemployment..." and this was in a good week when he didn't put a foot wrong." Mr Moore told the television journalist that any implication of Labour means-testing the unemployed was a "wicked thing to suggest." The combat of question and answer between the two finished with the reporter abandoning her line of questioning. The press conference then ended when Mr Moore decided he would not take any more questions. The Labour politician had clearly won the contest.

#### 13.4 "Secret agenda" replaces "tax tiff"

Television, radio and print media all responded to Labour's forwards spin doctoring in their news stories. The taxation issue was bumped from front pages and broadcasts by the secret agenda claims, reaction to them and the power story. The news media responded to the media manipulation, allowing Labour to make news with a contrived grab-bag of possible policies based loosely around the "secret agenda" bogey, even though many of the news media acknowledged in their stories that it was a diversionary tactic to bump taxation from the front pages. *The Dominion* newspaper,

for example, led its page two political page with the headline "National has secret agenda, claims Moore". The story introduction acknowledges Labour's manipulation by reading, "Labour cranked up its campaign to convince voters National has a secret post-election agenda yesterday *in a bid to shift the political debate away from tax*" (emphasis added). The remainder of the story then bought into the spin doctoring by outlining the bones of the claims plus the politician-journalist contest over electricity.

*Television New Zealand's* reportage similarly acknowledged the overt attempt at media manipulation by diversion through unveiling the "secret agenda" documents. Linda Clark told viewers on *Television New Zealand's* One Network News at 6 pm that most of Labour's battle with National over the past few days had concerned tax but that Mr Moore had tried to "steer the campaign to what he calls National's secret post election secret agenda." And the reporter stated that Labour had "tried to take the campaign high ground" with the release of Treasury documents. Mr Moore was featured outlining some of his claims against the Labour slogan backdrop at his Bowen House press conference. The news item then featured Prime Minister Jim Bolger dismissing the prospect of a secret agenda and his suggestion that his political rival was "cracking up". The news item featured Mr Moore responding and flashed to a clip of New Zealand First leader Winston Peters making similar claims about National. The news item finished with Linda Clark's reportorial verdict that while New Zealand First's revelations might not have the Government on the ropes, National "may have more trouble this time around with Labour." Similar reportage to that of *Television New Zealand* was evident in *TV3's* wrap-up on their principal early evening news broadcast by political reporter Steve Christianson. Labour went for the "big hitter, a big ten pointer" and Labour, who had "taken heat, turned the torch on National" with the secret agenda claims.

Labour's strategists felt that the prevailing impression left by the news item was that Mr Moore had seized the offensive and they regarded the acceleration of the "secret agenda" media strategy to have been successful. Of interest, particularly in light of the veiled threats to Labour staff made by the *Television New Zealand* reporter in the wake of Mr Moore's refusal to answer questions at the first press conference, was how the

news media reported Mr Moore's aggression and irritation. In all the media accounts of the press conferences, coverage of the exchanges between Mr Moore and reporters was muted. Reporter Linda Clark, who had indicated to Labour staff in the heat of the aftermath of the first press conference that the "tone" of her report could be damaging to Labour, and who was dealt with most severely by Mr Moore at the subsequent press conference, made no reference to the nature of the combat between politician and journalist. TV3's only mention of the skirmishing came when the reporter told his audience that Mr Moore had refused to answer questions at a press conference "apparently to get the Government's response" to the secret agenda claims. The *New Zealand Herald* headlined their front page account, "Power plan stumbled" and said Mr Moore had found himself in difficulties explaining the difference between party policies on power and had "stumbled at a press conference to clarify what, if any, differences there were on Trans Power."

*The Dominion's* account too, minimises, the role of the adversarial relationship between politicians and journalists which had characterised the day. In the seventh paragraph of his story the reporter, Simon Kilroy, stated Mr Moore had made his claims about a secret agenda at a press conference "but refused to take questions saying journalists need time to study the material." And in the last paragraph of his story after reference to the power issue, the reporter wrote "Mr Moore cut off questioning on the issue, telling journalists they had had 'seven or eight goes'".

In all, Mr Moore escaped lightly in news accounts in view of his inability to clarify any differentiation between Labour and National on the energy issue. Jackman's reaction, for example, to the two press conferences was that the press had been "too soft on us" because Labour and Mr Moore were ill-prepared in relation to energy and did not have a sufficiently differentiated policy from that of National. "Bernard (Orsman, the *New Zealand Herald* reporter) was only doing his job," Jackman said.

The absence of emphasis on the adversarial nature of the politician-reporter relationship may simply reflect the journalistic perception, that the public are not interested in how reporters get the news or how reporters fail to get the news, as a substitute for the news

itself. Robust cut-and-thrust probing by an informed press, part of the time-honoured tradition of the fourth estate, is often countered in response by political criticism of journalism. A recognised aspect of the journalistic temperament is that there is no place for the thin-skinned reporter.

A more likely explanation for the way in which the story was treated revolves around the news media's compelling requirement for a fresh supply of campaign news. The taxation story was exhausted as a story in terms of follow-up and reverberation effect. The secret agenda claims had sufficient amplitude as a story to get over the threshold of newsworthiness required, and the timing of the release was right. It furthered journalistic notions of balance and to extend Crouse's (1972) metaphor, it gave the pack hunt of election coverage a new scent. Election campaigns are an exercise in the supply and demand of news. The "secret agenda" was a new news story, the "taxation" was old news, had passed through the cycle of continuity as a news story and was no longer news.

### **13.5 Analysis of the forwards spin doctoring**

The Labour leader and his media advisers had used two tactics in the strategy of forwards spin doctoring aimed at allowing Labour to divert news media attention from the embarrassing taxation issue. First, they accelerated the pace of publicity by making news from a construction of documents labelled a "secret agenda". Labour took the initiative in setting the news frame so that the Government and journalists would have to respond inside the parameters of that framework. Bolger, for example, was asked his reaction to the claims and responded by suggesting Mr Moore was "cracking up" and that the documents represented nothing new.

Second, Mr Moore abandoned conventional press-politician decorum which had been in evidence. He controlled access by refusing questions at the first press conference (even if this was unpremeditated) and adopted an aggressive and adversarial manner to undermine both reportorial techniques and to challenge journalistic judgment. He

spoke slightly of the *New Zealand Herald* when deflecting Orsman's persistence, and he belittled Linda Clark who abandoned her line of questioning. Mr Moore had served notice to the news media of his irritation with their performance.

The successful forwards spin doctoring meant the news was slanted in a positive way for Mr Moore. The spin doctoring had alerted reporters to a news opportunity by transforming a political event into a news event by the release of "secret agenda" documents. A competitive climate was created around the news episode in a number of ways. First, confining Mr Moore's public appearance to Bowen House meant the press conference was accessible to, and convenient for, representatives of centralised news organisations and the parliamentary press gallery. Second, additional members of the press attended the second press conference from the gallery indicating that word had spread amongst the press corps that the Labour leader had acted unpredictably. Volatile politicians, particularly within an election campaign, heighten the *frisson* of political journalism. Third, pack journalism means journalists become nervous about non attendance at press conferences and they clearly determined that they need to be present for protective cover. And, as Tiffen (1989) suggests, "once reporters are committed to attending an event, coverage usually follows" (p.76).

The successful attempt to gain positive publicity by staging their own news event allowed Labour to not only orchestrate good news and win electoral kudos but also to contain bad news, the continuation of the "tax tiff." If the taxation story had continued to dominate headlines, Labour would have suffered electoral damage. Labour manipulated the news media by responding to the need for a fresh supply of stories and by creating an environment surrounding the news by which they controlled its presentation.

Mr Moore's adversarial relationship with reporters during the press conferences influenced the spin placed on the stories published and broadcast which were, in the main, deferential. In particular, the news media treated Mr Moore's uncertainty about energy policy in a light handed way, perhaps with the exception of the *New Zealand*

*Herald*. It is suggested here that this is a failure of journalistic accountability whereby reporters during election campaigns hold political leaders and candidates to account by securing coherent explanations of election manifesto policy.

### 13.6 Conclusions about the influence of spin doctoring on the manufacture of news

What conclusions can be drawn from the participant observation about the influence of spin doctoring in the manufacture of news? In one critical instance reported in Chapter Twelve journalistic autonomy prevailed over an overt attempt to manipulate the news by backwards spin doctoring. In the second episode reported in this chapter the news was made by the politician and third party sources manipulating the news media by forwards spin doctoring which used overt and covert tactics. In this case journalistic autonomy was secondary to the manufacture of pre-arranged news in the form of the release of a sheath of papers suggesting a secret agenda by the Government and the consequences of re-election of National. This enabled Labour to utilise an overt tactic of wresting the news initiative back from journalists pursuing the taxation story.

This combined with covert tactics such as Mr Moore's intimidation of reporters in a reassertion of political power to ensure the prevailing spin on the story was pro-Labour. The reworked hypothesis that forwards spin doctoring which occurs at the beginning of news gathering and before journalists begin processing information is more likely to prevail over journalistic autonomy was confirmed by the second critical instance described in this research. The implications of spin doctoring for the democratic function of the news media are addressed in Chapter Sixteen, Field Research Conclusion.

Some additional observations about spin doctoring need to be acknowledged. Tankard and Sumpter's (1993) research suggests there is an indication of acceptance of spin doctoring by the news media. This acceptance was apparent in the New Zealand context by the description of Jackman in a newspaper profile, by the news media's acceptance of his spin doctor lexicon ("stunt", "grab" etc), by his brokerage of access to the Labour leader on the hustings and at press conferences, and by the affectionate

banter which took place between Jackman and journalists prior to Mr Moore's first press conference. There was no challenge by journalists to Jackman's interventions, or to his role, observed at any stage in the two episodes described.

Tankard and Sumpter (1993) suggest journalists should "recommit themselves to revealing spin doctors in the original sense of the term--that is, they should strive to point out news source attempts to influence the newsmaking process" (p.10). In addition, less dependence on spin doctoring is recommended by Tankard and Sumpter. Tiffen (1989) expresses a more benign view of the influence of media manipulation such as spin doctoring and states that "despite the rhetoric of both practitioners and opponents, the most heartening feature of public relations politics is how often it fails" (p.85).

Given the sophistication of spin doctoring and its ascendancy in modern political reportage, Tankard and Sumpter's (1993) call for greater disclosure by journalists of media manipulation may not be heeded. An increasing degree of "source professionalization" as Blumler (1990) calls it, is more likely to become the norm. The making of the news is a theatre of combat not between two traditional adversaries; press and politicians, but between politician, journalist and spin doctors. Schlesinger (1990) in his call for a rethinking of the sociology of journalism criticises the "excessive *media-centrism*" of much existing research and argues persuasively for academic redress of the "failure to look at source-media relations from the perspective of *the sources themselves*" (p.61). This research suggests future scholarship must include the influence of spin doctors either as sources themselves, or in terms of their impact on politicians as source and on the journalist's framing of the news. Tankard and Sumpter (1993) correctly suggest that while it is popular to debate journalism in terms of the objectivity/subjectivity paradigm, this narrow focus obscures the significant role in newsmaking played by spin doctors.

Blumler (1990), too, urges more studies of roles at the cutting edge of "source professionalization". He states:

After all, leading campaign consultants and publicity specialists do have theories of political communication and are often in a position to apply them. So what are their most prevalent theories? How far are they shared across the profession as a whole, and what differences, if any, divide it? Do such theories meet any significant opposition within campaign teams? What normative restraints and controls have to be respected? How does publicity professionalism relate to more partisan influences? (p.112).

In conversations with Mr Moore's media secretaries it was apparent they were guided by a non-theoretic, pragmatic and opportunist approach to political communication. Nor was there a uniform view. Jackman espoused the "Paul Keating-blank page" approach, referring to the Australian Prime Minister's acknowledgement that he took each day at a time in electioneering and responded to events of the day working from this "blank page" approach to media strategies and tactics. Jackman also indicated that he and Labour regarded the Government's principal spin doctor, communications manager, Michael Wall, as our "secret weapon." "He's an ad man not a journalist and he hasn't been able to fix Bolger's image", Jackman said. He was referring to the difficulty the Government had in projecting the human face of the Prime Minister, Mr Bolger, who languished low in preferred Prime Minister stakes and political popularity as measured by public opinion polls throughout the election campaign. Jackman said he had known the Prime Minister when he was a parliamentary political reporter for Radio New Zealand. "I'd be able to fix his image problem. I'd get him down on the farm", referring to Mr Bolger's status as a King Country farmer in his electoral constituency. Jackman, too, believed in the primacy of television as the site of the election contest, "no-one reads newspapers."

Sue Foley, on the other hand, who probably spent more time with Mr Moore on the road, expressed different perceptions of the competence and quality of the news media covering the election and did not necessarily adhere to the "blank page" school of electioneering strategy in terms of dealing with the news media. She spent time preparing in advance to choreograph television by ensuring a continuing supply of visual material for daily television footage. While acknowledging the centrality of

television in reporting of election news, Foley expressed wariness about the role of the two morning dailies, the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Dominion*. She also encouraged Mr Moore's enthusiasm for the role of radio, in both the links he made weekly from his home studio to more than 20 radio stations scattered throughout New Zealand, and his use of talkback radio. On several occasions Foley confided in me her impressions of the lethargic and indifferent coverage of the hustings by a number of reporters assigned to follow Mr Moore. Her overall view of the lack of journalistic initiative expressed as it was in a lack of "journalistic hustle" or inquiry and the familiar pack hunt approach directly contradicted Jackman's view of the news media performing professionally. Foley contended that the lack lustre nature of the coverage meant the full flavour of public support in the electorate at large for Mr Moore was not revealed by the traditional news media.

Spin doctoring, used in this research as a more generic term for media manipulation, is a relatively new field of "source professionalization" in the New Zealand political context. Its influence as observed during a week in the 1993 New Zealand general election indicates that studies of news manufacture in the political arena premised on the traditional model of two-way exchange between journalists and politicians as sources are anachronistic. Future studies of the manufacture of political news to be meaningful must accommodate the triumvirate of actors involved-journalist, politician and spin doctor. The changing role of the journalist needs more focus, too, and the next chapter, Chapter Fourteen, addresses threats to traditional journalistic autonomy.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE REPORTORIAL ROLE, THE PRIMACY OF TELEVISION AND THE ALLOCATION OF JOURNALISTIC RESOURCES

### 14.1 Introduction

The second preliminary hypothesis formulated in the participant observation section of this research was that when traditional journalistic autonomy is under threat reporters will seek to reassert their role in such a way as to influence the nature of news. This chapter discusses the trend towards political journalists reasserting their significance in political communication by defensive strategies and by going on the offensive, and the impact of these strategies on news content. In addition some observations are made from the week's observation about the primacy of television in election coverage and the allocation of journalistic resources.

### 14.2 Defensive strategies

Blumler (1990) states that the modern publicity process "makes journalists uneasy about their roles and concerned at times to reassert somehow the significance of their own contributions. The dilemma is that journalism-steered-by-news-values converts all too readily in practice into news-management-for politicians" (p.107). Levy (1981) states that the device of "disdaining the news" allows reporters to be seen to distance themselves from the media manipulation by suggesting it is contrived. His thesis is that journalists regularly encounter stories which conform to professional notions of newsworthiness which can be reported with ritual, if not actual, objectivity but that some stories are both tainted and accompanied by strong competitive pressures to report them as news. "Examples of such potentially tainted phenomena include political conventions and campaigns" (p.24).

Levy (1981) states the notion of disdaining the news "as used here is also meant to imply a relatively high degree of self-consciousness by the journalist toward the problematic newswork task" (p.27). The journalist engages in the "social psychological mechanism of role-distancing" (p.27), actions which convey some sceptical or disdainful distance of the actor from the role he or she may be performing. Levy suggests disdaining the news is similar to objectivity as a strategic ritual because both behaviours are fundamentally defensive.

...disdained stories do include signs that the journalist-as-author is deliberately intruding his or her presence into the account. Among such intruding signs are expressions such as "this reporter" or "some observers" as well as phrases intended to convey an apology or explanation for the story. Further, disdained news departs from "objective" news in that disdained stories frequently contain editorially judgmental words or phrases which clearly suggest the journalist's point of view about the tainted phenomenon. Sometimes, in fact, these editorial judgments are highly critical, scornful, or derisive (p.28).

Maharey (1992) writing of the New Zealand political context states there is a growing tendency for journalists to adopt a disdainful stance. "In other words, they send up or expose what they see as the efforts of politicians to make themselves look good in the eyes of the public" (p.96).

An example of disdaining the politician, if not the news, occurred at the Auckland Hospital press conference when Labour leader Mike Moore was attempting to steer the news media away from the taxation tiff towards the health/copyright story. The patient in a wheelchair who called out a message of support to Mr Moore allowed the Labour leader to physically break away from the assembled press and their microphones and limit further news media questions about tax as he moved towards his waiting transport. This appeared to frustrate Kim Webby, *Television New Zealand's* reporter, who made a loud and cynical aside to the rest of the assembled press that the patient, who was clearly there fortuitously, "must have been a Labour plant". The remark may have been borne simply of frustration that she had not more energetically tackled Mr Moore and provoked a stronger response making it a "better story." It may also have been motivated by political partisanship or an attempt at humour or at

engendering journalistic solidarity in the face of a quite obvious attempt to manipulate the news media by throwing them off the scent of one story by offering them the bones of another. Whatever the motivation for the remark, its utterance was disdainful.

*The Dominion's* reporter Stephen Bell's testy account of the Labour leader's visit to a Manawatu factory (previously referred to in Chapter 11) in which the journalist implies the event was a "jack up" simply for campaign purposes is an example of disdain for the news. The reporter distanced himself by suggesting that he knew it was a pre-arranged campaign activity aimed at press coverage and that it had little other significance. He was obliged to be present, and to file copy, as the Manawatu correspondent for his Wellington-based newspaper because of the competitive nature of news. As Levy (1981) states, "the newsworker is saying, in effect, "yes, I define this phenomenon as news. But my story is also a bit troublesome for me in my role as a journalist" (p.28).

In addition to defensive strategies journalists sought also to reassert themselves by going on the offensive.

### 14.3 Going on the offensive

A fundamental change to the nature of news was observed during the 1993 election campaign arising out of examples of journalistic self promotion. An analysis of commentary and reportage at the end of the first week of the election campaign included an examination of *Television New Zealand's* late night news programme *Prime Time*. The interviewer, Maggie Barry, asked the two senior political reporters who had spent the week on the hustings trail following the two main political leaders for their verdicts on campaign politicking after one week of the four week contest. Barry asked reporter Linda Clark who accompanied the Prime Minister Jim Bolger what stood out for her after the first week. This was the reporter's televised answer.

"What stands out for me, after the first week on the heartland tour, is the food. You can't go anywhere on the National Party campaign without being fed at least every two hours. It tends to be asparagus rolls, sausage rolls or...baby quiches made by big, beefy National Party women."

Clark then lamented the possibility of a potential weight gain during the campaign while the other senior reporter Richard Harman, who had followed Labour leader Mike Moore, quipped that Labour's campaign was a "do-it-yourself" affair as far as food went. McGregor (1993) states that the food habits of journalists had little to do with major political issues of the day, the credibility of the leaders as they campaigned, or what issues were really troubling voters. "But they do reveal a profound journalistic ego: An ego that suggests that what reporters are fed on election campaigns, is the stuff of political commentary on national television news" (p.13).

Martin Vander Weyer (1994) writing of current British journalism believes "media arrogance is the heart of the problem, and it has two faces, neither altogether acceptable" (p.9). The first is the upmarket journalists who think they are running the country and the second is their downmarket colleagues who topple elected politicians for sport. And while Vander Weyer states neither practice is new, nor in their less extreme forms are they without a coherent defence, "today's press has a particular swagger in its gait partly because today's politicians (in their official capacities, if not in their boudoirs) are so subdued" (p.9). Vander Weyer indicates a measure of this "media arrogance" "is the extent to which the media now regard *themselves* as newsworthy. He states it is symptomatic of the blurring of the distinction between news and entertainment. Vander Weyer does not suggest the news media should be anonymous but states, "it is one thing to intermeditate legitimately in the transmission process in order to add focus, opinion and colour; another thing altogether, a corruption of the power of media technology, to hog the space in order to talk about yourself" (p.11).

Part of the self promotion stems from television's use of "standups" or what Taylor (1993) calls the "standup syndrome". Taylor states the idea behind "standups", the television reporter on camera behind the microphone speaking directly to the audience as opposed to interviewing a source on camera, is that "the journalist on camera serves as a guide for viewers, leading them through the television screen, deeper into the story, showing through, words reactions and body language what it's like on the plains of East Texas or deep in the Hindu Kush" (p.35). Taylor quotes Michael Rosenblum, an independent producer who sells news video to American television, as describing

"standups" as " a primitive kind of grammar in TV. [done only] to prove the reporter is there...You end up making a movie about what the reporter does for a living." (p.37).

"Standups" alter standard journalistic practices particularly in relation to attribution, by which information published or broadcast is attributed to a source. Assertions are often made in a story without any supporting facts or evidence. Taylor (1993) states:

Television reporters often seem to forget standard journalistic practices during those seconds when their faces, as well as their voices, are on the air. It's then that attribution sometimes disappears. All manner of stereotype, slant and speculation may be proffered. In the full thrall of the standup syndrome, reporters simply voice their opinion, or, worse, drop in a line merely because it's punchy (p.36).

Television One reporter Linda Clark's verdict on the first week of the hustings in terms of the food offered exemplifies the "standup syndrome", in addition to the format of news reader interviewing journalist, and affirms Rosenblum's 'grammar' metaphor. For what Television One news did produce was a "movie" about Linda Clark and Richard Harman's eating habits on the hustings with Maggie Barry, as presenter, playing a bit part in the televised theatre.

#### 14.4 The journalist as news

Journalists then are reasserting the significance of their own contributions by the device of vigorous self promotion of the journalist-as-personality and journalist-as-central-actor in the political morality play. Journalistic self promotion would appear to be one of the most visible characteristics of the modern publicity process in relation to contemporary political journalism. This self promotion which is expressing itself more frequently in both print media and electronic broadcasts is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the personalisation of the news. As the political system becomes weaker and media structures more powerful there has been an inexorable slide towards journalists and their opinions supplanting politicians and their opinions. This trend clearly further exposes the fallacy of journalistic objectivity. The reassertion of journalistic identity by

self promotion manifests itself by the journalist making the news not about the event or politician's role in the event with the journalist in the background, but about the event and the journalist's role in the foreground with the political actors, traditional sources, and the political event as a contextual environment only in which this self promotion can take place.

Blumler (1990) writes of the "decline of the party system" undermining the traditional political model at its core (p.105) and elsewhere of the "greater centrality of mass media to the conduct of political conflict and its outcomes" (p.103). But what emerged from watching the Labour leader and journalists during press conferences was the insight that just as the news media has usurped the functions of the Opposition in the contemporary political landscape, so, too, have they usurped some of the behavioural characteristics of an Opposition. If this premise is accepted then the personalisation of the journalist, as well as the personalisation of the politician, which is a predominant feature of contemporary journalism, and the self promotion by reporters, becomes a corollary of the process of journalists behaving as well as functioning like an Opposition, rather than some form of substitute for conventional reporting.

Contemporary news media scholarship which expresses concern about the trivialisation inherent in political reporting and the disdain of politicians is largely premised on traditional communication models of reporters acting as intermediaries or conduits between the message and audience. But these analyses may miss the significance of the modern reportorial role. For example, take the question asked by American news commentator Paul Taylor: "how can our society expect a better breed of politician if its journalists convey such a low opinion of political life?" The question is predicated on an assumption that journalists are somehow external to the political process about which they report rather than central actors behaving as if they constitute a political party themselves, not in the sense of policy formation but in the sense of putting the affairs of Government under a media microscope.

It is suggested here that some reporters appear to have usurped not only the functions but the behavioural characteristics of political opponents. Tiffen (1989) states that "political reporters often seem to adopt the gladiatorial style of the politicians they report" (p.44). In response to overt and covert attempts to spin political news

journalists have sought to re-establish reportorial autonomy. An increasing trend, apparent during the election campaign, is for the journalist to become the focus of the story, with the politician providing the socio-political context for the self promotion and the election campaign being the background environment. This trend is in addition to strategies such as disdaining the news and affirms the hypothesis that when traditional journalistic autonomy is under threat journalists seek to assert their role in a way which influences both the making of and the nature of news. The reassertion by journalists has coincided with the primacy of television in election reporting which is addressed in the next section.

#### **14.5 The influence of television**

It is not the intention of this research to explore generally the impact of television on political communication. The centrality of television to political reporting has spawned its own genre of news media scholarship and media commentary. Central to the debate is generalised concern among commentators about the intrusiveness of television into politics. Leone (1993), for example, wrote of the 1992 American presidential campaign that during the first quarter of the election year, "the only issue on which the campaigners and the public all agreed was that television seemed less concerned with the profound issues at stake in the election than with matters of peripheral, personal and even prurient interest" (p.vi).

And the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force examining television and the United States presidential campaign of 1992 states:

Television alone cannot transform campaigns into intelligent and profound public discourse when presidential candidates routinely seek to avoid issues, when they dwell on the opposition's negatives, and when they consciously distort. In years past, many institutions--families, churches, community organizations, schools, and especially local political parties and their apparatus--helped to foster political awareness and to transmit values. But the authority of many of these institutions has waned, leaving television with undue influence and a role in fostering consensus that it was never designed to play (p.11).

While this research does not explore the role of television in political communication, two episodes during the week of observation warrant comment about the primacy of television and its impact on news making during the Labour leader's campaign. Both issues concern television's inherent need for "visualness" in the making of news.

#### 14.6 Spinning the backdrop

Labour's principal advertising slogan for the election campaign was "jobs, growth, health". Each of the concepts had been tested for electoral significance. Jobs referred to anxiety about unemployment reflected as the number one public concern in public opinion polling, growth referred to economic development, and health to social concern by the public in the midst of a painful restructuring of the health system. The slogan "jobs, growth and health" was used on billboards, in pamphlets and other printed electioneering material, and the words in Labour's colours, red and black, were painted as a visual backdrop behind the rostrum used by the Labour leader for his Bowen House press conferences.

The visual backdrop was designed to catch the television "eye". The words were central to Labour's overall election campaign strategy and candidates were expected to use the themes to differentiate Labour as the more caring party in relation to the concepts. The visual backdrop, a huge white banner, with the words running horizontally, was expected to frame Mr Moore as he spoke from rostrums and act as a visual reminder cue for audiences. Because Mr Moore's advisers felt that when he was standing directly in front of the banner with its three word slogan he eclipsed the word "growth", the banner at Bowen House was re-designed. In the re-design the words were presented in an inverted pyramid form rather than horizontally.

As the television news camera crews were setting up their equipment at Bowen House for the first of two press conferences on Tuesday, 19 October, 1993, Television Three's cameraman complained to Paul Jackman about the change. After looking into his camera focused on the rostrum he complained that the "background doesn't work too well, now." He allowed Jackman to look down the camera and there was general discussion about whether the words would be better displayed visually if they ran horizontally as before or in the pyramidal style of the re-design.

What was remarkable about this scenario was the co-operation between a television news cameraman and a spin doctor to improve the visual impact of what was essentially a propagandist message. There appeared to be implicit acceptance of the *raison d'être* of the backdrop as a television prop which the camera could not avoid as it filmed Mr Moore, and concurrence between the cameraman and the third party source of the media manipulation. Jackman promised the cameraman he would look into further adjustments so the banner "works for television."

#### 14.7 Election campaign choreography

The second illustration of television's influence on the manufacture of news was disclosed during an interview with Labour leader's other media adviser Sue Foley during Mr Moore's visit to the Manawatu knitwear factory previously referred to in Chapter 11. Foley acknowledged that every day of the campaign some visual backdrop, such as a school or factory visit, was arranged, for the *primary purpose of providing film for nightly television news*. This admission confirmed the fundamental paramountcy of television to the Labour leader's election campaign. Locations and events were chosen for their "visualness" to provide a "moving wallpaper" of election campaign movement. In many cases the film itself, of Mr Moore shaking hands at a factory, provided little or no part of the actual story script but, like an expensive stage set at the theatre, provided a visual backdrop to the "standup" or to the piece of voice-over.

The need for such film during election campaigns to a large extent dictated Mr Moore's schedule of daily activity. Foley indicated that the timing of the event or activity with visual potential for television was arranged to coincide with television's production deadlines, so that in general the vaudeville of campaigning took place in the morning or early afternoon so it could be processed for the 6pm news. Foley indicated to this researcher that while it had not been discussed directly she felt there was a tacit understanding, indeed, and expectation, by television journalists that she would act as a political choreographer delivering good visuals and film opportunities on a daily basis. One consequence of the perceived need for television visuals to direct the news is the reliance this places on photo opportunities and the implications for staff resourcing. Foley needed to be able to chose a staged opportunity for the camera to

photograph every day and she needed to ensure the television reporters and camera crews would be present. This meant selecting convenient, manageable locations and appropriate timing for the processing of film for the evening news.

#### 14.8 Television logic

It was apparent during the week's observation of news coverage of Mr Moore's campaign that the deference accorded television both in terms of journalistic judgment by media minders as to what *is* news and organization means the tail was wagging the dog in terms of news media processes. News was not covered because it was "out there", instead it was stage managed, and the news media acquiesced to the extent that these photo-opportunities were largely the visual backdrop to the news of the day.

Election events were selected, then, according to what Altheide and Snow (1991) have called "media logic". The media perspective largely determined the geography of campaigning, the places Mr Moore would visit, the hands he would shake and the voters' questions he would answer. Electioneering was a television tableau aimed at a mass audience rather than the campaign providing opportunities for direct access by voters. Should members of the public happen to be in the right place at the right time and have the opportunity to see, hear or ask a question of Mr Moore, then this grassroots participation was considered to be a bonus, but clearly an ancillary purpose.

This has clear implications for conventional election campaigning. First, it reduces the role played by party workers and supporters who traditionally provided intelligence to politicians particularly within local constituencies about issues and concerns of the day which can be weaved into the fabric of stumping the hustings. If every speech, every doorstep meeting, every street corner is predicated on the premise of the television "eye", then clearly political leaders will concentrate on national themes, with considerable repetition, as opposed to local themes. Political rhetoric will be guided by considerations such as the length of the soundbite and the need to avoid gaffes, slips of the tongue or injudicious remarks. Politicians, too, then attempt to minimise public participation such as heckling, robust cut and thrust and the "argy bargy" of electioneering because they may not be able to control such spontaneity. The whole

campaign performance by politicians alters in character, becoming more "public" than "private" to take Meyrowitz's (1985) point, with no opportunity for rehearsals. The concept of controlling the spontaneity of public participation in electioneering had become an issue for Labour in the first week of the campaign when party strategists felt at least one doorstep meeting had been partly derailed by a noisy heckler who was an Alliance supporter.

Second, if such paramountcy is accorded television, then this increases "source professionalization" and deepens a politician's dependence on experts skilled in knowledge and techniques to manipulate the making of the news. Foley was "making" at least the visual backdrop to nightly news items about the Labour leader's campaign by exercising her judgment daily using the criteria of "visualness". Altheide and Snow (1991) in developing their concept of media logic suggest that experts skilled in the techniques of manipulating events to fit media procedures will become central and influential in their respective organizations.

It is significant to note in this context that Mr Moore had eschewed advice from party strategists such as Lloyd Falck to be accompanied throughout the four week election campaign by a political minder. Experienced political campaigners themselves and very often retired politicians, political minders travel with the party leader providing personal and professional support, acting as a sounding board in terms of policy and advice and generally guiding the politician away from perceived peril. Former Minister of Overseas Trade, the late Hon. Joe Walding, had a prodigious reputation as a consummate political minder when he accompanied David Lange on the hustings in his successful bid for re-election as Prime Minister in 1984.

Instead, Mr Moore preferred to be accompanied only by his wife Yvonne, the Canterbury regional chairman, Clayton Cosgrave, and a media minder, either Paul Jackman, but more often, Sue Foley. These spin doctors, of course, as former journalists carry with them an insider's understanding of how news can be manufactured, how it can be shaped, and of the journalistic temperament. They know, too, how journalists think. Jamieson (1993) talks of what she calls the "revolving door" (p.39) of campaign insiders now covering campaigns as journalists and vice versa within America. The "revolving door" operates also in New Zealand.

#### 14.9 Resource allocation

The emphasis on the role of third party sources and the sophistication of spin doctoring on the traditional relationship between politicians and reporters raises the issue of news media resourcing of the election campaign. The allocation of journalistic resources has a profound influence on both the *amount* and the *kind* of news which is eventually published or broadcast. Perhaps surprisingly, though, little empirical research has been conducted examining the linkages between fewer journalists employed in newsrooms and the kind of news produced. The 1993 general election followed a period of general economic recession in New Zealand which impacted severely on advertising revenue, and to a lesser degree on newspaper circulations and radio and television audience size. Media commentators in New Zealand provided different estimates from a variety of sources as to the reduction in the number of reporters. Maharey (1992) said, "By my count, around six hundred journalists have lost their jobs or left voluntarily over the past year" (p.95). Lealand (1994) in his second national survey of New Zealand journalists acknowledges the trend of print media mergers and closures and the accelerated networking of news in the radio market. But states Lealand, "there has also been an increase in possible employment opportunities as new publications and media outlets provide for new niche markets" (p.13). Lealand notes an extraordinary growth in certain areas of the media, for example radio stations, which have doubled to 140 in New Zealand in the past five years. "But it is less clear whether such growth translates into more employment opportunities for news journalists, given the level of syndication that characterises such growth" (p.13). He notes too, that, the New Zealand Journalist Training Organisation's own financial levy information relating to membership "support the contention that mainstream print and radio newsroom journalists are fewer than a few years ago" (p.6).

The economic downturn was not the only influence on New Zealand's media environment. The swift impact of Government's de-regulatory policies in broadcasting led to an overcrowded media marketplace. In 1992 Maharey wrote:

New Zealand has 31 daily newspapers, 105 community newspapers, 333 registered radio frequencies, three television channels, three pay-for-service channels, Canterbury Regional Television and numerous outlets on the way. In the past year, overall advertising revenue available to the media has dropped by \$27 million. There is simply not the room in a depressed market for everyone and, as a result, more job losses are inevitable (p.95).

Fewer journalists working within serious financial constraints subtly alters the dynamic of news gathering. It can shift reliance for news selection towards media minders, it can mean that from the vast panoply of potential news available on an hourly basis the news which *is* manufactured is that which is convenient and cost effective to gather only. It can affect news judgment as competitive pressures force downwards altering the face of the news towards entertainment rather than information values. It cramps the time frame of the news process cycle which inevitably means journalists have less time to be thoughtful and considered in their interpretations or provide the contextual backdrops. Financial under-investment in the creativity of journalism, as opposed to the technology of journalism, which is the hallmark of the current New Zealand mediascape has a discernible qualitative impact, although more scholarship is needed to define and quantify the impact.

What is beyond doubt is the centralisation of news which occurs when there are fewer journalists involved in the news process cycle. The diversity of sources is reduced when there are fewer journalists harvesting material, a smaller number of reporters are feeding in ideas, tips, suggestions, reactions and story possibilities to the daily assignment lists, and there is a concentration on the news judgment and direction of middle level news managers; chief reporters and news editors. Ironically, when the public perception of reporters chasing scoops is considered, the end result of this squeeze of editorial resourcing is an inevitable conformity of news.

In the context of the 1993 general election it was apparent from a week's observation that the making of news was affected by the resourcing difficulties of the news media. The allocation of several junior or middle graded journalists as opposed to senior, experienced staff, the reduced number of journalists travelling with the Opposition leader on a fulltime basis, and the selection of events to be covered or ignored were

manifestations of the constraints. Examples are the editorial decisions of both major Wellington based newspapers, the *Dominion* and the *Evening Post*, not to allocate political reporters on a fulltime basis dedicated to coverage of Mr Moore 'on the road' but rather to cover his activities when he was within the area covered directly by their circulations. While the *Evening Post* could justify its meagre resourcing on the basis that it is primarily a Wellington-based afternoon newspaper, the *Dominion* has persistently attempted to claim *de facto* national newspaper status in New Zealand and promotes itself on the basis of political coverage which is differentiated by quality from the mainstream news media. While reduced resources were allocated to on-the-road coverage during the 1993 election campaign they were, of course, supplemented by those based in the parliamentary press gallery, some of whom were senior, experienced and long-serving political journalists.

For the week of observation, *Radio New Zealand* allocated only moderate reportorial "firepower" to Mr Moore's campaign with the attachment of a medium graded reporter who had only recently joined Radio New Zealand from private radio. In addition, there were reporters located within the press gallery. *Television New Zealand* adopted the policy of allocating its two senior political reporters to accompany the two main political leaders week about. Even within the week in which Linda Clark followed Mr Moore, though, there appeared to be little consistency in that the reporter attended some events but not others.

The *New Zealand Herald's* reporter, Patricia Herbert, rather defensively complained to the researcher during a wait at one of the factory visits by Mr Moore, that she considered the way in which the Labour leader and his media minders had arranged their campaign, flying by helicopter backwards and forwards from location to location in electorates scattered throughout the North and South Islands posed organizational difficulties for the news media. Herbert, complained too, about the lack of prior news media notification about the politician's daily campaign diary although the complaint was dismissed by Foley who considered such complaints as part of reportorial rationalisation for indifferent election coverage.

There is some validity in Herbert's complaint. On Tuesday October 19 Mr Moore was scheduled to be in Auckland for a whistle-stop meeting, then fly by helicopter to the South Waikato town of Tokoroa for a meeting with parents, school children and the public. Unless the news media either won a seat on Mr Moore's helicopter through negotiating with Foley, or hired their own aircraft it would be impossible for one journalist to cover both events. This meant a number of journalists in consultation with their news superiors decided not to cover the school visit and leave it to the news agency, the *New Zealand Press Association*. This compounded the feeling in the Labour camp that the news media was less interested in the human face of the election campaign and Mr Moore's constituency popularity evident at Tokoroa, than they were with conflict-based news. Overall, though, the assessment after a week's observation is that organizational hiccups were secondary to reportorial resource constraints in producing a lack of continuity of personnel and of consistency in election campaign coverage of the Labour leader.

The frantic and rather frenetic nature of Mr Moore's itinerary reflected what Auletta (1993) has described as "hopscoching from airport to airport" (p.75). It created an artificial pace and momentum to an otherwise fairly humdrum election campaign which bolstered the morale of campaign workers who felt they were "on the go" and it provided an essential feelgood factor for a candidate who might otherwise be dismayed by small turnouts of the public and news media indifference. The "hop scotching" was also necessary if Mr Moore was to make regular and repeated visits to marginal electorates, such as the urban Auckland seats and Manawatu, identified as crucial to electoral success.

But it also added to the division between what Patterson (1993) has described as "reporters' issues" and "candidates' issues." Because there was often no continuity of reporter and politician on the election trail, the disparity of perspectives as to the issues and what the choices being offered the voters widened. Patterson says of the American experience:

In this respect, election news in 1992, as in previous years was misshapen. The issues that candidates stress most heavily are not those reported most heavily by the press. Candidates base their campaigns on broad policy

commitments, such as promises to keep the peace and to promote prosperity, and on specific pledges to the groups and interests aligned with their party. These issues dominate the candidates' efforts because they are the issues that have the greatest impact on the voters.

These issues, however, tend not to be the favourites of reporters. The candidates' coalitional appeals are thought to be too narrow to be of general news interest, and their broad appeals are often seen as too vague for easy use. Moreover, these issues usually do not involve the conflict that reporters prefer in news stories (p.98).

Journalists privately complained on the hustings during moments when they could socialise that Mr Moore was repeating his old favourite themes, such as the threat to free milk in schools and the possible Americanisation of health and the erosion of the much-vaunted accident compensation scheme. Their complaints typify the disparity between journalist's issues and candidate's issues. For the Labour leader the main election issue was a broad policy commitment to preserve essential characteristics of the New Zealand way of life, which he expressed in metaphors like free school milk. But for reporters, this was not the major election issue, except in the sense of a contest between the two leaders over who could demonstrate his party was the more "caring." Reporter's issues were instead concrete particulars such as the specifics of whether Labour was united over taxation policy, and whether Mr Lange was tilting at Mr Moore's leadership.

So in the week of observation news media resource allocation was marked by low to medium level coverage which was neither consistent nor continuous. While the news media coverage of the 1992 presidential election in the United States is generally acknowledged to have improved because television, in particular, consciously decided to resist staged photo opportunities directing national news as a consequence of new policies about who should travel "on the bus", New Zealand's coverage of the hustings perhaps reflects not so much the lofty ideal of journalistic reform, but more the pragmatism of editorial cost-cutting.

Insight into the allocation of journalistic resources, and the manner in which it orchestrates news making, can be gathered by looking at an edition of the provincial newspaper, the *Evening Standard* in Palmerston North, which circulated throughout one

of the most marginal electorates. Thursday, September 30 1993, saw both major party leaders and a third party leader visit the city on the same day, an unusual occurrence, but one which indicated the leaders were covering each other and attempting to cancel out each other's news media exposure. Nine general news reporters employed by the *Evening Standard* were on duty during the day and seven of the nine were assigned to cover events involving one or other of the political leaders. Of the twenty story possibilities listed in the daily assignment list, nine of them related to the politicians' visits. Of the fourteen photographic assignments listed for three photographers on duty that day, four related to the visits and the election campaign. This heavy allocation of editorial resource to the election campaign transforms the next day's edition into a heavy dose of political news with pages two and three, generally reserved for local news, devoted to coverage of the leaders' visits (Appendix 42). Three stories carried the bylines of three different reporters. They reported the activities and comments of New Zealand First leader Winston Peters which comprised the main display stories on page three accompanied by a photograph. In addition on page three there was a story following the visit of an independent candidate for the Western Maori electorate. Page two was dominated by accounts of Prime Minister Mr Bolger's visit to the city, his helicopter ride, and his views on proportional representation. Underneath these two stories and photograph Labour leader Mr Moore was featured with a local candidate on the marginal status of the Manawatu electorate.

The linkage between the allocation of reporters and the making of news was in this case uncomplicated. The *Evening Standard* had nine reporters only on the day to fill its next edition, so copy filed by reporters was likely to be used regardless of the degree of newsworthiness. Reporters were allocated to assignments not in the hope but in the expectation that usable copy would be produced. In this newsroom climate where resourcing is tight there were limited options for news judgment.

In election reporting the notion of balance, referred to earlier in this study, is a consideration. For example, the reporter assigned to cover Mr Moore's visit to Palmerston North returned to the newsroom and reported to her news superior that after studying her notebook she could make little news sense of what Mr Moore had said. The Labour leader's scatter-gun verbal acuity meant there was not a coherent theme from which could be processed a news package. The reporter was instructed to

write a story anyway linking disparate themes. The rationale was that the newspaper would lack balance, and would leave itself open to charges of bias, if it carried news on the other political leaders who had visited the city but not Mr Moore.

While more research would be valuable examining the effects of journalistic resourcing on the quality of election reporting, it is clear the dangers of reduced reportorial resources lie in the diminished ability of the news media to counter sophisticated third party sources intervening in the news process cycle. A rethink by the New Zealand news media about how election campaigns should be covered is overdue and Morrison (1993) suggests it will be forced on the press by electoral reform and the system of proportional representation New Zealand is moving towards. In the meantime, however, editorial cost cutting in political reporting prevails by default.

While the news media appeared to allocate fewer resources to cover the 1993 general election campaign, politicians, too, were making strategic decisions about their own use of media. The primacy of television was coupled with a rapid headlong plunge into new technology. The impact of the "new" news, or electronic populism, as it has been called, is described in the next chapter, Chapter Fifteen.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN: THE "NEW" NEWS

### 15.1 Introduction

On Monday, 17 October, 1993, during my participant observation of the Labour leader's campaign, Mr Moore remained at home in his Christchurch electorate to go on air from his home-built radio studio. He made over 20 calls to radio stations, some of them live feed-ins without audience response, and many of them talkback involving interaction with listeners who called into the radio stations. This was a weekly ritual during the campaign. The Labour leader indicated he considered the unmediated nature of this 'new' news more politically effective than committing time and resources to the usual media management manoeuvres aimed at conventional news stories. The "new" news (Katz, 1992) or electronic populism was a potent instrument of political communication during New Zealand's 1993 general election campaign, challenging the pre-eminence of the traditional mainstream news media. The "new" news impacted on the "old" news and raises questions about the relationship between the news media and democracy.

### 15.2 Definition of the "new" news

Taylor (1992), in his essay on political coverage in the 1990s, defines "old" news in the American context as the network news shows, the Sunday morning interview and commentary shows, the weekly news magazines, and the prestige national and regional newspapers "whose collective news judgments form the closest thing the journalistic establishment has to a code of standard practices" (p.39). He describes "new" news as a "hodgepodge" which includes television talk shows, talk radio and "call in shows that aspire to create a plebiscitary rather than a representative democracy" (p.40). Taylor says the "new" news is a "mix of the serious, the slightly bizarre and the *au courant*: in other words, the "everywhere culture." Owen and Robinson (1993) identify one of the characteristics of the "new" news as essentially soft news, rather than a mix of hard and soft news found in conventional journalism (p.115).

The evolution of political communication from "old" news to "new" news is a global phenomenon. Much American news media commentary of the 1992 presidential election campaign was devoted to analysis of the announcement by Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot of his presidential candidacy during the *Larry King Live* show on CNN ignoring the time-honoured venue of a press conference, and of Bill Clinton in sunglasses blowing his saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show*. A week before the 1992 American presidential election, and 10 points down in the polls, a previously reticent President George Bush accepted an invitation to appear on MTV's "Presidential Forum." Owen and Robinson (1993) state that, "these three watershed events in the presidential campaign of 1992 epitomize the rise of a new era in electioneering, a phenomenon that Time media critic Christopher Ogden labelled "electronic populism" (p.115).

Similar journalistic commentary surrounded the 1994 Italian election victory of cultural entrepreneur, Silvio Berlusconi. Writers have emphasized Berlusconi's rejection of traditional party organizational formats including old methods of political reportage and his substitution of a new style of electoral politics highly dependent on "infotainment" media-talk shows, music television, print and electronic personality magazines. Martin Jacques in *The Sunday Times* asked whether Berlusconi was a "miracle maker or a media manipulator" and wrote that the "weapon of the charismatic leader is no longer the demagoguery of the street corner and the public square but the charm and perma-grin of the television studio" (p.1).

### 15.3 The New Zealand context

In the New Zealand context, leaders of the two major political parties and several third party contenders utilised talkback radio and participant television programmes such as Television New Zealand's *Counterpoint* programme and the two important, home town leader's debates to an unprecedented degree in 1993. The potency of talkback radio, in particular, is partly a consequence of the de-regulation of New Zealand's broadcasting industry. In the new, niche-radio climate engendered by de-regulation, talkback manifested itself at a local level; through a tribal radio network which allows Maori radio talkback; and through national talkback via the public service *Radio New Zealand*, and more importantly through the feisty *Radio Pacific*, allegedly described in

1992 by the Prime Minister's chief press secretary Michael Wall as the "most damaging medium in the country" (*Sunday Star*, 25 October 1992). Originally an Auckland station, since May 1992 an expanded network has provided coverage of 90% of New Zealand with an estimated 300-350,000 listeners.

The "new" news in the New Zealand environment, then, consists of talkback radio and participant television programmes offering audience interaction with candidates. The "old" news comprises traditional political reportage from press conferences, coverage of election meetings and activities, press releases and parliamentary press gallery journalism from accredited gallery journalists published or broadcast in traditional news formats.

#### 15.4 Shifting allegiances

Three examples during the 1993 election campaign indicate that politicians themselves were shifting allegiance from the traditional methods of political reportage in 1993. The first example is the Perot-style start up of a new political party by former National Government Cabinet Minister, Winston Peters. When Mr Peters launched New Zealand First he chose the remarkable venue of Alexandra Park Raceway, home of the horse sport, trotting, in Auckland. He swatted away journalistic inquiry about the small size of the crowd attending the launch by stating that the direct radio broadcast to a wider audience of New Zealanders through *Radio Pacific*, the pre-eminent talkback station, "without dilution or the editing done by other media" was what was really important (*New Zealand Herald*, 20 July 1993, my emphasis added).

A second example concerns the somersault in attitude in 1993 by Prime Minister Jim Bolger on his need for the use of talkback. In 1992 Mr Bolger gave up his weekly talkback programme on *Radio Pacific* in what *The Dominion*, January 25, 1993, described as "lofty disdain", with aides indicating the Prime Minister had more productive things to do with his time. The Prime Minister was unhappy with *Radio Pacific's* breakfast host Pam Corkery, for her opposition to National and apparent support for third party Alliance, policies. In July 1992 the Prime Minister in a speech described debate on

talkback as "sometimes shamefully low." He said: "Populists and pessimists on every talkback show in the country offer wild and often contradictory policy changes—some are boastful, some are obviously barmy, some are filled with the wrath of righteous indignation." Yet in January 1993 Mr Bolger resumed a regular weekly talkback session on the station he had previously spurned. *The Dominion's* editorial commented: "Prime Minister Jim Bolger must feel an election coming on. There is no other reasonable explanation for his decision to expose himself again to the slings and arrows of the "populists, pessimists and obviously barmy" folk of talkback radio when he returns to *Radio Pacific* this Friday" (p.8). *The Evening Post*, October 10, 1993, reported that the Prime Minister had a rudimentary talkback studio set up in a dining room off his parliamentary office. In addition to *Radio Pacific*, Bolger talked back in regular sessions with radio host, Paul Holmes, on his Auckland 1ZB *Newstalk* station, and to Lindsay Perigo on the *BBC World Service* breakfast programme. His capitulation on the need for talkback occurred in the year the Prime Minister cancelled the time-honoured convention of a formal weekly press conference with members of the parliamentary press gallery.

But it was the Labour leader Mike Moore who set the pace of the electronic populism during the 1993 election campaign. By April 1993 Mr Moore had used money from the Opposition Leader's budget to wire his Papanui home in Christchurch specially and install a broadcast quality "wideband"-the equivalent of two toll lines-so he could link himself up with Auckland, where listeners' calls were taken. Mr Moore supplemented the traditional baggage of electioneering such as street corner demagoguery with elements of popular culture: talk back radio with its part-news, part-entertainment elements. Explaining his motives in the *Sunday Star*, 11 April 1993, Mr Moore said he was fed up with trying to sum up "important" party policies in "10 second grabs", a reference to television's shortened sound bites. "We have to do things differently to match the new technology of 10 second bites—and that's all you get." The Labour leader said he conducted dozens of radio shows a week and a "studio in my own home will give me quicker, clearer, more convenient access for those interviews" (p.1).

The prospect of politics without journalists, which is the ultimate promise of electronic populism such as talkback radio, clearly had appeal to leading politicians during the 1993 election. They felt the use of talkback increased direct encounters with voters

allowing a communication which was not mediated or filtered by journalistic intervention. In addition these new formats allowed political leaders such as Messers Moore, Bolger, Peters and Jim Anderton, leader of the Alliance Party who also used *Radio Pacific* and other talkback radio stations, to hear what they considered was a more reliable, authentic 'audience voice' in return, than the commentary provided by political journalists for the traditional news media.

### 15.5 Access and proximity

Why did New Zealand's political leadership embrace the 'new' news so dramatically in 1993? While more research would be useful exploring political motivation and the use of talk show politics, my observations during the election campaign suggest three reasons. These are the issue of access and proximity; the political desire to avoid the oppositional stance of journalism; and the political perception that a new audience was being reached. All have implications for the democratic role of the news media.

First, the issue of access and proximity. Talkshow politics on both radio and television in the 1993 New Zealand election went beyond traditional interactive forums, at least in time and scope. For example, *Radio Pacific's* gabfest alone, during the month-long election campaign, amounted to 73 hours of political talkback radio. It is suggested that politicians are attracted to talkshow politics because they believe it brings them closer to voters; they have access to voters and a proximity to a voter's feedback that is more immediate, more "authentic" and very often more comforting than traditional news media messages.

The easiness of talkback is only partly technological, it rests also with the informality of the medium by which the unaccredited, the ordinary as opposed to the powerful and the non-elites in society can become sources, even if the result of all this is eclectic. Is it any wonder the Labour leader Mr Moore several times contrasted the results of formal public opinion polling with what he clearly saw as the "true voice" of those who talked back to him on radio, his "favourite medium" (*Sunday Star*, 11 April, 1993). The "closeness" engendered by talkback is, of course, not one-sided. Armstrong and Rubi (1989) in their study of talk back radio state, "Those who phone a talk radio program

are motivated by a desire for interpersonal contact" (p.84). They also suggest, "the particular content of talk radio may tend to make it a more instrumental media experience, with issues, arguments, information and humor encouraging listeners to attend and become involved" (p.90-91).

What are the implications of the easier access and closer proximity of talkback for the democratic function of the news media? Horowitz (1993) sees a positive effect because talk shows are able to greatly involve the public in a dialogue with politicians in a way that traditional journalism does not allow for. The live and unedited appearances by political candidates allow the public to see and hear them unfiltered by journalists. Horowitz states:

The public can now hear the candidates give complete answers to questions, not just tiny sound bites. Previously, the ability for people to see and listen to candidates has been limited to news stories reported by the media, press conferences, actual campaign appearances or rallies that people may attend (p.15).

### 15.6 Avoiding journalistic accountability

While talkshow politics may improve access and proximity of the public to political candidates it does, however, threaten the accountability role of journalism. In the context of the New Zealand 1993 general election the "new" news has been described as the "electronic sidestep" used by politicians to evade journalistic accountability (McGregor, 1993). Journalistic accountability in this context means the holding of officials to account for how they exercise power, identified by Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) as one of eight normative standards for the media in democratic societies.

The function of holding public officials to account is grounded in utilitarianism theory (Keane, 1991) of the liberty of the press which argues (after Jeremy Bentham) that a free press exposes the secretiveness of those who govern and makes them more inclined to respect and serve the governed. Keane states that the utilitarian case suggests the probability of prudent decision making by officials is increased with publicly available

and comprehensive information about the world provided by the news media. "And a free press casts a watchful public eye over the bureaucracy thus preventing the outbreak of nepotism between legislators and administrators" (p.16).

One of the conventions of political journalism in contemporary times is the use of interviewing skills whereby journalists follow a specific line of questioning until a subject is examined comprehensively. Persistent questioning has provided at least a partial bulwark against the encroaching tide of media management strategies and tactics employed by politicians. As Keane (1991) so bluntly puts it, "the nasty business of lying in politics is a characteristic feature of democratic (and other) regimes" (p.101). Robust political journalism is a buffer against political mendacity.

It is precisely that reportorial format, persistent followup questioning, which the "new" news allows politicians to avoid. In addition, there is an inherent attractiveness about talk show politics for politicians which strikes at the heart of the manufacture of news by the conventional news media. Talkback, by its very nature, allows politicians to avoid the adversarial formats which are the foundation of traditional journalism. Rosen (1992) describes the "natural temperament of most journalists... is to be "against" rather than "for". The oppositional stance of the mainstream news media, the supremacy of "bad news", the conflict-based sense of newsworthiness, the dialectical story model of A versus B in presentation, are not the inevitable byproducts of talk back radio or audience participation shows on television.

A tough question from a caller, sceptical intervention by talkshow hosts, even populist outrage can all be directed at a politician who submits to talkback, but missing is the systemic and organized intervention and filtering of the traditional news media cast as it is in a hardened adversarial mould. Instead of the public relying on processed accounts of actual campaign appearances or press conferences they did not personally attend, talkback radio and talkshow television allows voters to hear the candidates give complete answers to questions and, with television, to hear and see how they look when they are giving them. The new-found ability of politicians to directly appeal to the public and evade the prevailing journalistic temperament, in the processes of communicating to and from voters, allows public figures to bypass the manufacture of news as we conventionally know it. This is a major determinant in the switch of

allegiance by politicians to the "new" news and a significant dilution of the power and influence of traditional political reportage. It also has the potential to undermine the role of the news media in holding elected officials and political candidates to their promises.

Is this public interest role of the press transferring to journalistic amateurs, the talkshow callers? Are citizens' questions, while different from journalists' questions, fuelling public interest or self interest? Kolbert (1992) quotes Professor Michael Robinson who states: "there is nothing more self-centred than an audience of untrained voters who ask the same question: me, me, me." Other researchers, such as Kinsley (1992), suggest that the questions from callers to talk show programmes were better than reporters' questions. McGregor (1993) commenting on the televised, home town leaders debates which featured audience questions said the most ingenuous, innovative question asked of a politician during the New Zealand campaign came not from a seasoned political reporter but from a young man in the Christchurch audience. He asked Bolger and Moore: "My question is quite simple: What do you think your opponent's best quality is? And could you please try and avoid an answer like 'his desire to do his best for all New Zealanders'". The question was a clever one because it asked two powerful men to reveal a little of themselves while at the same time closing off the option of political rhetoric. It is a matter of record that neither politician was able to rise to the challenge of the question and both displayed the mean spirited nature of politics in their replies. The question, however, was one of substance not process and McGregor asks, "If amateurs exploiting the access offered by such electronic town hall meetings can ask questions that have the potential to raise the level of political discourse, who needs the pros?" (p.13).

### 15.7 "New" news and a "new" audience?

The notion that the 'new' news is reaching a new audience is hard to substantiate in the New Zealand context because of sparse empirical evidence. Horowitz (1993) talking of the American presidential campaign states that, "as talk shows are reaching a larger audience than traditional media, they are also reaching a different audience. These are people who do not watch traditional media and appear to be more alienated from the political process" (p.11).

While there is little empirical data available in the New Zealand context, it is clear from audience ratings that talkback radio had a growing audience and that there was a strong perception by politicians that it was reaching a different audience. There is a bulge in the 40-plus age group in both listeners and callers to *Radio Pacific*, and "grey power", as older voters were colloquially referred to, was considered to a critical constituency to be wooed in 1993, partly because of its demographic significance and more particularly because of its cohesiveness and mobilisation as a lobby. Previous research (Armstrong & Rubin, 1989; Turow, 1974) shows that talk radio callers were less socially interactive and less mobile than noncallers. While additional research on the comparative media consumption patterns of talkshow callers and listeners would be useful, it can be suggested that talkshow politics in the 1993 election led by *Radio Pacific* amplified the strong sense of political disenfranchisement felt by many of the electorate. The station provided a daily cathartic venting of anger and frustration for alienated voters. Kolbert, (1992) quotes Michael Deaver, a former Reagan aide, as describing the process as "like a flow of water that gets dammed up and finds another way to go."

The implications for mainstream journalism of a new audience or one that is disaffected with traditional news, concern both resource allocation of reporters covering politics and the style of traditional election campaign news. First, the "old" news have had to acknowledge that their monopoly on political appearances, like campaign launches and policy releases, is under threat by the "new" news being the preferred option of some politicians. And that political preference is being couched in democracy rhetoric. For example, Labour's leader Mike Moore was quoted in the second week of the 1993 election campaign as stating he believed radio was worth all the time he could give it. "I may be only talking to 5000 people in the Wairarapa, but I'm not going to get those people to read a paper, am I? It's raw and real democracy. Its telecratic, talkback democracy". (*Evening Post*, 10 October, 1993, p.2.) Owen and Robinson (1993) writing of the American elections suggest that the "new" news supplements the old news but does not supplant it. But they state, "soft news *did* reach most voters and *did* influence some of them" (p.117).

The "new" news also impacted on what the mainstream news media reported on during the election campaign. Political journalists followed the tradition of accompanying the leaders on the hustings, covering the election as a contest, publishing poll results and

exercising their fourth estate function with respect to candidates, policies and political promises. In addition, though, they were obliged to report, albeit warily, on the development of the "new" news and talkshow politics.

### 15.8 The impact of the "new" news

As Owen and Robinson (1993) have noted, journalists and news media commentators are sharply divided in their views of the new developments in political media. This division is apparent even in the range of epithets and descriptions for the "new" news. During the New Zealand election campaign one Sunday newspaper devoted a front page lead to the emphasis Labour leader Mike Moore was placing on talk show politics. This and other feature articles and editorial comment published by the print media were relatively neutral. The threat to the traditional role of political reporters in asking politicians to account for their exercise of power by a series of focused, follow-up questions was raised by one commentator only (McGregor, 1993).

Two American scholars, in particular, reflect the division of opinion about the "new" news. Horowitz (1993), states "the potential to reach disenfranchised voters is seen as one of the most positive effects of talk show politics" (p.11) and asks whether the "new" news will be the "match that rekindles American democracy?" Taylor (1992) provides a less benign prognosis with his definition of the "new news" as a "hydra-headed beast. Some of it is loopy, some deadly serious" (p.40). Looking at the 'loopy' aspect he states:

The New News, even more than the old, feasts on political stories that come packaged as morality plays, soap operas, or "gotcha" cat-and-mouse games. The more trivial, the more simple-minded, the more trashy, the more cynical, the better. Its sense of mission is built entirely around staying in synch with the regnant populist outrage. Unlike the Old News, it doesn't fail to maintain standards of balance, nuance, perspective: it never aspired to these standards in the first place (p.40).

The 'loopy' element aside, the view articulated by Trish Carter, the operations manager of *Newstalk 1ZB*, Radio New Zealand's station rivalling *Radio Pacific*, that talkback was acting as an alternative Opposition to the Government (*Sunday Star*, 25 October 1992) was prevalent prior to the election.

The jury remains out on whether talkshow politics empowers disenfranchised voters or whether it debilitates the dialogue of democracy and public discourse about politics. But in an examination of the 1993 New Zealand general election no discussion about the news media would be complete without acknowledging the role of and challenges posed by the 'new' news. The most serious threat appears to be the ability of politicians to sidestep traditional reportorial formats and avoid persistent and focused questioning in the public interest. This electronic sidestep has the potential to undermine the accountability role of the news media. Further research is required looking at whether the "new" news is supplementing or supplanting traditional political journalism. But if the trend towards increased use of talkshow politics observed in the 1993 campaign continues then political journalism will need to redefine its role and develop new initiatives and defensive strategies to preserve its public interest function.

## 15.9 Conclusion

In the next chapter, Chapter Sixteen, the conclusions arising from the field work are reported. Comment is made about the evaluation of participant observation and the generalizability of the findings. How the news was manufactured and the relationship between politicians, journalists and third party sources is examined in relation to the theoretical framework provided by Blumler's (1990) analysis of the "modern publicity process". Finally the implications of this manufacture of news for the news media in the political process and in the exercise of democracy is addressed.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN: FIELD RESEARCH CONCLUSION

### 16.1 Introduction

The purpose of the participant observation research was to approach an understanding of the social action; the inter-relationship between reporters, politicians and third party sources from the perspectives of those involved and from the perspective of the involved researcher. The two critical instances reported in the research attempt to interpret the meaning of the inter-relationship as it relates to the manufacture of news. Participant observation was used as the methodology because it was clear that the struggle for control over the making of news between politician, reporter and third party sources was not necessarily apparent from traditional, end-product analysis of the broadcast or published news stories.

Two preliminary hypotheses were tested; one which required revision and the other which was affirmed in the course of the research. The negative case involving backwards spin doctoring led to a reformulation which distinguished between backwards and forwards spin doctoring in determining the contest over news-making. It also prompted a revised thinking about the timing of intervention of third party sources in the news process cycle.

This reformulation suggested that attempts by third party sources to set the news frame at the start of the cycle were more likely to succeed than a mid-point intervention which collides directly with newswriters' sense of their own professionalism and journalistic autonomy. It was affirmed by the critical instance described in the research involving forwards spin doctoring to replace "bad" news (the tax tiff) with "good news" (secret agenda claims) as the news of the day.

The second preliminary hypothesis suggested journalists were reasserting their role and significance in response to aggressive politicians and to sophisticated media manipulation by politicians and third party sources in such a way as to influence the

nature of news. The participant observation revealed episodes of disdain for the news, of self promotion by reporters, and of reporters rivalling politicians as the subject of the news. This confirmed the view that journalists were influencing the nature of news by re-establishing their authority in political reportage. In addition to their role as mere filters of news from politicians to the news media audience, journalists intruded into the news process so that the news features them as central to the story in addition to the centrality of politicians. In fact, the two were often competing for prominence. An analysis of the relationship between politician, reporter and third party source must acknowledge this central role of reporters as sources, too.

An alteration in the nature of news as a consequence is also evident, away from a journalistic genre characterised mainly by descriptive news towards a journalistic genre combining descriptive news with narrative features combined with elements of exposition, where the tone of the commentary is personal, and of criticism, where the journalist is allowed impressionistic licence. The nature of journalistic writing is examined in greater depth in the content analysis section, Chapters 17-21.

## **16.2 The question of generalizability**

While these findings emerged from the participant observation the question of whether they are generalizable needs to be addressed. Anderson (1987) suggests it is the business of participant observation not to explain individuals one at a time but rather to explain the social action of the scene. He states, "the scene is an identifiable part of human life; the social action is the myriad of performances which give it meaning. The analyst has to make those generalizing steps from acts to action to social action within a scene" (p.354).

And Denzin (1989) states:

just as the experiment and the survey are subject to the problems of internal and external validity, so too is participant observation. Can the observations of the participant observer be generalized to other populations (external validity)? Do the observations represent real differences, or are they artifacts of the observational process (internal validity)?" (p.170-171).

Denzin (1989) states that ideally, the use of analytic induction frees the participant observer from the question of external validity and he suggests it is "incumbent on the participant observer to demonstrate that the cases studied are representative of the class of units to which generalizations are made."

Generalizability as a problem for field researchers crops up in three forms (Babbie, 1992). The first is that the personal and subjective nature of the observations by the researcher can produce results which will not necessarily be replicated by another, independent researcher. "If the observation depends in part on the particular observers, then it becomes more valuable as a source of insight than as proof or truth" (p.308). The second is that the unusually comprehensive understanding afforded by participant observers exposed to an immersed view of their subject matter may mean the understanding is less generalizable than results based on sampling or standard measures. For example, does the understanding of the contestation between the Labour leader, his spin doctors and the political reporters concerned, allow the researcher to carry over learning from the specific to the general? Does it allow general insights into the relationship between political leaders, media advisers and journalists and their impact on the making of news during election campaigns? The third problem associated with generalizability occurs within the specific subject matter being observed. How "typical" were they? Were the particular reporters "typical" of New Zealand political reporters covering the election? Was Mr Moore a "typical" political leadership contender? Were Paul Jackman and Sue Foley "typical" third party sources?

Nothing in participant observation as a methodology provides the researcher with a guarantee that he or she is generalizing within the accepted boundaries and contours laid out by the specific observations. It is clear as Babbie (1992) suggests, that "field research results cannot be generalized as safely as those based on rigorous sampling and standardized questionnaires" (p.309). In the end it is a matter of judgement by the researcher that the nature of the specific observation allows a generalizable finding. That judgement is in itself judged by the discerning and sceptical reader reviewing reports of the participant observation. The element of reader judgment will apply not only to generalizability. Anderson (1987) states:

The discerning reader will consider the naturalistic study from the criteria of purpose, informational source, commitment, completeness, generalizability, and propriety of the argument...Ultimately, the research piece must be helpful in understanding the social world in which we live (p.355).

The strength of participant observation lies in the depth of understanding it may permit. As Babbie states "being there" is a powerful technique for gaining insights into the nature of human affairs" (p.306).

### 16.3 Generalizable findings

What generalizable findings, then, can be advanced from the participant observation in this case? This research has adopted, in general, a conservative approach to generalization. It is contended that the findings reveal a complex, shifting contest for control over knowledge and power in the making of news between politicians, reporters and third party sources which is altering the face of traditional political journalism. The participant observation illustrated that, in general, the contest has three features.

1. The first is the increased sophistication of, and acceptance of, third party sources actively intervening in the news media process. A factor influencing the success of the intervention, judged from the perspective of the media manipulation, is the timing of the manipulation in the cycle of news manufacture.
2. The second feature is the manifestation of frustration among political leaders seeking to control or to avoid traditional, mainstream reportage and wrest back the initiative in communicating with the electorate. The frustration expressed itself in more aggressive responses to individual reporters, increased reliance on spin doctoring, a re-think by politicians about the nature of their "public appearances" during election campaigns, and strategic support for "new" news media formats.

3. The third is a more central, active and subjective role by journalists in news processes developed both to defend their status and to enlarge their role. Self promotion, disdaining both the news and politicians, and inserting themselves as sources in the news are some of the characteristics of this new reportorial role.

#### 16.4 Theory development

These findings move beyond current orthodoxies which, as Schlesinger (1990) has pointed out, are excessively "media-centric" in their focus. For example, the shifting sands of source relationships in political news revealed in this study does not fit with structuralist conceptions of source relationships best exemplified by Hall et al's (1978) notion of "primary definition". In this theory of dominance, media reports are grounded in authoritative accounts from "accredited sources" who are representatives of traditional, important political and social institutions. Clearly, part of the focus of this research is the exploration of the invisible hand of "non-accredited", third party sources and an analysis of the strategies and tactics employed by all three sets of situated individuals in source interactions.

While this breaks away from structuralist conceptions of news making, it also undermines conventional exchange theories of the news modelled on politicians and journalists exchanging information for publicity. This research is instead suggesting that the making of news must be analysed in terms of three sets of relations between groups, not two. Because the news media and third party sources are not passive but active in the news process (at least as active as the traditional source, the politician), the strategic advantage in source relationships is more complex than the previous sociology of journalism suggests. And the shifts in power evident in source relationships in this research led to all three, the politician, journalists and spin doctors, employing new tactics, both overt and covert, to try and win ascendancy.

A challenge for future scholarship may involve researchers combining insights about the complexities of three-way source relationships in the making of political news *and* a contemporaneous examination of the news media content which results from the

interaction. A mix of methodologies will provide better linkage between the process, source relationships, and the results of the process in terms of access, content, agendas and the "spin" of the news. In this way the struggle over power and knowledge central to the manufacture of news in the modern publicity process will be disclosed.

### 16.5 The manufacture of news and the dialogue of democracy

To conclude the participant observation section of this research some comment needs to be made about the implications of the findings for the dialogue of democracy. Keane (1991) in his persuasive analysis of the media and democracy states that in the past the close relationship between democracy and the media has been justified in several ways. These include utilitarian theories which postulate that interested parties can sift through the options presented by the news media and decide for themselves, the notion that a free press is superior because it provides an antidote to power, and the idea that a free press maximises freedom in the sense of individual or group autonomy.

But Keane (1991) says "new justifications of the intimate relationship between 'liberty of the press' and democracy are needed" (p.175). While he is writing in defence of public service media, in particular, his observations hold true for the news media in general. He suggests one new justification for the close relationship between democracy and the media-this is that democratic procedures and a free news media also facilitate *disagreement* and the *disapproval* and *revision* of established agreements. He states:

Democratic procedures are superior to all other types of decision making, not because they guarantee both a consensus and 'good' decisions, but because they provide citizens who are affected by certain decisions with the possibility of *reconsidering* their judgements about the quality and unintended consequences of these decisions. Democratic procedures sometimes allow the majority to decide things about which they are blissfully ignorant; but they also enable minorities to challenge blissfully ignorant majorities, to bring them to their senses. They enable some citizens to tell others what they do not want to hear. Democratic procedures enable citizens to think twice and say no (p.178).

Keane also suggests the combination of democratic procedures and a plurality of communications media acts as essential correctives to the exercise of power. "They are unsurpassed methods of checking the unending arrogance and foolishness of those who wield it" and they are "unparalleled early warning devices" (p.181).

Patterson (1993) in his analysis of election campaign reporting suggests that perhaps too much has been claimed for the press in relation to democratic discourse. He states that even if the news media did not want the responsibility of organizing election campaigns it is theirs by virtue of an election system which comprises weak political parties, self-generated candidacies and other factors. He dismisses the notion that news organizations are somehow inferior to political institutions but "rather that each has a different role and responsibility" (p.92).

Democratic elections cannot operate effectively without a free press acting effectively in its sphere. Yet the news media should not be asked to do the job intended for political institutions. When we ask the press to operate in their stead, it is bound to fail us, no matter how determined its effort (p.92).

Patterson urges that the press be allowed to be the press and that election processes, political communication and campaign journalism all be altered to relieve the press of responsibilities it should not assume, nor be asked to assume. This would allow politicians, political institutions and electoral processes to reassert their own roles. Patterson's call is referred to in more depth in the content analysis section which begins in the next chapter.

Perhaps those scholars suggesting a revival of the notion of citizenship in relation to political communication provide a clear path forward for those examining the implications of the democratic function of the news media. Golding's (1990) concept of the "resurrection of the concept of citizenship as a critical benchmark of enquiry in communication research" is a useful framework. Golding sees the critical question as "to what degree and in what ways are people denied access to necessary information and imagery to allow full and equal participation in the social order?" (p.98).

One finding of this participant observation research has positive potential, and three specific findings have negative implications, for the notion of citizenship. The positive possibility is the strategic use by politicians of non-traditional news formats which may lead to greater access to politicians by audiences that feel distanced and perceive themselves to be disenfranchised by conventional election campaign communication. This may prove to be positive for the notion of citizenship. Citizens who were previously disinterested and uninformed may in future use the "new" news to participate better in social and political processes.

The negative implication of the "new" news, though, is that it has provided politicians with a strategy to avoid adversarial reporters so they can side-step the conventional accountability function of journalism. A second finding with negative implications for citizenship is the uncritical acceptance by journalists of the rituals and performance of spin doctors. This acceptance manifests itself in non-disclosure by journalists to the public of the pervasive influence of spin doctors on the content and nature of news. A number of factors point to an increasing rather than decreasing trend towards "source professionalization" as Blumler (1990) has termed the growing media manipulation within political communication. The public is entitled to story presentation which acknowledges, rather than disguises, such sourcing.

Both these negative findings, the "new" news and spin doctoring, represent an erosion of the watchdog role of the press and have consequences for the flow of necessary information to the public. The third finding which negatively impacts on citizenship is the self promotion of journalists as more central and active in the news process altering the face of news towards more subjective, interpretive and impressionistic journalism. Patterson (1993) states that in this type of reporting, "the candidate's words are noteworthy largely insofar as they illustrate the journalist's chosen theme, which typically centers on the election's contestual aspects" (p.102). He suggests the soundbite or the brief quote of the candidate's words is nearly always an "attack line" rather than a "thoughtful statement. The predominance of clear-cut issues is a consequence" (p.102).

Once again, there is the issue of non-disclosure. If the journalist speaking, as opposed to the politician speaking, is to become routine in contemporary journalism, and it may be unrealistic to expect a retreat to pre "stand up" syndrome days, then there needs to be a better recognition by media consumers that this is the journalist's view of political reality and not the politician's view of political reality. Such recognition can only be generated by honest differentiation in the presentation of material. Instead of being presented as a factual portrayal of the election campaign it must be presented as an opinion-based portrayal (and not the politician's opinion but the journalist's), by such acknowledgements as "in my opinion", "in my view", "from my observations". While this may not cure some of the excesses and deficiencies of election journalism such as the absence of contextual material in reportage and the obsession with contest, it will at least provide media consumers with a clear distinction as to the journalist's voice or the politician's voice, part of the necessary information for citizenship.

If there is limited disclosure as to the nature of news, and while journalistic presentations which personalise the reporter disguise whether a news presentation is based on "fact" and is descriptive, or whether it is interpretive journalism based on "opinion", then the news is failing to fulfil its democratic function. In such a media milieu Keane's (1991) rhetorical questions concerning the future are more likely to become reality. He states that, "it may be that citizens will no longer invest any hopes in public life...Perhaps they will be persuaded to privatize themselves, to regard politics as a nuisance, to transform themselves silently and unprotestingly from citizens to mobile and private consumers" (p.192).

The "stand up" syndrome and self promotion by journalists are seductive news media techniques in a turbulent and competitive environment. But as Patterson (1993) states:

This type of reporting makes the campaign look meaner, more chaotic, more manipulative, and more combative than it actually is. It highlights the disorganization of the campaign, and wrenches the candidate out of the context of their roles as leaders of electoral coalitions. In addition, it misrepresents the candidates' positions and priorities. Of all the issues they address, only those that can be fitted to the narrative line have much chance of making the news regularly (p.102).

A more compelling reason for honest differentiation of fact and opinion in political reportage emerges from the suggestion in this research that journalists have usurped not only the functions of the Opposition in the contemporary political landscape but also the behavioural characteristics. Where there is reluctant acknowledgement only, and no clear differentiation of the roles of the politician, the reporter and third party sources in the making of political news, then the public distemper about the political process spreads to the journalistic process. The essence of journalism, in addition to the essence of politics, is infected by the general malaise about politicians. Journalistic credibility is irrevocably damaged when reporters become not just the messenger but part of the message and the public cannot tell the difference.

The next section of the research, Chapters 17-21, examines the manufacture of election news by employing content analysis methodology. The "insider" nature of action research and participant observation is complemented in the following report and discussion by "outsider" research.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: THE PROBLEMATIC SITUATION IN THE NEWS

### 17.1 Introduction

Both methodologies, action research and participant observation, described so far in this research examining the manufacture of news, have as their primary focus the relationship between politicians, journalists and third parties who intervene in the relationship. The third methodology, described in Chapters 17-21, is content analysis used to examine the making of the news in a political context. It adds in another dimension and refers to the audiences of the news. This chapter outlines the theoretical framework in which the content analysis is grounded. It defines the "problematic situation" developed in Edelstein, Ito and Kepplinger's (1989) research and promotes it as a "testable" theory of news which distinguishes it from "working" theories of news (McQuail, 1987). In Chapters 17-21 this "testable" theory is used to examine election news reports published in New Zealand's metropolitan press during the 1993 general election campaign.

It is necessary to distinguish the content analysis employed in this study of news manufacture from typical content analytical studies traditionally employed in news media scholarship. Interpretive content analysis was utilised in the study because it was appropriate for the research objectives and because it minimised the objections made by critics, referred to later in this chapter, about quantitative content analysis which is descriptive and uses topical coding systems only.

The interpretive content analysis used here is based on the theory of news as "discrepancy" (Lippmann, 1922) and the theory that journalists and audiences interpret news as "problematic situations" (Edelstein *et al*, 1989). Both of these concepts are explained in detail. The research was not searching for proportions of subjects covered in the news, or for bias, or changes in the patterns of coverage over time, which are the types of inquiry that traditionally dominate quantitative content analysis. Instead the study asks whether journalists interpret the news, and if so, whether they do so according to a certain frame of reference.

The study used Edelstein *et al's* "cognitive construct of the problematic situation to provide equivalence in the meaning of news to both producers and consumers of news" (p.124). Edelstein *et al* (1989) believe that the problematic situation provides a "system of analysis that would reflect audience interests with the dynamics of news" (p.106). They suggest:

..the motivations of audiences and the content of news are best described by problematic situations, and topical categories would fall within those conceptual boundaries. Thus news stories categorized simply as "economics" might imply a number of problematics. One of them would incorporate losses of value that were associated with inflation; another would describe needs for value related to investments. In the same sense, news stories categorized topically as foreign relations could incorporate a number of problematics; one might be dimensions of conflict while another might address global steps that were being taken toward the solution of world problems (p.106).

The research was premised on the notion that the news media are central to the performance of election campaigns and examines how the news was manufactured during the 1993 general election in New Zealand. The very concept, that news is manufactured or made, grounds the scholarship in what has been labelled, in modern news media scholarship, the social construction of reality perspective of news. The social construction of reality perspective of the news rejects the view that meaning is either inherent or universal, and similarly rejects the view that it is not dependent on social context. Davis (1990) states:

Social construction of reality theory is grounded on the premise that we live in a fundamentally ambiguous social world—a world in which persons, objects, and actions have no inherent or essential meaning. If meaning is not inherent, then it must be created—imposed on action, events, or things through human action. But action is necessarily situated in a specific place and time. The meaning that is imposed is limited by and relative to the context in which meaning is generated. Moreover, because action in situations is inevitably structured by groups that dominate those situations, those groups enjoy an inherent advantage in determining the meaning derived from action in situations (p.159).

Edelstein *et al* (1989) state that the cognitive approach to the news which employs the "problematic situation", contrasts an "internal" appraisal of news with social analyses of "external" forces, and incorporates the structural, cultural and socio-political perspectives inherent in a social theory of news. In addition the influences of newsroom socialisation, the attitudes of journalists, the technological imperatives and ideological forces are acknowledged.

As Major (1992) suggests, in the research literature a rich tradition is associated with the social construction of reality perspective with the predominant focus on audience-centred media effects. She states "though a vast amount of content data exists, too few of these content analyses have attempted to test and develop theory" (p.600). Like Major's own study of "problematic" situations in press coverage in the 1988 United States and French elections, the New Zealand research tested Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of the problematic situation of media content.

The research employed interpretive, as opposed to descriptive, content analysis of the election news published in New Zealand's metropolitan press which comprises five newspapers; the *New Zealand Herald*, *The Dominion*, the *Evening Post*, the *Christchurch Press* and the *Otago Daily Times*.

## 17.2 The concept of the problematic situation in communications research

Edelstein *et al* (1989) suggest that the communication processes by which society comes to recognize its problems, and cope with them, are "neglected aspects of two important research traditions: the idea of the problem itself and the functions of communication in coping with problems" (p.66). They state, "the idea of the problem (sic) with us for a long time, but the suggestion that we study *communication about problems* is relatively new" (p.66).

The use of the problematic situation in communications scholarship was employed by the Japanese when Takashina (1984) looked at the role of broadcasting in regional Japan. Edelstein *et al* (1989) state:

The researchers adopted the "problematic" or "events" approach so that they could anchor opinions in a "concrete" situation. The "problems" that they elected as being contemporary and specific related to the concerns of local people about their safety or security. The most important of those problems were selected--those that had produced demands by people that something be done about them (p.68).

The Japanese respondents listed problems which included the arts, business and economic development, corruption, crime, politics, sport and the weather. Edelstein *et al* (1989) state:

Dynamically, in terms of the concept of the problematic situation, the problems were articulated as losses of value (because of corruption and crime, typhoon damage, etc) and steps towards the solution of problems including business reorganization, construction, and changes in business practices (p.68).

Takashina's (1984) study also examined communication about problems and looked to see which media, television, newspapers and public information bulletins were most depended on, and found television was the best source of information about natural disasters, sport and weather, newspapers were best for business and the economy, and the bulletins for information about personal health and hygiene.

Edelstein *et al* (1989) state Takashina's (1984) study illustrated several major considerations including:

1. the focus of attention was the problem in a highly situational setting,
2. the problems were topically characterised, but they revealed dynamics they described as "problematic situations",
3. different communications media were more useful for different problems-and for their implied character as problematic situations.

The next question in developing a concept of problematic situation which might be employed in communication research is that of determining the kinds of meanings that are attached to problems. Noelle-Neumann and Kepplinger (1981) conducted a study

of a local community in which they documented the fact that problems, whether they be individual or community-wide, were not objective realities but were the subjective outcomes of the problemization of a topic by an individual or by the wider society. Individuals perceived problems for themselves personally as a "threat to me" and in social terms as a "threat to the society in which I live". And when an individual problem engulfs a wider number of people it becomes a social problem. Noelle-Neumann and Kepplinger described the process of problemization as the "problem of the problem". They state:

Problem dimensions are the characteristics or the effects of individual problems thought to be particularly serious and forming the "problem of the problem". We then speak, say in the case of unemployment, of its problematic nature for the workers concerned, their dependents, and the general economic situation of the country (p.24).

### 17.3 Conditions of discrepancy

The theory of the problematic situation of media content is grounded in educational problem-solving research. In addition the research history of "the problem" has its roots in sociology as well as educational psychology. Edelstein *et al* (1989) state "behaviorists were interested in individual problems, whereas sociologists were concerned about social problems." (p.93).

Educational problem solving was pioneered by Dewey (1927). According to Dewey, situations were problematic in their character, and communications were most useful in a defined situation. Dewey recognised the relationship between communication and the community. He spoke of the problematic situation in different ways, referring to the presence of individual and social needs, the multiplicity of expectations generated in society and the inevitability of social conflict.

Dewey's search for the relationship of communication to problematic situations was followed by scholarship on problem-solving and Edelstein *et al* (1989) state the legacy of this research enabled them to generate a formal scheme of problematic situations that

included seven conditions of discrepancy (p.74). These conditions of discrepancy form the "problem of the problem", to use Noelle-Neumann and Kepplinger's (1981) phrase. They are:

- \* Loss of values: A condition of discrepancy where the individual once possessed something of value and had not yet moved to replace it, a present-past temporal condition.
- \* Need for value: A condition of discrepancy where the individual sought to gain or to achieve some value that had not been attained, a present-future temporal dimension.
- \* Institutional breakdown: A loss of value on institutional rather than on an individual basis, a situation where a social institution such as government, education or the family no longer was functioning adequately or failing to meet societal needs, a present-past temporal dimension.
- \* Social conflict: The individual observed conditions of conflict between or among other actors or institutions, including issues of war, trade and other competition between individuals or between or among governments; this could occur along any temporal dimensions, past, present and/or future.
- \* Indeterminate situation: Conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, chaos, confusion, questioning, prioritizing, etc. This, too, could take place in any time frame.
- \* Steps toward solutions: demands for, proposals for, or observation of any steps that might lead to solutions. This, too could take place in any time dimension.
- \* Blocking: An individual or a collectivity that was proceeding on a path is interrupted by an actor. This could take place in any time frame (Edelstein *et al*, 1989, p.74).

#### 17.4 A "testable" theory of the news

These seven conditions of discrepancy formed the basis of a multicultural theory of news developed from the problematic situation by Edelstein *et al* (1989). They state, "our purpose is to move conceptually from what McQuail (1987) called "working theories" of news to a "testable" theory" (p.103).

McQuail's (1987) *working theory* of news is "developed and maintained by media practitioners themselves" (p.4). He states:

..it offers guidelines on the purposes of media work, how things ought to be done in line with the more abstract principles of social theory and also on how certain ends *can* be achieved. Some of the ideas involved are matters of technique, some are enshrined in traditions, professional practices, norms of behaviour, rules of thumb, which guide the work of media production and give it consistency over time (p.5).

He distinguishes *working theory* from *social scientific theory*, and from *normative theory* concerned with how the media ought to operate, and what he calls *commonsense theory*, referring to the knowledge and ideas which everyone has, by virtue of direct experience in an audience.

In developing a *testable* theory of the news, Edelstein *et al* (1989), like other scholars researching the news media, note that the question "what is news" has "not been answered in any meaningful way" (p.103). They state that textbooks on news writing simply restate the values that journalists assign to news when answering the question and that these characterizations reflect McQuail's (1987) notion that "working theories" guide the daily routines and observations of journalists and news organizations. Edelstein *et al* state:

But these characterizations actually fall far short of a *working theory*. They actually represent a set of rules, embodied in a loosely held inventory of news values. As a *working theory* such elements should be linked conceptually and describe a system and a hierarchy of values. Most critically, if news values were expressive of a theory, the audiences for news would express their values in similar terms to those of journalists and be guided by the same rules and cognitive values (p.104).

What was required was a system of mutual understanding that was utilized similarly by *both* journalists and audiences. Edelstein *et al* (1989) state they utilized the cognitive structure of the problematic situation to provide equivalence in the meaning of news to both producers and consumers of news. In this cognitive theory of news "we have transformed topical approaches to news into problematic situations, and we have suggested that journalists and audiences "co-orient" to these problematics that reflect the meaning in the news" (p.124). The theory is cognitive in approach because it addresses behaviours such as problem definition.

In developing a cognitive theory of news Edelstein *et al* state it is "consistent with the pioneering ideas of Lippmann (1922), and it extends through the theorizing of Galtung and Ruge (1965) and other colleagues" p.124. Lippmann (1922), himself a journalist, writing about the nature of news states, "before a series of events become news they have usually to make themselves noticeable in some more or less overt act. Generally too, in a crudely overt act" (p.339). And, he says, something definite with unmistakable form must occur whether it be a fire or a well known citizen expressing an opinion. "The course of events must assume a certain definable shape, and until it is in a phase where some aspect is an accomplished fact, news does not separate itself from the ocean of possible truth" (p.340).

In a much quoted passage Lippmann expounds his "obtrusion" theory of the news. He states:

In the first instance, therefore, the news is not a mirror of social conditions, but the report of an aspect that has obtruded itself. The news does not tell you how the seed is germinating in the ground, but it may tell you what somebody says is happening to the seed under ground. It may tell you that the sprout did not come up at the time it was expected. The more points, then, at which any happening can be fixed, objectified, measured, named, the more points there are at which the news can occur (p.341).

Edelstein *et al* (1989) state Lippmann's theory sees the news media scanning the environment (as would radar or sonar impulses) for these obtrusions, "which revealed themselves as news blips" on a journalistic screen. The more some events stuck out because of their character, the more likely they would show up as news blips on the journalistic screen.

Theory about the nature of news by Norwegian social scientists Galtung and Ruge (1965) also influenced the development of Edelstein *et al's* (1989) cognitive theory of the news based around problematic situations. Galtung and Ruge selected the metaphor of an enormous set of broadcasting signals to explain a theory of structuring and selecting news. They state:

The set of world events, then, is like the cacophony of sound one gets by scanning the dial of one's radio receiver, and particularly confusing if this is done on the medium-wave or short-wave dials. Obviously this cacophony does not make sense, it may become meaningful only if one station is tuned in and listened to for some time before one switches on to the next one. Since we cannot register everything, we have to select, and the question is what will strike our attention. This is a problem in the psychology of perception (p.64).

Galtung and Ruge (1965), using the broadcasting signal metaphor and common-sense perception psychology, developed a typology of criteria which has influenced a generation of news media scholarship about the concept of newsworthiness. They state that:

events become news to the extent that they satisfy the conditions of frequency, threshold, absolute intensity, intensity increase, unambiguity, meaningfulness, cultural proximity, relevance, consonance, predictability, demand, unexpectedness, unpredictability, scarcity, continuity, composition, reference to elite people, reference to elite nations, reference to persons and reference to something negative (p.68).

These factors are not independent of each other and inter-relations exist between them. Some appear on the surface to be contradictory but the complex interplay between them and the criteria operating together dilute possible ambiguities in the definition of newsworthiness. Most importantly, state Galtung and Ruge (1965), "the more events satisfy the criteria mentioned, the more likely that they will be registered as news" (p.68). The typology has strongly influenced scholarship of "newsworthiness." Researchers (Chibnall, 1978; Tiffen, 1989) have restated news values by either reducing the number of criteria or using different descriptors, but Galtung and Ruge's original thesis has not been substantially challenged.

Edelstein *et al* (1989) acknowledge that the production of news is part of a process of information gathering and processing that is carried out in a broad social context which fits with the social construction of reality perspective of news. They state that "structural, technological, and social forces impinge on the work of the journalist" (p.124).

## 17.5 Distinguishing the cognitive theory of the news

Edelstein *et al* (1989) also clearly differentiate their cognitive theory of the news and the testing of it by content analysis from traditional news media scholarship using content analysis methodology. Typically the majority of news media content analyses describe topical content. For example, researchers have examined how much crime news is published or broadcast over a given period and the nature of the crime news. These studies can be considered "commonsense" means of categorizing news. Topical coding systems see news content placed into descriptive categories such as economics, crime, foreign relations, domestic policies, the environment, health education and so on. Edelstein *et al* (1965) state:

These labels or topics typically have reflected as much the "location" or the "environment" of a story as its meaning, a "classification by convenience" that created its own limitations. It should have been no surprise to editors that stories classified under different topical headings often contained similar dynamics, and that stories that were topically the same reflected different dynamics (p.96).

In general, content analyses employing topical coding report the percentages of news stories appearing in each topical category. For example, crime news in New Zealand's five metropolitan newspapers in June 1992 represented 16.44% of the "hard" news content (McGregor, 1993). Edelstein *et al* (1989) report that the American Society of Newspaper Editors discovered the inherently subjective nature of topical categorization when they reviewed a study that looked into the ways in which editors, reporters and readers categorized news topically and found substantial areas of disagreement. "Whereas editors might classify a story as "economics", reporters thought it smacked of "politics" (p.96). Edelstein *et al* (1989) state:

However, readers were not classifying content on these lofty planes; rather the stories were subjecting them to a number of anxieties, including a sense of uncertainty about their ability to make intelligent budgeting decisions based on the outcomes of economic policies. It became quite clear that similarly designated topics incorporated a broad variety of meanings and behavioral consequences. Few stories reflected a single, unambiguous stimulus (p.96).

The limitations of topical coding in content analysis fit the wider conceptual, methodological and epistemological criticisms made by numerous news media scholars about quantitative content analysis of news media texts (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1991; Hackett, Gilsdorf & Savage, 1992). The debate about content analytical techniques in news media research has been rich and multi-layered. Part of the dialogue has taken place in the context of theoretical and epistemological discussion between supporters of quantitative versus supporters of qualitative methodologies in communications research. A succinct description and summary of the limitations of each methodology with reference to relevant scholarship is provided by Ericson *et al*, themselves news media researchers who have employed a combination of research approaches in their own analysis of crime, law and justice in the news media.

At another level those researchers actually employing content analytical techniques in news media research and reporting their results are increasingly detailing justifications and rationales for the methodologies employed (Miljan, 1992). For example, in the Canadian context, an ideological tussle, marked by the public hostility of protagonists towards one another, is revealed in the special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Communication* entitled "Questioning Balance: Struggles Over Broadcasting Policies and Content". Supporters of, and researchers at, the National Media Archive and their critics eschew the academic tradition of criticism in the abstract in their debate about content analysis methodologies used by the archive to examine major public policy issues. In one section of the journal entitled "lies, damn lies and scholarly critique" three researchers who question the conceptual and epistemological basis of the archive's work are accused of misquoting, over simplification and misrepresentation. More typically, however, the scholarly debate over quantitative content analysis is less personal and more sedate.

For this discussion the aspect of the debate over content analysis which is relevant concerns categorization. Hackett, Gilsdorf and Savage (1992) state:

..we must recognize that content analysis is limited to and by the choices researchers make about categories, and by the degree to which they select and treat the material systematically. Like other efforts to quantify and "scientize" human behavioural and communication

processes, content analysis tends to mask the degree of interpretation present and to disguise the inevitable influence created by the intervention of the researcher (p.19).

And Ericson *et al* (1991) who acknowledge "quantitative content analysis is a valuable means of revealing patterns in news content" (p.50) state that the methodology is restricted to what can be quantified and it often results in a rather "barren counting of repetition without adequate attention to its significance" (p.51). They state, "In studies where there is no effort to theorize the significance of what is being counted, quantitative content analysis ends up as no more than "repetition speculation" (p.51). As Major (1992) states, in relation to most descriptive content analysis using topical coding, "what these studies do not report is how journalists translate news topics, that is, if and how journalists define topics as problematic situations for readers" (p.601).

This study aims to rectify the omission of descriptive content analysis employing traditional topical categories by examining problematic situations in news stories published in newspapers during the election campaign. This examination is the basis of the following four chapters, Chapters 18-21.

Kepplinger (1989) proposed that the mass media have the most impact on public consciousness when they "engage in the construction of topics as problematic situations" (p.279). Interpretive content analysis utilising problematic situations, as opposed to descriptive content analysis, allows an examination of the performance of journalists in their role as analyzers of social problems rather than simply describers of social problems. This matches the journalists' perception of their own role. While New Zealand data is unavailable as to how journalists perceive their role, Weaver and Wilhoit's (1986) research showed that a majority of 1,001 American journalists in their sample believed that their principal role in news construction was "interpretive". My own experience as a reporter and an editor confirms the belief by journalists that their role is to interpret and evaluate in addition to describing the news.

This self perception is bound up in the generalized view journalists have of the news media's role in the democratic process, such as acting on behalf of citizens as watchdogs of politicians and political institutions. To fulfil such a role, particularly surveillance

of the political scene and holding officials to account for the exercise of power, requires something more than a passive, descriptive reportorial role. The available New Zealand scholarship confirms that some specialist reporters are practising an interpretive role. For example, Saunders (1992), talking about his environmental reporting in New Zealand provincial newspaper reveals an interpretive and analytical focus for his work. He states:

I believe the best approach is to weigh up all the facts, then attempt to draw a line through the confusing signals towards an outcome, or even an unanswered question. The voice will be the first person, suggesting 'this is the way I see it', and the readership will hopefully appreciate having someone else sort out what it all means (p.215).

Harvey (1992) and Morrison and Tremewan (1992), too, acknowledge the myth of objectivity in news reporting in the New Zealand context. They also signal an interpretive role for reporters, both in terms of what journalists *are* doing and what they *should* be doing.

## 17.6 The 1993 general election as a problematic situation

The news media define for the electorate the problems and issues faced by society. But as Major (1992) points out:

the media's construction of the political spectacle remains problematic particularly if voters are seeking information to resolve or better understand social problems when, for the most part, research examining election press coverage indicates that the campaign "horse race", "hoopla" and strategy are highlighted instead of analyses of campaign issues (p.600).

The 1993 general election context represents a number of problems including the matrix of interconnected social, economic and political problems which elections are fought around, and leadership and candidate conflicts. By utilising content analysis framed around the problematic situation the research yields greater insight into how issues were defined for the electorate by the news media. Were they defined problematically by reference to conditions of discrepancy such as **loss of value**? The election campaign

process, with the creation of a manifesto and party policy and the differentiation between parties and candidates in terms of political platforms, are all, to varying degrees, constructed to provide solutions to problems, in addition to explicating the problems. But were issues defined in campaign news in terms of moving towards solutions? Issues are also defined by politicians with the aims of achieving advantage over political opponents and of establishing credibility as the politician with the right answer to the problem. All of these campaign scenarios were reported by the news media. The use of a more sophisticated content analysis protocol in this study allowed us to see whether journalists were using the problematic situation in election reporting to interpret the "problem of the problem".

Analysing the news in this way provided a number of points of reference from which to discuss the function of the news in political communication and the role of the news media in a democracy. If insights could be revealed about if, and how, journalists defined campaign issues or topics as problematic situations for readers then this extends news media scholarship beyond descriptive accounts of election coverage.

The content analysis, then, tests Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of the problematic situation of media content by examining metropolitan newspaper coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election and allows for comparison with Major's (1992) study of the 1988 United States and French presidential elections which utilised Edelstein *et al's* theory. In the following chapter, Chapter 18, a broad and general rationale for the use of content analysis in news media scholarship is established. Methods of minimising the limitations of the technique are discussed. The procedures of content analysis in general are described and the chapter explores previous content analysis which has utilised the problematic situation. Chapter 19 outlines the specific methodology employed in this study, Chapter 20 describes the results of the research, and discussion and analysis of the results follow in Chapter 21. The final chapter examines the role of political journalism in a democracy and outlines potential reforms for improving the performance of the press.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: CONTENT ANALYSIS AND THE PROBLEMATIC SITUATION

### 18.1 Introduction

A research rationale for using content analysis in news media scholarship is advanced in this chapter and content analysis as a methodology and its procedures are discussed. Ways of minimising the limitations of the methodology are referred to and the chapter concludes by examining previous studies which have employed content analysis to examine the concept of the problematic situation in the news. Content analysis is referred to in general terms only in this chapter. Its specific application in the 1993 general election study is referred to in the following chapter, Chapter Nineteen: Content Analysis Methodology.

### 18.2 Why content analysis?

Lichty and Bailey (1978) state that the "news" is so pervasive and commonplace that many of the public assume they know what is there. The scientific study of news content requires the use of content analysis methodology because a viewer, reader or listener's selective exposure, perception and recall make it impossible for the news consumer to have a broad and accurate overview of all that is on the news. Lichty and Bailey state, "people tend to over-generalize from what they do see and remember" and that "we analyze the content of news because a valid and reliable study is sharply different from casual watching" (p.112).

Stempel (1989) states that content analysis is a "formal system for doing something that we all do informally rather frequently, drawing conclusions from observations of content" (p.125). He states that members of the public advance opinions about the adequacy of coverage by different news media based on personal observations and that important social issues, such as the coverage of elections, "are too important to be

resolved on the basis of people's impressions" (p.125). He states that, "the place of content analysis in communication research is indicated by the following paradigm for communication research:

*Who says what to whom with what effect" (p.125).*

Content analysis is now one of the most frequently used communications research methodologies (Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989). Its use in communications research has been prompted by the development and sophistication of new conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and by statistical advances and improved technology enabling the use of computers for data analysis. This allows researchers to adhere to procedures which have been both elaborately defined and refined, and to explore a wide range of research questions. In addition, a rich vein of scholarship exists examining qualitative and quantitative content analytical methodologies and comparing the merits of the two (Ericson *et al*, 1991). This debate has been held in the context of a wider epistemological controversy over qualitative and quantitative methodologies. For example, Jensen and Jankowski (1991) talk of qualitative research in communication as a neglected area of study and espouse the "qualitative turn" (p.1) in their handbook. Berger and Chafee (1987) in their handbook of communication science talk of "unspecified qualitative techniques" (p.18), and imply that quantitative methods are superior to qualitative ones to ground general or predictive theory. The academic debate which has tended to pitch qualitative and quantitative methodologies against each other as mutually exclusive options overlooks what Tuchman (1991) describes as the "old rule" of research, "the method one should choose when approaching any topic, including news, depends upon the question one wants to answer" (p.79). And, in studies such as this, the content analysis protocol includes elements of both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

Ericson *et al* (1991) state:

Traditionally there has been a distinction between quantitative content analysis, which seeks to show patterns or irregularities in content through repetition, and

qualitative content analysis which emphasizes the fluidity of text and content in the interpretive understanding of culture. Each of these approaches has strengths and limitations (p.50).

And Stempel (1989) observes that "there has been the recurring suggestion that content analyses should be qualitative rather than quantitative. This suggestion has incorrectly assumed that these were mutually exclusive" (p.126). He states that those who have suggested the supremacy of qualitative content analysis have criticised published studies of content for lack of depth and meaning but that such criticism may well be an indictment of a study which fails to be systematic as opposed to quantitative. And, states Stempel, "those who advocate qualitative rather than quantitative content analysis also seem to overlook what would be lost in meaning if a study were not quantitative" (p.126).

### 18.3 Definition of content analysis

The classic and most widely accepted definition of content analysis is that provided by Berelson in 1952. He states, "content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (p.18).

The key elements in this definition recognised by Stempel (1989) and Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) are *objective, systematic, quantitative, manifest content*. Not all of these elements are unproblematic. Kaid and Wadsworth state, "the need for objectivity has been rarely questioned by content analysts. It is well accepted that the lack of bias is an inherent characteristic of any specific research methodology" (p.198). Stempel states that objective means the opposite of subjective and that "objectivity is achieved by having the categories of analysis defined so precisely that different persons can apply them to the same content and get the same results" and that the results "depend upon the procedure and not the analyst" (p.125).

While the need for objectivity in content analysis is acknowledged for the purposes of this research, the concept of objectivity is adopted cautiously in this study on the basis that the reality of analysing the news means that the reader in his or her own setting gives the news significance according to circumstances, the time of reading and individual circumstances. Essentially this process is inherently subjective, while the structures, processes and protocols of content analysis strive to be objective. Stempel's (1989) hard and fast distinction between the procedure and the analyst in content analysis results needs to be refined by theorists examining content analysis methodology. Not all communications researchers have been so emphatic about the notion of objectivity. Molotch and Lester (1974) suggest, for example, in relation to intercoder reliability that there is no such thing because each individual enjoys a unique observational world. They state:

Our coders are competent social members, each of whom has a world as valid as any other. The intervention of such coders' worlds into the coding process is a fact which must be acknowledged, not obscured through assertions of objective intercoder reliability (p.240-1).

This fits with the notion of news as socially constructed and as an interpreted text. Ericson *et al* (1991) state that "people in various settings at different settings at different times give it (the news) significance according to their circumstances and their selves" (p.53). But the research is premised on the view that there *is* an important distinction between informal reading of the news and a scientific study of news content employing content analysis methodology used by researchers trained to bring to their analysis a common frame of reference. The study uses quantitative and qualitative elements of content analysis to overcome all the difficulties attached to impressionistic studies of the news.

There *is* agreement about the need to be systematic and apply consistent criteria in a rigorous and methodical way. Stempel (1989) states:

*Systematic* means, first, that a set procedure is applied in the same way to all the content being analyzed. Second, it means that categories are set up so that all relevant content is analyzed. Finally, it means that the analyses are designed to secure data relevant to a research question or a hypothesis (p.125).

Holsti (1969) has added the need for *generality* to the need for *objective* and *systematic* inquiry. He argues that simple descriptions of content are of limited use without the drawing out of relationships and comparisons based on theoretical concerns. Holsti's objection is to content analysis which produces "shopping list" data without the procedure also yielding some relationship among the topics.

The two most contested notions in Berelson's (1952) definition are those of *quantification* and *manifest content*. Krippendorff (1980), for example, employs a definition of content analysis which, while it accepts the need for the procedure to be objective and systematic, challenges the manifest content and quantification concepts. He defines content analysis as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (p.21).

Krippendorff (1980) suggests the context in which the content exists needs to be considered and also that communication is symbolic content originating from a source and from which a receiver draws inferences. The difficulty of exhibiting concern for "inferences" and for looking at the intent or motives of the communicator have been referred to by Holsti (1969) and Stempel (1989). Stempel asks whether objectivity can be maintained if manifest content is abandoned. He states:

The content analyst after all is at this point injecting a subjective interpretation. While he or she may feel that it is an obviously correct interpretation, whether or not others will see the situation in the same terms is another matter. If other coders do not agree, then obviously the criterion of two persons getting the same results when applying the categories to the same content will not be met (p.126).

And Stempel (1989) states that while some researchers have reservations about taking content at its face value, "the concern, however, probably can be dealt with more effectively by interpreting the results accordingly than by giving up on manifest content" (p.126). This research adopts Stempel's position and uses manifest content as the basis to describe and explain the nature of news content and to theorize about its significance in relation to Edelstein *et al's* (1989) "testable" theory of the news based on the cognitive construct of the problematic situation.

The other challenge to the traditional definition of content analysis is whether content analysis must be a quantitative undertaking. Holsti (1969) states that there is a strong case for content analysis based on exact counts of frequency because quantification introduces a degree of precision of the conclusions and, as Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) suggest, "permits a more accurate description of covariance between elements" (p.199). But Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) do acknowledge that there is no easy resolution to the debate about quantification and they suggest the assumption that counting is the only way to characterise communication content may seem unreasonable. The major objection is, of course, that the importance of a particular item of content may outweigh its frequency. While quantification may guard against a researcher substituting novelty for importance, the analyst who simply counts may not completely describe the content and may not correlate content with communication effects. The controversy about manifest content and quantification is related to the general limitations of content analysis which are outlined in the following section.

#### **18.4 Overcoming the limitations of content analysis as a methodology**

The basic limitation of quantitative content analysis is that it can only deal with what has been disseminated or published. Other methodologies need to be used if the research purpose is to provide insights into news selection processes and why some news which is written is not published and why some events are not selected as news at all. So while participant observation as a methodology may provide insights as to

why a particular news story was selected for publication, content analysis can only be utilised post publication.

In the contemporary New Zealand context this limitation may be of minimal effect. A feature of the lack of investment in journalism in this country is that newspaper "news tasting" has subtly altered. Fewer reporting staff and cutbacks in newsroom resources means news editors and chief reporters and others who manage the news gathering processes cannot afford to assign reporters to stories which will not be published. Currently almost all copy produced by reporters is published rendering old research models of gatekeeping in the news obsolete. The significance of the selection process now lies at first instance with the assigning of journalists to cover stories, rather than at some later point in the processing of news. When nearly all the news that is covered is published, editing becomes a series of choices about "where" in the newspaper, and "how" it will be presented, not "if" the story will make it at all. Only the larger metropolitan newspapers, such as the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Christchurch Press*, are likely to be exercising selection policies which see some news gathered but not published.

The second limitation is that quantitative content analysis is limited to what can be quantified. As Ericson *et al* (1991) state:

This limitation leads to a concentration on aspects that are simple, measurable, and subject to standardization. Important dimensions are likely to be overlooked. Instead of searching for the anomaly and focusing upon its significance, the researcher looks no further than what his or her predefined categories have told him or her to see (p.51).

These limitations are perhaps most apparent when researchers adopt a topical approach to categorizing news by labelling it in descriptive terms such as "economics, energy housing, crime", and so forth. In reality, as Edelstein *et al* (1989) suggest, this description is something of a "classification by convenience" as "the labels or topics

typically have reflected as much the "location" or the "environment" of a story as its meaning" (p.96). One way of overcoming the limitation inherent in the descriptive approach is to adopt a more delicate methodology which is interpretive and to search for a "meaning" rather than merely a topical approach.

A second method of reducing the limitations of quantitative content analysis is to take up Ericson *et al's* (1991) challenge about "theorizing the significance" of what is being counted. They state:

In studies where there is no effort to theorize the significance of what is being counted, quantitative content analysis ends up as no more than 'repetition speculation'....This is not to say that quantitative content analysts are precluded from theorizing about the significance of what they count, as more sophisticated research has shown (p.51-52).

This study aims to test Edelstein's theory of the problematic situation of media content by examining New Zealand metropolitan newspaper coverage of the 1993 general election which provides an opportunity to theorize about the significance of the results. In using problematic rather than topical categories of news the research examines how journalists translate news topics, and if, and how, journalists define topics in an election campaign context as problematic situations for readers.

The basic limitations of qualitative content analysis relate to the fluidity of the approach. In qualitative content analysis the role of the content analyst is akin to that of a literary critic. The text itself contains interpretations which themselves must be interpreted (Carey, 1979). News media researchers employ qualitative content analysis because, as

Ericson *et al* (1991) state, "the news media are too ubiquitous to be isolated from the flow of events and portrayed exclusively in quantitative terms" (p.61). Geertz (1983) states:

The great virtue of the extension of the notion of a text beyond things written on paper... is that it trains attention precisely on this phenomenon: on how the inscription of action is brought about, what its vehicles are and how they work, and on what the fixation of meaning from the flow of events...implies...(p.31).

Two difficulties can arise from the approach. The first concerns the rigour of the approach. And the second is whose 'preferred readings' will prevail. Both of these are discussed in turn. As Ericson *et al* (1991) state, "the dimensions of openness and sensitivity in qualitative content analysis foster discovery, but not always solid evidence and analytical rigour" (p.58).

They state that all readings even those by content analysts of the news are "subjective and speculative, particular and relative". Ericson *et al* argue these analysts:

...have to take the part for the whole, and the question becomes what they will fill in the blanks with. In this respect, qualitative content analysis is in the realm of literary and textual criticism, with attendant debates about the proper procedures for reading texts and which readings seem preferable. These debates centre upon 'preferred readings' and whose preferences win out, i.e., which readers are able to convince others that their readings are preferable and that these other should join them (p.58).

The question of analytical rigour is to some degree a question of process which can be minimised with careful selection of coders and with a thorough explanation by the researcher of what understandings inform the analysis. For example, Ericson *et al* (1991) clearly state that in understanding a cross-section of news items it is necessary to understand how that content is made by the various participants and in their case they have such an awareness as a result of previous detailed ethnographies conducted by the group in 1987 and 1989 of source and news organizations. In this case the level of understanding by the researcher which contributes to the rigour of the analysis comes from previous studies of New Zealand news content (McGregor & Melville, 1993; McGregor 1993; McGregor & Comrie, 1995) and from twenty years experience as a

journalist. The content analyst should be able to minimise difficulties attached to 'preferred readings' by demonstrating the evidence on which the 'preferred reading' is based and convincing others that the data is systematic and that the findings are generalizable, and this is the approach taken in this study. The research adopts, too, the position of Ericson *et al's* (1991) on qualitative content analysis which is that, "Qualitative-content researchers do not exalt the reality of interpretive pluralism-particularism, subjectivism, idealism, relativism-but they do take pluralism seriously as a matter worthy of interpretive description and analysis" (p.58).

## **18.5 Content analysis procedures**

Stempel (1989) states that a "successful content analysis study is the result of a series of good decisions" (p.136). The process starts with clear research questions.

Following the definition of the research questions a content analysis study involves at least four methodological problems. These are:

1. deciding on the unit of analysis,
2. the construction of categories,
3. selecting the sample to be analysed,
4. coding and the attendant reliability and validity issues.

Each of these procedural steps will be described generally in this section and then dealt with in the following chapter, Chapter Nineteen, in relation to their specific application in this research.

### **18.5.1 Selecting the unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis chosen by the content analyst for study depends on what is being researched. The unit of analysis must relate to the purpose of the study. News media

scholarship has encompassed units of analysis ranging from a single word as the smallest unit, through statements, sentences, paragraphs to stories. In studies of television entire programmes have been selected as a large unit of analysis (Guback, 1962; Topping & Lichty, 1971). Krippendorff (1980) suggests five ways of defining a unit; (a) a physical unit such as a book, time or pages, (b) a syntactical unit such as a sentence or word, (c) a referential unit such as objects to which the unit refers, (d) a propositional unit by which sentences and other units are redesigned for analysis and (e) a thematic unit such as recurring elements. Lichty and Bailey (1978) suggest in relation to television news that "in most cases the 'story' as a unit is most logical and useful" (p.117).

Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) state that closely related to the unit of analysis is the way in which quantification is accomplished for each category and unit. Holsti (1969) has called this the *unit of enumeration*. It may be a simple frequency count or noting the presence or absence of the classifications of a category. A weighting or measure of intensity might accompany the unit of enumeration. For example, coders asked to rank whether the tone of a story is positive, might be asked to use a scale indicating the degree of positiveness. The unit of analysis used in this research is described in 19.3 in the next chapter.

### 18.5.2 Selecting the sample

In selecting the sample the basic concern is, as Stempel (1989) suggests, to ensure the "sample represents the population that it is intended to represent" (p.130). Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) state that "one must devise a method of obtaining a sample which is (1) representative of the universe from which it comes and (2) of sufficient size to adequately represent that universe" (p.201).

Random sampling and stratified random sampling techniques are often used in content analysis by communication researchers. But as Lichty and Bailey (1978) suggest, "under appropriate circumstances, an alternative to random sampling or stratified random

sampling is to take all the newscasts from entire selected weeks" (p.115). They suggest if the subject matter is shortlived examining the entire period is much better than attempting to sample. Some studies have examined month-long episodes, such as political conventions and examine consecutive days throughout an entire period rather than sampling.

The sample chosen is described and figuratively displayed in the following chapter at 19.4.

### 18.5.3 Deciding on categories

Category construction is one of the most time-consuming and exacting tasks in content analysis. Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) state "no step in content analysis is more crucial than the formulation of categories" (p.203). The concepts contained in the research questions of the study must be reflected in the categories formulated. Stempel (1989) states "categories must be pertinent to the objectives of your study" and says the "simple test" of whether or not they are "is whether or not the information they yield will answer the research questions of the study or permit the testing of the hypotheses of the study" (p.128).

Like category formulation in other research the categories should be *mutually exclusive* and *exhaustive*. Kaid and Wadsworth (1989) state that "however, in practice, the necessity for exhaustive or exclusive categories may not always be essential to answer a particular research question" (p.203).

Categories in content analysis can be of two basic types, substance categories (what is said) and form categories (how it is said), according to Berelson (1952). Stempel (1989) says that categories should be "functional" and that the "system of categories must be manageable" (p.128). This is "mostly a matter of limiting the number of categories" (p.129). As Stempel states "it is easy to become fascinated with all the possible categories and in the process forget about what it is that you set out to do" (p.129). The specific categories formulated in this research are outlined in 19.5 in the following chapter.

#### 18.5.4 Coding and reliability issues

Communications researchers using content analysis because it is *systematic* and *objective* need to be concerned with reliability. Stempel (1989) states that "by reliability we mean simply consistency of clarification" (p.132). Krippendorff (1980) suggests three forms of reliability exist. These are; (1) stability, meaning that the same results could be produced at a future date, (2) reproducibility, meaning that the process yields what it is designed to yield as decided by a panel of experts, and (3) intercoder reliability which is usually assessed by a number of coders independently coding the same data using the same coding sheet. Lichty and Bailey (1977) state the most commonly used measure of inter-coder reliability is:

..simply the average percent of agreement in the content conclusions of the coders. The number of decisions on which coders agree is divided by the total number of coding decisions. Agreement on 80 per cent of the coding decisions is widely used as an acceptable minimum level of inter-coder reliability (p.124).

Intercoder reliability is insisted on as a fundamental bedrock of content analysis by communication research theorists (Stempel, 1989; Kaid & Wadsworth, 1989) and is the most commonly assessed measure of reliability in content analysis. But it is worth noting that alternative perspectives to that expressed by Stempel exist on the concept of intercoder reliability in content analysis. These alternative perspectives have been expressed in the sophisticated analysis of Ericson *et al* (1991) who state:

The reality of reading the news is that people in various settings at different times give it significance according to their circumstances and their selves. The news fosters pluralism, varying opinion, and different uses, in different settings. This approach is the antithesis of that taken by researchers in most quantitative content analyses, which involve a methodological construction of consensus through prolonged discussion that culminates in forcing everyone either to 'see it this way' or to not see it at all. The failure of quantitative-content analysts to accept the reality of how texts are a matter of consumers' contexts means that their analyses are not only reified but fictive (p.53).

More specifically, they cite Molotch and Lester (1974), referred to earlier in this chapter, who dispute the reality of inter coder reliability on the basis of the essential subjectivity of each coder's world.

While acknowledging the concept of consumers' contexts and the plurality of the news, this study adheres to the traditional insistence on inter-coder and intracoder reliability in quantitative content analysis for three reasons. First, if the argument about the intrinsic subjectivity of human involvement in research methodology was taken to its extreme *all* scholarship, not just quantitative content analysis, would need to be restated in terms of the continuum between objectivity and subjectivity. Second, adherence to time-honoured insistence on reliability and validity minimises the pitfalls of an impressionistic study. As Lacy and Riffe (1993) suggest:

the real advantage of quantitative content analysis is the ability to measure the level of reliability for coding definitions used in the project. If this is not done, data from content analyses are no more or less reliable and valid than data a person would derive by reading the content and reporting her impressions. All content analyses should report intercoder and intracoder reliability levels to show that the instrument is consistent across coders and time....The research must report reliability figures before other scholars can take the study seriously (p.129).

Third, the testing and refining of theory about the news media rests in part on comparing and replicating other studies. This can only be done if reliability and validity measures are transparent. The results of the reliability tests conducted in this research are discussed in 19.6 in the following chapter.

## 18.6 Previous content analysis utilising the problematic situation

Major (1992) states that research examining the mass media's construction of problematic situations is relatively recent. Edelstein *et al* (1989) developed a content analysis procedure for examining media constructions of problematic situations. They analysed newspapers for a six month period between November and April. In the cross cultural study, two German newspapers, a politically liberal national daily newspaper, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and the more conservative *Allgemeine Zeitung* of Mainz were analysed along with the *Seattle Times* and *Post-Intelligencer* in Washington State. The *Yomiuri News* and *Mainichi Times* in Japan and the *South China Morning Post*, the largest circulating English language newspaper, and the *Oriental News*, the Chinese-language newspaper with the largest circulation in Hong Kong, were the other newspapers surveyed in the international study.

Edelstein *et al* (1989) addressed "both topics in the news and the meaning of news as defined by problematic situations" (p.107). They state the data they collected allowed them to assess the overall array of problematic situations in the news, their distribution by topics, the relationship of headlines to story content and cross cultural similarities and differences. The study saw 24 coding decisions made for each issue of the newspaper. The six most prominent stories beginning on page one were sampled over a constructed week-long publishing cycle. The headlines and the first three paragraphs of each story were classified separately to compare the thrust of the headlines with the content of the story.

Their newspaper study was based on a formal scheme of problematic situations that included seven conditions of discrepancy referred to in Chapter Seventeen--**loss of value, need for value, institutional breakdown, social conflict, indeterminate situation, steps towards solution and blocking**. In operationalizing their content analysis they added three categories: **the consequences of problem solving incorporating both positive and negative consequences, implications for problematic situations and denial of problematic situations**. They state that, "in adopting our

category 'implications for problematic situations' we were able to code *all* news stories in *all* newspapers" (p.111).

The results showed that more than three quarters of the stories referred to problematic situations. Across the four cultures the researchers found similarities in the portrayal of problematic situations and "there was far less portrayal of conflict than would be supposed from a perspective of media criticism" (p.111) and all the media devoted a "great deal of attention to problem solving". Cultural differences were also observed and while a high degree of fidelity was found between headlines and stories in the United States newspapers a great variation was found in the German newspapers. The sweep of Edelstein *et al's* (1989) study allows New Zealand research, using similar categories and methodology, to be compared with both European and American examples.

Edelstein *et al* (1989) also reviewed their data to see if "they could address such concepts as good and bad news and intellectual imperialism" (p.125). Both concepts are frequently the subject of media criticism in the international environment. Edelstein *et al* concluded that:

We concluded that good and bad news could be defined from several cognitive perspectives but that evaluations of this kind were subjective. Cognitive aspects of news also fitted into the debate over intellectual imperialism. Western democratic cognitive processes, particularly those that are openly portrayed, run counter to cognitive strategies of both style and substance that are pursued in Third World and socialist countries (p.125).

The relevance of the good news/bad news debate has been particularly apparent in the New Zealand context in relation to the reporting of race, minorities and gender issues, so again there is utility in exploring the concepts, this time in an election campaign context.

In addition to media content analysis, Edelstein *et al* (1989) conducted research to determine what Kepplinger (1989) described as "the fit of perceptions of problematic situations with respect to media and audiences" (p.280). Edelstein *et al* talked of "media-audience mutuality of definition of the dynamics of news" (p.281). Students in United States, Germany, Japan and Hong Kong were asked to name three important problems and to state which of them was most important to them personally. The problems were first classified topically using conventional categories of media content.

For example, American students at the time of the study were preoccupied primarily by only two problems: economic issues and nuclear arms and war. Edelstein *et al* (1989) provide an illustration of how these "topics" translate into the cognitive dynamics of problematic situations. An American student who cited economic problems said high interest rates were affecting him personally so this item was coded by the researchers as **loss of value**, while the lack of a balanced federal budget and the market system were more broadly conceived of as evidence of **institutional breakdown**. He saw nuclear arms as necessary to maintain a balance of power, but wondered how many nuclear weapons were required. "In raising both the literal and metaphorical question, he described an **indeterminate situation**" (p.75). The plight of Third World countries suffering poverty, hunger and political instability required a "plan of action" so this was coded as a need for **steps toward a solution**.

Edelstein *et al* (1989) state the transformation of topics into problematic situations had the function of assigning *meaning* to topical categories.

By viewing topics as problematics we were able to observe that the *same meanings* occurred with *different topics*, whereas *different meanings* often were associated with the *same topics*. To illustrate, what one person sees as deprivation caused by economic policy will be perceived by another person as economic opportunity (p.83).

An obvious example is, of course, high interest rates noted by the American student as a **loss of value** which may be perceived quite differently by someone else. Problematic situations are therefore varied in their attributions of meaningfulness depending on their cultural and socio-political context. To test Edelstein *et al's* theory of the problematic situation in news, news content needs to be analysed to see if stories are created by journalists who have interpreted issues and topic problematically. If stories are interpreted problematically what conditions of discrepancy are highlighted and how could such knowledge influence the performance of journalists and political sources?

Major's (1992) study of "problematic" situations in press coverage of the 1988 United States and French presidential elections tested Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of the problematic situation of media content. She used the theory as a means for examining how journalists translate campaign issues into problematic situations for their readers. Major states "the use of problematic rather than topical categories provides a means of examining the performance of journalists in their role as analyzers of social problems" (p.601-2). She used a coding scheme for analysing problematic situations based on eight conditions of discrepancy which emerged from categories found in the problem-solving literature. These were **loss of value** where the individual perceives that he or she or society once possessed something that is no longer possessed, **need for value** which arises when the problem is constructed in terms of an individual or social need that must be fulfilled to end a situation of discrepancy. Problems constructed as clashes, disagreements, oppositional stances, or general discord between and among individuals, groups, institutions, or nations were defined as **conflict**. The problematic situation defined as an **indeterminate situation** arises when the situation of discrepancy is ambiguous, when there is uncertainty associated with the problem.

The notion of **blocking** (Major, 1992) refers to the problematic situation wherein an individual, group or nation has been working towards a goal and some actor or set of circumstances interrupts progress toward the goal. And when proposals are outlined or demands are raised that propose solutions to the problem, the problematic situation is defined as **steps towards solution**. When an individual or a group denies that a

problem exists, or denies wrongdoing or incompetence, then this results in **denial of a problematic situation**.

Major (1992) states, "in a campaign situation, the 'denial' construction often results when one candidate denies having failed to accomplish a previously stated promise" (p.603). The eighth problematic situation used by Major was **consequences of earlier solutions** which refers to goals that have been reached to solve a problem and the evaluation of those earlier solutions.

Major (1992) applied the problematic coding scheme to press coverage of the presidential election as a means of examining how the news media constructed the meaning of campaign issues and whether or not the media merely provide topical coverage of campaign issues by mentioning issues without a problematic situation. She states, "Although previous election coverage findings have suggested that a predominant focus of coverage is the campaign 'horse race', these findings may have resulted from the use of topical coding procedures" (p.603). Major states her study assumes that Edelstein *et al's* (1989) problematic coding scheme will result in a more comprehensive approach to examining journalistic issue definition.

In operationalizing her use of a problematic coding scheme Major (1992) first identified the number and proportion of issue references in the news media coverage using a typology of 32 campaign issues ranging from abortion to welfare. These issue references were then looked at in terms of whether or not they were covered problematically using the conditions of discrepancy previously recognised. An example of the methodology used is a coder considering whether a story on a rise in taxes for higher income earners, for example, was reported as a *loss of value* for an individual or group of individuals or whether it was reported unproblematically. Major examined each story in her source material of newspapers and news magazines to see if the identified campaign issue which formed the topic of the story was defined by the reporter as a problem or not. If a campaign issue such as crime or economic policy was mentioned in a news story in relation to either the French or United States presidential

elections without providing any problematic interpretation of it, then the issue was regarded as having received topical press coverage only and was coded as "no problematic situation."

Up to two different problematic situations were coded for each campaign issue reference. Each campaign issue was recorded only once regardless of the number of times it was mentioned in a story. If a problem was defined with reference to the campaign issue then each coded campaign issue was coded against the eight problematic situation descriptions. In addition, three of the problematic situation categories (**loss of value**, **need for value** and **conflict**) included two categories each, one for individual and the other for societal-level descriptions.

Major (1992) found that over half, 55.3 per cent, of the news stories were defined in terms of a problematic situation in relation to the United States presidential elections and, nearly three quarters, 74.8 per cent, in relation to the French elections. The rankings of problematic situation references for the top five issues in both campaigns were **losses**, **conflict**, **steps to solution** and **needs**.

She states:

This study provides support for the utility of Edelstein's theory of the problematic situation for examining media constructions of election campaigns...The use of the problematic coding scheme does provide evidence that journalists do perform an interpretive role in the construction of mediated political reality (p.610).

The New Zealand study aims to test Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory, compare the New Zealand election campaign with the results of Major's (1992) two election campaign contexts, and theorize about the significance of the findings and the comparisons. Major (1992) suggests the addition of problematic situations codes to traditional topical issue classification schemes "provides insight into the meaning of campaign coverage" (p.611). She states that because some issues are not defined problematically this may provide important political advantages. "The world of issue ambiguity is the politician's haven"

(p.611). Because innovative ideas may be more likely to disqualify aspirants political candidates can shelter in the woods of ambiguity when issues are not defined problematically. Major also suggests the relatively high occurrence of problems defined as **losses** in her study provides some clues as to how candidates might tailor their campaigns. "While the voters were apparently told they had "lost something", politicians were less likely to provide voters with **steps towards solutions** that, if elected, the politicians would supply" (p.611). The New Zealand study will examine Major's suggestion about the implications for political candidates of the definition of campaign issues. It will explore whether or not political advantage does apply to the way in which the journalist interprets the news, if, in fact, an interpretation is evident.

The study reported in Chapters Nineteen to Twenty One follows Major's (1992) use of eight problematic situations, with the addition of three of the problematic situations (i.e. **loss of value**, **need for value**, and **conflict**) described in separate categories for individual and societal-level descriptions. The study takes up Major's point that subsequent applications of Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of problematic situation of news media content to a variety of election contexts will be useful in clarifying how political contexts are reported.

Reading the news utilising the problematic situation tests the theory that news is manufactured by journalists who interpret a situation or set of facts according to the conditions of discrepancy outlined previously. For example, a lack of hospital beds could be reported as an election campaign issue (health) either with reference to a problematic situation (that it represented a **need for value** or a **loss of value** for individual patients or the wider community) or unproblematically. A news story in which no problem is defined could be a descriptive news story that recites in a simple, stenographic manner a series of facts about the number of hospital beds.

Utilisation of the problematic situation moves an explanation of the manufacture of news beyond "working" theories of news (McQuail, 1992) which simply restate the values that journalists assign to news. As Edelstein *et al* (1989) state:

If news values were expressive of a theory, the audiences for news would express their values in similar terms to those of journalists and be guided by the same rules and cognitive values. By contrast, there are numerous criticisms that the world of the journalist does not describe the world of the audiences (p.104).

While this study is confined to journalistic issue definition, Edelstein *et al* (1989) found a correlation between journalistic constructions of general social and economic problems and audience constructions of the same problems across different cultures. Utilisation of a "testable" theory of the news which attempts to explain the nature of news in terms of meaning expands news media scholarship beyond studies which treats the news as a given, the "working" theory of the news. Studies which assume the nature of news and then explore the daily routines and value systems of the news process to answer the question "what is news", are limited by the circularity of approach.

The utility of the theory in the 1993 New Zealand general election context is that it offers the opportunity to explore meaning in the news and for journalists, politicians and news audiences a testable theory of the news may provide indications about the advantages of particular communication strategies. Are journalists interpreting election campaign issues problematically? If so, are specific campaign topics more likely to be presented as problematic situations? What implications does this have for political candidates? Should they embrace conditions of discrepancy, such as aligning themselves to solutions to a problem, to increase or enhance their news media profile or should they take cognisance of Edelman's (1988) caveat that innovative ideas are more likely to disqualify a candidate?

The comparative recency of published research examining the news media's construction of problematic situations creates both possibilities and limitations for this research project. Testing and further developing the theory of news as discrepancy through content analysis provide valuable additional theoretical perspectives about news media content. However, there is not a rich vein of applications of Edelstein's *et al* (1989) theory which confirm the utility of the notion of problematic situations for examining

news media constructions. While Major's (1992) study found support for Edelstein *et al*, the two studies utilised somewhat different categories and were conducted in specific contexts. Subsequent applications of the theory of the problematic situation of news media content in a variety of contexts are clearly necessary. In particular, comparative data which analyse whether election campaigns are reported more problematically by reporters covering politics than non-campaign periods would be particularly useful. It would provide insight into whether journalists bring a special interpretive frame of reference to election campaigns.

The following chapter, Chapter Nineteen, picks up on many of the general points made about content analysis methodology in this chapter, and specifically describes its application in the examination of metropolitan newspaper coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign utilising the problematic situation framework developed by Edelstein *et al* (1989). Linkages are made between the general theory of content analysis and this particular study, which begins with the theory of news as discrepancy and employs a cognitive construct, the problematic situation, to explore meaning in news. Points of differentiation between traditional concepts of content analysis and this study are also noted in the following chapter which describes the particular methodology utilised in the research.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN: CONTENT ANALYSIS METHODOLOGY USED IN THE INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF NEW ZEALAND'S METROPOLITAN PRESS DURING THE 1993 ELECTION CAMPAIGN

### 19.1 Introduction

This study analyses the coverage by New Zealand's elite daily press of the 1993 general election campaign utilising Edelstein's *et al* (1989) interpretive framework of the problematic situation. The five newspapers in Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin provide an aggregate picture of metropolitan coverage across a regional sweep of New Zealand. The study follows at least part of Gitlin's (1980) prescription that, "it remains important to study variation among media (not only networks and newspapers but, importantly, wire services, radio and local television) and among institutions within a single medium (emphasis added)" (p.32).

Stempel (1989) indicates that a successful content analysis study is the result of a series of good decisions and that the process starts with clear research questions. In this case the research questions are:

- (a) did journalists define topics in the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign context as problematic situations for readers?
- (b) if so, what was the distribution of problematic situations?
- (c) what implications for the making of news emerge from an analysis of the journalistic definition of topics in stories?
- (d) what are the implications of the findings for the democratic role of the news media?

The research project was looking to see if journalists frame the news by defining campaign issues which they report in news stories by reference to problematic situations such as **loss of value, conflict, need for value** etc, as discussed in Chapters 17 and 18. This data will provide a platform to examine the implications of such

journalistic definition for political communication and the function of the news media in democratic discourse.

This chapter provides background details about the newspapers used in the study, discusses how the unit of analysis was arrived at and describes the rationale used for selecting the sample. The formulation of categories both for basic identification and for content is described, and coding and reliability issues are addressed. The chapter concludes by examining the projected outcomes of the content analysis.

## 19.2 Profile of newspapers studied

The five newspapers chosen for the study comprise New Zealand's total metropolitan press since the closure of the *Auckland Star* and the *Christchurch Star* in 1991. All five titles are daily newspapers (six times a week) and four are published in the morning, with Wellington's *Evening Post* the only afternoon daily newspaper in the sample. Three of the newspapers, *The Dominion*, published in the capital city, the *Evening Post*, and Christchurch's *The Press*, are owned by Independent Newspapers Limited, whose major shareholder is Rupert Murdoch's News Limited. The other major newspaper company in New Zealand, Wilson and Horton, owns the *New Zealand Herald*. Dunedin's *Otago Daily Times* is the only independently-owned (in the sense of being a non-chain newspaper) metropolitan newspaper in New Zealand.

According to the 1994 edition of *Information about Newspapers* published by the Newspaper Publishers Association of New Zealand, the circulation figures for the metropolitan newspapers are: *New Zealand Herald*, 246,092; *The Dominion*, 66,009; the *Evening Post*, 71,092; *The Press*, 102,066 and the *Otago Daily Times*, 50,260. Only Christchurch's *The Press* is currently experiencing any true circulation growth if annual circulation figures from 1991 are examined. The other mastheads have static or sliding circulations except for periods of promotional campaigns or as a result of new geographical distribution patterns.

The *New Zealand Herald* circulates in a broad urban and rural sweep of the North Island with urban concentration in Auckland, Hamilton, Whangarei and Bay of Plenty. An unstated agreement between Independent Newspapers Limited and Wilson and Horton sees Taupo as the cut-off point for the *New Zealand Herald* going south apart from token numbers of copies into Wellington and elsewhere, and for *The Dominion*, Wellington's morning newspaper going north. *The Dominion* circulates in urban Wellington, Manawatu, Taranaki and Hawke's Bay regions and sends token copies only, flown by air, into Auckland. The *Evening Post* primarily concentrates on the Wellington urban market but since the closure of the *Auckland Star* in 1990 the *Evening Post* has flown several thousand copies daily of its first edition into the Auckland market to be sold at selected retail outlets. This marketing strategy is aimed at filling the vacuum in New Zealand's largest city which no longer has an afternoon metropolitan newspaper of its own. *The Press* stretches into Nelson, Marlborough, the West Coast and mid-Canterbury, but regards Christchurch as its circulation stranglehold. The *Otago Daily Times* is part of Dunedin's historic and cultural identity, and circulates out into Southland and South Otago.

Three of the newspapers, the Independent Newspapers Limited titles, have fully computerised, state-of-the-art newsroom technology with each site linked electronically to one another (as well as other Independent Newspapers Limited newspapers) and to the New Zealand Press Association. All of the newspapers are members of the New Zealand Press Association, a co-operative news agency funded by a circulation-indexed, yearly subscription levy on member newspapers. The New Zealand Press Association acts as the central brokerage of news within and outside New Zealand for the newspaper industry. Member newspapers must file spot news around the clock to contribute to the newsgathering process and as Sanders (1979) states, to "surmount the obstacles of space, time, language and money in order to bring news of the world, of New Zealand and of neighbouring towns to readers" (p.v.). Membership of the New Zealand Press Association by the five metropolitan newspapers analysed raises the issue of the homogeneity of political news reported. However, during election campaigns reporters from individual newspapers, often located as journalists in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, traditionally go on the campaign trail with major party leaders and provide much of the political journalism.

Particular characteristics of the newspaper industry in New Zealand have implications for political journalism. The industry is duopolistic and is characterised by aggregation of ownership (Wilson and Horton and Independent Newspapers Limited each own forty five per cent of New Zealand's metropolitan circulation). In addition to aggregation of ownership there is increasing overseas ownership of both chains. Independent Newspapers Limited has Rupert Murdoch's News Limited as a major shareholder. And at the time of writing, the second chain, Wilson and Horton, was subject of an acrimonious tussle with Brierley Investments Limited, whose previous asset stripping of newspaper interests and management style contributed to the eventual closures of the *Auckland Star* and the *Christchurch Star* newspapers. Brierley Investments Limited sold its 28 per cent stake in Wilson and Horton in May 1995 to American-based Irishman, Dr Tony O'Reilly's Independent Press, a joint venture between O'Reilly and Ireland's Independent Newspapers of which he is chairman and chief executive. This has compounded the trend towards overseas ownership of New Zealand newspapers and the founding Wilson and Horton families are likely to lose effective management control to the Irish interests.

While the two trends of concentration of ownership of newspaper interests and increased level of overseas ownership are not confined to New Zealand, unlike many countries, the aggregation of the press appears to be a non-policy area in New Zealand. McGregor (1992) notes that the concentration of ownership in fewer hands has been paralleled by a dilution of legislative restraints on newspaper ownership as the Commerce Act, relating to mergers and acquisitions, has been progressively amended and watered down. The freeing up of legislative control is in keeping with the *laissez faire* economic policies of successive New Zealand Governments since the 1980s and the spirit of deregulated markets.

Systematic research is needed about the relationship between the two levels of control within news organisations, that of the operational control by editors and newsroom managers and of the higher level, allocative control by owners. For the purpose of this study though it is worth noting that the metropolitan newspapers studied can be categorised as generally conservative in outlook and with no overt, declared party political allegiances. However, during the 1993 general election, on the question of whether New Zealand should embrace proportional representation, the metropolitan

newspapers adopted partisan positions. The *New Zealand Herald*, generally considered to be a more conservative newspaper by New Zealand standards, surprised many of its readers by editorialising in favour of change away from "first past the post." *The Dominion*, the *Evening Post* and the *Christchurch Press* all editorialised in favour of the status quo with varying tones of emphasis. The *Otago Daily Times* adopted a strong editorial line against proportional representation and carried its first front page editorial ever robustly defending the "first past the post" system.

### 19.3 Unit of analysis

For this research the story was the most logical and useful unit of analysis. Stories for the purpose of study were defined as all those election-related stories which appeared in the "hard" news pages as topical stories of the day; softer, feature stories published on opinion pages opposite or adjacent to the editorial page or elsewhere in the newspaper; political analysis or commentary; and election-related stories which appeared in farming, business and regional news pages. Biographical material about candidates published in feature pages and election "briefs" on news and feature pages were also included. Editorials and letters to the editor were not defined as "stories" for the purposes of the research except in the case of a lengthy letter about proportional representation from former Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Palmer which was presented as a feature story, and the front page editorial in the *Otago Daily Times* which was treated as a news story as well as an editorial.

The definition of "story" used in the research was a broad one encompassing both "hard" and "soft" news. McGregor (1991) states:

hard news is often called spot news or news of the day. It is characterised by the inverted pyramid style (Ward, 1985; Cappon, 1982). The inverted pyramid means the story is fact-heavy at the top, with the foundation of the story containing the most important information coming first, and the rest of the information appearing in descending order of importance (p.74).

"Soft" news or feature writing is not necessarily reliant on a reductionist style typical of topical news reporting and it allows for literary flourish and creativity in the use of

language. Feature stories are generally longer and build to a conclusion. As Wyatt and Badger (1993) state, the rhetorical mode of "hard" news is description, as opposed to "soft" news which features narration, argument, exposition or criticism and sometimes a combination of some or all. It is clear that a more interpretive journalistic style has traditionally been associated with "soft" news. A research definition of what constituted a story which featured only "hard" or "soft" news could distort the findings of a study analysing whether journalists interpret the news in a particular way. For this reason both "hard" and "soft" news stories are included.

Using this definition a total of 2002 stories was published in the five metropolitan newspapers in the twenty three days of the 1993 official general election campaign. The twenty three day period ran from Monday, 11 October 1993 until Friday, 5 November 1993. The *Evening Post* published 433 stories, the *New Zealand Herald* printed 427 during the period studied, the *Christchurch Press* published 395 articles, *The Dominion* carried 384 stories and the *Otago Daily Times* published 363 stories. From these a sample was selected which is described in the next section.

#### 19.4 The sample

Defining the population and determining how many issues to sample are two major decisions for researchers utilising content analysis. Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) state:

The researcher's goal is to sample enough issues to achieve an "acceptable" estimate of unknown population parameters, while maximising efficiency of time and effort. Selecting too few issues may produce unreliable data and invalid results; selecting too many may be a wasteful misuse of coding resources (p.133).

Two approaches have been adopted traditionally in content analyses with respect to the sample. The first approach involves some form of sampling and random or stratified random sampling is used employing either a table of random numbers or a computer programme. Lichty and Bailey (1978) state that "most research which uses a pure random sample has selected for analysis between one-fourth and one-half of the days during the period under study (e.g. Lowry, 1971a, 1971b, 1974; Patterson, 1977)"

(p.114). Other researchers such as Evarts and Stempel (1974) sampled 25 days from a two-month campaign period and Lowry (1971a) randomly chose 15 days from a two month period. Lichty and Bailey refer to an unpublished analysis of 12 weeks of 1972 presidential election coverage by Carroll and Lichty which found that any sample smaller than about one-fifth of all days showed a rapid decrease in reliability.

A variation on random sampling is constructed week sampling in which the approach is, as Lichty and Bailey (1978) state, to "stratify the drawing to insure that the final sample will be evenly distributed across the days of the week, weeks, months, or even years" (p.115). Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) state constructed week sampling "assumes cyclic variation of content for different days of the week and requires that all the different days of the week be represented" (p.134). As Stempel (1989) says most newspapers have a fairly consistent pattern so far as number of pages is concerned.

In the New Zealand context newspaper pagination is dependent on advertising volume and on days when there is heavier advertising a newspaper has more pages. Wednesdays and Saturdays are heavy advertising days because traditionally these days carry more "Situations Vacant" classified advertising and these days consequently have a larger "newshole" (journalistic vernacular for space for news stories). In constructed week sampling it is imperative to represent the days of the week equally. In this study the metropolitan newspapers analyzed published six days a week from Monday through to Saturday.

In addition to random and constructed week sampling some studies have used sets of consecutive days in which all weekdays may be present in a seven-day sample. As Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) note, this procedure can ignore between-week differences. They state that research on sampling is limited and in their study they tested the effectiveness of random, consecutive day and constructed week sampling in newspaper content analysis. They asked two research questions:

1. what is the minimum number of constructed weeks needed to estimate the average number of local stories per day, including Sundays?

2. is a constructed week more efficient than simple random or consecutive day samples of comparable size?

Riffe, Aust and Lacy (1993) found a constructed week procedure is more efficient than pure random or consecutive day sampling and that for a population of six months of editions, one constructed week was as efficient as four. They said "two constructed weeks would allow reliable estimates of local stories in a year's worth of newspaper entire issues" (p.139) which confirmed Stempel's (1952) earlier findings.

The second approach traditionally used in content analysis with respect to the sample is to take all stories from entire selected weeks. Daniels (1976), for example, chose ten weeks representing various stages of reporting in an analysis of "Watergate" coverage by network evening news. Lichty and Bailey (1978) suggest that if the subject matter is short-lived then examining the entire period is much better than attempting to sample. Writing about television newscasts they state, "Sampling newscasts for any topic which was limited to less than a month is probably not advisable" (p.115).

Published content analysis by New Zealand researchers has generally used small samples. Atkinson (1994a), for example, in his analysis of the categories of news broadcast by Television New Zealand does not acknowledge the sample size but states, "admittedly the figures... are based on a relatively small sample of news content and more research needs to be done to assure their reliability" (p.56). Recent print media content analysis of crime news in New Zealand's metropolitan press by McGregor (1993) utilised a monthly print cycle as the sample, and research measuring gender representation in sports news coverage conducted in seven New Zealand newspapers used a weekly print cycle (McGregor & Melville, 1993).

The sample chosen for this research reflects the following considerations:

1. the need to note any between-week differences in the election campaign to allow for analysis of whether journalists translated topics into news stories consistently throughout the campaign,

2. the desire to include enough stories to provide reliable and valid data particularly in light of the possibility that contemporary New Zealand news media research has erred on the side of small samples,
3. the constraints of time and resources which dictate an efficient use of coding resources, and
4. the acknowledgement that while an election campaign formed the basis of coverage, the content analysis employed interpretive categories rather than descriptive categories eliminating the need for analysis of the entire period.

The official election campaign period ran from October 11, 1993, until November 5, 1993, and comprised 23 publishing days. From these days two constructed weeks comprising 12 publishing days were selected as the sample for study. The following table indicates the sample selected.

**TABLE 1**

**Total number of available publishing days and sample selected**

<b>October 1993</b>				<b>November 1993</b>							
11	Mon	<input type="checkbox"/>	18	Mon	25	Mon	<input type="checkbox"/>	1	Mon		
<input type="checkbox"/>	12	Tues	<input type="checkbox"/>	19	Tues	<input type="checkbox"/>	26	Tues	2	Tues	
	13	Wed	<input type="checkbox"/>	20	Wed		27	Wed	<input type="checkbox"/>	3	Wed
<input type="checkbox"/>	14	Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/>	21	Thurs	<input type="checkbox"/>	28	Thurs		4	Thurs
	15	Fri	<input type="checkbox"/>	22	Fri		29	Fri	<input type="checkbox"/>	5	Fri
<input type="checkbox"/>	16	Sat		23	Sat	<input type="checkbox"/>	30	Sat			

Publishing days selected as sample

This provided two days of each publishing day of the week and meant a total of 997 stories were examined representing 49.8% of the census of 2002 stories available for study. A total of 216 (representing 49.8% of those available) stories were examined from the *Evening Post*, 191 (48.3%) from the *Christchurch Press*, 216 (50.5%) from the *New Zealand Herald*, 182 (47.39%) from *The Dominion*, and 192 (52.89%) from the *Otago Daily Times*. The highest number of stories per newspaper on any day was 25 stories on November 3, 1993, in the *New Zealand Herald* and the lowest number of stories per newspaper was eight stories recorded on October 26, 1993, in the *Otago Daily Times*.

TABLE 2

## Total of stories per newspaper by selected days

	Evening Post	Christchurch Press	New Zealand Herald	Dominion	Otago Daily Times	Total No. of Stories Per Day
Oct 12	15	10	21	12	17	75
Oct 14	22	15	16	15	12	80
Oct 16	10	16	18	13	20	77
Oct 18	20	18	20	14	15	87
Oct 20	23	20	16	18	18	95
Oct 22	15	12	19	17	19	82
Oct 26	21	9	12	13	8	63
Oct 28	20	15	19	18	17	89
Oct 30	12	15	17	12	17	73
Nov 1	23	15	18	10	13	79
Nov 3	20	23	25	20	22	110
Nov 5	15	23	15	20	14	87
<b>Total Per Paper</b>	216	191	216	182	192	997 Overall

Copies of the newspapers selected were gathered from the archives of the Palmerston North City Council library and when specific copies could not be located the stories were analyzed in the reading room of the Turnbull Library in Wellington.

The sample compares favourably with Major's (1992) study in relation to the 1988 United States presidential election. She utilised a simple random sample of 387 campaign related stories from the 4,200 stories published between September 1 and November 8, in the United States daily newspapers sampled. (Major also sampled news magazines). Major's newspaper story sample then constituted 9.2% of the available stories. By comparison this study has used 49.8% of the census and attempts to overcome the limitations of earlier content analysis studies of the New Zealand news media which rely on relatively small samples.

### 19.5 The categories

Six categories were formulated for basic identification while a number of other categories was developed to describe the content for the purposes of the particular study. The identifying categories included: name of newspaper, date of publication, page number the story was published on, whether the story was bylined or not, the nature of the byline such as staff reporter, political journalist or news agency, and the prominence of the story when published.

The content categories were designed to provide data to answer the research question of whether journalists defined topics in the election campaign context as problematic situations for readers. A list of topics or election campaign issues was devised as categories. These were used as the basis for asking whether or not each campaign issue was defined in the news story by reference to a problematic situation. A list of 43 campaign issues was established encompassing both election campaign issues and traditional topics such as education and health. The campaign issues categories were established both inductively and deductively during the study. The following methods were used to establish the campaign issues.

1. First, Major's (1992) list of 32 campaign issues was examined and where appropriate her typology formed the basis of a preliminary list of categories of campaign issues. For example, her second campaign issue was "agriculture" and it is clear that in the New Zealand context with an economy highly reliant on agricultural export that agriculture would be a campaign issue in this study. However, Major, who was studying U.S. newspaper and magazine coverage of the U.S. and French 1988 Presidential election campaigns, had election issues such as No.21. "Mitterrand", and No.24. "Pledge of Allegiance" which were clearly irrelevant for this study. Also campaign issues like "school prayer", which was included in Major's list, were specifically ethnocentric. In addition to the relevance of some of Major's categories it was decided that one of her categories No.4. "campaign, dirty" was presented with an implication of value judgement and it was decided for the purpose of the New Zealand study to identify the campaign issues in news stories against categories that were as objective as possible. Another of Major's categories No.20. "women/minorities" was a mixed category. In the New Zealand context it was felt more appropriate to establish three separate categories No.18 "Ethnic minorities", No.26 "Maori issues" and No.36 "Women".
  
2. The second method in which the categories of campaign issues were formulated was by pre-reading stories in the sample to see which campaign issues emerged from the stories. In this way it was possible to formulate a number of categories relating not to the more predictable subject areas such as "education" or "economic policy" or "taxes" but to the election campaign processes themselves. In the sample of 12 newspapers chosen to analyse which campaign issues emerged from stories, clear differences were apparent among stories about election campaign processes. For example, it was possible to distinguish between stories about candidates hitting the trail (which was categorised as No.14 Election campaign (roadshow), and the organisation of electorate machinery for polling day (categorised as No.12 Election campaign (organisation). While Major (1992) identified three campaign categories (campaign, dirty; campaign, funding; and campaign, style) this study utilised nine categories relating to the process of the election campaign. These are election campaign (style), (funding), (organisation), (advertising and publicity), (roadshow), (candidates), (leadership), (polls) and (other).

3. Two of these nine categories, leadership and polls, emerged from the third method of finalising the categories of campaign issues which was a process of discussion and agreement among coders after noting any discrepancies from stories. The three coders established a protocol of noting any stories containing potentially new campaign issues which did not logically fit with the 36 categories decided on before coding began. These would then be discussed by the three coders involved in the study to see if they could be incorporated within an existing category. Where coders agreed that the new campaign issue should be differentiated, a new category was established and added to coding sheets. A check was then made of all stories previously coded to determine whether the establishment of a new category was consistent with prior coding decisions.

Where inconsistency was apparent new coding decisions supplanted previous coding decisions in relation to particular stories. In this way a further seven campaign issues were identified, including "poverty" as a category distinct from "social welfare" and "unemployment", and "election campaign (polls)" which emerged as a distinct issue some time into the election campaign. Part way through the election campaign the leader of the New Zealand First party, Winston Peters, began to attack the news media making the issue distinct from traditional election campaign rhetoric. For this reason a category "news media" was added to the list of election issues. It was also apparent that "parliamentary reform" was discussed in stories relating to the general election as a subject distinct from "electoral reform," so again this category was added. The following table compares the election campaign issues identified and utilised by Major (1992) and those established for the study reported here.

**TABLE 3**  
**Comparison of campaign issues in studies utilising**  
**problematic situations in press coverage**

Major's (1992) campaign issues in US newspaper and magazine coverage of the US and French 1988 Presidential Election campaigns		Campaign issues utilised in the New Zealand metropolitan press coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election	
Abortion	1	Agriculture	1
Agriculture	2	Broadcasting	2
Budget deficit	3	Budget deficit	3
Campaign, dirty	4	Business development	4
Campaign, funding	5	Crime	5
Campaign, style	6	Cultural issues	6
Cohabitation	7	Defence	7
Crime	8	Economic policy	8
Debates	9	Education	9
Defense	10	Election campaign (style)	10
Education	11	Election campaign (funding)	11
Environment	12	Election campaign (organisation)	12
Foreign relations	13	Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	13
General economics	14	Election campaign (roadshow)	14
General political	15	Election campaign (candidates)	15
General social	16	Election campaign (other)	16
Health	17	Environment	17
Inflation	18	Ethnic minorities	18
Immigration	19	Fishing	19
Women/minorities	20	Foreign Affairs	20
Mitterrand	21	Health	21
National identity	22	Housing	22
Nationalization	23	Immigration	23
Pledge of Allegiance	24	Industrial relations	24
Political corruption	25	Inflation	25
School prayer	26	Maori issues	26
Taxes	27	Political debates	27
Terrorism	28	Proportional representation	28
Trade	29	Regional issues	29
Unemployment	30	Sport	30
Vice president	31	Social welfare	31
Welfare	32	Taxes	32
		Trade	33
		Transport	34
		Unemployment	35
		Women	36
		Election campaign (leadership)	37
		News media	38
		Poverty	39
		Parliamentary Reform	40
		Energy	41
		Tourism	42
		Election campaign (polls)	43

The advantage of determining categories using the three protocols outlined (using Major's (1992) list as a basis, pre-reading of stories and coder discussion of discrepancy) was that an exhaustive list of categories was provided without the need for an all-encompassing "other" category. "Other" categories, as a potential dumping ground for miscellaneous subjects or indecisive coding, can undermine data in content analysis studies. A second advantage was the level of interaction between coders about the categories formulated, the boundaries of categories as defined, what belonged where, and the nature of differentiation between campaign issues. This helped confirm for the coders involved in the study that they were employing the same frames of reference with regard to the nature of campaign issues within election related news stories. The disadvantage of determining categories in this manner is that it is time consuming and demands a higher level of checking coding, and of recoding where necessary.

Some additional, more general and descriptive content categories were also included in the study which asked coders to identify whether each story was "hard" or "soft" news, whether the headline matched the story content, whether the story focused on the "horse race" aspect of the election and whether the story focused predominantly on election candidates. The content categories asked whether the story was predominately good news, bad news or neutral in emphasis. These content categories were added as the basis for comparison with other studies and because they explore traditional themes in news media scholarship such as the news media's apparent preference for personalisation in election campaign stories at the expense of policy.

The content categories for each story asked how many campaign issues were referred to with up to five campaign issues being coded in each story. Pre-reading and pre-testing of stories in the sample showed the majority of election news stories carried only one or two campaign issue references. Allowing for up to five campaign issue references in each story means the study captures the vast majority of election campaign topics reported in news stories in the sample. Each campaign issue was dealt with separately.

Whether the campaign issues were defined with reference to a problematic situation the eight conditions of discrepancy previously described (**loss of value, need for value, conflict, indeterminate situation, blocking, steps towards a solution, consequences, denial of a problem**), or not, was a critical content category for the research. If so,

identification of which problematic situation with reference to the eight conditions of discrepancy (plus the three problematic situations categories; **loss of value**, **need for value** and **conflict**, which have separate categories for individual and societal level descriptions), was required of coders.

This research, then, follows Major's (1992) categories as a framework for analyzing problematic situations according to conditions of discrepancy based on meaning categories found in the problem-solving literature. As Stempel (1989) states "category systems already developed by other researchers may prove to be appropriate" (p.127). Three of the eight conditions of discrepancy used as categories have both individual and societal level descriptions. A problem can be defined in terms of a **loss of value** where an individual perceives he or she no longer possesses what he or she once possessed. **Loss of value** can also acquire a societal level description. The meaning category **need for value** occurs as a condition of discrepancy where the individual sought to gain or achieve some value that had not been attained. Again, **need for value** can additionally acquire a societal level description. The condition of discrepancy described as **conflict** can also occur on two levels, individual and societal. Major (1992) states it refers to "problems constructed as clashes, disagreements, or general discord between and among individuals, groups, institutions, or nations" (p.602).

The condition of discrepancy referred to as **indeterminate situation** occurs when there is uncertainty, ambiguity, chaos, confusion, questioning or prioritizing associated with a problem. **Blocking**, another condition of discrepancy, occurs when an individual or a collectivity (e.g., group or nation) has been working towards a goal or proceeding on a particular path and progress is interrupted by an actor or by a set of circumstances. **Steps towards solution** defines the problematic situation which occurs when demands for, proposals for, or observations of any steps are raised that propose solutions to the problem.

Major (1992) states the condition of discrepancy referred to as **consequences of earlier solutions** relates "to goals that have been reached to solve a problem and the evaluation of those earlier solutions" (p.603). The final condition of discrepancy, **denial of a problematic situation**, results when an individual or collectivity (group or nation) denies the existence of a problem, or denies wrong doing, incompetence or inconsistency. As Major states, the **denial** construction in election campaign reportage

often occurs when a candidate denies his or her failure to accomplish a previously stated promise or denies that what they have said on one occasion is inconsistent with previous utterings or with party policy. Coders needed to differentiate between the following categories outlined in the table below in utilising the problematic situation in content analysis and the training undertaken by coders is referred to later in this chapter.

**TABLE 4**  
**Problematic situation categories utilised in the content analysis**

<b>Problematic situation</b>
1. No problem defined
(If problem <i>is</i> defined then is it):
2. Loss of value (individual), or
3. Loss of value (societal), or
4. Need for value (individual), or
5. Need for value (societal), or
6. Conflict (individual), or
7. Conflict (societal), or
8. Indeterminate situation, or
9. Blocking, or
10. Steps to solution, or
11. Consequences, or
12. Denial of a problem.

A research document encompassing the categories was prepared in the form of a content analysis questionnaire for coding purposes (See Appendix M). A total of 38 possible coding decisions could be made in relation to each story although the reality of the coding process saw fewer coding decisions made for the majority of news stories. The total number of coding decisions was necessary only for election news stories in the

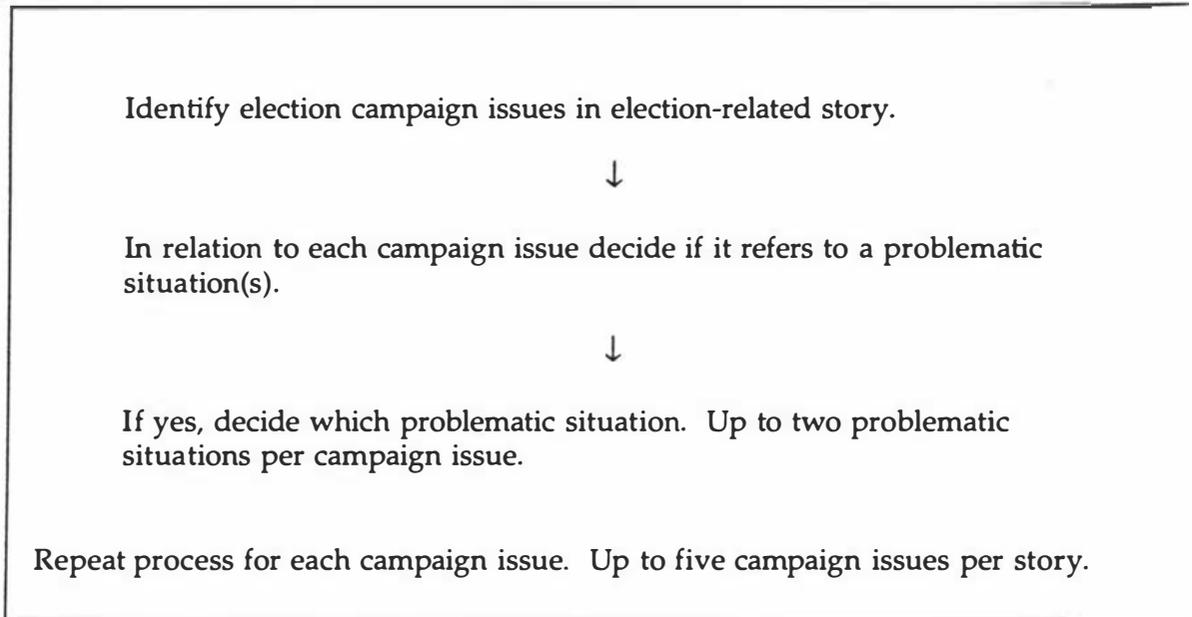
sample which contained the maximum number (five) of campaign issues, and when these campaign issues were all defined problematically with up to the maximum of two problematic definitions for each campaign issue. Data was entered from the questionnaires completed for each story and the statistical package SPSS-X was used to analyze data.

### 19.6 Three stage coding process for the problematic situation

Each of the 997 stories which related to the 1993 New Zealand general election in the 12 day sample period published in the five newspapers was examined in the study. A three stage coding process was employed in the content analysis in relation to the categories of the problematic situation. First, the election-related story had to be read closely and the election campaign issues identified from the list of 43 identified. For example, one story might mention taxes, unemployment and election candidate (style) making a total of three campaign issues in the story. Each campaign issue was then examined to determine whether or not the issue had been defined in the story with reference to a problematic situation. So the coder would look at the campaign issue of taxes and decide if it was defined problematically. If so, the coder identified how many (one or two) problematic situations had been referred to. Then in the third stage coders would identify which problematic situation(s) the campaign issue referred to against the conditions of discrepancy referred to in Table 4. For example, taxes may be defined as a campaign issue in the news story by reference to the problematic situations of **loss of value** and **conflict**. Table 5 shows the process employed by coders in determining content categories in the study.

TABLE 5

## Three stage coding process for the content category of election issue



Up to five campaign issues were analysed for each story and the first five campaign issues in the story were selected for examination. Each campaign issue was recorded only once regardless of the number of times it was mentioned in a story. Following Major's (1992) research, a limit of two problematic situations per story was employed and where relevant, coders chose the two problematic situations with primary emphasis in the story.

### 19.7 Coding and reliability

Stempel's (1989) advice to "try to find experienced coders" was employed in this study (p.133). The three coders used had two levels of expertise valuable for the research project; knowledge of the news media and previous content analysis coding expertise. Coding was undertaken by the principal researcher, a post-graduate media studies student who had been involved in previous content analytical studies involving an analysis of crime news on television and a research project exploring balance and fairness in both radio and television news, and an experienced journalist and newspaper editor previously involved in content analysis of crime news in metropolitan

newspapers in New Zealand. The "desirability of having people with somewhat similar academic backgrounds" referred to by Stempel (p.134) was acknowledged. All three coders were graduates with a specialist interest in news media scholarship. It is commonly agreed by content analysts that the major challenge in the training of coders is the development of a frame of reference that is universal to the coders. In content analysis protocols that move beyond descriptive, topical categories into interpretive frameworks, such as this study employing the problematic situation, the challenge is more acute.

Four formal training sessions were held during the content analysis project with the coders to develop common views of the problematic situation construct, in particular. Little disagreement among the coders was expressed about whether a campaign issue was health or education, for example, or even whether the issue was election campaign (roadshow) or election campaign (organisation) because commonsense assumptions could be applied. The potential for subjective interpretation was higher when a coder was asked whether the campaign issue was defined in the story by reference to a problematic situation and, if so, what was the nature of the problematic definition. For example, was it loss of value or need for value? For this study development of a common frame of reference occurred through a process of identification, description, argumentation and consultation by, and among, coders. Coders adopted a trial and error process of identifying the category. When they had classified the category the decision was then brought back to the group for discussion at which time the coder argued the case. Finally consensus emerged about the appropriateness of the classification. Coders transferred the consensus decisions to future categorisations to achieve coding consistency. In addition to formal training, the principal researcher made twice daily checks during the 120 hours allocated to the 997 stories so that "difficult cases" or ambiguities could be resolved through discussion and consistency maintained.

The challenge of developing a common frame of reference is the reason the research project employed reliability checks more regularly than might be the case with descriptive content analysis. Intracoder reliability checks to ensure coder's own decisions were consistent were conducted in two ways. First, the establishment of several extra campaign issue categories during the coding process meant the three coders were progressively going back over coding decisions and recoding where

necessary. In addition to these regular intracoder reliability checks, the coders at the end of the exercise recoded 10% each of the stories they had coded. The average intracoder reliability was .83. Intercoder reliability checks were conducted on stories selected from each of the 12 sample publishing days for each of the five newspapers, which meant sixty stories were subject to intercoder reliability. Consistency between coders was necessary in two critical areas, consistent identification of the topics in news stories as election issues and then consistent identification of the problematic situation. For example, the row within Labour ranks about tax should be identified as "tax" for the election campaign issue, and then if tax was defined by reference to a problematic situation then coders were identifying the same problematic situations such as **loss of value** (individual) and **conflict** (individual) if these were the relevant problematic situations. Intercoder reliability was very high at .98 for issues and .83.1 for problematic situation codes. This compares favourably with Major's (1992) intercoder reliability of .91 for issues and .76 for problematic situations codes. The high intercoder reliability for issues reflects the considerable interaction between coders during coding about the establishment of campaign issue categories which meant coders developed very similar frames of reference.

### 19.8 Projected outcomes

Chaffee and Jamieson (1994) state in the American context that "presidential campaigns have provided the setting for innovative research on communication processes for more than half a century" (p.261). They state the attraction of the election setting to communication scholars derives both from its "general predictability and from its particular novelty" (p.261). There is little tradition of news media scholarship in election settings in New Zealand but the potential for innovative research is obvious. The "general predictability" occurs because the researcher knows when the election occurs, can plan for data collection and can anticipate major media occurrences.

In the New Zealand context the surprise of the 1993 election was the influence and extent of the proportional representation debate and activities which provided a counter flow to the general predictability of the election campaign. Other studies employing the problematic situation as a variable of analysis to determine whether journalists define topics or not, concentrate in their published reports on whether or not topics are

defined problematically and if so, which problematic situations or conditions of discrepancy are preferred. This research project attempts to apply (in its own particular election context) those aspects of previous studies but in addition attempts to determine whether particular news topics invite problematic definition or not. Did journalists, for example, report proportional representation topics problematically while reporting traditional election issues stories, such as education topics, unproblematically? Or does the subject matter or topics covered in stories make little difference to how journalists translate news topics?

A major purpose of the study, then, is to test Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of news media content by examining metropolitan newspaper coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election. Additionally the research analyses whether particular campaign issues are treated differently and discusses possible explanations for this in terms of the performance of journalists in their role as social analysts and in terms of journalistic routines on news content. The research acknowledges Chaffee and Jamieson's (1994) notion that "communication research on political campaigns is not concerned with the outcome of the election so much as it is with the processes of the campaign." (p.261). The strength of the research strategy adopted is that it uses categories in addition to traditional topical categories to explore journalistic definition of the news. Insight is gained into how election news is made over and above details about proportions of topics reported. The nature and degree of journalistic definition of topics in the news for readers is examined, and the implications for the manufacture of news during a general election are discussed.

The study additionally examines several concepts from news media scholarship traditionally associated with analysis of election campaign coverage. For example, did the "horse race" dominate the 1993 General Election coverage by the metropolitan press? Was the coverage candidate-focused, emphasizing human interest and personalisation in the news? Was there a bad news emphasis in election news stories suggesting that the news values of negativity and conflict prevailed? And was the news presented according to Hohenberg's (1978) editorial division between "hard" news and "soft" news?

The content analysis allows for aggregated results across the metropolitan newspapers and for comparative results of the individual newspapers. This provides for scrutiny of the degree of homogeneity of election campaign news across the five newspapers studied. Is the degree of congruence of reports noted in a recent study of crime news across the same newspapers (McGregor, 1993) apparent in political reporting?

The results of the content analysis study are reported in the following chapter, Chapter 20. The chapter is structured to present the results of the problematic definition of election news, then to provide data broken out by individual newspaper. The chapter then examines which particular problematic situations (if any) attach to specific campaign issues. These results are followed by data on the "hard" news/"soft" news division, on good news versus bad news in political reporting, on the degree of candidate focus and on the extent of "horse race" coverage.

Chapter 21 discusses and analyses the results, compares the results of the study with previous research and outlines the implications of the results. The strengths and limitations of the research are presented and future research directions are suggested to finish the chapter. The final chapter of the study, Chapter 22, examines the results of the three methodologies, action research, participant observation and content analysis, in the context of journalism as democratic discourse. What are the implications of this study for the "dialogue of democracy?" (Taylor, 1992). Challenges facing political journalism are debated and potential reforms suggested to improve the reporting of elections.

## CHAPTER TWENTY: RESULTS OF CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEW ZEALAND'S METROPOLITAN PRESS UTILISING THE PROBLEMATIC SITUATION

### 20.1 Introduction

It is commonly accepted that one of the roles of the news media in election campaigns is to report news which allows the electorate to differentiate between candidates and make choices. The problems and issues faced by a nation are also defined by the news media to a greater or lesser extent during an election campaign. The nature of this definition has not previously received attention from New Zealand news media researchers and this study aims to present data from content analysis which reveals the nature of news definition. The study also presents data on the prevailing emphases of the news during the 1993 General Election campaign. If the news media concentrate on the style and spectacle of the campaign and the personality of political contenders instead of the substance of the campaign and the political (as opposed to the personal) character of aspirants then the very nature of election campaign journalism will limit what voters can learn.

The potential of election campaign journalism is to fulfil several of the normative standards for the media in democratic society identified by Gurevitch and Blumler (1990). The relevant standards are; platforms for politicians to debate intelligently and advocate positions, the provision of incentives for citizens to learn, choose and become involved, the accountability function of holding incumbent politicians to account for their exercise of power, and meaningful agenda setting. Patterson's (1993) contends that the news media has its own responsibilities and that the press should be allowed to be the press and "not also a stand-in for defective political institutions" (p.92). But just what the responsibilities of the press should be and what the reality of election reportage is demands continuing scrutiny. This research aims to cast light on how campaign issues are defined and to explore whether what Major (1993) describes as

"campaign "horse race", "hoopla" and strategy are highlighted instead of analyses of campaign issues" (p.600). The results presented in this chapter provide insight into how the news is manufactured in a general election context.

The chapter is structured to present the frequency and ranking of the campaign issues identified and then data indicates whether these campaign issues were defined by reference to problematic situations or not. The problematic situations, such as **loss of value, conflict, steps towards solution**, are identified and ranked, and the data provide both for aggregated results and results by individual newspaper, allowing for comparison. Data are presented to show which campaign issues attract problematic definition. Results are then presented on "hard" and "soft" news and whether there is a difference in definition, good news and bad news, the "horse race" factor in election coverage and whether the news is focused on the candidate. Where appropriate the results of Major's (1992) study are presented figuratively, along with the results of the New Zealand research, for ease of comparison. More detailed comment about the similarities and differences between the research and earlier studies utilising the problematic situation are made in the next chapter, Chapter 21.

The written description of the results is accompanied by tables to illustrate major findings. Because of the complexity of the three stage coding process, outlined in Table 5 in the previous chapter, which moves from story, to election campaign issue, to problematic situation the tables are presented as proportions for clarity and ease of understanding.

## 20.2 Number and proportion of election campaign issue references

The study asked coders to identify up to five campaign issues in each of the news stories in the sample (Question 13 of the coding questionnaire, Appendix M). The results show that in the 997 stories analysed a total of 2032 election campaign issues was identified. Table 6 shows the ranking of election campaign issues by number of identifications by coders in the study. Three election campaign categories; election campaign (candidates); election campaign (roadshow); and election campaign (style) topped the ratings followed by health, proportional representation (electoral reform) and unemployment.

TABLE 6  
Number and proportion of issue references in New Zealand metropolitan  
press coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign

Issue	Number	Percentage	Rank
Agriculture	7	.3	33 =
Broadcasting	5	.2	40
Budget deficit	6	.3	36 =
Business development	32	1.6	20
Crime	56	2.8	14
Cultural issues	6	.3	36 =
Defence	10	.5	29 =
Economic policy	99	4.9	7
Education	78	3.8	9
Election campaign (style)	180	8.9	3
Election campaign (funding)	19	.9	24
Election campaign (organisation)	92	4.5	8
Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	72	3.5	11
Election campaign (roadshow)	183	9.0	2
Election campaign (candidates)	232	11.4	1
Election campaign (other)	7	.3	33 =
Environment	35	1.7	19
Ethnic minorities	6	.3	36 =
Fishing	3	.1	41 =
Foreign Affairs	11	.5	28
Health	127	6.3	4
Housing	10	.5	29 =
Immigration	3	.1	41 =
Industrial relations	71	3.5	12
Inflation	3	.1	41 =
Maori issues	23	1.1	22
Political debates	14	.7	25 =
Proportional representation	112	5.5	5
Regional issues	27	1.3	21
Sport	8	.4	32
Social welfare	64	3.1	13
Taxes	77	3.8	10
Trade	7	.3	33 =
Transport	12	.6	27
Unemployment	111	5.5	6
Women	36	1.8	18
Election campaign (leadership)	44	2.2	17
News media	46	2.3	16
Poverty	10	.5	29 =
Parliamentary Reform	20	1.0	23
Energy	14	.7	25 =
Tourism	6	.3	36 =
Election campaign (polls)	48	2.4	15
TOTAL	2,032	100%	

The significance of the findings is that the election campaign itself dominated election news ahead of important socio-economic or political issues which political parties are concerned with during election campaigns. The fourth-ranked campaign issue, health, was an important area of contest for the leading political parties in the 1993 general election following the radical restructure of New Zealand's health system. Unemployment, the fifth ranked campaign issue, was the issue used by politicians to symbolise the effect of Government's economic policies and philosophy. Jobs, either the lack of them or the need for them, was utilised in "attack" politics by Opposition and third party candidates. Electoral reform coded in this study as proportional representation was a major issue throughout the election campaign with debate about the amount spent on pro and anti propaganda by the respective camps in the electoral reform debate. A referendum on electoral reform was held concurrently with general election polling and debate about proportional representation was interwoven with news about the election campaign. For example, candidates were persistently asked at public meetings to declare their position on proportional representation throughout the election campaign period.

### **20.3 Number of campaign issues referenced**

Coders were asked to examine each story for up to five campaign issues in each story. In the pre-testing of the coding instrument it was discovered that the majority of stories concentrated on one, two or three campaign issues only. It was felt that in only a small number of cases would news stories contain five plus campaign issues. The results confirm the pre-testing and show that the majority of the 997 stories contain one, two or three campaign issues (85.9%). Those containing one campaign issue comprised 41.5% of the stories, those containing two campaign issues totalled 28.4% and those with three campaign issues amounted to 16%. Less than ten per cent of stories (8.8%) contained four campaign issues and 4.5% contained five campaign issues. The proportion of stories containing no campaign issues was 0.8% and these were tiny stories giving notice of meetings or events without issue reference.

TABLE 7

## Number of campaign issues referenced, by percentage

Number of campaign issues	Percentage
0	0.8%
1	41.5%
2	28.4%
3	16.0%
4	8.8%
5	4.5%
	100%

The findings confirm the essential characteristic of news writing which is a reductionist style, emphasizing simplicity and brevity and concentrating on a certain number of issues in the one account.

#### 20.4 Number and proportion of problematic codes for campaign issues in coverage of the 1993 New Zealand General Election

A central question for the content analysis was whether journalists defined topics in the 1993 General election as problematic situations such as *loss of value*, *need for value*, or whether they described campaign issue in news stories for readers without reference to problematic situations. If they did define issues problematically then this has implications both for the journalist's role and the frame of reference of the news.

After identifying up to five campaign issues per story coders were then asked (Questions 15, 19, 23, 27, 31, Appendix M) in relation to each individual campaign issue whether it had been defined with reference to a problematic situation. If yes, coders were asked how many problematic situations the individual campaign issue referred to, either one or two (Questions 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, Appendix M). For our earlier

example of the story that contained taxes, unemployment, and election campaign (style), the coders answered whether each individual campaign issue was defined with reference to a problematic situation, then for each of the issues defined problematically, whether one or two problematic situations applied.

The results showed that over seven issues in ten in the metropolitan newspaper coverage of the 1993 New Zealand General Election in the sample period were defined in terms of a problematic situation. Of the total number of 2032 election campaign issues, 73.8% of campaign issues (1500) were accompanied by a problematic situation. A total of 26.2% (532) campaign issues were not defined in terms of a problematic situation.

TABLE 8

Number and proportion of problematic codes for campaign issues  
in coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election

Campaign issues	N	%
No problem defined	532	26.2
Problem defined	1500	73.8
TOTAL	2032	100

Looking at how many problematic situations were recorded for each campaign issue defined problematically, the results show 2188 problematic situations were reported for the 1500 campaign issues defined problematically. This represents 1.45 problematic situations per each campaign issue defined problematically in an election story and indicates that where a campaign issue was defined by the reporter by reference to a problematic situation it was more likely that more than one condition of discrepancy applied. For example, our tax story example is coded as being reported with reference to a problematic situation and then when asked how many problematic situations apply coders often found that more than one applied such as *loss of value and conflict*.

The significance of these findings is that over 70% of campaign issues referred to by journalists reporting the election in the metropolitan newspapers studied in the 1993 election contest were translated by journalists into problematic situations, into conditions of discrepancy for their readers. This has profound implications for the role of the journalist in the manufacture of election news which will be discussed in the next chapter.

### 20.5 Rating of problematic situations

Eleven conditions of discrepancy had been established as problematic situations in the content analysis, as outlined in Table 4 in Chapter 19. Once coders had answered in the affirmative to the question of whether the campaign issue had been defined with reference to a problematic situation and then answered whether one or two problematic situations were referred to, they then identified which problematic situation had been referred to: **loss of value (individual), loss of value (society), need for value (individual), need for value (society), conflict (individual), conflict (society), indeterminate situation, blocking, steps towards a solution, consequences, denial of a problem**. These conditions of discrepancy or problematic situations were identified by reference to Edelstein *et al* (1989) and Major (1992). Collapsing the three categories with individual and societal levels in this presentation, the results show that over half of the problematic situations were **loss of value and conflict**.

TABLE 9

## Rating of problematic situations by number and percentage

Rating of problematic situations	Categories	No.	%
1.	Loss of value	576	26.3%
2.	Conflict	565	25.8%
3.	Need for value	364	16.6%
4.	Steps towards solution	312	14.3%
5.	Denial of a problem	137	6.3%
6.	Blocking	121	5.5%
7.	Consequences	61	2.8%
8.	Indeterminate situation	52	2.4%
Total		2188	100%

The results show, firstly, that campaign issues are more likely to be defined by reference to clear cut or black and white problem situations such as **loss of value** and **conflict** rather than to the more ambiguous or complex problematic situations which imply shades of grey in meaning such as **indeterminate situation** or **blocking**. Secondly, the findings are significant because proportionately more references to problematic situations which are negative in emphasis (**loss of value**, **conflict**) emerged than references to problematic situations which are neutral or positive in emphasis (**need for value**, **steps towards a solution**). The implications of these findings are analysed in the following chapter, Chapter 21.

If the results of issue definitions are looked at overall, with both **no problem defined** plus the problematic situations included (See Table 4, Chapter 19), the rankings show **loss**, **conflict** followed by **no problem defined**. Again the three categories of **loss of value**, **need for value**, and **conflict** at individual and societal levels are collapsed for presentation. In 532 cases when campaign issues were mentioned they were not defined by reference to a problematic situation.

TABLE 10

**Proportion of issue references overall, inclusive of no problem defined  
and of problematic situations**

<b>Rating of issue references overall</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1.	Loss of value	576	21.2%
2.	Conflict	565	20.8%
3.	No problem defined	532	19.6%
4.	Need for value	364	13.4%
5.	Steps towards solution	312	11.5%
6.	Denial of a problem	137	5.0%
7.	Blocking	121	4.4%
8.	Consequences	61	2.2%
9.	Indeterminate situation	52	1.9%
<b>Total</b>		<b>2720</b>	<b>100%</b>

This results shows that even with the inclusion of the campaign issue that were not defined by reference to a problematic situation the ranking of negative definitions (loss of value and conflict) is not altered.

#### **20.6 Proportion of problematic codes by story type**

The study asked coders to distinguish between stories (Question 5, Appendix M). Was the story published as a lead story, a display story or a brief/campaign diary story? The question acknowledges the print media tradition during election campaign coverage of running snippets of news in diary form, very often ironic in tone and relating to the quirkiness of campaigning, and presented together in a column with a stylised logo

such as "Election Notebook" (*New Zealand Herald*). The traditional news hierarchy in newspaper presentation means front page lead stories are considered by the journalists involved in news production to be the strongest and most important story in the newspaper. Front page lead stories are accorded prominence in position (above the newspaper fold in broadsheet newspapers), the largest type and so on. Lead stories are generally accorded more space for the story to be told. As the reader moves through the newspaper the lead story on each page should be the most important story in significance and presented most dramatically in terms of aesthetics on the page. Display stories are lesser stories (in the judgement of the news taster, not necessarily the reader), while briefs/campaign stories are smaller still, less consequential and often do not carry headlines, being distinguished from other stories by some typographical measure such as a row of asterisks.

Of the 997 stories in the sample, 119 (11.9%) were lead stories, 666 were display stories (66.8%) and 212 (21.3%) were brief/campaign diary stories. If the three story types are examined individually it is clear that lead stories and display stories carried proportionately more problematic situations in campaign issues reported in the news. In other words campaign issues covered in lead stories were more likely to be defined problematically than in display stories or campaign briefs. If campaign briefs are eliminated from the sample then the overall percentage of problematic definitions for lead and display stories averages 76.5%. Given the print media's hierarchy of news presentation it appears that problematic definition is linked to stories selected for prominence in the newspaper studied which is a significant finding.

**TABLE 11**

**Proportion of problematic definitions by story type**

	<b>Lead story</b>	<b>Display story</b>	<b>Brief/campaign diary</b>
No problem defined	22.6%	24.3%	38.2%
Problem defined	77.4%	75.7%	61.8%
	100%	100%	100%

The fact that over three quarters of campaign issues mentioned in lead stories in metropolitan newspaper coverage of the general election were defined problematically raises questions relating to how and why journalists translate campaign issues for their readers and the intersection of this interpretive frame and the news selection and presentation processes which will be discussed in the following chapter, Chapter 21.

### 20.7 Proportion of campaign issues defined problematically by individual newspaper

The homogeneity of news in New Zealand's metropolitan press (McGregor, 1993) has led to suggestions that readers, no matter where they live, are receiving much the same news which inevitably leads to complaint about the blandness and the lack of alternative perspectives in the news. The coding protocol for the content analysis project was constructed to test whether homogeneity prevailed in political journalism in metropolitan newspapers during the 1993 campaign or whether there was differentiation in the sample of stories from the five newspapers.

The data allowed for aggregation of results across five newspapers as well as analysis of each individual newspaper. The proportion of problematic codes for campaign issues by each newspaper is reported below. It showed that the *New Zealand Herald* had the greatest proportion of campaign issues in its election news stories coded as problematic, followed by the *Christchurch Press*. The *Otago Daily Times*, followed by the *Evening Post*, had the lowest proportion of problematic codes of the five newspapers studied. In keeping with the aggregated results proportionately more campaign issues were defined by reference to four problematic situations, **conflict**, **loss of value**, **need for value** and **steps towards a solution**, for all five newspapers studied. But the rankings of these four problematic situations differed for individual newspapers. For example, for the *New Zealand Herald*, the *Evening Post* and the *Otago Daily Times*, **steps towards a solution** was ranked third and **need for value**, fourth, whereas for *The Dominion*, **loss of value** was third followed by **steps towards a solution** and for the *Christchurch Press*, **need for value** was followed by **steps towards a solution**.

TABLE 12

Proportion of campaign issues defined by reference to a problematic situation  
by individual newspaper

	New Zealand Herald	Dominion	Evening Post	Christchurch Press	Otago Daily Times
No problem defined	19.8%	24.0%	34.4%	21.5%	36.5%
Problem defined	80.2%	76.0%	65.6%	78.5%	63.5%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

While the variation between newspapers appears at first glance to be at odds with findings of homogeneity of crime news in New Zealand's metropolitan press (McGregor, 1993), the earlier study was strictly quantitative looking at proportions of crime news in the total news content. It did not use the problematic situation as a content category, so caution needs to be exercised in comparing the two studies. This point will be discussed further, along with the implications of the finding of a degree of incongruence among individual newspapers, in the next chapter, Chapter 21.

The variation by newspaper was marked in relation to the number of problematic situations (one or two) referred to for each campaign issue in an election news story. Again the results show the *Christchurch Press* and the *New Zealand Herald* at one end of the scale with a higher proportion of two problematic situations per campaign issue defined problematically in an election news story. The *Evening Post* and the *Otago Daily Times* at the other end of the scale had a higher percentage of one only problematic situations for each campaign issue defined problematically.

TABLE 13

Proportion of one or two problematic situations for each campaign issue defined problematically by individual newspaper

Number of problematic situation	New Zealand Herald	Dominion	Evening Post	Christchurch Press	Otago Daily Times
1	44.6%	47.2%	83.3%	41.8%	75.1%
2	55.4%	52.8%	16.7%	58.2%	24.9%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The two previous findings taken together suggest that proportionately more campaign issues were more markedly defined by reference to problematic situations in political journalism in the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Christchurch Press* than in the other metropolitan newspapers. This is an important finding when the elite status (both by circulation and reputation) of the two newspapers is considered. The *New Zealand Herald* is the prestige newspaper serving the North Island, while the *Christchurch Press* enjoys similar prestige in the South Island.

The five metropolitan newspapers again differed when it came to the rating of the 2188 problematic situations identified in relation to the election campaign issues covered in news stories. Of the 2188 problematic situations identified in the study, 628 were published in the *New Zealand Herald*, 443 in *The Dominion*, 268 in the *Evening Post*, 593 in the *Christchurch Press* and 256 in the *Otago Daily Times*. Looking at the proportions of the problematic situations by individual newspaper differences were apparent. With the three individual and societal levels collapsed for loss of value, need for value, and conflict, the category of conflict was highest of all the categories for *The Dominion*, the *Christchurch Press* and the *Otago Daily Times* whereas loss of value was highest for the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Evening Post*.

TABLE 14

Proportion of problematic situations categories by individual newspaper

Problematic situations	New Zealand Herald	Dominion	Evening Post	Christchurch Press	Otago Daily Times
Loss of value	28.4%	21.5%	33%	26.7%	21.8%
Need for value	16.5%	23.8%	8.6%	19.2%	7.1%
Conflict	22.0%	27.1%	20.2%	29.6%	30.1%
Indeterminate situation	2.5%	1.6%	4.5%	.9%	4.7%
Blocking	5.3%	5.2%	4.5%	6.9%	4.7%
Steps towards a solution	18.5%	12.0%	14.2%	10.8%	15.6%
Consequences	2.0%	3.4%	5.6%	1.2%	4.3%
Denial	4.8%	5.4%	9.4%	4.7%	11.7%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The overall degree of congruence among the newspapers studied, and the differences noted, may reflect to some degree the allocation of specialist correspondents to cover politics and the 1993 general election and the decreased reliance on press agency reportage during the 1993 campaign, referred to in the discussion of the profile of the newspapers studied in the previous chapter, Chapter 19 at 19.2. The implications of the findings relating to individual newspapers is discussed in Chapter 21, the next chapter.

## 20.8 The problematic nature of specific campaign issues

A principal question of the research project was to look to see whether particular campaign issues were defined more problematically than others. If so, which campaign issues as news topics did journalists translate as problematic situations? The results have implications for the roles of both election candidates and journalists. For example,

should candidates wishing their comments to be reported cast their comments around issues such as progressive tax in a clear cut, unambiguous way so that it is couched as a **step towards a solution** and as a **need for value** for improving the position of lower paid workers (the position adopted by former Prime Minister David Lange, referred to earlier in the participant observation section at Chapter 12), or should candidates be less decisive, adopt fuzzy semantics and disguise their position on tax issues in ambiguity? (which was the position retreated to by Labour leader Mike Moore, in response to the fallout over Mr Lange's remarks). The issue of whether particular campaign issues were defined more problematically has not been a principal feature of previous research using the problematic situation as a content category to examine election reportage (Major, 1992) and the results represent a valuable extension of earlier studies.

The results show that, of the 43 campaign issues, six issues (broadcasting, ethnic minorities, housing, immigration, trade and poverty) were defined with reference to a problematic situation every time they were mentioned in an election news story. In other words housing was mentioned as a campaign issue ten times in the sample and in a hundred per cent of cases it was defined in terms of one of the conditions of discrepancy such as **need for value** or **loss of value**. At the other end of the scale the three issues which were least likely to be defined problematically were fishing, cultural issues and inflation. Over two thirds (66.7%) of the references recorded for these three campaign issues were not identified as a problem.

These issues at either end of the scale were not, however, the campaign issues which dominated election news during the 1993 campaign. The following table looks at the ten election campaign issue categories which were most mentioned of the 43 campaign issues identified in relation to how problematically they were defined.

TABLE 15

Number, proportion and ranking of the problematic definitions for the top ten campaign issues mentioned in election news stories

Top ten campaign issues	No. of problematic definitions	% of mentions	Ranking of problematic definition
1. Election campaign (candidates)	145	62.5%	9
2. Election campaign (roadshow)	66	36.3%	10
3. Election campaign (style)	148	82.2%	5
4. Health	121	95.3%	1
5. Proportional representation	89	79.5%	7
6. Unemployment	101	91.0%	2
7. Economic policy	82	82.8%	4
8. Election campaign (organisation)	58	63.0%	8
9. Education	64	82.1%	6
10. Taxes	70	90.1%	3

The findings show that the campaign issues of health, unemployment and taxes were defined by reference to a problematic situation in over 90% of mentions in election news reports in the sample studies. This confirms the elite status of those issues in the 1993 General Election campaign. They were the general areas of contest between parties and individual politicians. Economic policy was at the centre stage of the election as National and Labour attempted to differentiate themselves philosophically to the electorate. It was in the area of economic policy, too, that the third party, the Alliance, was able to provide policy contrast to National and Labour throughout the campaign.

A clear difference emerged in relation to aspects of the election campaign as identified as separate categories in this study. Looking at the election campaign issue categories, stories which featured campaign roadshow issues were very often purely descriptive accounts of where the Prime Minister was campaigning for the day and which schools and factories were to be visited by the Leader of the Opposition. This accounts for the lower proportion of problematic definition. Election campaign organisation and stories about specific candidates also often tended to be purely informational in nature. But the category of election campaign (style) was used by coders for all stories which related to public disenchantment with the political process, comments by politicians about the political style of rivals, and stories about "attack" politics.

In more than three times out of four mentions (79.5%) proportional representation, which ran parallel as an issue to the traditional election issues throughout the election campaign, was defined problematically by metropolitan newspapers in the 1993 general election. The question which is raised by the data is whether the problematic definition is primarily that of **conflict** mirroring the political contest (those in favour versus those against) or whether the majority of problematic situations referred to suggest a desired change in the electoral system (**need for value**, or **steps towards a solution**). Did journalists interpret proportional representation as a straightforward tussle between protagonists (**conflict**) or in terms of a **loss of value** for individuals or society, or in terms of a cure for a problem (**steps towards a solution**), or in some other way? These questions are answered in the following findings.

### **20.9 Which problematic situations attach to particular campaign issues?**

Analysis was also made of which problematic situations, or conditions of discrepancy from those identified for the study, attached to particular campaign issues. Was unemployment, for example, more likely to be constructed as a **loss of value** or **need for value**?

The results, which again collapsed the individual and societal levels of the categories of **loss of value**, **need for value** and **conflict**, show some congruence when the top three campaign issues by number of mentions are examined. **Conflict** and **loss of value**

are the two most likely problematic definitions for election campaign (candidates), election campaign (roadshow) and election campaign (style), with much the same proportion for conflict recorded across all three campaign issues. So the results have shown that election campaign (style) was more likely to be defined problematically than the other two (Table 16). But when analysis is made of election campaign (roadshow), election campaign (candidates) and election campaign (style) in relation to which conditions of discrepancy are applied when there is a problematic definition, then similarities arise. The finding suggests that candidate and roadshow news reports are in general descriptive accounts but the question of political style during the election campaign was a question of journalistic interpretation.

**TABLE 16**

**Proportion of problematic situations for the top three campaign issues**

<b>Problematic situation</b>	<b>Election campaign (candidate)</b>	<b>Election campaign (roadshow)</b>	<b>Election campaign (style)</b>
Loss of value	39%	38%	27%
Need for value	6%	3%	13%
Conflict	38%	39%	39%
Indeterminate situation	2%	7%	3%
Blocking	6%	6%	7%
Steps towards solution	2%	2%	7%
Consequences	0%	3%	0%
Denial of a problem	7%	2%	4%
	100%	100%	100%

The results show that the election campaign as an event, whether it be the roadshow, the candidates or their style, is interpreted in a particular way usually by reference to the problematic situations used as content categories in the research such as **loss of value** or **conflict** by journalists when they are defining these problematically, which



The significance of the findings is that only the campaign issue of unemployment had proportionately higher references to the more positive problematic situation. Edelstein *et al* (1989) state that taking steps towards a solution was considered to be good news because "generally speaking, people like to see problems solved" (p.122). The lower proportions of **steps towards solution** as problematic definitions of other campaign issues has implications for political communication which will be discussed in the next chapter. The issue for candidates is whether they should cast political messages accordingly? The problematic definition of proportional representation was congruent with other main issues with respect to **conflict**, but the problematic definition of **need for value** out ranked by proportion the definition of **loss of value**. This suggests that while on the one hand the issue was interpreted by journalists in terms of the familiar A versus B model, on the other proportional representation was also framed in the news in terms of societal or individual needs.

Further discussion and analysis can be found in Chapter 21 which follows.

#### 20.10 Some descriptive factors

The results section now moves from a concentration on the content category of determining whether campaign issues were defined by reference to problematic situations to looking at some of the other theoretical concepts such as "hard" and "soft" news and the good news/bad news debate which are the more traditional site of content analysis. This data is, by and large, quantitative and descriptive supplemented with several cross tabulations with data on problematic definition of particular categories of news. Several findings are also presented by individual newspaper to reveal the degree of congruence of results across the metropolitan press. The data generally uses the proportion of stories, as opposed to the proportion of campaign issues within stories, used earlier, as the basis of calculation.

Some of the questions coders were asked to answer (Appendix M) were similar to those used to analyse election news in previous news media scholarship (Major, 1992; Broh, 1980; Graber, 1976). These questions explored whether aspects such as candidate focus, the "horse race" aspect of elections, dominated political reporting during the election campaign.

### 20.10.1 "Hard" news and "soft" news

Hohenberg (1978) describes the hard news/soft news distinction as the "old editorial division" (p.226). McGregor (1991) states that the hard news format is the most prevalent in New Zealand newspapers. Often called spot news, "happening" news or news of the day, hard news is characterised by the inverted pyramid style (Ward, 1985; Cappon, 1982). The inverted pyramid means the story is fact-heavy at the top, with the foundation of the story containing the most important information coming first, and the rest of the information appearing in descending order of importance. Theory relating to the nature of journalistic writing was referred to earlier in the study in the literature review, Chapter Two.

Soft news is often equated to feature article writing, described by Wyatt and Badger (1993) as containing stories of special human appeal outside the breaking news. The relevance of the distinction between hard and soft news for this research is that the level of interpretation of the news by the journalist is traditionally minimised in hard news. Wyatt and Badger state the hard news story typically informs the reader by "signalizing" an event to use Lippmann's (1922) concept. The subjective, evaluation and interpretive characteristics more typically belong to soft news or opinion writing. The proportion of campaign issues defined problematically in hard news stories, then, might affirm or suggest a break with the fact-value division of journalism into genres of news, features and opinion.

The results show over three quarters of the 997 news stories in the sample were coded as hard news (76.1%) compared with 10.9% as soft news, 8.8% as a mixture of both categories and the rest coded as other.

TABLE 18

## Proportion of stories by hard news, soft news

	N	%
Hard news	758	76.1%
Soft news	109	10.9%
Mixed	88	8.8%
Other	42	4.2%
Total	997	100%

The proportion of hard and soft news varied by newspaper in the study. The *Christchurch Press* carrying the most hard news at 87.4% and the *New Zealand Herald* the lowest at 64.3%.

TABLE 19

## Proportion of hard news and soft news by individual newspaper

Nature of news	New Zealand Herald	Dominion	Evening Post	Christchurch Press	Otago Daily Times
Hard news	64.3%	82.4%	70.4%	87.4%	78.1%
Soft news	21.6%	1.6%	18.1%	2.6%	7.8%
Mixed	14.1%	7.8%	5.0%	7.9%	9.4%
Other		8.2%	6.5%	2.1%	4.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The results suggest the *New Zealand Herald* carried more of its election campaign coverage in feature news formats such as commentary on the same page or on the opposite page to the editorial and in weekly reviews and wrap-ups by the newspaper's political editor and political correspondents. The similarities and differences between

individual newspapers is discussed in the following chapter. The two previous findings confirm the primacy of "hard" news in election campaign coverage with over three quarters of the news copy sampled falling into the category of "hard" news. The question posed by the result is whether the "hard" news fits the tradition that "hard" news is primarily descriptive.

Looking at the proportion of campaign issues defined problematically by the nature of the news; hard, soft, mixed or other, it is clear proportionately more campaign issues in hard news stories were defined problematically than soft news. A total of 76.5% of campaign issues in hard news stories were defined problematically, compared with 23.5% which were not defined problematically. Of the campaign issues in soft news stories 54.5% were defined problematically while 45.5% were not. In mixed news stories 74.2% of the campaign issues were defined problematically while 25.8% were not. These findings impact on the old editorial division between hard news/soft news and opinion, and on the nature of journalistic writing. Both of these will be discussed in more depth in the discussion chapter which follows, Chapter 21.

**TABLE 20**

**Proportion of campaign issues in hard or soft news defined problematically**

	<b>Hard news</b>	<b>Soft news</b>	<b>Mixed</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Problem defined</b>	76.5%	54.5%	74.2%	60%
<b>No problem defined</b>	23.5%	45.5%	25.8%	40%
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%

**20.10.2 Story bylines**

One method by which regular newspaper readers judge the credibility of the news is by looking to see who wrote the story. The knowledge that a reporter of known reputation has written a particular story can influence the reader's perception of the

story. Story by-lines indicate attribution and identify for readers who has written the story or which agency has transmitted the news. An election news story which features a political correspondent's byline signifies to regular readers a degree of experience and political knowledge not necessarily held by a staff reporter, for example. The study asked whether the story was bylined and in 69.5% of the 997 stories a byline was used, while in 30.5% of stories no reporter's name or agency byline was attached to the news story. Of the 693 stories which were bylined, 38.9% carried the byline of a staff reporter on the newspaper, 25.4% carried the byline of a political correspondent specialising in political reporting employed by the newspaper, and 30.5% carried the *New Zealand Press Association* byline. The remaining 5.25% included mixed bylines such as "NZPA and staff reporter" and other press agencies.

There were variations among the five newspapers studied in relation to bylined stories with 95.3% of *Otago Daily Times* stories carrying a byline while a byline was attached to stories published in the *Evening Post* in 51.9% of cases only, perhaps reflecting the *Evening Post's* editorial policy or deadline constraints. Fluctuating policy considerations have influenced byline use in New Zealand newspapers over the years. While bylines used to be considered by news managers as rewards for particularly meritorious stories, the rise of the reporter as personality has seen an increase in bylines to promote both the journalist and the newspaper.

**TABLE 21**

**Proportion of byline attribution by individual newspaper**

<b>Byline attribution</b>	<b>New Zealand Herald</b>	<b>The Dominion</b>	<b>Evening Post</b>	<b>Christchurch Press</b>	<b>Otago Daily Times</b>
Yes	67.3%	74.7%	51.9%	60.7%	95.3%
No	32.7%	25.3%	48.1%	39.3%	4.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

For this study it was important to see how many bylined stories, where the journalist could be identified, contained election campaign issues which were defined by reference to problematic situations. The results show bylined stories were more likely than non bylined stories to contain election campaign issues which were defined problematically. A total of 76.2% of campaign issues were defined problematically in bylined stories compared with 23.8% which were not defined problematically. In non-bylined stories 67.1% of campaign issues were defined problematically compared with 32.9% which did not refer to a problematic situation.

**TABLE 22**

**The definition of campaign issues in bylined stories**

	<b>Bylined stories</b>	<b>Non bylined stories</b>
Problem defined	76.2%	67.1%
No problem defined	23.8%	32.9%
Total	100%	100%

The findings indicate that in the majority of stories containing problematic definition readers knew the identity of the reporter or the agency who had written the story. Byline attribution clearly marks out the origin of the story and goes to the issue of the credibility of the news.

For example it is suggested that a feature story written by Peter Shirtcliffe, who led the anti proportional representation lobby, and identified as such by the newspaper concerned, which contained problematic definition because proportional representation was treated as **loss of value**, might be perceived in a certain way by readers because they know the identity of the story. Similarly, a feature story written by an identified supporter of proportional representation that defines the campaign issue as **steps towards a solution** will also stimulate a particular reader reception. Byline attribution is an important element in disclosing the identity of the author and the implications of the finding will be referred to in Chapter 21.

### 20.10.3 Headline fit

The fit between the story's headline and the story itself was analysed in the study and coders were asked to decide whether the headline matched the story fully, partly or hardly at all. In 93.1 of the 997 stories coders decided the headline fully matched the story content, and in a further 6.5% of cases there was a partial match between headline and story content. In only four stories was there a problem with the headline matching the story content. The finding shows that election stories sampled were not presented in a sensational manner with the headline exaggerating or distorting the story content.

### 20.10.4 Good news/bad news

Scrutiny of the good news/bad news dichotomy is a persistent feature of news media scholarship with researchers using different units of analysis and specific comparative techniques. The irresistibility of bad news is linked to the news value of negative consequences which underpins many news selection decisions. Edelstein *et al* (1989) examined the cross cultural implications of the good news/bad news argument and characterised cognitive elements of the problematic situations by the most obvious "value" perspectives. For example, loss of value to individuals and to society was characterised as bad news because reports of this kind represented deprivation to the individual and to society, while steps towards solution was considered to be good news because people like to see problems solved. Denial of a problematic situation was regarded as balanced news. Edelstein *et al* collected data from United States, Germany, Japan and Hong Kong and then analysed the problematic situations in headlines as good, balanced and bad news according to Third World and Socialist perspectives, and according to a Western perspective. They concluded that:

...good news and bad news could be defined from several cognitive perspectives but that evaluations of this kind were subjective. Cognitive aspects of news also fitted into the debate over intellectual imperialism. Western democratic cognitive processes, particularly those that are openly portrayed, run counter to cognitive strategies of both style and substance that are pursued in Third World and socialist countries (p.125).

Patterson (1993) states that studies show election candidates in the United States context routinely receive bad press. He quotes the study by Michael Robinson and Margaret Sheehan, *Over the wire and on TV*, which examined CBS and UPI coverage of the 1980 election. The study found there was a general pattern of candidates receiving a bad press which was more pronounced in some situations, and of some candidates, and more marked on television. The study concluded that journalists, "do seem to want to make the public aware of the frailties and inadequacies of their elected leadership" (p.99). Patterson's own research of 1960-1988 election coverage, which employed a different methodology, confirmed their findings. Bad news stories about candidates create a generalised scepticism about their ability to keep election promises and their sincerity in making them in the first place.

In this research coders were asked to exercise their judgement and state whether a story was predominantly in emphasis good news, bad news or neutral. The good news/bad news categories made no distinction between good news or bad news "for" or "about" the subject matter of the news. A total of 47.7% of the stories were judged to be neutral. Over a third of the stories, 38.9%, were bad news stories and 13.4% good news.

TABLE 23

Percentage of stories whose primary emphasis was good news, bad news or balanced news

Good news	13.4%
Bad news	38.9%
Balanced news	47.7%
	100%

While there was variation between newspapers studied in no case did the proportion of good news exceed the bad news. The differences revealed between newspapers studied showed that the *Christchurch Press* had about 16% more of its stories as bad news than the *Otago Daily Times* which was the only newspaper to have more than 20%

of its news coded as "good news", possibly because of editorial policy or conventions of the newspaper. The good news/bad news discussion is a timeless one in newsrooms and many newspaper have either formal or informal editorial policies that to maintain readership the ubiquity of bad news must be leavened with daily dollops of good news. There is tension between the commercial imperatives of maintaining readership which could slip if the newspaper becomes either a "gloom sheet" or does not offer sufficiently exciting news to attract the reader's eye, and the idea that news defies a quota system and that journalists should not predetermine the emphasis of the news.

**TABLE 24**

**Percentage of good news and bad news stories by individual newspaper**

	<b>New Zealand Herald</b>	<b>Dominion</b>	<b>Evening Post</b>	<b>Christchurch Press</b>	<b>Otago Daily Times</b>
Good news	11.8%	11.0%	16.7%	5.3%	21.9%
Bad news	40.6%	44.5%	34.0%	46.6%	30.2%
Neutral	47.6%	44.5%	49.3%	48.1%	47.9%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Again there was variation between story type when the primary emphasis of the 997 stories was examined. Campaign briefs were more likely to be neutral in emphasis than either lead stories or display stories in the sample. Display stories were more likely to be neutral or bad news in emphasis.

**TABLE 25**

**Percentage of good, bad and balanced news by story type**

<b>Primary emphasis</b>	<b>Lead story</b>	<b>Display story</b>	<b>Campaign briefs</b>
Good news	16.8%	13.0%	12.8%
Bad news	35.3%	43.0%	28.4%
Balanced news	47.9%	44.0%	58.8%
Total	100%	100%	100%

The results show that campaign issues in bad news stories are more likely to be defined problematically than campaign issues in stories whose predominant emphasis is neutral or good news. A total of 89.6% of election campaign issues in stories coded as bad news were problematically defined compared with 57.5% of issues in good news stories and 63.3% of issues in stories of neutral emphasis.

**TABLE 26**  
**The definition of campaign issues in good news/bad news stories**

	<b>Good news</b>	<b>Bad news</b>	<b>Neutral</b>
Problem defined	57.5%	89.6%	63.3%
No problem defined	42.5%	10.4%	36.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

The findings show a clear relationship between campaign news stories which are predominantly bad news in emphasis and problematic definition, reinforcing the notion of a negative frame of reference in much political journalism which is discussed in Chapter 21.

#### 20.10.5 Candidate focus

The fixation of the news media on personality and not policy has long been a concern of those who would elevate the role of the news media in political discourse. Graber (1976) was able to state with respect to the United States 1972 presidential campaign that, "the most striking feature of the campaign coverage formula is the very heavy emphasis on personality characteristics of the candidates, compared to discussion of the professional qualities and issues" (p.508).

The extent of personalisation of election news stories through focus on candidates was looked at in Major's (1992) study and in this research. Coders were asked (Question 11, Appendix M) whether the news story focused predominantly on election candidates in the 1993 general election. The results show that in a third of the stories, 33.4% of stories, election candidates were the predominant focus, while in two thirds of the stories they were not. Again, the results varied by individual news paper with the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Christchurch Press* having proportionately more stories which focused on election candidates than the others.

TABLE 27

Does the story focus on election candidates by individual newspaper

	New Zealand Herald	Dominion	Evening Post	Christchurch Press	Otago Daily Times
Yes	45.8%	26.9%	27.8%	39.7%	25.5%
No	54.2%	73.1%	72.2%	60.3%	74.5%
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The results are similar to those reported by Major's (1992) in relation to newspaper stories of the 1988 United States presidential election but lower than the results recorded for news stories of the French presidential election. She examined the number and proportion of stories focusing on candidates in the United States and French presidential elections in 1988. She found 31.8% of newspaper stories focused on candidates in the United States election compared with 68.2% which did not. The proportion of newspaper stories sampled which focused on candidates in the French election was 48.7%.

New Zealand political parties have adopted a more presidential style of campaigning which is leader-focused during recent elections and the 1993 election campaign in New Zealand was perhaps more personality-centred because of the high media profiles of third party leaders, Winston Peters of New Zealand First and Jim Anderton of the



Again the results can be compared with Major's (1992) study in which she found 21.2% of newspaper stories focusing on the horse race in the 1988 United States presidential election coverage and 23.7% in the French election coverage sampled. Her results for news magazines which she also examined showed 11.5% of stories focused on the horse race in the United States 1988 presidential election and 3.1% of stories relating to the French election of the same year. Taking the results of both media, 17.5% of stories examining the United States election focused on the horse race aspect compared with 82.5% which did not and 17.6% of stories examining the French election which focused on the horse race compared with 83.4% which did not. The implications of the proportion of "horse race" coverage will be examined in the discussion of the results which follows in the next chapter, Chapter 21.

### 20.11 Summary of principal results

To summarise, the main findings of the content analysis are:

1. A total of 43 election campaign issues were defined as categories in relation to 997 stories in the sample. These campaign issues were mentioned 2032 times with three election campaign categories (candidates, roadshow and style) having the most mentions followed by health, proportional representation and unemployment. The majority of the 997 stories contain one, two or three campaign issues (86.7%).
2. A total of 73.8% (1500) of the 2032 election campaign issue mentions were accompanied by a problematic situation, compared with 26.2% (532) of issue references not defined problematically. The proportion of problematic definitions for campaign issues rises to 76.5% if the story type of campaign briefs is eliminated.
3. The problematic situation most referred to when election campaign issues are defined problematically is **loss of value**, followed by **conflict**, **need for value**, **steps towards solution**, **denial of a problem**, **blocking**, **consequences** and **indeterminate situation**.

4. Lead stories are more problematically defined than other story types and proportions of problematic codes for campaign issues varied across the five metropolitan newspapers with the two largest newspapers, the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Christchurch Press*, having the highest proportion of campaign issues in their election news coverage as problematic.
5. Clear differences emerged between specific campaign issues and the proportion of problematic definition with six issues: broadcasting, ethnic minorities, housing, immigration, trade and poverty defined with reference to a problematic situation every time they were mentioned in an election news story and fishing, cultural issues and inflation least likely to be defined problematically. The top ten campaign issues ranged from 95.3% problematic definition for health to 36.3% for election campaign (roadshow). In 75.9% of mentions proportional representation was defined by reference to a problematic situation.
6. **Loss of value and conflict** were the two dominant problematic situations for the majority of the top ten (by number of mentions) campaign issues but in relation to proportional representation **need for value** outranked **loss of value**. Unemployment was the only campaign issue that had proportionately more problematic definitions relating to **steps towards solution**.
7. Over three quarters of campaign issues in hard news stories were defined problematically, compared with a little over half of the campaign issues in soft news stories. Byline attribution was a feature of stories in which campaign issues were defined by reference to a problematic situation, the headline matched the story in over 90% of cases. Neutral news predominated, followed by bad news, then good news and a third of the news stories in the sample were candidate focused. A total of 16.7% of the stories focused on the horse race aspect of the election.

These results are discussed in the next chapter. Chapter 21 examines whether the study fulfilled the research objectives, compares the findings with previous studies, discusses the implications of principal research findings, looks at the degree of congruence in results across the newspapers studied, and discusses strengths and limitations of the study. Future research directions are also discussed in Chapter 21.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: CONTENT ANALYSIS CONCLUSION

### 21.1 Introduction

The research questions for the content analysis asked whether journalists defined topics in election campaign stories as problematic situations for readers, and if so, what was the distribution of problematic situations referred to. The other objective of the content analysis was to examine the implications of the problematic definitions for the making of political news. The research questions relating to if, and how, journalists translate campaign issues are answered conclusively. In over seven out of ten mentions journalists have translated election campaign issues into problematic situations, into conditions of discrepancy, for their readers. And the results showed clearly that a hierarchy of problematic situations was apparent. Campaign issues defined problematically were more likely to contain references to **loss of value and conflict**, followed by **need for value, steps towards a solution, denial of a problem, blocking, consequences, and indeterminate situation**.

Overall the results of the study provided support for the utility of Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of the problematic situation in news media content during an election campaign. The results show over 70% of election campaign issues sampled in news stories published by New Zealand's metropolitan newspapers over the twelve day period were defined by reference to a problematic situation such as **loss of value or conflict**. This rose to over three quarters of the campaign issues sampled when the third category of news stories, campaign briefs, were eliminated. The results show that the most important stories in the newspapers, the lead stories, were most likely to be defined problematically.

This research moved beyond descriptions of the characteristics of news and tests, and confirmed Edelstein *et al's* (1989) view of the nature of news as "discrepancy" in answer to the elusive question, "what is news?" The study supports the view that "what journalists intuitively characterize as news had its basis in conditions of discrepancy"

(p.275). Edelstein *et al* state that these conditions of discrepancy "have long been recognised intuitively as the essence of news not only by journalists but by audiences as well" (p.275). They state, "we saw our cognitive construction of problematic situations as leading to a theory of *news as discrepancy*" (p.275).

As well as the insights the results provide about the nature of news as "discrepancy", the study provided information about the performance and role of journalists in news making during a general election. The journalistic performance revealed is one of interpreting and analysing social problems and presenting them to readers as interpretation as well as description. The results have some fundamental implications for our understanding of journalistic writing, journalist routines and performance, and for news selection. The role of other social actors in the news process, such as political candidates as sources, needs re-consideration if news is "discrepancy" and particular problematic situations predominate. All of these factors are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

This chapter is structured in the following way. First, the results are compared with the findings of previous studies employing the problematic situation as a theory of media content, noting similarities and differences. Second, the principal features of the results are discussed in more depth in relation to the theory of "news as discrepancy". Third, the implications for our understanding of journalistic writing and the reportorial role are examined. Fourth, the implications of the results for other social actors in political communication are analysed. Fifth, the similarities and differences between newspapers in the study are examined. Finally, the strengths and limitations of the study are outlined and future research directions are addressed.

## **21.2 Comparison with previous studies**

This section compares the results of the research with previous studies utilising the problematic situation. There is not a rich vein of applications of Edelstein *et al*'s (1989) theory, as mentioned in Chapter 18, which confirms the relevance of the notion of problematic situations for examining news media constructions. While Major's (1992) study found support for Edelstein *et al*, the two studies utilised somewhat different

categories and were conducted in specific contexts. The differences between the two previous studies and this research need to be clearly noted because the degree of replicability achieved necessarily modifies claims of congruence and similarity of results.

For example, Edelstein *et al* (1989) sampled in each newspaper the six most prominent stories beginning on page one and made 24 coding decisions for each issue of each newspaper-six headlines and three paragraphs in each of the stories, a total of 18 paragraphs. The headlines of each story and the first three paragraphs were classified separately. In this way, Edelstein *et al* compared the thrust of the headlines with the content of the stories to see if the headline portrayed the same problematic situation that was represented by the lead paragraphs of the story. By comparison in Major's (1992) study and in this research the whole story is the unit of analysis rather than the first three paragraphs only. Second, the placement of the story in the newspaper was not a feature of categorisation. So while Edelstein *et al* concentrated on the front page this study looked at *all* stories.

A different approach was taken in this study towards headline "fit", a methodological design difference based on twenty years of copy tasting while I was a journalist. In the New Zealand context there are few stories in each edition of a newspaper in which the headline is not taken directly from the first three paragraphs of the story. Copy editing, called sub-editing in New Zealand, is generally characterised by a conservative rather than a sensational approach in broadsheet journalism. While sub editors who write headlines enjoy a degree of freedom and autonomy they must follow the story to encapsulate in the headline of a few words the major elements and principal theme of the story. To some extent computerisation in New Zealand newsrooms has honed the fit between headline and story because of the check subbing process by which a check sub editor vets story editing and headline fit before the page is made up.

Because it was felt there would be very few stories in the New Zealand sample in which the headline might be more problematically defined than the story it was attached to, the headline was not a unit of analysis. Instead a general content question was asked in relation to each story (Question 9) about whether the headline matched the story content, fully, partly, or hardly at all. The results confirm the conformity between headline and story in the New Zealand context; in 93.1% of the 997 stories the headline matched fully and in a further 6.5% of cases there was a partial fit.

The nature of news analysed differed too. Edelstein *et al* (1989) concentrated on front page news stories ("hard" news) while Major's (1992) study covered straight news stories, signed opinion columns, editorials, features, news analysis stories and opinion polls ("hard" and "soft" news). This research covered all the categories identified as "news" by Major except for editorials which were not considered "news" for the purpose of the study. Using the same rationale, that the editorials were opinion-based, letters to the editor were excluded also from the New Zealand research.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the Edelstein *et al* (1989) study and those that have followed, relates to the categories of problematic situation. In addition to the eight problematic situations identified in Major's (1992) research and replicated in this study (**loss of value, individual and societal; need for value, individual and societal; conflict, individual and societal; indeterminate situation, blocking, consequences, steps towards a solution and denial of a problem**), Edelstein *et al* added another category, "implications for problematic situations." They state:

One conceptual consideration was that many news reports about such seemingly routine events as meetings, announcements, reports, and so on did not state explicitly that the events were held in response to observable problematic situations, present or future. But it could be reasonably assumed that meetings carried implications of that kind, that is, problematics that created the need for meetings, announcements, and so on or that might, as a consequence create problems. We coded stories of this kind as "implications for problematic situations" (p.109).

The addition of this category of problematic situation allows Edelstein *et al* to code all news stories in all newspapers, whereas such stories caught by the creation of this category may have been coded as "no problem defined" in Major's (1992) study and in this research.

Comparison across the three studies is therefore problematic and it is easier to compare Major's (1992) findings with the New Zealand results. It is worth noting, however, Edelstein *et al*'s (1989) comments about their findings **without** the additional category. They state:

Except for announcements of meetings and similar events as carrying implications for problematic situations, 75% (Hong Kong) to 86% (U.S.) of the stories on page 1 contained references to the kinds of problematic situations reflected in interviews with students. Other than conflict in the individual and individual needs, all categories were represented (p.111).

Bearing in mind the caveat expressed about comparability, there is evidence of congruence across the three studies in relation to the principal finding. This is that the majority of stories in different newspapers studied, and published in different cultural and political contexts and at different times, were defined in relation to problematic situations. Edelstein *et al* (1989) found between 75% and 86% depending on the country and newspaper, Major (1992) who studied both newspapers and news magazines found 55.3% defined problematically in relation to the 1988 United States elections and 74.8% in relation to the French election of the same year, and the New Zealand results showed 73.8% of campaign issues in news stories in metropolitan newspapers sampled defined problematically, rising to 76.5% when campaign brief stories are eliminated. The New Zealand results answer in the affirmative the research question of whether journalists define topics in the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign as problematic situations for readers. What then are the implications of the main findings for the manufacture of news?

### 21.3 The implications for the manufacture of news

The results of the New Zealand research refine what Edelstein *et al* (1989) have called a "testable" theory of news. They state the "testable" theory is distinguishable from McQuail's (1987) four other kinds of theory concerning mass communication (social scientific theory, normative theory, working theory and commonsense theory) because it allows a meaningful answer to the question, "what is news?" The study shows support for Edelstein *et al*'s concept that news is discrepancy, that an event, issue, utterance or happening will become news when it can be defined by reference to a problematic situation such as loss of value, need for value etc.

When there is competition for news attention in an election, campaign issues which are problematically defined become news in over seven cases out of ten and this cognitive structure of the problematic situation provides equivalence of meaning to both producers and consumers of news because as Edelstein *et al* (1989) state, the problematic situation is utilized similarly by both journalists and audiences. The problematic situation provides a "system of analysis that would reflect audience interests with the dynamics of news" (p.106). The course of events which may provide potential news must assume the "definable shape", to use Lippmann's (1922) description, before news is made. The definable shape is one of "obtrusion", the obtrusion of a discrepancy, as discussed in Chapter 17 at 17.4. From the indefinable course of events there is a point which can be "fixed, objectified, measured and named" in relation to the discrepancy (Lippmann, p.341).

An example is the election story relating to the letter from the Minister of Women's Affairs, Mrs Jenny Shipley, to New Zealand women during the election campaign (*New Zealand Herald*, October 28, 1993, p.1.). Addressed to "Dear Voter", the letter canvassed "positive progress" in issues that affected women. Letters are sent to constituents by politicians free of direct cost as a matter of course under parliamentary service regulations. The vast majority of such letters do not make the news nor cause any ripple of public attention. What then pushed this particular letter into the headlines? It was an "obtrusion," to use Lippmann's (1922) term, because it provoked complaint from political opponents and sparked political controversy and conflict. Mrs Shipley's response was one of denying the problem. The major condition of discrepancy was that of **conflict**, with the secondary problematic situation of **denial of a problem**. The election campaign issue of women's affairs was defined problematically and the flow of the course of events was "fixed, objectified, measured and named" in relation to the complaints. It was a case of "news as discrepancy". Of course, the news as discrepancy had a reverberation effect in the news cycle as follow-up stories followed a path of problematic definitions in terms of **consequences**, and **steps towards solution**, of the "problem" of political over-expenditure of "free" postage.

The findings of the research answer, too, the second research question relating to the distribution of problematic situations. The study identified 2032 campaign issue references and in 1500 cases the issue was defined problematically. A total of 2188

problematic situations were recorded by coders for the 1500 cases. Collapsing the three categories (loss of value, need for value and conflict) which had individual and societal levels, the results show that over half (51.2%) of the problematic situations were loss of value or conflict.

Edelstein *et al* (1989), in the context of their cross cultural study, characterised loss of value as bad news and conflict as either bad news or balanced news. The New Zealand findings reveal a definite hierarchy of problematic situations by proportion of use. Campaign issues defined problematically were more likely to be defined by reference to negative conditions of discrepancy such as loss of value and conflict than the more positive categories, need for value, which Edelstein *et al* coded as balanced news, and steps towards solution, defined as good news. The results show journalists are more frequently interpreting election campaign issues with reference to negative problematic situations than positive problematic situations. In relation to the theory of news as discrepancy the findings reaffirm negativity in news manufacture. Bad news is more likely to be discrepant than good news.

The results confirm, too, the journalist's dislike of ambiguity or situations which suggest subtle shades of grey in meaning. The problematic situations which can be characterised as black or white such as conflict and need for value were more frequently utilised than the less clear cut categories of indeterminate situation, consequences or blocking, which featured lowest by proportion of the problematic situations in the study.

The New Zealand study explored whether particular campaign issues such as health or education were defined by reference to specific problematic situations, and if so, which ones. Of the ten major campaign issues (ranked by number of mentions) only one, unemployment, was defined most often (in terms of proportion of references) as the problematic situation of steps towards solution. This problematic situation, which most equates to the provision of "answers" for campaign issues and societal ills, is therefore not ranked highly overall and this has implications for the function and purpose of the news media. McQuail (1987), in his discussion of the principal functions of the mass media for society, referred to in Chapter Two, suggests a typology which includes mobilization, campaigning for societal objectives in different spheres such as

politics. The results of this study suggest, though, that the important news media purpose of mobilization was accorded a fairly low priority during the 1993 New Zealand general election campaign reportage by metropolitan newspaper journalists. Instead, emphasis is on controversy, differentiation and opposition (conflict), on what society or an individual has to lose (loss of value), and to a lesser extent on what society and the individual needs to gain (need for value). This finding has implications, too, for the way politicians as news sources tailor their political communication which will be referred to later in this chapter.

The conformity of the results across the major election campaign categories in the study (candidates, roadshow and style), with the emphasis on problematic definitions of loss and conflict, showed that journalists in general interpreted the campaign with a particular frame of reference. A number of issues are raised by the results. The first is that if voters were seeking information to understand social problems, to differentiate candidate positions and to reconcile party policy, the news media's construction in metropolitan newspapers in the 1993 general election would probably not have provided them with the necessary information. The second issue concerns the function of news. If the majority of election campaign issues were defined problematically according to a negative frame of reference could the news media fulfil McQuail's (1987) other principal purposes of the media? These are **information**, **correlation** described as explaining, interpreting and commenting on the meaning of events, and **continuity** described in part as forging and maintaining commonality of values. The answer is probably not. Instead the news media may be simply fulfilling the **entertainment** function with the political spectacle and the dramaturgy of the election campaign providing diversion, if not relaxation.

The third issue raised by the research findings is whether, and how much, the negative frame of reference or bad news interpretation reflects the news media "disdaining" the election campaign as news (Levy, 1981). How much did the interpretation of the news by political reporters reflect their perception of the election campaign as "pseudo" news (Tiffen, 1989)? It was clear that many of the campaign events and utterances by political candidates which were reported would not be news outside an election campaign context. The nexus between politicians and journalists during election campaigns is an uneasy one. Journalists know that election campaigns are contrived events which

politicians would probably abandon altogether should the news media collectively boycott them. Yet reporters are unable to ignore election campaigns both for their democratic and historical significance and because they must cover all the other journalists covering the election campaign. So journalists adopt defensive strategies and Levy states the device of "disdaining the news" allows reporters to be seen to distance themselves from media manipulation by suggesting it is contrived. Levy states the notion of disdaining the news is also meant to imply "a relatively high degree of self-consciousness by the journalist toward the problematic newswork task" and the journalist engages in the "social psychological mechanism of role-distancing" (p.27). The question raised by the findings of the research was whether journalists are more likely to define campaign issues problematically, say as conflict between two politicians, as a defensive strategy. Future research which compares election campaign reportage with political news coverage outside the election campaign context could test this suggestion.

The results have implications, too, for the public mood about politics. How much do journalistic interpretations of election campaign issues reflect the public mood and how much do they create and reinforce impressions of the political process? If the news media do loom even larger in the whole election campaign process as Leone (1993) suggests, then should they share a greater responsibility for any influence they have on the prevailing public mood of scepticism and distaste for politics and politicians? What is the impact of the theory of news as discrepancy, of the fact that most election campaign issues are defined problematically, and of the fact that the major issues have negative definitions? Do these factors combine to increase the disconnection of voters with political processes? While this research did not examine media effects it is clear that the findings and the theory of "news as discrepancy" warrant further enquiry in relation to media effects. Blumler (1990) states there are signs that "the modern publicity process may be promoting an increased circulation of negative messages about political actors, events and decisions" (p.109). These findings certainly support the contention. The question is whether this means, as Blumler states, "the prospects are evident for inculcating detachment, confusion and mistrust among citizens" (p.109).

Two findings of the content analysis have more positive implications. Personalisation of the news, the human interest factor, is linked to increasing the entertainment character of the news while downgrading the information content of the news. With

an increasing emphasis on leadership in politics and the rise of maverick politicians such as Winston Peters to leadership status in the 1993 campaign, it could have been expected that the proportion of news stories which focused predominantly on candidates would have been higher. Two thirds of election reportage in the sample of metropolitan news stories was *not* predominantly about aspiring politicians, while a third of the stories in the sample focused mainly on candidates. While there is no previous comparative data about previous New Zealand election news coverage which permits discussion of trends, the result appears to be in keeping with the increased issue coverage of the 1992 American presidential election noted as an improvement by the Twentieth Century Fund Taskforce on Television and the Campaign of 1992.

The proportion of news stories which focused on the "horse race" of the election campaign was another finding which prompts cautious optimism. Patterson (1980) in his comprehensive study of the 1976 presidential election found that, over all the news media studied, between 51 and 58% of election news was about the campaign contest process, compared with only 28 to 32% of election news about the substance of the presidential election. Major's (1992) study of the 1988 presidential election found only 21.2% of newspaper stories focusing on the "horse race". And the New Zealand study found only 16.5% of the 997 stories were focused on who would win the race and be first past the post. Directly comparing these results is risky because the studies used different categories, but criticism of "horse race" reporting during campaigns has led to some improvements. In the New Zealand context one factor influencing the lower proportion of "horse race" reporting concerns reporting of polls. In 1993 the principal polls on party favouritism and political leadership popularity were commissioned by the electronic media and news magazines and not by the metropolitan press. So while the newspapers analysed in this study reported the results of the polls commissioned by competitors they did so in a low level manner both in terms of prominence and space allocated.

#### **21.4 Implications of the findings for the nature of journalistic writing**

The research results (Chapter 20, Table 20) suggest that the traditional, commonly accepted editorial division of "hard" news which contains "facts" and is "objective", and "soft" news which contains interpretation and opinion and is more "subjective", is

anachronistic. Wyatt and Badger (1993) state, "the grand division into the Big Three of news, editorials and features has become enshrined, either explicitly or implicitly, in most textbooks and in the heads of generations of students" despite the knowledge by practising journalists and news media researchers that the boundaries are "fuzzy and misleading and are continually crossed in practice" (p.3). Wyatt and Badger list no less than thirteen journalism education text books in which the division is perpetuated. Even Cappon (1982), editor of the news writing bible, *The word*, divides the news into "hard" and "soft". He states, "the hard news story marches briskly through the whats, whens, wheres, *looking neither right nor left*, packing in enough details to give readers a clear picture" (my emphasis added, p.100). Feature stories, or "soft news" on the other hand, "illuminate events, offer perspective, explanation and interpretation, record trends and tell people about people"(p.100). As referred to in Chapter Two, Wyatt and Badger call for a new typology of journalistic genres.

The relevance of the distinction between hard and soft news for this research is that the findings confound the traditional division. In hard news the level of interpretation by the journalist is commonly assumed to be minimal. Acknowledging the obvious, that all news is to some degree "interpretive", in hard news the journalist dons a mask of detachment and suppresses his or her personal opinion and analytical perspective. Yet the results show the majority of stories to be hard news, and that within these the majority of campaign issues were defined problematically.

The performance of the journalist shown in the results was not objective, detached and factual but rather interpretive and analytical in addition to the descriptive function of the reporting. The Ministry of Women's Affairs letter story, for example, was not framed as a description of a set of facts from which readers are left to make up their minds. Rather it was interpreted by the reporter as a contested scenario and presented as "facts" defined with reference to problematic situations (**conflict and denial of a problem**). While the **form** of hard news stories in the sample allowed coders to distinguish between hard and soft news stories and followed conventional hard news formats like the inverted pyramid format, the story content contained both description (the "facts") and exposition (interpretation). This finding further undermines the hard news/soft news dichotomy and means the nature of journalistic writing needs reconsideration.

Despite the fallacious nature of the concept of objectivity in the news, the legitimacy of contemporary journalism in developed society has been inextricably bound to the notion of objectivity as a working practice. Hard news is often considered innately superior as a form of journalistic writing because it is pure and uncontaminated by subjectivity. The results showed that under the surface of news formats, though, the news content is far from objective, but interpretive with problematic definitions of the majority of election campaign issues. The study confirms that the journalistic genre is more complex than the "old editorial division" allows. In particular this has implications for the attachment of reporters to the myth of objectivity in hard news, in practice, and for the teaching of journalistic writing. Wyatt and Badger's (1993) call for a new typology of journalism, based on the modes of composition commonly used in rhetorical and literary studies, may provide a more definitive classification scheme for contemporary journalism. The results of this study support their call for a re-examination of the way journalism is written.

### 21.5 Politicians as news sources and the problematic definition of news

This section of the discussion examines what the results mean for politicians who wish to tailor their communications to political advantage. The results show that election campaign issues covered in lead stories were more likely to be defined problematically, and that the dominant problematic situations were **conflict** and **loss of value**.

Two competing scenarios can be advanced on behalf of politicians as news sources in light of these findings. The first is suggested by Major (1992) who states that the fact "some issues are not defined problematically may provide important political advantages. The world of issue ambiguity is the politician's haven" (p.611). She goes on to quote Edelman (1988) who suggests that innovative ideas are more likely to disqualify an aspirant. This line of argument would suggest that a political candidate should align themselves with campaign issues which would not be defined problematically in new stories by journalists. They would stay away from areas of contestation and perhaps identify with campaign issues which might be interpreted not as **conflict**, **loss of value** and **need for value** but as **consequences** or **indeterminate situations**.

There is, however, a two-fold difficulty with this scenario. The first is that the major issues of the New Zealand 1993 general election campaign: health, taxes, education, proportional representation and unemployment were not defined by reference to anything other than clear cut problematic situations such as loss of **value**, **conflict** and in the case of unemployment **steps towards solution**. So a serious political aspirant could not hide in the haven of "issue ambiguity" and at the same time feature on the front page of metropolitan newspapers. The public expected answers to questions on major issues such as health and taxes, and it is these issues in which policy differentiation between candidates is publicised.

The second objection to Major's (1992) view is that it runs counter to the prevailing relationship between politicians as sources and journalists. As Blumler (1990) states there is "the assumption that publicity matters." Political candidates have had to develop what Blumler (1990) has termed "source professionalization" and tailor their messages to the requirements of journalists' formats, news values and work habits. If the predominant coverage of election issues by journalists in news stories is one of problematic definition then politicians must attune themselves to this interpretive stance or risk being ignored by the news media. This requires a degree of sophistication about political communication that many politicians do not possess although the results of the action research project during this research suggested candidates could increase their level of understanding of news media processes during an election campaign and develop regular source relationships with journalists.

The notion of source professionalization raises the question of equality of access by political aspirants. Not all good political candidates can afford the vast expense of those who dabble in political message-making, the "spin doctors", the public relations advisers, communications consultants and information specialists. Political incumbency, too, allows the Government of the day access to a growing apparatus of state information management. The economically differentiated access to source professionalization among political aspirants undermines the ideal of the news media as a conduit to the public for political messages.

Both these objections suggest the second scenario will be adopted by political candidates wishing to tailor political communications to their advantage. This scenario would see political sources exploit the journalistic definition of campaign issues as problematic situations by casting news releases, political speeches aimed at the news media, and public appearances around campaign issues which can be defined problematically. The heavy occurrence of problems defined as **conflict and loss of value** and the relatively few campaign issues defined as **steps towards solution** suggest that in the 1993 New Zealand general election, at least, the journalistic interpretation to readers of issues was more likely to be defined in terms of the public losing something of value instead of what politicians felt could be done to improve a situation. This represents a bleak, but nonetheless realistic, picture of contemporary political journalism and the nature of political dialogue in New Zealand during the 1993 campaign.

#### **21.6 Similarities and differences between newspapers in the study**

The results overall show general patterns such as election campaign issues were more likely to be defined problematically and that three out of five of the newspapers were more likely to define election campaign issues by reference to two problematic situations than one. Again the ranking of problematic situations shows a hierarchy across the newspapers of **conflict and loss of value** followed by **need for value** and **steps towards solution**.

Despite the congruence of main findings, though, the findings reveal some unexpected differences between the newspapers studied. In a previous study of the same newspapers in relation to crime news reporting (McGregor, 1993) a greater degree of homogeneity of news was reported although the study was descriptive only and explored the percentage of space allocated to crime news, rather than whether the news was problematically defined. This led to an expectation by the researcher of a similar degree of congruence across the five newspapers which was not borne out by the results.

The differences recorded in the content analysis of election news somewhat confound popular perception of the image of at least two of the newspapers concerned. For example, two metropolitans commonly regarded as more conservative, the *New Zealand Herald* (colloquially and affectionately referred to as "Granny Herald") and the *Christchurch Press* were most likely to define election campaign issues in stories as problematic, and were more likely to define election campaign issues by reference to two problematic situations than one. The *Otago Daily Times* and the *Evening Post* were at the other end of the scale.

Some tentative suggestions only can be advanced for these differences. First, it is perhaps no surprise that the *Evening Post* results show that when an election campaign issue was defined problematically in the newspaper it was predominantly defined by reference to one problematic situation (83.3%) rather than two problematic situations (16.7%). The newspaper was the only metropolitan daily in the sample published in the afternoon cycle as opposed to the morning cycle. Prohibitive deadlines attach to afternoon dailies in New Zealand with copy deadlines for last editorial pages of 10am-10.30am of the day of publication. The time frame for news gathering for an afternoon metropolitan newspaper begins at midnight of the day before publication (when the morning newspaper cycle ends) and goes through to about 2 pm (last edition) on the day of publication. This necessarily limits the amount of interpretation a journalist can bring to a story. The challenge is to simply provide descriptive copy content of news of the day for the first edition and tidy up the copy by additional comment or "re hitting" the copy for the second edition. The fastest form of news writing is a stenographic approach highlighting "facts" in an inverted pyramid format.

Suggested reasons why election issues in the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Christchurch Press* were more likely to be problematically defined include the characteristics of the reporters and the size and catchment areas of these two newspapers. Both the newspapers have senior, long standing political correspondents attached to parliament who covered the 1993 general election. Correspondents like Oliver Riddell of the *Christchurch Press* are veteran "heavyweights" in the Parliamentary Press Gallery.

The two metropolitans have always placed emphasis on quality political reportage, not necessarily a feature of other major New Zealand newspapers. Political correspondents are not always subject to rigorous copy editing which purges opinion and eliminates interpretation in story content. They enjoy a different newsroom status than staff reporters who often do not have the experience, confidence or political sophistication to "angle" a story and define it in a particular way. *The Dominion*, by comparison, lost its most senior political correspondent, Richard Long, from the Parliamentary Press Gallery between the 1990-1993 elections. Long, considered the doyen of the Gallery, became editor of the newspaper and the newspaper appeared to adopt a lower key approach to the 1993 campaign with political correspondents of lesser experience and reputation in the parliamentary press gallery.

The second suggested reason for the proportionately greater problematic definition of election campaign issues by the two newspapers concerns their size, catchment area and superior resources. All of these influence news selection policy. The two newspapers, the largest in the sample, were likely to be more competitive in the news selected with reporters fighting for news space and for prominence. The suggestion is that a greater number of reporters covering a larger area produced an excess of news copy each day of the election campaign which meant news editors could choose which stories to use and which to highlight. In a more competitive news environment those who make the important choices in newsrooms were likely to choose the more controversial, harder edged, stories in keeping with journalistic tradition, over blander news copy. The more controversial the story the more prominently it was displayed which confirms the finding that lead stories during the campaign contained proportionately more references to problematic situations. Clearly these suggestions concerning journalistic resources and news selection policies, which are based on personal journalistic experience, need more research, including participant observation in the news room, to see which stories are chosen ahead of others and what criteria are used for the selection.

## 21.7 Strengths, limitations and future research directions

### 21.7.1 Strengths

The strength of this research lies in the use of a cognitive structure as a main category for analysis. The structure, the problematic situation, allowed for a more sophisticated examination of the meaning of news in an election campaign context than would have been provided from descriptive categories traditionally employed in content analysis. The study *did* provide descriptive results, such as election campaign issues as topics by number of mention in election news stories, which provided valuable information about which issues dominated the news agenda. But this quantitative data was supplemented by additional insights into whether journalists interpreted the news. The study enabled the researcher to confirm the utility of a "testable" theory of news as discrepancy and to establish the journalists' role as social analysts during the 1993 campaign.

The research results are important, too, because they have provided new information about how particular campaign issues are defined by journalists. For example, when unemployment was defined by reference to a problematic situation, the most likely problematic definition was *steps towards a solution*. Taxes were a clear site of *conflict* definitions and health was interpreted as *loss of value and conflict*, in the majority of cases where these issues were problematically defined. The knowledge that certain campaign issues attract negative or positive problematic definitions could influence the content and style of political messages by future general election candidates.

The healthy sample size used in the research, the rigour of the coding process employed in the content analysis and the clarity of data which was produced, allow, too, for replications of the study in future elections and for application in other political, and non-political contexts. It could be argued that several previous content analyses of the news media in New Zealand (Atkinson, 1994; McGregor, 1993) have been too small to generalise with confidence from the findings which has limited the quality of debate between academics and practitioners.

### 21.7.2 Limitations

Several limitations need to be noted about this research. The first is a general limitation which relates to any content analysis of news media content which purports to be "objective" but in the end is being coded by human beings and their essentially "subjective" frames of reference. The reality of reading the news, of analysing news stories in an election campaign and working out the issues covered and then considering whether these issues were defined problematically, is essentially a subjective process. As Ericson *et al* (1991) state, "people in various settings at different times give it (the news) significance according to their circumstances and their selves" (p.53). But there is an important distinction between informal viewing of, and listening to, the news and an empirical study of news content employing content analysis methodology.

Talking of television news, Lichty and Bailey (1978) state that a viewer or listener's selective exposure, perception and recall make it impossible for the news consumer to have a broad and accurate overview of all that is on the news. "People tend to over-generalize from what they do see and remember". They state that "we analyse the content of news because a valid and reliable study is sharply different from casual watching" (p.112). The comments relate equally to the reading of newspapers.

This study minimised the limitations of the inherent subjectivity of content analysis by insistence on a common frame of reference among the three coders and by adherence to the time-honoured measures of reliability and validity to limit the study being impressionistic. The degree of interaction about coding decisions between coders was high. In part this was because the development of the 43 election campaign issues involved continuous discussion, review and recoding where necessary. In part, too, it was a response to the content analysis protocol going beyond topical descriptions (such as whether the election campaign issue was "health", or "education" or "crime") to interpretive frameworks such as if, and how, these topics are translated by journalists. The reliability results (for issues and for topics referred to in Chapter 19) show that the coders developed a slightly more universal frame of reference for topics than for issues, and this reflects the acute research challenge posed by content analysis of news media content which moves beyond topical coding.

A clear limitation of this research is the lack of precise replicability of Edelstein *et al's* (1989) and Major's (1992) studies to allow direct cross cultural comparison of the utility of the theory of news media content. Because the same units of analysis and categories were not applied in the three studies general patterns in results can be referred to only, such as the majority of campaign issues being defined problematically and the dominance of some problematic situations. There clearly needs to be subsequent applications of Edelstein *et al's* theory examining the news media's construction of problematic situation to confirm the utility of the theory in news media scholarship. However, the principal results do show that the addition of the problematic situation codes employed in this research to traditional topic classification employed in the majority of news media analysis provides valuable insight into political communication.

### 21.7.3 Future research directions

Several future research directions are suggested by the results reported here. In particular, comparative data which analyse whether election campaigns are reported more problematically by reporters covering politics than non-campaign periods would be particularly useful. It would provide insight into whether journalists bring a special interpretative frame of reference to election campaigns. Major (1992) suggests, too, that subsequent applications of the theory of problematic situation of media content to a variety of election contexts should be useful in clarifying how political contexts are reported. She states:

Application of the problematic situation codes to the text of political speeches, press releases and voter interpretations of what the candidates and press are reporting may provide answers to whether or not the lack of problem definition results from journalistic constraints or is a product of political rhetoric or both (p.611).

Two other points are worth noting. The first arose in discussion between coders about the manner in which election campaign stories are written. The methodology as employed looked at the manifest content of what was written and there has been discussion of the implications of the findings for the nature of journalistic writing and the concept of objectivity. But very often coders felt there was an additional ingredient

in stories which could influence their judgement on whether an election issue was defined problematically or not. This referred less to the content of the story than the tone of the story as written by the journalist. Very often a story would be couched in a cynical or sceptical tone, an ironic tone, or in occasional cases a downright sarcastic tone. It would be useful in further applications to attempt to develop a typology in relation to "tone" which would allow cross correlation between the tone of the story and whether there was problematic definition.

The second point is that applications of the "testable" theory of news which have been reported concentrate on the print media: newspapers and news magazines. Subsequent applications of the theory of the problematic situation of media content could usefully explore electronic news, both radio and television. It is acknowledged that the development of categories and content analysis protocols for broadcast news is more complex, resource intensive and needs to include typologies relating to visualness in the case of television which do not apply to the literalness of print media. Nonetheless a cross media comparison would be a valuable addition to research on news media content theory employing the problematic situation.

## 21.8 Conclusion

This research makes a claim for an understanding of the interpretive dimensions of political communication through analysing news media content. This differs from the more traditional evaluative dimension in which the central question is whether the news media have exhibited bias or partisanship in coverage. As Golding (1990) suggests, the interpretive dimension asks "what aspects of policy are broadcast into the public domain, what is the issue seen to be about. This dimension can introduce indirect evaluation by linking a policy with pre-set responses to key issues" (p.97).

It can be suggested that translation of election campaign issues into largely negative problematic definitions works to produce a fairly arid picture of contemporary politics. When, for example, fundamental issues such as health, taxes and education are defined during the election campaign by reference to conflict and loss of value and to a lesser

extent by reference to need for value and to steps towards solution then this builds a general frame of reference. Golding (1990) states that it is the general frame of reference into which the policy initiative is translated that "determines its reception, lodging it into a predetermined response set more permanently located in the political culture" (p.98). If Golding is correct, then in political news which consistently suggests, say, that politicians disagree about the necessity for, and extent of, health restructure then should it be a surprise that one response is that politicians are implacably combative and incapable of consensus? Similarly when election campaign style is often discussed in terms of the familiar "broken promises" of politicians, one response will be that politics is innately mendacious. And it can be asked, too, if the low ranking given to the problematic definition of steps towards solution evoke a response that politically inspired solutions for the problems that worry individual voters are irrelevant and unlikely? The implications of the research findings for political journalism are that the ideal of the news media as a democratic force during an election campaign, a force which provides citizens with the opportunity to inform themselves, was not fully realised during metropolitan newspaper coverage of the 1993 New Zealand general election. A remaining question is whether we need to, as Patterson (1993) suggests, reassess "our expectations of the press as thoroughly as we judge its performance" (p.92). He states, "we need to examine why the press cannot do the job that the modern campaign asks of it" (p.92).

In the concluding chapter, Chapter 21, the three methodologies employed in this research to examine the manufacture of the news in the 1993 New Zealand general election are summarised and linkages identified. The final chapter considers, too, the nature of political journalism as democratic dialogue in light of the major results and whether society needs to reconsider its expectations of the news media. Possible reforms to improve the performance of the press in election reporting are suggested to conclude the study.

## CHAPTER TWENTY TWO: ELECTION COVERAGE AND DEMOCRATIC JOURNALISM

### 22.1 Introduction

The suggestion that expectations of the news media need to be examined as thoroughly as the performance of journalists (Patterson, 1993) implies that in some way society's expectations are too high. Certainly all three methodologies utilised in this research, action research, participant observation and content analysis, expose limitations, excesses and negative patterns of news making which suggest commonly accepted normative standards for the news media are not being met. The question is whether these normative standards are unrealistic ideals.

### 22.2 Principal findings

While a separate conclusions chapter has been written for each of the research strands (Action research, Chapter Six; Participant observation, Chapter 16; and Content analysis, Chapter 21), it is worth restating the principal findings of the three strands of research before debating the issue of normative standards.

#### 22.2.1 Action research findings

The findings of the action research methodology revealed that a systematic process of source relationship can be cultivated between political candidate and journalist, which in principle enhances the democratic function of the news media as a platform for intelligent and informed debate. The action research project in Miramar raised the level of understanding by a candidate and her political workers about use of the news media. Concepts such as newsworthiness, candidate accessibility, political incumbency and the reporter's search for a news angle were all disclosed to Mrs King and her campaign committee. The random nature of news manufacture was also illustrated to those participating in the action research.

The project also provided a model of the news process cycle which can be utilised by other political candidates who do not have access to professional public relations. This is likely to be a valuable communications tool in a new political environment which will be ushered in with proportional representation to New Zealand. And the action research answered McChesney's (1993) call for communications scholars to work with public groups so they can use the existing media systems to best effect and produce their own communications. It is debatable, though, whether the action research improved the nature of democratic dialogue. In the process of manufacturing news the project was bound by the prevailing climate of political rhetoric, with its considerable shortcomings.

### 22.2.2 Participant observation results

The participant observation component of this research demonstrated the pervasive nature of spin doctoring in the manufacture of election news during the 1993 New Zealand general election. The participant observation study examined the timing and character of spin doctoring occurring reactively (backwards spin doctoring) or preemptively (forwards spin doctoring), and discussed the need for future communications scholarship exploring the nexus between journalist and politician to be expanded to include spin doctors. The generalizable findings from the participant observation used in this study revealed a complex, shifting contest for control over knowledge and power in the making of news between politicians, reporters and third party sources. The contest had three significant features which were:

1. The increased sophistication of, and acceptance of, third party sources actively intervening in news processes.
2. The frustration evident among political leaders seeking to control or to circumvent traditional political journalism and wrest back for themselves the initiative in communicating with the electorate. The frustration manifested itself in more aggressive behaviour towards reporters, increased reliance on spin doctoring, new thinking by politicians about the nature of their "public appearances" during election campaigns, and strategic support for "new" news formats.

3. A more central, active and subjective role by journalists in news processes assumed by them to both defend their status and enlarge their role. Self promotion, disdaining both the news and politicians, and inserting themselves in the news are some of the characteristics of this new reportorial role.

Again these features impacting on the manufacture of news during an election campaign have implications for the democratic role of the news media. The participant observation section of the research examined them against Golding's (1990) suggestion of a revival of the notion of citizenship in relation to political communication. Golding sees the critical question as "to what degree and in what ways are people denied access to necessary information and imagery to allow full and equal participation in the social order?" (p.98).

One finding of the participant observation had positive potential, and three findings had negative implications, for the notion of citizenship in political communication. The positive possibility was the strategic use by politicians of non-traditional news formats which may lead to greater access to politicians by audiences who feel distanced and perceive themselves to be disenfranchised by conventional election campaign communication. The negative implication of the "new" news was that it has provided politicians with a strategy to avoid adversarial questions from reporters and so side-step the conventional accountability function of journalism.

The second finding with negative implications for citizenship was the uncritical acceptance by journalists of the rituals and performance of spin doctors. This acceptance manifested itself in non-disclosure by journalists to the public of the pervasive influence of spin doctors on the content and nature of news. The third finding which negatively impacted on citizenship was the self promotion of journalists as more central and active in the news process altering the face of news towards more subjective, interpretive and impressionistic journalism. Part of the necessary information for citizenship is the ability of the news media audience to differentiate between the journalist's voice and the politician's voice in the news process.

### 22.2.3 Content analysis findings

The third arm of the research process examining the manufacture of news employed content analysis to test Edelstein *et al's* (1989) theory of news media content. The results confirmed a larger interpretive as opposed to purely descriptive role for journalists with over 70% of election campaign mentions in the metropolitan press in the period sampled being defined problematically. The negative nature of the problematic definition was apparent with a high reliance on references to **loss of value and conflict**. The content analysis confirmed the theory of the news as discrepancy.

The implications for the democratic function of the news media relate to whether the news media can fulfil roles such as **mobilizing** (McQuail, 1987) by campaigning for societal objectives, if they are employing consistently negative frames of reference to define election campaign issues. The news media's claim to legitimacy as "objective" purveyors of information, a claim which has largely rested on the nature of journalistic writing, is questioned by the research findings. And the findings have implications for how political candidates could and should tailor political messages. If candidates want to make news then the results suggested they must present clear cut campaign issues which were defined as a loss to someone or society, or as involving conflict at an individual or societal level. The idealist who advances solutions to political problems or the political aspirant who wants to explore the complexities and contexts of social situations in a less definitive manner was less likely to be headlined.

### **22.3 Overall limitations**

The limitations of each methodology employed in this study have been debated separately (Action research, Chapter Nine at 9.7; Participant observation, Chapter 10 at 10.2.11 and Content analysis, Chapter 21 at 21.1.7). But it is necessary to note some general limitations of the study. An obvious limitation is the absence of research exemplars. This impacts in two ways. First, there is very little in the way of news media scholarship in the New Zealand election context to provide a basis for comparison about the manufacture of news. Second, there are few journalism research precedents

which employ the particular combination of methodologies and perspectives used here. Because the research is benchmark in its nature and broad in its scope some caution must be expressed about the generalizability and definitive nature of the findings. The innovative use of action research in political communication is another reason for a conservative approach to the findings. For while action research aims at holistic understanding of a given social situation it is, of course, situation specific.

The second general limitation concerns the nature of any personal bias brought to the research by the researcher. In this case such bias might exist because the usual degree of research detachment and objectivity brought by researchers who are not deeply steeped in the mores, customs and professional norms of the activity they study is absent. Two sections of the research, action research and participant observation, comprise an "insider's" look conducted by a researcher who is additionally a former "insider". Journalistic socialisation weaves a powerful influence on those it embraces and after twenty years as a journalist it may be unrealistic, even impossible, to negate every aspect of journalistic socialisation during research which examines the news.

Aguilar (1981) describes bias as "the human condition, a danger for both insider and outsider researchers" (p.22). Throughout the study the researcher adopted the policy of informally testing fundamental ideas, beliefs, opinions and values generated by the data against a "journalistic eye view" to try to rid the research of what Aguilar calls a "biasing chauvinism" which the researcher as an "insider" might labour under (p.22). In this case the "biasing chauvinism" was a journalist's world view. By this method of continuing reflection a researcher's perspective was developed of the data which emerged and the journalist's perspective minimised.

In this research bias in relation to the two "insider" methodologies has been discussed or referred to (Action research, Chapter Three at 3.1 and Chapter Nine at 9.2 and 9.7.2; Participant observation, Chapter 10 at 10.2.5 and Chapter 16 at 16.2). Reliability in relation to content analysis is discussed in Chapter 19 at 19.7.

## 22.4 Overall implications

Overall the results of the methodologies taken together disclose a powerful dilemma about the making of election news in the 1993 New Zealand general election. An overarching conclusion can be made that, partly by default, the news media's ambit of influence in the election campaign has so swollen that they now define issues and direct the dramaturgy of the campaign. But the expanded influence in the New Zealand context has not been accompanied by a re-examination of the standards by which the news media should be judged in performance of that enlarged role. The unstated divide between what the news media is doing and what it should be doing has widened.

A spectrum of opinion is available in popular commentary and scholarship overseas ranging from whether it is even possible to uphold standards in an age of instant news, to the idea that the challenge of reform is to move the version of the election campaign seen and heard via the news media closer to the political reality (Patterson, 1993). In New Zealand, however, the debate over these fundamental issues has scarcely begun. Political journalism is largely unexamined. And alarmingly, when there has been discussion it has been initiated by politicians and former politicians (Upton, 1993; Palmer, 1992) rather than by journalists. In a succinct acknowledgement of the worrying silence, a former New Zealand Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Palmer states, "it is not clear what conception the New Zealand media have of their responsibilities, or whether they recognise any" (p.202).

The possibility of electoral reform in New Zealand has sparked welcome debate about what it might mean for the news media. Morrison (1993) has examined the prospect of proportional representation in New Zealand on political journalism. He adopted a benign view of improved performance with increased plurality in access to the news media, shifting balances in agenda setting and improvements in the nature of parliamentary reporting. He predicted a different role for the news media in political consensus and more intelligent news analysis. Morrison's optimism about news media performance under proportional representation has yet to be tested, though.

But a changing political environment does provide new opportunities and challenges for both journalists and politicians. And it needs to be acknowledged that many of the complaints and charges levelled at the news media about democratic dialogue need to be re-directed. When political candidates routinely resort to tedious "knocking" rhetoric and cliches of contest and combat, when they seek to avoid answers to hard questions, when they focus on personality attributes, then the news media cannot elevate the discourse and promote it as illuminating and intelligent. The frailty of politicians need not be the frailty of journalism.

Other institutions too, in addition to the news media, have fallen short in elevating the dialogue of democracy, which has been noted by the Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Television and the Campaign of 1992. The Task Force talking of American presidential politics states:

In years past, many institutions - families, churches, community organizations, schools, and especially local political parties and their apparatus - helped to foster political awareness and to transmit values. But the authority of many of these institutions has waned, leaving television with undue influence and a role in fostering consensus that it was never designed to play (p.11).

While the arguments of Patterson (1993) and the Task Force, that too much is being asked of the news media in election campaign reportage, are persuasive, there is a worrying whiff of moral relativism about them. Patterson is correct in stating that the news media should not be asked to do the job intended for political institutions and he states, "when we ask the press to operate in their stead, it is bound to fail us, no matter how determined its effort." But in urging that "let the press be the press", is he suggesting that the status quo in election reportage with all its excesses and deficiencies should prevail? Should the news media have freedom-of-choice about political agenda setting and about negative problematic definition? And should the news media, with their intolerance of introspection and with increased technological and commercial imperatives to withstand, be the only ones to decide what it is the press should be doing in political communication? Patterson (1993) suggests that rather than asking more of the press, we might ask: How might election journalism be changed to relieve

the press of responsibilities it has assumed but cannot or ought not perform? A better question might be: How might election journalism be changed so the press assume the responsibilities they should perform?

## 22.5 Reform of political journalism?

In the New Zealand context any number of reforms could be proposed to improve the manufacture of election news and the news media's role in enhancing electorate understanding of political issues. Potential reforms which arise directly from the research findings include:

- disclosure by the news media of the influence of spin doctoring in election reportage,
- commitment, by broadcast news in particular, to lowering the uncomfortable level of self aggrandizement of journalists in election news,
- greater reliance on the political candidate's voice in election news and less emphasis on the reportorial voice and the "stand up" syndrome,
- acknowledgement by talk back radio and participatory audience television that the "new" news needs to build into the format of electronic populism the ability to hold politicians accountable,
- changes in journalism education about the fundamental character of journalism writing and the development of a new typology of journalistic genres which better matches practice, and
- balancing of the negative definition of election campaign issues with a positive frame of reference where this is appropriate.

These can be seen as worthwhile suggestions to improve the nature and content of election news. But do they simply tinker with the existing system of political communication and is more radical reform required? The most pressing challenge for political journalism in New Zealand which emerges from the study is an acknowledgement of the need for a clearer conception of what the news media's responsibilities should be. This research has yielded insight into the manufacture of election news measured against traditional normative standards of how the press

should function. But has the nature and face of political journalism been reconfigured so totally that these standards are irrelevant? Or is the measure of our contemporary immersion in a *laissez faire* lifestyle referred to by O'Neill (1994) and our attachment to moral pragmatism such that it is easier to change the standards and revise expectations downwards, than improve the performance? McGregor and Comrie (1995) state that, "the question is whether journalistic standards are fixed so that performance and content can be measured against them and reporters and the public know what is expected of the news, or whether they are variable, in which case there is little certainty to be gained from them" (p.82).

American commentator Jay Rosen (1992), a proponent of what has been called public journalism, believes that the news media itself needs to re-vision and states "the press might point itself toward a new public philosophy, toward an improved method of explaining its place in politics and its role in public life" (p.3-4). This would enable the news media to consolidate its powerful, but in some ways waning, influence in the public sphere. He states that journalists should commit themselves not to a liberal agenda or a conservative cause but to "a certain kind of discourse that permits the political community to understand itself in a better, fuller way. Journalists should try to make politics "go well", so that it produces a discussion in which the polity learns more about itself, its current problems, its real divisions, its place in time, its prospects for the future" (p.10). He distinguishes public politics, in which the visible activity is discussion and debate, from electoral politics, interest group politics and image politics. Such a re-visioning as suggested by Rosen, which could embrace Golding's (1990) notion of citizenship, would help the press to resolve what it is they should be doing in political journalism.

The second radical reform required to restore political journalism concerns the election campaign roadshow. Many of the excesses of both campaign politics and campaign journalism occur in the context of the election campaign roadshow, with its contrived photo opportunities, its accompanying spin doctoring, and its degenerative rhetoric. The roadshow no longer commands either a respectable or a respectful public audience, even as a ritual. Its pseudo nature is now so transparently a news media format rather than a political or public format that its abandonment or curtailment is unlikely to diminish the flow of information to the electorate. Both politicians and the news media

in concert need to acknowledge the charade of the roadshow and that "media logic" (Altheide & Snow, 1991) now governs public appearances of politicians during the campaign roadshow.

The revelation during the participant observation study by one of the Labour leader Mike Moore's press advisers that she was planning the politician's itinerary around venues which provided strong visuals for television news illustrates that the campaign roadshow has become the theatre of the absurd. It is suggested here that a compact is needed between politicians and journalists not to perform an encore in the next election. Instead progress should be made in securing alternative, relevant forums for debating political issues. Politicians have already begun the quest for new ways of communicating with voters by their strategic use of electronic populism, talk back radio and audience participation television referred to in Chapter 15. The news media, if they are serious about their democratic role during election campaigns must confront the challenge of the "new" news or risk being marginalised.

The alternative to the election campaign roadshow is for the news media to provide opportunities for candidates, whether by debate, media interview, audience or public questions or by allocation of time and space for candidates to outline policy, to differentiate their position and to "show" themselves to voters. Political candidates, too, must rise to the challenge of more serious political discourse offered in such forums if a new compact between journalists and politicians is to be workable. Candidates could still hold public meetings, street corner stops and whistle-stop visits to schools and factories to meet voters if they felt these were effective means of campaigning and necessary to meet democratic obligations and electorate commitments. But the press should reconsider their obligations to the public in relation to the way these campaign events, the traditional roadshow, are covered. This would provide journalists with an opportunity to restate their criteria of newsworthiness during election campaigns.

The suggested compact between politicians and the news media, who offer a meaningful forum to candidates in exchange for an end to the pseudo-roadshow, embraces, rather than rejects, new media formats. The debate over whether "traditional" election campaigns (Miller, 1994) are superior to modern media campaigns involving electronic populism and audience participation (Cutler, 1994) implies that somehow the two are mutually exclusive. But political journalism can, and must, adapt to new media

formats and at the same time stimulate meaningful political dialogue. The exact formats to be used to give effect to improved performance by the news media and politicians using relevant media need to be determined. They might include: increased use of televised debates with audience participation, structured and unstructured talk show participation, "meet the press" and "meet the people" programmes, general-election candidate telecasts (Patterson, 1993) or the "five-minute fix" or five-minute presentations on television by candidates (Taylor, 1992), newspaper "hotlines" which provide readers with a forum for question and answers, issues of the day and "where the candidate" stands" newspaper features and perhaps even citizen involvement projects through newspapers to increase "citizen connection" (Shepard, 1994) with electoral processes. Whatever formats are agreed upon in the proposed new order of political reportage during election campaigns, one element should be constant. This element is the fundamental role of the political journalist to hold accountable politicians, party leaders and candidates for political office.

## 22.6 Conclusion

The strength, independence and intelligence of a country's political journalism is a barometer of its democratic health. Only by knowing how they should be functioning in modern election campaigns can the news media begin to eradicate their essential weaknesses identified in this research. And it is here that the news media need help, because standards of political journalism are too important to be left to practitioners solely. As McChesney (1993) states communication scholars need to *privilege* journalism as a form of discourse because it is impossible to conceive of a democratic society without journalism playing a central role in the political process. In examining the manufacture of news from a variety of perspectives and utilising different methodologies this research *does* privilege journalism. It does so in the knowledge that improving democratic journalism is complex and not conducive to quick-fix solutions. Nor can elevating the "dialogue of democracy" (Taylor, 1992) be achieved without necessary adjustments to the socio-political context in which the news media operate. This does not mean, however, that communications scholars, the public, politicians and journalists should neglect its pursuit.

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## Introduction to Appendices

The appendices which follow include all of the measurement instruments used in the research. These encompass the self perception and reference group questionnaires (Appendices A-D) used in the action research, the content analysis coding sheet used in the action research (Appendix L) and the coding questionnaire for content analysis utilising the problematic situation (Appendix M).

The appendices also include a sample only (Appendices E-K) of the news stories and publicity material generated in the action research project. Those chosen for inclusion were considered to be most relevant to the discussion and representative of the publicity generated. All the data is available for scrutiny.

Appendix A: Self perception questionnaire used in the action research project  
in the Miramar electorate.

**How competent do you perceive yourself to be in initiating contact with journalists about stories?**

Competent  
1            2            3            4            5            6            Incompetent  
7

**How competent as a news source do you perceive yourself to be?**

Competent  
1            2            3            4            5            6            Incompetent  
7

**How competent do you perceive yourself to be in negotiating with journalists about story content?**

Competent  
1            2            3            4            5            6            Incompetent  
7

**How competent do you perceive yourself to be in identifying angles for news stories?**

Competent  
1            2            3            4            5            6            Incompetent  
7

**What level of understanding do you have of the journalistic concept of news worthiness?**

High  
1            2            3            4            5            6            Low  
7

**What level of understanding do you have of the news production process in print media?**

High							Low
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**What level of understanding do you have of the news production process in radio?**

High							Low
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**What level of understanding do you have of the news production process in television?**

High							Low
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**What level of understanding do you have of how a journalist thinks about news construction?**

High							Low
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**How confident do you feel you are in complaining when necessary to a journalist about story content?**

Confident							Unconfident
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**What are some key words to describe your feelings as a political candidate towards the news media.**

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Appendix B: Reference group questionnaire used in the action research project in the Miramar electorate.

**How competent do you perceive Annette King to be in initiating contact with journalists about stories?**

Competent							Incompetent
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**How competent as a news source do you perceive Annette King to be?**

Competent							Incompetent
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**How competent do you perceive Annette King to be in negotiating with journalists about story content?**

Competent							Incompetent
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**How competent do you perceive Annette King to be in identifying angles for news stories?**

Competent							Incompetent
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

**What level of understanding do you perceive Annette King has of the journalistic concept of news worthiness?**

High							Low
1	2	3	4	5	6		7



**Rank your perception of Annette King's understanding of how news is created.**

<b>Good</b>							<b>Poor</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7

**Rank your perception of Annette King's utilisation of the news media as a political candidate.**

<b>Good</b>							<b>Poor</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	7

### Self Perception Questionnaire Administered to Annette King

April 1993



November 1993



**How competent do you perceive yourself to be in initiating contact with journalists about stories?**

Competent

Incompetent

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

**How competent as a news source do you perceive yourself to be?**

Competent

Incompetent

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

**How competent do you perceive yourself to be in negotiating with journalists about story content?**

Competent

Incompetent

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

**How competent do you perceive yourself to be in identifying angles for news stories?**

Competent

Incompetent

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

**What level of understanding do you have of the journalistic concept of news worthiness?**

High

Low

1



4

5

6

7

**What level of understanding do you have of the news production process in print media?**

High

Low

1

2

3



5

6

7

**What level of understanding do you have of the news production process in radio?**

High

Low

1

2

3



5

6

7

**What level of understanding do you have of the news production process in television?**

High

Low

1

2

3



6

7

**What level of understanding do you have of how a journalist thinks about news construction?**

High

Low

1

2



4



6

7

How confident do you feel you are in complaining when necessary to a journalist about any content?

Confident

Unconfident

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

What are some key words to describe your feelings as a political candidate towards the news media.

Comprehensive (April 1993)

Aggressive

Suspicious

Disappointed - print media (local) (November 1993)

Satisfied - print media (National daily)

Confident and improved performance (T.V.)

Appendix D: Reference Group's Perception of Candidate's (Mrs King) competence, understanding and confidence.

## Reference Group's Perception of Candidate's Competence, Understanding and Confidence

### First Survey

March/April 1993

### Second Survey

November 1993

Q1	Mean 2.3; range 1-3	Mean 2.3; range 1-4
Q2	Mean 2.6; range 1-4	Mean 2; range 1-3
Q3	Mean 2; range 1-4	Mean 2.3; range 1-3
Q4	Mean 2.3; range 1-4	Mean 2.3; range 1-4
Q5	Mean 2.3; range 1-4	Mean 1.6; range 1-3
Q6	Mean 2.6; range 1-4	Mean 2.3; range 1-4
Q7	Mean 2.3; range 1-5	Mean 2.3; range 1-4
Q8	Mean 2; range 1-4	Mean 2.3; range 1-4
Q9	Mean 2.6; range 1-4	Mean 2.6; range 1-4
Q10	Mean 2; range 1-3	Mean 1.3; range 1-2
Q11	Mean 2.3; range 1-4	Mean 1.6; range 1-3
Q12	Mean 1.6; range 1-3	Mean 2; range 1-3

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# THE Eastern News

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Local issues from Hataitai, Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay, Melrose, Miramar, Oriental Bay, Rosebath, Rongotai, Strathmore, Seatoun.

**Inside...**

**Tenants rubbish recycling scheme...** page 3

**Residents give mixed reception to Bay Rd development...** page 11

**Rodrigo Rd syndicate may get council help...** page 16

**THIS WEEK'S Features...**

**Plus 4 Auto Complex comes to Miramar...** page 4

**Home Improvements...** pages 11-13

## Staff cuts prompt fears for public safety

Kilbirnie fire fighters say the public will be more at risk if staff are cut from a specialised vehicle used for aircraft fires at Wellington Airport.

Currently a special hose layer vehicle based at Kilbirnie Fire Station has two fire fighters assigned to it at any one time.

The vehicle holds about a kilometre of hose and is used as a back up to supply water in major fires in Wellington and at Wellington Airport. It's the only vehicle of its kind in the region.

Now the New Zealand Fire Service is considering removing its permanent crew as part of an efficiency drive.

New Zealand Professional Fire Fighters Union spokesman Wayne England believes this may mean the difference between life and death if a major emergency occurs at Wellington Airport.

Mr England says water and foam supplies carried by crash rescue vehicles at the airport will only last for about two minutes in a major fire. The hose layer vehicle brings the extra water.

"It's an integral part of the system," he says.

Mr England says if the vehicle doesn't have the

two permanent crew, finding another two fire fighters to operate it will cause delays.

All other vehicles from Kilbirnie may already be at the fire, and two crew to operate the hose layer vehicle may have to come from Lower Hutt or Petone.

"The administration says it's an acceptable delay but how can you put an acceptable delay on people's lives? The public must know what the effects are," he says.

"Overseas studies show the damage done by a fire increases by 50% every minute after the first five minutes.

"If we haven't got the extra water we can't extinguish fires and if this goes ahead we can't guarantee to be there any more," he says.

Mr England says his union will discuss the proposal with the New Zealand Fire Service on June 18. Meanwhile, the union will consult with its members about the issue.

Mr England says he realises it is still only a proposal. "But my feeling is that they've got their hearts set on it," he says.

However, Airport Fire Service manager Trevor Read says if the vehicle is withdrawn he does not believe it will jeopardise

their own service. "Under the airport emergency plan the fire service still has to provide support," he says.

Mr Read says vehicles other than the hose layer can provide a back up. At present this can happen at any time if the hose layer vehicle has already been called to another emergency.

Mr Read says to date the New Zealand Fire Service has not advised him of this proposal.

New Zealand Fire Service's personnel director Geoff Summers says the change is not being considered to save money. "It's not specifically about our budget, because we've had cuts and changes in Government over the past 10 years."

He says their chief executive doesn't believe there's any operational advantage to having a permanent crew just for this appliance and it can still be used when needed in an emergency.



Hataitai's Jackie Clarke gets into the part of children's librarian cum diva Enid Barker in the musical *Coropetta* which opened at Bats Theatre last Thursday. See story page 2.

## Young offenders could be housed in Miramar

*by Justine Price*

A Social Welfare home in Miramar could be reopened to house youths involved in the recent muggings in Central Wellington.

The house was used as emergency accommodation for children by the Department of Social Welfare, but has been empty for about a year.

The department's youth justice field services manager Neville Hurd says it is considering re-opening the Miramar house as a temporary holding place for youths who have committed minor offences.

It would cater for up to six youths aged between 14 and 17, plus provide accommodation for a caregiver and their spouse to live in, he says.

Mr Hurd plans to approach two groups as well as any other interested organisations to help staff and run the family home in association with its children and young persons service.

He says by placing the youths in a family home environment as an interim measure, it will give staff

time to talk to the youths and find out what their needs are. "It's a time-out place while we organise what we can do for the youth," Mr Hurd says.

The youths can then be dealt with according to the Children and Young Persons Act.

Social Welfare representatives and the police met with Youth Affairs Minister Roger McClay on May 2 about the recent spate of muggings.

At the meeting Mr Hurd suggested the possibility of using the Miramar house. Mr Hurd says there was a positive response from the group to his suggestion.

Supporting the proposal, police acting district commander Wayne Strong says at the moment there is no similar facility available for youths in Wellington.

He says the problem is that there is no half way house between a youth's home and Social Welfare's Epuni Centre. This is a residence for young people remanded by the youth court or sentenced to month's supervision by the court.

Continued on page 2

## King responds

The New Zealand Fire Service's proposal to cut the crew from its hose layer vehicle was recently brought to light by Labour's Miramar candidate Annette King.

Mrs King was told of the proposal and fire fighters' concerns when she met with them recently. "I immediately saw the implications for Wellington Airport. The public has to know," she says.

Mrs King believes no delay is acceptable and the geography of the area means the delay to get a crew to the vehicle may take even longer. "No delay is acceptable if the plane crashes," she says.

Mrs King says the real responsibility for the proposal rests with the Government which has cut the fire service's budget.

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# NEW Eastern

February 1,

## Miramar tenants community centre still lies empty

Tenants at Hobart Park Flats in Miramar are furious their new community centre still lies empty and useless a year after it was opened.

The community centre, part of a \$205,000 project which included three new pensioner flats, was opened by Wellington City Council in February last year.

Council built the community centre so pensioners, most of whom live in small bedsit flats, would have a place to meet and have a cup of tea.

Tenants say they can't understand why the centre is locked, has kitchen facilities, a large bathroom and carpets, but no furniture.

Ivy Davis says she is angry the centre is still empty while her own flat is small and cramped.

"It seems stupid to see it lying idle. There should be furniture so we can use it," she says.

Mrs Davis says the money could have been spent on extending the small bedsits to provide a separate bedroom in the small flats.

Mrs Davis and other tenants have complained and been told council would look into it, but nothing has been done.

"It would be nice to go over there. Do some knitting and enjoy it."

Her next door neighbour Yvonne McGregor is equally adamant something must be done.

Mrs McGregor has lived in her flat for ten years and was pleased at first to see the centre built.

"Either we're going to use it or they should tear it down," she says.

Council housing manager Emele Duituraga says the community centre has remained empty because of council restructuring and the time it takes to form tenants' community groups.

Council is to appoint a tenant development adviser for the elderly this month.

Organising a tenants' group at Hobart Park and finding out what tenants want from the centre will be a priority, she says.

Funds will be available for furniture and other facilities.

Ms Duituraga says the centre could only be built at the same time as three new pensioner flats, but it takes about a year to get a tenants' community group off the ground.

The tenants group is needed to help organise use of the centre.

Responsibility for using the centre falls between the council and tenants, she says.

Miramar Labour candidate Annette King is writing a letter to Mayor Fran Wilde about the centre after tenants told her of their concerns when she visited the flats recently.



Summer sail: Crowded House, captained by Seaton's Mark with Greg Wagstaff and Stan Robinson, cuts the calm waters of Bay during National Regatta Week last Tuesday.

The Evans Bay Yacht and Motor Boat Club coordinated the na regatta, complementing local yacht racing in the Wellington Anniversary regatta.

## Action group formed to fight Kohanga Reo

Miramar residents have now formed an action group in a bid to stop a kohanga reo being built on reserve land in Chelsea St.

Seven local residents were elected to the action group formed at a public meeting on the issue at Miramar Community Centre last week.

Meeting organiser and Chelsea St resident Kevin Allan says they may also hire a consultant to produce a formal submission against the Maori language nest going ahead.

Mr Allan says the 70 people who attended the meeting on Wednesday January 27 overwhelmingly rejected plans for the kohanga reo.

However, kohanga reo representatives reject Mr Allan's view of the meeting's outcome claiming at least half the audience was in favour of the development.

But Mr Allan says residents supported any initiatives to stop it going ahead including individual objections against resource consent for the building.

"We were both encouraged and surprised at the number of people who attended," he says.

Mr Allan says there was clear support and recognition of the need to establish a kohanga reo in the district at the meeting, but residents don't want to lose any more open space in the area.

"Speakers felt the council and applicant had not

sufficiently explored other options and opportunities which might be available to meet their needs, including known spare classrooms and other buildings in the eastern suburbs."

Motu Kairanga Te Kohanga Reo kaiako Phyllis Butler attended the meeting and rejects Mr Allan's assertion the majority were against the language nest being built.

"It was about half and half. Most of the people went there to listen to what they had to say," she says.

Mrs Butler says she doesn't think there would have been the level of opposition from residents if a creche had been planned.

"If it has got a Maori name and things Maori it gets people's backs up. But they don't understand," she says.

Mrs Butler says many residents at the meeting had the wrong idea about the kohanga reo.

She says once they explained it is not just for Maori children, some residents were more positive.

Mrs Butler says Motu Kairanga, based at present in Miramar's Darlington Rd, has continued to look at buildings in the area as an alternative to the Chelsea St site.

However, Chelsea St is still the cheapest and most convenient for children and their families.

## Former Wellington prison manager starts new job

Former Wellington Prison general manager Kelvin Nolly starts a new job this week, two months after he was mysteriously relieved of his previous position.

Mr Nolly has been reassigned within the penal division of the Justice Department to the position of Manager Special Projects. He will be working on the development of new prison management techniques.

Mr Nolly was taken out of his job at the prison last November while an audit and inquiry was carried out at Wellington Prison.

Neither Mr Nolly or the Justice Department would comment on why it happened or the results of the investigation.

He says his new position department did not come as a surprise.

"I've been working in the system for over twenty years very enthusiastic about the pointment. It will be a change for me."

The Nolly family has no intention of moving from the Miramar district they love the area.

"We have bought a house a start commuting like the rest of Wellington from today," he says.

Mr Nolly was Wellington Prison general manager for two years.

Acting head of the prison Jones will remain in the position a further decision is made.

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### More support needed

The shellfish hatchery at Mahanga Bay should be expanded because of the increasing importance of fisheries and aquaculture in our economy says Labour's research and technology spokesman Pete Hodgson.

Mr Hodgson's comment follows a visit to the Ministry of Agriculture's Mahanga Bay hatchery and Greta Point marine research laboratories recently.

He says the recent ban on eating shellfish because of a toxic algal bloom making the shellfish unfit for eating emphasises the importance of continued research and monitoring of our fisheries. Mr Hodgson believes the Government is not giving enough support to fisheries research.

Mr Hodgson says research is needed to improve the management quality of our fish stocks, and much more investigations needed of stocks in our oceans. He believes this could also be improved if some of Greta Point's functions became part of a Crown Research Institute.

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The Porirua and Waitangirua Neighbourhood Units are located in the old Housing Corporation Building, Walton Leigh Avenue, Porirua

All enquiries welcome  
Come to us for your rental home

### Valentine's Day Winners

Congratulations to Christine Young of Lyall Bay, whose poem won 1st prize in our Valentine's Day Competition. Mrs Young wins runner for two with the compliments of the Airport Hotel, Kilbirnie, plus a beauty treatment, courtesy of Babbé Beauty Clinic, Miramar.  
Congratulations also to the following consolation winners, who receive Roses chocolates, donated by Woolworths, Kilbirnie: Mrs Ison, Miramar; Mrs B Bottin, Kilbirnie; Ms K Langford, Seatoun; Ms T Lincoln, Lyall Bay; Mrs G Morris, Kilbirnie; Miss E Smidt, Miramar. Mrs Young's winning poem is printed below:

If I should advertise to fill your place,  
This is what I would put in this space:

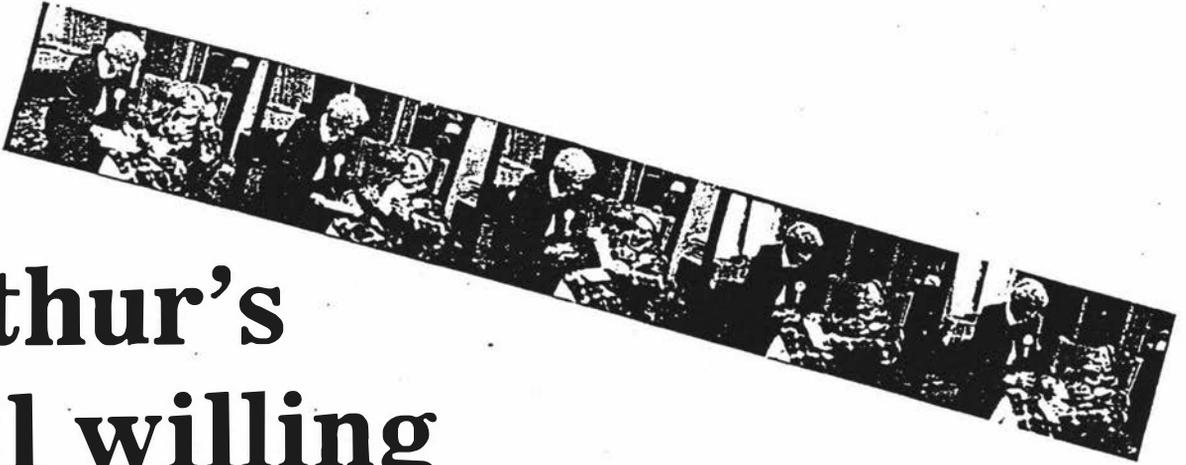
24 hours a day for all of my life,  
A partner, a friend, a father, a lover,  
Someone who would want no other;

When I am sad or when I am mad,  
When life's just too much,  
A hug, a kiss, a gentle touch,  
A smile, a laugh,  
Would diminish my pain by half.



Look at this and can see...

## 2 Miramar News



# Arthur's still willing to give advice

SIXTY-TWO-year-old Arthur Brady of Miramar has some unfinished business.

The ardent, long-term Labour Party supporter says he has in mind writing a book on Rogernomics. And that from an old timer whose current bedtime reading is Gibbon's *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

"If I had time to write it, what with my shopping and keeping house, my book would be called *The House that Roger Built*. I believe that Rogernomics nearly wrecked the Labour Party and we've had to rebuild since Roger Douglas."

Mr Brady says history has shown the state cannot allow market forces to prevail in every instance. "You can't sell health, you simply can't do it. Similarly electricity, gas and water should not be privatised. Government needs to bold essential services on behalf of the people."

Mr Brady, who will be voting on November 6 at his nearest polling booth, Rongotai College, has acute recall of the 1937 electorate campaign when Peter Fraser won an inner city Wellington seat. Along with prominent members of the New Zealand Engineers' Union, Mr Brady drove a Ford touring car that picked up the elderly and took them to the polls. The car was decorated with scarlet crinkle paper wound through the wheel spokes and draped all over the car.

The nonagenarian, whose father Thomas was a Fabian Socialist and a well-known Methodist minister in Wellington, came to New Zealand from Manchester with his parents when he was in his twenties.

He has been a Labour supporter all his life and recently wrote to leader Mike Moore offering him some campaign tips. The Lonsdale Crescent man also has some advice for Labour candidate Annette King when she returns to Parliament.

Mr Brady is an enthusiastic listener of parliamentary debates when they are broadcast. He told Mrs King during one of her visits, "Stick to policy not personalities. The standard of the debates today is very, very low. Never mind character assassination, concentrate on policies and politics. The racket that currently passes for debate is built on very poor arguments indeed."

Soapbox oratory was an art form practised by Labour politicians such as John A. Lee, Peter Fraser, Bob Semple and Walter Nash, he said. Some of the skills would enhance today's parliamentary debating style. "What a racket it is with childish name calling. I am very disappointed with both sides of the House."

The Miramar pensioner, who spent about 13 years in the administrative and legal section of the Inland Revenue Department before retiring, is a treasure trove of Labour Party history, anecdote and passing reminiscence.

During Mrs King's visit he recalled that "after Peter Fraser's election Mrs Fraser said to my mother, 'Pray for us'."

And he described Mabel Howard, New Zealand's first woman Cabinet Minister who immortalised bloomers. "She was as rough as bags, but a great Minister. She knew what she was doing, and she knew what struggle was. A rough diamond but a wonderful one."

Mr Brady was full of admiration for Bob Semple and his contribution to public works in New Zealand. "A former mine tunneller, a man who could read engineering blueprints... no other country in the world could boast such a minister."

He admired Walter Nash for his budgeting skills and Harry Holland because he was well read. "Harry always had a book with him in Bellamy's."



## How good is your memory?

THE FOLLOWING quiz has already been tested on Labour candidate Annette King's pet cat Tramp — who, by the way, got all 10 right.

First prize for everyone who answers all 10 questions correctly is the pleasure of having a hard-working, intelligent, energetic, enthusiastic, caring MP (who else but Annette King?) representing Miramar.

The booby prize for anyone answering all 10 questions incorrectly is an all expenses-paid bicycle ride to Jim Bolger's November 6 wake in Te Kuiti.

### Questions

1. Which party repealed the pay equity legislation?
2. Which party, which repealed the pay equity legislation, and presided over three years in which the relative pay of women declined in comparison with men, has a leader who awarded himself a suffrage medal?

cally-elected area health boards?

5. Which party promised in 1990 to introduce no new taxes and no tax increases?
6. Which party promised in 1990 to restore New Zealand's Triple A credit rating?
7. Which party's leader promised in 1990 to "tear down" the tollgate "on the road to knowledge"?
8. Which party promised in 1990 not to cut one cent from the health budget?
9. Which party promised in 1990 "we will not cut your weekly pay, your weekend pay or the pay you receive for overtime"?
10. Which party's leader said in 1990: "To me integrity is the most important thing in politics"?

Pssst! Just so no one is in danger of winning the booby prize, and having to put up with Honest Jim company on election night when they could be ce



the  
*Rendezvous*  
CAFE

JUDIE & KEITH

CNR COUTTS ST & ONEPU ROAD,  
KILBIRNIE, WELLINGTON

# This is her life!



te, aged about two, with her favourite fluffy toy.



Team spirit . . . Annette (second from right sitting) in her netball team during dental nurse training.



Annette on graduation day, 1966, after dental nurse training.

GSLIFER



Life before politics . . . Annette as a tutor at the Dental School in Willis Street.



ABOVE: Cabinet day . . . the day Annette became a Minister. Seen with then PM Geoff Palmer and Koro Wetere.

LEFT: The Hon. Annette King addresses the CWI.



Annette King and David Lange visit a kohanga reo on the campaign trail in 1984.



*Pizza Express*  
**FREE DELIVERY**  
**387-2471**

---

**MIRAMAR**

**NEEDS**

**A. KING**

---

---

**A. KING**

**FOR**

**MIRAMAR**

---

# Sticker slogans a little bit of wit



NEW ZEALAND is getting more like America every year, and even more so when it comes to the elections. It seems we have seen the end of the 'soapbox years' when politicians stumped from end to end of the country; the district halls, the bouquets from the Women's Division Federated Farmers, Ladies a Plate, John A Lee and all that.

More and more, things are forming themselves pretty well up into a multi-media war.

This is the age of the one liner, the capturing of a constellation of social attitudes into the wisp of a saying. Call some Oscar Wilde. And the best of these will be distilled into that medium of devastatingly sophisticated wit — the bumper sticker.

I'm peddling as fast as I can. My other car is a Hillman Hunter, and the all time classic... You Toucha My Car I Smacka Your Face.

When it comes to political bumper stickers you have to hand it to Fran Wilde. Her "Wide About Wellington" series for the mayoralty was a winner. You couldn't miss the flaring pink. To quote Marshall McLuhan the guru of communications. The medium was the message. We got a woman mayor.

One of the first to get a sticker on the street for the '93 election was Miramar Labour candidate Annette King.

Annette says she put the slogans out to tender with her branch members and she got some interesting responses.

**I'M VOTING  
FOR  
A. KING**

"Labour's the Best. Put King to the Test."

Mmmmm.

There must have been a number of Yul Brunner fans out there too because *The King and I* featured fairly prominently.

But that would have involved Annette dressing up in funny shoes with curly tops that would be a disaster for absailing around the Hataitai hills on the campaign trail.

"The campaign is a very serious matter, but you can have some fun as well", says Annette.

"Most of all I was looking for

something snappy on the street," she says.

The Miramar King Movement eventually committed itself to play on Annette's surname.

Three designs were commissioned in all, to be released over the duration of the election campaign.

"There was a kind of a story line, the three", says Annette. "and we let them out one at a time."

The secret is out now, the campaign is on the home straight.

Miramar needs A King. A King for Miramar. I'm voting for A King. Make sure you do on the big day!

ANNETTE KING takes a rest from one of her favourite pursuits, walking, with her dog Jana on the Seatoun beach seat that was the regular of former Labour Prime Minister Norm Kirk during his illness.

**DON'T FORGET TO VOTE  
ON NOVEMBER 6**

**KING Annette (Labour)**



Require a special vote before  
the election?

**Phone 386 3482**

**ON ELECTION DAY**

For transport or a special vote, phone the  
number of your suburb

Mt Victoria 385 4743 Hataitai 386 1599

Seatoun 388 6398

Kilbirnie, Lyall Bay, Melrose 387 3061

Miramar, Strathmore 388 9373



*Letter from a friend*

I'VE known Annette King for 13 years and for half of that time she was a workmate in Parliament. Annette has energy and intelligence, tempered with an ability to see the social impact of what, to many politicians, are cold policy decisions.

She recognises that human dignity must be respected. Annette will be a great MP for Miramar, serving the people and the wider community with commu-

## Politicians row over unemployment figures

A row has broken out over the number of unemployed in the Miramar electorate between sitting National MP Graeme Reeves and Labour's candidate Annette King since the release of a pamphlet on jobs recently.

In the pamphlet, Annette King on Jobs, Mrs King claims there are 3,000 unemployed people in the Miramar electorate.

Mr Reeves disputes this figure. He says the New Zealand Employment Service does not keep statistics on an electoral basis.

He says information provided to him shows there are less than 2,000 unemployed in the Miramar electorate on a suburb by suburb basis.

"The pamphlet does not give a source for her information. It would be useful and honest if she would do so, so that constituents would have faith in the accuracy of her assertion," he says.

Mrs King says the source for her figure was the New Zealand Labour Department statistics for registered unemployed in March at its Kilbirnie Office.

"The figures reveal a very high 3,005 people registered as unemployed," she says.

Mrs King acknowledges that the figure of 3,000 her pamphlet quotes also takes in some registered unemployed outside the electorate, but is sticking to the number she has given.

The figure released by the Labour Department is a

conservative one as registered unemployed statistics represent a portion of the total number of unemployed people in Miramar.

"Thousands of people do not register as they are ineligible to receive an unemployment benefit or any assistance," she says.

However, New Zealand Employment Service National Office advisory officer Greg Williams says taking the Kilbirnie office's figure alone does not give an accurate number for the registered unemployed in the Miramar electorate.

The 3,000 figure includes those registered unemployed in Island Bay and Newtown, but neither suburb is in the Miramar electorate.

And the figure excludes registered unemployed in Rosemeath, Mt Victoria and part of Oriental Bay, which are in the Miramar electorate.

Mr Williams confirms the figure of 2,000 cited by Mr Reeves is from the total in each suburb which is in the Miramar electorate.

But because of overlapping boundaries this may not be accurate either, he says.

"Getting an exact figure is not possible. It's only the number that use the office."

Mr Campbell says part of the difficulty is because the two offices overlap. Some people prefer to register at the Kilbirnie office instead of Wellington City and vice versa.

## Fines for cyclists needed - Police

The police believe fines may need to be increased to stop some cyclists riding at night without lights.

The suggestion came at the start of the police's Operation Winter Safety campaign last week.

The campaign hopes to increase awareness amongst motorists, pedestrians and cyclists about safety measures they should take to prevent accidents over the winter months.

Inspector Hugh Flower, who is co-ordinating the campaign in the Wellington region, says cyclists are usually fined about \$35 if they are caught riding at night without a head or tail light, or reflectors.

However, some cyclists continue to ride at night without adequate lighting. "An increase may be in order, as there's a degree of non compliance from cyclists," he says. "Cyclists have to remember that under the Transport Act their bike is a vehicle."

However, any change to the law so fines would increase has to go through Parliament.

Mr Flower's suggestion is backed by Hataitai resident and motorist Mike Chadwick.

He believes the fines are too low to be a deterrent and some cyclists continue to ignore the law.

Mr Chadwick says he has seen several cyclists on the roads in the eastern suburbs at night without lights. "You can't see them. The potential for an accident is great," he says.

Mr Chadwick says he's been lucky and hasn't hit any cyclists who weren't using lights at night, but he can remember some close calls.

He has complained to the Ministry of Transport in the past about the incidents.

Kilbirnie Police were also running Operation Winter Safety in the eastern suburbs last week.



Kilbirnie's community constable Les Jardine, above, displays the right safety gear cyclists should have to stay safe this winter.

**YOU DON'T  
KNOW WHEN**

WELLINGTON'S NEWEST GYM  
TOTALLY NEW EQUIPMENT

SAVE  
UP TO  
\$247

Healthland  
FITNESS CENTRE

## WINTER PARADISE SPECIAL

- ☆ FREE 3 MONTHS MEMBERSHIP Normally \$159
- ☆ FREE 1/2 HOUR HEALTH MASSAGE WITH SURRENDRA OR SARINA Normally \$25  
(exclusive to new members)
- ☆ FREE 10 TRIP SOLARIUM IN PARADISE Bring your favourite tropical music Normally \$63
- ☆ FREE FITNESS ASSESSMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMME
- ☆ WITH 6 MONTHS MEMBERSHIP

A total of 9 months

ONLY \$249

WINTER PARADISE SPECIAL EXPIRES MON 7 JUNE 1993



JAN GREG JOANNE

Come on ... Spoil Yourself ...  
You Deserve It!

First Contact	
Journalist approach	
Candidate approach	
Mixed j/c approach	
No approach	

Negotiation over content	
Candidate initiates negotiation	
Journalist initiates negotiation	
Joint initiation of negotiation	
No negotiation	

Nature of Story Possibility	
New "breaking" story possibility	
Follow-up story possibility	
Reaction story possibility	

Supplied Material	
Press release	
Fact sheet	
Other documentation	
Phone information	
Contacts provided	
No material supplied	

Supplied Material Used	
Yes	
No	

Publication/Broadcast	
Community newspaper	
Daily newspaper	
Magazine	
Radio	
Television	
No publication/broadcast	

<b>Nature of Publication in Print Media</b>	
Story published	
Photograph & caption published	
Story & photograph published	

<b>Prominence and Position</b>	
Page Number	
Lead	
Lead out	
Box story	
Other	

<b>Nature of Broadcast on Television</b>	
Profile interview	
Live studio	
Panel debate	
Field interview	
Stock footage	
Actuality	

<b>Prominence &amp; Position of TV Broadcast</b>	
Placement	
Length	
Live Film	
Stock footage	

<b>Nature of Broadcast on Radio</b>	
Phone interview	
Studio interview	
Field interview	
Talk back	

<b>Prominence &amp; Placement of Radio Broadcast</b>	
Time of day	
Length	
Position in programme bulletin	

Candidate as a Source	
Primary source	
Secondary source	
Other mention of candidate	

Channel Used	
Enterprise channel	
Routine channel	
Informal channel	
Not ascertainable	

Overall Tone of Publication/ Broadcast	
Positive	
Negative	
Neutral	

Content Basis of Publication/ Broadcast	
Personality based	
Issues based	
Mixed personality/issues based	

Nature of Collaborative Action Research Intervention	
Identification of news opportunity	
Identification of news follow-up	
Tuition of candidate in news media techniques	
Revising candidate's interview skills	
Developing candidate's understanding of news	
Developing candidate's sense of newsworthiness	

Iteration	
Sequence within cycle	
Whole cycle	
No iteration	

## CONTENT ANALYSIS OF METROPOLITAN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 1993 GENERAL ELECTION UTILISING THE PROBLEMATIC SITUATION

1. What is the number of the story?

--	--	--	--

(1-4)

2. In which newspaper was the story published?

- New Zealand Herald      1
- The Dominion              2
- Evening Post              3
- Christchurch Press      4
- Otago Daily Times        5

(5)

3. What is the date of publication?  
(day, month, year)

--	--	--	--	--	--

(6-11)

4. On what page was the story published?

(1--50)      \_\_\_\_\_

--	--

(12-13)

5. Was the story published as a :

- Lead story                      1
- Display story                  2
- Brief/campaign diary story   3

(14)

6. Was the nature of the story:

- Hard news      1
- Soft news      2
- Mixed          3
- Other          4

(15)

7. Was the story by-lined?

- Yes      1
- No      2

(16)

(If the answer is no, go to Q 9).

8. If the story was by-lined, was the by-line a:

- Staff reporter 1
- Political correspondent 2
- New Zealand Press Association 3
- Other press agency 4
- Mixed 5
- Other 6

(17)

9. Does the headline match the story content ?

- Fully 1
- Partly 2
- Hardly at all 3

(18)

10. Did the story focus predominantly on the 1993 general election 'horse race'?

- Yes 1
- No 2

(19)

11. Did the story focus predominantly on election candidates in the 1993 general election ?

- Yes 1
- No 2

(20)

12. Is the story predominantly in its emphasis:

- Good news 1
- Bad news 2
- Neutral 3

(21)

13. How many campaign issues (up to five in each story) does the story refer to?

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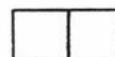
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(22)

*(This section refers to the campaign issues in the story. Each campaign issue is dealt with individually. Up to five campaign issues were coded for each story).*

14. What is the first campaign issue the story refers to?

Agriculture	1
Broadcasting	2
Budget deficit	3
Business development	4
Crime	5
Cultural issues	6
Defence	7
Economic policy	8
Education	9
Election campaign (style)	10
Election campaign (funding)	11
Election campaign (organisation)	12
Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	13
Election campaign (roadshow)	14
Election campaign (candidates)	15
Election campaign (other)	16
Environment	17
Ethnic minorities	18
Fishing	19
Foreign Affairs	20
Health	21
Housing	22
Immigration	23
Industrial relations	24
Inflation	25
Maori issues	26
Political debates	27
Proportional representation	28
Regional issues	29
Sport	30
Social welfare	31
Taxes	32
Trade	33
Transport	34
Unemployment	35
Women	36
Election campaign (leadership)	37
News media	38
Poverty	39
Parliamentary Reform	40
Energy	41
Tourism	42
Election campaign (polls)	43



(23-24)

15. Is the first campaign issue defined with reference to a problematic situation(s)?

- Yes 1
- No 2

(25)

(If no, do not answer Questions 16-17B, and go to Q 18. If yes, answer the next question and then code up to two different problematic situations for each campaign issue.)

16. How many problematic situations does the campaign issue refer to?

- 1
- 2

(26)

(For each problematic situation answer the following.)

17(a). Was the first problematic situation referred to:

- Loss of value (individual) 1
- Loss of value (society) 2
- Need for value (individual) 3
- Need for value (society) 4
- Conflict (individual) 5
- Conflict (society) 6
- Indeterminate situation 7
- Blocking 8
- Steps towards a solution 9
- Consequences 10
- Denial of a problem 11

(27-28)

NEW LINE

17(b). Was the second problematic situation referred to:

- Loss of value (individual) 1
- Loss of value (society) 2
- Need for value (individual) 3
- Need for value (society) 4
- Conflict (individual) 5
- Conflict (society) 6
- Indeterminate situation 7
- Blocking 8
- Steps towards a solution 9
- Consequences 10
- Denial of a problem 11

(27-28)

18. What is the second campaign issue the story refers to?

NEW LINE

Agriculture	1
Broadcasting	2
Budget deficit	3
Business development	4
Crime	5
Cultural issues	6
Defence	7
Economic policy	8
Education	9
Election campaign (style)	10
Election campaign (funding)	11
Election campaign (organisation)	12
Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	13
Election campaign (roadshow)	14
Election campaign (candidates)	15
Election campaign (other)	16
Environment	17
Ethnic minorities	18
Fishing	19
Foreign Affairs	20
Health	21
Housing	22
Immigration	23
Industrial relations	24
Inflation	25
Maori issues	26
Political debates	27
Proportional representation	28
Regional issues	29
Sport	30
Social welfare	31
Taxes	32
Trade	33
Transport	34
Unemployment	35
Women	36
Election campaign (leadership)	37
News media	38
Poverty	39
Parliamentary Reform	40
Energy	41
Tourism	42
Election campaign (polls)	43



(23-24)

19. Is the second campaign issue defined with reference to a problematic situation(s)?

Yes 1  
No 2

(25)

(If no, do not answer Questions 20-21B and go to Q 22. If yes, answer the next question and then code up to two different problematic situations for each campaign issue.)

20. How many problematic situations does the campaign issue refer to?

1  
2

(26)

(For each problematic situation answer the following.)

- 21(a). Was the first problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

(27-28)

- 21(b). Was the second problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

NEW LINE


(27-28)

22. What is the third campaign issue the story refers to?

NEW LINE

Agriculture	1
Broadcasting	2
Budget deficit	3
Business development	4
Crime	5
Cultural issues	6
Defence	7
Economic policy	8
Education	9
Election campaign (style)	10
Election campaign (funding)	11
Election campaign (organisation)	12
Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	13
Election campaign (roadshow)	14
Election campaign (candidates)	15
Election campaign (other)	16
Environment	17
Ethnic minorities	18
Fishing	19
Foreign Affairs	20
Health	21
Housing	22
Immigration	23
Industrial relations	24
Inflation	25
Maori issues	26
Political debates	27
Proportional representation	28
Regional issues	29
Sport	30
Social welfare	31
Taxes	32
Trade	33
Transport	34
Unemployment	35
Women	36
Election campaign (leadership)	37
News media	38
Poverty	39
Parliamentary Reform	40
Energy	41
Tourism	42
Election campaign (polls)	43



(23-24)

23. Is the third campaign issue defined with reference to a problematic situation(s)?

Yes 1  
No 2

(25)

(If no, do not answer Questions 24-25B, and go to Q 26. If yes, answer the next question and code up to two different problematic situations for each campaign issue.)

24. How many problematic situations does the third campaign issue refer to?

1  
2

(26)

*(For each problematic situation answer the following.)*

25(a). Was the first problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

(27-28)

25(b). Was the second problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

NEW LINE

(27-28)

26. What is the fourth campaign issue the story refers to?

NEW LINE

Agriculture	1
Broadcasting	2
Budget deficit	3
Business development	4
Crime	5
Cultural issues	6
Defence	7
Economic policy	8
Education	9
Election campaign (style)	10
Election campaign (funding)	11
Election campaign (organisation)	12
Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	13
Election campaign (roadshow)	14
Election campaign (candidates)	15
Election campaign (other)	16
Environment	17
Ethnic minorities	18
Fishing	19
Foreign Affairs	20
Health	21
Housing	22
Immigration	23
Industrial relations	24
Inflation	25
Maori issues	26
Political debates	27
Proportional representation	28
Regional issues	29
Sport	30
Social welfare	31
Taxes	32
Trade	33
Transport	34
Unemployment	35
Women	36
Election campaign (leadership)	37
News media	38
Poverty	39
Parliamentary Reform	40
Energy	41
Tourism	42
Election campaign (polls)	43



(23-24)

27. Is the fourth campaign issue defined with reference to a problematic situation(s)?

Yes 1  
No 2

(25)

(If no, do not answer Questions 28-29b, and go to Q 30. If yes, answer the next question and code up to two different problematic situations for each campaign issue.)

28. How many problematic situations does the fourth campaign issue refer to?

1  
2

(26)

(For each problematic situation answer the following.)

29(a). Was the first problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

(27-28)

29(b). Was the second problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

**NEW LINE**


(27-28)

30. What is the fifth campaign issue the story refers to?

NEW LINE

Agriculture	1
Broadcasting	2
Budget deficit	3
Business development	4
Crime	5
Cultural issues	6
Defence	7
Economic policy	8
Education	9
Election campaign (style)	10
Election campaign (funding)	11
Election campaign (organisation)	12
Election campaign (advertising & publicity)	13
Election campaign (roadshow)	14
Election campaign (candidates)	15
Election campaign (other)	16
Environment	17
Ethnic minorities	18
Fishing	19
Foreign Affairs	20
Health	21
Housing	22
Immigration	23
Industrial relations	24
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(23-24)

31. Is the fifth campaign issue defined with reference to a problematic situation(s)?

Yes 1  
No 2

(25)

(If no, do not answer Questions 32-33B. If yes, answer the next question and then code up to two different problematic situations for each campaign issue.)

32. How many problematic situations does the fifth campaign issue refer to?

1  
2

(26)

(For each problematic situation answer the following.)

33(a). Was the first problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

(27-28)

33(b). Was the second problematic situation referred to:

Loss of value (individual)	1
Loss of value (society)	2
Need for value (individual)	3
Need for value (society)	4
Conflict (individual)	5
Conflict (society)	6
Indeterminate situation	7
Blocking	8
Steps towards a solution	9
Consequences	10
Denial of a problem	11

NEW LINE

(27-28)