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A Stylish Revolution:
The fourth Labour Government and information management

Fay Ann Burke

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Arts
at the University of Otago, Dunedin,
New Zealand.

September 1992
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Abstract

This thesis explores the development of the fourth Labour Government’s news and publicity management strategies, and the rise of a sophisticated and professional system of information dispersal. Given that Labour embarked upon the most radical programme of reform seen for fifty years in New Zealand, it should be of greater concern that the mainstream media failed to provide a sustained critique and in-depth investigation of the changes which were occurring to the social and economic system. A range of factors contributed to the fourth Labour Government’s ability to manage news and publicity – the formal structures of the media itself and the impact of the Government’s free market policy on those structures; the establishment of a system of professional handlers of information within the beehive, and the associated techniques of news management and publicity; the instruments for conducting publicity and news management – the press gallery, and taxpayer funded state publicity campaigns; and finally the impact of modern election campaigns where all the techniques of news management come together more visibly than in day-to-day government. The underlying premise of the thesis is that modern democratic governments will inevitably seek to manipulate and propagandise, and the communications revolution coupled with new right ideology has exacerbated that trend, causing something of a revolution in government communications techniques.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments ................................................................. ii
Abstract .................................................................................. iii
Introduction .............................................................................. 6

CHAPTER 1
Government and the Media in New Zealand .............................. 13
  Propaganda and Democracy .................................................. 13
  Government and the Early Press ............................................ 18
  Radio-Government and the Origins of Broadcasting ............... 23
  The Arrival of Television .................................................... 28
  Muldoon and the Media 1975-1984 ....................................... 30

CHAPTER 2
Media Structures and Labour: Reform, Deregulation and Concentration of Ownership ................................................. 34
  The United Kingdom Experience .......................................... 36
  The Status of the Media in New Zealand ............................... 38
  The Rhetoric .................................................................. 43
  . And The Reality ............................................................ 47
  Restructuring the Business of Broadcasting .......................... 49

CHAPTER 3
Feeding the Chooks: ............................................................... 55
  Government-Party Policy on Communication ......................... 56
  Professionalisation of Information Control ............................ 58
  Politicisation of ministerial support staff ............................... 63
  The Politics of Information Dispersal ..................................... 67

CHAPTER 4
Publicity Strategies ............................................................... 72
  The Press Gallery and Political Reporting ............................. 73
  State Publicity Campaigns .................................................. 82

CHAPTER 5
Elections and the fourth Labour Government ........................... 92
  The evolution of modern campaign techniques in New Zealand 93
  The 1987 and 1990 campaigns ........................................... 97
  Style ........................................................................ 99
The effects of deregulation and concentration of ownership .................. 103
Conclusions .................................................................................. 107
Appendices .................................................................................... 113
Appendix 1 Media Takeovers and Mergers – 1984-87 ......................... 114
Appendix 2 Correspondence with Advertising Standards Complaints Board.......... 118
Appendix 3 Correspondence with Audit Office........................................ 121
References .................................................................................... 122
Introduction

After the election of the National Government in 1990, there was increasing discussion in the mainstream media regarding the relationship between that government and the media. Concerns were voiced regarding the increase in the level of expenditure and allocation of resources by the National Government into improving media management, and also at attempts by National to silence the increasing number of critics of its economic direction.

By March 1991, less than six months into their term, the Bolger Government had spent an estimated two million dollars on ‘information’ campaigns, including advertising the Employment Contracts Bill ($240,000 on information pamphlets), benefit cuts ($895,000 on print and television campaigns, $400,000 on letters to beneficiaries), and Ka Awatea (ten dollars per copy of a report which was not Government policy). Commentators and the Labour opposition were quick to point to the hypocrisy of the National Party, which when in opposition had been quick to condemn similar activities of the fourth Labour Government (Otago Daily Times, 14/03/91, and 16/03/91). Later came the revelations that National was spending $500,000 per year just to monitor the output of the media (Maharey, 1992, p.94), and had spent $2.1 million to write, print and publicise the 1991 budget (Moore, 1992, p.87). Following the Tamaki by-election, Prime Minister Jim Bolger announced that the chief message the Government had received from Tamaki was that Government policies were not being communicated clearly, and in order to fill that gap they were reactivating plans to establish a $440,000 communications unit inside the Prime Minister’s Department – thereby avoiding the public criticism that arose from letting publicity contracts to public relations firms (Dominion, 18/02/92).

Also raised by the media were concerns at the way the Prime Minister’s Department was dealing with media criticism. It seemed in 1992, that the Bolger Government was returning to a more confrontational media relationship. Although there was very little direct evidence, there were concerns about ‘threats’ to Radio New Zealand’s future following some tense interviews between RNZ’s Kim Hill and Jim Bolger. Television New Zealand’s Richard Harman had been hauled over the coals for ‘bad mouthing’ the Prime Minister at a Beehive social function. One of the best publicised reactions was between the Prime Minister, his Press Secretary Mike Wall and TV3 heads regarding TV3’s Bill Ralston’s satire of the Prime Minister on Nightline. At one stage, TV3 heads were asked to withdraw Ralston from the Prime Minister’s press conferences (Evening
At the same time that these concerns were being voiced media watchers, and the media themselves were becoming increasingly concerned about the effects of deregulation and concentration of media ownership on news reporting. Fewer journalists and more intense competition had led to less investigative journalism, more sensationalist style reporting and an increasing reliance on press releases from major news sources. It also made journalists more susceptible to pressure from important news sources such as the Government.

The area of government-media relations is an extremely complex one, and one which deserves closer scrutiny. While the Bolger Government’s relationship with the media increasingly came under the microscope, much of what was happening could be traced back to changes instigated by the fourth Labour Government. 1984 constituted a landmark year in terms of government-media relations. Gone was the direct confrontational style of the Muldoon era; enter a new and user friendly Labour Government. Lange established a very good rapport with the press gallery, and Ministers were encouraged to do likewise. A new professional breed of press secretaries arrived and Labour began pouring vast sums of money into ensuring their policies received plenty of good, positive advertising – both paid and unpaid. The fourth Labour Government were the first in New Zealand to be young enough to have grown up with the electronic media, to be comfortable with it, to recognise the potential of its power, and most importantly, to know how to use it. Like National, there were a number of allegations levelled at Labour regarding the way they (ab)used the media. Few of these allegations made it through to the mainstream media, particularly during Labour’s first term (the exception would have to be Labour Government expenditure on state publicity campaigns).

It has been alleged that the fourth Labour Government manipulated broadcasting, used publicly funded advertising to distribute party propaganda and cultivated journalists.

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1 See also Legat (1992, pp.54-63), Campbell (1992a, pp.19-22), Templeton, *Evening Post*, 20/05/92.
2 See for example, *The Evening Post*, 4 March, 1992, “... the push [to counteract negative publicity] has come when newspapers, radio and television are in a weakened state through newspaper closures and cuts. There are fewer reporters to do the job.’ See also, Gordon McLauchlan in *The Evening Post*, 10 April 1992, ‘If more New Zealanders are getting... their news from Television One than any other source, all I can say is the nation must be suffering from intellectual rickets.’ *Whose News?* (Comrie and McGregor, eds, 1992) explores the issues of concentration of ownership and deregulation in some detail.
3 For example, Ian Cross, former Broadcasting Corporation Chairman: ‘I could not help wondering – and still do – whether certain more sophisticated tacticians behind the scenes were maintaining the attack to discredit a broadcasting administration that would be a major obstacle to any future political strategy whereby in office the party would use public broadcasting as a tool of its political goals’ (1988, p.214). Cross goes on to note that in a period of the greatest social and political upheaval for fifty years, public television made no independent, detailed examination of what was happening and in fact, carefully avoided issues of political
There were also concerns raised regarding the level of expenditure on private consultants and advertising agencies, and at government attempts to increase access to free broadcasting time at elections, and effectively marginalise third parties. The Government certainly put a huge effort and expense into its publicity functions and in improving the standard of communication through the media. Yet despite concerns regarding the communications policy of the fourth Labour Government, very little research has been done which focuses explicitly on how the communications policy of that Government differed from those of previous governments and, the question which follows on from that, of how far should a government be able to go in selling itself to the public and controlling or limiting opposition and alternative viewpoints?

Essentially then, this thesis is a study of a specific party in government, its relationship to the media and how it developed its publicity functions in order to maximise positive publicity of its policies. Initially, the changes made to the publicity structures by the fourth Labour Government were tremendously successful although it must be recognised that the publicity operated in tandem with other factors, such as the desire of the voting public for a new approach to the New Zealand economy. Early in the second term of the Government however the successful public image they enjoyed in their first term began to tarnish, due to a number of largely external factors which led many people to revise their opinion both of the Government and their policies. These factors included the sharemarket crash, dissatisfaction with growing unemployment and probably most importantly, the growing rift between Roger Douglas, one of the major driving forces behind the new economic direction, and David Lange.

In order to explore the specifics of the fourth Labour Government’s publicity manoeuvres and relationship with the media, this thesis explores a range of mechanisms used by modern political parties in an attempt to gain good public relations which are a significant factor on the road to re-election. There are two prongs to a modern government’s communications policy: a) the paid media or advertising, which only requires expenditure by government, but which attracts a lot of adverse publicity for that very reason; b) the unpaid media or publicity, which requires far more effort in order to be effective, but if successful has more credibility than advertisements, and has the added advantage that it may reach people who ignore advertisements.

The three issues which dominate this review of the fourth Labour Government’s public relations exercises are the what, why and how questions: what has changed in terms of sensitivity (p.240). Also see Jesson, (1990b, p.114); Report of the Audit Office, (1989, p.2) and McQueen, (1991) who makes references throughout to the significance of the media, importance of publicity, and the part this played in the downfall of David Lange.
the relationship with the media and government’s publicity mechanisms; how has it changed, and why did those changes occur. In addition to the discussion about the fourth Labour Government, there are occasional references throughout this thesis to how Labour’s successors, the Bolger-led National Government, have continued the trends begun by Labour in developing sophisticated and professional information management strategies, thereby showing the shift to improving propaganda functions was not something unique to Labour, but part of a general trend. 

Efforts by the fourth Labour Government to improve its public relations methods have seen the development of propaganda machinery as distinct from simply relying on the mass media to report what is said or done. This is evidenced by, for example, the growth in the numbers of press secretaries, and state funded publicity campaigns. Information now, is not simply imparted, it is carefully managed and manipulated in an attempt to gain the right sort of coverage. This has raised fears that the Labour Government used its position not simply to advise and inform as to what it was doing, but to actively sell an ideology in the guise of official government business. The questions which stem from this development in modern government communications include: did any of these efforts constitute an abuse of power and if they did, what checks exist in the system to ensure that these abuses are identified and responded to?

This type of study which focuses on government-media relationships is of central relevance to modern society. As Seymour-Ure (1991) points out,

"Extra edge is given to the government’s power to control media by the fact that, if it is used, the government interferes with an instrument of its own accountability. In constitutional theory, the accountability of the government lies through Parliament to the electorate. In practice, however, the rise of mass suffrage made the government dependant upon the media (pp.159-60)."

Additionally, as society becomes increasingly fragmented, the media are fast becoming the primary source of information about central government for the public. It is the forum where politics is increasingly played out and when that information is distorted, it has tremendous potential to influence the knowledge, views, and agenda of that public.

Obviously, politicians have always recognised that they are in the business of communicating. Effective communication is a significant part of a political party’s ability to remain in government and to that end, the party in power has always manipulated the available means of communication to some extent. It is important then, not to simply consider the case of the fourth Labour Government in isolation, but to put it in its historical context. Chapter 1 deals with this aspect of the study, setting out the appropriate framework, relating the need to manage information to the ideological change which occurred in 1984, and the ongoing role of propaganda in democracies. The chapter
then moves on to review the relationship of various governments, from the days of the early press through to 1984. What becomes apparent is the fact that the government-media relationship is one which is in a constant state of flux, with governments trying to gain an advantage, and the media resisting this challenge to its autonomy. This is particularly apparent as governments grapple with the nuances of new technology. With the scene set, the chapter finishes by reviewing the issues confronting the media, and the government’s relationship with the media in 1984. These include concerns regarding concentration of press ownership, the future for state owned television and the rather belligerent way in which the then Prime Minister, Sir Robert Muldoon had dealt with political reporters and the media generally.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 pick up on the issues considered in Chapter 1 and discuss in some detail the elements of the fourth Labour Government’s communications policies. Chapter 2 reviews the fourth Labour Government’s response to concerns about the increasing concentration of newspaper ownership, and reviews the process which led to the new broadcasting structure, and what that structure meant for an independent broadcasting system. This is compared briefly with the international situation. While these aspects of policy may not have been consciously seen as direct constituents of the fourth Labour Government’s communications policy by the policy makers themselves, there is a direct link between these policies and coverage of Government activities. The concentration of media ownership for example has led to fewer journalists in the gallery with an increasing workload, and a loss of diversity of opinion. The parliamentary press gallery has become ‘younger, . . . leaner, but more bloody minded and perhaps more inclined to go for the jugular and miss the point.’

The issues in regard to broadcasting are rather more complex. Initially it appeared the existing public broadcasting system would be maintained and the system fine tuned. It was not. The system was overhauled so it would fall into line with the free market ethos of the fourth Labour Government. But the key point to note is that some of the essential means by which governments can intimidate broadcasters were maintained – the fee setting function, and the Government’s role in continuing to appoint the controlling board members.

Chapter 3 moves on to look at a more direct indicator of the fourth Labour Government’s communications policies – government press secretaries, news management strategies and the Government’s ‘no expense spared’ approach to public relations manoeuvres. Selling a government, its policies, and its image is something usually associated with an election campaign. But in modern governments, there is increasing emphasis on public

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4 Richard Griffen, Chairperson of the parliamentary press gallery, speaking to David Lange on National Radio’s Nine to Noon programme, 20/03/92.
relations throughout its term. Under the fourth Labour Government, emphasis shifted from using the mass media to put the Government’s message across, to the development of separate and distinct propaganda functions. It is here that professionalism really becomes apparent, with the shift from employing public service advisers and assistants, to press secretaries being employed from the private sector, as recommended by the communications audit commissioned by Labour on winning the 1984 election. The formula worked well for the Government in their first term, but worked against them in their second term. This chapter reviews the changes, and why they failed the Government after 1987. The era of the modern press secretary is important to government communications for a number of reasons. It brought the press gallery closer to the Government and for much of the first term they acted as agents for the fourth Labour Government, selling policies such as GST on their behalf. It also heralded the era of the private consultancy, to advise the government on the image and marketing of new policies. It was a significant factor in accelerating the feud between Roger Douglas and David Lange from early 1988 onwards.

Having reviewed the development of sophisticated news dispersal techniques, Chapter 4 moves on to look at the two publicity elements of the communications strategy. First, the role of the press gallery – the conduit for unpaid publicity. This chapter reviews the criticisms made of the gallery regarding their failure to provide critiques and in-depth analysis through the mainstream media, and the apparent success of the fourth Labour Government at marketing their policies through the gallery. The chapter then goes on to look at the second aspect of Government communications strategy which achieved increasing prominence under Labour – state publicity campaigns. Concerns were raised regarding a number of campaigns conducted by the fourth Labour Government, that taxpayer funded campaigns purporting to inform the public about new policies were actually selling political ideology. Similar concerns were raised regarding the abuse by some politicians of the parliamentary postal privilege, the subject of a report from the Office of the Controller and Auditor General. The issue of rules regarding the postal privilege was never satisfactorily resolved. The author of the Report of the Controller and Auditor General on the Parliamentary Postal Privilege, Mr Brian Tyler, came in for criticism from Geoffrey Palmer, reflecting the sensitive nature of parliamentary abuse of privileges.5 This chapter looks at the campaigns which were criticised, the levels of expenditure, and what checks exist in the system to try to prevent abuse.

5 Geoffrey Palmer remarked that; ‘I think the competence of the Auditor General is somewhat dubious in these matters. He had a rather extended view of his own constitutional role, which it seemed to me was overblown. His basic job was to see that the money was spent on the purpose for which it was appropriated, something that he isn’t actually very good at’ (Palmer, interview).
Finally, Chapter 5 examines at the strategies adopted by the Labour Party to sell the Government at election time to the people. Election advertising and promotion differs from governmental self-promotion because it is recognised by the public as political or ideological self-promotion, and this may lessen its impact. Having discussed the methods employed by the fourth Labour Government to promote itself, the chapter then looks at the effects of the development of communications technology on the nature of the campaign. Television and the development of communications technology figures very largely as the driving forces behind the changes which have occurred in electioneering styles in the last decade. Images have become of paramount importance, to the detriment of actual issues. Politicians are as much responsible for this decline as the television networks themselves. Some of the issues raised include: how has the nature of the campaign changed; how important is the actual campaign in influencing voters; and why did the methods which served Labour so well in 1987 fail so dismally in 1990? The attempt in 1990 by the Palmer led Government to increase its entitlement to free air time on television and radio highlights reasons for further concerns regarding government access to broadcasting in New Zealand.

What was seen with the fourth Labour Government was a shift to a modern style government, comparable with the United States under Reagan and Britain under Thatcher. They were professional managers of the media, and employed sophisticated tacticians in order to enable them to take full advantage of modern communications techniques. Regardless of whether this was the intent, changes to the regulations surrounding newspaper ownership resulted in a concentration of ownership of the New Zealand press, which ultimately limited diversity of opinion in the mainstream media, lessening the likelihood of investigative journalism. Deregulation of the broadcasting sector similarly caused a decline in news standards in New Zealand. While the Labour Government appeared to be moving away from overt controls over the media, they were tightening the availability of information, carefully packaging information to meet the needs of the media, managing their communications outputs professionally. It seems to be part of a growing belief on the part of politicians that the public will accept a particular policy, if only it is correctly packaged and presented to them.
CHAPTER 1

Government and the Media in New Zealand

Antagonism between journalists and politicians is as old as the press itself... (Whale, 1980, p.114).

Propaganda and Democracy

Propaganda as a description, is largely meaningless. It is seldom used today except as a term of abuse, levelled by the opposition against government, and vice versa. Propaganda is what your opposition engages in, one's own propaganda appears under the guise of 'publicity', or 'information' (Taylor, 1979, p.19). Interpreted in this way, it is a useless concept, but commentators have shown that when the term is given a value-free definition, it is equally applicable to both totalitarian states and democracies. As Robins et al. (1987) see it,

The modern democratic state is, necessarily and inescapably, the propagandist state. The complexity of the developed nation-state appears to be such that a 'free market' of ideas and debate must be superseded by the (scientific) management and orchestration of public opinion (p.7).¹

The simplest definition of propaganda is that it is biased information (Dovring, 1959, p.5). While such a definition is simple and concise, it lacks necessary detail to make it useful. For example, if the propaganda is ineffective in convincing people, is it still regarded as propaganda? Richard Taylor (1979, pp.19-31), gives one of the best and thorough debates regarding propaganda. He concludes that:

Propaganda is the attempt to influence the public opinions of an audience through the transmission of ideas and values... Propaganda can encompass both the confirmation of existing inclinations and the 'conversion' to ones that were not hitherto apparent; propaganda both confirms and 'converts'... Propaganda aims to influence the 'public opinion of an audience': it is concerned to influence opinions and attitudes towards matters of public interest,... propaganda

¹ See also Morgan (1991) on the concerns surrounding information management and control in Britain.
is aimed at a particular audience and manipulates that audience for its own purposes. Finally, propaganda exerts its influence through the 'transmission of ideas and values': it is thus distinguished from more overt pressures, such as financial reward, or the threat or use of violence. But these ideas and values may be transmitted either directly, as in a political speech, or indirectly by association, through the use of significant symbols such as the flag or emblem (Taylor, 1979, p.28).

A number of points are raised by this definition. First, propaganda is only the 'attempt' to influence opinion; it does not need to be effective in its aims. This is important because of the tremendous difficulty in measuring the effects or relative success of a propaganda exercise. Secondly, it is an attempt only to 'influence', not an attempt to control – control was seen as too total in its implications. Thirdly, propaganda can be effective only on those who are already partly or entirely convinced of the truth. It cannot be created out of a void; the basis for the ideas or beliefs must exist already. Fourthly, the aim of propaganda is to affect public opinion. Private opinion is of little concern to the propagandist, except to the extent it impinges on public interest or activities. Finally, the propaganda need not be disseminated through the mass media, nor is it vital that its sources remain concealed. Certainly, it may be that propaganda is more effective where sources do remain concealed, but it is not imperative. The problem which remains is how do we distinguish between propaganda and education? Taylor deals with this question too, determining that where education teaches people how to think, effectively broadening the perspective of information or education, and leading people to question their values, propaganda teaches people what to think, narrowing information or education with the aim of making its audience accept the values it disseminates, and sometimes to act on that acceptance (Taylor, 1979, pp.25-6).

As early theories of mass media impact on audiences began to be discredited, the relevance of propaganda to politics was thought to have declined, and communications and propaganda studies became the domain of psychology and sociology. However Robins et al. (1987) place propaganda firmly in the arena of political science, arguing it is both relevant and interesting. As society became increasingly fragmented in order to maintain adequate linkages between individuals to provide a stable integrated system of social control, communication has become the main framework of the web of social life (p.2). In the eighteenth century, Enlightenment philosophy presumed that society was constituted of a rational public, able to invoke a ‘rational process of decision-making on the basis of freely available information and effective communication’ (p.6). Detractors however, argued the theory was inherently flawed. Communication of information was not ideal and efficient, and the public were often irrational and poor judges. Communications systems therefore were open to manipulation and subversion, and if

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2 See Taylor (1979), pp 19-29 for a fuller discussion of the following points.
there is no rational public, then biased information becomes necessary in order to help guide that public to a conclusion. The modern state is essentially and necessarily an information society, and it has inescapably become a propagandist state, because ‘in a world of competing doctrines, partisans of democratic government cannot rely on appeal to reason or abstract liberalism (p.7). The need for news management, and manipulation of public debate has become necessary because of the denial of the existence of a rational public.

Robins et al. claim that propaganda has long been present in democratic societies, but that as society increasingly becomes dependant on information technology, the scientific management of information has become the crucial element for maintaining the organisational coherence of mass society. Propaganda then, in the 1980s has developed from being ‘a process of ad hoc information manipulation’ to become ‘transmogrified into the increasingly systemic and integrated machinery of global information control’ (p.13). Therefore, the argument goes, information flows and management are becoming increasingly important in modern society, and are increasingly the key to social control in modern capitalist societies.

Robins et al. argue as their central thesis that ‘in the nation-state of late capitalism information management is inherently totalitarian’ (p.16). Because of the widespread mechanisms for managing information, it has become systemic, routine and normative. It is important to note that the development of the propagandist democratic state does not presuppose an elite bent on manipulation and conspiracy. The point is that information control and management is systemic and integral to modern society, and it has developed over many years to reach this point.

Robins et al. point to four closely related forces which underpin the modern system of information management and control:
- the institutions of active persuasion, like propaganda agencies, public relations firms and advertising agencies;
- various mechanisms of secrecy, security and censorship which restrict popular access to certain categories of information;
- increasing developments towards the commodification and commercialisation of information which subordinate the flow of information to business values and priorities;
- the proliferation of research by corporate and political interests, like opinion polling and market research. This information collection provides increasingly detailed information to those with access to the data, dramatically increasing their ability to create and target propaganda. It also raises fears for the privacy of the individuals involved (pp.12-13).
It is an underlying assumption of this thesis that governments have long attempted to manipulate the communications processes, and have indulged in propaganda, not because of an overt desire to misinform the public, but because it has become a normative feature of democracy that the public are not rational and need directed. Under the Labour Government, between 1984 and 1990, this trend was accelerated through the development of news management strategies, and techniques which allow government to know more about public opinion in order to better manage information dispersal.

Propaganda and the New Right

There has been much discussion and analysis of the ideological shift which occurred with the election of the fourth Labour Government. It is more than coincidence that in New Zealand government attempts to manage information increased with the change of ideology in 1984. The need to manage information in order to make New Right policies appear inescapable is an important aspect of this policy – hence we were repeatedly told, and many came to believe: ‘TINA, there is no alternative’. In the New Zealand context this information management was doubly important as it was a party traditionally associated with socialism and the working class that was introducing reforms more usually associated with conservative parties. This meant Labour had to take extra care not to totally erode its traditional electoral base, while at the same time attract new voters from different areas. Of the British situation, Morgan remarked,

"It is clear that British governments have a range of effective tools which may be used to restrict parliamentary and popular access to information and to propagate a government ‘line’ to mass media on general (what to do?) and specific (who or how to do?) questions. It is equally clear that the 1980s saw a significant strengthening of trends making for more government secrecy and more Downing Street control of the government information system... by a combination of secrecy and careful use of the Lobby to set the political agenda, British governments can go a long way toward writing their own news for considerable periods of time (1991, p.538)."

Morgan comments also on the difficulty for the Thatcher Government in retaining that same sort of control over information management – setting the agenda for debate, in the face of highly controversial policies like the poll tax. Similarly in New Zealand, it became difficult for the Labour Government to maintain that control following the sharemarket crash of 1987, and in the face of growing public awareness regarding the ideological rift developing in the Labour Party from late 1988 onwards. Similar difficulties would no doubt have been faced had Labour fully followed through its New Right enterprise style policies into labour market reform and social policy. The point then, is that information in democracies can be, and is, successfully managed, and the agenda for public debate set, but there is a point at which that propagation of ideas will fail, as it did both for Thatcher in Britain and Labour in New Zealand. To return to the initial point however, the need to successfully manage information was vital to proponents of New Right policy, both in order to convince their own party, the media, and through the media, the wider public.
This is a characteristic of the New Right throughout the western world. Lauder (1990) makes this point very well in regard to New Zealand.

The prime agency for the promotion of these policies has been the Treasury which, in a series of publications, has advocated some of the most pristine New Right policies to be seen anywhere in the western world. What is significant and alarming about the Treasury’s espousal of New Right doctrine is that it has not only been prepared to argue the intellectual case for it but has also engaged in the more overt political propaganda typical of the New Right (p.1) [emphasis added].

Obviously in undertaking such a radical programme, Labour had to convince the public of the necessity of changes – hence the need for an effective system of dispersing the Government’s viewpoint. Lauder goes as far as to outline the typical New Right strategy for doing this. It includes,

1. public pronouncements by leading New Right figures that the institutions/policies they are attacking have been an abysmal failure;
2. the publication of propaganda by New Right think tanks supporting such claims and presenting New Right alternatives as common sense;
3. the presentation of social policies as if they were merely economic policies to which, it is claimed, there are no alternatives (p.1).

Thus during the lead up to the reforms undertaken by Labour there was: the replacement of Bill Rowling with David Lange and the subsequent remodelling of Lange to make him a more user friendly product; the derision of Muldoon and his interventionist style policies; and the publicity exercises of ‘opening the books’ and the economic summit. The Labour Government were ably assisted and encouraged in their derision of past policies and endorsement of New Right solutions by Treasury publications (for example, Economic Management, Volumes I & II), and the Business Roundtable think tank, the Centre for Independent Studies (Lauder, 1990, p.2). What will become clear throughout this thesis is the subtle shift in government information dispersal techniques. The Labour Government did not try to control the media, so much as control their access to information and the slant of that information.

Some critics have gone as far as to allege publicity (particularly the tax-payer funded advertising) generated by the fourth Labour government was cleverly disguised party propaganda, a debate which the auditor general stepped into on a number of occasions. The interaction of New Right beliefs with the information technology, coupled with the traditional and systemic nature of information management and control described by Robins et al. is critical to the revolution in news and information management techniques which occurred in New Zealand after 1984.

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3 Walker (1989), pp.210-11
4 See for example, Sir Robert Muldoon, quoted in the Auckland Star, 5/11/84, on Labour Government proposals to buy advertising time to explain the budget, and Jesson, (1990b, pp.176-8) on Labour Government manipulation of the media.
To put the issue into context however, it is first necessary to look at the history of the media and governments in New Zealand. Politicians have always recognised that they are in the business of communicating. Effective communication is the key to remaining in government. To that end, they have always manipulated the means of communication open to them. The media recognise this and where possible, have resisted those challenges. Journalists have long clung to their belief that the ideals of impartiality and balance be upheld in reporting and news collection. The news media and politicians are mutually dependent, one cannot afford to alienate the other, and this adds a further complexity to the relationship. The development and growth of the electronic media has created new problems to be overcome for both the journalists and editors as well as the politicians. In New Zealand, the power governments have exercised over the media has gone through a number of phases – from suppression and censorship applied to the early press, through to the control, censorship and overt manipulation of radio through the 1930s until the 1960s. The communications revolution of the 1960s brought with it less overt measures. Notably patronage, but elements of censorship and control remained. The growth of the electronic media throughout the 1970s has added a new dimension to the relationship between politicians and the media, as politicians must yet again adapt to the changing demands of television and its associated technology.

**Government and the Early Press**

*New Zealand northern press was born under the influence of a government intolerant of criticism and willing to resort to draconian measures to suppress it* (Day, 1981, p.2).

Described as 'one of the blackest pages in the early history of New Zealand’, the overt, heavy handed censorship of the press by the Crown Colony Government marked the beginnings of a complicated relationship between the media and the government. The early involvement of the Crown Colony Government in the business of the press reflected a certain naivety on the part of the Administration. While their heavy-handed style may have succeeded in silencing their critics, it did little towards gaining the Government any sort of support from the press and settlers, and probably did more to damage their credibility.

It was the northern press who suffered most from the ‘iron hand’ of the Administration, with southern newspapers being both beyond the Administration’s sphere of influence, and themselves being under the influence of the New Zealand Company. The main bone of contention between the Crown Colony Government and the press was discussion of the way the government was handling the land issue.
Government policy on this extremely complex problem ‘was attacked in the distant south with the utmost vigour and acerbity. In the north it was approached with great circumspection, for there the government was close by, and its iron hand felt at once’ (Meiklejohn, 1953, p.14, quoting T.M. Hocken).

The first instance of Administration interference began with the first paper to be published in the north, the *New Zealand Advertiser* and *Bay of Islands Gazette*. First published in 1840 it was intended to give the Crown Colony Government somewhere to publish its decrees. The editor, Reverend Barsalli Quaife used the paper to begin discussing the big issue of the day, the land question, and the lack of speed with which the Government was proceeding on approving claims. After only twenty-seven issues, Quaife was called before Colonial Secretary Shortland.

The Administrator, Hobson responded to this first act of criticism by reviving a series of oppressive anti-press laws, instituted in Australia between 1827 and 1830.5 The complete revival of these laws was an over-reaction, as the first act, requiring a newspaper proprietor and at least two sureties to deposit £300 each with the Supreme Court, was enough to end the life of the *New Zealand Advertiser* (Day, 1981, p.3).

The reaction of the settlers to the introduction of the oppressive laws was one of outrage. A Wellington paper described the anti-press law as ‘arbitrary, oppressive and inapplicable to the state of society in this Colony . . . an insult to the good sense and loyal disposition to the Queen’s subjects in New Zealand’ (Day, 1990, pp.13-14). The Administration continued to respond harshly to criticism of its conduct regarding the land question, perhaps in part fuelled by fears that these criticisms may make their way back to England. A further five newspapers begun in Auckland were to incur the wrath of Hobson, or his successor as administrator, Shortland. The Administration had a range of measures with which to punish newspaper editors and staff who spoke out on the sensitive issue regarding the administration of the land claims, but there were three basic forms of this government interference.

- The strongest weapon in the arsenal of the Crown Colony Government was the domination by their staff of the Auckland Newspaper and General Printing Company, which held the only printing press in the area. It is certain that the Government were able to use their influence to ‘approve’ a new paper, and also to deny access to the press if a newspaper became too critical of Government policy.
- The initial tactic of the Government however, was to set up an opposition paper. ‘The point in regard to the Administration’s technique of press control would appear to be that prior to using its private control to close down the Herald, the Administration first attempted to either counter it or to suppress it economically, by

5 New South Wales laws were applicable to New Zealand at this time. This was the only instance under which the NSW Acts were applied to New Zealand (Day, 1990, p.13).
starting an opposing paper’ (Day, 1981, p.8). The Auckland Standard was one such paper, set up to oppose the Herald. Such papers were generally recognised for what they were, and the Standard in particular, 'was certainly regarded with disdain by other New Zealand papers' (Day, 1990, p.18).

The Crown Colony Government would also withdraw official patronage. For these early papers with small circulations, withdrawal of patronage was a severe blow, usually resulting in closure.

Often not just one, but a combination of these measures were used in order to suppress criticism by the press. In one instance, Shortland attempted to bribe an editor in order to gain good press for the Government. It was an effort which backfired on Shortland, for the editor in question, Dr Samuel Martin, responded with disgust, and went on to write about the irregularities and corruption of allocation surrounding the land claims. The Government’s response was to close the Herald, fire Martin, and purchase the entire stock.

In Auckland, independence for the press really only began with the purchasing of a second press by the Southern Cross, there ending the monopoly the Government had held over the printing of papers. Tension lessened with the arrival of FitzRoy as the replacement for Shortland, but did not disappear.

From 1840-1860, newspapers’ positions remained largely unchanged. Administration influence appeared largely removed during this period and newspapers had become aware of the need to remove state control from their boards-production-editorial content as much as possible. Tensions of the 1870s led to the establishment of two press associations, one of which, ‘was at least partly an attempt to escape from what it saw as [Prime Minister] Vogel’s political control of the compilation and dissemination of news summaries’ (Day, 1990, p.204). In 1879, the two associations merged and established the United Press Association.

The levels of heavy-handed and clumsy interference in press affairs and independence, has never been returned to on the scale it began in the early 1840s. That is not to say governments kept out of future affairs of the press. Interference continued, but not on the level of 1840-44, and certainly not with the same impact. Newspapers now were financially stronger, and less susceptible to government interference involving the removal of patronage and withdrawal of government advertising. They remained highly partisan – until self-government was obtained in 1853, newspapers had been the only outlet for political expression. Objectivity as a concept, did not come into common usage until the 1930s, when the rise of mass circulation newspapers meant editorial lines had to
be modified in order to target the widest possible audience in terms of readership and advertising (Morrison and Tremewan, 1992, pp.115-118).

In the late 1870s, the Grey Government retaliated to claims in the Southland Times of corruption in the Government by refusing to place advertising with them. The paper suffered no notable effects as a result. The same tactic was reapplied in 1907 to the newly established Dominion, launched as a vehicle for the Opposition Reform Party. The Dominion responded by publishing the information free – ‘In order that our readers may not suffer from this grave abuse of ministerial authority we publish the advertisements below at our own cost’ (Verry, 1985, p.75). The Dominion, according to Verry, went on to play a major part in the defeat of the liberal Government and the success of the Reform Party.

1910-1960
Incidents like those described above were scattered throughout the early years of the New Zealand press, but they became more isolated as time went by. In spite of these sort of incidents, the newspaper industry flourished. By 1910, there were sixty-seven newspapers being published in New Zealand. Many of the newspapers came and went, finding there was not a large enough population to support them. By the 1930s, each of the four main centres (Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin) was supporting at least two daily newspapers – a morning and an evening. Christchurch had four, two morning and two evening, resulting in the mid-1930s in a tough newspaper war, with all the newspapers slashing cover prices and attempting to extend their circulation areas. In addition to the large urban papers, there was a huge network of small newspapers serving rural areas. By the 1950s, the number of newspapers had declined to forty-two. It is worth noting that a few of these, notably, the Herald in Auckland, had and continues to have, huge circulations, but a number of smaller rural newspapers service only very small populations. Up until the 1970s, newspapers were largely supportive of the National Party. The Grey River Argus was the only pro-Labour newspaper, and it folded in 1966. Efforts to establish pro-Labour newspapers, for example the Southern Cross in 1946, were largely unsuccessful. (The Southern Cross folded after only five years of publication). Problems of transport and a scattered population have always precluded the establishment of a national daily newspaper.

Although there was little direct involvement by governments in the business of the press during this period, there were some concerns raised. There was criticism of what were seen as unnecessarily harsh wartime censorship measures. There were complaints regarding government censorship of war telegraphs from London which had already been
censored by British Authorities as it caused unnecessary delays in relaying information to the public. From the mid to late 1920s, governments began – slowly at first – to turn their attentions to the newly forming medium of radio. Government realised there were insurmountable problems in becoming too involved in the business of an independent press, particularly following the second World War. The press had gradually shifted support to the conservative interests of the middle classes. The changing nature of newspaper ownership was no doubt the key reason for this, as was the fact that newspapers were now driven by the profit motive. Many of New Zealand's newspapers were owned by landowners, businessmen and politicians who shared the conservative governments’ interest of the property owning middle class. Many of the small maverick newspapers which had sprung up with the gold rush had disappeared. However, government responses to the reporting of the unemployment riots of the 1930s, and the 1951 Waterside dispute, reflect the state’s continued concern about allowing a free and balanced media in times of national tension.

1960-1975
From the early 1960s, concerns began to arise about the takeover by overseas interests of New Zealand newspapers. On the part of the National Government, it was a matter of some self-interest. The collective National Party eyebrow was not raised at the takeover of Truth by the Wellington Publishing Company, the biggest such merger for thirty-five years, and one of the biggest in the country's history. Yet that same eyebrow jumped about a foot on hearing the news that overseas interests were interested in taking over the Dominion in early 1964, with Prime Minister Holyoake personally stepping in to prevent it. Charges of self-interest were levelled at the Government by the Labour Opposition in a series of heated and very emotional debates over the News Media Ownership Bill, introduced in 1965 by the National Government in order to prevent future takeover bids from overseas interests.

Newspapers, as noted above, had long been recognised as supportive of the conservative, middle class politics of the National Party, with Edwards describing the press of the 1930s thus,

Newspapers were safely under control in the sense that they were mostly owned by right-minded men who supported the Government, financed conservative political parties, [and] ran their papers as conservative propagandist organs (Edwards, 1971, p.12).
By the mid to late 1970s most commentators were pointing to this situation changing (in terms of news coverage, although not in editorial approach) with newspapers becoming more neutral and balanced in their presentation of the two main political parties.\(^6\)

The News Media Ownership Bill was thought to have been ‘urged on the Government by newspaper proprietors anxious for their own security’, and drew angry protests from many quarters (Verry, 1985, p.116). Journalists were strongly opposed to the Bill, as were the Stock Exchange Association, and the Federation of Labour, and all groups made submissions on the Bill in the short time allowed. The Labour Opposition opposed the Bill for four main reasons:

- Overwhelming evidence against it was presented to the Statutes Revisions Committee;
- The Bill would prevent the establishment of any additional newspapers and would in effect preserve the monopoly on news by the New Zealand Press Association;
- The Bill would do nothing to prevent the establishment of monopolies within New Zealand, which it was felt, was a greater danger to the press than overseas interests;
- It was felt the Bill would place the metropolitan papers in permanent debt to the government (Parliamentary Debates, Volume 345, p.3921 *inter alia*).

The Opposition claimed the National Government was sheltering in the conservative press, was indulging in thought control, that the New Zealand press were smug, uneducated and useless at their jobs. Debates in Parliament made frequent comparisons of the National Government with Mussolini, Goebbels and the suppression of the press in Hitler’s Germany, reflecting what a sensitive issue legislating for the press was – and remains. Nevertheless, the Bill was passed, but subsequently repealed in 1975 by the Labour Government, as had been promised.

A second piece of legislation, the Newspaper Ownership Bill, was introduced in 1971 by Labour MP, Dr Findlay. This piece of legislation was prompted by the takeover of the *Waikato Times* by the *Dominion*. The Bill was intended to prevent monopolies being formed in the newspaper industry. Again, spirited debate followed the introduction of the bill, with National focusing their criticism on the apparent inconsistencies in Labour policy – that is Labour’s earlier opposition to the News Media Ownership Act, and the establishment of the Broadcasting Authority. The Bill was unable to proceed past a second reading, as it was a private member’s Bill and would have required an appropriation of funds. It is interesting to note however that Labour, once in government in 1972, did not reintroduce this piece of legislation. This was probably a reflection of the

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\(^6\) See, for example, Cleveland (1980, p.186). It is worth noting that news coverage may have been improving, but some newspapers through their editorials remain(ed) anti-trade union, if not anti-Labour. The *New Zealand Herald*, – known as Granny Herald – remains a conservative paper, and is New Zealand’s largest circulation daily.
difficulties of legislating for an independent press, particularly given the sometimes hostile attitude of past Labour politicians to the press.

The press which developed in New Zealand is largely independent of government, and is noted for its conservative nature, and approach. There has never been a strong radical press in New Zealand. As already noted, even a pro-Labour press has had a great deal of difficulty in establishing itself. The conservative nature of the press was a significant catalyst for the control the first Labour Government would assume over broadcasting in the mid-to-late 1930s.

Radio-Government and the Origins of Broadcasting

*broadcasting [will] have only a very short run. People [will] soon get tired of hearing gramophone records by wireless* (Post office official, 1922, quoted in Sullivan, 1987, p.11).

New Zealand broadcasting changed form no less than nine times between 1923 and 1984. Initial controls concerned the registration and licensing of sound broadcasting. In 1925 there was rationalisation in the form of the *Radio Broadcasting Company of New Zealand*, the first public radio broadcasting service, which drew all existing stations which had been subsidised from licences under its wing. 1932 saw the establishment of the *Broadcasting Board*, modelled on the BBC, to oversee the development of a national network of stations. Eighteen private stations in existence were allowed to keep their private status, although in 1935 their numbers were fixed and they became supervised by the Post Office. The election of the first Labour Government saw broadcasting drawn under the auspices of the state, with the establishment of a ministry with responsibility for broadcasting. At this stage, private and commercial broadcasting were maintained separately, although in 1943 the two departments joined forces. In 1946, broadcasting was provided with the title *New Zealand Broadcasting Service*. In 1960 the state monopoly over radio broadcasting was extended to television, and in 1962 broadcasting moved from being a government department to a state corporation. Agitation from would-be private broadcasters, notably the Hauraki pirates in the late sixties, brought the 1968 legislative changes permitting private radio. In 1973, Roger Douglas, as Minister of Broadcasting, brought in legislation which abolished the corporation and established four organisations to replace it: the Broadcasting Council of New Zealand, the Radio New Zealand Corporation, Television Service one and Television Service two. It was a restructuring which gained quite a degree of support from broadcasters but apparently was beset with financial problems. In this service can be seen the origins of the reforms

7 The information in this section is drawn primarily from the 1977 Report of the Communications Commission, *Telecommunications in New Zealand*. 
which occurred after 1984. In 1976 the Muldoon government returned broadcasting to a similar form to that of 1962-75. The 1976 legislation established the *Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand*, rejoining radio and television under one service. Additionally, a Broadcasting Tribunal was established to issue warrants for private radio stations, and as a last resort for complaints.

**Radio: 1921-1925**

While government was initially ambivalent to the developing forum of radio, it did not take long for them to begin to control and censor radio. This is a dominant theme throughout media but in broadcasting, government was able to use the additional control of public ownership. Patterns of state intervention and regulation became firmly entrenched in broadcasting and, as with the press, there were fears regarding the dissemination of alternative points of view.

In the early 1920s, radio had few listeners, and was generally viewed as a fad. There soon developed fears in 1923 that radicals were going 'to use broadcasting as a back door through which to sneak into parliament' (Edwards, 1971, p.48). What followed was an over-reaction, reminiscent of the press in its early days. Regulations passed in 1923 made it easier,

> to get a licence for a firearm than for a wireless set. The establishment was evidently less concerned about bullets that might come out of a rifle and kill someone than about ideas that might come over the air and enlighten someone (Edwards, 1971, pp.48-9).

A gun licence was there for the asking. To get a listening licence, proof of British nationality, a character reference and five shillings were needed.

This early response to radio is reminiscent of the paranoia surrounding the dissemination of ideas through the press nearly one hundred years earlier. The Wireless Telegraphy Act 1903 already required government consent not only for the sending of any wireless communication but also the receiving. This was the first such legislation anywhere in the world. A 1923 amendment also set out guidelines restricting what was allowed to be transmitted. There was to be no 'dissemination of propaganda of a controversial nature'. The legislation allowed for educative, entertaining content, religious services and 'other items of general interest as may be approved by the Minister from time to time' (Sullivan, 1987, p.13). So government established a tight rein on the content of radio broadcasting, setting a pattern from the early years for a firm paternalistic-style control by successive governments over broadcasting – something which was to be maintained for over thirty years. One is inclined to wonder however, who they were protecting, and from what? Part of the answer must be that politicians were protecting themselves from
criticisms both of their performance and policies. A further answer must be that they felt they were protecting a naïve public from the evils of communist-socialist doctrines.

In 1925, the Government established closer links with radio by entering into a five year contract with the Radio Broadcasting Company. All but a couple of its existing stations were bought out and the company was given five-sixths of the licence fee in order to operate four stations in the four main areas.

In 1932, an election year, the decision was made to replace the unpopular Radio Broadcasting Company with a broadcasting board of three, established to control the Company’s radio stations in accord with the Post-Master Generals’ policy. The Forbes Government was becoming increasingly concerned with the restive private stations – known as ‘B’ stations – which had sprung up, and the board was a means of trying to ensure nothing seditious, controversial or libellous was broadcast. The Board members, all appointees of a conservative government also ‘ensured that radio did nothing to threaten the newspaper monopoly on news’ (Sullivan, 1987, p.22). Political patronage of boards and commissions is a common theme throughout government involvement with broadcasting. The relationship of the press to the board reflected the situation which existed between the government and the press at this time – the boards were composed of right-minded men who supported the government. The press were not a threat to the then conservative government, but radio – particularly the private B stations – were showing they had the potential to be. Early New Zealand radio then, was characterised by strong elements of censorship and control. The government-radio relationship was to change rather suddenly with the election of the first Labour Government in 1935, who took and used radio as an overt organ of Government propaganda.

Savage recognised that radio was the ‘one way to get the Labour message across in a country dominated by newspapers which supported the Government’ (Sullivan, 1987, p.22). He made no secret of his intentions to take over broadcasting if Labour was successful at the coming election. Before that was to happen however, there was what remains the most notorious incident of radio broadcasting history – the jamming of 1ZB.

**A Case of Government Interference?**

Colin Scrimgeour, a 1ZB announcer, had been a thorn in the side of the Government since 1931, when he had openly sided in his broadcasts with those involved in the unemployment riots. This had caused the government some embarrassment. Newspaper journalists had nothing like the same degree of freedom as independent radio. In Christchurch a leading article in support of striking tramworkers had cost the editor his job. So in spite of the oppressive reforms regarding what could and could not be
broadcast, there was still some scope for opinions contrary to those of the Government – one merely had to be very cautious about how they were expressed. Broadcasting had become a conspicuous issue of the 1935 election, spurred on by agitation from the B stations fearful for their existence if the Forbes Government was re-elected. Scrim, as an open supporter of Savage’s Labour Party posed a threat to the incumbent Government, particularly given the popularity of his radio show. Scrim had released two pamphlets detailing his dissatisfaction with the Government’s use of and intentions for, radio and alleging newspaper proprietors were lobbying Government to maintain a tight rein on what could be broadcast. Such information had to be distributed in pamphlet form – it was far too controversial to be broadcast given the regulations in force.

Governmental suspicions began to be aroused that Scrim’s pre-election broadcasts would give instructions on how people should vote. Nobody ever found out what Scrim’s intentions were, for as the broadcast began, it faded out, to be replaced by electrical interference. When the broadcast ended, so did the interference, and the rest of the station’s programme was heard perfectly. Subsequent investigations traced the interference to a transmitter in a dilapidated shed in a Post and Telegraph depot. It eventually transpired that the Minister for Broadcasting, Adam Hamilton, paranoid about Scrim’s intent for the broadcast, had given orders that the broadcast be stopped. No-one else, not even the Prime Minister, had been consulted. This, like the earlier attempts to keep radio broadcasting under a tight rein, reflects the real fear politicians had of the power of radio, and their lack of faith in the public to make up their own minds on such issues.

The Labour Propaganda Machine
The broadcasting issue was a minor factor in the Labour landslide victory of 1935. Following the victory, Savage scrapped the Broadcasting Board and brought in legislation to set up broadcasting as a government department – the National Broadcasting Service. Once the business of government and the business of broadcasting were brought together in this way it became very difficult to separate the two. The changes came rapidly, with Savage instituting his own Sunday evening talks, to which the Opposition were given no right of reply. ‘Government is going to be the master of publicity’ claimed Savage (Gregory, 1985, p.18). Also instituted were the first broadcasts of parliamentary debates, intended to give further balance to the one-sided coverage provided through the print media. Politics became very much intertwined with the business of broadcasting, despite the belief that the two could be kept separate. Up until this point, government had meddled in a piecemeal and uncoordinated way. There was an air of unease at taking
over broadcasting completely, and at the same time a suspicion and mistrust of broadcasting in the mind of the previous government – not so for Labour.

As a reflection of the importance with which Labour regarded broadcasting, Savage himself assumed the portfolio of Broadcasting. His close relationship with Scrim continued until Savage’s death in 1940. Labour and Savage had made no secret of their intentions to use broadcasting as a counter to the ‘Tory propaganda of the press’. In 1937, a government ‘independent news service’ – rather more accurately known as the Labour news service – was established.

This service was Savage’s answer to the problem of giving the Labour party a propaganda platform. This service appears to have been set up in some haste... but, once established, it remained virtually unchanged for a quarter of a century. The ‘Official News Service’,....was quite openly a compilation of government handouts dressed up as news items. The bulletin was compiled by the Prime Minister’s Department and supplied to the National Broadcasting Service to be broadcast without alteration or omission (Sullivan, 1987, p.250).

The service was described as not being in the business of propaganda. What it did do was present a positive image of the Government and its policies. The real problem with the broadcast was that ‘once established, it proved such an initially successful masquerade of what a local news bulletin should be that it stifled attempts to provide a genuine New Zealand news service’ for the next twenty-five years (Sullivan, 1987, pp.25-6).

The war brought with it the obligatory censorship regulations. Severe restrictions were placed on radio. No unscripted talks were allowed – all scripts had to be approved by the Government censor. If an announcer deviated from the order of the written word, technicians were under orders to cut the programme. All notices and commercials were subject to censorship and weather forecasts were banned. During this time, the National Broadcasting Service and the National Commercial Broadcasting Service were amalgamated (Sullivan, 1987, pp.32-6).

Post-war developments
Any credibility the radio news service had gained throughout the war years was lost in 1951 when the Prime Minister banned references to the Waterside dispute on the main news bulletin of the day. This action returned listeners to the early days of direct government interference – if in fact they had ever left them – and is probably one of the clearest reflections of the difficulties of attempting to provide a balanced perspective on issues involving direct confrontation between government and organised unionism from a government controlled institution. When reports were prepared on the dispute, they ‘showed an orchestrated, pro-government bias’, a further example of the direct influence
of government, and also of the censorship provisions of the emergency regulations the
government had in force (Sullivan, 1987, pp.39-40). Through the state of emergency
declared to try and end the Waterside dispute, the Government of the early 1950s
showed itself to be unwilling to accept an open and frank discussion on issues of the day.

In the late 1950s, broadcasting began to move towards establishing a true news service.
Government was obviously slow to move on this as it was reluctant to forgo the
advantages its control over radio allowed. Once given, broadcasting itself showed a great
deal of difficulty in coming to grips with its new freedom, remaining cautious in its
approach to the news. For radio, 1962 was the real watershed year with the government
decision to reform radio and television as a government corporation, allowing them to
develop a far more independent news service.

The Arrival of Television
It was Ian Cross who devised the epithet of New Zealand broadcasting as the battered
but tough baby of New Zealand's parliamentary system (quoted in Gregory, 1985, pp.98-9).
Successive governments' relationship with broadcasting has been characterised by
an apprehension regarding how to place it in relation to the state. Should broadcasting be
fully or partially state-owned and operated, or be more responsive to market forces? As
with other media, television suffered censorship, both overt and covert. There was a
constant tension between politicians and the administration regarding the intrusive role of
the state into the area of broadcasting. However, as politicians were working to find an
appropriate form for broadcasting administration, television was changing the nature of
politics. Television has probably done more to change the face of politics than any other
single event this century. It brings not just the words and the voices, but the faces,
gesticulations and appearances of politicians into most New Zealand living rooms.
'Effective' television, as perceived by journalists and news editors, does not deal with
issues in depth. It thrives on simplicity, conflict, and images. Talking heads do not make
good viewing, or attract the advertising dollar. This has substantially affected the way
politicians approach the media, and has also caused commercial radio and newspapers to
rethink their approach to news as the media compete to grab the ever decreasing
advertising dollar.

Television began in New Zealand on an experimental basis in 1951. Strict regulations
governed the nature of broadcasts. In 1962, the National Government reformed the New
Zealand Broadcasting Service into the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation,
established to run both radio and the newly developing television service. The BBC was
the model for this new service. The corporatisation of broadcasting was a concession to independence which radio had been demanding for some years. The New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation is described as ‘a product of political compromise and administrative practicality’ (Gregory, 1985, p.39). The Government proved reluctant to relinquish the advantages of a news service that was ‘primarily a transmission belt of Government information’ (p.34). Criticism of the slowness of Government to act was seen by the Government as a sign the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation had too much power. Consequently the Board was expanded from three to seven members in 1965 with the hope that the Director General may be better held to account. Political patronage became a strong feature of the [National] Government’s relationship with broadcasting during the 1960s and early 1970s.

Private radio was also becoming an issue during this period. The Government was divided on how to respond, and so responded with inactivity, until the pirate ship Tiri forced its hand in the run-up to the election. Tensions continued regarding Government interference in broadcasting, particularly news. Labour Party leader Norman Kirk came to regard broadcasting as ‘a servant of National Party interests’ (Gregory, 1985, p.56). The key to the source of the tension lay in the fact that politics and administration could not exist comfortably together, as it had earlier been believed. Broadcasting independence was constantly compromised by ministerial influence.

The New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation was subject to constant criticism from outside government circles regarding its cautious approach to controversy and lack of political independence. The stance of the broadcasting administration was at least in part due to the fact they had embarked upon a programme of capital development, funds for which required governmental approval. In these circumstances, it was obviously important not to antagonise the government. The MacLeod incident of 1972 highlighted the difficulties of having a politically appointed chairperson and board, but the National Government ignored the suggestion, when two seats became vacant, of appointing a member who identified with the Labour Party.8

It is not surprising then that in 1973, following the 1972 election of the third Labour Government (1972-75), the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation was abolished along with the portfolio of Broadcasting in order to distance the broadcasting industry from

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8 In July 1972 the NZBC board dismissed Listener editor Alexander MacLeod citing his failure to attend the board’s meeting as the reason. A subsequent inquiry revealed that there was a great deal of tension between the board and MacLeod as the result of editorials written by MacLeod and critical of New Zealand’s commitment to the Indo-China conflict. While the board’s decision to dismiss MacLeod was not linked to any direct governmental pressure, the inquiry highlighted the issue of political patronage in relation to appointments to the NZBC board (Gregory, 1985, pp.64-68).
government influence. Three independently operated corporations were established which, in addition to providing broadcasters more freedom, it was hoped would put broadcasting out of reach of future National governments. It may well have been effective, but it was never properly tested, for despite the optimistic feelings towards the new structures from broadcasting staff, it was beset with financial problems, and the National Government of 1975-84 reversed the changes and re-established a system similar to that of 1960-63, albeit with a new name.

Muldoon and the Media 1975-1984

Under the Prime-Ministership of Muldoon, government-media relations began to take rather a different course. As a politician he had been noted from his early days as one of the very few politicians who understood the media (especially television) and was capable of using it effectively. He remained throughout his Government a very high profile Prime Minister and he tended to capture far more media attention than his colleagues, commenting himself,

> National Party ministers were much more concerned with administering their portfolios than with standing up in public and explaining their policies. Some of our people have a psychological blind spot in that they more or less subconsciously believe that they are Government as of right, and that the public will understand this and re-elect them while they get on with the difficult job of governing. How wrong they are (Muldoon, 1981, p.14).

With Muldoon, certain trends can be recognised in terms of his relationship with the media such as his recognition of the electoral importance of television. With the ‘dancing cossacks’ in 1975 the full-scale television election campaign in New Zealand was born. It reflected a shift by politicians from both parties towards using the technology that television provided, and developing media strategies to take full advantage of the opportunities television and its associated technology could provide. This trend was accelerated under the fourth Labour Government.

A second key feature of the Muldoon/media relationship was his antagonistic approach to the media. It was clear Muldoon believed it was the job of press gallery journalists to simply report what was said or done without embellishment (Muldoon, 1992, p.75). A consequence of this was Muldoon’s efforts to commandeer television and radio for ‘state of the nation’ addresses – this way he could speak directly to the public without journalists as an intermediary. Where he felt he had been misreported, he would publicly correct, and often demand an apology. Where this was not appropriate, or forthcoming, Muldoon would take the offending medium to court, and during his political career, he was involved in eighteen prospective or actual libel cases (with, as he puts it fourteen wins, two losses and two draws) (1992, p.75). Probably the most common Muldoon tactic for recalcitrant members of the press gallery was to refuse to be interviewed by them or to
allow them to attend press conferences or travel overseas as a part of his press entourage. Television reporters, presenters and commentators Ian Fraser, Brian Edwards, David Exel, John Roberts, and Gorden Dryden were all attacked by Muldoon for having Labour Party connections. Soon it became difficult for television to find someone Muldoon would accept as an interviewer.

In 1980 Muldoon banned all *Dominion* reporters from his press conferences until the *Dominion* published a reply he had written, in full, to a series of articles they had published about him. It proved an effective tactic. In 1983, the *Dominion* again incurred the wrath of Muldoon by publishing leaked Government documents. Muldoon responded by placing a cabinet ban on the release of all official information to the *Dominion*. A subsequent complaint to the Press Council by the *Dominion* and Press Gallery regarding this action was upheld – one of very few victories by journalists against a politician.

As already mentioned, broadcasting was again restructured, with the 1976 Broadcasting Act. The ministerial portfolio was reinstated with the Minister once more given power to issue written directives, and the corporation having an obligation to ‘have regard to the general policy of the government in relation to broadcasting’. While the Government was returning to a system which allowed for interference, Gregory felt Government was stepping back a little but ‘it became abundantly clear that the Government would apply pressure on the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand as and when it felt the need. Usually the initiative was taken by the Prime Minister...’ (Gregory, 1985, p.93). Ian Cross replaced Ron Jarden as chairman of the newly formed Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand. He was in a rather uncomfortable position throughout his time in broadcasting, suffering attacks from the National Government and the Labour Opposition, particularly Roger Douglas who claimed he was a political appointee, and from his own staff, who felt he too often either made concessions to, or ignored criticisms of Muldoon. Muldoon’s weekly *Truth* column became a venue for his attacks and threats particularly against broadcasting. There were confrontations between Cross and Muldoon over Muldoon’s desire to commandeer television and radio for a simultaneous address to the nation.

A number of complaints were lodged against the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand by the National Party and Muldoon complaining at the lack of balance in programming – particularly election coverage. Significantly, a number of these were upheld. Throughout this time, requests from the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand for an increase in the licence fee were refused – a significant power over broadcasting which government still appears to retain.
Muldoon has described the media as self-opinionated, negative, aggressively anti-establishment, sired by hyperbole and weaned on massive draughts of triviality (Muldoon, 1984, pp.52-53). As the period immediately preceding the fourth Labour Government, the Muldoon era is significant. Two aspects dominated his relationship with the media. First, with Muldoon, here was a politician who understood the electoral importance of television, perhaps as Savage had radio, fifty years earlier. Secondly, there was the continued interference in the form of criticisms, threats and official complaints. Significant too was Muldoon's opinion that the press gallery and politicians should maintain a relationship on a purely professional basis (Muldoon, 1992, p.79).

By the early 1980s there were a number of issues of concern, in terms of media structures. The print media had been subject to a tremendous concentration of ownership. By the end of 1980, there were only thirty-three newspapers, compared with forty in 1970, forty-two in 1957, and sixty-seven in 1910. Only two major dailies, the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Christchurch Press*, were independent. The majority of remaining papers were owned by five groups: New Zealand News; United Press and Publishing; Independent News Limited; Otago Press and Publishing Limited; Lucas and Sons. Three boards – Wilson and Horton (publishers of the *New Zealand Herald*), NZ News and INL controlled two-thirds of the circulation. In addition to this, there was an extensive web of interlocking relationships both within the press, and with other branches of the media, particularly television and radio, extending into the international arena (Simpson, 1984, pp.210-13). As Simpson comments, '[T]he existence of such relationships does not of course automatically establish the press as an instrument of hegemonic manipulation on behalf of the ruling elites . . . Nevertheless what research has been undertaken seems to suggest that the accusation is justified'. The problem for Labour was what could be done about this problem. Newspapers had come to be largely above legislative interference, and any governmental attempt to interfere would no doubt be attacked as had National's 1965 legislation.

In broadcasting, discussions were under way regarding the establishment of a third television channel, and this raised questions of ownership and competition. Television and radio had been reorganised many times in their short lives, and there was also the ongoing question of the extent to which governments should be allowed to meddle in broadcasting.

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9 For a full discussion on the problems of ownership and control and patterns of vertical and horizontal integration of media, see Wheelwright and Buckley (eds) (1987, Chapter One).
This brief historical overview has highlighted the often conflictual and uneasy relationship between various governments and the media. Propaganda has been used as a means of controlling information being disseminated, through the early press and through broadcasting up until the 1960s. Lord Windlesham (1966), like Hawthorn, agrees persuasion via communication is more important for political survival in the twentieth century than at any other time in history.

To get and keep power it is necessary, either continuously or at intervals, to persuade those people who are the ultimate source of the policymakers’ authority that the decisions arrived at are good decision in terms of what public policy-makers are trying to achieve; that what they are trying to achieve is generally desirable; and that events are being handled skilfully and with resolution (p.16).

Geoffrey Palmer echoed these sentiments, remarking on the propriety of some of the Labour Government’s state funded publicity campaigns, ‘...I think that often governments have to actually try and persuade people that what they are doing is good as well as what it is that they are doing’.

The environment, of both the electorate and the press gallery were open to Labour’s persuasive efforts in 1984. The development of communications and information technology made propaganda and information control easier and more inevitable. Under Labour, it became far more sophisticated, not ‘hit and miss’ as it had been in the past. Muldoon’s interventionist style policies did not appear to be working, and the public and press gallery alike were open to the suggestion of a new style and a new direction, inspired by the young and dynamic Labour Party. The apparent ‘open government’ style had a great deal of appeal after Muldoon’s abrasiveness.

10 Palmer, interview.
11 Interview with former chief political reporter for the Evening Post, John Goulter.
CHAPTER 2

Media Structures and Labour: Reform, Deregulation and Concentration of Ownership

The change of government in 1984 heralded a watershed in terms of government-media relationships, and clear contrasts can be drawn between the fourth Labour Government and the previous Muldoon Administrations. The aim of this chapter is to explore the responses of the fourth Labour Government to the issues relating to the various media structures inherited from the previous Government and to examine why there was initially a failure on the part of the Government to provide a clear initial policy direction. The choices confronting the Government in terms of media structures were the same as those the Government had confronted in the 1960s with regard to broadcasting – direct or indirect controls, public ownership or private, or a balance between the two. The final choice depends upon whether the government in question believes the media are simply producing a product like baked beans, or whether they see an added social responsibility or duty on the part of the media.¹

The final policy direction in the areas of both print and broadcasting have had quite strong implications for news collection and reporting methods, which have contributed to the changing nature of political reporting and have had some spin-off benefits for the Government in terms of getting policy reported. The direction and effects of the changes have also been aided by the weaknesses of the media’s own structures – the press council, the lack of a tradition of informed debate on the media in New Zealand, and the affects of concentration of ownership on the parliamentary press gallery.

The chapter concludes with a look at the effects of deregulation and concentration of ownership, and the ways this has inhibited the media’s ability to fulfil their social responsibility as public watchdog, and stymied the creation of an environment for informed

¹ The baked beans comparison has become a part of newspaper mythology in New Zealand following the remark of a Brierly executive, when Brierlys were asset stripping their newspapers, that ‘producing newspapers is really no different to producing tins of baked beans’ (McGregor, 1992, p.26). It is an analogy which has been extended by some, to include television and public radio, following government deregulation of the broadcasting sector.
Labour inherited a range of media related problems from the outgoing National Government. The first was the international trend towards market led deregulation of broadcasting, very much in keeping with the ideology of the new Minister of Finance Roger Douglas regarding reducing the role of the state in providing services (Hunt, 1990, p.6). Secondly there was a very strong awareness within the new Government of the communications revolution impacting far more widely than just on the mass media. Their awareness of the importance of their own ability to communicate effectively through the media – and notably to use television – was reflected by the replacement of Bill Rowling as party leader in 1983 by David Lange, a figure far more popular in the public opinion polls, and one capable of articulating the new Douglas-style policies to the wider public. As Tom Scott put it, ‘[I]f the party at large were divided over who should be leader they were at least resigned to the fact that the country as a whole was for Lange’ (Scott, 1985, p.135). Both public opinion polls and the increasing emphasis on the party leader were to assume greater importance in the later relationship between the Labour Government and the media.

In addition to the international trend to deregulate broadcasting, there were the long-time concerns that broadcasting too often suffered from its links to the government of the day. There were concerns about the means of funding – the level of the licence fee and its means of collection and distribution. In the print media, growing concerns were being articulated regarding the concentration of ownership both within the newspaper industry, and between newspapers, radio, publishers and other elements of the communications industry such as satellite communications and the video industry (Simpson, 1984, pp.210-13).

The response of the fourth Labour Government to the concerns and issues which were being raised regarding the media was initially very cautious, and to an extent, misleading. The establishment of a royal commission to investigate broadcasting, and its terms of reference gave the impression there would be no overhaul of broadcasting, merely a fine-tuning of the existing system. Similarly, the establishment of a committee to investigate concentration of ownership and cross media links suggested some reform might be forthcoming to keep ownership in check. As the first term progressed, it became clear the Government intended to move itself as much as possible out of the economy, lessen regulation and protection, and open previously protected industries to the rigours of competition. The shift itself and the association of the new-right, free market style policies which came to be associated so strongly with Finance Minister Roger Douglas and Treasury have been well documented.² Ultimately the reforms of the second term (1987-1990) gave broadcasting a radically altered new

structure.

General changes to Government information dispersal also saw the Labour Government adopting a far more sophisticated and professional approach to communications. What one would expect to see in an administration intent on lessening state intervention in the economy is a complementary shift by that government away from the media. That is not what happened. In many ways, the Labour Government moved closer to the media than the previous National Government, but through more indirect links. It would be a great mistake to assume that lack of overt and direct involvement or intervention by the Labour Government suggests declining government involvement in information management. The Thatcher Government proved quite the opposite, as increasing government intervention in the BBC and ITV paralleled the privatisation/deregulation programme. Similarly in New Zealand, the Labour Government were alleged to be increasingly involved in the day to day business of TVNZ, and were taking significant steps to ensure the media covered policy and events in order to put the Government in the best possible light. Closening of ties between government and media, in tandem with professional and scientific management of information, would appear as much a part of New Right policies as deregulation, corporatisation and privatisation.

The developments that were to unfold in New Zealand bear similarities to what was happening elsewhere, particularly in the United Kingdom. It is instructive to digress briefly and look at the situation in the United Kingdom in more detail.

**The United Kingdom Experience**

The New Zealand moves followed a shift in the international environment towards improving communication and marketing of modern governments. Television was the key to this shift in style, but also a more professional approach to information dispersal generally.

In the UK, image makers were a vital part of the political campaign of the Conservative Government after 1979. Margaret Thatcher was coached on how to dress, what to say – even how to say it. Clichés were discouraged. The Tories were to be marketed as a product rather than a political party. Saatchi and Saatchi were brought in to promote the election campaign, a free hand was allowed with scripts, which focussed on the Conservative Party leader and every advantage was taken of photo opportunities. Thatcher’s appearances were ‘honed for pictorial media’, with promoter Gordon Reece saying ‘he would be happy if he could arrange for the leader to be seen but never heard on television news each night’ (Young, 1989, pp.128-130). Saatchi and Saatchi continued to play an important role throughout the various Thatcher Governments.

In the UK there did not appear to be the same emphasis on marketing government policies and

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3 Interview with a former TVNZ board member.
government through state publicity campaigns, and perhaps this was due to the fact there was not the same need. Close relationships between the press and government ensured positive coverage through the newspapers. Criticism and legislation worked to keep television in check, in a way which would not have been countenanced in previous eras.

It is clear that British governments have a range of effective tools which may be used to restrict parliamentary and popular access to information and to propagate a government ‘line’ to the mass media and the public. . . . It is equally clear that the 1980s saw a significant strengthening of trends making for more Downing Street control of the government information system (Morgan, 1991, p.538).

The Thatcher government was not afraid of interfering with the media in order to ensure good coverage, something which Thatcher enjoyed more than any of her predecessors. Information was controlled through a range of measures. The Official Secrets Act promotes secrecy in the Civil Service. Centralisation of information throughout the 1980s in the Number 10 Downing Street Press Office ensured further controls. It forced ministers, bound by collective ministerial responsibility to accept the Number 10 version of what they were supposed to be saying. Concentration of media ownership meant magnates had little interest in ‘biting the governmental hand that fed them’. The BBC was dependant on the government fixed licence fee. The device of the Lobby increasingly tied journalists to the Number 10 source and they were constantly aware of the threat of the withdrawal of information (Morgan, 1991, p.533).

In the first term knighthoods were offered to and accepted by editors of the Sunday Express, Daily Mail and the Sun. Mrs Thatcher felt the press were so favourable towards her because she was ‘so kind to them’ (Young, 1989, p.510). As a consequence the tabloid press were unlikely to be a threat to the implementation of policy. Knighthoods also went to the principal political interviewers in the BBC and Independent Television News.

In addition to the ‘carrots’ in the form of knighthoods to encourage or reward positive coverage, the Thatcher Government were not afraid to get out its stick to deal with dissenters. More often than not it was television which suffered. In a smear campaign against the BBC, widespread allegations were made that producers and editors of major BBC news and current affairs shows were left-wing, or in some cases, outright Marxists. There was a growing ruthlessness too with the way the government criticised programmes which offended them. There was direct intervention from the Home Office to ban a programme on Northern Ireland and foreign policy in general was a relatively frequent area in which government directly intervened in media coverage.

In early 1987, the most important TV strategist in the Thatcher circle summed up the relationship thus. ITN were ‘sound’, with the right people in the right positions. Channel Four news was considered unsound, but it was watched by a minority so didn’t matter. The BBC were the problem – nobody was sure who was in charge, ‘to whom complaints should be made and pressure applied’ (Young, 1989, p.512). This problem was solved with a
reorganisation of BBC staff. The pressure and intimidation of constant criticism by the government saw the BBC avoiding controversy in order to prevent rows with the government.

The New Right economic strategy adopted in the 1980s and 1990s has brought with it a need to control the media which is reflected in the approach taken by the Thatcher government in the UK, and the policies adopted by the fourth Labour government in New Zealand.

The Status of the Media in New Zealand

The Print Media
The conclusion to Chapter 1 highlighted some of the concerns being raised regarding the environment in which the New Zealand media was operating. By 1987 this situation had been exacerbated by a series of takeovers and mergers throughout 1984/87 (See Table 1 for ownership).

The situation is however more complex than it would initially appear. There are a series of links both between the major companies, and within different types of media. Ownership of press, publishing, communications networks, radio and television broadcasting are increasingly linked. Additional ownership of non-media interests raises concerns that the various media enterprises owned by a company could become a vehicle for those other interests – as Rupert Murdoch’s newspapers did in the UK for his cable network, Sky. In 1986, the Labour Government responded to the concerns of conglomeration by freeing up the regulations controlling takeovers and mergers. The Commerce Commission Act 1975 previously allowed the Commission wide discretion in deciding whether to approve a takeover or not, and the conditions surrounding that takeover. For example they had to consider public interest, the effect on employees and editorial independence. This discretion was often used in media takeovers to add conditions of editorial and advertising independence to ensure the interest of the public was looked after (Burrows, 1990, p.413). It reflected a belief that the news media did have an added social responsibility – that producing news was not analogous to producing cans of baked beans. The Commerce Act 1986 removed this discretion, and the Commerce Commission now only has to consider whether a takeover or merger will result in a person or company acquiring or strengthening a dominant market position, placing the media on the same footing as other types of products. The interpretation of ‘dominant position’ seems to have been left to the discretion of the Commission. As of January 1991, the Commerce Act has been further relaxed, removing the obligation for companies to obtain the Commission’s approval for a merger if it will not result in strengthening or acquiring a dominant market position. (See Appendix 1 for the decisions of the Commission 1984-1987 regarding takeovers within the media).
Table 1: News Media Ownership, 1987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilson &amp; Horton Ltd</th>
<th>Brierly Investments Ltd through New Zealand News Ltd</th>
<th>Independent Newspapers Ltd</th>
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**other media interests;**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilson &amp; Horton Ltd</th>
<th>Brierly Investments Ltd through New Zealand News Ltd</th>
<th>Independent Newspapers Ltd</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wanganui Newspapers Ltd; Northern Television; Southern Cross Television Ltd. 49% NZPA</td>
<td>Radio Hauraki (Radio Otago hold 18% of this station and also controls Fouveux Radio, Hauraki also holds substantial interest in Radio 1), Radio Avon, Radio Hawkes Bay, Independent Television Ltd, Vidcom, New Zealand Woman's Weekly, New Zealand Farmer, Dolly.</td>
<td>Capital City Radio (Windy), Radio Waikato, Newztel, United Telecast Corp. 49% NZPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source, Otago Daily Times, 23 April 1987*

#W&H own New Zealand’s largest circulation daily in the largest city, The New Zealand Herald.

##INL is 40% owned by News Limited, the conglomerate of Rupert Murdoch

By 1991/92, the situation of news media ownership represented in Table 1 had been further concentrated by various sales and closures, and rationalisation of publications. The Auckland
Sun, the Auckland Star, the Taranaki Herald and the Christchurch Star had all closed. The Otago Daily Times is New Zealand’s only independently owned metropolitan daily. By 1991 Wilson Horton and Independent Newspapers Limited together owned 90.5 per cent of metropolitan circulation, and approximately 65 per cent of provincial circulation largely as a consequence of a sell-out by Brierlys.4

Concentration of media ownership was not a problem unique to New Zealand; there was also concern in both Australia and the UK, not only over the concentration of ownership within the press, but also the increasing conglomeration within the media and the increasing emphasis on profits from advertising as opposed to circulation and a fully informed public. The major consequence of this is that information ‘reinforces, reassures and placates. It seldom challenges or opposes’ (Wheelwright and Buckley, 1987, p.28). Similarly, governments in these countries have proved unwilling to respond to the increasing concerns regarding the concentration of information dispersal.

Previous debate in New Zealand on newspaper ownership, notably the News Media Ownership Act 1964, (known as the Riddiford family protection Bill after the owners of the Dominion), and the Newspaper Ownership Bill 1971, gives clear indication why there is a reluctance on the part of governments to legislate directly for the print media. As mentioned in the previous chapter, such legislation becomes a prime target for cries of censorship and self-protection, and the party or individual who introduces it becomes the subject of macabre comparisons to Hitler and Goebbels. A free press is seen as the cornerstone of democracy and therefore interference with it or its functions are not easily accepted.

As a consequence, limited legislation exists relating directly to newspapers. The Newspapers and Printers Act 1955 is a very simple piece of legislation which sets out a basic minimum of regulations regarding newspaper publishing. It provides a legal definition of ‘newspaper’, and establishes the procedure for compulsory newspaper registration. All that registration requires in New Zealand is an affidavit in statutory form, sworn and signed by the publisher, printer and editor. Once this is lodged, a newspaper is considered registered.5 The Act also provides for details relating to the name and address of the printer and publisher, the date of publishing, and sets out the regulations governing the responsibilities of the printer to mark copies and keep any document printed for six months.

The regulatory body of New Zealand newspapers is the Press Council, a voluntary body established in 1972 in response to calls that there needed to be a national co-ordinating body to establish codes of practice for the press. Modelled on the English version, it has five members: an independent chairperson (so far always a retired judge); two representatives of

5 See Burrows (1990, pp.404-407) for detail on the ins and outs of newspaper registration and so forth.
the public; a representative of the New Zealand Publishers’ Association; a representative of the New Zealand Journalists’ Union; and a representative of the Northern Journalists’ Union. In addition to its functions of maintaining standards and acting as a lobby group on matters relating to the ‘supply of information of public interest and importance’, the Press Council also deals with complaints, both about the press and regarding treatment of the press by persons and organisations (Burrows, 1990, p.414). The Council has a limited effectiveness, and has been severely criticised for its failure to act decisively. It has been accused of according more importance to the narrow interests of the newspaper industry, as opposed to matters of broad public interest. It has been criticised for a lack of ‘teeth’ to act as an effective watchdog of the industry’s ethics (Wilson, 1990, p.55). Sir Robert Muldoon criticised the length of time between complaints being laid and the resolution of those complaints by the Council, saying ‘the fact it meets so infrequently makes it a rather sick joke’ (Muldoon, 1992, p.76). Unlike the English model, it has not undergone the structural changes which have been designed to make the Press Council smaller, better-funded and able to apply tougher standards. The British Government warned the press this would be the last chance at self-regulation. If the new system did not improve standards, a statutory press tribunal would be set up (Seymour-Ure, 1991, p.237). In New Zealand, the fourth Labour Government remained consistent to its free-market stance, refusing to intervene with the press even on the level of setting and maintaining standards.

Broadcasting

As noted in the previous chapter, two themes are easily discernible in New Zealand broadcasting history. First is the distinct effect on public broadcasting of being controlled by, and answerable to, parliament. Second is the interference in the operations of broadcasting in New Zealand by successive governments. As Ian Cross noted in 1985,

...whether through the agency of an authority, tribunal, committee, council or commission, or by parliamentary acts (16 since 1961) and regulation (six lots since 1976) or attacks from both sides of the House, television ... has suffered as no other public institution... (Butterworth, 1989, p.153).

Reforms by the fourth Labour Government in the area of broadcasting stumbled along for some years as the Government seemed to struggle to find a structure which fitted its economic priorities. Hearings for applications for the third channel staggered along from 1985 to 1987 (Rennie, 1992, p.63). The Royal Commission on Broadcasting came and went. It was not until 1988 that the Government dumped the Royal Commission findings, and decided on a final form for a new broadcasting structure, ‘which broadly followed BCNZ suggestions, but was also strongly influenced by private industry lobbying’ (ibid, p.66). In the new deregulatory environment, ‘protection’ was a dirty word and the Government would accept no argument that broadcasting was a special case, to which the free market might not be totally
A strong tradition of governmental interference in New Zealand broadcasting made it easier for the Labour Government to continue reforming the broadcasting structure. By contrast, a lack of government involvement in the press – apart from setting up registration procedures, and laws relating to decency and fairness – made involvement increasingly difficult. Obviously the nature of the ownership is significant: it is far easier for governments to interfere in a state-owned corporation than in the privately-owned newspapers, particularly in the climate of economic thought of the post-1970s. The government had also in the past seen a role for itself in providing broadcasting as a public service, ensuring national coverage and a percentage of local content. While direct government control of the privately owned media is virtually non-existent, controls do exist through a variety of legislation and conventions affecting media reporting methods. Existing legislation affects both the content, and news collection methods, and the most contentious legislation in New Zealand is the law relating to libel.

Current law which affects the news media in New Zealand is scattered throughout a wide range of statutes and cases. Some of the most significant regulations regarding what can and cannot be printed, and access to information are included in the Defamation Act 1954, the Official Information Act 1982, and Parliamentary Standing Orders. Of New Zealand libel laws, and media conventions, Bruce Jesson has remarked:

> Our libel laws are about the most draconian in the Western world and are consciously used by the rich and the powerful to suppress criticism by intimidating the media. Control of the New Zealand media is in the hands of a small number of large companies, limiting the career prospects of journalists of an independent frame of mind. And New Zealand journalism is stifled by the convention it be “objective” and “balanced”...as soon as they [broadcast journalists] show signs of an independent spirit they are disciplined or culled...The requirement of balance is always used in a coercive way against critics of the authorities, and never against the hacks who fill our newspapers and TV screens with PR pieces on behalf of politicians and businessmen (Jessen, 1990a, p.142).

Reform of New Zealand defamation laws has been mooted for quite some time, a draft bill has been drawn up, but nothing has yet come of it. If enacted, the proposed laws should simplify and rationalise this extremely complex branch of the law. It has been alleged that the "Frontline"
exposé ‘For The Public Good?’, which suggested Government policies were for sale to wealthy business people, dampened Geoffrey Palmer’s enthusiasm for reform. It is true the present defamation laws are harsh, with media law expert, J. Burrows remarking,

... as a civil wrong, defamation remains the breach of the law which the media most fear. This fear is well grounded. Damages in defamation cases tend to be high, especially if the plaintiff is a well-known person with a substantial reputation to lose. Moreover a defamation proceeding is one of the less predictable court actions (Burrows, 1990, p.10).

However advocates of investigative journalism, while recognising the barriers New Zealand defamation laws place in front of serious investigative journalism, point toward other factors as well – a lack of training and therefore a lack of knowledge by journalists about how to conduct an investigation, laziness on the part of journalists who are just not prepared to undertake the hard work necessary, and the lack of encouragement and preparedness on the part of management and editorial staff to commit the resources which may or may not produce a good story (Booth, 1992, p.168). Many of these factors have been exacerbated by the concentration of ownership and deregulation which has occurred in New Zealand. Fewer journalists with an increasing workload increases the likelihood that reporters and editors will accept press releases from government and business in order to fill the demand for news, without double checking facts, background or opposition.

The Rhetoric . . .

The direction the fourth Labour Government took with regard to its media policy – the deregulation and relaxing of controls on ownership – took some time to emerge. There was little articulation of overall policy by the Labour Party pre-1984, (due largely to the collapsing consensus on a Keynesian style approach to economic policy and subsequent disagreement within Labour Party ranks about a new direction), but there appeared to be pointers towards general policy directions in broadcasting. They were mixed indicators, sending out confused signals about the direction of the Government reflecting, no doubt, the lack of unity and agreement within the Party over the direction policy should take. The election promises of the fourth Labour Government were broad and vaguely defined. The most accurate indications of future policy came from Roger Douglas’ past involvement as Minister of Broadcasting in the third Labour Government. However that was not the direction which the Government at first followed. Initially Labour followed a course which involved extensive consultation and research, setting up commissions and committees to investigate concerns which were being raised regarding the media. Much of the rhetoric resulting from these investigations was subsequently ignored by the final direction of the Government, who ultimately favoured

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market orientated reforms.

**Election '84: promises and threats**

The Labour Party campaigned in the 1984 election on a "promise little", "low content" campaign (Selinkoff, 1991, p.12). The two key promises they made relating most specifically to the media were: to initiate a review of broadcasting in New Zealand and to establish open government as reflected in the initial 'opening the books' exercise. Both were very cautious and possibly even deceptive statements regarding the future relationship of the Government with the media, particularly when they are taken in the context of what actually occurred. This highlights two things regarding Labour's early strategy. First, the very strong desire to remain in government for more than one term, and hence caution on certain policy areas in order to appease the more traditional supporters and Party members. Secondly, the lack of solid policy agreed on by the Party as a whole prior to the 1984 election.

The first of the clues to actual policy direction lies in the reorganisation of broadcasting which occurred under Roger Douglas during the third Labour Government. The 1973 reforms embraced principles of removal of government control of broadcasting, abolishing the ministerial portfolio, and expressing disapproval of the political patronage which had become inherent in appointments to the NZBC. In the new organisation there was a spirit of competition, and separation of structures. Considering the increasing and continued importance of Roger Douglas in the Party in the early 1980s, the development of his economic philosophy, particularly in *There's Got To Be A Better Way!* (1980) and the fervour with which new governments had indulged in broadcasting restructuring in the past, it seemed highly likely that the policy direction of the new Government would be orientated towards deregulation and increasing competition. But then with the benefit of hindsight, clues as to policy direction are always more readily apparent than at the time.

A second pointer to the attitude of the Labour Government towards broadcasting lies in the hostile attitude of both David Lange and Roger Douglas to the then chairperson of broadcasting, Ian Cross, and the broadcasting system generally. On many occasions since the appointment of Cross in 1976, accusations had flown across the house that his appointment was a political one. In 1984, Lange told a press conference that Cross would be history following the election of the Labour Party to government. In his book of memoirs, Ian Cross fought back, accusing the new Labour Government of having a hidden agenda aimed at completely discrediting broadcasting to enable them once in government to use it to their advantage.

Looking back over the whole history of our difficulties, especially since the departure of Mr Rowling, I could not help wondering – and still do – whether certain more sophisticated tacticians behind the scenes were maintaining the attack to discredit a broadcasting administration that would be a major obstacle to any future strategy, whereby in office the party would use public broadcasting as a tool of its political goals (Cross, 1988, p.214).
Nevertheless, during its first term of office at least, the indicators were confused giving no real idea of the direction of Government policy towards the news media. Subsequent rhetoric continued to obscure the policy direction the Government intended to follow.

**The First Term: Commissions, Cohesion and Caution**

The keynote to the first term regarding broadcasting was caution. The fourth Labour Government wanted to ensure a second term doubtless encouraging caution in certain policy areas – no doubt this was tempered by the realisation of the significance of television in the modern campaign, and a desire to harness some of that power – a factor which Ian Cross pointed towards. Consequently, they were careful to appear as a unified and cohesive team – there was to be no hint of internal rifts. Additionally, caution was doubtless exercised in order to ensure that any substantial changes which were made were not undone by the next government, as had happened in 1976. Consequently, steps toward introducing regional television and/or a third channel moved very slowly, as the Minister familiarised himself with all the facts. The Government, although cautious, was also determined to follow its programme ‘...and deliberately set about isolating itself from the pressure of traditional interest groups’ (Wilson, 1989, p.36).

The first term of the fourth Labour Government was characterised by the enthusiasm of various ministers for royal commissions of inquiry. Ultimately, the majority of recommendations issued from various commissions were ignored and they proved themselves an excellent way of appearing to do something without actually doing anything. Three royal commissions dealt at least to some extent, with broadcasting: the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Broadcasting and Related Telecommunications; the Royal Commission on Social Policy; and the Royal Commission on the Electoral System. The Royal Commission on the Electoral System dealt with the issues surrounding election advertising, and the allocation of time for free-to-air party political broadcasts.

**The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Broadcasting and Related Telecommunications**

The Commission which had the most potential to impact on the media was set up in 1985 when Minister of Broadcasting Jonathan Hunt announced the establishment of a Royal Commission into broadcasting and telecommunications, as promised in the 1984 election campaign. He expected it would look at issues of cross-media ownership, stating that he felt ‘We must have a separation in the three areas [radio, television and newspapers] and I am determined to do this the best I can’ (Auckland Star, 14/09/85). Hunt also anticipated the Commission would deal with: issues relating to technology, including (cable television, FM
broadcasting and satellite links); resources and institutions’ needs in order to best serve all New Zealanders; regional television; educational television; violence and television; the potential role of a charter similar to the BBC’s; and establishing a formula for providing for right of reply when it is established an ‘inaccurate or distorted picture has been given’ (Auckland Star, 14/09/85).

There is little utility in reviewing the work of the Royal Commission considering that the vast bulk of its recommendations were made redundant by the more free market, deregulation style reforms of 1988-1990. The Commission presumed that they were fine tuning the 1976 Broadcasting Act, and their recommendations reflected that they anticipated a continuation of the status quo. The dissenting addendum of member L. A. Cameron gives an alternative view, airing the ‘credible options’ of a more ‘competitive and commercial’ orientated broadcasting industry. Even his comments do not go as far as the reforms which were eventually adopted. Both parties assumed the basic structures of one Corporation and a Broadcasting Tribunal would be maintained, but adapted and restructured internally to meet the needs of the changing environment.

The work and advice of the Royal Commissions’ seems to have had little bearing on the direction the Government took to redesign broadcasting along free-market principles. Far more important seems to have been the Government’s desire to appear consistent in its application of free market, deregulatory policies as advocated by Roger Douglas and Treasury.

**State-Owned Enterprises Principles**

While the Labour Party were unclear about their direction pre-1984, their rejection of the interventionist style government characterised by the previous National Government gave impetus to the direction towards policies lessening the intervention of the administration. The announcement in 1985 of the principles for State-owned enterprises (SOEs) was probably the watershed, reflecting the Government’s shift from non-intervention to commercialism (Easton, 1989, pp.123-4). These five principles ‘set the direction of the public sector organisational reform’. They stated:

- Responsibility for non-commercial functions would be separated from major trading SOEs;
- Managers would be given a principal objective of running SOEs as successful businesses;
- Managers would be given responsibility for deciding how they achieved performance objectives agreed with ministers, so the managers could be held accountable to ministers and parliament for their results;
- The advantages and disadvantages which SOEs had, including barriers to competition, would be removed so commercial criteria provided a fair assessment of performance;
- Each SOE would be restructured according to its commercial purpose under the
guidance of boards appointed generally from the private sector (Douglas, 1987, p.227).

A consistent application of these principles to broadcasting should have established a system independent from government interference, with the chief non-commercial function, that of public service broadcasting, being maintained and strengthened through its separation from the commercial functions. However while the new legislation did attempt to separate broadcasting and political control, early concerns arose, both due to the continued influence of ministers, and to the new structure established to provide for public broadcasting. The same principle of non-interference in the marketplace led to a response of no response to the problems of concentration of ownership in the media.

The important question which comes out of this is why did the fourth Labour Government establish costly forms of research and consultation and then largely ignore the outcomes of those commissions? There are allegations that it was a deliberate strategy to protect a hidden agenda. It may also have been reflective of an attempt to keep factions within the Government and Party happier with the direction of the Government, or uncertainty within the Government itself regarding its direction on issues such as newspaper ownership and the future of broadcasting.

...And The Reality

Initial actions, focussed on staffing of both broadcasting and the Government's own public relations machine, appeared designed to draw all aspects of the media closer to the new Government. As already noted, the Government had made it very clear they would not be working with Ian Cross as chairman of the Broadcasting Corporation. While Cross does not wish to be remembered as a political victim, it is obvious from the epilogue of his book that he felt very uncomfortable with the direction the relationship between BCNZ and the Labour Government was taking. Further changes included the sideways shift of the Controller of News and Current Affairs, with the position being left vacant for nearly a year. The direct telephone line from the Minister's office to the BCNZ switchboard was reconnected. Jonathan Hunt offered people of his choice and presumably of his political sympathies positions on regional advisory groups which dealt with programming. The allegations, that the new Government was removing obstacles such as the news controller and indulging in overt patronage in order to manage programming, news and current affairs content, are backed up by Cross' observations that in a period of the greatest political and social change for nearly fifty years, television avoided in-depth handling of politically sensitive issues. Cross felt television and radio coverage was timidly superficial and restrained, concessions were made to government political advertising which should not have been countenanced, and radio and
television coverage of foreign policy developments – notably the series of coups in Fiji – was reported in support of Government policy (Cross, 1988, pp.236-42).

A further and interesting change to the staffing structure was the appointment of Hugh Rennie as chairman and the splitting of the position, formerly held by Cross, into two – Chairman and Chief Executive. Cross felt this move would doom the new chief executive to frustrations, and it certainly appears to have been a move designed to lessen the power of the head of NZBC (Cross, 1988, p.242). Again, there were the traditional allegations from the National Opposition of cronyism in the appointment of Rennie.

Staffing shifts were also afoot in the Government’s own public relations structure. Tourist and Publicity staff, the usual source of government press secretaries, public relations staff and information campaigns, were definitely out of favour. The Government moved quickly to replace these public service staff with people bought in on private contract, thus establishing their own distinct propaganda machinery within the Beehive, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Staffing changes both to broadcasting and to internal government structures reflect the strong desire of the fourth Labour Government to appear as a cohesive and unified team and reflected the general policy direction of taking control of publicity and using it in a far more sophisticated and professional manner.

**The Second Term – towards a level playing field**

In 1988 the Royal Commission on Social Policy completed its report – a vast piece of work, spanning five volumes collectively known as *The April Report*. It is a very valuable piece of research, commenting on a wide range of issues. The concerns it had regarding the media were the same concerns which were being raised in the early eighties, reflecting a failure on the part of the Government in its first term to address any of the issues surrounding the media. It discusses the continuing fears of trying to introduce public broadcasting into the marketplace. Farnsworth, in his piece, points out that broadcasting and the media generally can never be a true free market as it is subject to intervention (censorship) and due to the nature of its revenue (advertising). The conclusion is that application of the free market to broadcasting would not be socially equitable nor would it produce the broadest set of conditions for the public interest (1988, pp.462-3). There is concern over the likelihood that deregulation could lead to a situation where broadcasters are under no obligation to provide a New Zealand content, and provide a barrier to equality of access – particularly for minority groups. Also expressed are concerns about the complex web of interlocking relationships which exist in the print media (1988, pp.465-7).
Restructuring the Business of Broadcasting

In April 1988, the Government made it very clear what direction its policy on broadcasting was going to take. As an issue it remained conspicuously absent from the 1987 election, despite the Commission on Broadcasting having reported back the previous year. In April 1988 it was announced the Broadcasting Tribunal was to be abolished, restrictions governing entry and ownership were to be relaxed and no special barriers introduced to prevent or delay the introduction of new technologies. Radio spectrum allocation would be undertaken by the Crown, and there would be special restrictions, notably on overseas ownership in relation to broadcasting. A Broadcasting Commission was to be established to administer the licence fee for public service broadcasting in order to promote New Zealand’s social and cultural identity. The National and Concert programmes were to be maintained under public ownership. A new system for complaints was to be established, but it was to be operated in conjunction with self-regulation. Policy advice on broadcasting and technology was to be shifted to the Department of Trade and Industry.

In July 1988 the Steering Committee reported back with recommendations ‘on the optimal organisation and financial structure’ of the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand (BCNZ), based on State-owned enterprise guidelines’ (Steering Committee Report, 1988, p.i). It advised the BCNZ be broken into two State-owned enterprises; that separate mechanisms be established to provide for Maori radio initiatives; that public service radio broadcasting be separately contracted, and not be funded by the licence fee; the Listener was to be be an independent business in which both the radio and television SOEs were to have equity. The Symphony orchestra was felt to be a separate organisation from TV and radio, but one which should remain government funded. The overall concept was to create enterprises which would operate comfortably in the new competitive environment.

The advice of the Committee was picked up in legislation in 1988 and 1989. Under a 1988 amendment to the State-Owned Enterprises Act 1986, two new enterprises were formed with business orientated objectives and a duty to ‘accommodate or encourage’ social responsibility ‘when able to do so’ (State-Owned Enterprises Act, 1986, s4). The shares of the new companies are held by the shareholding ministers, the Minister of Finance and Minister of Broadcasting. A board of directors is established to run the enterprises, and they are accountable to the Ministers. The Broadcasting Act 1989 establishes the Broadcasting Standards Authority to deal with codes of acceptable practice amongst broadcasters and to deal with complaints which the broadcaster has dealt with unsatisfactorily. The new Authority has far more power than the Tribunal, with the power to make orders and fine broadcasters for failure to comply. The Act also establishes the Broadcasting Commission or New Zealand On Air as it has named itself. The Commission collects the licence fee, previously undertaken by the BCNZ, and allocates money to broadcasters with specific programme proposals which promote New Zealand culture and identity, and minority interests. Responsibility for setting
the fee has been shifted to the Commission, ‘... the Commission may charge fees, to be known as public broadcasting fees, in accordance with regulations made under this Act’ (s47). While this appears to remove a long-time contentious responsibility from government, s44 states the Commission must have regard to Government policy, and must comply with directions given by the Minister. The Minister may not however interfere with any particular programme, or interfere with the presentation of news, or the preparation and presentation of current affairs programmes (s44.2 a & b). The Commission also operates with money appropriated from parliament. The Act also sets out restrictions on overseas ownership. Changes to the allocation of airwaves were made under the Radiocommunications Act 1989. Under this Act radio frequencies must be registered with the Secretary of Commerce. Licences to transmit may have statutory conditions imposed, such as that imposed on TV3 to maintain a proportion of programmes which reflect New Zealand culture (25-30 per cent local production).

The new system deals with some of the long-term concerns with broadcasting in this country, and addresses some of the issues raised by the various commissions. For example, the licence fee has been both maintained and has been placed in the hands of an independent Commission, and in that same Commission there is a dedication to providing local content on television. Broadcasting now has more power over the way it chooses to allocate its money. However there are tensions within the new system. The most obvious is that the element of patronage has not been removed. The Governor-General, on the advice of the Minister, appoints the Commission and Authority members, and the two SOE boards. In this way, the government has huge potential to influence the affairs of Broadcasting. There are allegations from a past member of the TVNZ board that there was constant interference from the shareholding ministers in the operations of the board.9 Problems within Radio New Zealand led to the resignation in April 1991 of RNZ director, Beverly Wakem. There remains government interference in the allocation of the spectrum, and in settling Maori claims in relation to airwave allocation (Bruce Sane, Chairperson of Broadcasting Summit Conference, Morning Report, 29/09/91). There is a constant tension between the desires of government departments such as Treasury to make broadcasting fully commercial, and the commitment from broadcasters to maintain a standard and level of public service programming. There have even been allegations that Treasury wanted TVNZ ‘run into the ground’ in order to provide the level playing field, seen as the cornerstone of free market competition. Predictions abounded that further moves included the privatisation of Radio New Zealand, that TV2 was to be sold off, and that the entire licence fee would be given to Television One and it made part-commercial. Geoffrey Palmer denies that any further changes were planned for broadcasting, feeling that deregulation was necessary due to ‘world-wide trends which we can’t resist very easily’. He

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9 Interview with a former TVNZ board member.
did feel however that the Government ‘... went too far in favour of the market’ in terms of achieving a balance between market forces and public service broadcasting.\(^{10}\)

There was also tension apparent between TVNZ and the Commission. TVNZ felt frustrated by the Commission’s demands that applications be made for money on a programme by programme basis. It would prefer to have been given the money in a bulk grant to do what it liked with (McLoughlin, 1990, p.61). There were also fears of censorship, given the remark of Commission Chairman Merv Norrish that ‘he doubted something like the TV drama of the 1985 French attack on the *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland Harbour would get money, because of the foreign policy implications’ (quoted in McLoughlin, 1990, p.60). Minister of Broadcasting Jonathan Hunt, on the other hand, said the arguments had been healthy and predictable (McLoughlin, 1990, p.67). Commenting on how happy he felt about the work of the Commission, and the direction of broadcasting generally Hunt said, ‘I think we have laid the framework and groundwork for the nineties, an age when the communications revolution will affect every aspect of public life’ (Hunt, 1990, p.12).

Farnsworth (1988) articulates commonly raised concerns about the future and present condition of the media, and the Government in its reforms did attempt to address some of the concerns for a deregulated broadcasting market. However the problems of concentration of ownership in the print media were largely left alone. The Commerce Act 1986 with its emphasis on market dominance as the prime reason for preventing takeovers and mergers in the media, has not prevented two companies – Independent Newspapers Limited (INL) and Wilson and Horton – controlling much of the circulation of newspapers in New Zealand. In 1990/91, INL had forty-five percent of metropolitan circulation and forty-four percent of provincial newspaper circulation. Wilson and Horton had approximately forty-five and one-half percent of metropolitan circulation, and twenty-one percent of provincial circulation (McGregor, 1992, p.30).

In the electronic media, deregulation, the introduction of competition to television and the shift in emphasis from public service to profit motive has had disturbing, although not unexpected, effects on news and current affairs programmes. Research by Atkinson (1992) very clearly shows a decline, both in the type of content and in the quality of content on *One Network News*, between 1985 and 1992. Research showed a sharp decline in the amount of time devoted to ‘hard’ news on political, economics and industrial stories, and subsequent increases in the amount of time spent on crime, disaster and human interest stories. Not only was there less emphasis on the ‘harder’ news items, but there was also an overall decline in the average length of items, sound bites and shot lengths.(Atkinson, 1992, p.5). That decline is reflected by attitudes such as that of TVNZ’s head of news and current affairs, Paul Norris that

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10 Palmer, interview.
television ‘violates its “essential nature” when it taxes the brain unduly’ (quoted in Campbell, 1992b, p.17).

The obvious concerns that arise from this concentration of ownership and the effects of deregulation is the impact it has had on diversity of opinion being offered through the media, and the reduced quality information and analysis reaching the public.

It is unlikely in a climate of New Right philosophy that a government will involve itself in the debate on concentration of ownership and cross media ownership; to do so would go against the ideology of allowing business to operate in a free market. In addition the hostility which has arisen in the past when governments have legislated for the press, has ensured that this is always a politically sensitive area irrespective of the prevailing economic orthodoxy. Michael Cullen felt the Government did not respond to concerns regarding concentration of ownership and cross-media ownership because they recognised that it was a commercial reality, and somewhat inevitable.

I think it’s a matter of size, its a recognition that it’s very difficult to disperse ownership widely given the nature of what we’re talking about . . . There’s always been concern about cross ownership of the media. But I don’t think it’s anything sinister, I think it is just a recognition that given the economics of running a newspapers for example, it’s hard to have every newspaper with its own owner. So there’s been a loss of competition at the metropolitan level, there just isn’t room for it. The *Auckland Sun* or whatever it was called proved it, it just couldn’t hack it, had to shut down, just couldn’t handle it. The *Christchurch Star* went. The *Evening Post* is the only remaining metropolitan afternoon paper, that’s because Wellington has a stronger public transport system, and everybody likes to have something to read on the train! (Cullen, interview).

Geoffrey Palmer felt legislation was not the answer, but perhaps the solution lay in providing better training, attracting ‘better and brighter’ people to the profession, and ensuring the career structure of journalism retained those people, rather than letting them go into better paid careers in public relation.11 Given the problems confronting the newspaper industry, there will need to be closer scrutiny and criticism of the work of the daily newspapers (and all media) in New Zealand, both from within the media and by outside observers.

**Conclusions**

The increasing emphasis on communication was a result of two things: first, governments taking advantage of the new communications technology and secondly, effective communication was also an integral part of the new economic policies being adopted by Western governments. Rapid and often dramatic changes needed to be explained to the public. Just as important was the message that there was no alternative to these policies. In order to communicate this message there was a need for firmer control over the mass media to ensure political coverage reported events in the government’s favour.

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11 Palmer, interview.
The reforms of the late 1980s in the area of broadcasting have been a combination of the consistent application of the market orientated policy of the fourth Labour Government, tempered by the vague realisation that broadcasting was not 'like making tins of baked beans', and some concessions had to be made in order to ensure some sort of local quality and content in programming. While there is an appearance in broadcasting that it has been separated from governmental control, there are still issues of concern: notably political patronage of boards and interference by shareholding ministers in operations of the SOEs, but also the use of the Broadcasting Commission for social engineering, and the potential for censorship from the Commission. The concentration of ownership and deregulation of the media in the 1980s has had a noticeable impact on the ability of media organisations to report events. These two developments have effectively precluded a free market place of ideas and information, as fewer journalists cover more events and reports are increasingly shared amongst a diminishing number of newspapers. In the electronic media, the advent of competition between channels for advertising has led to the tabloidisation of news and current affairs programmes. There are obvious benefits which accrue to the Government and any large organisation with resources devoted to ensuring media coverage. In the environment of the 1990s it will be much easier for government and other organisations to get their press releases circulated in the mainstream media, particularly given the fact that press secretaries and media officers are often more experienced journalists than those working in the actual media and the increasing amount of resources governments are channeling to their PR functions. It is also increasingly difficult for journalists of both the electronic and print media to conduct lengthy investigations or even to provide a range of opinions in order to create an environment for informed and wide ranging debate. These will be issues for future governments, but a product of the fourth Labour Government. The issues of patronage and interference reflects a reluctance on the part of the government to let go the reins of broadcasting completely and is a measure of the significance of television to the modern politician.

The state of government-media relations in 1990 was a very different to that Muldoon left in 1984. His attempts to control and influence the media were highly publicised, and usually took the form of direct attacks on the offending medium. With the notable exception of TVNZ's *Frontline* programme, the fourth Labour Government had stepped back and assumed more insidious means of control. This involved less of the direct intervention which characterised the Muldoon era and more attempts to control the information which was dispersed, and the way it was used. Fourth Labour Government attempts to control publicity had led to the establishment of government propaganda machinery in the form of public relations exercises, and privately employed press secretaries who were and are political aides, rather than the traditional 'apolitical' government department staff who had traditionally provided these services. It is this aspect of the fourth Labour Government's media policy that
is the focus of the next chapter.
CHAPTER 3

Feeding the Chooks: ¹
The fourth Labour Government and Information Management

By and large it has become a back scratching business. We have become used to each other ... the politicians can provide the easy headline for the day ... and the journalists can be useful to the politician like the Minister who wants to present something in a particular light (quoted by Freeth, 1985, p.39).

A conspiracy of superficiality is one that the politicians and the media share in New Zealand – neither thrives on analysis of complex ideas; both prefer slogans and short bites (Palmer, Lecture 1991).

Introduction
Chapter 2 reviewed the structural aspects of the New Zealand media, the links with government, the legislative changes which occurred under the fourth Labour Government, and the links between propaganda, democracy and the New Right. This chapter turns to look at the news management strategies adopted by the Government in order to better control the information being dispersed through the media regarding Government activities. The key element to the strategy was to better control the information being disseminated, the slant and ‘spin’ of the news rather than attempt to control the media themselves through bullying tactics, censorship, or direct controls as had been used in the past. In order to do this, the Labour Government restructured the system of employing ministerial support staff, thus changing the nature of the staff in ministerial offices liaising with the media. The new press secretaries brought with them an understanding of how the various media operated, particularly the electronic media, information about deadlines, the style of information which was appropriate to each medium, how best to present information in order to maximise coverage if that was appropriate, or to hide potentially unpopular news. Consequently, Labour were far more

¹ 'Feeding the Chooks' was a term used by (Sir) Joh Bjelke Petersen, former Premier of Queensland, to describe talking to journalists.
professional and sophisticated at news management strategies than the opposition. The new system however was flawed; it was not a unified and coherent strategy, and consequently it allowed certain ministers to build up their publicity functions in order to follow a personal agenda or programme, rather than to work for the government as a whole. As a consequence the system which had served Labour well in its first term in selling its programme to the public and media, exacerbated the philosophical split in the Labour Party and Government in its second term. This chapter looks at the news management strategy Labour put in place, why it initially worked so well, some of the specific ways the news was managed and controlled, and why a system which appeared to work so well in the first term, failed in the Government’s second term to contain the differences of opinion between Roger Douglas and David Lange.

Government-Party Policy on Communication
The election in 1984 of the fourth Labour Government was a watershed in terms of government public relations in New Zealand. The new Labour Government had a radically different image from its predecessors and this was accentuated throughout the run-up to the 1984 election. It was a very young Government with a great deal of experience as members of the Opposition, but little as actual Government. Many cabinet members had university degrees and were involved in professional or semi-professional occupations – in stark contrast with the socially conservative farmers and small business men and women of previous National governments, and the manual workers and full-time union officials of previous Labour governments. They were seen as energetic, dynamic and approachable, with a great deal of focus on David Lange as ‘David the Avuncular’ (Selinkoff, 1991, pp.12-13; also John Goulter, interview).

That image did not simply happen. It came about as the result of a lot of research and discussion. Labour MPs had set about reorganising the business of marketing themselves and their policies before the election was even won. Mike Moore says the decision was made to improve information dispersal and public relations before 1984 as,

[T]he experience of previous Labour Governments showed that the most progressive or dynamic policies would be forgotten and swept away if they were not properly explained to the public. We wanted a public relations system that would allow each minister to have a dedicated staff, with developed fields of expertise, to advise on media strategy and tactics (Mike Moore, correspondence).

A coherent media-publicity strategy was all the more important in the New Zealand context because it was a Labour Government which was implementing policies usually associated with right-wing parties. Evidence of the impact of such policies – including massive unemployment – could be clearly seen in countries like Britain, where they had been in place for much longer. They were policies which clearly affected the traditional base of Labour Party support – blue collar workers, trade unionists, and lower socio-economic groupings. The New Zealand
Labour Government had to tailor its publicity and policies more cautiously than would have perhaps a National Government, in order to avoid alienating their traditional voters, and possibly to attract a wider base of voting support from less traditional Labour areas.

If the Party were agreed on improving communications structures, it was one of the very few areas on which there was agreement. Even before Labour was elected to government in 1984, there was a rift developing within the Party regarding the direction of economic policies. The media were used to advertise Government policies and ensure they were properly explained to the public, but they were also used to push the Party into agreeing to changes in economic policy.

Roger Douglas believes that the Labour Party has drifted to the point where is [sic] has become quite unresponsive to new ideas and that the only way to get through to it is to shout through the media rather than cajole in the smoke filled rooms of tradition (Roger, 1989, p.38).

Roger Douglas and his supporters had to sell his policies, not only to the wider public, but also to his own Party, and the media proved a useful vehicle for both those objectives. Douglas began to shout through the media in the mid to late 1970s when Labour was in opposition. His methods included the release of an alternative budget, publishing of economic papers (when he was not finance spokesperson), sniping at the lack of direction and poor management within the Party, and putting out embarrassing press releases on the eve of a Party conference (Roger, 1989, p.38).

Fears that the media might pick up on disunity proved an effective means of suppressing any open opposition from within the Party during the first term of the fourth Labour Government. The Douglas camp pushed hard for Party debates on economic policy to be open to the media in order to suppress criticisms. Margaret Wilson, Party president from 1984 to 1987, details the difficulties the Party organisation had in contributing to the programme of the Government, claiming they had to fight for the right to be consulted (Wilson, 1989, Chapter 3). On certain issues, concessions were made to the left-wing of the Party – nuclear issues and sporting links with South Africa for example. Such concessions were no doubt necessary to maintain Party support from traditional sources – or at least acquiescence – for the Government’s economic direction. The annual Party Conferences, particularly between 1984 and 1988, became the venue for criticism of the lack of mechanisms for the Party to have input into Government (see Labour Party Conference papers, 1984 to 1988, particularly the President’s address). Mike Moore also recognised the difficulties of Party-Government communication saying it was ‘on the whole, not good during our time in Government.’ In 1988, a formal consultative mechanism was established, requiring Ministers wishing to depart from party policy to consult with specialist committees of party members. Moore says his ‘...perception is that this improved Party-Government relations and that the Party’s elected officials became somewhat more relaxed’ (correspondence). Certainly, criticism at the annual conference, that the Party
was not being consulted, stopped after 1988.

**Professionalisation of Information Control**

Traditionally, the publicity functions of governments were handled by the Tourist and Publicity Department. They provided press secretaries to ministers and departments from a pool of people. Tourism and Publicity also provided various forms of public relations advice. The first press secretary has been traced back to the 1940s, when Peter Fraser employed Mr J.T. Paul as his Public Relations Officer. From there, as David Exel, author of a 1984 communications audit, puts it,

> The present system of providing Ministerial Press Secretaries has, like Topsy, “just grewed” from the days when a government Press Secretary was an individual who “called in” at a Ministerial Office a few times a week to inquire: “Any press statements to be looked after?” (Exel, 1984, p.24).

Initially, only the Prime Minister had a full-time press officer and press officer service. The service to Ministers was quite basic, with only press releases and speech notes being provided through the service. Ministers under the first Labour Government had the service of journalists from the Labour newspapers, *The Southern Cross* and *The Standard*, for political work and promotion. The system has been subject to a number of reviews and reforms over the years, no doubt inspiring Exel’s remark that it has ‘growed like Topsy’.

In 1969, the ‘Lambert Affair’ resulted in a management review of the Information and Press Section. As a consequence guidelines were drawn up for the ministerial press officer service, directing press officers not to undertake work which could be taken to be outside the portfolio responsibilities of the ministers (that is, political work). The Kirk/Rowling Labour Government conducted a performance review of the press secretaries, which endorsed the quality of the work from the press secretaries, but was critical of the lack of political content. Mr G.P.E. Bryant, Director of the Information and Publicity Services Division 1977-1985, felt that,

> [T]he message was clearer than ever before: the government expected a wider press officer participation in the political publicity process, that is promotional work for their policies as well as promotional work for individual ministers nationally and in their electorate (correspondence).

The system had evolved to provide ministers, departments and agencies of state with full-time public service press secretaries, with the remainder being provided either on a part-time or as required from the pool of staff available.

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2 The ‘Lambert affair’ involved Mr Lambert, a press officer, who wrote two press releases praising the performance of John Marshall as Minister of Trade. Norman Kirk, leader of the opposition accused the Government of using public servants for political work, and a Parliamentary Inquiry, chaired by Sir Les Munro resulted. The Inquiry directed a management review then in progress to draw up the guidelines, issued as Staff Circular 14/70 (1970).
By the time of the August 1984 Exel review, all press officers were based in their Minister’s suites. Several were writing their minister’s weekly columns in electorate newspapers and at times were ‘flying the flag’ in their minister’s electorates (Bryant, correspondence).

Immediately following the 1984 election, the new Government commissioned David Exel, a former New Zealand journalist working for a Sydney PR firm, Eric White and Associates, to carry out a communications audit of its publicity functions. Six thousand dollars was paid for this report and Exel concluded that the position of ministerial press secretary was demanding and poorly paid. The then professional standard was uneven. Exel felt press secretaries needed to be superwomen and men, with a wide range of skills. Included in their job description was the requirement to:

...provide minister with strategic PR advice; must be competent speech writers and journalists; they must have “a thorough knowledge of the Departments for which the Minister has responsibility”; they must have liaison skills with the media, civil servants and industry groups, and they must do all this work virtually without training, with minimal professional supervision, and with inadequate administrative support (Exel, 1984, p.3).

Exel saw the biggest gap from the media’s perspective as being the lack of provision of background material and briefings. He recommended that these be given more emphasis, as should off the record background briefings (p.40). He also recommended a fixed quota (ten initially) of competent staff from the Information and Publicity Services Division, the remainder of positions were to be filled on professional merit. Coordination and a team approach were also key elements, as was loyalty, both to the Minister and the Government. He felt the appointments should be a matter of urgency. The new staff, he emphasised, should be professional, not political handlers of information. The role of the press secretaries would be to inform and not to propagandise. In conclusion Exel commented,

...any system of Government communications in the final analysis, will be judged positively to the degree that it provides more information and less blatant propaganda; it will be judged negatively to the degree that it puts more blockages between the Government and the people (p.44).

The decision was made to change the system, replacing the public service press secretaries with people from the private sector, because according to Geoffrey Palmer those from Tourism and Publicity were ‘lazy, incompetent and ineffective’.

Mike Moore was more diplomatic, saying the Government ‘wanted to attract staff of suitable calibre and experience who were committed and prepared to “go the extra distance.”’ Often, the NZTP pay scales did not facilitate this.

Tourism and Publicity suffered a fate familiar to certain other government departments –

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3 The author thanks Mr G.P.E. Bryant for the wealth of information he provided on the history of the Tourist and Publicity Department, the changing role of press secretaries and government communications policies.
5 Correspondence.
reorganised, and then sold off. In 1984, it comprised three publicity divisions: Information and Publicity Services; National Publicity Studios and the National Film Unit. In 1986, the first two were amalgamated, and renamed Communicate New Zealand. By 1987, they were operating on a commercial basis. In 1989, CNZ was sold, followed by the NFU in 1990.

Figure 1 shows the growth of numbers of press secretaries employed by ministers and departments under the various governments from 1973 to 1992. Changes in reporting, accounting and employment methods make it difficult to chart changes over the years in government expenditure on publicity functions. Until 1978, press secretaries worked for departments rather than individual ministers. In addition to these full-time officers, there are a number part-time press secretaries employed by various departments, and a few employed on an 'as required' basis. The figures for 1984-1992 are particularly deceptive because of the new trend for bringing in private consultants to market and advise on strategies for individual campaigns, particularly launches of new policies, such as GST, budgets, and restructuring of social policy. As a basic measure however, this graph does show a quite steady and substantial increase in the numbers of people employed full-time to perform the duties of press secretaries.

The change to the system of providing Governmental press secretaries is significant because it essentially replaced public service people with private individuals, selected by the minister they were to work for, often sharing their ideology, and loyal to them rather than the Government.

*Sources: Tourism and Publicity Annual Reports; Correspondence Mike Moore; Legat (1992, p.58).
as a whole. They were people with often extensive experience working in the media, who could take advantage of their knowledge of how the media functioned, and their links back to the media. In spite of Exel’s recommendations, they did become political handlers of information, and the Government failed to create a system of coordination and team approach.

Structure of Information Dispersal
The new breed of government press secretary was pivotal to the Government’s communication policy. Press secretaries have a variety of pseudonyms, such as Executive Assistant (Media), Press Officers, Public Relations staff and Media Secretaries. Whatever the title, the modern press secretary’s principal function is to control the access of the media to politicians. They provide background for statements, set up interviews and conferences, answer journalists questions, write press statements and have them circulated through the gallery, deal with queries from the wider public and play a role in advising ministers on strategies for the release of material in order to best minimise or maximise impact – depending on whether it is good or bad news. Press secretaries do not just pass on information, they put a ‘spin’ on the news; that is they give it an interpretation.

The government will always be interested in coordinating its announcements and giving them the appropriate spin. It adds to an impression of purposefulness and coherence. This is a most important message to get across because it is almost never the truth. Government tends to be a chapter of accidents, mess-ups and conflicts much of the time (Palmer, Lecture 1991).

The replacements for the public service staff were brought in from the press gallery and from the print and broadcast media, mostly on one year renewable contracts. As the size of the public relations-press secretary contingent increased so did the strength of links between the Government and the media. As Sir Robert Muldoon interpreted the situation, ‘. . . I assume that it was thought that they [the press secretaries] would use their contacts [within the press gallery] accordingly’.6

Press secretaries are employed by Internal Affairs, but are interviewed and selected by the Minister they are to work for. Appointments are then approved by the Deputy Prime Minister. In April 1988, the Dominion Sunday Times reported twelve senior journalists as having taken publicity positions with ministers, five from within the press gallery:

Russell Hill, (New Zealand Herald Political Editor, no minister given)
Andy Gregory, (Radio New Zealand Chief Political Reporter, Richard Prebble)
Tony Garnier, (Evening Post, Chief Political Reporter, Mike Moore)
Karren Beanland, (Auckland Sun Senior Political Reporter, Geoffrey Palmer)
Brent Solvander, (Private Radio, David Butcher).

Those from outside the gallery included:
Mervyn Cull, (NZ Herald, Mr Lange)

6 Correspondence.
Ministers in the Labour Government were entitled to employ at least one press secretary; if they had a large workload, more were allowed. Press secretaries were responsible to individual ministers as opposed to the pool system which had been operated by Tourism and Publicity. The Department of Internal Affairs was the servicing agent. The majority of new press secretaries were employed on a fixed term contract, with salaries being negotiated with ministers and the Department of Internal Affairs. In 1985, fifteen press officers came from Tourism and Publicity. In 1988 there were only three provided in this way. Fourteen were employed on contract, and the remaining one was employed by an individual department. In the Bolger Government, all twenty-two ministerial [twenty-seven in 1992] press secretaries were employed on contract (Moore, correspondence).

New salary scales reflected the shift away from public service employees. In 1990, public service press secretaries’ salaries ranged from $19,110 to $26,680, while contract press secretaries’ salaries had a lower limit of $29,000 and an upper limit of $47,840, paid to Overseas Trade Minister Mike Moore’s media adviser, Graeme Colman. A salary review boosted public service staff rates to a top rate of $35,000, and contract salaries to an upper limit believed to be about $50,000. Public service press secretaries also received an additional $2,500 to cover overtime, entertainment and clothing expenses. (Dominion Sunday Times, 09/08/87).

In addition to improving the staffing of the public relations functions of Government, there was also an attempt to improve the coordination of PR functions. In 1986, Ariane Burgess was brought in from her position as press attaché at the French embassy to assume the role of chief press secretary. She assumed responsibility for the performance of media support services, and for providing effective communication between the Communication Advisory Committee, a group set up to examine the Government’s communication requirements, and the press secretary group. This position took over from a similar one previously undertaken by an officer from Tourism and Publicity (Otago Daily Times, 21/7/86). According to Mike Moore, ‘the level of coordination between press secretaries, for example on the timing of major initiatives, tended to vary a great deal. Weekly meetings of media staff were organised, under different names and guises, and these varied in their effectiveness.’ By contrast, the gallery journalists recall attempts to establish a communications unit with some amusement, claiming

7Dominion Sunday Times 17/04/88.
8 Mr Moore also notes that ‘It is interesting that, having criticised us, the National Party has adopted almost exactly the same system’ (correspondence).
no-one really seemed to know what it was there for, and that it soon fizzled out. Failure to follow Exel’s advice regarding loyalty of secretaries to the Government as a whole, and coordination of various offices, created huge problems for the fourth Labour Government in their second term. In the UK Mrs Thatcher’s press secretary, Bernard Ingham, gained more publicity and notoriety than any previous secretary. There was at times considerable tension between Ingham and the political lobby, and his influence became such that it led to allegations that he was ‘managing’ the media (Seymour-Ure, 1990, p.192). In New Zealand, press secretaries increasingly used their knowledge and power to undermine the work of others. They became political, rather than professional handlers of information.

**Politisation of ministerial support staff**

 Ideally, the role of the press secretary is to take some of the minister’s workload off his or her shoulders, to deal with press queries, arrange interviews and provide advice on timing and wording of announcements. Exel in his report emphasised that these staff should not be political handlers of information – they should inform, not propagandise. However it became apparent under the fourth Labour Government that this would not be the case. Press secretaries bought in on contract do not work for the Minister of Finance or the Prime Minister. They work for Roger Douglas, or David Lange – the individual, not the government. Their advice and work will be political rather than neutral. Rodger claims that loyalty was essential. ‘[Y]ou expect the press secretary to be loyal to the minister, to be eyes and ears to hear things and report back, that is the two way flow, and to articulate in an informal way to the press gallery what lies behind various issues’.10

The press secretaries helped the relationship between the gallery and the fourth Labour Government enormously. They initially proved themselves effective and successful in selling Government to the gallery and managing the news.

Leitch (1991a) refers to one commentator, a *Listener* reporter, remarking;

> Consider...how the mainstream media leapt aboard the bandwagon of Rogernomics. Journalists who thought of themselves as grizzled apolitical cynics became unpaid PR agents for the Government (Leitch, p.28).

Lange had Ross Virtiner, who had been with him in Opposition. John Goulter, chief political reporter for the *Evening Post* says Vintiner got along well with the gallery, and gave good off the record, non-attributable comment, which was invaluable to the gallery. Bevan Burgess also came in with h.s Minister, Roger Douglas. He had a long history in the media; a former member of the gallery and a former media consultant. Burgess was very committed both to

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9 Goulter, interview.
10 Rodger, interview.
Douglas’ economic policies and to Douglas personally. He wrote most of Douglas’ speeches (which John Goulter says were very good), and did Douglas’ press liaison.\footnote{Goulter, interview.}

Sir Robert Muldoon claims Burgess’ links with gallery reporters were also invaluable in getting press releases circulated:

Some Ministers were successful in getting their publicity material circulated and some were not. One of the most successful was Roger Douglas whose Press Secretary, Bevan Burgess, had been in the Parliamentary Press Gallery since the early 1960s. His close friend, lan Templeton, is a senior member of the Press Gallery with much the same length of service, and Templeton’s articles in the Auckland and Sunday Stars and other papers were merely a re-write of Burgess’ handouts. Burgess still works with Roger Douglas and Templeton still writes the same kind of material, although he has now transferred his affection to the new National Minister of Finance and her policies.\footnote{Correspondence.}

The modern press secretaries have a pivotal role in government. There is a great deal of information available to them, and it became apparent that strong loyalties were developing between individual press secretaries and their ministers rather than the Government as a whole. In addition, certain ministers within the Labour Government were using their staff to help further their own personal ambitions and programmes.

I didn’t go out seeking media situations, some ministers did, they thought it was good for their image, and gave them a canvas to paint on. Well that was fine, but that was not my style. They actually had a rather different agenda, or had to run a different agenda, because some of them wanted a high profile and some of them wanted media opportunities all the time. . . We had one Minister who finished up with a greater media team than the Prime Minister. He had deliberately gone out of his way to accomplish that huge media machine which was at the taxpayer’s expense and I thought that was deplorable (Rodger, interview).

Harvey McQueen, an executive assistant in the Prime Minister’s office from 1988 to 1990, described the atmosphere this created in the Beehive as being ‘like medieval Europe, with allegiance to the local baron rather than to the far-away king. Each ministerial office was a self-contained enclave from which staffers sallied forth to uphold the honour of their particular household’ (McQueen, 1991, p.66).

Roger Douglas is often recognised as a master of manipulating the media. Harvey McQueen (1991) highlights this in repeating Geoffrey Palmer’s remark that Douglas ‘had his own ways of pre-empting Cabinet decisions and avoiding Cabinet discussions of elements of his financial policy’ (p.74). Douglas was able to do this through his ability to merchandise a policy and sell it to the right people. ‘[B]ehind the Douglas speeches were powerful political and media allies. Announcements were kept to near-certainties, risk reduced as much as possible’ (p.75). The ability of Douglas to manipulate the media was a key element in the ability of the fourth Labour Government to push through a lot of the radical reforms made to the New Zealand economy. ‘Roger had a fairly careful and clear media strategy with an excellent media strategist.’\footnote{Palmer, interview.} The success of Douglas and the fourth Labour Government at marketing policy
is well illustrated with regard to the debate over the lack of in-depth analysis and critiques of Labour’s economic policies.

Given the radical nature of the changes Labour wrought on the New Zealand economy – changes which over-turned fifty years of economic tradition – one would have expected to see the new Government’s policies subjected to a sustained critique in the news media. But such critiques were only noticeable by their virtual absence from the mainstream popular newspapers and news broadcasts (Leitch, 1991, p.20).

The lack of critical discussion in the mass media is a credit to Roger Douglas, his press secretary and their ‘blitzkrieg’ method of introducing policy. This success, and continual pushing by Douglas, supported by Burgess, for more reforms, against the wishes of Prime Minister Lange led to the decision in late 1988 not to renew Burgess’ contract. He had become too political working for Douglas’s cause alone and not for the Government as a whole. This decision was made by Palmer and Lange. Douglas, out of the country at the time, responded by re-hiring Burgess on an independent salary upon his return.

The Douglas-Lange feud was the best example of the tensions the new system created. Where the previous pooling system of press secretaries and employment of Ministerial staff from the public service largely prevented this from occurring, the new method of bringing support staff for ministerial offices in from the private sector demanded individual loyalty. What the new system reflected was that when the Cabinet were unified in their aims, the system was very effective. However when a dispute arose, the emphasis on the loyalty to individual ministers which the new system had created meant that instead of the differences being contained, each minister, or his/her staff tried to fight it out through the mainstream media in order to force acceptance and understanding of his/her point of view. While it is difficult to imagine the difference of opinion between the Prime Minister and the principal minister, the Minister of Finance being kept entirely within Cabinet regardless of the structure of the public relations staff, the system introduced by the fourth Labour Government exacerbated the split, because ministers had been able to build up their own publicity functions, as distinct from the Government.

I mean the government is a collective, I think it is very dangerous if you’ve got [individual ministers building up public relations functions], because in fact the underlings so to speak go out and fight far more furiously than the principals, because of the developing bond to their own minister, and that is a worry. It got totally out of hand with us in 1988. (Cullen, interview).

The Lange-Douglas differences were fought through press secretaries. The press secretaries have the potential to greatly undermine ministers through carefully placing unattributable comments around the press gallery. Geoffrey Palmer describes this as ‘one of the blacker political arts.’ John Goulter on a more general level commented that press secretaries were loyal to their own Minister, and no-one else. They would defend their own Minister, and run down others and/or their portfolio. ‘There was surprisingly little communication between
departments and very little overall loyalty’ 14 The press gallery for their part are more than willing to pick up on rumours of dissent and quarrels within Government. Such stories make far more exciting copy than coverage of bills, legislation and select committees.

An interesting fact about the Lange/Douglas split is that most of the press gallery represented it as a purely personal divide, and did not, despite the fundamental differences between David Lange and Roger Douglas begin to question the economic and social direction of the Government.

What was very interesting was very few of the gallery actually understood the nature of the argument, they never understood it wasn't a fundamental personal divide, it was a fundamental philosophical divide, about the whole direction of the state, and the analysis of that was extremely poor in the gallery (Cullen, interview).

This over-simplification is indicative of the effect of the deregulation on the style and quality of journalism in the gallery.

The politicisation of support staff in this way and the development of loyalties to a particular minister has obvious problems. Under the fourth Labour Government, it allowed one minister to continue pushing for policies and reforms largely opposed by a significant number of the Caucus, and it provided him with a large degree of support from the media due to his own and his staff's ability to lobby and manipulate the media. It is symptomatic of a new trend in government for battles to be played out increasingly through the avenues the modern mass media make available to government, and also of the increasing necessity for governments to be able to use the media effectively to get ideas across. Additionally, it is not a trend which was unique to the fourth Labour Government. Members of the Bolger National Government have continued to use the media as an arena for attempting to redirect the Government’s direction – notably Winston Peters release of Ka Awatea before it had been approved by Cabinet.

In addition to professionalising their information dispersal, Labour also conducted fairly continuous polling to carefully monitor public opinion, in order to know which policies and politicians were popular and which were not. The polls were funded by the Labour Party, rather than through official channels. That way the results and findings of the polls could remain private – publicly funded polls would have meant making the results available to anyone. The poll results were used on occasion to modify behaviour on issues and policies where there was some discretion available to the government, according to Stan Rodger. 15 However Michael Cullen felt the Government paid far too little attention to the poll results in connection with decision-making. He felt there was a fear amongst the Cabinet of giving in to popular opinion and 'political' considerations.

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14 Goulter, interview.
15 Rodger, interview.
It [opinion polling] had far too little impact on some of our decision-making. We would have been a great deal better off if we had read some of the opinion polls a bit more carefully, taken a bit more notice of them...we got into a mode, a cast of mind, which said that our responsibility was to do what had to be done and blow the consequences (Cullen, interview).

Opinion polls were most important in the way they were used to shape publicity strategies. The poll results were used to gauge which were popular messages and issues, so publicity and news management strategies could be tailored accordingly.

**The Politics of Information Dispersal**

*Publicity is any unpaid form of non-personal communication, in which the agency is not identified as being the direct sponsor of the communication.* It consists of news and features coverage about the agency, its people and its programs communicated to the general public through the mass media at no direct cost to the agency (Crompton and Lamb, 1986, p.463. Italics in original).

‘Publicity’ as so defined has a number of benefits which advertising does not. News stories have higher credibility than items of advertising; publicity may reach individuals who may not normally pay attention to advertisements; there is only the cost of preparing the initial press release or publicity material, which may often get national coverage through both print and broadcast media. There are disadvantages – the media have complete control over how it uses material, and items usually only appear once (Crompton and Lamb, 1986, p.464). Obviously, the best attempts to gain publicity will only succeed if all the elements are in one’s favour. If the media and/or public are not interested, for whatever reasons, then publicity will fail. Governments have a natural advantage in the publicity stakes – there will always be a focus of attention on what they are doing, who is saying what and to whom. The press gallery is specially placed to record their version of the events of governments.

A variety of methods are open to governments which enable them to better control what is covered and the sort of coverage it can get. The growth of television and its associated technology has been the key factor in the growth of the publicity business, and there is a variety of ways by which government can and does influence what is covered and the type of coverage it gets.

An understanding of how the media functions is vital to successful publicity. Many western politicians fell in the 1960s and 1970s because of a failure to understand how to relate to a television audience. Politicians continue to fall due to declining popularity spurred on by poor performances in the medium of television. The 1980s have seen the replacement of Labour Party Leader Bill Rowling with David Lange, National Opposition leader Jim McClay with Jim Bolger. Labour Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer’s resignation was doubtless encouraged by ongoing media speculation about his poor performance in popularity polls. His replacement,
Mike Moore had long been noted for his ability to create publicity. As Tiffen comments, the size of government propaganda organs are no substitute for the PR skills of the leaders themselves (Tiffen, 1989, p.86). The Labour Party itself recognised this as far back as 1982 in a strategy booklet.

4.9 The Importance of Leadership

In the television era, the role of leadership is even more important than it was previously. Not only must Party Leaders direct the party in Parliament and oversee the workings of the organisation. They must front up to the public constantly through the television screen. For the majority of voters, television is probably the most important source of political information and television focuses on leaders, their personalities, their style, and their utterances. All the elements of leadership can be used effectively in this area (NZ Labour Party, Strategic Plan 1982 -84, 1982).

Publicity manoeuvres tend to relate mostly to timing and leaking of information. Tiffen has organised them into two categories overt and covert manoeuvres.

Overt Manoeuvres...

Overt manoeuvres relate mostly to releasing information at an appropriate time in order to take advantage of different methods of news collection. Release of information is often timed in conjunction with knowledge about the deadlines various media have. Lateness reduces the chances of media gathering reactions or criticism, as does releasing major press releases in the middle of the night or after a particularly busy day. Release on a quiet day – traditionally Sunday – will maximise coverage. Timing can also be used to ensure continued coverage. News collection methods mean journalists are continually searching for a fresh angle or theme. Stringing a story out into a stream of small facts can obscure the overall picture, and a popular policy such as tax cuts can be strung out to maximise good coverage. Bad news can be released all at once at a time distant from an election. Tiffen describes mini-budgets as an excellent example of this, done as soon as possible following an election, and including allegations that the previous government mismanaged the economy in order to draw media attention away from any unpopular measures.

Information also needs to be targeted specifically to each medium. Margaret Thatcher developed her doorway chats outside Number 10 specifically for the TV medium, but this format is not good for capturing the lead in the press. Hijacking reporters is another means of orchestrating publicity. Once reporters are assigned to cover an event, they are obliged to produce something. Accompanying it with something for free is encouraged. The Labour Government organised numerous policy launches with this concept in mind. An element of cooperation is also encouraged through briefings, and occasionally, patronage. Both Roger Douglas and Mike Moore were excellent at using these types of approaches in order to gain publicity.

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16 See for example, Wilson (1989), p.75; also Palmer, interview.
The campaign which advertised the introduction of a goods and services tax was an example of an extremely well organised publicity campaign in which the Government took full advantage of the free publicity the media can provide, in tandem with the paid campaign. A special unit outside both Treasury and Parliament was set up to organise and consult all relevant pressure groups and business organisations. Television, newspaper and radio journalists were all thoroughly briefed, and the Government were able to use them to advertise the new policy as a supplement to their own advertising campaign.

John Goulter recalled a couple of incidents indicative of how a government can hide unwelcome information. First, an economic report by the Ministry of Works and Development produced in 1986 was highly critical of the effects of the Government’s economic policies, citing a run-down of various sectors of the economy as evidence of failure. The Government, according to Goulter, ‘hated’ this report, and despite repeated calls to release it, sat on it. It was finally released on Christmas Eve afternoon, when everyone was winding down for the break, and obviously, there were no newspapers the following day. The second instance of the fourth Labour Government hiding unwelcome information Goulter recalled was a committee report which was highly critical of proposed tax reforms. Bevan Burgess released the report at about one o’clock, the day of the budget, as journalists were going into the traditional pre-budget lock-up. Nothing could be done about the story at the time, and obviously it had been calculated that budget coverage would obscure the story for long enough so that it would no longer be newsworthy.

. . . & Covert Manoeuvres

Covert manoeuvres are most often leaks of information where the source remains concealed. They are useful for providing an element of drama to a story. They can also be very damaging to a government. They are difficult to document as the media will sometimes report an event as leaked when in fact the information has been provided quite freely. Up until 1987, non-attributable information was used by press secretaries in order to fill in the gallery on background information and explain economic reforms. According to Goulter, it was ‘an enormous help to journalists, enabling them to look as if they knew more, and to understand background.’ It doubtless also allowed the Government to provide the right sort of slant to the background they were giving, lessening the chance journalists may get other background to economic and social reforms, which may have been less supportive of their policies. Covert manoeuvres were used in a more destructive way in the second term of the Labour Government. As mentioned earlier, the Douglas-Lange feud was continually fuelled by both support staff and politicians feeding the press gallery non-attributable gossip, remarks and comments. This incident is reflective of the sort of power the modern press secretary has to

17 Rodney Tiffen in *News and Power* (1989, Chapters 4 and 5) outlines these methods in more detail and provides some interesting and amusing examples from Australian Federal and State politics.
undermine others, and was not uncommon in the fourth Labour Government.

There were some more underhand measures adopted by the fourth Labour Government in order to control information more closely. Suppressing information critical of government fits this category. In June 1987 New Zealand Journalist reported the closure of the MAF information service Medialink.

‘Public Service Association’s Wellington secretary, Francis Wevers, said he had a strong suspicion Medialink was down the road because its journalists were “too honest.” It was regarded as having occasionally carried news articles which seemed contrary to Ministry interests or Government policy’ (NZ Journalist, June 1987, p.6).

Making information difficult to access also seems to have been a ploy adopted by the fourth Labour Government. In 1986 the New Zealand Herald reported it had asked for information, as it had done in the past, from the Prime Minister’s Office regarding the cost of Ministerial travel abroad. Having supplied the information, which was subsequently published, the department rendered an account for $135.

In 1987, NZ Journalist reported that politicians and parliamentary staff were able to access New Zealand Press Association stories through a computer terminal in the Prime Minister’s Department. This would give the politicians a significant advantage because it gave them time to undermine and neutralise stories before they went to print, put pressure on journalists and newspapers, and allowed them to cover their tracks (NZ Journalist, March 1987, pp.1-2).

Conclusion

The fourth Labour Government’s use of more professional techniques to control information dispersal represented an important step in the evolution of modern government. Not everyone welcomed this increasing dependence on media assistants. Sir Robert Muldoon summed up the attitude of his Government towards the use of such intermediaries during 1975-1984 thus,

My own personal view is that there is no substitute finally for Ministers of the Crown themselves being sufficiently knowledgeable in the affairs of their departments to front up directly to the news media without the necessity for an intermediary. I have always found those Ministers who do that... have had no difficulty in getting their ideas and explanations across to the public.  

That is not to say that press secretaries and press statements were unimportant before 1984. They were used and at times came in for criticism from members of the press gallery. However from 1984 onwards the role and numbers of press secretaries has grown reflecting the increasing importance of the communications industry to modern governments.

It is interesting to note that Muldoon’s own success as a political leader was said to be due to his ability to master: the use of television – to look straight down the lens of the camera and talk directly to the viewing public. He was the first politician to really master the art of using

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18 Correspondence.
19 Gregory, 1985, p.94.
television in New Zealand. However that is largely where the similarity ends between Muldoon’s Administrations and the fourth Labour Government. Where as Muldoon attempted to control what was published or broadcast by intimidating the gallery, the newspapers or television, the fourth Labour Government was more surreptitious. Jesson claims that Labour’s slickness was one of its fundamental faults.

Labour gathered around it clever, self-serving people. They were given positions of influence. They were awarded lucrative media consultancies. They manipulated the media. Some of them were in the media. Nothing on this scale had occurred before in New Zealand, and the effect was to fundamentally change the nature of our political system (Jesson, 1990b, p.178).

It is true, the fourth Labour Government befriended the gallery through their press secretaries, and through their approachability. They spent vast sums of money selling, not just their policies, but their Government as well (see Chapter 4). It was a strategy which succeeded in the first term, aided by reminders of how the country had been ruled under Sir Robert Muldoon. The best professional management of the media could not, however, disguise the underlying problems of disunity and weak leadership, nor could it mask growing dissatisfaction with growing unemployment and stagnant economic growth.

The relationship between the Government and the gallery is much more complicated than it would appear. There were in fact a number of factors which affected the gallery’s treatment of the Government. From reviewing Labour’s new management strategies, the following chapter moves on to look at the targets of those strategies: the press gallery, and state publicity campaigns.
CHAPTER 4

Publicity Strategies

The methods the ministers relied on to convey their policies involved a skilful blending of the paid and unpaid media. Reliance was placed upon television to advertise new policies such as the introduction of the goods and services tax. Journalists were also provided with accessible information to explain complex policies. This enabled them to write or speak about what was happening with some authority. If they needed further assistance in explaining policies there appeared to be plenty of financial specialists prepared to talk in support of them. This period may, with hindsight, be seen as one of the more stylish revolutions. There was confidence and panache about the presentation of economic policy. I sometimes wonder if the media was more captivated by the form than the content. One could hardly blame them if they were, because the performance was truly amazing... (Wilson, 1989, pp.127-8).

For a government, there are always two aspects to its publicity strategies – the paid media (advertisements and state publicity campaigns) and the unpaid media (the news media). Of the two, the unpaid publicity is normally going to be far more valuable, because, as discussed in the previous chapter, it has far more credibility, it can reach more people and of course it is relatively speaking, free. The previous chapter looked at the news management strategies Labour were putting in place in order to gain better control of their publicity. This chapter follows on from that by looking at the the two types of publicity the fourth Labour Government used – the paid and the unpaid. It also picks up on the issues of Chapter 2, the impact of deregulation and concentration of ownership on the ability of the media to fulfil its duty as public watchdog. The press gallery are central to political reporting in New Zealand, so the focus of the section on unpaid publicity focuses on this aspect of journalism, their structure, and relationship with the fourth Labour Government. It is also the intention here to explore some of the criticisms that have been directed at members of the gallery – that they are lazy, incompetent, and were bought out and manipulated by the fourth Labour Government. Finally, the question of how successful were Labour’s news management strategies will be reviewed.

The second aspect of publicity is paid publicity, the taxpayer-funded state publicity campaigns. These received increasing prominence under the Labour. Criticisms, particularly allegations of
bias and propaganda were levelled at some campaigns and concerns raised regarding the tremendous expense of this type of publicity. The role of this type of campaign in modern society is examined. the abuse that the system of paid publicity in New Zealand is open to and the consequences of that abuse.

The Press Gallery and Political Reporting

The relationship between the gallery and a government are central to a government’s publicity strategy. The gallery are the conduit for the first line of publicity – the unpaid publicity strategy. They are centrally placed to record their version of events as they occur in national politics. Under Muldoon the relationship had often been stormy, and it was characterised by Muldoon’s belief that the gallery journalists be kept at arms length, not befriended. Under Labour that relationship changed. The gallery were befriended and welcomed. For its part, the gallery welcomed the apparent openness of the fourth Labour Government, and with it the thrust of Rogernomics. The relationship between the fourth Labour Government and the press gallery becomes more significant given the allegations that have been raised that Labour cultivated journalists, and that the mainstream media which the press gallery represent reported events largely in favour of the government, despite the fact that New Zealand was undergoing the most radical reforms to its social and economic system for fifty years.

Any successful media management policy will include attempts to shape and influence the type of coverage a government will receive through the media. The means of doing this for the Labour Government was through the new system of press secretaries and accompanying news management strategies as discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter will examine the actual impact the professionalism of news management had on the press gallery and hence mainstream media coverage of the fourth Labour Government. It is important here not to oversimplify the relationship between the Labour Government and the press gallery. For the most part, they were not bought out by the Labour Government, and this is reflected in the way the gallery did turn and attack the Government when the split in ideology became apparent in 1988. However, Morgan’s (1991) conclusion that British governments have a range of tools available to them which may be used to restrict parliamentary and popular access to information and to propagate a government line to the mass media and the public, during times where there is no strong controversy, is equally applicable to the New Zealand context (p.538). The nature of the press gallery and their relationship with the fourth Labour Government is central to that ability.

The changing structure of the Press Gallery

The New Zealand press gallery exists almost as a secret society. There is no accurate record of when the press gallery came into existence in New Zealand although what is believed to be
one of the first press cards, issued in 1870, is framed in the gallery (Garnier, 1978, p.149).
Very little work has been published in this country which reviews the work of the gallery, its
membership, or how it operates within Parliament. There has been endless debate on the
public influence of the mass media, with varying conclusions. However, as Garnier remarks,
‘A large proportion of New Zealand’s political news originates from the press gallery,
including almost all the commentary (with the exception of editorials and letters to
newspapers)’ (p.149). With very few people having alternative sources of reliable
information about events in central government, the press gallery as a group must have an
impact on what people think about politics, because it is they who provide the information
about central government.

All gallery matters are apparently, strictly confidential, a rule which Tom Scott for one, finds
perplexing and disturbing. ‘On the one hand journalists are forever calling for a more open
society, an end to secrecy and fuller access to information, and on the other we run an
organisation more secret that [sic] a papal election’ (Scott, 1985, p.75). Rules which deal
with the Parliamentary press gallery are approved by the Speaker of the House. The last set of
rules were approved in September 1984 by the Speaker, Sir Basil Arthur. They deal with
matters such as accreditation, journalistic privileges, seating arrangements, election of
executive officers and so forth. The House’s Standing Orders also deal with the press gallery,
albeit very briefly. They provide for the exclusion of any member of the press gallery who
breaches the Standing Orders of the House (S.O. 410).

There are about fifty members of the gallery who work there on a full-time basis. A further
forty have associate membership, meaning they have demonstrated a need for frequent access
to Parliament. The press gallery elect officials who deal with accommodation issues, and any
discipline problems which may arise. There is a Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson, and a
Treasurer. The gallery levies its members sixty dollars a year to pay administrative expenses,
and to throw an apparently ‘boisterous’ party for each Caucus.¹ That sort of relationship
between politicians and the media is increasingly causing concern. The fact that Prime
Minister Jim Bolger and Opposition leader Mike Moore were both guests at the wedding of
TVNZ’s prime-time current affairs presenter, Paul Holmes, is indicative of a problem that has
been around as long as the gallery itself, but achieved increasing prominence under the fourth
Labour Government:

New Zealand is such a county council, such a small country that personalities and who you know
become sort of important where people build up around them a media machine to promote
themselves, but they’re able to do that because of the sort of mateship that’s part of New Zealand.
I think that’s bad. The distance between politicians and the media should be greater than it is. I
mean I have got tons of friends in the media but I think that a formalised distance is needed. Now
we don’t have that, we don’t have that in any country that I know of, but we certainly don’t have
it in New Zealand and as a result some ministers tend to have greater coverage than others

The real problem with that sort of mateship between politicians and journalists is that it seldom comes into the open to the extent it did at the Holmes wedding. Allison (1990) notes an incident on the 1990 campaign trail where TVNZ’s Richard Harman, RNZ’s Barry Soper, and Jim Bolger settle in for a night with a bottle of whiskey (p.121). These sort of incidents most often occur out of the public eye and it would be quite naïve to assume that this sort of socialising has no impact on journalistic independence. However because of the small, close-knit nature of central politics in Wellington, and the lack of a strong ethical code on the separation of politicians and journalists, it also seems somewhat inevitable.

Problems exist not only between the gallery and politicians, but within the gallery itself. The competitive nature of journalism has always caused difficulties. It is very rare for there to be a consensus in the gallery on issues of concern. Delays for example in press conferences will benefit those with a later deadline, but penalise those with an earlier deadline. The inability of the gallery to agree on such issues gives them little power to bargain.

In the 1980s the gallery had suffered the effects of deregulation and concentration of ownership (discussed in Chapter 2), with newspapers cutting back staff and centralising resources. The rapid and quite dramatic reforms undertaken by the fourth Labour Government often could not be researched in detail by gallery journalists because of the enormity of their workloads, and the lack of resources available to them.

We’re a small society, the Herald is the only one which really mounts an enormous effort, in the press gallery. They’ve put a lot of money in there, most of the other agencies and so on are quite small. Collectively it’s a big gallery, because you’ve got TV1, TV2, and TV3, Radio NZ, private radio stations, the Herald’s outfit, the SOPAC agency – the South Pacific news agency – and a raft of others, so collectively they’re quite large, but some of the units are quite small, within it. . . [T]he deregulation has meant they’re far more cost conscious . . . you see if the level of public perception of political matters is not high why should you pander to them, if you’re from the electronic media. Why waste money? So they don’t. So you don’t have a big presence by private radio, say, or radio of any type I think. State radio is a little bigger. Then you go into the news media ownership side of things, that’s really quite alarming. The secondary newspapers are collapsing, the ownership is going into basically three big groups, and that closes off options for news reporting because they just use one agency. It’s cheaper, you can sort of understand them doing it, but you don’t get the different interpretations of the same situations (Rodger, interview).

A more recent development which, like deregulation, coincided with the fourth Labour Government has been caused by the phenomenal growth of public relations consultancy firms which began in the early 1980s. The growth of such organisations has effectively drained the media of its experienced reporters, and this affected the press gallery quite severely, particularly in the mid to late 1980s when public relations firms moved increasingly into working for public sector organisations – also, the politicians, both Government and Opposition, were recruiting journalists from the gallery as personal media advisers.

There is a growing trend in New Zealand journalism for a high number of ex-journalists to work for politicians and public relations firms. Often these days the inexperienced journalists are the
ones on the receiving end of the publicity and the experienced ones are sending it out. So in terms of numbers and seniority, some news media may fare badly in the battle between journalists and publicity staff over what the public gets to read, hear or see. It seems that as the number of journalists decreases the number of public relations consultants increases. In unstable economic times this puts even more pressure on journalists not to rock the boat that may one day employ them (Moore, 1992, p.87).

High turnover of gallery staff means reporters do not develop the necessary experience and knowledge to report on complex political issues, and poor economic reporting throughout much of Labour’s term is, at least in part, a consequence of this.\(^2\)

That changing structure, the effects of deregulation and concentration of ownership, and declining experience and resources is important when it is considered that as this decline was occurring in the gallery, the fourth Labour Government were building up their media structures and media management strategies.

**The Gallery and the fourth Labour Government**

The relationship between the press gallery and the Labour Government divides easily into the first and second term. The first from 1984 to 1987 saw an amicable relationship. The second following the 1987 election, marked a turning point for three inter-related reasons: it was the beginning of the second term when the vision of Rogernomics should have been reaching fruition; it was the year of the stock-market crash when it became apparent that Rogernomics did not have all the answers; and it was the year the Lange-Douglas feud began to come out into the open.

John Goulter, then Chief Political Reporter for the *Evening Post*, says the early relationship between the press gallery and the fourth Labour Government was really good. The reporters in the gallery gave the new Government ‘an easy ride’ in their first term. Goulter saw this as the result of a number of reasons. They came after nine years of the rather dictatorial Muldoon Administrations and represented a completely different approach. The press gallery saw them as a new, young, approachable cabinet doing dramatic and necessary things, not just in terms of economic policy, but also in foreign affairs, for example, the anti-nuclear stance. The Rainbow Warrior affair also provided an interesting distraction for journalists.\(^3\)

One of the first actions of the fourth Labour Government directly affecting the press gallery was to reverse the previous Government’s decision to charge the press gallery for the space they occupied in parliament buildings, no doubt a popular move with the gallery who had been highly critical of the idea they rent their space. Geoffrey Palmer remarked that the change was made for constitutional reasons. ‘I thought the recording of parliament is very important, it’s a

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\(^2\) Geoffrey Palmer both in his lecture and his interview noted the declining standard of reporting of economic issues, and in fact most policy areas. Leitch (1991a) is similarly disappointed by the standard of reporting in the mainstream media regarding fourth Labour Government restructuring.

\(^3\) Goulter, interview.
constitutional function. It ought to be encouraged. To charge people will certainly discourage it. I notice the present government has gone back to that.\textsuperscript{4} Regardless of the motivation for reversing the decision to charge the press gallery, it no doubt contributed to the warm welcome the press gallery offered the fourth Labour Government, and the easy ride which they got in their first term.

Initially Goulter says, Lange’s own relationship with the gallery through his press conferences was also very good. He was a good speaker, could entertain the gallery, make them laugh and defuse a tense situation very readily.\textsuperscript{5}

‘Open government’ was one of the catchphrases of the fourth Labour Government in its early days, and was certainly a focus in the early months, with the ‘opening the books’ and economic summit exercises. Labour continued to develop a proficiency for stage managing events in order to catch media attention, although the shine did begin to wear off open government. As early in the term as February 1986 the regular post-Caucus press conference was dropped unless Lange had a particular issue or line he wanted to push, and ‘partly closed the door on Labour’s much trumpeted open government policy’ (\textit{Otago Daily Times}, 22/02/86). The door closed further with the on-again off-again Prime Ministerial press conferences. Regular post-Cabinet press conferences were cancelled in 1987 and not held regularly again until January 1989. The cancellation, particularly of the Prime Minister’s press conferences reflected the tensions that were developing between Lange and the gallery, attempts by the news managers to rein-in Lange to prevent his sometimes offensive spontaneous outbursts, and the increasing control of public relations that was being given to the press secretaries and public relations staff employed by various ministers.\textsuperscript{6} Both moves broke with the tradition of successive prime ministers, with the post-Cabinet press conferences having been introduced by the first Labour Government.

In 1985 the Standing Orders Committee launched an attack on the standard of work in the press gallery. The Committee was highly critical of the standard of the work from the press gallery. ‘The Committee feels that at the present time the press gallery as a whole is content to coast along, giving a very much less than adequate report on the work of Parliament’ (Standing Orders Committee Report, 1985, 2.6.2). The Committee went on to note that it felt it had a duty to draw the attention of the press ‘to what it sees as an inadequate performance of the functions for which Parliament makes facilities and privileges available’, particularly in terms of the lack of reporting of select committee proceedings (2.6.3). The Committee felt

\textsuperscript{4} Palmer, interview.
\textsuperscript{5} Goulter, interview.
\textsuperscript{6} Both Stan Rodger and John Goulter mentioned during their respective interviews, attempts to ‘rein-in’ Prime Minister Lange. See also Denemark (1991, p.270).
there was too much attention paid to the reporting of dramatic incidents within the house, and little attention paid to the substance of debates. There was also disappointment expressed with the lack of understanding amongst journalists of the rules of parliamentary privilege, a subject of a 1982 Privileges Committee report.

It would seem these are common criticisms of any media. In a 1971 lecture, the chief press secretary to the then British Prime Minister saw the most common criticisms of the British media as being the tendency to trivialise public affairs, to personalise serious issues, and sensationalise (Maitland, 1971, p.8). In defence of the gallery, it is simple to see why reporting standards may have declined. Television, arguably the most important provider of information, picks out items of news which will have the necessary elements of a good TV news item; that is, those items which are dramatic, can be discussed briefly and simply, and fit the television news format. With declining competition between newspapers and fewer journalists, the competition has shifted to a different level, with newspapers either competing with the type of information provided by broadcasters, or by picking up and carrying through items initially covered by television. Additionally, there has been a realisation that political news is not widely read, and as a consequence there has been a shift of limited resources to more popular areas of reporting. Nevertheless, criticism of the gallery continues. Geoffrey Palmer has described them as ‘having an absence of focus, a lack of professional standards, and a fair degree of incompetence’, claiming they make better use of their privilege to use the bar than their privilege to use the library.\(^7\) The tensions between the Government and the gallery reflect the complex nature of the relationship between the two, and the response of the fourth Labour Government reflects very much the fact they could not always have the degree of control they may have liked over the media, and what they would report.

Following the 1987 election the relationship between the gallery and the government really began to change. Lange had become ‘grumpy, tired and aloof’, due largely to the developing feud between himself and Finance Minister Roger Douglas. He had ‘lost his style and his special relationship with the gallery’.\(^8\) Some commentators continue to point to the ongoing positive coverage of government policies, in spite of the very apparent split in the ranks of the cabinet, and growing public disillusionment with the direction of Government economic and social policy.

For most of the last six years, the media has been heavily biased in its treatment of politics, in favour of the government, not against it. In the early years of Rogernomics most journalists were ecstatic about the government. As things have fallen apart since 1987 the tone has become more apologetic. It is only this year, with the government facing an ignominious defeat, that the tone has become overwhelmingly negative (Jesson, 1990a, p.142).

\(^7\) Palmer, interview.

\(^8\) Goulter, interview.
In the first term, then, the media management strategies of the fourth Labour Government seemed to prove effective. The new style of press secretary was popular with the gallery reporters, as was the enthusiasm and approachability of the new ministers. A further factor worth noting is that the people who work in the press gallery, and journalism generally are the type of people who the economic policies of the fourth Labour Government were likely to benefit. As Morrison and Tremewan note, the world of news is largely dominated by white males with status in the establishment (1992, p.119). In addition to Labour’s overall approach, there were certain ministers within the cabinet who had closer links with certain journalists within the gallery and took advantage of those links in order to get their views circulated.

The closeness of the relationship between the gallery and some Labour ministers became at some stages closer than others in the Labour Government may have liked.

There are some journalists who are unthinking supporters of the free market line, and become mouth pieces for the government. It happened with us... And indeed, it got to the point where one would read their comments in order to know what Roger Douglas was going to bring to cabinet in the next week or two (Cullen, interview).

During research undertaken for this thesis, it became apparent that this type of manipulation of the press gallery was limited to certain individuals within the cabinet taking advantage of the weaknesses (apparent inability to act together, often overworked, declining resources, increasing workload) of the gallery system in order to further their own personal ambitions or agendas.

As the average age of parliamentarians has fallen, as their energy levels would therefore be greater, they have devoted far, far more time to their own personal ambitions and to their own images. You see, I don’t want to denigrate ambition too much, because the whole political process is actually based on competition, competition between teams and within teams, therefore, you've got to have people who strive, the burning desire to move up. But if that outweighs their judgement or the application they should be applying to the issues, in other words, their own personal agenda becomes greater than the national agenda, it's damaging. Now I've seen quite a number of examples of people who I thought devoted far too much time to their own political aspirations (Rodger, interview).

Labour's system of news management worked well for them while there was no other crisis or negative factors working to detract from what they were telling the gallery. It is easier, given the workload of the gallery and the effects deregulation has had on resources for a government, when things are going well to get its story told the way it would like it to be heard.

(T)here is a very strong herd instinct amongst the gallery. So they tend to move together, they may suddenly move very quickly in another direction, and it's quite unpredictable on occasions, not necessarily related to a great deal of objective reality. Suddenly the mood will shift for some reason, and neither the Government, or opposition can work out why that is, but it happens. But in general terms if things are going well, you get away with some things, they sort of slip into the background, whereas troubles tend to build upon themselves and so the image created is the government is in difficulty and it gets quite hard to get out of that. You have to look at the whole media management processes as this Government obviously did at the beginning of this [1992] year (Cullen, interview).
In the face of the circumstances facing Labour in 1988, with the philosophical divide between Finance Minister Roger Douglas and Prime Minister David Lange coming out into the open, it became impossible for the Labour Government to continue its successful operation of the ‘good news’ machine. It reflected the fact that a government cannot maintain successful news management *ad infinitum*, however good its news management strategy may be. It also reflected a central flaw of Labour’s news management strategy – that in allowing individual ministers to build up their public relations functions and encouraging a system where every minister’s staff becomes loyal to him or her, when these disagreements do occur, they become very public and very embarrassing. Goulter claimed the Lange-Douglas differences were handled very badly by the individual offices and this helped blow the whole story up.9

One senior political reporter points to the loss of Ross Vintiner from Lange’s Office as one of the reasons the whole Douglas-Lange affair was handled so badly. Mervyn Cull, a former editorial writer for the *Herald*, took the position of chief press secretary in his place. He was apparently, ‘a nice old chap’, but was totally out of his depth, and became a source of mockery for the gallery. That reporter claimed this was disastrous for Lange. In 1988, he was replaced by Viviene Smith. She was seen as ‘fiercely personally devoted to Lange’, but not very good at explaining Lange’s position to the media. Lange himself was also seen to handle the whole thing very badly. He was unable to publicly discredit his Finance Minister, and began to spend less and less time holding press conferences – apparently holding less than any previous Prime Minister.10 Burgess apparently was ‘awfully nasty’ during the feud, but both sides ‘fought dirty’ by spreading non-attributable gossip and rumours through the gallery. The whole affair became a field day for the press gallery, particularly with the non-attributable remarks and off the record chats.11

The media coverage of the feud between Lange and Douglas would appear to be one of the few exceptions to the uncritical nature of the mainstream media coverage of the Labour Government, particularly if the analyses of Leitch (1991a), Jesson (1990a), and Hubbard (quoted in Leitch, 1991a), are to be accepted. The second notable exception would have to be the 1990 *Frontline* story ‘For the Public Good’, which alleged that the Government’s policies were for sale to wealthy business people. As noted in Chapter 2, the Labour Government, and Geoffrey Palmer in particular responded by attacking TVNZ with writs for defamation, and as Jesson (1992) notes, that incident has made it virtually impossible for a programme of that sort to be made again in this country (p.4).

John Goulter felt Geoffrey Palmer never really enjoyed good relations with the gallery

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9 Goulter, interview.
10 Goulter claimed Keith Holyoake used to hold two press conferences a day. Sir Robert Muldoon held less, but used to make ‘state of the nation’ addresses on television (interview).
11 The journalist I spoke to about the Lange/Douglas feud wished to remain anonymous.
journalists. Palmer has commented that he viewed journalists with a fair amount of disdain and his view of the gallery journalists was reflected in his treatment of them. Goulter claimed that Palmer really suffered as he did not understand the news and did not relate well to the gallery journalists. He could be 'nasty' at times, and according to Goulter had misled the gallery on occasions, giving them little reason to have faith in, or trust him. The gallery themselves claim some of the credit for Palmer's downfall, which could in part, explain his contempt for the media. Allison, for example claims that,

[1] In tandem with the opinion polls, the press can actually initiate change: the way the media reported the growing dissatisfaction with Labour's leadership, for example, played a significant part in Mike Moore's becoming our third Prime Minister in 13 months (Allison, 1990, p.118).

Journalists interviewed during this research defended themselves against the charges that they had failed to provide a sufficient critique of the policies of the fourth Labour Government. John Goulter claimed that in the early 1980s there was a widespread consensus within the media and the wider public that what was happening was really necessary, that the economic reforms were long overdue. Until 1987, the economy was booming and consequently, journalists saw little reason to question the wisdom of the Government's policies. He felt perhaps there was a lot of naïve euphoria about how exciting the changes were, and with so many rapid and far-reaching changes, it was impossible for journalists to keep up. He agreed there was a lack of research on the part of gallery journalists and attributed this to the huge workload gallery journalists face – they work very long days, and with the news media cutting back on resources, their workload is continually increasing, given both the rationalisation by big media companies of staff and resources due to both the concentration of ownership which was occurring and the recession. Politicians themselves agree that some of those in the gallery were unthinking supporters of the free market line, which resulted in a lack of solid critical analyses of Labour's policies. It would seem fair comment that Labour's news management strategies served them well, at least in their first term. This was supplemented by the close connection between some cabinet ministers, their public relations staff and members of the gallery. The drain of resources, and disappearance of experienced journalists from the gallery as a direct effect of the concentration of ownership and deregulation has also played a significant role in limiting the diversity of points of view available to the public through the mainstream media. Comments from Bruce Jesson back up this claim.

The fault for this state of affairs rests partly with biased and lethargic journalists; partly with a cabinet that manipulates the media and cultivates obsequious journalists but mainly with the appalling situation in which New Zealand journalists work (Jesson, 1990a, p.142).

Government strategies were not therefore, the only reason for the ability of the fourth Labour Government to gain favourable economic coverage. The changing structure of the gallery was very much in its favour, and uncritical coverage may not have been so commonplace had it not

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12 Goulter, interview.
been for these unusual circumstances.

State Publicity Campaigns

Modern taxpayer funded state publicity campaigns like those conducted by the fourth Labour Government raise a number of issues. In a democracy it is the duty of the government to provide information about what they are doing. They also feel a social responsibility to provide social service messages. Advertising has long been used to ask consumers to save energy, to enlist, to inform about emergency services and advise about legislative changes. In a time of rapid economic and social reform, such as occurred between 1984 and 1990, it is not surprising the fourth Labour Government channeled extra resources into campaigns to ensure people were aware of these changes and what they would mean for them. In the 1930s Savage had commandeered radio to get his message across. Muldoon had commandeered television and radio in order to make state of the nation addresses. But broadcasting personnel were becoming increasingly antagonistic towards this particular use of the mediums. In the mid-to-late 1980s, an attempt to control the media in a similar way would have been both unacceptable and unpopular; the alternative was to better control the information being disseminated through the media to the public. As an additional measure to the press officers brought in from the private sector interpreting the news for the press gallery, the fourth Labour Government used the added measure of taxpayer funded state publicity campaigns to ‘inform’ the public about details of the changes occurring in a huge range of fields such as education, tax reform, export incentives, ACCESS schemes, law and order, local government reform and privatisation of SOEs. Many of these campaigns were conducted through television and radio advertising, with pamphlet and letter drops for some of the lower profile campaigns.

In a democratic society, it is imperative that governments make available to the public, information about what they are doing. That information should be there to inform the public, not to persuade it about the propriety of a government’s activities – in a democracy, the public should be given credit for being able to determine the merits of government policy for themselves. A number of the state publicity campaigns conducted under Labour raised concerns about the intentions behind them: that is, some of the campaigns funded by the taxpayer were not designed simply to inform, but to push a party line and/or promote Government propaganda. The difficulty which arises then, is for the government of the day to strike the balance between information and persuasion. Under Labour there were key campaigns which did not achieve this. Thirteen campaigns, advertisements and/or publicity initiatives were the subject of complaints to the Auditor-General, the main reasons being they
were a waste of money or amounted to political advertisements.13 This section will discuss the rise of taxpayer funded advertising campaigns, and some of the accompanying concerns of such campaigns.

In line with the ongoing communications revolution, governments internationally have picked up on the trend to advertise their services, products and impending legislative changes. Yarwood and Enis (1984) noted that whilst accurate figures for government advertising were extremely difficult to collate, in 1978 the American Government ranked twenty-fifth in terms of paid advertising dollars spent, falling just behind corporate giants like Coca-Cola and McDonalds and just ahead of J. C. Penny and Colgate-Palmolive (p.69). White (1989) in Australia notes that total Commonwealth advertising spending in Australia, through the AGAS rose from $6.5 million in 1970-71, to $23.2 million in 1980-81; and television advertisements as a proportion of that rose from twelve per cent to forty per cent of the total (p.33).

In New Zealand paid government advertising has, in the last eight years, gained increasing prominence, particularly given the revelation that government departments under the fourth Labour Government spent $114.8 million dollars on advertising, public relations and consultancy work between April 1987 and June 1990 (Otago Daily Times, 26/6/90). Following the Tamaki by-election in 1992, Jim Bolger made the very telling remark that the National Government was unpopular because people did not understand its policies: the solution to this was to put increased resources into informing (presumably this meant advertising and publicity) what the Government was doing, and why. This presumably meant that the National Government needed to be 'sold' more effectively to the New Zealand public. This decision was reached, in spite of the fact that in the previous year the National Government had been severely criticised for spending $2.1 million on production and publicity for its largely unpopular 1991 budget (Moore, 1992, p.87). What this suggested was that the Government is ignoring the critical messages being communicated to it by the public through means such as lobby groups, opinion polls, letters to the editor, radio talkback, commissions/committees of investigation, letters to their MPs and protests such as those against the Employment Contracts Bill. Instead the Government was forging ahead regardless in the belief that if only people understood why the Government was following its present course, they would see the necessity and be less critical. Mulgan has very cynically summarised that attitude towards the public.

>Voters are a mass audience of consumers swayed by images and impressions, not facts and arguments. They are incapable of understanding the realities of government and are fit only to be wooed by public relations experts. The business of government is therefore to stand firm against any expression of contrary opinion from the community. Such opinion will inevitably be either biased or ill-informed and must be

13 Correspondence with Audit Office.
Mulgan points out the origins of this theory in New Zealand stem from the ideology of Rogernomics. Theorists who follow this type of ideology believe that governments must not allow their decisions to be affected by 'political' considerations such as public opinion. Ignoring public opinion and declining popularity equates however with losing elections. In an attempt to win back voters governments rely on image-makers to promote what they are doing, and sell government to the people.

National has recognised that in a time of economic recession, the public do resent seeing amounts like that spent on the budget or the $500 000 per year the National Government was spending simply to monitor the output of the news media (Maharey, 1992, p.94). As a consequence of this recognition, the Bolger Government continued its publicity campaigns, but attempted to conceal the costs. As from mid-1992 the Government’s renewed efforts at public relations are intended to be largely conducted from a communications unit established within the Prime Minister’s Department, thus putting an end to the public outcry that occured whenever the Government contracted out its advertising campaigns to private public relations firms (Dominion, 18/02/92).

While the self-promotion policies of the Bolger Government came in for criticism, the use of such campaigns were part of the legacy of the fourth Labour Government. The interpretation of Government self-promotion policies by Mulgan appears a very cynical one, but it is vindicated by Geoffrey Palmer’s remarks on the ability of the public to understand what is happening in national politics.

[The only way you can communicate anything to people in a modern democracy is through television. You can’t do it any other way . . . if you’ve got something to communicate you’ve got to get it across to them and to do that the message has to be very simple. As a matter of fact one of the major problems facing us at the moment with this electoral change which is being put to a referendum is that the thing is so complex it will never be capable of being done on a television ad and so the result will be that probably nothing will happen because people will never understand it. Most people are not educated, most people don’t pay any attention to what is going on in the political system, and even if you get to university, it’s difficult to understand. You can’t get the material and the result is that people’s understanding of what is really going on is extraordinarily limited (Interview).]

To return to the Labour Government then, they picked up on an international trend to advertise their activities through taxpayer funded state publicity campaigns, but in doing so introduced a series of issues for debate regarding the role of such commercials in modern democracy. In the first term, the highest profile campaign was that for the impending Goods and Services Tax, costing more than $8 million (New Zealand Sunday Times, 21/09/86). The
advertisements attracted criticism, regarding their cost, and because it was felt by some that they were purely political propaganda. One in particular depicting 'a bevy of bouncing babies', especially came in for criticism (New Zealand Sunday Times, 21/09/86). Although it was never the subject of a complaint to the Auditor-General, the campaign raised the problem that there were no guidelines regarding when, what and how a government in this country should be able to advertise. The only controls which exist were and are the advertising code of ethics, drawn up by the Advertising Standards Authority, and the availability of funds appropriated by parliament. The advertising code of ethics states advertisements must not be misleading or deceptive, and must be prepared with a sense of social responsibility (see Appendix 2). The advertising code of ethics is broadly written, and was not drawn up with political propaganda in mind, a factor which was noted by critics of the GST commercial when, in response to complaints about the wording of the commercials, Lange rested his defence of them on their acceptance by the Broadcasting Commission (New Zealand Sunday Times, 21/09/86).

From early 1987 to 1990, a steady stream of complaints regarding the Labour Government’s campaigns and initiatives came into the office of the Controller and Auditor-General. Campaigns and publicity initiatives complained of included:

- The shape of the future – A statement by the Prime Minister, Rt Hon David Lange, undated, but issued in early-1987.
- The Rub Out Crime television commercials first screened in May 1987 as a part of the Community Support Programme.
- Newspaper advertisements and television commercials relating to changes in the personal taxation regime, appearing in September 1988.
- Pamphlet summarising the Economic Statement to the House of Representatives by the Minister of Finance on 21 March 1989.
- Advertisements by the Department of Health relating to the provisions of the Smoke-Free Environments Bill, May 1990.
- An Important Message To All New Zealanders – Towards Full Employment 1995, a letter from the Prime Minister to every household, June 1990.
- Advertisements, placed by the New Zealand Forestry Corporation, “explaining” the sale of
forestry assets, July/August 1990.
- Pamphlet on *The Growth Agreement* issued by the Prime Minister, October 1990.

(Source; All information provided by Audit Office).

Alan Spencer, Director of the Audit Office, summarised the nature of the criticisms as commonly being that the expense was an improper use of public funds because the publicity:

- Promoted the Government as a political entity.
- Amounted to party politicking.
- Was a waste of money.
- Was "propaganda".

One of the series of advertisements, dubbed 'Mrs Mop', depicted the benefits of the tax cuts to a woman cleaner and her family. It was suspended following discussions between the Broadcasting Corporation and the advertising agency DDB Needham, pending changes in the script designed to make clear the circumstances of the entitlements. The general manager of the advertising agency said the alteration had no connection with the Auditor-General’s report, and was done as a gesture of goodwill (*Otago Daily Times*, 05/10/88).

The Auditor-General (1983-1992), Mr Brian Tyler, was heavily criticised for his entry into this debate, particularly following his report on the 1988 campaign to advertise changes in the personal taxation regime. In 1988, the Auditor-General released a report which stated the advertisements ‘appear designed to enhance the reputation of the Government rather than to inform those affected about, and to explain, the taxation change’ (*Evening Post*, 1/10/88). Associate Minister of Finance, Peter Neilson claimed the reports were "hasty, ill-considered and absurd" and publicly contemplated suing Mr Tyler for what he considered a 'smear' on the Government (*Otago Daily Times*, 5/10/88, and Radio New Zealand 6:00pm News, 04/10/88). David Lange joined the attack, rebuking the Auditor-General for his criticism, claiming he ‘has to be more than a media commentator’, and that he is an accountant, not a scriptwriter (*National Business Review*, 05/10/88). Mr Palmer at the time expressed confidence in the office, (Radio New Zealand 6:00pm News, 04/10/88), but seems to have reconsidered his attitude, stating in 1991:

> I think the competence of the Auditor General is somewhat dubious in these matters [determining the propriety of state publicity campaigns]. He had a rather extended view of his own constitutional role, which it seemed to me was overblown. His basic job was to see that the money was spent on the purpose for which it was appropriated, something that he isn’t actually very good at (Interview).
Earlier, in 1987, a memo showed the state publicity campaigns were being questioned, even by close party supporters. The campaigns under scrutiny this time were the ACCESS and the Rub Out Crime advertisements, being shown prior to the 1987 election. It was suggested at the time that these advertisements had succeeded in defusing two key issues of the 1987 election as far as floating voters were concerned, and in terms of the Rub Out Crime advertisements, was tackling an area of traditional strength for the National Party. Excerpts from the memo from Simon Walker a public relations man, and someone with close contacts in the Labour Government, were reprinted by the National Party Research Unit, and stated,

These taxpayer-funded campaigns have astonished even supporters of Government-citizen communications initiatives, including myself. The Auditor-General may well condemn them, eventually. But by then the election will be well and truly over, with National’s two key issues largely out of the way (National Party Research Unit, 1987).

Eyewitness News’ political reporter interpreted the memo:

What he seems to be suggesting is that Labour has run these ads knowing that the Auditor-General will eventually declare that they were not legitimate pieces of information, as far as ads goes [sic], and I think that’s an interesting insight into the cynicism that appears to be in some parts of the Government’s multimillion dollar PR and advertising effort that it calls its election campaign (National Party Research Unit, 1987).

That concern from Labour Party supporters regarding the use of taxpayer funded campaigns is echoed in a letter of support to the Auditor-General from a long-time active Labour Party member (see Appendix 3).

In April 1989, the level of public concern about taxpayer-funded advertising campaigns, and the absence of any rules for Government advertising in New Zealand led the Auditor-General to produce the report Suggested Guidelines For a Convention on Publicly-Funded Government Advertising and Publicity. The guidelines were prepared in four parts, covering the types of information dispersal the guidelines were intended to cover, principles of government advertising, standards of advertisements, and issues of accountability. They were intended to provide a basic yardstick for judging whether particular items were an appropriate charge on the public purse, and were based on conventions and guidelines used in the UK and Australia, existing New Zealand television standards and rules as well as advertising standards of practice. In November 1989, the Government adopted its own Guidelines For Government Advertising, broadly similar to the Auditor-General’s, with the exception of the issues of accountability. The Government’s guidelines included the recommendations that there must be an identified and justifiable need for the information and that there must be designation of responsibility to one project manager. The Government’s guidelines do not include: specifying the objectives the project is being designed to meet, the authorisation of the project by a ‘recognisable authority’ and the necessity of documentation to be made available upon request under the Official Information Act, for every stage of project creation and
implementation. Finally there is no provision in the case of ‘significantly expensive’ or complex projects, for monitoring of the implementation to ensure it meets the agreed arrangements and post-implementation checks to be carried out to ensure the objectives have been meet. The Government’s guidelines do not pick up on the checks the Auditor-General recommended. But it must be remembered that even these are only guidelines and unless they are made legally binding, the only safeguards which exist in the system to control this type of activity are those relating to the availability of funds appropriated by parliament for the purpose.

Three issues arise from the use of taxpayer-funded state publicity campaigns. First, there is the presumption in biased or oversimplified campaigns that the public is not intelligent enough to understand a more ‘honest and straightforward’ explanation of Government policies. Second, the concern that the fourth Labour Government used campaigns and publicity material as propaganda, not to inform, but to raise their own political profile to gain electoral advantage, and to push their own political ideology. Finally there is a lack of clearly defined rules and safeguards against public monies being used inappropriately.

Unfortunately for the Labour Government, the area of state publicity campaigns is one the Opposition and the media did pick up on, and consequently there was considerable coverage of the costs of various campaign initiatives in the mainstream media. The failure during the second term of office of the various campaigns, which cost a total of $114.8 million, to win back public favour in the 1990 election, is evidence that publicity campaigns do not always have a great or the desired impact, although it should be recognised the crime and unemployment campaigns of 1987 were more successful. Growing media attention to the publicity initiatives, and the motivations for the initiatives has led to increasing scepticism from the public about such campaigns.

[T]he Mrs Mop campaign was counter productive, . . It was quite clear that it was counter productive politically, it didn’t get the message across. . . it was cynical manipulation of a set of facts to try and make out it could be made to work, and the populace didn’t like it and they were right (Rodger, interview).

The public may be able to recognise inappropriate advertising, but there are further problems in this area. Yarwood and Enis (1984) point out that contemporary advertising campaigns may well have contributed to the diminution of the credibility of modern governments today, particularly where the campaigns are misleading, use mediums for which the topics/issues are ill-suited (for example, using television to explain complex changes in the personal tax structures), or to use publicity programs for ‘products’ the public do not want (p.73).

The fourth Labour Government used taxpayer funded state publicity campaigns to push its own viewpoint, as is made clear by the Auditor-General’s report on the taxation changes in
1988. Further evidence comes from Geoffrey Palmer’s own remark ‘that often governments have to actually try and persuade people that what they are doing is good as well as what it is that they are doing’.14 Given this attitude that the Government must not only inform, but attempt to persuade, it is doubly important that there is an independent agency with responsibility for monitoring governmental use of public money for advertising. At the time of the Mrs Mop furor in particular, there was a lot of criticism of the right and competence of the Auditor-General to comment on the acceptability of government publicity. The Auditor-General responded to these criticisms as follows.

The right to make the judgements, we believe, is well founded in the Office’s responsibilities as the auditor of public money. The role of a legislative auditor is recognised internationally as extending beyond the mere auditing of numbers into questions of legality, probity and value for money. Thus, public sector auditing is not limited to an accounting-related function, as witnessed by the topics tackled in our major project reports and the fact that not all of our professional staff are accountants.

As to the competence to make the judgements, what are the necessary qualities? As one correspondent said to us – “no great expertise is required – only common sense and courage”. We have always consciously attempted to avoid making judgements of matters within the provinces of the commercial artist and the copywriter, unless the resulting material is incorrect or misleading or represents poor value for money. But the Auditor-General is no less qualified than anyone else, and probably more qualified than most, to stand in the place of an informed, objective observer to form an opinion on whether the advertising or publicity material is a proper charge on the public purse (correspondence).

In retrospect, former ministers (with the exception of Geoffrey Palmer) seem to agree on the need for more careful monitoring of taxpayer funded state publicity campaigns. Former cabinet Minister, Stan Rodger stated,

[There will always be an argument I suppose, between political beings and the Auditor-General or whoever as to how that guideline is operating. I definitely believe there has to be guidelines, and probably at the end of the day, what we need is some kind of independent panel which could come together quickly, look at the campaign, the government says we’re going to spend a couple of a million dollars on this, and they say ‘yes, sounds good, show us the nature of the ads you’re constructing, material you’ll be putting out’, give it the tick of approval, or the cross, yes indeed. ‘It’s too political, it’s not warranted in our collective judgement, go back and think again’ (Rodger, interview).]

Michael Cullen agreed a clearer system of control and monitoring was needed to ensure government expenditure on publicity campaigns was warranted.15 It would appear inevitable that modern governments seek to publicise their activities through taxpayer funded campaigns. Cullen felt it was inevitable governments better marketed and packaged themselves due to the facts that ‘they are competing in a very competitive marketplace for people’s attention... and also, the rate of change has speeded up so that things are changing more often and people need to know about some of those changes’.16 In the face of this growing trend by governments to advertise, it has become clear there needs to be guidelines put in place, agreed to by both major

14 Palmer, interview.
15 Cullen, interview.
16 Cullen, interview.
parties, which outline the role and propriety of such advertising. The establishment of an
independent panel, as mooted by Stan Rodger would provide an additional, valuable check on
this type of government expenditure. At the present time, advertisements and publicity
initiatives only come under scrutiny once they have been put to air, or printed. The National
Government seemed not to have learned from the experience of its predecessor, that misleading
campaigns like that conducted to publicise the Accident Compensation Corporation changes,
probably do more harm than good to a government’s credibility. Given that governments seem
doomed to repeat Labour’s mistakes, politicians need to move quickly to establish better
checks within the system to prevent these abuses re-occurring.

Conclusions
Labour’s news management strategies as discussed in Chapter 3 were aided by a number of
factors affecting the gallery, particularly the effects of concentration of ownership and
deregulation. On the effects of media concentration on gallery journalists, Radio New
Zealand’s political editor, Richard Griffen remarked,

[T]hey’ve got younger, that’s probably healthy, they’ve got leaner, they’ve got greener, but more
bloody minded, and perhaps more inclined to go for the jugular and miss the point.... You see
now really two big big brothers calling the tune in the gallery...

It is becoming more and more of a fact that a lot of the stuff out of the Herald and a lot of the
stuff out of the metropolitans percolates through to the provincials and, more than percolates, is
directed through to the provincials. It is becoming more of a closed shop than ever was the
case...17

The lack of diversity of points of view in the gallery, the lack of experience, the increasing
pressure of gallery journalist’s workload made it easier for the fourth Labour Government to
exploit the gallery, and get their policy messages across. Where the gallery did tend to criticise
the government, it was on a far more personal level – lack of resources, knowledge and time
precluded serious in-depth investigation of the fourth Labour Government’s policies. What the
gallery weaknesses highlight, is the need for informed and serious debate regarding the nature
of the media in New Zealand, and the need for the media to recognise the weaknesses of the
present system.

In terms of publicity, the gallery is a vital component. Comments from John Goulter regarding
the popularity of the fourth Labour Government with the gallery highlight the early success of
Labour’s news management strategies. However as Morgan notes, while governments can go
a long way towards controlling news flows and information being disseminated, the likelihood
of governments being able to maintain that control in the face of growing public
disillusionment is severely diminished (Morgan, 1991, p.538).

17 RNZ’s political editor Richard Griffen talking to David Lange on National Radio’s Nine to Noon show,
23/03/92.
Government news management strategies which simplify events, and emphasise image over issues and extravagant state publicity campaigns which are designed to promote the government, ultimately only serve to damage credibility and exacerbate the growing feeling of disillusionment and apathy felt by the public towards the political system and politicians.
CHAPTER 5

Elections and the fourth Labour Government
A triumph of style over content?

The Labour Government was able to take advantage of the vast resources it had at its disposal in order to better manage its publicity and media functions. There is much a government can achieve with the resources of the state available to it. However there is a point where it becomes unacceptable to continue using state funds. It may be, as it was with much of the opinion polling being conducted by Labour, that the Government prefers the results to remain confidential. Or it may be that the campaign/programme involves overt politicking and persuasion – hence it becomes necessary to use party and not state resources.

Election campaigns last more than six or so frenzied weeks. Ruth Dyson’s remark that the election campaign is a three year process, not a matter of three or four weeks, serves to highlight the point that elections do not merely consist of the brief campaigning period (Dyson, 1991, p.13). For the fourth Labour Government this meant an ongoing campaign to sell to the public the benefits of what had the potential (and actually proved) to be massively unpopular reforms. Together with that programme of state sponsored media management and publicity, operates the Party sponsored programme of more overt politicking. Having reviewed some of the techniques used by a government to sell its ideology to the public, this chapter turns to look at how the Labour Party used modern campaign techniques in an attempt to win re-election in 1987 and 1990. These were two very different elections for the Labour Government.

Elections are one of the most studied areas of politics, no doubt because they represent a microcosm of political activity. The trends in technology that have affected the day to day business of government are even more pronounced and identifiable in an election. Television again, has been the key to the changes in electioneering styles, but politicians are also increasingly taking advantage of modern marketing techniques in order to supplement the often blunderbus impact of television. Media specialists in the form of advertising agencies and consultants have become an increasingly important feature in the modern campaign, as has the
polling and targeting of marginal seats. As tacticians and committees create increasingly sophisticated campaigns, the question which may never be resolved is how effective can any party political election campaign really be? An unstable and unpopular government/opposition surely will not be saved by the best campaign money can buy. There can be a tendency to overstate the role of the election campaign in influencing voters. As Leitch remarks, ‘[I]f voters are not receptive to your message before the campaign starts then media advertisements are not going to convert them. . . wooing the undecided voter is really about wooing back the party unfaithful’ (Leitch, 1991b, p.13). While Leitch is able to conclude that around a quarter of the population in 1990 were at least potentially open to the media messages of the parties, the study was unable to answer questions regarding the degree of influence media consumption had in influencing voter choice, leaving the area open to speculation (Leitch 1991b, p.14). Vowles’ analysis of the 1987 election, however, showed Labour’s poll-guided emphasis on their anti-nuclear strategy was a crucial element in their electoral victory (Denemark, 1991, p.267). The answer is that in a close election, the campaign can make a difference. The introduction of sophisticated polling techniques in marginal electorates has enhanced the potential of a campaign, with careful monitoring of the concerns of targeted voters. While the new techniques adopted by political parties for election campaigns may have the potential to effect a proportion of the swinging voters, they must not be considered in isolation. Appearances throughout a term of office must count for at least as much as the photo-opportunities of the campaign trail. The emphasis in this thesis on the publicity machine developing within the fourth Labour Government thus places the Labour Party’s election campaign within an appropriate context.

Regardless of the arguments for and against the effect on voters of the techniques used in election campaigns, the political parties certainly seem to believe in the value of a well conducted campaign given an adequate level of funding and enthusiasm from the party faithful.

In New Zealand, the election of 1987 represented a real watershed in electioneering style for it was the first truly modern campaign for the Labour Party (Denemark, 1991, p.263). Elements from previous campaigns, such as the presidential style, the use of private consultants, and image creation (for example Norman Kirk in 1972 and David Lange in 1983-84), were combined in the Labour campaign with sophisticated targeting and polling in marginal seats and a managed media campaign.

The evolution of modern campaign techniques in New Zealand
New Zealand politicians have been slow to adapt to new electioneering techniques. While the first British television election was 1959, and the first American TV election, 1950, the first
New Zealand TV campaign was not until 1975, despite the arrival of television in New Zealand in the early 1960s. Writing on the 1960 general election, Chapman described how poorly New Zealand politicians had adapted to the medium of radio, ignoring modern methods of presentation and resorting to ‘inordinately long nationwide harangues from broadcast public meetings, supplemented by one-man studio talks’ (Chapman, 1962, p.110). Speeches were apparently muddled, boring, rushed and/or incoherent. The mid-1960s saw an unsuccessful attempt to introduce a presidential style campaign to New Zealand politics by Gorden Dryden, working for Labour’s Arnold Nordmeyer (Harvey, 1992a, p.60). In 1969, a progressive new advertising agency, McHarmens took control of the Labour campaign using techniques picked up from the American campaign to sell Richard Nixon in the US the presidential election. The slogan was ‘Make things happen’, a campaign song specially recorded and the Labour Party symbol was redesigned from the fernleaf of the 1930s to the simple letter “L”. Party leader Norman Kirk, who agency cofounder Bob Harvey described as ‘an unsophisticated slob’, also had his image redefined to meet the demands of a television audience (Harvey, 1992a, p.61). Labour lost, but the 1969 campaign marked a turning point in the role of advertising agencies and techniques in election campaigns. In 1972 McHarmens were back with their remodelled Norman Kirk, and the slogan ‘It’s time’ (for Norman Kirk, for Labour) in an $84,000 campaign for the Labour Party. Political polling was used for the first time in an election, despite Labour Caucus opposition, to give Kirk an edge. The success of the 1972 Labour Party campaign led to a changed approach by the National Party in 1975. The Colenso advertising agency, led by Michael Wall (later to become Prime Minister Jim Bolger’s Press Secretary), and Roger MacDonnell, conducted the ‘bloodiest, knock-down-drag-out campaign in living memory’ (Michael Wall quoted in Misa, 1987, p.63). National’s $2 million campaign featured dancing Cossacks, fights outside pubs, and immigrants flooding the country. The slogan was ‘New Zealand The Way You Want It’. Behind the scenes, Colenso had conducted a giant listening-in operation, using National’s 200,000 strong membership to find out what fears people had. Policy was written in response to this. These same market research methods used by the National Party in 1975 were still being used by them in 1987. Party research at electorate level was used to find out who liked National, who didn’t, and how the undecided could be persuaded to change (Misa, 1987, p.65). Results of these polls typically arrived at campaign headquarters three to six weeks after the polling date, which effectively precluded National ‘from being able to alter its issue strategies and target priorities as the campaign progressed’ (Denemark, 1991, p.273).

Candidates were also given pointers on working with different types of media, instruction on grooming, conducting research and running a party conference. Television training was given, with seminars run by David Exel (author of the 1984 Communications Audit conducted for the fourth Labour Government), and Ian Fraser (Misa, 1987, pp.64-5). 1975 was New Zealand’s first television campaign, and Rob Muldoon was the first New Zealand politician
to really master using the television medium (Cleveland, 1980, p.191). The Labour Party by contrast, spent only a tenth of National’s $2 million, and Bill Rowling paled by comparison to both the late Norman Kirk and Rob Muldoon. In addition to the campaign proper, there was also the citizen initiated Citizens for Rowling campaign, which succeeded more in embarrassing than raising additional support for Bill Rowling; it was in fact perceived as an anti-Muldoon campaign, rather than a pro-Rowling one.¹

In 1975, the era of political television had finally arrived in New Zealand. Ninety-one per cent of those surveyed had seen one or more political broadcasts. Four per cent said television had changed their preference, 60 per cent said it had confirmed their preference, and 26 per cent said it had not affected them. Cleveland argues that four percent can make a difference in a close election, and hence television time was a crucial component. Cleveland also remarks on the nature of the television coverage of the campaign,

For many viewers the general election coverage must seem more like a variety show and an excuse for an evening’s drinking than a solemn ritual of democracy (1980, p.190).

The 1978 election by contrast with 1975 was a much calmer affair. Labour’s communications director, David Exel promised there would be no tricks or gimmicks, placing Labour’s advertising with a conservative, established Wellington firm, Wood and Mitchell. National toned down their campaign, and other advertising agencies declared their distaste for the Colenso style campaign, and political advertising generally, by saying their firms would not get involved for business or ethical reasons (Misa, 1987, p.66). The ‘Hairy Arm’ incident and official complaints laid by Muldoon regarding bias in specific newspapers and both television channels, reflected the growing paranoia about secrecy and the mass media coverage of the campaign, possibly sparked by the growing importance of the television to election campaigns.² Muldoon also claimed the Labour Party was behind a series of bomb hoaxes at Party meetings.

Fears surrounding security were highlighted again in the 1981 election, with the agency designing the National Party campaign working in a locked room. Security guards were on duty twenty-four hours a day, loose paper went into the shredder at the end of the day, and at one stage, orders were issued that no election material was to be written down (Misa, 1987, p.66).

By 1984, Labour was more than ready to make a comeback. They had a new party leader, capable of articulating the new policy direction, one who could match the charisma of

¹ See Clements (1976) for an article by one of the members of the Citizens for Rowling campaign, explaining its failure.
² The Hairy Arm incident is sometimes pointed to as the highlight of the 1978 campaign reflecting what a low key affair it was. The incident involved a film script, allegedly stolen for distribution to the Labour Party, showing a clean government arm wrestling a hairy union arm, and winning. It was later found that the script had been mislaid, someone had found it, photocopied it and distributed copies to the media and Labour Party (Misa, 1987, p.66).
Muldoon. David Lange was completely remodelled for the 1984 campaign – he underwent an operation to reduce his weight, was given new glasses, suits, and haircut. Declining popularity in 1983 led to Lange being given special coaching in order that he be able to translate his style to television – apparently, Lange was all wrong for the television medium, he was seen as long winded, a joker, someone who dealt in ad hominem attacks rather than the political issues. His gestures had to be toned down to suit his new weight. While Lange was the primary focus of the special coaching, it was also available to the deputy leader, the party president and sixteen senior MPs (Whitney, 1984, pp.43-5). The expertise of individuals from four major advertising agencies was put to work for the Labour Party campaign of 1984. Howard Campbell and Dave Roberts from MDA MacKay King, Geoff Kirkham from TEAM Communications, David Innes from Rialto, and McHarman Ayer’s Bob Harvey came together with Labour’s communications director, Simon Walker to form a strategy for television, radio and press advertisements and to produce campaign brochures. Brad Fischer, an advertising executive who worked on National’s 1981 campaign, felt that 1984 would be seen as the battle of the persuaders and image makers.

Images are the important thing now in an election campaign. You have to play, be and look the role you’ve defined as the campaign target. There is still a certain unsophistication with the New Zealand public and their reaction to the mix of television and politics. The idea of a media manipulated and managed campaign is new to them – some would consider this a betrayal or intrusion, but it does happen and will happen now much, much more (Whitney, 1984, p.52).

Many of the techniques which made the 1987 campaign the first of the modern campaigns in New Zealand were in existence before 1987: the reliance on advertising agencies and consultants, the presidentialisation and the emphasis on the television aspect of the campaign. Polling techniques were in evidence, but as noted, were not generally conducted by professionals and results were slow in coming through, meaning it was virtually impossible for politicians to exploit results of polls through adapting their campaign to meet voter concerns.

The shift to the fully modern campaign occurred between 1984 and 1987. As Denemark describes, pre-1987, the fundamentally stable and loyal voting patterns precluded the moves apparent in other democracies to targeting marginal seats through both polling and direct mail techniques. The shift to the right by the fourth Labour Government which succeeded in simultaneously alienating traditional Labour supporters, and drawing the interest of a new group of voters, was the first time there was a need by a political party in New Zealand to take advantage of the new technology, in order to convince the very large number of floating voters that Labour was the natural party of government (Denemark, 1991, pp.261-2).

Thus New Zealand Labour, in the build-up to the 1987 general election, faced both the perceived dismantling of its traditional electoral base, and the consequent difficulties of attempting to forge simultaneous appeals to dissimilar, blue and white collar, electorate bases, and to an increasingly unstable, cynical, and independent electorate. Labour’s response was the pursuit of a campaign strategy built around sophisticated polling, targeted appeals, and the instrumental, managed use of the mass media (Denemark, 1991, p.262).
The 1987 and 1990 campaigns

The campaign strategists and consultants behind the scenes conducting polls, interpreting and advising on strategy, organising media strategies and damage control for the unscripted outbursts by obstreperous party leaders, have become as central to the campaign as the politicians themselves. In 1987, the Labour Party had, in addition to the private secretaries and public relations officers of the ministers, Australian polling expert, John Utting, two professionals employed to manage fundraising and direct mail efforts, and one of the country’s’ most costly advertising firms, Colenso (Misa, 1987, p.69). The party organisation was tightly structured and organised. Party president Margaret Wilson acted as campaign co-ordinator. There was a central strategy committee, the marginal seats committee, the campaign committee and a group of smaller, more specifically focussed committees (Wilson, 1989, p.115). That tight control, and the up-to-the-minute knowledge Labour had about concerns of targeted voters made 1987 a highly successful election campaign for Labour.

Labour took advantage of sophisticated strategies for organising allocation of resources and information collection, of which the National Party had yet to see the benefits. For Labour, a big part of the success of 1987 lay in the accurate targeting of key seats, which were recognised as seats which given the right sort of encouragement, could swing to Labour, or be prevented from swinging to National.

According to Pete Hodgson, Marginal Seats Organiser in 1987, Labour picked up on the idea of targeting back in 1981. In that election, twenty-three seats were targeted for special attention. Hodgson feels that the narrow loss of that election suggests that had targeting been narrower, with resources put into ten or fifteen of those seats, Labour could have won that election.3

The pendulum is used as the basis for selecting marginal seats. Additions and subtractions are made according to Labour’s own market research, and audits carried out by the marginal seats organiser. Once a list of marginal seats is devised, it becomes a matter of concentrating resources into those seats. Within marginal seats, different demographic groups are identified and messages tailored, hopefully to meet their concerns. Direct mail, market research, qualitative opinion polling, tracking and marginal opinion polling have become central to this type of carefully targeted campaign. The level of sophistication of opinion polling now gives the parties far greater control over the direction of the campaign. While New Zealand politicians have taken on a considerable amount of the technology available, Hodgson believes there are aspects of technology used in the states which we will not be seen in New Zealand for cultural reasons, such as telemarketing.

3 Hodgson, interview.
The position of marginal seats organiser has existed since before the 1984 election. By 1987 though, Hodgson says:

[T]he Marginal Seats concept probably reached its height, in the sense that . . . we took the marginal seats concept to an almost extreme position. Nothing happens unless it happens in a marginal seat. Safe seats were expected to scuttle their own campaigns, to reduce, I shouldn’t say scuttle, but to reduce the impetus of their own campaigns and put money and people into marginal seats. People travelled long distances. Cheques were sent from one local electorate to another electorate many miles away, to people that they didn’t know. So we built the links and took the ideas to a sort of zenith. The result of this was that in 1987 there was a swing against Labour across the nation. . . but a tiny swing towards us in the marginal seats. As a result, we actually increased our majority in parliament against the flow of public opinion and I suppose that, finally is the most important measurement – the results, the election results (interview).

Along with the targeting of resources, the travelling itineraries of key political figures, such as the leader, the deputy leader and the front bench is ‘detailed’ to the marginal electorates, thus the marginal seats become the focus for the media as they follow the party leaders around key seats.

In 1987, the idea of Labour’s nationwide, paid campaign was to create a ‘business as usual’ image of the government. Colenso’s advertisements for Labour depicted Lange and a few key cabinet ministers going about their day-to-day business in corporate, professional settings. Responding to the messages of their market research, Labour focused on its perceived weak areas like education and law and order, and attempted to present a softer, more caring image of Finance Minister, Roger Douglas (Misa, 1987, p.71, and Denemark, 1991, p.266).

In 1990, by contrast, Labour did not have the funding to conduct such an expensive campaign, nor did they have the party activists at ground level to carry out the legwork required for canvassing and enrolment. It is difficult to see how Labour could have won much from a huge campaign effort in 1990 for as Party president, Ruth Dyson noted, the public had committed itself to a change of government well before the campaign had even begun (Dyson, 1991, p.13). Again the campaign was a presidential, television orientated campaign. Dyson says it was also a very people orientated campaign, both in its paid advertising campaign and its meetings (ibid, p.14). To the journalists covering Labour’s campaign, it appeared disorganised, bland and low-budget. There was no organised transport for journalists, and the itinerary often was not ready until the day itself. Mike Moore was distinguished by his lack of advisers, PR staff, and advertising executives, particularly in comparison with National leader, Jim Bolger (Allison, 1990, pp.111-121).

1990 was a very different election from 1987 for a number of reasons. As Stan Rodger noted, the climate for the two elections was quite different, the fourth Labour Government carried the
community with it for its first three years, and lost them all (almost), in their second term. In
1987, the sharemarket boom was insulating a considerable number of people from the effects
of government policies. Labour were still presenting an image of a competent and capable
government which needed more time to put its programme in place. The National opposition
were still regrouping following their loss in 1984. Rodger points to the sharemarket meltdown
as the beginning of the serious decline for Labour, but the chief determinant was the fallout
between David Lange and Roger Douglas.

The massive fallout that eventually occurred between the Prime-Minister and the Minister of
Finance had determined the end of that government. You cannot have the PM and the principal
minister, the Minister of Finance, at loggerheads for month after month and the political and
policy paralysis that brought. I mean, we as ministers were trying to bridge gaps and persuade
them to talk to one another and so on, but the problem was so deep-seated that...each felt quite
passionately that they were right, so what the hell do you do with headstrong, competent people.
I mean at the end of the day, we were like, not Lange and Douglas, but the rest of the ministers,
we were just like opossums in the centre of the road in the middle of the night with a car bearing
down and the lights shining. We just felt we were going to get knocked over soon, and we did!
(Rodger, interview).

The succession of Prime-Ministers – three in the last fifteen months of the Government – did
d little to enhance the image of the fourth Labour Government, as stable, capable and credible.

**Style**

Election campaigns aren’t about policy. They’re about impression (Palmer, interview).

Television as a medium is unable to deal with issues in any sort of detail. As television has
assumed increasing importance in New Zealand elections, issues have taken a back seat to the
images of the campaign. A good indication of how unimportant issues and policy have
become is the fact that Labour’s 1987 manifesto was not produced until after the election had
taken place. That television is important to the campaign is reflected by the viewing figures.
Seventy-two per cent of survey respondents in 1990 claimed to watch news programmes
‘often or sometimes’, with newspapers following at sixty per cent, and radio at just over fifty
per cent (Leitch, 1991b, p.6). Post election research conducted by the National Party showed
that sixty-seven per cent of the voters surveyed thought television was the most effective
campaign medium, and thirteen per cent thought it was newspapers. However, when it comes
to determining the issues of the campaign, television takes a nosedive, with only twenty-seven
per cent relying on television to determine the issues, and twenty-two per cent relying on
newspapers (Collinge, 1990, p.24). This suggests there is a level of understanding amongst
the public that television coverage is not as detailed and in-depth as it could be, although

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4 Rodger, interview.
5 See for example, Neil Postman (1985) *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Postman claims television has
conditioned the public to accept show business style presentation of serious issues, to the detriment of rational
public discourse, and reasoned public affairs.
television still rates above newspapers. Of the different types of media, television may have the highest viewing figure, and be seen as the most effective campaign medium by the voting public. However figures discussed by Morrison and Tremewan (1992), from a Heylen survey measuring confidence and trust in public institutions reflect that it may be that television is regarded as the best of a bad bunch. The survey, conducted since 1975 and including the media since 1985, shows that the media has only ever gained the full trust and confidence of 11 to 12 per cent of the population. Of the 15 institutions measured, the media has never scored better than the tenth most trusted institution, and several times has been second bottom (1992, p.128).

This leads on to the point that the style of coverage television gives elections and politics in general, has forced newspapers to modify their political coverage in order to compete. As politicians modify their campaign style to meet the needs of television, there become less issues for newspapers to cover — or at least, less widespread interest in those issues. As Atkinson (1989, p.16) puts it, the media, and specifically television has reduced the intellectual quality of politics by focussing instead on voice, looks, and stylistic peculiarities.

**The Television Campaign**

This election campaign has been remarkable for its lack of real heat. Mike Moore has done the hokey cokey. Jim Bolger’s best remembered performance has been with a foul-mouthed sickness beneficiary who fought off four policemen. And television has been the real winner (Winston Peters on the 1990 election campaign, quoted in Allison, 1990, p.111).

The election campaigns of 1987 and 1990 placed major emphasis on the television medium especially with efforts to manage events in order to capture time on television’s evening news. Fredd Dobbs of Dobbs Wiggins, National’s advertising agency in 1981 and 1984, remarked,

One thinks of paid advertising as having the most impact, but the most potent influence on a campaign is how the camera’s going to react at 6:30. The 6:30 news editor will have more to do with the outcome of the next election than any advertising man [or woman] (Misa, 1987, p.66).

As a consequence both major parties have turned to presidential style campaigns which involve day trips by the party leader out to a (usually marginal) electorate, where they take part in an event designed specifically for the television cameras, travel back to Wellington for a press conference, catch themselves on the evening news, and be ready for a possible response on the ten or ten-thirty news. Evenings were sometimes used to give interviews to journalists for National Radios’ Morning Report, which were embargoed until seven o’clock the following morning. The priorities were, stage events in order to gain media coverage on the evening news, and provide comments, press releases, or conferences in order to catch the attention of Morning Report. Television coverage tended to set the agenda for the following day’s newspapers, and Morning Report tended to set the agenda for the days discussions in the media, including what remained of New Zealand’s evening newspapers (Denemark, 1991,
pp.270-271, and Misa, 1987, pp.66-67). As an example of just how important television is perceived to be, eighty per cent of Labour’s three million dollar 1987 election expenditure was spent on television (Harvey, 1992c, p.108).

A further example of how important Labour considered television to be was the attempt in 1990 to vastly increase the amount of free air time provided to the two main parties for their election campaign advertising. The fourth Labour Government introduced reforms forcing all radio stations to carry up to twelve minutes a day of party political broadcasts during the election campaign, and television time increased from six to sixteen hours. The changes were introduced under urgency, and so were not open to public submissions (Otago Daily Times 15/03/90). The level of criticism and outrage expressed at the changes forced both Government and Opposition to rethink the changes, and subsequent legislation reconsidered these reforms. An amendment passed in August 1990 repealed all of part VI, the section which dealt with parliamentary election programmes, of the Broadcasting Act 1989. It repealed the obligation on the part of broadcasters to provide free time, instead giving the Minister the power to invite broadcasters to provide free time and time at a discounted rate. As a consequence, in 1990, National and Labour received up to eighty minutes of free television time on all three channels, as well as half-an-hour for an opening address, and ten minutes for a closing address (Leitch, 1991b, p.2). The state was to provide $1.6 million for the advertisements, a further irony for a user-pays oriented Government noted by the National Business Review (04/06/90). The 1990 amendment retained the conditions of the 1989 Act which effectively marginalised small parties, the most notable example being Mana Motuhake, a strong contender for at least one of the four Māori seats, but not entitled to any of the available broadcasting time because it was not fielding candidates nationally.

Long gone are the days of a lengthy tour of the country by party leaders and senior ministers, meeting people on walkabouts and at public meetings. The modern election is carefully managed and targeted and scripted – sometimes by quite a large team of media advisers and press secretaries – in order to appeal to what is now considered the most important medium, television. A member of the diplomatic protection squad assigned to cover the 1990 campaign remarked

I never realised how media-driven the whole thing is. I know politicians only go to a particular factory or whatever because the media are going to be there. But it’s got to the stage now where some of them won’t even get out of the car until the TV cameras arrive (Allison, 1990, pp.117-8).

What we get as a consequence of this media management are accounts of, as Rudd (1989, p.41), puts it, Bolger and Lange ‘variously planting trees, holding babies, visiting potters, glass-blowers, breweries and schools, driving steam engines and piloting helicopters.’ Hodgson says on a prime-ministerial itinerary, the public relations squad must include staged
events in order to ‘make good television’.

[1] If we don’t give television that opportunity, then we know that we are going to get ‘grayer’ television. So those are the famous photo-opportunities and the secret is to ensure that the photo-opportunities are there. People say that the photo-opportunities are junk and when President Bush took a walk in a tropical bush forest last night on television with a polystyrene cup, then we all noticed the irony because his minders had made a bad job of it. If I was minding him I would never have a polystyrene cup in a tropical bush forest. So in the sense that that is management of the news that is what we do (Hodgson, interview).

Obviously, it remains up to television whether or not they choose to run a particular photo-opportunity. As reporting standards have declined on television, it has created problems for politicians competing with each other, with the Auckland crime stories and the rugby league for coverage. Michael Cullen is highly critical of the role of television in New Zealand politics and the way politicians have become caught up in that.

Television coverage of political events in New Zealand is abysmal, and we are extremely poorly served. There is now, no decent background journalism, there is totally superficial reporting of an extraordinarily peculiar collection of news, on the main bulletins. And as in fact that is the main source of news for a large proportion of the people, it is extremely worrying. The possibilities of intelligent debate on political issues in New Zealand is now very poor largely because of television. And now we also get bound up in that because we have to think well, how on earth can one get on, what stunt do you have to pull, how do you sort of manufacture news, in order to get coverage on television, so it’s become a very, very unintelligent medium, and one which one could almost wish didn’t cover politics at all, because it might be better if it didn’t (interview).

It is little wonder that television has responded to this style of media-managed campaign by putting forward journalists like Bill Ralston and Paul Holmes to report on such events. As much as they may criticise it, the politicians share responsibility for the rise of ‘infotainment’ with the television networks. It is also little wonder that in the midst of such bland and stage managed campaigns, it is the faux pas that stand out in many people’s memories as highlights, and gain the most lively media coverage. In 1990 we saw the media leap on Jim Bolger’s attempt to invoke images of 1975, by suggesting Ken Douglas might be giving the Soviets New Zealand secrets; and his rebuttal of a rather vociferous heckler at a party address. Interestingly, Bolger chose to apologise for neither of these incidents until making his victory speech on the evening of the election. 1987 saw David Lange being effectively ‘reined-in’, to prevent him offending anybody – spontaneous events such as traditional mass rallies, local talk-back radio shows, and walkabouts, were written out of the campaign schedule in favour of ‘scripted photo-opportunities and managed events’ (Denemark, 1991, p.270). As an indication however of just how important the little side issues become, Stan Roger points towards an outburst of Lange’s in 1987 at a farmer’s wife in Ashburton, which it was believed at the time, might have derailed the campaign effort.7

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6 For evidence of television’s declining standards, see Edwards’ (1992) discussion of Television One network news in the post-deregulatory climate. Also Atkinson (1992) for a discussion on the impact of government policy on the media and some thoughts on the impact of the changes on democracy.

7 ‘Lange having a burst at some poor farmer’s wife in Ashburton or whatever in 1987, that one, we thought may have derailed the campaign effort. He was obviously short-tempered and this lady made an assertion that
The issue of the role of television in election campaigns creates something of a Catch-22 situation, as each has adapted to meet the demands of the other, and each has contributed to the decline of intelligent discussion. Geoffrey Palmer felt there was no point in trying to run an election campaign based on discussing issues, as opposed to presenting images, because the media simply would not cover them. Pete Hodgson pointed towards the last US presidential election, where the average sound bite of information was nine seconds. In New Zealand, a larger concern is raised, for as he noted, the rise of infotainment has not been in addition to the serious media, but at the expense of it. All of these things mean that the public is increasingly being forced to make a decision at election time based on less information.

The effects of deregulation and concentration of ownership

Deregulation has had a significant effect on the type of coverage the news media gives to events, in this case politics generally, and elections in particular. While television news has never seen itself as able to cover events with the same depth and focus on complex issues as other media, it was seen as ‘low-key, authoritative, neutral. The messenger was subservient to the message and the message was unadorned’ (Edwards, 1992, p.20). Deregulation and the arrival of TV3 and Sky TV, has seen what is variously described as infotainment or the ‘tabloidisation’ of TV news formats. News editors, (particularly TVNZ) now fear losing their audience to ‘the other side’, and items become shorter, and more superficial. The news must now not just inform, it must entertain as well (Edwards, p.20). Television increasingly deals with information in short bites, and simplifies events to fit its format. This is based on the belief that the viewing public has only a short attention span and consequently cannot deal with issues being debated on television in any depth. Issues and people must be simplified to good and bad, right and wrong. Politicians respond by shaping their activities and policies to meet the needs of television, in order to get the thirty-second ‘grab’, and here begins the downward spiral. Other media must fall into step, both in order to compete for the ever declining advertising dollar, and in order to adapt to the increasingly television orientated methods adopted by modern politicians. Deregulation, and economic recession and the concentration of ownership of the print media, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 4, have led to massive, on-going lay-offs in all sectors of the media. This leads to less journalists doing more work with the obvious effect that there is less time and opportunity for investigative journalism, and more frequently, journalists are covering areas about which they have little background knowledge. As this decline was occurring in the news media, politicians were becoming more sophisticated

offended him and he sort of stamped and shouted at her’ (interview).
8 Palmer, interview.
9 Hodgson, interview.
10 Steve Maharey, Labour Member of Parliament for Palmerston North, and a former Sociology lecturer, claims that in the past year (1991), around six-hundred journalists have either lost their jobs or left voluntarily, and the overall advertising revenue available to the media has dropped by $27 million.
with their media management strategies. What resulted in the 1987 and 1990 elections as a consequence of the effects of deregulation, concentration of ownership and increasing sophistication by politicians at using the media, was carefully managed and manipulated campaigns specifically targeted at key mediums (specifically the six-thirty news, but also Morning Report). Peter Allison rather cynically summed up his experience of the 1990 campaign trail thus:

Forget the campaigning of old. If a politician resorts to a soapbox on a street corner, a meeting in a draughty hall or a walkabout through a shopping centre these days, it’s because there’s a TV crew nearby. Election 1990 was an Americanised, poll-driven, presidential-style affair aimed directly at the TV sets in one million New Zealand homes. It concentrated more on the personalities of the leaders than the issues; where issues, such as unemployment or the state of the economy, did come up, the protagonists resorted to a “you did, we didn’t” approach, accusing each other of dirty tricks or broken promises. Image was everything – the ultimate triumph of style over content (Allison, 1990, p.111).

The result, according to Allison (p.111), was apathy, boredom and cynicism, as reflected in the high number of undecideds, and no doubt, the lower than usual voter turnout. Bob Harvey, the man who first brought this style of campaign to New Zealand, would no doubt agree. He claimed the 1987 campaign was ‘flat, vapid and lifeless . . . the [television] campaign was a turn-off for the public and started the ‘bore factor’ of political advertising (Harvey, 1992c, p.108).

**Conclusion**

Bob Harvey is often credited with creating the political advertising campaign which has now become an accepted part of the modern political election process. With that, he claims,

> goes the burden of accepting responsibility for bringing the American presidential race up-front, with all its trappings of campaign slogans, songs, political rallies and the ballyhoo that attends those six weeks of the election campaign (Harvey, 1992c, p.101).

The 1990s, he feels, will be the test of politicians, the media and political advertising, as the overkill of television political advertising and failure by politicians to deliver on their election promises have caused massive disillusionment and disappointment with the political process.

Advertising is the art of teaching people to want things. Every product has a life cycle and so do the techniques that sell that product. When the consumer loses faith in the product and the advertising that reinforces it, nothing can revive it. I think political advertising in the media has reached that critical point. The advertising agencies and the media have in the past enjoyed a triennial feeding frenzy, but those days are gone. Maybe ‘it’s time’ (Harvey, op cit. p.110).

Regardless of the arguments for and against the effects of the media on voting behaviour, television has become the central element of the campaign, and that has been the result of twenty to twenty-five years of evolution of the election campaign. The ability of television to provide quality coverage of current events has also long been a contentious issue.
Deregulation has led to a noted decline in the ability of television, and the news media generally, to provide in-depth coverage, investigative journalism, and background information of news generally, politics in particular. In spite of this inability of television, the election campaign remains geared to television as the primary medium for reaching voters, although its broad message is now increasingly supplemented by direct mail targeted to carefully defined audiences. Television has played a significant role in shaping the election campaign effort. The campaign has become centralised around the party leaders, and getting those leaders onto television, and as a consequence the issues have become subservient to the images. It becomes, as Stan Rodger remarked, a chicken and egg situation;\(^{11}\) the coverage is shallow, the events become contrived in order to ‘make better television’. The medium has, as Michael Cullen put it become a very, very unintelligent one, and events become increasingly manufactured to meet the needs of the television medium.

All of this impacts on the election campaign at local level. The big sell of the leaders focuses the attention of the electorate on the television campaign, forcing the local campaign to compete with the glamour of the television campaign for attendances at meetings.

In 1987 I think I had three meetings in this electorate, because people wanted to stay at home and watch the big players. The only reason I had those meetings in '87 was because I didn’t want to give my opponents the opportunity to say, ‘he’s so laid back, he won’t even have meetings’, so I decided I’d have meetings, and I advertised them quite widely....I had tiddlywinking little attendance. Mum, Dad and about a dozen other party supporters, and about three faces which I couldn’t recognise, I mean at each meeting, that’s crazy. But there we are, and that’s a sad reflection of the type that’s gone in at the centre (Rodger, interview).

Limited public attention goes hand-in-hand with limited media attention and vice versa. As Rodger put it, the poor old average candidate won’t get a look in in terms of getting media coverage of his or her campaign effort.

They’re promised one expanded report in the ODT throughout the whole campaign, a meeting which they are generally able to designate... and that’s very important because they’ve done their chips, they won’t get much more reporting. You hope that you will get about six more people than you’re otherwise getting and that’s the printed media. The radio stations will carry what you drop into them, or you call in and see them and talk, or they may say we’ll have a talkback, we’ll run through the candidates or whatever. You generally have one go and you’re finished. So you’re left with putting out pamphlets, or knocking on doors, and hoping to meet people (interview).

The presidential style campaign not only impacts on the nature of coverage on the evening news; it is impacting quite severely on media and voters at the local level. It would appear that the trivialisation of politics at a national level is not being supplemented by discussion of issues at a local level, and that failure increasingly centralises attention and power on the leaders and events in Wellington.

A further effect of the perceived growing role of television is on the calibre of the candidates. The result of the emphasis on images in a campaign, as Pete Hodgson sees it is,

\(^{11}\) Rodger, interview.
...that very, very good politicians, often, the people I know to be good politicians often don't make it in the public arena. Poor politicians often do. In other words, the people who are into popularism do quite well. I think Jim Anderton, Winston Peters and Michael Laws, but especially the last two, not so much Jim Anderton, are very, very good manipulators of their own image. Although Winston Peters has almost certainly overstepped the mark this time, and probably misjudged it, his ability to get stories where there are no stories is absolutely brilliant. He's down as second most preferred prime-minister and that is a remarkable situation for a man whom I know to be as empty and devious as he is (interview).

Given the key role that the media play in keeping the public informed about politics, in order to change this situation of declining quality of political debate, there must be efforts at improving the standard of media coverage, building a quality press and broadcasting system. Again, there is an important role here for informed, intelligent debate, and for the media to take heed of the criticisms being levelled at it. The small nature of the population of New Zealand makes it unlikely that affordable and accessible quality media could survive. What that means is the answer ultimately lies with government. It is unlikely a future government will renge on the deregulation which has fueled the decline. The only realistic possibility for the future is the establishment of a properly funded public-sector television channel, independent of government influence and manipulation, in which the motivation is not profit, but the provision of a public service.
Conclusions

The period 1984-1990 divides into two distinct periods. In the first period, from 1984-1987, the fourth Labour Government were the ‘darlings of the media’. Publicity was highly favourable, the image of the Cabinet was of a dynamic, radical young group who were making necessary changes. The second period was far less favourable. It became apparent after the election that there was a major disagreement in both Party and Government ranks over the economic and social direction of the Government. Lange was losing his charisma, and his replacement, Geoffrey Palmer never had the same sort of relationship with the media. As the squabbles came out into the open, specifically with the Lange-Douglas feud, and it became apparent there was a lack of unity within the Government, that image began to change for the worse.

The area of government communications policy is an extremely complex one, as the variety of aspects to this thesis reflect. It is important once again to note that government communications do not operate in a vacuum; many social and attitudinal factors work together on public attitudes with government communications’ strategies, which are beyond the scope of this work to explore. Additionally it is overly simplistic to presume governments can assume control of the media through the press gallery. However the example of the fourth Labour Government shows governments have considerable resources and ability to exercise influence over the nature of the messages being disseminated and for quite a significant length of time, shape the agenda for public debate.

The period 1984-1990 saw a revolution occur in the development of government information management strategies. Under Muldoon, cabinet and caucus used to ‘grind up’ advice from government departments largely unaided. Ministers for the most part wrote their own speeches and sank or swum alone at public meetings.1

Under Labour, emphasis shifted from trying to impose direct controls on the media, to controlling the information the media received. Information dispersal and management systems were professionalised and politicised in order to achieve this. The following diagram attempts to bring the various aspects of this thesis together in order to give an overall impression of the developments in government information management techniques during the fourth Labour Government. It begins by showing some of the external factors (the

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1 Campbell (1992a, p.19).
Shift to New Right Ideology  Communications Revolution

Belief governments should not bow to 'political' considerations

Rise of the Propaganda State
(that is; the need to control the nature and slant of information being disseminated).

PARTY

Continuous polling throughout Govt's term, sophisticated information management strategies particularly in lead-up to elections. For example, marginal seats campaign. Information shared with Government and used to their advantage (e.g. Rub Out Crime campaign).

Images supercede issues in Party sponsored campaigns. For example, in elections leader's appearance of paramount importance, as is capturing the coverage of television – 30 second sound bites dominate.

GOVERNMENT


Extravagant use of costly, misleading and even biased state publicity campaigns. For example; 'Mrs Mop', 'Rubbing Out Crime'.

Information from each ministerial office now carefully managed and controlled

Public: Increasingly making choices/decisions based on poorer information – images, massaged information, lack of alternative news sources.

Deregulation of media

Concentration of ownership results in rationalisation of staff and resources

PressGallery – less experience, fewer resources, increasing workload, increasingly susceptible to manipulation from sophisticated management strategies

Lack of critiques and investigative journalism in mainstream media
international trend towards New Right ideology, and the ongoing communications revolution) impacting on the Government and the Party and the subsequent shift toward the development of a propagandist state. What follows is a very brief summary of the development of the various mechanisms developed by the fourth Labour Government in order to better disseminate propaganda.

As a consequence of the development of these structures for better disseminating the government’s point of view, and the decline of critiques and investigative journalism from the mainstream media as a consequence of government policy, the public have less information, and in some cases, poorer information than in the past.

Within the changes to information dispersal structures, has been the development of the four forces Robins et al. (1987) point to as underpinning modern democratic information management and control (pp.12-13).

1. The institutions of active persuasion; propaganda; advertising and public relations. Under Labour, we saw the replacement of public service secretaries with professional media managers. Their advice was political rather than impartial. Unfortunately for Labour, their allegiances tended to be too narrow – they were loyal to the individual rather than the government. Under Labour we also saw huge expenditure on advertising campaigns and public relations exercises, which were subsequently criticised for their bias. Additionally, there was propaganda coming out of right-wing groups with status in the community supporting and encouraging the Government (for example, the Business Roundtable, and the Treasury).

2. Mechanisms of secrecy, security and censorship. Despite professing open government and indulging in elaborate public relations exercises to emphasise this point to the public, Lange held less press conferences than any other Prime Minister. The new professional aides were good at burying unwelcome information. Goulter and others from the gallery remember reports critical of government policy, but it is unlikely many others are aware even of their existence. The closure of Medialink points to censorship as did the apparent difficulty for newspapers of accessing information from the Government. Increasing centralisation of media in Wellington due to deregulation and concentration of ownership, together with increasing attention on the role of party leaders in election campaigns indicates further controls.

3. Commodification and commercialisation of information. Concentration of ownership combined with the problems of cross-media ownership increasingly mean information is dispersed for profit rather than for information or for a balance of divergent view-points. The policies of the fourth Labour Government exacerbated this trend. The profit motive now drives all aspects of the media in New Zealand.
4. A proliferation of information gathering by corporate and political interests. Continuous Labour Party polling throughout Labour's two terms gave the Government important knowledge about the popular policies and images to keep at the forefront, and the unpopular images and issues to be kept out of the limelight. Polls conducted by media groups have also flourished in the last eight years as have the firms which conduct market research and opinion polling. Labour's polling and market research were significant to their conduct in the 1987 and 1990 election campaigns. The ability to collect specialised information about individuals and families gives those with the resources powerful knowledge for targeting propaganda.

The new technology of communications and information management gives those with power increased knowledge about the public, and with that, increases the ability of those with that knowledge to control or at least direct that public. In addition to the Government's own information structures, they were able to take advantage of the weaknesses of the gallery system, exacerbated by the concentration of ownership. Lack of resources, loss of experienced reporters, and a weighty workload made it easier for Government press releases to get through. General agreement within the gallery about the direction of Government reflected a gallery structured with sympathetic and like-minded people, a reflection of the lack of diversity of opinions within it. Key figures within the Government additionally had close links with some gallery reporters, further benefiting the Government (initially at least), in terms of limiting opposition and critiques.

In spite of the resources the Government had at its disposal for the purposes of publicity and information management, it is evident they cannot maintain the good news and the positive images indefinitely, and attempts to do so are destabilising for the political system. Public response, for example in election turnout, to expensive and cynically manipulated state publicity campaigns and carefully stage managed election campaigns are evidence of this.

The trend Labour began has been continued by the Bolger National Government. While in opposition, they were highly critical of Labour's media machine, claiming they would not be continuing that trend and initially they did strip down the size of their support staff teams. But by 1992 they had more support staff than their predecessors. In 1988, Labour employed 18 press secretaries; in 1992 the National Government employed 27. When the proposed communications unit is finally established, the number of staff dealing with public relations will be even larger. National's 'good news' team have had their successes too, as Labour MP Pete Hodgson notes.

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2 Rodger, interview.
In the last week of the Tamaki by-election there was an extraordinary outpouring of good news. The good news machine worked, it really worked, and they were a bit lucky that some of the figures that came out were good for that week, and they were able to capitalise on that. We had stories breaking about the dairy payment that I'd known for bloody weeks. It was presented as headline, and the media headlined it because they were not good enough to ascertain that it was not a headline. In that sense there was some control of the election, and that was a time of intense polling to work out what the news was that people wanted (Hodgson, interview).

Hodgson denies a government can maintain that sort of positive control of coverage for any length of time, and for National this has certainly been true. Bolger and his ministers do not seem to have been able to establish the same sort of rapport with the gallery as their predecessors and perception of an open, user-friendly cabinet, as there was a lot of hostility to Government policy from National’s own caucus, with which the media had a field day. Probably the largest resentment factor between the gallery and the National Government is the ‘heavying’ of the media which is now occurring, as both Michael Cullen and Pete Hodgson noted in interviews, and has been getting considerable coverage throughout the print media in particular. Under National too it is possible to observe the emergence of the four criteria outlined by Robins and his colleagues. Community services cards reflect further information gathering by Government and the mootling of a universal ‘smart’ card raises very serious concerns about individual privacy, and the sort of knowledge governments are justified in collecting. There has been continued growth of Government publicity functions with the establishment of the communications unit and growth in the numbers of press secretaries, also the further relaxation of media ownership regulations. National Government pressure on the media is raising public concerns regarding censorship and secrecy. The growth of these forces under Labour and the continuation of their development under National all point towards a growing, intrinsic and systemic role for propaganda in a democracy. Further evidence of the growth of Robins e. al. four criteria lies in politician’s growing disdain for public opinion, the belief that the public are not a rational mass, and need to be not only informed about legislative changes, but convinced of their necessity, and the lack of alternatives. The effect of such propaganda has varied over the last eight years, but the effect is not so important as the existence of the bias (see Chapter 1).

Remedies to the situation are difficult given the near impossibility that any future government will legislate to undo the concentration of ownership and cross-media ownership which has occurred. Informed debate on the role and functions of the media in New Zealand will certainly help, but only if the media themselves are willing to accept criticisms and change. The establishment of a full public sector television channel with public service rather than profit as its goal would help the tone of debate – maybe even encouraging politicians to bring issues back into election campaigns. An effective media watchdog, prepared to investigate policy, rather than personality would hopefully return an element of accountability back to government. The current climate presumes it is dangerous to give into popular opinion formed
in biased and ill-informed minds. The result of this attitude as Sir Robert Muldoon concluded, is that,

Credibility gets lost...once politics and the prime minister are treated as mere commodities to be marketed, because there is an urge to put an unreal advertising gloss on everything. And the public turn off, as you just put up the good news, never explain the bad news and ignore it and hope it will go away (quoted in Campbell, 1992, p.19).

While the fourth Labour Government did in some situations take advantage of the weakness’ of the media and advantage of their own vast resources in order to gain unfair advantage of publicity, New Zealand has yet to see a serious and dishonest abuse of resources and taxpayer funds by a government. However the existence of these structures, the vast resources a government has at its disposal together with the lack of checks and balances in the system and the weakness of the mainstream media in this country should raise serious concerns in people’s minds regarding the potential for a calculated abuse of power in the future.
Appendices
### Appendix 1 Media Takeovers and Mergers – 1984-87

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date gazetted/ approved</th>
<th>Merger/ Takeover Company</th>
<th>Company being taken over</th>
<th>Conditions/other notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01.03.84</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Limited</td>
<td>Southland Times</td>
<td>Subject to conditions of editorial and advertising independence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Hawkes Bay News Ltd</td>
<td>100% Subject to editorial independence and advertising options of Hawkes Bay Herald Tribune and Daily Telegraph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.08.84</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>INL</td>
<td>Acquired 21.62%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.12.84</td>
<td>Wilson &amp; Horton</td>
<td>United Publishing and Printing Co</td>
<td>Acquired 50.1% of issued capital. Commission accepted voluntary undertakings from W&amp;H as to editorial independence and non-discrimination in advertising services and protection of existing staff. Took general approach that benefits of competition with INL and NZ News would outweigh the lessening of competition in Rotorua (where both papers owned by W&amp;H).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.12.84</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Timaru Herald Co Ltd</td>
<td>Allowed to increase shareholding from 24% to more than 50%, noting it was a defensive move. (NZ News having sought 49% of THL – INL seen as having a good record and had substantial influence on THL as it did INL's South Island Printing).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.03.85</td>
<td>Brierly Investment Ltd</td>
<td>NZ New Ltd</td>
<td>Commission refused to consent BIL increasing its holding in NZ News Ltd from 38.8% to over 50%. Commission noted its duty to consider the well being of the NZ people, as well as the social responsibility of Newspaper Proprietors as to full dissemination of information and views. Went on to express a tentative view that no one newspaper group should aspire to more than 1/3 of the total circulation of daily newspapers and no one shareholder should be in a dominant position in any one of the three major newspaper companies (Dominant = 40% Ownership).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.12.84</td>
<td>Wilson &amp; Horton</td>
<td>NZPA</td>
<td>Obtained 49% of Share Capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Entity 1</td>
<td>Entity 2</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.04.85</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Tainui Press Ltd</td>
<td>All shares acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.05.85</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>NZPA</td>
<td>Obtained 49% of Share Capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.06.85</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Christchurch Shopping and T.V. Guide</td>
<td>Received publication rights and rights to the name ‘New Zealand Shopping Guide’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.06.85</td>
<td>John Fairfax Ltd (Australian publishing group)</td>
<td>Fourth Estate Holdings (NBR, Capital Letter etc)</td>
<td>Acquired 50% of the capital.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.06.85</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>John Woods Publications Ltd, and Bay Sun Ltd</td>
<td>Acquired all shares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.07.85</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>BPI systems</td>
<td>100% Acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.07.85</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>College Publisher Ltd</td>
<td>Acquired all shares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.10.85</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Franklin Country News</td>
<td>Obtained all of Franklin Country News.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.11.85</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Community Press Ltd and Karori News Ltd</td>
<td>Acquired all business and assets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.02 86</td>
<td>Brierley Investment Limited</td>
<td>New Zealand News</td>
<td>High Court overturned Commerce Commission ruling vetoing BIL proposal to increase its holding from 40% to over 50% of voting power. Court stated there is no magic figures of 40% – effective control must be considered on the facts of each case; at 40% BIL had effective control of NZN. Three conditions were imposed to ensure editorial independence for, and protect business advertisers, in NZN papers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Company 1</td>
<td>Company 2</td>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.05.86</td>
<td>News Ltd</td>
<td>INL</td>
<td>Commerce Commission Decision 164 News Ltd (Part of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp Group) given clearance to increase its shareholding in INL from 21.68% to 40%. New Commerce Act 1986 applied. Discussed s66(7), 'dominant influence', arguing that the proposal meant no increase in INL's market share (INL not dominant in newspapers, radio/TV, commercial printing, records). INL prepared to give undertakings on principle of editorial freedom. Commission pointed out the new act does not provide for general public well-being (or employment) factors, nor the imposition of conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.11.86</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Thames Valley &amp; Wahi Gazettes</td>
<td>Acquisition seen to strengthen INL's position by reducing the level of competition, but, it was seen as unlikely to lead to INL being in a dominant position in the areas' print medium advertising services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.10.86</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>New Plymouth Star Ltd</td>
<td>Commission concluded that although NZN would be printing and publishing the two daily and two community papers in the area, the proposal would not result in any person acquiring or strengthening a dominant position in the North Taranaki and ease of market entry meant other publishers would be able to exercise adequate constraints on NZN conduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.07.86</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Leighton Publications Ltd</td>
<td>Up to 51%.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.11.86</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Stylex Print Ltd</td>
<td>Acquisition of stock, plant, equipment and goodwill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.07.86</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Target Press Ltd</td>
<td>50% acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.06.86</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Weekend Enterprises Ltd</td>
<td>All assets, except debts acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.02.86</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Business Media Ltd</td>
<td>33.3% acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>East City News Ltd</td>
<td>33.3% acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.05.86</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Dannevirke Publishing Co. Ltd</td>
<td>Up to 100% acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.05.86</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Independent Herald Ltd, Johnsonville</td>
<td>Assets acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Company</td>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.10.86</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>New Plymouth Star</td>
<td>Total shareholding acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.04.86</td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>River Valley News Ltd</td>
<td>Business of, acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New Zealand News Ltd</td>
<td>Taupo Weekender</td>
<td>Publication of, acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.03 or 03.04.86</td>
<td>Printing and Packaging Corp Ltd</td>
<td>Allied Press</td>
<td>Obtained all of Allied Press’ commercial Printing Division and 50% of its interests in i) Otago Fibre Packaging Ltd ii) Amalgamated Packaging Ltd.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.05.87</td>
<td>Unpublished Commerce Commission Decision</td>
<td>Independent Newspapers Ltd</td>
<td>Acquired all of. Commission felt INL would not obtain a dominant position in South Island in provision of news, advertising in the print and general media.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Capital Letter 1984 -1987
ADVERTISING CODE OF ETHICS

BASIC PRINCIPLES

All advertising must comply with the laws of New Zealand.

No advertisement shall be such as to impair public confidence in advertising.

No advertisement may be misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive the consumer. (Exaggerated hyperbole, identifiable as such, is not considered to be misleading).

All advertising must be prepared with a sense of social responsibility, both to the individual consumer and to society, and shall conform to the principles of fair competition, as generally accepted in business.

CODR

1. Identification - Advertisements must be clearly distinguishable as such, whatever their form and whatever the medium used; when an advertisement appears in a medium which contains news or editorial matter, it must be presented so that it is readily recognised as an advertisement.

2. Truthful Presentation - Advertisements must not contain any statement or visual presentation which directly or by implication, omission, ambiguity or exaggerated claim is misleading or deceptive, is likely to deceive or mislead the consumer, or makes false and misleading representation - in particular with regard to:

a) characteristics such as nature, composition, method and date of manufacture, fitness for purpose, range of use, quantity, commercial or geographical origin;

b) the value of the product and the total price actually to be paid;

c) terms of purchase such as hire purchase and credit sale;
d) delivery, exchange, return, repair, maintenance and terms of guarantee;

e) copyright and industrial property rights such as patents, trade marks, designs and models and trade names;

f) official recognition or endorsement, awards of medals, prizes and diplomas.

3. **Research, Tests and Surveys** - Advertisements must not use tests and surveys, research results or quotations from technical and scientific literature, in a manner which is misleading or deceptive.

4. **Decency** - Advertisements shall not contain statements or visual presentations which clearly offend against prevailing standards of decency or cause undue offence to the community or to a significant section of the community.

5. **Honesty** - Advertisements must be framed so as not to abuse the trust of the consumer or exploit his/her lack of experience or knowledge.

Advertisements must not exploit the superstitious, nor without justifiable reason, play on fear.

Advertisements must not contain anything which lends support to acts of violence.

6. **Portrayal of People** - Advertisements must not exploit people’s gender, sexual preference, age, cultural, religious or political beliefs, educational or occupational status.

Advertisements should promote the image of all people as persons of equal value. Refer People in Advertising Code.

7. **Comparative** - Advertisements containing comparisons should be designed so that the comparison itself is not likely to mislead or create a false impression, and should comply with the law and with the principles of fair competition. Points of comparison must be based on facts that can be substantiated and must not be unfairly selected. Refer Comparative Advertising Code.

8. **Denigration** - Advertisements must not disparage identifiable products or competitors.
9. **Testimonials** - Advertisements must not contain or refer to any personal testimonial or endorsement unless it is genuine and related to the experience of the person giving it. Testimonials or endorsements which are obsolete or no longer applicable should not be used.

10. **Privacy** - Unless prior permission has been obtained, advertisements must not portray or refer to any persons, whether in a private or a public capacity, or refer to any person's property in a way likely to convey the impression of a genuine endorsement.

11. **Controversial Advertising** - Subject to the Publisher's discretion the identity of an advertiser in matters of public controversy should be quite clear.

12. **Safety** - Advertisements should not, unless, justifiable on educational or social grounds contain any visual presentation or any description of dangerous or illegal practices or situations which show a disregard for safety.

13. **Children** - Special care must be taken in advertisements directed toward or depicting children or young people. Refer Children in Advertising Code.
The Auditor-General,
Audit Office,
Wellington.

Dear Mr. Tyler,

I have been an active member of the Labour Party for fifteen years and a Labour member of the City Council for eleven years. I think it is important for the Government to communicate effectively with the public and television is the obvious medium. However, I felt most uncomfortable about the advertisements on the tax changes. They were grossly misleading in suggesting that "ordinary" people were going to receive great benefit. I doubt if the advertisements would meet the criteria that the Commerce Commission tries to enforce on commercial advertising on behalf of the Government. This morning's "Press" has letters from three separate people who state that their weekly tax reductions will be 18 cents, 19 cents, and 96 cents, respectively.

I would like to commend you for speaking out on the issue. I was disturbed by Peter Neilson's "smear" comment and his suggestion that he would have liked to sue you. I was surprised at his claim that you lacked the "expertise" to assess the advertisements. It seems to me that no great expertise is required - only common sense and courage, both of which I am pleased to observe you possess.

I hope we will always have an Auditor-General with your sense of public duty.

Yours sincerely,

Christchurch 7.
1.10.88
Primary Sources:
Given the dearth of research in New Zealand in the area of government information management, and the relationship between governments and the media, this thesis relies quite heavily on interviews and correspondence with people involved in the changes. Four politicians were interviewed: Geoffrey Palmer; Michael Cullen; Stan Rodger and Pete Hodgson, and all quotations from these interviews are from typed transcripts of the interview. In addition, I spoke more informally with John Goulter, former political editor for the Evening Post. Because of the sensitive nature of some of the information and the small and close knit nature of Wellington’s political community, some interviewees wished to remain anonymous. Additional comments come from a former TVNZ board member, and a further senior political reporter in Wellington. Much assistance has also been provided from correspondence with various people listed below.

Correspondence with:
Advertising Standards Complaints Board.
Barry Holt, Department of Internal Affairs.
Clerk of the House of Representatives.
Mike Moore, Former Labour Prime Minister (1990) and Leader of the Opposition.
Mr G. P. E. Bryant, former head of the Information and Publicity Services Department.
Alan Spencer, Director of the Office of the Controller and Auditor General.

Interviews with:
John Goulter, formerly Chief political reporter, Evening Post (date interviewed, 18/12/91).
Senior gallery member (date interviewed, 18/12/91).
Former TVNZ board member (date interviewed, 06/05/91).
Pete Hodgson, Marginal Seats Organiser, 1984-87 and Labour Member of Parliament, 1990- (date interviewed, 15/06/92).

Party Research Papers, Official Publications and Reports:

National Party Research Unit:


**Secondary Sources:**

**New Zealand**


Harvey, B. (1992b) Soul Survivor Metro April, 110-118.


Jesson, B. (1990a) Geoffrey and the Journalists Metro July, 142-144.


McLoughlin, D. (1990) *We're In Your Money; How Your TV Licence Funds An Elite Lottery* *North and South* November, 56-81.


Misa, T. (1987) *All the politician’s men; How the Ad Agencies Conspire to Catch Your Vote* *North and South* August, 58-71.


Wood, B. (1984) *Smashing the Audience; an analysis of New Zealand Political Television* Massey University Monograph No 1, New Zealand Cultural Studies Working Group in Association with the Department of Sociology.


**Other**


