

The treatment of industrial relations in three major New Zealand newspapers.

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Industrial relations items appearing in three New Zealand newspapers were examined to provide an analysis of issues presented and frequency with which spokespersons were reported. The newspapers followed the same approach. Disputes were reported in 55 percent of items and no spokesperson was reported in 80 percent. When a spokesperson was reported it was most likely to be an employee representative. A comparison of the treatment of industrial relations and control items showed significant differences. Industrial relations was found to be presented in short articles with large headlines which indicated a tendency to sensationalise.

Introduction

Unfair and biased reporting is a major concern of industrial relations practitioners, particularly labour leaders. Their concern is based on the knowledge that public opinion, vital to successful union action, will be largely formed by the "news" that the media offer. Their concern with this issue is evidenced by three examples of "corrective action" against the press taken by the labour movement in the first few months of 1982 alone. First, the Leader of the Labour Party Opposition, Mr Rowling, banned reporters from *The Dominion* which reported in a front page story that :

Mr Rowling's ban on *The Dominion* arises from his claim that *The Dominion* has misreported and misinterpreted regional meetings of the Labour Party over the last two weekends, in particular on the union affiliation issue (*The Dominion* 9 March 1982)

Second, the President of the New Zealand Federation of Labour, Mr Knox, banned the industrial reporter for the *Evening Post*, Mr Parker, in June 1982. The *New Zealand Listener* commented on the dispute as follows—

There can be few more perilous livelihoods than that of the industrial reporter, whose job involves trying to stay onside with a trade union movement which is often hostile to the "Tory" press.

One who has survived despite numerous spats with the Federation of Labour and various affiliated unions is John Parker of the *Evening Post*. But long standing tension between Parker and FoL President Jim Knox finally erupted in public recently when Knox declared that he would no longer talk to Parker or other *Post* reporters. Knox accused Parker of trying to discredit him and split

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the union movement, and of being closely aligned to a union faction headed by Electrical Workers Union secretary, Tony Neary, an avowed foe of the Socialist Unity Party. The *Post* rejected the allegations and accused Knox of intimidation. (*New Zealand Listener* 24 July 1982. p.120)

These two instances of labour leaders "banning" reporters have the effect of bringing to the public's attention specific instances of alleged mis-reporting or bias. This is, however, only one aspect of the difficulty that can arise through the media's efforts to report industrial relations.

A third instance of organised labour in New Zealand taking action to "correct" the media's approach to industrial relations was the formation, by trade unionists representing the Auckland Trades Council and the Combined State Unions, of the Auckland Combined Unions Information Service with the objectives of "improving news media coverage of union news and views and to discourage anti-union bias and practices in the news media". In its introductory notice to unions, the Information Service outlines its intention of holding regular meetings with journalists, of producing regular information bulletins on union news and views not requiring instant publicity, of maintaining a news media watch with a view to identifying specific instances of anti-union bias and raising those instances as complaints with the news media. In addressing the first meeting with the journalists, the Information Service convenor, Mr G. Whimp, stated—

We recognise that journalists are workers and fellow unionists. We do not accuse them of wishing to promote a bias against the trade union movement, but we all acknowledge (at least privately) that there is such a thing as public bias against unions and we believe that it is in part due to the influence of the news media. Generally we accept that the media anti-union bias is not a conscious activity . . . rather it flows from a uncritical acceptance of traditional concepts and a series of unthinking and emotive formulas.

These three examples demonstrate three different types of attempts by labour leaders to redress the balance of what those leaders have perceived as the news media presenting an unfair view of their perspective on some industrial relations activity. The efforts of Rowling and Knox are reactive — responding to specific instances where a bias was perceived. The effort of the Auckland Combined Unions Information Service is different in that, as well as addressing specific instances where bias is perceived, it is attempting actively to gain increased coverage of union activities, news and views in order to promote an improved public relations image of Auckland unionists in the eyes of the general public.

The vexed question of balanced media presentation of industrial relations has been the subject of a number of major studies. The Glasgow University Media Group (1976) monitored all British television news broadcasts for a six month period in 1975, undertaking a content analysis of industrial news and examining the processes used by broadcasters to develop "news". By examining specific cases, the Glasgow group were able to demonstrate examples of bias. But more important was their finding that television news gives greater coverage to certain individuals and institutions and that there is no consistent relationship between actual events (e.g. industrial disputes) and television coverage. This led the Glasgow group to examine the way that events become news in the hope that, by exposing the underlying assumptions of industrial reporting, change would be brought about. Following this study, Philo, Beharrell and Hewitt (1977) have argued that the essential dimension of news cover is the control that media producers exercise over the explanation of social life and of the effect that specific actions produce in society, these factors being more important than mis-reporting, and specific instances of "who gains what coverage" and whether that coverage gives a "fair deal".

In examining industrial news in New Zealand, Cordery, Jamieson and Stacey concluded that—

any faith in the impartiality, neutrality, balance of news representativeness of industrial relations news produced by the mass media is misplaced. (1978, p.62)

Cordery's (1978) Master's thesis sampled the eight main newspapers then published in

New Zealand, for a ten day period in May 1976. His conclusion that the news media seeks to report disruption through union activity was supported by his finding that 56 percent of all industrial news items were about industrial action, particularly strikes, and he explained his finding that the statements and actions of unionists received greater coverage than those of politicians or employers, as a result of politicians and employers being the sources of many industrial items.

The importance of fair reporting of industrial relations is of interest and concern not only to labour leaders or management leaders, but to the community at large and is the central issue addressed in this research. This study attempts to measure objectively the nature and frequency of industrial reporting, and then examines whether industrial relations items are handled any differently from other types of items. The question of "fairness" then is approached from a perspective of "difference"; differences in reporting between newspapers and reporting of other material within single newspapers will be used to draw conclusions as to whether newspapers are fair in their approach.

Method

There are seven major daily newspapers in New Zealand : in Auckland *The Auckland Star* and the *NZ Herald*; in Wellington, *The Dominion* and the *Evening Post*; in Christchurch, *The Star* and *The Press* and in Dunedin, *The Otago Daily Times*. There is no national daily paper. In the smaller cities and provincial towns, there are about 30 daily newspapers. There has been a tendency for many of these operators to combine into newspaper chains and cut costs by plant sharing and other methods of rationalisation in producing copy. Most papers rely heavily on a common core of national and international news supplied by the New Zealand Press Association (NZPA), a co-operative news gathering agency to which they all subscribe. Papers using items supplied from NZPA pay a fee to the paper of origin.

Newspapers in New Zealand are in business to make a profit, and that profit is not made through selling the paper to the consumer but through the sale of advertising space and, from that point of view, a newspaper is essentially a collection of paid advertisements with the spaces between filled with news and other editorial material. A minimum of 60 percent to 65 percent of each newspaper examined in this study is devoted to paid advertisements.

Three daily newspapers were selected for this study – the *NZ Herald*, *The Evening Post* and *The Star*, a morning and two afternoon papers respectively. The papers are owned by the three major newspaper ownership groups in New Zealand, respectively, Wilson and Horton Ltd, Wellington Newspapers Ltd and NZ Newspapers Ltd. The papers selected give a fair reflection of the industry by representing the major publishing groups, the geographical differences and the morning and afternoon papers. The combined net circulation is 392 253 copies.¹

"Industrial relations items" were identified and defined broadly to include items on all industrial disputes and developments that arose from those disputes, personnel matters including statements by employers and unions and Government, and policy matters affecting employer-employee relationships.

In order to ascertain if one group of people involved in industrial relations was gaining greater coverage than other groups, and perhaps gaining some possible advantage in putting across their view as a result of that coverage, people reported as politicians, government officials, employer or employee representatives were identified and the frequency with which they were reported was recorded. Employer and employee representatives were further categorised according to whether they were locally or nationally based and "employee representatives" rather than "union officials" was chosen to include those

¹ At 30 September 1981 the NZ Audit Bureau of Circulation figures were *NZ Herald* 240 700 copies, *Evening Post* 92 222 copies and *The Star* 60 331 copies.

situations where there was no union involvement, but where a person reported was clearly speaking on behalf of a group of workers without being either a full- or part-time union official. Each article was also measured in terms of the geography of the issue central to the article, whether local, national or international. This variable was recorded to identify the relative importance of local and national news to each newspaper.

In order to ascertain whether industrial relations items were treated differently from other types of items within each newspaper, non-industrial items were recorded and used for comparison. Every eleventh issue of each newspaper was selected to form the control sample, with this selection acting as a control on the differences due to the day of the week.

The following variables were recorded for every item: paper name, date, type of item, headline length and depth, article length and width, article prominence, the number of words appearing in the headline yet not in the text. Story characteristics such as headline size and article size give important information about the way that journalists and sub-editors treat their material. The prominence of articles, using Budd's Attention Score², and the page number, was measured to establish if industrial relations items were treated more prominently than non-industrial items. Words appearing in the headline but not in the text were measured to ascertain if the sub-editing process was causing industrial relations items to be treated differently in this respect from other types of items.

The research took place on all editions published during the first quarter of 1982, with a three-month period being selected to ensure that a particular issue or type of news did not appear unrepresentatively in the results. The three papers published 74 daily newspapers during this period, and seven days were selected as "control" days.

Results

During the period of the study, 472 industrial relations items were published by the *NZ Herald*, 508 by the *Evening Post*, 382 by *The Star*, making 1362 industrial relations items in all. A total 3477 control items were analysed for comparison. The industrial relations items occupied 46,142 standard column centimeters in length – i.e. about 82.4 pages of solely industrial relations items. On average the *NZ Herald* contained 0.36 pages of industrial relations items per edition, the *Evening Post* 0.49 pages and *The Star* 0.27 pages. The *NZ Herald* used on average, 0.77 percent of the total space within each edition for industrial relations items, the *Evening Post* 1.53 percent and *The Star* 0.79 percent.

The *Evening Post* placed greater importance on reporting industrial relations than the *NZ Herald* or *The Star* in the three months studied. This is shown by the larger number of items appearing in the *Evening Post* than other papers and by the larger percentage of available space allocated. The type of industrial relations item was measured, across newspapers, and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 *The type of industrial relations articles, according to newspaper*

Type of article	NZ Herald		Evening Post		Star		Total	
News	408	(86.4%)	438	(86.2%)	344	(90.1%)	1190	(87.4%)
Editorial	12	(2.5%)	13	(2.6%)	11	(2.9%)	36	(2.6%)
Features	6	(1.3%)	5	(1.0%)	3	(0.8%)	14	(1.0%)
Letters	39	(8.3%)	47	(9.3%)	22	(5.8%)	108	(7.9%)
Cartoons	7	(1.5%)	5	(1.0%)	2	(0.5%)	14	(1.0%)
TOTAL	472	(100.0%)	508	(100.0%)	382	(100.0%)	1362	(100.0%)

2 For explanation see Budd (1964) The Attention Score is on a 0 - 5 scale with a "5" indicating a very prominent position.

Over 85 percent of industrial relations items are news stories and only 1 percent of the items were categorised as "features" i.e. an article that could be published at any time, that is not dependent on immediacy and recency for its placement, and which attempts to background some particular issue in industrial relations. The story content of each article was analysed to examine the distribution of coverage and the results are given in Table 2.

Table 2 *The frequency of articles according to newspaper and industry story type*

Story content	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
Disputes				
<i>Award disputes</i>	127 (27.0%)	75 (14.8%)	55 (14.4%)	257 (18.9%)
<i>Redundancy disputes</i>	67 (14.2%)	127 (25.0%)	67 (17.5%)	261 (19.2%)
<i>Other disputes</i>	39 (8.3%)	40 (7.9%)	54 (14.1%)	133 (9.8%)
<i>Demarcation disputes</i>	29 (6.1%)	30 (5.9%)	28 (7.3%)	87 (6.4%)
<i>Subtotal</i>	262 (55.6%)	272 (53.6%)	204 (53.3%)	783 (54.3%)
Policy				
<i>Policy matters</i>	85 (18.0%)	90 (17.7%)	69 (18.1%)	244 (17.8%)
<i>Poland</i>	28 (5.9%)	29 (5.7%)	28 (7.3%)	85 (6.2%)
<i>Wage-tax trade-off</i>	11 (2.3%)	12 (2.4%)	11 (2.9%)	34 (2.5%)
<i>Subtotal</i>	124 (26.2%)	131 (25.8%)	108 (28.3%)	363 (26.5%)
Other				
<i>Personnel</i>	14 (3.0%)	27 (5.3%)	21 (5.5%)	62 (4.6%)
<i>Other</i>	64 (13.6%)	74 (14.6%)	44 (11.5%)	182 (13.3%)
<i>Insufficient info.</i>	8 (1.6%)	4 (0.7%)	5 (1.4%)	17 (1.3%)
<i>Subtotal</i>	86 (18.4%)	105 (20.6%)	70 (18.4%)	261 (19.2%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)

The three papers have been consistent with each other regarding the number of items appearing in the different story content areas. The major differences between the papers were the *NZ Herald's* emphasis on "award disputes", reporting twice as many items in this category as the other papers, the *Evening Post's* emphasis on "redundancy disputes", and *The Star's* emphasis on "other disputes". Surprisingly low levels of attention were given in all three papers to the "wage-tax trade-off" talks and proposals, although at the outset of the study the author had identified this policy matter as one worthy of a subcategory to itself.

The "who is being reported" analysis of industrial relations items makes no subjective attempt to judge whether the statement is favourable or unfavourable, accurate or inaccurate, but simply measures the frequency with which the participants in industrial relations were reported. Employer and employee representatives were recorded according to whether they were locally or nationally based representatives and the results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

National or local employers were reported in under 15 percent of items, local employees were reported in around 20 percent of items, and national employees were reported in around 25 percent of items.

Government officials were defined as participants such as industrial conciliators and mediators, Labour Department officials such as factory and award inspectors and in certain cases, officials of other departments such as Health Department officers. Such officials were reported rarely by comparison with other industrial relations participants, in less than 8 percent of items. The results are presented in Table 5.

Politicians were recorded as was their affiliation. The results in Table 6 show that a politician was reported in nearly 20 percent of all items, gaining comparatively more coverage than government officials and employer representatives, receiving similar coverage to locally-based employees and less coverage only than nationally-based employee representatives.

Table 3 *The frequency of articles in which employer representatives are reported according to newspaper*

Number of representatives reported in each article	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
National representatives				
None	398 (84.3%)	452 (89.0%)	333 (87.2%)	1183 (86.9%)
1	68 (14.4%)	49 (9.6%)	47 (12.3%)	164 (12.0%)
2 or more	6 (1.3%)	7 (1.4%)	2 (0.5%)	15 (1.1%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)
Local representatives				
None	408 (86.4%)	204 (83.4%)	337 (88.2%)	1169 (85.8%)
1	54 (11.4%)	66 (13.0%)	38 (9.9%)	158 (11.6%)
2 or more	10 (2.1%)	18 (3.6%)	7 (1.9%)	35 (2.6%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)

Table 4 *The frequency of articles in which employee representatives are reported according to newspaper*

Number of representatives reported in each article	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
National representatives				
None	332 (70.3%)	367 (72.7%)	296 (77.5%)	995 (73.1%)
1	123 (26.1%)	125 (24.6%)	81 (21.2%)	329 (24.2%)
2 or more	17 (3.6%)	16 (3.2%)	5 (1.3%)	38 (2.8%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)
Local representatives				
None	395 (83.7%)	393 (77.3%)	309 (80.9%)	1097 (80.5%)
1	67 (14.2%)	100 (10.7%)	67 (17.5%)	234 (17.2%)
2 or more	10 (2.1%)	15 (3.0%)	6 (1.6%)	31 (2.3%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)

Table 5 *The frequency of government officials being reported in articles, according to newspaper*

Number of government officials reported in each article	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
None	440 (93.2%)	471 (91.6%)	350 (91.6%)	1261 (92.5%)
1	30 (6.4%)	34 (6.7%)	27 (7.1%)	91 (6.7%)
2 or more	2 (0.4%)	3 (0.6%)	5 (1.3%)	10 (0.8%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)

The affiliation of every politician reported is given in Table 7 and indicates that more Labour politicians were reported than National politicians and that Social Credit and Socialist Unity Party politicians are infrequently reported by comparison in industrial items. However, National politicians were reported in more individual items than Labour

Table 6 *The frequency of articles in which politicians are reported according to newspaper*

Number of politicians	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
None	379 (80.3%)	409 (80.5%)	320 (83.8%)	1108 (81.4%)
1	70 (14.8%)	72 (14.2%)	43 (11.3%)	185 (13.6%)
2 or more	23 (4.9%)	27 (5.3%)	19 (5.0%)	69 (5.1%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)

politicians – 119 items against 73 items. The reason that more Labour politicians than National politicians are reported overall is that in 37 percent of cases where one Labour politician is reported, at least one further Labour politician was also reported, whereas in only 7 percent of items where one National politician was reported were further National politicians reported. There were only 18 items (5 percent) where National and Labour politicians were reported in the same item.

Table 7 *The affiliation of reported politicians according to newspaper* ^(a)

Affiliation	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
National	51	48	37	136
Labour	57	69	42	168
Socred	4	5	1	10
SUP	4	2	1	7
Other ^(b)	7	7	1	15
Total	123	131	82	336

Notes: (a) There are 13 cases of reported politicians missing from this Table. Those cases occurred when more than four politicians were reported in the same item.

(b) "Other" invariably refers to politicians reported in international stories.

The geography of the central issue in the item was recorded as either a local issue, a national issue or an international issue. The geography of particular issues may change with time during the course of events and items were measured depending on the geography of the issue on the day being recorded. For example, the redundancy dispute between the Gear Meat Co and the NZ Freezing Workers Union commenced as a local dispute but, when the Union called for a national stoppage of freezing workers over the issue, the dispute was, from that point on, classified as a national dispute. The results of this geographical analysis are presented in Table 8, and show that slightly more than half the articles are concerned with national issues.

The results presented in Tables 1 to 8 outline the content of industrial relations items. The variables item width and length along with headline length and depth were measured

Table 8 *The geography of the issue central to the article according to newspaper*

Location	NZ Herald	Evening Post	Star	Total
Local	133 (28.2%)	186 (36.6%)	119 (31.2%)	438 (32.2%)
National	257 (54.4%)	272 (53.5%)	181 (47.4%)	710 (52.1%)
International	82 (17.4%)	50 (9.8%)	82 (21.5%)	214 (15.7%)
Total	472 (100.0%)	508 (100.0%)	382 (100.0%)	1362 (100.0%)

to ascertain whether industrial relations items were being treated differently from other types of items, and these characteristics are presented in Table 9. On average, industrial

Table 9 *Item characteristics (all newspapers)*

Mean characteristic	Industrial relations items	Control items
Article length (in std col cm)	33.90	34.07
Article width (in std cols)	2.53	2.37
Headline length (in cm)	16.36	12.29
Headline depth (in mm)	8.39	7.35
Number of cases	1362	3477

relations items are slightly shorter in length, yet are wider, and have longer and deeper headlines than do other items. These differences were tested for statistical significance using the Mann-Whitney U test.³ Industrial relations item length is significantly shorter ($Z = -5.0182$, $p < 0.00005$), and significantly wider ($Z = -5.0289$, $p < 0.00005$). The industrial relations item headline is significantly longer ($Z = -12.5798$, $p < 0.00005$) and significantly deeper ($Z = -8.7949$, $p < 0.00005$).

The prominence of each item was measured using two methods – the number of the page on which the item appeared and the Budd's Attention Score method. It was assumed that the most prominent place for an item to appear was page 1 of the paper, and industrial relations and control items that appeared on that page were recorded. A total of 212 industrial relations items and 272 control items appeared on the front page. Again the Mann-Whitney U test was used. The result of that analysis was that industrial relations items were no more likely to appear on the front page than were control items ($Z = 0.0$, $p < 1.0000$). The mean Budd's Attention Scores for industrial relations items and control items were 1.6167 and 1.6549 respectively, indicating that control items may be, on average, more prominently placed than industrial relations items. However the differences were not significant ($Z = -1.0530$, $p < 0.2924$).

The number of words appearing in the headline, yet not in the text, was on average 1.3223 for industrial relations items and 1.2183 for control groups. This difference was significant ($Z = -2.4505$, $p < 0.0143$).

Discussion

The above results suggest four important issues for comment and further examination.

Consistency

First the consistency of approach. The facts here almost suggest a conspiracy. Although the *Evening Post* allocated more of its total newspaper space to industrial relations than the other two papers, that was the only major feature of difference between the papers in their methods of covering industrial relations items.

This consistency is apparent when every variable recorded is examined, for example; the ratios between items of news, editorial, features, letters, cartoons; the percentage of items containing reported comments from people involved in the particular issue; and item characteristics such as article length and width and headline depth and length. Nowhere, however, is this consistency more apparent than in the breakdown of the types of issues reported according to story type (Table 2). The percentages of coverage of items of disputes and policy issues are almost identical, with the exception of the *NZ Herald's* reporting of award disputes, the *Evening Post's* reporting of redundancy disputes and *The Star's*

3 For explanation, see Downie *et al.* (1970) or alternatively Hull *et al.* (1979)

emphasis on "other disputes". It may be that the *NZ Herald* reports more "award disputes" because of the size and industrial nature of Auckland, and the prevalence of house agreements means that more "award disputes" occurred in that area. The heightened level of *Evening Post* interest in "redundancy disputes" may be explained by two specific disputes. First, the closure of the Gear Meat Co Ltd at Petone, Wellington, and the consequent dispute between the owners and the New Zealand Meatworkers Union over the level of redundancy payments, in January and February, and second the dispute in February between the Labourers Union and the Wellington City Council over the introduction of private contracting of refuse collection. With these exceptions, the level of consistency between papers is very high.

That editors and journalists have "conspired" to produce a common formula for reporting industrial relations items is extremely unlikely and two more acceptable explanations for this consistency are the use of the NZPA wire system and the lack of direct competition between newspapers.

The Press Association co-operative system of dispersing news means that a considerable quantity of the material published was written by a quite small group of journalists and then simply "picked up" by other papers in the co-operative and used directly without any substantial changes being made to the text. This explanation for the consistency could account for up to two-thirds of industrial relations items — all items classified as "national" or "international". The third of items classified as "local" would have been written by each paper's own writers and these items provided a limited opportunity for independence and difference in style and approach between the newspapers.

The existence and widespread use of the NZPA wire service has clearly dictated to newspapers and journalists an implied standard form for preparing items for their own papers and possible subsequent syndication, and is the most likely reason for the consistency observed.

The lack of direct competition between the daily newspapers in that there is only one morning and one afternoon paper per city and that the markets of the papers do not overlap geographically, is an important factor. While it is true that newspapers may compete with other media for the advertising dollar, they are not directly competing with each other and there is no necessity for their product to be different in a bid to attract readers.

Emphasis

Second, the emphasis on manifestations of conflict and the absence of analysis of the reasons for that conflict. Around 55 percent of all industrial relations items were about disputes and the likely effects of those disputes. Many of the items classified as "policy matters" were also about matters where conflict within unions or between unions and employers was about to emerge. The most common approach in items was to simply report that some industrial action was about to take place, 25 percent of items ask the union for a comment, and 20 percent of items ask a government politician what he was going to do about it. Analysis of the dispute or policy or an expose of the various issues involved by way of background was rarely supplied. Industrial relations items were shorter than control items and only 1 percent of items were features giving background to a particular issue, further indicating a lack of depth in coverage. At the outset of this research it was decided to set aside a separate category for items concerned with the "wage-tax trade-off" talks as this was foreseen as an important policy matter for 1982, yet only 2.5 percent of items were on that topic. The "wage-tax" issue contained important issues which needed clarification and explanation for the public, yet the newspapers failed to background the issues and contented themselves with reporting the possible dates when future meetings would take place.

People reported

Third, the people reported. The most important finding here is that in around 80 percent of items no one is reported, and this must raise serious questions about the source of

the industrial relations item for the journalist. It is likely that some groups of people who use the newspaper as a means of disseminating information about an industrial relations issue are achieving that coverage without themselves being reported.

Employee representatives could be pleased at the comparatively high level of coverage they receive. No assessment has been made as to whether that coverage is "fair" but, that journalists are reporting employee representatives frequently, suggests a willingness on the part of the journalist to invite comment and then publish that comment. Unionists would do well to reflect on the responses that they give journalists and to endeavour to use the invitation to comment to best advantage.

Symptomatic of the general lack of background and explanation, is the low coverage given to comments from government officials. Third party "independents" may have some valuable insights to the causes of disputes and industrial relations issues yet they are seldom reported.

In comparison with other groups, politicians have maintained a high profile in the industrial relations item, being reported in about one item in five, and receiving greater coverage than all other groups except nationally based employee representatives – generally senior union officials. This finding is not surprising, as the State in New Zealand has always maintained a high level of involvement in industrial relations and the history of that involvement is well known and documented.⁴

Comparative treatment of items

Fourth, the different treatment of industrial relations items and control items. The differences observed were very significant, industrial relations items being shorter yet wider and industrial relations headlines being longer and deeper. These differences indicate a sensation seeking approach to reporting industrial relations issues, with large headlines over short items, however sensationalism through prominence within the newspaper is not evident.

Conclusion

In his recent work, Clutterbuck (1981) discusses the widely voiced criticism of the media in the United Kingdom that they fail to give a fair background to disputes and that more depth is needed on both sides of an issue. Cordery *et al* (1978) concluded that the media in simplifying greatly the events that they cover were providing little background information and were paying too little attention to the causes and effects in industrial relations. They argue consequently that industrial relations events, as news, are trivialised. The results of this study support both those views and suggest that trivialisation and sensationalisation are prominent features of industrial reporting, as is demonstrated by the finding of short items with large headlines. This study has adopted one possible method of examining the treatment of industrial relations reporting in the New Zealand press and the results provide a useful baseline for further research to examine the issues of fair and unbiased reporting.

There are two areas that this study suggests as worthy of further research. First, the marked tendency of newspapers to report politicians on industrial relations matters, when many industrial relations practitioners in New Zealand believe that government is too involved in the industrial relations process. An issue for further research and consideration is the effect on the industrial relations process that occurs when a journalist asks a politician for a comment on an industrial item. The question, "What are you doing about it?" may reflect the high level of government involvement in industrial relations – however the extent to which the question acts as the stimulus or as the response to government involve-

4 For example, see Young F.J.L. (1982) for an academic's and a practitioner's view of the State's involvement in the New Zealand industrial relations system.

ment is worth considering. The second issue is related to the consistency of reporting established here, and whether this consistency, and the use of the NZPA wire service, has the effect of seeking out and highlighting certain issues, institutions and individuals while suppressing others.

Newspapers have an important function in reporting industrial relations news and views. The formation of the Auckland Combined Unions Information Service seeks to assist reporters in that aim and it will be interesting to see what differences, if any, are achieved in the future.

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