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UNEMPLOYMENT IN NEW ZEALAND, 1981-1983:
A STUDY OF THE PRESENTATION
BY RADIO, TELEVISION AND THE PRESS
OF A MAJOR SOCIAL PROBLEM

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A Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Studies.

University of Auckland

1986.
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ABSTRACT

In New Zealand there is a marked scarcity of material on the workings of the indigenous news media. This thesis is intended to partially fill the large gap in New Zealand scholarship in this area. It provides a case study of the production of meaning by mainstream New Zealand news media organisations. Its purpose is to explicate the dominant messages in circulation from 1981 through 1983 regarding unemployment. The neutral face of the news discourse is shown to conceal the routinized signification practices of journalistic professionalism. These practices act to separate the normative from the deviant. They also serve the interests of society's established and legitimated institutions. This process was aided by the simplistic, as opposed to simplified, nature of news media presentations.
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CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a case study of the production of meaning by mainstream New Zealand news media organisations. Its purpose is to explicate the dominant messages in circulation regarding unemployment during the years 1981 through 1983 on radio, television and in the press. The period studied covers all but six months of the final term in office of the National Party Government under the leadership of the Right Hon. - later Sir - Robert Muldoon. It was a government that had come in on a slim majority. On election night, the National Party gained exactly half of the seats in the House. On the basis of special votes and recounts they eventually secured an additional seat. This seat gave them the right to form a Government. But it gave the party only a tenuous hold on the treasury benches. In 1984, their downfall at an early election was sparked off by the inability of Government whips to deliver the votes of all National Party members.

Economic issues dominated the news during this time. In particular, the steadily rising level of unemployment and the Government's 'Think Big' economic policy featured prominently. Unemployment had begun to rise in the late 1970s. Between December 1977 and December 1978 the unemployment figure more than trebled, so that by the
election of November 1981 unemployment was the major issue. In 1981, the average end-of-month registered unemployment figure was 48,302. By the end of 1983 the figure had risen to 76,475.

The ruling National Party had chosen to contest the 1981 election on the basis of their 'Think Big' policy, or the 'Growth Strategy' as they preferred to call it. This policy involved the construction of large energy-intensive industries using the finance and expertise of multinational corporations. Specific projects included the expansion of the Glenbrook Steel Mill and the Marsden Point Oil refinery, and the construction of a synthetic petrol plant at Motonui and an aluminium smelter at Aramoana Point.

Although the estimated cost of the Motonui project rose from an initial $500m to $750m in early 1981, the Government had signed the contract with Mobil Oil by September of that year. In October 1981, Alusuisse, the Swiss company with a 25% interest in the proposed aluminium smelter, announced their withdrawal from the project. Critics of the 'Think Big' policy contended that the smelter would have to be abandoned. They asserted that Alusuisse's withdrawal placed the whole of the Government's economic strategy in jeopardy. The Government denied this, claiming that a new partner would
soon be found. They continued to use the Growth Strategy as the basis of their election campaign. In late October, they formally approved the New Zealand Steel plant expansion.

Throughout the period, the Government argued that a lack of economic growth was the major cause of New Zealand's unemployment problem, and that the major projects were intended to promote growth and were a solution to unemployment. But one of its first acts when newly re-elected in 1981 was to prune 3% from departmental budgets for the 1982 to 1983 financial year. This 3% cut involved the introduction of a 'sinking lid' policy for the staffing of government departments. The contradiction between this policy and the Government's pledge to reduce unemployment was justified on the basis of economic growth. The 3% cut, it was argued, would lead to greater public sector efficiency which in turn, would encourage private sector growth.

In June 1982 the Government placed a twelve-month freeze on wages, prices, and rents. The freeze also applied to interest rates, dividends, professional charges and directors' fees. The Government contended that the freeze would help the employment situation by lowering the real cost of wages. But unemployment continued to rise
throughout the first year of its imposition. Despite widespread criticism of the policy, including the claim that it had actually caused additional unemployment, the Government extended the freeze until 29 February 1984.

By 1981 the level of unemployment had become a major political issue. The Government did not always choose policy options which created the most favourable employment climate. However, the effect on unemployment was always a factor that the Government had to consider. But growth in 'the economy' rather than growth in employment was consistently cited by the Government as their major objective. It was also cited as the solution to all economic problems. The very real possibility that the Government's policies might lead to widespread jobless growth was never systematically examined in the news stories surveyed. Jobs are not an automatic by-product of economic growth. Indeed some forms of economic growth which involve the substitution of capital for labour actually destroy existing jobs.

* * * * * *

International scholarship has shown that the dominant messages in news stories are the products of news work rather than the undiluted reflections of some external
reality. As will be more fully discussed below, news sources (the people, groups and institutions who are reported) do indeed speak in news stories. But only in a highly modified way. Their voices are edited and re-packaged according to the dictates of the journalist's conception of newsworthiness. Sometimes this re-packaging may suit the purposes of news sources but frequently it does not. It is always the news media version of events and issues, and not the events and issues precisely as seen by the sources, that is transmitted to news consumers. Even those news sources which are demonstrably favoured by news media organisations - typically the major institutions of government and business - are not always pleased by the nature of their representation in news stories. The fact seems to be that, world-wide, news work has an internal dynamic; and it has priorities of its own. So, even if the media favour them, the great institutions are represented in a series of disconnected, ahistorical images selected by news workers to fulfil certain institutional and professional criteria peculiar to the media organisations. News media institutions are themselves powerful agents within society. Moreover, whilst they operate to preserve the status quo power structure generally, they do not necessarily support all
of its elements either continuously or at any one time (1).

This much has been shown in international scholarship. But in New Zealand there is a marked scarcity of material on the workings of the indigenous news media. New Zealand marxists, in the tradition of David Bedggood, have tended to ignore the news media organisations (2). They have mainly viewed the news media as mere apparatus through which the cultural norms and values of the New Zealand bourgeoisie are transmitted to captive audiences. The media through which this transmission has taken place have not been considered an important area of study in


themselves but only as mechanisms in a wider process to which scholarship must be devoted.

What (non-marxist) studies of the New Zealand news media there have been have tended to be overwhelmingly quantitative in approach. Such studies have also been few and far between (3). Given the dominance of modern news media organisations as conveyers of information as well as entertainment, this gap in New Zealand scholarship is a glaring one.

The ethics and priorities of journalistic professionalism do demonstrate a substantial degree of similarity throughout the Western democracies. Thus, while the products are unique to each society, the practices of news work are more universal. Research undertaken elsewhere can furnish New Zealand researchers with important insights into the production of newspapers and news shows. This study draws heavily on such research, particularly that undertaken by Tuchman and Galtung and Ruge (4).

(3) The most notable of these studies was: A. Vintiner, A Structural Analysis of Television in New Zealand, M.A. Thesis, University of Canterbury, 1976. See B. Wood, 1982, chapter one for a critique of New Zealand media studies.

Accordingly, Chapter II below contains a summary of the history of research into the phenomenon of the mass news media systems and products. It is a summary neither complete nor exhaustive. It simply attempts to draw out the main strands of work in this area and to outline changes in its prevailing orthodoxies. And the point of doing this is to place this study into its scholarly context.

* * * * * *

Though the mass media of radio, television and print employ different means of communication, language is the common factor which unites them. Radio and television have use of the additional dimension of spoken words to add meaning to their stories. Newspapers have static photographs, diagrams and cartoons while television uses moving pictures. What these three news media share, however, is their use of words to tell stories. And it is the words of the news media organisations' discourses on unemployment which constitutes the major focus of this study.

The Political Studies Department of Auckland University,
whose extensive news archive is now accessible for research work, is beginning to foster a number of news media theses. If the trend continues, the next decade could see the production of more research on the New Zealand news media than currently exists. This thesis is the first, hopefully of many, to utilize the contents of that archive. Research is made possible by the availability of sufficient source material. The extensive nature of the Political Studies Department's archive placed me in the fortunate position of being able to select material using criteria other than availability.

The news products selected for scrutiny were chosen with the whole New Zealand news media audience in mind. Broadcasting in New Zealand is divided between the private sector and the Broadcasting Corporation of New Zealand, the B.C.N.Z. The B.C.N.Z. has existed as an independent body since 1961. It controls both of New Zealand's television channels as well as the YA, YC, ZM and ZB radio networks. None of the privately owned and operated radio stations have the national reach of those controlled by the B.C.N.Z. Their broadcasts are confined to particular regions of New Zealand. Hence the choice of the National Programme's Morning Report was dictated partly by its popularity and partly by its ability to reach a national audience.
Morning Report is the most popular news show on the National Programme. For example, between May 1981 and November 1983, 1.Y.A. received a steady ten to eleven per cent share of the total radio audience (5). Between 6 a.m. and 9 a.m., which includes the hour-long Morning Report programme, 1.Y.A.'s audience share rose to between nineteen and twenty-four per cent. This amounted to approximately 110,000 of the 555,000 people who listened to a morning radio show.

The 6.30 News programme broadcast on Television One was New Zealand's most popular news show. The following graph shows its popularity in the randomly selected week, 3 to 9 December, 1983. This programme, like Morning Report, ran for an hour in total. The second half of the programme was, however, devoted to local news. The country was split into regions and each region received its own show. This study elected to examine the Auckland version of this show, primarily for reasons of availability because the researcher was Auckland based, but also because it received the largest audience share.

(5) All figures for 1.Y.A. are taken from B.C.N.Z. Audience Research, February/March, 1983.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY</th>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>TOTAL VIEWING AUDIENCE</th>
<th>% POTENTIAL AUDIENCE</th>
<th>RANKING FOR WEEK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>578,000</td>
<td>976,000</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>684,000</td>
<td>1,438,000</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>678,000</td>
<td>1,537,000</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>642,000</td>
<td>1,562,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>830,000</td>
<td>NOT AVAIL.</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>762,000</td>
<td>1,325,000</td>
<td>26.1</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>970,000</td>
<td>NOT AVAIL.</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>734,857</td>
<td><strong>-</strong></td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td><strong>-</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AUDIENCE equals total watching 6.30 News.

TOTAL VIEWING AUDIENCE equals audience viewing T.V.1 and T.V.2, 6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

% POTENTIAL AUDIENCE equals % of potentially available audience viewing 6.30 News.

RANKING FOR WEEK equals popularity for viewers in week examined.

All figures from B.C.N.Z., Audience Research, 3-9 December, 1983.

The major daily newspaper in each of the four main regional centres was also selected for study. The four were The New Zealand Herald (Auckland), the Evening Post (Wellington), The Press (Christchurch), and the Otago
Daily Times (Dunedin). The following table gives the circulation figures for New Zealand's major daily newspapers in 1981 and 1983.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TITLE</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
<th>1981</th>
<th>1983</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEW ZEALAND HERALD</td>
<td>AUCKLAND</td>
<td>240,700</td>
<td>245,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUCKLAND STAR</td>
<td>AUCKLAND</td>
<td>116,000</td>
<td>118,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EVENING POST</td>
<td>WELLINGTON</td>
<td>92,222</td>
<td>90,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE DOMINION</td>
<td>WELLINGTON</td>
<td>62,862</td>
<td>65,055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE PRESS</td>
<td>CHRISTCHURCH</td>
<td>79,900</td>
<td>86,612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE STAR</td>
<td>CHRISTCHURCH</td>
<td>60,331</td>
<td>62,619</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTAGO DAILY TIMES</td>
<td>DUNEDIN</td>
<td>52,750</td>
<td>53,620</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In brief: between them, the 6.30 News, Morning Report, the New-Zealand Herald, the Christchurch Press, the Evening Post and the Otago Daily Times, provide a solid indication of the diet of news stories on unemployment which the
mainstream news media organisations were serving up to news consumers in 1981 through 1983. And this is why they were chosen for study.

Data gathering from the chosen media was a somewhat laborious process. I read every issue of the 3720 relevant newspaper issues published during this time from cover to cover. I recorded every published story related to unemployment and compiled a separate index for each newspaper. At the same time I took notes of 'keywords' which emerged as being commonly used in the stories (6). Once this process had been completed I selected one hundred hours of 6.30 News broadcasts (which amounted to one hundred shows). This selection process was not random but was based on the knowledge gained from the newspapers as to exactly when important news stories on unemployment were discussed. A similar process was used to select one hundred hours of Morning Report broadcasts (again, a sample of 100 news shows). These news shows were subsequently transcribed, indexed and their usage of keywords was also noted.

In order to provide an indication of just how mainstream mass media publications intended for a general audience differ from other publications, two other newspapers were

(6) See Chapter IV for a discussion of 'keywords'.
studied. The weekly National Business Review which is intended for the consumption of New Zealand business people was one of these publications. The other, the monthly Doledrums newspaper was intended for unemployed workers and other beneficiaries. Every issue of these two newspapers was read from cover to cover and relevant stories were recorded and indexed. In the case of Doledrums virtually every news story was recorded. While evidence from these publications was not included in the main body of this study they proved valuable in determining just what ideological perspectives and language usages the mainstream news media products have in common. Their differences highlighted the similarities of the other news products surveyed. Doledrums differed from the mainstream news media primarily in terms of its ideological perspective. While news stories in Doledrums were clearly written from a marxist or radical perspective the mainstream news products espoused a liberal-individualistic ideology committed to a capitalist economic system. National Business Review shared the mainstream media's ideology. Where its stories differed from the mainstream was in their depth and tone. They had greater analytical depth and were addressed primarily to businesspeople. This difference in tone will be discussed below in Chapter V.

Chapter III argues that the journalist's allegiance to the
concept of neutrality is an integral component of the ideology that is dominant in news products. The ideology represents the interests of those who are heard - New Zealand's established and legitimated institutions. Even if journalists had achieved their desired neutrality in terms of the quality of individual news stories, an ideological perspective would still have been discerned in the quantity of space or time allocated to these institutions.

Chapter IV is devoted to the concepts of political language which guides this research project. In particular, my debt to Professor Raymond Williams' approach to content analysis by way of 'keywords' is acknowledged. A brief lexical history of the evolution of some of the keywords for this study is provided. It is a history designed both to illustrate the dynamic character of language and to provide a foundation for the case studies in unemployment which will follow. Chapter IV also seeks to further discredit the notion of journalistic neutrality by using the idea that language is a prime site of political conflict.

The prime determinant of the type of coverage received by news sources during the period studied was how the institutions and persons were defined in terms of their relationship to 'the economy'. Chapter IV demonstrates
this, largely by way of showing that the trade unions were not accorded the same quality or quantity of media coverage as employer groups. Unions were denied the status of 'legitimated' institutions because their activities and goals were presented as being in conflict with the interests of 'the economy' and hence of the New Zealand people. This depiction, it is argued, was derived from the economic rhetoric dominant in news stories.

Chapters V through IX contain the empirical component of this research project. They constitute a series of case studies on the major issues of New Zealand unemployment as they appeared in news stories. Their subject matter is: economic policies, statistics, images of the unemployed, industrial relations and youth unemployment. In each case the major issues are outlined, keywords are identified and the treatment of different news sources is analysed. Together these five chapters provide a comprehensive picture of the major areas of public debate on unemployment as reconstructed in news products.

Thus, this thesis discusses the 'mass' story on New Zealand unemployment and not the 'true' story. It provides a view of the information freely available to most New Zealanders on issues related to unemployment. Audiences are, however, always going to receive messages in different ways depending upon the personal
characteristics of the individual audience members. Even when two people receive an identical message their interpretations of its content can vary widely. But there are, nevertheless, dominant media messages which are frequently reproduced and which act to reinforce one another. What we can see, therefore, is which messages were dominant and the apparent reasons for their dominance.

In the process of analysing the kinds of information available to news consumers, this thesis will reveal much about the nature of the story-tellers themselves. The inherent conservatism of New Zealand news media organisations will become apparent in the proceeding chapters. These organisations constitute a 'fourth estate' only in the sense that they are also legitimated institutions with a vested interest in the continuation of the status quo.
CHAPTER II : THE PATTERN OF RECENT MEDIA STUDIES

The products of news media organisations and the effects of those products have been the focus of a large quantity of research this century, especially since the end of World War I. But it is only recently - since the 1960's - that the intentions and purposes which inform the products - the discourses - of the news media have been examined in a systematic manner. And these studies, initially continental European rather than anglophone, have further cast doubt on the older idea that there is any simple core to a (potentially effective) message which a news product might convey. A reading of the history of the study of the effects of the media and of the new studies on the meanings of media messages suggests the approach adopted in the New Zealand case study which makes up the bulk of this thesis. This chapter sketches the history of media studies, and the following two isolate and clarify the crucial points that inform my case study: that the sources of news are predominantly powerful organisations and institutions, and that the language of news products is inherently ideological.

During the inter-war years the dominant view of news media theorists was that the organs of the mass media were capable of manipulating the masses at will. Earlier
scholars like Ferdinand Tonnies, Émile Durkheim and others had outlined the dissolution of previously strong social relationships which had traditionally maintained social cohesion. 'Masses' had supposedly been created by the extension of the universal political franchise in Western-style democracies. This process had been further augmented by the levelling effects of the market economy in which everything was mass produced and hence standardized. Rapid urbanisation and industrialisation had destroyed small community networks and in their absence citizens came to be, and to be viewed as, part of an undifferentiated mass. Lacking traditional ties and restrictions, the masses were supposedly easy prey for the sophisticated techniques of the mass media organisations (1). As Curran and his colleagues reported, interwar students of the media followed this line and took the:

relatively uncomplicated view of the media as all-powerful propaganda agencies brainwashing a susceptible and defenceless public. The media propelled 'word bullets' that penetrated deep into its [sic] inert and passive victims. All that needed to be done was to measure the depth and size of penetration through modern scientific techniques. (2)


The masses were nothing other than passive recipients of the messages they received. Credence was lent to this theory of the vulnerable masses by the interpretations given to certain historical events in the first half of this century. There was widespread acceptance of the belief that people had been 'brainwashed' during the First World War. Similarly, the European news media organisations were said to have facilitated the rise of Nazism in Germany and Fascism in Italy. Hannah Arendt, for example, postulated the alienated and fundamentally rootless citizen of the twentieth century as the ideal fodder for the propaganda organs of Nazi Germany.

During the 1940's a raft of highly empirical studies of the news media began to appear. In the United States this research revolved around Harold Lasswell's question 'Who says what in which channel, to whom, with what effects?'. Most of these studies, however, concentrated solely on the topic of media effects. They sought to empirically test the validity of the orthodoxy concerning the ability of mass media products to manipulate mass public opinion. But they did not, in fact, concentrate so much on 'who' said 'what in which channel'.

Such studies almost universally rejected the orthodoxy of mass vulnerability in favour of a new diffusionist model of mass media power. They concentrated on the 'uses and
gratifications' of the media, and concluded that rather
than providing fodder for sophisticated propaganda
machines, individual audience members brought their own
needs to and made their own uses of media products. They
postulated an active rather than a passive audience who
manipulated rather than were manipulated by media
messages. Citizens were seen as belonging to numerous
small groups which had their own norms and rules. These
groups, such as the family or church, were said to protect
individuals from manipulation. Rather than positing the
rootless and alienated populace of earlier theorists,
the diffusionist studies placed citizens firmly into a new
context as members of strong social networks which
mediated between individuals and external propaganda
messages.

The formulation of the theory of cognitive dissonance
added further weight to this view. Individuals were said
to suffer from severe psychological discomfort when
confronted with ideas or values which did not fit in with
their previous perceptions of reality. They sought, both
consciously and subconsciously, to avoid the offending
message and therefore were not open to manipulation by
mass media organisations. Individuals were not, it was
asserted, willing to change their world views or opinions
simply because of overt pressure from media messages to do
so. Indeed, the exact opposite effect was likely to
occur. Alien concepts would be rejected in favour of more familiar ones.

Liberal-pluralist theorists in particular were vocal in their dismissal of the mass society thesis. Daniel Bell, Edward Shils and others argued that there was only mass society in the sense that the mass of people had come to occupy the centre-stage of political life. They also argued that this was in essence a profoundly democratic development. Rather than an undifferentiated mass, the people were depicted by the liberal-pluralists (who worked mainly in and on the U.S.A.) as an irreducible mixture of races and cultures. Mass society theorists were dismissed by them as elitists who opposed the democratic institutions and decision-making procedures appropriate to such a plurality of independent and differing social units.

A slightly different conception of the distribution and working of political power was proposed by Joseph Schumpeter. He argued that an elite did rule in society but that members of this elite did not comprise a single, homogeneous unit. Rather, he posited competing elites who had to appeal to the masses at election time in order to become the ruling elite. Thus, which elite group was dominant depended upon the wishes of the masses. The elites had, therefore, to consider the interests of the
people rather than just their own narrow self-interests. Interestingly this new model was viewed as only a slight adaptation of the pluralist model. As Bennett asserts:

[blockquote]
Schumpeter's definition ... does not differ significantly from Marx's castigation of bourgeois democracy as a system in which the oppressed are allowed, every few years, to decide which particular representatives of the ruling class shall be allowed to represent and repress them in parliament. (3)
[/blockquote]

Perhaps the fundamental difference was that Schumpeter saw the elites as operating in a benign and paternalistic fashion while Marx interpreted the situation as disguised class warfare.

The liberal theorists viewed the mass media organisations as constituting a 'fourth estate'. The 'free press' it was asserted, played the role of a political watchdog. They oversaw the activities of politicians and other public officials. They also provided citizens with the information needed to make rational political choices.

The liberal theorists also argued that the competition between newspapers, radio stations and television channels was a healthy phenomenon which promoted a diversity of

political viewpoints. The freedom of the media was thus rooted in the competitive nature of news production as well as the lack of state control. By being 'free' the media could stand guard over the freedoms of the rest of society.

According to liberal theorists, mass media organisations had the responsibility to provide the public with important political, social and economic information (4). This responsibility was based on a journalistic conception of professionalism which included an allegiance to the concepts of balance and neutrality (5). But responsibility was not extended beyond the realm of news or current affairs news products. Thus the content and messages of other broadcast shows or publications, provided they were not deemed pornographic, were not bound by these same professional ethics. The mass media organisations had, therefore, to exercise responsibility only when their products purported to reflect reality, as did their newspapers and news programmes. Plays, works of fiction and art, television dramas, and so forth could portray the world in any way they chose. Artistic freedom involved freedom from responsibility for the substance of one's message. To an extent this is

(5) See Chapter IV below.
changing today with the passage of legislation
prohibiting, for instance, racist propaganda.

The 'fourth estate' was viewed as an essential component
of any liberal democracy worthy of the title. Instead of
the threatening giants of mass society theory, the media
organisations were assigned a positively favourable role
in society. As Bennett has observed in his study of media
theories:

The media, it was contended, were far from
monolithic. The clash and diversity of the
viewpoints contained within them contributed to
the free and open circulation of ideas, thereby
enabling them to play the role of a 'fourth
estate' through which governing elites could be
pressurized and reminded of their dependency on
majority opinion. (6)

This was the liberal-pluralist orthodoxy of the 1950's and
60's. But by the late 1960's the new orthodoxy was in
turn questioned. Its critics argued that studies of media
effects had concentrated only on the capacity of media
messages to cause changes in audience opinion and belief.
But continuities in belief, critics such as Herbert
Marcuse argued, are more obvious and weighty than changes.
The critical studies were to reveal the immense


(6) See also: E. Shils, 'The Theory of Mass Society' in
Diogenes 39, 1962; D. Bell, The End of Ideology :
on the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties,
opportunities news media products possessed to reinforce and consolidate existing values and attitudes. That the news media could not necessarily convert anyone to a new set of values and attitudes did not demonstrate a lack of influence over the audience. Rather, it demonstrated a different type of influence: the ability to reinforce certain dominant messages over time. This ability had not been noted because it had not been looked for.

From this new perspective, liberal-pluralist media theorists seemed, therefore, to have come to conclusions very similar to those held by many Marxist and critical theorists. Although the theoretical frameworks into which they would slot this argument are obviously widely divergent both would argue that the mass media's main influence lay in the area of consolidating ideas. Thus the prevailing orthodoxy had shifted once again. Originally attributing a huge mass media influence over audiences, it had moved to attributing only minimal effects, and finally shifted to a position somewhere in between these two in which the mass media products were seen to reinforce pre-existing beliefs.

While the mainly anglophone students of the media had taken a route suggested by the 'with what effect?' part of Lasswell's question, continental theorists had concentrated on the content of media message. Content
analysis had been undertaken by British and American scholars but it was of a quantitative rather than qualitative nature (7). The frequency of messages was said to indicate the value of the message. A message repeated on ten successive days in a newspaper was said to be twice as effective as one repeated on only five occasions. Each segment of content was treated as equal to every other segment of content. Thus, the meaning of the content was removed from consideration. This was done in the interests of 'objectivity'. It was assumed that what could not be quantified could not be analysed 'scientifically' and, therefore, should be ignored.

The main strands of continental influence over media studies emanated from the linguistics of Ferdinand Saussure, the structural anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss, the semiotics of Roland Bathes, and Jacques Lacan's reformulations of psychoanalysis. Rather than concentrating on media effects, these scholars and philosophers focused their attention on the text itself and on the nature of the reader or receiver of the text.

They came to view the products of the mass media organisations as open to more than just the single reading preferred by the sender. And they even decentred the reading subject. The subject was no longer seen as a passive recipient of media messages. Neither 'reader' nor 'text' were treated as static concepts. Concrete messages, passed from sender to receiver, were seen as becoming something less than concrete during the process of their transmission. The structuralists sought to formulate a code of media messages and symbols and a universal grammar. The deconstructionists attempted to take these messages and symbols apart to reveal alternative readings which in turn could be deconstructed.

The products of the mass media organisations became the objects of renewed attention particularly from semioticians. The anglophone media effects studies had assumed that the content of messages could be taken for granted as though it operated in an uncomplicated manner. But now the actual content itself came under real scrutiny. The semioticians were to demonstrate the existence of myths and symbols in even the simplest advertising message (8). The deconstructionists were to

argue for the possibility of numerous different readings of the same text (9). Both were to show that texts link together across time and that each text joins to those which precede it. The isolated messages which the media effects theorists had used to test audience conversion were themselves brought into question.

Old-style literary criticism had sought to reveal an authoritative reading of the original text. The new literary criticism assumed that the primary goal was to interpret the text and that this interpretation could involve a number of contradictory readings. Moreover, Paul de Man, Shoshana Felman and others emphasised the way in which the critic of any text is also trapped inside the text they claim to be analysing. They rejected Karl Mannheim’s thesis that intellectuals have the unique ability to stand outside of their own culture and society and objectively analyse its products and structures. They asserted that intellectuals can only hope to bring a critical awareness to a taken-for-granted world and must always remain both reflective and self-reflective.

Kaja Silverman concluded in her study that:

\[\text{It is important to keep in mind that there is always a heterogeneity of conflicting ideologies concealed behind the dominant one. While it may not be possible to step outside of ideology altogether, it is possible to effect a rupture with one, and a rapprochement with another. (10)}\]

Thus the continental theorists had added the qualitative dimension of meaning to the study of news media products. A further impetus was given to the study of mass media language by those engaged in studies of culture, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall. Continental literary deconstructionists and their followers have tended to ignore the historical context within which media messages have been created as well as the historical context within which they have been received (11). While texts have been linked to each other via the language as a whole they have not necessarily been linked to the conditions under which they have been produced. The culturalists, while ignoring many of the subtleties of the texts themselves have worked to place media messages more firmly within their cultural and historical contexts.

Raymond Williams commenting on Lasswell's famous formulation stated:

To anyone with literary experience, the 'what' is irreducible, as well as active, and needs precise attention as a way of understanding the 'who' and the 'whom' in their most significant senses, and certainly as a way of understanding 'effect'. And I suppose it was this that led me to noticing the formula's most extraordinary omission: 'Who says what how to whom with what effect' but 'with what purpose'? Nobody seemed to be mentioning or inquiring into that. I know now that this exclusion of intention was characteristic of a whole phase of functionalist social theory; in communications as in much else. (12)

This exclusion of 'purpose' or 'intention' from media studies finds its corollary in the professional code of journalists which specifically excludes these concepts from news work. News products were supposed to neutrally reflect the world rather than to exist because of some intention. News products which were created with an intention were said to be ideological in character rather than neutral (13).

The cultural theorists did not assign the intention to create specific meanings wholly to the newsworkers who created news products. Instead, they incorporated the concept that professional ideologies and work practices placed the responsibility for content on to news sources (14). Powerful institutions and groups, they argued, are

(13) See Chapter III.
more likely to be used as news sources than are those who do not fit the criteria for 'credibility' or 'trustworthiness'.

And thus they saw news content reflecting not the whole of the world 'out there' but only a highly filtered reconstruction of the reality derived from preferred sources. Thus the culturalists asserted that:

The media are not the primary definers of news events but their structured relationship to powerful primary definers has the effect of giving them a crucial role in reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access to the media as 'accredited sources'. (15)

* * * *

The historical developments of mass media analysis as briefly outlined above have set the context for this study. I assume the importance of Lasswell's complete question, but - because one cannot do everything - do not say much about the effects of media messages. I pay a semioticians' attention to the language of texts but I attempt to analyse these texts as much on their own terms as possible rather than to deconstruct them from within an alien theoretical framework. There is no return to the

(15) See Chapter III.
task of uncovering a single, authoritative reading which is said to be the 'right' way of interpreting a text. Rather, the multiplicity of potential readings is acknowledged but at the same time a dominant reading of the text surfaces. This dominant reading emerges by placing the text within its historical context of society, economy and politics. The study follows Williams in his concern to say something of intention and hence reinstates the role of the speaker as an object of scrutiny.

There is no suggestion that this dominant meaning is the one which will be received by each and every individual in the straightforward manner posited by media effects theorists. I make the assumption, though, that the dominant messages of news stories do tend to reinforce certain values and beliefs.
CHAPTER III: NEUTRALITY AS IDEOLOGY:
NEWS MEDIA ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR SOURCES

Journalism is surely the only profession where a lack of purpose is so highly esteemed, where belief in it is so deeply rooted and yet so patently absurd. Thus, the function of objectivity is to deny that news has a purpose: to transform the selection and processing of news from an essentially subjective business into a technical one, and to disguise a narrow, highly filtered and regulated picture of the world as reality.


In recent years numerous studies of news production, undertaken in Britain, the U.S.A. and New Zealand, have shown that the virtues of 'objectivity' and 'neutrality' are aspired to by journalists. Only in the so-called 'scandal sheets' or 'gutter press' are the claims to such virtues abandoned in the search for news consumers and for advertising revenue. The ruling idea is that the personal biases of journalists or the biases of the owners and controllers of news media organisations should not influence the content of news stories. The products of these organisations are supposed to simply reflect the issues and events of the world 'out there'. As Whitaker states, the journalist's creed is that:

Those with purposes produce propaganda; those whose only purpose is to reflect reality, produce news. (1)

When Arthur Schlesinger interviewed journalists in the B.B.C. radio and television newsrooms in 1978, he found a high degree of commitment to and belief in the impartiality of news work. One television journalist informed him that:

In ten years here I've never had an explicit conversation with any of my colleagues on politics or religion. There's a feeling that you might limit your scope for action if you declare yourself. (2)

Another journalist explained to him the psychodynamics of the situation:

I insist I am able, and I think it's one of the skills of a reporter, to be a complete schizophrenic. I can have strong political views, and do have, in some quarters. But when the camera is on they do not come into play. Sometimes in journalism you get someone who is unable to do that: it swiftly shows itself, and he very quickly becomes known as someone who is unreliable ... (3)

Both of these British journalists affirmed the notion it was possible (and probably desirable) to keep value judgements out of the news production process. Richard Salant, the president of the American C.B.S. network stated that:

(3) Ibid, p.194.
Our reporters do not cover stories from their point of view. They are presenting them from nobody's point of view. (4)

Whether or not it is desirable to produce a neutral news product it has never been demonstrated that such a task is possible. As Mannheim asserted, knowledge is to a large extent, 'situationally determined' (5). Mannheim posited the detached intelligentsia as the only group capable of objectivity because they stood outside of society and examined it. Even intellectuals, however, cannot really be socially detached and it is unlikely that journalists have succeeded where the intelligentsia have failed. Schlesinger asserts that:

[The] B.B.C.'s doctrine of impartiality/independence is nothing if not a latter-day Mannheimianism - a response to social cleavage which attempts to gain some measure of epistemological privilege for those who survey and report on it. (6)

The central reason that news workers cling to the neutrality doctrine is that to be accused of abandoning neutrality is generally to be accused of harbouring an overt bias in one's presentation of news stories. News

which is constructed with a 'purpose' is said to favour
the interests of particular people or ideas over others.
Newsworkers would, therefore, contend that they are not
presenting their views but the views of sources 'out
there' in the real world. As Curran and his colleagues
state:

[T]he commitment of media professionals to the
canons of objectivity and impartiality, however
genuinely held, also serves to protect them from
criticism of their performance as professionals,
by partly removing their responsibility for the
output of the media and placing it on their
sources. (7)

The doctrine of neutrality therefore distances news
workers from the charge that they are propagandizing for
their own causes. It does not distance them from the
charge that they provide a conduit for the propaganda of
their news sources. Moreover, this conduit function is
not open equally to all but instead operates to
selectively favour the propaganda of only certain groups
in society.

This chapter contends that while a systematic bias can be
detected in news stories, this is not the result of an
overt intention to favour some views over others. Rather,

(7) M. Gurevitch, T. Bennet, J. Curran and J. Woolacott
(Eds.) Culture, Society and the Media, London,
the organisational structure of newswork and the ideological dimension of news language combine to favour those who are already powerful. These two factors mean that even though journalists may sincerely attempt to be 'neutral', the cards from which they deal have all been stacked in advance. Indeed, by merely presenting what 'is' (and not what 'ought to be') the news media aid the legitimation of existing social, political and economic structures. They retail, in Mannheim's terminology, 'ideology' and not 'utopia' (8). The continued dominance of governmental and powerful economic institutions in news products reinforces their status and marks out alternative structures as abnormal and deviant. As the Glasgow Media Group contend:

Communication power is about the right to define and demarcate situations. When we look at cultural power in this context we mean the power to typify, transmit and define the 'normal', to set agendas. (9)

The dominant ideology in news products thus represents the interests of those who are heard.

Overseas studies have found a similar dominant ideology determining the dispersal of the 'news net'. Tuchman, in

(8) K. Mannheim, 1936.
her study of American news workers, found that, '... a pattern of centralisation at legitimated institutions, was a dominant characteristic of the news net' (10). Journalists were routinely deployed to report on the statements and activities of legitimated institutions. Moreover, this deployment helped to define these institutions as legitimate. McQuail found a similar pattern of dispersal of news workers in Britain. He stated that, 'Evidence about participants suggests news to be heavily weighted towards reporting from and about official and political figures and institutions' (11).

The main actors in news stories on unemployment were the spokespersons from dominant institutions. These institutions were the parties of Government and Opposition together with their organs, including cabinet and caucuses; Government departments, notably the Departments of Labour and Social Welfare, the Industries' Development Commission; local bodies and regional authorities; interest groups, and in particular the Employers' Federation, the Manufacturers' Federation, the Chambers of Commerce and Federated Farmers; and large private sector businesses such as the Fletcher-Challenge Corporation.

All of these organisations were allowed to make news rather than to just be the subject of it. Their press statements appeared frequently in news products and their opinions were routinely sought on many important issues.

In New Zealand, the media gave 'legitimated' institutional status to those defined in news stories as having a particular kind of relationship with 'the economy' (12). If the relationship was to be seen as legitimated then the institution or organisation had to be seen to act in the 'national interest'. Some institutions which were both long-standing and powerful organisations were denied this status because their actions were deemed harmful to 'the economy'. The trade union movement was depicted in this manner. Their actions were deemed narrowly self-interested because they sought to improve the contractual rights of workers rather than to boost the 'profitability', 'productivity' and 'efficiency' which was in the 'national interest'. Trade unions were more often the subject than the source of news stories and their opinions were sought on only a narrow range of issues concomitant with their legal incapacity to deal with matters much outside the narrowly defined interest of workers on wages and conditions of work.

(12) See: G. Tuchman, 1978 for a discussion of the concept of 'legitimated' institutions.
Certain institutions, organisations and official persons, then, provided the dominant sources for news products. But this is not to say that these products were always to the liking of the sources themselves. The process of news production often frustrated their purposes. The Prime Minister, for instance, was given more coverage in news stories than any other individual during the time period surveyed. Mr. Muldoon was, however, also the most vocal critic of the content of news products. On several occasions he asserted that the coverage accorded to his major economic policy statements had 'appalled him' (13). His major complaint was that news stories had not presented a totally favourable picture of the 'Think Big' projects which constituted the central strand of the Government's economic strategy. What he could not claim, though, as numerous others could, was that his statements and actions were ignored and, hence, invisible in news products. The systematic bias of the news stories surveyed was rooted in the selection process of news stories. This did not necessarily translate, however, into a 'one-sided' presentation of those issues selected for inclusion.

The dominance of the Prime Minister in news stories provides a good illustration not only of the way the

(13) e.g. The Otago Daily Times, 26 August 1981, p.14.
purposes of sources could be, and were, often frustrated but also of the personalisation of issues so predominant in the media. The news media dealt with social, economic and political issues by presenting them as conflicts between individual people (or institutions conceived as individuals and represented by them) rather than between competing ideologies. This individualisation rendered structures and processes invisible. And it was a clear expression of the ideology dominant in news products precisely because it allowed no room for the questioning of structures, processes, and ways of thinking about them. Society was depicted as an entity composed of discrete, autonomous individuals. These individuals were said to share roughly the same interests, particularly with regard to the functioning of 'our economy'. The emphasis on the harmony of economic interests in New Zealand enabled the media to reconcile the apparently conflicting ideologies of capitalism and consensus; of competition and cooperation.

From a liberal-pluralist perspective, the extensive coverage granted to legitimated institutions cannot be criticised. Their actions do in fact impinge greatly upon the lives of New Zealand news consumers. What can be criticised, however, is the virtual exclusion of a whole range of other voices from news stories. This exclusion served to artificially limit the range within which public
debates were reported to have taken place. The dominance of a small number of institutional voices in news media products not only acted to exclude 'ordinary' people. It also screened out the voices of alternative institutions. For example, the employment policies of the major New Zealand political parties in the 1981 election - National, Labour and Social Credit - were readily obtainable from news stories. The policies of the smaller more radical parties, such as the Socialist Unity Party, were not. It could be argued that the policies of those parties which had a chance of winning seats were the only ones worth including because these would be the only ones of interest to news consumers. Such an argument would, from a liberal-pluralist perspective, be circular. For if alternatives are never to be given the widespread publicity of current orthodoxies then how could they ever gain popular appeal? Those who are already successful would continue to enjoy a huge advantage over political newcomers who do not fit within the established, narrow range of debate.

The dependency of news workers upon 'official' sources has developed in New Zealand, as elsewhere, for a variety of reasons. Two of the primary reasons involved considerations of time and money expended. Even though news work is supposed to feed upon the new (and hence the unpredictable) the ongoing needs of the news media
organisations determine that a certain quantity of news stories must be produced each day. The New Zealand Herald has never, in more than 100 years of publishing history, begun its front page with the headline, 'NOTHING IMPORTANT HAPPENED TODAY'. The 'news hole' surrounding the advertisements must be filled in on a daily basis whether the medium be radio, television or newspapers. News organisations have to position their staff so as to gain the maximum number of newsworthy stories each day.

Governments are particularly favoured by the nature of the dispersal of news workers. News media organisations assume that the actions of Governments are important, and therefore newsworthy, and so journalists are permanently stationed to cover the New Zealand Parliament. News media organisations employ only a limited number of journalists, so the coverage of one issue or institution is automatically at the expense of another. 'Legitimated' institutions are thus reported on quite routinely in news products. They do not have to raise their voices to be heard. Journalists are always stationed on their doorsteps.

And even if the journalists are not waiting, the fact that news work is undertaken under the severe constraints imposed by deadlines acts to encourage the use of 'official' sources. Government ministers, government
departments, major companies, employer organisations and
producer boards all employ full-time press officers or
'public relations' workers. Their task is to propagandize
on behalf of their employers. They stage press
conferences, to which journalists are often invited well
in advance, and they release regular press statements.
These professional news sources are invaluable for
providing regular news copy because they represent sources
which have already been defined as newsworthy. The news
media organisations are thus reliant upon 'official'
sources who provide a steady diet of news stories which
enable them to fill news products on a daily basis.

Such powerful institutions as Governments and large
corporations are able to use their resources to manipulate
journalists into covering certain events and issues. As
Rosenbloom found in his Australian study:

Three main methods of news manipulation are
used: press conferences, press statements and
leaks. All three methods have been developed by
political operators because of the tight control
they allow. In each case, the source dictates
the timing, structure and substance of an
information release, and allows journalists only
limited opportunities to assess and interpret
the divulged material. (14)

News media organisations are provided with pre-packaged

(14) H. Rosenbloom, 1979, p.56.
news stories which are simply re-assembled by news workers and conveyed to news consumers. Just how successful powerful institutions are at getting their desired message across in news products certainly varies from issue to issue. They are, however, almost always successful in getting their voices heard whenever they so choose. Other individuals and organisations, lacking these same extensive resources, do not enjoy this huge advantage.

Their reliance on 'official' sources means that news media organisations are as dependent upon these sources to provide news copy as the sources are dependent upon the media to provide them with publicity. During his time as Prime Minister, Mr. Muldoon ousted several journalists from his press conferences because he disliked their work (15).

Journalists cannot, therefore, afford to bite too hard the hand that feeds them news stories. Moreover, as Tuchman (1978) has argued, if news products presented all of officialdom as potentially corrupt or inept, then they would need to consult many more news sources to validate their stories. Instead 'fact' and 'source' become virtually indistinguishable. The 'facts' on which the

(15) e.g. Mr. Tom Scott who then worked for the New Zealand Listener was in receipt of such a ban.
media work tend to be what the legitimated 'source' asserts them to be (16). The news media organisations surveyed tended to merely present the statements issued by their chosen sources and to wait for some other news source to either contradict or verify them. Thus, the appearance was maintained that news stories merely reflect the issues and debates occurring 'out there' in the real world.

The news products surveyed also displayed a high degree of dependency on the services of the New Zealand Press Association (N.Z.P.A.) and other news services. Of the 54 news stories carried on the front page of The New Zealand Herald in the week, 4 to 9 July, 1983, seventeen carried the N.Z.P.A. by-line. This reliance translated into a great deal of news story repetition amongst news products. It also limited the range of news stories covered on a national basis. Newspapers and news shows frequently presented the same stories and thus functioned to mutually reinforce the notion that what was important was what was in the news.

To be in the news is, by definition, to be important. Altheide found that:

With few exceptions, viewers seldom watch the evening news in order to learn about topics experienced independently of news channels. Rather, people 'watch the news' because that is where newsworthy events are presented. The institutionalization of news messages has become a sanctioned activity. In the process of watching the news, people learn what is significant from the standpoint of those who work within practical and organisational limitations to find, schedule, film and report events-as-news. (17)

It is part of a journalist's training to internalize the criteria for determining what is important and, hence, newsworthy. As Tuchman states: '[B]eing a professional reporter capable of coping with idiosyncratic occurrences means being able to use typifications to invoke appropriate reportorial techniques' (18). Journalists must quickly learn how to obtain a steady supply of news stories which meet the requirements and standards of the organisation by whom they are employed. Those who fail to absorb the criteria find that their stories simply fail to be accepted or else appear in a radically re-written form.

The concept of 'newsworthiness' has been analysed by Galtung and Ruge who found that twelve major ingredients interacted to determine whether or not a news story would be deemed acceptable (19). This analysis exactly fits

(18) G. Tuchman, p.58.
the stories covered by the New Zealand news media organisations surveyed. The 'frequency' of an event was the first determinant of newsworthiness. Economic trends which took years to unfold and yield their meaning were outside of the 'frequency' range of daily newspapers and news shows. Thus, the announcement of redundancies at a factory was 'newsworthy' but the slow decline of the industry concerned prior to the lay-offs, was not. When economic trends were presented, it was after an event, such as redundancies, had occurred, and with an eye to explaining the event, not to explicating the trends with care and at length.

The second determinant of newsworthiness, according to Galtung and Ruge, was the 'threshold' of an occurrence. Before an event could be deemed newsworthy, it had to register with a sufficient magnitude of importance. The required magnitude, moreover, altered over time. New dramas were needed to keep a story in the news. Otherwise it would simply disappear from sight (20). This may mean, as Tuchman contends, that news consumers come, '... to mistake knowing about problems ... for doing something about them' (21). It would be easy to gain the impression that the 'problem' had been dealt with simply because it

(20) See Chapter IX for a discussion of the 'threshold' factor applied to the 'streetkid' news story.
had been given widespread publicity.

The third determinant posited by Galtung and Ruge was that of 'unambiguity'. They found that news media organisations sought to present news stories in the simplest possible terms. My own conclusions in what follows show that in New Zealand the drive for simplicity or 'unambiguity' frequently led journalists into oversimplifying issues and events (22). News stories tended to distort them in the process. Connections between various news stories were seldom made so that each news story existed in artificial isolation from its fellows. News stories were also removed from their historical contexts so that long-term causes were difficult to discern.

The fourth determinant of newsworthiness was that of 'meaningfulness'. According to Galtung and Ruge an event became 'meaningful' by its cultural proximity or relevance to the culture of news consumers. Events also had to have 'consonance', a function of the predictability of or the desire for, an event to occur. This was the fifth determinant. Royal weddings are, therefore, both 'meaningful' and 'consonant'. 'Unexpectedness' was, however, also a category but only within the boundaries of

(22) See especially Chapter VI.
'meaningfulness' and 'consonance'. An unexpected event which was neither culturally meaningful nor consonant with day-to-day events was likely to slip through the news net unobserved.

The seventh determinant of newsworthiness was 'continuity'. Under this category fell stories which began with a distinct event and then unfolded over a set time period like a television serial drama. An example drawn from the data covered in this study illustrates the phenomenon well. The Evening Post ran six separate news stories on the closure of the Gear Meat Works in Petone from 16 to 19 November 1981 (23). A further nine stories ran in 1982 (24). In many of these news stories nothing 'new' had happened. News consumers were merely reminded that the serial was continuing and new instalments were imminent.

Galtung and Ruge's eighth criterion was 'composition'. The format of news products is set in advance with so much space, or time, allotted to foreign news, national news,

local news, business news, and so forth. Not only do news organisations require a set amount of news copy every day, they also require a set amount of certain kinds of news. Thus the importance and, therefore, 'newsworthiness' of events was judged partly on the basis of what other news stories of the same kind were available at that time. A news story which would feature on one day might not have been used at all on another day, depending upon what other stories it had to compete with for inclusion.

'Elite' nations and people were automatically granted newsworthiness status according to Galtung and Ruge's ninth and tenth categories. 'Elite' nations for the western news media organisations consisted of other western nations. 'Elite' persons were those prominent in political, sporting, cultural or business activities in these same nations. Hence New Zealand news consumers were regularly informed of the unemployment rates in Australia, Britain, the U.S.A. and the E.E.C. countries while unemployment in African, Asian or South American countries was almost completely ignored.

Personalisation of news stories is a marked trait of media products. The eighth category of newsworthiness recognised this fact. According to Galtung and Ruge, if an event could be presented as due to the actions of specific individuals then the likelihood of its inclusion
in news products was increased. For instance, political debates were presented as disputes between individual people rather than as disputes over issues. The protagonists and not the substance of the debate was highlighted.

The final category and probably the most obvious, was that of 'negativity'. The best news is, as some New Zealanders keep complaining, 'bad news'. 'Good news' tends to be ignored. It was not newsworthy that some industries were surviving the recession without laying off staff. It was news that the Auckland Reidrubber tyre plant closed down meaning, '570 MORE JOBS TO GO IN AUCKLAND' (25). What 'good' news did appear, such as successful co-operative work schemes, was assigned to the feature news pages as 'soft' or non-factual news.

There is, in sum, nothing random about news work in general, and New Zealand provides no exception. It is a highly organised and routinized process which guarantees the procurement of a certain number of specific kinds of news stories. This process is highly reliant upon 'official' and elite sources of information to fill the daily news intake. And this reliance translates into a

very narrow range of voices dominating news stories. In the U.S.A., Tuchman found that:

Through its dispersion of the news net, its typifications, the claimed professionalism of newsworkers, the mutual constitution of fact and source, the representational forms of the news narrative, the claims to first amendment rights of both private property and professionalism — news legitimates the status quo. (26)

With the exception of first amendment rights, Tuchman's summary of news work could be applied to New Zealand news media products.

The apparently 'commonsense' mode of news media presentation helped disguise the ideological dimension of news products (27). There was no critical dimension to the 'commonsense' mode of news media presentations. Language was employed as though the definitions involved were accepted and shared by all New Zealanders. News media products had the appearance of casual conversations which masked the fact that they were pre-selected, carefully constructed and edited to present a specific storyline to news consumers. There was nothing 'casual' or 'commonsense' about the highly routinized and tightly organized procedures of the news media.

The news media are not only reliant upon only a few legitimated sources and a narrow definition of newsworthiness. They also actively seek to give shape to the events. This process of 'making things mean', of representation, means that the news media do not neutrally reflect even the small range of stories which fall into the news net. As Hall asserts:

[R]epresentation is a very different notion from that of reflection. It implies the active work of selecting and presenting, of structuring and shaping: not merely the transmitting of an already-existing meaning, but the more active labour of making things mean. (28)

As a part of this process of representation economic activity was depicted as a reified force. Like an earthquake, 'the economy' appeared to be beyond human control. Tuchman stated that news consumers were not able to deal with such forces and that 'experts and authorities' were shown to be doing everything they could (29). News consumers were not given the impression that they personally had the competence to control, or even to understand, the economic issues involved. Thus news media organisations not only allowed 'legitimated' institutional sources to set the terms within which economic issues were debated, they also did not present these debates in a

(28) In Gurevitch et al, 1982, p.64.
manner which invited public participation. Indeed, as will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, news stories promote the idea of the incompetence of individuals to deal with complex social, economic and political phenomena. In the field of unemployment, experts such as political leaders and economists were depicted as battling against reified forces to increase job opportunities. Just what these forces consisted of or what range of alternative battle plans was available was not revealed in news stories. News consumers might have been able to assess whether the experts were achieving their stated ends but they were certainly not placed in a position to judge the worth of the means employed.

In brief, the products of the New Zealand news media were dominated by the voices of those who were already powerful in New Zealand society. This was the result of organisational practices and the journalistic conception of 'newsworthiness' rather than any overt and crude bias. Those 'legitimated' institutions with the financial ability to hire professional press officers were, moreover, able to provide a constant stream of news copy for journalists. Such institutions were able to dominate news products both in terms of the quantity of coverage they received and by strongly influencing the terms of reference within which issues were debated. Chapters V through IX will provide a case study of how this process
worked in practice with regard to the issues of unemployment. The next (and final preliminary) chapter examines more closely the 'terms of reference' - the language - of news products.
CHAPTER IV: NEUTRALITY AS IDEOLOGY:
THE LANGUAGE OF NEWS STORIES

If there are no conflicts over meaning, the issue is not political by definition.

The Masters' right of giving names goes so far that it is permissible to look upon language itself as the expression of the power of the masters: they say 'this is that, and that,' they seal finally every object and every event with a sound and thereby at the same time take possession of it.
Friedrich Nietzsche, 1887.

Language plays a central role in politics as in all fields of human endeavour. It is also language which is the central focus of this project - the language of the New Zealand news media organisations. Obviously, and as we have recently been reminded by philosophers and historians of ideas, to say something is to do something not quite so obviously. The meanings which are attached to words are never neutral. As I have had Edelman saying in the headnote, if the meanings of the words surrounding an issue do not generate conflict then the issue has not become a political one (1). Debate coalesces around - either to dispute or assume - certain 'keywords'. And the

content and results of these debates are intensely practical. Certain 'keywords' emerged in the course of this study which can be seen as pivotal to the whole news media discourse on unemployment. The usage accorded to such words limited both the breadth and depth of the analysis in news stories.

In his examination of the 'keywords' used in the recent British mining strike, Raymond Williams (1985) found that the usage accorded to certain keywords like 'community' favoured the interests of the Coal Board (2). In the process, certain fundamental points central to the coal miners' cause were obscured or ignored. For example, Williams found that the miners were often said to be acting against the interests of the 'community' but the 'community' in question was a particular and narrow definition of that term. Williams states:

What the miners, like most of us, mean by their communities is the places where they have lived and want to go on living, where generations not only of social effort and human care have been invested, and which new generations will inherit. Without that kind of strong whole attachment, there can be no meaningful community.

However, there is another use of community, to mean not these actual places and people but an abstract aggregate with an arbitrary general

(2) R. Williams, 'Mining the Meaning, Keywords in the Miners Strike' in New Socialist, March 1985.
interest ... To destroy actual communities in
the name of 'community' or 'the public' is then
evill as well as false. (3)

One may well argue that the destruction might not be evil
and that it is not so much based on the falsity of the
more abstract meaning of 'community' as on the unsettled
ambiguity of the word 'community'. But it is clear that
to examine the meanings accorded to words in news stories
is not to merely split semantic straws. It is to examine
consequential political processes.

The way in which an event is defined in a story will have
a very real effect upon the way in which the event is
perceived by the story's audience. This is not to say
that the audience will necessarily accept the definitions
favoured by the story-teller. But by evoking such narrow
definitions the powerful story-tellers - news media
organisations - can limit the range within which public
debate occurs. Other possible definitions of events are
not overtly attacked. They are quite simply rendered
invisible by their exclusion. This power of exclusion
involves the ability to select what is and what is not
'newsworthy' along with the ability to delineate the
context within which that which is deemed 'newsworthy' is
set.

The construction of meaning in language is, of course, a contentious issue amongst scholars. Each language operates by defining what words mean and equally, or perhaps more importantly, each language operates by defining what words do not mean. For example the word 'red' is used to designate a whole range of hues which, potentially, could all be allocated their own word. What the word 'red' tells the audience, therefore, is not the exact colour of an object but the colours which the object is not. Words are generally only created and maintained in circulation if they fill a social need. The English language has only one term for 'snow' but the Eskimo peoples whose lives are bound up with this substance have many words to differentiate the various kinds of 'snow'.

Whether or not this formulation of the function of definition is accepted, it is nevertheless clear that words do not exist independently of one another or of the culture within which they operate. Derrida called this intertwining of words 'the play of differences'. He stated that:

The play of differences supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be present in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present .... Nothing, neither among the elements nor within the
system, is anywhere ever present or absent. There are only everywhere, differences and traces of traces. (4)

Derrida thus argues for a dynamic rather than a static language, for a language which is constantly in a state of flux, and which relates to itself as much as to the world it (sometimes) names to represent. And who would argue with him?

A similar formulation of the construction of meaning in language can be found in the work of Saussure. He asserted that:

Instead of pre-existing ideas, then, we find ... values emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their passive content but negatively by their relations with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not. (5)

For both Saussure and Derrida it is, therefore, the conceptual field within which a concept lies that is of primary importance. This study therefore does not propose to examine 'keywords' in isolation as though they had some

independent existence apart from the discourse in which they were embedded. It will examine not just what was meant by such words but also what was not meant. It will attempt to at least partially uncover the meanings which have been specifically excluded from the New Zealand media's discourse on unemployment.

In his seminal *Keywords* (1976), Williams provided a list of words whose meanings have been a site of conflict over time (6). Included in his list were the terms, 'unemployment', 'work', 'welfare' and 'rational', all of which have been exploited at various stages of history for different reasons, and all of which continued their history and use in New Zealand. A similar evaluation of the way in which the meanings of 'keywords' develop over the long term is beyond the scope of a study which takes only a three year period as its base. But it will be useful to place some of the 'keywords' for this study into the longer-term context provided by Williams.

The word 'unemployed' was first used in the sixteenth century to designate an object which was not being put to use. For instance, a plough lying in a barn could be described as an unemployed plough. In the seventeenth

century this word began to be applied to people rather than objects. This was done, however, only in the sense of people who were not doing anything at the particular time in question rather than of people who had no work to do. Hence, a person resting in the sunshine would be described as unemployed. By the end of the seventeenth century, however, unemployed had appeared in its modern sense as the state of not working because no work was available. Williams states that:

The developing sense is important because it represents the specialization of productive effort to paid employment by another, which has been an important part of the history of capitalist production and wage labour. (7)

It is worth noting that the earlier definition of unemployment as voluntary idleness has lingered on in New Zealand. This is shown in Chapter VII in which the dominant image of unemployed people as 'dole bludgers' is examined. The term 'unemployed' is, therefore, still used to designate those who choose not to work along with those who have no choice because they have no work to do. In the news stories surveyed this led to the use of the distinction between 'dole bludgers' and 'victims', the 'real' unemployed. This distinction clearly evoked a moral dimension into the debate.

(7) Ibid, p.274.
The word 'work' is the general English word for engaging in some kind of activity. Originally, however, there was a strong distinction between 'work' and 'labour', between the French words 'travailler' and 'ouvrer', and between the German words 'arbeiten' and 'werken'. According to Arendt: 'In all these cases, only the equivalents for 'labor' have an unequivocal connotation of pain and trouble' (8). The German word 'arbeit' was initially used to describe manual labour undertaken by serfs while the skilled activities of artisans were called 'werk'. Similarly the French word 'travailler' was derived from 'tripalium' which was a form of torture. The connotations of these two words are still present today. The unemployed often use 'the right to work' as a slogan with which to lobby for changes in governmental employment policies. One cannot, however, find anyone calling for the 'right to labour'.

The meanings attached to the word 'work' have altered considerably over time. Today a working person is one who has a job. According to Williams:

The specialization of 'work' to paid employment is the result of the development of capitalist productive relations. To be 'in work' or 'out

of work' was to be in a definite relationship with some other who had control of the means of productive effort. 'Work' then partly shifted from the productive effort itself to the predominant social relationship. It is only in this sense that a woman running a house and bringing up children can be said to be 'not working'. (9)

The other more general definition of 'work' simply as productive activity has not disappeared altogether from common usage. (For example, people are still said to be 'working' in their gardens even though they receive no payment for this activity). Current usage generally, however, distinguishes between 'work' and 'leisure', naming 'leisure activities' as those carried out outside of 'working hours' and often refers to them as a time of pleasant respite from the rigours of paid employment. It involves the freedom to choose the activities one engages in. It is designated 'leisure' time even when the activity chosen involves a large amount of physical exertion or produces a tangible product.

Nevertheless, news stories in which the unemployed were said to be in need of 'education for leisure' appeared often (10). But the use of the word 'leisure' to describe the content of the lives of unemployed people was misleadingly ambiguous. For in the normal understanding

(9) R. Williams, 1976, p.282.
(10) See Chapter VII.
of it leisure time is the time in which one is not engaged in one's paid employment, and if one does not have paid employment then the ordinary distinction between 'work' and 'leisure' collapses - at least from the point of view of the unemployed. Thus to apply the term 'leisure' to all of the activities of unemployed people was (wrongly on normal usage) to imply that they lived 'lives of leisure' in conditions where 'leisure' was an enjoyable respite from work. And this implication was used as a political weapon against those who might otherwise have been seen as unwilling victims of circumstance.

There was an awareness expressed, in some of the news stories surveyed that the meaning of the word 'work' was itself a potential site for political struggle. For instance, an Evening Post news story stated:

What is happening has not been fully realised: the problem is not how to decrease unemployment but rather to rethink what we believe about work and jobs .... we are stuck with the obsolete idea that to be employed is to be a worthwhile person, to be unemployed is to be a bludger, a personal failure, a drain on the productive community .... Perhaps unemployment should be redefined as a state of mind whereby a person has needs which are regularly not being met by his or her existing pattern of working activity. On this basis, some people with paid jobs are in fact unhappily unemployed and some who ... don't have a job in the traditional sense are actually happily employed because their daily activities satisfy them ... Being employed for wages or
recorded on official work statistics is not the critical issue. (11)

Such statements were, however, extremely rare in mainstream news products but were to be found mainly in the publications of fringe groups such as unemployed worker associations. 'Work' was overwhelmingly defined as that set of activities associated with paid employment.

The word 'welfare' was used from the fourteenth century onwards to indicate happiness and prosperity. In the twentieth century it lost these dominant associations and instead has mainly to do with the 'welfare state'. Such a state claims to (or sets out to) guarantee minimum standards of subsistence through the use of subsidies and direct 'welfare' payments. To be living on 'welfare' in the U.S.A. is to be living on money supplied as a benefit or pension by the state. Such organised care of a nation's citizens has nothing to do with the provision of happiness. Moreover, those who are in direct receipt of welfare payments tend to be those living in poverty rather than prosperity. In New Zealand, for example, the Government has taken great care to ensure that the level of the unemployment benefit remains fixed below the level of the lowest award rate. This is to ensure that no one

will be lured away from their job by the prospect of earning more for doing nothing. The 'welfare state' thus has rather more to do with minimum 'standards of living' than with either prosperity or happiness.

The word 'rationality' is associated closely with the word 'reason'. A 'rational' being has always been one who is endowed with 'reason'. However, reasonableness became associated with moderateness as in a 'reasonable request'. In this sense a 'rational' request is not necessarily a 'reasonable' one. The word 'rational' has also carried with it since the eighteenth century a distinction from emotions or feelings. Increasingly, since the 'age of enlightenment' a 'rational' decision has been seen to be one made with the 'head' rather than the 'heart'. Earlier no such distinction was felt necessary. A 'rationalization' can, however, be a false reason for an act as when one rationalizes ones actions after the event. This definition holds primacy in Freudian psychology. There has to be a way of speaking of misplaced rationalism, but no such usage was adopted by the New Zealand media.

In New Zealand news stories to 'rationalize' referred to the attempts to make New Zealand industries more 'efficient' and 'competitive'. The term was employed with none of the connotations of Freudian cover-ups but stood
in opposition to the 'irrational'. 'Rationalizing' was presented as the logical and only way of reorganising industries. It involved appeals to the dollar and cents equations of balance sheets rather than to 'emotive' issues such as unemployment. Hence, what was 'rational' for the national economy might be the loss of thousands of jobs.

Economic 'rationality' thus excluded many human factors from its equations. Opponents of 'rationalization' were cast as supporters of the 'irrational' who dragged their emotions into what should be purely economic decisions. At no time in the news stories surveyed was the meaning of the word 'rationalisation' called in to question. Instead the closed economic 'rationality' favoured by the government and business leaders dominated unchallenged in the products of the news media organisations.

The quote from Nietzsche I also cite in the headnote suggests that certain people have the opportunity of 'giving names' and that this ability gives such 'masters' power over others (12). In New Zealand, the news media organisations provide the largest source of information

about events and issues outside of direct personal experiences. The language usages dominant in news products can, therefore, be seen to have a very real impact upon the terms of reference within which such issues and events are viewed by news consumers.

This language is not necessarily that of the news media organisations themselves. News products tend to give more coverage to sources which Tuchman (1978) has described as 'legitimated' or 'official'. These sources include politicians, Government departments, large companies and powerful pressure groups. It is, then, the preferred language of these sources which dominates news products, the voices of the established institutions in New Zealand. Other 'deviant' voices do not have the same ease of access to news products, do not have an equal ability to publicise and seek support for their views. It should be noted, however, that it is the news media's reconstructions of these dominant sources and not the sources themselves which make up the news. In the course of production they modulate the language of their sources - and from the point of view of the sources themselves, 'distort' the messages they would prefer to see transmitted.

An assertion by Bernard Cohen that is often quoted in media studies is that: 'The press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think but it is
stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about' (13). But Cohen does not, however, go far enough. The news media organisations not only have a decisive influence over 'what' people think about, they also have an influence over the context within which the chosen issues and events are debated. News stories do not neutrally reflect even the bits of reality they deem 'newsworthy'. Rather, they present only a particular version of this selected sample. One of the major reasons for this is the language with which news stories are told.

Language is, therefore, open to change as well as being a potential site of political conflict. But the discourse of the New Zealand news media organisations is overly simple and narrow in its use of language. New Zealand organisations are not unique in this (14). Hartley, who examined the British media, argued that news workers always attempt to present clear and unambiguous stories about events and issues and thus that:

News discourse is hostile to ambiguities and alternative possibilities intersecting its signs by reference either to 'the facts of the story', or to 'normal usage'. Many of the explicit 'values' of journalistic codes are concerned with unambiguity, clarity, etc.

(14) See Chapter III.
But since signs are necessarily multi-accentual any discourse which seeks to 'close' their potential and to prefer one evaluative accent over another is ideological: such discourses present evaluative differences as differences in fact. (15)

It is in this sense that the discourse of New Zealand news media organisations is ideological. Because it is a specific part of the journalistic code to present news stories in their simplest form, news workers also screen out many of the rich complexities of language which are an integral part of, rather than peripheral to, the news story concerned.

Language itself is, therefore, a powerful ideological weapon. In New Zealand, the predominance of 'official' sources means that it is the ideological preferences of these sources which are dominant. This is not, however, immediately apparent because the language used appears to be the 'commonsense' usages. It is only when The New Zealand Herald is compared with a radical or socialist newspaper, such as the Tribune, that its ideological bent stands out as supportive of the established and dominant institutions in New Zealand society. Ideologies only become starkly visible when viewed from a distance.

According to Edelman:

The critical element in political manoeuvre for advantage is the creation of meaning: the construction of beliefs about the significance of events, of problems, of crises, of policy changes, and of leaders. The strategic need is to immobilize opposition and mobilize support. While coercion and intimidation help to check resistance in all political systems, the key tactic must always be the evocation of meanings that legitimize favoured courses of action and threaten or reassure people so as to encourage them to be supportive or to remain quiescent.

(16)

If the ideological dimension of the news media's discourse were not invisible it would not be so effective. If it were apparent that an ideologically charged perspective on world events and issues was being presented then it would become equally apparent that other ideological perspectives were being excluded. But it is not apparent. The 'neutrality' and 'objectivity' aspired to by journalists are an integral part of the cohesive ideological view of the world presented in the news discourse (17). That this discourse is so widely accepted as 'neutral' and 'objective' shows the extent to which this ideological view has come to be accepted as the 'norm' (18).

This is not to suggest that it is possible to present a non-ideological view of the world. News products tell

(17) See Chapter III.
stories to news consumers and in the process interpret events and issues. It is not possible to present the world 'out there' in an unaltered form to an audience. By merely selecting what facets of the world are 'newsworthy' news workers have begun to impose their particular perspective upon the world. Moreover, by presenting the world in story form, with a starting point and an ending point, the event or issue in question has been taken out of its wider context. What is interesting is not that news stories contain a definite ideological perspective but that news workers generally assert that they do not. For instance, the code of ethics adopted by the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1923 states that: 'Sound practice makes clear distinction between news reports and expressions of opinion. News reports should be free from opinion or bias of any kind' (19). It is a canon of sound journalistic practice, therefore, that news workers seek to achieve the unachievable, a story which is told from no one point of view (20).

News media institutions do not, however, generally foist alien values and views upon news consumers. If they were to do so then they would be immediately charged with presenting biased news products. To a large extent, then,

news media products must present what will be acceptable to their news consumers. As Edelman observed, 'What is accepted as a 'good reason' tells nothing about the cogency of its argument but is a sensitive index to the problems, aspirations and social situation of its audience' (21).

A clear example of such an argument in the period surveyed will be provided in Chapter VII in regard to the representation of the unemployed as 'dole bludgers' (22). In brief, news must draw on society's stock of images and myths (23). For this reason, news products often liken events to one another even when they have no important connection (24).

This view of the news media products as presenting a dominant ideological view seems, on the surface, to be challenged by the fact that much of what is considered newsworthy involves conflict. Moreover news media institutions consciously strive to present 'both sides' of any argument. The parameters within which conflict actually occurred in the news media products surveyed were, however, extremely narrow. The terms within which debates took place were to a large extent set by the

(22) See Chapter VII.
(24) See Chapter III.
dominant 'official' sources. What the issue was, was what these dominant voices said it was. Opponents had the opportunity to present opposing views but they seldom had the opportunity to redefine the issue (25).

The dominant news sources themselves often appeared to be in conflict in news stories. But this conflict took place at a superficial rather than at a fundamental level. For example, while the Labour Party and the National Party were competing to become the government of New Zealand, they were competing within the bounds of the same electoral process. Neither party professed a desire to permanently disband Parliament, to found a New Zealand monarchy or to nationalize the means of production, distribution and exchange. Both were committed to a capitalist economic system which operated within the boundaries of a welfare state. While appearing to be diametrically opposed to one another, these two political parties in fact inhabited very similar ideological territory. The ideological perspective of the news discourse was that small but dominant slice of the ideological spectrum to be found in New Zealand society and within it there was ample room for disagreements and conflicts.

(25) See Chapter VIII.
That the terms within which debates in the news discourse were set, was largely determined by the preferences of the dominant news sources and was significant for several reasons. It meant that organisations and individuals who had not gained such an ease of access for their views were almost always arguing on ground staked out by their opponents. It is much easier to win a battle if one can pre-select the territory over which it will be fought. Moreover, such non-dominant news sources spent much of their time denying the views of their opponents rather than using it to present alternative views.

Language carries with it associated connotations. Many different words may be selected to describe the same phenomenon and the chosen words will influence the way in which the phenomenon is viewed by an audience. For example, a strike by workers could be described as a 'threat to the economy' or as a 'breakdown in negotiations'. Given the dominance of 'legitimated' status quo institutions as news sources, it is these same institutions, therefore, who have the greatest opportunity to select the words which will set an event or issue in its context. Hence, these sources are able not only to determine what it is that is important, but also how what is important will in fact be debated. They are, of course, never entirely successful in convincing New Zealanders of the validity of their case but this does not
negate the enormous advantages they enjoy over 'non-legitimated' news sources.

That New Zealand news consumers do not always accept the story told by the most dominant voice can be shown by the simple act of periodically voting for a change of government. This is despite the fact that the policies and personalities of the ruling party receive far more coverage in news products than do those of opposing parties. Meaning is not, therefore, something which exists independently of consciousness (26).

Language and the meaning and value it ascribes to institutions and persons is both a cultural fact and a personal possession. Its rules and usages may be common to a society but at the same time it is open to creative change by individuals, albeit within the boundaries set by these rules and usages. News products are not fed in to wholly passive audiences who receive a pre-constructed ideological message in identical ways. The narrowness of the ideological spectrum and the predominance of sources might, therefore, appear to be of no great importance. After all, individuals are capable of rejecting as well as accepting the news discourse. This does not, however, alter the fact that it is only a narrow band of messages

which is open to acceptance or rejection in news products. Alternative voices are seldom heard, dissent is generally contained within the dominant ideology and debates are argued within the terms set by the dominant news sources.

What was the ideological perspective that was discovered in the course of examining the language of the news discourse on unemployment in New Zealand? The ideological 'norms' for society were overtly supportive of parliamentary democracy, capitalism, economic growth, the work ethic, and consensus. News stories were hostile to communism, 'dole bludgers', and dissenters. There were numerous references to the 'national interest', the 'New Zealand economy' and 'our industry' all of which suggested a harmony of interests in New Zealand society. The interests of the owners and controllers of New Zealand's industries were equated with the 'national interest'. The interests of the workers in these industries were treated as narrow, sectional interests (27).

The promotion of consensus was contradicted by the capitalist ethics of individualism and competitiveness in news products. This contradiction was never openly considered. Indeed the two ideas often existed, side by side, in the same news story. For example, the Evening

(27) See Chapter VIII. 
Post ran a story under the headline, 'ECONOMIC 'GANGS' ARE URGED TO CO-OPERATE TO ENSURE PROSPERITY' in which the New Zealand Planning Council chairman, Sir Frank Holmes, asserted that all of the 'social partners' had a stake in ensuring economic prosperity (28). He called for 'shared responsibility among unions, employers and government' as though they were equal partners in the New Zealand economy. All this talk of consensus was, however, directly negated later in this story when Sir Frank advocated a more 'free market' approach. He stated:

We are one of the most protectionist countries in the world, and it has not proved to be a satisfactory way to promote full employment, let alone living standards for our people. (29)

It was the open competition of unfettered capitalism rather than the democratic negotiating processes of consensus which Sir Frank desired. Still later in this story, Sir Frank abandoned consensus altogether with the statement that:

I strongly believe that a longer parliamentary term would help governments take a longer view, to have more time for the more beneficial effects of apparently unpalatable measures to become evident, and to reduce the number of

(29) Ibid.
years in which they feel obliged to do short-sighted things to try to avoid unpopularity with important groups in the electorate. (30)

This statement clearly evoked the image of corporate state capitalism rather than either the 'free market' or democratic consensus. As Williams asserts:

[The] emphasis on the nation-state taking control of a national political and economic life contradicts very openly the practices and ideals of market mobility and free consumer choice. (31)

Few news stories demonstrated the contradictions in the prevailing economic rhetoric as clearly as did this one but there were numerous other examples of it.

The dominance of the idea of consensus was not, however, exclusive to New Zealand. Hartley found that in Britain news stories promoted the same consensual model with all of its internal contradictions. He stated that the model: '... requires both unity and fragmentation, both the notion of 'elite' persons and the assumption that we all also have roughly the same interests in the society, and that we all roughly have an equal share of power in the society' (32). Moreover, the idea of a consensus society

(30) Ibid.
(32) J. Hartley, 1982, p.82.
enabled news products to depict dissenters as being irrational, irresponsible and dangerous. After all, they were a threat to 'our' society. Hartley adds that: 'Exactly whose society is being so threatened is not an open question, since the consensual model requires 'society' to be everyone. Dissidents, then, are mad or malicious' (33). This depiction of dissenters will be illustrated later with respect to the activities of the New Zealand trade union movement (34). Passivity was the only mode of behaviour approved of in news stories for people such as the unemployed who sought change, if not in society itself then at least in their own personal situations (35).

The dominant ideological perspective in news stories was also conspicuously European. It involved a way of looking at the world which was not shared by all other cultures including the indigenous culture of the New Zealand Maori people. According to Wilden, European culture acts to:

[D]eny the complementary relationships on which it depends, and consequently to justify them as symmetrical. Real relationships of dominance and subservience between unequal partners are defined as free competition in an

(33) Ibid, p.84.
(34) See Chapter VIII.
(35) See Chapter VII.
open market place between free and equal legal, psychological and socioeconomic subjects. (36)

This world view is a culturally specific one rather than the universal it appears in news stories. The world views of other cultures were definitely not the 'norm' in news products and were absent from the news stories surveyed.

News products reflected the dominant slice of the New Zealand ideological spectrum. This was not the result of some insidious conspiracy to dupe the populace into subservience. Rather, it was a reflection of the news workers' codes of neutrality and their definitions of newsworthiness (37). The language of the dominant New Zealand institutions is also the language of the New Zealand news discourse. This discourse helps to legitimate the power of established institutions (38). Thus the opportunities the mass communications systems of the press, radio and television afford to politicians, and others who wish to seek public endorsement for their views, are enormously important. Once these communications systems came into existence they could not be ignored.

(37) See Chapter III.
The news stories surveyed showed clearly that the news media's discourse on unemployment was not a rich one which blended views from all segments of the New Zealand society. Instead it was dominated by a few voices: politicians, business leaders and other powerful sectional interest groups. The language of the news discourse on unemployment hinged around a few 'keywords' and these words will be explored in Chapters Five through Nine. Thus, while it is important to ascertain just which stories were told about unemployment and who told them, it is also important to examine the way in which these stories were told. Without this additional qualitative dimension the actual meaning of the news stories would disappear in a host of statistics measuring the importance of issues and the dominance of voices purely in terms of column inches and broadcast time. While such quantitative measures are important they can reveal only a fragment of the nature of the discourse of the New Zealand news media institutions on unemployment.
CHAPTER V: THE SIMPLIFICATION OF ECONOMICS IN NEWS STORIES, 1981-1983

There was, from 1981 through 1983, undisputed agreement in New Zealand, that the cause, the context, and perhaps the cure of unemployment lay in 'the economy' and in economic policy. There was agreement, too, that present and future unemployment related to complexly connected policy options facing the nation. This was the basic ideological matrix in which stories on unemployment were placed.

Simplicity was the virtue which lay at the core of almost all of the news stories surveyed. It was also their greatest vice. There was a marked lack of breadth and depth to stories about economic policies. The news media organisations could claim that by simplifying otherwise complex events or concepts they had brought these events and concepts to a wider audience. But there is a great deal of difference between presenting a complex idea in simple terms and simplifying a complex idea until it becomes virtually meaningless. Journalists lay claim to simplifying the complex but can often, and justly, be accused of rendering it utterly unclear. What was meant to be put simply was put simplistically.

The overly simplistic presentation of economic issues that
will be discussed in this chapter cannot be attributed solely to the belief that news products are intended for the widest possible audience and that this audience lacks the sophistication to understand economics. Other reasons were evident. Firstly, only certain kinds of economic arguments were presented, indicating that there was a pronounced ideological perspective to be taken into account. For instance, there was only one specific criticism of 'capitalism' to be found in the hundreds of stories on unemployment appearing in The New Zealand Herald in the period 1981 through 1983 (1). The theories of mainstream capitalist economics were exclusively the norm for news stories. The alternative policies offered by radical or marxist economists were neither criticised nor dismissed in news products. They were just not mentioned. The economic system in New Zealand was not referred to as the 'capitalist' economy but only as 'the' economy. It was as though other varieties of economic systems did not exist. Secondly, certain sections of newspapers and news broadcasts were specifically addressed to the person who did possess some specialist knowledge of the economic sphere. These stories, contained in 'financial' or 'business' sections, were slightly less simplistic in nature. The major difference between them and general news stories lay, however, not in the relative

complexity of the stories but in the perspective from which they were presented.

An announcement that workers had been made redundant would be treated in very different ways depending upon the section of the newspaper or news broadcast in which it appeared. For example, under the headline, 'ATLAS FORECASTS FIRST HALF PROFIT', 'business' section readers were informed that Atlas Majestic Industries Ltd., had returned to profitability (2). Management spokespeople attributed their achievement to a 'rationalization' of the company which had involved 'redundancies'. This same newspaper announced intended redundancies by another firm, in the general news section under the headline, 'FIRM AXES 100 JOBS' (3). News workers quite apparently constructed news stories with more than the economic sophistication of their audience in mind. The assignment of a story to either the general news section or the 'business' section involved a consideration of both content and tone as well as complexity. However, the dominant ideology still reigned whatever the category news stories were assigned to.

The absence of an historical perspective was a major

contributing factor to the overly simple character of news stories. This absence meant that issues and events were removed from their diachronic context. It aided the presentation of the status quo as the 'norm'. The capitalist economic system not only appeared as the only system for New Zealand but also seemed to have always existed in its present form. Current economic problems appeared, therefore, to have sprung out of nowhere in the manner of floods and earthquakes. The closure of a major industry was newsworthy; the long-term trends which had caused it, were not. Events were not depicted as being a consequence of their antecedent conditions. Thus they also appeared to be beyond human control. The reification of economic forces was a major trait of news stories.

Events and issues were also not linked together synchronically. The relationships between the various economic news stories appearing on the same day were seldom explicated. Each story was separated into its own space or time slot so that linkages between stories were obscured. It was as though the world was a void out of which discrete events sprang and into which they rapidly disappeared. Events appeared to be disjointed phenomena suspended in a timeless space with no apparent past and no long-term future.

The simplistic nature of news stories was added to by a
marked concentration on personalised party-political manoeuvring. Ideological rifts over economic policies were presented as personal feuds out of which clear 'winners' and 'losers' emerged. In the process 'what' had been won was obscured by the focus on 'who' had won. Clashing people are far easier to depict than are clashing ideologies. They also made for more dramatic news stories. What this focus did not lend itself to, however, was the production of informative news. Information rather than pure entertainment does, after all, provide the rationale for the existence of news products, particularly those outside of private sector control.

The uncritical manner in which certain keywords in the news discourse were presented further added to the simplistic nature of that discourse. Unemployment was one of the most visible features of New Zealand's economic problems. The term unemployment was, however, never actually defined in news stories. Rather it was routinely used as though its meaning was clear and self-evident. Economists speak of the differences between cyclical unemployment, resulting from changes in aggregate demand and structural unemployment, resulting from changes in the nature of demand, international competitiveness and technology.* They also distinguish between frictional unemployment, to characterise the short time spent between jobs in times of full employment and structural

unemployment, to characterise structural changes in 'the economy' which implied that many people would experience long-term joblessness. These distinctions were absent from all but a tiny fraction of news stories. The nature of New Zealand's unemployment problem was thus rendered unclear by the omission of a precise definition of the keyword 'unemployment'.

The very concept of unemployment is a relatively new one born out of the industrialised welfare economies.

As Roger Clarke asserts,

In previous periods of history many a worker could not obtain regular full-time employment. But they could use their initiative and bring in a little income by offering their services, engaging in whatever casual employment might be available. Or they could use their skill of hand within the home and hawk what goods they might manage to produce around the neighbourhood. But in our age of formal contracts of employment, complex income tax ... and above all the tight bar on earnings built into our present system of State benefits, such entrepreneurial activities run into all kinds of institutional problems. Instead of allowing the unemployed to do something for themselves to supplement incomes and maintain morale we have tended to adopt Draconian measures to prevent this. We expect our unemployed either to find sufficient employment to become wholly self-supporting ... or else we expect them to adopt an economically wholly passive pose. There appears to be no acceptable halfway position. (4)

The point is that the kind of unemployment experienced by New Zealanders in 1981 through 1983 was the product of numerous social, economic and institutional norms and practices, and had grown up within a particular historical context. Unemployment means very different things to people living in different societies or at different times. Despite these differences, it was a popular device in news stories to draw numerical comparisons between the unemployment of the 1930's and unemployment in the 1980's.

Such comparisons were essentially worthless, ignoring as they did the disparate historical contexts within which the unemployment was set. Thus, the treatment of such keywords added much to the simplistic nature of news stories.

Economic news stories in the period surveyed centred on the 'Think Big' or 'Growth' strategy adopted by the National Party Government. In the 1981 election campaign, voters were encouraged to believe that large-scale investment in 'energy projects' by multi-national companies was desirable and would render New Zealand more self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency would free New Zealand from her perennial balance of payments problems caused by an over-reliance on the export of agricultural products. The strategy was initially formulated for this purpose alone; but by 1981 it was also being presented as
the solution to New Zealand's unemployment problem. Economic growth, it was argued, would automatically translate into jobs for all.

The National Party also established an Industries Development Commission, the I.D.C., to restructure existing New Zealand industries. 'Competition' and 'efficiency' were the keywords for the I.D.C. according to news stories. The commission's brief did not, however, include any suggestion that they ought to find new ways of employing people more 'efficiently'. The idea was rather to close down 'inefficient' industries, destroying thousands of jobs in the process.

The 'restructuring' plan was partly justified by the new Closer Economic Relations, C.E.R., agreement with Australia. This agreement essentially involved the scrapping of Government 'protectionism' of New Zealand industries against Australian imports. Such 'protectionism', it was argued, had led to 'distortions' in the economy which had to be removed in the interests of economic 'recovery' or 'health'. Generally the plan was said to favour the New Zealand agricultural sector and the Australian manufacturing sector. C.E.R. thus translated into the destruction of jobs in many New Zealand industries.
As part of its package to solve New Zealand's economic problems, the Government was also pledged to cutting the budgets of its own departments by three percent. The stated aim of this proposal was to 'tighten the belt' of the government bureaucracy by making its activities more 'efficient'. One of the major components of the three percent cut was the so-called 'sinking lid' policy. This was a policy of non-replacement of civil servants who resigned or retired from government departments. Thus, at the heart of the three percent cut was a measure specifically designed to contract public sector employment opportunities during a time of rising unemployment.

A freeze on wage and price levels was also a major government policy during this time. Introduced in June 1982, this policy was primarily designed to lower New Zealand's high inflation rate. It also had the effect of lowering the real cost of labour for employers by holding down wage rates. Despite the advantages such developments were supposed to accord the industrial sector, unemployment continued to escalate throughout the duration of the freeze.

Technological innovations in the workplace provided the substance of the final major category of economic news stories linked to unemployment. New technologies were said to be 'inevitable' developments, essential to the
'growth' of the New Zealand economy. These developments almost always involved the destruction of jobs but job losses were justified, it was argued, by the gains in 'productivity', 'efficiency' and 'competitiveness'. The I.D.C. plan encouraged the rapid introduction of new technologies into all sections of the economy.

All of these economic policies were promoted by the Government as long-term solutions to New Zealand's unemployment problem. The fact that most of them involved initial job destruction appeared in news stories as an unfortunate but unavoidable part of the drive for future 'growth'. Just how each of these policies was presented will now be examined. In the process the ideological perspective dominant in news products will become clear. The simplistic nature of news stories will also be illustrated with reference to the characteristics described above.

* * * *

A continuing low rate of economic growth was said in news stories to be the root cause of all of New Zealand's economic woes. Occasionally other factors, such as the rising price of oil and the entry of Britain into the E.E.C., figured in stories but 'growth' was generally seen as the solution to all the problems these factors
engendered. It was a simple formula and one easily conveyed in news stories: a recovering economy equals a growing economy. If 'no growth' was the problem then 'growth' must be the solution.

The 'Think Big' projects implemented by the National Party in the 1981 through 1983 period were supposed to provide for New Zealand's economic salvation through 'growth'. This was well illustrated by the following extract from a speech by the Prime Minister, as it appeared on Morning Report:

Announcer. The major point of Mr. Muldoon's address was the promotion of National's policies for economic growth.

Prime Minister. This growth is what, in the next two decades, will underpin our policies on health, on education, on social welfare, on employment. It will underpin the future for our young people. That's what this is all about. It will underpin the future for our young people over the next two decades and beyond. You can't build a system of social welfare on a sick economy. (5)

Similarly, under the headline, 'GROWTH KEY TO JOBS', the Minister of Labour, Mr. Bolger, informed news consumers that, 'Growth in manufacturing, agriculture and the small

number of large-scale development projects based on New Zealand's indigenous resources will be the key to solving New Zealand's unemployment problem ...' (6).

The National Party's major political opponents, the Labour and Social Credit parties, agreed that 'growth' was indeed the solution to New Zealand's economic problems. All that they disputed was that the government's policy was the most effective means for the achievement of 'growth'. The Labour M.P. for Hastings, Mr. David Butcher, informed Evening Post readers that the dispute between the parties was not over whether increased rates of 'growth', productivity, investment and job creation were desirable. Rather, he stated, 'The debate is over how it should be done and how quickly it can be done' (7). The Labour Party rejected National's 'Think Big' projects. Labour politicians urged voters to support the channelling of investment finance into more traditional New Zealand industries such as carpet factories and the agricultural sector. Under the headline, 'MR ROWLING PITS JOBS IN HAND AGAINST GAMBLE IN BUSH', the Labour Party leader criticised the risk involved with 'Think Big' (8). He labelled projects, such as the Aromoana aluminium smelter, a 'gamble' and compared them unfavourably with Labour's

policy of relying on areas in which New Zealanders had proven skills.

Whatever their differences, however, all parties accepted the necessity of economic growth. As a consequence the underlying implications of the 'growth' goal were not examined in news stories. One might well think that 'growth' is not a neutral, apolitical concept remote from all policy considerations and from dispute about its value. And even the economic indices themselves which are used to determine such things as gross national product and hence 'growth' have important social and political ramifications (9). Most obviously, too, the differences between the economic strategies of the major political parties clearly involved different outcomes to 'growth' as well as means of achieving it. The achievement of 'growth' through the construction of major industries using the finance and expertise of multi-national companies would result in a very different kind of society than would 'growth' achieved through small-scale enterprises. The number of people who could be employed, the sectors of society who would gain or suffer, the

(9) There is no scope in these equations for the inclusion of unpaid work such as that performed, mainly by women, in the home. This is despite the fact that such domestic labour constitutes a vital part of the economy. See; B. Rogers, The Domestication of Women, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1979, for a discussion of this in a Third World context.
effects on the environment as a whole and a host of other consequences would all be different according to just what kind of 'growth' was pursued.

None of this could have been ascertained from any of the major daily newspapers surveyed. Growth was usually mentioned as if there were only one possible meaning for the term and as though this meaning were universally accepted. Such a consensus on the 'growth' goal would have disintegrated in the face of a critical examination of the goal itself. But no critical examination was forthcoming. Instead the news media told the stories that constitute the remainder of this chapter.

The major components of the Government's strategy to achieve 'growth' were the 'Think Big' projects. These projects constituted one of the consistently dominating news topics in the period 1981 through 1983. Many of these news stories were obviously based upon press releases issued by government departments and politicians. They tended merely to present recent developments on the projects and how close to budget or schedule they were keeping. However, criticisms of the 'Think Big' projects were widespread in the news. Accordingly, news stories oscillated between calm assurances from the National Party government that the 'Think Big' strategy was running adequately if not completely smoothly, and blistering
attacks from critics who asserted that it was not.

In January 1981, The New Zealand Herald carried a front page story in which New Zealanders were assured by the Ministers of Labour and Energy that 'Think Big' would '... help counter the balance of payment problem which is at the root of the present recession' (10). Unemployment was said to be, 'on the run'. Ten days later, this same newspaper featured a story under the headline, 'THINK BIG A DANGEROUS STUPID PLAN SAYS MR ROWLING' (11). This was the typical pattern. Claims would be made by the Government only to be refuted several days later by critics. Similarly, criticisms by opponents of 'Think Big' would be denied outright by ministers at their next press conference. Nothing at all about 'Think Big', it appeared, was true. What exactly were news consumers to make of all this confused battling in the economic arena?

According to Mr. Derek Quigley, who resigned as Minister of Works and Development in June 1982, it was not likely that many New Zealanders actually understood the Government's economic strategy. The 6.30 News presented this announcement in the following way:

Announcer. Here at home it's been a day of reaction to the resignation of the Minister of Works, Mr. Quigley. He stepped down after an argument with the Prime Minister over a speech in which he questioned the Government's Growth Strategy. And Mr. Quigley's departure, the first cabinet resignation in fifty years has sparked an uproar.

Journalist 1. We have reaction from Mr. Quigley's cabinet colleagues, his backbench colleagues and National Party members. To sum it up: there's regret that Mr. Quigley has resigned, there's some feeling that he shouldn't have made the speech in the first place and that Mr. Muldoon overreacted. The cabinet, exercising that collective responsibility that led to Mr. Quigley's downfall in the first place, remained silent today. Questions from us about free speech and other ministers who've been out of line with Government policy, drew a blank 'no comment'. (12) Off the record though, some ministers question Mr. Quigley's action in making the speech. They say he went too far in saying what he did in public. Caucus members were more forthright, however. Ted Sheehan [journalist 2] has been gauging their reaction.

Journalist 2. In general, Mr. Quigley's backbench colleagues regret his departure from cabinet but show no signs of promoting a caucus revolt in his favour. But several Government M.P.'s are unhappy about the handling of the affair by the Prime Minister, saying he overreacted. Mr. Muldoon defends his action with the charge that Mr. Quigley breached the doctrine of

(12) Morning Report on 15 June, 1982 focused on the fact that when Mr. Ben Couch, Minister of Police, made his 'I support apartheid' speech in 1981 he was able to remain in cabinet even though his stance directly contradicted official Government policy at that time.
collective cabinet responsibility when he questioned aspects of the Growth Strategy. That has drawn both scorn and a warning from Hamilton West M.P., Mike Minogue.

(Cut to Mr. Minogue)

Mr. Minogue. Collective responsibility in fact is another name for collective obedience to the Prime Minister and you don’t even get a job unless he thinks you’re going to be pretty obedient. That’s all it means.

Journalist 2. Doesn’t that make for more efficient Government?

Mr. Minogue. No it makes for more powerful Prime Ministerial Government, making for two things that concern me: a growing concentration of political power that has become totally unhealthy, matched outside with a growing concentration of economic power. These two things together are setting the scene, if we’re not very careful, for the establishment of what people euphemistically refer to as the ’corporate state’ while I would refer to it as the ’fascist state’. Structurally we’re well on the way.

(Cut to Journalist 2)

Journalist 2. Mr. John Banks of Whangarei [has] described the resignation as a sad day for private enterprise and commonsense ...

[The Prime Minister refused to be interviewed, it was announced at this point, unless his comments were broadcast unedited and in full. This request was denied]

Journalist 1. Mr. Quigley later talked to Bret Dumbleton (journalist 3) about the reaction to his resignation.

(Cut to Mr. Quigley)
Mr. Quigley. Well, it's of considerable interest and I'm very happy that people have reacted in that way. I really would like people to participate in the important issues that concern them and I suppose this is really part of it. I've got a few telegrams here. That's some of what's come in today.

Journalist 3. Those I presume would be mainly in support. There is though, I think, a feeling that the whole incident can only promote rifts in the National Party which in the long-run, perhaps, will do the party no good. Are you still happy with the situation?

Mr. Quigley. I would be most unhappy if it did in fact create rifts in the National Party. I would want people to be concentrating on the issues.

(Cut to Journalist 1)

Journalist 1. Politically, the Quigley affair will require some fence-mending by Mr. Muldoon with the grassroots of the party but within his parliamentary team his position is secure. There's no sign of a co-ordinated move against Mr. Muldoon nor is there any evidence at this stage that significant numbers of M.P.'s will rally around Mr. Quigley to form a new faction within caucus ranks.

[Cut to discuss the swearing in of Mr. Keith Allen and Mr. Tony Friedlander as cabinet ministers at Government House. The swearing-in ceremony was shown and at its conclusion Mr. Friedlander expressed regret at Mr. Quigley's departure from cabinet.] (13)

This news story possessed many of the traits of the overly

simple mode of news presentation described above. The story focused on the event itself and on the immediate reactions to that event. In the process, it virtually ignored the event's antecedent conditions. The 'Quigley affair,' as it was speedily tagged, was removed from its historical context. Viewers were informed at the beginning of the news item that Mr. Quigley's was, 'the first cabinet resignation in 50 years'. But this bit of history was an entirely trivial piece of information. It was a clear example of journalists attempting to explain a unique phenomenon by comparing it with another phenomenon with which it was connected in only the most superficial way - as a matter, in this case, of constitutional history. Such comparisons are commonplace in news stories and are almost always unenlightening as to the causes and conditions in which the event occurred. For instance, a news story on any natural disaster will always include a comparison of death tolls, injuries and property damage with other natural disasters. These comparisons will be included even when the two 'disasters' are not closely connected in either time or space. Such trivial comparisons generally constitute the only historical context given in news stories for the latest 'event'.

This 6.30 News story also focused on the possible impact the resignation could potentially have had on Mr. Muldoon's control of the Government caucus. Hence the
statement, 'We have reaction,' from other M.P.'s. It was the 'reaction' to the 'event' and speculations as to whether there would be a 'move against Mr. Muldoon,' that the 6.30 News chose to highlight. The absence of any explanation within the news item of just why there should be any dissent or what differing ideological perspective Mr. Quigley might have brought to the National Party rendered such speculations meaningless. The actual nature of the issues in dispute between the Prime Minister and Mr. Quigley was not discussed. Viewers were merely informed that Mr. Quigley, 'questioned the Government's Growth Strategy'. Such an uninformative presentation of a deep rift on policy rendered the substance of the dispute invisible. The 'Quigley affair' appeared to be a fight between Mr. Muldoon and Mr. Quigley in which Mr. Muldoon emerged the clear winner. It was who won rather than the cause of the fight that engaged the attention of the 6.30 News team. H. Rosenbloom has found evidence of the same phenomenon in the Australian press (14).

The statements made by Mr. Minogue and Mr. Banks could potentially have been used to add more depth to this news story. These statements were not, however, followed up by

the journalists or, if they were, they were edited out of the finished product. There was in fact a direct connection between Mr. Minogue's assertion that New Zealand was fast becoming a 'corporate' or 'fascist' state and the substance of Mr. Quigley's 'questioning' of the Growth Strategy. The degree of Government intervention in and control of the New Zealand economy did resemble the corporate state in which politicians run the country in much the same manner as managers run businesses. But this linkage was not identified in the 6.30 News item so that the comments appeared to refer only to Mr. Muldoon's actions in dismissing Mr. Quigley from cabinet. Similar treatment was accorded to Mr. Banks' assertion that it was a 'sad day for private enterprise'. The fact that Mr. Quigley's resignation was linked directly to his support of the 'free market' and 'private enterprise' against the corporate state ideology embodied in the Growth Strategy was not discussed. This 6.30 News story thus removed the Quigley affair from its historical context, focussed on the superficialities of party-political manoeuvring instead of the substance of the issue and lacked explanatory linkages between statements and events. Moreover, by not defining certain keywords and concepts, such as the 'corporate state', the story obscured the central crux of the dispute.

The newspapers and the National Programme did a little
better in informing their consumers of the issues at stake. The Otago Daily Times reported that the substance of Mr. Quigley's public criticisms of the Growth Strategy was that New Zealanders did not understand the policy and that this was primarily due to the lack of publicly available information on 'Think Big'. It reported his speech to the Young Nationals, (the youth wing of the National Party), which sparked off the 'Quigley affair'. It quoted Mr. Quigley:

[0]nly 7% of those who voted National at the last election did so because of our growth strategy. Clearly 'Think Big' is neither understood nor supported at this stage by the majority of New Zealanders. (15)

Mr. Quigley's assertion that there had been insufficient public consultation over the Growth Strategy was also voiced in other non-televised news stories. For example, the business editor of the New Zealand Herald wrote that:

It is sad that attempts are being made to determine the merit and community value of projects by their size, shareholding or an undetailed cost figure and not by the balance of benefits and costs. But criticism and allegedly unfair assessment aren't blunted by dearth of detail. (16)

The clear implication was that whilst some criticisms of 'Think Big' might be unfair or even untrue, the public lacked the necessary information to determine what a fair, honest assessment would be. He was criticising the Government for releasing so little factual material to justify the Growth Strategy in terms either of its economic or social impact. Mr. McPhee's criticisms were shared by the chief economist of the Bank of New South Wales, Mr. Rufus Dawe. *Morning Report* interviewed him:

**Announcer.** The Bank of New South Wales would like more information about the Government's pricing plans for the development of the aluminium industry here. The bank's chief economist, Rufus Dawe, explains.

**Mr. Dawe.** I think an economist must have facts to work on. We must have facts for and against, to reach some conclusion. We've looked at a number of facts that people have put forward and, both for and against, but when we come up to try and make a decision based on these facts it's very difficult indeed because we haven't got the most important facts.

**Journalist.** You say it is important that the Government correctly assesses the costs and benefits of such a project so where do you think the Government has maybe been incorrect in maybe assessing these costs and benefits?

**Mr. Dawe.** Well I don't say that. I don't think I say that they are incorrect in doing so because I honestly don't know. They have access to all the evidence, which evidence is not available to anybody else and they're satisfied and quite possibly they're correct. I'm not saying they're not. I'm just
saying that there isn't anything which we have seen which would allow us to make a judgement one way or another.

Journalist. So, in effect you're saying that nobody could come up with a correct assessment?

Mr. Dawe. Well, I think I say an assessment must be based on the facts and the facts are simply not available to the private sector to make a decision so therefore you have to suspend your judgement.

Journalist. What are the missing facts?

Mr. Dawe. I think they're basically their pricing, aluminium pricing. That's a key factor. I can see a lot of figures which are quoted and the range in them is enormous but I don't - it makes an awful difference what exactly you put into the basic price of aluminium.

Journalist. Why do you think the Government isn't making this kind of information available?

Mr. Dawe. They have difficulties, I must admit. The aluminium industry is a highly competitive industry in which there are very few producers and naturally, of course, they are very jealous of their cost structures. The information that they supply naturally they wish to keep away from their competitors. I suppose the Government respects that, respects those confidences and feels unable to disclose, of course, exactly what the details of the contracts are. (17)

Mr. Dawe suggested, therefore, that the Government were not merely unwilling to release information on 'Think Big'

(17) Morning Report, 2 April, 1981.
projects but were actually prevented from doing so in order to protect the interests of the multi-national companies involved. Thus news media organisations and their consumers were denied the opportunity to assess independently the Government's proposals. As Mr. Dawe stated, the Government has 'access to all the evidence'. But this access was not granted to other New Zealanders. The only people who might know all the 'facts' were in the National Government or were senior members of government departments. Certainly these were the news sources who issued calm (and not so calm) assurances that 'Think Big' was the solution to all of New Zealand's economic problems. And these were the sources that could dismiss criticisms of the government's strategy as ill-informed. The critics, the argument went, were not in possession of all the relevant details. For example, under the headline, 'PM ON EMPLOYMENT', Mr. Muldoon replied to criticisms of the Growth Strategy made by Mr. Rowling (18):

He is creating unnecessary alarm and concern and appears to be more concerned with spreading misleading information about Government policies than stating facts.

The facts on employment growth have been spelled out clearly by myself and the Minister of Labour, (Mr. Bolger). They have been carefully compiled and are not figments of someone's imagination. (19)

(19) Ibid.
Similarly, under the headline, 'GOVERNMENT SMELTER INFORMATION BEST', the Prime Minister asserted that, 'We've worked through it very carefully and we believe that it's good for the New Zealand economy, and good for the New Zealand people' (20).

The Government, one may conclude, not only released little substantive information on their 'Think Big' policy. They also used the resulting information vacuum to refute the validity of their opponents' criticisms. As a result, the news consumer's choice between the various factions became based on an act of faith - and faith in the authority of the source alone. The need for faith arose despite the mountains of news media coverage which the 'Think Big' projects received. The situation was aptly illustrated by an Evening Post cartoon depicting the Prime Minister as a rather tattered ecclesiastical figure urging voters to support 'Think Big' with the words, 'Have faith my son' (21).

The 'growth' goal had initially been formulated to solve the problems generated by the 'oil shock' of the early 1970's. By 1981, the strategy was also being promoted as the solution to New Zealand's unemployment problem even

The Prime Minister reacted to reports of falling aluminium prices by urging New Zealanders to have faith in the future of the industry.

"Have faith, my son!"

"I thought he wants us to give him our blessing?"

"I think it's the laying-on of hands."

"Well, I wish he had immediate plans to stop the laying-off of hands!"

"Voter"

"Voter"

"Voter"

"Voter"

"Voter"

"Redundancy notice"
though this was not the original intention of its planners. Criticisms of this ad hoc adjustment to the strategy constituted the only major detour from the central debate over whether 'Think Big' could actually achieve economic growth.

During the 1981 election campaign, the National Party claimed that 410,000 jobs would be generated in the following decade by their economic policies. Under the headline, 'GOVT STRATEGY FOR JOBS', the Minister of Labour, Mr. Bolger stated, 'I believe that we have the capacity to create the 400,000 or more jobs that will be needed in the next ten years' (22). The managing director of the Fletcher Challenge Corporation, Mr. Hugh Fletcher, released a press statement supporting the Government's figure. He claimed that the proposed Aramoana aluminium smelter would generate 25,000 jobs by itself (23). Mr. Fletcher informed journalists that, 'In one project we can duplicate all the growth of the past five years' (24). Such 'growth', Mr. Fletcher implied, would create jobs on a massive scale.

(23) Fletcher Challenge was one of the partners in the smelter proposal.
The actual number of jobs which 'Think Big' would generate was however, a figure which could be prophesised - but not accurately. Future trends in such things as the world price of aluminium or crude oil could be estimated, but there was no guarantee that such an estimate would bear much resemblance to the real figure. This situation was discussed on *Morning Report* in an interview with the Otago University economist, Associate-Professor John Parker. The interview went as follows:

Announcer. Economist, Dr. John Parker, says the smelter proposal isn't supported by any independent economist in the country. He says the Government was taking a big risk by investing about $2,000m in this project.

Prof. Parker. It's inappropriate because the current philosophy in economics is as follows. You assume that you cannot predict the future, then you assume that you will get it wrong so the last thing you should do is pick a single project and make it dependent on one variable only, namely the world price of aluminium. Now that is what the Government has chosen to do, an immense project is dependent on one thing alone - the world price of aluminium in the next 42 and a half years. The chances of getting that right are minimal and, therefore, the whole economy is at risk. (25)

Essentially, Professor Parker was asserting that the problem was not just the reluctance of the Government to

release data which would justify the Growth Strategy to 'independent' economists, but that such material might not actually exist. The Government's cost-benefit analysis involved hypotheses as to the future price of aluminium and the future demand for this product. Both of these variables were uncertainties rather than predictable facts. Mr. Dawe's suggestion that the lack of hard data on the major projects was due to the Government's desire to protect its private sector partners was, therefore, only a part of the answer.

Despite its election promise of more jobs as a consequence of 'Think Big', the Government, by 1982, was forced to admit that its prediction of growth in employment was based on nothing more substantial than an optimistic guess. In November, under the headline, 'JOB CREATION "DIFFICULT"', the Minister of Labour conceded that it would be 'much more difficult' to create 410,000 jobs than he had previously anticipated in 1981 (26). He added that it was 'virtually impossible' to predict 'growth' and that, in any case, the 410,000 figure had only been an indication of the job creation 'potential' of 'Think Big'. It was not a prediction based on 'hard' evidence. This complete reversal by the Government was given little news media attention. Indeed, when in February 1983 the

Minister of Energy reaffirmed the Government's belief in the 410,000 jobs prediction, nothing was made of the fact that this affirmation directly contradicted the statement by Mr. Bolger made not much more than two months earlier (27). Clearly this was another example of the news media's failure to link events and statements together in a coherent manner. Given the extremely confused state of the debates over 'Think Big', such a coherent picture was urgently required. But news consumers were left without a rational basis on which to assess the widely disparate claims circulating in news stories about the Government's economic policies.

Critics of the 'Think Big' strategy also stated in news stories that the major projects, in diverting investment finance away from traditional areas of the New Zealand economy, would actually decrease job opportunities in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. The major agricultural producer boards formed their own organisation, 'AGROW', whose function was to promote the job creation potential of the agricultural sector. AGROW's aggressive campaign centred on the idea that agriculture produced more jobs per investment dollar than did 'Think Big' and that therefore investment in agriculture was more desirable than investment in the

major projects. The news media gave extensive coverage to this campaign, featuring headlines such as: 'MANY NEW JOBS FROM GROWTH IN AGRICULTURE', 'AGRICULTURE PROMISES JOBS, PROFITS', and '10,000 NEW JOBS A YEAR POSSIBLE IN AGRICULTURE' (28).

Given that jobless 'growth' had been occurring for some time in the agricultural sector, the accuracy of AGROW claims were at least open to question. AGROW did, however, introduce into the 'Think Big' debate the concept that economic growth achieved by different means produced a correspondingly different number - as well as range - of job opportunities. AGROW argued that it was entirely possible that while 'Think Big' would prove to be a marked success in terms of the 'growth' it produced, it would nevertheless leave thousands of New Zealanders in the dole queues. The challenge which this conception of jobless 'growth' made to the whole 'growth' ideology was not, however, followed up in any systematic way in news products. Moreover, this challenge was ignored despite the appearance of new technologies which decreased the total labour force requirements of New Zealand industries. And 'Think Big' continued to be presented by the Government as the long-term solution to the unemployment

See also Morning Report, 23 March, 1981.
problem. The actual number of jobs was quibbled over in news stories but no attention was paid to the rather central question as to whether some forms of 'growth' might yield a negative number. Coverage of the job creation potential of 'Think Big' projects quite obviously failed to link up social phenomena so that the relationships between alternative policies, issues and important events became clear.

The absence of an examination of the 'growth' goal or of the possibility of a jobless 'growth' had a decisive effect upon the way in which the 'Think Big' strategy was represented in the news products. It might have been thought, for instance, that arguments about temporary work schemes and work training schemes should have been conducted in the context of long-term predictions as to the effect of 'Think Big' policies on employment. If one accepted the Government's word that the strategy would achieve 'growth', then, in the long-term, one could also accept that it would act as a panacea for New Zealand's unemployment problem. In accordance with this view, the focus in the employment arena ought, therefore, to have been on the establishment of only temporary work and training schemes. If, on the other hand, one rejected the idea that 'growth' would automatically assist the unemployed then the focus would have had to move elsewhere. For instance, the promotion of temporary
schemes in the face of long-term unemployment would have been immediately brought into question. But such connections between policies, events and issues surfaced only rarely in news stories. This was not due to the lack of available sources for such stories. (The newspaper *Doledrums*, for example, which was produced by the Wellington Unemployed Workers Union, consistently presented this line of argument). By favouring certain news sources and excluding others, news media excluded not only optional ways of examining problems, but did not even examine the implications of the policy arguments they reported.

The I.D.C. plans to restructure the New Zealand economy constituted the economic policy second only to 'Think Big' in terms of coverage by the news media. The rhetoric of the 'free market' economists was used in news stories to justify the plans though in fact they involved Government intervention in and control of the private sector on a grand scale. Indeed, the very lines between the public and private sectors had become blurred, so extensive was Government involvement in 'the economy'. This direct contradiction between the 'free market' rhetoric and the reality of the Government's role in the 'restructuring' plan was not alluded to in any of the news stories surveyed.
To many critics of the I.D.C.'s work, the commission's activities centred on the destruction of jobs rather than the construction of stronger industries. This was well illustrated by an Otago Daily Times cartoon which depicted jobs as a dead body in the boot of a 'restructured' car (29).

Under the headline 'CAR-PARTS REPORT "ONLY HALF DONE"', the managing director of Repco Ltd., Mr. R. Stephens, stated that the I.D.C. report on the automotive component manufacturing industry was the 'destructive half of "restructuring" without even attempting the constructive half' (30). He asserted that the I.D.C. had 'identified areas of so-called inefficient use of areas ... [but had given] no attention to the areas to which these resources of capital and labour should be diverted' (31). Mr. Stephens went on to add:

Whether our industry is ... inefficient to some degree, it must be remembered that it was created and sustained by Government policy.

If the Government wishes to change that policy, then it has an obligation to say so, to define the areas to which our resources should be shifted, and to provide time and opportunity for that transition to occur without undue disruption to jobs and businesses.

(31) Ibid.
Well no, it's not actually cheaper, but it is more efficient under the bonnet!
Were the current recommendations of the I.D.C. to be accepted then the Government would be saying to New Zealand businessmen that they should not only have to make normal prudent business decisions within the context of existing policy, but also to adopt the role of political scientists, and predict with accuracy any future policy changes which might be created in the minds of politicians and public servants. (32)

Mr. Stephen's claim was essentially that 'rationality', in terms of the best possible structure within which to organise an industrial sector, was not as self-evident as the I.D.C.'s reports made it appear. An economic policy must, he argued, have an end or purpose in mind. It does not simply consist of means. His criticisms were not heeded. In the news stories, means to economic ends such as 'efficiency' and 'productivity' were presented as though they were ends in themselves. For instance, redundancies were justified on the basis that a company would become more 'efficient' and 'stream-lined' by shedding workers. But the most 'rational' way to 'restructure' industry if one is seeking to maximise job opportunities might arguably be thought to be very different from the most 'rational' way to achieve maximum competitiveness for New Zealand's exports on the international market. The numerous different variations on what might be implied in economic 'rationality'

(32) Ibid.
remained, however, as invisible in news stories as did the many types of possible economic systems. Economic 'rationality' was presented as though it were a commonsense term with only one possible definition. News stories which suggested otherwise, such as the article quoted above, constituted only a minute fraction of the total number of news stories on the I.D.C.'s work.

In the news stories, the terms 'restructuring' and 'rationalization' were used interchangeably as though their meanings were identical. This language usage was, however, misleading for several reasons. As Massey and Meegan have pointed out, there are three basic types of production reorganisation (33). The first type, 'intensification' involves 'changes designed to increase the productivity of labour but without major new investment or substantial reorganisation of production technique' (34). Intensification could involve increased incentives for the workers to raise productivity or the acceleration of a conveyor-belt assembly line. The second type of organisation, 'investment and technical change', calls for 'significant investment often related to changes between techniques of production' (35). The introduction

(34) Ibid, p.18.
of new technological developments to raise productivity levels or to simply gain more managerial (as opposed to worker) control over the production process, are incorporated into this category. Lastly, Massey and Meegan identified 'rationalization' which involved a, 'simple reduction in total capacity' (36). They further note that, 'Unlike intensification and technical change, this strategy produces job loss as a direct result of disinvestment ... the end result being a reduction in the productive base of the industries in which it is undertaken' (37). Moreover, a profitable business might 'rationalize' its activities to effect a shift of capital into an area of even higher profitability.

'Rationalization' can occur within an existing industrial structure. In those cases no 'restructuring' is involved. There is no necessary connection between 'rationalization' and 'restructuring'. Any connection is merely contingent. This is made further evident in the consideration that 'restructuring' might involve expansion rather than a 'rationalization' or contraction of business activities. But the media did not report these alternative possibilities. They uncritically adopted the I.D.C.'s idea that 'restructuring' centred on the contraction of

(37) Ibid, p.87.
the industrial sector and that this form of 'restructuring' should be known as 'rationalization'. The underlying 'rationality' of the I.D.C.'s plan to develop a smaller but more 'competitive' industrial sector during a time of high unemployment remained virtually unchallenged in the news stories surveyed. Words such as 'efficiency', 'productivity' and 'profitability' were never defined in news stories and their desirability was, therefore, never brought into question. Raymond Williams who has discovered a similar, if more pronounced, kind of political and economic rhetoric operating in the British news media, explained it in the following way:

The fiercest drives of the modern international capitalist market are to extend and speed up these flows across nominal frontiers, these mutual if uneven penetrations that are properly called, (including by some of the most surprising people), 'aggressive marketing' .... Thus a planned penetration or disruption of other people's economies, by the strongest national economies and by the multinational companies which are already operating without respect to frontiers, is offered as unambiguously in the general good. If you or yours suffer from it, many others benefit. All you have to do or can do is cut your costs and improve your product. If you cannot sufficiently do either, you must become redundant, go bankrupt, get out of the way of the leaner and fitter, join the real world. (38)

The work of the New Zealand I.D.C. was specifically

tailored to suit the needs of the kind of modern international capitalist market Williams described. Neither the consequences of such a policy nor the ideological foundations upon which it rested were evaluated in the news stories surveyed.

The focus of news stories on the 'restructuring' plans was on either the redundancies which would result or the benefits that would be gained in the form of cheaper cars or shoes. Under the headline, 'JOBS HIT IN CAR INDUSTRY PLAN', The Press informed readers that jobs were to be the 'first casualties' of the I.D.C. plan for the 'restructuring' of the motor vehicle assembly industry (39).

The article went on to state that in the 'long-term', the 'economy' would be boosted and new jobs automatically created. The assembly industry was said to be in desperate need of 'restructuring' because it was one of the 'least efficient' users of New Zealand's resources. Thus, the unfortunate short-term prospect of 'redundancies' was seen as justified because in the unspecified 'long-term', the (undefined) 'economy' would be better off. This article was typical of news stories which announced the effects of the I.D.C.'s work.

Virtually the sole criticisms of the 'restructuring' plans appeared in news stories which centred upon their immediate effect on employment. The whole issue of whether New Zealand could overcome a 'balance of payments' problem while closing down industries and opening trading borders to multi-national companies was seldom even mentioned. Similarly, the notion that 'growth' could actually be achieved by 'restructuring' or 'rationalizing' existing industries was not discussed.

As a result of the narrow basis upon which criticisms of the I.D.C.'s work were based in news stories, the underlying claim that their activities were ultimately for the good of 'the economy', was never systematically examined in the news stories surveyed. This meant it was possible to view the I.D.C. inspired massive redundancies as a 'human tragedy' - though only in the short-term. In the long-term, it was asserted, the restructured manufacturing sector would flourish promoting 'growth' and, therefore, new jobs. Critics of the commission's work could, moreover, be cast in reactionary roles as the protectors of 'inefficient' industries and 'unproductive' workers.

Whether or not the I.D.C. plans were worthwhile or 'rational' could not be ascertained from the news stories surveyed. It would have been even more difficult to
determine which groups a 'restructured' economy would work best for. In fact, the benefits of the 'restructured' economy would not be distributed evenly between New Zealanders and if 'growth' did occur in the 'restructured' industries there was no guarantee that this would translate into jobs for the displaced workers. As with the 'growth' goal, news stories on the 'restructuring' plans expressed a naive belief in an undemonstrated harmony of interests in the economic sphere. Overall, there was a paucity of information on the I.D.C.'s plans in news products. This concealed potentially controversial aspects of the commission's activities.

If little information was made available by the news media on the potential effects of the I.D.C.'s work, even less was said about the prospect of Closer Economic Relations, (C.E.R.) with Australia. News stories about C.E.R. generally concentrated on either the C.E.R. negotiations or on the consequences of such an agreement for the New Zealand economy. Little about C.E.R. could be gauged from the first type of story which tended to merely outline who was negotiating with whom, when negotiations would end, but never what all the negotiating was about. The following Morning Report item provides a typical example of such a story:
There's a feeling of optimism over the talks between Australia and New Zealand on closer economic ties. The official talks in Wellington have ended with the Prime Minister saying that real progress has been made on all outstanding matters and a conclusion reached on some of them. Both Mr. Muldoon and the Australian deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Anthony, say the meeting has been very productive. Mr. Anthony will be making a full report to the Australian cabinet on the progress made. Neither Mr. Muldoon nor Mr. Anthony would specify exactly what has or has not been resolved but the Prime Minister did say the question of access for New Zealand finance houses to the Australian market has been sorted out. (40)

This news story told news consumers virtually nothing except that the C.E.R. negotiations were continuing.

The second category of C.E.R. news story focused on the effects of the agreement, particularly with reference to the number of jobs which would be lost. Thus, as with the 'restructuring' programme, the major criticism of C.E.R. to appear in news stories concerned the effects on short-term employment. It was asserted by some critics that Australian manufacturers definitely held a competitive edge over their New Zealand counterparts. For example, under the headline, 'F.O.L. WORRIED THAT C.E.R. WILL COST JOBS', the secretary of the Engineers' Union, Mr. Ernie Ball, voiced the fear that New Zealand would be transformed into a mere 'food producer' for Australia (41).

(40) Morning Report, 13 May, 1981.
Mr. Ball asserted that thousands of jobs would disappear from the industrial sector if the C.E.R. agreement went ahead.

In part, the 'restructuring' plan was justified on the basis that C.E.R. would render New Zealand industries 'uneconomic' in their present form. Job losses from 'restructuring' were, therefore, often attributed in news stories to the proposed C.E.R. deal. For example, under the headline, '570 MORE JOBS TO GO IN AUCKLAND', the managing director of Feltex Industries, Mr. H. Titter, stated that while the I.D.C. had recommended the closure of their tyre company, Reidrubber, the advent of C.E.R. was partially responsible (42). He asserted that the tyre industry would be hard-pressed to compete with Australian companies once the C.E.R. agreement was implemented. Similarly, under the headline, 'FOOTWEAR JOB LOSSES FEARED', an executive member of the Footwear Manufacturers Federation, Mr. Bruce Marler, claimed that the I.D.C. report on their industry would lead to immediate and extensive job losses (43). He added that, despite the 'restructured' shape of the footwear industry, New Zealand would not be able to compete with Australian manufacturers once C.E.R. arrived, and that further job losses would then occur.

News stories also presented the idea that C.E.R. would lead to long-term 'growth' in 'the economy'. This economic growth, it was claimed, would be eventually translated into the creation of new job opportunities. Under the headline, 'GROWTH, JOBS, PART OF C.E.R. DEAL', the Government member for Tarawera, Mr. Ian McLean, stated that C.E.R. would produce a rise in the 'living standards' of New Zealanders, a drop in the unemployment figures, and economic growth (44). Justification of the Government line, that C.E.R. inspired economic growth implied jobs and prosperity for New Zealanders, was not, however, provided for news consumers. In the news stories surveyed, the loss of jobs in the short-term was not represented as a sufficient reason to oppose C.E.R. if C.E.R. fostered the long-term 'growth' goal. A Press editorial informed readers that New Zealand, 'to succeed economically must live in the real world, not in a South Pacific cocoon' (45). Similarly, an Otago Daily Times article stated that 'our future depends', on C.E.R. and that New Zealanders had to recognise the 'simple facts of life in the market place' (46). Its author, Professor Cowan of Otago University, wrote that 'cost cutting' programmes were essential, even if they caused 'redundancies', so that New Zealand industry could become.

'lean', 'hungry', and 'competitive'. Thus the rhetoric of the free marketeers with their narrow definition of 'reality' was once again dominant.

The news media organisations' presentation of C.E.R. made it possible for news consumers to accept both that the agreement would cost some workers their jobs and that it was for the good of 'the economy' in the long-term. Just how this mysterious process of automatic job creation via 'growth' actually worked was never explained in news stories. The only real criticisms in news stories of the C.E.R. plan centred on the short-term job losses it would produce. And the short-term is only the short-term.

Given this dearth of news stories on other anticipated effects of C.E.R. on the New Zealand economy, it is not likely that many news consumers developed any coherent view whatsoever about the agreement. This confusion was echoed in a New Zealand Herald headline which ran, 'WHO WILL SUFFER STILL BIG WORRY OF C.E.R.' (47).

While the I.D.C. 'restructured' the private sector the Government attempted to duplicate the process in the public sector. The Government had pledged to cut the budgets of all government departments by 3% to ease the

balance of payments problem and promote 'growth'. The stated goal was a more 'efficient' bureaucracy. Generally, news stories accepted this rationale for the '3% cut' without questioning the notion that the fashionable terminology of 'free market' economists could be readily applied to the public sector. When the private sector was 'restructured', 'profitability' and 'productivity' provided measures for 'efficiency'. Just how this terminology could be applied to government departments was not altogether clear. Efforts could be made to determine whether the most 'efficient' means were employed to achieve the ends of government policies but who was to determine whether these policies were themselves 'efficient'?

The contraction of the public sector employment by the non-replacement of staff was a major element of the 3% cut. The essence of this 'sinking lid' policy was highlighted in a New Zealand Herald article which bore the headline, 'OFFICE BOOST FOR SOCIAL WELFARE' (48). This article announced the opening of three new offices to cope with the growing numbers of unemployment beneficiaries. It went on to assure readers that the Auckland director of the Department of Social Welfare had, 'emphasised that the reorganisation was being undertaken without any increase

in staff already employed and was within the Government's 'sinking lid policy' (49). The rise in unemployment had led to the establishment of more offices but was not permitted to lead to a corresponding increase in the number of Social Welfare Department jobs. Despite the very close interdependence of the public and private sectors, government jobs were not counted as being 'productive' even though their performance was central to the functioning of the capitalist economy (50). As 'non-productive' jobs they could make no contribution to 'growth' and, therefore, their existence was not readily defensible within the context of 'free market' rhetoric. To reduce public sector employment was depicted in the news stories surveyed as equivalent to reducing a drain on 'the economy'.

The goal of public sector 'efficiency' was, therefore, to be achieved at the expense of jobs in the hope of reducing the budget deficit. Whether the 'sinking lid' policy had led to greater 'efficiency' in government departments depended, however, on one's preferred definition of 'efficiency'. For example, under the headline, 'SINKING LID LEAVES JOBS UNDONE', a press release from the Public Service Association, (P.S.A.), conference asserted that

(49) Ibid.
the policy had led to the neglect of 'essential' work due to chronic staff shortages (51). Such news stories were, however, extremely rare. Generally, those who opposed the '3% cut' were portrayed as reactionary defenders of 'unproductive' jobs not to mention of governmental extravagance with 'taxpayers' money'.

In the news stories surveyed few references were made to the 'sinking lid' or the '3% cut' either in terms of their effectiveness as cost-cutting measures or their impact upon unemployment. Whether the policies stood in direct contradiction to the Government's job creation policies was also not examined in news products. For example, the fact that many government departments were utilizing temporary job creation programmes in order to both comply with the 'sinking lid' policy and to perform necessary work, was completely ignored. Once again, news consumers were not placed in an informed position from which it would have been possible to analyse the merits and shortcomings of a Government policy.

In a bid to control New Zealand's high inflation rate, the Prime Minister announced (on special radio and television broadcasts in June 1982): a 'freeze' on wage and price levels. Exemptions from or violations of the 'freeze'

provided the substance of most of the news stories on this issue. Initially, the sole criticisms of the policy to feature in news stories dealt with the charge that the 'freeze' was only an ad hoc delaying measure. Once the policy expired, it was alleged, the rate of inflation would once again soar. The major focus of news stories linking the freeze with inflation was, however, on the substantial decline in the inflation rate. More attention was paid to this decline than to the rise in the level of unemployment. This may have been due to the relative simplicity of the linkage between prices and inflation as compared with the more complex connections between prices, inflation and unemployment. Whatever the cause, the effects of the 'freeze' on unemployment were not analysed beyond the most superficial of levels in any of the news stories surveyed. The presentation of the 'freeze' thus favoured the Government's definition of it as a weapon to combat inflation.

But by mid-1983 the 'freeze' began to be linked in news stories with the rising level of unemployment. Under the headline, 'JOBLESS TOTAL UP 63 PC IN LAST YEAR', the leader of the Opposition, Mr. Lange claimed that, 'The cost of every one percent reduction in inflation under the freeze has seen 3500 more people added to the unemployment
register' (52). The supposedly high cost of labour had been identified on numerous occasions by the Government as a major reason for the rise in unemployment. Hence, under the headline, 'NZ MUST REGAIN COMPETITIVE EDGE SAYS MP', the Government Member for Waikato, Mr. Simon Upton, asserted that, 'Those who have over-priced their labour stand indicted while fellow New Zealanders are out of work' (53). Given that the 'freeze' had lowered the real cost of labour while unemployment had continued to escalate, the validity of this assertion was at least questionable. And it was reasonable for the Labour Member for Miramar, Peter Neilson, to tell Otago Daily Times' readers that the rising unemployment figures were, 'The result of the Government's stop-go economic policies, its wage freeze which has reduced demand for domestic products and so for labour, and its industry restructuring at a time of economic recession when there are no alternative jobs for those made redundant' (54).

But the reasons why the 'freeze' might produce rising unemployment levels when labour costs were lowered were not explained to news consumers. Economic phenomena such as inflation rates and real wage levels were seldom linked

(53) The New Zealand Herald, 16 April, 1982, p.5.
together. When they were linked, the connections were usually made without considering the wider context in which these phenomena existed. Major economic indicators were kept in the public eye by the news media. But the actual implications that these indicators had for the lives of New Zealanders were not to be found in news products.

Technological innovations in the workplace provided the substance of another major category of news story related to unemployment in the 1981 through 1983 time period (55). Linked to these innovations were speculations as to the long-term effects this 'new technology' would have on the number of job opportunities available to New Zealanders. The opinions of assorted business leaders, trade union representatives and technical experts as to the size and nature of the New Zealand workforce of the future were often cited in news products. Occasionally the calls from trade unionists and others for a 'shorter working week' and for 'job sharing', to ensure that people remained employed, were also mentioned. More frequent, however, were news stories which bore headlines such as, 'SHORTER WORKING WEEK CHALLENGED', 'NZ "CANNOT AFFORD" SHORT WEEK', 'EMPLOYERS RUBBISH 35-HOUR WEEK IDEA', '35-HOUR WEEK "A

(55) See Chapter VIII.
DISASTER" and so forth (56).

The dominant theme of most news stories on the introduction of new technologies was that such innovations were 'inevitable' and that they could not and should not be resisted. 'IT'S A MATTER OF NEW TECHNOLOGY OR BUST', ran The New Zealand Herald headline preceding an article on the D.S.I.R. report on the electronics industry (57). Once again, 'efficiency', 'productivity' and 'competitiveness' were the key words associated with these news stories. They were used, moreover, as though their meanings were entirely apolitical and remote from any economic ideology.

The major controversy in news stories about technological developments was related to the increased unemployment they might herald or had already created. Headlines such as '75% JOB LOSS AS COMPUTER FIRM EXPANDS', and 'BIG CHANGES FACING JOB MARKET', pointed to the structural changes occurring within the New Zealand economy (58). Particular attention was focused on the meat industry where the closure of large freezing works, such as those

at Patea and Southdown, had left thousands of workers without jobs (59). Initially trade unionists attempted to negotiate a four-day working week for their members but this was strongly resisted by employers who had substantial Government support (60).

Any attempts to resist the introduction of new technologies on the grounds that they caused redundancies were presented by the media as being against the best interests of the New Zealand economy. If technological advances were needed to help 'growth' in the economy and to maintain the 'competitiveness' of New Zealand industries, then attempts to stall their introduction were viewed with marked disfavour (61). As usual in news stories, the rise of unemployment was presented as a regrettable but inevitable component of a policy to achieve the goal of 'growth'.

Occasionally a news story which carried a less gloomy prediction about the potential effects of new technologies on jobs, would appear. This more optimistic argument asserted that technological change had always produced as


(60) See Chapter VIII.

(61) See Chapter VIII.
many jobs as it had destroyed. Hence the headlines that read, 'TECHNOLOGY SERVANT NOT MASTER', and 'COMPUTERS OFFER JOBS FOR ALL' (62). What New Zealand was currently experiencing according to this argument, was the temporary 'dislocation' of the labour force while old and 'inefficient' industries closed down in the face of increased 'competition' and technological change. In the longer term, though, these workers would be needed once again in the new jobs created as part of the '50 year cycle' of the economy (63). Even if one accepted this argument, however, it transpired that workers still ought to passively accept redundancies in the short-term, for the good of 'the economy'. Just who or what 'the economy' might be good for was a question not raised in any of the news stories surveyed.

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Thus the New Zealand economic system was portrayed in a series of overly superficial scenarios. The news products certainly reported major criticisms of the Government's economic policies but they did not often do so in a manner conducive to informed public debate about them. Claims

(63) See for example, The New Zealand Herald, 20 March, 1981, Sec. 2.
and counterclaims featured in news headlines but there was no real dialogue between the claimants. The claimants addressed news consumers but only rarely addressed one another. Disputes were not resolved in news stories. They simply disappeared as new, more 'newsworthy' disputes sprang up.

The news media's uncritical use of the English language meant that the economic rhetoric employed to justify policies went virtually unchallenged. Key words in economic news stories were employed as though their meanings were tied to only a 'commonsense' dictionary definition. In reality, the meaning and evaluative force of such words are highly controversial. They mask a distinct ideological perspective. The most important of these key words in the news stories surveyed was the concept of 'the economy'. News stories reified this concept and presented it as a distinct entity with a life-force and a personality of its own. So dominant was this representation of 'the economy' that it seems almost strange to note that this predominant usage of the concept has only developed since the Second World War (64). Prior to this, the word 'economy' was used mainly in formal contexts as something that thrifty people hoped to achieve.

Governments would make an 'economy' by cutting the budget during this era. Today Governments cut the budget to help 'the economy'. Wisman (1979), notes that:

In traditional societies ... the economy is not viewed as a separate institution but rather as embedded in the total social fabric. In such societies economic activity is principally steered by tradition. Accordingly, there neither exists nor is there a social need for a distinct body of economic thought. Just as the economy cannot be viewed by its participants as a separate social institution, so economic thought cannot be viewed as distinct from total social knowledge. (65)

In contradistinction to this traditional view, 'the economy' as it appeared in the news stories surveyed was of the completely disembedded variety. The economic activity of New Zealand and, indeed, the whole world had been projected into this detached concept. Moreover, the reified 'economy' dwelt in the closed world of economic models. As a corollary to this, Government actions would be justified on the basis that they helped 'the economy' even though they hurt real people. That is, the good of the disembedded 'economy', living in its simplified economist's model of the world, was used to justify Governmental policies which actually added to the nation's social problems, particularly unemployment. Thus 'restructuring' was said in news stories to be good for

(65) Ibid. p42
'the economy' and therefore necessary even though it involved the destruction of thousands of jobs.

By presenting 'the economy' as a living entity with wants and needs of its own, news stories also presented the idea that 'the economy' served only its own interests. 'The economy' was said not to favour anyone in particular and certainly no social group or class in particular. This claim is not unique to New Zealand. Emmison has noted in connection with his study of this concept that:

The economy, in short, appears to be on no one's side. In this way unpopular political decisions and policies can be taken and justified whilst avoiding the charge of class- or self-interest. The nation's economy is apparently more important than its citizens. (66)

As Hall et al assert:

The state is required as a neutral and objective sphere, precisely in order that the long-term interests of capital can be 'represented' as a general interest. It is through the 'relative neutrality' of the state -- not in spite of it -- that conflicts are settled 'to the profit of the ruling classes', but in ways which, because they appear as neutral and general, command the assent of the nation as a whole. (67)

The conception of the economy as a living thing which nevertheless existed in a closed world of equations, added force to the arguments of proponents of 'Think Big', 'restructuring', 'C.E.R.', the 'freeze', 'sinking lid' and 'new technology'. The equations of the economist, which determine economic 'rationality', admit only certain kinds of variables and deliberately exclude others. The well-being of 'the economy' rather than the well-being of individual people was the central goal of economic policies. Thus the 'growth' and 'recovery' of the 'troubled economy' rather than the benefits which might accrue to New Zealanders was the end most emphasised in news stories. Indeed there seemed to be a naive assumption in play that what was good for 'the economy' must also be good for New Zealanders. The economist's indicators of economic health might, however, all register positively, yet leave thousands of New Zealanders without jobs, housing or an adequate health or education system. The narrow definition of economic 'rationality' to be found in news stories rendered this fact invisible. It was as though the interests of actual people had become completely subordinate to the interests of a fictional entity, 'the economy'.

The news media's presentation of 'the economy' was, therefore, a prescription for inaction and despair in the face of growing unemployment. In news stories, the
unemployed were depicted as 'inefficient' elements of 'the economy' who were not required by the 'Think Big' strategy or the 'restructured' industrial sector using 'new technology' as part of the C.E.R. agreement. The 'sinking lid' would descend on the public sector worker while those in the private sector would be 'rationalized' out of their jobs. At the same time, both of these processes would lead to 'growth' so that in the 'future' there would again be work for all. Even if one did not accept that jobs would be created by this process, news stories did not present this as a reason for rejecting these economic policies. To resist them was to stand, a reactionary proponent of 'inefficiency', in the path of progress.

In the news stories surveyed, the economic world was dominated exclusively by politicians and other economic experts. There was no suggestion that other citizens had the ability fully to comprehend the complexities of economic life. The ruling National Party had access to more information, could call on the services of more experts, and, of course, were in the position to implement their policies. It was, therefore, the discussion of the Government's economic policies which dominated news stories. Even if news consumers rejected these policies, the news media organisations did not provide detailed alternatives to them. If there was a lack of depth in the
information provided on the Government's economic policies, there was a virtual vacuum of information on alternatives. Without such information, news consumers could either accept or reject the Government's economic strategy but in either case the decision would be an 'act of faith'.

Economic decisions were presented in news stories as having been determined in the best interests of 'the economy'. There was, however, no consideration as to what end 'the economy' served. This presentation conjures up images of Mr. Minogue's 'corporate state' in which politicians managed 'the economy' for the good of 'the economy' just as factory managers organised industries to maximise profits. It also provided an image of a 'consensus' society in which a harmony of interests ought to prevail. No such harmony was ever demonstrated in news stories. The vast majority of news consumers were allocated no role in this economic tale other than that of passive recipients of conflicting information. This conflict, of course, was said to lie in the realm of means rather than ends because New Zealanders supposedly shared the common goal of economic growth. Just what kind of society would be engendered in the process of achieving this economic goal was never stated.
CHAPTER VI: STATISTICS

News stories, the purpose of which was to release new statistical data on employment, constituted the largest single category of stories surveyed. Such stories included periodic announcements of the number of people registered as unemployed, in receipt of an unemployment benefit, or engaged on special Government work schemes. Speculations by the Government's political opponents as to the number of unemployed New Zealanders who were not officially registered as unemployed were also common. In addition, news consumers were regularly informed of the level of 'concern' their fellow citizens felt about the unemployment figures as revealed by the opinion polls taken by the National Research Bureau, (N.R.B.). The unemployed were completely dehumanised.

Statistical releases emanating from the Departments of Social Welfare and Labour featured prominently. In The New Zealand Herald, for example, these government departments announced their statistics in seventeen news stories in 1981, nineteen in 1982, and eighteen in 1983 appeared on the front page. Thus news consumers got a monthly and sometimes fortnightly roller-coaster ride through the ups and downs of these statistics. Comments from politicians would sometimes be included. These
comments would read cause for gloom or optimism into the figures depending upon the speaker's party affiliation. Under the headline of October 1981, 'GOVT WORK SCHEMES PARE DOLE', a decline of 774 in the number of registered unemployed was attributed by the Minister of Labour to a 'good response' by local authorities, non-profit making groups and community organisations to subsidised work schemes (1). This same newspaper published another article about these unemployment statistics the next day - this time under the headline: 'JOBLESS DISGUISE CLAIM AS DOLE TALLY EDGES UP' (2). In this news story the focus was on statistics which showed that unemployment had in fact risen during the preceding fortnight. Mr. Kerry Burke, the Labour Party's shadow minister of employment, was quoted accusing the Government of using special work schemes to disguise the true level of unemployment. As with all such statistical releases the Government attempted to present them in the most favourable of lights while their opponents attempted to achieve the opposite effect.

Most commonly, however, the figures released by government departments on unemployment were presented as bald statistics noting only rises and falls on the last

released total. Only rarely was any attempt made to take a more long-term view of these unemployment figures.

Nor did news stories often attempt to assess the reasons why the figures had changed or remained static. The headlines simply proclaimed the figures, '3000 MORE ON DOLE IN A MONTH', '700 FEWER ON THE DOLE', 'JOBLESS UP BY 1000 IN AUCKLAND', 'DOLE FIGURE DOWN BY 295', and so forth (3). This bewildering array of statistics certainly kept unemployment in the public eye but it did little to add to the ability of news consumers to understand the issues involved. Overall, the unemployment statistics were presented in news stories as events with few apparent causes, as though unemployment was a natural disaster beyond human control.

During 1981 through 1983, there was a continuing dispute as to just who ought to be counted as unemployed and, hence, what the 'true' or 'real' level of unemployment was. Members of the Opposition frequently pressed the Government to introduce monthly house-to-house surveys in order to ascertain the number of unemployed people who had not registered with the Department of Labour. Under the

The New Zealand Herald, 30 April, 1981, p.1,
The New Zealand Herald, 16 May, 1981, p.3,
headline, 'LABOUR CALLS FOR FACTS ON UNEMPLOYMENT', Mr. Kerry Burke voiced the Labour Party's promise to implement a household employment survey if elected to government (4).

He understood, he said, the 'The Government's sensitivity about unemployment figures', because, 'together with inflation, they are the most visible sign of the National Party's failure as a Government' (5). The Departments of Labour and Statistics presented a similar proposal for a monthly survey to the Government but it was rejected on the basis of cost (6). It may well also have been that the Government was not eager to discover that an already alarmingly high unemployment figure might actually be too low. However, the Government asserted that the Labour Party was merely attempting to make 'political capital' out of the statistics. When Labour attempted to introduce a bill to institute a household-survey, Mr. Bolger retorted that, 'They are not showing any concern for the unemployed. Their one ambition is to see if they can get a bigger figure' (7).

Debate in news stories over the validity of the

(5) Ibid.
Government's data collection methods was fueled by the release of a report on New Zealand unemployment compiled by the U.S.A. embassy. This report was intended for the consumption of U.S.A. businesspeople and therefore the figures were calculated using American methods. As the embassy's counsellor for public affairs, Mr. C. Bell, pointed out, under the headline, 'DOLE REPORT DEFENDED', it was 'not intended to impact on the domestic scene here' (8). But 'impact' the report did. The controversy arose because the methods employed in the U.S.A. to calculate the unemployment figure, when applied to New Zealand, placed the unemployment total some 3% above the official New Zealand Government figure (9). The Prime Minister responded to the American report with a broadside at the embassy itself. He informed journalists that the report made him '... wonder about the calibre of staff the United States is sending to their Wellington embassy' (10). Mr. Bolger also responded by criticising the source of the report:

[I]f you don't do something the way the Americans do it, they see it as wrong. It is a perfectly adequate and consistent method which allows us to see variations and trends. (11)

The Government, then, attempted to obscure the issues raised by the report mainly by attacking the report's authors. It was here, too, that the news media let the matter lie.

The two main groups of unemployed people who were not registered with the Department of Labour were those aged under sixteen years of age and married women. The legal school leaving age in New Zealand was fifteen but the legal age for entitlement to an unemployment benefit was set at sixteen years. Parents or legal guardians rather than the state were supposed to provide support for unemployed teenagers of fifteen. By 1981, however, the name 'street kids' had been coined to describe those young people who were homeless either because their parents could not support them or because they themselves were unwilling to be supported. Homeless teenagers did not, however, appear only in the 1980's. In 1977 and 1978 there were numerous news stories about the so-called 'disco kids' who frequented inner-city disco-dancing halls and clubs. The 'disco kids' danced till the early hours of the morning and then slept out wherever they could find shelter. There have also always been 'runaways' who refused to live with their parents for fear of such things as incestuous rape, beatings or because of personality conflicts with their parents. The rise in New Zealand's unemployment figures in the 1980's increased the strain on
low income, often non-Pakeha, households and caused a corresponding rise in the numbers of homeless teenagers (12). Most of these teenagers remained statistically invisible and so the size of the problem was never known. The only visible indicator was the increasing number of 'street kids' to be found on week days in New Zealand's central city parks and squares.

Unlike fifteen year olds, married women were permitted to register as unemployed. But there was often little incentive for them to do so if they were married and their husband was employed, for they were not entitled to any Government assistance. Married couples were expected to take financial responsibility for each other in the same way that parents were expected to provide for their children. Besides the financial pointlessness of registering there was also pressure for married women to give up work altogether. Married women, it was argued, were selfishly denying younger people work when it was possible for them to live off their husband's earnings. This line was frequently taken in the 'letters to the editor' columns of newspapers. The same was not commonly said of married men who had wives in paid employment. It was the woman alone who faced the social pressure. Thus while married men might also fall into this category the

same pressures against their working and, therefore, against their registering as unemployed, did not exist.

A survey on women's employment was conducted in Palmerston North by the sociologist, Ms. Susan Shipley. The results of the survey - which were given wide coverage by news media - showed that one in three unemployed women were not registered (13). This statistic had many possible explanations but a large factor was certainly the policies of the Department itself. To remain on the official register took some effort with regular reporting days, questionnaires to fill in, and restrictions on mobility. As there was no financial reward and much social stigma to be gained from all this effort most married women did not bother to register.

However, even this low registration of married women was too high according to some news stories. Under the headline, 'TOTAL OF JOBLESS WIVES SOUGHT', the Prime Minister argued that the Department of Labour should ascertain the number of married women who were registered as unemployed (14). He asserted that the group who were

registered but were not in receipt of the unemployment benefit consisted mainly of women whose husbands had jobs. Mr. Muldoon made no reference to married men who might be in the same position and, therefore, had an identical statistical status. Thus, in an attempt to lower the unemployment statistic, the Prime Minister implied that married women were not really unemployed because they were not really workers. He defined their status in terms of their relationship to the private domestic sphere rather than the public economic sphere.

This suggestion - that married women became 'housewives' rather than unemployed people when they lost their jobs - was repeated in other news stories. Women were not viewed as being dependent upon their incomes in the same way as men. It was argued that women worked to gain luxury 'extras' rather than to feed and clothe themselves or their families. The claim was made in one news story that the kiwifruit industry would do nothing to ease the unemployment problem because 'married women' and not the 'unemployed' would be hired to harvest and pack the fruit (15). The article assumed that because many married women did not register as unemployed they could not be counted as such even when they showed themselves to be willing to take on work. And even when women did find work, they

were still designated as 'married women' rather than as 'seasonal workers' and so the jobs which had been created in the kiwifruit industry were said to be of no significance.

The rise in the number of married women who were part of the workforce was also cited in some news stories as a statistic explaining the difficulties young people faced in finding work. It was argued that women should step aside and leave the job market open for youngsters who badly needed to work. Not surprisingly then, Ms. Shipley was reported to have found that, 'Discouragement about unemployment is high among married women. A lot feel guilty about applying for jobs that could be given to younger people' (16).

Speculations as to the number of people who were unemployed but were not officially counted as such, were rife from 1981 through 1983. In addition to fifteen year olds and married women, it was frequently asserted that New Zealanders feared the social stigma attached to dole recipients and so many did not register until their financial positions had become completely desperate. The most widely publicised speculations on the unemployment figure were those made in a National Research Advisory Council (N.R.A.C.) report released in

1981. Whatever contribution this report - Research into Employment with Special Emphasis on Youth Unemployment - could potentially have made to public understanding of unemployment remains unknown. This was partly due to the Government's rejection of the report and partly to the sensationalist manner in which its contents were treated in news stories.

The controversy over the N.R.A.C. report arose because it stated that New Zealand's official unemployment figure was kept artificially low and that the 'true' figure could go as high as 300,000 people. For this reason as well as for the criticisms of Government policies the report contained, it was not released immediately by the Government. The report's contents only became public knowledge after it had been leaked to the news media organisations by an unnamed source. In the interval the Government had commissioned Link Consultants, a private research firm, to produce a public relations document explaining the Government's employment strategy. This document - entitled Jobs and People, was released shortly before the N.R.A.C. reports findings were eventually published in July 1981.

The leaked N.R.A.C. report, and the fact that the Government had suppressed it, were used to attack the Jobs and People booklet. The booklet, it was claimed, was
nothing but an attempt to 'whitewash' the employment situation in a haze of public relations material. Under the headline, 'LABOUR BLASTS JOBS REPORT "COVER-UP"', Labour's Mr. Burke called on the Government to clarify contradictions between Jobs and People and the N.R.A.C. report (17). Mr. David Butcher, the Opposition member for Hastings asked the Government why it had selected the March figures for unemployment in Jobs and People when these were known always to be the year's lowest due to seasonal employment factors (18).

The main substance of the N.R.A.C. report was, however, virtually ignored in news stories. News stories dealt with either the Government's statements about the report or a single assertion in the report that:

Estimates of the true unemployment figure go as high as 150,000. There is no indication that unemployment will diminish in the immediate future. Indeed, there are other estimates that put the possible figure of unemployment by 1984/1985 as high as 300,000. (19)

The 6.30 News story on the release of the N.R.A.C. report went as follows:

(18) Ibid.
Announcer. The Prime Minister has labelled as 'garbage' a confidential report on research into unemployment. The report, leaked to the news media, contains heavy criticism of some areas of Government policy on employment and Mr. Muldoon says a senior Treasury official, Mr. Jack McKenzie, has disassociated himself from the report.

(Cut to Prime Minister).

Prime Minister. Now that's the statement of a very senior Treasury officer who was on that working party and I think in a nutshell deals with the report. It's noted that among those involved in bringing it together was the great Alf Kirk, the economist for the Federation of Labour, whom many of you will know, and a fellow named Shirley who has politicised himself from as far back as I can recall. I think he works at Massey University. That's the background to it and one of these people is leaking this report all over the place with the idea of embarrassing the Government and it's no more than that.

(Cut to a journalist)

Journalist. The report was effectively commissioned by the Government in 1979, it was researched and prepared by a working party of seven people, headed by Professor Ray Adams from Massey University and including a Labour Department official according to a list at the back of the report. The working party was responsible to the National Research Advisory Council which in turn was responsible to the Minister of Science and Technology. The report was completed last year and then it appeared working party members were told it was the property of the council and so of the Government. Its contents have now been widely publicised but most coverage has emphasised the estimates on unemployment figures.
Some go as high as 150,000 unemployed the report says. But its greatest thrust is in the area it was originally asked to look at, that's research on unemployment. The report says there is a dangerous lack of it and goes on to say Government policy decisions are made using flawed and sometimes incomplete data. (20)

This news story began by presenting the Prime Minister's view that the N.R.A.C. report was 'garbage'. The story then explained that the report, 'contains heavy criticism of some areas of Government policy on employment', but at no time stated just which policies these were or the substance of the criticisms. Similarly, the final two sentences informed news consumers that the N.R.A.C. report's analysis of 'research on unemployment' was its 'greatest thrust' but did not state what this analysis revealed. Just what additional research was needed to supplement a 'flawed and sometimes incomplete' data base or what possible errors Government policies might contain were not outlined. Instead, the 6.30 News programme chose to highlight the Prime Minister's attacks on the report and on two members of the N.R.A.C. working party. The item was both superficial and sensationalist and told news consumers little about the report apart from the fact that it was 'controversial'. It was the conflict itself that a news story elected to prominence. As in the controversy

(20) 6.30 News, 6 July, 1981.
about 'Think Big', the causes of the conflict escaped attention.

Coverage of the N.R.A.C. report by New Zealand's major newspapers was markedly similar to that accorded it by the 6.30 News. Under the headline, 'P.M. DECLARES REPORT "LOAD OF GARBAGE"', the Evening Post reported the Prime Minister's derogatory references about Mr. Kirk and Mr. Shirley (21). The New Zealand Herald repeated them under the headline, 'P.M. ATTACKS JOBS STUDY', as did The Press in the headline 'JOBS REPORT GARBAGE, P.M. SAYS' (22).

Apart from the Prime Minister's attempts to discredit the authors of the report, the newspapers focused on the 'true' unemployment figure estimates in the report. Hence the headlines, 'FORECAST OF 300,000 JOBLESS BY 1985', "GUESSTIMATE" - BOLGER : "CATASTROPHE" - ANDERTON', 'HOW MANY JOBLESS', and '150,000 JOBLESS CLAIM JUST "GUESSTIMATE"' (23). For it was the section of the report which focused on the 'true' figures that was selected and used by the Labour Party as part of their ongoing campaign to discredit the Government's method of compiling

unemployment statistics. The news media organisations surveyed chose not to go beyond this. They did not examine its other contentions. Morning Report presented the following news story:

Announcer. The Labour Party president, Jim Anderton, says New Zealand has its most serious social problem since the depression if the leaked report by the N.R.A.C. is right at putting unemployment at more than three times the official figure.

[Gap filled by another news item]

Announcer. 150,000 people are believed unemployed and 300,000 could be unemployed by 1985. Mr. Anderton spoke to Gerard Cancil about the report.

Mr. Anderton. I believe in fact that the information contained in the original document was very serious indeed as far as unemployment is concerned. I haven't got any actual confirmation of the level but I believe it to be of the order that was indicated in the weekend news reports. Now quite frankly, the fact that the Government has kept the report since last October and has not shown any great enthusiasm or interest in releasing it, coupled with the fact that they have known what unemployment figures are from the census and could, if they haven't already processed them, do so as a matter of urgency, leads me to believe that they're in no great hurry for people to really comprehend what the magnitude and nature of the unemployment problem is in New Zealand at the present time.

Journalist. What is your basic concern, Mr. Anderton, about the findings of this leaked N.R.A.C. working party report on unemployment?
Mr. Anderton. Well I think the major thing of concern is really the level of unemployment. They are indicating a level of unemployment of 150,000 which is 8% of the total workforce. Now, while that level is actually a fact in a number of regions; the Northland region and one or two centres like Tauranga, nobody has previously believed, although some suggested, that there are 150,000 unemployed in New Zealand at the present time. Now if that is the level of unemployment, if that is a fact, then we have the most serious social problem we've had since the depression and in fact it exceeds, by quite a large number the unemployment we had in New Zealand during the Great Depression. (24)

Overall, then, the news media organisations allowed the N.R.A.C. report to be used as a political football to be kicked between the Government and their opponents. The two major political parties were permitted to set the context within which the report was publicised and the vast bulk of the report's substantive content disappeared in the process. In particular, the report's implications for the Government's policies on youth unemployment were not dealt with in news stories. The report had argued that, 'There are few, if any, grounds for regarding youth unemployment as different in any basic way from the causes and effects of unemployment in general' (25). As with most other issues, the news media products set the agenda

of the debate over the N.R.A.C. report in a narrow and superficial manner according to the preferences of a few sources. They thereby excluded a vast amount of potential material from the debate.

Due to all of this controversy over the various estimates of the 'true' unemployment figure, the news media organisations paid a great deal of attention to the impending release of employment data from the 1981 census. The 1976 census had revealed that 27,000 New Zealanders considered themselves to be unemployed at a time when the official figure for unemployment stood at only 5000, an increase of 440%. The 1981 census, however, produced a figure which was only 28% higher than the number registered as unemployed. 'EACH PARTY SAYS CENSUS COUNT OF JOBLESS BACKS ITS STAND', ran The New Zealand Herald headline following the publication of the census (26). Once again, controversy reigned as the Government attempted to present the census statistics in the best possible light and the Labour Party tried to present them in their worst. Confusion abounded as figures were tossed back and forth and the actual issue in question was obscured in the process. Arguments between politicians were obviously considered by the news media organisations to constitute a more interesting focus for news stories

than did the census statistics which were the substance of these arguments.

Morning Report presented the census news story by interviewing the Minister of Labour and the Labour Party shadow Minister of Employment. This interview was summed up later in the broadcast in the following way:

The Minister of Labour, Jim Bolger, says the latest census figures vindicate the Government's view that unemployment levels have been grossly exaggerated. The Labour Party employment spokesman, Kerry Burke, says the figures show unemployment is considerably higher than the official register indicates and the situation would be much worse if so many workers hadn't left the country. They were both commenting on the census survey released this morning showing that 60,800 people said they were unemployed on census night, about eight months ago, more than 13,000 higher than the official figure at that time. Mr. Bolger said the census confirms that unemployment is being measured much more accurately than critics claim though it's higher than the Government would like. Mr. Burke said that if the census figure is added to those on special work, the total is about 85,000 which is close to the estimates the Labour Party has been using. (27)

This news story centred on the conflicting claims made by the Government and the Labour Party rather than on the actual census data. This was not simply a case of the media telling 'both sides' of the story and allowing news consumers to make up their own minds on the basis of the

available facts. As with the N.R.A.C. report, 'both sides' covered between them only a tiny segment of the issue.

A further element of the debate on statistics on unemployment was the disagreement between the Government and the Opposition parties as to the status of those who were employed on job creation schemes. News stories sometimes included these temporary workers in the figure for the total number of unemployed and sometimes presented the two figures separately. Similarly, in news stories, the unemployment figure was sometimes the number who were registered as unemployed and sometimes only the number who were in receipt of the unemployment benefit. This led to an even more confusing picture of the 'true' level of unemployment. The method of calculation was never agreed upon, either by politicians or the news media organisations themselves, and so it varied from news story to news story.

From 1981 through 1983 the Government consistently stated that only those who were officially on the Department of Labour's register could be counted as unemployed. The Government claimed that those employed on Government work programmes were, by definition, working and so could not be numbered amongst the jobless. They further diminished the importance of the unemployment figure by asserting
that only those unemployed who were enrolled for the unemployment benefit were actually in need of a job. Under the headline, 'JOBLESS FIGURE "DISTORTED"', the Minister of Social Welfare, Mr. Venn Young, supported statements made earlier by the Prime Minister that the 42,000 on the unemployment benefit were the 'true' number of unemployed (28). This article went on to quote Labour's Mr. Burke who disagreed with this assertion. Mr. Burke stated that the Prime Minister had 'sharply attacked', trade unions and the news media for giving 'undue attention' to the position of the unemployed by including those employed on Government job creation schemes. He added, however, that the Prime Minister had calculated the unemployment figures in just this manner during the 1975 election campaign when the Labour Party had been in office.

Once the 1981 census figures had been released, the Government attempted to use to its advantage the prevailing sense of confusion over how to best calculate unemployment. Hence the following Morning Report interview with the Minister of Labour:

Journalist. ... [I]f you add the number of people now on special work, something

like 25,000, to the 60,000 we now know to be out of work, that's 85,000 people which is getting close to the 100,000 talked about by the Labour Party.

Mr. Bolger. You are presuming and I think wrongly presuming that everyone who's on a project employment programme or temporary employment programme, listed themselves as employed. According to the media all the way through, you can't draw that conclusion, because every month, despite what I've told them, every month they've lumped the two figures together and put out a global figure of 70,000. Every branch of the media has done that. Now of course, they're embarrassed by it because they've been proven wrong. (29)

Mr. Bolger was here suggesting that at least some of those employed on special work schemes would not tick the census box marked, 'working for wages or salary', even though they were. This suggestion could be neither verified nor refuted. It simply added to the already considerable confusion over the issue. Indeed by the end of the above quoted statement, Mr. Bolger was asserting the exact opposite, that temporary workers had not ticked the 'unemployed' box and hence had 'embarrassed' the news media organisations. At no stage did the news media organisations surveyed manage to clarify the issue or to outline some kind of consistent

criteria upon which to base their estimates of unemployment.

The results of the N.R.B.'s public opinion polls constituted another set of statistics periodically conveyed to news consumers. Commissioned by The New Zealand Herald, the N.R.B. poll results were syndicated out to the other news media organisations (30). The poll routinely posed the question, 'What is the single most important problem facing New Zealand right now?' and divided the answers into a few general categories and provided a few general answers. The following table shows the percentage of respondents who replied, 'unemployment', to this question. During the 1981 through 1983 time period, unemployment was consistently cited as the major 'concern' for New Zealanders. By June 1983, unemployment was cited by 54% of respondents. This was the highest level of 'concern' accorded to any issue since the introduction of the poll twelve years earlier. And this 'concern' continued to rise. It peaked at 58% in September 1983.

NRB Poll % Answering "Unemployment is the single most important problem facing NZ right now"
The implications of the N.R.B. poll results were, however, difficult to draw and the causes of 'concern' hard to pinpoint. Rises and falls in the public's professed 'concern' over unemployment did not always parallel rises and falls in registered unemployment. For example, registered unemployment dropped by a total of 1442 people between March and May 1981 but 'concern' went up by 6%. Similarly, registered unemployment went up by over 5000 between November 1981 and February 1982 but 'concern' dropped by 9%. The poll could tell news consumers what percentage of the surveyed population sample had answered 'unemployment' to the pollster's question but it could not provide any explanation for the replies. The raw statistics did not reveal exactly what respondents had meant by their answers. The person who believed that it was abhorrent that the Government had abandoned the full employment goal might answer 'unemployment' to the N.R.B. question. The same answer might be given by a person who thought that all the unemployed were 'dole bludgers' and that the only appropriate Government response was to abolish the unemployment benefit. The poll results could be read in a number of very different ways, covering the whole variety of contradictory readings equivalent to the range of attitudes to unemployment in New Zealand. The following Otago Daily Times cartoon expresses a degree of cynicism towards the accuracy of the poll results (31).

POLL SHOWS: UNEMPLOYMENT MAIN WORRY FOR N.Z.-ERS

- News

"They must have asked the wrong questions."

ALL BLACKS VS SCOTLAND JUNE 13 CARISBROOK

Todd
Few issues are so simple that they can be adequately represented by this device of finding two groups who disagree over it and merely presenting the areas of disagreement. This binary conflict model of news presentation generally obscures those areas over which the 'two sides' are in agreement as well as those areas which they both prefer to ignore. It is, however, one of the least demanding forms of newwork. Hunting out alternative views or analysing issues with more breadth and depth would require increased inputs in terms of effort by staff, and in terms of time and money expended. Moreover, heated arguments between political opponents can be more easily transferred into the kind of sensationalist news copy which dominates front pages and headline news bulletins than can more reasoned discussions.

Whatever the motivations of news media organisations may have been, the resulting news stories on the statistics of unemployment tended to narrowly delineate the boundaries of public debates. News media products constituted the major forum within which public debate occurred, at least from the perspective of the news consumer. And the reconstructed segments of controversy presented by news products were all the majority of news consumers would have heard of them. The treatment of unemployment statistics is one example of the way in which news media organisations not only set the agenda as to what issues
were important enough to receive coverage but also set the
terms and limits within which these issues were debated (32).

Overall, the news stories surveyed which dealt with
statistical data were simplistic, inconsistent and
frequently ambiguous. The ease with which a news story
could be constructed was, however, a major factor in
determining their obvious popularity with journalists and
editors. Such stories did not add much to the news
consumer's ability to understand what was happening to
employment in New Zealand. The statistics were either
presented as raw data without any explanation of their
significance or else they were buried in a barrage of
controversy which obscured their significance. The
ongoing dispute as to what methodology ought to be applied
to measure unemployment and, hence, what the 'true'
unemployment level was, merely added to the confusion.
News consumers were certainly made aware by news stories
that unemployment in New Zealand was high - but exactly
how high, who was most affected by it and for how long
were questions which remained anything but clear.

(32) See Chapter IX.
Freedom from labor itself is not new, it once belonged among the most firmly established privileges of the few. In this instance, it seems as though scientific progress and technical developments had been only taken advantage of to achieve something about which all former ages dreamed but which none had been able to realise.

However, this is so only in appearance. The modern age has carried with it a theoretical glorification of labor and has resulted in a factual transformation of the whole of society into a laboring society. The fulfillment of the wish, therefore, like the fulfillment of wishes in fairy tales, comes at a moment when it can only be self-defeating. It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won .... Even presidents, kings and prime ministers think of their offices in terms of a job necessary for the life of society, and among the intellectuals, only solitary individuals are left who consider what they are doing in terms of work and not in terms of making a living. What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, the bulk of news stories on unemployment entirely dehumanised the unemployed and treated them as mere statistical units whose condition was the consequence of the workings of 'the economy'. But, in line with Galtung and Ruge's analysis of 'newsworthiness', there was also a tendency to focus on the unemployed as stereotyped individuals. This focus on individuals was at the expense of social, economic and political structures. The unemployed were depicted as either 'dole bludgers' or 'victims'. The purpose of this chapter is to describe these personalizing stories and to locate the political, social and ideological conditions which made this possible.

Chapters III and IV have argued that the media construct their own definitions of issues and limit debates in line with the requirements of their organisations, their ideology of neutrality, and the source material they gather from established institutions, organisations and elite individuals. Their stories accordingly define not only what is normal, commonsensical, and therefore normative but also what is deviant (1).

In New Zealand, in 1981 through 1983, unemployment

fitted neatly into the category of deviant behaviour. And so the unemployed could readily be seen as individual deviants. In the words of the Minister of Labour, New Zealand was 'very much [a] work-oriented society' (2). The notion that anyone who wanted work could easily obtain a job was entrenched in New Zealand mythology by the years of full employment which followed the Second World War. Working hard to obtain money to purchase consumer goods and a comfortable lifestyle was what most New Zealand men were brought up to expect from life. Most New Zealand women grew up expecting to make marriage and child-rearing their primary profession before any paid work they might undertake. And others expected that of them. Numerous news stories, particularly in the 'Letters to the Editor' column, reinforced this sex-role stereotype (3). Married women in particular were more likely to become the invisible unemployed, swallowed up in the role of unpaid domestic, than to be labelled as 'dole bludgers'.

According to the great sociologist Max Weber, the roots of the work ethic lay in the realm of the spirit of puritanism. Whatever the truth of that, he reported rightly that the work ethic had subsequently become disconnected from its religious foundations and that the

(3) See Chapter IV.
accumulation of wealth, of consumer goods, had become an end in itself (4). Respectability in modern industrial societies had become tied to paid employment and the material possessions it financed.

Weber's observations of Europe and U.S.A. at the turn of the century were true of New Zealand in the period under review. The appearance in the late 1970's of an increasingly large number of people who had been unemployed for an increasingly long period of time deviated markedly from a dominant ethos of work. Thus, it was a relatively easy process for politicians to depict the jobless as 'dole bludgers' who did not want to work. In doing so, they attempted to divert attention away from their own inability or unwillingness to create more jobs. Politicians obviously believed that New Zealanders shared an internalised acceptance of the work ethic with them. That the news media organisations responded so effusively with headlines such as, 'DOLE NET OUT FOR "SHARKS"', and 'UNFILLED JOBS IN 1000'S DESPITE HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT', is a mark of how acceptable they in turn considered such sentiments to be to their news consumers.

'Dole bludger' news stories were not usually

initiated by the news media organisations themselves. They emanated mainly from sources in the offices of the Ministers of Social Welfare and Labour and from their respective departments. But the media did play the role of willing respondents and retailed the stories they received from the departments. It is notable, however that they varied their treatment of them markedly.

In March 1982, the Minister of Labour, Mr. Bolger, called for 'action' to be taken against those people who had been registered as unemployed for more than 26 weeks. This was the length of time arbitrarily selected by the Department of Labour for designation as 'long-term unemployment'. According to Mr. Bolger, the long-term unemployed sought 'to make a career out of being unemployed'. A 'crackdown' was therefore called for (5). Having raised the bogey of the 'dole bludger' Mr. Bolger then informed journalists that, 'he was sure that such people exist, but in much lesser numbers than many believe by casual observation' (6). This was a common feature of such news stories. Firstly, the unemployed would be labelled as 'sharks' or 'dole bludgers' and then their good name would be partially redeemed by the proviso that the labels were not universally applicable. In this way, it became a charge

(6) loc. cit.
which could be neither proved nor disproved. Producing an unemployed person who had diligently hunted for a job served only to demonstrate that some of the unemployed were not 'work-shy' (7). However the slur of the 'dole bludger' label still hung over the unemployed as a whole.

The manner in which the announcement by the Minister of Labour was treated - the 'slant' it was given in news stories - varied greatly between the news products surveyed. The Otago Daily Times positioned it prominently on the front page with the headline, 'GOVT. CRACKDOWN ON DOLE. PURGE OF THE UNEMPLOYED' (8). The New Zealand Herald placed the story on page three with the headline, 'DRIVE TO END DOLE CAREERS', while the Evening Post and The Press did not headline the announcement at all (9). Morning Report actually turned the whole story on to its head. Instead of accepting the story as it was received from the Minister, they elected to dispute the assertion that those on the unemployment benefit for six months or more were voluntarily unemployed. The news item went as follows:

Announcer. Comments made by two M.P.'s yesterday that the Government should get tougher with people who've been on the dole

for some time have brought sharp criticism from Massey University lecturer in social work, Mike O'Brien. He says it's a very convenient but incorrect assertion for the Government to make in saying that people make careers out of being on the dole when there's no evidence to support this.

Mr. O'Brien. It seems to me again that it puts the blame for unemployment on the individual people who are unemployed, takes no notice of the causes of unemployment, the implications of unemployment for them and for society as a whole and really in many ways is a very good smokescreen that diverts us away from tackling what's probably the major social issue that we're facing.

Journalist. And what is the major social issue in your view?

Mr. O'Brien. Well, the major social issue is really to create job opportunities, to create employment opportunities that mean that the kind of dramatic rises we've had in unemployment in the last few years don't continue, and part of that I think probably means the need to rethink what we mean by work, what sort of priority we give to work in our lives and in our society.

Journalist. Mr. Bolger and Mr. Young have levelled these comments at the under-twenties on the dole and claimed that a third of the beneficiaries are under twenty. Do you think that singling out such a group is justified?

Mr. O'Brien. Well, I gather, though I haven't seen the figures, I gather that they are the largest group of long-term, that's over six months - beneficiaries. What's very interesting is that they have been singled out and the other group which is very substantial, in terms of long-term beneficiaries, are those in between 40 and 60 and there's no mention of them at all and we might
ask why not. And, I guess, again the young can become very convenient scapegoats. We can blame them for all kinds of things. They won't bounce back perhaps in the way that older people may do and I think that both ministers would be much better occupied giving some attention to creating creative solutions to unemployment - to creating employment and to creative programmes for those who happen to be unemployed. I guess what's disturbing as much as anything is not just that a minister can say it but that it doesn't raise a real agitation and uproar in the country. We've almost become immune now to attacks on the unemployed, and to unemployment, and I think in some ways that's just as disturbing.

**Journalist.** What do you think is the major reason so many young people face unemployment?

**Mr. O'Brian.** We don't really know what are the substantial reasons. I think that the first and obvious one is that, it's almost trite in a way but it makes it nonetheless real, we simply in New Zealand have not created the necessary number of jobs. That's what makes a nonsense of the agitation at the moment. When employment was full, in the sixties and early part of the seventies, we didn't have large numbers of people unemployed for long periods of time so that it's obvious from that that periods of unemployment are related to the availability of jobs rather than their own behaviour. (10)

The most notable feature of this news story was the contrast it created for other news stories on the

Minister's announcement. Instead of merely repeating the statements made by Mr. Bolger, and endorsed by the Minister of Social Welfare, Mr. Young, *Morning Report* chose to focus on the 'sharp criticism' of it made by Mr. O'Brian. When Mr. O'Brian expressed concern that the 'dole bludger' attack on welfare beneficiaries did not raise 'a real agitation and uproar in the country', he was referring more to what was not said in other news media products than the actual reactions of many groups in New Zealand society, particularly the unemployed. Mr. O'Brian was drawing attention - and correctly - to an illusion of consensus as to the personal culpability of the unemployed. The source of the illusion was, no doubt, the treatment of the unemployment issue by the bulk of the media.

The Government's campaign to discredit the unemployed as 'dole bludgers' continued throughout the period from 1981. It was, however, relaunched with renewed vigour in March 1983. The *6.30 News* announced this campaign with the following news story:

**Announcer.** The Government is cracking down on the Social Welfare benefit system to cut out cheating. The Prime Minister says some people are getting benefits to which they are not entitled and the Government caucus has set up a committee to review both the range of payments and how they're paid.
Journalist. Social Welfare benefits are the single most costly item in the Government's budget. Nearly thirty percent of the Government's revenue flows through this department's books. National superannuation alone takes nearly two-thirds of that total at $23,000,000 but unemployment costs another $200,000,000, payments for sickness benefits nearly $50,000,000 and the domestic purposes benefit, the d.p.b., a further $300,000,000 plus the same amount again for the family benefit. The Government says there's a significant leakage in the system. Some people are cheating, others getting something they're not entitled to. While some are found out, Mr. Muldoon says no one knows the full extent of the problem. As far as this exercise is concerned, the Government hasn't got a specific savings target in mind.

Prime Minister. The point is that if people are getting benefits to which they are not entitled, the revenue is being attacked and the taxpayer is paying more than he should for our social welfare system and, so, what we shall be looking at is to see if we can't amend the procedures so as to make this less easy or alternatively the detection of such things easier. (11)

There was a marked inconsistency in this news story which was not pointed out by the 6.30 News workers. Initially the journalist stated that the Government claimed that

there was 'significant leakage' in the social welfare system. This clearly implied that the Government was aware of large scale 'cheating' or fraud by beneficiaries. The journalist went on to add, however, that 'no one knows the full extent of the problem'. If only 'some' frauds had been 'found out' by the Department of Social Welfare then how did the Prime Minister know that a 'significant' number of frauds were occurring? The assertion was pure speculation on the part of the Prime Minister but it was not treated as such in this 6.30 News story.

The newspapers also responded to this new campaign in an uncritical manner. They featured the story under headlines such as: 'WEEDING OUT IN WELFARE SAVES $300,000', 'BENEFICIARIES GOT $19.6M EXTRA IN YEAR', and 'WORKING WIFE AND FIVE BENEFITS' (12). All of these news stories presented the Government's line that beneficiaries in general, but the unemployed in particular, were parasites living at the taxpayer's expense. Such headlines also evoked images of unemployed people driving around in Rolls Royces or indulging in other aspects of an opulent life style as a result of their fraudulent activities. What the news stories did not mention was that most beneficiary overpayments were for very small

sums of money often due to a short delay, either by the Department of Social Welfare itself or through the beneficiary's negligence in cancelling a benefit. The high overpayment figures were thus due to the cumulative effect of an extremely high level of unemployment and not to any multi-million dollar fraud schemes.

Wide publicity was given in news stories to the Government's 'quality control' squads which were formed to investigate possible fraud cases. Official statements from Department of Social Welfare officers attempted to repudiate the 'hit squad' tag which had been attached to the squads by unemployment groups (13). Under the headline, 'BENEFICIARIES CHECK', the assistant director of benefits and pensions for the department, Mr. Brian Tyler, informed journalists that:

The operation was not intended to be a crackdown on abuse of benefits. The field units would be making sure beneficiaries were getting all they were entitled to and they were getting the correct benefit. (14)

Despite this assurance that the squads were actually working in the interests of beneficiaries, news stories continued to present them as charged with the hunting out

(14) The Evening Post, 8 June, 1983, p.4.
of 'dole bludgers'. Hence the headline announcing the results of the first set of checks which The New Zealand Herald stated to be 'WELFARE CHEATS CAUGHT OUT' (15).

News stories generally presented the 'field units' as desirable both because they detected welfare frauds and because they allegedly saved taxpayers' money. This was in spite of the fact that the highly labour-intensive squads cost almost as much to run as they saved in cancelled benefits. Less than 0.5% of revenue was lost through incorrect payments and most of this amount was never recovered. That it was worth harassing beneficiaries, who were already disadvantaged relative to the New Zealand community as a whole, was at least questionable, particularly when the gains were so minimal.

At the same time as the Government was undertaking this campaign, moreover, it was also periodically increasing the revenue vote for the unemployment benefit in anticipation of ever-increasing numbers of jobless people. In his study of the coverage given to the O.P.E.C. organisation in western news media products, Snow concluded that:

Perhaps the most depressing feature of the media coverage of O.P.E.C. is the dogged

persistence with which some misrepresentations continue to surface long after they have been disproved by events. (16)

The same could be said of the coverage New Zealand news media organisations accorded to the issue of fraud and the unemployment benefit in New Zealand.

In Australia, Keith Windshuttle found a similar readiness by the news media organisations to promote the 'dole bludger' myth. He explained it in this way:

The media have found that people want news that both titillates their imagination and confirms their prejudices. Journalists justify their presentation of such news as 'giving the public what it wants'. The public wants to experience, vicariously, a life different to the one to which most people are confined; but it also wants to feel morally outraged about those it believes take the easy way out. This duality forms the basis of the media's concentration on all forms of deviant behaviour and of its definition of social problems. (17)

Presenting the unemployed as parasitic upon the wider community in general and upon taxpayers in particular could thus be justified as 'giving the public what it wants'.

At no time was the exact basis on which New Zealand's social welfare system rested made explicit in the news stories surveyed. The system was thus rendered rootless and, therefore, extremely vulnerable to assault by all critics. The newly revitalised 'free market' enthusiasts, who viewed social welfare as an unwarranted drain on the economy, were particularly vocal in their criticisms from 1981 through 1983. According to T. H. Marshall, an Englishman writing on the corporate state in 1981, the welfare state undermines all of the principles upon which the capitalist 'free market' system rests. He considered that:

In contrast to the economic process, it is a fundamental principle of the welfare state that the market value of an individual cannot be the measure of his right to welfare. The central function of welfare, in fact, is to supersede the market by taking goods and services out of it, or in some way to control and modify its operations so as to produce a result which it would not have produced of itself. (18)

News stories in the period surveyed were full of 'free market' rhetoric which lent extra weight to attacks from this quarter upon New Zealand's social welfare system.

There is evidence to suggest, however, that the activities

of private sector capitalism are inextricably intertwined with the activities of the public sector. Moreover, capitalism itself has relied heavily on the welfare state to provide the necessary work force. As Offe asserts:

[Although wage-labour is treated as if it were a commodity, it is in fact, not a commodity. This is not only because it cannot be separated from its owner. Unlike all other commodities - whose volume, quality, time and place of appearance are determined by criteria of market rationality - wage labour is not predominantly determined in these respects by the anticipation of its marketability .... Polanyi, points out that a society based on the 'fictitious' commodity form of labour power necessarily depends upon non-commodified support systems. These systems function to preserve and enhance labour power whenever it is not traded in labour 'markets'. Contrary to the view later associated with the writings of T. H. Marshall, Polanyi suggests that 'welfare' is not a late development within capitalist societies, something that somehow came into being for philanthropic reasons after the time of the absolute exploitation of labour power. Rather 'welfare' institutions are a precondition of the commodification of labour power. (19)

Rather than being parasitic upon the capitalist sector, then, welfare support systems such as the unemployment benefit can be viewed as an essential element of the capitalist system. For example, without such systems, workers could not be kept 'work-ready' during times of unemployment and, therefore, would not be available to

provide labour power should employers again require it. Such a view of the welfare system as playing a vital role in the economy was not voiced in the news stories surveyed. Welfare measures were uncontroversedly presented as philanthropic devices and, moreover, as devices which often placed 'intolerable' burdens upon the productive sphere. Given this context, it was a relatively short step to the portrayal of welfare beneficiaries as 'dole bludgers' and 'parasites'.

New Zealand news media products did, however, present an alternative to the 'dole bludger' portrayal as an image of the unemployed. And this perhaps is further evidence of their independence of official sources. *Morning Report* in particular seemed loath to attack those who had already been seriously disadvantaged by the economic depression. But other media also frequently presented the unemployed as 'victims' who should be pitied rather than as semi-criminals who should be harassed. The existence of any 'leakage' in the Department of Social Welfare's system was not considered a sufficient excuse to treat jobless people as 'dole bludgers'. Financial, physical and psychological stress along with alcoholism, divorce, domestic violence, homelessness, crime, delinquency and suicide all figured in news stories as the social consequences of unemployment.
It should not be inferred from this that the bases of all these ills and the mechanisms which connected them with unemployment were ever examined by the media in any detail or at any length. Overseas studies have indeed discussed the correlation between unemployment and other phenomena. J. Harvey Brenner of John Hopkins University found that in the U.S.A. a:

10% rise in percentage of workforce unemployed led to a 2% rise in cardio-vascular mortality, a 4% rise in suicide rates, a 6% rise in homicide rates, a 3% rise in first admission to mental hospitals and a 4% rise in admission to state prisons, most of these effects being noted within two years of the changing unemployment rate. (20)

And in New Zealand, non mass media sources have shown that post neonatal mortality rates and the admission of young alcoholics to mental institutions have shown a strong correlation with rises and falls in the unemployment statistics (21). But such correlations were not often made or discussed at all in the news stories surveyed. Occasionally unemployment was mentioned as a contributing factor to some other social ill but was rarely viewed as a primary cause of the ill. And overwhelmingly social problems were seen as involving specific individuals rather than groups formed by the workings of explicable

social and economic structures. When the individuals were personalized as either 'dole bludgers' or 'victims' there was even room to blame some of those suffering from such social ills for their own plight as of course the point of the personalization of dole bludgers was to blame them.

Despite the availability of material from voluntary agencies, community workers and social scientists which depicted the jobless as 'victims' of an economic problem rather than a personal pathology, news media organisations continued to give prominence to 'dole bludger' stories. It seems that the news media did not learn quickly, especially when ministerial press releases were readily available. The overall picture to be gained from news stories was, then, that the unemployed were either 'dole bludgers' or 'victims' (and most likely the former); and that the two groups ought to be separated by fraud squad investigations - much in the way the 'deserving poor of the parish' were once separated from the 'ablebodied poor'.

Such puritanical divisions have a long history. As Clarke asserts:

[B]y the end of the Tudor period we see emerging three different sorts of pauper. For the impotent poor there was the provision of poorhouses, for the able-bodied genuinely unemployed individual there were the workhouses
and for the idler there were the houses of correction. (22)

The institutional purpose of the distinction in New Zealand in the 1980's was so that the Department of Social Welfare could offer sickness benefits to the 'impotent poor', unemployment benefits to the 'able-bodied genuinely unemployed individual', and punitive withdrawal of benefits from the idler. Their purpose was well met by the personalized language of unemployment (23).

All this said, depictions of the unemployed as 'victims' were common enough. The health problems they and their families suffered constituted one variant of the 'victim' news story. For example, under the headline, 'COSTS KEEPING JOBLESS AWAY FROM THE SURGERY', a youth worker, Mrs. Margaret Reeves stated:

I wish someone would explode this myth that everyone on the unemployment benefit is ripping off the country and doing extremely well .... These kids are suffering. (24)

Similarly, under the headline, 'JOBLESS CAN'T PAY DOCTOR', a spokesperson for the Wellington Unemployed Workers Union, W.U.W.U., Ms. Jane Stevens asserted that:

(23) Ibid, p.185.
After paying week to week expenses, there is nothing left for other needs that arise. Medical expenses, clothing, bills, mortgages, school expenses, and transport cannot be covered by the pittance the Government gives to the unemployed .... How can 60,000 people be lazy bludgers? (25)

Significantly, both Mrs. Reeves and Ms. Stevens saw the explosion of the 'dole bludger' myth as essential if they were to achieve a greater public understanding of the nature and effects of unemployment. For far more news stories featured the argument that the unemployed were 'dole bludgers' than asserted the contrary. The medium through which Mrs. Reeves and Ms. Stevens sought to publicise the suffering of the unemployed was itself weighted against their cause.

Suicide, amongst young people in particular, was another 'problem' linked in news stories with the rising level of unemployment. In June 1981, the director of the Mental Health Foundation, Dr. Max Abbott, issued a press release which stated that long-term unemployment could lead to suicide, depression, alcoholism and ill-health (26). Citing British studies undertaken during the economic depression of the 1930's, Dr. Abbott asserted that while the unemployed had more time available they engaged in

fewer leisure activities than the employed. A year later, the Rev. Bruce Mackie, director of Lifeline, announced that their telephone counselling service had received 140 suicide calls in the previous six month period. He stated:

The most serious thing arising from unemployment is the bitterness and despondency arising from people who have made multiple job attempts .... Their self-esteem and confidence has been totally destroyed resulting in personal disintegration. (27)

By the end of 1983, news stories began to appear with headlines such as 'SUICIDE RATE DOUBLES AMONG THE YOUNG' (28). A report released by the Department of Health had shown a suicide rate amongst 15 to 29 year olds which had doubled in the period between 1961 and 1981. At 28% of the total number of suicides, this figure was equal to that which had existed during the 1930's. None of the news stories on the topic, however, looked into the rising level of suicide at any length or with any depth. An increasing proportion of young New Zealanders were contemplating or actually committing suicide. But the possible economic causes of this tragic phenomenon were largely ignored by the media. Stories about suicides provide yet another example of the media's tendency to

focus on the superficial characteristics of individual events rather than their antecedent conditions.

Voluntary organisations whose role it was to offer assistance to people 'in need', particularly the homeless, attempted to highlight the social pressures that unemployment had engendered. Under the headline, 'EMERGENCY SERVICES SWAMPED BY HOMELESS', a Salvation Army spokesperson, Major Stark, called for the unemployment benefit to be raised by at least $50 (29). The Salvation Army was at that time receiving around twenty calls each day from people unable to afford rental accommodation. The housing problem was particularly acute in the Auckland region according to the chairman of the Manukau Emergency Housing Committee, Mrs. Phillipa Wilson. Under the headline, 'OUTLOOK GRIM FOR HOMELESS', Mrs. Wilson stated that unemployment was one of the primary causes of homelessness (30). The only kind of housing many people could afford was that offered by local bodies or the Government and this was in short supply.

The personalization of the unemployed as 'victims' and 'dole bludgers' was largely due to the dominance in New Zealand of the work ethic. Both self-esteem and the esteem

of one's peers were shown in news stories to be dependent upon one's contribution to the economy through work. Women were able to avoid the 'dole bludger' label by becoming 'housewives'. This role was not, however, one which carried with it high status. Through their personalization of the unemployed, the news media avoided undertaking any kind of structural analysis. Individuals or dehumanised masses, and not structures or processes, were the focus of news stories. The many stories on temporary work schemes illustrate these themes, their interconnections and ramifications.

Until 1981, the Temporary Employment Programme, (T.E.P.), together with the smaller private sector schemes had been providing work for approximately 50% of the unemployed. In March 1979, the Department of Labour's statistics showed that 23,700 people were registered as unemployed while 26,100 people were engaged on special work schemes. Before looking at the news stories on temporary schemes operating between 1981 and 1983 it would be useful to put these into their historical context by looking briefly at the role work schemes had been playing prior to this.

The schemes were popular with local bodies who had used them to extend, upgrade and often merely to maintain
services (31). With grants for wages, materials and administration forthcoming from central government, local bodies were able to improve services and maintain them in the face of inflation without adding to the yearly bill for ratepayers. This fact made the schemes acceptable to both councillors and those who elected them. Similarly, Government departments were able to employ people in temporary jobs while at the same time cutting back on permanent staffing levels in line with the 'sinking lid' policy (32). Although the work done was officially designated as 'additional' in that it would not have been undertaken without T.E.P. funding, it was obvious that many 'abuses' of the scheme took place (33).

One of the outcomes of the extensive use of T.E.P. was the creation of a large, temporary workforce which performed 'additional' and, therefore, by definition, inessential work. Such workers had fewer rights than workers in permanent jobs and seldom had access to effective trade union representation. No matter how diligently they applied themselves to their jobs or how talented they

(31) M. O'Connor, Look a Gift Horse In the Mouth, Auckland City Council Employment Dept., May, 1983, provides a good discussion of the use of work schemes by local bodies.
(32) Ibid, p.9. See also Chapter V.
(33) See C. Bell, After the Wombles; Job Creation in a Rural Community Context, N.Z. Sociology Association Conference Paper, University of Auckland, May 1983.
proved to be, it was inevitable that they would soon face unemployment again. In addition, T.E.P. jobs were not publicly viewed as 'real' jobs and hence the workers were not seen as really employed. (It will be recalled that news stories often presented the figure for those on T.E.P., and later the Project Employment Programme, as part of the total unemployment figure (34)). In brief: an increasingly large section of the New Zealand workforce was being shunted into temporary work schemes in which it had fewer rights and poorer conditions than other workers as well as no security of tenure. At the same time, these workers were denied the social status of other workers and, instead, were saddled with the social stigma usually reserved for the unemployed (35).

By 1981, the Government was forced to reconsider its temporary employment policy: unemployment had continued to rise and so had the cost of subsidizing temporary work. The T.E.P. had taken on an embarrassingly permanent character. The Government took account of both of these factors in its public relations document, Jobs and People, The Government's Employment Strategy, which was released in June 1981. This booklet announced that the Government now saw the role of temporary schemes in quite a different light.

(34) See Chapter VI.
(35) C. Bell, 1983.
Assisting the Unemployed

The Government knows that, in the present economic climate, improved education, training and placement services cannot, in themselves, solve the basic problem of unemployment. The [Think Big] economic strategy already outlined is the major thrust of building our potential to provide satisfying jobs for all New Zealanders seeking work.

At present, however, there is a need to provide short-term support and subsidised job opportunities for those unable to find regular employment.

Currently there are three private sector programmes and five in the public sector. All these are designed as far as possible as 'bridges' to help people into unsubsidised employment. The Government is generally not prepared to provide indefinite wage subsidies for jobs, but these programmes cushion the impact of unemployment and open the way to real job opportunities. (36)

As Martin O'Connor observed:

Thus a new era of the job creation programmes was born: the era of the 'bridge', the stop-gap, the fill-in, the necessary input of 'skills', work habits, work ethic, training, to keep the workers' hands in, as it were, (and their bellies full) until 'real' work comes along. (37)

Little of this could have been gauged from news stories.

The news media initially presented Jobs and People

(37) M. O'Connor, Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth, p.11.
uncritically and no doubt in a way which would have pleased the Government. 'JOB HELP NOT FULLY UTILIZED', ran The New Zealand Herald headline following the release of the 'Jobs and People' booklet (38). The focus of this article was on the Government's claim that employers were not taking full advantage of job creation schemes. Responsibility was placed on to private sector employers, trade unions, regional authorities, local bodies and community agencies to create more jobs through the temporary work schemes. The image was of a Government, working under extremely difficult conditions in a hostile economic environment, doing all they could to solve the unemployment problem. Criticism of this publication was, however, widespread in New Zealand and so news stories critical of it did subsequently appear.

But even then the most fundamental issue that the Government had formally abandoned full employment as an immediate goal in a document which carried the label 'Employment Strategy' - was not discussed in the news stories surveyed. Rather, debate centred around whether or not the Government's economic strategy would provide jobs sometime in the not clearly specified future. The full employment ideal had been allowed to die a quiet death on the understanding

that it would be resurrected by an 'economic miracle' in the 1990's.

As a part of this new employment strategy, a variety of new temporary job creation schemes were introduced in 1981 and in 1983. Their purpose was defined in news stories as not only being to provide temporary relief from subsistence on the unemployment benefit but also, and notably, to assist young unemployed people to develop work habits, and to protect the work habits of older people. The existence of what the Government termed, a 'hard-core' of long-term unemployed people who were not accustomed to working a 40-hour week was considered to be socially undesirable (39). Whether the concern was for the loss of 'human resources' to industry and 'the economy', for the cost of supporting unemployed people, for the plight of the unemployed themselves, or for a combination of these factors was not, however, stated in news stories.

Temporary work schemes were usually presented in news stories as visible evidence that the Government was

(39) e.g. The New Zealand Herald, 1 November, 1983, p.1. in which Mr. Bolger said of a proposal to alter P.E.P. schemes so that only those who had been registered for longer than 26 weeks would be eligible for them; 'This is designed to ensure we do not permit, despite considerable employment difficulties, the development of a hard-core of long-term unemployed persons in New Zealand'.
actively pursuing job creation policies. Controversy did however, surround some of these schemes, particularly the proposal to introduce military training for unemployed youths. This idea was included in the package of schemes formulated by the Government Task Force on Youth Training, headed by the under-secretary for Internal Affairs, Mr. Geoff. Thompson. This proposal fitted in well with the idea that the unemployed were 'dole bludgers' who needed to have some discipline instilled into their personalities. Under the headline, 'ARMY-SKILLS TRAINING FOR JOBLESS CONSIDERED', Mr. Thompson stated:

The military-based option is one we are looking at very seriously because in many areas there are complaints from employers that young people coming out (from school) have no skills whatsoever and no discipline. (40)

Thus, for Mr. Thompson, it was for the employers and not the unemployed to decide what function work schemes ought to serve. If employers wanted a disciplined workforce accustomed to obeying orders then this is what the state ought to be supplying.

This ministerial statement generated much hostility, particularly from community organisations. For example, Mr. Jim Brown, the president of the National Youth

(40) Evening Post, 10 May, 1982, p.18.
Council, told journalists that the suggestion was 'a transparent attempt to lower the unemployment figure without actually doing anything to solve unemployment' (41). His point was that the Government was merely going to transfer young unemployed people onto these schemes so that they would cease to appear in the unemployment total. And he accused the Government of using the military scheme to reinforce the 'dole bludger' myth.

Despite the opposition, most editorial comments welcomed the armed forces training scheme, although in cautiously measured terms. The Press, under the editorial headline, 'ARMY FOR THE UNEMPLOYED?', said the programme would be useful for some unemployed people (42). It warned, however, that: 'The greatest source of misunderstanding is likely to be the notion that military methods will "knock people into shape" for employment' (43). The Otago Daily Times' editorial on the subject was more enthusiastic about the proposal. It concluded that: 'All able-bodied unemployed should be directed into some form of constructive work for state or local bodies, rather than be merely drawing the dole for doing nothing' (44).

(41) Evening Post, 11 May, 1982, p.3.
(43) loc. cit.
The *Otago Daily Times'* view was that the unemployment benefit was not a payment awarded to those who could not find work as a part of the social welfare system funded by New Zealanders. It was a payment 'for doing nothing' - a gift from the state, rather than a fundamental right of each person.

The proposal disappeared from sight in news stories after June 1982 only to reappear once more in November 1983 (45). This time, however, it was not a mere proposal but a concrete plan which the Government intended to introduce. The *Otago Daily Times* greeted this announcement with a cartoon suggesting that the armed forces scheme was only a temporary time-filler for unemployed people and, therefore, not a real solution to unemployment (46). *The Press* repeated much of its earlier editorial under the same headline, 'ARMY FOR THE UNEMPLOYED?' (47). This editorial urged people to 'give it a try' before they condemned the proposal. It encouraged objectors to ignore the theory underlying the scheme and concentrate on whether it would help young people to get jobs in practice.

The president of Mana Motahake, Mr. Tai Pene, was not,

(46) See cartoon overleaf.
VOLUNTARY TRAINING UNDER MILITARY AUSPICES AVAILABLE TO UNEMPLOYED - news

MARK TIME!

UNEMPLOYED PARADE GROUP
however, prepared to exercise the patience advocated by The Press. Under the headline, 'ARMY STINT OPPOSED', Mr. Pene likened military training to incarceration in a detention centre or borstal (48). 'They get exactly the same thing. They run ten kilometres in the morning, get breakfast, lunch and tea and a roof over their heads' (49). He thought the only real benefit to be gained from the scheme was that its participants would be able to run faster than other unemployed people.

None of these news stories contained any analysis of the implications of the military-based training schemes. Indeed, as shown above, The Press, even argued that these implications should be ignored. That the scheme actively promoted the idea that the unemployed were undisciplined 'dole bludgers' was not, therefore, presented in news stories as a reason for opposing it. Apart from the editorials, the news media merely presented the views of the people who opposed or supported the scheme without attempting to analyse these views. The effect of the schemes on the image the unemployed enjoyed in the New Zealand community was certainly not examined.

Periodically, the news media organisations would present a  

(49) Ibid.
'human interest' news story which would focus on a particular work scheme and the people employed on it. These news stories provided the only glimpses available in news products of the individual images of people who were actually unemployed. Such stories were usually accompanied, in newspapers, by a photograph of smiling workers engaged in a relevant activity. They would also include interviews with scheme workers who would profess enormous gratitude for the existence of temporary work programmes. The Evening Post ran such a news story under the headline, 'WORK SCHEME BRINGS HOPE TO UNEMPLOYED' (50). The story began:

For a small group of unemployed youths the new day will no longer dawn to a sense of overriding hopelessness.

For some, used to treading dance floors and playing amusement parlours to the wee small hours, time has suddenly acquired a new significance.

The hours that have been tossed away idly on street corners are forgotten now, where a few minutes are precious and costly. (51)

Such idealized views of temporary work schemes were a feature of these 'human interest' stories. All criticisms that had been made of the schemes were thus obscured in a cloud of hazy romanticism.

(51) loc. cit.
Criticisms of particular work schemes or of temporary work schemes in general, did, however, appear in news stories. Under the headline, 'JOB SUBSIDY "DISASTER"', a P.P.T.A. spokesperson outlined the organisation's analysis of the First Job Programme. This programme involved the payment of a subsidy to any employer who hired a school-leaver in his or her first job. According to the P.P.T.A.:

It has a greater potential for increasing business profitability than for increasing the number of jobs on the labour market .... Like work exploration schemes it merely shuffles the pack of cards and makes the young job-seeker more competitive at the expense of the older, more experienced worker. It does not put more cards in the pack. (52)

Most critiques of specific varieties of work scheme in news stories emanated from those who actually operated the schemes, especially from local bodies. As the people who had to implement the schemes on a day-to-day basis they were acutely aware of the shortcomings of the schemes. One such news story, appeared under the headline 'HIGH SACKING RATE ON WORK SCHEMES' (53), stated that a fifth of the temporary workers hired by the Auckland City Council were subsequently sacked. The chairman of the Auckland City Council Employment Sub-committee, Mr. R. C. Johnson, said this could be explained very simply: 'The majority

(52) loc. cit.
of these people are put into work that they are not fundamentally qualified for, have no interest in and no aptitude for' (54). The very basis upon which the Department of Labour selected candidates for work schemes was thus questioned. This criticism was not, however, followed up in further news stories. Other complaints, such as those relating to the criteria under which work schemes were accepted or rejected and the attempt to introduce youth rates, were also featured occasionally but never examined in depth. Criticisms appeared as one-off events and once they had been made were allowed to disappear unless some other newsworthy source wished them pursued.

Other news stories were critical of the overall way in which the Government's temporary work schemes were operated. The Opposition member for Miramar, Mr. Peter Neilson, was cited in news stories as accusing the Government of having run down the Department of Labour to the extent that it was no longer capable of effectively administering job creation programmes (55). Two days later a New Zealand Herald article, under the headline, 'CAUCUS TENSION EXPECTED ON WORK POLICIES', stated that

(54) loc. cit.
Government backbenchers were pressuring for a new employment portfolio (56). This proposal was rejected outright by Mr. Bolger, on the grounds that he still had many ideas for job creation schemes. He added, however, that, 'I have not got the magic wand. If you run across it, let me know'. (57) Not the most fortunate choice of words, perhaps, from the Party which had claimed to specialise in economic 'miracles'.

There were also news stories in which the whole concept of job creation on a temporary basis was put into question. Some of these criticisms emanated from individuals and organisations who were deeply concerned about the plight of the unemployed who found themselves slotted into these work schemes. Under the headline, 'BRIEF WORK SCHEMES QUERIED', the chairman of the New Zealand Maori Council, Sir Graham Latimer, put the view that: 'Our young people work for six months and then get put out on to the road again for a further eight months when the schemes end .... It is cruel, totally cruel' (58).

Other critics, approaching the question from quite a different perspective, claimed that temporary work schemes

interfered with the real economy. The executive director of the Contractors' Federation, Mr. R. McKnight, claimed that the jobs of one thousand workers were endangered by the use of P.E.P. workers to perform jobs previously tendered to private contractors. This claim was reported in a number of news stories. Both *The New Zealand Herald* and the *Otago Daily Times* carried the Contractors' Federation press release which stated that:

> It is a crazy circle. The Government makes economic decisions that increase unemployment. Then it decides unemployment figures are too high so sets about creating work for those out of a job. Local bodies take them on and give them work like kerbing and channelling or drainlaying or footpath laying, or any number of things that contractor's would normally do. So now contractors have not got work, they have to lay off staff who turn up at the Labour Department to be told they can go on these work schemes. If there is any economic sense in it, I am afraid the Contractors Federation is not clever enough to see what it is. (59)

Similarly, under the headline, 'CARE NECESSARY IN SUBSIDISED LABOUR PROJECTS', the chairman of the Auckland Employment Advisory Committee, Mr. K. G. Fraser, asserted that temporary jobs should never encroach upon the territory of the private sector (60). He stated that:


Cleaning cemeteries does not threaten the jobs of those still in work but painting carriages and houses does. The more useful the work, the more it reduces the pool of real work opportunities. (61)

Thus, temporary work programmes were officially permitted to improve only the quality of life, by creating parks and organising voluntary community offices, and then only if a private sector business was not already providing that service. This massive temporary workforce was not allowed to contribute to any scheme which might actually create long-term jobs in the existing "economy", for this would hinder economic recovery. The purpose of work schemes such as P.E.P. was indeed to provide unemployed people with some kind of employment experience. But only for a few months of each year until that unknown future date when "the economy" would "recover". In this way, the work ethic would not decay and the unemployed would be briefly salvaged from the poverty of subsisting on the unemployment benefit. The idea that the unemployed might themselves attempt to find a solution to their own unemployment through the temporary work schemes was obviously not accepted by the Government, nor discussed in news stories (62). While small businesses slid into bankruptcy, New Zealand's parks bloomed with carefully

(61) loc. cit. Emphasis added.
(62) A few co-operative workschemes in operation provided the only exception to this but these were rarely mentioned.
tended flowers and previously grey walls sported bright new murals.

Generally, temporary work schemes were presented in the news products surveyed as evidence that the Government was actively pursuing job creation policies. Criticisms of the underlying basis on which these policies had been constructed were only occasionally mentioned. Thus, even though the level of unemployment was not expected to fall in New Zealand before 1990, the Government's creation of jobs which lasted for only six months was seldom questioned. Moreover, there was no discussion in news stories of the questionable rationality of pouring millions of dollars into work schemes specifically designed not to benefit 'the economy' during a time of recession. That one ought not to 'look a gift horse in the mouth' seemed indeed to be the dominant attitude in the news stories surveyed towards job creation schemes.

The image that the unemployed themselves were allocated in these news stories was as the passive recipients of Government handouts of work or training. When the views of the people employed on the temporary schemes appeared in news stories, they were almost always confined to simple expressions of gratitude for these handouts. The frustrations that many of the unemployed felt about the
wastefulness of these schemes remained completely hidden (63).

In particular, the complaint that Government money was being channelled into temporary instead of long-term solutions to unemployment received little news media coverage. The unemployed might indeed be grateful for the existence of the schemes but they were also aware that within six months they would be unemployed once again.

Despite the normal story that P.E.P. work was not real work, these work schemes had provided the only jobs that many unemployed people had ever held. The work schemes were not seen in news stories from the perspective of those who had little alternative but to work on them. Instead, news stories conveyed, albeit selectively, the views of those who formulated, operated or observed the schemes in action. And they moreover suggested that gratitude was the only response appropriate from scheme employees. All other responses were excluded from presentation (64).

News stories about the temporary work programmes fitted

(64) See Chapter IX for a discussion of the presentation of S.T.E.P.S. trainees.
into the 'victims' and 'dole bludgers' dichotomy. News stories implied that the unemployed - as 'victims' - ought to be uncritically grateful for the work schemes which had rescued them from, '... treading dance floors and playing amusement parlours to the wee small hours' (65). Any other response would have left scheme employees open to the charge that they were 'dole bludgers' who did not really want to work and so were rejecting the Government's schemes in favour of idleness. In the words of the Otago Daily Press editorial: '[A]ll able-bodied unemployed should be directed in to some form of constructive work for state or local bodies, rather than be merely drawing the dole for doing nothing' (66).

During the period 1981 through 1983 there was some recognition in news stories of the picture which all the statistics had been painting, namely that unemployment was a long-term and widespread phenomenon. News stories in which this was discussed tended to call for more 'tolerance' of the 'victims' of unemployment. They often recommended the introduction of programmes designed to teach the unemployed to make 'constructive' use of their increased 'leisure' time. Such images of the unemployed as targets for tolerance presented a marked contrast to

news stories in which the unemployed were labelled as 'bludgers' and 'cheats'. It should be noted, however, that 'dole bludger' news stories far outnumbered 'tolerance' stories in the news products surveyed.

In the 'tolerance' news stories, the unemployed were presented as people who had need of 'education for leisure'. Playing Space Invaders or other video-parlour games were not considered to constitute a 'constructive' use of leisure time. Such activities were presented as not only time-wasting but also as slightly 'underworld' or criminal. The following excerpt from a Morning Report news item was typical:

Unemployment in the city means a different 24 hour clock than most workers. It's a night world of video parlours and cops and wagons and some parlours are nastier than others. I went out with two large teenagers late at night to talk to people without jobs. And when they said, suspiciously, why was I there, I said to show those who had jobs that you're still human. (67)

News stories advocated that the unemployed should turn away from such trivial pursuits and adopt the leisure activities favoured by the employed during their weekends. Soccer, cricket and hockey were said to be 'constructive' in a way that video games were not.

A major drawback in this plan to fill the time of the unemployed with 'constructive' activities was nevertheless recognised in some of the stories to be the fact that New Zealanders generally derived their status from the paid work they undertook. The Auckland City Council's recreation and pool officer, Mr. Bob Larkin was reported as saying:

It is inbred in us to recognise people for what they do for a living. If you meet people socially you very shortly establish their name and ask them what they do. You don't mean do they play cricket - you mean what do they do for work. People who don't work, where do they get their status? How do they relate socially to other people? How do they fill their time? (68)

Another drawback to the idea of constructive leisure was reported to be that the unemployed simply did not know how to fill in their days. The controversial N.R.A.C. report noted the notion that the unemployed would use their time in, 'culturally enlightened and personally enriching' ways to be false (69).

Given that a large proportion of the unemployed consists of the less well educated, the least socially secure, the least successful, the least

(68) The New Zealand Herald, 25 September, 1982, Sec.2, p.3.
confident, and the least well off, such a belief is naive in the extreme. (70)

This truth is amply recorded in the international literature (71). It was also evident in New Zealand. Disillusioned after repeated rejections by employers and with the knowledge that unemployment figures were rising, the unemployed were more likely to sink into a state of depression and apathy than to take up a new hobby or 'constructive' pursuit.

What was required, then, according to news stories, was 'education for leisure' (72). Schools ought to teach children how to deal with a life of unemployment. Under the headline, 'GRIM VIEW GRIPS STUDENTS FACING UNEMPLOYMENT AS WAY OF LIFE', the president of the P.P.T.A. - a professional group with a vested interest in education - stated:

[W]e are finding it necessary to move towards education for leisure. It is preparation for a society of which unemployment will be a normal part .... Hopefully the social stigma will start to disappear. (73)

(71) See: H. Arendt, p.133 and R. Clarke, p.35.
(73) loc. cit.
The only difficulty with this solution was that if the unemployed put their time and energy into constructive leisure activities then they were obviously not also out searching for work. If they were not searching for work then they were not eligible to receive the unemployment benefit. Moreover, such well-adjusted unemployed people were likely to be labelled as 'dole bludgers' within the criteria established by other news stories.

As has been noted already, the Minister of Labour had publicly stated that the 'Think Big' strategy might not produce the 410,000 jobs by 1990 which had been promised in the National Party's 1981 election campaign (74). It had become apparent that full employment was not going to be achieved again in the foreseeable future. The only purpose, therefore, that the 'dole bludger' campaigns, which were featured so prominently in news products, served, was to take the pressure off central government to create more jobs. If the unemployed were not the 'deserving poor' then unemployment could be attributed to the failings of individuals rather than to the failings of governmental policy decisions.

The simplistic response to the unemployment problem - that

(74) e.g. The New Zealand Herald, 14 April, 1983 headline, 'RETHINK ON WORK FIGURES'.

the unemployed should learn to 'productively' fill their days - did not provide a real solution. Leisure time denotes the hours people devote to recreational activities outside of their working day. If one has no working hours then one has no 'leisure' time. One is simply unemployed. Given New Zealand's attachment to the work ethic there was little possibility that even the unemployed themselves, still less their employed fellow citizens, would accept a 'leisure' time extended to designate one's whole life as an adequate trade-off for a paid job. And why should the unemployed feel fulfilled by taking up cricket while other New Zealanders enjoyed the material comforts and social status their jobs provided? Not only were these factors excluded from consideration, these same news products were busy attacking the unemployed as unproductive drones.

Given the economic policies favoured by the National Party, the most 'rational' choice to be made by many unemployed people could well have been to build a lifestyle - and not a 'leisure' time - outside of the arena of the labour market. Such people were, however, usually villainised in news stories. By dividing the unemployed into 'dole bludgers' and 'victims' there was only room for the unemployed to move back and forth between these two categories of deviant behaviour. Their only escape was back into the labour force as productive workers. In news stories, however, the unemployed were
offered little immediate hope of work and no choice other
than to wait passively for the economy to recover, even
though this recovery might exclude them. The phenomenon
of 'jobless growth' might well see the economic indicators
registering favourably once more while unemployment
figures remained at a high level.

The individuals who were most affected by unemployment
tended to belong to those groups which had traditionally
found it most difficult to obtain work even in times of
full employment. These individuals included those who
could be categorised as Maori, unskilled, young, or
married women. To acknowledge this, however, would have
been also to acknowledge that the social, political and
economic power structures in New Zealand were not equally
accessible to everyone. Such an acknowledgement would
have called into question the whole nature of New
Zealand's democratic system (75). But in news stories the
problem was never seen as being that some groups in
society had too much and others too little. The problem
was always that some individuals had too little. They,
either through ill-luck or moral turpitude, were as likely
to be blamed as pitied for their plight in the news
stories surveyed.

(75) See A. Simpson, A Vision Betrayed: The Decline of
Democracy in New Zealand, Auckland, Hodder and
To be a worker in the paid economy continued to be the 'norm' in news stories, particularly for men, throughout the period 1981 to 1983. This 'norm' had, however, long since ceased to be the reality for thousands of New Zealanders. News stories did nothing to add to the ability of individuals to make informed political choices or to respond creatively in the face of growing unemployment. Instead, all of this attention by the fourth estate amounted to a prescription for inaction and despair on the part of the unemployed themselves. The only images they were allocated within the context set by news stories were both socially peripheral and soul-destroying. Moreover, the definitions of 'work' to be found in news stories were firmly rooted in the by-gone era of full employment. The world had changed but the news media products' representations of it lagged far behind.
CHAPTER VIII: INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The views of the trade union movement did feature in the news. Frequently, however, the commentary supplied by news workers on these views swamped the point which the trade unionists were attempting to convey. Trade unions were generally depicted as a narrow interest group which did not even always act in the best interests of union members. Moreover, while statements made by trade unionists were, on occasion, presented as reasonable and rational, actions taken by the union movement almost never were. Strikes, stop-work meetings, sit-ins and so forth were presented as the result of a trade union militancy originating in Marxist or communist theory. Only rarely were such actions depicted as the outcome of a breakdown in the negotiating process between two parties, the trade unions and the employers.

As the effects of the international recession began to hit the New Zealand business sectors, employers sought to cut back wage rates, manning levels and other contractual rights won for workers by the trade union movement. Employers attempted to introduce a variety of new labour-saving technological developments into both industry and commerce. The trade unions clearly saw it as their role to resist the unmonitored implementation of these trends
or, at least, to negotiate the best possible settlement for affected workers. News stories generally portrayed such trade union activities as foolhardy on the grounds that they were potentially making life more difficult for an already shaky business sector. They frequently suggested that the most sensible course of action for trade unions to follow was to grant employers whatever concessions they desired in order to ensure continued economic viability. That the contractural rights of workers and, hence, the living standards of the majority of the New Zealand population, were to be sacrificed in order to maintain business profitability levels, was an issue not examined at any length or depth by the news media.

Central to this process, whereby the views of employers received more favourable coverage in news stories than the views of trade unionists, was the use of the word 'economy' to represent New Zealand as a whole. It will be recalled from Chapter V that the economy was deemed to be the central factor determining the well-being and prosperity of the New Zealand people (1). The concept was even anthropomorphised. Thus news stories often referred to the 'ailing' economy and speculated as to when, or

(1) And see also Chapter VII for further discussion of the use of the word 'economy'.

whether, it would 'recover' and become 'healthy' once again. It was considered to be a single, living thing capable of being struck down by sickness. As a consequence of this simplistic representation of economic activity, the fact that the 'economy' was in recession was allowed to obscure the fact that many businesses had actually been increasing their profit levels. That the economy was referred to as a single entity meant that all employers were able to use the recession as a justification for staff redundancies or manning reductions. Moreover, they could do so even if their own profitability had been maintained or risen.

Whereas both employers and the National Government were often presented in news stories as though they spoke on behalf of all citizens, the equation between the interests of the trade union movement and the interests of the New Zealand people was never made. Thus employers referred to 'New Zealand's industry', 'New Zealand's competitiveness' and 'our exports' as though such things belonged equally to everyone. Trade unions, however, were always presented as the representatives of only a sectional interest group whose desires seldom coincided and often conflicted with the so-called 'national interest'. The interests of the 'economy' were what news stories deemed the 'national interest' and trade union activities were rarely depicted as in the best interests of 'the economy'. The depiction
of industrial disputes as threatening to 'the economy' and the alignment of the interests of capital with the 'national interest' were marked characteristics of news stories. These phenomena have been noted in other places.

As John Hartley asserts in his study of the media:

The frequent discrepancy between what is claimed as the national interest and the needs of people living in that nation (as in 'It's in the national interest to beat inflation - but meanwhile you lose your job') is made sense of [in news stories] as a consequence of a particular government (not class) action, or even as a natural and inevitable 'fact of life'. (2)

The effect of such an alignment of interests in news stories has been considered by Stuart Hall who wrote:

(5) suppose that every industrial dispute could be signified as a threat to the economic life of the country, and therefore against 'the national interest'. Then such significations would construct or define issues of economic and industrial conflict in terms which would consistently favour current economic strategies, supporting anything which maintains the continuity of production, while stigmatizing anything which breaks the continuity of production, favouring the general interests of employers and shareholders who have nothing to gain from production being interrupted, lending credence to the specific policies of governments which seek to curtail the right to strike or to

weaken the bargaining position and political power of the trade unions. (3)

What Hartley and Hall said of the British media might equally be said of New Zealand.

The Government and employers, who had the most control over the New Zealand economy, were generally presented in news stories as therefore occupying the best vantage points from which to determine economic policies. Certainly many of the Government's policies were heavily criticised in news stories. But the politicians were nevertheless depicted as the people who had access to the best information and, hence, the greatest propensity to formulate correct policies. The trade union movement were explicitly excluded from this knowledgeable group in news stories.

The role of the trade union movement in the industrial relations process often embroiled them in open conflict with both the Government and employers. The employers and the Government were, however, consistently presented as those who knew what was the best for the 'economy'.

Hence it was easy to depict trade union activities as detrimental to the 'economy' and, therefore, by definition, damaging to the interests of the New Zealand people. Just who would benefit most from what was good for the 'economy' was never discussed. Instead, news stories presented the simplistic idea that some kind of harmonious national interest, a 'consensus', existed which could be equally agreed upon by 'reasonable' or 'moderate' trade unionists, employers and politicians.

The major site of trade union conflict with employers, in news stories related to unemployment, lay in the issues connected with redundancy settlements. When an employer laid off staff it was the task of the relevant trade union to arrange compensation payments for affected workers. The negotiation process was frequently complicated by the absence of an existing redundancy agreement from many industrial awards. Trade unions were therefore placed in the position of having to fight for such redundancy clauses at the very time when their bargaining strength was at its weakest due to the high level of unemployment. Moreover, when a company was declared bankrupt any compensation payments owing to workers were difficult to obtain due to their status as unsecured creditors. Wages and redundancy payments did not have first call on the assets of a bankrupt employer. Numerous obstacles stood between redundant workers and their so-called 'golden
handshakes'.

During 1981 through 1983 there was a concerted campaign launched by the various employer organisations to present redundancy payments as contrary to the prevailing economic interests of New Zealand. In this campaign, the employer organisations were supported by the National Government in general and the Minister of Labour, Mr. Bolger, in particular. During August 1981, the Otago-Southland Employers Association called upon their members to identify what they considered to be the major obstacles preventing increased job creation by private sector employers (4). The survey results indicated that these obstacles were primarily the fear of redundancy payments, overly restrictive trade union practices, the lack of youth rates in some major industrial awards, the unsuitability of most job applicants, and the high cost of labour (5). Identical surveys were conducted by the other regional employer associations and the results were released nationally by the New Zealand Employers' Federation on September 5th. New Zealand newspapers announced the survey under such headlines as, 'THOUSANDS OF JOBS MAY BE AVAILABLE NOW', 'NEW ZEALAND EMPLOYERS ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT'S CLAIM 39,000 VACANCIES IN NEW

(4) See Chapter IX for a discussion of this survey in relation to youth rates.
ZEALAND', 'JOBS GOING BEGGING' and 'BOSSES PINPOINT JOB CURBS' (6). All of the newspapers surveyed accorded prominence to the survey's results.

The argument that the Employer's Associations wished to have accepted was that if these 'obstacles' were removed New Zealand's high unemployment would disappear instantly. Redundancy payments were singled out, along with the absence of youth-rates, as being particularly obstructive to the employer's desire to create new jobs. Mr. Stan Duncan, the President of the Employers' Federation, informed Evening Post readers that:

I find it staggering that such a large number of vacancies exist at present because of things we can do something about virtually immediately.

If employers could come to some agreement with the unions and with the Government on how to break down these barriers, we would go a long way towards solving unemployment, almost overnight. (7)

Employers sought to reduce their labour costs by lowering real wages. The existence of a high level of unemployment was, therefore, used by employers to justify this end. In the news stories surveyed no consideration was given to


the fact that employers' labour costs were identical to their worker's means of subsistence or that a cut in favour of the former automatically entailed a drop in living standards.

Throughout 1981 through 1983 employers consistently argued that the existence of redundancy payment clauses in industrial awards was a major obstacle in the path of job creation. Employers were said to be reluctant to hire new staff because of the 'fear' that they would be unable to maintain the position and therefore forced to pay redundancy compensation to that employee. The abolition of redundancy payments, it was argued, would increase the employer's willingness to take the 'risk' of creating more jobs. For instance, under the headline 'REDUNDANCY SETTLEMENTS BEHIND DOLE PROBLEMS', the President of the Employers' Federation stated:

Few people on the dole today are there because they have been made redundant but many could have been there because of the level of redundancy settlements. (8)

Mr. Duncan then proceeded to blame the 'intransigent' attitudes of the trade union movement towards the issue of redundancy payments as the major reason for the dearth of

new job opportunities.

A similar stance was taken by the executive director of the Employers' Federation, Mr. Jim Rowe. Under the headline, "'WHAT ABOUT THE BOSSES' PLEA TO SOCIETY', Mr. Rowe asserted:

It is time we thought harder about the cost of placing so many social burdens on the employer .... Think of the pressure for high redundancy payments. Small wonder that staff numbers are kept to a minimum and job opportunities lost in the process. (9)

Neither of these news stories mentioned the fact that it was the economic recession and not trade union activities that placed jobs in potential jeopardy. Nor did these articles consider the fact that an employee who had only worked for a company for a matter of a few weeks or months was entitled to only a meagre redundancy settlement. Moreover, Mr. Rowe's 'plea' for the removal of 'social burdens' from the employer's shoulders amounted to an attempt to disassociate wage rates from worker living standards. Just who ought now to shoulder these burdens was not specified.

This campaign by employer organisations was endorsed by

the National Government. In October 1981, the Minister of Labour announced that his department was about to investigate the whole redundancy question. The New Zealand Herald greeted this announcement with the headline, 'GOVERNMENT EYES "GREEDY" WORKER PAY OFFS' (10). The article accompanying it looked at redundancy payments through the eyes of the Government and employers rather than from the perspective of laid off workers. The legislation promised by the Government on this issue was passed in July 1982. A Morning Report news item said of it:

The Government has imposed strict limits on redundancy payments. Under new regulations all agreements will now have to go to the Arbitration Court and it won't be allowed to authorise settlements above a certain level. That level's exactly the same as was agreed last week between Air New Zealand and most of its employees who are facing redundancy. The ceiling is four weeks pay for the first year of service and two weeks for each subsequent year. Employees will be required to have worked for a firm for a year before getting any redundancy pay and there'll be a maximum of twenty years compensation. (11)

This Morning Report programme went on to interview the Minister of Labour about the new legislation. Mr. Bolger justified the introduction of the restrictions on the grounds that redundancy, '... was one element of

remuneration that wasn't covered by the wage freeze regulations that were brought down' (12). Redundancy payments, it was implied, had been rising at a time when both wages and prices had been fixed. This interpretation of events was, however, disputed in the same programme by the advocate for the Distribution Unions, Mr. Rob Campbell. Mr. Campbell asserted that the regulations might, '... do something to restrain some of the higher levels of settlements but they do nothing to meet the need of people who lose their jobs and in many instances get no redundancy pay at all' (13). Essentially the employers had achieved their stated aim of removing the entitlement of short-term employees to redundancy compensation.

Unemployment figures did not, however, experience a sudden decline following the passage of this legislation. Just where all those potential jobs, which employers were too frightened to fill, went to remains a mystery. What was clear though was that employers had succeeded in cutting back on one of the costs associated with employing people. They were now free to lay off staff at no cost whatsoever to themselves provided they selected only those workers with less than a year's service.

News stories covering redundancy announcements which

(12) loc. cit.
(13) loc. cit.
followed the introduction of this legislation did not, however, make any connection between the two. For example, under the headline, 'G.M. LAYING OFF UP TO 250 AFTER UNIONS REJECT CLOSURE PLAN,' the Evening Post reported, approving the generosity of the company, that General Motors would not fire any employee who had been with the company for more than a year (14). The news story made no mention of the fact that all those selected by the company were not entitled to any redundancy pay. It might well be suspected that in fact the decision was not the reward for faithful service which it appeared to be in this article, and that it was quite obviously based on a consideration of what would most benefit General Motors financially. But the Evening Post did not hint at this interpretation at all.

The campaign by employer organisations to reduce or abolish redundancy payments saw the release of a host of press statements during the 1981 through 1983 period. The media devoted numerous news stories to these press releases thus allowing the employers' claims to reach a wide audience on a regular basis. Nor did the passage of the redundancy legislation see an end to this campaign. The legislation dealt only with one of the employers' complaints against redundancy payments - the issue of

short term employment. Employer organisations also asserted, and continued after the legislation to assert, that workers should not be entitled to any redundancy compensation whatsoever because of the harmful effect that such payments had on business profitability. Under the headline, 'REDUNDANCY Crippling', the President of the New Zealand Meat Retailers' Federation, Mr. J. Stewart stated:

The added burden of a redundancy claim at such a critical moment can deliver the final blow which will force the closure of an ailing business.

But it can be more devastating than that. It can cripple the proprietor personally. The risk of such an event happening can stifle all ambition to progress, and in extreme cases it can prematurely close a business which might otherwise have a viable future. (15)

A similar view was expressed, in equally dramatic terms, by the President of the Chambers of Commerce, Mr. Alan Williams. Under the headline 'REDUNDANCY RAIDERS ILL-ADVISED', Mr. Williams informed readers of the Evening Post that:

Redundancy payments are justified in the proper circumstances and are accepted by business. But today, when circumstances arise that staff must be reduced for one reason or another, the opportunity is now being taken to squeeze the last drop of blood from enterprises which are usually financially up against the wall .... We

can do without unjustified and ill-advised raids on the remaining cash resources of the enterprises which we depend upon to provide future jobs.

The workforce and next year's intake need to know where it is being led and the consequences of the unbridled use of industrial muscle .... The only alternative is that the golden goose goes on strike and an authoritarian state takes over. (16)

This same press release was used three days later by The Press under the headline, 'REDUNDANCY CLAIMS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE' (17). Trade unions were depicted as the greedy villains who would kill the 'golden goose' of industry and hence also damage worker interests by destroying jobs. Again trade unions were being blamed for the effects of the international economic recession which had driven enterprises 'financially up against the wall'. The implication of this statement was that trade unionists were either too stupid to notice the effects of their actions or else sought, purposely, to bankrupt companies.

During 1983, the Government began to publicly endorse this argument. In June 1983, the under-secretary of Internal Affairs, Mr. Geoff. Thompson, announced that the Government was now, 'looking at a bridging fund rather than a golden handshake fund' (18). He stated that

(16) Evening Post, 26 September, 1981, p.3.
(18) The New Zealand Herald, 6 June, 1983, p.3.
redundancy payments should be 'drip fed' to laid off workers as 'bridging finance' until they found new employment instead of being awarded in the form of lump-sum payments (19). The implication of this proposed policy change was that workers found jobs with relative ease and so redundancy payments had been acting as kind of surprise bonus for those made redundant. No statistics of any kind were ever supplied in news stories to validate this notion. The only relevant statistics available, the unemployment figures, supported the exact opposite view—that workers were finding it increasingly difficult to obtain new jobs.

Later in the same month Mr. Thompson informed journalists that:

The growth of large lump sum redundancy settlements and the confusion of severance entitlements with retraining requirements, have caused employers to limit hiring. We are looking at these impediments and are keen to overcome them for the sake of jobs. (20)

Mr. Thompson was using the terminology of the Employers' Federation when he referred to redundancy payments as 'impediments' to job creation. He went so far as to say that the Government had really 'mucked up' the redundancy

legislation by allowing lump-sum payments which "... encroached on the life-blood capital" of the business sector (21). Thus, the Government fully supported the campaign by employer groups to first reduce the level of redundancy payments and then to abolish them altogether.

Generally, the news media organisations surveyed presented the views of the employer groups on the redundancy issue at length and at frequent intervals whilst virtually ignoring the opposing views expressed by trade unionists. It is true that trade union views were not excluded from news products, but they were certainly presented less often on this issue than those of the Government or the Employers' Federation. It was of similar circumstances in the U.K. that Mr Philo and his colleagues were led to claim that, 'The selection and editing of information to fit a dominant view cannot be justified by saying that this view is held by a lot of "important" people' (22).

Unjustified or not, it is doubtful that a concerted campaign by trade unionists to raise the level of redundancy payments, supported by a plethora of press

releases, would have been greeted by such a co-operative press corps. More important people were against than for trade union policies; and even by 'neutrally' presenting the redundancy compensation issue the news media organisations would still have acted (as they did) against the interests of the trade union movement and hence against affected workers.

At times, the news media not only gave a generous presentation of the views of employer organisations and the Government, they also actively supported these views in their editorial comments. For example, an Otago Daily Times editorial for example stated that:

... it must remain fundamentally the responsibility of an employee to be prepared to face the prospect of needing a new job. It is a responsibility which years of full employment and the Welfare State may have blurred, but which still exists. If many white or blue-collar workers are careless or improvident about putting aside something for this 'rainy day' but demand that the employer look after them, then the employer can fairly argue that the 'looking after' should take the form of a weekly deduction from a man's pay throughout his working period - making redundancy virtually a parallel form of superannuation. (23)

This highly moralistic editorial evoked images of greedy, spend-thrift employees seeking to remain forever children

(23) Otago Daily Times, 8 June, 1983, p.4.
while the employer was ceaselessly exploited. It argued, moreover, that workers ought to finance their own redundancy payments and hence removed the connotation that such payments were made in compensation for being laid off through no fault of one's own. It also ignored the question of whether wage levels were adequate to enable even workers who were not 'careless or improvident' to save for their 'rainy day'.

The supposed effect on business profitability was not, however, the only justification offered for employer resistance to redundancy payments. Frequently news stories appeared in which trade unions were cited as a major cause of business failure and hence of any resulting redundancies. Trade unions rather than employers were said to be the culpable party and, therefore, it was argued that employers ought not be obliged to pay out any compensation to laid off workers. Only those workers who had been 'good', in the terms defined by the employers, deserved such payments. Members of active trade unions were, by definition, undeserving.

This argument was particularly well-illustrated in news stories which dealt with the closure of the Gear meat works in Petone. Immediately following the closure, Gear management spokespeople laid the blame for it at the door of the Meat Workers' Union. The management viewpoint was
also publicly endorsed by the Government. Under the headline, 'BLAME SWAPPED OVER GEAR SHUTDOWN' The New Zealand Herald presented the views of selected people as to what or who had caused it (24). The secretary of the Meat Workers' Union, Mr. A. J. (Blue) Kennedy, stated that it was a management decision which had nothing to do with the workers. All of the other people interviewed for this news story took the opposite view. As a body they blamed the Meat Workers' Union. The Minister of Labour asserted that, 'What will assist these older works maintain a competitive position and remain viable is a responsible attitude by the unions' (25). Mr. Bolger was of course implying that it was his definition of a 'responsible attitude' that the unions should adopt. This attitude essentially involved agreeing to any proposals put forward by employers to maintain or increase profitability and productivity. The Chairman of the Gear works, Mr. Michael Groome, also stated that the Meat Workers' Union was the primary cause of the closure. Mr. Rowe, the executive director of the Employers' Federation, said that the trade union concerned had ignored 'economic reality'. The New Zealand Herald chose to seek the opinions of those who could be expected to attack the Meat Workers' Union rather than those who would probably have supported union

(25) loc. cit.
tactics. This article was clearly weighted against the views of the trade union movement and in favour of the views of the Government and employer organisations.

Generally, Morning Report granted trade unionists greater proportional access in its news stories than did the editors of newspapers or the 6.30 News. But while it allowed trade union views to be expressed, Morning Report still conveyed the impression that most trade union actions were at least unwise. For example, during the industrial dispute which followed the announced closure of the Gear works, Morning Report gave ample coverage to statements made by representatives of the Meat Workers' Union. But the way in which the news stories were constructed implied that the union was in the wrong.

Due to their inability to negotiate a satisfactory redundancy agreement with the Gear management, the Meat Workers' Union called for freezing works throughout New Zealand to go out on strike. Morning Report announced this decision in the following terms as:

... A threat to farmers, the industry and the economy especially at a time in the season when the country is facing drought conditions from North Cape to the Bluff. Mr. Bolger says he will discuss the measures available to him to solve strike action in essential industries with the secretary of the Meat Workers' Union, Blue Kennedy, at the earliest opportunity. The country's freezing works began closing last
night as the union started to enforce its call for better redundancy pay for Gear meat workers .... By tomorrow night, the nation's freezing industry should be paralysed according to a Meat Worker's spokesman, Jim Sneddon. (26)

This news story demonstrates several characteristics in common with the majority of news stories on trade union activities. Firstly, the strike was described as an event caused by the trade union involved rather than as the outcome of a breakdown in the negotiating process between the trade union and the employer. The fact that there were two parties involved who might bear culpability for this breakdown was ignored. Moreover, the fact that this strike had been called only after months of fruitless negotiation was not even mentioned. The strike was described as a 'threat' to the 'economy' as though trade unionists were holding New Zealand's defenceless economic system to ransom. This was despite the inclusion in the article of a reminder that the Minister of Labour had at his disposal many legal remedies to strike actions if they ever really did seriously affect the 'economy'.

The equation of employer interests with the interests of the 'economy' and hence the 'national interest' has been outlined above. This news story went on to depict the proposed nation-wide strike as 'paralysing' the 'nation's

freezing industry' as though the industry belonged to all New Zealanders instead of to only a small group of shareholders. The unions were said to be threatening 'our' economy and 'our' freezing industry as though their narrow interests were in conflict with those of all other New Zealanders. That the freezing company concerned could be equally said to be acting in their own interests by denying adequate compensation to redundant workers and thereby causing a strike, was not mentioned in this news story. Overall, the complicated substantive details of the redundancy issues in dispute were almost completely obscured by the news item. The issue was simply described as one of 'redundancy'.

Later in the same news broadcast, Morning Report interviewed the director of the Freezing Companies Association, Mr. Peter Blomfield. The interview went as follows:

Journalist. The country's freezing works will be closing tomorrow night unless there's a last minute settlement of the redundancy dispute at the Gear Works, Petone. The union claims the redundancy pay offered the Gear workers is not enough, even though some of them have already accepted the company's offer. Here's the director of the Freezing Companies Association, Peter Blomfield.

Mr Blomfield. It's a matter between the ... Board and the Union and I think it's very unfortunate that the union have resorted to strike action over this
issue. I think the offer which was made recently ... was fair and reasonable.

Journalist. Nobody wants this strike to last. What are your next moves going to be?

Mr Blomfield. Well, I think that one of course would want to watch developments here. I cannot really believe that the Meat Worker's Union and other freezing workers would be so irresponsible at such a difficult time for farmers as to put the whole country out.

Journalist. Are you contemplating an approach to the minister?

Mr Blomfield. Well naturally there'll be informal discussions with the minister on a matter that could be potentially difficult for the country. (27)

Throughout the course of this interview the journalist avoided any suggestion that the Gear employer might be in any way to blame for the strike. The strike was depicted purely as an action undertaken by the Meat Workers' Union. From the introductory paragraph the credibility of the Meat Workers' Union's claims were cast in doubt by the statement that, 'The union claims the redundancy pay offered the Gear workers is not enough, even though some of them have already accepted the company's offer'. This statement strongly suggested that the union was not acting in accordance with the wishes of Gear workers. No attempt was made to substantiate this claim during the interview.

(27) loc. cit.
Instead, the view expressed by the employer's representative, Mr. Blomfield, closely paralleled the statements on this issue made earlier in the broadcast and quoted above. Mr. Blomfield referred to the strike as an 'irresponsible action' which could put 'the whole country out'. The trade union concerned was portrayed as a narrow interest group acting against the interests of other New Zealanders, Gear workers included. Thus the terms in which the *Morning Report* journalists described the Gear dispute were to a large extent derived from statements made by employer representatives. The parameters within which the debate was conducted were not those which would have been selected by the Meat Workers' Union. The union's case was severely handicapped by the fact that the battle was fought on grounds staked out by their opponents.

Following this interview with Mr. Blomfield, *Morning Report* spoke to the Minister of Labour. Mr. Bolger said of the proposed strike, 'Well it's clearly a serious threat of a dispute of major proportions at this stage of the meat season' (28). It is highly likely that the word 'threat' which was used in the initial introductory item on the Gear dispute was derived from this interview. *Morning Report* had allowed Mr. Bolger, and the employer

(28) loc. cit.
representatives with whom he sided to set the context in which the dispute was discussed.

Morning Report turned next to an interview with Mr. Wes Cameron, a spokesperson for the Meat Workers' Union. The interview went as follows:

Journalist. How much too low is the present redundancy offer from Gear?

Mr Cameron. It's somewhere around half or less than half of what it should be. When I say what it should be, there have been levels set for redundancy right throughout the country in all different industries. First of all the Hawkes Bay Meat Company were saying no and now they've made an offer that is really unrealistic.

Journalist. The offer is something like $5700 for long-standing workers so you're saying in effect that it should be eleven or twelve thousand.

Mr Cameron. Well, I'm saying - yes, it's around half of what we would have expected, around half of what is generally accepted, not only in the meat industry but throughout the country as a compensatory payment to people for losing their jobs.

Journalist. But there is as you're aware, something of an emergency going on at the moment, and killing is very important. Couldn't you suspend this action while the emergency exists and deal with the situation after that?

Mr Cameron. Well, it's very, very difficult. You know we've been talking about the question of redundancy for the people at Gear who lost their jobs now for a number of weeks and we have been trying to get some satisfaction from
the company. No, I don't think it can be delayed any longer, the thing has to be brought to a head and it's got to be dealt with now, and we've got to get this one off our plate and get a satisfactory settlement.

Journalist. But why pick such a difficult time in particular?

Mr Cameron. Well, it doesn't really matter when you do things, from our point of view, I think it's generally accepted that it's the wrong time. We've been negotiating this now, as I say, for quite a while and we've got to do something about it and there's no point in talking to the freezing companies during the winter on this one.

Journalist. We understand that some workers have already accepted the present redundancy payment so obviously in their eyes the payment was satisfactory.

Mr Cameron. I understand there have been a very small number of people who have picked their money up.

Journalist. Well what about those people?

Mr Cameron. Well, we can't stop them from doing that. The company did make an offer at a level we couldn't accept. Now there have been workers that have gone along and uplifted that and there's nothing we can do about that.

Journalist. Under present legislation you could be directed to return to work by the Arbitration Court, how would you react to that?

Mr Cameron. Oh well, we'll just have to wait and see what happens there. I can't forecast what will happen in the event of a direction coming from the Arbitration Court. We'll just have to wait and see. No doubt there will be discussions taking place and we'll be keeping a close eye on that.
Journalist. Have your workers voted to go on strike or have they been directed to go on strike?

Mr Cameron. A series of meetings took place right throughout the country on this question of monetary compensation for the people who lost their jobs at Petone. Speakers from the Gear Meat Worker's Union have been around and addressed all the sheds and generally the workers have voted and said we'll support, after hearing the spokesmen and the stories from the Gear works on what happened, they said we'll support action to maintain that you get a decent redundancy payment.

Journalist. And were votes taken on this?

Mr Cameron. There were votes taken and resolutions carried in most sheds throughout the country. (29)

Obviously the tone of this interview differed quite markedly from that of the previous two. Whereas both Mr. Blomfield and Mr. Bolger were merely asked what they intended to do, Mr. Cameron was called upon to justify all of the union's actions. The interviewer criticised the union for striking at this stage of the year because of the difficulties a strike could cause for farmers. He even suggested that the union consider delaying their industrial action until a more convenient time of year. This implied that the unions had selected this time purposely and that they were singlehandedly responsible for the dispute. No criticism was ever made of the

(29) loc. cit.
employers on the grounds that they had refused to negotiate a settlement even though a strike could have such a potentially dire effect on the freezing industry. The interviewer was also ignoring the fact that the strike is only an effective weapon if it is used at a time when it causes maximum inconvenience to the employer. As Mr. Cameron stated, '... there's no point in talking to the freezing companies during the winter ...'. The power balance between the employers and the trade unions was thus not accorded any consideration by the interviewer. Instead it was suggested not only that the trade union was the cause of the strike but also that they were being 'irresponsible' in causing it at this particular time.

The interviewer also made several attempts to discredit the union's status as the chosen representatives of the redundant Gear workers. This was done initially in the statement that some Gear workers obviously considered the company's offer to be 'satisfactory' because they had already collected their redundancy cheques despite union opposition. The interviewer continued this line of questioning even after Mr. Cameron had stated that only a few workers had done so. Moreover the interviewer did not know - or did not appear to know - the motivations of the workers involved. It was equally possible that these workers feared that the company would collapse leaving them with no redundancy than that they considered the
offer 'satisfactory'. The interviewer was speculating in a way which cast the trade union's actions in the poorest of possible lights. Next it was suggested that the proposed strike was an undemocratic imposition on freezing workers by the Meat Workers' Union, with the question, 'Have your workers voted to go on strike or have they been directed?' Even after Mr. Cameron had answered to the effect that meetings had been held throughout New Zealand and that votes had been taken, the question was repeated, 'And were votes taken on this?' This repetition implied that Mr. Cameron's answer was at least questionable. Neither Mr. Bolger nor Mr. Blomfield were subjected to such an inquisition.

Whereas the employer's and the Government's interpretations of events at Gear were included in the Morning Report introduction to this news story, the Meat Workers' Union's interpretation was notable only by its absence. At several points during his interview, Mr. Cameron stated the central issue, from the union's perspective, which was the, '... question of monetary compensation for the people who lost their jobs at Petone.' Morning Report, however, chose to obscure this issue by concentrating on the potential effects on the 'nation's freezing industry'. This, of course, was exactly the focus favoured by Mr. Blomfield and Mr. Bolger. The news story appeared to be about a fight
between the drought-hit freezing industry, supported by the Government's industrial legislation, and the 'irresponsible' Meat Workers' Union. The plight of the redundant Gear workers did not even enter into this formula. Hence, the entire news story was skewed against the interests of the trade union involved and in favour of the employer. This was because it was the employer who was allowed to set the context within which the dispute was discussed. By limiting debate in this manner, numerous arguments which could have been put forward by the Meat Workers' Union were automatically excluded from consideration. It will be clear, in considering this series of interviews, that just whose language is used, and who gets to set the terms of reference for a news item, can have a very real effect on the way in which the resulting story will portray the issue.

One of the major reasons for the Hawkes Bay Meat Company's success in presenting the strike as the fault of the Meat Workers Union was the campaign which they had waged immediately prior to the strike. This campaign involved the depiction of the union's activities as the primary cause of the Gear closure. The news media products surveyed gave more publicity to the employer's interpretation of events than they did to the trade union's. For instance, the **Evening Post** greeted the closure announcement with the headline 'UNION CHIEF KILLED
GEAR WORKS : M.P.' (30). In this news story, the Government M.P. for Pahiatua, Mr. John Falloon stated that, 'West Coast Meat Workers' Union secretary, Ken Findley, can now happily say he's destroyed two freezing works'. Mr. Falloon added his belief that the 'union had been on strike for half the year' (31). This article was accompanied by an editorial entitled, 'INFLEXIBILITY AT GEAR EXTRACTS A HIGH COST' (32). The editorial laid blame for the Gear closure on the Meat Workers' Union's refusal to accept both pay cuts and manning reductions as proposed by the Hawkes Bay Meat Company. It stated:

In every battle, industrial as well as military, there are troops who are required to be sacrificed.

It will be interesting to see how the union hierarchy will square its sacrifice of the Gear workers for the common good of all members. (33)

Similarly the Otago Daily Times cartoon, reproduced overleaf, which depicted the Gear meat works as a man stabbed by a butcher's knife, left no doubt as to where the cartoonist's sympathies lay (34).

The Hawkes Bay Meat Company had succeeded in its aim to

(31) loc. cit.
(33) loc. cit.
MEAT WORKERS THREATEN ACTION TO HAVE GEAR MEAT WORKS REOPENED - NEWS

"I only wanted a pound of flesh!"
have the Meat Workers' Union blamed in news stories for the closure even though a large number of other factors could have been cited. These included the fact that the company had not invested in the eight million dollars' worth of capital improvements needed to upgrade the Gear works to the standard required to process meat for export! Other factors, such as the new technological developments in meat processing introduced by Gear's competitors and the opening of several new freezing works, were rarely mentioned. Instead, the Meat Workers' Union's protection of the contractual rights of workers was presented as the major contributing factor even though they had granted sizeable concessions in terms of both wage rates and Manning levels. As with most news stories about industrial disputes, the fact that the workers' only real bargaining weapon, the strike, of necessity inconvenienced people and caused the employer to lose money, was used to discredit the trade union's actions. That the employer was also a party to the dispute rather than an innocent victim of it remained invisible in news stories.

During 1981 through 1983, the introduction of recent technological developments in both the industrial and commercial sectors was a major site of conflict between the trade union movement on the one hand, and the Government and employers on the other. The trade unions were concerned that machines were rapidly replacing people
in the workplace at a time when the labour market was contracting rather than expanding. Displaced workers could no longer be assured that they would find new jobs, particularly if their skills and work experience had been rendered obsolete by new technologies. But the employers and the Government regarded these technological developments as essential if New Zealand exports were to remain 'competitive' on the world market. They considered the resulting increases in 'productivity' and 'efficiency' as the only way to ensure the survival of New Zealand-made products. In the interests of 'the economy' and, hence, of the 'national interest', trade unions were directed to accept the introduction of new technologies whatever the consequences in terms of the destruction of jobs.

In news stories redundancy announcements connected with the substitution of capital for labour were treated as the highly regrettable by-product of economic progress. The trade unions were frequently presented as though they obstinately stood in the path of this progress rather than as the protectors of the displaced workers. If technological advances were necessary to the 'growth' of the New Zealand economy, then attempts to hinder their introduction were viewed with disfavour in news stories. The New Zealand Herald quoted the manager of the Horotiu Freezing Works as asserting that workers ought willingly
to accept new technologies for, 'the good of all' (35). That these machines automatically meant the loss of 500 jobs at Horotiu alone was obviously not considered to figure in the sum of what was 'good for all'.

The Government actively promoted the introduction of new technologies throughout the period surveyed. Under the headline, 'IGNORING NEW TECHNOLOGY IS "NOT AN OPTION"', the Minister of Labour stated:

We must not say, as some trade unions are saying, that we cannot introduce new technology if jobs are going to be put at risk .... Somehow we have to work patiently to bring them, (the trade unions), closer to the 1980's in terms of attitude and approach. If we don't do it, we are going to lose across the board the benefits we can get out of a range of developments that are in front of us .... (36)

As with the Morning Report news story on the Gear dispute, this news item made the 'them-us' split between the interests of trade unions, as 'them', and the interests of 'we' New Zealanders, or 'us'. The trade unions' interests were depicted as being other than those of the New Zealand people in general.

This theme of the trade unions as 'other', was repeated

many times in the news stories surveyed. To stand in the path of what the Government and employers defined as necessary was to act as a divisive reactionary in opposition to the interests of 'the economy'. Thus, upon his return from a visit to Japan, the Minister of Labour advised New Zealand trade unions to remodel themselves along the same lines as the weak Japanese unions. The New Zealand Herald printed this story under the headline, 'NEW ATTITUDE CALLED FOR IN N.Z. UNIONS', and advised readers that, 'Additional jobs can be provided only from growth in industry and efficiency of production' (37). Similarly, under the headline, 'JOB LOSSES IF NEW TECHNOLOGY SHUNNED', the Minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Shearer, said:

We cannot allow intransigent union leaders or fearful company managers to cripple New Zealander's export competitiveness and put at risk the jobs of Kiwi workers, school-leavers and, ultimately, the future of all of us. (38)

Any suggestion of trade union opposition was presented by the Government as a threat to the 'future of all of us'. Employer groups frequently referred to this theme within news stories. For example, under the headline, 'TRADE UNIONISTS PICKED AS THE TRUE BLUES', the chairman of the

(38) Evening Post, 27 September, 1982, p.11.
Meat Producers' Board, Mr. Adam Begg, was reported saying that 'Resistance to change, insistence on outdated relativities, manning scales, and work methods are holding back progress' (39). Employer groups were attempting to portray trade unions as anachronisms in the modern world whose only function now was to impede progress and, thereby, harm the 'national interest'. The news stories uncritically repeated their portrayal.

Many news stories on new technologies featured the argument that trade unions had succeeded in over-pricing the labour of workers during the by-gone era of full employment. This over-pricing, it was claimed, had forced employers to substitute capital for labour by introducing new technological developments in order to remain 'competitive'. Hence the statement by Government M.P., Mr. Simon Upton, under the headline, 'N.Z. MUST REGAIN COMPETITIVE EDGE', that:

> Those who have over-priced their labour stand indicted while fellow New Zealanders are out of work. Either we return to a lower standard of living or we deploy new technology and regain the competitive edge. (40)

Once again the trade unions were designated as being

(40) *The New Zealand Herald*, 16 April, 1982, p.5.
separate from 'fellow New Zealanders', as 'them', 'those who have over-priced their labour'. The president of Federated Farmers, Mr. Rob Storey, agreed with this portrayal of the trade union movement. In a press release he stated that:

As labour costs make up 60% of meat processing charges, it is inevitable that unless there is a substantial reduction in labour costs through the introduction of new technology over the next few years, meat processing costs will continue to rise. (41)

According to Mr. Storey such rises could not be carried by farmers and so ought to be avoided.

Overall, then, new technologies were presented in news stories as 'inevitable' developments which ought to be introduced as rapidly as possible for the 'good of all'. Some argued, moreover, that technological advances had always produced as many jobs as they had destroyed. What New Zealand was experiencing was the temporary 'dislocation' of the labour force while old and inefficient industries closed down. In the long term, this argument maintained, workers would be required to fill the jobs which the new economic 'growth' would automatically create. Under the headline, 'TECHNOLOGY SERVANT NOT MASTER', The New Zealand Herald presented the

views of the director of the Vocational Training Council, Mr. Derek Wood, on this subject: 'If you look at history, changing technology has simply changed the nature of work. In general it has produced new work and new sorts of work. (42)

Mr. Wood went on to caution readers that some initial unemployment would be caused by technological change. But he emphasised that this would only be a short-term phenomenon. (43)

In 1981, the Control '81 Conference was held in Auckland to promote the use of industrial robots and other new technological developments intended for the workplace. The conference also aimed to dispel the fears of New Zealanders as to the possible negative effects such developments could have on both jobs and lifestyles. A major element of this promotion was the fantastic, futuristic 'Star Wars' aura with which it was possible to surround such inventions. This presentation of new technologies was accepted uncritically by the news media organisations which covered the conference. For example, the 6.30 NEWS item on the Conference went as follows:

(43) Loc. cit.
Announcer. Robots - 16,000 of the mobile computers have now joined the workforce overseas and a conference opened in Auckland today promoting the idea that new technology will lead to shared prosperity and leisure.

(Background noise of a robotic voice)

Journalist. "The Control '81 Conference is proving a delight for people who love electronic gadgets. Robot technology is still at the stage the computers were twenty years ago but apparently their wide use is near."

Dr. Kessler. In Australia, the Australian Wool Corporation has been sponsoring the research to develop a robotic capacity to shear sheep. That's perhaps the most novel application that we're talking about at the Control '81 Conference.

Journalist. Dr. Kessler, who's a key speaker at the conference, wants to dispel fears about the robot age and convince people the new, precise workers joining the labour force are much like robots themselves.

Dr. Kessler. They shouldn't be regarded as a threat to jobs and, therefore, something to be opposed while the robots are a prime technology that's going to allow all of us to have a shorter working week as well as an increase in real income and it's going to create an environment where machines are doing jobs that have so little intelligence that in fact they can be programmed to accomplish them.

Journalist. Dr. Kessler says anyone can buy a robot for fifty thousand NZ dollars. He stresses they can work for everyone's advantage.

Dr. Kessler. And one intriguing suggestion about the future that was made by an American roboticist is that perhaps workers should own the robots that
take over jobs previously done by people and lease them back to employers. (44)

During the course of this news story, no attempt was made by the journalist to critically question any of Dr. Kessler's assertions. Instead, the statements made by the journalist added to and reinforced the message that Dr. Kessler was attempting to convey. This was despite the fact that the message was highly controversial. For example, Dr. Kessler's statement that the use of industrial robots would lead to increases in income along with a decrease in working hours was reinforced by the announcer's introductory comment that, 'new technology will lead to shared prosperity and leisure'. It might be thought that while this outcome is a very real possibility it avoids the other very real possibility that new technologies will lead to fewer jobs and enforced 'leisure' in the form of involuntary unemployment. Similarly Dr. Kessler's assertion that 'anyone can buy a robot' was actually stated by the journalist. That the assertion was repeated by the journalist without any attached reservations or qualifications lent additional credence to it. It was, however, at least debatable that 'anyone' could obtain $50,000 to purchase a robot. On current evidence it is impossible. But by its not being

questioned credence was lent to Dr. Kessler's final statement that displaced workers could potentially purchase the robots which had replaced them. This assertion ignored the fact that industrial robots tend to replace many workers rather than just one and that even the combined resources of many workers would not necessarily equal the cost of a single robot. It also ignored the probable resistance of employers to any plan to lease docile robots from less than docile workers. After all, one of the main attractions of mechanical workers for employers is their inability to go on strike or to demand wages for their labour.

This news story was carefully constructed to convey a particular message about new technology. Only small segments of the possible story lines were included on the film. A multiplicity of other possible meanings were excluded. The selected segments of Dr. Kessler speaking were spliced together with comments made by the journalist. These comments reinforced the particular 'slant' or interpretation of events favoured by the news organisation. In this instance the product was designed to convey the message that new technologies are not only necessary for the 'economy' but also that the consequences of their introduction include 'an increase
in real income' and a 'shorter working week'. 'Prosperity' and 'leisure' were thus the key words in this news story which linked them, in a causal manner, to the acceptance of industrial robots.

The rosy picture of the future painted by Dr. Kessler bore little resemblance to the actual situation in which trade unionists found themselves in regard to protecting worker interests in the face of new technologies. The trade union movement had sought to preserve jobs principally by negotiating a shorter working week in those sectors most affected by new technologies such as the freezing industry. Their attempts had been completely rejected by both the employers and the Government on the grounds that they were harmful to the 'economy'. News stories generally did not present shorter working week proposals favourably and more coverage was allocated to the arguments of the Government and of employer groups.

Employers and their representatives released numerous press statements designed to discredit trade union proposals for a shorter working week. Under the headline 'FARM SECTOR GIVES P.M. MESSAGE ON SHORT WEEK', the executive director of the Employers' Federation, Mr.
Jim Rowe, was reported as saying:

Technological change is essential to preserve and expand employment. It must not be mortgaged to prop up existing jobs. Unless technological changes are allowed to raise productivity and make industry more competitive, jobs will disappear anyway. (45)

The Employers' Federation argued that New Zealand industry urgently needed to raise productivity levels and that new technologies provided the means for doing so. If new technologies were introduced in conjunction with a shorter working week, however, the anticipated productivity levels might not have been achieved. This, the Federation argued, would mean fewer job opportunities because industries, unable to remain competitive without such rises in productivity, would collapse. The trade unions were trapped in this vicious circle. Trade unions had to either accept new technologies and the resulting job losses or risk destroying all of the jobs by bankrupting industries. Within the terms of this circular argument, the only inevitability was that jobs would disappear as capital

was progressively substituted for labour (46). It was an inevitability audibly argued by employers and reported by the news media.

This campaign by the Employers' Federation was given full support by the Government. Upon his return from the 1981

(46) N.B. Only those news stories whose headline conveyed the anti-short-week stand have been included here.

See also in 1981: Otago Daily Times, 15 April, 1981, p.1. '35-HOUR WEEK CONDEMNED'.
Otago Daily Times, 22 July, 1981, p.4. 'EMPLOYERS RESIST 35-HOUR WEEK'.
Otago Daily Times, 7 November, 1981, p.5. 'SHORTER WEEK NOT PRACTICAL'.
The New Zealand Herald, 2 April, 1981, p.3. 'SHORTENED WEEK CHALLENGED'.
The New Zealand Herald, 4 April, 1981, p.5. 'NZ CANNOT AFFORD SHORT WEEK'.
The New Zealand Herald, 11 May, 1981, p.5. 'FOL DECISIONS CALLED "ABSURD"'.
The New Zealand Herald, 30 July, 1981, p.2. 'JOBS RISK SEEN IF WEEK CUT'.
Evening Post, 8 April, 1981, p.2. 'A 35-HOUR WEEK: SOME GIVING BEFORE TAKING'.
Evening Post, 11 June, 1981, p.6. 'JOBS THREAT'.
Evening Post, 30 June, 1981, p.13. 'FARM OFFICIALS REJECT FOUR DAY WEEK IDEA'.
Evening Post, 22 July, 1981, p.5. 'FARMERS FEARFUL IF 35-HOUR WEEK INTRODUCED'.
Evening Post, 21 October, 1981, p.1. 'BOLGER "ALL FOR WORKERS"'.
Evening Post, 2 April, 1981, p.1. 'GOVT OPPOSES CAMPAIGN FOR 35-HOUR WEEK'.
International Labour Organisation (I.L.O.), conference, the Minister of Labour informed journalists that:

(T)o seek a significant reduction in working hours during a period of slow economic growth would, if agreed to, frustrate economic recovery and employment opportunities ... [if] weekly earnings are maintained in the face of a reduction in working hours, with no attendant rise in productivity, then unit labour costs will increase. This will not only put pressure on prices, but also increase the price of labour relative to other inputs - a process which will result in fewer rather than more jobs. (47)

Thus the official position taken by the Government on this matter, as on numerous others, coincided with that adopted by the employers.

News stories on the shorter working week proposal provided many more examples of the argument that the trade union movement does not act in the best interests of the New Zealand economy. It has been noted that the economy was never presented as the 'capitalist' economy but only as 'our New Zealand' economy, or more simply as 'the' economy. And just who 'our' economy worked best for was never stated. This enabled employers to assert that they were acting in the interests of the New Zealand economy when they were actually safeguarding the interests of

private enterprise. So when the actions of the trade union movement impinged even slightly on the profitability of the private sector they could be easily depicted as acting against the interests of the New Zealand economy and hence of all New Zealanders. The simplistic presentation of the economic system as well as the absence of any coherent explanation of just what 'the' economy was, combined to provide the framework which rendered this argument plausible in news stories.

The appeal to the supposed harmony of economic interests of New Zealanders appeared frequently in news stories about the proposed introduction of a shorter working week. In October 1981 a Morning Report announcer informed listeners that:

New Zealand cannot afford a 35 hour working week according to the president of the Canterbury Employers Association, Mr. Val McKie. He says that the shorter week will mean a substantial increase in costs which would have to be passed on to prices. While shorter working weeks are desirable, Mr. McKie says the whole concept has to be within our national means and it's not. (48)

The statements, 'New Zealand cannot afford' and, 'within our national means' imply the existence of a harmony of

economic interests which was in fact never demonstrated in news stories. The aim of the employers, which was said to be in New Zealand's economic interest, was to raise productivity levels and increase efficiency by reducing job opportunities through the introduction of new technologies. The aim of the trade union movement was to share the benefits of such technological developments by reducing working hours and thereby preserving jobs. Just where this shared national interest lay in an economic system supposedly based on an ethic of competition remained an unexplained mystery.

The Manufacturers' Federation also invoked this argument when presenting their case opposing the introduction of the shorter working week. Their case was a part of the campaign organised jointly by the Employers' Federation, the Chambers of Commerce, the Retailers' Federation, and Federated Farmers. Under the headline, 'EMPLOYERS RUBBISH 35-HOUR WEEK IDEA', the chairman of the Manufacturers' Federation stated that:

The realities are that New Zealand has a long way to go before the economy would be capable of adapting to the enormous costs involved in moving towards a 35-hour week .... If one industry accepts the shorter week concept, there will be a flow-on to other industries and the country's economic performance will decline, which means lower living standards and higher unemployment. (49)

(49) Evening Post, 4 April, 1981, p.1.
The economy was once again presented as a thing which belonged equally to all New Zealanders as though everyone had a stake in ensuring that it continued to function well in its present form.

Similarly, a Press editorial, quoting extensively from a speech delivered by the executive director of the Employers' Federation, stated that:

The union's cry for a 35-hour working week for 40 hours pay, or variants thereof, clearly shows the union movement's lack of concern for unemployment. The cost of labour is high enough without part of it being for compulsory leisure. It would be a disaster for New Zealand. (50)

Appearing under the headline, 'JOBLESS COULD LOOK TO UNIONS', the editorial made no critical commentary of any kind on Mr. Rowe's assertions (51). For instance, the statement that the trade union movement was demonstrating a 'lack of concern for unemployment' by attempting to block job destruction with a shorter working week proposal, at least warranted further explanation. But the editorial comment came down heavily on the side of the employers and the Government and in opposition to the views of the trade union movement.

(51) loc. cit.
The main area of industrial disputes involving the introduction of new technologies, which appeared in news stories, was the freezing industry. Of particular concern to trade unions was the installation of automatic pelting machines which removed the skins from animal carcasses. These machines, which reduced the manning requirements of the meat chains, were the cause of major disputes between the Meat Workers' Union and the freezing companies.

Employers sought to reduce the total size of the workforce and had the support of both Federated Farmers and the Government for this aim. The Meat Workers' Union, however, wanted to maintain current manning levels in conjunction with a reduced working week. The issue at stake, then, was just who would reap what proportion of the benefits from the productivity gains produced by such new technologies.

According to the executive director of the Employers' Federation, Mr. J. Rowe:

Technological change is essential to preserve and expand employment. It must not be mortgaged to prop up existing jobs. Unless technological changes are allowed to raise productivity and make industry competitive, jobs will disappear anyway. (52)

Once again a circular argument was adopted by the employers within which trade unions could not win. No matter what course they followed, according to this argument, job opportunities would decrease.

Because of the prospect of new technology being introduced in the freezing works, it was in this industry that the trade union's concentrated their claims for a shorter working week. This, the unions thought, would preserve jobs in the industry. But the news media never fully explained this. Instead, news stories appeared, on the one hand, in which trade unionists called for a shorter working week and, on the other, news stories explained why the Government, the employer groups and the producer boards considered such a proposal to be economically unfeasible. The shorter working week thus became a concept which belonged to the future but which 'New Zealand' could not 'afford' to introduce in the 1980's.

This argument was well illustrated by the furore which greeted the negotiation of a four-day working week at the Longburn Freezing Works which had installed automatic pelting machines. The 6.30 News show presented the following news story on this plan:

Announcer. The Government today cracked down on a revolutionary new proposal for a four-day working week at the Longburn
Freezing Works. The Government veto came after a late night meeting in Wellington between the meat company, Borthwicks, the Freezing Companies Association, the ministers of Labour and Agriculture, and the Prime Minister.

(Cut to the Prime Minister, Mr. Muldoon)

Prime Minister. At the conclusion of our discussion, I informed Borthwicks that the Government was totally opposed to their moving to a four-day week and Borthwicks in the light of that statement have agreed to negotiate the introduction of new technology at Longburn on a different basis. And they will proceed to do that today.

(Cut to journalist)

Journalist. That from the Prime Minister comes only three days after the meat giant, Borthwicks, made its startling announcement that it was preparing to discuss a four-day working week at Longburn as part of a package to introduce new labour-saving technology. Borthwicks has no doubts the package could cut costs to farmers but the Prime Minister fears the flow-on effects to other freezing works and to other industries.

(Cut to Prime Minister)

Prime Minister. There's no country in the world that can build up its economy by requiring its workforce to work less hours. That makes no sense at all and is not an approach that the Government is prepared to agree to.

(Cut to journalist)

Journalist. The leader of the Opposition, hit out at the Government's move pointing out that the meat industry was delicensed only last year.

(Cut to leader of the Opposition, Mr. Rowling)
Mr. Rowling. The first time a company moves the Government's got to poke its oar in again ....

(Cut to Minister of Labour, Mr. Bolger)

Mr. Bolger. Well the Government have a broader responsibility than an individual company or a trade union, and our responsibility in this area is to see that trade practices or work practices or wage structures are not introduced that are going to flow across industry and impact on our competitiveness.

(Cut to journalist)

Journalist. But the Meat Workers' Union hasn't taken kindly to the Government's involvement. This reaction from national secretary, Mr. Blue Kennedy.

(Cut to Mr. Kennedy)

Mr. Kennedy. I'm shocked and from the point of view of the workers I'm absolutely scandalised to think that an agreement that has been entered into freely has been withdrawn on the basis of Government intervention. It creates a precedent that is extremely dangerous and simply gives lie to the proposition that these agreements are supposed to be sacrosanct once they're entered in to. (53)

It is worth examining the language employed in this news item. In the introductory paragraph, the four-day week proposal was described as 'revolutionary' and 'new'. This depiction was subsequently reinforced by the journalist's assertion that the proposal to negotiate a four-day week was a 'startling announcement'. Use of the words

(53) 6.30 News, 22 October, 1981.
'revolutionary', 'new', and 'startling' clearly imply that the 6.30 News journalists considered the notion of a four-day week to be a quite extraordinary development. This presentation ignored the fact that there had been a concerted campaign by the trade union movement throughout 1981 to negotiate a four-day week, particularly in the freezing industry. The Longburn proposal was, therefore, neither 'new' nor 'revolutionary' and it was only 'startling' if one had totally ignored - as the journalists did - the negotiations connected with the introduction of new technologies.

By comparing this 6.30 News story with the programme's coverage of the Control '81 Conference, which has already been discussed, it is possible to examine the way in which words are selected in order to place a news story within a particular context. The Control '81 news item commenced with the information that, '... 16,000 of the mobile computers have now joined the workforce overseas ...' (54). This statement implied that the use of industrial robots, while new to New Zealand, was relatively commonplace in an unspecified area called 'overseas'. Not only was there nothing 'new' or 'revolutionary' about these industrial robots but their introduction would lead to the favourable consequences associated with, 'shared

prosperity and leisure'. The unspecified 'overseas' had also experienced the implementations of variations of the shorter working week proposal. However, as soon as New Zealand trade unions succeeded in negotiating some of this 'shared prosperity and leisure' for themselves the 6.30 News story described it as 'new' and 'revolutionary'. Introducing new technologies was thus presented as an essential component of industrial growth enabling New Zealand to keep pace with 'overseas' competitors. Attempts by the workers in these industries to actually gain some of the promised benefits of these technological developments for themselves were, however, presented as threateningly 'revolutionary'.

The Government was described, in the Longburn News story, as having 'cracked down' on the proposal to introduce a four-day week. The phrase 'cracked down' was, however, generally used in news stories in connection with forms of illegal activity. For example a 1983 6.30 News item began as follows:

The Government is cracking down on the Social Welfare system to cut out cheating. The Prime Minister says some people are getting benefits to which they are not entitled and the Government caucus has set up a committee to review both the range of payments and how they're paid. (55)

(55) 6.30 News, 10 March, 1983.
The words 'cracked down' clearly implied that the Government was to forcibly prevent people from 'getting away with' benefits to which they had no legal claim. The choice of words is important because they were specifically selected out of the whole range of possible terms to describe the Government's actions. Thus the Government could have been said to have merely 'stopped' the proposal, or to have 'intervened' or 'interfered' in the negotiations between Borthwicks and the Meat Workers Union. But the phrase 'cracked down' implied that the Government had made a show of strength in the face of 'revolutionary' trade union activities.

The shorter working week was, thus, overwhelmingly rejected in news stories on the grounds that it would cost 'the economy' too dearly. This argument, that the aims of the trade union movement were economically unfeasible and therefore unreasonable, was used in connection with a variety of other issues related to unemployment. In particular, trade unionists were strongly criticised in news stories for their part in wage negotiations which had seen a rise in the cost of labour for employers. During 1981 through 1983 both the Government and the employer groups actively promoted the idea that the high cost of labour was one of the primary reasons for the upsurge in unemployment which began in the late 1970's. The 'free market' argument generally ran as follows. When the
labour market was oversupplied, as was indicated by a rising level of unemployment, then workers ought to offer their labour more cheaply in order to succeed in the competition for work. The existence of fixed award rates, negotiated by trade unions, directly interfered with this 'market mechanism', preventing workers from accepting such wage cuts. Thus employers had no incentive to create more jobs and might even consider it more economically advisable to substitute machine labour for manpower. This argument was put forward by the Government M.P. for Fendalton, Mr. P. Burdon, under the headline, 'WAGE RISES "CAN COST JOBS"' (56). Mr. Burdon stated, 'Indisputably excessive wage settlements destroy job creation' (57).

Workers were, therefore, accused of selfishly denying the unemployed job opportunities by demanding such high wage settlements. Contradicting one of their own basic psychological and moral tenets, those who argued that in a market system each individual did and should act only on consideration of rational self-interest concluded that workers ought to allow altruism to enter the equation. This contradiction was not, however, examined in any of the news stories surveyed.

(57) loc. cit.
In 1983, a great deal of news media attention was focused on a Reserve Bank report, by Mr. A. Grimes, entitled, An Examination of NZ Wage Inflation. According to a New Zealand Herald headline this report demonstrated that 'WAGE INFLATION COSTS JOBS' (58). In the preface to this report the governor of the Reserve Bank, Dr. R. S. Deane, stated, 'Overvalued real wage rates have been a fundamental cause of unemployment ...' (59) Large sections of the report were published verbatim in The New Zealand Herald without any attached critical commentary. The report was, however, subsequently subjected to such criticism in other news stories. For example, Dr. Peter Harris, an economist with the P.S.A. stated that:

A number of factors determine the number of jobs that will be on offer at any time. They include export prices, access to overseas markets, the form and level of Government spending, the value of real take home pay .... The point is that our experience has shown that the 'wage factor' is swamped by these other influences in general. In particular instances, these other factors are aggravated when real wages are allowed to fall. The naivety of the Reserve Bank Model lies in its belief that real wage cuts are the solution to the unemployment problem. The labour market is not a simple market in which the laws of supply and demand operate in an unrestrained way. (60)

(59) loc. cit.
This Reserve Bank Bulletin appeared in June 1982 but The New Zealand Herald decided to publish sections of it some eight months later. The report was not, therefore, 'news' in the sense that it was not new but clearly The New Zealand Herald's editor considered that its content ought to remain in the public eye.

Upon its initial publication, the report had been greeted enthusiastically by the Minister of Labour who cited it as substantial proof of his assertions that wage rates had a detrimental effect on employment levels. Under the headline, 'WAGE BOOST COULD COST JOBS - BOLGER', the Minister of Labour said he had: 'frequently pointed out that there is a direct relationship between demands for higher wages on one hand and the levels of employment the economy is able to sustain on the other' (61). He went on to claim that the Reserve Bank report had shown that while real wages had risen by 24% between 1969 and 1980, productivity levels had only risen by 10%. If real wage growth had equalled productivity growth instead of outstripping it, the Minister asserted, there would have been 54,000 more jobs available in 1980. A month later, under the headline, 'WAGE RISES BLAMED FOR UNEMPLOYMENT', the Minister again invoked the Reserve Bank report to justify the statement that:

The solution to New Zealand's unemployment problem, therefore, appears largely to depend on achieving some reduction in real wages so as to induce an increase in employment, both directly, owing to the decreased price of labour relative to capital and output prices, and indirectly, by encouraging higher profits and output growth.

Clearly such a solution may not be easy to implement, since it is likely to involve a reduction in the living standards for at least some sections of the population, but the alternative may be the even less attractive prospect of long term maintenance of high rates of unemployment. (62)

The phrase 'some sections of the population' obviously referred to workers. Thus it was the New Zealand workers who were called upon to bear the burdens needed to reduce unemployment. No suggestion was made that such burdens could possibly be shared more equally, in any of the news stories which used the Minister as the major news source.

The Reserve Bank report did, however, come under a great deal of criticism from New Zealand economists. Apart from the commentary by Mr. Harris, cited above, none of this criticism found its way into the news stories. The National Business Review did examine the report and the criticisms of it in some depth. It concluded that 'the Reserve Bank's single equation for explaining employment in the New Zealand economy can be seriously questioned on

theoretical grounds alone ....' (63).

But such an analysis was absent from the mainstream newspapers surveyed. This was entirely in line with the simplistic level at which all economic issues were examined in news stories in these newspapers as well as on Morning Report and the 6.30 News. And The New Zealand Herald not only ignored most of the criticisms of the reports findings but chose to resurrect it again, uncriticised, in 1983. Clearly it was editorial policy to keep in circulation the claim that high wage rates caused unemployment.

Employer organisations joined with the Minister of Labour in supporting the Reserve Bank's stance on wage levels. Under the headline, 'UNIONS BLAMED FOR HOLDING BACK GROWTH', the president of the Employers' Federation, Mr. S. Duncan, stated:

The union movement has severely damaged New Zealand's standard of living in its blind efforts to maintain and improve the real incomes of its members, helping to hold back growth .... Our productive base is being whittled away in order, not only to maintain, but to improve the standard of living of wage and salary earners and welfare recipients .... Wages have led inflation in the last few years, and excessive

settlements remain a significant factor. Had wage levels been kept to a minimum we would be in a lot better position today. (64)

Mr. Duncan once again used the 'them-us' split although in a significantly different manner. In this article, the split was between a group designated as 'wage and salary earners and welfare recipients', who were represented by the trade unions, as 'them', and a group who were not specified but which presumably included all those excluded from the first group, as 'us'. If 'we' would be in a better position today if wages had not risen then 'we' are obviously not workers. Thus, what Mr. Duncan was actually promoting was the interests of the owners and shareholders of businesses. This promotion was, however, cloaked in language which initially suggested an appeal to some joint national interest. Hence, Mr. Duncan's apparent concern for 'our productive base'. By attacking workers and beneficiaries rather than just trade unions, as was usual practice in news stories, just whose interests were being defined as the 'national interest' actually emerged rather more clearly. It became clear that the Employers' Federation were concerned, not just with the living standards of New Zealanders in general, but, as a priority, with the profitability of the business sector. These two factors are certainly not disconnected but they

are also just as certainly not identical.

This argument that the high cost of labour acted as a major disincentive to job creation by employers was also presented in the news stories about the Employer Associations’ surveys. Employer groups claimed that lower real wages would make it economically feasible for them to increase job opportunities. The bid to introduce youth rates into all industrial awards employed this same argument to justify the wage cuts (65). As such it provided an election plank for the National Party in 1981. Morning Report replayed a segment from the Prime Minister’s speech to the National Party Conference, that year, in which he stated:

All around the country employers say to me, look, I'd take on a couple of boys, train them, give them a career, but I cannot pay them full adult wages and the union won't let me pay them any less and so I don't take them on. Now what crazy cutting off your nose to spite your face that is! (66)

Clearly Mr. Muldoon endorsed the notion that any job at any wage rate was preferable to unemployment.

Trade unions did attempt to counter this joint campaign by

(65) See Chapter IX.
the employer groups and the Government to reduce the level of real wages. Under the headline, 'LABOUR COSTS "LIE" SOLD TO WORKERS', the secretary of the Federation of Labour, Mr. Ken Douglas stated, in a speech to the Meat Worker's Union conference of 1983, that:

It is not a problem of production that we are in this mess today. It is not the workers' fault we have a stockpile of lamb in the freezers, that there is a stockpile of cars and wool and just about any other commodity you can name .... That over-production is not a consequence of poor productivity of the workers, it is not because of the wages they have been paid already that these stockpiles are there, it is the problem of the whole economic fabric of our society, the system of capitalism. (67)

This article contained one of only six mentions of the word 'capitalism' to be found in all the news stories surveyed. The message of this news story was that the economic system itself rather than workers or the unemployed ought to bear at least some of the blame for the economic recession and the associated high levels of unemployment. This message was, however, overwhelmed in terms of the sheer quantity of news stories which presented the exact opposite viewpoint.

The trade union movement constituted a popular target in

the news stories surveyed. Whatever actions they took, the trade unions were attacked as having damaged the undefined 'economy' and the nebulous 'national interest'. Only passivity was acceptable in news stories. Thus, when the Patea Freezing Works closed down, the Minister of Labour informed journalists that:

I say with sorrow for the wives and children of Patea that unfortunately and correctly a significant amount of the problems are attributable to the leadership of the Meat Workers Union at that plant. (68)

Despite the intrinsically controversial nature of such an assertion, no attempt was made in this news story, or in subsequent stories, to substantiate this claim about the union's actions. It appeared that by definition in news stories an active union was equal to an irresponsible union.

A quite different depiction of trade union activities appeared, however, whenever unions were seen to acquiesce to the wishes of employers. For example, news stories on the reorganisation or 'rationalisation' of the Westfield Freezing Works presented a trade union which was fully prepared to co-operate with the management's plans. This reorganisation involved the elimination of approximately

100 jobs at the works. The general manager of Westfield summed the negotiations up with the words, 'We don't see any benefit in a cloud of emotionalism over what should be a commonsense approach to solving problems' (69). Unfortunately it turned out that one person's 'problem' was another person's job.

The fact that news stories covered the opinions of the industrial triad, composed of trade unions, employers and the Government, meant that even if unions had been allocated equal coverage, their views would have been outweighed, two-to-one, in terms of the sheer quantity of material presented. They were not, however, granted equal coverage. The examples cited above illustrate the manner in which news media organisations tended to favour the interpretations of industrial issues provided by either the Government or the employers, or both. News stories are clearly weighted against the interests of the trade union movement.

In news stories it was the employer groups and the Government spokespeople who were allowed to set the context within which trade union activities were portrayed. Any deviation from the code of approved, passive behaviour on the part of the trade union movement

was represented as though it went against economic 'commonsense'. Just what 'the economy' actually consisted of, how it operated or whose interests it served best were questions rendered almost completely invisible in the news stories surveyed. The phrase 'the economy' came to symbolise the well-being and prosperity of the whole New Zealand people even when the term was actually referring to the well-being of only a minority, sectional interest group. Trade unions were often said to be acting in a manner harmful to 'the economy' whenever they sought to prevent the erosion of workers' contractual rights.

Presumably, then, the dominant news media definition of a properly functioning economy was not contingent upon the existence of a well-paid workforce enjoying a stable or rising standard of living. Indeed, the welfare of this mysterious entity, 'the economy', took precedence in news stories over the welfare of real people. Hence, both the laying off of thousands of workers and the call to abolish redundancy payments were justified on the basis of what was supposedly good for 'the economy'. Unemployment and wage reductions were depicted in news stories as the regrettable but inevitable consequences of economic necessity. Only rarely was the suggestion made that other potential solutions to New Zealand's economic problems existed. Clearly one definition of economic 'commonsense' could also constitute a definition of a dominant economic
ideology in action. This overly simple presentation of the New Zealand economic system can, therefore, be seen as one of the primary reasons for the unfavourable context within which the vast majority of trade union activities were represented in news stories.

That the voices of the trade union movement were outnumbered in the ranks of the news media organisations' favoured news sources was also a major hinderance to trade union aims. Generally, industrial disputes of any size or importance were considered by the news media to be triangular in nature in that they involved the Government, the employer and the trade unions. In nearly all of the news stories surveyed the Government did not act as a neutral arbiter in such disputes but tended to strongly back the employer's case. The major exception to this, the Longburn Freezing Works short week proposal, saw the Government siding against the employer although still with the Employers' Federation. This meant that even within individual news stories the trade union's voice was outnumbered at least two-to-one. Given that the Government's role was supposedly to act out of consideration for the 'national interest' whereas trade unions acted primarily in the interests of their members, the Government's sustained backing of the employers tended to lend legitimacy to the employers' claims. As Mr. Bolger stated, 'Well the Government have a broader
responsibility than an individual company or a trade union ...' (70). This is not to assert that news consumers necessarily accepted the definitions of issues and events proffered by the employers or the Government. It is, however, to point out that the odds were heavily weighted against the acceptance of trade union definitions.

A further reason for the type and quantity of news media coverage received by the trade union movement was the nature and consequences of many union activities. Strikes, work-to-rule campaigns, sit-ins and so forth, of necessity inconvenience other New Zealanders and cause employers to lose money. The focus of news stories was then on the inconvenience and the monetary losses rather than the actual dispute. This was well illustrated by the news media's presentation of the Gear redundancy dispute described above. When employers' suffered losses because their industry was disrupted by union actions, the underlying causes of the dispute were ignored in favour of the potential economic consequences. Thus, news stories on the Gear dispute passed over the issue of the entitlement of laid off workers to a compensatory redundancy payment. Instead news stories concentrated on

(70) 6.30 News, 22 October, 1981.
the 'threat' the strike could pose to the 'nation's' freezing industry.

Just how a New Zealand trade union could both fulfil its role within a capitalist economic system and receive a favourable news coverage within the context of current newswork practices remains a mystery. As Dr. Andrew Hearn has demonstrated, '... the likelihood of a linkage between union unpopularity and the nature of industrial reporting has been strongly suggested.' (71)

CHAPTER IX: YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Unemployment amongst young New Zealanders constituted a major focus for news stories from 1981 through 1983. The Department of Labour's statistics on those entitled to the unemployment benefit showed clearly that workers aged under 20 years were disproportionately prominent amongst the ranks of the unemployed (1). Moreover, because fifteen-year-olds were legally permitted to leave school but were not entitled to receive an unemployment benefit prior to their sixteenth birthday, the unemployment problem amongst young people was actually far worse than was depicted by the statistics (2). As a consequence, considerable 'concern' was expressed in news stories as to the plight of the young unemployed person. The plight of the older unemployed person was, however, barely mentioned even though those aged over twenty made up around 70% of the official unemployed total. While young New Zealanders were over-represented in the unemployment figures relative to their numbers in the work-force they were even more over-represented in news stories about the unemployed, relative to their numbers in the unemployment statistics.

(1) Department of Labour, Monthly Employment Operations, February 1983 showed that 27,854 of the unemployed total of 73,550 were aged less than twenty years.
(2) Census results released in 1981 found that 37.3% of the unemployed were aged between sixteen and nineteen years.
In news stories, the young unemployed were used to symbolise the unemployed as a whole for a number of reasons. The sentimental or emotional aspect of stories about teenagers who had nothing better to do than watch television all day was certainly one factor. The notion that New Zealand's children might have been 'educated for the scrapheap' had a poignancy about it that stories about older unemployed people lacked. For example, under the headline, 'GENERATION BECOMING "BOLGERISED"' the Labour Party shadow minister of Labour, Mr. T. K. Burke, asserted that school-leavers were being '... "Bolgerised" into thinking that no matter how hard they work and study at school ...' they would never find a job (3).

In a work oriented society, such as New Zealand, the proposition that one could leave school without the certain prospect of entering paid employment was greeted with horror. A part of this horror was certainly due to 'concern' for young people as individuals who might suffer financial, physical and psychological problems as a direct result of their unemployment. Unemployment was, however, a double-edged sword which might not merely render the young unemployed as 'victims' of the recession, it might also cause them to lose their grasp of the work ethic. Worse still, the young unemployed might never be

given the opportunity to foster a work ethic in the first place! The New Zealand Herald ran an article detailing the proposal for a new type of work scheme, in which the Manukau City Council's senior employment advisory officer justified the introduction of a lower pay rate for young people by reference to this fear:

With the introduction of the plan, I could see a great reduction in the number who are registered as unskilled. By the time the Labour Department gets to those people, the motivation to work is gone. (4)

It was, on such grounds, considered advisable to get young people into a job—any job—so as to ensure the development and maintenance of a work ethic. The leader of the opposition Social Credit Party, Mr. Bruce Beetham, put it that, 'the creation of a generation of people to whom the work ethic is almost an alien concept, will undoubtedly be the worst long term consequence of our current unemployment'. (5)

There were two major reasons given in news stories for the loss of the work ethic. The first was that young people became so disillusioned by their inability to find

employment that their self-confidence was undermined and they often developed psychological problems such as acute depression. After numerous unsuccessful job applications, some of the unemployed gave up the search for work altogether because they could no longer cope with their continual rejection by employers. Sir Frank Holmes, as Chairman of the New Zealand Planning Council, was reported to have said that these young people become, "... permanently unemployable, convinced they are of no use to society or that society is of no use to them" (6). Similarly, the Director of the Vocational Training Council, Mr. Derek Wood, warned of the dangers of allowing young people to face long-term unemployment: 'If you destroy a person's dignity it can take a long time to recover' (7).

As a corollary to this, news stories frequently stated that employers were loath to hire any person who had been unemployed for a long period of time on the grounds that such people no longer espoused the 'proper attitude' or work ethic. Under the headline, 'GIVE KIDS JOBS, NOT "HARDCORE" JOBLESS, EMPLOYERS URGE' the Evening Post ran an interview with the research director of the Employers' Federation, Mr. Bill Poole, on this topic. The article

reported Mr. Poole being asked where he stood if forced to choose between 'having a "hardcore" of jobless as opposed to the urgency of introducing school leavers to employment before they begin to believe it was not necessary'. He replied 'Our emphasis would stay with the kids' (8). He advocated the Department of Labour allocating its resources to placing recent school leavers into jobs rather than to finding work for the long-term unemployed. The long-term unemployed were those most in need of a job, (both psychologically and financially). But they were also the most disillusioned job seekers and employers were loath to hire them for fear that their work ethic had decayed. The long-term unemployed were thus handicapped by the ideology of the work ethic. This situation had become starkly obvious by 1985 when unemployment had dropped considerably but the long-term unemployed were still unable to procure work. Subsequently, the Labour Government offered a $120 a week subsidy to any employer who would hire a 'hardcore' unemployed person.

This belief, that the work ethic of the unemployed decayed, led to the establishment of training schemes designed to restore their shattered self-confidence. Under the headline, 'TRUST BEAMS AT JOB-SHY YOUTH', an

officer with the Department of Social Welfare, Mr. T. Hickey, explained the purpose of such a scheme (9). He stated that the Mahia Kia Mahia Trust had been formed to motivate unemployed youths into continuing their search for work. It was not mentioned that such an increase in personal motivation would not necessarily lead on to a corresponding increase in job opportunities. This article, like numerous others, therefore, conveyed the impression that it was the individual characteristics of the unemployed rather than the broader economic situation which stood at the heart of the unemployment problem.

The second reason proposed for the loss of the work ethic was that young people demonstrably may come to enjoy the freedom of not having to work. They become, in other words, fully-fledged 'dole bludgers'. This can be seen as an integral part of the 'dole bludger'/ 'victim' dichotomy outlined in Chapter VII. The moment the unemployed adjusted psychologically to their status as unemployed people or rejected that status in favour of a lifestyle which held no room for paid employment, they instantly became 'dole bludgers'. The under-secretary to the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Geoff. Thompson endorsed this belief publicly when he said of young unemployed people that 'perhaps' their 'expectations' were too high,

'perhaps the option of being paid by the state for doing nothing' was too tempting, and 'perhaps the reward-for-effort ethic' was 'devalued' (10).

As Father Felix Donnelly wrote in 1982, 'The concept that you are really no good unless you fit into a traditional work type category [was] going to take a lot of changing' (11).

One of the most visible manifestations of youth unemployment and of the economic depression generally, was the increasing number of 'street-kids' in New Zealand's city centres. These young people were homeless and so slept in cars, under bridges or in vacant buildings. During the day they congregated in city squares and parks where their unkempt appearance and 'glue-sniffing' behaviour brought them in to the public, and police, eye. In their coverage of 'street-kids', the news media organisations oscillated between depicting them as vandals, drug abusers and thieves, and citing them as victims of parental neglect or abuse. Very occasionally a news story did look at some of the underlying social and economic reasons for the existence of these homeless teenagers but generally attention focused on a specific

event they were reporting which involved them.

This trait in news stories of concentrating on events rather than causes and trends was one of their most noticeable features. Social trends such as poverty, unemployment or homelessness were not considered to be newsworthy until something specific occurred. Hence, when a group of 'street-kids' occupied a church in inner-city Auckland they became front page news (12). In between such specific events their existence was not deemed newsworthy. That children as young as ten or twelve years old were sleeping under bridges was not news for long once it had been reported for the first time. In order to become newsworthy again something new had to occur to engage the attention of journalists. Thus the impression created by news stories on 'street-kids' was that the issue flared up and then died down again periodically, it was as though the homeless children vanished from the streets in between the occasions of the headlines. The journalists' attention did not wane because the problem had gone away, but because their own definitions of newsworthiness had rendered the 'street-kids' once again ineligible for inclusion in newspaper columns or in broadcast-time, and hence invisible.

Parents of these homeless children were often blamed in news stories for the actions of their off-spring. The enormous pressures which the economic depression had placed on these, generally Maori and Pacific Islander, parents, were not examined in these news stories. Similarly, in 1981, the announcement that 'YOUNG MAORI JOBLESS COULD NEAR 20,000' was greeted by numerous news stories in which the blame for the high unemployment rate amongst Maori youth was attributed to the negligence of parents (13). Education statistics showed clearly that young Maori people left school at an earlier age and with fewer academic qualifications than did their Pakeha counterparts. 'JOB TRAINING STARTS AT HOME' intoned The New Zealand Herald headline following the announcement (14). The accompanying article alleged that Maori parents were at fault because they had not encouraged their children to utilize fully the available educational opportunities. This implication was overtly racist. No suggestion was ever made in news stories that the parents of unemployed Pakeha children might bear a similar guilt.

The Otago Daily Times went even further than this. In a paternalistic editorial it compared the Maori race to 'lame ducks':

In a society that believes in integration there can be only one solution. The fit must slow down to help these handicapped Maoris and if there is an individual reluctance to do this then the community pressure should be marshalled to see that it is done. If not, the selfish are going to cause as much trouble for our society in the long run as the lame ducks. (15)

The words 'fit' to describe European New Zealanders and 'handicapped' to describe Maori New Zealanders clearly indicated this editorial's perspective. Maori school students had failed within the criteria of a Pakeha-dominated education system; and rather than seeing this as an indictment of the system it was seen as an invidious indication of the nature of the students. Hence the editorial clearly wished to see Maori students 'helped' to succeed rather than the terms within which success and failure were evaluated altered in any way.

As Mr. Selwyn Peters, head of the Wiri Department of Maori Affairs saw: '... the economic situation has put a spotlight on the problems of young Maoris.' (16) Overall, little understanding of the problems faced by non-Europeans in New Zealand society was evident in news stories. The problems were not new but they had grown proportionately worse and hence more visible as the economic depression had deepened. Blaming the parents of

a segment of its youngest victims often amounted to blaming those who were victims themselves. Such a gesture might satisfy the urge to apportion blame but it certainly did nothing to foster a deeper understanding of the nature of New Zealand society or to improve race relations within it.

News stories also allocated some of the blame for the inability of young New Zealanders to obtain their first jobs to secondary schools. Often the blame was based on a conservative desire for a return to outdated teaching methods, discipline tactics and a 'back-to-basics' curriculum. In an article entitled 'EDUCATION SYSTEM FAILING', the National Party candidate for the St. Albans electorate was quoted as having recommended that schools go '... back to an old-fashioned attitude to education' (17). The major reason given by the candidate, Mr. Jim Baker, for such a policy reversal was that the old system had provided employers with the kind of workers they wanted. Mr. Baker viewed the primary role of the school system as being to provide workers for employers rather than an education for life as a whole.

The Prime Minister was reported to share that view. He stated:

The two-fold challenge of making these young people employable and of providing employment opportunities for them is the greatest single contemporary challenge facing you in schools, and facing all those of us in the Government ...

New Zealand cannot afford to educate purely for the sake of knowledge, ignoring education which benefits the economy. (18)

Strangely perhaps at a time when 'the economy' was requiring the services of fewer young workers, schools were being encouraged in news stories to devote more of their attention to the needs of employers. Just why the undefined 'economy' ought to take precedence over individuals was never stated. Again the assumption was made that the interests of the economy somehow equated with the interests of all New Zealanders (19).

In 1981, much of the criticism of the school system to be found in news stories was centred around the document, Secondary Education And The Path To Work. This report had been produced by a national advisory committee consisting of delegates from the Federation of Labour, the Employers' Federation, the Combined State Unions, the Post Primary Teachers Association, the Secondary Schools Boards Association, the State Services Commission and the

Evening Post, 25 June, 1981, p.2. and
(19) See Chapter V.
Departments of Education and Labour. The report expressed the dissatisfaction felt by teachers, employers and others with the academic, examination oriented nature of the school curriculum and grading system. Teachers asserted that the education system was labelling a large proportion of school-leavers as failures because they had not passed any of the external examinations. They called for a Certificate of Attainment which would outline the qualities and achievements of all pupils in non-academic spheres. In effect the teachers sought to provide school-leavers with a record which highlighted their strengths instead of their weaknesses.

The media did not take much notice of the teachers' views. But employer organisations strongly backed the call for a Certificate of Attainment. And their view achieved prominence in news stories (20). The 6.30 News announced that the '... Employers' Federation today has put out a booklet called 'Secondary Education And The Path To Work' (21). No mention was made in this news broadcast of the numerous other groups involved.

According to Mr. Ross Pedder, the Employers' Federation Training and Development officer, the certificate was

(20) See Chapter III.
(21) 6.30 News, 15 April, 1981.
essentially designed to aid those young people who found
themselves, '... seriously disadvantaged in the
competition for work because of a lack of usable and
marketable assessment of their competence' (22). The
employers were, in effect, calling upon schools to make it
easier for them to select suitable school-leavers to fill
job vacancies. This plea received immediate news media
attention.

The Regional Affairs manager of the Chambers of Commerce,
Mr. Ralph Penning, stated the employers' case bluntly: 'It
would be much easier if schools dealt directly with
employers and gave expert opinions on students'
suitability for particular jobs' (23).

Thus, employer organisations used the opposition, expressed
by secondary school teachers and others to the examination
oriented 'failure' system, in an attempt to manipulate
schools into acting as employment agencies working in the
interests of employers rather than of pupils. News
stories did not, however, indicate that the aims of the
employers might differ quite substantially from the aims
of the teaching profession. Teachers sought a broader
based education system which was not principally geared

(22) The New Zealand Herald, 8 April, 1981, p.16.
towards providing employers with suitable workers. This ideal was, however, criticised in the media.

In news stories, much of the blame for the high level of youth unemployment was directed at the parents of Maori children, at the secondary school system and at the young unemployed themselves. This was despite the appearance of a report commissioned by the Government from the N.R.A.C. which had found that: 'There are few, if any, grounds for regarding the causes and effects of youth unemployment as different in any basic way from the causes and effects of unemployment in general' (24).

When the Federation of Labour economist, Mr. Alf. Kirk, was interviewed on this subject by Morning Report, he made the obvious answer to the question on youth unemployment that he addressed to himself:

Why are a large number of young people unemployed? It's largely because they were the people who were not in the workforce when unemployment levels started to rise ... whether a person had a job or not at the time when employment prospects started to worsen. (25)

Youth unemployment was due to the fact that school-leavers

were seeking work at a time when few employers were hiring. Lacking work experience or training to compete for the few jobs available many young people joined the end of the dole queue instead of the workforce. Obvious as this explanation might seem, the news media products frequently ignored it in favour of those blaming the individual victims, their parents, and the education system. These explanations were at least as popular as blaming the economy for unemployment in general.

The news media products devoted a lot of attention to this aspect of youth unemployment. Lack of training was frequently cited as the major reason why employers preferred to hire older workers.Positing a lack of training as the central problem, however, automatically presented training schemes as the best solution to youth unemployment. The argument was quite misleading as it took one of the characteristics of young unemployed people out of context and labelled it 'the problem'. The fact that many older people who had years of training and work experience behind them were also receiving unemployment benefits was not presented in news stories as a reason for questioning the rationale of placing all young people in training schemes. Rather it was argued that it was preferable to train people even though their new skills would not gain them employment. The hope was that when the economy 'recovered' the necessary jobs would be created.
This argument was forcefully presented in an *Evening Post* editorial which stated:

Ideally, the economic conditions of the country should be such as to give employers the incentive to make full use of all the skilled workers the institutes and the universities can turn out. This could well be the case some time in the future when energy development booms and the country can be persuaded to upgrade growth. (26)

As with the vast majority of news stories on the subject, this editorial saw no contradiction in the plan to increase the number of training schemes at a time when job opportunities were decreasing. The young were to be persuaded to spend more time in the education system in work-related courses at the very time when they were least likely to find employment at the end of training schemes.

One of the main justifications for increasing the number and range of youth training schemes, aside from the hope that one day the skills would be needed, was that such schemes kept young people 'employable'. The discipline imposed by the routine of attending classes at set times was supposed to be instrumental in halting the decay of the work ethic. An *Evening Post* editorial put it this way:

The untried, and therefore dormant, skills inherent in young people are a precious resource crying out to be exploited to the mutual benefit of both youth and country .... Worthwhile job training is a priority need and the sooner young people are taught to value themselves and their skills the more likely they are to feel part of the community - and not an isolated minority.

(27)

Young people were seen as an economic 'resource' which was being currently under-utilized and which might be completely wasted if they were permitted to become 'an isolated minority'. The work ethic could potentially be replaced by anti-social attitudes unless the young were kept busy.

In a similar vein, Mr. Geoff. Thompson informed the National Party Wellington Division conference in 1982 that new training schemes were likely to be introduced in the next budget. These schemes were not, however, to be voluntary. According to Mr. Thompson, 'Any person who did not choose the various options available would not get state support....'(28). He also stated that young people lacked the 'discipline' required by employers and some training schemes would be specifically designed to instill this virtue in trainees. Inculcating the young with the 'work ethic' was, therefore, a Government policy. It found

ready acceptance in news stories, including endorsement from editorial columns.

In mid-1982 Mr. Thompson was appointed to head the Government Task Force on Youth Training which was charged with investigating the whole training field in New Zealand. When he was questioned by journalists as to the value of training young people when there were no jobs available, he replied:

That's a damn silly question. It's a damn sight better to give skills which give people an opportunity of getting a job appropriate to them and to give them work skills so that they are better motivated than to have them on the dole.

(29)

Thus 'motivation' was seen as the key priority in this news story. The fact that young people would still be unemployed could be conveniently put to one side so long as their motivation to work - their work ethic - was maintained. The validity of increasing the pressure on young people to hold to the work ethic in a society which denied them jobs was not questioned in news stories.

When the Task Force report on training was completed it led to cabinet approval of schemes which would cost some

$15m. Many of these schemes did not, however, involve training people to develop any particular job skill. Their main orientation was to 'train' young people to be workers. The Government had absorbed the fact that there were not enough jobs for all school-leavers, because of the so-called 'youth bulge' in the population and because of the economic recession. Instead of attempting to help young people to deal with unemployment in a work oriented society or to create jobs for them to do, the Government chose to train them to want to work and to hold the attitudes considered appropriate for workers. This had always been the rationale underlying the Work Skills Development Programmes. Young trainees under W.S.D.P.s were only permitted to remain employed on the scheme until they were designated 'work ready' by their supervisors. Thus it was not in the interests of these trainees to be seen to progress too quickly because as soon as they were considered capable of holding a 'real' job they became unemployed. For many young people, W.S.D.P. schemes provided their only chance for employment of any kind so, ironically, the label 'unemployable' was seen as preferable to the harsher reality of unemployment. Thus the belief that school-leavers in the 1980's were uniquely unemployable in a way that was unknown in previous generations was fostered by the Government and disseminated in news stories.
The news media products did not, however, greet the report of the Task Force with totally unbounded enthusiasm. They presented the many criticisms of the report along with the report's proposals, while giving the impression that the report was at least a sincere attempt to deal with youth unemployment. As such, it was to be supported. For example, The New Zealand Herald announced the report with the headline, 'CAUTIOUS WELCOME FOR $15M SCHEME' (30). In this article the various new schemes were described briefly and then the comments of selected people working in the first of the youth unemployment were presented. All of these comments were critical rather than 'cautiously' welcoming of the Government's proposals. The President of the National Youth Council, Mr. J. Brown, called the schemes 'cheap and nasty'. The principal of Tuakau College, Mr. Q. Tapsell, said that it remained to be seen if there were any jobs available for those who completed the training courses. The headline, 'CAUTIOUS WELCOME ...', in fact indicated the attitude of The New Zealand Herald rather than the opinions of the people they had surveyed.

Immediately before the release of the Task Force report, the Evening Post ran a series of three feature articles under the title 'OUT OF WORK'. The first of these

articles included a photograph of two teenage unemployed people playing on a Space Invaders video game. The two were interviewed about their lives and the way in which they perceived unemployment. Their sense of hopelessness and desperation for work was conveyed in quotes such as:

Even if I got a job I didn't like, I'd keep doing my best. But when they turn you down, you don't want to go for another. There's always people ahead of you with better qualifications. (31)

The second article in the series was divided into three sections entitled, 'ALERTING COUNTRY TO PROBLEM', 'MINORITY GROUPS WORST HIT', and 'DAYS OF BOREDOM FOR THE YOUNG'. The first of these sections outlined the efforts made by the National Youth Council to make youth unemployment a national issue. The Council's executive officer, Mr. Malcolm Menzies, voiced criticism of the Task Force responsible for the youth training report: 'It was made up of older people, mostly men, trying to make policy in isolation from young people for which it was designed. It was a paternalistic attitude. It made us angry' (32).

In the 'MINORITY GROUPS WORST HIT' section, a spokesman from the Porirua Unemployed Workers Union, Mr. Don Polley,

(31) Evening Post, 27 November, 1982, p.3.
(32) Evening Post, 4 December, 1982, p.15.
was interviewed. This group had conducted their own survey in the Porirua area which found that some 90% of the young, black women respondents were unemployed.

Mr. Polley viewed his groups' role as one of liaising between the Departments of Labour and Social Welfare and the unemployed in the Porirua area who were predominantly from minority racial groups.

The final segment of the article was similar to the one preceding it. Young unemployed people who had been located in video game parlours were asked their opinions on unemployment and training schemes. One said of the 'pre-employment' courses so favoured by the Government:

That's just a waste of the Government's money, eh. You get a bunch of teenage kids off the street, sit them around in this room all day and talk about the silliest boring things - things about if you're a Maori and how to present yourself and stuff like that. They're keeping them (the kids) off the street for six weeks and then chucking them back. (33)

The combined effect of the three sections was to depict youth unemployment as a social problem of major proportions, the Government response to which was both inadequate and piecemeal.

(33) *Evening Post*, 4 December, 1982, p.15.
In between the second and third articles, a news story appeared using the same piece of graphics as the 'OUT OF WORK' series. Under the headline, 'OUT OF WORK HELP IS ON THE WAY', the Evening Post announced that the release of the new youth training package by the Minister of Labour was imminent (34). The impression conveyed by this news story was that here at last was a practical solution to all of the problems outlined in the previous stories. This was despite the fact that some of the people interviewed for the series had specifically singled out the Task Force for criticism. It also ignored the rather obvious point that the Evening Post did not know the exact details of what was to be contained in the package. The timing of the articles to coincide with the impending release of the Government's training scheme proposals seemed designed to provide a 'happy ending' in true fairy-tale tradition to the unhappy tale of youth unemployment.

The final article in the series appeared in the following issue of the Evening Post under the headline, 'GETTING OUT AND FINDING WORK' (35). In this article a young man, Mr. Selwyn Churcher, who had never been unemployed was given the opportunity to express his views on youth unemployment. He said of being unemployed, 'It's

basically bludging isn't it' (36). No explanation was offered in the article as to why Mr. Churcher's opinions on unemployment should be so valued as to be worthy of a whole feature article. Mr. Churcher had neither worked in the field of youth unemployment nor experienced it personally. The *Evening Post*’s series on youth unemployment was thus concluded with the twin messages that the Government was doing something to help young people and that to be unemployed was to be a 'dole bludger'.

Both the news story in *The New Zealand Herald* and the series of feature articles in the *Evening Post* canvassed the views of a large number of individuals before they were published. The framework in to which these views were slotted appeared, however, to have been determined in advance, before the views were known. *The New Zealand Herald* reported 'caution' rather than outright criticism with regard to the Task Force report. Similarly, the *Evening Post* series furnished a conclusion which greeted the Government's proposals enthusiastically and which attacked young unemployed people as bludgers even though these interpretations were directly contradictory to what had actually been shown in the first two articles. Clearly, neither of these newspapers was content to

(36) Loc. cit.
express the opinions which had been voiced on the subject by their selected sources but wanted to make their own voices heard. Both had specific attitudes to youth unemployment and to the Government's response to it which they wished to present. These attitudes remained dominant even though the evidence from within their own news stories was weighted in favour of other possible attitudes. The newspapers were actively manufacturing a specific view of reality.

The School-leavers Training and Employment Preparation Scheme (S.T.E.P.S.) was one of the major components of the Task Force report. This scheme was designed for fifteen and sixteen-year-olds and was based on the same premise as the W.S.D.P. - that young New Zealanders were unemployable when they left school. In the words of The New Zealand Herald article, the S.T.E.P.S. programme was, '... designed to help young people move confidently into working life by offering individually tailored combinations of training and work experience' (37). The period between leaving school and finding one's first job was deemed by the Government to be fraught with perils and hence worthy of a multi-million dollar training scheme. School-leavers were said to be 'at risk', (although the risk was seldom defined), and in need of 'transition'

education. Young people were now to be taught how to present themselves in a job interview, the etiquette of personal hygiene, how they should dress and what answers to give to a prospective employers' questions. Overall the emphasis was on teaching the unemployed to make themselves into the kinds of workers that employers wanted to hire, and to 'sell' themselves as such. Thus, the scheme was designed to improve the job hunting skills of young unemployed people, not to give them particular skills that an employer might want.

At best, the S.T.E.P.S. trainees would have an advantage over their peers in obtaining work. The number of jobs and, therefore, the number of unemployed people would remain essentially static. S.T.E.P.S. had little potential to generate new job opportunities. All S.T.E.P.S. could do was to change the faces in the unemployment queue but it could do nothing to make the queue shorter.

Criticism of the S.T.E.P.S. programme came from many different sections of New Zealand society. Thus, after the initial news stories which outlined the details of the scheme, the majority of subsequent stories were highly critical of it. '§15 MILLION JOB SCHEME "CHEAP"', 'SCHEME FOR SCHOOL-LEAVERS' PROGRAMME ATTACKED', 'LACK OF JOBS THE PROBLEM', 'JOBS SKILL SCHEME QUESTIONED', were typical of
the headlines over news stories on the S.T.E.P.S. programme in newspapers (38).

The sole exception to this was the Evening Post. Though the Post did carry some criticisms, it differed from the other news media products in that the majority of its stories on S.T.E.P.S. actively favoured the programme. The Post even went so far as to defend the programme against the many attacks it was receiving and retailing. Under the headline, 'SCHOOL-LEAVERS DEFEND S.T.E.P.S. PROGRAMME AS WORK-FINDER', an Evening Post journalist interviewed three young people who had just enrolled on the scheme (39). All of these young people stated that S.T.E.P.S. would definitely help them to find work. That their optimism might be unfounded because it conflicted with the actual success rate of S.T.E.P.S. trainees was not mentioned in the story (40). The Evening Post appears to have decided to continue to present S.T.E.P.S. in the best of possible lights in spite of the evidence, provided

by both statistics and observation, that the programme did nothing to reduce youth unemployment.

As a result of the Government's stated belief that young New Zealanders needed to be trained in job-search techniques, a range of school-to-work 'transition' programmes was implemented by secondary schools. These transition programmes had much in common with the S.T.E.P.S. schemes. The major differences were that transition programmes were conducted by schools while S.T.E.P.S. was organised by the Department of Labour, and that both S.T.E.P.S. trainees, and the employers who took them on for a week or two, received an allowance from the Government. A lot of the criticism of the S.T.E.P.S. programme emanated from the perception that the training allowance would make S.T.E.P.S. more attractive to young people than the transition programmes. It was feared that the allowance would lure students out of schools only to leave them unemployed at the end of the six week programme (41). It was also argued that employers would be loath to give work experience to those on transition programmes when they could receive payment for taking on a S.T.E.P.S. trainee instead. To the question posed by Morning Report as to why S.T.E.P.S. trainee employers should be paid, the

(41) e.g. Evening Post, 2 June, 1983, p.12, headline 'SCHOOLS LOSE TO TRAINING SCHEMES'.
Minister of Labour, Mr. Bolger replied:

Well they're going to be paid for the simple reason we require more from them. It's not the same request that's being imposed upon them ... we want to know that the young person is going to get genuine training for the period they are there. No just a [sic] experience. Not just the environment of knowing what it's like to be in a factory or whatever it might happen to be. (42)

Transition programmes based in secondary schools were, therefore, specifically designed to teach no skills to their trainees beyond those involved in looking for work. The trainees were permitted to experience a visit to a workplace. But they were to be provided with no actual work training or experience. Mr. Bolger's assertion that this was the major difference between S.T.E.P.S. and transition programmes does not actually appear to have been correct. In the interview quoted the minister used the word 'training' in a manner that placed it outside of its usual context. Training generally refers to the process whereby a person learns a particular skill. Mr. Bolger was contending that to merely be employed, without wages, in a work place constituted training. This was despite the fact that the majority of the jobs involved were officially designated as requiring 'unskilled' labour.

What the minister had done was to make the concepts 'work experience' and 'work training' interchangeable as though the former necessarily constituted the latter.

The news media products surveyed were almost totally uncritical of the school-based transition programmes. The central idea that special programmes were actually necessary to teach school-leavers to make the 'transition' from the school yard to the work place was certainly not questioned in any of the material covered. This idea was, moreover, not only the premise upon which Government training policies were based but received support from other quarters. For instance the leader of the opposition Labour Party, Mr. Bill Rowling told a P.P.T.A. conference that:

The education system will have to merge its boundaries with the community to become a virtual transition place between school and work .... Further the responsibility of the state for the education of the young would be extended until they were securely placed in the workforce. (43)

The most notable aspect of this statement was the extension of the coverage of the cradle-to-grave welfare

Otago Daily Times, 25 August, 1981, p.28, and 
state. No longer did the state merely have to provide an
income for the unemployed person. It had also to ensure
that all school-leavers were kept occupied, in ways
acceptable to the state, until they secured their first
job. This aspect of the speech was not, however,
discussed in any of the news stories examined.

Just as the Morning Report journalist did not think to
question the definition of 'training' used by the Minister
of Labour, news stories used the word 'transition' as
though its meaning was self-evident. Any debate in news
stories over the transition programmes was centred on
whether trainees would obtain private sector jobs once the
programmes ended. The underlying assumptions upon which
these programmes were based were never questioned.

This uncritical acceptance of the Government's definitions
of words helped the Government to introduce potentially
highly controversial programmes in a less controversial
atmosphere. It was 'common sense' that most young people
would make the transition from school to work but it was
not necessarily 'common sense' to assume that a whole raft
of schemes was needed to 'train' school-leavers to make
this transition. It was as if the young needed to undergo
some sort of ritual passage in order to pass out of
childhood and into the adult world of work. No
explanation was ever asked of, or offered by, the
Government, in the news products surveyed, as to why young people in the 1980's were to be regarded as unemployable, as unable to make the 'transition', without the aid of such schemes.

Occasionally, the application of the concept of 'unemployable youths' to real people did, however, spark off controversies which were reported in news stories. An employment scheme designed by the Invercargill County Council for school-leavers provides an example of this. The Council had negotiated with the Southland Trades Council to allow them to employ the 'unemployable' on a training scheme. Trainees were to be paid only $75 a week instead of the $200 a week to which they would otherwise have been entitled under the Labourers' award. Controversy arose because the Labourers' Union and the County Council had two very different definitions as to whom should be designated with the label 'unemployable'. Morning Report interviewed the National Secretary of the Labourers' Union, Mr. Charlie Clayton, who said of the scheme:

Well, my information is that the only discussions that have taken place were for people who were not capable of earning an adult rate of pay. That they were either physically or mentally handicapped in some way and there would be some consideration given to those people. (44)

To which the interviewer added, 'They're actually talking about school-leavers aren't they' (45).

The Invercargill County Council obviously shared the view that school-leavers were in some way 'handicapped' and, therefore, unemployable even if they were sound in both mind and body. The criticisms brought by the Labourers' Union against this particular scheme were not extended in news stories to the application of the concept of the 'unemployable' to other Government schemes. The news media products surveyed were a great deal better at dealing with isolated events than they were at linking these events together or at examining concepts. They also treated words as though they were neutral, apolitical and without power rather than as potential sites for political conflict. This was despite the fact that the actual practice of constructing news products stood in contradiction to this approach - that journalists and their editors choose the words they use very carefully with the intention of conveying certain meanings in their news stories. Politicians, business people and other dominant news wholesalers, with their armies of public relations workers, do exactly the same thing. As a consequence of the news workers' practices, it was the ideology of the dominant groups that was retailed by the

(45) Loc. cit.
Apart from declaring school-leavers unemployable, the other major policy response from the Government to youth unemployment was to seek the reintroduction of youth rates of pay into all awards. This policy generated a great deal of criticism, particularly from within the trade union movement, and was given a considerable amount of attention by the news media organisations. Generally, news stories either focused on whether or not the Government would succeed in implementing their policy or on those groups which favoured youth rates. News stories critical of the youth rates policy came a poor second overall to stories which were supportive. In any case, and in accordance with normal practice, once the bill which would have introduced youth rates came before Parliament news media attention moved away from the substance of the bill to focus on the fight to get it passed.

There were three main justifications given in news stories for the reintroduction of youth rates. Firstly, it was argued that employers preferred older workers over school-leavers because they had work experience. Youth rates would thus provide employers with a financial incentive to employ school-leavers, allowing young people to successfully compete for the available jobs. Secondly, it
was argued that all jobs required at least some measure of training and that young people were simply not worth as much to an employer until they had received this training. Without universal youth rates employers were said to be paying too dearly for untrained and inexperienced workers. Lastly, it was claimed that the cost of wages generally was far too high and that youth rates would help to redress the balance in the employer's favour. Certain jobs, it was argued, were no longer economically viable to maintain because of high wage costs and this led to the loss of job opportunities. This argument implied that youth rates would actually increase the number of jobs available and thus reduce total unemployment rather than just youth unemployment.

The Minister of Labour, was frequently cited in news stories propounding the first of these arguments. He was reported as saying that, 'In essence the concept of a youth rate was to encourage the employment of young people by paying them a wage which realistically reflects their lack of work experience and skills' (46).

Mr. Stan. Duncan, the President of the Employers' Federation, put the same point from the employers' point of view in an interview with Morning Report. They were,

he said, reluctant to take on young people, asking themselves 'why should we employ a young person when we've got to pay the same rate for an adult. So we employ the adult' (47).

The government-employer argument implied that it was preferable for older people to be unemployed than for younger people. No additional jobs would be created as a result of such a move. But it was possible that young people would cease to constitute a disproportionately large percentage of the unemployed total. It was an argument directed principally at those whose main concern was with youth unemployment rather than with unemployment per se.

Indeed the Minister and others stated quite openly that such an age rearrangement in the dole queue was a desirable development. For example, Mr. Bolger said, with regard to the possibility that employers would lay off older workers to take advantage of the cheaper labour furnished by youth rates:

Even if it were proven, why shouldn't they have equal opportunity? I think it is more important that young people get a start in the workforce than we maintain employment elsewhere throughout the workforce. (48)

This statement reflected the belief that young people needed the opportunity to develop the work ethic so that they did not become unemployable or, more accurately, so that they could be made employable. Older workers were to be the sacrificial lamb (more strictly sheep) in this process.

The second argument, that young people were not worth the adult wage rate to an employer found a most enthusiastic exponent in the pages of the Otago Daily Times. One editorial, entitled, 'BOYS ON MENS WAGES', read:

There will be wide support for the Minister of Labour's proposal that proportional wage rates for young workers should be restored to the awards. Whether the support will be justified by an improvement in employment is a moot point. The real justification is the instinctive sense of rightness involved, supported by historical examples. Only rarely, and then in abnormal conditions have youngsters been expected to match the responsibilities and earnings of adults. Nor is this merely a question of 'taking advantage' of youth: for it is a rare factory lad, office boy or shop girl who has the maturity of behaviour and judgment that deserves full rates .... Indeed, if Mr. Bolger expects employers to be more willing to employ more young people (under twenty) on proportional wages, it would seem as though unemployment pressures on the young adult sector (21-30 age group) would actually increase.

And this is far from being an attractive prospect, because many more of these young adults will be married, supporting young children, and requiring housing ....
So if youth rates are to be restored, this should be done because it is fundamentally right, and not because it is necessarily going to help unemployment in any way. (49)

The Otago Daily Times supported youth rates because of the 'instinctual sense of rightness involved'. The proposal was, moreover, 'fundamentally right' despite the fact that the consequences for increasing unemployment in the 21 to 30 year old age group were deemed worse than the consequences of youth unemployment. The editorial was advocating the principle of equal pay for equal work. But there was no proof that young people in unskilled jobs were any less valuable than older people in the same positions. While the principle on which this argument was based was sound the facts were not. The argument was subsequently repeated in an editorial which appeared in May 1983 (50).

The core of the youth rates proposal was that young people were of little value to their employers until they had undergone a period of training. This period, presumably, lasted until they reached the age of 20. Under the headline, "'TRAINING ALLOWANCE' ADVOCATED FOR YOUTH'", Mr. Derek Wood, the director of the Vocational Training Council, stated that, 'Every job today requires training,

even the so-called unskilled jobs' (51). Obviously well aware of the importance of language, Mr. Wood went on to recommend that youth rates be rechristened the 'vocational skills programme'. The justification for this name change was that the concept of youth rates carried an 'unfortunate connotation' of 'exploitation'. Mr. Wood was not arguing for any change in the substance of the youth rates proposals - only in the language with which they were described. Whether or not the 'unfortunate connotation' of 'exploitation' was justified by the effects of the 'vocational skills programme' was not discussed in the article.

The journalists involved in the construction of youth rates news stories did not appear to share Mr. Wood's sensitivity to language use. They allowed the substitution of the concept of 'job training' for 'work experience' to pass unmentioned in the news products surveyed. In unskilled jobs workers received lower pay because, by definition, the work did not require real training. Mr. Wood, Mr. Bolger and others argued that young people should be paid even less because they lacked 'training'. But in unskilled work the link was between time spent in a particular job and proficiency rather than the age of the worker. By choosing to use the word

'training' instead of 'experience' Mr. Bolger and others could superficially justify denying adult wages to young workers. The fact that one's age had no necessary connection to one's length of service was not mentioned in news stories. Overall, the arguments promoting the concept that all young workers were worth less than older workers were rather tenuous in nature. Despite this, they received a great deal of coverage and only marginal criticism in the news products surveyed.

The trade union movement was the most vociferous opponent of youth rates in general and this argument in particular. The movement asserted that a youth rates clause had been retained in all of the awards for which training was required. To claim that such unskilled jobs as labouring on a building site required skill training was seen as patently absurd. Trade union spokespeople presented the principle of equal pay for equal work as the main reason why young people in unskilled jobs should not receive lower wages merely because of their youth. The President of the Federation of Labour, Mr. Jim Knox, asked whether the Government would be 'proposing a reduced rate for women and Maoris so that these two particular groups can have more chance of getting employment?' (52).

Instead of receiving equal coverage from the news media organisations for its arguments, the trade union movement was frequently attacked as a major cause of youth unemployment. An integral part of the third argument, that high wage rates reduced job opportunities, was the claim that the trade unions, who were responsible for negotiating wage rates were thus responsible for limiting job opportunities. This attack on trade unions was mainly promulgated by the Employers' Federation. It received a great deal more news media attention than any of the claims made by the trade union movement.

News stories attacking trade unions were a common phenomenon in the news products surveyed. Under the headline, 'UNIONS COSTING MANY A JOB', the executive director of the Employers' Federation, Mr. Jim Rowe, stated:

We maintain that unions do a great deal to destroy jobs and their successful attempts to increase the cost of hiring young people illustrates this point ... The unions refuse to recognise this and continue to encourage what amounts to the pricing of young people off the employment market. (53)

The executive director of the Retailers' Federation, Mr. B. Purdy, made a similar claim. Under the headline,

'YOUTH-RATES CLAIM "ARRANT NONSENSE"', he stated:

Hundreds of workers have lost their jobs in retailing because, as the union frequently boasts in wage negotiations, it is there to gain the best possible terms for the survivors and it is 'not interested' in casualties .... Employers, on the other hand, spend most of their time in wage negotiations trying to preserve job opportunities for both young and adult workers by arguing for realistic wage increases, particularly in the rates paid to inexperienced workers while under training.

(54)

Mr. Purdy was, therefore, positing employers as the champions of worker interests against the allegedly opposing interests of the trade union movement.

In the news stories surveyed, the trade union movement was a popular target for criticism because, it was claimed, the unions went outside of the proper bounds of their job. In the process they were said to cause unnecessary problems for both employers and their own members. With regard to news stories on youth rates, however, trade unions were attacked for performing the tasks for which they were initially established (55). Trade unions had fought during the years of full employment to remove the youth rates clause from all of the awards pertaining to

(55) See also news stories on redundancy payments in Chapter VIII.
unskilled work. The reason for this fight was that with youth rates clauses intact it was in the employers' interest to fire workers once they qualified for the full adult wage rate. In the tighter employment climate of the 1980's this policy of opposing youth rates was presented by employers as a piece of villainy designed to raise the cost of labour and deny young people work. Mr. Bolger went so far on one occasion as to blame employers for youth unemployment because it was they who had conceded to the withdrawal of youth rates during wage round negotiations (56). This news story implied that it was the employers' duty to restore youth rates immediately. No mention was made of the fact that it was also in the employers' financial self-interest to do so.

Government support for the reintroduction of youth rates led to the formation of a Labour Department policy designed to deny young people access to work on training schemes if the relevant award specified that they had to be paid an adult wage rate. This policy had the effect of excluding many young people from access to the only employment opportunities locally available. For example, labouring jobs for councils and regional bodies were one of the commonest varieties of subsidised work schemes for the unemployed. Given that the Labourers' award lacked a

youth rates clause, those unemployed people who were aged under twenty were ineligible to take up any of these jobs.

The Department's policy became newsworthy because of the opposition to it expressed by the Porirua City Council. Under the headline, 'PAY RULE BARS YOUNG', the assistant secretary of Labour, Mr. Peter Lorimer, argued that to pay young people award rates would be to remove the incentive for them to move into unsubsidised jobs. He stated that it 'would defeat the intention of the whole programme which is to provide a bridge between doing nothing and getting into regular employment' (57). The Ministry of Labour had been unable to persuade the Federation of Labour to accept the reintroduction of youth rates and so had decided to penalise young unemployed people for the Federation's stance. Young people were to be denied employment on public sector labouring jobs on the unsubstantiated grounds that paying them an adult rate would remove their incentive to find a permanent private sector job. This argument ignored the temporary nature of job creation schemes. It also ignored the fact that the private sector employers were already paying adult wage rate to labourers aged under twenty. Exactly why the young would be discouraged from moving into private sector jobs was not, therefore, particularly clear.

Neither of these two points was raised in news stories. Instead, the debate was presented as a battle between the Porirua City Council and the Government rather than as an argument over the substance of a policy. Prominence was given to the developments of the battle rather than to the reasons for it.

The assertion that youth rates would actually increase the number of job opportunities available instead of merely redistributing unemployment was most frequently promoted in news stories by the Employers' Federation. A series of press releases which featured in news stories in July and August 1981 was issued by the Federation. The series announced the results of a survey which it had conducted amongst its members (58). The Federation's President, Mr. Stan. Duncan, claimed that some 39,000 job vacancies existed 'potentially' in New Zealand but that certain inhibiting factors, such as the high cost of labour, prevented employers from filling them. The lack of youth rates in some awards was said to be one of the main components of the high cost of labour. This claim was presented, without any criticism or comment from other groups, under such headlines as, 'THOUSANDS OF JOBS MAY BE

AVAILABLE NOW' and 'BOSSES PINPOINT JOB CURBS' (59). The results of the Federation's survey were said to prove that trade unions had over-priced the labour of their members and had caused the destruction of these 'potential' job opportunities. In reality, all the survey had demonstrated was that certain jobs were currently unprofitable to perform and that only by paying workers substantially under the award rate could they be made economically viable once again. Whether or not workers could actually support themselves - much less a family- on a lower wage rate was a point not raised in any of the news stories about the survey.

Essentially, the Employers' Federation was using the youth rates debate to promote the argument that wage rates should be based solely on the amount that the employer considered affordable. Only by using this formula, it was argued, could jobs be provided for all New Zealanders. In a work oriented society such as New Zealand is, this claim was lent automatic credence because work of any kind at any pay rate was seen by many as preferable to unemployment. Mr. Bolger was supporting this idea when he argued that it was 'better for young people to have a job at a lesser rate of pay and enjoy the dignity of work,

than have them denied employment opportunities and remain on the dole' (60).

The employer organisations were quite obviously taking advantage of the tight job market in order to lower the price of labour. This aim was thinly disguised by the claim that a job at any wage rate at all - no matter how low - was better than unemployment. The fact that lower wages meant higher productivity per wage dollar and hence higher profits was not mentioned in the news stories surveyed. Once again, the news media organisations had presented an argument within the terms set out by their dominant news sources. In this instance they were the Government and the Employers' Federation. Journalists had not bothered to examine in depth the underlying assumptions upon which the argument was based. Indeed the reasons why workers should be entitled to a wage payment of any kind were never discussed in news stories. Wages, like redundancy payments, were presented as something which workers were fortunate enough to receive and were greedy to demand too much of. Allusions to non-capitalist theories of the value of workers, such as the Marxist labour theory of surplus value, were certainly never made. Because competing ideologies were almost completely

(60) Evening Post, 1 August, 1981, p.2.
excluded from news media products it was relatively easy for the Employers' Federation to present their case.

The introduction of the Industrial Law Reform Bill into Parliament brought with it a change in the focus of news stories on youth rates. Journalists now shifted their attention to the heated battle to get the bill - which contained a clause reinstating youth rates into all industrial awards - passed into law. The bill generated all of this attention not merely because of the importance of its content but because two Government M.P.'s had threatened to vote against it. There was also much speculation over whether Mr. John Kirk, the independent M.P. who had been expelled from the Labour Party, would vote with his former colleagues against the youth rates clause. Mr. Kirk had publicly vowed never to vote with the Labour Party in Parliament again. It was known, however, that he opposed the reintroduction of youth rates and that he had proposed an amendment to the clause. Although it was ascertained that the Government M.P. for Waipa, Ms. Marilyn Waring, would definitely vote against the bill, the strength of Mr. Michael Minogue's commitment to opposing youth rates was not known. Such uncertainty made for exciting news stories - full of suspense and unexpected twists in true thriller style. It was this aspect of the bill, then, its perilous journey through Parliament, that the news media organisations
chose to focus on.

Prior to the vote on the youth rates clause of the Industrial Law Reform Bill, a Morning Report journalist informed listeners that:

While speculation on how the votes will fall has several endings possible, it now seems more than probable that the Government will lose the youth rates measure. The possibility is openly talked about by National M.P.'s, their feeling being that Marilyn Waring is immovable in her opposition and that the proposed Kirk amendment, whatever it may be, will not keep her colleague, Mike Minogue, from the no's lobby either. However, the script of the clause by clause debate is long and so the answer is still some way off. (61)

The use of the word 'script' clearly indicated that the journalist wished to depict the debate as an unfolding drama. It was also clear that the news story's focus was on this dramatic dimension of the bill and not on its substantive implications.

Following the defeat of the youth rates clause in Parliament, news stories concentrated on the implications of this defeat for the stability of the National Party as a Government. Interviewed by the 6.30 News, the Prime Minister stated:

(61) Morning Report, 8 December, 1983.
My personal attitude would be to put this bill on again, that section of it, next year .... We can't just throw it away because one member said I think it's anti-women and the other member was persuaded by a Parliament buildings cleaner in the early hours of the morning. You don't discard policy simply for reasons like that. (62)

The sexism and elitism implicit in the Prime Minister's comments were not, however, queried by the journalist involved. The Prime Minister then went on to deny that a snap election was an imminent possibility.

The leader of the Opposition Labour Party, Mr. David Lange, obviously viewed the defeat of the youth rates clause in terms of who had won and who had lost rather than what had been gained by workers. Interviewed as part of the same news show as the Prime Minister, Mr. Lange stated, 'Mr. Kirk voted in the way in which he has been behaving lately, totally contrary to what he said. But he voted the right way and the Government obviously has lost any right to govern' (63). The victory of the Labour Party over the National Party rather than the defeat of the youth rates clause therefore provided the focus for the 6.30 News team's report.

The preference of news media organisations for stories

(63) 6.30 News, 10 December, 1983.
involving open conflict between people rather than ideas was well illustrated by the youth rates debate. According to Rosenbloom (1979) this is, moreover, a general characteristic of news media products. He stated:

Above all, political journalism is obliged to dramatise information. And, in politics, the simplest, most direct, and most vivid way to account for activity is to describe people .... Journalism, like nature, abhors a vacuum. It cannot tolerate the endless deliberation of committees, the detailed arguments of bureaucrats, the involvement of party branches - in short, the details of policy-making and decision making. As a kind of psychological short-hand, it telescopes these boring facts into the physical presences of individuals. (64)

It is convenient for the news media organisations to concentrate on the clash of personalities which makes for more exciting news stories but not necessarily more informative ones.

The major daily newspapers surveyed announced the defeat of the youth rates clause with headlines such as, 'NATIONAL REBELS SWING YOUTH VOTE', 'UPROAR IN HOUSE: REBEL VOTES THROW OUT YOUTH RATES' and 'M.P.'S CROSS FLOOR TO DEFEAT YOUTH RATES' (65). These news stories outlined

(64) H. Rosenbloom, Politics and the Media, Australia, Scribe Publications, 1978, p.46.
See also, Otago Daily Times, 10 December, 1983, p.1.
the unfolding drama of the clause's defeat along with the possibility that the National Party's ability to govern had been fundamentally undermined. All four newspapers carried the comment made by the Minister of Labour that he was, '... disappointed for the people it was designed to assist - the young, unskilled workers seeking their first job' (66). In all of this coverage, the jubilation of the trade union movement and other non-Parliamentary opponents of the youth rates clause was almost completely ignored.

Thus the news media products, particularly the newspapers, gave proponents of the universal reinstatement of youth rates in industrial awards ample opportunity to express their views. Some, such as the Otago Daily Times, The Press, and The New Zealand Herald, even went so far as to present editorials which strongly favoured the reintroduction of youth rates and to dismiss all criticisms of the proposal as unfounded (67). The objections of the main opponents of youth rates, the trade union movement, were not ignored. But the coverage that these opposing views received in news media products was far outweighed by that given to the views of the

(66) Ibid.
Government, the Employers' Federation, and other employer organisations. Central to this coverage, moreover, were numerous attacks on the trade union movement per se which sought to destroy their credibility and question their motivation. Rather than a victory for the trade unions' cause, the defeat of the youth rates clause was cast as a setback for and an embarrassment to the Government.

The presentation by the news media organisations of news stories related to youth unemployment provides a clear example of how open to manipulation, at an ideological level, these organisations are. At times news products appeared to serve the purpose of public relations organisations for the respectable status quo organisations such as the Employers' Federation. The terminology used by such organisations and by the Government remained unchallenged in the overwhelming majority of the news stories surveyed. The news media organisations allowed the Government and employer groups to substantially set the limits of debate on issues relating to youth unemployment in general and youth rates in particular. Young New Zealanders were suddenly deemed 'unemployable' for no other apparent reason than that this was how the Government described them. They were described as being in need of transition-to-work courses, rather than jobs, because this is what the Government Task Force had offered them. The distinction between skilled and unskilled work,
which had been carefully maintained for decades by the trade union movement, was seriously undermined by the Government's attempt to substitute work 'training'. The terms of the debate had been set by those who were explicitly hostile to the very existence of the trade union movement. The arguments proffered by trade unionists were, therefore, marginalised.

It is a matter for debate whether the news media organisations tended to aid the Government's attempt to introduce youth rates through choice or through naivety. There is something to be said for both arguments depending upon which news story one was examining. Certainly the *Otago Daily Times* editorial quoted above would have left little doubt in the minds of readers as to its wholehearted support for the youth rates proposal. More commonly, however, the Government's case gained support not from any apparently overt bias but from the news media organisations' obvious acceptance of the right of legitimating institutions, such as the Employers' Federation, to have their views widely publicised (68). At other times 'sloppy' journalism appeared to be a major contributing factor in that journalists did not bother to examine the issues in contention at anything but the most superficial of levels. These factors combined to weight

(68) See Chapter III.
coverage on youth rates against the arguments put forward by the trade union movement. That the youth rates proposal was ultimately defeated, therefore, occurred despite rather than because of any attention by New Zealand's fourth estate.
CHAPTER X : CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have demonstrated the ideological nature of the discourses of the New Zealand news media. The media treated the meanings of keywords - pivotal to the entire news discourse - as self-evident rather than as real sites for political conflict. The neutral face of news language concealed the routinized signification practices of journalistic professionalism designed to separate the normative from the deviant. This process was aided by the simplistic, as opposed to simplified, nature of news media presentations.

Current systems of social, political and economic organisation in New Zealand appeared to exist in a timeless vacuum. The historical dimension was markedly lacking from news stories. The underlying rationale for the creation of existing institutions or social conventions, the options offered by alternative social systems, or the possibilities for radical change in the future were rarely discussed. Immediacy was a dominant trait of news products.

This absence of an historical perspective from news stories served the interests of the already powerful. The route the powerful had taken to achieve their current
status, along with the routes taken by the powerless, were obscured from view. It was as though the relative wealth or poverty of New Zealanders had existed from time immemorial. In particular the depiction of the New Zealand Maori people as suffering from individual pathologies was abetted by the absence of their race's history. The rhetoric of 'consensus' politics so prevalent in news stories also helped to perpetuate the status quo. New Zealanders were presented as autonomous individuals who substantially shared the same interests. Central to this presentation was the concept of 'the economy'. Whatever benefitted 'the economy' was said to be 'good for all'. The 'consensus' thus revolved around this shared economic self-interest. Such a harmony of economic interests was, however, never actually demonstrated in news stories. Indeed the news stories about 'street kids' and rising unemployment tended to suggest the exact opposite. But such factual considerations as would challenge the theory of harmony were not permitted to dent the prevailing rhetoric of 'consensus'.

As a part of this ideology of consensus politics no mention of the concepts of class, be they Marxist, Weberian or vulgarised versions of either, was made. New Zealanders were not presented as constituting a series of classes whose interests were in conflict. Rather they
appeared as individuals who had the opportunity to make as much of their lives as their talents and energies allowed. This individualistic ethic, so central to the capitalist ideology, functioned to promote the idea that social and economic problems were the outcome of personal inadequacies. Thus the unemployed featured as 'dole bludgers' or as pitiable 'victims'. These images of deviance marked the unemployed off as being different from other people. This difference was, however, presented as an individual and not a class phenomenon. All New Zealanders were said to share the same interests and those who did not prosper were personal failures rather than proof that 'consensus' was an illusion.

The economic rhetoric predominant in news stories was overtly supportive of the capitalist mode of production. This rhetoric was dominated by 'free market' concepts but frequently referred to the ideas of 'corporate state' capitalism. These two varieties of capitalism existed unchallenged in news products, often within the bounds of a single news story. The contradictions between the ideology of Friedmanite theories of competition within an open marketplace and the realities of Government penetration into the private sector and the power of transnational corporations were invisible in news stories. The frequent news stories calling for a return to 'free market' policies ignored the realities of twentieth
century economic life. Generally such calls masked simple bids for personal gain. For example, employer groups used the rhetoric of the 'free market' to oppose trade union-backed award rates. In reality they sought not economic purity but higher profits as a result of reduced labour costs.

Alternative economic theories were excluded from news stories. When the word 'Marxist' appeared it was always as a pejorative adjective attached to the name of a trade unionist or a political radical. The constant quarrels between the major political parties over economic issues masked the substantial areas of agreement between them. Such quarrels ranged within only a narrow segment of the possible economic spectrum. The economic options available to New Zealanders thus also appeared to be bound within this narrow range.

Within the boundaries imposed by the dominant economic rhetoric the actions of business leaders were lent an air of respectability not accorded to the actions of trade unionists. Central to this depiction was the key-word 'economy'. This anthropomorphic entity which supposedly operated by the iron laws of supply and demand was presented as neutrally dispensing benefits to those who obeyed its laws. The economy was said to have a dynamic and character of its own rather than to be only one of
many possible systems for the organisation of human economic activities. Thus the economy was seen to act according to its own immutable laws rather than in the interests of any particular individual and certainly not in the interests of any class.

What was good for 'the economy' was always represented in news stories as being good for all New Zealanders. The actions of business leaders which raised efficiency or increased export levels were, therefore, always presented favourably. Wage cuts were treated as courageous measures taken for the 'good of all', while wage rises threatened 'New Zealander's productivity'. That the actions of business leaders seemed so frequently to coincide with the best interests of 'the economy' was not, however, considered as evidence that the economic system was organised with the interests of this group in mind. What was actually highly ideological in nature thus appeared as 'commonsense' in news stories. It was taken for granted that what helped the Fletcher-Challenge Corporation also benefitted 'the economy' and hence all New Zealanders.

News products did not encourage the bulk of their news consumers to become involved in the issues they discussed. News audiences were addressed as voters but not as potential political activists. They were addressed as consumers rather than as workers. Economic issues, for
example, remained the preserve of experts and politicians. This presentation promoted an aura of the incompetence of individuals to either understand or deal with such crucial issues. Moreover, it clearly favoured the indefinite continuation of the status quo.

The amount of broadcast time or column inches devoted to a topic bore little relationship to the breadth or depth of information available on that topic. As has been shown, for example, in Chapter VI, the appearance of numerous news stories on a particular issue did not necessarily translate into a well-informed news audience. The sheer quantity of stories on the level of unemployment or the 'Think Big' projects created the illusion of an abundance of information. But the illusion is easily shattered by an examination of the news stories themselves. Quantity and quality of information clearly have no necessary connection. Only the most superficial understanding of the issues connected with unemployment could be gleaned from the mainstream news products surveyed.

The journalistic code of 'balance' further served to simplify the world in news stories. Journalists and editors sought to present 'both sides' of any issue in the interests of fairness and impartiality. Few political issues are, however, so clear-cut that two opposing spokespeople can actually present the full range of
conflicting opinions on them. This binary conflict model obscured those areas over which there was substantial agreement along with those areas which 'both sides' preferred to ignore.

Conflicts in news stories were also personalized so that their ideological dimension remained invisible. Politicians, for example, were presented as 'winners' and 'losers' rather than as the representatives of competing political programmes and sectional interests. The primary reason for this was almost certainly the ease with which clashing people can be depicted, particularly on television, as compared with the difficulty of presenting ideological disputes. Within the simplistic mode of presentation adopted by news products any issue which required an historical perspective or extensive explanation in order to be understood was likely to be represented only symbolically. Individuals became symbols of opposing policies and ideologies and the ideologies and policies themselves were hardly discussed.

The ideological nature of the news products surveyed was further disguised by the doctrine of neutrality espoused by news workers. Legitimated institutions were granted an ease of access to news products which was denied to others. The favouritism displayed towards such powerful news sources could be justified by the claim that news
products were simply reflecting the important events occurring in society. The journalistic code of neutrality was thus applied to an unequal world and did nothing to redress the balance. The more power and influence one possessed the more likely were one's ideas to be deemed 'newsworthy' and consequently disseminated by news media organisations. The doctrine of neutrality thus functioned to reinforce the status quo.

The treatment of trade unions in news stories, however, belied the claim that journalists simply depicted what was caught in their news nets. Trade unions, despite their size and lengthy history, were never granted the status of legitimated institutions accorded to employer groups. Again the keyword 'economy' was central. Within the economic rhetoric dominant in news stories, trade union activities were, by definition, against the interests of the 'economy'. Journalists did not, therefore, reflect the whole of the constructed economic reality but actively created and promoted only a certain segment of it.

This case study of unemployment has, however, only scratched the surface of the ideological mechanisms of the New Zealand news media organisations. Broader or more in-depth studies, both diachronically or synchronically, could profitably be undertaken. The task is important because of the dominant role news media organisations play
in the modern world as sources of political, social and economic information. In a country with such a small population as New Zealand's, the role of large news media organisations takes on even more importance. News consumers can generally choose between only two major daily newspapers, two television channels and a handful of radio stations. The vast similarities between the products of these organisations as demonstrated by this study indicate, moreover, that there is really very little choice at all.

News consumers may not believe a single thing that the news media tells them. Even this level of audience resistance does not, however, negate the importance of news media organisations. By controlling most of the systems for the distribution of information in New Zealand, these organisations are able to control the agendas of public debate. News products, after all, provide the major forum for public debates. News consumers may reject the stories that they are told but they do not have easy access to alternative views. Thus, the ideology of the mainstream news media is encountered on an everyday basis while alternative ideologies stand out because of their rarity. Hence this dominant ideology appears as 'commonsense' and 'normal' while alternatives appear markedly 'deviant'. The power of the news media is rooted in the pervasive nature of their distribution systems.
New Zealand news media organisations are inherently conservative bodies. Their products foster the interests of legitimated institutions and help to preserve the status quo. Journalistic neutrality operates to promote bias against those who are not powerful and in favour of those who are. Rather than relentlessly seeking out the 'new', news products demonstrate a hostility towards or a trivializing of those who seek change. Thus it is the liberalist-individualist ideology of 'consensus' within a capitalist economic system which dominates New Zealand news products.
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