

Rethinking Australian journalism in the 1960s:

The 1966-67 work value case and the Sydney newspaper strike

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Part 1: The 1966-67 work value case for journalists

Speaking in February 1965, the academic [Henry Mayer](#) suggested that ‘Australian journalists, like journalists in all industrialised countries ... [are] ... caught up in a triple revolution in communications, news and education’.¹ The speech, acknowledging that the 1960s was a period of considerable change for Australian journalism, was to the first summer school of professional journalism, organised by Canberra members of the Australian Journalists’ Association (AJA).² The aim of the summer school was to bring together journalists, managers, academics, and other people outside of the industry, to discuss the standards and standing of journalism in Australia.³



Raymond O'Dea 1969 (Journalism and the Law: Fifth Summer School of Professional Journalism, Canberra, February 1969)

Mayer's message would have been welcomed by AJA members, because they realised that an opportunity was available for the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission to take a fresh look at the basis for the salaries being paid by proprietors of metropolitan daily newspapers. They were encouraged in their thinking by the success in the early 1960s of the professional engineers' case, which indicated willingness by the Commission to consider the status of the engineers' profession when determining appropriate professional salaries. The case, led by advocate Raymond O'Dea, executive officer of the Association of Professional Engineers, had set out to persuade the Commission that:

- engineering is a profession;
- they as engineers were professionals;
- professionals were entitled to much more money than they were currently receiving; and
- this long-term unjust situation should be corrected.⁴

In essence, the professional engineers' case had become a model work value case for other professions, focussing on what a professional person could offer with respect to education, training, responsibility, care, and other issues.⁵ Following his success with the engineers, O'Dea sought to interest the AJA in a similar approach for journalists. By 1965, he had moved to Canberra to enrol in a PhD in the Law program at the Australian National University, with the aim of researching various aspects of Australia's arbitration system. In October 1965, he wrote to Syd Crosland, General Secretary of the AJA, offering to undertake research, negotiation and advocacy of a journalists' work value case at the Commission. The cost to the union would be any out-of-pocket expenses not covered by the ANU's field work payments.⁶

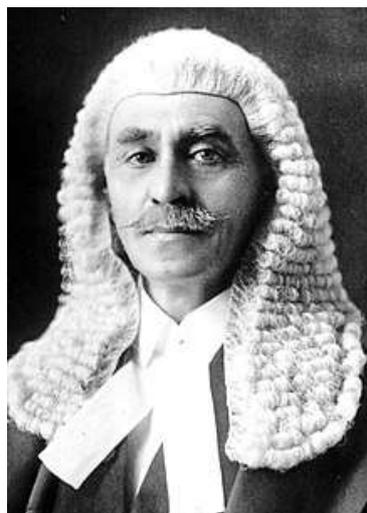
Given the likely complexity of such a case, this was a very generous offer. The proposal was approved at the AJA's federal council annual meeting, held in Melbourne on 13-19 November 1965. The meeting agreed to the appointment of a steering committee to plan and guide the program for the 1966 metropolitan dailies award case. The committee comprised the general president (George Godfrey), general secretary (Syd Crosland), NSW district⁷ secretary (HP Coleman) and Victorian district secretary (Jack Vidulich). Raymond O'Dea was invited to join the committee to aid and assist in preparing the case, particularly as advocate for any court case.⁸

Even before O’Dea submitted his proposal to the AJA, he had been sounding out people with a knowledge of the newspaper industry. For instance, he contacted [George Munster](#) of *Nation*, the political-literary fortnightly magazine in Sydney. It is possible that he had thought Munster would agree to be an expert witness for the work value case, but in a letter to O’Dea, Munster indicated that, while he was ‘very interested to hear of your project about the AJA’, he made it clear that he was not an AJA member, ‘on the grounds that I sign cheques etc.’⁹

In spite of this, Munster provided valuable advice to O’Dea on the political situation with journalists in different states and different newspaper publishers, and he highlighted possible pitfalls. He concluded his letter by offering to meet with O’Dea in Sydney ‘in order to find out at greater lengths what sort of approach you are likely to take? I wouldn’t like *Nation*’s columns to start off on this in the wrong way or queer your pitch by arousing all sorts of undercurrents in the profession.’ In the event, as the AJA’s work value case proceeded, *Nation* did not ‘queer O’Dea’s pitch’, but published regular reports on the development of the case and its aftermath.

As background to the AJA’s work value case, it is necessary to understand the system of remuneration for Australian journalists that applied at that time. Each journalist was paid according to a system of grades, ranging from D Grade up to Special A. Grading was the prerogative of the newspaper proprietors, with the individual journalist allocated a grade on the basis of ability, experience, and the value of that journalist to the employer. The grading principle for journalists had been created in 1913 and was confirmed in 1917 by Mr Justice Isaacs of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration.¹⁰ Originally, journalists were graded as senior, general, or junior reporters, but in 1927 the earlier classifications were changed to something similar to the classifications that applied in 1967.

Throughout the history of the AJA there had been long periods of negotiated agreements between journalists and the newspaper proprietors. Until 1966, the Commonwealth arbitration system had only been required to settle disputed logs of claim on three occasions, 1917, 1927, and 1954-55.¹¹ For 50 years, the AJA had based successive approaches for wage rises on the concept that journalism as a profession was *sui generis* (meaning ‘of its own kind’ or ‘unique’). The term had first been used in relation to journalism by Mr Justice Isaacs in the 1917 wage case: ‘Journalism is really a profession *sui generis*; I cannot measure it by what is required by totally different work...’¹²



Sir Isaac Isaacs ([Wikipedia](#))

In that decision, Isaacs concluded that, while he wished to introduce comparative wage justice for journalists, there were no similar professions that permitted such a comparison. In the years that followed, the newspaper proprietors were able to argue that journalism was unique as a profession and this would therefore block any flow-on agreements from awards in other industries. Such a situation prevailed in 1960 when the *sui generis* argument was used by the proprietors to shut out the AJA from the previous year's increase in metal trades margins.¹³

O'Dea's case for the AJA would stress the following points:

Firstly, the media of mass communications, and in particular the metropolitan daily newspapers, perform a great public function without which a complex society could not function. Unless the profession which serves this function is adequately rewarded, the quality of the media will suffer, and the community be deprived.

Secondly, journalism has, at present, a low status and poor rewards by comparison with occupations requiring persons of comparable intellect and integrity.¹⁴

In summary, the intention of the association would be to present a 'work value' case to the Commission in which the applicant would argue that the courts should 'reward the possession of skill and give an incentive to pursue the socially more valuable occupations'.¹⁵

Following his meeting with George Munster, O'Dea spent considerable time consulting with journalist members and officials from different AJA districts.¹⁶ As well, the AJA's Syd Crosland organised for O'Dea to meet with Henry Mayer at the University of Sydney in June 1966, both to help develop the work value case and to discuss Mayer's involvement as an expert witness in the case. Prior to this, Mayer had written to O'Dea, drawing attention to the writing on journalism by the German sociologist, Max Weber.¹⁷

Weber: "Not everybody realizes that a really good journalistic accomplishment requires just as much 'genius' as any scholarly accomplishment, especially because of the necessity of producing at once and 'on order', and because of the necessity of being effective, to be sure, under quite different conditions of production."¹⁸

O'Dea also consulted experts in America and the United Kingdom, including W. Sprague Holden, Professor of Journalism at Wayne State University in Michigan. Holden, a former journalist, had spent 13 months in Australia in 1956-57, funded by a Fulbright grant, studying the Australian Press. The AJA had advised O'Dea that Holden would be returning to Australia in 1966 for a study tour of state and federal industrial courts,¹⁹ and O'Dea wrote to Holden spelling out his argument for the scheduled work value case.²⁰

- The Press is a vital public instrument, and whether in public or private hands owes a responsibility, transcending the usual proprietorial one, to the community.
- The Australian Press has not realised its responsibilities in assuring quality in journalism by according professional salaries to its journalists.
- The lack of appropriate professional salaries has discouraged the pursuit of formal education and discourages journalists from remaining with the Press.
- The arbitration tribunal should award such salaries as will attract and hold journalists of quality.

The National Union of Journalists in the UK provided information outlining the union's comparable negotiations with the Newspaper Proprietors' Association in 1964 and 1966, and drawing attention to information on the educational standards and training of journalists from the report of the UK Royal Commission on the press, 1947-49. The union also mentioned that

the second Royal Commission in 1961-62 had dealt chiefly with concentration of newspaper ownership and restrictive labour practices.²¹

Application for a full-bench hearing

In July 1966, a conference was held between the AJA and the metropolitan daily newspaper proprietors to settle a new wage agreement for journalists. The proprietors offered increases ranging from \$5.27 for D grade journalists to \$10.40 for Special A.²²

The federal council of the AJA rejected this offer and, after all districts of the association had endorsed the rejection, the federal council decided to seek a reference to a presidential bench of the Commission (that is, two judges and a commissioner). This necessitated reporting the existence of an 'industrial dispute' to a commissioner (Commissioner Portus) and making out a case for reference to the presidential bench. The AJA case application covered the following matters:

Exclusions from the award; salaries for journalists; gradings; the basic wage and the right to re-open the award during its currency; a board of reference to cover reduction in classifications; non-reduction of salaries; and operation period.²³

The application was opposed by the proprietors, but the association was granted a full bench hearing. The full bench comprised Deputy Presidents Justice Moore and Justice Nimmo, and Commissioner Neil. Persuading the Commission to appoint a full bench represented an initial success for the AJA and assisted the association's case in the following ways:

- A full-bench hearing was necessary if the entire field of journalism was to be looked at without regard to previous judgments.
- It assisted in creating an atmosphere of public interest; essential for the style of advocacy that would be used by Raymond O'Dea.
- A full-bench decision offered immunity from appeal.²⁴

The resulting 1966-67 journalists' (metropolitan daily newspapers) case extended over 29 hearing days from 16 August 1966 to 17 June 1967, with hearings in Canberra, Sydney and Melbourne. The decision was handed down on 7 July 1967. The applicant (AJA) introduced 17 witnesses and tendered 72 exhibits. The respondents (newspaper proprietors) countered with six witnesses and 31 exhibits. All told, there were 1600 pages of transcript.²⁵



Geoffrey Sawyer, an expert witness ([Australian National University Archives: Photographs of people at the Australian National University, ANUA 225-1102, Professor G. Sawyer, 1953](#); Australian National University Archives: ANU History Project, ANUA 44-47, Interview with Emeritus Professor Geoffrey Sawyer, May-June 1990)

In his presentation of the AJA’s case, O’Dea adopted a different course from previous hearings before the commission. Instead of calling low- and middle-grade journalists to describe their duties and activities, he used highly placed and publicly known expert witnesses discussing the place and value of journalists’ work in the community.²⁶ The AJA’s witnesses included:

- [Gough Whitlam](#), deputy leader of the Australian Labor Party, speaking on the role of the journalist in the reporting of politics in a democracy;
- [Professor Geoffrey Sawer](#), Australian National University, on the law and the journalist;
- [Professor Sol Encel](#), University of New South Wales, on the status of journalists and journalism;
- [Professor Henry Mayer](#), University of Sydney, describing the profession of journalism and its status, as well as the demand for higher education for journalists;
- [Professor W. Macmahon Ball](#), University of Melbourne; on the significance of journalism in foreign affairs;
- [Bruce Grant](#), Reader in Political Science at the University of Melbourne and former foreign correspondent for *The Age* newspaper, describing the role of the foreign correspondent
- [John Bennetts](#), political correspondent for *The Age* newspaper, on the role of a political journalist, and the role of education for the development of the journalist; and
- [Maxwell Newton](#), former editor of the *Australian Financial Review* and foundation editor of *The Australian*, describing the failures of the Press, and how the commission could raise the status of journalism.²⁷

As well, a number of highly graded practising journalists outlined the nature of their work and elaborated on the evidence of other witnesses.

Although the proprietors’ counsel, [JH \(Hal\) Wootten](#), was able to argue in his final submission that much of this evidence was irrelevant, the atmosphere created during these hearings was a powerful support for O’Dea’s submission that journalists as professionals deserved more lucrative financial rewards. By concentrating the association’s case on the need to rethink the salaries for high grade journalists, O’Dea anticipated that the lower-grade employees would also receive proportional increases in salary.

The judgment

The judgment handed down on 7 July 1967 was at first sight a significant victory for the AJA and the ‘work value’ approach adopted by Raymond O’Dea. The commission increased existing salary rates by amounts ranging from \$6.40 (D grade) to \$31.20 (Special A grade).²⁸ The rates awarded were:

	Grade	New Rate	Old Rate	% Increase
	A1	\$135	\$103.80	30.1%
	A	\$115	\$92.10	24.9%
	B	\$95	\$80.40	18.2%
	C	\$75	\$65.75	14.1%
	D	\$60	\$53.60	11.9%

Apart from setting new minimum salary levels, the award also set out minimum and maximum percentages of journalists to be employed in each grade by each company. The minimum number of high-grade journalists that each company was required to employ was substantially increased.²⁹ Under the old system, each company was required to employ not less than:

15% A grade (including Special A)

50% B grade

17½% C grade

and not more than

17½% D grade.

Under the new award each company was now required to employ not less than:

30% A grade (including 10% Special A)

40% B grade

15% C grade

and not more than

15% D grade.

An important consideration for the full bench in handing down the award was the fact that, at the time the case was finalised, existing percentages employed within each grade varied sharply from newspaper to newspaper. The following were the variations reported by the full bench in the judgment³⁰:

Grade	Variation
A (incl. A1)	From: 38% to 53%
B	20% to 33%
C	11% to 20%
D	11% to 17%

For various reasons, over the years the proprietors had promoted their best journalists into the three top classifications of the grading ladder (A1, A and B). These reasons included the need to retain journalists in the face of more lucrative offers from elsewhere. Even then, the grade of the journalist did not necessarily dictate the salary paid, only the *minimum* salary, with some journalists receiving substantial over-award payments. Thus, a B grade journalist might receive A grade pay. But, even with the revised minimum percentages required to be employed within each grade under the new award, most daily newspapers were employing more Special A, A and B grade journalists than the new award required.

During the hearings, the commission had indicated that it regarded the grading system as a means of fixing minimum rates of pay, and not as a means of describing the work performed by journalists. This had been reaffirmed in the 1917 award which stated:

Classified journalists for the purposes of this award are journalists as hereafter mentioned, not for the purpose of controlling or regulating their qualifications or work or duties towards their employers, but only for the purpose of fixing the minimum rates of pay which they are to receive.³¹

In the 1967 judgment, however, the commission did imply that the grading classification for journalists could be regarded as a guide to quality and seniority within the profession: ‘All

journalists nominally do the same kind of work although it is possible in a broad way to talk about the different work done by the different grades'.³²



Maxwell Newton, an expert witness ([Wikipedia](#))³³

In the 1955 wage case, Conciliation Commissioner Blackburn had also regarded grading classifications as a guide to quality and seniority:

[T]he D grade journalist is normally the beginner ... Promotion to B grade ... normally means that he has shown himself to be thoroughly competent and trained. Promotion from there to A grade and Special A appears to show normally that the journalist is outstanding or is required to take a position of greater responsibility.³³

No matter how the grading policy had been spelt out by Mr Justice Isaacs in 1917, or how it was interpreted by the Commission in 1967, grades were a matter of self-esteem, especially for those journalists in the higher classifications. A higher grade offered prestige and status, as well as greater financial rewards. To be downgraded was to be told that one was less than one's colleagues.

Downgrading as an issue for journalists

The downgrading issue figured prominently in the AJA's calculations and preparations for the 1966-67 journalists' case. After the 1955 case, a number of journalists had been downgraded by the newspaper proprietors and this had caused great bitterness. The NSW district committee of the AJA had been aware that the proprietors might seek to lessen the cost of the new award by downgrading AJA members and, during the early hearings of the 1966-67 case, the committee warned its NSW membership to guard against and resist any downgrading. 'Any case of downgrading or attempted downgrading must be reported to District Office immediately ... Members affected should not accept or reject any downgrading proposal when it is put to them. (Instruction to Members on Downgrading).'³⁴

In its presentation of the 1966-67 case the AJA sought to limit the powers of newspaper proprietors to regrade, or change the classification of, any journalist. First, the association asked the commission for an increase in the percentages of higher grades, in order to match more closely the de facto position. The court's decision went a reasonable distance in meeting this request, but the AJA realised that the proprietors had been left with a good deal of room for

downgrading when the new minimum percentage for A and Special A grades (30%) differed from the existing situation in metropolitan daily newspapers (38% to 53%). The association realised that, under the new award, between 8% and 13% of A grade journalists could be downgraded by any proprietors who wished to reclassify.

Given this concern, the AJA had also sought the introduction of a board of reference to adjudicate with any case of reduction in classification. A commissioner, acting as chairman of the board of reference, would settle any differences over the downgrading of journalists. In seeking a board of reference, the AJA cited a precedent with the provision of a similar type of board in the 1961 professional engineers' award. The association was faced with a difficult problem, however, in trying to adopt this provision to the journalists' award. This was because the engineers possessed a more formal system of recognition of the educational level and the levels of professional practice.³⁵

The Commission rejected the AJA's application of a board of reference but stipulated that no salaries should be reduced because of the new award. In rejecting the board of reference claim, the Commission referred to the problem of having some proprietors who over-graded as a means of over-award payments and others who simply made over-award payments. The board of reference would have restrained the former but not the latter from absorbing over-award payments.³⁶

As a result, in the short term, journalists were being offered significant pay rises and added professional status. But, as one writer indicated, the full bench fell far short of meeting the AJA's demands: 'The Bench was permitting proprietors to trim the costs of the new award if these proprietors considered that some of their senior men were not worth the additional money for the higher grades'.³⁷

The response of the newspaper proprietors lay ahead, but the finalising of the wage case also marked the conclusion of O'Dea's involvement with the AJA. In Sydney on 24 July 1967, a special meeting of the federal council endorsed a motion expressing appreciation to O'Dea for 'his fine industrial achievement on behalf of the AJA members before the Full Bench of the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission', and approved payment to O'Dea of an honorarium of \$2500 from the union's federal fighting fund.³⁸

Part 2: The 1967 Sydney newspaper strike



Letterhead for Clarion Press, publishers of The Clarion, the strikers' newspaper (Author)

The 1967 Sydney newspaper strike, involving journalists, printers and other production workers, has been described as the most bitter in the history of Australian journalism.³⁹ AJA members had participated in prolonged newspaper strikes in 1944 and 1955, but this was the first major strike that was actually initiated by the action of journalists. The 1967 newspaper strike arose in the aftermath of the 1966-67 journalists' (metropolitan daily newspapers) case, when newspaper proprietors responded to the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission's award of wage rises for journalists by downgrading more than 130 AJA members (see Part 1 of this article).

Once the new salary rates had been settled for journalists in all capital cities, the way was open for newspaper proprietors to start cost-cutting. On 31 July 1967, the first downgrading notices were issued to journalists at *The Australian*. The following day journalists at other Sydney daily newspapers were also informed that they had been downgraded. By the evening of 1 August, it was estimated that some 130 journalists out of 800 employed in Sydney had been reclassified downwards in some way. (Some were advised that over-award payments or 'margins' had been absorbed.)⁴⁰ According to the AJA, 52 journalists were affected at John Fairfax and Sungravure, 25 at *The Australian*, and 30 at the *Daily Mirror*, while at Australian Consolidated Press, 25 were downgraded and 10 were reclassified upwards.

As well as the general dissatisfaction at news of the downgradings, journalists in Sydney were particularly incensed at the injustice of some individual cases of reclassification:

- Pat Burgess and DM Davies were downgraded from A1 to A by John Fairfax. They had both appeared as AJA witnesses at the recent full bench wage case hearings.⁴¹ The Fairfax editorial manager, Lou Leck, had described them both as 'outstanding examples of A1 grade' (page 872 of the full bench transcript). Davies had been upgraded from A to A1 during the case.
- The *Daily Mirror* downgraded the only A1 grade journalist who gave evidence at the wage case (G. Griffith). Leck had also described him as an outstanding example of A1 grade.
- A number of those employed by John Fairfax and Sons had worked for that company for many years and were close to retirement. Downgrading them meant smaller superannuation and reduced long service leave benefits.
- Otto Beeby, who was an AJA office holder for 20 years and an employee of John Fairfax and Sons for almost 40 years, was downgraded from A to B. He had held a

number of editorial positions and was due for retirement within a short time. (His A grade classification was later restored.)

Other examples included the following:

- An individual who had nine months to serve before retirement had been downgraded from A1 to A. The reply from management was that this had been a ‘mistake’ and the higher grade was restored.
- Alexander Macdonald, columnist with *The Australian*, had been downgraded from A1 to A.
- Noel Lindblom, science writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was downgraded from A to B.
- Les Hollings of *The Australian* was downgraded from A1 to A. He had been a sub-editor with *The Times* (London) and was also a member of the AJA’s federal executive.
- Noel Bailey of *The Sun*, twice winner of [Walkley awards for journalism](#), was downgraded from A1 to A.
- David Halpin was a member of the AJA’s NSW district committee and was downgraded by *The Australian* from A to B grade. He had also previously won a Walkley award for journalism.

The following is an example of the letter sent by John Fairfax and Sons to employees who had been re-classified:

The company invites you to continue in its employ as a B grade journalist.

If you reject the Company’s invitation it will be necessary to terminate your service ... In order to have a record, will you please sign the attached (striking out either “accept” or “reject”) and return it to me not later than 8.30pm on Thursday, August 3.⁴²



The first issue of the strikers’ paper, The Clarion, hits the streets ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Raymond O’Dea Collection, P113-41](#), [First issue of The Clarion leaving the editorial office for the streets, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#). This and subsequent illustrations from Tribune can be found in the [Raymond O’Dea Collection Deposit 2 P113](#) in the [Butlin Archives](#).)

Reaction to the downgrading issue outside Sydney varied from state to state. In Canberra and Adelaide, the journalists went out on strike. In Canberra, it was a strike of sympathy and support for Sydney colleagues. In South Australia, six journalists had been downgraded, others had their margins absorbed, and eight were upgraded. An Adelaide strike, involving AJA members, started on Wednesday, 2 August, after the employers informed members of the

reclassifications. By Sunday night, the members decided that their position with the courts would be strengthened if they returned to work; the Adelaide strike ended on 8 August.⁴³ In other states, the effect of the downgrading was much less severe, employers seemed less intent on creating a confrontation, and industrial action was avoided.

The NSW district committee of the AJA met and called a stop work meeting for 5pm on 1 August (Tuesday). The great majority of Sydney's journalists attended this meeting, held in the Federated Ironworkers' Hall in George Street. The resolutions passed at the meeting indicated that the journalists saw the action of the proprietors as a reprisal for the success of the AJA in their recently contested pay claim. The meeting instructed the NSW district committee of the AJA to seek the support of the NSW Trades and Labor Council and its disputes committee. Another meeting was called for 5pm on the following day (Wednesday) and in the meantime it was resolved:

that no AJA member on any newspaper or magazine produced by a Sydney metropolitan proprietor shall perform any work until further action is decided at tomorrow's resumption of this meeting;

that Federal Executive be requested to direct AJA members employed in interstate offices not to provide any copy for Sydney metropolitan newspapers during the period of any industrial dispute.⁴⁴

The second part of this motion emphasised that at this point journalists in other capital cities had not yet been affected by the proprietors' approach on reclassification. The Sydney journalists would not be alone for long, however. The following day (Wednesday, 2 August) downgrading notices were issued to journalists employed in other capital cities, but, compared with Sydney, a smaller number of journalists were affected by reclassification.

Reclassification in metropolitan daily newspapers

Location	Newspaper	Reclassification		Breakdown ⁴⁵
		Down	Up	
Sydney	Fairfax & Sungravure	52	-	The bulk were A1 to A, and A to B
	<i>The Australian</i>	23	-	10 from A1 to A, and 13 from A to B
	<i>Daily Mirror</i>	19	-	6 from A1 to A; 11 from A to B; and 2 from B to C
	Consolidated Press	25	10	16 from A to B; 9 from B to C; and 10 from A to A1
Melbourne	<i>Herald & Weekly Times</i>	11	16	9 from A to B; 2 from B to C; 15 from A to A1; 1 from B to A
	<i>The Age</i>	13	-	9 from A1 to A + 1 artist and 3 photographers downgraded
	<i>The News</i>	2	8	2 from A to B; 1 from C to B; 4 from D to C; 3 cadets to D

	<i>The Advertiser</i>	4	-	4 from A to B
Perth	<i>West Australian</i>	21	3	The bulk were A1 to A, and A to B
Brisbane	<i>Courier Mail</i>	-	-	6 out of 51 over-award payments were reduced
Hobart	<i>Mercury</i>	-	-	

Note: Generally speaking, these figures underestimated the financial impact of the downgrading. Some employers, such as the Herald & Weekly Times, absorbed previous over-award payments.

On the afternoon of 1 August, at the first stop-work meeting of journalists, the motion to strike had been passed with only a handful of dissenters. With journalists on strike, the Sydney proprietors were forced to use staff and non-union journalists to produce copy for their papers. By Wednesday morning, it had become apparent that the strike would widen as newspaper production workers indicated their sympathy for the position of journalists and their unwillingness to work alongside non-union labour.

Officers of the NSW branch of the Printing and Kindred Industries Union (PKIU) requested a meeting with the district secretary of the AJA and reported that members of the printing union were walking off the job. At the premises of John Fairfax and Sons, printers of *The Sun*, employed in the machine and publishing rooms, stopped work on their own initiative. There was no production of *The Sun* that day. For the time being, printers remained on the job at the *Daily Mirror* (Sydney's other afternoon newspaper) and production of that paper was not affected. The executive committee of the NSW branch of the PKIU met, and while expressing support for the journalists, indicated that printers should remain on the job, pending a further meeting of journalists.

The journalists met again, late on Wednesday afternoon, 24 hours after their first stop work meeting. They received a report from the district committee, who indicated that the proprietors were unwilling to withdraw the downgrading notices or discuss the issues involved in the reclassification of journalists. Once again, there was an overwhelming show of support for the actions of the committee. The meeting instructed all members of the association who had been downgraded to ignore the proprietors' instruction (i.e. not sign the notice of reclassification). Meanwhile, the meeting voted to adjourn for two days – in effect deciding to remain on strike at least until 5pm on Friday, 4 August. With the journalists affirming the decision to remain on strike, the dispute widened to include other workers and other unions and, for the first time, AJA members in London went on strike in support of their Sydney colleagues.⁴⁶

The strike widens

On Thursday afternoon, the NSW Labor Council's disputes committee met and indicated its support for the AJA in the dispute. The committee declared that members of the various unions employed at Sydney newspaper establishments should cease work for the duration of the journalists' strike. As a result, unionists started to walk off the job from 4pm on Thursday, and there was no issue of the *Daily Mirror* or *The Australian* on the following day.

At this stage, the disputes committee deferred a decision on taking control of the strike and acting on behalf of the striking unionists. The committee was aware that the federal president of the AJA, George Godfrey, had announced that the federal executive of the association had

assumed control of the dispute. This intervention by the union's federal body reflected the fact that journalists working at metropolitan daily newspapers were employed under a federal award. This contrasted with the position of workers in the production unions of the newspaper industry (e.g. printers, electricians, metal workers) who were employed under state awards.

The decision of the AJA's federal executive to take control of the strike created immediate problems for the striking journalists. The federal executive had decided – without consulting NSW district representatives who were absent attending a meeting of the NSW district committee – that the journalists should return to work and seek discussions with the proprietors *after* normal production had been resumed. The return-to-work announcement from the AJA's federal executive was broadcast over Sydney radio station 2KY but was ignored by the striking journalists. The federal officials had forgotten that other newspaper production workers were already on strike, committed to support the journalists in their dispute over reclassification. Any decision by journalists to return to work would have meant that they were rejecting support already offered by the production workers.



Conference of Clarion (the strikers' paper) journalists ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-38, Conference of journalists in the circulation department, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))

More than 800 journalists met again at 5pm on Friday afternoon. An angry meeting rejected the return-to-work direction from the AJA's federal executive. It was an indication of the divisiveness of the executive's action that about 200 of the 800 attending supported the motion that the strike should end. However, a significant majority favoured a continuation of the strike and the meeting adjourned until the following Monday, 7 August.

The printers and journalists had already decided that all striking unionists and other volunteers would assist in the production of a trade union newspaper, *The Clarion*, for the duration of the stoppage. *The Clarion* had first been published during the 1955 printers' strike and, on that occasion, striking journalists, printers and other production workers had combined to produce the newspaper on three successive days. This strike publication had provided the public with a cheap alternative source of news and the unionists had a means of publicising the issues in the dispute. It also raised money for the combined union strike fund. The decision to reconstitute

The Clarion had been strongly supported at the Friday meeting of journalists and at a Saturday meeting of printers.

The Saturday meeting of printers had been called by the NSW branch executive of the PKIU and was held at Harold Park. The printers decided by 2000 votes to five that they would remain on strike while the journalists were not working. Neither *The Sun* nor the *Mirror* was produced on the Saturday. The following day, the three Sydney proprietors (Murdoch, Packer and Fairfax) combined to publish a 64-page composite newspaper, the *Sunday News*, produced at the Broadway plant of John Fairfax.

After the weekend, the trade union initiative for settling the strike was taken up by the Labor Council. The council's disputes committee met on the Monday morning, and having resolved that the dispute had reached 'a serious stage', requested support for the strike in the following ways:

- All unions with members employed by the Sydney daily newspapers calling upon all employees in the industry to cease work.
- All unionists refusing to buy, transport, or in any way to assist in the distribution or production of papers produced by the Sydney daily press proprietors.
- Giving full support to the trade union paper, *The Clarion*, which would be on sale on Wednesday onwards, written and produced by unionists.

At the same time, Jim Kenny, Secretary of the Labor Council, sought to confer with the newspaper proprietors, but this conference was refused. The journalists met again on Monday afternoon and were advised that the proprietors had refused to withdraw the downgrading notices. The journalists decided to remain on strike and their meeting was adjourned until Thursday, 10 August.

In the meantime, in the words of one writer, 'the wheels of Conciliation and Arbitration moved fast at first, and then slowly'.⁴⁷ Within 24 hours of the start of the strike the Sydney newspaper proprietors had applied to Commonwealth Commissioner Portus for the insertion of a 'no-strike' clause in the journalists' award. Portus warned that he intended adopting this course unless the journalists returned to work. This clause was inserted on Thursday, 3 August, and was one of the factors that contributed to the federal executive of the AJA 'taking fright' and recommending an unconditional end to the strike – a recommendation that was firmly rejected by the Sydney journalists. The action by Portus had little effect because, as far as the courts were concerned, nothing much happened for a week. The ruling became absolute, which enabled the proprietors to apply for a penalty against the AJA for failing to observe a no-strike clause.

The AJA and newspaper proprietors were called before Commissioner Portus on Thursday, 10 August, and at this hearing Portus supported the right of the proprietors to absorb over-award payments and downgrade employees.⁴⁸ Portus, however, criticised how the proprietors had acted in implementing the reclassifications. After the hearing before Portus, the AJA claimed that the employers had agreed to a return to work under the following conditions:

1. The proprietors were willing to confer once work was proceeding normally.
2. The notices would be discussed on a resumption of work.
3. Notices would be withdrawn in the meantime until the method of downgrading had been discussed with the federal executive of the AJA.

This claim by the AJA was later disputed by the employers. The proprietors agreed that items (1) and (2) were terms for a return to work, but not item (3). Both parties had placed their own interpretations on the proceedings that had taken place before Commissioner Portus, but the

transcript of the proceedings supported the employers' interpretation. The other unions involved in the strike would later claim that the federal officers of the AJA had been anxious to ensure a return to work for journalists under any conditions and were therefore happy to place 'a broad' interpretation on the court's hearing. This desire by the AJA to hastily end the strike would lead to a feeling of ill-will between the journalists and other striking newspaper workers.



Journalists sifting copy for the strikers' paper, The Clarion ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-37](#), [Journalists sifting copy for The Clarion in the advertising department, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))

Production of the proprietors' newspapers during the strike

The 1967 stoppage had significance for Sydney's printers and other production workers because, for the first time, the proprietors were able to publish most of their normal magazines and daily newspapers under strike conditions. Admittedly, most of the editions were abbreviated, compromised in terms of printing quality, and limited as vehicles for news or advertising, but there was continuity of production for most of the publications.

During the strikes of 1944 and 1955, Sydney's newspaper proprietors had found it necessary to combine their resources in order to produce a composite newspaper. It was a sign of the development of modern printing technology by 1967 that near normal production was possible during this strike. Moreover, the production of daily newspapers showed that proprietors had made elaborate preparations in preparation for the eventuality of such a long strike.

The Sunday News

While most publications during the dispute had the appearance of normality, the conditions of production were far from normal. During the strike publishing was carried out under a state of siege for a good deal of the time. The proprietors resorted to producing a composite newspaper twice during the dispute. For each of the Sundays, 6 and 13 August, the three Sydney proprietors combined to produce a 64-page publication called the *Sunday News*. This composite newspaper offered several features from each of the usual Sunday papers, the *Sun-Herald*, the *Sunday Telegraph*, and the *Sunday Mirror*.

The proprietors claimed a circulation of about 1.2 million on each of the Sundays and apparently 1.25 million copies were printed, all at the Fairfax plant. According to *Nation* magazine, these production numbers were excessive as some suburbs were over-supplied.⁴⁹ For readers, the *Sunday News* was a rather erratic blend of features of the three papers. No regular Sunday reader would have objected to four pages of sport, six pages of comics (two

from each of the regular publications), or two pages of the *Sunday Mirror*'s TV guide. On the other hand, the *Sun-Herald*'s 'Candid Comment' and 'Good Living', or socialite Nola Dekyvere's column from the *Sunday Telegraph*, were strange companions for the *Sunday Mirror*'s scantily clad beach girls.

The role of John Fairfax and Sons

It was significant that production of the *Sunday News* took place at the headquarters of John Fairfax and Sons, because in several ways during the dispute this company was the base for proprietorial initiative and activity. Geographically, the Broadway plant of John Fairfax was ideally suited as the centre for newspaper publishing during a strike. The other newspaper and publishing companies in Sydney operated from buildings that were hemmed in by narrow streets and commercial activity and were easy prey for pickets and other union protests. In contrast, the Fairfax plant was surrounded on all sides by streets and not overshadowed by other buildings.

There was a good deal of evidence that the Fairfax group had been preparing for many months for the possibility of a strike. A significant advance in newspaper production techniques for Fairfax had been the introduction of typesetting computers. This move circumvented the necessity of utilising skilled printers to set hot-metal type. On the second full day of the strike (Friday, 4 August), EC Bennett and F. Howe, both officials of the NSW branch of the PKIU, managed to get past security guards and enter the premises of John Fairfax. They witnessed more than a dozen women operating teletypesetting (TTS) machines and producing non-justified tape.⁵⁰ They were informed by representatives of the Fairfax management that the tape was being justified and processed by a computer on another floor of the building.⁵¹ It was then being fed into automatic hot-metal linotype typesetting machines.

It later transpired that for some months the Fairfax company had been training some of their non-union employees to operate the teletypesetting machines. These women had been secretly trained at Fairfax's Hunter Street premises. The PKIU had become aware of this practice sometime before the strike and had raised the matter with Fairfax management, who denied it. One reason for the concern of the printing union officials was that the practice was contrary to the agreement between the PKIU and Fairfax, first signed in 1957 and renewed in substantially similar form in January 1967. The agreement stated (among other things):

- that the work of operating teletypesetting equipment was within the jurisdiction of the PKIU;
- that operation of the teletypesetting equipment was the work of males.⁵²

According to *Tribune* newspaper, '[W]hen the Herald general manager, Mr A. McLachlan, was asked by union officials to confirm reports that a computer had been installed, he flatly denied it, without batting an eyelid'.⁵³ Apparently, the women who were operating the TTS perforating machines lived on the *Herald*'s premises for the duration of the strike. All sorts of lurid stories were carried by pro-union sources describing 'Hong Kong' conditions in which the women slept and worked during the strike. According to these sources, the women were plied with numerous presents and financial incentives in order to keep their resolve strong and morale high. Again, from *Tribune*, 'Herald girls have been given huge boxes of chocolates, free stockings ... and masses of flowers in their workroom. Maybe it helps to overpower the smell of the building, uncleaned since the week before last.'

During the strike, Sydney's printers realised that, for the first time, newspaper proprietors could manage without printing tradesmen for an extended period and still produce acceptable quality daily newspapers. It is ironic that the newspaper strike, which was begun by the journalists in a wave of indignation over their downgrading, would show printing tradesmen that their future

in the newspaper industry was not rosy: they would be confronted with the steady encroachment of modern printing technology which, over time, displaced their previously highly valued craft skills. This would be consolidated in Sydney in 1975 with the Fairfax group using phototypesetting and high-speed computers while introducing an ambitious program of automation.

Production at John Fairfax and Sungravure

During the strike, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Australian Financial Review* continued publication, not missing a single day. However, there were problems and limitations with the production of each of these papers:

- the strike editions of the *Financial Review* were small, on some days just 12 pages;
- on most days there was only one edition of the *Herald*, and on one day (Friday, 4 August) the printing quality was very rough, but, generally speaking, production quality improved as the strike progressed.

The Fairfax group did not publish the usual racing edition of *The Sun* on either of the two Saturdays of the strike. This was by arrangement with Rupert Murdoch, who also agreed not to publish the *Daily Mirror* on either of the Saturdays. In the early stages of the strike *The Sun* missed regular publication on one other day (Wednesday, 2 August) when printers at John Fairfax refused to work with non-union journalists and stopped production. At the same time, the Fairfax-controlled magazine publisher, Sungravure, maintained production of *Woman's Day* during the dispute.⁵⁴



Journalist dictating a story for the strikers' paper, The Clarion ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-36](#), [Journalist dictating a story for The Clarion, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))

Production at Australian Consolidated Press

Sir Frank Packer, proprietor of Australian Consolidated Press, published the *Daily Telegraph* without break, Monday to Saturday, during the strike, but the *Bulletin* magazine missed publication for one week (the 12 August issue). Consolidated Press had been using old production facilities and antiquated presses at the *Telegraph's* Castlereagh Street plant, inherited from the *Evening News*. These facilities were very much past their prime and were not using more sophisticated teletypesetting equipment.

It became apparent that resources that were not available at the Castlereagh Street premises were willingly provided to Consolidated Press by other newspaper companies, particularly the Fairfax group. An examination of copies of the *Daily Telegraph* published during the strike

showed that some of the stereotypes (hot-metal plates) used in the printing of the *Telegraph* had been made at the Fairfax plant. For instance, the *Telegraph's* stock exchange listing and weekly television guide were typeset and cast at the Broadway plant of John Fairfax and Sons. The same thing happened with the *Daily Telegraph* using *The Sun's* weekly television guide. The Fairfax people did the typesetting, produced the matte⁵⁵ and made plates for their own use and the use of Consolidated Press and the *Daily Telegraph*.

If Sir Frank Packer willingly accepted this largesse offered in the form of hot-metal plates, he more than repaid the generosity of the Fairfax organisation by using the *Daily Telegraph* to berate any trade union officials, striking workers or other opponents who had not offered full support to the cause of the newspaper proprietors. Here is an example, an editorial from the *Daily Telegraph* of 8 August:

GUTLESS

Yesterday Ampol – “The Australian Company” – did not deliver petrol as they usually do on Mondays to the *Daily Telegraph* garages.

When asked why there was no delivery, the industrial officer stated they had heard the building was picketed and did not instruct their drivers to deliver.

How far does this gutless acceptance, by reputable companies, of union standover go?

... Yesterday Ampol failed to deliver to an old company.⁵⁶

The *Telegraph* saved its most inflammatory statements for the period at the end of the strike. On the day that the newspaper workers were returning to work, an article was published in the *Telegraph* with the following heading:

THE STRIKE – GOOD MEN, POOR LEADERS⁵⁷

Later in the day, when all parties were called before the State Industrial Commission to report on the return to work, Mr Justice Beattie, president of the Commission, commented on the *Telegraph's* article in the following terms:

The Commission, too, has freedom of expression and in respect of the article ... we state that, in our opinion, it was wholly deplorable ... [We issue a] plea to all for common sense, forbearance and mutual tolerance. We regard this article as a repudiation of the spirit of that plea.⁵⁸

Packer was not impressed by this criticism and the following day released this statement: ‘*The Daily Telegraph* has no regrets and makes no apologies for its account of the newspaper strike published in yesterday’s issue’.⁵⁹

During the strike, the newspaper-television commercial connection of the *Daily Telegraph* and TCN Channel 9 was clear as the television station was used to present editorial viewpoints supporting the position of the newspaper proprietors. During the early days of the strike, TCN 9 varied its early morning program to screen interviews in which the interviewees were the channel’s news editor, Mike Ramsden, and another staff journalist, Brian Bury. David McNicoll, as editor-in-chief of the *Daily Telegraph*, was the subject of the interviews, with each interview providing a direct ‘question and answer’ format. It was clear that each interview constituted an editorial opinion; in the words of one writer:

The policy line had been clearly established in advance and ... the sole purpose of going to air at all was to express the newspaper proprietors’ point of view to the detriment of the journalists’ opinions.⁶⁰

News Limited

The major daily newspaper casualty during the strike was *The Australian*. On Monday, 7 August, after *The Australian* had not appeared in Sydney but was sold in other states, Rupert Murdoch announced that publication had been suspended for the duration of the strike. *The Australian* did not appear again until 18 August. The *Daily Mirror* missed one day's publication early on in the dispute (Friday, 4 August), but after that date the quantity produced was small and poor in quality.

The suspension of production of *The Australian* resulted from its position as a national newspaper. *The Australian* was edited in Sydney and in 1967 was printed in both Sydney and Melbourne. Copies of the paper were sold in Sydney during the early period of the strike (1, 2 and 3 August), apparently supplied from an expanded Melbourne print run. On the following two days, *The Australian* failed to appear in Sydney, black-banned by transport unions.⁶¹ Rupert Murdoch had then realised that, if he continued to supply Sydney from the Melbourne production run, he would risk widening the dispute to involve printers in other capital cities. He therefore suspended publication of *The Australian* and its printers in Sydney were stood down with pay for the duration of the strike, a gesture that was commended by the PKIU.⁶²



Daily Telegraph journalist, *Jacqueline Phillips*, selling the strikers' paper, *The Clarion*, outside the Sydney Trades Hall ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre](#), [Australian National University: Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-35](#), [Daily Telegraph journalist Jacqueline Phillips selling *The Clarion* outside the Sydney Trades Hall, printed in *Tribune*, August 1967](#))

Murdoch was the most visible of the proprietors during the strike because he was involved in negotiations with the unions and the Industrial Commission by virtue of his position as chairman of the proprietors' council. However, differences between the proprietors became evident by the end of the first week of the strike. The proprietors ceased to have a named spokesman after the night of Thursday, 10 August, when Sir Frank Packer made a statement to the ABC News about conditions for a return to work. Apparently, Packer had acted without consulting the other proprietors and Murdoch resigned his position as chairman in protest.⁶³

The Clarion

During the 1967 strike the Sydney printers and journalists combined to publish their own newspaper. This 'Newspapermen's Newspaper', as it was sub-titled, was produced on three

days: 9, 10 and 16 August. The third issue eventually came out when the strike was all but settled. It was a tabloid-sized newspaper that sold for five cents. The first issue was 12 pages, but this grew to 16 pages for the other two issues.

This was the third time that Sydney's printers and journalists had produced a pro-union paper during a newspaper strike. In 1944, they published nine issues of a daily tabloid called *The News*.⁶⁴ In 1955, *The Clarion* was produced on three successive days towards the end of a protracted strike. The 1967 version of *The Clarion* had its origins in the early strike meetings of printers and journalists. By Saturday, 5 August, both unions had agreed to support the production of *The Clarion* and the work commenced, organising production and distribution, and the editorial and writing side.

Editorial and advertising

Headquarters were established in the Sydney Journalists' Club in Chalmers Street and Harry Kippax, a senior journalist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was appointed editor. The editorial working space for *The Clarion* was spread throughout the Journalists' Club, with the editor in the club's card room, sub-editors in the reading room, and more than one hundred reporters in the Star Room, normally used for banquets.⁶⁵

The Clarion attracted an impressive array of writers and senior journalists as contributors. Maxwell Newton, billed as 'Australia's leading economist', offered his opinions on financial and economic topics. Other journalistic support came from Helen Frizell, Brian Johns, Gavin Souter, Pat Burgess, Alexander Macdonald, and Josephine O'Neill. Sporting writers included EE Christensen, Tom Goodman, Rod Humphries and Pat Farrell. Bruce Petty (two) and Pat Benier (one) provided cartoons.

While the first issue of *The Clarion* had stated that it was intended 'neither as an instrument in the dispute nor an organ of the dispute', on each day that *The Clarion* appeared there was at least one page of news and opinion related to the strike. The early issues concentrated on outlining the journalists' side of the dispute, with articles such as 'The case for journalists',⁶⁶ and 'Court orders A.J.A. to heed ban'⁶⁷. The third issue contained reports that were less concerned with the downgrading of journalists and directed more at ensuring that all striking workers could return without having their positions prejudiced.

Advertising was co-ordinated from rooms at the Journalists' Club, with a policy that deliberately restricted advertising space to 20 per cent of each issue. There was a quick response from advertisers.

FIRST COME, FIRST SERVED ... [from *The Clarion*, No.1]

It was a case of first come, first served when advertisers sought space in this issue of *The Clarion*. To those who missed out, we express our apologies. Our ad-men are still on the job, and for space in future issues, advertisers should contact us at ...

A number of organisations placed large advertisements with Lufthansa, Lorack Motors of Granville, and the Theatre Royal all taking a full page.

Production

The Clarion was printed in Sydney on two old letterpress plants, *The Worker* press of the Australian Workers' Union at 235 Castlereagh Street, and the *Catholic Press* newspaper at 36 Chalmers Street. The condition of these presses and the availability of newsprint were the major factors limiting the size of the print run each day.

The printers, like other contributors to *The Clarion*, were volunteers. Within the PKIU, responsibility was divided into several sections, supplies, printing and distribution. A chairman

was appointed for these divisions, and each chairman worked with an ad hoc committee of representatives of the different newspaper chapels. For example, John Johnson who was in charge of the publishing (distribution) section, was at that time chairman of the night publishers' section of the Herald-Sun chapel at John Fairfax. Each newspaper chapel was responsible for publishing on a particular night and its representative undertook to provide a certain number of workers on that night.



Meeting of over 4000 Sydney press workers ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-34](#), [Photograph of a section of Sunday's meeting of over 4000 Sydney press workers, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))

There was a good deal of enthusiasm among the printers who attended on the evening of Tuesday, 8 August, to start work on the first issue of *The Clarion*. Unfortunately, this enthusiasm did not compensate for the poor state of the presses with which they had to operate. Quite a number of trials were needed with the presses at *The Worker* before satisfactory results were produced. At the *Catholic Weekly*, the printing presses had so many idiosyncrasies that the tradesmen who were normally employed at the *Catholic Weekly* opted to stay on after they had finished their regular work and bear most of the brunt of operating the presses for the first issue of *The Clarion*. For later issues, volunteer printers were able to familiarise themselves with the strange ways of the *Catholic Weekly* press, but on that first night they were mainly there as offsidiers. The first copies of *The Clarion* rolled off the press at the *Catholic Weekly* at 2.10am on Wednesday, 9 August. The printing was rather uneven, but most technical problems were overcome in printing the second issue.⁶⁸

Distribution

Distribution of *The Clarion* was organised by regions. Trucks called at one or other of the two printing houses, collected a load and delivered it to a pre-arranged distribution point. One was at Moore Park in the open area between the park and the Showground. It was quite wet on the first night, but the PKIU's John Johnson related that people still turned up with great enthusiasm to collect their supplies.⁶⁹

There were conflicting reports about the size of the circulation of the three issues of *The Clarion*. The PKIU reported that the 9 August issue sold 225 000 copies and the 10 August issue about 400 000 copies.⁷⁰ *Tribune* newspaper estimated that only 300 000 copies were sold on 9 and 10 August but, although this is closer to the true position, it probably under-estimated the actual circulation of *The Clarion*.⁷¹

Striking journalists, printers and production workers combined with other volunteers to sell *The Clarion*. Many copies of the strike paper were sold near public transport routes. Trucks

sometimes used railway station entrances as delivery points for supplies. Sellers were coordinated by head sellers who were responsible for the supply of papers and cash, and all cash was paid in at the AJA's *Clarion* office at Chalmers Street. In spite of the enthusiasm of writers, printers and sellers, there were moves from inside and outside of the trade union movement to limit and stop the sale and production of *The Clarion* and the newspaper companies indicated to newsagents that they risked losing supplies of regular daily newspapers if they handled *The Clarion*.

Among the striking unions, the federal branch of the AJA appears to have been anxious to limit the number of issues of the strike paper. The 16 August issue of *The Clarion* carried the following notice:

We published twice last week, primarily as a service to the public by professional journalists and printers.

We suspended publication because we believed this was in the best interest of all involved in the newspaper dispute.⁷²

On Friday, 11 August, Con Simons, who was head of the editorial section of *The Clarion*, announced at a meeting of the disputes committee of the NSW Labor Council that it had been decided to suspend publication. This journalist-inspired move annoyed many of the printers who had already held a number of meetings to organise production of a Sunday *Clarion*. The printers thought the suspension ill-advised; they felt it was important for the strikers' morale that the union newspaper be produced on Sunday to counter the proprietors' composite *Sunday News*.⁷³

In another move, pressure had been exerted on the board of directors of the *Catholic Weekly* to stop the *Weekly's* presses being used for printing *The Clarion*.⁷⁴ The matter was discussed at a board meeting on the evening of 10 August, and, when the board was informed that continued production of *The Clarion* was unlikely, the matter was shelved.



Sydney journalists at a strike meeting ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University](#); [Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-32, Sydney journalists at a strike meeting, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))

The Clarion: a summary

Those involved in production of *The Clarion* maintained that the newspaper had served three useful purposes:

- It tapped the energy of strikers and volunteers and helped maintain their enthusiasm for the strike.

- It helped maintain a sense of unity (however fragile) between unions involved in the strike.
- It helped publicise the issues of the strike.

Against this, it could be argued that the 1967 *Clarion* was the least successful of the three Sydney trade union papers published in newspaper strikes up until that time.⁷⁵ In 1944 and 1955, the unions were working against a single non-union competitor – the composite publication of the newspaper proprietors. In 1967, printers and journalists found some of the proprietors were able to maintain near normal production of their papers. Despite this, *The Clarion* still provided a modest financial return to the AJA and PKIU. The 1969 annual report of the AJA’s NSW district contained the following information on revenue from *The Clarion*:

Financial returns of *The Clarion*, published for three issues during the 1967 Sydney newspaper dispute, were finalised during the year.

The surplus was \$3,316.

It has been agreed by the newspaper unions that the amount would be divided, the AJA and the PKIU each retaining an equal share within their funds as a “Clarion Reserve Fund”.

The money will be used to publish *The Clarion* on any future occasion.⁷⁶

Ending the strike

Before the return to work on Thursday, 17 August, significant strains and even hostility were apparent within the ranks of the striking unionists. This ill feeling could probably be traced back to the response of the AJA’s federal branch to the hearing before Commissioner Portus on 10 August. The officers of the AJA claimed that, at the hearing, proprietors had undertaken to withdraw the downgrading notices. They repeated this claim at the combined meeting of striking journalists, but it was ridiculed by the proprietors, who also indicated that they would not accept the strikers back at work until Monday, 14 August.

Meanwhile, the trade union officials involved with the Labor Council’s disputes committee were annoyed that the journalists had acted without consulting their fellow striking unionists and had gained no assurances about victimisation of those workers who had been on strike. A mass meeting of all of these unionists (journalists, printers and others) was called for Sunday, 13 August. At the meeting, the Labor Council’s secretary, Jim Kenny, said that the federal council of the AJA had been imaginative in supposing that the proprietors had given any sort of guarantee at the court hearing of 10 August that they would withdraw downgrading notices.⁷⁷ The AJA later responded defensively to the charge of misrepresentation, including issuing a pamphlet, entitled ‘Journalists return to work – the facts’.

Kenny obtained overwhelming support from the mass meeting for a motion to reverse the journalists’ decision to return to work. This made the issue, not the journalists’ downgrading, but the claims by two proprietors (Murdoch and Fairfax) that they intended reducing the status of some members of their non-journalist staff who had gone out on strike.⁷⁸ These members had been caught in a loyalty tug-of-war between their employers, who considered that as staff they should have continued to work during the strike, and the trade unions to which they belonged. There were seven staff involved, six from Mirror Newspapers and one from John Fairfax, all of them members of the PKIU and the Federated Clerks’ Union. The mass meeting rejected any idea that these striking staff members should accept a loss of authority and the meeting decided to continue the strike and continue publishing *The Clarion*.



Newspaper workers picketing the Sun-Herald building, Sydney ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University](#): [Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-31](#), [Newspaper workers' picketing the Sun-Herald building in Sydney, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))

It remained for the deadlock over the reinstatement of the staff members to be settled early in the week. The matter was heard in the NSW Industrial Commission, with the unions and employers called to a compulsory conference on 14 and 15 August. The Commission directed the newspaper companies to reinstate the staff employees without loss of salary, status or authority, but nothing was said about employers having to withdraw downgrading notices. A second mass meeting of striking unionists was held on 16 August and the newspaper workers decided by an overwhelming vote to end the strike.

From the moment, halfway through the strike, when the journalists decided at a meeting of their own that they would like to return to work, the other striking unionists lost their enthusiasm for the journalists' cause. At the beginning of the dispute, the printers and other production workers had offered their support without any hesitation. By the end, they were happy to get out without further prejudicing their own employment position. They had not bargained for the group within the AJA who were prepared to end the strike without making any gains at all. It appears that this group, strongly represented on the AJA's federal council, were embarrassed by the enthusiasm that non-journalist newspaper workers displayed for the major issue of the strike.

For the employers, the 1967 strike was an exercise in which the proprietors lost a small amount in the short term and gained more with the passing of time. Ironically, although printers would be faced with significant changes in printing technology, in the five years following the 1967 strike, it was printers who made significantly larger wage gains, 170% for the printers, and 75-80% for the journalists.⁷⁹

With the journalists, after the minimum requirements for grading were altered by the full decision, the employers had sought to introduce flexibility in their recruitment program. The proprietors realised that they would have been financially constrained from employing high grade journalists if their companies were already over-supplied with well paid employees. They therefore decided to reduce the number of high grade journalists by reducing the grades. The expression of indignation by the journalists, and the decision to go on strike, meant that in the short term the proprietors lost the respect of their employees. Clem Lloyd's history of the AJA records that, a fortnight after the strike ended, the AJA and the proprietors met in a stormy meeting to try and pick up the pieces.⁸⁰ At the meeting the association's federal president, George Godfrey, had summarised the nub of the dispute.

The recent award, which had lifted them into professional ranking, by industrial acceptance, in addition to the past tradition, was an exhilaration which turned to bitter resentment when the blow of down-grading fell.

Acknowledgments and Afterword

An earlier version of this paper was researched and written in 1976 as part of the requirement for a BA (Hons) degree in Government at the University of Sydney. I am deeply indebted to several people (all deceased) who assisted and advised with my original research: Professor Henry Mayer, Professor Jim Hagen, Mrs W. Holden (widow of Professor W. Sprague Holden), John Johnson, Hazel Jones, and Frank Kelly. With this revised version, I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of Jim Andrighetti, David Stephens, the staff of the Noel Butlin Archives Centre at the Australian National University, and the Search Foundation, Sydney, for permission to reproduce *Tribune* newspaper photographs.

After the 1966-67 work value case, Raymond O'Dea continued to live in Canberra where he built an industrial advocacy practice. On 9 October 1973, he was killed in a head-on collision when he was driving from Melbourne to Canberra. He was survived by his wife Marjory and four children and was widely regarded as one of Australia's most respected industrial advocates.⁸¹ His research papers are held in Canberra by the Noel Butlin Archives Centre.

** John Myrtle was principal librarian at the Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. He has produced Online Gems for Honest History, drawing upon his extensive database of references and including notes about the 1940 Canberra plane crash and the 1937 Stinson crash in Queensland, and has written a number of book reviews for us (use our Search engine), most recently of a book about the Mallee, and a study of Edward St John QC. He has also explored the history of the Arthur Norman Smith lectures in journalism.*

ENDNOTES

¹ Henry Mayer, 'Higher education for journalism?', *First Summer School of Professional Journalism*, Canberra: February 1965: 35.

² Held annually from 1965 to 1972.

³ *First Summer School of Professional Journalism*: 1.

⁴ W. Sprague Holden, 'The Sydney newspaper dim-out of August 1967', W. Sprague Holden Collection, University Archives, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, USA.

⁵ Raymond O'Dea, 'Journalism and arbitration', *Journalism and the Law: Fifth Summer School of Professional Journalism*, 1969: 26.

⁶ Raymond O'Dea to Syd Crosland, 19 Oct. 1965. Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, Raymond O'Dea Collection Deposit 1 P53 (henceforth NBAC, P53/1).

⁷ AJA branches were called 'districts'.

⁸ Australian Journalists' Association. Federal Office, Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, Minutes of the AJA's Federal Council, Z270 (henceforth NBAC, Z270).

⁹ George Munster to Raymond O'Dea, 14 Oct. 1965. NBAC, P53/1.

¹⁰ Geoff Sparrow (ed.), *Crusade for Journalism*, AJA, Sydney, 1960: 110.

¹¹ W. Sprague Holden, *Australia Goes to Press*, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1961: 173

¹² Raymond O'Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination in Commonwealth Arbitration*, West Publishing Corporation, Sydney, 1969: 153

¹³ *Nation*, 29 July 1967: 6.

¹⁴ O'Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 152-53.

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- ¹⁵ Raymond O’Dea, ‘The significance and future of industrial relations in Australia’, *Australian Quarterly*, June 1967: 79-88.
- ¹⁶ AJA branches were called ‘districts’
- ¹⁷ Henry Mayer to Raymond O’Dea, 25 Mar. 1966. NBAC, 53/1.
- ¹⁸ Max Weber: *Essays in Sociology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1970: 96
- ¹⁹ During his visit to Australia, on 13 September 1966, Professor Holden delivered the 29th Arthur Norman Smith Lecture.
- ²⁰ Raymond O’Dea to W. Sprague Holden, 24 Nov. 1965. NBAC, P53/1.
- ²¹ George Viner (for the Assistant General Secretary of the NUJ) to Syd Crosland, 12 Sept. 1966. NBAC, P53/1.
- ²² AJA (NSW District), 1967 *Annual Report*: 5.
- ²³ AJA (NSW District), 1967 *Annual Report*: 6.
- ²⁴ *Nation*, 29 July 1967: 6.
- ²⁵ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 272-73
- ²⁶ Clem Lloyd’s history of the AJA, *Profession: Journalist: A History of the Australian Journalists’ Association*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1985, outlines O’Dea’s approach as an advocate for the Association, developing and leading a work value case; see pp.258 ff.
- ²⁷ Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Commission, Transcript of proceedings, 25 Oct 1966: 97.
- ²⁸ *Australian Industrial Law Review*, 29 July 1967: 295 (journalists).
- ²⁹ *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 11
- ³⁰ *Australian Industrial Law Review*, 29 July 1967.
- ³¹ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 16.
- ³² *Australian Industrial Law Review*, 29 July 1967.
- ³³ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 252
- ³⁴ AJA (NSW District), *District News Bulletin*, no.166, 29 Sept. 1966.
- ³⁵ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 254.
- ³⁶ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 216.
- ³⁷ *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 13
- ³⁸ Minutes of the AJA’s Federal Council, NBAC Z270/ Box 27; also, during hearings of the wage case, the Federal Council approved payment to O’Dea of an honorarium of \$500, ‘expressing appreciation of your excellent presentation ... up to the present stage’ (Letter from Syd Crosland to Raymond O’Dea, 15 Nov. 1966).
- ³⁹ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 258.
- ⁴⁰ O’Dea, *Principles of Wage Determination*: 10.
- ⁴¹ AJA (NSW District), 1968 *Annual Report*. (Information on many of the downgradings was listed in this report.)
- ⁴² *Tribune*, 9 Aug. 1967: 1.
- ⁴³ *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 10.
- ⁴⁴ AJA (NSW District), 1968 *Annual Report*: 10.
- ⁴⁵ AJA (NSW District), 1968 *Annual Report*: 12-13; also, *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 10.
- ⁴⁶ Lloyd, *Profession: Journalist*: 267.
- ⁴⁷ *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 10.
- ⁴⁸ *Printing Trades Journal*, Sept. 1967: 148.
- ⁴⁹ *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 11.
- ⁵⁰ In the printing trade, ‘justifying’ means adjusting a line of type to neatly fill a space, so a straight margin is achieved on both sides of a printed page.
- ⁵¹ *Printing Trades Journal*, Aug. 1967: 135.
- ⁵² *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 9.
- ⁵³ *Tribune*, 9 Aug. 1967: 1.
- ⁵⁴ John Fairfax Limited, 1967 *Annual Report*: 9.
- ⁵⁵ The matte or matrix is the mould of the original type made out of paper mache.
- ⁵⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 8 Aug. 1967: 2.
- ⁵⁷ *Daily Telegraph*: 17 Aug. 1967: 3.
- ⁵⁸ AJA (NSW District) 1968 *Annual Report*: 20.

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- ⁵⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Aug. 1967.
- ⁶⁰ Kit Denton, 'Public affairs', in Mungo MacCallum (ed.), *Ten Years of Television*, Sun, Melbourne, 1968: 53.
- ⁶¹ *Nation*, 12 Aug. 1967: 10-11.
- ⁶² *Printing Trades Journal*, Sept. 1967: 138.
- ⁶³ *Nation*, 26 Aug. 1967: 8
- ⁶⁴ Henry Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, Lansdowne Press, Melbourne, 1964: 205.
- ⁶⁵ *Tribune*, 16 Aug. 1967: 5.
- ⁶⁶ *The Clarion*, 9 Aug. 1967: 2.
- ⁶⁷ *The Clarion*, 10 Aug. 1967: 2.
- ⁶⁸ *Tribune*, 19 Aug. 1967: 5.
- ⁶⁹ Johnson compiled tally sheets with information on sales in different suburbs.
- ⁷⁰ *Printing Trades Journal*, Aug. 1967: 126.
- ⁷¹ *Tribune*, 16 Aug. 1967: 5.
- ⁷² *The Clarion*, 16 Aug. 1967: 1.
- ⁷³ Personal communication from the PKIU's John Johnson.
- ⁷⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 10 Aug. 1967: 1.
- ⁷⁵ *The Clarion* was published again in May 1980 following an industrial dispute over penalty rates for operating visual display terminals; see: Don Angel, *The Journalists' Club*, Sydney, [The Club, 1985]: 161.
- ⁷⁶ AJA (NSW District), 1969 *Annual Report*: 35.
- ⁷⁷ *Tribune*, 16 Aug. 1967: 1.
- ⁷⁸ *Nation*, 26 Aug. 1967: 8.
- ⁷⁹ *Survey of the Media*, Cortis and Carr, Melbourne, 1976: 17.
- ⁸⁰ Lloyd, *Profession: Journalist*: 266.
- ⁸¹ ["Revolution" from O'Dea cases', Canberra Times, 11 Oct 1973: 7.](#)



Despatch men bundling The Clarion for distribution ([Search Foundation](#): owner of the material; [Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University: Raymond O'Dea Collection, P113-40, Photograph of despatch men bundling The Clarion for distribution, printed in Tribune, August 1967](#))