

2475/4156

MONASH UNIVERSITY
THESIS ACCEPTED IN SATISFACTION OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ON..... 20 July 2004.....

Sec. Research Graduate School Committee

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SAGA•CITY

PATTERNS OF INFLUENCE IN POLITICS,
PUBLIC RELATIONS, AND JOURNALISM:
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATORS
IN A REGIONAL CITY

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December 2003

Errata

- p 7 line 1: "Stevenson" for "Stephenson"
- p 14 para 2 line 4 "other's" for "others"
- p 26 para 1 line 3 "Mayer's" for "Mayer's' "
- p 37 para 1 line 8 "it" for "which"
- p 69 para 1 line 22 "Glenn" for "Glen"
- p 84 line 2: "Sekulless" for "Sekulless"
- p 96 para 2 line 8, p 101 line 4: "have" for "has"
- p 97 line 4: "because of" for "due to"
- p 100 para 1 line 3 "aforementioned group," for "aforementioned group"
- p 116 para 3 line 4 "dyed" for "died"
- p 153 para 2 line 8 "Councils" for "Council's"
- p 165 para 2 line 11 "who" for "whom"
- p 192 para 2 line 1 "letters" for "letter's"
- p 194 para 2 line 6 "issue" for "issues"
- p 230 para 2 line 10: "practise" for "practice"
- p 234 para 2 line 13: "is" for "are"
- p 258 para 2 line 2: "lent" for "leant"
- pp 23, 25, 91, 96, 122, 150 and 281 "Hazleton" for "Hazelton"

Addendum

- p IV line 1: delete "between" replace with "among"
- p 11 para 2 first line: "communications are performed" for "communications is performed"
- p 19 para 2 line 9: "a lack of understanding" for "a lack of understand"
- p 70 line 1: delete "due to"
- p 102 para 2 line 8: "that local daily newspapers" should read "that Britain's local daily newspapers"
- p 124 line 10 "with the tools reply strategically" should read "with the tools to reply strategically"
- p 153 para 2 line 19: "Mayor Allen Smith" should read "Mayor Alan Smith"
- p 166 line 1: "engage readers in response to what would normally be a routine story" should read "The timing of the CWD survey is impeccable as one would expect. Any good editor would jump at the chance to engage readers in response to what would normally be a routine story"
- p 204 line 1: "economic necessity at the conclusion" should read "economic necessity to the conclusion"
- p 211 para 2 line 2: "power and influence is devolutionary" should read "power and influence are devolutionary"
- p 246 para 2 line 5: "Media Alliance" should read "Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance"
- p 276 "Kruckeberg & Starck 1998" should read "Kruckeberg & Starck 1988"

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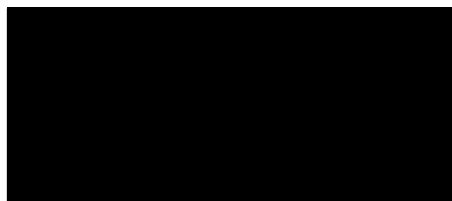
ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the relationships and patterns of influence that develop between politicians, journalists and public relations actors in the public sphere. Its empirical setting is the local government election campaign of an independent in a regional Australian city. It employs a modernist inductivist perspective using case studies of community pressure and interest groups as its fundamental unit of analysis within a neopluralist conservative framework. It is thus grounded in the dynamics of interpretation, presupposing comprehension of meaning through layers of previous interpretation. It is a narrative laid over historical principles.

The methodology is intensive analysis of an individual actor, his political campaign, and his first term of office. In this it tracks the political socialisation of the performer and his subsequent performance in this regional setting. It attempts to ascribe meaning to a single political event but does not attempt to place that meaning in a broad historical context. It supports and extends Leon Mayhew's argument — that professional communicators exert substantial sociopolitical influence — by examining Mayhew's *New Public* (1997), locating it in an Australian context, and ascribing meaning to theories of influence and persuasion as they occur in the political process in a conservatively-dominated materialist, neopluralist regional city.

STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and affirms that to the best of my knowledge, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.



Richard Stanton
December 2003

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to a number of people without whom this thesis may not have fared as well.

Firstly, for listening carefully to my proposal and asking me the hard questions prior to embarkation, I thank sincerely my supervisor, Peter Spearritt. As a candidate living in Sydney and enrolled in a Melbourne university, I was under no illusions that contact was likely to be more difficult than that of a candidate with a supervisor in the same city. But when Professor Spearritt decided to accept a new position in Brisbane, and to relocate from Melbourne halfway through my candidature, I got a queasy feeling in my stomach. It transpired however, that geographical obstacles could be overcome.

For allowing me to poke my nose into his political life, I am deeply indebted to Peter Hetherington, and to his partner Shelley Hetherington, for her gracious hospitality during my frequent visits to Orange. Peter Hetherington's deep reserves of energy and enthusiasm were contagious and enabled me to maintain a sustained level of activity over a long period of time.

Journalists and broadcasters, without whom there would be no thesis, gave me their time and answered my questions without reservation and for that I am professionally grateful: They are Genya Cole, Joanne Crawford, John Fabbriss, Mark Filmer, John Lloyd-Green, Peter O'Connor, Ross Larsen, Steve Martin, and Nick Redmond. (With special thanks to Linda Filmer for her gracious hospitality).

A number of representatives and administrators provided invaluable advice, insight and information that enabled me to frame the work. They are Max Boss, Brenda Davies, Alan Dwyer, John Miller, Richard Niven, Tim O'Sullivan, David Shearing, Glenn Taylor, and Russell Turner.

Individuals also played a role in assisting me to focus on the work. I thank Dr David Foster for leading me on to the path of higher research; Robert Wilson for his views on local government election campaigns; Professor Malcolm Walker for his insight into participation observer status; Veronica Mamalioga for transcribing long and often semi-audible interview tapes; Anne Hopper for constant encouragement; Christine Hester for providing an important link to the past; Dr Nicholas Economou for reading early drafts; and Peter Andren for demonstrating the reality of journalism and politics.

And lastly, without whom I may never have folded the tent and come down from the mountains, I owe my greatest debt to my family, Lorraine Stanton, James Stanton and Elizabeth Stanton. Thank you for keeping the party going.

PREFACE

In the late 20th century Leon Mayhew, a US sociologist, set out to prove that professional communicators exert enormous influence and persuasion upon the mass public of western culture, and that the consequent rationalisation '...erodes the social organisation of public opinion' (Mayhew 1997: ix). These professional communicators Mayhew refers to are public relations practitioners, political consultants, advertisers and marketer researchers. To support his argument, Mayhew draws on the work of Jurgen Habermas and to a lesser degree, Talcott Parsons. Habermas, in terms of a Mayhewian argument, questioned separately the validity of existence of modern differentiated society without the input of opinions of an integrated mass public.

Mayhew presents his modernist image of the mass public as a hybrid, emerging from Habermas's generalist public sphere. By shaping the mass public in a particular form Mayhew was able to imagine his own "new public" in which mass opinion is fully aware of the aims and goals of professional communicators working on behalf of clients, refusing thus to be influenced or persuaded.

Mayhew's argument is that these groups of professional communicators dominate public communication, displacing the free public of the enlightenment — in which objective discussion formed public opinion — and setting up a new public which is subjected to systematic mass persuasion. Mayhew's new public can thus be viewed as a refeudalised Habermasian public sphere in which the processes of rationalisation of persuasion, developed in advertising and market research, dominate public communication and the political process through the rhetoric of presentation.

Habermas (1989) aligns the modernist politics of advertising — in which forms of democratic social order are displayed through contested elections — with 18th century European dramatic spectacle. These spectacles however, Habermas thought of as far removed from authentic public dialogue of that earlier period.

It is within this framework that I have attempted to demonstrate that complex patterns of influence and persuasion exist outside Mayhew's narrow modernist perspective. While Mayhew argues political consulting is a '...direct outgrowth of public relations and the methods of influence developed in advertising and market research' (1997: 209), I have added two additional layers by including the roles of journalists and politicians in

influencing the mass public. Analysis of the roles of the various actors is framed in the context of the Habermasian spectacle of a political election.

To maintain a Mayhewian focus I have used a modernist inductivist approach, with case studies of pressure groups and interest groups to frame important events. There are limitations on the definition of professional communicators in Mayhew's work. It does not argue far enough to embrace all possible actors. My thesis develops his argument, analysing it within the framework of the sociopolitical in a regional Australian city. It is based on a close analysis of one political campaign and its immediate aftermath from June 1999 to March 2003. It supports Mayhew's argument that professional communicators exert substantial sociopolitical influence.

US media analyst Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2000) suggests the political contest captures three groups: candidates, journalists and voters (2000: 39). When assigned dramatic equivalents, the groups become performers (candidates), critics (journalists) and audiences (voters). Jamieson's stereotypes can be best assessed in conjunction with Nimmo and Combs' (1992) explanation of the divisions of political punditry in which the four ancient pillars — priest, bard, sage and oracle — are presented in modernist western political terms. Performers, critics and audiences have been the subjects of academic work individually and collectively with a focus on the United States and United Kingdom.

This thesis examines the campaign of an individual "performer" and analyses the patterns of influence of the various "critics" as they watch and report on the performance. It does not seek to analyse audience reactions (voter intentions) other than to record the outcome of the contest.

Influence and persuasion between performers, critics and audiences are centred on political science and media studies, and for the purpose of this work are referred to as political communication. It is here the overlap between Jamieson's three dramatic equivalents and Nimmo and Combs' four ancient pillars begins to emerge, but it is also where the problem of differentiation and assignation begins. As part of the process of observation I have attempted to tease out the interlocking influences and to explain how the actors — performers, critics, audiences, priests, bards, sages and oracles — operate individually and collectively within a defined frame.

I have found evidence that professional communicators in regional cities act within a narrow framework of unwritten rules and that power is hidden from public view but centralised in the hands of the elites.

The political candidate, Peter Hetherington, campaigned on an independent liberal platform which saw him elected to Orange City Council in the central west of New South Wales from an ungrouped right-hand side of a two-piece ballot paper which favours above the line party voting. Hetherington effectively defied the party preferential NSW voting system, but his ideas for reform of local government policy were far too radical for the dominant conservative coalition. He failed to gain support for any motion during his first three years on council. His ideas were defeated on party lines rather than merit. Most of his ideas were not unusual and indeed, have been adopted by candidates in one way or another in larger metropolitan areas: tree preservation, popular election of mayor, and an employment "pathways" policy for local Koori aborigines. But Hetherington's success was unique. For the first time in Orange electoral history a candidate was elected from the far right hand side of the ballot paper, "ungrouped".

This thesis tracks that success and places it in a Mayhewian framework of influence and persuasion.

CHAPTER 1

INFLUENCE IN A REGIONAL CITY

*We were the proletarian evolution,
a lot of us. We've been the future
of many snobbish nations,
but now the elite Revolution
that rules unsullied by elections
has no use for us. Our experience
and presence, unlike theirs, are fictive
ideological constructs*

— Les Murray, *Subhuman Redneck Poems*

Orange, in the central west of New South Wales, is a regional city with a population of 34,000 (ABS, 2001 Census data), 30,000 of whom were born in Australia. It offers a cold tablelands climate and a conservative polity. Historically dependent on agriculture to sustain it economically, Orange has become less so during the past 30 years, shifting the focus to industry, mining and the services sector. In 1991, in an attempt to reify the agricultural identity of the city, the NSW Liberal Coalition government transferred the headquarters of the state Department of Agriculture to the city. Orange is one of a handful of major towns and cities in New South Wales not located on a waterway, a situation which has kept the focus of local government on engineering drainage and water supply. The city's area is 286 square kilometres, and while it is designated mainly rural by the local council, 90 per cent of the population live in urban precincts. Population growth is estimated to be 0.6 per cent. Fewer than four per cent claim non-English descent and five per cent speak languages other than English (Orange City Council, Annual Report 1999-2000).

The physical landscape of the central west is unremitting: hot dry summers, cool snow-driven winters. The independent candidate — the primary subject of this study — fitted comfortably into the physical landscape but less well into the political culture, as I will attempt to demonstrate.

The news media is also a central focus. MacCallum (2001) suggests that in the mid 1960s Australian media, 'after decades of conforming to the most wowserish¹ standards in the English speaking world, were finally starting to have a cautious go' (2001: 106). Not so media in regional Australia which I will argue is as rooted in wowserism at the beginning of the 21st century as it was 50 years earlier. MacCallum views the broader thrust of metropolitan and national journalism as beginning a process of change from the mid 1960s, but change did not extend far from the cities to reporting in weekly and daily regional newspapers.

Australia has a three tier structure of government: federal, state and local. The federal electorate of Calare, in which Orange city is located, is represented by an independent member of parliament. The state seat of Orange is represented by the National Party and has been held continuously for 56 years. The city council, the third tier of government, is controlled by the National Party with support from three Labor councillors. One National councillor, Russell Turner, is the sitting state member. A second National councillor, David Shearing, nominated to contest the 2001 federal election, competing against sitting Independent Peter Andren. A third, Labor councillor Glenn Taylor, contested the 2003 NSW state election. The ultra-conservative party, Pauline Hanson's One Nation, has also been represented on council. Conservative representatives are known as *White Hats* while Labor members and sympathisers are known as *Black Hats*. Orange City Council has 14 councillors in all.

National Party control of city politics is supported by the local newspaper, *The Central Western Daily* (CWD) which is owned by Rural Press and published Monday to Saturday. Regular Sunday editions ceased in the late 1990s. It is a tabloid format paper devoted to Orange city. Individual CWD journalists and reporters attempt to provide an objective news view but they are overwhelmed by market forces. Media in Orange claiming "regional" rather than local interest includes two television stations, *Prime* and *WIN*, two radio stations, *ABC* and *2GZ* and a weekly (formerly monthly) news-sheet *The Tablelands Post*. A third radio station is community-based. Broadcasting from commercial radio station 2GZ began in 1935. According to publisher Oswald Ziegler in a 1960

¹ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines wowser as (chiefly Australian) a puritanical enthusiast or fanatic; a killjoy; a spoilsport.

commemorative book commissioned by the council '...it [2GZ] has been closely interwoven with the life of the community, providing news, information and entertainment' (1960: 68). The call sign for the station is an initialism derived from the word "grazier". A further revealing piece of information from Ziegler is a reference to the comparative lifestyle an Orange "dweller" will find between the city and Sydney. 'Everything is available in Orange, except television' (1960: 64). The new medium had been available in Sydney since 1956. Zeigler assured his readers it would not be long in arriving in Orange. Geographical elements play a role in the location of the two television stations. Mt Conobolas, as the site for their signal stations, is the highest point between the Blue Mountains to the east, and Africa to the west.

The first Catholic school opened in Orange in 1850 and it was not until nine years later that a competing Anglican school was established. The first convent followed in 1878, the first brothers school for boys in 1890 and by 1960 there were four Catholic schools in the city. The latest available census data (2001) shows Protestants marginally outnumber Catholics. An analysis of Orange City Council's 1999/2000 annual report reveals it has an overtly economic focus with very little interest in social equity or justice. Social and cultural issues are viewed as "costs: in financial terms; they have no measurable "profit" basis. A high priority is given to issues of law and order in an attempt to place the burden of responsible citizenship onto the electorate and to divert attention from equally important social issues.

This thesis is based on a close analysis of a political campaign for election to local government in September 1999, and its aftermath from mid 1999 to March 2003. In June 1999, Peter Hetherington began his campaign for election to Orange City Council. His decision to stand had its basis in a development consent which had an impact on his real property. He considered the council decision to be problematical and set out to 'get elected so I can stop this type of thing happening' (Hetherington interview, June 1999). A *CWD* newspaper sub-editor was also elected, a point that will become relevant in further chapters. Almost 30 years earlier, another *CWD* reporter, Denis Gregory, was elected while employed by the then owner of the newspaper, The Macquarie Group. Also in 1999 two women were elected. One, Margaret Stevenson, was first elected at the same time as Gregory in 1971. Stevenson and another, Leone Fairly, were the first

women elected to council. Stephenson has represented Orange more or less continuously since 1971.



Figure 1.1 Peter Hetherington

Contrary to the argument that '...local government is seen by most of the community as being of little significance' (Aitkin and Jinks 1980: 222) I agree with an alternative position put by Halligan and Paris (1984) that distinctive characteristics of local authorities are '...often obscured by generalisations about local government as a whole' (1985: 58). But in the 16 years since publication of the Halligan/Paris argument, the negative image of local government has not been dispelled. There is no palpable split regarding the perception of local government, but in the case study of Orange, urban issues within a regional context appear to have an individual flavour.

While this thesis is essentially an analysis of media and communication in the political process, it acknowledges three approaches to the study of politics; legal-institutional focussing on government structure and constitutional existence; behavioural, focussing on the actors and their influence on the process and outcomes; and systems, in which special interest groups are analysed. The normative approach, focussing on the ideas and principles of the political philosophers is less relevant (Leach 1993: 4). Emphasis is placed on the behavioural model.

A defining moment with unintended consequences

Peter Hetherington discussed the idea of standing for local government in early 1999. His first confidant, his wife, remarked that the election was due to be held in September, but she thought he had little chance of success despite the reasonable amount of campaign time available (Shelley Hetherington interview, Dec 1999). He too questioned his capacity to win a position on council given that he had been born outside Orange, (a

criterion, he was told early in his campaign that stood alongside the Australian Constitution as sacred.² He was not a member of any community organisations and despite having two primary school-aged children, a factor which should have propelled him into some social activity, he and his wife were not well-known in the city. At the conclusion of discussions with numerous family members and a number of friends in Sydney, Hetherington announced his intention to seek election three months before polling date. The various pieces of information and advice he received from fellow candidates and the tactics used by the contesting parties will be discussed in a later chapter.³

Hetherington's decision to nominate was based on an empirically developed belief that the existing council was not 'adequately looking after a number of interests of the wider community' (Hetherington interview, December 1999). The decision to nominate created the possibility that an independent, completely removed from party politics, and thus, all financial and political assistance and ideological motivation, could develop and carry through a professional campaign using orthodox political communication tactics. Hetherington was assisted by the researcher — as a participant observer — to develop his campaign strategy using Mayhew's framework. Hetherington's strategy and tactics were adopted directly from Mayhew's *New Public* to test the hypothesis that professional communicators have enormous influence within the public sphere. Further, it allowed consideration of the possibility that such a campaign had the potential to be successful if the candidate stuck with his strategic intent. Hetherington had very little political experience and no clear idea how to develop a policy platform other than to use his professional sales skills "in the street", meeting people at every opportunity, presenting a genuinely honest "package" of intentions. He required professional assistance to understand three elements of campaigning: the political motivation of his competitors; how to gain the greatest advantage from publicity; and an understanding of the importance of a professional communication strategy. His observation of the path taken by his former colleague at *Prime Television*, Peter Andren, into federal politics was

² This is a variation on the "native son" doctrine applied successfully by the Democratic Party in the US and more recently adopted successfully by the Republican Party (See Walton, 2000).

³ It is a normative function of the decision to nominate as a candidate to seek reinforcement from close contacts such as family members.

a motivator.⁴ Hetherington's dissatisfaction with the political process at local government level was also a minor factor.

Hetherington had been employed as a salesman with *Prime* television for eight years, but he was naïve and uneducated about news reporting processes and how to generate publicity. He made an early appeal to *Prime*, for assistance with news coverage of his policies but it was refused by management. Their argument was that it would be seen to be favouring him because he was an employee. Ultimately, station management attempted to undermine his campaign, accusing him of fraud at 5pm on the Friday evening immediately before the poll, more of which will be discussed below.

Hetherington was also uneducated in campaign strategy development, but throughout the campaign he rarely veered from the plan developed by the researcher.



Peter Hetherington

Independent stands for council

Story: JANICE HARRIS
Photo: JUDE KEOGH

PETER Hetherington of Orange announced yesterday he will nominate for the Orange City Council election to be held in September.

Mr Hetherington, 45, a local sales representative who moved to Orange 10 years ago, is married with two daughters aged nine and six.

"I have been considering standing for council now for a number of weeks and have decided to stand as an independent," he said.

Mr Hetherington said he felt he can make a greater contribution to the community by divorcing himself from party politics.

"I am not involved with any particular party and haven't been in the past.

"I feel that the ideolo-

gies of some parties would make it difficult to make true and objective decisions on council."

He said he believed there should be a greater focus on youth, the aged and the Koori community in Orange.

"It will be my duty as an elected representative of all Orange city residents to constantly and consistently review the delivery of council services

to the broader community."

Before making his decision, Mr Hetherington said he had consulted widely with community leaders as well as speaking to a number of people in the city involved in government at various levels.

"What I will be offering is a policy platform which focuses on integrity, honesty, family and the community," he said.

Figure 1.2 Peter Hetherington's first taste of publicity — *The Central Western Daily*

During the three month campaign, Hetherington made rough notes of his actions and occasional diary entries of events. He gave me access to these diaries and notes, usually providing photocopies of the notes immediately after they were written. As the campaign gathered pace I realised I had to analyse how a relative stranger in a city of 34,000 could run for office when powerful elements within the community, namely political institutions and community interest groups were not backing him. Moreover, other more high-profile individuals, appeared to be in a much better electoral position. It also became important to examine the motivation of political groups who invited Hetherington to join their tickets and why other individuals or institutions — such as the television station — made serious attempts to thwart his success. At the close of

⁴ Andren and Hetherington were not colleagues in any sense other than that they shared the same employer. Hetherington, as an advertising salesman, was in a different social category to Andren, the stations' weekly news reader.

the poll, there were 33 nominations for 14 seats. Orange city constitutes a single electorate. A profile of the successful candidates reveals a range of political positions between ultra conservative to left-of-centre unionists.

Peter Hetherington presented himself to the electorate as a truly independent candidate outside the sphere of influence of established political groupings or other independent candidates. It was a position he maintained throughout the campaign, despite powerful persuasive arguments in favour of joining an existing ticket with other candidates. This strategy placed him on the far right of the ballot paper, ungrouped and below the line. Within the framework of the Australian Electoral Act, any candidate who chooses to run individually — without a running partner or the support of a political party — is automatically ungrouped, below the line, at the far right of the ballot paper.⁵ For three weeks before the announcement of the close of nominations on August 11, 1999 candidates formed groups in order to obtain some advantage from the majority of electors who would place a single number above the line rather than compulsorily be required to number at least one to 14 squares below the line. Hetherington agreed with the philosophical argument of federal independent Peter Andren, that any grouping of independents automatically devalued the independent label.

The image shows a ballot paper for the Orange City election. It features 14 groups of candidates, labeled GROUP A through GROUP N. Each group has a 'Ticket' box with a number. GROUP F is enlarged to show three options: 1 NIVEN (Richard), 2 SHEARING (David), and 3 GRANT (Peter). A horizontal line separates the groups above the line from those below. Text above the line reads 'ONLY NUMBER ONE SQUARE ABOVE THE LINE'. Text below the line reads 'ONLY NUMBER ONE SQUARE ABOVE THE LINE'.

Figure 1.3 A copy of the Orange City ballot paper with enlarged section showing electors how to vote for a specific group above the line

The role of the independent political performer provides an additional focus for this work. The election of an independent raises interesting questions. What is the impact

⁵ Changes to the electoral act for the forthcoming local government election in NSW mean a candidate in Orange must have at least seven running partners to secure a position above the line. In an undivided council, a group requires at least half the number to be elected. A group does not need to be a registered party to qualify for a group voting square in 2004.

of an independent on the political and policy process? What is the motivation to become a politician/professional communicator? I emphasise here that the nature of this work lies in a cross-disciplinary attempt to embrace two literatures — political science and media and communication — and note that the former has been subject to a more intense level of theory and analysis than the latter. Political science is more codified than media and communication. For the purpose of this thesis they are therefore considered to be discrete evidential regimes with differing levels of authority. Data quality is strong after the election but empirically less so before.

There are a variety of levels at which media and communication is performed in order to significantly change a social or political structure. Troy (1999) argues that the role of government is to 'facilitate the engagement of citizens in community-based activities thus constructing decision-making processes in such a way that democratic institutions are fostered' (1999: 133). One of the consequences, he suggests, of the current shift in direction in Australian government policy towards increased privatisation, is a redistribution of facilities at an uneven rate. Rather than examining the changes and the variation which they support, it is the intention of the researcher to examine the persuasive influences occurring prior to such change. In support of my argument I will examine specific cases in which the will of a number of community groups within Orange has been overpowered by local government. It is thus the intention to attempt to understand political power in a regional city in terms of its relationship to the wider community.

In recent years long-term policy processes in local government have been displaced by ad-hoc decision-making. Professional communicators — media, public relations and politicians — have played a major role in this displacement process. But professional communicators are not, despite media claims to the contrary, overwhelmingly public relations practitioners and politicians manipulating the policy agenda on behalf of clients. Professional communicators — those capable of enunciating an argument powerful enough to influence and persuade — also include powerbrokers such as Westfield's Frank Lowy and Microsoft's Bill Gates. Influence and persuasion in these cases is at least partly a function of wealth and passive corporate influence over immediate employees, supplicant political parties (from campaign contributors to favourable media coverage) and even in some cases, consumers.

Below line is only way, says Andren

Story: NICK REDMOND

THE current manipulation of the preference system by council candidates is undemocratic, according to Federal independent Member for Calare Peter Andren.

Mr Andren said a system which elected a candidate who received 70 primary votes ahead of another who received more than 300 (which was the case at the last election) was ludicrous.

Voters will be given a choice of how to vote next Saturday.

They can place a number in one of 14 boxes of group candidates above the line relying on where those candidates want the preferences to flow.

To be elected each candidate needs to reach a quota of votes, which is expected to be about 1300, and any votes received above that quota will be passed to candidates of their choosing.

Alternatively voters can number boxes from one to 14 or more

below the line and make their own decisions about which 14 candidates should represent them in council.

In voting under the line again once a candidate reaches the quota they will be elected but the votes above the quota will go to the candidate the voter chooses.

Mr Andren has urged to all voters to ignore the "group ticket game" and vote below the line (see letters page 10).

"People should be aware that is how it works," he said.

"Group tickets should not be part of the scene."

Mr Andren said a number of candidates were claiming independence yet were using group tickets.

He acknowledged that the group ticket system was entrenched but said it was not in the spirit of democracy.

Of Orange's 33 council candidates just two, Peter Hetherington and Mike Fleming, are not part of a group.

Figure 1.4 CWD report on federal independent's view of voting procedures

The capacity to influence

The capacity to influence a federal government broadcasting policy, a state government decision on the location of a shopping centre, or the acquisition of large-scale information technology reflects both vast wealth and corporate power. In these cases it is the role of the professional communicator — the public relations practitioner acting for the client — to persuade the public and thus public opinion that the policy adoption has a positive influence on the social structure. Narrow sectional private interests are therefore also examined against the wider public good and community interest. For example, the state government of NSW began in the early 1980s to accept as accurate the argument that the market rather than the statutory planning system, in which were embodied well-researched plans, was more capable of regulating a variety of planning processes (Stein, in Troy 1999: 150). The devolution of the process into local government meant a reduction in direct intervention by local communities. At a local level it is important to observe how an elected council favours almost any development

application while simultaneously rejecting socio-institutional applications from community groups on the grounds that council must never "give in" to pressure.

Diminished access to community participation through normative channels, combined with a legislative or bureaucratic narrowing of participative processes, (plus other vital factors including declining membership of political parties), has led to a wider community need to consider electing representatives who would temper party coalitions

TUESDAY, AUGUST 17, 1999

Give council poll lots of thought

NOW that the full list of candidates for the Orange City Council election on September 11 has been released and the ballot paper order decided, it is time for all voters in the city to start thinking about who they will vote for.

State and federal elections are different because most of the time it is the party, not the individual, one is voting for.

But council elections are about individuals, people that you know, people you say hello to in the street every day.

With less than four weeks to go before the poll there is sufficient time to judge the merits of each candidate.

Of the present councillors who are seeking re-election, voters must carefully consider what they have contributed to the city in the four years they have been there. Have they acted on behalf of the people? Have they worked hard? Have they attended as many meetings as possible? Have they done what you consider is right for the city and for you?

Of the new candidates try to ascertain whether they will work hard and have knowledge of various aspects of the city. Will they have the time? Will they be independent thinkers? Have they worked in the community?

In the next few weeks all candidates will have the chance to air their views on a number of issues. As they do take a good look at their responses which will help you decide which 14 will be best.

Above the line voting is a lazy way out ... why not work out who you think will be the best 14 to represent your interests and go below the line.

Figure 1.5 CWD editorial promoting below the line voting

or bipartisan support for "unplanned development". The "true" independent, Peter Hetherington, campaigned on a platform of restraint, offering representation of the interests of the majority who are not members of the power elite.

Of considerable interest is the position of elected performers who manage their image substantially well enough to be re-elected despite a general feeling of unease among citizens about their involvement in unethical activities. It is possible for a local politician to present an election image out of synchronisation with the position adopted during a term in office. That person may seek to present an acceptable image at election time. A local politician may attempt to reinforce this image by abstaining from negative decision-making prior to the election in the hope that voters will have short term memories. Community motivation to vote for these Janus-faced individuals is of interest to the researcher. Within this framework lies my primary interest as participant observer in the campaign of the independent.

"The idea that local government is not, or should not be the place for party politics to come to the fore was the argument presented by Peter Hetherington. He wanted to get party politics out of local government, and people saw that as an attractive idea. I think most people view councils as wrongly getting involved in party politics when really they should be there to collect rates and provide services and that's the extent of what they should be about."

— John Fabriess, broadcaster 2GZ

The influence of the professional communicator in the formulation of public opinion and public policy is central to this thesis. In order to examine professional communicators, I consider them to be politicians, journalists, and public relations counsellors. All are mutually reliant to activate and acknowledge each others existence within the public sphere. While Nimmo (1978) asserts that each member of the social structure is effectively a political communicator by virtue of participation as an individual with an opinion, I would argue that few citizens deploy their opinions in the available public spheres. Identification of the social status of the professional communicators in question is an important aspect of this work.

To identify the politician at local government level is to identify a part-time professional practitioner. Local government in Australia is the province of the part-timer in all states except Queensland, where some councils pay all their councillors fulltime salaries. The most important elected official, the Mayor, is generally also a part-time politician although there are some cities in which the Mayor's position has been taken on full time, excluding the major metropolitan capital cities of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane (Ted

Mack, North Sydney 1982; Casey Conway, Liverpool 1983). The difficulty for the part-time politician is the capacity to differentiate acting roles between private citizen and public official when determining communicator boundaries. This raises the rhetorical question of whether an elected local politician can also act as a private citizen during their time in office.

This thesis focuses its attention on specific politicians, media and public relations counsellors, namely the independent Orange City candidate Peter Hetherington, the Orange newspaper, the *CWD*, its journalists Mark Filmer and Nick Redmond and its editor at the time of the local election in 1999, Joanne Crawford. Key individuals with significance to the overall framework include the remainder of the Orange City media, independent federal MP Peter Andren, Orange City Council (OCC) senior managers and the 14 Orange City councillors. Another significant communicator in the frame is the OCC General Manager Alan Dwyer. As an appointed official, Dwyer plays a major role in communicating the policy initiatives of council to various community stakeholders as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Nimmo (1978) suggests it is important to understand politicians as either "representatives" of special interests or "ideologues" interested in broad policy goals and reforms. In a technical sense Hetherington cannot be considered ideological as he did not have a body of doctrine and symbols that would define the ideology of a social movement, institution or non-government organisation (NGO). But his campaign policy platform could be described as ideological in the sense that the candidate attempted to place a number of ideas in the public sphere. His interest was in broad policy goals and reforms. On this basis he could be considered an ideologue.

While The *CWD* should, by its very nature, maintain an ideological position — a body of doctrine (The Media Alliance Code of Ethics, for example) with a cultural plan and the devices to put it together — its existence is maintained by advertising revenue, a substantial portion of which is derived from OCC. This economic imperative tends to displace ideology, a situation that has provided historically bitter divisions among journalist.

I acknowledge the existence of a "structure of relations" rather than a single relation which arises because of the presence of private institutions, but I am more interested in

the historical public institutional structure and its relationship to the actors: those who present themselves on the public stage and the reasons behind their emergence and presentation.

As this thesis concentrates on analysing conservative and independent politics in a regional city, there may be a temptation for the reader to discern political bias on the part of the researcher. It is true that analysing a dominant ideology has the potential to place a critical researcher in oppositional mode. Every effort has been made to avoid this trap.

Stereotyping the independent

For each taxonomy of political communicator, Nimmo identifies divisions between representation and persuasion (1978: 31). Representation of the viewpoint between sources and audiences is the role of party officials and journalists while persuading an audience of the value in changing its opinion is left to the ideologists, public relations counsellors and opinion formers. Mayhew (1997) argues the participants in the professional communication process are distinct and overwhelmingly commercially focussed. They are public relations counsellors, media specialists (not journalists) public opinion pollsters, specialist lobbyists, focus group organisers and demographic researchers (1997: 4). There is no flexibility in this list. Each is a product of the market. For Mayhew, there is no system of checks and balances coupled to the role of the journalist as professional political communicator and ideologue. There is only commercial gain for the individual and the firm. In this sense Mayhew has adopted elements of Jurgen Habermas's arguments for the benefit of his own position, stating that the public is being consistently duped with regard to the establishment of policy, and that it is framed solely through the influence of professionals acting on behalf of the influential; in effect that professional communicators dominate discursive processes within the democratic public sphere (Habermas 1989).

Indeed, journalists themselves have become narrowly focussed as the "cost-cutting" of economic rationalism bites deeply into the newspaper business. Journalists have difficulty in seeking to investigate ideal policy when acceptable policy is close by. They readily accept professional norms of what is news rather than investigating events outside a conventional framework. They focus on the success or failure of a campaign rather than the veracity of the information being presented. But journalists are not

totally to blame. Their narrow focus is partly a function of the contemporary workplace in which specialisation has become the norm. Motor vehicles are now manufactured beyond the capabilities of the home servicer. While it may still be possible for an individual to change the oil, most mechanical work is linked to computer technology requiring the services of an expert. Similarly the plumber, carpenter, and electrician, while operating equipment less technologically complex than the mechanic, work under umbrella legislation which makes their services almost mandatory for the changing of a tap washer or the replacement of a fuse.

Insurance too has played a role in the emergence of the specialist or expert and many middle-class Australian households now employ the services of a "professional" for everything from child-minding to lawn-mowing. Part of the argument is that one's own time is freed up for individual pursuits. Popular identification of specialisation may have economic benefits for the community in that payment for services increases the flow and distribution of money, but it reduces the opportunity for an individual to place a radical idea in the public sphere as it will be measured in terms outside the realm of specialisation. It is difficult for an individual in contemporary society to adopt more than one or two referents or tags which serve to identify a special interest. A musician, for example, cannot also identify as a mechanic. There is no juxtaposition between the two in the mind of the community.

Media reinforces these binary differentials and anything outside the accepted frame is an aberration. Thus an independent, if employed by a media organisation, is perceived by the community to have unencumbered access to media and to understand and use it to advantage. This happened in Hetherington's case: he was stereotyped by his competitors as being a media expert.

Lippmann (1922) argues that stereotyping allows us to maintain order, to represent a consistent picture within our worldview and to remain comfortable in our habits and tastes (1922: 63). But this is a picture which presents the independent candidate with limited alternatives despite the availability of a wider and deeper frame of reference. In other words, while the independent in politics can place any idea on the agenda, constraint is applied from existing self-interested institutions and groups. The independent is constrained by institutional pressures that attempt to influence and persuade public opinion to remove the independent from the public sphere. Because

persuasion is dialectical it is determined by an investigation of truth through discourse. In its purest form, persuasion as dialectic is a foundation argument. In real terms, persuasion is influenced by deadlines, alternative viewpoints which are powerful through their stereotype, and images of those attempting to pursue the dialectic.

Politicians arrive at elected office from all types of social backgrounds. Some have media skills, public speaking or self-presentation skills, and others don't. These skills are integral to the effectiveness of an election campaign. The domination of election campaigns by the media and the capacity for alternative "spin" to be placed on a story by a candidate is partly responsible for the growth of professional communicators acting on behalf of political "clients". The emergence of these professional communicators began in the USA, and can be traced to the 1952 presidential campaign of Dwight Eisenhower.

The Australian model of professional political communication — the triangular relationship between politicians, journalists and public relations consultants — had its origin in the work of Sydney-based public relations consultant Asher Joel (Tymson and Sherman 1990: 13). Party-based commitment to financially retain professional communicators as advisers in the three-way arrangement is less clear in its origins. Media or policy advisers have been retained by parties and politicians since the end of World War 2.

Orange city interest in independent candidates began with the election in 1996 of Peter Andren to the federal seat of Calare which — with a 2000 boundary redistribution — centres on Orange, Cowra and Bathurst. Prior to his election, Andren had been a news reader for 18 years at regional television station *Prime*. The sitting National member retired, creating the circumstances for a by-election in early 1996.⁶ The National Party was unable to field a candidate with either strong personal integrity, or perceptual ability. The previous candidate was involved in the payout of a large sum of money, in suspicious circumstance, from the regional electricity authority. Andren argues that neither the Nationals nor the Labor Party were able to field a candidate any where near his own high profile (Andren interview, May 2000).

⁶ Andren was again successful in general elections in late 1996, 1998 and 2001.

During Hetherington's campaign, Andren frequently met with the candidate for coffee in Orange. Andren spends a day a week in Orange dealing with electorate issues. His electoral office is in Bathurst, 55 kilometres east of Orange. Hetherington believes the meetings with Andren were more productive for Andren than they were for him. He bases this assessment on the idea that the questions and issues raised were done in an environment which stood to benefit Andren. Issues discussed had the potential to secure publicity about the nature of "independence" rather than assist with the identification of issues or image for his own campaign (Hetherington telecon, May 2000).

Despite earlier observations that the elected representative in Australia was rarely an independent (Davies 1958: 40) there is some evidence that an increasing number of independent candidates are contesting and winning elections at all levels of government in Australia and that the electorate is enamoured of them without a deeper understanding of their motivation (Marsh 2001; *The Australian Financial Review* 2001; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 2001; *The Australian* 2001). It has its basis in the argument that the community is unhappy with the two-party preferred system, seeking to disrupt it from the "grassroots" with alternative minor parties and independents. This argument accounts for a lack of understanding of the nature of the two-party preferred system, and a general lack of understanding of the political process and political institutions within the electorate, despite the legal requirement of compulsory voting in Australia. Community interest in politics and the communication of politics appears to be similar in Australia to other western English-speaking countries, notably the UK, the USA, Canada, and New Zealand. Community participation in politics in Orange is perceived by the elected council to be low to moderate, yet council itself is believed by the majority of councillors to be representative (Interviews with councillors, June 2001).

Validation of the independent in contemporary politics is growing because citizens are choosing to vote more frequently for non-party candidates (Andren 2003: 247; Dahlgren 2001: 43; Lipset 1960: 180). This is a volatile situation that represents the potential for more radical change than were citizens contributing regularly to orthodox institutionality and having a "sense" of participation.

In Orange, participation in political affairs is dominated by a conservative coalition of small business and middle-class professionals. Public opinion centres on the economic rather than the social. A significant feature of the sociopolitical structure in Orange can

be linked to the lack of major manufacturing plant and major industry. Orange City Council is one of the largest employees after Electrolux, the NSW Department of Agriculture and TAFE. Orange City Council argues it requires consistently greater economic inputs if it is to grow as a regional centre.

The Australian context

The Australian context is critical to theory development in part because of the peculiar relationship between professional communicators and the public. A flat social structure, perceived or real, allows multiple crossovers between those within the anticipated professional political communication paradigm; journalists, reporters, editors, politicians and public relations practitioners. Within this sphere — what I will term the information generating sphere — relationships are perceived to be at a similar social level even if in reality, in economic terms, there is very little equality. Journalists and reporters on moderate salaries and wages perceive an equality which is socially grounded. Very little equality exists in economic terms between politicians and public relations practitioners and their counterparts, journalists and reporters. In the rarest of circumstances are journalists equivalently compensated. At lower operative levels and backbench levels there may be some comparative relationship but at the level where influence manifests itself this is not the case. Within another sphere — what I will term the information retrieval sphere — the perceived relationship between reporter, politician and practitioner is unknown or at best, if suspected, left to an imaginary notion of quick self-interest rather than long term relationships. Even if the relationships are known, there is generally a belief that some sort of objectivity exists. The emergence and development of a neoparadigm of professional political communication theory rests on the assumption that existing communication, social, political and management theories are incapable of sustaining professional political communication in global or local terms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

CROSSING NARRATIVE BOUNDARIES

*The first step [] is to recognise the dependence of
value judgements on scholarship.
Scholarship, or the knowledge of literature,
constantly expands and increases;
value judgements are produced by skill
based on the knowledge we already have.
The second step is to recognise the dependence
of scholarship on a coordinated view of literature.
A good deal of critical taxonomy lies ahead of us.*

— Northrop Frye, *Literature as Context: Milton's Lycidas*

When Leon Mayhew set out to prove that professional communicators exert enormous influence and persuasion upon the mass public of western culture, he built his argument on the earlier works of Jurgen Habermas and Talcott Parsons (Mayhew 1997: ix). As I have mentioned above, the professional communicators Mayhew refers to are public relations practitioners, political consultants, advertisers and market researchers.

Mayhew attempts to frame the Habermasian notion of public sphere in modernist “new public” terms. He presents his modernist image of the mass public as a hybrid, emerging from Habermas’s generalist public sphere. And I suggest that the public sphere in the regional city under investigation is neither Habermasian in nature, nor the alternative defined best by Nancy Fraser (1993), in which a variety of overlapping public spheres co-exist. Habermas’s public sphere was defined as a meeting place or public forum — a mediating environment — between citizens and the state in which information about relevant issues was discussed openly and objectively.

Mayhew argues that professional communicators now dominate public communication, displacing Habermas’s free public of the enlightenment — in which objective discussion formed public opinion — and setting up in its place a new public which is subject to systematic mass persuasion. But Fraser and others (see Garnham 1993; Goodnight

1992; Schudson 1993; Warner 1993) repudiate, (as does Habermas himself) the notion that such an ideal public sphere ever existed. The importance of the possibility of there having been such a sphere is, however, vital to Mayhew's argument that there has been an enormous transfer of power from the public within such a sphere, to professional communicators whose sole interest is in the manipulation of the opinions of the public within it.

Habermas's shaping of the mass public in a particular form, also offers Mayhew the opportunity to imagine his own fictional new public in which mass opinion is aware of the objectives of client-sponsored professional communicators, and that consequently the new public refuses to be influenced or persuaded.

Mayhew's new public can be viewed as a refeudalised Habermasian public sphere in which the processes of rationalisation of persuasion, developed in advertising and market research, dominate public communication and the political process through the rhetoric of presentation. But there are alternative, more recent views on this, notably that of Pippa Norris (2000) who suggests the unquestioned orthodoxy which frames advertising and marketing in terms of control of the political process, is an inaccurate reflection of the public's perception (Norris 2000: 25). Voters seek information from sources outside those controlled directly by professional communicators — newsmedia — and use the information to make rational choices about their voting. But this is most relevant at national political level, where issues focus on leadership of major parties with millions of dollars to spend on campaigns. For local government politics in rural environments, there is more emphasis on information being obtained from media controlled by professional communicators, and more discourse in public fora such as coffee shops and pubs, (although the quality of discourse is low) as I will discuss below.

Habermas aligns the modernist politics of advertising — in which forms of democratic social order are displayed through contested elections — with 18th century European dramatic spectacle (1989). These spectacles however, he thought of as far removed from authentic public dialogue of that earlier period. He defines and conceptualises the public sphere within a sociological paradigm, thus creating the platform for Mayhew to launch his attack. And Mayhew attributes the origin of scholarly writing on political communication (as public relations) to Habermas in the 1950s and 1960s. (see Calhoun 2000; Garnham 1993; McNair 2000). Prior to Habermas, the literature took a more

generalist view, at once analysing and providing practical advice on lobbying, publicity and advertising (see Bernays 1928; Goldman 1948; Lippmann 1922). But Habermas's work should be viewed in the light of Aristotelian (Lawson-Tancred 1991) influence in the development of rhetoric as a historical precedent for public relations and as the true base on which modern professional political communication — as a science of influence and persuasion — is built.

The theoretical component of this thesis is built upon Mayhew's argument for a new public, so to understand its relevance it is necessary to examine the position from which he constructs it along with the position from which other contemporary theorists construct arguments about the relationship of political communication to public relations, journalism, and public opinion (see Botan 1993; Davis and Curtice 2000; Esser 2000; Hoffman 2000; Joensson and Ornebring 2000; Reinemann and Fan 2001). The modern public relations (PR) which Mayhew discusses emerged in the 1980s as a discipline with little theoretical foundation, relying on empiricism to establish its position (see Blyskal and Blyskal 1985; Grunig 1984; Hart 1987). As a practical communication discipline it continues to have its basis in the empirical work of Grunig (see Kitchen 1997; McElreath 1997; Wilcox et al 2000). Since the late 1990s, however, a broadening of the theoretical base has occurred (see Holtzhausen 1999; Moloney 2000; Page and Hazelton 1999). For the purpose of this thesis, PR is viewed within the political paradigm as political communication (see Aristotelian 1991; McNair 2000; Wild 1972), rather than as a function of corporate management (see Kitchen 1997; McElreath 1997; Wilcox 2000).

Political communication has developed a theoretical paradigm through the adoption of various social theories and their deductivist reinterpretations (see Archibugi, Held and Kohler 1998; Blumler 1987; Lindblom 1997; Lipset 1960), while PR has emerged through empirical or inductive reasoning combined with a social science theoretical frame (see Grunig and Dozier 1992; Moloney 2000; Wilcox 2000). Social science theory plays a critical role in shaping PR, political communication and thus professional political communication (see Habermas 1987; Holtzhausen 1999; Mayhew 1997).

Political communication in Australia is most often examined as a cultural discipline following the US model (see McAllister 1992; Tiffen 2000). In modernist Western democratic terms, it began to have a serious impact in the US with the establishment of the Eisenhower presidential election campaign of 1952 (see Jones 1995; Langer 1998; Plasser 2000; Trent and Freidenberg 2000). Eisenhower adapted quickly to the arrival of television that year rejecting the traditional "whistle stop" train journey in favour of mass message delivery through the new medium. There is a similar starting point in the UK with a later date in Australia. Television was introduced to Australia in 1956. Paradoxically almost 50 years later, a majority of candidates nominating for the local government election in Orange rejected television advertising as a campaign tactic, citing intuitively that it would not assist their campaigns. There is no evidence to link the relatively large financial investment of a television campaign with this reluctance. One candidate cited cost as a deterrent (Candidate survey, May 2000).

Examination of political communication in a cultural context requires a determination of ideologies. For this thesis the prevailing ideology is conservative (see Freedan 1996; Leech 1993; Papadakis and Grant 2001). Assessments of political culture in Australia are most often framed as radical argument (see Gleeson and Low 2000; Melleuish 1998; Sawyer and Zappalà 2001; Smith 1993) with few adherents of a moderate centre position (see Kemp 1978; Tiffen 2000) and even fewer attempting to argue a conservative view (see Hazelhurst 1979; Nethercote 1999). Recognition of levels of accessible and inaccessible discourse within a community assists in determining a framework for the examination of political culture. The US view is generally left of centre (see Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; Cavanaugh 1995; Graber 1988; Jamieson 1992; Kraus 1976; McChesney 1997; Sparrow 1999). The UK position is ambiguous. While there is left of centre argument, (see Archard 1998; Franklin 1994) there is a dominant liberal perspective (see Dalton 1996; de Burgh 2000; Hindess 1989; Kavanagh 1995; McNair 2000; Moloney 2000; Mosco 1996; Rush 1990; Wheeler 1997).

Campaign model literature is less evident in Australia than in the UK (see Franklin 1994; Kavanagh 1995) and the US (see Thurber and Nelson 1995; Trent and Freidenberg 2000). Globalisation has created a demand for international political campaign literature (see Novotny 2000; Plasser 2000; Swanson and Mancini 1996) but that too is UK/US

centric, though Plasser (2000) argues Latin American campaign techniques are slowly entering western democracies.

Campaign literature is generally anecdotal. "Handbooks" of political campaigning apply techniques to high-profile presidential campaigns (see Bowler and Farrell 1992; Devlin 1987; Martel 1983; Nimmo and Sanders 1981; Swanson and Nimmo 1990), giving campaign operatives a chance to extrapolate strategies and tactics to local campaigns (see Burgess et al 2000; Bowler and Farrell 1992; Crouch and Marquand 1995). Campaign literature focuses on ascribing meaning to the identification of elements that position a campaign in specific terms (see Burgess, Haney et al 2000; Walton 2000; Zappalà 1999). In the US, the literature covers issues of presidency, party, and voter behaviour (see Blais, Nevitte et al 2000; Hart 2000; Levasseur and Carlin 2001; Norris 2000). In the UK, interest is less top-heavy and is more closely aligned with the Australian model because it attempts to analyse the campaign from the macro-democratic level rather than the micro level (see Esser, Reinemann and Fan 2001).

According to Page and Hazelton, (1999) communication strategies are enacted to accomplish specific objectives relevant to specific situations and are therefore situational constructs which require the adaptation of messages to audiences in order to produce effective results. Blumler (1995 in Blumler and Gurevitch) identifies receivers (audiences of voters) of political information as being motivated by different expectations of it. Receivers are therefore perceived as playing different roles in the political communication system. Another view is that contemporary election campaigns appear to be indistinguishable in form from product marketing campaigns (see Franklin 1994; Kavanagh 1995; Leiss et al 1997) and if, as Harris (1991) argues, the communication process is both dynamic and functional, situational variables must significantly influence the selection of professional political communication campaign strategies (see Plasser 2000; Studlar and McAllister 1994; Swanson and Mancini 1996).

The literature on politicians as communicators focuses on the US presidential election campaigns. The role of politicians as communicators (see Franklin 1994; Nimmo 1978; Paletz 1987; Seymour-Ure 1974) and the role of PR practitioners as communicators (see Hazelton 1999; Kitchen 1997; Mayhew 1997; Moloney 2000) overlaps with the role of journalists as communicators (see de Burgh 2000; Graber, McQuail and Norris 1998; McNair 2000; O'Neil 1998; Sparrow 1999; Wheeler 1997).

Journalism and media

Australian newspaper journalism has a relatively strong history of academic analysis in the second half of the twentieth century, beginning with Henry Mayer in the 1960s. Mayer's work, *The Press in Australia*, provides limited analysis of lesser papers than metropolitan dailies, preferring to examine the comparative relationship between Australia and the UK. It is unlikely that Mayer intentionally avoided a detailed analysis of local and regional press. A more plausible reason may lie in the fact that suburban and regional newspapers were less diffuse, only then beginning to become something other than 'thin and poorly printed advertising sheets' (1964: 29). Nonetheless, most newspaper journalism scholars following Mayer avoid local and regional newspapers despite their rapid growth in numbers in the past three decades. Rod Kirkpatrick's (2000) detailed analysis of the New South Wales provincial press has filled a large gap in the literature.

The focus for journalism scholars has been on the national and metropolitan media but it was not until the constitutional crisis of 1975 that academic examination of the media and the role of the journalist and reporter really began to take shape in Australia, and another decade before the 75th anniversary of the Australian Journalists' Association union produced a historical understanding of the journalist as white collar worker (see Lloyd 1985). In the same year Keith Windschuttle published the first defining work on the media, including TV and radio (see Windschuttle 1985). Windschuttle followed Patricia Edgar who had examined the relationship between the press and politics (see Edgar 1979; Mayer 1964).

Towards the end of the twentieth century authors began producing works with a strong cultural perspective (see Kingston 1999; MacCallum 1979; Simons 1999) and analysis of the press began to focus on its institutional power (see Simms and Bolger 2000; Tiffen 2000). The press is a powerful institution despite the argument that it reached its zenith in political terms in 1958, with the last untelevised election campaign (Simms and Bolger 2000: 26). If the power of the metropolitan daily and the national newspaper has diminished in comparative terms since the emergence of television, and more recently talk-back radio as political vehicles of immediacy, the role of the local newspaper remains profoundly influential in terms of its capacity to present partisan tokens either during an election campaign, or more generally, on a daily basis (see Dalton, Beck and Huckfeldt 1998; Simms and Bolger 2000, Tiffen 2000). Histories of journalism and

reporting in Australia (Lloyd 1988; Lloyd 1985; Simons 1999) reflect on institutions such as the press gallery and more often favour a structuralist approach.

More generalist media examination in Australia focuses on political issues including ownership, power, legitimacy, institutions, policy and process, (see Mayer 1964; Nightingale 1997; Smith 1989; Souter 1991; Tumber 2000). Kingdon (1995) describes such a portrayal in terms of the "agenda setting" capability residing within the institution of media and its consequent ability to profoundly affect public opinion (1995: 57). Moloney argues that just as public relations is a subsystem of media, media itself is a subsystem of the broader system of politics (2000). If the media covers an issue, then public opinion tends to move in the direction of the issue (Kingdon 1995) leading to the observation that media is not so much able to control public opinion by pushing certain news items (McCoy 1993: 155), but that its power lies within its capacity to present only the information it wants the public to think about (see Graber, McQuail and Norris 1998; Jamieson 1992; McNair 2000). Journalism, being a dynamic process rather than a static phenomenon, allows for what Tuchman refers to as 'routinising the unexpected' (1973: 110). Baerns presents both PR and journalism from a systems theory perspective, suggesting journalism can be considered to be a subsystem of the media system while PR is a subsystem of any other system outside the media system (1987: 91). Moloney (2000) argues that public relations is now itself a subsystem of the media. For Tunstall, public relations is merely a modernist construct of the ancient '...business of arranging facades' (1971: 71) in which news 'events' must be contextualised by journalists so that genuine "unplanned" news rises to the top of the value hierarchy.

Media is integral to the development of contemporary political theory (see Garnham 2000; Gunther and Mughan 2000; Janeway 1999; Papadakis and Grant 2001). It was not always so. It is instructive that the third formal text on Australian politics edited by Mayer and Helen Nelson, published almost three decades ago, included an essay on the parliamentary press gallery under a chapter on parliament and politicians; an essay on press oligopoly titled *Issues*, plus essays on media perspectives and journals and magazines. Two years later mass media had become a chapter topic in its own right (see Lucy 1975).

Media coverage of Australia's involvement in the war in Vietnam and the constitutional crisis in 1975 provided the means for substantially increased examination of media itself as part of the political process. Prior to 1975, the relationship between the mass media and politics was less well-known. Media has since shifted inexorably from being a provider of information about policy and the political process, to one of being an overt part of the process (see Kingdon 1995; Kraus 1975; Mannheim 1998). How audiences process news has been widely analysed (see Barr 2000; Graber 1988 and 1998; Nightingale 1996) but the relative importance of the news process has been given less attention. News, as a construct, is a version of reality shaped by conventions and rules (Graber, McQuail and Norris 1998).

Public Opinion

Emy suggests there is a need for a clear distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere (1974: 341) if there is to be a better understanding of the relationship between public policy and public opinion. Stewart claims the electoral process in liberal democracies establishes mandate government, allowing the framing and creation of policy more complex in nature than the simplicity of its election policies (1999: 11), requiring greater analysis after the fact. Governments rely on one-way communication of information to influence public opinion. Feedback is provided through media which publishes the results of polling. Qualter (1985: 1) argues public opinion is traditionally associated with liberal democracy while Mayhew suggests the electorate is the bearer of public opinion and the source of legitimate governing power (1997: 137). Kemp expands this notion by arguing that there is a separation of opinion in metropolitan and regional areas in Australia due to the density of communications infrastructure in metropolitan areas at the expense of regional areas (1978: 219). More recent work attempts to define the relationship between the public and the policy process (see Davis and Weller 2001; Sawyer and Zappala 2001) in an Australian sense, presenting a narrative assessment of contemporary issues. Much wider and larger interest culminates in publication of works on public policy both in Australia and internationally (see Bridgeman and Davis 1998; Considine 1994; Corbett 1992; Davis, Wanna, Warhurst and Weller 1993; Davis and Weller 2001; Parsons 1995; Stewart 1999).

Modern public opinion is a product of democracy (see Fishkin 1997; Fraser 1993). Of equal interest to public policy is public opinion and while most governments would

appear to be keen to formulate policy without interference from the public sphere, the literature of public opinion is vast (see Bridgman and Davis 1998; Considine 1994; Crespi 1997; Dalton 1996). A strategic difference can be detected in the origins of the works of public opinion which has its genesis in Lippmann's eponymous early twentieth century work. Lippmann (1922) provided a rigid platform onto which could be constructed a body of work with clear definition, despite its elitist perspective (see Fishkin 1997; Lane and Sears 1964; Qualter 1989; Stretton and Orchard 1994). In contrast, public policy literature appears to have no similar foundation. Its modern emergence can be traced to a reaction by the left in the US against conservative foreign policy (see McChesney 1997; Chomsky 1969) and to a shift of focus from development of theories of public administration — examination of the structure of government — to observation of the effects of government (see Davis and Weller 2001; Davis, Wana, Warhurst and Weller 1993; Howlett and Ramesh 1995; Sharp 1999; Smith 1993; Stewart 1999; Stone 1997).

The Public Sphere

In western democracies, the public sphere is viewed from a number of competing political positions and indeed is presented as a variety of alternative spheres, depending upon the worldview of the protagonist. Some view the public sphere as being in crisis (see Baudrillard 1998; Blumler and Gurevitch 1995; McNair 2000; Michie 1997) while others argue it is maintaining stability and developing its own weapons against the onslaught of new media (see Berelsen, Lazarsfeld and McPhee 1954; Mayhew 1997; Stretton and Orchard 1996). A third position argues there are competing spheres offering ideologically-based positions such as feminist, materialist, and post-materialist (see Fraser 1993; Grant and Papadakis 2000). For McNair (2000) it is the media that contributes to the information which is central to an analysis of the public sphere while Stretton and Orchard (1994) argue economic theories of government should be more central than political or social theories. Earlier, Lippmann (1922) had defined the public sphere in terms of public opinion and stereotypes while Packard (1957), continuing the sociological metaphor, focussed on the relationship between the public and advertising to define the public sphere.

Local government

Analysis of local government pivots around service delivery and its adequacy (see Caulfield and Wanna 1995; Davis, Wanna, Warhurst and Weller 1993; Gleeson and Low 2000; Halligan and Paris 1984; Painter 1993; Stretton 1970). There is a tendency to write about state and federal personalities (see Considine and Costar 1992; Costar and Economou 1999; Donovan 2000; Pasquarelli 1998), leaving little space for local government personality analysis. There is an interest in the micro-issues of ethical behaviour and the macro-issues of broader relativities (see Batley and Stoker 1991; Bishop and Preston 2000) but less interest in processes and the comparative capacity of local government to act in professional political communicator terms.

A model of government-community relations which frames public relations involvement in government activity in terms of the ability of the organisation to build strong relations with publics has been explored by Ledingham (2001). While Ledingham's model is not new (see Botan 1993; Moloney 2000; Wilcox 2000), it provides a strong counterpoint to my argument that local government limits acknowledgement of the existence of communities within the public sphere unless those communities have institutional power. Ledingham follows Kruckeberg and Starck's (1998) dictum that PR focuses on the restoration and maintenance of a sense of community, and Wild's (1972) theory that PR is government derived, rather than the alternative view that it is a management function within a corporate environment. Ledingham's research, conducted in a midwest US metropolitan centre not unlike the city of Orange, examines the drift of residents from one neighbourhood to another and identifies public perceptions, attitudes and choice behaviours for local government planning. Its purpose was to attempt to find a link between community and public relations and to test an earlier model, known as the Bruning-Ledingham Relationship Scale of social exchange theory relative to the relationship model. Similarly, Kent and Taylor (2002) attempt to build a theoretical base for PR around the concept of dialogue. They argue it is "ubiquity" of dialogue as a concept in public relations that requires it to be understood and modelled from Grunig's (1984) platform and thus transformed into strategy three ways: building interpersonal relationships, building mediated dialogic relationships, and creating procedures for ethical communication. But this argument

neglects earlier work on the relationship of dialogue to reality (see Bakhtin 1989) and the twin elements of power and profit inherent in neo-pluralism (Smith 1995: 209).

Australian rural political literature

Rawson and Holtzinger (1958) provide one of the first analyses of an electoral campaign in non-metropolitan Australia in their examination of candidates in the southern NSW federal electorate of Eden-Monaro. This was followed some years later by Wild (1972) who takes a political look at a small town, also in southern NSW. Both works present an empirical investigation of how politics works in a rural environment, while Aitkin (1973) and others such as Costar and Woodward (1985) analyse rurally-based political institutions such as the National Party and its earlier manifestation, the Country Party. Rural and regional politics is also covered well but more generally in works devoted to the history of the press especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries. (See for example Kirkpatrick 2000; Lockwood 1980; Share 1995; Twopeny 1973; and Walker 1980 and 1976.)

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

DEFINING THE CRITICAL FRAMEWORK

*Nick had milked more media time
out of this one little fuck-up
in the backwater of nowhere
than a PR firm could have pulled off
with one hundred catered ho-hums
in all the major cities of the globe*

— Ken Kesey, *Sailor Song*

Kavanagh (1983) suggests political culture can be used to explain political phenomenon and in this it is applied to explain the election of an independent to Orange City Council (1983: 58). MacDonald and Ellgren (2000) argue that academic researchers need to treat interviews differently to the journalistic interview, that '...they are anxious not to be confused with others who might explore issues [in management] and who rely heavily on interviews, specifically journalists' (2000: 264).

As part of the methodology of this thesis I completed face-to-face interviews with all nine newswriters who covered the 1999 local government election campaign in Orange city. I interviewed the federal member for Calare, the state member for Orange, several Orange City councillors and a number of private individuals with direct input into the sociopolitical process. MacDonald and Ellgren make the further point that the empirical researcher will begin to identify with the [organisation] being studied, as the hostage ultimately identifies with the captor (2000: 266). They argue that academic researchers, having rarely been in more than the most minor management positions have increased risks of attempting to identify with their subjects.

My interviews were informed by my career as a reporter, journalist, editor and publisher. As a reporter on a weekly suburban newspaper in a historically Labor-centred city I was

provided with a close period of observation of local council politicians one of whom, during his time as Mayor, undertook a regular weekly meeting with me and another reporter from a rival newspaper. The meeting took the form of a lunch paid for by the Mayor. Both reporters were collected from their respective newspapers, given lunch in one of the many high-class restaurants in the city, chauffeured in the mayoral limousine and returned to the office late in the afternoon. In a later appointment, as editor of a suburban weekly in a conservative liberal city, there were numerous occasions when managing directors of locally-based corporations provided lunch invitations. Some years later, as a senior writer with a national business magazine, corporations provided almost unlimited access to managers and senior managers, to boardrooms and to company expense accounts for lunch and overseas travel to observe first hand their operations in Europe, Asia and America. The object of the exchange was always implicit: the possibility of a favourable story. It is very difficult for an individual to avoid favourable identification with an organisation, a policy, or a process when one is given such high level access.

As a participant observer, my thinking about Hetherington's campaign led to an expansion of the idea of the use of professional communication. If as it appeared, a relatively unknown candidate could develop a successful campaign within a couple of months, using orthodox rhetoric (Bitzer 1981: 225) in a conservative electorate, then I began to suspect that constituents were not well educated about, nor cogniscent of, the political communication process. In following closely Hetherington's campaign I had available a great deal of information about how to create and distribute publicity material, how to develop a policy platform, how to administer daily activity and ultimately how to manage a polling day. But it was the relationships that developed between the candidate and the media and the candidate and a handful of the other 33 people who nominated that interested me more. From Hetherington's viewpoint the objective appeared to be relatively simple, but I needed comparative data as to how it appeared from the viewpoint of the media. Not long after polling day I heard news that the editor of the *CWD*, Joanne Crawford, was leaving the newspaper to take up a position in Maitland, her hometown. In February 2000 I arranged an interview with Crawford. I questioned the position of the paper relative to the election and asked specific questions about the independent candidate, Hetherington. I had known

Crawford during 1995 when she was appointed editor. Her tenure of a little over five years, according to some reporters on the paper, was less than agreeable (reporter interviews, May/July 2001). Despite the generally poor grasp of the election or the election process that Crawford appeared to have, she introduced a vital aspect to my research. During the interview, when I asked whether she believed professional communicators had influenced the election she said they had because she and her media colleagues in Orange were all professional communicators. Her reaction to my question sparked my interest in an area that Leon Mayhew had dwelt on when he examined the role of professional communicators. For Mayhew, the demonisation of PR, advertisers and marketers framed his argument, while journalists did not come under attack. (Mayhew 1997). The empirical nature of this thesis did not preclude me from the logic that Crawford had revealed to me: if PR, advertisers, and marketers were capable of influencing sociopolitics through communication, then equally so were journalists, reporters, editors and politicians. The next step was to discover whether Crawford was alone in her assessment of media as professional communicators through an examination of the various relationships that exist between the media and politicians in a regional city.

Boreham, Stokes and Hall (2000) suggest the researcher has difficulty remaining neutral in any social research and thus, when selecting a research problem, automatically must adopt a value position on its social, political or ethical significance (2000: 1).

The role of the individual in liberal democratic politics, following Mill, emphasises the moral obligation of the individual to self, without becoming egoism — self over all others — thus creating a niche for those with moral individualism as an ethos to believe their natural political allegiance to the liberal parties is no longer significant. In other words, to believe that individual equates with independent. Lippmann (1922) argues for participant observer status suggesting the eyewitness brings something to the scene, then takes it away. What is believed to be an account, is really a transfiguration of the occurrence (1922: 54). This thesis is my contribution to the transfiguration of the occurrence of the 1999 local government election in the City of Orange. It is framed by the three month campaign of independent candidate Peter Hetherington. It draws assumptions about the effectiveness at various community levels of an independent, unaligned representative in local government.

Attributable and non-attributable interviews

It is critical to the continuity of this work that the researcher is not seen to favour one or another interview subjects. One councillor offered to discuss my research over dinner. Another provided a generous offer of accommodation in his family home while I was in Orange undertaking research. As a participant observer, there are other factors which must also be explicitly stated in the methodology. During the election campaign I was invited to observe various activities of the independent Peter Hetherington. Close observation of a candidate, entering his home, being accorded certain privileges, poses the same threat of identity (MacDonald and Ellgren 2000).

Newswriters were unconcerned about attribution of their interview material in this thesis. Some councillors and community spokespeople however, had concerns ranging from identification resulting in political revenge, to minor personal concerns with identification. In these cases the interview subjects have not been identified individually. All interviews were open-ended. A valuable part of the interview methodology occurred during interviews with newswriters. Prior to each interview I provided the interviewee with some background — details of my own journalistic career and the nature of my research in terms of its relevance to rural media. There was a reverse empathy in all cases; the interviewees provided more information due to my personal professional experience and understanding of their individual positions within the organisation's hierarchy.

The methodology has not been designed to coincide or converge with particular views of the newswriters or politicians. During the three and a half years after the election, and on completion of my participant observer status of Hetherington's campaign, the candidate invited me to maintain contact with him. Each week he telephoned to provide me with various views and observations of the political scene in Orange and to seek reassurance that he was "on the right track" with various issues of policy and process that he may have been pursuing. This provided me initially with an ethical dilemma. If I reinforced his views on certain issues did I then become directly involved in the process? Additionally, if I had information from media interviews or interviews with other politicians, how did I reconcile confirming or denying his observations with

what I knew to be accuracies or inaccuracies, thus providing him with privileged information?

Part of the process of writing this thesis involves decisions about whether it is actively defending the role of professional communicators or whether, following Mayhew, it is a treatise demonising their presence or thirdly, presenting an argument for a need for greater educative and information dissemination in the election process. By its nature, it must defend the presence of professional communicators in the political process without advocating one alternative or another. Such defence removes the possibility of writing from a Marxist perspective, one which would appear to be less demanding than that of the neo-pragmatist or structuralist. To approach the work from a post-structuralist perspective would require the rejection of all stereotypes within the rural paradigm. The most likely perspective is that of structural historicism.

The viewpoint of the work is considerably different to the position taken by Mayhew and others who suggest professional communication and therefore persuasion can be described as manipulation. For Mayhew the position is simple. Professional communicators control the policy and opinion agenda and manipulate both in order to satisfy political market demand. From the perspective of this work persuasion is a responsive process in which the actors, rather than being reduced to reactivity, demonstrate behaviour which is positive and interpretive, where sources and audiences interlock, frequently exchanging positions. Following Burke (1910), persuasion of any kind is action rather than mechanistic motion. And action is defined as the construction of policy.

The ethics of observer participation status in the political communication process

As a participant observer in Hetherington's political campaign the researcher was frequently in a position to provide advice on policy issues and on theories of persuasion and influence which had the potential to provide him with the capacity to influence public opinion in a broad sense. In offering a private opinion, I was in a similar position to any citizen. Wild (1974) puts an argument for participant observer status in a similar setting. As a participant observer in Bowral in the late 1970s Wild undertook two years' research into status, class and power in a small country town. His status as participant observer lead him to join a number of committees in selected clubs which provided a

detailed insight into the organisational structure of some voluntary associations (1974: 209). The difficulty for Wild, as for anyone embracing a participant observer status, lay in the potential of the participant observer to alter the balance of the environment in which they are participating. There are strong arguments against such status in the natural sciences, particularly anthropology which argues that even the most minute participation in non-western cultures can potentially alter the cultural and social balance of the community under observation. On the other hand, there is an argument for such status as without which there is no potential to investigate and learn from those cultures (Walker 1972; Walker interview, March 2001).

Defining the research framework

Within the regional city of Orange the political culture is conservative. Liberal, socialist, green and feminist ideologies are subsumed within the conservative hierarchy. The relationship between the three ALP councillors and the majority National councillors is an example. Of equal interest are the feminist and liberal perspectives. A green ideology does not exist in OCC as it exists explicitly in some regional councils such as Bega Valley Shire and Wagga Wagga City. An examination of development recommendations in Orange during the first three years of the 1999 - 2003 council, shows Hetherington's unsuccessful attempt to table a policy on tree preservation was one of the greenest moments. One woman councillor professes a feminist ideology while consistently voting with the conservative majority against social policy issues, while several councillors claim liberal views, yet continue to support the conservative viewpoint. There is nothing unusual in this in Australian politics. It occurs at federal level where a convenient relationship between a conservative coalition which has within its ranks ideologues arguing liberal, feminist and green viewpoints. At federal level this alliance is presented to the electorate as being important to the political dynamic despite the palpability of the convenience factor. At local level it can be seen as a relationship of convenience but it is much more harmful, as candidates for council offer specific individual policy platforms to the electorate when seeking election. There is a far more explicit reliance on the redemption of these specific tokens from the individual than there is at either federal or state level where the opinion of the electorate is that party politics will play a major role in the allocation of resources. At local level, when an alliance is formed after the fact, the electorate can, not unreasonably, come to the conclusion that they have been "duped".

In methodological terms, conservatism presents itself as a structural configuration of political concepts similar to other politically ideological concepts (Freedan 1996: 317). Leach (1993) identifies the conservative as one who continually searches for 'the security of habit' reinforcing it as traditional and ultimately proscriptive (1993: 46). Thus we have the generally conservative argument within the traditional family along the lines that "this is how it has always been done so this is the way it will always be done". There is little room for examination of the process and indeed, in the vast majority of cases, there is no need of examination, nor for continual decoding, because the process provides the required results. Within the family unit this application of time-honoured processes allows the handing down of precious information and skills, but when it is transferred to the political sphere, it breaks down as an ideology. Conservative principles tend to exist where continuous development exists. At national level, democratic countries which have evaded or overcome colonialism and social revolution and adopted continuous infrastructure development at the expense of social equity, are most likely to be dominated by conservatism. These include the USA, the UK, and to a lesser extent Canada, New Zealand and Australia (Leach 1993: 47). Continuous development also drives conservatism at a local level, presenting itself less as a cohesive definable structure and more as an economic imperative. It is this indefinability which allows conservatism the luxury of transferring what are normally termed "family values" to the political sphere. Conservatism, however, should not be confused in this context with right of centre. The emergence of ultra-right religious/political organisations with family and religion-based ideologies does not equate with conservatism. In identify a conservative ideology as the dominant political paradigm in the regional city of Orange it becomes necessary to frame it in terms of the structural configuration mentioned above. The most obvious structural configuration — enunciated clearly and publicly by OCC Mayor Richard Niven — is the maintenance of the status quo. Niven has stated publicly that "pressure groups" must never be allowed to over-ride council, a remark which has its basis in the individual desire to maintain the status quo: economic development at the expense of social equity. Freedan suggests this is the core of conservatism over-riding alternatives such as liberty, democracy, and social justice (1996: 329).

Methodologically, all primary research for this thesis has been undertaken within parameters defined by the orthodoxy of conservatism within the city's political culture. Questions about social hierarchy and power have been answered without the

interviewee, in all cases, being able to define why a hierarchy and power structure exists. Neither have those interviewed been able to provide a theoretical framework for their answers. This is to be expected. The professional communicators interviewed operate in an empirical environment. Dissemination and gathering of information relies on a historical imperative.

Outside the framework of conservatism lie a number of alternative ideological public spheres — social justice, feminism and liberalism for example — but there is no established position from which to examine independence. The methodology employed in an examination of the independent in politics must therefore be framed “independently” of extant ideologies, but be developed in the knowledge that the independent can draw from a wider pool, effectively adapting elements of ideologies that suit a contemporary purpose.

The methodology adopted for the three years nine months period of examination is non-discursive and iterative, reflecting a rapport which developed between the independent and the researcher during the researcher’s observation of the independent’s campaign. It is reliant for its legitimacy on regular telephone communication between the researcher and the independent.

It was also necessary to develop certain taxonomies in which to frame minor hypotheses. Levels of participation in community politics became clearer as more actors revealed themselves. For example, Hetherington played a dominant role in all three of the case studies in this work, as did OCC senior officers. There were however, three different reporters involved in all three cases. Actors from within the public sphere emerged as separate entities in all three cases but there was some minor crossover between them in information sharing. Evaluating the interlocking registers between community groups and lobby groups became necessary.

Defining actors by religion, politics, age and occupation played a role in the evaluation of power. A predominantly Catholic council, for example, did not translate into a wide social justice agenda in accordance with the publicly defined principles of the Catholic Church in Australia. Catholicism’s popularity within the political culture appears to have influenced certain candidates to compete at a by-election in 2001 but there is no available evidence to suggest it is linked to party-based power structures. There is some evidence to suggest there was a strong linkage between the Australian Labor Party and the Catholic Church in the recent past when two of the most powerful members of the

political elite dominated the policy agenda. It is not evident at present. No tangible overlap exists between the cultural elite and the power elite. Economic rationalism overpowers the cultural elite at the top of the hierarchy. Cultural pursuits are considered to be a '...major drain on general fund operations' (OCC annual report 2000).

Newsworkers were more difficult to evaluate as typologies were more difficult to apply. Two members of staff of the *CWD* with direct input into the election campaign acknowledge their involvement in Christian churches, but there is no evidence to link them, nor to conclude any political relationship exists between them. There is some evidence that newsworkers at the *CWD* were slightly more conservative in their political views than those working for radio and television stations, particularly John Fabriss at *Radio 2GZ* and Steve Martin at *ABC Radio* who indicated substantial ALP sympathies. Prior to his employment at *ABC Radio* Martin had worked for *Prime Television*. *WIN* Television reporter Genya Cole, *Prime Television* news director Ross Larsen, and news reader John Lloyd-Green behaved as one would expect of conservative supporters, while all reporters, journalists and the editor of the *CWD* presented a conservative face. Local television coverage of politics in Orange contains substantial government news, a large percentage of which is imported from other areas. Political events in Canberra and Sydney, for example, are considered newsworthy. A nightly local news bulletin is followed by a wider national half-hour bulletin. When considering news values within a regional context, journalists and reporters have professional concerns that the citizen is unaware of. The journalistic focus is more on format than content, and the greater the station's available resources, the more active is the journalistic investigation. In investigative terms, the activity of the Orange stations is marginal. The larger stations, *Prime* and *WIN*, rely on two cameras to gather news from their total coverage area.⁷

"Look, it's funny. I'll tell you what happens. You get the high profile candidates who are used to campaigning, putting out a fairly good campaign. They see themselves as being the squeaky wheel. They seem to get a bit of attention. Then you get the new ones who have got some sort of appeal to the media or some sort of personal appeal, that you tend to gravitate towards. So you give them a bit of coverage. Then you get the whole bank of others who jump up and down at the last minute and say 'you haven't given us fair coverage, why don't you'?"

⁷ Most of the material that finds its way into the nightly bulletins on *WIN* and *Prime* is sourced from that morning's *CWD*. According to a source, if the regular delivery paper fails to arrive on time, there is mild panic until it is purchased at a newsagency.

So you say, well, you haven't given us proper press releases, you don't seem to have a platform, you don't seem to know what you're doing. You don't say that but you say it in so many words. So in the end I suppose you don't give everyone a fair hearing. I think if a candidate has a good campaign, in terms of press material, you tend to look at those. If a person doesn't, you tend not to worry about them. You haven't got time to go researching these days. You'd like to but you just can't."

— John Lloyd-Green, news reader *Prime Television*

A typology of local stations reveals *Prime*, *WIN* and *Capital* frame news around four pillars:

1. Public affairs — government process and civic issues.
2. Community service; an image of being helpful, sponsoring sporting and charity events.
3. Crime and disaster; capture news quickly. Take imports from other regions.
4. Public journalism; enterprise reporting and knowledge of communities in coverage area.

Korpius (2000) argues the real goal of public journalism is to improve ideas through citizen dialogue, government, and media, and is shifting community coverage from '...the episodic to the thematic' (Korpius 2000: 340).

Candidate survey and questionnaire

As part of this research, I sent a survey questionnaire to all candidates. To determine comprehension, I pretested the questions on third-year university undergraduate public communication students. Feedback indicated a high level of comprehension although later feedback from two candidates indicated a lower level. A critique of utility of the survey indicated content clarity and structure was within an acceptable frame. The survey was posted to all candidates, with a stamped, self-addressed envelope, accompanied by a covering letter. The covering letter conveyed information that the intention of the survey was to assist in evaluating the political culture of Orange city. Candidates were asked to complete the questionnaire without obligation. They were offered access to the published work. The survey questionnaire was divided into sections. The first was closed questions in a five-point Likert Scale from "agree" to "disagree". The second section was open-ended and included questions about campaign costs and numbers of people involved.

Limitations of the survey

The survey was undertaken as an exercise to determine whether candidates at a local government election had an understanding of the elements of persuasion and influence which underline campaigning but which rarely appear in the public sphere. It was not an attempt to test a theory but an attempt to derive a set of conceptual propositions which were either in agreement or disagreement with Mayhew's argument that professional communicators are influential in the public sphere. It is unknown whether the respondents viewed their own positions as candidates and prospective politicians as professional communicators. What is known is that they agreed overwhelmingly with Mayhew's proposition. I suspect the questionnaire, in most cases, was interpreted from the position of observer rather than participant.

Ten of the 33 candidates returned completed survey questionnaires. While personal and telephone surveys return higher response rates than mailed questionnaires in general population samples, (de Vaus 1991: 107) the return of 33 per cent in this survey is adequate given a number of issues. Two candidates were unable to complete the survey due to party restraints. One candidate failed to return the survey due to life threatening illness immediately after the election (the candidate was elected but met his death some months later). There is evidence that two candidates had left town between the time of the election and issuing of the survey five months later. One survey was returned address unknown. All candidate addresses were obtained from the electoral returning officer. It is unknown why the remaining 15 candidates failed to complete and return the questionnaire. It is possible part one of the survey was perceived to be too long. It asked 33 closed questions, while section two asked 10 open-ended questions.

Of the 10 candidates returning the survey questionnaire, five were unelected. Of these five, four were male and one female. Of the remaining candidates returning the survey four were male and one female. (See appendix for questions and tabulated answers.)

The questions were generally derived directly from Mayhew's *New Public* in an attempt to place his argument in a local context. Each question was formulated from statements made by Mayhew. For example, Question 5 can be found on page 8 of the *New Public* '...public discussion is sufficiently independent of other strong forces — most notably power and wealth — to constitute a guiding integrative force in its own right'. Of the

330 possible answers, 164 agreed with the statements in the questions, 85 strongly agreed, 51 disagreed, 22 did not know and eight strongly disagreed.

There was strong agreement about media power and influence but mild disagreement on the question of influence exerted in the public sphere. Some questions in this category received equal support. Question 16, for example, had four candidates agreeing with the proposition that candidates seek to influence opinion and policy through votes in the name of the public interest, and four disagreeing. There was equal agreement and disagreement that personal influence was the most important element in a campaign, indicating 50 per cent favour the elementary campaign tactics of doorknocking over wider, professional advertising. All respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that leadership is dependent on trust (Q.22) and that prolocutors use persuasion to capture free floating disposable loyalties (Q.21) but this is paradoxical in that a belief in trust in leadership does not equate with the more cynical belief that loyalty can be influenced by persuasion.

Individual responses to open ended questions

Respondents were asked in Section 2 of the survey to provide short answers which elicited interesting information. One respondent will never invest in television advertising while another sees it as imperative. There was some disillusionment with the team approach.

One respondent said:

"I put a lot of energy into supporting and assisting the whole conservative team — assisting people to find suitable running mates, coordinating meetings, advising on promotion strategies and giving general moral support. I did it because they looked to me for support and leadership, asked for help (and because I enjoyed it!) The loyalty and support has not been reciprocated. All members of the so-called team turned out to be egocentric and lacking in loyalty. I am disillusioned about councillors' motivation."

Another offered the advice that:

"It was an interesting exercise but one I would not repeat. Knowing most local councillors well, I was totally disillusioned with the voting public's inability to see the "person" as distinct from the "actor" some candidates became for the period of the campaign. Party politics should have no place in local government and I am a strong believer in one vote one value."

A third appeared equally cynical about party involvement suggesting:

"[I will] run as an independent but have a foot in both parties to both gain and distribute my preferences to. I would not rely on the "word" of too many people and I would not miss an opportunity to speak to the "public" in forums. I would try to educate the voter about their voting habits and how they could change the face of the elected council by thinking about their vote more. I would also make sure I reminded previous successful councillors of their "failings" in the past term. I think the media is great but in a regional centre you need to be "known" to the editors and since the last election I have been more of a public voice in the community which strangely enough has just happened through my work and the like."

Media interviews

Newsworker interviews provided the core for evaluation of the proposition of the thesis. All newsworkers who were involved in the election as reporters, volunteered to be interviewed. Each interview was constructed from a set of questions which related directly to their involvement in the election campaign and what acting role they perceived themselves to have in the election process. Media questions were derived from an initial interview with the editor of the *CIVD*, Joanne Crawford, in which she claimed ownership of the role of professional communicator. I had not anticipated Crawford's reaction to questions about professional communicators. When I asked her if she thought professional communicators play a role in local government elections, she replied they did. But it was not until much later in the interview (conducted by telephone and recorded for transcription in February 2000, prior to her departure from the paper) that it struck me she was referring to her own role and that of her colleagues rather than the role of PR. From Crawford's evaluation all media newsworkers responded similarly: there is a strong belief that they are professional communicators and that they influence the outcome of elections.

Newsworker interviews elicited a number of general responses.

On candidates:

1. *Candidates are more often interested in acquiring the image of power and authority that emanates from local government.*
2. *Candidates are politically naïve, relying on personal attributes to gain election.*
3. *Candidates expect favourable and equal publicity even when they have nothing newsworthy to offer.*

On institutions:

1. *An overall ignorance of the institutional nature of power and authority.*
2. *A lack of understanding or possibly acceptance of the power relationship between the institutions of media and government.*

On power, control and influence:

1. *A naïve belief that media workers had the power to influence what appeared in their respective outlets.*

To substantiate newsworker responses, similar questions about power and control were put to a number of sitting councillors and former councillors. The same questions were asked of the federal member for Calare, the state member for Orange, and the general manager of OCC. While newsworkers saw themselves as actors with specific professionally defined communicator roles, politicians were less likely to see themselves as professional communicators and more likely to see themselves as the main actors.

The results of the survey and interviews form part of the narrative.

CHAPTER 4

THE CAMPAIGN

RUNNING AGAINST THE ODDS

*"I don't honestly know how he did it.
He was ungrouped on the ballot paper
and no one had ever heard of him before.
It's a mystery to me how he got elected"*

— Richard Niven, *Orange City Mayor,*
on the election to council of Peter Hetherington

The two most important issues facing a candidate at an election are the capacity to develop an effective communication campaign and the resources to implement it. According to Kavanagh (1995), election campaigning requires an adaptive mechanism which can be triggered each time a new or favourable communication idea emerges (1995: 8). For Mayhew (1997), political communication is dominated by professionals rationalising persuasive techniques adapted from advertising, marketing and public relations (1997: 4). This argument assumes meaning can be ascribed in terms of a single issue or mandate, as it parallels the notion of candidate as product. The contemporary manifestation of the adaptation lies in microspecialisations as complex as the development of strategies for the counteraction of negative advertising campaigns. Nevertheless some elements of election campaigning have not altered significantly since the beginning of the twentieth century when leaflets and posters were the primary sources of publicity (Kavanagh 1995: 8).

The majority of candidates at the September 1999 Orange election employed these early devices with leaflets and posters being the dominant forms of non mass media publicity. Hetherington, we know with hindsight, conducted a winning campaign; a campaign the electorate found believable enough to support at the ballot box.

In a regional city such as Orange, being born in town is valued highly in the political sphere and the social sphere. To be a "blow in" is to not understand, according to local

myth, the culture or the history that provides the "being". Institutions, whether the churches or political parties, have a vested interest in framing their own position around longevity and community standing. A number of candidates gained advantage from playing the "long-term" card, including the Mayor Richard Niven and the Deputy Mayor Glenn Taylor, while others were able to bank on the inherited prestige of father (Jason Jaeger) or husband (Brenda Davies)⁸. Hetherington had been a resident for fewer than 10 years, a period of time in a country electorate which seemed almost transitory, implying he had no roots and therefore no long-term commitment to the existing institutions. For Hetherington's detractors however, the result of the ballot indicated a level of citizen dissatisfaction with the elites and with the institutions.

Some sitting councillors were also in a position of advantage as indicated by those re-elected. Of the 14 elected to council in 1999, one was returned after an absence of one term (four years) and one was elected with no previous experience as a representative on council, committees or community groups. Unlike the organised parties or groups who drew on a wider number of people to perform support roles, Hetherington drew on a much narrower pool of supporters who comprised family, and a few friends from Sydney whom he was able to gently coerce into acting on his behalf on polling day (Miller, Shearing, Taylor, and Hetherington interviews, June 2000).

If one were to seek a theoretical basis from which to examine Hetherington's campaign it would most likely be in Jameson's notion of the dialectic of the political unconscious and the foregrounding of historical campaign taxonomies. It is thus grounded in the dynamics of interpretation, presupposing comprehension of meaning through layers of previous interpretation (Jameson 1981).

Hetherington arrived at a point in time where he made a decision to nominate based on a desire to attain public office. His decision was neither a reflection of a compelling community support base, nor grounded in any politically motivated challenge to the status quo. Hetherington claims it was a combination of factors including the development consent mentioned above, boredom, an interest in ideas, but more importantly, a conscious attempt to make a civic contribution to a community in which he and his family lived and worked and intended to remain for the longer term

⁸ Inherited prestige has often been the catalyst for election of siblings in Australian politics at all levels of government (Rawson and Holtzinger 1958: 42).

(Hetherington telecon, May 2001). He initially displayed a one-dimensional political strategy: be honest, be truthful and assume your opponents will do the same. Within a week of the campaign opening, it became obvious that his opponents sought to eliminate him from the contest by any means available. Before he began to construct a campaign strategy he was approached confidentially by a number of people in town keen to persuade him to join their ticket. Two groups stand out: a conservative National ticket and a Labor ticket. Hetherington was invited on separate occasions to join both. He was also invited to join another ticket that presented an independent face but in fact had a loose real estate/developer focus. Invitations from the two major parties were made almost immediately upon his candidacy announcement. The competing parties believed their invitations were the only way he would gain a seat in the chamber, but both offered the third unwinnable position on the ticket (Hetherington interview, May 2001).

In retrospect, Hetherington's summation of the invitations was that they were tactics to remove him from the campaign because of a perception that he would draw valuable votes due primarily to his employment at a television station (Hetherington telecon, May 2001). Certainly some of his opponents believed his job at a television station would assist his campaign. They were particularly conscious of this because the federal member for Calare, Peter Andren, as I have mentioned above, was a news reader at the same station for 18 years prior to his decision to nominate for federal parliament. There is evidence Andren's diffuse television image assisted his election campaign.⁹ Hetherington's opponents had no real knowledge of his terms of employment and appeared not to distinguish between a news reader and a salesman in terms of personal image. The argument is that if you work for a television station you will be perceived to have a higher than normal profile and be perceived to be a member of an elite institution. Hetherington had no profile within the wider community and very little knowledge of the processes of mass media news gathering. Secondly, some opponents believed Hetherington was assisted substantially by Andren because of their perceived close association at *Prime* and their emergence politically as independents. Both

⁹ Andren can be considered to be a pundit in terms described by Nimmo and Combs (1992); he had elite status that moved with him horizontally to his new institution of parliament.

perceptions were false. Hetherington and Andren had few conversations and no social contact in the four years Hetherington was at the station prior to Andren's departure (Hetherington interview, May 2001).

In fact Hetherington's relationship with Andren was almost non-existent. The rumour campaign around town however, right from the beginning of Hetherington's nomination, was that Hetherington received substantial advice from Andren and support by way of resource allocation for flyers and newsletter production. Hetherington's relationship with Andren during the three month campaign amounted to four short daylight meetings in coffee shops at which Andren implored Hetherington to continue as an independent rather than to accept any offers of solidarity on group tickets (Andren interview, May 2001). These meetings occurred at the front-end of the three month period when Hetherington was being lobbied by various groups that it would be in his best interest to run on their tickets. Andren's advice and support was forthcoming because he saw a real need for a true independent representing the constituents of Orange at local government level. As a journalist and news reader, Andren believed there was a well-defined power-base within the institution of local government in Orange, requiring an objective presence on council (Andren interview, Feb 2000).

Veracity in reading the community

One important element of a strong campaign is the capacity of the candidate to accurately interpret the needs of the various communities within the electorate. A candidate should be prepared to meet with as many stakeholders and groups as it is physically possible to meet with in the campaign timeframe. Hetherington met with a large number of stakeholder groups with a diverse range of interests. They included local aboriginals, outlying village committees and small businesses. He continued to represent a variety of interests after his election. His observation after three years in council was that very few councillors met with community groups to obtain information. Councillors were more likely to meet with individual stakeholders and those with whom they were directly associated in business. In a number of instances the opportunity for stakeholder groups to put information into the public sphere was

rejected by council.¹⁰ Establishing a claim to speak for the wider public in terms of its general well-being was the approach adopted by Hetherington as his campaign strategy (Mayhew 1997: 230). Standing as an independent with no party or interest group affiliation placed him in a similar position to those groups seeking credibility through the employment of a rhetorical strategy which relies upon 'the imprimatur of research' (Mayhew 1997: 230). The order of magnitude, as Mayhew argues, is relative to the credibility of the research and in the case of the independent, the order of magnitude is relative to his capacity to equate his policy platform directly to citizen well-being.

The Hetherington campaign suffered a similar problem to ultra-right candidate Pauline Hanson's campaign at the 1998 federal election in which parties with historical ideological differences provided mutual support through the distribution of preferences to each other to keep votes from Hanson's One Nation party. A similar situation arose for Hetherington in that parties and individuals made decisions to marginalise him in preference allocations so that he would not receive the required quota to "get across the stripe" to put it in Hetherington's own vernacular. There is no evidence to support an argument that Hetherington used any specific model for his election campaign other than those elements of campaign practice provided by the researcher. Nor is there evidence to suggest he received other professional assistance. Nor did his campaign consciously analyse or adapt elements of wider state and federal campaigns, although it is clear campaigns run by the ALP in Victoria, for example, (see Donovan 2000), present a number of parallel elements. In Hetherington's situation — an individual with no previous political campaign experience — there was little time or motivation for him to study either the theory or the practice of political campaigns. Of the four accepted

¹⁰ Politicians and candidates need to be fully aware of the presence or otherwise of specific media they wish to have or develop a relationship with. As a reporter on a Sydney suburban newspaper in the 1980s this researcher attended a media event at the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation's facilities in Lucas Heights. The federal opposition spokesman on science and technology, Andrew Peacock, along with several other lesser politicians were to attend the briefing. When Peacock arrived, he immediately walked straight up to me in a group of reporters and asked directly if I was from the metropolitan press. When I replied in the negative Peacock abandoned the group, turning away to go into the facility. It occurred to me later that it had been my clothing which had alerted Peacock. I had on a coat and tie; uncustomary attire for a suburban reporter at the time. What this demonstrates is the hierarchy politician's employ when timing is critical. There was no value for Peacock in gaining coverage in the suburban press as it was not his electorate. His interest was in making a negative comment at a higher level about federal Labor government policy on science and technology.

modes of persuasive communication in politics presented by Nimmo and Sanders (1981), the one that best describes the Hetherington campaign is rhetoric.¹¹

While state and federal campaigns rely partly on the ability of candidates to "pick holes" in the platforms of their opponents, there is very little opportunity to achieve this at local level and indeed, the tendency is to compete for one of the available positions on individual merit rather than run a smear campaign against an opponent because there are too many opponents with diverse interests and political platforms. The diversity of issues supports the major parties in their attempts to present "independent" images rather than party allegiances. The campaigns of party representatives are run as if the candidate is independent. Groupings and coalitions are organised immediately after the announcement of the poll.

In larger urban areas it is difficult for the electorate to determine party affiliation due to the reduced chance of meeting a candidate face to face. One might assume that the opposite would be the case in a regional city, the assumption being based on the belief that everyone knows everyone else and therefore also knows the political affiliations of the candidate. This however is not the case as Hetherington discovered during his "doorknocking". In response to his "true independence" presentation he was frequently told by electors that they thought every candidate was independent. Alternatively, citizens saw the election more cynically as a contest between the two major parties, believing that there was no such thing as independence. While state election campaigns are waged over issues of a higher magnitude such as employment, health and education — issues which can be dealt with at that level — a local government campaign is fought on different turf, presenting more than the capacity of a candidate to fix potholes, and remove rubbish more effectively, but less than the ability to fix socially focussed issues that citizens really want fixed such as health, education and employment. Hetherington appeared to have an innate sense of this "community" ground and laid claim to it very early in his campaign. Rather than "badmouth" the existing regime or the existing infrastructure, Hetherington set out to present himself as someone who would bring new ideas to local government whether or not he was capable of controlling their outcomes. In this he was reflecting a number of theoretical

¹¹ Political language, political advertising and political debates are the others (Nimmo and Sanders 1981).

models of independence (see for example Nimmo 1978; Paletz 1987; Stone 1997; Tumber 2000).

An independent, especially one standing for the first time, needs the capacity to persuade and influence through long hours of face to face meetings, telephone calling and letterbox deliveries. Hetherington's campaign tactics were similar to his competitors. The distinction lay in his commitment to truly independent representation. An advantage in a regional city is the non-division into wards; candidates represent interests of the whole city.

While Hetherington campaigned busily around the streets closest to his own home, doorknocking in the near freezing July and August conditions amid occasional snowfall, he was able to take advantage of the wider constituency through publication of a regular campaign newspaper, *The Orange Independent*, which was distributed free at four strategically located newsagencies for the duration of the campaign (see figures 4.1 and 4.2).

As part of his campaign Hetherington undertook to publish the newspaper to give the impression of objectivity, a strategy that provided him with an instant communication success. As Donovan suggests, there is a community belief that everyone can write a speech (2000: 123) which can be extrapolated into the belief that everyone can publish a newspaper because of the availability of technology. While the technology may be widely available however, few candidates, especially independent candidates without the backing of a political party machine, have the required training, graphic skills and journalistic capabilities to produce a competent publication.

Hetherington required journalistic and production assistance to publish the *Independent*. It was a double-sided A4 sheet designed and laid out using PageMaker software on a Macintosh computer. It was printed on a laser printer in monochrome. The average print run was 300. It presented his policies along with issues of voting and independence.

True independent stands for Orange City Council

A candidate with a strategic focus on community and a commitment to true independence has nominated to stand for local government election in September. Orange resident Peter Hetherington, with the support of a broad cross-section of the regional community launched his campaign offering a policy platform which focussed on integrity, honesty, family, and community.

Hetherington chose to announce his decision to run for local council from the steps of the Orange City Hall, saying he had thought for some time about the need for true independent representation on council.

"This has not been a snap decision", he said.

"I have thought a great deal about what a true independent can achieve in government.

"I have spoken at length to federal parliamentarians.

"My conclusion, drawn from my observations of the past four years, is that an inland City such as Orange must focus on the real issues.

"Issues such as how we expand our capabilities to attract greater levels of investment across the broader spectrum, rather than focussing simply on tourism.

"Issues such as how we develop strategies to position Orange as a 'real' focus for central New South Wales.

"The broader view seems to get lost when we have representation which is focussed on political issues rather than understanding the need to include environmental, social, technological and economic strategies in our plans for the future."

Hetherington added that as a true independent, free from party politics and entrenched ideology, he would be proactive in creating a review of council policy and objectives.

"It will be my duty as an elected representative of all Orange City residents to constantly review the performance of council officers and the delivery of council services to the broader community.



Peter Hetherington...
Orange City
council candidate

"In the past it has been argued that a true independent can achieve nothing because of party controls over the power base, but that's all changed.

"Huge growth in the media, in technology, in the way we do business means real independents can monitor government activity and provide true community representation.

Hetherington added that he believed council should not be run as if it is interested only in making a profit.

"Orange City Council is not a private business and it should not be managed as such.

"But overall, it could be managed more appropriately in terms of its profit and loss.

"It is this type of managed that I am interested in improving," he concluded.

Figure 4.1 The independent candidate's newspaper

Late night political deals unmasked

Voters in Orange City Council election have no clue who they are voting for if they vote above the line on the ballot paper.

Political party deals behind closed doors mean voters in Orange City's local government election on September 11 could be voting for someone completely different from who they place on the ballot paper.

Local government has been corrupted by political party politics to the extent that last Sunday night, less than 12 hours before the close of preferences, candidates calling themselves Independents were doing backroom deals with Labour, Liberal and One National parties to make sure they get above the line on the ballot paper.

Grouped as a party above the line, a candidate gets two chances of a seat — first preferences and preferences from backroom deals.

Voters are required by law to place the numbers 1-14 on their ballot paper if they elect to vote below the line because there are 14 seats vacant on council.

If on the other hand they vote above the line, they need only number one box.

But numbering one box for a team of so called independents above the line does not mean that a vote will go specifically to that team.

Most of the thirty three candidates in Orange City have spent the past few weeks making thousands of telephone calls to each other doing sweetheart deals to make sure they get preferences because they know they can't get elected on their own merit.

Preferences work in two ways. If a candidate gets a quota of votes, which is around 1300, then any extras go to the candidate next on his or her ticket.

If a candidate at the bottom of a group fails to get a quota, extras go to the person they have nominated as their next preference.

In 1995 this quota system meant a person running number three on a popular party ticket could get onto council with a meagre 70 first preference votes and get quota from other candidates.

Worse still, candidates who call themselves Independent are actually running as political party groups on the ballot paper without identifying themselves as being party political.

Other groups are running as political parties without identifying themselves at all.

The only independents in this election are grouped at the far right hand side of the ballot paper, **BELOW THE LINE.**

Only two candidates chose to run

as independents and only one has remained a **TRUE INDEPENDENT** for the duration of the campaign— Peter Hetherington.

Hetherington has been campaigning strongly as an Independent which meant he was invited by nearly every political party in Orange City to run as a candidate on a political party ticket.

Throughout the campaign he has chosen to remain Truly Independent.

"Despite being offered all sorts of incentives and inducements to run with various political parties so I could get a seat on council after September 11, I have chosen to remain truly independent," Hetherington said.

"I have no interest in compromising myself the way other independents have by grabbing an offer just so I could get above the line.

I believe in the Orange community and I believe they will treat these party deals the way they should be treated.

"Any community member who understands the need for integrity in their elected local government representatives will vote below the line.

"A vote above the line could go anywhere. We don't know what sort

Figure 4.2 The 'free' Independent publishes hard news on cover-ups and scandals

Hetherington also wrote numerous letters to the editor of the *CWD*. Of the 20 written and delivered, three were published. McNair (2000) argues that unsolicited letters to the editor are the most valid form of fulfilling the requirements of a balanced public sphere (2000: 108). As a candidate, Hetherington, through his letters, was attempting to seek an avenue to present his policies to a particular audience. As McNair points out, readers' letters have functioned historically as a means for the communication of public opinion to politicians (2000: 109) and Hetherington saw no reason for this function not to be reversed. In most cases, the letters written by Hetherington were a last resort. He had been unable to have his policies reported in the news section of the paper. During the two weeks leading to polling day, there were a number of letters published in the *CWD* relating to the election. Letters to the editor are an expression of the public voice and a tangible demonstration of the relationship between the newspaper and the public. Radio has a parallel in its talkback content. Television is less directly connected to public opinion via opinion phone-ins. E-publishing is the closest to it in that it has more immediate response times available to an audience keen to satisfy immediate engagement rather than waiting a day or two to see hard copy in a newspaper or magazine. However, e-democracy sites have only modest penetration beyond professional circles of educators and political activists.

McNair (2000) makes a valid point that letters to the editor are subject to editing and to the probability that letter writers are generally unrepresentative given the modern acceptance of e-mail as the quickest form of response to a news story or feature. Hetherington's inability to have the majority of his letters published in the *CWD* bore a direct relationship to the editor's perception of the candidate. Crawford believed Hetherington was obtaining direct access to news coverage at *Prime* Television and thus made an editorial decision to limit the coverage he received in the *CWD* in news or the letters pages (Crawford interview, Feb 2000). Some long term councillors standing for re-election had more letters published than Hetherington. Crawford's justification for this apparent imbalance, which was editorially well-reasoned, was that these candidates had established credentials and thus wrote about issues of a wider interest to the community.

Voting below the line

John Lomas and Chris Stanger of Orange, write:

WE would like to add our voices to the number of people calling for voters to vote below the line. John scored over 500 votes at the last election but was beaten by candidates with less than 100 votes.

Voters should think that about 10 minutes' thought every four years is not a lot to ask to give when voting for the people who will be responsible for the running of this wonderful city.

We would like to declare that if elected we will oppose any moves to raise councillors' fees. We raise this issue as, during the last Council, councillors voted to double their fees – an increase of \$70,000 per year – but we fail to find this in any of the statements made during the election campaign. We feel that these fees are for out of pocket expenses and not as an attempt to have a full-time wage. We invite comment from other prospective councillors.

Gail Copping, of Orange, writes:

In recent days there has been a lot of articles in the paper regarding HOW TO VOTE. On all my material I have had printed I have asked people to vote BELOW the line as I think this is the fairest way possible.

In Orange the voters know a lot of the candidates who have nominated and this way the voters can choose the 14 people they would like to represent them on council.

The reason I stated on my nomination form that I am an Independent is, although I am running with two well known Country Labor men, I am not and never have been a member of any political

party. I am an independent person of the community, in that I choose to vote or help the candidate I believe will represent us in parliament to the best of their abilities.

In the Federal election I chose to volunteer my time to help Peter Andren with his campaign as he is the best Independent MP for Caire, and I will again help him in the next federal election.

When it was the State election earlier this year, I chose to volunteer to help Glen Taylor as I found him to be the best candidate running in that election, and I will be helping him in 2003 as I believe he will be our next State Member for Orange. I would like all voters to take a few minutes more when making their votes on Saturday, September 11, and choose which way they would like to vote.

Also I would like to take this opportunity to wish each and every candidate all the best on polling day as each has special qualities and talents to offer the people of Orange.

Nigel Buttrick, of Pixighmans Lane, Orange, writes:

As a candidate for this Saturday's Local Government elections in Orange I feel this is a timely reminder of how lucky we are to live in Australia. We only have to look to recent events in East Timor, whose people are willing to risk their lives for the chance to vote.

We in Australia take this for granted. We complain because we have to give up 20 minutes of our weekend to vote. We really are very lucky in this country so, on Saturday, vote in the election and vote correctly so your vote counts! Vote below the line; number your boxes 1 to 14.

Figure 4.3 Citizen participation in the political process – CWD letters to the editor

Candidates spend an inordinate amount of time developing a campaign, yet frequently they are frightened by the reality of implementation. They find it far easier to present themselves in what they consider to be their everyday attitude with the concomitant expectation that voters will see this as a positive image of the person which somehow reflects a similar level of policy. Minimalist communication thus appears to be a normative strategy for conservative rural candidates. There remains a strong belief in the notion that word-of-mouth is more important than advertised policy statements and that electors will osmotically transfer what is in the mind of the candidate to themselves without possibility of misinterpretation or ambiguity. Most candidates believed that what worked in the past would work in the future (Councillor interviews, June 2001).

The maxim "if it ain't broke don't fix it" applied to the majority of candidate campaigns at the 1999 poll. With 14 places available for 33 candidates, there was a need to see the result and to apply all their resources to being elected. As Kavanagh remarks, it is the 'subordination of all goals to that of election victory' which marks off the territory of the political communicator in politics (1995: 21). There is a paradox in this assessment of candidates who present an unadorned image in that it resists Mayhew's insistence on the injection of the professional communicator between the candidate and the public. The complexity of the local government voting system is compounded in Orange City by being comprised of one electorate rather than a series of "wards" or "ridings" as they

are in urban areas or larger, less populated shires. Consequently, a large part of a candidate's time is taken up in providing educative mechanisms to a wider constituency through door-knocks, letterbox drops or public fora. The focus of Hetherington's campaign was to take advantage of the rhetoric of spectacle, and the rhetoric of expertise (education) while other candidates were pursuing campaigns based on the rhetoric of presentation (advertising). As Mayhew (1997) argues, there has always been a rhetoric of presentation in which the display of symbols outweighs discursive argument, however when he attempts to define this argument more specifically, stating that media specialists have produced anti-discursive models which present high levels of information as being dangerous, he fails to acknowledge the presence of the mass media and its capacity to "filter" and "distil" specialist rhetoric of presentation.



Figure 4.4 Advertising the image 'ambience'— candidates present themselves in the *CWD*

Mayhew argues that it is standard practice in advertising or political persuasion to imply positive position but not specify exactly how promised benefits will materialise. This syllogistic technique was evident in the advertising campaigns of most of the political candidates for election in 1999 in Orange City with the exception of the independent candidate, Hetherington (see fig 4.4). The technique is applied best in print media, hence the large number of candidates who invested in advertising space in the *CWD* supplying pictures of themselves with a short caption promising a wide range of benefits to the community. Hetherington had a reasonable level of personal and contributed funding, but took no advertising space in the *CWD*, believing it was more beneficial to remain outside the traditional media. Mayhew seems to be suggesting that members of his "new public" are unable to grasp the superficial nature of this type of persuasion, eager as they are to elect a candidate on the basis of implication and the redemption of a candidate's tokens based on narrow or ill-defined reputational capital. This is the argument put by *CWD* editor Joanne Crawford in her determination that campaign experience is vital to winning the vote (Crawford interview, Feb 2000).

In general terms, Mayhew's argument that the rhetoric of pathos, or the emotions of the audience, can be measured as the dominant form of persuasion in the USA, has credence. It must be viewed though, in its narrower sociological perspective as there is compelling evidence to suggest that outside the mass urban paradigm, especially in the rural hinterland of Australia, the first of Aristotle's principles of persuasion — ethos — still prevails. In order to test this hypothesis the weekly *Independent* newspaper was published during the final six weeks of Hetherington's campaign. It proved effective because of the discursive nature of its "token" redemption: it related arguments and facts that represented the Habermasian "lifeworld" of the whole Orange City community. It did not embrace the Mayhewian notion of the rhetoric of presentation and therefore was not focussed on acting as a presentation of stimuli, designed to stand on its own as an effective persuader.

The media campaign

As part of a planned three-month campaign Hetherington developed a policy platform designed to present specific information to taxpaying citizens and to the wider community through traditional media channels.

Broad media coverage was important to disseminate policy messages to a wide community. He understood the value of television as a medium which could deliver him visually and, that as a physically strong and active person, this would be important to a large percentage of the voting community which was conservative, middle-aged, white and male. He also used radio as a vehicle to present his message. A large percentage of rural constituents listen to the radio either in the kitchen or in the work environment — in factories or on farms. As there is generally more car travelling done by rural constituents, radio is a favoured medium. One of the most interesting aspects of his radio coverage during the election campaign was the ABC decision to create news coverage out of his newspaper publishing venture. He had sent regular news statements to the station but they had failed to interest the news producer because they were too localised: ABC radio transmits to a wide area of central and western NSW, and Orange is only one town within its broadcast. The newsroom however, was interested in the publication of the *Independent* as a news story because no previous candidate had attempted such a tactic. The ABC coverage of the publication as a news story was one of the few things Hetherington had not actively sought. It just happened.

His strategy included a media plan to obtain coverage of his policies in at least one news medium at least once a week. The media plan was tightly focussed on the complex issue of voting preferences within the proportional system. While the issue was complex, Hetherington developed a simple method of presenting information, explaining in non-political terms, the workings of above-the-line/below-the-line groupings on the ballot paper. His adoption of an educative mechanism, or the rhetoric of expertise (Mayhew 1997), demonstrated his objectivity and assisted his pursuit of legitimacy. Through the available news media channels he attempted to provide the electorate with a ten-point policy platform focussing on what he considered to be the most important issues and goals for the city. He presented himself as a truly independent candidate, removed completely from political groupings, a strategy which placed him on the far right of the ballot paper, ungrouped and below the line. The structure of the ballot paper provided space for parties and groups of individuals to represent their interests collectively.

At the close of nominations names of groups and parties were placed into a "hat". A draw then took place to allocate relative positions on the ballot paper. Individual candidates, unaligned and seeking no collective representation, were automatically grouped on the far right-hand side of the ballot paper. A second draw of individual

names determined their respective places in the far right-hand column. There were two candidates ungrouped. A ballot determined their position in the final column. Hetherington drew second place, a position from which no candidate had been elected in a first campaign in Orange or in rural NSW.¹²

There is no opportunity for an independent to be grouped above the line nor to claim the first column which historically attracts a proportion of votes known as the "donkey vote". Within the framework of the Australian Electoral Act (1999), any candidate who chose to run individually — without a running partner or the support of a political party — was automatically ungrouped, below the line, at the far right of the paper.¹³

For three weeks before the announcement of the close of nominations on August 11, candidates formed groups in order to obtain an advantage from constituents who would seek to place a single number above the line rather than the alternative option of compulsorily numbering at least 1-14 below the line.

The notion that most people think rationally about politics and elections has been questioned many times (see for example, Lippmann 1922). The emotive side of individual choice is more likely to emerge the closer to polling day he or she gets. (One voter suggested to the researcher she would look at the names on Saturday morning before making a choice.) On polling day in Orange, when Hetherington was present at a polling booth, electors were keen to take how-to-vote cards and vote for him on impulse because he 'looked honest, looked strong, appeared to be a decent sort of bloke, looked better than them other ratbags' (researcher earwitness to conversations at Glenroi polling station, Sept 1999).

As Kavanagh (1995) notes, most people find politics difficult and complex compared to the simplicity of their household budget or normal daily decision-making process (1995: 13). Schumpeter (1976: 283) and other scholars (see for example, Blumenthal 1992; Bowler and Farrell 1992; Kavanagh 1995; Freidenberg 1997) have found that voters appeared to be more interested in the image of a party than in its policies.

¹² An attempt by this researcher to establish the credentials of the second ungrouped candidate failed. A question on the second candidate's alignment with the National Party put to the Mayor, was denied.

¹³ The electoral rules changed in 2003. Candidates registered as non parties in open electorates needed at least half of the number of places available to become grouped candidates (AEC website, April 2003).

Orange City Council elections - September 11, 1999

Family: With Jordan, three daughters.
How long in Orange? 25 years.
Previous experience on Council: Councillor on Boreas Shire Council.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Continue the responsible management of Council's finances.
2 Foster further community involvement in Council decisions.
3 Remove the footways to traffic in Orange and disperse.



Ian Spurway

Age 42
Occupation: Ambulance officer.
Family: With Alison, 4 1/2 year old son, 11 year old daughter.
How long in Orange? 10 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 To ensure the ambulance service is properly funded.
2 To ensure a high standard of service.
3 To ensure the ambulance service is properly funded.



Warren Mannion

Age 42
Occupation: Ambulance Officer.
Family: Two children.
How long in Orange? 10 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Working towards the removal of heavy vehicles from Summer Street.
2 Continuing to work on the development of the town.
3 Ensuring the ambulance service is properly funded.



Jason Jaeger

Age 22
Occupation: Sales consultant.
Family: With Lisa, two children and another on the way.
How long in Orange? 25 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Getting trucks out of Summer Street.
2 Continuing the growth of Orange in terms of both housing and existing businesses and encouraging new developments.
3 Ensuring the ambulance service is properly funded.



Linda Glover

Age 52
Occupation: Office manager.
Family: With David, two children and three grandchildren.
How long in Orange: Seven years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Sustainable economic growth via tourism and light industry/manufacturing.
2 To achieve a determination on the by-pass issue.
3 Greater lobbying of State/Federal Governments for improved medical facilities, especially for the elderly.



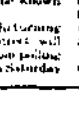
John Murphy

Age 50
Occupation: Small business owner.
Family: With Cathy, three children.
How long in Orange? 24 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Traffic in Orange.
2 Law and order.
3 The general raising of the city.



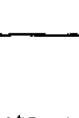
Robyn Eid

Age 43
Occupation: Family business manager.
Family: A husband and two children aged 8 and 12.
How long in Orange: Born in Orange.
Previous experience on Council: Candidate in 1995.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Law and Order.
2 Good management of rates.
3 To provide the people of Orange with quality services.



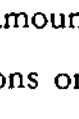
Ron Garvin

Age 42
Occupation: Self employed businessman.
Family: Married with one teenage daughter.
How long in Orange: 10 1/2 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 To not only keep but also attract the people of Orange to the town.
2 Ensure that the Council budget the City to greater development.
3 Develop Orange as a place where you want to live in.



Cr John Miller

Age 38
Occupation: Sub editor.
Family: With Lynn, daughter Philippa.
How long in Orange: 37 years.
Previous experience on Council: Four years.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 To see trucks removed from main street.
2 To see the Mudge-Chance road and developed to two-lane drive.
3 To see the Olympic Hotel and Wade Park re-developed for the benefit of all.



Cr Jim McArdle

Age 66
Occupation: Retired.
Family: Wife, six adult children and 14 grandchildren.
How long in Orange: 32 years.
Previous experience on Council: Elected to Council 1995.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 To serve the ratepayers and community of Orange.
2 To serve on the committees assigned to the last four years.
3 To promote current businesses and all new industries.



Gail Copping

Age 41
Occupation: Salesperson.
Family: Partner and four children aged 10, 11, 8 and 6.
How long in Orange: 27 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Look at the present problems of the town and plan for the future.
2 Be a voice for all ratepayers.
3 Learn the workings of council quickly and efficiently.



Cr Margaret Stevenson OAM

Age 45
Occupation: Real Estate Agent and auctioneer.
Family: Husband, four children, four grandchildren.
How long in Orange: 46 years.
Previous experience on Council: 26 years.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Fight for abolition of user pays water system.
2 Make sure ratepayers get a bargain.
3 Get trucks out of Summer Street.

Nigel Buttriss

Age 23
Occupation: Motor mechanic and small business owner.
Family: None.
How long in Orange: 23 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Bring the voice of youth to council.
2 Try to create a good environment for new and existing business.
3 Stand against user pays water.

Cr Glenn Taylor

Age 48
Occupation: Office of the Minister for Regional Development and Local Government, Harry Woods.
How long in Orange: All my life.
Previous experience on Council: Four years, elected 1995.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Economic Development - jobs, more housing.
2 Quality services - access committee.
3 Law and order, eg cameras in the CBD, as in Cefranella.

Cr Martin Gleeson

Age 49
Occupation: Building Company Director, builder, and farmer.
Family: Wife Judy, three children.
How long in Orange: 31 years.
Previous experience on Council: 12 years on Council, Chairperson and member of numerous committees, Current Chairperson of Finance.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Northern heavy vehicle and what's out the Woodward Street option.
2 Revamping the CBD Carparking Zone with a view to making businesses in the CBD more competitive.
3 A bridge across the Macintyre River to increase tourism in the area.

Nanette Mulcahy

Age 48
Occupation: Lifestyle Education Programmer - Disability.
Family: Husband Des, three children.
How long in Orange: 19 years.
Previous experience on Council: 12 years.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Mudge-Chance Road link.
2 Tourism.
3 Law and order.

Michael Fleming

Age 37
Occupation: Fork lift sales and service.
Family: Three sons and four grandchildren.
How long in Orange: Since January 1977.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 To move all through transport from Summer Street both heavy and light.
2 To attract business to Orange.
3 To increase tourism to the area.

Peter Hetherington

Age 45
Occupation: Sales representative.
Family: Wife, four children.
How long in Orange: 8 1/2 yrs.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Create a town preservation order.
2 Make the indoor aquatic centre happen.
3 Attract broad spectrum of investment to Orange.

Results known Monday

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and those in genuine hardship.
3 To acknowledge the importance of our tourism, businesses, and education and medical industries.

Ian Maxwell

Age 40
Occupation: Building contractor, building foreman, Clerk of Works.
Family: Married to Heather.
How long in Orange: Lifelong resident of Orange.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Further community involvement, particularly in the social welfare and community sector.



Cr Glenn Taylor

Age 48
Occupation: Office of the Minister for Regional Development and Local Government, Harry Woods.
How long in Orange: All my life.
Previous experience on Council: Four years, elected 1995.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Economic Development - jobs, more housing.
2 Quality services - access committee.
3 Law and order, eg cameras in the CBD, as in Cefranella.



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Previous experience on Council: Elected to Council 1995.
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3 To promote current businesses and all new industries.



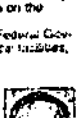
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2 Be a voice for all ratepayers.
3 Learn the workings of council quickly and efficiently.



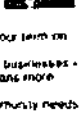
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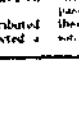
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Family: None.
How long in Orange: 23 years.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Bring the voice of youth to council.
2 Try to create a good environment for new and existing business.
3 Stand against user pays water.



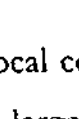
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Family: Wife Judy, three children.
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Previous experience on Council: 12 years on Council, Chairperson and member of numerous committees, Current Chairperson of Finance.
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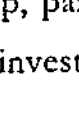
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Previous experience on Council: 12 years.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Mudge-Chance Road link.
2 Tourism.
3 Law and order.



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Family: Three sons and four grandchildren.
How long in Orange: Since January 1977.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
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2 To attract business to Orange.
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Age 45
Occupation: Sales representative.
Family: Wife, four children.
How long in Orange: 8 1/2 yrs.
Previous experience on Council: None.
Your top three priorities for your term on Council:
1 Create a town preservation order.
2 Make the indoor aquatic centre happen.
3 Attract broad spectrum of investment to Orange.



Results known Monday

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number of winning positions will be down enough to call.
Candidates will need to reach a quota of about 1300 primary votes to be elected without preferences.

At the last election just two candidates, Tim Sullivan and John Davies, passed the three quota of 1244 with their primary vote and Martin Gleeson just missed out picking up 1206

primary votes.
The Central Western Daily will be publishing an extensive coverage of the Saturday local council elections in its Monday edition.

Full results of the poll for Orange and Calonne will be published later in the week, when known.

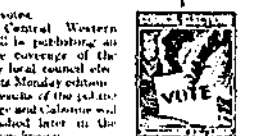


Figure 4.5 Player profiles - the CWD gives voters 'the drum'

In rural environments, especially at local council elections, the level of campaigning is far removed from the high profile, large financial investment of the national poll although a certain amount of funding is injected into the campaigns of local candidates with party affiliations or membership, particularly the National Party and the ALP. There is also considerably smaller investment in the employment or retention of

campaign managers and directors, as my survey of candidates at the September 1999 poll demonstrates. Few chose to seek assistance from a professional communicator in any real sense. Some may have taken advice from friends and acquaintances with varying levels of political knowledge, and some may have been recipients of advice from newswriters, but generally speaking candidates outside the two major parties chose to run their own campaigns.

The main tool employed by candidates in the election was the newspaper advertisement. Most advertisements appeared in the *CWD*. This has been a historical strategy in Orange as it has been for most candidates at most local government elections across NSW during the latter half of the twentieth century. Very little has changed at local government level in terms of the use of advertising as a campaign tool in Australia, despite changes in other western democracies such as the UK and the USA.

The advertising policy devised by radio station 2GZ is interesting and worth highlighting from the viewpoint of one of its broadcasters covering the election.

"This will probably knock you socks off. The policy with 2GZ was to give interviews only to those who paid. And this was also the policy for the federal election. I'm speaking in reference to Peter Andren's election. At the time he made reference to 2GZ, questioning why candidates would only be given airtime if they paid and why he hadn't been approached. He did not come forward with any advertising budget.

I had editorial issues with [the policy] quite frankly. In fact I questioned management about the ethics behind it. They seemed quite comfortable from the point of view that it is a commercial enterprise and it's here to make money."

— John Fabriss, broadcaster 2GZ

Resistance to discursive contests

For Habermas (1996) the notion of public discourse meant communicative action of discursive contests on public policy, functioning specifically to allow citizens the opportunity to understand and formulate opinion without perceived rhetorical influence. Mayhew however, argues that the "new public" has little interest in such contests, valorising them in terms of the rhetoric of persuasion and believing them to be less forums for the redemption of tokens than forums in which political persuasion will overwhelm the underlying issues.

CWD editor Joanne Crawford attempts to place the argument in a local context by suggesting public debate has little relevance in a city such as Orange because the electorate can read objective detail of the issues in the *CWD* rather than being

confronted by politicians with specific "barrows" to push at public meetings (Crawford interview, Feb 2000). It is instructive that the single most important planned public meeting of candidates in Orange City prior to the election, was cancelled 24 hours beforehand because of a perceived lack of interest from the community.

Crawford argues that the daily newspaper is influential in the community and fills the role of discursive contest through its letters pages. In national and metropolitan newspapers the op-ed page, rather than the letters page, is the influential arena, providing a distinct difference between them and rural and suburban newspapers in which there is no op-ed page and usually only a few paragraphs of editorial comment. To achieve influence through the dissemination of information is the goal of the regional daily, leading the electorate to make an informed decision. A simple content analysis of the *CWD* however, for the 14 days prior to the election, revealed an imbalance of news coverage of candidates.

Table 4.1 Number of times candidates names appeared in the *CWD* during two week period before poll (August 28 - September 11)

Gryllis	4*+	Riley	6	Lomas	10*
Stanger	4	Davies	9*	Brouwers	4
Quick	4	Boog S	4	Boog F	4
Kidd	5*	Ralston	4	Niven	24*
Shearing	8*	Grant	5	Spurway	4
Mannion	2	Jaeger	13*	Murphy	3
Eid	4	Garvin	7**	Miller	6*
Glover	3	Turner	11*	Maxwell	2
Taylor	14*	McCardle	7*	Copping	4
Stevenson	12*	Buttris	2	Gleeson	9*
Mulcahey	7**	Fleming	7++	Hetherington	7*

* Elected. ** Mulcahey/Garvin second on respective tickets.

+ First position on ballot paper. ++ Ungrouped. Did not mount campaign.

A candidate's name mentioned in the *CWD* six or more times during the two weeks prior to the poll appears to have assisted election chances, providing some evidence that Crawford's argument about information dissemination influenced the electorate. The exceptions were candidate Gryllis who gained advantage from first position on the

ballot paper and candidate Fleming, who received good coverage in the *CWD* but no other media coverage. Hetherington's suspicion about the role played by Fleming is discussed below.

Hetherington's strategy was to provide information to the electorate without attempting to overtly influence or court their vote. Most voters have psychological attachments to parties which is a central component of their voter decision-making, an attachment which is not dissimilar to support they may provide for a football team. Politicians enjoy harnessing their own image to this attachment psychology and do so by attending football matches and supporting teams they have been advised will provide legitimacy at certain socioeconomic levels and within the wider sporting fraternity.

The most difficult issue for an independent in framing an identifiable image relevant to the electorate, is that of the profile of the major parties which is the key to their dominance (Peter Andren, quoted in *CWD* July 17, 2001).

It's tough being an Independent: Andren

IT'S tough being the only independent in a house of 147.

And Member for Calare Peter Andren - one of only two independents in the Federal House of Representatives - now that Bob Katter has officially resigned from the National Party - is the first to admit it.

"You can go from the depths of despair to exultation in this business, it can be terribly frustrating," he said.

Next month Mr Andren will address a two-day Independent's conference organised by Victorian MP Susan Davies.

He will talk to the 42 other Independent MPs about achieving federal office and the pitfalls and difficulties of Independent political life.

While Mr Andren sometimes found it lonely in Canberra, he said the "support and warmth from the electorate recharges you".

Initially he found it difficult to get a second order for motions and amendments, but has since found an easy way around that by offering them to the majority parties and Independents in the Senate.



MEMBER: Peter Andren.

But it was through raising issues outside Canberra - such as telecommunications - that results were often forthcoming, he said.

"Without that I don't think we would have seen the commitment to the Internet and telephone infrastructure (in regional areas) that we have, quite frankly."

"I think the question of what can an Independent do is a fairly daunting point, it's certainly out there in the wilderness."

Mr Andren said the political climate meant many people were suspicious of the major parties and expected candidates to be "subsumed into that party black hole and

not stand up for the electorate".

But at the same time, the profile of the major parties was the key to their dominance, and the most difficult point to tackle when running as an Independent.

Mr Andren said the preferential voting system used in the House of Representatives meant he, Bob Katter and possibly Tony Windsor would be the only Independent members next term.

"I don't expect to see a whole raft of Independents after the [Federal] election."

Mr Andren had the following advice for budding Independent MPs.

"I should not kid themselves that the Independent title will be enough."

"I need to know all of the communities large and small that make up the electorate."

"I when running an electorate should not allocate preferences, which would indicate a 'phony Independent'."

"I don't lose focus on the electorate."

"I forget about ambitions for high office or a Ministerial portfolio."

INDEPENDENT

• Some of Australia's 43 Independent MPs will meet in Canberra next month.

• The two-day forum comes ahead of a Federal Election in which more Independent MPs are tipped to join Member for Calare Peter Andren.

• Mr Andren will be a keynote speaker at the Independent's Conference.

Figure 4.6 Federal independent obtains strong coverage for specific issues in the *CWD*: a strong, well-groomed confident, masculine image

Ten of the 14 candidates elected in 1999 had served on previous councils, and a content analysis of the number of times a candidates name appeared in the *CWD* in the two weeks prior to the poll, indicates Councillor Niven was ahead by a strong margin with

24 appearances. Niven also plays a strong mayoral role as both an organisational leader and a symbolic leader. Nimmo (1978) suggests that in the USA, at least, the president is both the best known symbolic leader and the best known organisational leader (1978: 44).

In terms of symbolism and organisational leadership, the position of Mayor in a town holds some equivalency, although in Orange the Mayor is not elected by popular vote. Councillor Niven is both an organisational leader (head of an elite business organisation) and a symbolic leader (property owner, local lawyer) in that his position is one to which community members aspire. Niven has the personal financial capacity for frequent European travel, owns unencumbered real estate outside Orange and is a partner in a thriving law firm (Niven interview, June 2001). As a clearly identified community leader, Niven can be either task-oriented in pursuit of the preservation of continued leadership or he can choose to be emotion-oriented. As leader of the council, it is his primary role to be task-oriented and to achieve results which will have a perceived benefit to a majority. As an emotion-oriented leader he can depart from his task orientation at times of necessity to adopt an ideological perspective and attempt to persuade using emotional tactics.

An independent member of the same council has only the capacity to persuade through ideology, as he has no task-orientation through leadership other than to his immediate supporters and those stakeholders in the community who view him as representative of their views rather than a leader or potential leader.

On the advice of this researcher and with the support of Peter Andren, Hetherington ran two separate but parallel campaigns; one on image and one on policy. The foundation of the image campaign was to present himself to the wider community in a variety of different guises, including a presentation of "self" as neither one side of politics nor the other. Lippmann (1922) argues the subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes (1922: 59). The difficulty that arises in attempting to balance a variety of personas or stereotypes within the one candidate revealed itself early on in the campaign. Lippmann's (1922) explanation of "what we know" — as distinct from what we imagine or what we are told and imagine in terms of politics and news — allowed the campaign to exist knowing that process and policy are unavailable to the "man in the street". At local level, there is however, the potential for the "whistlestop" speech, the long debate in the

town hall, and the doorknocking and late night "cuppas" which form the core of local election campaigns.

In terms of a mass audience the need for international, national, or even provincial campaign tactics such as television advertising should be supplementary to a local campaign. The fact that broader sophisticated tactics such as television advertising and individual news-sheet production attract attention and influence the electorate, is a symptom of mass media penetration into all issues, local and non-local and the belief within the electorate that to be effective and believable, the message must be conveyed through these channels rather than the traditional channels such as "soap box" and "gladhanding" on Saturday morning.

An independent needs to convince a variety of groups and individuals to "see" him or her as being the same as them in order to transfer their individual codes and values to him/her and thus, his/her to them so that they will be compelled to vote for him/her because they see him/her to be serving their values and ideals. The difficulty lies in the independent's capacity to draw together enough values and ideals to appeal to and ultimately influence a wide variety of constituents. In effect, the independent must draw from a wide pool by displaying all the characteristics of the party affiliate who has a pool of party faithful to draw upon and needs to draw on very few values and ideals because they automatically equate with the party faithful.

The placement of orthodoxies in terms of advertising image during the campaign was relevant to the capacity of candidates to distinguish and position themselves relative to their chosen constituencies. Generally speaking, conservative candidates present advertising which includes a "mug" shot of themselves — a picture front on — of the face and shoulders, more often in collar and tie if a male or "sensible" dress and jewellery if female which reflects the image of the candidate as defender of the status quo, defender of inalienable property rights and the existing class structure, presenting ownership and control of the economy as above politics and society. The difficulty in modern terms for the independent is similar to the difficulty of the socialist or leftist leaning candidate who needs to be seen to be embracing a market position while defending social equity and social justice.

Niven tops poll

Story: JANICE HARRIS

ORANGE Mayor Dick Niven topped the poll in Saturday's Orange City Council election with almost 3000 votes.

His tally included 1685 above the line votes and 1604 below the line.

Glenn Taylor had the second highest tally with a total of 2120, including 1391 above the line and 729 below.

Next past the post was Margaret Stevenson with a total of 1716 (813 above, 903 below) while Russell Turner, with a total vote of 1414 (816 above 400 below) was fourth elected.

Dave Shearing is virtually guaranteed a place. He scored 1112 votes above the line but as a member saw on the Mayor's ticket, he will benefit from the flow of preference.

Chris Oryllis, who is a former councillor, is almost certain to gain a place with a total of 1233 (690 and 573).

Although allocation of preference doesn't take place until today it's likely James Jaeger will take a seat on council as the youngest sitting member with a total of 824 votes.

Reg Kidd, Brenda Davies and Martin Glendon are also strong contenders to retain their seats recording totals of 940, 748 and 751 respectively.

Independent Peter Hetherington, who was one of only two of the 23 candidates not to stand on a ticket, has scored a comparatively high 664

Taylor has second best result



Topped the poll - Mayor Dick Niven.



Runner-up - Glenn Taylor.



Margaret Stevenson.



Russell Turner.

below the line votes which may make him a contender after distribution of preference.

John Leman, who missed out on being elected last time, is likely to regain his seat on council after scoring 861 (648 and 418).

Sharon Bagg (see front) was next & Continued page 2

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Man dies on roadway

Story: JANICE HARRIS

Photo: JANE BRIDGE

POLICE are investigating the death of a 41-year-old Orange man who was struck by a car in Moulder Street around 1pm last night.

It is believed the man was lying on the roadway 25 metres east of Hill Street where two vehicles swerved to the left to avoid hitting him.

A third vehicle travelling behind struck the man.

Ambulance and Orange Rescue Squad personnel were immediately called to the scene.

The man, whose name has not been released, was taken to Orange Base Hospital but was dead on arrival.

Two ambulances from the Fire Brigade attended the scene to treat the victim.

The 41-year-old female driver was taken to Orange Base Hospital to be treated for shock.

Police cordoned off Moulder Street between Hill and



Fire, ambulance and SES personnel at the accident scene in Moulder Street last night.

Clinton streets until late last night while the police

investigate. Investigation

board carried out investigation

into the accident.

Orange Police have

appealed to anyone who

may have witnessed the

activities of the man before

he walked on to the road.

way to contact police on

6391-6409.

No charges have been

laid and investigations are

continuing.

Lose 10 kgs for Just \$10

262 Braymore St. This is a winning the weight battle. He lost 10 kgs in 75 weeks. He's still going!



CALL US NOW

6332 3272 • Orange 6363 1333

WEATHER Fine and mild, partly cloudy. Top of 16.

TV UP/DOWN Pages 13-18

CLASSIFIEDS P.18

Figure 4.7 'Game day' coverage in the CWD — the biggest story in town

Campaigning within the electoral system

Central to a successful campaign is an understanding of electoral systems and preferential voting and the issue of representation of minority interests.

Farrell (1997) argues that the presumption of minority interest representation resting on stability is fallacious and that in fact an electoral system can cope with maximum

representation of those interests without a threat being imposed on the stability of government (1997: 6). Representation has two primary faces; microcosm and principle agent. The microcosm theory is affiliated with proportional representation and the agent theory with non-proportional systems. According to Farrell, the big drawback of a proportional system, especially for established politicians, is the ease with which it allows minor parties and independents to gain seats (1997: 10). Proportional representation is the mode of delivery in Orange as it is a single area rather than being divided into wards.

One of the major parties in Australia, The Australian Labor Party (ALP), has embraced most aspects of market economics in its policy at federal level and filtered them down to provincial and local levels of the party and government. Within OCC, the ALP member with the highest profile, Councillor Glenn Taylor, came to an arrangement with the majority conservative National Party in order to secure the position of deputy mayor (Taylor, Hetherington interviews, June 2000). Taylor positioned himself within the electorate in economic terms at the 1999 election. Paid advertising presented him as 'proud to be Labor, proud to serve the people of Orange, and proud of his [past] achievements as a councillor' (figure 4.8). Taylor, while a councillor, was selected as ALP state candidate. His policy platform was economic, focussing on employment, tourism and industry (Taylor interview, June 2000).

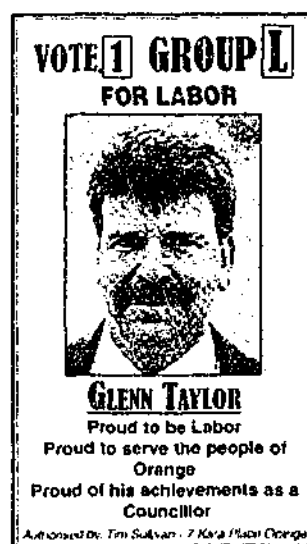


Figure 4.8 A reliance on past achievements sets candidate image

While left of centre parties and independents have difficulties attempting to reposition themselves in economic terms because polling and market research indicates a shift to

the right in the electorate, they must also acknowledge the growing number giving first preference votes to independents who present policy platforms which balance economic, social and environmental measures. In terms of objectivity, it is far easier for an independent to present a platform along objective lines because when elected there is nothing more that can be done than make representation to the ruling parties on behalf of citizens. If an independent councillor raises an issue on behalf of his or her constituency, there is very little chance it will gain majority support or at the very least become a recommendation even if it appears to carry the weight of public opinion (see Swimfit case, chapter 7). Even then there is a good chance it will have been introduced into the council by a ruling faction which is by its very nature working closely with council senior management to gain access to this public opinion before anyone else. If an independent is lucky enough to present an issue on behalf of some section of his constituency, if he is truly independent of all party political objectives, he will still have some direction which may overlap with one or other of the political groupings in council and may receive nominal support. In Hetherington's case, during his first two years on council, he received support for three motions. Support came from the conservative grouping because the issues were perceived to be economic rather than social or environmental. During his first two years he attempted to table more than 40 motions, most of which had a social or environmental angle (Hetherington interview, April 2002). Most of Hetherington's motions concerned issues which would be considered left of centre, thus one would expect he would have received support from the ALP or left members on council — Glen Taylor, Jim McArdle (grouped as ALP ticket) John Lomas, Chris Gryllis, and Margaret Stevenson (campaigning as independents but supporting the ALP). In fact councillors Gryllis and Lomas were the two who provided support to Hetherington on issues which appeared to be social rather than economic.

When all major parties attempt to gain and hold power by claiming to be good economic managers, some part of the electorate must look to alternative candidates to deliver social and political balance. So where has this economic accountability come from and why does the electorate appear to favour it over issues of social and political importance? The dominant coalition of councillors in Orange City has nine conservatives and two Labor. The coalition emerged following the 1999 election although it did not become evident until early 2000. Part of the reason for its late arrival

was due to the misconception that the newly elected independent Peter Hetherington would show conservative leanings.

Hetherington published a how-to-vote-ticket which indicated no preferences for other candidates. Despite his clear intentions, there was a belief that his familial relationship to two prominent members of the community would naturally align him with the right.¹⁴ When he failed to deliver what the conservatives had anticipated, they approached the two members of the ALP to become aligned against what they believed was a potential split, if the ALP members supported the four unaligned councillors (Hetherington, Gryllis, Stevenson and Lomas) and a swinging conservative, Reg Kidd (Hetherington interview, July 2001). While councillors Lomas and Gryllis had historical associations with the ALP factions they tended to indicate independence after 1999 which provided the potential for a seven-all split (Davies interview, June 2001). To avoid what the conservative leaders believed would be a similar divisive chamber to that of the previous Labor-run council, they devised an arrangement whereby the Labor leader was offered the deputy mayor's position in exchange for his and his Labor running mate's vote on all important issues. (Redmond interview, June 2001).

Barriers to entry: a candidate's motivation tested

Early in the three month campaign Hetherington experienced the politics of exclusion in a number of forms. Most vigorous was the attack from both sides of politics — the conservatives and Labor — against him as an individual rather than his proposed ideas and policies. A strategy designed to ensure he did not achieve office was formulated by both sides in concert. This strategy took place not at the time of his announcement of his candidacy but after a few weeks when an evaluation of his campaign's effectiveness proved he was a serious risk.

He was first approached by conservative candidate John Miller running an independent ticket. Over coffee in a Summer Street cafe he was offered the unwinnable third place

¹⁴ Hetherington has a cousin and an uncle of the same name living in Orange. His uncle, a prominent member of numerous committees and organisations has been a resident all his life. Hetherington's cousin is an Anglican church canon. It is this information which lead opinion among conservatives to the conclusion that Hetherington would show conservative leanings when in the chamber. All conservative policy makers believed him to be Protestant when he is in fact Catholic. Also of interest is the relative backgrounds of candidates and their consequent perception of their own relationships with the public, other candidates, and the media. In Orange the diversity of candidate employment, family, leisure pursuits and community involvement appears to be no greater than that of other rural electorates.

on the ticket. Hetherington declined the offer, advising that true independence required him to remain ungrouped. Grouping, he argued correctly, technically and ethically removed him from independence (Hetherington interview, April 2000). A few days later he was approached indirectly to stand on a ALP ticket. This proved a difficult decision for him as his wife, by this time, was in favour of his forming an alliance, arguing that he would not stand much chance unless he was with a strong group. Hetherington's natural leaning was to the ALP and it was a difficult decision to make. Ultimately he declined for the same reason he declined the conservative offer, although he was close to throwing in with the ALP based on what he believed were its policies on local issues. He was not to discover the deals that had been done by the ALP candidate in order to secure the deputy mayoral position until a few months after the election. His decision to run independently provoked a whisper campaign against him in the city (Redmond interview, Feb 2000). Both the Nationals and Labor said he had approached them, desperate to join their tickets. The Nationals said he had run to Labor when they rejected him and Labor said he ran to the Nationals when they rejected him. This was Hetherington's first encounter with local politics and its power. The media did not report any elements of the whisper campaign despite Hetherington's attempts to ignite their interest. (Filmer/Martin interviews, June 2000).

Media barriers were erected almost immediately. Hetherington bore no illusions that he would be given personal assistance from his employer, *Prime Television*. He was however, nonplussed by the blanket block-out he received from the news department and the treatment he suffered by management in what he considers was its attempt to eliminate his chances of election (Hetherington interview, Aug 2000).

Hetherington believed there was an objectivity within the electorate but he incorrectly extrapolated that belief into his place of employment. Had there been an objective policy of election coverage in the newsroom, Hetherington may have been included in the local six o'clock bulletin as his 10 point program was straightforward, with strong regional angles designed to interest television. According to Ross Larsen, the news director at the time of the election, the station had no defined policy for election coverage due to its regional status. Despite his representations that his stories had regional angles, Larsen argues Hetherington's material was rejected because a precedent had been set when former news reader Peter Andren campaigned for the federal seat of Calare in 1996. Larsen says the station did not want to be seen to be supporting Andren

nor to be 'showing bias' and that the policy, while unwritten and unstated in formal terms, also applied to Hetherington. Larsen argues that a regional television station receives daily requests from politicians and press secretaries. His reaction as news director is to ask if there is relevance to the region and usually there is not, so the material is spiked (Larsen interview, June 2000). *Prime* news reader John Lloyd-Green reinforces parts of Larsen's assessment of the situation but contradicts others. Lloyd-Green says there was a partially-defined policy for election coverage but it was '...influenced by the fact we had an employee going for council' (Lloyd-Green interview, June 2000). He says a certain number of favours were done for candidates and at times the stories would jeopardise legitimate news stories.

"Look its funny. I'll tell you what happens. You get high profile candidates who are used to campaigning putting out a fairly good campaign. They are a bit like the squeaky wheel and they seem to get a bit of attention. Then you get the new ones in who have got some sort of appeal to the media or some sort of personal appeal that you tend to gravitate towards. So you give them a bit of coverage. Then you get the whole bank of others who jump up and down at the last minute and say - you haven't given us fair coverage, why don't you? And then you say, well you haven't given proper press releases, you don't seem to have a platform, you don't seem to know what you are doing. You don't say that but you say it in so many words. So in the end you are, I suppose, not giving a cross section, you know, a full gamut affair, fair hearing."

— John Lloyd-Green, news reader *Prime* Television

If the newsroom was less than objective in its reception of Hetherington's campaign material, management was overtly hostile in its attempt to derail the campaign proper. A major part of Hetherington's campaign strategy was occupied with presenting an image to the widest possible audience. Most candidates chose to buy space in the *CWD* to present an image — photographic and textual — relying on the weight of historical evidence that the print medium is taken more seriously by the electorate than the visual medium of television or the auditory medium of radio. Hetherington's grasp of communication was strong enough to intuitively believe television advertising offered more scope to present his message to a wider audience and also to position him away from the other 32 candidates, most of whom took paid space in the *CWD*. He undertook no technical evaluation to reinforce his instinct. Only one other candidate took paid advertising space on television.¹⁵

¹⁵ A year after the election that candidate said he would not entertain the idea again as it proved worthless.

In making a calculated decision to buy space from his own television station, Hetherington developed a tactic which bought with it an element of risk. Rather than using his own finances to fund the television advertising campaign, he chose to contact a small number of his clients — customers who had regularly bought advertising space from him and whom he believed were sympathetic to his campaign — to ask if they would be willing to donate their own paid airtime to him. The response was positive. The donated space was billed to the client as a regular 15 or 30 second “run of station” spot (it is unknown whether these clients claimed this money as a legitimate business expense). Hetherington constructed his message for delivery in both timeframes. Administratively, he logged each spot into the central computer register in *Prime's* Canberra head office, informing the administrative personnel there of his intention and of the exchange between the clients and himself. And to make sure his intentions were legitimate, he asked each client to sign a letter detailing the exchange.

His understanding of the level of manageable risk involved in the exercise prompted him to advise the station general manager (his supervisor) of his intention well before the exchange took place. The general manager gave tacit approval to the idea noting that he believed Hetherington would be unsuccessful in his approach to the clients (Hetherington interview, June 2000). The advertisements aired a month before the campaign as full-fee spots. No discounts were available in contrast to those received by another candidate and his running partner.¹⁶

Primed and ready to run

At 4.15pm on Friday September 10, the evening before election day, Hetherington was visiting a client on the outskirts of the city collecting material for an advertisement to be made the following week. His mind was focussed not on next week's customer advertising, but on his political goal, but he was not due to complete his day's work until 5pm. At 4.30pm, as he was about to return to the office, he received a call on his mobile telephone. He had been using the mobile fairly heavily during the day and the battery was low. Before the battery died he was able to determine that he was needed back at the office. He drove around for some minutes until he found a public telephone

¹⁶ *Prime* schedule of advertising shows a candidate on a National Party ticket received a 6pm Friday evening 30 second news booking on August 25 for \$160.00. A standard fee for such a placement is \$250.00.

from where he confirmed that the general manager wished to see him immediately (Researcher observation, Sept 1999). On his return to the office 15 minutes later at precisely 5pm, he was informed by the station general manager that he was guilty of fraudulent activity relating to his campaign. Hetherington denied the allegation. His immediate reaction was to resign his position. At 5.30pm he left the station, having resisted the temptation to resign, and went home to report the allegations to his wife. Hetherington had four additional people in his home that evening; two adult daughters from a previous marriage who had arrived from Sydney to assist him with polling day, his mother-in-law, and this researcher as a participant observer of the final days of the campaign. The accusations of fraud created havoc. Hetherington's wife had revealed personal doubts about the campaign at numerous times. When it presented the possibility of being the catalyst for him to lose his employment she was understandably concerned.

Hetherington's wife had spent many hours discussing the implications of his decision. His revelation of the fraud allegations coincided with her completion of a polling booth roster which included the names of numerous people she had personally persuaded to assist on polling day. Hetherington had left the station agreeing to speak to the general manager again the following Monday about the allegations. If, as he suspected, the general manager's relationship to National Party candidates had motivated the allegations, there was nothing that could be done until the following week, an approach which took some hours to settle in the Hetherington household that Friday evening. (The allegations came to nothing at the time, but in November 2002 they were used as support for Hetherington's dismissal from the station on "redundancy" grounds.) It is difficult to present an image of the stress the allegations wrought upon the household that evening between six and midnight. It was not a time for subtle reflection, so Hetherington has no diary entry.

Numerous "things" required completion prior to polling day; lists of booth attendants,¹⁷ distribution of how to vote leaflets, and refreshments for booth attendants among them.

¹⁷ There were 13 booths and each required manning between 8.30am and 6pm. Hetherington had acquired a quantity of t-shirts which he distributed to everyone at a booth. The t-shirts were white with the words Hetherington Vote 1 positioned beneath a thick black line. If there was any doubt in an elector's mind about the position of the independent on the ballot paper it disappeared when they saw the t-shirts.

The organisation and distribution of signed forms (figure 4.9) for those doubling as scrutineers was also necessary.¹⁸

APPOINTMENT OF SCRUTINEER
COUNCILLOR/MAYOR
 COUNCIL CRANSTON WARD WARD 1
 Election to be held on 11. 9. 73
 I, the undersigned, do hereby appoint the person named below as a scrutineer for the election to be held on the date above mentioned.
 Name of person appointed: [Signature]
 Name of person appointing: [Signature]
UNDERTAKING OF SCRUTINEER
 I, the undersigned, do hereby undertake to act as a scrutineer for the election to be held on the date above mentioned, and to perform the duties of a scrutineer in accordance with the provisions of the Electoral Act 1963 and the Regulations made thereunder.
 Signature of Scrutineer: [Signature]
 Signature of Precinct Officer: [Signature]
 This form should be completed and returned to the Precinct Officer for transmission to the Returning Officer.
 A person who is appointed as a scrutineer must be present at the polling station on polling day.

Figure 4.9 A copy of a signed scrutineer polling day form

Polling Day

Hetherington's campaign was run in accordance with the rules laid down by the State Electoral Office. He made only two minor infractions. He neglected to publish the name of the printer on his how-to-vote cards, and he placed large coreflute posters closer to polling stations than the allowable distance.

Thirteen polling stations throughout the city and villages opened at 8am on polling day. A roster had been drawn up to provide support for Hetherington between 8am and 7pm at most stations, excluding a central station in Summer Street which represented 400 votes. It remained unmanned as a supporter from Sydney, travelling with four others, did not arrive until midday. Supporters were rostered for a four-hour shift. Hetherington's wife travelled between each station to provide refreshments but this

¹⁸ A highlight of the day was when Hetherington's wife arrived at a Labor-dominated booth with tea and muffins. With muffins to spare she approached a Labor candidate and presented him with one of the last muffins. She was wearing a Hetherington t-shirt. In front of a number of supporters, the Labor candidate graciously accepted the muffin.

became unwieldy as the distances were greater than anticipated. A number of people remained at stations throughout the day as other supporters failed to materialise. As it was Hetherington's first election campaign, he was unfamiliar with attendance patterns at polling stations. There were three time periods at most stations where numbers of voters were largest; early morning, mid morning and lunchtime. The prediction that there would be a late surge proved incorrect. Hetherington himself spent time at each station, his level of energy such that later in the evening, around midnight, when the last of his supporters had departed, he physically collapsed from exhaustion.

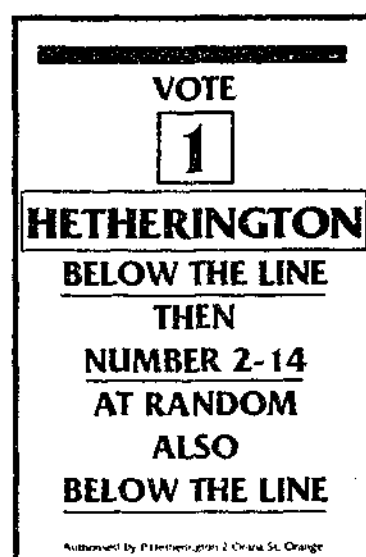


Figure 4.10 Hetherington's B5 sized "how-to-vote" card

While he was energetic and constant in his appearance at polling stations throughout the day, at the close of polls he was exhausted and unable to attend the counting at the central polling station later in the evening. None of the candidates attended the tally room and very few candidate supporters bothered to wait for the conclusion of counting for the evening, a sign that there was very little interest in the actual voting process. Two candidates, including Hetherington, had scrutineers in the tally room during the evening (Researcher observation).

It has been suggested by some candidates in Orange that polling day, the event itself, should be reformed; that candidate material be prohibited and that voters attend, vote and depart without being subjected to the late information campaigns of candidates (McArdle media statement 1999; Sullivan interview, June 2000). For a large number of electors however, casting a vote requires the presence of information on candidates at

the polling station as it is the first and last time during the term of council that they are aware of the candidates and their policies.

Despite the high energy levels displayed by candidates on polling day (many could be seen handing out how-to-vote cards and talking animatedly to electors) the public and indeed, candidate supporters, treat a local government election as an interference in their normal Saturday. It is an inconvenience that irritates them. The prospect of being confronted, especially in a regional city where individual recognition is high, is stressful. People will walk through school garden beds, sneak through fences and cross the street to look for alternative entrances to polling stations to avoid being pressed with voting material (Researcher observations, Glenroi and Bletchington polling stations, September 1999). For example, it is a given that the polling station at Glenroi Public School, in the eastern part of the city, is within a well-defined Labor 'stronghold'. During the day, few National candidates bothered to personally attend the Glenroi station and most voters refused to take the independent's how to vote card (Researcher observation, Glenroi polling station, September 1999).

Hetherington's most valuable tactic on polling day was to present himself personally to as many voters as possible at as many stations as possible. This meant being at the closest station to his home when polls opened, and being at the furthest station at 7pm when polls closed. He estimated the half hour he spent at the most removed station between 6.30pm and 7pm earned at least 20 primary votes. He believes it showed those voters how serious he was about representing them. At the close of polls Hetherington made his way home where 20 of his supporters had gathered. One supporter had donated pizzas and another some beer and these were consumed amid a high level of discussion about whether or not he had succeeded. The general "feeling" fluctuated sporadically between euphoria and depression, led respectively by Hetherington and his wife. This researcher divided his time between observing the gathering and the vote counting. When it became clear, by around 10.30pm, that Hetherington was not going to poll the required primary votes to be elected that evening, a deep level of depression descended upon the remaining members of the group. Despite a tacit acknowledgment (a raising of the eyebrows and a nod of the head) from the returning officer, that Hetherington's primary vote level was higher than normal, receipt of this information did not change the sombre mood of the group.

There was an uninformed opinion among voters that were a quota not obtained at the first count, there was very little chance of preferences making up the balance. This was not the case, even though Hetherington had not issued preferences and expected to receive none from his competitors. An analysis of the council's Voter Tracker data base — a software system for analysing preferences — indicated Hetherington received preferences from quarters other than those who initially promised them to him. While candidates may have provided voters with their preferences, it is clear from the Voter Tracker records that voters rejected these preferences in favour of their own, placing Hetherington in a much higher position than his competitors directed them to (OCC Voter Tracker).

Hetherington went to bed that evening around 2am, distraught and in tears, believing he had lost and that he had put his family, friends and supporters through three months of stress for no result. He was experiencing rejection, despite assurances that his primary vote had been substantial enough for him to have a good chance, depending on the distribution of preferences. In fact his emotional state reinforced his political naiveté, and revealed how little a candidate knows of political communication and how vulnerable they are to Mayhew's dictum.

The issue of preferences was one with which Hetherington had difficulty in terms of his true independence. He believed it was essential for him to gain the required number of primary votes if he was to represent his constituents in a truly independent fashion. His how to vote card indicated he gave no preferences. He asked voters to vote for him then vote 2-14 randomly below the line. It appears a number took his advice as his preferences assisted no other candidate in gaining quota (OCC Voter Tracker 1999).

Following distribution of first preferences, Hetherington received 670 votes against a quota of 1246. Five candidates were elected with a primary quota — Gryllis (1258), Niven (3103), Turner (1460), Taylor (2167) and Stevenson (1760). Hetherington's primary vote of 670 was similar to a number of other candidates, all of whom were elected — Lomas (871), Davies (785), Kidd (959), Jaeger (846), Miller (545) and Gleeson (764). One candidate (Boog 610) received a relatively high number of primary votes but failed to be elected on preferences. Two candidates — Shearing (National 210), and McArdle (Labor 107) — were elected from second position on their tickets.

After distribution of second preferences, Shearing was elected from the National ticket of Niven. Hetherington received 8 of Niven's second preferences, 13 from Taylor (ALP), 10 Stevenson (Ind), 1 Turner (Nat), none Gryllis, 2 Shearing, (Nat) 5 Mulcahey, 1 Garvin, 2 Ralston, 3 Mannion, 4 Brouwers, 8 Glover, 108 Fleming, 4 Murphy, 10 Riley, 8 Quick, 13 Boog J, 7 Maxwell, 27 Copping, 16 Stanger. After Kidd's preferences were distributed, Hetherington remained on 914 but Lomas was elected. Hetherington received 6 preferences from Lomas, 23 Spurway, 37 Buttris. McArdle was then elected. Four preferences came from McArdle then 23 from Grant, when Jaeger was elected. Two then came from Jaeger, 647 Eid, and Hetherington was then elected as the twelfth councillor. While Hetherington had nominated no preferences, asking his supporters to vote randomly below the line, his preferences elected a One Nation supporter, Martin Gleeson and the last, National Party candidate and *CWD* sub-editor, John Miller. There were 23,179 electors registered to vote of which 18,687 cast formally. The quota of votes required to gain office was formulaic. The number of formal votes was divided by the number of seats (14) plus one and the quotient obtained added to by one, resulting in a quota of 1246.

It is worth revealing Hetherington's primary vote of 670 in relation to those who attempted to persuade him to join group tickets. Miller (National) received 545 primary votes and his campaign colleague, Glover received 116. Miller was the last candidate elected and then from a division with the other lowest remaining candidate, Boog. The difference in votes for the two lowest remaining candidates was 110 votes. As mentioned, on the Labor ticket Hetherington was asked to join the leading candidate Glenn Taylor. Taylor was elected on a primary vote of 2167 votes while his running mate McArdle received 107 primary votes. An interpretation of some of the other aspects of the results indicates Gryllis (conservative independent 1258) may have received a number of "donkey" votes while Taylor advertised himself as the answer to the retired former ALP Mayor Tim Sullivan, a popular councillor who received more than 5000 primary votes during his last terms (Sullivan interview, June 2000).

It is reasonable to assume conservative Richard Niven received a higher than average primary vote due to his position as Mayor. A higher than average profile usually guarantees a higher vote. Ironically, the other independent ungrouped on the right-hand side of the paper, Mike Fleming, received 134 primary votes.

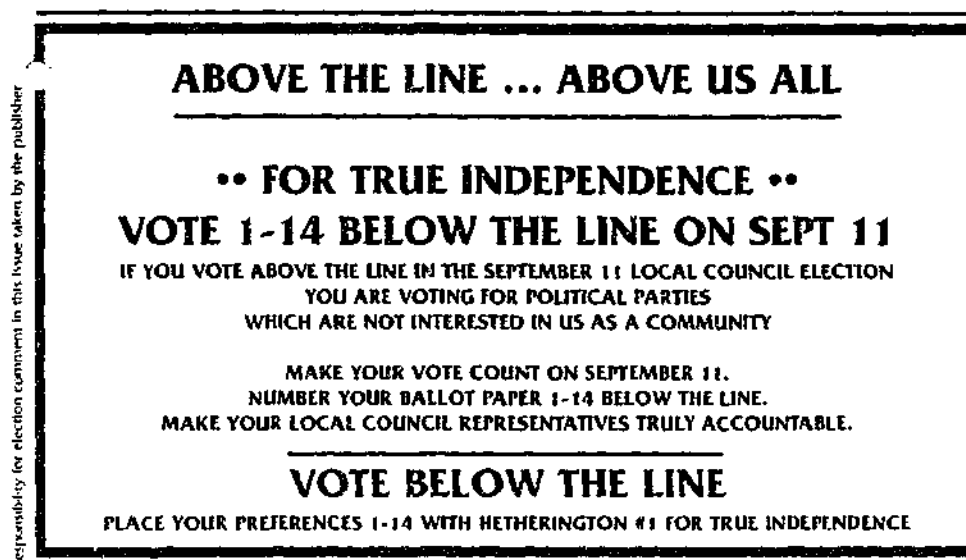


Figure 4.11 Self-promotion through advertising: Hetherington's independent newspaper included a mock advertisement for below-the-line voting. The advertisement was designed to begin the process of educating voters to the possibility of using their vote constructively

There is no *prima facie* evidence to prove Fleming was introduced to the election as a party "stooge" to deflect the vote from Hetherington's high profile campaign. Nonetheless he nominated on the last acceptable day and proceeded to vanish from the electorate, neither campaigning nor presenting an image of the candidate for examination by the electorate. His primary vote reveals nothing of his alleged party affiliations.

Late on Monday evening September 13, Hetherington was named the 11 elected councillor. He was almost unable to contain his glee. His success represented three months of campaigning and the capacity to unerringly remain focussed on his strategy, making only occasional alterations as the campaign progressed. His prediction however, that he would be representing the broad interests of the city were, as I will demonstrate, difficult to implement in practice.

The three case studies that form chapter 7 reflect Hetherington's direct involvement in community issues. The process and outcomes represent his approach to his sociopolitical involvement in Orange.

A new team

Meet
your
new
council



Dick Niven



Glenn Taylor

10 former councillors returned

Story: NICK REDMOND

THE final election result was announced just after 9pm last night with 10 councillors from the last term returned along with four new councillors.

Sharon Boag (Pratt) was the only standing councillor not returned.

She missed out in the final count when John Miller was elected as the 14th and final councillor, 110 votes ahead.

The counting began with low polling candidates dropping out, passing their preferences to those remaining.

After the 26th preference count there were just eight candidates left for five positions.

Peter Grant was the next to drop out and his preferences flowed to Jason Jaeger who was elected as the youngest member of this council at 29.

It might not be the Kennedys but it's a continuation of Jaeger tradition in local government with Jason following his retiring father Trevor onto Orange City Council.

Cr Jaeger jnr is joined as a rookie by Peter Hetherington.

Peter Hetherington was highly critical of the preference system and deals down for above line tickets but that is what ultimately got him home.

He began with 664 primary votes and reached the required quota of 1246 largely due to the fact that he was listed as the number 14 choice of many candidates.

The other two new councillors are John Lomas and Chris Gryllis and both are returning to council after missing just one term.

The mayor for the next four years will be elected at a meeting next week.

Cr Dick Niven is in the box seat to be returned as mayor and can probably count seven heads in support.

If Glenn Taylor throws his hat in the ring he could probably count six supporters.

Where newcomer Peter Hetherington stands on the mayoral election is not known and it also possible that someone other than Cr Niven or Cr Taylor could seek election.

More than 13 per cent of the 23,179 people on the electoral role didn't vote and 1436 people voted informally.

Order of election

THE new councillors were elected in this order:

Dick Niven, Glenn Taylor, Margaret Stevenson, Russell Turner, Chris Gryllis, Dave Shearing, Reg Kidd, John Lomas, Jim McArdie, Jason Jaeger, Brenda Davies, Peter Hetherington, Martin Gleeson and John Miller.



Margaret Stevenson



Russell Turner



Chris Gryllis



Dave Shearing



Reg Kidd



John Lomas



Jason Jaeger



Jim McArdie



Brenda Davies



Peter Hetherington



Martin Gleeson



John Miller

ORANGE CITY COUNCIL

Link

people

with

6362

A MEMBER OF INLAND

THE PERFECT MATCH

247 Anson St., Orange

Figure 4.12 Front page news: *The Central Western Daily* delivers the election results

1999 Orange City Council election wrap-up

Four get quota on first count

Mayor confident council will work better together

Informals concern

Candidate	ABOVE LINE	BELOW LINE	TOTAL
GRYLLIA, Chris	688	579	1267
RILEY, John		121	121
LOMAS, John	443	418	861
STANGER, Chris		244	244
DAVIES, Brenda	470	296	766
BROUWERS, Charlie		84	84
QUICK, Lee		142	142
BOOG, Sharon	383	208	591
BOOG, John (Fred)		172	172
KIDD, Reg	431	508	939
ALSTON, Alan		78	78
NIVEN, Richard	1506	1404	2910
SHEARNO, Dave		213	213
GRANT, Peter		43	43
SPURWAY, Ian	251	103	354
MANNION, Warren		81	81
JAEGER, Jason	547	277	824
MURPHY, John		123	123
EID, Robyn	286	130	416
GARYN, Ron		72	72
MILLER, John	222	249	471
GLOVER, Lindy		116	116
TURNER, Russell	916	488	1404
MAXWELL, Ian		35	35
TAYLOR, Glenn	1381	728	2109
MCARDLE, Jim		191	191
PPING, Gail		180	180
STEVENSON, Margaret, OAM	913	603	1516
BUTTRISS, Nigel		107	107
GLEESON, Martin	488	283	771
MULCAHY, Nan		46	46
FLEMING, Michael		131	131
HETHERINGTON, Peter		664	664

* from page 1
after first preferences were counted and is also in contention to regain a seat on council. She recorded 393 above the line and 308 below the line.

John Miller is struggling to retain his seat with a total of 631, comprising 282 above and 349 votes below the line.

Jim McArdle, who was elected in 1996 in a similar position. As number two on Glenn Taylor's ticket he scored 101 first preferences below the line.

First-time candidates unlikely to secure a seat on council and who earned under 250 votes were John Riley, Chris Stanger, Charlie Brouwers, Lee Quick, Fred Boog, Alan Reiston, Peter Grant, Warren Mannion, John Murphy, Ron Garvin, Ian Maxwell, Nigel Buttriss, Nan Mulcahy, and Michael Fleming.

Ian Spurway received a combined total of 353 votes and Robyn Eid 404.

Allocation of preferences begins at 5pm today and continues throughout the day at the electoral office located in Summer Street.

Stories: JAMIE HARRIS

MAYOR of Orange Cr Dick Niven who has scored a huge vote in the election said he was looking forward to working with the newly elected councillors.

"Even though the final tally isn't in yet there are certainly some positives and I think we will have a better council this time that is more able to work together."

"It's good to see we will have the experience on council of both Chris Gryllia and John Lomas who have both had terms on council and are familiar with the process," he said.

"It's also excellent to see a young person like Jason Jaeger who has been elected."

"I have known him and his family for a long time and as a young person he will have a lot to offer - I think it's important to have a youth representation on council."

Peter Hetherington, too, is also in there with a chance and it will be good to see some new blood on council if he makes it on.

ORANGE recorded a high number of informal votes for the election on Saturday.

Returning officer Ross Baker, who has been supervising the count, said it was a cause of concern.

"This time we have an additional 660 people voting, but I certainly think the task was more difficult for people, because I don't think there were the strong personalities like there were last time. It seemed a lot more even choice this election."

"With the informal vote we even had blank ballot forms submitted with nothing recorded on the paper."

Mr Baker said after the elimination of some candidates and distribution of their preferences to other candidates it was expected results on the 14 elected councillors would be finalised today.

"This year we are using a computerised system compared to the last election where we did a manual count, so that should speed things up a bit."



LEFT: A team of young helpers converges on Jack Thomas before he casts his vote at Hetherington Public School on Saturday.

I want a cohesive council: Taylor

CANDIDATES elected after the counting of primary votes have responded with enthusiasm.

Glenn Taylor, who has been re-elected for a second term, said he was looking forward to working closely with other councillors for the benefit of the city.

"I really want us to be a cohesive council and not to be divisive as we have been at times," he said.

Margaret Stevenson OAM is the longest serving member of the new council and she told the CWD yesterday she had resolved to put forward a resolution motion on the water supply system.

"And I also want to see more things discussed openly, not in closed council," she said.

Member for Orange Russell Turner will be taking up the challenge of involvement in local and State government again, and congratulated the Mayor on what he

said was a wonderful vote.

"Now I have been re-elected I will work for continuance of the growth we have achieved in the last four years with emphasis on attracting business, industry and jobs," Mr Turner said.

Chris Gryllia, who didn't have the numbers at the last election, but has secured a seat this time, is excited about being back.

"I would like to thank my supporters and the public and I promise I will try to work for everyone in this city to make it an even greater place to live. I am also really hoping that John Miller gets back in because he deserves to."

Peter Hetherington who took a stance against ticket voting, says with his tally of 664 votes he believes he has a chance of getting on.

"Although I had hoped for a higher vote, realistically it is a victory for below the line voting."

Peter Andren MP
Federal Member for Calare
is available for interviews on weekdays at
Orange City Centre
The appointments phone
0800 606 617

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TERENCE DONOVAN MARK NEAL
GLYNN NICHOLAS PETER ROWSTHORN

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Figure 4.13 Inside CWD coverage of election results

CHAPTER 5

PROFESSIONAL POLITICAL COMMUNICATORS

THE SPIN CYCLE ON FULL

*Politics refers to interest in the distribution,
maintenance or transfer of power in the
sphere of public relations*

— Wild, Bradstow, 1974: 3

The rise of the political consultant, along with attendant tools of opinion polling, market-driven election campaigning, political advertising and lobbying, created the circumstances for the emergence of Mayhew's *New Public*: an amorphous mass subjected to persuasion through systematic processes, replacing the more acceptable modern public of the enlightenment in which discursive processes in public places embodied the good in each society (Mayhew 1997: 189).

Earlier criticism of the emergence of the political communicator came from Habermas (1989) arguing that persuasion and influence transferred from the "honorific" avocation of the politician to the paid professional brought about the structural transformation of the public sphere (Habermas 1989: 202). For Habermas, a society circumscribed by communication produces observable limitations, the consequence of which is a communicative-theoretic model in which 'actors orient their own actions by their own interpretations' (Habermas 1987: 118). Such is the position of the politician as actor through either an interpretation of his own actions or an interpretation by a second actor (PR counsellor) of the interpretation of the actions of the politicians.

Kavanagh (1995) refers to a variety of operatives as professional communicators. They included opinion pollsters, consultants from advertising and public relations agencies, speechwriters and other advisers. He includes party politicians and officials as others who shape the general election strategies of [British] political parties. Kavanagh points out that the literature on voters is large, while that on campaign "producers" is small (Kavanagh 1995: 156).

Opinion varies about who in Australia communicates professionally (see Davis 1995; Sekulless 1991; Smith 2001; Tiffen 2000), but local government candidates are rarely in a financial position to engage professional communication consultants. And assembling campaign materials, especially if they require new prose, requires a candidate or a supporter who can write. Strategic discussions tend to be held with a handful of supporters, more so when the candidate is outside the party system. The Local Government Association provides a low level of information to candidates, focussing on the electoral process. There is no evidence, in Australia at least, of the move in the USA towards campaign training or seminars (Plasser 2000). The issue for local government candidates is the fundamental change in campaigning from being labour-intensive to capital-intensive. Large budgets for short national campaigns are invested in television, radio and newspaper advertising; the shorter the campaign the bigger the budget. At local government level, the candidate's election campaign remains labour-intensive and ought to begin the day after the last poll. A local government candidate has a maximum of four years to prepare.

In Orange no candidate claimed to have sought the assistance of professional communicators or others in the pursuit of elected office (Candidate survey, May 2000). Some claimed assistance from friends and relatives in the production of brochures, while others sought assistance in handing out how to vote cards on polling day. There was a conscious acknowledgment that they were responsible entirely for the development, production and dissemination of their campaigns. Such acknowledgment goes some way to explaining the differences between the campaigns of a rural community candidate and metropolitan candidates. Rural community candidates perceive that they are in frequent contact with the community and are therefore well-known to members of the voting public to secure a place on council. The campaigns of metropolitan candidates who have less constant contact with constituents because of diverse patterns of employment and social activity perceive the need to use professional communicators to disseminate their messages to the different communities they wish to influence (Wilson conversation, September 1999).¹⁹

¹⁹ Candidates in the East Ward of Willoughby council presented themselves in marketing terms by distributing an advertising revenue-driven newsletter around the ward for six months prior to the campaign. There was acknowledgment among the candidates that they required a high level of information dissemination on specific east ward issue if they were to influence the vote.

For the politician in the USA (the place of origin of the modern political communication campaign) an election campaign has a number of specific states: preprimary, primary, convention and general election (Trent and Freidenberg 2000: 19). The USA differs from other liberal democracies, such as the UK, in that it has a clearly delineated path from which citizens with an interest in the political process cannot wander. In the UK and Australia, a federal election campaign, for example, has a defined beginning only when an election is called by the incumbent government. At state and local government levels in Australia, there is a defined term of office, but that does not translate into a defined format for an election campaign.

Possibly the most interesting development has been the expansion of the opinion poll from outside to inside election campaigns (Kavanagh 1995: 6). Kavanagh suggests there were very few political campaign consultants in the UK in 1995 while there were as many as 5000 in the USA. He suggests there is no market in the UK for campaign consultancy as the main parties use the services of advertising agencies where commercial viability 'derives from non-political business between elections' (Kavanagh 1995: 6). In terms of its capacity to market, or sell its candidates as products, he suggests the general election is the largest of all exercises in persuasion.

A majority of candidates in Orange received no overt professional assistance in running their campaigns. They received unpaid assistance and advice from a variety of quarters (Candidate survey, April 2000). Two candidates who received the full support of a major political party indicated they had no professional help. Another candidate who failed to gain a seat indicated professional assistance was provided but claimed to have budgeted the relatively small sum of \$1000 for the complete campaign. It is reasonable to assume that the provision of campaign advice to the candidates was multi-level; how to structure polling day by a friend who had run a garage sale; advice from a relative who had read widely about federal campaign practices; or the "gift" of a handbook of campaign tactics published by a major party.

At local government level a record of pecuniary interests is available to the public. A city council is obligated under the act to provide a copy to a citizen when asked. There is no parallel requirement for a candidate to place on public record the relationship that may exist between the candidate and a campaign professional.

When examining the linkages between the professional political communicator and the candidate, the issue of the relationship between the communicator and other interests where these special skills may be used, most notably business, comes into focus. Novotny (1999) has described this skills transfer as a profitable use of "downtime" (that period between election campaigns when professional political communicators' don't have much to do). But additionally, the transfer highlights the problem of a conflict of interest between the communicator's political contacts and business contacts. Novotny provides evidence that such relationships exist at national level in the US, specifically in the re-election of Bill Clinton. Post-election it was revealed that the successful Clinton campaigners were also contracted to large private multinationals such as AT&T and Texaco (Novotny 1999; see also Trent and Freidenberg 2001).

Similar relationships exist at local government level but are seen to be legitimate for a number of reasons. The part-time nature of local government in NSW presents a paradox and the potential for a conflict of interest. It is generally acceptable for the Mayor to maintain a full-time role as a partner in a local law firm which takes briefs from the council and land developers. The legitimacy for this paradox — the notion that an elected government representative can also have a business relationship with a land developer — resides in the simple proposition that the Mayor disengage from the chamber whenever a business matter in which his firm has an interest arises. This is part of the reason for Mayhew's opposition to the employment of professional political communicators within the public sphere (Mayhew 1997: 3).

Despite evidence that election campaign communication has developed dramatically at global level since the 1952 televised US presidential campaign, the Australian model of campaigning in regional areas has altered little in the past 50 years. (See Rawson and Holtzinger's 1958 analysis of the state and federal campaigns run in the south coast electorate of Eden Monaro in NSW.) Candidates at the 1999 election argue there is little need of television advertising or other "modern" tools for a successful campaign. There is a belief among most that they are well-known in the city, and therefore have no need of persuasive mechanisms to deliver messages. (Five of the 33 candidates gained a quota of 1247 primary votes, all of whom undertook extensive print advertising campaigns prior to the poll.)

Plasser (2000) argues that rejection of global models is conscious and that candidates will adopt tactics if they feel they will work, similar to how they "shop" when buying

goods and services. But this argument is more relevant to the global market than the local political market. I suggest that local candidates, with limited budgets and limited knowledge of the availability of a "basket" of campaign tactics, enter the political sphere in ignorance, relying on unsophisticated ideas based loosely on the reinforcement of friends and relatives that they have a "chance" rather than "shopping" for the right combination of tools to do the job effectively.

Dominance and change in political communication

Professional political communication consultants have created inexorable change across the political landscape in the last three decades. (see Franklin 1994; Kavanagh 1995; Kraus 1976; Mayhew 1997; Seymour-Ure 1974). The election campaign strategy implemented by Peter Hetherington is an example. It provided a precedent in that the candidate was elected from the ungrouped far right-hand side of a "placemat" sized ballot paper. As mentioned earlier, Councillor Richard Niven was amazed that a candidate could get elected from that position having been almost unknown in the town (Niven interview, June 2001).

The reliance of a communal interpretation of communicative action and the relativisation of utterances within a valid framework presents the politician with a logical direction in which to enact an election communication campaign. Interestingly, one candidate at the 1999 election believed the public had an '...inability to see the "person" as distinct from the "actor" some candidates bec[o]me for the period of the campaign' (Cnclr Davies interview, June 2001). Such an "inability" reflects some of the elements suggested by Mayhew: that the rationalisation of persuasion and its domination by professional communicators has the capacity to destroy socially organised public opinion (Mayhew 1997: ix) and thus, the core of the public sphere as it exists within a democracy.

An inescapable promotional dynamic lies at the heart of contemporary political culture (Schlesinger 1994: 99). Within this culture, marketers rely on the identification of aggregates of preferences in determining potential sales of goods and create a framework in which these aggregates are measured against the supply of goods and services from industry. Political campaigns on the other hand, rely on values, opinions and attitudes which are almost impossible to aggregate in an attempt to find a state of

equilibrium which can be measured against the supply of redeemable tokens (Moloney 2000: 105).

Justifying commodification of political communication

If, as Mayhew argues, a contemporary political campaign is crafted along the same lines as a marketing campaign, there is justification for consultants offering campaign solutions. It is not, however, a simple step from making an assumption about the use of marketing tools to conclude that marketing has subsumed political election campaigning within its economic framework. Marketing is by its nature, based on tactics designed to sell products and services. Some marketing tools have made a successful transition to the political sphere. They include direct mail, telephone surveys, database management and list selling (Mayhew 1997: 212). Overall, however, effective marketing campaign measurement does not equate with similar success in political campaigns. Marketing as a subset of economics, uses quantitative modelling as a predictive tool. As part of the process of commodifying politics, professional communicators have turned in recent years to the use of marketing and marketing communication tools to assist political clients.

The use of tools such as market research, targeting voters and measuring opinion polls, permeates national election campaigns in western democracies but is not widely used in local politics. The application of marketing tools has a different effect on the electorate to the employment of advertising and public relations. Advertising provides direct image comparison. The candidate who uses the local newspaper to advertise a policy, accompanied by a picture, allows the electorate to read its own message into the image (figure 5.1). Public relations campaigns which include dissemination of published material, such as newsletters, create a more direct relationship with the electorate.

The main functions of communicating politics, for the campaigning politician, are to affect the allocation of resources and to avert, divert or convert social change (Nimmo 1978: 24). Quite frequently however, candidates begin their campaign unequipped. They present their credentials as they relate to places of employment, community affiliations or family. It is not unusual for a candidate to run on a platform of family, work and church. Intuition and a "feeling" for the electorate may provide the initial impetus or motivation to nominate, but the development of a strategy and the application of tactics within the strategy will impel that initial motivation towards elected representation.

Vote 1 Group A



Chris Gryllis
PROG. CITIZEN OF ORANGE


Committed to the future of Orange

PERMITTED TO VOTE FOR ALL OF OUR CANDIDATES


THE ALTERNATE ROUTE
By Martin Gleeson

- I will continue to push for a heavy vehicle alternate route to Summer Street and get the trucks out of Summer Street.
- I don't think Woodward Street or any other street is an option or a short term solution. I have fought and won on this and will lobby the new council to stand by its current commitment to abandon the Woodward Street option.
- Will the government pay to construct the alternate route? The answer is NO. The RTAs view is the northern or southern route is not needed until the Year 2015. The money the ratepayers must pay for the alternate route.
- Which route will give Orange ratepayers the best value for money? The northern route.
- Why? Because Leewood Industrial Estate, Email and Capra mine in the southern area are already adequately covered by existing routes. Leewood is full now so where is Orange to grow?
- To the north of the city we have industrial land and it is this area that is our future growth - although it has poor access currently.
- The Orange City Council approved the shadow increasing its toll to 1,500 animals a day. But that means an extra 30 cents.
- The Northern route would go through open farm land leaving the Mitchell Highway at Consumers Bend travelling through the high country past the quarry through the middle of Hatterville Bushy Park, along Farnell Road and join the highway again at Plogymans Creek and Molep Road. This route would guarantee our future growth and would pay for itself.
- As chairman of Orange City Council's finance committee I know it is within council's resources to build the northern road.

Vote 1 GROUP N



NANETTE MULCAHY



MARTIN GLEESON

Authorised by M. Gleeson
Purley Road, Orange

Figure 5.1 Examples of candidate advertising in the *CIVD* prior to the election:
For some candidates the portrait is more important than their policies,
for others, single issue politics takes precedence in message delivery

Richard Lucy's 1965 analysis of the Liberal campaign for the state seat of Manly, NSW, provided early evidence of a cultural infiltration and a naïve belief in the role of intuition as an important factor in campaign development along with a simple misunderstanding by candidates of the distinction between propaganda and persuasion (Lucy 1968: 100). This researcher's candidate interviews provide evidence that the belief in the importance of intuition is still prominent in campaign development 30 years later.

To understand the role of professional communication in the political process it is necessary to understand the distinction between public relations and publicity, the origin of professional political communication in the US in the early 1950s, and to understand why political public relations can be used to greater advantage than publicity. Market testing techniques to predict election outcomes emerged at around the same time.

Influence and persuasion as technique

Vance Packard's (1957) famous study, *The Hidden Persuaders*, made an early assessment of influence and persuasion in advertising by way of apology to his British readers for his research being predominantly US-based. His justification was that '...Americans have

become the most manipulated people outside the Iron Curtain' (1957: 5). Packard's was the first work to place the manipulative techniques of advertisers into a theoretical framework and was prescient in suspecting

"[the British] have little ground for complacency, manipulation by playing upon the public's subconscious is clearly spreading. The possibilities of using the insights of psychiatry and the social sciences to influence our choices and our behaviour are so inviting that no-one anywhere can be sure nowadays that he (sic) is not being worked upon by the depth persuaders" (1957: 9).

Packard's argument showed how observation of influence and persuasion underpinned media and politics. The role of professional communicators, as both Packard and Mayhew argue, is extraordinarily powerful in terms of their capacity to influence without attracting public attention (see also Michie 1997). Packard makes an important claim when he quotes a New York advertising executive using depth techniques, who contended '...if ad men were given really free rein they could successfully swing crucial voters in just about any election, with appeals geared to the undecided or listless mass' (Packard 1957: 151). Also highly revealing in its relationship to present day voting patterns is the question that Packard raises of the undecided voter not [being] the thoughtful independent he is often pictured as. The switch voter he claims, '[...] switches for some snotty little reason such as not liking the candidate's wife' (1957: 151).²⁰

Australia established a pattern of influence more haphazardly, adopting US ideas without much intellectual discussion or analysis. Social commentator Vincent Buckley (1997) argues Australia applied intellectualism to a suburban model in the first half of the twentieth century with little desire to create discussion (similar to that which occurred in pre-war New York or post-war Paris), because it was removed from any centre of ideological disturbance (1997: 165). The same applies to professional communication and its imposition of influence across the political spectrum. No war has "belonged" to Australia, no uprising has threatened the established system, and monoculturalism provided the framework for a continuation of the easier idea of adopting overseas trends and influences. Warhurst (1987) suggests 1960s lobby groups,

²⁰ See also Kavanagh [1995] and Sabato [1981] for confirmation of the Eisenhower 1952 campaign as the first real test for the new medium of television.

centralising in the emerging capital city of Canberra, may have played a particular role in the development of professional political communication in Australia (1987: 181). Lobbyist and lobby groups also play a distinct role in terms of professional communication, and an established point of convergence links lobbyists directly to the professional communication paradigm (Sekules 1991).

Career officials as political communicators

In political communication terms, an elected representative is perceived to be in the "front line". Within the second line lie professional communicators who may have a similar degree of influence. Here reside the career bureaucrats, appointed officials and government employees influencing policy and opinion.

The most prominent public official in the political communication process in Orange is the general manager (GM) of the city council. His duties and powers are defined by the Local Government Act (LGA). But it is his capacity as a political communicator to persuade and influence the political and policy process that is of most interest to this study. In communicating policy and information senior council officers most frequently adopt a power-based strategy of threat and punishment (Page and Hazelton 1999). OCC threatens to produce an independent newspaper if the *CWD* fails to publish regular positive material about council²¹. The council is not however, setting a precedent in employing this tactic. In the UK the number and quality of council sponsored newspapers has increased dramatically since the 1970s due in part to the emergence of the council public relations officer (Franklin 1994).

In the UK in the past 30 years local councils have increased the circulation and quality of their newspapers from photocopied sheets supplying swimming pool opening times, to becoming competitors with commercially produced, advertising-driven papers owned by the major newspaper companies.²² In Australia, the emergence of information

²¹ The tactic was employed three times between 2000 and 2003. The most recent, in March 2003, drew in high-level management from Rural Press. The issue of the threat was treated as front page news by the *CWD*.

²² In NSW the majority of weekly and regional daily rural newspapers are owned by two groups: Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation and John Fairfax. There are few regional exceptions in NSW, notably the *Quirindi Advocate*, the *Manilla Express* and the *Bourke Advocate* which remain in private or individual ownership. The Macquarie network in central and western NSW was the third major owner until its acquisition by Rural Press (controlled by Fairfax) in the late 1990s.

technology and the introduction of the user-friendly Macintosh computer in 1987 allowed previously high-cost publishing and editing tasks to be concentrated within the offices of local government, which in turn developed the skill levels of council employees. The corollary to this was that an overzealousness emerged so that by the late 1990s every employee was potentially capable, using a low-end publishing program of producing a range of communication material from leaflets, newsletters and brochures to glossy magazines and newspapers. As the information technology base expanded, so too did the demand for readily available information. Some organisations discovered through audit that employees were spending inordinate amounts of time designing and writing material rather than concentrating on their substantive tasks (Sydney Water 2001).

Orange City Council does not employ a public relations officer (PRO). The GM assumes responsibility for the public face of council. Suburban metropolitan councils in Sydney, on the other hand, often employ full time public relations officers or managers. The PRO in local government in Australia, much like its counterpart in the UK, spends more time on the operational task of media relations than on other operational or strategic work. Public relations and information services within local government differ enormously from those at state and national levels. Local government public relations officers are best described as historically aligned with town criers who rang bells and invited citizens to town squares to receive information on government proclamations (Franklin 1994: 113).

During the 1970s and 1980s the emergence of the full time PRO in local government in NSW was the province of the middle-aged male reporter looking for a quieter life with no shift work and a substantial superannuation payout. (Reinforcing OCC GM's opinion of the value in the PRO.) The role of the PRO was to disseminate information to newsmedia, to meet and greet official visitors, and to arrange community functions and events. This is the model identified by OCC. It was also part of the role of the PRO to attend public council meetings and to minister to the needs of media. In terms of media attendance at council meetings, most councils provide allocated space for reporters somewhere near the public gallery.

I would argue, from my own experience as a reporter covering a variety of local councils, that councils with PROs tend to have better relations with local media than

those without. Orange's GM reinforces this argument through his belief that the communication role between council and the community is ... 'the hardest thing to get a handle on and to effectively do. I have never seen anybody effectively do it.' (Dwyer interview, June 2000). This is supported by Tunstall, who argues journalists, despite public criticism, frequently prefer to establish arrangements with organisations in which there is an element of public relations professionalism (1971: 76). In part this is due to the number of journalists who become PR professionals while maintaining contact with their former colleagues. There are layers of trust and friendship that remain active.

Senior council officers view their relationship with the media as asymmetrical in terms of Grunig's second model; public information. Information dissemination is the most frequently used model of communication theory applied at local government level and OCC is no exception. As well as public information campaigns such as the dissemination of material on the electoral process, information about childcare, information in the form of brochures or booklets about conservation, environmental preservation, recycling and rubbish disposal, senior council officers oversee the production of media material. The GM is the final sign-off point of all media statements issued by council (Dwyer interview, June 2000). Media material originates from the desks of line management, or directors. The GM maintains regular contact with local media through a weekly media briefing which is arranged by his personal assistant and held in his office. This weekly event is similar in format to briefings which local media have with local police, and other "rounds" which are delegated to specific reporters and broadcasters. The GM's briefing with a reporter from the *CWD* usually occurs on Tuesdays at 10.00am. Reporters receive council business papers for the following Thursday general meeting earlier that same Tuesday (Redmond interview, June 2000). In contradiction of his statement that community communication is hard to effect, the GM believes that the problems of communicating with the community should be able to be overcome by employing a professional communicator.

"Shepparton Council [central northern Victoria] has employed the local radio announcer as their media person. That's a good move if you can get a good person like that."

— Alan Dwyer, June 2000

The issue, however, is one of control and continued development. The GM's concern is with the possibility that a professional communicator may become less motivated within the system.

"I suppose the risk then is they get stale and get in to a system and don't be (sic) as effective as they used to be and that is a bit difficult. That's something to be avoided."

— Alan Dwyer, June 2000

This negative aspect of employing a professional communicator appears to outweigh the potential for vigorous engagement with the community.

Of most interest in the threat and punishment communication strategy of the senior council officer, is an attempt to "manage" news. For the purposes of this work I will regard it as a tactic to manage news output. Additionally, OCC appears to have little technical or practical understanding of public relations. It appears to have little or no interest in public relations as a contributing factor in building community relations (Kruckeberg and Starck 1998; Ledingham 2001).

The relative power of the "state" — in this case the council — bears a direct relationship to the degree of pressure a media organisation will place upon it through the publishing or broadcasting of negative material. For broadcasting or television organisations the way through this dilemma is to allow politicians to make their own errors or admissions on camera or in the studio. An example is the developer who admits he is doing something when he cannot see the moral or ethical problem, but the audience has an opinion and sees it from a different perspective. For a newspaper reporter the answer lies in the ability to present the material in its most objective light, allowing the reader to draw assumptions from the information provided and the omission of material which could be perceived to be damaging. An example is the story published in the *CWD* on the council decision to choose "route one" as the preferred option for a new "ringroad" around Orange. A *CWD* reporter attended a council meeting on Thursday February 15 2001, and filed a story which appeared in the Saturday edition of February 17. At the conclusion of the meeting the reporter was approached by Councillor Hetherington who had asked for an amendment to the recommendation and had been defeated 12 to one. Councillor Hetherington approached the reporter and asked him what he had thought of the debate. Specifically he asked if he too thought the GM had appeared to be "flustered". The reporter made

no specific comment on the issue and when he had finished talking to Hetherington he was invited to have a drink with the GM and two national party councillors. Prior to the meeting Hetherington had made a telephone call to the reporter who promised that if the amendment was adopted he would write a story. The story appeared on page five of the *CWD*. It outlined the council decision and added a paragraph about Hetherington's defeated amendment. It also added the information that Hetherington, for his efforts, had received a standing ovation from the packed gallery. This attempt to present council in a negative light is one of the few non-litigious avenues available to the reporter. Whether it was successful is academic, as Hetherington himself argued the story did not reflect the real issue of councillors with vested interests presenting themselves to vote on the issue in the chamber (Hetherington telecon, Redmond telecon, 19.2.2001).

A secondary part of council's delivery of public information is a weekly radio broadcast by the Mayor on local commercial radio station 2GZ. It is considered by 2GZ management to be a community service so it does not attract an advertising rate (O'Connor telecon, July 2001). The program is in a talkback format; people ring the Mayor with questions or issues and he responds. Station management is unsure how it would monitor the political nature of the program but believes that because it is a talkback format that it would most likely be described as nonpolitical (O'Connor telecon, July 2001). The mayoral radio program is an extension of James Grunig's public information model. Despite creating familiarity with community members — the closeness of the relationship implied through the talkback format — the message disseminated in the program is the same as that disseminated through other council vehicles. It is the message council wishes to be disseminated rather than the message the community wishes council to receive. Fortunately for the Orange community, there is some evidence that this type of political talk radio, while it may mobilise and motivate, fails to persuade (Barker and Knight 2000: 151).

Orange City Council views communication with the public and the media as a PR cost rather than a positive investment. This is a standard management practice when examining PR activities. Traditionally, day-to-day activities known as PR are bundled under a marketing umbrella. The marketing functions of an organisation are divided between cost and profit. Public relations, because of its historical inability to be measured economically, is viewed as a cost. In this regard OCC is no different to most

other organisation which view PR as a cost, rather than an investment, or a profit centre. In its Management Plan 1999-2002 within the division of Corporate Services it presents a zero dollar figure for PR operating revenue for each of the three financial years 1999/2000, 2000/2001, 2001/2002. PR operating expenses for the same three financial periods are \$291,260, \$65,920, and \$65,920.

The GM suggests the negative trend is a function of a different accounting process. Council has, he argues

"become more adept at becoming precise about funds allocated for a particular project rather than having them in a bucket. I don't think our expenditure would be down in that. It would just be in different areas."

— Alan Dwyer, June 2000

OCC appears to have a limited understanding of the potential for PR as political communication. The published Management Report objective for PR is to

"provide a service at all civic receptions and civic functions which is appropriate to the function and which reflects council's commitment to professionalism and excellence [and] to inform the residents of Orange about council progress, service and matters of importance to their well-being"

— OCC 1999

These activities are low-level operational events-management activities and provide the framework for the maintenance of a public information program rather than the development and maintenance of a professional public communication strategy. The important point here is whether an organisation such as a local council requires any more in the way of professional communication than a continuing public information campaign. Grunig's second model, despite criticism (Page and Hazelton 1999) has merit if the role of the local council is to provide information without engagement. Changes in the pattern of taxpayer interest in the role of local council, however, has provided a real need for councils to engage more transparently with their constituencies. It is no longer acceptable for a local council to provide its traditional roads, rates and rubbish services to the community. It has been argued that local government is possibly the closest institution to the democratic process due to its direct engagement with its publics (Goss 2001, Stoker 2001). If this is the case, then a local council should consider public relations and its measurability in terms of profit rather than cost. It

should engage with its publics, with its communities in developing and building infrastructure, in promoting its position in a competitive environment.

Local government responsibilities, however, lie outside competitive economic environments due to the nature of rate-based revenue raising. Local government has no mandate to compete, and strategic intent is not a requirement of management. While public opinion is important to the election of local government representatives, local government appears to be administered without concern for public opinion. What the public wants, even though it is the main revenue source, is not necessarily what council wants. It is interested primarily in the political process. The dissemination of information, rather than the two-way process of symmetrical communication in which an organisation and its publics alter the nature of the organisation based on mutual requirements within a specified framework, is the dominant communication model. Within the paradigm of professional communication this model has its roots in social change theory rather than communication theory or systems theory.

Candidates as communicators

The other actors who require analysis are the candidates. Different interpretations of communication and of the political process apply to those interviewed. Some see themselves as activist or special interest communicators. Activists can be separated into group spokespersons and opinion leaders (Nimmo 1978: 31) but it is arguable whether both can be considered to be prolocutors (Mayhew 1997: 127). Political leadership and political motivation can be described as two distinct styles; task motivation and relationship motivation (Nimmo 1978: 36) which provides two types of leadership roles involving one based on tasks and outcomes, the other on development of emotional responses in group members. Popularity among individual political communicators provides a link to their capacity for leadership. Candidates, unless they have achieved some success in becoming known in the electorate, (for example Peter Andren as a news reader for 18 years prior to nomination as a federal candidate), must run an information campaign designed to register them within the broader electorate as someone trustworthy, at the very least, and someone who has a legitimate right to stake a claim in the contest. Legitimacy embraces the capacity for policy formulation and issues management as well as an understanding and application of the elements of communication which play a role in the candidate's election.

Councillors in Orange had different ideas about themselves as professional communicators. The Mayor did not see his role as one of overt leadership, rather as a member of a group of elites from whom leadership emanated as part of the responsibility of framing policy. His view, however, did not match that of other councillors who saw him as a prolocutor. One woman candidate believed she would not be elected as a leader because she was a woman, but nevertheless argued she would receive a substantial number of votes left over from her late husband, a former Mayor, whom she said was a popular and effective leader. She argued there was no effective leadership within the council but that council was active in communicating its policy to its stakeholders (Davies interview, March 2001). The deputy mayor, as leader of the ALP faction, believed he had a role to play as a leader to communicate policy to the electorate in a form that was understandable (Taylor interview, June 2000). He was thus attempting to act as prolocutor for his working class constituency.

A former Mayor and ALP member, Tim Sullivan, suggests it is necessary to act as a communicator continuously when elected to council and to use the media to communicate council and personal messages.

"People used to forgive me for things I did. I basically used the media all the time to communicate. I did a radio program every second Friday, a phone in. They hardly get any calls now [reference to the present Mayor's radio program] but then it used to light up like a Christmas tree and people always called me Tim. I was perceived as being honest. That's the main thing. They'll forgive you any mistake but be honest."

— former Mayor Tim Sullivan, June 2000

Sullivan also believes that the *CWD* has a natural bias against Labor and that while such a suggestion may appear paranoid, the natural community bias in the city was towards Labor. Sullivan's argument is orthodox in that it assumes a relationship between the conservative businesses that support a town economically and their advertising revenue that supports a newspaper. A town's political leaning away from a conservative position might occur if it has a large working class, which is the case in Orange.

Identifying the spin

The term spin doctor as a political and public relations identification tag first appeared in the US in the mid 1980s (Moloney 2000, McNair 2000). It is used most frequently as a term of derision when applied to public relations counsellors by newswriters (see

AFR, *SMH*, *The Australian* various issues) unless the newsworker has applied direct information obtained from the PR counsellor to a news or feature piece and then less derisory terms such as "consultant" are applied (Walker, *AFR* 14. 6. 2001). In terms of its less flattering use, it appears to provocatively describe what newsworkers and the public perceive to be manipulative and threatening forms of political public communication, removed from the traditional perception of the press or publicity officer as an honest, or at least respectable, career (see Maloney 2000; McNair 2000; Michie 1997). The non-politicisation of information emerging from government has been the stock-in-trade of the press officer placing in the public sphere information on government for the interpretation of newsworkers and the public.

A study of the turning point in the supply of information from objective to subjective appears not to have been undertaken in detail in either the US or the UK other than to plot the rise of the term "spin doctor" from the politically sinister operations of the Central Intelligence Agency (McNair 2000:126). To doctor information or to alter the context of information as propaganda is not new. To add the word spin to the doctoring alters its perspective in professional terms, allowing the professional nature of the communicative process to be reduced to a less than professional position.. The most trenchant criticism of the role of the professional political communicator as 'spin doctor' is delivered by those closest to the action: newsworkers. I will attempt to analyse this paradox in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6

MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

REPORTING IN A REGIONAL CITY

*It was after six o'clock when I reached Wollongong
I checked into a motel down near the beach and went for a swim.
My body was winter pale and the water was icy cold.
It was a brief visit to the beach.
I went back to the motel, showered and changed
and watched the evening news on TV.
After a couple of beers and a barbecued steak
at the pub opposite the motel I was ready to go to work.*

— Peter Corris, *Heroin Annie*

Professional communicators include elected representatives, career officials, and public relations counsellors but they also include reporters, journalists and editors. Unlike the aforementioned group reporters, journalists and editors have very little formal input into the policy process. Their traditional role is to interpret and mediate information on behalf of the public. Despite their removal from direct involvement in the process, they play a dynamic role in influencing the political and policy process, often reflecting the views of media owners and sympathetic institutional powers. Early in the 20th century Escott (1911) argued that '...a fair working definition of a journalist would be a man (sic) who seeks to influence public opinion in a given direction by periodical writings published at short intervals' (1911: 216). The "problem" with an analysis of the role of the reporter in the political communication process concerns history. Examination of Australian newsmedia in political terms has been generally restricted to a specific process. It is an "either/or" process in which journalism is placed in a cultural, economic, political or social context. Restrictions on analysis have resulted in subjectivities of place and questions on the relationships and ethics of the reporter/journalist being defined in narrow terms relative to externalities such as issues, events, personalities and professional networks.

McNair (2000) highlights the problem by suggesting that linkages between journalism and the political process have been matters of discussion and debate ever since the appearance of print media in the UK (2000: ix). But discussion and debate on the interlinking of politics and journalism has been confined to a historical evaluation of the process.

Despite claims of subjectivity from within the public sphere, newsmedia provides a nexus between a majority of the population and information interpretation, manifesting as daily news. The public takes in information and ways of thinking about it from a variety of newsmedia outlets including newspapers, radio, television, the internet, magazines, newsletters, and billboard advertising. Access to most outlets, including the internet, is diffuse. Radio occupies an important position as the main source of information for motoring commuters, while television is the preferred medium for obtaining news as entertainment in the majority of households from mid evening onwards. Newspapers account for a large percentage of political news and analysis actively sought by consumers. Magazines supply lengthier analyses of issues and events and newsletters and journals fulfil the remaining requirements of a public actively seeking information. MacNair has described this process as mediated news (2000: 1).

Mayhew's (1997) demonisation of the professional communicator as a persuader and influencer within the public sphere included no substantial examination of the role of the journalist as professional communicator. His argument supports the veracity of the newsworker. To maintain objectivity Mayhew develops a link between elites and the mass media and corresponding patterns of influence. Journalism itself, he argues, is influenced profoundly by its professionalism and its desire to produce objectivity (1997: 250). In an attempt to ground this professionalism in reality Mayhew acknowledges the reliance placed on news sources and the "problem" with sources based on the opinion of the source and the potential to influence. He fails to present a realistic image of a news source and of the capacity or otherwise of a journalist to determine the veracity of the supplied information and thus the legitimacy of the story ultimately produced. An argument for the veracity of the final story can be built around the structural embedding of a system of checks and balances that exists in a newsroom – subediting for example – but as I suggest below these checks and balances often fail to materialise when the "spin" is being applied from inside the system.

The newsmedia plays a direct role in the formulation and development of opinion within the public sphere. Newsmedia, by its very nature, has a powerful capacity to

influence and persuade all stakeholder communities. In large conurbations it operates as the axis between the supply of information from local government to a variety of communities or stakeholders through the primary conduits of community radio and free suburban newspapers.

In a rural or regional context, newsmedia hold a more tangibly powerful position than in a more dispersed metropolitan setting because of the nature of sociopolitics in small communities. Small town politics requires media workers — journalists, reporters, television producers, and broadcasters — to live exposed to daily events and circumstances at a more personal frequency than their counterparts in larger urban areas. In larger metropolitan areas a degree of anonymity is provided by weight of population density. In country towns, which rely for their economic existence on a close network and intricate value chain, there is a community expectation that newsmedia workers will be participants rather than observers, or merely chroniclers of the political process.

"I think people in the country find media a bit more user friendly in a way. From our point of view most country media outlets, especially from a television viewpoint, we don't particularly set out to be controversial and don't particularly go out to get all the negatives. We're in a community where some of the positive stories will lead our bulletin. It's not always the negative stories. It's not always the blood and guts. It's something that might be, you know, from this region, very positive and that's the way we like to treat our news too. There's enough negativity in the world without us adding to it."

— Ross Larson, news director *Prime Television*

An expectation of conformity, less evident in larger metropolitan areas, exists within small towns. There is a general expectation that newswriters will act in accordance with a set of unwritten and unspoken rules additional to those imposed upon them and their metropolitan colleagues by broadly defined codes of ethics imposed by weak industrial unions. Verrall, Ward and Hay (1985) suggest that local press in rural areas have a parochial interest in politics that flows through local issues to create strong relationships with organisations that present themselves as local (1985: 16). Murphy (1976) argues that local daily newspapers in the 1970s reflected right-of-centre business community attitudes (1976: 30), a position that remains unchanged in Orange a generation later. An example of news organisations working with communities to increase media education and understanding was the publication between 1980 and 1999 of a booklet titled *Please Print: a practical guide for publicity officers and contributors to community newspapers*. (Sommerlad 2000: 154). The booklet was designed to assist reporters on

rural and regional newspapers by giving members of the community some guidelines for the presentation of news copy. Its success was so great it remained in print for 20 years, increasing its print run with each edition.

Newsworkers in less densely populated areas occupy the same social space as other townspeople. In larger urban areas, where populations are often in the millions, it is not uncommon for media workers to travel across a number of suburbs to their places of employment. This geographic shift allows the media newsworker a degree of anonymity in the presentation of news. Relative anonymity rarely exists for long in smaller communities. The professional requirement of the newsworker to engage with the public removes the opportunity. Newsworkers in less densely populated communities have direct social involvement with constituents, ratepayers and local shire or city councils through sporting clubs, schools, churches and cultural activities such as guides, scouts, masons, musical societies, pubs, and discos. Such a position means newsworkers constantly act as conduits for the dissemination of information because community presence constrains the final published or broadcast form that the information will take. It is meant to be a two-way process, similar in shape to the fourth Grunig model of public relations communication: two-way asymmetrical, reflecting and guiding public opinion and observing and reporting on the social consequences of council policy so local government can act in accordance with the will of the community. It is however, difficult for rural-based newspapers to observe this ideal of two-way communication because of the Janus View which places the responsibility for the newspaper to reflect and guide public opinion parallel with a second 'face'; to make money by producing a profitable newspaper (Mayer 1964: 173).

"The relationship of the local media to local government and others is interesting. It's a relationship which at times [such as elections] becomes very close. And the candidates try to manipulate the local media. And the media, in a sense, is a whore. It can be manipulated from time to time, because of the nature of a community, like we are. We don't necessarily rush out to them. We only rush out to people who we've had an association with before. But candidates will try to impose their will on the media anyway. An example might be the sitting Mayor, who may have had a long association, particularly if he has been in the position for a long time. There's this sort of indirect, or unspoken[ness], you know, we've helped each other over the years and let's continue to help each other now, so we can continue to help each other in the future."

— John Lloyd-Green, news reader *Prime Television*

But as Kirkpatrick (2000) points out, the community leadership role of the regional newspaper, and thus its newsworkers, is not as great as it was in the 19th and early 20th centuries when they had a strong editorial voice (2000: 407). They are thus inclined to

agree or disagree editorially with other community leaders rather than taking any initiative on issues.

Media and the delivery of larger audiences

There has been a dramatic change in the nature of campaign politics and its relationship to the public sphere, and thus the media, in the past three decades (see Franklin 1994; Kavanagh 1995; McNair 2000; Nimmo 1978; Paletz 1987). The most radical change has been technologically-driven in the universal adoption of mass media as a tool to deliver messages across increasingly larger audiences and to access niche audiences. The days of the politician travelling the country delivering speeches to small communities, without attendant media, are gone. A politician who spends a morning talking to a small group about policy issues without making sure there is broader media coverage is not using communication tools effectively. Media reinforcement of a political message is vital to a winning campaign. Politicians emerge from all backgrounds and very few bring media skills vital to a successful election campaign. These skills include public speaking and presentation of self as a positive image. Many campaigns are lost at the ballot box because an elector dislikes a candidate's face. (There is very little a candidate can realistically do about this but others skills can be employed to overcome obvious defects.)

The domination of election campaign information dissemination by the media and the consequent capacity for alternative spin to be placed on a story by the candidate is partly responsible for the growth, especially in the past three decades, of professional communicators acting on behalf of political clients. As mentioned above, the emergence of professional communicators in the USA can be traced to the 1956 presidential campaign of Dwight Eisenhower with a progression into the UK that meant they would begin to operate in Australia with little resistance from politicians or candidates keen to gain comparative advantage. The origin of the Australian model of professional communication — the triangular relationship between politicians, journalists and PR — can be traced to the work of Sydney-based PR consultant and publisher Asher Joel (Tymson and Sherman 1987: 13). Retention of media advisers and policy advisers by parties and individual politicians, mainly frontbenchers and ministers at federal and state level, can be traced back at least to the end of World War 2.

News processing and processing news

In a small community such as Orange there is less outright reliance on media for supply of information about local issues than exists within larger metropolitan areas. Citizens can obtain information about local issues and policy by attending council meetings, meeting socially, or joining groups. Similar avenues exist within larger communities but appear to be activated less frequently for a number of reasons, including greater geographical separation of places of employment and home; increased use of private transport allowing freedom of movement across wider areas of major cities, and a preoccupation with the privatisation of leisure (Spearritt 2000).

Similar patterns exist in smaller more isolated communities. But a historical sense of public purpose appears to continue to contribute to smaller community well-being. Large metropolitan areas have reduced levels of interest in community, replacing them with increased levels of self-interest. Differentiations in patterns of existence create differentiations in the role of reporters and journalists and the degree of influence which can be applied to the community.

Baerns (1987) suggests there is a simple question which can be asked in analysing patterns of influence and that is: whether that which purports to be journalistic news is in fact PR. This indicates an approach to the determination of latent interaction through analysis of patterns of influence as transcending media content. It is an attempt to investigate the relationship between events as they are presented by the media and what may have happened 'in fact' or 'in reality' (Baerns 1987: 88). It operates from the premise set out by Lippmann that media content can be described as results of a whole series of selections (1922: 354). The relevance here is the relationship between news media in Orange with particular reference to the *CWD* and its process of selection and distribution. It is not a question of what characterises news rather it is a question of '...how information enters news agency services, radio and television programs, as well as newspapers and thereby becomes news' (1987: 89). Baerns suggests interaction between journalist and public relations counsel should be described in terms of influence and that influence 'denotes a connection between actors in which one actor can get the other to behave in some way he [sic] would not otherwise' (1987: 89). Public relations activities can therefore be seen to have exerted influence successfully if the result with respect to media coverage would otherwise have been different. Journalists have successfully exerted influence if the result would have altered without

their own investigative activity. In other words the mutual dependency can be framed as: 'the more influence public relations activities exert the less there is so of journalism and vice versa (Baerns 1987: 91). This argument assumes PR is concerned primarily with the capture of media space. It can be illustrated by a speech made by former Melbourne *Herald* editor Eric Beecher warning that public relations was infiltrating journalism to an unprecedented degree (Andrew Ollie Memorial lecture 2000, cited in Osborne and Lewis 2001: 195).

Weaver (1987) suggests the press specifically shapes and filters reality rather than 'acting as a transmission belt or a mirror of society' and concentration on relatively few issues and subjects invariably leads to a public perception that they are therefore more important than other issues or subjects (1987: 176). Weaver adds an important point to his argument. He says it is crucial to differentiate between agenda setting by the media and the passing on of priorities set by other actors and institutions within the social sphere. In all three case studies that form chapter 7 there are elements of both.

Habermas (1989) regards the press as the original pre-eminent institution of the public sphere citing its foundations in craft-based business interests as overwhelmingly more focussed on public good than the present commercial operators from where ideologies and viewpoints overshadow news gathering and news dissemination (1989: 181). I would argue reporters on the *CWD* spend most of their time attempting to focus on the public good associated with their news gathering. A Habermasian position is more evident in the news dissemination process, as will be discussed below.

Kraus (1976) argues that political theorists historically considered mass communication to be part of the political process, a condition which allowed mass media to simply appear to reinforce elite leadership and to disseminate policy decisions as a one-way process intent on legitimising political institutions and the actions of leaders (1976: 175). The relationship between the media — the press in particular — and politics has historically been unbalanced, creating partisan support which has increased particularly in the UK in the past three decades (Kavanagh 1995: 185). Evidence exists that contemporary relationships between Australia's major parties and major newsmedia outlets are stronger now than in the past (*AFR*, 31.8.2001). Such is the position of the newsmedia in Australia today that it often acts as a powerful special interest group rather than an impartial observer, especially on issues of cross-media ownership. Newsmedia globally and locally has been framed as a separate entity within the polity

(Smith 2001; Smith and Watson 1989; Warhurst 1987, Wilson 1990) and as a special interest group (Hurst and White 1994; Sawyer and Zappalà 2001; Tiffen 1989).

Another view of the newsmedia as part of the polity is its development during the past three decades as an interdisciplinary field of academic study which integrates history, political science, sociology and cultural studies (McColl 1985: 235). There is a conservative argument which says media can only present news as fact and that the interpretation of facts resides with the audience. The corollary is that audiences have come to rely on message dissemination being factual. This is a situation which allows the news producer to make decisions based on the likely outcome having the potential to alter the balance rather than on the presentation of facts. Such is the nature of the human element in the process that the balance more frequently is presented to an individual journalist or reporter than the source of the information may wish the recipient to enjoy.

The power of the press

Aspects of the reporter's work have been usually described as the interpretative moment, the interrogative moment and the adversarial moment (McNair 2000). A typology of reporting is therefore required to relate the three aspects to news gathering. But it is the adversarial moment, the actual interview between a reporter and a political communicator which is of interest here as is the other defining element of the typology, news reception (from political communicators to the reporter) when viewed as normative.

McNair (2000: 85) and others (McChesney 1999; Seib 1994; Sparrow 1999) concentrate their analysis of the television interview working from the position of observer of the increasingly contested relationship between reporter and politician. An equally important aspect of the typology of the adversarial moment is the reporter interview in which information from the political communicator is accepted without qualification, transcribed, then broadcast or published as fact.

Wild (1974) presents early evidence of town-based reliance on mutual newspaper support for conservative policies (1974: 190). When a reporter undertakes to interview a political communicator for a potential news story, the decision to do the interview begins with an assessment of the information and the angle that might give the story sufficient legitimacy to warrant publication. Reporters frequently receive telephone calls

and personal visits from political communicators with information which has no angle or timeliness, questionable veracity and thus no legitimacy. Concurrently, a scrap of information which has the potential to become a lead story is often overlooked as the reporter becomes immune to the reception of information, stereotyping the source and thus reducing the size of the pool from which legitimate news can be drawn. This is in part due to the position of the reporter as a member of the elite within the community. In Orange, some reporters on the *CWD* have tertiary qualifications while others have been plucked from the community and trained "in house". Whether they agree or not, and whether they attempt to blunt their elitism by drinking at working class hotels, is incidental. The difficulty for reporters on the *CWD* is the dual position of the newspaper as a record of community events, (following Lippmann) and a populist paper. In this the *CWD* follows historic patterns of country newspapers that summarised city news, provided social advice and had a wide circulation (Mayer 1964: 15). The *CWD* provides advice about constructs such as community events, and council policy. It publishes local angles on news from federal parliament and from Sydney, its closest major city. It also attempts to find popular angles for local news, usually reporting superficially in the belief the community is more interested in the superficial. In so doing it is presenting itself and its reporters as elitist. By resisting the opportunity to provide analysis and reflective criticism it is suggesting a gap exists between its 'capacity' to report and its 'actual' report.. It is denying its less well educated audience the chance to obtain valid information about issues by presenting them only in populist terms. This can be considered as a reflection of the relationship between the media elites, politicians, and council officers.

Newsworkers and influence: politicians, council officers and their power

Two relationships are equally important at local newspaper level. The relationship between the reporter and the politician, and the reporter and the government administrator. The relationship between the reporter and the politician in terms of the capacity to influence is relatively stable. In terms of consensus and cleavage, a town in which local politics is divided will provide the reporter with more legitimate news than one in which a council is run consensually. Legitimacy in a cleavage context is provided through the delivery of messages from either side of politics. Consensus provides the opportunity to report factually but leaves no room for the interpretative moment. A reporter feeling the need to question consensual policy has only the special interest

group through which to pursue an alternative angle to the consensus. Even then there is a need for caution as the reported/published position of the special interest group, while being in conflict with consensual policy, may be seen to be an attempt by the reporter to subvert policy. The best situation for the reporter is the politically divided council. From another perspective, the newspaper has a powerful capacity to influence through its leader or editorial. In a small town environment the leader writer is frequently the editor of the paper.

A typology of reporter relationships highlights some of the problems confronting those gathering and interpreting news. Reporters can be either proactive or reactive in sourcing material and assessing its newsworthiness. Proactive reporters are those who develop and maintain a strong book of contacts regardless of political affiliation. In this, group contacts would be those not outwardly motivated by politically partisan or commercial gain: clergy, school principals, police commanding officers, senior government department heads, business owners, senior health administrators — those able and willing to provide background information on issues even if this did not result in the capture of media space. A source list of this nature is the underpinning of a reporter's basis of employment. It provides verification of information supplied by those with a professional interest in the provision of information to the reporter. Professional interest often comes with a degree of self-interest as well. A good reporter needs to evaluate the level of self-interest which could be related to the survival of an institution (eg. a school) and the informants' role as a publicist for his or her employer (whether a council, or even a 'charity') as there may be identifiable self-interest in the provision of information and it may transpire that it is less than factual and therefore requires verification from another more objective source. In the event that a reporter does not maintain a strong contact list there must be a reliance on either the reporter's own knowledge or in the veracity of the information supplied by the political source. As the motivation for supply of information from a political source is self-interest, it must always be verified. Reactive reporters rely on politically motivated sources for most if not all their information. This is a dangerous position to be in as reporters are

already vulnerable to disinformation, the reporting of untruths and sophisticated information and propaganda machinery (Sparrow 1999: 59).²³

The power of newspaper reporters lies in the decisions they make regarding what to report and what not to report (Seib 1994: 31) which is a process of informed decision making rather than luck. While the reporter must make a decision about inclusion or exclusion as a primary motive there are numerous other factors which assist in the decision process. Within this framework the reporter is obligated to produce news along company guidelines with varying degrees of editorial direction or intervention. Management pressure to conform to guidelines is as strong among local newspapers as it is among metropolitan dailies and nationals. The difficulty for a local newspaper reporter is the direct involvement of management on a daily basis. Quite often in regional newspapers the editor will also be the manager. An additional difficulty for the newspaper reporter in the small town is the lack of reinforcement available from alternative media sources.

In national terms in Australia, the UK and the US, Canada and New Zealand, Sunday morning television is devoted to political interviews (McNair 2000). If an interview with a politician has some substance most other newsmedia outlets, especially newspapers, will pick up and run with it on Monday. It is not unusual for *The Sydney Morning Herald* to run its lead story based on a *Channel 9 Sunday* program interview between its political reporter and a politician, even though *Channel 9* is owned by a rival media group. In the country town the reverse is the dominant strategy. The daily newspaper is the first point of reference from which radio stations and evening television news bulletins source their material. Interestingly, these television and radio reports, which have their basis in a published newspaper report, rarely cite the newspaper or the by-lined reporter as the source. Despite a defined point of reference for the newspaper, there is the obtuse notion that it will know which of its material is unacceptable as it will not be picked up by the other media (Redmond/Lloyd-Green/Cole interviews, June 2000). The upside for the newspaper reporter is that material filed and published is disseminated first.

²³ See for example the *US Church Committee Report* which uncovered more than 200 wire services, newspapers, magazines and book publishers wholly owned by the CIA.

The process for the reporter is relatively simple. Ideas for news stories are discussed at a morning editorial meeting at which the editor makes decisions on feasibility. During politically important times such as the lead up to an election, there will be an editor/manager decision to cover policy issues in more detail than usual (Seib 1994: 41). This will require the reporter to undertake more detailed research and to present both sides of an issue more fully. While this is perceived to be a well balanced, objective management decision, it rarely occurs because space allocations within the paper do not alter to accommodate the research.

True independent Peter Hetherington has promised to establish unambiguous 'pathways program' for local Koori community elected to Orange City Council on September 11.

Hetherington met recently with leaders of the local Koori communities in which local government and general employment could be accessible.

At present there are limited avenues available to the Koori community for extensive developments in vocational education and training.

"It is vital the whole community benefits from opportunities in when they become available.

"It is my intention, if elected on September 11, to see that Orange and indeed, all local government in the central west of New South Wales have a 'pathways program' which allows equal opportunity of employment.

"Such a program must also apply the principles of industrial design, occupational health and safety at the highest levels, which candidate for a position is offered the same opportunity," he said.

Hetherington added he was preparing a detailed investment proposal for operation with local investment advisers and stockbrokers, in examination of the present tendering system for council contracts.

Ends
For further information contact:
Peter Hetherington
Telephone 6361 6888
Facsimile 6362 3791
Mobile 0419 637004

Figure 6.1 A copy of a Hetherington media statement: content over style in an attempt to inject an educative element in to the campaign

It is the role of the reporter to support the editor in the delivery of a fair and competent account by producing fair and competent material. Anything less and the reporter is not doing what he or she is employed at face value to do. The reporter is obliged to source material and to table it as a story angle at editorial meetings. But reporter's frequently make decisions to withhold potential news material. Such a decision may be personal. Another reason is lack of support for a story angle but most often a potential story is withheld for political reasons. Political reporters by their nature, are partisan towards either social equity platforms or conservative business platforms, a position which has been examined in detail (see Nimmo 1978; Paletz 1987; Simms and Bolger 2000; Tiffen 2000). Most frequently though there is a left-of-centre leaning (Weaver 1998: 51).

In a local news context a reporter's sources on one side will dry up very quickly if there is a negative story published about the other side without a corresponding reply. Thus a reporter makes daily decisions on the construction of political news based foremost on continuity of supply. It is in the reporter's best interests to suppress stories which could damage his sources. In this regard it is dangerous for a reporter to table the potential story and let the decision to file rest with the editor. Whether or not it is a conscious decision by the reporter, it is much more likely that the source will be advised that there was no angle or no news value at an early stage. An excuse often provided by the reporter is the limitation on editorial space or that the copy, if the reporter filed, was spiked by the editor. Again though, this is the least likely avenue as there is always the chance the editor will run the story if it is filed. A similar situation arises when an editor spikes filed copy. A reporter may have filed a story which meets all the requirements of political news value: timely, of public interest, interpreting the facts objectively and maintaining a position removed from influence. The copy however, is spiked by the editor who argues it did not reflect the public's right to know nor the public interest. The reporter has no firm ground on which to argue against the spike as there is no mileage in defending the story against the editor's decision. An editor's decision to spike can be either personally or politically motivated, aside from the more obvious reluctance to publish because the material is unacceptable professionally.

The distinction between 'news reporting' which should be descriptive, accurate and explanatory (de Burgh 2000) and 'political news reporting' which is frequently mediated, (McNair 2000) can be drawn in a number of ways. The difficulty for the reporter lies in the interpretation of the rhetoric. And it is the capacity to interpret or mediate the

rhetoric, to turn it into manageable, readable material, which is at the heart of Mayhew's argument. Reporters from urban, weekly, or regional daily, bi-weekly or weekly newspapers attend council meetings, obtain copies of council business papers and file stories which they and their editor believe will be of interest to the public. When assessing council activities reporters have, by convention, an area within the chamber set aside for their exclusive use, much like the national newsmedia have space provided in federal parliament for exclusive use. Rights and obligations placed upon urban and regional reporters by local government administrations are similar to those placed upon federal parliamentary press gallery members. Councils supply local papers with a public meeting agenda but these frequently differ from that which a councillor is reading from because the copy provided to the reporter does not contain controversial attachments or committee meeting minutes. (Griffiths 2002: 110).

As well as attending council meetings, obtaining copies of business papers and attending special media briefing sessions with senior council officers or councillors, media representatives — reporters, sub-editors, or more often editors on smaller country newspapers — develop business and personal relationships with elected representatives as well as council employees. These relationships may have formed from a common community base. An elected councillor and a reporter may be members of the same sporting or social club.

Strong relationships can be beneficial for both parties or they can be detrimental to the pursuit of objective reporting by the newsworker. The extent of the relationships and the degree to which both sides will pursue them varies significantly in urban and rural areas. Ease of transport and portability of employment mean most council reporters on weekly or bi-weekly newspapers in large conurbations live outside the boundaries of the city or shire council in which they report. In these instances other means of relationship development must be considered. In rural areas however the relationship is very different.

Weaver (1987) raises three questions concerning media agenda setting which resonate with reporters in smaller communities. Weaver inquires whether, 1) media are both necessary and sufficient in setting public agendas; 2) are necessary but not sufficient in setting public agendas; 3) are neither necessary nor sufficient in setting public agendas. Weaver discovered that in the US, newspaper and television influence on public concern

was greatest in spring and summer and least during the final few months of a federal election campaign. The local government election in Orange was held in Spring. Weaver also discerned that the distinction between television and newspapers as issue agenda setters became less pronounced as a campaign continued. In terms of candidate image he found the press played a major role in making some candidates and their characteristics more relevant (1987: 179). The *CWD* coverage of ALP policy reinforces this finding.

There is a limited amount of space available on a daily basis for news coverage in all media. In newspaper terms, the space available for news is in direct proportion to the amount of space sold for advertising. On any given day in a process of "mocking up" the "book", the advertising department has final control of space ratios. If for example the *CWD* is ready for "bed" at 6pm and an advertising sales representative calls in a late advertisement, it will take precedence over news which may have already been set and waiting on the page to be printed. The page will be changed, the advertisement added, the news removed and the only people in the process who will be aware are the advertising manager, the compositor, possibly the sub editor, or "stone" sub and the editor. The reporter who wrote the removed piece will discover its removal when the paper is distributed the following day. The reader will never know.

In theory, newswriters operate under an Australian Journalists' Association (AJA) charter described as being without fear or favour. In practice, a reporter who has published anti-capitalism stories in a pro-capitalist newspaper or anti-unionist stories in a pro-unionist newspaper will understand very quickly the true meaning of the word objective (see for example Bottom 1984, Windschuttle 1984).

The researcher's own experience as editor of a weekly suburban newspaper confirms the reality that to go against the unspoken policy of a proprietor produces a position of conflict from which it is almost impossible for the journalist to recover. As editor of *The North Shore Times*, a weekly suburban newspaper within the News Corporation subsidiary Cumberland Press, located in the northern Sydney suburb of Chatswood, the writer undertook to allow reporters the freedom to investigate allegedly corrupt building activities within the city. In 1987 Chatswood was undergoing structural redevelopment around the hub of the railway station and bus interchange. The development of space transfers from one building site to another, originated in nearby North Sydney, had moved further north. Allegations of corruption had existed within the city prior to the

researcher's appointment as editor, but had been ignored by the newspaper's reporters for undefined reasons. Working at the editor's direction in a more flexible framework, reporters began to investigate other activities in the adjoining shires and cities within the paper's distribution area but it was only a matter of weeks before management — centralised in the western suburb of Parramatta where it oversaw the production of all Cumberland publications — took an interest in the changed nature of the political coverage. But it was not a direct interest. A directive to "tone down" the lead stories and to "avoid going out of your way to upset people" was given by a middle management journalist, a position known as chief of staff that sat below the editor in chief but above each individual editor. The chief of staff, as a member of The AJA, was subject to a payscale known as "off the timebook", as were senior editors with responsibility for individual newspapers (but they were not afforded the luxury of company cars or expenses allotted to management). To be a good "Cumberland Man" one was required to understand the culture of the organisation and to aspire to a higher position within the corridors of power at News Corporation. Needless to say the writer argued the AJA dictum 'without fear or favour' but ultimately suffered the consequences of moving outside the narrow, implied structural boundaries of the company. His predecessor returned the newspaper to a position from which it published derivative news from public relations sources. He remained editor for 14 years. This anecdote serves to introduce the problem faced by reporters in Orange working for newsmedia organisations with political interests. But there is no *prima facie* evidence that particular newswriters in Orange have been given management directives to "spike" copy or to take a specific story angle.

Conflicting levels of community power

The GM of Orange City Council plays a pivotal part in initiating public policy, but the relationship between an officer of a government organisation and the media, by its very nature, is fraught. Traditional relationships exist between elected politicians and media (see Tumber 2000; Seymour-Ure 1974) but the relationship between an unelected representative and the media, falls outside the framework of the "public good". The relationship between senior officers of OCC and the editor of the *CWD* at the time of the 1999 election created potential ethical difficulties for the editor. Despite the GM claim to a cordial relationship with the editor and the editor's counter claim to an objective relationship with the GM, in reality the relationship appears to have been one

sided, dominated by the council. The relationship consisted of a regular monthly lunch engagement where the senior council officer would provide the editor with information concerning council activities. In arguing the power relationship of the meetings the senior officer made reference to payment for lunch more often being made by council than by the newspaper (Dwyer interview, June 2000). This is not an unusual situation. Editorial expenses on a regional newspaper are limited. It would not be seen as being unethical for an editor to accede to an offer of payment despite the potential for compromise. In terms of a greater understanding of the relationship between the newspaper and the council, the perception of the senior officer towards the professional work of the editor was that she was good at her job but overburdened by administrative procedures which placed a strain on her capacity to operate at a level he would have expected of the position (Dwyer interview, June 2001).²⁴

In terms of the position of the editor in the hierarchy of the town, the GM perceived the position to be one of importance and within the hierarchy, but placed the editor herself outside the structure due to certain personal factors (Dwyer interview, June 2001). (While he did not enunciate them, it was clear he had personal feelings about the editor working full-time while her partner took on full-time home duties.) The GM viewed the editor's role as community-minded rather than as "critic" seeking spectacle and sensationalism.

In contrast to the comment on Joanne Crawford as editor, the GM's opinion of the her replacement, who arrived in early 2000, was not as soft. Dwyer's opinion was that the new editor, Kerry Meyers, was "aloof and standoffish" but ironically, that he was a "died in the wool journalist who saw himself as the conscience of the community" (Dwyer interview, June 2000)²⁵.

From the council's viewpoint the media appears to be reactive; to pursue an angle only when something is wrong, rather than attempting to act in a balanced fashion and pursue news angles in which council could be seen to be acting positively. There was also a difficulty in communicating council activity because there was no interest unless it

²⁴ Note though that the general manager has no expert knowledge of the process of news gathering and production and is therefore not strictly in a position from which to make an accurate judgement.

²⁵ Dwyer also made a comment that he thought Meyers would not survive too long, having come from the big city of Sydney. In late October 2003 Meyers resigned his post at the CWD to return to Sydney to take up the position of editor of the *Catholic Weekly*.

affected the reporter directly (Dwyer interview, June 2000). There was a community expectation that unless something was wrong, "things would go on as normal" (Dwyer interview, June 2000). There was also a council opinion that the CWD was not averse to unscrupulous tactics to generate story angles. Some years ago a conflict emerged that remained a point of contention for the GM in his determination of his relationship with the media.

"We had one case here where some reporters got onto the local reptile farm and brought a snake into the playground at Spring Street Neighbourhood Centre. They photographed the snake in the playground, where the kids were. It was front page. They said how slack the council was because there was a snake in the children's playground. It came from a reptile farm out at Molong. Brought in and planted there and that's the sort of despicable act the paper will go to get stories. We will just not tolerate that. If they do that, if there was a repeat, we would cut our advertising and do our own paper. We would do a fortnightly issue."

—Alan Dwyer, June 2000

When senior government administrators control media relations they tend to view the relationship in an unbalanced fashion. They expect the media's role to be to boost council's image. But it is also the task of the local newspaper to uncover and report the issues council most often attempts to hide. In the USA the situation is different.

The pattern of coverage of council issues by local or regional media is usually one of conscious and mutually agreed boosterism designed to increase growth in all areas of a town or city's economy in tourism, manufacturing, culture and arts (Myers-Jones and Brooker-Gross 1994: 195). The notion of journalistic integrity and objectivity is translated into the direct competition which emerges between towns and cities as a consequence of the boosterism. Thus boosterism, while remaining subjective, is perceived as objectivity due to its increased scale. But a newspaper will inevitably be confronted by its agreement to promote an issue by the presence of negative news stories. And when it appears to senior council administrators that the newspaper is running too many negative stories, they adopt a confrontationist approach and jeopardise the boosterism agreement.

To manage the flow of negative council news in the CWD, OCC threatened to publish a council-funded competing newspaper. This threat, which has never manifested itself, is used along with a second threat to remove council advertising from the CWD if it fails

to deliver a satisfactory product (Dwyer interview, June 2000).²⁶ What is meant by a "satisfactory product" is problematic. Whenever the newspaper publishes a news item in which council is featured, irrespective of factual evidence, it runs the risk of being labelled bias.

The most interesting feature of the threat and punishment strategy applied by council to the newsmedia is the electorate's earlier response to distribution of an extant, free council newspaper. The results of a council-sponsored survey carried out in June 2000 were indicative of ratepayer interest in council published information. Extant council publications were perceived to have low importance in the community while other information services, including community information in the *CWD* was in the moderate to high range (CLGR survey 2000). The survey showed community information coverage in the *CWD* was more important to women than men and more important to the over 40 age group. The age category reflects ownership and ratepaying status. Slightly more respondents in urban areas of the city thought the newspaper information more important than rural dwellers, and those who had lived in the city for the least amount of time (1-5 years) placed the most importance on the information (CLGR Survey, 2000).²⁷

²⁶ The value of council advertising in the *CWD* in 2003 was \$125,000.00, or the equivalent of three editorial positions. Council general manager Alan Dwyer attempted to use the tactic in April 2003 but council rejected his recommendation. According to *CWD* journalist Mark Filmer, the issue caused grave concern at the newspaper, to the extent that the editor, Kerry Meyers and a senior Rural Press staff member from North Richmond headquarters, attended the April 3 meeting at which the GM's recommendation was made (Filmer email, Hetherington telecon, April 2003).

²⁷ At the time, council placed a ban on communication with *Prime* Television. It was in response to an assumption that Peter Hetherington was influencing news content. It pivoted around a specific case, in which Hetherington supported an environmental group opposed to the establishment of a rowing course by a powerful regional private school. Aside from the publicly fought campaign, which pitted duck-lovers against a powerful 'mezzanine' group, the issue is complex. There were accusations that a senior council officer had a vested interest in the issue. Accusations were levelled at councillor Hetherington that he attempted to introduce this into the public sphere through the news department. Council argued it had been unfairly treated and that Hetherington had been the source of the story. The council imposed a ban on employees talking to *Prime*. Despite Hetherington's appeal to the station's Canberra regional manager that he was not involved, the station broadcast an apology. This act, based on the word of a senior council officer, provoked the federal member for Calare, Peter Andren, himself the former news anchor for *Prime*, to become involved. Andren argued it was not in the best interest of the station to succumb to pressure and threats when reporting to the best of its ability.

CWD reporter Nick Redmond believes the power of the GM has a lot to do with the way news is reported.

"I think part of the problem is that he is a very powerful general manager and I don't know if it's true, but I would be very surprised to see any of his recommendations to council, or the papers that he registers in council, get voted out."

— Nick Redmond, reporter CWD

Local newspaper reporters, television reporters and broadcasters in Orange work within deadlines for production of copy and vision. There is also a space requirement within each medium for day-to-day news and features. Orange City Council is cogniscent of newsmedia deadlines, newsmedia space and the nature of objectivity and subjectivity and legal rights pertaining to the latter two. A Janus View of the position of a council provides evidence to substantiate how it can influence public opinion through placement of material in all local newsmedia along with how it deals directly and indirectly with popularly elected council representatives.

A city council presents a public image in a number of ways. In terms of theoretical public relations models, a council applies Grunig's first and second models — publicity and public information — in much the same way as most state and federal governments. The dissemination of material which is directly related to council activities falls within the first model while material of an educative nature — recycling, correct use of roundabouts, or environmental standards in council parks and gardens — falls within the second.

While the GM controls information flows from council, the Mayor also plays a considerable role in manufacturing an external image. But it is the GM who engineers the day-to-day image, in terms he believes will be acceptable to the media and thus, the public. The majority of citizens in Orange receive policy information from the newsmedia. Despite the availability of direct democracy — the freedom of citizens to enter the council chamber during debate — citizens rarely attend council unless pursuing a special interest. But quite frequently councillors themselves are at odds with the public image of council.

News

Soaring approval for GM

By Nick Redmond

ORANGE City Council's general manager Allen Dwyer has been given a thumbs up by councillors in a review of his performance over the past 12 months.

Across seven management categories Mr Dwyer's performance was considered excellent by, on average, 7.3 of the 13 responding councillors.

One councillor's responses were not included in the anonymous review as they were lodged after the closing date.

According to the review, which is undertaken annually, Mr Dwyer performed best in the management, planning, policy and financial area where his work in the past year was considered excellent by 10 of the respondents.

The review contains references to the general manager including "very vigilant", "very active" and "shows utmost responsibility".

In the review Mr Dwyer received the lowest scores in the general section, where five councillors considered his per-

formance excellent, four high, one good, two average and one poor.

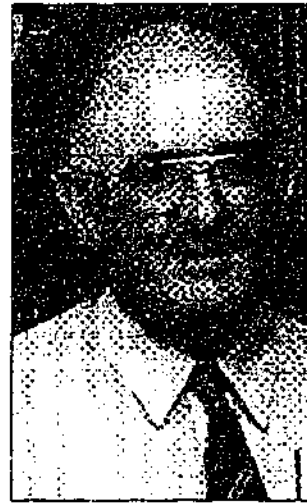
In that section, one of the councillors said Mr Dwyer was highly regarded within council but questioned his community image.

The councillor said: "The perception from within the council does appear to be somewhat different to that of the general public."

"[The] relationship with many community groups/organisations seems at times confrontational. Possibly a more conciliatory approach would provide a positive image," was another response, while another said: "Room for improvement."

At the other end of the performance scale Mr Dwyer was likened to an eagle.

"A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others ... In the end, leaders are much like eagles ... they don't flock - you find them one at a time. Such as Allen Dwyer," said one councillor's response.



GOOD REPORT: Orange City Council's general manager Allen Dwyer received a generally positive report from councillors on his performance.

For overall performance

seven councillors responded excellent, four high, and two above average.

Figure 6.2 *CWD* reporting of the council process of performance review of the GM

A GM's own public image is operational. He is seen to be in day-to-day control of the running of the council. But a more complex role emerges when a council has little direction; when councillors get bogged down in personalities and minor political skirmishes. This is the case within OCC. The GM has an issue with one councillor. He sees him as being an uneducated person and a "Greek" (Dwyer interview, June 2000). The councillor in question has lived in Orange for 32 years and is in his second term on council. His command of English, like many European migrants, lacks conventional grammatical structures. Nevertheless, he has successfully spent 32 years in business in Orange, a testimony to either his tenacity or his personality. He is also one of the city's most prolific fundraisers (Hetherington telecon, Nov 2001). The GM makes no attempt to hide his animosity for the councillor and the councillor has made no attempt to hide his personal dislike of the GM. (Figure 6.3, letter to the editor, *CWD* April 2001). The question is whether this mutual dislike should affect the operation of council at either a policy level or administrative level and whether it translates into a negative image of

council in the public sphere. An examination of specific issues indicates it does have an influence on both, even though it rarely emerges in the media as a personal issue. There may be the occasional letter to the editor from both parties but these will present the issues in a soft light to avoid the potential for legal action.

In the event of a conflict between the GM and a councillor, the GM usually wins. There may be a minor victory for a councillor in terms of points scoring but the power of the GM will outweigh that of the councillor. In this case a limited understanding of political strategy and tactics pushed the councillor to a low level of confrontation involving personal remarks and asides during council meetings as his only remaining response. The GM, on the other hand, was able to draw on vast political capital on each occasion the councillor has sought to enter the public sphere.

Hazelton deserves better treatment

Since I arrived in Australia in 1962 it has been my pleasure and privilege to become part of the Orange community, to live here with my family, to work very hard and to achieve my goals for myself and the community.

I have seen this town and district thrive and prosper and have observed various changes.

Over the years individual names have become companies, small operators have become big business.

From early days when I started working at Jim's Café in 1962, I got to know the Hazelton aviation family and their staff.

From a humble beginning with crop dusting and charter work, Hazelton became the nationally successful company we know today.

I often used their services to and from Sydney and I always felt proud as I know many citizens of Orange felt the same as I for the success of this home grown industry.

I was proud of the promotion it provided for this city and district. Hazelton has always been an excellent corporate citizen for Orange by creating jobs, sponsoring events and helping in many situations.

As I am writing this letter, Hazelton Airlines has become part of a bigger organisation. Unfortunately, in a globalisation era, it had become a "boutique" carrier and to survive it had to go

that way.

For the last two years the relationship between the Orange City Council and this wonderful corporate citizen regrettably has not been good.

To read on the front page of the Central Western Daily on Monday, February 19, 2001 a report attributed to the Orange City Council's general manager, that council was going to start legal proceedings against Hazelton to recover outstanding airport taxes

offended me. I consider this published statement to be most inappropriate having regard to the contribution made by Hazelton to Orange in the past.

The general manager on the same page of the Central Western Daily stated "The resolution said to take every possible step to collect this money".

I believe he was referring to the resolution passed on February 1 which reads as follows:

1. That the mayoral minute be noted;

2. That council pursue the collection of funds due from Hazelton Airlines;

3. That council again request a meeting with Hazelton Airlines.

The general manager's published statement in my view did not reflect the attitude of council or indeed council's resolution.

I wish to disassociate myself altogether from the general manager's stated proposed action. I under-

stand the outstanding amounts have now been paid by Hazelton.

If the General Manager of the Orange City Council wishes to have credibility as per his comments in Central Western Daily, page 8 of March 28, 2001, that "We are in the business of addressing facts" then I suggest strongly that we all stick to the facts at all times.

In conclusion I would like to thank Hazelton management and staff for excellent services provided over the years.

Good luck in the future and may you continue to serve Orange and district with the same community spirit and safety record.

Or Chris Gryllis
Orange

Figure 6.3 The letter from Councillor Gryllis that caused concern

A public example of this was the GM's response to a letter to the editor of the *CWD* written by Councillor Gryllis, and published on April 2, 2001 which was tabled under

the heading 'issues of integrity' by the GM at a public council meeting on April 5, 2001. The content of the councillor's letter related to the issue of local airline Hazelton being in dispute with council over an airport tax issue. Councillor Gryllis used strong written language to attempt to present the GM as being less than credible, as the instigator of the dispute for personal reasons, and for appearing to take action on behalf of council without council's approval. Councillor Gryllis's letter contained a number of inaccuracies. Mr Dwyer's report to council of April 5 was accompanied by a mayoral minute titled 'Conduct of Councillors' (Figure 6.4) and followed by a report in the *CWD* (Figure 6.5). Mr Dwyer's reports detailed the attendance by Councillor Gryllis when the Hazelton decision was being made. They argued that Councillor Gryllis knew of the procedures, and having been in attendance, was party to the decision.

LATE ITEM
PAGE: 1

C:\Users\101mayer

MAYORAL MINUTE TO	COUNCIL MEETING OF 5 APRIL 2001
SUBJECT	CONDUCT OF COUNCILLORS
DATE	4 APRIL 2001
	016.02.00

It is quite evident that certain Councillors are now in the habit of making broadbrush statements denigrating Council staff and the accuracy of reports brought by the staff to Council. This is occurring on an increasing number of occasions, not only in the Council, but letters to and interviews with the media.


This Mayoral Minute is intended to bring to the notice of all Councillors and staff that such action will not be tolerated and could even lead to legal action if the necessity arises.

If any Councillor has any real allegation and evidence to support it, they should approach either the Mayor or General Manager or both with the information.

I believe from the date of this Minute that the Mayor as Chairman, the Deputy Mayor and any Councillors chairing meetings will call on any speaker to, in effect, "put up or shut up" with regard to these damaging broadbrush statements that continue to occur.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 That this Minute be noted.
- 2 That all Chairmen of Council meetings adopt a "put up or shut up" attitude with regard to any sweeping allegations made by Councillors or staff to avoid ongoing conflict which could readily be resolved if a more direct approach was adopted.



Cr Richard Niven
MAYOR

Figure 6.4 The document that created media interest

What Mr Dwyer set out to achieve was to discredit Councillor Gryllis in the same fashion that Councillor Gryllis had attempted to discredit Mr Dwyer. The importance of the event is that Councillor Gryllis took into the public sphere, through a letter to the editor, the personal issue he has with Mr Dwyer. Mr Dwyer used the public forum of the council meeting to correct the record and to counterattack. The point here is that Councillor Gryllis presented his argument through the channel most used by councillors — the *CWD* and its letters to the editor page — which is his right as a popularly elected representative of the community.

Put up or shut up, Mayor tells councillors

By Pádraig Redmond

ORANGE mayor Dick Niven has issued a caution to his fellow councillors "to put up or shut up" when raising allegations in the chamber regarding the accuracy of staff reports.

Cr Niven tabled a mayoral minute in council last week that stated certain councillors were now in the habit of making broad statements denigrating council staff and the accuracy of reports brought by the staff to council.

Cr Niven said this was occurring on an increasing number of occasions, not only in council, but also in

letters to and interviews with the media.

"This mayoral minute is intended to bring to the notice of all councillors and staff that such action will not be tolerated and could even lead to legal action if the necessity arises," Cr Niven said.

"If any councillor has any real allegation and evidence to support it, they should approach either the mayor or the general manager or both with the information."

The minute recommending chairs of council take a "put up or shut up attitude with regard to any sweeping allegations" was supported by a majority of council.

Figure 6.5 *CWD* treatment of mayoral threat and punishment strategy

Council influence on *CWD* reporting

The letters pages of the *CWD*, in Habermasian terms, are an integral part of the public sphere. They are published in order to initiate public debate and as a cost-effective way for the paper to demonstrate that it takes public opinion seriously. In the Gryllis case, the GM, rather than responding with his own letter to the editor, which would be the only avenue available to non-political members of the community, used his power to present the issues in an alternative forum; the council chamber. In using this forum the GM achieved three things that Councillor Gryllis failed to detect in a political assessment of his tactic of writing his letter. Firstly, Mr Dwyer was able to continue the debate in the chamber. In so doing he presented Councillor Gryllis and his personal vendetta to his peers. Secondly, he opened the way for mayoral or other councillor

support which came in the form of the mayoral minute (see figure 6.5 above). The four paragraph mayoral minute titled "Conduct of Councillors" set out in clear and concise wording that councillors are no longer able to make "broadbrush statements or sweeping allegations" without bringing upon themselves the potential for legal action (Figure 6.5, Mayoral minute, May 2001). Thirdly, and most important in the process of selecting political strategy, Mr Dwyer provided the media with strong copy and a good angle. The news angle had existed intangibly, and the powers of the GM to influence public opinion had been revealed, but not to the extent that he was able to engineer sufficient council support to generate media coverage. Effectively, Councillor Gryllis provided the GM with the tools reply strategically: to convey within the public sphere a message that council was run by part-time politicians with little or no experience — they could not even remember when they had been at meetings when votes had been cast — and that they were prone to using their positions of political power to denigrate administrators, employed for the purpose of providing timely and expert advice to assist them to formulate policy.

While Councillor Gryllis provided the GM with a capability to deliver an effective blow to his status as an elected representative, Mr Dwyer also used the situation in a timely fashion to present Councillor Hetherington in an unfavourable light. Prior to the publication of Councillor Gryllis's letter, council made a decision to reject the development of an indoor swimming pool. This issue will be dealt with in detail in chapter 7, but it is important to present some of the information again as it relates to the position taken by Councillor Hetherington in relation to Councillor Gryllis and in relation to the GM. The report from the GM began with the statement ...

"Following on from Cr Hetherington's scurrilous and totally unsubstantiated attack on the integrity of the general manager and other staff on the aquatic centre issue at the council meeting held on March 15 2001 it came as no surprise to read the letter to the editor on Saturday 31 March and Monday April 2 respectively from Swimfit and Cr Hetherington's colleague, Cr Chris Gryllis."

— Late item 5, April 5 2001 council business paper

What is most important about this introduction to the Gryllis issue is the GM's tactic of linking Hetherington to Gryllis. If councillor Gryllis can be portrayed in the chamber and the media as a "ratbag" then ratbag by association will affect Hetherington, a councillor who in a short period of time on council had gained a reputation for asking

'hard' questions and for appearing to have a high profile in the community. Guilt by association was the tactic employed. The irony of this tactic lies in the fact that Gryllis and Hetherington, while exchanging information on several occasions, have no political alignment even though Gryllis refers to himself as an independent. Hetherington received no preferences from Gryllis at the election despite Gryllis's assurance to Hetherington during the campaign that he would get his preferences, a clear indication that there was no party political association to begin with and that according to Hetherington, it had not developed during his time on council (Hetherington interview, Aug 2001).

Councillor Hetherington sought advice on an appropriate response to the attack by the GM. He chose to accept the advice and made no mention of the issue again. Hetherington's tactic of remaining silent instead of attempting to rebut the GM's remarks in the tabled report indicated a reasonable understanding of the political process. Hetherington believes Dwyer was counting on him reacting to the remark and placing himself in an invidious position from where he may have incurred a rebuke by the Mayor or more seriously been ejected from the chamber, an act which would have generated favourable media coverage for council, but unfavourable coverage for Hetherington.

Councillor Hetherington developed the perception that the council reporter from the *CWD*, Nick Redmond, was advised by council officers to marginalise him. On numerous occasions after council meetings Hetherington attempted to strike up a conversation with Redmond, to be met with a less than friendly attitude (Hetherington telecon, Aug 2001).

The clue to understanding the relationships and the power of the GM can be seen in the behaviour of councillors and general staff at the conclusion of council meetings when supper is served and drinks are selected from the extensive range in the large glass-fronted refrigerator. The public, while invited to these after meeting suppers, rarely remain. The environment is similar to the football dressing room after a winning match. There is a great deal of bravado about which point was won or lost, boisterous cliques and caucuses appear and women staff and councillors involve themselves in what appears to be a festive occasion. But it is the location of senior council officers at these suppers which is most revealing in understanding influence and power within local

government, the relationship of the media to senior officers and ultimately, delivery of policy information to the public sphere. Councillor Hetherington, as a relatively new representative, argues the after meeting supper can be partly likened to the dressing room after a football match.

"It's like winning a grand final. On the field you give a bit of a serve to some bloke on the opposition team and an opposition player gives you a serve and you get stuck into him. It's on for young and old and you make sure you give as much as you get. There's no pouting and lolling about and getting all upset. You just get in and do the same.

After the game it's all over. You have a few beers with the opposing team and a bit of a laugh. You leave any dislike or hatred on the field. I can't say the same for council meetings. You get stuck into someone in the chamber and they don't leave it there. They take it out into the after meeting supper. They look the other way, they carry on like big girls or they get in a huddle in the corner with the general manager and badmouth you. Politics is not football, or it's not like it used to be on the old days, at least."

— Peter Hetherington, June 2000

Hetherington's point about the huddle in the corner provides a picture of the political relationships that exist in OCC and the power and influence of the senior officers. After the incident between the GM and Councillor Gryllis in council, Councillor Gryllis left the chamber. He did not stay for supper. Under normal conditions he would have stayed until around midnight. His abrupt departure on this evening provided the GM with sufficient evidence that his tactic had worked. It was evident that he had upset Councillor Gryllis. Councillor Hetherington however, remained during supper and attempted to engage a One Nation councillor in conversation. After each fortnightly meeting, the GM finds his way to a specific corner of the room; a corner near his office which has a small round table and a few chairs which are used by visitors during the day. It is here that he "holds court". As already mentioned the court consists of the ruling conservative coalition of conservative councillors and the two ALP councillors (Researcher observations, Jun, Aug 2000; May, July, Sept 2001; June 2002).

The view from the editor's desk

Candidates at a local election present a variety of information to newsmedia through a number of diffuse and often bizarre channels. In attempting to present objective material, a candidate — especially one new to the political process — will have difficulty assessing whether it will be accepted on an objective basis. The editor of the *CWD* provided a valuable insight into the relationship between a candidate and a daily regional newspaper. Despite Hetherington's argument that he had no party alignment nor

funding from special interest groups, Joanne Crawford questioned the legitimacy of his so called "true" independence (Crawford interview, Feb 2000). Crawford said she could not see why people would vote for him just because he was an independent. She did not believe the label "independence" influenced voters at local government level. At state and federal level, she argued, people can see independents bring power — power for the electorate — because they hold the balance of power, whereas that does not happen at local government level. Crawford said the electorate should vote in favour of a candidate if they had done a good job for the city (Crawford interview, Feb 2000). But this argument assumes candidates will have a greater capacity for political leadership if they have had previous local government or community group experience.

There is an implied assumption in western democracies that the role of the newsmedia is to disseminate objective information and to have a deep background understanding of the issues and political processes so that objectivity can flourish. Audience perceptions are that it is also to rebut the practice of PR which, according to McNair (2000), and following Mayhew, is designed to subvert the normative integrity of the public sphere by transforming it into a vehicle for the pursuit of vested interests and the subordination of the public interest. Crawford, reinforced this view by believing Hetherington had done "preference deals" with both the National Party and Labor Party. And that these arrangements allowed him to win a seat. For Crawford, a belief in conspiracy theory allowed her to reinforce her own view that the political process, and those seeking political office, were of low integrity. Ironically, a major policy plank in Hetherington's campaign was the non-acceptance of political party affiliations despite overtures from both major parties during his early campaigning (Hetherington interview, Feb 2000).

It is instructive to examine the convergent relationship between elected local government representatives and editorial staff at the *CWD*. A sub-editor on the newspaper is also a councillor although this is not unique and indeed occurred in Orange 30 years previously, as mentioned above.²⁸

²⁸ A reporter on the *CWD* in 1970, Denis Gregory, campaigned for and won a seat on council for one term. Gregory told this researcher that at the time, he believed he could do a better job than those he was reporting on. The researcher witnessed a similar example when, in 1984, a reporter on the *Liverpool Champion* newspaper, Jim Merry, campaigned for and won a seat on Campbelltown City Council for the same reason.

It does, however, place a separate burden of responsibility upon the editor of the newspaper.

Conflicting views on the objectivity of "journalist as councillor" exist at a number of levels in Orange. By way of example, Sinclair (1987) in her work on Victorian local government elections, notes that candidates stick pretty much to standard procedures when attempting to educate an electorate. Preferred campaign tactics for the majority are doorknocking, leaflet dropping and attempting to gain media coverage (1987: 61). Open house, public meetings and posters are other tactics applied less frequently and with fewer measurable results (1987: 63). What is extraordinary about the observation of Sinclair's candidates is that one admits to gaining vital coverage in a local newspaper because she was a woman and '... in the whole history of the municipality only one woman had ever stood and so they gave me terrific coverage' (1987: 63). Sinclair further exposes the judgment and subjectivity of the mass media by revealing a candidate who had come under verbal attack from a sitting candidate was 'saved' because her story was picked up by a 'sympathetic woman journalist' (1987: 65).

Sinclair does not reveal the name of the electorate or the newspaper but such a relationship is normative. It serves to counter the argument put by Joanne Crawford that her 'journalist/councillor' was objective (Crawford interview, Feb 2000). Additionally, the journalist, John Miller, contradicts Crawford's assessment of the situation (Cnclr Miller interview, 2001). Crawford said she had placed Miller on leave during the campaign in order to avoid a conflict of interest. Miller claims to have worked normal shifts during the campaign as other sub editors were unavailable to take on his shifts during the final three weeks of the election. Miller's position itself is challenged by a *CW/D* colleague, Mark Filmer, who claims numerous well-qualified sub editors were available and capable of undertaking all Miller's shifts leading up to election day (Filmer interview, Aug 2001).

Archard (1998), a leading media theorist, argues the media have a strong and complex influence upon how the public understands and shapes its world (1998: 85). And the individual as both journalist and councillor raises the issue of ethics in a broader sense as the individual is creator and disseminator of policy information.

In terms of Archard's argument, a newspaper sub editor is usually the last checkpoint before a story is published. In the case of large metropolitan daily newspapers such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* or *The Los Angeles Times* there will be a number of sub editors

in the chain checking and cross checking the reporter's work for house style as well as factual and typographical errors or omissions. In the case of a small daily such as the *CWD*, one sub takes responsibility for a number of actions including fact checking, style and lastly "stone" subbing, the process of observing whether the editorial copy fits the available space in the newspaper after advertising copy is placed. It is the stone subs responsibility to cut long material or add to short material. Most often there is a requirement to cut copy and time constraints usually mean a stone sub will cut from the bottom. This occurs in both electronic and hard copy placement.

Making value judgements on what to cut is part of a daily routine. This is the point at which a sub editor has most control over news. On the day of publication a reporter will usually examine news stories, discussing with a sub the cuts or additions that may have been enacted on the stone, but they will have no opportunity to discuss or change a story before it goes to bed. (Stone subbing usually occurs immediately before a page is ready for "camera" so a reporter, unless they are working a late or split shift, will not be involved in any cuts on the stone because they have finished their shift. In the case of the *CWD*, the stone sub checks pages electronically immediately prior to them being uploaded for printing to a remote site in another city.)

For the *CWD* sub editor John Miller, the issue is one of balance concerning his employment with the newspaper and his public responsibility as a councillor and in 2003, mayor of the city. As an elected representative, Miller is responsible for creation of public policy. As a journalist, he is responsible for dissemination of policy. The notion of vested interest is not at issue because Councillor Miller can remove himself from the chamber during business relating to the newspaper. This is the simplistic answer to all matters of personal interest for councillors and one that has some significance given that a number of them are involved in real estate development. Instead, the concern is about the ethical position of the sub editor and the capacity it provides to influence copy about competing candidates. There is no evidence that copy was influenced. Nor is it suggested that Councillor Miller would have put himself in a position to influence copy. What is argued is that the view of the public is shaped by its perception of the dual responsibilities. This in turn shapes the way the public views presentation of the news. If the public has a perception that influence occurred, then there is very little that can be done to change that perception. For the editor of the *CWD*, Joanne Crawford, there was an unresolved issue because of public perception

that news influences occurred during the three month campaign period immediately before the election. Crawford appeared to be incapable of a resolution to the satisfaction of the public, thus emasculating the *CWD*'s public position as a newspaper of record. When this occurs, the only course of action is to remove the sub editor from duty during elections. But there is anecdotal evidence that this did not happen. The *CWD* had to live with the consequences.

"During the election we had some sort of sub editing or production problem. One candidate who was in a pairing of candidates was cropped out of a photograph that was due to appear. I don't know what the reason was. But the woman who was running took out classified ads and published the photos, under the big bold letters - 'this is the photo that the Central Western Daily wouldn't publish'."

— Nick Redmond, reporter *CWD*

On balance Crawford suggested perhaps the *CWD* was seen to be "too close to council" despite running the occasional anti-council story. She believed sponsoring Christmas street parties and joint promotions of the city by the newspaper would assist in the process of balancing the community's perception of bias towards council (Crawford interview, Feb 2000).²⁹ According to ABC broadcaster Steve Martin, the *CWD* was very local and stuck with established performers rather than attempting to analyse new political actors. He believes few risks were taken to upset the established order (Martin interview, June 2000). Crawford suggests the newspaper should have been involved in a public forum organised by church, business and council interests prior to polling day. As mentioned above, such a forum was mooted although cancelled well before polling day. Crawford argues the *CWD* involvement would have altered the perception of it as a public forum within the community and provided it with some deeper legitimacy (Crawford interview, Feb 2000).

Patterson (2000) claims the American press is freer than most, combined with a more adversarial relationship 'with the officials it covers' (2000: 248). He further argues news

²⁹ A large part of each shift on metropolitan newspapers is taken up in answering telephone and personal calls from self-interested parties with an interest in submitted material (*The Australian Financial Review* 14.4.00: 24). Martin suggests there is a standard procedure for gauging candidates on "an idiot scale" and vetting them accordingly (Martin interview, June 2000). He reveals that there were times during the election campaign when reporters at the ABC could "see" a candidate approaching the newsroom from the street and, knowing that they would be timewasters, instruct a colleague to tell the candidate there was no-one available to speak to them. The election reporter would then retreat to a backroom until the candidate left.

itself is a construct and not capable of attaining the journalistic position of a mirror image of reality. This is not the case of the *CWD* reporting.

Media as promotional vehicle

Newspapers are frequently used for the promotion of regionally defining strategies (Myers-Jones and Brooker-Gross 1994). The *CWD* is no exception. Newspapers have the potential to take an editorial line in favour of or against growth in all its manifestations: economic, industrial, demographic or political and they can exert influence through leaders and selection of material. In promoting growth, there is an implication that stagnation is the alternative.

Growth generally equates with economic well-being. It is presented in economic or financial terms relative to a return on investment: high growth equals high returns and high returns mean wise investment. Frequently the policy direction of the newsmedia reflects a desire for growth as it is established in terms of the market. There is rarely a balance between the requirements of social or political change to be offset by economic growth and while the opposite of political growth or social growth is not necessarily stagnation or recession, the dominant economic ideology over-rides the potential for discussion of the alternatives. Tourism and regional development for example, are catchcries which receive strong financial commitment from government as economic indicators of growth. For these catchcries to be effective, they must prevail in the media.

A newsmedium which rejects a council policy decision to increase tourism may be seen to be avoiding representation of the public good, and yet there may be no evidence that increased tourism would add to the economic or social well-being of the community. The difficulty for the newspaper arises from its inability to provide an alternative. Increased tourism is evidence of economic advancement. While no formal arrangement for the promotion of tourism and regional growth exists, the *CWD* accepts and publishes material from council, free of charge, which promotes Orange as a tourism destination at different times of the year. This type of arrangement exists at all levels of media in Orange and is viewed by newsmedia management as a community service (Crawford 2000, Larsen 2000) despite the argument put by Sommerlad (2000) that country newspaper publishers and editors have an aversion to PR material (Sommerlad 2000: 163). Sommerlad cites the frequent campaigns of the Country Press Association

of NSW that urge the return of PR material to its source because it is seen to be an attempt to gain free advertising, noting that in 1996 the annual Country Press conference resolved to resist '...government expectations of the press to use hand-out material claimed to be in the public interest' (Sommerlad 2000: 164).

Despite these fine sentiments and the publisher of the *CWD* being a member of the CPA, many of its pages are regularly a promotional vehicle for OCC rather than a newspaper of record. There are arguments in favour of a local newspaper taking a boosterist position in regard to the city in which it resides, but they are overwhelmed by the argument for objective reporting of what counts as news rather than reporting events which have been constructed to appear to be news. Most newswriters in Orange city report constructs of news rather than actual news despite evidence that news stories are freely accessible and investigative. When a real news story breaks in the city there is a strong likelihood it will be picked up by all newsmedia outlets and remain in the system for as long as it can be pursued.

Media as agenda setters

A further effect of the media as agenda setters is the reporter turned commentator. Frequently in Australian writing, there is a shift of emphasis from reporting to commentating on the issues. This is evident in most daily newspapers which offer increasingly more space to journalistic opinion. It is however the publication of journalistic features, news reporting or "think" pieces as full length books which reinforces the position of the journalist as commentator and expert.

Public relations also uses the book as a tool for dissemination of material in a more serious format than other media but it is the book by recognised journalists which reinforces in the minds of the public that the issues being written about are in fact valid and higher in veracity than they would have been if reported and left to lie. Tiffen (2000) describes this phenomenon as news conflicts and divides them into six categories. He argues for example that the public statements of unions and corporations during a conflict are categorised by a 'high degree of bluff' (2000: 200). He suggests that while there is a degree of rhetoric about ambit claims and refusal to move from the status quo, the middle ground has already been staked. Earlier, Seymour-Ure (1974) identified a similar pattern as those that divide candidates, provoke conflict and are stated simply along with clichéd catchlines or "slugs".

Tiffen provides other relevant categories of conflict which bear a direct relationship to the elected representatives defined in this thesis. The two main categories are inter-party conflict and pressure group and social movement conflict. In newsworthy terms Tiffen argues that in judging the relevance of pressure groups 'there is often more than the usual room for editorial discretion, for news judgements to be affected by editorial sympathies and partisanship' (2000: 200). This was the case during the 1999 election in Orange in which a variety of pressure groups fielded candidates but achieved limited success in media coverage and ultimately, limited success at the ballot box. In inter-party terms, Tiffen suggests a zero-sum winner-take-all-contest is in play resulting in the greatest number of column centimetres or minutes of coverage of conflicts within the parliament in a liberal democracy (2000: 192). At the local level, the same inter-party debates produce the most news coverage. In Orange City the sitting state government National Party member is also a city councillor. The state endorsed Labor candidate is also a councillor. When a conflict arises both seek publicity by localising the issue. The question is whether the public has an interest in a broader issues being localised and occupying local media space.

Prime Television news director Ross Larsen suggests there is little room for localised issues within a regional reporting context.

"If something really unusual came up, if a candidate came up with a situation where they think the local reservoir should be drained because it's about to rack and wipe out half a suburb, yeah, we might pick up on something like that. If an issue like that is being uncovered by a candidate, something that might have a big impact on the town, we may run it but we are not going to run with a story that Joe Bloggs thinks the garbage should be collected twice a week in one suburb and not the other. We don't really cover local government. Not that we're not interested. We are, but to be fair to our whole viewing audience we cover a third of the state so we can't physically cover all local government elections. So we leave it to radio and the press. Our television newsroom also supplies the radio newsroom. We supply news to them from our journalists."

— Ross Larsen, news director Prime Television

Tiffen argues that ruthless tactics accompany a zero-sum winner-take-all-game and inter-party conflict encourages 'the exaggeration of differences' (Tiffen 2000: 192). In a local environment however, the tactics appear to be less sophisticated and less ruthless than in the world of large city politics or national or state politics and newsmedia tend to focus on simple, clear cut issues. A simple issue provides a division between candidates and parties. It is more attractive to the newsworker because it can be presented as cleavage, rather than consensus.

CHAPTER 7

THREE STUDIES IN THE ART OF INFLUENCE AND PERSUASION

INTEREST GROUPS AND THE REALITY OF POWER

*One moment I was on steep Wiradhuri,
the next my white pickup translated me to a
meeting of suits in Lost River Council Chambers ...
... The suits closed ranks, separating into what
could have been chance groupings, and began
to speak together with a kind of exhausted cordiality
about a proposed new jail and a
high-temperature incinerator for the town.
An agenda of civic progress.
There would be a vote taken the following August,
and plans, or a campaign even,
to deal with the inevitable protests.*

— David Ireland, *The Chosen*

Interest groups and community groups in Orange use different strategies to attempt to persuade Orange City Council of the merit in their issues. But in each of the three case under examination the objective was to influence council policy. Each group framed a media strategy as part of a wider campaign. One organisation was successful while the other two failed. Peter Hetherington played an important role in each.

The first study centres on the role of Orange City journalists (critics) and politicians (performers) who support regional economic development at the expense of social development. It assumes a position of Mayhewian logic concerning the redemption of rhetorical tokens. It presents a counterpoint to the two following cases, and demonstrates that special interest groups can shape public opinion if they have support from media and government. It demonstrates that it is possible for special interest groups to develop what I call “mezzanine” status — between non-government organisations (NGOs) and grassroots groups — and to present an image in the public sphere which is supported unconditionally by media and government.

The case examines the Inland Marketing Corporation (IMC) and its pursuit of financial support from government. It has its basis in Andsager’s (2001) proposition that interest groups attempt to shape public opinion using competing news frames. It expands this

proposition by arguing that special interest groups are capable of creating strategies which position them as institutionally legitimate, placing them alongside other institutions, while avoiding real scrutiny from the public sphere. It provides an analysis of OCC's unprecedented decision to invest ratepayer funds in a high-risk, low-yield proposal, despite concerns of a minority of councillors that the decision was made without community consultation. The case study does not attempt to examine the viability or otherwise of the IMC. It is framed specifically around the local government investment strategy and its actors.

'Interest groups develop rhetoric to garner media coverage and favourable public opinion, influencing how journalists frame issues because interest groups positions can become pervasive' (Andsager 2001). Julie Andsager's dictum resonates with the issue of government investment in high risk commercial ventures, specifically the IMC and its enthymemic rhetorical coercion of local councils through the more influential NSW state government.

THE INLAND MARKETING CORPORATION:

The concept of a mezzanine group

The question is how an organisation such as the IMC is capable of persuading and influencing government and media — using the Mayhewian concept of the redemption of rhetorical tokens — to the extent that an idea becomes accepted as policy within the public sphere.

The council's chosen policy resonates dually with the dilution of accountability theory (Funnell 2001: 1) and the argument that the rise of neo-liberalism has occurred as a reaction to the increasing influence of interest groups and social movements (Marsh 2001: 178). Sociocultural interest groups play an important role in defining the political process (Kingdon 1995), but they are viewed combatively by OCC and perceived to exist to overthrow its authority and disrupt the democratic process.³⁰ Groups that present an argument in alignment with an institutionalised policy of economic development receive favourable treatment.

Alignment requires an organisation such as the IMC to present its strategy and itself at a level I term "mezzanine".

³⁰ OCC Mayor Richard Niven made an impassioned plea from the chamber for councillors to 'stick together' so they were not over-run by pressure groups. (Researcher observation, June 2001.)

Grassroots implies ground level, and in a vertical hierarchy the institutions of government and media reside at the top with non-government organisations (NGOs) occupying the higher levels immediately below powerful political and corporate institutions. Mezzanine groups claim space between the NGOs and grassroots groups. They lie outside acknowledged frames that require institutions dealing with NGOs and grassroots groups to act confrontationally.

Mezzanine groups are capable of influence and persuasion at a high level, outside established conventions of confrontation that occur between government and NGOs and government and grassroots groups, without allowing their various publics to redeem rhetorical tokens (Mayhew 1997). Grassroots groups and NGOs are viewed as confrontational by institutionalised power provoking cleavage rather than consensus. Mezzanine status, because it lies outside this framework and is difficult to label, confers a degree of consensus, removing cleavage and confrontation and allows the organisation to present harmonious proposals and strategies.

A clue to mezzanine success is the capacity of the organisation to present its strategy to media and government in such a way that it will appear to exist at the same level as the institutions it is attempting to influence and persuade. Grassroots community groups most often fail to influence and persuade the institutions of media and government because they fail to understand their complexity and their relationship to each other.

The argument that interest groups develop special rhetoric to garner favourable media coverage and influence public opinion (Andsager 2001) resonates with the issue of government investment in high-risk commercial ventures such as the IMC and its enthymemic rhetorical influence over OCC. When special rhetoric is invoked as "deal making", rhetorical tokens — those placed with the public by elected representatives — cease to exist and can never be redeemed in the Mayhewian sense. The elected representatives "sidestep" the electorate to claim goals of their own choosing rather than allowing discursive contests to assist in the establishment of broader policy goals.

The IMC case is important because of the publicity it received at local and national level during the debate about its local government investment strategy and the conflicting story angles taken by two local reporters and one national newspaper reporter. The issue was reported in the *CWD* by Mark Filmer and Nick Redmond and in *The*

Australian Financial Review by Lisa Allen. When a negative story appeared in the *AFR* about the IMC, its chief executive Alex Ferguson responded to the reporter, Lisa Allen, attempting to apply pressure, arguing it was not in the best interests of Australia's relationship with Asia nor its economic development to publish negative stories.

The IMC has defined itself in media terms through "ownership" of the issue of transport and logistics of fresh export produce, specifically to Asia, despite five years of achieving little more than publicity. The IMC campaign was so powerful that special rhetoric altered state government policy and placed the burden of responsibility for investment on local government regardless of discursive processes normally undertaken in the public sphere.

History of the Inland Marketing Corporation

The idea for an inland marketing organisation close to the eastern seaboard, with responsibility for coordinating airfreighted exports of fresh produce to Asia, was promoted in 1994 within a federally-funded local enterprise program to investigate economic development in regional NSW. The investigation concluded that such an organisation was viable.

Initial funding was provided by the Keating Labor Government. A report on the potential demand for export crops to Asia (Barracrough Report) intersected with the investigation, introducing the IMC as a regional development initiative of four central western NSW councils. At this early stage of its life, a transference of responsibility of ownership had already begun but had not been questioned in the public sphere. Subsequently four regional NSW councils centred on the Lachlan Valley — Parkes, Forbes, Lachlan and Cabonne — combined in 1995 to invest \$2000 each in the concept. This initial small capital investment assisted in securing the beginnings of ownership of the concept which was competitively being considered in Victoria and Queensland within similar primary producing districts.

For its first few years of operation, the IMC received funding to write a business plan and to develop strategies in harmony with the original federal government aim of regional development. Its operations were focussed on reconstructing a WW2 airforce base at Parkes, an hour's drive west of Orange, as the centre of its Asian export operations. The IMC received funding from federal, NSW and local government of \$4,500,000, \$600,000 and \$775,000 respectively prior to the launch of its wider local government investment strategy in 2000.

An information memorandum submitted by the IMC to regional councils, dated April 27 2001, states that the IMC concept was founded by its managing director and interim chairman, Alex Ferguson.

By its own recognisance, the IMC was '...established with the aim of developing new and exciting opportunities for farmers and regional communities in Australia' (IMC website). In Mayhewian terms, this is the starting point of the IMC's political campaign in which the construction of images that take the rhetorical token to be 'self contained' (1997: 274), requiring no redemption nor explication, is substituted for an economic campaign. It is difficult to determine what exactly is meant by 'new and exciting opportunities for farmers' nonetheless the abstract images continue with the IMC promising to introduce 'innovative solutions for export marketing and transport of agricultural products'. Advertising images of boosterism substitute for realism throughout the campaign, culminating in the publication in the NSW Government Gazette of the IMC as a legitimate investment vehicle for local government (152, 24. 11. 200, p12041).

Local government strategy

Rhetorical foundations of the campaign to lock in funding from local government are revealed in the organisations' website in which it claims local government was instrumental in establishing the IMC as it is the driving force behind regional communities. The website offers a claim that the founding four councils have support from 'over 50 other councils throughout NSW' which, *prima facie*, is accurate. It is however a falsification of the scale of the involvement of councils, a claim which is perpetuated by others with a vested interest in the development as the campaign evolves (see for example independent NSW MP Tony McGrane's maiden speech). Of the 102 councils in NSW with the potential to invest in the IMC scheme 60 ignored the offer, 11 rejected it and 16 accepted before the deadline of August 31, 2001 (AFR 10.7.01).

Between 1995 and 2000 a number of reports were prepared. Some on behalf of the IMC reflecting its advantages, others less favourable, notably that written by David Asimus, which rejected the probabilities raised by the IMC that it would increase exports and find Asian markets. Asimus, a Director of Rural Press and Chancellor of Charles Sturt University at Bathurst, revealed that during his inquiry he had received representations from local councils and regional development authorities '...stressing

the importance of infrastructure investment in regional economies and the importance of such investments as catalysts for economic growth' (Asimus report). Asimus acknowledged the importance of the issues of economic growth but concluded the rhetoric did not outweigh the reality that there is a '...need to seek investment in projects which are likely to yield high returns at relatively low risk' (Asimus report). The implication is that the IMC venture was high risk and low yield. Asimus's report was a response to a feasibility study by the Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics (CARE) and DJA Maunsell, consultants. On publication of the Asimus Report, CARE/Maunsell responded, arguing the IMC proposal was based on a 'holistic' approach to construction of a freight facility and in the context of '...the opportunities available to Australia to maintain and expand our market share in trade in Asia and elsewhere, especially in perishable products' (CARE/Maunsell report July 1997).

By establishing "ownership" of the idea of fast freight of fresh produce to Asia, whether it did or did not have any basis in reality, the IMC captured, through a strong emotional appeal of rhetoric (Andsager 2001) the high media ground. The groundwork for boosterism of economic growth in regional Australia already existed. Regional news organisations were in no position to critically examine the idea as they were jointly responsible for initial shaping of public opinion. The IMC was guilty of nothing more than exploiting the existing media frame which favoured economic growth at the expense of public discourse.

IMC investment and Orange City Council

The IMC investment issue arrived in the national media following an OCC general meeting on Thursday June 21, 2001. Council business papers included an item which provided a brief outline of an investment strategy formulated by the NSW state government allowing, through a change to the local government act, NSW councils to invest in the IMC. The item recommended council invest \$48,000 in the IMC as a B Class shareholder. The investment strategy had been put to 102 councils throughout NSW. The OCC business paper provided no evidence to suggest one way or the other that other councils had accepted the investment offer. Advice from two senior staff of OCC was for council to accept the investment offer, not because it had the potential to yield a reasonable return, rather the recommendation was based on council's management plan which argues for leadership by local government in regional

communities. Prior to the meeting Councillor Hetherington had sought advice on the issue of investment, and determined it was not in council's best interest to invest in what appeared to be a high risk strategy. His argument included misuse of ratepayer funds and lack of scrutiny of the investment by council prior to a decision.

A number of councillors spoke in favour of the investment recommendation including Deputy Mayor Glenn Taylor (Labor), John Miller (National), Russell Turner (National and state MP), and Mayor Richard Niven (National). At the conclusion of the discussion, Councillor Niven put the recommendation to a vote. Immediately the vote was concluded, Hetherington stood to speak against the recommendation, or against the motion, which the recommendation had become. Hetherington was ruled out of order as a vote had been taken. Niven provided advice that Hetherington could move a rescission motion if he wished to continue to speak.³¹ With the rescission motion lodged, Hetherington spoke briefly on the dearth of information which accompanied the investment recommendation arguing that it appeared to be high risk (acknowledged in the director's report) and appeared to be a misuse of council funds without some direct input from the community. Unbeknown to him, Hetherington was following international (OECD) and state (LGA) policy regarding involvement of the public in issues of finance. In the Conservatorium case set out below, the council had argued strongly in favour of clear and transparent information being delivered to the public despite the relatively small difference in amounts (\$50,000 and \$100,000).³² With the rescission motion seconded, the issue was destined to return to council at its next general meeting scheduled for July 5.

During the week prior to the July 5 meeting Councillor Hetherington sought advice from a number of quarters and attempted to lobby councillors he believed may have supported him in rejecting the investment offer. He sought technical advice from the Mayor on the sequence of speaking for and against the motion. He sought political

³¹ In the chamber Hetherington sits to the left of One Nation councillor Martin Gleeson. Hetherington quickly discussed the issue with Gleeson who agreed to 'second' a rescission motion put by Hetherington. On a few occasions during the months prior, Hetherington had sought minor technical advice from Gleeson based on a mutual personal recognition rather than political alliance or political recognition.

³² No councillor spoke against this part of Hetherington's argument, citing themselves as direct community representatives and therefore being in a position to take action on behalf of their constituents.

advice on framing his argument from Councillor Gryllis (anti-National) although Gryllis was to be out of town at the time of the meeting. Hetherington used the telephone to lobby Councillor Stevenson (pro development) and made an attempt to contact Councillor Turner but was unsuccessful as Turner was in Sydney for the conclusion of the winter state parliamentary session. The lobbying attempt made by Hetherington in what was essentially an important issue for his political position was less than adequate. He did not attempt to lobby a number of councillors who could have altered the balance of the final vote. It is speculative, but Hetherington's perception of his relationship with a number of councillors including Taylor, Miller, Jim McArdle (Labor), Brenda Davies (conservative), and David Shearing (National) indicates he is not comfortable pursuing them on any issues. He believes they will automatically vote against him because he campaigned as a 'true independent' and because he has not voted with them on issues in the past. Hetherington believes his relationship with other councillors is based on political alignment at all times, rather than an assessment of the details of issues.

While Hetherington argues for a vote on the merit of issues, he claims others vote on party lines. An analysis of voting on all issues before council during a set period would be one method of substantiating Hetherington's claim. The final vote on the investment was five to eight against the rescission motion. Hetherington made a number of valid points and received support from Stevenson, whom he had lobbied, Gleeson, who had seconded the rescission motion, Jason Jaeger and Reg Kidd who both told Hetherington after the meeting that his argument in the chamber had persuaded them to change their vote. The change of vote of two councillors to support Hetherington should have had a major impact on his education into the political process.

As Mayhew argues, the rhetoric of presentation implies the rhetorical token is self-contained (1997: 274), requiring no redemption. In this Hetherington needed to have regard for the power of his argument in persuasive terms; to separate the perception he had of other councillors as being aligned in opposition to him as a single unit and therefore requiring redemption of tokens if he was to receive support, from the reality that most councillors act on issues in a similar fashion to him — intuitively and instinctively rather than as a bloc. If voting on issues appears to be bloc it is more likely

due to a similarity of individual opinion than to a conscious aligning of disparate factions against one independent. In other words, what he needed on the night were the numbers.

Media and the IMC

The framework for boosterism of economic growth in regional Australia exists at an institutional level, so regional news organisations are in no position to publish critical examination. Economic growth for regional Australia is a conservative policy agenda that resonates with regional news organisation audiences; to reject it is to court disaster. To accept this proposition is to argue the IMC is guilty of nothing more than exploiting the existing media frame which favours economic growth at the expense of public discourse.

The IMC disseminates news of its activities on its website and directly to newsmedia organisations in the expectation it will receive favourable coverage. Two "press releases" with relevance to this case were distributed in June and August 2001 highlighting the strategic intent of the IMC relative to its attempt to position itself as a legitimate institution. In the first statement, the IMC praises an Australian Industry Group (AIG) Commonwealth Bank (CBA) survey (Industry in the Regions 2001) stating that the report '...reinforces the strategies of the IMC [and that] the IMC fully supports the findings of the Industry in the Regions Report' (IMC website). It is unknown how much media coverage the IMC press release gained. The AIG report argues that industry adds substantially to the net wealth of regions and that

"Through using local resources and selling to markets outside the region, including export markets, regional industry provides a solid base for local economic development and on-going growth [and that] to ensure the future of regions we need to encourage regional industry to be more competitive through investing in human and physical resources; to be more outward looking by developing export markets."

— AIG report, p1

The report surveyed 635 businesses with a combined turnover of \$9,500,000,000 and employing 40,000. It covered 12 regions in Queensland, NSW and Victoria but *did not* include the central west of NSW. The response to the sample of 2000 mailed surveys was thirty two per cent, which the AIG considered high (Report p3).

In lobbying terms, the AIG is a powerful NGO, and exists in an institutional sense at a high level. IMC support for the AIG report was a clever positioning strategy. Alignment with a powerful NGO (no matter that it was self-generated) provided evidence that the IMC was also powerful. Its survey of regional industry and its findings were published at a time when federal government was focussing closely on attempting to revitalise regional areas by any means.

While the AIG survey focussed on industry in an attempt to explain its potential to regional Australia, an earlier report from the Central West Economic Development Group (CWEDG) determined that '...the profile of the central west region [...] is typical of most Australian rural regions'. The key points are: An aging community; marginal growth rates, especially of the smaller satellite communities; lower family income levels; skills levels throughout the community generally below the national average and international standards; a significant departure of youth from the region; economic dependence on rural enterprises; one of Australia's oldest and largest exporting regions but only wheat wool and fruit to Sydney; progress of social restructuring well advanced; generously serviced by health education and social security mechanisms; and a satisfying quality of life (CWEDG Report 1995). The report also states the region is unlikely to ever be a substantial supplier of manufactured product, locally or internationally, other than rural "value adding". I will assume the AIG report chose to ignore the central west for this reason. In these terms it is paradoxical — both understandable and questionable — that the IMC chooses to locate in the central west. Understandable because it will receive government support to assist in economic regeneration, questionable because the infrastructure is too narrow to support the development in either the long or short term.

The second press release from the IMC, dated August 24, 2001 was headed 'IMC spreads from border to border' — an allusion to a diffusion and strength across NSW in its pursuit of local government investment which was neither accurate nor reflective of reality. The press release begins by stating IMC shareholders '...truly represent a significant proportion of inland NSW' (IMC 24.8.2001). It quotes IMC chairman Alex Ferguson saying he is '...delighted with the response to the [...] share offer [and that] the positive response clearly illustrates most councils are committed to finding new opportunities for growth in their region' (IMC 24.8.2001). The press release was a response to an *AFR* story of July 10 in which Lisa Allen wrote that 60 of the 102

eligible councils had ignored the offer, and 11 had rejected it. The original deadline for the expiry of the offer was August 31 but it was extended twice to October 31 and then again to November 30. There are no council numbers in the IMC press release, rather an allusion to a significant proportion of councils when in fact by the date of the final extension, November 30, fewer than half had accepted the offer.

Press releases issued by the IMC are normative in their attempts to provide a positive "spin" on the information surrounding the issue of investment. Responsibility for investigation and substantiation of the information lay with the media. In real terms councils are less than enthusiastic about the share raising but it is not in the interest of the organisation pitching itself and its capabilities to be seen to be ignored as a suitor. The cleverness of the IMC strategy is centred on its capacity to present its community-based argument at a national and international economic level rather than a social local level.

In terms of media coverage of the issue of the IMC investment, television and radio in Orange provided limited news and no feature interest in the story prior to the July 5 meeting and only limited news follow-up after July 5. The story was not initially picked up by the *CWD* as a lead-in to the June 21 council meeting as would normally be expected of an issue of the magnitude of the IMC investment. There are a number of reasons for this which will become clearer after content, textual and behavioural analyses of the material which appeared following the June 21 meeting and written by *CWD* council reporter Nick Redmond and regional affairs journalist Mark Filmer. While Filmer did not attend the June 21 meeting, the first article, a twelve paragraph piece, appeared under his by-line the following Monday, June 25 (see figure 7.1). Filmer quotes Hetherington's support for the principle of the IMC and his concern for the ethics of the decision to invest public money in a high risk venture (*CWD* 25.6.2001: 2). Filmer introduces information into the story which had not been included in the council report. Evidence that 102 councils had been invited to invest is introduced in the fourth paragraph. This information appears in neither the council report nor the information memorandum from the IMC. Its source is unknown but it can be assumed Filmer received it directly from IMC chairman Alex Ferguson.

Support for IMC placed on hold

By Mark Filmer

A DECISION by Orange City Council last week to invest \$46,000 in the Inland Marketing Corporation has been placed on hold following the lodgement of a rescission motion seeking to overturn the decision.

The rescission motion, lodged by Cr Peter Hetherington, means the issue will come back before council on July 12 for further debate.

Cr Hetherington said while he supported regional development and the principle of the IMC, there were questions over "the ethics of councils putting \$50,000 of public money into what is a high-risk venture".

The IMC has invited 102 councils throughout regional NSW to purchase a parcel of 50,000 shares to make them part owners of an international airfreight terminal being established at Parkes.

Council gave \$2000 to the IMC in 1995, a move designed to allow it to have some say in the project's planning process.

The first stage of the IMC



Cr Peter Hetherington.

project, IMC Airfast, was launched by Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson earlier this month. It provides an airfreight service for the transport of fresh and perishable produce to Asia and other global markets.

The share offer will raise capital to allow the IMC to pursue other plans focusing on sea-freight, cold storage, agricultural product development and export marketing through e-commerce.

Last Thursday council passed without any debate a motion to accept the share offer. A report on the proposal prepared for that meeting said it was unlikely council would see any return on its investment for at least three years.

The report, by council's director of human resources Michael Milton and director of corporate services Christine Hannus, concluded: "Based on pure financial considerations council would be advised not to invest in the IMC at this stage. However, considering the economic development and leadership issues, which are seen to be of more significance, this project does have potential for growth in regional services and employment."

Blayney Shire Council decided recently to decline the IMC share offer but the IMC has written to council urging it to reconsider. Blayney made its decision on the basis that it did not have the financial resources to invest \$50,000.

Councils have until the end of August to respond.

Figure 7.1 *CWD* coverage of Hetherington's involvement in the council decision

In the penultimate paragraph Filmer introduces information concerning an adjoining council, Blayney Shire, and its decision to decline the offer. Filmer filed a second piece which was published on Saturday July 7, two days after the meeting at which the rescission motion was lost. It comprised nine paragraphs and was again under Filmer's by-line. Filmer's second piece (see figure 7.3) was published as a regional sidebar to a front page piece under Nick Redmond's by-line which will be analysed separately (see figure 7.2).

A standard procedure on a newspaper is for a reporter to submit potential heads (headlines) to a subeditor as they may reflect the angle of the story or they may remove some pressure from the sub to read completely the filed copy. A copy subeditorial role is to edit the copy to "house style" and supply a head to correct measure. A layout subeditor then selects appropriate images to accompany the copy and lays out the copy and images to fit the space provided on a specific page. Filmer's first piece was placed on page two of the Monday edition of the *CWD* as the page two lead. It ran over three

columns with a two deck head above a centre column mugshot (picture) of Peter Hetherington. The headline was written by the subeditor, John Miller. Filmer does not follow procedure in submitting potential heads to subs. (Filmer interview, Dec 2001). He believes there is little value, as the political involvement of the subeditor will make an inevitable change to an objective submitted head. The head which ran over his page two copy read '...Support for IMC placed on hold' (*CWD* 25.6.01: 2). The two deck pyramid head which ran over his copy on July 7 read '...IMC support shows leadership.' (*CWD* 7.7.01: 2). Both heads were composed in a standard san-serif typeface employed by the newspaper. The type was bold and approximately 68pts in height. The page one story on Saturday July 7 carried a much larger head point size, in the same typeface as warrants a front page article, and read '...Council invests funds in IMC.'" (*CWD* 7.7.01: 1). All three heads were composed at subeditorial level. It is unknown whether Redmond submitted a head with his bodycopy. The word "support" appeared on two occasions – in the initial Filmer piece and in the followup Filmer piece. The initialism, IMC, appeared in each.

Use of the name of a corporation or organisation in a headline has become common practice in Australia, the US and the UK newspaper business in the past few years. Changes in management practice have coincided with technology changes in the newsroom. Fewer journalists are employed to contribute sustained levels of copy which invariably leads to a diminution of control over issues of objectivity in which corporate and organisation names appear as a matter of course.

The job of a spin doctor is to include the name of the client corporation, organisation, or individual as many times as can bearably be achieved in a news release or media statement and traditionally it has been the job of the subeditor or journalist receiving the information to undertake to remove the corporate name, replacing it with "it" or "the company" or "a company spokesman". Pressure from advertisers has combined with time constraints on the reporter to spend less time on correcting copy. Thus, the initialism IMC appeared in the *CWD* twice in heads, nine times in the initial Filmer story (twice in the penultimate paragraph), three times in the follow up Filmer piece (one each in the first three pars) and a further nine times in the Redmond piece (twice in paragraph six).

In the follow-up 12 paragraph article in the *AFR* of Tuesday July 10, — when the story received national attention — the IMC name appeared eight times. The *AFR* headline reflected a more traditional objective approach to reporting, reading ‘...Councils ignore \$5m stock offer’ (*AFR* 10.7.01: 5).

Council invests funds in IMC

By Nick Redmond

ORANGE City Council **(votes)** on Thursday night to invest \$48,000 in the Inland Marketing Corporation but the decision did not go unchallenged.

Thursday night's **(vote)** will take council's commitment in the Parkes air-freight service to \$50,000 but several councillors questioned supporting a project they said should be funded by the State and Federal governments.

Council **(voted)** last month to purchase a parcel of 50,000 shares but a rescission motion debated on Thursday had hoped to reverse that decision.

Cr Peter Hetherington, a signatory to the rescission motion, said council should not be gambling with ratepayers' money particularly as the State Government in date had only invested

mitted \$4.5 million.

Deputy Prime Minister John Anderson launched the first stage of the IMC project, IMC Airfast, last month providing an airfreight service for the transport of fresh and perishable produce to Asia and other global markets.

The share offer will raise capital to allow the IMC to pursue other plans focusing on sea-freight, cold storage, agricultural product development and export marketing through e-commerce.

Cr Hetherington acknowledged the IMC was an exciting project but said: "I am supportive in managed risk but what I am not supportive of is council's potential involvement in a commercial activity without the support of the community. At the end of the day there is a risk factor and the money involved is public money."

Cr Margaret Stevenson, in support of Cr Hetherington's rescission motion,

said: "We are Local Government, we should look after our own local area."

Cabonne, Parkes, Forbes and Lachlan councils have been involved in the project from the outset and Cr Russell Turner said it was important Orange City Council showed leadership in the IMC given that Dubbo had rejected the share offer and Bathurst and Blayney were still considering their positions.

"We may lose our \$48,000 but I believe as Orange City Council we have a responsibility to put that investment in to show [the IMC] has the support of council," he said.

Mayor Dick Niven and Deputy Glenn Taylor both argued Orange should look beyond council boundaries on issues of regional importance.

Continued Page 2
Example of leadership Page 2

Figure 7.2 Front page *CW/D* coverage of the IMC funding issue.
The corporate name appears nine times in the story

If argument by enthymeme has been the vehicle of choice of the IMC — persuading its constituents through a presentation of token arguments that suggest a positive outcome but fail to specify how it will be achieved (Mayhew 1997: 270) — it has attained a level of success through the support of the *CW/D*, among others, including Peter Andren. IMC chief executive Alex Ferguson has convinced Peter Andren that the IMC is a vital and viable strategy for regional development in NSW with particular interest to his own electorate (Andren telecon, Nov 2001). On the Friday following the council meeting at which Hetherington moved his rescission motion, Andren telephoned Hetherington to persuade him to withdraw it. The basis of Andren's argument was that the IMC is vital to the economic growth of the central west and that regional development in industrial and commercial terms is the spearhead of such development (Hetherington telecon, Nov 2001). This argument is not new. Economic development outside the Sydney region, in the greater part of the state, is devoted to agriculture, mining, forestry and fishing. Very few major industrial developments in NSW have occurred outside the Sydney region. This makes Andren's and the IMC's argument persuasive.



IMC chief executive officer Alex Ferguson welcomes Orange City Council's support
Photo: STEVE GOSCH, Sydney

IMC support shows leadership

By Mark Filmer

ORANGE City Council's decision to support the IMC financially was an example of leadership other local councils should follow, according to the driving force behind the project.

IMC chief executive officer Alex Ferguson said he was "absolutely delighted that (Orange City) Council has had the debate and come out in favour of the project".

Mr Ferguson said 16 councils had now accepted a special IMC share offer, while 12 had rejected the offer.

However, two of those - Bathurst and Blayney - were reconsidering their decisions.

"Eleven other councils are in various stages of saying yes, while there are still 63 we haven't

heard back from," Mr Ferguson said.

The offer was made to 102 councils throughout regional NSW to purchase 50,000 shares to make them part owners of an international airfreight terminal being established at Parkes. Councils have until the end of August to accept the offer.

Mr Ferguson, who has been travelling throughout the State talking to councils about the offer, said those councils who supported the project would end up owning it.

"It has always been designed to be owned by the community of inland NSW through local government," he said.

"Profits that accrue down the track will be distributed to the shareholders and the shareholders are the councils."

Council invests funds in IMC

From Page 1

"I've been critical of the IMC in the past but I have also been supportive of the concept. I think we have to take a gamble. If it was my money and I had other options to invest money I probably would not (invest in the IMC) but we are acting on behalf of the community of

Orange," Cr Taylor said.

For the record, Councillors Niven, Turner, Taylor, John Miller, Dave Shearing, Brenda Davies, Dave Hackett and Jim McArdle supported the share acquisition in opposition to Councillors Hetherington, Stevenson, Martin Gleeson, Jason Jaeger and Reg Kidd.

Figure 7.3 CWD coverage of the IMC issue continues inside the paper

The IMC potential is economically large and the community of the central west in particular stands to benefit substantially if and when the strategy becomes productive. The difficulty lies in the "boosterism" that has attached itself to the strategy with no concomitant regard for reality. If it is such a good idea, Hetherington argues, then why has there been little commercial interest. Ferguson argues it was always the intent of the strategy to involve local government as investors but prior to the drafting of the information memorandum and the legislative change to the act, there is no record of it.

Analysis of media coverage

A textual analysis of the Filmer pieces and the Redmond piece provides an insight into Hetherington's suspicion that the *CWD* has been instructed by OCC to look *unfavourably* on story angles which include Hetherington. *CWD* sub-editor John Miller has input into framing the angle and therefore the weighting of the stories in which Hetherington is featured. Filmer suspects his copy has been altered on occasion to reflect a slightly different angle than that which he originally intended. (Filmer interview, Nov 2001). In both the initial Filmer piece and the Redmond front page lead the text reflects a perception gap between the reporter/newspaper and the public. The gap is based on complacency, a disregard for the political knowledge of the average reader, or both. Filmer and Redmond use the term "rescission motion" to explain Hetherington's opposition to the investment. Filmer expands his use of bureaucratic language by referring to "the lodgement of a rescission motion" and "[Last Thursday] council passed without any debate a motion [to accept the share offer]". In both cases the reporter is writing for an elite audience: one with a larger than average understanding of political and bureaucratic jargon.

Redmond's seventh paragraph repeated Filmer's seventh paragraph and his sixth replaced Filmer's sixth with one amendment. The act of reproducing material from a previous edition of the same paper is not an uncommon one when considering tight deadlines and limited investigative resources of the reporter. It is however interesting to observe the reasoning behind the act. Redmond makes specific use of words to avoid any explicit acknowledgment of Hetherington providing leadership in opposition to the investment. In the third paragraph he uses the word "hope" when referring to the rescission motion, implying there was little substance attached to the tactic. In the fourth paragraph Redmond refers to Hetherington as a signatory to the motion rather than as the leader but is required by the ninth paragraph to make some acknowledgement to it belonging to Hetherington. There is here the argument that it had been reported by Filmer a week earlier as Hetherington's motion, but that argument denies responsibility to the newspaper's readership to re-establish sufficient credible information each time and to not assume a level of existing knowledge on the part of the reader. The word "leadership" also emerges, derived, one would assume, from its use in the OCC report arguing for leadership from council in community activities.

An aspect of this analysis which has its genesis in Mayhewian logic can be found in the example of the space in the *CWD* devoted to council issues appearing under the mayoral by-line (see figure 7.4). Traditionally, the Mayor's "column" appears each Wednesday of the week *following* a council meeting. It provides information on council decisions: effectively Grunig's (1984) public information model. In 2001 the strategy altered. The Grunig public information model was replaced with what Hazelton (1999) refers to as a threat and punishment model. The mayoral column disappeared from the Wednesday paper following the council meeting, to re-emerge in the Wednesday paper *immediately preceding* the council meeting. A persuasive argument in favour of the IMC appeared in the mayoral column of the *CWD* on Wednesday June 4, the day *prior* to the rescission motion being debated in council. It reflected on the rescission motion, suggesting it would be lost in the chamber, as it ultimately was. Space in the *CWD* devoted to the mayoral column is unpaid community information space.

The process of influencing public opinion indirectly, by presenting the opinion of a high profile, powerful, elite public figure prior to debate on an issue of public importance, reinforces the object of the debate, the outcome of which is justified in any follow-up material and generated as a further reinforcing mechanism of public opinion. In the case of the IMC, information on the investment process and the changes to legislation in the Local Government Act have not entered the public sphere other than by way of the NSW Department of Local Government placing the act on its Internet website. Newspaper, television and radio coverage has been limited to reports of activity rather than of process and policy.

Lippmann (1922) suggests the function of becoming the 'printed diary of the home town' is what a newspaper must aspire to fulfil if it is to be a newspaper (1922: 210) but it is also a vehicle with which, in Mayhewian terms, to communicate the means of social influence. On this basis Lippmann's assertion that a '...stereotyped shape assumed by an event at an obvious place that uncovers the run of the news [and that] the most obvious place is where people's affairs touch public authority' (1922: 215) resonates contemporarily with the transfer of the Mayoral column in the *CWD* from a "post-match roundup" to a "pre-match roundup".

City welcomes CPLA delegates

THIS week we welcome delegates to the annual conference of the Country Public Libraries Association of NSW which is being held this week with a theme of 'Lobby Influence Promote: The Art of Persuasion'. The aim is to draw on the experience of successful practitioners to explore ways in which public libraries can reposition themselves with key decision-makers to the benefit of their communities.

The conference has attracted more than 330 delegates from NSW and interstate. Hopefully the great winter weather we have been having will last long enough to showcase our beautiful city to conference delegates and visitors.

Greening up Australia
Planet Ark is inviting local community and green groups in council areas to get involved in National Tree Day on Sunday, July 29 to help Green Up Australia.

The aim of National Tree Day is to plant trees and shrubs which are native to local areas. Last year, more than 45,000 volunteers got their hands dirty planting more than 400,000 native trees and shrubs at 750 sites across Australia, more volunteers than the Sydney Olympics.

This year Planet Ark is striving to plant one million trees. This can only be achieved by the local community to get those trees and shrubs in the ground.

Anyone interested in taking an active part in National Tree Day should contact parks manager Nigel Hobden to discuss how they can get involved in planting trees by assisting at selected sites.

Accommodating new industry

Council staff are currently working at Narrambla Industrial Subdivision to create four blocks for the accommodation of existing and new industries. It would appear that another two sales, which are currently confidential, will take place shortly and it is important that council keeps ahead of demand as developed industrial land is relatively short.

Protecting park ducks

An interesting note from our Parks and Gardens staff is that duck warning signs will be erected in Sampson Street between Summer and Kite streets this week as there have been many crossings of ducks to and from Cook Park.

Pure, delicious water
Orange's water should now be much improved with the completion of the

CIVIC AFFAIRS with MAYOR CR DICK NIVEN

Ozonation Plant at the Water Filtration Plant in Icky Road. Councillors and staff will be making an inspection of the site on Saturday morning.

This innovative project, valued at \$5.5m, has solved the problem of taste and odour in the city's water, which was associated with the persistent blooms of blue-green algae in Gunns Park Dam.

Augmentation of the existing 33ML/day dual media Icky Road filtration plant was completed in May this year after a 14-month construction period, without interruption to production.

The result is pure, delicious water, and a very happy public, no doubt.

Olympic Pool refurbishment
Tonight, council will presumably confirm the acceptance of a tender of more than \$400,000 for the refurbishment of the Orange Olympic Pool. It will be paid out of pool reserve funds held for this purpose. The proposed works include design and construction of a wet deck for the 50m pool and design for the lining/filling of the 50m pool and investigation and design of hydraulics to meet health requirements.

There is no doubt that the continuing upkeep of assets such as our Olympic Pool is important and expensive.

Inland Marketing Corporation

Council will again debate the proposed investment of \$48,000 in the Inland Marketing Corporation at Parkes, with a rescission motion signed by Councillors Hetherington, Jaeger and Gleeson.

I was impressed by the report from council's director of human services Michael Milston and director of corporate services Christine Hannus, which suggested that consideration of economic development and leadership issues does have potential for growth in regional services and employment and I believe it is reasonable to expend \$50,000 in an effort to support Parkes and our region.

Preventing air pollution

Our attention is again turning to air pollution problems partially caused by wood fires. I note that Armidale Council is talking of fining residents who are polluting through inefficient chimneys.

Council has had awareness campaigns

for many years with no improvement in air quality and it may be necessary to replace this with regulation by enforcing penalties. We understand that there is a significant increase in respiratory and asthma cases being reported after nights of high pollution. With potential health risks to young children, older people and those with asthma and respiratory problems, householders should not be burning softwood or chemically treated wood, household rubbish or other non-wood materials and allowing their combustion heaters to be closed down and smoulder overnight. Fines of up to \$750 are prescribed for any provable offence.

Call for more police

Council supports the call by Canoboles Local Area Command Superintendent Peter Gallagher who has applied for a significant increase in police staff in our region. Council itself has written to the Minister for Police Paul Whelan for an appointment to discuss the matter with him, and we have also given notice of our requirements to the Premier Bob Carr and Leader of the Opposition Kerry Chikarovski as well as Local Member Russell Turner. We have not yet received a reply to our request for a meeting.

Donation of land for walkway

Thank you to West Orange Baptist Church which has donated land to enable a walkway connecting Molong Road to Sieben Drive to be completed. Council is interested in the provision of bike tracks and walkways to assist the community's wishes to remain fit by regular exercise.

Parking and traffic plan

I am supportive of our council's plans to investigate a long-term parking and traffic plan. There is no doubt that these matters are fast becoming a problem in the city and that we will need a multi-storey carpark and more user pay car parks in the city not only to provide funding, but to help regulate parking facilities.

Water storage reservoir

Council has recently awarded the contract for the construction of a new 20 megalitre water storage reservoir in Anson Road adjacent to the existing 9 megalitre reservoir to Hornicks Pty Ltd.

The reservoir forms part of the north Orange/Ploughmans Valley water supply strategy which will provide water for the ultimate development of these areas.

Figure 7.4 The Mayor's column: space to push the IMC issue prior to debate

Justification for the transfer may be supported by the argument that the public is more interested in information prior to an event rather than after, a logic pursued by Mayhew, following Aristotle and Habermas, that spectacle is a persuasive means of influence (1997: 272).

But reporting by the Mayor after the event placed him, as a high profile, powerful politician, outside the arena of spectacle which is, in local terms, the council chamber. Reporting prior to the event added a dimension — aside from the potential to influence public opinion — of intensity to the issues reported, effectively providing the public sphere with something against which they could frame their own opinions. The outcome of the transference may be an increase in public attendance at council meetings, an outcome which may not have been sought or planned in the change strategy.

A content analysis of the stories reveals a slightly different picture. The headline on the first Filmer piece has already been discussed. Filmer's copy reveals an attempt to present objective information and to place the Hetherington objection in perspective. Filmer refers to Hetherington in paragraphs two and three then moves to provide information on the investment strategy without appearing to judge whether it was sufficient for council to make an informed decision. No other Orange City councillor is mentioned in Filmer's first piece, correctly, as he is attempting to find a regional angle. He refers to the report from council's directors and to adjoining Blayney Shire Council and its decision to decline the investment offer. In his follow-up piece Filmer displays similar objectivity, filing copy based on an interview with IMC chairman Alex Ferguson. In this story Filmer reveals a hitherto unknown piece of information. Ferguson states that '...It [the IMC] has always been designed to be owned by the community of inland NSW through local government'. If this is factual one may question why it took seven years, from the emergence of the IMC, for local government legislation to change to allow local government to invest. It would be reasonable to argue Ferguson and the four original IMC councils devised the strategy following a distinct lack of interest from commercial suppliers of capital, and low to moderate interest from the NSW state government. There is little in the IMC information memorandum to suggest the \$50,000 investment is anything more than a high risk, low return venture. While there is nothing inherently wrong with high risk investments — they are more often associated with large profits or spectacular financial collapses — there is an uninvestigated ethical dimension to the changes made to the local government act to allow the IMC to seek investment of council funds.

A link to this argument can be found in the story written by Lisa Allen in the *AFR* of June 28 2001, in which she cites a Public Accounts Committee statement that the Minister for State and Regional Development Michael Egan misled the electorate by not disclosing who [the department] was granting money to. The PAC report agreed with the NSW Audit Office on the need for greater disclosure, arguing that investment of public money demanded public accountability (*AFR* 28.6.01: 5).

The argument for public accountability when spending public money was pursued by Councillor Hetherington in relation to the IMC case. He argued that it was not sufficient to accept a ruling handed down by the state government. In pursuing this argument, Hetherington was continuing the line taken by Allen in the *AFR* following

the PAC report. Hetherington drew a link between the Department of State and Regional Development and the Department of Local Government. He believed collusion existed between the department ministers, Egan and Harry Woods, and that Egan had been lobbied by the IMC and persuaded to seek a change to the act which would force local government to invest in the proposal. A change of this nature would relieve the pressure on the state government to invest outside the Sydney metropolitan area — a course it was reticent to take — and place the burden of responsibility on local government. For a number of years the NSW state government has devolved responsibility for state-based issues to local government, including law and order and waste management. (If a local government area is in need of additional police for example, it is now required to finance the additional numbers from its own budget [Dwyer interview, June 2000]).

Publication of a negatively pitched piece in the *CWD* on June 26 provided Hetherington with evidence that he needed to broaden his communication campaign. He thus contacted Lisa Allen at the *AFR* and provided background information on the issue (Hetherington interview, Aug 2001). He also outlined the questions he would ask in the chamber if the rescission motion were adopted. Following the Thursday night meeting, Allen contacted Councillors Hetherington and Gleeson — the seconder of the motion — to seek information on the result. The following Tuesday, July 10, a piece under Allen's by-line appeared in the *AFR* (see figure 7.5) under the balanced head, 'Council's ignore \$5m stock offer' (*AFR* 10.7.01: 5). Allen's story was also well balanced. She made contact with IMC chairman Alex Ferguson, Dubbo Mayor Allan Smith (Dubbo rejected the offer) and presented information on the number of councils that had agreed to accept the offer, those that had rejected it and the number that had ignored it. The information on the number of councils ignoring the offer inflamed Ferguson to respond with a letter to the editor of the *AFR* (Allen telecon, Aug 2001) claiming inaccuracies. Allen quoted Hetherington's argument that local government was being required by the state government to invest public money in a high risk business when the state government itself was not prepared to invest larger sums (*AFR* 10.7.01: 5). Gleeson supported Hetherington's comment, saying he was not against the IMC concept but against the use of ratepayer funds to support it. Dubbo Mayor Allen Smith was quoted saying he wanted to see some evidence of how the \$6m in federal funding had been used, as other than marketing brochures, a business plan had yet to be produced.

Councils ignore \$5m stock offer

Lisa Allen

More than 75 regional councils have ignored a \$5 million offer from the NSW Government to fund a new regional airport, expected to cost \$100 million, says Asia.

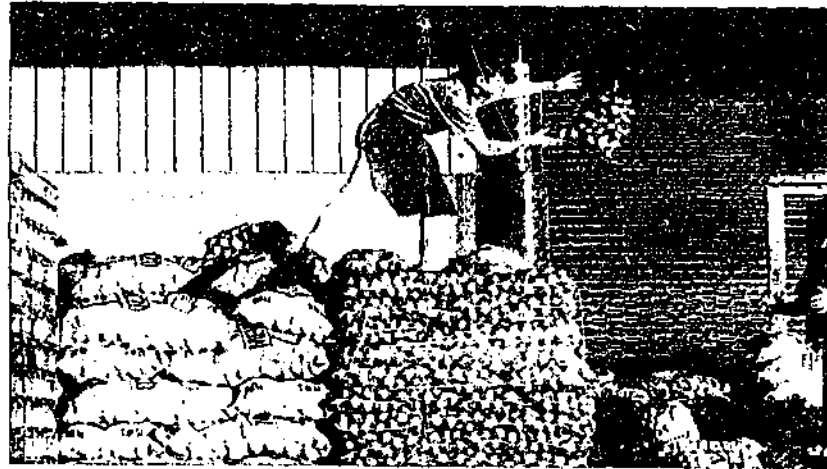
Just 16 of the 102 local government authorities earmarked as potential investors have agreed to buy 50,000 shares from the Inland Marketing Corporation, the unusual offer begun in April. NSW Government officials have been generous beneficiaries of the offer, with the Federal Government providing \$1.5 million.

The NSW Government has raised more than \$400,000 in the offer, while local councils have raised another \$775,000.

The offer is part of the State's plan to build a new international airport at Parkes. IMC is directed by Dr Peter Somers, a senior economic adviser to former prime minister Mr Paul Keating, and lawyer Mr Norman Hunt, who is also providing legal advice through his Sydney firm Hunt Partners.

More than 60 regional councils have ignored the share offer, while 11 councils have rejected it. IMC plans to develop an international air freight facility at Parkes.

Dubbo Council wants to see some return on the board with the \$6 million the IMC has acquired in Federal and State funding," said Dubbo's Mayor, Mr Allan Smith, who has refused to invest. "There



Just 16 of 102 local government authorities are investing in the Inland Marketing Corporation.

has been a lot of money put into IMC, but we haven't seen any return nor have we seen a business plan.

"We haven't seen any achievements yet, except for brochures and a lot of planning. That's why we are cautious at this stage."

Orange City Council agreed to a minimum investment of \$50,000 B-class shares costing \$50,000 late last week. But several councillors,

including Mr Peter Hetherington, opposed the deal.

"Councils are being asked to take a punt with public money by the State Government," said Mr Hetherington. "It's a potentially high-risk investment... the State Government is not even prepared to underwrite it."

"It's (\$50,000) not a big ask for the bigger councils, they are fairly financial, but it is a big ask for some

of the smaller councils struggling to keep up with commitments for basic public amenities."

Orange City Councillor Mr Martin Gleeson said he was not against the IMC, but "against the money coming from ratepayers' coffers".

IMC's chairman, Mr Alex Ferguson, says the offer, which closes on August 31, needs one more buyer of 50,000 B-class shares to be successful.

Figure 7.5 A respected national daily picks up the issue: *The Australian Financial Review*

Councillor Hetherington's exercise of his democratic right to communicate the investment issue to a wider public, through publication in the *AFR*, reinforced the belief held by some government officials and media in Orange (Niven, Dwyer, Filmer, Redmond), that his position as a sales representative at *Prime Television* provided him with strong links to national television media.

His achievement in persuading a national financial reporter of the merit of the story however, bore no relationship to his employment. As a sales representative, Hetherington has only a slightly better understanding of the process of publication and broadcasting than the average citizen. Contrary to prevailing opinion, since his elevation to council, his few sympathetic media contacts within the city of Orange had relocated (One, Steve Martin, has since returned although there is no evidence he has picked up any of Hetherington's community issues at *ABC Radio*). Councillor Hetherington's own employer television station had a newsroom policy of seeking comment on local government issues when they had a broader regional context and to seek comment from councillors other than Hetherington so the station was seen to be

objective (O'Connor interview, Aug 2001). This policy was applied in the IMC case. *Prime* Television, while choosing to broadcast nothing of the initial issue, ran a followup piece in the six o'clock local news bulletin on Tuesday July 10. The story presented a factual account of the investment offer at regional level. Hetherington first became aware of the story while at home watching the news bulletin (Hetherington interview, Aug 2001). The interesting aspect of this policy is its direction away from Hetherington on both axes: he is unable to generate story ideas at "home" while other media in the city, notably the *CWD*, *WIN* Television and *Capital* Television have a perception that he receives favourable coverage from *Prime* Television, thereby excluding him on the basis of favouritism from a competitor. A content analysis of material appearing in the television news bulletins or the *CWD* news pages over any reasonable period of time since his election would confirm this perception is inaccurate.

A second aspect which reinforces the inaccurate perception is the elevation of Hetherington's former *Prime* Television colleague Peter Andren, to independent member for the federal seat of Calare. Media and government opinion in Orange was similar to Hetherington's case — that Andren received solid support from *Prime* Television in his federal campaign and since, due to his strong relationship with former *Prime* Television management although no investigation into this has been undertaken by the researcher.

While Allen's *AFR* piece provoked unjustifiable outrage from the IMC it presented Hetherington's opinions on a wider stage, and reflected his concern that local government investment requires a forum for public opinion to be gauged outside the fortnightly part-time local government meeting, or the reliance on advice from council administrators. Hetherington's limited experience of politics and media prevented him from pursuing his investigation into the IMC investment proposal much further. His focus, while maintained for short periods of time on major issues, or issues which appear to have some major consequences at state or regional level, taper quickly when he is confronted with alternative issues which also require application at a local level. Allen was capable of locating information on the number of councils involved (102) and those interested and uninterested, while Hetherington found the time constraints on investigation of such minor details overwhelming. He was also professionally ignorant of elementary investigative procedures: where or whom he might contact to obtain such elementary information. If it was to be obtained from the IMC, Hetherington was

incapable of making contact due to his perceived position as a protagonist rather than as a professional communicator (performer).

The difficulty for an independent politician entering the public sphere from other than traditional party channels, through which are derived vast degrees of learning during the linear process, is the genuine lack of political education which is required in both the chamber and the public sphere. Coupled with the degree of political isolation which occurs when an independent is genuinely unaligned, it has a powerful impact on how that politician shapes and expresses his or her opinion.

IMC buy 'defies reality'

For the Inland Marketing Corporation to suggest that it is in a position to acquire Hazelton Airlines from the wreckage of Ansett defies reality. ('Rural councils authorise buyout talks on Hazelton', *AFR*, September 24).

The IMC has been in existence for more than five years and has yet to prove its capability in its core business, let alone in running an airline.

A recent IMC marketing exercise persuaded a number of rural councils to invest \$50,000 each in its core activity, an exercise which was influenced substantially by the NSW Labor Government in its desperate bid to get someone else besides it to finance the venture. Some of those councils are already ques-

tioning their investment decision.

I was not in favour of Orange City Council investing ratepayer funds in a high-risk commercial venture, nor am I in favour of it investing in the high-risk airline business.

I do, however, strongly support both the concept of the IMC and the quick revival of Hazelton Airlines.

But it is not the role of local government to fill the gaps left by a State Government intent on further reducing its responsibilities to its citizens – whether they live in major cities, regional cities or small country towns.

P. R. Hetherington,
Independent City Councillor,
Orange, NSW.

Figure 7.6 Hetherington continues to take the issue to national level through the *AFR* letters pages

Marsh (1995: 131) suggests the growing support for independents is a good thing and will lead to constitutional change in the longer term, but this argument fails to take account of the barrenness of independence and the real levels of support that accrue to members of parties. While independents such as Andren at federal level receive certain levels of financial and motivational support from groups of constituents, the political process is revealed slowly through reading of histories, or painfully slowly with respect to constituents by sitting in parliament and learning through trial and error. Andren, for example, took two years to discover an alternative to obtaining a seconder for his motions after being defeated consistently for the first two years of his tenure in the lower house of the Australian Federal Parliament (Andren interview, Aug 2001).

The decision-making process of the council is set out clearly in the Local Government Act. Decisions and policy are meant to be framed within its boundaries, but it is more often the case that party lines and personalities play a major role in the decision-making process.

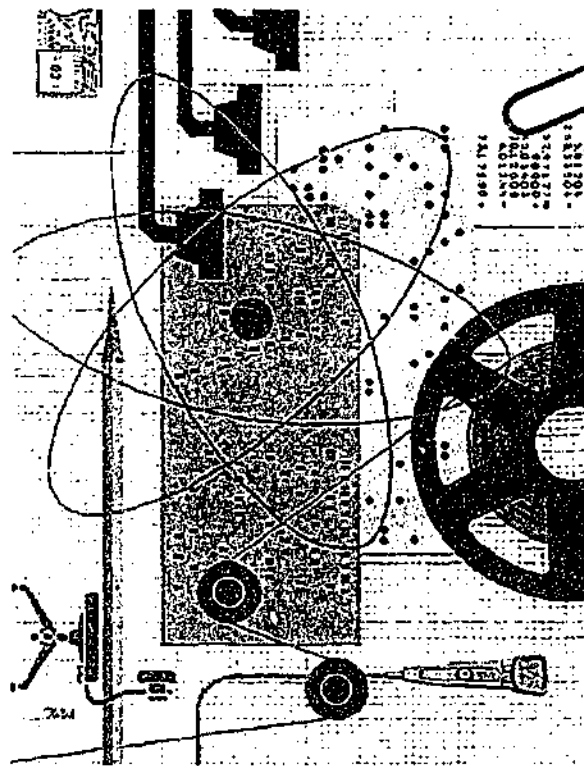
The role of the GM is set out in the OCC Management Plan 2001 in which it is described as being '...generally responsible for the efficient and effective operation of the council's organisation and for ensuring the implementation without undue delay of the decisions of council'. There is no explicit mention of policy formulation. It is the role of the Mayor to exercise, in cases of necessity, the policy making functions of the council between meetings of the council.

A councillor is defined as '...playing a key role in the creation and review of the council's policies and objectives and criteria relating to the exercise of the council's regulatory functions'. It is also to direct and control the affairs of the council in accordance with the act. As an elected person, a councillor is expected to represent the interests of the residents and ratepayers, to provide leadership and guidance to the community and to facilitate communication between the community and the council. Part of the mission of a council is defined in terms of its capacity to demonstrate accountable decision-making processes. (OCC Management Report 2001).

Global public opinion reflects a requirement of governments to improve delivery of services, achieve greater levels of resource use, remove themselves from areas where they have little expertise and remain in the background while self-interest and economic considerations move to the foreground (Buchanan and Tullock 1962; OECD 2001; Stewart 1999: 2). When a government "acts" in some way it does so as policy. Orange City council's management plan embraces a structure which is "outcome oriented"; in other words it is attempting to convert its actions into tangible results. But there is no evidence to suggest council is attempting to achieve measurable outcomes within this management structure.

IMC success in persuading OCC to invest ratepayer funds in its high-risk low-yield proposal was derived directly from its capacity to present itself to institutional elites as a "mezzanine player" of almost equal stature. By adapting powerful non-government organisation rhetoric to its own special non-redemptive rhetoric, and utilising its understanding of the relationship between market-driven media and economic outcome-driven government, it succeeded in persuading decision-making stakeholders in the merit of its strategy. Unlike the two cases which follow.

Management Plan



2001-2004

Figure 7.7 Design of outside front cover of OCC management report

CASE TWO: THE INDOOR SWIMMING CENTRE

This case study examines the tensions between the politicians (actors) in Orange City Council, the media (critics), and a special interest group (audience) known as Swimfit. Swimfit was conceived for a single purpose; to lobby for the development and construction of an indoor swimming and fitness centre. As a special interest community group Swimfit is perceived by council to be similar in stature to other community “industry” such as welfare “industry” groups. OCC has publicly acknowledged it (a majority) will not allow itself to be “held hostage” or “captured” by special interest groups (OCC meeting, June 2001). This mantra reflects the federal coalition position that it is being “captured” by interest groups, reinforcing its policy of

rationalisation of peak welfare agency groups (May, 2001: 255 in Sawyer and Zappalà). The Swimfit case is also concerned with the lobbying activities of the community group. It examines the tensions between Swimfit and OCC, and the role of the media in the process of communicating both sides of the issue to the wider public. The interrogative moment concerns the Swimfit community group seeking to develop a new pool, when a council operated pool existed.

Action by community groups in Orange is similar in shape and scope to other local government areas in NSW. Activity outside council's authoritative umbrella is considered illegitimate. Councils view their authority as being narrowly interpretative, due to its being regulated by state government.

At its meeting of March 15 2001, Orange City Council rejected a community generated idea — construction of an indoor aquatic centre — proposed by Swimfit. The community group had made representations to council during the previous 18 months for financial support for a new swimming centre and health resort within the precinct of the existing public outdoor pool. The prevailing climate in Orange, for most of the year, precludes outdoor swimming, and the Swimfit group believed there was substantial interest within the wider community for construction of an indoor centre. Orange is serviced by three existing pools, one public and two private. Swimfit argued the existing services were inadequate.

For 18 months, the community group engaged in relatively low-level lobbying activities pitched mainly at councillors and council. It presented what it believed was a substantial and attractive case for development of the pool and its consequent benefits to the wider community in terms of fitness and well-being. Its committee was nonplussed when it failed to ignite interest in a majority of councillors. As part of its loosely defined lobbying strategy, Swimfit co-opted Peter Hetherington as prolocutor. Hetherington, an ex-Sydney footballer, was keen on fitness, swimming regularly at the existing pool. Hetherington says he genuinely believed the development of an indoor public pool would be beneficial for Orange (Hetherington telecon, August 2001). Hetherington's short apprenticeship on council and his limited lobbying expertise posed an immediate problem for the group. Swimfit had a number of members of the community with a higher than usual public profile, including the principal of Orange High School Ms Pam

Ryan, but it had no-one within the group who was professionally capable of moving the issue from its relatively low level.

On March 15, the Swimfit proposal was defeated in the council chamber. The events leading up to the council rejection are ordinary in their complexity, their flavour and their capacity to be manipulated to the full extent of the power of senior council officers, ipso facto. As a case study however, the Swimfit lobbying, persuading, and attempts at influencing the policy agenda are breathtakingly naïve. It is the sequence of events and the community group's incapacity to control and apply them to a broader public interest which is important to an understanding of this case, which I would argue in terms of the mezzanine model I have introduced earlier, in the IMC case. The Swimfit group had no leverage in institutional terms. It is not a mezzanine group. It is a grassroots group. The basis of its existence was merit. The group believed genuinely that the city needed an indoor swimming pool (it is not in contention whether individual members sought its construction in order to benefit them individually, in either an economic or sporting sense). The events leading to the rejection of the proposal include, but are not limited to, the death of a sitting councillor; the naïve committee belief that the numbers on council were in their favour; and the triangular relationship between Swimfit, the council and the *CWD*.

On the surface, the events leading up to March 15 appear straightforward when considered from the position of the citizen. The Swimfit team, without professional communication assistance, did everything it believed possible to secure a positive recommendation from council that it would contribute financially to the development of an indoor pool and fitness centre. It put what it believed to be a genuine case. Swimfit members spoke directly with all 14 Orange City councillors and extracted what they thought to be a commitment from at least eight in favour of council financial support.

Swimfit history

In 1994 a ratepayer survey was conducted by the council in an attempt to measure public interest in an indoor swimming centre. Seventy seven per cent responded favourably. In January 1996 council commissioned a design with a valuation of \$5.7m. Four months later, in May, it made a decision to defer discussion about the pool until it could be raised as part of its regular management plan.

Support from the community and council fluctuated for a number of years. In May 1997 a public meeting, chaired by the Mayor, was held to determine the level of community support for the proposal. The following month council undertook a second ratepayer survey which rejected the idea of a special annual rate increase of \$68.44 for 10 years to fund the \$5 million development. Sixty six per cent of ratepayers responded to the survey. Seventy per cent of respondents opposed the rate increase. Despite the 1996 council decision to include the pool proposal in the next management plan, it was not included in a 1998-2001 plan published in May 1998. It was included in the overlapping and sequential 1999-2001 management plan. Swimfit's memorandum outlining the history of the case fails to acknowledge its inclusion in this plan. The indoor pool was included as part of 'Program 61' for the existing pool infrastructure. As part of earlier lobbying by the Swimfit group, council supported the development with a \$1 million loan pledge and a further \$400,000 from its restricted asset funds if the Swimfit committee could raise an equivalent amount from private funding. Swimfit subsequently raised \$100,000 in reasonably quick time, applying immediately for a state government grant of \$300,000 and a Federal Government grant of \$500,000.

In April 2000 the Swimfit group met with council's planning committee. The committee agreed to consider including the proposal in the 2000 - 2001 management plan (which ultimately became that referred to above as 2001 - 2004). Following planning committee advice council asked the Swimfit group to provide a revised design for the pool. From the end of 2000, no mention had been made in OCC of a particular timeframe for final discussion or recommendations about the indoor aquatic centre.

Councillor death referendum trigger

On Sunday March 4 2001, after a long battle with cancer, Councillor John Lomas died. He was 60 years old and an active supporter of the indoor aquatic centre. The following Tuesday, as a condolatory gesture, Lomas' widow, Chris, was paid a visit by a council representative. Over a cup of tea the council representative sought to engage Mrs Lomas in a discussion about the potential for her to stand for election to council in the inevitable by-election for the position vacated by her husband (Lomas telecon, Aug 2001). Council had already set a date for the by-election, Saturday May 5, a statutory two month period. Mrs Lomas declined the offer, having less interest in local politics than her husband. John Lomas, while professing independence, had a natural leaning to

issues of social justice and equity while on council and while his widow had similar ideals, sought not to pursue them in the public sphere nor to endorse any other candidates (Lomas allowed supply of information to this researcher by interview with Cnclr Hetherington, Aug 2001). The death of Councillor Lomas, while appearing to present council administration with nothing more than a by-election, presented instead an opportunity to test public opinion; effectively, to 'hit the proposal for the indoor aquatic centre on the head once and for all' (Hetherington telecon, Aug 2001). The Council was on the public record as being against its development, citing existing facilities as being more than adequate for the population, along with the notion that it would increase the tax burden on non-swimming ratepayers, despite the acknowledgement by a majority of elected councillors that they endorsed the development. How council initiated and managed the next sequence of events, those emerging immediately after the death of John Lomas and leading up to the vote on Thursday evening March 15, is crucial to an understanding of the power of unelected local government representatives.

Media and council

The clue to the outcome of the vote in council on Thursday evening March 15 is understanding the relationship between OCC GM Alan Dwyer and the *CWD* and the relationship between Alan Dwyer, and Councillor Hetherington.

A report from the office of the GM was published in order to be tabled at the council meeting of Thursday March 15. The report made recommendations seeking either a vote for or against the conduct of a poll to determine public opinion on the development of an indoor aquatic centre or outright rejection of the Swimfit proposal. Business papers are distributed to councillors three days prior to a scheduled meeting. Council meets generally twice every month. Swimfit always believed it had enough councillors on side so that an outright rejection would not "get up". The death of Councillor Lomas left it "one down". Councillors Hetherington, Gryllis, Stevenson, Miller, Davies, and Kidd were known to favour the pool from time to time during the various debates over the years, with Hetherington most vocal and supportive for reasons mentioned above. Still, there were not too many councillors, even the National Party majority, and ALP members Glenn Taylor and Jim McArdle who wanted to be seen to be voting outright against a community development which had high-profile

support from various members of the legal profession in town and the head of the largest and most important non-private high school.

Orange High School Principal Pam Ryan was alarmed at the swiftness of the move by council. As reported by Nick Redmond, Ryan said the argument that existing facilities were enough, ignored the fact they were not all community facilities and that it was unlikely council's figure of \$2 million, plus recurrent costs, was accurate because current costs were fixed over a year with revenue limited to a couple of months [in summer]. Council recommendations that seek public support for rejection of an issue — the May 5 poll for example — are political tactics. At once they avoid direct confrontation of councillors with large sections of their constituency — those in favour of the proposals — while setting up the proposal for public rejection based on a "yes" answer which advocates a direct tax increase. A by-election is most often the favoured vehicle for all sorts of things that would, of necessity, wait another couple of years until a general election.

The most spectacular tactic was that which the council ultimately attempted to employ to gag an influential supporter of the proposal. At the previous general meeting, Hetherington had asked an unrelated but difficult and embarrassing question, which, despite its perceived objectivity, appeared to take the GM by surprise and catch him off guard. It is the GM's responsibility within the council to be "on top of" all business. At the conclusion of the meeting, over drinks and supper, the GM stood toe to toe with Hetherington and told him in no uncertain terms what he thought of him and that he would "have him" some time in the future. The confrontation was witnessed by a number of councillors and a reporter from the local newspaper. Hetherington appeared nonplussed by the confrontation but decided to "let it lie", knowing he had partly been consciously responsible for the outburst by placing the GM in the spotlight. The confrontation was not reported by Redmond. (Hetherington telecon, Redmond telecon, March 16 2001).

Late in the evening of March 13, Hetherington received a telephone call from a member of the Swimfit team, Jenny Hazelton. Hazelton recounted a message she had received earlier in the evening from *CWD* report Nick Redmond that the GM intended to table a notice of motion on March 15 at the general meeting, alleging Hetherington — as a

member of the Swimfit team — had a vested interest in proceedings and should therefore remove himself from debate on the issue. Hetherington at the time of Hazelton's telephone call had been meeting privately with a colleague, councillor Gryllis, on another issue before council. Hetherington became enraged. Gryllis told him to calm down and to think about things objectively. Hetherington said he was enraged because he could not believe the GM would use the death of John Lomas — whom Hetherington had held in high regard for his objectivity — to score political points by getting the Swimfit proposal off the agenda at the same time attempting to have Hetherington removed from the chamber. Gryllis suggested to Hetherington that he should calm down and not get '...upset or emotional like they do to me all the time'. Gryllis is known in council circles as an easy target when an emotion is required as someone of Greek background who is likely to "over-react" under normal circumstances. (Hetherington telecon, March 13, 2001). Hetherington believed he was lucky to have been informed of the issue by Hazelton before he arrived at the council meeting. He had resigned from the Swimfit team some months earlier, concerned he would be seen to be less objective and unable to put the view of his constituency. As a true independent, Hetherington attempts to represent a broad cross-section of the community, as does Peter Andren in Federal Parliament. According to Andren, it is the responsibility of the "true independent" to place the issues of the community on the public record and debate them objectively, without recourse to party political motives. Hetherington has expressed the same regard for his position in local government. (Andren interview, Aug 2001; Hetherington interview, Aug 2001).

Hetherington believes the general manager was motivated to attempt to exclude him from debate for two reasons. Firstly Hetherington was a strong supporter of Swimfit with the potential to persuade councillors to vote in favour of the poll option. Secondly, information which could be perceived to have placed Hetherington in a position of interest and to be therefore unable to participate in any debate was about to be placed legitimately in the public sphere. The information, a schedule of proposed Swimfit television advertising, found its way to the council officer directly from Swimfit itself in what certain group members believed was an ethical requirement of them as a community group (Hetherington telecon, March 2001).

In his capacity as a sales representative for *Prime* Television, Hetherington provided Swimfit with an attractive management-approved schedule of advertising space for it to

use to present its argument to the community to gain additional support prior to the proposal being debated further in council. A member of the group, when sending copies of the minutes of its meeting to OCC, naively attached a schedule of the television advertising. But Hetherington took his Swimfit information file to the OCC meeting and was able to table his letter of resignation and its acceptance by the chair, Pam Ryan, thus diverting a possible conflict (Hetherington telecon, March 2001).

In its issue of Friday March 17, the *CWD* front page banner head read 'Pool plan sunk' (see figure 7.8). The newspaper had conducted its own telephone poll of ratepayers and discovered there was unanimous support for rejection of an indoor aquatic centre. In the same issue the editor published letters from residents arguing Hetherington was 'a dill' for supporting the pool when all it meant was a rate increase. Hetherington had been quoted in the issue of the previous Monday, March 12, saying he supported Swimfit and the idea of a council survey as long as the wording of the survey question was fair. He also said it was important to ask the youth of the city because they would be one of the major user groups of the centre (Hetherington telecon, March 2001). There are more than 3,500 people in the 18-24 age group in Orange, the majority of whom are not ratepayers but whom are eligible to vote (ABS 2001 Census).

Pool plan sunk

By Nick Redmond

A COMMUNITY indoor aquatic centre will not be built in Orange in this council's term and a poll to gauge support for the project will not be undertaken.

Orange City Council voted seven to four to end Swimfit's campaign for the construction of a \$2.5 million indoor aquatic centre on Thursday night and also rejected a poll, which was to be carried out during a by-election on May 5.

In a heated debate the result was described by opposite sides of the chamber as both a vote for common sense and an impediment to democracy.

Council voted last year to discuss the matter during consideration of the next management plan.

It was for Swimfit was brought forward with the tabling of a report by general manager Allen Dwyer, which offered councillors a choice of supporting a poll of residents or rejecting Swimfit's proposal outright.

The report said council would need to borrow up to \$2 million to realise the Swimfit proposal, which would require loan repayments of \$272,000 annually

Council votes against community indoor pool

on top of recurrent operational costs of \$215,000.

If the project was to go ahead the financial impact on the city would be equivalent to a 3.3 per cent rate increase, Mr Dwyer said.

The report suggested a referendum on the pool issue could be held in conjunction with a by-election for Cr John Lomas' position on council.

Cr Lomas, a supporter of the aquatic centre, passed away earlier this month.

"I'll tell every councillor, no matter what their view on the pool, they should not be afraid to go to the people," Cr Glenn Taylor said.

Cr Jason Jaeger said rejecting the centre was a vote for "common sense."

Cr Martin Gleeson agreed, stating a poll of ratepayers had already been con-

ducted in 1997 rejecting an indoor pool.

Council on Thursday voted instead to redevelop the diving pool area for the construction of a water slide.

Cr Margaret Stevenson asked Mr Dwyer to explain how the cost projections in his report were formulated.

Mr Dwyer said the projections were generous and based on the existing Olympic Pool's usage.

Cr Peter Hetherington said the report was "loaded" against Swimfit.

He questioned figures used in the report and said council claimed a sound financial position with up to \$10 million in reserve yet could not fund a \$2.5 million community facility.

He said the "ultimate political strategy"

Continued Page 2



Figure 7.8 *Central Western Daily* front page treatment of the Swimfit issue

Council votes against pool

• From Page 1

was to bring forward the debate of the pool following the death of John Lomas.

Cr Hetherington said council should stand by its original intention of discussing the matter when the management plan was debated in May.

He said Swimfit was given that period to bring solid figures back to council on recurrent costs but that had been derailed by the general manager's report.

Mr Dwyer, together with a number of councillors, vigorously rejected Cr Hetherington's statements, particularly referring to "the ultimate political strategy."

"This is totally out of order. It is all innuendo... I've been in local government a long time and thought we lived in the real world and dealt with facts but obviously this is fairy land," Mr Dwyer said.

"This is outrageous. I've been a town clerk or a general manager for some 28 years and I've never had one of my reports ever questioned as far as accu-

racy and I stand by them 110 per cent."

Cr John Miller told the meeting he was disgusted by Cr Hetherington's comments and they were a slur on councillors and staff.

Mr Dwyer said the council had in fact a \$3.8 million debt in the general fund and the funds in reserve were already earmarked for other projects.

Swimfit chairwoman Pam Ryan told the Central Western Daily yesterday: "Add Swimfit to the growing list of community groups who are bitterly disappointed with the performance of this council."

"It seems that grass roots, community-based needs keep being dismissed as non-profit making and therefore unnecessary."

She said council had raised new questions in relation to the proposal over the last four years.

"By pursuing detailed planning, we brought capital costs down by at least \$1 million on the lowest previous estimate and by \$4 million on the highest."

"We were in the process of preparing a recurrent cost analysis which council had in fact requested for May when suddenly this decision was taken. It seems the ground just keeps shifting," Ms Ryan said.

She said it was possible the pool could be built with little or no impact on rates.

Councillors Taylor, Hetherington, Stevenson and Chris Gryllis supported the poll but were defeated by Councillors Gleason, Miller, Jaeger, Brenda Davies, Russell Turner, Jim McArdle and Dick Niven.

Cr Turner had indicated he would support the poll but changed his mind following Cr Hetherington's statement.

Councillors Dave Shearing and Reg Kidd were absent.

Swimfit has raised \$100,000 in cash and pledges with about \$35,000 in a bank account.

Ms Ryan said a decision would need to be made about the \$35,000 and it was possible the money could be placed in a trust until the aquatic centre issue was raised again, as it would inevitably be.

Figure 7.9 Continued CWD editorial treatment of Swimfit inside the paper:
The bold typeface headline indicates continued seriousness for the issue

engage readers in response to what may be considered a routine story. As such it elicits a wider reader-response and has the potential to deliver increased revenue through increased circulation. It also allows the CWD to be manipulated by the political power of the OCC management which has a vested interest in promoting a negative view of the proposal. In terms of representation, ALP Councillor Glenn Taylor, was quoted in the CWD on Monday March 12 supporting the council-generated poll. Taylor was quoted in the article as saying he would '...never support going against what the people say'. The denouement of the issue was in the reaction of Councillor Hetherington's speech against the recommendations. It provoked the GM into rising to his feet and berating the councillor in an unprecedented fashion (Redmond telecon, March 2001). The GM said that in his 38 years in local government no councillor had had the audacity to question his figures (Redmond telecon, March 2001).

Analysis of press coverage

Reporting of the issue by the *CWD* was objective and contained an adequate level of information for professional communicators and citizens to grasp its political significance. Between August 2000 and May 2001, 12 pieces appeared, nine by-lined Nick Redmond, two by-lined Janice Harris and one by-lined Yolanda Torrisi.

In the two weeks prior to the September 1999 election, the *CWD* surveyed candidates about support for an aquatic centre. Nine of the elected councillors stated publicly that they supported the proposed development.³³ The newspaper survey provided clearly defined public support for the development from a majority of candidates, a situation which allowed the Swimfit committee to believe it had the numbers once council was reconvened. Such a well-defined position also provided the *CWD* editor and editorial staff with a reasonably sound benchmark from which to pursue all future material related to the indoor pool development. In other words, it was reasonable to assume councillor support for the development would continue, provided it remained within established parameters.

During the first 12 months tenure of the new council, the development was scaled down financially and physically, and in mid August the redesigned proposal received public attention on page two of the *CWD*. The original plan for a \$6m centre was revised, adopting elements of the existing outdoor council-run pool, estimated to cost \$2.5m.³⁴

³³ The nine councillors were Miller, Kidd, Davies, Niven, Shearing, McArdle, Stevenson, Hetherington and Gryllis. I am uncertain whether the remaining councillors, Lomas, Turner, Gleeson, Taylor, and Jaeger, presented opinions to the newspaper, as I was unable to locate an edition which contained any further *CWD*-generated surveys. Councillors supporting the development cited several conditions to their support including self-funded running costs, modification of the existing plans, community funding, and government funding. Nonetheless a majority recorded publicly the need for an indoor public swimming pool, and allowed their campaign for election to include provision for its development in their platform.

³⁴ An analysis of the differentiation between the information on the pool in the 1999-2001 report and the 2001-2004 report provides the evidence needed to conclude the council had marginalised the indoor pool proposal. When read in conjunction with media reports the evidence is palpable: council had ceased to have a genuine interest in the indoor pool.

Swimfit hopes for government funds

By NICK REDMOND

THE proposed Swimfit indoor aquatic centre has been included on a NSW Sport and Recreation funding list and a submission for Federal funding is being prepared.

If successful the Sport and Recreation application will provide \$300,000 while \$500,000 will be sought from Federal sources.

Orange City Council has previously pledged \$500,000 towards the project and Swimfit has raised about \$100,000 towards the \$2.5 million centre.

The design has been simplified and now includes a 25 metre, eight lane pool and a

smaller pool suitable for toddlers as well as leisure and rehabilitation activities.

Swimfit chairwoman Pam Ryan said the funding was an important step towards construction as was raising the issue in the community.

"We understand that council makes a decision on funding in its management plan in May so in the lead up to that we will be giving the issue a profile. We're pretty proud that the model we have now has saved a million and a half dollars," she said.

Ms Ryan said the argument that Orange already had sufficient indoor pools was flawed because the existing pools did

not provide leisure space.

"The Kinross pool is going extremely well for the school community and that is what it is intended for. It is a beautiful centre and it is for the school.

"The gym market is well served and people who are members of the Ex Services are well served but there are 35,000 people in this town," she said.

The Swimfit proposal was for a community facility open to all.

"We've seen 1800 people going to the pool every day during the hot weather. Where are they going when there is no sun?"

"We have three indoor pools but none of them serve that leisure/recreational need."

Figure 7.10 Continuity of coverage, but not positive for interest group

Indoor pool plan more affordable, but ...

Funding bid not supported

By NICK REDMOND

SWIMFIT presented its most detailed and affordable plan to date for an indoor aquatic centre on Thursday night but failed to gain council support for a funding application that could secure \$300,000 for the project.

The design includes an eight lane 25 metre pool, capable of staging country swim meets and carnivals, and a program pool for toddlers.

The cost is now estimated at \$2.5 million which has shaved at least \$1 million from earlier estimates.

The report said savings had been made through a simplified design, less high tech plant equipment and closer scrutiny of building costs.

Designer Stephen Johnson said

many of the cost components were still estimated at the high end and there was considerable saving possible.

"There is a lot of fat in parts of this report," he said.

The presentation of the report was overshadowed to a degree when council voted against supporting a Swimfit application to the State Department of Sport and Recreation for \$300,000.

The applications close next week.

Cr Peter Hetherington made a recommendation that council support the application.

He said council support would assist the application and if successful could be the beginning of "new balling" fund raising.

Sport and Recreation regional coordinator Paul Couras, who attended the

meeting, said only one application has been made and Swimfit's application would be assisted by council's support.

Cr Margaret Stevenson said Swimfit was not asking for a financial pledge or any guarantee that the project would go ahead.

"All they want is support for the application," she said.

Deputy mayor Glenn Taylor strenuously opposed Cr Hetherington's motion because, he said, it contradicted an earlier council decision that the indoor aquatic centre be considered when the next management plan is up for discussion in May next year.

Cr John Miller agreed, amending Cr Hetherington's motion. He said the Swimfit presentation should be noted.

(Continued Page 2)

West Orange Motors Car of the Week featured on the back page

5 The Aussie dollar was steady at US\$0.5208.

TV PROGRAMS Pages 66 & 67

Figure 7.11 More front page coverage with continuing bad news for supporters



An impression of the view from Hill Street of an indoor facility that is proposed to be built next to the Olympic pool.

Funding bid not supported

• From Page 1

The amendment was carried. Swimfit Committee chair Pam Ryan said the application would go ahead. She said this proposal had resolved many of council's issues with capital costs.

Swimfit has raised \$100,000, council's pledge of \$500,000 of Olympic Pool reserves still stood, there was the possibility of Sport and Recreation funding of \$300,000 and the prospect of Federal funding of \$500,000, and corporate sponsorship.

Mayor Dick Niven again raised the

issue of existing indoor swimming facilities. He said council had to be careful it did not compete with private enterprise.

Ms Ryan said existing facilities were not targeting the same community members as the Swimfit proposal.

"What we have in the town are a couple of very good facilities for the purpose they were built for and the section of the community they were built for," she said.

"We're not talking about that. We do not provide a gym we're not in competition. We are looking at a facility for youth to go to, a recreational space not a

fitness space. The existing facilities don't want kids to go there just to meet and rightly so. They are not social havens, they are a community space like the Olympic Pool is in the summer."

Cr Jim McArdle said the major issue was recurrent costs.

Ms Ryan said the Swimfit proposal addressed some recurrent cost problems and there was evidence from other well managed centres that running costs were not prohibitive.

"The challenge now is to look at recurrent costs and we will do that," she said.

Figure 7.12 Substantial message delivery supported by sketch of proposed pool

Pool now much more affordable

By NICK HETHERINGTON

NEW plans for an indoor swimming pool have been unveiled, and the cost has been slashed to a level that is much more affordable than the previous proposal.

The new plan, which has been developed by the local authority, is based on a design that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing. It is a large, modern building with a high, vaulted ceiling and large windows that will allow natural light to flood the interior.

The pool itself will be a large, rectangular pool with a depth of 1.5 metres. It will be surrounded by a paved area with seating and a small cafe. There will also be a changing room and a shower area.

The cost of the pool has been slashed from the previous proposal of £1.2 million to a much more affordable £500,000. This is due to a number of factors, including the use of a pre-fabricated pool and the fact that the building will be built on a site that is already owned by the council.

The pool is expected to be completed by the end of the year and will be open to the public from the start of the new year.



On the right, the new indoor swimming pool is shown in a perspective view. The building is a large, modern structure with a high, vaulted ceiling and large windows. The pool itself is a large, rectangular pool with a depth of 1.5 metres. It is surrounded by a paved area with seating and a small cafe. There is also a changing room and a shower area.

The pool is expected to be completed by the end of the year and will be open to the public from the start of the new year. The cost of the pool has been slashed from the previous proposal of £1.2 million to a much more affordable £500,000. This is due to a number of factors, including the use of a pre-fabricated pool and the fact that the building will be built on a site that is already owned by the council.

Council inspects city indoor pools

By NICK HETHERINGTON

COUNCIL has undertaken an inspection of the city's indoor swimming pools. The inspection was carried out by a team of council members and community interest group members. The team visited the three indoor pools in the city and inspected the facilities, the staff, and the overall condition of the pools.

The inspection found that the pools were generally well maintained and that the staff were well trained. However, there were some areas for improvement, particularly in the area of safety and security. The council has agreed to take action to address these areas and to ensure that the pools are safe and secure for all users.

The inspection also found that the pools were popular with the community and that they provided a valuable service. The council is committed to maintaining and improving the pools and to ensuring that they are a safe and secure place for all to enjoy.



On the right, the new indoor swimming pool is shown in a perspective view. The building is a large, modern structure with a high, vaulted ceiling and large windows. The pool itself is a large, rectangular pool with a depth of 1.5 metres. It is surrounded by a paved area with seating and a small cafe. There is also a changing room and a shower area.

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Figure 7.13 Pictures of the community interest group and councillors adds a human dimension to the story. Hetherington features in both

Swimfit signs up support

By Nick Redmond

A PLETHORA of local residents are backing the plans for a new indoor aquatic centre in Orange, which would be the first of its kind in the south-east of Australia.

Swimfit, the company behind the project, has today announced that it has secured the support of the Orange City Council, which has agreed to fund the project.

The council's decision to fund the project is a significant step towards the realisation of the project, which is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

The project is expected to provide a valuable facility for the community, and will also provide a source of income for the council.

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Children at the school, which is a partner for the project, are looking at the plans for the new pool.

Figure 7.14 Images of happy children provides strong emotional appeal. Again Hetherington features having set up the picture for the newspaper at the local primary school

Crunch time for new pool

By Nick Redmond

IF there is to be an indoor aquatic centre in Orange in the near future it rests with a decision to be made by Orange City Council on Thursday night.

Councillors will vote to either conduct a poll of residents to gauge community support for the centre or to not proceed with the Swimfit proposal.

Swimfit has released a design for a \$2.5 million indoor aquatic centre to be built at the eastern end of the existing Olympic pool.

A report by council general manager Allen Dwyer to be tabled on Thursday night includes two recommendations.

The first suggests conducting a poll of electors to be held in conjunction with a by-election to be held on May 5.

The by-election is to be held following the death of Cr John Lomas, who passed away on March 4.

Council and Swimfit representatives

would prepare the voting paper, which would have to include a realistic assessment in percentage terms as to a required rate increase to fund the centre and council would be the final arbiter, Mr Dwyer said.

The second recommendation suggests council should advise Swimfit it is not prepared to proceed with the Aquatic Centre proposal as there are indoor aquatic centres provided by the private sector in the city and the centre would be an unnecessary financial burden on ratepayers.

The second recommendation includes refurbishment of the existing pool complex and redevelopment of the diving pool area to provide a water slide.

Council is still bound by a \$1 million loan pledge and a further \$400,000 from restricted asset funds to the Swimfit proposal.

Swimfit has raised \$100,000 towards the project and has applied for a

\$300,000 State Government grant and a \$500,000 Federal grant.

Mr Dwyer said: "In my opinion, council will require loan funds of at least \$2 million to complete the project."

He said the loan repayments together with the operational costs of the centre, estimated at \$215,000 annually, would amount to \$487,000 per annum, which is equivalent to a 3.3 per cent general rate increase.

He said the most feasible method of raising the funds for the pool would be through a rate increase.

Cr Jason Jaeger said he would oppose the referendum because he could not justify voting for a facility which would increase the city's already high rates.

"There is already an abundance of pools in the city," he said.

He said an earlier survey had settled the issue.

Continued Page 2

Figure 7.15 Back on the front page: the CWD frames the story by indirectly challenging council

Council split on future of pool

14/3/01
P1

By Nick Redmond

ORANGE City Council is split over a referendum to decide the future of the Swimfit indoor aquatic centre proposal.

Tomorrow night councillors will choose between two recommendations to be tabled in a report by general manager Allen Dwyer.

The first, if supported by a majority of council, will lead

to a referendum giving all registered voting age-residents an opportunity to decide whether the city supports the Swimfit model for a \$2.6 million indoor aquatic centre.

The second recommendation will bring an end to the debate on an indoor aquatic centre probably until the current council's term finishes in September 2003.

Mr Dwyer's first recommendation said the poll on

the Swimfit proposal could be held in conjunction with a by-election on May 5. That comes following the death of Cr John Lomas.

There will be 12 councillors in attendance at tomorrow's meeting. Yesterday five supported the poll, four said council should not proceed with the Swimfit proposal and two were undecided, while two councillors were unavailable for comment.

Councillors in favour of

the poll believe residents should be given the opportunity to have their say.

Councillors opposing the Swimfit proposal believe whether a poll is held or not an indoor aquatic centre is not financially within reach and would place too much burden on ratepayers.

Councillors Glenn Taylor, Peter Hetherington, Margaret Stevenson, Russell Turner and Chris Gryllis

Continued Page 2

Security against pool survey: poll

Council split on pool poll

From Page 1

The *Central Western Daily* conducted a telephone poll between 7.30am-5pm yesterday to give readers the chance to have their say on the indoor aquatic centre proposal.

Thirty-five readers favoured the first option - that council should allow a poll to be held in conjunction with a by-election on May 5. The poll would include an assessment of the cost of an aquatic centre in terms of a rate increase to fund it.

On the question of whether coun-

cil should decide to advise Swimfit that it is not prepared to proceed with the plan on the basis of current alternative availability and cost, the recorded vote was 56.

A poll is also being conducted on the Daily's website, orange.your-guide.com.au.

There, in response to the question "Does Orange need a public indoor swimming pool?", 73 per cent of 33 respondents answered 'yes', with 27 per cent voting 'no'.

support the poll.

Councillors Jason Jaeger, Martin Gleeson, Jim McArdle and Brenda Davies oppose an indoor aquatic centre.

Mayor Dick Niven and Cr John Miller are undecided on the poll.

Cr Reg Kidd and Cr Dave Shearing were unavailable for comment yesterday.

Figure 7.16 Further *Central Western Daily* coverage includes its own poll of citizens

I suspect the *CWD* survey and its results created unintended consequences, one of which was what Sharp (1999) defines as the "sometimes connection": the relationship between public opinion and government policies in which there appear undefined correlations between a public's policy preferences and government actions. In this case the relationship between the council and the public was subsumed within a wider

political correlate undefined and undetected within the public sphere to the extent that it remained obscured from the view of the *CWD* reporter until very much later in the narrative. Nonetheless, *CWD* reportage of the issue was based on a traditional myth structure that news is a naturally occurring phenomena in which political elements exist at any given time, nurturing actions and events that emerge directly from it (Manheim 1998: 94).

Reportage harvests "news stories" from the surface of the political system as they "grow". Alternative structures include the capacity of the reporter to dig into the surface and extract material without waiting for it to grow, investigative reporting which pursues wider causes, effects and correlates, and what Manheim (1998) terms enterprise reporting which occurs when a reporter originates the source of an idea.

De Burgh (2000) provides a disparaging distinction between reporting and journalism, describing reporting as merely descriptive news, while investigative journalism reconfigures, asking questions and attempting to see a situation or action in a different way (2000: 13).

CWD reporting is generally confined, for budgetary and resource reasons, to the establishment of facts and the reporting of events and actions as defined by Manheim's first model: naturally occurring in which political elements exist and nurture surface stories. The culture of a regional city such as Orange provides very little opportunity for a reporter to do otherwise, when combined with restricted resources such as tight deadlines. It is on this basis that an assessment of the news value of the reporting of the Swimfit case in the *CWD*, by Nick Redmond at least, must be seen to be balanced.

The case was reported by Redmond until immediately after the council meeting of March 15 at which it voted to abandon the development. On March 20 the *CWD* published a front page piece and a picture of the Swimfit committee by-lined Janice Harris (see figure 7.18). On March 28, Harris followed up with a piece on Swimfit's plans to regroup (see figure 7.19). Prior to the March 20 article, Redmond had reported the case from a singular perspective — since the previous November — each time including sufficient background material for a first-time reader to valorise the case objectively. Harris in March, then Torrisi in April, altered the perspective, framing the case in terms of the existing facilities and their adequacy (Torrisi, *CWD* 9.4.2001) and the future of the Swimfit committee (Harris; *CWD* 20.3.2001, 28.3.2001).

MONDAY, MARCH 19, 2001

Swimfit faces new challenge

THE decision to dump plans for an indoor aquatic centre leaves no room for ambiguity - the present council and its administration do not want it.

The seven councillors who formed the majority against it will argue, too, that this means the community agrees.

Council's vote means, however, that the community will not get a chance to confirm this by way of a referendum. It means, too, that council will not have an opportunity of hearing Swimfit's cost management proposals.

Looking at the numbers last Thursday night, the pro-Swimfit vote never stood much of a chance of getting up.

The decision, council tells us, is based on the question of cost - not just to council but ultimately to ratepayers, who general manager Allen Dwyer says would have been slugged with a 3.3 per cent rates rise. This on top of last year's five per cent increase, would have proved a hefty burden to bear.

What council and its bureaucracy need to focus on now is elimination of the \$3.8 million debt in the general fund.

It really should inform the community of its strategy to do just that, for while that debt hangs over the heads of ratepayers it is hard to see how any future non-profit making project for public recreation can be undertaken.

Swimfit has lost this battle but given the calibre of its members it is hard to see them withdrawing from the campaign.

The city, saddled with its present financial position, cannot afford a public indoor swimming centre now, but financial circumstances can change so can councillors and administrators.

It is up to Swimfit to persuade the community that change is worthwhile.

Figure 7.17 CWD leader treatment of the issue: time for the newspaper to take sides

From a political perspective, Redmond had ceased cultivation of his 'garden' immediately after the March 15 decision. For Redmond, the structure of his reporting meant the story was concluded, similar to the denouement of the Watergate reporting: when Richard Nixon confessed, the narrative constructed by *Washington Post* reporters ceased. It was taken up by others, as was the Swimfit case, to be analysed and investigated for alternative reasons to the business of reporting the news.

Swimfit outrage



Swimfit committee members (from left) Gai Stone, Pam Ryan, Glenn Mickle, Rob Williamson, Toot Keegan and Jenny Hazelton at Orange People's Pool yesterday ... "disillusioned by council's action". Photo: IAN ANDERSON

By Janice Harris

Pool group will fight on despite council setback

SWIMFIT feels it has had "the rug pulled from under it" but will not be giving up its quest for an indoor aquatic centre for the city.

Chairwoman Pam Ryan said yesterday the committee felt it had been let down by council and was disillusioned with some councillors and staff after a decision was made to scrap the project while the committee was in the process of preparing detailed costings of on-going expenses for the facility.

At last Thursday night's meeting council voted seven to four in favour of rejecting the pool plan. It also voted against a referendum on the matter.

Ms Ryan said loyal supporters of the concept should know that Swimfit had always maintained an open line of communication to council advising it of their progress throughout the project.

"When you feel you've been poorly treated you don't just do the same to those who've supported you, and we need to let the community know about the way we have con-

ducted the campaign through the entire process," she said.

Committee member Jenny Hazelton said Swimfit had always been very open with council.

"We were in the process of preparing our figures, which we were told were to be presented to council in May," she said.

"I wrote to council on February 28 advising them of our progress and the next thing we know it is on the agenda for last week's meeting."

"We've had the rug pulled from under us," she said.

The committee is unanimous in its disapproval of what it says was a sudden and unannounced decision to bring the issue forward at last Thursday's meeting.

Referring to Councillor Peter Hetherington's support for Swimfit at the meeting, Ms Ryan said she believed he had acted with integrity.

"He's the one genuine independent on council and he should not be made a scapegoat."

Councillor Hetherington told the Central Western Daily yesterday he believed that emotion over the recent death of John Louas had played a part in his address to council.

"I worked closely with John on this project and I know he believed in an indoor aquatic centre - I spoke from the heart when I said those things," he said.

Mayor of Orange Councillor Dick Niven has defended the decision by council to place the indoor aquatic centre on the agenda for last Thursday night's meeting.

"The fact is we are now in the process of preparing the May management plan and staff needed to know and needed an indication from council as to what might hap-

pen," he said.

"The people who want this pool are a very small minority compared with the ratepayers who say the facility is not justified," Councillor Niven said.

Swimfit committee member Rob Williamson said he feared the children of Orange were the losers in the whole issue.

"When you look at our local swimming statistics they're not good compared with other areas," he said.

Mrs Hazelton said Swimfit had been looking forward to tonight's Sports Council meeting to speak on the issue, but was disappointed it was cancelled.

"So our next step is to meet as usual next Monday night when we will be looking at ways to refocus on a plan to get an indoor aquatic centre for the people of Orange," she said.



Figure 7.18 Images of despair: CWD treatment of the issue includes picture of group members vowing to continue the fight despite having failed in its bid to create policy

Public meeting over aquatic centre plan

28/3/01 P3

By Janice Harris

SWIMFIT is planning to organise a public meeting on May 7 to address key issues surrounding the future of the committee formed to lobby for an indoor aquatic centre for Orange.

At the committee's meeting on Monday night, the vote was unanimous that members press for a public meeting to address the issues of the future of the centre and the funds currently held in trust by the organisation, and what the committee says is an ongoing need for a community-based indoor aquatic centre.

Committee spokeswoman Jenny Hazelton said yesterday the Swimfit committee has worked tirelessly over the past four years to translate a dream into a reality.

"Our work over this time has been dominated by a shifting landscape. Councils and council staff have constantly changed the parameters of our work which has left us disillusioned and doubtful about the value of community input



Alan Dwyer ... addressing the facts



Jenny Hazelton ... supporting the project

into council decisions," she said.

However, general manager of Orange City Council, Alan Dwyer, said he challenged the committee to be more specific about the suggestion that parameters for the indoor aquatic centre had changed.

"It's impossible to respond to those sweeping statements if all Swimfit wants to be more specific then we are certainly address that," he said.

"We are in the business of addressing facts and regardless of what the committee thinks, council didn't deliberately bring this issue forward to torpedo them," Mr Dwyer said.

Mrs Hazelton said the committee remained keenly aware of widespread support in the community for the project and for the trust placed in them.

"In light of this trust we have decided to hold this public meeting in May, with the venue yet to be decided," she said.

Swimfit had its hopes for an indoor aquatic centre dashed at the last meeting of Orange City Council when councillors voted seven to four to abandon the project.

Last week, committee members said they would not walk away from the project and would consider all options at last Monday night's meeting.

"The committee has had many approaches from people who have reflected the acute disquiet about the future of the council's handling of the matter in recent times and in the past," Mrs Hazelton said.

Figure 7.19 A CWD attempt to introduce the main "performer" in the Swimfit issue

Part of the problem for Swimfit as a community pressure group was an ignorance of the news-gathering and news-dissemination processes, combined with a naïve belief in the veracity of the political system. The group believed Redmond, as a community member, empathised with their aims and goal, and would thus report their case favourably. Community groups frequently accept, from a number of cues, the belief that the media is on side: reporters appear interested in their case through constant direct contact; reporters, through their published material appear to be interested in fighting for the rights of minorities against governments; reporters by their code of dress, align with community groups and outsiders.³⁵ The group failed to undertake an analysis of the content or subtext of the published material about the case, relying instead on instinctual observation of the surface text and the positiveness provided by accompanying pictures of the group. In political terms, it relied on the veracity of the elected representatives, nine of whom publicly endorsed the development prior to the September 1999 poll. The group claims knowledge of the role of the unelected representative in the process but powerlessness to counter political agendas not expressed openly in the public sphere. In all nine Redmond stories, one line of

³⁵ Community groups, I suspect, do not consider their actions to be related to political campaigning. They seek to influence through lesser strategies and tactics employing 'soft' social options against institutions which measure success through the acceptance of 'hard' economic options.

reporting is taken: a community group seeks approval for the development of a recreational facility that has a number of existing counterparts, will require a substantial financial commitment from ratepayers, and began life with an ambit figure 50 per cent higher than the final cost estimate. What Redmond reports consistently and subtextually, is that the community group's aspirations did not equate with the financial and cultural aspirations of the majority, nor with the council.

Swimfit vows to battle on

By Nick Redmond

A NEW Swimfit Committee was elected on Monday night with a vow to continue lobbying and raising funds for an indoor aquatic centre.

The committee is now led by Rob Williamson in the chair in place of Pam Ryan while Glenn Mickle remains vice chairman and Loanne Boss as the treasurer.

In May Orange City Council voted against the Swimfit Committee's \$2.5 million model and the concept is now off council's agenda indefinitely.

Swimfit has raised \$100,000 which includes \$65,000 in cash and the balance in pledges.

Incoming chairman Rob Williamson said the pool was still an important issue for many Orange residents and those residents would be

encouraged to add their voice to the campaign by way of lobbying.

He said the current fundraising campaign had run its course but a new program to raise funds would be developed in the near future.

Outgoing chairwoman Pam Ryan said the next council election was not that far away (September 2003) and the funds would continue to build.

Figure 7.20 Back to tend the garden: CWD introduces new information

Relationship to wider community

The Swimfit committee believed it was working on behalf of the wider community to secure the development of the indoor pool. Part of this belief was based on its capacity to raise a substantial sum of public money — \$100,000 — towards construction costs. In relative terms however, the amount was insubstantial when considered as an investment in the original total cost of \$5m. The fundraising strategy of the group appears to have been limited to obtaining small donations from a wide section of the community through general activities such as "fun runs" (a contradiction in terms) and barbeques. Corporate or business sponsorship of the pool was never seriously considered despite a number of opportunities presenting themselves during 2000 (Hetherington telecon, March 2001).

In a memorandum from group committee member Jenny Hazelton to OCC's sports advisory committee dated March 31, 2000 a number of issues were raised obliquely, as if

the committee was afraid to confront the rejection of the proposal in real terms. Hazelton leads with the death of Councillor Lomas, building a picture of a group that relied heavily on individuals outside it to achieve high levels of success on its behalf. While not directly apportioning blame for the failure, the text of the memorandum was devoted to absolving the committee due to its belief in human veracity (councillors not changing their minds), a suspicion of council administrators conspiratorially plotting against them, (in reality a misreading of council's written intentions), and its assumption that as a community group of elites, it would achieve its goals (based primarily on what the group considered to be a high level of "trust" placed in it by the wider community following security of \$100,000 in donations) (Swimfit memorandum, 31.3.2000).

The illusory nature of these beliefs is not uncommon among community groups. While community groups have a number of reasons for their individual existence they can be categorised as either pressure or cause groups (Moloney 2000: 37) and can represent interests and causes national or locally and are promotional to greater or lesser degrees. As I have mentioned elsewhere, most community groups are comprised of individuals who form for a specific purpose which, on achievement of some outcome (positive or negative), disband and go about their normal lives. Success for these groups can be measured against collective expertise and contacts. Their failure rate is also a function of government rejection of influence and persuasion by grassroots groups as they are not aligned with the conservative ideology.

An examination of grassroots community groups relative to my mezzanine model reveals failures occur because groups have little expertise in public relations, media management or access to power elites. In Orange the accuracy of this statement is reflected in the failure of both the swimming pool and conservatorium cases. In contrast all three elements of the IMC case contributed to its success.

While there are no figures available for the number of groups lobbying a local council in Australia, in the UK there are an estimated 100 single interest groups for each of the 250 local councils, most of whom employ some degree of professional PR (Maloney 2000: 38). This means there are 100 groups attempting to influence and persuade a local government authority of the merits of their individual goals. Orange City Councillor and National Party chairman John Miller estimates a similar number of groups exist in Orange but that very few employ professional public relations to advance their cause. (Miller telecon, February 2002).

The failure of the proposal highlights elementary political campaign errors perpetrated by community groups in their quests to become part of the public policy process. It served as the first real practical example to Councillor Hetherington that political communication requires a high degree of understanding of the political process, policy process and the relatively low level of importance placed on public opinion by government agencies. Hetherington continued to demonstrate individual integrity by remaining loyal to the group despite clear early warning signals. His integrity was grasped by the *CWD*, and through its pages, given a wider audience. Despite the failure of the proposal, Hetherington's position as a true independent, willing to represent the interests of the electorate against institutional interests, was confirmed. In this he followed the doctrine of the federal independent Peter Andren who argues representation of the interests of the electorate must over-ride party or individual interests.

CASE THREE: ORANGE REGIONAL CONSERVATORIUM

The point of this case is the way in which the competing sides attempted to present their positions to the public through the media. An examination of the issues which inform the case, indicates both sides had reasonable grounds to believe theirs was the correct position. Of greater importance is the quality of information placed in the public sphere and how the competing sides attempted to use theories of persuasion and influence to change public opinion. Orange City Council attempted to reinforce its image as a responsible organisation whose primary interest was the fiduciary governance of ratepayer funds and investments. Orange Regional Conservatorium (ORC) attempted to position itself as a private entity beyond the authority of local government and to employ negative reinforcement of public opinion of local government. The conservatorium overlooked its moral obligation to the community in terms of its public funding and residence in council-owned premises, but nonetheless, pursued its democratic right to legal opinion, evidence it had a defined level of autonomy. The council responded bureaucratically to a community group seeking autonomy. Councillors were influenced to take sides on the issue, along lines of personality rather than information.

The conservatorium case requires consideration from a number of perspectives. The perspective that has occupied the most time for both sides is legal argument about the tendering process for a proposed new building. This part of the case revolves around two performers — the council general manager and the conservatorium president. Bishop (2000) argues that ethical practice in local government depends more for its success on the consideration of the ethics of representation than the 'drafting of codes of conduct' (2000: 23). A valid point from which to begin this examination. The public part of the case centres on the expenditure of \$50,000 in legal fees by both parties and the belligerence of the two main performers in failing to understand the long-term damage the original dispute (over s55 of the Local Government Act and the process of tendering) would do to them in the public sphere.

ORC History

The ORC began in 1989 as Orange Musical Association, a non-profit community group. Its charter was the provision of musical education, professional musical development and musical performance to enhance music in the region. The focus was on education in parallel with its sister, Orange Symphony Orchestra Society's focus on concert performance. In early 2000 the organisations merged to become Orange Regional Conservatorium Incorporated.

In 1990, less than a year after its establishment, Orange Musical Association was provided with a cottage owned by OCC, in return for payment of rates.³⁶ Around the same time or a little later — it is unclear from the available documents — council provided a second adjoining cottage for a commercially fixed rental and allowed construction of a large studio and three smaller rooms. A third cottage was supplied to the group by a private citizen. Funds for construction were provided by a trust known as the Godfrey Turner Memorial Music Trust. Godfrey Turner was the late husband of the incumbent president, Mary Turner. A point around which I will examine the tensions between OCC and ORC regarding the provision of building tenders is that the buildings were converted to studios through donations of material and time from suppliers and tradesmen.

³⁶ This will become an important point when I discuss the issue of why council was inflexible in its interpretation of the LGA 10 years later.

While this brief history appears in a linear attempt to frame various issues, it is less than satisfactory as the researcher is reliant on the memory of conservatorium people to provide accurate reflections. The group remained in the original premises for two years. In 1992 on reflection on the growing community demand for the services provided by the group, council drew ORC's attention to a large auditorium and adjoining toilet block on the site where a church had stood in Hill Street. In collaboration with, but financially separate from OCC, the group commissioned a feasibility study which reported the site was satisfactory for a music school. The architect's report valued it around \$1m. The following year council acquired the land and buildings with the express purpose of allowing it to be developed by the group.

Council bought the land and buildings for \$380,000. It leased the property to the group as its contribution to the development of '...a first class regional education facility for tuition in music from infancy to tertiary level which may in the future be consolidated into an existing or new public education institution which respects the principles upon which it was founded' (Heads of Consideration agreement OCC and OMA, April 1994). At the same time the heads of agreement (or heads of consideration as the document was titled) between OCC and ORC put into place a number of other obligations including OCC acting as sponsor when OCR applied for state and federal government funding. The heads of agreement, including a covering letter signed by then general manager Max Boss, makes no implied or actual recognition that OCC is to act in an authoritative capacity towards OCR. It unambiguously presents ORC as the community group responsible for its own future. ORC agreed enthusiastically to the obligations (HOC letter, 1994).

Some time later, council backed away from its commitment. It made sure it was not being locked in to something that it may wish to alter in the future. A motion put by councillor Richard Niven, the present Mayor, and retired councillor Nancy Weathersten determined [the property] be bought as '...a city facility, not necessarily dedicated to music absolutely and certainly not committing council to further contribution to development of the facility' (Memo from GM to Mayor, 22.10.99). This motion was put to council and adopted in 1994 and despite its obvious intent, there appears to have been no public objection to it by the ORC. During the next two years, funding and

building issues precluded the ORC from permanently occupying the new site. In December 1996, after numerous alterations generated through public exhibition, OCC approved a development application and ORC took up residence. The purchase of the site included a mortgage, and instalment repayments of \$100,000 in January 1994, \$100,000 in July 1994 and \$180,000 in July 1995. Between July 1995 and October 1999 the ORC appears to have used the site as it was intended and in accordance with the heads of agreement established in 1994.

It appears that a problem arose between council and the conservatorium sometime early in 1999 when the conservatorium decided to make some structural modifications. The 1994 Heads of Agreement proposed building work in three stages was required for the site to be completely useable as a music centre. Development included a bar, foyer and kitchen and an open stage auditorium as a public performance space. The value of the work was \$1.5m. The roof over the walkway which was begun in 1999 was not part of the overall plan.

This is the point at which council and the conservatorium become engaged in a dispute over the tendering process. The dispute becomes public a short time later. The starting point is the conservatorium's interpretation of the Heads of Agreement which provided it with the authority to develop the property in a legal ownership sense, despite council being the registered proprietor of the land.

In May 1999 the conservatorium submitted development plans to cover the walkway. ORC claims it was advised by a council officer there was no requirement to call tenders as it was considered a 'small job'. The ORC obtained a quote and was ready to proceed when council intervened. Council insisted on calling tenders for the work (valued at less than \$50,000) and four builders acceded before the deadline of September 17, 1999. One quote was supplied by the builder originally offered the work and one was received from OCC. Prior to the tenders being called, council, according to ORC, made some minor modifications to the already approved development application plans (Unsigned, undated document outlining history of proposed building work. Supplied by ORC). The accuracy of this information is questionable. Orange City Council submitted the lowest tender price of \$37,211 while the highest was \$50,095.50. The OCC quote was reviewed by council's director of corporate services and complied with national competition policy (Memo from administration engineer to director of human resources dated 23.9.99). In concluding his report on the tender, the administration engineer

added that he understood '...some organisations refrained from tendering on this project stating they believed the architectural drawings to be inadequate' (same memo as above). The report also concluded that the computer disk provided by the architect contained a virus. It recommended '...serious consideration needs to occur prior to council engaging this architect to do further work' (same memo). Notwithstanding, the architect in question was originally engaged by ORC in 1995 to determine the feasibility of the new site. He was retained for the staged construction.

The first documented communication leading to the legal dispute is a memorandum from the GM to the Mayor dated October 22, 1999, a month after close of tenders for the minor work on the site. The GM's decision to publish the issue requires examination based on a textual analysis of the memorandum and its public counterpart, a report to council from the GM dated November 3, 1999. Paragraphs five and six of the memorandum highlight in specific terms council's ownership of the property. The legal and ethical obligations of council with regard to ownership are also the subject of paragraph five while the ethical position is again raised in paragraph six. In ethical terms paragraph five refers to the responsibility of council towards council owned property explicitly conveying the message that it is 'community owned' (this term appears in brackets within the sentence on ethical obligations). In paragraph six ethical responsibility relates to '...the appointment and engagement of local ratepayers when appropriate' (Memorandum dated 22.10.99). The difficulty here is in the OCC interpretation of "ethics" and its binary position — publicly acknowledged — in other cases that it cannot be seen to be favouring a local supplier of goods or services over a supplier from outside the city. (For a broader examination of ethics in government see Bishop and Preston 2000; Cooper 1991; Uhr 1994; Yankelovitch 1991).

In the transference of information from the memorandum to a report from the GM to full council dated November 11, 1999, the word 'ethical' has been replaced by the word 'probity'. Reiteration of responsibilities of council within the Local Government Act, and its proscription of council actions with regard to property, is the central metaphor for ethical engagement in paragraphs five, six and seven of the memorandum. A second argument appears in paragraph six and seven concerned with the value of the proposed work and its relationship to the local government tendering process. Under the Act, all work with a value greater than \$100,000 must be advertised publicly. Tenders are then

called and assessed within the framework of the act. In this case the full value of the work in three stages is estimated at \$1,565,000.

Divergence of opinion between ORC and OCC about council's responsibility as owner of the property occurs at this point. The memorandum makes no reference to the detail of the Heads of Consideration document other than to acknowledge its existence. It states nothing other than the council, as the registered owner of the property, is responsible for all work associated with it. The memorandum also provides six points of recommended action but in this regard 'action' ought not be seen to be interchangeable with 'policy' (see Stewart, 1996). The first point is simply an acknowledgment that council has made a large contribution to the miscommunication between the two parties.

It is unclear upon who or whom this remarkable paragraph is a reflection. Further recommended action in the memorandum requests the OMA (sic) to report to council through identifiable channels, namely the Civic Facilities Advisory Committee (recommended action point two) and more specifically to the GM when 'procedural issues' are involved (point three). It is unclear in what sense procedural issues is defined here. In the recommendations to council in the memorandum dated November 3, point three remains the same while point two becomes far more specific, taking its authority directly from the Act and the issue of tendering. The additional material recommends the OMA report to the same advisory committee but on matters '...relating to council property'. While the earlier memorandum attempted to contain all ORC activities within the framework of the committee structure³⁷ the public document redefined its reporting requirements more concisely. Redefinition of the reporting channel most likely occurred because of an acknowledgment by council administration that ORC is a registered association defined as a corporate body with its own legal rights and responsibilities outside the framework of the Local Government Act. There is no evidence to suggest an alternative.

The remaining recommendations reflect a standard bureaucratic response to a potential problem. While the earlier memorandum from the GM to the Mayor reflected a level of unacceptable risk exposure, this information did not appear in the public report.

³⁷ Despite the ORC being registered as an association and therefore being subject to a different set of rules to those within the act governing committees.

An important issue within this case is the granting of funds to maintain ORC activities and to continue building work. The Heads of Consideration intended that the ORC seek government and other funding, including a public appeal for contributions from the community, to develop the property. The council agreed to act as sponsor of its grant applications. Consequently, a meeting between OCC, Orange Music Centre and other participants including Orange Symphony Orchestra Society, Central West Economic Development Group and most importantly, NSW Ministry for the Arts was convened in April 1994 by Professor David Cubbin, head of the federal ministry of education and youth affairs. According to an unsigned and undated original document supplied to this researcher titled *A Short History of the Orange Regional Conservatorium Incorporated*, this meeting '...produced a positive commitment by all participants to seek funding from both Federal and State Governments and from the community to proceed with the development. The Council [] had already lodged an application with the Ministry for the Arts (sic) for an initial grant of \$100,000'. The application was successful. The NSW government provided \$100,000. At some point between 1994 and 1999, OCC decided to provide additional council funding, matching any grants from other government sources, up to \$250,000 with the provision that council contribution was invested in actual building work. (Record of meeting of Feb 24, 2000 between abovementioned parties).

Council's 1999-2002 management plan sets out a key performance indicator of its cultural services program as acquisition of \$1m in funding for the 'Music Centre' under the umbrella of a wider program embracing music and history development (p4:11).

Its successor, the 2002-2004 management plan, indicates a 'target' date of June 2002 for this acquisition with entries for 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 remaining blank (p70). The 2002-2004 management plan outlines strategic objectives as the development of the music tuition industry; expected outcomes as facilitated expansion of [the] music tuition industry; and key actions 2001/2002 as assist[ing] the Orange Regional Conservatorium Inc to lobby for and attract funds. These objectives, outcomes and actions, the management plan concludes, '...will be measured by funds acquired for Orange Regional Conservatorium' (p70).

An assessment of the dispute between the conservatorium and council pivots around the belief both parties have in the 'correctness' of their opinion regarding the tender process for building work on the conservatorium property. The land is owned by OCC, but the Heads of Consideration provided for the conservatorium to act as an association rather than as a council-sponsored group or committee. Of relevance to this definition of the conservatorium is OCC's 1999-2000 annual report which contains a revealing overview that names specific community and cultural infrastructure considered to be a 'major drain' on the general council fund and includes the art gallery, theatre, library, parks and gardens and the function centre. The conservatorium is not mentioned (p1). As a legal entity in its own right with responsibility for self-funding, ORC falls outside the authority of OCC for its day-to-day operation and existence. Council's 1994 decision to assist financially, and to establish where it stood legally, provides clear evidence it has not been interested in administering or managing the conservatorium.³⁸ The dispute however, pivots around a council belief in its responsibility to its ratepayers through ownership of the land and thus to an open tender process in compliance with the LGA (1993) for work valued in excess of \$100,000. In itself this is a commendable position for OCC to adopt.

Any number of groups or individuals would gleefully report to higher authorities, council actions falling anywhere outside its proscribed boundaries. The LGA is inflexible in this regard. Councils are constantly at risk of being "sacked" by the state minister for local government for infractions of the local government act. Bega Valley Shire is the most recent example in NSW.

In the OCC case however, council has available to it a legitimate alternative position as it relates to the Heads of Consideration between council and the conservatorium.

The problem associated with this is the early position adopted by council in the report from the GM to council dated November 3, 1999. The GM refers to the Heads of Consideration as a 'document of unknown status' yet the document was tabled along with the report as late item 5 at the council meeting of November 4, 1999. What is meant by unknown status is problematical. What is known is that the document was accompanied by a covering letter dated April 15, 1994, signed by then GM Max Boss,

³⁸ The use of the term 'administration' does not arise until August 2001 when council refers to it in a letter to the ministry of arts clarifying some development issues.

addressed to Mrs M Turner, President, Orange Music Association. The covering letter referred directly to the Heads of Consideration.

OVERVIEW BY GENERAL MANAGER



Citizens of Orange and district should again be pleased with the level of economic growth witnessed in the area for the year ended June 30 2000. Once again, the catalyst for this growth was the increasing development of the mining industry particularly at Cadia.

The statistics contained in this report reflect the strong growth in housing, commercial and industrial activity in the City area. There is no doubt Orange is a vibrant regional centre, which services the Central West for cultural, commercial, medical and educational purposes.

The infrastructure provided by Council of Parks and Gardens, Libraries, Theatre, Art Gallery and Function Centre, however, continues to be a major drain on its general fund operations. Council is ever mindful of these costs and continually strives to determine more cost-effective ways of providing a satisfactory service to the community. Council Auditors have reaffirmed that, overall, Council is in a very healthy financial situation.

Priorities for Council in the foreseeable future include the provision of a first-class caravan/cabin park, the construction of a distributor road and to provide further assistance to the police and other community leaders in reducing anti-social behaviour in the area.

I acknowledge the dedication and expertise of my fellow employees of Council who make up a team unparalleled in local government.

I also acknowledge and appreciate the support provided by all members of Council, particularly Mayor Richard Niven and Deputy Mayor Glenn Taylor.

Allen Dwyer
GENERAL MANAGER

Orange City Council

2000 Annual Report

Figure 7.21 General manager's overview of the city

The involvement of legal experts in the dispute follows closely behind the tabling of the report which refers to the Heads of Consideration as a 'document of unknown status'. The dispute was arbitrated by the law society and determined in favour of the conservatorium. Around \$50,000 in legal fees was spent by both parties. Legal proceedings were instigated by ORC sometime immediately after publication of the

memorandum from the GM to the Mayor on October 22, though this was not a public document. The conservatorium received advice from its Sydney-based lawyer that the Heads of Consideration (referred to by the lawyer as heads of agreement) was valid and enforceable and that the parties agreed it was the responsibility of the conservatorium to design and renovate the building. The advice confirmed the status of the conservatorium as an association registered under the Incorporate Association Act (a body corporate) and not as a committee constituted under s355 of the LGA. The denouement of the advice is critical to the position of the council and the conservatorium. The lawyer advised that while the GM's recommendations were '...founded on a strong sense of responsibility for the well-being of both the City Council and the Project [.....] *it is not based on law.*' (My italics).

In considering this issue in terms of the public sphere and public opinion, along with negative public perceptions of appointed government officials as professional communicators, this point provided a legitimate avenue of escape for council. It offered a public position which could have been employed to present council in a truly responsible light while shifting it to a position with no further responsibility to ORC other than injections of funds. It is speculative whether OCC in fact recognised such an avenue, because it raised the issue in open council on November 4. Paragraph 8 of the GM's report to council dated November 3 1999, noted ORC had obtained a legal opinion endorsing its action. There is no further reference to the matter other than to indicate a copy of the original advice was attached to the file. Nine recommendations were made without further reference to the ORC's legal opinion.

The penultimate recommendation sought the preparation of a lease document '...to reflect the *objectives of the Heads of Consideration* document and to also *protect the interest of the community* in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1993' (my italics) and the final recommendation, as if in challenge to ORC, sought to sell the property to the "Association" if it failed to agree with council on the other recommendations. As a result of the council recommendations, an arbitration meeting, as described above, was convened between all parties. Lawyers for OCC presented a 10 point proposal to the arbitrator referring directly to the Heads of Consideration as set out in an unsigned undated document made available to this researcher. There is however some ambiguity in the document. Point 4 states '...tenders will be called from

building contractors for building construction'. The document states that ORC agreed to all the points. Point 10 states that an agreement was reached to distribute a press statement advising the 'Orange community' that differences had been settled and nothing new stands in the way of building construction. The ambiguity lies in Point 4, calling for tenders. There is no express resolution that tenders must be publicly advertised. There is an implied resolution that ORC can call tenders in accordance with its interpretation of the Heads of Consideration. The dispute appears to have been settled by this arbitration meeting, as nothing emerges between February 2000 and June 2001.

On June 13 2001 ORC received a letter from council's administration engineer suggesting he was concerned about ORC's intention to call for tenders from a *limited number of local builders* and that a selective tendering or open tendering process needs to occur to satisfy the LGA. (My italics). This requirement appears to be in diametric opposition to the paragraph in the GM's memorandum to the Mayor dated October 22, 1999, mentioned above, that '...there is an ethical question that council always considers in these matters — being the appointment and *engagement of local ratepayers* when appropriate'. (My italics). This is the point at which the dispute is re-engaged. Orange City Council appears to have forgotten its accession to the arbitrator's resolutions of February 2000. The conservatorium responded to the engineer's request outlining the requirements of the lease, restating that it is not burdened by the LGA. (Letter dated June 14, 2001).

Within the seven pieces of correspondence about the issue of tenders, transmitted between June 13 and July 10, lies evidence that a battle other than that concerning the technicalities of the tender dispute is being waged. A textual analysis of the salutations indicates ORC made an attempt to bring the issue to a less frictional level. The president refers to both the engineer and the GM by their first names while both the engineer and the GM move from referring to the president by her first name to her married name. The tone of the letters from the president remain objective and professional throughout. The tone of the letters from the council indicates a contempt for the ORC legal opinion, an implied threat to the overall success of the building program, and a reversion to the argument that expenditure in excess of \$100,000 requires public tendering in accordance with the LGA.

An analogy may simplify the complexity of the case. If a home owner is intent on adding a wing, he or she will usually seek a number of quotes for the work. If the same home is mortgaged to the bank, the homeowner is under no obligation to seek the approval of the bank nor to allow the bank to provide the quotes.

Influencing councillors

A political campaign can take any number of forms. In this case an attempt by a senior council officer to influence councillors was made through the provision of negative textual information. The level of information available to councillors appears to have been poor, or at best inadequate to make an informed decision given the ambiguity surrounding the original dispute. There appears to have been an attempt to present certain pieces of information for debate, but most of the information provided to councillors is interwoven with language which has the potential to present a negative image of ORC.

City councillors rely for their information on issues, on the expertise of council officers. It is unlikely — given decisions made by council on September 6, 2001 — that councillors examined the ORC file in detail. Support for this position lies in the fact that OCC agreed to the decision of the arbitrator made on February 2000, yet it revisited the dispute in June 2001 as if no arbitration had taken place. Had councillors examined the file it would be reasonable to assume the issue of agreement on the arbitrator's resolutions may have been added to the debate. A councillor may have recognised the rights of ORC had the lease agreement been examined in detail.

It appears that at least two councillors, Hetherington and Gryllis, drew some conclusions as to the merit of ORC's argument and the associated arbitration decisions, including that of the expert opinion provided by the Law Society of NSW. Both made an attempt to debate the issue in open council on September 6. The attempt was limited as the numbers had already been achieved outside the chamber, partly from information supplied by council officers and partly by material appearing in the media, most notably the *CWD*.

At the time ORC received the decision from the expert appointed by the Law Society, council's GM received a telephone call from *CWD* reporter Nick Redmond. Redmond had been given a copy of the Law Society deliberation and was seeking comment on the

decision from council in order to write a balanced story (Redmond telecon, Sept 2001). This is standard syllogistic journalism practice. A reporter receiving information which has the potential to become the basis of a story, has an ethical obligation to contact those parties who may wish to make a contribution from an opposing viewpoint. On Thursday August 23, the GM, in consultation with the Mayor, made available to the newspaper the report on the issue which had been prepared for the council meeting of September 6. The same report was then distributed to councillors under a three paragraph memorandum from the GM.

Inferences can be drawn from the memorandum regarding the level of information councillors may have been in possession of. Paragraph 2 refers to the Law Society finding as 'the decision' with no clarifying information as to its origin. This assumes councillors knew individually or collectively of the course of action taken by ORC although there is no evidence that it appeared in council minutes. The same paragraph notes that 'the decision' — which I assume was that made by the Law Society — was provided to the *CWD* 'by persons unknown' (in parentheses). There is some ambiguity about whether the "persons" were unknown to the council, unknown to the *CWD* or unknown generally. Relevance to the issue, of the source of the reporter's information, is problematical. The same paragraph indicates to councillors the precise time the GM was contacted by the newspaper. I would infer from this that OCC was concerned the newspaper may publish the following day, given the time of contact was 11.00am, well before deadline. Copies of the memorandum and the report would have been distributed to each councillor during the day. A council meeting was scheduled for that evening, but it appears there was no attempt made to introduce the report as a late item for the agenda, a tactic often employed when there is a need for councillors to have a limited time to absorb information.

Anticipation of a one-sided piece in the *CWD* may have motivated the GM to supply the report which would normally have been tabled two weeks later on September 6. Supply to a media organisation, of a report of this nature, requires some examination.

The *CWD* reporter assigned to council "rounds" covered the issue when it emerged as a report to council in November 1999. The same reporter covered the November 2000 meeting between council and 23 community groups, at which a number of issues were raised concerning the relationships between them and OCC, as they appeared in the public sphere (Redmond telecon, Sept 2001). A week prior to publication of a report of

the Law Society's findings, the *CWD* published a letter to the editor from an Orange resident, Ms Narelle Nelson. The letter detailed unambiguously the irritation the writer felt towards council, offering support to an earlier letter writer, Ms Jenny Hazelton, and the level of commitment displayed by community groups to the prosperity and vibrancy of the city.



Figure 7.22 Letters to the editor page of the *CWD* containing the Nelson material

The erudition of the 14 paragraph letter is palpable. It attempts to join a number of issues that concern community groups, among them the combative approach of council towards community groups, identified publicly by the Mayor as "pressure groups"; an acknowledgment that pressure groups have been the catalyst for change in the past, responsible for such institutions as Orange Civic Theatre, Orange Botanic Gardens and Orange Jockey Club; and an overt reference to the perceived control of the GM over council, which dominates community group discourse in the public sphere in the city. There is nothing in the letter to identify the source of the writer's grievances nor the writer of the earlier letter which it supports. The letter was published by the *CWD* as

unsolicited copy in its pages devoted to public opinion. In identifying an apparent common interest, Nelson was utilising what Marsh (2001) defines as the need for integration of special interest groups outside the major parties in contemporary Australia (Marsh 2001: 178).

The letter's page of the *CWD* is run under a strap-line titled *Your say*. Its standfirst, or introduction, states '...tell us what's on your mind about our community'. The letter from Narelle Nelson refers in the fifth paragraph to the need for an aquatic centre and a purpose built conservatorium of music, along with 'many other facilities'. Nelson's motivation in seeking publication is clear if one has access to ORC correspondence. The name Narelle Nelson appears at the top of a letter dated April 27, 1994 from the Orange Music Association to council, accepting the Heads of Consideration proposal. Hazelton was similarly motivated as she was a member of the Swimfit committee, although this is not information which would be available in the public sphere. The question here is whether Nelson and Hazelton, representing the interests of their respective community groups, should be publicly identified to reflect that interest. Nelson is adopting an unelected professional communicator role in her representation. Identification of a letter writer is similar to identification of a professional communicator. Public access to such identification may assist in the formulation of opinion. A letter writer who remains unidentified as having a direct interest in an issue presents its audience — in this case the newspaper readers — with a perception of objectivity aligned with their own. Identification of vested or self interest changes the relationship between the reader and the information provider demonstrating a preferred position from which the reader is then able to formulate a more informed position. Several more letters on the issue are analysed below.³⁹

On Friday August 24, two weeks before a scheduled council meeting at which the issue of the tender dispute was to be debated, the *CWD* published an 18 paragraph front page story under the banner headline '...Conservatorium is right: Law Society'. The by-lined report by Nick Redmond (see figure 7.23) lead with the news that the NSW Law Society

³⁹ It should be noted that Hetherington indulged in this practice a week prior to the federal election by writing a letter on behalf of his uncle who wished to remain anonymous. Hetherington acceded to his uncle's request to write the letter, supporting the independent Peter Andren, and had it published under the name of a third person, a friend of the uncle who had no association with the issue other than as the signatory to the letter.

had handed down a decision favouring the conservatorium in '...a dispute with Orange City Council concerning the choice of builder', adding a 'teaser' that the '...conflict is far from over' (CWD 24.8.01). Redmond's second paragraph took a standard journalistic approach to the issue by "beating up" one of the OCC recommendations so it stood in stark contrast with his lead paragraph; in effect raising the level of the "conflict" (the dispute had become a conflict within the space of the first paragraph) to a new high. The second paragraph stated — accurately in terms of the GM's report to council — that '...council is now looking into several options as a way forward but one alternative is to investigate action to terminate the conservatorium lease and sell the Music Centre in Hill Street' (CWD 24.8.01).

Conservatorium is right: Law Society

By Nick Redmond

THE NSW Law Society has found in favour of Orange Regional Conservatorium in a dispute with Orange City Council concerning the choice of a builder but the conflict is far from over.

Council is now looking into several options as a way forward but one alternative is to investigate action to terminate the conservatorium's lease and sell the Music Centre in Hill Street.

In the latest dispute the conservatorium management asked four building firms to tender for about \$700,000 work on the south wing of the centre.

Council protested, arguing the work was being carried out on a council building, council was contributing \$250,000 to the project and a full and open tender process should be carried out.

A similar dispute arose when an architect was appointed but was rejected when no council funds were used to fund his work.

Following a request by conservatorium management, the Law Society was appointed as a mediator earlier this month on the issue of the builder and on Tuesday this week found in favour of the conservatorium.

The determination said section 56 of the Local Government Act did not apply

to the conservatorium and the lease with council did not compel the conservatorium to undertake a tender process.

A report to council by general manager Allen Dwyer released yesterday said council now had the option of providing the \$250,000 with no tender requirements, provide the funding with conditions for open tendering or provide no more financial support which could jeopardise State Government grants.

Mr Dwyer said council could also terminate the lease and sell the building or seek an amendment to the lease requiring an open tender process for work in excess of \$100,000.

Mayor Dick Niven and Mr Dwyer are travelling to Sydney today to meet with lawyers to discuss the issue.

"I find it difficult to believe that council purchased the Music Centre for \$390,000, the first tier of government to give any support, and has since set aside \$250,000 on a dollar-for-dollar basis with the State Government yet can still be subjected to criticism from the major proponents within the Regional Conservatorium that we don't support the project," Cr Niven said.

On hearing the determination the Conservatorium's president Mary Turner said she was pleased with the result and once a builder was appointed work

would start immediately.

Late yesterday Mrs Turner said she was surprised by Mr Dwyer's report.

"I always understood the only option council had was to abide by the agreement it had with the Government in matching funds and abide by the agreement to lease which we, council and we, want to endlose together to get right together," she said.

Mr Dwyer's report said: "While the lease document does not require Orange Regional Conservatorium to call on tenders for the building project, including \$250,000 of ratepayers funds, council may well find it difficult to justify to the many ratepaying builders of the city that they are unable to submit a tender for the project. There is certainly at least an obvious expectation that open tenders be called for the project."

Cr Chris Grylls said council should abide by the Law Society ruling and let the Conservatorium get on with the development.

"Enough is enough," he said.

The report was made available to councillors yesterday and the matter will be debated at the next full council meeting on September 6.

Continued legal battle in the long running dispute have now exceeded \$50,000.

Figure 7.23 The headline says it all

Point 4 of the GM's report to council dated August 22, for tabling at the regular council meeting of September 6, offered the 'option' (this was never referred to as a 'recommendation' from the GM) that council '...investigate action required to terminate the lease and dispose of the property for commercial gain' (OCC report 22.8.01). Redmond's second paragraph differs marginally in content to the GM's report but ascribes similar meaning. Redmond's use of the bureaucratic phrase "a way forward" does not appear in the council document.

It could be argued that the beat up was in fact a tactical manoeuvre. The first three options presented in the GM's report relate to financial support for ORC, the third

suggesting no further support would endanger state government grants. The first option, the most logical given the historical circumstances, was for OCC to provide \$250,000 to ORC with no tender requirements. The question remains whether council would have considered this, as it is the first option and therefore that ranking as most important, if there had been no media involvement in the case. The *CWD* report, after the first two paragraphs, outlined the issue, referring to it as a second dispute and providing information about a first dispute as a disagreement about the use of an architect. While the issues have been separated for the benefit of the story they are substantially one and the same. It is not until the second column, eighth paragraph that the story reveals the first option available to council along with the second and third. The ninth paragraph returns to the threat to sell the property quoting the GM by name, and bracketing it with the fifth option which was to amend the lease to require open tenders for work in excess of \$100,000 (this is the central argument of the whole issue being revisited). This paragraph introduces an implied threat which is being reported as originating with the GM. The *CWD* story pivots around this paragraph. It implies the options have been distilled to that which is most "unlikely" and that which is most "likely" to be given assent. It was never a real alternative that OCC would sell the property out from under the conservatorium. The introduction of this tactical option into the public sphere provided the effect that it was meant to have on those councillors who may have analysed the options in detail. It introduced a binary position — most often favoured by councillors requiring right and wrong options — ensuring the favoured option would be the one given assent.

The reporter introduced a third actor into the story. A comment from the Mayor adds information but creates confusion. The Mayor argues that ORC has been critical of OCC for its lack of support despite OCC buying the property for \$380,000 and supplying \$250,000 in grants to the ORC building fund. There is no documentary evidence to support the Mayor's claim that the ORC has been critical of OCC support. The issues has been technical, relating to the tendering process. The introduction of an element of passion into the story however, provides a different focus.

Council's considerable music centre support

THE next stage of the development of the Orange Regional Conservatorium is scheduled to proceed in the near future.

Council staff will work with the conservatorium representatives to prepare tender documentation as a matter of urgency to expedite the requirements of the tender process.

Recent allegations by some of the representatives of the conservatorium that council does not support the facility are absolutely untrue and very misleading to the community.

The conservatorium has enjoyed some \$800,000 in direct financial assistance from ratepayers' coffers and a large amount of in-kind support from councillors and staff who unanimously endorse the project as a major industry for the area.

In early 1993 at a time when council was endeavouring to radically reduce its operational costs, a motion brought forward by myself and Nancy Weatherstan to purchase the Plymouth Brethren Church for the sum of \$380,000 for the purposes of a music centre was unanimously carried by council.

In view of the council's economic circumstances at that time such a decision was an outstanding indication of the level of support for such a development.

Council's support for the project has never wavered, with a further \$250,000 being allocated in the current Management Plan for refurbishment of the building.

Council is the custodian of ratepayers'



CIVIC AFFAIRS

with Mayor CR DICK RIVEN

funds on behalf of all ratepayers and, therefore, must ensure that expenditure of such funds is carried out in a totally transparent manner to observe all principles of probity.

That is the reason for council insisting on the current building project being the subject of an open tender process.

It is not proper for council to abdicate its responsibility to ratepayers in this matter and allow the Orange Regional Conservatorium to selectively appoint a builder.

Figure 7.24 The Mayoral column in the *CWD*: arguing OCC support has been consistent

The introduction of an impassioned plea is that of the "victim" and in this case is supported by the powerful argument that the "dog keeps biting the hand that feeds it". The Mayor's performance as a leading actor in the story is commendable and reduces Mayhew's argument for the redemption of tokens as an act of solidarity, to one which can be juxtaposed over the Janus Face of the actor. On the one hand the Mayor seeks to act as a leader of a large and vibrant community. On the other, he seeks to be portrayed as a victim, overpowered by a pressure group of musical barbarians intent on destroying the ideology of the institutions he holds dear. The *CWD* story concludes that the matter will be debated in open council on September 6, and that the combined legal costs have exceeded \$50,000. It also publishes a comment from a councillor arguing that OCC should abide by the Law Society ruling. This comment provokes a response from another councillor and forms the basis for a continuing story the following week.

The story of August 24 was well constructed journalistically. It had a strong angle, a balanced lead paragraph and a denouement which left no room for ambiguity. It encapsulated the issue from both sides leaving no hanging ending on which to tack a story at a later date. On Wednesday August 28, the *CWD* published two pieces about

the issue. The first on page one, appeared under the headline '...Premier's Office offers to act as mediator if needed'. (*CWD* 29.8.01) It revisited the earlier piece almost paragraph for paragraph after paragraph one, which restated news issued in the headline, that the premier's office had offered to act as mediator in the dispute. It is not until paragraph eight, which spills to page two, that the link to the premier's office is made. It becomes clear that the Ministry for the Arts, the funding body associated with the ORC and OCC is making the offer. An accompanying piece on page two, beside the front page spill, is headlined '...Enough is enough' (*CWD* 29.8.01) (see figure 7.25). The 20-paragraph feature piece centres on a comment from the Deputy Mayor, ALP councillor Glenn Taylor, who has been motivated by the comment outlined above. In the news story of August 24 Councillor Gryllis, an independent, had argued the Law Society ruling stand. He was quoted as saying '...enough is enough' (*CWD* 24.8.01). His meaning is uncertain. It did however, provoke the headline the following week, based on the deputy mayor's response to Councillor Gryllis. Again, it is difficult to determine meaning.

The feature piece, with a by-line from chief of staff Janice Harris, draws its legitimacy from the fact that the comments are being made by the Deputy Mayor, Glenn Taylor. There is no other evidence to support its inclusion. Councillor Taylor reinforces its legitimacy by suggesting the funding may be spent on an alternative project if the dispute cannot be settled. The tactic adopted by councillor Taylor — the inclusion of inaccurate information — is similar to that adopted by the Mayor in the earlier piece.

Councillor Taylor argues it is unacceptable for the money to be invested in ORC if it is intent on excluding local builders from the tender process. There is nothing to link councillor Taylor's membership of the ALP to the news piece in this issue claiming the ALP State Government is willing to mediate in the dispute. Councillor Taylor is quoted saying '...there is no way I can continue to support the centre knowing they are intent upon pursuing their own tender process' (*CWD* 29.8.01). Tactically, councillor Taylor provides the reporter with the information that he has historically been a "staunch" supporter of ORC. The reporter includes additional information that councillor Taylor stated earlier that ORC was '...too important to let personalities get in the way of the negotiating process' (*CDW* 29.8.01).

'Enough is enough'

Music funds may be better spent elsewhere: Or Taylor

By Janice Harris

It has been argued by Orange City Council for the Orange Regional Conservatorium that it might be better spent on an alternative project, according to Deputy Mayor Glenn Taylor.

Yesterday Mr Taylor voted out at the board of the Orange Regional Conservatorium, saying he would no longer continue to support a music upgrading because the money could be better spent on other projects.

"I thought now I have wanted to give Mary Turner and the board the benefit of the doubt, but as far as in conservatorium is enough," Mr Taylor said.

A large number of local organisations who would only benefit in the way of support we have given the Music Centre, he said.

Yesterday evening through President Mary Turner said she was disappointed to hear that Mr Taylor was not supporting the conservatorium.

Mr Taylor has been a staunch supporter of the conservatorium since he was elected to the Orange City Council. He said he would like to see the conservatorium as a separate entity, but he would like to see the conservatorium as a separate entity, but he would like to see the conservatorium as a separate entity.

There is a lot of money to support the conservatorium, but it is not enough to support the conservatorium.



The conservatorium is a building which is a project of the Orange Regional Conservatorium. It is a building which is a project of the Orange Regional Conservatorium.

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Premier's Office offers to act as mediator if needed

By Nick Redmond

THE Premier's Office has offered to act as mediator if a dispute between Orange City Council and the Orange Regional Conservatorium cannot be resolved.

The relationship between the conservatorium and council has reached a new low and both parties have again engaged legal representation in a dispute over the selection process for builders.

The conservatorium has asked four construction companies to quote for a \$700,000 building project on the south wing of the Hill Street Music Centre, which is owned by council but leased to the conservatorium for a 99-year term.

Council believes the project should go to open tender despite a NSW Law Society determination that said the conservatorium had the right to choose a builder.

The dispute will be the subject of a report to General Manager Allen Davies to be tabled at council on September 6.

The report offers council several options including investigating what action would be necessary to terminate the conservatorium lease or withholding a \$250,000 pledge of council funds to the project.

The Ministry for the Arts had matched that pledge dollar for dollar. In a statement released yesterday by the Ministry for the Arts, within 24 hours of the report.

NO MORE SUPPORT: Glenn Taylor at Orange Regional Conservatorium, photo by Nick Redmond.

There is no way I can continue to support the centre knowing they are in a tender process.

Conservatorium dispute

From Page 1

The office of Premier Rich Carr said the Government might be asked to mediate the dispute between the Orange Regional Conservatorium and the Orange City Council. The Ministry for the Arts has set aside \$150,000 to match the pledge of the conservatorium and has asked the Government to match the pledge.

The dispute between the conservatorium and council over the building project can be resolved quickly. It would be a matter of a few weeks to get the project back on track.

Council's general manager Allen Davies on May 12 said he would not match the conservatorium's pledge.

Mr Davies said he would not match the conservatorium's pledge because he would not match the conservatorium's pledge.

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Figure 7.25 A threat and punishment strategy from a councillor previously offering support

The reporter provides additional inaccurate editorial comment in paragraph 12 stating that OCC and ORC have been at "loggerheads" over leasing and tendering, mixing the two issues together for editorial purposes despite their clear differentiation in technical terms. As a lobbying exercise, the appearance of the piece two days before the meeting had the potential to influence councilors. In the story Mrs Turner attempts to persuade the OCC of the "sound basis" on which it should agree with ORC's option. But the tone of her argument, mediated though it is by Redmond, has a patronising ring to it. Redmond reinforces the patronage by editorialising on the relationship between OCC and ORC.

It is important now to turn to other material which appeared in the CWD prior to the September 6 meeting of council. Three news pieces and the feature piece published between the handing down of the Law Society decision on Monday August 20 and the

council meeting of Thursday September 6, (14 working days) had a major impact on the OCC decision. The action of publishing material favouring the ORC position — which is conclusive based on an evaluation of the four pieces — produced a response from the dominant coalition which had a twofold purpose: kill off the issue, and marginalise the independents by showing them to be incapable of successfully representing the community.⁴⁰ A fifth published piece, neither a news story nor a feature — the mayoral civic affairs opinion column of Wednesday September 12 — will also be examined in detail below. The third news story, published on Tuesday August 4, two days prior to the council meeting under the headline ‘...Music centre must proceed’ and Nick Redmond’s by-line, had for its angle an appeal from ORC president Mary Turner for the building works to continue lest it jeopardise the grant funding.

Musical barbarians defeated at palace gate

Three other letters are worth mentioning. Two appear to be unsolicited while a third attempts to persuade OCC to vote for ORC using the LGA. The first two appear together on September 4 while the third appears five days earlier on Thursday August 30. The August 30 letter questions the unambiguous threat to sell the land and close ORC, arguing that it employs skilled musicians, provides access to music education and ‘...enriches the lives of its students and those people attending conservatorium concerts’. The letter suggests that should this occur, ratepayers will question council’s motives. It attempts to compel by vigorous argument, council to vote with Councillor Gryllis to accept the decision of the Law Society. While the first letter was from a woman, one of the letters on September 4 was submitted by a male. The other is ambiguous. It has been written by a medical practitioner of indeterminate sex. The content of the letter does not resolve the ambiguity. In its eight paragraphs this letter attempts to place the issue in context revealing information about a council sponsored activity that ‘...encouraged a Sydney non-specialist doctor to Orange to do skin checks on council staff and families despite their family doctors being qualified to do this’. (CWD 4.9.01)

⁴⁰ Hetherington, in his first two years on council, failed to have a recommendation approved. As I have discussed elsewhere, his failure is a result of councillors voting against him even when they are personally in favour of the motion.

Music centre 'must proceed'

By Mick Redmond

ORANGE City Council must allow the Orange Regional Conservatorium to proceed with its builder selection process or a building improvement project might not continue and grant funds will be jeopardised, according to Mary Turner.

Mrs Turner, the conservatorium's president, said of the five options to be debated by council only one had "any sound basis if the project is to continue."

On Thursday night the city's 14 councillors will debate a report by general manager Allen Dwyer which outlines five options, including allowing the conservatorium go ahead with its plans, withholding a \$250,000 pledge of council funds or starting an investigation into the action required to terminate the conservatorium's lease.

Council and conservatorium management have at times had a less than amicable relationship since council purchased the Hill Street Music Centre in 1993 but the latest dispute is the most serious to date.

At issue is the selection process to engage a builder to

Plea to council from president

undertake \$700,000 of work on the Hill Street Music Centre.

Both council and the conservatorium have again engaged legal representation.

The conservatorium has asked four construction companies to quote for the project on the south wing of the Hill Street Music Centre, which is owned by council but leased to the conservatorium for a peppercorn rent.

Council believes because the project is using ratepayers' funds it should go to open tender despite a recent NSW Law Society determination that said the conservatorium had the right to choose a builder.

Deputy Mayor Glenn Taylor told the Central Western Daily last week "enough was enough" and council should now spend the \$250,000 on some other community project.

Mr Dwyer has maintained the conservatorium continues to have council's support but when \$250,000 of ratepayers funds have been allocated to a project

the tender process must be thorough and transparent.

The State Government has also pledged \$250,000 but that is dependent on the council pledge.

It is unclear what might happen to the State grant if council withdraws financial support.

Mrs Turner acknowledged council's support but said the conservatorium's contribution to the city should not be underestimated.

"We employ 22 people. Three of our former students were part of the Australian Youth Orchestra on its recent tour of Europe. These would be gold medallists if we were speaking of the Olympic Games," Mrs Turner said.

"We regularly average three to four students in the annual National Music Camp - the major youth music education in the whole of Australia."

Cr Chris Gryllis said he was disturbed by council's recent habit of issuing ultimatums.

"You never shut the gate," he said.

The Premier Bob Carr's office has offered to act as mediator if the dispute cannot be resolved.

Figure 7.26 The wrong public strategy in response to threat and punishment

The writer attempts to position this issue against OCC's concern about local builders being excluded from the tendering process for the construction work. The writer makes the point that they have no connection with ORC other than investing in tuition for their children but it appears to them that OCC is seeking to keep the work "in house". The paradox of the health issue is not expanded other than through the metaphor as question that council may be '...indicating they would prefer a local domestic house builder if the quote was lower?'. This letter concludes that council is making the wrong decision.

Its counterpart, a letter from a male resident, is more concerned that both parties are at fault, suggesting they '...sat down quietly and had a friendly discussion on what is best for council, [the] music centre and most importantly, Orange ratepayers' (CW'D 4.9.01). This correspondent appears to be confused by his interpretation of the news stories. He believes both organisations, OCC and ORC are showing belligerence in failing to

reach a compromise. 'On reading the *CWD* over the past few weeks, what I see is both organisations will not change their minds.' He suggests '...it is time for both committees to work out a compromise to suit both bodies while also satisfying ratepayers' (*CWD* 4.9.01). The use of the word "ratepayers" narrows the focus of the issue while the word committee further confuses it. As mentioned above ORC is not a committee of council, nor is it responsible for its actions to a council committee. There has been no mention in the *CWD* news stories of committee involvement.

Your say

Tell us what's on your mind about our community. Preference is given to short letters up to 250 words. Include your name, address and a day-time contact number for verification. Letters may be edited.

Conservatorium must not be lost

The headline said it all (*CWD*, Friday, August 24, 2001): 'Conservatorium is right: Law Society'.

Threats coming from the General Manager of Orange City Council, Allen Dwyer, to withdraw funding for the Orange Regional Conservatorium's building extensions, or to terminate the lease and sell the site, or to insist on the council tendering process are very difficult to understand, especially the insistence on the council's tendering process under section 55 of the Local Government Act, as the Law Society mediator has stated that the lease precludes this requirement.

Why would council want to close down, or displace, the asset that the conservatorium is to this city?

Apart from employing 22 skilled musicians and support personnel, it gives the people of this city and surrounding areas, access to quality music education at all levels, infant to adult.

It enriches the lives of its students and those people attending conservatorium concerts.

I am sure the students of the conservatorium would be devastated if they were to lose this wonderful facility.

THE CWD READERS

New legislation which would life is to be introduced into agree with the tough stance

Results 0%

yes 82%

no 18%

Have your say - cast your Western Daily website at or down to Reader's Poll, click it your vote - it's as easy as that

The conservatorium has around 350 students enrolled for individual instrumental tuition, about 400 enrolled for group lessons.

This represents more than 6500 teaching hours per year.

If this were to be taken away from this city it would cause many ratepayers to ask what council is up to and who are its masters, certainly not the ratepayers.

I urge council to vote with Cr Chris Gryllis to accept the arbiter's decision on the terms of the lease that Orange City Council negotiated earlier this year and to allow the building work to start now, before any more rate and tax payer's money is wasted on ridiculous legal arguments.

Leonie Diment,
Orange.

Figure 7.27 Letter to the editor on conservatorium issue

In conclusion, the letters, like the reporting, reveal a great deal about the relationship of the community to its council through mediation of news in the *CWD*. While the letters

discussed earlier appear to be part of the political process and to have some political motivation, those from Dr R Leslie and Mr John Milne reflect a concern with the political process as it is reported in the newspaper rather than as it occurs in reality. (It could be argued that Dr Leslie is politically motivated as he introduces a health issue in which he may have been involved. For the purpose of this work, however, it is reasonable to conclude Dr Leslie is basing his argument on a similar reading of *CWD* material to that of Mr Milne.)

Your say *CWD* 4/9/01

Tell us what's on your mind about our community. Preference is given to short letters up to 250 words. Include your name, address and a day-time contact number for verification. Letters may be edited.

Compromise must satisfy ratepayers

I have refrained from writing to the editor about the music centre before now, but I feel I must say what I believe should be stated in your paper.

It has been five years since the debate started - I think it is time that the City Council and Music Centre committee sat down quietly and had a friendly discussion on what is best for council, music centre and, most importantly, Orange ratepayers.

As I read it, the City Council is putting \$250,000 of ratepayers' money into the project.

I believe the ratepayers should have a say in how their money is spent by the Music Centre committee.

I have been involved and still am involved in some projects with council that I do not agree with, but I feel Orange will lose the Music Centre if the two bodies involved don't sit down and talk things out in a quiet, peaceful way.

On reading the Central Western Daily over the past few weeks, what I see is both organisations (council and music centre) will not change their minds.

It is time for both committees to work out a compromise to suit both bodies while also satisfying ratepayers.

John Milne
Orange.

Don't jeopardise music centre

The council seems to be concerned about the process for development of the Hill St building, as there are a limited number of tenderers and business may be lost to local builders and suppliers who have not been given the chance to tender.

I can understand how local builders may feel about this, as recently council encouraged a Sydney non-specialist doctor to Orange to do skinchecks on Council staff and families despite their family doctors being qualified to do this.

However, according to your report, two companies are from Orange, one from Bathurst and one from outside the area.

It appears that the local area has a reasonably good chance of winning the tender.

I have had nothing to do with the business of the ORC and the development of the music centre apart from my children having tuition there.

It seems obvious to me that with a tendering process involving major restructuring of a large commercial building, potential builders would have to be limited to those with a track record in this type of work.

Are council indicating that they would prefer a local domestic house builder if the quote was lower?

My understanding is that this project has been planned to produce a top class facility for the whole region, to be an asset for decades of young and old. It should not be jeopardised by council's action.

Dr R Leslie
Orange

Figure 7.28 Follow-up letters to the editor of the *CWD*

The Conservatorium and Swimfit campaigns were viewed by council as grassroots pressure groups against which communication strategies and tactics were to be employed to undermine the position of the prolocutor — Peter Hetherington — and to use public opinion to create policy which rejected both grassroots ideas.

The Inland Marketing Corporation campaign was successful because it based its rhetoric on economic argument rather than in social terms.

CHAPTER 8

POLITICAL CULTURE OF A REGIONAL CITY

DEFINING THE POLITICAL MOMENT

*"Thank you, Mr Deputy Mayor.
We've just had the coroner's report.
There are no suspicious circumstances.
Your cousin died of an infarction."*

— David Foster, *In The New Country*

The prevailing political culture in Orange is conservative, emphasising rural small town values as the core of existence.⁴¹ Economic goals over-ride social and cultural objectives, providing a conservatively-led council with a mandate to resist the potential influence of diverse community groups lying outside the central sphere of power.

Verrall, Ward and Hay (1985, in Costar and Woodward), argue that local elites remain powerful and maintain a conservatively dominant ideology because rurally-based towns are service centres dependent on a 'flourishing rural sector'. They suggest towns take on the political culture of the surrounding countryside because there is a lack of vigorous class consciousness that exists when different strata of employment exist. They add that the larger the town, (as is the case with Orange) the less likelihood of the local rural elite dominating (1985: 21). In Orange, small business and professionals dominate the council. There is no appearance of balance or objective discourse on matters which have no economic existence.

Social and cultural issues are marginalised and dealt with accordingly. It remains inconclusive whether local autonomy exists in Orange beyond the definition of OCC proscribed by the Local Government Act 1993. What is conclusive, is the exercise of power and thus a degree of autonomy held by conservatives, intent on maintaining the

⁴¹ Nisbett's (1986) definition of conservative ideology, a coherent body of moral, economic, social and cultural ideas that have a known inference to politics and political power [...] and presents a power base for the transfer of the ideas, resonates with the researcher's observations of political culture in Orange. While action and reform, the traditional elements of genuine ideology are not evident, the political culture fits a conservative frame rather than any other.

city as an entity driven by economic necessity at the exclusion of social or cultural reform ideas.⁴² Media images present a different picture. Conservative councillors publicly display Labor alliances in order to reduce the power of the independents on council and the community groups whom the independents represent. The timeframe for this study is September 1999 to March 2003. A different culture existed prior to the council elected in the study timeframe. Convergent comments from some councillors indicate an earlier council comprised of a Labor Catholic Mayor and Labor Catholic GM '...gave great largesse to the populace and were thought of as good blokes. The GM believed that funds fell like manna from heaven', (Miller interview, June 2001) indicating a traditional Labor social equity position, which is the opposite of the present economic rationalist council. (Former OCC GM, Max Boss, confirmed the former social equity position, telecon, Dec 2001). Despite claims to the contrary by some sitting councillors, the political culture is narrowly represented, with a number of groups marginalised, or lying outside the power structure. They include aborigines, youth, and the unemployed. There is little to distinguish the power structure in these terms from any other local government area.

Orange has avoided the gaze of those with more than economic rationalism on their minds. Despite a publicity slogan based on dramatic seasonal change claiming Orange is a "colour city", it has not been the subject of artistic or fictional endeavours. But this does not mean it is not worthy of investigation in those terms. Economic goals take precedence, a situation which leaves other community interests and issues in the margin. Residential issues such as open space, social justice issues such as child care and unemployment, appear to take precedence over economic issues in the wider community, but fail to attract much attention from those in control in OCC who are focussed entirely on the economic issues.

⁴² Following Marx and Pareto, Kavanagh argues the ideas of a society are those of its ruling class, and function as a factor of elite domination (Kavanagh 1983: 66). This appears to be the case in Orange.

An appropriate theoretical framework for analysis of regional city political culture

A societal model of political culture embraces the disciplines most relevant to this thesis, namely media and communication. Institutional models such as policy, public choice, and social justice are too economic in focus although a fourth institutional model, participation, overlaps substantially with the societal model. Societal models include pluralism and elitism, the city as "growth machine", plus second and third dimensions of power (Caulfield and Wanna 1995). While a number of descriptors exist to define major metropolitan areas as global cities, there appears to be no "graspable" metaphor which adequately describes a regional city such as Orange, especially one lying outside the well-documented built environments of the USA and Europe. A regional Australian city such as Orange, appears to have no tangible equivalent in either the USA, the UK or Europe that I can identify. Comparative analyses have been made between larger Australian cities such as Sydney (Spearritt 2000) and Brisbane (Magnusson 1995).

Regional cities fail to ignite national and international characterisation for a number of reasons. Population density plays an important role in the identification of comparisons and Orange with a population of 34,000 is not as large as most Sydney suburbs.⁴³ Comparisons have therefore not been seriously considered other than by way of the unsophisticated marketing promotional tool known as "sister cities". According to Troy (1999), local governments have historically been interested in framing their place in the world through housing stock (1999: 8), an inflexible position which fails to take account of any other than an economic model. Economic rationalism drives industrial, commercial and residential development in Orange (Councillor Miller interview, July 2001); a favoured position of neo-liberal institutional interests. Local politicians acknowledge its dominance and make no attempt to shift from the economic to the social despite strong persuasion from publicly-supported interest and social groups.⁴⁴ Such a position reinforces the dilution of accountability theory (Funnell 2001: 3) and the

⁴³ Epping 55,000; Chatswood 60,000; Liverpool 110,000; Fairfield 120,000. Nor is it among the largest inland cities in NSW: Wagga Wagga 57,000; Tamworth 56,000; and Dubbo 55,000.

⁴⁴ In this case institutionalised power is that which resides with the major political parties, the church and the local council. Council and the political parties vigorously pursue a policy of economic development. Other non-sectarian institutions appear to play no major part in the public sphere with regard to the economic or social development of this regional city.

argument that the rise of neo-liberalism has occurred as a reaction to the increasing influence of interest groups and social movements (Marsh 2000: 178). The appeal of economic rationalism, according to Kitchener, lies in '...the rhetoric of the arguments of its supporters' (1999: 241).

Hunter (1953) argues towns and cities are dominated by hidden elites occupying strategic business and government positions, structuring public policy for personal gain. And while this is a dominantly Marxist argument, it is elementally accurate when used to describe the regional city of Orange. Those elected to political office however are not necessarily those holding power. There is no precedent for the present paradoxical relationship on council between the Labor Party and the National Party. It appears not to have existed previously in the history of local government in the city. Its existence is founded on the politics of exclusion — exclusion of special interest groups whom councillors believe are attempting to wrest control from them as incumbents.

From a pluralist perspective the analysis of certain council decisions yields substantive information about the city's political culture without resorting to a stratified quantitative examination of outcomes which may result only in the identification of social divisions along elitist lines, a situation which would present itself as Marxist. Davis (1995) argues that a stratification model cannot fail to find an elite as it is concerned entirely with discovering social divisions (1995: 268 in Caulfield and Wanna). It is not the intention of this chapter to dwell on social divisions or stratifications. Its intention is to build a framework in which to place a picture of political culture as it exists in a regional city. It is not an attempt to place it in the wider national political culture or in global political terms. On the other hand, it must by its very nature attempt to draw together some conclusions about the interlocking registers between local, state and federal political culture as local government in Orange is a realpolitic nursery. (As mentioned above, three sitting councillors nominated as candidates for state and federal election in 2003 and 2001 respectively). A further question concerns the relationship between those who rule and those who benefit from active involvement in the political culture of the city.

The question of the value of one group — elites or special interests — controlling the agenda is important. Political culture in Orange is alive to the tensions between the elites (the Mayor, the GM and the media) and special interest groups formed around specific issues (Swimfit, Conservatorium) a situation which perplexes the Mayor as he is unable to valorise the tensions from a democratic perspective, nor from the pluralist

perspective, both of which advocate acknowledgement of diversity through discourse. It is at this point that divergence becomes the policy driver and the agenda is controlled by the elites in a publicly admitted strategy to keep special interest groups from the controls of power.⁴⁵

Power can be described as not only observable actions, such as the right numbers to pass a development application. It also applies to constraints on change and the passing of recommendations which may have appeared to be beyond belief (Lindblom 1977). Consideration also needs to be given to the second or third dimension of influence and power. The question here relates to how we observe power and influence being exercised when there appears to be no direct decision-maker within our field of view.

A survey of councillors and newswriters in Orange reveals an acknowledgement that a power structure exists and that power appears to be centralised at the top of a hierarchy although respondents were unclear about how the structure is maintained or indeed who the members of the hierarchy may be.

This leads to a number of questions. How valuable is community participation in the policy process? How important is it seen to be as an information gathering process? Is community participation an open and accountable process whereby individuals and groups have a formal opportunity to influence the outcomes of a policy or decision making process? (Caulfield and Wanna 1995: xv). Consultation can be seen as a democratic right of the community, or by council as a method of controlling or regulating dissent. Does council interest or regulation in an activity occur due to public protest? Do short term economic advantages outweigh longer term environmental and social impacts? Does council maintain an economic position despite its public image of being interested in all its stakeholder communities? The image Orange has of itself in wider terms also requires analysis. It attempts to compete for tourism investment with other cities in the central west region including Bathurst and Dubbo, but it cannot

⁴⁵ The Mayor made an impassioned plea from the chamber for councillors to 'stick together' in order that they did not get overrun by special interest groups or pressure groups (Researcher observation, June 2001). Ironically Prime Minister John Howard provides a diametrically opposite opinion, arguing that elected representatives 'should canvass views and take advice from as wide a range of legitimate community sources as possible' (Howard 2001). Howard's comment however must be analysed against his government's rationalisation of peak welfare agencies and his rhetorical commitment that he will not allow his government to be "captured" by any interest group (May 2001: 255 in Sawyer and Zappalà). It is also important to understand the meaning of legitimate in this context as legitimacy, I suspect, will never be conferred on grassroots community groups in Orange.

compete with major commercial and business centres such as Sydney for industry, and the increasingly important services sector. As described above, state government policy of decentralisation saw the relocation of the Department of Agriculture to Orange in 1991. One large industry — Electrolux (formerly Email) — has been a corporate resident for some years but other than government agencies such as TAFE and a university college, economic advantages are limited. The question here is why a regional city such as Orange has not achieved much higher levels of economic development given OCC's support for housing development as an index of economic worth. Is the strategy of OCC one of housing development without a concomitant commitment to wider and more complex industries and services? Has the council been preserving rural tranquillity at the expense of advancement? What is the strategy of the city to position itself in global terms as information technology and communications make doing business remotely a reality?

There is a tendency to lay a lot of the blame for the lack of development over the past 30 years on two factors, one geographic and one political. The Whitlam decentralisation experiment is the first and a more tangible barrier, the Blue Mountains the second. The Blue Mountains have recently been renamed the "sandstone curtain" in political circles. The demonisation of the Blue Mountains as a physical barrier to economic expansion in the central west is a way to avoid taking responsibility for the lack of social growth which has occurred during the past 30 years, since the Whitlam experiment attempted to create a regional city of 100,000 halfway between Orange and Bathurst. One can drive west beyond the Blue Mountains today and experience a landscape that remains unchanged since 1972. The rapid development of Sydney as Australia's pre-eminent financial centre has done little for the central west. Part of the answer to the question of slow economic growth in the central west lies in the recent joint decision by the region's local councils to pursue an economic investment policy aligned with the federal opposition rather than the government. The federal government argues for market mechanisms to create economic growth and investment. (Graham Apthorp, Economic Development Manager, Cowra Shire Council, telecon July 2001).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Cowra lies within the political boundaries of the state seat of Orange and the federal seat of Calare.

Local governments in many societies foster the interests of property owners, and in this Orange is no exception. Land development in Orange differs little from land development in suburban Sydney where streetscapes can alter overnight; a full brick house on a 1200 square metre block takes a day and a half to load into dump trucks and disappear forever. (Replaced by three eaveless townhouses occupying 400 square metres each). This is not to say that the full brick house (with verandah and eaves, rather than the modern cooling device of ducted airconditioning) was worth maintaining and that preservation is good and redevelopment bad. It is to point out that the extraordinarily large changes that are occurring to the built environment in Sydney are also now reflected in the development of land in Orange and other regional cities in NSW⁴⁷. The OCC 2000-2004 management plan begins with a reference to population growth and a commitment to housing infrastructure (OCC management plan 2000 p1). Sydney's urban consolidation policy along with its status as a world city and its migrant population being unwilling to venture outside its boundaries contributes to slow growth west of the Blue Mountains.

Another logical aspect of the discovery of political culture in Orange requiring analysis is the actors in the frame.⁴⁸ The relative importance of the actors, how each affects the sociopolitical agenda and the availability of resources to each actor is also relevant. Kingdon (1995) suggests policy-makers are frequently preoccupied with administration, supplying the lead on issues which are then followed by many of the important actors (1995: 20). This appears to be the case with OCC. The capacity of senior council officers to influence resource priorities is reflected in the three cases already discussed. A councillor or citizen not aligned with the power structure in council will find great difficulty in getting an issue to be seen as a priority or at least a proposal for serious consideration. Interest groups play an important role in defining the political process (Kingdon 1995) but they are viewed by OCC as placing the authority of council at risk and presenting the potential for disruption to the democratic process.

⁴⁷ A CWD lead story of April 7, 2003 highlights the issue by applauding the "fast pace" of housing prices in Orange, comparing the return on investment with Sydney's residential property market.

⁴⁸ As mentioned above, I have adopted Kathleen Hall Jamieson's typology of candidates as performers, journalists as critics, and voters as audience to delineate actors in Orange (Jamieson 2000: 38).

As I have demonstrated in chapter 7, interest groups in Orange are diverse, ranging from active to passive. As well as business and industry groups in the city, there are other active groups with interests in arts, science, education, health, and sport. Some of these groups overlap with business interests, as in the case of a number of health-based groups, while others are active for family-based or ethnic-based reasons. A group with an interest in the development of a skateboard park, for example, had the wellbeing of their children as their motivation. Funding for the park was raised privately in the community with the involvement of one or two councillors in a private citizen capacity. Interest groups have the potential capacity to set the agenda in Orange despite the general belief that they are relatively powerless. Much of the work of interest groups is designed to block an agenda as it is to promote one. Some groups, which I have termed "mezzanine", have the capacity to overcome perceptions of negativity attached to most "grassroots" groups but they are rare and more often financially capable of hiring the services of professional communicators.

Promotion of Orange city is central to the self-image of survival as it is in other parts of rural Australia. The types of promotion employed appears to be seasonal as weather plays a large part in the development of the city. Winter is subject to lengthy periods in which temperatures remain below freezing. Due to its relatively high position in the tablelands the city is subject to frequent snowstorms. Ironically, summer months incur lengthy periods of rainfall making the economics of tourism a patchy affair. Yet tourism is high on council's agenda as a potential generator of revenue. Orange is promoted by the phrase "the colour city" which has no connotation of race, relating instead to the variations of foliage which drop in Autumn from the large numbers of English species of annual trees. A variety of alternative slogans have been produced in the past 30 years with little success. Public relations promotion of a city is not new (see Caulfield and Wanna 1995; Kitchen 1997; Gold and Ward 1994) yet it appears to be in its infancy in Orange. Councillors tend to seek membership of committees which will be seen to advance their political careers, and tourism is no exception.

The difficulty for an inland regional city in following a national or international strategy in developing tourism policy is its relationship with the coast and the "outback".

Australia is advertised internationally as a country of extremes. Unfortunately for a regional city such as Orange, it has a dominant urban culture with few places of interest to international or even domestic tourists. It is 250 kilometres from the ocean and 1000 kilometres from the "outback". It attempts to compete with other inland regional cities, and in this it is following a global pattern, attempting to gain economic benefit from tourism. Ironically, while state and federal governments invest heavily in overseas advertising in their attempts to draw large numbers of tourists to Australia, very little is expended on steering them towards regional cities. The regional cities themselves have no financial capacity to undertake their own broad advertising campaigns so the end result is the convening of local government committees and community tourism boards. These groups provide policy initiatives and ideas to councils but little is achieved as there is either insufficient funding or greater priority.

The other difficulty for Orange or any regional city, is one of application. At local level, the role of government has traditionally been the supply of services. Applying resources to the promotion of the city and the boosterism required to attract tourists and industry remains a positivist marketing technique; one which remains outside the skills base of most local councils. But this does not mean a council will not attempt some low-level strategy provided it can be justified under the LGA.

Local government and power structures

Local government is the bottom tier of a three tier system in which power and influence is devolutionary from the second, or state government tier. It is a key element in the political system of liberal democracy although rarely is it provided with the opportunity to realise its potential. Australian local government is differentiated from its counterparts in the USA the UK and Europe, in that it has no responsibility for major social services such as education and transport which are the province of state governments. All states in Australia maintain peculiar systems of local government. In New South Wales it is constrained by the LGA (1993) which is itself an Act of the NSW Parliament. Local Government is a department of provincial (state) parliament rather than government, and as such is responsible to a provincial minister. Until recently, candidates seeking election to local government did so as part of a process which was unique to local government. Polls were the province of the local government area and responsibility for poll results lay with the town clerk of the shire or city in which they

were held. Since the inception of the 1993 Act, local government elections are conducted by an electoral commissioner, set out in s296 of the Act.

There is a strong belief among councillors that OCC is representative of its citizens. It is grounded in the theory that an anglo/catholic/protestant majority requires a broader representation than smaller ethnic/religious/class groups. The presence of a middle-aged Greek businessman (real estate agent) a relatively young (30s) male of Prussian descent and two women in their 50s and 60s is sufficient evidence for council that representation is equal. Functional representation under English common law traditions is most often viewed as desirable while those countries operating under Roman law (Latin America for example) are more likely to view special interest groups or functional representation as a threat to the common good (Wilson 1990: 18).

As the level of government closest to the people local government is meant to play a major role in representing '...the concerns and views of the locality' (Barley and Stoker 1991: 1) but such representation is limited and actual representation, as I have argued above, lies with the "economic rationalist" theories most often associated with neo-liberalism.

Local government in NSW, as described above, is generally a part-time occupation. An economic comparison can be drawn between councillors and a company board of directors. Councillors are paid a yearly allowance. In the financial year 1999/2000, 14 OC councillors received \$10,000 each in fees and allowances plus expenses of \$1300. A mayoral allowance of \$20,000 was paid. Total operating revenues for 1999/2000 were \$39,009,000 (OCC annual report). Comparatively, payment to federal parliamentarians was introduced in the 19th century. From a democratic theory perspective the deliberative forum of local government ought to be capable of accommodating opposing viewpoints. This is not the case. The council chooses to take a populist view that it represents the interests of the majority. This position obligates it to over-ride the interests of minorities as a defence of the majority which it perceives as the "victim" of minority self-interest. In populist terms, councillors claiming to be the "voice of the people" (Sawer 2001: 52) prioritise unmediated majority opinion and present it as the view of the "ratepayers" with no reference to discursive contests in the chamber. The National/Labor coalition of 11 councillors claims to represent the interests of the majority of ratepayers. Thus the community is assisted in framing its contemptuous

image of politicians, an image which is widespread in regional communities (Kirkpatrick 2000: 406).

In the UK, by way of comparison, New Labour at federal level has made an attempt to implement a process of local government reform (Stoker 2001). While the Australian model is based on similar principles, local government in the UK is the lower of a two-tier system with higher levels of responsibility and inclusion (Redcliffe-Maud 1974). Local government reform in the UK is an attempt to create democratic renewal through greater say in local communities and offering greater freedom to local councils. It is an attempt to recast the relationship between state and society through active citizenship, a rebirth of democratic local government. It is a national government policy designed to tackle the problem of social disengagement with community affairs (UK Government 1997). In terms of the relationship between national and local government, organised party politics have little purchase on the rest of society. The question is whether the reform measures being pursued in the UK have relevance to Australia and whether local government in Australia is in need of reform to create greater social engagement with community affairs. In the UK, local councils are, in the future, to play an enabling role, shaping policy through development of strategic partnerships in different policy areas. This element of the UK model bears a direct relationship to the policy change in the NSW Act (1993) concerning investment and particularly investment in the Inland Marketing Corporation. While the new UK model is an enabling model, the NSW model is interventionist. The new UK reform includes wider use of referenda to provide more say for the community, but the results may be used more for consultative processes than changes to policy. Traditional democracy is the capacity to hold representatives accountable for policy. In the UK a new gerrymander will alter traditional boundaries providing equal opportunities to participate. There is a danger the participation process will become personal popularity contests rather than serious elections as has been the case in some local government areas in NSW including Nimbin in the north of the state and Sydney City.

Elected councillors in Orange are not representative of the overall community but are typical of local governments in traditional Australia. Of the 14 councillors, two are female, one male is younger than 35 and one male is of ethnic origin. Twelve councillors are male, aged over 45, AngloCeltic, Protestant or Catholic, married,

property owners. Population distribution is 0-25, 13,891; 25-50, 11,927; 50-75, 6,779 (ABS community profile 2002). On the basis of representation, policy is directed towards the interest of the majority. The notion of broad representation — termed therapeutic politics — gives a feeling of greater inclusion and sense of community, thereby reducing individual perceptions of low worth. This follows Habermas (1987) in focussing on individual inclusion over collective accountability stressing communicative or dialogic democracy. Communities are created by collective expression of individual feelings but there is a risk of such a policy appearing to have the hallmarks of a theme park. For Habermas (1987) the idea of a systemic integration was problematic as it failed to take account of related human interests being transitory (1987: 116). An external link is created, but unlike familial ties, they remain removed and on completion of the transaction retire again to individual pursuits. Values and norms are an expression of a collective consciousness which cannot be replaced by market conditions or any other systemic mechanism that has as its basis an aggregation of interest-oriented policies (1987: 116). If, as Habermas argues, societies are '...systemically stabilised complexes of action of socially integrated groups' (1987: 152) and "action", as determined by Stewart and others, is interchangeable with "policy" when concerned with government, local government is then, in normative terms, the natural state of sociopolitical wellbeing. However, attempts by the power coalition to keep out anyone with different ideas to their own, removes tensions which are vital to the dynamic democratic process. So while the rhetoric of inclusion and broad representation is presented by OCC as a mantra for its own continuity, in reality it is representative of a narrow set of economic, or neo-liberalist interests.

Dunstan (1984) argues that political institutions should be viewed in terms of those within them, and those they represent, but that they frequently see themselves as being all-important. This leads, he suggests, to a '...conservatism, or resistance to change' depending upon the length of time they have been attached to the institution (1984: 73).

Orange City Council promotes an image of inclusion through its relationship with media. The time limitations and deadlines placed on reporters, make it difficult for a full investigation of council rhetoric concerning its actual representation. Secondly, it is not in the interests of a reporter to file negative material on representation, as mentioned elsewhere, because of the risk of marginalisation by council. A story in the *CWD* which focuses on demographics can be rebutted simply by arguing the electorate

voted for candidates of choice. This argument, however, fails to acknowledge the various barriers to candidacy which are presented to some groups throughout the life of a council, and more dramatically during the election campaign. While no formal barriers to candidacy exist within the terms of the LGA or the NSW Electoral Act, covert barriers present themselves to groups within the community and preclude them from the democratic process. Limited knowledge of the political process and the rights of an individual to nominate is the most obvious barrier.

Mayhew's argument for reflection on the lost "centre" of society (invoking a literary metaphor originating with Yeats) reinforces the idea that the "new public" is incapable of understanding its position due to a constantly shifting focus within the model dominated by professional communicators. This assumes accurately, that no immediate point of reference is available for an individual who may be considering nominating as a candidate. Any consideration by a potential candidate will require some knowledge of the process and some prior educative mechanism or alternatively the application of advice from someone in a position of authority. Sinclair (1987) reveals that most often women candidates for local government have been persuaded by someone and that this in itself is a marginalisation because women therefore require the endorsement of others to actually nominate. Sinclair also notes candidates would rather take their lead from individuals than be involved in impersonal institutional tuition on the process of election (1987: 58). In this regard Peter Hetherington's marginalisation by all except two councillors during his first term presented him with a challenge in terms of his capacity to seek information relating to the structure of office.

McChesney (1997) argues participatory self-government requires three criteria if it is to work effectively: equality of wealth and property ownership, individual wellbeing equalling community wellbeing, and a system of political communication that informs, engages and has some gravitational pull that funnels constituents into the political process (1997: 6). McChesney's dictum parallels the idea of the new UK model in that it attempts to frame a paradigm which suggests an equal share of wealth must be accompanied by an equal share of information. The more complex and larger the society, the greater the requirement for objective information. Habermas argues that constituents will not participate in the political process simply because they are entitled to certain services from the state. They will instead have expectations — based on

economic demand — that the services will be provided without their involvement in policy or in fighting for decisions to be made. It is important to remember that Habermas is arguing from a European position in the early part of the second half of the 20th century, but his remarks appear to have contemporary validity when framed against the polity of Orange. Constituents will also measure their individual participation in the political process against the “performance” of their representatives in each forum. Constituents will generally distinguish their representatives as either delegates or trustees (Sawer and Zappalà 2001: 4) with Labor constituents more inclined to seek delegation while conservative constituents seek to be represented by trustees. Trusteeship implies a measure of judgement outside the direct sphere of influence and follows Burke’s (1910) argument that informed judgement takes precedence over majority opinion. The delegate, on the other hand, is bound to represent the majority, a point made indirectly by Orange City Deputy Mayor, ALP Councillor Glenn Taylor, who argues in the conservatorium case cited above that he ‘...would never go against the wishes of the people’. (CWD 29.8.01).

It is the subsumation of the political interests of constituents under administrative acts which creates the circumstances whereby constituent engagement is through legislation rather than the public sphere (Habermas 1989: 211). Habermas suggests those who are well-informed may engage more frequently in the political process, but their ideas are more likely to be taken up by marginal political parties; a situation which does not contribute substantially to public opinion, rather it continues the process of reinforcing private opinion (1989: 213). A similar argument can be made for the relationship of the better informed, or “educated” in Mayhewian terms, and their relationship to the independent. It is in the interest of the independent to engage with the more informed or educated in the electorate for practical influencing purposes⁴⁹ even when the outcome of the engagement is already known and the potential for it to influence public opinion is limited. It has been argued (Habermas 1989; Nimmo 1978; Lippmann 1922) that private opinion within groups such as family, neighbours, workers and special interest groups provides a non-fluctuating climate which is transferred to specific party affiliations while the less interested, less informed, — especially in Australia which

⁴⁹ Those citizens tend to distribute information among other constituent groups more frequently — witness the Swimfit committee, chaired by a high school principal.

invokes legislation in pursuit of a large voter turnout — those who avoid the perception that they are part of the formation of public opinion, are most likely to be influenced by a manipulated public sphere.

Evaluating political culture

Part of the process of analysing public opinion about council activities, expenditure and services is the conduct of a survey of community attitudes. Surveys of this nature are an integral component of the political performer's resources, designed to inform and to allow a greater level of persuasion and influence to occur. It may alter the perception of the audience in favour of the image change the performer makes relative to the survey results. There is no legislative requirement in NSW for local councils to participate in regular qualitative or quantitative research gathering. Orange City Council elects to examine its role in the community annually by distributing a quantitative survey to ratepayers. Ratepayers are the primary target of the survey as it is the opinion of ratepayers — council's primary revenue source — or primary customer base, to whom it perceives it should respond. Such a response to a vertical customer market is an orthodox historical reaction. Orange City Council provides a copy of the survey results to each councillor. A comment on the most recent 2000 survey by the GM is worth presenting in full for its insight into the relationship of administration to the community.

"They were interesting. You're always a bit cynical about polling and reports like that but this particular one was a little bit critical of the performance of councillors and value for money. Our rates are high, there is no doubt about that and it's something we can never address. We can never pick up that \$50 or \$60 million that we really wasted. To my mind we wasted it and I make no apology for that I think that is a fact. But there are two or three minority lobby groups at the moment who are making a lot of noise. There is a move to construct an indoor heated aquatic centre and the majority of council are not supportive of that because we have excellent private facilities - we've got a bloke spent \$2million up here on his fitness perfection centre. We've got an eight lane 25m pool up at the ex-services club and Kinross (local private school) is about to open a Mickey Mouse eight lane 25m indoor complex [up there] which will be open to the public as well. So we are saying we are well catered for and the public should not be subsidising another pool but there is a noisy little element there that are a bit in the public.

We have got a proposal to divert the traffic from the main street out in to the ringroad, as we call it, which has been on the town plan since 1982. People have bought blocks out there adjacent and now they are trying to move the ringroad - a bit like moving the airport when people were buying around Mascot. So they are now saying we don't know what we are talking about and council shouldn't be doing this but there are people out there who bought an acre of land for \$60,000 which is a normal block price and you've got four normal blocks on it because you've got the ringroad behind it. We think there has probably been a perception out there that the councillors — we attribute that to their lower than average performance but overall we have

performed best of all the councils for customer service. We work very hard on our customer service aspects which is reflected in the poll pretty well. It's interesting."

— Alan Dwyer, General Manager OCC

While council has the power under the LGA to provide a wide range of services, rarely does it do so. The provision of community services such as parks and gardens, a library, a theatre and an art gallery, while considered to be broadly-based have two dichotomous elements about them. Firstly, they are not perceived to be in the same frame as activities and issues pursued by minority groups. Secondly, they are viewed as cost-centres rather than profit-centres or investments that might attract other activities to the city. Council-operated community activities such as libraries and theatres are considered acceptable within the conservative framework of local government. Community-led activities such as additional swimming pools and conservatoria of music, with a genesis outside the purview of the Act, are unacceptable. Thus, power and control derive from the centre and remain at the centre. There is no devolution towards the margins.

Economic accountability

This throws up the question of where local government preoccupation with economic accountability has come from and whether the electorate favours it over issues of social importance? Councils in NSW have been forced to become a lot more commercial in the delivery of services, but there remains the question of subsidisation of services if councils are to provide social equity. The GM of OCC believes all local governments are gradually going broke because they are the only accountable level of government. There is no level of government that is accountable except local government, he argues (Dwyer interview, Sept 2000). Accountability is an aspect of local government that state government is quite happy to ignore. Local government is now virtually autonomous. It has rate "pegging" and it cannot borrow money from a state government, but otherwise it is autonomous except for the [legislative] requirements placed on it by state government. The GM suggests an obvious example is the level of funding available from state government for additional police officers. There is no longer a provision which allows local government to lobby a state government on merit or need. If a larger police presence is required in a local government area, the responsibility for funding rests with the local council. The GM sees this as proscription of local government (Dwyer interview, Sept 2000).

But the public face of economic accountability is usually the Mayor. Tucker (1995) argues that managers in Brisbane in the 1960s considered themselves '...the custodians of the public interest' (1995: 50). Tucker highlights the mayoral term of Clem Jones as one in which a hostile media was overbalanced by a community which believed Jones was responsive to their requests for minor items such as pot-hole fixing and park mowing (1995: 55). Jones used council funding for a weekly television broadcast of five minutes to tell constituents of goings on in the city. Despite allegations that this was merely ALP propaganda, the broadcasts assisted the Mayor to become generally well-known in Brisbane.

Kotter and Lawrence (1974) have developed a mayoral typology which runs from minimum to maximum impact: *Ceremonial* - no action where action is required; *Caretaker* - maintains the system but makes no start on significant problems; *Personality/individualist* - moderate impact with supporters/detractors equal; *Executive* - large impact attempt to much or the wrong issues; *Program entrepreneur* - large positive impact under which changes can be seen as positive. A minimum impact mayor will allow power to devolve to departmental managers (1974: 65).

There is also the need to distinguish between a popularly elected mayor (at large) and a mayor elected by parties in chamber. The US mayoral model is instructive when assessing the relative power of the mayor in a regional city such as Orange.

Mayoral power derives from the support of a political party, bureaucracy, civic groups and the community (Tucker 1995: 47) each with their own agenda for redemption of tokens of support. The question is, why does power accumulate in a regional city and how does its accumulation affect the general community? Is the community, or are community groups, powerless? How is power used? Is it simply a mechanism for the generation of wealth through judicious buying and selling of real estate? If one is a conservative mayor, is one able to use one's power to regularly pass development applications which have an indirect financial benefit? There is nothing inherently unusual in the relationship of a conservative-dominated council representing the interest of business and real estate.

'There is an interesting power structure. It's evident. There are wealthy people in Orange. Council thinks it controls what goes on but I don't know that they do. The Chamber of Commerce is weak, but there are other groups. Lawyers would be one group that I immediately think of. And there are lots of professionals. Doctors as well. You see those types of groups getting involved in things like ... they're trying to get an indoor aquatic centre built here and the

key people in that group are a very powerful lawyer and a quite well-known doctor. The Kooris on the other hand have no power at all."

— Nick Redmond, reporter CWD

New industrial zones on the eastern side of town and residential subdivisions to the north, south and west provide what most conservatives would term "growth" or "progress" and in this the role of council to provide roads, sewer and electricity is secure. There is then a natural symbiosis between council, its officers who wish to maintain a large role for local government, and land developers. A paradox arises when a council without enough conservative numbers to continually pass land development applications establishes a relationship with ALP councillors so that voting on any issue favourable to the development is never blocked. This is the case with the 1999-2003 council in Orange.

The American model of public private partnership best describes the present council. Its proponents regard Pittsburgh and Houston, Atlanta and Detroit as strong examples where union control and community control is lowest and where the business/government partnership can operate unobstructed (Magnusson 1995: 25). It is worth highlighting the example of Houston, a city with no zoning. Land-use control is the province of the developer which applies restrictive covenants to marketable parcels. When enough land is obtained, developers can plan a community that is marketable — a completely market-driven system — which marginalises the municipality or city council and is regulated by the courts (Magnusson 1995: 24).

Local government as political nursery

The path to representation

It is not a factor in all local government areas but in Orange, as in larger metropolitan cities, winning a seat on council is, for some candidates, the first step towards higher political ambition. Orange is represented at state level by a sitting councillor, Russell Turner. At least two other councillors are known to have state political ambitions and a National Party councillor stood as a candidate at the 2001 federal election. By way of contrast, adjoining Cowra Shire Council — a small town council — has no publicly acknowledged councillor with higher political aspirations. Some Australian state and federal representatives who began their political careers with local councils include federal members of parliament Janice Crosio (ALP Fairfield), Laurie Brereton (ALP Botany) and Ted Mack (Ind North Sydney). NSW parliamentary careers which began in

local council include Health Minister Craig Knowles (ALP Liverpool) and former Police Minister George Paciullo (ALP Liverpool).

While there is no reference in the LGA to the requirement that local government remain independent of party politics, strong but ambiguous linkages exist between the political parties and local councils. Within the public sphere there is consensus that political parties determine council policy despite frequent public denial by those elected with the financial or other support of the parties. In recent years the ALP has moved closer to publicly admitting its direct intervention in local politics while the National Party holds the moral high ground, continuing to deny its active involvement. At the 1999 local government election a number of National Party candidates in Orange referred to themselves on the ballot paper as "independents".

The purpose of the LGA, in part, is to encourage and assist the effective participation of local communities in the affairs of local government (Stuckey 1994: 5) but the direct, active involvement of the major parties narrows the available channels through which legitimate alternative candidates can seek to win a seat in the chamber. By this I do not mean a legitimate candidate has no avenue available other than joining a party ticket. Any number of candidates can, within a democracy, contest an election. There are two barriers to entry. The larger the field of candidates the lower the probability of an individual candidate gaining a seat. Secondly, group tickets on the ballot paper and the choice of voting above the line for a group ticket further reduce the probability. A third, more covert factor, plays a major part in the reduction process. When a citizen declares an intention to nominate as a candidate, a number of things happen. The citizen, now a candidate, becomes public property through the media. A picture and a short biographical piece usually appear in the local newspaper a few days after nominations close, unless the candidate has made their intentions clear before the close of nominations (see figure 8.1). Then the same material will appear, but more randomly in terms of its relationship to the closing of nominations.

Miller, Glover stand as team

COUNCILLOR John Miller and Lindy Glover have announced they will be standing as a team for the Orange City Council election.

Ms Glover is a business adviser and office manager with Orange Business Enterprise Centre. She said she would not be "taking a hobby horse" to council but had a broader view of the city and its needs.

Ms Glover has not stood for election before and said her business background would make her a valuable addition to council.

"I'm a doer," she said.

Ms Glover has lived in Orange for eight years and said one thing she would like to achieve on council was a highway by-pass.

Cr Miller is a sub editor with the Central Western Daily and was first elected to council in 1995. He is married with one daughter, 9.

"In the next term I want to see an alternate truck route established and a community heated indoor aquatic centre built as well as see Orange continue to grow, thereby providing more jobs for young people," he said.



Cr John Miller and Lindy Glover running for council.
Photo: STEVE GOSCH

Figure 8.1 Typical newspaper reporting of candidates: candidate media statements and accompanying pictures are generally run without editorial changes

At this stage the candidate may also be asked by the media to provide an outline of their policies. Very few first time candidates enunciate clear policies. An independent, first time candidate is more likely to offer generalist views on the existing council in conjunction with personal opinions on how local government should be run (Hetherington interview, July 2001). On the other hand some candidates provide erudite descriptions of policies which parallel the policies of one or other of the major parties, distilling them to local issues in order to avoid confusion when the policy is state or federally based. The ALP, for example, employed the issue of crime prevention based on the devolution of funding responsibility for extra police from state to local government.

As part of the process of marginalisation, representation will frequently be made to first time candidates by the major parties inviting them to join a group ticket. Strength in numbers, financing a campaign and likemindedness, are powerful persuasive mechanisms which frequently overpower first time candidates and influence them towards the solidarity of history. In the event these inducements are rejected, a threat and punishment strategy may be employed and there will be a campaign to discredit the candidate if he or she decides to run independently. If representation from one party

Vote 1 GROUP F ~ DICK NIVEN

GROUP A Ticket	GROUP B Ticket	GROUP C Ticket	GROUP D Ticket	GROUP E Ticket	GROUP F Ticket <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; line-height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;">1</div> OF	GROUP G Ticket	GROUP H Ticket	GROUP I Ticket	GROUP J Ticket	GROUP K Ticket	GROUP L Ticket	GROUP M Ticket	GROUP N Ticket
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ONLY NUMBER ONE SQUARE ABOVE THE LINE

GROUP A Ticket	GROUP B Ticket	GROUP C Ticket	GROUP D Ticket	GROUP E Ticket	1 NIVEN Richard Niven	GROUP G Ticket	GROUP H Ticket	GROUP I Ticket	GROUP J Ticket	GROUP K Ticket	GROUP L Ticket	GROUP M Ticket	GROUP N Ticket
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ONLY NUMBER ONE SQUARE ABOVE THE LINE

GROUP A Ticket	GROUP B Ticket	GROUP C Ticket	GROUP D Ticket	GROUP E Ticket	2 SHEARING David Shearing	GROUP G Ticket	GROUP H Ticket	GROUP I Ticket	GROUP J Ticket	GROUP K Ticket	GROUP L Ticket	GROUP M Ticket	GROUP N Ticket
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ONLY NUMBER ONE SQUARE ABOVE THE LINE


GROUP A Ticket	GROUP B Ticket	GROUP C Ticket	GROUP D Ticket	GROUP E Ticket	3 GRANT Peter Grant	GROUP G Ticket	GROUP H Ticket	GROUP I Ticket	GROUP J Ticket	GROUP K Ticket	GROUP L Ticket	GROUP M Ticket	GROUP N Ticket
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RESPONSIBLE CITY MANAGEMENT




RICHARD NIVEN

- 17 years a councillor
- Mayor since 1998
- Life long resident
- Committed to progress and development leading to more jobs and a better lifestyle



DAVID SHEARING

- Councillor serving on 20 council committees
- Family man - children attending primary school
- Raised and educated in Orange
- 20 years serving the community - Apex, NSW Fire Brigades



PETER GRANT

- Orange resident & business man for 25 years
- Experienced in local government - former council on Boree State
- Committed to the equality of opportunity for all amongst groups in the city

WE WILL

VOTE 1 ABOVE THE LINE FOR DICK NIVEN'S TICKET

*Committee to Responsible Management Council's Filibuster "Back Broad Community Involvement in Council Decision - Making "Encourage New Business & Industry to Orange "Active Promote the Ring-road 15 km Heavy Traffic Act of Summer 87 "Grow the Tourism Food & Wine Industry "Committee to Promote Facilities for our Youth and Senior Citizens"

Authorised by P.J. Grant, 35 Hill Street, Orange

CENTRAL WESTERN DAILY, Friday, September 10, 1998

Influencing a candidate to join a group ticket results in the candidate being placed on the ticket somewhere below the number one position. Party representatives generally take the first position and the second, leaving the unwinnable third or fourth position for the outsider (see figure 8.2). The objective in persuading the candidate to join the group becomes evident as the campaign progresses. Most often it is not evident to the candidate prior to accepting the unwinnable ticket position. The candidate has no prior knowledge of party politics, believing the offer of a group position to be genuine. The unwinnability of the third and fourth positions, demonstrated at the 1999 election, has its genesis in the distribution of preferences and their relationship to the required quota of votes which must be obtained to win a seat.

Off to polls today

Preferences to decide make-up of council

By: NICK REDMOND

CANDIDATES for today's Orange City Council election have recognised the importance of preferences but a number of deals could mean that the significance is lost on voters.

The preference system is relatively simple and based largely on a vote quota that once a candidate reaches they are elected and any votes they receive above that pass to the next candidate on a reduced basis.

Where those preferences flow is determined by the candidate for people who vote above the line and by the voter for votes registered below the line.

The quota, which is expected to be about 1300, is the number of valid votes divided by the number of council positions.

To be eligible for a spot above the line candidates have had to form into groups allocating preferences down to at least 14, which have been registered with the

Returning Office.

All candidates excepting independents Mike Fleming and Peter Hetherington are part of a group.

On one side of the ticket is the mostly Labor faction led by Glenn Taylor, who was the Labor candidate at the last State election, and a number of other local Labor Party members.

On the other side there is the loosely-based conservative faction led by Mayor Dick Niven, which includes National Party member for Orange Russell Turner, a number of National Party members and Martin Gleeson who stood as the One Nation candidate at the Federal election last year.

Some of these candidates have aligned themselves in these groups for the election only.

Call them factions call them parties - the end result is the same with people voting above the line being given a choice of two.

The preference system is further complicated with groups in

How they line up

CANDIDATES and current councillors correctly maintain that they will or do vote with and against their particular faction regularly. The abrasive nature of the relationship bubbled to the surface last week with a very public slanging match between outgoing councillors Tim Sullivan and Trevor Jaeger.

It's fair to say the factions aren't hand fed party policy by political heavyweights. But it is also fair to say the demarcation lines are clear. Whichever faction gains the most seats tomorrow will also gain the numbers to decide the next mayor.

Peter Hetherington and Mike Fleming have not joined group tickets.

How they line up:

FACTION ONE:

Cr Dick Niven
Cr Dave Shearing
Cr Brenda Davies
Cr Reg Kidd
Cr Sharon Boag (Pratt)
Cr John Miller
Cr Russell Turner
Cr Martin Gleeson
Charlie Brouwers
Les Quick
Fred Boag
Peter Grant
Jason Jaeger
John Murphy
Alan Ralston
Lindy Glover
Nanette Mulcahy
Ian Maxwell

FACTION TWO:

Cr Glenn Taylor
Cr Margaret Stevenson
Cr Jim McArdle
Gail Copping
Chris Gryllis
John Lomas
Robyn Eid
John Riley
Christine Stanger
Ian Spurway
Warren Mannion
Ron Garvin
Nigel Buttriss

Continued page 2

Figure 8.3 *Central Western Daily* coverage of election day: after weeks of seriousness, a light hearted headline

Candidates seeking election from an ungrouped position on the ballot paper must have a strong belief in their individual capabilities relative to their policies and their campaigns. It is at this psychologically early point in the process that candidates form, or join group tickets in the unsubstantiated belief that citizens will be more likely to vote cleanly above the line than make a concerted effort to number every square below the line in order for their vote to remain formal. Most candidates at the local government election in Orange in 1999 campaigned on personality and their commitment to Orange. Another factor which reduces the chances of an independent candidate gaining a seat is the size of the ballot paper and its relationship to the requirement that voters must number all squares if they chose to vote below the line. Compulsory voting in Australia requires an elector to enter a polling station and register with an electoral officer. A ruled line is then placed through the elector's name on the list of electors. An elector can then chose to do nothing with the ballot papers, or mark them according to their choice of candidates. Electoral booths in polling stations are usually prefabricated cardboard affairs with a writing platform enclosed on three sides to offer a degree of

privacy to the voter. At the 1999 local government election the ballot paper was twice as wide as the space available for marking the paper. Thirty three candidates were grouped across the paper. If an elector chose to vote below the line, they were required to mark at least 14 squares. A determination of the number of electors who chose to vote above the line is not calculated by the returning officer, making it difficult to support an argument that a majority chose to do so. I suspect however that the general uninterest in the process, while not supported by the ratio of formal to informal votes (Total 23179. Formal 18687. Informal 1436), drives most electors to place a single number above the line. Observations of the time taken by electors from entering the polling station to the time of leaving supports this suspicion (Researcher observation, Sept 1999).

Established political culture and the independents

Established conservative political culture is continually vulnerable because it defends the status quo against change. Councillor Richard Niven's public comment that pressure groups must not be allowed to influence policy reflects this orthodox conservative view. It is a view however, which fails to recognise the distinction between radical and incremental change. For the conservative established political culture of Orange, all change is radical. Even the smallest increment threatens the conservative balance.⁵⁰ In his first term on council, Peter Hetherington failed at each attempt to have a motion become a recommendation. Rather than a reflection of poor judgement in selecting issues favourable to a majority, his lack of success reflects the intention and desire of the established political culture to exclude him from the process. At least two issues were voted against by the majority simply because they were moved by Hetherington. Both issues — tree preservation and the popular election of the mayor — were constructed in the public sphere. After the defeat of both on separate occasions in the chamber, Hetherington was advised by councillors who had voted against the motions, that they were defeated because he had put them up. (Hetherington interview, Dec 2001).

⁵⁰ This argument is based on a personal acknowledgement by the Deputy Mayor, Glenn Taylor, that he and his Labor colleague Jim McArdle are as conservatively right of centre as his National Party opponents on council (Taylor interview, June 2001). For an example of the strategy employed by the established political culture against change agents, see the case study on the indoor swimming pool.

The established conservative political culture in Orange, as in most western democracies, valorises the wellbeing of the individual in preference to community wellbeing. Markets, labour, and privatisation reflect a desire for individual accumulation of wealth rather than the accumulation of "commonwealth". The wellbeing of the individual lies at the heart of conservative ideology, reflected in the desire for economic growth through increased housing and related infrastructure, at the expense of social equity growth. This is no less the case nationally in Australia as the result of the 2001 federal election demonstrates. The return of the Howard government for a third term was, according to leading national and metropolitan newspapers, achieved with the direct assistance of threats to the individual electors wellbeing from illegal immigrants and refugees intent on destabilising the status quo (*SMH, The Age, AFR, The Australian*). Whether the claims reflect reality is problematical as they were embedded in the national campaign of the conservative coalition along with the terrorist attacks on New York of September 11, 2001. What is known is the conservative coalition increased its primary vote and number of seats in parliament at the expense of ultra-right minor party Pauline Hanson's One Nation, effectively undermining her populist, racist appeal to "the real Australia".

It is the mark of a broad move away from such policies that electors in the federal seat of Calare, which embraces Orange, elected the independent Peter Andren at the 1996 poll. Andren and Hanson shared a seat on the cross benches until Hanson's maiden speech, at which time Andren chose to relocate so he would not be associated with Hanson through physical proximity (Andren interview, Feb 2002).

It is instructive that there was no One Nation candidate at the 1996 poll in Calare. Andren received 21,708 (29.37 per cent) while the National Party candidate Trevor Toole received 15,371 and the ALP 21,407. In 1998 One Nation candidate Martin Gleeson (an Orange City Councillor and city land developer) polled 7,954 to Andren's 29,522 (40.55 per cent) (NP 8,556, ALP 17,425) and in 2001 One Nation's Terry Nixon polled 2,577 to Andren's 34,319 (ALP 13,805 NP 13,694). In 1996 Calare had 78,339 registered voters. In 2001 the number had risen to 84,596.

Despite the established conservative political culture, there are demands for change in Orange. The northern New England city of Armidale also elected a federal independent — former NSW State MP Tony Windsor — over a sitting conservative member at the 2001 election (AEC website, 2001). Of the 84,596 voters in Calare more than 50 per

cent chose to vote for an independent for a third consecutive time, with the National Party and Labor Party, each receiving around 20 per cent and the remainder to the minor parties, Democrats, Greens and One Nation (AEC website, 2001).

T Brown	ALP	1906-13
H Piggott	LP/NP	1913-19
T Lavelle	ALP	1919-22
Sir N Howse	NAT	1922-29
G Gibbons	ALP	1929-31
H Thorby	CP	1931-40
J Breen	ALP	1940-46
J Howse	LP	1946-60
J England	CP/NCP	1960-75
A MacKenzie	NCP/NP	1975-83
D Simmons	ALP	1983-96
P Andren	INDEPENDENT	1996-03

Table 8.1 Calare Representation 1906 - 2003

The question is not whether change is therefore something which ought to be debated and considered but that it is something the electorate has attained "against the run of play"; the argument put by the conservative established culture that the status quo remain. It is also important to examine why the change occurred and to analyse it as a continuum rather than a response, in 1996, to the Keating Labor Government. The argument that the election of Andren was a radical reaction to 13 years of Labor had credence for one term only. His third election victory in five years indicates the continuum for change lies within the body of the electorate and not at party political level. A divisional boundary change wrought on Calare provides an example of the desire for change within the rural environment. Calare lost part of its northern area to Gwydir but gained the town of Cowra from Hume. Cowra shire councillor and mayor Bruce Miller, a Labor Party supporter, campaigned on Andren's behalf, represented him at an election booth and attended a post-election function in Orange (Andren interview, June 2001).

The results from the four main polling stations in Cowra indicate Andren received 2680 votes, almost the same number as the National Party and Labor Party candidates combined (AEC website, 2001).

Part of the answer to Andren's success as an independent lies in his personality and part in the desire of the electorate to remove inflexible political barriers which present no opportunity for economic or social growth. Andren has a friendly intelligent appearance. He has an ability to grasp an issue quickly and to present a balanced argument. His independence, as he indicates in his monthly newsletter to constituents, allows him to '...represent their interests honestly and fairly, believing the sum total of parliament and government should be made up of its component parts, the ordinary people and not the dominant interest groups' (*Calare Independent* October 2001, p5). Andren also argues '...voters will more and more seek out representatives who have no other agenda than to represent their interests' (*Calare Independent* October 2001, p5), a remark directed at the major parties where issues such as the sale of the majority government-owned telecommunications company Telstra would almost create more expensive and perhaps even fewer services for rural subscribers.

CHAPTER 9

THE PUBLIC SPHERE

SELLING MANDARINS TO STAKEHOLDERS

*After the minister for local government,
Pat 'the mortician' Morton, signed a rezoning order
which cleared the way for Jennings' bulldozers,
the Battlers approached the labour movement.*
— John Birmingham, *Leviathan*

*Mandarin, n. 1. an official or bureaucrat,
esp. one who is in or makes himself (sic)
in a high or inaccessible position.*
2. A small flattish citrus fruit - mandarine orange.
— Macquarie Dictionary

Primary responsibility for the public image of Orange City Council rests with the chief executive, and it is incumbent on that person to present council in the best possible light. The most important and readily identifiable stakeholder group for council is ratepayers. This group, varying from business people and residents, to absentee landlords of residential and commercial property, provides local government with most of its operating revenue. There is no stakeholder group that is of more interest to it. But local media is almost as important if not equally interesting given that it is one of the main channels through which council attempts to sell its policies to its stakeholders and that one of local media's guiding principles is '...that no propaganda or publicity matter should be published unless it contains information to which readers are entitled, and that whenever such matter is printed its source should be indicated' (Sommerlad 2000: xi).

Public opinion is partly shaped by information obtained from the mass media but in small towns and cities word of mouth can also be a very influential source of information. Mediated information or news is the most obvious source of influence on public opinion (Dahlgren 2001). It is dependent for its accuracy and objectivity on the veracity of the reporter, the credibility of the source and whether the story is published.

Newswriters in Orange are caught up in the hierarchy of influence and persuasion employed by those controlling the institutions of power. To the extent that they write (and see published) stories that are completely independent of both council and their own editorial management they are free agents, but my research suggests that this is rarely the case.

The idea of public opinion and political independence emerged at roughly the same time in social history; the civil wars in England. In the mid 17th century Thomas Hobbes attempted to reconcile absolute sovereignty with a personal social and political position of the rights of the individual that contributed to the modern notion of community. Most of the published work of the period dealt with ethical, religious and theological ideas as they related to the application of government. The popular pamphlet debate was considered the first great experiment in political education (Sabine and Thorson 1973: 441) in which the recently invented printing press and its movable type played a major role. At the same time the notion of "independence" began to gain currency. A group known as "The Levellers" attempted to practice popular political thought. The Levellers, whose published work was generated principally by the political communicators and party leaders Richard Overton and John Lilburne, were active between 1647 and 1650. While there were large and important public issues being debated immediately after Oliver Cromwell's revolution, it was the independence of parliament that appears to have most interested Overton and Lilburne. Independence, from their viewpoint, was mandatory as parliament was representative of the people. Overton and Lilburne believed that the people, rather than the parliament, were sovereign, that parliament ought to operate under delegated authority, and that too much power resided in the "executive officers" of parliament and within the higher social classes (Sabine and Thorson 1973: 444).

Delegated authority has a contemporary equivalent in local government. The notion that too much power resides with the executive officers in OCC and with other elites resonates with numerous community and special interest groups.

The principles upon which local government "community" is based today — the sovereignty of the ratepayer — was conceptualised by Cromwell's son in law, Henry Ireton. In his statement on representation in the new parliament Ireton said '...No man has a right to vote unless he has a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom' (Clarke Papers Vol 1: 302). The extension of this doctrine was that the interest must be

immovable and form a permanent part of the economic and political structure. It was, in other words, a direct push for propertied classes to maintain parliamentary power over non-propertied classes. Overton and Lilburne responded by arguing it was the individual who was important to the kingdom rather than the property and that it should therefore be the right of the individual to be represented.⁵¹

A further argument put by Overton and Lilburne was that man cannot be represented unless he has a voice in choosing his own representation. In relation to law, natural and man-made, there was a dichotomy. Ireton was not in favour of the idea of natural law as it meant the possibility that man may have a natural right against the legal rights pertaining to property. He argued that political rights and property rights were determined by law, but Overton and Lilburne rejected his claim, arguing instead that unless law was made with all people's consent then all men were not necessarily obliged to obey that law.

From this we can formulate a clearer idea of "community" as it relates to landed and non-landed individuals and make a direct connection to the present in which OCC ratepayers, or those who own rateable property, are construed to be the community which is of most importance. This view, as we shall see, is a naturally conservative one and inspires little hope that the role of the independent in modern politics, while providing virtue, will ever capture legitimacy in terms of electoral power.

Orange City Council "sells" its policy decisions to its stakeholder communities within the framework of Grunig's second model of public relations: public information. It publishes fliers plus a quarterly newsletter and disseminates them with rate notices. But in doing so it concentrates most of its publicity efforts on a limited number of stakeholder communities. The mayoral column in the *CWD* provides notification of policy decisions made by OCC. Council also disseminates information in a weekly mayoral broadcast on radio station 2GZ. But the limitation is on the stakeholder communities that listen to the radio between 8:00am and 9:00am on Friday.

But while responsibility for the OCC public image rests with the GM, as mentioned earlier, dissemination of policy information by the Mayor is subject to his personal

⁵¹ The Orange Mayor Richard Niven supports the Ireton doctrine. In council chambers on August 2 2001 he argued unsuccessfully for rejection of a request for a minor change in a footpath structure based on the fact that the requester '...did not live in Orange' (Researcher observation).

interpretation and influence. An interpretation of a decision may be influenced by his assessment of the policy rather than the reality of the position in the chamber during the discussion and voting. It thus provides a self-serving view. It would not be unreasonable for the mayor to seek to influence his audience through the media if he believed the wrong policy decision had been made. An example of an approved council policy with which the Mayor disagreed was the relocation of a shopping trolley bay from the footpath outside an office block to nearer a major retailer (see footnote previous page). The Mayor was unambiguous in the chamber concerning his rejection of the recommendation to relocate the trolley bay. The following day, had he had the opportunity to express his concerns on radio, he would have done so (Researcher observation, Aug 2001).

There is a belief among OCC policy decision-makers and among newswriters that the community's role in policy development is and should be limited. For the *CWD*, ideas on potential policy are generated either by letters to the editor or from ideas which emerge during news conferences and other internal discussions. Such ideas are presented as news items from where they are read by councillors. Frequently these ideas are reworked by an individual councillor and appear on the council business papers as a policy recommendation. An editorial in the *CWD* of August 2, 2001 relating to hospital security was taken up by a councillor in the chamber the same evening and presented as an original comment. (The comment, which was a direct quote from the *CWD*, remained unattributed by the councillor, researcher observation.)

Some senior council officers and some councillors in Orange frequently show contempt for the opinion of ratepayers and some believe minimum effort is made to obtain a broad cross-section of stakeholder opinion on policy prior to or during its formulation (Miller, Niven, Shearing, Taylor interviews, June 2001). There is fundamental agreement among most councillors that they represent the opinions of the majority of stakeholder communities, though they may seek opinion from other elites during social encounters at the golf club or rugby club (Councillor interviews, 2000/2001). Policy is handed down from management and is task-oriented. The decisions themselves are elitist in that they are formulated by a special group and "sold" as being acceptable using tools such as internal newsletters and intranet sites. To disagree with a policy decision within

the OCC at a lower level, is to present a public image of disunity. In rare cases, policy is generated from an idea emerging in the public sphere. More often it arrives at the *CWD* as a letter to the editor and is considered for the higher virtue of its news value. It may then become the subject of a leader, and from there, find its way into the council business paper. The idea that arrives from a community member in the public sphere, however, in Councillor Hetherington's view, will rarely be translated into policy (Hetherington interview, Nov 2002). In some policy decisions that had broad ramifications for stakeholder community involvement, such as the indoor swimming centre and the Inland Marketing Corporation investment, there is evidence decisions were made and reinforced by coalition leaders who rejected valid community concerns and opinions. As shown in chapter 7 above, the community concerns were reported adequately in the *CWD*.

In a number of important cases OCC used the *CWD* to set an agenda or frame an issue. Agenda setting or issue framing occurs when a focussed event helps set the structure of an issue. Immediately following such an event, special interest groups put forward theories promoting policy goals (Haider, Markel and Joslyn 2001). A focussed event tends to play up inadequacies in existing policy and reinforces public opinion that the policy was, because of the event, flawed. Causal theories of the event's occurrence tend to examine how a government can avoid a similar event in the future (Gamson 1992). Tunstall (1971) suggests that state control of news and issues preceded the modernist version of the "public relations event" by 300 years. In the 17th century, various regimes in Europe and England controlled the press and therefore, the events and issues (1971: 71).

The complexity of an issue will generate a variety of interpretations within OCC. A resolution, if there is to be one, will depend upon which interpretation dominates. How an issue is defined and understood influences policy proposals, participation in policy process, and eventual winners and losers. And cognitive capacity to process policy information shapes public opinion. Frames assign relative importance to each consideration and political predispositions create intervening variables between opinion and information (Converse 1964). Objective journalism at the *CWD* communicates information to its audience. The interpretation of that information is then the

responsibility of the individual and the eventual opinion, which has the capacity to translate directly into votes.

Framing theory in Australia towards the end of the 20th century tended to centre on issues related to health, education, social security and drug control while in the US it centred on welfare, affirmative action, government spending, civil liberties and gun control. The issue of gun control in Australia, while marginal compared with the incidence of gun-related deaths in the US, was pointedly raised and then effectively framed against the shooting deaths in Port Arthur, Tasmania in 1996.

When manufacturing a framework in which policy decisions are made relative to a background of issue framing, a number of important policy decisions were rejected in Orange as they had not been generated by the dominant coalition. In terms of agenda setting, those that had been thus generated had become the subject of framing. The state-based issue of law and order found its way into the local sphere for a number of reasons. Foremost was the requirement of the ALP leader in the dominant local coalition, Councillor Glenn Taylor, to present himself as a valid alternative as a candidate for the NSW state parliament. Second was the devolution of authority being pressed upon local government to accept financial responsibility for increased policing within local government areas in NSW. On this basis the local policy on law and order was been framed against the dual issue of 24 hour licensing and combined with belligerent attacks on citizens leaving local hotels late at night, to present an issue of public interest. A number of alternatives are available to OCC. It chose to install a security camera at one of the hotels.

The issue of law and order and the rights of citizens to traverse the streets at night free from harassment became manifest in a campaign by the ALP leader to introduce security cameras. The resultant publicity (*CWD*, August 3, 2001 p1) provided the basis for public opinion and discussion of the proposed policy. In reality however, the decisions had been made prior to any publicity. In framing an opinion on the issue, the citizen had the newspaper material and other media from which to draw conclusions. The information in this example however, while front page news, was convoluted to the extent that a reader may have failed to continue past the first paragraph. In a similar fashion to a page three piece the same day, on magnetic resonance imaging, the law and order story provided a difficult introductory paragraph which, rather than being written

to lead the reader into the story to obtain information, was a powerful disincentive to reading any further. A convoluted first paragraph on a page one story is either evidence of a less than professional approach to a reader response or a conscious attempt to obfuscate. The former is the most likely answer in either of these cases.

Communicating policy: community perceptions

To understand the communication of policy at local government level, it is necessary to explain some aspects of policy and its relationship to the community. Part of the problem of understanding the relationship between public policy and public opinion lies in the fact that there has never been a clear distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere (Emy 1974: 341). Hugh Emy's argument in favour of such a distinction, concerns the inability of political "actors" to distinguish between the value and purpose of public good, the political sphere and the private sphere in which the public sphere and consequently public policy, is seen to have a defined sense of value (Emy 1974: 341). Stewart (1999) argues liberal democracies provide a mandate for governments to enact policy that is embodied within the electoral process (1999: 11). Once elected, a government will frame and create policy which is more complex in its nature than the simplicity of its election promises. It will attempt to govern by mandate. While party policy is broadly philosophical, Stewart argues, it requires more in-depth analysis after the fact. Mandate government, however, fails to account for public opinion in terms of the availability and dissemination of information prior to a poll, the use applied to available information and the variety and number of ways the public may interpret opinion relative to the policy being presented by various political parties and individuals (Nethercote 1999: 112). Evidence exists in the example of the fixed four-year term of the NSW state parliament. After a poll citizens become relatively powerless as accountability is directed towards a short, manageable space of time prior to the next election (Stewart 1999: 13). Accountability on this basis is determined pre-poll. Public opinion is shaped by the generalist information provided by competing parties who sometimes almost appear to collude in their efforts to keep some issues off the public agenda.

Stewart raises interesting questions about participation in policy development. He argues that the traditional structuralist approach to public policy management — the supply of services — requires an attitudinal change (1999: 310). The traditional

autocratic attitude which views the public (stakeholders) as recipients of services (Corbett 1992: 42) precludes participation at anything other than the level of elected representative. When the elected representative is a member of a party, then the opinion of the individual as a voter is valued pre-poll rather than as a continuous two-way relationship throughout the life of the government.

The complexity of this relationship must also be explained in terms of Grunig's two-way asymmetrical model of public relations communication and within the structure of local government where it is more complex because of the perceived absence of party affiliations. Stewart argues that policy development must include the primary structure of stakeholder and client management (1999: 310) and that increased transparency and pluralism can only occur at lower levels of government if the secrecy (applied to federal level cabinet decisions) is removed. This argument provides local government with substantial arguments from which to operate and develop policy with narrow stakeholder consultation. A council will be uninterested in adopting a two-way position while ever there is the possibility of continuing to hold power as an elite group making decisions on behalf of citizens, while citizens continue to defer to the leadership of political elites at local level (Schudson 1999).

Grunig's public information model has been adopted by local government because it provides for a one-way flow (Grunig and Dozier 1992; Kitchen 1997; Wilcox et al 2000). Stewart (1999) argues for a two-way flow if policy is to be balanced. Stewart is in favour of adopting a wide range of participatory measures including fora and public meetings. These options already exist at local government level and indeed, as already mentioned, local government sittings are open to the public along with the right to participate in the provision of information. Australian local government sittings are more accessible than either state and federal parliaments where almost all sittings are in their respective capital cities. Local government meetings are held in the evening making it relatively easy for residents to attend. Information provided by the public to local government through a variety of channels has the capacity to influence policy direction. At local government level this does not translate into widespread attendance nor to an interest in attendance as a measure of success of the existence of a public sphere (see Schudson 1992: 147). Only very occasionally does an issue provoke a large public attendance. Recent examples in Orange are the proposed ring road, the

relocation of the volunteer bushfire brigade headquarters, and the location of a petrol service station in the central part of the city.

Stewart (1999) differentiates between the role of the private sector in its relationship with stakeholder communities as one of profit seeking, a role which carries little ambiguity for the stakeholder or the private organisation (1999: 313). In public policy terms, stakeholder communities are not as easily identified as shareholders, customers, employees or competitors. Rather, they could be taxpayers, voters, the business community or other government departments. Local government in Orange has little interest in taking in the opinion of those other than ratepayers.

Local government generates the majority of its funding through the levying of taxes on property, and charges for rubbish removal and road maintenance. It is here the dichotomy for local government begins. Is it traditionally "Three Rs" — roads, rates and rubbish — a provider of services, or a community leader capable of influencing public opinion and consequently, public policy? Stewart provides graphic evidence of a stakeholder community map in which, for example, the premier of a state is surrounded by activists groups, customers, customer advocate groups, unions, other levels of government, employees, trade and industry associations, other public sector organisations, suppliers, government, political groups, taxpayers, the business and financial community and, in an era of globalisation, the international community as well (Stewart 1999: 312).

Such is the perceived importance of globalisation that local government too considers itself part of a worldwide structure, investing in high-risk business ventures such as the IMC. Investments of this nature by local government are not led by public opinion. The decision by OCC to invest in the IMC was taken without public consultation and against expressed public opinion, as discussed above.

There is enormous pressure on local government to perform "economic miracles" and to keep stakeholders happy. In questioning the role in the policy process of a public sector administrator, such as a local council general manager, Stewart seeks to determine if the role is one of being a direct competitor in various "games" or of being a facilitator of the goals of stakeholder communities (1999: 313). Local government management is about stewardship of resources (Carroll 1993: 66) combined with an understanding of stakeholder requirements so that resource allocation can be achieved ethically and

effectively. But there is a problem for the community and the "stewardship of resources" if a predictor of action by the council is based on perceptions of stakeholder behaviour and actions rather than a real understanding of their requirements. This appears to be the case in Orange.

It is important here not to confuse political participation with policy participation. There are low levels of political knowledge among the liberal democracies (Schudson 1999) but community opinion about policy development is often relatively high. Stewart makes a strong case for consultation on policy development. Consulting is a 'small p' political process which can begin to build support, overcome objections and help policy makers predict stakeholder reaction to policy initiatives. Consulting with stakeholders can inform the policy maker of the other perceptions which exist in relation to the policy, add value to the quality of available choices by identifying resource and non-market needs of stakeholders, and generate information which only the stakeholders have but which the policy makers need. It can improve prospects of implementation by making sure the policy is grounded in the community stakeholders' values. In other words, it can make the local council strategic and accountable by making community perspectives part of the decision-making process.

Part of the process of policy development and enactment is tied directly to the management of issues within a community and '...issue identification is very much a question of detecting changes in public opinion' (Stewart 1999: 165). Local government in Orange employs very few consultative mechanisms, despite their availability. Council tends to measure trends in community opinion, and consequent issues, through elementary media analysis (Dwyer, Niven interviews, Nov 2002). In so doing it removes itself from direct contact with community opinion, relying instead on the subjectivity of the mediated response imposed from within the media. Stewart (1999) presents the notion of public opinion change as a "frustrating reality" for public service managers suggesting the public, once it has changed its opinion, has an expectation that policy will change to meet that change. This is known as an expectation gap (1999: 165). This is a naïve assumption as it is in reality the use of the media by the public sector manager that persuades a public of its changed opinion initially. The matter of representing the change as a policy shift is then relatively easy. It is similar in effect to the marketing gap

employed in the private sector to draw together a product change and a public which is not buying the altered/new product.

To understand the relationship between public policy and community opinion, it is necessary to understand the relationship between community and democracy.

Tocqueville put forward the idea that individual will governs private actions through the guiding principle of equality. By extension, he claims individuals will apply this enjoyment of private opinion to the possibility of political freedom and that '...men living in such times have a natural bias to free institutions' and that those most highly valued will be the institutions of government which can be controlled and elected by him as an individual (1956: 289).

Tocqueville was concerned with the concentration of power held by elites as a continuum of supreme power and the rule of monarchy. His assessment of democratic power in the US was based on the notion that individual private will would ultimately produce a concentration of power among elites and that the opinion of elites would reinforce the idea of the concentration, thus making it a self-fulfilling prophesy. In attempting to draw a comparison between democracy in the US with a number of democratic states in Europe, Tocqueville produces an image of global opinion which suggests elite opinion on both continents agreed on the inherent value in elite control of the democratic institutions of government. Tocqueville's argument is powerful because of the relationship he draws between the terms "community" and "state" (1956: 293) in applying them to the idea that individuals focus intense interest on private business in democratic times, rather than devoting themselves to public business. A natural bias in favour of private business activity, Tocqueville argues, leads individuals – elites and others – to rely completely on the representation of the state where the interests of community are concerned (1956: 293). Fear of social isolation has a powerful impact on how people shape and express their opinion.

McChesney (1997) proposes a similar requirement for a contemporary model of democratic involvement; equality in property, wellbeing of the individual equalling wellbeing of the community, and an effective system of political communication which, he argues should inform and engage citizens sufficiently to gravitationally pull them into the polity. McChesney's introduction to his model pre-empts his primary argument: corporate communicators being responsible for the devaluation of the public sphere,

and private ownership of the means of control of the media providing an unassailable position from which to influence, manipulate and control public opinion and the policy agenda. McChesney supports the Habermasian notion of a democratic media and the potential for such a model to exist, though he is cautious to frame Habermas's concept of the public sphere as an idealisation (1997: 10). Others, notably Blumler (1987), Garnham (1993) and Seymour-Ure (1974), parallel McChesney in his assessment of the idealisation of the public sphere arguing that media ought to recognise an obligation to act as a part of the public sphere rather than as the determinant.

For Habermas (1989) the necessity for political managers and communicators to be conscious of their role in the reduction of the public sphere to a marketable product, parallels their capacity to reconstitute it as a market-driven concept, capable of framing an opinion climate by acclamation rather than by being part of a robust community opinion. Habermas suggests control of the media in 'democratic states' is no less than control of media in 'command states'.

To assess levels of community involvement in the political process within the public sphere, it is necessary to understand the influences upon those communities. Understanding the influences leads to an understanding of how the local government authority determines its communication strategy selection. Community political participation in Orange has its origins in conservative and ALP history. It is tied to secular cleavages between Roman Catholics and Protestants/Masons. Candidates at local government elections in NSW historically present a public image that avoids party affiliations, (by presenting themselves as "independents" on how to vote tickets and the ballot paper). Similar tactics were not applied in Orange. The ALP campaign focussed on longstanding Labor Mayor Tim Sullivan, a self-confessed socialist (Sullivan interview, June 2000). In an attempt to maintain party affiliations, Labor campaign advertising included pictures of his successor, Glenn Taylor, below the name of Tim Sullivan (see figure 9.1).

According to Stretton and Orchard (1996), a human self is constituted partly by its bodily existence, but of necessity also by its experience, moral intuitions and social environment. When a person learns or decides that some things are good and some bad, and thereafter sees them as good and bad, the disposition to recognise their moral colour in that way becomes an element of the persons character, a quality of the self (1996: 271). Stretton and Orchard's assessment of the philosophical nature of an

individual in society follows Lippmann's evaluation of stereotype. Stretton and Orchard suggest people live in communities which do much to free and form their members, in which the idea of "good" influences and continues to inform their thinking. It is also one in which they place a high degree of value on individuality, the scope for choice and invention and the capacity to choose and invent (1996: 267).

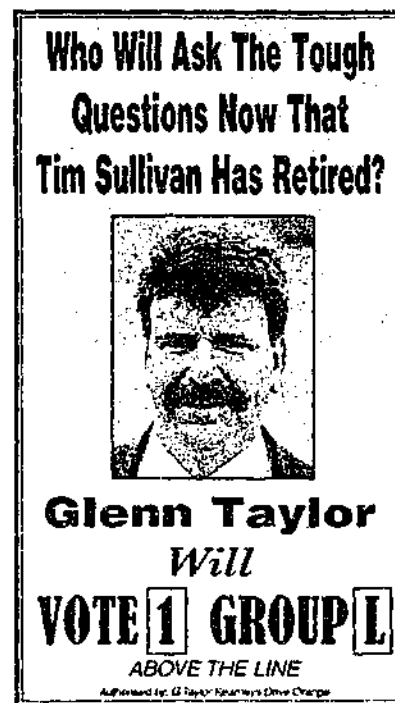


Figure 9.1 Visions of the mild west:
candidate poster advertising in the CWD

Stretton and Orchard consider human beings worry about mortality and the meaning of life, concepts which force them to belong, to seek to be part of entities more significant than themselves '...to be members of family, neighbourhood, class, church, nation and to join firms and teams, regiments, clubs and association' (1996: 221). Defining involvement in this way provides an understanding of the level of community participation in politics in Orange. Walter Lippmann (1922), paraphrasing Locke and Aristotle among others, drew a similar, much earlier conclusion where each person has well defined functions and rights, and in conscientiously fulfilling the role allotted to him [sic] his opinions, whether right or wrong, were of little consequence (1922: 167). In doing his duty along with everyone else doing their duty, a harmonious world was created.

Lippmann refers to communities in the democratic sense, employing a similar ironic slant to Stretton and Orchard that when the democrat was unable to reconcile his belief

in an ideal environment and a selected class, after Jefferson, he wandered into the wilderness fearing foreign trade and manufacturing because it involved dealing with foreigners, creating cities and collecting crowds. The alternative was to seek utopian "communities" in the wilderness. Accompanying slogans — self government, self determination, and independence — Lippmann argues, revealed associated prejudices and not one of the ideas developed by the democrat carried with it a notion of consent or community '... beyond the frontiers of the self-governing groups' (1922: 171). Lippmann is suggesting most voters lived their lives in one environment with nothing more than a few newspapers, political speeches and rumour and religion to fortify their political views. Public opinion based on objective was small compared with the proportion based on "casual fancy" (1922: 173).

I would argue that little has changed in a "rurban"⁵² environment such as Orange, where a similar framework can be drawn around a relatively conservative community. Lippmann observes that '...the physical isolation of a township, the loneliness of the pioneer, the theory of democracy and Protestant tradition alone, combined with the limitations of political science, all converge to make men believe that out of their own consciences they must extricate political wisdom' (1922: 173).

It is this notion that men were required to employ their individual consciences to construct political wisdom that is of most interest in terms of a definition of community such as Orange. The public opinions of a community consist mainly of stereotyped images arranged in a pattern which is primarily deduced from that community's moral, ethical and legal codes. The manifestation of community public opinion is through the experiences it encounters directly from within its boundaries; indirectly from within its boundaries from information obtained by way of media; and also indirectly by way of information delivered by professional communicators — boundary spanners — such as journalists, public relations counsellors or politicians. Occasionally it is animated by information delivered directly from a community member who has traversed the boundaries of the community, and returned with eye or earwitness accounts of the outside world, but generally speaking, the three first points of contact are most utilised.

⁵² The term was coined by Melbourne journalist Michael Morris to describe the broad expanses of unimproved pasture in south western Sydney that were developed into housing estates in the 1970s.

Stereotypes exist within OCC's 14 elected representatives and it is not difficult to taxonomise individuals. If all councillors arrived at the same point about an issue or activity that required a vote, and all were apprised of all extant facts, it stands to reason, in Lippmannist terms, that the only real disagreement would be in judgement about those facts (1922: 174). It is not, however, facts that emerge as victors during debate on issues and activities in council, but the degree of power that community groups apply in their attempts to influence various councillors or political groupings in council.

Mayhew (1996) takes the ideal of community and places it in a slightly different frame. He argues that a real suspicion of modernity lies at the root of changing community structures and that in the past, entrenched social stratification and "local community" created stable connections valued by "republican" thinkers for their '...putative contribution to civic virtue' (1996:179). This differentiation by Mayhew from the Lippmannist democrat, towards a republican view, places the idea of community under a certain level of strain that requires it to consider far more about itself. Civic republicanism, Mayhew argues, even in its democratic versions, readily gravitated to aristocratic conceptions of society. When dealing with a historical presentation of community, Mayhew reflects on the idea of a community of discourse which itself raised the issue of discourse generally as a tool of the community in its capacity to influence and persuade.

The structure of influence

Rational public policy rests on a triangulation of models: reasoning, society and policy making (Stone 1997: 8). Within the framework of reason lies the capacity for rational decision making where objectives are identified along with alternative courses of action, a prediction of consequences of alternatives, an evaluation of the consequences of the alternatives and final selection of the policy which optimises the objectives. Underpinning the societal framework is the market in which individuals compete for limited resources in order to optimise self interest and self wellbeing.

If power is the capacity to bestow or remove something, as in the power to sack an employee, and influence is the capacity to change public opinion through a newspaper leader or televised political speech, then it is necessary to define the terms of power and influence as separate processes and to apply them to individual actors in order to determine where power resides and where influence in Orange city is most likely to emerge relative to the actors. Influence arises from the capacity to persuade at one level

using rhetorical devices, and at a secondary level using the resources of knowledge, trust, prestige or a combination of each (Mayhew 1997: 51). In normative processing, the day-to-day activities of a council's senior management are recognised in power terms. The position of the most senior officer, the GM, is one of power or authority and attracts little or no influence that can be applied in the public sphere or to public opinion. His or her authority rests on the position of general manager with the capacity to hire and fire, or to withdraw financial support for a newsmedia by removing advertising. A general manager may attempt to persuade a councillor to adopt a position on policy, and in so doing, influence that councillor's decision. But it is impossible to succeed, as the position itself is incapable of exercising power as a threat or punishment. A councillor can never be in fear of losing an elected position due to a threat. A councillor is free to make decisions and determine what is in the best interests of the constituency, removed from any potential threat from the bureaucracy. The only conceivable avenue open to such an exercise of power against a sitting councillor would be to instruct council officers to withhold information. This would be technically in breach of the LGA.

Newspaper editors have similar power vested in their authority as editor. They may hire and fire reporters and journalists. They may choose to take an angle on a news story which runs counter to general opinion. They may elect to run a campaign in their newspaper based on rumour and innuendo. In these terms the newspaper editor holds a vastly greater position of power within the public sphere than does a council administrator. The *CWD* editor has the potential to exercise enormous influence within the city. In practical terms, however, checks and balances dilute this potential. Checks and balances include newspaper senior management, boards of directors and advertisers in one direction, and reporters, journalists and subeditors in the opposite direction. They also include the community and its capacity for information interpretation.

Belief in the dictum that the checks and balances operate effectively in determining the objectivity of the newspaper editor and the degree of influence capable of being exercised, presents a position from which it is possible to accept the principles of democracy and the role of the media within the democratic process. If however, belief is otherwise — that the checks and balances are ineffective against an editor applying influence — then there will be disagreement with the proposition that the media has a valid position within the democratic process.

For the elected councillor, influence is applied in a number of ways in a number of directions. A survey of councillors conducted by this researcher in February 2001 revealed four out of five agreed influence is the power to sway based on prestige, ability, wealth or position (see appendix). The same ratio agreed daily activity and wider community affairs are ordered by a process of addressing people and talking them in to the three stages of influence: accepting, believing and doing.

The same survey revealed four out of five councillors believe citizens regularly accept on faith, without independent verification, the pronouncements of others and that people rely on the reputation of others and therefore come under their influence (Candidate survey, Feb 2000).

For Mayhew this reality locks in to a confidence in reputation and prestige and the capacity of the individual to accept as a token of faith the opinion of those displaying reputation and prestige (Mayhew 1997: 65). Of vital importance to this argument is the contemporary legitimization of the need to validate information and opinion received from others relative to their standing in the social order (Mayhew 1997: 65). Hence the paradox of the councillor providing an opinion in the newspaper, based on available information, which is promptly overturned by a fellow councillor. Stone (1998) argues that information is never '...fully and equally available to all participants in politics' (1998: 29) and it is from this position that local government politics, while based on the notion of democracy and equality, is mostly about the retention of information for one's own purposes rather than the sharing and dissemination of it for the communal good. This position rejects the notion of the rational in the policy process and places it firmly in the framework of conflict and cleavage. But the problem arises that the conflict or cleavage is ideological. For the leaders of the dominant coalition in OCC, conventional party-political ideological positions do not always exist, yet cleavage is present, based on solidarity against the independents. This solidarity presents itself as the antithesis of Mayhewian solidarity in which tokens of redemption are held by the citizenry.

The presence of independents in the chamber under these conditions can be nothing more than representational. The opportunity to present policy recommendations may arise, as in the indoor swimming pool case, and to alter existing policy, as in the IMC case, but the policy will never be supported, as support would represent a cleavage away from the dominant coalition and thus away from a position of influence. While the

theory of persuasion evokes images of reasoned argument and informed decision (see Lipset 1997, Mayhew 1997; Stone 1997) and the potential for the council chamber to operate in a democratic fashion concerning policy, the belief that solidarity equals increased influence prevents it. The possibility that Councillor Hetherington may table a potentially perfect policy idea, or a policy idea which is informed by the model presented by Stone above, would create a situation in which the dominant coalition may be forced to vote against it even in the knowledge that they were voting against an idea which may have been in the community's best interests. In this case the dominant coalition may place spurious arguments and misinformation in the public sphere in an attempt to counter the informed opinion of the independent. They may attempt to redeem from the public the tokens they placed there on previous occasions through these arguments and misinformation. Publication, for example, in the *CWD* of the opinion of the coalition leaders, if it were diametrically opposed to the opinion of the independent, would transform the misinformation into information and spurious argument into informed argument through the process of validation which is given to the newspaper by the public, who perceives the *CWD* to have a number of elements of influence at its disposal, including prestige and knowledge.

Despite this position, three out of five councillors agree that when candidates at a local election seek to influence opinion and policy by open appeals for general support they do so in the name of the public or public interest (Candidate survey, Feb 2000). Four out of five also agreed influence is created and sustained when prolocutors establish credibility as people who can be trusted to speak sincerely and effectively for the groups that they claim to represent. Yet this is in direct contrast to the argument for solidarity as a dominant coalition in order to negate any influence which may emanate from the independent. The alliance between the ALP and conservatives in OCC, as a solidarity, was manufactured to exclude the independents from policy, and to present them as illegitimate and relatively powerless.

Public opinion is traditionally associated with liberal democracy (Qualter 1985:1) and the community is the bearer of public opinion and the source of 'legitimate governing power' (Mayhew 1997: 137). Kemp (1978) recognised that the development of a significant separation of opinion in metropolitan and rural regions emerged very early in Australia as density of communications networks increased in one, at the expense of the

other (1978: 219). Public debate about rural communications infrastructure continues in the case of Telstra and subscriber trunk dialling from regional areas.

Aitkin (1973) sees an ideological rural community opinion emerging directly after World War 1 as numerous agrarian based issues such as tariffs and price fixing presented an opportunity for a serious third party to enter the Australian political sphere (1973: 415). Access to a wider range of news sources presents the electorate with a greater number of alternative viewpoints. This may not always be an ideal situation, however in terms of the geographical isolation of a city such as Orange. (Two hundred and fifty kilometres or three and a half hours drive from Sydney.)

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSIONS

THE CANDIDATE: COMMUNICATOR ON AND OFF THE FIELD

*Editors, publishers, Time and Newsweek writers,
CIA agents, entertainment lawyers, business analysts,
plus the presidents of a number of great corporations
that mould public opinion, all live along these
curving roads or out in big secluded houses.*

— Richard Ford, *The Sportswriter*

Influence in Orange is manifest as power within the city council, and is divided between the conservative National Party and the Australian Labor Party. Power is exercised over the media, community groups and politicians who are unaligned with the two major parties. Despite ideological differences, the major parties work together, out of the view of the public and with the imprimatur of senior council officers, to protect their political interests. To maintain this protection, threat and punishment strategies are employed against the media, community groups and politicians such as independent Peter Hetherington with the consequence that representation of interests is defined by the narrow conservative framework of economic rationalism.

Influence and persuasion in a regional city

The city council is uninterested in using persuasion through rhetoric, taking instead a direct threat and punishment approach when dealing with grassroots groups seeking social reform, or the media when it is perceived to be acting outside an accepted conservative framework. In this it has the support of a majority of elected councillors. Mutual support means the city council can adopt policy which may not have the support of a majority in the wider community. In the IMC case, for example, council adopted a threat and punishment strategy; without council investment there would be reduced

economic growth, a situation that would need to be offset by higher taxes. The same strategy was applied in the Swimfit case but inversely; if council succumbed to pressure from a minority group there would be an economic burden, also requiring a tax offset. The rhetoric of persuasion was abandoned for the more direct, measurable strategy.

Persuasion was used in a minor way by the city council to attempt to marginalise the independent but it was quickly substituted by the more reliable threat and punishment strategy when persuasive rhetoric failed to have the desired effect. It was applied to the media in the first few months of Hetherington's election to expose him as a politician without support in the council. When it failed in its effect, the media, specifically the *CWD* and *Prime* Television were threatened with a loss of advertising revenue and a loss of access.

Media in a regional city

The role played by regional newspapers in terms of persuasion and influence is a function of the freedom of its journalists and reporters. The media in Orange succumbs to pressure from the city council by acting as a vehicle for tourism promotions. It has little interest in investigative reporting of negative issues involving council despite a mandate from the Australian Media Alliance to report "without fear or favour". Individual journalists occasionally file material with embedded codes but if these codes are broken, the information is more likely to be acted upon by those with influence and power. Ambiguity in Australian defamation law is also a deterrent.

Media with the potential for the strongest influence in the city is the newspaper the *CWD*. Both television stations, *Prime* and *WIN*, present evening news bulletins derived substantially from the *CWD*. Hard news that has not already been reported in the *CWD* is avoided for fear of conflict with the city's power brokers. Radio station *2GZ* has some potential for influence but its ownership by *Prime* proscribes it.

Despite its potential for objective reporting of city affairs, the *CWD* is regulated by city advertising income. Two senior journalists, however, continue to file objectively on city affairs. Despite their qualifications, they are not members of the influential elite. Corporate ownership of the media in Orange provides further opportunities for objectivity. Ownership resides in the larger capital cities of Canberra and Sydney so

there is no familiar relationship between local proprietors and local politicians intent on maintaining the status quo. What there is however, is a pattern of corporate ownership and profit that exists globally which supplants the need for local liaisons by keeping the focus on economic sustainability. The two *CWD* journalists, Mark Filmer and Nick Redmond, are aware of their responsibilities and act courageously but they are limited in their capacity.

One of the biggest issues for the *CWD* and its management is the employment of a sub editor who is an elected city councillor. There is anecdotal evidence that John Miller acted in his capacity as sub editor during the lead up to the 1999 poll. Besides the obvious ethical position this presents to the newspaper's editor and management, it has far broader ramifications for the community and how it determines the veracity of *CWD* reporting. If a sub editor has access to filed copy and has some personal interest, then it must be considered in exactly the same way as a city councillor who is unable to vote when there is a vested interest. I would argue the sub editor on the *CWD* had a similar vested interest in the copy appearing in the *CWD* prior to polling day because he was a candidate. The contentiousness of the position is not that the sub editor applied influence to the filed copy. It is that an opportunity existed to do so. In September 2002 John Miller was elected to the highest position in the city. As Mayor, he continues in his employment as sub editor on the *CWD*. In democratic terms this is available to everyone who wishes to nominate for public office; they are at liberty to continue their full-time occupations while acting part-time for the public good. The issue of conflict of interest arises not in the promotion of self, but in the exercise of influence over material relating to other elected representatives.

Throughout his campaign Peter Hetherington believed he was being marginalised by the *CWD*. This is borne out to some extent by anecdotal evidence derived from the editor at the time, Joanne Crawford. Crawford had a perception that Hetherington was receiving favourable attention from *Prime* Television because he was employed there as a salesman. What is more important is the issue of how persuasive other candidates were in reinforcing this position for Crawford. Sparrow argues that journalists see themselves as umpires in the political contest (1999: 26) and I contend that this is the case in Orange city where most of them have some knowledge of the political process and wish to be involved as "umpires" between candidates rather than seeing themselves as mediators between candidates and community, or actors and audience. This

Jamiesonian notion of the media as critic, mediating between actor and audience, rarely surfaced during the 1999 campaign. It was clear that newswriters were attempting to elevate themselves (with the exception of Filmer and Redmond) to elite status simply because they were reporting the most exciting and sustainable (if for a relatively short period) event of the year. The fact that a city council election has such status is in indication of the level of tedium imposed upon regional newswriters.

Political culture in a regional city

The political culture in Orange contributes to a large extent to the need for newswriters to alleviate boredom with the excitement of city council elections. Newswriters occasionally attempt to introduce alternatives but they are infrequent and short-lived. John Fabriss of 2GZ and Steve Martin of ABC Radio are the closest Orange has to newswriters who are willing to contest the conservative political culture by acting radically. Unfortunately, both Fabriss and Martin act out their radicalism by dressing like goths or hippies and leaving town frequently rather than engaging directly and consistently with the conservative institutions.

A conservative political culture is not unusual in Australian regional cities and towns nor indeed in some larger and more cosmopolitan capitals such as Melbourne and Brisbane. What is unusual in Orange is that community involvement has the potential to radicalise the culture, but it fails to grasp or secure a position when it presents itself. Hetherington's election as a true independent presented what I would argue was a fine opportunity to rethink the relationship of the political culture within the conservative public sphere. It provided a starting point for discursive processes to encourage city elites to engage with alternative public spheres, or at least a Habermasian model if not the fuller alternatives advocated by Fraser. It was an opportunity for influential power brokers to acknowledge that with the election of an outsider there was an interest in alternative models of governance and communication. Instead, the elites closed ranks and marginalised the independent and his large support base. In effect, the elites communicated a particular negative message to the community that in itself was a threat and punishment strategy. It said if you elect someone outside the two main power groups, you too will be marginalised because when you use that independent to

promote your goals in council, you too will be marginalised but indirectly. The effect was the same. The supporters who had initially acknowledged the need for an independent voice in council, were unwilling to extend their support when Hetherington campaigned for higher office. They had decoded the city message.

Community and interest groups in a regional city

Those groups in the city with no direct affiliation to the two major parties do less well in achieving their goals. Most grassroots groups are perceived to be pressure activists intent on destabilising institutional power. Unfortunately for these groups, the conservative mindset allows very little room for flexibility. Council will consult but usually with an end result already in mind. Grassroots groups share a naïve belief that they will be treated equitably and fairly by the city because they have something worthwhile to offer. When their project or goal is rejected they usually give up and go back to their normal lives outside politics. The difficulty for community groups intent on pursuing a sociopolitical agenda is their consistent underestimation of the level of strategic commitment they face from opponents intent on maintaining the status quo.

When Peter Hetherington was elected, a number of groups saw that political change had occurred and translated it into engaging him as the means by which they could change the social fabric. In his campaign Hetherington staked a claim on some groups that had previously been overlooked while for others he was press-ganged after the event. The tendency of most candidates was to pitch their campaigns to ratepayers as a core voting bloc. Hetherington discovered a number of additional groups including 18-25 year olds and the most marginalised group in the city, aborigines and set about gaining their support. While a number of aboriginals held positions of relatively low power in the city they had never been valorised in voting terms. Hetherington gained their support but failed to follow through with support for them once he was elected. Fortunately for Hetherington and unfortunately for the aboriginals, this was not reported in the media. Without doubt, for a community or grassroots group to reach its goals in the city it must align itself with the conservative elites within the major parties. But to do this it may need to abandon its ideological or philosophical position. It thus becomes a clone of the institutional powers and abrogates its responsibility for any social change it may have been attempting to construct.

If any conclusion is to be drawn from this thesis, it is that there are numbers of people within the city who are willing to form into groups to achieve some success in attaining their goals and objectives but that they will usually fail because they do not understand the capacity for influence that is available to be exercised by institutional power.

On the other hand the vast majority of those in the city are content within the conservative sociopolitical culture of this regional city because they continue to vote for candidates from the major parties. There is an argument that these people are uneducated about alternatives to the two party preferred system, but when the opportunity arises to do something tangible, such as vote for more independents, they fail to do so.

The central argument of this thesis is that professional political communicators adopt specific persuasive strategies in order to influence the social structures of the regional city under investigation. I have found evidence to support this argument and to conclude that influence is centred in the hands of the dominant conservative institutions intent on preserving the status quo even when public opinion is weighted against it. While such a finding presents the political institutions within Orange in a less than favourable light it serves as a valuable platform from which to amass further research on the topic both in Australia and more widely in other democratic and non-democratic countries.

CHAPTER 11

POSTSCRIPT

THE NEXT CAMPAIGN

*"Got your plans approved already,
have you"? asked Arthur.
"Pretty quick work."
"Plans"? Hook lifted the boiling kettle
from the ring [...] "Plans?
You mean the Council? Bugger the Council, mate,
I've got a solicitor, told him to fix that part of it.
That's what the bastards are for.
Bits of paper. That's all they know..."
"You haven't got a plan approved?
A septic tank application, anything?"
"No time for that, Arthur...
I'm building a bloody house
... let the bloody clerks fix it up."*

— Humphrey McQueen, *Hook's Mountain*

In September 2002, three years after being elected to Orange City Council, Peter Hetherington decided to campaign to win the seat of Orange in the March 2003 state elections. He failed. Sitting National Party MP Russell Turner was returned with an increased majority (45 per cent of the total vote). The National Party had held the seat for 56 years and looked set to hold it for at least another four. For an independent, Hetherington attracted a strong following: 14.41 per cent or 5,864 primary votes. But it was not enough to unseat the incumbent nor to overtake the ALP candidate, high profile Deputy Mayor, Glenn Taylor. A brief analysis of Hetherington's state campaign will help to keep his council campaign success in perspective.

In Mayhewian terms, a professional political communicator, seeking to trade warrants of solidarity, must make Habermasian judgements by seeking to act out what has been said. For Peter Hetherington, stakeholders in his election to council were unwilling to enter into this trade at a higher level. They had not seen enough to elevate him to state government (Mayhew 1997: 21).

The ALP attempted to discredit Hetherington. His record of consistency of statements and acts built his reputation for sincerity (Mayhew 1997: 121). This reputation made his media statements credible and allowed constituents to see his motivation as communicative rather than strategic and thus, appear to contain policy. But then he took a different direction. Instead of developing a policy framework to support his strong existing image campaign, he consciously pursued a higher profile media image. This decision was the turning point in the campaign. It left him without time to develop a policy platform, as events flowing from his media campaign overtook him and dogged him right up to polling day. Hetherington's error was in calculating that the electorate's interest in sport was so great that he had only to represent himself as a sportsman to gain greater leverage among voters. To this end he took advantage of a *CWD* invitation to present a profile of himself for publication. The newspaper was profiling the five candidates. It was a good opportunity to present a policy platform but Hetherington misread the electorate. He believed it was not possible for him, as an independent, to frame policy. In this he was following the line taken by Peter Andren who has stated that he could represent constituents in federal parliament but not frame policy for them (Andren 2003). Hetherington chose to use the profile piece to present his credentials as a sportsman, claiming to have played rugby league football for Sydney club South Sydney, and while travelling in England some years earlier, to have played regularly for a high ranking English club.

A grave situation arose when a local former South Sydney player told an ALP friend that he had never heard of Hetherington playing for South Sydney, at least not in the grade he claimed to have played in. The ALP member pursued the matter and discovered that Hetherington had embellished the truth in both his claims. The revelation had a dual impact. It presented the *CWD* with a new story angle — candidate running on platform of honesty and integrity lied — and it kept Hetherington occupied both mentally and physically for weeks as he attempted to re “spin” the story while the ALP kept it alive by pressing *CWD* reporter, Mark Filmer, to publish. The initial difficulty for Hetherington lay in his capacity to tell “yarns” and to blend truth with fiction. He had in fact played two games of lower grade football for South Sydney and one or two for the English club. But the *CWD* profile was built around his father's love of the game, and the son's desire to emulate him, as a working class man who had

seen action in the Pacific during World War 2. Hetherington built the story angle for the *CWD* and sold it as a reinforcement of his own community values.

As a feature profile, the angle sold by Hetherington had little to recommend it as a campaign image-building exercise. Embedded negative connotations framed him as someone less than capable of making the transition from part-time to full-time representation of citizen interests.

Hetherington applied optimistic affirmations of hope that were inherently inventive in character but sadly, less empirically grounded than the electorate required. His media and image campaigns at local level could not translate to state level. To build a higher level of influence, Hetherington needed to apply creative and inventive rhetoric (Mayhew 1997: 129) building on his initial bid to act as prolocutor for interest groups. Despite his successful actions at local level he was unable to activate or realise potential bonds with his stakeholders. At local level, his stakeholders were satisfied with his performance as a councillor: He brought to the public sphere numerous issues that would otherwise have remained hidden. But he was unsuccessful in their prosecution. Stakeholder perception of an elected representative being capable of acting on their behalf was not relevant, because Orange is represented at federal level by a self-defined "waste of space" — independent⁵³, Peter Andren and at state level by an opposition MP Russell Turner.

In Andren's case, unlike Hetherington, the Habermasian notion of initial credit comes in to play. Habermas (1987) argues that a prestigious or influential person who takes initiative can rely to some extent on receiving an 'advance' of trust (or in this case votes) (1987: 179) similar to Mayhew's warrants of solidarity. Andren had a high public profile and was influential in local media for 18 years prior to his election. Hetherington had spent three years fighting everyone on council in an attempt to gain some prestige. Rather than continuing to act as a communicator with prolocutor status, Hetherington was possibly perceived to be acting as a prolocutor for strategic purpose: to gain advantage for himself rather than his stakeholders. He was seen then, as a professional

⁵³ Peter Andren planned to call his book, titled the Andren Report, "wasted space" because that was how he was described in parliament by members of the government and opposition. (Andren conversation, March 2003.)

communicator acting on behalf of himself, rather than as a prolocutor acting on behalf of his stakeholders.

Identifying some of the differences between his local council campaign and his state campaign may assist in delineating his success and failure. Two additional personal issues are worth noting as it is the researcher's opinion that they contributed heavily to the loss. In July 2002, Hetherington broke his shoulder during a reunion football match. By March it had not healed successfully. He was in some physical pain throughout the campaign. Two months later, he was "sacked" by his employer, *Prime Television*. Legal action against the dismissal ensued. Both incidents played a large role in framing his mental attitude to the campaign. Had he remained at the television station he would have been able to devote less time to the campaign because he was owed fewer than six weeks annual holiday. His poor relationship with station management meant he would be unable to seek any additional leave without pay (Hetherington telecon, Feb 2003).

Funding was a major issue in the state campaign. Hetherington estimated he needed \$100,000 to run a professional campaign based on discussions he had with former candidate Tim O'Sullivan and Councillor Chris Gryllis, a former state campaign director. He raised \$17,000 but spent in excess of \$30,000. This amount left him well short in his proposed budget for newspaper and television advertising, areas he believed were critical to success. His funding campaign consisted of "cold calling" former clients to ask for donations. Additionally, he sent a direct mail plea to a small number of people who had showed support in certain council issues. But these tactics, while forming a part of a standard campaign fund-raising strategy were employed at a low, unsophisticated level. Hetherington failed to raise his sights towards the larger business community because he had no feeling of solidarity with them.

He had operated as a salesman for so long he was unable to "upsell" his campaign to a higher level. Secondly, the fund-raising failed because he received poor advice. He relied on the experience of people who had worked funding campaigns, but they had been at low levels collecting a few thousand dollars for minor community constructs. A theory of campaign funding is beyond the scope of this thesis but it is important to note that the larger media advertising budgets employed by the major parties played a role in the outcome of the campaign.

In analysing the electorate by polling place, Hetherington believed it was important for him to spend as much time as possible outside the main city centre of Orange, where he was unknown, but this proved to be a spurious argument. Analysis of polling station results indicated he would have been well advised to have reinforced his position in the larger centres. But he had another reason for travelling more widely. His sacking from *Prime* was not well-known but it had the effect of making him feel inadequate. He reasoned that travelling around the outskirts of the electorate would assist in the rebuilding process, but I would argue it merely took him away from the "action" and kept his focus on minor issues rather than on the need to build a strong policy framework.

Another difficulty arose for Hetherington through his perception of himself as working class rather than an elite. His sacking from *Prime* accentuated this issue, but it manifested in less likely places. During the campaign he was advised to seek support from business and in so doing, make connections with businessmen outside the working environment at clubs and social functions. He made some minor connections but felt uncomfortable attending the elite golf club, Duntry League, on Saturday afternoons to have a few beers with elite businessmen. His discomfort led him to spend more time at a working class hotel where he could share a few football "yarns".

An important element of his campaign and its outcome was his relationship to Peter Andren and the public support Andren lent to the campaign. There was divided opinion on the support within Hetherington's closest circle of advisers. Andren himself, in his book *The Andren Report*, claims to have '...encouraged a former *Prime* Television colleague to run below the line in his bid to be elected as a true independent to Orange Council' (Andren 2003: 270), an accurate reflection, and one extended to the state campaign (Andren conversation, March 16, 2003). Without analytical measurement of the support, however, it is difficult to determine its value. This researcher's observations on polling day indicated voters were more perplexed than enthusiastic about Andren's presence. In the two weeks prior to polling day, Hetherington aired on *Prime* and *WIN* television, advertisements featuring Andren arguing Hetherington was the best option. But lack of funding meant these advertisements were produced unprofessionally and aired at inopportune times, revealing a lack of planning and a poorly executed strategy. The television advertising, despite Hetherington's constant belief that Andren was the key to higher voter

recognition and support, had not been seen by voters, or if it had been seen, had not influenced them to vote for him (Researcher observations, conversations with voters, March 16, 2003). Andren was with Hetherington for almost the full day, from 7.15am until the close of the polls. On completion of his commitment, he went on to provide radio commentary on the election, then returned later in the evening to Hetherington's supporter celebration drinks party. It is not in contention that Andren was genuinely supportive. It is however doubtful that voters understood the connection, and being cognisant of the difference between federal and state politics, were able to act upon it. If, on the other hand there was support for the connection between the independents at federal and state levels, it was not widely advertised, nor on polling day could it be expected to manifest as votes given the time needed to visit each polling station. Within this framework of support, Hetherington had been concerned to avoid an attempt to constantly harness the "Andren Factor" lest he irritate him, but I would argue that this fear was groundless and that Andren in fact was waiting for Hetherington to make the approach (Andren conversation, March 2003).

A final negative aspect of the Andren support was the belief that an independent is not in a position to present a policy platform because an independent cannot deliver policy in parliament. But this neglects the notion that an independent can still "frame" policy and present the electorate with a well-defined platform from which they can assess value. Hetherington misinterpreted Andren's argument that it would be presumptuous to issue detailed policy statements. An independent must provide guides on issues that can be taken to parliament to be argued as policy changes (Andren 2003: 95). With profound implications, there were a number of misinterpretations within the campaign that consistently took the candidate's "eye off the ball". Minor irritations about who looked after the main street campaign office, who signed off invoices, and who was in control of various parts of the campaign combined with the elements set out above to undermine the strength of preparedness the candidate required to present a successful image and policy campaign as he had done in 1999.

The 2003 campaign, rather than shifting its strategic intent and purpose to a higher level, languished below that of the local 1999 campaign. It was overtaken by events, media and power brokers intent on maintaining the status quo in the city. Five months after the event, and four years from his induction into the world of political communication, Hetherington had made no decision on his future.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire schedule (written responses).

Section one of the survey, fixed response questions, was comprised of questions about professional communicators, power, influence and persuasion in a regional city.

Section two of the survey, open ended questions with written answers, is discussed in Chapter 3.

The questions were:

1. Professional specialists, using market research and promotional campaigns dominate public communication.
2. Advertising, market research and public relations are systematically applied to political communication.
3. Professional domination of communication alters the organisation of social life by undermining the ties between citizens and the connections between citizens and their leaders.
4. Citizens (ratepayers) play an active role in public debate and in influencing what occurs in the public sphere.
5. Public discussion is sufficiently independent of other strong forces such as power and wealth to constitute a guiding integrative force in its own right.
6. Influence is the power to sway based on prestige, ability, wealth or position.
7. Daily activity and wider community affairs are ordered by a process of addressing people and talking them in to accepting and believing and doing.
8. If communication fails to establish sufficient trust people break off old ties and seek to establish new socially grounded connection.
9. A meaningful electoral campaign must have regard to matters of political policy.
10. People regularly accept on faith, without independent verification, the pronouncements of others.
11. Confidence in reputation and prestige, in perceived common interests, and in the good faith of others is a pervasive background force in daily life.
12. In democratic countries citizens are directly exposed to attempted influence each time elections are held.

13. Personal influence exerted face to face, among friends and neighbours, colleagues and co-workers is the most important element in an election campaign.
14. Media messages are filtered through a two-stage flow first from the media to opinion leaders, then to others by personal influence.
15. To assert that one speaks for a group is to place the solidarity of that group behind attempts to persuade members of the group and others for whom the interests of the group have consequences.
16. When candidates seek to influence opinion and policy by open appeals for general support (votes) they do so in the name of the public or public interest.
17. Broad appeals for political support are driven by the advice of public relations and communication experts.
18. Influence is the capacity to speak on behalf of the solidarities of groups bound by common interests.
19. Persuasion involves a presupposition that the persuader and the audience share a common interest.
20. People rely on the reputation of others and therefore come under their influence.
21. In modern societies influential people (prolocutors) use persuasion to capture free-floating disposable loyalties.
22. Leadership is dependent on trust.
23. Influence is created and sustained when prolocutors establish credibility as people who can be trusted to speak sincerely and effectively for the groups that they claim to represent.
24. Influence is backed by the willingness and capacity of prolocutors to fulfil their promises to the electorate.
25. The public is the electorate and the bearer of public opinion, the ultimate source of legitimate governing power.
26. Elected representatives hold only delegated power as agents of the people and are separate from and accountable to the differentiated publics.
27. Political advertising should be limited to evocative
28. The power of political institutions is inherent in their function as articulators of interest and mobilisers of social power for purposes of political action.
29. The power of the mass media comes from their unique capacity to deliver to the politician an audience which, in size and composition, is unavailable to him by any other means.

30. The basis of media power stems from the relations of credibility and trust that different media organisations have succeeded in developing with members of their audiences.
31. The media is capable of restructuring the timing and character of political events.
32. The media is capable of defining crisis situations to which politicians are obliged to react, requiring comment on issues media personnel have emphasised as important.
33. The media has stimulated the growth in new communication agencies such as public relations firms, opinion poll agencies, and political advertising and campaign management specialists.

The following table shows the breakdown of answers to each of the 33 survey questions.

Question	S Agree	Agree	C Decide	Disagree	S Disagree	Total
1	3	4		3		10
2	3	5		2		10
3	2	5	1	2		10
4	2	3		5		10
5	1	4	1	3	1	10
6	4	5	1			10
7	2	6	1	1		10
8	1	6	1	2		10
9	3	4	1	2		10
10	3	5		2		10
11	1	9				10
12	6	4				10
13	2	3		5		10
14		7		3		10
15	3	5	1	1		10
16	1	4	1	4		10
17		6	1	3		10
18	4	3	1	2		10
19		8		2		10
20	1	7	1	1		10
21	2	8				10
22	5	5				10
23	2	7	1			10
24	1	7	1	1		10
25	2	5		2	1	10
26	1	6	2		1	10
27	0	2		5	3	10
28	1	4	4		1	10
29	5	4	1			10
30	2	6	1		1	10
31	6	4				10
32	8	2				10
33	7	2	1			10

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AFR	The Australian Financial Review
AJA	Australian Journalists' Association
AIG	Australian Industry Group
ALP	Australian Labor Party
CARE	Centre for Agricultural and Regional Economics
CBA	Commonwealth Bank of Australia
CWD	The Central Western Daily
CWEDG	Central West Economic Development Group
GM	General Manager
IMC	Inland Marketing Corporation
LGA	Local Government Act
LGA	Local Government Association
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NSW	New South Wales
OCC	Orange City Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMA	Orange Musical Association
ORC	Orange Regional Conservatorium
PR	Public Relations
PRO	Public Relations Officer
SMH	The Sydney Morning Herald
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

Throughout the work, single quotes have been used for material which is referenced. Double quotes are used to highlight a word or phrase which is not part of a citation.

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- Boss Max former General Manager, Orange City Council
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- Foster David, Writer
June 1999 interview, Bundanoon NSW
- Hetherington Peter, Orange City Councillor
1999-2003 interviews and discussions, Orange, Sydney and Bermagui, NSW
- Larsen Ross, News Director, *Prime* Television
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- Lloyd-Green John, News reader, Journalist, *Prime* Television
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- Martin Steve, Broadcaster, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
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Miller John, Orange City Councillor, Sub Editor, *The Central Western Daily*
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