

Saving Public Radio

A report on bias at National Radio by Deborah Coddington, MP

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of my former press secretary, David Young, and my current press secretary, Scott Dennison

Preface by Denis Dutton and John Isles

We commend this study to supporters of public radio who want to see it playing a strong role in an informed democracy. For Radio New Zealand to have confidence in its tax-funded future, there must be broad confidence and support that it is meeting its Charter requirements of providing balance and diversity in programming.

We have a long-standing, nagging concern about the underlying intellectual framework of some RNZ current affairs and features programmes. This study represents a way to bring out one aspect of the current framework: Does much of the discussion and argument on National Radio implicitly assume, or begin from the assumption, that more state-intervention in business and in the lives of New Zealanders is better than less? Are cogently argued alternative frameworks given adequate airtime? Our concern goes wider than economic and business issues because the same implicit assumptions seem to pervade some programmes about welfare, education, Maori issues, the arts and so on.

It is sometimes alleged that National Radio has become 'Labour Radio'. The problems, however, are deeper and more subtle. There are some issues on which the Labour Government's stance falls outside an interventionist, less-choice framework, such as international trade and genetic modification.

We noticed over the years as directors of the company that RNZ staff and management are extremely defensive when confronted with criticism of any kind. RNZ always insists that its version of public radio presents true balance and diversity to the New Zealand audience. We think that this study suggests endemic problems needing to be considered in a reasoned, sober way. We hope the study is not simply dismissed by trying to discredit the source, and then ignoring the outcomes.

Radio New Zealand presents itself to a much more diverse media market than was available a decade ago. Some commercial networks, such as NewstalkZB, have lively, informed presenters handling a diverse range of political and economic topics with depth and balance. There are four news-based television stations on Sky Television providing a wonderful smorgasbord of timely perspectives on the world.

The dailies cheerfully publish viewpoints from more- and less-interventionists alike. The two business weeklies, NBR and The Independent, have major features from a range of perspectives represented at the poles by Chris Trotter on the left and Owen McShane on the right. Metro, North and South, and The Listener present a wide variety of perspectives, as well as in-depth analysis.

The Internet in particular has altered the perceptions of many New Zealanders not only about where to go for up-to-date information on breaking news, but about what counts as news in the first place. Ten years ago, many New Zealanders would tune first to RNZ

to hear the latest on some important story. Now they will run to their computers, even before CNN. Radio New Zealand is now farther down the list of major news priorities.

It is little wonder that Radio New Zealand audience is aging and is in decline. Will RNZ address its problems to ensure a brighter future for public broadcasting, or will it adopt a default procedure of rubbishing its critics? While we may not agree with every aspect of this study, we think it is an excellent starting point for a deeper, more robust discussion of how to protect Radio New Zealand by lifting its game.

John Isles, Director of RNZ, 1994-1998, Chairman, 1998 – 2000

Denis Dutton, Director of RNZ, 1995 – 2002, Founder, Friends of National Radio (Inc.), 1991

Introduction

Every broadcaster is subject to obligations of objectivity and impartiality in news, and fairness in matters of debate.

A public service broadcaster must do more than the minimum because it is owned by the whole community and exists to serve every citizen. A news provider that is funded by taxes has added responsibility to provide reporting that is unbiased and balanced.

A state-owned media outlet faces the tension between appealing to the widest possible audience so that taxpayers will get value for money, and the statutory need to avoid compromising on quality. The option of 'dumbing down' for mainstream appeal is not available.

The ideal blend of news and current affairs programming will provide a diversity of views without favour or partiality – thus meeting the objectives of both broad representation and quality.

Crown-owned company Radio New Zealand produces and broadcasts programmes over three nationwide networks and one international network.

This report is concerned with National Radio, which broadcasts on AM nationwide and FM in some localities.

An ACNielsen survey conducted for Radio New Zealand showed 502,000 (17.3%) of New Zealanders aged 15 years and over listened to National Radio at some stage each week in 2002.¹ National Radio chiefly broadcasts news, current affairs, documentary and feature programmes.

The goal of this project is to test whether National Radio under-represents pro-market voices and messages, and/or favours pro-interventionist voices and messages.

Claims that National Radio has sunk into a "leftist miasma" are not new.² *Supporting Public Radio* will avoid such unhelpful labelling, and instead present the results of an open-minded analysis of the broadcaster's programming, along with specific recommendations to lift performance in areas that are found to be weak. The report will include quantitative research and a qualitative analysis of several shows.

Any study of this type is subjective. This report is not intended to be the last word on New Zealand's crown-owned broadcaster, but the catalyst for a public debate.

The creation of this document is motivated by a desire to see National Radio programmes continue to be the "staples of New Zealanders' listening lives" that the broadcaster sees them as today.³ I believe whole-heartedly in the objectives of the

¹ Radio New Zealand Ltd, Statement of Intent, 2003/2004.

² Evening Post editorial "Radio NZ – boring, but politically safe", Thursday July 4, 2002.

³ "National Radio", <http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/f-nr.htm>

Radio New Zealand Charter, and hope my suggestions will assist National Radio to meet its obligation to provide “innovative, comprehensive and independent”⁴ programming.

The ongoing security of any crown-owned company depends on the strength of its political independence and transparency. This report examines the possibility that imbalance will increase the chances of National Radio being weakened under a future government.

I do not believe that a left-wing bias exists throughout New Zealand’s media. The reasons for any bias found within National Radio are outside the scope of this report.

A public service broadcaster should seek the trust of its audience: taxpayers who keep the institution alive. Equally, citizens must feel that it is their right to question the organisation’s philosophy and direction.

Radio New Zealand acknowledges this unwritten contract in its Vision Statement when it undertakes to measure success in part by its “image in the eyes of listeners and other stakeholders”. The organisation also declares that it wishes to make its service “indispensable to listeners and decision makers across the full spectrum of New Zealand society...”⁵

It is in this spirit of reciprocity between broadcaster and audience that *Saving Public Radio* is presented to the many listeners of National Radio.

⁴ Radio New Zealand Charter, at <http://www.radionz.co.nz/au/f-au.htm>

⁵ Radio New Zealand Ltd, Statement of Intent, 2003/2004

Structure of this report

The first section of *Saving Public Radio* aims to provide a context for the subsequent analysis. It outlines why diversity and balance must be priorities for National Radio.

The requirements of the Charter are explored, and relevant terms are defined.

Examples of pro-market and pro-interventionist messages are provided. New Zealand's political climate is examined in an attempt to explore the long-term effects that bias within National Radio could have on the organisation.

The second section includes the results of analysis conducted for this report. National Radio's 'experts' are studied to identify the diversity of views. Diversity is also the theme of a comparison of perspectives presented in news bulletins.

The broadcaster's treatment of education stories from pro-market and pro-interventionist organisations is evaluated.

In the third section, two programmes have been selected for case studies. The first, "Business News", was selected because of its relevance to pro-market organisations – and, of course, to growing the economy. The second, "MediaWatch", was chosen to assess National Radio's evaluation of other news organisations.

The final section summarises the findings of this report and provides recommendations.

The Context for this Report

The Charter

The Radio New Zealand Charter was introduced in 1995. It is a contract between New Zealand taxpayers and Radio New Zealand. The contract is monitored by parliament on behalf of the public.

The Charter begins by stating that “the functions of the public radio company shall be to provide **innovative, comprehensive, and independent** broadcasting services of a **high standard**.”⁶

Commentators (ie Cohen, 2002; Evening Post, 2002) have questioned whether the broadcaster remains innovative. That is outside the scope of this report, which focuses on the delivery of “comprehensive and independent” services.

In this context, the term “comprehensive... broadcasting services” is taken to mean “inclusive delivery of content”. If the goal was being met, this study would find programming that portrays a representative spectrum of the perspectives adding to New Zealand’s cultural and intellectual landscape.

The Charter’s creators did not intend the term “independent... broadcasting services” to be interpreted as a promise of financial self-sustainability. The term is understood in this report to be a command for National Radio to remain “free from outside influences” and “unwilling to be under obligation to others”. In brief: the public should be able to expect consistent provision of balanced and unbiased broadcasting, regardless of changes in the political climate. This is an important safeguard against bias.

Aside from these over-arching requirements, three specific Charter objectives are relevant to this analysis. The first two expand on the need for the broadcaster to meet the needs of a variety of audiences:

“[Radio New Zealand will provide:]

(c) Programmes which provide for **varied interests within the community**, including information, educational, special interest, and entertainment programmes; and ...

(e) A nationwide service providing programming of the highest quality to **as many New Zealanders as possible, thereby engendering a sense of citizenship and national identity**;⁷

Failure to fairly represent diversity of varied interests in the community – including pro-market views – would amount to a breach of sections (c) and (e) of the Charter.

⁶ Radio New Zealand website, <http://www.radionz.co.nz/au/f-au.htm> Emphasis added.

⁷ Ibid.

The third relevant requirement explicitly outlines the need for news and current affairs coverage to be unbiased:

[Radio New Zealand will provide:]

- (f) Comprehensive, independent, **impartial, and balanced** national news services and current affairs, including items with a regional perspective.

Impartiality relies on treating differing perspectives objectively and fairly. If pro-market views are under-represented or given unbalanced treatment, the broadcaster is failing to meet its obligations under section (f) of the Charter.

Bias and public service broadcasting

Bias is not necessarily the result of a conscious choice by a reporter or editor. Nor is it an inevitable sign of overt political influence.

It may be the result of deadline pressure – if a reporter doesn't understand one perspective well enough to explain in a story, that viewpoint may be missed.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority (2002) found that “ethics and resources seem to be intrinsically linked”.⁸ Media operations where resources are poorly directed prompt journalists to cut corners in their research and reporting.

These are not valid excuses for a publicly-owned media organisation to fail to present balanced news and current affairs. Although these reasons may provide an explanation for bias, they do not amount to an exemption from ethical or legislative requirements to provide a forum for a range of voices and messages.

Public service broadcasting should be especially careful of partiality because it has an established vulnerability to political bias.⁹

Given this vulnerability and National Radio's legislative requirements, it could be expected that the organisation would work even harder than other media outlets to avoid accusations of bias.

No transparent project to improve balance or increase diversity has been attempted by National Radio.

Pro-market and pro-interventionist messages

Supporting Public Radio examines National Radio's treatment of pro-market and pro-interventionist perspectives. Some explanation of these terms is required.

Use of 'left wing' and 'right wing' has been avoided, mainly because of their broad interpretations. As New Zealand Business Roundtable chief executive Roger Kerr has

⁸ Australian Sources of News and Current Affairs, Stage One: The Industry, http://www.aba.gov.au/tv/research/projects/sources/stage1/pdf/ind_58.pdf

⁹ Voltmer, Katrin, 2000: Structures of diversity of press and broadcasting systems: The institutional context of public communication in Western democracies. Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung (WZB).

stated, “right wing’ is a remarkably inclusive group” which includes religious fundamentalists and atheists, nationalists and internationalists, central planners and free marketers.¹⁰ Kerr has pointed out that Zionist settlers on the West Bank of the Jordan, Winston Peters, hard-line communist opponents of former Soviet leader Michail Gorbachov and Kerr’s own organisation, the Business Roundtable, have all been labelled ‘right wing’ by the media.¹¹ The label is nearly devoid of meaning.

In this report, the preferred terms are “pro-interventionist” and “pro-market”. The first label categorises the collectivist or socialist belief in the forceful manipulation of economic affairs. Some examples of pro-interventionist groups in New Zealand are workers’ and students’ unions, and the Labour, Progressive and Green political parties.

The following quote is an example of a pro-interventionist message:

Some social change takes place naturally. When it seems that change won't occur naturally, the Government can intervene through legislation and regulation.¹²

The term “pro-market” relates to the economic (and moral) view that governments should only intervene minimally in the economic activities of corporations or individuals. Most adherents to this view believe that governments have a responsibility to provide a general framework to ensure the smooth operation of the market system, but argue that the role of government should be limited.

Some examples of pro-market groups in New Zealand are the New Zealand Business Roundtable, Business New Zealand, and political parties ACT New Zealand, National and United Future.

The following quote is an example of a pro-market message:

Instead of threatening to punish success through the re-imposition of price controls or à la carte regulation, Congress should acknowledge the cable industry’s achievement as one of the great capitalist success stories of recent American history.¹³

Particular shows on National Radio are targeted to meet the needs of New Zealanders with disabilities, Pacific Island New Zealanders, and Maori. However, the audience that this report is concerned with is the group of New Zealanders with pro-market views. At

¹⁰ ‘Left’ and ‘right’: stars to steer by or black holes? 3 March 1999, speech to Mount Victoria Rotary club, Roger Kerr, NZBR,

¹¹ Media use of such labels can itself be evidence of bias, when groups like the Business Roundtable are labelled as “right wing” while organisations such as the Council of Trade Unions are not affixed with a “left wing” moniker.

¹² Mallard, Hon. Trevor, ‘Social marketing in the public sector’, speech to Social Marketing for Social Profit conference, Hotel Intercontinental, Wellington, 20 October 2003

¹³ Adam Thierer, press release, GAO cable report: Deregulation works, October 23, 2003

the last election, 37 percent¹⁴ of party votes went to parties with pro-market policies:¹⁵ this is a significant group.

Political setting

The incumbent broadcasting minister used a Radio New Zealand staff function in May 2003 to sympathise with staff that had “every reason to feel nervous, bullied and uncertain” under the previous administration:

Under the National government Radio New Zealand struggled against political reluctance to maintain its funding and, through public pressure and its own lobbying, managed to secure the continuing existence of two networks, National Radio and Concert FM.

Many of you here will have been taken part in those battles because you know that public radio is worth fighting for.¹⁶

The wisdom of allowing Radio New Zealand to be used for the delivery of such an overt political message is questionable, especially when concerns of political bias have been made against the organisation.

The Minister’s theme – that public radio is under threat from his political opponents – appears to have currency within the broadcaster. The Radio New Zealand website asserts that this is “a time when the whole concept of public radio is under attack”.¹⁷ The Radio New Zealand Statement of Intent 2003/2004 declares under the heading of “Strategic Issues” that the institution of Radio New Zealand was “eroded” during the 1990s, and needed “re-building”.

By allowing its offices to be used for the delivery of a political message, and by making political statements, Radio New Zealand is expressing a clear philosophical view about the direction the broadcaster took under the previous government. These opinions belong to the political debate about public service broadcasting – a debate that it is inappropriate for National Radio to join, as a crown-owned company and provider of impartial news. The organisation runs the risk of becoming associated with a political message: that National ‘ruined’ the broadcaster and Labour is ‘fixing’ it. The merits of this view are irrelevant: National Radio must make an overt attempt to be transparent and impartial if it is serious about raising its credibility.

¹⁴ This is a reference to National, ACT and United Future – all have referred to themselves as ‘classical liberal’ parties. Classical liberalism is a philosophy based, in part, on the economic and moral doctrine of *laissez faire*: see authors’ definition of political terms.

¹⁵ 2002 General Election Results, New Zealand Ministry of Justice, Chief Electoral Office, Wellington

¹⁶ Maharey Speech: Supporting public service radio, Wednesday, 7 May 2003, 8:18 am, Speech: New Zealand Government

¹⁷ Radio New Zealand website, <http://www.radionz.co.nz/au/f-au.htm>

If Radio New Zealand employees were concerned about a political 'attack' from the previous government, the presence of a high-polling, social democrat government could be seen to provide safety.

A Radio New Zealand employee told a journalist in 2002 that, "the current security of the Labour Government seems so overwhelming that the psychology of the place is 'no-one can touch us now'".¹⁸ In reference to management, the same employee said: "They don't feel answerable to anybody. If Helen [Clark, prime minister] likes them and Marian [Hobbs, former broadcasting minister] likes them, they feel like they're in clover."

The Labour Government has generally been favourable toward National Radio. Although the Minister of Broadcasting told a newspaper that he would like Radio New Zealand to be "an exciting, compulsive piece of our media - and I don't think it is right now",¹⁹ the Radio New Zealand chief executive claimed the Minister had "personally assured" her he was not critical of RNZ, despite the article "implying" he had been. In a memo to staff, she stated: "He has no concerns over the quality of our programming, our management, or our governance..."²⁰

A plausible theme emerges from a brief review of recent articles that complacency has developed at Radio New Zealand due to the presence of a 'friendly' government. This would not automatically lead to pro-interventionist bias in reporting. However, such complacency would be extremely risky for the broadcaster.

A crown-owned company must be ready to withstand a change in political climate. If a perception of political bias develops (toward either end of the political spectrum), then a newly elected government would have an obvious incentive to weaken the organisation's structure. This weakening could take different forms, from privatisation to changes in funding or governance.

The attitude of a future government

If there is a perception at Radio New Zealand that a pro-market government would sell the company regardless of whether it was meeting its Charter obligations, then it would be possible that bias could emerge against those politicians (and organisations associated with them) from employees who would fear for their jobs.

However, an analysis of current policy shows that, contrary to the perception fuelled by the incumbent Broadcasting Minister, only one political party would consider privatising the broadcaster.

United Future would maintain Radio New Zealand in public ownership, "notwithstanding changes to [its] structure or operation".²¹ The National Party "continues to acknowledge

¹⁸ The Press, 15 June 2002, The Press, page D1, Radio Waves, Colin Espiner

¹⁹ Sunday Star Times, 22 September 2002, Labour in a spin about third term

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ United Future, broadcasting policy, <http://www.unitedfuture.org.nz/policies/broadcasting.php>

the role that the state does have in the provision of non-commercial radio services through National Radio”.²² While New Zealand First believes that the role of Government should largely be confined to essential regulatory matters, it finds that there are “issues relating to community standards, access, impartiality, and diversity that necessitate intervention” in the case of broadcasting.²³

This leaves ACT New Zealand, a classical liberal political party. Classical liberals (or free market liberals) generally oppose the concept of public service broadcasting because of its vulnerability to political bias, and because of their belief that a market-based solution is more efficient.²⁴ This is currently ACT New Zealand’s policy. As broadcasting spokesperson, I have stated:

If New Zealanders don’t want public broadcasting to be rubbed out, they should think hard about what it should be – broadcasting for the public, not for the government.²⁵

I submit that a more overt effort by National Radio to eliminate bias would be greeted by a more positive attitude toward the broadcaster by a future government. It could even be argued that National Radio is baiting pro-market politicians by allowing its offices to be used for the delivery of a pro-interventionist, political message and by publishing its own political views on public service broadcasting.

Significantly, ACT New Zealand is not the only political party to have alleged that bias or institutional problems exist at National Radio – these claims have also been made by National and New Zealand First.²⁶

A media search was conducted to try to find any published concerns from pro-interventionists about bias on Radio New Zealand. No such concerns were discovered. Although this absence is not evidence in itself that Radio New Zealand is biased, it is worth noting.

Several comments were found from pro-interventionists claiming that no bias existed on the broadcaster. In April 2003 the Green Party’s broadcasting spokesperson said:

I find it extraordinary that some persons [in parliament] are even trying to suggest that Radio New Zealand might not be balanced and impartial. I think it is one of

²² National Party of New Zealand, broadcasting policy, election 2002

²³ NZ First, broadcasting and communications policy, <http://www.nzfirst.org.nz/policies/broadcasting.php>

²⁴ See, for example, Brittan, S (1988) ‘The Case for the Consumer Market’ paper presented at ‘Rethinking Freedom of the Press in Europe’ PCL, November 1988: London.

²⁵ Deborah Coddington, Liberty Belle, 12 September 2003

²⁶ See Peters, Rt Hon Winston, Speech, 19 Apr 2002, ‘Fourth estate or unregistered party: you be the judge’; Peters, Rt Hon Winston, Media Release, 24 Oct 2003, Changes overdue at Radio NZ; Peters, Rt Hon Winston, Speech, 25 September 2001, New Zealand Press Club breakfast; Speeches to debate of the Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill, First Reading, First Session, Hansard, 1 April 2003 (continued on Wednesday, 2 April 2003); <http://www.mccully.co.nz>

the mediums of communication in our land that actually is balanced and impartial.²⁷

Findings

- No transparent project to improve balance or increase diversity has been attempted by National Radio, despite the established vulnerability of public service broadcasting to political influence, and explicit accusations of bias from pro-market politicians.
- As a crown-owned organisation, Radio New Zealand leaves itself open to accusations of political bias by allowing its premises to be used for announcements of a political nature, and by publishing anti-market views on its website and in corporate documents.

The next section of this report aims to provide quantitative analysis that proves or disproves the hypothesis that National Radio under-represents pro-market voices and/or favours pro-interventionist messages.

²⁷ Speech to debate of the Radio New Zealand Amendment Bill, First Reading, Sue Kedgley MP, Green Party, First Reading, Hansard, 1 April 2003

Analysis: Range of Views

Presenters

In one sense, the diversity of presenters' opinions may be seen to be irrelevant. Complete objectivity for a journalist is an unattainable ideal, as is absolutely representative diversity for a media organisation. A journalist's views will not necessarily make his or her reporting biased.

There is a difference between declared bias and undeclared bias – an Australian radio host told the Australian Broadcasting Authority that:

I don't see a great ethical conflict if I have a particular political view. Not for a political party but on a political issue. I don't see any problem with that because, as I say, I've got a view that Peter Reith is, at least, a disgrace. I'll state that view, and then I'll interview him so Peter Reith knows where I'm coming from. It's no secret. The audience knows where I'm coming from. So I don't find that a conflict even though some would say, "Well, you're conducting what is a prejudiced interview". I am. Because I come from a particular point of view.²⁸

Within National Radio, presenters seldom declare any bias on air. It is necessary to look further a field and collate presenters' work in other media which indicates a political or philosophical framework.

This report will not single out any employee – this would convey a message that the presence of pro-interventionist views is the problem. It is not. The problem is a lack of diversity. Two conclusions are indisputable:

1. National Radio does not have a single presenter who clearly and publicly holds a pro-market philosophical framework.
2. There are high profile presenters whose work in other media (and, arguably, Radio New Zealand) indicates a clear preference for pro-interventionist views and actions.

The second point does not mean that these presenters are impartial or unprofessional, but – taken with the first point – it indicates a possible level of institutional bias that shall be examined in more depth later. First, it is valuable to explore whether political views are blunted by other forces. Author Kathleen Hall Jamieson notes:

One might hypothesise that reporters respond to the cues of those who pay their salaries and mask their own ideological dispositions. Another explanation would

²⁸ Australian Sources of News and Current Affairs, Stage One: The Industry, http://www.aba.gov.au/tv/research/projects/sources/stage1/pdf/ind_58.pdf

hold that norms of journalism, including ‘objectivity’ and ‘balance’ blunt whatever biases exist.²⁹

Jamieson’s first hypothesis – that journalists “respond to the cues of those who pay their salaries and mask their own ideological dispositions” leads to a counterfactual implication in the case of Radio New Zealand. If it is true that the crown-owned company’s employees consistently act in this manner, then it could be expected that mainstream allegations of “right-wing bias” would have arisen under the previous, National administration. No examples of such allegations could be found. In fact, during that time, then-Opposition leader Helen Clark attacked the *board* of Radio New Zealand for planning to cut up to \$3.5 million from the National Radio news budget, indicating that she was not unhappy with her portrayal by the broadcaster.³⁰

Jamieson’s second suggestion – that “objectivity and balance blunt whatever biases exist” is more relevant. The public does not expect each journalist to abandon his or her conscience or philosophical framework. The existence of views does not automatically lead to bias.

Of course, having some presenters with a pro-market viewpoint would reduce the perception – and weaken accusations – of bias.

It is instructional to put the presenters aside for a moment and instead examine the diversity of the broadcaster’s regular guests: the people who are selected by the producers and presenters.

Regular guests are used extensively by National Radio to provide ‘expert’ opinion on matters from financial planning to news from abroad.

As ‘experts’, they are held up as objective analysts with a nuanced understanding of their field.

A detailed analysis of the views of regular guests is more instructional than an exploration of presenters’ views because this is an area where diversity is important: regular guests provide an authoritative perspective to the audience that is based on their own perception. Their opinions are blended into fact, with no dissenting viewpoints offered.

As has been established, a presenter may hold strong views and still be impartial. But if impartiality did exist, then a cursory search would find a broad cross section of views represented by the regular guests that producers and presenters select.

²⁹ Jamieson, Kathleen Hall. 2002. Everything you think you know about politics... and why you’re wrong. New York: Basic Books.

³⁰ SUNDAY STAR TIMES, 14 JUL 2002, Radio New Zealand - dead air or NZ on air?, TAYLOR Phil

This broad cross section would be an indication that National Radio was meeting the Charter objective to broadcast programming which provides “for varied interests within the community”.

Regular guests on Morning Report and Nine to Noon:³¹

Murray Weatherston, financial planner: Appointed to the crown entity Public Trust Modernisation Board by Hon Jim Anderton in 2001³² and the Public Trust Board in March 2003.³³ Weatherston was cited in a Green Party parliamentary speech responding to the 2001 Budget.³⁴

Kieran McLeonard, Australian perspective: Broadcaster who has worked extensively for Australian state-owned broadcaster Radio National.

Patrick Ensor, British perspective: Editor of the Guardian Weekly.³⁵ In an Australian interview, said that the Guardian Weekly:

needs to have a radical agenda... I do feel that there is a need to kind of question some of the accepted beliefs that we have thrust down our throats by politicians, by corporations, I think we need to question all the things they're up to, and globalisation in particular being a particularly important issue at the moment.

He went on to state:

The Guardian itself does carry campaigns. For instance, an issue which they raised recently, in which we echoed in The Guardian Weekly, was how the pharmaceutical companies, the small number who control AIDS drugs in particular, and the issue of why they aren't supplying Africa, why they're trying to stop Africa trying to get cheap, generic drugs to cure what is, or rather to help solve what is a fearful problem in Southern Africa. And I think we came to the conclusion in The Guardian and the Guardian Weekly that the drug companies were out to make a profit and they weren't putting people first on their agenda, all they were concerned about was their shareholders and protecting their patents.

Anita McNaught, British perspective: New Zealand broadcaster who has worked most recently for the British state-owned broadcaster, BBC. McNaught wanted to join a London protest against the invasion of Iraq. BBC banned staff from protesting, but before the ban McNaught reportedly sent the following message

³¹ List of regular guests has been obtained from Radio New Zealand's website <http://www.radionz.co.nz/nr/f-nr.htm> (excludes film, internet and sports guests)

³² <http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/PA0108/S00117.htm>

³³ <http://www.ccm.govt.nz/ce/profiles/PublicTrust.asp>

³⁴ Greens support budget, with reservations, Rod Donald, Green Party Co-Leader, Budget Speech in Parliament, 12th June 2001, <http://www.greens.org.nz/docs/speeches/010612rd-budget.htm>

³⁵ <http://adinfo-guardian.co.uk/display/the-guardian/pdfs/guardian-editors.pdf>

to Global Peace and Justice Auckland: “I wish you all the best. I'll be marching on 15th Feb here in London in solidarity, and perhaps sooner, if Blair doesn't show some signs of stopping his own ludicrous participation in this insane business.”³⁶

Rod Oram, business news: financial journalist and Adjunct Professor in the New Zealand Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship.³⁷ Took part in the ‘Reclaiming APEC Conference’ – “a conference to critique APEC’s misguided direction & develop positive models for people & earth-centred development”.³⁸ Believes that “bad company performance and management are major contributors to New Zealand’s poor economic performance”. This view puts him at odds with pro-market business representatives such as Roger Kerr, executive director of the New Zealand Business Roundtable.³⁹ Has worked on crown-appointed economic development projects.

Gordon Harcourt, British perspective: A broadcaster who has worked for the state-owned BBC.

Phil Kafcaloudes, Australian perspective: Has had a lifelong career in Australian state-owned broadcaster ABC, and has written several books, including journalism manuals.

Bill Bevan, Whitireia Community Law Centre: a member of the Public Advisory Committee of the crown entity Legal Services Agency. Bevan’s role on the committee is to represent community law centres, legal, Maori, consumers. His writing includes the advocacy of pro-interventionist views.

Stephen Price, Victoria University: an academic trained in law who discusses “consumer issues and listener queries”.

This snapshot of the views of National Radio’s regular guests indicates a striking homogeneity.

Of local guests, the majority espouse a pro-interventionist philosophy, and have been appointed to a crown entity since the election of a pro-interventionist government.

There is similar pattern among overseas guests – every one except Patrick Ensor works for a state-owned broadcaster. Ensor is the editor of a newspaper with a strong pro-interventionist leaning.

Where are the commentators from ‘rightwing’ news organisations?

This homogeneity is disquieting. It indicates that the Radio New Zealand environment lacks diversity.

³⁶ <http://www.scoop.co.nz/mason/stories/PO0302/S00102.htm>

³⁷ http://www.evision.org.nz/symposium/march/_rod_oram.html

³⁸ <http://www.converge.org.nz/prout/>

³⁹ <http://unlimited.co.nz/unlimited.nsf/UNID/AF861C107E6C1043CC256AE70001498C>

University of Maryland behavioural scientist Ben Schneider has proposed an attraction-selection-attrition (ASA) model for explaining organisational behaviour. The fundamental proposition of the ASA model is that, over time, the processes of attraction to organisations, selection into organisations, and attrition from organisations, will produce a restriction of range on a host of unspecified individual differences variables. Consequently, the people who remain in an organisation will come to find themselves working with colleagues much like themselves because the "fit" is better.⁴⁰

This appears to have happened in the case of Radio New Zealand. The predominance of pro-interventionist views from regular guests and the lack of clear pro-market voices result in a narrow spectrum of views. If an ASA model is present, a similarly narrow range would be expected among other staff, including management (who would be responsible for the political, pro-interventionist statements in Radio New Zealand documents – and for appointing presenters and producers).

No single employee or regular guest with pro-market views can be identified. Although such employees may exist, the existence of so many clear pro-interventionist views without any obvious balance should be of huge concern to the public broadcaster.

Findings

- The Radio New Zealand environment lacks diversity and, because of the attraction of 'like minds', is unlikely to achieve it without a transparent and overt effort.
- National Radio does not have a single presenter who clearly and publicly holds a pro-market philosophical framework.
- There is a preponderance of presenters whose work in other media indicates a clear level of pro-interventionist views.
- An analysis of the views of National Radio's regular guests indicates a completely unbalanced level of pro-interventionist views.

⁴⁰ See Schneider, B. (1987). "The people make the place." *Personnel Psychology*, 40:437-453; Schneider, B., Goldstein, H. W., & Smith, D. B. (1995). "The ASA framework: An update." *Personnel Psychology*, 48:747-773.

Analysis: Perspectives in News Stories

Two analyses and a comparison were carried out to gauge National Radio's selection and treatment of perspectives within news stories. The focus was to conclude whether the public service broadcaster's presentation of pro-interventionist and pro-market viewpoints was balanced.

Methodology

The first analysis used a database of stories filed by National Radio staff between 1 September and 7 September (inclusive). Use of this database has benefits and drawbacks. Although it reveals every story filed by journalists, it excludes live, unscripted interviews and exchanges. Not all of the stories in the database necessarily appeared on news bulletins themselves – some appeared during other portions of Morning Report or other programming. Some may not have aired.

Stories that were excluded from analysis included: sports stories, weather stories, emergency stories, crime stories, court stories, Pacific Island reports and world wire items. The first five types of stories fell outside the scope of this study because they could not be analysed for pro-market or pro-interventionist perspectives. The final two types of stories (Pacific Island and world) were excluded in line with a decision to avoid examination of international coverage.⁴¹

The second analysis was based on audio recordings of 7am and 8am news bulletins between the dates of 1 September and 7 September (inclusive). The same criterion was used to exclude certain stories.

The comparison took the form of an analysis of two other media (one print, one radio) over the same period, using the same formula.

The first analysis

Stories filed by National Radio staff between 1 September and 7 September (inclusive) were harvested from the National Radio news database.

After the process of excluding irrelevant stories, 287 stories remained, which included 402 individual perspectives (either soundbites or summaries of a viewpoint).⁴²

⁴¹ There were two factors in this decision. Firstly, I did not want to get involved in an examination of the media's treatment of the war in Iraq, which has been covered by other authors. Secondly, National Radio staff have no input into international coverage from wire agencies. The decision to exclude this data is not inconsistent with the decision to analyse foreign guests' viewpoints in the previous section – in that case, National Radio staff do have the power to select guests, and thus frame the coverage.

⁴² I acknowledge that a weakness of this methodology is that an organisation will be classed as having its perspective aired when in reality it is receiving negative media coverage (for example, an organisation may be responding to an attack from another group). I investigated different measures of calculation (including a weighted index for 'attack' or 'defence' perspectives), but abandoned these because they wanted their analysis to retain transparency. Even where a group was being attacked, that organisation had a space on National Radio to air its view, making it better off than a group that had been attacked but did not have a space to respond.

Each perspective was catalogued:

Unions: workers' and students' unions

Pro-interventionist political: includes Greens (a pro-interventionist political party outside government) and non-parliamentary lobby groups that argue for pro-interventionist policies (an example in the education sector would be QPEC)

Government (for a perspective to be included, it needed to provide a Minister's viewpoint or convey the government's policy or direction – straight stories representing government department announcements such as public health warnings were not included)

Academic: researchers

Maori: representatives of iwi and other Maori groupings

Local government

Individual businesses

Pro-market political: includes ACT New Zealand, National and New Zealand First (pro-market political parties in opposition) and United Future (a pro-market political party that supports the government), and non-parliamentary lobby groups that argue for pro-market policies (an example in the education sector would be the Education Forum)

Representative business organisations: groups that speak for a collective of businesses

Using this catalogue system, perspectives from representatives of the following sub-groups were logged as “pro-interventionist opinions”:

unions, pro-interventionist political and government

Perspectives from representatives of the following sub-groups were logged as “pro-market opinions”:

individual businesses, pro-market political, representative business organisations

Perspectives from the remaining three sub-groups (academic, Maori and local government) were classed as ‘neutral’.⁴³

In the first analysis, classification of each perspective indicated the following:

26 percent of perspectives were pro-market

⁴³ My reasoning was that often the elements of argument within a Maori or academic viewpoint fell outside the ‘pro-market’/‘pro-interventionist’ paradigm. Local governments have a broad range of political views. I could have classified each ‘local government’ spokesperson’s perspectives to represent his or her own political views (or those of the ticket that he or she was elected upon), but decided this would be unproductive.

25 percent of perspectives were neutral

49 percent of perspectives were pro-interventionist

The second analysis

The second analysis was based on audio recordings of 7am and 8am news bulletins between the dates of 1 September and 7 September (inclusive). The same criterion and methodology was used as in the first analysis.

Classification of each perspective indicated the following:

27 percent of perspectives were pro-market

26 percent of perspectives were neutral

48 percent of perspectives were pro-interventionist

Comparison

Articles from the first section of the North Island edition of the New Zealand Herald were analysed, using the same methodology as the analyses of National Radio. All opinion-based content was removed from analysis, including letters to the editor, op-eds, commentary and editorials. In total, 350 individual perspectives were identified and catalogued.

Classification of each perspective indicated the following:

32 percent of perspectives were pro-market

32 percent of perspectives were neutral

36 percent of perspectives were pro-interventionist

Items from IRN Limited's morning news reports (NewstalkZB) were analysed.⁴⁴

Classification of each perspective indicated the following:

33 percent of perspectives were pro-market

26 percent of perspectives were neutral

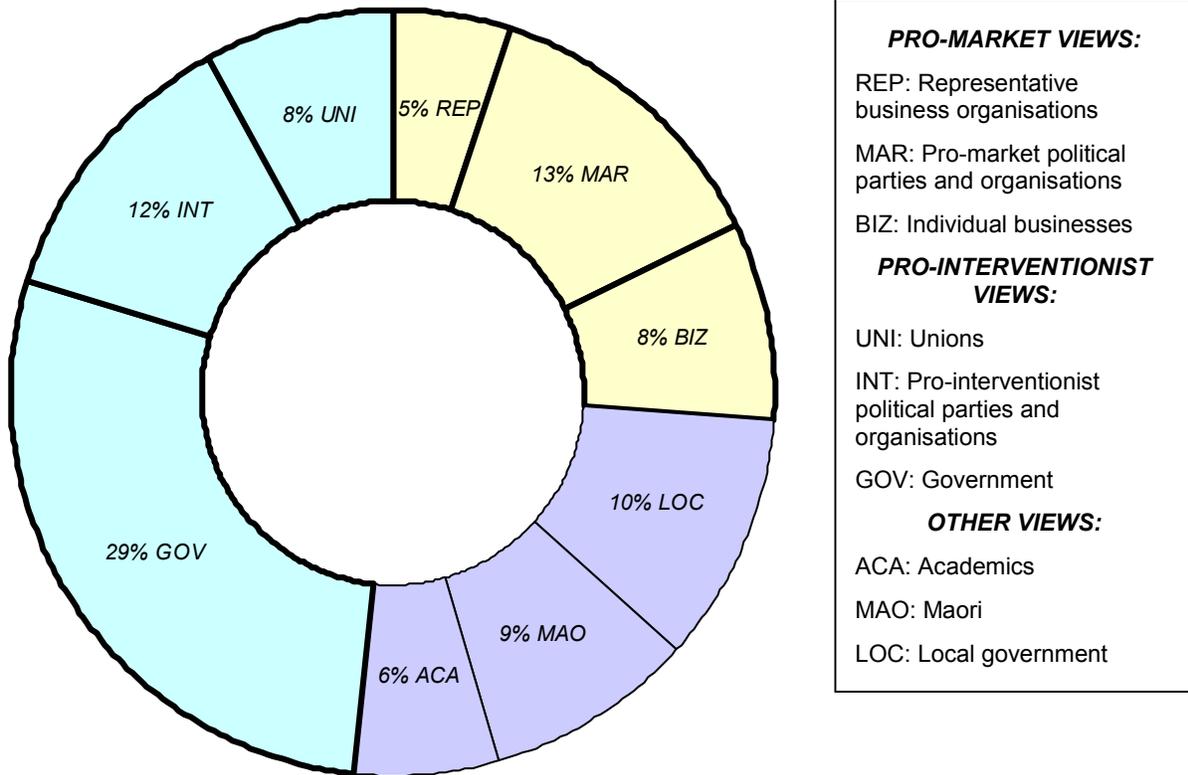
41 percent of perspectives were pro-interventionist.

⁴⁴ I was not able to analyse material from Saturday 6 and Sunday 7 September. They included two extra days of news instead (Monday 8 and Tuesday 9). I also note that the total number of perspectives available for analysis was much smaller than that of any other sample taken, and suggest therefore that the analysis of NewstalkZB stories be treated with caution.

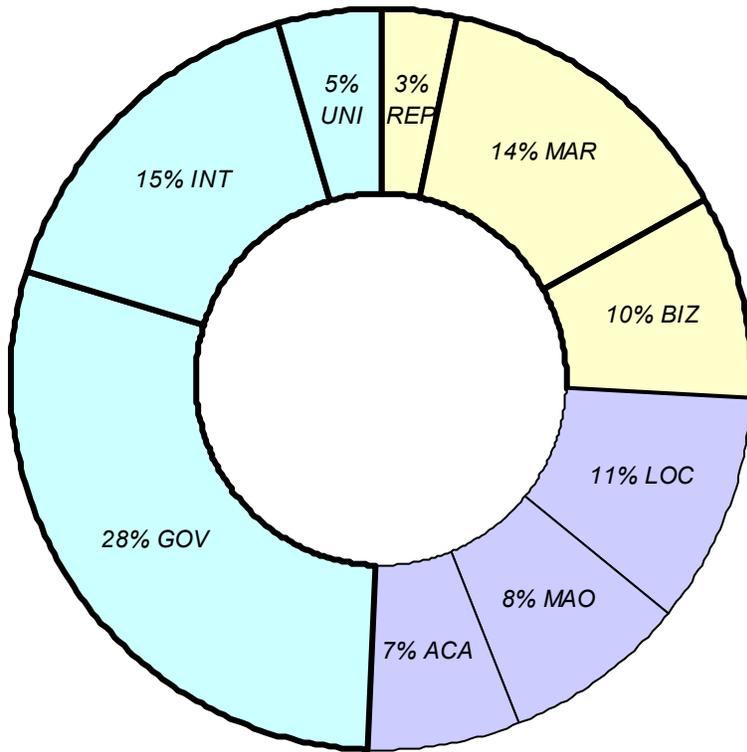
Table 1: Comparison of results

	National Radio (first analysis)	National Radio (second analysis)	New Zealand Herald	NewstalkZB (IRN)
Pro-market	26	27	32	35
Neutral	25	26	32	26
Pro-interventionist	49	48	36	39

National Radio (first analysis)



National Radio (second analysis)



PRO-MARKET VIEWS:

REP: Representative business organisations

MAR: Pro-market political parties and organisations

BIZ: Individual businesses

PRO-INTERVENTIONIST VIEWS:

UNI: Unions

INT: Pro-interventionist political parties and organisations

GOV: Government

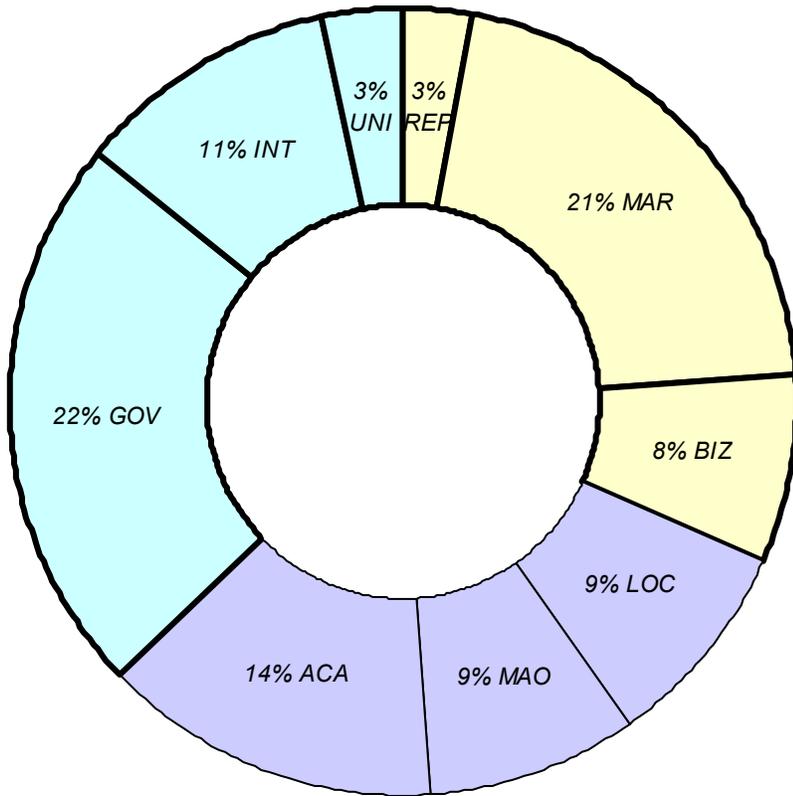
OTHER VIEWS:

ACA: Academics

MAO: Maori

LOC: Local government

New Zealand Herald



PRO-MARKET VIEWS:

REP: Representative business organisations

MAR: Pro-market political parties and organisations

BIZ: Individual businesses

PRO-INTERVENTIONIST VIEWS:

UNI: Unions

INT: Pro-interventionist political parties and organisations

GOV: Government

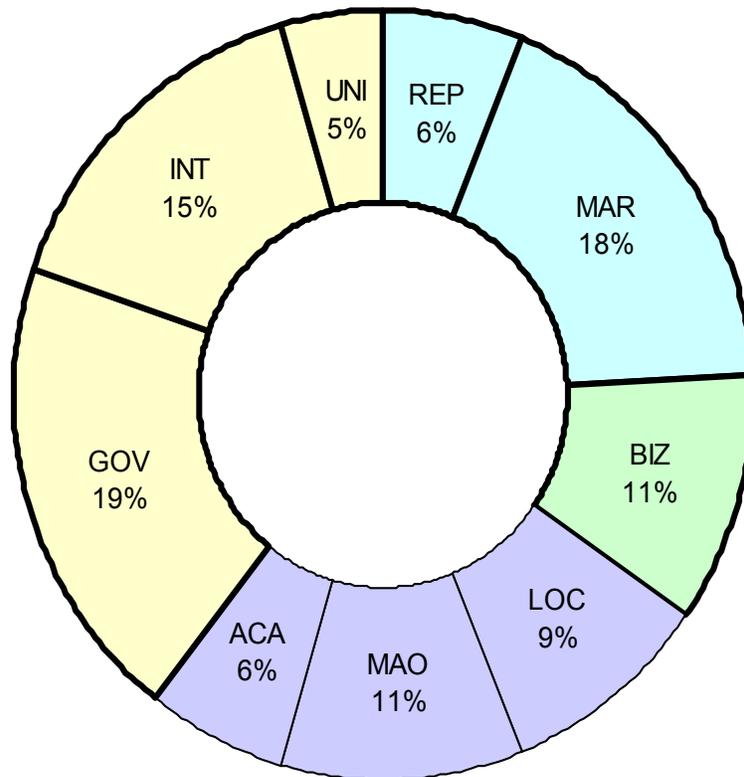
OTHER VIEWS:

ACA: Academics

MAO: Maori

LOC: Local government

NewstalkZB (IRN)



PRO-MARKET VIEWS:

REP: Representative business organisations

MAR: Pro-market political parties and organisations

BIZ: Individual businesses

PRO-INTERVENTIONIST VIEWS:

UNI: Unions

INT: Pro-interventionist political parties and organisations

GOV: Government

OTHER VIEWS:

ACA: Academics

MAO: Maori

LOC: Local government

Findings

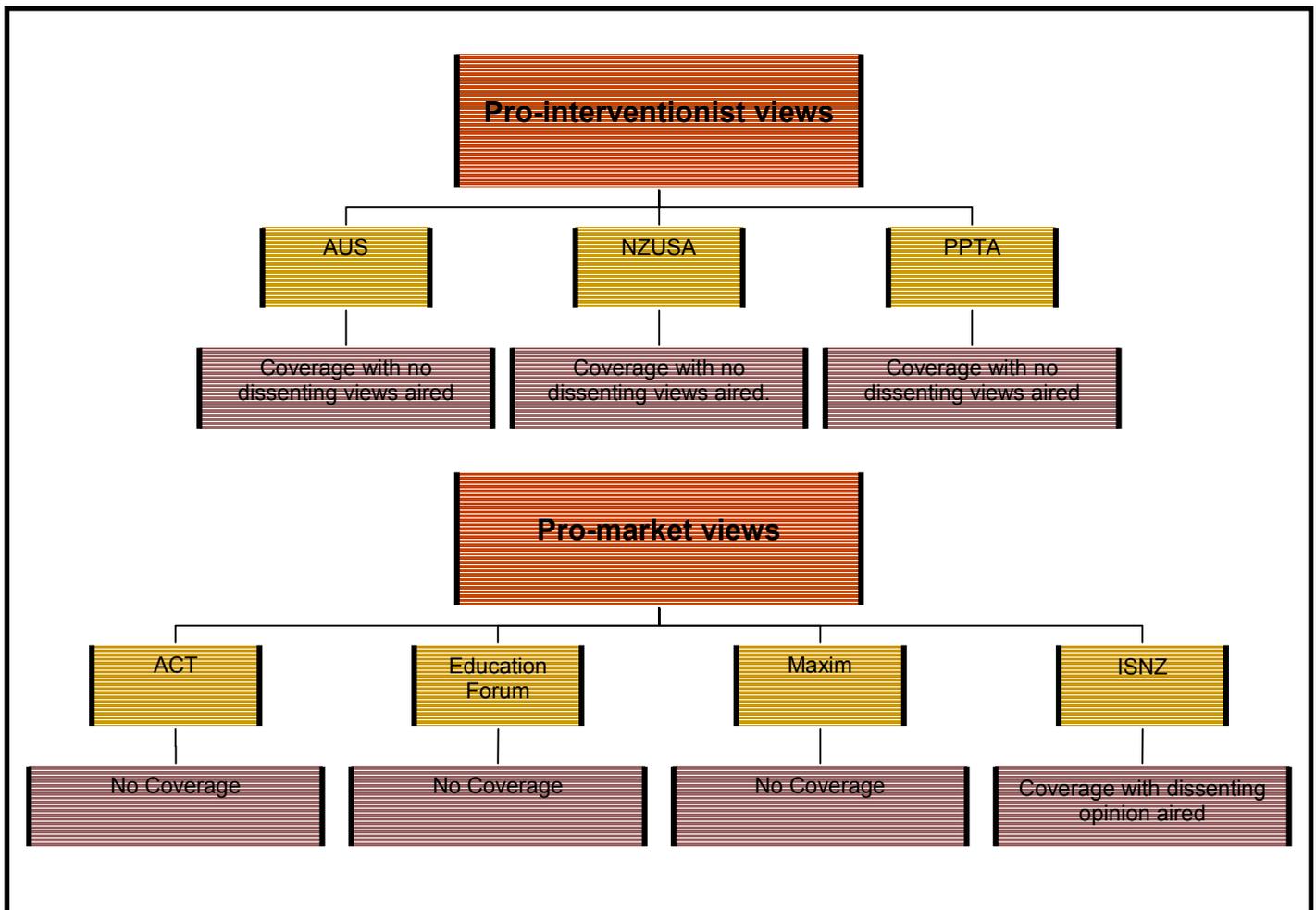
- Compared to other media, National Radio news favours pro-interventionist perspectives and under-represents pro-market voices.
- National Radio carries more perspectives from the government than other media.
- National Radio carries less perspectives from pro-market political groups and organisations than other media.

Analysis: Education Stories

During a six week period, specific attention was paid to National Radio's treatment of education stories. Releases by pro-interventionist and pro-market organisations were monitored, and their treatment compared.

There were two significant releases of research or announcements by pro-interventionist groups. Both were given full coverage with no dissenting opinions aired. Following a government announcement about tertiary funding, a pro-interventionist group was given air time, with no balancing time given to pro-market messages.

There were four significant releases of research or announcements by pro-market groups. Three of those were given no coverage. The fourth was covered, but a dissenting opinion (from a pro-interventionist group) was also aired.



The pro-interventionist messages:

On 2 September, the New Zealand Post Primary Teachers' Association Te Wehengarua (PPTA) released a report that argued for greater governmental funding of public schools.

Coverage: This item appeared high on every Morning Report news bulletin, plus a one-to-one live interview was aired with a PPTA spokesperson, plus a pre-recorded story was played in which the education correspondent presented the views of the Education Minister, a PPTA spokesperson, and a Wellington parent. No pro-market opinions were aired.

On 2 September, the Association of University Staff (AUS) announced that it was seeking a ten percent pay rise for staff.

Coverage: This item appeared high on every Morning Report news bulletin, plus a live discussion took place featuring an AUS spokesman and a University representative. No pro-market opinions were aired.

On 8 October, the the annual report to parliament on the student loan scheme revised downward the total debt students will owe by 2020.

Coverage: A compulsory student union representative was asked for comment. No pro-market opinions were aired.

The pro-market messages:

On 30 September, the Maxim Institute launched a book calling for the New Zealand curriculum to be rewritten.

Coverage: None.

On 9 October, ACT New Zealand launched a book based on my research, arguing for greater choice and competition in the schooling system.

Coverage: None.

On 12 September, Independent Schools of New Zealand (ISNZ) released a report that argued that funding for independent schools was not at an optimal level.

Coverage: Morning Report news bulletins, plus an on-air discussion that included both ISNZ chief executive and dissenting viewpoints, including John Minto of the Quality Public Education Coalition.

On October 14, four centre-right political parties in parliament hosted the Education Forum launch of a manifesto that argued for greater choice and competition in the schooling system. Press releases welcoming the publication were issued by Independent Schools of New Zealand, the National Party, ACT New Zealand and the Early Childhood Council.

Coverage: None.

Contact was made with each group that had delivered a pro-market message and gained no coverage. The groups had all sent an early copy of their publication and a press release to National Radio's Morning Report or to the education correspondent. None had been interviewed, indicating that there were no stories that had been spiked because of more important news. Each of the launches had been covered by other media, discounting the possibility that none of the stories was newsworthy. One organisation reported that:

[A staff member] rang Morning Report to ask if they would be interested in [our new publication]. A producer responded, "We've already read it", and hung up. At that stage, the publication had not been printed.⁴⁵

National Radio news files were searched for the terms "Education Forum" and "Early Childhood Council" to establish when each had last been quoted on-air.⁴⁶ The results:

On 2 February 2003, Morning Report reported the publication of a book by Education Forum's policy advisor Norman LaRocque. Coverage took the form of an on-air discussion between Mr LaRocque, the host, and a representative of the New Zealand University Student's Association (NZUSA). There were four news stories written. Two quoted Mr LaRocque. Two quoted the NZUSA spokesperson.

On 3 August 2002, the Early Childhood Council was mentioned in a weekend news bulletin on National Radio. The report stated that the Council warned "the government's desire to have parents involved in the governance of privately-run early childhood centres, could lead to closures".

Presence of bias

This analysis indicates the presence of bias by story selection, bias by the selection of sources and bias by spin.

Bias by story selection and bias by selection of sources

Bias by story selection is a pattern of highlighting news stories that coincide with a certain ideology or political agenda while ignoring stories that may challenge that agenda or ideology.⁴⁷

Conceivably, an argument could be made that stories from unions should gain greater coverage because they represent more people than pro-market organisations. While

⁴⁵ Email from employee of pro-market organisation to authors, 12 October 2003

⁴⁶ Maxim was excluded from this search because Paul Henderson's book was its first major education publication. ACT New Zealand was excluded because my book was the first education-specific publication by the political party since the previous election.

⁴⁷ These definitions of bias have been used by numerous authors. See, for example: Ed. Bozell, LB and Baker, BH, 'And That's The Way It Isn't: A Reference Guide to Media Bias', Media Research Center, 1990

this argument does have some merit, it is clear that balance cannot be measured by counting the number of people represented by a single viewpoint. If that were the case, then Norm Withers – author of the enormously popular referendum on sentencing – would be expected to be given more air-time than most politicians. Further, measuring the constituency of a think tank or research group is difficult, though the electoral success of political parties that have espoused pro-market messages indicates that these groups are being under-represented in National Radio education coverage.

This argument also makes the appearance of John Minto of QPEC in an Independent Schools of New Zealand report very puzzling. The Quality Public Education Coalition (Inc) is a small-scale, pro-interventionist lobby group which does not appear to have a large constituency.

Bias by the selection of sources is a pattern of including more sources who support one view over another.

In this case, a pro-interventionist (John Minto) was given an opportunity to comment on the sole pro-market message that was given air-time (the Independent Schools report). The same did not occur when pro-interventionist messages were presented as news.

The same treatment occurred on the last occasion that pro-market lobby group the Education Forum attained coverage: National Radio presented a student union perspective to counter the pro-market message. This ‘balance’ does not, apparently, extend to pro-interventionist stories.

In this case, bias appears to be the only explanation for the combined lack of coverage of pro-market messages and full coverage of pro-interventionist messages

Bias by spin

One story featuring a pro-interventionist message was selected for further examination, to discover if bias by spin was present.

Bias by spin is a pattern of emphasising the aspects of a news story favourable to one side, without noting aspects favourable to others – or giving one interpretation of what an event means, while giving little or no time or space to explaining other mainstream interpretations.

This is how the news story was played on the 8am bulletin:

[Morning Report news presenter]: More than 40% of secondary schools are unable to balance their books, and principals say they are struggling to meet day to day costs.

A new paper on education funding says schools now rely excessively on locally raised funds, parental donations and foreign fee-paying students.

Here’s our education correspondent, Gael Woods.

[Education correspondent]: The paper, prepared by the Post Primary Teachers Association for its conference later this month, says schools' reliance on parents for funding is further eroding children's' access to free education.

The PPTA says locally-raised funds increased by more than 170 percent between 1992 and 2001.

It says without that non-government money, schools would be operating with either massive deficits or would be forced to slash spending to the bone.

The PPTA is calling for an independent investigation into the true funding needs of schools.

The pro-interventionist interpretation of the research – that government needed to inject more money into taxpayer-funded schools – was given ample coverage. There was no acknowledgement of other interpretations (eg the funding that is currently being spent on education is being misdirected, and schools need greater control of their own budgets).

The same lack of balance had occurred at 7.21am, when Morning Report aired the following story, featuring the views of “a Wellington parent”, the Minister of Education, and the PPTA:

[Morning Report host] More than 40 percent of secondary schools are unable to balance their books and many principals say they are struggling simply to meet day-to-day costs.

A new paper on education funding by the Post Primary Teachers Association says schools now rely excessively on locally raised community funds, parental donations and foreign fee-paying students. Here's education correspondent Gael Woods.

[Education correspondent] A Wellington parent Irene Wilson, whose youngest daughter is off to high school next year, has been counting up the cost of a “free” education.

[Irene Wilson] “I was just adding it all up last night and got a bit of a fright really. I know there's an outlay of about \$450 for the school fees, which include old girls' association and IT, but I was a little horrified when I added up the uniform costs – that is assuming that I don't buy second-hand and I was looking at a basic uniform cost of \$952 not including summer or winter shoes.”

[Education correspondent] And she says that's only the beginning.

[Irene Wilson] “On top of that I understand there's a Year Nine camp. As yet I have no idea as to the fees of that but I've heard (laugh) that they are going to further a field places than my time and I imagine the costs will be up of \$100, at least.”

[Education correspondent] The PPTA says parental contributions and other locally raised funds increased by more than 170% between 1992 and 2001. It says without that non-Government money, schools would be operating with massive deficits or would be forced to slash spending to the bone. The PPTA president Phil Smith says the concept of free education is dead and buried:

[Phil Smith] "I think it's part of a wider debate we need to have about education in terms of going back to that principle and saying, you know, we want a free secular education and why aren't we getting it? Why are schools having to rely on overseas students? Why are they having to raise lots and lots of local funds to pay for basic needs in a school when it should be getting paid for out of Vote Education?"

[Education correspondent] Still toting up next year's bill, Irene Wilson agrees that free education just doesn't exist:

[Irene Wilson] "My daughter's very keen to do rowing next year. Having had one daughter already go through rowing, I went back to look at the costs. The fees for the year are \$200 plus an extra \$500 to get them to the yearly [inaudible] event, and then the training camps are \$175 plus you've got your ongoing costs of just getting to and from regattas – several of which are in Wanganui.

[Education correspondent] The Minister of Education Trevor Mallard says parental donations and fees paid by overseas students have replaced school galas and working bees over past 20 years.

[Trevor Mallard] "In the past, parents used to do a lot more work in the maintenance of schools, raising funds for projects, running galas, and did a lot more voluntary work. Our culture now is less voluntary and more pay, and while I frankly don't think that's a great thing, it is just really one of the facts of life now".

[Education correspondent] The facts of life, according to Irene Wilson who has even more to pay:

[Irene Wilson] "Once they get to the 5th form, I thought, I have just paid fees for my 15-year-old son of \$175 to sit NCEA and then at the 7th form level nearly \$200 to sit Bursary, so that is still ahead of me as a yearly basis on top of regular school fees."

[Education correspondent] Mr Mallard isn't worried about the number of schools currently running deficits.

[Trevor Mallard] "I'm concerned if the figure gets, say, higher than 50 percent and I'm very concerned at schools who run deficits for more than two years. But I don't expect schools to run at big profits and if they make small losses, that's not something I'm concerned about."

[Education correspondent] Over the past ten years, per-student grants to schools have increased by almost 30% but the PPTA says during that time, expenditure has risen by almost 43%, with the extra costs being met through local funding. The union's calling for an independent investigation into the funding schools need to deliver what the government expects. Meanwhile, Irene Wilson is still doing her sums...

[Irene Wilson] "Then of top of that, you have a \$49 fee which is just part of the beginning of the year, and those are the compulsory items (fade out)..."

[Education correspondent] For Morning Report, Gael Woods.

Again, a pro-interventionist spin was given prominent air time, with an absence of any pro-market messages. Other voices that could have been included in the story include:

An opposition political party's education spokesperson

A representative of a pro-market education lobby group (such as Education Forum)

A principal or teacher who wasn't member of the PPTA

Parents whose children were attending lower decile schools⁴⁸

Boards of Trustees

The presence of more voices would have lent greater credibility to the item, and to National Radio's education correspondent.

A live interview took place at 8.20am between the Morning Report host and Russell Trethewey, principal of Palmerston North's Freyberg High School and chair of the PPTA's Principal's Council. The questions asked by Morning Report were:

For a school in a poorer area, just how bad is the funding shortfall right now?

Are schools and their operational grants at present – secondary schools – given enough money to do the basics, without extracurricular activity?

Are schools therefore – some schools – not doing the basics?

Well just how much burden falls on parents, then?

So what you're telling us really, in basic terms, is that we have a secondary education system which is inadequately funded, and some kids are missing out on what should be the basics of an education in this country?

So in essence you're saying, quite simply, more money is needed?

⁴⁸ An assumption is made that the parent featured in the National Radio item is a middle-class Wellingtonian whose children are attending high decile schools. This is taken from cues such as the 'old girls' association', the availability of rowing at the school, and the interviewee's address.

You don't think there are any more efficiencies left in the system?

Although the depth of questioning is shallow, of more concern is the apparent assumption by the host that the pro-interventionist message being espoused by the PPTA amounted to fact. The range of questions meant that the principal was presented as an 'expert' who could provide insight into issues such as whether there was inefficiency in the entire education budget, whether schools he had no responsibility for were able to meet the needs of their communities, and how parents around the country were feeling.

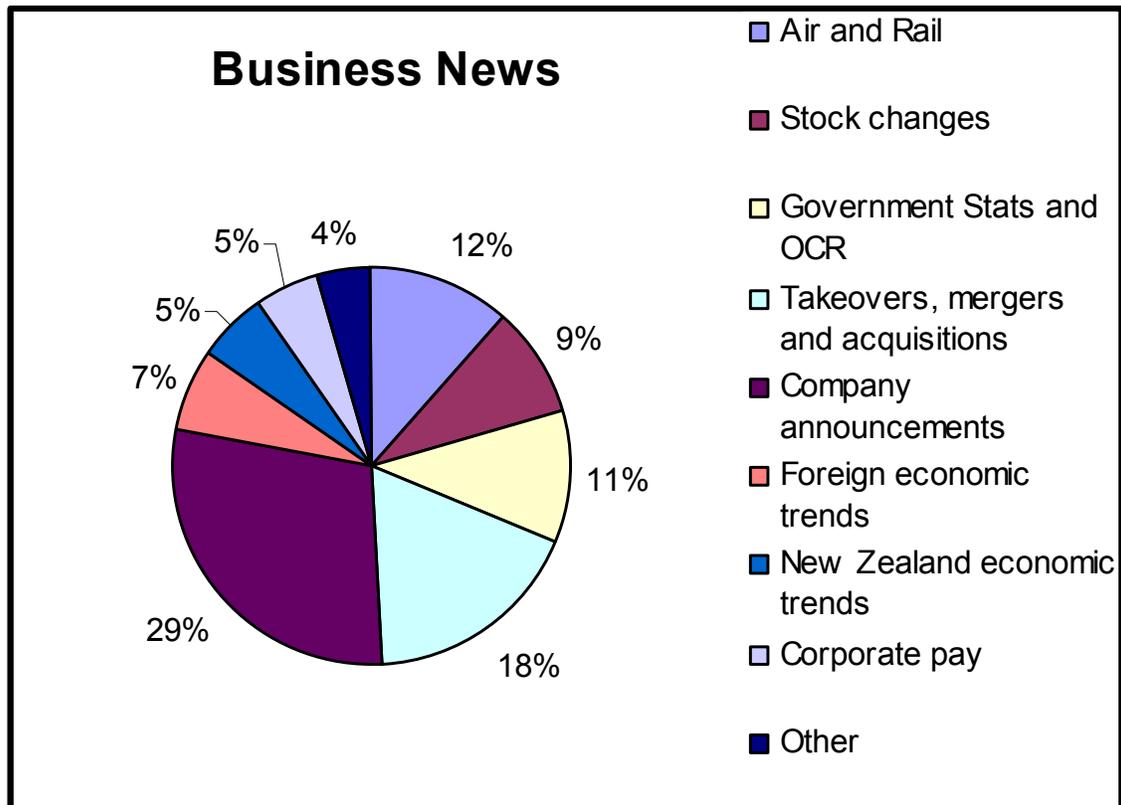
Findings

- There is bias present in National Radio's treatment of education stories.
- Pro-interventionist stories and perspectives are clearly favoured.
- When pro-market perspectives appear in a news story or on an interview programme, they are countered by pro-interventionist voices. In comparison, pro-interventionist voices are not countered.
- The education correspondent seems to have good links to many pro-interventionist organisations within the sector, but lacks connections to pro-market organisations⁴⁹ who believe that bias exists.
- A lack of understanding of pro-market messages may explain their absence from news stories, but is not an acceptable excuse for a public service broadcaster.

⁴⁹ This includes organisations featured in this story, and others that were consulted.

Case Study: Business News

This study was based on an analysis of twenty-one National Radio business news bulletins which featured 113 news stories.⁵⁰ The stories could be divided into clear themes:



The National Radio business news producers appear to have taken a narrow view of their mission. They measure business largely on the terms of individual companies, using press releases (and little else) as their source material. Thus the focus is on corporate announcements, takeovers, mergers and acquisitions.

This focus leads to superficial coverage with few insights. There is no attempt to provide the public with an understanding of business views on issues of national importance, such as legislation that the government was considering (or passing) at the time.

It is difficult to determine whether the broadcasts are intended to be 'business news for business people', or 'business news for the general public'. There appears to be a mixture of stories intended for both audiences – this is confusing, and means that neither possible audience is well-catered for.

⁵⁰ A period of nine days was chosen so that the treatment of stories could be mapped over time. The bulletins (three per week day) were from September 1 – September 9.

Some items are irrelevant to a New Zealand audience, and could lead to an impression that the broadcasters were padding their coverage. An example:

German luxury car maker Daimler Chrysler signed a two billion dollar deal to build Mercedes cars and trucks in China to supply the world's fastest growing market. The aim is to produce 25,000 luxury cars a year, enough to corner 10 percent of the sector.

Of 113 items, only two stories dealt with international trade. One of these only quoted a government minister. No opposition members of parliament were quoted in any stories.

An item on a corporate governance survey by the Securities Commission failed to present the pro-market viewpoint on introducing corporate governance regulations.

During the period analysed, there was only one appearance by a representative business organisation – the Auckland Chamber of Commerce. Business New Zealand and the New Zealand Business Roundtable – the two largest groups of this nature – were not represented in any stories.

Only one story in the entire period attempted to explore the effects of new government regulation on a business.

Findings

- National Radio's Business News fails to meet the organisation's Charter obligation to provide "broadcasting services of a high standard" that meet the needs of "varied interests within the community".
- The show is extremely limited in scope, resulting in shallow coverage of the business world.
- Pro-market voices appear under-represented, while government perspectives are over-represented.
- The show focuses too heavily on the focus is on corporate announcements, takeovers, mergers, acquisitions and government press statements.

Case Study: Mediawatch

Mediawatch is a weekly 24-minute show aired on Sundays. Its website⁵¹ states:

Mediawatch takes a weekly look at the stuff that surrounds us – print, radio, television and the Internet. We examine questions of journalistic ethics and media law, analyse media perspectives and deliver the news about the news at home and abroad.

As well as listening to four weeks of Mediawatch audio, I accessed the show archives online. It is upon these archives that much of this case-study is based.⁵²

The Mediawatch format is flexible. The presenter attempts to grapple issues of media ownership, technological advances, media trends and ethics, and appointments.

If, as I submit, a public service broadcaster must achieve an even higher level of impartiality and objectivity than other broadcasters (due to the medium's public ownership and established vulnerability to political bias), then it follows that a media analysis programme that attempts to examine others' ethics has even higher hurdles to overcome.

I posed three simple questions:

1. Does the team behind Mediawatch represent a broad spectrum of views?
2. Do guests represent a broad range of views on the media – and are different interpretations and philosophical viewpoints given equal weight?
3. Does Mediawatch provide listeners with probing, rigorous and extensive coverage of the news industry and its practices – in other words, does it meet the Charter objective of providing “programming of the highest quality”?

The team behind Mediawatch

Does the team behind Mediawatch represent a broad spectrum of views on the media?

The presenter of Mediawatch is Russell Brown. Brown keeps a weblog, ‘Hard News’. After the election of a Labour-Alliance government in 2000, he wrote:

A caller... this week reckoned Hard News oughtn't be called Hard News because I'm going soft on the government. If that means I like this government a lot better than the last one, then I'm guilty, sir.

I know some people would rather have Jenny Shipley, Max Bradford, Murray McCully, Roger Sowry and Lockwood Smith running things, but I am not among

⁵¹ <http://www.mediawatch.co.nz>

⁵² While I acknowledge the limitations of basing research on a website that supplements the weekly radio show, I felt that the greater depth of data available would make this a useful exercise.

them. If you want Maori-bashing, bile and spite, read NBR - although the latest Nielsen numbers suggest hardly anybody is doing that these days.⁵³

Brown does not appear to be well disposed to pro-market politicians or their messages. Although his prolific writing displays an effort on occasion to understand a pro-market perspective, often it tends toward baser comments: National is a party of “smug bigots”, Dr Muriel Newman is “appalling”, and “goodwill seems like a big ask in a world where Richard Prebble still gets airtime”.

The “chief contributor” to Mediawatch is Tom Frewen. The Mediawatch website states that Frewen has “a particular interest in the theory and practice of public broadcasting”. From a brief search of Frewen’s published work and views, it appears his interest veers toward quite strong views on the topic. In an article for Friends of Public Broadcasting, he wrote:

The reasons for our commercial television becoming worse than in any other country apart from the United States are two politicians Maurice Williamson and Bill Birch.

Williamson was the National Government's broadcasting minister from 1990 to 1996 an easy convert to happy-clappy free market fundamentalism. His blind faith in the market as an apolitical mechanism for delivering "choice" prevented him from seeing that the theory only works in the large, densely-populated societies from which it evolved. Its application in New Zealand, with small, scattered regional markets unable to afford their own minority-interest broadcasting, has been a cultural disaster....

While Williamson demolished regulatory barriers to foreign ownership of television and radio, Birch was preparing them for sale. The decline in TVNZ's esteem as a public broadcaster dates from 1993 when Birch took over from Ruth Richardson as finance minister and revived the drive for privatisation of state assets.... [Birch and officials have] settled for getting rid of the public broadcasting fee. Just how they plan to do it will be revealed in the Budget on May 20. But the reaction, if any, will reveal whether public broadcasting will survive this government's attempt to destroy it over the past decade.⁵⁴

There are two other members of the Mediawatch team: a producer and a journalist. Neither has written as extensively as Brown and Frewen. While their CVs were taken into account for the subsequent analysis of depth of experience, there was not enough data to accurately establish their political viewpoints.

⁵³ <http://nznews.net.nz/hardnews/2000/20001006.html>

⁵⁴ Frewen, T, Friends of Public Broadcasting newsletter, Vol 9, No 1, 'Why We Need A Non-commercial Television Channel', May 1999

The presence of strong political views does not necessarily mean that either Brown or Frewen is biased. I welcome the strength of their views. It is the lack of diversity in this show that presents a problem. There are pro-market media commentators: the National Business Review, which has never been accused of being a bastion of pro-interventionism, has published a media analysis column since 1989. No pro-market commentators are associated with Mediawatch.

A researcher recently asked Paul Thompson, the editor of The Press, for his views on Mediawatch. He responded in part, “[A media monitoring show needs] someone who asks tough questions, but also knows something about the reality of running a media business.”⁵⁵ I agree with Thompson. Although Frewen and Brown have a wealth of experience in public broadcasting, punditry and information technology journalism, they lack a perspective on other aspects of the media. This is not something that can be overcome without revisiting the make-up of the team behind the programme, and lends to superficial and shallow media analysis.

Guests’ views

Do guests represent a broad range of views on the media – and are different interpretations and philosophical viewpoints given equal weight?

There is more diversity among guests than staff. This is largely because of the presence of a “Comment” section, which operates like the op-ed page of a newspaper. Various journalists and media commentators have taken advantage of the soapbox that the forum provides, including libertarian broadcaster Lindsay Perigo.

If the “Comment” section is removed from analysis, Mediawatch is found to provide a lot less diversity. Although representatives of commercial media organisations are relatively well-represented, there appears to be a bias toward pro-interventionist perspectives.

More questions arise. Where are the interviews with politicians who allege that National Radio has a political bias? Where are the interviews with media commentators from business journalism? Where are the interviews with those who believe broadcasting is not a public good?

Quality of coverage

Does Mediawatch provide listeners with probing, rigorous and extensive coverage of the news industry and its practices – in other words, does it meet the Charter objective of providing “programming of the highest quality”?

⁵⁵ Dunbar, Jane, Can we talk about the news? A discussion of media criticism in New Zealand, New Zealand Journalism Monograph, Published by the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Canterbury, 2002

New Zealand Herald editor-in-chief Gavin Ellis has stated that Mediawatch “exhibits signs of imbalance and lacks an in-depth knowledge of the media it criticises”.

I agree. Mediawatch rarely reaches above shallow commenting or glib reporting of weekly media occurrences. This comment by the show’s chief contributor is typical:

The big thing about the New Zealand news media is that there are a lot of media but not much news.

Real news, that is, disasters, catastrophes, scandals and genuinely surprising revelations.

So, on a daily basis, the main challenge for reporters and editors is the filling of blank space with stuff that looks like news.

That is reported opinion, or more often these days, reported emotion. Anger, for instance, is often used to dramatise an opinion and give it substance. Words like fury also make a better headline.

One irony is that the comment itself does not rise above “reported emotion”. Another is that a show that spends so much time investigating the phenomenon of ‘advertorial’ on commercial media fails to adequately outline whether the comment is Frewen’s own, or a comment (and therefore editorial stance) by Mediawatch. However, the chief concern with this commentary is its sheer banality. It is neither sophisticated nor probing – it is difficult to see how programming of this calibre achieves Radio New Zealand Charter obligations.

For its supposedly wide ambit, the show focuses a lot of attention on political stories. This clearly represents the interests of the presenter and chief contributor, if not other staff. In such stories, the presenter occasionally drifts toward political commentary.

Quite often, Mediawatch exhibits a subtle bias against commercial broadcasting (as opposed to public service broadcasting). One example of this bias was exhibited when the presenter interviewed a former commercial radio employee:

Newstalk's news operation comes from a public service background. Does what we've heard this week from Paul Holmes, and the general drift, suggest that it's moving away from that?

The comment, “what we’ve heard this week from Paul Holmes”, was a reference to Holmes’ widely-attacked comment on commercial radio that Kofi Annan was a “cheeky darkie”. The underlying assumption the presenter is making is that such a comment would not be made on a public service broadcaster.

As examined in an earlier section, the Mediawatch team lacks an in-depth knowledge of many of the forms of media it criticises. It has large blind spots – a search of show archives reveals the show almost never examines business journalism. The presenter

has explained in a magazine article that he perceives a gulf exists between journalists and businesspeople:

It might not qualify as a non sequitur or even a contradiction in terms, but there is always a little irony about business journalism. Journalists, on the whole, do not make great businesspeople.⁵⁶

Very rarely are major business news scoops or examples of business reporting noted by Mediawatch.

Findings

- Mediawatch is limited in scope and breadth
- The show fails to provide rigorous, extensive coverage of many aspects of the news industry
- The show lacks a diversity of experience and perspectives.

⁵⁶ Modestly does it: Why small risks are better than big ones on the internet, Russell Brown, Tuesday, 1 May, 2001, Unlimited Magazine

Findings and Recommendations

Radio New Zealand engages in political debate

As a crown-owned organisation, Radio New Zealand leaves itself open to accusations of political bias by allowing its premises to be used for Ministerial announcements of a political nature, and by publishing anti-market views on its website and in corporate documents. It is in breach of its Charter requirement to be “independent”.

Recommendation 1 The organisation must not join political debate. The strongest method of presenting a case for public service broadcasting is by meeting its Charter obligations of comprehensive and independent programming.

Recommendation 2 Premises and functions should not be used for political announcements of any kind.

Recommendation 3 .The company website and corporate documents should not contain any material advancing political arguments.

National Radio lacks organisational diversity

Radio New Zealand is a politically narrow, non-diverse organisation which is unrepresentative and skewed clearly toward pro-interventionism. National Radio lacks a single presenter with clear, pro-market views. There is a lack of diversity among regular guests selected by the company. It is in breach of several Charter requirements, including the overarching obligation to provide “comprehensive” services of a high quality, and requirements to meet the needs of “varied interests” in the community.

Recommendation 4 National Radio should aim to increase the diversity of key presenters, and have at least one clear pro-market voice..

Recommendation 5 National Radio should re-examine its selection of regular guests and aim to increase the diversity of philosophical views and backgrounds.

News and current affairs programmes are biased

National Radio news and current affairs programmes lack balance. Compared to other media, National Radio news favours pro-interventionist perspectives and under-represents pro-market voices.

National Radio carries more perspectives from the government than other media, and less perspectives from pro-market political groups and organisations than other media.

Recommendation 6 National Radio journalists should forge more links with pro-market organisations in their rounds.

Recommendation 7 News producers must pay more attention to monitoring whether balance of perspectives is provided, and greater balance must be a central goal of the news and current affairs teams.

Treatment of education stories is biased and partial

There is bias present in National Radio's treatment of education stories. Pro-interventionist stories and perspectives are clearly favoured.

When pro-market perspectives appear in a news story or on an interview programme, they are countered by pro-interventionist voices. In comparison, pro-interventionist voices are not countered.

The education correspondent seems to have good links to many pro-interventionist organisations within the sector, but lacks credibility with pro-market organisations, due to a (seemingly accurate) perception of bias from the correspondent or her organisation.

Recommendation 8 National Radio should pay special attention to extending its depth of talent in the reporting of education news stories, to reflect the presence of a diversity of voices that are currently ignored.

Recommendation 9 News producers must be instructed to ensure that pro-market and pro-interventionist perspectives are treated equally.

Treatment of Business News is of a low quality

National Radio's Business News is of a low standard and fails to meet the needs of "varied interests" within the community: two breaches of the Charter.

The show is extremely limited in scope, resulting in shallow coverage of the business world. Pro-market voices appear under-represented, while government perspectives are over-represented.

The show focuses too heavily on the focus is on corporate announcements, takeovers, mergers, acquisitions and government press statements.

Recommendation 10 Business News needs to provide a forum for more voices and a wider range of stories, rely less on press statements and corporate announcements, and lift standards of inquiry and reporting.

Mediawatch lacks diversity and balance

Mediawatch is limited in scope and breadth. The show fails to provide rigorous, extensive coverage of many aspects of the news industry, therefore amounting to a breach of Charter obligations of "quality" and "comprehensive" coverage. The show lacks a diversity of perspectives and presenters, as well as expertise and breadth of scope.

Recommendation 11 The diversity of talent should be expanded to represent a broader range of media experience, as well as a more representative cross-section of views. Mediawatch should focus on improving its coverage of under-represented areas of the industry – in particular, business journalism.