'Don't rock the boat'
Pervasive precarity and industrial inertia among Queensland journalists

Abstract: While considerable academic attention has been paid to the effect of industry turbulence on journalists' perceptions of their professional identity and the normative values of journalism over the past two decades, there has been less focus on how transformations wrought by digital incursion, corporate economising, and the rise of neoliberal ideologies might have injured journalist's industrial agency. This article argues that journalists' willingness to assert or advance their industrial rights at work has been diminished in Australia by the increase in precarity that has arisen as a result of shifts in the media landscape. It argues disruption has created precarious working environments in which uncertainty and fear drive an unprecedented and almost universal sense of self-preservation that has detached journalists from industrial engagement and the mechanisms that support safe and secure working conditions—to the detriment of the journalism industry and the public it serves.

Keywords: Australia, collectivism, digital disruption, fourth estate, industrial relations, journalism, MEAA, precarity, Queensland, unions, workers' rights.

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Introduction

THE JOURNALISM industry has faced rapid and seismic changes over the past two decades that have reshaped the professional and occupational practices of its practitioners. While journalism has always been at the mercy of market forces and technological change, the pace, scale and impact of those changes since the turn of the millennium have had consequences on an unprecedented scale. Mass layoffs, masthead closures and the demands of digital first publishing, the 24/7 news cycle, multi-skilling, social media and audience metrics, among other things, have created a news media ecosystem where journalists are frequently expected to do more for little (if any) extra pay. It is an environment where injurious and exploitative conditions such as long hours, poor remuneration and poor training, coupled with work/life bleed and expectations to self-skill and self-brand are often dismissed as simply *de rigueur* for contemporary journalism work.

This article is drawn from research examining the perceptions of a select,

but broadly representative, group of Queensland journalists in relation to their industrial literacy and their capacity to effect change in the workplace in Australia. It reveals that a pervasive sense of precarity among working journalists is a significant factor in their reluctance to demand compliance with, or advancement of, their workplace rights. This sense of precarity is strongly linked to instability and change in the industry over the past two decades and their fear of being sacked or blacklisted or suffering career stagnation within an extremely competitive job market. The research suggests the result is a workforce practised in self-preservation, underpinned by a combination of fear and professional pride, that normalises injurious or exploitative working conditions. As a workforce, journalists are thus industrially disempowered and disengaged from the very instruments and processes that might offer relief, including the journalists' trade union.

None of this serves journalists or the industry well. A workforce that lacks industrial will or courage cannot negotiate or advocate for the industrial infrastructure that supports good journalism—such as adequate staff levels, training, representation, or resources.

Literature

There is a significant body of research that acknowledges deficiencies in the employment conditions of working journalists in the trans-Tasman region, particularly with respect to salaries, workloads and unpaid or undervalued overtime. Australian research over the past two decades from the likes of Zion et al. (2016) and O'Donnell (2017) point to corporate cost-cutting, increased workload demands, social media expectations, the 24/7 news-cycle, new technologies, and role recalibrations as the root causes of declining conditions. Zion et al. attribute a 'rapid downturn in journalism wages in full-time positions' to the 'industry trend to produce news at lower costs, such as Fairfax's offshore outsourcing of editing functions to Pagemasters in New Zealand (Christensen, 2014)' while also acknowledging 'anecdotal Australian media reports about the decline in remuneration to freelancers (Buckingham-Jones & Ward, 2015)' (2016, p. 131). Karen Meehan makes similar observations in her research on self-employed journalists, noting they endure 'poor work conditions, isolation, slippery contractual arrangements and inconsistent rates of pay' (2001, p. 107). Meehan argues this creates cheap labour which also jeopardises the job security and work conditions of salaried employees. Molloy and Bromley's study of young online journalists highlights concerns over 'heavy workloads, insufficient training and uncertainty about roles' (2009, p. 79) while Neilson's New Zealand study identifies the pressure on journalists to engage in 'unpaid or under-compensated' (2018, p. 549) digital labour (social media, online engagement) to retain jobs or improve future employment prospects.

These work conditions and labour practices are exploitative or injurious. The term exploitation in this research is used in a moral sense, more suggestive of misuse than use. While acknowledging the term's roots in Marxist theories around workers selling their labour for less than its value, it shifts focus to the actions of the exploiter using someone unfairly for their own advantage (Wood, 1995). This study also uses the word injurious to describe labour practices which cause injury. In this context injury can also be applied more broadly to non-material artefacts including knowledge or rights, not unlike its use in law (FWC, 2018).

Union rights and collectivism

At last count there were 5,500 unionised journalists in Australia, including 1,400 who classify themselves as freelancers (MEAA, 2017). This is a relatively small percentage in an industry that in the 2016 Census boasted 14,000 practitioners (Fisher et al., 2020), yet it is on par with broader national trade union figures in that it represents a membership in steady decline. Trade union membership in Australia has fallen significantly over the past two decades, a situation well documented by scholars (Bray, Macneil & Spiess, 2021; Curtin, 2019), political analysts (Bishop & Chan, 2019) and the Australian media itself (Bonyhady, 2020; Bowden, 2017). In the early 1980s about half the Australian workforce was unionised, but by 2020 it was estimated that only 12.7 percent of men and 15.9 percent of women counted themselves as members (ABS, 2020). At an industry level, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) lost 31 percent of its membership between 2003 and 2017 (Gilfilian & McGann, 2018), with membership particularly low among young journalists who generally consider unions outdated (O'Donnell, 2021).

Dorney (2018) attributes falling union membership to legislative changes to labour laws and industrial relations; the increase in part-time and casual employment and technological and organisational change. Other analysts and scholars (Bray & Macneil, 2011; Cooper et al., 2009) point to the Howard government's introduction of individual Australian Workplace Agreements in 1996 and the attempted overhaul of the industrial relations system via the WorkChoices legislation in 2005 as key causes.[1] They argue this anti-union agenda caused irreparable damage to worker powerbases by creating a cohort of individuals whose wages and working conditions were no longer tethered collectively to that of their colleagues.

Industrial inertia and the impact on good journalism

An examination of journalists' working conditions, perceptions of precarity and their industrial agency offers plenty to unpack at a practitioner level, including but not limited to the impact on their physical and psychological health, and their material wellbeing. But there are also implications for the potency and

integrity of the wider profession. This article argues that the workforce's capacity to fulfill its Fourth Estate obligations and produce robust journalism, generally considered matters of professional practice, should also be considered through an industrial frame.

Henrick Örnebring (2018) maintains that quality journalism is contingent on having an empowered, secure journalistic workforce, and argues the connection between precarity and quality reporting needs greater attention. He claims: 'Many of the key concepts and heuristics that journalists used to describe and make sense of their work (e.g. professionalism, objectivity, democratic role and verification) are contingent on a high degree of contractual stability' (2018, pp. 109-110). Nick Davies (2009) asserts that tensions around deskilling and excessive workloads for example, are compromising good journalism practice including the basics like cultivating sources, fact checking and independent truth seeking. Other scholars and analysts (Carr, 2014; Dwyer, Wilding & Koskie, 2021; Hayes & Silke, 2019; Murtha, 2015; Tandoc & Thomas, 2015) argue Fourth Estate imperatives are under attack from web metrics and payment models that link a journalist's job security or financial compensation to online traffic or engagement. They argue it encourages journalists to favour click- or cash- generating content over stories less likely to attract traffic, which can include labour intensive, but critical, investigative reportage. The MEAA, meanwhile, in its submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Future of Public Interest Journalism addressed logistics, arguing 'there just aren't enough journalists available to report on what needs to be covered in order to have an informed society' (MEAA, 2017, p. 8).

Methodology

A semi-structured focus group methodology was adopted for this study drawing on Morgan's assertion that 'the hallmark of focus groups is their explicit use of the group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group' (1997, p. 2). However, the 'unconscious competence' (Dwyer, 1996, p. 16) of the journalist participants, necessitated recalibration of the standard focus group structure, resulting in a 'co-active' construction that leveraged the research cohort's natural curiosity and interviewing expertise to encourage cross questioning in a multi-interviewer format.[2] The co-active approach allowed the researcher to steer proceedings and put participants in the role of content experts who not only fuelled discussion but actively engaged in questioning. Furthermore, insider knowledge acquired over 20 years as a professional journalist allowed the researcher to draw on shared understandings to grease the wheels of conversation.

Sampling and data collection

A total of 13 Queensland working journalists were interviewed in five focus

groups—two conducted online and three face-to-face. While focus groups of between four and 12 are generally considered standard for communications and media research (Krueger & Casey, 2014; Morgan, 2019), there are studies in this field (Fitzsimmons & Smith-Frigerio, 2020; Park, Freeman & Middleton, 2019; Wei-Ern, 2019) which have successfully used groups of this size to extract rich qualitative data.

Multi-purpose, maximum-variation sampling techniques were used over three stages to select the bulk of the participant group. The researcher then used snowball recruiting to secure additional participants to ensure a representative sample across seven fields: gender, age, cultural identification, employment roles, career stage, work locality and work medium.[3]

Each participant was assigned an alphanumeric identifier and was categorised for comparative purposes as either an owner-operator who produces content for their own publishing or broadcast platforms; a permanent worker employed under either award or contract; a freelancer who engages in freelance work by design, or an irregular worker who undertakes backfill, locum and short-term work until they can secure more stable employment.

Five focus group sessions were conducted, recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted manually rather than digitally owing to the qualitative nature of the research and the loosely structured co-active interview method. Eight data sets were identified, including three of which were relevant to this article: Exploitation, Precarity, and Industrial Agency.

Findings and discussion

The focus group interviews elicited three key findings:

- That the sense of precarity is pervasive across employment arrangements, even those which might be considered traditionally stable.
- That this sense of precarity and uncertainty drives an unprecedented sense of self-preservation that contributes to forbearance of injurious or exploitative working conditions.
- That this sense of self-preservation has detached journalists from industrial engagement and external mechanisms that support and advocate fair, safe and sustainable working conditions.

This study concludes that journalism and its Fourth Estate mandate are poorly served by a precarious and industrially disempowered workforce and that a workforce that is secure, properly remunerated and properly resourced is better placed to produce good journalism.

Exploitation and injurious work

The journalists interviewed for this research had all experienced exploitative or injurious working conditions. Workload pressures and the failure to acknowledge the impact of high performance demands in a heavily scrutinised environment

was the issue most discussed by the focus group members. For salaried workers the charge centred around quantitative content demands and multi-platform production, or, put simply, the push for content to be produced faster, in greater quantity and in more formats. Several respondents said they did not have enough time to produce content as comprehensive or expansive as they would like. Some respondents suggested workload pressures were pushing good journalists out of the industry, including both later-career practitioners unable or unwilling to keep pace with technological and delivery changes and new-starters expected to perform like seasoned practitioners straight out of the gate.

For freelance and irregular workers workload pressures manifest as the need to manage multiple projects and be adaptable and flexible to meet the expectations of an increasingly competitive market swollen by securely employed journalists engaging in 'side-hustles' to build personal brands outside their newsrooms. The low rates of freelance pay meant that securing enough work to earn a living wage often meant taking on workloads which, in addition to content production, might also involve self-funded, own time training or drafting pitches and briefs with no guarantee of a contract.

> **J13:** I feel like we're constantly taken for granted, that (adapting to change, upskilling) is part of the job, and (we're not) paid anymore for it or even acknowledged for it, you know?

The companion issue to workloads was the normalisation of work-life crossover. Of all the issues, work-life bleed was the one most readily dismissed as being simply part of the job' and yet, based on the discussions, it was also one of the most likely to have an adverse effect on wellbeing. Respondents reported fatigue, stress, headaches, difficulty sleeping, relationship strain, parental guilt, anxiety and burnout linked to excessive hours. One of the more common threads in conversations around work-life bleed, was the matter of out-of-hours online engagement. The pressure to perform online and the pervasiveness of measurable metrics was a common theme regardless of employment arrangement. Journalists working in structured newsrooms were most likely to speak of clicks, likes and comments, while freelancers and owner-operators tended to reference subscriber and follower metrics. On the surface metrics as a gauge for audience engagement seems benign enough, and while there are professional concerns around content prioritisation, the industrial reality is that securing acceptable metrics is not only a highly competitive, individualistic pursuit that undermines collective endeavours, it also requires the donation of significant unpaid personal time and is increasingly tethered to job security and employability.

> **J7:** You've got to have a guaranteed social media presence and a certain amount of followers… before you can be offered a gig these days. They

won't go, 'Okay, this is a good story.' They'll look at how many followers you've got.

While some work-life bleed was considered perfectly reasonable given the 24-hour nature of news, several participants were critical of the prevalence and pervasiveness of work intrusions and the normalisation of being 'always on' (J3).

> **J1:** Did you know at (my work), I have never once ever had an overtime request rejected. You just don't get told to put them in.

> **J3:** (T)here's never a stop and start…you've always sort of got to be on. And it bleeds a lot more. Like here we have a text group work message thing, it's all on our personal phones and literally you're getting text messages at all hours.

Journalists in permanent roles with rostered hours were more outspoken on work/life bleed than their freelance counterparts, possibly because rosters make it more conspicuous, or perhaps because unlike freelancers who are the apex beneficiaries of their own labour, the un- or underpaid labour of salaried employees ultimately benefits the employer. Even owner-operator participants admitted to working outside what might be considered normal working hours, despite arguably having greater autonomy over their time.

Journalists under pressure

Participants were clearly aware of the potentially injurious nature of these kinds of working conditions. The issue of mental health was raised in discussions of stress and burnout at one end and trauma and PTSD at the other. Burnout was viewed as a direct consequence of workplace practices and expectations that exploit a journalist's professional pride, work ethic, and fear of job loss or career stagnation. Almost all the journalists said they felt stressed beyond healthy levels throughout their career and said it was not uncommon to see stress affecting their colleagues.

> **J5:** The breakfast presenter I used to work with, she left basically after wanting to kill herself. She was an amazing journalist, amazing. (**J4:** Was that work burnout?) Yeah, 100 percent.

> **J1:** (You) get to a point that's like, well shit what do I do now? I can't keep doing this forever because physically, mentally, emotionally, socially... I don't feel like I can, and it's bad for you, you know?

Discussions around extreme mental health matters was particularly robust among late-career and veteran journalists, many of whom recalled seriously inadequate

mental health support in their early careers and had a work history that included, or continues to include, reporting traumatic events. The discussions among this cohort were remarkably frank, with one journalist breaking down completely as they discussed their own tipping point.

> **J11:** I've been seeing a therapist for about five years now. Not the same one, and on and off. But I've become a regular user in the last two years.

Precarity and the journalistic calling

The obvious question is why journalists put up with these conditions when there are avenues in industrial instruments and law that might offer support or recourse.

The research group rationalised their forbearance of exploitative or injurious conditions broadly through two frames—professional convention and fear-driven compliance. Under the convention frame, participants argued journalism is not, and has never been, a traditional nine-to-five job, asserting that poor conditions were *de rigueur* for the industry and a convention endured by generations of practitioners as simply a reality of journalism work. Several participants conceded that accepting and embracing these conventions made them complicit in their own exploitation, but justified this by describing journalism as a calling, with some stating that being a journalist was 'who they are' not 'what they are'. Ambition, the adrenaline rush of a good story and the satisfaction of a job well done were all raised as justifications for working beyond agreed workplace conditions.

> **J4:** There's nothing like the taste of blood. When you got one of the bastards on the ropes, it's like, I fucking gotcha, and I'm going to expose you for the rat that you are. You pulled 18-hour days, back-to-back, and you'll do it with joy because you got the bastards. You might only get that a few times in your career, but that can sustain years of the drudgery of little league football and the crap you don't care about. And then you hang on till the next one.

That being said, they also conceded that this mindset made them vulnerable to exploitation.

> **J13:** I think (professional) pride can be easily exploited. Our bosses know that. It's one thing to be dedicated, it's another thing to be exploited.

The compliance frame, by contrast, was underpinned by fear. All participants described the current journalism job market as being more competitive and precarious than a decade ago, feeding the fear that raising a grievance or asserting their workplace rights might jeopardise stable employment or career progression. In this sense, enduring poor conditions was a matter of self-preservation.

J7: (We're) afraid to lose jobs. If you piss-off two newsrooms, there's only one newsroom left in, Brisbane, really, because you wouldn't work for (channel x), you know. Also, there's the blacklist—we (freelancers) can get locked out of newsrooms; we can get blacklisted.

J3: I've seen stuff in different newsrooms … that lots of people are unhappy with and lots of people whinge about, but no one wants to stand up. I think it comes down to whether they feel like they have power or not.

For owner-operators the sense of precariousness grew from the vagaries of market forces and the real-life consequences of making poor returns from their own substantial financial and personal investment. These participants were acutely aware of their 'all or nothing' position.

J6: I've gone from being on a very nice income to at one stage not knowing how I was going to pay my rent. I was pretty much down to zero.… I haven't paid any superannuation for a year and a half. So, it's been quite worrying and stressful … particularly being a mum.

J9: You've got no fallback. It was extremely precarious (for me) because we really were sweating on everything going right… there is no other option, it's all over red rover... well I suppose I could always become a dishwasher.

The sense of insecurity pervading salaried journalists' conversations—a group who might usually feel insulated by their more secure positions—was palpable. Their sense of security was often contingent on being able to perform despite excessive workloads and stress, 'not rocking the boat' and, in some cases, not claiming rightful entitlements like overtime payments. They feared being thrust back into a super-saturated job market.

J2: A lot of people used to be worried about job security, but I said… you are a good journalist, you'll always find a job… But as we know, when the big slides came, that was no protection… It's scary. I don't feel totally secure because I'm just an old dog in a young person's game.

J11: (We've) had a level of staff turnover in the newsroom that in any other organisation…would've been an investigation. (It) was a… really highly insecure environment for everyone.

This subset of participants often used terms like lucky or fortunate to describe their permanency, in many cases attributing it, in part, to timing, location, and having useful industry contacts, as much as skill and work history. One noted

that as the market was awash with unemployed journalists of a similar calibre and work history they were grateful for their permanent position.

Agency and avoidance

Discussions around addressing exploitative or injurious conditions often high-lighted the tension between recognising the need to stand up for their rights in the workplace and the reality of the power structure at work. For most of the research cohort, power in the workplace was distributed in traditional hi-erarchical newsroom configurations. Salaried participants generally positioned themselves in what might be described as a moderately submissive position of power, entrenched in traditional newsroom and organisational power structures and without the resources, capacity, or confidence to take a more assertive posi-tion. Some respondents confessed to a sense of impotence—of having to accept a lack of power as a fait accompli.

> **J10:** I just feel like at the end of the day, people have so many deadlines they just go, 'I'll deal with that another time. I'll deal with myself being exploited another day.'

Several participants also framed their individual capacity to push back against poor working conditions in terms of having a 'good boss' or a 'good' working relationship with them. Veteran and late career journalists with more experience of workplace politics and industrial and collective activity were more likely to question poor conditions, but many conceded they chose their battles carefully. Perhaps unsurprisingly, case-hardened union members were the most likely to advocate taking ownership of individual power; while those who might col-lectively be called 'subaltern persons' within the workplace, specifically First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse workers and working mothers, felt that entrenched power imbalances in the industry made rocking the boat a riskier proposition for them than for others.

In an environment where objecting to poor conditions was generally con-sidered unwise, participants were resigned to enduring them. The result was a work environment where workers remained industrially non-confrontational, adopting a policy of self-preservation described variously as 'flying under the radar' or 'keeping (one's) head down'. They endured these conditions by drawing strength and purpose from their professional ethos and in the knowledge they were experiencing a continuum of conditions that was almost a rite of passage.

This concession to powerlessness and self-preservation can be seen as both a cause and effect of journalists' disengagement from the industrial and collective mechanisms that might assist them in asserting their mandated rights and advocat-ing for improved conditions. This includes disengagement from the peak collective

industrial organisation for journalists—the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (MEAA). All but one participant had been an MEAA member at some point during their career and eight out of the 13 still were. About half of the cohort rated their experience with the MEAA as positive, but almost as many believed the union was weak. While many respondents, particularly the mid- to veteran career groups said they valued the union's place in labour relations, perceptions of its power to make changes in the workplace were generally poor.

> **J4:** I'm not particularly enamoured by the union. I mean, the concept of unions has eroded in this country…they've become an unworldly beast of their own and a bit of a toothless tiger.

> **J5:** Some of the journalists I've talked to … they've gone to the union for support and not received what they thought they'd signed up for. That makes me lose faith....

> **J1:** I had my first visit from the union in my 10th year at (my workplace).

For some respondents, particularly more senior practitioners, the union's perceived weakness reflected the general decline in union power across Australia. A lack of collegial cohesion was also identified as a contributor to decline, with some regional respondents pointing to the difficulty of organising small or geographically dispersed newsrooms. Social isolation due to the de-centralisation of newsrooms in the early 2000s and the working-from-home arrangements that arose in response to the COVID-19 pandemic also loomed large in conversation.

Interestingly, despite the perceived weaknesses of the union—including its small powerbase and stretched resources—the MEAA continued to be regarded as part of a journalists' professional toolkit. This might have been dismissed as nostalgia had it only been the case for the more senior journalists, but this view was also persistent among most of the younger early and mid-career cohort. It was an interesting observation given O'Donnell's (2021) claim that younger journalists tend to view unions as outdated.

Of course, the union is not the only mechanism practitioners might use to take collective action to advancing workplace rights, though as J4 noted it is the 'default model'. However, all models rely on the willingness of the workers to organise and work collectively, something many participants said might be difficult to achieve as it requires resources and someone willing to put their neck out (J3).

Evidence of industrial disengagement was also observed in discussions around participants' knowledge of industrial instruments and their provisions. As a collective, the journalists conceded they were not industrially literate. Many confessed to having poor personal knowledge of their industrial rights

and instruments—a thread most common among early and mid-career journalists (particularly permanent employees), with most unable to recall when they had last seen a copy of their award or collective agreement or only having read their contract as a matter of process at the time of their employment. Participants who stated they did have a reasonable understanding of their workplace rights were generally journalists who had sought or received union assistance for a workplace grievance.

Conclusion

While this study cannot attest to the quality of journalism or the vigour of the reporting produced by the journalists interviewed, there was ample evidence in the findings that described working conditions consistent with those considered a risk to quality journalism and critical reporting. For descriptions of shrinking newsrooms, the resulting paucity of journalists and the workload constraints and expectations on those who remain all feed into Davies' (2009) concerns around newsgathering practices. The research participants' narratives around the centrality of online metrics as determinants of newsworthiness and measures of employability and their attendant intrusions on personal time, recall warnings from the likes of Hayes and Silke (2019) and Carr (2014) about the lure of producing populist content. In the same vein, the low wages, insecure work and systemic inequity identified by subaltern journalists as participation barriers for those at the disadvantaged end of the employment spectrum—a space most often populated by minorities and women—contributes to what former president of the Australian Human Rights Commission Gillian Triggs describes as the scarcity of diverse voices in the media (Triggs, 2017, as cited in Rodrigues, Niemann & Paradies, 2021).

A decline in quality journalism and non-representative newsrooms compounds the already formidable task of asserting the value of journalism in public discourse already awash with distrust.[4] The reasons are manyfold but are captured broadly by Fisher et al. (2020) who identify impartiality, sensationalism, relevance and lack of depth in reporting as factors creating low levels of trust in Australia. Hanitzsch, Van Dalen, and Steindl (2018) cite public perceptions of the media as elitist and open to political influence. If this is the case, then the perpetuation of newsrooms delivering rushed journalism and favouring clicks over newsworthiness and staffed by people benefiting from systemic privilege, but ultimately being too disempowered to effect change, is clearly injurious to the profession and democracy itself.

Threats to quality journalism such as job security, understaffing, poor training and productivity demands are all industrially negotiable or contestable. Grievance processes, compliance campaigns, industrial action and enterprise bargaining are among a raft of industrial mechanisms which could be used to resolve substandard

workplace conditions and help address integrity issues by default. The sticking point is that in order to be effective, the industrial approach requires a collectivised, empowered and engaged workforce. As the findings of this study suggest, precarity, fear and self-preservation cultivated by two decades of industry upheaval have reduced journalists' industrial operativeness almost to the point of inertia.

The concept of journalism as the Fourth Estate and its democratic imperative of holding power to account is grounded in discussion of the corollaries of industrial disruption on professional identity and the normative values of journalism (Hampton, 2010; McNair, 2012; Schultz, 1998; Ward, 2009). There is a case to be made for increasing the focus on journalist's industrial health, not simply to 'improve the lot' of practitioners weighed down by exploitative and injurious working conditions—a worthy cause in its own right—but also to explore the cause and effect of disengagement and disempowerment and its bearing on good journalism. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to investigate the potential for re-engagement and empowerment which, given the centrality of journalism to democratic accountability and an informed citizenry, and flagging public perceptions of journalism's value and purpose, might offer industrial solutions for issues of professional integrity.

Notes

1. WorkChoices, among other things, restricted collective action, banned pattern bargaining, reduced unfair dismissal protections and reduced the role of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC).
2. Dana Dwyer describes this as a journalist's natural skill and desire to question.
3. While demographic coverage was reasonably distributed, it must be noted that union membership figures were aberrant. Union density among Queensland journalists is around 49 percent (M. Rae, personal communication, January 14, 2022), however current union membership within the research group was 61.5 percent, with 92 percent having been members at some point during their career. This was attributed to the nature of the research being of greater appeal to journalists with broader exposure to collective apparatuses or industrial matters.
4. According to the Roy Morgan Image of Professions survey for 2021, Australian Newspaper Journalists were rated 'very high' or 'high' for ethics and honesty by just 15 percent of the surveyed population—a five percent drop since 2017; television journalists are down from 17 percent in 2017.

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