

# WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

• The Police and the Press are frequently closely involved in incidents of public disorder — the Police to maintain the peace, the Press to record a matter of public interest. At times the two roles conflict. In the interests of bringing any such conflict into the open and of maintaining the high degree of understanding that generally exists between the Police and the Press, we publish this article by Inspector Graham Taylor, of the A.C.T. Region.

MEMBERS of the Press are always willing to rigorously pursue matters requiring investigation, and rightly so. But care is needed to ensure that the rights of others are not infringed or the law broken while obtaining their stories.

I was involved in an incident in Canberra on 1 August 1985 when I thought the Press overstepped the mark.

At about midday that day about 50 young people demonstrated at the Department of Housing and Construction on the rights of adolescents in housing matters. The demonstrators had moved into the executive suite of the Commissioner for Housing. Two of them had forced their way into the Commissioner's office and had set up a bed on the floor.

A number of Press people were present, some recording and others standing on tables and chairs pointing their television cameras into the Commissioner's office.

The Commissioner for Housing told the spokespersons for the demonstrators that he would be willing to speak with them provided the Press did not record his conversation. The spokespersons passed on this message to the demonstrators and the Press and a short time later they returned to say that the Press had agreed not to record while the Commissioner spoke.

Soon after, the Commissioner began addressing the demonstrators. However, as he spoke, I noticed that some of the Press members were recording. The Commissioner also noticed they were recording, but continued. He told me later that he should have stopped when he realised they were not adhering to their original agreement, but he felt obligated to continue and said he was inexperienced in dealing with this type of incident.

After completing his address he immediately requested everyone in the group to leave the executive suite.

A few minutes later a direction was given by an authorised Commonwealth

Officer acting under the Public Order (Protection of Persons and Property) Act to everyone in the executive suite to leave immediately. The group remained.

Shortly after I addressed the group and told them they were required to leave the premises, otherwise they would be subjected to arrest. After some interjection and questions I was asked whether the direction applied to members of the Press as well as the demonstrators.

I considered everyone in the executive suite was trespassing and I could not discriminate between the Press and the demonstrators. I said that if the Press remained they also would be subjected to possible arrest. They did not appear to accept this statement and one reporter wished to argue with me. Others sought a direction from their offices.

I felt that the issue could be resolved without arrests but I was unhappy with the attitude of the Press members and their reluctance to leave.

The demonstrators decided to vacate the premises and not long afterwards members of the Press also left.

I believe that those Press members who sought advice from their supervisors were directed to stay and cover the story. I felt that this direction was unfair to the journalists concerned and placed additional pressure on those who were dealing with the incident, including the Commissioner for Housing and the Police.

The members of the Press later complained to representatives of their union and as a result a complaint was lodged and a meeting organised between the Australian Journalists' Association

representatives and the Deputy Commander of the ACT Region, Chief Superintendent A. Bird. Later I was informed that, after attending the meeting, the AJA did not wish to pursue the complaint.

I consider members of the Press went beyond their expected code of behaviour in climbing on furniture, intruding into the Commissioner's private office with cameras and continuing to record and televise when they had been requested not to do so. They also remained on private Commonwealth premises after having been requested to leave.

I believe the Press has the right to ask questions and to conduct interviews, but members must do so within the parameters of the law. When they realise they may be committing a criminal offence, such as trespass, they should leave the premises voluntarily and conduct their interviews elsewhere.

I have a great deal of admiration for the Press and the manner in which they generally conduct themselves — particularly investigative reporting of topical matters such as the Greenpeace incident in Auckland. However, some of the younger, less experienced members would do well to remember their position under the law set out in various legislations and their expected code of behaviour. This is particularly necessary in matters concerning privacy and trespass.

Police officers generally work harmoniously with the Press and both groups assist one another whenever possible. But we are not able to extend to the Press special treatment when offences have been committed.

## MEANWHILE AT THE DEMONSTRATION

