

PROFILE

Meet Jennifer Treleaven, the Press Council's Executive Secretary.

In another life, Jennifer Treleaven might have been a diplomat. It's a role she appears to be comfortable with as she soothes angry complainants, furious over some claimed inaccuracy in their newspapers, or calmly negotiates a dispute with a harried editor.

Having joined the Press Council in June 1980, she has worked with each of the Council's four chairmen since the Council itself was established in 1976.

Born in Ceylon (she says, in a mixture of nostalgia and insistence, that "it became Sri Lanka long after I was born"), she had her education there before moving to Singapore in the late 1950s for four years. She then



settled in Australia, spending just over a year in Brisbane before moving south to Sydney.

Working for a Sydney import company for the next 10 years, she decided on taking an extended holiday to Europe and Asia, returning to Australia at the end of it to temporary work – while keeping her eye out for something interesting.

It was a small ad in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that caught her eye. The advertiser proved to be the Press Council, and having successfully applied for the position, Jennifer Treleaven began as assistant to Colin McKay, at that time the Council's executive secretary.

Following his resignation some time later, she then served as the Press Council's acting executive secretary until July 1986 when she was appointed to the position on a permanent basis.

Her principal source of satisfaction,

she says, comes when she is able to persuade a newspaper to do something to placate an angry complainant. Over a desk covered impressively by papers and documents, she explains that all written complaints come to her desk initially. "If I feel that I can remedy something by talking to a newspaper editor, I immediately pick up the phone," she says.

"Basically, it would be preferable if all disputes could be resolved by mediation. It is only when mediation is impossible that a dispute goes to the Council," she notes. And in most cases, mediation is successful: last year, for example, of a total of 223 complaints received, only 49 ended up going to the Council for adjudication. The rest were either settled by mediation or subsequently withdrawn by the complainants.

Jennifer Treleaven believes that it is an important part of her job to ensure that the public understands what it is that the Press Council does.

"The first real seminar we held was in 1986 at Sydney's Regent Hotel to mark the Council's 10th anniversary. We had a number of local and overseas speakers there, and our success then spurred the Council on to organise further seminars and public meetings to increase the public's understanding of the Press Council's role."

"For instance, at a public meeting we organised in Launceston we had people turn up, some of whom had never heard of the Press Council. Yet

because of the heavy advance publicity the meeting attracted, they came along, were very vocal and so created a very interesting meeting."

Despite the fact that certain complainants are somewhat excitable when they first contact the Press Council, Jennifer Treleaven says that the Council's 'watchdog' role is generally well understood. "In my experience, members of the public expect the Council to be sympathetic towards them, and they are not disappointed," she says.

Of her relationship with the media, she says she is similarly pleased. "On most occasions I find editors are very cooperative when I talk to them on the phone."

So how does she relax after a busy day managing the day to day concerns of the Press Council and fielding complaints? "I love the theatre," she says, "and I also love to cook. If we entertain friends, I'm generally asked to prepare a Ceylon-style meal, and so I wind up cooking curry nine times out of 10."

Jennifer Treleaven says that over the years Australian palates have become used to far hotter and spicier foods, and she expresses a personal view that the hotter the meal, the better. For someone who handles irate, irrational and abusive complainants from time to time while retaining the diplomatic touch, that attitude seems somehow appropriate. ●

IAN HAY

HIGH STANDARD IN COMPETITION

Following the Press Council's announcement recently of the results of a competition for the best thesis dealing with issues relating to freedom of the press in Australia, the Council has commended the standard of the entries received. Details of the entrants and their work are as follows:

'Press Freedom: The Right to Privacy' by Karen Shaw, 'Hawke's 1983 Media Circus' by Robert O'Sullivan, 'Differing Concepts' by Hidayat A. Djajamihardja, 'Should Journalists be Licensed?' by Denise Lucey, 'Journalism Ethics' by Rodney Chester (commended), 'Proposals to Outlaw

Incitement to Racial Hatred' by Margaret Cronin (commended), 'The Role of the Media in the Case of the Teenage Jackeroos' by Alison Puchy (joint winner), and 'Legal Restrictions on Disclosure of 'Confidential' Government Information' by Mark Richardson (joint winner).

A paper entitled 'The Press Council in Colonial Queensland' by Denis Cryle was ineligible for consideration since it had already been published as a doctoral thesis. All entries in the competition will be retained by the Press Council since they are expected to prove useful in the teaching of journalism. ●