

editors down, professional standards vary. Unfortunately, in the world of the news media there is a certain professional arrogance – almost a chip-on-the-shoulder attitude, a belief that it is the duty of the news media to put down those holding high office.<sup>56</sup>

As for accuracy (or the lack thereof), Muldoon observed: 'The press gallery is a kind of sieve through which information passes very rapidly, but unfortunately not all of it is accurate. The gallery is also a rumour factory'.<sup>57</sup>

Probably few politicians have had so long-running a preoccupation with the media as Muldoon. His views about the media also reflected his views about himself – about his own principles and performance, particularly on television. In his first book, *The Rise and Fall of a Young Turk*, there was also a chapter devoted to the media (Chapter 10, entitled simply 'The Media'). Muldoon contrasted his own talents with those of his parliamentary colleagues: 'I am one of the fortunate politicians who grew up with political television. Some of my older colleagues have never really liked it ... In the early days I used to watch playbacks to see if they came over as me. When I was satisfied with that I simply used the same style, relaxed, and concentrated on what I wanted to say'.<sup>58</sup>

He felt, too, that he knew more than those who were interviewing him: 'Austin Mitchell [a political scientist and prominent television interviewer in the late 1960s, later to become a British Labour MP] had the best sense of humour, but his research was not good. ... Invariably he would be left behind. It is worth remembering that on your own subject you are the expert'.<sup>59</sup>

When it came to how he should communicate with the New Zealand public, Muldoon felt little need for outside advice. 'In my early days on television I was often criticised by TV critics for speaking straight down the barrel of the camera – in other words, directly at my audience. My mail told me that this method held the attention of the viewer so I continued. ... The NZBC finally stopped trying to talk me out of it ...'.<sup>60</sup>

Muldoon's critical attitude towards the media was evident early on. 'I have had my bad times. I usually let a journalist know in no uncertain terms if I think he has distorted or misreported something in my field, and occasionally a small-minded journalist has borne a grudge for that'.<sup>61</sup>

Years later Muldoon was still reflecting on the discrepancy between his own grasp of how the news should be reported and the stance taken by the press themselves. In his *Number 38* – written as an ex-Prime Minister looking back – he observed: 'The *Dominion*, the Wellington morning newspaper, has, for many years suffered from its reputation as the worst daily newspaper in the country'. In September 1983 Muldoon issued a press statement describing a front-page story in the paper as 'an appalling piece of journalism'. Reflecting on the decision to ban

the newspaper from the receipt of official government information materials and from press conferences, Muldoon noted that '[t]he ban was intended to emphasise to the *Dominion*, its editor, its management and its readers that the Government had had enough, the latest effort being mischievous, journalistically deplorable and calculated to do damage to the public interest ...'.<sup>62</sup>

In due course there were complaints to the New Zealand Press Council from both the *Dominion* and the Parliamentary Press Gallery and although the complaints against the bans were upheld, Muldoon's concerns about the quality of the media were in no way reduced: 'On this occasion the Press Council ... also upheld the criticism by the Government. The *Dominion* failed to exercise the standard of care and accuracy required of a newspaper when presenting confidential material'.<sup>63</sup>

Of course, for most people the politician they think they know is simply a person portrayed to them through the media. However the media portray politicians – and however politicians portray themselves – there is inevitably a gap between the 'real' person and the one on the television screen or in the newspaper. Some of the discrepancy is unavoidable; some of it reflects problems of attitude and ability. The less able and the more antagonistic have problems getting their message across, while the more skilful can manipulate things so well that the public may never know who they 'really' are.

There is always going to be more to a leader than can be learned about them through the media. To some degree, though, what the public and the media can do is to allow individuals to be heard, understood and judged for themselves, based on their own deeds and words. This was what Muldoon himself wanted from the media – for radio to present his voice to the people; for television to allow him to speak directly to the public; and for newspapers to report exactly what he said, free from interpretation or innuendo.

In the New Zealand Parliament there are two occasions that present special opportunities for MPs to speak of themselves – of why they have gone into politics and what they sought to achieve. The first, the 'maiden speech', is made shortly after taking their seat in the House for the first time. The second, the 'valedictory', is a farewell address. Each is heard in silence, free from the usual interjections that characterise partisan debate. Of the two, probably the valedictory is the more emotional, as MPs take leave of their colleagues.

Muldoon's farewell saw him leaving Parliament more gently than he had entered it. There was no final settling of scores, but rather a last look around at where he had been, with a few chosen words for those he had respected, including Holyoake ('my mentor in politics') and Kirk ('The mental energy and intelligence that he had were incredible. ... I respected him greatly.').<sup>64</sup> There were words of appreciation to those who had assisted him over the years, with special reference to the former permanent head of his department, the then Secretary to the Treasury,

Bernard Galvin, whom Muldoon summed up as 'the finest public servant who ever worked with me'.<sup>65</sup>

Muldoon's final remarks, reflecting on his career, show a humour – and an ability to laugh at himself – that make for a more complex, and no doubt more accurate, image of a person usually portrayed in more one-dimensional terms. The humour adds to our sense of his humanity, reminding us that what we see, or imagine, of a person is often little more than an outline, a silhouette, and perhaps a deceptive one at that.

Muldoon, more than most, seems to have been concerned throughout his career with the difference, or distance, between what he was trying to do or say and what others said about him. He was interested in the facts – one of the 'simple tests and rules' he set down for assessing news stories (and the journalists who write them) was 'is it true?'<sup>66</sup> – and he wanted to be able to communicate directly with New Zealanders without his views being mediated by anybody else. So this chapter gives Muldoon his wish, and closes by giving him the final word. Uttered on 17 December 1991 and coming at the end of his valedictory, they were the last words he ever spoke as a Member of Parliament:

There was a lady walking down the pavement and as we passed she stopped and she said: "I know you, don't I?" I said: "I don't know, you might." She said: "I come from Tauranga and I'm a nurse." I said: "Well, I've been to Tauranga a few times and I don't know any nurses." I thought: "I'll put her out of her misery." I said: "My name's Muldoon." She said: "You're not related to that bastard in Parliament, are you?" And on that salutary note Mr Speaker, I say goodbye.<sup>67</sup>

#### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Fred I. Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 194.
- <sup>2</sup> Prior to television there were, of course, opportunities for New Zealand Prime Ministers to be seen and heard by the public through the mass media. In addition to newspapers and radio, there were cinema newsreels – such as 'Pathe' and 'Movietone' – but these tended to be much more stage-managed affairs (as in movie footage of Labour Prime Minister Peter Fraser addressing the troops in the Western desert during World War II) which were, for a generation of New Zealanders, important political images and doubtless contributed to Fraser's success as Prime Minister.
- <sup>3</sup> The authors acknowledge with gratitude the assistance of Keith W. Bolland, a student at Victoria University of Wellington, who worked assiduously to provide us with accounts documenting the abilities and attitudes towards the media of selected New Zealand Prime Ministers.
- <sup>4</sup> See Barry Gustafson, *His Way: A Biography of Robert Muldoon* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2000), p. 182c.

- <sup>5</sup> Television broadcasts in New Zealand began in Auckland on 1 June 1960, but for only two hours a week. TV transmissions in Auckland increased to seven days per week in January 1961, and in the middle of that year broadcasting started in Wellington and Christchurch. In July 1962 a television channel was also opened in Dunedin (then New Zealand's fourth largest city). Within four years, 'television reached nearly 50 percent of New Zealand households.' See *New Zealand Official Yearbook 2000* (Auckland: David Bateman, 2000), p. 266.
- <sup>6</sup> Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, p. 190.
- <sup>7</sup> For instance, if Helen Clark's performance were judged across her entire career in politics – rather than only on her performance since becoming Prime Minister – the ranking given to her would be considerably less positive, reflecting difficulties that she had using the media for at least half the time she was Leader of the Opposition. On the other hand, Mike Moore's ability to communicate with the media from the platform of his position as Secretary-General of the World Trade Organization was considerably better than his performance during his exceptionally brief and difficult time as Prime Minister in 1990.
- <sup>8</sup> Gustafson, *His Way*, p. 126.
- <sup>9</sup> Keith Eunson, *Mirrors on the Hill: Reflections on New Zealand's Political Leaders* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001), pp. 228, 219.
- <sup>10</sup> Although National won the 1978 and 1981 elections, winning parliamentary majorities and allowing Muldoon to retain office as prime minister, on both occasions it won fewer overall votes nationwide than the Labour Party. Indeed, the discrepancy between popular vote proportions and parliamentary seats was a factor influencing the move towards a new, more proportional electoral system.
- <sup>11</sup> A new electoral system to some extent requires new, or additional, leadership skills, both from Prime Ministers and from those seeking to hold that office. The theme is explored in Stephen Levine, 'Political Leadership in a Parliamentary Setting: The Case of New Zealand', in Larry D. Longley, Attila Agh and Drago Zajc (eds), *Parliamentary Members and Leaders – The Delicate Balance* (Appleton, Wisconsin: Research Committee of Legislative Specialists, International Political Science Association, 2000), pp. 399–412.
- <sup>12</sup> Eileen O'Leary, 'Political Spin', in Judy McGregor and Margie Comrie (eds.), *What's News?: Reclaiming Journalism in New Zealand* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2002), pp. 191–92.
- <sup>13</sup> Brian Edwards, *The Public Eye* (Wellington: Alister Taylor, rev. ed., 1972), pp. 161–62.
- <sup>14</sup> Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference*, pp. 194–195.
- <sup>15</sup> Quoted in Ruth Laugesen, 'Prime Minister in Waiting...', the *Dominion* 20 March 1993, p. 9.
- <sup>16</sup> Warwick Roger, 'Three Days in Another Town: Inside the Coalition Government', *North & South*, July 1997, p. 43.
- <sup>17</sup> Ruth Laugesen, 'A Media Perspective on the 1996 Election Campaign', in Jonathan Boston, Stephen Levine, Elizabeth McLeay and Nigel S. Roberts (eds), *From*

- Campaign to Coalition: New Zealand's First General Election Under Proportional Representation* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1997), p. 72.
- 18 David McLoughlin, 'Tangled Webs', *North & South*, August 1999, p. 98.
- 19 Keith Holyoake first became Prime Minister on 20 September 1957 (when he replaced National's ailing leader, Sid Holland). However, the National Party lost the November 1957 elections, and Holyoake stepped down as PM on 12 December 1957. Three years later to the day – on 27 December 1960 – he became Prime Minister for the second time, remaining in the post until 7 February 1972.
- 20 Hugh Templeton, *All Honourable Men: Inside the Muldoon Cabinet, 1975–1984* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1995), p. 38. Alister McIntosh was permanent Head of the Prime Minister's Department.
- 21 Ross A. Doughty, *The Holyoake Years* (Feilding: Ross Doughty, 1977), p. 149.
- 22 Eunson, *Mirrors on the Hill*, pp. 228–29.
- 23 Edwards, *The Public Eye*, p. 162.
- 24 John Henderson, 'Bill Rowling: The Man and his Politics' in Margaret Clark (ed.), *Three Labour Leaders: Nordmeyer, Kirk, Rowling* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 2001), p. 201.
- 25 Gustafson, *His Way*, p. 359.
- 26 Gustafson, *His Way*, p. 378.
- 27 Geoffrey Palmer, *New Zealand's Constitution in Crisis: Reforming our Political System* (Dunedin: John McIndoe, 1992), p. 200.
- 28 Eunson, *Mirrors on the Hill*, p. 227.
- 29 Geraldine Johns, 'Come in Spinner', *Metro*, May 1999, p. 62.
- 30 'Stunts and sly digs from PM', *The Waikato Times*, 13 November 1998.
- 31 Jenny Shipley, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (HANSARD)*, Volume 601, 11 June 2002, p.16961. Shipley's comments echo Muldoon's dictum to journalists, admonishing them to 'just print what I say!'
- 32 Templeton, *All Honourable Men*, pp. 38–39.
- 33 Edwards, *The Public Eye*, pp. 156–57.
- 34 Henderson, 'Bill Rowling: The Man and his Politics', pp. 201, 199.
- 35 Margaret Hayward, *Diary of the Kirk Years* (Queen Charlotte Sound and Wellington: Cape Catley and A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1981), pp. 178, 228–229 and 245.
- 36 Hayward, *Diary of the Kirk Years*, p. 258.
- 37 Hayward, *Diary of the Kirk Years*, p. 296.
- 38 Gordon Campbell, 'Media clobbering machine', the *Listener and TV Times*, 8 June 1992, pp. 19–21.
- 39 Nick Venter, 'Bolger earns mixed reviews for his showing in the prime role', *Otago Daily Times*, 9 October 1993, p. 23.
- 40 Johns, 'Come in Spinner', p. 64.
- 41 Johns, 'Come in Spinner', p. 64.
- 42 Jim Bolger, *Bolger: A View From the Top* (Auckland: Viking, 1998), pp. 124, 240.
- 43 Bolger, *Bolger*, pp. 211–212.
- 44 Edwards, *The Public Eye*, p. 162.

- 45 John Marshall, *Memoirs, Volume Two: 1960 to 1988* (Auckland: Collins Publishers, 1989), pp. 174–175.
- 46 Mike Moore, 'The Reporting of New Zealand Politics', in Margie Comrie and Judy McGregor (eds.), *Whose News?* (Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1992), p. 81.
- 47 Eunson, *Mirrors on the Hill*, p. 228.
- 48 Harvey McQueen, *The Ninth Floor: Inside The Prime Minister's Office – A Political Experience* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 138.
- 49 Victoria Main, 'Helen Clark: the good, the bad, and the ugly', *The Press*, 19 December 2000.
- 50 Brian Edwards, *Helen: Portrait of a Prime Minister* (Auckland: Exisle Publishing, 2001), p. 336.
- 51 Other examples of the use of figures such as this for analytic purposes can be found in David Butler and Donald Stokes, *Political Change in Britain: The Evolution of Electoral Choice*, Second Edition (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 294–308, and – in a New Zealand context – in Nigel S. Roberts, 'The Outcome', in Howard R. Penniman (ed.), *New Zealand at the Polls: The General Election of 1978* (Washington, D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980), p. 245.
- 52 This quote, taken from James David Barber, *The Presidential Character: Predicting Performance in the White House*, Third Edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 9, should not be taken to suggest that this chapter is in any way an attempt to supplement the model and categories used by Barber in his analysis of U.S. Presidents. As a further note, the scheme employed in this chapter does lend itself to comparative analytic purposes and is in no way limited only to New Zealand's Prime Ministers.
- 53 Limits of space preclude giving detailed assessments of Prime Ministers' political skills to support a more elaborate numerical ranking scheme for them analogous to those provided in Tables 1 and 2. It should also be noted that the data for Helen Clark are, perforce, interim in character as she was in office at the time of writing.
- 54 Jefferson's views – not inconsistent so much as fully human – are echoed by a character in a Tom Stoppard play (*Night and Day*), who says: 'I'm with you on the free press. It's the newspapers I can't stand'. For an interpretation of Muldoon's relationship with the media, written towards the end of his term as Prime Minister, see Stephen Levine, 'Muldoon and the Media', *Wellington Cosmo* [later *Wellington City*], vol. 1, no. 1, July/August 1984, pp. 53–54.
- 55 Robert Muldoon, *My Way* (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1981).
- 56 Muldoon, *My Way*, p. 44.
- 57 Muldoon, *My Way*, p. 52.
- 58 Robert D. Muldoon, *The Rise and Fall of a Young Turk* (Wellington: A.H. and A.W. Reed, 1974), p. 148.
- 59 Muldoon, *The Rise and Fall of a Young Turk*, p. 149.
- 60 *The Rise and Fall of a Young Turk*, p. 152.
- 61 *The Rise and Fall of a Young Turk*, p. 153.
- 62 Robert Muldoon, *Number 38* (Auckland: Reed Methuen, 1986), pp. 6–7.

- <sup>63</sup> Muldoon, *Number 38*, p. 8.
- <sup>64</sup> The references to both Holyoake and Kirk are from Muldoon, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 521, 17 December 1991, p. 6457.
- <sup>65</sup> Muldoon, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*, Volume 521, 17 December 1991, p. 6456.
- <sup>66</sup> Muldoon, *My Way*, pp. 54, 44.
- <sup>67</sup> Sir Robert Muldoon, *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates (Hansard)*, Volume 521, 17 December 1991, p. 6458.