

Four Work-Ins by Australian Journalists, 1944-80

Samuel Russell

During industrial disputes with employers between 1944 and 1980 the Australian Journalist's Association occasionally turned to the tactic of the work-in, producing wild cat newspapers during strikes in Sydney. These newspapers (*The News*, and *The Clarion*) exemplified problematic elements of the work-in as a working-class strategy.

While single incident studies of the work-in have been conducted in Australia, the Australian Journalist Association work-ins present a time series of struggle. This time series allows for a broader evaluation of the radical content of the work-in and indicates that the tactic can become systematised, less radical, and less participatory when not connected to a broader generation of workplace radical behaviour by workers. In short: the work-in, much like the strike or go slow, can become a tame cat tactic – it is not inherently transgressive or opposed to capitalist production.

Expectedly, the first work-ins were more radical in scope, presenting a newspaper which fully duplicated the commodity produced under capitalist control and in some ways exceeded the scope presented by capitalist organised journalism in both a material and a cultural sense.

However, this radical economic potential dissipated by the end of the time series of work-ins. Instead of providing an alternative commodity fit for market, the tactic produced propaganda pieces aimed primarily at the members of the community who would be predisposed to favour the journalist's case. The 1980s *Clarion* was not a daily newspaper of news, sport, racing, women's interest, classifieds, and general opinion.

This change will be explained in terms of human causes such as skills loss, production process causes such as computerisation and wire services, and broader social causes such as the changing role of the newspaper in Australian society.

Samuel Russell, *Work and Organisational Studies*, The University of Sydney.
<g.samuelrussell@gmail.com>