

Media politician Bob Carr: And the familiar path from journalism to politics

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In the court of Carr, management of the media is a particularly prized skill. The premier, himself a former journalist, is without doubt one of the most skilled media managers ever to occupy public office in this country (Dempster 2004, p. 41).

For the three years prior to former NSW Premier Bob Carr's resignation from office in July 2005, three of Australia's eight state and territory leaders, including he had worked primarily as journalists before entering parliament. During this time journalism was the most common former vocation of political leaders in Australia. Six months after Carr's resignation altered the balance in favour of lawyers, another former journalist was promoted to Premier in West Australian following the resignation of Geoff Gallop and once again journalism was the most common prior employment of state and territory leaders in Australia. Given persistent claims that the former NSW Premier's career in journalism influenced his career in politics and further that Bob Carr was first attracted to a career in the media with a view to benefiting from this in his quest for political success; given the similar interest in the influence of the prior careers of the journalist politicians in other jurisdictions; and given a demonstrable career path from journalism to politics in Australia; the connection between the two vocations deserves closer scrutiny.

This paper will examine the relationship between journalists and politicians. It will firstly consider views about the connection between Bob Carr's career in journalism and his subsequent political success before then examining the historic connection between the two vocations to show there is a rich history of career crossover in New South Wales. Three reasons for the strength of that connection will be offered. Firstly, that the shared evolution of politics and the media has determined that political journalists and representative politicians developed their work with reference to each other's endeavours hence practitioners from each sector have an interest in and knowledge of the work of the other. This makes crossover between the two vocations relatively undemanding. Secondly, that the proximity of journalists to politicians

affords journalists the opportunity to engage with the political sector and so inspires participation. Further, that proximity provides a competitive advantage to journalists when and if striving for a career in politics. Finally, that a number of similar skills are required for the vocations of journalism and politics. This paper will offer a shared skill-set as an explanation for the suitability of journalists to public office.

Former NSW Premier Bob Carr's previous career in journalism

Perhaps unsurprisingly media examinations of NSW Premier Bob Carr typically highlight the influence on his political management style of his previous work in the media as a journalist¹. In a feature article exemplifying a genre of similar media items that highlight the Premier's early career, Courier Mail journalist Peter Charlton wrote 'As a former journalist, Carr knows how the media works. And no one works it better'². In a similar vein Sydney Morning Herald columnist Adele Horin wrote 'the state is in the hands of a master news manipulator, the Premier and former journalist, Bob Carr. Carr has worked assiduously to snuff out sources of bad news'³. Indeed at the time of his resignation from the Premiership, 160 feature articles drawing a connection between Carr's political leadership style and his former career in journalism had been published in the major metropolitan newspapers in New South Wales⁴.

Scholars examining Carr's leadership have made similar observations. Professor of Public Policy at the University of Queensland, Peter Botsman, observed, 'A former journalist, Mr Carr is an excellent media player'⁵. Academics Gerard Goggin and Christopher Newell, in a joint health and cultural studies examination of the debate in NSW on stem cell research, argued 'Former journalist Carr is noted for unremitting attention to his media image. In orchestrating state action, Carr sought to rally public opinion by identifying himself with the depths of the tragedy of disability'⁶. In his examination of political leadership in New South Wales, Parliamentary researcher David Clune remarked on Carr's focus on media communications:

A key part of the Carr style is communication. An excellent media performer himself, Carr has always been aware of the vital importance of media

management to political success. He is omnipresent in the media, not only defending the government and selling its policies, but also floating ideas and showing the electorate that he is listening and in touch⁷.

Similarly, Politics Lecturer at the University of Sydney Dr Rodney Smith observed that in the 2003 NSW election the Premier ‘used his media skills to cover the few ‘gaffes’ made by his ministers’ and that ‘Labor’s strategy of denying news organisations advance knowledge of campaign events kept journalists chasing Carr and other Labor spokespeople in case they missed crucial announcements’⁸. Given the persistent claims of a relationship between Carr’s political success and his former media career or highly developed media skills, it’s prudent to examine the relationship between the vocations of journalism and politics.

The historic path from journalism to politics

In his Forward to Bob Carr’s book *Thoughtlines*, former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam drew attention to the author’s earlier career in journalism. Whitlam maintained that the then NSW Premier’s career path from prominent journalist to politician was atypical:

Bob Carr is the first journalist to shine as a Labor politician since John Curtin ... the only other journalist of first class distinction in post-war Australian politics was Paul Hasluck, who shared with Bob Carr a love of Australian, European and American history⁹.

While Whitlam’s observation may have rung true in this historic comparison, had the former Prime Minister considered Bob Carr’s immediate peers, he’d have been moved to tell a different story. At the time that Whitlam’s comments were published, Bob Carr was not the only Australian political leader to have worked firstly as a journalist of some merit before subsequently becoming a member of parliament for Labor. He was one of three from the eight state and territory leaders at that time who had similar career paths. Northern Territory Chief Minister Clare Martin and South Australian Premier Mike Rann both enjoyed prominent careers in the media prior to entering politics and eventually leading the ALP in government. Six months after Carr’s resignation, the number was again at three when Alan Carpenter was announced as West Australia’s new Premier in the wake of Geoff Gallop’s unexpected resignation.

Former NSW Premier Bob Carr reported firstly for ABC radio and then for The Bulletin magazine as well as engaging in various university, Labor Council and ALP media endeavours¹⁰. Like Carr, Clare Martin previously worked for the ABC, first as a journalist and then as a presenter and interviewer¹¹. Mike Rann reported on politics for the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation after having served time as editor of the student newspaper at Auckland University¹². With three from eight premiers and chief ministers coming from careers in the media, this made journalism the most common former occupation of Australian political leaders during the three year period until Carr's resignation in July 2005. After Carr's resignation and following West Australian Premier Geoff Gallop's resignation, this balance was restored when former ABC reporter Alan Carpenter became Premier of West Australia. Alan Carpenter began his journalism career at the Albany Advertiser newspaper before working at TVW Channel 7 and then ABC TV as a State political reporter. He later became a reporter and presenter on the ABC's 7.30 Report in West Australia¹³. All four ALP media political leaders had come to politics from distinguished journalism careers.

Moreover, Bob Carr is not the first NSW Premier to have worked previously as a journalist. Former Premiers Henry Parkes and James Martin also worked as journalists both prior to and during their political careers. Henry Parkes contributed to a number of newspapers as a freelance journalist during the 1840s before establishing The Empire newspaper in 1850. Parkes was editor-proprietor of The Empire until 1958 when he was made bankrupt. He became a member of parliament in 1954 during his tenure at The Empire and later worked again as a freelance journalist while still serving in parliament¹⁴. Former NSW Premier James Martin was a journalist on, and for a short period acting editor of, The Australian newspaper. Although he later moved to a successful career in law, Martin maintained his interest in journalism, writing for and later serving as manager and editor of The Atlas newspaper. Like Parkes, Martin continued his media engagement while also serving as a member of parliament¹⁵.

Former NSW Premiers John See, William Holman and John Lang were newspaper proprietors and editors. John See held an interest in the Daily Telegraph Newspaper Company and in 1897, while also a sitting member of parliament, founded and

become director of the Australia Star Newspaper Company¹⁶. William Holman was part-owner and subeditor of New Order until 1894 and then in 1895, prior to entering parliament, became part-owner and director of the Daily Post¹⁷. Jack Lang was director of the Labor Daily from 1924 until 1938 at which time he was also a sitting member of parliament holding various offices including Premier. In 1938 Lang established the Century newspaper which he edited until his death in 1975¹⁸. Further, NSW Premiers William Forster, George Reid, Thomas Waddell and Thomas Bavin were all essayists and regular newspaper contributors during their parliamentary tenures¹⁹. Journalists were similarly represented at the national level among Australia's Prime Ministers. Former Prime Ministers John Curtin, Alfred Deakin and James Scullin were all working journalists prior to entering politics indeed Deakin continued his media employment during his ministerial and Prime Ministerial tenures. Though not a journalist, Prime Minister Chris Watson was employed in the media industry as a newspaper compositor prior to entering parliament²⁰.

Indeed, in Australia it is not now nor has it previously been unusual for journalists to become members of parliament. A survey of the former vocations of members of the 52nd Parliament of New South Wales, prior to Premier Bob Carr's resignation in July 2005, indicated that 6.7% of parliamentarians were previously engaged in primary employment in the media. A further 2.3% of parliamentarians enjoyed voluntary or occasional employment in the media. These proportions are similar to those found in surveys of the NSW parliamentarians of the previous century indicating a constancy of the career path from the media to politics across Australian history. The 2005 survey further indicated that journalism was the fifth most common former vocation for NSW parliamentarians at that time. A media career compared with the most common former vocation teaching, with 13.3% of parliamentarians first working as school teachers prior to formalising their political careers. Lawyers and public servants were equal second on 10.3% each, though it's important to note that public service employment represents a range of vocations from engineering to administration. Also, the number of lawyers may alternatively be calculated at 12.6% because among the members, one former journalist, one teacher and one farmer each subsequently practiced law before then entering parliament. The number of public servants may also be adjusted up on the same basis. Just ahead of a career in the media, 8.1% of parliamentarians may be classed as professional politicians, having no

career prior to becoming ministerial staffers, electoral officers or party employees and then entering parliament. Slightly less common than a former media career was the 5.9% of parliamentarians who were previously employed by a union but who had no prior non-union employment before entering parliament. Lagging behind were the 4.4% of parliamentarians who were farmers, and then in equal eighth spot with 2.9% each who were academics and public relations or public affairs practitioners. Three vocations shared ninth spot, each representing 2.2% of total parliamentarians. These were small business owners, doctors, and nurses. All vocational categories from this point on represented only one or two parliamentarians each²¹. So in a comparative sense, former journalists made up a substantial proportion of NSW parliamentarians in 2005.

At this time, nine members of the NSW Parliament had once been employed primarily in the media. The former journalists were distributed across the partisan spectrum, though were slightly more common in the parties broadly considered to be on the political right, with five, compared to those parties on the left, with four. The Liberal Party's Greg Alpine was a television executive and radio announcer prior to entering parliament. Bob Carr worked for the ABC and the Bulletin Magazine prior to becoming the Member for Maroubra and NSW Premier. NSW Attorney General, Environment Minister and Minister for the Arts, Bob Debus, worked for the ABC as a broadcaster and executive producer prior to entering law and then politics. Former Fisheries Minister Eddie Obeid published El Telegraph, a foreign language newspaper owned by the Obeid family. The National Party's Melinda Pavey worked as a radio journalist with 2UW prior to developing a career firstly as a political media advisor and then politician. The Greens' Lee Rhiannon worked as a freelance journalist as well as a zoologist, academic and environmental activist. Liberal Party MP Michael Richardson was a magazine publisher and journalist and fellow Liberal Jillian Skinner enjoyed a substantial career in journalism working for the Melbourne Herald, Radio Hong Kong, The Associated Press in Hong Kong and the Sunday Australian, before taking on a public service role. Shooters' Party MP John Tingle had an even more enduring career in the media prior to entering parliament. He worked predominantly in radio journalism for the ABC and a number of commercial radio stations mostly in Sydney but also in Melbourne and Brisbane. John Tingle also worked for ABC Television as a presenter.

In addition to those with substantial media careers, a number of NSW Parliamentarians also had some experience in a media work environment. This distribution again favoured the political right. Labor MP Virginia Judge worked in community radio as did Liberal MP Barry O'Farrell who was a broadcaster with 2RPH radio reading service, and Christian Democrat Fred Nile edited the publication "Family World News". A large proportion of MPs have been regular contributors to local newspapers with many writing weekly columns on local and NSW politics although no distinction is made between those MPs who write the columns personally and those who have staff or party members do this.

The proportion of former journalists in the current NSW Parliament is consistent with that in historic parliaments. In his study of the work of the NSW Press Gallery, David O'Reilly (observed that even prior to Federation in Australia, former journalists represented a substantial proportion of members of successive parliaments:

Legislative Assemblies of the mid-19th Century contained increasing numbers of members who were journalists. In 1887 there were eight journalists as members. In 1891 there were fifteen and the same number in 1898. In these parliaments they formed respectively 6.4, 10.5 and 12 per cent of total membership of the House²².

Given this persistent relationship between media and politics and particularly the demonstrable career path from journalism to parliament in New South Wales, the connection between journalism and politics deserves closer scrutiny.

The related development of mass media and representative politics

The tendency for journalists to become politicians was conceivably triggered by the related development of representative democratic politics and the mass media, and further by the manner in which the institutions of politics and those of the media are recognisable forums for power within representative liberal democracy. Describing the concurrent evolution, British media studies scholar Philip Schlesinger said 'the formation of the classic public sphere coincided with the growth of nationalism and nation-state formation'²³. In many ways the mass media and politics in mass society

are mutually related activities. Schlesinger maintained ‘The presence of this domain is central to the freedom of expression commonly associated with democracy; it is necessarily a space in which communication takes place’²⁴. Australasian media scholar Geoffrey Craig described how the rise of the mass media and the rise of mass politics, as representative democracy, coincided. He said ‘Prior to modern media, public life was linked to a common locale; an event became public when a plurality of people physically congregated to hear and see the communication of anniversary message’²⁵. The development of the print media allowed communication to overcome distance and bring disparate populations together into a unified public discourse. Indeed demonstrating this, prior to 1879 in New South Wales, newspapers carried the only published account of parliamentary proceedings because Hansard did not exist before that time²⁶.

United States media scholar John Street observed that a minimalist understanding of democracy acknowledged that it relied upon the people’s capacity to ‘form judgements about what policies or representatives they want, and about whether those policies or representatives have delivered what they promised’²⁷. Achieving this in mass society, he said, depends upon the conveyance of information about the politicians and their activities, as well as the people’s capacity to assess this. Since the introduction of representative democracy, the former has largely been delivered by the mass media and the latter has been addressed by a combination of the expansion of communication of political analysis, particularly via the media, and universal education. British media scholar Brian McNair said ‘Modern politics are largely mediated politics, experienced by the great majority of citizens at one remove, through their print and broadcast media of choice’²⁸. McNair asserted that an examination of contemporary democracy is necessarily also an examination of ‘how the media report and interpret political events and issues’ and that it is important to monitor how the media facilitate politicians’ attempts to persuade their electorates, influence the political process and shape public opinion.

The formational and interconnected quality of the relationship between the mass media and representative democracy has determined that political journalists and representative politicians developed their work concurrently and, at least in part, in reference to each other’s endeavours. The mass media helped make mass

representative politics possible and representative politicians have used the media to communicate their message so helping to ensure the media's relevance and continuance. Each sector and so each career path was informed by the other. Journalists observed that what they did was necessary to and shaped political outcomes. So too, politicians observed that the media was an arena of power that was both useful and menacing to their actions and so required close attention. When there is criticism of the degree to which one sector achieves good representation for the people, invariably the other sector will be linked to that criticism. It's not surprising that practitioners from each sector have an interest in and knowledge of the work of the other and indeed that crossover between careers occurs.

Biographical examinations of Bob Carr suggest that, harbouring a strong ambition for a career in politics, he was attracted to an initial career in journalism due to the historic relationship that this profession had with politics and because of the advantages that this relationship could deliver to his political quest²⁹. Given the claim of Carr's strategic interest in a journalism career for the purpose of developing his political prospects, and the historic inter-related development of the two vocations, it's valid to examine the qualities that contribute to making a career in the media an asset to the political aspirant.

The proximity of journalists to politics

The tendency for journalists to become politicians or so too for aspiring politicians to work initially as journalists in order to achieve their political goals may be prompted by the proximity of each to the other. Proximity can act as a catalyst to crossover in at least two ways. Firstly, journalists may be so motivated by their observation of the activities of politicians that they come to desire first-hand engagement in political endeavour. It can be frustrating for journalists to be the perpetual observers of the work of others particularly where their enduring surveillance may lead them to develop political expertise or ideas at least as sophisticated as those of some of the politicians in office whom they observe. Secondly, the mutual networking that is necessary to both careers, and further incidental given the social nature of both, may create opportunities whether by design or chance. Journalists will engage with the

power-brokers of politics and will develop connections with political actors that may lead either party to consider a different role for the journalist.

Biographical examinations of Bob Carr suggest that his career in journalism provided substantial advantages of proximity, particularly in allowing him the opportunity to network with political actors who had influence in the arena that he aspired to join, and also in giving him the capacity to advocate on behalf of his career and the political viewpoints that he espoused. For example, Carr's work on the University of NSW ALP Club news letter *In Labor* brought him to the attention of NSW Branch Secretary John Armitage who sought to meet him after reading his work. Armitage later introduced Carr to Paul Keating who became a long time friend and valuable political ally. Carr's later work at the ABC helped secure him the influential position of Education/Publicity Office at the Labor Council of NSW³⁰. His interview programme on 2KY and work at the *Labor Leader* newspaper, which he established, gave Carr the capacity to provide publicity to ideas and political aspirants of his choosing and also meant he was lobbied by political players because of the media access he could provide. West and Morris said the *Labor Leader* 'gave a platform to revisionists who, partly, wanted to fashion a centrist Labor message but, mostly, wanted to promote their own candidacies for parliamentary preselections or party office'³¹. They claim Carr used 'journalism to make the most respectable, middle-class case for Labor and its leading personnel'³². Carr also used his work as a journalist at *The Bulletin* to promote his particular political perspective and his career. In *Thoughtlines* he said 'Writing for *The Bulletin* between 1978 and 1983, I had a chance to elevate some political causes'³³. In an interview with biographer Fia Cumming Carr said of his work at *The Bulletin* 'It kept me in the limelight, as a by-lined journalist writing for a national weekly'³⁴. For Carr, the media was an expedient tool that could be used to further his political objectives. His career as a journalist was a means to an end, a temporary position from which he could network with influential people in public life and advance his political goals.

The career of radio commentator Alan Jones illustrates the media-political proximity relationship in the reverse order. Jones demonstrably aspired to political life long before making a career as a social and political commentator on talkback radio. In 1976 Jones stood for preselection in the Federal seat of Eden Monaro for the National

Country Party and in 1978 he won pre-selection for the Liberal Party in the NSW seat of Earlwood though lost the seat to the ALP in the subsequent election and instead became a speech-writer for the then Liberal Opposition Leader John Mason. In 1979 Jones stood for Liberal preselection for the Federal seat of North Sydney and after losing went on to work as a speechwriter for Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser. In 1985 he joined Radio 2UE as the morning radio host where he worked until 2002 when he moved to 2GB³⁵. Jones has led social commentary discussions in a talkback format on his radio programmes and has commonly interviewed political leaders. He has also met privately with premiers, the Prime Minister, opposition leaders and ministers to discuss his political views and is considered to wield significant political influence because of his audience reach³⁶. While Jones was unable to develop a parliamentary career, he has nevertheless engaged actively in the political debate via his media work and the networking that has come from this work.

The interaction between journalists and politicians provides the opportunity and the inspiration to move from one vocation to the other in order to shift from political outsider to political insider. That there are few set qualifications for public office beyond the capacity to gain the necessary support demanded by the electoral system, means that journalists are at least as suitably placed as any other members of society to become politicians. Their proximity to the political sector provides them with a competitive advantage. For this reason, while some journalists may be induced to try their hand at politics given the experiences provided by proximity; other aspiring politicians may seek to work as political journalists as a means to gain a competitive advantage in their quest for a political career or as a fallback career.

The skill-set shared by journalists and politicians

So too, crossing from journalism to politics may be made easier by a set of skills shared by the two vocations. Many of the skills that are valuable to journalists, particularly political or public policy round journalists, are also valuable to politicians and many of the aims of the two vocations are related. Five skills in particular may be described as important to both careers. These five skills are news-sense, effective communication, networking ability, judiciousness and competitiveness. While these

five do not represent an exhaustive skill-set for either journalism or politics, nor are they necessarily the only skills relevant to both vocations, these skills may have inspired and helped the transition from journalism to politics that has demonstrably been a part of Australian political history. This shared skill-set offers journalists a range of tools that can help address many of the problems they would come to face if they were to become politicians and so provides them with a justifiable claim to qualification for the job as well as a means to help make their attempt successful.

News-sense

For a journalist, news-sense is the necessary ability to determine which stories will capture the interest and sense of importance of audiences whether those audiences are diverse or narrowly targeted with respect to particular media products. Describing news-sense, journalism scholar Len Granato said ‘With experience, journalists develop a “feel” for what kinds of stories are appropriate for the media unit for which they work. This “feel” is what old-time journos used to call “a nose for news”³⁷. Having news-sense is essential for journalists in order that they are able to produce news items that are relevant to and maintain the interest of their audiences so that the media organisations for which they work remain commercially or otherwise justifiably viable.

News-sense translates to the political context in at least two ways. Firstly, the ability for a politician to gain media coverage is important given the relationship between the mass media and representative democratic politics. Representative politicians must convey their messages to the collection of people relevant to their political jurisdictions and with whom they otherwise have little or no personal or proximal contact. The news media is one of the few means by which individual politicians can do this and it has, at least traditionally, been the cheapest and least resource intensive way when compared with other methods such as direct mail or telephone communication. Speaking of the particular necessity of the media to politicians in opposition, given the comparative lack of alternate resources, Carr told Dodkin that when he was Opposition Leader his ‘job was to keep the Labor party in the media, to go out and appear in marginal seats, to work up local issues’³⁸. When he was NSW Premier, Nick Greiner made much the same observation about the importance of the

media when campaigning from opposition. In an interview with the Sydney Morning Herald Greiner said that in opposition, ‘you don’t *do* anything, all you do is appear in the media’³⁹.

The second way in which news-sense translates to the political context relates to a politician’s ability to assess the public interest, and connectedly to shape it, whether that public is the general electorate or a target group. This ability is important to representative politicians in order that they can execute their political function and shape policy while maintaining the support of the electorate to whom they are accountable. Where the media is sensitive to its audience due to sales and ratings, politicians are held accountable to their constituency via elections. In between, but with reference to future elections, politicians may be swayed by public sentiment often conveyed through the media. Any media concern that persists in ignoring newsworthiness in selecting items to publish is unlikely to endure. So too, politicians who are insensitive to their constituents are unlikely to either gain, or remain in office.

Carr’s adept media skills, attributed to his years working in journalism, have often been described as a key to his political longevity in allowing him to develop and maintain a presence in the news media and shape the news agenda. Carr’s career in journalism developed his news-sense and further shaped his capacity to see the potential power of the media as a political tool. Morris and West reported ‘He once told Cavalier that, in the old days, if the left-wing Builders’ Labourers Federation, ‘kicked John Ducker in the shins, they’d call the police. But I would ring the newspapers’⁴⁰. They described Carr’s adroit new-sense saying he had a:

‘... strong sense of the photogenic, of how to explain the issue in the simplest terms. When John MacBean the Labor organiser, began arguing for a 35-hour week in the power industry, Carr called in the cameras and had MacBean spread out his papers for ten metres along the corridor to illustrate the detail of their case’.

Adding weight to this view, News Limited journalists rated Carr as being ‘astute in his news judgments’ when the then NSW Premier Carr attended a morning news conference at The Daily Telegraph and discussed his views about story inclusion for the day’s newspaper⁴¹.

Communication

Effective communication skills are also essential for both journalists and politicians. Street observed ‘reporting is a form of rhetoric, it is about *persuading* us – the readers, the viewers – that something happened’⁴². For journalists, whether print or broadcast, communication is a fundamental requirement of a vocation for which the major function is to convey information to audiences. If a good story is poorly communicated it is unlikely to capture the interest of its potential audience or convey the information accurately hence will not succeed in its aim to inform. Despite the complexity of much of the information that political journalists are required to convey, they need to communicate with ‘clarity and brevity’⁴³. Fundamental to journalism is the capacity to present complex information clearly, concisely and appealingly in order that it can capture and hold the interest of diverse audiences and be sufficiently understood.

So too, communication is a major function of politics. Reflecting on the nature of politics in *Thoughtlines*, Carr echoed Street’s view about journalism when he argued that ‘politics is about persuasion’⁴⁴. Politicians must convey their messages to their electorates and to various policy stakeholders in order to engage support and enthusiasm for their policies. They must have the skill to communicate their ideas and persuade audiences in a variety of situations from parliament and public meetings to the print and broadcast media. Describing the success of current Labor Premiers including Carr, John Wanna and Paul Williams said ‘Often their dominance is based on the classical political skills of persuasion, consultation, coaxing, even personal pleading’⁴⁵. In his examination of NSW political leadership, Clune observed that communication was a key component of Carr’s success. He said ‘Carr put all his skills as a communicator into conveying the message that he was listening and consulting’⁴⁶.

Carr’s career in journalism helped him develop the communication skills that were later useful to his political career. Journalism taught Carr how to convey complex information in a simple format and how to be sufficiently brief that he was able to maintain his audiences’ attention. Clune observed ‘Carr has a populist ability to speak

out as the voice of the ordinary citizen in response to events causing concern in the community⁴⁷. Journalism also taught Carr how to communicate in a manner suited to media production styles. Skills including voice control and brevity are useful legacies of his broadcast career and concise argument presentation is a skill developed during his print media experience. SMH journalist David Marr described Bob Carr's voice as one of the great achievements of the ABC.

The voice of a man in control' Marr said is 'an instrument envied today by political opponents and radio jocks alike'. Carr's broadcast voice was an essential tool not only for his livelihood, but also his political career. He needed a voice that could carry above the din of a public meeting, above the hecklers and the doubters; 'a voice that could cajole and command; a voice that could resonate in the House of Representatives⁴⁸.

Historian and biographer Marilyn Dodkin observed that for Carr, talkback radio 'was the perfect medium for his deep voice and quick intellect'⁴⁹. Carr also put his communication skills to use by writing opinion pieces for the major metropolitan newspapers in New South Wales. During his tenure as Premier, Carr published 250 mass media commentaries which served to both showcase him as an intellectual and policy leader, and aided the Premier to steer public debate and set the agenda.

Networking

The capacity to effectively network with key individuals and groups is also an important skill for both journalists and politicians. Forming and maintaining gainful relationships under difficult circumstances will test both professional groups, particularly where the requirements of good journalism or politics often leads to conflict. For journalists, it's important to develop relationships with sources and contacts who are able to help break stories, provide access to key people, and who can offer reliable background information to help uncover the truth or deception of stories discovered through other means. Rod Tiffen said 'the scarcity of first-hand observation, the delays and omissions in routine channels, and the desire for exclusive information and penetrating analysis all lead to a strong emphasis on the personal source'⁵⁰. Sally White observed 'Contacts are particularly important for round reporters who are expected to generate their own stories'⁵¹. In his examination of the NSW Press Gallery, O'Reilly found that political reporters typically 'will have

developed a key PRO [public relations officer] or politician who will feed them with early information about what's coming up for the day or beyond'⁵².

It's essential for journalists to cultivate sources and contacts of all political persuasions and to maintain relationships with multiple groups and individuals despite not acquiescing to their competing demands for unduly favourable media coverage. Effective networking may also demand that journalists socialise with their contacts in order to foster trust and loyalty. This can test a journalist's endurance, objectivity, personal preferences and principals or standard of decency⁵³. The ability to strike a balance between building a trusting relationship and maintaining professional integrity is an important part of the networking skill. Discussing the close relationship between political reporters and politicians, Craig observed:

This facilitates intense relationships between the two parties which can work for and against the journalist. On the one hand, the journalists have close scrutiny of the political actors, which provides them with a greater opportunity to discover the true state of affairs; on the other, the closeness of their relationship with sources can mean they do not have sufficient critical distance from the information they receive⁵⁴.

The capacity to effectively network with key individuals and groups is also an essential skill for a politician. Politicians must make and maintain networks throughout the community. They must network with journalists in order to maximise positive media exposure; and with policy stakeholders in order to develop their understanding of key issues as well as to garner support for their initiatives. Politicians who are members of political parties must network within party factions in order to maintain their careers and have influence; leaders and party heavyweights must network across factions in order to forge alliance for strategic decisions and to influence the appointment of office holders. Minor party members or independents must network in order to secure support to either block legislation in parliament or to persuade governments to adopt particular policy initiatives. Representative politicians must form networks within their local communities in order to keep in touch with local issues and to ensure they have backing when campaigning for elections or making decisions that affect local communities. Ministers must network within caucus and with key organisations, and party officials must network with major donators and supporters.

Politics is necessarily about conflict and democratic politics is necessarily about collectives. Politicians rely on strong networks in order to be effective and require constant support to overcome perpetual tension. They must maintain relationships despite significant adversity including the inevitable conflict when collective decisions don't match with individual preferences. Bob Carr demonstrated strong networking skills when he was a journalist. He was able to set aside his core political philosophy to forge useful and pleasant relationships with people from competing perspectives. For instance, West and Morris report that 'In the late seventies, when Carr was at *The Bulletin* and [former NSW Liberal leader Peter] Collins was working for the Liberal secretariate, having left his reporting job on ABC TV's 'This Day Tonight', they would huddle in the corner at ... parties, ignoring other guests, and trade political gossip'⁵⁵. Peter Fitzsimons pointed to the networking opportunity that journalism provided Carr, explaining how the future Premier first met his deputy when , as a young reporter, he interviewed then Redfern Medical centre doctor and aspiring Marrickville ALP candidate Dr Andrew Refshauge about future directions in public health⁵⁶. Refshauge, who is from the Labor Left, later become Carr's longstanding Deputy Premier. So too, Carr demonstrated strong networking skills during his political career. In his examination of Carr's leadership, Clune found:

Carr has had good relations with the ALP machine, as is to be expected given his history as a foot soldier for the right ... With its overriding concern for electoral success, the dominant faction has taken care to protect the premier from embarrassing rebuffs and has generally delivered the numbers when needed⁵⁷.

Judiciousness

The capacity to make good judgements when attempting to balance competing demands is another skill necessary to both journalists and politicians. For journalists, this relates to the need to judge the right balance when dealing with the competing demands of audiences with differentiated needs and wants particularly where these must be pitted against commercial and management pressures including those coming from advertisers or conveyed through the organisational culture. In this vein, Granato observed 'Consideration of the audience is important because news media must

satisfy their audience to survive ... Journalists must be aware of their audience when deciding which events are worth covering and how to cover them'⁵⁸. Griffen-Foley reported an example of where commercial pressure had influenced Fairfax's decision to back Labor in the 1961 federal election. Here, Warwick Fairfax is reported to have told Labor leader Arthur Calwell 'If you were running a newspaper and you found that your classified advertisements had fallen drastically ... you would want a change of government, wouldn't you?'⁵⁹

So too for politicians, the capacity to judge how best to manage competing demands and satisfy diverse electorates is essential. Not only do different sections of an electorate have competing demands, but the needs and wants of the general electorate may be in conflict with the needs and wants of key stakeholders including members of caucus, party donators and interest groups. Indeed conflict is also strong within political parties, within factions of parties and within the bureaucracy and interest groups. Tiffen identified six key areas of conflict that may be pertinent to the experience of political leaders and require their judicial skill to manage: inter-party; intra-party; bureaucratic; pressure group and international conflicts⁶⁰. Politicians, particularly party leaders, must exercise good judgement in order to balance competing demands in a politically sustainable fashion. Clune reported that in Carr's NSW Government 'Decisions are carefully assessed from the political as well as the policy viewpoint'⁶¹. Indeed opinion polling is used to help both media and political organisations to gain a better sense of audiences or electorate preferences. Clune said of the former NSW Premier:

Carr reads public opinion astutely and is careful not to get too far ahead of the voters. He constantly monitors community feeling and endeavours to position the government accordingly. Carr also takes considerable notice of opinion polling although he denies such an approach is 'about being sleazily poll driven, it's trying to do proper research to see that your commitments bear some relationship to what people truly perceive'⁶².

The cost and heavy time consumption of opinion polling, though, prohibits its day to day use by both individual politicians and journalists. While journalists may use their media organisation's opinion polling as a general guide, this will serve as only one of many ways in which they may assess their audience and potential audiences' interests within their daily working routine. They will mostly rely on personal skill. So too,

while government is often aided by opinion polling coordinated by party executives, individual politicians are rarely guided in day to day activity by such methods given the prohibitive cost. Further, individual politicians may be driven to some extent by specific local interests that may be at odds with the interests of the party executive. For instance, when the NSW Government proposed changes to the taxation scales for clubs in relation to poker machine revenue, many local politicians disagreed with the central decision given the pressure from clubs in their locale. It's worth noting that whether in politics or the media, majoritarianism is only one of the many decision making models that drive choices. The quality of preferences of specific audiences or interested stakeholders may also motivate decisions both in politics and the media. Having a capacity to judge where best to focus attention is a skill that will equally serve journalists and politicians.

Competitiveness

That competitiveness is a central feature of both politics and journalism seems almost too obvious to document. Nevertheless its importance as part of a shared skill-set should not be overlooked. Competition is a key motivator for both professional groups. For journalists there is a competitive need to either scoop the rival media organisations or to produce a more appealing product. This drive exists in two parts. Firstly, competitiveness is a function of the commercial and economic reality of most media organizations. Media scholar John McManus asserts ‘... the media firm competes in markets for investors, sources, advertisers, and consumers’⁶³. Secondly, though to a large extent related to the economic incentive, competitiveness is a motivator at the personal level for journalists who are often driven by professionalism and the desire to be good at their jobs. Though perplexingly, when O’Reilly examined the operation of the press gallery in NSW during the 1980s, he found that gallery journalists tended also to network with each other:

In Sydney, there is a far greater degree of co-operation between competing organisations. They have fewer staff – they need one another. All keenly espouse the principles of scooping one another. Rarely do they carry the threat through⁶⁴.

For politicians competition is explicit in the need to defeat the opposition to win government and to dominate public debate in order to implement a policy agenda. Though politicians are not simply driven by the need to satisfy the broad electorate, they also face competition in a range of more focussed power struggles including intra-party competition for pre-selection and key positions; competition within policy networks over support for differing positions; and competition in the parliament or media to win support for, or establish opposition to, legislative options. In their examination of contemporary Australian political leadership, Wanna and Williams found that for political leaders ‘There is often no security of tenure – they are removable not only by the electorate at periodic intervals, but instantaneously by colleagues and rivals anxious to take over’⁶⁵. Like journalists, politicians will both work with each other and in competition to achieve success.

Research is equally important to politicians, particularly non-government politicians who have a substantial resource disadvantage compared with politicians in government. Researching policies as well as digging for dirt to uncover government faults may be important for winning government. West and Morris say that in 1988 when Carr was Opposition Leader, he ‘decided to supplement the press gallery by turning his own staff and shadow cabinet into a team of investigative journalists with a brief to mine their contacts, especially among the quickly disaffected public servants, for scandal’⁶⁶. Even as Premier, Bob Carr didn’t leave the competitive element of politics to change. Clune observed, ‘An early riser, he would often begin his day by phoning editors and newsrooms to get a comment in the day’s media’⁶⁷.

Conclusion

To sum up, the path from journalism to politics in New South Wales is demonstrably well worn and so it is not surprising that a politician with a former prominent career in journalism, Bob Carr, emerged as Premier. This paper proposed three possible explanations for how a career in journalism may be helpful to a subsequent career in politics. Firstly, the shared evolution of politics and the media has meant that political journalists and representative politicians developed their work with reference to each

other's endeavours hence it's not surprising that practitioners from each sector have an interest in and knowledge of the work of the other and indeed that crossover between careers occurs. There's evidence, in Carr's writing and in interviews he had with his biographers, to suggest that prior to his work in politics, Carr pursued a career in the media because of its relationship with politics and with a view to using it to help develop his political career. Indeed SMH journalist David Marr contends the Premier 'turned himself into a journalist to be a politician'⁶⁸. Secondly, the proximity of journalists to politicians provides the inspiration and opportunity to engage with the political sector first hand as well as a competitive advantage to compete for a career in politics should they desire it. There is substantial evidence in biographical examinations of Carr to give credence to the view that his early career in journalism allowed him to network and lobby on behalf of his career in politics. Finally, the skill-set shared by journalists and politicians help make members of one profession well qualified to attempt work in the other. Skills shared by politicians and journalists include news-sense, the ability to network, effective communication, judgement, competitiveness and a faculty for research. There is substantial evidence that Carr possesses and puts to effective use in his political career each of these skills and further that he developed many of them while working as a journalist.

The current strong representation of former journalists with distinguished media careers among those who have become political leaders is though noteworthy. It would be worth considering separately whether contemporary socio-political conditions provide an environment that is advantageous to the journalist politician.

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⁴ The Australian Financial Review, the Daily Telegraph, the Sun Herald, the Sunday Telegraph, The Australian, The Newcastle Herald, the Sydney Morning Herald. NB: The Illawarra Mercury published no such articles.

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