



# News loses its heart: more to come?

**Long-standing journalists at The Australian were made redundant last week – there was no choice whether they could stay or go. It's a dramatic shift on the part of management that leaves staff asking, what's next?**

Since December the company had been approaching people quietly, offering redundancy to some, with no repercussions if they rejected management's offer. But now, it appears, the company has decided to target individual staff members, which leaves many feeling uncertain about the future.

The front page of this week's Media section of *The Australian* does more than hint at further job cuts, through the consolidation of the features sections of metropolitan and Sunday newspapers under Alan Oakley's stewardship. Oakley gave confirmation of recent rumours of further cuts, acknowledging the restructure "will result in job losses", Sally Jackson writes.

"If the end result of that is cost efficiency, that's a good outcome, too," Oakley is quoted as saying. "But that's not the driving force."

Oakley has recent experience with large-scale job cuts. As editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, he presided over cuts to 87 staff at the paper last year – the fourth round of redundancies in four years at the paper.

**Your union, the Media Alliance will convene meetings of staff in coming days to discuss the changes. Stay tuned for meeting times and places, and make sure you come along for this important discussion about your future at this great Australian company. You are welcome to attend the meeting regardless of whether you are a member or not. If you're on an AWA you are welcome to come along.**

## Redundancy: your legal rights depend on your union membership

If you are called into a meeting to discuss your future at News Ltd, you are entitled to union representation – contact your house committee delegate or Media Alliance organiser immediately and get them to sit with you in the meeting.

The collective agreement that sets out your pay and conditions allows for redundancy of two weeks severance pay plus a redundancy payment of four weeks for each year of service (capped at 112 weeks, or no more than would be received in salary had they remained in employment until the age of 65). If you have worked at News Ltd for five years or more, you will also get any accrued long service leave paid out.

It is an uncertain time for the economy and newspapers, but there is one thing you can be sure of if you are a member of your union – proper redundancy provisions. These provisions were won by staff at News working together as union members to ensure their rights are legally protected.

**There are no guarantees to the redundancy entitlement if you are covered by an individual contract, otherwise known as an Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA).**

## Individual contracts: little benefit

AWAs are old-hat contracts, rejected by the majority of the Australian public at the last election. New laws passed earlier this month mean that AWAs can no longer be renewed. ITEAs, the individual contracts that cover some staff at News, have a nominal expiry date of December 31, 2009.

AWAs have many inferior conditions to those enjoyed by people who work under the collective agreement, not least of which is redundancy. The company may tell you that you'll be looked after, but is a promise from management reliable in these uncertain economic times?

**Individual contracts can be terminated at your choice after they expire, or by agreement with management prior to expiry. After termination your employment reverts to the collective agreement which guarantees a full redundancy. It's time to place these junk these contracts, so that journalists have legal rights and certainty regarding their working conditions. Contact your Alliance organiser to discuss your options.**

## Don't discount journalism

News Ltd staff deserve to be treated with respect. Respect for their livelihoods, respect for their careers, respect for the many years of work they have put in to ensure top-notch stories are delivered to the public, day in, day out.

Instead of showing staff respect, News Ltd has shown some of their longest-serving journalists the door.

Journalists deserve better than to be informed of looming job losses through the front page of today's Media section of *The Australian*. Media Alliance officials are seeking a meeting with News Ltd management and demand a respectful relationship between management and staff, and the removal of individual contracts that undermine conditions.

**Not a member?**  
**Join your union at**  
[\*\*www.alliance.org.au\*\*](http://www.alliance.org.au)  
**or call 1300 656 513.**  
*Even if you're on an AWA you can still be a member.*

Contact your house committee or organiser to discuss further issues.

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