

by Mr. Stevenson, counsel for the press, and by Mr. Smith, Editor of the *Evening Post*, that it was proper that information relating to identification and condition of the bodies found should not be made public till time had been given to communicate with next-of-kin. Mr. Smith suggested it was not necessary to withhold the information from the press, but that they should be trusted not to make publication till opportunity had been given of communicating with the next-of-kin. That was, in the circumstances of a disaster in this remote area, even if desirable, probably impossible. The incidents referred to occurred before the last of the bodies reached the plateau, and in fact the public received all the news available as soon as it could properly be made public. That it might have been released after the deadline of some evening papers may have occasioned them at least some disappointment. I think it clear that the public interest did not suffer in any respect at all from any of the restrictions imposed by the authorities, whether or no the instructions not to give information applied to civilian volunteers as well as to Service personnel. I find it difficult to reconcile conflicting statements as to the words actually used in many of the conversations recorded. I am satisfied that Flight Lieutenant Jacobsen was justified in placing the Karioi Airfield out of bounds to ensure safety, that Colonel Pleasants was justified in doing likewise with the Cowern's Mill area, and that they obtained authority for their action. I am satisfied also that Sergeant Taylor was justified in restricting the use of the track from the plateau to the requirements of search parties going to the mountain and bearers bringing back the bodies. More importance seems to be attached to what was said, or might have been said, as to who gave orders for these restrictions. Reporters seem to me to have rather over-emphasized their recollection of words used relating to supposed instructions from the Prime Minister's Department or the Air Department, without at the same time having a clear recollection as to whether they were speaking to soldiers or civilians, or the particular point reached in the conversation recorded. To me it appeared there was a tendency on the part of reporters to make their case justify, if possible, subsequent editorial comment indicting the Acting Prime Minister and the Air Department of attempting to channel information away from the press to the Publicity Department of the Prime Minister's Department. I am satisfied that neither Colonel Pleasants nor Captain Slade-Jones instructed volunteers going to or returning from the mountain that they were not to disclose information. They certainly instructed Service personnel that they were not entitled to grant interviews or give information to any one. I think from a military point of view the instruction to reporters that interviews were not to take place in the area controlled at Cowern's Mill referred to as the yard was permissible. The removal of pressmen from the precincts of the radio van was, on the evidence given, unquestionably justified. That Colonel Pleasants was bound not to give information of messages passed from the plane to that van to be forwarded to the Air Department or the Prime Minister's Department in Wellington is again, I think, unquestionable. It seems that Sergeant Taylor did instruct that no information was to be given by those returning from the plane regarding the bodies and details of wreckage. It is possible that Sergeant Taylor's instructions may have been interpreted as binding on volunteers as well as Service personnel, and covered more than mere information as to the condition and identification of the bodies, and it may even be that the police official under him at the plateau overstated the position if he warned reporters not to question members of the returning parties. Those on the spot, and aware of the general circumstances, may have wondered if any interference or control at all was necessary. The account of the circumstances confronting Sergeant Taylor does, I think, adequately explain the insistent need of control and discipline if the operations entrusted to his control were to be efficiently carried out in a decent and fitting manner.

Counsel for the Journalists' Association, Mr. Leicester, opened his case as if the reporters were championing the cause of freedom of the press and the freedom of the individual. If that was their belief, they chose a series of incidents to support their cause much too insignificant, in my opinion, to sustain the burden. In their evidence