

political organisations: newspapers with opposing political outlooks were present in both agencies. The two Nelson papers in the *Otago Daily Times* group were in political opposition to one another. The *Evening Post*³⁶ was an opposition paper while the *Hawke's Bay Herald*³⁷ supported the Government. Most notably the *Lyttelton Times* was a staunch supporter of Vogel while the *Otago Daily Times* was his most fervent opponent. The *Wellington Independent* was with the Greville group, and, while it was a Vogel supporter and thus at odds with the *Otago Daily Times*, both it and the *Otago Daily Times* held that their presence in opposing press agencies was on account, not of political differences, but of an inability to agree on a price for the supply of telegrams.³⁸

Despite the primarily business orientation of the two press agencies, the Government, in particular Vogel, was often to be accused of improper interference with agency telegrams. The most serious incident was one which escalated eventually to become known as the Telegraph Libel Case,³⁹ which took place during the Franco-Prussian War and had to do with the news of the victory of Prussia, the surrender of Napoleon III at Sedan and the declaration of France as a republic. The S.S. *Gothenberg* was about to leave for Bluff when the news began arriving at Melbourne. The ship waited until a telegraphic summary for the *Otago Daily Times* group was prepared and thus sailed with it but not that of the rival agency. And yet this news was carried in the *Wellington Independent* before it appeared in either the *Otago Daily Times* or the *Evening Post*, the Wellington member of the *Otago Daily Times* agency.

The *Otago Daily Times* on 1 October 1870 accused the Government of holding back its telegrams until opposition news summaries appeared:

By Electric Telegraph. Wellington September 30. The English mail telegrams this morning were kept back until a message containing a summary of the news had been sent to the Government. The contents of this message were communicated by the Government to the Independent which thus issued an Extra before a single line of the Press telegrams was received. The Evening Post denounces this conduct as grossly unfair and dishonest.

In the editorial on the same day, the argument continued:

A greater degree of excitement has never been witnessed in Dunedin on any similar occasion than that which seized all classes of the community yesterday, when the nature of the English mail news was made known. A crowd of two or three hundred literally besieged our door. . . We regret the delay which took place in the publication but the delay was not owing to any neglect on our part. . . We assert that the Telegraph Office, acting of course under instructions from the General Government unnecessarily delayed our telegrams in order to serve a political purpose. The object of this delay is sufficiently explained in the Wellington telegram which appears in another column.