

PRINTERS AND NEWSPAPERS BILL  
(Serial 33)

Bill presented and read a first time.

Mr EVERINGHAM (Chief Minister): Mr Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

Mr Speaker, I believe that the principal objective of this type of legislation should be to provide a means of identification of printers and publishers in cases where civil or criminal action against such persons may justifiably be contemplated. Examples of court actions would include civil suits for libel or criminal proceedings for contempt where material prejudicial to a pending trial is published. The 1928 act of the Northern Territory, which presently stands on the statute books, is obscure, confusing and ineffective. Because of the large number of amendments required, this bill repeals the present legislation and proposes an entirely new act in its place.

The bill preserves the basic requirement that printers print their names and addresses on any works that they publish. In the case of newspapers, publishers have a similar obligation. In the case of a paper or a book, the printer is required to keep a copy of the work and on it place the name and address of the person who employed him to print it. Failure to comply with these basic requirements will render offenders liable to penalties which have been increased in line with similar penalties in South Australia, Western Australia and the ACT.

The definitions section needed attention. Some of the old definitions, while legally valid, are in a confusing format. For example, the old definition describes a newspaper as including a publication costing 10¢ or any lesser amount. At first glance, it would appear that no newspaper published in the Territory would be covered by the act because of the reference to price. The word 'includes' in the definition shows, however, that the description is not intended to be exhaustive and free newspapers or those sold for more than 10¢ are covered. Nonetheless, the format of the old definition led to widespread misapprehension as to its effect. Accordingly, the definitions have been revised and updated. In addition to the revisions, definitions of 'duplicating machine', 'printer', 'printing press', 'proprietor' and 'publisher', hitherto missing from the act, have been included.

The old requirements for registration of newspapers and printing presses have been deleted as they serve little purpose. The requirements for printers and publishers of newspapers to enter into recognisances against penalties inflicted on conviction for publishing blasphemous or seditious libel have been abolished also.

I believe that, while a simplified procedure should be received favourably by publishing enterprises, the retention of the basic requirement for publication of the names and addresses of printers and publishers, together with the provision of realistic penalties, should protect the public interest. I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.