Mr Big of Bankstown
The Scandalous Fitzpatrick and Browne Affair
By Andrew Moore

When a short article printed in a local newspaper in 1955 resulted in the gaoling of rough-hewn Bankstown businessman Ray Fitzpatrick and trouble-making journalist Frank Browne, one of the most extraordinary legal cases in Australia’s history unfolded.

Amongst the ancient enmities, business rivalries and factional politics of post-war Bankstown – ‘the Birmingham of Australia’ – the Fitzpatrick and Browne affair pitted the right to free speech against parliamentary privilege.

Fitzpatrick’s penchant for rorting the system, along with Browne’s reputation for fiery verbal attacks, quickly got the pair in trouble when they used Fitzpatrick’s newspaper to teach MP Charles Morgan a lesson.

In an unprecedented use of parliamentary privilege, Fitzpatrick and Browne were imprisoned solely on a vote of the House of Representatives – without charge, trial or legal representation – after making unsubstantiated and erroneous claims about Morgan.

Filled with larrikins and crooks, pious politicians and loudmouthed reporters, Mr Big of Bankstown mixes bribery and corruption with violence and power-wrangling, revealing the Underbelly of 1950s Australia.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andrew Moore is an associate professor of Australian history at the University of Western Sydney. He is an associate editor of Labour History and a member of the NSW working party of the Australian Dictionary of Biography, as well as a research associate of the Social Justice Social Change Research Group at UWS. His first book, The Secret Army and the Premier was shortlisted for the 1990 Marjorie Barnard literary award; his last book, Francis De Groot, Irish Fascist Australian Legend was shortlisted for the 2006 NSW Premier’s History Awards.