



The Media POLICY DEBATE

And should it even be taking place?

UNTIL fairly recently, all the talk around the “New South Africa” had yielded very little discussion about the role of the mass media.

Politicians had been conducting talks about talks and arguing about constituent assemblies or national conventions or Indabas; lawyers were talking about Bills Of Rights and definitions of Apartheid legislation; educationists were discussing the opening of schools, the need for relevance and equality, and the pros and cons of affirmative action; and economists were discussing issues such as nationalisation, mixed economies and the social responsibilities of business.

But while all this talk was going on, it seemed as if journalists were content to sit back and wait to see what kind of media system would eventually emerge in a post-Apartheid South Africa – as if the mass media would automatically take on the form and function of whatever political and economic dispensation the politicians happened to decide on: private ownership in a free-market society, public (State) ownership under a socialist government, or some kind of compromise in a mixed economy.

Thankfully this seems to be changing. Just as politicians are coming to terms with the fact that “democracy” is a rather nebulous concept, so media practitioners are beginning to realise that “press freedom” can be interpreted in various ways.

Given the fact that the media have an enormous responsibility during these exciting times of change and beyond, it is essential that interested parties define their goals clearly and make sure that the question of a “media policy” assumes its rightful place in the negotiations process.

What little discussion has emerged around this critical issue in recent months is as diverse as the entire South African political scene. It ranges from calls for the outright

nationalisation of all media so that the State will control the flow of information in the interests of the ‘people’, to the passionate defence of free enterprise under which the market would decide which media survive in open competition for readers, listeners and viewers.

Some would go so far as to say that there is no need for this debate at all, that any suggestion of a post-Apartheid “media policy” smacks of State control, of Big Brother in the newsroom with a censor’s hat and a red pen.

Others believe the concentration of media in the hands of a few large companies limits democracy in the sense that alternative, perhaps less powerful voices, are often denied access to mass media and production processes. At the very least, this argument calls for anti-trust laws to act against monopolistic control. In its extreme form, advocates of government intervention call for outright public (State) ownership and control.

In *Review’s* Special Report this issue, we look at a cross section of views expressed by journalists and media analysts at the recent Media Policy Workshop held at Rhodes University’s Department of Journalism and Media Studies.

While there was clearly no meeting of minds – and no attempt to formulate anything as ambitious, or presumptuous, as a “media charter” – there was at least a genuine attempt on the part of most delegates to understand opposing views.

Something like a process of negotiation has thus been set in motion, but it looks as if any formalised media policy for a “New South Africa” is going to have a very stormy passage indeed. But at least people are now discussing these issues and putting their positions and this is infinitely preferable to the pregnant silence of the recent past.

PLEASE TURN OVER

ERIC LOUW

Restructuring the media: can socialist and libertarian principles be combined?

A capitalist society, South Africa currently has a media that is driven by commercial principles. This media has failed dismally to service all South Africans with the full range of information they need to make rational decisions about their world. Those in the mainstream press have traditionally blamed government censorship for their failure to fully cover events. It is true that the state has placed enormous restrictions upon the media. However, a significant part of the problem lies in the market mechanism itself when applied to media organization. In other words there are problems inherent in the libertarian model of the media (Louw, 1984).

The claim that a libertarian ('free enterprise') media guarantees a 'free market place of ideas' is not borne out by the facts.

Rather a commercially-oriented media means market-censorship. It means a media *de facto* 'controlled' by advertisers, and the middle-class interests they pander to. Advertisers are interested in those with disposable income; and that means the middle class. And if advertisers are interested in the middle class, then it is this middle class that editors of the commercially-driven media must attract if they are to survive.



ERIC LOUW, of the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Natal, Durban.

Non-middle class audiences are not profitable, and hence the media serving, for example, working-class opinion in a capitalist society will face enormous financial difficulties because they will have comparatively less success in attracting advertising.

The best South African example of this is the case of the *Rand Daily Mail*. This newspaper had an enormous circulation when it was closed. The problem was that too high a percentage of its readers were black. Worse, from the point of view of advertisers, they were working-class blacks, and so had little disposable income. For advertisers this meant the *Rand Daily Mail* was a bad bet

– it meant they had to pay advertising rates calculated on an enormous readership of people they believed could not afford their products. So the more successful the *Rand Daily Mail* was in attracting new black working-class readers, the less successful it became within a market-libertarian press system.

This means that to be successful as an editor within a South African libertarian press framework one has to, in effect, 'censor' news in order to please the white middle class. This group is generally conservative, and prefers not to hear the 'bad tidings' about the social struggle in South Africa. This results in a curtailment of the flow of information in society. Clearly, then, a libertarian model has severe limitations, especially in the South African context.

Given the above problem, a logical argument might be to argue for the abolishment of the libertarian media model.

The next logical step might be to argue for state intervention or "nationalisation" of the media.

In a state whose government represented a working-class constituency such pressures towards nationalisation could become very great indeed. This would certainly be the Leninist-socialist argument.

A Leninist-socialist media model could certainly overcome the skewing of the information flow which currently favours the "haves" (i.e. the capitalist

ASSUMPTIONS

owners of the media and the middle classes). Such a nationalised media could ensure, for example, that working-class opinion (and rural peasant opinion) was given a platform. However, at what cost? And does this form of media not merely skew and distort information flow in a different way?

This approach to the media has a number of serious limitations, which recent events in Eastern Europe have well illustrated. Primary amongst these is that a government adopting this approach to the media runs the risk of blinding itself.

Given the problems with both the libertarian and Leninist models, and yet recognizing the need to overcome market distortion, what is the answer?

This paper will argue for a position that attempts to marry the positive aspects of both the libertarian and Marxist approaches, and yet one that attempts to avoid the pitfalls of both. This paper will hence argue for a position between the options of (1) nationalising the media, and (2) leaving the current structures untempered with.

The third option could be termed a democratic socialist option.

I would argue that such a third route is consistent with the principles as spelled out in the the ANC's Freedom Charter. In addition, it is an approach fully compatible with the interests of the large working-class constituency within the ANC support base. Of course, the actual extent to which the Freedom Charter's principles will ultimately prevail in the formulation of a future media policy has yet to be determined. Ultimately, it will not be principles alone, but also struggles on the ground – both within the ANC and within the wider society – which will set the parameters for a media policy. However, given that the ANC seems set to be the key player in South Africa (at least in the short-to-medium term), the ANC's Charter will undoubtedly play some role in the restructuring of our society. Hence it seems valuable to brainstorm around the parameters set by (i) the Freedom Charter (and its 'national liberation'/ multi-class position), as well as by (ii) the needs of the strong working class and/or socialist constituency within the ANC.

1 Some sort of socialist redistribution of resources (including media resources) is required to redress the skewing produced by racial-capitalism. At the same time, working from the Freedom Charter's principle of a 'national liberation' (which is a multi-class position), this paper simultaneously assumes the importance of democracy, and a guaranteed diversity of opinion.

2 A national and regional media structure(s) that explicitly articulates the positions of peasants and the working class (and/or a socialist position) is required.

3 Any overt 'takeover' (nationalisation, or otherwise) of the existing commercial media will destroy this media's credibility with their existing audience and so would not serve an ANC government attempting to gain hegemony over society. In fact, nationalisation of the media would presumably only lead to the development of an 'alternative' (or even underground) press; and/or would encourage the exodus of skilled whites from South Africa

4 South Africa has a sophisticated commercial media infrastructure and related advertising industry. The latter does facilitate the transfer of wealth into the media structures. To destroy this system will only mean having to create a new bureaucracy to replace it in the task of distributing information (and paying for it). In the short-to-medium term it might therefore be more efficient for the ANC to leave these existing structures in place, but find ways to 'use' them to complement Charterist and socialist policies.

5 But, the present media-and-advertising structures operate against both the working class, peasants and unemployed through a form of 'economic censorship'. The present media system encourages a middle-class bias in news and information dispersal. A creative way of 'challenging' this prob-

lem will need to be found – i.e. what the ANC will really need to serve its constituency's interests is a way of transferring some wealth away from the conservative establishment media and into media which articulate the interests of the working class, peasants and the unemployed.

A working-class media is not economically viable in terms of capitalist accounting (because of advertising pressures). The only way a working-class media can survive is with a massive subsidy from somewhere – eg. at present church funding in South Africa.

Given that overseas (and possibly also church) funding will fall away in a post-apartheid South Africa, there is a need to give serious consideration to finding an alternative 'subsidy' arrangement.

6 A diversity of opinion in society is seen to be healthy. In other words, libertarian media theory does contain some valuable principles which it would be valuable to incorporate into a restructured South African media network.

For one thing, if each constituency has its own media this is presumably the most effective way for a government to keep tabs on public opinion. Block this information distribution mechanism and a security police mechanism is then needed to collect the information instead.

South Africa under the National Party has been a case in point. Such a security mechanism is both very expensive (and hence wasteful of limited resources) and is, in any case, less effective than an open media system.

7 The proposed democratic socialist media would be built on the joint assumptions that: (a) diversity of opinion and/or democratic public debate is to be encouraged; and (b) that the state needs to intervene to insure that working class, peasant and unemployed opinion is given a media vehicle. Such a system would constitute a 'socialist challenge' to capitalist media hegemony but at the same time avoids the mistakes of Eastern Europe.

PLEASE TURN OVER

ERIC LOUW

A democratic socialist media system

Clearly a government serving the present "have nots" (working class, peasants and unemployed) will be under considerable pressure from its constituency to change the present media system, because the present network only articulates the position of a (white middle class) minority. This paper will argue that instead of nationalising the existing commercial media, such a government might be better off creating a parallel system for the purposes of its constituency. This parallel system would consist of the following:

(1) A Media Subsidy System

A subsidy system would be designed to overcome the skewing that a capitalist media system creates – the subsidy would work with a view to ensuring that all constituencies were guaranteed access to a media of their choice.

The subsidy system would be administered by a statutory Media Council. Other countries to have tried such subsidy systems are Sweden, Holland, and Belgium.

The state would *create a fund to pay for media diversity*. This fund would be created from taxes on the commercial media and advertising sector. However, if taxing this sector cannot provide sufficient funds, the state must provide funds from its other sources. The fund would be large enough to pay for the running of the country's media so as to ensure that:

- Every major constituency has its own media network in *proportion* to the size of its constituency within the overall population. In other words if 50% of the

population are socialists and 40% nationalists then the Media Council must ensure that 50% of the resources invested in the country's media be allocated to a socialist media, and 40% to nationalist media; and

- Minor constituencies have a 'media voice' (say in the form of a time slot on 'an alternative' TV or radio network etc). For example: if 1% of the population were Ethiopian-Church Revivalists then they should get 1% of the media budget. But 1% of the total budget may be insufficient to effectively run an independent ECR media structure. For cases like this it may be best if the Council allocates money for the creation of a 'multi-voiced' TV or radio channel. Each minority group could be allocated a space on this channel in *proportion* to the size of its constituency.

The Media Council would only be responsible for allocating money to the different constituencies, and/or allocating money to grassroots Media Resource Centres. The Council would NOT run any media themselves. Neither would the Council decide how the money is to be spent.

To use the above example, once the Nationalists got their 40% it would be up to them to spend it on media *as they saw fit*. This places the onus on each constituency to use the money it is given to the best possible advantage to advance their own particular world view.

The Media Council would be created by statute to administer the subsidy system. This Council would need to be composed of a *diversity* of opinion – i.e. drawn from media experts as well as representatives from all the major constituencies in society. It would need to be independent from the pressures of any one constituency – i.e. independent from the ruling political party in power (although such a party would clearly be represented on such a Council as one of the major constituencies in society).

For this reason the Media Council might possibly also be the most appropriate body to deal with the country's satellite policy (which will become an area of growing importance in the future).

This Media Council would do a yearly 'audit' of public opinion. (If this proves too complex, it may be necessary to

publish an audit only every two or three years). The aim would be to ascertain the exact distribution of public support for each constituency in society. The 'audit' is to ensure that the subsidy system does not suffer from inertia.

In other words, if the nationalists got 40% of last year's media budget, but they messed up their media usage they might lose support. If so, and for example their constituency shrank to 35%, then their slice of the budget would shrink to 35%. This would place the onus on *them* to cut back on the size of their media network in accordance with the money available.

If, on the other hand, the nationalists used their 40% of the budget well and increased their constituency to 50%, then the following year their slice would be increased to 50% and they would be able to expand their media network. The same logic holds for smaller constituencies – if a small group use their 1% of media time well they might increase their support to 5% the next year. This might give them a large enough proportion of the budget to start their own independent channel. With this they could increase their support to 10%, 20% and so on. Hence a minority position in society could grow to a majority position (and visa versa).

The subsidy system would be able to deal with this development – i.e. it is a dynamic democratic system of matching media to actual public opinion.

The Media Council could also assist the state in ascertaining levels of taxation on the commercial media infrastructures (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, advertising and PR agencies, film and video distributors, cinema industry, etc).

Taxation of these media is one way of re-distributing wealth away from, say, the liberal commercial press sector towards other constituencies.

Such a subsidy system would enable an ANC government, for example, to set up a media network to serve its own constituency's needs. However, it would simultaneously guarantee other constituencies their own independent media.

Under such a media system there would be no need to nationalise the existing English-liberal or Afrikaner-nationalist press in order to redress the skewing of information resources.

(2) The SABC

The SABC will present those administering a democratic socialist media policy with something of a challenge.

An incoming government voted in on a one-person-one-vote basis will be under real pressure from its constituency to 'capture' the SABC for its own purposes. In terms of the legislation governing the SABC this is made possible (Tomaselli et al, 1989). Such a takeover would, of course, merely replicate the sort of distortion of information flow perpetrated by the National Party in its handling of the SABC.

From the perspective of a democratic-socialist media policy such a 'takeover' of the SABC would be unacceptable because it would violate the (democratic) principle of generating a 'diversity of opinion'.

The question is – how would a democratic socialist media policy handle the restructuring of the SABC?

Even though a centralized media system is inherently undemocratic, it seems most cost effective (at least in the short to medium term) to retain a centralized electronic media infrastructure – i.e. retain the existing Auckland Park (and related national-network) SABC complex. However, it might be necessary for the Media Council to oversee – via representation on the SABC Board – the technical and managerial side of the SABC to ensure that no one constituency in society gained control of these 'non-editorial' functions.

However, if a centralized structure is retained, a way needs to be found of creating a diversity of opinion within this electronic media. If this is not done, this media will lose 'credibility' with the audience – as we have seen with the National Party controlled SABC and with the East European media. (I think Eastern Europe demonstrates that a socialist-controlled media which grants a monopoly to socialist opinion is not in the interests of socialism in the long term)

The following may be an option a future government could look at:

(a) Create a 'national' channel on both TV and Radio. This could consist of programming designed to 're-educate' people for a non-racial South Africa.

Such a national channel should satisfy the demands of the new government's constituency for visible intervention into the media world. This 'single' channel may broadcast simultaneously in different languages – eg. English, Afrikaans, Nguni and Sotho. (So for example, retaining the Afrikaans Service in a very similar format to the existing programming, while adding a new "nation building non-racial" content might be the most effective way to reach this sector, albeit as part of a long-term process)

But at the same time, in order to satisfy the requirements of the proposed democratic socialist media policy, there would be a need to:

(b) Create sub-networks (of TV and radio) for each constituency. Each major constituency would be allocated a percentage of broadcast time in terms of the 'audit' figures produced by the Media Council. Very large constituencies may even have their own radio or TV channel in terms of such a system. Smaller constituencies would only have time slots.

A special channel (for example, on Sundays) could be operated for 'Micro-groups' (not yet large enough to register on the 'audit'). Such micro-groups could possibly be allocated an occasional one hour slot in which to try and promote their position. If successful they might win a constituency and so ultimately become a minor constituency with a right to a media budget of their own.

In the long run it might be possible to decentralize the electronic media network itself so that studio facilities are spread into all the centres of the country. This would mean as wide a spread of people as possible are given direct access to the media. (See Nigg & Wade, 1980)

Such a diversified and less centralized media network would be democratic and more subject to direct control by grassroots constituencies at the local level.

In the long run a democratic socialist media subsidy system should perhaps make a proliferation of electronic media access points its long-term aim (perhaps in the form of cable TV networks?).

Reaching for a Media Charter

During the process of restructuring South Africa into a non-racial democratic state we have the opportunity to re-make our media into a democratic communication system. Perhaps a Media Charter would be helpful in this process.

The question is what should such a Media Charter say? Some ideas in this regard are:

- Freedom of expression should be guaranteed.

- But such freedom should not be only a 'paper right' (as in the libertarian model).

Rather, to make freedom of expression meaningful, all sectors of society must be guaranteed the actual resources/facilities required to make themselves heard. In this case the "have nots" in society present media planners with a special problem – unless society as a whole guarantees the existence of media resources for this sector, their voice will be stifled by economic pressures. This is why a democratic socialist media system would insist that a system of transferring resources into media infrastructures for all is required. A subsidy system seems then most efficient way of achieving this aim.

- A democratic media system should guarantee all citizens direct access to media resources. Local media resource centres, and (possibly) local cable TV networks, seem the most practical way of providing such access. These would also need to be subsidised by the Media Council.

- A media policy should avoid inertia in the media system, and also avoid inertia in the Media Policy itself. Society will continually change. As it does so media policy, and the administration thereof, must keep pace.

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HARVEY TYSON

Truth, tolerance, fairness and freedom are the values we should be striving for

THIS paper is supposed to focus on the so-called 'mainstream press', as opposed to the so-called 'alternative press', neither of which is capable of precise definition. There is no clear boundary between the two; certainly none as clear as, say, the line between party papers and independent ones; or the community neighbourhood press and the daily metropolitan press.

The alternative press has been part of a valuable protest medium in times of censorship and oppression. It has played a proud and significant role (and one which the established mainstream press has touched on only at risk of extinction as opposed to suspension).(1)

But as society grows closer to democracy and freedom, the distinctions between the two will of necessity fade. However, if one regime were to be substituted for another, a new type of alternative—or even underground—press may evolve.

In any event, the real discussion should be about the future role of the media, or of the printed press, not about which titles should be condemned to death in Utopia in order to benefit other favoured forms of publication. Therein lies a barren political debate, and one which presupposes lack of freedom.



HARVEY TYSON, Editor-in-Chief of The Star offers a private view.

Instead I wish to focus on the press's role in relation to fundamental values. I shall deal with only four.

Truth, Tolerance, Fairness and Freedom.

TRUTH

Truth, as John Stuart Mill explained 150 years ago during a radical political transition on another continent, is *not a single element. It is a gem of many faces, each capable of different – even contradictory – appearance.* (2)

I emphasise that statement, because it is not only basic to any meaningful debate on the press, it also encapsulates the entire argument for a free press. To summarise further Mill's logic:

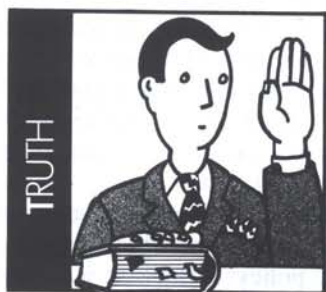
It is impossible to grasp the whole truth from a single point of view; and conversely, every honest point of view achieves an aspect of truth. (3)

With Mill's logic in mind, let us examine some contradictory versions of truth about the South African press:

The first set of opposing "truths" consists of the following:

A. It is believed that 95 percent of the press is controlled by a handful of people in Anglo-American and Sanlam; that the capitalist press is the lackey of its masters who insist on using their monopoly on the press to ensure their own positions and their ideology; that the "mainstream" press is the creature of the regime; that the national AND the international press have submitted to or have indirectly supported apartheid. (4)

B. The contradictory version is that there are far in excess of 100 daily and



weekly newspapers in South Africa and that only 24 of the biggest are partly owned by the shareholders of major financial institutions. (5)

Most of the major English dailies and the overseas press have always been emphatically anti-apartheid. If there has been overt bias in South African reporting, this has been mainly due, in recent years, to bannings and government censorship. It is true, however, that the mainstream press has been hugely "white-oriented", but this was part of an historical process, and there is extraordinarily rapid change.

Second versions of opposing truths:

A. It is a fallacy of Western democracy that ownership and control of the press can be separated. (6)

B. The opposite perception is that ownership and control can, and often are, separated where newspaper chains (as against sole proprietorship) exist. In fact, fact, newspaper chains, owning papers with different audiences and policies, cannot operate efficiently without divorcing ownership and editorial control. Thus editors working within a newspaper group usually have astonishing independence, and are even protected from commercial, shareholder, advertising and political pressure. (7)

Third versions:

A. Newspaper editors are responsible to no-one. It is essential for democracy

that they be made answerable to the people.

B. On the other hand, the concept of editorial policy being subject to the whims of a committee elected supposedly in the name of the people, is seen as the very antithesis of editorial independence. Committee policy over news and opinion encourages mediocrity – or worse.

No newspaper could fearlessly investigate and expose maladministration in an administration or local community if the newspaper is answerable to representatives of the administration, or the local community. The urge of members of the public or of committees to hush things up "in the wider interests of the community" is demonstrated daily.

Fourth example:

A. There is the socialist version that the SA media have failed in their duty to mobilise mass opinion for the national good.

B. There is the Western version that it is the duty of the media to avoid "mobilisation of the masses" (if this were ever possible, for people are usually inclined to think for themselves). Instead, the duty of the media is to report all sides as fairly as they can, without propaganda.

Two more versions of the truth.

A. Proponents of nationalisation and/or State control of the press say that organisations like Anglo-American Corporation must be prevented from in-

sidious control and manipulation of the main printed media.

B. Anglo-American believes that its altruistic attempts to shield part of the press from take-overs by interested parties (including agents of any government) has injured Anglo. Though Anglo has no influence whatever on anything that appears in any publication, the false perception of its "control" has guaranteed it an unsympathetic press, and damaged its reputation.

Why should Anglo, through its tenuous cross-holdings, carry on trying to uphold independence and indirectly encourage reasonable standards, when its influence is so negligible, the perception so skewed, and the criticism so virulent?

Another version of "truth":

A. Argus Newspapers has a monopoly on most of the country's press resources which creates a protective ring around its own publications. This monopoly of resources, in capital, in printing, in skills, in distribution, prevents competition and allows no rival publications to grow.

B. The response from Argus, never yet publicly expressed, is indignant. It finds itself accused of killing off the opposition through acquisition and close-down, when, in fact, it believes it is doing its best to rationalise (and pool) resources in order to keep several newspapers alive... even to the detriment of its own newspapers.

HARVEY TYSON

CONTINUED

The seventh set of truths would be:

A. Monopoly capitalist control over the media, compounded by racist policies, has effectively deprived the black majority of any access to the mass media.(8)

B. Each of the assumptions in the above sentence are denied. For example, according to the contradictory truth, it is the mis-labelled "capitalist, profit-obsessed" press, which saved the old *Bantu World* from extinction, and kept it alive for years despite a steady and inevitable loss. When *The World* was shut down by the government, Argus defiantly opened *Post*, after keeping unemployed black journalists on the payroll for months.

It risked its presses and assets to meet a principle. It supported all detained black journalists on full salary. When the government closed down *Post* during an industrial dispute, Argus went through the same costly process – only this time having to promote an unknown weekly "freebie" into a national newspaper with a suburban name; and also having to switch presses and other assets into safer channels. The costs and the risks offered no profit whatever...only more political threat.

There are many other aspects of truth; viewpoints; sets of facts and prejudices; accusations and counter-accusations; justifications and counter-arguments. Let me give you just one more set of contradictory examples.

A. One version is that advertising has a pernicious influence on the community and the press. It turns people into greedy consumers at the expense of their quality of life. It takes space from editorial. It corrupts the content of newspapers.

B. The other version is that advertising reduces by as much as two-thirds the cost of publishing (and the price for the copy of a newspaper which must be paid by

readers, or if nationalised, by taxpayers of the State).

Advertising, far from reducing space, allows additional space for editorial at no extra cost. (Successful commercial papers run to 100 pages or more. Even the biggest national State-run newspapers in the world seldom reach 24 pages). The only influence advertising is likely to have on editors, in the economically independent mainstream press at least, is one of overt hostility to any hint of pressure from any advertiser.

Those are some honestly held points of view which make up what John Stuart Mill called "aspects of truth". It doesn't matter which you choose to believe. It does matter – irrespective of anyone's political ideology, values or cultural beliefs – that everyone should be able to expound any view and have access to all information in order to discover the truth.

Which brings me to the second fundamental value directly affecting the future of the press:



TOLERANCE

Our divided society, with its interesting variety of cultures and values, has almost no tradition of democracy and justice. Yet if we cannot quickly find some genuine give-and-take form of democracy, there will be no peace.

In trying to build a future, therefore, the key element above all others has to be tolerance.

Instead of demanding freedom of the press (rather than nationalisation of the press), we need to ensure that the press deserves to be free. Instead of demanding from the public the right to speak our minds fearlessly and without regard to others' sensitivities, we ought to be persuading the people that the press deserves that right.

The press, whatever its present or fu-

ture position, whatever its views, has a serious (and uncompromising) role to play in healing the wounds inflicted by violence and oppression and counter-violence.

We need, not so much a cause-oriented, propagandising or combative press, but one which will work hard at explaining both sides of each issue to all South Africans. Save us from the fervent socialists, free-marketeers, and other ideologues in all camps!

We have a responsibility to help cure the communal blindness brought on by an official policy of racism; a mutual attitude of enmity; and a century of ignorance and mistrust between separated communities living cheek-by-jowl.

We need in this period of instability and transition, media that will be constructive, not destructive. In a word, the press needs tolerance. We need less arrogance. But that form of tolerance has a weakness. It carries a latent virus. To be "positive" and Pollyana-like; to be constructive and constantly cheerful; is to be misleading – or worse – manipulative. We must guard against that form of weakness, but we should also guard against being party to the aggressive propaganda put out by most interests seeking power or special privilege in an unstable political situation.

This does not mean that propagandists should not be allowed to run hard-hitting newspapers. It is essential that, from the beginning, all views whether extreme or moderate must be allowed expression. But we all need to be aware that we can be hard-hitting without being intolerant; critical without being emotionally or misleadingly destructive.

These are qualities that cannot be legislated for or against. It requires peer pressure; something journalists need to think more about.

But there is a second form of tolerance required in our society if we are to have a free press.

● **Tolerance by journalists of each others' views.**

Already there is the unedifying spectacle of journalists slinging mud at one part of the press or another in order to further their own or some political interest. The press, like freedom, is indivisible when it comes to its role in society and its basic rights. If we wish to attain freedom we need to spend more time

being supportive of each other, regardless of positions and prejudices. Journalists need to spend less time spreading one-sided and inaccurate information in order to damage their rivals.

● **Tolerance by newly-formed political parties of any press that opposes them.**

Already there are ominous signs of threat, boycott and violence by some of the newly emerging political parties. Already black journalists are finding themselves worrying far less about State or proprietorial pressure, and much more about the possibility even of death at the hands of people in the community who disagree with their published views.

● **Tolerance by any government in power of all honestly held views.**

We have had little of that from government in the past 40 years...and there are signs that some future government might emulate past practices against the press with mirror-image arguments. I shall refer to this trend under the subject of Freedom.

Tolerance, being the key quality for national peace in the future, requires priority attention now. We need to be firm and strong in encouraging tolerance – and intolerant of intolerance.

As John Stuart Mill wrote: Tolerance must be seen, not as a weakness, but as a creative force.

FAIRNESS

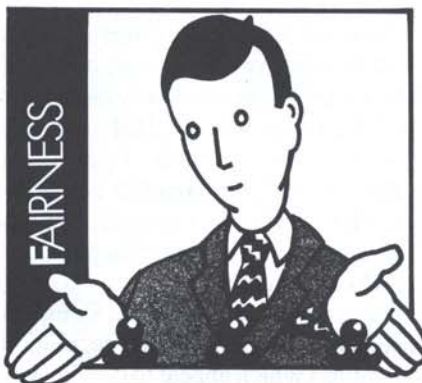
It seems to me that of all the aspects of truth that exist about the press in this country, the one on which there is nearly consensus is the imbalance of resources, of opportunities and of media coverage of our society as a whole.

Most are agreed that the balance of resources and skills should be put right as soon as possible; even before the nation embarks on the thorny road to a new South Africa.

The reasons for the imbalance, or the blame, are of little consequence. What is of cardinal importance is HOW to ensure fairness without sacrificing democracy and freedom. There is much talk of nationalisation of the press; though this comes mainly from the SACP and socialist academics and not from major new players such as the ANC and PAC.

There is talk of “democratisation” of the press, which usually turns out to be gobbledegook, or even a deliberate move towards tyranny in the name of “the

people”. It seems that we still have to learn the lessons of the Jacobins. If so, so be it – but not at the expense of true democracy and genuine press freedom.



I believe the economically independent press has a major responsibility in this regard. It has to take radical steps, immediately, to share what it has with those who have been deprived through discrimination, poverty, racism, and other historical factors.

While those on the receiving end expect nothing less in “reparations”, those in the capitalist system will say that they will act out of a sense of fairness; to protect the principle of a free press, and to do normal, fair, business.

Again, the rationalisations and rhetoric provided by different interests hardly matter. But I believe the so-called monopolistic press is more than happy to share, willingly, a century and a half of effort, talent, sweat, investment and experience in order to ensure:

- fairness and balance
- equal opportunity
- diversity of opinion and news analysis.

Only by working hard to provide these can press freedom be achieved.

It seems to me that the economically independent press should now make specific offers to any major, currently historically disadvantaged interest group in a position to begin to help itself. Those in a position to launch their own media should be offered:

1. Full use of the mainstream presses (at the same rates as the papers now cost out their own printing). This would be a major concession, for the cost of a single newly imported big press is now prohibi-

tive – as much as R100 million for a large colour press with peripherals.

2. Equal use of all pooled distribution resources, again at the same rates (usually based on circulation) as the existing dailies and weeklies arrange for themselves.

3. Training facilities for editorial skills, and advice on newspapering techniques. Everything, in fact, except participation in the emerging press’s editorial decisions.

4. Secondment of newspaper managerial skills.

5. Circulation expertise and distribution management.

6. Advertising advice, volunteered free by the agencies.

7. Newspaper Press Union membership and its shared facilities.

8. Media Council membership.

9. News agency and other shared feature syndication services.

10. Sharing of communication technology wherever possible.

All of these – or none of these – need be accepted by any party aspiring to introduce a new voice into the print media.

In my enthusiasm for diversifying and balancing the media market, I would wish to go one step further. I would like to see any serious new voice given an instant mass circulation if it cannot be done in the usual way. Perhaps a significant new paper could, for instance, “piggy-back” a major newspaper like *The Star*. Whether it was a separate tabloid carried within *The Star* once a week, or even a broadsheet daily, it would enjoy what *The Star* has taken 100 years to build: a daily readership of one million.

But these are only ideas, and there are snags, such as how to ensure fairness to different groups whenever an offer is made. Indeed, before offers are made, it should be up to black leaders in politics or business to evince interest in these ideas.

What if black interests or newly emerging elected political parties are against any aid from the “capitalist press”?

There is, of course, nothing to stop any group doing what countless “disadvantaged” political groups have done on several continents for the past 300 years:

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launch a party paper with the resources of sympathetic donors – and more important, with subscriptions from supporters or party members. Afrikanerdom found itself “disadvantaged” and poor in British colonial days, but managed the independent route.

Why should a new government not launch State-funded newspapers? Years ago I was one of those who lifted my hands in horror at such dependence on the State and the consequent interference in the marketplace and the free flow of news. But study of the State-subsidy systems in Sweden, Netherlands, and elsewhere suggests that the advantages from State subsidy for freedom of information and diversity are great; the disadvantages can be overcome.

But all South Africans of every creed and colour should insist that no State-funded publication meant for political or wide public consumption should enjoy any subsidy except through an independent body apportioning funds to agreed and strict rules.

There could be one exception in the new South Africa: a series of government-issue educational publications distributed in rural and under-developed areas.

Finally, black owners should be strongly encouraged to set up individual or co-operative “neighbourhood” newspapers, whether free or paid-for, but preferably supported by consumer advertising. The preference here is not for capitalism over socialism, but for individual or editorial independence over bureaucratic authoritarianism.

My only fear is that, given human nature and individual choice, the commercially independent press, paying attention to the real needs of readers rather than the perceptions of their rulers, will

quickly outclass all competition...and thus place themselves under the threat of any government which is allowed to be undemocratic.

FREEDOM.

There is nothing so effective as the threat of majority rule to make a minority government focus on democracy. It is a healthy process, which failed to occur as “liberation” governments – from Algeria to Zimbabwe; from Israel to Mozambique – took over the oppressive regulations used by retiring colonial powers. It could be different here.

For instance the SA Media Council is currently examining all the regulations and statutes which appear to conflict with the principles of any proposed Bill of Rights. The more one examines the 50 or so laws that inhibit the media, and compares them with the way nations such as the USA and Western Germany deal with similar problems, the more it becomes apparent that not a single restrictive press law is necessary to guarantee orderly government or a responsible press. Both freedom and responsibility can be properly tested in the courts in terms of a Bill of Rights.

Now is the time to put into practice Solon’s golden rule: a wise government should spend all its time abolishing laws, and preventing itself from passing new ones. In this way our society will get closer to real freedom – and distance itself from the kind of authoritarian, as well as discriminatory, legislation which has corrupted our current legal system.

In the cause of freedom of the press, it is my view that we should avoid any attempt whatever to give journalists special privileges. We should avoid the perception (especially among journalists) of their elitism. Special treatment is especially dangerous for it usually backfires on the press. Unesco has caused all genuine democrats real fear in this regard with its proposals for state-registration of journalists “for their own protection”.

To me it seems best that we should focus only on the fundamental value of freedom, and emphasise simplicity in protecting freedom of expression. Article 19 of the UN Charter does the job superbly. All that is required is the willingness of nations and the independence of courts to support the accepted principle.

Every qualification placed on freedom of expression creates a flaw, because

while almost all politicians support the principle of “freedom of the press”... each wants to insert provisos in the name of responsibility, or democracy, or justice or some other word which will protect that politician’s own interests. Thus, the National Party persuaded its own supporters that it was necessary, for the sake of democracy, to forbid freedom of expression to communists. It also passed a law forbidding incitement to racism – a law which effectively gagged almost all extra-parliamentary opposition.

Now, among the most well-meaning and liberal of extra-parliamentarians we hear proposals to ban fascism and racism...the ugly mirror-image of what the apartheid government did. Such qualifications on freedom of expression are not likely to curb either neo-nazis or racists. More likely they will result merely in banning political parties in a future State – and completing today’s vicious circle.

Freedom, I repeat, is indivisible. That is probably why the South African government, even in its worst days, was unable to suppress a hostile press. The very existence of the so-called mainstream press in South Africa, and its vociferous opposition in many quarters, allowed the so-called alternative press to come into being.

If you doubt this, you need only look to the rest of Africa, and to all those other countries in the world where no independent “mainstream” press exists. In all these countries, from China to Zimbabwe; from the Soviet Union to Iraq; there is not a single publication which can be hostile to the government and live. In only a very few of these countries some so-called opposition newspapers are allowed to criticise the Government...provided the criticism is “positive”, and does not hurt those in power.

The existence of a hostile press is the first test of freedom of expression.

In China this year I heard the Prime Minister lecturing the media on their role as good socialists. The truth, he inferred, was something for the government to decide, and the press to print. When some Chinese journalists hinted at problems – as at the time of the demonstrations in Tiananmen Square, for instance – those were purged from the news pages, radio

stations and television screens, despite their party allegiance.

When Russian editors were called upon to exercise glasnost recently, the perils of even approaching freedom of expression resulted in one publication (named *Glasnost*) being closed down. The Editor-in-chief of *Isvestia* – a man of immense influence in the Communist Party and in the Soviet Government – expressed the view that editing a newspaper in the new era was like “walking through a minefield”. I told him that the strikingly similar phrase used in South Africa by an editor of *The Star* was, “walking through a minefield blindfolded”. And that was 30 years ago; before mass bannings and Media Regulations.

When the press is totally owned or subdued by the State; where nationalisation is done in the name of freedom; there is no freedom. Editors are not allowed to walk on their own – let alone be offered the option of a stroll in the political minefields.

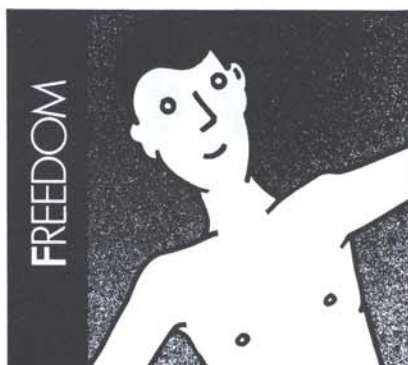
Iran and South Africa make excellent contrasts in this respect. When Iran exploded in revolution, the world’s political analysts, almost all the international intelligence networks; the press, TV news and the US Administration were taken totally by surprise. Why? Because the Shah tolerated only an obedient, unquestioning press.

In South Africa, from the moment the first apartheid law and the first detention-without-trial law were passed, this country was the focus of world attention, often in the most minute detail, often with far more exposure than the press of other countries gave even to their own affairs.

This was not due entirely to the crime against humanity (the crime of slavery, for instance, still flourishes elsewhere in the world without much outcry). The attention focussed on apartheid was mainly due to the “walk through the minefield” which South African journalists – usually oft-maligned mainstream journalists – have been taking for 40 years.

Which brings us back to the point of the indivisibility of freedom. You cannot exercise it by allowing “just a little freedom”. Freedom means that you and I can say what we think, provided we do not harm others. It also means that we can print what we think. You have to be of

independent mind and of independent means to be able to do that.



Yet neither freedom nor individual independence can be limitless. To whom, then, should the Press be answerable? Certainly not to itself. And, I would argue, certainly not the government, or even to the State or to “the people’s representatives”. The history of tyranny in the name of “the people” is too long and too well known for me to elaborate here. But let me name just one interesting example: When the Soviet press was instructed to “think for itself” for the first time in the USSR’s history, those newspapers representing the “people” did their utmost to oppose the move.

They even challenged the two giants, *Pravda* and *Isvestia* for publishing information that was hitherto secret. Why? Because the “people’s press” was run by the local Soviet committees. The last thing the “People’s Committees” want is for people to say what they think. It could destroy the Communist Party which, though strongly entrenched, represents a small minority.

To whom, then, should the press be answerable?

Democracy has taught us that it must be answerable to the Courts. It is the Courts who will decide where the right to free expression infringes on the right to individual privacy; on communal moral values; on the interests of the State. And it is the independent judiciary who must protect the independence of the press – just as the press must protect the independence of the Courts. This symbiosis is part of democracy, while a State press, or a press subservient to the party and/or “the people” is not helpful to democracy or to freedom.

These truisms may be obvious to you and I, and anyone else fully educated and taught to cherish these fundamental values, but they are not known to most of the under-privileged and ill-educated.

As a leader of the ANC so wisely says: unless the broad masses of the people want democracy, there will be no democracy.

We have to make them aware of their rights. We can do so only by massive moves in education. Freedom, your freedom, will depend on education. That is why all the media (and this is the first time I refer to the electronic as well as the printed media) must combine in overcoming SA’s appalling backlog in education.

To sum up on press freedom. The press has to earn it. It must do so:

- by demonstrating fairness;
- by playing a part in building a fair and just society;
- by being undivided and vigilant in its support of free expression;
- by helping to protect the independence of the judiciary;
- by respecting the authority of the courts;
- by doing everything possible to help in normal education;
- by rejecting fulltime hand-outs and resisting political pressure in order to be independent;
- by ensuring that views opposed to our own are given a voice.

FOOTNOTES

(1) An example of the measure of risk for a major daily: When *The Star* decided to publish an item about people in detention without trial – after a specific warning from the Security Police that the newspaper might be confiscated if this was done – the calculated cost of losing just one day’s edition was estimated for the Court at R500 000. On this scale, any closure lasting only a few days might see the end of a newspaper on whom several thousand jobs depended. The economic viability of several other newspapers would also be in jeopardy.

(2) *John Stuart Mill*, by Michael St J Packe, pref by Prof Hayek, Secker & Warburg, 1954

(3) *Ibid*

(4) Niddrie & Barrell, *SA mass media in a post-apartheid society*.

(5) NPU membership of daily, weekly

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Harvey Tyson

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and provincial newspapers; excluding periodicals, January, 1990. The total number of publications registered at the Department of Home Affairs in August, 1990 was 5 131. When the list is finally updated in 1991, it is likely that 3 000 odd publications will still be in existence.

However, the combined weekly and monthly circulations of the eight main "alternative" newspapers in South Africa amount to less than the week's output of a small "mainstream" daily.

(6) Victor Moche, *Towards a post-apartheid democratic media*.

(7) Editorial independence in Argus has been traditionally vouchsafed by a policy in which Argus Boards never discussed individual newspaper policy, and no editor was called upon to address the board. The Editor and Manager have equal responsibility for the wellbeing of their newspaper, but editors have sole charge of editorial policy.

The editor reports to no-one about the political views he expresses on his newspaper's behalf; nor is he required to heed advertisers' or other demands addressed to him or anyone else about editorial policy.

In practice he is protected from commercial and proprietorial pressures. In nearly 17 years as Editor of *The Star*, I was not once even approached by shareholders or board members or management about editorial. Threats from some advertisers to boycott the paper, unless editorial criticism was withdrawn, were easily rejected out of hand.

(9) Pallo Jordan, quoted by Niddrie & Barrell.

Notes on manuscripts

AUTHORS who wish to submit work for publication in *Review* should please send their scripts to: **The Editor, Rhodes University Journalism Review, PO Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.**

Supporting graphics or photographs should be clearly captioned and their source revealed. If supporting visual material is copywrite protected, written permission from the copywrite holder is required and should be enclosed with your submission.

CHRISTINA JUTTERSTRÖM

Media must be independent of political parties, organisations and business companies

I hope South Africa ends up with a generous media constitution. At the same time, one should not have too many laws and rules. Sooner or later they limit the freedom of the press rather than enlarge it.

I belonged to those who, during the sixties and the seventies, sympathised with, and thought I understood, the use of the one-party system by newly independent African countries as a way of making democracy. I thought it would be easier for countries to develop within such a system.

I no longer believe in one-party systems where everything is directed from the top. I think you have to have a multi-party system where you never silence people or parties or organisations. Let them come up to the surface, examine them and let people take their own view and choose among several political parties. Have confidence in your readers, the South Africans.

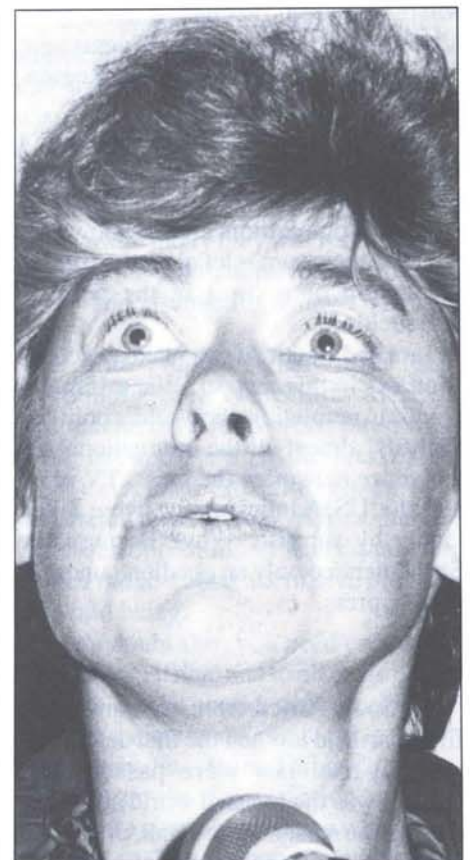
As a consequence of this, I am an ardent advocate of pluralism in media and of impartial and truthful reporting.

For democracy to function, one has to have media independent of political parties, organisations and business companies.

Sweden has an interesting legal and organisational situation on the media side.

Sweden was the first country to establish freedom of the press by law. In 1766 Parliament adopted a Freedom of the Press Act as a part of the Constitution.

Censorship and repression against the press have occurred since then – but since the constitutional reform of 1809, freedom of the press has prevailed in Sweden.



CHRISTINA JUTTERSTRÖM, Editor of *Dagens Nyheter*, Sweden's largest daily newspaper.

The present Act dates from 1949 – as a result of what happened during the war. Any amendments or changes of the Act have to be confirmed by two successive parliaments with general elections in between.

Under the Act, censorship, or other serious restrictions on publishing and distribution of printed matter, is explicitly forbidden.

To safeguard press freedom, law makers have set out a combination of measures.

Foremost among these devices is the institution of the *responsible publisher*. Any periodical appearing four times or more a year must appoint a responsible publisher who alone is responsible for the content. He or she alone – I am one of them – is held responsible for any violation of the Freedom of the Press Act.

The law also explicitly prohibits the investigation or disclosure of newspapermen's sources. A person who contributes to a newspaper as a reporter or informant is protected against legal actions. This protection is extended even to State and municipal employees, who are thus free to give information to newspapers and other media without fear of legal repercussions.

On the other hand, this doesn't prevent, from time to time, ministers and other similar persons from trying to silence their employees – sometimes with success.

There are also some exceptions to the general rule: for example, matters dealing with State security.

Another remarkable feature of the Swedish Freedom of the Press Act is the principle of free access to public documents. (It is a part of the lawmakers' intention to support the role of public watchdog.)

Requests for public documents may only be rejected with specific reference to a particular rule or rules of the Secrecy Act.

This is the legal framework for Swedish press freedom. It is, as I said, a constitutional law. Radio and TV, in general, follow the same rules, although these are not written in the Constitution.

For many decades, Swedish press organisations have been intent on guarding against abuse of the liberties guaranteed by the Constitution. In 1916 the Swedish Press Council was formed by the national press club, Publicistklubben, the newspaper publishers' association and the union of journalists. A journalistic Code of Ethics was set up in 1923 by the Press Council. The code we have today was adopted in 1978.

The code aims at upholding high ethical standards in general and, especially, at protecting the integrity of individuals.

A special section is devoted to combating editorial advertising and other

undue outside influences calculated to mislead the readers. A special committee watches over this type of malpractice.

In 1969, the office of Press Ombudsman (PO) was established to supervise the adherence to ethical standards. Public complaints are directed to the PO who is also entitled to act on his own initiative. He may dismiss a complaint if unfounded, or get the newspaper to publish a retraction or rectification acceptable to the complainant. In clear cases of minor importance, the PO may issue *ex-officio* criticism of the newspaper.

When the PO finds the grievance is of a more serious nature, he will file a complaint with the Press Council, which will then publish a statement acquitting or censuring the newspaper. The findings of the Council are published in the newspaper concerned and in the business papers of the press. The offending newspaper also has to pay a fine.

The Council is composed of six members, two of whom represent the general public while three are appointed by the press organisations, and the sixth is the chairman who holds a casting-vote. This last member has always been a member of the Supreme Court.

Well, having this Freedom of the Press Act, doesn't mean that relations between media and government are without friction.

Traditionally, Swedish newspapers are more or less connected to political parties. Quite a few are owned by parties or organisations related to parties. For many years this meant to politicians and parties that they got support from their papers.

However, this political line-up has been anything but representative of the political preferences of the electorate. While Social Democrats and Communists have shared approximately half the popular vote for decades (with the Social Democrats being the overwhelmingly larger party), their share of the press amounts to only about one fifth of total circulation.

Conversely, non-socialist parties were supported by, roughly, four newspapers out of five, and here the liberal press has a share, far exceeding the Liberal Party's share of votes cast in elections.

There is a simple reason for these discrepancies. The newspaper market is governed by economic mechanisms, not by political power structures. Newspapers derive their revenue from sales to readers and from the sale of advertising space.

Structural development and financial conditions in the daily press have been under close official surveillance since the beginning of the 1960's. Five commissions have come to the conclusion that newspaper closures left the daily press less well equipped for the discharge of its functions within the Swedish democratic system and, accordingly, a series of measures were taken to counteract further concentration of ownership and to facilitate the establishment of additional newspapers. The conditions regarding subsidies to the press are geared to the workings of the market, the aim being for subsidies to supplement the market system. The first subsidy measures were taken in 1969.

The effect of the consecutive recommendations of these commissions has been to create an elaborate system of subsidies.

In 1988, direct subsidies to "low-coverage newspapers", i.e. those with not more than 50 percent household coverage in their place of issue, totalled approximately R178 million. These selective subsidies amounted to about four percent of the net circulation and advertising revenues of Swedish papers. In addition, subsidies of about R25 million were extended to newspapers participating in joint distribution schemes.

Lesser sums are paid out to support the establishment of new papers, and efforts to co-operate in production are also eligible for loans to finance plant renewal.

Production subsidies for low-coverage newspapers today give the recipient newspapers an average revenue increment of about 20 percent.

The subsidy system could not be abolished today without immediately jeopardizing vast numbers of newspapers.

The subsidies are financed by a tax on all advertising.

LOUIS RAUBENHEIMER

The position, structure, control and financing of the SABC must also be placed under the magnifying glass

AT the end of the 1980s, broadcasters and interested parties look back in wonder at the changes that have swept television and radio. The overriding issue has been the "deregulation" of broadcasting in many countries, the consequent increase in competition and the effects thereof.

The final outcome of all this is by no means certain. Indeed, the overriding characteristic of the industry at present is probably uncertainty. One dazed managing director of a European broadcasting network summed up the general attitude thus: "This is the best time to be a part of broadcasting, if only to witness how it all turns out."

In South Africa, too, the industry is in the crucible. The appointment by the Government of the Task Group on Broadcasting, and the march on the SABC in late August, testify to this fact.

South Africa is in a very critical phase of its development. And, in the future, economic and political literacy will be a prerequisite for meaningful decisions on a future dispensation – which means the public must be fully informed of all developments. I do not think it is necessary to expand on that. But what is important is that this means it will be necessary to look with the greatest circumspection at an appropriate media structure for this country.

A number of considerations of cardinal importance are relevant:

- The geography and demography of the country;

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LOUIS RAUBENHEIMER is Editor-in-Chief, News Management of the SABC.

- The population composition in terms of language and cultural communities;

- The country's economic structure and, more particularly, its advertising industry;

- The need or otherwise for an educational approach to the communication sector;

- The availability of the necessary technical communication infrastructure;

- The historical phase in which the country finds itself.

It has become necessary to look incisively at an appropriate media structure for this country. And in this process, the position, structure, control and financing of the SABC must also be placed under the magnifying glass.

Many misconceptions have been cultivated, apparently deliberately, about the SABC for such reasons as self-interest. The fact is that the Corporation is not averse to an impartial appraisal of its position, the establishment of competition and the judicious "deregulation" of the broadcasting terrain, provided this is done in an orderly manner and the broadcasting requirements of the population in all its facets are given due recognition.

The real and potential role of the electronic media

Viewpoints on contentious issues such as "democratisation" and "deregulation" are closely related to one's outlook on life and one's aspirations for the community with which one associates. Equally, they are related to perspectives of recent history – including the forces and powers that are unique to the communication media in modern society.

In order to conduct a meaningful dialogue on the role and place of the media in the future South Africa it is, therefore, necessary, in my opinion, to look first at the potential contribution that the media can make in ensuring an informed and peaceful community – more

SPECIAL REPORT



especially as this question features prominently in the well-known MacBride Report.

A constant preoccupation of the report concerns the relationship between power and communication with the latter identified as a critical source of power and influence within the global system that creates relationships of domination and dependency, cultural imperialism and political disruption.

Traditional concepts of the power of the media

Since the advent of the electronic media much has been written and said about what is regarded as its extraordinary, almost magical, power. Reference has been made to the huge audiences that can be reached, the number of hours people spend in front of their sets, how extensive the industry has become in terms of Rands and Cents and how much is spent every year on advertising. This trend probably reached its peak in the 1960's when the popularity of the well-known Frankfurter Scöle was at its height. They issued warnings that the individuality of the human being would be destroyed in the process and that the people of the Twentieth Century would, on a large scale, degenerate into human masses without their own convictions and personalities.

Nearer home, the enormous power of the SABC, specifically as an information medium, is frequently referred to these days, and the concept "information" is then used in such a broad sense that it really includes influencing and moulding public opinion.

The more researchers study the actual impact of the media, however, the greater is the realization that this is an exceptionally complex question that will not easily be answered one way or the other. In spite of a series of empirical studies on the effect the media has on behavioural patterns, only limited understanding has been forthcoming on this question. For the reliability and validity of much of the results must be questioned because of serious methodological defects in, especially, the experimental design.

What has nevertheless become clear is that no unqualified statements can be made on the formative influence of the media. The media is neither Satan's minions nor angels with white wings.

Curren and Seaton put it this way in a summary of the course of the debate on the influence of the media thus far: "There is no adequate vocabulary to describe the relationships between the media, individuals, and society."

A more nuanced view

A number of trends are nevertheless apparent from the latest research:

- The capacity of the media to influence the public to contemplate certain pressing issues is far-reaching. Doris Graber writes:

"In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about."

- William McGuire is of the opinion that it is a myth that the public media has a major formative influence on the public's thoughts, sentiments and behaviour. Most of the reliable empirical

studies point to a small yet significant influence.

- Much work has been done on the effect specifically of the information media on the public's political preferences. And this confirms the trends revealed by recent research – that the media is relatively ineffective in forming political preferences and sentiments. The outstanding characteristic of the media in this respect is rather to entrench existing political attitudes.

An excellent precis of the conclusions thus far on the power of the media to mould public opinion has been formulated by Hiebert, Ungurait and Bohn:

"Most research evidence supports the hypothesis that mass media can create new opinions more easily than they can change existing ones, but that reinforcement of existing beliefs, is the main effect of most mass communication experiences. One reason for this reinforcement is the self-protective human process of selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention. We tend to expose ourselves only to messages that agree with our existing opinions; we tend to avoid communication that is unsympathetic to our predispositions."

Unqualified claims on the opinion-forming power of the media have led in the past to what I would like to call the Great Irony of Public Communication: that the media's ability to influence sentiments and channel public opinion in a particular community in a certain direction rests rather on its perceived – in contrast to its actual – power as a moulder of public opinion. And this has been caused chiefly by the simplistic concept

LOUIS RAUBENHEIMER

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that communication operates according to a stimulus-response mechanism; that there is a casual connection between what the media publishes and what the public believe.

Remarks about the notion "Democratising the media"

Everyone agrees that the goal of any restructuring of the media should be to take into account the needs and expectations of all South Africans. The differences of opinion possibly concern the content of these needs and expectations, as well as the best way to achieve it.

In the slogan of "Democratising the media", as in "The people shall broadcast", I fear a new spectre of monopolism is haunting South Africa. And with John Kane-Berman, executive director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, I would like to point out that 36 million South Africans can hardly have a single will. This kind of language cannot be described as anything but totalitarian and has its origins in the revolutionary ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau.

In fact, Western democracies are characterised by a rich and very diverse social texture. There are thousands of organizations which are able to operate freely and pursue their own interests. In South Africa – one of the most divided communities – there are ethnic differences, religious cleavages and class divisions; there are rich and poor, urban and rural, housed and homeless, educated and illiterate, employed and unemployed. The interests of these people do not necessarily coincide – indeed, they often conflict.

A slogan such as "Democratising the media" accordingly sounds more like an effort to mobilise the masses and to whip up emotions – action that runs the risk of further polarising South African society; and to feed intolerance precisely at a time when it has become such a disturbing phenomenon.

Clearly, in any society, news values are inseparable from national values; and editorial judgments will be made on

the basis of the interests of subscribers and listeners. And in South Africa national values have changed dramatically since February 2 – with the result that the media's handling of the South African situation has undergone a corresponding dramatic change.

The promotion of democratic sentiment is already part of the national ethos of the majority of the population.

One only has to glance from time to time at the media's coverage of recent news events to realise that it is already reflecting this new sentiment. In the case of the SABC, a course correction in the Corporation's handling of the news was already discernible during the 1989 General Election, as was reflected in the evaluation of Whites, Coloureds and Asians of impartiality in the handling of news.

I am firmly convinced that the latest surveys amongst all groups in South African society will confirm this trend and will endorse the impartiality of the SABC, notwithstanding persistent accusations of partiality from certain quarters.



Structure of the electronic media: nationalisation versus deregulation

There is wide divergence of opinion on the most desirable broadcasting model. Competition has been a way of life in the United States. According to John Abel, executive vice-president for the National Association of Broadcasters, trends around the world are bringing broadcasting closer in line with that in North America:

"It confirms for us that our system is correct – countries throughout the world are emulating the private broadcasting system that we have in this country."

On the other hand, Pierre Juneau, resident of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, refers to the American model and calls it a mistake:

"In my opinion, this is indeed a regrettable cultural mistake, for which the entire world is paying the price. The mistake consists of tying radio and television completely to business, that is, the marketing of things like chewing gum, denture aids, toothpaste, soaps of all kinds, all sorts of drinks and candies, car tyres, the cars themselves or everything related to the automobile industry."

In this country one thing emerges clearly from current arguments on the most desirable broadcasting structure: so long as you denigrate the existing structure, and in the process condemn the SABC, it is not important what alternative you propose. Proposals thus range from the two extremes of privatisation to nationalisation. (It is simply inexplicable how people who demand the "democratisation" of the media can, in the same breath, advocate "nationalisation" which, after all, implies total central government control.)

The recommendation of the MacBride Report on the undesirability of commercialisation of the media has been overtaken by recent developments in Europe and Eastern Europe, and is completely out of touch.

This is to be seen, in particular, in Recommendation 31. It calls for giving preference "in expanding communication systems to non-commercial forms of communications." This embodies the presumption that commercial media are bad per se. But stating that non-commercial forms of mass communication are preferable appears to endorse the system of the previously socialist states – without pointing out that this system has led to the establishment of media whose primary aim was to support the objectives of the governmental regimes of the particular country!

On the other hand, it would appear that genuine deregulation is also not really a workable alternative.

In a recent survey amongst a selection of European broadcasters as to their experience of deregulation, the first question many of them asked was: "Deregulation? What deregulation?"

In an article in a recent edition of *Broadcast* under the heading "The Myth of Freedom", some of these broadcasters gave their reaction. These responses are

not simply bits of special pleading by broadcasters in the private sector. If they seem rather surprising reactions from France, with its six free national television networks, that is, in part, because of the sloppy way in which we all tend to use the word "deregulation".

According to Patrick Le Lay, president of the privatised TF1, France's biggest-audience television channel, they have a very strong system of regulation. "We are more regulated than 10 years ago."

West Germany provides, if anything, an even clearer case of "What deregulation?" Albert Scharf, deputy director general of the public Bavarian Broadcasting Corporation and president of the European Broadcasting Union, explains:

"Real deregulation did not happen in Germany. The existing system was simply enhanced. The public service broadcasters face private competition, but the private broadcasters work under the same general terms as the public one".

The picture that emerges here is that there are numerous factors that make it necessary to have some form or other of regulation or, rather, re-regulation.

The availability of frequencies

The first of these factors is the scarcity of one of the chief assets of the broadcasting industry, namely frequencies, which are a national resource. The consequence of this is that only a limited number of broadcasters can be allowed to operate in each country/territory. Regulation in one form or another, and to a lesser or greater degree, is as inevitable as the regulation of taxation. Without regulation of broadcasting standards, and without the allocation of wavelengths, our airwaves would degenerate into a cacophony of conflicting and discordant signals.

The safeguarding of quality

I fear that the argument on ensuring



quality broadcasting is probably not going to be part of the South African debate on a new media structure. I have the impression that this question has been so politicised that for many it does not matter what the quality will be of the services that remain or that are created.

In other parts of the Western world, and especially in Europe, this argument is central to the debate on broadcasting. Alma Brink, Opposition spokesman for Broadcasting in the House of Lords, has summed up the issue: "...the most vital ingredients for a healthy and lively broadcasting system remain the quality and diversity of programming." She adds that the greatest danger facing the broadcasting industry is that factors other than quality – such as commercial considerations – will become the most important criteria in decisions on a broadcasting structure:

"It cannot be right that those with the deepest pockets can decide, with the minimum of rules laid down by the Government, what we will be able to watch on our screens and listen to on our radios."

In general the point of departure in European countries is to broadcast radio and television programmes for citizens, not consumers. Society before business!

Freedom of speech

While freedom of speech – of the individual and the media – has traditionally meant the absence of State controls, the rationale for broadcast regulation, that is widely accepted, is that uncontrolled freedom permits – even encourages – bias. Public-spirited regulation is thought to be necessary to ensure equal media access to those on all sides of controversies and to promote equal treatment of proponents of different viewpoints.

Impartiality is one of the fundamental characteristics of responsible journalism and I believe that the authorities should provide mechanisms to safeguard and enforce this principle – as in the case of the latest Broadcasting Bill in Britain. (The Independent Broadcasting Authority as well as the BBC have expressed support for such stipulations in the Broadcasting Bill.)

An older example of such a document is the American Fairness Doctrine, which requires of radio and television licences "to provide coverage of vitally important controversial issues of interest to the community...and...a reasonable opportunity for the presentation of contrasting viewpoints on such issues."

But vague policy documents and other prescriptions can so easily become of academic interest only in the editing booth where decisions have to be taken on many concrete things, such as the inclusion of certain gestures, a single sentence or even a solitary word.

I consequently subscribe to the school of thought that believes that such documents or conventions are not only necessary but must also be very specific.

Moreover, it is imperative that the provisions of any code must be enforceable, as is the case in respect of the Broadcasting Bill. A broadcaster who infringes the impartiality code will be liable, in terms of the Broadcasting Bill, to sanc-

PLEASE TURN OVER

More and more journalists are requiring degrees

EACH year over 200 new students enroll for the degree course in Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

They come from all over South Africa and, as Rhodes offers the only English-language degree course in Journalism, students are coming from further afield, from neighbouring countries, from France, from Canada.

And, for graduates in other disciplines, Rhodes offers a one-year Higher Diploma in Journalism which gives candidates an intense training in journalism and media studies.



Students can read for a three-year BA degree with Journalism or the four-year B Journalism degree.

The degrees offer a broad theoretical grounding and specialist training in print and television, newswriting, feature writing, and public relations and advertising. The fourth year puts heavy emphasis on practical training.

If you would like further details about undergraduate or post-graduate options, write to: The Secretary, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.

LOUIS RAUBENHEIMER

CONTINUED

tions that are specifically defined.

Such a code should:

- be rooted in the idea of fairness and a respect for truth;
- distinguish fact from opinion;
- aim to ensure that a proper range of views and perspectives is aired over a reasonable period of time in all matters of public controversy;
- give a fair account of the subject matter.

In the case of South Africa, it is of paramount importance that certain extremely important constraints should be placed on freedom of speech. Broadcasts should not:

- incite racial emotions;
- foster violence;
- advance anti-social behaviour.

The need for different language and cultural services

The latest study on the state of the Black market comes to some exceptionally important conclusions:

■ that 80 percent of the Black audience prefers to be served in its own language, only about 17 percent has a reasonable understanding of English, and only five percent of Afrikaans;

■ that radio is, for Black communities, the most important communication medium – in particular, the cultural services in the Nguni and Sotho languages.

One of the factors that entrenched the concept of a national broadcasting role in Europe and Canada is the reality of different language and cultural groupings. Private concerns do not have the differentiated infrastructure – or the motivation – to meet these requirements.

At present the SABC is providing such language and cultural services at a great loss, by means of cross-subsidisation from a few profitable radio and television services.

Broadcasting organisations that are established with the sole purpose of broadcasting in the metropolitan areas in English can accordingly not lay claim to serving the different language groups



with information, entertainment or educational broadcasts. Their existence is clearly prompted by commercial or other considerations.

Affordability and viability of new services - licence fees and income sources

The broadcasting market does not have a built-in mechanism that guarantees a variety of choices and quality in the midst of competition. Put another way, competition does not automatically guarantee a variety of quality products for different audiences with different needs. On the contrary, competition for the same audiences and the same sources of income encourages a uniformity that narrows choices. This has been the indisputable experience in, especially, the United States.

The system that is probably the best equipped to overcome this problem is the British system – possibly because the cardinal consideration in decisions on the media structure in Britain is still that of quality and variety.

The result is a system where the BBC and the commercial services are not dependent on the same sources of income, although they serve the same public.

In my opinion a similar system would have been ideal for South Africa. But various factors would make it difficult to apply:

● Problems in the determination of a realistic licence fee that have meant that for many years licence fees have not nearly kept pace with increases in the consumer price index;

● Unwillingness on the part of members of the broadcasting audience to pay the licence fee.

The inevitable question that arises, then, is just how big is South Africa's "advertising cake", and how many commercial radio and television services can it support?

Before any final decisions can be taken on the granting of broadcasting licences, a thorough and realistic study will have to be made of the potential size of the advertising cake in the country. Independent stations will certainly not receive a licence to print money; a licence to broadcast is not a licence to print money.

Very few of the local stations developed in the UK after commercial radio was legalised in 1973 have made money. This was partly because they were up against established BBC stations and partly because they were restricted by the Independent Broadcasting Authority in respect of the amount of time they were allowed to devote to music while being compelled at the same time to give attention to less profitable, but necessary, services such as local news and actuality programmes.

In Australia the position of many broadcasting organisations is even worse.

Dangers of cross ownership

One of the key issues in the international debate on the deregulation of the media is that of cross ownership; in other words, the question of control over more than one information medium.

Throughout the world there is concern at the power that is concentrated in the hands of individuals or groups that gain control over both the printed and electronic media. Many countries accordingly have strict limitations on shareholding and cross shareholding.

In the Broadcasting Bill before the British Parliament, it is stipulated that a newspaper editor may hold only a maximum 20 percent of shares in one specific broadcasting service and a maximum of five percent in others.

In Australia there are certain geographic restrictions on cross ownership of television and the press.

Even in the economically liberated United States the owner of a press group is precluded from having control of a television or radio station in the same state.

Those who draft a new media structure for South Africa will have to take this question into account.

A regulating and controlling mechanism

In the light of the above, it is necessary that a professionally controlled mechanism be created for the entire broadcasting environment – perhaps even the entire media environment. Such a body will obviously need to be representative of all the relevant interest groups in the country. Hopefully this route will partially depoliticise the media – and especially the broadcasting media.

Most Western countries have such a control structure, especially where there are also private broadcasters. As the SABC in the past was the only broadcaster in South Africa, with a Broadcasting Act that was applicable to it alone, there has not been an effective system to regulate the broadcasting industry as such.

In an environment in which there are a number of broadcasters it is necessary that a Broadcasting Act – quite apart from an SABC Act – should be established to regulate the broadcasting industry. The administration of such a Broadcasting Act could then be the responsibility of an independent professional agency appointed by the government of the day.

Such a “Broadcasting Council” will need to have the power to enforce regulations in order to perform effectively the following tasks:

- The drafting and enforcing of norms and standards for all broadcasters (technical standards, ethical norms, local content norms, journalistic standards, etc);
- The control of licensing conditions pertaining to the various broadcasters;
- The settlement of disputes in the case of improper practices that are brought to its attention.

Conclusion

There is a correlation between a desirable economic structure and a desirable media structure in South Africa. In the same way that nationalisation, on the one hand, or a system of unfettered economic freedoms, on the other, will not resolve South Africa’s economic problems, neither nationalisation nor deregulation are the answer for our future media structure.

Rather, it would seem sensible to look for a broadcasting structure that retains both the beneficial elements of some form of planning and regulation while, at

the same time, encouraging competition and diversity.

Technology has not brought a widening choice, either quantitatively or qualitatively – which is certainly not what the governments concerned expected. In any event, the national broadcasters have no intention of abandoning broadcasting to the laws of the marketplace. They remain conscious of their cultural mission. Competition has ultimately been beneficial in that the national broadcasters are now firmly convinced that they must remain strong to assume all their roles: information, education and entertainment.

While some people still think that the Europe of television will be private or nothing, the public broadcasters have already proved that the Europe of television will be both, public and private ...or nothing.

I would, therefore, like to make a plea that what we in South Africa need is neither merely deregulation or nationalisation, but judicious re-regulation that will take cognizance of the broadcasting needs of the country and its human diversity and which will create the necessary structures to meet those needs.

NATURAL FACTS

Meet the world’s most experienced ventilation engineer

Over the past few million years, termites have perfected the technology for the design, construction and maintenance of air conditioning in tower blocks that can house up to a million citizens.

In fact a termite mound, with its myriad passageways, ducts and chambers, incorporates one of the world’s most efficient and sophisticated ventilation systems.

Using legs and mandibles to scratch, mould, push, carve and carry, termites move tremendous amounts of soil, grain by grain, as they excavate, construct and carry out repairs to the mound or tend their subterranean fungus farms.

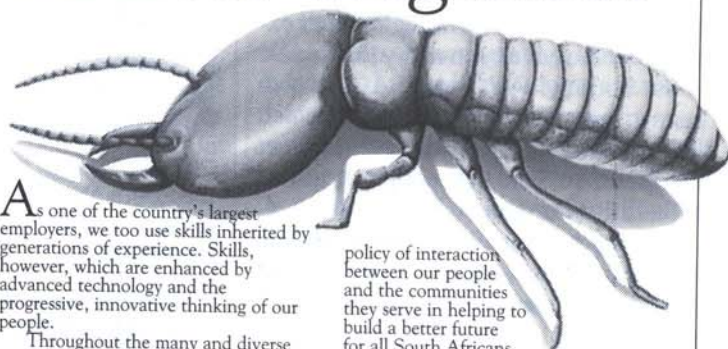
Warm air generated by all this activity and countless termite bodies rises through innumerable ducts and passageways to the mound’s ‘attic’. From there it is ingeniously

funnelled through a series of flues into the thick walls of the mound. Pressure from more heated air following causes it to keep moving, losing carbon dioxide and picking up oxygen as it goes.

The ‘purified’ air then travels down through the continuing ductwork into the ‘basement’ and the whole cycle begins again.

By opening and closing ducts termites are able to keep temperature fluctuations within the colony to between 2 and 3 degrees Centigrade while outside temperatures may rise or fall by 12 degrees or more.

Termite mounds – living monuments to social and industrial co-operation, second only to man’s vastly more sophisticated ability to act with common purpose for the good of the community.



As one of the country’s largest employers, we too use skills inherited by generations of experience. Skills, however, which are enhanced by advanced technology and the progressive, innovative thinking of our people.

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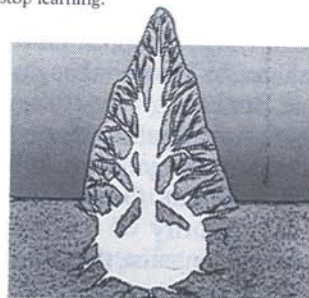
policy of interaction between our people and the communities they serve in helping to build a better future for all South Africans.

Above all, we never stop learning.



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ESSOP PAHAD

The media are too important to be left to the professionals to plan

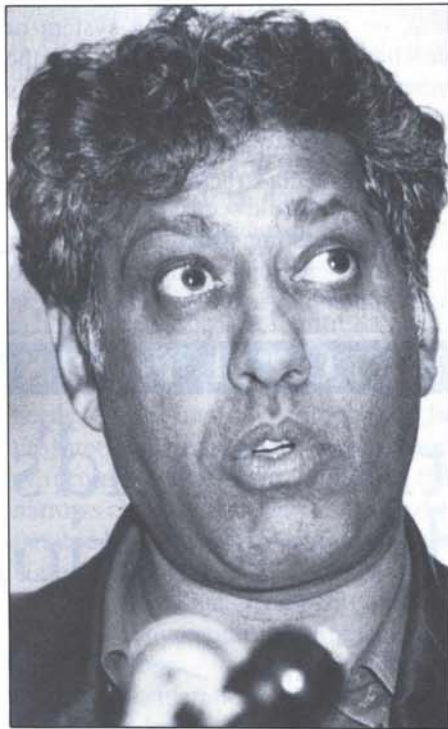
IN assessing what the media of the future are going to be like, we are talking about two things: the transition period to a post-apartheid society, and then something much further in the future. We have to begin with an understanding of what the media are like today.

This country has never had a free media. I think that is a fundamental point. So we are not talking about maintaining standards or maintaining something else. We must talk about creating something new.

The victims of this unfree media have been the oppressed and exploited people of South Africa – organisations like the ANC and the SACP. Throughout our existence there have been many things said about both the ANC and SACP which have been purposefully untrue, which have been distortions and yet they get repeated so often that people begin to believe they are true.

Having been in South Africa only a short time, I must say I find the standard of South African journalism, both in the print and the electronic media, is low. There is no real in-depth analysis and a lot of superficiality. When I was in England I never stopped criticising the British press. I never thought I would miss it. But I do!

There is an appalling ignorance about Africa in this country. At the Five Freedoms Forum Conference, when I said the majority of the countries in Africa were capitalist, the white audience started laughing.



ESSOP PAHAD, a media spokesman for the South African Communist Party. This extract is from a speech and is not a formal paper.

Later I was talking to a "top" South African journalist, and he said: "Africa is not capitalist."

So I said, "Which university did you go to? Because you had better go and collect your fees". He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "How many countries in Africa are socialist?" He said: "All of them". When I asked him to name them, he started with Zambia. At that point I gave up.

Among media people there is unfortunately great ignorance about our con-

tinents and about our country. How little was known about the ANC and the SACP until these last few months! So when we talk about creating a new media, we have to begin from scratch.

There are many journalists in this country who happen to be white, who think they are very skilled, who think they are very clever. Perhaps they don't need re-education camps, but they do need to look at themselves and their own abilities, their own skills and the way they have been used in this country.

We also need to look at the way the Police and the Security Forces have used them. When there is unrest in Soweto, many of the white journalists remain in the northern suburbs. They write about Soweto but they don't really know and understand the vibrancy, vicissitudes and ebb and flow of township life. The bulk of their information comes from the Police and the Security Forces.

Democratising the media

Now let me deal with the question of democratising of the media. I think we all agree that the media needs to be democratised, but there will be great differences of opinion about what we mean by "democratisation".

The SACP and the ANC are not going to nationalise the SABC. We think it should be democratised. There is, as yet, no clear policy position on this. But what is emerging in discussions amongst ourselves is that while the SABC should remain a national institution, it should not be the propaganda mouthpiece of any political party or group in power.

Many groups should be discussing

this, but instead we have the SABC Task Force. Here the same people who are responsible for the problems are investigating the issue.

How can you ask the head of the SABC to investigate himself out of a job? The whole question of what should happen to the SABC should be thrown open for the widest possible debate. It cannot be left to a small group of government people.

On the other hand, the SABC is involved in the process of restructuring, practically privatising parts of itself and promoting people on a long-term contractual basis. This means they want to tie the hand of a new incoming democratic government because part of any negotiations will be the honouring of those contracts. And all those who are being promoted are whites. This is clearly unacceptable.

Competition and free media

I also want to raise some questions about the relationship between competition and a free media. There are those, and they are many, who shout about a free enterprise system, and the necessity for competition. But when you point out that there is monopoly control over the media in this country; when you ask them to show you this free enterprise; when you ask whether in the interests of free media, shouldn't you dismember the monopolies, they say: "No. Why do you want to do this? It is against a free press."

But if they are interested in competition, then my understanding of competition is that there'll be more competition if you dismember the monopolies.

These people don't want competition. They talk about free enterprise but what they are really talking about is their fear that a new democratic State will intervene in this process.

If it's a free press they're concerned with, why has there been so little support from the "free marketers" for the alternative press which has suffered greatly from State oppression and curbs on its freedom?

So we need to look at the relationship between competition and monopoly.

Competition, in itself, is not necessarily an answer. In Britain competition has led to a position in which the making and scheduling of programmes is increasingly, and too frequently, determined by viewer ratings. The most popular

programmes are the ones that get screened and serious programmes are pushed behind.

The point here is that competition can kill quality.

“ —
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— ”

Lack of access

Another problem in this country is the lack of access that the working class has to the media. This really needs to be studied. There are no easy solutions here.

You can't solve the problem by saying you are going to put working-class people on some board or committee. But they need to get into the news focus. How many programmes have we seen here that deal with the lives of an unemployed worker? None! So popular access means the media should reflect the grievances, the aspirations, the feelings and the degradation of the lives of these people so we can begin to understand what the majority of the people of this country are going through.

But the present skewed access is not just about who gets into the news. Take the question of electricity for example. How do you expect people to read newspapers after work if they don't have electricity? It is virtually impossible to read newspapers by candlelight. And

who can watch television without electricity?

So the democratisation of media has to be seen in the wider context of improving the entire society we live in.

Journalists are very fond of saying what they publish is "in the public interest". But, who decides what is in the public interests? Take that British rag, *The Sun*. Every time they make a vicious personal attack on someone they claim it is in the public interest. Why the public needs to know how many people are bonking how many women, I don't know! In South Africa we shouldn't let the media violate private lives in the name of public interest.

Conclusion

Let me end by looking at censorship. This is a very controversial question. In Sweden, Britain and many other countries there is some form of censorship against racism and the publication of racist articles.

I think this is quite right. We cannot give freedom to people to attack the dignity and the colour of another person.

But you get into deeper waters with pornography. For example, should the paedophiles have the right to publish their own journals? In my view they do one of the most inhuman things, which is to use children as sexual objects. Should these people have the right to actually publish why and how they do this? Frankly, I believe not. But this is a form of censorship.

Perhaps men may be happy with no censorship of pornography. But if I were a woman I would find it highly insulting because pornography degrades women. Can we have a situation where one half of our population is going to be marketed to the other half as objects of titillation? I think this is an important question.

So there are no easy answers in media policy planning. Speakers at the Policy Workshop have argued that only we professionals must be involved in this planning. But this is a very narrow approach. We cannot exclude those who are the objects and the users of media from the process of shaping its future. So what we need in this country right now are discussions involving the broadest possible spectrum of opinion on media futures.

The media are too important to be left to the professionals to plan.

NAHUM GORELICK

Namibia's experience can offer some lessons

IT'S been very interesting listening to the discussion at this workshop, because it has all happened already in Namibia. From our experience I would offer one warning right at the start. You can never really pace yourself according to some nice crystal-ball plan. It is very difficult to anticipate change that's happening in Southern Africa.

I would like to fill you in on the background to the then SWABC (South West African Broadcasting Corporation). It was set up very much as a means of communication for passing on information – a particular type of information for the peoples – and I say again, peoples, of the country.

The radio infrastructure could reach the whole country but it was beamed out in particular languages to particular areas. In other words, there was no blanket service that could reach the whole country. Television was set up mainly to relay from South Africa in the sense that, although packaged in Namibia, the material really originated from SABC television.

So the information that was coming through was not Namibian by any means. There was very little information relating to the struggle except in a negative way and it created a vast amount of confusion and misinformation as to what exactly was going to happen.

During that time – and this was in 1988 – the SWABC decided to restructure their organisation to facilitate what they considered to be the future changes in Namibia and they set up a structure that really reinforced the links between the Administrator General, his administration and the controllers of the media.



NAHUM GORELICK is Director of the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation.

Now this all happened without anyone really thinking or knowing about what was going to happen in the future. At the time of the implementation of the UN Resolution 435, I got involved with a group called the Namibia Peace Plan 435 to study what the SWABC was putting out. The reason for the study was that the Resolution itself determined that all government and para-statal organisations had to be able to open up completely and not show any bias towards any political group.

We felt that the SWABC was not really complying with this. So we did an investigation and came to certain conclusions. From the study of 65 radio and 27 television news broadcasts, it was evident that the SWABC, which continually defended its impartiality, disseminated information in a biased manner through the use of the following techniques:

- Selective choice of content in editing and compiling news bulletins;
- Use of a style of reporting which passed on pre-selected information without verifying, examining or criticising;
- Adherence to one viewpoint with no alternative viewpoints being offered. The electorate was, therefore, not being prepared for any alternative to the South African-imposed order.

Anyway, we continued to monitor the SWABC and managed to alert the public as to what was happening.

On independence a new dilemma arose in that from November last year through to March this year, there was no government in power at all. The Constitutional Council was meeting to try and set up a Constitution. I think, in hindsight, it is at this stage that the most important work to safeguard media freedom should be done. Rather than a policy document regarding how the media can operate, you should try and establish representation in people who are going to design the Constitution and pressurise them to put clauses in which protect the right and the freedoms of speech, of the press, of the broadcasting or whatever.

With safeguards in the Constitution you could then leave it up to the various media people themselves to determine their own editorial slant. The law of a country determines how one can deal with speech that, in fact, will determine how the various media are going to be able to deal with information. So, I would suggest, direct your energies towards the architects of the Constitution.

In the meantime, the SWABC changed their name to NBC and came out with a statement of intent which, basically, said that no matter what the govern-

SPECIAL REPORT

ment said or who the government of the day was, they would portray the information according to the needs of the government of the day.

I think this was the one fatal mistake they made because what they were saying was that they would realign themselves to an independent Namibia's viewpoint and there was no chance of their ever gaining credibility for this. I think this was, in a sense, their downfall.

During that period as well, SWAPO, which was the leading party, came out with a policy of reconciliation. And that policy of reconciliation was really an attempt to try and get people to start moving together. In other words, what they did was declare some sort of path where people could move from the left and from the right – and I use those terms very loosely. And they came out with a saying: "Let's forget what has happened in the past – let's build a nation moving together into the future".

I came into the organisation with that philosophy and the first thing the Board and I did once I took over (and I will go into the control aspects later) was to come up with a policy document. This document does not change all that drastically from the original one, with the exception of one or two clauses. The policy of the NBC might give some idea of how we're thinking of disseminating information.

(See box below).

INTRODUCTION

The Corporation will act in the best interests of its country and its people with particular emphasis on nation-building and development.

GENERAL POLICY

The general policy of the Corporation is that publicly-supported broadcasting is primarily for disseminating information and reflecting newsworthy events. As a para-statal organisation run autonomously by an independent board in terms of the constitution which guarantees freedom of the media, the Corporation endeavours to propagate and strengthen these ideals amongst its members. At the same time the Corporation will encourage responsible and professional reporting free from government or outside interference.

In addition to the news programmes, the Corporation will encourage the

The policy guidelines are very broad and we are relying on the news people to come up with particular guidelines as to how to deal with specifics. In other words, it is up to the news people to operate within these guidelines.

In trying to democratise the process, the language services of the Corporation have created, I think, one of our biggest dilemmas. We have started a national service in English which cuts in on all the language services. Television, because it has only one channel, is a national service and therefore is run in English as well. The argument against this is strong as the common language in Namibia at this point is still Afrikaans.

The problem, however, is that the people in the country have never had the option of listening to English. The bulk of the population live in the north and no English signal was sent out to them at all. The response that we are now getting from the north is that, although they do not understand it, they are at least exposed to it and can start picking up phrases with the support of the community service lessons they are getting from the schools and churches.

So we are reinforcing a process of learning English. We are using English lessons we receive from the BBC. We are also waiting for the Ministry of Education to come in so that we can also facilitate and assist them in the process of

broadest possible access to broadcast disseminations for public organisations and associations which wish to inform and educate the public.

FUNCTION

The Corporation's function is to inform, entertain and to contribute to the education of the people through radio and television programme services. These services will cover Namibian events – both national and local – as well as African and international news.

Particular emphasis will be placed on reporting to the Namibian people about the internal functioning of all three branches of government.

NEWS GUIDELINES

News reports and news commentary will be presented on a factual and balanced basis. The Corporation will provide a forum for active and investiga-

education.

In terms of the control of the NBC, we have a Constitution which gives us the right to freedom of speech and we have a Broadcast Act which gives us the right to broadcast. Now the Act of the old SWABC and the proposed Bill of the new NBC do not differ much at all. There are one or two innuendos in there. It doesn't really differ. What is important is that the ACT is interpreted according to the laws of the country. The Act is really there only to establish the NBC as a para-statal organisation. The task of the NBC is defined by the Board of the Corporation. So we have the Constitution, the Act, and the Board.

The Board is selected by the President of the country and must be composed of Namibians. It cannot have any political office bearers serving on it. The result is that we've got social workers, industrial relations people, professional and legal people, and education inspectors. Generally, the composition of the Board consists of people who have been working in the community, many of them at a grassroots level.

The problem of the editorial mix of national and community content is something that is going to take time. Ideally, we would like to set up community stations where community people can get involved. At the moment NBC is very much a national structure.

tive journalism. Debate, critical analysis and discussion on current topical affairs will facilitate a free flow of information. The independent board of the Corporation will assure that news reports and commentary benefit from access to information, but are free from censorship or manipulation.

CONTENT

The content of information broadcast is subject to the constitution and the laws of Namibia. This content shall at all times remain sensitive to the value of people and uphold the principles of the Bill of Fundamental Human Rights enshrined in the Constitution.

RELIGION

Namibia is a secular state and the Corporation will, therefore, encourage tolerance and respect all religious persuasions in terms of the Constitution.

WORKSHOP ROUNDUP

Workshop organiser, **DON PINNOCK** looks at opinions expressed in the study commissions

THE Media Policy Workshop arranged by the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University in Grahamstown recently was aimed at opening up discussions on media futures.

The Workshop was attended by delegates from the Argus Company, the SABC, ANC, SACP, Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, FAWO, ADJ, the Swedish daily *Dagens Nyher*, several universities, and journalism students.

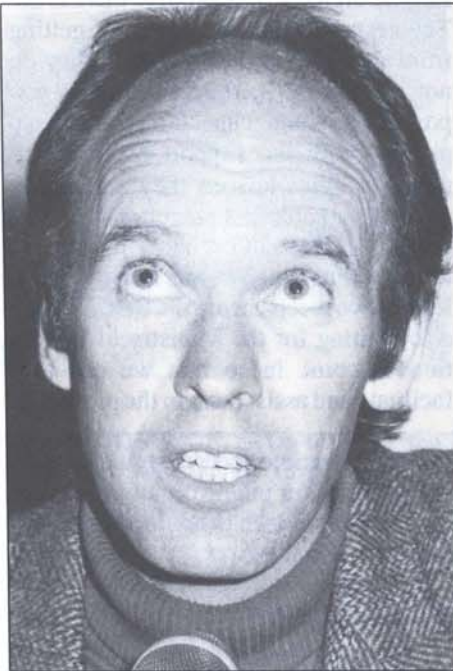
The Workshop was divided into plenary sessions at which invited delegates delivered talks on specific topics (some of these are published in *Review*), and study commissions on areas of special interest to the media.

Not all the delegates agreed with the findings of these commissions, nor were commission findings ratified. They were simply formulated as the basis for further discussion, and to stimulate thought about the future of the media in this country.

What follows is a summary of the findings of the study commissions.

Media models and systems

Freedom of expression was desirable, it was felt, but the extent of that freedom should be decided upon by a democratically elected legislative body. The commission felt that the media should act as a watchdog on both State and private



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organisations, and that public agencies should make all official documents available to the public.

An independent Media Council should be set up, and through it funding, both local and foreign, should be channelled into subsidies for grassroots media.

It was suggested that a tax on advertising, levied on the media monopolies (even the current sales tax), would release large funds for smaller newspapers and even radio stations.

Working with the Media Council

should be an Ombudsman, someone who could maintain a link between the media and the public and deal with complaints.

As with the Media Council, a Film Institute should be established to assist the development of indigenous film and video production.

Media education should be developed in schools and in all forms of media, and Community Media Centres established to give a voice to people with few resources.

It was noted that SAPA should be collectively owned by all news producers and users.

Politics and propaganda

In order for democracy to work, the commission felt that everyone would need as much information as possible on which to base their decisions. For this reason, South Africa needed a free, independent and critical mass media. There was also clearly a need for more voices to be heard, but with the present media monopolies these voices were forced to remain silent. This would have to change.

Media economics

It was proposed that during the transitional period, the mainstream print media structures should remain the same. However, the 'alternative' press should benefit from the re-channelling of the advertising tax.

This funding would have to take place according to carefully-devised criteria, and be implemented according to strict

standards of eligibility by an independent Media Council.

However, although a subsidy system would ensure the survival of smaller media operations, clauses concerning natural death should also be included to prevent wasteful voices with no audiences.

Incentives should also be offered to encourage the sharing of resources between the mainstream and emerging media.

With regard to broadcasting, the commission proposed that state-funded radio and television should be maintained in the transitional period, but that the independent Media Council (or a Broadcasting Council) should administer its funds and set standards. A de-regulation of the airwaves was proposed, and independent organisations wishing to launch a broadcasting service should be allowed to do so.

Media and the law

The commission agreed that basic press freedoms should be protected within a Bill of Rights and should be subject to the judicial process. All censorship should cease, acts and regulations restricting the media should be struck down and the media should be subject to common law alone.

The task of the State would be to ensure that the basic freedoms were upheld, to prevent the development of media monopolies, and to set up instruments to assist the funding and diversification of media voices.

Journalists' rights and duties

It was generally agreed that the basic rights of journalists should be contained within a Bill of Rights. Beyond this, common law would be sufficient to define the limits and safeguards of the profession as long as the following additions were recognised:

- Journalists should, in certain situations, be granted access rights beyond those in common law;

- Public organisations should be obliged to provide information on an impartial and regular basis;

- Sources should be protected; and

- Journalists should have a right to physical protection in conflict situations.

Within this framework, however, the media should develop such instruments

as a Code of Ethics and a Media Council.

There was some dissent about whether the media could be best served by a Media Council. Among those who thought it to be a good idea, it was agreed that it should be as independent as possible, and be composed of lawyers, journalists, regional members of parliament and media union representatives.

It was generally agreed that a code of ethics for journalists should be drawn up. However, the licensing of journalists was not considered to be a viable option.

Print media

The basic call by this commission was for a diversity of media voices. The press was presently owned and controlled by big business. The commission proposed the breaking up of media monopolies, but underlined that it was not in opposition to rationalisation and co-operation between newspapers and newspaper groups.

It warned, however, that if existing newspaper groups were broken up, individual papers may not be able to survive on their own.

It was suggested that communities be granted more access to the national media, and that community newspapers should be started with the help of a subsidy system. A growing number of smaller publications would then form the basis for a national network of community correspondents.

It was also suggested that printing works be streamlined, amalgamated and centralised, and that a joint distribution scheme be implemented. Cheaper sources of newsprint should also be investigated.

Electronic media

This commission reported that in the many issues it had discussed, there was consensus only on the absence of consensus. The key points discussed in the commission were that:

- Demands made on the SABC should be achievable. The balance of forces was at this stage not in favour of those in opposition to the corporation. A lot more technical information about the day-to-day workings of the SABC was needed, because it could not be changed or democratised without knowing how it worked.

- There was a need to look at how homeland stations could be incorporated into a broadcasting network.

- Discussions about freedom of expression had generally taken place in relation to print. What was needed was discussion around a Right to Broadcast.

- It was suggested that an independent board be established to ensure some kind of balance. The Broadcasting Act actually provided for this.

- Research was needed into language policy, and training programmes needed to be reviewed in the light of affirmative action.

Literacy and access

The commission noted that in South Africa one person out of four was illiterate. Of the total population of this country, only about one person in five could read a newspaper.

This was a warning to media planners that the future of journalism in South Africa depended on a mass literacy drive.

Radio and television could be used in such a campaign (about 14 million South Africans listen to the radio every day). Community-based radio stations should be encouraged.

However, radio, and particularly television, were expensive forms of communication, and in the end print media carried the main burden of popular education.

A call was made for development journalism to be strongly supported as a genre, and efforts should be made to locate it at the centre of mass communication systems.

It was considered that English was the most widespread international language. But all children should have the right to be educated in their mother-tongue, and steps should be taken to nurture the development of literature in all indigenous languages.

Some themes

The need for freedom of expression in a new South Africa was acknowledged by all delegates.

There was general agreement that the instrument to ensure this freedom should be a Bill of Rights, and that the only curbs on the media beyond this should be common law acting through the courts.

This call was extended to broadcasting, which was seen as an important educational tool in the future society. It was strongly felt that people and groups should have the right to broadcast, and

Roundup report on media policy

CONTINUED

that the airwaves should be de-regulated.

Many delegates called for more diversity of media voices. These should be independent, critical and outside State and corporate control.

Concern was expressed about monopolistic media structures in South Africa. Some delegates and commissions called for these to be dismantled. However, there was an awareness that the profitability of the large media corporations ensured the survival of smaller newspapers, and that there was a need to move cautiously in this respect.

Considerable discussion took place about the funding of smaller newspapers and radio stations. The Swedish system of media taxing was considered to be a good starting point for planning in this regard. A tax on media advertising, even the present sales tax, would release sufficient funds to support smaller community news resources.

The allocation of such funds could be undertaken by an independent Media Council, which would have the task of supporting grassroots initiatives and mediating in disputes within the profession. The post of Media Ombudsman was suggested to assist in this task.

Further points of rationalisation called for were the sharing of printing facilities, distribution systems and wire services. Tax incentives and special rates could assist this process.

There were a number of calls for a Code of Ethics to act as a guide for media practices. This went along with a need to protect journalists and their sources, and to provide media workers and editors with a professional frame of reference.

There was also a call for better training for journalists, and for affirmative action in the selection of those who received training. Given the poor educational standards and high illiteracy rates in this country, it was felt that, increasingly, journalists needed to be educators and to receive the training necessary to do this. For this reason the ethics and practices described as development journalism should be at the heart of all mass communication systems in South Africa.

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