

Review

10

RHODES UNIVERSITY JOURNALISM

Special Focus: Freedom of Information

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MASS
MEETS
MOMENTUM**

**Digital photojournal
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COLDTYPE
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Stidy '95

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Edition 10 • July 1995

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Special Inserts

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Founding Editor:
Kerry Swift

Editor:
Charles Riddle

Design/Production:
Ulla Otte

Illustrations:
Caroline Melton-Thorpe
Antony Stidolph

Cover:
Antony Stidolph

Advertising:
Chloë O'Keeffe
Odette Quesnel

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Management Board:
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Charles Riddle

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All correspondence to:
The Editor, Rhodes University Journalism Review, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa
Telephone: 0461 - 318336, 318337
Fax 0461 - 28447
e-mail: riddle@thoth.ru.ac.za

editorial

It's a whole new world: will journalism survive?

Journalists are under pressure, and this thread runs throughout this edition of Review.

In part, the tension is due to the uncertainties and stresses from that strange new animal called competition. But there's more at stake.

Largely, the pressure on journalists today is the product of change. There is a surfeit of turbulence that is putting our patterns and procedures to the test. A new and unknown world is taking shape in ownership and control, in politics and technology.

You might be working for a JCI-owned TML publication today; tomorrow Nthatho Motlana or Don Ncube may be your boss. The Star's Richard Steyn could not live with Tony O'Reilly; will Ken Owen and Nigel Bruce survive their new employers?

You may have been a humble hack, hidden away on an Argus paper (or what used to be called Argus): nowa-

day, even you dare not dally in the chase for dollars.

Those journalists working in the erstwhile alternative press last year are mostly now employed in the mainstream. Magazines too are in turmoil: new titles come tumbling forth; there is intense rivalry – including from kindred newspaper supplements and magazines.

Things are no different in broadcast: you're here today, moved tomorrow. It is "all change" on the SABC's "fast-track", where the centre of gravity has lurched towards African-language broadcasting and projected regional programming.

At the same moment, the doughty IBA is weighing up the future size and scope of the public broadcaster. Audience ratings fluctuate wildly with AMPS figures in seeming disarray.

Community radio competition begins to burgeon, with the commercial big boys close behind. Not to mention the satellite factor. Who will be joining, and who will be trying to beat, these new broadcasters on the block?

Then, affecting everyone in the media, there's the new political scene. At times it's impossibly fluid, at others, brittle and fragile. One minute, the government pledges itself to press freedom, the next it's pressurising the press. Hot, cold. Cold, hot. How about the freedom of information legislation on the cards? It's a new, and in some ways scary, vista – dotted with delights as well as dangers.

And not to overlook the technological change overtaking media as we know it. What DTP is doing to print, digital non-linear editing is starting to do to radio and television. Distinctions in all media are fading between those who report the message, and those who massage it. Journalists all over are having to learn new skills. Approaching at a moderate, but inexorable, pace from the horizon, there is interactive multi-media. How do you report and script for stuff that will go out on CD-Rom? How will a wordsmith work not only with graphic artists, design artists and photojournalists – but with colleagues spe-

cialised in sound and moving image?

In this incredible, unprecedented flux in South Africa's media, one question remains constant: What will journalists be in this process? Subjects – or subjected? Keeping and extending our limited control over our space in this society, or surrendering it to commerce, state or technology? Do we treat the changes as threats or opportunities?

Hostages of history, or makers of history: that's the choice for South African journalists.

A reactive, defensive response to the new conditions is better than none at all. Far better, however, would be a positive stand that seeks not only to defend, but also to advance, the cause of journalism at this threshold of the 21st century.

As individuals, South African journalists will no doubt survive the changes. But the treasure of journalism – of mastering the world through messages and meanings – may not. It's time to put the mission of journalism upfront.

guest editorial

Discovering the noblest of all careers

One of my profession's more prevalent misconceptions is that journalists in their anecdotalism have pearls of advice for their fresher colleagues. Believe me, it is a misconception. Anecdotes about long-forgotten and much-embellished scoops are often all the tyro reporter will get if he innocently seeks advice.

So, anecdotally, when my luck changed and I discovered journalism was the noblest of all careers, the two most important pieces of advice I received from more-experienced colleagues were:

Use your thumb for the bar; and

The first question to ask is: Why is the lying devil lying?

Thumbing the bar more than doubled my typing speed. And I have reported the second inaccurately. Devil was not the word used. More accurately, the noun reflected the marital status of the liar's parents.

That was advice. As I grow older and wiser – crabbier and more cynical, you might say – I've come to realise that a journalist is only as important as his newspaper. No more, no less. That might be pretty difficult for a journalist to get his head around. Most of us are so involved in our work – driven by the chimera of uncovering this, that or the other scandal or scam – that we often choose to overlook the fact that many of our sources are far from altruistic. They have axes to grind. And where better to grind them

than in the columns of a newspaper? Many a poor journalist fails to realise that, far from doing him a favour, his informant is generally after something.

Before we go any further, for the purposes of this article the male gender shall be taken to include the female, the intermediate and the indeterminate. This is not the moment for political correctness.

But to get back to the point (I hope), Ambrose Bierce neatly summed up the glory of our profession in his Devil's Dictionary definition of the press:

A mighty magnifying machine which, by the aid of "we" and printer's ink, changes the squeak of a mouse into the roar of an editorial lion, on whose utterances the nation (presumably) hangs with bated breath.

Bierce is unstinting with his tart observations. A few entries before, he defines politics as:

A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.

Remember that Bierce was an American and has been dead this eighty years or more. Times have changed, for the better. These days they define an honest politician in America as one who when bought, stays bought.

Where is all this getting us? Nowhere, if it is failing to reflect that most important of the journalist's qualities – deep-rooted cynicism. Perhaps I should use the expression "healthy curiosity". But curiosity seems, to me, to imply merely turning over the stone.

Cynicism implies an ability to deal with what comes crawling out from under it. If it is a writ, perhaps you got the story right. Fulsome praise from anyone but your editor (and he is generally short on that commodity as most journalists will know) implies that somehow the informant pulled the wool over your eyes.

The easiest people to deal with, of course, are the foreign politicians. Those that are not venal, and many that are, are past masters at prevarication, dissembling and all the other life skills needed in their clamber up the political heap. Naturally, this crass generalisation only applies abroad where politicians are regularly exposed in three-in-a-bed sex romps or fiddling state money. It never happens here.

Nor, I might hasten to add, are there any crooked businessmen here. They flourish only in the more decadent nations of Europe or America – not here, heaven forbid! If you do not believe me just ask when anyone has been caught insider trading through the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Ten out of ten for those who gave "Never" as the correct answer. Which plainly proves my thesis that probity is second nature to the entire South African business community.

Perhaps I am being unfair. Business reporters spend a great deal of time reporting the affairs of well-run companies competently operating in their own particular markets. So they should admit most companies and businessmen are like that. More satisfying, though, is when the journalist is

uncovering affairs that the perpetrators would rather keep under wraps.

But I am getting ahead of myself. There is no excitement or adrenalin rush and as all journalists will know, our profession is dreary humdrum. Why? Because our politicians, businessmen, clerics, lawyers and other professionals are, to a man, honest as the day is long, there can be no scandals to uncover and report. There is no point in probing because no creepycrawly will scramble for cover when you turn the stone over. If there were any scoundrels, they scarpared.

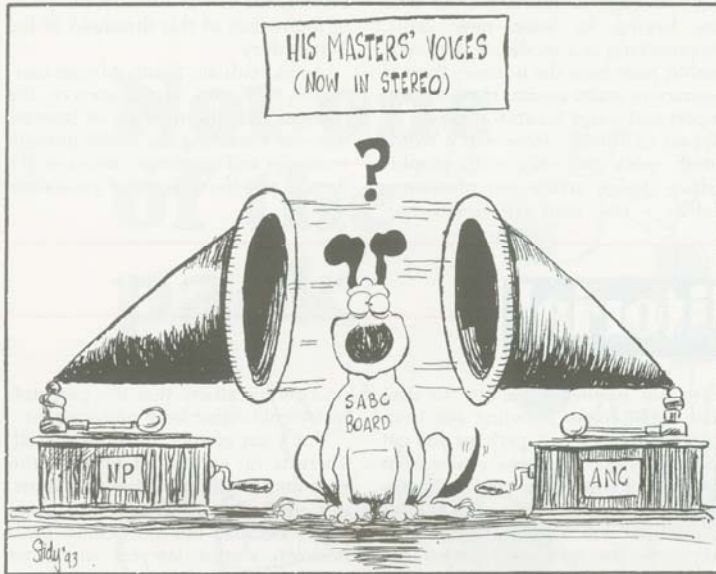
And, if you believe all this, you will also believe that I did not scramble to write this article five minutes ahead of deadline, that the editor did not have to nag me for copy and that I only started writing after I had thoroughly researched the subject and interviewed all the experts.



Jim Jones is editor of Business Day

THE TROUBLE WITH TELEVISION

SABC risks reverting to old patterns, unless its journalists sound off against government calls for airtime – and improve their craft, says George Mazarakis former *Agenda* executive producer.



WHAT'S WRONG WITH RADIO

George Mazarakis joins the fray over SAFM

The language debate on SAFM is eclipsing the question of journalistic quality. The sound is not necessarily right, but the journalism is definitely not right. If it was, possibly people would not have responded with such passion to language. The product would have been giving them a great deal more than they got before.

SAFM's journalism is suffering because they are trying to grow audiences by shrinking budgets, and the only way to do this is through replacing real reportage with talk shows.

As a result, there is little evidence of reporters in the field, even though there are now offices in nine centres. If the SABC used its reporters for bi-media – radio and television it would be able to deliver sufficient reports. Without reportage, talk radio risks repeating opinions ad infinitum.

A second problem is whether SAFM's talk is even working. The station seems to have missed that talk radio works best in a regional context, tackling specific local problems – problems which often don't have the same interest to the rest of the nation. This is the case with the programme "Eavesdropping" that has become essentially a Natal programme. That's fine, but the point is that the show is in danger of running out of talk issues with a national interest and national perspective.

Which raises the question of what the point is of SAFM even trying for national talk radio. Talk, it seems, is SAFM's way of responding to 702 – by trying not to do something different, but simply to emulate it. Far from leading the media field, here we have

THE GOVERNMENT'S DESIRE for free broadcast time should set all alarm bells ringing. I fear it could portend a return to the SABC formula of old.

Pretoria's rationale is that we journalists broadcast only news, and not the mass of important government information that needs to be communicated. In short, those in power feel we don't publish what's important.

Some journalists say this is an insult to the profession. I think it's a compliment. It demonstrates our independence. If journalists broadcast information that was not news, we wouldn't be doing our jobs.

What does government really want with its own prime time broadcast slot? It knows that surrendering communication to journalists will get it less mileage. That's logical, because we as journalists are in the business of selecting, evaluating and presenting information in terms of our own professionalism. We are not in the business of propaganda, education or social marketing.

Some broadcasting may be in that kind of business. Many areas require no critical journalistic principles: sports, music and education needn't be done by journalists. Yet even here, judgements about what should be communicated, and how it should be done, ought to be left in hands independent of government.

There is no other way, if broadcasting as a whole is to escape becoming a state apparatus and to keep its credibility as being politically impartial.

There is an argument that although government shouldn't take over the work of broadcasters, it should still be allowed to buy television advertising time to get its message across. Yet this would be a case of government spending millions in taxpayers' money to tell the public what it thinks they ought to know. Why doesn't the government rather advertise what info it has, and where the public can get this directly?

Why not, in fact, just leave it to professional broadcasters to use their ethics and their expertise, plus audience feedback and ratings, to give the public what it wants to know.

Government should keep its hands out of broadcasting. And even within broadcasting, we ought not to leave information programmes solely in the hands of people whose speciality is not journalism. For example, information about housing subsidies should not be left to educational programming alone, beyond the glare of critical scrutiny – and not least because of the potential for corruption involved.

In the face of governmental designs, will the SABC's journo's prove themselves worthy of the designation? Will they defend and develop their right to be society's trusted and primary communicators, professionals who are expected to be critical and independent?

We forget past patterns at our peril. Previous thinking was that radio and television were one and the same thing: a tool for the ruling party. From the mid-1980s onwards, there was a single controlling editor for both

a case of broadcasting following not merely print, but trailing behind a competing broadcasting venture.

Introducing direct speech into news bulletins à la 702 is the way to go, but SAFM does not do it sufficiently. Almost every story on 702 has a soundbite. That's what makes it come alive. And 702 also communicates more info in shorter and less wordy bulletins.

Despite its bid for a new look, SAFM retains officialese in the form of "the minister of xyz said ...". The newswriting side, it seems, has yet to understand what the new look-alive style is supposed to do. And what is the point of changing a station and keeping very much the same programme format?

The journalism outside the talk shows is weak on contextualising and lacking in critical questioning. Sometimes it is downright embarrassing on general awareness. Just recently, AM-Live's Sally Burdett came across as knowing neither the proper name nor background of broadcast lawyer David Dison. (This is the man who helped draft the Broadcasting Act – about which she was talking and within which she functions!) It

makes one wonder where she has been the past few years – and why the research department, at least, is not filling her in?

A further criticism is that Burdett's co-presenter John Maytham doesn't listen to his answers. In addition, the field reporters for all SAFM's current affairs programmes do not deliver structured reports (with a few notable exceptions).

The problems with SAFM lie not only in the journalism, but in a strategic mistake. The SABC's view is that the complainers are a small audience, and that it won't make a difference if they are lost. The question is why the corporation changed something that, though limited, still worked, instead of rather putting resources into building Radio Metro and serving its 3.08 million listeners? Metro already has a style which SAFM is not succeeding in producing, although it aspires to this.

The SABC should have shrunk Radio South Africa, giving its listeners a little less, but keeping it as a market niche for that particular group of white people while still introducing them to the broader South African picture. Resourcing could have been switched

media. It was not enough to have Broederbond and/or security-linked apparatchiks in charge of individual stations – a supreme central power was required.

My former colleagues at the SABC will remember how the organisation used to be run by a cabal headed by Kobus Hamman, deputy director general entrusted with news and current affairs. He was assisted by Johan Pretorius (known in the corporation as the "Tuinhuys-Muis" for the manner in which he acted as veritable spokesman for the presidency). The team included Sakkie Burger (brother of the CCB's Staal Burger) and Christo Kritzinger (brother of Krappies, colonel in the infamous Brixton Murder and Robbery squad). In time, the grouping appointed Louis Raubenheimer as head of radio news – a man exposed in the Sunday Times recently for his apartheid connections.

As part of this picture, there was a single news conference for radio and television. The rationale was not one of bi-media news production, even though radio occasionally ran extracts from television's news and current affairs. The logic was purely political.

The effect on journalism was disastrous. Down the ranks, every time a journo showed independence, they would move you away or edge you out. Ask Christopher Dingle and Steve Brittan. If you didn't toe a very narrow line, they just did not use your material.

"The atmosphere is electric. This day will be remembered as one when ululating women lined the streets of Hillbrow and 'Viva' became entrenched in South Africa's vocabulary." These were my words in describing a mass march on the day of

Nelson Mandela's release from prison.

They were not to be broadcast. The question came down the hierarchy from Christo Kritzinger: who was I to describe the atmosphere as electric? "I'm a journalist," I replied. To no avail. That was how the control worked.

The standard practice in television was that we had to phone political editor Andre le Roux for clearance of any controversial item. Although he is now a transformed character, I recall how he intervened in 1992 to censor a programme on June 16.

It is indicative of how things were. The script of our reconstruction of the '76 insurrection was slashed. So too were the visuals. There was a chilling shot taken from inside the back of a police van, and looking down the barrel of a moving rifle. It was cut off short so as to exclude the ensuing sequence of a demonstrator gunned down by the same weapon. No matter that the shooting actually happened, that it was important history on an important anniversary.

Most other visuals from 1976 were,

I believe, destroyed. The remainder were embargoed in the archives. In fact, it was only when Ameen Akhalwaya arrived at Agenda that the archivists finally stopped seeing it as their duty to enforce a ban on journalists even locating materials labelled "under no circumstances to be used".

Everyone thought that the SABC would change with the introduction of a new board in 1994. There was a brief Golden Age, when people like John Bishop began challenging the authorities on GMSA. On Agenda, we started

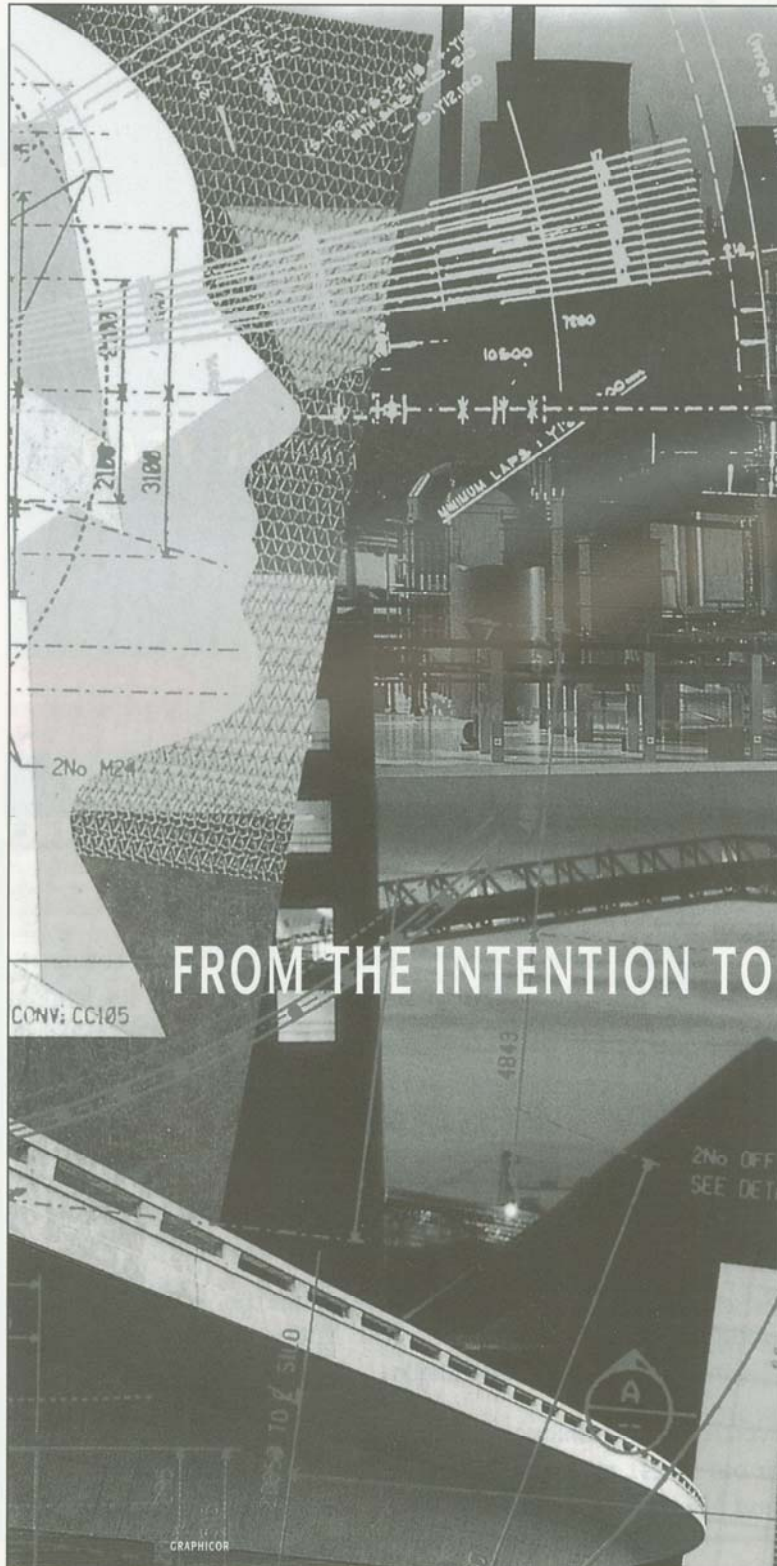
to making Metro even more successful. Metro has the English-speaking audience, it has excellent talk radio, brilliant current affairs and targeted music. It has a South African character.

Why then impose an entirely different character on a station that though limited was working? They should have kept it - called it English Radio, or Classic Radio. Metro is something an audience can relate to: who can relate to SAFM as it is now?

Metro also has a majority of black staff, people who know the majority community in South Africa and who talk to it directly. This is not the case on SAFM, and there is still lots of racial exclusion on the station.

It's to be expected that whites will often offend blacks, that they don't understand the different cultural dynamics. I hear black listeners phoning SAFM to complain, and getting cut off. This is not saying that white journalists are bad journalists, but that SAFM's character is off the mark in terms of who it is trying to reach.

SABC radio journalists get good marks for trying, but a lot more will have to be done if radio is to be put right in South Africa.



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doing strike-force stories, producing on the day, up-to-the-minute current affairs – as opposed to dated, long-drawn out and easily censored productions. An example was when the story broke about the military signal ordering the “removal from society” of activist Matthew Goniwe. Our programme was shot in two days. Editing on the final 12-minute piece began with just two-and-a-half hours to go before transmission.

The press had not specified where the elimination decision had ultimate-

ly come from, and we began to narrow it down. We named the police who had been persecuting Goniwe, and we named the cabinet members of the state security council.

It was a risky business. Someone secretly searched my home, leaving conspicuous muddy footprints on the carpet. Then a bogus telegram announced that my call-up unit had been changed, and that I was required to do 752 days service.

But the show went on. For the first time, the country’s national television

network had tackled a politically contentious story. The then President FW de Klerk phoned director general Wynand Harmse, tracking him down late at night at a conference in West Africa. The cabinet, I was later told, had threatened to sue. “The best news I’ve heard,” I responded. “We’ll establish some credibility here.”

Radio had a less visible flourishing of journalism during this period, although Patricia Glynn was asking up-front questions, and Angus Begg did some quality journalism.

However, things began to change at the time of the election. The Independent Media Commission regulations, designed to ensure equitable treatment for all political parties, reversed the tendencies towards journalistic independence. The climate became reminiscent of what had happened before: people became aware again that they had to be politically careful.

The arrival of new journalists like Thandeka Gqubule, Charles Leonard and Jacques Paauw, made existing producers feel less confident because they lacked the same politically correct blood. For their part, the newcomers were not tuned into the needs of television.

Today, at the very time when government is signalling a desire to muscle in on broadcasting, a kind of journalistic inertia has resulted. The strength of television is to pre-empt the press, but there is very little of that happening. We have reverted to television that very rarely breaks stories; it just amplifies those already in the news. The same applies to radio.

The problem is that this kind of journalism doesn’t go further than what you would expect. There are no surprises. Television especially can surprise. It should.

Instead, we are seeing a lot more radio on television. It is easier to go for discussion programmes when you don’t have experienced producers. The result is that it is not exciting television to watch. So viewers turn to entertainment programmes.

Take the RDP. It is being done to death in a very predictable way. The stories start in the same way, and lead to the same conclusions. Where is the surprise, the debate, the controversy, the scandals?

Broadcast journalism has a role to play in making officials accountable. Instead, we see it too often acting as a PR mouthpiece. There is a lack of critical journalism, and that again is not much different to what has happened in the past.

There seems to be an over-riding fear of what a journalist can say or cover in a climate of political correctness. A commitment to nation-building and “rainbow-ism” may also be inhibiting investigative or critical journalism.

The new SABC board’s initial mission statement was to portray broadcasting as a way to heal South Africa. But journalists are not doctors. If we spend our time trying to heal, our watchdog role gets impaired.

Healing can be done in entertainment or educational programming. It is not appropriate in a journalistic context. Our job is to monitor the health of the patient. And to sound the alarm if necessary. I hope the SABC’s journalists will hear it.

George Mazarakis is executive producer of *Carte Blanche*. He is a former senior lecturer in Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University, as well as a former executive producer of *Agenda*.

LIEBENBERG, MBEKI, BUTHELEZI, DE KLERK, MBOWENI.

A FEW LEADERS ON OUR MENU THIS YEAR.

(NOT ALL APPRECIATED BEING GRILLED.)

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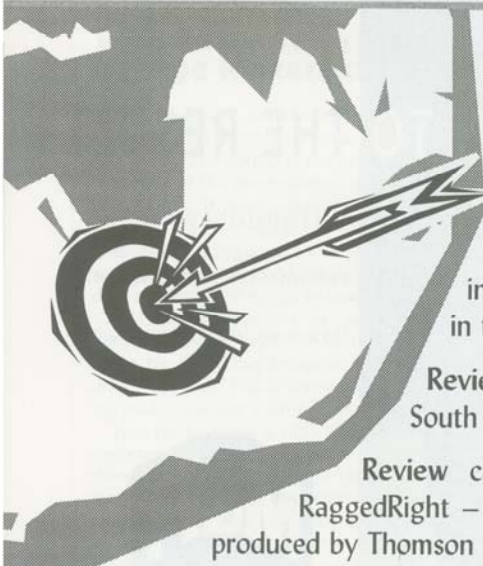
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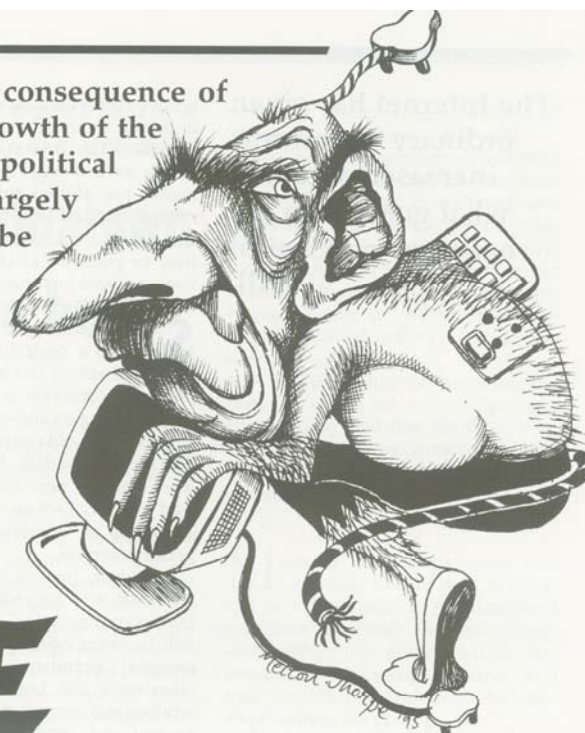
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The decentralisation of power has been the single biggest consequence of satellite television. This process will be continued by the growth of the information superhighway, or infobahn. Regardless of the political ground rules, the commoditisation of information is largely expected to ensure that governments around the world will be unable to control the flow of information.

by Neil Bierbaum

A BEAST LET LOOSE



A CNN news report last year showed an American cameraman protecting a Haitian citizen from being arrested by military police. It was symbolic of a new global reality: the power of the camera over the gun. Global economic interdependence and competition has fuelled the need for shared information and rapid telecommunications. While this global interconnectedness is essential for a country's economy, it is at the expense of governments' ability to maintain power and exercise control. Governments can no longer control their own media image simply by controlling the flow of information. Instead they have to behave themselves. The main catalyst for this has been technology, and new developments such as the Internet will serve only to accentuate this decentralisation of power.

For centuries whoever could control the medium could control the message. The Catholic Church restricted thought and religious debate by restricting the reproduction of the Bible. Only with the invention of the printing press did it begin to relinquish its hold on the minds of its subjects - the result largely of its inability to control the new technology.

In her book *Wild Swans*, Jung Chang tells how the communist government of China managed to convince even its educated citizens that people in the western world were also starving. It was only when the Chinese began receiving satellite images from the rest of the world that they discovered the lie. And they became angry. The uprising at Tiananmen Square was one consequence of this, and one which did not go unnoticed as it might once have done. Images of a Chinese student

lying down in front of a tank were carried by satellite to millions of TV screens around the world. Satellite TV broadcasts from West Germany into East Germany were largely credited for the collapse of the Berlin Wall.

Today we have come to expect live footage of the world's wars and trouble spots, almost to the point where Arnold Schwarzeneger movies have to compete with news reports. Specialist magazines which cover the global satellite industry carry advertisements for portable satellite dishes which video journalists can use to provide live feed from Nepal or Burundi back to Atlanta, Georgia.

The infobahn will have a similar effect. A recent story in *Leadership* magazine told how, during the anti-apartheid struggle, Gabu Tugwana, now editor of *New Nation*, used to compile lists of sports boycott breakers while working in the sports department at the now defunct *Rand Daily Mail*. He would then pass the lists on to someone who was leaving the country, who would mail them to Sam Ramsamy at the Non-Racial Olympic Committee in London. Today he would be able to send those messages instantly by e-mail. He could send photographs, recorded sounds and even moving images, all with a few mouse clicks. With a few e-mail addresses, revolutionaries need never be seen together, need never show their faces. The old apartheid law that a gathering of two or more people could be deemed illegal would have been laughable if all those involved in the struggle had been wired.

Policing in that case would have been almost impossible. Preventing

people from owning computers, restricting the allocation of telephones, such actions would militate against the efficient functioning - and therefore survival of an economy.

Information has become a commodity as essential to any economy as gold is to South Africa.

And that information is no longer in the hands of the government. The Chinese government tried unsuccessfully to ban the satellite dish, but the Chinese people stopped at nothing to acquire them. Then it tried to cripple Rupert Murdoch's *Star TV* by not allowing him to set up infrastructures on the ground by which to collect pay-TV subscriptions. Eventually Murdoch agreed to drop the BBC - which was seen as being anti-Chinese - from his bouquet of channels and in so doing won concessions from the Chinese government. Conceivably it is only a matter of time before Murdoch's channels have such popular support that the government could face mass disapproval if it tried to remove them.

This is an example of how television, a technology that was once centralised and subject to government control through the assignment of frequencies, has become decentralised and diffuse and impossible to control as a result of a technology that put the viewing choice into the hands of the individual on an enormous scale. What was once a powerful and easily controlled medium for government propaganda has become a beast let loose from its cage.

The defining factor here is increased - perhaps unlimited - choice in the hands of the end user. In a recent discussion about a global, multichannel satellite television environment, Koos Bekker, founder and CEO of M-Net/MultiChoice said he does not

With a few e-mail addresses, revolutionaries need never be seen together, need never show their faces.

The Internet has given ordinary Americans increased access to what goes on in the hallways on Capitol Hill.

believe that media owners, who make decisions about program content, will ever be more powerful than governments, even though the control of the media has shifted into these media moguls' hands. "There will be too much choice," he says. "If one media owner tries to push an ideological line, the viewer would just change channels."

Similarly, computers were initially seen as a centralising force, both by organisations and by governments. Through a massive centralised mainframe, managers and bureaucrats were able to access and control the programs and the flow of data, thus fuelling the fears that this new technology would lead to every fact about every citizen ending up on that database under one person's control.

However, just as satellites turned television and television programmes into commodities, so information will be commoditised by millions of personal computers, each linked to the other on a distributed network, each sending and receiving information, the content and form of which is determined by the user.

This commoditisation of information that arises will truly democratise the world. According to Frank Heydenrych, editor *Computer Week*, "If information control enslaves, then the corollary must be equally true - unrestricted information flow liberates in a manner we can only now start to glimpse."

One question that must be asked is what would happen if one person or organisation ended up owning all the infrastructure, all the means of distribution of information, all the satellites or all the fibre optic cable networks? Conceivably they could cut a disliked user's cables but the victim could simply move next door and log in from there. The effective policing of satellite dish owners in China proved impossible, while the collection of TV licences in South Africa has been highly ineffective and it is debatable whether it will ever justify the cost of collection and monitoring. The sheer volume of personal computers and telephone connections make the idea of policing the Internet even more absurd. Even if such policing could be done electronically, the fact that so much banking, financial and economic information is

on that network would remain an important deterrent to such actions.

The next step will be the convergence of television and telephony, and of TV screens and computer monitors. The viewer will have an unlimited choice and will be able to order movies - or news broadcasts - at their own volition. The fact that in the new South African government the ministerial portfolios of broadcasting and telecommunications have been lumped together under the eye of Dr Pallo Jordan is evidence that the new government has acknowledged this convergence and is preparing for it. One significant beneficiary in South Africa will be education. Used correctly, this technology can provide education to millions of people at a fraction of the cost of classrooms and teachers and restricted learning hours.

Neil Jacobsohn is heading up a project at Times Media Limited which will see *Business Day* being published in one form or another on the Internet before the end of this year. He believes that we are witnessing the "birth of a new definition of individual democracy". Although he acknowledges that it will be confined to those who have access, he points out that for the first time ordinary people will be able to contribute to debate on a wide scale. "One will have an infinitely greater chance of being heard than through the traditional letter to the editor. Your right of reply is guaranteed," says Jacobsohn. "Nobody will interfere. You will be able to address politicians directly. This is a politician's nightmare. Any government that does not actively promote it is frankly short-sighted and dumb."

Certainly, in America, presidential candidates who have managed to master the prevalent medium of their time have tended to be more successful. For Franklin D Roosevelt it was radio. For JFK and Ronald Reagan, television. For Bill Clinton, MTV. Many ambitious American politicians today are going live on the Internet. The most recently successful was Newt Gingrich, the new Republican Speaker, who has become synonymous with a laptop computer.

The Internet has given ordinary Americans increased access to what goes on in the hallways on Capitol Hill.

This is the culmination of a process that started with talk radio and continued with the fax machine. The latter in particular increased the reaction time of special interest groups whose lobbyists could rally enough support during a lunch break to influence a change in the direction of a congressional vote.

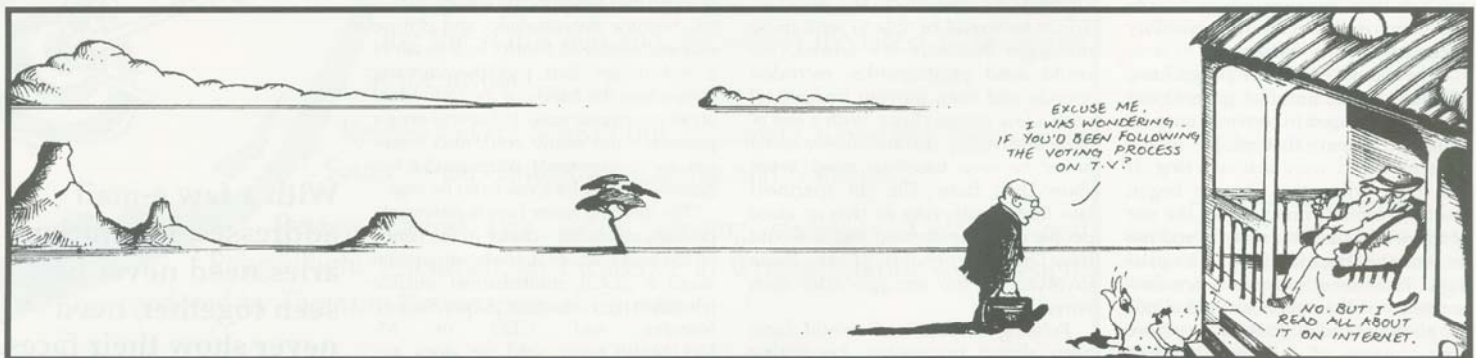
Whether having such power in the hands of these special interest groups is beneficial to the American public as a whole is an ongoing point of debate, but the fact of this shift away from being a representative democracy towards being a direct democracy is certainly significant, and has challenged the secure positions of America's leaders. At the moment two percent of Americans say they log onto a network for at least an hour a day. This may sound trivial but it equals the audience figures for some cable networks - and it's growing, fast.

The growth of the Internet will be interesting to watch in South Africa. It is clear that its penetration will remain low and will favour businesspeople, who through the connection necessary for them to do business, will have access to cyberdemocracy. These will include secretaries, credit controllers and financial analysts. Many will no doubt be more interested in alt.sex.stories than in alt.politics.greens. Some may prefer alt.politics.libertarian to alt.politics.nationalism.white, but either way they will have an easy and accessible medium for their own personal voice.

It is certainly much easier to post an opinion to a user group than it is to track down one's local MP and write a long letter, find a stamp and then a post-box, and hope that it is opened. Wired individuals will be far more likely to contribute directly to a parliamentary debate, and so the potential exists for the representation to be skewed in favour of the upper classes. Meanwhile, those left out on the street will have to rely on making enough noise to get good news coverage.

Neil Bierbaum is the media editor of *Marketing Mix* magazine. He recently won the Premier Award in the Business category at the 1994 Mondri Paper Magazine Awards and was runner-up for the Siemens Journalist of the Year Award at the 1994 Specialist Press Association Awards.

This commoditisation of information that arises will truly democratise the world.



South African newspapers either operate in a vacuum or, at best, deliver a mediocre product

Romancing about Sophiatown and what might have been

On Wednesday August 31 last year, a question was asked in Parliament by Felix Fankomo, a member of parliament who comes from a remote part of the Northern Transvaal.

He wanted to know whether the government was planning to build a reservoir or a dam at Lehokwe in the District of Mandela in the Northern Transvaal.

The short answer, from the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Mr Kadar Asmal, was: "Yes."

The long answer was: "The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry intends to start construction of the Njaka Dam on the Maritsane River, immediately downstream of the confluence of the Maritsane and Nqwaritsane rivers in the vicinity of Lehokwe in October 1994. The dam is scheduled for completion in 1999."

I took the story back to my office and during a planning meeting attended by the managing editor, news editor and political editor, among others, I proposed what I called a "multi-track" approach to reporting current issues in South Africa. I used the Fankomo question and Asmal answer as a case in point. The idea was, I said, that we take the question and answer and carry it as a straight news report from Parliament.

I suggested, also, that at the same time, and on another level, we send a team of journalists (consisting of a writer and a photographer) to the area in question to produce pictures and text of the perennial drought in the region and its effects on the local people.

I suggested, further, that we asked people in the region if (a) they knew about plans to build a dam and (b) how they thought a dam would change their lives.

Contiguously I offered to look, on yet another level, at State plans, including funding, for the project and suggested that I would bring in, for example, the developmental aspects of building a dam in a rural area.

For the greater part of my proposal I was stared at (by my colleagues) as if I had plunged my bare hand into their chests and wrenched out their hearts without anaesthetic. They retained this condition throughout what I followed it up with.

By this approach, I said, we would, in a heuristic way, explain to readers (in this case also the people in the Northern Transvaal) what it was that their elected representatives were doing in Parliament and what some of the purposes of the legislature were.

Nothing has to date been said or done about this multi-track approach I recommended.

This apparent lack of innovative approaches to journalism in the pre-

sent state of constant change in the environment is not restricted to one or two newspapers.

On another occasion a (senior) editor on a newspaper turned down an article (before ever having seen it) which, I explained, was critical of the role of certain multi-national corporations in the host-country economy.

The response was curt: "We need investment."

On another occasion he refused even to consider a piece (also written by this journalist) which argued that South Africa may become an entirely peripheral country in the international political economy if, to begin with, local business (not necessarily foreigners) failed to invest (first) and afterwards to compete internationally.

In both instances my arguments were based on reliable theories and on assumptions that had been tested in academia and in international institutions. On the multinational corporations' global reach, Anthony Sampson's *The Sovereign State: The Secret History of IIT and The Seven Sisters*, to name only two established texts off the top of my head, were to form the bedrock of my argument.

In the case of the argument that South Africa could become a peripheral country my argument was based on theories from selected readings which included work done by, for example, Patrick McGowan in the South African Journal of International Affairs and further afield, the works of Lenin, Hobson and lately Johan Galtung, James O'Connor, Immanuel Wallerstein among many.

Judging by the responses I have received, these established arguments apparently do not form part of the conceptual framework for analysis among especially senior journalists - those in decision making positions - on most local newspapers.

Most senior journalists, including some editors who spend most of their time romancing about Sophiatown and what might have been, or wallowing in self-dramatising apostasy, seem intimidated by the idea of pushing at the edge of the envelope.

The result, in many instances, is that South African newspapers tend either

to operate in a vacuum or, at best, deliver a mediocre product that fails to challenge the intellectual faculties of the reader.

Having said that, one must add that at the best of times, only the *Weekly Mail & Guardian* and the *Sunday Times* stand out (for different reasons) in any challenging way.

The best thing about the *Weekly Mail* is that it may well be the only paper in the country that has forsaken (if that's the right word) the commercial interest in the interest of promoting the literary, aesthetic and intellectual aspects of journalism.

Ken Owen one might disagree with, but his column is, perhaps, the best reading on any Sunday. The rest of the weekend reading, perhaps more the columnists, is about as exciting as a stick; at least one of these falls into the category of the self-dramatists.

How else can one explain this columnist on a very big and influential newspaper, writing about his Filofax and about all the important people he had had lunch with whom and how they had sought his advice...

It is difficult, as a working journalist, to deliver trenchant commentary or analysis of the print media without raising the spectre of being victimised or ostracised.

I have sought to explain some of the trends and tendencies in journalism I have discerned by inferences and by alluding to the possible routes through which I believe the print media can become less of a drudgery and more exciting, informative and reliable.

As a pointer, I want to refer to a remark made by Lenin an act which may have serious connotations and implications. Who can forget what happened to Sefako Nyaka when it was found a few years ago, that he was a member of the ANC? This, I hope, should not mean that I am a member of any political party.

Newspapers, Lenin said, "may be likened to the scaffolding around a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communications between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common result achieved..."

I would like to turn, also, to the

words of a former editor-in-chief of *Time* magazine, Henry Grunwald.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* Grunwald said "...journalists are in the same madly rocking boat as diplomats and statesmen. Like them, when the Cold War ended, they looked for a new world order and found a new world disorder. If making and conducting foreign policy in today's turbulent world is difficult, so is practising journalism."

A respected former American deputy secretary of state, Lawrence Eagleburger, said that the Cold War, for all its risks "was characterised by a remarkably stable and predictable set of relationships among the great powers".

Much of what Eagleburger and Grunwald said of the Cold War can be extrapolated to the Apartheid era. Since last year's election political commentary in South Africa has missed its organising principle, and that "remarkably stable set of relationships among the great powers".

During a television panel discussion two years ago Professor Robert Schrire of the University of Cape Town said former president FW de Klerk had on February 2, 1995 shattered the mould of politics.

My response at the time, on the same programme, was that politics and democracy were oozing from this shattered mould, in all directions. It was difficult, I suggested, to codify the changes in the environment, worst still to analyse them. Since

then, what has passed for analysis is often descriptive narrative, or simply just commentary.

It would seem, for all intents and purposes, that working journalists have not come to terms with the abundance of reality around them to use a Sartrean idea. No new mould has been created.

But then again, perhaps we have lacked a conceptual framework to begin with. I remember the comment included by the political editor of one of South Africa's bigger newspapers on the address to Parliament last July of President Francois Mitterrand.

Mitterrand, he wrote, had secured a place for himself in history, when he addressed the South African Parliament. I would like to believe that for many reasons, not just for the fact that he was the longest serving French president since the Second World War, Mitterrand had had a place in history long before he arrived in South Africa.

The lesson one can learn from this is perhaps, in terms of the writer's comment, his concept of history begins and ends in South Africa.

Ismail Lagardien is political correspondent for the *Sowetan*.

The rest of the weekend reading, perhaps more the columnists, is about as exciting as a stick

I was stared at as if I had plunged my bare hand into their chests and wrenched out their hearts

MASS + MOMENTUM = POWER

There's a bullish new mood in the executive corridors of 47 Sauer Street, former headquarters of Old Aunty Argus. But as Independent Newspapers gets set to shake up the industry, the big question is whether the mood is permeating through to the lower floors. Group Editorial Director Ivan Fallon thinks the answer is yes – but he admits Aunty Argus's "aggressive young nephew" still has a long way to go to meet its entrepreneurial ambitions.

BY GUS SILBER

We are in the office of the Group Editorial Director, Independent Newspapers, Sauer Street, Johannesburg. Ivan Fallon, his soft Irish brogue hardened by thirty years on Fleet Street, is sitting on the couch, reading aloud from a rough draft of the future.

It's a hand-written Mission Statement, the result of three "gruelling but exhilarating" days of brainstorming in the company boardroom. Vision. Drive. Empowerment. Prosperity.

It's familiar corporate goal-speak, given new impetus by the onrush of the 21st Century, but the core of it all is a simple scientific principle that has been gaining currency in these executive corridors since Argus became Independent in May this year. Mass, plus Momentum, equals Power.

Fallon slams his fist against his palm. A year ago, the way he recalls it, Argus Newspapers Limited was all mass: a well-entrenched stronghold of daily newspaper publishing with vast resources, solid assets, and a comfortable base for growth. "But absolutely zero momentum."

Last year, just before the April elections, the missing element arrived in the form of Tony O'Reilly, the Irish industrialist and entrepreneur, seeking new territory for his Irish Independent Newspapers publishing empire.

Also in the country when O'Reilly tied up the deal that gave him Anglo-American's 31 percent controlling share of Argus, was Ivan Fallon, award-winning financial journalist, deputy editor of the London Sunday Times, and authorised biographer of "Ireland's richest man in history".

Since his vision coincided with that of his subject, Fallon leaped at the opportunity to move to Johannesburg, charged with the mammoth task of reinventing and repositioning Argus's newspapers for the New Millennium.

A top-of-the-market Sunday broadsheet. A glossy lifestyle supplement. A British-style tabloid for the mass market. A national Sowetan. A world-class, nationwide business section. A network of regional knock-and-drops. An on-line electronic journal.

Fallon talks of the future with a quiet, steely confidence, making it plain that Independent Newspapers should in no way be confused with Argus.

But the big question, amidst the gung-ho spirit on the Sixth Floor, is whether Independent has the will – and the people – to match Goal One of its mission statement "To be the leading creator, manager, and developer of newspaper audiences in South Africa". Fallon is convinced. Well, up to a point.

"When I arrived to take up this job, I was quite frankly astounded by the quality of some of the people in this building. There are at least half a dozen people who you could take and put into a world-class newspaper company anywhere in the world, and they'd fit right in."

Fallon singles out John Featherstone, the group's managing director, and newly appointed *Sunday Independent* editor Shaun Johnson. "A terrifically exciting journalist." But he admits it's a thin layer,

To be the leading creator, manager, and developer of newspaper audiences in South Africa

leaving the company no option but to import skills from outside journalism and outside the country.

When Independent launched the much-hyped *Business Report* earlier this year, for instance, editor Jim Smith was recruited not from the company's own ranks of specialist business writers, but from the executive pool at PG Bison.

"I walked straight into creating *Business Report*," says Fallon. "There was nothing, not even a concept. I had to find staff and I very quickly became aware that that staff did not exist within the company. So I hired from outside, and absorbed everything else we'd got. I think we're still too thin on the ground. We need more people, and we need good people."

As a winner of two major financial journalism awards in the UK, Fallon has a particular attachment to the business section, now resident in *The Star*, *Cape Times*, *Argus*, *Pretoria News*, and the *Daily News* in Durban. Asked if he is satisfied with the product, Fallon answers with immediate and characteristic bluntness. "No. I'm not."

He fetches a fresh *Star* from his desk and peels off the front section before spreading the day's *Business Report* on the table. "I can certainly go through this and get very unhappy," he says. "I look at it, and I see big holes in it, to the point where I've actually had to pull myself back. The first few days, I was shouting myself hoarse, endangering the morale of the people down there. I was too close to it to see any of the good points. But it is getting better. And it's a hell of a lot better than what was there before."

Story by story, Fallon checks the front page of *Business Report* against its major morning rival, concluding with a nod to his own title. "It's a damn good attempt." But the real issue with *Business Report* has not been one of quality – few will dispute

Fallon's view that it is vastly superior to previous Argus business reporting – as confusion in the marketplace.

Launched as part of a separate premium-priced edition of *The Star* in Gauteng, *Business Report* was incorporated into all morning editions after only 19 days. Fallon flatly rejects any notion that this was an admission of the section's failure to find its niche market. But he does concede that things got a little confusing.

"With so many different *Stars* around, readers and advertisers were having difficulty working out which one contained *Business Report*. There wasn't resistance, funnily enough, but we did find that most of our target market was used to reading *Business Day* in the morning so they wanted to get *Business Report* with their *Star* in the afternoon. And that wasn't what we wanted to give them."

Since Independent spent millions researching and launching the product, shouldn't this potential for confusion have been foreseen?

"I always distrust research," says Fallon. "If people haven't had something, they won't know if they want it or not. It's a question of changing minds – and minds are being changed. I think the real fact of the matter is that this company has mentally been an afternoon newspaper company, and we just didn't understand morning newspaper production. That's been a big culture change."

Fallon is quick to point out that *Business Report* has been a huge circulation, advertising, and credibility-booster in Independent's other territories, particularly Cape Town and Pretoria. At the same time Fallon can see why many people, himself included, choose to start their business day with *Business Day*. In his case, it's the driving instinct to keep tabs on the competition. In others, it's the modern-day phenomenon of the diminishing attention span.

"If you read *Business Day* over breakfast, it doesn't last you over breakfast. It's five to ten minutes, maximum. And people seem to like that. It's not like England and America, where you might spend up to half-an-hour reading your business paper. Here, we get told that our leaders are too long. It's a question of what you're used to."

As a result, Fallon believes the business market will take both papers. "I don't think we'll ever replace *Business Day*. We're not head-to-head with them." In the same spirit of a symbiosis – so much for putting an end to bad *Business Days* – Fallon sees the upper bracket of Sunday readers choosing the new *Sunday Independent* in addition to the TML option.

"The *Sunday Times* doesn't cater for the top-end of the market. It doesn't cater for the bottom-end and there are lots of areas in the middle that it doesn't cater for either. That leaves plenty of room for us. We can survive on thirty thousand."

It's a modest ambition, even for a top-end paper, and it raises the spectre of Argus's previous venture into the thinking person's Sunday market. Fallon wasn't there at the time, but he draws a simple lesson from hindsight.

"The *Sunday Star* should not have closed. It closed on a circulation of 95 000 – there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to make money on that. Lesson two is that it was a local product staffed with local people, who tried to do everything on their own."

With isolated exceptions, Fallon has a jaundiced view of South African journalistic standards. His first impression, he remembers, was one of acute disappointment. "What struck me when I picked up the papers was the dramatic contrast between a country that is in many ways First World, with world-class companies, world-class services, and world-class sport, and a media which simply doesn't measure up."

"I found there was an audience that was thirsting for international quality news rather than the

High-quality journalists have to stop writing to move up the pay-scale

parochialism they were used to. I think the problem is that there aren't any national newspapers in South Africa, so even *The Star* tends to be fairly regional in outlook."

But if there has been a broadening of vision at Independent, Fallon credits it largely to one "wonderful, superb" man. Melbourne-based business consultant Chris Tippler. Sent by O'Reilly to find ways of streamlining Independent's operation for maximum efficiency and profit, Tippler made a series of recommendations that finally swept the cobwebs from Auntie Argus's domain.

The result has been a series of staff cuts, management reshuffles, regional shake-ups and product revamps, ushering in an era of what Fallon calls "aggressive entrepreneurialism". The mood here may be buoyant and bullish, but just how well is it permeating through to the lower floors?

"Well, I hope morale is improving," says Fallon. "It's certainly improving at the top. I find no resistance to change here at all. There's an enormous enthusiasm, you almost have to hold it back. And it's happening right through the company. There's a feeling that we're moving full-steam into the future – unlike other companies, who still seem to be based in the 1970s and 80s."

It's just an aside, a throwaway acknowledgement of the fierce rivalry between Independent and Times Media Limited. Pressed on the state of the battle, Fallon shrugs. "I'm really not too concerned what the opposition does. They fortunately seem to be remarkably complacent, and long may they remain so."

He is neither perturbed nor goaded by TML's own slant on *Business Report*. "A 19-day wonder", noted the front page of the *Sunday Times*, in a gleeful broadside from veteran anti-Argus campaigner Ken Owen.

"They're incredibly defensive, aren't they? In Britain or America, if a company is actually launching new products and doing new things, the other companies may react to it, but they don't usually resent it. The fact is, they are very well entrenched, and they do have some very strong products, which are not going to be easy to dislodge. But they're vulnerable. They're just sitting there, while we have acquired all the momentum."

The question now, if mass plus momentum equals power, is what Independent Newspapers plan to do with that power. The answer: focus. Not just on bigger profits, but on better newspapers. Which means better journalists. And better pay?

"From what I've seen," says Fallon, "salaries in this place are not bad. But what does disturb me is the way newspaper groups in South Africa are run along Civil Service lines. You have these ridiculous pay-scales, which means that instead of high-quality journalists being left to do what they do best, they have to stop writing and become administrators in order to move up the pay-scale. That's a huge shame. There are far too many assistant editors, and not enough good specialist writers."

Fallon is also concerned at the state of investigative journalism in South Africa, mainly because he believes there isn't any. While Independent has created its own nationwide investigative unit, led by former *Weekend Star* editor David Allen, Fallon does not exclude the paper's lengthy Helderberg Crash and Red Mercury investigations from his judgment.

"I think they were absolutely right to do those investigations, but I'm not sure they got to the bottom of anything. The crash of the Helderberg is still an unexplained, very serious mystery. As for Red Mercury, that investigation actually started at the *Sunday Times* in London. It must have cost them about 150 000 pounds, and there's still no proof that the substance even exists. But it's the type of story you have to follow through. Any decent journalist, I think, is at heart an investigative journalist. It just takes enormous resources, and enormous commitment."

The way Fallon sees it, Independent Newspapers has plenty of both. He looks back at Argus, and he sees a company managing itself to extinction, cutting costs and closing publications in a desperate bid to stop circulation and revenue from falling. He sees a "terrible clampdown" on people and talent, and a vicious cycle of declining standards and plummeting morale. Then he looks at Independent.

"We're not going to close anything," he says. "We're not in a closing mood. If we have strong products, let's grow them. If there's something wrong, let's fix it. Let's find gaps, let's expand, let's invest. This isn't the old Auntie Argus you're looking at anymore. This is the aggressive young nephew."

Ivan Fallon is employed by Tony O'Reilly's Irish Independent Newspaper group, and was seconded to Johannesburg as Group Editorial Director of the newly-formed Independent Newspapers in 1994.



David Beresford On bully-beef tin scuds & what is "really" happening

The sweetest moments in the life of a journalist must be those occasions when a scandal of major public interest drops into one's hands out of the blue. Perhaps the sweetest in my years covering the South African story came in 1991 when I settled down for a beer with a young man clutching a handful of documents at a bar in London's Soho.

We had arranged by telephone to meet and had agreed that he would use a pseudonym and that I would make no attempt to discover his real identity. The documents he had were all I needed. Their contents are now well known – they were the top secret police files detailing covert payments to Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi in what was to become known as the Inkathagate scandal.

Recently I spoke to him again and this time he revealed his identity: Brian Morrow, a former warrant officer in the Durban security branch. The reason why he had decided to come out into the open was that he had been unable to get indemnity against prosecution for the "criminal" act he had committed by feeding me the documents – a breach of the Official Secrets Act. He was incensed at this and wanted to express his indignation in print.

His indignation was understandable. He had, after all, rendered a signal service to South Africa, exposing a major abuse of power by the government and the police as well as the political corruption at the heart of the power struggle in KwaZulu and Natal. And yet his only reward for this selfless act (he sought no payment, or other reward from me) was to have a criminal prosecution hanging over his head, which has effectively left him stranded in exile in England.

Whistle-blowers, unfortunately, rarely get their just rewards. Eschel Rhoodie (admittedly not as selfless an informant as Brian Morrow) paid for the Muldergate scandal in exile. The "Deep Throat" who was responsible for Watergate has never been identified, probably maintaining his, or her anonymity in recognition that there was a price to be paid for exposure – quite possibly career-threatening, if not life-threatening.

Talking to Morrow about Inkathagate brought home to me the ignorance in which journalists labour, without the rare appearance of the whistle-blower. He recounted how he had filed the documents when some closely-guarded filing cabinets were briefly moved to a less secure room during building operations at Durban police headquarters, CR Swart Square. Under suspicion of "disloyalty", he had to grab the little that he could in the time available. "There was far more there. There were other documents with Buthelezi's name on and documents with (FW) De Klerk's name on," he told me. "I didn't have time to read them."

It leaves one wondering what other "Inkathagate" lay in those cab-

inets and, for that matter, in other filing cabinets in other regional police headquarters; in those of Military Intelligence, the National Intelligence Service and the State Security Council. Grounds for speculation are endless. What was the Third Force? Does conspiracy lie behind Inkatha's electoral victory in Natal? How did Samora Machel really die...?

Wisdom, so it is said, lies in the discovery of one's ignorance. But the acquisition of such wisdom does little to alleviate my growing disquiet at the realisation of how limited is the ability of journalists to inform the public as to what is "really" happening.

My current angst on this issue was born, I suspect, of my experiences covering the Gulf War. I clearly remember the sad farewells my family bade me, assuming there was a good chance that I was not going to return from this assignment. Chemical warfare was certain; the only question was whether the Iraqis would use their biological weapons.

My sense of impending doom was reinforced by a SAS captain who regularly went snooping about the trench positions and was able to give me a detailed breakdown of the chemical weapons the Iraqis had stockpiled and how precisely they planned using them.

There were moments of doubt, as when a Scud missile crashed behind our hotel and I went to inspect the wreckage. I was handling a piece of the rocket casing, marvelling at the ingenuity of the Iraqis at having constructed such an awesome weapon out of bully-beef tins, when a Saudi secret policeman threatened to charge me with spying.

But such moments were swept aside by the knowledgeable, like CNN, pumping out to the world not only confirmation of the chemical weapons threat, but details of the immense and sophisticated fortifications prepared for the Allied land invasion; the massive underground labyrinths constructed to protect the heavy armour against aerial bombardment; the giant artificial sanddunes making miniature Maginot lines



across the desert; the huge canals of oil that would be set ablaze when the tactical moment came.

As it turned out I went to war with the Egyptians. We swept right across Kuwait, through the battlefields. Maginot lines there were none. There was one oil moat which I jumped across. The only underground fortification I saw was a single line of trenches, the sophistication of which would have had a World War I combatant scoffing. An American communications expert who examined their equipment shook his head, saying he did not think the Iraqi radios were capable of transmitting to neighbouring trenches, much less headquarters. It is now a matter of record that there were no chemical weapons in the Kuwait theatre of operations.

I finally "liberated" Kuwait City, after being captured twice. First by the US 7th Army Corps and then by the US Marines who had little else to do to fill their time.

When I arrived in the city in the company of hordes of other journalists, we were mobbed as "liberators". The Allied armies were waiting to make sure all the television cameras were there before they actually marched in.

...not a war as such, but a massive psychops operation – an exercise in the deployment of a bodyguard of lies.

I left the Gulf suspecting that the real story of what I had experienced was not war as such, but a massive "psychops" operation – an exercise in the deployment of what Churchill referred to as a "bodyguard of lies" – on a scale and with a sophistication which the world has quite possibly never previously experienced. Certainly it had me questioning whether journalism – our attempts to "tell it like it is" – does not in fact render society a disservice, by misleading the public into the belief that "the truth" is actually discoverable, particularly when governments are determined to conceal and mislead.

The thought brings to mind a column in the Spanish newspaper, *El Pais*, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in the aftermath of the Falklands war. The article purported to tell the inside story of that miserable little conflict – including hair-raising accounts of the savagery of the Gurkha troops who, according to Marquez, spent their time chopping people's heads off, as well as the perversions of British officers whose predilection for sodomy had, again according to Marquez, landed large numbers of young Argentinean POWs in hospital nursing their rear ends.

My initial indignation at this obvious travesty of the truth began to fade as it dawned on me that Marquez had come closer than any journalist to communicating the "truth" of the

Falklands. With the magical power of caricature and parody he had encapsulated the essential savagery and obscenity of war. It was, to use the phrase with which Marquez will forever be associated, "magical realism".

Is caricature and parody then a better way to discover and communicate "truth"? Does the likes of the "Dear Walter" column, run by the *Weekly Mail & Guardian*, come closer to capturing the quintessentials of South African public life than the acres of print to be found in the "news" columns?

Clearly the press cannot abandon its attempts to discover what is happening in the corridors of power. But if it is to do its job it needs help. Which is why I watch with intense interest the momentous battle being waged by civil rights activists to preserve the idealistic commitment to "freedom of information" entrenched as a right in South Africa's new constitution. Because, without help, journalism is in danger of becoming nothing more than the handmaiden of ignorance. To get at the truth we would do better to play the part of jester.

Twice the winner of the International Journalist of the Year Award, and author of the acclaimed book about the Irish hunger strikes, *Ten Men Dead*, David Beresford is currently the Johannesburg correspondent for the *Guardian*.

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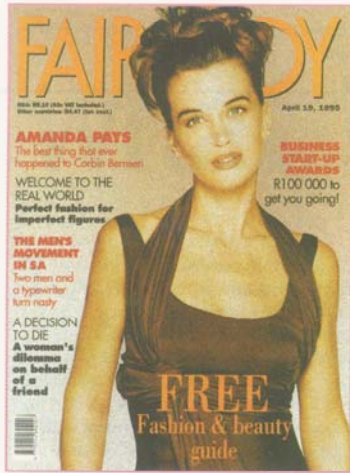
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FAIR LADY PICKS



The SA consumer magazine market has never been more yeasty or dangerous. Disarray in television and radio has inclined media planners to the overtures of print. Feisty niche publications are proliferating. And – surprise, surprise – the grande dame of a high-risk category (general women's magazines) has zoomed out of soft-focus under a sharp new editor.

by CATHERINE KNOX

With the covers of her first two issues Wrottesley gave the Fair Lady persona a new edge: stereotypical bourgeois beauty, but tautly honed and shot through with adrenalin. A complex national fortnightly like Fair Lady runs on a conveyor belt which a new editor has to hop aboard - at least three issues are in production and a fourth in the planning at any one point. So in these first two issues, the contents was still in transition. By the third the transformation was at work far below the surface.

RINGING THE CHANGES:

Editor's message – meatier, topical (baby Micaela, the di Blasi scandal) with a broader, value-based context for the topic

Editorial style – faster pace, more information dense, less shopping

Contents – “My list of issues includes: health services, education, violence, the expectations of ordinary people, AIDS/HIV, unemployment, the environment and the RDP.” As leavening: “escapism is vital: sleaze, celebs, beautiful homes, fashion and beauty ... yes, and royals if the story is well-written and slavish adoration is replaced with a touch of irony. So many issues invite irony but this kind of writing is so hard to come by. “I'd like to run local stories in 70% of our feature space.”

Texts – Asked about the popular wisdom of a bite-sized two-page feature, she says: “The nearly universal complaint about Fair Lady has been ‘there's nothing substantial to read!’. Being able to supply more depth and substance is one of our strengths - and even a six-page feature is much, much shorter than a book and can be read in the bath or as a nightcap. The maximum length for us from now on will go up to around 3 000 words.”

Fiction – “No, it hasn't gone out of fashion: we simply can't find enough decent scripts. I want to get away from the British magazine stuff set in the kitchen of a semi.”

Target – “Our readership is very broad, with a weighting in the 16-24 category, and this has led to a somewhat scattered approach. We have now narrowed our editorial focus down to the 19-35 age group as a strategy to help us to produce a consistently younger, fresher and more vital book.”

A new Jody Foster cover hit the news-stands with a disturbingly aggressive glamour towards the end of April. The frank concupiscence in her eye, the contradictions of tension and abandon in her pose challenged shoppers from 10 metres down the aisles of Checkers and Pick 'n Pay. Ah, the ambiguity of that soft, long-sleeved, Sunday-grey suit all but exposing one breast and revealing a shapely leg virtually to the hip! But most of all, that pagan gaze and the bold geometry of the image and the type accompanying it!

Leaning forward out of the name-plate towards the reader, her head obscures a third of it. Her left hand points directly at the screaming pink WIN, her toe anchors the image and the word shopping like an arrow in the ground.

Last year's *Fair lady* “cover girls” look positively blobby in comparison.

This cover announced unequivocally that *Fair Lady* was off on a new trajectory. At 30-something, one of our best-loved but hitherto most easily taken for granted staples, has

acquired a new editor and a new zest.

Fair Lady started publication in 1965 with Jane Raphaely as editor. She was a young mother with experience that included writing a column for the *Cape Times*. Nasionale Pers, bastion of Afrikanerdom, had seen the business sense of starting an English sister to the evergreen *Sarie Marais*, even if it meant hiring people whose religious, cultural and political affiliations were left of the company ideal at the time.

So began SA's own little one-title magazine revolution that blazed a trail through the euphoric and doomed 60s into the liberating 70s (which were also a time of unprecedented repression for most South Africans) and on towards the 80s when the founding editor left, passing the baton to Dene Smuts who dropped it after a tussle with management over editorial independence. Liz Butler picked up the title and led the retreat into conspicuous consumption. The sales graph drooped – partly a symptom of tighter markets and fiercer competition, partly through the magazine's failure to engage with the central concerns of its

readership at the time. Shopping and gossip only dull pain and lull fears temporarily.

The brand retained an inert power but lost impetus. Then Liz Butler decided to go home to New Zealand where she now edits a family-owned decor magazine. When she gave notice at Naspers, a replacement hadn't even been considered, let alone inducted into the post. Management had been scouting around for a deputy editor to



Roz Wrottesley on her own personal strengths:

“... a capacity for change and for risk-taking; a good visual sense, a trained eye for detail and very high standards ... I enjoy pushing things to the limit and will bring more controversy to Fair Lady, which I hope will make for a more compelling read ...”

fill the gap left by another long-term Fair Lady stalwart, Gillian Caradoc Davies, so the search was stepped up for the two top English language jobs on the sixth floor at headquarters on the Heerenracht. Roz Wrottesley, who was being lunched by Naspers about the deputy's job at the time, moved into the editor's chair with no externally visible ripples.

With a new editor in place, Di Paice, another experienced magazine jour-

UP SPEED

nalist and media trainer with an established by-line was quickly recruited as deputy. Catherine Eden, the incumbent features editor, had worked for Wrottesley previously. Long-serving sub-editor Pat Barton is another associate and friend who goes way back. Annette Kesler is the doyenne of local cookery editors; fashion editor Stephanie Wolhuter Inggs and her photographer husband Stephen have created a special signature for their pristine odes to fashion.

Syndication editor June Botha has worked the rights minefield for *Fair Lady* since before it first hit the streets. She brings to the conference table a unique global perspective as well as a piercing empathy for the ordinary reader. Sue Grant is little short of an institution at the Gauteng end of the *Fair Lady* operation and Judy Olivier in the London office provides a northern barometer and that rarest of all commodities: humour.

Roz Wrottesley inherited a strong team. But the title was a venerable hohum segment of the wallpaper on our news-stands. She transformed it into a potential hot property in six short weeks — overnight in the time-frame of a fortnightly.

If ever there was proof that a consumer magazine is a personality-based commodity this is it.

Though whether consumers will respond with equal energy and "grabbing it" as a "must-have" (Wrottesley's words), remains to be seen. Readers and advertisers alike will inevitably wait and watch awhile. Is this new promise just a flash in the pan? Or a genuine gold strike?

The Naspers circulation department confirmed in mid April that up to the minute cash sales figures indicated that circulation was holding steady with no more than a slight quiver in the upward direction.

Wrottesley has described her new job as "an enormous privilege" but has shown no sign of being awed by it. She claims that her personal strengths include lack of ego and an advanced team spirit. And she is every bit as enthusiastic as she looks, but colleagues can vouch for the adamantine will from which her energy springs.

Of *Fair Lady's* place in SA magazine

history, she says: "There's nothing wrong with a magazine being a powerful brand, as long as it isn't expected to run on its own steam. The challenge is to enjoy the traditional status and the extremely high recognition factor but to imbue it with the relevance and freshness of a new arrival. Continual re-evaluation and judicious change is essential. As someone said: 'a magazine is not a museum and a magazine that doesn't change dies'."

"Bringing depth and excitement to *Fair Lady* is my most pressing task," says new editor Roz Wrottesley. "Achieving a racially-balanced readership is the greatest challenge."

"Last year adspend increased most in radio and print. Certainly television is competition on all fronts, but we have to capitalise on our strengths which include precise targeting, a very personal relationship with readers and portable storable information to which readers can refer repeatedly,"

Too canny to fix what ain't broke, she intends playing up existing strengths which include a universally trusted advice column (Elizabeth Duncan is SA's most famous agony aunty), a legendary food section and an in-house test kitchen and laboratory permanently staffed by professionals. As a fortnightly, *Fair Lady* can offer readers twice as much advice and up to three times as many recipes as the competition.

"The Consumer Test House is a wonderful and undervalued resource. I have stepped up the frequency from alternate issues to every issue and would like it to form the core of a really strong section, running full investigations as well as the surveys and Tried and Tested pages. It is expensive to run, but it's unique and can be developed into a marvellous source of publicity and site of reader participation. And it's right in line with our drive to give the reader real, usable information as well as inspiration."

This drive has also seen the itsy-bitsy upfront "Etceteras" pages change into a more authoritative "For you" information section which admonishes "Know it", "Watch it", "Read it" and so on. But the wealth of information (the word comes up frequently in Roz-speak) is presented in a bright post-modern layout that holds the browsing eye. In fact this is much closer to the original form of Etceteras which served as a bulletin board, particularly for women's issues, before declining into a pretty catalogue of pricey ephemera.

Publications like *Fair Lady* have often rightly been accused of training their readers to be good little consumers. Roz Wrottesley's response: "It's certainly true that women's magazines have become shop windows

ly, *Fair Lady* can offer readers twice as much advice and up to three times as many recipes as the competition.

Dark is too gloomy; a cover with a white background sells better ... the new *Fair Lady's* vivid bridal issue turns this conventional wisdom on its head. "I certainly wouldn't change *Fair Lady's* name even if I could," says Wrottesley briskly. "It has developed associations and meanings of its own — far greater than the simple denotation of the words."



This is the cover, Roz Wrottesley's third, with which Wrottesley announced *Fair Lady's* new intentions. Aptly, it stars the most powerful woman in Hollywood.

In a media segment where packaging is vital, the May 3 issue of *Fair Lady* is a bench-mark. *How to sound intelligent at your next dinner-party and survive to shop another day*, might be a cynic's synopsis of the message. *My best, cleverest and most exciting friend*, is the wannabe's reading.

over the last decade. I think this trend was partly prompted by the perception that people didn't have time to read, so they wanted visually pleasing pages they could flip through. And partly by economics which pressurised editors to support advertisers at the expense of editorial content.

"In fact, I don't believe we can afford too much of the flip-through factor - we need to supply really authoritative information to make *Fair Lady* worth buying. Readers would continue to pick up the occasional

copy as a 10-minute diversion, but they won't buy every one unless there is some food for thought, some real information, some entertainment ... and then, only then, some ideas for things to buy."

This is not to suggest the material girl has become a blue stocking. The new values and vision do not preclude lush dreams of all the good things money can buy. The promise of those yuppy covers is not forgotten inside. There are pots and pots of creams and potions to keep you young forever;

clothes approved by the fashion police; aspirational dwelling-spaces ...

And, "Yes, competitions with big prizes still work. Readers expect them now. I suppose the advent of lotteries will spur us on to find even bigger incentives." R20 000 "to make a dream come true" was offered in the 5 April issue. A fortnight later R100 000 was up for grabs in the form of a business start-up award. On 3 May readers were offered the chance to win a R40 000 trip to Australia and a R27 000 shopping spree.

Roz Wrottesley is under no illusions about the highly commercial nature of this business and of her role. Referring to an article in *Folio* (the magazine of magazine management) which referred to the personality of the editor as a profit-centre, she says: "The editor of a woman's magazine has no choice but to get involved in marketing. My natural inclination is to be a backroom person, but that's not an option." As well as writing, she is an accomplished commissioning and re-write editor.

"In a competitive market and in a country hungry for role models and spokespeople, the editor has to offer a persona readers can identify with."

She has to get out there and court her publics - the readers and the advertisers. She has to take responsibility for her editorial policies where adspend is concerned.

"As a communicator with the privilege of being able to take a public stance on issues and of filtering and presenting information according to her own reading of events and readers' requirements, she must be prepared to account for herself.

"It's tough because not every good editor is equipped to cope with high visibility. But because of *Fair Lady's* status in the market, I cannot afford to be anonymous." The changing faces on the cover are not enough.

The metaphor of the orphan brand comes to mind. A brand apparently unconnected to a parent company or progenitor. Finite and unchanging.

Jane Raphaely left *Fair Lady* with a seemingly indelible branding. Now let's see what this new mama can do about the orphan status.

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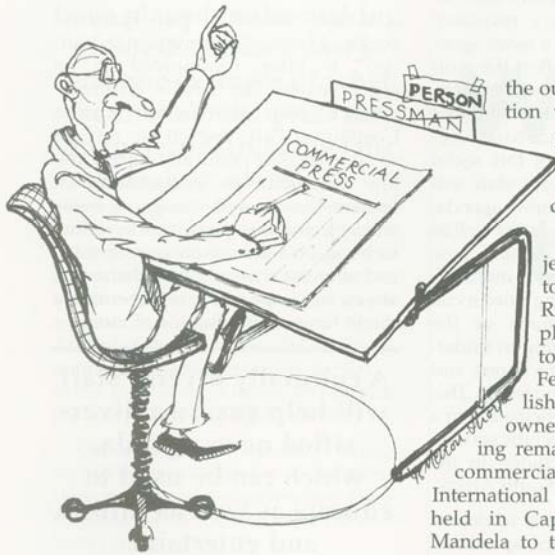
THE MAKING OF A MAGAZINE EDITOR:

Roz Wrottesley and her husband Stephen (daily news editor of the *Argus*) have two daughters aged six and nine. Before taking over as editor of *Fair Lady*, she was managing editor of *Femina* where she used the business skills and financial savvy honed in her own independent publishing company which had produced *Via* magazine for Volkswagen. Prior to that, between 1987 and 1989, she'd served as deputy editor on *Femina*. This was immediately after Jane Raphaely bought the ailing title, gave it a new direction and re-launched it. Wrottesley had already spent four years in the burgeoning Raphaely empire as features, beauty and then assistant editor of *Cosmopolitan*. In a yo-yo movement typical of our closed magazine shop, she had moved to *Cosmopolitan* from *Fair Lady* where she'd worked as London representative and then "showbiz" editor.

Catherine Knox, who started her working life at *Fair Lady* in the '60s, is a senior lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes University.

"IMAGE AND REALITY"

A CRITIQUE OF SOUTH AFRICA'S ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS



By Les Switzer

THE PRESS IN SOUTH AFRICA will celebrate its 200th anniversary in the year 2000, but for the vast majority of South Africa's literate population there will be little to celebrate. Why? Because this was – and to a large extent still is – a sectional press. These newspapers, newsletters and magazines have been owned and controlled by whites, aimed at or intended for whites, concerned almost exclusively with the political, economic and social life of the white population, and consumed mainly by whites for most of this 200-year history.

The image of a muckraking, watchdog English-language "opposition" press defending the civil rights of all who were oppressed in South Africa, however, was an enduring one during the apartheid era. And this image – reinforced in the midst of draconian censorship laws, widespread intimidation and sometimes even repression – has been generally accepted by mainstream media and media scholars outside as well as inside South Africa.

These newspapers included Johannesburg's *Rand Daily Mail* and to a lesser extent the *Star*, Bloemfontein's *Friend*, Cape Town's *Cape Times*, Port Elizabeth's *Evening Post*, East London's *Daily Dispatch* and Pietermaritzburg's *Natal Witness*. They were deemed to be a kind of extra-parliamentary opposition – telling the truth about apartheid to South Africans and

the outside world in a generation when white opposition parties had virtually collapsed and black opposition parties had been driven into exile.

The same image is projected in South Africa today. Former *Star* editor Richard Steyn, for example, wrote an "open letter" to President Mandela in February 1994 (it was published in various Argus-owned newspapers) deploring remarks he made about the commercial press at an International Press Institute congress held in Cape Town. Steyn took Mandela to task for not mentioning key journalists and newspapers in the "mainstream" commercial press that had opposed apartheid between the 1960s and 1980s, for entertaining "romantic, ahistorical" notions about the contributions made by alternative publications to the anti-apartheid struggle, and for seeking changes in the industry "on the grounds of skin colour or gender alone." The press in South Africa, as Steyn saw it, "is the envy of its counterparts in most African countries and in many emerging democracies around the world."

The press in South Africa, as Steyn saw it, "is the envy of its counterparts in most African countries and in many emerging democracies around the world."

But Steyn's view is really the romantic and ahistorical view. He assumed the alternative press was grounded in an "old and developed tradition" of opposition pioneered by the white commercial press. In reality, it was grounded in a tradition of protest and resistance that can be traced back to the 19th Century and in a press that struggled to project images of social reality that were decidedly different from the images projected by "mainstream" white

media. These publications were rarely viable commercially or indeed visible to most white readers, but they have persisted for more than a century in an effort to voice the grievances and aspirations of the majority who had no voice in South Africa.

The alternative press constitutes a unique political, social and literary archive – the oldest, most extensive and varied collection of indigenous serial publications of this kind in sub-Saharan Africa. There have been four distinct phases in the history of South Africa's alternative press:

- **The African mission press (1830s-1880s)**, which represented the pioneer missionary societies and their converts living and working primarily in mission station and outstation communities. The earliest African protest literature can be traced to a few mission journals in the last two decades or so of this era.

- **The independent protest press (1880s-1930s)**, which represented primarily the aspirant black middle class. The roots of an indigenous black (African, Coloured and Indian) literary tradition in English, Afrikaans and various ethnic African languages stems from this period. It would take many forms, including personality profiles and essays devoted to African language, literature and history, humour and advice columns, poetry, short stories, plays, sermons, hymns and other musical compositions.

- **The early resistance press (1930s-1960s)**, which gradually embraced a popular, non-racial, non-sectarian and more militant alliance of left-wing working and middle-class interests.

- **The later resistance press (1970s-1980s)**, which represented primarily the Black Consciousness movement and its press (1970s) and the "progressive" community press (1980s). Resistance media changed dramatically in form and content during these decades. They would embrace (a) various commercial publications still aimed at segregated black and/or white audiences; (b) progressive academic journals and student publications from historically "white" universities, adult literacy texts, published oral narratives, personal memoirs and

popular histories; and (c) a variety of literary, musical and performance texts generated mainly in segregated African townships, informal settlements and historically "black" and "homeland" university settings that were now fully engaged in the struggle for South Africa.

... surrogate newspapers like *Bantu World* (later renamed the *World*) offered a protest agenda that would not offend the ruling elites.

African nationalist newspapers initially dominated the alternative press, but between the 1930s and 1950s traditional protest publications were bought out and closed down or denuded of political content and merged with a new captive black commercial press. This in turn was controlled by white entrepreneurs linked directly or indirectly to the major English and Afrikaans-language press groups.

The segregationist state was steadily expanding and solidifying its control over the African population during this period, and surrogate newspapers like *Bantu World* (later renamed the *World*) offered a protest agenda that would not offend the ruling elites. *Bantu World* was the flagship of *Bantu Press*, an Argus subsidiary, and it would eventually own or otherwise control a chain of black publications extending throughout southern and central Africa. *Bantu World* would be the trendsetter in the campaign to develop a captive black commercial press that was supervised by white editorial overseers and monitored in white-controlled newsrooms.

The fledgling socialist press filled the vacuum created by the demise of the independent African protest press between the 1930s and 1960s. These newspapers included *Inkululeko*, the Communist Party's flagship newspaper; the *Guardian* and its successors, socialist weeklies that were independent of the party; *Fighting Talk*, mouthpiece of the Springbok Legion and eventually the Congress Alliance; and the *Torch*, organ of the Unity move-

ment. It was they and not English-language opposition newspapers that best represented the transition in discourse from petitionary protest to popular resistance. And it was Black Consciousness publications during the 1970s – and journalists influenced by the BC movement – that provided the main stimulus for the alternative press of the 1980s.

Few English-speaking journalists have actually analysed the content of their newspapers – despite scores of reminiscences, biographies and in-house histories.

In the end, the image of an independent, muckraking, watchdog commercial press projected by Steyn and his peers over many decades falls far short of reality. The struggle to impose meaning on this strand of post-colonial discourse, however, continues in post-apartheid South Africa.

Few English-speaking journalists have actually analysed the content of their newspapers – despite scores of reminiscences, biographies and in-house histories. The evidence we have, however, is revealing. The targets of dissent in this “opposition” press were carefully selected, and anti-apartheid news and opinion accounted for an insignificant proportion of the news-hole. African journalists were given permanent employment in a few of these newspapers only from the 1960s and 1970s, and they worked almost exclusively on subordinate, segregated and decidedly paternalistic inserts or supplements targeted for black audiences. African journalists, moreover, had no control over and virtually no access to other media of mass communication before the 1960s.

Anti-apartheid critics of the English-language press have claimed these “opposition” newspapers (a) focused on “safe” anti-apartheid news stories and on personalities and events rather than issues – ignoring the conditions and contexts in which these stories took place; (b) practised widespread self-censorship as part of their response to the government’s attempts to censor and control communication media; (c) did nothing to deracialise and democratise their own institutions – inside and outside the newsroom; (d) omitted, trivialised or downplayed news that might threaten the economic and political interests of those corporate groups who owned or otherwise controlled these publications; and (e) played the role of a sectional press that served the cultural interests of their largely white, English-speaking readership in much the same way as the sectional Afrikaans press, which was perceived to be the mouthpiece of the Afrikaner community and the National Party.

Even during the apartheid era, only a few newspapers were really critical of government policy before the 1980s.

“Mainstream” newspapers in post-apartheid South Africa are under increasing pressure to be more representative and more responsible in their coverage of events and issues, and some critics are suggesting that the white-controlled press in particular must do more to educate its audience. I would suggest that the South African press can address these concerns in at least two ways before the end of the century.

Even during the apartheid era, only a few newspapers were really critical of government policy before the 1980s.

•The first way points to changing the racial and gender complexions of the newsroom and boardroom. The world the established commercial press represented after Union in 1910 was a white, patriarchal and middle-class world. It was largely oblivious even to contradictions between white social groups and for the most part either ignored, demonised or parodied any opposition that challenged the social order.

As I understand Mandela’s remarks at the IPI congress, the promotion of cultural diversity in the news staffs of the commercial press is a necessary step in the promotion of a news agenda that will ultimately reflect the multicultural and primarily non-Western society that is South Africa. The major newspapers in South Africa have barely explored the surface of this social reality. A culturally diverse staff will help ensure a diversified news agenda, which can be used to educate as well as inform and entertain. Learning how events can be viewed from multicultural perspectives, learning how social differences structure much of the human experience, learning to understand and respect the traditions and values of people unlike ourselves. This is what is essential to participation in a more inclusive and democratic society. And this should be included in the news agenda of the new South Africa.

•The second way points to deconstructing the language of apartheid. Public discourse during the apartheid era was extraordinarily pervasive in setting the boundaries for ideological conformity in social relations, politics, the economy and culture, but so far South Africa’s commercial press has shown little interest in the problem other than deracialising (and degendering) the more common forms of public address.

Let’s take one example. The Nationalists maintained a firm and

productive alliance with the US and its allies for decades on the basis of a proclaimed pro-capitalist and anti-communist position – a position that continues to appeal to whites and some blacks still polarised by the rhetoric of the Cold War. This rhetoric sought to reduce the language of politics to a simplistic, value-laden dichotomy between two stereotyped abstractions called capitalism and communism/socialism (almost always represented as one by the media). Like most stereotypes, neither “ism” can sustain close scrutiny today.

In the context of post-apartheid South Africa, “communism/socialism” is often represented as an anachronism. The ANC’s continued alliance with the South African Communist Party (which has refused so far to become politically correct, follow the trend in post-communist Eastern Europe and change its name and objectives) is perceived by critics to be at best an unnecessary burden and at worst a trojan horse that could wreck any hope a future government might have of reviving the economy.

A culturally diverse staff will help ensure a diversified news agenda, which can be used to educate as well as inform and entertain.

These critics have an inadequate, and ahistorical, understanding of South Africa’s past. The Communist Party between 1925 and its banning in 1950 was one of the few organised political pressure groups in the country that sought to give voice to the interests and concerns of African peasants and industrial workers – the vast majority of the population – and the socialist voice in various forms was a bastion of the broader resistance movement during the apartheid era.

These critics also ignore the fact that socialists stemmed from all designated “racial” groups, and their very existence as a community – however fragmented they seemed to be at various moments in time – offered concrete evidence that the democratic commitment to an open, non-racial society has had a history of its own even in South Africa. Finally, these critics discount public statements made by Communist Party officials today, who accept the ANC’s pragmatic economic policies and claim the socialist project will assume a form and function in this country that is in harmony with the wishes of the majority population.

Deconstructing the role that capitalism, socialism and the Communist Party have played in the making of South Africa’s past is just one example of what the commercial press can do to deconstruct the language of apartheid. The narration of news is

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grounded in binary signs – subject and object, male and female, white and black, good and bad, pure and impure, legitimate and illegitimate, sane and insane, normal and abnormal, sacred and profane, skilled and unskilled, capitalism and communism, development and dependency, north and south, metropole and periphery the dichotomies are endless.

Deconstructing the role that capitalism, socialism and the Communist Party have played in the making of South Africa's past is just one example of what the commercial press can do to deconstruct the language of apartheid.

The press' task is no less than an interrogation of the binary signs that comprise the master narrative of apartheid. This is by no means a simple exercise, but it must be done if South Africa is to be the role model for a truly nonracial, nonsectarian society that so many well wishers inside and outside the country are hoping it will be.

Deconstructing these bogus dichotomies would be a corrective step on the road to constructing a new language of reconciliation for the new South Africa.



Les Switzer is professor in the School of Communication and adjunct professor in History and co-director of the Center for Critical Cultural Studies at the University of Houston. He spent 16 years in South Africa, working initially as a journalist and later as an academic. Among his major publications is *Black press in South Africa and Lesotho, 1836-1976* (1979), *Media and dependency in South Africa* (1985) and *Power and resistance in an African society: The Ciskei Xhosa and the making of South Africa* (1993). His latest book, *South Africa's alternative press in protest and resistance*, will be published by Cambridge University Press towards the end of this year.

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Who's winning the battle to get more and more South Africans to buy newspapers?

(There's nothing Irish about the answer...)

Over the five year period, 1990 to 1995, there is only one company whose sold newspapers have grown by more than the rate of the population increase. That company is Caxton Newspapers. Our 11 paid papers have put on 24% ABC circulation growth. This is in stark contrast to the biggest publisher of dailies, who've seen circulation slide by 10% in the same period.

In addition, Caxton is a group who has a vigorous empowerment programme. We're bringing newspapers to communities who have never been served by newspapers before. And we're doing it in partnership with people from the communities we aim to serve. In



Alexandra, in Soweto and on the East Rand. And there are more to come...

With a full time training department, and a unique system of awards and incentives, Caxton encourages its journalists to aim high. The payoff comes in the dedicated readership for our free and paid papers. With an aggregate circulation (including associates) of 1,3 million in 62 communities, Caxton is playing a major role in the creation of a free and informative press in the New South Africa.

Caxton - born, bred and rooted in the RSA.

CAXTON/CTP & ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS: ■ BEDFORDVIEW EDENVALE NEWS ■ KEMPTON EXPRESS ■ TEMBISAN ■ SANDTON CHRONICLE ■ RANDBURG SUN ■ NORTH EASTERN TRIBUNE ■ NORTHCLIFF MELVILLE TIMES ■ ROSEBANK KILLARNEY GAZETTE ■ BENONI CITY TIMES ■ BOKSBURG ADVERTISER ■ BRAKPAN HERALD ■ GERMISTON CITY NEWS ■ SUNBEAM ■ KRUGERSDORP NEWS ■ RANDFONTEIN HERALD ■ ROODEPOORT RECORD ■ DOBSONVILLE KAGISO EXPRESS ■ WEST RAND TIMES ■ SECUNDA BETHAL HIGHVELD RIDGE ■ ALBERTON RECORD ■ SOUTHERN COURIER ■ PRETORIA RECORD ATTRIDGEVILLE ■ PRETORIA RECORD CENTRAL ■ PRETORIA RECORD CENTURION ■ PRETORIA RECORD EAST ■ PRETORIA RECORD MAMELODI ■ PRETORIA RECORD MOOT ■ PRETORIA RECORD NORTH ■ ALEX TIMES ■ VAAL STER ■ VAAL VISION ■ VAALWEEKBLAD ■ BONUS ■ BRITS POS ■ GEMSBOK ADVERTISER ■ NOORDWESTER ■ RUSTENBURG HERALD ■ STELLALANDER ■ THE MAIL ■ DIE LAEVELDER ■ LOWWELD NEWS ■ ZULULAND OBSERVER ■ UMLOZI WEZINDABA ■ LADYSMITH GAZETTE ■ DRAKENSBORGER/TIMES OF LADYSMITH ■ OGWINI ■ SOUTH COAST HERALD ■ SOUTH COAST MAIL ■ SOUTH COAST SUN ■ SOUTHLANDS SUN ■ BEREA MAIL ■ HIGHWAY MAIL ■ NORTHGLEN NEWS ■ QUEENSBURGH NEWS ■ TEMPO ■ TAXI ■ NEWCASTLE ADVERTISER ■ INKANYEZI ■ ESTCOURT MIDLANDS NEWS ■ GEORGE HERALD ■ OUDTSHOORN KOERANT ■ MOSSEL BAY ADVERTISER ■ KNYSNA & PLETT HERALD



Stidy, '95



THE

SHOOTING SEASON HAS RE-OPENED



Left: "I like to take an idea to its logical extreme – I try to make it as abnormal as possible. I just sit and doodle until something comes out."

Left: "The day I drew this I'd lent the car to a friend and had walked in to work through Alexandra Park. There was litter everywhere, they'd just had a cycle meet, I think."



Left: "I was initially influenced by English cartoonists – we always got the Giles annual. But I like Ronald Searle. In recent years I have gone over more to the American style, I find them sharper. I grew up on a farm – hence the chickens."

Above: "This cartoon is a landmark for me. I'm not sure why it has so much detail. I like drawing animals and people behaving as animals and animals behaving as people. It's my farm background."

I BECAME A CARTOONIST OUT OF SELF-DEFENCE

I was brought up on a farm in the Nyanga District of Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands, the fourth son in a family of seven children. My three elder brothers were very down-to-earth practical, scientific types (two became farmers, the other a geologist). Realising I had no hope of ever measuring up to them when it came to fixing tractors or arguing the merits of different breeds of cattle, I turned to the Arts for my salvation.

Ironically, I did not take up cartooning professionally until I was in my early thirties when I moved to South Africa. Up until then I had done a variety of dead-end jobs – including dishwasher, apple picker, turkey-plucker and civil servant – all of which helped sharpen my skills as a daydreamer/cynic/doodler.

My first job in South Africa was as a feature writer/cartoonist with *Scope* magazine which might sound glamorous to some. But I was soon tired of writing facetious pieces about big-breasted women, so when I was offered a job on the newly formed satirical magazine *Laughing Stock*, I accepted. Unfortunately, although it had some great comic talent on board, the magazine never really came up to expectations and soon folded.

After a brief sojourn overseas, I started working for the *Natal Witness* in 1990 as their editorial cartoonist. I like working in Pietermaritzburg because it's slow and sleepy and out on a limb and I think this gives me a different perspective on things.

Probably the best definition of the political cartoon I've read is the one by J N Darling: "It is a humour-coated capsule by means of which the sober judgments of editorial minds are surreptitiously gotten down the throats of an apathetic public." As such, cartooning is essentially about communicating ideas and the better the idea, the better the cartoon usually is. If there is no point of view to be had then we are mere decorators.

I always try to retain the element of surprise by avoiding the obvious joke/punchline. The readers must never expect what you are about to throw at them or the cartoon will lose much of its humorous impact.

Sometimes, if I'm lucky, the idea will come in a blinding flash but usually I have to sweat it out by a process that one humourist called "controlled mind wandering". Lateral thinking, if you like. As James Thurber said: "The hardest part of my job is convincing my wife I'm working when I'm standing staring out the window."

People may see it as a cushy way to earn a living but you often have to do a great deal of research and there is always the terror of the daily deadline. Besides being funny one also needs to be politically sophisticated, with a strong sense of history and an eye for the absurd. Unlike the political writer who can waffle to his heart's content, you have to achieve that telling unity between word and image and communicate in one quick glance often very complex political situations.

What I do like about it is that you can, within reason, be as rude as you like about people you don't



Above: "The local branch of Earthlife is very active in Pietermaritzburg. I drew this at the end of 1994, after Dawie de Villiers hadn't objected to toxic waste entering the country."

Below: "This is a variation on a theme. I did a similar one to this of them sitting on a branch of a tree, sawing off the branch, but sitting on the wrong side of the saw. I've always seen them as cutting themselves off from Africa."



like (and, like most other cartoonists, I have a very low opinion of politicians. Liars to the last.) with usually no come-back.

As the British cartoonist Ralph Steadman said: "Cartooning is not a business. It's a cause. It's the next best thing to shooting somebody."

I was a little worried after the election because everybody was being so nice to each other and I felt it would be churlish of me to continue pulling tongues so for a short while I went very PC. Fortunately, the honeymoon now seems to be over and, with the likes of Boesak, Winnie and Buthelezi stirring up the mud, it's back to business as usual.

I guess you can say the shooting season has reopened and, unlike our four-legged friends, the politicians are still in plentiful supply.

The *Natal Witness* published a book of Stidy's work, *Riding the Rainbow*, in May, simultaneously with an exhibition of his drawings at the Tatham Gallery in Pietermaritzburg. Stidy has worked on three books with author Gus Silber: *It Takes Two to Toyi-Toyi*, *Braai-voles of the Vanities* and *The Naked Pun*. A fourth book is due out at the end of the year.

Below: "This was a bit of a mixed image. I'm not sure now why I used the mine, maybe because the Democratic Party was hoping to get their share of the ore at the elections."



Above: "In Pietermaritzburg this topic comes up every year with reports on the bacteria level, the ecoli count, in the Dusi River before the race."

Below: "I've always had a love of children's literature, always liked stories of the dragon slayer. I'd like to illustrate a children's book someday."



THE END.

MEDIA COUNCIL TESTED IN PRESS FREEDOM FIRES

There is no doubt that the Press Council was a defensive response to National Party government threats to control and discipline the English language press whom it regarded as "South Africa's greatest enemy".

At one time or another, the English language press was blamed for everything from economic recession to South Africa's departure from the Commonwealth, suspension from the United Nations, its polecat status in the world and international sanctions.

From 1948, when the Nationalists came to power, the English language press provided outspoken opposition and it was not long before the government decided to do something about it.

The first step was to appoint the Press Commission headed by Mr Justice J W van Zyl in 1950, to look into:

Concentration of newspaper control and its effect on editorial opinion and news presentation;

The accuracy of news reporting here and abroad; and

The adequacy of existing means of self-control and discipline by the press.

This threatening move prompted D H Ollemans, chairman of the Argus company, to propose in March 1951 a voluntary press council, but at first the idea received little support.

That changed abruptly when the Van Zyl commission's first report came out 11 years later. It took the press only one month to put the idea into practice, in the form of the Press Board of Reference and a code of conduct for journalists. The circumstances suggest strongly that the decision was taken under duress.

Any hope that this step had appeased the crocodile's appetite was dashed by the Van Zyl commission's second report, in 1964. It said bluntly that the Board was inadequate and should be replaced by a statutory Press Council. A more sinister proposal was that every newspaper and every journalist be required to register annually with the statutory council, and pay a registration fee.

The Van Zyl commission's objections were that only owners were represented on the Board; it had no disciplinary power; the code was not comprehensive enough, and the Board had no power to deal with individual journalists. John Vorster warned the press directors and editors that unless they "put their house in order" by January 1974, he would intervene.

In July that year, the SASJ held a symposium on press freedom in Cape Town. Leyton Slater, chairman of the Argus group and NPU president at the time, said the NPU would fight any form of control by the government.

But the NPU held talks with government and delivered to Vorster a revised constitution and a more

restrictive code of conduct. The new proposal would give the Press Board of Reference, to be known as the Press Council, power to impose fines up to R10 000, and require all NPU members to accept its jurisdiction.

Slater urged journalists to accept the amendments as an attempt to keep the contents of newspapers out of the hands of bureaucrats and politicians. Argus and Afrikaans editors supported the move but not Morning Group editors and the SASJ who said it was a capitulation to threats and smears.

Vorster didn't respond to the NPU's plans until December 1975 when he suggested some changes. Then June 16 1976 erupted and the government responded with the Internal Security Act giving the Minister of Justice wide powers to ban organisations, people and publications.

The next intimidatory step by the government came in February 1977 when the Newspaper Press Bill was handed to the NPU and then introduced in parliament. It contained all that the National Party government had ever said it needed to control the press, including a statutory Press Council which would administer a severely restrictive code of conduct.

All sections of the press reacted critically and the chairmen of the four newspaper groups of the time (Argus, SAAN, Nasionale and Perskor) went to see Vorster. On March 23, Vorster announced he was withdrawing the bill but would give the NPU a year in which to test its own amended code of conduct.

The new council and code differed in important aspects from the press council proposed in the Newspaper Bill: the council could not suspend individual publications nor fine individual journalists, and it did not include a provision preventing newspapers from prejudicing relations between different groups or from damaging the country's name abroad.

The Press Council survived until 1983 when it was replaced by the Media Council. The pressure for the change came in evidence by government officials to the Steyn Commission on the press that there was a need for new measures against the press, including a statutory council.

When the Steyn Commission reported in 1982, the English press and also the Afrikaans press were united

in opposing, even outrightly condemnatory of, its proposals.

Nevertheless, Heunis pushed through parliament the Registration of Newspapers Amendment Act, first claiming NPU support and, in the face of rebuttals, blaming it on a misunderstanding.

It was some misunderstanding! The key provision in this little bombshell was that the minister could cancel the registration of a newspaper if it did not subject itself to a statutory Media Council. The Act was never brought into effect by promulgation, but remained a sword of Damocles for the press for many years.

When the NPU approached the Conference of Editors to produce a plan for a new media council, a committee of editors (Ton Vosloo of Beeld, Harvey Tyson of The Star, Harald Pakendorf of Vaderland, and Tertius Myburgh of the Sunday Times, with myself as convener) decided on a new approach. It was that we should adopt and adapt the British Press Council to local needs, rather than reflect the demands of the government and its Registration of Newspapers Amendment Act of 1982.

The formality of the Press Council and the fact that its decisions were taken by one person, albeit a distinguished judge, had long disturbed editors. The new media council was to be representative of both press and public, have much less formal procedures, have its decisions made by majority vote, and most significantly, put a conciliator in place.

But elements among the public members pressed hard for the Media Council to take on the role of censor by monitoring on a daily basis what all the newspapers published and initiating disciplinary action against what it perceived to be possible contraventions of the code of conduct.

Although the Media Council was intended to provide a forum for complaints against broadcasters, only one such was heard. In 1992, the council, on the initiative of the Conference of Editors, shed its claim to jurisdiction over the broadcast media.

It became, once more, the Press Council of South Africa, but with an amended constitution to reduce its size and cost, and streamlined rules of procedure. A few months later, the Broadcast Complaints Commission of

South Africa was formed to take over the handling of complaints against broadcasters.

The reconstituted Press Council retained its general function of maintaining the freedom of the press and achieved some success in that role. The most notable was persuading the government to amend the controversial section 205 of the Criminal Procedure Act which had for years been used to try and force journalists to reveal information to the state under threat of imprisonment.

The harsh sentence in the Cornelissen case of 1993 provided the lever needed to prise open the iron grip of section 205. Although the government would not agree to the demand for journalists to be totally exempted from its provisions, amendments were accepted that significantly improved the position of journalists.

A full assessment of the role of the Press Council in its various forms over the years has yet to be done. The question has to be asked: Was it a worthwhile defence of the freedom of speech and the press or was it self-censorship through intimidation as W A Hachten and C A Giffard put it in "Total Onslaught: the South African press under attack"? Did it keep the press out of the hands of bureaucrats and politicians, or was it a surrender by instalment?

The answer at this early stage, for me, is yes, it did keep the bureaucrats and politicians at bay, it did help to preserve what press freedom remained after the draconian legislation of the apartheid era restricted reporting in almost every field.

Its code was a collection of ethics that could be described as apple pie and motherhood, ethics that are standard in journalism. It might have looked to outsiders as though it was there to discipline the press and get it to impose self-censorship; in reality it did nothing of the sort.

The Council, sometimes alone and sometimes in concert with the NPU and the Conference of Editors, took on the government on issues of freedom of speech and the press, defended journalists and their rights.

It helped to bring home to the whole press the fact that freedom is indivisible, that whatever was done to curb the English press also curbed the Afrikaans press.

What of the future? Well, the newspapers in many countries recognise the need for their readers to have someone to complain to. That need is also recognised in South Africa. There are various forms of self-disciplinary bodies appointed by the press in most Western countries which apply generally accepted ethical standards. Some newspapers appoint their own ombudsman to resolve complaints from readers, especially in the United States where press councils are not highly regarded.

South Africa should have its own solution.

OMBUDSMAN "HOT SEAT" MOOTED

By Anton Harber

In recent years, a new-look Conference of Editors has been moving to rid the press of some of the more dubious institutions inherited from the 1980s.

A couple of years ago, the Conference became more inclusive, taking in editors of the new generation of independent newspapers. It became more assertive, aiming to end the era in which dealing with the government on press freedom issues was left to the then-Newspaper Press Union.

One of the first institutions to come under attack was the long-standing agreement with the Defence Force which had the mainstream editors assenting to certain limitations on their coverage. It was thrown out, as were attempts by the military to replace it with a new, improved agreement.

The Conference dispensed with its tradition of no action without consensus. Since the Conference had always been so divided on press freedom issues, it had been unable to take action significant to protect newspapers or journalists under attack. The new conference would act on a majority vote, thus enabling it to take much firmer and quicker action when necessary.

Perhaps the most significant of the institutions to face a challenge from the Conference, however, was the Press Council. The Conference has given two reasons for its proposal to get rid of the Press Council. The current council was formed under pressure from the National Party government, to head off his threats to legislate for a statutory council, and therefore has had an unsavoury history. Its record on press freedom issues is not one that commands pride.

The second is that the council has become a cumbersome and ineffective way of dealing with public complaints about the conduct of the press. It is unrepresentative slow to act and expensive to run.

The editors have proposed replacing the elaborate structure with a single, independent Ombudsman at the head of a simple, streamlined structure. This person could deal with the most valuable function of the council – providing the public with a cheap and effective way of dealing with complaints against the media.

The proposal is that the Ombudsman would be appointed jointly by the editors and the NPU, now called the Print Media Association. He or she would be empowered to attempt mediation on complaints against newspapers and, where necessary, make a ruling. Under debate at the moment is whether this ruling should be subject

to a system of appeal. The PMA is proposing that a three-person appeal board be drawn from a list of eminent South Africans. Such a board would be formed on the few occasions that a ruling is contested by either party.

The editors' proposal has met with some resistance. Some elements of the PMA have argued that the Press Council could prove useful in the likelihood of future conflicts with the government over press freedom. Others have expressed fear of a too-powerful

Ombudsman, whose rulings may be disputed. This grouping have said they would not accept the Ombudsman's authority without an effective appeal structure. The editors strongly rejected the argument that the Press Council could provide a future bulwark against government, because of its poor record in this regard, and because it was felt that the new constitution and Constitutional Court provided more effective and realistic defences against attacks on press freedom.

What is important is that individual members of the public feel they have a way to seek redress for grievances about press conduct without resorting to the courts. In fact, a good Ombudsman could do this quicker, cheaper and more effectively than a large council. Either way, the editors have given notice that they are pulling out of the Press Council at the end of its current term of office, in mid-year. Whether or not a new Ombudsman structure can be agreed on and set in place before then remains to be seen.

*Some of our biggest reasons
for believing in big business
are some of our smallest.*



A few of the business leaders of tomorrow at play.

If our children are to inherit a country worth inheriting, a financially strong country, big business becomes more important than ever before.

For one thing, like other small countries with big business, it is big business that enables South Africa to compete in the international markets and be a big earner of foreign exchange.

For another, it is big business that provides a stable base from which medium and small business can grow and expand on

a scale significant enough to become major contributors to the wealth- and job-creation processes of the new South Africa.

And that is really what a healthy economy is all about, a mix of big, medium and small businesses operating internationally and internally off a strong, competitive base.

Big business and the South African economy. Inseparable if the new South Africa is to have an economy worthy of generations to come.



ANGLO AMERICAN CORPORATION OF SOUTH AFRICA



THE CAMERA DOESN'T LIE (AND PIGS CAN FLY)

In February this year fifteen directors of photography from newspapers and magazines from all over the USA gathered to discuss the crisis during an intensive seminar at the highly respected Poynter Institute for Media Studies in Florida.

The seminar looked at how the new techniques of digital photography and manipulation presented new ethical choices for the professional journalist.

And they were dismayed at the amount of manipulation that has been appearing more and more in the magazine and tabloid world in the US.

The justification for the manipulation, mostly on the covers of these publications, has been that they are using DM as "illustrations".

DM here should be identified as the new style of altering an image in terms of its colour saturation, contrast and of special interest here - removing offending telephone poles out of the picture, etc.

Picture several photojournalists jockeying for a decent pic of Winnie Mandela again! And one or two of the pixmen don't crack the code and get appalling pictures. Their pix editors use Photoshop to increase the colour of one of the new images and brighten the contrast.

Deadline hour speeds nearer and nearer - but Winnie's face is partly obscured by the brim of her vast hat.

No problem! The picture desk imports another image, places it under the hat and deletes the first image.

Hey presto, Winnie in two places at once! It is, of course, a complete misrepresentation of the truth.

The rules are bent a "little" but DM is supposedly justified by deadlines and the pressure of competition.

Humour me a little more in this scenario. After the use of the Winnie image, not too many readers complained. And slowly the use of manipulation programmes grows in that newsroom - not just the standard burning, dodging and cropping as in the wet darkroom, but much, much more.

How much further will the newsroom go under enormous pressure?

Take the well-known photograph of the AWB men lying near their car, one dead, one injured, one surrendering. "Let's move them closer together - the page can only take a three-column today, but we can run a deeper pic," the picture editor says. Using Photoshop, you move the figures around and rebuild the background. You can even add people, change their expressions!

It is shortsighted to say that only the tabloid or yellow press will use digital manipulation. Great magazines like Time and National Geographic, and several major, highly respected newspapers in the USA are using DM regularly.

A new "seamless reality" has evolved with the latest digital technol-

ogy. Fictitious, yes, but almost impossible to tell that it is a fake.

The groups were appalled at one of the first major DMs of its kind to appear in the National Geographic, who had used the technology to "move" the Egyptian pyramids closer together for their now-infamous cover.

There was further dismay at the colour manipulation in the OJ Simpson covers on Time and Newsweek, where OJ had been "made" blacker.

We were appalled at the Newsday cover featuring a seamlessly assembled photograph of Tonya Harding and Nancy Kerrigan supposedly skating together.

American photojournalists are in danger of becoming "toothless". They are still taking great pictures, giving further meaning to life but are their images believable anymore? Which images are real or are all partially altered?

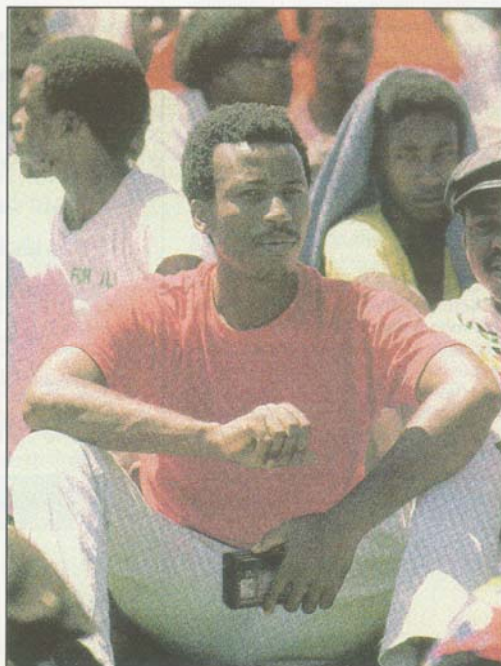
With more and more illustrative pix appearing daily, no image can be taken for granted. No image is immediately recognised as the truth. Photographs now can be freely dismantled and seamlessly reassembled via DM.

Computer packages and programme developments are partly "responsible" for this slicing away at the credibility of the already hard-pressed photographer.

The newsrooms of the United States are being haunted by the "new kid on the block," the crisis of digital manipulation that is changing the face of visual journalism in the United States.

By Montgomery Cooper

Swords into plough shears
Witness the subtle manipulation in this double image, where the submachine gun is turned into a tape recorder, the t-shirt slogan vanishes and the bent trigger finger is made user friendly.





Left:
Pact Ballet dancer Nigel Hannah as the "Ugly Sister" in the PACT version of Cinderella by Rodrigues.
Right:
Nigel "unmasked".

Original photograph by Montgomery Cooper.
Impressionist Image by Arti Paschedag

The Department of Journalism and Media Studies is currently working with several groups in Europe to resurrect an ethics databank. The bank, one of very few databanks of this nature anywhere in the world, will be operated and administered by the Department, in collaboration with Finnish experts. The bank will include an archive facility, a discussion group and advisory function. All submissions in the form of published articles, conference material, news updates etc are welcome. Those interested should contact Montgomery Cooper at the Department or on e-mail: Cooper@thoth.ru.ac.za

Many American photojournalists regularly use DM and I saw the ease with which some of them use this new tool. South African visual journalists and editorial hotshots are poised on the very precipice of the turmoil and ethical dilemmas caused by Photoshop and manipulation software packages.

Of course, manipulation in photography is not a new concept — black and white manipulation has been very visible for 100 years. W Eugene Smith was just one of the really great photographers who was brilliant at his superimposed images and manipulations.

And the techniques in the wet dark-room — cropping, burning, dodging — have been taken for granted for too long.

But with Quark and Photoshop how long will it be before the real content of the photograph is interfered with, either on the newsfloor or down in the computer centre?

So before it is too late, let us learn from our colleagues in the New World and set down a more focused ethical "skeleton" around the new rights given to Joe public and the media.

We need an updated code for the visual media, a new Ethical Code, built up, for example, from the Code of Ethics of the NPPAA (National Press Photographers of America Association) — tried and tested through their embryonic period with DM.

The proposed code should include the wealth of experience and knowledge from journalism practitioners and ethics experts worldwide.

We need an ethical code which will guide the photojournalist and journalists in moral decision-making on a daily basis.

A participant at Poynter, Geoff Forester, mentioned William Glaberson from the New York Times who, in an article on digital manipulation, asked: "If a news picture isn't true, then what about the words around them?"

Exactly. This powerful technology could affect the credibility of journalism.

Montgomery Cooper, Photojournalism lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies, was awarded a Poynter Fellowship in Florida earlier this year.

"The only reason we're at the rock-face is to reach the top."



If we kept our noses to the grindstone, the grindstone is all we'd ever see.

Fortunately, Gencor attracts the kind of people who never take the short-sighted approach.

Our aim is real growth. For the people who work for us. For the world-class companies they have created. For the communities in which we operate.

Our long-term vision is to become one of the world's top resource companies, creating global opportunities for all those who want to climb with us.



FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CONFERENCE

The Department of Journalism and Media Studies and the Institute for Multi-Party Democracy hosted a Freedom of Information Conference at Rhodes University earlier in the year. In this special focus, sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, Review highlights the proceedings.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION MATTERS



GUY BERGER
Head of Department,
Journalism
& Media Studies

A perverse logic emerged at the Freedom of Information Conference: entirely unexpected arose the refrains: we can't utilise a freedom of info dispensation, so why have it? We can hardly cover the courts or parliament - how do you expect us to use an Open Democracy Act?

There were also those who not merely spurned Thabo Mbeki's gift horse, but - having scrutinised its teeth - proclaimed it to be a Trojan steed! Ken Owen and Nigel Bruce warned that by defining and legislating the exemptions to freedom of information, an Open Democracy Act could produce more - rather than fewer - restrictions on information. A genuine fear, but one which may be allayed by the prospect of a genuine independent appeal mechanism whether exemptions are broadly or narrowly defined.

Other reservations at the conference came from the state security apparatuses. Most explicit here were Correctional Services, who stressed that information about prisons would be supplied, in line with the present constitution, only to those with a need (as opposed to a general right) to the data. This position served to underline a key weakness in the interim constitution, and the need to amend it and bring it into line with the kind of rights proposed for the Open Democracy Act.

Somewhat more forthcoming about information disclosure were the state communication apparatuses: libraries, archives, SA Communication Services, RDP office. Also supporting freedom of information were top people from public broadcasting, Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri and Govan Reddy, as well as academics and lawyers.

But the grouping most in favour was the politicians: Thabo Mbeki, Valli Moosa and Frene Ginwala. Certainly an unusual situation, given the natural penchant of people in power for secrecy and information manipulation.

This reversal of classic roles is clearly the (transient) product of our peculiar history. Whether because of, or despite, such a genesis, there is no doubt that an Open Democracy Act will signify a fundamental change in the balance of power between citizen and state.

This is the "vertical" dimension of freedom of information legislation. There is also the "horizontal" - concerning openness, transparency and privacy between citizen and citizen.

Drawing from both dimensions, South Africa could be in for across the board openness. This is not to forget that - as many at the conference stressed - the real impact of freedom of information depends not on law, but on public awareness, comprehension and use of such a dispensation.

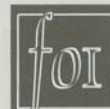
For decades, our state has controlled information in society. Today, the tables are turning: we have the chance to control information in the state. It is a shift of epochal proportions.

Who wants freedom of information? I do.



Thabo Mbeki

Openness is a focal point



THABO MBEKI
Deputy President

The government used to be a closed book that did not want to part with information and, indeed, in some instances was as closed to those outside of government as to those inside the government.

It was inevitable therefore that once we had to deal with replacing an apartheid constitution, openness would become a focal point.

Indeed, even the documents that one gets from government - like our treasurer who circulates a document once a month which lists the telephone calls that have been made from our office - come in a file marked "Secret". It's part of where we come from.

It has also resulted in somewhat of a presumption, which perhaps is correct, that this government - like all other governments - is guilty until proven innocent; that government is in some way inherently evil, liable to corruption, tempted to repression; that there is something about government, about which all of us should be suspicious, and therefore that we need a Freedom of Information Act in order to protect ourselves from violation of our rights by the government and to deal with the abuse of power and corruption and so on.

Yes, indeed, we do need to do all of those things. And it is important that this should be done particularly given our history. But I think we also need to say something else.

We also need to say, certainly from the government side, that we need to build a democratic system which ensures the greatest possible participation of the people. When you say, the people shall govern, you need to

empower the people so that they do indeed govern. The opening of government, the ensuring of the accessibility of government information to the citizen, should in the first instance be to empower the public to participate in governing themselves and changing their society.

So if I live in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape and I need water, it should be possible to go to government and say: "Can I have information about water resources in this area - the water underground - how much would it cost if we sank a borehole and laid a pipe and took water to village X?" Access to information means that I, as a citizen of Eastern Cape, can then come to my local authority or to my provincial government and say: "Why are you not doing the following things?". It is very important, very critical, this matter of empowerment of the people to intervene.

My colleague, Cyril Ramaphosa, chairperson of the Constitutional Assembly, addressed a meeting about a fortnight ago on the constitution-making process. He said that it is very important that the general public participate in this constitution-making process, make submissions and write and come and speak. People responded: "We have not been empowered to intervene in this discussion about the constitution. The fact that it is possible, that we must write and so on, is not enough. You should say in more detail, what it is a constitution will take, what it is that you will be discussing".

The empowerment of the people is necessary so that they can participate in the process of changing their lives. Freedom of information by itself - good, solid, acceptable to all the people - does not necessarily solve the problem.

What clearly becomes important is that the government itself, should assume a proactive stance in terms of informing the people. The government itself, seeking as it does the involvement of people in these processes of change, should take the necessary steps to make government information available to the people. A posture, a stance on the part of government, becomes necessary.

SOUND BITE

Look at your press freedom in a global perspective. In 1994, there were over 1 500 attacks on the press in nearly 110 countries. This included 120 journalists killed in 30 countries, close to 30 kidnapped or disappeared, nearly 260 journalists and media employees physically attacked, and over 300 arrested.

Scott Low, President International Federation of Newspaper Publishers

That raises the issue of the role of the media. Once this legislation is passed, it's going to be very important that media informs the public, educates the public about such legislation, gives such information as will enable the ordinary citizens to utilise this legislation. The legislation should not just be a matter which is known to lawyers and editors, but to an ordinary person who may indeed be interested in a file of themselves from the security branch, but also may very well be interested in how to access money for the education of their child in high school.

Clearly government has to use its own structures, its own mechanisms and its own media to ensure that its information becomes available. We also count on the media, apart from anything else that the media does, to assist in that process of communicating to the public. Millions of people in the rural areas have no access to information. Ought we not to be looking at ensuring that we do indeed reach the entirety of our people and not be satisfied that our media, both governmental and non-governmental, in large measure reaches the urban areas? We need to address the issue of people who are badly educated, uneducated, illiterate, because it is probably they who need the greatest possible access to information in the process of empowerment, because they are precisely the most disadvantaged.

There are other issues to discuss:

- One question relates to limitations in terms of access to information. This is something that could be discussed forever. What is this balance that we need to strike between the demands of openness and the needs of good governance? This has no obvious answers, but it is something that we need to grapple with because it is a matter which has to be addressed in this legislation.

It certainly is my view that we should tend towards more openness rather than restrictiveness - that in weighing this particular balance, we should tilt in that particular direction. When one gets used to secrecy, sometimes judgment becomes impaired in terms of understanding what it is that should be secret. If we get into a mood, a certain frame of mind, it becomes possible indeed to classify all manner of things as secret which should not be secret.

- Another question is the constitution. The question arises as to whether you can by legislation move beyond what is contained in the constitution in terms of this openness, in terms of this access to information. The constitution limits the right of access to some people, some individuals, some institutions in terms of access to information. Whether one can in fact extend the rights set out in the constitution is one of the matters to be discussed.

- A further question is the matter of cost. I am not saying that because it's costly, therefore don't do it. Everything costs money - democracy costs money. But there is an actual constraint with regard to public funds and it may very well not be possible with the legislation approved to do certain things that all of us would like to do simply because there is no money.

I'm raising this matter now so that it ought not to arise in future as though government agreed to such legislation, because the constitution required it to pass such legislation, but is dragging its feet on implementation because it never wanted such legislation in the first instance.

Budget constraints affect the capacity of the government to deliver the sorts of changes which our people deserve. Desire is there, capacity does not quite match desire.

The fear of the public, the hiding of the truth of the past, was a function of an oppressive society. It ought to be a natural thing that a democratic society should seek to be open and non-secretive and that we produce legislation which would reinforce that kind of character.

Government must go beyond the past



MOJANKU GUMBI
Legal Advisor to the
Deputy President

While we recognise that this freedom of information movement is informed in the first instance by our immediate past, we should go beyond that.

Democracy should not depend on the benign nature of the rulers that we have. We must ensure that there are structures and laws that make sure that this democratic ideal is properly grounded in our society.

These are the principles that drive freedom of information legislation. An informed citizenry is vital to the functioning of a democratic society, and it is needed to check against corruption and to hold the government responsible. But while there is some openness in this government, is there participation? That is one of the major challenges that we identified as the Task Group on FOI legislation. To say: while parliament is open, while the committees are open, while the Constitutional Assembly is open, is there participation by the majority of our people?

Even while you open up, people don't usually just come forward be-



Forum discussion during the conference

cause they have not been empowered.

When we travel around the country asking for submissions on open democracy most of our people say: "Oh, can you give us that information that you are talking about?"

Most people don't even know what this freedom of information is, and we need first to explain what it is before we can expect them to make submissions on how they want this act to look.

We have said that this freedom of information legislation should encompass four main sections. The first one on Freedom of Information, the second on Privacy, another on Open Meetings and the last one on the Protection of Whistleblowers.

Our proposals go on to suggest very definite pro-active mechanisms. We suggest ways in which our people can have access to information without having to ask the government to provide it.

We have gone further to propose the establishment of an open democracy commission which is going to oversee an education process, and which is also going to act as some kind of, what Americans call, a clearing house.

We know that constitutional bodies that were set up by our new constitution, like the Human Rights Commission, and the Public Protector, are still not up and running. If we propose the establishment of another commission, is this feasible? How soon can it be up and running when those set out by the constitution are not yet up and running?

We also need to look at the role that the South African Communication Services play. What is the future of SACS? Should it play this role of the Open Democracy Commission?

One of the more contentious issues is the scope of this act. Should it include private entities especially in regard to the privacy section? How many institutions hold private data banks on us? There was a recent furore over the SABC sending people TV licence renewal notices, using private data from other sources to send these reminders.

How many times are we required to give our home addresses, home telephones, banks? Do we have any control over that information? When we talk about private institutions, we should look at the role that these private institutions play. While we are not questioning the decision of financial institutions to refuse a person a loan, shouldn't the individual know the factual basis upon which that decision was taken? Shouldn't people know what information an institution holds about them and whether the information is correct or incorrect?

We have proposed the inclusion of whistleblower provisions in this Act. Our document states that the rights of a person to blow-the-whistle are limited. That person is not entitled to go out and just inform the media generally about what is happening. We have proposed that the whistle be blown to specific institutions like the Human Rights' Commission or the Public Protector or some other commissions.

Is it desirable in an open society that we should actually limit the right of officials to blow the whistle? What about those institutions that they are supposed to report to? Are those independent of the government or are they also part of the government?

Can we entrust the duty to them or should it be open to the media?

From the American experience



HARRY HAMMITT
Editor and
Publisher of Access
Reports USA

Mr Hammit responded via teleconference to questions:

Q: This conference has called unsuccessfully on the police to prove an adherence to transparency by releasing a tape recording. The item reportedly reveals serious racism in the force. Under the US Freedom of Information legislation, would a citizen or a journalist be able to get the police to release such a recording?

A: Our government might consider that an invasion of privacy, but I think that under the circumstances you're explaining to me, there would be a strong public interest in disclosure. We now have a standard in the US that the public interest might outweigh privacy in such cases.

Q: Would you advise South Africans to include a Deliberative Process Exemption or not?

A: I have a very strong opposition to the Deliberative Process Privilege in general. A Deliberative Process Privilege essentially allows for the candid discussion of possible policy options and alternatives - how to strategise on certain issues that may face an agency - and that information comes under this privilege.

We don't want people to have to pull their punches because they are afraid that somebody else may find out what they said and embarrass them some way, or harass them. That, broadly, is what the privilege is designed to protect.

The problem with the privilege that we see in the US is that it is a very highly abused exemption. It is used to withhold any sort of information that an agency doesn't want released because it is embarrassing in nature. Our Supreme Court has said that the core purpose of the Freedom of Information Act is to shed light on government operations and activities. It seems to me that the decision making that goes on in an agency is the core of that sort of process. Our Deliberative Process Exemption allows agencies to withhold much of that information.

The Clinton administration has basically told agencies: "You have to show a demonstrable harm in order to claim something like the Deliberative Process Privilege". This is their way

of trying to get agencies to back off of abusing the Deliberative Process Privilege quite so much. My advice would be not to have a deliberative process exemption at all.

Q: What kinds of people in the US are getting access to information under freedom of information legislation?

A: The largest user is the business community. They are looking for information from regulatory agencies on the decisions that they've made that might affect their industry or their company. They are also looking for information about their fellow competitors, but I think it is unfair to characterise the requesters as requesting trade secrets of other companies.

Other than that, a lot of requests in the US come from prisoners, and the rest of them from specific interest groups. The press claims it doesn't use the Freedom of Information Act very much because it takes too long to get a response - they don't find it terribly useful for people who are on a deadline.

Q: How would you have drawn up US legislation if you had a chance now?

A: On the federal level in the US we took the route that we would let our courts be the arbiters of how exemptions would be interpreted. I admire this federal model of having only a few, relatively broad based, exemptions as opposed States that may have dozens of more specific exemptions.

I would always tie release to a harm, and basically require the agency to provide a fairly high standard of proof that shows that this harm is extremely likely. I would not generally allow agencies to get off the hook saying that 'Well this might happen if we release this information'. Everybody can deal in possibilities, but what you really need is to have something that is a fairly strong probability. Exemptions do need to be tied into some sort of a harm test and an agency has to keep the threshold of that test before they can say we won't disclose the information.

Q: There are said to be so many requests in the US that there are backlogs amounting to more than twenty thousand requests.

SOUND BITE

Look at other countries' norms and standards, at the mistakes that were made, and how - despite legal guarantees - limitations and restrictions have continued in one form or another. Any new Freedom of Information Act should start out as broad as possible.

Scott Low, President International Federation of Newspaper Publishers

A: When Congress amended the Freedom of Information Act, and put a time limit on it of ten working days which is essentially two weeks, they didn't really do very much deep thinking. Over the years it has turned out that the complexity and the volume of requests are significantly greater than Congress anticipated in 1974. It is certainly true that many agencies, including law enforcement, intelligence agencies and the state department can't meet deadlines in the US. They don't have the money and they don't have the staff.

But if you increase the time limit significantly you are just going to see the lag increase that much. When people ask me how long requests take in the US I say a minimum of a month and probably closer to three to six months.

Q: If you were given the opportunity to rewrite the US Freedom of Information legislation what would you write into or out of it?

A: The Act needs updating. Our problem on the federal level is that what constitutes a record is not actually defined in the Act. So we have spent an awful lot of time litigating what constitutes a record and what isn't a record. Some states, New York comes to mind, have taken a very broad, but specific, definition of what a record is, and computer records and other sorts of electronic media are considered, right up front, to be a record.

As far as our Act is concerned, I might have put a more reasonable time limit in to begin with. Perhaps we also need to figure out some fair way to distribute resources in terms of money to agencies to comply with the Freedom of Information Act.

Freedom of Information in the US has not been anywhere near as expensive as people have led us to believe in the past. In addition, our government never quantifies what the savings are from the Freedom of Information Act. If somebody finds out, or asks why, the government has been cheated out of \$10-million, then that can be looked at as a ten million dollar savings out of the Freedom of Information Act, if we can recover that money.

The US spent some \$80-million dollars responding to freedom of information requests, while at the same time paying for public relations specialists in the agencies something in the order of two billion dollars. The way I translate that is that the government was spending two billion dollars to tell the public what the government wanted the public to know while it was only spending \$80 million dollars on letting the public know what it wanted to know.

Q: How much does it cost a citizen to exercise their rights under this legislation?

SOUND BITE

There will be exemptions preventing certain company information from being published, but these have to be defined very narrowly. Firstly, secrecy needs to be in the public interest, rather than the government interest or in the private interest. Secondly, exemptions must not shield companies from providing information to workers on a confidential basis.

Neil Coleman, Spokesperson for COSATU

A: To make a request doesn't cost anything. A lot of the Commonwealth countries charge something like \$5 per request. That is not a concept we have in the US. The charges on the federal level in the US can be incurred in having to pay government for the time that it spends for photocopying. So we have the concept of Search-time in which you get two hours of free Search-time and then you have to pay at a certain level per hour. It can be anywhere from about \$15 an hour to about \$50 or \$60 an hour, depending on how high up in the agency the person doing the searching is. You also pay about 10 cents a page if your response takes more than 100 pages.

We have one more concept that applies only to people who are using the Act for commercial purposes, and that is called Review-time. It can be costed out at about the same rate as I described for Search-time and it varies in different professional categories. Review-time involves looking at the records that are relevant to your requests; deciding what should be released and what can't be released. My anecdotal evidence is that Review-time is not used too often in the US. Basically we are charged for Search-time and photocopying. Bills will come in at a couple of hundred of dollars, sometimes in the thousands of dollars if they are asking for an awful lot of documents. Most people probably don't actually pay anything for a typical request.

Q: We've been warned by the Deputy-President of South Africa, that his government hopes to pass the legislation but they may not have the money to deliver on it. We've been warned by the Press that the legislation might exist but they don't have enough staff to make use of it. We have also been warned that the majority of South Africans are too economically deprived or illiterate, to make use of a Freedom of Information Act. Should we bother, in South Africa, with pushing ahead with this kind of legislation?

A: I don't think that any of those are particularly legitimate rea-

sons for not going ahead. My advice would be to go ahead. Freedom of information legislation is an extremely important part of the whole concept of constitutional rights that we have in the US as far as participatory democracy, and the right of a free press and free speech goes.

If one has no way of finding out anything about the government, or what the government has done, it is very difficult to be able to engage in an informed debate on what's going on. Lack of money and resources is certainly a problem, but that's a problem in implementing any programme.

SOUND BITE

It is very important to start as broad and open as possible - there is no need to put restrictions into the act. Don't worry about it: Acts will follow that will bring the necessary restrictions, wether you put them in or not. But it is better to start out with as broad an Act as possible.

Ali Rahnema Director of the Press Freedom Fund Fiej

10 lessons in the public interest

M. PEARLMAN
Executive Director,
Connecticut FOI
Commission

The rationale behind Freedom of Information and so-called "Government in the Sunshine" laws is perhaps best expressed in what was to be the preamble to the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act, as first passed in 1975:

"The legislature finds and declares that secrecy in government is inherently inconsistent with a true democracy, that the people have a right to be fully informed of the action taken by public agencies in order that they may retain control over the instruments they have created; that the people do not yield their sovereignty to the agencies which serve them; that the people in delegating authority do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for them to know and that it is the intent of the law that actions taken by public agencies be taken openly and their deliberations be conducted openly and that the record of all public agencies be open to the public except in those instances where a superior public interest requires confidentiality."

What important lessons can we take from American history that might serve well the people of a new South Africa? Key points that need be stressed are:

1. Knowledge and the accountability of government are essential ingredients to a true democracy. Therefore meaningful Freedom of Information and free press laws must be enacted.

2. For Freedom of Information laws to be meaningful, they must confer broad rights of public access to information; they must contain limited and narrowly drawn exceptions to the rule favouring disclosure; and they must establish an independent and powerful enforcement mechanism. It is highly desirable that such laws be constitutionally predicated.

For example, Section 1-19(a) of the Connecticut General Statutes provides: "Except as otherwise provided by any federal law or state statute, all records maintained or kept on file by any public agency, whether or not such records are required by any law or by any rule or regulation, shall be public records and every person shall have the right to inspect such records promptly ... or to receive a copy of such records."

Similarly, Section 1-21(a) of the same statutes provides: "The meetings of all public agencies, except executive sessions as defined ..., shall be open to the public."

Different north American jurisdictions have different types of independent enforcement offices. Connecticut employs a multi-member, quasi-judicial administrative agency; Ontario has a single information/privacy commissioner with both investigatory and order-issuing powers; and the Canadian national government has opted for separate information and privacy commissioners with ombudsman-like investigatory and reporting powers.

3. Because it is often important to know the reasons behind the adoption or rejection of governmental decisions, Freedom of Information laws must cover the deliberative and meeting processes within government.

4. Freedom of Information laws must cover all levels of government. Most citizen contact with government occurs at the local level. Although regional and national governments are ordinarily more remote from people's everyday lives, they nonetheless often involve higher stakes, such as national security interests or the potential for massive invasions of privacy.

5. It is essential that both Freedom of Information and free press laws broadly cover all police institutions. Such institutions are the greatest threats to a democratic form of government.

6. Because societal values are dynamic rather than static, the basic values at play in Freedom of Information and free press laws must be clearly established.

These laws should strive to achieve an appropriate balance between competing values such as accountability versus national security interests or individual privacy rights.

Notwithstanding the best drafting, however, tensions between competing values will always remain and must be addressed periodically.

7. Governments disseminate information they believe the public ought to know. The duty of government to disseminate information must not be confused with, or take precedence over, the duty of government to disclose information requested by members of the public and news media under Freedom of Information and free press laws.

8. No law should define what the news media are, and the media should not enjoy greater rights under law than ordinary citizens.

9. Freedom of Information laws are not the exclusive province of the news media. They affect the public's right to know - a right the media also serve as the public's surrogate.

10. Constant vigilance is essential to maintaining effective Freedom of Information and free press laws. The very nature of information as a source of power will ensure that public offi-

cial and government bureaucracies will always gnaw away at such laws and their implementation.

Periodic scandals would, of course, be helpful in re-establishing the importance of these laws. In the absence of really juicy ones, however, the lessons of history must be taught and re-learned perpetually.

SOUND BITE

Workers believe that they have the right to access to information on strategic decisions such as investment decisions, decisions on new technology and so on which could have a fundamental impact on areas such as job creation and productivity. These demands by trade unions for disclosure of company information are seen as an integral part of democratisation of the workplace.

Neil Coleman, Spokesperson for COSATU

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From the African experience



GEOFF NYAROTA
Nordic-Sadc
Journalism Centre

South Africa has a long tradition of independent, critical and investigative journalism and a government which appears to be sincerely committed to respecting democratic institutions and freedom of information.

This should go a long way towards saving South Africa's citizens from enduring some of the more traumatic post-independence experiences of their neighbours in the region where one-party authoritarian regimes reduced professional journalism to the systematic regurgitation of ministerial speeches, punctuated by the writing of adulatory and sycophantic editorial comments.

But South Africa's learning process will not be an automatic or natural process. There has to be, of necessity, a conscious and deliberate effort on the part of both the people and their government to undergo that learning process.

I remember Zimbabweans, in the starry-eyed euphoria of independence, expressing similar optimism about their political, economic and social future. The new and popularly-elected government of Mr Robert Mugabe would surely avoid some of the more obvious mistakes made by Dr Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Mr Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and the late Mr Samora Machel of Mozambique.

But history was to prove both Zimbabwean and outside political observers wrong. In due course, some Zimbabweans started to question some of governments policies and practices and some of the more blatant excesses. Government turned against them.

In a situation where governments had a monopoly of control over the media it was fairly easy to ruin the reputation of a perceived government adversary.

At the moment the government of Mr Nelson Mandela is riding on a wave of massive popularity and can afford to be very charitable in terms of freedom of information. Political fortunes change, however, and when the same government discerns signs of unpopularity its attitude will change accordingly.

In Zambia the government of Mr Frederick Chiluba's Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD)

ascended to power largely because of a campaign launched on its behalf by *The Weekly Post*, the first independent publication in Zambia to come out openly and challenge Dr Kaunda and his United National Independence Party (UNIP).

Under the new MMD government *The Post* maintained its strict adherence to fearless, critical and independent journalism. It published allegations of corruption, particularly drug dealing, in the higher echelons of Mr Chiluba's government.

Today Fred M'membe the managing director and editor-in-chief of *The Post* is a haunted man. As he was attending the annual congress of the Media Institute of Southern Africa in Mbabane last November, his office in Lusaka was raided by police agents in broad daylight, thus publicly and effectively signalling the end of the marriage between his paper and the ruling party.

In Malawi the opposite happened. The fall from power of former dictator, Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda, was to a large extent the outcome of a ruthless campaign mounted against his Malawi Congress Party by the country's fledgling independent press in the run-up to last May's general elections.

The new president, Mr Bakili Muluzi, was extremely grateful to the independent press, thereafter. So indebted does he feel, in fact, that he is virtually killing off the country's once vibrant independent press by his acts of gratitude.

To start with, Mr Al Osman, former publisher and editor of the *Financial Post*, Malawi's first independent newspaper, is now press secretary at Sanjika Palace, the president's official residence in Blantyre. The *Financial Post* is no more.

Mr Precious Stambuli, former publisher and editor of the fiery independent paper, *The Herald*, is now economic adviser to Mr Muluzi and his paper is also now defunct.

Meanwhile, Dr Ken Lipenga, one of Malawi's media luminaries, last month left his position as editor-in-chief of the country's most respected daily newspaper, *The Nation*, and joined what appears to be the great trek to Sanjika.

The implications of all this movement of senior journalists on the democratic right of the citizens of Malawi to freedom of information are obvious. One does not need to be a maths wizard to figure out that their right to freedom of information is being eroded by inverse proportion to the growing number of professional and experienced journalists assuming high office at Sanjika Palace.



Frene Ginwala

Going beyond open doors and windows



FRENE GINWALA
South African
Parliamentary
Speaker

For decades, South Africa has been characterised by formal and informal censorship and the restriction and control of information.

To this day, every communication I receive from the Cabinet office is marked SECRET, notwithstanding that it might deal with such strategic matters as rules on whether an MP's allocation of air tickets which can be used by spouses can also be used for a child.

The constitutional requirement for an open and transparent government, does not mean that no future government will be able to infringe our rights. But in discussion and in framing legislation, the right to freedom of information should not be based on an assumption of a confrontation with the state, nor as some reports of this conference have suggested as a contest between the media and the government.

By focusing on the rights of the citizenry, i.e. the general public, we ensure that all obstacles to the free flow of information are held up for examination as a prelude to being removed.

But also, issues such as concentration of the ownership and control of media in both government and private hands, the advisability of allowing cross ownership of electronic and print media, and the need to open up the air waves have to be considered, if not at this conference, then certainly within the broader debate on freedom of information.

Further, if freedom of information is defined broadly, as necessary for

democracy and development and empowering, then one cannot limit access to information that is in the hands of the state alone.

Many private bodies take decisions that have a profound impact on public policy and on people's lives. Such institutions must also be obliged to provide information in the public interest. This would include for example the content of medicines and the likely side effects, the risks in inappropriate disposal of hazardous waste or its transport, the possible harmful effects of certain pesticides and so on.

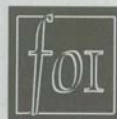
In Parliament we have looked at freedom of information in the context of its relevance to an open society and to facilitate transparency and accountability.

Documents made available to committees are also made available to the media. On at least one occasion, this was done notwithstanding an objection from those who had provided a briefing to the committee. Following a request, the members attendance register was opened.

Clearly we have not thought of everything, but whenever our attention is drawn or a request made, we try to be open. However, I must assure you that when last week's ANC caucus proceedings were broadcast over the parliamentary monitors, it was not a case of an over-zealous Speaker trying to make even more information available!

In our view all this is not enough and does not constitute access except in the narrowest sense. If the focus is on reaching out to the public - as it is in parliament - then we have to go beyond opening doors and windows.

Section 23 is "seriously flawed"



LENE JOHANNESSEN
Centre for Applied
Legal Studies

South Africa has a constitutionally entrenched right of (limited) access to state information in Section 23 of the Interim Constitution.

Section 23 applies to the extent that such information is required for the exercise or protection of one's rights. The scope of this is undoubtedly "vertical", in that it expressly applies to only the state and not to private bodies.

Section 23 is seriously flawed. It puts the onus on a requester to justify the need for such information. This does not comply with the rationales for an Open Democracy Act, and it

leaves too much scope for civil servants to delay and/or refuse disclosure.

However, even if Section 23 is amended, an Open Democracy Act is still required. In order that the courts not be swamped, statutory measures should be taken. These would assist the courts, prosecutors and defence lawyers in limiting and implementing a right of access.

In addition, in order to fully reflect democratic and transparent rationales, an Open Democracy Act should cover information held by all bodies exercising public power and not only organs of state. Open democracy legislation should thus extend the right of access to information slightly beyond the limits of the strictly vertical application of Section 23.

For instance, not only Eskom, but also a private company providing electricity would be under an obligation to disclose plans for which areas it was planning to service first.

The Task Group has provided for a limited "horizontal" application of an Open Democracy Act. This means that a very wide range of bodies, whose activities have implications for the public sphere, should fall under the Act. School boards, hospitals and tribal meetings and many more like these would fall within the act, to the extent that their activities can be considered as a way of exercising public powers.

Information of a private or confidential commercial nature should be exempt from the general right of access. This means that a state-owned or private company which competes commercially would never be compelled to reveal confidential commercial information which would damage their business interests.

Likewise, a hospital or a school board would never be compelled to reveal information regarding an individual patient or pupil, but only that which relates to the general policies of the institution and which has implications for the public.

Law won't alter secrecy culture



CARMEL RICKARD
Journalist,
Sunday Times

Section 23 of the bill of rights makes access to information a qualified right. The problem lies chiefly with the last phrase which says that you are only entitled to information if you need it for a particular purpose.

The Open Democracy Act which the Task Group hopes will follow from their proposals makes your reason for wanting the information no longer

decisive or even relevant to whether you will get it or not.

Despite its importance, however, legislation alone cannot change the culture of secrecy and mistrust towards the public and the media so long inculcated in civil servants. Bureaucrats of the old order are still burdened with these instincts. And they have a powerful additional reason to prefer silence despite any changes to the law: they fear their jobs, already under threat by affirmative action, could be lost altogether if they say something their new bosses disapprove of.

The new laws appear to deal mainly with information which requires some research by government before it can be provided. But there are also questions which need immediate answers and from a live person, not a fax machine.

The media would be impossibly hampered if bureaucrats tried to deal with requests for this type of information through the structures set up by the proposed new legislation. A more flexible, informal and faster system of providing information will have to co-exist with the proposed new structures under the Open Democracy Act.

Existing media liaison or PR staff of some state departments do not operate perfectly, and we are given to unintelligible, faxed, late answers which do not answer the question. There is as much need to improve this channel of access to government information as there is to set up methods of obtaining other kinds of information.

Getting the local evidence



CLIVE PLASKET
Director, Legal
Resources Centre,
Grahamstown

During 1992 the Grahamstown City Council retrenched four senior officials, gave them handsome payments totalling R2,3-million and then rehired them on five-year contracts.

The scheme was later rescinded, due primarily to it being made public and the outcry that followed. The outcry increased when it was learnt that as 'compensation' for rescinding the scheme, three of the officials were paid R65 000.

The whole saga also drew the attention of the media, resulting in the mayor and all of the councillors instituting claims for defamation against two newspapers and a news agency. These actions were withdrawn shortly before an application, brought by one of the defendants, for access to certain council documents was to be heard.

The controversy still rages and there are plans to appoint a commission of

enquiry. At least one individual wants a Supreme Court order to compel the council to recover the R65 000.

Obviously, in all of this, crucial evidence is to be found in minutes of the council.

Every municipality in what was formerly the Cape draws its powers from the Cape Municipal Ordinance 20 of 1974. Section 55(6) gives the public a right to inspect confirmed council minutes. But, under section 55(3)(a), this is not the case with minutes which the council decides should be kept separately.

Under the Interim Constitution's section 23, an applicant could challenge this on the basis of a breach of his or her right to information. The onus would be on the council to prove that section 55(3) is reasonable and 'justifiable in an open and democratic society based on freedom and equality', as the constitution requires.

This means proving that the objective which section 55(3) is designed to serve is sufficiently important to override a constitutionally protected right.

The council would have to bona fide believe that disclosure would prejudice the municipality. How on earth would disclosure of the retrenchment and rehiring scheme or the R65 000 'compensation' deal be prejudicial to the municipality?

In future, however, if the planned expansion of the right to information is promulgated, a ratepayer would simply have to ask for the information, rather than have to argue for it in terms of the exercise or protection of a right.

SOUND BITE

Many government officials forget their duties and responsibilities to the public. In a lot of cases, they treat the information they hold as their private property, not even that of their department. So even if they are supposed to give it to you they are doing you a favour when they do it.

Ali Rahnama
Director, Press Freedom Fund of Fie

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Gebran Tueni

"Words on a page signify nothing"



GEBRAN TUENI
Publisher,
An-Nahar, Lebanon

The American-style conception of a Freedom of Information Act which you in South African are debating does not exist in Lebanon - in fact, or in concept. For an individual even to try to get information from the government is near impossible.

Unfortunately, the three and a half million Lebanese in Lebanon have very little access to government information. They cannot, for example, waltz into a government agency, or a ministry, and ask for anything, whether it's a cup of water or the minutes of a ministerial meeting.

It has been that way for as long as the state has existed, and it will be that way for many more years to come. However, we do have a free press. It is the freest in the Arab world. And it has consistently opposed the government when public matters of vital interest are discussed behind closed doors.

A year ago, mortars were placed in a church organ. They exploded during Sunday service, killing 10 people. The message the terrorists sent was crystal clear. Because the war had been basically sectarian - Muslim against Christian - those who planted the mortars were trying to whip up sectarian tension anew. Everyone saw through this. And the attack on the church was condemned by all the sects within the country.

As reportage increased in the media, the government worried that the murder of church worshippers would result in renewed sectarian tension. A legitimate concern. Their

response: they issued a blanket ban on news reporting affecting the audio-visual media. The rationale: what the people don't know won't hurt them.

For half a year, no domestic political reportage was allowed on the airwaves. The government was able to target audio-visual media because all the television and radio stations which had started during the war were technically illegal.

The outcry from journalists in editorials was intense. Daily, we hammered away at the government, reporting what the man on the street thought of the ban, and such intense pressure finally forced the government, with its tail between its legs, to withdraw the ban.

Having won that battle, I should underscore that there are things which we just won't touch. There is clear self-censorship of the media. There is no doubt about that. We set parameters in which we can operate. During the war, it was from illegitimate intimidation by the militias and foreign armies.

Now, after the war, there is de jure freedom, but de facto, things are different. We have to take into consideration that we can be hurt by those who do not like us.

- The first parameter is Israel. A southern slice of Lebanon is still occupied by the Israelis, as it has been since the Israeli invasion of 1982. And we will not, and do not want to, give comfort to the enemy. If the Israelis, for instance, release prisoners from their concentration camp in southern Lebanon as a goodwill gesture, we are not impressed. We will not applaud them violating international law a little less than they were before.

- The second parameter deals with the other foreign army in our country. There are 40,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon. Considering the size of our army is only 35,000, it's a prodigious figure. Syrian soldiers are in the country at the request of the current Lebanese government, but there is hostility in some circles to their presence. The argument being that no country can be truly free if there are foreign forces. It depends on what school of thought you belong to. Was the Japanese government free during the US occupation following World War Two? They were free to develop democratically, but they were not free to rebuild militarily.

The An-Nahar paper, of which I am general manager, takes a centrist view. We do not seek to antagonise the foreign troops because they are in Lebanon at the request of the government. However, we recognise the enormous pressure they exert and are opposed to it in our editorials and in our articles. There's a fine line between being helped by a friendly power and being subservient to it.

The government can be harsh when they are crossed. My father, Ghassan Tueni, for instance, who was general director of the An-Nahar, was put in prison for revealing the decision of an Arab League conference in Algeria. These decisions were secret but they affected the Arab people, and my father felt the Lebanese people had a right to know what their politicians were deciding about their future.

The government then tried to kill us economically by pressuring advertisers not to advertise with us. They told advertisers that they would give them problems at the port when their goods were being processed, or would cause them problems at their place of business. This scared off advertisers, but only publicly. We received donations to keep the paper afloat, not just from them, but from many people who were opposed to what the government was trying to do. In many issues where advertisements appeared, there would be a black white space indicating the advertisers' solidarity with us.

Not only did the government fail in its bid to silence us, but my father in 1975 was brought into a national unity cabinet consisting of six men in an attempt to end the war.

To conclude, in Lebanon, it is the media which is an intermediary between the government and its people. A Freedom of Information Act does not exist. But a free press does. And it is the free press which informs the public of what the government is doing, on one hand, and, on the other hand, we are the mouthpiece of the man on the street.

Most importantly: one can have the best press laws in the world, but if there is no real democracy and no leaders who believe in that democracy and no people who are willing to fight and die for that freedom, then all that one has are words on a page signifying nothing.

"Secrecy makes governance more difficult"



VALLI MOOSA
Deputy Minister
Provincial Affairs

There is a view that governments have a natural tendency towards greater secrecy. The present government, however, is generally of the view that unnecessary secrecy makes governance more difficult, rather than easier. It is in the interest of government, especially during this delicate period, to build the maximum

SOUND BITE

Freedom of the press is one of the pillars of democracy, and when the right to know is compromised, so is the very fabric of democracy.

Scott Low, President of FIEJ

national consensus and co-operation around the policies and programme of the government. Such consensus will not be possible without placing information before relevant role-players and the public in general.

In responding to the legitimate denial of teachers for higher salaries, the government decided to put before the teacher organisations details of the education budget. This exercise was aimed at indicating to the teachers that more money for salaries means less money for textbooks or new classrooms or some other aspect of education. So transparency on the part of government is more than just an act of altruism.

As far as the legislative process is concerned, the new parliament is already practising an unprecedented level of openness. All meetings of all parliamentary committees are open to the press and other observers. The Constitutional Assembly has adopted the same practice. Not only are the theme committees and the central negotiating forum, the Constitutional Committee, open to the public, but also the twelve-person management committee of the Constitutional Assembly.

The only complaint nowadays from parliamentary journalists is that at any one time, there are too many meetings which they are entitled to attend.

I would like to take a brief look at relevant provisions in the interim constitution:

Section 15 states: "Every person shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, which shall include freedom of the press and other media and the freedom of artistic creativity and scientific research."

"All media financed by or under the control of the state shall be regulated in a manner which ensures impartiality and the expression of a diversity of opinion."

Section 23: states: "Every person shall have the right of access to all information held by the state or any of its organs at any level of government in so far as such information is required for the exercise or protection of any of his or her rights."

Furthermore, Section 33 states: 33(1) "The rights entrenched in this chapter may be limited by law of general application, provided that such limitation -

(a) shall be permissible only to the extent that it is -
(i) reasonable; and (ii) justifiable in an

open and democratic society based on "freedom and equality," and subsection - (b) provides that in addition to being reasonable, such limitation shall also be necessary.

In my view section 92 (1) may also be relevant. It states: "A minister shall be accountable individually both to the President and to Parliament for the administration of the portfolio entrusted to him or her..."

The access to information clause (Section 23) is subject to two limitations: it is limited by the general limitations to all rights outlined in Section 33, but in addition, it has a limitation built into the clause itself. This is indeed a double limitation!

For apart from the fact that limitations which are "reasonable" and "justifiable in an open and democratic society" are provided for, citizens only have the right to such information as is required for the exercise or protection of any of his or her rights.

In my view the limitations are excessive, particularly the limitation in Section 23 which places the onus on the individual to prove that information requested is required for the exercise or protection of any of his or her rights.

As a general premise, the law should only protect government information in order to protect the sovereignty of the state and the safety of its citizens, or where the risk of a breach of national security (which itself needs precise definition) is clearly established or where there would be an unjustifiable invasion of an individual's privacy, or where the release of information could impact negatively on the economy as a whole.

For the purpose of good governance, the general limitation provided for in Section 33 (i) is more than sufficient. The limitation in Section 23 narrows the right of access to information to an extent that should be unacceptable to a society trying to become open and democratic.

I therefore hold the view that the existing right confirmed in the interim Bill of Rights needs to be widened when the Constitutional Assembly finalises the new constitution.

The present right applies only vertically between the citizen and the state. A matter which requires consideration is whether, and to what extent, the right of access to information should apply horizontally between citizens and institutions in the civil society.

Surely, a student who has been refused readmission to Rhodes University this year should have a right to know what factors were taken into account by the university authorities in arriving at such a decision. Surely, trade unions should have a right to certain information from companies in order to enable them to participate meaningfully in bargaining processes.

All this is aimed at deepening democracy.

Openness is a burden for us



MATHATHA TSEDU
Political Editor,
The Sowetan

I don't think that the passage of this legislation, if it is ever going to be passed, is necessarily going to change the ethical demands that are made on media workers. The obligations of right of response or right of reply or those kinds of things, have always been there and will continue to be there. I think that, necessarily, the ethical impact is going to be mainly on civil servants to move away from an ethical denial to an ethical openness. As some kind of policy, the instinctive gut response should change from 'no' to 'yes'.

I am spending some of my time now in parliament, trying to acquaint myself with what has suddenly become my government, not their government. Parliament proper has not even started - the constitutional assembly is the only one that is sitting, and it has six theme committees, and the sixth committee has six sub-theme committees, and they sit every day. The *Sowetan* has two people in parliament. Which of these theme committees do they cover? Which ones do they not cover? Which of these things do we go for, and which do we leave out?

The drama that we are involved in as a newspaper, and as activists in the media for more openness, has actually become a big burden for us and the burden has become all the more seri-

ous because the media industry has become the recruiting ground for the new civil service. As the new government realises that communication with its own citizens becomes more important, the only people who can man their communication departments are the people who are manning news desks and other departments in newspapers, radio, and television.

So you are faced with the situation where, for example, at the *Sowetan*, over the past two years, we have lost accumulated experience of about 70 years. When Thami Mazwai went off to *Enterprise* the SABC came and took Joe Thloloe, and they came back again and took Barney Mthomboti, and I was saying to Govan Reddy yesterday: "Who is the next one?" because I don't think he is through with us yet.

If you look at our newsroom today, over 70% of the people have less than two years experience. What does a news editor do with that kind of "green horn" squad? And as that happens you have this situation with parliament opening up, and we are saying we need even more from the government - who is going to handle and cope with this thing? We cannot turn around and say that because we don't have staff to do that, the sources must be closed. I think the sources must remain open. We must deal with the problem that faces us - which is a problem of training. It is an area that I think government also, on the basis of the commitment it makes by coming around to agreeing to enact this kind of legislation, should go as far as ensuring that the mechanisms to indeed utilise this openness are in place.

I am going to end by introducing another lament. All the newspapers of this country today, combined,

reach less than 5% of the population. If the *Sowetan* is defined as the largest daily of South Africa, and it reaches at most 1,6 million people, and we have about 40 million people, how do we reach the other people? If we say that government must ensure that information is freely available - then how does the information reach the people? I think it is an element that government must also look at.

The stranglehold that Ken Owen's employers and my employers have on the print media is something that the government needs to address very seriously in trying to empower people who are running small publications in obscure areas, but who are ensuring that those communities are also informed about things that matter to them. They are not able to survive on their own because of the monopolies, because of my employer and Ken's employer.

And it is at that level that government needs to make an impact. Because all we will succeed in doing is ensuring that the privileged few who stay in major cities, and towns, and have access to newspapers, and television, are the ones who become even better informed and better equipped, and at the same time will effectively be discriminating against the poor.

SOUND BITE

The civil service will have to become accustomed to supplying information from any department to whoever asks for it. The new freedoms will also increase the workload, pressure on resources and responsibilities of journalists.

Ed Collis, SA Union of Journalists



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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CONFERENCE

How does it actually work in practice?



KEN OWEN
Editor,
Sunday Times

I have, unlike most people, had some experience of using a Freedom of Information Act which I did in the United States.

I once forced them to reclassify all their documents on the arms trade with South Africa. What they did was to reclassify them and give me a couple of useless bits of information, and reconfirm the secrecy of the main product. So I'm a little sceptical about how freedom of information legislation actually works in practice.

There are obstacles to the Freedom of Information Act. I want to make

just a couple of points which I think are important.

One is that - when discussing the possibilities of a Freedom of Information Act - we are not talking about freedom of expression. We have that already; it is in the constitution. What we are talking about is the appropriate limitations. So I think we must approach it with very, very great care.

The second point I want to make is that we do have to look at resources. And the third one is - I'll just sound a warning - that we must be careful not to create a new playground for lawyers.

Firstly, a Freedom of Information Act legitimates certain kinds of control. The first thing we're saying when we ask for a Freedom of Information Act is: "Well, we recognise certain kinds of secrecy are necessary." We accept national security as a justification, we accept foreign policy, and then I start worrying about the Vietnam war; Angola; and the fact that the Defence Act is still extant. When we start legitimating secrecy, we're actually beginning to

deal with inroads on the freedom of speech. All of these provisions actually start out as being one thing and they end up being another. Even the fact that the Freedom of Information Act designates spokesmen. The police are now nice to deal with because policemen are allowed to talk to you, but I don't want them to designate Craig Kotze as "the spokesman" again.

Secondly, Freedom of Information legislation requires immense resources, and it requires them from government. It requires them particularly from news media, or from individuals who want to use it.

I don't think the story of the destructive effect of apartheid on the South African press has yet been properly told. People who haven't worked in South African newspapers in the last decade or two really can't imagine how bruising, how brutal, how difficult an environment it has been.

I went to *Business Day*, some years ago, with a staff of 73. Within the first couple of days I had 14 resignations on my desk, the Australians were flying them out by the plane load.

The whites have suffered a tremendous loss of cultural confidence, and they are very timid reporters, which is the last thing you want.

Information overload is the way that Americans counter Freedom of Information - they just pour information onto you. Their Freedom of Information Act says that if material has been referred to in publications it is deemed to have been published. But you find that where it has been referred to is in some sub clause, of some piece of paper, that is hidden somewhere, in some archive.

Limitations clauses are inescapable. The Americans who have the first amendment that says congress shall make no law abridging freedom of speech, are constantly abridging the freedom of speech - in times of war, the Pentagon Papers, and all sorts of things. That's a fact of life.

Freedom of Information must be balanced with other rights, and I am in favour of strengthening some of those rights and particularly the right of privacy. This is because I think the press, internationally, is earning itself a loathing and a contempt by drifting further away from its social role and more and more into a very, very sleazy profit-making stance. So I accept that you have to have some balance with rights, but there are a lot of problems there.

The constitution, in my view, is defective because it gives a lower level of protection to Sections 23 and 15 in Section 33 than it does to other rights. It does not always require that restrictions on the freedom of the press must be necessary. In law this an important distinction, it requires just that they must be reasonable and appropriate to a democracy.

Why have they given us a lower level of protection than other rights? I think it is because the constitutional court is preparing the way for legislation against hate speech, and I am suspicious of that kind of legislation because it tends to be used, sooner or later, to silence minorities or weak players.

That leads me to my final point which is the legal terrain in which we are trying to operate now. That is the terrain in which the judges, like the public, actually loathe the media and find them embarrassing, bad mannered and rude.

We are in danger, with a Freedom of Information Act, of creating a nightmare of definitions and exceptions and all kinds of legal loopholes in which we can be trapped badly, and I think, maybe, it is a mistake to rush this legislation.

Police may speak to media but...



REG CREWE
Head, Media
Liaison SAPS

The South African Police Service has committed itself to the principles of transparency and accountability. Consequently, the police shall make available to the media (and other public bodies) the maximum information they can. Explanations will be given when they cannot.

A Police/Media policy was formulated and existed until November 16, 1994 when the Standing Order governing police/media relations was rescinded by the Commissioner of the SA Police. The establishment of a Transparency and Communications Programme was announced and a new SAPS Media Policy is currently being investigated. In this process, the police are not acting unilaterally. All relevant role-players have been invited to participate in the SAPS Media Policy Advisory Committee.

Whilst no final policy document has yet been formulated, the Commissioner has been firm on the following principle: in the interests of transparency, any member of the SA Police may speak to the media. However, no member is compelled to do so. Where a member does speak to the media, the following provisos will apply:

the member will identify himself/herself to the media;

the member will be responsible and accountable for what he/she says.

However, there are factors which may

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place a restriction on the furnishing of certain information. For example, information which would threaten or breach a person's right to privacy, the interests of justice, legislation etc.

Whilst the police are not averse to furnishing information in principle, it must be accepted that there are certain kinds of information which, for practical and/or logistical purposes, the police either do not keep or research.

Armcor's three steps to transparency



Y ABBA OMAR
General Manager,
Communications,
Armcor

Armcor is moving from an organisation which was the epitome of secrecy to one committed to transparency. We are implementing three steps to facilitate this move:

1. Training programme managers to communicate.

2. Achieving a Copernican revolution in the classification of information. In the past, if any task was regarded as sensitive, the entire programme was declared secret. The new approach has turned the old practice on its head. If a task is to be classified it has to be motivated, with the provision of a recurrent review process. This does not mean that the rest of the programme will be classified.

3. Introducing an acquisition bulletin. Although several democracies issue a tender bulletin, South Africa is the only one which has every (yes, every) tender available for public scrutiny on an electronic bulletin board.

I would like to echo the sentiments of Allister Sparks: "If we, as the media claim it is our role to serve the democratic process by keeping the citizenry informed, then we must be true to that role, we must exercise it responsibly and competently."

I don't wish to dwell on the crass reporting we have had over the Helderberg issue. I don't even wish to reflect on the countless other inaccuracies journalists commit about Armcor's business.

Because of this Armcor has become so cautious when it briefs the media, that it virtually spoonfeeds them with information. For example, when announcing the acquisition of a chemicals testing plant recently, not only did we provide detailed verbal presentations, we had notes made for the media. The new plant is vital for SA's observance of the chemical warfare convention (CWC). Its manager

explained that they produce minute samples of mustard gas and other toxic agents to help in the non-proliferation of dangerous chemicals.

After the briefing, we returned to our offices thinking the media could not mess this one up. But we were disappointed. A radio news station was the first one to break the story: "Armcor confirms it produced mustard gas."

SOUND BITE

"Will the Freedom of Information Act be the tool of a minority interest if blacks continue to be grossly under-represented in decision-making positions in the Press? In the exchange of information between Government and the people in this epoch, we want to hear new voices."

Mandla Tyala, Office of the State President

Prisons unlock information doors



CHRIS OLCKERS
Director,
Correctional
Services

Section 23 of the Constitution states clearly that every person shall have the right of access to all information held by the State in so far as such information is required for the exercise or protection of his/her rights.

The onus should be on the applicant to indicate the reason/motive for the disclosure of the information, whereafter the onus shifts to the State to indicate why such information should not be disclosed (if need be).

The fact is that the community is entitled to know what is going on in prisons.

In 1992, Section 44 (1)(F) of the Correctional Services Act (Act 8 1959) which prohibited the media from reporting false information on correctional matters was repealed. This, alongside a policy decision to make prisons more accessible to the media and the public, paved the way for ensuring that the public is well informed on prison matters.

During 1994 for instance, the media visited various prisons on 203 occasions while members of the public and other interested groups visited prisons on 603 occasions. In considering of requests to visit such prisons, the prisoners' rights to privacy are taken into account. In terms of security there will have to be control of access to prisons.

During visits by the media, journalists are allowed to talk to prisoners and report on what prisoners have to say as far as their incarceration conditions and treatment is concerned. Interviews with high-profile criminals for the sake of sensation are not allowed.

The principle of freedom of information is in the interest of healthy administration, accountability and transparency. The impact or magnitude of such an arrangement whereby information may be disclosed should, however, not be so time-consuming that it becomes disruptive.

Furthermore, although personal details of a prisoner's conviction and sentence should be public knowledge, more intimate details such as a prisoner's response to treatment programmes, particulars of his private visitors, etc., should not be disclosed without proper justification and the prisoner's consent.

A prisoner must have access to certain aspects pertaining to his file, for example, parole and/or release profiles.

Persons with vested interests in certain information should have a redress in case of refusals. The idea of a totally independent ombudsman/tribunal to deal with such matters is supported.

SOUND BITE

State information officials and media people should decide for themselves, in a sound ethical way - rather than having an act prescribing for them in detail - what information they will distribute and what form that information will take.

Professor Arrie de Beer,
Potchefstroom University

The military leans toward the light but...



GN OPPERMAN
General, SANDF

The SANDF adheres to a principle of minimum required security classification, with a leaning towards rather declassifying than unnecessarily upgrading security classifications.

The military could in due course negotiate with the media the creation of a form of military correspondent system, but in a different form to the one that used to exist in the past. The main function of the proposed sys-

tem, which will have to be sorted out in consultation with all parties concerned, will be to provide greater continuity and smooth the relationship between the military and the media, by providing a freer flow of information to the public via the media.

If information can safely be released without any detriment to the SANDF, that information should not be denied to a person. The SANDF, however, reserves for itself the right to if necessary request a limitation of these fundamental rights, in terms of Chapter 3, Section 33 of the Constitution.

The right of access to information must be counterbalanced with the right of the State to withhold sensitive information. If divulgence of information would be detrimental to the interests of the State, a limitation should be regarded as justified. A balance must be found between protection and transparency.

It should be emphasized that operational information appears not to be well protected in the Constitution or any other relevant new Act that has been passed. This matter should be more accurately defined and rectified in the coming debate on the Freedom of Information and other relevant Acts. It should thereafter be included as specific exclusions in the Constitution and the revised Defence Act.

Regardless of the formulation of the envisaged Freedom of Information Act, there are other laws still protecting information, like the Archives Act, 1962, and the Protection of Information Act, 1982, which are still in force and prohibit unauthorised access to certain classified information.

The SANDF is willing and tries to be more transparent, but not to the detriment of State security and the defence of the country and its people. A Freedom of Information Act, with the required exclusions stipulated, could well serve to regulate this matter.

This is only a tentative, non-binding point of departure. The SANDF will, in due course, submit its definitive reaction to the Minister of Defence.

SOUND BITE

It has been proposed that freedom of information should extend to the private sector. Certain exemptions have been proposed which relate to a business' operations which impact upon the manner in which it can compete. The South African Chamber of Business (SACOB) would fully support such exemptions.

V W Lacey, Senior Economist, South African Chamber of Business



ADRIAAN NORTJE
Deputy Director,
SACS

The envisaged Open Democracy Commission (ODC) should utilise the infrastructure and personnel resources of the SACS to assist in administering and managing the Act. The proposed Information Officers could be appointed to the staff of the SACS and then seconded to individual government departments and other relevant bodies.

The Open Democracy Act should be supported by a code of conduct to which all organs of state and office bearers should be bound. This code should form part of a National Information Policy, drafted by the ODC and the SACS after intensive consultation.



PE WESTRA
Director, South
African Library,
Cape Town

There are 3000 library service points, many linked to computer networks. So the potential of libraries to make available information generated by the government cannot be over-emphasized.

But government departments, agencies and institutions on all levels are often not properly geared to distribute and market their material effectively. Perhaps all government institutions should be required by law to publish regular lists of newly available material and also make provision for their efficient distribution.



MARIE OLIVIER
Acting Director,
State Archives

The Archives Act, 1962, stipulates that all records of government departments and local authorities, as well as private collections, in state archives dating up to 31 December 1960 are accessible to the public free of charge.

Archives become automatically accessible in five-yearly cycles. As from 1 January 1996, access will be extended to 31 December 1965. The closed period could possibly be shortened to twenty years, and access could be extended on an annual basis.

Section 9 of the Archives Act provides for the Minister to withhold access to archives on the grounds of public policy.

Removal of a time clause could be extremely costly. Access during a closed period could be applied for by researchers and other users, and automatically be assessed in terms of the provisions and exemptions of freedom of information and privacy pro-

"A nation uninformed is a nation doomed"



KHULU SIBIYA
Editor, City Press

As sage once said: 'A nation uninformed is a nation doomed,' or words to such effect. Nothing could be truer than this. A world uninformed would be a dead world indeed.

Today an epoch-making event taking place in Japan can be made available to millions of people in the world by merely touching a button. Again the democratisation phenomenon sweeping the rest of the world, from the former Soviet Union and her satellites, throughout Asia and Africa is in the main a legacy of access to information.

We in South Africa are painfully aware how tyrants behave in trying to suppress information. In the worst of times, access to information was a criminal act punishable by imprisonment. A plethora of laws such as the Police Act, Prisons Act, Official Secrets Act, Publications Control Act, and many more were cooked up with the main purpose of keeping the overwhelming majority of the population of this country uninformed.

The question today is how can people be empowered to access information, and how can information empower people? These things must be done urgently.

In the first instance, co-operation between government sectors, (major custodians of information), and the public has got to be built. For generations, the culture has been cultivated by officialdom denying access to information by members of the public.

For example, the average South African is not aware that he/she could walk into a courtroom and ask to see the charge sheet. It is a public document, and even in the days of apartheid regimes, it was still defined as such - at least legally.

However, opening up the courts and police stations for the public to peruse the files could bring with it untold logistical problems - much as it is undesirable to legislate against it.

A more effective approach would be to rather encourage a spirit of co-operation between custodians of information (policemen, magistrates, prosecutors, librarians, politicians) and the media.

However, an even more effective approach would be to make it an offence for a custodian of public information to deliberately withhold it from a bona fide representative of the media (and by extension, the public, whose right it is to access information).



Khulu Sibiyi

Various organs of civil society need to get more involved in the dissemination of information. They must also guard jealously their right to be informed and put on the pressure when these freedoms are being threatened.

The present structure of the SABC needs to be looked at. The SABC has the potential to be the most effective way of informing the nation. The tragedy for this country would be for the SABC to pander to sectional interests.

Publishers and editors need to look beyond the profit motive and do more groundwork to establish a foundation of the free flow of information they waxed so lyrical about when it was barely legal even to refer to the matter.

Workshops have to be arranged, as a matter of urgency, between the publishers and custodians of information, at a significantly senior level, to map out the way forward - with the ultimate aim being legislation that will ensure an informed nation in which access to information is a right, not a privilege.

Grassroots publications which seem to be dying since the demise of apartheid need to flourish again. There is also a need to look at other - less expensive - ways of informing people. Examples of news dissemination in places like Mozambique need to be considered.

In the South African situation all is not doom and gloom. The Bill of Rights in our interim constitution is a step in the right direction towards making information accessible to the general public unfettered by officialdom. The Bill enshrines freedom of speech and free media. That is well and good. But in its present form it is ill-defined and subject to various limitations.

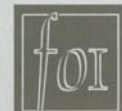
We also know from experience elsewhere in the world, even in the

leading democracies, that politicians as a rule claim to support the freedom of the press. The reality is something else. At best they pay lip service to this.

Against this background, media people must campaign aggressively in conjunction with other organs of civil society to make sure that our constitution is clear and unambiguous on access to information. We have seen recently how a well-meaning government like that of President Mandela can easily infringe upon the rights of people and try to deny them information they are entitled to.

There are no easy answers or easy routes to achieve the objective of making information accessible and empowering to the majority. There are many vested interests that will try to thwart the efforts of those trying to establish networks to make this feasible.

In spite of all these difficulties, if this world is to be a better place for humanity, we will need to have better informed people. We owe it to humanity and its survival.



DR M SCHUTTE
Assistant to the
Ombudsman

The Public Protector already has all the powers necessary to effectively serve as an independent forum to try and solve freedom of information complaints.

However, the perception of impartiality will suffer if the Public Protector is perceived to argue against the State in a court, or generally acts like a legal representative will act in the interests of his client. This is not the domain of the classical Ombudsman and could detract from the effectiveness of the Office.

Should the Public Protector be subject to freedom of information legislation? Considerations of personal privacy and the possibility that the proper functioning of the Public Protector could be impeded, should be weighed against the benefit of freedom of information.

The potentially negative results should be very carefully considered before making freedom of information legislation applicable to the Office of the Public Protector.

SOUND BITE

A bill before Congress allows FOIA users to request information in electronic form, via telecommunications, CD-ROM or on disk.

Dr Wendy Simmons, US Information Service



JEANETTE MINNIE
Freedom of
Expression Institute

Civil society should be on the Task Force drawing up the legislation - people who represent rural people, or landless people, or underdeveloped people. These are the kind of people who, if you say, as the Task Force is proposing, they can use the Public Protector's office, will say whether it's workable.

Constituencies who have different interests in this Act are not actually talking to each other. So, for instance, the media and the security constituency are not coming together and thrashing out their concerns. There's no debate and there's no balancing of rights taking place between these constituencies.

SOUND BITE

The battle for transparency and access to information is not for journalists and editors alone to fight. It's a battle which should be waged by the entire civil society together with those in the new government committed to the same values.

Neil Coleman, Spokesperson for COSATU



ALLISTER SPARKS
Institute for the
Advancement of
Journalism

We journalists claim the right to information on behalf of the public. That carries with it a reciprocal obligation for responsible reporting. It is really no secret that our reporting standards are stretched and are declining to perhaps the lowest point I have seen in my 44 years as a journalist.

The newsrooms are very understaffed. They are becoming more and more junior - while the challenges and demands on them are becoming greater and greater all the time.

We are not making adequate use of the courts. Reporters are not getting out into the countryside. Huge areas like Botshabelo with nearly a million people in it, or the old homeland of Qwaqwa with possibly two and a half million people, go uncovered. Northern Transvaal, Eastern Transvaal, North West. Who is covering the parliament of Northern Cape? These are cosmic black holes.

We are demanding access, but we can't even handle what we have. There are serious structural problems within the media that need to be looked at urgently as we demand and claim that we have this public duty to perform in a new democracy.

"If the government was a bank, I'd keep my money in a sock"



TIM MODISE
Radio Metro/SABC

What is Abba Omar of Armscor doing at a conference on FOI when a senior Armscor representative spent much of this week telling the Cameron Commission of Inquiry into alleged illegal arm deals that he would like to answer their questions, but he might incriminate himself?

Basically the media are in a similar position to Armscor in that business issues outweigh FOI issues. Advertisers would pull out if, instead of constantly reassuring them that we serve up to them an affluent market, we said no, in the interests of FOI we've expanded into Botshabelo shackland in the OFS and not Sandton because they can get it on 702.

Freedom of information is a concern related to class and comfort. If you are hungry, homeless, without a job, traumatised by political violence, and so on, FOI is an elitist card game.

I would like to see FOI being marketed as a consumer issue. We pay for government, those who work in government are intended to be the servants of the people, and yet what do we get for our investment?

The callers to my show don't know where to register for the October local government elections. Craig Kotze basically barred Minister of Safety and Security Sydney Mufamadi from answering callers' queries for months. Gauteng MEC for Safety and Security, Jessie Duarte, will give information to a group of policemen 24 hours before giving it to the press.

Commissioner George Fivaz secrets away tapes of police broadcasts which were paid for by my taxes. If the government was a bank, I would be keeping my money in a sock under the bed by now. But these are media complaints. Most ordinary people are in a far worse position. They don't have the resources to spend a day tracking down a shifty public official the way the press can.

I'm not sure how much difference FOI laws would make to the media world. A lot of Newsline producers, for example, would be horrified if FOI laws meant that they could tackle a controversial subject, one that would rock the boat. Many journalists would rather hit the canteen for a coffee or the bar for a beer and a chance to moan about obstructive government functionaries than do anything about it.

If we want to fight for FOI, it must

be because we believe that it will benefit society, even if society yawns and says "who's got the entertainment pages?". And if we decide to fight for FOI, we must not make the mistake of assuming that beyond a certain level, we can sit back and relax.

An FOI act is useless if:

- a) you don't know it exists,
- b) you don't know how to use it,
- c) you don't know how to make a government official respond to it, or
- d) you need a lawyer to use it.

Other changes need to take place before FOI can jump from the paper it's drafted on, to the general political consciousness. RDP is needed - houses, clean water, sewerage, jobs - because people need their material concerns sorted out before worrying about their second-generation or third-generation rights.

Political intolerance and intolerant politicians need to have a stroke and retire to the Wilderness. FOI can't exist in a place like Khumalo Street, Thokoza, where the ANC side take taxis from one end and the Inkatha side don't go through Phola Park, they go through the Ntalspruit Hospital.



RAYMOND LOUW
Freedom of
Expression Institute

I am distressed that so many journalists and editors are so negative about the proposed Act. One has suggested that its introduction should be postponed; another that it should be dropped.

While I am as concerned as they are about a law defining what portions of state information should be secret, this Act is an advance - and a big advance - on the present position where the state has the power to declare what it likes an "official secret" - and does.

It is up to all of us to ensure that the restrictions in the Act are reduced to the absolute minimum.

The fact that newsrooms are deficient in staffing and skills is no reason to reject a Freedom of Information Act. The answer is to improve the staff skills.

The media are being singularly careless of their freedoms. We are going through a period of "benign" authority now, but it will not last forever.

In the Freedom of Information Act we have an opportunity to grasp the rights that we have aspired to for so long. And we will not readily have another opportunity. Where are the editors of the country's newspapers?



DENE SMUTS
MP,
Democratic Party

The most compelling example of monitoring, lobbying and empowerment around freedom of information occurred on behalf of victims in the public hearings on the Truth Commission Bill.

The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation gave notice that it would mount a constitutional challenge to the "closed doors" provision on three grounds.

Section 23, the Right to Information, is the first. Not only this section is argued to render secrecy constitutionally suspect, but also 22, access to court; 24, administrative justice and the application and interpretation clauses of the Chapter on Rights.

There is a growing conviction that it cannot be correct or constitutional that a victim should find out after the fact that someone has received political amnesty which they may have wished to contest.

The fact is that it is a distasteful business, letting perpetrators go free. The fact is that it is a terrible thing to extinguish the legal rights of the victims.

It is around the constitutional rights of individual victims, ranged against the political forces who constitute or control the State, that the drama of the right to information is unfolding.



CLIVE EMDON
Director
IMDT

The development of a whole new sector of hundreds of independent and community newspapers, magazines and radio and TV stations is the key way to monitor and network and lobby for free flow of information.

The two media worlds, that of the A & B income reader catered for by the national and provincial press and that of the independent and community press wanting to serve urban and rural people who have little disposable income but a great need for information, need to come together in a coherent plan to develop the new sector of media.

SOUND BITE

The right to access to information should by no means be a privilege of the press alone, but a right granted and guaranteed equally to every citizen.

Scott Low, President, International Federation of Newspaper Publishers

COMPETITIONS: Has the means become the end?

Competitions of one sort or another are a normal part of newspaper promotions today. In the last few years many of these have taken the form of lucky numbers games and scratch cards. When these were first launched, very few newspapers were involved. Today, almost all South African newspapers run these types of games frequently, so that at any given moment, at least one such competition is being run. Originally, the purpose of these competitions was to act as some sort of "hook" to attract people to buy the newspaper, in order to encourage trial. It was hoped that once these people had bought the newspaper and played the game, they might find something else interesting in the paper, and hopefully convert to readers.

If my memory serves me correctly, *City Press* launched the first Lucky Card Game around 1991. The little plastic credit-type card created something of a sensation at the time, by producing an additional 30 000 or so sales to *City Press'* ABC certificate at the time. The competition was the hottest topic of conversation in newspaper management circles. Here seemed to be the perfect tool for boosting those critical circulation numbers. Half the newspapers in the country clamoured

to board this new bandwagon.

But something seems to have been lost on the way. The original purpose behind the competitions seems to have been replaced by the need to have an improved ABC. Fullstop. There's nothing wrong with wanting to have a healthy circulation. What is problematic though, is that certain types of games do not do the job of drawing people into the newspaper to read.

Newspaper sales soar at the start of the game, but when it's over, most of those sales fall off. That doesn't seem to phase the newspapers which run these games, because similar types of games continue to be run, one after the other. It would seem then, that the most sought after thing in a competition nowadays, is an improved ABC rather than more readers.

There is a difference between the two. A sale is not necessarily the same thing as a reader, because certain types of competitions only attract buyers. In the case of most scratch-card and lucky number games, literacy is scarcely a requirement. I have personally witnessed buyers of newspapers (during such a competition) that could not read or write, being assisted with a game. Forgive me if I seem stupid, but

surely literacy is the most basic requirement in order to read a newspaper? I have also spoken to hundreds of scratch-card entrants and asked them what they thought of the newspaper and its contents. Most of them said that they didn't read it and only bought the paper for the competition. Yes I'm aware that this is "depth-of-one-research", but the sales figures for the newspapers speak for themselves. The temporary sales boost and subsequent drop-off of sales, after these competitions have ended, seems to support this argument.

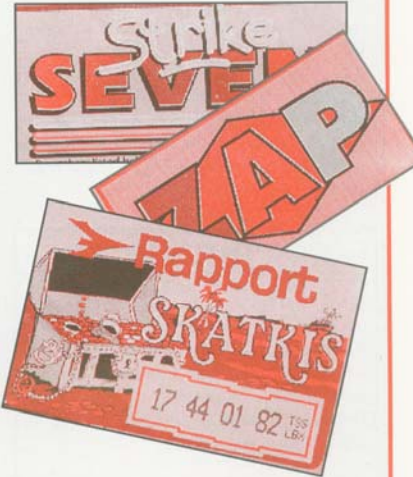
At the end of the day, such boosts to circulation are essentially artificial. If we are not converting these people to readers, how on earth do we sell these figures to our advertisers? They are not going to be impressed with a sales figure if they cannot be assured that there are readers behind this figure, who will at least go through the newspaper and see their adverts. In addition, if we do not care that people are buying the newspaper for something totally unrelated to its contents, then we have a serious dilemma about which business we are in.

Competitions need to be well thought through in terms of the people they attract. Those which are

likely to attract people who are similar to the existing reader profile, whatever that may be, are also likely to become the necessary "hooks" to convert buyers to readers.

Newspapers which allow games or competitions to become the end themselves, would do better to shut down their editorial departments and open a games business.

Cleo Ehlers, Marketing Analyst and Consultant: Synergistic Solutions



thumbsuck

their hands of the lot. The way matters stand any company with a few thousand to spare can set up an award (named after the company naturally) and buy themselves some publicity. The problem these days, is to find an area of journalism not yet recognised as "award worthy". All the obvious beats such as health, business, finance, environment, computers, consumerism have been taken up. Still, there are few left over. Any takers for best court reporter, an area sadly neglected these days?

Fairbairn figured, naively as it turned out, that all these awards might mean good advertising for *Review*. After all, what better way to inform all those hacks out there of conditions of entry and so forth? Strange to tell, only one of the dozens approached was interested. Why bother, seemed to be the average response. The awards achieve their purpose – which is to generate publicity for the company. Silly of me really. I thought they were about journalism.

M-Net's Playmates of the Year programme is a bit of South Africa's post-censorship media history by now. But who, as I, wondered at the incongruous soft-serve commentary to what was essentially a soft-porn interlude? Well, wonder no more. Fairbairn has it on good authority the text was

penned by a woman – who fell about laughing every time she came up with another "ships of the desert" metaphor.

Tired of all those earnest texts on how to write well? Here, especially for all those hard-worked newsdesk persons out there, is one that does the opposite. It comes courtesy of the Internet and one Gerald Grow who teaches journalism in Tallahassee, Florida.

1. Start with a simple statement: "We quit because nobody knew how to programme the computer."
2. Put it in the passive voice, to dilute the responsibility: "It was decided to quit."
3. Expand with terminology that does not add meaning: "It was decided to terminate."
4. Build in noun strings: "It was decided to terminate project processes."
5. Add a qualifier of uncertain relation to the original statement: "On account of the status of the computer, it was decided to terminate project processes."
6. Add noun strings and terminology to the qualifier: "On account of the status of the computer programme assessment planning development effort, it was decided to terminate project processes."
7. Separate related words: "On account of the status of the computer

programme assessment planning development effort, it was decided to terminate until a later date project processes."

8. Equivocate: "On account of the uncertain status of the computer programme assessment planning development effort, it was proposed and tentatively accepted to terminate until a later date project processes."

9. Obfuscate: "Due to uncertainties in the status of the computer programme assessment planning development effort, proposals were carefully considered and tentatively adopted to suspend temporarily until a later date project processes."

10. Cover your tracks to make yourself look good: "Due to unavoidable uncertainties in the status of the computer programme assessment planning development effort, a number of contingency proposals were carefully considered and one was tentatively adopted to suspend on a temporary basis until a later date those project processes deemed unessential to the expeditious fulfillment of contract requirements."

Trouble is, many of those brand-new media spokespersons out there representing the ministry of something-or-other, seem to take Grow seriously. But, what's worse, journalists are often reporting their gobbledygook word-for-word.



By Thomas Fairbairn

Ever thought about the number of awards there are for enterprising journalism in South Africa? Of course not, you're too busy just getting on with the job of writing or scripting, right? Well, Fairbairn in yet another idle moment started a list – there are literally dozens. Shocked, he contacted the venerable Syd Pote at what used to be the NPU (now the PMA) to see if they had any line on them. They don't. Nor, it seems, does the Conference of Editors, who have apparently washed