FOR THE RECORD

LIFE MORE ABUNDANT
A retrospective look at Drum magazine in the 1970s

BY KERRY SWIFT

Drum magazine in the 1950s has come to be seen as the ‘Golden Age’ of black journalism in South Africa, a period before the cottage industry of racial segregation translated into the big business of apartheid, and before the doctrine of advocacy journalism and the collectivism which was to follow began to reduce individual journalistic flair and editorial independence.

The early Drum was invested with a great deal of rugged individualism and has become important because there were no other credible, mass-circulation vehicles for the authentic black voice at that time.

A magazine called Zonki was published in the early '50s, but it was always a poor shadow of Drum and was finally forced to give up its pallid ghost, while Bona, which was launched in 1956 to propagate government policies, had a strong tribal and rural bias and was never a credible competitor. Drum, on the other hand, catered for detribalised township readers. It faced the issues and it sought out and promoted the enormous creative talent developing at the apartheid coalface in townships such as Sophiatown, Western and Alexandra.

Drum offered open house for this creative flow and successfully managed to merge the technical skills of British editing in the mould of Picture Post with the vigour of African reportage, maintaining all its breathless intensity and rich township language. It was perhaps the first real example of what the music industry today calls ‘cross-over’. And Drum ‘cross-over’ was about working as a rainbow coalition for the New Jerusalem.

Jim Bailey, Drum’s former owner and the guiding hand behind the magazine, had a much more appropriate description of Drum journalism when he called it “Life More Abundant”. Nobody can put it better than that, because anyone who ever worked for a lengthy period on the magazine under Bailey’s proprietorship had to learn to see all over again, and if Drum gave us the great gift of sight, we used it to seek some light in the gathering darkness because we all knew that somewhere out there manifest destiny beckoned and that was surely the creation of a “life more abundant” for all South Africa’s people.

While the '50s and the early '60s were the halcyon days of Drum, it would be fair to say that for a number of years thereafter it filtered, its own performance broadly reflecting the misfortunes of its readers as the apartheid machine cut its destructive path through our society, blunting creative energy and turning it into a sullen and silent vigil for the gathering storm.

That storm was to come on June 16, 1976 with the Soweto uprising and the countrywide rebellion that followed, and it was a storm which changed the face of South Africa forever. June 16 was to become the symbolic date on which a second generation of black South Africans were initiated into the crucible of resistance.

And just as the youth rose up in 1976 to reject Bantu Education and all the apartheid machinery maintaining their oppression, so Drum journalism gained a new vigour in its determination to serve its readers and stay abreast of the issues.

Fuelled by the Black Consciousness Movement formulated in the Eastern Cape by Steve Biko and his colleagues, this rising tide of resistance led to a renaissance in Drum-style journalism and the years from 1976 to the end of the
decade constituted another high point in the magazine's chequered history.

In any discussion of Drum, one instinctively reverts to the characters of the day for Drum was never an ideological publication. At core it was about the rich passing parade—the pathos, the humour and, of course, the pain.

While Drum journalism was fully committed to black emancipation, it never espoused an ideological line or fell into the trap, so common in white liberal circles, of idealising blacks. In fact, it often admonished its readers, adopting a somewhat stentorian and moralistic tone. It was also genuinely suspicious of ideology and sloganeering, preferring always to explore the human reality because, essentially, Drum was about people, the people we wrote about and, of course, the people who did the writing.

It was this deeply individualistic approach which made Drum journalism so rewarding, and it was also responsible for the weaning of so many gifted men and women who went on to greater things, for a number of Drum graduates have left their thumbprints on the history of our continent.

The Drum school of journalism has come in for occasional criticism, invariably from people who never served the publication.

Some critics accuse Drum of quietism, of remaining, as one put it, "outside the struggle", while an American literary critic named Don Dodson suggests Drum acted as a means of social and political control by implicitly reinforcing, and very seldom challenging, the system of values of the oppressor.

My response to this drivel comes in the form of a statement from Drum's former owner Jim Bailey when he finally sold his South African publishing interests to Nasionale Pers: "Dear Readers," wrote Bailey in the June 1984 edition, "after 33 years I am bidding you farewell. I believe that with our Drum operation in South Africa we have achieved the following:

- We have provided, for 33 years, a great popular educator for the broad mass of our fellow citizens, at a time when, until recently, popular education was being deliberately lowered in quality by the South African government.
- We have maintained professional standards and a policy that has been consistent and unwavering from first to last, although the methods used have had to alter as new legislation was developed to limit the activities of the Press.
- We have bred, or given opportunity to, a generation or more of black authors, journalists and photographers who have provided some of the substantial foundations for the future society that is now being born..."

And he ended his valediction with these words: "Despite our occasional differences, a handful of people have done all this, working as a group of friends. To all our people, living and dead, I must pay tribute and give special thanks. Despite my withdrawal from the battle, I greatly hope that our friendships will be maintained into the distant future. On this note, Farewell. And to my successors, Good Luck! Go and do better."

When I joined Jim Bailey's publishing stable in 1976, Drum had a permanent editorial staff of only seven journalists and two drivers, one of whom was running a freelance 'chicken farm' from a large and disused room in the bowels of the building. Our editor was Stanley Motjuwadi, Des Tutu's life-long friend since the time they were golf caddies together as young boys.

Stan came to journalism from the teaching profession when, along with many other honourable men, he resigned his job in protest following the introduction of Bantu Education. Thus began a long and illustrious career in journalism.

When I joined as news editor, Stan was the last of the early school of Drum writers still on the permanent staff and he had the distinction of being the magazine's longest-serving editor.

A talented and mercurial former London Daily Express journalist, Tony Sutton was responsible for the design, production and day-to-day running of the magazine which he did with considerable creative flair.

There were two photographers, Chester Maharraj and his young apprentice, Dumisane Ndlovu, who was wounded by police buckshot while photographing the June '76 uprising and only escaped more serious injury by hiding in an open grave.

We had two reporters, Morakile Shenyane and Patrick E Cohen, and a filing clerk, Sipho Jacobs wrote occasional stories.

Casey 'The Kid' Motsisi, whose column, 'Casey's Beat' first appeared in 1958, was still writing for Drum and his work was read and loved throughout English-speaking Africa. But The Kid was in decline in the '70s and less than a year after I joined the magazine, Casey left us for some kinder place.

When we gathered on a brilliant June afternoon in 1977 at Avalon Cemetery to bury our colleague, Jim Bailey said of him that "Casey had a small touch of genius. I think genius is the correct word, not talent..." They were well-chosen words because, with Can Temba who had left the small group of friends before him, Casey shared the same transparent honesty and the same understanding of Johannesburg's heart which have ensured them both permanent recognition in the annals of African journalism.

Also on retainer was Jacky Heyns in Cape Town who, among many other things, wrote a lively column called 'Virginia' about a good-time girl from the other side of the racial tracks whose exploits, in flagrant delicto, posed a considerable challenge to the Immorality Act.

In the character of Virginia, Jacky created a deceptively intelligent bimbo who developed a vast continental following and who received regular offers of marriage from well-heeled Nigerians, Kenyans, Ugandans, Tanzanians and, as I recall on one occasion, one particularly hopeful invitation to conjugal bliss from a white railway worker in Windhoek.

On retainer in Durban was the late and ingenious journalist, GR Naidoo, whose primary editorial focus was the vast quantity of dirty linen regularly hung out in court by the litigious Indian community of Natal.

And, in what was then Rhodesia, Justin Nyoka served us before he "disappeared", as the BBC Africa Service would
Virginia’s exploits, in flagrante delicto, posed a considerable challenge to the Immorality Act
have it at the time, only to re-emerge in Maputo as an official spokesman for Robert Mugabe's ZANU party just before Ian Smith took his final bow. Needless to say, we were disappointed to learn that a Drum correspondent had abandoned his low calling as a journalist to follow the distinctly lower one of politician. (I might add that in October 1989 it was reported from Harare that Justin had resigned his top government post in Zimbabwe following allegations of corruption.)

Drum also had a permanent suite of offices in London's Fleet Street which fed us regular material from Central and West Africa, although Bailey's publishing interests in Nigeria had been nationalised by this stage and our supply of good material from West Africa had largely dried up, as I might add, had the quality of the journalism.

We were also served by a small but dedicated group of local freelancers covering everything from local politics and sport to show business and crime. Not all these freelance contributors could even write properly, but Drum's pages were open to anyone who could gather facts, substantiate them and communicate them to the staff. As a result a great deal of our work at Drum consisted of ghost-writing or rewriting tortuous copy from the freelancers.

There were a number of engaging characters among the freelancers and while none of them were likely candidates for a Niemann Fellowship to Harvard, they all made valuable editorial contributions. There were three in particular who perhaps typified our freelance operation.

The first was the aptly named 'Belladonna' Mashiya, a Soweto sangoma who occasionally sauntered into Drum's offices when business was slack in her consultancy in the posh Soweto suburb of Dube.

Bella's made most of her money from white shopkeepers around Johannesburg who paid her handsomely for throwing the bones and sprinkling her potions around their premises to dissuade would-be piffers. When Bella 'fixed' a shop, it stayed fixed.

On one memorable occasion we arranged for her to visit the gravesites of the great traditional tribal chiefs where she would attempt to commune with the spirits and ask the simple question: "quó vadis South Africa?"

All went well until she visited Chaka Zulu's gravesite in Natal. By some strange twist of fate, she got a cosmic crossed line, and instead of contacting Chaka, she spoke to Chief Albert Luthuli - South Africa's first recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize and a former president of the African National Congress.

The message she received from the spirit world was simple and prophetic. South Africa, said the voice from beyond the grave, is like a cow made up of black and white spots. If you plunge a spear into either a black or a white spot, the whole cow will die.

When Bella brought this message back to Drum House, there was genuine delight among the editorial staff. After all, nothing is so moving or quite so profound as simple common sense.

This netherworld interview, however, never saw print as Drum's long-suffering lawyer, Keith Lister, advised against publication on the grounds that as Chief Luthuli had been banned at the time of his death, to quote his spirit would constitute an offence.

So it was that in apartheid South Africa we had even contrived to silence our dead, which only goes to support the notion that if, in general, the law is an ass, in apartheid South Africa it had become a jackass.

Another member of our freelance team was Mike 'Mazurkie' Phahlane of Phefeni, a friend of the exiled jazz pianist Dollar Brand who dedicated a song to Mazurkie entitled 'The Indestructible Man'. And there was good reason for that title because Mazurkie's brushes with the Grim Reaper were legion.

A delightful article by Obed Musi, another Drum graduate, in the Rand Daily Mail outlined Mazurkie's chronicle of woe along the following lines:

1945 - broke left ankle playing soccer in Sophiatown.
1946 - broke right elbow falling through roof of Juvenile Court.
1947 - stabbed in the head and stoned by the Dead-End Kids gang in Sophiatown.
1948 - reached the semi-finals in the National Amateur Boxing Championships as a flyweight but fell among thieves in Western Native Township the night before his next bout and was stabbed in both sides of the body. Spent six months in Coronationville Hospital recovering from wounds.
1950 - shot in right ankle by the Berlin Gang for being friendly with a rival mob, the Corporatives. The bullet is still there.
1951 - stabbed in right thigh at the famed 'Back Of The Moon' shebeen in Sophiatown.
1952 - 'chopped' twice in the back and head by members of the infamous 'Chops Gang' after an argument about a woman outside the old Reno Cinema.
1953 - shot in left thigh during a fight over the singer Miriam Makeba.
1954 - broke left arm in overturning car en route from Pretoria.
1955 - broke both thighs in hit-and-run accident and, later in the year, was beaten in the calf by a police dog during the demolition of Sophiatown.
1957 - stabbed twice in the back during a fight with the Tondo gang.
1958 - shot in left knee by Durango Kid in Durban.

And so the list continues year by painful year right up to 1974 when Obed suggests Mazurkie was stabbed in the mouth in a shebeen brawl. There is no reason to bring the record up to date for fear of repetition. Suffice it to say that when 'The Indestructible Man' suggested his body be offered to medical science in the event of his death, it was tactfully refused.

Then there was Emelda Sekgalakane who roamed the Northern Transvaal like a bloodhound rooting out some of the most bizarre stories ever carried in the pages of Drum or probably any magazine in the history of publishing. Most of her stories dealt with the dark waters of witchcraft and murder and one notable story is worth recalling because it shows a side of Drum journalism which, although not the stuff of historical record, certainly was important.

The story revolved around six young girls who had been slain and mutilated in a series of muti-murders near Pietersburg. In following up the story, Emelda had managed to get photographs of the six victims from their families and had pursued the story to the point where she believed she could make contact with a Pietersburg witchdoctor who was
selling bottles of human flesh to be used for muti.

It was gruesome stuff all right, but it was an important story. We commissioned Emelda to make the purchase, which she duly did, returning to the office with two small bottles of a fatty substance which had been sold to her as human flesh and which she certainly believed to be the genuine article.

We had the bottles delivered to Colonel (now General) Lothar Neethling at the police forensic laboratories in Pretoria for analysis. The forensic report confirmed Emelda's bottles contained animal fats. When we ran the story it was the talk of the townships and it probably did more to highlight the demonic trade in human flesh than any other article ever run on the subject before or since.

These stories were all just part of the Drum I knew. So were the statements smuggled out of Death Row by prisoners awaiting execution - haunted souls who wanted to make some final pronouncement before they took their lonely walks to the gallows. Their stories made chilling reading and were far more telling as indictments of capital punishment than any silent vigils at dawn, outraged letters to newspapers, questions in Parliament or simmering editorials on the leader pages of the liberal newspapers.

That was probably the great difference between Drum-style journalism and the rest. Where we immersed ourselves in the human condition, most other publications explored it as a mental construct. They are, of course, quite literally worlds apart.

Drum got to the very heart of it all, as it somehow always managed to do for that was the essence of the magazine. And it was this constant human expression of the news around us, which saw Drum's circulation rise from under 50 000 in 1975 to above 180 000 in 1980, which is a fair reflection of the magazine's renewed popularity. Independent market research conducted at the time indicated that every copy of Drum sold had upward of 10 readers, giving us an audited monthly readership in 1980 of almost two million, an enviable market penetration by South African standards.

Of course there were other important factors at play in the resurgence of Drum at this time. Our readers - particularly with the advent of Black Consciousness in the '70s - were becoming more politically aware, more sophisticated and more determined to change the world they had inherited. Drum had the credibility to maintain the trust of this new generation simply because the roots of their struggle were all to be found in past issues of Drum. Those in the know still trusted the veracity of Drum journalism and it is my view that they held in high regard the motives of its owner Jim Bailey who had been a friend, confidant and intellectual touchstone since organised resistance to apartheid began.

As had happened in the past, community leaders still used Drum's pages to explain their actions to their constituents. In the '50s it was the voices of Luthuli, Mandela, Sobukwe, Sisulu and their colleagues. In the '70s it was the Bikos, Tutus and Motlanas - a notable example being Des Tutu's explanation through the pages of Drum as to why he decided to meet the prime minister of the day, PW Botha.

This was not the same publishing climate experienced by early Drum editors such as Anthony Sampson and Tom Hopkinson. A plethora of legislation inhibiting a free Press had found its way onto the statute books and, as a result, we could no longer set Drum up as an open forum for political opinion. We had to quote friends of the protagonists or family members outside the restrictive net and, of course, this was never really satisfactory.

When World and Weekend World were banned and their redoubtable editor Percy Qoboza was thrown into prison, Drum became particularly vulnerable. The banning of Percy's newspapers revolved around the sinister death of Steve Biko in police detention. Drum immediately picked up where World and Weekend World left off, filling the void by publishing a special tribute to Biko, written by the poet Adam Small. That edition sold out in under a week, Drum's fastest sale ever.

And while Drum had its smattering of bannings, its owner believed - correctly - that it was more important that Drum remain on the newsstands than sacrifice all in a show of editorial bravado that might warrant a few paragraphs in the Times of London but which would also bring the wrath of the State down on our heads and throw a loyal and dedicated staff onto the streets. Survival was always a fundamental imperative for Drum.

The company was also without the political muscle and financial resources of the mainstream Press. It was Jim Bailey's private liability and wealthy though Bailey may have been as the son of Randlord, Sir Abe Bailey, enough of Jim's private fortune had already been spent in laying down the foundations of an independent black Press in Africa without putting more than was absolutely necessary into the pockets of Johannesburg's voracious legal fraternity.

On the technical side, Drum at this time was unmatched in its design excellence. In technical terms, we were light years ahead of the opposition and the standard of layout in packaging our editorial message was very high indeed. Using innovative design techniques, typographical variety, catchy headlines and strong visual projection, we reached out and grabbed the reader's attention. And while some of this may have been a trifle over-indulgent at times, it was visually challenging and much of our technical innovation was studiously copied elsewhere in the magazine market.

We also stayed true to Drum's tradition of exposé journalism which was one of Stan Motjwadi's main preoccupations. With our limited human and financial resources, we still managed to break a number of important stories, and notably those turning on corruption in Swaziland and the excesses and financial shenanigans of the homeland leaders.

'Black Stan', 'Bantu Stan', 'Plural Stan', 'De-Kaffer-nated Stan', or whatever light-hearted mantle Stan Motjwadi was wearing at the time quickly gave way to cold and penetrating reportage when he came to grips with the 'Goat Milkers' Union' making whoopie at the expense of...
South African taxpayers in homeland government councils.

Quite understandably, Stan was persona non grata in Transkei under the Matanzimas, but in 1980, he tried to sneak in unannounced on a Transkei Airways flight to attend the funeral of Saul Mdzumo, a former Cabinet Minister who died in detention in Transkei under suspicious circumstances. This was a serious miscalculation on Stan’s part because no sooner had he landed at KD Matanzima Airport than he was arrested and taken to the ‘Royal Matanzima Hotel’ — Umtata’s Wellington Jail.

We knew a good deal about Wellington Jail because another Drum graduate, Nnimrod Mkhele, had been a guest in that particular hostelry and had managed to keep a record of his stay by writing it all down on toilet paper.

The South African Department of Foreign Affairs did nothing to help Stan though he held a South African passport. Officials were courteous and treated my requests for intervention seriously enough during meetings at the Union Buildings, but finally it took the intervention of a certain Mr M, a well-known Soweto man-about-town and former Drum circulation inspector to get Stan out of jail.

At Bailey’s instigation Mr M drove to Umtata and miraculously returned with our editor, stone-cold sober and none the worse for his 26-day incarceration. We parted long and hard at Drum House and it was widely speculated at the time that Mr M had sprung Stan from jail by dispensing a certain amount of Drum largesse in powerful Umtata circles.

The truth, however, only emerged years later when I received a letter from Jim Bailey in response to research queries about the incident.

Mr M “is part of a long and entertaining story,” wrote Jim. It appears that after leaving Drum for “misappropriation of funds”, Mr M set up his own public relations business which, among other things, allegedly used to find women for Kaiser Matanzima when he visited the Reef.

“When I arranged his trip to Transkei, he brought with him Joe Dube to whom I had given the ‘Sportsman of the Year’ belt 20 years before and who had just come out of jail, having done five years for armed robbery, or so I was told. Stan Motjwadi used to write Joe’s speeches for him, so Joe had an ulterior motive for getting Stan out of jail. They bribed nobody, in a sense. I gave them enough money for petrol and accommodation; that was all. When they came back with Stan 48 hours later, they asked for a contribution of, I think, R400, to the Transkei Wanders Association, to which beneficent body I was happy to contribute!”

This was also one of Drum’s great strengths—we always had clever, powerful and resourceful friends in the community who were prepared to get us out of tight corners when the need arose, which was rather too often. And building friendship, when all is said and done, was what Drum was actually all about.

I might add that Stan Motjwadi was never reconciled with the homeland leadership of Transkei during his lifetime. However, when our “small group of friends” gathered at Stan’s funeral in Randfontein on July 29, 1989, General Bantu Holomisa was in attendance, a fact which bore mute testimony to the impact of Stan’s exposés on the man who finally tried to stamp out corruption in Transkei by engineering the coup which ousted the Matanzimas.

At Drum we promoted local artists and musicians when other publications ignored them in favour of foreigners, and we applauded local success in our Masterpiece in Bronze series, which carried on the early tradition of offering bouquets to people who worked to serve the common good.

We praised people, regardless of colour or political persuasion, who attempted to leop the mean little racial fences erected around them or who reached out for reconciliation. But equally we were critical when we found cause, particularly with regard to noxious ideas such as “liberation first, education second”. We demanded more than fatuous slogans for our readers and we poured scorn on political humbug from whatever source it came.

On the broader front, we campaigned throughout the ’70s against government excesses elsewhere in Africa. A major Drum campaign at that time was for the removal of Uganda’s Idi Amin who was a regular target of all Jim Bailey’s publications.

Bailey claims to have lowered morale in Amin’s army by stopping the whisky run from Gatwick to Kampala, a feat allegedly achieved by pressing the right buttons in Whitehall. And he certainly urged his old friend, Julius Nyerere in Tanzania to act decisively and rid Africa of Amin. The rest is history.

Although a good 80% of our readers were black (and that I mean African), Bailey insisted we run stories covering the entire racial spectrum, even though editorially we believed this put a brake on local circulation. The subjects of Drum’s editorial focus were consequently without colour. It was always the human element of the story that mattered and, I think, in a very real sense, we were nation-building without really knowing it.

All this was the standard editorial fare of Drum and while we battled along on the editorial front, Jim Bailey was fighting an even greater battle elsewhere.

The roots of this struggle can be traced back to October 1975 when Bailey and his family executors were approached by the fertiliser baron Louis Luyt to sell the Bailey Trust’s key shareholdings in South African Associated Newspapers (SAAN, now Times Media Limited), of which Bailey was an influential board member.

Luyt’s offer was double the Stock Exchange value of SAAN shares at the time, and while the Bailey interests stood to make a “seven-figure profit” from this transaction, they declined on the grounds that the sale could compromise the independence of SAAN’s editors and was consequently not in the public interest.

It emerged later that Luyt was acting for Minister Connie Mulder’s Department of Information, and when the Bailey interests refused Luyt’s offer, the Citizen was launched in Johannesburg in opposition to SAAN’s flagship, the Rand Daily Mail, which for a long time had been a thorn in the government’s side.

The thinking seemed to have been that if the government could not buy control of the independent Press, it would attempt to sink it in battle. The scene was being set for a bitter and debilitating struggle, and lurking in the background of all these sinister machinations was the commanding presence of General Hendrik van den Bergh, head of the Bureau of State Security and a man who, by his own later admission, was above the law.

The Luyt offer for SAAN was all part of Van den Bergh’s wider attempt to pervert the independent Press in South

PLEASE TURN OVER
Photo-journalism had always been a Drum speciality and the seventies offered a feast of material.

Confessions or final statements smuggled out of Death Row made chilling reading.

Steve Biko’s body lies in state. Drum’s tribute by poet Adam Small was a six-day sellout.

Joshua Nkomo is given the Drum treatment in this glorious study of sycophancy.

There were many tragic tales of love across the colour line. Drum told them as noone else could.

One of Stan Motjwadi’s many exposés of the corruption in homeland government circles.

We demanded more than fatuous slogans for our readers and we poured scorn on political humbug from whatever source it came.
Africa and buy favourable coverage for apartheid abroad. And while the Bailey interests had thwarted Van den Bergh’s designs on SAAN, the ‘Info Gang’, as they came to be known, were not finished with Jim Bailey.

In April 1977 Bailey was approached in London by a leading English newspaperman named Christopher Dolly who wished to purchase a stake in Drum South Africa. As a former board member of the London Daily Mirror and chairman of Penguin Books, his credentials were impeccable but when, a mere two months later, Dolly doubled his initial offer, raising the bid to R600 000 in any currency and payable anywhere in the world, Drum’s owner got suspicious. Christopher Dolly then allegedly threatened Bailey that a magazine would be launched against Drum with unlimited money if he refused to sell.

Bailey backed out of these negotiations and returned home to muster his forces. At that time I was on sabbatical from Drum and doing some post-graduate work at the University of York. I received a letter from Jim which read: “We have a two-pronged attack on ourselves down here from Government-sponsored magazines using unlimited money belonging to the taxpayer, and (from) monopoly capitalism in the form of the Argus Group in the last stages of engulfing the English-language Press. It is important that an independent black Press be maintained in order to avoid the Republic sinking to the sanguinary mess of Rhodesia. I would therefore very much look forward to your return…” Immediately I settled my affairs and arranged to return home. The real world beckoned; the time for gathering acorns was finally over.

Back at my desk in Johannesburg, things had moved extraordinarily fast. True to Christopher Dolly’s word, a magazine called Pace had been launched against Drum and our editorial response was aggressive and uncompromising.

In the May 1979 edition of Drum, Bailey named the Info plotters and put them on public trial under the headline “I ACCUSE” and a number of solid reputations went up in smoke. “There is no way these men can possibly say they were in ignorance,” wrote Bailey. “Their eyes were open.”

Drum took the cue from its embattled owner. Each month we ran exposés on the secret manoeuvres of the Info Gang, often including personal attacks on Pace journalists, indiciating them for their involvement and calling on them to resign, a simple option but which very few had the courage to take. There was great acrimony between Drum and Pace staffs which, on occasions, almost led to fist fights. We believed passionately in Drum’s cause and our competitors, having felt the sting of our editorial lash, were set on revenge.

Our on-going campaign against Pace did, however, have its lighter side. One of our readers who bore a striking resemblance to the Pace editor, Lucas Molete, asked Drum for help as he feared retribution from angry Drum readers. We ran a story supported by pictures of both men and asked readers please not to vent their spleen on the wrong man. Our loyal reader even shaved off his beard so that local shebeen queens would stop confusing him with Molete and treat him like any other regular Soweto guzzler.

I knew we were hitting the mark, however, when the senior editorial executive of Pace came to my home one evening and offered me the editorship of the magazine. During the course of this discussion, he broke down saying the Drum campaign was ruining his life.

Through all this Drum made some powerful enemies. Sensitive discussions were conducted outside Drum House or in the lift rather than in our offices, and to this day, Jim Bailey is convinced he survived two assassination attempts, one of which allegedly occurred on his farm outside Johannesburg.

I was with him the day after this incident and can attest to the shot-gun wound in his face. He was in no doubt but that an attempt had been made on his life.

So it was that the so-called ‘Info Scandal’ continued to sweep through South Africa’s political life and Drum played an honourable and decisive role in exposing the whole mendacious affair. We were fully vindicated when Eschel Rhodie, a key figure in the whole scandal, admitted in a French courtroom that Pace magazine had been an Info Department project. Pace was almost immediately put up for sale and Drum had won another skirmish in the apartheid State’s war of attrition against the opposition Press.

On the broader front, continuing exposés of the Info Department’s covert operations the English-language newspapers finally led to the resignations of State President John Vorster and Information Minister Connie Mulder and to the discrediting of the entire Info Gang.

Bailey’s comment on this period is revealing. “It is extraordinary,” he wrote, “that the former head of the Bureau of State Security did not appreciate that the most barren of all dialogues is with your own echo.”

Drum emerged from the Info Scandal bloodied but unbowed. And when the dust finally settled, we had a vigorous magazine on our hands with a greatly increased circulation but – most important – Drum’s credibility was undoubtedly enhanced and its critics were silenced.

The Drum experience left all of us who worked there enriched. We entertained, we informed and we encouraged our readers through an extremely difficult time in their history. Undoubtedly editorial mistakes were made, but I also know that throughout those years at Drum there had only been one overriding ambition among all the staff members and that was to see a Life More Abundant for all the people of South Africa. •