

Rhodes University **3** Journalism

# Review

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**INTIMIDATION**  
**WHEN ONLY SILENCE REIGNS**

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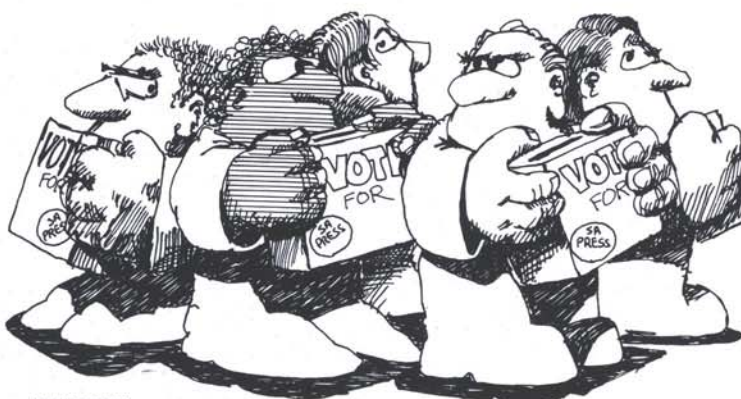
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RHODES UNIVERSITY



ALEX GROEN

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# editorial

## Review forges ahead

THE *Review* project is forging ahead – thanks to our advertisers and the growing number of our subscribers – and, as 1991 closes, here are a few ideas in the pipeline for 1992:

- Subscribers will find a free copy of the *State of the Nation Report* with this edition of the *Rhodes Journalism Review*. We hope to continue bringing this product to our subscribers next year.

As such, *Review* subscribers have joined that group of opinion formers who will be receive a deeper insight into the affairs of our developing region.

The report comes to *Review* subscribers as a courtesy of joint publishers, *Vrye Weekblad* and the *Sowetan*, and is aimed at filling the gap for in-depth, authoritative and balanced information highlighted by Rod Fehrsen of Glass South Africa in the letters columns of our last edition.

- *Review* subscribers will continue to receive occasional specialist inserts on media matters, such as the 16-page *Discussion Paper* in our second edition which dealt with ownership patterns in the South African media, and the South African Union of Journalists' *Press Freedom Report* which comes as an insert to the current issue.

In the planning for 1992 are inserts of specific interest to corporate editors and users or prospective users of desk-top publishing technology. We are also negotiating with publishing interests in the United States to bring our subscribers specialist information in the areas of info graphics, design and typography.

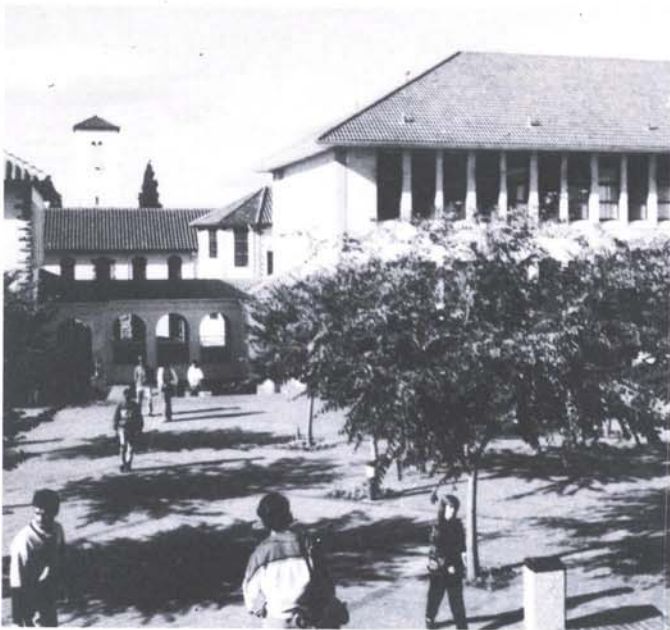
- *Review* has approached a number of leading newspaper editors around South Africa with questions about journalistic ethics to launch a series called *The Editors Speak*, which will start running in 1992. We thank the editors for their responses to date.

- Friends of *Review* may be pleased to learn that the journal now has its own dedicated telephone line. You can now make direct contact with *Review* by phoning (0461) 24577.

We also have a telephone answering service – courtesy of a friendly subscriber – which prompts us to ask whether there are any other potential benefactors out there; for example, someone who might have a spare or second-hand fax for a good cause? Any advance on a fax? ●

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**I**T is common cause that the ownership of the media in South Africa is in too few hands. Broadcasting is an effective state monopoly and establishment newspapers are near-monopolies, in private hands. The situation was created in history by the grip the white establishment had on the country and its resources. However understandable, it is untenable when one considers the needs of a new, democratic order in South Africa. It is equally unsatisfactory considering the needs of the run-up period to free and fair elections.

Something must be done about it for the short-term, and also for the long-term, if South Africa is to have a healthy media, which means healthy political life. Indeed, unless something specific is done about the ownership, control and direction of the mainstream media within the next year or so, South Africa will hardly be able to say that the elections it subsequently holds are free. It is a national priority, every bit as important as devising a new constitution and electoral procedures and systems.

Without the opening up of the media, millions of South African will have been denied access, simply because the main broadcasting and print outlets remain in the hands of the old establishment – even if belated steps are taken to embellish boardrooms with black faces, credible or otherwise. The hostility and rancour that poor media access will generate among now-unbanned militant black groups, whether they are successful in elections or not, presages a very bumpy ride ahead for the media. The future prospects will be a sterile choice: bitter opposition by people who feel robbed of victory, and who blame the media; or, on the other hand, pressure for nationalisation or drastic anti-monopoly action by people who have triumphed in elections despite scant support from the media. Both ways, the role of the media in the vital but delicate job of reconstruction after apartheid will be compromised. Things should and can be different.

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### *The mass media is in too few hands*

I do not intend to make out the case in detail that the mass media is in too few hands. I am prepared to argue that with anyone at any time. My learned counsel will be stock exchange handbooks, other well-known reference works, newspaper people and personal experience.

The Afrikaans market is dominated by one powerful, far-sighted and well-run company (Nasionale Pers), and there is also a lesser group, with vicissitudes (Perskor). Both are in the Nationalist fold, and enjoy all the lucrative business patronage, such as printing contracts (for school books, official publications and journals), that closeness to power brings – in past years the comfy wallowing-ground of the English-speaking groups.

# tony heard

*Former Editor of the Cape Times, Tony Heard, argues that it is in the interests of media and of South Africa that all the political players have equal access to media*

In the English-language establishment press, there are the very powerful Argus Holdings and the slimmer Times Media Limited, both of whom are linked by shareholdings and contracts but effectively owned by Anglo-American or associated companies like Johannesburg Consolidated Investments. Except for the *Natal Witness* of Maritzburg, and arguably the *Daily Dispatch* of East London, there is no such animal as an independent daily paper in South Africa. Even the *Dispatch* has departed from its Crewe Trust past and has a substantial number of its shares in the hands of one of the major groups, TML.

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### *It bodes ill for the future of media*

Allow me one quotation to illuminate my point, from Anton Harber, joint-Editor of the *Weekly Mail*, (May 30 to June 6 issue), in which he refers to the Argus group: "It has come to dominate not just the English-language newspaper business, but also its main rivals (Times Media and Caxtons), the distributing agency (Allied Publishing) and the major printing presses (Johannesburg printers, for example). And Argus – or its sister companies – now has a major hand in the companies that overwhelmingly dominate the book industry (CNA and the Literary Group), the record-industry (Gallo), television (M-Net), radio (702) and the film industry (NuMetro). It also has links, through its sister companies, with a video production studio, a major ink producer, a major paper producer. In most Western countries, such a situation would be unthinkable." Harber's point is telling.

But what is as worrying as the absence of independent ownership is the fact that major unbanned players in the peace and political process, notably the African National Congress, cannot rely on media support worth speaking of in the establishment press. That should be obvious from perusal of newspaper columns, however much individual editors might sincerely strive for fairness and individual journalists might break ranks with the ruling atmosphere. Ask the ANC how they feel about coverage of their affairs in the establishment press. To use a phrase of Ray Swart's in his recent book, *Progressive Odyssey*, the ANC lacks "friendly editors" (page 58). It has no Laurence Gandar of the *Rand Daily Mail* to be buoyingly sympathetic and understanding; or echoes of sympathy which the Progressive Party attracted in Port Elizabeth, East London and Maritzburg. The genus, "friendly editors", means people who are like-minded, even if independently so. There are people who will not "ambush" political friends who share confidences; people who, in broad terms, can be counted on to be well-disposed, within the confines of their commitment to the record and the public good.

PLEASE TURN OVER



in the public domain, and there is every justification to have their structures, ownership and direction inquired into publicly – as long as this is not part of a government or special-interest vendetta and there is no resulting state interference in the realm of the media. Let there be light, not control. And let a task group report in six months, unlike the ponderous, state-run Press Commission which took 12 years. Will someone take the initiative?

When I suggest there is no significant media support for militant black groups, people will say: what about the alternative press? The alternative newspapers are performing a most valuable function, and managing even in these days of diminishing public protest to expose government and other abuse – recent examples being 'Inkathagate', death squads, etc. But their combined weekly circulations do not even match the daily circulation of the Johannesburg *Star*, as Allister Sparks recently reminded the *Weekly Mail* Book-week in Cape Town. And, with world and European attention turned to the basket-case which was the Soviet Union (now battening down for a bleak winter), there is no disposition to ladle millions into the South African alternative press.

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***The basis for an arrangement is there***

As part of the underpinning of free and fair elections, the alternatives need to be strongly supported from within South Africa, notably by the institutional giants which can afford the benefits of public-interest advertising and, with the flick of a corporate 'pinkie' (*smallest finger*), can rescue ailing alternative newspapers. The money spent will be both investment and assurance.

In the realm of the establishment press, the basis for an arrangement is there. The ANC wants and needs a daily press; the newspaper companies want insurance against nationalisation or bruising anti-monopoly action.

Newspapers these days tend to share plant and equipment and even advertising and distribution arrangements, with editorial effort separate and competing. Though in some ways regrettable, the "joint operating agreement" principle has gained widespread favour internationally, because of rising costs. Presses and distribution are neutral factors and can be shared by all. There is no reason why current joint operating agreements should not continue more or less as now, but with ownership of certain titles passing to other hands.

I know that some newspaper chiefs see little future for general daily papers, and are concentrating on building up their specialist publications. Good luck to them. They might well be happy, at a price, to divest themselves of some general dailies, to the local communities where they belong and/or to organisations

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***In South Africa it would be a disaster if the ANC were either to lose or win an election without a friendly press. Either way there would be bitterness – the former amid frustration and the latter amid triumph. Dangerous bitterness which could fuel the violent enthusiasms of fringe elements who indulge in bover-boy attacks on journalists and their craft***  
 ”

openly committed to alternative political directions. In addition, there is no reason why those who own the scarce and expensive printing plant should not make it available, at similar prices as are charged in joint operating agreements to close associates, to virtually anyone who wishes to put a view.

The same applies to distribution. Getting a bright idea is totally free; putting it into shape on a computer screen and stripping it up in sticky-backed paper on a light table is cheap; securing advertising can be tricky; but what can be prohibitively expensive is the paraphernalia of printing and distribution which can stymie the cause of media diversity.

The future South African media order should be marked by maximum press and broadcasting diversity, and a fair spread of outlets for competing philosophies. This country's democratic veneer is too thin to risk a future in which, like Britain's Labour Party, one major player has virtually no press.

Labour survives this (though only just) because British society has its own established democratic culture, checks and balances, alert pressure groups, a tradition of giving opponents a chance, etc. South Africa currently has no public opinion worth speaking of. We have been bullied for too long by "those who know best and who shall be obeyed". Here it would be a disaster if the ANC were either to lose or win an election without a friendly press. Either way there would be bitterness – the former amid frustration and the latter amid triumph. Dangerous bitterness which could fuel the violent enthusiasms of fringe elements – the Clockwork Orange brigade – who indulge in bover-boy attacks on journalists and their craft.

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***Is there someone out there listening?***

To sum up, a new media order requires:

1. A broadcasting policy for TV and radio – incidentally, designed by a task group inclusive of all parties to the South African negotiations and not just hand-picked by government – which will guarantee air access to all significant political parties and interests.

2. An enlightened reconstruction of the established newspapers, to ensure that near-monopoly is broken, preferably at the initiative of the groups themselves – to put it bluntly, to give other major interests like the ANC a "piece of the action".

3. Strong support among institutional advertisers and other influential interests for the struggling alternative newspapers, so that – unlike the *Rand Daily Mail* in the turmoil of 1985 – they will not fade from the scene just when most needed. The investment is small when compared with the returns to be reaped in a peaceful and prosperous South Africa.

4. Entrenched free expression in a new constitution, to foster the environment for a healthy media.

Is there someone out there listening? ●



**M  
A  
X**

**DU PREEZ**



*Following the murder of Sowetan journalist Sam Mabe by unknown assassins, Raymond Ackerman established a scholarship at Rhodes University in his memory. What follows are extracts from the inaugural Ackerman Press Freedom Lecture by Max du Preez, editor of Vrye Weekblad*

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The Inaugural

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**ACKERMAN**

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**PRESS FREEDOM**

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**LECTURE**

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**M**AY I first congratulate the Department of Journalism and Media Studies of Rhodes University on their 21st anniversary. It is and has been a magnificent school. Over the last decade I have worked with several of the graduates of this department and they represent the best of our profession.

It was very appropriate for the department to have launched the *Journalism Review* in this anniversary year. It is an excellent, well-balanced publication and it fills a huge void in our professional life. After just two editions it has established itself as the flagship of the journalistic profession in South Africa. 📖



**T**HOMAS JEFFERSON once said: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."

Perhaps, as American politicians are prone to do, Jefferson was overstating his case. However, I do believe that a country with a flawed constitution but with a vigorous, independent press is much better off than a country with a good constitution but a lame, unfree press. In our modern world, only societies with lively, independent newspapers, radio and television stations are truly democratic. When checks and balances are what one is looking for in a constitution, a free media is step one.

Judging by the widely different proposals for a new constitution for South Africa and the fundamental compromises that will therefore have to be made by all sides in our polarised society, we can accept that the first constitution of the New South Africa is likely to be a flawed one.

We have the additional disadvantage that after generations of oligarchic white rule, there is no culture of a really free media in South Africa, not in the white community and certainly also not in the black community.

The Afrikaans newspapers were founded with the purpose of supporting Afrikaner nationalism and therefore apartheid and did so very effectively. The English-language newspapers, almost exclusively owned by big capital, have always served the narrow interests of the white entrepreneurial classes. Both white newspaper groups, therefore, had a cosy relationship with their constituencies within the apartheid system. And where a newspaper violated this cosiness, as did the *Rand Daily Mail*, it was dealt with.

**The black** community was always hampered by large-scale illiteracy and poverty, and the early black newspapers were run by and produced for a small elite. When the community could sustain viable newspapers, it got the kind of product that had to live within the narrow parameters of the apartheid system and was owned by white capital. When these newspapers started pushing those parameters, as did *The World*, it was summarily banned by the government and the journalists detained.

It is because of these reasons that there has never really been a massive outcry by the South African public when the National Party government restricted press freedom, jailed or banned journalists or closed down newspapers.

It is also for these reasons that the white establishment reacted with considerable hostility to the advent of the frontier journalism of the so-called alternative press; and it is for these reasons that there is still so much intolerance in the black community towards black journalists who try to be independent.

Journalists themselves are the only people who can repair this damage and restore or create a mentality among the majority of South Africans where a free and independent press is not seen as a privilege, but as an absolute right.



We will only be able to achieve that if we show all our communities that, despite the political differences we may have, our main mission is to inform them fearlessly and in a fair and balanced fashion; and to be the wide-awake guardians of freedom of speech, of democracy and of human rights and dignity.

It is easier to do that now than before February 2, 1990, but there still is a list of laws as long as my arm restricting the freedoms of the media. Of course the bureaucracy and the securocrats are way behind the State President and would love to charge and prosecute as in the good old days. But the fact of the matter is that there is more freedom for the media in South Africa today than probably anywhere in Africa or perhaps anywhere in the developing world. I am just not sure that

all of us are equally prepared to exercise that freedom to the full.

**It is clear** that the concept freedom of the media has two legs: statutory freedom or the freedom that the state allows the media; and the freedom manifested by the media itself.

On the eve of constitutional negotiations, all the main political parties state on paper that they will guarantee a free media. But there is one lesson every journalist learns sooner or later: never, ever trust a politician, not even the one that you have voted for yourself. It is in the nature of the beast to dislike all journalists.

It is of crucial importance that we as journalists and as citizens demand an entrenchment in our new constitution of the rights of freedom of speech and opinion as firm as that of the American First Amendment.

There is an argument that the First Amendment provides too much protection and that it is therefore very difficult for an American politician to sue successfully for published defamation.

I think that is an additional reason why we should have a similar protection. During a period of 18 months, *Vrye Weekblad*, the newspaper I work for, was sued for defamation by three senior civil servants and a state president. Two cases have actually been in court, and all indications are that it is going to cost the taxpayer in the region of R2-million. The legal costs to *Vrye Weekblad* at this stage are just over R1,1 million. In every case the basis of the litigation was criticism by the newspaper of the way the public figure executed his public duties, and in every case the litigation was sponsored by the state.

The fear of a libel suit brought by a politician or a civil servant and the exorbitant costs of Supreme Court litigation have served as one of the most powerful forms of self-censorship in the newspaper world in South Africa. This form of restriction of press freedom should also be tempered.

There is another dangerous trend that has shown itself in recent months, and that is the practice of granting Supreme Court interdicts to gag newspapers. The case of Mr Vito Palazzolo versus the *Sunday Times* is the most outrageous one that has severely dented the credibility of the courts, but there

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were also two others in recent months. *Vrye Weekblad* has also had one such experience, but fortunately we could have it overturned. These so-called temporary interdicts may, in fact, last many months, even years, if there is an appeal to the Appellate Division.

Allow me to quote the *Sunday Times* editor, Ken Owen, on this, because even when he talks nonsense he says it better than I can: "Newspapers are answerable at law, and the courts should not lightly usurp, even temporarily, the duty of editors to decide what may, and what may not, be lawfully published. If this trend continues, we regret to predict, newspapers will simply cease to give the subject of a report the chance, in fairness, to comment before publication. They will publish first, and argue in court later."

I believe that the present Media Council, however flawed it may be, is a system that can work. *Vrye Weekblad* recently had a fairly serious conflict with the police, and to save legal costs we both agreed to mediation by the Media Council. *Vrye Weekblad* and the SA Police are not exactly fans of each other's approaches and actions, but within two hours we reached an agreement. Both sides were satisfied, we did not waste our money or that of the taxpayer, and for a few days afterwards we actually had a workable relationship. I hope the status and standing of the Media Council will improve, because that can enhance the freedom of the media as well as its relationship with the public and individuals in public life.

**Let us** look now at the other leg of media freedom, the media itself.

The first thing that strikes an outside observer about our media is how monopolistic it is. Monopolies anywhere are unhealthy, but in the information business they are a serious health hazard. Diversity is absolutely essential.

Let us discard immediately any suggestion of "closing down" or "nationalising" any of these newspapers. No serious journalist or democrat will go along with that. The answer, in my view, lies not in "breaking" the monopoly publishing companies, but rather ensuring that the non-monopolistic or independent media survive and flourish. That would ensure the balance; that would prevent serious distortions and misrepresentations. Because not only does society have access to other sources of information and opinion than that of the big publishing companies, but the mere existence of other media and the material they publish will influence the bigger publishers and force them to take a wider look at society and its ills.

I am, of course, talking about what is commonly called the "alternative" press, and by "alternative" a whole lot of people, including media people, mean "fringe".

An article in the last edition of the *Rhodes Journalism Review* on the alternative press by the co-editor and co-founder of one of the pioneers in this field, the *Weekly Mail*, had done us all a lot of harm and was a very poor reflection of what is actually going on in the independent press. His article was widely reproduced elsewhere and was translated

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**"There is a  
lesson every  
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sooner or later:  
never, ever trust  
a politician, not  
even the one  
that you have  
voted for  
yourself. It is in  
the nature of the  
beast to dislike  
all journalists"**

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and published with great glee in *Die Burger* and *Beeld* as a kind of farewell to the alternative press.

The esteemed co-editor starts his article off with these words: "The alternative press will soon die." I say to him: Speak for yourself. No-one dies quicker than he who has lost the desire to live.

The co-editor also wrote: "The alternative press is running out of causes". Again I say to him: Speak for yourself because the independent press has never been more healthy and buoyant and motivated as it is now. February 2, 1990 and FW de Klerk liberated us and gave us a new lease on life.

It is true that we were born during the dark days of repression, States of Emergency and censorship – those harsh days of the PW Botha era. We believed the existing newspapers did not reflect the real issues and struggles of the South African people; we believed they were silent on a whole range of issues in our society because it was safer and cosier not to bring them up; we believed they did not fight hard enough against censorship and tyranny; we believed that they did not give a voice to large sections of our nation.

So most of us, for the sake of balance, embarked on a degree of advocacy journalism. It was a very serious business, and risky and dangerous at the same time. It also produced some of the finest, proudest moments in South Africa's media history. I want to believe it had a profound effect on public debate and, as importantly, on the mainstream media who knew that the era of comfortable and smug journalism was over.

But the advent of one Frederik de Klerk, the lifting of the State of Emergency, the release of political leaders, the unbanning of political movements and the commitment to negotiations changed the whole ballgame.

The worst forms of repression, of apartheid and of censorship were done away with. A large part of our original task was fulfilled.

But we never planned to be just a flash in the pan, or to have a short, glorious life as media 'terrorists'. We believed then, as we believe now, that we are professional journalists in the first place, and a journalist's work is never done.

**The kind** of journalism we felt we had to practise in those early days was exciting in the extreme, as my personal three criminal convictions and 11 court cases can testify. But February 2 relieved us of a large part of that awesome early burden.

We could afford to spend our energy and talents on those facets of journalism that are so terribly important: good writing, good culture, good sport, good fun and humour. We could start concentrating on good journalism rather than just being good watchdogs.

It is significant that, instead of withering away or being on our death-beds, every single one of the member newspapers in the Conference of Independent Newspaper Editors (CINE), that is *New Nation*, *Vrye Weekblad*, *South* and *New African*,

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has seen a substantial increase in circulation as well as advertising revenue since February 2 1990. One of those newspapers whose imminent death we hear so much about, *New Nation*, has just rocketed to 410 000 readers. That must say something.

Newspapers such as *Vrye Weekblad* and *South* have changed their whole approach and format. *Vrye Weekblad*, for example, is now a news magazine. Perhaps it is because the *Weekly Mail* has not changed that they are dying.

I am not saying that everything is fine in the affairs of the independent media. All these newspapers were started by journalists, and to this day we are struggling to catch up with those years of neglect in the fields of management, marketing, distribution and advertising.

Even our editorial mix is still not always right, and some of us tend to still be too political and even predictable at times. But we are learning our lessons fast and the future is exciting rather than gloomy.

The task ahead of the independents is as important as the one we set ourselves in those early years – to spearhead the march to a new, peaceful, just and prosperous South Africa; to work for a truly open and tolerant society where every citizen will count; to build a strong, enthusiastic and united nation. With our pioneering experience and the substantial credibility we have earned in the oppressed communities, we are in an excellent position to do that.

I feel very strongly that the time has come to cut the rhetoric, to end the war of words between the independent press and the mainstream media. The cowboys, the upstarts, the print guerrillas on the one hand and the commercial press, the lackeys of the white state and of big capital on the other. These have become senseless insults caused by unnecessary conflict, professional jealousy and one-upmanship. On the other hand, we should not be over-sensitive about mutual criticism – the so-called “dog-eat-dog” doctrine – because newspapers are instruments of democracy and should always be prepared to be criticised. As my favourite philosopher, Naas Botha, used to say: Cowboys don’t cry – especially not in front of horses.

But it is as important for our society as it is for the mainstream media that the independent press survive into the New South Africa. And if it is really true, as we are told by some, that the mainstream media want us to survive because it is also in their interest, the time to act together is now.

**It must** be abundantly clear to everyone but a few hardliners that the claim that a free enterprise or libertarian media model guarantees a free exchange of information, opinion and ideas is not true – at least not in our divided and unequal society with its sad history of apartheid, indoctrination and division.

Let me give you a crude example of our predicament. If *Vrye Weekblad* with all its human and technical resources and talents were to decide tomorrow to align itself with the white rightwing, we would sell 100 000 copies by the end of the year and make a million rand profit by the end of next year. But our choice is to stick to democracy, non-racialism and quality journalism, and that means remaining poor and small.



If the independent press is to survive in the long term and to produce even better newspapers, we will need more help than the cynical white middle-class media planners at advertising agencies are prepared to give us. They are the people who *really* count in the media.

With this in mind the Conference of Independent Newspaper Editors will soon make proposals to the Newspaper Press Union, of which we are not yet a part, for the creation of at least a temporary support system for all young and struggling newspapers that deserve a place in the media market. We are using the Swedish, Dutch and Belgian systems as models.

I do not think we should wait for a new constitution or a new government; I think we in the media industry should initiate such a support system now and present it

to the government.

The independent newspapers did not have the luxury of huge and financially strong mother companies when they started out. They all started on the savings of the individual journalists and on grants from foreign governments and institutions that have now all but dried up.

But with a little help we can overcome those drawbacks. A little help such as more favourable deals from those printing and distribution companies that are part of the same newspaper monopolies. The cost of distribution, for instance, is killing us. Putting up the cover price does not help, though, because the distribution companies – or at least the largest one – works on the very strange principle that you pay just under 50 percent of your cover price for distribution, be that 80 cents or R8.

The mainstream media itself felt the pinch of a smaller advertising cake when television took its slice, and negotiated the M-Net deal with government. If the mainstream media is serious about allowing a diversity of publications to survive, is it not a good idea to let the independent press also share in the benefit of M-Net shares?

**I have** concentrated mainly on the print media, but the reality is that for the greater South African population with their high illiteracy rates, radio is far more important. And apart from radio there is the extremely powerful TV1, 2 and 3 channels.

There has recently been a flurry of demands for the airwaves to be freed, for radio and TV licences to be issued freely and for the entire SABC to be privatised. I think this is dangerous. Most of the people now clamouring for radio licences would not have an idea what to do with one if they got it. My fear is that in the end the airwaves will be completely dominated by commercial stations with an overriding profit motive. That would not benefit those people who are illiterate or who live in outlying rural areas one bit.

I believe in our country the main radio and television stations will for at least some years still have to be in the hands of the state, of course with private competition.

The question in my mind is: Can we really wait until we have a new government to see the control of the SABC change into the hands of the representatives of the majority? I sincerely hope that Christo Viljoen’s Task Force would

PLEASE TURN OVER

consider replacing the present control board of the SABC with its massive infrastructure with a new board representative of the major political parties in our country. And this should be addressed now, not in two years' time. This period of transition is too crucial for this decision to be postponed.

**There is** a lot of paranoia at the moment in white Afrikaans circles about the survival of Afrikaans as a language and of Afrikaans newspapers and magazines. Some of this makes me very depressed. Can you imagine what the reaction would be if Mangosuthu Buthelezi were to get on a public platform and announce that if Zulu is not declared an official language of South Africa, he will muster his impis and turn South Africa into a bloodbath?

Yet read this: "If Afrikaans is sidetracked or stripped of its official status or artificially kept out, then we are looking for serious trouble, no matter what government. Such a course of action will bring forth big and fierce resistance. It will be a ruinous day if white Afrikaans-speakers across the spectrum judge that they must unite to fight for the preservation of their language. Their capacity for destruction will be massive, dwarfing the resistance efforts we have come to know in Northern Ireland, Lebanon and elsewhere."

Andries Treurnicht? Eugene TerreBlanche? No, those bloodthirsty words were written in the last *Rhodes Journalism Review* by none other than the managing director of Nasionale Pers and chairman of M-Net, Mr Ton Vosloo. It makes one want to apply for political asylum in a Boerestaat.

Afrikaans is the home language of more than five million people. According to the 1980 census, more than 13 million South Africans can speak and understand Afrikaans compared

with 12,3 million people who can speak and understand English.

Afrikaans is a language of Africa. It is an indigenous South African language just as Zulu or Xhosa or Sotho is. It is a beautiful, alive and passionate language. It will never disappear.

The best thing that can happen to Afrikaans now is for it to be stripped of all its artificial official protection and its elevated status above other indigenous languages. Liberate the language of the chains of Afrikaner nationalism and white power and it will flourish and grow. It has no moral or other right to have a higher status than other languages. It is exactly this attitude that has made it the hated language of the oppressor.

**Afrikaans** should not be a Casspir language, Broederbond language, a policeman language, a magistrate or prison warden language. We should hijack it and give it back to the ordinary people of whatever colour. It can also be a language of Liberation and of Unity.

If somebody asked me now what the biggest threat against the media in the New South Africa was, my answer would be short and simple: Mediocrity and boredom. A big greyness that will engulf us all. May God and a new generation of hot-blooded, robust and imaginative reporters save us from that. ●

**“Liberate the language of the chains of Afrikaner nationalism and white power and it will flourish and grow”**

## NATURAL FACTS

# Meet the soundproofing system developed 65-million years ago – which is still at the leading edge

In perpetual search of "live" food, almost exclusively the only type of food it will eat, it is a matter of life and death for the owl to be able to approach its prey swiftly and undetected.

For the owl seeking terrestrial prey, this requires incredible stealth. Adaptations to the physique of the prey-hunting owl have thus evolved over the past 65-million years to meet this requirement: the disproportionately large size of the wings to body mass, enabling buoyant, effortless flight; and the exceptionally dense, soft and smooth qualities of the plumage. This greatly reduces air turbulence and even eliminates ultrasonic sounds.

But perhaps the most remarkable of all are

the miniscule barbs along the leading edge of the outermost primary feathers. These barbs, which lock the feather vane into a firm but flexible structure, curve forward in a unique fashion to form a highly effective aerodynamic front.

The near-silent flight of the owl enables it not only to hunt successfully but also to continue listen-

ing for sounds of its own aggressors while in flight. And thus, over millions of years, it has adapted to survive and continue as a species.

As one of the country's largest employers we, too, have learned to adapt and adjust to changing conditions, using the skills inherited by generations of experience. Skills, however, which are enhanced by advanced technology and the progressive, innovative thinking of our people. Throughout the many diverse industries within the Murray & Roberts group, we also use our skills to participate in the communities we serve, to help build a better future for all South Africans.

Above all, we never stop learning.



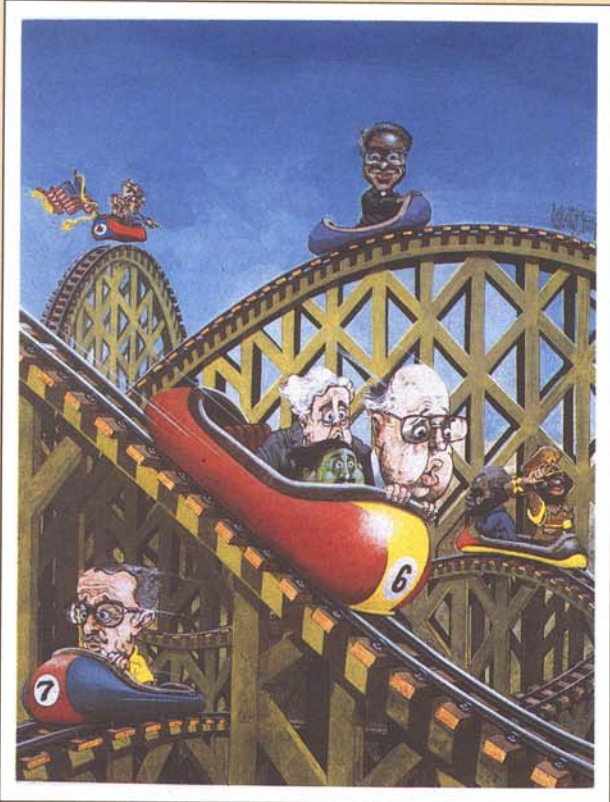
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Progress based on knowledge

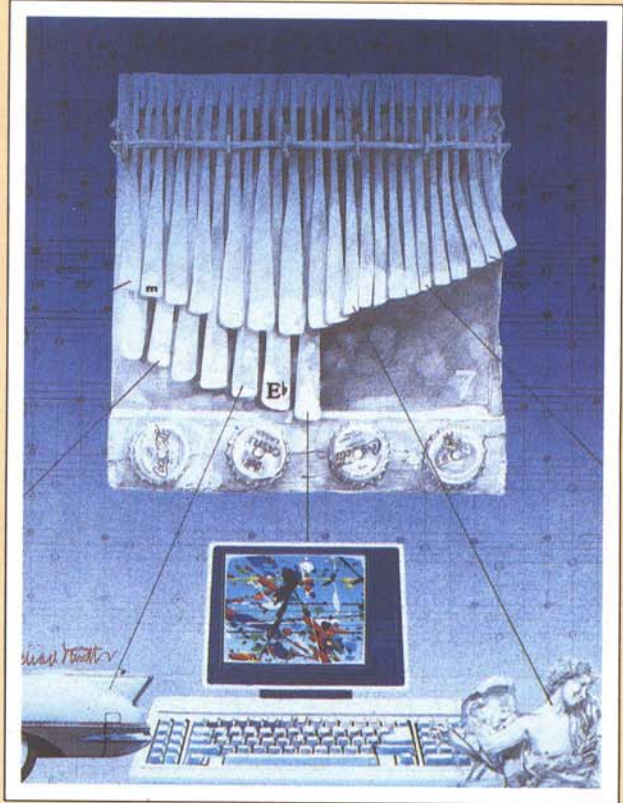
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“There always seemed to be three or four articles that were perfect for illustration”



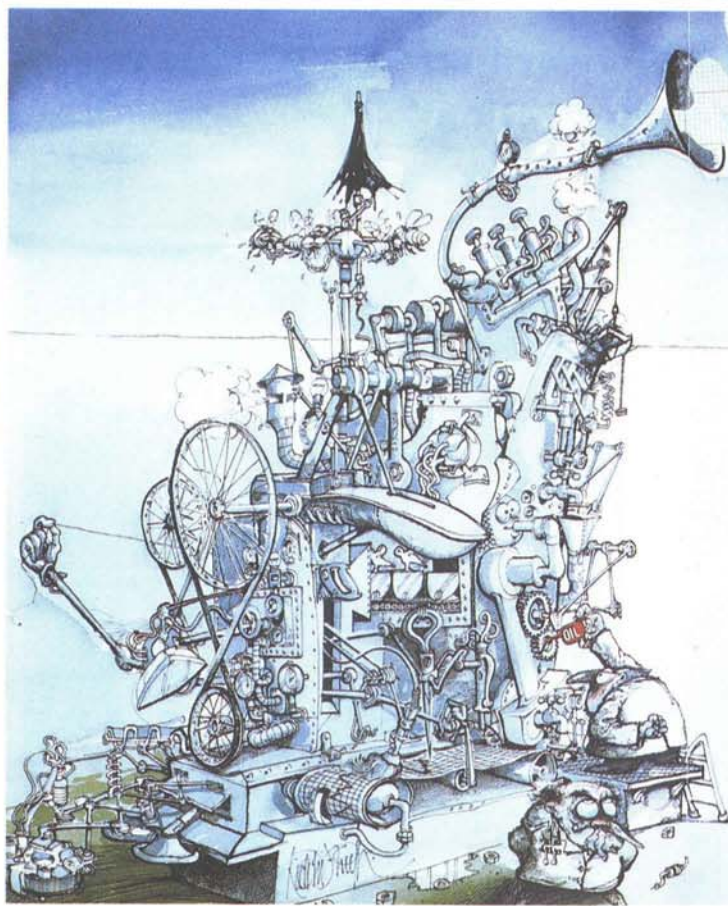
1985: An acrylic painting to illustrate a feature article on South Africa's fluctuating foreign policy.



1986: Pencil, acrylic and airbrush combine for a piece on the influence of African music on the West.

## THROUGH THE EYE OF **RICHARD SMITH**

*Increasingly custom graphics are playing a leading role in the well-designed magazine package. They add something that no photograph can offer and contribute enormously to the readability of any publication. On this and the following pages Review looks at the graphic solutions of one of southern Africa's leading illustrators.*



## THE ENGINEER SHORTAGE

**SERIOUS UNEMPLOYMENT LOOMS THROUGH LACK OF TECHNICAL SKILLS**  
**PROFESSOR DIRK DE VOS, PRESIDENT, SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL OF PROFESSIONAL ENGINEERS**

**S**outh Africa's rather unique manpower establishment — a large unskilled labour force and a small population of the population supplying the skilled labour, expertise and brain power — brings with it a particularly difficult challenge.

We have to provide work for a rapidly growing number of work-seekers. It is important that we apply technologies relevant to our needs, which rely from relatively unsophisticated labour-intensive technologies in rural homelands to highly sophisticated technologies to make South Africa more self-reliant and less dependent on overseas know-how, even in the highly competitive export market.

To meet the challenges facing them, industrialists and infrastructure-providers require in their organizations professional engineers who are able to keep abreast of modern developments, who are able to apply available knowledge appropriately, who can innovate, and

who can even develop new knowledge and apply it in new technologies.

These engineers have to ensure that they get their fair share of the country's educated manpower. More than 80 per cent of school leavers with matriculation exemption proceed to university, and industry therefore has to employ engineering graduates to obtain its share.

The Stratacker Commission found that there was a close correlation between the number of engineers in a country and that country's GDP. This should increase by at least five to six per cent a year if we are to keep unemployment within safe limits. In South Africa it is expected to increase by between zero and four per cent during the next few years. If this trend continues it will cause unemployment to rise to unacceptable levels.

The 13th (1979) Manpower Survey by the Department of Manpower revealed that professionally qualified engineers constituted

0.3 per cent of the total labour force in the Republic — significantly less than other western countries. In other industrialized countries 0.8 per cent — 1.5 per cent of the labour force were engineers, except for the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium where they constituted 0.4 per cent — 0.6 per cent. In these latter countries there were, however, proportionately many more technologists and technicians than in South Africa.

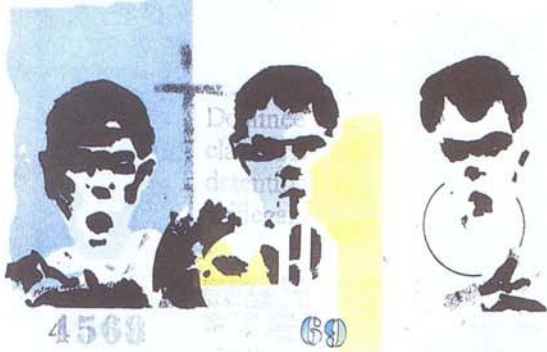
Engineering graduates make up about eight per cent of all our university graduates. In other industrialized countries, the Stratacker Commission found that this figure was about 15 per cent, nearly double the South African proportion.

The same Commission also found that South Africa produced rather fewer engineering graduates per 100,000 of white and urban non-white population than most other industrialized countries.



**TOP:** (1982) — Pen and ink, and watercolour collage for this spread on the dearth of engineers.  
**ABOVE:** (1988) — Feature on Privatisation entitled *Breaking the Mould*, airbrush and acrylic.  
**RIGHT:** (1987) — Airbrush and acrylic for this illustration from a spread on local universities.





*Necklacing is the most singular and spectacular form of murder in living memory.*

responsible for the deaths of three children who were crushed by a truck near his village. Between September 1984 and the end of April 1985, at least 500 people were burnt to death by other members of the community in which they lived. By July nearly 1,000 had been arrested for these crimes, clearly only a small proportion of the number involved in the killings.

During the two stages of emergency a flood of almost complete silence that continues to the present time descended on the township, heightened only dimly by the dubious pronouncements of the Department of Information. Accurate figures are now impossible to assemble and it is likely that no one knows the number of people who have died in this way.

By the middle of 1986 more than 1,700 black-owned businesses, over 4,000 homes of more successful members of the black community, 25 churches, 54 halls, a few government offices and dozens of buses and cars had been destroyed. A black doctor who possesses a Mercedes-Benz motor car took to parking in Johannesburg in order to safeguard his car and stretch the township by bicycle to his patients.

Only one of the victims up to the present time has been white. The necklacing is wholly an African phenomenon, both perpetrator and victim being black. It is the result of an unbridled and unrelenting aggression, an aggression that

ignores the real enemy and looks on and to find the means of weakness, deceit, dishonesty and dishonesty within the oppressed community itself. It is not difficult to see Freud's death wish at work here. The life force, constantly frustrated, eventually finding no other for an outlet, turns back on itself, seeking weakness. Healthy aggression, the vital force that is the root of each species' survival, has in this case supported for wrong, undirected inward and to strike at any point where there is an available target.

The black South African has simply been required to sacrifice too much of himself in order to get through each day; he has suffered too many humiliations, great and small, too much governmental restriction, too much unnecessary anxiety and, above all, he has seen too great a distance develop between himself and his African roots. It was Jung who taught us that we dare not sacrifice ourselves for the attainment of our objectives. His words, written half a century ago and referring specifically to the individual, seem at this point to be most applicable to the South African generally: "The aspect of himself for the South African being sacrificed is the attainment of a given objective in their lives in reborn and reborn, and in the aspects of themselves that black South Africans have been forced to sacrifice, their human dignity, their freedom, their very masculinity and femininity, have



returned, knife in hand, seeking any possible target for revenge.

Most a result is disaffected and rejected. We see it still as a dark constant, dominated by ignorance and illiteracy. Even its friends view it through eyes of pity rather than respect.

African society has been destroyed and is set to be replaced by anything acceptable to its peoples. African knowledge is indelible. Its young no longer know the ways of the wild. The children of people who could travel unarmoured on foot through wild and forbidding landscapes, living off the most delicious tubers and roots, were merely seeking out fishing trees or capturing the proliferating spring hare; their children no longer possess even the beginnings of such knowledge. The knowledge of this generation of African children extends no further than the law of urban survival that governs life on the township streets.

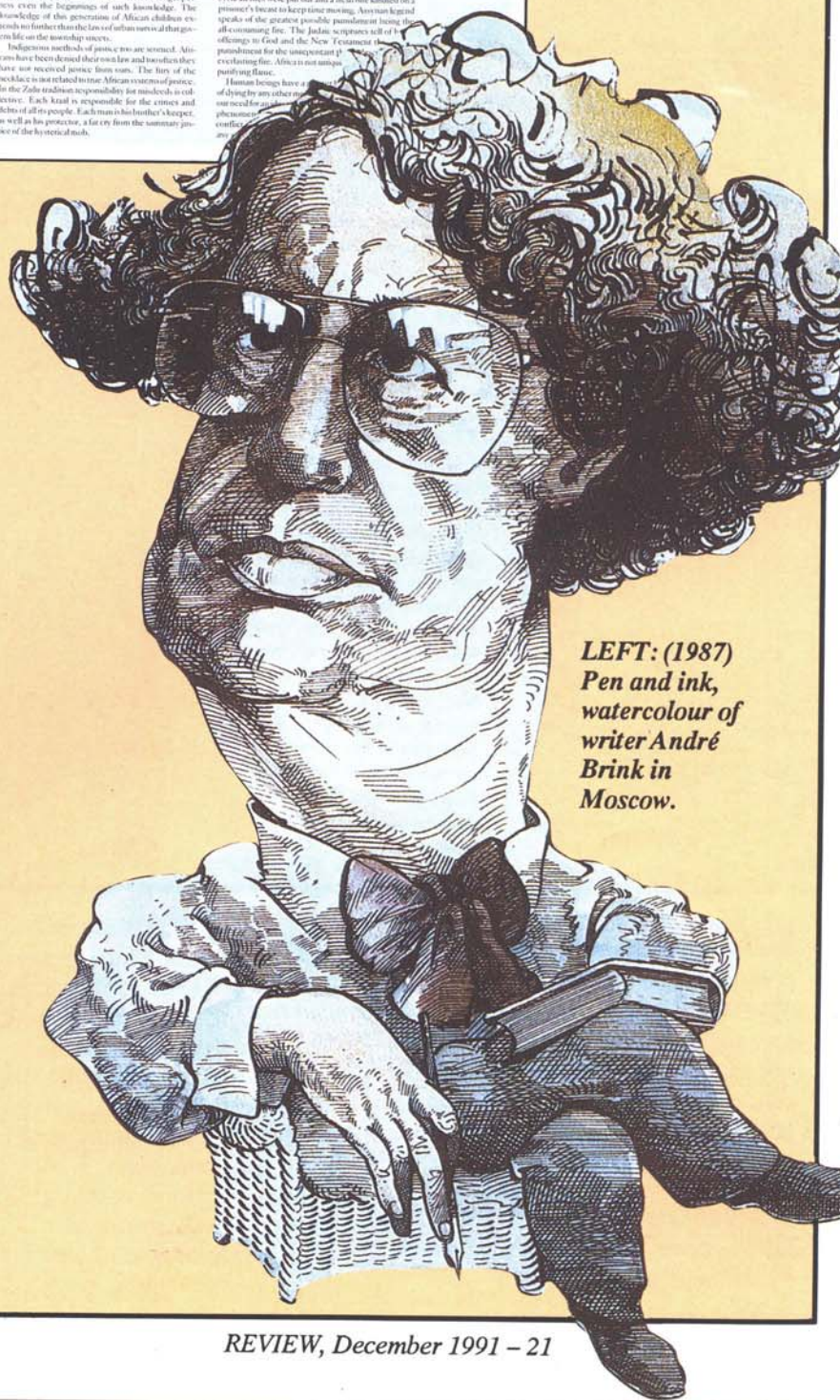
Indigenous methods of justice, as an example, Africans have been denied their own law and to which they have no need of justice from ours. The fury of the necklacing is not related to the African systems of justice. In the Zulu tradition responsibility for manslaughter is collective. Each head is responsible for the crimes and deaths of all its people. Each man is his brother's keeper, as well as his protector, a far cry from the summary justice of the hysterical mob.

The necklacing itself, the rite that punishes the arms and prevents the victim from doing anything to put out the flames, is not the most significant part of the phenomenon. It is the flame that is the key. The rite is a matter of convenience. They litter the subject's eyes, as each as a child and no one can do this effectively. It is the fire that kills.

Mythology is full of fire rites. Fire worship and fire goddesses are commonplace. The Tominic tradition had a legend of fire giant, Ji to. Slavs believed that the holy faces of the holy and good people possessed a purifying flame. In the Victorian culture of ancient America, fire was linked to some itself. At the end of each 52-year cycle all faces were put out and a skull was landed on a prisoner's breast to keep time moving. Assam legend speaks of the greatest possible punishment being the self-consuming fire. The Judeo-Christianity of the offerings to God and the New Testament punishment for the unsavory part of the purifying flame. Human beings have a need of dying by one other or another. We need a need for a death. Each man is his brother's keeper, as well as his protector, a far cry from the summary justice of the hysterical mob.

*The fury of the necklacing is not related to true African systems of justice.*

**LEFT: (1987) – India ink, pencil, charcoal, acrylic, airbrush...to illustrate an article on 'necklacing' entitled Ring of Fire by the acclaimed local writer Wessel Ebersohn. This illustration led to the artist's doing a number of illustrations for the Harvard Business Review.**



**LEFT: (1987) Pen and ink, watercolour of writer André Brink in Moscow.**

**P**AINTER, ILLUSTRATOR, cartoonist Richard Smith is a man of few words. He prefers to let his work do the talking. The work on these pages is culled from *Leadership* magazine where Smith did much of his best illustrating. The illustrations clearly mark his departure from cartooning, although the influence of caricature is still strong in much of the work.

In the 1970s Richard Smith was highly visible and arguably the leading political cartoonist of that decade in southern Africa, working for the SAAN stable of newspapers. But he grew tired of pampering politicians' egos and of the graphic limitations of caricature and finally branched into other fields.

Smith's creative talents were not entirely lost to publishing, however, as he continued providing cover illustrations for the *Financial Mail* and *Frontline*, and he became heavily involved in the up-market magazine *Leadership*. Richard Smith takes up the story



1982: An illustration in pen and ink, and acrylic showing a strong cartoon emphasis to support an interview with US diplomat Chet Crocker explaining the US policy of Constructive Engagement'.

## RICHARD SMITH

CONTINUED

"**THE WORK** I did for *Leadership* was successful, I think, because I managed to keep a variety of different graphic styles going at the same time and, in many cases, even in the same issue.

"By using different mediums and techniques, I could make three or four illustrations throughout one edition of the magazine look as if they were done by different people.

"We used other illustrators at times, but basically the creative team in the early days of *Leadership* was the troika of Hugh Murray, the photographer David Goldblatt and myself.

"Editorial meetings were casual affairs. We used to decide which articles needed visual support and bounce ideas off each other. There always seemed to be three or four articles that were perfect for illustration.

"From light-hearted cartoon treatment to mixed-media graphic support

for heavyweight articles, all were part of *Leadership's* graphic challenge.

"Then Hugh Murray moved everything and everyone down to Cape Town to be nearer his production facilities, but I stayed in Johannesburg and continued to do the illustrations at arms' length. But by then I was so into the creative life and flow of the magazine that I managed to continue illustrating from a distance. In fact, I think I did some of my best work during this period." ●



# PR SHOULD SELL, NOT TELL

*Although Public Relations practitioners need to employ selling skills in order to influence the media favourably, few meet the standards practised by effective and professional salespeople, writes **LINDA TRUMP***

**D**URING the 10 years I have worked as a journalist and magazine editor, I have often wondered why public relations practitioners so rarely provide me or my readers with information of real value.

While I am bombarded by a continuous flow of press releases, averaging at least three a day, I only use about five of these pieces per month in abbreviated form in our "New Products & Services" column. The rest are simply relegated to File Thirteen. And with one or two exceptions, none has ever been worthy of publishing as a self-standing article.

The same goes for the regular invitations received for press launches. Few are ever of direct relevance to our target market and with time being at a premium, it does not pay to attend the majority of these events.

Colleagues in the publishing world share similar sentiments to the above. Which makes one wonder why PR companies so rarely seem to meet the specific needs of the print media.

In my opinion, the problem stems primarily from poor selling skills, and the lack of awareness regarding the fact that public relations is fundamentally a selling activity.

The Public Relations Institute defines PR as "the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics."

Compare this statement to the definition of selling provided by HK Nixon in his book titled *Principles of Selling*: "Selling has to do with all the numerous activities whereby individuals or firms possessing goods or rendering services seek to influence others to trade with them. Salesmanship is a popular term used to designate the arts practised by sellers in their attempt to influence others to buy."

Both definitions refer to the fundamental activity of influencing the public favourably. However, the PRISA definition does not specifically mention the key role practitioners need to play in order to influence, or sell, the press on passing on information to their respective readers.

If one accepts at face value that persuading the press to publish certain information requires a modicum of salesmanship, then many PR companies fare very poorly in this regard.

According to research carried out by international training consultants, Wilson Learning and Beveridge Systems, salespeople predictably progress through three distinct skills levels.

*Speak  
to  
individual  
editors in  
order to  
determine  
what  
story  
angle  
would  
interest  
them*

## Level 1 – befriending customers

Regrettably, PR practitioners generally employ only the skills used by inexperienced salespeople at Levels 1 or 2 of the model, as follows:

### Focus on 'pleasing' the customer

At Level 1, salespeople attempt to sell by making friends with customers. This often entails inviting them to social and sporting activities and providing them with gifts in order to curry favour.

The PR industry excels in this area, assuming that journalists simply love the distraction of breakfasts, cocktail parties, tennis matches, and the like. However, if they were to survey media people, they would find that many of them resent the time wasted in "sitting around" waiting for presentations to begin.

At a recent meeting I attended, a prominent financial editor deliberately arrived late and then interrupted lengthy introductions by stating "Who cares who I am. Just get to the point and tell us why you dragged us out here in the first place."

His acerbic comment had the desired effect and the meeting immediately swung into action with more hard core information being exchanged than I have ever experienced at a press event.

### Concentrate on activity rather than results

Like the lowly order taker, PR practitioners often focus on reaching as many media people as they can, rather than targeting a few quality prospects. As few magazines or newspapers like publishing information which has clearly been disseminated to everyone in town, this "spray and pray" strategy usually backfires.

### Reluctance to ask for the order

Embarrassed at being seen as pushy, PR practitioners often fail to follow through in order to find out whether their offering meets the editor's needs and can be used.

They habitually 'close' or append messages to their letterheads like "Call us if you need any further information." Hardly an incentive to action!

## Level 2 – the peddler

When commercial salespeople (read PR practitioners) are pressurised by management or their clients to produce tangible results, they usually evolve into peddlers, characterised by:

### "Pitches" versus needs analysis

At this level, PR practitioners habitually bombard editors with generalised information concerning their clients' activities, products or services, often at the rate of one release a week. Pressurised to produce results, they then phone up to find out whether the editor will be using the material or attending the press launch.

When the answer is no, they often fail to comprehend why, and sometimes resort to a "deal orientation" where they either refer to client advertising which has already appeared or the imminent possibility of ad support should the recalcitrant editor publish the required information. The underlying assumption here is that one favour deserves another and that editors focus primarily on raising ad revenues, and not on producing quality copy.

What these amateur practitioners fail to respect is that professional editors rarely bow to threats and will refuse to budge unless the PRO can produce material of specific interest for the readership in question.

### Level 3 – needs orientation

Only at Level 3, do salespeople (or PR practitioners) exhibit selling skills worthy of being called professional.

It is only at this level, that practitioners stop focussing solely on their own needs and consciously attempt to find ways in which they can customise information or events to meet editors' specific needs.

In other words, before they bash out the same press release to everyone, these practitioners speak to individual editors in order to determine what information or story angle would interest them specifically.

They then focus on conveying only the information which will be of specific use to the editor in question. And where they lack sufficient background, they take the trouble either to glean the information themselves or to put the editor in touch with the relevant client expert.

These more sophisticated practitioners recognise that unless they are able to differentiate themselves from their competitors by providing a unique service or article, they are likely to be eclipsed by more interesting information.

I once met a public relations consultant who met this description. A former journalist, he went out of his way to contact editors before he touched his typewriter in order to discuss how he could create a story uniquely tailored for their target markets. Using this approach, every single one of his articles was published.

In a more advanced stage of third level selling, the PR practitioner becomes a sustaining resource to his media contacts by providing them with innovative ideas and support which enhance the overall growth and appearance of their publications.

I only experienced this kind of assistance once when a prominent PR consultant took the trouble to send me copies of overseas articles or snippets of information which she thought I might find useful.

Not only were these items useful, but they also endeared me to this particular practitioner, with the result that I always went out of my way to support her when she held events which were of any pertinence to our target market. In a nutshell, what I am advising PR practitioners to do is refine their selling skills. They can start by implementing the following practices:

**Study the media you are seeking to influence: Who are the readers/listeners/viewers (in terms of age, occupation, sex, income bracket, etc.)? What kind of content is generally featured in this medium?**

**Present information to this medium so that it would interest its target market.**

**Once you have come up with a good angle, phone up the editor or producer and discuss your idea. Are they interested? And if you submit it, how likely are they to publish it? (This preamble is essential as it clarifies what you need to do and builds commitment. Few people feel comfortable making promises which they subsequently fail to honour.)**

**Write your story so that it matches the format used by the publication. For example, if the publication uses introductory paragraphs and pull quotes, make sure that you provide these. Also match the length and style of the article to those used by the magazine. This is the hallmark of the true professional.**

**After submitting your story, or sending off the invitation, phone to find out whether it meets the editor's needs (not if he or she will be using it). If your information falls short of the mark, find out why and then rework it until it meets the editor's needs. (Contrary to popular opinion, editors do not enjoy fixing up PR peoples' poor grammar or incomplete stories, especially when they have been paid good money by their clients to produce the item correctly in the first place.)**

**Find out if any support material is required and then make sure you send exactly what the editor needs, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant the publication may seem. Remember your client is paying you a sizeable retainer in order to do a thorough, and not a half-baked job. Can you really afford to risk information about your client being published in a slipshod way, accompanied by grainy photographs taken by the editor?**

**Last, but not least, when information is published by the media, remember to thank the editor! This is the one area in business dealings where a little social charm can go a long way. And this gesture means a lot more to hard-worked editors than a dozen boring breakfasts or cocktail parties.**

*Write  
your  
story so  
that it  
matches  
the  
format  
used  
by the  
publication*

LINDA Trump is editor of *Successful Salesmanship* magazine.



## WHEN ONLY SILENCE REIGNS

**NOMAVENDA MATHIANE** looks back on the days when black journalists surrendered editorial integrity in the face of threats from political factions and suggests this form of intimidation is still rife

**A**S in most townships on the Reef, Saturdays in Soweto tend to be hectic. The streets are a hive of activity and one would be right in assuming the houses are empty and everybody is out on the streets.

It was on just such a Saturday, a summer's day back in 1987 when, in the middle of the hustle and bustle, I noticed a group of men wielding an assortment of weapons.

This was long before the days of the now much-dreaded Inkatha impis. Those were still the days when it did not matter if you came across a group of Zulus wielding kierries and assegais because you knew they had no hostile intentions and you also knew they harboured no ill feelings towards anyone in the community. They would merely be on their

way to a rally at Jabulani Ampitheatre, traditional weapons in hand, as was their wont. Nor was it a problem back then to have an Inkatha member for a neighbour. It would be like a Catholic living next to a member of the Lutheran Church – a non-issue.

Taking a closer look at the crowd that Saturday back in 1987, however, I noticed I knew some of the men. They were all upright and respectable members of their community, fathers and husbands, all decent human beings. Most were also well-known supporters of Azapo.

What was the immediate cause of all this tension in the township? What was it that made ordinary fathers and husbands walk the streets of their own neighbourhood brandishing dangerous weapons like a bunch of armed bodyguards?

So I asked around and was told they made up the funeral procession for an elderly woman, herself an active Azapo supporter, who had recently collapsed and died. This woman had suffered considerable State harassment, but had also suffered at the hands of a rival political group in the township.

She was not the only member of the community to be hounded by activists from rival political factions.

The previous year a young supporter of Black Consciousness had skipped the country because he was wanted for murder. The story was that for some time this man had been living under threats from youths from a rival group who wanted him to leave the area. When he refused to leave, four youths are alleged to have burnt down the house he was renting. In

PLEASE TURN OVER

retaliation he allegedly caught up with them and bundled them into his car. He then allegedly killed them and dumped their bodies in the open veld. He was arrested, skipped bail, and left the country.

So people were constantly looking over their shoulders. This was open war. It was a war for the hearts and minds of township residents, an ideological war in which to be a black journalist was also to be a target of the attentions of the warring factions on the ground.

**A reporter's** choice was really quite simple. Did you serve your readers and report what you saw and knew to be happening and thus invoke the attentions of the hard men and women who were conducting the war, or did you serve your own self interest and remain silent in the face of the growing atrocities?

This was no simple choice because in an atmosphere of intense struggle against the system, it was a choice which could have life-threatening consequences for working journalists who had the temerity to stick their necks out and report abuses in the liberation movements' own activities.

On the ground it was all-out factional war, in our hearts it was a war of conscience. To report or to keep silent, that was the question.

I remember too that it was during this period that commuters had to duck for cover at the taxi rank next to the Esso garage on the old Potchefstroom road leading into Johannesburg when youngsters from the nearby Ibhongo School decided to shoot it out in broad daylight in support of different political groups.

Claims made were that the student wing of Azapo were chasing members of an ANC student body out of the school.

These and many other incidents were happening in front of black journalists in the townships every day. Most of the journalists living in Soweto knew that one side of the old Potchefstroom road was UDF territory and the other side was Azapo turf. They also knew that the ordinary people in the township did not understand what was going on. Quite often adults would say, "we see comrades are fighting among themselves" – they did

*The children's education was in ruins and we could not even stand up and say, 'We told you so' because we had failed to alert the community to what was going on. If we had reported the true picture, parents probably could have done something.*

not understand the bitter ideological battles these youngsters were fighting.

This was the background to the group of Soweto neighbours carrying weapons to an old friend's funeral. This was the poisoned atmosphere in which upright citizens were turning into armed vigilantes.

**Black** journalists were fully aware of this situation. They too were living in these communities. They too were caught in the vicious crossfire, victims of the ideological war raging in the townships.

The case of the young Black Consciousness supporter who allegedly murdered four members of a rival political group is a good case in point.

Once again journalists were caught in the crossfire. They knew this man was

being harassed and victimised for his political beliefs. And, they watched him being burned out by his political rivals.

Many journalists were scandalised by the fact that a group of high school students were harassing somebody from the community and forcing him to leave town just because they disagreed with his politics. But they were afraid to bring these things to light and opted, instead, to remain silent out of fear for their own safety.

They also remained silent when, in what was clearly a reprisal killing, the young man's father was abducted, murdered and his body thrown into a ditch.

**Journalists** knew full well which political group was responsible for this murder, but still they remained silent.

Fear of being necklaced for criticising those responsible for the killing immobilised journalists and rendered the community ignorant of what was going on around them.

If the truth be told, many a night have black journalists stayed awake agonising over what to do.

In January 1988, after parents and community activists had met and decided that the children should go back to school, I met a colleague while doing township rounds and for hours we discussed what we should do about the schools crisis.

We were both appalled at the lackadaisical response to the 'back-to-school' calls. We had to make a decision whether to report the truth – that children were not returning to school despite claims to the contrary – or to keep quiet about it.

We chose to remain silent. We made that choice out of fear. And, of course, the developing tragedy in black education unfolded in that silence. When the end of the school year came, the exam results were unprecedentedly and understandably bad. The children's education was in ruin and we could not even stand up and say, "We told you so" because we had failed to alert the community to what was going on. If we had reported the true picture, parents probably could have done something about it.

At the time we were hoping the schoolchildren would see reason and start taking their lessons seriously. We argued that having been through almost five years of disrupted education, they had

come to realise that they could not become perpetual students.

But events proved us wrong. The disruption of education continued and far from creating a reaction in students, they began to take the disruption as the norm.

In retrospect we should have told the black community the truth about their children, that unlike those in Coloured, white and Indian schools who were in the schoolyard at 8am, black children were hanging around the bus stops or walking the streets long after school opened.

**While other** children were diligently preparing for examinations and their destinies in a new society yet to come, black children were contending with education as a site of struggle. And struggle translated into "stay-aways", and teachers being accused of being "stubborn"; or being stabbed or having their motorcar tyres slashed. Black school children, in a very real sense, became double victims and, as their future prospects were liquidated in 'struggle', most journalists stayed silent out of fear of their own liquidation.

Instead of being mirrors of the society, which is what our calling is all about, we thought it wiser to sit on the stories and leave the community in ignorance of what was going on all around them and of what was happening to their children.

In mitigation, being a black person in that poisoned atmosphere was difficult, but being a black journalist was doubly difficult. For at the back of our minds we always knew things did not just happen in isolation and that the atrocities were there because of apartheid. Knowing the root cause of the problems in the community, it became even more difficult to come out and condemn actions taken.

This has not changed to the present day. Unless one wants to earn the label of being a Pretoria apologist, one must not condemn actions of students and one must not question personalities who make statements of behalf of legitimate political leaders.

At a recent debate an Inkatha Freedom Party spokesman asked a member of CAST (the umbrella body of local civic associations in the Transvaal) why CAST, which claims to have a following in Indian and Coloured townships, does not pressurise its management councils to resign. "Why is it that it is only blacks

*Is it perhaps an African disease that writers are heroes only when they expose white abuses and become enemies of 'the people' when they expose abuses eroding the fabric of their own societies?*

who necklace and petrol bomb their mayors and counsellors?" was the question.

And yet while we were ducking and diving what was going on in the townships, we did not hesitate to expose what the police and the SADF were doing there.

**We were** quite prepared to be thrown into jail rather than face the necklace. We were prepared to write about exploitation of maids by their white madams and yet black madams can pay slave wages to their illiterate cousins and grannies whom they import from the homelands to come and look after their township homes while they are at work.

Is it perhaps an African disease that writers are heroes only when they expose white abuses and become enemies of "the

people" when they expose abuses eroding the fabric of their own societies?

Is it merely coincidence that so many African writers lead nomadic lives in Europe because they are not tolerated by the very people they put into government back home?

While it is not the task of journalists to bring governments down, I would like to live to see the day when we have black journalists of the calibre of Bernstein and Woodward. I would like to see someone like Hugo Young who will come up with a critical book on some of our leaders and live to hear those same leaders prescribe the book for others to read.

That does not mean there are no black journalists who could write such books. The problem lies not with our pens but with our society. The crusading investigative journalists I mention above come from communities where they not only write about the various freedoms but also fight for those freedoms to be realised and not tampered with. And therein lies the real problem.

**Our problem** as black journalists is not in the way we write, but in what certain people want to see us write. Our problem lies in that we are subjected to hidden hands which demand there shall be praise and no criticism.

Black journalists are expected to be accountable, but political players who demand accountability from journalists remain unaccountable themselves. This selective accountability can never be the handmaiden of liberty.

At a time when there are any number of good, honest and solid black journalists to chronicle history, it is sad to find that we are unable freely to pursue the profession of our choice for lack of freedom of expression.

Blacks are once more silent and sitting on the fence, dependent on their white journalist colleagues to expose abuses of power. And the liberation movements turn around and accuse black journalists of being inefficient and lazy. Now that's a strange irony if ever there was one. ●

*Nomavanda Mathiane works for The Sunday Star. Her first book, South Africa: A Diary of Troubled Times, is published by Freedom House in New York. Her second book, Beyond The Headlines is published by Southern Books.*

# A PLEA FOR MORAL GRAVITY

*For the past 10 years journalist and author **PAUL JOHNSON** has written a controversial weekly column on British media. Here he surveys a decade of change and hope for British journalism*

**I**T is now over 10 years since I began a column analysing and criticising the British media from a position within it. During that period, media power and influence have continued to grow, so that the term I have coined for the typical modern Western state, Media Democracy, has acquired growing validity and my further term for the arrogance with which some of its practitioners wield this power, Media Triumphalism, is, alas, more valid than ever.

In some ways the Western media now has more impact on events than Western governments. Mikhail Gorbachev in captivity was able to receive vital information, which stiffened his resolve, from the BBC World Service at a time when George Bush and John Major tried and failed to make contact with him. Boris Yeltsin, throughout the coup, brilliantly exploited the Western media to encourage his followers and demoralise his opponents.

**I notice** that increasing use is made by oppressed people, whether in the Baltic States or Croatia, Asia or Africa, of the chance to air their grievances in the Western media. The placards carrying their demands and slogans are now written in English. They address themselves directly to us, via newspaper photographs and television screens. All this growing authority should make Western media bosses, editors, producers, not the least reporters, awesomely conscious of the enormous responsibilities they now carry, to the truth, to justice and to civilisation.

“

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They are technically more competent than ever before, even if their English lacks elegance and often grammar and syntax; and they have a broader knowledge of the world than earlier generations of communicators.

What makes me tremble is the evident lack of moral training, their semi-detachment from the Judaeo-Christian system of ethics which, more than ever before, is now the only sheet-anchor for a world adrift on an ocean of doubt and fear.

Too many people in the media find it difficult to make principled and systematic distinctions between right and wrong because they have simply never been taught how to do so.

**Over this** decade I have tried to convince people in the media that the task of communicating accurate information to the public is a profoundly moral occupation, demanding the highest standards, as well as a commercial business. There are certain practical points to which I have devoted much attention.

The first was the need for newspapers and television stations to work in a climate of political and economic freedom. That has now largely been accomplished, at any rate in Britain. Union monopoly power, and with it union censorship, was decisively broken at Wapping and the events which followed. Newspapers can now manage themselves. New ones can be launched successfully, often by people of modest means. Broadcasting has been thrown open, the duopoly broken, and during the 1990s we are going to see much more variety and (in my judgement) high quality. I feel that I have helped to win a

PLEASE TURN OVER

number of key battles here, and I believe the 1990s will be a magnificent decade for the British media.

**On the** other hand, on two critical issues my campaigns have so far failed. The operating arms of the BBC and ITV are still mainly controlled by a left-liberal establishment, whose devotion to accuracy is not always beyond doubt – to put it mildly – and who do not understand what political objectivity means. Rather like Gorbachev, they have been brought up (especially since the 1960s) in a certain closed politico-moral climate and remain the prisoners of it. My consolation is that during the 1990s these people will gradually disappear. Equally, I have failed to persuade newspapers that invasion of privacy is now the cardinal sin of British journalism and must cease or be punished in the courts. They are demonstrably incapable of self-reform, and I am more convinced than ever that parliament will be forced to legislate, to make privacy invasion a tort and, in really

serious cases, a criminal offence. This will come in the next two or three years.

In one area I have been delighted by the progress made. I used to complain, long and often, at the absence of women in the higher reaches of journalism, and in particular at the failure of proprietors to appoint women editors. My pleas went unheeded but suddenly, almost overnight it seemed, women broke through this barrier, and are now increasingly in positions of power throughout the media – though I am still waiting for one to be appointed editor of a quality national newspaper.

What is equally welcome is the prominent role of women reporters, often in positions of great stress and danger, in bringing us the latest news. They are doing it, too, with enviable professional skill and sometimes with real distinction.

**I repeat** my contention that by the earlier years of the next century, the media will be increasingly run by women: they are just better at it than men. The rise of women in the media, and of course I mean normal women, not

ideologues, feminists, libbers, lesbians etc, is an important part of the way in which the media is being democratised under the pressure of market forces.

**Market** democracy is the most reliable guarantee of every other form of democracy – including the right to vote – and that is why the media should be gradually stripped of its monopolies and duopolies, its subsidies and any special legal privileges, and be thrown open to the maximum competition, the paying public being the only arbiter, and the ordinary law of the land the only judge.

Those who defend the expiring system, the vested interests, are people who think they know better than you or me, reader. Like Boris Yeltsin, I believe in People Power. And, having said that, I now relinquish the position of self-appointed scourge of the media. ●

*PAUL Johnson, a former Editor of the New Statesman and author of numerous best-selling books, writes for The Spectator.*

**non-racial, democratic,  
non-sexist, non-hetero-sexist,  
non-ageist, non-regionalist,  
non-elitist, nuclear-free  
and ozone-friendly.**

**but never, never PC** (Politically Correct)

**Vrye Weekblad**

**THE BILINGUAL NEWS MAGAZINE THINKING SOUTH AFRICANS DESERVE**

# Letters

TO THE EDITOR

Letters to: *The Editor, Rhodes Journalism Review, PO Box 94, Grahamstown 6140, South Africa.*

## Key issues

I READ the last edition of *Review* with great interest.

I must congratulate you on a magazine which addresses the key issues of South Africa today without resorting to the worn-out rhetoric of so many other publications.

Keep up the good work.

*Dr JJ Nel, managing director, South African Rail Com-muter Corporation.*

## Design copyright

A COMPLAINT commonly voiced by publication consultants in South Africa is that some clients use consultants to produce their publications, then discontinue the service the moment a design package has been established. The new-look publication is then hawked about for the lowest production quote with instructions that the existing design should be copied in all essentials.

The question of design copyright immediately arises from these abuses and I thought *Review* readers would like to share my experience of a former client who misused my company's services in this way.

My company pitched for, and got, the redesign and production work on a bi-monthly corporate publication earlier this year.

We relaunched the new-look journal in February, but when we contacted the client to begin work on their April edition, we were informed we no longer had the job. How often have publication consultants heard this story? Let's face it, this practice is rife in the corporate communications industry!



When the April issue of the journal finally came out, the client had continued in all essentials the design we had created for the publication.

As the copyright laws have been amended to include design, I approached our former client, offering them two options: either they reinstate my company to produce their publication or they buy the design copyright from us.

The upshot of this dispute was that they finally accepted they were in breach of copyright and the matter was settled out of court.

The real issue here was that my company had created something that a third party had used without our permission.

I write to *Review* because I hope this little incident sets an

example for publication designers and encourages them to stand up and protect their work from those unscrupulous companies who would take advantage of designers.

Remember copyright vests in the hands of the creator. So, if you create the design, it appears that under the amended law you hold copyright unless you specifically sign it away to the customer in terms of a formal contract. However, if you are employed by a company which pays you a salary to design publications, they hold copyright over the work you do on their behalf while you are employed by them.

So fellow designers, it's time to stand up and fight for your copyright. If you don't, nobody else will.

*John R Emerton, Pretoria.*

## A voice of our own

THE introduction of an academic-cum-practical magazine for the exchange of news, ideas and opinions may be a small step for Rhodes University, but it is a giant step for media and communication in Africa south of the Sahara.

Whereas in the past media academics and practitioners thirsting for new information in their respective fields had to look to overseas publications, at vast cost, now we have our own.

What is even more encouraging is the fact that the editorial net you have cast allows for a really wide and diversified approach.

*Crosby Mwanza, Maseru, Lesotho.*

## New group forms

THE Centre for Cultural and Media Studies (CCMS) at the University of Natal, Durban, has established a Working Group to examine questions relating to broadcasting, deregulation, privatisation and future telecommunications policy in South Africa.

The group invites cooperation between academics in making information available to the public on the choices facing South Africa with regard to broadcasting and electronic media.

Any person or organisation with an interest in Broadcast and Telecommunication Policy is invited to make submissions to the Group.

Our address is: Centre for Cultural and Media Studies, University of Natal, King George V Avenue, Durban 4001.

*Professor Keyan Tomaselli, Director, CCMS.*



# COMING UP FOR AIR TIME

*With deregulation of broadcasting now seriously being discussed, the battle for the southern African airwaves has only just begun write*

**DON PINNOCK & LLEWELYN RODERICK**

**W**HEN SABC head Christo Viljoen toy-toyed up the aisle on the arm of a black woman in a wild Afro at the Jabulani 'Freedom Of The Airways' conference in Amsterdam recently, it was noted he did so with some reluctance. Adjusting to the demands of the new South Africa has its problems. But when his Task Group report on broadcasting came out, it was clear that some major adjusting *had* been going on at the SABC.

The Task Group's report – sporting the new 'democratic, non-racial and non-sexist' vocabulary, surprised many broadcasters with its proposals for an Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to regulate the broadcasting industry and all aspects of telecommunications.

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## *There were other surprises*

Other surprises were the report's emphasis on educational broadcasting, local radio and the training of local broadcasters as a matter of priority. The report suggested that the SABC be transformed into a Public Services Broadcaster (PSB). The SABC, says the report, "should be seen as belonging to the public". The report also recognised the need for encouraging independent production to boost local content. Could this mean fewer American soaps?

The SABC Task Group attracted controversy from inception early in 1991. Its non-representative composition – all men hand-picked by the government – attracted a good deal of early negative publicity. It even occasioned the first march on the SABC's headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. Concern over what Viljoen would deliver also provoked a large gathering of independent broadcasters in Holland. This meeting, at the Jabulani conference, put out its version of the future broadcasting structure shortly before Viljoen's Task Force presented its own report.

Of course both reports are merely suggestions – Parliament may still accept or reject some or all of Viljoen's offerings. It will probably choose to ignore the Jabulani report. But in its slow, formal South African way, the debate on the future of broadcasting has begun. And the process seems likely to speed up as the ANC starts thinking about the agenda for next year's All-Party Conference.



Superficially, there are many similarities in the demands made in the two reports: the call for an Independent Broadcasting Authority, for more local content, for educational broadcasting and for more training. But there are fundamental differences as well.

The Task Group seems to have attempted a double defence of the *status quo* by ensuring that the SABC keeps its hands firmly on the microphones in the run-up to elections, while planning to deny control of the airwaves to any future government. The Jabulani report and the Film and Allied Workers Union (FAWO), while demanding an IBA, say this cannot be created by the present government. "There are no guarantees that SABC news reporting will be fair, impartial and balanced during the interim period", says the Jabulani report.

FAWO suggests that an All Party Conference appoint an Interim Broadcasting Consultative Committee to do the job until a new constitution is drafted. The Jabulani report adds that the All-Party Conference should appoint a commission of inquiry which "will survey public opinion and produce recommendations on the re-regulation of broadcasting in South Africa under a democratic constitution".

Though the Task Group agrees that an IBA would only function properly under a new constitution with an entrenched Bill of Rights, it is silent on an interim arrangement to monitor or regulate broadcasting.

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## *More criticism than praise*

Since the Task Group report was made public, it has has been praised and criticised by media academics. An initial criticism was over the report's language: it said things which sounded revolutionary but added up, some claim, to more of the same old stuff.

According to Roy Williams, head of Communications at the University of Bophuthatswana, the report "tries to hijack and pre-empt democratic debate on broadcasting by incorporating the ways in which broadcasting may be articulated". The effect is to "occupy the field (of discussion) before any of the other players have even got dressed for the game".

Eric Louw of Natal's Centre for Cultural and Media Studies says he finds "a serious contradiction between the report's call for broadcasting to be de-politicised

PLEASE TURN OVER

while at the same time calling for a system based on the principles of free enterprise and commercial competition. Explicitly advocating a preferred economic model is hardly a depoliticised position".

FAWO notes "with pleasant surprise" language such as "democratic, nonracial and nonsexist". But it points out that FW de Klerk "uses terminology which would have been unthinkable two years ago, yet it is clear from the NP's constitutional proposals that what is said is not always what is meant".

Broadcasting types are concerned over more material contradictions in the report. Michael Markovitz of FAWO says that while the Task Force report suggests the establishment of the SABC as a public service broadcaster, the corporation has been steering in the opposite direction. In the last year it has set up a number of private companies such as Television News Production, SAFRITEL, SCENIA, COM-TV, TV Facilities and TV Production Services, all of which are profit-based and are run as commercial ventures.

This cuts right across the idea of public service broadcasting, which should be state funded and run in the public interest alone. This new SABC brood, with full and free access to the Corporation's immense facilities, are competing aggressively with the struggling independent film and television sector. According to Markovitz, the Task Force report is also silent on how the public would get access to SABC transmission and production facilities.

The appointment of members to an IBA board has been another point of concern. The Task Group suggests that this powerful regulatory body consist of five people appointed by the State President. "Why so few members?" asks Markovitz. Also there are no checks and balances to ensure that the President's final appointments are broadly acceptable. And if the recommendations become legislation next year, as the Task Group hopes, the IBA will be De Klerk's appointees. According to Markovitz, "it would be another example of all the President's men, and the broadcast sector in this country cannot take that chance".

### *An interesting silence on M-Net*

An interesting silence in the Task Group report settles around M-Net. Markovitz notes that the pay television service is not criticised for failing to comply with local content percentages negotiated in 1986. He says that Ton Vosloo, chairman of M-Net, "was the vice-chairman of the Task Group and obviously had blocked any explicit recommendations around cross-ownership or specific mention of M-Net with regards to local content".

Another silence envelops community radio. In a press release, some staff of the Rhodes University Journalism Department welcomed the Task Group's recommendation that community radio should be

The Task Group seems to have adopted a double defence of the status quo by ensuring that the SABC keeps its hands firmly on the mikes in the run-up to elections, while planning to deny control of the airwaves to any future government

deregulated. But they asked why no subsidy arrangements had been suggested for this vital sector.

Community radio could be the biggest broadcasting growth area in the future – the Jabulani report has rightly declared it to be a priority focus. In recommending that deregulation start at the "bottom", however, the Task Group got no further than suggesting that local operators pay a licence fee. Community radio is obviously being seen by Viljoen as being commercial and not a community service.

### *'Com-radio' is already rolling*

Initiatives in the area of so-called 'com-radio' are already rolling. 'Bush Radio', University of the Western Cape's proposed station, is aiming to broadcast to its immediate community and has been consulting extensively with civic and other organisations in the Western Cape around structure and future programme content.

If deregulation takes place (and perhaps even if it doesn't) 'Bush Radio' might be the first of many community-specific broadcasting projects.

Another radio concern, this time from students, is the Task Group's silence on Campus Radio. This was raised at a National Campus Radio conference held in September under the auspices of the South African Students Press Union. It was also pointed out that the report failed to distinguish clearly between commercial and non-commercial broadcasting. The report's emphasis was on "market forces" and financial viability in considerations about granting licenses to new radio stations. Did this apply to campus and community stations as well, students wanted to know?

There is also concern about the Task Group's suggestion that community radio be allocated the medium-wave band. This would ensure good reception at night but poor reception during the day.

The debate around broadcasting is now rumbling on two tracks. One heads towards Parliament, the other to further debates and conferences within the extra-parliamentary movement. The Minister of Home Affairs, Gene Louw, says that "after the consideration of all comments which may be received, legislation will be drafted for submission to Parliament, hopefully during the 1992 session of Parliament". But if the legislation follows the recommendations of the Task Force report, as it probably will, independent broadcasters and political movements are guaranteed to launch a campaign against the government's hand on the tiller. It is probable, therefore, that the battle for the airwaves is just about to begin. ●

*DON Pinnock is a senior lecturer in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rhodes and Llewelyn Roderick is a student in the department.*

*The tabloid format is easier to handle than broadsheet and cheaper to produce. Why, then, has it proved so unpopular?*

# THINK SMALL

**N**

O adult human being, no matter how sober or how fit, can comfortably read a broadsheet newspaper while standing up.

Try it for yourself. In no time at all, your spread-eagled arms will ache from shoulder-blade to shoulder-blade and your eyes will water from concentrating on small print held rather too far off.

Sitting down while reading helps the elbows a little, but the pages billow about and you have to pump your arms up and down as your nose tracks its way from top left to distant bottom right.

The only easy way to read a broadsheet newspaper is to cheat by folding it in half. Which raises the obvious question: why aren't all newspapers

printed in this convenient, folded-in-half format?

The answer is that newspapers are printed in bloated sizes because they have been printed in bloated sizes for hundreds of years.

This wasn't always the case; the very earliest newspapers were sensibly designed in a compact format which a messenger could fit in a saddlebag. But in no time at all, the editors, like editors ever since, decided they had so much to say they needed bigger pages.

The trend ended with British press baron Lord Northcliffe, who published the first popular contemporary newspaper, the Daily Mail. Northcliffe sold his paper more cheaply than his rivals by saving himself a fortune on newsprint. All he did was chop three inches off the length of the standard

broadsheet page.

This principle was to catch on. Later popular newspapers adopted an even smaller half-sheet format. A 32-page Daily Mirror, for example, used half the newsprint of a 32-page Daily Mail, and cost the readers a lot less too.

But it was this very cheapness that ruined the tabloid's reputation. The format became associated with the bottom-end of the newspaper market, with sleaze, blaring headlines and lower-class vulgarity.

In class-obsessed Britain, no newspaper of dignity would adopt such a format. Indeed, the heavyweights flaunted their bulkiness, charging customers extra for the privilege of reading in civilised discomfort.

Out here in soberly provincial South Africa, all newspapers, white or black,

In our third design forum, **IRWIN MANOIM**, whose designs have included the Sunday Express, Business Day and The Weekly Mail, discusses size, shape and prejudice



WEEKLY MAIL INTERVIEW

# MANDELA SPEAKS

**In his first press interview, the ANC leader talks about the need for flexibility**

Interviewed by **GAVIN EVANS and SHAUN JOHNSON**

**N**ELSON MANDELA said yesterday that he was willing to discuss even fundamental issues — even human rights.

Interviewed at his home in Johannesburg, the 70-year-old African National Congress (ANC) leader told the Weekly Mail that it was a "new thing" to have regular press interviews.

"I have never in the past had a regular press interview," he said. "I have always been approached by the press and I have always been prepared to cooperate. This is the first time I have had a regular press interview."

Asked if the need for regular press interviews was a sign of a change in the ANC's attitude towards the press, he said: "I have never had a regular press interview. I have always been approached by the press and I have always been prepared to cooperate. This is the first time I have had a regular press interview."

Asked if the need for regular press interviews was a sign of a change in the ANC's attitude towards the press, he said: "I have never had a regular press interview. I have always been approached by the press and I have always been prepared to cooperate. This is the first time I have had a regular press interview."



I HAD A DREAM ... AND SO DID 150 000 OTHERS **Thandiswa Mkhawana on Page 11**

Only an urgent all-party conference can bring peace

## There IS a way to end the violence

**T**HERE IS a way to get national negotiations back on track: an urgent conference of all major political parties to hammer out a joint strategy on the violence wrecking South African townships.

The proposal of an all-party conference on violence came this week from Miss director Frederick van Zyl Slabbert as a way forward from the African National Congress' seven-point ultimatum to the government, which almost certainly will not be met by the May 9 deadline.

Many political pundits believe that the ultimatum, far from achieving its aim, has given Defence Minister Magnus Malan and Law and Order Minister Adrian Vlok, new levers on life, and suddenly antagonised the Inkatha Freedom Party.

However, the ANC has brought home to the government the fact that there is an emergency situation in the black townships that can no longer be tolerated, and that negotiations for a new South Africa cannot proceed until the slaughter is brought under control.

And many of the ANC's demands — such as the disbanding of counter-insurgency units and the suspension of police officers involved in massacres in the townships — could be discussed in a serious debate about how the crisis is to be overcome.

Despite the modification of the ultimatum this week by ANC deputy president Nelson Mandela, who reversed the organisation's "flexibility" on the issue, many analysts agree that, all else having failed, a fresh approach is urgently required to deal with the conflict.

Another face-to-face encounter between Mandela and President PW de Klerk, the steps for which he has ended past stand-offs, seem to be in the air.

As long as the violence continues, the ANC will be under pressure from its township constituency, which sees the negotiations with the government as meaningless while the townships are burning, to take the kind of hard line expressed by last Friday's ultimatum.

Slabbert said this week that until the country had solved the basic problem of stability, via



DESPITE THE CRITICS, THE ANC'S OPEN LETTER WAS RIGHT **Page 4**

affected the same genteel stuffiness and a "gutter press" never really emerged. But there was a hierarchy of page formats nonetheless. "Real" newspapers were broadsheet; tabloid was reserved for advertising free-sheets, small-town rags and parish newsletters.

For over a century, the South African newspaper world has been dominated by broadsheets. Generally, only the poorer newspapers, like the Diamond Fields Advertiser or the Evening Post, have been tabloid.

Of course there are some exceptions, invariably at the "popular" end of the market. During the late fifties and sixties, the tabloid Sunday Express of Joel Mervis and Johnny Johnson nosed up close to the Sunday Times, thanks to a mixture of populism, schlock and

moral outrage at the decadence of the young.

There was also Jim Bailey's Golden City Post, much less famous than its stablemate Drum, which is a pity, because it was the only really good South African attempt at a racy, working-class tabloid.

Strident and cheeky, it specialised in such mind-improving fare as "COP RAPED DOLL OF THREE IN GRAVEYARD". Modelled on the Daily Mirror, it was particularly well designed for its time; indeed, it was the only South African newspaper of the fifties and early sixties to show any understanding of contemporary design principles.

The hour of the tabloid may yet come, and it is rising costs that may speed it along. In Britain, for example,

costs have forced all the middle-brow newspapers and several leading provincial titles to adopt the smaller format.

In South Africa, the Argus company's "think-tank", Newspaper Market Research, announced last year that research indicated most South African readers prefer the tabloid format. You will note that the Argus company's editors remain unmoved.

The two fastest-growing newspapers of the moment, the Sowetan and the Citizen, are both tabloids. Both were circulation and advertising laggards for years, and have made breakthroughs only quite recently. In both cases, the new readerships are largely black, the one section of the market with no pent-up ancient prejudices against the small format.

**Big shout**  
 Say one thing, and say it loud.  
 The Weekly Mail's unusual readership mix ranges from white professionals to township workers. The front page has to strive for a balance between a brashness that will stand out on newsstands and an elegance that denotes seriousness.



One of the most interesting European tabloids is the Parisian daily Liberation, which uses an often cheeky, magazine-style on its front pages.



The Christian Science Monitor is elegant and restrained ... but then, it does not have to compete for customers on cluttered newsagent shelves.



Vrye Weekblad usually goes for a big picture display, but in this ably-handled variation, the headline typography does the talking.



**Going colourful**

Acclaimed Fleet Street designer Leslie Sellers spent a decade on the Sunday Times and influenced a generation, including myself. Sellers' South African work remained within the Fleet Street popular tradition, but he took advantage of the then-new technologies of photo-litho and colour to explore areas then unavailable in Britain.

Tabloid design offers different opportunities to broadsheet design ... and a host of different problems too.

A tabloid is at an immediate disadvantage when laid out on a pavement or a café shelf along with its broadsheet competitors. True, a folded broadsheet and a tabloid take up the same amount of pavement real-estate, but the horizontal shape of the folded broadsheet allows for more flexible headline positioning and bolder picture sizing.

This is why tabloids have traditionally fought back against the broadsheets by compensating for their undersized formats with oversized headlines, particularly in heavy, black condensed faces which potential customers can read at twenty paces.

South Africa shares with some European countries a tabloid size based on the metric A3 format. It's a little too long and narrow, not nearly as elegant as the smaller and squarer British and American tabloid.

But the smaller format has on occasion surfaced here. When Caxtons landed the printing contract for the international edition of the London Daily Express earlier this year, they had to order special paper in the British format. Since then, Vrye Weekblad, printed on the same Caxtons press, has adopted the British format, with attractive results.

But there's a hidden trap to the smaller format, painfully learnt by the late Sunday Express. In its final incarnation, the paper was printed on an eccentric second-hand South American press which offered only the smaller US format. The format was a delight to work with, but there was one snag: standard full page advertising material would not fit. And no advertising agency would remake material for the convenience of a single newspaper.

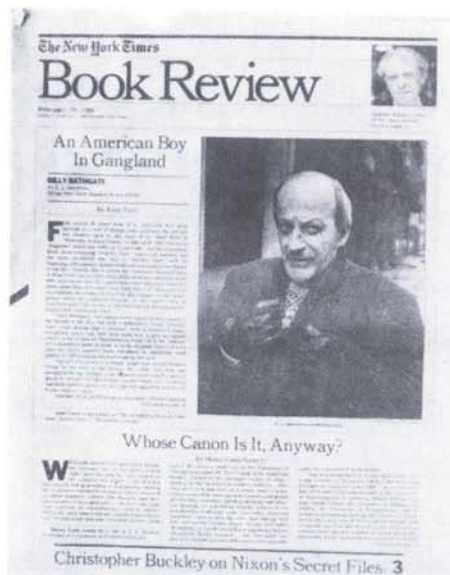
Advertising shapes are the biggest obstacle to good tabloid design in this country. Take a look at major tabloids abroad, like the pace-setting New York Newsday, and you'll notice that advertisements are firmly cordoned-off in neat modular boxes, usually either full or half pages. The resulting rectangular editorial holes make for attractive pages which benefit both readers and advertisers.

Not so here. Most advertisements are designed to look good in magazines or broadsheets, which is where most of the adspend goes. A favourite shape, for example, is A4, which neatly fills full pages in magazines and quarter pages in broadsheets. In tabloids, however, the A4 is a menace. It leaves the merest sliver of editorial space around the top and sides, useless for picture display and awkward even for headlines.

The Argus company appears to have a firm rule that no front page may venture forth without



The feature section of the redesigned Sunday Express of 1984 was first to use the smaller tabloid size ... at the cost of its advertising revenue.



The main section of the New York Times is as grey as ever, but the feature supplements, like this tabloid, are models of understated elegance.



Bold black-and-white picture from a Weekly Mail supplement. Market pressure finally pushed the paper towards colour just a few months ago.

its solus cigarette advert. This is fine on broadsheets, which have the top of the page to stretch out, but disastrous on tabloids.

The Sowetan's designers, for example, were for years expected to squeeze their front page leads into a narrow gully between the masthead and the ever-present advertisement. Not surprisingly, they rarely succeeded. Recently this advertisement has been reduced a little, and the front pages have noticeably improved as a result.

Perhaps the trickiest task in tabloid design is creating an "upmarket" front page, because it is not easy to be serious ... and also to be seen. Some of the best "serious" layout can be found in publications like the Christian Science Monitor and the tabloid inside sections of the New York Times, which convey a quiet, thoughtful elegance.

But the designers of these sections enjoy one freedom which the rest of us don't have: they aren't required to compete for attention on crowded South African café counters.

This has been one of the dilemmas of

designing The Weekly Mail. The audience is serious, but the competition is loud and brash. Modest front-page display would fade into the merest whisper alongside the artillery of the Sunday Times.

The short-lived British tabloid, the Sunday Correspondent, faced the same problem. It was Fleet Street's first "serious" tabloid, and its elegant inside pages more than demonstrated how well the tabloid size can handle long features. But in the front, the newspaper had to compete on news-stands ... so it used thumping sans typefaces and shouted like everyone else.

For The Weekly Mail, the problem has an added twist. The people who subscribe (mainly white and middle-class) would probably prefer a quiet paper like the Christian Science Monitor. But the floating population of casual buyers (mainly black) are attracted by bold display.

So The Weekly Mail must adopt a schizoid personality; quiet on its inside pages, with light headline faces, and brash in front. We use many of the same sledgehammer techniques that the Mirror perfected years ago, but with

one important difference: where the Mirror used bold, fat sans serif types, we use the more elegant serif types, mainly Times and Palatino.

When The Weekly Mail has a big story, we clear the front page and go for broke, hammering a single message. On more ordinary weeks, we adopt a poster front page, a series of capsule summaries of the goods on offer inside. This allows for plenty of headlines, and avoids one of the tabloid format's most serious shortcomings: multiple turns. The Citizen, for example, will often display five stories on page one, and turn all of them.

The Citizen is perhaps a good place to finish. Editor Johnny Johnson is the only leading editor who has always sworn by the tabloid format. The Citizen is a splendid example of anti-design, with headlines doglegging all over and crashing into one another. A modern designer would clean the paper up into tidy, modular blocks, logical, cool and elegant.

But the paper would lose its olde-world charm, its intriguing nooks and crannies full of human-interest oddities. It's a bit like Grandma's flat, full of knick-knacks and ill-matched Edwardian furniture, but so much more interesting than the studied elegance of those interior-designed rooms we see in glossy magazines.



A 1934 edition of the tabloid Sunday Express shows a simple boldness unusual for the time

“News is a window on the world.

The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, whether the window faces a street or a backyard. The unfolding scene also depends upon where one stands, far or near, craning one’s neck to the side, or gazing straight ahead, eyes parallel to the wall in which the window is encased.”

– Gaye Tuchman in *Making News*

## JOURNALISTS AS MEDIATORS

**HANNES SIEBERT & MELISSA BAUMANN** argue that journalists should broaden their traditional role of objective recorders to embrace the role of peacemakers and facilitators

**E**VENTS happen; news is made. Largely the construct of journalists, ‘newsframes’, or selective reportage, yield both ‘windows of reality’ for readers and limit the view. Newsframes in South Africa, in the context of apartheid and heavy media restrictions, have yielded countless perspectives and distortions from all sides. In today’s ‘pre-post-apartheid’ era, though official media restrictions have been dropped, news remains heavily opaqued and partisan. Nasionale Pers, Perskor and, to a lessening degree, the SABC persist with the Nationalist frame. The Argus Group and Times Media continue to promote the liberal, capitalist interests of their owners. ‘Alternative’ publications, faced with the quandary of becoming mainstream in a future South Africa, still generally toe the anti-government, anti-Inkatha, and anti-corporate line. Newsframes are shifting somewhat during this current period of transition, as lines of social and political conflict – the journalist’s axes – are redrawn. But they remain largely intact,

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shaping reality with their particular biases amidst loud rhetoric about press freedom, ‘the truth’, and democratic media. The sad ‘truth’ is, in the words of media analyst AJ Liebling, that “freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.”

Journalists in South Africa have understandably been preoccupied with press freedom, in concept and practice. The years 1986-1989, particularly, with their hundreds of media regulations and numerous detentions of journalists, fanned the press freedom fervour. *The Star* rallied around the issue with an international conference on “Conflict and the Press” in Johannesburg in early 1987. In recent discussions within media circles about the future of media in South Africa, ‘press freedom’ remains a top priority. Any government – Nationalist, ANC or a multi-party coalition – will have this commitment to reckon with.

But what does ‘press freedom’ really mean? If it means simply the absence of government or quasi-government



ALEX GROEN

interference, then since early 1989, when media restrictions were abolished, South Africa's press has been relatively 'free'. Definitions of press freedom were much simpler when the media restrictions were in place; the onus of truth was on the government's inhibition of that freedom. Now that the restrictions have been lifted, the burden falls much more squarely on journalists' shoulders to report the truth, or at least to more actively promote communication and more earnestly plumb to the causes of issues, not just redundantly describe their symptoms.

**THE MPJ:** With this opening in the media in South Africa, it seemed prudent to explore opportunities for making ourselves and other interested journalists more aware of the dynamics of change and conflict, and of how what we report shapes those processes. We journalists all shape reality, whether we intend to or not; the 'neutrality' championed by the Western liberal press is a chimera. As the editors of *Cross Times Magazine*, a national journal of news and commentary, we held, and still hold, a commitment to dialogue, reconciliation with constructive change, and the healing and building of relationships. In this light, the Mediation and Conflict Management Projects for Journalists (MPJ) was initiated in early 1990 by the Cross Times Trust, with assistance from the Centre for Intergroup Studies in Cape Town. Its intention is not to transform journalists into mediators *per se*, but to make them much more sensitive to conflict dynamics, to the impact of their work, and to the potential for managing conflict – by defining antagonists' mutual interests and getting to genuine causes of conflict – through the media.

In its pilot year, the MPJ met with scepticism, curiosity and overwhelming support from various quarters. Three workshops held in Cape Town in 1990 drew nearly 50

journalists, primarily from the 'alternative' press. Workshops looked at conflict theoretically and practically, with role plays simulating conflicts that journalists encounter and cover, specifically within South Africa. Participants learned paraphrasing (rephrasing carefully what a person says), intensive listening, non-aggressive behaviour and communication, and various other mediation skills – all of which apply to sound interviewing and reporting. This first incarnation of the MPJ also entailed an intern programme at *Cross Times Magazine*, and organisation towards an international conference on the media and conflict and a related book, which we plan to pursue.

In the near future, as the vicissitudes of funding allow, we intend to take the MPJ on the road, to cities around the country and possibly to smaller communities upon request. An MPJ newsletter is on the cards, as is an 'extern' journalist programme which works with journalists based at various publications throughout South Africa and, eventually, from abroad. Given the current flux of media in South Africa, or at least active debate around the future of the country's media, the MPJ calls upon journalists to re-examine their approaches to media, their own biases and relations to various parties and conflicts, and their awareness of the power of their own work. It encourages them to break the moulds and spring the traps that so many of us have fallen into, whether we report news or merely read it.

**MEDIATRAPS:** There are many traps, or ruts, which journalists slide into, or even consciously step into, which decisively shape their 'news frames'. Aside from personal or collective biases, three particular sorts of media traps emerge: muckraking, often masquerading as investigative journalism;

PLEASE TURN OVER



## *Investigative journalism in South Africa faces the same dangers of degeneracy to which it succumbed in the United States*

'positional journalism', which like positional bargaining in negotiations generally reinforces antagonisms; and narratives of violence, often highly distorted and mythologised.

With the 'Inkathagate' scandal earlier this year, reporting in South Africa shadowed that of its namesake, the *Washington Post's* uncovering of the Republican wiretapping of the Democratic Convention at the Watergate complex in 1974. One of the biggest, if not the biggest, investigative scoops in American press history, the Watergate story led to the resignation of President Nixon and the deification of *Post* reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.

'Investigative journalism' became a specialisation in the United States' leading journalism schools, supposedly drawing the strongest talent as practitioners. In South Africa, investigative journalism is most conspicuously practised by only a few publications: the *Weekly Mail*, which broke the Inkathagate story; *Vrye Weekblad*, renowned for its diggings on the Civic Co-operation Bureau (CCB); *Beeld*, exposing the Information Scandal; and others such as *New Nation* and the *Star*.

Investigative journalism here faces the same dangers of degeneracy to which it succumbed in the United States, motivated to a drive to go for the jugular, to beat the competition for the sensational story. Obvious in the way that many American reporters have gone for the 'slime' of politicians, the 'honourable' search for 'truth', the supposed defence of the 'public's right to know', is easily contaminated by self-aggrandisement. Indeed, most of the reporters firing questions at Foreign Minister Pik Botha at the SABC broadcast of the Inkathagate press conference were clearly lunging for his throat.

The key is to uncover abuses, but to question one's motives in doing so and to not stop just at incrimination. Long repressed and at least partially silenced by the state, much of the South African press was lulled into not investigating anything very far; the assumption was often that any information given would be lies, anyway. Now the risk is to run amuck with investigative reporting.

The trap of 'positional reporting' snags journalists all over the world. As reporters we are almost universally taught to construct 'objective' news stories around "X said, Y said, X said, Y said", often giving the last word to the party we secretly support – or to whoever has offered the most dramatic closing quote. Like positional bargaining – where one party in a conflict states its position or demands, then the other side does the same, and they each try to 'win' – this approach to reporting plays a zero-sum game. X and Y, the reporter's sources, merely reiterate their hardened positions and no dialogue, compromise or constructive change is advanced. In fact, the reporter's story often reinforces the parties'

antagonisms; differences and criticisms sting much sharper in print.

Certain journalists may claim this is the task of the news story, to 'merely report what was said', but it is too often the mark of lazy, passive journalism. Journalists have almost unequalled access to various parties, and can often ask them questions they would never ask each other; most waste this potential for furthering such communication.

Many have argued that violence is endemic to South African society; content analysis of the country's media leads rapidly to that conclusion. University of Cape Town political scientist Robert Thornton argues that a narrative of violence is being perpetuated by the South African press. One can read almost any publication to pick up the narrative thread. Take coverage of 'the Natal conflict' (is it one conflict, you may well ask?) or the violence of the last few months on the Witwatersrand. Are journalists, like other South Africans, victims of a 'culture of violence', or are they among its perpetrators? Again and again, journalists recycle the same stale 'wisdom' about the source of violence – Inkatha-ANC antagonisms, a mysterious 'third force', the government – and generally fail to get to its root causes. The violence is largely described in terms of political rivalries, body counts and burned homes; its socio-economic context receives short shrift, factors such as backyard squatters, hostel dwellers and more 'permanent' township residents competing for resources, the effects of joblessness, or the destructive influence of broken families on the country's youth. Again, journalists lock themselves, the antagonistic parties and their readers or viewers into seemingly intractable positions. Their narratives rarely challenge the violence, or the conditions of violence; rather they often help build a frightening tolerance of violence.

**MIDDLE GROUND:** It is much easier to criticise than to construct or create. So with the MPJ, it is easier to identify where journalists stray than to map out alternatives. It's a fair question: can journalists play a constructive mediatory role in the community, or a country, without forsaking or betraying their role as journalists? Should they?

The MPJ's premise is that they can, and that they should. "Journalists stand between events and the public, so in that way they mediate conflict," says Ron Kraybill, a mediator with the Centre for Intergroup Studies and an MPJ workshop facilitator. But just where do journalists have to stand to give the government and the public clear views of themselves?

The words 'media' and 'mediate' both derive from the Latin 'medius', or 'middle'. But 'in the middle of the road', or 'in the thick of it' – where do we journalists reside? The Western liberal view says we must stand in the no-man's land of 'objectivity'. But as we've argued, in highly conflicted

*Journalism tends to be outcome-orientated, around an event, announcement, vote or decision, at the expense of the processes leading to those outcomes*

societies like South Africa's, particularly, this remains an elusive and questionable objective. Israeli journalist and peace activist Michel Warschawski, director of the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, has articulated a radical 'middle ground' which seems appropriate territory for journalists in South Africa. In a speech delivered shortly before his imprisonment for printing 'enemy' (Palestinian) material, Warschawski defines the concept of 'the border', among other divisions, the line between Palestinians and Israelis:

"The system is determined to strengthen the separation border between Israelis and Palestinians, and to stop any process that blurs the border...(But) we should begin building togetherness from today – in dialogues, in cooperation, in solidarity. All these are impossible to do from a safe place in the middle of the national consensus. You build the Israeli-Palestinian partnership on the border, and only on the border that separates these two peoples..."

"I refuse to stand far from the border, in a safe place in the middle. I refuse to be a border guard. My will is to...break through the fences of hate and the walls of separation."

Many journalists in South Africa share Warschawski's commitment to centering themselves in the fray, in the heart of the conflict, where lies the potential for its resolution. "Objectivity' is nonsense in a distorted society like this one," says *Vrye Weekblad* editor, Max Du Preez. "Journalists must be interpretive, and try to be fair and balanced...Our paper is absolutely confrontationalist, we try to slaughter a lot of the holy cows of Afrikanerdom. And we seek conflict, we don't try to resolve it. We cause conflict."

Conflict in itself is not necessarily destructive; if managed appropriately, it can actually build bonds between and within communities. The MPJ, then, trains journalists in conflict management; in getting to causes and not just symptoms; in engaging parties in 'interest-based' discussions, or defining mutual interests; in airing parties' perceptions and fears; and in prioritising process over outcome, or paying more heed to the process of negotiations, to how they're structured and to who is involved – and also to the process of news gathering and reporting, to sources cited and to the process of stories evolving. Too often journalism is outcome-oriented, around an event, announcement, vote or decision, at the expense of the processes leading to those outcomes.

**PEACEMAKERS:** Many would argue that journalists cannot mediate conflict in sense of resolving it, but we do shape conflict by what we record, by selecting and editing stories, by giving certain writers certain assignments, by the 'facts' we include and omit, by the sources we quote, by what we quote from them. On community, national and international scales, we have mediated as journalists in defining political

agendas and public sympathies. The prospect of journalists-as-peacemakers or facilitators may be hard to grasp, or distasteful, to some. But the potential is there.

"Journalists have key access to both sides," says mediator Kraybill, "and access is the biggest problem in peacemaking. Successful mediation usually involves beginning with information gathering and sharing, establishing a common ground and trust, establishing basic human needs and interests rather than positions. Journalists must try to get people off their positions, away from positional bargaining and more towards an interest-based approach, towards joint problem solving."

Granted, it is a stretch of the imagination to picture South African journalists alongside FW de Klerk, Nelson Mandela and their respective teams around the negotiations table. Proponents of 'objectivity' howl at the mere thought. But journalists can mediate more informally, in parallel ways to those of professional mediators.

"Mediation is closely related to conciliation," says veteran mediator and Centre for Intergroup Studies Director, HW van der Merwe, "an informal process in which a third party tries to bring parties to agreement by improving communications, interpreting issues, and exploring potential solutions." Why can't journalists do the same? To some degree, don't they already?

Perhaps the journalist's role more readily aligns with that of a facilitator, who according to Van der Merwe concentrates on facilitating communication between conflicting parties and is "less likely than the mediator to be seen as a meddler, or a preacher, or a moralist". When negotiations break down, a facilitator becomes even more critical. 'Facilitator journalists' have the advantage of being less bound by protocol and the constraints of an official negotiations process; they are more able to widen the agenda through their reportage and to suggest constructive initiatives.

**ACCOUNTABILITY:** At the core of mediating as a journalist is the issue of accountability. Journalists, like mediators, are not meant to 'take sides', but this does not free them from being accountable in certain ways to different parties: their editors, their sources and others they write about, their readers, themselves.

The question of community is key, and related to that, responsibility. As journalist/mediator, we are responsible to the communities we write about. Not that they should dictate what we write, but we should not write about them cavalierly, callously or glibly. Often our awareness of the communities we cover, our sense of responsibility towards them can be critical; it can sometimes mean life or death for certain of their people.

*The peace process will go nowhere if we deny the deep-rooted feelings and beliefs of those to whom we feel morally superior*

If a journalist is, in an ethical sense, accountable to everyone he or she writes about and to his or her own conscience, then the issue of credibility that so often arises here is more ably addressed. The tendency in recent years of much of the 'alternative' media to be accountable to organisations flies in the face of the 'democracy' so many journalists tout.

**LANGUAGE:** The medium of mediation, resolution and conflict building is language; journalists concerned about their impact on various conflicts must be well aware of words. The MPJ explores the explosive and divisive, as well as healing, power of language. 'Laundered' or toned-down language as well as trumped-up rhetoric come under scrutiny. Shifts in language patterns, such as the shift from the specific to the general as conflict escalates, are studied. "People often retreat into theory and rhetoric because then they don't have to think anymore," says Kraybill. "Journalists must work with them, get them off the abstract, move them towards how the conflict/issue affects them specifically and personally."

**CORE VALUES:** How we express ourselves as journalists is a statement of who we are, and of how we relate to others. To be an effective journalist/mediator or facilitator, the MPJ maintains, requires a consistent embodiment of values, awareness and skills which underlie a genuine commitment to peace and justice.

As Krayhill explains, the journalist/mediator must be hard on issues, soft on people. The 'truth' for which journalists claim so avidly to search lies not in structures or systems or philosophies, but in the persons of the people we write about.

So often we look through the frame of only one viewpoint or ideology. We miss the person. We don't look at the person through the eyes of his own value system; we don't take the time. Instead we make harsh deadline-orientated value judgements about naive socialists or fat-cat capitalists or ignorant boers. The peace process will go nowhere if we deny the deep-rooted feelings and beliefs of those to whom we feel morally superior.

The MPJ asks that journalists not retaliate. This means responding to apparent provocation in ways that appeal to the dignity of one's 'opponents' and to focus on solving mutual problems rather than winning battles. It also means often suspending judgement, and paying more attention to antagonists' underlying concerns and perceptions.

Becoming informal, unofficial mediators may not be a choice for many of us. Many journalists, if not all, already are. The point is to understand the power that we wield, and to challenge ourselves on our relationships and commitments within that power.

"In Natal I've been a State of Emergency editor with automatic involvement as a mediator," says Khaba Mkhize, assistant editor of *The Natal Witness*. "For many reporters, death is news. But ask yourself what you want to achieve at the end of the day. A commitment to peacemaking leads to creative writing. Stay away from stereotypes that reinforce pain." ●

*FORMER book publisher Hannes Siebert is editor and publisher of Cross Times Magazine; and Melissa Baumann, Harvard journalism academic and former associate editor of Harper's in New York, is an associate editor on the Cape Town-based publication.*

## It takes all types to run the media

**T**HAT'S why the Department of Journalism & Media Studies at Rhodes University established its Higher Diploma in Journalism. Scientists, painters, actors, accountants...they all come to Rhodes to develop communications skills through this intensive one-year post-graduate course. And they come from all over Southern Africa. Some come from as far afield as the United Kingdom, Australasia, Canada, France and the United States.

If you are a university graduate and wish to prepare for a career in media, you should consider registering for the Higher Diploma in Journalism at Rhodes.

For further details write to: *The Registrar, Rhodes University, PO Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140, South Africa*

**A**N architect? You've got to be out of your mind. They're far too expensive. My wife can design the house – after all, she has been on a calligraphy course!"

Does this sound ridiculous? Familiar? Well, it certainly happens. Even though building a house is one of the most important tasks people can undertake, they are often surprisingly short-sighted when it comes to employing an architect to design and oversee the project. People still believe employing an architect is a luxury. And, by the same token, trained artisans are often overlooked in favour of off-the-street labourers. It's called the 'Bucket Shop' syndrome and there are an extraordinary number of sufferers of this common malady in the corporate communications field.

Inevitably the indigestion must follow. Penny wise, pound foolish is stock-in-trade for the building industry as all too often what started out as an exercise in domestic economy leads directly to the bank manager's office – usually on your knees!

**This is** an apt metaphor for the burgeoning house journal industry in South Africa, which, for some strange reason, also suffers chronically from 'Bucket Shop' syndrome.

In this time of change and transition, everyone is climbing on the communications bandwagon and boardrooms across the country have committed themselves to communicating through staff journals, which, in many instances, are the only means companies have of reaching their widely distributed staff.

How do we know the house journal industry is growing? Well, membership of the South African Association of Industrial Editors (SAAIE) is growing in leaps and bounds. House journals have become a major growth industry.

Usually, however, and certainly in companies without established public relations departments, responsibility for the staff journal falls to the 'human resources executive' (what we used to call the 'personnel manager'). And more often than not, the human resources executive wouldn't know news if it jumped up and bit him in the shiniest part of his three-piece suit. He only compounds the overall editorial shortcomings when he

## LET'S PUT MORE PROS IN THE HOUSE JOURNAL HOT SEAT

*The house journal, once a subject of derision among journalists, has come into its own with the growing demand for effective communication in the workplace.*  
**TOM FERREIRA**  
*argues that as management relies increasingly on staff journals to communicate down the line, they need to employ suitably qualified editorial staff*

delegates, which is what managers are supposed to do, and pressgangs old Bumstead from Pensions to edit the journal. Bumstead, after all, is secretary of the bowling club and he writes an occasional memo when he's got his gander up. Then there's Fanny from the typing pool who's never been short on gossip. She can collect the news, and Pompies in the postal department can handle the distribution. Hey presto, the 'A Team' rides again, but needless to say, this plan very seldom comes together.

**Does this** perhaps also sound ridiculous? Familiar?

Unfortunately this is how many house journals are born. Is it surprising therefore that the house journal is regarded as a poor cousin by mainstream newspaper and magazine journalists?

Put it in perspective. No construction manager in his right mind would ask a secretary to design a bridge because there is a shortage of engineers. Nor would a mine manager ask a filing clerk to act as geologist. But when it comes to editing and producing the company staff journal, well, it appears anyone will do!

Naturally the result is a jerry-built house. Patching it up won't help because the foundations have not been correctly laid. What started off as a low-budget, in-house production often ends up as a very expensive white elephant and, as the old Nigerian proverb goes, where elephants tread the grass gets flattened. Put another way, the wrong message being packaged down the line could lead to major staff problems. Conversely, the right message wrongly packaged leads to similar failure.

Clearly editing house journals is no longer a job for amateurs or armchair communicators; the Bumstead brigade will no longer suffice, not in the context of communication in the changing South Africa. Today's communications tasks are stretching many of the finest minds in the business and the book on corporate communications is going to be rewritten as the enormous challenges of multi-cultural communication in commerce and industry continue to present themselves.

In a nutshell, there's nothing humble about the house journal any longer. In many ways it has become a far more demanding editorial task than mainstream journalism.

Returning to our metaphor, establishing a house journal is much like building a house. The editor, as architect of the publication, has to do thorough research of the target market, the readers, long before thinking about origination, design or production logistics.

The editor must also act as a quantity surveyor establishing a budget and then planning how much house will be left over after installing the jacuzzi. In many respects the budget will dictate the physical attributes of the publication; whether it will run full colour on coated paper or spot colour on newsprint, that is whether the house will be built with Corobrick's finest or cement brick.

Only then does the editor turn to the design package. The grid is the foundation and must be carefully designed to fit the favoured format. It is on the grid, the visual foundation if you like, that the entire house will stand or fall.

**Each page**, to pursue the metaphor even further, is a room that is to be individually planned and decorated to blend in with the rest of the house. Then each word has to be laid, carefully, brick by brick, because a weak brick – a single word that is out of line – can spoil the entire house.

Adjectives, adverbs and punctuation signs must be combined to form a perfect dagha, which will ensure that each word fits into place. Too much of any one ingredient will weaken the mixture and cause cracks in the walls.

As in any home, paint also plays an important role in providing a perfect finish. Now the editor changes hats again and becomes an interior designer. The



*Premier News...some house journals can teach mainstream a thing or two.*

next job is to give thorough consideration to the painting of each room, the colouring of every page. A touch of red here or a dash of blue can work wonders, but too much colour will spoil the effect.

And again, each painting on the wall is like a photograph or illustration. It must be chosen judiciously and placed in exactly the right spot.

Any interior designer knows that the choice and positioning of paintings can make or break a room and you should

choose one or two large paintings, or group smaller ones together and use frames to portray them as a unified visual element. Poor paintings are not displayed, they are stuck away in attics or given to church bazaars. So it should be with visual elements like photographs and graphics – project the good image or group weaker images and relegate the rest to the wastepaper bin.

Headlines can equally make or break a house journal. Well-crafted heads invite readers to enter, poor heads chase them away, and make no mistake, headline writing is a highly skilled craft.

Lighting is also important, as the designer has to focus a spotlight on a certain area on each and every page to create a focal point that will attract and hold the reader's attention.

**And lastly**, there is the question of a suitable masthead, the roof of the building. It has to be the right size, colour and design as it spans your entire home and gives you the security you need. Would you put a flat zinc roof on a yuppie cathedral in Sandton or tiles on the Taj Mahal?

So building effective house journals requires considerable skill and planning. And, if you want them to last and to do the job they are intended for, give them to professionals to edit and design or you might end up with the toilet in the kitchen – even if your wife can do calligraphy.

*Tom Ferreira is sitting President of the South African Association of Industrial Editors and is co-author of Write Angles, South Africa's first book on house journals.*

## The Alternative Press in South Africa

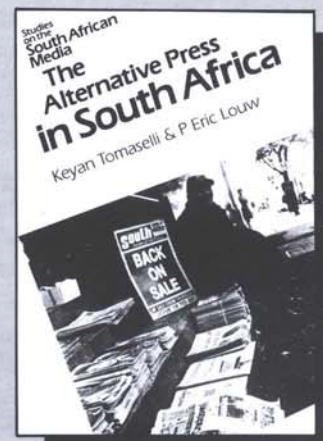
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**Shaun Johnson and Lew Raubenheimer**



# AND IN THIS CORNER

Natal University's **ERIC LOUW** comes out fighting in response to a broadside from Reg Lascaris as the war of word over a possible future subsidy system to fund alternative media hots up

**R**EG Lascaris' article, 'A Pox on Your Taxes' (*Review*, June 1991) contains a number of valuable insights concerning potential problems with a media subsidy scheme. Certainly, three potential problem areas with my proposed scheme suggest themselves.

- Firstly, how to ensure that the commissioners on any Media Council represent the full spectrum of opinion in society rather than merely the interests of the Government-of-the-day (or any other interest group, for that matter)?

- Secondly, deciding on the criteria whereby subsidies are offered – i.e. which groups are eligible for a subsidy?

- Thirdly, how to prevent subsidies becoming a gravy-train?

I agree with Mr Lascaris when he rings the alarm bells regarding these issues. Were a subsidy system ever to be instituted I, for one, would hope that people like Mr Lascaris would be consulted for their insights and experience. However, I have difficulty with the dichotomy he sets up of a market-driven media system being good, while a media subsidy system is necessarily bad.

Let me, however, deal with the above three problem areas as a way of illustrating my counter-argument to Reg Lascaris' objections to my views on building a media subsidy system.

**Firstly**, Mr. Lascaris is seemingly concerned about the prospect of one political party gaining control of a media subsidy system and potentially using it to stifle diversity of opinion in favour of their own centralized 'grand plan'. In this regard, Mr. Lascaris seems to suffer from a common white South African malady called the "Rest-of-Africa" syndrome. To some extent one can understand these fears, especially given the history of



Comrade Mugabe's abuse of the Zimbabwean media (and closer to home, of the National Party's misuse of the SABC).

However, I would argue that South Africa is different from the rest of Africa.

We have a number of key players in this country, each with large constituencies. None of these players is able to wish away or overwhelm the other players. Hence the balance of forces in a one-person-one-vote South Africa would effectively rule out any one sector gaining a monopoly of power. Democracy is not an abstract ideal. Rather, democracy is the outcome of precisely such balances of power where players have to build a social system of working compromises.

My assumption is that the complex balance of forces in South Africa would provide an ideal matrix for a Media Council that no one sector could control. Hence Reg Lascaris' fear that the Media Council would aim to "correct trends" (pg 49, *Review*, June) misses the point of the proposal.

If the Media Council was drawn from the full range of interests in society, it would become impossible for any one

group to (mis)use the system in such a way.

The proposed media subsidy scheme in my *Restructuring the Media* paper specifically drew upon the Dutch "verzuiling" ("pillarization") system because it seemed the best way to utilize the existing balance of forces in our country in such a way as to create a democratically-diverse media BEYOND the control of any ONE vested interest (whether this be the ANC, the NP or mining-capitalism). Yet it is a scheme which recognizes the diversity of interest groups and opinion in our society, and indeed institutionalizes this diversity.

**A second** problem is devising criteria whereby a subsidy will be payable. Mr Lascaris' point about the difficulty of 'audits'/surveys is correct. However, his view that annual audits would be invalid because of "people being a changeable lot" (pg 50, *Review*, June) is a little extreme. After all, if we apply this sort of logic we will have to do away with elections for Parliaments.

But even if audits are a problem, other criteria for deciding how to pay a subsidy do suggest themselves. What is clear is that there is a need to avoid the development of a bottomless pit into which funds will be endlessly poured.

One way of achieving this is to link the payment of subsidy-payments to some kind of measurement of tangible results. In other words, the medium has to demonstrate that it is attracting an audience/readers.

I have no fixed ideas for running such a reward-system. However, two alternatives have been tried elsewhere. The Swedes link payment to (audited) audience size within quite a complex subsidy formula. Alternatively, the Dutch "verzuiling" approach uses the sales figures for TV/radio guides as a sort of

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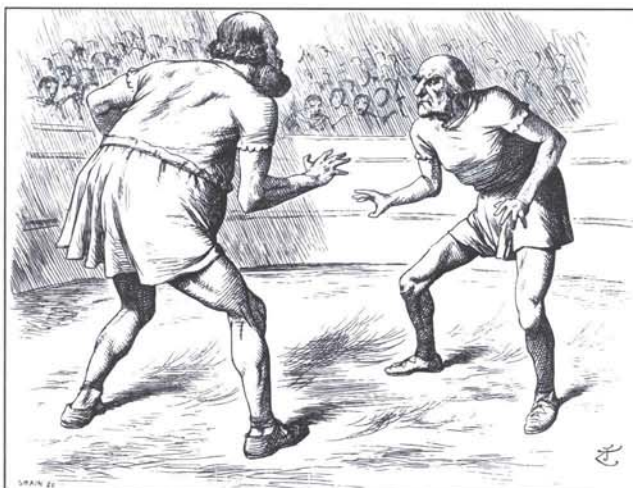
(on-going) in-built audit system of the support each sector has. Each sector has its own radio/TV station. The assumption is that if one buys the programme guide for that station, then one supports that position (ie. belongs to that "club").

Mr Lascaris' suggestion that my paper proposed only giving media subsidies to political groups (pg 50, *Review*, June) is simply wrong. In my paper (pg 36, *Review*, November) one suggestion was that religious groups would, for example, be eligible for a subsidy. And in other forums/papers I have suggested that civic groups and grassroots media generate a democratic grassroots dialogue and to help counter-balance any trends towards the formation of a comprador or nomenklatura class.

A third area of concern to Reg Lascaris is the development of 'Big-Daddyism' and a related gravy-train for services rendered to the system. In the book Lascaris co-authored with Nick Green, he calls this the "wabenzi" phenomenon, a term derived from the ownership of Mercedes Benz cars. I would agree with Mr Lascaris that this is a phenomenon that our society would be well advised to guard against. However, he has a rather slanted understanding of the operation of "wabenzi".

**I take** issue with his assumption that this phenomenon only affects 'state-planned' (socialist?) societies. Evidence suggests that there are actually two forms of "wabenzis"; the nomenklatura variety took root in certain state-planned economies, while the comprador-class variety has taken root in certain free-market economies.

Mr Lascaris should take care not to allow free-market tinted glasses to obscure the fact that African societies, which are the darlings of free-market ideologues (such as Kenya, Botswana, Cameroon and Ivory Coast), also have their "wabenzis"/compradors. And in these latter societies the same Big Daddies/"wabenzis" tend to draw their sustenance from both the state and business sectors simultaneously. The free-enterprise variety could be termed "super-wabenzis".



Reg Lascaris goes on to ask "just how representative are the 'experts' (and)... where is their constituency?" I make no claim to represent anyone. However, perhaps giving the genealogy of my *Restructuring the Media* paper will serve to dispel the notion that it was merely the result of a purely academic exercise (since the latter is something Mr Lascaris seems to object to).

This paper began its life during the dark days of the PW Botha era as an internal UDF discussion document. My intention was to raise for discussion an ALTERNATIVE to the Zimbabwe-route and/or 'nationalization' of the Press. Two years after writing it, I was asked to turn this discussion paper into a presentation for a media workshop at the Department of Journalism & Media Studies at Rhodes University.

The intention of both the UDF and/or Rhodes paper was not to prescribe. Rather it was to generate debate. In this, at least, I have been successful – ideologues of all hues (free marketeers and some far-Leftists) have found fault with my proposal for a mixed economy media model. The less ideologically-bound, however, seem to have found some merit in it.

**Mr Lascaris'** proposed alternative to a media subsidy system is a "public service" approach for transferring wealth to "worthwhile causes" (pg 50, *Review*, June). This sounds like charity to me.

Mr Lascaris adopts the same liberal-charity approach so characteristic of those sectors controlling societies' wealth.

The liberal solution to the mal-distribution of social resources is to propose charity for the less well off. It is an approach, of course, that leaves the wealthy alone.

More important, it retains the existing power relationships intact and in favour of those owning the wealth because it is they who can decide when to turn the flow of resources on and off. Frankly, Mr Lascaris, I would sooner trust the judgment of a Media Council created by Parliamentary legislation (although independent of the

Government of the day) and drawn from all sections of society, rather than rely on the whims of liberal charity. Hence my proposal for a media subsidy system backed by legislation.

The contents of a market-driven media are inherently skewed in favour of those with disposable income and hence do not serve the full spectrum of interests and views in society. For anyone concerned with creating a media system that facilitates a democratic dialogue in society this is a problem. On these grounds I (and many other South Africans) see a need to reform our press system.

**In calling** for a reformed media system – which guarantees a diversity of opinion – I was careful NOT to call for the dismantling of the existing market-driven media. Rather I called for the existing market system to be 'tamed' with some of the wealth from the successful market-media to be re-directed into a scheme for overcoming the distortions and skewed information flow caused by market forces.

Free-market ideologues will naturally be offended by this proposal. However, in formulating any 'alternative' to the subsidy scheme, these same free marketeers will have to come up with a far more credible proposal than mere 'charity'.

Reg Lascaris is correct – any scheme to reform our media will have to be grounded in reality. One important reality, Mr Lascaris, is that a large constituency exists in this country which is unhappy with the existing skewed information-flow. ●