

THE ELECTION behind, where does journalism go from here?

Coverage of the poll itself provides some pointers. Media veterans of the election Mark van der Velden, Michelle Kemp, Zubeida Jaffer, Lakela Kaunda, George Mazarakis and Don Pinnock highlight in this edition what it was like reporting for the wider South Africa and dealing with secretive IEC-style State apparatus at the same time.

Such challenges will continue no matter what politicians tell us about transparency and open government.

It remains the duty of journalists to guard against encroachment of citizens' rights and to go further by advancing these against the State. Following on their tiff with Joe Modise, the *Weekly Mail and Guardian* are in the forefront testing the boundaries by demanding access to police and military intelligence files.

There also has been some encouragement in the courts. The findings in the Falati and Cornellisen cases suggest a change in direction in interpretation, while the Eastern Cape Supreme Court recently ruled in favour of Siphon Qozeleni, who wanted to see his police docket. In his judgment, Justice Froneman said decisions made before the new constitution, which ruled out disclosure of dockets in civil cases where

the criminal prosecution has ended, "are no longer binding or applicable" because of the new Bill of Rights.

But for journalists, as is reported by a number of contributors in this Review, the Bill of Rights is not a sufficient guarantee of press freedom or the right to know. It should not be necessary for the *WM&G* to test the boundaries of what is, and isn't, "transparent" in pursuit, or protection of, one's rights. The onus, rather, should fall on the State to show why information cannot be released.

Journalists, as contributor Michael Morris notes, need to be aggressive in their defence of the free flow of information. In some media institutions this may require retraining or even the importation of non-institutionalised minds, as happened with the SABC's recruitment of prominent print journalists, including Max du Preez, Zwelakhe Sisulu, Joe Thloloe and Govin Reddy. One new recruit, Sylvia Vollenhoven, spells out, in this edition, the problems encountered.

Empowering the media vis-a-vis the State does not, however, mean empowering citizens to gain access to media. In this Review, Jolyon Nuttall, Harvey Tyson, Franz Krüger, Robin McGregor and Cleo Ehlers discuss ways of deconcentrating media holdings, developing new voices and

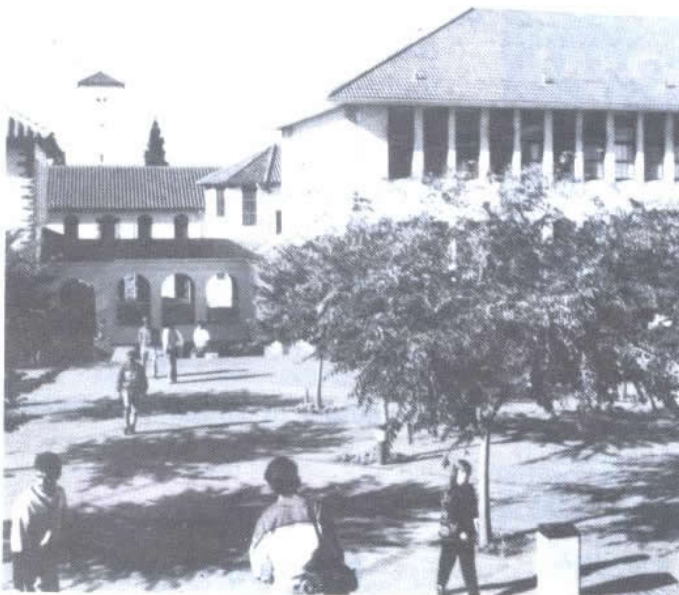
enhancing business performance. The focus in this edition on the IBA previews the impending empowerment of new broadcasters. Democracy depends on the diversity of its media voices and we have to move ahead with developing greater pluralism in the press, both print and broadcast.

What is also needed is a Freedom of Information Act to give journalists, and others, the right to expect, as a matter of course, access to public information. As contributor Gavin Stewart suggests, this may require a quid pro quo — a code of ethics. Such codes have a worrying political hangover but, he argues, a professional body of journalists — guided by a code and protected by a Freedom of Information Act — could ensure the media perform the watchdog role effectively.

Writing in that other momentous year of political change, 1961, Argus editor Morris Broughton commented on press-State relations. He said that while the press's ethical standards were admirable and technical achievements outstanding, it wielded the "sceptre of righteousness and the swords of denunciation" in vain. "The magnificent watchdog barks," he noted, "but the caravan moves on, unheeding". It is time to ensure the growing number of watchdogs will be listened to.

■ Charles Riddle

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