

LONELY HEARTS

THE SA Communications Service (SACS) shackled up recently with the African Council for Communication Education (ACCE) for a weeklong conference junket in Cape Town. The theme, "communication for empowering civil society", conveniently reflected the latest (last?) catchy funding fashion amongst ACCE's declining donor base. Alas, civil society evidently excludes Africa's independent press. ACCE, whose president is a Cameroonian civil servant, wouldn't hear of calling upon Cameroonian dictator Paul Biya to release leading African editor Pius Njawa, jailed for "insulting the president".

For its part, the SACS announced itself to delegates with a laminated dinner party menu bearing a whitewashed message including the following line: "Then known as the Bureau for Information, the organisation's responsibility was to communicate with the South African population on behalf of other government departments." Tell that one to civil society and its journoes who suffered censorship by SACS minions during the 1980s states of emergency. No surprise that SACS officials, in-between cheering their supremo Sol Kotane (he of Bop Broadcasting Big Bucks retrenchment fame), organised themselves to take the top positions in the South African chapter of the ACCE.

COUNTING FOR COMTASK

THE Media Monitoring Project recently inspected 7000 articles for Thabo Mbeki's Comtask. They then proclaimed 49% of news about government was neutral, 30% positive and 21% negative. This, without giving a definition of what these labels mean in practice when you come to classifying an article. Worse than this messy methodology, MMP commits a cardinal theoretical blunder. No self-respecting media researcher today believes that meanings reside in texts. In fact, anyone half-aware of how past media coverage of ANC terro's was decoded to mean ANC heroes, would be sceptical of reading meanings into texts. Meanings, to be meaningful, need to be studied in terms of what real readers, listeners and viewers make of them. Rather than the Media Monitoring Problem, good old journalistic thumbsuck would suggest that government's problem is not the percentages of coverage, but how to ensure that its practical performance is experienced positively by the populace, whether via the media or directly. It's deeds, not words, that really count.

SPELL THAT AGAIN

HAVING dished out the disgrace to the Media Monitors, Thumbsuck now turns to his own humbly. He was sorely embarrassed in the previous *Review* to have picked out the South African Society of Journalists and the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism for spelling mistakes. The self same edition spelt "Whither" without the "h" and misspelled a contributor's name. That almost beats a Sapa report on the Black Editors Forum and the Conference of Editors in 1995, which spoke of "Thami Matswai" and "Jan Patten". For a magazine done by a journalism school, our errors make us rather shame-faced. So, a free sub for the first reader to find a spelling miskate in this edition.

JUDGING THE JUDGES:

WHILE John Patten has retired to take on the mantle of columnist James McClurg, Thami Mazwai has soldiered on to be elected president of the South African National Editors Forum. In that capacity Mazwai last year headed up an off-

PUZZLE

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the-record lunch for SANEF and the country's top two judges. Thumbsuck cannot reveal whether Constitutional Court president Arthur Chaskalson failed to moderate his media unfriendly statements about the subpoena power of Section 205 (take a guess), nor whether chief justice Ismail Mohammed used Codesa-style diplomacy to keep the discussion decent. But let it be known that Mr Mazwai - incarcerated under 205 for more days than he cares to recall - put forward the classic position of the journalist: "I have an open mind on argument in favour of Section 205," he told the judges. "It goes in one ear, and out the other."

NUTSHELLS

ANOTHER classic comment comes from Naspers newspapers boss, Hennie van Deventer, speaking at a Comtask conference in Caledon: "The public probably don't want 100% of information generated in parliament. That's the point of having editors. In fact the legendary definition of an editor is someone who separates the wheat from the chaff, and publishes the chaff."

Also of vintage value is the following: "When Samuel Morse flicked the switch for the first telegraph message, someone said that Maine could now talk to Florida. In Boston, Ralph Waldo Emerson remarked, 'Yes, but has Maine anything to say to Florida?'" Anthony Sampson cited this Alistair Cooke story when making a point about the Internet at the Commonwealth Press Union conference in Cape Town last year.

NO PLACE TO HIDE

DUMBEST caption in 1996: Photojournalist snaps white woman talking to black man, pic gets run big and in colour in *The Star*, the following words accompanying it: "Let's discuss ... Salome Stopford and Charles Mahlangu get away from the media in Brakpan yesterday to talk about the future of unsettled young Sifiso."

SMOKE SIGNALS

THE LOBBY FOR "free commercial speech", (puffery lingo for unrestricted advertisements), is enough to set Thumbsuck fuming. The tobacco giants support the cause, so does the Print Media Association. The PMA now wants the journoes to join the campaign. But a bad odour still lingers: only months back, smoke sellers Rembrandt displayed zero support for freedom of editorial speech. The cigarette company yanked its advertising out of *The Star* when that paper dared to editorialise against smoking. If the media is going to support free commercial speech, there's got to be reciprocity. A one-way street is enough to make at least this journalist want to kick butt!

PRESS STRESS

AN AMERICAN study recently discovered that AUS journalists are more stressed out than ever, but they are smoking and drinking less. Er, ... is that "but" - or "because"?

DREAM TEAM

THE ASSOCIATED Press Managing Editors have compiled their dream newspaper team, drawing on famous figures who practised journalism at one point or another. Here are some of the highlights (find the rest at: <http://www.apme.com/eternal.htm>)

Senior Management:

- MARK TWAIN, Editor-in-Chief: "Get your facts first, and then you can distort 'em as much as you please."
- FREDERICK DOUGLASS, Editorial Page Editor: "Truth is proper and beautiful in all times and in all places." Born into slavery in 1818, he became one of America's greatest anti-slavery crusaders.
- JOSEPH PULITZER, Managing Editor: Sued by an opera singer who his paper reported gave a drunken performance, Pulitzer responded not with a retraction but with a story headlined "Full as a tick".

Department Heads

- CHARLES DICKENS, City Editor.
- BEN FRANKLIN, Business Editor.
- ERNEST HEMINGWAY, Sports Editor.
- WINSTON CHURCHILL, Foreign Editor.
- WILLIAM FAULKNER, State Editor.
- MARGARET BOURKE-WHITE, Photo Editor.
- WALT WHITMAN, Features Editor.
- WALT DISNEY, Art Director.
- IAN FLEMING, Projects Editor (Investigative Desk).
- ISAAC BASHEVIS SINGER, Copy Chief: "The wastepaper basket is a writer's best friend."

Section Editors

- EDGAR ALLAN POE, Sunday Magazine Editor/Literary Critic.
- ALBERT CAMUS, Op-Ed Editor.
- H.G. WELLS, Science Editor.

Senior Correspondents

- JACK LONDON, National Correspondent: "Invariably I complete every (story) I start. If it's good, I sign it and send it out. If it isn't good, I sign it and send it out."
- RUDYARD KIPLING, Foreign Correspondent: "I keep six honest serving men (they taught me all I knew); their names are What and Why and When and How and Where and Who."

Columnists, Editorial Writers.

- KARL MARX, Financial Columnist: "Information is the only delight of the newspapers."
- H.L. MENCKEN, Metro: "All successful newspapers are ceaselessly querulous and bellicose. They never defend anyone or anything if they can help it; if the job is forced upon them, they tackle it by denouncing someone or something else."
- BAT MASTERSON, Sports Columnist: "We all get about the same amount of ice. The rich get it in summer and the poor get it in winter."

Senior Reporters

- HENRY MORTON STANLEY, Investigative Reporter.
- TRUMAN CAPOTE, Police Reporter.
- JOHN STEINBECK, Social Services Reporter.
- FREDERIC REMINGTON, Staff Illustrator: It was Remington who was sent by William Randolph Hearst to witness the rebel uprising in Cuba. When he cabled home that he found no uprising, Hearst replied: "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."

Other

- P.T. BARNUM, United Way Fund Drive: "There's a sucker born every minute."
- WARREN G. HARDING, Vice President/Advertising: Holds the distinction of being the only newspaper publisher ever to become president; he was second-rate at both jobs.

A paper probably wouldn't work with even two of these egos. But there's no harm pretending. Thumbsuck calls for South African nominations ... Pringle, Plaatje, Plomer ...?

Send your South African Dream Team nomination to: anthea@thoth.ru.ac.za.

Courageous Journalism AWARD 1997

Applications close on
AUGUST 8.
For more information, call
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