



ANTHEA GARMAN

In this issue

REVIEW is usually a one-person operation (me). When it's seriously under construction it involves another two (an ad seller and a designer). This review has been under construction since last year and it has gone through several incarnations to get to the state you will see it in when it reaches your desk. There's nothing like the process of putting together a major production almost single-handedly to convince an editor that publishing on paper is still a labour-intensive occupation.

There are many journalists around the country who have Review on their hearts and they contribute wonderful ideas and stories to share with their colleagues — many of the writers in this edition are among that group. I'm very grateful to them for their support and for being a network so that Review can reach across media into newsrooms all over the continent.

Our African mailing list is growing by the edition thanks to the training groups who come to Rhodes for skills upgrading and who then find and want Review too. The challenge then is to make Review more Africa-focused, so that other Africans don't feel that they're eavesdropping on South African-specific conversations all the time.

Our other challenge is to our growing group of student readers. Lecturers around the country are prescribing Review as study material. It makes us proud to know we're this kind of resource. An exciting development from our links with tertiary institutions is having students write for us. In this edition a Pretoria Technikon student evaluates cigarette smoking and the role magazines play, and our own Rhodes students tackle the issue of the election and the low registration turnout of first-time voters.

There is no shortage of issues to debate: racism, Section 205, the spies, the Lesotho aftermath, the election, community media, gay-bashing, corruption. This Review has it all!

'STOP THE PERSECUTION'

As we go to press Sanef and the SA national committee of the International Press Institute have appealed to President Robert Mugabe to stop the persecution of Zimbabwean journalists.

Mark Chavunduka and Ray Choto of the Standard, Ibbo Mandaza, Grace Kwinjeh, Fernando Goncalves and Ferai Mungazi of the Zimbabwe Mirror have all been on the receiving end of legislation used by the Smith regime against its opponents.

The organisations told Mugabe: "As subscribers to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the Southern African Development Community protocols on media freedom, it is incumbent on Zimbabwean authorities to release these journalists immediately."

"Sanef and SA IPI are also deeply alarmed by the view that news media that defames the government forfeits the protection of the law. Zimbabwe professes to be a democracy and there can be no question of the media 'defaming' the government when it publishes news reports however much they reflect on the competency or efficiency of the administration. That is the news media's right in a democracy."

TALKING WITH THABO

With Nelson Mandela in power, Sanef set up several discussions with the President's Office about issues of concern to journalists. Some of the meetings were heated and fraught but many others were cordial and frank. I attended the last one last year and while the Sanef members were gathering early outside Tuynhuis to arrive en masse and on time, Mandela appeared at the door to say: It's cold, come inside and have a cup of coffee.

That was Mandela. Often aloof and austere, often very disapproving of the media, but always engaged.

Fast forward to Feb 16, 1999. Sanef is now embarking on the same process with the President-designate Thabo Mbeki. Things are far stiffer. We're at Tuynhuis again, early in the morning. We all sit in that bizarre, horse-shaped, wooden, table structure that some apartheid architect designed for conferencing, and Mbeki decides he doesn't want to hold lengthy introductions. Nevertheless Mike Siluma, Sanef chair, decides we should all introduce ourselves. It becomes clear that when Sanef members want assurances (that the SA government is taking seriously the situation in Zimbabwe, is serious about legislation that inhibits free media in SA, will hold the ANC firebrands in check during electioneering) Mbeki is not going to get into any intense discussions or honest talk. While he did promise that his advisers would set up a mechanism to meet directly with media people and to talk about how government is communicating and what concerns media the most, the lack of trust on both sides was palpable. The respect editors accord Mandela was not quite there (people interrupted Mbeki in mid-flow quite casually) and Mbeki commented that he will no longer say publicly when he has a problem with certain reporting ("I get accused of strangling press freedom"), he will go directly to the media owners and talk to them about specifics.

As we left — exactly on the hour, no lingering here for an autograph for the kid or some chit chat — Tony O'Reilly, Shaun Johnson, Ivan Fallon and Liam Healey arrived for an Independent Newspapers meeting with Mbeki.

It seems that the incoming president doesn't see the editors as significant enough or united enough to engage in straight talk. He has a small group around himself of journalists he trusts (people like Thami Mazwai — see the report on the African Renaissance conference on p20) and there are a few others he works with when he needs to. But it seems his style will be to refer big issues directly to the media owners.

It's become an overused cliché, to say Mbeki is an enigma. We've seen enough evidence to know he's a very clever politician. He juggles things many of us consider very contradictory (like outright support for capitalism and a strong commitment to improving the lot of the poor and dispossessed). But he also surrounds himself with yes people and seems to be insecure about exposing himself to strong criticism.

It's going to be interesting to watch his developing relationship with the mass media.



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