



Elias T Rusike, Publisher and Chief Executive, *The Financial Gazette*, compares his country's media past and present

Zimbabwe's Experience

By the time Ian Smith declared UDI from Britain in 1965, the Argus Group of South Africa and its subsidiary in Rhodesia controlled every daily newspaper in the former Federation of the Rhodesias and Nyasaland as well as two Sunday newspapers. Racism and separate development were part and parcel of the editorial policies.

After political independence in April 1980, the new government of Robert Mugabe set up the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust to take over the 45% South African ownership of the Rhodesia Printing and Publishing Company with financial assistance from the Government of Nigeria.

Zimbabwe Newspapers now owns 51% of the newspaper group. Today, Zimbabwe Newspapers publishes two dailies — *The Herald* in Harare and *The Chronicle* in Bulawayo; weeklies — the *Sunday Mail* in Harare, *Sunday News* in Bulawayo, the *Manica Post* in Mutare and *Kwayedza* — a Shona newspaper in Harare.

What is ironic is that these newspapers, which used to be perceived as racist, i.e. anti-black, are now rabidly anti-white, thus reflecting the present government's policies — especially in the recent farm invasions by war veterans, ZANU PF supporters and unemployed youths. The reporting in government-owned papers has become so anti-white and one-sided, that many whites now read the independent newspapers. These privately-owned newspapers are the *Daily News* — owned by the Associated Newspapers of Zimbabwe, the *Financial Gazette* by Modus Publications and the *Independent* and the *Sunday Standard* — owned by Clive Wilson, Clive Murphy and Trevor Ncube, former editor of the *Financial Gazette*.

The success of the *Daily News* and other independent newspapers in Zimbabwe is directly attributed to the decline and unpopularity of government newspapers. Zimbabweans were being fed a daily news diet of lies and propaganda by government newspapers and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation. The fact that both Zimpapers and ZBC are funded by public money did not matter much. The government uses the two publicly-owned companies to promote the President and ZANU PF to the exclusion of the opposition parties. The appointment of Bornwell Chakaodza as editor-in-chief of the *Herald* was the worst decision ever made. Here was a man who was Director of Information, the government's chief spokesman and chief government censor, who was made editor-in-chief of a national, not even government or party, newspaper. The result has been disastrous.

The circulation of government newspapers has declined and the independent newspapers have increased theirs. For instance, the *Herald* print run is now about 80 000 copies with over 25% returns, i.e. unsold copies. On the other hand, the *Daily News* has increased its circulation from about 40 000 in December 1999 to more than 100 000 at the end of May 2000.

The independent newspapers are perceived as fair, objective and balanced, accommodating the views of

government and the ruling party. Their non-racial approach to reporting has earned the independent media support in both readership and advertising from both black and white readers.

There is certainly a convergence of views between white and black editors in the way they look at and analyse problems. For instance, the invasion of 1500 white-owned farms was seen as an electioneering exercise by Robert Mugabe in an attempt to regain lost support from blacks. Both the *Herald* and President Mugabe have accused Zimbabwean whites of being racist.

For blacks, the need for land redistribution is legitimate, but the methods used are unacceptable. Why did Mugabe wait for 20 years before taking concrete measures to redistribute the land? He deliberately waited for Election 2000 in order to use the land issue against whites and the British, locating it at the Centre of his Party Manifesto, i.e. the Economy is Land and Land is the Economy.

It is very difficult for media personnel, whether black or white, to operate under the present political and racial environment.

“There’s a convergence of views of black and white editors”



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