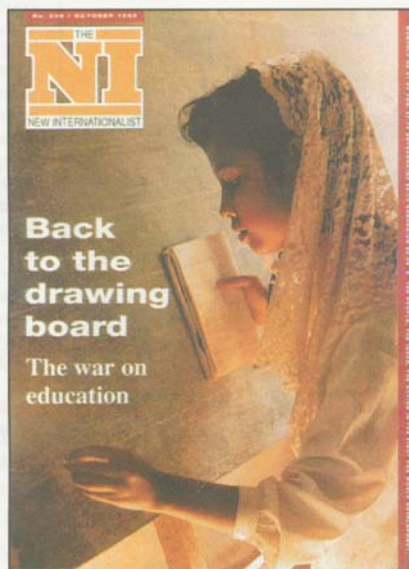




With 65 000 subscribers, the New Internationalist is the largest-selling magazine on global social justice issues. It's independent, hard-hitting and consistently provides an alternative view of world events. The NI is run as a co-operative and is financially self-sustaining. Below one of the editorial team, Troth Wells, introduces the NI and looks at the relevance of its role and experience to the media in South Africa in the light of the Government's Reconstruction and Development Programme.

VERY LITTLE IS SACRED



With each issue devoted to a single topic NI is able to cover stories in depth.

Giving a voice to the world's oppressed and dispossessed people has been a major part of the NI's purpose. It has been achieved through campaigning issues, such as one in 1973 on the unscrupulous selling of baby milk in the Third World by Nestle and other large companies. Other magazines have turned the spotlight on the dumping of hazardous products on developing world markets (out-of-date drugs and dangerous pesticides for example), or the genocide in East Timor which the NI has consistently publicized since the Indonesian invasion of 1975.

Each edition of the NI takes one subject and gives a concise overview of the major issues and arguments, backed up with full-colour design, visuals, facts and photos to make it accessible. The range of topics is wide: we've had magazines on Race, the World Bank, Debt, the Arms Trade, Tourism, Education, Masculinity, Global Warming, the Media, Language, History, Mozambique, Food, Northern Ireland, New York, Cambodia, Trade, Mexico, India, Sex, Human Rights, Multinationals, Sex, Drugs, (but not rock 'n roll yet), and even The Rich.

What makes the NI distinctive is that it will tackle virtually any topic; very little is sacred. This element of unpredictability makes the magazine popular with its readers who seem to enjoy (or at least accept) its provocative and campaigning stance. And the reason the magazine can be so outspoken is that it is an independent publication, with no media magnate pulling the strings. There is no proprietor to haul journalists over the coals. This editorial freedom allows us to decide both what goes into the magazine and what we feel is important to say about an issue.

But while editorial freedom is highly prized, it's hard to achieve without financial freedom. Fortunately the NI has that too. After initial funding

from Oxfam and Christian Aid, two major UK aid agencies, the NI built up its subscriber base to the current level of 65 000. The income from subscriptions and other publications means we don't have to kow-tow to advertisers. The only advertisements we carry have to meet our ethical criteria: certainly no alcohol, tobacco or arms ads.

The New Internationalist is run by a co-operative and wholly owned by a non-profit Trust. This seems to work well. There is an editorial team of seven (five in Oxford and two in our Toronto office) who rotate as editor of each issue, with a second editor riding shotgun. At the annual selection meeting, all 16 members of the Co-op contribute ideas for the next year's magazines. We look for a mix of campaigning themes, country-specific magazines, environmental topics, personal politics and the more obvious 'development' subjects such as education, health or world hunger.

What may be transferable or useful to an SA setting from the NI's experience? Perhaps the most important element the NI's example can bring is that of support — to bolster the idealism and sense of social justice which has been so clearly demonstrated by the vibrant South African press, especially by English-language papers such as The Sowetan, South, City Press, the Rand Daily Mail and its successor the Weekly Mail and Guardian during the Nationalists' years in power. Magazines like New Ground play a vital role in publicising environmental concerns such as the dumping of heavy metals. These are very much in the NI's mould of trying to present an alternative voice to the mainstream media, one that will not be fobbed off with ministerial murmurings, nor gagged by a proprietor's political preferences.

That is surely the paramount role of the press and media in a democracy: to question and to challenge, to provide a source of information for its

audience and to help the process of finding solutions. It is right that the Government is questioned about the Gravy Train. The press should be probing to see exactly who is getting the building contracts under the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). But what is important is the tone and manner in which this is done: to be completely negative is likely to cut off the avenues of communication. By endorsing the aims and purposes of the RDP in general, the press can contribute to the debates about policy and practice. This does not always have to be negative, and one thing the NI has succeeded in (to a greater or lesser extent) is to promote a positive message or way forward. And not just with words. Searching out images that reflect the vitality and dignity of people, even in adversity, is an important part of the magazine's message. Even poor and oppressed people can have some control over their lives: depicting them only as passive victims demeans them further. The magazine also provides practical suggestions for what readers can do to change a situation, from simply joining an action group to lobbying an MP.

In supporting the RDP the press can contribute best from a position of independence. As the RDP document puts it: "The democratic government must seek to correct the skewed legacy of apartheid where public media were turned into instruments of National Party policy". How vital it is therefore that the press and media are not co-opted into the Government, that the Government of National Unity does not tread in the dismal footprints of its predecessors.

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Tolerance for a critical press is a mark of maturity. Like him or loathe him, Sunday Times editor Ken Owen will continue his gad-fly role; learning how to deal with his barbs is an essential part of living in today's media world. The ANC has a huge amount of goodwill and support both from within and without South Africa. It has taken the difficult step of advocating "open debate and transparency in government and society (as) crucial elements of reconstruction and development", and it does not need to overreact when people criticise policy or individuals. Maybe the criticism is valid, maybe it is not. But let it be made, for the Government, even the ANC part of it, does not have the monopoly on wisdom.

The new Government in South Africa is familiar with the agendas and interests of various segments of the media. It knows too that there are elements who want to see it fail. But to lash out at all the media for being 'counter-revolutionary' or seeking 'crises' is a sign of insecurity.

A recent edition of the NI, called *Spiked! The Stories that don't make the*

News noted that 'sometimes stories don't get told simply because those in power make damned sure they don't and the media gatherers lack the clout, resources or inclination to investigate further'. The ANC is a principled government stepping bravely out into its new world, and it recognizes the dangers ahead. As it puts it in RDP document: "A deliberate policy must be followed to prevent unwarranted state intervention in levelling the media playing field or in preserving privileged status for government information". Let that be the spirit of the new South Africa.



The New Internationalist will be available in South Africa in early 1995 in a special joint promotion with the Weekly Mail and Guardian. Subscribe to both journals for R150, or just the NI - 12 monthly issues for R 90. Apply to New Internationalist, FREEPOST JH125, P O Box 32797, Braamfontein 2107. Tel (011) 358 2120 Fax (011) 726 8430.

This tiny sliver represents an Afrikaans broadsheet with a share of **3,7%**. Must try harder in the future.

This strip represents a niche market morning broadsheet. At **9,1%** they're on the threshold of double figures. Well done.

This section represents an English tabloid with a bias towards the south west townships. This paper achieved a creditable

13,7%.

A sterling effort.

This section represents an English morning tabloid which is also our 'biggest' competitor. At

18,2%

they deserve every encouragement.

The coloured rectangles represent newspaper market share in the greater Johannesburg area. See this red section.

This represents The Star's market share of

55,3%.

That means that The Star is bigger than all other dailies combined.

Weekend Star The Star
THERE'S MUCH MORE IN IT FOR YOU