

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNALISTS IN THE FRONT LINE

By Brian Bunting



Above: Editors of the Weekly Mail address the press after the paper is suspended, November 1988

Right: Progressive papers of the sixties, also victims of censorship.

On The Eve Of May Day

WORKERS' PARLIAM

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120 Delegates

JOHANNESBURG. ONE hundred and twenty delegates from all over South Africa attended the most successful conference ever at the seventh annual meeting of the S.A. Congress of Trade Unions in Johannesburg last week-end.

For the first time in the history of the Congress there were numerous delegates from the new Agricultural Workers' Union, including some from the Bethal district.

In his presidential address Mr. Lou Levy said:

"We liken our conference to a workers' parliament where we consider the weightiest problem down to the finest organisational detail involving the building of the trade union movement."

MOST DYNAMIC

"SACTU is now the most dynamic trade union centre in the country—a symbol of hope and unity and an inspiring prototype of the trade union co-ordinating body of the future."

Mr. George Mnyoni, who read the address on behalf of the banned president, went on to remind the

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Tanganyika Premier ...



Tanganyika Prime Minister Rukidi Kawawa throwing earth out of the foundations of a new house.

Freedom And Work In Tanganyika

From J. J. Huddle
DAR ES SALAAM.
THE slogan UHURU NA KAZI (Freedom and Work) was put into practice in Tanganyika recently by the President of the Tanganyika African National Union, Mr. Julius Nyerere, the Prime

who had come to cover the story found themselves gradually taking part in the scheme. In recent weeks, the number of volunteers has been growing larger and larger.

Leaders of all PAFMECA organisations based in Dar Es Salaam, as well as freedom-fighters returning from South

... And TANU



The New Nation, South, Weekly Mail, Grassroots and New Era have all suffered banning orders under the emergency regulations; Al-Qalam and Work In Progress are under threat. They are, of course, not the first newspapers in South Africa to have suffered from censorship.

Censorship is not a prerogative of the Afrikaners. It was the English governor of South Africa, Lord Charles Somerset, who suppressed the newspaper of Thomas Pringle and James Fairbairn, *The South African Commercial Advertiser*, in the 1830s, and deported George Greig, the

editor and printer. It took a four-year battle before the authorities could be persuaded by public and private agitation to issue an ordinance in 1829, setting out the parameters of press freedom.

This little episode of history so inspired the Director of Information at the South

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GUARDIAN

CLARION

PEOPLE'S WORLD

40th BIRTHDAY

ADVANCE

NEW AGE

African Embassy in London, that in a pamphlet on the *South African Press, Radio and Television* issued by the Embassy a few years ago he claimed that this ordinance:

"was greeted as the Magna Carta of the Press in South Africa, (and) made the arbitrary suppression of papers a thing of the past."

Tell that to Zwelakhe Sisulu, who was detained without trial for over two years; or the other journalists languishing in gaol under the emergency regulations; or the Catholic bishops responsible for the production of *New Nation*; or the director and staff of *South*; or Dr Jon Lewis, editor of the *South African Labour Bulletin*, who was deported from South Africa in 1987.

There were others after Lord Charles Somerset who tried to interfere with press freedom. In the days of the Transvaal Republic, Paul Kruger tried to interfere with the production of the *Johannesburg Star*, but the paper appealed to the courts, and its rights were fully restored. In the last year of fusion government under General Hertzog, another attempt was made to curb the freedom of the press, which was accused of insulting the heads of the Nazi and fascist states of Europe. After appealing to the newspaper editors to put their house in order, Hertzog drafted a censorship bill, but was prevented by the outbreak of war from putting it into effect.

Fascist Draft Constitution

The idea of censorship continued to simmer in the Nationalist mind. The draft constitution, which was adopted by the Nationalist Party during the war in the expectation that the Nazis would be victorious, provided for "the total abolition of the British Kingship," the installation of a president with dictatorial powers, and the designation of Afrikaans as the "first official language" of the country, with English relegated to the status of "second or supplementary official language."

In the sphere of human rights, the draft constitution declared that the state would have power to make sure that:

"individual citizens, as well as the organs of public opinion such as the existence of parties, the radio, the Press and the cinema, whilst their rightful freedom of expressions, including criticism of government policy, will be protected, shall not be allowed by their actions to undermine the public order or good morale of the Republic internally or externally."

The form of this pledge has been repeated over and over again by Nationalist Party politicians in the intervening years. There is the promise to preserve "freedom of expression, including criticism of government." On the other hand, there is the

threat against all those who "undermine the public order or good morale of the Republic." The regime must be cruel only to be kind.

"A free press is essential to a free democratic country,"

said Dr Van Rhyen in parliament in January 1950, when introducing the motion which led to the appointment of the notorious Press Commission; but his motion went on to declare that:

"all activities and tendencies to undermine or abuse such freedom ... should therefore be combated."

Press control, the Nationalists maintain, is essential if a press is to be free. In the 40 years since it came to power the Nationalist government has piled one measure of control on top of another. The South African press is certainly controlled; but who would be so brave as to maintain that it is free?

P W Botha Protects the People

In banning the *New Nation* and *South*, cabinet ministers justified themselves by alleging that the papers had identified themselves "absolutely" with Communism, and once again the argument is trotted out that in the fight against Communism anything is justified. P W Botha himself maintained that the banning of the UDF, COSATU and the other organisations and individuals in February 1988 was:

"not to oppress people, but to prevent others being oppressed by a communist dictatorship."

Hitler had the same approach. In his book, *Mein Kampf*, he maintained that:

"Democracy is the breeding ground in which the bacilli of the Marxist world pest can grow and spread."

Thus his campaign against Communism necessitated the elimination of democracy, and set the world on the course that led to the second world war and the destruction of 50 million lives. The anti-Communism of the Pretoria regime is clearly setting us on

the same course. At home we live today in a condition of civil war, as our people battle to defend themselves against the repression of the state and the violence and brutality of its security organs and their agents and allies, the vigilantes and death squads. Abroad, the assorted agents and allies of South Africa, like UNITA and the MNR, sow death and destruction in the Front Line States in pursuit of the regime's policies of domination over the whole sub-continent.

From the first moment they came to power, the Nationalists took steps to entrench apartheid and eliminate the opposition. In their first months of office, legislation was introduced to limit the franchise rights of Indians and Coloureds — the beginning of a campaign eventually extending over more than a decade to produce their dream of an all-White parliament. At the same time, the Minister of Justice, C R Swart, appointed a departmental committee to "investigate" Communism.

Anti-Communist Legislation

The Committee, working in secrecy with extraordinary rapidity, produced within a few months a report declaring that Communism was a national danger that had to be extirpated from "our national life, our democratic institutions and our Western philosophy." The fruit of this 'research' was the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, which not only outlawed the Communist Party but also produced our first casualty in the sphere of newspaper production: the newspaper *Inkululeko*, which had carried the message of the Party to all parts of the country and in which the views of Party stalwarts like Moses Kotane, J B Marks, Edwin Mofutsanyana and many others were published in several of the main languages of the country. *Inkululeko*, which at its peak had a circulation of about 10 000, was arbitrarily suppressed, together with *Freedom*, the theoretical organ of the Party, and other intermittent Party publications.

The Suppression of Communism Act, which forms the core of the Internal

Security Act of 1982 under which most of our activists are detained, prosecuted and persecuted, gives the regime the power to ban any periodical or other publication which promotes the spread of Communism or:

"serves inter alia as a means for expressing views or conveying information, the publication of which is calculated to further the achievements of any of the objects of Communism."

If Pretoria had been able to produce any evidence to justify its charge that the *New Nation* or *South* were identifying themselves "absolutely" with Communism, it could have used the Internal Security Act to ban them, not for three months but for good. The fact that it has not done so can be accepted as proof that no such evidence is available. Under the emergency regulations, as Judge Curlewis pointed out in the *New Nation* case, the Minister of Information does not have to give reasons why the *New Nation* offends him.

"It is not our job to pass opinion on a minister's opinion,"

said the judge. Under the emergency regulations the Minister can and does do what he likes, and the victim has no recourse to the courts. The judge's advice to newspaper editors was,

"If in doubt, don't publish."

When the law is so unclear, and the penalties so severe, who can be sure of anything?

Opposition Banned

During the last 40 years, the regime has made it plain that it will not tolerate anybody who, to adapt Karl Marx's famous thesis on Feuerbach, not only interprets the world but also tries to change it. The apartheid regime doesn't mind anyone saying he is against apartheid provided he does nothing about it. Gatsha Buthelezi, for example, constantly proclaims he is opposed to apartheid, but because he does nothing to end it — indeed many will argue that in practice he helps to perpetuate it —

no action has ever been taken against him.

On the other hand, those who try to mobilise effective opposition to the system are struck down with ever-increasing viciousness and violence. Ten years after the banning of the Communist Party, the time came for the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress to be banned in 1960, followed by the Congress of Democrats in 1962, the Black Consciousness organisations in the 1970s and the 18 organisations in February 1988, prohibited from doing anything except write to their lawyers and keep their books in order.

In the sphere of the press, the bannings have been equally draconian. In 1952, two years after the disappearance of *Inkululeko*, it was the turn of the weekly newspaper, the *Guardian*, banned by the Minister of Justice in terms of the Suppression of Communism Act.

Democratic Press Fights for Life

The *Guardian* had been launched in 1937 as a journal of the labour movement, but over the years had become established as the mouthpiece of the forces in South Africa fighting for national liberation and socialism, and against racism, capitalism and imperialism. At its peak during the war and in the immediate post-war period, it had a regular circulation of 45 000 — one issue, at the time of the 1943 general election, topped 55 000. Throwing its considerable weight behind the projected Defiance Campaign, the *Guardian* was a force the regime could not ignore. The paper was banned, not because it was propagating communism or breaking the law in any other way, for which it could have been prosecuted, but because it was said to be under the control of people who had been members of the former Communist Party of South Africa before it was banned in 1950. The paper had never been an organ of the Communist Party, though it supported its policies. It was banned because it stood in the way of the apartheid juggernaut.

The paper was replaced immediately by

the *Clarion*, which had to change its name for technical reasons to *People's World* and then to *Advance*, which was banned in 1954 to be replaced by *New Age*, which was banned in 1962. The line was finally brought to an end in 1963, when all the members of the editorial staff of *Spark* were prohibited from producing any material for publication, and no replacements could be found who were not under similar restrictions.

It is worth recalling these episodes because we must never allow the history of either repression or resistance to be forgotten. When the *Spark* was doused, other media were brought into the front line, sometimes involuntarily.

Spiral of Repression and Resistance

In October 1977 it was the turn of the *World*, a White-owned paper directed towards the African market, which had achieved a circulation of 150 000, the second largest of any daily in South Africa. It was banned together with its week-end edition, the *Weekend World*, and the *Christian Institute newspaper, Pro Veritate*. The editor of the *World*, Percy Qoboza, was detained, while the editor of *Pro Veritate*, Cedric Mayson (today an active member of the ANC) and the editor of the East London *Daily Dispatch*, Donald Woods, were banned. Various organs of the Black Consciousness Movement also disappeared.

The spiral of repression keeps advancing, but so does that of resistance. In 1950 it was the Communist Party alone that was the target of attack, but in 1987 it was 18 organisations that were restricted by the regime — 18 organisations campaigning for a united, non-racial and democratic South Africa. In 1952 it was the *Guardian* that was banned; today, in addition to *New Nation*, *South and Weekly Mail*, a whole range of 'dissident' publications are under threat — *Sowetan*, *City Press*, *Saamstaan*, *New Era*, *Work in Progress*, *Grassroots*. What is impressive is that the groundswell of opposition has grown to tidal wave proportions,

and where the freedom fighters could once be counted in thousands, they now number millions. The dialectical relationship between repression and resistance flows from the central contradiction of South African society — colonialist White domination of the Black majority. The resolution of this contradiction is fast approaching, as the consciousness spreads that the regime can offer no solutions and that a united people's front must be formed to bring the apartheid era to a close. The regime takes refuge in a permanent state of emergency.

The freedom of the press in South Africa is today restricted by over 100 laws plus the emergency regulations. An editor knows that if he publishes any criticism of the regime he does so at his peril. It is an offence for a newspaper to publish unauthorised or 'untruthful' information about Departments of Defence, Police or Prisons, or the treatment of prisoners. Since the only criterion of truthfulness is, in the last resort, the say-so of officials of these departments, the effect of these laws is that the press publishes only what the regime allows it to publish.

Under the emergency regulations introduced since June 1986 it is an offence to write or reproduce any "subversive" statement, which is again defined so loosely that anyone saying almost anything can be brought within its ambit. Thus, in addition to promoting the aims of an unlawful organisation, it becomes an offence to discredit military service, promote sanctions, encourage disinvestment or "weaken or undermine the public's confidence in the termination of the state of emergency."

Overseas Coverage Shrinks

Perhaps the measure which has had the most serious effect abroad has been the proclamation issued by the regime in November 1985, during the first state of emergency, prohibiting any person from photographing, filming or recording, as well as broadcasting or distributing within or outside South Africa, any film or recording of any public disturbance, strike or boycott, or any damage to property, or any assault or killing, or even any person

present at any of these activities. The proclamation also banned the photographing or filming of any member of the security services engaged in any activity relating to the termination of the state of emergency without the permission of the authorities. The Minister of Law and Order at the time, Louis le Grange, said the presence of television and camera crews in "unrest situations" had proved to be "a catalyst to further violence." In fact, however, the violence had continued, but the effect of the proclamation had been to wipe off the TV screens of the world all visual evidence of police and military brutality against the people.

A study done by the Canadian Department of External Affairs has found that United States network air time on South Africa declined by about two-thirds following the tightening of media restrictions. *West Africa* magazine, published in London, reported on March 28th 1988 that, at the same time, the survey had found:

"a levelling off and even a decrease in the American public's understanding of the issues in South Africa."

Side by side with the suppression of its critics, the regime concentrates enormous resources on the spread of its own propaganda. Because of the odium created by the apartheid system throughout the world, one of the first tasks undertaken by the Nationalist government when it came to power in 1948 was the reorganisation of the information services to counter the unfavourable publicity abroad. Following the Sharpeville shooting and the economic crisis of 1960-61, the external propaganda drive was greatly stepped up. In 1962 a separate Department of Information was set up, and the sum spent on information services was boosted from a meagre R100 000 in 1949-50 to R4 159 000 in 1968 and to R28 850 000 in 1986 — more than double the figure for 1985. The 1988-89 allocation was R31 600 000. In fact, South Africa's outlay on information is a matter of conjecture, for, as the Muldergate scandal revealed, the regime has devoted untold millions to the development of undercover propaganda agencies at home and abroad.

Money Power

A memorandum submitted by the British Anti-Apartheid Movement to a seminar on the mass media in Berlin in 1981 stated that the South African propaganda drive:

"... depends on the methods, skills and persuasion of modern advertising and public relations, backed by world-wide market research surveys and supported by extensive special supplements in newspapers, shrewdly slanted television programmes and an enormous number of fellow-travellers in the West's governments, media, industry, commerce and even charitable organisations and church groups. It is without doubt the world's most carefully planned campaign of mass indoctrination, beside which the racial propaganda campaigns of the late Dr Josef Goebbels pale into insignificance. And it is spearheaded by the mass media of the West."

It is not only the regime that restricts the freedom of the South African press. Class and national divisions also play a role. The monopoly of economic power by the White minority ensures that the Black majority is starved of the capital needed to launch a newspaper. Most South African newspapers are owned and directed by Whites, even those aimed at the African market, and apart from a handful of 'alternative' or communally based journals Black South Africans have no press at their disposal. Of course there are organs of the liberation movement, but one cannot regard them as a free press, since even possession of a copy can incur imprisonment.

Even among the Whites there is a vital division in the extent of press control. With the exception of the *Citizen*, which is owned by Nationalist capital, all English-language daily newspapers oppose the regime and the apartheid policy, however feebly, with all the Afrikaans-language daily newspapers support one or other form of apartheid. The circulation of the English press outnumbers that of the Afrikaans press (plus the *Citizen*) by three to one, which is one reason why the Nationalist government has regarded the press as a source of ideological danger ever since it came to power.

Press Monopoly

Monopoly control of the press also restricts freedom of expression. Effective control of the Argus group of newspapers is held by the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa via Charter Consolidated (an Anglo-controlled British company) and the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company. Up to 1985, the Argus group owned 39.2% of South African Associated Newspapers, with a further 20.9% of SAAN being held by the Advowson Trust, which was set up by Anglo-American interests in 1975. In September 1985, the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company bought 13.5% of SAAN shares from the Abe Bailey estate and the Bailey Trust, thus giving Anglo-American effective control of both SAAN and the Argus group, which between them control almost all the English-language press.

The power of advertising in influencing editorial policies is also a factor ensuring that the press dances to the tune of the ruling class. The media directed towards Africans receive only 6% of all print advertising revenue, while Africans account for 40% of all retail sales. We know that advertisers were reluctant to support the *Rand Daily Mail* because of its large circulation among Blacks and that this was perhaps the main cause of its demise. The drive to free the press from the 'money power' must be seen as part of our overall struggle to free South Africa from the grip of monopoly capitalism, racism and imperialism.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

This Declaration was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10th 1948, but has never been signed by South Africa. The recent actions of the regime make it clear that freedom of opinion and expression is today further removed from the grasp of our people than

ever. Yet never has the need for it been greater.

A Future South Africa

Journalists in South Africa have launched a Hands off the Press Campaign, and we have a duty to promote this campaign with all our energy and enthusiasm, not only in the interests of a free press, but also to help bring into existence the united, non-racial and democratic South Africa outlined in the Freedom Charter. The Conference on Culture for Another South Africa (CASA), held in Amsterdam in December 1987 and attended by 300 delegates from inside and outside South Africa, set out some guidelines to assist us in this task. The conference resolved:

- To internationalise the campaign to defend the progressive press in South Africa.

- To build solidarity between South African media workers and those abroad.

- To call on governmental and non-governmental organisations abroad to pressure the South African government by:
a) reviewing the position of South African press attaches (in their countries) in the light of repression in South Africa,
b) curbing the practice of allowing foreign journalists to be used for government propaganda.

- To call on the international community to insist on its right to be informed and to evolve methods which ensure there is a constant flow of information into and out of the country.

- To call on solidarity movements internationally to increase financial assistance to media projects within the national and democratic structures.

- To encourage media workers to organise themselves into truly national and democratic structures.

- To set up appropriate structures in the country that will survive the state onslaught in the long term.

- To regard media training as a priority in all sectors and to promote the incorporation of women fully into media projects.

More than two dozen progressive South

African journalists meeting in Amsterdam issued a separate declaration stressing that the freedom of the media depended on:

"... the right freely to inform and be informed (and) the right to live peacefully in a non-racial democratic society based on universal franchise."

The declaration continued:

"As journalists we believe we are entitled to live and work in a society based on these principles. And we believe that only in a society based on those principles is a truly free South African press possible."

The face of journalism in South Africa is changing. Speaking in the no confidence debate in the House of Assembly in February 1987, the Minister of Home Affairs, Stoffel Botha, deplored the development of a new breed of journalist who saw his duty not as being to report the news but to make the news:

"This new breed of journalist sees himself as an agent for change, with a mission to convince his readers to his way of thinking."

Stoffel Botha thought this was dreadful, and called on the Media Council to put its house in order. Perhaps we journalists can take pride in the fact that our efforts to tell the truth about what is happening in South Africa are helping to bring about the changes we all want to see.

South African Democratic Journalists

Yes, it is true that a new breed of journalist has been developed, a journalist who associates himself fully with the democratic cause, who respects the truth, but understands that there can be no freedom of the press in an unfree society. From ancient times, philosophers have argued that the pen is mightier than the sword. Even Stoffel Botha declared in October 1987:

"The journalist with a poison pen contributed just as much to the revolution as did the man with a gun, or the bomb thrower." (Daily News, October 16th 1987)

Those who are for revolution will listen with respect to Vladimir Lenin, who, in *Where to Begin* in 1901, wrote that revolutionaries can learn from their press how to live and how to die.

"A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organiser,"

he said, stressing the importance of a political organ to a political movement. He criticised those working in the underground who immersed themselves almost completely in local work,

"... which narrows their outlook, the scope of their activities and their skill in the maintenance of secrecy and their preparedness."

A party newspaper could help to overcome these shortcomings, he said.

"This work will train and bring into the foreground not only the most skilful propagandists, but the most capable organisers, the most talented political party leaders capable, at the right moment, of releasing the slogan for the decisive struggle and of taking the lead in that struggle."

Lenin always stressed the unity of theory and practice. And he also always stressed the need for a vanguard party to strengthen its links with, to be rooted in, the masses. In *Left-Wing Communism — an Infantile Disorder* in 1920, he said:

"Victory cannot be won with a vanguard alone. The broad masses of the working people, those oppressed by capital, must become involved."

This is achieved, of course, not only by propaganda, but also by their own experience gained in struggle. Our cadres engaged in various forms of organisation and action must remember that they are also propagandists, and that the purpose of all their work, in journalism as elsewhere, is to arouse, educate and mobilise the masses within South Africa to revolutionary activity.

Journalists in South Africa today are in the front line. Let them not feel they are isolated and alone, but part of a mighty army which, despite all setbacks, is steadily advancing on the road to freedom.