The Role of Media under Apartheid

African National Congress Submission on Media to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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PREFACE

The South African media is not a monolithic institution, and any examination of the role of the South African media during apartheid therefore has to distinguish between its various sectors - each of which had particular objectives and characteristics, and each of which played a particular role, during the period under review.

This document examines the role of the media under apartheid by:

- looking briefly at the context in which the mass media operated;
- examining the role of media institutions as employers;
- studying the role of the mass media as disseminators of information (i.e. as publishers or
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broadcasters);
• making observations on the activities of the mass media in bolstering apartheid; and
• acknowledging the valuable role played by the alternative/ progressive/independent media in reporting a broader truth.

Section 1

THE CONTEXT

The apartheid system - condemned by the United Nations as a crime against humanity - denied all South Africans their basic human rights.

Those working in the media were denied certain rights as workers - they were prevented from collectively organising and mobilising.

They were also affected as citizens - they were denied the right to freedom of association, freedom of movement and so on.

However, they were particularly affected as gatherers and disseminators of information, as apartheid deprived them of a range of basic freedoms.

Heavy censorship was applied to all publications and broadcasts throughout the period under review. The apartheid state imposed a complex web of legislation, designed to protect itself from exposure and control what people read, heard and saw. This legislation affected the activities of the police, the army, the prisons, the courts, parastatals, the public service and many other state institutions. It restricted the publication or broadcast of Information about the liberation movements; it threw a heavy blanket over entire communities and institutions; it prevented people from being quoted in the media; it gagged an entire nation, and subjected them to the views of a minority.

This legislation restricted both access to information, and freedom of expression.

During the states of emergency in the mid-80s, as the apartheid state came under increasing pressure from all sides, the regime stepped up its offensive against the media and imposed a virtual black-out on information.

The impact of this repressive framework cannot be under-estimated. Control of the media was one of the most important tools in the apartheid arsenal, and a battery of censorship legislation undoubtedly played a role in helping to ensure the survival of the regime - in particular, in ensuring ongoing support from its key constituencies by keeping them in the dark.
Individual media workers, and some media institutions, took great risks in their attempts to publish or broadcast the truth. Their untiring commitment to seeing that the truth came out played a vital role in bringing about the downfall of the apartheid system.

Many media workers were jailed or detained in the course of their duties, and others left the country to escape repression. Several died on duty. The African National Congress pays tribute to their efforts, and to the part they played in bringing about democracy in our country.

However, we also believe the South African media played other (broader) roles during the apartheid era, and we believe these roles need to be examined.

This examination is vital if we are to understand our past, to bring about reconciliation, and to broaden our understanding of basic freedoms.

It is also vital if we are to ensure true freedom of expression - including freedom of the media - in our new democracy.

South Africa needs a watchdog media, not a lapdog media. The African National Congress believes the Truth & Reconciliation Commission can play a significant role in helping us to understand the role of the media in the past, which in turn can shape our understanding of the role of the media in the future.

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**Section 2**

**THE MEDIA AS EMPLOYER**

The South African media operated in a political, commercial and economic environment which favoured the interests of the ruling class, and which helped to entrench the skewed economic development of our country.

Afrikaner and English capital were the primary stakeholders in the commercial media sector, and they profited greatly from the economic injustices which resulted from apartheid. Monopolistic practices (and legislation) ensured that the commercial media was able to conspire against any who threatened its interests. It is fair to say that freedom of the press only applied to those who were rich enough to own one.

Media companies enjoyed the privileges of all other apartheid-era employers, where labour legislation legitimised discriminatory practices and entrenched the disempowerment of workers.

Examples of this include:

- Petty apartheid in the workplace Like most, if not all South African employers, the media applied
apartheid in the workplace despite (in some cases) its public criticism of these practices. Separate toiletries and canteens were the order of the day and black workers were treated as second-class employees. Workers were, in the process, denied basic human rights such as freedom of movement and freedom of association.

- Suppression of workers' rights Workers were subjected to the myriad of apartheid labour laws which discriminated against blacks. Certain jobs were reserved for whites. Worker disputes were dealt with in terms of discriminatory labour legislation, often depriving workers of their rights to organise and mobilise. In addition, media managements recognised (and thereby condoned) racially-exclusive trade unions such as the SA Typographic Union.

- Second-class treatment of black media workers Black media workers were rare during the period under review. Media institutions tended to downplay the contribution of the few who were employed, very few of them were promoted to positions of seniority. Black editors were the exception rather than the rule (even on newspapers or radio stations targeted at black readers or listeners) and they were not given the status of their white counterparts.

- No corrective action to redress imbalances Despite their recognition of the inferior quality of bantu education and its impact on the career prospects of black people, media institutions did little to train or develop black staff. Black media workers remained in junior positions because of a lack of training or career development.

- Little protection for employees under threat Several black media workers were detained, banned or otherwise restricted under apartheid legislation. Although on some occasions they received protection from their employers, many media workers still recall that they felt neglected or exposed because of a lack of protection by their employers.

- No advancement of the disadvantaged: black workers Black workers were discriminated against both in law and in practice. Despite being aware of the situation, the South African mass media did little (if anything) to advance the cause of the disadvantaged.

There is no evidence of initiatives by the mass media to proactively implement programmes of corrective or affirmative action or to develop and advance staff from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a rule, where these programmes have been introduced (post-1994), this has been at the insistence of trade unions rather than as a proactive measure.

No advancement of the disadvantaged: women media workers There are countless examples of the media industry's tardiness in redressing gender imbalances. Little, if anything, was done to advance the cause of women media workers. On the contrary, the African National Congress believes the mass media actively restricted the career advancement of women media workers. The African National Congress believes this practice was a deliberate attempt to suppress the rights and advancement of women media workers, and to ensure a male hegemony in newsrooms and boardrooms.

Punitive action against striking workers The mass media, as most employers in apartheid South Africa, adopted an attitude of dismissing workers who exercised the right to strike. One of the better-known cases is the Media Workers' Association strike in 1983 at what was then the Argus Company, where many workers were fired after striking for better pay. Despite its public criticism of other employers who took a hard line against workers, the Argus Company did not seem to use apartheid labour legislation to act against its own workforce.

Punitive action against victims of the apartheid state There are many documented examples of media workers losing pay, or even their jobs, after being acted against by the apartheid state's security forces.
The African National Congress believes the mass media should have acted in support of its staff when they were victimised or abused, rather than having punished them.

We believe this argument applies particularly to media workers who were detained, harassed or jailed as a result of actions taken in the course of duty.

Conclusion As employers, the South African mass media can therefore be regarded as beneficiaries of apartheid. They generally failed to challenge or defy apartheid legislation. So, while some media institutions were publicly critical of apartheid labour legislation, the owners of these institutions would not hesitate to use this legislation to suppress their own workers' rights.

As far as can be ascertained, the media industry made no attempts to use its economic muscle to bring about change--whether by threatening to withhold tax revenue, by implementing alternative business practices by promoting workers' interests, by advancing the disadvantaged, or by lobbying as an industry for the abolition of apartheid legislation. Nor is there evidence that the commercial or private sector media lobbied within its broad ownership base (Afrikaner and English capital) for change.

Section 3

THE MEDIA AS DISSEMINATOR OF INFORMATION

3.1 The state-owned media During the period under review, the SOUTH AFRICAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION was the most important weapon in the apartheid state's battle for the hearts and minds of the people.

The SABC's three TV channels and its multitude of radio stations (broadcasting both internally and externally) were the primary source of information for the majority of South Africans.

The state controlled and ran the national broadcaster. Through the SABC board, it regulated the corporation's activities, its budgets and its management. Through the SABC's management--primarily Broederbond appointees--it ensured that the corporation stayed true to its mandate of propping up the apartheid state through spreading disinformation.

There are numerous reported examples of state interference in the SABC's activities, and it is an illusion to imagine that the SABC was anything other than the propaganda machine of the apartheid state during the period under review.

Its actions during this period can be summarised as follows:
The SABC's channels were primarily used to promote only the interests of the ruling party, and to propagate only those views which reinforced the hegemony of the apartheid state.

In addition, the SABC was often a virulent opponent of the liberation movements, and played a primary role in spreading disinformation and lies about the activities of these movements and their leaders.

As a rule, there was no attempt made to apply balance to coverage of news events. Official sources were generally the only sources of information.

Apart from spreading disinformation, the corporation also denied South Africans access to information and opinions. Countless events and developments went unreported, ensuring that millions of South Africans remained unaware of developments in their own country.

The impact of this was that millions of South Africans were subjected to propaganda masquerading as news. In the case of the illiterate, they were subjected to one view without being able to access other views or sources of information. The state broadcaster effectively had a stranglehold on the provision of information to the majority of South Africans.

Management and media workers at the SABC, as a whole, went along with this broad objective. Many senior editorial managers, for example, were either Military Intelligence operatives or in other ways part of the apartheid state.

There are examples of principled media workers and other SABC staff who left the corporation rather than go along with its policies, or waged their own struggle to change the nature of the SABC; the African National Congress pays tribute to their commitment and resolve.

But the general rule (at least until early 1990) seems to have been that the corporation employed media workers, producers, researchers etc. who were broadly supportive of the apartheid state.

The state-owned media had other weapons at its disposal:

- The BUREAU FOR INFORMATION (later the South African Communications Service) served a dual function: as a propagator of state information, supplying the mass media and foreign audiences (through embassies) with pro-apartheid information; and as a gatherer of information, with its staff acting as the eyes and ears of the apartheid state in local communities, feeding information to the many security management structures put in place by the regime.
- The DEFENCE ESTABLISHMENT'S information machinery, responsible for wide-scale disinformation and cover-ups about the war in Namibia and Angola, cross-border raids etc.
- The POLICE INFORMATION MACHINERY, largely responsible for disinformation about local-level conflicts, for covering up the activities of hit squads, etc.
- The RESEARCH ESTABLISHMENT (such as the Human Sciences Research Council, Central Statistical Services and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research), responsible for manipulating data and supportive information to substantiate the interests of the apartheid state.

These were all primary sources for both the state-owned media and other media institutions, and helped to reinforce the apartheid state's propaganda war. Although discredited in the broad public domain, they remained as "credible" sources for almost all forms of media during the period under review.
3.2 Newspapers owned by Afrikaner capital Newspapers published by Afrikaner capital played a similar role to the SABC during the period under review. In particular, they represented the interests of their owners--Afrikaner capital--and played a part in ensuring the survival and growth of that sector of the economy. It championed the interests of a class who believed its very survival depended on apartheid.

Like the national broadcaster, their agenda was set by the ruling party. Their primary functions was not to publish news and information but to advance the interests of the apartheid state among the core of its supporters--white Afrikaans-speaking people.

Unashamedly pro-National Party, they functioned as party mouthpieces unaffected by notions of objectivity and balance.

Managers and editors were almost exclusively drawn from the ranks of the Broederbond, with many working in close allegiance with senior National Party leaders.

Titles such as Die Burger, Beeld, Rapport and Die Volksblad played a vital role in reinforcing the messages propagated by the SABC, and thereby advancing only the interests of the ruling party: justifying the actions of the, apartheid state (in particular the security establishment) and heatedly opposing the liberation movements.

These newspapers played a major role in building morale among those white Afrikaners who supported apartheid - for example, by glorifying cross-border raids, and downplaying the successes of sanctions campaigns.

These newspapers also assisted in the dangerous "demonisation" of the liberation movements and their leadership, as well as less-effective political formations such as the liberal establishment. This led to increasing polarisation and hatred for people from other race groups.

Apart from spreading disinformation, the newspapers of Afrikaner capital also denied South Africans access to other non-official sources of information and opinions. Large chunks of South African life went unreported in these newspapers, leading to increased ignorance and reinforcing the so-called "laager mentality". This denial of information was one of the most important shortcomings of the Afrikaans-language press.

There are examples of principled media workers who left the Afrikaans press because of dissatisfaction with its approach, or who waged their own struggle for the truth within these institutions; the African National Congress pays tribute to their commitment and resolve.

Although this sector has become a process of self-transformation, and has separated itself somewhat from the interests of the National Party, we believe it still has much to answer for because of the role it played in reinforcing apartheid ideology and in shaping the mindset of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans.

We believe these newspapers should reflect honestly on the role they played during this era, for the sake of themselves and their readers.
3.3 Newspapers owned by English capital

Owned and controlled by English capital more specifically by the mining magnates, the English-language press advanced the interests of this sector and championed its commitment to these interests.

To understand this sector, it is worth referring to the recent submission to the TRC by the former Argus Company (now Independent Newspapers), in which the company concedes "shortcomings" in its behaviour during the apartheid era.

It makes several concessions, which the African National Congress believes can also be applied to the rest of the English-language press then owned by the mining companies:

- Insufficient effort was made to circumvent restrictions imposed by apartheid and other legislation.
- White perceptions monopolised judgements on the newsworthiness of particular information.
- The contribution of black editorial staff was not recognised.
- A "gradualist" anti-apartheid policy was adopted, leaving the impression that English-language newspapers were colluding with the regime.
- In a climate of intensive state propaganda, there was insufficient contact with the liberation movements.

There is no doubt that the English-language press produced editors and media workers of tremendous courage and moral integrity during this period. South Africa owes much to those who lived the truism of "publish or be damned".

This courage was, sadly, often lacking at the level of editorial decisionmakers, where editors chose to suppress good stories or were happy to replicate state propaganda. The ANC believes there are many examples of this which need to be told, and encourages media workers to come forward so that the South African public knows the full extent of news manipulation by the so-called liberal press.

A key issue here is hypocrisy. While the state-run media and the newspapers owned by Afrikaner capital made no bones about their loyalty to the apartheid state, the newspapers owned by English capital trumpeted a liberal commitment to balance and objectivity - while failing to apply these principles in their own columns.

They failed dismally to reflect the feelings of "ordinary" South Africans. They relied heavily on government sources of information, no matter how discredited they were, and made very little effort to obtain information from alternative sources.

In their coverage of the struggle against apartheid, including the armed struggle, the English-language press relied almost exclusively on information from arms of the state. Contacts with the liberation movement were insufficient, and the paradigm remained the "white world view". This served to entrench the polarisation of apartheid, rather than exposing readers to a range of views.

This "white world view" applied not only to the selection of news, but to its treatment. Few can forget the sense of triumph in the Sunday Times' response to the SADF raid into Botswana, in which several civilians were killed (headline: The Guns of Gaborone!).

Not everyone was prepared to accept this mindset: There are examples of principled media workers who left the English-language press because of dissatisfaction with its approach, or bravely waged their own struggle within these institutions. The African National Congress pays tribute to them.

3.4 The privately-owned broadcast media During the apartheid era, privately-owned radio stations (such as Radio 702, Radio Bop and Capital Radio) broadcast from the then-bantustans, operating under licence from bantustan governments.

Despite this, one of the hallmarks of "non-SABC" radio was their quality news coverage, their refusal to rely on "the official story" and their commitment to balance.

Despite their limited resources, they reflected a much broader spectrum of news than that offered by the state broadcaster or the press. They pioneered the concept of debate on radio, as opposed to the dissemination of "his master's Voice. They also enabled victims of violence and apartheid repression to speak.

In doing so, they forced South Africans to hear, and engage with, views different to their own and helped to broaden understanding among various sectors of the population.

This resulted in a better-informed populace - and, in addition, put some pressure on the state broadcaster to improve the quality of its service and to seek additional sources of information.

This sector has grown significantly since the advent of democracy, and its growth is to be welcomed.

3.5 The privately-owned African language press Although small, newspapers in this sector had a noticeable impact in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu/Natal during the period under review.

In the Eastern Cape, Imvo Zabantsundu was used by Afrikaner capital to occasionally promote sentiments and institutions which were opposed to the liberation movements. The newspaper had little political credibility because of this, however, and its reach remained limited.

In KwaZulu/Natal, Ilanga was owned by the Argus Company until it was sold to an Inkatha Freedom Party-owned company in the mid-1980s. The newspaper played a role in promoting the interests of Inkatha during the late 1980s, and understandably took a partisan approach to the conflict which raged in the area.

These newspapers are, significantly, the only two to have had an impact on the attitudes of rural black South Africans.

3.6 The independent press and radio As with privately-owned radio stations, this sector has played a vital role in championing the rights of the oppressed, in exposing South Africans to a diversity of views, and in providing a channel of communication for those ignored by the mainstream.

The contribution of the independent press to exposing the horrors of apartheid, and in probing the activities of state-sanctioned hit-squads in particular, is well documented. These newspapers played a vital role in bringing about the collapse of the security establishment, and in exposing human rights atrocities.
committed under apartheid. They restored dignity to communities which had been ravaged by apartheid, and helped promote a human rights culture in our country.

Despite their limited resources, they were prepared to take on the state's oppressive censorship machinery and succeeded in creating space for others to publish. Their commitment to freedom of speech, and their creative approach to the challenge of publishing under apartheid, deserve recognition.

However, it would be wrong to ignore the contribution made by smaller, less influential publications such as those produced by pressure groups and literacy groups, as well as those made by communities in Oudtshoorn, on the Cape Flats, and in townships across the country. These small publications and radio stations, which published and broadcast at great risk, also restored dignity to communities who lived under the yoke of apartheid tyranny.

The African National Congress believes it is a great pity that many of these publications and radio stations have collapsed without receiving recognition for their contribution to human rights.

Section 4

STRATKOM AND THE MEDIA

"Wars are not won on the battlefield but in the minds of men". Andre Beaufre

We refer the Commission to Section 4 7 of the ANC's first submission to the TRC (August 1•6), in which the bedrock of the apartheid state's approach to the political threats it faced - "counter-revolutionary" tactics - was described in some detail.

We again draw the attention of the Commission to some of the centrally important points made in this submission of particular relevance to this paper on the media.

During the 1980s the State Security Council was served by a Secretariat of around 100 functionaries seconded from various government departments. It had four branches, including a Strategic Communications (Stratkom) branch. It is of critical importance to again point out that the Stratkom committee under the SSC remained in place after 1990, as indicated in the official Manual on the National Co-ordinating Mechanism (which replaced the National Security Management System in 1990).

We have previously urged the Commission to understand the importance of thoroughly investigating the activities of this particular branch of the SSC. We take this opportunity to again urge the Commission to understand the importance of doing so with regard to its investigations into gross human rights violations, including assassinations and other violence against civilians, rather than seeing this branch of the SSC as only being involved in "sort" operations such smear campaigns against selected enemies of the former apartheid regime Some Stratkom operations involved violence, in fact, violence has been a critically
important component of anti-ANC propaganda in our country for many years.

As stated in our first submission to the Commission, the Stratkom branch of the SSC was tasked with working out a total package of strategy alternatives in response to requests from Ministries, government departments, or Joint Management Committees (committees of this nature continued to function into the 1990s as shown in the NCM Manual.) These plans could include tactics such as assassinations, attacks on neighbouring countries, economic sabotage by spreading negative propaganda about a particular country, campaigns of character defamation, setting up various front companies to engage in operations to influence the media and decision makers -- in general, the entire gamut of what have become known as "dirty tricks" operations.

These operations were not only confined within the borders of South Africa, but extended to a range of fronts in various African and Western countries which attempted to counter the negative attitudes towards the apartheid regime in these countries, and to promote proxy right-wing (and violent) forces such as UNITA, Renamo, and in the latter part of the 1980's and into the 1990's, Inkatha (in terms of the guidelines set out in Operation Marion.).

All these operations needed both violent and non-violent propaganda components to successfully take the battle to the most crucial arena - perceptions. The establishment of a network of agents in the mass media, and the setting up of a number of specialist fronts tasked with ensuring that perceptions were influenced in a manner considered appropriate by the apartheid regime and its allies, was obviously critical to the success of such plans

The establishment of The Citizen newspaper (to counter the "overly critical" English medium mainstream press) with covert funds provides just one key example of work of this nature in the context of this submission, but there were many other operations, such as the setting up of Dixon Soule Associates to promote the image of Bophutatswana, or the National Students Federation to counter NUSAS, or the International Freedom Foundation to demonise the ANC and promote the image of UNITA, Renamo and similar Forces - in which the mass media - wittingly or unwittingly - played a pivotal role in influencing perceptions.

The Bureau for Information played an important role in the apartheid regime's attempts during the 1980's to influence the perceptions of the public and manipulate the mass media. The Bureau acted both as propagator of information - disseminating disinformation to the mass media - and as a censorship structure during this period.

Besides the SABC, every single government department had a Stratkom component, even those which had no obvious security or intelligence functions. For example, the Department of National Health and Population Development closely co-operated with Military Intelligence operations such as Project Henry, which entailed attempts to promote the image of the "Reverend" Maqina as a counter-force to popular UDF • or ANC - aligned leaders through "counter-revolutionary" violence as well as the distribution of food parcels in an attempt to "win hearts and minds."

During the 1980s AND the 1990s the Department of Military Intelligence had a major Stratkom department in the form of the Directorate: Communication Operations (DMI/Comops), renamed DMI/ Command Communications (Bevcom) after 1990.
In our first submission to the TRC we drew attention to the fact that FW de Klerk approved the continued operation of around 40 Stratkom operations in 1991, including Operation Marion and several projects which fell under the auspices of Project Ancor (Adult Education Consultants.)

We urge the Commission to call former commanders and key operatives from this sector of Military Intelligence to testify with regard to their activities in the 1980s and 1990s. We also call the attention of the Commission to the considerable amount of information supplied by former communications specialist and Comops employee, Major Nico Basson, on the activities in the propaganda and disinformation field in which the former government was involved in its efforts to manipulate the outcome of the elections in Namibia. These activities did not only involve propaganda, but also operations which resulted in the deaths of a number of people. In the cynical world of those who set out to manipulate perceptions, this is par for the course.

In this regard we draw the attention of the Commission to the range of "fronts" set up by state Stratkom structures in the 1980s and 1990s to act as smokescreens for illegal and violent activities, and to influence the perceptions of decision-makers. It was recently stated by a former SAP official that the "Wit Wolwe" (which "claimed" responsibility for the blowing up of Khotso House before the ANC or UDF was blamed) was "nothing but propaganda." The media has shown no interest whatsoever of following up the far-ranging implications of this statement. We have already drawn the attention of the Commission to another "right-wing" front, the Orde Boerevolk, which came into operation at the time of the Namibian elections, continued operations throughout the negotiations phase, and was strongly implicated in the assassination of Chris Hani. There were several others.

As pointed out in our first submission, Stratkom operations initiated in the 1990s including Project Marion and various Adult Education Consultants fronts continued with the full approval of FW De Klerk throughout the negotiations phase in the 1990s. Literally millions of Rands of taxpayers' money was spent on these covert projects during the 1990s (for example, see responses from the Minister of Defence to questions posed by Llewellyn Landers, MP on the subject of the continued funding of Adult Education Consultant fronts during the 1990s.)

During the negotiations phase, Stratkom operations intensified as the NP used every means at its disposal to gain advantage at the negotiating table, both in terms of influencing domestic and international perceptions of the process, and in terms of destabilising its prime adversary, the ANC.

The sudden explosion of so-called:"third force" violence on the Reef in July 1990 was an integral part of these operations, as were operations aimed at subverting or "countering" SDU's set up to protect communities from violence of this nature. Some media people may recall the bizarre phenomenon of so-called "ANC attackers" who apparently took the time to scatter membership cards and shed their clothes with slogans painted on them at scenes of violence.

One of the few propaganda operations in which DMI/Comops (or Bevcom) was involved which came close to being exposed was Project Echoes. Little has emerged on this operation besides that which came to light after Leon Flores and Pamela du Randt were arrested in Britain on suspicion of attempting to assassinate Dirk Coetzee, an operation which was generally portrayed as really being about an attempt to link MK and the IRA in the minds of the public, in order to damage the image of the ANC. We do not believe that Project Echoes was only about linking the IRA and the ANC in the minds of the public, and
call on the Commission to directly demand information from former commanders of Military Intelligence Comops (Bevcom) structures to testify with regard to the activities of their departments.

Another key propaganda operation carried out for a considerable period of time, and which was wittingly and unwittingly promoted in the commercial press during the negotiations phase was that of "Operation Sunrise/Sunshine" This operations entailed a relatively sophisticated faked "SACP strategic document" which was used on a number of occasions in an attempt to portray the SACP as being involved in attempting to covertly create conditions for a "revolutionary seizure of power" whilst pretending to go along with the ANC's policy regarding the negotiations process. This "SACP document" was used in attempts to influence the negotiations process by stirring up fear and hatred in the ranks of the far right, with Tienie Groenewald - formerly a senior manager in the Bureau for Information - apparently playing a role in this regard. If necessary a copy of this "SACP document" and related information can be supplied to the TRC.

Related Stratkom operations which depended on the active collusion or attempted manipulation of elements in the mass media included sustained allegations that the late Chris Hani was involved in setting up a covert "Black People's Army" consisting of disaffected and "radical" members of MK and Apla who would opposed and organise against an ANC-led government - and these reports went so far as being fed to a Parliamentary committee by the former intelligence services - should be the focus of intensive investigation by the TRC. The anti-Hani propaganda which distinctly intensified in the months leading up to his assassination bear all the hallmarks of what the DMI called "klimaatskepping" - the "creation of a climate" in which an action can take place, and be generally perceived in the desired manner by the real perpetrator of the action.

Again, we urge the TRC to use its powers to fully investigate all projects of the Strategic Communications branch of the SSC in the 1980s and 1990s, and to ensure that the public is fully informed on the nature and extent of Project Echoes, as well all other covert projects involving strategic communications projects and the manipulation of the media during the 1980s and 1990s.

We do not only insist this is important in terms of understanding our history, and the intimate relationship between propaganda and violence that has characterised the counterrevolutionary effort since the early 1990s, and which drastically intensified during the negotiations era.

We remain convinced that elements of these Stratkom networks and fronts remain in place and that they must be exposed, as some are actively engaged in attempting to sabotage the new order through sustained, deliberate attempts to negatively influence perceptions with regard to issues such as the level of crime in South Africa, the ability of the new government to govern, and allegations regarding corruption. Once a perception has been successfully established that a country is a crime-ridden, corruption-infested basket case, that perception is very hard to eradicate.

We should not forget Baufre's maxim regarding the true terrain on which wars are won or lost.

Section 5
A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA

The South African media was, and is, a powerful institution. It had tremendous power and influence - not just in South Africa, but on the world stage. It was, and is, part of an influential international community of media institutions.

The African National Congress believes that one of the greatest shortcomings of the commercial media was its failure to use this power and influence to bring pressure on the system of apartheid.

As disseminators of information, the commercial media failed to resist censorship and encroachments on its freedoms. Instead, it chose to either willingly comply with the conditions laid down by an illegitimate government (in the case of the Afrikaans-language press) or to apply self-censorship (in the case of the English language press) through a range of agreements. The media volunteered to establish regulatory institutions such as the Press Council, made up primarily of middle-class white men. It agreed to the institution of regulatory mechanisms such as "accreditation" for police and military correspondents, thereby complying with the state's restrictions on who could report what.

The media also regularly repeated the state's claim that South Africa had "the freest press in Africa" - despite the fact that it was subject to more than 150 statutes limiting freedom of expression.

The role of organised media owners

The acquiescence of institutions like the Newspaper Press Union (NPU) has yet to be fully revealed, and the African National Congress urges the Truth & Reconciliation Commission to probe the nature of the many "agreements" which were drawn up by the NPU and elements of the apartheid state such as the South African Defence Force.

Although the process of negotiating these "agreements" has yet to be revealed, enough is known to make us believe that these "agreements were in fact voluntary self-censorship mechanisms introduced by the mass media - at the expense of the South African public, who were effectively deprived of the right to know by the very advocates of that right.

Editorial independence

The question of editorial independence is rather a spurious one when applied to both the state-owned and the commercial media. In both institutions, the "owners" (whether the government or capital) as a rule would only appoint to senior positions individuals who would "toe the line". If they did not, they were either fired or their publications closed.

The possibility of management interference with editorial content was often as a result, purely academic: "He who pays the piper calls the tune."

However despite this it appears there were often examples of specific interventions into editorial content on the basis of either political or economic concern by managements. The African National Congress
ANC submission on Media to the TRC encourages those who have experienced this to make submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Misinformation and disinformation

One of the greatest shortcomings of the state-owned and commercial media was its gullible acceptance of "dirty tricks" - its uncritical publication of lies spread by agents of the state.

There are some well-known examples of how the media was used by the apartheid state to publish lies and distortion. Many of these relate to character assassinations on leaders of the liberation movements: for example, The Star's insinuation that Joe Slovo had been responsible for the assassination of Ruth First, or the hysterical coverage of the apartheid state's attempts to smear Hein Grosskopf.

None of the media's often-trumpeted tenants of "balance" or "Objectivity" were applied in the development of these articles. No attempts were made to ascertain the accuracy of these articles. Instead, the approach was to swallow the smears of the security forces - hook, line and sinker.

White lives are worth more than black lives

Throughout apartheid era, state-owned radio and TV as well as the commercial print media adopted the approach that white lives are more important than black lives. This approach to "newsworthiness" cheapened black lives and reinforced the apartheid notion of first and second-class citizens. Black South Africans did not just lose their dignity -- they lost their right to representation in the media.

White politics is the only relevant form of politics

The state-owned and commercial media ploughed resources into the creation and maintenance of dedicated parliamentary political newsteams, to cover parliamentary debates and party congresses. "Political coverage" implied only the activities of those privileged enough to have the vote. There are few signs that the same resources were applied to extraparliamentary politics, or to ensuring that the political aspirations of those not represented in parliament (approximately 8% of the population) were represented in the media.

The ghettoisation of news about black people

The South African print media reinforced the divisions of apartheid by creating apartheid editions of their newspapers. These "extra" editions effectively prevented whites from reading about events affecting blacks, and vice versa. Those working on these "extra" editions were also treated as second-class media workers, with smaller staff and fewer resources.

While it may have made some commercial sense, this approach was hurtful and divisive. It was, among other things, responsible for entrenching ignorance of blacks about whites, and vice versa, and for reinforcing stereotypes. It separated readers rather than uniting them, and ghetto-nised news.

Spies in the newsroom
It is no secret that the apartheid security establishment relied heavily on networks and spies across the media spectrum.

The extent of these networks is gradually beginning to emerge, and the African National Congress welcomes this development.

Spies in the newsrooms operated with a broad mandate; among other things, they were to use their newspapers or other institutions to get across the "party line". They were to spy on their colleagues, and use their access to communities to spy on the broader community.

The African National Congress believes these apartheid spies betrayed the trust of their colleagues and their readers. No-one knows the extent of this betrayal, or the impact it may have had on the lives of sources or other media workers. The African National Congress therefore believes that media workers who were on the payroll of the apartheid regime should be forced to testify before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, so that all may know the truth.

One additional observation, however, is that the management of some media institutions seem to have displayed particular enthusiasm to root out staff members who were favourably disposed to the cause of the liberation movements--but displayed little interest in doing the same to those who spied for the apartheid state. The African National Congress believes that media institutions should comment specifically on what attempts they made to identify media workers on the apartheid payroll, and what action they took in this regard.

Demonisation of the liberation movement and its leadership

One of the most reckless activities undertaken by elements of the South African media was their demonisation of leaders of the liberation movement. Here, the African National Congress thinks specifically of the attempts to demonise our late leader, Comrade Chris Hani, shortly before his assassination.

This demonisation took the form of untruths, unsourced allegations and the publication and broadcast of information without comment from the liberation movement. The outcome of this reckless and irresponsible campaign was to demonise Comrade Chris Hani in the eyes of particular communities, and to whip up hysteria. We can only speculate on the impact this campaign had on those who eventually issued the order to have him killed.

One side of the story

The absence of an official African National Congress presence inside the country until 1990, and the repressive legislation outlawing utterances of the ANC, enabled the media to publish or broadcast without having to "get the other side".

Media workers may argue that they did so in the hope that the public could "read between the lines". This may explain their fond recollections of trips undertaken in SADF tanks, in the back of SAP Hippos, or on navy frigates.
But at a time when the ANC and other liberation movements were silenced, one would have expected a vigorous media, committed to the truth, to do all in its power to "get the other side". While there are a few examples of this, we believe that too often the media chose to publish only the official version.

Section 6

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE INDEPENDENT MEDIA

The phrase "independent media" is used to refer to what was described at the time as the alternative media, the progressive media, and community media. It refers both to publications - i.e. New Nation, New African, UmAfrika, Vrye Weekblad, Work In Progress, SPEAK, Learn & Teach, Saamstaan, etc - and news-gathering agencies such as East Cape News Agencies, Concord etc.

The courage of the independent media, and individuals working for the independent media, cannot be under-estimated or down-played. Despite having limited resources, it displayed a tenacity, a courage and a creativity of which the commercial media should be more than a little embarrassed. Its relentless attempts to go beyond the boundaries of the law are admirable.

It was the small, under-resourced independent media which posed the greatest challenge to the apartheid regime - whether in the courts, where it fought for space to publish, or in the streets, where it stayed true to its mission of publishing the truth.

We believe the independent media played a critical role in critiquing and pressurising the mass media. In addition, it played an invaluable role in ensuring that South Africans were exposed to "the other side of the story". It is important to note, however, that the response of the mass media to these new voices was, as a rule, to try to squeeze them out through monopolistic practices rather than to assist in their development.

CONCLUSION

The South African media was a major influence on the thinking, attitude and behaviour all who lived under apartheid rule in South Africa.
ANC submission on Media to the TRC

This document is in no way to be conceived as a blanket condemnation of the South African mass media. As stated upfront, the media is diverse and there are therefore varying degrees of complicity--as there are varying degrees of courage and commitment to the truth.

But whatever the argument, we believe large sectors of the media failed in their obligation to fully inform their readers, viewers and listeners:

- They failed in their obligation to provide balance and context.
- They failed to commit resources to fully uncovering what was happening inside their own country.
- They failed to fully explain the horrors of apartheid.
- They failed to break through the barriers of ignorance and misunderstanding which formed a cornerstone of apartheid.
- They failed to tell the truth.

POSTSCRIPT

It is interesting to note the growing assertiveness within the media industry around basic human rights such as freedom of information, freedom of association and freedom of expression.

Obviously, it is much easier to champion these rights in a democratic society, where these freedom are enshrined in the constitution - thanks to the brave efforts of millions of South Africans who fought for, and are deeply committed to, these ideals.

However, we in the African National Congress cannot but wonder at this recent conversion by many in the media industry to what are, after all, basic human rights.

We cannot also but wonder what the impact would have been on the history of our people if the South African media had been prepared to express such a fundamental commitment to basic human rights before it became "safe" to do so.

Having said that, it would be irresponsible not to note the significant changes which have taken place in the South African media since the advent of a democratic state.

To some extent, the media has been transformed. The public broadcaster, for example, is now free of government control. Major changes in ownership have taken place, and the media industry is starting to deal seriously with shortcomings in the field of skills development and black advancement.

There is still a long way to go, however. Huge strides need to be made to talk about equality in the South African media, and in building the diversity and depth which a developing society such as ours so desperately needs.
Finally: It must also be recorded that the ANC is disappointed with the media's lack of response to the call from the Truth & Reconciliation Commission for hearings into the media under apartheid. So far, only one media company has made a submission to the TRC.

We are particularly concerned that this debate has been limited to the role of the English-language press, as we believe other sectors of the media have a lot to answer for.

The ANC hopes that other media institutions will recognise the importance of evaluating their actions under apartheid, and that individual media workers and other employees will come forward with their own testimony.

We believe there is an urgent need for **all South African media institutions** to probe their past and to come forward to establish the truth, promote reconciliation and strengthen the basic media freedoms.