

ADDRESS BY PETER SOAL
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AT THE CONFERENCE ON SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA
IN TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY
UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE
FRIDAY 31 JANUARY 1992 - 10 AM

INDEPENDENT
BROADCASTING AUTHORITY
FFOCONF 14/16

of the Police Act of 1958.

This section put all editors at risk by criminalising any publication concerning the actions of the police which the editor or the writer does not reasonably believe to be true.

The onus was upon the editor or the writer to see that extensive research had been done to ascertain the correctness of the report.

Hopefully sufficient pressures will be brought on the government to repeal during the course of this current session of parliament, all other legislation which affects freedom of the press.

I then wish to turn to the question of electronic media. The Democratic Party was the first political organisation to produce proposals regarding principles for broadcasting in South Africa. We are extremely proud of the trendsetting role we played in this regard and I am pleased that our suggestion for an independent authority has been endorsed by many other organisations. Indeed it would seem that the concept of an independent authority is the one common denominator in all the comments made on the report of the Task Group of Professor Christo Viljoen. In our guidelines published last May, we suggested that the authority which we named the "South African Communications Authority" (SACA) should consist of South African commissioners selected by the State President and that the State President would seek candidates broadly representative of and acceptable to the country's diverse peoples as well as its major political groups.

LIBRARY

It is our hope that the deliberations and decisions taken during the course of this weekend will have some influence on opening up the media to all.

This body represents all the media interest groups and it is important that a clear statement is sent into the outside world that we require nothing less in the new South Africa than freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It should be clear that we require no further privileges for the press than those every individual in South Africa will enjoy and no restrictions which do not apply to individuals. The press, as is often said, is a mirror of society and should be free to reflect that society, warts and all.

With regard to the printed media, we in the Democratic Party, have appealed for the legislation which restricted the press, to be repealed long before we get into the new South Africa. A great deal of good work has been done by various individuals and organisations to identify the pieces of legislation which dumping upon the independence and freedom of the press. We have urged the government on a number of occasions to repeal those pieces of legislation and it is a source of great regret that the only bill on the order paper at the present time is the Police Amendment Bill which, inter alia, repeals Section 27B



We also proposed that an upper house or second chamber in parliament would be empowered to conduct public hearings into the appointments to confirm the suitability of the proposed commissioners. Now, while this proposal might find favour in due course, it clearly does not address the problem we find at the present time. Suggestions have been made that an interim body should be brought into existence to control broadcasting during the transition phase. I believe that if an effort is to be made to constitute an interim body we might as well make that a permanent one. I wish to propose therefore that efforts be made to lobby the government to introduce legislation, certainly during this session, and preferably before the Easter recess, to provide for the appointment of a broadcasting authority to regulate internal communications and media and to co-ordinate with international organisations. It should be created with a specific responsibility to promote for all our people, access to a rapid, efficient, nationwide communication system with adequate facilities at reasonable charges. I would envisage that the authority will regulate the use of the electromagnetic spectrum for broadcasting, including mass media and private radio use. The authority should be restricted from censoring programmes or interfering with the right of free speech except for criminal activity as limited by specific acts of parliament. I suggest that the authority be based on a number of citizens to be agreed upon, appointed by the President who will be broadly representative of and acceptable to the country's diverse peoples. As we do not have an upper house of parliament, I would

suggest that a sub-committee of Codesa be appointed which will be empowered to conduct public hearings into appointments to confirm the suitability of the proposed commissioners. This should satisfy both those who are in parliament at the present time and those who are not.

THE SABC : A NATIONAL BROADCASTER

Clearly the role and funding of our national broadcaster needs to be the subject of public discussion and debate. It represents a substantial public asset which can be of great use to this country in the years to come. As a publicly funded institution, it should both be regulated by the IBA and responsive to public needs - for example, the SABC will have a great role to play in education and in the promotion or preservation of our diverse cultural heritages. The SABC board - and perhaps the company's management - needs to be reorganised to be more clearly representative of South Africa as a whole. There is no need to await the new South African constitution and government before beginning the process of meaningfully integrating this important public institution. The SABC should refrain from expanding existing services or starting new ones at this time. The dominance of the national broadcaster over the airwaves should not be growing at a time when the nation is considering the opening of broadcasting to private, commercial ventures. Clearly the method of funding the SABC, the TV licence fee, is not working, and acceptable methods will have to be found to raise much needed funds for necessary public services.