

The title of this session ... Towards an open media for a New South Africa ... assumes that the media is not yet entirely open ... and South Africa is not yet entirely new ...

I agree wholeheartedly with both assumptions ...

I like the "towards" bit in the title, too ... because it assumes we all agree we need to spend some time thinking ahead ... This may sound obvious ... but many of us here find ourselves spending most of our time doing what needs to be done to meet a deadline ... and precious little of it musing on where it is all leading ...

I want to preface my few remarks on a negative ... but I think thought-provoking ... note ... I was stopped in my tracks by an exchange the other day with a very senior Western diplomat ... "Are you enjoying your work?" he asked ... I said yes ... "Well I would make the most of it if I were you," he went on, "because this period will be recorded as the apogee of press freedom in South Africa's history ..."

He meant that in the partial political interregnum that is this "negotiations process" ... no one has the will or the power^{to} energetically to control the flow of information ... Once a new government ... of whatever hue ... is ensconced ... he implied ... it will have both ...

I think this creates a modestly historic moment for journalists in this country and ... I think ... motley crew that we are ... we should seize it by making a public stand now ... while we are enjoying what I call the Pretoria Spring ...

I'll end off with my tentative suggestion for what that stand might be ... But first let's look at what is wrong right now ...

Speakers more knowledgeable than myself ... and certainly more able to influence matters ... have talked about ownership and the concentration thereof ... Some brief ... naive points ... It seems obvious there is not sufficient diversity of ownership in the media ... and means must be found to redress this ...

We can draw on experiences elsewhere ... like the rather hoary Swedish and Finnish models ... and learn from their successes and failures ... I am attracted to the idea of some kind of subsidy system to enable talented journalists to have a go at producing independent and economically viable publications which lack of resources would otherwise rule out ... The danger of course is manipulation by the government doling out such largesse ... Party newspapers are fine ... as long as they are not disingenuous about their affiliations ... and as long there are plenty of other voices ... The alternative press has greatly enriched this

nationalisation of existing media groups ... it has always ended in tears ... not least for the Journalists concerned

(7)

...
But now to a matter closer to my heart ... It remains a scandal that whites predominate to such an extent in positions of journalistic power in this country ... Writing in 1956 ... Anthony Sampson recalled a conversation with Job Rathebe ... a Sophiatown boxing promoter ... "I'll tell you what's wrong with Drum" ... Rathebe told Sampson ... "it's got the white hand on it ... Drum is what white men want Africans to be ... not what they are ... "

Certainly, a lot has changed since then ... but the point persists in a depressing number of cases ... Most important ... I think ... is the dearth of black sub editors ... the people who really put papers together ... The answer ... of course ... is not and cannot be token appointments ... Neither should it be the wholesale removal of white hands ... and their replacement with darker ones ... The answer is training on an epic scale ... and opportunities to match ...

I don't think media barons deliberately keep black staffers down ... indeed ... the more far sighted among them are desperate to do just the opposite ... But they are paying now for failure ... by all of us ... over decades ...

(5)

And so to censorship ... My own views have waxed and waned over the years ... In the darkest days of the 1970s and 1980s I had some sympathy with the idea that ... some sorts of commissars ... representing ... of course ... the will of the people ... might have to be arbiters of information in a country as economically skewed ... deeply divided ... and scarred as ours ...

I don't any more ... I believe the right to dissent in print or on the airwaves ... just as much as the means to concur ... is going to be absolutely vital as we try to create a decent society here ...

And this brings me to my suggestion for a rare joint stand by all of us tradespeople ... wherever we may come from politically ...

(6)

I think we need to say now ... even before we know what it's going to look like ... that in the new South Africa we want no specific media laws at all ... We want the monitoring of our performance left to the courts ... courts that enjoy the confidence of all the people of this country ...

We do not want specific press legislation outlawing racism, for example ... surely we have all at least learned that when something is suppressed ... it acquires a mystique and additional power ... If the HNP wants to continue publishing Die Afrikaner ... let it ... I believe the readers will in any event judge it unkindly ... And if it promotes violence

defamatory ... take it to court ... If it invades privacy
paedophilia ... take it to court ... If it is "irresponsible" ...
... take it to court ... If it is "irresponsible" ...
whatever that means ... prove it in court before the likes
of Mr Justice Ismail Mahomed or perhaps Matthew Phosa ...

But don't succumb to the temptation which afflicts both the
National Party and President Mobutu ... Seize the
opportunity to be visionary ... to make a fresh start in
this country ... I believe such an open-minded policy would
attract tremendous goodwill to a new democratic government
... from every corner of this society ... and indeed the
world ... whose money ... after all ... we need to make this
new South Africa the non-racial ... prosperous model state
we know it can be ... That is my plea on behalf of this
untidy interest group called journalists ... unpopular and
unattractive perhaps ... but actually rather necessary ...

Just on a lighter note ... Oscar Wilde didn't think much of
journalists ... and he had good reason not to ... Many
figures in the government and the ANC today would agree with
him. ^{Wilde} once said "Journalism justifies its own existence by
the great Darwinian principle of the survival of the
vulgarest" ...

But he was a free thinker ... most journalism in his Britain
consisted ... he said ... of "prejudice, stupidity, cant and
twaddle" ... At the same time ... he believed that the good
could only emerge if you permitted the bad too,

Thank you very much.