

Campaign for Independent Broadcasting (CIB)

Press statement, January 27, 1993

The Campaign for Independent Broadcasting was launched last November with the immediate objective of ending the undue influence and control exercised by the National Party over the South African Broadcasting Corporation.

The campaign was based on the belief that South Africans have a right to accurate and impartial information, and that the country's first democratic, non-racial election will not be free and fair unless they enjoy this right.

South Africa has an estimated rate of functional illiteracy of 60%. SABC is thus the country's major information source - with a daily audience of around 20-million, more than three times the size of its print and broadcasting competitors.

It is thus essential that the current position of effective government control over SABC is replaced soon with control by an autonomous and independent structure. We believe independent control is the only guarantee against improper interference in public broadcasting by the ruling party and other political players, both now and in the future.

We believe multi-lateral control over SABC by a range of political parties is not a viable alternative to unilateral control by the National Party.

Formal control by the ruling party is currently exercised through the appointment of the SABC board by the state president.

To end this, and to achieve an independent control structure, CIB has prepared a detailed model for the appointment of a new board for the SABC to replace the current board, whose term ends on March 31 this year.

The details of the proposal are provided elsewhere. But, in broad terms, the proposals outline a selection process for the new board involving, for the first time in South Africa's history, substantial participation by the public.

The process is designed to incorporate proposals from party political interests, but to prevent their control either of the process or of a new board.

It involves the appointment of a panel of seven eminent South Africans of national standing to select a new board, from nominations offered by the public.

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We believe the process goes as far as is practically possible towards achievement of an independent board.

In December last year we placed these proposals before the government and began negotiating for their implementation.

CIB representatives have held two meetings with Home Affairs Ministry officials.

A third was due on January 18, but was unilaterally postponed by Minister Louis Pienaar's office.

In the course of our negotiations with the government, we have succeeded in persuading government negotiators to accept the broad outline of our proposals.

However, we are increasingly of the view that the government is using disagreement on detail to stall implementation of the CIB proposals and retain the status quo.

In our initial engagements with the government, government officials argued the need to delay the appointment of a new SABC board and for the extension of the term of the current board - for up to six months according to one Home Affairs source quoted in a local report.

The government has now accepted at least rhetorically our demand for an independently-selected board by April 1. We welcome this shift.

But we are extremely concerned that the government's deeds in this regard contradict its words.

Although Minister Pienaar is quoted this morning (in Beeld) as wanting to see an independent selection process in place by next week, by stalling on the details of our proposals, he is in fact making this impossible.

In addition, Pienaar has released several provocative public statements about the selection process - provoking concern among several political parties, particularly but not exclusively those on the far right, that they are being excluded from a secret bilateral deal between the government and the ANC.

It appears increasingly as if these statements are being deliberately released to provoke opposition to the CIB proposals, and thus delay their implementation.

This appears, to some extent to have succeeded, and there have, in the past week been widespread misunderstandings and misinterpretations of the CIB proposals, some of them apparently deliberate.

In particular several parties have suggested the CIB proposals would result in substantial retrenchments of existing SABC staff. This is totally incorrect: the CIB is campaigning for the sovereignty of a new SABC board. It is therefore not about to undermine that sovereignty itself.

In December Pienaar insisted that he had to consult more broadly on the CIB proposals. To our knowledge he has to date raised the issue only with the ANC, but is still insisting he needs more time to consult.

It is also increasingly apparent that the government is also attempting to use its bilateral negotiations with the ANC to delay finalising agreement on the CIB proposals.

X Barely ^{five} months remain before the term of the current SABC board expires. Agreement must be reached in the next few days if the process to appoint an independent board is to be completed in time.

The only obstacle, in the view of the CIB, is the National Party itself.

All affiliates of the CIB will be meeting on Saturday, January 30 to discuss a programme of action to pressure the NP government to accept not only in word but also in its actions the process to achieve independence for the SABC.