

Association of Democratic Journalists

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4 January 1990

Transvaal Save the Press Committee
c/o Acag
Johannesburg

I have been asked by the ADJ national executive committee to express the ADJ's support for the press freedom petition initiated by the Transvaal Save the Press Committee and for its request for a meeting between media representatives and FW de Klerk to discuss the issue.

If you would like a letter from the ADJ formally endorsing the petition to include in whatever documentation you are preparing, please contact Tyrone August, the ADJ general secretary, at our offices.

The ADJ is also encouraging its members to sign the Save the Press petition.

Assuming, in the light of the government's inaction over New Nation the committee continues to push for a meeting with De Klerk, the ADJ believes it is important that the delegation is as representative as possible.

In order both to ensure this we propose that it include representatives of the ADJ, SASJ and Mwasu, speaking on behalf of organised journalists, and of the conference of alternative editors, on behalf of those publications most directly affected by existing media regulations and laws.

Without this representivity, we feel the delegation will be seen as no more than a group of concerned individuals and the arguments it puts to De Klerk correspondingly weakened.

With regard to the Save The Press Committee itself, we have several suggestions and observations.

The first of these is that the most pressing need is not for a second regional STP structure, but for a single national Save The Press formation. Regional structures, without a national centre, tend to limit the national and international impact of campaigns. In addition, available resources are limited and need to be centralised for maximum effectiveness.

Secondly, there is the issue of the committee/campaign's objectives. Our feeling is that, having drawn lessons from the Western Cape experience, Save The Press should focus exclusively on the twin issues of press freedom and censorship, rather than branching out into other areas of media activity - news agencies, media training etc. as happened in Cape Town.

We propose whatever permanent structures are established are kept as small as possible - a burgeoning bureaucracy will inevitably find itself with free time on its hands and will begin seeking to expand its mandate and increasingly blur its original objectives.

Finally, and to reiterate our original point: We propose that whatever structure is established be made up of representatives of organisations rather than of individuals. Without this, we believe the structure will drift away from its natural constituency - threatened publications and journalists - and speak increasingly for itself, rather than for the actual victims of censorship and state action.

We therefore propose:

- * That activities directed at establishing a Transvaal Save The Press structure be redirected towards the establishment of a national structure;
- * That the establishment of a national structure be undertaken jointly with the following organisations: ADJ, SASJ, Mwasu, Ppwawu, the conference of alternative editors and ACAG. We recognise that there is a major gap in this - the monopoly media - but as the Conference of Editors is unlikely to participate, our only suggestion is for representation on an ad hoc basis from those mainstream editors who wish to participate;
- * That the national structure that is established be made up of representatives of the organisations listed above and constitutes itself as a committee along the lines of the Media Defence Trust, rather than as a fully-fledged organisation recruiting individual members - it should not attempt to establish a mass base, but can link in with mass-based organisations on specific campaigns;
- * That it runs a bank account, but does not establish an office - we feel any available funds should be channeled into the constituent organisations to enable them to undertake whatever administrative and organisational work is necessary;
- * That it does not attempt to establish regional offices, but works through its constituent organisations.

A national Save The Press Committee established on these lines will, we believe, ensure continuing representivity and the most effective framework around which future press freedom campaigns can be undertaken.

I have discussed this informally with Jeanette Minnie of the SASJ who is in broad agreement with the proposals.

Yours sincerely



David Niddrie
(for the ADJ)