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P.O. ANERLEY,
South Coast,
Natal.

16th February, 1953.

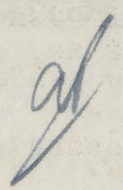
Secretary,
Commission of Inquiry
into Press,
P.O. Box 1296,
PRETORIA.

Dear Sir,

I did not realise that the questionnaire would be of so involved a nature. To do justice to it, or at least to those parts of it which I feel able to deal with, would take me several days.

I am writing, in the first place, to apologise for not having replied before, but I am also writing to inquire whether, in view of its lateness, a reply to the questionnaire would still be received. If, however, I am too late, I apologise again for having failed to do what you asked me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be the initials 'al' or 'al' with a flourish.

Geliewe in u antwoord
te verwoys na
In reply please quote
No. 2/31/7

UNIE VAN
SUID-AFRIKA.



UNION OF
SOUTH AFRICA.

Z. 14 B.

KANTOOR VAN DIE—OFFICE OF THE

COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY INTO THE PRESS,

P.O. Box 1296,

PRETORIA.

20th February, 1953.

Mr. Alan Paton,
P.O. Anerley,
SOUTH COAST. NATAL.

Dear Sir,

I have to thank you for your letter of the 16th February and to inform you that a reply to the questionnaire would still be received. The Commission would be pleased to have your views on the matter raised in its questionnaire.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

SECRETARY.

COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY INTO THE PRESS.

P.O. AMERLEY,
South Coast,
Natal.

1st April, 1953.

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Secretary,
Commission of Inquiry
into Press,
P.O. Box 1296,
PRETORIA.

Dear Sir,

Herewith I enclose my reply to the questionnaire.
I regret, however, that I was not able to do justice to the
document, which was an extraordinarily comprehensive one, and
in some cases propounded questions to which I believe no satis-
factory answer could be given without scientific investigation.
I regret also that I was not able to devote more time to it.

Yours faithfully,



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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONNAIRE

I (i)

The freedom of the Press consists in the fact that, except in a completely totalitarian society, there is more than one authority to which a man can give allegiance, such authorities being God, the State, Truth, the Church, one's Country as distinct from the State, etc., etc. The healthiest society is that in which these various loyalties are harmonised under the benevolent government of the State, so that it does not become necessary for a man to have to choose between any two of them. I do not refer, of course, to the many lesser loyalties, which very seldom, under normal circumstances, come into conflict with any of the greater. It is, I think, the highest and best duty of the State to make it possible for man to harmonise these various loyalties within himself. It is in fact only when he can do this that he is truly free, and it is only when he is truly free that he is able to give the most constructive and creative contribution to the common life; so that in the good State these liberties are guaranteed to men - not the liberty for a man to do what he wishes, but the liberty to do what he thinks he ought to do. This giving to man of various freedoms and this recognition of them is again to me the mark of a truly good State. By these things the State recognises that man does not belong to the State alone, and by giving these freedoms should strengthen rather than impair man's loyalty to it.

Some men, however, are tempted to abuse this freedom, and I assume that such problems are dealt with in the questionnaire, but the fact remains that the freedom of the Press is one of these freedoms. This again should be to do what it thinks it ought to do, not merely what it wants to do. Its freedom consists, therefore, in the recognition of the fact that man must be free to do his duty and to this end it is important that he should know what is happening, that he should express his opinions about what is happening, that he should be able to know what the opinions of others are, that he should be able to criticise the acts of authority.

(ii) (a) There are certainly restraints on this freedom. At the moment I am not considering any restraints imposed on the Press by law.

(ii) (b) These restraints are, in my opinion, of two kinds. One is the restraint which is placed upon the Press by its own code of behaviour. The other is the restraint imposed upon it by the opinion of the people. These restraints are largely ethical, moral, conventional, religious. There are, no doubt, economic restraints of which I know very little, and political restraints also, but, to my mind, the important thing is that

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the restraints on the freedom of the Press should, as far as possible, be exercised by the Press itself with a proper regard for public opinion.

I (iii) (a) The freedom of the Press therefore will be affected by restraints arising from the three factors mentioned.

(iii) (b) These restraints are again self-imposed by the Press and should prevent the Press from indulging in any comment or from framing its news in such a way that it will show contempt or disregard for the feelings and welfare of any section of the population. It must also bear itself in a responsible fashion, realising that its papers will be read by people who have no tradition of newspapers or free expression of this kind, and who could, presumably, be inflamed by such news or comment.

(iv) (a,b,c,) My opinion would not be of value here.

II (i) (a) The Press has very great responsibilities to the public.

(i) (b) One of these responsibilities is to disseminate news. This news may be fairly set out from the point of view of the newspaper concerned but should contain no misstatement of fact. The Press also has a responsibility if it encourages readers' views to give a fair sample of them, but such a matter must be left to its own good sense. The tendency of one newspaper to give prominence to an item which another almost ignores is an example of this freedom to present news from its own point of view. A reputable newspaper will not exaggerate unimportant or ignore important news.

We are fortunate in South Africa in having a number of newspapers of varying shades of opinion, so that most well-informed people soon get to know when a particular newspaper has ignored some item of news. I must state my strong view here that it is education that is important and not control of newspapers. The more educated people are, the more critical they are of any information presented to them, and the more aware they are of the human tendency to present facts according to one's wishes. The question arises, of course, as to what to do about a newspaper which presents facts exaggeratedly to an ill-educated section of the population. My own opinion is that any attempt to deal with any but the grossest abuses would lead to other abuses, namely the taking of increasing power by the State and the lessening of all those various freedoms which go to make human life dignified and purposeful. In its editorial comments a

/newspaper.....

newspaper also has responsibilities. These responsibilities should be honourably discharged, because it is part of the code to discharge them honourably, not because it is ordered by legislation.

II (2) (a)

The Press certainly has responsibilities to the State and to the Government. As I am not a philosopher, I intend to deal with these two together.

(2) (b)

The Press has a duty just like any citizen to obey the laws of the State. It should treat with respect any member of the Government in his capacity as Minister of the State. It should not be precluded in any way from criticising the actions of such a person. A great deal of liberty has always been accorded to the newspapers to make fun, especially in cartoons, of important members of the Government. Sometimes such fun is recognised to go beyond the bounds of good taste, but we should not be tempted to legislate against it. There is a phrase in English, "on state occasions". On such occasions the personage is usually reckoned to be exempt from fun or criticism, but in his capacity as a politician he should run the same risks as anybody else and no special protection should be accorded to him.

II (3)

The responsibilities above certainly restrict the freedom of the Press, and they are in general, in my opinion, reasonably observed.

III

IV

In my opinion, the Press in South Africa is reasonably free. I do not see what could be done to prevent the Press from getting into the hands of big interests. Whether the Press is controlled by a political body, mining group, or private family makes little difference. Those particular newspapers are likely to conform in general to the wishes of their controllers. I do not think it is a good suggestion that the Press should be in the hands of some public corporation which would mean that in the last resort it would be too subservient to the wishes of the Government of the day. I have lived for some time in England and in America, and regard our South African Press as superior in general to the Presses of those countries.

V

VI

The concept "freedom of the Press" could not be expected to convey the same meaning to European, Coloured, Bantu, and Indian groups. I would expect the first group to have the clearest ideas about Press responsibility. I

/should.....

should expect the other groups to learn a great deal from observing the first. I have not sufficient knowledge to deal with each group separately.

7. I do not see how the freedom of the Press can be compared with news broadcasted. One obvious difference is that the broadcasting of news falls under a single authority. This authority has therefore a different responsibility to a multi-racial population, and must therefore aim at objectivity which naturally leads to colourlessness. To be a news commentator for the S.A.B.C. is certainly not a job for a person with fire and originality. In America, where broadcasting is left to private enterprise, many of the principles applicable to a free Press apply also to broadcasting.
8. (1) I am not sure what you mean here. Do you mean freedom of expression by readers? I would hesitate to compel newspapers to print all letters received. If you mean expression of opinion by editors and owners, facilities are adequate. Or are you referring, perhaps, to public speakers?
- (2) I do not think so.
9. (1) (a) Against.
- (b) Not necessarily, but probably against.
- (c) Again, I am not sure whose opinion you mean, but the answer is probably against.
- (d) My own view is that really informed public opinion is not formed by newspapers, but in general, the answer is probably against.
- (2) Yes.
- (3) Yes. Why not daily?
- (4) No.
- (5) I consider it neither advisable nor inadvisable.
10. Do not know.
11. I accept the fact that a paper may be the mouth-piece of certain opinions. I should think more of it if it presented other points of view but would hesitate to compel it.
12. (a) (b) (c) Yes. I would not wish to compel this by law.
13. (a) Many bodies form public opinion - parents, church,
/school.....

school, university, trade-union, profession, organisation, etc. The Press may certainly compete amongst these. In other words, the giving of a lead is not a peculiar function of the Press.

(2) In giving any lead, it is the duty of the Press to adhere to the truth and the canons of good taste.

(3) A newspaper may follow public opinion, but it is not its function to do so.

(4) If the Press, on occasions, follows public opinion it is its duty to inform it when it is uninformed or misinformed, to moderate it when it is violent and unreasonable.

14. (1) The influence of the Press declines with the education of the reader. To my mind, the extent of this influence on public opinion is exaggerated, although I am aware that the Press can foster agitation and inflame feelings.

(2) As above.

(3) (4) These two questions cannot, in my opinion, be answered except after much research. It is generally recognised that more Afrikaners read English newspapers than English-speaking people read Afrikaans newspapers. Yet I would hesitate to say that either group was better informed than the other. I am doubtful of the extent to which newspapers can be held responsible for the opinion under discussion. I am sure that many people read newspapers because there they find their own opinions expressed. It seems to me that homes, churches, schools, play a greater part than newspapers in causing or healing discord. The newspaper world is a hard one and hard knocks are given, but amongst my own circle of friends, there is seldom any reference made to the newspapers, which would suggest either that they are influenced by newspapers views or that they would wish to curb them. Politicians seem very sensitive to newspaper news and comment, but it would be a bad day when the Press is curbed because of them. My own view is that it would be impossible in this country to pass any public judgment on English papers or Afrikaans papers. Both have virtues and faults, but who is so detached that he can say what they are? In my opinion, the newspapers would have to show far greater irresponsibility before they should be touched. In that event, where could one find an authority pure enough to interfere? We can be grateful that the sense of responsibility is as high as it is.

(5) (6) (7) I do not see how these questions can be answered by anyone who has not conducted an objective research.

15. (1) None.

15. (2) Public opinion desires, and rightly, that the broadcasting of news and comments by the S.A.B.C. should suffer many restrictions not imposed upon the Press.

(3) I much doubt it.

16. (1) The proper function of the newspaper is to give news. This news will be given from the point of view of the newspaper, but should nevertheless conform to certain standards. A Company controlling a newspaper will probably wish also to express its own opinions on public matters with the hope, no doubt, of shaping and influencing the opinion of others.

(2a) The newspaper's responsibility, therefore, is to present news truthfully, even if not dispassionately, and to express opinion in a responsible, even if not a partisan manner. Again, it seems to me that one should not attempt to change the partisan character of our newspaper arrangements. Our system of government itself is partisan, and could not be expected to control the partisanship of newspapers.

(2b) I do not think one can deal specifically with a newspaper's responsibility to each population group. In general however, it can be said that a newspaper has a grave responsibility to refrain from injuring the race pride and racial feelings of any section of the population, and it has a special responsibility to avoid playing on the emotions and feelings of the less developed races.

(3) - - - - -

(4) The newspaper's responsibility is to avoid losses, and even to give the shareholders a return on their investment. Further, if the shareholders have a political goal in view, it is the newspaper's responsibility to achieve that goal.

(5) The only thing that can enable a newspaper to decide on its course of action when its responsibilities conflict with one another is a high code of professional ethics. Anything which encourages newspaper men to believe in the worth of their profession as distinct from any other consideration whatsoever helps towards this end.

17. (1) I am not well-informed on this point.

(2) Nor this.

18. (1) Both sensational and trivial news are treated in a way quite disproportionate to their importance. By trivial news I do not mean local news. Sensational news is an attempt

/on.....

on the part of the newspaper to give a news value to the event which it does not deserve. The newspapers deliberately pand-
er to a certain public appetite, and I myself doubt if any
social or therapeutical ^{advantage} advance whatever is to be gained
thereby.

(2) I regard as sensational news the love affairs of Ali Khan, King Farouk, Ingrid Bergman, etc., etc. Trivial news is the kind which relates the exploits of hens, donkeys, and human beings, mainly from America, and recently, I note, from Australia. An unforgivable piece of sensational journalism was the republication of Arthur Bagg's life history. This was a disgusting deed and must have caused great pain to the girl whom he intended to marry. Another objectionable feature of the Sunday papers is their sensational efforts to describe dagga waves, prostitution waves, seduction waves, even religious waves, which are based on evidence of the most unscientific kind.

(3) For my liking, yes, but I must nevertheless declare that our Press is far superior in this respect to those of Great Britain and America.

(4) Some research is required before such an opinion can be expressed.

(5) This question, therefore, falls away.

(6) On the whole, I regard these as harmless.

19. The accurate presentation of news is influenced by every single factor mentioned. The higher the ethical professional standard, the nearer will be the approach to that impartial presentation of news, which might conceivably be given by an observer from Mars. The lower the ethical professional standard, the more likely is the news to be distorted or restricted or even, possibly, invented.

20. A very similar reply must be given to this question. Here, however, a greater allowance may justifiably be made for all these factors. If I witness an incident, I should, as an honourable man, be able to say what happened, but when I begin to interpret it, some quite other part of myself enters the equation. This is natural and should be expected.

21. Any speculations on this question would be of very doubtful scientific value. It is supposed by some people, for example, that Afrikaans-speaking South Africa has a better understanding of English-speaking South Africa, and vice versa. I doubt this very much. There is no doubt that more Afrikaners know what English papers say than English-speaking people know what Afrikaans papers say, but I doubt whether such knowledge is as important as some people think.

It is idle to suppose that the political struggles of the last forty years could have been prevented or softened by some control of the Press. It seems to me that our political struggles will go on and that we can be thankful that they have been less bitter than might have been expected. In my opinion, visitors and journalists from abroad, if they have any intelligence, do not rely on the Press for their information. I think that the big newspapers overseas would not hesitate to get rid of a representative whose views were too much influenced by South African newspapers.

22. It is unfortunate that the language and political differences between newspapers so nearly coincide. But that is also to a large extent true of the country itself. The minorities on either side are not big enough to call for separate newspapers. When the country changes, this state of affairs will change. We must not think that we can change the country by fiddling with its newspapers.
23. In general, I am opposed to the control by persons not nationals of the Union of any daily paper in South Africa
24. I am against the control of 43% of the circulation by one publishing company. On the whole, it is my opinion that the standard set by this company is high, but I object to the holding of so much power by so few hands.
25. Same as 24.
26. Here is the beginning of a process which may lead to a similar concentration of power. I am, in general, opposed to the control of more than one daily paper by one company.
27. As above.
28. I know that a great fuss is made of the importance of journalistic anonymity. I do not attach much importance to the anonymity but to my mind it is important that the journalist should be protected. To my mind, this whole matter requires the fullest possible discussion. I myself would wish to sign openly anything that I wrote. In most walks of life people are openly responsible for what they do. I give my opinion, therefore, that signing of names would place reports in a better perspective and increase the sense of responsibility, but I am prepared to consider every argument as to the disadvantages of such a procedure.
29. I am willing that any measures whatsoever consistent with the freedom of newspapers should be taken to get

/them.....

them to devote sufficient space and attention to news of other groups, but there should be no compulsion.

30/31

As above.

32. No, they do not, but the only way to improve the situation is to increase the amount of harmony in the country and consistently and untiringly to aim at the raising of the ethical standards of the profession.

33. As far as I am concerned, yes.

34. (1a) A newspaper should not be responsible for opinions in articles, (b) nor letters.

(2) I do not see why a newspaper should conceal the identity of a contributor of an article or letter. I have already said in my answer to question 28 that I am prepared to listen to argument in regard to the concealment of the identity of a staff member. I do not see myself why anonymous letters, which, under other circumstances, are regarded with contempt, should be received and published. If a letter-writer wishes to remain anonymous and has good reasons for doing so, and if the newspaper considers that his letter is important, then it itself should be prepared to take up the matter.

(3a, b, c, d) Decrease. Of course I write from my own point of view, but it is quite possible that this point of view has changed since I left the Public Service. In my view, the disappearance of anonymous letters from the newspapers would be no great loss, but I must confess that I draw back from forbidding such things by legislation..

(4) I should take it up with the various professional associations.

(5) Put them in the wastepaper-basket.

35. (1) Compulsory signing of political matter has less and less effect as the professional standards become higher and higher.

(2) I have no information on this.

(3) Leave it alone.

36. (1) An editor with high professional standards will not open a topic without allowing free discussion of it.

(2) This is a vague question.

/No.....

36. (3)

No.

37. (1)

→ → → → - - - -

(2)

In my circles, the following words carry opprobrium:- coolie, hotnot, kaffir, koelie. In other words, we are repelled most by those terms which imply contempt for a whole race. These are the words whose use should be forbidden. *Backveld & Backveldeer are also derogatory, having a racial and social rather than a political animus.*

(3)

- - - - -

(4)

See reply to question 37 (2)

(5)

- - - - -

(6)

The use of words, like coolie, hotnot, kaffir, do disturb good relations. The other words should be left alone if they were forbidden, half of our politicians would be speechless.

(7)

Not very far.

38.

In my opinion, the Press abroad does not always succeed in presenting a true picture of events in South Africa. This is hardly surprising when there is such a divergence of opinion in South Africa itself. Here again it seems to me that the true picture will depend on the professional standards of the papers concerned. To my mind, the Press abroad often fails to present a true picture because it does not understand what is happening here. On the contrary, some of its observers have presented pictures which contain so much of the truth as to make their observations remarkable. I submit with respect that there is very little that can be done to change the attitude of the Press abroad. You are not here dealing with a Press question at all. You are dealing with a political one.

39.

- - - - -

40. (1)

Yes. (2) Sometimes.

41. (1)

A very difficult question to answer. I am tempted to reply, my own standard. If one observed an incident, one should be able to discuss it without having to consider the opinions of editors, shareholders, political parties, churches, etc. In other words, there is an objective standard of truth. One should aim to get as close to it as possible.

(2)

There are times when an honest man must add other relevant facts.

41. (3)

I believe the policy of some newspapers would be much higher than that of others, but no one could answer such a question without a research.

42./43.

I am not competent to answer these questions.

44. (1)

The idea of having two representatives is repugnant to me. It is surely possible to find one person who knows what matters should be of interest to the two white groups of South Africa.

(2)

Yes.

45.

The idea is repugnant to me, although by now it is a common one in South African life.

46.

No information.

47. (1)

Yes.

(2)

(3)

I think it does quite well, considering the divided nature of the country.

(4)

48.

I would not express an opinion on this matter without listening to argument. It is highly desirable that journalists should have a high code of professional conduct, but whether such a code should be instituted, that is, formulated and put down in writing, is a question I cannot answer. I repeat my view, that the standards of the Press in South Africa are in my opinion high, and I always hesitate to recommend the legalistic formulation of morals and ideals. This question is essentially one for discussion with journalists themselves.

49. (1)

Yes. (2) Yes, why not, provided that other bodies are not excluded.

(3)

No.

(4)

I can see no objection whatever to such a proposal.

(5)

An excellent suggestion which I should hate to see made compulsory.

(6)

An excellent suggestion.

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