

Our concern with the freedom of expression in the election campaign led us to take a close interest in the performance of the media.

We interviewed editors and executives of the press, radio and television in Salisbury. In other towns, such as Bulawayo, Gwelo, Fort Victoria and Umtali, members of the Group made contact with local editors and journalists. The Group's Media Adviser was in close touch with the press, radio and TV throughout the period.

The Lancaster House Agreement provided for the parties to have "free and unfettered access to the public media." The importance of this provision can best be understood by a brief description of the role of the privately-owned media, namely the press. The main newspapers in Rhodesia are all owned by The Rhodesian Printing and Publishing Company Limited. Approximately 55 per cent of the shares of the company are held by people living in Rhodesia and 40 per cent by Argus Newspapers of South Africa. It publishes two dailies, The Herald in Salisbury and the Bulawayo Chronicle, as well as The Sunday Mail in Salisbury, The Sunday News in Bulawayo, a weekly in Umtali and the National Observer, a weekly newspaper published in Salisbury and mainly aimed at the African market. Circulations are approximately as follows:-

<u>The Herald</u>	80,000
<u>Sunday Mail</u>	108,000
<u>Bulawayo Chronicle</u>	35,000
<u>Sunday News</u>	29,000
<u>National Observer</u>	30,000

Nearly all Rhodesia's newspapers are in English. Attempts to produce papers in African languages in the past have failed, partly because literacy in English was higher than in most African countries but also because Africans have tended to view attempts by European publishers to produce newspapers in their own language as paternalistic.

Two newspapers aimed at African readership and publishing four days a week appeared during the election campaign - The Times of Zimbabwe and The Drums of Zimbabwe. The Times had been launched on 15 April 1977, but was banned on 2 October 1978. Its editor, Mr. Munangatire, recommenced publication on 12 February 1980 in the last weeks of the election campaign, during which it broadly supported the PF and ZANU(PF).

Another weekly paper of significance which was allowed to recommence publication was Moto, produced in Gwelo by the Mambo Press, a Roman Catholic publishing organisation. Moto had been banned in 1974. Its editor then was a well-known African journalist, Mr. Nyoka, who became publicity secretary to

ZANU(PF). A week before the election the offices of Moto were destroyed by a bomb and the paper silenced after seven issues.

Drums, a party paper run by UANC, switched to daily publication for the election period and intended to revert to a weekly after the election. The remainder of Rhodesia's press consists of a number of party weeklies and small magazines, none of them of much political significance.

The Zimbabwe Rhodesia Broadcasting Corporation (ZRBC) is the sole broadcasting authority in the country. It runs a nightly television service, which has a small and mainly European audience, and radio services in English, Shona and Ndebele. The ZRBC has a constitution similar to that of the British Broadcasting Corporation. Under the Broadcasting Act (Cap. 248) it has a Board of Governors appointed by the President. At the time of the election there were nine members - four European and four African, plus a European Chairman. The senior executives were all European.

CENSORSHIP

The Rhodesian press has long been self-contained, since almost no foreign publications came into the country during the 15 years of UDI. Copies of the London Financial Times, Time Magazine, The Economist and one or two other papers appeared on sale during the election campaign, but the Rhodesian public generally remained without access to outside publications. The official explanation was that this had been done to conserve foreign exchange, but its reality was to keep Rhodesians insulated from outside news and views.

The Smith regime was largely successful in achieving this objective. Sometimes newspapers were shut down; always they were censored. This was often carried to absurd lengths so that for long periods the names of Mr. Mugabe and Mr. Nkomo could not appear; when they had to be mentioned they were referred to as "a terrorist leader based in Maputo" or "a terrorist leader based in Lusaka."

The Herald, formerly The Rhodesia Herald, and other papers of the Group, after a brief period following UDI when they preferred to publish blank spaces rather than submit to the censorship, accommodated themselves to the rules of the game. Rhodesian journalists had thus long been accustomed to working within a stringent system of censorship. As well as having to comply with the law they had exercised a considerable amount of self-censorship which dates back even before UDI.

The censorship regulations had two main purposes - to cover the security situation and so prevent publication of the movements of the Security Forces, facts and figures about the armed services, police and Special Branch, etc., and to prevent any information appearing about the methods by which Rhodesia was circumventing sanctions. Censorship was also strict in such matters as the detention of nationalist leaders, their political activities and all military developments.

When the Governor assumed office, sanctions were lifted and the Patriotic Front parties became legal. As a result, censorship of the press was diminished but not ended.

The Emergency Powers Regulations (Maintenance of Law and Order) 1977 imposed penalties on persons who made statements likely to "cause alarm or despondency among the inhabitants of Rhodesia or some of them" (Section 42), and effectively placed the control of all information concerning the Security Forces (which included the police) under the control of the Minister of Information. As interpreted, the following provision had a widespread effect on the ability of newspapers to report current events in Rhodesia throughout the campaign, and the holding of the elections. This meant that in some important respects we had to rely on newspaper reports published abroad, as they were effectively banned in Rhodesia. The key section reads as follows:

"42A(1) No person shall, for the purpose of publishing news by radio, television or writing, communicate, publish or disseminate, whether within or outside Rhodesia, any information which relates or purports to relate directly or indirectly to -

(a) any measure or act of any description whatsoever of the Security Forces or the Government for the purpose of combating or suppressing terrorism or reducing the incidence thereof within Rhodesia:

(b) the commission of any act of terrorism or sabotage."

An additional form of censorship, provided in the Censorship and Entertainment Control Act (Cap. 78) prohibited any trade in publications etc. declared by the Censorship Board to be "undesirable." The definition of "undesirable", as well as the more conventional meanings, included "to bring any member or section of the public into contempt; or harm relations between any sections of the public; or be contrary to the interests of public safety or public order."

The Censorship Board often banned scholarly and serious writings on southern Africa. At the behest of staff members of Government House, bans on a significant number of works were lifted before the elections. Some idea of the scope of the banned publications is given by the Schedule of banned publications whose bans were lifted in several Gazette Notices in the weeks preceding the election (an example is at Annex 28).

A "D" Notice system was provided for in the Emergency Powers ("D" Notices) Regulations 1976. These regulations imposed controls, inter alia, "for the prevention of alarm or despondency", and for the purpose of dealing with any circumstances which had arisen or were likely to arise and would interfere with" peace, order and good government in Rhodesia." (Section 5(1)(c) and (d)).

The "D" Notices procedure was suspended on the arrival of the Governor but under Section 42A the appearance in the Rhodesian press two weeks before the election of news and pictures of newly-introduced joint ZIPRA/police patrols at assembly points was prevented, although the story was published abroad. A report that Britain had referred to these patrols in a United Nations debate on Rhodesia was carried in the Bulawayo Chronicle, thus challenging the continuing validity of the procedure. Later the ZRBC quoted the Chronicle. News of the joint patrols had also reached the country by way of the 1600 hours GMT BBC World Service News, relayed daily by ZRBC since shortly after the Governor's arrival.

Nevertheless, this episode showed that notwithstanding the advent of

the Governor, restrictive legislation developed over a long period of years was kept intact and was available to the police, the Security Forces and the local administration to enforce as they saw fit throughout the election campaign. Copy which editors considered came under Section 42A still had to be submitted to the Ministry of Information, and on security matters Combined Operations (known as COMOPS) decided what should appear.

THE PUBLIC MEDIA

Against this background we were particularly concerned about the role of the public media - radio and television - during the election campaign.

The British Administration, in line with its general policy of leaving the government infrastructure intact, sought to persuade rather than direct the Ministry of Information and ZRBC into better ways. An information office in Government House monitored the media, and privately expressed its displeasure from time to time in matters of news balance and censorship. Often the Governor's office suggested, in its defence, that pressures on the Rhodesian Administration had to be applied on important matters that had greater priority than those connected with censorship and the media.

Within days of the Governor taking over, the BBC World Service news bulletin began to be transmitted through ZRBC once a day. It was the first time Rhodesians had heard the BBC on their own radio services since UDI. Other BBC items including many on Rhodesia were also used in ZRBC's newsreel programmes.

A South African news broadcast continued to be transmitted daily on ZRBC. It went out at 8.00 a.m. - a "white housewives" peak listening time rather than an African peak time - and, unlike the BBC news, was broadcast on only one programme. It was argued in defence of the continued South African broadcasts that Zambia and Mozambique beamed into Rhodesia special programmes that could be heard widely all over the country, both propagating the views of the Patriotic Front partners.

Our own view is that while there was a limit to pressures that could be exerted on the press, being privately owned, some more positive action could have been taken in regard to ZRBC. The introduction into the editorial department of ZRBC of two or three outside journalists from one of the Commonwealth radio corporations could have rectified the news imbalance in a matter of days and we believe such a step would have been of inestimable help in enlarging the freedom of expression during the election period.

We did not regard the television service as having much influence on the mass of African voters, but the radio did concern us since many Africans in the villages, townships and TTLs have their own transistor sets, and radio is heard in beerhalls and other public places.

Each of the political parties was offered equal free time on radio and television. From 28 January to 1 February 1980, each had a free, six minute "start of campaign" broadcast on all channels, and a "close of campaign" six minute broadcast during the period 18 to 22 February. In addition, on 26 February each party had a two minute "eve of poll" broadcast on all channels.

The order of broadcasts was determined by lot, and in the African services each party was free to choose its language. Programmes were pre-recorded so that no party could reply. Scripts were vetted by ZRBC's legal advisers and some amendments were asked for; we heard no complaints on this score.

Additionally, each party was free to purchase time for television and radio advertisements, up to a fixed maximum value over the whole span of the campaign. The apportionment of time was strictly equal, and no complaints were received from any party. If a party did not take up its full allocation of paid for time, the "spots" were not made available to anyone else. There was no control over newspaper advertisements. All the major parties advertised extensively. In our view, these arrangements worked satisfactorily.

PERFORMANCE OF THE MEDIA

On radio and TV there was even less investigative journalism than there was in the press, and statements by the administration were invariably accepted at face value. When we first arrived in the country the Communiques of Combined Operations (COMOPS) were often read out word for word as the first item of the news bulletins. As these Communiques were written in political terms - and their content was not always accepted as accurate by members of the Monitoring Force - we were particularly concerned at the effect of such broadcasts on the ZIPRA and ZANLA forces in the assembly places. We were told that sometimes members of the Monitoring Force had to go round the areas calming the soldiers after Communiques had upset them.

We made this point to the Director-General of the ZRBC and also expressed our concern at the balance of many news broadcasts, which did not seem to be giving the political parties equality of treatment. In our interview about two weeks before the election, he told us that he had given instructions that the COMOPS Communiques should in future be treated on their news merit and that if they contained little of importance they need not be mentioned. The Editor of The Herald said he had given similar instructions to his staff. In both cases there did seem to be a reduction in the prominence given to the COMOPS Communiques in the last two weeks before the elections. We regret this development took place so late in the day.

In fact, there appeared to be a marked improvement in the balance of coverage in both the daily press and broadcasting in the last days of the campaign, and especially during the three polling days. When the ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrilla forces moved into training with the security forces, the event received full coverage. Earlier reluctance to inform the country about similar developments, i.e. in the matter of the joint patrols, now seemed to have disappeared. This situation, as in so many other matters, changed from day to day, usually for the better.

What emerged in our observations on the media in Rhodesia was the fact that nearly 20 years of a fettered press had blunted the journalists' cutting edge. It had become the habit to accept statements without question and to publish what officialdom chose to say and to leave out what it ordained should not be said. This had led to a situation where the media had suffered a loss of credibility, especially among the African population. Indeed, tribespeople in Manyika District were delighted to meet us as they had previously thought that the Commonwealth Observer Group itself did not exist but was a figment of official propaganda.

In our talks with representatives of the media, with one exception, there was a noticeable incapacity to look at both sides of an argument and to accept that misbehaviour might not always take place on the African nationalist side and that the authorities might also be capable of misdemeanours. This emerged particularly clearly when on the night of 14 February the three bombs exploded in Salisbury, two in churches, and a fourth was planted in the Roman Catholic Cathedral. Though it was plain that there was at least considerable doubt as to who was responsible for these acts, the media scarcely conveyed this doubt. It suggested anti-Christian elements were the culprits. We found this kind of journalism in the middle of the election campaign to be calculated to mislead the voters.

Much that happened during the election campaign arose out of an irrational fear harboured over many years by one group of the population towards another. We believe the public media should have attempted to allay these fears instead of heightening them further. If the election was itself a step towards reconciliation the media should have seen itself as an integral part of the process. We cannot, therefore, subscribe to the official view that the performance of the media was not an issue in this election. Quite apart from professional questions of balance, an important national opportunity was lost.