

***Press should be accountable to the people
it serves***

Press freedom: How the IFP sees the role of the media in a new society

The right to freedom of speech and expression are fundamental rights in any democratic society. The Inkatha Freedom Party would jealously guard Press Freedom in a new South Africa. Equally, it would want the media to implement a code of conduct aimed at fair and responsible reporting and to acknowledge its wider role as a potential conciliator in our multi-cultural society...

The Inkatha Freedom Party stands firmly in the liberal tradition. It wants a Press and Television that is free in the manner that is characteristic of most Western democracies.

The IFP has often been the victim of such a free Press in South Africa. The reporting and editorial comment has not always been fair - indeed at times it has been downright tendentious. In the IFP's view, public perceptions of the Party have at times been deliberately moulded for a destructively hegemonic political purpose.

It might be argued therefore that the IFP could feel justified in demanding of the media that such negative partisanship be prohibited, that politically sensitive reporting be curtailed and that such criticism should be tempered with control.

On the other hand, because the IFP sees the success of South Africa's future democracy hinging upon certain crucial themes such as reconciliation and the development of a national unity through the promotion of a national will, it might

seem natural that the IFP should suggest that the media be charged with responsibility for operating within such socially desirable parameters.

As with all other aspect of its policies, the IFP rejects any form of coercion in its dealings with the media.

Though we might wish the media to support our policies, we do not demand this. It has been a noticeable trend over the past few years that some alternate and mainline Black journalists have been intimidated into supporting a particular political movement. It is a healthy sign that certain journalists have spoken out against this trend, but it is a sign of sickness that a number of their colleagues have been killed, not for supporting apartheid, but for showing signs of sympathy for certain liberation movements. This is an ugly phenomenon we can do without in the new South Africa.

MEDIA COUNCIL TO ACT AS OMBUDSMAN

What are the IFP's guidelines for the establishment of a genuinely free Press (the term to include Television journalism) in South Africa?

The Party's formal stance on Press freedom is expressed in "The 1990 Inkatha Declaration" in which it is stated:

"There shall be freedom of speech within the bounds of reason supported by practice and law in the civilised world, and there shall be the right for all of freedom of opinion and expression and the right to propagate ideas through any media."

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Sunday Times

THE CITIZEN

SOWETAN

Business Day

The Star

Though the IFP believes it desirable that the Press promotes national unity, we do not believe we should prohibit others from publishing material which may not conform to particular political dictates. We believe that the right to freedom of speech takes precedence over the desirability that certain policies be promoted.

Our views on the media would take the following into account:

* Though the IFP believes it desirable that the Press promotes national unity, we do not believe we should prohibit others from publishing material which may not conform to particular political dictates. We believe that the right to freedom of speech takes precedence over the desirability that certain policies be promoted.

* The IFP believes that it is the right of political organisations to promote whatever policy they choose to, provided they do not promote violence in the process.

* The IFP further advocates that people must be free to present their political views to their constituencies and to the market place in general.

* Though the IFP is avowedly anti-Communist, we would defend the right of

Press freedom

the Press to support either Communism per se, or the South African Communist Party in particular.

* Though the IFP would condemn the promotion of any form of racialism, we do not think we have the right to prohibit others from propagating racially - exclusive Party politics. Similarly, we would not ban any radical political movements - to the left or the right - provided they operate within the bounds of the Common Law, the future Constitution and Bill of Rights - and always provided they do not promote violence.

* The IFP rejects State control of the Press. Because the Press sells information to a market, we reject the idea that the Press must fulfill a role defined by the State. But though the IFP itself stands in the liberal tradition as far as Press freedom is concerned, this is not to say that the IFP supports an irresponsible and non-accountable approach.

* The liberal tradition is that of a vibrant and independent Press responding to the needs of a segmented market. It is the

owners, editors and readers who determine their inter-relationship. The Press should therefore be accountable to the people it serves. Their decision to support a particular newspaper charges the paper with the responsibility of serving its constituency. It is power to the people - as consumers.

Newspapers exercise responsibility through constraints such as national security, the laws of libel and defamation, the mores of morality and a host of media-related legislation. These restrict what a newspaper should not do, rather than define what it should. No-one should pretend that the liberal route is the easiest. It is not always easy to strike a balance between freedom of expression and pornography, hatred and blasphemy.

* The IFP therefore supports the concept of a Media Council to which aggrieved parties can turn. Such a body, acting as an ombudsman, can encourage the Media to report factually, make them retract false statements and urge them to uphold minimum standards.

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Left-wing intimidation exposed

First-person accounts documented by the independent South African Institute of Race Relations have confirmed the widespread intimidation of Black journalists who do not "toe" the political line...

The Institute says radical left-wing groups have taken over from the Government in stifling Press freedom.

The claim is made in the Institute's recently-launched book, "Mau-Mauing the Media: New Censorship for new South Africa."

The book cites the example of the IFP-owned newspaper, *Ilanga*, as typical of the type of intimidation that is taking place.

It says the circulation of the Durban-based *Ilanga* dropped by about 23,000 after shopkeepers who sold it were attacked. People who were caught reading the newspaper were forced to eat it and

sometimes threatened with death.

The book contains transcripts of discussions at an Institute seminar attended by senior Black journalists.

Says the Institute: "They indicated that in recent years, this 'alternative' censorship has been fierce enough to block the publication of much that happened in the country's Black townships."

According to the book, journalists were supported when jailed by the State, but blacklisted when they criticised the Left. Senior political reporter at *The Johannesburg Star*, Kaiser Nyatumba, said censorship from the Left was worse because it was never reported.

White liberals also came in for criticism at a function to launch the new book. Black journalists accused them of being reluctant to criticise liberation movements for fear of having their credentials questioned.

The English Press in South Africa was hammered for being "sycophantic" towards the ANC for the past seven years.