

# And here is the NEWS . . .

**BROADCASTING** in South Africa has always been used by its political masters for their own ends. Jan Smuts used radio extensively during World War II to boost the Allied cause by broadcasting the speeches of British statesmen which, not unsurprisingly, angered the emerging National Party.

After the NP victory in 1948, the SABC systematically became the mouthpiece of the ruling party. Control was extended gradually but effectively as the more liberal viewpoints of men such as Gideon Roos were slowly emasculated by the extreme *verkramptheid* of Piet Meyer and Albert Hertzog.

Meyer brought with him the Broederbond influence of Afrikaner ideological domination while Hertzog (the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs responsible for the SABC) stated publicly that the introduction of "the little black box" would mean that "the Bantu would crowd round the few sets which there are and they will witness the commission of crimes, they will learn how to evade the police". (Hansard, 1964:6 611)

These men moulded the SABC into playing a continuously subservient role. It is therefore evident that the broadcast media has reflected the dominant ideological orientation of the state. This is clearly due to the centralised government control of the SABC in recognition of the important and often dangerous role such a media institution can play.

However, the days of Albert Hertzog are over. The National Party is beginning to respond to the ever-increasing pressures and dynamics of the South African body politic. Again, this response is visible in an analysis of the changing trends within the SABC.

Glasnost in the SABC had been slowly building even during the "reform and repression" PW Botha years. However, it has been evident that since the waning of Botha's power since the beginning of 1989, a new-found openness has emerged which would have left Albert Hertzog turning in his grave.

Witness the following examples:

Both Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu, two of the most outspoken critics of the state, have recently appeared on SABC Network/Netwerk debates.

Gregory Rockman was shown at the Cape Town Press Club castigating the police for promoting unrest.

Walter Sisulu and other former prisoners were brought into the homes of white viewers after their release and now are

## Daniel Silke, author of "The Broadcasting of Politics in South Africa", reflects on the change of style at Auckland Park.

regularly mentioned in evening newscasts.

Winnie Mandela, who has long had one of the worst relationships with the broadcasting authorities, is now freely quoted and shown without bias.

National Education Crisis Committee (NECC) members were interviewed regarding the current education crisis.

I Yusuf Ebrahim of Sacos and South Africa's arch sporting enemy, Peter Hain appeared in an unedited debate which was

traditionally served the interests of the state. They continue to do so. While glasnost has hit the SABC, control remains solid and the promotion of the dominant government thinking is maintained. Nevertheless, propaganda has a tendency to become boring (witness the Rumanian example of television for two hours an evening totally devoted to praising Ceausescu). Glasnost may also be used to increase the attractiveness of the propaganda effect.

Thirdly, it is clear that the examples of openness mentioned above represent the reform policies of the F W de Klerk era. It may be argued that the willingness to film and show those associated with the MDM and ANC on television indicates an acceptance of their importance in bringing about a non-racial democracy.

The new openness also shows a more relaxed approach to problem-solving and incorporates opposing viewpoints which were largely stifled under previous NP administrations.

The broadcasting of this by the state-sanctioned SABC indicates again the close state/SABC bond which this time is used as part of the reform initiative.

The fourth and most important reason is that of the socialising and conscientising effect of television. This motivation, largely directed at white audiences, involves bringing into the homes of conservative voters, activists and individuals who are critical of government policy. This may be done with the hope that the more white voters see these images, the more comfortable they will become with an alternative viewpoint.

It should be remembered that for years, the very same SABC was able to demonise many of these personalities now shown objectively. This may be an attempt to correct in the minds of white viewers, the misplaced and prejudiced judgements that some of them entertain as well as

familiarise them with the majority viewpoint of which they may be unaware.

If this factor is genuine, then it may be seen as one of the most important reforms by the government - an attempt (albeit rather crude and undefined at present) at re-educating an electorate that has historically supported security clampdowns of the very people they now see nightly on TV.

Glasnost has found the SABC. We are today witnessing a state-run broadcast media that, while still painfully under the National Party thumb, is beginning to display a new responsibility so necessary in an era of removing mistrust and encouraging nation-building.

(With acknowledgement to South)

## 'We want to be fair to all'

**WHILE** it is unlikely that the changes are due to the efforts of one person alone, the appointment of Carel van der Merwe as chief director of news at SABC in June last year has coincided with some significant changes.

Asked whether the SABC had undergone a change of policy Van der Merwe said this was the case and since the middle of 1989 the corporation had been trying to report matters of public concern.

"We are trying to put over different political viewpoints of political parties, persons, groups and organisations," he said, adding the SABC wanted to be fair to them all and wanted the public to understand the broadcasts they were seeing.

"We want to supply good quality radio and TV," he said.

Since F W de Klerk's an-

nouncements unbanning the ANC, PAC and Cosatu as well as easing the media emergency regulations on February 2, Van der Merwe said life had been made easier for all the media.

"Now we are ready to handle the whole of the political spectrum. It is most important for the public to understand there are other views which differ from their own. They must accept that what we broadcast is to inform them, we are not trying to take sides."

Van der Merwe emphasised the need for the public to accept the changing situation in South Africa and said the media likewise had to learn to report on events in this new climate.

"We must be responsible in our reporting and be careful not to create mass hysterics. Our only yardstick is to do a good job of reporting what is in the public interest," he said.

highly critical of the state.

Why is the state allowing such glasnost in this influential medium of television broadcasting? There are four identifiable reasons.

Firstly, the advent of M-Net means that viewers now have a choice to watch the evening newscasts or tune to entertainment programmes. To compete, therefore, the SABC must make its news more attractive to viewers and so ensure high viewership and commensurate advertising revenue. It would seem that such competition has forced the SABC to switch from continual government supporters to the more stimulating divergence of opinion approach.

Secondly, the evening newscasts have