

2. THE RAND DAILY MAIL

The Rand Daily Mail is dead, done to death, we are told, by the forces of the free market. The people who administered the deathblow were the management of South African Associated Newspapers. The person best pleased by what they did was the State President, who saw in the closing of the Mail signs of an emerging "new South Africanism". Where he got that curious notion from would be hard to say.

The people who will be hurt most by what has happened will be the paper's staff and its readers, particularly its black readers, for many of whom the Mail was a recurring reminder that there were at least some white-controlled institutions which were, on most issues, on their side. They will not have this regular reassurance now, and that could cost us all a lot more in the long run, in terms of racial polarisation, than SAAN would ever have lost in the market-place.

But how freely was the market operating in this instance? If the market was free how is it that the Citizen can survive, when its sales are much lower than the Mail's were? Perhaps the management of SAAN was as incompetent as many of its critics have hinted, or perhaps the market was not as free as it should have been.

If it was really the free operation of market forces which killed the Mail, that raises some other questions. Was the product too unpalatable to survive? Not to its readers, judging by its circulation. To potential advertisers, perhaps frightened of upsetting the Government by seeming to support its progressive policies? Or does its demise

suggest that no newspaper, out of its own resources, can survive the competition from TV advertising, and that we are to be condemned to the prospect of relying on dubious sources like the Citizen and the SABC to tell us what is going on in our country and the world?

Most of its supporters almost certainly felt that what the Mail had done since Laurence Gandar's day as editor was to raise the prospects of reasonably peaceful change here by regularly confronting its readers with the facts of life in Southern Africa. The editorial policies of first Gandar and then a distinguished line of successors (all of whom SAAN got rid of in one way or another) and the reporting of people like Benjamin Pogrund, made many white South Africans aware for the first time of what was going on around them, and conditioned their minds to accept that fundamental change must come. They certainly won't get any of that kind of conditioning from the Citizen and not much from most other English-language newspapers.

If it is really the operation of a free market system which has killed the Mail then its death will have dealt another blow to that system's prospects for survival here. Already all the years of economic discrimination exercised against them by governments and employers who claimed to be champions of free enterprise have made many blacks come to regard the term as just another name for their exploitation, and to reject it because of that. If it has now killed their one most tried and consistent friend in the newspaper world, why should they not be confirmed in that rejection?□

by Jill Wentzel

BENJIE POGRUND — A TRIBUTE

What was unique about the Mail was that it created, then nurtured and supported its own distinctive community: so much so that its readers seemed to think the Mail belonged to them more than it belonged to its own management — as though management were some kind of civil service who ought to do as they were told. And most indignant the SAAN management have been when public protest meetings and supportive functions greeted the threatened firing of Gandar and the firing of Sparks and Louw.

The Mail has had an open, non-pompous way with it. Most cultural, community and political organizations just took its support for granted and, if their particular stories weren't printed, or weren't printed prominently enough, felt free to take up the telephone and complain bitterly. Certainly, within the Black Sash, whenever the press didn't give sufficient emphasis to matters which we believed to be important, someone or other would be

delegated, as a matter of routine, to go and complain to Benjie Pogrund at his home before breakfast next morning — Towards other newspapers we were more tentative and more respectful. Indeed, Pogrund was at the heart of the Mail's community and its cross-fertilizing dynamic, and of its crusading, and of its steady support of people and organizations. In all the years I have known him his house has been open at any hour to anyone who wanted to wander in and tell him something. He could be maddeningly dismissive of one's ideas or suggestions. One had to get him in the right mood. But I don't know any other newsman so open to the impertinent kind of lobbying and abuse that went on in his house. It was the place for going and Blaming the Mail. Even when the Mail no longer exists, how are we going to break the habit? Suppers at the Pogrunds were a marvellous melting pot of people, politicians, artists and writers who could argue over soup and bread as long as they liked — which enriched the Mail's