

## 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?□

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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

contact-system and the lives of all of us who used to go there. Benjie nurtured and supported the Black Sash during its darkest days in the 60s and early 70s. He nurtured and supported black movements and their members, not only journalistically but personally, often with fierce loyalty and, in the days before overseas money, financially out of his own pocket when people were persecuted or imprisoned. And he bullied others to support them, too.

He is the unsung hero of the Mail and the unsung part of it is outrageous. It was his exposure of prison conditions which earned the Mail the World Press Achievement Award, for which he was convicted under the Prisons Act and fined. Politically he has been the catalyst and the lobbyist for much that is decent in our society. He was a vitally active founding member of the Liberal Party and in his student days an important member of NUSAS. He is the only person I know who has withstood and successfully reprimanded the student lynch mob at Wits which he did one day when they attempted to howl down his Nationalist co-speaker.

At various times he was loathed by the police and hated by the white establishment, who have never been able to recognise or appreciate a sensible, moderate ally if they fell over one. He was often much abused by the hard left. He has been the classic, reviled Liberal, and always will be.

Liberal Party members will remember how he happened to be in prison when his first child was born. There had been

a party in Cape Town at Tom Walters' house where, among much drunken hilarity, Operation Thundercracker was launched: Voortrekker celebrations in Pretoria were to be sabotaged by putting stones in the lavatories, by halving the order for ice-cream, doubling the order for hotdogs etc. Someone sent the mock-military memo to Benjie who published it in jest. Then the Security Police descended, demanding to know his source. A few Liberals, having planned serious sabotage at that time, had currently escaped the country. He could lyingly have said that his source was one of them but would never lie so stayed in prison (Tom Walters and others were actually arrested, tried and acquitted!) Thereafter, Benjie had his share of harassment and petty convictions and lost his passport for over 5 years.

His whole working life, 26 years of it, has been at the Mail. Now what is to become of him? And do the SAAN management care? Are they perhaps glad to be rid of him? Their ingratitude is their own problem. But those of us who want to see this society mutate peacefully are distressed that the entire English business community (unlike their Afrikaner fellows in previous decades) do not seem to recognise the need to look after, and have amongst us, people of the calibre of Pogrand and all the other competent and decent journalists who are now discarded, first by SAAN and ultimately by all of us.□

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by Simon Baynham

## PROTEST, THE POLICE AND PUBLIC ORDER

*I would not have a small sore cured by a greater griefe; not, for avoydinge of popular sedition, which happeneth very seldome and is soon quenched, to bring in a continuall yoke*

Examination of certayne . . . Ordinary Complaints (1581)

The recent spate of violence on South African streets in the Eastern Cape confirms the unhappy trend in internal security policy which was evident in the Vaal Triangle and elsewhere last Spring. During that season of discontent, more than 200 people died — and many more were injured — in a series of bloody confrontations (documented by Pat Schwartz in the January issue of **Reality**).

On 23 October, 7 000 troops were deployed in the black township of Sebokeng in a 'seal and search' operation, provoking widespread protest that the Defence Force was being thrust into a political role. In fact, the military had already been used in support of the SAP earlier that month when soldiers were used to patrol parts of Soweto and Grahamstown following sporadic incidents of unrest in black residential areas.

Since the start of this year, the total of riot-related deaths already exceeds 100. Seventy-nine people died in the month of March alone. It is a bleak and depressing picture.

Once again the Botha government has deemed it necessary to cast the SADF in the role of an auxiliary police force, a development that suggests the police are unable, by themselves, to keep the peace. It also suggests that the level of unrest is more serious than the public thinks or has been told.

Mobilizing the military in aid of the civil power usually occurs when police strength on the ground is stretched or inadequate to cope with a given situation. For this reason, it will also be interpreted overseas as an indication that unrest is more widespread, and less containable, than the authorities will admit.

However, there is some evidence that the matter is being approached with considerably more tact and delicacy than in 1984. For one thing, the SADF is apparently being deployed in a support rather than a policing role; that is, engaged on logistical and similar tasks rather than for