

level, there is an undoubted requirement to issue the police with special protective clothing including helmets (with neck guards and visors) and transparent shields. This helps to protect policemen from injuries caused by stones, bottles and other objects.

The second and third stages, which may be juxtapositioned depending on the circumstances, would cover first the employment of a missile which will stop or knock over a person but which will not kill or bodily hurt (fire hoses, plastic bullets and incapacitating gas — the latter dispensed by grenade, rifle or, in the case of large crowds, by the 'sneeze machine' which is a rotary dispenser mounted on a vehicle). At this level, baton charges may also be used. However, in the open layout of the townships, where a crowd has good cover and room for manoeuvre, small police units are constantly in danger of being surrounded, cut off and annihilated, a fear articulated by several policemen to the Kannemeyer Inquiry on 2 April.

The penultimate stage involves bird-shot and then heavier buck-shot. Finally, military weapons, normally the R1, would be used in a controlled (i.e. a selective) fashion against those who have taken or are endangering the lives of others.

This is what **should** happen in theory but the fundamentally important principle of minimum force is not often

adhered to in practice. One reason for this is that the SAP is under-manned and over-stretched. With only 43 000 personnel in a country approaching 30 million, they are spread very thinly indeed.

In riot control operations, this weakness makes itself keenly felt. Thus, it is not unusual for a single platoon to find itself facing a mob of several thousand.

Under these circumstances, the first rungs in the escalation ladder may be by-passed in order to avoid physical contact with the crowd. The wretched results are the deaths and serious injuries of a Sharpeville or Uitenhage.

The need is for a stronger, well-equipped and better-trained force so that the SADF can be kept for its legitimate task of national defence. Measures should also be implemented to upgrade the quality of recruits since the SAP direly needs to modernize its attitude, approach and methods. The cost of implementing such measures will be small compared with the consequences if they are not.

But the use of physical force to contain violence — however carefully regulated and restrained — is at best temporary in the present political climate. The best police service in the world will not stem the unrest if the Government fails to tackle the underlying reasons for the deep enmity and hostility its policies attract.□

by John Grogan

PESSIMISM ABOUT THE PRESS

TOTAL ONSLAUGHT: THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS UNDER ATTACK.
by W.A. Hachten and C.A. Giffard (Macmillan, 1984).

The threat of the "total onslaught" against South Africa looms large in Nationalist rhetoric. It is used not only to conjure up popular fears with the object of strengthening national resolve, but also to justify violations of basic liberties in the name of the "national interest". As the main title of this book is intended to suggest, a notable victim of the government's onslaught on civil rights has been the freedom of the press to comment and report on matters of public concern which may cast official policy in an unfavourable light or blot the roseate hue in which government propagandists attempt to colour conditions in this country.

Authors Hachten and Giffard — both American media specialists — have in this volume updated a growing literature on media-government relations in South Africa. Their work includes surveys of such important topics as legislation affecting the press, the background to the current Media Council, censorship, the special position of the 'black' press, and government harassment of journalists.

Included too are analyses of the role of the Afrikaans press, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, and of the significance of the Information Scandal exposures.

The book contains little in the way of fresh theoretical insights. But it is a convenient if depressing compendium of the data which supports the most pessimistic forecasts of the fate of press freedom in South Africa. At the core of Hachten and Giffard's analysis is the contention that external and internal pressures on the South African government will determine the severity of the pressures which it in turn applies to the domestic media. In other words, the fate of press freedom in South Africa is dependent on the success of policies which, the authors suggest if not directly submit, are bound to fail on both internal and international fronts.

These pressures, the authors contend, need not and probably will not take the form of more Draconian administrative action or legislation against the media — the government has already accrued to itself almost unlimited legisla-

tive power to act against errant newspapers and journalists, and demonstrated its ruthless willingness to use it. Instead, the future is likely to witness a growing propensity, at least on the part of the mainstream commercial newspapers, to "more self-restraint through self-censorship". Indeed, the authors note, such caution will not only be the result of overt political pressures, but also of an attempt to counter, through reaching for the broadest stratum of readers, the massive economic pressures caused by competition from the predominantly government-controlled electronic media. For the "black" press, on the other hand, the prognostication is a continuing wave of repression.

The evidence mustered for this forecast is compelling. The history of successive attempts by the major newspapers to head off government threats of direct statutory control by adopting self-regulatory codes and institutions, culminating in the present Media Council, is only one of a number of pointers. But Hachten and Giffard, writing within a classic libertarian frame of reference, do not write off the media as irrelevant to the growing cycle of conflict. As they note, the newspapers have made a significant contribution to the circulation of information in a society that would otherwise have become entirely closed. Whether they will continue to do so in the emasculated form into which they could be pressed by events is, however, another question.

The authors are aware that the media are inextricably intermeshed with the society in which they function. Already, the mass communications channels are beginning to reflect the polarisation of the general political spectrum – a phenomenon which has manifested itself in what Hachten identifies as a series of competing "press concepts". First, there is the adversarial idea which guides the English-language newspapers, which see their role as opposing government and conveying disinterested news and information to the wider public. Then, there is what Hachten terms the Afrikaner concept, at the heart of which lies the idea that the press owes its ultimate allegiance, not to the public, but to the chosen leaders of their own sectional group – a view against which, Hachten contends, the Afrikaans newspapers have periodically rebelled.

Finally, fuelled by the radical critique of the Opposition press and by the harassing tactics for which black journa-

lists are especially singled out, Hachten has discerned an African concept of the press, which in his words has

"...jettisoned the Anglo-American press standards of objectivity and fairness as well as the idea of a free and independent press-since, in their view, blacks have little freedom or independence to express their own views. So, to them, truth is only what advances 'the cause'." (p. 98)

The authors' forecast for these competing concepts is not sanguine, at least to those who view the media's primary function as the dissemination of impartial news. In the short or medium term, they predict that the liberal English newspapers will gradually abandon their adversary role, and that public communications will be dominated by government-controlled electronic media unlikely to resist the view, advocated by the Steyn Commission, that the primary task of the media is to join the "total strategy" of the Botha government against the total onslaught of international communism, black nationalism, et al. And as long as that view triumphs, the press committed to truly radical reform will continue to be branded as treasonable.

The principal message of this book makes for sober reflection. True, the rapid flow of events in South Africa could swiftly contradict some of the authors' predictions. That is an unavoidable hazard of writing on so sensitive a subject. The book does, however, betray in irritating, if minor, detail the defect of authorial distance. For one, the section on legislative controls discusses several Acts as if they were still in force. In fact, many of the most restrictive statutes were repealed and incorporated in the Internal Security Act of 1982 and the Protection of Information Act of the same year. These include the old Internal Security Act, the Unlawful Organisations Act, the Riotous Assemblies Act and the Official Secrets Act. Although the authors made use of interviews with media practitioners in South Africa, most of these are fairly dated. More extensive analysis of the **content** of the various media discussed would also have made for a more detailed picture. These shortcomings are, however, far from fatal. This is a useful book, and has gathered in convenient compass a record of assaults on a basic liberty which, if unrecorded, could be forgotten in the press of events.□

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS

We apologise for the fact that poor proof-reading on our part resulted in this year's January and March issues appearing as Nos 1 and 2 of Volume 18, whereas they should have been Nos 1 and 2 of Volume 17.

Editorial Board.