

meet more than one person at a time, except members of his family. Still, it was better than being in prison – especially a South African prison.

Events late in 1977 seemed to suggest that South Africa was abandoning one of its very few claims to being a free country, even for the whites. It was abandoning any pretence of freedom of the press. Like so many other extreme opponents of Communism, the Vorster Government had embraced the more repressive methods of Communism and was displaying the paranoiac reactions that have made Communist governments so intolerant of dissent.

#### Little vigour

The South African press in general had hardly been noted for the vigour of its political criticism. The Afrikaner newspapers tended to be tame, and some of them were out-and-out apologists for the regime. Some of the English-language papers were compendious rather than incisive. The state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation usually ignored news likely to embarrass the Government. Its single television channel, which broadcasts alternately in Afrikaans and English, has been on the air only since 1975. I was told by a member of the white establishment that television coverage of the Soweto riots in June 1976 had given white viewers for the first time some idea of what black anger was all about. I cannot vouch for this, but normal TV coverage is heavily biased in favour of the Government and the white community.

*Content*, a Toronto monthly magazine devoted primarily to news and criticism of the Canadian media, published in its issue of last November a comparison of news coverage done in South Africa in a single week of March 1977. The study was done by Michael Hastings, a television journalist who has been a producer for both the CBC and the SABC, as well as a reporter for the *Hamilton Spectator*. He compared hard news coverage (leaving out editorials, sports, business news, fashion features and so forth) in five daily newspapers and on both the Afrikaans and English newscasts of the SABC. The papers studied were the *Rand Daily Mail* (English morning), the *Johannesburg Star* (English afternoon), *Die Transvaler* (Afrikaans morning), *Beeld* (Afrikaans morning), and *Die Vaderland* (Afrikaans afternoon). All these papers are aimed primarily at white readers. Unfortunately, Hastings did not include *The World* in his study.

The most interesting statistics were in a column headed "bad news" – defined here as "news that could be seriously embarrassing to the South African Government –

mostly allegations of criminal violence to the police or illegal police meddling with the administration of justice". The percentage of such news appearing in the media surveyed in the week chosen at random last March were as follows: *Rand Daily Mail*, 6.1 per cent; *Transvaler*, 2.2 per cent; *Beeld*, 1.5 per cent; *Star*, 0.6 per cent; *Vaderland*, 0; South African television (English), 0; SATV (Afrikaans), 0. Assuming the week was reasonably typical, these findings confirm the common opinion that, among the big newspapers, the *Rand Daily Mail* is the sharpest thorn in the Government's flesh. They show that the Afrikaans press is not entirely uncritical. They suggest that the *Star* is less than adventurous in its domestic coverage. They confirm that television news in South Africa is what the Government wants the audience to know and little more.

The Hastings article lists half a dozen highly-dramatic news events that occurred during this week picked at random and gave a negative impression of the South African authorities. One was a decision by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Others were allegations of police brutality sensationalized beyond any journalistic standard. These were among the news stories ignored by television and by some of the newspapers.

Apart from this kind of suppression there is another way in which press and broadcast coverage affects the outlook and judgment of white South Africans. Hastings put it this way in *Content*:

Both TV and the white-oriented papers provide meagre coverage of events among the non-white population. Admittedly whites' wealth, education, and political power cause them to be the chief newsmakers, but while blacks generally know a good deal about the everyday existence of the whites (because they work with them), extremely few whites have the slightest notion of what is going on among the blacks, who make up the overwhelming majority of the population. Universal is this hermetically-sealed ignorance that most whites never give any thought.

#### Prodigies of courage

Yet, despite all this, South Africa can boast prodigies of journalistic courage on a scale quite unknown in Canada. In this country, as in the other Western democracies, throwing verbal rocks at the Government is so easy that sometimes it takes more brains and guts to offer a word in defence of established authority. In South Africa, defiance of the Government is dangerous and highly unpopular with the white community. It requires conviction, stamina and a willingness

*First idea  
of black anger  
from coverage  
of Soweto  
on television*