



(centre) with Nelson Mandela and Nthato Motlana.

untouched

concept of our political map. The leadership of the organisations and institutions of our society have a profound responsibility to educate their supporters and employees in this as a matter of urgency. Within the Peace Accord, it is clear that some political leaders have not given this the necessary commitment.

At the same time, it is clear that structural issues are very relevant. Until fair, unbiased and sympathetic policing becomes the norm and until the perpetrators of violence are systematically brought to justice, preaching "democratic tolerance" in some areas will fall on stony ground. Likewise, if some political groupings have no reasonable access to putting their viewpoints through the media, do not expect them to renounce their right of recourse to violence. Nor does the culture of democracy flourish in a squatter camp.

The inequalities and power imbalances of our society are urgent issues to address. But let us address them in the context of democratic tolerance.

A confusion of means

ERIKA COETZEE
Regional Co-ordinator

By comparing the central themes of "two very different conferences" on democracy, Albert Nolan juxtaposes two ways of talking about obstacles to the process of transition in South Africa.

At first glance, the one seems to be characterised by a vocabulary of intangibles: attitudes, values, the spirit in which political interaction takes place. The second appears

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Empowerment buzz at media festival

By **MOIRA LEVY**

Media and democracy – not only the name of the festival held in Grahamstown on April 10 to 12, co-hosted by Idasa and the East Cape News Agency. It also turned out to be the message that underpinned the weekend's proceedings.

A common theme underlying the speeches, the plenary debates and the informal discussions at the pub or over meals was the principle that an effective, free media is a cornerstone of any democratic society – the two cannot be separated.

The festival brought groups together for the first time. Journalists sat down with community press officers to thrash out difficulties and preconceptions. Community newspapers from isolated towns identified common objectives and set in motion plans for co-operation.

The commercial press outlined its plans for assisting the alternative press through a trust fund, and said it already administered aid by printing the independent papers at reasonable rates and selling advertising.

The festival combined conventional conference proceedings with "hands-on" skills workshops. Small-group training sessions ran overtime as delegates produced their own radio and TV programmes, screened slogans onto T-shirts and tried their hand at creating posters and pamphlets.

A comment overheard from a student delegate summed up the spirit: "Now I know I can do it, I know how to do it, I know it can be done."

"Empowerment" was the buzzword. The workshops, run by the National Media Trainers Forum, aimed to equip delegates with a sense of what they could achieve in making their voices heard – through the commercial media or by producing their own media.

The aim of the festival was to build a "media consciousness" in the region and an understanding of the centrality of media in building a democratic society.

Joel Netshitenze, editor of the ANC's

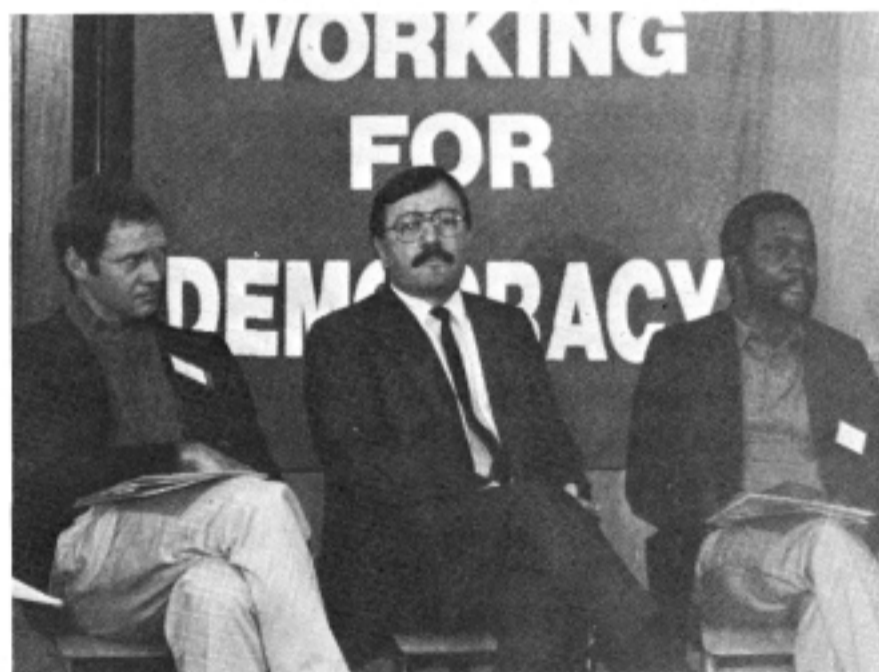
journal, *Mayibuye*, opened the festival with an outline of the ANC's model of a future media dispensation.

He cited the need for anti-trust legislation to tackle the legacy of inequality created by the huge monopolies who are now in control of the media.

He also said the ANC did not see the need for censorship; the rights and responsibilities of journalists would be prescribed by the constitution, the courts and a bill of rights.

But he cautioned that addressing the questions of press freedom and ownership was in itself not sufficient. There was also a need for affirmative action to redistribute resources, for example through taxation and state subsidies, to ensure a voice for those who do not have one. "Even this is not sufficient. You can't say people have the right to watch TV if they don't have electricity... "We need to encourage debate and a culture of reading and knowledge of current affairs.

"We need to encourage people to take



Rory Wilson, Calle Badenhorst and Joel Netshitenze

advantage of the new freedoms, otherwise those who have always had rights and resources will be the only ones who act on them.

"We cannot postpone media freedom to some distant future."

In plenary session the commercial press squared up to the alternative press. Rory Wilson, managing editor of the *Sowetan*, urged the alternative press to target a specific readership and market itself.

"The commercial press seeks to make money. Up to 80 percent of our revenue

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comes from advertising. If we did not have adverts we would have to rely on subsidies...there is a link between commercial independence and editorial independence.

"You cannot produce a newspaper on an editorial idea alone," he said.

Thami Ntenti from the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity, queried the fairness of commercial dictates. Those who have something to say but lack the resources to say it should still have the right to publish, he said, even if they cannot survive in the marketplace.

There were calls to dismantle the huge media monopolies that own almost all the country's newspapers, but Wilson cautioned that some of the newspapers would not survive without the backing of the mother companies.



Marion Sparg: more crusading journalism



Gavin Stewart, of Rhodes University Journalism Department, in the chair during the opening session of the conference

The editor of *South*, Guy Berger, added that the alternative press made use of the printing and distribution resources of the monopolies.

Across the spectrum, from the ANC to the National Party, speakers echoed the need to redistribute ownership and control of the SABC, partly by introducing an independent broadcasting authority.

Leslie Xinwa of Radio Transkei said there would still be a need for a state broadcaster in the future, but it would have to be fundamentally restructured.

And speakers, Gabriel Ugoiti of Bush Radio and Libby Lloyd of *Speak* magazine, said the time had come to open the airwaves to community radio, which was the voice of ordinary South Africans speaking for themselves.

Marion Sparg of the ANC appealed to the media "for a more crusading, investigating, exposing ethic of journalism. This has been lost in this country. It is the kind of ethic we had in the past, and we need it today.

"Lifting restrictions and telling the press it is free does not mean there is press freedom and media democracy. The media has to start reflecting the reality on the ground," she said.

The idea is not to establish an ANC press, but a free press that reflects the majority of the people, she said.

The message the 170 delegates departed with was that freedom of the press and media democracy would be meaningless if it was not reflected at all levels of society.

Moir Levy is media facilitator with Idasa.

Call essential

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structures and mechanisms by which the legacies of apartheid can be addressed, and it must recognise the fact that we are a multi-cultural society and that divergent views abound.

It is futile to expect that economic justice, control over the security forces and the elimination of media monopolies can be achieved when the structures of our society are geared towards exactly the opposite.

What comes to mind is the two-stage theory which was the subject of heated debate in the mid-1980s. "First we take power and then we create an egalitarian society."

Yes, democracy must address the legacies of apartheid, but unless we can achieve consensus as to how this is going to be done (the purpose of the democratic process), the call for political tolerance (preparedness to engage constructively with those holding opposing views) remains essential.

Confusion of means

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to speak more concretely: of dominant structures, the distribution of power and access to resources. It is suggested that these two "languages" reflect two different realms of apartheid experience, each extending its own words to express its fear and mistrust.

In one sense this may well be so: it cannot be denied that apartheid successfully blinded the powerful to the most tangible everyday manifestations of racism - and that the disenfranchised must feel patronised by the implication that "tolerance" is all we need in order to live happily ever after. Used in this way, the great call for tolerance indeed becomes an iniquitous power tactic.

However, there is a difference between, on the one hand, taking seriously the intolerance which apartheid has bred and, on the other, proposing that it is tolerance that will lead us to a democratic order. To equate these two is to assume that the only road leading away from intolerance is one of tol-

erance. This may not necessarily be accurate.

Intolerance is an active word: it is provocative. There is aggression in the way it excludes and disregards. Many of the obstacles to democracy discussed at the ITC conference - economic, injustice, media monopolies, the role of the security forces - seem to express such intolerance: of poverty and deprivation, of hearing another voice, of fear and brutalisation. It is intolerance that trivialises oppression and keeps the structures of exclusion in place. Tolerance, on the other hand, implies passivity and acceptance. It calls for patience with the status quo, with one another as we are - it pushes change to the back burner. It does nothing to counter and redress the spoils of intolerance.

It seems clear that there is indeed an urgent need to address the intolerance of apartheid. Yet it does not follow that the only alternative is to cultivate tolerance of the present order. Moving away from intolerance can lead us in many directions, including actively bringing an end to oppression in its multiple forms.