



CENSORSHIP

PACSA FACTSHEET

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948: Article 19).

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands (Freedom Charter, 1955).

Both of these important documents thus reject the concept of censorship. They do so because they recognise that in a healthy society people can best exercise their democratic rights if they have freedom of access to a wide range of points of view. Authoritarian governments opt for censorship as it allows them to promote their own ideas while suppressing those of other people.

SOUTH AFRICA

1. Books & Periodicals

1.1 Censorship is a basic part of everyday life in South Africa. It is one of the means used to keep a small minority of the population in power. Many laws promote censorship, the two most important being : the PUBLICATIONS ACT of 1976 and the INTERNAL SECURITY ACT of 1982. The first of these empowers the Publications Control Board to restrict the sale and circulation of certain titles; and in some cases to ban their possession altogether. Most bannings are initiated by the authorities rather than by the public :

<u>Publications Control Board 1984-1985</u>	
Publications submitted to the Board (incl. 223 reviews)	1501
Submitted by the police and customs and the directorate	1179
Submitted by publishers and the public	99
Found undesirable	645 (50.5%)
<u>Dept. of Home Affairs Annual Report.</u>	

In the case of the Internal Security Act all the work of banned and listed persons; and all the work published by or reflecting the policies of banned organisations is restricted in various ways, ranging from limited circulation to outright prohibition on possession.

In an average university library, for example, 30% of its banned books will fall into the 'possession prohibited' categories. They are inaccessible except through the permission of the Directorate of Publications or the Minister of Law & Order as appropriate.

1.2 The effect of these laws controlling publications is to make access to the views and opinions of outstanding South Africans extremely difficult. Many of these people have recorded the aims and aspirations of the majority of South Africans: Mandela, Tambo, Slovo, Brutus, Woods, Benson, Joseph, Kotze and Segal, for example. We are similarly not allowed to read publications from the African National Congress, Pan Africanist Congress, Christian Institute, Congress of South African Students and others.

White South Africans are thus unable to inform themselves of important developments in the black community. The government keeps whites in a state of ignorance.

2. Newspapers

2.1 Control. The South African Government controls the dissemination of the news in different ways, mainly through Acts dealing with various aspects of society and the economy - prisons, the police, oil supplies, for example - which contain stringent curbs on the publication of information. The PROTECTION OF INFORMATION ACT of 1982 closes loopholes by invoking State Security and acting as an umbrella law. Under s.205 of the CRIMINAL PROCEDURE ACT of 1977 journalists are compelled to reveal sources of information.

The June 1986 State of Emergency placed a severe clamp on the dissemination of news so that political comment relating to unrest, except that from the Bureau for Information, was almost totally censored. The Natal Supreme Court totally or partially overturned certain sections of the Emergency regulations, but the authorities retain the right to simply close down a newspaper. A number of notices issued under the Emergency regulations have been published, including:

11th December 1986:-
Proclamation R.224, 1986, by the State President

The amendments prohibit all non-official news and comment on unrest, illegal strikes, unlawful gatherings, consumer and rent boycotts and alternative structures such as people's courts. Newspapers are forbidden to publish blank spaces, obliterations or deletions to indicate that they have been censored by the regulations. A new restriction prohibits the publication or import of a publication, document, television film or sound recording containing a subversive statement.

8th January 1987:-
Gov. Notice 102, by the Commissioner of the SAP

Prohibiting the publication of an advertisement or report calculated to improve or promote the public image or esteem of banned organisations. No publication may commend, defend, explain or justify any action or policy of any organisation which is aimed at resistance against or subversion of the authority of the State.

All this legislation is specifically designed to restrict our knowledge.

2.2 The Press as a Tool. The Press can be used as a tool to serve a government's ends, rather than to serve the people as a whole. "...*(we) expect the media to play a leading role in promoting political 'consensus' under the new constitution*". (Chris Heunis quoted by Race Relations Survey, 1984: 885). This authoritarian sentiment has been backed by State action. Newspaper editors and journalists are frequently charged and convicted; reporters have been assaulted while carrying out their work; and media persons have been detained during the current State of Emergency. In mid-1986 there was a spate of deportations from South Africa: a large proportion of those expelled worked for foreign media. South African newspaper employees are used to harassment, detention and banning as an occupational hazard. Meanwhile, the S A B C is "...*no more than an editorial arm of government propaganda*". (PFP spokesperson quoted in Race Relations Survey, 1984: 894).

2.3 Self Censorship. There is no doubt that the weight of frequently overlapping legislation and the harassment of the State, coupled with the commercial nervousness of the mainline Press, creates an atmosphere of self censorship. This is a view supported by Irwin Manoim, co-editor of the Weekly Mail. This newspaper's revelations about the Joint Management Councils show what can be done to reveal the truth. However, on the whole, the public is left very much in the dark about how South Africa is governed, an understandable pre-requisite for any regime lacking legitimacy.

3. How Does this Affect Us?

The nature of South African society is such that we need maximum possible exposure to the facts, particularly to the facts which comprise the daily experience and aspirations of fellow South Africans. Without this exposure and knowledge we are unable to make sensible or informed decisions. Ignorance leads to false rumours and ungrounded fears.

We need to make every effort to obtain information - and pass it on. We need to listen to those who are not given opportunities by the present authorities to air their views and explain their positions. We need to give platforms, where possible, to people who are never otherwise heard.

We need to be aware that we are being kept in ignorance.