

ANC forcing media back into apartheid-era mode

 By [Chris Moerdyk: @chrismoerdyk](#)

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I don't know whether presidential spokesman, Mac Maharaj gave much thought to the consequences of laying a charge of theft against two *Mail & Guardian* journalists, but he might well have lit a fuse of something that could explode in the ANC's face.

M&G editor Nick Dawes presented the most chilling example of the direction in which ANC media relations are heading when he reacted to his investigative reporters being told that they were suspects in a criminal investigation, when he said that the law might be used in this way to prevent the media from reporting on "matters of immense and indisputable public interest."

Panic in the ranks

This example and many others in the past few years, in which ANC officer-bearers have threatened to action against newspapers and also promoted with vigour and more than just a modicum vengeance, legislation such as the secrecy bill and a media tribunal, leaves one with very little doubt that there is panic in the ranks.

It is now quite clear that the ANC has chosen a path of confrontation with the media, with very little evidence of any moves being made to try to establish an efficient working relationship.

What I can see happening in this country right now is the ANC forcing the media back into apartheid era mode.

Back in latter part of those dark days, many media ethics were tossed aside. Most newspapers and radio stations such as 702, would openly bash the governing National Party, becoming in a way, part of the revolution instead of remaining the objective and unbiased messengers they all really wished to be.

Provoking

This is already happening as far as the ANC is concerned. There are media that are openly taunting, provoking, and making the occasional mountain out of a molehill in an effort to bring the ANC down off its pedestal.

And the more the ANC is even perceived to threaten, legislate and muzzle the media, the quicker the media will revolt.

The past two decades have seen numerous calls from within and outside of the ANC for cabinet ministers and ANC NEC members to get some sort of media mentoring. For them to be able to understand what makes the media tick. To

understand the benefits of communicating with the media rather than keeping them at arm's length. And how to take an example from the Americans on when and when not to react.

That was a huge problem with the previous regime. It remains a huge problem with many state institutions such as the SABC, SAA and others.

Dealing with strangers

They simply don't bother to try and get to know the media; they simply cannot be bothered to interact with the media and do nothing else but call impersonal press conferences when they have something to say. Or, they get some poor fall guy to stand up after a cabinet meetings to tell the media what the ANC wants them to hear.

They are oblivious of the fact that success in business, sport and life in general is based on "knowing your enemy." Of engaging with people who might or might not share your point of view.

That's the kind of media mentoring the ANC and cabinet need. How to build relationships, because in every walk of life relationships are the most critical of components.

Until the ANC and cabinet stop believing that they know everything there is to know about how to handle the media and how to create relationships, they will continue to nurture an increasingly frustrated enemy.

The mass media in South Africa played a massive role in bringing about change. It was fearless in doing so.

And the way things are going now, I would not be surprised that when eventually the ANC loses power, the media in this country will be shown to have been one of the biggest factors in their downfall.

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