

Dear Comrade Trevor

We welcome your interest in the arena of battle of ideas. However let's do some quick house-keeping. I regard myself as a revolutionary democrat who cut his teeth in the student politics of the 80's and proud of the contribution that my generation made during the last decade of apartheid rule.

So for the record I am not some Mr Mjongile, who emerged from some dark corner, an unknown stuff rider who just emerged as Secretary of ANC Western Cape for which I have the privilege to speak on its behalf and represent.

Ordinarily, and as a rule we do not like to engage in trivial debates - in particular amongst our leadership. However, when a perspective is presented by a leader of your stature to clarify and inform society about the kind of change we seek to achieve as a movement, we would have expected a more nuanced and thoughtful engagement from our elders and not some obsequious and obfuscating offering.

This engagement has presented an opportunity for all and sundry to engage the imperatives of media transformation. This is even more relevant; given the historic and sad occasion of Madiba's passing. This is even more important during a period in which we are entering into the 20th year of democracy in South Africa. We must engage by remaining firm on principles and flexible on tactics and not confuse a strategic moment of advancement as a reproduction of the same condition we seek to change. These ideological battles are the necessary condition for progress.

Let us also make sure that we do not personalise this debate nor allow old grudges to cloud our judgement. We hope that the call made by you to the executive chairperson of Independent Group is one that is made in good faith, as we have read both the statements of SANEF and that of the Executive Chairperson of the Independent Group, Dr Iqbal Surve.

Minister Manuel, you must also be assured that the ANC in the Western Cape has been following the story of the change of guard at the Cape Times and attendant contractual disputes. This is not unusual given what we see happening at Times Media, where all the black editors have been, should we say, relieved of their duties'. Cases in point include the departure of Mondli Makhaya and Barney Mthomboti, amongst others and with little comment from our not too principled leadership.

It is also not helpful for anyone to decontextualize the points that were raised about lack of transformation in the print media and the Cape Times in particular. This posture only misleads the public about the contentious issue of an untransformed media that continues to reflect the views of the dominant social classes. While it is useful to pinpoint specific roles played by individual journalists in the struggle against apartheid we urge you, Minister Manuel not to insult our historical memory.

We know the role that Cape Times played in our oppression as the mouth piece of the English white interests even up to this day. We also know that Cape Times did not unwaveringly work in order to ensure the advancement of the liberation of the black masses. We will not keep quiet if you, Mr Minister, seek to mislead the public about the role of the media during the heydays of Apartheid.

The danger with your brand of reasoning is that because few progressive individuals worked in apartheid newspaper and resisted, or even cooperated with the liberation movement, does not mean that the media overall was instrumental in the liberation struggle. What is more, now that we are in a democratic dispensation, the need to transform all sectors of our society including the media is not only compelling but a moral imperative.

The media sector must be transformed! If we do not transform the media sector, we defeat the very essence of our struggle as the media is central to our public policy process and the formation of opinion on how the South African society and state should be reconstituted.

In the light of your convenient defence of editorial independence (as if there are no legal guarantees delivered and protected by the ANC), that independence can only be guaranteed by diversity and restoration of public trust in how it carries out its business.

The media is a contested terrain and therefore not neutral, but reflects the ideological battles and power relations based on race, class and gender in our society. It cannot claim its role as merely to reflect societal interests - rather it helps to shape those interests. In other words, print and electronic journalists are not passive transmitters of information without political and class interests, 'a clean slate', on whom events imprint themselves. Dare we add that the Cape Times is no exception!

It should be emphasised, though, that the mere prospect of objective benefit does not necessarily translate to revolutionary consciousness and resolve to act in the interest of all peoples. Nor does the fact of belonging to either side of the divide, remove the possibility of individuals from these classes and strata aligning themselves with the antagonists.

In the light of the point made at Mangaung it is important that we explain what exactly we mean by "mouth piece of neo-liberal fascists". Firstly, it is important to note that we called this institution a "mouth piece" not "fascists" in itself. Secondly, we cannot just be satisfied with co-option of few Coloureds and Africans into the coterie of privilege use that as a means to "beautify" our oppression by the same forces that continue to enjoy the same privileges of Apartheid. The ANC will certainly oppose such an agenda of co-opting a few and then portraying these few as speaking on behalf of the majority of our people.

Therefore, ours is not some reformist program but a revolutionary obligation. A fundamental program of change to deconstruct the Apartheid structure and its apparatus is the imperative of our generation. Thus, we cannot just be satisfied with the vote, a better house, a better education without fundamental changes to the economic and social structures of our country and our province in particular.

It is important that we remind ourselves that transformation in the media is closely linked to the question of diversity in media. Media diversity supports, promotes, deepens, consolidates and strengthens democracy. Any initiative towards diversifying the media leads to transformation within the sector and the ANC welcomes these moves as much as it welcomes debate on the matter.

Minister Manuel as things stand Cape Times compared to Argus has no black or coloured senior managers apart from the recently appointed black Editor. So, Minister Manuel what is it that must be done in your name?

Songezo Mjongile

ANC PROVINCIAL SECRETARY

WESTERN CAPE