

Defend the freedom of expression

Written by Barry Marcus

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A new Media Tribunal has been proposed by the ANC as a means of controlling the press. While the proponents of this tribunal claim that the intentions in no way conflict with the ideals of press freedom, such measures always do carry a huge risk.

We should all feel threatened by this proposal. Everyone that is involved in ideas, news, political criticism. Everyone that is involved in the media whether digital or print, whether a blog or a report. Censorship is a threat to all.

The media has been critical of the ANC. This is entirely in line with a free press. A critical press is one that is effective. It is one that enabled the New York Times to uncover the Watergate scandal.

Sometimes a free press can be criticised for becoming too conservative. This criticism has been leveled against much of the US media - since 9/11 there has been a swing towards conservatism and adapting a less critical stance. Self censorship has been imposed.

The first step in the move away from democracy to dictatorship is often signaled by restrictions on the media. A successful government has no reason to harness the press. It has to find its own way of carrying the electorate with it. Governments begin to encroach on press freedom when they feel threatened by different ideas. The Apartheid government imposed one restriction on the press after another.

As Mugabe destroyed his country, he accompanied this with restrictions on the media. The Nazis allowed only one official view of everything.

If our democracy is to thrive and grow, we need a vibrant and free press. A media tribunal is not necessary to protect anyone against it. It is a form of censorship. We do not need any form of censorship to be re-introduced into South Africa. Censorship goes hand in hand with the erosion of freedom. South Africa has had too much of that and we certainly do not need it again!

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