

FAIRBAIRN MEMORIAL LECTURE - S A SOCIETY OF JOURNALISTS'
ANNUAL CONGRESS - EAST LONDON, 26 MAY 1978

WHEN EARLIER THIS YEAR I WAS HONOURED BY YOUR SOCIETY IN BEING INVITED TO DELIVER THE ANNUAL FAIRBAIRN MEMORIAL LECTURE, I KNEW LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE MAN WHOSE NAME WE COMMEMORATE TODAY THAN THAT, ALONG WITH GEORGE GREIG AND THOMAS PRINGLE, HE WAS ONE OF THE SEMINAL FIGURES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS, AND THAT HE WAS RECKONED AS ONE OF THE GREAT CHAMPIONS OF ITS FREEDOM. ON GOING INTO THE MATTER A LITTLE FURTHER, I DISCOVERED, TO QUOTE THE OPENING WORDS OF A MASTER'S THESIS BY J FRYE ON THE TREATMENT OF THE FRONTIER WARS BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER, THAT :

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"THE NAME OF JOHN FAIRBAIRN IS REMEMBERED WITH HONOUR IN SOUTH AFRICA FOR THE PART HE PLAYED IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF A FREE PRESS IN THE CAPE COLONY, IN THE CAMPAIGN TO PREVENT BRITAIN FROM ESTABLISHING A CONVICT STATION ON CAPE SOIL, AND IN THE MOVEMENT WHICH RESULTED IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FORM OF REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT IN THE CAPE IN 1853. MORE CONTROVERSIAL IS HIS SHARE, AS THE EDITOR OF THE FIRST MODERN NEWSPAPER IN THE COLONY, IN A CAMPAIGN TO SECURE JUST TREATMENT FOR THE NATIVES BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE COLONY."

HISTORIANS OF THE PERIOD HAVE NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY KIND IN THEIR ASSESSMENT OF FAIRBAIRN'S VIEWS ON THIS KEY SUBJECT, ON HIS REPORTING OF WHICH HE EARNED BOTH OBLOQUY AND A REPUTATION FOR DEFENDING FREEDOM. THE WORDS OF G M THEAL, AS CITED BY FRYE, ARE REPRESENTATIVE:

"THE SUFFERINGS OF THE COLONISTS WERE EITHER IGNORED OR REPRESENTED AS VERY TRIVIAL, WHILE THE UTMOST FEAR WAS EXPRESSED THAT THE BANTU TRIBES WOULD PERISH IF EXPOSED TO FREE INTERCOURSE WITH WHITE PEOPLE . . . THE VIEW SET FORTH IN THE COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER COULD BE LEGITIMATELY HELD WITHOUT ANYONE HAVING JUST CAUSE OF COMPLAINT. IT WAS THE MANNER IN WHICH THESE VIEWS WERE FORWARDED BY SOME MEMBERS OF THE PARTY, AND THE DISTORTED CHARGES AGAINST THE COLONISTS MADE IN SUPPORT OF THEM, THAT EXCITED ANGER FROM ONE END OF THE COUNTRY TO THE OTHER."

THIS IS STERN CRITICISM INDEED OF ONE OF THE TRADITIONAL HEROES OF THE PRESS. THAT FAIRBAIRN HAD THE COURAGE OF HIS CONVICTIONS IN WHAT HE PRINTED, AND WAS PREPARED TO SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF EXTREME UNPOPULARITY AND EVEN OF HAVING HIS PAPER SUPPRESSED, THERE IS NO DISPUTE. WE CANNOT FAULT HIS COURAGE, BUT HIS CARE IN DETERMINING THE ADEQUACY OF HIS SOURCES AND IN QUESTIONING HIS OWN PRECONCEPTIONS CAN REASONABLY BE CRITICISED. HIS OWN DRAMATIC CHANGE OF ATTITUDE AFTER THE WAR OF 1846 IS TANTAMOUNT TO SELF-ADMISSION OF THE INADEQUACY OF HIS EARLIER DIAGNOSES.

PRESS FREEDOM, THEN, AS WE DO NOT NEED TO BE REMINDED TO-DAY, IS, AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN, A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT. THOSE IN AUTHORITY TEND TO ARGUE THAT RESTRAINTS ON THE ABSOLUTE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS ARE NECESSARY IN ORDER TO PROTECT SOCIETY FROM ITS ABUSES. PROTAGONISTS AVER THAT A SOCIETY WITHOUT PRESS FREEDOM (OR EVEN WITH AN ATTENUATED FREEDOM) IS INFINITELY LESS PREFERABLE TO A FREE PRESS SOCIETY, NO MATTER WHAT ABUSES SOME SECTIONS OF THE PRESS SUBJECT THAT FREEDOM TO.

MY THESIS IS THAT WE ERR IN MAKING AN ABSOLUTE CONCEPT OF PRESS FREEDOM, BUT RATHER THAT IT IS A DERIVATIVE FROM THE MORE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF INDEPENDENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY. WHERE THERE IS AN ABSOLUTE MONOPOLY OF POWER THERE CAN OBVIOUSLY BE NO REAL FREEDOM OF ANY KIND FOR THOSE OUTSIDE THAT MONOPOLY. PRESS FREEDOM THEN PRESUPPOSES THE EXISTENCE OF A (RELATIVELY) INDEPENDENT POWER BASE, WHICH USUALLY IMPLIES SOME DEGREE OF ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE, IN ORDER TO PROVIDE A PLATFORM FROM WHICH DECISIONS, NOT ENTIRELY UNDER THE CONTROL OF OTHERS, CAN BE MADE.

UNLESS ONE POSSESSES AN ABSOLUTE MONOPOLY OF POWER, WHAT POWER, AND THEREFORE INDEPENDENCE, ONE DOES POSSESS MUST BE EXERCISED WITH RESPONSIBILITY AND RESTRAINT. FAILURE TO DO SO INEVITABLY INVITES REACTION FROM THOSE WHOSE INTERESTS ARE THREATENED BY THE IRRESPONSIBLE EXERCISE OF POWER, AND THEREFORE OF INDEPENDENCE, AND CONSEQUENTLY OF FREEDOM. FREEDOM WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY IS LICENCE, AND ANY SOCIETY INTOLERANT OF ANARCHY WILL INEVITABLY REACT TO CURB WHAT IT SEES AS LICENCE.

THE CONCEPTS OF RESPONSIBILITY, INDEPENDENCE AND FREEDOM ARE CLOSELY WOVEN TOGETHER. ONE CANNOT ACT RESPONSIBLY WITHOUT INDEPENDENCE; OTHERWISE ONE FINDS ONESELF IN THE POSITION OF THE YOUNG MAN IN THE FAMOUS LIMERICK:

THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN WHO SAID "DAMN!
AT LAST I'VE FOUND THAT I AM
A CREATURE THAT MOVES
IN DETERMINATE GROOVES
IN FACT NOT A BUS BUT A TRAM."

RESPONSIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE ARE PRECONDITIONS FOR THE EXERCISE OF TRUE FREEDOM. IS IT NOT THEN AN EXERCISE IN SEMANTICS TO TALK OF RESPONSIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE RATHER THAN FREEDOM? I THINK NOT. ABSOLUTISING THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM LEADS TO THE ALMOST INEVITABLE TEMPTATION OF IGNORING THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS IN PROMOTING OUR OWN, AND OF PANDERING TO THE LESS ATTRACTIVE INSTINCTS OF MEN, SUCH AS BELLIGERENCE, GREED, ENVY, LUST AND SCANDALMONGERING.

LET ME ILLUSTRATE MY THESIS BY TWO ANALOGIES, ONE FROM THE LAW AND THE OTHER FROM BUSINESS. ONE OF THE GREAT GLORIES OF THE ENGLISH TRADITION OF LAW, BY WHICH WE ARE SO STRONGLY INFLUENCED IN SOUTH AFRICA, EVEN TODAY, IS THAT COUNSEL FOR THE PLAINTIFF AND FOR THE DEFENDANT ARE BOTH REGARDED AS OFFICERS OF THE COURT, BOTH CHARGED WITH A DUTY TO SEE THAT JUSTICE IS DONE. DEFENDING COUNSEL'S CONCERN FOR THE INTERESTS OF HIS CLIENT OR THE PROSECUTOR'S NATURAL WISH FOR A CONVICTION MUST BOTH BE SEEN IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR OBLIGATIONS TO A JUST OUTCOME.

SUPPRESSION OF EMBARRASSING EVIDENCE AND FACTS IS ANATHEMA. SO ARE SUCH PRACTICES AS CONTINGENT FEES, FOR COUNSEL'S CONCERN FOR JUSTICE IS NOW CLOUDED BY HIS CONCERN TO EARN A FEE. IN AMERICA, UNFORTUNATELY, THE EMPHASIS IS DIFFERENT. THE SYSTEM IS ONE OF ADVERSARIES. COUNSEL'S DUTY TO HIS CLIENT IS IN PRACTICE REGARDED AS ABSOLUTE. TO DO THE AMERICANS JUSTICE THEY HONESTLY BELIEVE THAT AN ADVERSARY SYSTEM IS THE BEST SAFEGUARD YET DEvised THAT JUSTICE WILL BE DONE. THE EMPHASIS, HOWEVER, IS SUBTLY DIFFERENT. THE LAWYER IS NOW CONCERNED MORE IN MAKING OUT A CASE THAN ARRIVING AT TRUTH AND JUSTICE. A DEFENDENT'S FREEDOM TO BE PRESENTED IN THE BEST POSSIBLE LIGHT IS ABSOLUTISED, AT THE EXPENSE OF HIS COUNSEL'S RESPONSIBILITY AS AN INDEPENDENT OFFICER OF THE COURT. THE DIFFERENCE IN EMPHASIS BETWEEN ENGLISH AND AMERICAN LAW THUS DEMONSTRATES THAT MY EARLIER DISTINCTION BETWEEN FREEDOM ON THE ONE HAND AND RESPONSIBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE ON THE OTHER, IS FAR FROM BEING MERELY A MATTER OF SEMANTICS.

IN A RECENT TIME MAGAZINE ESSAY IT WAS SUGGESTED THAT THIS ADVERSARY ATTITUDE HAD PERMEATED THE AMERICAN PRESS. ANYONE WHO HAS EVER SEEN A TELEVISED PRESIDENTIAL PRESS CONFERENCE CAN HARDLY DOUBT SUCH A PROPOSITION. A ONE-SIDED VIEW OF PRESS FREEDOM INEVITABLY LEADS TO THE CONCEPT THAT ANYTHING SHORT OF SUCH BELLIGERENCE IS SELLING PRESS FREEDOM SHORT. SUCH A VIEW IMPLIES THAT EVERY POLITICIAN IS VENAL, THAT THE INTEGRITY OF EVERY OFFICIAL, WHETHER FROM THE PUBLIC OR THE PRIVATE SECTOR, MUST BE QUESTIONED AND THAT EVERY POLICEMAN IS A BRUTAL SADIST UNTIL PROVED OTHERWISE. THE VICTIMS NATURALLY CLAM UP AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, AND TRY TO OFFER NO MORE THAN "NO COMMENT", AND EVEN THIS CAN BE PUT IN A SINISTER LIGHT. SUCH A SITUATION IS CERTAINLY PREFERABLE TO THE TAME AND SYCOPHANTIC INTERVIEWS OF MINISTERS WITH WHICH WE ARE ALL TOO FAMILIAR, BUT NEITHER PRACTICE IS AT ALL SATISFACTORY. TIME'S PRESCRIPTION, WITH WHICH I AM IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT, IS PRESS INDEPENDENCE. INDEPENDENCE IS SELF-EVIDENTLY INCOMPATIBLE WITH SYCOPHANCY.

LESS SELF-EVIDENTLY, BUT EQUALLY CORRECTLY, IT IS ALSO INCOMPATIBLE WITH KNEE-JERK BELLIGERENCE. IF YOU ARE COMPELLED BY PSYCHOLOGICAL PRESSURES ALWAYS TO BE HOSTILE YOU ARE NO MORE FREE THAN IF YOU ARE COMPELLED BY POLITICAL PRESSURES ALWAYS TO BE FLATTERING. COOL ASSESSMENT AND UNCLOUDED JUDGEMENT ARE THE FRUITS OF INDEPENDENCE, BUT THESE DO NOT NECESSARILY FLOW FROM PRESS FREEDOM, CONCEIVED FROM THE WORM'S EYE VIEW.

MY OTHER ANALOGY IS FROM BUSINESS, OR FREE-ENTERPRISE, MORE PARTICULARLY AS IT TENDS TO BE PROPOUNDED IN ITS PURE LAISSEZ-FAIRE OR ADAM SMITH "WEALTH OF NATIONS" FORM. IF ONLY GOVERNMENTS COULD BE PERSUADED TO KEEP THEIR HANDS ENTIRELY OFF BUSINESS THEN BUSINESS-DECISIONS TO OPTIMISE PROFITS AS REGULATED BY THE SUPPLY AND DEMAND OF THE MARKET PLACE, WILL INEVITABLY THROUGH THE MECHANISM OF THE "INVISIBLE HAND" LEAD TO THE SPREAD OF CREATED WEALTH AND ULTIMATELY TO THE GREATEST HAPPINESS OF THE GREATEST NUMBER. IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY THIS WAS LARGELY INDISPUTED HOLY WRIT, (AND STILL IS TODAY IN SOME QUARTERS). NO MATTER THAT WOMEN AND YOUNG CHILDREN LABOURED TWELVE AND FOURTEEN HOURS A DAY IN COALPITS OR "DARK SATANIC

MILLS"; OFTEN TO FALL ASLEEP AND BE MANGLED BY UNPROTECTED MACHINERY. NO MATTER WHAT CONDITIONS OF FOETID UNHYGIENE IN ROTTING JERRY-BUILT ROW HOUSES THEY HAD TO ENDURE. TO HAVE DIVERTED PROFITS TO IMPROVE THEIR CONDITIONS OR PAY WOULD HAVE INTERFERED WITH THE SACRED MARKET MECHANISM OF FREE ENTERPRISE AND RENDERED THE HOLY WEALTH-CREATING SYSTEM OUT OF KILTER.

ONCE AGAIN A ONE-SIDED OVER-EMPHASIS ON FREEDOM DIVORCED FROM RESPONSIBILITY WAS THE ROOT DIFFICULTY. A SUCCESSION OF HYGIENE AND FACTORY ACTS, AND LATER IN THIS CENTURY ANTI-POLLUTION MEASURES, CERTAINLY INTERFERED WITH THE FREEDOM OF ENTREPRENEURS UNREASONABLY TO EXPLOIT THEIR FELLOW MEN, BUT DID NOT LEAD TO THE DOWNFALL OF CAPITALISM. THE ESSENCE OF OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEM IS NOT UNFETTERED FREE ENTERPRISE, BUT THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR DECISION-MAKER FROM TOTAL GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE. IF THAT INDEPENDENCE IS NOT USED RESPONSIBLY THEN GOVERNMENT CAN, MUST AND DOES STEP IN.

AN ABSOLUTIST DOCTRINE OF PRESS-FREEDOM IS, I SUBMIT, AS UNTENABLE A POSITION AS AN ABSOLUTIST DOCTRINE OF LAISSEZ FAIRE FREE ENTERPRISE CAPITALISM. VIRTUALLY EVERY GOVERNMENT IN THE WORLD HAS FOUND IT NECESSARY TO ENACT THE PRESS EQUIVALENT OF HYGIENE AND FACTORY LEGISLATION, EVEN ANTI-POLLUTION LEGISLATION. THE OLDEST AND LEAST CONTROVERSIAL OF SUCH LEGAL RESTRAINTS ARE THE STEPS THAT ARE AVAILABLE TO PROTECT ONESELF FROM LIBEL AND SLANDER, AND TO PROTECT A COUNTRY'S SECURITY IN TIME OF OPEN HOSTILITY. EVEN IN THE UNITED STATES, THE WONDERFULLY SIMPLE LANGUAGE OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT, "CONGRESS SHALL MAKE NO LAW ---- ABRIDGING THE FREEDOM OF SPEECH, OR OF THE PRESS" IS NO PROOF AGAINST "TRUTH IN ADVERTISING" LAWS. A MAN MAY NOT WITH IMPUNITY PLACE WHATEVER ADVERTISEMENT HE PLEASES, WITHOUT ANY CONSIDERATION AS TO WHETHER THE PRODUCT OR SERVICE HE OFFERS CAN MEET WHAT IS CLAIMED FOR IT. THERE MUST BE VERY FEW GOVERNMENTS TOO THAT WILL TOLERATE THE OPEN ADVOCACY OF SEDITION AND PUBLIC VIOLENCE. IN MY VIEW THE "ANTI-POLLUTION" ASPECT OF POSSIBLE PRESS LEGISLATION SHOULD BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY. IT IS SURPRISING HOW UNCONTROVERSIAL SUCH MATTERS CAN BE. THE RECENTLY PROMULGATED RESTRAINTS ON THE REPORTING OF DIVORCE PROCEEDINGS, FOR EXAMPLE, HAVE OCCASIONED REMARKABLY LITTLE COMMENT, LET ALONE CRITICISM FROM THE PRESS.

AS LONG AS THE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED WORD CENSORSHIP CAN BE AVOIDED IT SEEMS THAT A REMARKABLE DEGREE OF CONSENSUS IS AVAILABLE. A GREAT MANY LAWS CONSTRAINING THE MANUFACTURE, DISTRIBUTION AND SALE OF HARMFUL AND DANGEROUS PRODUCTS ARE ACCEPTED WITHOUT DEMUR. SURELY IN CONSULTATION WITH THE PRESS AN ANALAGOUS EFFECT CAN BE ACHIEVED WITHOUT DUBBING THE RESULT CENSORSHIP. AS IN THE MANUFACTURING CASE, SUCH LAWS SHOULD BE TESTABLE IN THE COURTS, WITH THE USUAL PROCEDURES AND AVENUES OF APPEAL. IT WOULD SEEM THAT WHAT IS MOST OBJECTIONABLE ABOUT OUR PRESENT POSITION, IS NOT SO MUCH THE EXISTENCE OF THE CONSTRAINTS, BUT THE EXTRA-JUDICIAL, ADMINISTRATIVE WAY IN WHICH THEY ARE TESTED. THE VAST MAJORITY OF SOUTH AFRICANS ARE WITHOUT DOUBT IN FAVOUR OF THE EXCLUSION OF HARDCORE PORNOGRAPHY, THE STIRRING UP OF RACIAL ANIMOSITIES, THE ADVOCACY OF CRIME, VIOLENCE OR SOCIALLY UNDESIRABLE PRACTICES. MANY WOULD FAVOUR THE BANNING OF LIQUOR AND TOBACCO ADVERTISEMENTS WITHOUT BEING IN DANGER OF STANDING ACCUSED OF FAVOURING CENSORSHIP. COULD IT NOT BE ARGUED THAT THE ARBITRARY ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY FOR CLOSING NEWSPAPERS, BANNING EDITORS OR DENYING THE PUBLICATION OF WORKS OF LITERATURE, WITH NO JUDICIAL APPEAL, IS THE OBJECTIONABLE FACTOR, NOT THE RESTRAINTS ON PUBLICATION PER SE?

BE THAT AS IT MAY, WE HAVE SUFFERED A GREAT MANY RESTRAINTS IN RECENT YEARS IN SOUTH AFRICA ON OUR RIGHT TO BE INFORMED. PEOPLE MAY NOT BE QUOTED, PRISONS AND PRISONERS MAY NOT BE PHOTOGRAPHED, REPORTING ON BORDER CONFLICTS HAS BEEN REPRESSED IN A WAY THAT WOULD HAVE MADE FAIRBAIRN APOPLECTIC, AND NOW WE ARE TO BE DENIED ACCESS TO OPINION POLLS AS TO HOW VOTERS ARE PROPOSING TO VOTE AT ELECTIONS. ONE INDIGNITY WE HAVE SO FAR BEEN SPARED: POSITIVE CENSORSHIP, BY WHICH I MEAN BEING COMPELLED TO PRINT DICTATED ITEMS, IN CONTRAST TO BEING COMPELLED NOT TO PRINT CERTAIN MATTERS.

A BASICALLY NEGATIVE APPROACH TO PRESS FREEDOM, SUMMARISED IN THE ATTITUDE "I AM FREE TO PRINT WHAT I LIKE" IN CONTRAST TO "ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT", CAN HAVE A VERY CORROSIVE EFFECT IN THE WAY A NEWSPAPERMAN APPROACHES HIS WORK. HE BECOMES CYNICAL AND PRONE TO PANDER TO THAT ALL TOO HUMAN TRAIT OF HIS READERS, THE DESIRE TO HEAR ILL OF HIS NEIGHBOUR, HIS OPPONENT OR HIS SUPERIORS. ROBERT SHNAYERSON, A VERY EXPERIENCED JOURNALIST, HAD THIS TO TELL HIS POTENTIAL READERS WHEN HE FOUNDED THE NEW PUBLICATION QUEST :-

"FOR 20 YEARS I HELPED EDIT THREE OF THE WORLD'S BEST MAGAZINES : TIME, LIFE, AND HARPER'S. LAST YEAR, AFTER FIVE YEARS AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF HARPERS, I TOOK A LONG HARD LOOK AT MY PROFESSION.

JOURNALISM HAD TRAINED ME TO ASSUME THAT EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY, THINGS WERE GETTING WORSE AND WORSE. I ENJOYED THAT NOTION. YET ALL AROUND ME WAS CONTRARY EVIDENCE. NEW LIFE-STYLES, INVENTIONS, WORKS OF ART, WORLD RECORDS. THE QUIET HEROISM OF ORDINARY PEOPLE COPING, HEALING, TEACHING. THE UNKNOWN BEST AND BRIGHTEST IN A BILLION CORNERS OF THE EARTH ---UNKNOWN BECAUSE GOOD NEWS ISN'T NEWS.

I'M TIRED OF JOURNALISTIC MYOPIA. FED UP WITH PUBLICATIONS THAT APPEAL TO OUR WORSE INSTINCTS. LET OTHER EDITORS DRAG READERS THROUGH CESSPOOLS OF MEDIOCRITY. I'M INTERESTED IN PEOPLE AS THEY REALLY ARE --- AND COULD BECOME.

SO I'VE STARTED A NEW MAGAZINE ABOUT THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE -- THE SEARCH FOR THE FULLY LIVED LIFE, YOURS AS WELL AS MINE."

ONE OF YOUR OWN FRATERNITY, STANLEY UYS, ADDRESSING HIMSELF IN ONE OF HIS RECENT LONDON COLUMNS TO THE PRESENT STATE OF AMERICAN FILM AND TV VERY MUCH ECHOED MR SHNAYERSON'S SENTIMENTS. HE HAD THIS TO SAY :-

"IS THERE NOTHING DECENT IN LIFE WORTH PORTRAYING? DOES IT ALWAYS HAVE TO BE VIOLENT AND SLEAZY? DOES ALL THAT SKULLDUGGERY REALLY TAKE PLACE BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE HIGHEST CIRCLES OF THE LAND? AN EXAMPLE OF WHAT COMES TO MIND IS THE RECENT TELEVISION SERIAL 'WASHINGTON', A FICTIONAL VERSION OF WHAT LIFE WAS LIKE UNDER TRICKY DICK. IT WAS A BRILLIANT FILM, TECHNICALLY AND CREATIVELY, BUT IT MADE ONE FEEL QUITE SICK ---

I HAVE BEEN SEEING A LOT OF OLD MOVIES ON TELEVISION LATELY, THE "OLDIES" FROM THE 1930'S , 1940'S AND 1950'S. WHAT STRUCK ME ABOUT MANY OF THESE FILMS WAS THE ALMOST TOTAL ABSENCE OF VIOLENCE -- AND THE QUAINLY HONOURABLE WAY IN WHICH PEOPLE BEHAVED -- TODAY WE HAVE TAKEN 'REALISM' TO A POINT WHERE THERE IS ALMOST NO ROOM FOR THE PORTRAYAL OF 'DECENT AND SECURE' LIVES, HONOURABLE BEHAVIOUR, AND LIFE WITHOUT VIOLENCE".

SURELY EVERY GOOD JOURNALIST MUST ASK HIMSELF FROM TIME TO TIME THE SORT OF QUESTION POSED BY SHNAYERSON AND UYS. WOULD HE NOT ALSO WISH TO COME TO THE SAME CONCLUSION AS THE FORMER, WERE HE NOT OF THE VIEW THAT DESCRIBING "WHAT THE BUTLER SAW" OR "WHAT THE ACTRESS SAID TO THE BISHOP" IS REGRETTABLE BUT NECESSARY TO KEEP HIS NEWSPAPER OUT OF THE RED INK? FORTUNATELY, THERE ARE MANY SUCCESSFUL PRODUCTS THAT PUT THE LIE TO THE PROPOSITION THAT QUALITY DOES NOT SELL. I AM REMINDED OF THE LITTLE MESSAGE, ORIGINALLY DUE TO JOHN RUSKIN, ONE RECEIVES EVERY TIME ONE BUYS A PARTICULARLY WELLKNOWN AND HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL BRAND OF SHIRT :-

"THERE IS HARDLY ANYTHING IN THE WORLD THAT SOME MAN CANNOT MAKE A LITTLE WORSE AND SELL A LITTLE CHEAPER, AND THE PEOPLE WHO CONSIDER PRICE ONLY ARE THIS MAN'S LAWFUL PREY".

AMONGST THE NEWSPAPERS REPRESENTED IN THIS AUDIENCE MANY, IF NOT MOST, DO AIM WITHIN THE CONSTRAINTS OF THEIR READERS' TASTE AND THE BUDGET TO PRODUCE A HIGH QUALITY PRODUCT, BUT, ALAS, EVEN THE TIMES CAN NO LONGER AFFORD TO HIRE FLOCKS OF RETIRED CLERGYMEN TO DO THE PROOFREADING. MANY JOURNALISTS PAY FAR MORE THAN LIPSERVICE TO IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND, NOT CONTENT WITH WHAT THEIR READERS LIKE, ATTEMPT TO EDUCATE THEM.

A VERY GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE DILEMMA RAISED BY THE RESPONSIBILITY VERSUS FREEDOM QUESTION IS THE ISSUE OF PUBLICISING ITEMS WHICH LIE ALONG THE CUTTING EDGE OF SOCIAL CHANGE IN OUR VERY STRANGE SOCIETY. THERE ARE MANY SITUATIONS IN WHICH BLACKS ARE PERFORMING CERTAIN TASKS, ENJOYING CERTAIN AMENITIES OR OCCUPYING CERTAIN PREMISES WITH THE TACIT NON-PROHIBITION OF THE AUTHORITIES. RECENT, OR FAIRLY RECENT, EXAMPLES ARE BLACKS EMPLOYED AS TRAIN-MARSHALLERS, LIVING IN HILLBROW, ATTENDING PRIVATE SCHOOLS OR SWIMMING AT CERTAIN BEACHES. THE RULES OF THE GAME APPEAR TO BE THAT WHILE THEY ARE STILL SENSITIVE ISSUES THESE THINGS ARE TOLERATED BY THE AUTHORITIES, SO LONG AS THEY ARE NOT PUBLICISED. PREMATURE PUBLICATION OF SUCH PRACTICES, IT CAN REASONABLY BE ARGUED, BRINGS DOWN THE WRATH OF THE POWERS THAT BE ON THE OFFENDING INDIVIDUALS, AND DEFERS THE PROCESSES OF NEEDED CHANGE. THE CONTRARY VIEW IS THAT MAKING THEM WIDELY KNOWN PREPARES (WHITE) PUBLIC OPINION FOR FURTHER NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS.

I SUSPECT THAT THIS PARTICULAR DEBATE HAS THE MAKINGS OF BEING AS INCONCLUSIVE AS THE QUESTION WHETHER FOREIGN COMPANIES MAKE A GREATER CONTRIBUTION TO PROMOTING CHANGE BY REMAINING IN SOUTH AFRICA AS PACESETTERS OR BY WITHDRAWING ALTOGETHER. AS WITH SO MANY CONTROVERSIES IT IS FAR MORE COMFORTING TO STATE ONE'S CASE, AND ACT ON IT, WITH VEHEMENCE, THAN TO EXAMINE WHAT FACTS ARE AVAILABLE. SOME SUCH SITUATIONS HAVE IN FACT BEEN PUBLICISED AND OTHERS NOT. I HAVE AS YET HEARD OF NO STUDY AS TO WHICH COURSE OF ACTION HAS PRODUCED THE MORE DESIRABLE RESULTS. PERHAPS UNIVERSITIES WITH JOURNALISM DEPARTMENTS COULD WELL ADDRESS THEMSELVES TO THIS PROBLEM.

THIS QUESTION OF DISCLOSURE OR NON-DISCLOSURE FREQUENTLY INVOLVES NOT ONLY THE EDITOR OR JOURNALIST WHO HOPES TO PRINT AN ITEM, BUT ALSO THE OFFICIAL WHO HAS THE DETAILS AT HIS DISPOSAL. SIR KENNETH WHEARE, THEN VICE-CHANCELLOR OF OXFORD, CONCERNED HIMSELF WITH THIS IN HIS 1967 REDE LECTURE "THE UNIVERSITIES IN THE NEWS" :-

"IN SOME CASES IT SEEMS TO BE ASSERTED THAT THE PUBLIC HAS THE RIGHT TO READ ANYTHING ABOUT ANYTHING; THAT ANY MATTER WHICH INTERESTS OR AMUSES OR EXCITES THE PUBLIC HAS A CLAIM TO BE PRINTED. THIS IS NOT A VIEW WHICH THOSE OF US WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR UNIVERSITIES CAN ACCEPT. IF WE ARE ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE AFFAIRS OF STUDENTS, WE MUST CONSIDER, BEFORE WE ANSWER, A NUMBER OF FACTORS OTHER THAN THE FACT THAT THE READERS OF A NEWSPAPER WOULD BE INTERESTED IN THE MATTER. AT TIMES, IT SEEMS TO ME, A JOURNALIST APPEARS TO THINK THAT HE IS ENTITLED TO RECEIVE INFORMATION BECAUSE HE IS A JOURNALIST. IT STRIKES ME AS ODD THAT SOMEONE SHOULD EXPECT TO RECEIVE AN ANSWER TO A QUESTION BECAUSE HE IS GOING TO PRINT IT. IS THERE NOT A STRONGER CASE FOR ANSWERING A QUESTION, IF IN FACT THE ANSWER IS NOT GOING TO BE PRINTED? SHOULD WE FEEL OBLIGED TO DISCLOSE TO A JOURNALIST, WHO IS GOING TO PRINT IT, MATTERS WHICH WE WOULD CERTAINLY REFUSE TO DISCLOSE TO ANOTHER INQUIRER, WHO WAS NOT GOING TO PRINT IT? THERE ARE QUESTIONS ASKED BY

JOURNALISTS WHICH, IF ASKED BY ANOTHER MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC, WOULD BE MET WITH THE RESPONSE: WHAT BUSINESS IS THAT OF YOURS? THE PRESS FEELS ENTITLED TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT ANYTHING; WE FEEL UNEASY IF WE CANNOT ANSWER THEM: BUT THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT WE ARE ENTITLED TO REFUSE TO GIVE INFORMATION IF, IN OUR JUDGEMENT, THESE MATTERS SHOULD NOT BE MADE PUBLIC."

I HAVE FREQUENTLY FOUND MYSELF IN THIS SITUATION. I CANNOT FOR VERY GOOD REASONS SAY ANYTHING FOR PUBLICATION, YET FAILURE TO PRODUCE REASONS MAKES ONE APPEAR ARBITRARY AND UNJUST IN ONE'S ACTIONS. IF THE JOURNALIST QUITE CLEARLY TAKES UP THE ADVERSARY POSITION TO WHICH I REFERRED EARLIER THEN ALL I CAN DO, TO BORROW FROM SIR KENNETH AGAIN IS "NOT TO GRIN, BUT BEAR IT". IF THE JOURNALIST DOES NOT REGARD ME AS AN ADVERSARY, AND I KNOW THAT I CAN RELY ON HIS INTEGRITY, THEN I AM PREPARED TO DISCLOSE MY POSITION, BUT NOT FOR PUBLICATION. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES I HAVE

USUALLY FOUND COMPLETE SYMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING FOR MY SITUATION AND CONSEQUENTLY A FAIRMINDED REPORT. IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN A SOURCE OF GREAT REGRET WHEN IN A SMALL MINORITY OF CASES, I HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO ACT IN THIS WAY. IT IS OF ADVANTAGE TO BOTH JOURNALIST AND PUBLIC FIGURES TO HAVE A PROFESSIONAL WORKING RELATIONSHIP OF MUTUAL RESPECT, AND A CLEAR UNDERSTANDING OF EACH OTHER'S RESPONSIBILITIES. PROVIDED THESE ARE THE GROUND RULES, ONE DOES NOT OBJECT OCCASIONALLY TO BEING THE BUTT OF SOME PUCKISH HUMOUR. THE PRESS, ESPECIALLY THE STUDENT PRESS ALWAYS GETS THE LAST WORD, AS SIR KENNETH DISCOVERED WHEN LYCIDAS, THE MAGAZINE OF WOLFSON COLLEGE REPRINTED STRAIGHTFACED AND VERBATIM AN EXTRACT FROM THE OFFICIAL LIST OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY PREACHERS:

"SUNDAY, 24 NOVEMBER, AT 10.15 A.M. SIR KENNETH WHEARE, C.M.G., M.A., D.LITT. (M.A. MELBOURNE, HON. LITT.D CAMBRIDGE, HON. L.H.D. COLUMBIA, HON. L.L.D. EXETER AND LIVERPOOL), FELLOW OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE AND HONORARY FELLOW OF UNIVERSITY, EXETER, ORIEL, NUFFIELD, AND WOLFSON COLLEGES. (ON THE SIN OF PRIDE.)"

IN LAYING THE EMPHASIS AS I HAVE THIS AFTERNOON ON PRESS RESPONSIBILITY AND PRESS INDEPENDENCE RATHER THAN ON PRESS FREEDOM, I AM NOT FOR A MOMENT SUGGESTING THAT THE PRESS DOES NOT HAVE THE RIGHT, NAY THE DUTY, TO EXPOSE OFFICIAL FRAUD, VENALITY, CORRUPTION OR JUST OLD-FASHIONED INCOMPETENCE, NO MATTER HOW EMBARRASSING OR INCONVENIENT THIS MAY BE TO THE PARTIES CONCERNED. IT ALSO HAS THE RIGHT TO ESPOUSE A PARTICULAR SET OF PUBLIC POLICY POSITIONS AND TO INFORM ITS READERS ON ALL MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST NOT PRESCRIBED BY BENEFICIAL AND ACCEPTABLE RESTRAINTS SUCH AS LIBEL AND SUB-JUDICE LAWS, OR MATTERS RELATING TO "CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGERS" TO THE STATE. ANY INFORMED PERSON IN THE POST-WATERGATE ERA COULD NOT BUT SUBSCRIBE TO SUCH A VIEW. I AM ADVOCATING RATHER A THESIS WHEREIN PRESS FREEDOM IS SEEN AS DERIVATIVE FROM PRESS RESPONSIBILITY AND PRESS INDEPENDENCE. THE EFFECT OF SUCH A THESIS IS TO SEE PRESS FREEDOM FROM A PERSPECTIVE THAT ACCEPTS THAT ALL THE NEWS IS NOT ALWAYS FIT TO PRINT, AND FOR SOUND REASON; AND THAT NOT EVERY FORM OF LITERARY OR DRAMATIC ENTERTAINMENT IS NECESSARILY IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST.

WITH MINOR EXCEPTIONS I AM A GREAT ADMIRER OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS, MORE PARTICULARLY THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE PRESS. YOUR FRATERNITY IS CHARACTERISED BY HIGH IDEALS, INTEGRITY, OBJECTIVITY, THOROUGHNESS AND A COOLNESS UNDER FIRE THAT HAS GAINED YOU THE ADMIRATION OF YOUR COLLEAGUES IN LESS BELEAGUED CIRCUMSTANCES. IN SPITE OF GREAT PRESSURES YOU HAVE MAINTAINED THE ONLY TRULY INDEPENDENT PRESS IN AFRICA, AND FOR THAT YOU MERIT THE THANKS AND SUPPORT OF EVERY FAIR-MINDED SOUTH AFRICAN. ONE OF THE INSTITUTIONS IN THIS COUNTRY THAT CAN STILL FACE UP TO INTERNATIONAL SCRUTINY WITH HONOUR IS OUR PRESS. IT IS THEREFORE WITH A SENSE OF PRIVILEGE AND HUMILITY THAT I STAND BEFORE YOU TODAY, AND I THANK YOU FOR THE HONOUR THAT YOU HAVE DONE ME. YOU HAVE DESERVED OUR CONGRATULATIONS AND YOU HAVE AMPLY MERITED OUR CONTINUED SUPPORT. I SHOULD LIKE THEREFORE TO CONCLUDE WITH A VALEDICTION WHICH, WERE I MAKING THIS ADDRESS IN THE CONTEXT OF AN AFTER-DINNER SPEECH, WOULD TAKE THE FORM OF A TOAST: "TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS; LONG MAY IT CONTINUE TO INFORM ITS READERS AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD, WITH CANDOUR, ACCURACY, GOOD TASTE AND ABOVE ALL, WITH COURAGE".

D S HENDERSON
RHODES UNIVERSITY
GRAHAMSTOWN