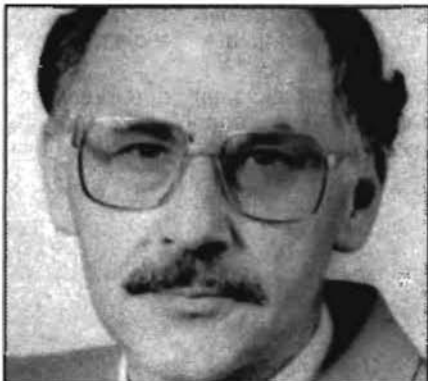

The Last Word

Democratizing South Africa: A Communication Perspective

There is little doubt that great stress will in the short to medium-term future be placed on all processes geared for the establishment of a democracy and a shared loyalty in this country. It cannot be denied that there are very deep cleavages in the South African society. At the same time it has to be admitted that significant progress has been made over the past years if one considers how apparently unbridgeable the divide looked as recently as early 1989. It is probably a truism to say that in future communication will simultaneously be one of the necessary conditions for the successful transformation of the country, and one of the indices of the progress and success of such transformation. Against this background the following paragraphs contain a summary of the more important findings, as well as a number of further actions that may be required on the road ahead.

1. The process of developing a common loyalty - South Africanism - will be a slow one, albeit more noticeable than in the past. Factors that may contribute towards this process include the following:
 - An entire communication context - i.e. political dispensation - focussed on commonality rather than divisions' also negative reinforcement for racism.
 - Electronic media that would promote national unity. Mass media can be used in a synergistic fashion. However, it is also clear that if the European example is anything to go by, we can in fu-



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ture expect growing pressure on public broadcasting services due to increasing industrialization of broadcasting. Maybe we should reconsider the development model for the broadcasting industry.

- Various modes and forms of training aimed at the improvement of relations, e.g. school courses, training within industry, etc.
- The development of shared symbols, especially national overarching ones.

However, some of the divides might even become more accentuated as certain groups strive to dissociate themselves from the seeking of commonality.

2. Interaction between different population categories are bound

to increase as the initial stages of affirmative action take effect. To a limited extent this means that the nature of the participants will all change in the sense that communication will become somewhat less hierarchical.

3. English will increasingly become the lingua franca of the country and the character of South African English will increasingly be under the influence of an Africanization force, as opposed to the relatively strong Afrikaans influence of the past.
4. Education can, should and in fact seems geared to play a very important role in the transformation of the country. In this regard specific attention would have to be paid to the constructive intercultural content and processes.
5. The agendas of the media in the country have undeniably undergone significant change in the course of the past two or so years in the sense that a broader spectrum of information of the total political spectrum is provided. The role of the media as agenda-setter, but also as indicator of change will probably grow, especially if the social turbulence persist.
6. The process of participatory democracy will become more salient and potentially represents an important unifying force.

The perspective on the role of communication indicates a trend towards unifying the people of the land. It would be naive, however, to infer from this that the road ahead would be a smooth one. Factors such as the tragic

extent and abhorrent nature of the violence in the country, the run-up to the 1994 election and the actual campaigns in which political support is to be mobilized, the unacceptably high level of unemployment, the stagnating economy, etc., may bring a temporary halt to some of the positive signs we have alluded to. Perhaps the ideal expressed by the South African motto of *Ex unitate vires*¹ does not emphasize our most salient needs. Somehow the concept of *Ubuntu*, freely translated as humaneness should receive more attention. This could enable us to be more appreciative of typically African ways of doing things, a point in case being the principles of African financial management that were highlighted in the workshop by Jeff Fadiman. Over the shorter term, we will have to make a motto such as that of the USA work for us: *Ex pluribus unum*², at least at the national overarching level.

The theme of the Twelfth Biannual Convention of the World Communication Association, *Unity through communication*, represents a call to all South Africa resonating in the words of a young black poet, Dennis Nkosi, from the University of Durban-Westville:

Like a Rising Sun

*Let us talk of freedom,
not of years of serfdom
build our community
on a solid foundation of unity
building a revolution through
negotiations*

*negotiations for reconstruction
like a rising sun that will shine
should in a constitution
our hopes enshrine.*

1 Strength from unity.

2 Unity out of diversity.