

Journalism education in South Africa comes of age

Arnold S. de Beer

Department of Communication
RAU

Journalism in South Africa can be traced back to the first half of the last century, but academic training on a tertiary level only came into being in 1960 when Prof. Gert Pienaar initiated the first course in journalism at the Potchefstroom University.

Since then tertiary education and training in this field has grown to a position where journalism is offered as an independent subject or as part of communication at the Potchefstroom University, the University of South Africa, the Rand Afrikaans University, the University of the Orange Free State, the University of Stellenbosch, the University of Fort Hare, Rhodes University and the Technicons in Pretoria and Durban.

To celebrate the 21 years of the existence of journalism education in South Africa a two-day seminar was organized by the department of Communication at RAU at the RAU Island in the Vaal Dam. Some 50 academics and journalists attended the seminar. The latter included representatives from the daily, Sunday, industrial and church Press, as well as journalists from the SABC.

Within the context of the American idea of a state of the art meeting, numerous actual topics covering a wide field were discussed.

In the first session papers were read on the theory of journalism by:

- Prof. M.B. van Schoor (UNISA) — *Soren Kierkegaard's approach to journalism*
- Dr. Koos Roelofse (UNISA) — *Raymond Williams and journalism*
- Mr. Johan Snyman (RAU) — *New Marxism as an alternative journalistic theory*
- Mr. Attie Gerber (RAU) — *The New Information Order.*

The research session included a paper on *Qualitative and Quantitative Research* by Prof. H.C. Marais (UOFS).

The third session concentrated on the theoretical and practical guidelines for the journalist.

- *The South African journalist: who is he/she?* — Prof. P.J. Cillie (Stellenbosch)
- *The journalist and his rôle concerning his own and other groups* — Mr. Otto Krause (Die Transvaler)

Concluding the first day's activities were papers which dealt with the following:

- *The journalist and his relationship to the state* — Mr. Paul Vorster (Fort Hare)
- *The rôle of the press in a culturally diversified society* — Mr. John Battersby (SASJ)
- *The Journalist as a Film Critic* — Mr. Keyan Tomaselli (Rhodes)

The following day began with the presentation of some practical topics.

- *The local press* — Dr. Johan de Jager (PU vir CHE)
- *Industrial journalism* — Mr. Dirk Venter (SAAIE)
- *Public relations* — Mr. Gibo Gerber (Technicon, Pretoria)
- *Electronic Editing* — Mr. Ian Forsyth (SAAN)
- *Radio and TV journalism* — Mr. Carel van der Merwe and Mr. Fanus Venter (SABC)
- *Magazine journalism* — Mrs. Amanda van Eeden (UNISA)

Academics and representatives of the press called on each other for greater co-operation in the training and education of journalists as well as in journalism research. Mr. Carl van der Merwe, head of radio news for the SABC, added that today's journalist is subject to particular requirements and training is therefore essential. Prof. Cillié of the University of Stellenbosch and chairman of Nasionale Pers, emphasised the need for practical, job-ready training. Particular attention must be paid to the acquisition of journalistic skills.

Prof. M.B. van Schoor of UNISA emphasised the necessity of a theoretical foundation in journalism. Other academics stressed the point that journalists must be able to conceptualise on an abstract level about their profession. This necessitates theoretical training. The rôle of the press in society and special South African problems (e.g. the findings of the Steyn Commission on the media) made it all the more important that journalism should not only be seen as a trade but as a true or emerging profession based on a sound body of knowledge, research and literature.

Prof. H.C. Marais felt that the departments of communication and journalism should exchange ideas with practising journalists in order to generate research which will provide solutions for practising journalists and also develop the field of journalism theory.