Out from Under the Media’s Biases

How can we avoid taking on the same biases about Zimbabwe that are expressed in major media from which we get most of our information?

1. Learn to read and listen critically.
Next time you read an account of a massacre, an attack on the church, or an assessment of political developments in Rhodesia, refer back to this leaflet to help evaluate what you read.

2. Alternative media.
To escape the limitations of the establishment media, seek out other sources of information. Magazines such as International Bulletin, In These Times, Seven Days and The Guardian can round out your information about southern Africa. Good sources of in-depth information on southern Africa include:

**Southern Africa**
156 Fifth Ave., Room 707
New York, N.Y. 10010
($8 subscription for 12 issues)

**Africa News**
P.O. Box 3851
Durham, N.C. 27702
($15 introductory offer for 48 issues)

**Washington Notes on Africa**
110 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002
($5 annual contribution)

**American Committee on Africa**
305 East 46th St.
New York, N.Y. 10017
(ask for literature list)

3. Educate others.
Distribute copies of this leaflet. Order from the Washington Office on Africa (see address below) for 15¢ each for 1-10; 10¢ each for 11-50; 5¢ each for over 50 copies.

Monitor the local media and write articles or letters to the editor to correct false or one-sided coverage. Take the opportunity to appear on public radio and TV shows to give a side of the story different from what usually appears. Organize teach-ins in your local community at schools, churches or union meetings.

WASHINGTON OFFICE ON AFRICA
110 Maryland Ave., N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

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ZIMBABWE:
Winning Hearts and Minds

Each time another white person is killed in Rhodesia, western journalists vividly depict a scene of bloodshed and brutality and inevitably blame the incident on the liberation forces of the Patriotic Front. When this occurs, the illegal regime scores a propaganda victory, using the event to discredit the guerrillas and to win support for its war effort, and, since March 3, to gain international recognition for its internal settlement.

For instance, when Pentacostal missionaries and their children were killed near the eastern border on June 23rd, the regime flew foreign journalists to the scene of the slayings, allowing them to photograph freely, and to send back stories without censoring the gory details. This was quite a contrast to the massacre of 22 Africans by security forces two weeks previous when even the statements of two members of the interim Executive Council were censored. It also far overshadowed the coverage of a massacre only 24 hours earlier when Rhodesian troops raided a refugee camp 33 kilometers inside Mozambique, killing 17 refugees and 2 UN Food and Agriculture Organization volunteers from Belgium.

The statements of the liberation forces, if used at all, are reduced to a few sentences and buried in the middle of an article. Most US media simply repeat the regime’s accusations that the guerrillas are on the rampage against whites and the church. This process reinforces racist images which make it easy to believe stories depicting Africans as brutal barbarians. It bolsters the regime’s contention that it is fighting to preserve Christianity and civilization against the attacks of “murdering mad-dog communist terrorists.”

The media thus tend to act as both judge and jury—to pronounce a verdict instead of giving their audience the evidence needed to form their own conclusions.
What the Media Don't Tell Us

Twelve people . . . were killed last night in a terrorist attack. The 12, all white, were battered and bayonetted by black nationalists.


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1. The US media have given scant coverage to the Selous Scouts, an elite counter-insurgency unit in the Smith army which impersonates guerrillas and commits atrocities in order to discredit the authentic liberation forces. Their activities make it extremely difficult to tell which side is in fact responsible for any atrocity. In the eyes of the African people, the Scouts are the real terrorists and would not shrink from murdering missionaries if it would serve their cause. The Commission for Justice and Peace in Rhodesia had gathered significant evidence linking the Scouts with the death of seven missionaries at St. Paul’s Mission in February, 1977 as well as to several major massacres of African civilians which had been blamed on the guerillas.

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2. Missionaries who have stayed in rural areas have generally formed a working relationship with the liberation forces in their region. Some church personnel provide food, shelter and medicine to the liberation army. It is therefore much more likely that missionaries would be viewed as enemy targets by the Smith regime than by the guerillas. The church, as a rule, does not report the presence of guerillas, a crime that carries a maximum penalty of death. It is missionaries who have witnessed and exposed torture and ill-treatment of African civilians by the security forces.

Several church people who have been killed were firm supporters of the Patriotic Front. One of the first victims, Bishop Adolph Schmitt, was a life-long friend of Patriotic Front leader Joshua Nkomo. The Pentacostals who were the most recent victims were reportedly cooperating with the liberation forces in their area. On the other hand, missionaries of churches which support the regime, such as the Dutch Reformed Church and the Anglicans, have never been touched.
The campaign against the Roman Catholic Church by the Smith regime is deliberate and calculated because of the stiff resistance which that Church has put up against the injustice and mass murder of people... Smith, in an attempt to cover up these atrocities, has accused us of committing them... The truth is that the white missionaries are being sacrificed by the Smith regime on the mistaken belief that the gullible Western world will believe his side and see justice in his cause and injustice in ours.

Robert Mugabe, President of ZANU
U.N. Conference on Zimbabwe and Namibia
Maputo, Mozambique, May 16, 1977

It is a wicked lie for anybody to suggest that freedom fighters are molesting or killing missionaries... Those who have left the country because they have been deported or because they could not stand the oppressive system in our country, or because they feared for their lives, must know that they will be needed in a free Zimbabwe. We shall take trouble to bring them back to continue to perform their invaluable service.

Joshua Nkomo, President of ZAPU
Lusaka Radio, September 1977

Propaganda has been a powerful weapon in the Smith arsenal. The regime publishes numerous pamphlets depicting Rhodesia as a happy multi-racial society beset by communist invaders from without its borders. A national psychological campaign was launched in October, 1976 to sell the idea of an internal settlement and to depict the liberation movement as Marxist, terrorist and extremist. This pervasive propaganda provides the government with a plausible motive for blaming the missionary killings on the guerrillas.

In Rhodesia the news media are completely controlled by the regime. Only a censored version of the killings (or any other aspect of the war) reaches the outside world. Journalists who have been critical, or even skeptical, of official Rhodesian propaganda have been promptly deported, over 70 of them to date.

Christian Science Monitor, July 11, 1978

The regime has powerful supporters in the US which help make its voice heard there. The official Rhodesian Information Office in Washington, D.C. provides a steady flow of propaganda to sympathetic Americans, especially politicians and journalists. The networks of the New Right are beginning to mobilize support for the internal settlement. Robin Moore, who heads an unofficial "embassy" in Salisbury to serve American mercenaries, has written a popular paperback containing the regime's version of the war. American industry is also deeply involved. E.F. Andrews of Allegheny Ludlum Industries (the country's largest specialty steel company which has used chrome mined in Rhodesia), has been a principal lobbyist over the years against sanctions. This year he has helped promote the internal settlement in Rhodesia and the United States.

Why we hear Only One Side

The Smith regime goes to inordinate lengths to conceal the real situation in Rhodesia from the outside world, and even from its own citizens. Since the white minority regime seized power illegally in 1965, Rhodesia has been in a declared State of Emergency. Such laws as the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act curtail freedom of the press as well as freedom of speech, particularly with regard to the conduct of the war. It is a crime to publish anything "contrary to the interests of public safety or public order," or anything likely to "cause fear, alarm and despondency."

Since January of 1978, all reports relating to the war must pass through the hands of government censors. The penalty for violating the new press restrictions is a $700 fine or one year imprisonment or both.

Journalists' access to information is also severely limited. On arrival in Rhodesia journalists are informed that they are forbidden to enter operational areas without government permission and escort. This includes almost the entire country except for the cities of Bulawayo and Salisbury.

They are also forbidden to visit the government's "protected villages," in which one-third of the rural population is restricted. Because of the racial segregation enforced by the Land Tenure Act, it is also difficult for white journalists to visit African townships or to talk to Africans without drawing the at-
tention of the police. Reporters are usually tailed by
the Special Branch of the police and their hotel
rooms are often searched.

The government also controls journalists by issuing
them work permits for a limited period of 29 days.
If their reporting is not acceptable to the regime they
will not be granted an extension.

During briefings by military personnel, journalists
are fed the regime’s side of the war and also dis­
couraged from talking with Africans. They are in­
doctrinated with the stereotype of Africans as hostile,
anti-white, and tribally oriented. With this kind of
introduction it is small wonder that many corres­
dpondents are forced to rely on gossip which circulates
among journalists who gather at the Quill Club in
Salisbury’s Ambassador Hotel.

The American media coverage of Zimbabwe is also
biased because of the structure of the media itself.
UPI and AP are the major sources of foreign coverage
for most American papers. Neither has reporters
based in any of the front-line states where they would
hear the Patriotic Front’s version of the war. In con­
trast, both agencies have bureaus in Salisbury where
they are inundated with the Smith regime’s propa­
ganda. Individual reporters who cover Africa for the
major big-city papers and magazines generally have to
cover almost all of the continent. They can only
spend a few days at a time in Rhodesia, and seldom
have time to establish African contacts and get an
in-depth reading of the situation.

The highly concentrated corporate ownership of
US media is not interested in sympathetic portrayals
of movements with socialist objectives. It is therefore
not surprising that reporters or editors do not get
encouragement to write stories that break stereo­
types or challenge assumptions that the Patriotic
Front is the enemy. This same factor helps to explain
why evidence of US support for the minority regime—
the continued violations of sanctions, the supply of
oil from US subsidiaries in South Africa, the 500
mercenaries in Smith’s army—is often ignored. The
combined effect of Rhodesia’s propaganda, encour­
gagement of racist biases and the corporate interests
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The Eye of the Beholder

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