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INTRODUCTION

In the following pages are reproduced the recent statement of the Press Association of Jamaica on current issues of concern to the Association and the speeches which were made at the annual dinner of the PAJ which took place on December 10.

Their publication is part of the PAJ's effort to present to its members and the public what, in our view, are important contributions to the ongoing debate on freedom of the press and the role and rights of journalists in Jamaica today.

Interest in and the debate on these issues have developed and gained momentum since last August with the dismissal of Canute James, Editor of the Jamaica Daily News, and the upsurge of media workers in defence of the progressive and democratic approach to the media.

Since that time, too, the debate has taken on international proportions, especially in the Caribbean, with leading newspapers and commentators opposing the positions put forward by the Press Association.

We hope that this publication will bring a better understanding of the issues and assist in developing our ideas on creating a free press in a free country.

The following statement was made by the Press Association of Jamaica on December 7, 1977, in response to the developing trend within the profession whereby certain elements have embarked on a campaign of slander against the democratically elected Government, the due processes of Parliament, the people of Jamaica and those journalists who seek to encourage a democratic interpretation of freedom of the press.

The Press Association of Jamaica fully supports the concept of Parliamentary House Committees. We see it as a means of deepening democracy by bringing Parliament closer to the day-to-day issues and problems of the nation.

We believe however that the activities of the committees must be carried out in a manner which does not erode the democratic rights of the people.

Of necessity the role and objective of the committees must be clearly outlined and defined to the public to prevent distortion of the principles which guide these committees.

We see nothing wrong with journalists being called before the committees. Journalists, like all other citizens, have a public responsibility and public accountability.

The press is not a law unto itself. It has tremendous power and influence and therefore must exercise responsibility by adhering to strict ethical standards and sound principles, guided at all times by what is in the people's interest.

These principles are embodied in the existing code of ethics of our Association which reads in part:

"The rights, privileges and freedoms enjoyed by them (the media) are only exercisable on the understanding that the general public interest and the good of the country are and remain paramount; and where there is conflict between the news media's or journalist's rights and the community's interest, the latter should prevail".

The code of ethics further enjoins journalists to refrain from "writing or publishing news or information which is not based on fact, or slanting or selecting the news to give any particular bias to serve any particular interest".

The association has been concerned about the levels to which some practitioners of our profession have descended.

This trend has developed since the invasion of the profession by a new minority breed of non-professionals, some of whom would set themselves up as martyrs in defence of their concept of freedom of the press.

The so-called expose of conditions of the Savanna-la-mar Hospital and the work of the Cuban doctors provides a glaring example of the cheapening of the profession.

Our association regards these articles as malicious, lacking in objectivity, one-sided and an example of the use of the profession to malign accredited members of another profession who have responded to the cries of the Jamaican poor.

The Association has taken a decision to write to the Cuban doctors apologising for the abusive and unprofessional attacks on them by a section of our profession. We urge them to continue and expand their work among the Jamaican masses.

We note continuous hysterical outbursts and abusive personal attacks being made daily by this new breed of journalistic hacks even to the point of urging the people to remove a democratically elected Government. All this in the name of freedom of the press and freedom of speech.

The association reaffirms its commitment to freedom of the press, but this freedom can only be exercised when the majority of the people have access to the news media, when working journalists have a say in the decision-making process; and when the media recognise and carry out their social responsibilities.

SPEECH BY MR THEODORE SEALY, FORMER EDITOR OF DAILY GLEANER, TO PAJ DINNER

Mr Theodore Sealy, the acknowledged dean of Jamaican journalism is the former Editor-in-chief of Gleaner publications and presently a member of the Board of Directors of the Gleaner Company Limited. He had a distinguished career in journalism, having served The Gleaner for more than 40 years.

This outstanding newspaperman began working at The Gleaner as a sub-editor in charge of rural news. By 1944 he assumed editorial responsibility as co-ordinating editor at The Gleaner. In 1951 he became Editor and in 1973 was appointed Editor-in-chief in charge of The Gleaner, The Star, The Jamaica Weekly Gleaner and Children's Own. Mr Sealy retired in March 1977.

He is one of the few Jamaicans to have been awarded the Norman Manley Foundation Award for excellence and has also been honoured by the Government of Jamaica and the University of the West Indies.

We have developed. The fact that we are in trouble in economic terms doesn't mean that we haven't developed. Many years ago the people in Washington — who lend us money sometimes and destabilise us at other times — questioned whether Jamaica in fact was entitled to help of this nature since it was far above the median line of the economic circumstances of the nations of the world.

And those of us, Mr Minister, like yourself, who have been to depressed areas will agree that in fact we have no tangible signs of the kinds of poverty that exist in a great many parts of the world.

We are poor yes. We are also proud. But we are not in abject poverty unless we agree that we want to make things better. But we can't start out by saying we are no good in order to make things better. So I think we are playing ourselves down a bit. But we are developed. God bless us.

A country must have honour

Now, one of my many friends there who is an economist says to me that with our foreign exchange deficiency, if we had more tourists, hotels back in private ownership and occupied by paying guests who do not take out the carpets and the towels, and if we went back to producing half million tons of sugar a year, and if we went back to producing 200,000 tons of export bananas a year, and if we hadn't promised the Americans to stop the ganja trade, we would have no adverse balance of payments. The ganja trade alone accounts for half of our adverse balance of payments. And such is life. And there are other ways a country must have some honour in its dealings and we did promise those awful Americans that we would try and stop this illicit trade and make their country one of the best countries of the world.

So while our Government is under criticism for this, that and the other, let us recall and remember that behind all this foreign-exchange deficiency is empty hotels, no ganja planes, shortage of sugar production, shortage of banana production and even now, Seprod will tell us, shortage of coconut oil. So we are going through very difficult trials. So what is the role of the journalists in all this? Mark Twain said, when in doubt tell the truth.

Recently our Association has been involved in an inquiry about one of our publications which I think should have been referred to the Press Council, which came about largely as a result of one of our past Presidents of this Association. The Press Council is a body — at the head of which is a great jurist — the head of the Norman Manley Law School — and I recommend to our executive that sometimes they consider that when they have a hot ball pass it to the Press Council.

This Government is a socialist Government. But it is not a dialectically socialist Government. It's a humanistic socialist Government. Whether you can let Socialism work without cruelty, without repression, is an experiment that this Government is making.

So let us not become jargon-minded and trot out all the craziness. Now most people in any conversation now especially the articulate political journalist; every other word is "right"; "right?" (*laughter*) as if it's a semi-colon. And I think we should go back to our own way of free speech and give up dialectic and ask the Minister not to say "right" any time tonight.

False Journalism

There is another type of journalists, who are not writing for the public but are writing to outdo each other. They are largely our columnists. I once fired one of my columnists because he kept writing to impress other columnists (*Applause*).

They are writing not so much for you and me and the general public as to outdo one another; and I think that is false journalism. I have no more control over them than you have, but the fact is that I would like to throw out tonight a suggestion that they are getting too self-important, and writing to titilate one another. Their business is to expose, explore, explain and deal with the nation's business and not to show off on one another (*Applause*).

Now I would like to talk about freedom of the press. Mark Twain said of the United States, "In our country we have three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and the prudence never to practise any of them". That's cynical but it goes to the root of the matter. Because if we do not exercise and use these freedoms to their full extent the freedoms perish. And in this respect I would ask our association to try to get back to the problem since we have an amenable Government, to deal with the livel laws which are, in fact, the real, almost unconstitutional, limitation upon freedom of speech.

In the United States freedom of the press is an entrenched part of the United States constitution and yet in recent years, through the Supreme Court, they have brought it to the point where public men may not recover damages for libel even if the defamation is untrue unless they can prove that it was written knowing it to be untrue.

In Jamaica you write one thing about a Minister or any member of Parliament and they lodge a libel writ against you and in Parliament itself the matter can't be discussed because it is then *subjudice*. I think that is a stumbling block to total freedom of expression in Jamaica.

The media of any kind should not be liable to defamation¹ and damages unless it can be proved that it was with malice knowing it to be false — so far as it's a public man. Now in relation to private citizens. Ordinary people should not be deprived in any way because they are sovereign individuals and we should not use our power and our media to defame and disgrace them. But when people offer themselves for public service they must stand up and be counted (*Applause*).

Social responsibility

Also, to talk about the social responsibility of the journalist. I don't know whether that means they must get married or what. It's a notionally immoral profession, the night life and things like that, because that's how you get news (*laughter*). Up to now I have 20 drinks a day in various places. But I don't buy every drink of course. For everyone you buy somebody else buys one and so on. But that is social responsibility in the sense that if you go home to your wife and children every night and read the Bible and read any other great work, how are you fulfilling your social responsibility? You're setting a good example of how to live.

The journalist must go outside those limitations and move among his people, see their problems, face the dangers of moving around the country at night and in remote places; otherwise you can't feel and understand the nature of your country. So the journalist who goes home, stays home and pontificates on the radio twice a day or in his column, I think, is not fulfilling his social responsibility.

Now the Daily News inquiry, Canute. I believe that after what our Minister said a couple nights ago this is a subjudice matter (*laughter*).

But I gave evidence in that inquiry by compulsion. And I think my views are still right, that until we change our constitution and change the law of property a thing belongs to the person that it belongs to and you can't use another man's thing to do your own thing. That is my fundamental feeling on the *Daily News* inquiry but as an Editor we must feel every day you are going to work or you are prepared to resign or have them fire you. It's a bold and aggressive responsibility but I have news for Canute: never resign, you must let them fire you; I got this from a man named Percy Aidlin who was Editor of the *Daily Herald* in London. Now the *Daily Herald* in London was an amorphous creature. It belonged in terms of property to Adams Press Limited and belonged in terms of editorial opinion to the Trade Union Congress. And the Editor fell between them. And Aidlin told me in 1945 when I was there spending time that he would write an editorial praising something that some socialist member of the British Parliament had said — only to be rebuked from the TUC headquarters that this paper belongs to the union and not to the party; and he said, you know what I am going to do? "I am going to have them fire me because I can't take the strain. But if they don't fire you, you don't get compensation. If you let them fire you, Canute, then you claim so many years severance pay . . . at the maximum income that you enjoy. An Editor must be prepared to be fired every day of his life. That is how you maintain the razor-sharp, antagonistic, total journalistic quality and I'm sorry I don't have to run that gauntlet anymore.

RADIO JAMAICA

Now the RJR experiment. I came here with strong views but I ran into Peter Abrahams (*laughter*). And he had promised to cook a 'lunch' for me — an Indochinese lunch. I don't know if there is any risk in that. But I personally have always felt that no medium should belong to an extra-national person (*Applause*).

Lord Thompson on Fleet had many newspapers in the United States but he was not allowed to start a single radio station because in the United States of America, continental and off-shore United States, you cannot run a radio station unless you are a citizen. And I feel that that is a good piece of legislation and protection for a nation.

How they come to put a South African in charge is a different matter. I met Peter Abrahams in London in 1945 and it cost me five guineas. I asked him to write for the *Gleaner* an article about how he escaped from South Africa on some ship — which he did. And the *Gleaner* only paid him two guineas for it and he complained and I agreed with him, so I gave him the rest of money. I gave him five guineas to make it up. But he is a hard bargainer (*laughter*). And if the people at RJR think they have got a sort of push-over there in financial matters they have another guess coming.

They don't mention financial matters, but to have Peter Abrahams in charge of this thing, I think is the brightest thing this Government has ever done and RJR will do better, Sir, than the Workers Bank (*laughter*).

ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR INFORMATION AND CULTURE, HON. ARNOLD BERTRAM

"DO NOT CONFUSE PROPERTY RIGHTS WITH FREEDOM OF THE PRESS"

Mr Chairman, Guest of Honour, Dr Theodore Sealy, President and members of the Press Association of Jamaica, Ladies and Gentlemen:

First, permit me to bring to this gathering the sincere greetings of the Hon. Michael Manley, Prime Minister of Jamaica.

I am particularly happy to be associated with this activity which honours an outstanding Jamaican and brings together fellow workers in this important field of communications. Dr Sealy has been honoured by the Government of Jamaica, the Norman Manley Foundation and the University of the West Indies, and it is only fitting that on this occasion, we again recognise his achievements. Dr Sealy is a man with whom I have many differences, but I want to unreservedly state my respect for his achievements as a professional journalist.

Mission of the Minority

However, a man like Mr Sealy must be clearly distinguished from a small minority who have climbed into the pages of the newspapers on the basis of their social and family connections. This small minority have made it their mission not merely to criticise the Government but to cry down the Jamaican people.

Let me make it clear that the concern is not their criticism of the Government. The Government, supported by the overwhelming majority of the people, respected by the international community, has demonstrated its capacity to advance in the face of the most bitter and vulgar attacks.

My concern is their attitude to the Jamaican people, all the people, PNP and JLP. Every day they make it their duty to belittle the people, to abuse them, and to pour scorn on their intelligence. They see nothing good in the Jamaican people and nothing positive in their achievements.

Jamaicans tired of negativism

I want to state further that my objection to them is neither as a member of the PNP nor as a Minister of Government. But as a Jamaican, I am heartily sick and tired of their negativism, which is affecting every area of national creative endeavour. And I am not the only one who is fed up. Let me quote from a speech by the Secretary-General of the Jamaica Teachers' Association, made a week ago at the Awards function of the Jamaica Women Teachers' Association:

"Everyday I take up a certain newspaper, she said, and from the first to the last page is covered with all that is wrong with Jamaica. It is becoming almost monotonous now. We all know by now what is wrong with Jamaica. If we as teachers, especially, don't know by now, then we are poor teachers. We cannot continue to itemise what is wrong and go on in the same manner. We have to do something positive right now."

Freedom of property

This minority, of whom Mrs Saunders spoke, are calling their negativism and abuse of the Jamaican people "freedom of the press". This is not freedom of the press; *this is freedom of property*. They simply own the press and from this position dictate what is to be put in it. They do not care whether the working journalists at *The Gleaner* or *The Star* share these views. They do not care what harm these attacks do to the country or its people. It is their property and they are doing as they like with it.

Our constitution protects their property rights and the Government respects the constitution. But let us not confuse property

rights with freedom of the press. Freedom of the press must ensure that all the ideas and aspirations of the people find full expression. The aspiration of the people for better housing, for land, for education for their children, for better standard of living and a more upright and dignified life.

Repel the attacks

It is full time for all of us journalists, teachers, farmers, professionals, working people in general, to begin to repel these attacks against the integrity of our people. It is full time for us to show more respect for the achievements of our people and call a halt to this campaign of destruction.

The journalists have a special role to play in this regard. It is your duty to *encourage* the people, to highlight their achievements and positive qualities. It is your duty to supply the people with factual information which will enable them to come to grips with the problems of the country and to make the best decisions in the interest of the nation's progress. It is your duty to afford the people every opportunity to express their ideas and to discuss with one another what is the best way forward for the country.

The Daily News

In this connection, I want to express a point of view on the situation which has developed at the *Daily News*. The Government recognises in the *Daily News* another attempt by the Jamaican people to create an avenue for the expression of their views. As workers in the media, you are no doubt familiar with the history of many of these attempts and their eventual defeat. Despite the weakness of the *Daily News*, for the fact that it is a part of this tradition, it deserves the support of the Government. However, I want to emphasise that it is not enough to have good ideas; a newspaper can only continue to communicate if it is based on a viable economic foundation. Therefore, we are trying to find a solution to the problems of the *Daily News* in consultation with the workers and their representatives and other parities. One thing should be clear, in the Jamaica of 1977, the question of this paper being taken over by any existing monopoly interest, for them to add it to the chorus of negativism and abuse of the people, is not on the agenda of this Government.

In league with international reaction

Finally, there is an international aspect of the present situation that needs to be understood. It is a fact that there are elements in the United States who support the racist minority regime in South Africa, who are opposed to the Panamanian people regaining sovereignty over the canal, who are in favour of the destabilisation of Jamaica and who are bitterly opposed to any improvement in the relations between Cuba and the United States. In these areas, they put themselves in opposition to the policies of the present United States Administration.

It is also a fact that some of these same elements were among those with whom the Leader of the Opposition had a breakfast meeting in Washington, including, I repeat, the representative of the South African Foundation which is a front of and financed by the racist regime in South Africa.

It is also a fact that Prime Minister Manley is due to visit Washington shortly to discuss matters vital to the interest of the country.

Having said all this, we must ask ourselves the question — is this the reason for the hew and cry about freedom of the press, which has never been threatened? Is this the reason for the attack against the Cuban doctors, whose only crime has been their sincere attempt to improve the health services of the country?

Help the people to advance

I know it is the responsibility of the Press Association to protect and advance the interest and rights of working journalists. This is your duty which the Government supports. However, it is also your duty as Jamaicans to find answers to these questions, as you proceed in your task of repelling negativism, encouraging the people, highlighting their good qualities — in short to help the people advance.

SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE PRESS ASSOCIATION OF JAMAICA, MR CANUTE JAMES

Mr Chairman, Mr Minister, special guests, fellow members of the Press Association of Jamaica.

We have gathered that since the administration of this association was charged by the will of the majority of the membership in 1976, the association has now become "politicised". We gather also that we were once a respected organisation. That respect I think we lost in the eyes of some who were democratically rejected by the membership of the association in 1976.

My task here, Mr Chairman, is not to defend positions and statements which are quite clear in themselves. The defence of a position is for those who are themselves not very clear about what they are doing.

We will not be divided

Statements implying that the Press Association of Jamaica has "become politicised" — whatever that means, and is adopting a partisan approach in its functions, cannot and will not divide the membership of the organisation.

Mr Chairman, we hold no brief for any party political organisation, for any sectoral interests save that of our profession.

The executive of this Association is soon to put to the general membership several points relating to the direction of the association's affairs, and while we would not at this stage go into details on this, it is suggested that this Association should initiate discussion and dialogue on public issues — not necessarily those related to the media.

Parliamentary committees

We have had in recent days growing discussion on the question of press freedom, stimulated by the proceedings of one of the select committees of parliament.

The Association's stand on the matter of the House committees is now a matter of record. We would go further and advocate that these committees be used wherever possible to bring to the public's view any form of misbehaviour in any area of public life — not only where it exists in the press, but also in areas of the public service.

This level of open government is something which the country needs, and which is necessary if there is to be any credibility in the administration of the country's affairs.

On the other hand, Mr Chairman, and as we have said in our statement, there is every need for those who constitute these committees to exercise some responsibility in the way they address themselves to their tasks. The country cannot allow for this quite legitimate and constitutional procedure to be used to erode democratic rights of individuals who may come before it.

This is one point which the executive of this Association made forcefully to the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs when both parties met this week. We note that, following this meeting, the next sitting of the Committee with which we are concerned was cancelled.

We do not know if this was the result of our statements to the Minister. However, we would hope that the opportunity be taken by that particular Ministry to look carefully at the way in which the parliamentary committees address themselves to their tasks.

We will defend the peoples' interests

Mr Chairman, as an Association representing a group of professionals in the media, we cannot stand idly by and allow the interests of the people of this country to be trampled and used for personal convenience and petty party political gain by sectional interests, whether these be private or public. Our primary responsibility is to the Jamaican people. This represents a change in the direction of our Association, and it is interesting to note, Mr Chairman, that since this direction in terms of our responsibilities became known a year and a half ago, we have been described as being "politicised".

We will not allow this Association to ever again be used to defend partisan financial and political interests.

And whenever we see any indications of this, whether this be in direct relation to the media or to any other aspect of the nation's affairs, rest assured that statements to the effect that we were "once respected" will not get us to keep our mouths shut.

If respectability means the protection of these sectional interests, rather than carrying out our responsibility to the Jamaican people in the defence of truth, informative education and fair comment, and in the defence of the so-far limited democratic gains of the people, then rest assured that we will from now on ride a wave of total disrespect.

Meet with JCC

The Association is to meet with the Jamaica Council of Churches and with other groupings to initiate constant dialogue on the matter of the media and its social responsibilities.

Mr Chairman, it is not my intention to speak for long, but I plead forgiveness for detaining you a bit longer with one point which we consider of fundamental importance to the affairs of this country.

Telling blow to press freedom

This is a matter of great personal concern and distress for me. You will no doubt have heard the rumours and the comments on the fate of the *Jamaica Daily News*, one of the island's morning newspapers. Unfortunately, through a series of circumstances with which I suspect you are all familiar, I myself do not know much more than you do, despite my connections with that organisation.

If, however, these reports of the impending closure of the newspaper are true, then we are facing perhaps a most telling blow to any one of the many concepts of press freedom which are being currently defended.

This possible catastrophe has apparently escaped those who now shout loudly about press freedom. It is self-evident that the fewer the channels of expression available, the more restricted will be the opportunities for expression.

As I said earlier, I am addressing this issue from a position of ignorance as to the facts of the situation facing the newspaper. Such is the problem of one who has been on leave for over three months awaiting the outcome of a commission of inquiry.

I would, however, suggest that you all look very carefully at the developments surrounding the newspaper in the weeks to come. It is possible that what will be attempted, and what will in fact take place, in terms of keeping the newspaper going, or making sure that it is not published at all, will indicate very clearly who is and who is not really concerned about press freedom.