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# Media Policy: A Factor in the Search for Democracy\*

by Kwame Karikari\*\*

## Abstract

The need for and the character of media policy are inseparable from discussions and resolutions of issues concerning societal control and domination. This article argues that from available evidence, the NRC/SMC and PNDC military regimes in Ghana show tendencies towards eroding the independence of editors and journalists in the state-owned press; they also deny access to these editors of opinions or demands from sections of the public that are not complementary to the regimes. In addressing the issues of media policy, therefore, one cannot escape addressing the larger issue of how and who rules society, i.e. what is political framework for an appropriate media policy?

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## Politique des médias: un facteur important dans la lutte pour la démocratie

### Résumé

Le besoin et le caractère d'une politique des médias sont des éléments qu'on ne peut pas isoler des discussions et résolutions sur les problèmes concernant le contrôle et la domination de la société. Cet article indique qu'à partir des preuves disponibles, les régimes militaires ghanéens du NRC/SMC et PDNC ont montré des tendances à empiéter sur la liberté des rédacteurs et journalistes de la presse gouvernementale. Ces rédacteurs sont privés de l'accès aux idées et besoins des sections du public qui ne sont pas nécessairement pro-gouvernementales. Ainsi donc, quand on s'embarque sur l'analyse de la politique de médias, on ne peut s'empêcher de toucher la question cruciale, à savoir comment gouverne-t-on la société et qui la gouverne et par exemple, quel est le meilleur contexte politique pour une meilleure politique des médias.

## Introduction

Under the administration of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), many seminars, workshops and symposia have been organized for practitioners in the state-owned media houses. A good many of them have even involved foreign media experts and organizations and much effort and finance have been invested.<sup>1</sup> They have been ostensibly aimed at raising the standard of the journalists' professional performance. Thus, if by their numbers alone these educational activities result in high professional standards on one hand and, on the other, imbue a press system with generally acceptable and recognizable attributes of freedom, Ghana's newspaper press would be above much of the reproach hurled at it.

Similarly, in the first five years of PNDC reign, defence committees,<sup>2</sup> labour unions, religious groups, student bodies, professional bodies, women's groups and farmers' associations around the country held public discussions of the role of the press in national development and in political processes. Several times, topics included issues on press freedom. These are all indications of a high level of public awareness of, and/or desire for the central role of the press in social processes for political liberty and socio-economic progress.

These activities, it is argued, may be identified as part, albeit a spontaneous one, of the search for a press system which may correspond to an ideal of press freedom and responsibility — an ideal whose definition is likely to differ from government to government in Ghana's history, and may vary also for the different social forces along the political-economic spectrum of society. It is an ideal, however, whose realization would have to be striven for, peacefully or otherwise, since, it is contended, this concern for an ideal press system is integral to the strivings for political power and liberty.

That the different social forces and political institutions would have conflicting appreciations of the role of the press, and may even contend over what constitutes the press' exercise of its 'freedom' and responsibility, can be gleaned from the following examples of political experience in the first five years of PNDC authority:

- (i) In the turbulent months of 1982, the masses of urban working classes were propelled as never before into militant class struggles by the December 31 coup and its call for 'revolution'. Apparently agitated by what they considered 'reactionary propaganda', People's and Workers' Defence Committees in Accra attacked and forcibly closed down *The Echo* and *The Free Press*, two privately-owned newspapers, expressing views independent from and contrary to prevailing policies and actions of the regime, its mass supporters at the time and its media.

- (ii) Similarly, in 1983, University of Ghana students initially supportive of, but by then apparently disenchanted with, the PNDC and angered by what they saw as the state-owned press' perversion of their views and demands, stormed the offices of the *The Ghanaian Times* in an adventure that ended in a melee of clubs and fisticuffs with workers protecting their plant (as well as, in those days, 'their' government).
- (iii) On March 6, 1983, the Chairman of the PNDC's Independence Day broadcast made an obvious hint at the Council's 'reconciliation policy' toward political forces attacked by or alienated from the PNDC's initial radical left-seeming actions. A key element in the broadcast was a scathing attack on the then heads of the state-owned media as people imposing their 'minority ideology' on the country. His solution? A call to the P/WDCs to intervene to determine how the media should be run.<sup>3</sup>

These represent highlights of the more dramatic struggles and debates over the performance, role and freedom of the press in the first five-year period of the PNDC.

Many more statements, public pronouncements and other expressions of dissatisfaction have been made. But a highly significant turn of events in the coverage of the press since about mid-1984, and coinciding with the full implementation of the PNDC's IMF/World Bank-dictated Structural Adjustment Programme, is the almost sudden relegation of the working class from the pedestal of 'back-bone of the revolution' to virtual foes of the 'revolution'. This 'ideological onslaught' on the working class impelled the TUC to issue a 10-page press statement against the 'lies being spread about workers and the TUC... to make workers scapegoats for the economic problems of the nation'.<sup>4</sup> Not unexpectedly, none of the state-owned press carried this, and any other subsequent critical TUC statement.

For that matter, it is not only the TUC that may complain about negative press attitudes and/or deliberate blackout of coverage of its activities, grievances and positions on national issues. Many identifiable groups and organizations of different ideological and political persuasions, including some who were once allies of the PNDC, have had to make such a complaint at one time or another. It is indeed noteworthy that, for the first time in Ghana's press history, even workers of a newspaper, *The People's Daily Graphic*, found it necessary in 1986 to demand publication of a statement in their own paper to dissociate themselves from the paper's editorial. According to the *Graphic* workers, the statement was a means of protection from public harrassment and outrage over the newspaper's editorial support for a government policy abolishing leave allowances (*The People's Daily Graphic* 1986).

A catalogue of significant public dissatisfaction with the coverage,

general operation, editorial orientation and perspectives of the press could be endless. Ultimately they seem to point to a desire for a press system that would enhance a generally acceptable professional standard, allow for freer access to people of their expressions on public affairs in the national press, promote and defend fundamental democratic and human rights, and stand against governmental violations of universally recognized rights. Certainly, no matter how the press performs, depending on its general ideological-political complexion, it is bound to have critics, and even enemies from the other side of the ideological-political divide in society. In other words, since the press anywhere, ultimately, articulate the worldview and values of particular social classes and their interests, no press can satisfy all of society all of the time. As a principal element in the ensemble of cultural communication media, the press contributes enormously in promoting and developing popular support for the values and interests of those who own and or control it. Indeed, it is largely the realization of this essence of the media of mass communication that aroused Non-Aligned nations to demand a New International Information and Communication Order.

Much as the essential character of a press system is its overall political and ideological standpoint, the socio-political system of which it is part or operates in, discussions on policy for the press system would involve ideological and political questions.

### **Objective of this Article**

Thus, the aim of this paper is to: (i) survey the relations between government and the state-owned press, based on selected correspondence in the form of memoranda, circulars, queries and orders — from governments' principal instrument of press-supervision, the Ministry of Information; examine how this constitutes government's exercise of editorial policy formulation and control; suggest how these impede the realization of high journalistic standards and obstruct the freedom of access to the press for the expression of critical or contrary views; and (ii) raise questions pertaining to the political and ideological conditions or environment for which a policy on the press may be considered.

Our focus in the survey will be the periods of the two military-based, coup d'etat-originated governments: the National Redemption/Supreme Military Council (1972-79), and the PNDC 1982 to-date).

### **Military Regimes and the Media**

The choice of the NRC period is because of the uncontested general recognition that under it the press represented an 'authoritarian model' (Hachten 1978); the PNDC period because it is the present and, therefore, impliedly the object of concern with current debates on media policy. On

the other hand, both are chosen because they have been the two longest reigning military regimes. Moreover, unlike the National Liberation Council (1966-69) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (June-September, 1979), the NRC/SMC and the PNDC, albeit with varying rhetoric, have variously pursued and expressed concepts of political organization of society that preclude parties (a principal expression at the political level of the democratic right of association) as instruments of contest for political office. The NRC/SMC pursued, up to the holding of a controversial referendum, the concept of 'Union Government'. It was indisputably one of the factors for popular opposition to that regime. The PNDC too campaigned for and established by the end of 1988 District Assemblies of people elected on individual merit or appointed by the PNDC. Both political programmes may be described as the military regimes' search for legitimation.

In the history of relations between government and the state-owned press, one important development can be observed: the high turnover of ministers (commissioners or secretaries) of information. In the thirty years of independence, there have been 28 ministers (commissioners and secretaries) of information. The NRC/SMC appointed eight in seven years of rule, while the PNDC, in its first five years, appointed four. The shortest records of tenure in that office were 20 days each under the NLC and PNDC. This high turnover seems to suggest both the strategic importance governments attach to that portfolio, and/or the possible instability in policy formulation or implementation and interpretation at that ministry: an instability possibly indicative of governments' dissatisfaction with their media's inability to woo public opinion in their direction regardless of how firm the governments' grips on the content and direction of media communication. There has also been instantaneous changes in the editorial management of state media houses with every change of government. Under the PNDC, however, there has been a greater turnover of this group of media personnel. It is more pronounced at the broadcasting corporation which has since 1982 had four directors-general, four directors of television and numerous changes at other management levels.<sup>5</sup> The government's reasons notwithstanding, an important factor for this management instability at broadcasting is the PNDC's apparent dissatisfaction with the performance of a highly controlled broadcasting organization — a medium which that government heavily depends on for its rule.

Overall, however, there seems to have been a greater tendency on the part of military regimes to depend more heavily on the press both in building their image, buying legitimacy and in effecting policies. Some researchers surmise that this is because military regimes lack an effective political organization for communication with the masses, presumably the machinery of a political party network (Twumasi 1981).

This is no doubt an important factor. However, that the PNDC also

manifested this tendency in the use of the press may be inferred from other factors, since this military-originated government spawned such mass organizations as the defence committees, 31 December Women's Movement, the June Four Movement and the paramilitary Civil Defence Organization, each with branches in every town and in most villages. Two factors may be discerned, the first and principal of which would generally apply to the NRC/SMC too, namely, that a coup d'etat is an act of conspiracy by a tiny group of people. Being conspiratorial in origin, a coup-borne regime would have only one recourse to inform and win the population to its mission: the mass media, thus the broadcasting station featuring so high as a strategic target of a putsch. Moreover, the group of conspirators is often likely to harbour within it individual ambitions, differences in political tactics and orientation beyond the common bond of the act of a putsch. Inherent in that act of conspiracy is the political element of arbitrariness. This is often enhanced by the elimination of a democratically promulgated constitution and the representative legislature based on it, which could put brakes on the tendencies of arbitrariness and caprice characteristic of military-originated regimes. The media, in such circumstances, could be very welcome and ready-made tools to smoothen the edges of arbitrary practices.

Related to the above proposition is the factor of the military establishment's traditional institutional distance from civil society. Barricaded in their barracks, the military's relations with civil society is clearly defined — maintenance of law and order. Both the officer corps and ranks are traditionally cut off from their corresponding social classes in civil society. Having little or no long-established social links deny coup makers avenues of propagating and winning sympathy for their perceptions of society and their political programme on the sudden, often jolting assumption of power by violence. The media are thus the ready-made tools to persuade the population. The situation does not change significantly even as the military remain in power. Coupled with the military's preponderant propensity toward authoritarianism, its rule constantly demands greater and greater dependence on the media to placate society's apprehensions of its tendency to the use of force.

Secondly, in the case of the PNDC, which has its network of mass organizations, the expression of this tendency of over-dependence on the media to reach the people could derive from the origins of the mass movements so spawned. Unlike political parties that are consciously created by political cadre and presumably bound by a unitary ideological outlook and a political programme, the PDCs/CDRs, for instance, sprang up spontaneously without any ideological cohesion and embraced varying social forces and political tendencies. Such motley forces could present themselves to a military regime, at decisive moments, as unreliable agents for control.

Could it not be said further, that having come to power by force

without prior mass support of any form, a coup-borne political authority would find recourse to violence a principal medium of intervening in political crisis? Not used to debate and dialogue as methods of communication between authority and subordinates, would not a coup-borne regime find monopolization of, and the unidirectional character of mass media of communication convenient and, indeed, natural to its perceptions of communication?

Whereas this tendency is common to both the NRC/SMC and the PNDC, the two have shown different styles of approach to the management structure of the press. The former retained the boards of directors in the press houses while the latter replaced them by a new management structure, Interim Management Committee.<sup>6</sup> Even then, the change by the latter did not, theoretically, determine a new policy defining the operation of the press concerned. The IMCs were, in December, 1984, replaced by Joint Consultative Committees, without the return of the boards, but now placing greater management responsibility in the hands of the managers, with workers now playing 'consultative' roles.

## The Ministry of Information and Press

A reading of records of the administration and supervision of the state-owned press by the information ministers under these two regimes depicts a glaring absence of any clear, worked out, comprehensive policy besides the provisions in the legislative instruments or decrees establishing the press organizations. Theoretically, the press houses existed under these regimes on the bases of prior legislative instruments. PNDC Law 6 pertained to all public boards and corporations, and did not completely abrogate pre-existing Acts covering the newspapers.

The various ministers including commissioners and secretaries have sought, by means of more or less regular periodic meetings with heads of media organizations and through occasional or regular memoranda, queries, directives and oral instructions, to provide basis of editorial policy, and sometimes editorial content, covering anything from advertizing to what sections of society and sometimes individuals to blacklist from or give coverage to.<sup>7</sup> It is not at all a rarity to encounter instructions on the choice of headlines or the use of certain photographs to illustrate news stories.

One PNDC secretary instructed that action be taken to 'reverse this situation' of 'low quality of pictures in the *Graphic* and *Mirror*' over a two-month period. Ten years earlier in June, 1976, the commissioner had instructed an editor to discard pictures of 'Council members who were smiling when they were reciting the pledge [before their daily business session at the Castle — author] since it would give a bad impression to the public.' In the same year, an order to all editors instructed that: 'it is not

in keeping with the revolution for advertisements to be published ... that certain businesses cannot satisfy the demands of their customers because of lack of import licences. Such advertisements, whether intended or not, expose the government to criticism and are not in the best interest of the country'.

In 1983, a secretary circulated a proposal for policy on advertizing requesting comments from the heads of media. While the proposal cautioned that the search for advertisement revenue should be subordinated to the duty of the press to inform and 'provide a forum for debate', it, however, suggested, among other things, that ads should be rejected if their 'general import opposes the basic principles of the December 31 Revolution as set out in the Directive-Principles of State Policy, PNDC Law 42.' Three years later, however, a secretary was querying the papers for low advertising fees and, in possible consonance with the cost-effective demands of the Structural Adjustment Programme, instructed that a review be made.

The similarities in some of the edicts are quite striking. Early in 1982, the press houses were admonished for reporting 'mainly the negative aspects of events'. Negative reports . . . must be carefully balanced with the positive one'. In 1977, the commissioner found it necessary to express 'concern about inaccurate publication of Government activities and programmes in some of the local newspapers'.

Both regimes have complained about the 'low standard' of news reporting or presentation. For the PNDC, however, it seems its representatives have used verbal instructions to get the press to kill certain stories or deny certain groups and individuals access to press coverage of their activities or demands. In March, 1987, this writer learned from an editor of a state-owned paper that the press houses were instructed to kill any story about the arrest and trial of Salifu Amankwa on an alleged murder charge.<sup>8</sup>

If that is inexplicable, the trend in the press under the PNDC whereby newspapers write editorials on issues and events without any coverage of the issues in news also defies professional ethics of responsibility.

What emerges from a reading of the files, and buttressed by systematic observation of the press' daily editions over time, is a phenomenon common to the press under other regimes in Africa. The extent to which heads of state are given coverage could be as banal as the case of Ghana's Gen. I.K. Acheampong whose information commissioner instructed that a state-owned weekly places a picture of the head of state's wife working in her garden on the front page of an edition. It could even take on the curious dimension of the head of state who directs his country's television cameras as to what angles of his postures to shoot, or selects for editors pictures to print after public activities such as tours of the provinces.

Our two case studies do not, from the evidence, contradict the

observation that 'The African regimes are avid for publicity. Whatever their policies or degrees of popularity may be, they all have permanent need to prove that they are devoting all their energies to working for the people.' (da Costa 1980). The principal question here may not be so much the extent of publicity given to regimes and their leaders. That question however assumes principal significance when no one else in society is allowed significant space in the state-owned press. Additionally, criticism becomes valid when this avalanche of narcissistic press coverage perpetrates authoritarian policies and practices.

The NRC may have also used the subtler method of verbal orders. But it has left a record of instructions banning 'publication of activities of the Makola Women' (April 1977), 'publicity to Mr. J.A. Blay-Miezah in any respect,' and on the anti-government agitations of the professional organizations of lawyers, doctors, accountants, engineers and so on.

An attempt is not being made here to compare or contrast the press under the two regimes. Neither is there an attempt to place both equally in their handling of the press. The sampling from a wealth of records of governmental control by an almost weekly release of edicts and orders by circular, is to show that, in the absence of comprehensive policies, both regimes have exhibited, in the management of the press, an arbitrariness and ad hocism objectively hampering the independent exercise of editorial judgement by editors. Much of the use of the editorial page to curb expression of critical and contrary opinion under the PNDC has been laid at the doors of the Castle Information Bureau, a body whose existence has objectively paralleled (and perhaps contested) the supervisory authority of the office of the Minister of Information, and used to prod editors into line without the administrative encumbrances of a ministry.

A dissection of the letters and features columns of the *People's Daily Graphic* over a period appears to suggest efforts at manufacturing public opinion by way of fabrication of reader's letters, and articles under pseudonyms. For an example, an unpublished letter from the Head of Political Department of the TUC, protesting a slanderous letter attributed to a 'Johnson Cudjoe', has showed that no such person existed.<sup>9</sup>

There is also a very strong tendency under both regimes of an aversion to criticism in the press, and independent evaluation of issues by the editors, unless such evaluation fits into the general perspectives of the regimes, or are directly inserted in the papers by representatives of the regimes. (Throughout the period of the implementation of the SAP from 1984 to now — that is, April, 1987 — for example, not a single reader's letter, not a news story has been published expressing a contrary view or questioning the fundamental premises of the economic programme).

The tendencies in the two regimes' handling of the press might as well confirm the conclusion that:

No regime in Africa is prepared to allow the state-controlled media to disseminate

news liable to disturb public opinion: the main concern of every government is to avert the danger of any shock that might discredit national policies and give rise to troublesome reactions (da Costa 1980).

## What Bases for Policy?

These notwithstanding, we have to confront a number of questions. The absence of a comprehensive policy creates room for arbitrariness and ad hoc controls of editors' independence, and tends to curb free expression of independent opinions in the press. But does it follow that the mere formulation of any policy would avert these incursions into the right to press freedom? Who determines editorial policies in state-owned newspapers? What limits, if there must be any, can there be to the independence of the state-owned press? What criteria can there be for coverage of issues by the state-owned press to ensure fairness to all sections in society? Who is to ensure that all these are implemented and guaranteed? Who protects press people from any obstructions to the full exercise of their independent judgement, and who protects the public against the press' abuses of the exercise of their independent judgement? Having stated that governments delivered by coups d'etat are inherently arbitrary and authoritarian, and that their leaders consequently bear greater propensity to act autocratically, can we expect arbitrariness and ad hocism to cease with the formulation of a comprehensive policy for the press under military-based regimes?

The importance of these questions lies in the recognition that the demand for a policy cannot be for the mere exercise of providing consistency to existing practice (by codifying it) into policy; it is more for both what is actually contained in a policy and the institutional structures that see to their implementation and protection against tendencies subversive to the policy. For, as Schiller (1976) points out:

Communication policy making and the research that precede it can surely promote a more efficient status quo .... Without fundamental system-questioning, alternate social models cannot be imagined, much less introduced. In the struggle against domination the first need, after awareness itself, is the enunciation of alternative social forms.

Debate over media policy in Ghana has progressively assumed immense public importance since the two decades following the overthrow of the CPP government. It took on an even greater importance during the political struggles against the NRC/SMC's ill-fated Unigov enterprise culminating, for the first time in Ghana's history, in the explicit provision of press freedom guarantees in the Third Republican Constitution (1979) and the institution of a Press Commission to supervise their practical expression.

The struggles for press freedom, becoming increasingly intense as the anti-Unigov opposition forces pressed for a return to civilian rule, were motivated by the latter's opposition to what they saw as the regime's

monopoly of the media to propagate its Unigov proposition: a proposition that essentially and expressly denied as well the right of citizens sharing common opinions to associate, and the right of people to so contest political office in a republican country.

## Policy and Issue of Domination

According to Schiller (1976: 70), the struggles for the press policy enacting and guaranteeing freedoms are intrinsic to and

inseparable from the ultimate issue of societal control . . . . The struggle to overcome domination — external, where the power resides outside the national community; internal, where the power is exercised by the domestic ruling stratum — is the central, if not always recognised, issue in contemporary communications policy making. Internationally, nationally, and individually, the struggle, though often obscured, is between the forces of domination and those that resist and challenge that domination. All basic issues in communications today relate to this fundamental and increasingly intense confrontation.

It is this realization, as far as the anti-colonial movement in Africa was concerned, which underlay, for example, Nkrumah's (1963) general prescription for the newspaper in Africa to be 'a collective instrument of mobilization and a collective educator — a weapon, first and foremost, to overthrow colonialism and imperialism, and to assist total African independence and unity.'

In some circumstances, the battles may be waged by dominant social forces and their press whose principal interests are threatened by an emergent new order, and may even invite the intervention of international allies. This is what happened in Chile during the brief rule of Salvador Allende's socialist-oriented, reformist government deposed by a 'harshly repressive regime of authority and property.' The coup killed the pluralist media system of the Allende period and imposed a rigid code of censorship as its policy and practice. And that was considerably made possible by the intense propaganda of the largest daily in Chile, *El Mercurio*, endowed with a 11.5 million dollar CIA covert funding to the publisher, Augustine Edwards, a close friend of Donald Kendall, president of Pepsi Cola and an intimate of the then President Nixon (*New York Times*).

In Nicaragua, as is possible anywhere else, the intense battles over the direction of press policy since the Sandinista front came to power, has produced, in one instance, the interesting phenomenon of a split in the Chamorro family along intense ideological barricades. It is a family of long established pioneers and publishers of independent and critical newspapers throughout the fifty-year Somaza dynasty. One Chamorro brother, recently allying with the contras, is editor of the independent opposition *La Prensa*; another brother edits the Sandinista-owned *Barricada*, while an uncle edits the quasi-government paper *El Nuevo Diario* (Brownlee 1984).

Whereas the above foreign examples of battles over the direction of press and their role in political processes may not be exactly the same as Ghana's experiences so far, the experience of particular presses and individual journalists over the years bear much evidence of the potentially intense political conflict inherent in the overall struggles for policies for press freedoms. Or they indicate that the level of intensity or forms of struggle over press policy would be in consonance with the level of intensity of political conflicts in society. According to Mahle and Richter (1974):

Communication policies are sets of principles and norms established to guide the behaviour of communication systems. They are shaped over time in the context of society's general approach to communication and to the media. Emanating from political ideologies, the social and economic conditions of the country and the values on which they are based, they strive to relate these to the real needs for and prospective opportunities of communication.

This, again, compellingly raises the question of domination and resistance. The press by and large operate to reproduce or to subvert social relations and conditions prevalent in an historical moment. For, 'the press always takes on the colouration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm 1984). Even then, the conscious intervention of social forces to shape media policy and strive to protect the model is likely to immensely safeguard the ideal from becoming a caricature.

These bring us to the central question this paper poses, namely: what is the political, ideological or socio-philosophical environment of the media policy choice to be advocated? Is it possible, or is it realistic (and not idealistic) to formulate a policy option without a definition of the political context and socio-economic environment appropriate to it? Can there be a media policy that is suitable for all time, all places and socio-political contexts? Must we, or can we, borrow one from somewhere and use it to try to fit it to our circumstances and needs?

Experiences the world over confirm that every social system produces the press system best suited to its reproduction. The liberal bourgeois press system of the U.S. and other Western societies functions appropriately to the needs of an advanced capitalist and bourgeois democratic system. The first article of amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the first in the Bill of Rights guaranteeing the particular expression of press freedom, shows the philosophy of social organization upon which it is founded (Cox 1981).

Similarly, socialist countries of the Marxist-Leninist category derive their system from the socio-philosophical basis of Marxism-Leninism.

The choice for a media policy ought to take the prevailing political conjuncture as its starting point, and an envisaged future political system as its framework.

Going by this, the PNDC as it exists today necessarily offers us the basis for discussion. The impression, as indicated earlier, is that its political programme precludes the right of people to associate according to their political views and aspirations in a contest for political leadership of the country. If this is not a mere impression, then it can safely be conjectured that the debate for a media policy will necessarily have to be placed in the centre of a provoked debate over the rights of all citizens in a republic — as opposed to a monarchy, a theocracy or an autocracy — to determine who they want to rule them and how they want to be ruled.

## Conclusion

It has been argued in this paper that the discussion on the need for, or the character of, media policy, is inseparable from discussions and resolutions of questions concerning societal control and domination. It has been argued that evidence from records of the mode of supervision of the press by the NRC/SMC and PNDC military regimes show a tendency to erode the independence of editors and journalists on the state-owned presses, and does exclude from access to these media opinions and expressions of demands from sections of the public that are not exactly complementary to the regimes. Thus, ultimately, these regimes have shown great propensity toward monopolizing access to the press and thereby curbing press freedoms.

Finally, the paper has attempted to raise the issue that in order to realistically address the problem of a media policy that enhances independence of judgement of the press people in exercising their professional responsibilities, and that creates conditions for the realization of the role of the press approximating that of a defender of and fighter for democracy and social progress, who decides who rules, and how society is ruled, are an unavoidable questions.

What, simply put, is the potential framework for a media policy?

## Notes

1. Both the International Institute for Journalism in the two Berlins (Federal Republic and Democratic Republic of Germany) have participated in some of these seminars and workshops.
2. *On seizing power by the December 31, 1981 coup d'etat*, Flt. Lt. Jerry J. Rawlings made a call for people to organize defence committees and work places. They were, respectively, called the People's and Worker's Defence Committees until December, 1984, when they were renamed Committees for the Defence of the Revolution with accompanying changes in their political influence.
3. Radio and TV broadcast by the Chairman of the PNDC, Independence Day, March 6, 1983.
4. TUC statement on 'Current Attacks on the Labour Movement — Response of the Trades Union Congress', Accra, October 10, 1986.

5. In November, 1988, for example, about 40 Ghana Broadcasting Corporation staff, including the entire union executive, were arrested, many detained for about a month, and all dismissed following an industrial dispute. See *West Africa Magazine*, November 14-20, 1988.
6. PNDC Law 6, 1982. At the end of 1988, the government restored the boards of directors of the GBC and the Ghana News Agency.
7. The references to records here are from files on correspondence to editors from 1973-1986 made available to me under permission from the Ministry of Information.
8. Salifu Amankwaa, a Warrant officer of the Ghana Army was appointed by the PNDC charged with supervising the beautification of the area around the Kwame Nkrumah Circle in Accra. There was widespread public disapproval of his authoritarian methods of handling the public. In 1987 he was convicted of murder and sentenced to die by firing squad. The PNDC freed him on amnesty in December, 1988.
9. Letter to PNDC Secretary for Information, 5 August, 1986, from Head of TUC Political Department entitled 'Unfair Reporting'. It refers to a letter by 'one Johnson Cudjoe' in *The People's Daily Graphic*, July 7, 1986.

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