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**THE MEYER COMMISSION OF INQUIRY**

‘Is there any reason why a highly developed country like South Africa should decide in advance to keep a new technical development of any kind out of the country?’<sup>1</sup>

*- Meyer Commission Report, 1971*

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<sup>1</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

## 1. Introduction

Five months after the moon landing, on 15 December 1969, the South African government appointed the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television, which would be chaired by television's erstwhile enemy, SABC and Broederbond chairman Piet Meyer. The Commission was asked to make recommendations about the desirability and nature of a television service for South Africa.

Although this was a welcome step towards the possible introduction of television, not everybody applauded the appointment. According to opposition members from the UP and the PP, the fact that the Commission had to decide whether or not South Africa should get television was a waste of time and taxpayers' money. UP member E. G. Malan accused the NP of being so internally divided that they could not make a decision themselves, even though television was clearly a desirable medium. Opposition members were furthermore not impressed by the Commission's points of reference and composition, and complained about its slowness, methods and secrecy.<sup>2</sup>

Resistance also came from Albert Hertzog and his newly formed HNP, who had not changed their position on television's undesirability. Hertzog suggested that the NP had already decided to introduce the 'little bioscope' and that the Commission was merely a formality.<sup>3</sup>

The two opposition sides – the UP and PP on the one, and the HNP on the other – therefore had different reasons to criticise the Commission. While the one thought the Commission was meant to advise and influence the government on a subject that actually needed no further discussion, the other believed that the Commission was just a matter of red tape, and a mouthpiece of the government. Both sides agreed, however, that the Meyer Commission was a waste of time and money. Historian Saul Dubow echoes some of these concerns about commissions of inquiry: 'Governments often appoint commissions as a way of testing the political climate or, more cynically,

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<sup>2</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, cols. 818-822; RSA, *Hansard* 29, 1970-08-10, cols. 1381-1417.

<sup>3</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, cols. 828-829.

to defer action on tricky problems.’<sup>4</sup> In other words, according to Dubow, commissions give government a chance to ‘gain time’, even though the commission might tell them what they already know, or would like to hear.

Nevertheless, the NP government insisted that the matter of television should be thoroughly investigated by a body of experts so that South Africa could, if it did get television, decide on the best technology and structures right from the start. A commission, they argued, would prevent South Africa from making the same mistakes other countries had made when they introduced television.<sup>5</sup>

## **2. The Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television**

### **a. Composition**

The Commission consisted of thirteen prominent figures in South African cultural life. Among the commission members were H. B. Thom, Chairman of the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurvereniginge (Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Societies, FAK); P. J. Riekert, advisor to the Prime Minister; S. M. Naudé, president of the CSIR; N. Sieberhagen, rector of the University College of the Western Cape and former chair of the South African Teachers’ Union; O. P. F. Horwood, the president of the University of Natal Athletic Union and principal and vice-chancellor of the University of Natal; Bishop R. W. F. Cowdry, Anglican Assistant Bishop of Grahamstown; and G. J. Beukes, member of the Board for Art and Humanities of the South African Academy.<sup>6</sup>

The opposition was critical of the commission’s make-up: of the thirteen members, only four were English-speaking. This, argued UP member E. G. Malan, was not representative of and thus not fair to both sections of the (white) South African population. What is more, a number of the Afrikaans members were also members of the Broederbond, and Horwood, although English-speaking, was an NP senator. Far

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<sup>4</sup> S. Dubow, Introduction, in S. Dubow & A. Jeeves (eds), *South Africa’s 1940s. Worlds of Possibilities*, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-09, col. 554.

<sup>6</sup> P. J. Meyer, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television, p.v; P. J. Gibson (ed.), *Who’s Who in South Africa*, 1969, pp.659, 936, 793, 699, 866, 478; T. Roberts (ed.), *Who’s Who in South Africa*, 1971, pp.153, 699.

from being an objective body, Malan contended, the Commission was simply appointed from the ranks of the NP's close supporters.<sup>7</sup> Instead of independent and authoritative recommendations, these supporters would therefore merely say what the government already knew and wanted to hear. Malan's argument mirrored Hertzog's remark that the Commission was just a formality that would reflect views that the government had already formed for itself. But according to Hertzog, the NP had already made up its mind about television. The UP, on the other hand, suggested that the NP was too weak to make up its own mind and therefore needed guidance. By appointing the Commission from within its own ranks, however, the NP ensured that the Commission's recommendations would fall within the framework of NP ideology and policies.

Malan continued: not only was the English population and the opposition misrepresented, but the commission had no members to represent the industries that would be most affected by television, namely the press, the advertising industry, and the entertainment and sports industries. Nor were there any women on the commission. Malan believed this was a great oversight: 'Surely the mothers of South Africa are the people really to decide on the effect of television on family life.'<sup>8</sup>

### **b. Points of reference**

President J. J. Fouché's mandate to the commission included nine points of reference to guide the research and recommendations, namely the composition of the population; television's potential harmful influence on the public; its consequences for the press, film and entertainment industries; the cost of a country-wide service and its influence on the national economy; television's effects on manpower; the effects of technological advancements (particularly satellite broadcasts) if a television service were or were *not* introduced; technical standards for television sets; the most appropriate type of service (technically and economically); and whether the service would be able to provide enough high-quality television programmes.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, col. 819.

<sup>8</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 28, 1970-02-11, col. 819.

<sup>9</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.v-vi.

The government gave the commission full authority to decide whom to interview, as well as unlimited access to government documents needed to conduct the research. Nevertheless, the state president's mandate stipulated a very specific framework for a possible television service. If television was introduced, it would have to be under the state's control. Furthermore, the service would have to be bilingual for white people and multilingual for black people. It could not supplant the press and film industry – in other words, it could not take over the functions of these industries. Instead, it had to complement these roles of informing, educating and entertaining. It could also not be independent from radio, but had to be integrated with the existing radio service. Lastly, South African television would have to be a cultural service with strict control over television programmes. In other words, television programmes would have to contribute to the cultural life of South Africans, and not just provide cheap entertainment.<sup>10</sup>

The points of reference reflected the fears and concerns about the effects on television on South African society. In the television debates, these concerns were some of the main reasons given by the NP government for television's absence in the country.<sup>11</sup> The appointment of the commission was the first attempt at an official investigation into these concerns.

### **c. Research**

The commission's first meeting took place on 10 February 1970 – two months after its appointment. Here, the members compiled a comprehensive questionnaire that they then sent out to experts in fields related to and influenced by television, including education, performance arts, the press, film and advertising industries and the electronics and manufacturing industries. The questionnaire was sent out with an invitation to submit a memorandum covering the issues on the questionnaire, as well as any other aspects *not* dealt with on the survey. This invitation also went out to 125 organisations representing public opinion, such as churches, cultural organisations,

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<sup>10</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vi.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter III, pp.66-91.

women's organisations, the Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns<sup>12</sup> and the English Academy.<sup>13</sup>

According to the commission, the organisations approached were 'representative of all sectors of public opinion and all experts and interested groups in the country'<sup>14</sup>. This 'public', however, was meant to consist of the white Christian population, just as Malan spoke of the 'two sectors of South African society' to be Afrikaans- and English-speaking white people. No mention was made of other cultural or religious groups.

After receiving 95 memoranda and a few additional interviews, the commission made their recommendations. Their report was a comprehensive, nine-chapter document that detailed the worldwide development of television, the medium's role in society, and recommendations for a South African television service – all within the framework of the government's terms of reference.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the questionnaires, Commission members made their own investigations. Chairman P. J. Meyer travelled to Australia, Japan, the USA, Canada, Brazil and Argentina to discuss issues such as management, administration and finances with leading television experts. Commission secretary J. H. T. Schutte, who was also the SABC Director of Programmes, researched programme aspects, particularly with regard to colour broadcasts.<sup>16</sup>

### **3. The Commission's report and recommendations**

#### **a. Television or not?**

The commission found that a South African television service had not only become technically possible, but indeed a necessity. To reach this conclusion, the commission

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<sup>12</sup> The South African Academy for Science and Culture

<sup>13</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>14</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>15</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.vii.

<sup>16</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.7.

asked the question: ‘Does South Africa need an additional medium of communication?’<sup>17</sup>

The question may rightly be asked ... whether South Africa with its modern postal, telegraph and telephone systems, with its extensive land, sea and air transport system, with its highly developed school system, with its extensive press, film and radio industries, and with its first-rate theatre and entertainment industry, has any justifiable need for an additional medium of communication, namely television. There can be no doubt that, without any one of the above-mentioned systems, no developed country or society would be able to take its place and play its part with any distinction in the modern world.<sup>18</sup>

But in 1969 it had become clear that none of these modern, extensive and first-rate communication systems had been able to bring the miracle of the moon landing into South African living rooms. The best South Africans could do was to listen on the radio, fly overseas to watch it on television, or wait to see recorded footage afterwards.<sup>19</sup>

The commission was aware of this. They proposed another question: ‘Is there any reason why a highly developed country like South Africa should decide in advance to keep a new technical development of any kind out of the country?’<sup>20</sup> The implied answer was ‘no’. Since its early development, television technology had evolved into a medium that was not merely an extension of other media like radio and the cinema, but a unique form of communication in its own right. The development of colour television also meant that the television of the 1970s was light years away from the experimental medium of the 1930s.

South Africa, the commission argued, was actually in a very good position to introduce television in the 1970s. Unlike countries that had launched television services in previous decades, South Africa would be able to conduct thorough scientific research into the problems of television, as experienced in other countries, *before* its introduction.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

<sup>18</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter IV, pp.111-119.

<sup>20</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.14.

<sup>21</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.15.

Technically, South Africa also had an advantage. In other countries, the television service had to experience the growing pains of a very young medium and adapt to its technical limitations and developments. This aspect was perhaps most visible in terms of colour television. Countries that had introduced television when only black-and-white broadcasts were possible, had television sets that could only receive monochrome transmissions. When colour television was developed, these sets had to be replaced to receive colour broadcasts. This was one of the reasons offered by the NP for television's absence in the 1950s and 1960s: that television technology was still developing, and that it would cost large amounts to keep up with the developments.<sup>22</sup> By introducing television long after colour television had become a reality, the Commission pointed out, South Africa would be able to manufacture and trade colour-compatible sets right from the start.

This was a very valid point. Nevertheless, it would seem that the Commission was trying to vindicate the NP's long delay in introducing television and also their seemingly sudden decision to change their policy on television. The NP was neither neglectful nor fickle, as its critics had suggested. In truth, the Commission implied, the NP had been sensible to wait so long for television, and by considering television at that point, was wise to recognise that the time for television had become ripe.<sup>23</sup>

The Commission was also aware of the fact that government control over broadcasting was in jeopardy from outside influences:

In a world rapidly approaching a stage where direct reception of television transmissions from overseas sources via satellites will become a reality ... South Africa must have its own television service in order to nurture and strengthen its own spiritual roots, to foster respect and love for its own spiritual heritage and to protect and project the South African way of life, as it has developed here in its historical context.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> See Chapter III, p.75.

<sup>23</sup> This reasoning is consistent with the definition of ideology, according to which the ruling ideology does not recognise inconsistencies, but rather finds the fault somewhere else: in this case, it was not inconsistent of the NP to change their policy on television. Instead, it was television's role in NP ideology that changed. See 'Definition of concepts', p.23.

<sup>24</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

Television could therefore play a positive role in the country's religious, spiritual, cultural, social and economic life, provided that the television service was of a high quality. The commission felt strongly that television could, and should, be used for education. In a formal sense, it would make a useful teaching tool in schools and other education institutions. But it would also serve as an informal teaching tool by fostering pride in the identities and cultures of the different cultural groups in South Africa.<sup>25</sup>

Apart from education, television would also have a good impact on recreation. According to the commission, the fact that South Africa was becoming a technological society meant that people would have more free time on their hands. If people were then able to watch high-quality television programmes in their spare time, it could enrich them – or, as the commission put it, 'it could add tremendously to the fullness and variety of life'<sup>26</sup>.

In light of growing global criticism against South Africa's apartheid policies, the recommendation that television be used as a cultural and educational tool was very significant. For many years, NP members had been contesting television's benefits as a cultural and educational tool as exaggerated or untrue. But by the end of the 1960s, it had become clear that television was necessary and inevitable if the NP government wanted to keep control over South Africa's broadcast media. Just like the government had installed FM radio in the early 1960s to counter outside influences, it would now have to introduce television to ensure that anti-apartheid messages did not enter South African homes. A national television service could be used as a tool to support and propagate the NP's ideologies and policies in an attempt to counter the criticism from outside.

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<sup>25</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

<sup>26</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

### **b. The nature of a South African television service**

To ensure the high quality of a television service, the commission recommended specific requirements. Firstly, in line with the government's mandate, the commission proposed a state controlled television service for South Africa.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the introduction of the service should be entrusted to the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). This would be in line with the 1936 Broadcasting Act, which authorised the SABC to use the radio airwaves for broadcasting purposes – not only for radio, but also for television.<sup>28</sup> The SABC would introduce the new medium as an integrated radio and television service, which meant that a large proportion of the existing radio infrastructure could also be used for television. As the SABC was a state controlled corporation, entrusting them with the television service would mean that the government could have more control over the medium. It would also mean that television would not be run by companies or private individuals who 'would run the service for private gain'<sup>29</sup>.

Thirdly, the service should uphold and enrich the country's Christian values, its national identity and the culture and social structure of each community. This would be ensured through 'wholesome and edifying'<sup>30</sup> entertainment and reliable, objective information. It would also be done by encouraging local creative talent and by promoting different cultures and cooperation between cultural groups. To this effect, the Broadcasting Act would have to be amended to provide that the television service had a Christian character.<sup>31</sup>

To ensure that the above requirements were upheld, the television service should be subject to strict control exercised by the SABC, the viewer community and Parliament.

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<sup>27</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.48.

<sup>28</sup> President's Office, No. 22 of 1936: *The Broadcasting Act*, 1936-06-16, p.208.

<sup>29</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.15.

<sup>30</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

<sup>31</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.16, 18-19.

The above recommendations could come as no surprise, as they merely reflected the framework specified in the State President's mandate: that the South African television service should be state controlled, that radio and television should be integrated and that the television service should be a strictly controlled service that offered wholesome cultural entertainment.

### **c. Implementation phases**

According to the commission, the South African television service had to be implemented in different phases. The first phase would see a combined Afrikaans and English service for white people in the main white population centres, namely the Witwatersrand, Pretoria, Rustenburg, Potchefstroom, Middelburg (Transvaal), Klerksdorp, Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, the Free State Goldfields, Kimberley, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, the Natal South Coast, the Cape Peninsula, the Boland, East London and Port Elizabeth. This would provide coverage for about 75% of the white population, 60% of the coloured population and 75% of the Asian population.<sup>32</sup>

As soon as that service was in place, a Sotho and Zulu service for black people would be launched in the Witwatersrand area. In the second phase, the white service would split into two equal services: one in English and one in Afrikaans. The black service would be extended to Durban (in Zulu) and the Eastern Cape (in Xhosa).<sup>33</sup>

In the television debates, the opposition argued that television would be affordable if it was introduced in the main urban centres first. However, the NP repeatedly stated that if television was to come to South Africa, it could be nothing less than a national service that covered the whole country. This would be much too expensive, the NP argued, and as such television could not even be considered.<sup>34</sup> But by the 1970s, television had become necessary, and the Commission's recommendation implied that it would be wise to introduce television only in the main centres after all. This turnabout strengthens the argument that the obstacles of cost and geographical consequences did not create insurmountable problems, but in the 1950s and 1960s

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<sup>32</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.19-22.

<sup>33</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.50-51.

<sup>34</sup> See Chapter III, p.70.

really served as excuses for a government that had no desire to introduce a medium that held, at that stage, no value for them. When television *did* become a valuable and necessary tool, the Commission admitted that the above-mentioned obstacles were not, in fact, so big after all.

#### **d. Technical specifications**

One of the most important technical issues was the choice between a colour or a black-and-white television service. The Meyer Commission recommended that the South African service should be a colour service that can also be received on black-and-white sets. This was not merely a matter of adopting the latest technical developments, but was to a great extent also an economic consideration.<sup>35</sup>

It is true that introducing a colour system from the outset would be more expensive than starting with monochrome broadcasts, because colour television equipment and its maintenance were much more complicated and expensive. Furthermore, many people would not be able to afford colour television sets, while black-and-white sets were far cheaper. However, the Commission realised that black-and-white television would eventually be phased out worldwide, and it would cost far more to *upgrade* to a colour system after a few years of black-and-white television. It would cost an estimated R6 000 000 less to introduce and maintain black-and-white system. But then, after a few years, it would cost about R24 500 000 to upgrade to colour. The commission argued that it would be far more economical to introduce a colour system, but that it had to be receivable on monochrome sets without compromising picture quality. In this way, the public could choose whether to buy colour sets or cheaper, black-and-white sets.<sup>36</sup>

The specific colour system recommended was the Phase Alternating Line (PAL) System. The SABC, Council for Scientific Industrial Research (CSIR) and Post Office all found this system superior to the USA's National Television Standards

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<sup>35</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

<sup>36</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.17.

Committee (NTSC) and France's Sequential Couleur Avec Memoire (Sequential Colour with memory, SECAM) systems.<sup>37</sup>

Other technical considerations were the building of studios and technical facilities. The commission proposed that these initially be provided in Johannesburg only, and that studios should later be built in Cape Town, Durban and the Eastern Cape. Mobile units would handle outside broadcasts in other parts of the country. To pick up satellite programmes from other countries, South Africa should erect a satellite ground station. The commission recommended that while the Department of Posts and Telegraphs turn their attention to the erection of such a station, the SABC should build its own station, so that it could link up with the Eurovision network on a 24-hour basis.<sup>38</sup>

#### **e. Financing**

Before the television service could be launched, a number of transmitter stations, studio facilities and mobile units had to be built and equipped. The commission foresaw the need for sixteen high-power and six low-power transmitter stations, each of which would have one transmitter for broadcasting a combined English and Afrikaans channel. Three of the stations would have transmitters for a black service. Studio facilities would be built in Johannesburg (for the white and black services) and Cape Town (for the white service). This would cost an estimated R32 256 000 for the white service and R16 500 000 for the black service. The erection of a satellite ground station would cost a further R1 500 000.<sup>39</sup>

After broadcasts began, more transmitter stations would have to be built. Although the use of existing radio equipment would save a lot of money, the capital outlay was still enormous. To reduce this, the commission proposed that sales tax on television sets, as well as excise and import taxes on sets and components, be paid over to the

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<sup>37</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.23.

<sup>38</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.23-24.

<sup>39</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

SABC. This should be done until the service showed a profit, but not for more than ten years.<sup>40</sup>

Further financing should be received from a yearly licence fee as well as from spot advertising. The commission made very specific recommendations regarding advertising to ensure that programmes would remain free from pressure by influential advertisers, and that the television service would maintain a high standard. Only spot advertisements before and after programmes should be allowed – that meant no advertisement breaks *during* programmes, and no sponsored programmes. Advertising time should only take up 10% of total broadcasting time, except on Sundays, when there would be no advertising at all. Furthermore, advertising spots should be allocated on a rotational basis: in other words, advertising spots and rates should not be determined by viewer ratings. This was to ensure that advertisers did not influence which programmes were shown when. Preference should be given to local products and advertising copy. Lastly, the commission recommended that the Association of Accredited Practitioners in Advertising should receive less advertising commission on spot advertisements, since these would be very limited.<sup>41</sup>

Despite the recommended revenue from the abovementioned sources, the television service would still make a loss in its first few years. The commission estimated this loss at R5 300 000 in the first year of the service for white people, but foresaw that this loss would be eradicated after five years.<sup>42</sup>

The black service would suffer a loss of R5 186 000 in the first year. However, it would take longer than the white service to break even, because only a small percentage of the black population would be able to buy television sets, and many did not have the electricity needed to use television sets.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, the commission argued, the television service should not receive a yearly government grant. This grant would after all consist of taxpayers' money, and the commission felt that it would 'impose unduly heavy burdens on White taxpayers.'<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, pp.30, 56.

<sup>41</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

<sup>42</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.18.

<sup>43</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.31.

<sup>44</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.56.

#### **4. The government's announcement**

The Meyer Commission handed their report to the State President in early 1971. On 27 April 1971, Minister of National Education<sup>45</sup> J. van der Spuy announced: 'The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television has been accepted by the Cabinet in its essentials. The Cabinet has also approved in principle the introduction of state controlled television service for South Africa...'<sup>46</sup> After decades of debates, television was finally on its way.

#### **5. Conclusion**

Appointing the Meyer Commission was a significant step for the government, even if it was not yet a formal announcement that television would be introduced. The government recognised that, if it wanted to keep its political support as well as its control over the media, television could no longer be kept at bay. For official confirmation of this realisation, the government appointed the Meyer Commission.

The Meyer Commission was not only meant to confirm that television should indeed be introduced, but also to make further recommendations about the nature of a South African television service. It is unlikely that the NP would have accepted any suggestions that did not fall within their political, social and economic policies: although they realised that they would have to introduce television to maintain their position, they were still aware of the medium's possible impact on their position. Therefore, in order to get expert advice that fell within their ideology and which they could easily accept, the NP appointed a commission made up from their own ranks.

To further ensure that the Meyer Commission's recommendations were acceptable, the government gave them a specific framework for television. This framework

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<sup>45</sup> After the death of Minister M. C. G. J. van Rensburg at the end of 1970, it was decided that the SABC and all broadcasting matters should be administered by the Minister of National Education instead of the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. See SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.7. Also see Chapter VII, p.172.

<sup>46</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 35, 1971-04-27, col. 5288.

precluded some of the main, possibly unacceptable suggestions, for example a commercial television service with little or no state control.

The framework, as well as the fact that the Commission members were NP supporters, raised valid questions about the body's independence. Indeed, as UP member E. G. Malan predicted, many of the Commission's recommendations confirmed NP views and supported government actions. By finding that television had at last become unavoidable, the Commission upheld the NP's dictum from the late 1960s that television would be introduced if and when it had become essential and inevitable.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the Commission implied, the NP had actually been wise in postponing the introduction of television, and they were now even wiser in recognising that its time had finally arrived.

Apart from the specific framework given by the NP, there were also unspoken aspects of NP policy that were supported by the Meyer Commission's recommendations. This formed the basic ideology on which the Commission was based, and which would determine South African television once it was introduced. Firstly, the extent of the Commission's research showed which elements were considered to be part of South African society: mostly white Christians, especially Afrikaners. Secondly, in its recommendations there was a basic understanding that a South African television service would be segregated along racial lines, and that the service should have a Christian character. No other possibilities were contemplated.

It can be argued – as it was by the opposition – that the Meyer Commission was not necessary at all. The fact that the Commission was appointed in the first place showed that the NP had already made significant changes in its television policy. And by saying what the government wanted or already expected to hear, the Meyer Commission may well have been a formality. In fact, even though the government accepted the Commission's essential recommendations, it ordered a similar investigation once the planning for television got underway.<sup>48</sup> Nevertheless, the Commission was the first formal investigation into television and followed the

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<sup>47</sup> See Chapter III, p.97 and Chapter IV, p.105.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter VI, p.139.

example of other countries that had appointed similar commissions and committees, including the United Kingdom and Australia.<sup>49</sup>

However, even if the government did not need to rely on the Commission to determine its television policy, the Commission and its mandate and recommendations reveal a lot about the ideology that would eventually determine South African television. If the Meyer Commission was not essential for its recommendations, it is definitely of value for the historian examining South African television.

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<sup>49</sup> See for example BBC, 'History of the BBC'. Internet: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/heritage/story/index.shtml>, s.a. Accessed: 2007-09-24; A. Moran, Australia, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 1*, p.173.