

VI  
PREPARING FOR TELEVISION,  
1971-1975



**Figure 13:** 'Progress' by Bob Connolly.  
**Source:** *Rand Daily Mail*, 1971-4-29, p.22.

## **1. Introduction**

Shortly after the announcement of television's introduction, the Television Project was launched. The project was aimed at getting South Africa ready for television and consisted of a number of planning and preparation stages. Firstly, the relevant bodies had to plan the South African service very carefully. Secondly, the actual preparations had to get underway: a television infrastructure had to be built, staff had to be trained and programmes had to be procured. Thirdly, as part of government policy, a local television manufacturing industry had to be created and efficiently managed. While the structures and policies were put into place, the South African public had to be informed of the different aspects that would directly influence their television experience: what to consider when buying sets and antennas, how and where to install them, and what to expect from the television service. Lastly, just before South African television officially began, the new service had to be tested with actual test transmissions.

By the time that South Africa started preparing for its first television service, many industrialised countries had had the medium for nearly twenty years. In the United Kingdom and the United States, television was already more than thirty years old. But in its report, the Meyer Commission justified South Africa's long wait: by only introducing television in the 1970s, South Africa would be able to use the best technology right from the beginning.

The government's two-decade-long reluctance to allow television would indeed have an impact on South African television, and this already became clear in the five years before the service was launched. While it is true that South Africa could choose the best technology for its television service, the long wait would also have its disadvantages: where many other countries had had the opportunity to experiment with television and adapt to new technology more gradually, South Africa would have to build most of its facilities within a few years. The preparation phase would therefore answer interesting questions about the government's long refusal: would the NP's hesitance benefit South Africa now that television was to be introduced, or did it actually create more obstacles?

The preparation phase also reveals many of the ideologies that underpinned South African government, society and the media during the 1970s. It is during this phase than many decisions were made that would influence South African television for many years.

## **2. Government involvement in the television project**

From the start of the planning phase, it was clear that the government would be closely involved. A Cabinet Committee consisting of a number of ministers, including Defence Minister P. W. Botha, would oversee and coordinate the planning phase. Furthermore, the government had already shown a new perspective on broadcasting by handing the portfolio to the Minister of National Education in 1970. Radio and especially television broadcasting was not seen as a mere technical invention and communications tool that fit under the wing of Posts and Telegraphs. Instead, it was now acknowledged as a cultural and educational institution with a powerful influence on the community.<sup>1</sup>

## **3. Planning for television**

### **a. The Technical Advisory Committee**

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) was appointed to assist the SABC and the government in planning the general character of the television service, particularly on technical, scientific and financial aspects. Membership was made up of a number of organisations, including the SABC, the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) and the Department of Education.<sup>2</sup>

Some of the most significant matters that enjoyed the TAC's attention were the decision on which colour television system South Africa should use; the socio-

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<sup>1</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1970, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.7.

cultural implications of television; the availability, recruitment and training of technical staff; and the economic and financial effects of television.<sup>3</sup>

Many of these topics had already been covered in the Meyer Commission's report. However, the Meyer Commission's report was intended as a research project through which the government could make an informed decision on whether or not to introduce television, and on how a South African service *could* and *should* look and operate. The TAC's research was an active planning process that laid the groundwork for how South African Television actually *would* look. Nevertheless, many of the TAC's investigations were repetitions of the Commission's research.

### **i. Television system**

In terms of the colour system, the government's hesitance to introduce television had an advantage. Whereas other countries had to experiment with technology and colour systems, South Africa was able to avoid the costs and mistakes of these experiments by choosing the most suitable system right from the start.

Although the Meyer Commission had already recommended the PAL system, the first matter on the TAC's agenda was to determine which colour system (PAL, SECAM or NTSC) would be the most suitable for South African television. First of all, the TAC eliminated the American NTSC system after finding its counterparts technically superior. And although the PAL and SECAM systems would both perform well under unstable technical circumstances, PAL was found to be more suitable for South Africa's mountainous terrain and sparse population distribution. Furthermore, more industrial countries were using PAL than SECAM, which meant that the PAL technique offered South Africa a bigger pool of manufacturers and experts. In fact, of all South Africa's major trade partners, France was the only one to use SECAM.<sup>4</sup> The TAC therefore upheld the Meyer Commission's recommendation, and on 28

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<sup>3</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, pp.7-8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.6; Suid-Afrikaanse Argiefbewaarplek (SAB), Pretoria: MES. H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/4, pp.1-6: Verslag oor Sake wat Reeds deur die Tegniese Advieskomitee Onderzoek is en Aanbevelings wat Reeds Gedoen is in verband met die Instelling van 'n Televisiediens in Suid-Afrika, 1972-05-02.

<sup>4</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/4, pp.1-2: Verslag oor Sake wat Reeds deur die Tegniese Advieskomitee Onderzoek is en Aanbevelings wat Reeds Gedoen is in verband met die Instelling van 'n Televisiediens in Suid-Afrika, 1972-05-02.

November 1971, the government announced the adoption of the PAL colour system for South African Television.<sup>5</sup>

## ii. The socio-cultural impact of television

In the 1960s, the possible adverse effects on society and South African culture were one of the government's main excuses for not establishing television. Even though television had become inevitable by the 1970s, the socio-cultural impact remained a big concern and the matter was referred to a special sub-committee consisting of three representatives, one each from the SABC, the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) and the Department of National Education. The sub-committee recommended that a comprehensive research project into television's influence on South Africa's socio-cultural life be launched as soon as possible.<sup>6</sup>

The research project would be entrusted to the HSRC, who would start their investigation with a comprehensive analysis of the socio-cultural life in South Africa. This would include a general study of specific values and habits of different social terrains, for example recreation, the use of existing mass media, daily habits, and attitudes towards authority, religion and education. When television was introduced, the study would be continued to determine whether, where and how changes occurred. Initially, the project would be limited to the white population, and once the black television service was launched, the research would be extended. The research would be conducted through questionnaires and other scientific measuring instruments.<sup>7</sup> Once again, this finding confirmed a recommendation by the Meyer Commission.<sup>8</sup>

South Africa was not the only country where the socio-cultural impacts of television were a concern. The effects of on-screen violence on audiences, for example, has for

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<sup>5</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.8.

<sup>6</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/4, p.3: Verslag oor Sake wat Reeds deur die Tegnieese Advieskomitee Onderzoek is en Aanbevelings wat Reeds Gedoen is in verband met die Instelling van 'n Televisiediens in Suid-Afrika, 1972-05-02.

<sup>7</sup> SAB, H5/2/3, 299(3), 72/1, pp.1-4: Memorandum vir die Kabinetskomitee vir Televisie (Bylaag F) 1972-02-15.

<sup>8</sup> P. J. Meyer, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters Relating to Television*, p.16.

many decades been a field of study that includes a number of research techniques.<sup>9</sup> However, by waiting as long as it did to introduce television, South Africa had a unique advantage over the other television nations. With no precedent, other countries had to wait until the effects of television had become apparent before the socio-cultural influence could be studied. South Africa, on the other hand, was able to use the experiences of other countries to investigate the possible effects *before* its own television service was introduced.

### **b. A television service for the black population**

From the outset, it was clear that South African Television was to be segregated. A main recommendation of the Meyer Commission was that television should be introduced in two stages: Phase One would entail the introduction of a combined channel for Afrikaans and English programmes, followed by a single-channel service in Sotho and Zulu for the Witwatersrand area. There would thus be television for both the white and black populations right from the first phase. Phase Two would involve separate channels for English and Afrikaans, and the extension of the black service to Durban and the Eastern Cape. However, during the planning and preparation stage, the phases were interpreted differently, so that Phase One meant the introduction of an Afrikaans and English service for white South Africans, and Phase Two was the launch of a black television service.<sup>10</sup>

The SABC argued that Phase Two was a very distinct stage with its own considerations and problems. At the request of the Cabinet, the SABC conducted research into the matter of a black television service. The report, which was presented in August 1973, outlined the special considerations and problems of the service and made recommendations for the planning and introduction of Phase Two.<sup>11</sup>

According to the SABC, there were a number of reasons why the black service could not be launched simultaneously with the white service. One of the most important

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<sup>9</sup> M. Tulloch & J. Tulloch, Violence on Television, in H. Newcomb (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Television 4*, pp.2449-2453.

<sup>10</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-31: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>11</sup> SAB, Pretoria: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-31: SAUK ondersoek (onderneem op versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

obstacles was the scarcity of electrical power. Less than 40% of the black population would be covered by the initial eighteen transmitters planned for Phase One. But only 7% of the total black population in South Africa had electricity in their homes – including those that lived in rooms in white neighbourhoods. Furthermore, not all of those who did have electricity would buy television sets. This was a big hurdle. A black television service would cost nearly as much as the white service, but with very little planned income from black viewers' licenses, the SABC would suffer great financial losses from a black television service.<sup>12</sup> Having one service for all, or even the same programmes in different languages, was however out of the question.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, the SABC maintained that Phase Two was neither impossible nor undesirable. It argued that a high percentage of the black viewing population would be the most influential and literate people among black South Africans. Through television, therefore, the messages and the uplifting cultural effect the government and SABC intended to convey could reach non-viewers indirectly. Moreover, there was a possibility that the introduction of black television would speed up the provision of electricity, if people who were eager to watch television applied and paid for electrical power.<sup>14</sup>

Another obstacle was the training of staff. For Phase One, training was taking place in a special studio and with foreign instructors. The amount of staff trained in this way was barely enough to provide for the white television service, and would not be able to accommodate the staff for Phase Two. A separate training studio would therefore have to be prepared for this phase, which would take at least two years. In addition, the black staff could not be trained by foreign experts. According to the SABC, black personnel had to be trained in more than just the techniques of programme production: they had to be instructed on the SABC's specific programme policy, which fit in with South Africa's policies on, among others, separate development. Foreign instructors would not understand these particular South African policies and circumstances and therefore the training of black staff could only be done by white

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<sup>12</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-2: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>13</sup> See below, p.144.

<sup>14</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.1-2: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

South Africans. Unfortunately, these potential white South African instructors were still undergoing training themselves. Furthermore, the black service would have to be planned out by white SABC personnel, but these staff members were occupied with planning and preparing for the white service.<sup>15</sup>

The manufacturing of television sets caused another problem. According to the SABC, manufacturers were already facing troubles with producing enough sets for the start of transmissions. If a black service was to start at the same time as the white service, there would be an even bigger demand, which would worsen the problem.<sup>16</sup>

‘Suitable’ programme material for Phase Two was very scarce. There had to be a different material for white and for black South Africans, because, argued the SABC, ‘the Bantu’s reception ability, and especially his interpretation of the things he sees, are different from that of the white man’s. Therefore, material that was made for white audiences would not necessarily be accepted by the Bantu.’<sup>17</sup> Apart from children’s programmes and travel programmes, little of the material that could be imported was deemed suitable for black viewers. Material that *was* readily available, like Westerns and international series such as *Sesame Street*, would be suitable for neither black nor white viewers, because in almost all these programmes ‘racial integration [was] deliberately and calculatedly propagated’<sup>18</sup>.

According to the SABC, producing local material for black people had its own problems, because there were not enough trained black artists. Dubbing imported material, even programmes judged to be suitable for black audiences, was also not seen as an ideal option. And as the SABC maintained that only the best quality service would be acceptable, it could therefore not just use white people speaking black languages, because the black audience would find it ridiculous and unrealistic. Even less suitable was the use of subtitles, as the process of simultaneously reading

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<sup>15</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.2-3: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>16</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.5: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>17</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.8: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973. (*My translation*).

<sup>18</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.8: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973. (*My translation*).

subtitles and interpreting the image on screen demanded a more advanced level of literacy, which the SABC reckoned black South African audiences did not yet possess.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the numerous obstacles, however, the SABC was adamant that a black television service should be introduced as soon as feasible, and not later than mid-1979. Initially, the service would be carried on one channel that was equally divided between the Nguni and Sotho language groups, but later, in about 1989, a second channel should be added. Each language group would then have its own channel. The service would initially broadcast for two hours daily, before viewing hours were extended to five hours per day. Because of the electricity shortage, the service would in the beginning be provided in the urban areas only.<sup>20</sup>

The SABC identified three requirements that a successful black service had to comply with. Firstly, it had to be in the black languages, and not English. Secondly, it had to carry the full spectrum of genres that any other television service had, and although educational and informative programmes had to receive special emphasis in South Africa's black television service, entertainment should not be left behind. Thirdly, the black service had to be of the same technical and programme quality as the white service, so that there would be 'no reason for anybody to believe that the black service was inferior to the white service'<sup>21</sup>. The Corporation also recommended that, unlike the white service, the black service should carry advertisements from the start, but that, like the white service, there should be no sponsored programmes. Furthermore, the SABC confirmed the Meyer Commission's recommendation that the black service should initially be equally divided between the Nguni and Sotho language groups.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.8-9: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>20</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.9-21, 31: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>21</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.10: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973 (*My translation*).

<sup>22</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, pp.9-21: SAUK Onderzoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): 'n Televisiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

To make a start with programme production for the black service, the SABC recommended that the film production budgets of the Departments of Education, Bantu Administration, Information and others be supplemented to provide for black television programmes. In this way, television could further the information that each of these government departments produced anyway. The government could also help the black television project by doing everything in its power to hasten the provision of electrical power to black people.<sup>23</sup>

In 1974, the government announced its approval of Phase Two of the Television Project, and the SABC soon started its planning and preparation for a television service for black South Africans.<sup>24</sup>

The recommendations for a black television service are very revealing of state policy at the time. The NP propagated a policy of ‘separate but equal’, according to which, they argued, the different racial and ethnic groups of South Africa would receive separate services, but equal treatment. In reality, the treatment was often everything but equal. Creating different government services (for example education and health) for each racial group meant duplication of departments, staff and infrastructure, and it would cost millions of rands to ensure that all of these services were of an equal standard. This meant that, more often than not, services for white people received priority.<sup>25</sup> South African television would be no different. While the state was adamant that separate television services should be introduced for all the population groups, there was no question that white staff would be trained first, and the white television service would be introduced long before a service for black people.

The approach towards a black television service also reflected the apartheid state’s attitude towards the black population in general. It was often a paternalistic view according to which the white government could act for and on behalf of the black population. White people could determine what black peoples’ abilities and needs were, and based on that would decide what was best for the black population. In fact,

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<sup>23</sup> SAB: MES. H5/2/3/2, 305(1), 73/1, p.21: SAUK Ondersoek (Onderneem op Versoek van Kabinet): ‘n Telesiediens vir die Bantoe, Augustus 1973.

<sup>24</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> H. Giliomee, Die Ontwikkeling van Afrikaner-Identiteit, in H. Giliomee & H. Adam, *Afrikanermag. Opkoms & Toekoms*, pp.84-92.

this was part of the NP's fundamental apartheid ideology. Black South Africans – in fact, all Africans – were still 'cultural infants'<sup>26</sup> who needed guidance. White South Africans, on the other hand, were part of a mature nation whose responsibility it was to direct black South Africans.<sup>27</sup> This ideology was perhaps most evident in the Bantu Education Act. The Bantu Education system was introduced to teach black children the basic skills that they would need: as Prime Minister Verwoerd explained, 'to prepare Natives more effectively for their future occupations' rather than 'showing him the green pastures of European society in which he is not allowed to graze.'<sup>28</sup> This meant that, instead of the mathematics and science taught in white schools, black children were trained in basic literacy and numeracy skills. In terms of television, the SABC determined what black people would be able to watch, what they would enjoy, and what kind of television programmes would be good and bad for them.

#### **4. Preparing for television**

The task of preparing and presenting South African television was ultimately entrusted to the SABC, who started by appointing a Television Project Committee that comprised a number of SABC directors. To help the Project Committee in planning the television service, the SABC Control Board appointed an expert team composed of local and international specialists, including programme production consultants, architects, engineers, acoustic consultants and quantity surveyors. Together, the Project Committee and the specialist team planned out the main features of the South African television service.<sup>29</sup>

Once the service was fully planned, further preparations had to be made, such as the establishment of a television infrastructure, the training and appointment of staff, and the preparation of programme material.

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<sup>26</sup> D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.71.

<sup>27</sup> H. Giliomee & L. Schlemmer, *From Apartheid to Nation-Building*, p.58.

<sup>28</sup> As quoted in D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years*, p.71.

<sup>29</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.7.

### **a. Building an infrastructure**

A television service would need an enormous amount of infrastructure, including studios, technical rooms, artists' facilities, décor production, outside-broadcast vehicles and electronic, electrical and mechanical equipment. By introducing television about twenty years later than most other countries, South Africa was at quite a disadvantage: while other countries had built up their television facilities over time, South Africa had given itself only five years to build a vast infrastructure. On the other hand, by waiting for technological developments to bring better equipment, South Africa was able to build a state-of-the-art infrastructure even before television broadcasting began.

Within less than five years, the SABC built the television headquarters in Auckland Park, Johannesburg (see Figure 14), as well as additional regional facilities in Pietersburg (now Polokwane), Port Elizabeth and Bloemfontein. Existing facilities in Durban and Cape Town were adapted to accommodate television. Equipment to the value of millions of rands were brought from overseas, and an extensive transmitter network was erected on existing FM transmitter station sites. While the Meyer Commission had recommended that sixteen high-power transmitter stations be erected to serve the densely populated areas, the SABC built eighteen.<sup>30</sup> These stations were completed by 1974, and the next year, the SABC decided to erect a further seven high-power transmitters.<sup>31</sup> To supplement the high-power transmitters, a number of low-power transmitters<sup>32</sup>, or so-called gap-filling stations, were also erected in areas where topographical obstacles (such as mountains) created reception shadow areas.

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<sup>30</sup> These transmitter stations were erected in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Middelburg (Transvaal), Davel, Hartbeesfontein, Welverdiend, Kroonstad, Bloemfontein, Theunissen, Kimberley, Alverston, Port Shepstone, Glencoe, East London, Port Elizabeth, George, Villiersdorp and Constantiaberg. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, p.74.

<sup>31</sup> These additional high-power stations were built in Piketberg, Grahamstown, Potgietersrust, Rustenburg, Oudtshoorn, Nelspruit and Volksrust. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

<sup>32</sup> These gap-filling transmissions were erected in Simonstown, Franschhoek, Stellenbosch, Paarl, Durbanville, Table Mountain, Pietermaritzburg, Durban, Overport (Durban), Bluff (Durban), Newcastle, Port Elizabeth, Menlo Park (Pretoria), Suidrand (Kroonstad), Knysna, Hout Bay, Heidelberg, Sea Point, and Welgemoed. SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.68; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

Most of these gap-filling stations were also completed by 1974. Together, the high- and low-power stations covered nearly 80% of the white South African population.<sup>33</sup>

In 1975, the television studios and facilities were ready to be put to use. This meant that the SABC could start in all earnest with productions for South African television.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 14:** Broadcasting Centre, Auckland Park, Johannesburg.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1981, p.115.

## **b. Training staff**

By the time the South African government decided to allow television, the medium had developed far beyond its amateur, experimental phase of the 1920s and 1930s. During this time, television staff had often been able to learn as they went along. But by the 1970s, it had become a sophisticated industry that would need thousands of experts. Because South Africa had waited so long to introduce television, potential television staff had to be trained in less than five years. In the few years before the introduction of television, the training of technical, administrative and programme personnel therefore enjoyed great priority at the SABC.

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<sup>33</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.64; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.6, 74-78; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

<sup>34</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.7.

In 1972, an already completed part of the new Broadcasting Centre was set up as a television training centre, and instructors were appointed from South Africa and abroad. Between 1973 and the end of 1975, training was provided to staff in four main areas, namely operations, programme production, engineering, and television news. By the end of 1975, on the eve of the launch of South African television, seven training courses for production and operations staff had yielded more than four hundred staff members. For training purposes, many programmes were produced, including drama, children's, magazine, variety, documentary and news programmes.<sup>35</sup>

### **c. Preparing programmes**

According to the SABC, one problem that other television nations had experienced in the past was a shortage in quality television scripts. South Africa faced an added challenge: because of the small population, there was a shortage of writers, artists, and technical staff. And because South Africa had waited so long to introduce television, it did not have a pool of trained television personnel like Western European countries and the USA. At the same time, the government's hesitance in introducing television created an advantage: South Africa would be able to learn from other countries' experience and prevent a programme shortage by building up a stockpile long before South African television went on air. The stockpile would consist of locally produced programmes, material bought from overseas and dubbed into Afrikaans or English, and co-productions.<sup>36</sup>

Since 1972, the SABC busied itself with the planning and production of programmes. The SABC appealed to South African writers to work in television and commissioned the first scripts for television plays and documentaries. A large number of documentaries were filmed, with subjects such as nature conservation and ecology, South African industries, South Africa's different ethnic cultures and relations between different groups, and South African pioneers. During 1974, production crews

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<sup>35</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, pp.7-8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.69-70; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, pp.6, 62; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.42, 77.

<sup>36</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.6-7;

ventured as far as Tristan da Cunha, Gough Island and the United Kingdom to collect programme material.<sup>37</sup>

In 1974, the focus was not only in building up programmes for the official television service, but also to collect material for the test transmissions, which would start in May 1975. A countrywide campaign to gather test material and participants was launched, and programme production increased significantly. These test programmes included documentaries, women's and children's journal programmes, quiz and variety shows, and drama series. Sports highlights were also filmed by the two outside-broadcast vehicles and included the Davis Cup tennis tournament, the six-hour Endurance Race at Kyalami and rugby and cricket matches.<sup>38</sup>

The first South African serial written for television, *Quest*, was recorded on videotape in the SABC Film Studios in 1974. The following year, a number of local series were recorded, including future favourites such as *Willem*, *Keertyd 11:30*, *The Villagers* and *Jordan*.<sup>39</sup>

To augment the programme stockpile, programmes were bought from abroad and dubbed into English and Afrikaans. Programmes were bought from Belgium, the United Kingdom, West Germany, France, Austria, Spain, the United States, Australia and Canada, and included documentaries, plays, serials, opera, ballet and a number of children's programmes. Dubbing facilities were made available at an existing radio studio at Broadcasting House in Johannesburg, as well as at an existing building at the new Broadcasting Centre. By the end of 1974, 76 programmes had been dubbed into Afrikaans alone.<sup>40</sup>

In 1974, two co-productions were undertaken: *Reinaerd die Vos*, with both Belgische Radio en Televisie (Belgian Radio and Television, BRT) and the Nederlandse Christelike Radiovereniging (Dutch Christian Radio Association, NCRV), and a

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<sup>37</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, pp.8, 62; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, p.72; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.64.

<sup>38</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.65; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.7.

<sup>39</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.65; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.65.

<sup>40</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.63; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, pp.65, 72; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.8.

documentary, *Mafeking*, with French production company Pathé. *Mafeking* formed part of an internationally distributed documentary series on famous battlefields.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to collecting a supply of television programmes, the SABC began to build up its archive of film footage. These included interviews with prominent South Africans, recordings of important sporting events, news stories such as the visit of UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim, the establishment of self-government in the Caprivi and the opening of the Sutherland Observatory.<sup>42</sup>

#### **d. Reporting the news**

In 1974, a core staff was appointed and trained to organise and establish the Television News Service, while senior news officials went abroad to study television news organisations in Britain and Europe, and particularly to investigate suppliers of television news material (namely film, colour, slides and still photographs), news policy, news handling, the nature and content of television news, staff requirements and utilisation, news presentation and the training of television news staff. After the overseas mission, a comprehensive training course was developed, and a news information centre was created and tasked with building up a stock of colour slides and photographs.<sup>43</sup>

#### **e. Preparing for Phase Two**

With the preparations for Phase One of South African Television well underway, the SABC started to plan and prepare for Phase Two in 1974. The first personnel, namely the head of the service, two programme managers and five organisers, all of whom were white, were appointed in 1975.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, pp.7-8, 64.

<sup>42</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1972, p.62; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1973, p.72.

<sup>43</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.58.

<sup>44</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, pp.8, 67; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68. For more on Phase Two, a television service for black South Africans, see above, p.142.

## **f. Financing television**

South African Television would be funded by viewers' licenses. To give the press time to adapt to the new television service, television advertisements would only be allowed from 1 January 1978. Before television started, however, the SABC had to procure foreign loans to finance the very expensive construction, planning and preparation stage of the television service. At the end of 1975, when South African Television was just about to start, the total cost of the white television service was estimated at R104-million. This included establishing the necessary infrastructure, staff training and salaries and producing and stockpiling television programmes.<sup>45</sup>

The first television licences were issued in 1975, at a cost of R36 per year. By the end of that year, 213 352 licences had been issued, which gave the SABC an income of more than R7 000 000. Before television was introduced, South African radio audiences had to buy listeners' licences. These were issued and administered by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs on behalf of the SABC. There was no system of proper record keeping, and no personal details of licence-holders were recorded. This meant that many radio listeners could get away with not paying their licenses at all. With the introduction of television, this problem had to be prevented, as the licences would play the main role in the financing of the new, very expensive, medium. The SABC recognised the need to create a proper register of issued licences. While the Department of Posts and Telegraphs would continue to issue licences as it had done in the past, the SABC would develop and administer the database. Although the task of developing the register was an enormous undertaking that demanded the appointment of additional staff, it proved to be successful even before television officially started: of the more than two hundred thousand sets that were sold by the end of 1975, very few were not licensed.<sup>46</sup>

By waiting such a long time to introduce television, South Africa had put itself in a position where it had to spend a lot of money in a very short time. If the medium had been introduced earlier, however, it might have cost more to continually upgrade and

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<sup>45</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1971, p.8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.8; SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.15-16.

<sup>46</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.16, 73.

maintain equipment, even though these costs would have been spread over a longer period. But by the time South Africa established a television service, it had learnt that a proper licence record system was imperative. Before television was introduced, therefore, the SABC could put in place sufficient records to keep track of licence-holders, and thus to ensure more income.

## **5. Creating a local manufacturing industry**

When Minister of National Education J. van der Spuy announced the introduction of television in South Africa, he instructed the Department of Industries to establish a local industry to manufacture television sets.<sup>47</sup> The television industry in South Africa had to be under local control, and not be determined by foreign companies.

Within two years of the announcement, the government's cabinet committee on television had appointed six local companies that would produce television sets: Barlows, ITT/Thorn Electrical, SA Philips, Electra, Tedelex and Perfectron. The television manufacturing industry was tightly controlled by government policies on, for example, standardisation and decentralisation.<sup>48</sup>

The government decided to allow only specific sizes for television sets: colour sets would be 66cm in size, and monochrome sets 61cm. The reasons for the standardisation were fourfold: firstly, it was to ensure that the manufacturing of television components was economically feasible; secondly, to pave the way for local production of standardised components; thirdly, to simplify maintenance; and lastly, to keep price differences to a minimum by not giving the consumer too much choice between large and small sets.<sup>49</sup>

Another way in which the government kept a close eye on the industry was by ordering the six television set manufacturers to decentralise their operations before they started with television production. This measure was part of the government's

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<sup>47</sup> RSA, *Hansard* 35, 1971-04-27, col, 5290.

<sup>48</sup> SAB, MES H5/2/3, 302, 1/1973, pp.1-28: Memorandum vir Voorlegging aan die Kabinetskomitee oor TV Aangeleenthede, deur Departement van Nywerheidswese, 1973; T. Koenderman, Television: Problems for Some Manufacturers, *Gazette*, 1973-09-28.

<sup>49</sup> SAB, MES H5/2/3, 302, 1/1973, pp.1-28: Memorandum vir Voorlegging aan die Kabinetskomitee oor TV Aangeleenthede, deur Departement van Nywerheidswese, 1973.

decentralising policy according to which companies had to move their operations, or parts thereof, outside of the main industrial areas. This meant that manufacturers could not simply adapt existing factories and staff, but had to build new factories and train new staff in other parts of the country. Not only did it raise manufacturing costs considerably, but the companies were also unable to get into full production soon enough to meet the very high demand from prospective television buyers. It was estimated that more than 85% of white South Africans would buy television sets. Even without the extra pressure of decentralisation, the initial rush of buyers would create a demand that local manufacturers could barely hope to meet in the first year.<sup>50</sup>

## 6. Informing the public

While the planning and preparations for television progressed, the South African public readied themselves for the great switch-on. To ensure that the public were properly prepared for the first broadcasts, the SABC in 1975 published a number of articles advising television set owners on what to look out for in a set, how to choose the right antenna, and how to ensure that their television equipment was ready for the first broadcasts. One article even advised prospective television set owners on the choice of a television room: ‘Give preference to a room where the family can comfortably sit and watch. Consider the visibility of the screen from different positions. The room must preferably be one that can be darkened somewhat. Bright light in the room will dim the image on the screen, and a room that is too dark will damage your eyes in the long run.’<sup>51</sup>

Another article gave buyers eleven points to consider before purchasing a television set, such as choosing between colour and monochrome sets, choosing the right set for your home, and checking the set’s sound quality.<sup>52</sup>

Before the test transmissions started in May 1975, television sets showed a colour test pattern (see Figure 15). This pattern, which would become a regular and well-known feature on television, was a static image that was designed to reveal faults in the

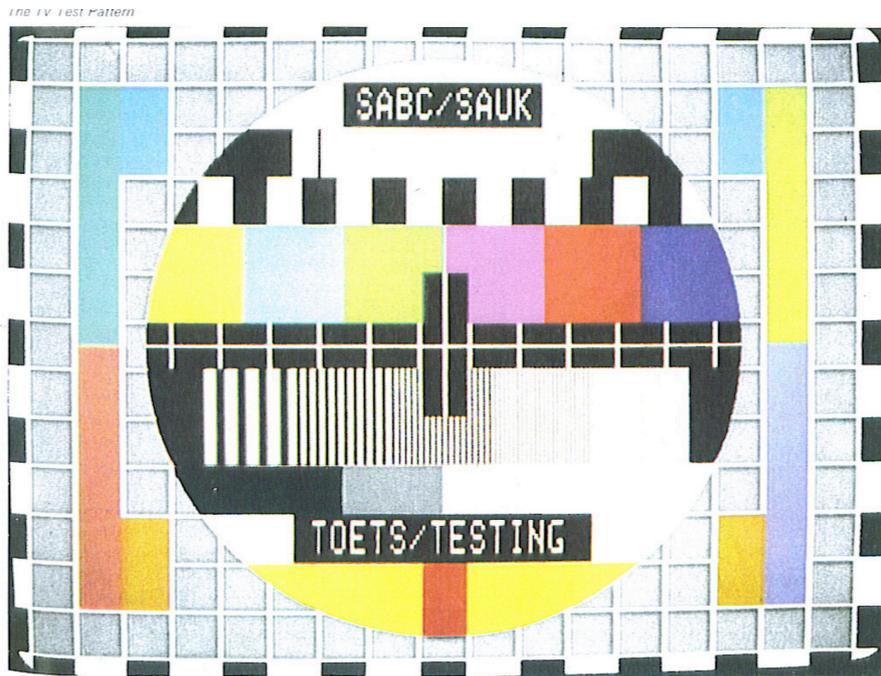
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<sup>50</sup> T. Koenderman, Television: Problems for Some Manufacturers, *Gazette*, 1973-09-28.

<sup>51</sup> Anoniem, Dié Patroon Verklik Foute, *Radio & TV* 20(41), 1975-03-17, p.2 (*My translation*).

<sup>52</sup> Anonym, You and Your TV Set, *Radio & TV* 20(51), 1975-05-19, pp.10-11.

television set and antenna. With regular broadcasts, these faults would not be picked up as easily as with the geometric shapes and bright colours of the test pattern. Each of these shapes and colours had a specific purpose, which a *Radio & TV* article explained in detail. For example, the white lines on the background were used to test the image geometry and should run straight and parallel. If this and other features did not display as it should, it meant that the set was either faulty, or that the set or the antenna had not been properly installed.<sup>53</sup>



**Figure 15:** The SABC Television Test Pattern.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1974, p.7.

Another article was devoted to antennae types and installation. According to the article, the antenna was the cause of most reception problems, and television viewers had to decide whether they needed an indoors or an outdoors antenna. The correct choice would render an image without snow, ghost images, interference, colour faults and noise.<sup>54</sup>

As test transmissions and the opening of the official service drew closer, articles on programmes and behind-the-scenes looks were published. Set building, graphic

<sup>53</sup> Anoniem, Dié Patroon Verklik Foute, *Radio & TV* 20(41), 1975-03-17, p.2.

<sup>54</sup> Anoniem, U en U Antenne, *Radio & TV* 20(50), 1975-05-12, pp.10-11.

design, dubbing and programme research were some of the glimpses offered to the public.<sup>55</sup> The publicity served to create enthusiasm among the South African viewing public, and, together with the test transmissions, paved the way for the official opening of South African television in January 1976.

Many of these topics may seem obvious to today's television buyer and viewer. But before television arrived in the country, South Africans had only heard about the medium, and what they had heard was probably mostly about the programmes and its effects, and not the more technical and practical aspects that television set owners would need and want to know. In the early 1970s, this was the kind of information that many South Africans sought eagerly.

## 7. Testing television

After months of seeing only the test pattern, television owners were finally rewarded with the first images and sounds on South African television. Test transmissions began on Monday, 5 May 1975 in the Johannesburg and Pretoria area, and eventually spread to other parts of the country. For the first five months, the test programme was transmitted for one hour each night, but on 1 October 1975 this was extended to two hours a day. The purpose of the test transmissions was to gradually acquaint viewers with the new medium, to promote the sale of television sets, and to enable television staff to gain good experience before the official service was launched.<sup>56</sup>

Initially, the test transmissions consisted only of pictures set to music. Visuals included a twenty-minute broadcast of university students during their rag celebrations; supermarkets; Saturday weddings; miniature trains; moving traffic; model boats; children playing at school and water fountains.<sup>57</sup> Eventually, however, full programmes and important events were broadcast. In August 1975, two weekly

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<sup>55</sup> A. Johnson, It All Looks So Easy on the Box, *Radio & TV* 21(5), 1975-06-30, pp.4-6, 9; Anoniem, Die Grafiese Kunstenaar, *Radio & TV* 21(14), 1975-09-01, pp.10-11; H. van der Walt, En toe Praat die Franse Akteur Afrikaans, *Radio & TV* 21(6), 1975-09-15, pp.10-11; B. van Dyck, TV se 'Bloedhonde', *Radio & TV* 21(20), 1975-10-13, pp.10-11; L. Pannall, Setting the TV Scene, *Radio & TV* 21(29), 1975-12-15, pp.4-7.

<sup>56</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.7, 64; Anonym, Lifting the Lid on Test Television, *Radio & TV* 20 (49), 1975-05-05, pp.4-7.

<sup>57</sup> Anonym, Lifting the Lid on Test Television. *Radio & TV* 20 (49), 1975-05-05, p.7.

magazine programmes, *Looking In* and *Kamera I*, went on air. The programmes featured a number of prominent personalities such as the Rhodesian premier Ian Smith, film actor Peter Lawford and Prime Minister B. J. Vorster. Two weekly local interview programmes were also added to the Test Television line-up, namely *Profile* and *Kollig*. South Africa's first television children's programmes also debuted during the Test Television phase, namely *Die Kraaines* ('The Crow's Nest') and *The Everywhere Express* (see Figure 16), two variety shows filled with entertainment.<sup>58</sup>



**Figure 16:** *The Everywhere Express*.  
**Source:** SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, p.68.

Test Television programmes also included broadcasts of public events, including the inauguration of State President Nico Diederichs, the official opening of the Rand Afrikaans University, and the Christmas and New Year messages of the State President and Prime Minister respectively. Major sports events shown on Test Television included the French rugby tour and the World Title Boxing Match between Pierre Fourie and Victor Galindez.<sup>59</sup> South Africa's first television news bulletin was broadcast on 5 May, the day on which Test Television began. The bulletin showed the siege of the Israeli embassy in Johannesburg that had taken place a week before Test Television began.

For the first two months, there was one news cast per week, after which the news was extended to one Afrikaans and one English bulletin per week. From 1 October 1975,

<sup>58</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.65-66.

<sup>59</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.64, 67.

news bulletins were broadcast daily, in Afrikaans and English alternately. From 6 October 1975, the news bulletins were broadcast live, after being pre-recorded for the first five months.<sup>60</sup>

Test Television was received with great enthusiasm. It was tangible evidence of the hard work put in by the SABC over four years, and created even more excitement for the official launch of South African television in January 1976.

## **8. Conclusion**

During the preparation phase, many ideologies that would underpin South African television were revealed. Firstly, by their close participation in the planning for television and their tight control over the manufacturing industry, the government showed that they intended to keep a close watch over the South African television service for many years. Secondly, it was clear that South African television, just like South African government and society, would be segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Thirdly, South African television programmes would uphold specific values, particularly those of the NP government. Programmes that did not conform to these values and which did not reflected the NP's apartheid ideology, would not be shown on South African television.

The preparation phase also provided interesting commentary on the government's two-decade refusal to introduce television. In many cases, the long wait was proven to be beneficial: South Africa could now choose the best, most modern and most suitable television technology, and set specific standards even before the launch of television. Since the rest of the industrialised world had had television for decades, South Africa could learn from other television countries' experiments and mistakes. In this way, the SABC knew long in advance that it would have to work very hard to build up programme reserves. Television staff were also able to get training from experts in the field, most notably from the BBC, who probably had more experience in television than any other broadcasting company in the world. South Africa was also in the unique position where they could do socio-cultural research on television

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<sup>60</sup> SABC, *Annual Report*, 1975, pp.42-43.

before the service started, unlike the rest of the world, who had to learn of the medium's impact through their own experiments and experience. Finally, the SABC had learnt to keep adequate records of licence holders before the first television licences were even issued.

On the other hand, the long wait created a number of obstacles. Firstly, a complicated television infrastructure had to be established in less than five years. Secondly, enough television staff had to be properly trained so that television production could start well in advance of the official launch. Thirdly, establishing a television service in less than five years demanded an enormous capital outlay in a very short period.

Nevertheless, South Africa was able to overcome these hindrances in the given time. By May 1975, the television preparations had developed far enough to enable test transmissions. And by January 1976, South Africa was ready to enter its era of television.