3.3. Bolivia

Bolivia, a country in the heart of South America, entered a period of major historical change in 2000.[1] This included substantial transformation of its society and the structure of its state, and involved equally significant social, ethnic, regional and political tensions. Thus, the country's constituent parts – among them the media – are constantly changing their alignment and relationship to one another. In short, today's Bolivia is in a state of flux and what is said or written today might have changed quite drastically within the year: the pendulum is near the extreme of its swing to the left. As these lines are being written, the Bolivian agenda includes the establishment of a Constitutional Assembly and the first ever election of departmental prefects, plus the drafting of a most controversial Hydrocarbons Bill that will regulate the newly discovered gas wealth. In this game everything is at stake: from the economic model to democracy itself. The media are key players with a high stake: their own survival as the heralds of free speech. But some of them seem not to have understood that freedom is to be managed responsibly, lest they lose it.

I. General Conditions

Illiteracy and education

Bolivia, economically the poorest country in South America, nevertheless ranks in the middle of the human development scale (114). The official literacy rate for those Bolivians aged 15 years and older is 87.07 per cent (2002), broken down into urban (93.76 per cent) and rural (74.86 per cent), with a median of 7.57 years of schooling.[2] These figures, however, may vary dramatically, especially in the countryside. An important percentage of the rural population, having learned to read and write, tends to forget these skills because they have no use for them in their daily life. Likewise, the difference in the urban and rural percentages of schooling occurs because parents tend not to send their daughters to school or prefer their children to work on the family farm.

Local media

Most Bolivians have access to radio and public television. Bolivian society is highly 'mediatised'. All the legal radio and television operators have to be registered with the Telecommunications Supervisory Board (Superintendencia

[1] Calderón, Fernando: *La Reforma de la Política*, Mexico City 2002 and UNDP: *Interculturalismo y Globalización – La Bolivia Posíble. Informe Nacional de Desarollo Humano 2004*, La Paz 2004.

[2] Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE): www.ine.gov.bo .

de Telecomunicaciones SITTEL, a government technical office with ministerial rank). There are, however, scores of temporary and permanent unregistered or pirate stations. In

TV, Radio

2002, there were 482 legally functioning radio operators (AM: 139; FM: 348) and 200 television operators (UHF: 76; VHF: 124) registered at SITTEL. For about 50 years there has been a varying number of trade union radios and for about 30 years a series of community radios. These are especially important in rural areas. They transmit programmes about the local population's needs and worries, mostly in their native languages: Aymara, Quechua and others. As for the

Print

print media, there is an odd situation: literacy is relatively low (see above), but unlike other great metropolises, where there is usually one big newspaper per city, most Bolivian cities have more than one major newspaper. La Paz has three big ones (down from six in 1998), Cochabamba and Santa Cruz have two each (in addition to smaller ones), and so on. There are 15 daily newspapers and numerous political and financial weeklies which are worth mentioning. Among them, maybe five dailies and five weeklies are truly influential. The National Press Association (ANP), which brings together most print media, currently has 11 members, but will probably expand to 17 during 2005.[3] The word 'big' perhaps demands some explanation: the bigger dailies (in Santa Cruz and La Paz) have a print run of fewer than 20,000 copies on their best days. The smaller ones in departmental capitals, like Potosí or Trinidad, probably fewer than a thousand. Consequently, print runs are treated like state secrets and, when asked for individually, are much inflated, for advertising purposes.

Media ownership

Bolivia used to have a long tradition of political media, and today there are still a number of media networks that are run or belong directly or indirectly to political parties. Since the recovery of democracy in 1982, however, none of those media groups have achieved any significant influence or made it into the mainstream; instead, they remain marginal and partisan. The most serious attempt at co-opting a mainstream media outlet happened in 1994, when the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) bought the newspaper *Hoy*, a fact that gradually alienated most readers. The daily went bankrupt in 1999. There are, nonetheless, radios that belong to social movements that take very explicit political stands.

[3] Gonzalo Torrico, Executive Secretary of ANP, to the author.

Internet media

Over the last few years there has been a surge of independent local Internet newspapers, which coexist with online versions of existing newspapers. Since these have appeared, there have been no reports of attempted state censorship or any other state interference in these or any other forms of the media.

Media access

Internet

The emergence of Internet newspapers has not affected the working conditions for open coverage, because of the relatively limited access to the Internet: only 3.59 per cent of the population of 8.5 million access the Internet.[4] Also, only 3.4 per cent of all Bolivian homes are connected to the Internet, but 25 per cent of the total population uses the Internet with varying frequency.[5] Bolivia has a vast and dense net of public Internet cafés in its cities of all sizes and also in the countryside.

Radio

Virtually the whole population has unrestricted access to radio, which is the most widespread form of media (75.71 per cent of all homes have at least one radio set).[6]

TV

The same can be said about open television, the only limitation being the reception of the signals (54.37 per cent of homes have at least one TV set). Cable television reaches only 6.10 per cent of Bolivia's homes, limited to those who can afford it.[7]

Print

Mainstream newspapers, meanwhile, have a very restricted circulation: even the two largest national newspapers have circulations of less than 20,000 copies each, even on Sundays (as compared with 100,000 in the late 1960s) and average sales of 8,000–15,000 on weekdays. There are many much smaller papers, some with a circulation of less than 1,000 copies.[8]

Media consumption

Radio, TV, Print, Internet

Bolivia is not a country of readers. Therefore, the vast majority of the population use the radio as their prime source of information [very often: 4], followed by television [often: 3]. The press is occasionally used [2], but the Internet almost never serves as a source of information [1]. Also, information is often verbally exchanged [3].

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4 Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones (SITTEL): *Memoria Anual 2003,* www.sittel.gov.bo .

5 UNDP 2004.

6 www.sittel.gov.bo .

7 www.sittel.gov.bo . UNDP 2004.

8 These figures are drawn from the author's own experience as former editor of one of the two biggest newspapers in the country.

Media influence on political opinion

The influence of the media on the formation of political opinion is highly significant [4]. Bolivia has a very unusual form of newscasting, particularly in television and radio: the TV anchor people editorialise on any item they choose. The media is highly opinionated and this has permeated through to the general public. For instance, one of the most influential newspapers, *La Razón*, was originally created to be 'an opinion newspaper'. The originator of this type of communication is Carlos Mesa, the journalist-turned-President of the Republic.

Therefore, the media exerts enormous influence on the formation of political opinion. A few telling facts: the current President of the Republic is a former journalist; the first Ombudsman was a journalist; a former president of the National Elections Court was a journalist; the president of the city council of La Paz (to name only one city) is a former journalist; the government's 'tsar' for the fight against corruption is a former journalist. The runner-up in the municipal elections in the city of Santa Cruz in December 2004 was a journalist. As can be seen, journalists are held in high regard. The media – especially radio and television – played a key role in overthrowing former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, and the opinions expressed by media personalities frequently become public opinion. This is because of most news consumers' very low levels of education. Also, the media and journalists have somehow taken over the role of the badly-functioning judiciary (a role that has been as much imposed upon the media by public opinion as it has been sought by the media itself). Another factor is that more than a few journalists now run for public offices – with highly variable degrees of success both in getting elected and in performing in their new roles.

State-owned media

That is not to say that state-operated media networks do not exist. In the not-so-distant past, the primary objectives of a coup d'état were precisely the state-owned media: Radio Illimani, the state's radio station and Canal 7, the public television network. The time for coup d'états has hopefully passed, and privately owned media groups, especially television networks, have proliferated since the mid 1980s. In the state-owned networks it is the executive branch which appoints the leading positions, such as general directors and editors-in-chief.

Today both the state-owned media stations have very low ratings and even less influence. The airwaves of Canal 7,

State-owned media and published opinion

nevertheless, are the only ones that reach remote regions of the country where privately operated stations do not penetrate. Still, there is a clear dominance of private media in the market.

Nevertheless, there are no figures that allow audiences to be measured: the assessments of audience shares and ratings are paid for by the private media; state-owned media do not request nor pay for any audience surveys. A private firm consulted by the author said: 'state- owned media are like God: we all know they are there, but no one hears or sees them'. An educated guess is that Canal 7 and in particular Radio Illimani have dismal shares in urban Bolivia, but they are the only ones that reach some isolated rural areas: an 'advantage' that constantly decreases in ever-growing urban Bolivia.

Journalists working for Radio Illimani and Canal 7 do not have to be unconditional government supporters. They are protected by the same laws that protect the work of other journalists: the Press Law (Ley de Imprenta) of 1925.[9]

It can be said that the coverage of the state-owned media is quite balanced: depending on the programme, it ranges between critical against [-1] to bias towards the government [+1].

As these lines are written, and the tense political events in Bolivia develop rapidly, the media are choosing and changing sides accordingly. Although it is difficult to detect a pattern, it could be said that non-governmental radio and television are increasingly critical of the government and the President, while the print media – albeit with exceptions— have chosen to stand their ground and are rather conservative.

Government press conferences

The Bolivian government regularly holds press conferences to inform the public about its programmes; all journalists have equal access to these conferences and all conferences are meant to be broadcast in their entirety.

[9] Gómez Mallea, Antonio: *Peso y Levedad de la Ley de Imprenta*, La Paz 1999. See also Brockmann, Robert: *Ley de Imprenta – legislación comparada*, La Paz 1999.

II. Legal Environment

Freedom of expression

Freedom of opinion is established in the Bolivian Constitution, in the section on fundamental individual rights. Article 7, paragraph b) of the Bolivian Constitution says: 'Every person has the right: to freely emit his/her ideas and opinions, by whatever media available.' There are no restricting amendments to the Constitution.

Media coverage

Freedom of the press or free media coverage is not expressly written into the Constitution, but they are implied. Article 15 of the Constitution penalises those public officials who 'persecute, lock up or exile citizens' because of their expressed opinions, and those who 'close printing-houses or other means of expression, or incur in depredations or other kinds of abuses'. These guarantees are suspended, however, according to the same article, if a state of siege is declared.

Regulation of media coverage

Although there is no Constitutional amendment that curtails – or extends – freedom of speech, opinion or coverage, it should be noted that there are several laws that protect the freedom of speech, opinion and coverage of journalists – to the detriment of the common citizen. Those laws are:

- The Press Law of 1925
- Law 479, which specifies who are journalists
- The Organic By-Law for Journalists of 1979, which claims the absolute freedom of speech, expression and opinion, but then establishes the limits of the kind of jobs that 'professional' journalists can hold, and that only the government will grant credentials to those people who fulfil the requirements for professional journalism. Although nominally in action today, this law has never been enforced and journalists themselves have made timid and rare attempts to enforce it.
- The Telecommunications Law of 1995, which forbids any kind of eavesdropping of electronic media.

There are no defamation laws or laws which determine the access to information and the protection of the privacy of those in office. The only law that touches on defamation issues is the Press Law of 1925, which protects journalists against eventual lawsuits by public officials. The privacy of office bearers has no protection against media violations.[10]

[10] Brockmann 1999.

However, the Bolivian media has shown little or no interest in the private life of public officials.

The implementation of media coverage is not regulated by law or decree; rather, there have been instances where access has not been granted to state documents, although in 2005 a supreme decree eliminated state secrecy in many instances.

Bolivian law does not allow censorship, but whenever it occurs, it occurs de facto. There are no legal restrictions on the coverage of people, groups, institutions, or issues. There are no people, groups or organisations excluded by law from working as journalists or from expressing their opinions.

At present, nothing could be further from the minds of Bolivian journalists and media than subjecting their writings to examination by state authorities before publication. Besides, there are neither government bodies nor commissions to regulate media coverage.

Changes in the past five years

Other than the already mentioned supreme decree partially lifting state secrecy, during the last five years there have been no legal changes regarding open coverage, but every administration has had its own approach towards media coverage. There have been four administrations in the last five years, each with its own attitudes, which have created either media-friendly or unfriendly environments. For instance, in 1999, the administration of General Hugo Banzer, due to his past as a military ruler (1971–78), was overly sensitive to media coverage (which, as stated, is very opinionated), resulting in an uncomfortable environment. His successors were much more liberal towards the media, with the current president being a former journalist.

Today there is unrestricted media coverage [+3], but the general feeling is that this extreme freedom of the press is not helping democracy or Bolivian society in times of social and political distress: many journalists and members of the media are exacerbating an already polarised political, regional and ethnic situation. In that sense, however, 9/11 has had no consequences in Bolivia. There are no anti-terror laws or regulations regarding the media or news coverage.

Nevertheless, there has been a change in the coverage over the last five years: it is an attitude change. Led by a mainstream television network, the quality of coverage has deteriorated: all of a sudden, it became fashionable to show

grisly accident scenes or other morbid, unnecessary invasions into the privacy of private citizens in extreme situations. Likewise, it is a common perception that journalists are more powerful than ordinary citizens: journalists are insolent and disrespectful not only with public officials, but also with the general public. There has thus been a strong aggravation [-2] in the quality of media coverage.

Censorship under the law

Rogue journalism feels encouraged by the lack of means for common citizens to defend themselves from media offences against privacy or good taste. There is no censorship law, but if a public official, feeling injured by slanderous allegations desires to go all the way and applies the Press Law of 1925, and a judge assesses that there is a case of defamation, a 40-member jury must be summoned (a 'press jury'), made up of 'the most notable lawyers, members of the University and owners with a fixed residence in town,' for a 'press trial'. In Bolivia it is extremely difficult to summon small juries, much less one consisting of 40 people. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that only two press trials have taken place since 1925. In one the journalist was sentenced to a minor fine (the worst penalty under the law), and, in the other, the journalist was acquitted due to a lack of evidence.

Media licences

As for media licences, newspapers, radio and television stations must be registered by state authorities in the Commerce Registry, as must every other business, while members of the electronic media must apply for available electronic frequencies and comply with legal and technical requirements at the Superintendencia de Telecomunicaciones. These are government authorities: the Commerce Registry is a simple office, while the Superintendent is elected by a two-third vote in Congress for five years. They are, therefore, in principle, politically independent. And in fact, once granted, there have never been attempts to retract licences or registrations. Until 1984, the state had the monopoly on television airwaves. Consequently, there were only the state-owned television and some state university channels (but state universities have been autonomous since the 1930s). In 1985, after being repeatedly denied licences, private entrepreneurs challenged the ruling by simultaneously establishing their own channels in Bolivia's two main cities. They were inevitably granted licences and registration without conditions. Many others have since followed.

Journalists' status

On the other hand, there have been two isolated attempts to close down the media since 1988. In 1988, the now extinct Ministry of Communication tried to close down Radio Metropolitana, rightly arguing that it had incurred an 'apology of felony' after the radio station had broadcast a lengthy interview with Roberto Suárez, then considered one of the world's biggest drug-traffickers. The attempt to close the station, however, went badly wrong for two reasons. First, the minister was almost lynched by an angry mob as he was leaving the station, and second, the attempt led to the owner of the radio station proclaiming himself as candidate for the presidency and creating his own political party. Thus, Radio Metropolitana was never closed down and it became an extremely successful and unequivocal political opposition instrument until the natural death of its owner, Carlos Palenque, in 1996.[11] Likewise, in 1999 another administration tried to shut down the newspaper *El Diario* – which was *not* an opposition daily – after a massive tax evasion scheme was proved in court. The public row was considerable, as would be expected, but the closure never took place.

Both examples illustrate the weakness of the Bolivian state and the growing strength and power of the Bolivian media. Because of this weakness, but also out of respect for the freedom of speech in a democratic framework, licences and/or registrations have almost never been refused or withdrawn on political grounds since the recovery of democracy in 1982. In that sense, the law that states that only professional journalists should practice their profession, and that the government should give them the relevant credentials, has never been enforced. In today's democratic environment, all journalists in Bolivia have the legal right to participate in all public meetings of the government and parliament, as long as they or their media network request an appropriate pass, which is easy to obtain. These public meetings are meant to be broadcast.

Today, journalists in Bolivia have the right to legally challenge state repression, as they have done in all the sporadic democratic periods since the promulgation of the Press Law of 1925. The existence of this legal instrument, under the current rule of law, makes state repression unnecessary. Yet, it must be remembered that, like many of

[11] Archondo, Rafael: *Compadres al Micrófono – la resurrección metropolitana del ayllu*, La Paz 1992.

its neighbours, Bolivia has lived under military regimes between 1964 and 1982, and that during that period – and many other periods before it – a number of journalists have been killed or forced into exile. Under these circumstances it is not possible to legally challenge state repression.

Monopolies and cartels

There has been considerable debate about monopolies and cartels since the late 1990s, but the truth is that they do not exist in Bolivia. Indeed, there are large media holdings – the Catholic church being the largest one – fostering healthy competition, but nothing close to the concept of a monopoly or cartel.

III. Political Conditions

Coverage of marginal groups

In today's Bolivian democracy, there are no sectors of the population or no particular social strata whose political concerns are not represented in media coverage or deliberately excluded by the state from their right to freedom of information.

Self-censorship

There is no self-censorship in media coverage either, although in the highly polarised Bolivian political environment, some opposition group could contend that some of the mainstream media are being too kind to the troubled government of President Carlos Mesa, a former journalist.

Illegal state repression

Today, no journalist, media company or organisation has to fear illegal state repression. In the last few years there have been different attitudes from different administrations towards the freedom of coverage, but almost always within a democratic framework. The worst kind of repression has been cutting off particular media houses from state propaganda and advertising. This has happened rarely, the last time probably being during General Hugo Banzer's administration (1997–2001).[12]

Obstacles to Internet access

On the other hand, Internet access, which first became part of Bolivian life in the mid-1990s, has been fostered by at least two administrations since its introduction. There have been no negative effects from state measures in this field.

Changes in the past five years

In the last five years, the media situation has developed to a point where there is virtually no fear of repression [+3]. This is because of the overall weakness of the state – both the

[12] This has been the author's own experience.

provisional character of the current administration (and the instability and short duration of the last three) as well as the fact that the President and some prominent members of his team are journalists.

Government control over print media

Other than perhaps during periods of military rule, until 1982, there have never been cases of the production and/or distribution of print media (the distribution of paper or surveillance of distribution systems) being monitored. The state authorities have also almost never taken advantage of these control mechanisms in order to influence contents.

IV. Economic Pressures

State subsidies

Until 2004, most privately owned media networks benefited from a kind of partial and soft subsidy from the state through advertisements. All media benefited in varying percentages. All or most of the private media receive state advertising/ propaganda. Although no single media organisation depends exclusively on state-funded advertising, even among the biggest ones the lack of it could mean the difference between profit and loss.

In more normal times, prior to the political debacle of 2003 and the economic crisis that started in late 1998, the Bolivian state used to be among the ten biggest advertisers. The current administration, however, has vowed to cut propaganda costs for the sake of austerity and has eliminated the former Ministry (later demoted to Under Secretary) of Communications. 2004 figures show that the state spent at least 60 per cent less than previous years, making up a mere 8 per cent of the total advertising budget. And there are announcements that in 2005 the government will spend only around 40 per cent of the 2004 figure. Not even a national referendum in 2004 significantly increased those percentages.

The fact that most – if not all – private media groups receive state-sponsored advertising may lead to the conclusion that the government can exert pressure upon them or that 'subsidising' networks – however lightly – might make them 'friendlier' towards the government. However, their individual stances towards the government vary greatly. Their positions range from anti-government [-3] stances to slightly pro-government [+1]. There are really no private media networks either unconditionally friendly or overtly

prejudiced in favour of the government, regardless of whether they are radio, print or television.

Further aspects

There are, nevertheless, some economic aspects, which create advantages and disadvantages for some media houses. Those media groups with the greatest circulation (print) or rating (television and radio) receive more government advertising, under the principle of efficiency. Thus, this practice creates a virtuous cycle for larger members of the media, and a vicious cycle for the smaller ones. Otherwise, the government's Comptroller Office (Contraloría General del Estado) could question the wasting of taxpayers' money on inefficient advertising and legally charge those responsible for it.

V. Non-state Repression

Repression by non-state groups

Since 2003, the year in which there were two socio-political upheavals, leading to the violent overthrow of the government of former President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and its constitutional succession by then-Vice President Carlos Mesa, there have been attacks on the press by various groups of demonstrators. During and since the violent events of 2003, covering social unrest has become dangerous for journalists, not because of the usual and predictable use of force by the police, but because the so-called social organisations – often quite radical – have come to distrust journalists and the media who are not explicitly on their side. A polarisation following the logic of 'you are either with me or against me' has begun to prevail in all sectors of Bolivian society.

There is no national unified leadership behind these grassroots groups and organisations: they claim regional, ethnic, and/or social aims. Thus, the coverage of riots, demonstrations and protest, particularly in the city of El Alto and the rural surroundings of the city of La Paz, but also in Chapare, in central Bolivia, where most of the illegal coca leaf crops are grown, has resulted in unprovoked attacks on journalists. This violence against journalists is the product of the specific circumstances through which Bolivia is passing. In the past, under more normal circumstances, these kinds of attacks have been very rare and isolated.

Government authorities do not prosecute attacks against journalists, unless the attacked individual presses charges. It is difficult to press charges against an angry, non-descript

mob, and then again, it is doubtful that the government, in its present helpless condition, would be able to enforce justice.

Currently, in the chain connecting the state, journalists and the social organisations, the weakest link and the least capable of enforcing the law is the state. Government authorities cannot effectively protect journalists, nor have they ever tried to. Indeed, journalists usually do not need the protection of the authorities. On the contrary, it is the authorities that need to be protected from the journalists – and, lately, from the rest of society too.

Changes in the past five years

Over the last few years, journalists, the media and journalists' unions have become more powerful than almost any state authority, except, perhaps, the President. The only protection that journalists would need from the state is armed protection under circumstances such as those that reigned during the revolt of September-October 2003, when violent riots overthrew then-president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and left a string of more than 60 casualties. The Bolivian government is presently passing through a period of extreme weakness.

Since 2000, Bolivia has been living in a climate of social instability that has led to the siege of cities and violent revolts, ending in a miraculously constitutional change of government in October of 2003. This change, however, has barely decreased the social tension. Bolivian society is increasingly polarised and the media is also caught in that process, but they are less the victims than the perpetrators.

In radio and television in particular, a number of journalists with political agendas have emerged and become key players. In that sense, the media enjoy the utmost freedom, even to the extent of being offensive and aggressive to the President [virtually no fear of repression: +3]. But in March 2005, a series of political demonstrations booed the private TV network Unitel and its anchorwoman in an indication of how the public standing of the media is deteriorating. The average citizen is showing the first signs of feeling offended by the media, but is still wary of expressing it openly or individually.

VI. Conclusions

Evaluation of media coverage

The free coverage of the media has changed in a complex way over the past five years. The quality of the media coverage has deteriorated [strong aggravation: -2]. Yet, many Bolivians still consider the media a trustworthy institution, second only to the Catholic church. But that trust shows signs of a slow but steady decline, and there are wide social sectors that feel annoyed by the increasingly disrespectful attitude of the media towards the most basic ethical values. Moreover, it is interesting to note that even the most 'conservative' Bolivian media networks – be it radio, television or print – would be considered very liberal in most of the rest of the world, a fact that mirrors today's Bolivian society and says something about the loss of its points of reference.

KAF support

As an integral part of its activities in Bolivia the Konrad Adenauer Foundation supports journalists and their work. The KAF cooperates with the Catholic University, Faculty of Communication, in the organisation of lectures and seminars for students of journalism and journalists about communication, politics and the economy (Cátedra Konrad Adenauer). Many journalists receive very general information and have no knowledge about specific topics. The KAF tries to provide them with the information that is needed for good reporting.

The KAF also cooperates with the Journalists' Association of La Paz, giving lectures and courses about journalism-related subjects, e.g. how to cover conflicts, the ethics of journalism, and how German press conferences work.

As the media is very free, it is now important to improve the quality of journalism and to make journalists and media owners aware of their political responsibilities. The KAF addresses these subjects in some of the seminars. These activities might be intensified.

Freedom of the media: general situation

There is no doubt that the overall situation in Bolivia is one of unrestricted freedom of the media. But this extreme freedom is being abused and the general public has taken notice and resents it. Any attempt at self-regulation, such as

the creation of an Ethics Committee by the press associations themselves has been thwarted.[13]

Major obstacles

From the point of view of most journalists, today there are no significant obstacles to free media coverage. The Bolivian media is probably more independent than most of their counterparts in the region. The general journalistic view is that the government should have no secrets whatsoever, not even military ones, and journalists have conveyed these views to a large portion of the least educated sectors of society. This ideal is, of course, unrealistic, but some members of the media nonetheless frequently demand it.

Other than the lack of a regulated access to some government documents, it can be said that Bolivia, in all things related to freedom of opinion, thought and of media coverage, is a very open and free society. Since the people do not trust and do not feel that the state and the three branches of government truly represent them, they have turned to the media as their organ of expression. The media has eagerly assumed this role, but all too frequently with very little responsibility: it is the media who, far from being the witnesses of events, exacerbate passions, assume political positions and constitute themselves as judge and jury. With very little criticism from the uneducated Bolivian majority and without any truly functioning self-regulating press bodies, the Bolivian media contravene more ethical values and moral boundaries with every passing day.

Robert Brockmann

Robert Brockmann was editor of the daily La Razón and is now the National Information Officer of the United Nations System in Bolivia.

[13] The project by the Press Association of La Paz (APLP) to create an Ethics Committee similar to the German Press Council, to be a self-regulatory body for editors, publishers and journalists to deal with failures to be professionally diligent and to enforce professional obligations, for instance, has been dubbed as 'an attempt at self-censorship' by the Union of Press Workers of La Paz (FTPLP).

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