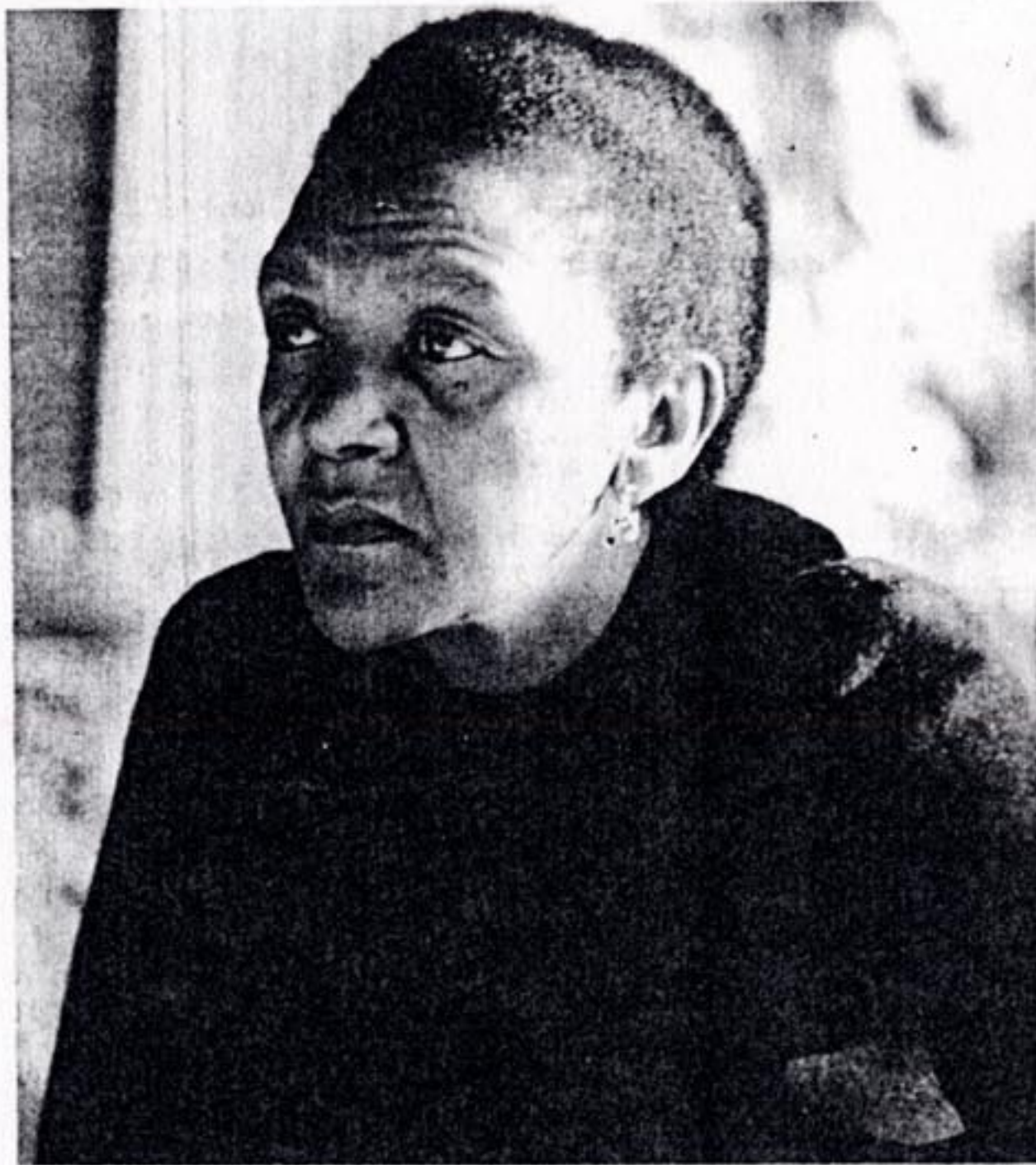


# 'I'm no Major Barbara', says ANC cultural chief



# Barbara Masekela, ANC cultural chief

PIC: RASHID LOMBARD

SISTER to independent-minded controversial trumpeter Hugh, Barbara Masekela is quick to correct an impression that she is a "commissar".

People have created this impression, says the former school teacher and a mother of two sons.

She is constantly flooded with requests from the press and various cultural organisations for comment on the cultural boycott and the ANC's position on censorship in the arts.

"The ANC is not a censorship board," she asserts.

Masekela says her department has been established to promote the arts and there is still an ongoing battle for recognition of the arts in the ANC and the broader South African society.

"Unless we are organised properly, culture will always be in an office at the back, asked to respond to difficult questions.

"We need the various artistic disciplines to be organised and national artists unions to be formed."

### Vacuum

She says the DAC serves as a facilitator for artists' organisations which are operating "in a legal vacuum without appropriate" understanding of laws of copyright and production.

"It's for this reason that the ANC has been involved in setting up structures which mobilise artists," she explains.

"Once we have state and regional government structures set up properly, then we won't need to play this kind of role."

Several controversies have arisen over ANC aligned Sama's handling of exiled musicians returning to South Africa. Musicians like Dollar Brand and Miriam Makeba have been accused of transgressing the cultural boycott by the South African Musicians Alliance, leading to the DAC and the "culture desk" being labelled censorship boards.

"We have to take into account the circumstances of repression,

**She is tough as nails. Barbara Masekela has been branded the ANC's commissar of culture, a firebrand responsible for policing artists who defy the cultural boycott. Assertive, sometimes schoolmarmish in her firm handling of issues and impatient with constant demands on her as head of the movement's Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), there is no "beating about the bush" with Masekela, writes HEATHER ROBERTSON:**

danger, lack of freedom of assembly which led to things like the cultural desk being formed," explains Masekela.

"The people who were in positions of leadership were working at great risk to themselves. But now we cannot continue to organise in the same secretive way. We need to discuss initiatives openly," she says.

"Our primary task is to democratise and work towards a national cultural organisation.

"If I were a writer, wouldn't like to be in a position where some politician always looks over my shoulder."

She says the DAC needs to shift from policing the cultural boycott to developing training and educational structures for the disadvantaged.

"We need to harness the skills of professionals to promote the development of those who need skills," she says.

She argues that the need for cultural facilities like libraries in the townships is an issue which must be tackled by civic organ-

isations. "The problem with progressives is that we want to reinvent the wheel.

"People in local organisations need to start demanding their basic public rights from local municipalities," she says.

According to Masekela, the role of the intellectuals is to high-

light issues like the right of access to mass media and public radio which is available in the Western world.

"Even the average white person on the platteland does not know about the need for public radio. Do they know that they have the right

to decide what they would like to hear on the radio?"

The problem is that people expect political leaders to pay minute attention to all these details, she says.

"It's our task as cultural workers to inform political organisations of our demands so that we can help to form relevant policy," she says.

The major task of exiled members of the DAC is "to integrate ourselves into our community," she says.

**'We need to harness the skills of professionals to promote the development of those who need skills'**



# Barbara Masekela and an ANC member on their arrival at DF Malan airport in Cape Town