

**A government's attempt to muzzle the press and media is absolute confirmation of corruption. So the proposed new legislation to control the press and to withhold information from the electorate speaks more to corruption than to press misconduct in South Africa.**

**That the government wants to keep information confidential is an indication that it cannot bear scrutiny.**

**It is an indication of a desire to renege on the constitution.**

**It is an indication that the constitution has little relevance to the practices that have become common at all levels of government.**

**It is an indication that we were completely idealistic in believing that we could achieve and maintain democracy in our country.**

Our press is functioning as it should; it is pointing out the failures of government officials and news is based on fact not assumption. If government wants press approval it will have to govern without widespread abuse of power. Considering that our press commentary is mild compared with the rigorous criticism that politicians overseas face from their journalists, we are forced to assume the worst – that there is no real commitment to democracy on the part of our rulers.

as a democracy.

If our press is controlled there is no hope for us

We are in a situation where the ruling party has a two-thirds majority so there is no effective opposition to its will in parliament.

As there are some checks and balances with a free press, press freedom is absolutely essential and its exposure of abuse and corruption should be challenged only on the grounds of factual reporting.

At present, the civil servants' strike is offering opposition to government. These are mainly people who voted for the ANC and are now demanding better wages and living conditions.

Their posters and banners indicate their awareness of corruption but their protest is being turned against them because their action does not hurt the government; it harms only the poor and vulnerable: the sick who cannot get access to medical care and pupils who are left to fend for themselves without teachers.

One has to wonder why civil servants do not use the ballot box to gain their ends rather than these extreme measures.

It is an indication that our understanding of democracy does not translate to the structures we have developed for it.

So the strike really amounts to faction fighting.

It can be construed simply as a demand by civil servants for the same privileges that government officials have appropriated.

So ours, despite an acclaimed constitution, is a flawed democracy and if we lose press freedom it will not be a democracy at all. Our government's priorities seem to be to prove to the world that South Africa is as good as any first world country.

The way to do that is to offer world-sporting events that compare favourably with what first world countries offer.

It is a pity that our self-esteem does not depend on trying to show the world that we are the best, even better than first world countries, in our ability to eradicate poverty.

Instead we wish to compete on a material level and the only ones who benefit from that are the politicians who have acquired standards of living equal to the best in the world.

Meanwhile ordinary citizens are required to pay for all kinds of government services that were offered freely before and standards of living of ordinary citizens are declining.

When it comes to corruption we seem to be among the best; our stiffest competition is from our neighbouring country. But we may yet win. While our rulers are looking for more sporting

events to prove our superiority to the world, local industries are declining, farmers are losing their ability to provide for the nation, mining projects are destroying the environment, water sources are steadily being polluted, health and education systems have deteriorated and unemployment, poverty and crime are on the increase.

Curbing press and media freedom will mean living in complete ignorance and eventually finding ourselves in a state of ruin.