

Right2Know: Is the MTMSA a corporate front parading as a self-proclaimed 'movement'

R2K has issued the following statement: On 17 December the Movement for Transformation of the Media in South Africa (MTMSA) chose a luxurious suite in the Mandela Rhodes Place Building to launch this self-styled 'movement'.



The first act of MTMSA was an unsuccessful attempt to break up a Right2Know Campaign protest for media freedom outside Independent Newspapers, less than 100m away. This was an aggressive act aimed to undermine the work of many civil society organisations that support genuine transformation of the media sector.

It is also now becoming apparent that the MTMSA is an apparent front for corporate and factional interests within political parties. This is a new low point for politicians and so called business leaders who fear civil society mobilization against their profiteering and corruption.

Who is behind this so-called 'Movement for Transformation of the Media'?

The MTMSA falsely claimed it had 1,000 supporters at the meeting but it is now clear that they may have an agenda to exploit people. Groundup interviewed some of the handful of MTMSA supporters who were bussed in to disrupt the Right2Know picket. One woman is reported as saying that "We were told we could come in a bus to Cape Town and would get food at the [St George's] cathedral,". Her two companions readily agreed: "We don't know what all this is about," they added. Others nodded in agreement, but would not comment although one muttered: "Ek dink ons is misgebruik." (I think we are misused).

A study of tweets in support of the MTMSA yesterday show the vast majority originating from the official ANC Western Cape Twitter account ([@ANCwcpe](#)) with supplementary tweeting from Leanne Neethling ([@LeanneNeethling](#)) whose LinkedIn profile describes her as "Policy, Investor Relations and Research Officer at Sekunjalo, Chairman's Office". It appears that Neethling reports directly to Iqbal Survé, who was the focus of the R2K protest action. The obvious link can therefore be made that Sekunjalo is supporting this corporate front by deploying staff to assist with their activities.

R2K calls on the following groups to place on record the nature of this relationship:

- We call on Iqbal Survé and Sekunjalo to place on record sources of support (including personnel, logistical and financial) that it has provided to the MTMSA.
- We call on the ANC Western Cape to explain its relationship to a group that was established to protect the interests of media owners who are victimising media workers that expose their alleged corruption.
- We call on the MTMSA to place on record its relationship with Sekunjalo and any political party.

We call on investigative journalists to ask the hard question as to who paid for the lavish MTMSA press conference venue, bussed in the rent-a-crowd, and the full-colour posters they brandished and funded their well organised publicity machine?

The facts already in the public domain suggest that the MTMSA is nothing more than AstroTurf: A fake grassroots 'movement' pushed to the fore by a convergence of big business and big political interests.

We have little confidence that MTMSA will have the interest or stomach to sustain a popular and democratic campaign uniting all freedom-loving South Africans and rooted in working class communities as the Right2Know Campaign has done successfully for over three years.



The Right2Know Campaign launched at the end of August 2010 in Cape Town. Since then the campaign says it has attained a place in the popular imagination and put the 'right to know' on the national agenda. (All images extracted from the [R2K website](#) and [its gallery](#))

It was thus regrettable that so much of the media coverage of yesterday's protests focused on the MTMSA disruption and there was little or no coverage of the important speeches made by human rights campaigners Mary Burton and Zackie Achmat, or independent journalist Terry Bell who all spoke in defence of our democracy.

Perhaps this rather homogenous reporting is the product of a truly untransformed media where profit seeking corporations have under-resourced news rooms. This leads to a syndicated emphasis on superficial and sensationalist 'conflict' rather than substantive information which is the lifeblood of our democracy.

Why genuine transformation of the media matters?

In their press statement the MTMSA counterpoise media freedom with media transformation stating that they "demand transformation of the media houses and companies so that more black editors, sub-editors and management staff of colour are appointed who represent the thinking of the black majority of South Africans, rather than the empowered racially advantaged few."

They go as far as to accuse the Right2Know of fronting a racist agenda: "The attack on Sekunjalo has got nothing to do with press freedom or the 'Right To Know', it has everything to do with the fact that the company is prepared to transform a media house that has for more than a century been supportive of colonialism, apartheid and is anti-black in its engagements with society. Now the racists are rallying to stop the march to transform the newspapers and its content to reflect the reality that is the "new South Africa"."

At the risk of giving this 'movement' more credibility than is due, the Right2Know is compelled to set the record straight.

By counterpoising media freedom and media transformation MTMSA suggest that these are two separate and unrelated goals. While giving faint commitment to media freedom the MTMSA are happy to defend Sekunjalo Investment's violation of editorial independence in the name of advancing the racial transformation of editorial management at Independent Newspapers.

The Right2Know Campaign has consistently argued that media freedom and diversity are two sides of the same coin. Without media freedom the media would become the voice of the government, without a diversity of ownership and economic models (non-commercial and commercial) the media would be the voice of an economic elite.



Right2Know has a proud history of campaigning not only for media freedom but also transformation in SA's media. (All images extracted from the [R2K website](#) and [its gallery](#))

In reality the concentration of ownership and control of the press in the hands of four corporations that control over 80% of all circulation in South Africa poses a significant threat to press freedom - irrespective of their racial composition or party political affiliation.

When access to the Constitutional right to press freedom is concentrated in the hands of so few it runs the risk of becoming an elite privilege that cannot fulfil the vital role of a free media within a democracy adequately.

The Right2Know has called on government consistently to explore more aggressive anti-trust measures to limit the dominant corporations and to promote mechanisms to enhance the sustainability and independence of public broadcasting and community media - ensuring that access to press freedom is enjoyed by more South Africans.

Our track record in support of thorough-going media transformation is clear and has been expressed in many public statements and submissions to Parliament, the Press Freedom Commission, the industry's Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team and ICASA over the years.

It is only by extending access to the ownership and control media production that we will ensure media freedom exists as a right in South Africa and not a privilege concentrated in the hands of a few who essentially share the same social and

economic interests.

As inequity deepens and social cohesion falters South Africa needs a media that can offer expression to the full range of voices and facilitate the substantive debates about the social and economic future of the country. In this sense media transformation is both urgent and critical to future of our democracy.

Nelson Mandela said in February 1994: "A critical, independent, and investigative press is the lifeblood of any democracy. The press must be free from state interference. It must have the economic strength to stand up to the blandishments of government officials. It must have sufficient independence from vested interests to be bold and inquiring without fear or favour. It must enjoy the protection of the constitution, so that it can protect our rights as citizens."

The emphasis on the narrow notion of racial transformation risks an elite transition that will see a new alliance of political and corporate elites merely replacing existing elites in the management of unchanged institutions.

We owe it to Madiba and our democracy to push for a deeper transformation that transfers power to the people.

References:

1. [The founding statement of the Movement for Transformation of the Media in South Africa \(MTMSA\)](#)
2. [The 2012 Right2Know Position Paper of Media Freedom Diversity and the Right to Communicate.](#)
3. [The Right2Know Memorandum regarding media freedom and the removal of the Cape Times Editor delivered to Iqbal Survé yesterday.](#)
4. [The Ground Up description of the MTMSA attempted disruption of the R2K protest.](#)

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