

FXI picket outside SABC on Perlman's last day

In November 2006, the FXI's Communication Rights Campaign held a march to the Head Office of the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in Auckland Park, Johannesburg. A memorandum was handed over to SABC Management, raising a number of complaints about the conduct of the public broadcaster. Over the past three weeks, the Campaign held three pickets outside the SABC Head Office in Auckland Park, Johannesburg and one picket outside the SABC offices in Durban, demanding a response to the memorandum. See the FXI's media alert below. You can also read the memorandum that the FXI submitted to the SABC on the 16th November 2006.

The Freedom of Expression Institute will hold another picket outside the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Head Office in Auckland Park, Johannesburg tomorrow, Friday 2 March 2007 at 06:00. This is the fourth such picket in three weeks. The protest will coincide with the last AM Live show to be hosted by veteran broadcaster John Perlman. Perlman will hang up his mike under a cloud of controversy about the role of the SABC as a public broadcaster.

The picket is being held to demand of the SABC a response to a memorandum submitted to the broadcaster by members of the FXI's Communication Rights Campaign. The memorandum was handed over during a march in November 2006 and no response has been forthcoming from the SABC.

The memorandum raises a number of issues of concern to various communities that the SABC claims to serve. Chief among these was that the SABC seemed to be drifting from its mandate of being a public broadcaster and seemed to be setting itself up as a propaganda arm of the government. The memo also included concerns around the content of news, the blacklisting of commentators, the non-screening of the documentary on President Thabo Mbeki, among other issues.

The SABC's lack of response to the memorandum has also prompted the FXI to, last week, lay a 20-page complaint with Icasa over the SABC's violation of the Broadcasting Act and of its licence conditions. (The FXI's complaint can be read at <http://www.fxio.org.za>.)

These violations are an indictment of the ability of the Board to govern a public broadcaster. And while most of the attention on the SABC in the wake of the blacklisting saga has focused on SABC's Director of News, Snuki Zikalala, the FXI's picket also seeks to draw attention to the fact that the current SABC Board is not fit to run the public broadcaster. Members of the Board are our public representatives, appointed by parliament, and we will not let them off the hook!

Tomorrow's picketers will call for the Board to be replaced by people who are, as the Broadcasting Act states, "committed to fairness, freedom of expression, the right of the public to be informed and openness and accountability on the part of those holding public office". We do not want a board that is the replacement of old-order propagandists with new-order ones.