

# OPINI

## The Times

### State power gets another shot of steroids

**A**S THE furore over the Protection of State Information Bill rages, another contentious piece of draft legislation has crept up on us barely noticed.

The information bill, which gives the state wide-ranging powers to keep state documents secret, will almost certainly be signed into law by President Jacob Zuma now that it has been passed by both houses of parliament.

Despite important amendments secured by opposition political parties it will no doubt have a chilling effect on whistle-blowers exposing corruption and on journalists. Fewer illegal practices by state officials will come to light and our democracy will be the poorer for it.

As all right-thinking South Africans lament the loss of freedoms we are about to suffer under the "Secrecy Bill", a new proposed law that gives the state sweeping powers to confiscate private property is inching closer to enactment.

As we report elsewhere in this edition, tomorrow is the deadline for public comment on the Expropriation Bill, which gives the government the power to expropriate private property, including land, residential property, business assets and even shares and investments — in "the public interest".

Critics of the bill, which, though a general purpose instrument, appears to be aimed principally at speeding up land reform, say it is too vague and will frighten off investors.

Deputy Public Works Minister Jeremy Cronin insists that the draft law makes sense given South Africa's "historical reality" and insists that the government would not expropriate property on a whim.

Few would deny the pressing need to bring redress to people who lost their land under apartheid. But surely there are better ways of achieving this than through investor-hostile, blunt-instrument legislation.

**Draft law justified by South Africa's 'historical reality'**