

The Kuli Roberts column - why the ANC want a media tribunal

 By Chris Mberdyk: [@chrismoerdyk](#)

1 Mar 2011

So, *Sunday World* columnist Kuli Roberts has apologised for writing a "racist" column about coloured people and typical of today's newspaper industry, the editor and management are huffing and puffing, playing the innocent, apologising, wailing, gnashing teeth and hoping that everything will go away.

They were quick to shut down the column after throwing their corporate hands in the air and joining the hue and cry about the racist nature of its content. Which is precisely what happened with the David Bullard saga.

Who me?

Once again, newspaper management and an editor have closed the stable door after the horse has bolted. And once again, a complete mockery has been made of objective newspaper journalism.

After the Bullard fiasco, *The Sunday Times* put in all sorts of checks and balances to make sure that this sort of column did not get to be published in the first place. Clearly at their sister newspaper, *Sunday World*, top management wasn't paying attention or probably just thought: "This won't happen to us."

Wake up

What seems to be happening, these days, is that a lot of newspaper editors are either fast asleep or just plain lazy. Some of them blame their sub-editors for fiddling with grammar, punctuation and fit, without giving a thought to the content. With the result that really stupid stuff gets through.

But, while good sub-editors will refer suspect content to the editor and bad ones won't give a toss, they're not to blame. It is the editor who actually has the sole responsibility for checking what goes into the newspaper. That is what editors do. Or, that's what editors are supposed to do.

And, until such time as editors start realising that the buck stops with them and that problems will not go away simply by firing columnists, this sort of journalistic insanity will continue to give politicians more and more ammunition for imposing media tribunals and the like.

Can't take it back.

And who can blame them really? Once something has been published it is there for life. Taking it off websites won't take it away. This one and Bullard's are already on other websites all over the world as a testament to the racism in South Africa.

Too many newspapers in SA have got into the habit of pushing the envelope and when there's an outcry they simply print a little apology somewhere in the remotest part of the paper. It has almost become acceptable practice.

This does not mean all newspapers. There are still some in SA where editors take responsibility for their actions and those of their staff. It is now up to those editors to mentor their errant colleagues for the sake of the whole industry.

Stopping political intervention will not be about beefing up press councils and appointing more ombudsmen. It will be about newspapers going back to basics of checking facts, giving both sides of the story, editors carrying the can and avoiding the trap of hyping controversy just to boost circulation.

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