

Cape Times row boils on... and over?



By [Rod Baker](#)

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NEWSWATCH: The abrupt departure of Chris Whitfield from Independent Newspapers has been blamed on editorial interference, reports Mail & Guardian, which also publishes fired editor Alide Dasnois' response to the public spat between the ANC's Trevor Manuel and Songezo Mjongile. Terry Bell also comments on the Mandela coverage/Alide Dasnois issue.



(Image extracted from the [Sanef website](#))

For more:

- Mail & Guardian: [Why did Chris Whitfield jump ship?](#) Why indeed? Usually when one takes early retirement, it's pretty straightforward, but in Whitfield's case, when he took [early retirement](#) he was reported as refusing to give further details, saying that the matter is "delicate and we are still working out details".

That, naturally, and the fact that his departure followed so closely on that of [the "removal" of Alide Dasnois as editor of the newspaper](#) fuelled speculation that editorial interference by new Independent Newspapers masters under Iqbal Survé is behind Whitfield's move.

Mail & Guardian reports that "a recent Cape Times opinion article criticising the paper's coverage of Nelson Mandela's death was the last straw, insiders say, for a senior editor who is now bowing out of Independent Newspapers." It also reports that "Dasnois has confirmed that she has lodged a dispute with the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, due to be heard on 24 January."

Time magazine had lauded the Cape Times coverage of Mandela's passing as among the best in the world, but that of course didn't register with some.

In the meantime, Dasnois has responded to the [public spat between the ANC's Trevor Manuel and Songezo Mjongile](#).

Iqbal Survé probably won't listen, but as Anton Harber said a little while ago [Survé is dead right to worry over his papers' figures](#). However, if those papers' readers become increasingly concerned that their "favourite read" is being biased through management's interference to punt a particular agenda, political or otherwise, Survé will have even more reason to worry.

Readers vote with their wallets and it is not impossible that if such a perception of bias through management's interference grows, readers and advertisers might reckon they'd rather spend their money elsewhere and the papers will haemorrhage readers, subscribers, and advertisers.

Should that happen, Survé and his shareholders could find themselves living through some really interesting times.

- Terry Bell Writes: [Letter to Cape Times...](#) Bell makes the point that given the amount of comment around the Mandela coverage issue and how much of it is "gross, and perhaps malicious" and continues to be touted publicly, it appears "other agendas are clearly at play".

I think it was Churchill who said that truth is the first casualty of war. I'd suggest it's also in a pretty vulnerable situation when it comes to media and this whole "war of words" around the Mandela coverage/Dasnois firing/Chris Whitfield "early retirement" saga, and the other issues, such as the Cape Times coverage of the Public Protector's report on Sekunjalo, threats of legal action and what have you.

In passing the row also saw the sudden emergence of the hitherto unknown Movement for Transformation of Media in SA (MTMSA), which rowdily hijacked a silent protest by R2K - MTMSA even had professionally printed posters ready to go (now wouldn't it be interesting to find out who printed *them* up so quickly). However, Tony Weaver brings some sanity to the whole issue with his '[Madiba Moment](#)'. Subsequently, he neatly demolished [the MTMSA "leader" Pastor Wesley Douglas](#).

ABOUT ROD BAKER

Rod Baker is Content Director at Bizcommunity.com. A journalist since before computers, he worked on a wide range of magazines and, in his youth, rose through the ranks from being a lowly and abused sub-editor, to a high and still abused editor and publisher. He has been editor and publisher of a number of magazines, as well as a newspaper. He has edited many books, and written a number too. Email him at rod@bizcommunity.com

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