

Absurdity rules the day in justice as in headlines

 By [Anton Harber](#)

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Craig Williamson, the security policeman who sent the bomb that killed activist Ruth First in Maputo in 1982, walks free in Johannesburg, having received amnesty for this and other murders after coming clean at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Pallo Jordan, who was in the room and injured when Williamson's letter bomb killed First, has withdrawn from public life, having been exposed as not having any university degree, let alone the doctorate attached to his name for so many years.

Justice, you have to say, is not always apparent in our society. I am not defending Jordan's foolishness, only contrasting the fall of a man based on a vanity that caused no one much harm with that of a cold-hearted multiple murderer whose victims' families are still in pain.

Absurdity rules the day. African National Congress (ANC) Cabinet ministers and the ANC Youth League saw fit this week to speak out about the country's best-paid actors, who want to be paid more. "The idea is to find a speedy and amicable solution to this national crisis," Department of Arts and Culture spokesman Sandile Memela said with a straight face. The youth league asked to meet the SABC "because we don't think it was correct for them to immediately dismiss those actors".

Getting into a lather over soapie actors

Don't get me wrong: I would love to see actors earn more. But you have to remember that this is a party that purports to prioritise the needs of the poor, and whose leaders are facing a kind of public trial for having their policemen mow down mine workers demanding a half-decent wage.

I guess it is easier to deal with soapie actors than migrant labourers... Or badly behaved MPs.

After the ministerial security cluster got together to strategise on how to save the country from such MPs, we will have to rethink what constitutes a national crisis.

Maybe we can take some direction from *The Onion*, the US satirical news site that specialises in unexpected headlines.

Some of its best include:

- *Drugs win drugs war;*
- *Sony releases new piece of s**t that doesn't f**king work;*

- *Kim Jong-il approval rating plummets to 98%;*
- *World death rate holds steady at 100%;*
- *Dolphin spends amazing vacation swimming with stockbroker;*
- *God answers prayer of paralysed little boy: "No," says God;*
- *Loved ones remember local man's cowardly battle with cancer.*

So let's try our own:

- *Zuma to marry the whole of Swaziland. 'That will solve a country's problems. Maybe two countries,' he said.*
- *Khulubuse Zuma swallows an entire mineshaft. "He saw me coming," said the liquidator, "and hid the evidence."*
- *Star editor fired for quoting boss Iqbal Survé only three times in a week. "Our Survé correspondent was off sick due to exhaustion and overwork," he explained.*
- *ANC leader chokes on cigar while fighting poverty. "This is a tough job when you haven't got a Blue Label to wash down the cigar."*
- *Speaker clamps down: EFF banned from parliamentary bar. "They are subverting our capacity to do work," Julius Malema said.*
- *Springbok team loses BEE rating: now forced to play in second league.*
- *China buys the Western Cape. "The ANC had nothing to do with this," said a grinning Gwede Mantashe. "The good part is that these guys know how to deal with farm workers."*
- *Thandi Modise misses key meeting: "I had to feed the pigs," she said.*
- *Daredevil motorbike festival at Union Buildings. Hold on, that actually happened this week.*
- *Labour minister paid farm worker poverty wage. Communist Party leader leaps to his defence.*

Oh dear, that actually happened too.

ABOUT ANTON HARBER

Anton Harber, Wits University Caxton Professor of Journalism and chair of the Freedom of Expression Institute, was a Weekly Mail (now Mail & Guardian) founding editor and a Kagiso Media executive director. He wrote *Diepsloot* (Jonathan Ball, 2011), *Recht Malan* Prize winner, and co-edited the first two editions of *The A-Z of South African Politics* (Penguin, 1994/5), *What is Left Unsaid: Reporting the South African HIV Epidemic* (Jacana, 2010) and *Troublemakers: The best of SA's investigative journalism* (Jacana, 2010).
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