



IS STEALING WRONG? OR IS IT JUST A WAY OF LIFE FOR THE ANC?

“To steal” (verb) – “to take another person's property without permission or legal right and without intending to return it.” (Dictionary: Merriam Webster)

It is now common cause that South Africa is a full blown kleptocracy. The stealing permeates virtually every facet of our society: it is in the country's DNA. But in whose particular DNA actually? And why? Was there any precedent in this country's history where stealing was so pervasive that it became a norm? The Merriam-Webster definition of stealing emanates from a Western cultural mindset. When it for example defines the word “rational” or the phrase “common sense”, this is done within a social behavioural context.

This is not to say that the Western explanation of stealing is the only one available. Throughout the world, even in many developing societies, the principle of personal ownership, legally confirmed and earned, is the bedrock of social coherence, law and order and a functioning economy. In mostly primitive societies, however, this principle is a complete non-starter as far as development is concerned. After independence in the mostly mid 20th century, communal ownership as a policy decision was tried in some African countries. It failed spectacularly. One example was Tanzania's president Julius Nyerere's blueprint of “ujamaa” (a Swahili word for “extended family”), which was proclaimed in the Arusha Declaration of 5.2.1967.

Citizens were removed from cities and placed on collective farms consisting of around 250 families. Agricultural production halved during the period of this strategy, and Nyerere became more oppressive as citizens fled to the cities. Tanzania then proceeded to become one of the poorest countries in Africa.

This “communal ownership” mind set may be the origin of the ANC's DNA. Wholesale theft and corruption has been that party's hallmark since it came to power in 1994. In the early days of Western settlement in South Africa, the tribal peoples in this part of the world were shown to have never developed a concept of personal property (or any other) ownership. Land was simply there, to be taken. There was no such thing as a Title Deed confirming proprietorship of a piece of land.

So is this historical legacy the reason why there is no shame or sense of guilt within the ANC about their corruption, nepotism, mismanagement and the wholesale theft of the country's assets? Says R.W. Johnson in his book "Fighting for the Dream", "African nationalism in South Africa has taken an almost exactly similar course as it did in the rest of the continent in that, once in power, it is driven by the same politically dominant class, the bureaucratic bourgeoisie. Moreover, the explosive factor that drives them far off course is also the same, the almost irresistible (and apparently bottomless) appetite of that class for primary accumulation. The fundamental problem is that this class is not productive. Because it does not itself generate wealth, it is inevitably parasitic and can achieve its goals only through patronage and corruption".

SAME AS THE REST OF AFRICA

It should be noted here that warnings years ago about the accession to power of the ANC and the inevitable plunder and destruction that would follow, were ignored. "Things would be different here", we were told. But the ANC turned out to be the same as the rest of Africa (with a few notable exceptions). How could they not have been, given the similarity in the social/political DNA's of Africa to the north? R.W.Johnson refers in his book to white South Africans who joined the ANC, "believing strongly in the party's professed ideals. In truth", says Johnson, "they had failed entirely to understand what sort of party they were choosing and were horrified as they discovered corruption, factionalism and thuggery".

It stands to reason that people who never developed the craft of writing, or knew nothing about the wheel, or whose way of life was so rudimentary that it had changed little for millennia, would not do anything but dip into a modern-day cookie jar from the word go. In South Africa they did just this, without hesitation or conscience. Their sense of entitlement is totally unjustified. They produce nothing, they only consume. Stealing is thus their only way to accrue assets and live as luxuriously as they can. They do not understand how a modern economy functions, or that money must be earned, hence the current South African bankruptcy. They just use the funds until there's nothing left.

THE STEALING IS ALL ENCOMPASSING.

Appointing political pals to jobs for which they are unqualified is stealing from the taxpayers who foot the bill and expect value for their hard-earned money. Paying consultants because you cannot do the work is stealing, as is not answering the office phone when members of the public call. Giving tenders to friends' companies when you know they cannot perform is stealing, and so

is taking for yourself food parcels destined for the poor under the Covid 19 pandemic assistance plan.

Stealing is when you don't fix the broken municipal infrastructure, when you go to court to try to keep your job after you have been fired for incompetence or corruption. Stealing is when you skim off cash from daily government transactions because "you know the system". Stealing is when the hospital under your jurisdiction is not fit for human abode, when equipment disappears, when medicines are purloined and sold on, and when patients have to sleep under newspapers because of your mismanagement. The government's Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA) cannot control the denuding of Metro rail networks throughout the country. Rail Lines and sleepers, overhead electrical cables, equipment and anything containing copper is being stolen in broad daylight. There is no security whatsoever. Many rail links no longer exist. Criminals are destroying what was once Africa's top rail network before our very eyes, but nothing is being done by the authorities. These criminal activities are eating into South Africa's previous good reputation, built up over years of hard work by honest people.

THEY REALLY DON'T CARE

It is time South Africa woke up to the fact that these government thieves really don't care. There appears to be a complete absence of a conscience within certain echelons of the party. Even those who appear to have avoided corruption (or have not yet been caught!) sat in Parliament for years and refused to support six Opposition Motions of No Confidence against ex president Jacob Zuma's history of alleged theft and plunder, those same people (including Zuma's Vice President Cyril Ramaphosa) who now declare that the Zuma presidency was "nine wasted years". So who is responsible for the wholesale ransacking of South Africa during that period? When you sit in Parliament and do nothing while stealing is rampant, then you are complicit in that crime and you wasted the years.

The very people whom the SA president should cherish – the country's commercial farming sector – are being murdered at an alarming rate. This last weekend there were nine farm attacks and five murders. Stock and grain theft is rampant, while farmers spend what little cash they have trying to defend themselves.

This crime of theft is a psychosis in South Africa – like gambling, it's addictive. Many of the ruling elite simply cannot resist taking what is not theirs. The president's regular statements that he is fighting corruption are unsubstantiated and he is not winning. Just a few days after he set up a Special

Investigating Unit (SIU) to probe a raft of allegations about businesses benefitting from billions of rands intended for the Covid-19 fight, stories swirled that tenders worth more than R2,2 billion and involving more than 90 companies belonging to party stalwarts and hangers-on had received contracts from the Gauteng health department. One of those allegedly involved is none other than the president's spokesperson Khusela Diko, where a Covid-19 contract of R124m was allegedly awarded to her husband. The official opposition is demanding full details of the whole mess.

And so it goes on. A Democratic Party spokesman told the press there are companies which are registered a few weeks before a tender is announced yet there is no sign of personnel within these companies who know anything about medical care and equipment supply. Tender capture has been going on for years within government's elite circles, with even witchdoctors advertising in the popular press that they can prevent divorce, organise lottery wins and "get tenders". Such is the level of business behaviour within SA under this ANC government and its president.

WHO PAYS?

The president recently declared he wants to involve "the private sector" in the rebuilding of the country. "We must use the available skills within the country" he said, while advertisements in the press for government and municipal jobs stipulate "Equal Opportunity" conditions applicable for applicants. Whites therefore cannot apply. The president speaks with forked tongue. It is obvious that no one in the government has the faintest idea how a modern economy works so they clearly don't comprehend that the funding for their profligacy is finite. Declares R.W. Johnson: "Many Africans are unfazed by the news of wealthy whites leaving. But this is a very serious mistake", he says. SA's tax base is very narrow. "Only 13% of the population pays income tax, which provides the government with 38% of all its revenue. The wealthiest one percent of the population pays 61% of all income tax". (In the USA for example, the same top one percent accounts for only 37% of all income tax.) According to the World Bank, SA's per capita income in 2019 was no greater than in 2010. "Another 18 % of all SA's tax receipts come from taxes of mainly white-owned companies and this group pays a high proportion of all the other taxes (Vat, customs and excise, for example.) "

In addition, under ANC rule, taxes have increased 25% since 1994. Says Johnson: "SA has the sixth highest ratio of revenue to GDP in the world, only the Scandinavian countries rate higher." These countries provide womb to tomb welfare, and are very rich. In SA, there is nothing for the poor, and very little for the rich.

“Thirty six percent of government revenue is spent on the public service wage bill while another 17 percent is spent on social grants”, declares R.W. Johnson. Despite this largesse, workers at the Tshwane municipality will be receiving a 6,25% salary raise, as well as hefty increases in medical and housing subsidies. Yet the Metro has taken a loss of 70% income due to the Covid-19 crisis and is presently under administration, meaning it has collapsed and cannot operate without outside assistance. Workers know how to pressure the ANC – they burn and vandalise. Recently two large commercial trucks were razed to the ground in the centre of Pretoria by municipal workers in support of their “demands”.

Much of what is left in SA's budget kitty is stolen. Corruption Watch declares that 13% of SA's national budget will disappear annually due to corruption. The organisation says that the government has stolen the human rights of more than 50 million people- 80% of the population. Hence, “kick-starting the economy”, as declared by the president, is a bizarre pipe dream. He is here dealing with a deep-seated DNA that will not change. Stealing, corruption, mismanagement and nepotism are endemic and are here to stay, as is the regular resort to violence and destruction when various citizens' groups don't get their way. The SA economy is heading for a perfect storm.