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APDUSA VIEWS  
P O BOX 8888  
CUMBERWOOD  
3235

e-mail: [malentro@telkomsa.net](mailto:malentro@telkomsa.net)  
website: [www.apdusaviews.co.za](http://www.apdusaviews.co.za)

# **1. A NOBLE CAUSE BETRAYED: THE ANC AND THE COMMODIFICATION AND POLITICISATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN SPORT**

**by  
Christopher Merrett**

NEXT year's Football World Cup is a classic example of international capitalism in action. FIFA is one of several branches of the sports department of globalisation, each of which wields the political and economic power of a small nation. It has hired South Africa as a theatre upon which to stage a highly lucrative media event and already departed with the profit. The Cup is about a great deal more than sport, the crowds simply part of the backdrop – the cost of their tickets is almost irrelevant. But the political dividends for the ANC are significant and the nation's new elite will be disporting itself in front of the world's cameras. The rest of the country will be enjoying a long holiday and the brief opportunity to forget South Africa's enormous burden of socio-economic problems.

There is no evidence from previous mega-events, or South Africa's current circumstances, that the World Cup will deliver any major benefit. Politicians traditionally lie about the projected economic and social outcomes of such events in order to requisition the resources required for their own political ends. The best guess is a pitiful 50 000 jobs and growth of 0.94% of gross domestic product. The World Cup was never intended for the benefit of township or suburban residents.

Taxpayers will pay dearly for this act of national prostitution destined to bequeath a clutch of expensive, white elephant sports stadiums. Health, education, police and local government infrastructure budgets will continue to suffer. This is a new form of colonialism – never mind the Chinese, Sepp Blatter's FIFA has got here first with commodified sport on a grand scale. And to keep visitors safe, a new form of apartheid will have to be erected to protect them from the violence that prematurely ends the lives of 30 000 South Africans every year.

The ANC has effectively nationalised football and badgered the population with endless propaganda about the World Cup; to such effect that even mild criticism has been suppressed. The media has bought into the myth of nation building through sport (the mystique of the 1995 rugby world cup victory is constantly invoked) and any dissent from this view is equated with treason. Contrast the recent uprisings over service delivery in several townships and it is clear which option the government has chosen in response to the politicians' classic dilemma over bread or circuses. But an imposed national consensus will not outlast 2010. In 2011 the cosy relationship between nationalist politics, corporate wealth and media and sporting globalisation will no longer have even a circus to offer a suffering people.

This scenario should be no surprise to anyone familiar with the history of South African sport in the dying days of apartheid. The South African Council on Sport (Sacos) had operated as the internal wing of the anti-apartheid sports struggle since 1973. While its roots lay in the principles of the Unity Movement, members came from different political backgrounds and Sacos was determinedly non-aligned. Although its aim was to transcend tendencies in the overall interest of sport, it contained more than a trace of Black Consciousness in its encouragement of self liberation. It rejected compromise with racist sports bodies through an unswerving commitment to the double standards resolution and to the international boycott. But its main strength lay in community development and, from the early 1980s, support for strikes and other local struggle issues. Discipline was harsh, but members were expected to adhere rigidly to principles.

The position of Sacos was uncontested – the ANC gave general support to the boycott, but had no detailed policy or consistent engagement. Sacos was particularly concerned about the context in which sport was played – political, social and economic rights – and above all the shared humanity of sportspeople. For a while sport provided one of few areas of South African life (others were faith-based organisations and the universities) in which the divisive intentions of the apartheid regime could be challenged effectively. And because apartheid was, strictly speaking, rooted in legislation, short-term, irregular use of space proved hard to control even given South Africa's bureaucracy. By the time the government had turned to illegality, sport was the least of its worries.

The apartheid regime had begun to unravel following the 1976 Soweto Uprising, but the national State of Emergency declared in 1986 marked a new crisis point. Amongst liberation movements the prospect of imminent power meant that principle was sacrificed to pragmatism. The weaknesses of Sacos – insufficient penetration of the African townships and a tendency to dogmatism – made sport a soft target for the ANC. Its client, the National Congress on Sport (NSC), emerged in early 1988 with a message about a mass-based sports organisation, but pledging recognition of Sacos as the authentic anti-apartheid sports body. The NSC, it was agreed, would organise the unorganised in areas where Sacos had traditionally been weak such as rural communities; and in the townships where the government's National Security Management System (NSMS) had proved hard to crack. Sacos recognised the NSC, but its trust was ruthlessly betrayed. NSC innuendo (about organisations 'purporting' to be non-aligned) and rhetoric predominated and it was soon apparent that this was an arrangement of bad faith and power politics in which Sacos members were cynically recruited. The NSC reneged on its original undertaking and became a home for two kinds of opportunist: those anxious to establish a future within what they shrewdly assumed would eventually become the new political establishment; and pragmatists keen to achieve rapprochement with the old white sports establishment. Conflict arose over the continued boycott, between regions (Sacos remained relatively strong in the Western Cape), and amongst sports codes (cricket and road running proved fertile ground for the NSC). It took Sacos a year, a year that was to prove fatal, to declare the NSC a rival organisation.

The NSC was simply part of the cultural desk of the ANC. It had little substance other than the promotion of a particular political party. Its leading lights included names, then largely unknown, that would later become famous – Gwede Mantashe and Kgalema Motlanthe from the National Union of Mineworkers (affiliated to Cosatu); Valence Watson, Makhenkesi Stofile, Ngconde Balfour and Danny Jordaan from Sacos-affiliated sports codes; and Smuts Ngonyama and Jakes Gerwel. The ANC was interested in political power – sport was simply a useful tool to that end. Sacos was ruthlessly sidelined, abandoned by its external partner the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee (Sanroc) whose president, Sam Ramsamy, flourished under the new order. Dennis Brutus

appropriately described Sanroc as gutless. The principles of Sacos were dismissed as unrealistic and hardline. South African sport was to pay for this – and continues to do so to this day.

It was offered cynically, on a platter, to the white community for two reasons: as compensation for the loss of political power; and as insurance to underwrite cultural identity (along with guaranteed religious freedom.) The moratorium was tossed into the dustbin, unity was fast-tracked and sport handed over to the business interests that would quickly commodify and package it for lucrative profit. These were the same capitalists who had sponsored the mercenary tours of the 1980s in defiance of World opinion, the United Nations and the anti-apartheid struggle.

With time, as the ANC's need for the rainbow nation myth wore off, sport was used to pursue other objectives. Under the regime of Thabo Mbeki, racial nationalism was advanced by a new form of apartheid in the form of quotas. And after he gave way to the post-Polokwane generation, the agenda became more clearly fixed on ANC political interests as the antics of Leonard Chuene (athletics), Irvin Khoza (football) and the relentless promotion of the World Cup demonstrate. In many codes sport had become totally subservient to the pursuit by individuals and interest groups of power, influence and wealth.

'No normal sport in an abnormal society' was the famous Sacos dictum. Since the fall of white nationalism it has largely been forgotten, but contemporary events suggest that it should be re-examined. Extremes of wealth indicate that South Africa remains one of the most abnormal countries in the World. The fate of sport since the silencing of Sacos nearly 20 years ago has been one of relentless political and commercial exploitation. Sacos believed that sport belonged first and foremost to communities and their people. Now, in no small measure because of ANC cynicism and opportunism, it is little more than a packaged commodity.

And perhaps the worst aspect of the loss of the Sacos legacy is the fact that its sharp socio-political analysis is no more. Scarcely a word is raised in protest or criticism. The unholy alliance of party political and corporate power has persuaded South Africans that commodification of sport is a natural and acceptable state of affairs. It is an appalling outcome to a process of liberation.

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## 2. ABOUT CHRISTOPHER MERRETT

A small publication like ours is honoured to have an article on so important a topic like SACOS written for us to publish by a person like Christopher Merrett.

Christopher Merrett is a well known and highly respected intellectual who has an enviable track record of being a leading *libertarian*. I recall first learning of his name when he publicly came out in defence of the Unity Movement Youth Wing which was being threatened with a ban to exist and function by the ANC controlled SRC at the Medical School in Durban in the 1980's. We learnt from his letter to the Editor of the "Witness" that he was the University Librarian.

Since that time I noticed a systematic and unending stream of letters and articles, written by him covering a wide variety of subjects including knowledgeable ones on various countries in Africa. The theme of these letters and articles deals with the existence or otherwise of basic civil liberties in those countries and the plight of the poor and downtrodden.

As Administrator of the University of KZNatal, he was accessible to members of the public. There was an occasion when I desperately wanted to know how a person like Professor William Makgoba, who had been caught out when he falsified his CV for a position at Wits, got himself appointed as Principal. I needed to know the procedure and powers of the various bodies of the University. There was nobody to tell me. In desperation I telephoned the Administrator of the University who happened to be Christopher Merrett. Although we had not met, nor spoken to each other before, he did not hesitate to enlighten me in detail on the intricacies of power play by the various institutions of a university.

Civil liberties for Christopher Merrett was not just a theoretical preference. He believed in those liberties and practised them. Hence he was part of a small group of White South Africans who defied the unwritten law of the local oppressors of total prohibition of integration in sport, and joined the Aurora Cricket Club, the first

non racial sporting body in this country. That was just a step away from his decades-long support (never uncritical) for SACOS and for non racial sport.

His writing has not been confined to articles letters and reviews. He has written a number of books. He is at his best when he writes about South African society by what one reviewer of his latest book, states "using physical recreation as a lens through which he views the political, social, economic and cultural history." In this instance, of Pietermaritzburg. His latest book is "Sport, Space and Segregation" published by the KwaZulu-Natal University Press. Although Christopher Merrett writes widely, I suspect that his special love is sport about which he writes so effectively.

The reader will understand why we feel honoured to publish his article which is a fine tribute to SACOS but also an exposure of mercenary, unprincipled and ignoble behaviour.

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### **3. TREVOR MANUEL – NOT ONLY CORRUPT BUT ALSO A HYPOCRITE.**

#### **Introduction**

When the ANC elite went on a spending binge (at taxpayers' expense, of course) there was an outcry from all people sensitive to the prevailing poverty and the difficult economic times. COSATU reacting to the pressures from the working population and the unemployed masses came out in condemnation at the obscene luxury. Much to COSATU's discomfort, it had to confront the issue of the human pigs at the feeding trough when its comrade from the Alliance, Blade Nzimande, was found doing the same thing. In order to be consistent, COSATU was compelled to criticise Nzimande for his wanton luxury.

Just as one thought that the public outcry and condemnation would have a salutary effect on prospective feeders at the trough, the country was shocked to learn that Trevor Manuel went ahead and bought a luxury BMW at a cost of R1,2 million!

One wonders what made him do a stupendously foolish thing. Whatever one may have thought of his politics, at least one conceded that the man was not a crook. Did he panic because he thought that his days were numbered in cabinet in view of the incessant baying for his blood by the SACP and COSATU? Did he decide to make luxury hay while he had the chance? Who knows what goes in the mind of unprincipled people? Having bought the luxury car, Manuel must have been dismayed and taken aback at the intensity of the widespread condemnation he received.

Manuel is one of those persons who wants people to think well of him. It is one thing being sworn at and called names by his political rivals, but contempt from ordinary people? That was too much to bear.

### **No Economic Sense**

So he resorts to a stratagem whereby he can literally have his cake and eat it. He chose to confess that he made an error of judgement in buying the R1,2 million BMW but has no intention of returning it since it would make *no economic sense*. He says what all long-suffering car owners all over the world know – the rapid deterioration of the value of used cars! He proceeds to convert a vice into a virtue! He claimed that by not returning the luxury car, *he would be saving the taxpayer a substantial amount*. So he decides not to return the car for the benefit of the South African taxpayer! He now wants to save money after having indulged in shameless extravagance.

### **But a Lot of Moral Sense!**

But to have returned the luxury BMW in the name of eschewing wanton luxury would have made a lot of MORAL SENSE! It would have been a mighty blow against extravagance as a vice and in the midst of so much poverty. The whole country would have asked: if Manuel can do it, what is stopping others from doing it? They (the luxury-smitten elite in power) would all be hard-pressed to give back their luxury cars. The loss on those cars would be money well spent in the fight against corruption. But who knows? There are always moneyed people who would regard those vehicles as collectors pieces because symbolically their return

would be regarded as a significant step in the fight against corruption. In time to come those cars would be worth a lot of money!!

### **What About Compensation to the Taxpayer?**

From time immemorial, it has been a universal law that any ill-considered act by a person which causes harm or loss to any person, the perpetrator is obliged to compensate the victim.

In this instance, Manuel has admitted that he had made an ill-advised decision to buy a luxury vehicle at the expense of the taxpayer. The correct thing to do is to give back the car. He must then compensate the taxpayer or the Treasury for the loss incurred in returning the car. Manuel is not a poor man. He has been Minister for many years during which time he earned the salary enjoyed by the fat cats of the land. So he can afford to pay the compensation. But being the hypocrite he is he will not do so.

### **But Not A Smirk-free Confession**

The new elite is notorious for its petty-mindedness and meanness of spirit. Manuel is no exception. Instead of doing the right things by confessing his error and backing up his confession by returning the vehicle, Manuel flirts around with a dishonest defence by shielding behind that shameful document called THE MINISTERIAL HANDBOOK which was drawn up during the rule of the former oppressors and which was adopted by the new elite from the ANC including its members who were part of the tripartite Alliance.<sup>1</sup>

His confession leaves a bitter taste in his mouth and so he vents his spleen on the Opposition which was most vociferous in the anti-luxury cars campaign. He who engaged in obscene and expensive taste now resorts to cheap sarcasm against the DA and in particular Helen Zille who took the position of non acquisition of new and luxury vehicles for herself as Premier and others in the Western Cape government.

Had Manuel displayed the decency of an upright and principled person and if he was serious about his confession he would have sincerely complimented Helen Zille for showing the correct way.

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<sup>1</sup> Just like the murderous Napoleon and his followers adopted many of the habits of 'Farmer Jones' habits and practices in George Orwell's ANIMAL FARM.

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## **4. HISTORY SUPPRESSED IS HISTORY FALSIFIED**

### **Introduction**

Those who wish to present the history or historical role of an organisation or an individual is duty bound to present a complete picture. Not necessarily each and every detail, but complete in essence so that there is no distortion or falsification. For example, if a person is presented as champion for the rights of women and nothing is said about the well known fact that he used to regularly beat his wife, then a vital part of that person's history and character are suppressed and a false picture of that person is presented. In other words, the reader or listener has been presented with falsified history.

The above remarks are made in relation to a lecture presented by Professor Raymond Suttner on the occasion of the inauguration of the Bram Fischer Multi-purpose Hall on the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2009. While broadly speaking one accepts what was said about Fischer's role in the fight against oppression by the Whites represented in the main by the Nationalist Party and the United Party, one rejects most strenuously the deliberate suppression of the role of Bram Fischer as a member of the Communist Party in its relationship with the Stalinist Soviet Union.

It has been said on many occasions in the past that the Communist Party of South Africa (or SACP as it was later called) in its relationship with the Soviet Union has been the most servile Communist party in the world.

It is well known that the ideals of socialism fought with such dedication and sacrifice were grossly betrayed by Stalin and the Soviet bureaucracy. Virtually the entire leadership of the Bolshevik Party of various levels were physically exterminated, either by an overworked firing squad or through the rigours and cruelty (starvation, unreasonably high work quota, lack of medical treatment, inadequate clothing) in ice bound Siberia and sadistic forms of detention that prisoners were subjected to. The great and

bloody purge carried out in the late 1930s would turn one's hair white through the sheer horror that was perpetrated on persons who had engaged in the noblest activity of seeking the liberation of the toiling Russian masses from serfdom and capitalist exploitation. Being committed internationalists, their vision extended and embraced the toiling masses throughout the world.

The Soviet Union under the rule of Stalin and his henchmen trampled underfoot every bit of civil liberty. There was no rule of law; there was no justice. There were trumped up charges presented in courts presided over by judges/magistrates who were from the beginning committed to rendering a guilty verdict. Outside the courtroom was the firing squad with itchy fingers on the trigger.

While the Communist Party of South Africa condemned the oppression of the people in South Africa and demanded justice and the rule of law for the overwhelming majority, it and its members, including Bram Fischer, gave wholehearted support to the butchery of the Bolsheviks and other political organisations engaged in the struggle. They justified their support on the grounds that those massacred were "counter-revolutionaries" "saboteurs" and "agents of imperialism"; until 1956, when Khrushchev delivered his famous speech at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress (of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) in which he lifts one corner of the suppressed history. As it happened, apart from a few statistics, Khrushchev told the delegates to that Congress really nothing that the entire world did not know. That is the entire world save for the servile supporters of Stalin who claimed that they did not know that those horrors were taking place.

Bram Fischer was one of those persons who did not raise even a whisper of protest or condemnation against the mass violation of the rule of law and justice and against the unending massacre of political opponents. Not at the time of the perpetration of the enormous crimes. Nor even at the time that Khrushchev made his exposure.

Professor Suttner is not unaware of this criticism from a section of the Left on the position of Bram Fischer and members of the Communist Party.

The reason/excuse for Bram Fischer's position as a loyal member of the Communist Party in relation to the happenings in the Soviet Union is attributed to his ignorance of what took place there. This is not a fresh excuse. It is the excuse of those like Ray Alexander who in spite of visits to the Soviet Union and East European countries under Soviet control claim ignorance of the repression of the people in those countries.

To the best of the writer's knowledge, the bloody purge of the Bolsheviks and the valiant struggle of the Left Opposition was given wide publicity internationally. There was a massive campaign publicising the atrocities.

To crown it all there was the Dewey Commission which was set up in 1937. It was headed by the renowned and revered educationist John Dewey. In effect it was a counter-trial to the trumped up trials against Trotsky and his son Leon Sedov staged in Moscow. Trotsky offered to submit himself to cross examination from any person or party which chose to do so. The Dewey Commission invited all interested parties including the Soviet Government to participate in its proceedings.

The Commission and its proceedings received wide and intense publicity on an international scale.

According Isaac Deutscher, renowned historian, Leon Trotsky who was the principal accused in the Moscow trials, submitted himself to a weeks' intensive questioning over thirteen long sessions.

"There was not a single question into which he refused to go or which he dodged."<sup>2</sup>

Thus there was sufficient material available to any person interested in hearing a viewpoint which contradicted that of the Soviet Government and its minions throughout the world.

In due course the Dewey Commission rendered a unanimous verdict of "NOT GUILTY" in favour of Trotsky and his son. That verdict also received wide publicity internationally.

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<sup>2</sup> The Prophet Outcast by Isaac Deutscher Oxford University Press 1963 page 374

The excuse of ignorance in these circumstances does not stand the test of reason. It can only mean that the Communist Party and Fischer as its loyal member ***chose consciously*** not to question or challenge the official Stalinist line that those Bolsheviks and Opposition members who were being lined up and slaughtered by the firing squads were ***counter-revolutionaries, saboteurs, agents of fascism and/ or imperialism.*** Never mind the absence of the rule of law, the torture, the forced confessions and the staged trials. Never mind the overwhelming improbability that the victims of the purge could in fact be guilty of such heinous crimes.

So here you have a person who in the South African political set-up fought tooth and nail against oppression, against the absence of the rule of law, against the absence of justice for the millions of its dark skinned citizens. Yet when it came to the Great Purge of the late 1930s in the Soviet Union, Fischer condoned or actively supported the very things he fought so nobly in South Africa.

Surely such a glaring contradiction is not only worthy of record, it must also be closely analysed and interrogated most intensively. A failure to do so must end up presenting a lopsided and false account of the man. Hence in this manner, history has been falsified.

The least Professor Suttner is obliged to do is to present the other side of Bram Fischer and if possible, a reasonable explanation for the glaring contradiction in his political position.

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## **WAS NIGERIAN CORRUPTION USED AS AN INSTRUCTION MANUAL?**

*(Editor's Note: This article is from a book written by Chinua Achebe, Africa's leading thinker, writer and most outspoken critic of corruption and abuse of power. The article is from his book "The Trouble with Africa." The title appearing above is ours)*

Quite recently an astonishing statement credited to President Shagari was given some publicity in Nigeria and abroad. According to the media our President said words to the effect that there was

corruption in Nigeria but that it had not yet reached alarming proportions. . .

My frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not yet become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country. Shagari is neither a fool nor a crook. So I must assume that he lives abroad. Which is not as strange or fanciful as some might think. Many Presidents, especially Third World Presidents, do not live in their country. One of the penalties of exalted power is loneliness. Harnessed to the trappings of protocol and blockaded by a buffer of grinning courtiers and sycophants, even a good and intelligent leader will gradually begin to forget what the real world looks like. When a President of Nigeria sets out to see things for himself, what does he actually see?

Highways temporarily cleared of lunatic drivers by even more lunatic presidential escorts; hitherto impassable tracks freshly graded and even watered to keep down the dust; buildings dripping fresh paint; well-fed obsequious welcoming parties; garlands of colourful toilet paper hung round the neck by women leaders; troupes of "cultural dancers" in the sun, and many other such scenes of contented citizenry. But history tells us of wise rulers at different times and places who achieved rare leadership by their blunt and simple refusal to be fooled by guided tours of their own country. In antiquity we read, for example, of Haroun al Rashid, an eighth century caliph of Baghdad, who frequently disguised himself and went unaccompanied into the streets of his city by day or night to see the life of his subjects in its ungarnished and uncensored reality. Modern history has its examples too, but they may be too close for comfort.

So Shehu Shagari should return home, read the papers and from time to time talk to Nigerians outside the circle of Presidential aides and party faithfuls. Corruption in Nigeria has passed the alarming and entered the fatal stage; and Nigeria will die if we keep pretending that she is only slightly indisposed. The ***Weekly Star*** of 15 May 1983 has this on its front page under the title ***The Nigerian and Corruption:***

Keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is..  
like keeping a goat from eating yam.

This is a bad way of putting it, worse perhaps than the President's denial of its severity. A goat needs yam because yam is food for goats. A Nigerian does not need corruption, neither is corruption necessary nourishment for Nigerians. It is totally false to suggest, as we are apt to do, that Nigerians are different fundamentally from any other people in the world. Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable; they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made ***difficult and inconvenient***. (Our italics and emphasis)

Furthermore the concept of "the average Nigerian" in this connection is hardly helpful. If indeed there is such a creature as "an average Nigerian" he is likely to be found at a point in social space with limited opportunities for corruption as we generally understand the word. Corruption goes with power and whatever the average man may have, it is *not* power. Therefore to hold any useful discussion of corruption we must first locate it where it properly belongs - in the ranks of the powerful.

The ostrich evasion of President Shagari and the fatalistic acceptance of the ***Weekly Star*** writer are among the major obstacles to a proper assessment of, and solution to, the problem of rampant corruption in Nigeria.

As I write this in my hotel room in Kano (Monday 16 May 1983) I have two of this morning's papers on my table - ***National Concord*** and ***Daily Times***. I shall go no further for my examples of Nigerian corruption.

The ***Concord*** carries a banner headline: FRAUD AT P and T. followed by a story with no less authority than that of the Federal Minister of Communications, Mr. Audu Ogbe, that "the Federal Government is losing #N50 million every month as salaries" to non-existent workers.

In the course of one year then Nigeria loses #N600 million in this particular racket. A series of little comparisons may bring home the size of this loss.

With #N600 million Nigeria could build two more international airports like the Murtala Muhammed Airport in Lagos; or if we are not keen on more airports the money could buy us three

refineries; or build us a dual express motorway from Lagos to Kaduna; or pay the salary of 10,000 workers on grade level 01 for forty years!

And please remember that Minister Audu Ogbe is not telling us about *all* the fraud in the Posts and Telegraphs Department but only about one particular racket which has just come to light: payment of salaries to fictitious workers.

And please, please remember also that Mr. Audu Ogbe is in no position to inform us about fraud in other Federal parastatals; not to talk of state government companies and corporations; not to talk of the Federal Civil Service including, if you please, the Department of Customs and Excise; not to talk of nineteen state civil services; not to talk of Local Governments, or Abuja., or etc., etc., etc.. And of course there is the completely different world of the Private Sector!

Would it be too fanciful then to reckon that the sum of all the fraud committed against the people of Nigeria in the public and the private services would come to a figure so staggering as completely to boggle the imagination?

We have become so used to talking in millions and billions' that we have ceased to have proper respect for the sheer size of such numbers. I sometimes startled my students by telling them that it was not yet one million days since Christ was on earth. As they gazed open-mouthed I would add: Not even half-a-million days!

In traditional Igbo lore numbers like one million are called **agukata agba awari**: *you count and count till your jaw breaks*. And yet it is now the prime ambition of so many to steal so much from the nation.

Now let's look at the other paper on my table. The ***Daily Times*** editorial headlined *The Fake Importers* brings us another revelation, this time at the ports - a story of Nigerian importers who having applied for and obtained scarce foreign exchange from the Central Bank ostensibly to pay for raw materials overseas, leave the money in their banks abroad and ship to Lagos containers of mud and sand!

I consider myself a reasonably humane person, but I must confess that after reading that editorial I dredged up from the depths of my psyche the following punishment: insert the importer head-first into his mud, seal the container once more and ship it back to his overseas collaborators!

These two stories - the payment of ghost workers at the Posts and Telegraphs and the importation of mud into Nigeria - are carried by two newspapers which I just happen to have bought this morning. If I had more papers or more days to choose from I could multiply such scandals and frauds against the nation a hundred-fold, nay, a thousand!

Knowledgeable observers have estimated that as much as 60 percent of the wealth of this nation is irregularly consumed by corruption. I have no doubt that defenders of our system would retort: Mere rumours! Where is the proof?

No one can offer "satisfactory" proof for the simple reason that nobody issues a receipt for a bribe or for money stolen from the public till. We do know, however, that when the revolution which such scandalous behaviour invites does come, proofs tend all of a sudden to pour out in torrential abundance. Meanwhile, as thieves say to one another, mum's the word!

So we must fall back on intelligent observation, surmises, estimations and even rumours.

A few years ago a new cultural facility was opened in London by Queen Elizabeth II. It was called the Barbican Centre and it cost the British tax-payer £150 million, which is roughly equivalent to #N180 million. It was such a magnificent structure that one account described it as the Eighth Wonder of the World.

We know that Nigeria in the last decade has built many structures worth more (or rather that cost more) than #N180 million. But show me one wonder among them, unless it be the wonder of discrepancy between cost and value!

The reason for this is quite simple. A structure that costs us, say #N200 million carries a huge element of kick back s and commissions to Nigerian middlemen and, increasingly, middle women. It carries inflated prices of materials caused largely by

corruption: theft and inefficiency on the site fostered by more corruption; contract variations corruptly arranged midstream in execution, an inflated margin (or, more aptly, corridor) of profit. When all these factors are added to others which our corrupt ingenuity constantly invents, you will be lucky if on completion (assuming such a happy event occurs) your structure is worth as much as #N80 million.

It would be impossible and, even if possible, of little value to attempt a comprehensive picture of the types and scope of Nigerian corruption. I will only say that most people will agree that corruption has grown enormously in magnitude and brazenness since the beginning of the Second Republic because it has been extravagantly fuelled by budgetary abuse and political patronage on an unprecedented scale.

Public funds are now routinely doled out to political allies and personal friends in the guise of contracts to execute public works of one kind or another, or licences to import restricted commodities. Generally a political contractor will have no expertise whatsoever nor even the intention to perform. He will simply sell the contract to a third party and pocket the commission running into hundreds of thousands of naira or even millions for acting as a conduit of executive fiat.

Alternatively he can raise cash not by selling the contract but by collecting a "mobilization fee" from the Treasury, putting aside the contract for the time being or for ever, buying himself a Mercedes Benz car and seeking elective office through open and massive bribery.

If in spite of all his exertions, he still fails to win nomination or is defeated at the polls he may be rewarded with a ministerial appointment. Should he as minister find himself engulfed in serious financial scandal the President will promptly re-assign him - to another ministry.

Although Nigeria is without any shadow of doubt one of the most corrupt nations in the world there has not been one high public officer in the twenty-three years of our independence who has been made to face the music for official corruption. And so, from fairly timid manifestations in the 1960s, corruption has grown bold and ravenous as, with each succeeding regime, our public servants have become more reckless and blatant. As we have sunk more

and more deeply into the quagmire we have been "blessed" with a succession of leaders who are said to possess impeccable personal integrity but unfortunately are surrounded by sharks and crooks. I do confess to some personal difficulty in even beginning to visualize genuine integrity in that kind of fix; for it has always seemed to me that the test of integrity is its blunt refusal to be compromised.

But be that as it may, we are all living witnesses to the failure of helpless integrity to solve the problem of rampant corruption which threatens now to paralyse this country in every sinew and every limb.

Obviously this situation which has built up over the years will take some time to correct, assuming we want to do it peacefully. But to initiate change the President of this country must take, and be seen to take, a decisive first step of ridding his administration of all persons on whom the slightest wind of corruption and scandal has blown. When he can summon up the courage to do that he will find himself grown overnight to such stature and authority that he will become Nigeria's leader, not just its president.

Only then can he take on and conquer corruption in the nation.

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