

Not African way

FRIENDS of mine talked about doing something "the African way", ie paying and taking bribes for licences, appointments etc. Well, they are wrong. Bribes are as American as apple pie, as European as fish and chips and as Afrikaans as Boere-wors. Pick up Gustavus Myers' 'The History of the Great American Fortunes' and D O'Meara's 'Volkskapitalisme' and you will see that corruption was an integral part of Euro-American, Euro-African and European development. (And the media keep us informed that the Euros of today are far from corruption-proof).

Corruption means: The functionaries who have been elected or appointed treat the power delegated by the public as if they owned it. What every citizen has a right to demand because of constitutional or legal guarantees, because of merit or certified qualifications is withheld or handed out by divine grace or rather administrative arbitrariness. The receiver is then expected to demonstrate his or her appreciation by being loyal or at least grateful to the generous official, by offering sexual favours or boetie-boetie support, or by simply paying for the services.

Corruption means: The people wielding power like that have to secure and enhance their power. They pull up the ladders of promotion so that others cannot claim up to their heights or they promote only those who will not be a threat to them. They, furthermore, do everything to accrue more power to themselves and have their eyes on even higher hierarchical grandeur.

Corruption, the private accumulation of power which is of social origin and should be made to work in the public interest only, tends to threaten democratic development:

Corruption excludes the others who happen to be outside the pale of power and thus generates a division between a new political class and the majority of the powerless.

Corruption seriously endangers the statal and parastatal machines' power to generate and redistribute national wealth and turns the attempt to redress colonial inequality by affirmative action into de facto job reservation. Officials who concentrate on their own relative superiority are, of necessity, wasteful with resources, disinterested in their work and pay nothing but lip service to the community and the nation.

Corruption undermines the moral fibre of a nation: People who are in the limelight as VIPs and potential role models do not turn to corruption clandestinely. They enjoy parading its results in the form of conspicuous consumption and ostentatious grandeur. Commoners tend to follow suit by indulging in petty corruption, by becoming overtly cynical or by accepting their continued exclusion from power as something having been ordained by fate.

Namibians have suffered and died fighting against colonial corruption. They certainly have not taken such sacrifices upon them to usher in an era of postcolonial or even neocolonial corruption. To honour them we have to continue their fight.

Let us be honest and check whether corruption has already taken roots in our society.

Let us insist on our rights as

voters, taxpayers and collective owners of an exemplary democratic constitution and gently but persistently urge our Ministers and administrators to act as servants of the nation.

Let us not forget that foreign donors have sometimes - probably unknowingly - boosted the public image of corrupt African rulers. The flow of foreign money, goods and know-how allows many self-serving elites to imprint on the public mind that they have a 'rain-making' or 'cargo-cult' ability to attract foreign wealth and seemingly superior Western expertise. They, of course, have never been keen on showing the back side of the coin: debts to be paid; the resulting redundancy of traditional indigenous knowledge and the potential threat to established indigenous production; an emerging donor-dependency syndrome.

Let us not be fooled into believing that the splendour of our upwardly mobile leaders is of immediate benefit for the social groups they have come from and that their empowerment is an effective countermeasure against the still predominant metropolitan and white economic set-up.

Let us get rid of the myth that bribes are 'African'. Let us call them the offshoot of a European concept of private acquisition of goods and power.

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Drought vs Falcon

IT is very sad for a developing country like Namibia to spend R80 million on an aircraft while at the same time begging donors for drought relief funds. How can the Government purchase such an expensive plane when the country suffers from a foreign debt of over R800 million?

Some of the arguments advanced by those who support the purchase of the aircraft are credible but these do not justify the cost of the aircraft. They have obviously not considered the grave financial and political implications arising from the purchase of the aircraft.

The Honourable Minister Hamutenya argued that it is cheaper to maintain a new aircraft. This is not true. The maintenance and fuel of the Falcon will cost the Government R5 million a year.

The Minister also argued that the plane can be used on gravel landing strips. This is not true. It may land on such strips but it may not take off. These types of planes are very sensitive to dust. And once they suck a great amount of dust they need a complete replacement of certain parts which are very expensive. The Minister also gave an example of the American President. We are not Americans. The Americans have money to spend as well as to feed their people. The budget of Namibia cannot even be compared to the budget of an American city council. After all, the Americans know their priorities.

Politically, the purchase of an aircraft is damaging to the image of both Swapo and the Government. Everybody knows that the country faces a serious drought problem and other social evils. People also know that the Ministry of Transport owns five aircraft which are rarely used. Air Namibia aircraft 737 is idle most of the