

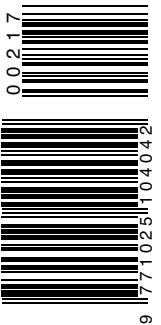
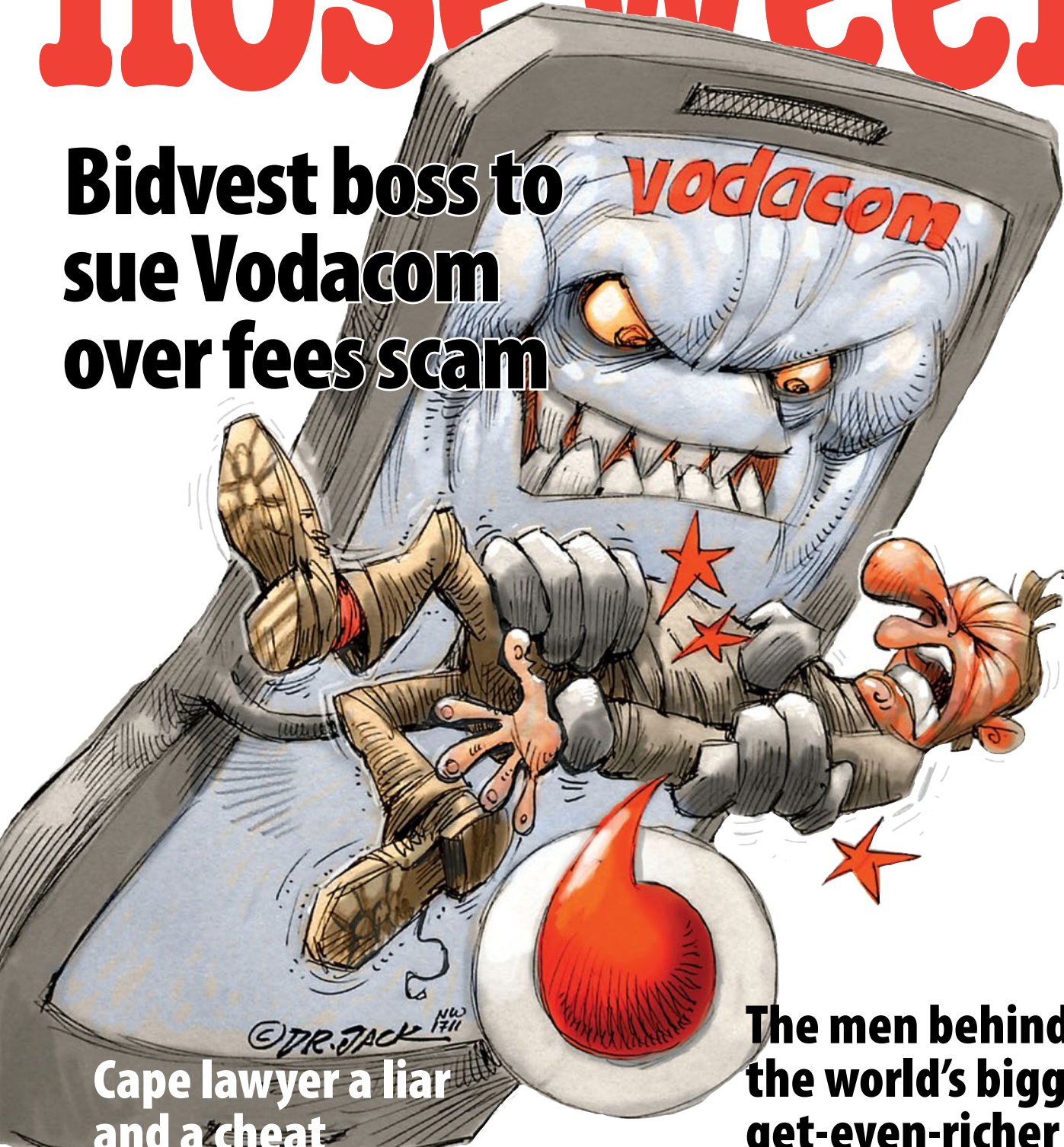
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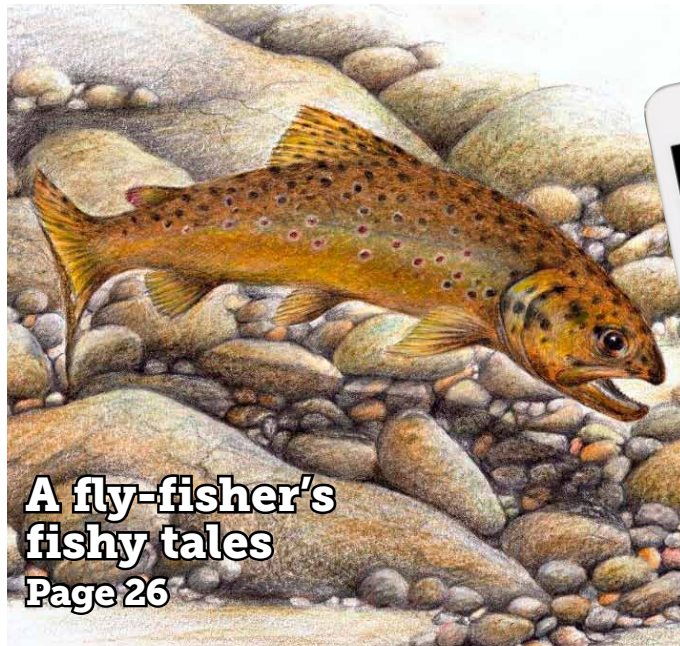
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Letters

Cover bouquet

OH, SHIT! – I DO LIKE YOUR OCTOBER magazine cover!

Andre Hanekom
Kenilworth, Cape Town

KPMG's diplomatic auditing

KPMG'S "DIPLOMATIC" AUDITING GOES way back. In the late 1980s I was employed by the Durban City Council's IT department to convert the programming of the city's computerised assets register from Mumps to Cobol, a project that took nearly three years. There were so many assets on the register that the printout pile stood more than a metre high. As a result no-one ever read it or knew what was in it; all the auditors wanted was the total.

Durban at the time claimed a world record; it and some city in Canada were the only cities that made a profit every year. Question frequently asked: why, if they are always making a profit, do rates continually rise?

One way they were doing it was by reflecting every expense incurred not as an expense in their books, but as the purchase of an asset. For example, installed street light bulbs were reflected as an asset; paint used on the roads – those white lines – was an asset. Donkeys they had bought in 1938 were still on the asset register, as were ancient tramlines long buried under layers of tarmac, still valued at cost. Contractors had been hired and paid to dig holes on Dairy Beach for poles to support a new lifesavers' hut close to the new pier. But they could not reach rock, so decided to erect the hut on North Beach instead. The abandoned holes in the sand on Dairy Beach remained on the asset register, at cost. Under the site where the Tollgate bridge now stands on the N3 highway, there was once a road intersection with robots. Those old road-works and traffic lights were still on the asset register, although they had been bulldozed away years before.

The council auditors weren't interested; they only wanted the total that the computer spewed out. When I drew the problem to the attention

of the city's external auditors, they informed me they did not carry out an independent audit; they just checked that the internal auditors were happy and had signed off the accounts.

Gary Smith
Cape Farms, Rondebeg, Western Cape

■ YOUR KPMG REPORT MAKES ONE wonder about professional status. No sooner have the accountants been sprung, along comes the South African Reserve Bank to the rescue: KPMG are too big to fail – the large corporate organisations must not ditch their Dutch Uncles.

"When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men in society, in the course of time they create a legal system that authorises it and a moral code that glorifies it." – *Economic Sophisms*, Frederic Bastiat (1801-1850).

What does the Reserve Bank know and what are they attempting to brush under the carpet? Perhaps another quotation might help:

"The few who understand the system will either be so interested in its profits or so dependent on its favours, that there will be no opposition from that class." And "Let me issue and control a nation's money and I care not who writes the laws." – Mayer Amschel Bauer Rothschild, (1744-1812).

Does history not teach us anything?

Barry Midgley
Durban

PS: This is not cricket! Where is Harold Strachan? I don't recall receiving a leave application – his is the most important article in *Noseweek*; without it we get withdrawal symptoms. – BM

See page 12 to understand the system – and then page 30 to light up your day! – Ed.

Have a bennie!

YOUR ARTICLE (*BIG PHARMA, NOSE216*) about the over-prescription of drugs was spot-on, if our local GPs are anything to go by. I was prescribed benzodiazepine a couple of years ago;

From the letters page, in *nose20*, December 1997:

Wrath of Muhammad

WE NEED NOT DESPAIR BECAUSE OF Texans' decision to maintain sanctions against South Africa! By God, The Prophets and CNN, El Nino is going to flood Texas by New Year's Day, and I will rejoice in the justice of the Laws of God and physics.

Muhammad Jadwat
La Mercy Beach, KZN

Mr Jadwat's prophecy was only 20 years out, but the residents of Houston may need reminding why the recent devastating hurricane was visited upon them. – Ed.

a month's supply plus two repeats. Since "bennies" are both easily abused and highly addictive, I was careful to make the month's supply last for nearly a year. By then the repeat prescriptions were out-of-date so I went back to ask, somewhat sheepishly, for a further supply and in a burst of generosity my dealer – sorry, my doctor – upped the dose and gave me another three months' supply. I mentioned that the product leaflet advised a maximum treatment period of two weeks but he said I was mistaken. I'm a pretty big guy (of Russian descent); I wonder if smaller folk are more at risk than me.

'Bear' Lee Konshus
Southern Cape

■ TO ADD TO YOUR EXCELLENT ARTICLE titled "Big Pharma is making us sick" (*nose216*) two notable quotes:

"It is simply no longer possible to believe much of the clinical research that is published, or to rely on the judgment of trusted physicians or authoritative medical guidelines. I take no pleasure in this conclusion, which I reached slowly and reluctantly over my two decades as an editor of *The New England Journal of Medicine*." – Marcia Angell, MD, in the *New York Review of Books*, January 15, 2009.

“The case against science is straightforward: much of the scientific literature, perhaps half, may simply be untrue. Afflicted by studies with small sample sizes, tiny effects, invalid exploratory analyses, and flagrant conflicts of interest, together with an obsession with pursuing fashionable trends of dubious importance, science has taken a turn towards darkness.”
 – Richard Horton, editor-in-chief, *The Lancet*, April 2015.

And who can argue with that!

Dr David Klatzow,
 Forensic scientist, Cape Town

Well done, neighbour!

WELL DONE TO NAMIBIA; THINKING outside the proverbial box is the way to go! SA Ports, SA Customs

and SARS will have to catch a BIG wake-up because Nam is busy taking business away from inefficient, bloated, red-tape and expensive SA government-run Ports Authority operations!

Rick Lobb
 Sunridge Park

Time Vodacom got stung

IF YOU ARE A VICTIM OF VODACOM'S WASP scam [charges to your cellphone account for junk “content” you neither ordered nor authorised] and assuming that the amount is less than R15,000, lodge a claim against Vodacom at the small claims court. Since the police and NPA have done nothing about it for years, *Noseweek* should encourage

everyone to go the small claims court route. If enough people do, Vodacom and friends will have to shut down these scams, because it will cost them too much to defend.

Ian Ashmole
 Posted online

No miracle cures

THERE ARE NO LONGER ETHICS IN BUSINESS, only the desire to be rich at all costs; even if it means that innocent people will die. When it comes to our health, we really have to apply common sense: drink water, eat in moderation, rest, but most importantly avoid miracle cures as they simply do not exist.

KG
 Pretoria



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unDONE

THIS MONTH, ALL I NEED DO IS RECOMMEND that you read a recently published book by Jacques Peretti titled *Done*, published by Hodder. You can start with the extract from the book on page 12. But for local perspective, keep the following in mind:

● Jonathan Taplin, *New York Times*, 22 April 2017: "Facebook, Google and Amazon have stymied innovation on a broad scale. They have become the point of access to all media for the majority of Americans [and *South Africans*]. Profits have soared while revenues in newspaper publishing have, since 2001, fallen by 70%. Billions of dollars have been re-allocated from creators of content to owners of monopoly platforms. Content creators dependent on advertising must negotiate with Google or Facebook."

● In *nose116* (June 2009) we reported that Johannesburg businessman Christopher Leppan had applied to court to have ponzi-operator Barry Tannenbaum declared insolvent. Leppan had invested in what was supposed to be a hugely profitable scheme to finance the importation of raw materials required for the manufacture of anti-retroviral drugs needed by the country's millions of indigent AIDS-sufferers. Leppan was promised a 20% return on his money every 12 weeks. That's more than 80% per year.

But when the time came to collect, Tannenbaum's cheque bounced, his bank account had been closed and Tannenbaum had emigrated to Australia. South Africa's latest and largest-ever ponzi scheme had collapsed. Who else had rushed to invest in this fabulous money-making scheme?

Finding the old stockbroking Lowenthals, father and son, in there with the best of the cowboys came as no surprise. But ex Pick n Pay CEO Sean Summers for R50m and ex OK Bazaars CEO Mervyn Serebro for R40m?! What were they, and John Storey of Cobalt Capital, Nic Pagden ex City Group (a rumoured R40m), Bruce MacDonald of Zenprop (said to be in for R50m), Tim Hacker and Johnny Rosenberg, doing there? All claimed to have consulted experts and auditors who assured them all was well.

How come these smart businessmen, with their lawyers and accountants, never got around to asking themselves: if Tannenbaum can offer 20% for a ten-week investment – secured by advance orders from generic drug manufacturer, Aspen – why wouldn't he take the same contracts to his bankers, RMB and Investec, borrow the money at

4% for two months and keep the remaining 16%? Charity for millionaires?

Did any of them pause to consider they were lining up to make easy billions out of South Africa's need for anti-retrovirals to deal with the AIDS crisis? How do we face a recession with that low level of business acumen and/or morality at the top?

● In March, AmaBhungane investigator Craig McKune revealed that: "The US-listed firm Net1 uses its subsidiary Cash Paymaster Services' (CPS) social grant distribution contract as a secret back door to harvest grant recipients' information. This is forbidden. Then Net1 uses the information to make billions selling micro-loans [at outrageous interest rates], insurance, airtime and other low-end financial products to beneficiaries."

"The Sassa contract forbade CPS and its subcontractors from using the beneficiaries' information for anything but paying grants. But other companies in the Net1 group are using the beneficiary data to seduce them into signing up for bank cards which allow Net1-associated businesses to extract deductions for loans, electricity, airtime and insurance, etc, trapping South Africa's poorest in a cycle of debt. Net1 is responsible for most of the R550m that comes off beneficiaries' bank accounts every month, court papers show," McKune reported.

● In late September DA shadow minister of social development Bridget Masango made an inspection visit to the Eastern Cape. In Tsolo, social security agency workers reported that illegal deductions from social grants are ongoing. The elderly sometimes get as little as R70 from a foster care grant of R920. Some old age grant recipients received R850 not R1,610.

In Butterworth she visited banks, ATMs and the Net1 Financial Services office. She noted that the queue at the Net1 Financial Services office providing EasyPay green cards and loans, was much longer than those at Sassa and bank ATMs.

"Green" cards – issued by Net1 associate Grindrod Bank – allow these deductions. Most recipients did not know they can refuse green cards in favour of the white Sassa cards that don't. Late at night at the local hospital grant recipients were waiting for midnight to withdraw their money before the illegal deductions could take place.

"The poor and needy are being pushed deeper into poverty and hopelessness," Masango said in a statement.

The Editor

Notes & Updates

KZN Bar brawl spreads the dirt

IN A RECENT JUDGMENT SUSPENDING KwaZulu-Natal Advocate Penny Hunt for six months, for spying on her colleagues, the same judgement rebuked the KwaZulu-Natal Bar of Advocates for embarking on a dirty tricks campaign to destroy Hunt's credibility.

The strike-off application was brought by the KZN Bar and heard in the Pietermaritzburg High Court. In a trial spanning 20 days over 18 months, many of the salacious details that spilled into the open in court, emanated from the Pietermaritzburg Bar. They included accounts of extramarital affairs, swearing, drunkenness, backstabbing and a childish dispute over how many cups of tea the tea-lady was allowed to make for each staff member (See *nose210*).

Hunt is currently seeking the provincial judge president's leave to appeal her six-month suspension, while the Bar has launched a cross-application to have Hunt's suspension made permanent.

The judgment recounts that on 11 June 2010, at a farewell party for Judge Rob Griffiths, who had just been elevated to the bench, Hunt spilled a drink on the head of a drunken fellow advocate, Mergen Chetty. Chetty claimed Hunt had deliberately poured it on his head. They had words, until Hunt's husband, Cameron Hunt SC, a former amateur boxer and a regular for representing the South African Revenue Service, stepped in and "hit Chetty twice with a fist", who "fell to the floor and only regained consciousness after a few minutes".

With a couple of loose teeth and a bruised ego, Chetty now wanted to sue Hunt SC. His wife Penny, rallying to her husband's defence, hired private investigator Houston Impey to place a tracker on Chetty's car and a listening device in the Bar administrator's office "to get some dirt on him". She wanted

to prove that Chetty was a regular drunkard and that the Bar, in disciplining her husband for knocking out Chetty, should take this into account.

But then Hunt's surveillance plot was reported by her former secretary, to Adrian Rall SC, chairman at the time of the Pietermaritzburg Bar.

PI Impey admitted to having installed the listening and tracking devices, but on Hunt's instruction. The question the strike-out judges needed to answer was whether Impey was lying, as Hunt maintained. She claimed she had merely employed Impey to "sweep" her office, and had asked for Chetty to be followed to help clear her husband's name.

"Impey had no cause to install a listening device off his own bat. The same goes for the tracking device on Chetty's car.

"[Penny Hunt's] actions show a lack of judgment. The standard of her behaviour fell short of what is expected from an advocate [but] the conduct of the respondent does not show a flaw in her character [sufficient to] justify striking off," read the judgment.

It said the "hostility of the Bar Council" to Hunt was evident when they accused her in public of theft of the Bar's CCTV hard-drive, when "there was no substance in such charge".

"The publicity resulted in serious and lasting damage to the respondent's [Penny Hunt's] reputation and practice. The conduct of the Pietermaritzburg Bar Council must be frowned upon by this court, because not only did it damage its own image, it also caused the evidence presented at this hearing to be muddled with irrelevant issues."

However, it added that "it is beyond question" that Cameron Hunt SC "did not act in the manner expected from a member of the Bar". ■

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JSE investigators assess Bonamour's offshore frolic

Which way will Tiso Blackstar chairman David Adomakoh and the Concert Party jump? By Jack Lundin

THE INVESTIGATIONS UNIT AT THE Johannesburg Stock Exchange has been assessing *Noseweek's* revelations (*nose216*) that an unconventional offshore money-spinner enriched media giant Tiso Blackstar's chief executive Andrew Bonamour and his asset-stripping mentor Julian Treger by up to R295m. The London Stock Exchange has launched its own investigation.

Our story told how, for more than three years, Bonamour used his British Virgin Islands-registered company, Blackstar Managers, to identify Black Economic Empowerment investment opportunities in South Africa, and billed his own newly-listed Blackstar Investors Plc for millions in performance and advisory fees.

Newly-consecrated media baron Bonamour, 46-year-old chief executive of the dual-listed Tiso Blackstar Group, which owns a bundle of titles including *Sunday Times*, *Business Day* and the *Financial Mail*, claims to be the founder of Blackstar – and takes credit for raising its billion rand start-up capital on the Alternative Investment Market of the London Stock Exchange.

Yet when the embryo Blackstar sought admission to the LSE's junior market in 2006, the admission document described him as a mere contracted service provider. As revealed in *nose216*, Bonamour was introduced as someone with "extensive experience in the financial services industry", who had established a newly-formed management company registered in the British Virgin Islands. Conditional on admission, the new Plc planned to enter into a service agreement with him on an annual salary of £15,000 to source Black

Economic Empowerment investment opportunities in South Africa.

"The role between the parties is strictly one of independent contractor and client," independent director David Brock assured the LSE regulators, as well as potential investors.

Little did they know that Bonamour, along with London-based Julian Treger, a 54-year-old Old Davidonian – former pupil of King David High School, Linksfield – had planned the formation of Blackstar Investors Plc months earlier in Johannesburg. They'd also planned the establishment in the British Virgin Islands of an unconnected (and misleadingly named) company, Blackstar Managers, which would deliver to them handsome rewards in the name of Black Economic Empowerment. (At Blackstar these days the BEE acronym stands for Bonamour's Economic Empowerment).

As previously recounted, on the strength of David Brock's misleading assurances major institutional investors, including the likes of Kleinwort Benson, Bear Stearns and Merrill Lynch stumped up £80m – a billion rands – to provide investment funding for the newly-listed Plc.

Founders of listed companies don't normally set up offshore enterprises to strip out chunks of the profits that would have been welcome on their own bottom line. Would Blackstar's original funders have been so quick to pump a billion rands into the new Plc had they known the true background? That was *Noseweek's* story last month. So what do the regulators make of it now?

The London Stock Exchange, which has suffered a flood of Chinese and Russian businesses seeking a listing

on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM) in recent years, is apparently inured to such practices. In any event, regulation of the junior market at the LSE has always been kept deliberately "flexible" – for which read 'minimal'. John Thain, while chairman of the New York Stock Exchange, famously told the World Economic Forum in Davos the year after Blackstar's listing that AIM "does not have any standards at all and anyone can list". To which AIM's head man, Martin Graham, hit back: "AIM is a risk-capital market. Investors have to take responsibility for their decisions."

As *Noseweek* went to press AIM's regulation unit tells us it is looking into Bonamour's alleged profiteering from his offshore Blackstar Managers.

In Johannesburg, Tiso Blackstar kicked off with a secondary listing on the JSE's AltX market. In July, with much trumpeting, the group was elevated to the main board. Nadia Jada, head of the JSE's investigations unit, tells *Noseweek*: "We shall assess this matter and revert as soon as possible." Her colleague Andrew Visser, general manager, issuer regulation, adds: "The JSE's powers don't extend to events or arrangements which existed prior to the company applying for a listing on the exchange. However, we shall review the information contained in the *Noseweek* article against the provisions of the listings requirements and engage with the company if necessary."

Bonamour's offshore caper was terminated by his own Blackstar group board in 2009 – the belated "internalisation" of Blackstar Managers involved the pay-out of more multi-millions to our local hero. And since it was not until



Andrew Bonamour (left) and David Adomakoh

2011 that the Blackstar group listed in Joburg, it looks as though Bonamour is in the clear there. In any event, the maverick asset-stripper has created a fresh income stream to top up his remuneration package at Tiso Blackstar: the Management Incentive Scheme.

Bonamour has always ensured that he sits on Blackstar's remuneration committee and in the early years scored himself straight bonuses: £471,000 (R5.3m) in 2010, £353,000 (R4.1m) in 2011, R3.3m in 2012. Then he came up with the Management Incentive Scheme, an annual award paid half in cash, half in Blackstar shares, for those adjudged to merit it. Since 2013 Bonamour's taken awards total R37.3m. With previous bonuses that's an extra R50m in cash and shares from debt-stricken Blackstar. To which must be added the 443,468 shares (value R4m) he dished out to himself in June, bringing his holding in Blackstar's stock to 3.4% – value R83m.

Just what Tiso Blackstar's shareholders make of their CEO's self-gratifying largesse at a time when the group's bank overdrafts are running at R94.2m, one can only imagine. The Public Investment Corp, entrusted with the management of R1.857 trillion of public funds, holds 10.3% of Blackstar's shares but declines to discuss the investment. Head of corporate affairs Deon Botha ignores a request for a view, but for now the PIC is holding on to the public's 27,716,143 Blackstar shares, worth some R250m.

But what does the Concert Party say? A mysterious entity, referred to in company documents only as "the Concert Party" holds an all-important 34.57% of Blackstar's issued shares.

Its supposedly secret members can, however, be fairly easily identified as Tiso Investments Holdings (TIH) and Tiso Foundation Charitable Trust. Now that Blackstar has disposed of its 22.9% stake in Kagiso Tiso Holdings (KagisoTH), will David Adomakoh, a KagisoTH director and co-founder and chairman of associated Tiso Investment Holdings (TIH), remain on the Blackstar board – currently as group chairman – or depart and dump the Concert Party's shareholding?

Certainly, when Tiso reversed into Blackstar three years ago, many pondered how the erudite and thoroughly respectable Adomakoh – former London banker, head of Chase Manhattan Bank in Southern Africa, and educated at the London School of Economics and the Sorbonne – would hit it off with a brash bottom line bandit like Andrew Bonamour.

Does Adomakoh, for example, approve of the CEO's obsession with Ebitda (earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation)? In his presentation of the latest Tiso

**Asked to comment
on Bonamour's
offshore antics,
AIM's investigations
unit doesn't bother
to respond**

Blackstar annual accounts and report in September, Bonamour came out with his usual flow of Ebitda-isms: Consolidated Ebitda increased by 30% to R467.6m... Strong performance from media segment with Ebitda growth of 25.8% to R131.2m...TV and radio Ebitda up by over 60%. Most of which was quoted by *Business Day* (owner Tiso Blackstar) under the headline "Tiso Blackstar on growth track".

If you prefer it straight: total debt at Tiso Blackstar stands at R1.386bn; short term borrowings total R886.8m, of which bank overdrafts are R94.2m; liabilities are R1.75bn (despite a ruthless mauling of pensioners' medical aid benefits – see *nose215* – that in four years has reduced that irritating liability from R274m to R61.9m). Group loss after tax; R15.4m.

In case you're not familiar with Ebitda, the metric was designed to give a short-term snapshot of a business's raw earnings potential, free of encumbrances like debt cost, tax burden, depreciation and amortisation. Ebitda is almost always used to justify undeserved premium valuations. Investment bankers – and asset-strippers – use Ebitda to answer the question: how much debt can we put on this company after we acquire it?

Billionaire investment guru Warren Buffett believes that "trumpeting Ebitda is a particularly pernicious practice. The fraudsters are trying to con you or they're trying to con themselves. We'll never buy a company when the managers talk about Ebitda".

Charlie Munger, Buffett's long-time business partner at Berkshire Hathaway, the US multinational conglomerate that's number two on this year's Fortune 500 list, has opined: "Every time you see the word Ebitda you should substitute 'bullshit earnings'."

Don't expect to read that in Tiso Blackstar's *Business Day* or *Financial Mail*, these days ensconced together in a cost-saving "multidisciplined" newsroom in Parktown. Despite having their own editors, both organs fall under the eagle eye of the former editor of both, Blackstar's editor-at-large Peter Bruce, an ardent admirer of the Great Asset-Stripper. When motorbike enthusiast Bonamour began commuting to work on his Triumph café racer, Bruce was quick to follow suit, wobbling in on a Honda NC750X. ■

Spouses on the scrapheap

MEDICAL AID BENEFITS FOR spouses of media pensioners at Tiso Blackstar Group will be eliminated from next January, chief executive Andrew Bonamour has ordered. The shock development has enraged retired journalists at Blackstar publications, which include *Sunday Times*, *Business Day*, *Sowetan* and *Financial Mail*.

And that's not all. At present, when pensioners die their spouses take over as principal members, and continue to receive the company's medical aid subsidy. But under Bonamour's new policy, after January 1 surviving partners and any other dependants will lose the subsidy and be scrubbed from the books.

At present, principal members on 100% benefits receive a monthly subsidy, frozen since 2014, of R1,893. Spouses get an additional R1,324 – to be axed from January. Medical cover for both at Discovery Health typically costs R9,000 per month or R100,000 plus per year, both due to increase by around 8% in 2018.

On top of this, still-serving hacks opting for early retirement – including those who leave on grounds of ill health or as an alternative to retrenchment – will have the (frozen) subsidy reduced by 2.5% for each year that they leave before the prescribed retirement age.

The new policy was communicated by Bonamour to some 300-plus pensioners on October 9. Under the previous ownership of Times Media Group, pensioners traditionally received a subsidy for life towards their medical aid cover, a subsidy which increased annually to keep pace with ever-mounting medical scheme fees. When Blackstar took effective control of the group in 2012, 688 members received the medical aid subsidy – 383 of them pensioners, 305 still working. The post-retirement subsidy liability, R67m back in 2000, had by then rocketed to R274m.

Reducing this liability has been a priority for Andrew Bonamour. A once-off cash offer in 2013 was taken up by 67% of in-service workers, but only 8% of pensioners. However, by the end of 2013 Bonamour was able to announce that the subsidy liability had been

reduced to R87m. For further saving, he froze the subsidy at its 2013 level. According to Tiso Blackstar's provisional annual results to June 2017, the liability is now down to R61.9m. The new policy will ensure that it continues to tumble as old hacks die off and their spouses are left with nothing.

As reported (*noses*189,191,215,216), a group of 51 pensioners went to court seeking resumption of annual subsidy increases. On the eve of trial a mediation resulted in the 51 receiving once-off settlements in June ranging from R96,000 to R384,000, 14 of them exceeding R300,000. The payouts totalled R13.1m – and Bonamour insisted on a confidentiality agreement.

The 300-or-so pensioners now hit by Bonamour's new policy are kicking themselves for not joining in the litigation. Some say they were not aware of the action; others didn't want to get involved in a court battle, leaving it to the 51 on the assumption that they would receive any benefits from it anyway. They failed to take into account the nature of their adversary, Andrew Bonamour.

Bonamour now justifies the axing of spouses' benefits on declining traditional media advertising and circulation revenues, while print, distribution and employment costs continue to rise with inflation. "The traditional print media businesses face a threat to their very existence," he tells the oldtimers. This gloomy picture clashes with the segmental review in Blackstar's latest annuals, which report a "strong media performance" generating revenue of R2bn for the year, "in the face of difficult trading conditions growing Ebitda (earnings) by 25.8% to R131.2m".

And though pensioners' spouses must now suffer to help relieve the group's R1.386bn debt burden, in June Bonamour still felt able to award himself 443,468 more Blackstar shares, worth R4m, in his Management Incentive Scheme, bringing the value of his now 3.4% stake in Tiso Blackstar to R83m.

News of the spouses' treatment has provoked uproar on social media. (See *Investigators assess Bonamour's offshore frolic*, page 8.)

Old hands enter the fray on Facebook

Peter Wilhelm We are both old and not exactly well. Now the spouses are to be excluded (unless I die quickly and my wife becomes the principal in time). The amounts paid are subject to continual revision "at the company's discretion". And prospective members of Tiso Blackstar as media people are duly warned ... And who really can afford to be a journalist now?

Jenny McMahon Same as all the thieves in government at the moment. And same all over the world. Money money money mad.

Eddie Botha I feel for those who have dependents. As for me, I am just thankful that they – Tiso Blackstar – will contribute for the time being.

Patricia Sidley Bonamour is the creature who is doing this. Might I suggest a group of you find a public interest law group and get another class action law suit underway. This guy is a mean thug. You all need to fight for your contractual rights.

Leon de Kock It would appear there's a certain desperation about margins in this newspaper group. It has never been a compassionate company, not in any of its manifestations: TML, Johnnic, Avusa, now TB - I know, I've worked for every one of them.

Fog of jaw over KZN land claim

FOR 103-YEAR-OLD PIETERMARITZBURG labour tenant Zabalaza Mshengu, the road to getting title deeds to the land he has occupied his entire life has no end in sight.

He has been waiting for his land to be transferred to his name for 16 years, but a series of delays, most of them unexplained, have dogged the process.

However, it would seem articles in *Noseweek* may have spurred some of those responsible for the delays into (slow) action. The director-general of the Department of Rural Development and Land Affairs in KZN, Jomo Ntuli, is finally taking a personal interest in the matter. Whether that will make a difference is yet to be seen.

Mshengu lodged his claim for the five hectare piece of land before 31 March 2001 – the cut-off date in line with the Land Reform (Land Tenants) Act. Only 22,000 such claims were lodged countrywide. A labour tenant is a farm worker who exchanged his labour on a commercial farm for the right to farm a portion of land for himself.

Mshengu was born on the land on 11 January 1914. Until 2006 the farm had been owned by at least two generations of the Hardman family. However the department (which must pay for Mshengu's piece of land), and the new farm owner, a black-directed company, Shockproof Investments 71 Pty Ltd, have yet to finalise the sale.

In May 2011, Mshengu, with the help of the Pietermaritzburg-based Association for Rural Advancement, dragged the department to the land claims court in an attempt to hurry the process along. An order was made by Acting Judge C Sardiwalla to do just that, but to no avail.

In May 2016 Mshengu brought a new application to the local high court. On 31 July (*nose215*) the Pietermaritzburg High Court ordered Shockproof Investments 71 and the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform to have the land valued within 60 days.

This has been done, but once again there is no clear path ahead.

Mshengu's lawyer, Muzi Mzila, told

Noseweek that Shockproof, through attorneys Schoerie & Sewgoolam Inc. has appointed Durban-based Ian Wyles Auctioneers & Appraisers to value the land. It has no services and there are just four simple dwellings, occupied by Mshengu, his two sons, and their livestock. Its market value has been placed at R1.3m, significantly up from the R950,000 it was valued at in 2014. In September 2016 the state offered R221,460 but Shockproof wanted "about R500,000". Deadlock set in and the deal stalled.

Shockproof directors are Dr Nomsa Dlamini and Roshan Morar. They are both extraordinarily politically connected (see *nose213*).

When contacted by *Noseweek*, Dlamini said the delay in finalising the matter was "a tragedy". She said she does not live on the land that she and her business partner bought to develop an upmarket housing estate.

"When we bought the farm the previous owner told us about the land tenant claim. We accepted it. In 2012 we signed the necessary paperwork with the department for the transfer of land to be completed to the labour tenants. We were under the impression there were three families and we had committed to giving them five hectares each while only charging the state for a total of six hectares," said Dlamini.

She said it was only after she saw

the article in *Noseweek* that she realised that not only had the matter not been concluded, but the plight of the other two families on the farm had not been addressed.

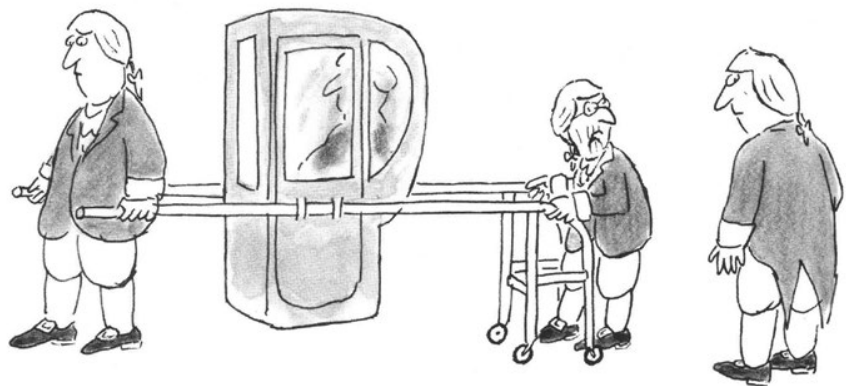
While the housing development has not taken off, she said she has been in contact with the department in a bid to finalise this matter.

"The delays can only lead a person to believe there are people within the department with their own agendas," she told *Noseweek*.

Department spokesman Sbonelo Hlongwane said "no specific date" has been set for when Mshengu should take transfer but they've instructed his attorney to "assist him with a will and to nominate a person who will carry on with his claim in any eventuality". He said once the land is transferred Mshengu will have no conditions placed on his ownership.

"As a labour tenant he qualifies for the land in full title."

Hlongwane dismissed the notion that either political pressure or bureaucratic lethargy were delaying the sale, adding that a "final" valuation will be done by the office of the valuer-general once agreement has been reached on the size of the land. Hlongwane said they have instructed Mzila, who they are paying on behalf of Mshengu, to also assist another two families on the farm with labour tenancy rights. ■



"I can't afford to retire."

S. GROSS

The biggest ever get-rich-quick plan

Lucy Mangan, in the UK *Guardian*, describes Jacques Peretti's book *Done*, and the BBC documentary series that accompanied it, as 'So brilliant you want to take notes'. Peretti explains the human 'global warming' the world is experiencing; why in recent years the rich everywhere – and excruciatingly so in South Africa – have been getting vastly richer, while the number of poor grows exponentially and the middle class drowns in debt on its way to extinction. The real surprise: it's all part of a perfectly logical plan – the biggest get-rich-quick scam or 'profit opportunity' the world has ever known. Peretti is no conspiracist. A graduate of the London School of Economics, and an investigative journalist and documentary film maker of note, the research is meticulous and his writing often gripping. It's a book *Noseweek* readers will want to read.

TAKE A BUGGY THAT CAN TAKE EIGHT people. Then put the eight wealthiest people on earth in that buggy: Carlos Slim (worth \$50bn), Bill Gates (\$75bn), Amancio Ortega (\$67bn), Warren Buffet (\$60.8bn), Jeff Bezos (\$45.2bn), Mark Zuckerberg (\$44.6bn), Larry Ellison (\$43.6bn) and, in the bucket seat, Michael Bloomberg (a mere \$40bn). With a combined worth of \$426bn, these eight people now own as much money as 3.7 billion people, who also happen to be the poorest fifty percent of the earth's population.

This polarization of global wealth – human global warming – is as threatening as the meteorological variety. Should we care? Absolute global poverty is reducing and, as the Institute of Economic Affairs argues, the widening gap is the price you pay for the planet as a whole getting richer. Whether you think it matters or not, widening inequality is happening and, to paraphrase Arnold Schwarzenegger, it doesn't care a damn whether you believe in it or not.

In March 2006 a group of analysts at Citigroup saw the whole thing coming

Extract from 'Done' by JACQUES PERETTI

and did something mind-blowing: they decided to treat coming global inequality as a business opportunity to be exploited, and widened. This seismic widening problem was a gift-horse like no other.

The hourglass

TOBIAS LEVKOVICH IS A VERY SMART man. He meets me in his vast office overlooking the Hudson River on the 49th floor of the world's fourth-largest bank, Citigroup. He tells me about a book he loves: *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes – a political treatise based on the premise that human beings will do whatever they can get away with.

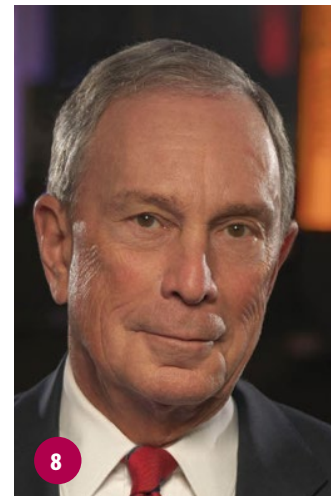
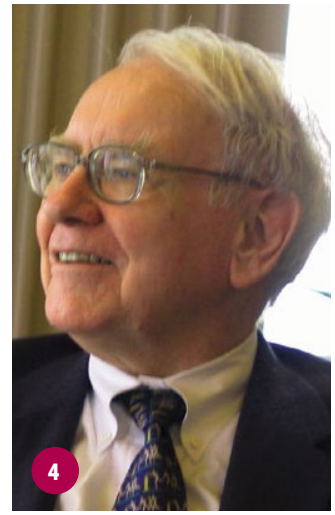
In 2006 Tobias held in his pocket a photograph of the future that, if he chose to share it with his clients, was going to make them a very large amount of money. Tobias is one of the most important bankers on earth: he is responsible for identifying the plate-tectonic shifts in the way the



global economy is moving and advising Citigroup and Wall Street to invest trillions of dollars in whatever he thinks is going to happen next.

He dropped his bombshell in 2006 in the very boardroom where I meet him, before a sea of stony-faced men and women in business suits, representing the biggest companies on earth. Tobias predicted – to the incredulity of his colleagues – that by 2015, the one hundred richest people would own the

The world's eight richest people



1. Carlos Slim (\$50 billion); 2. Bill Gates (\$75 billion); 3. Amancio Ortega (\$67 billion); 4. Warren Buffet (\$60.8 billion); 5. Jeff Bezos (\$45.2 billion); 6. Mark Zuckerberg (\$44.6 billion); 7. Larry Ellison (\$43.6 billion); 8. Michael Bloomberg (\$40 billion)

same as half the world's population. (It is actually just eight people: the guys sitting in the golf buggy.)

"The coming decade will be marked by polarisation and social unrest," Tobias said, "a direct consequence of growing economic inequality." The clients coughed and looked down at their notepads. "Many will be worried by this. We at the bank worry less."

Worry less?

"You can't sit there and say this doesn't meet everyone's social happi-

ness criteria. I have to deliver results or they're going to take their money and give it to someone else. It's not cynical. It's practical. That is our job. We are supposed to make them money."

Every country will, over time, he said, come to look like an hourglass: At the top, the super-rich global elite, to whom you will be able to sell Lear Jets and Bentleys; at the bottom, the global poor, to whom there will be unimaginable new opportunities to sell poverty products: payday loans,

zero-hour contracts, high-interest credit. [Noseweek readers might want to have another look at the big boys behind Net1, Blue Label, and CellC's plans to profit from their dominance of South Africa's social grants market and access to low-income population data. – Ed.] As stress increases for the poor, gambling and alcohol will once again become boom industries. Pound shops and discounting will become huge, as people fail to make ends meet.

I was intrigued by the hourglass:

What was the deal with the tapered bit in the middle? “Oh, that’s the middle class. They will be squeezed out of existence. They will cease to have any purchasing power, and thus be over as an investment opportunity,” Tobias told me cheerily.

In fact the middle class would sink into the lower globe of the hourglass, but continue to live for a time beyond their means, desperately clinging onto the tropes of being middle class (such as foreign holidays or a new car). Delusions of status.

In Tobias’s long-term view, the bottom orb of the hourglass would come to represent one giant new global class: what we now know as the ninety-nine percent, living one payday away from broke. The so-called “precarariat”.

As Tobias painted this brave new world to Citigroup’s clients, he noticed something in the room: Total silence. At first Tobias thought this might simply be shock – but then he realized it was something else. There was an expression of awe on their faces as it began to dawn just how much money there was to be made. In the two years between the Citigroup presentation and the 2008 crash, the companies in

the room diversified their portfolios exactly as Citigroup advised, focusing on businesses at both ends of the hourglass: high-end luxury for the rich and poverty products for the poor.

Tobias’s prediction came true faster than anyone could have dreamt.

The Hunger Games for real

THE PEOPLE ON MY GOLF BUGGY ALL think inequality is terrible. They say so all the time, as do the heads of the IMF, the World Bank, the Bank of England, the Fed and every other financial institution that spent the last twenty years putting in place the mechanisms that allowed inequality to open up – like a chasm.

In 2015, I interviewed French economist Thomas Piketty, the author of *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, who believes that selling to the rich and poor spheres of the hourglass is merely a by-product of inequality; the underlying process that drives its perpetuation is wealth extraction from the poorest to the wealthiest.

This, Piketty argues, is uniquely dangerous for society as a whole, because it tests society’s reason for existing. It pushes the contract of

shared rules to the edge, which is when society begins to break down. So, what can be done? Piketty shrugged his shoulders.

INEQUALITY IS HERE TO STAY AND WE NOW live daily and acceptingly with its extremes. In London, it is possible to get a facial in a Knightsbridge beauty salon with a throwaway liquid gold mask and a caviar massage. A top-of-the-hourglass product. Treatments cost up to £30,000. Some clients come three or four times a month. The staff who apply the gold mask and caviar massage are sometimes on, or just above, the minimum wage. If they need a payday loan to make ends meet, they are using a poverty product from the bottom of the hourglass.

IN 1845, FREDERICK ENGELS WROTE about Victorian Manchester in his *Condition of the Working Class in England*: “The members of the money aristocracy can take the shortest road through the middle of labouring districts without ever seeing they are in the midst of grimy misery.” In Mike Davis’s *Planet of Slums*, the eradication of the poor from view is catalogued across the globe, from slum clearances in Lagos to the displacement of 1.5 million people in Shanghai to make way for a re-skinned city of glittering wealth.

Countries across the world, regardless of their starter-gun wealth, are all in a race to become the same: Malawi, Spain, the United States, the UK, Uzbekistan. We are all morphing inexorably into the same kind of country with the same basic social stratification, defined by yawning divergence. We are all becoming equally unequal.

“How unequal will we become?” Piketty asks. “If you disenfranchise the middle class, you are dealing with a highly combustible force. If they are either scared for their future security or growing greedy on a rising economic tide, they will drive revolution.”

● Other chapters in the book include: *Cash* – who is killing it and why; *Risk* – how chaos came to Wall Street; *Tax* – why everyone wants to be the Cayman Islands; *Food* – owning fat and thin; *Power* – the firms who know everything.

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Bidvest boss to sue Vodacom

Fed-up executive plans class action against cellphone provider over fraudulent charges

A SENIOR BIDVEST CAR HIRE executive has instructed his lawyers to launch a class action against Vodacom for the tens of millions in unauthorised fees it has been charging ignorant cellphone users on behalf of usually unnamed providers of so-called “content services”.

In recent years *Noseweek* has received scores of complaints about this fraudulent practice indulged in by all South Africa’s cellphone service providers. Many have appeared in our letters columns. Available evidence suggests the companies themselves receive hundreds of complaints each day. They are routinely answered with a computer-generated, standard “it’s not our problem” letter.

More persistent complainants get a cheery “you have been unsubscribed” follow-up message or email – with no mention of a refund.

The reason is obvious: the companies are sharing in the vast sums being pocketed by the fraud operators.

Why the police and consumer-protection authorities have failed to take any action remains to be explained.

This month a man with the necessary means has decided enough is enough. William Douglas, national risk manager for Bidvest Car Hire, has not only laid charges with the police in Brakpan, but is also preparing to issue summons against Vodacom in a class action, where victims of the scam within the past three years can join.

His decision was triggered by his discovery that his September Vodacom account was R400 hundred higher than usual. On checking his bill he discovered that the higher bill was explained by an entry labelled “content services”.

In his October account more such charges appeared; they now total R1,000.

He went to a Vodacom Service



William Douglas

Provider shop and was told the following:

“Content Services are provided by what the technological boffins call WASPs. Your account can suddenly receive extra charges for these WASP services that, unknown to you, subscribe you to their sites. For instance, you would Google movie times at a cinema and one of these services would hack your IP address and then subscribe you to their site and charge you for an unwanted service. The assistant also told me that there is no way that Vodacom can stop this as most of these sites are situated in foreign countries.”

“I beg to differ,” Douglas told first Vodacom, and then *Noseweek*.

“How can Vodacom add charges to my account without;

- A signed contract, with terms and conditions from such WASP services?
- Sending me a proper account of what these WASP services were, with names, dates and time used?
- Attaching the WASP’s invoice to my billing from Vodacom?

“The fact that Vodacom simply adds R1,000 to my contract (I have signed for a specific package) for services for

which neither Vodacom (I presume) nor I have signed up, is both fraud and a contravention of the Consumer Protection Act.

“I will open such a case against Vodacom should I not receive feedback from Vodacom by 10 October 2017.

“I also want Vodacom to reimburse me my money for the past billing date.”

He was subsequently advised that the two content providers were called Opera Telecom and MT Digital Systems. In the next bill a third emerged, called Mobiteacher. The latter advised him: “We would like to offer you a full refund R520 as a goodwill gesture.”

On 10 October he advised Vodacom: “I am laying a case of fraud today against Vodacom and Mobiteacher as well as against any other WASP service that Vodacom illegally bills me for. I will also institute legal action to have all my contracts with Vodacom ended immediately.” (He has three Vodacom contracts.)

When nothing happened, on 11 October Douglas called Desmond Luckay of Vodacom Customer Care Services.

“I informed him of my intention to file fraud charges against the board of Vodacom, including Mohamed Shamel Aziz Joosub and Till Streichert, for the illegal amounts deducted by Vodacom for ‘content services’ on my September and October bills.

“I also informed him that, if Vodacom allows the ‘content services’ amount to be deducted again, I will add it as another fraud and theft case, and will, apart from the criminal action, institute a civil class action for damages. That way we will discover the full extent of the fraud.

“The way the cell phone companies operate is offensive to say the least – and downright criminal.” – *Martin Welz*.

KPMG whitewash report

The one they hoped we'd forgotten

KPMG'S DODGY BUSINESS DEALINGS on behalf of the Guptas have rightly dominated the news in recent months.

But, *Noseweek*, having had a beady eye on KPMG for years, has questions about another matter entirely: the small matter of the audit firm's social grants re-registration whitewash.

Last year amaBhungane journalist Craig McKune had a closer look at claims by Cash Paymaster Services (CPS) that it had done "extra work" for the South African Social Security Agency (Sassa) entitling it to an extra payment of R316m.

CPS was contracted to pay out social grants to millions of South Africans on behalf of Sassa, because the agency has not managed to get its act together to do the job itself. In 2014, CPS claimed it had enrolled more social grant recipients than it had been contracted to – and, according to amaBhungane, former Sassa chief executive Virginia Petersen accepted the claim and authorised the R316m payment.

However, it's clear that the original contract between CPS and Sassa covered all enrolment work, so there was no "extra" work, and that Petersen – now in retirement – had all the information she needed to refute CPS's claim for extra money.

In June last year, the national Treasury condoned the payment – only to withdraw their approval when questions were raised by amaBhungane.

At issue in relation to the R316m extra payment was, in a nutshell, the definitions of social grant "beneficiaries" and social grant "recipients".

"Beneficiaries" are those who qualify for grants, while "recipients" are those who actually collect or receive the payments. For instance, a child could be the beneficiary while her parent or guardian could be the recipient.

In terms of the original contract and the service level agreement, besides paying recipients each month, CPS was also tasked with enrolment of both beneficiaries and recipients. It was to be paid "an all-inclusive fee of R16.44" for each one.

But in March 2014, CPS sent Sassa an invoice for R316m, claiming it had enrolled an "extra" 11.9 million people – accounting for those cases where both beneficiary and recipient had to be registered.

Here's where KPMG comes in. Senior KPMG accountant Marlene Pappas submitted a four-page report confirming the enrolment of an extra 11.9 million people.

But her sums were incorrect. She wrongly thought CPS was contracted to enrol recipients only, and not benefi-

ciaries who are unable to collect their own grants as well.

According to amaBhungane: "In particular, she relied on an extract from the Sassa tender, which projected that the number of 'grant recipients' in 2012 would be about nine million.

"Pappas compared this number of recipients with the 22 million grant recipients and beneficiaries that CPS had enrolled. She subtracted one million new enrolments and agreed with CPS that there were 11.9 million enrolments 'in excess of the tender requirement'.

"In effect, comparing apples and oranges, she agreed with CPS's estimation that the 'extra' enrolments cost R316m."

At the time, Pappas and KPMG would not comment.

Virginia Petersen signed off the payment in May 2014 and CPS was paid not long after that.

Corruption Watch took the matter up and posed questions to Sassa but Petersen claimed in response that the payment was justified.

In March 2015, Corruption Watch launched an application in the North Gauteng High Court to review and set aside Petersen's decision to pay the R316m to CPS. Corruption Watch's review was premised on evidence which showed that the decision to make the payment was unlawful and irrational.



The NGO wanted CPS to be ordered to pay back the money.

Corruption Watch has spent a great deal of time trying to get the record of decision from Sassa, but to no avail. The matter is set down for hearing on 6 November.

In May last year, Sassa withdrew from opposition to the legal action, so CPS is now the only respondent.

In light of recent developments *Noseweek* dropped KPMG spokesman Pierre Jacobs an email, suggesting that journalist Craig McKune had done a better job of investigating the matter than their auditor, Marlene Pappas, and asking Pappas and KPMG to account for their actions.

KPMG's Nqubeko Sibiyi replied that KPMG "were engaged to perform procedures solely surrounding the accuracy of the calculations (the monetary amount) relating to the re-registration claim by CPS. Our mandate and report did not

include any procedures relating to the validity or legality of the claim.

"KPMG International has reviewed the work and file related to this matter and we stand by the results of our work."

Leanne Govindsamy, head of Corruption Watch's legal investigations team had this to say:

"When we saw the KPMG response on this payment, what struck us was the number of disclaimers they had. At the end of the day, Sassa did rely on that document as being an audit. In the end they relied on it to make the payment, so you have to ask questions about auditors and their role when it comes to the expenditure of public funds, and what the degree of investigation should be.

"We also have to ask what has been the impact of compiling that report. How can you verify a claim without having had sight of all the supporting documents?" – *Sue Segar*



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Fishy business

Judge finds Cape Town attorney and property developer, Richard Goudvis, to be a poor witness, evasive and a liar. By Martin Welz

IN JUNE 2009 *NOSEWEEK* REPORTED on a meeting of panicked Johannesburg investors in Barry Tannenbaum's billion rand pyramid scheme, which was held at the offices of attorneys Routledge Modise in Sandton days after they learned, via the grapevine, that the pyramid had collapsed. (Warren Drue, senior partner at Routledge Modise, introduced himself to them as a fellow investor.)

Noseweek noted that a whole clutch of Cape investors, who between them had invested over R100m, were represented at the meeting by attorneys Craig Delpport (see past *noses* about him) – and Richard Goudvis. Delpport and Goudvis (full names Richard Anthony Leigh) were classmates at UCT law school.

It is Goudvis who has most recently again attracted *Noseweek's* attention. But first some background:

In her May 2014 Ponzi Scheme Roundup, Los Angeles-based international ponzi scheme blogger Kathy Phelps reported that a settlement had been reached between Leonard Abel, an investor in Tannenbaum's ponzi scheme (*noses*116,117,121,122), and the man who had brought him into it, the same Richard Goudvis.

"Abel had invested \$1 million with Tannenbaum, expecting to receive his money back with a 15% profit in 90 days. The settlement [*with Goudvis*] is confidential. Tannenbaum is a fugitive, but it is believed that he fled to Australia with his wife after being accused of defrauding investors out of more than \$12bn, in what is known as the Frankel Scheme. The scheme offered returns up to 216% and repre-



Richard Goudvis

sented that funds were used to buy active pharmaceutical ingredients from foreign countries which were then sold to generic makers to make antiretroviral drugs." (*See editorial on page 6.*)

Whatever the settlement with Abel cost him, it does not appear to have set Goudvis back that much, because just a few months later, SABC3 magazine show *Top Billing* took viewers on a tour of the "beautiful Balinese-inspired Cape Town home of prop-

erty developer Richard Goudvis and his fiancée Jamie Lee Kleyn", with its spectacular views of the city and the sea (the couple are now married). Presenter Ursula, dazzling in pink, noted how they had incorporated "natural elements of stone, wood and water" into their home, and how their preference for vintage furniture "means it's a design masterpiece".

The latest chapter in our story begins in early 2012, when Graham Wooding and his partner Jenneke Nieves were looking to buy a family home. They declined to put in offers on the first three they viewed: a property in Fresnaye – rejected because they had seen the plans for a development on an adjoining plot; one in Higgovale – declined because they were concerned that a building in front of the property could be demolished and a more intrusive one erected; and in Tamboerskloof – because of the development potential of an adjoining property.

On 27 February 2012 Elisabeth Kretschmer, an estate agent who had had a long association with Richard Goudvis, together with her assistant and client Nieves, met Goudvis at 13 Chepstow Road in Green Point, on Cape Town's fashionable Atlantic seaboard, to discuss their possible purchase of that property. Goudvis's company was the owner.

The next day, 28 February 2012, Kretschmer, Wooding and Nieves met with Goudvis again at the site. A number of matters were discussed, mainly between Wooding and Goudvis, with Wooding keeping notes as the meeting progressed. The discussions were about the underfloor heating system (punted as a special feature

of the house), the zoning scheme and development in the area, and the neighbourhood in general. Goudvis expressed the opinion that the nearby property at 22/24 Chepstow Road was unlikely to be developed because it was a recent purchase and the owners had spent a substantial amount on improving it.

He told them that neighbours affected by the development of nearby 18 Chepstow Road as a multi-unit residential building had successfully negotiated a servitude in their favour, which prevented the developer from obstructing their views. Goudvis also said that if the owner of 20 Chepstow Road wanted to develop that property into a multi-unit residential building, neighbours could negotiate a *quid pro quo* height servitude in their favour. Goudvis informed Wooding that the owners of the property on the eastern side of the one he proposed buying were a Dutch family who had been living there for a long time.

Days later, on 2 March, Wooding and Nieves met with Kretschmer at her office where it was agreed to offer R14m for the property. A day later the sale agreement was concluded.

At the time Goudvis was fully aware that Ashley Stone, the property developer who had sold the house to him, had wanted to develop it, together with the neighbouring property, as a multi-unit, multi-storey, residential complex, but had not been able to do so because of development restrictions. Which was why Stone had sold it to Goudvis, who also knew that Stone intended to continue developing the single neighbouring property where no such restrictions applied. And that a previous potential buyer had pulled out of the deal when he learned of the proposed five-storey flat development next door, for which building plans had already been approved.

None of this did Goudvis disclose to his new buyers.

Building would in fact start very shortly after Wooding and Nieves concluded the purchase of what they planned to make their dream home with a nice Dutch couple living next door. The Dutch couple were a figment of Goudvis's crooked imagination – the house, as he well knew, was in fact let as temporary student digs until demolition could commence. An advertise-

ment had already appeared in a local newspaper, offering residential units for purchase in the planned development.

Had they been aware of this, and that the underfloor heating was non-functional – Wooding and Nieves alleged in a summons for damages they had issued out of the Cape High Court – they would have offered R11.75m (and not R14m) for the property.

In his plea to the summons, Goudvis denied they were entitled to damages. He claimed to have had no knowledge of the development next door, or of the hole in the pipe of the underfloor heating system. He denied that he had represented to Wooding that the underfloor heating was fully functional. The property, he said, had been sold “*voetstoots*” [as is, without warranties].

In his judgment, delivered in August this year, Judge Schippers found that Goudvis had seen, or had knowledge of, the approved plans for the next door development, had misrepresented to the plaintiffs that no development had been planned for the adjoining property, and misrepresented that a Dutch family lived in it – the latter invention probably to win Nieves's favour, as Goudvis knew she was of Dutch origin.

Kretschmer testified in court that when she learned of Goudvis's misrep-

resentations she was “in complete shock”. She had always trusted him. When she confronted Goudvis, he had adopted a smug attitude and said it was “tough” [for Wooding]. As a result she had no further working relationship with Goudvis.

In his summary of the evidence, the judge found that Goudvis was “extremely vague” about the extent of his knowledge at “any particular point in time”. In the course of his evidence, Goudvis had given four, contradicting, explanations for why he had not told the buyers about the planned development on the neighbouring property.

Immediately after the sale agreement was concluded, Goudvis had also advised his bank, Investec, that the sale of the property included moveables to the sum of R250,000. “This was false,” the judge noted.

Judge Schippers' final assessment: “Goudvis – an attorney – was a poor witness. He is obviously intelligent, yet the record shows that on numerous occasions he was deliberately evasive and refused to give straight answers to simple questions, often resorting to long exculpatory explanations. At times he was simply mendacious. He stubbornly refused to make concessions when it was obvious that he should do so. Some of the internal contradictions in his evidence have already been referred to. His evidence also contradicted what was pleaded or put on his behalf. He had a very good memory in relation to events which favoured his case, but his memory became hazy when dealing with facts adverse to his defence.”

But, said the judge, morally reprehensible conduct is not enough to establish a legal duty to speak in the circumstances. Knowledge of the planned development was not unique to Goudvis. Appropriate enquiry from the municipal planning authorities would have revealed this information. It was also common cause that the zoning of the neighbouring property allowed for a development as was planned. For this reason, Wooding and Nieves's claim for damages on this point did not succeed.

In conclusion, Goudvis was ordered to pay only the cost of repairing the underfloor heating system, at a total cost of R81,000. Each party was ordered to pay their own legal costs. ■

**They planned to
make their dream
home with a nice
Dutch couple living
next door. The Dutch
couple were a figment
of Goudvis's crooked
imagination**

Standing up and fighting

Magda Wierzycka most recently made headlines when hers was the first private sector company to fire audit firm KPMG for its role in state capture. She has also weighed in on the social grants fiasco and urged public servants to resist Treasury's plans to raid their pension fund to finance hopelessly bankrupt state-owned enterprises. By Sue Segar

SHE'S TRAVELLED THE WORLD – Antarctica, Galapagos, “everywhere” – with her adventurer husband and their two sons, but Magda Wierzycka, CEO of asset management company Sygnia, finds Cape Town the most beautiful place in the world and South Africa the “most incredible” country.

For this reason, Wierzycka, a refugee from Poland, is here to stay and believes that, as a key player in business, she has a duty to fight for political change here. So she's not going to stop.

“I don't want to move or to be a refugee again. I'm a very happy South African and I will fight for South Africa. That means contributing to solving some of the country's glaring problems,” she tells *Noseweek* in an interview at Sygnia's swish offices in Green Point.

“I can't wait for political change to take place so we can get back to talking about what really matters. At the moment all the conversations are about graft, BEE deals, SASSA contracts and people's sex lives. There are no real conversations about poverty, inequality, social welfare, job creation or education.

“I'd love, for instance to help design policies on education. I'm convinced that one of our solutions is to harness technology to provide free basic education. We have the tools, yet too few

people are talking about this as a solution.

“We have access to great technology. How difficult is it to equip containers with desks and cheap laptops and free data, with the best teachers available on screen? Class teachers would be there as monitors and guides.

“I'd love, in the future, to become part of conversations about inequality, but right now I'm focusing on political change, so we can get back to talk about what really matters.”

Wierzycka, for some time vocal about politics and business, recently made headline news when Sygnia became the first private sector company to fire audit firm KPMG for its role in state capture. A regular contributor to the op-ed pages of major publications, she has weighed in on the social grants fiasco and called on public servants to stand up against the Treasury's reported plans to use the Government Employees Pension Fund (GEPF) to fund hopelessly bankrupt state-owned enterprises.

She's said repeatedly that she takes corruption personally and will continue to be outspoken, even if, in the male-dominated world she inhabits, it is “not the done thing”.

She also famously suggested Jacob Zuma should be offered “as much money as he wishes and every immunisation under the sun” to stand down

as president because the potential damage he could yet do in a year far outweighs the cost of such a payoff.

Recently, when Sage accepted the resignation of Trillian whistleblower, Bianca Goodson (some see it as a straight axing), Wierzycka fired off on Twitter, sparking outrage at Sage's apparent lack of care for a brave colleague. “Sage has acted disgracefully. Yet another corporate not willing to take a stand against corruption. SA should be outraged,” tweeted Wierzycka, and offered Goodson a job, which she has accepted.

Noseweek wouldn't be *Noseweek* if it didn't ask whether her more recent entry into the public debate is simply an innovative marketing strategy.

After all, in a speech for event organisers Heavy Chef, she had described the importance of “fresh breakthrough ideas” to attract business.

“Charging low fees means you don't have the marketing budgets of the Coronations and Allan Grays, who spend R180 million a year on advertising, you need creative strategies,” she told her Heavy Chef audience.

“That brings us to where Sygnia was six months ago, before we embarked on our activist marketing strategy, which really wasn't a marketing strategy.” She went on to speak about her foray into commenting on current affairs, starting with an article for *Daily*



Magda Wierzycka at her offices

Maverick on social grants and the goings on at Net1.

“Sygnia’s become a much better known brand because of the activist stance we have taken and hopefully it’s a good stance that benefits everyone in the process. It’s not inconsistent with the ethos of the company and every-

thing that we have stood for.”

Not everyone shares Wierzycka’s view of her activism. A senior corporate source says: “... Magda is building her personal and corporate profile by speaking out on government. This is a golden ticket, a wave to ride.”

When *Noseweek* asks about this

in relation to firing auditors KPMG, her response is quick: “Trust me, this has nothing to do with marketing. Do I really want to move around with a security team and get death threats?”

Some weeks back, Wierzycka filed an urgent interdict against ANN7 owner and former government spokesman Mzwanele Manyi after he accused her on Twitter and Facebook of being guilty of “economic terrorism” and of being a “downright racist who objectifies black people as things that can be bought”.

The case was postponed after Manyi’s legal counsel claimed Acting Judge Fiona Dippenaar could not be impartial because she and Wierzycka were both white.

“He (Manyi) was tweeting about white monopoly capital, and tweeted (falsely) that I was related to Janusz Walus [*the Polish-born murderer of former SACP leader Chris Hani*]. I then started getting death threats.

“He was putting my family and me in danger. You don’t know what those sort of allegations can flush out in terms of people’s emotions.

“There were tweets saying, ‘we must get rid of her, where is she, we must eliminate her’.

“There were also tweets featuring photo-shopped images of me as a stripper, saying ‘Magda made her money from stripping.’

“These things are unpleasant but you have to see them in the context of what’s going on in South Africa. Literally anyone who speaks out against corruption becomes a target. When it comes to women, they’ll go for the lowest common denominator, which is sex.

“It’s not pleasant to look at images of yourself in pornographic visuals, but at the end of the day, I have to laugh and assume they’ve trawled through my life and found nothing, so they have had to manufacture stuff.”

An interviewer once asked Wierzycka if she’s looking to be South Africa’s (*Facebook* billionaire) Mark Zuckerberg; another described her as “smart, sassy – and scarily ambitious”, while 702’s Bruce Whitfield once said that Wierzycka has South Africa’s fund managers “shaking in their boots” through Sygnia’s commitment to cost-effective retirement annuities with low margins and low fees.

During our meeting in one of

Sygnia's boardrooms, she moves from discussing index tracking to market disruption and on to robo-advisors. She shifts engagingly from the Fourth Industrial Revolution to talking about her love for art, literature, design and interior decorating.

Sygnia's offices resemble an art gallery. Her PA pops in every now and then to update her on something. Across the corridor in another boardroom a packed and animated board meeting is taking place.

But right now we're talking about the state of the nation.

"Look at Turkey," she says. "That country has gone from being a democracy which was negotiating entry into the EU, into, effectively, a despotic autocracy. All it took was a staged coup, a state of emergency, the arrests of journalists, the dismissal of academics and the changing of the Constitution to give the president immunity. That all happened in three years and we cannot

assume that it won't happen in South Africa. In fact a number of those things are happening already here. We already have a parallel security state; we have our free media starved of government advertising, with all advertising going to *New Age* and ANN7, so we already have propaganda. We have no funding for civil rights organisations – other than private funding – and a paralysed prosecution authority.

"It is all very well for OUTA and the DA to open criminal cases, but nobody is investigating. So they've paralysed while we have a flat-lining economy and a budget deficit of R50 billion. How will we fund that? The only way is to increase tax, so watch February!

"Nobody is focusing on infrastructure, on water, or repairing roads. PIC money is already being used to bail out state enterprises, which we know are subject to the greatest amount of fraud, corruption and looting. Our economy won't recover unless we have

sound economic principles in place, but nobody is putting them in place.

"We are at real risk of descending from a striving democracy to an autocratic, despotic kleptocracy where anything goes."

Despite the gloomy prospects, Wierzycka conducts her life and runs her company – which has a market value of R1.4bn – on the basis that change will come.

"That is where the hope is. Change will come. It always does! Just think, we have about 2,000 corrupt people holding 56 million hostage. This is not sustainable. The fact that we have a free media, that the Gupta-leaks are there for everyone to read means the evidence is playing itself out in technicolour for all to see. South Africans will force change: an ANC that manages to do it themselves and someone credible comes to power is one scenario, but if that doesn't happen we can expect a host of other possibilities, such as

When the communist coffers ran dry

MAGDA WIERZYCKA WAS BORN IN Gliwice, a coalmining town in Poland and grew up in a "tiny apartment" with her parents, both doctors, a sister and brother and her grandmother.

"Until I was 11 I lived in a functioning communist state with free health care, free education of a high standard and where everyone was employed, but they all had the same things! Everyone lived in 30-square metre apartments; we were one of the lucky families, with a tiny car. I have many memories of the six of us squashing into that car!

She received an excellent education, particularly in mathematics and science. Because there was so much pollution in the town, Wierzycka's parents would regularly ship the kids out into the countryside to stay with a farming family, where they slept on haystacks in a loft.

"We would help the farmer cut the wheat, roll it into bales and load those onto horse-drawn wagons. Poland has

incredible forests, and lakes that are so pure they are used as a baseline for water purity. Communism was big on festive celebrations to keep everybody's spirits up. We weren't exposed to the west; we didn't know what was in the shops across the border."

Wierzycka's paternal grandmother Helena, had a big influence on her.

"She was from a prosperous Jewish family in Lvov, which is now part of the Ukraine. During World War II her family and my grandfather Gustav's family were sent to concentration camps. They were the only members of their families to survive the camps."

Wierzycka's grandfather joined the Polish army and was captured and placed in a prisoner-of-war camp on the border of Ukraine and Russia to work as a medical doctor.

"My grandmother was living outside of the camp and had already given birth to my father. She eventually helped my grandfather to escape by dressing him up as a woman and hiding him. We spent a great deal of

time with her and she told us about their days in the concentration camps. A woman of enormous character. She told me 'you can survive anything if you persevere. Don't let anything get you down. Hard work will get you everywhere. Do things for yourself and never depend on a man, ever'."

Wierzycka recently went back to Poland with her sister and taped her grandmother's stories. "We want to hold that history for our children."

The happy Polish childhood came to an end when, she says, "communism ran out of money. Overnight, there were huge shortages. Three million Europeans left the USSR satellite countries to become refugees".

Her father organized the paperwork and the family crossed the border into Austria where they were housed in a barracks outside Vienna. A young man in the bunk bed above her had walked all the way from the Ukraine.

The South African government was at that time keen to import

rolling mass action, all the way up to 2019 to try and force a general election," she said.

"It won't be business as usual if Jacob Zuma gets a proxy into power. Trade unions have already taken a stand and they're a powerful force with charismatic leaders and an amazing ability to mobilise; we have court cases under way and a strong civil society who are not going to keep quiet.

"That's where the hope is. Political change will come as this is not a sustainable state of affairs. The best scenario would be that there is an overhaul in the ANC and someone credible comes into power. I don't mind whether it is Cyril (Ramaphosa) or Zweli (Mkhize) – as long as it is not a Zuma proxy – and that they can, at least, stabilise the institutions that need it, like the Treasury, the Reserve Bank and SARS.

"Once a few key positions are sorted out, one can start rebuilding the economy, because a lot of work is

required to turn this ship around. We have slid down this slippery slope since Pravin Gordhan was removed as finance minister.

"If the government looting continues past December we are in for big economic trouble.

"So, my focus right now is on what happens in December. Some very positive things are happening, including the fact that the private sector is also being held to account. Obviously, once you paralyse the state prosecuting authorities like Zuma has done, you have to look for alternatives, but at least the international parent bodies of some private sector institutions (like KPMG) can be held to account.

The public outcry over the recent KPMG saga, she believes, is an indication of how angry South Africans are generally. What drives Magda Wierzycka is what she calls an "overly developed sense of justice".

"Perhaps it derives from the fact that

skills and the army was looking for doctors. So in 1987 Wierzycka, then 13, arrived with her parents, brother, sister and maternal grandmother to a Johannesburg winter, speaking little English and knowing very little about apartheid or SA. "Life was a scramble. We had to recreate a life and as kids we had to bring ourselves up. We were laughed at and bullied."

She went to Pretoria Girls High School – "the worst years of my life, teenage girls are so awful" – and then was awarded a bursary to study actuarial science at UCT.

She started her first job in 1993 as a product development and investment actuary at Southern Life, had her first encounters with sexism and sexual harassment and witnessed what she calls "appalling corporate excesses". "The CEO would fly in and land on the lawn in Newlands."

Wierzycka's actuarial career ended after eight months when she discovered the investment department of Southern Life, into which she managed to "wangle" her way.

Some time later she found herself at a dinner seated next to the CEO of Alexander Forbes. A job offer followed and she was asked to help set up an investment consulting division.

In 1997 she joined Coronation as a director and Head of Institutional Business, and stayed for six and a half "tough" years.

"The financial services industry is not women friendly. It is driven by money, which appeals to people's greed and fear. There is back-stabbing. Women don't thrive as they are generally more teamwork oriented."

She left Coronation in 2003 to become chief executive officer of the African Harvest Group. She negotiated the R300m sale of a stake in African Harvest Fund Managers to financial services company Cadiz in 2006 (making R80m in the process), and led the management acquisition of the remainder of the group, resulting in the formation of Sygnia as a specialist FinTech company.

Within ten years, she had grown its assets under management from R2bn to R162bn. In October 2015, Sygnia listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange and the share offer was twenty times oversubscribed.

She has headed Sygnia as CEO ever since, as well as serving as a council member of the Actuarial Society of SA and as a board member of the Advisory Board of the Centre for Africa at Harvard University. ■

I grew up in a communist country." [See box story] However, while she was working in the "closed ecosystem" of macroeconomics and building businesses, politics did not feature much in her life.

That changed when she met South African businessman and mining entrepreneur, Mzi Khumalo, who became a key figure in the development of her political awareness.

"He is a very clever man, and a larger-than-life personality. He spent 30 years on Robben Island and his



Baby Magda

stories intrigued me. Listening to what Mzi went through woke me up."

Wierzycka had, for many years, written columns on financial literacy, aimed at educating consumers about fees and costs. "I always used public relations for education. I wrote many pieces on financial savings issues.

She was already well known in the financial services industry when *Daily Maverick* asked her for an article.

"That was at the time the Net1/CPS/SASSA drama was playing out. I started digging into what was going on at Net1. It was like reading a horror story.

"This company had a stated objective of exploiting the poor by selling them financial and other services they didn't even know about – and nobody was hiding it. It was their business model."

She wrote about it and, next thing, was being interviewed on radio. "The issue reached fever pitch and Allan

Gray stepped in and implemented board changes. I began getting correspondence from women in the townships, who told me they were having problems with deductions from their social grants.

“Then came Guptaleaks and we saw the looting of the state playing out in technicolour. All the time I was linking everything to these women living off child grants. My blood began to boil.

“Once you know, you can’t unknow. You can’t go on as normal. I started speaking out. I was watching closely what was happening – and then KPMG happened and I decided to part ways with them.”

Should more people in business be speaking out as she is?

“Absolutely. But so many corporates do business with government that to expect business leaders to stand up and speak out, is a big ask.

“I believe that business will be the last to step up. It’s the civil rights organisations, the press, the trade unions and the court system who are the defenders of the Constitution and of South Africa.” ■



Magda with husband Simon Peile

The family that swims with piranhas

MAGDA WIERZYCKA MARRIED FELLOW actuary Simon Peile in 1996.

“We met while I was an actuarial student at Southern Life and he was at Forbes. A friend introduced us, thinking we’d be a good match. We hated each other on sight.” They met again a few months later, discovered they were both planning to do the Argus cycle tour and began training together. She’s done ten Arguses in all.

Despite having developed rheumatoid arthritis, Wierzycka trains for two-and-a-half hours a day. “I run 15 kms on the treadmill every day. The exercise keeps the arthritis at bay.”

She speaks of her sons, Alexander, 19, and Nicholas, 17, with pride. “Alex has just started at Columbia University in New York, studying computer science and creative writing. He’s a talented writer. He’s having a ball, but I miss him terribly.

“Nicholas has one more year of school and has just been part of the team which won the national public

speaking and debating championships.

“I always said I’d be the best mother for them from when they were 15 – and probably your worst nightmare before then. I wasn’t the mother who baked cupcakes as I was working all the time when they were young. I said to them, ‘guys, this is the deal ... I’ll be the type of mother who, whatever life throws at you, is the first person you come to. To achieve that, I can’t be a stay-at-home mother’.”

The family loves travelling together. “We’ve been to every corner of the world, swum with piranhas in the Amazon, been to Angkor Wat in Cambodia and to some really obscure places to learn about different cultures. That’s when we really bond as a family.”

Wierzycka is also an avid art collector. “My first pay cheque was spent on a Pieter van der Westhuizen painting which cost me R4,000. My husband and I collect art. We buy what we love. I always

say I work in financial services so that I can afford to buy the arts.” She is also passionate about design and interior decorating. “I do all my own interior decorating in our apartment.”

She is fascinated by the fourth industrial revolution and technology for change. “I am engrossed in what’s happening in that area, from virtual reality to self-driving cars and the amazing advances in medicine that are happening at an exponential rate.”

Developments in cryptocurrencies also intrigue her. “In a financial services company, you have to ask how these developments shape what we invest in, and what the future holds.”

Asked about other goals, Wierzycka said: “I would like to educate people more about finance, and about the importance of savings. I would like to make investment and savings a lot more accessible for average South Africans. That’s what Sygnia is premised on.” ■

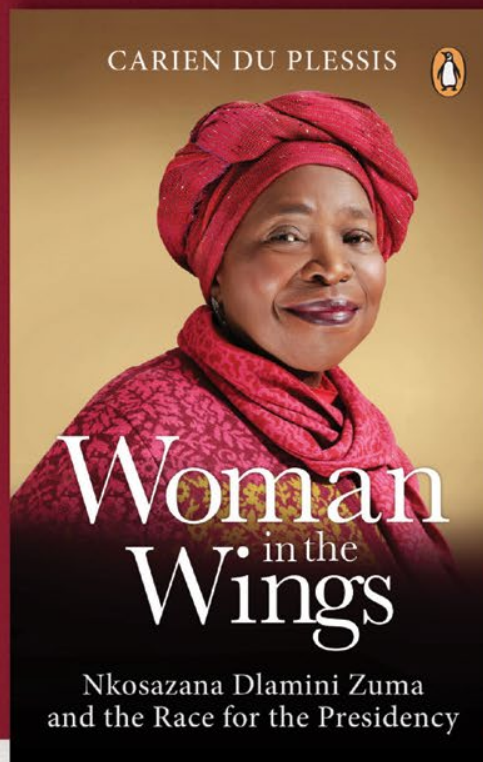
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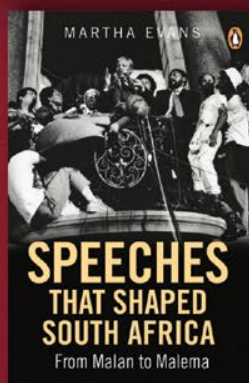
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Whatever role she takes up next within the ANC, Dlamini Zuma has a part to play in South Africa's political future.

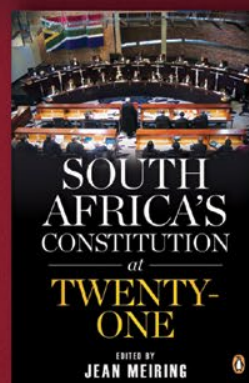
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Hidden depths. Art and politics of casting

A *RIVER RUNS THROUGH IT*, THE mesmerising Brad Pitt film featuring the peaceful grace of expert fly-fishing – and some memorably vicious punch-ups – neatly duplicates contrasting aspects of this beautiful new book. Co-author Ed Herbst, like heroic Brad P, is ravished by the joys of fly-fishing – when he is not flaying villains via his fierce investigative columns in the *Daily Maverick* and elsewhere.

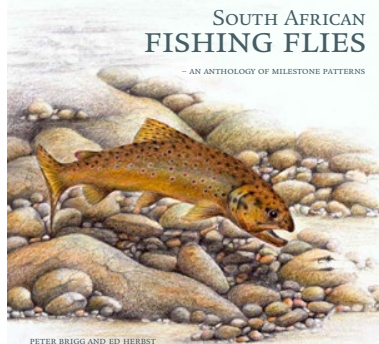
Fly-fishing? We, the uninformed, have no notion of the serious social influence of these powerful mysteries in South Africa. Apparently fly-fishing tourism and, in particular, trout tourism, underpins the economies of many communities. It is the basis for the country's growing aqua culture, and thousands of people owe their livelihoods to the fact that many fellow-citizens enjoy hunting fish, using lures of fur and feather.

So, it seems, while politicians sink their fangs into each others' throats and South Africa squelches through corruption mire, some 100,000 fly-fishers ply quiet waters and think long thoughts. Millions fish for bass and carp, but the fly-ers cast a big tourism shadow. They have their own magazines, hold international gatherings, and inculcate a love of angling in their offspring and communities.

In an informative foreword, Ian Cox pays tribute to “a small number of fly-fishers whose vision, passion, skill and commitment” revolutionised the entire exercise in the 1970s. Previously, flies and tackle were generally bought by mail order from Britain. Those revolutionaries who contributed to the book, or are mentioned in it, created a torrent of developments: fishing syndicates, specialist shops, fly-tying clubs and much else beside. Fly-fishing for other species, such as yellow fish, bass, carp and barbel, took off.

The book is a handsome tome (co-author Peter Brigg is responsible for

SOUTH AFRICAN FISHING FLIES
By Peter Brigg and Ed Herbst
(Penguin Random House)



some evocative illustrations). It is not a history. It is an anthology of personal accounts, cast against the backdrop of the flies that developed during that '70s revolution.

Warning: It should be noted that, before gentle and other readers rush off, with hook, line and sinker, for the nearest body of water, Cox notes that the fishing sages have warned that it takes 10,000 hours to become truly expert at something. “This book encapsulates a collective wisdom that spans lifetimes and runs to hundreds of thousands of hours”.

It certainly doesn't appear that our politicians, by and large, are capable of the concept of collective wisdom. Mind you, there were rumours some years ago, during Constitutional birth pangs, that Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer had enjoyed a thoughtful piscatorial splash between negotiations. Which sounds vaguely encouraging, should C.R. accede to the crown.

Beginner fisherpersons (PC obtrudes even here) should know that there are sometimes religious overtones to fly-fishing literature. Ted Leeson (*Inventing Montana*) remarks that fly patterns “bear the stamp of our individual minds. Our theories are impressed with something of who we are, and the choice of patterns we carry discloses something of us”.

Many names of flies conjure romance: think Hover Dragon Nymph, the Red Eyed Damsel, Sunken Terrestrials. Others not: Mario's Inch Worm, Sand Flea etc. As for White Death, let's keep politics out of it.

Peter Brigg is a freelancer, interested in hiking, photography and art, and is author of the fly-fishing guide *Call of the Stream*.

Ed Herbst, at age five, caught a rock cod and was hooked for ever. But somehow he has found time to expose the sins of his former employers, the SABC, and sundry other enemies of the people. And courageously continues to do so. ■

Letter from Umjindi

BHEKI MASHILE



Laughter. Gotta love street vending mamas

LAUGHTER IS GOOD FOR THE SOUL. If you don't believe that, well, it's quite clear you need a good laugh, ha ha! But alas, there are those times when you are forced to laugh, much as you really do not want to – or feel you ought not to laugh. Both easier and more difficult is when you have to laugh at yourself.

Which is what I found myself doing, following an interaction with one of the loyal vendor mamas who buy my produce.

But this laughter was long in coming. In fact, it had been boiling up within me for many years, not prompted, however, by the veggie mamas but by interactions with advertisers as I feverishly sought to secure adverts for my beloved *Umjindi Guardian* community newspaper. The veggie mamas just lit the fuse, to let off my explosion of laughter.

You see *Nosey* ones, while pursuing adverts I learned very quickly to assess the attitude of potential advertisers. This education prompted me to classify them in racial categories; not the most politically correct thing to do, but heck, sometimes stereotypes fit perfectly.

Now then, when dealing with an Afrikaner shop-owner or store-manager I knew I would be dealing with a straight shooter: “yes I will place the ad” or “no thanks I am not interested”: straightforward, no beating about the bush. Gotta love that.

Then there were the Indian traders, whom I infamously titled the ‘do I get a discount?’ I knew full well that if my ad was, say, R1,000, I would walk out of there with a measly R300, if that. Of course my Indian friends always had a good laugh at my on-the-spot observations.

Then there were the black managers, mainly of big retail shops,

supermarkets, and so on. They were worse than the Indian discounters. And so fearful of their *mlungu* bosses they could never make a decision, and instead referred you to the *mlungu* (the white man) in Jozi or head office.

I am reminded of one such *mlungu* who was very irritated with my call.

“Why the hell do I have these idiots as managers if they can't make a simple decision to advertise in a community newspaper? I have never seen the newspaper nor do I know the community that well. How the heck do I know what the people there read? These idiots are supposed to be our eyes and ears on the ground. Sorry about all this.

“Tell them I said they can place an ad in your newspaper and they can call me if there is any problem.”

Suffice it to say that every time thereafter when directed to a black store-manager I would simply ask him or her for the *mlungu's* contact number. Of course there were always those few exceptions when the brother from the other mother would make the decision.

And what does this have to do with the veggie mamas? Simple. I have learned from them that the more things change the more they stay the same. Oh! Another lesson – maybe just maybe my racial breakdown of things was not exactly fair.

Look, it's true that among the mamas I have encountered straight-shooters like my Afrikaner advertisers and discount-demanders like my Indian merchants, but, thank God all mighty, no mama has referred me off to a *mlungu*. How could they? Oh man oh man, what a relief they cannot.

This reality of ‘the more things change the more they stay the same’ was thrust upon me – yes thrust, not impressed, not revealed but yes

indeed thrust – as I went about delivering green peppers to these mamas' stalls.

Within 30 minutes I encountered a discount-demander. Funny how her veggie stall was set up in our Indian area; go figure!

Then as I made my way to town I encountered a straight-shooter who bitched and complained about the size of the peppers.

I was not in the mood to argue, or explain that the particular variety does not get much bigger than this. What was the point in trying to do so? I was already livid that she was squeezing my peppers while clearly not intending to buy.

While the first two veggie mamas might have irritated me, I had no choice but to laugh at the third one I encountered.

To my relief she bought a crate without fuss. That is, until she began checking them while I was transferring them from my crate to one of hers.

There you go; this mama, just like my local Pick n Pay produce buyer does, checked each and every single pepper. Quality, quality, what can one do?

So this mama picks out three peppers she is not happy with. I take the three and throw them in a crate in the back of the bakkie. Well, I get my payment, jump in, start up, and as I am about to pull away she yells, “Hey, you are not leaving here without replacing my three peppers”.

For just a moment I looked at myself in the rear-view mirror – and then I laughed and laughed until I cried. I have just created a new stereotype: the sharp-eyed black vegetable-vendor mama. And, I fear, there could be a stereotype of a black vegetable farmer beginning to emerge. What the hell was I laughing at? ■



Plastiki. Taxing a choking hazard

THE NICE LADY AT THE TILL WITH caked make-up and barely-detectable smile greets me with a “Plastiki?” after she finishes scanning my loaf of bread and the recent issue of *Noseweek*, at my local Pick n Pay.

Funny – as a child, plastic shopping bags were called *ushekhasi*, after the Checkers chain of supermarkets our parents frequented. Back then I imagined the name came from the sound a bag made when vigorously handled.

In the good ol’ days before 2003, plastic bags were as free as the air we breathed or the TV we never paid for, and it was quite the news story when government ordered by law this business of charging our parents for trash as valuable as the groceries they carried – in the minds of the grown-ups at least.

I got interested in the topic after Kenya recently announced an outright ban on plastic bags, with violations earning a sentence of up to four years and a fine of up to US\$ 40,000. I believe this bodes well for dealers of illicit bags in the black market. It seems a tad excessive, but the Kenyan government is reportedly sick of pulling bags from the stomachs of dead cows, to avoid risk of contaminating the beef. Besides – the poor cows! In one reported case 20 bags were removed from a distressed animal.

So Kenya introduced a complete shutdown on all plastic bags entering the local market, to help protect the environment. According to an August 2017 *BBC News* story, many people prefer to comply with the ban than risk a massive fine or the alternative of a four-year jail term, and I find myself wondering why.

When South Africa introduced the plastic bag levy in 2003, it was in an effort to make us use less of them, but in the strange spirit of things South



The cost of plastic carrier bags

African we responded with a collective “challenge accepted”. According to a 2010 study by Dr Johane Dikgang at the University of Cape Town, the average 46 cents charge on a 24-litre bag isn’t enough to curb our appetite for these turtle-chokers, and the effect of the levy has diminished over the long term.

In appealing to our better nature, another effect government expected of us with the levy was that we would re-use the bags, but South Africans have found it inconvenient to carry them to the shops. Or so the UCT study reports. The bags that don’t end up lining city dumps make for good bachelor-pad rubbish bags, or the occasional impromptu glove for clearing out a triggered mousetrap.

The then Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism had hoped revenue generated from the levy would create jobs in the plastics recycling sector, but, to nobody’s surprise, the money ended up lining the coffers of Treasury – and the pockets of our retailers. A November 2016 news report in *Independent*

Online (IOL) reported that between 2003 and 2014 the state had pocketed R1.1bn from sales of plastic bags, and around 5 billion *schmeckles* went to retailers for *ushekhasi*.

With figures like this we are effectively throwing money away, and I can imagine that these bags might become tradeable currency in the post-apocalyptic near-future. These choking hazards have the uncanny ability to last from 500 to a thousand years, unless – wait for it – we recycle!

Money is also not an object since you pay only around 50 cents each time you say “yes” to the *plastiki* lady, and there is the added benefit of job creation. The Kenyan example is extreme, since it might lead to up to 80,000 jobs lost, according to manufacturers in Kenya; we should count ourselves lucky in this regard.

I myself have elected to buy large, woven bags with Orlando Pirates crossbones emblazoned on the side, – despite being a Chiefs’ fan. We all make sacrifices to save the environment. ■



Guns and butter. Glad of the nanny state

AUSTRALIA IS CONGRATULATING itself on its gun control laws, ‘post Las Vegas’, and American commentators are looking for Australia-style solutions. There has not been a mass killing (defined as five or above shot) in the past 21 years – since the government’s gun “buyback” after the horrific Port Arthur massacre, in which a 28-year-old gunman, Martin Bryant, shot 35 dead and wounded another 23 customers seated in a café in Tasmania. The half-a-billion dollar gun buyback, funded by a special tax, saw more than 660,000 guns “seized and destroyed”, and was accompanied by the creation of a national firearms registry and a flat-out ban on automatics, semi-automatics, and shotguns. Gun-deaths went down, whether homicides or suicides. A more recent national amnesty saw a further 28,000 guns surrendered.

Not quite so high-minded, self-congratulatory Immigration Minister Peter Dutton boasts how other countries want to emulate Australia’s successful hard-line stop-the-boats policies. Immigration concerns were behind the coalition victory here in 2013, followed by the Brexit victory, Trump, and the surge of support for the far right in Germany, says this puffed-up man.

Recently, driving from the very gorgeous once-upon-a-time fishing village of Watson’s Bay (think Kalk Bay) in the early morning, I saw a posse of police cars and a helicopter whirring. Not hard to guess why: it’s The Gap, Australia’s most famous suicide spot, the high cliff where people go to jump, despite a CCTV system and dozens of cameras, a virtual fence detecting movement on the cliff side of the actual fence which triggers a police alarm, special lighting, and “social spaces”

designed to encourage people to hang around longer to increase the chance of noticing someone at risk.

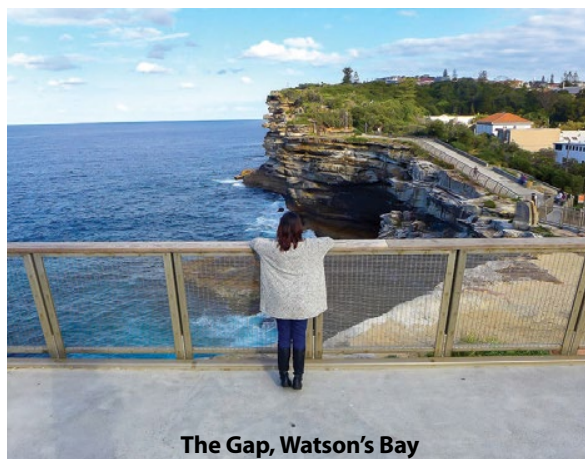
On the other side of the road, wedding pics are all the go, what with sparkling bay and quaint backdrop.

Cold comfort it may be for South Africans (and admittedly the weather bureau is forecasting that it will soon come bucketing down), but Sydney has had the driest September on record. Just 0.2mm of rain was recorded, with the previous lowest at 2.1mm in 1882. Temperatures reached 41.4 in Bourke, in the north west of NSW.

On the environmental front, low-lying Pacific islands which are at risk because of sea-level change are complaining that Australia’s energy emissions have hit record highs and half of the coral on the Great Barrier Reef has been predicted to die this year. Add to this that while Australia has more statues of animals than of women (only 3% of public sculptures in Australia honour non-fictional, non-royal women), koala bears are being killed, injured or made homeless by deforestation of “corridors” by tree-felling, and opposition is growing to a Aus\$1bn government loan for the Adani coal mine.

Onward and downward, to more petty aggravations: driving on a narrow tree-lined road, I am blocked by a garbage truck. A line of cars builds up behind me as the “garbos” go about their leisurely business, one even stopping for a “smoko”. I’m in a hurry, so try a little toot and a wave of the hand to indicate that there’s a space to the right, and if they just pulled over a little, I could squeeze through in my tiny, tiny inconspicuous and un-self-important car. They’re oblivious. I get out, and patiently explain in my best non-South African accent. “Fuck you lady”, comes the reply, and they dawdle along. Incensed, I take down the licence number to ring the council – only to double the pain: for the next 22 minutes and 16 seconds I listened to local government on-hold muzak as I made my way to the supermarket. Get there, and have just been connected to the operator when my phone shuts down; no reception in the bowels of Woolworths. Next, I wonder about the grand plan that has seen the blackberry cordial from New Zealand (described to me once as “a creepy little utopia”), moved to a different aisle and I am mildly pissed off that the bagels only come in packs of four when I need just two. Then I notice that underpants (for my teenager) skip straight from *kids 13-14* to *medium or large* for men, no *small men* here today (or whenever I look), and I go on a riff to a nearby woman – what is it with these men, can they not cope with being small, are they like fast-food hamburgers, always upsizing? – but I end up in a good mood because she and I talk schools, and she smiles and says that while our sons’ school may not be all that academically challenging, “It may not be the school, it’s just my son.”

Sane again! ■



The Gap, Watson’s Bay



Liberal. The hypocrisy problem

WELL LET'S BE GENEROUS AND say we all do our best not to be false and ungracious, though candidly I wouldn't want to enter into too much debate about that, what with the assorted scoundrels presently stomping about the Mid-East, and in our own history to this very date our home-grown breed filling our screens and speakers with sanctimonious phisogs and vapid declamation.

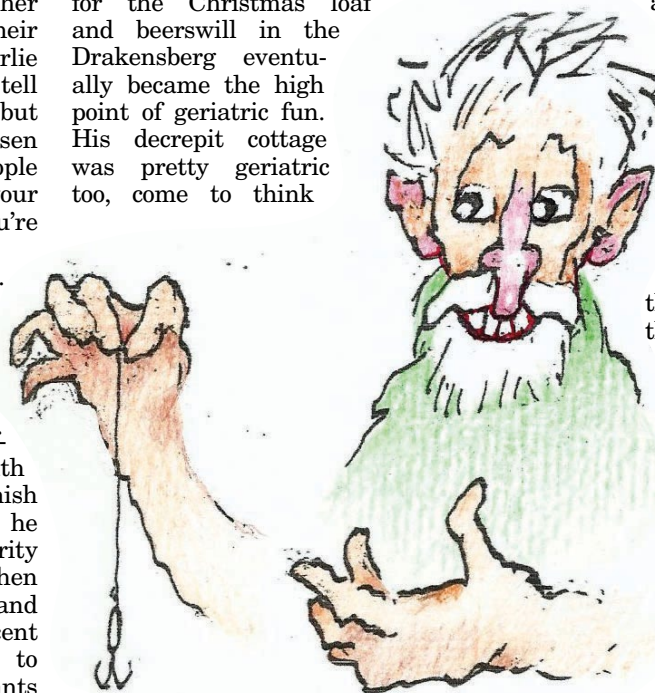
Seems there are decent and indecent people, regardless of ideology and class and ethnicity and all the rest of the crap we hurl at each other by way of self-justification. Me, I care neither feather nor fig where people lay their dedication: God, Mammon, Charlie Marx, pick your own prophet and tell your own beads, it's your concern, but don't square things with your chosen deity when you've robbed your people and laid waste the economy of your country, then come and tell me you're armed with righteousness.

True hypocrisy is a great old skill. Why, I've just seen a bombastic piece in a right-wing London paper by a self-proclaimed SA Struggle Person name of Johnson, a pom who in 1963 had the habit of taking tea with certain self-dedicated political figures in South Africa, and when things got warmish bugged off and declared when he came back in 1994 that the Security Branch had been after him back then so they could badly torture him, and now he's the lonely self-hero of decent democracy whom nobody wants to revere because they're all sycophants in the Game for Personal Acclaim and Riches. That's what I mean; plenty of hypocrisy around.

In which matter, you see, the curious thing about Peter Brown of the old Liberal Party was that he didn't know how to be a hypocrite. It wasn't that hypocrisy was in contravention of his scriptures, whatever they may have been, I never asked him, nor did he ask me about mine, that was our

own business. He just seemed not to understand the devices of hypocrisy, which you may call naïveté, but I call innocence. Indeed I often wonder these days if, in 1968 when the law said all political parties had to declare their racial orientation, the Liberal Party had gone silently underground instead of disbanding on principle. The Progressive Party declared itself to be White, a stigma attached to it this very day as the DA.

And you had to work pretty hard at being evil for Peter to judge you in any way, so joining a gaggle of decrepit old 1950s political coelacanths for the Christmas loaf and beerswill in the Drakensberg eventually became the high point of geriatric fun. His decrepit cottage was pretty geriatric too, come to think



of it, held in place by steel tie-rods like some old bloke's failing limbs. Devoid of luxury, minimal, ascetic. For passing German tourists and Japanese aesthetes on their way to the cave paintings along the escarpment the first introduction to God's Own Wilderness was clapped-out old pensioners standing naked in a trout stream next to the road, covered in soap.

Apropos trout streams; I've always suspected the creed of the trout priesthood, that their exotic *Salmo fario* is too genteel to ravage our indigenous river fauna, eating only flies as they do. As if our local vegetarian water-creatures have no use of such nunus anyway. So being cantankerous by nature and generally unsporting I took a R1 coin and bent it double in a vise, then threaded the very lightest of nylon line through the fold-over gap and tied on the very smallest triple-hook and, with a highly-verboden fixed-spool reel, dropped this highly-naturalistic wriggling tiddler with the greatest

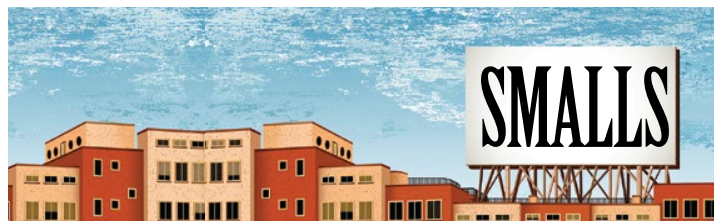
accuracy right at the far end of a long pool, wound it upriver right next to the bank and voila! Breakfast for All!

But there I go again. I forgot; I started with the hypocrisy problem and ended up with just another fishing yarn. Well then, you see, along with the theft of the country's money the main ingredient of hypocrisy is the need for acclaim. Fame. Status. I've been around in this dog-eat-dog political world a long time, and I tell you, Cdes, there have been few in it who weren't driven by such purpose. Now Peter didn't understand acclaim either. Not that he didn't get it, he just didn't know what to do with it.

One doesn't want to fall about too much in lamentation over death. It is the Second Law of Thermodynamics at work: all physical systems fall into increased disorder over time. Planets, stars, galaxies, the Universe. You must just try to add something to the world while you're in it. Well, Peter did.

Old age is not for sissies, said he when the Second Law hit him. I salute him. ■

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