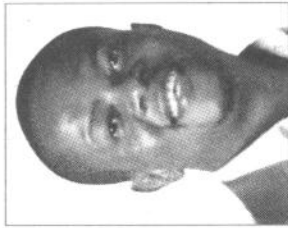


When evil enters president's house

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MAKHUDU SEFARA

It is hard to comprehend how R206m could be spent on one person's property

IMAGINE a traffic cop stopping a presidential cavalcade for a traffic infringement. After asking for a driver's licence and inspecting the lead car, the officer, with the president waiting in another car, asks for a bribe.

In an ideal world, your reaction would be that this madness is impossible. It ought to be. It's more stupidity than it is guts. How can you ask for a bribe from people working so closely with the president, the commander-in-chief of our armed forces, our anti-corruption chief campaigner and the nation's moral compass?

Well, as I say, in an ideal world, this must be the reaction.

Yet, when Public Works minister Thulas Nxesi told us that "the Supply Chain Management policy and pre-scripts were not fully complied with in procurement of goods and services" in that people inflated prices in the construction of President Jacob Zuma's palatial compound, our reaction was muted.

Granted, we were gobsmacked by other revelations. But the very fact that this corruption is happening at the very halls that must house our great leader did not warrant much attention and reaction. That someone felt they could engage in unethical conduct in a project involving the president speaks volumes.

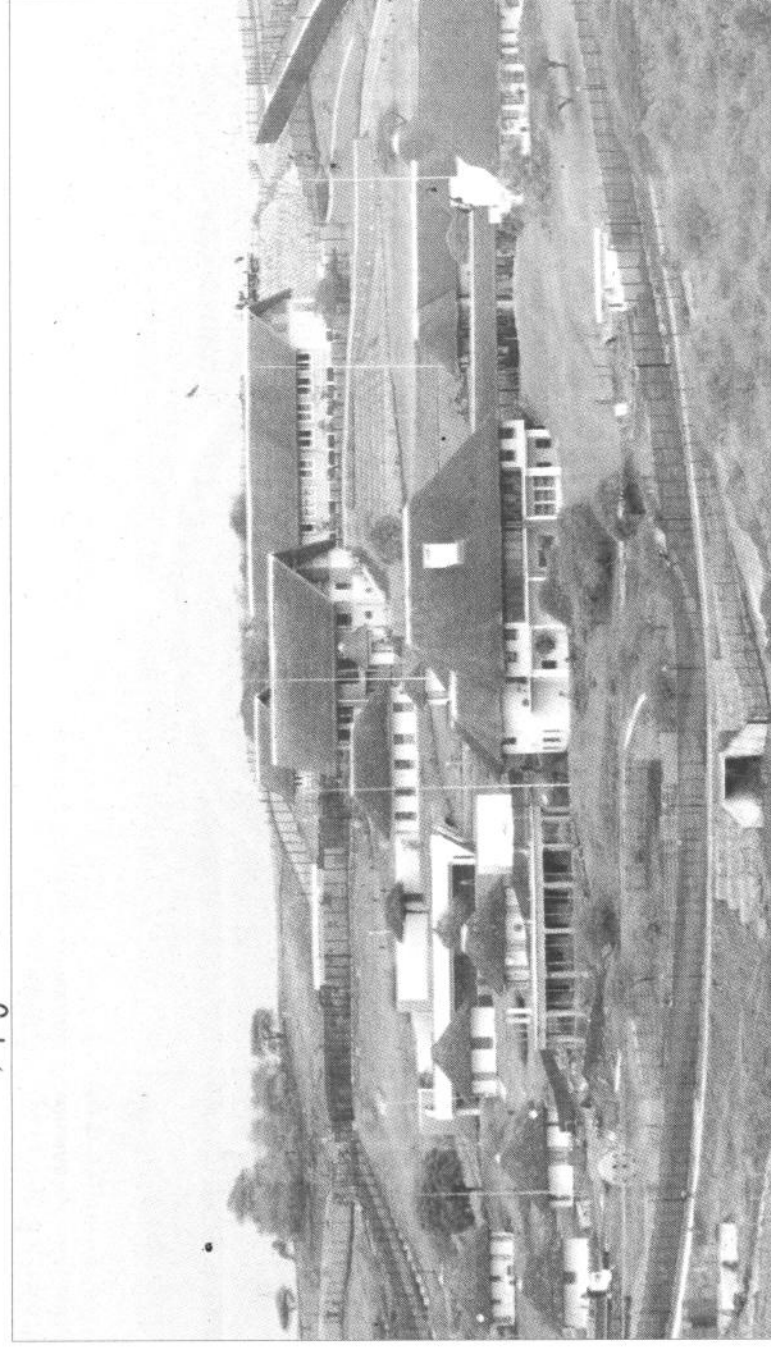
Solon, an ancient scholar of ethics, talks of "public evil entering the house of each man" when ethics is marginalised. John Ralston Saul notes that "ethics is like a muscle which must be exercised daily in order to be used in a normal manner".

For those doing work on Zuma's private home, his weight and perpetual presence in Nkandla were not enough to stop them from violating procurement procedures and, in the end, placing a ridiculous bill of R206 million "so far" on the table. What cheek? It is either these corrupt people are very brazen or they know they have a shield and spear to protect them!

But whatever their cover, the wretched of our country who this week forced multi-billionaire Patrice Motsepe to shed a tear must be brought before the courts to face the full wrath of the law. Nothing less will suffice.

Indeed, when people like Motsepe come forward to do good, they do so with hopes that government will do its part.

That government will continue to



CONTENTIOUS: President Jacob Zuma's home in Nkandla, KwaZulu Natal.

PICTURE: DOCTOR NGC080

help feed the poor and infirm, and also provide an environment in which businesses make it possible for philanthropists to help. Importantly, though, government has a duty to us all to ensure that the bright sparks who inflated the bill to R206m and still counting, are found and used as a lesson to show that corruption does not pay.

A failure to do this will see the president being disrespected without end. But the irony though is quite remarkable, is it not? By that I don't mean a former unionist-cum-communist minister trying in vain to justify spending R206m on one person's security. No. That part, sadly, I have reluctantly come to expect. I've made peace with it.

One's background is no guarantee of future conduct. That one is a former unionist does not mean one is inherently pro-workers. That one is a former freedom fighter does not necessarily mean one will infinitely work for the advancement of democracy. Our land, unfortunately, is laden with such examples.

The irony for me was that in the week when one prominent South African shows us the way by giving to the poor; the other prominent South African is in

be exercised everyday.

It is really pointless applauding Motsepe for doing the right thing when turning a blind eye on those who spread public evil. We are told the Auditor-General is investigating this matter. Yet, the AG has written many other reports that are gathering dust. Why? We have made it easy for people to think that it is possible to be unethical or corrupt, even on projects involving the highest offices of our land, and get away with it.

It does not help that people like Nxesi pretend they do not understand why many people are aghast at the Nkandla splurge.

For us to get rid of the putrid stench, the president too must take an interest in the matter. He must find out who the palookas are who are bringing his name into disrepute, make sure action is taken against them. Otherwise, people will think of him as a joke, as someone under whose nose it is easy to get away with murder, as it were.

Efforts by Motsepe and those like him to help create a better world will come to nought – unless Zuma shows that "public evil" of which Solon spoke, will not enter his house. We wait.

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