CHAPTER 6:
The Other Evil Politicians Do

"When we've got these people who have practically limitless powers within a society, if they get a pass without so much as a slap on the wrist, what example does that set for the next group of officials that come into power? To push the lines a little bit further, a little bit further, a little bit further, and we'll realize that we're no longer citizens - we're subjects."

- Edward Snowden (the honourable fugitive)

Expecting a political party to be honest and altruistic is as useful as a conversation with a cow. I've got nothing against cows but I'm adverse to the Knysna Council Chamber. Politicians called councillors still meet there to moo or deny the recommendations of municipal officials. The decisions I witnessed were not always in our best interest.

An impartial person might consider the Council Chamber conservatively tasteful, but I spent too many years making my arse sore in the Public gallery. I found the photos of Government leaders adorning the walls as appealing as the heads of animals shot by colonialists. And to have a photo of Helen Zille beside Jacob Zuma was as hilarious as coughing.

I observed incompetency, stupidity and selfishness in between a million hours of boredom. There were occasions where it ran from morning to night. And I had to stick around because the Municipality would often put the most important items late in the agenda so that the people who cared the most wouldn't witness it, having had to leave for work, fetch the kids etc.

Diligence gave me stories. Clues made rumours into soup, soup became blogs and complaints. I did my best to do what no one else seemed to have done before, to keep the Public of Knysna informed. Activism had become a full-time job without pay.

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Maybe you're like most people I've met who haven't stepped into the workplace of the Government they own. No, paying rates or a traffic fine doesn't count. And, yes, we own it. So, when something repeatedly goes wrong, we're the most to blame. Ignorance doesn't erase that responsibility. It's like blaming the school because your uncontrollable sperm is the result of your shitty, sugar parenting.

If you don't know how a Municipal Council handles your well-being, let me explain.

In the case of Knysna, 76,000 people are the responsibility of 21 councillors. That
latter figure gets unofficially smaller as it's actually a small number that wields the majority of the power.

To simplify it, imagine those 21 councillors being split into 11 DA members and 10 ANC members. On the agenda is a proposal to approve the awarding of a tender to a company that will plan the town's future for the next 30 years.

10 ANC councillors vote against the proposal whilst behind the scenes 4 DA members also vote against it. 10 + 4 = 14.

Theoretically, 14 councillors opposing the deal outweigh the 7 councillors supporting it. But in our constitutional democracy, a party most often represents one position only. The majority within the party rules. That means that the DA's 7 pro-tender councillors defeat their 4 anti-tender councillors, and collectively become 11 pro-tender votes. Thus the ANC's 10 anti-tender votes are defeated.

The proposal is approved even though the majority were against it.

The Public may never know how each councillor voted because the parties usually makes controversial decisions behind closed doors. A ward councillor could even vote against the majority of his residents' wishes, and then lie that he didn't. It's unlikely that a councillor will publicly substantiates their vote, at least not in meaningful manner. Consequently, it's extremely difficult to hold councillors accountable. They serve the party, not us.

The DA versus Cape Town Mayor Patricia de Lille in 2018 resulted in the Court ruling that a councillor can vote according to their conscience. That was mostly a hollow victory for the Public. The reality is that most councillors would be too scared to go against the party's wishes lest a different reason be found to remove them. Basically, they're bribed with a salary to ignore internal corruption.

In Knysna, in 2018, the DA didn't bother to hide their illegal action, and launched disciplinary hearings against Mayor Willemse and Councillor Myers for not voting with the others. The conflict of interest was in the others belonging to the same provincial faction trying to cover-up the corruption involved.

It's unlikely an apathetic Public will pay the hundreds of thousands of rands that would be needed for a councillor to challenge his party's leadership in High Court. Consequently, the power of the party defeats him, the interests of the residents, and the law.

The situation can be made more complex if party infighting has caused factions. The
reality in Knysna is that there were two DA 'parties' and two ANC 'parties'. There's jostling for higher positions which are willing to make secret allegiances with the 'opposition' which seems to exist more on TV and in supporters, than in Council rooms.

A politician can gain a majority for their faction if they're in the position to offer a bribe. The Mayor always has that clout. She can buy votes through her selection for the Mayoral Committee (MAYCO). Many will sell their loyalty for double their salary. Instead of the MAYCO having the best and brightest, it's more likely to be filled by fools and opportunists who obey the political positions and desires of the Mayor. That's what happened in Knysna. In effect, the Mayor's position was worth 5 votes. All she needed was 1 more vote to control the whole Council.

If the Mayor is loyal to the Premier, or hoping to one day be promoted provincially, the Premier controls the local Council. It's quite easy for 76,000 people to lose control of their future to an outsider who cares nothing about them. The country is a massive field wherein it's actually us who are the cows monotonously chewing grass whilst someone else decides whether we should be milked, sexed or slaughtered. Most often, when we're complaining, we're just another cow farting at the ozone layer of change.

Any or all of this might explain why not a single politician of the many I met over eight years was willing to meaningfully stand against corruption, if at all. The rare times the Public thought they were doing that, they were either attempting damage control or taking down rivals of their gang leader.

“Democracy is the freedom to choose our own dictator,” is an old saying. It isn’t democracy, it’s frighteningly insane.

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There's much more I wanted to tell you in this section of the book but I'm sure you'd prefer to read about the the madness that followed. Your majority vote rules so I'm going to rush through a few issues, starting with a forensic audit which only benefited the auditor.

The Knysna Vehicle Testing Station was closed and four officers suspended in 2013. ENS Africa was appointed to conduct the forensic investigation and paid R670,000 for their services. During the investigation, Peter Allwright, an employee of ENS, started his own company, Horizon Forensics. The Municipality then hired him to continue the work. That added another R785,000 to the bill.
It must be investigated why the Municipality gave the work to Horizon Forensics without tender, essentially helping establish Allwright's new company which has since been contracted by other DA municipalities in the region. When the ANC took over Bitou Municipality, and a dispute arose, Mayor Peter Lobese essentially accused Allwright of working for the DA.

Notably, after earning salaries for staying at home for two years, the Knysna traffic officers were cleared and reinstated. Were they guilty or victims of a money-making scheme at the expense of the Public? The report was kept hidden from the Public. The final cost to the taxpayer was an estimated R3-million... for zero result.

The Municipality denied my request, via PAIA, for information. My PAIAs being denied had become a regular feature.

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Refurbished offices with TVs and DSTV subscriptions contributed to councillors and directors overspending their budget by R481,656 in 2014. The extra sting was the DA having made austerity a fundamental election promise.

The High Court ridiculously and unprofessionally considered me having offended the dignity of Deputy Mayor Esme Edge because I asked in a photo caption if "she was too sexy for her furniture". I was mimicking that irritatingly effective song, 'Too Sexy for My Shirt'.

If only I'd had the balls back then to respond to Judge Allie with 'Don't Worry, Be Happy'.

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Manon McDonald, Knysna's Manager Electrical Department and Fleet Manager, was allegedly involved in graft and tender fraud.

In 2014, she secured Nissan vehicles for the traffic department. The tender contained irregularities and wasn't awarded to the winning bidder. An internal email shows that the Municipality knew something was wrong before the transaction.

Round the same time, Manon and her husband, Johan McDonald, were alleged to be driving new Nissan vehicles. I had two acquaintances of theirs contact me to say that they'd personally scored from the deal, one even saying they'd received a vehicle free.

Later that year, the majority of the Bid Evaluation Committee (BEC) quit in protest at outside interference in their committee. The Director of Technical Services and the
Manager of Environmental Management claimed interference of their responsibilities and the undermining of the BEC.

Manager Jonathan Mabula laid complaint against Director Mike Maughan-Brown for interference in the supply chain. The Municipality responded by instituting disciplinary hearings against Mabula. Again, they showed that a cabal in the Municipality were almost untouchable.

Before they quit, the BEC reported that the tender of Nissan Knysna had gone missing. Municipal Manager Lauren Waring failed to investigate appropriately. No criminal charges were laid.

A citizen with connections to the Municipality informed me in June 2015 that Manon McDonald had given her husband, Johan, a contract. An employee of the Electrical Department informed me that her husband had received most of the department’s work for years, valued in the millions. Another informant told me that Johan had received contracts under different company names over the years. Another acquaintance of the McDonalds said that had been happening for a decade. There’s that saying "where there's smoke there's fire'.

Manon McDonald handed in her resignation. The DA-led Municipality of George, immediately west of Knysna, hired her as their Fleet Manager. George is the DA’s seat of power for the Garden Route District under which Knysna falls. The DA appear to have protected her.

Back in Knysna, only a token tender was investigated several years later. Although found to be illegal, the Council accepted Cliff Dekker Hofmeyr Attorney’s recommendations that they not pursue recovery or punishment as the costs involved wouldn't be worth it. The attorneys strangely stated that the fact that the Municipal Manager had been pursued on offences was sufficient deterrent to other staff not to do wrong.

Cover-up complete.

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There were riots by Knysna's Oupad residents that led to repeated closures of the national highway (N2) in 2016. The Municipality failed to inform the Public that the main spark was a problem with the T20 tender involving housing, causing a delay, seemingly the Municipality’s fault.

Worsening the situation was that Leon Naude, Chairman of the Knysna Ratepayers’
Association and DA constituent, called for live bullets to be used on the protesters. He was supported by Kevin Grinaker, another DA constituent and the recently ex-Ward 10 Committee Chairperson. He suggested that a D10 be used, that's the infamous Caterpillar bulldozer Israel has utilised against Palestinians.

Both men had previously failed to act on my complaints against the DA but they'd gone too far for loyalty to matter. My Facebook post sparked outrage. The DA got rid of their members without acknowledging my complaint.

Susan Campbell, on behalf of the Knysna Ratepayers' Association, laid complaint against the awarding of the tender. A 100% black owned company that scored the most preference points, submitted a lower bid, and would do more work, lost to a 100% white owned company offering less. It was possible through the Municipality offering an illegal bonus scheme to local businesses. It was called the 'Preferential Premium Policy'. Taxpayers lost a small fortune.

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The Municipality probably thought that 'Preferential Premium Policy' sounded better than 'Public Pickpocketing Policy'. It granted bonus points to local suppliers which was used to circumnavigate Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment (B.B.B.E.E.). A tenderer who didn't submit the relevant certificate, and didn't score the highest points, could still walk away with the work and money. It's likely that favouritism was made easier.

The loss to local taxpayers in 2017 was R9-million.

The Western Cape Auditor General (AG) and Provincial Treasury only gave useless warnings. The AG even awarded a clean audit. Consequently, the Municipality continued the illegal practice for another year. By the time the AG stopped it, the final figure would've been higher.

Susan Campbell laid complaint with the Western Cape Treasury and the Knysna Council against Municipal Manager Lauren Waring. No one responded.

It later became one of the disciplinary charges against her successor, Grant Easton but he quit. Thereafter, the matter was swept under the carpet.

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The Sedgefield desalination plant hasn't been used since its inception in 2009. The Municipality claims that the cost to the Public for its water would be too high. However, the upkeep costs taxpayers millions of rands annually.

Same Shit, Different Government: Book 1 – The Corruption & The Intimidation
Early 2017, I had an email conversation with Tom Callaghan, the Divisional Director of GTEK (Pty) Ltd Water, the company that had installed the plant. He said, "DWS and The Water Research Commission [had wanted] to upgrade the plant with new technology and service and maintain it properly. The upgrade would be at NO cost to [the Municipality], and price of water would be within current municipal rates. We never heard back from the municipality. Very frustrating for us".

Why did the Municipality choose to waste millions on operating a desalination water plant that it isn't using when it could switch providers and put it to use in a water scarce area?

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The East Head is one of Knysna's main tourist attractions. It includes two restaurants and a shared parking lot beside the opening of the estuary to the sea - a priceless location.

**Without tender**, the Municipality leased half of it to a restaurant owner in 2018. The other restaurant tender, having begun much earlier, was so poorly handled by the Municipality that unpaid rent, unpaid rates and consequent court action has cost the taxpayer R7-million.

Despite the massive arrears, the Municipality installed a pre-paid electricity meter to assist the debtor. He made more money whilst not paying his other bills.

Eventually, the restaurant's doors closed. For a year, the Municipality has failed to award a tender which means another half a million in rental lost.

No one has been held accountable.

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The Knysna Municipality's year-long suspension of Budget Manager Avitha Sunkar cost the public over R870,000 in stay-at-home pay. Sunkar's suspension appeared to be victimisation, especially as she was said to have been instrumental in saving the town R40-million. The lengthy suspension may also have been the result of political factional power plays.

Sunkar, who was clearly unpopular amongst her colleagues, laid grievances which were ignored by then Municipal Manager Grant Easton (who was later charged himself, for misleading Council regards her). Instead, grievances were laid against her and she was suspended.
Outside of the normal municipal budget, each Ward Councillor is allocated an annual budget for infrastructure repairs. Last year, that was R3.5-million each. It's money that can easily buy favouritism rather than what is most needed for the Ward collectively.

I attended a Ward 10 committee meeting wherein some monies were dispensed at the whim of Committee members, without submission by the Public.

As none of the projects are designated before budgeting, the practice must be considered irregular expenditure, even more so because politicians are barred from interfering in the role of municipal officials.

This was amplified by the fact that in 2017, the DA allowed their coalition partner, Velile Waxa, to deviate R250,000 to buy soccer gear. It seemed obvious that they were bribing him. That he was given it whilst facing disciplinary charges for tender interference and threatening a woman made the situation more concerning. It was coalition no matter the cost.

In a little town called Knysna, the DA was involved in continuous corruption. I'm just one citizen. I cannot know the full reach of their dirty hands but it's obvious there are more blue fingerprints awaiting discovery.

Could that, in turn, be multiplied everywhere the DA rules? That's possible considering the emails I've received from other towns but not had the resources to investigate. For example, the alleged destabilisation of Bitou though DA funds is frightening, more so through the squashing of the police investigation and the complicity of the media that'll hopefully, eventually, go down in history as an example of the National Party having never died.

Because the leaders of the DA are involved in cover-up and criminal protection, it's reasonable to conclude that everywhere under them should be scrutinised.

When you read what they did to me, you'll be horrified.