

Those of you who were raised in the part of the world where Eugene Marais' testimony to the strange antics of ants in the Namid Desert will have no difficulty in conjuring up images in your mind of purposefulness and dedication. Remember those large, fearsome looking insects gathering their food, building their homes, and viciously defeating any enemy in their paths. Very focussed activity.

In a part of the jungle called California, the soul of the white ant is basically outlined as those negative feelings one has about costs involved in the tenting of the residence you have just bought to poison termites, and how unfair you feel the general costs of closing an escrow are.

And the mere mention of the word "Namib" rattles your white blood cells, because it reminds you of the newly independent state of Namibia and the consequences this little crack in history has upon your Mom & Dad, Sisters & Brothers, and your Buddies. Simultaneously, it reminds you of a raw, unspoilt wild beauty that no non-Safrican can ever come to understand. Never mind the fact that you never went there, nor found the time to do that Okavongo Swamp trip that you always promised yourself. That wild beauty is in your gene structure. See even now you can hear the roar of a lion in the back of your memory.

There used to be a joke, actually a cluster of jokes, circulating Jo'burg some years ago:

"How many Californians does it take to change a light bulb? Five. One to do the work and four to share the experience."

Either I've been totally misled, or else I missed the point, but I always thought that this joke was poking fun at the "Laid Back" attitude that is supposed to be widespread and rife in dear old Cal. Seems that this relaxed attitude was prevalent here for about six glorious weeks, in 1966, bounded in time somewhere between Sgt. Peppers and the Vietnam War.

Since then you could comfortably say that acquisitive greed has wiped out Flower Power and stretching and squeezing has become the order of the day. Stretching the hours in the day, stretching your credit to the limit, stretching the number of material things that your household can take. Squeezing every cent out of that Dollar, squeezing out your competitors, squeezing the maximum number of syllables into an indivisible second, e.g: "Have a nice day, Sunshine" was reduced to "A good one," and has become: "gun."

Do not miss that important word "competitors" that you just read. The other night there was a programme on TV which was explaining HUMAN MOTIVATION. Various brilliant psychologists and sociologists alluded to intrinsic and extrinsic values in accomplishing any given task. Intrinsic worth is the fuel of self-motivated individuals : the ones who get a kick out of doing something because it requires effort and just doing it is the reward. Extrinsic worth is the basis of motivation which is PAID. Either in money, or public recognition, or in terms of the number of people you can control etc. etc.

And your fierceness as a competitor is going to determine your motivation, whether you like it or not. Because people are going to compete with you willy nilly.

The Capitalist system has as its foundation competition, which is always touted to be the highest good because it results in reduced costs. But nobody ever stops to think about the costs of what? Most often, something we don't need. Example?

Once everyone in the world owns an electric can opener, there will be no market for electric can openers, so the capitalist competitors will start packaging food in a new type of container which will require a laser to open. And the competitors will fight for market share and make laser openers affordably available to every household!

And we are working harder than white ants to own them!

But back to the white ants. My Saffrican neighbour was making biltong during the period in which his house was in escrow. Seems they had to tent the biltong because the termites got to it.....

Another thing you're glad you escaped from is the poskantoor. We just recieved and parcel from the home country which had a large AMPTELİK stamp across it that read: DEMOLISH this package. It must have been an act of civil disobedience on the part of some "radical" that left my package intact, and my six-pack of Lion Lagers (in litre bottles) arrived undamaged.

Busy, busy, busy. Busy as insatiable termites. I have yet to meet a bored Californian. Nobody has time to be bored. Not even kids. Remember yourself whining over and over to your mom : "What should I do? There's nothing to do." Well nowadays TV and Nintendo have totally eradicated childish boredom. Is that a shame? I don't know. In fact take the trouble to look up the words boredom or ennui in the English Oxford Dictionary. You'll find a vast array of synonyms, antonyms, meanings, etc. Then go look them up in the Webster. All you'll find is a simple entry:

"Boredom: disease encountered everywhere except California."

What can you make of that? How the Hell should I know? But like the time-aged cliché goes.... Yes, the truth hurts.