

EDITOR'S VIEW

Maimane, the businessman and the sponsored car

TONY Leon has grown on me over the years, but I did not think much of him when he was in Parliament, post-1994.

Admittedly, Leon did not have it easy. He was a member of the opposition at a time when Nelson Mandela was president. Opposing him must have been a thankless task.

He became the leader of the official opposition in 1999 at a time when another great statesman, Thabo Mbeki, was elected as our president.

Leon's endless criticism of the ANC government won him few friends, and his relationship with Mbeki was frosty.

In fact, Mbeki met Leon for their first private meeting in May 2007, mere days before Leon retired.

Reports from the time illustrate the tensions that existed between the two.

Journalists had to ask them to sit closer to each other. And when one reporter asked if they had advice for the other, Mbeki replied: "No advice, not at all."

Leon did find favour with voters. And his ability to provide a punchy sound-bite or quote made him a darling of the media. As a result, under Leon, support for the DA grew, and the party entrenched itself as the main opposition.

Fast-forward to present times, where Mmusi Maimane is the leader of the DA.

Compared with Leon, he has had things relatively easy.

When he became the leader of the party, Jacob Zuma was in charge of the ANC. It was a party that was deeply divided and stumbling from one disaster to another.

There had never been a better time since democracy to unseat the ANC, but Maimane failed to do that.

What's more, under his leadership, several more political parties emerged because the DA under Maimane was not what disgruntled voters wanted.

I've not been impressed by Maimane in Parliament. He is too theatrical, and he delivers his speeches like he is in church. Now, it has become clear that Maimane doesn't practice what he preaches.

Allegations have now surfaced that Maimane drove around in a rental car, sponsored by businessman Markus Jooste.

This is the guy who was the former chief executive of Steinhoff International. He resigned at the end of 2017 amid allegations of accounting irregularities totalling billions of rand.

Maimane claims he is the victim of a smear campaign.

But you have to wonder why a man who earns R1.6 million a year needs a sponsored car.

You would also think that Maimane, who is a pastor, would have learned from Jesus Christ, who said it was more blessed to give than to receive.

The Quote

The enemy is fear.
We think it is hate, but it is fear.

MAHATMA GANDHI
Source: wisdomquotes.com

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Taking the mafia out of the unions

Number of work days lost to strikes will fall drastically as a result

JUGGERNAUT



KANTHAN PILLAY

ON Friday, September 27, a nationwide banking strike in South Africa did not take place. That same evening, *The Irishman*, starring Robert de Niro and Al Pacino and directed by Martin Scorsese, had its world premiere at the 57th New York Film Festival in the US.

There is a reason these two things are connected and it dates back to Valentine's Day, 1913, in a town called Brazil, Indiana, in the US when Viola Hoffa gave birth to a son.

Viola and her husband John named the boy James Riddle Hoffa – Riddle being his mother's maiden name. When Jimmy (as the boy came to be called) was 7 years old, John Hoffa died. Four years later, Viola moved the family to Detroit.

At age 14, Jimmy left school and took up manual labour jobs to support his family. One of these early jobs was with a grocery chain.

As was the case with most unskilled work at the time, the gig offered poor working conditions with little or no job security. The workers tried to organise themselves into a union. Jimmy Hoffa, although a teenager, soon rose to a leadership position.

In 1932, after clashing with an abusive shift foreman, Hoffa left the grocery chain. But his reputation as a leader of workers had grown and so he was invited to become an organiser in Detroit with a union called the Teamsters.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters had been founded in 1903. When Hoffa joined, they had around 75 000 members. As Hoffa rose through the leadership ranks, the union grew rapidly. Membership more than doubled to 170 000 in the next three years, and again, to 420 000 in the following three years. By 1951, membership topped 1 million.

But there was a cost associated with this expansion. The growth of the union's power saw a corresponding rise of corruption. Hoffa and other union leaders began to be associated with organised crime, which had a vested interest in the trucking business.

So in 1957, when Hoffa was elected president of the union, he was also under criminal investigation by a US Senate probe into "improper activities in labour or management".



THE writer refers to the premiere of the movie, *The Irishman*, which reunites Martin Scorsese with stars Robert de Niro, Al Pacino and Joe Pesci. | African News Agency (ANA) Archives

Hoffa was convicted in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1964, for attempted bribery of a grand jury investigator. He was sentenced to eight years in prison.

Hoffa was also convicted of fraud later that same year for illegally arranging several large pension fund loans to leading organised crime figures. For this, he received a five-year sentence to run concurrently with his bribery conviction.

Where did it go wrong? The young Hoffa was a genuinely downtrodden employee who campaigned assiduously for worker rights, but turned into a corrupt cat's paw for organised crime.

Perhaps the answer is to be found in the way in which decision-making has usually taken place in trade unions around the world – by show of hands or voice vote. Ordinary members who did not support their leaders' proposed courses of action would be afraid to speak out, lest they be victimised.

Which brings us back home to the banking strike that did not take place.

The South African Society of Bank Officials (Sasbo), a Cosatu-affiliated union in the banking sector, had planned a nationwide strike for September 27.

Sasbo general secretary Joe Kokela said the reason for the strike was that Standard Bank planned to retrench 6 000 employees, that Nedbank planned to retrench 3 000, and that Absa planned to shed 878 jobs.

Both Standard Bank and Nedbank denied this was the case. Nevertheless, Cosatu planned to go ahead the strike. Between 40 000 to 70 000 finance sector employees were expected to stay away from work.

The Labour Court shut down the strike. Judge Hilary Rabkin-Naicker declared Cosatu and Sasbo had failed to comply with a section of the Labour Relations Act.

That section requires any union planning any protest action to serve notice on the National Economic Development and Labour Council (Nedlac), stating the reasons for the protest action and the nature of the protest action.

Cosatu argued that it did not need to go through this process as it had served notice to Nedlac in 2017 outlining demands related to the economic downturn. In that notice, Cosatu wanted private companies to be prohibited from retrenching employees with a view to maintaining profits.

The judge appears to think otherwise. Cosatu and Sasbo will now need to go through the process from scratch.

But there's a twist in the tale. On January 1 this year, the Labour Relations Amendment Act came into effect. This requires that before any union can call a strike or lockout, that union is required by law to conduct a secret ballot of members. Those provisions came into effect on September 9.

Union bosses are not happy with the new

laws, threatening to challenge at the Constitutional Court, and at the International Labour Organisation. That is their right.

Meanwhile, under the new regulations, Sasbo will need to conduct a secret ballot of its members.

I find it unlikely that 70 000 financial sector workers will vote to forfeit a day's pay for political grandstanding. I also predict that the number of work days lost to strikes in general will fall drastically.

The Irishman stars De Niro as Frank Sheeran, a mob hitman and World War II vet who developed his skills during his service in Italy. Now an old man, Sheeran reflects on the events that defined his career as a hitman, particularly the role he played in the disappearance of Hoffa, his long-time friend, played by Pacino.

Hoffa disappeared on July 30, 1975 after telling his family he was going to meet two Mafia leaders at the Machus Red Fox, a suburban Detroit restaurant. His car was found in the parking lot of the restaurant. His body was never found.

Srikanthan is one of the names of Vishnu. Another name for Vishnu is Jagannath, "the unstoppable force", which gives us the modern word juggernaut. Kathan Pillay writes about understanding the unstoppable forces which shape our lives in technology, commerce, science and society.

Of course it's okay for men to cry



YOGIN DEVAN

IS IT OKAY for men to cry?

I ask this because two emotionally-draining events in the past few weeks should have had me shedding tears. But my eyes were dry.

First, I lost my only brother, 18 months younger than me. He passed away suddenly.

I will be lying if I say I enjoyed a close relationship with Thamo in the past two or so decades.

Both of us never made the effort to meet to stoke the fires of sibling love. Our different priorities in life, jumbled with the politics that attend marriage, drew us apart.

But our shared history – like the single bed we occupied as growing boys – was a powerful, sustaining bond. We would play truant from Tamil school and get up to all sorts of mischief.

We would walk home after spending the bus fare on orange slices sprinkled with chilli powder and salt, bought from the Barrow Uncle.

We would swim in dangerous muddy ponds. We would steal sugar cane from Blue House Aunt's garden. When we got caught, Thamo would blame it all on me – "the older one who should have had more brains", as my parents would be wont to say.

As I kissed his cold cheek moments before his mortal remains were confined to the glowing orange furnace at Clare Estate, I was instantaneously conscious of the fact that, even during this act of a final "goodbye" to my beloved brother, I did not cry.

A week after the funeral, I was in Chennai, where my daughter had enrolled to study at university for the next two years.

As the days passed and the time approached when my wife and I would have to leave Saranya, our daughter, in the care of a dotting, elderly woman, a heaviness invaded my heart.

I was well aware my precious daughter would be safe, in the city she refers to as her "second home".

Her affable nature would quickly win her friends. Her determination to research in a



INDIAN Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, consoles Kailasavadivoo Sivan. | newindianexpress.com

chosen field of study would keep her busy, fulfilled and happy.

Yet there was a pain in my heart because of the anticipated separation from a child, who has been my veritable shadow when she was not attending lectures.

Before she left Durban, I dare not enter the local supermarket without her because a dozen aisle staff and cashiers would enquire, as if they had been chorus trained: "Where is your daughter?"

From the time she was born, I saw to her night-time feeds, while her mother slept soundly. Saranya has insisted that I be present at every visit to a doctor. We share a wicked sense of humour and can finish each other's sentences.

Little wonder then that I was not sure how I would handle the situation when I would have to bid her farewell. Would I burst into tears?

Thankfully, there was nothing like that. In fact, my girl helped the situation by being so strong and cheerful herself.

We hugged, and hugged, and hugged, and then I jumped into the waiting car to head to the airport. I did not shed any tears.

I asked myself if I was normal. Did I not have a heart? Surely, events that have strong emotional consequences should cause me to cry.

Or did years of being a journalist, attending arenas of mass political killings, and

accident scenes where I helped to match severed limbs with torsos, leave me unfeeling and cold?

I quickly realised this cannot be true. I can be emotionally touched. I am not heartless.

Listening to MS Subbulakshmi's melodious rendering of *Manavayala in raga Nalinakanthi*, can leave me deeply moved beyond words.

The beautifully-crafted Holocaust movie *Schindler's List* hit me right in the bottom of my stomach – even if I did not cry. When Axel, our faithful German Shepherd, had to be put down, I felt numb for days thereafter.

I may not shed tears but that does not mean I am callous, cold-hearted or uncaring.

Perhaps I have conditioned myself not to shed tears in public because there is a pervading idea, especially in western culture, that big boys don't cry.

Personally, I believe it is fine for grown men to cry. That I why I was angry when Kailasavadivoo Sivan was criticised for crying in public.

You see, about a month ago, the Indian Space Research Organisation's most ambitious mission, Chandrayaan-2, failed to go according to plan.

The Vikram Lander lost contact with the mission control on the ground, just 2.1km from the lunar surface.

Later during the day, Sivan, who is the chief of Isro, was seen on television shaking hands with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with the latter hugging and consoling Sivan, who was in tears.

While it broke the hearts of some watching the Isro chief crying like that, after 10 years of solid work, some criticised this display of emotion and said that he should have maintained professional decorum.

The reality is that Sivan would have shed blood and sweat for this space mission. It was totally normal for him to express his emotions publicly and shed tears.

During the 2016 Euro final, an injured Cristiano Ronaldo broke into tears as he was carted from the field, just 17 minutes into the game.

Rather than poking fun at the forward for showing vulnerability, French and Portuguese fans rose to their feet in a standing ovation.

Former President of the US, Barack Obama, cried openly on live television, as he delivered a speech about his government's measures to tighten gun control, in the wake of the continued mass shootings in the country.

Closer to home, a tearful Justice Raymond Zondo, during his interview for the post of the deputy chief justice, recounted how he was determined to study law. However, his mother had lost her job and the family were struggling financially.

He approached an Indian businessman Suleman Bux, in Ixopo, told him his story and asked for a loan to support his family while he studied. The shopkeeper supported Zondo's mother and his siblings until he finished his degree.

When Zondo returned after his studies to pay the shopkeeper back, this is what he told Zondo: "No, don't worry. Just do to others what I've done to you."

Has crying at his interview, while recounting this act of philanthropy, made Zondo, who is heading the State Capture Inquiry, a lesser man? No, it only shows he is human too.

Emotion doesn't have anything to do with biological sex.

Men and women alike should feel free to wear their hearts on their sleeves.

Devan is a media consultant and social commentator. Share your comments with him on: yogind@meropa.co.za