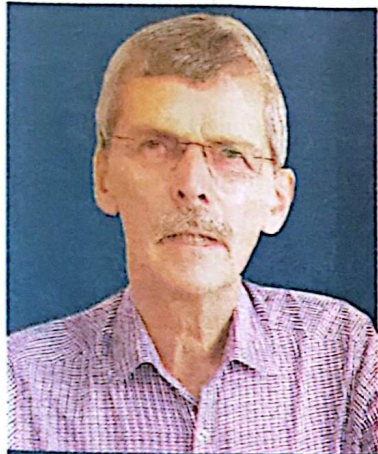


THE OSTENTATIOUS DISPLAY OF WEALTH BY THE SPEAKER



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The *Weekend Monitor* ran a front-page story of how the Speaker of Parliament had acquired a brand-new Rolls Royce Cullinan valued at \$600,000. The story showed a picture of the car, with a picture of the Speaker superimposed appearing to rub her hands in delight.

I really fail to understand how anyone in a prominent political position could think it is OK to have

her newly acquired wealth on such public display. Her purchase of one of the most expensive cars in the world is in stark contrast to the obvious failings of Government to provide the basics for the country, such as a motorable highway to Fort Portal or a capital city without potholes and dirt roads – and she thinks this is acceptable behaviour?

In addition, the purchase of this vehicle came just prior to the inauguration of the President and the 12th Parliament.

Since she is the current Speaker of Parliament, what does this say about the priorities of the 12th Parliament? Her actions appear to signal that we are to continue the practice of pampering the elite, while basic needs of the populace are left unbudgeted.

Our political representatives are supposed to represent the people, but we have started this new term with a demonstration by the Speaker of Parliament that it is the political elite who have the money.

We should not forget that this money does not come out of thin air and that the Uganda Revenue Authority puts great pressure on individuals and businesses to cough up in order that they can meet their targets, so the money that is being

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so brazenly flaunted is ultimately coming from the tax that we all pay.

The social contract that should apply to any nation is the tacit agreement between citizens and government that citizens will pay their tax and in turn the government will provide services, such as good roads, free education, healthcare and social services.

Therefore, the electorate see the results of paying tax in the development of their country. However, when we witness ostentatious displays of wealth by

prominent politicians, it leaves a bad taste in the mouth and a feeling of disillusionment with the whole system.

Such brazen displays of wealth reinforce the belief that the Government is not 'by the people, for the people' but 'by the elite, for the elite', while the rest of us can fend for ourselves. Amid all the political manoeuvring, I still believe (perhaps naively) there are some good people working to see that their country develops, but such people must be embarrassed by what we are witnessing, which also causes deep cynicism in the population about the good intentions of any programme undertaken by the Government.

There is a level of self-congratulation and self-reward among politicians that is mind-blowing, which, I suppose, is why it is a fight to the death when it comes to elections. But have we not lost sight of what politics is for?

Politicians are elected as the representatives of the people; they are supposed to be the mouthpiece for their constituency, but the whole thing has become so commercialised that once the politician has ascended to Parliament, there is little expectation that he will deliver

anything. This is why we have a 70% turnover in every Parliament. The politician, realising his time is limited, serves first his own needs, second, the needs of his party, with the needs of the people coming a distant third.

Gen. Salim Saleh is popular among the people because he tries to serve the ordinary man.

On his sixtieth birthday, he raised a billion shillings, not for himself, but for some nuns who are carrying out an agricultural project in Gulu, and I have met him in meetings of rural coffee farmers in which he has shown the patience of Job.

Why does he sit listening to ordinary people? Because he wants to improve their lives. But what has happened to our political system when it is so obvious that our leading politicians are out for themselves only, and if they can hoodwink 'the man with the hat' they can eat what they want. All of this has caused deep cynicism about our political system, which has become the most lucrative business in the country.

Until we change this and make politics, not for the good of the elites, but for the good of the people, we will fail to develop this country and meet the needs of the people.