

National Affairs by Claire Hoy ? A matter of sheer jealousy



Jealousy is among the least attractive yet most common human traits. It adds nothing to the target but subtracts from the jealous person.

It is hard to say exactly when this current fad began which sees success as a bad thing, as something that detracts from the rest of us rather than applauds the successful.

Yes, there have always been some who hold this view, those who believe that if one person is successful he or she must be doing it at the expense of somebody else. They seem to believe there is a set amount of success allowed in the world and if you get more than your share well then, that means everybody else is getting less than they deserve.

But it hasn't been until recent times when this unwholesome view has become widespread. Just look at all those protesters in the U.S. who go on about the dreaded one per cent, the idea apparently being that if they didn't have as much money as they have then you, the protester, would clearly have more.

Not that you're prepared to go out and work for it, mind you. It's the feeling that you are entitled to it, but they, those horrible successful people, are not.

Let us, for example, look closely the recent release of the so-called Panama Papers, the private financial records of some of the world's wealthiest individuals. An international consortium of journalists and others has discovered the secret identities of some 200,000 anonymous offshore entities ? thanks to somebody hacking into the private files of the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca ? and are about to make those names public.

Why? Out of sheer jealousy actually. Oh sure, they make it sound much more high-minded than that, telling readers and viewers that these ?tax dodgers? are up to no good. Or, as the page 2 headline in the Sunday Star said: ?New Panama Papers data could reveal crimes.?

Then again, they may not reveal crimes. But do you think the so-called investigative journalists promoting this story will differentiate? Do you think they will investigate every name to discover if in fact there was something criminal involved in the investments before publishing the names? Of course they won't. They'll publish them all and hope that crimes are revealed so they can get even more stories.

Same thing with the push from Ottawa to reveal the names of employees and 27 clients who took advantage of a service once offered by KPMG to set up tax shelters in the Isle of Man. Never mind that at the time of these investments it was perfectly legal and like all Canadians ? and yes, that includes you ? these wealthy people took advantage of a scheme to cut back on their tax bills.

Who among us doesn't take advantage of everything governments offer to cut back on taxes? And why not? It's your money, not the government's money. It's one thing if you're breaking the law to evade taxes ? that's a criminal matter ? but quite another if you're using the system to avoid paying more taxes than you absolutely have to pay.

Yet, these investors are painted as ?tax dodgers? of the worst kind. Indeed, I've even seen them labeled as ?tax evaders,? apparently from people who don't know or don't care about the difference between legal and illegal accounting practices.

And no ? if that's what you're thinking ? I do not have any offshore investments of any kind, so I'm not concerned about protecting my own butt here.

What concerns me a lot, however, is this popular, jealousy-inspired notion that successful people deserve to be shamed and brought to heel for the apparent social crime of being successful.

We used to admire people who succeeded in whatever it is they were doing. Success was not considered a four-letter word, worthy of being held up to ridicule and shame by those who no doubt wish in their hearts that they, too, were successful. But since they aren't, well then, the next best thing is to smear those who are.

Sure, it may be bad optics for a politician to stand up for the rich people ? who, despite the cheap partisan rhetoric to the opposite, already do pay far more than their fair share of taxes than the rest of us pay.

But sometimes the right thing to do is the toughest thing to do. And if nothing else, we should stop this nasty business of trying to drag successful people down to the lowest common denominator.