



Outrage at Corpcapital

THIS is absolutely outrageous," said Corpcapital executive director Neil Lazarus. "I am enraged. How dare anyone suggest that I ordered (a survey of) telephone calls made by or to persons unconnected with the firm?"

Lazarus was responding to questions put by me after it became known that telephone calls in July and August 2001 from both land lines and cellphones had been catalogued. In all, 30 pages of records of calls made to or by me are carefully recorded.

This applies also to eight other people, either journalists or those who were unhappy (and vociferous) minorities in the great battle that raged at the time over the proposed merger of Corpgro with Corpcapital and Corpcapital Bank.

They were journalists Deon Basson (Finance Week), Martin Mittner (Beeld), Stuart Theobald (Financial Mail) and Hilary Joffe (Business Day), along with David Sylvester (Shareholders' Association), Gerard le Roux and Rob Dow (then of AMB), Kelley Starke (Kensani) and the former stockbroker who sold Fulcrum Bank (Corpcapital Bank) to Corpgro, Ed Hern.

The investigation was carried out, apparently, by the Associated Group (AIN as it is known) whose MD, Warren Goldblatt,

also categorically denied any involvement by his firm. He said he knew of the dossier because it had been handed over during a pretrial conference on an action being brought by disaffected former Corpcapital director Nic Frangos against Lazarus and AIN for an invasion of privacy.

Lazarus is emphatic in his denial. So is Goldblatt. But the recording of the calls did take place. So, if not ordered by Corpcapital, then by who, and for what purpose?

AIN, by the way, was founded by the late Gary Lazarus, younger brother of Neil. He was trained at Vlakplaas, and was recognised as a serious covert operations functionary under the apartheid government.

In the circumstances of the time — and the Corpcapital fight was very dirty indeed — it seems highly unlikely any other group would have wanted to collect all this information about who financial journalists were talking to. What could the motive have been? To identify sources? Or was there something else in this that was more sinister?

In any event, what took place is expressly prohibited by statute. Of course, I castigate the Scorpions regularly. Will I be welcomed if I appear on their doorstep asking them to take up a case on my behalf?