

A Look at Student Unrest

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AFTER a period of relative calm the characteristic wave of unrest in institutions of learning is back. This follows the recent industrial unrest that had hit the country especially in the textile industries.

This appeared in form of strikes, demonstrations as well as riots. Unrests, whether in institutions of learning or industrial sector, seem to follow a pattern. For instance, at the university, a period of unrest was witnessed in mid-seventies followed by relative calm in the late seventies. Then came the unrest of early eighties. Among them the 1982 prolonged closure after which there has been relative calm.

Unrest in other tertiary institutions usually erupted at the same time. A similar trend seems to occur in secondary schools currently. Primary schools have however, been left out in these unrests.

Industrial unrest, seem to affect closely related establishments. This suggests a psychological basis. Each category can be said to be of the same academic standing, training and age, especially in institutions of learning. Their experiences are similar and hence easily moved by actions and sufferings, real or assumed of their colleagues. This they internalize and bring out as their own.

During this period of unrests, it is important to address ourselves to the causes as well as solutions. This is especially so when we consider the losses both psychological and physical in terms of damage to property, injuries suffered, time, manpower wastage, anxiety and fear.

We are awaiting the fruits of the second phase of the ambitions 8-4-4 system. Unfortunately even before blossoming we are getting bitter fruits. This requires urgent solution if we are to expect reasonable fruits by the turn of next year.

Diverse reasons have been given as the source of the unrest among the

youth. Some see it as the work of dissidents. This is especially so with the appearance of leaflets in some parts of the country.

However, of late highly placed officials in the Ministry of Education including the Minister himself Mr. Oloo Aringo, have put strong doubts to this.

But the recent firing of Ugandan teachers by the TSC leaves many wondering what could be up. Misuse of funds has also been given as a cause. With the abolition of building-funds and mock exam fees the students have gone further to ask for what they had already paid.

Furthermore some Boards of Governors and Heads do not seem to have got the message, and have turned to dubious P.T.A. subsidies. If the unrest is a result of funds, then the parents could also be to blame. The students could not be feeling it. However, the most common issue is lack of adequate materials and teachers.

To date the syllabi is still not clear. The scope is too wide, detailed and time limited. One is expected to cover more but in shorter time. In addition, reading material is scarce. The books arrive late, long behind schedule. The books are expensive. The mode assignment can only become clear with many simple questions yet the Exam council produced very few questions per subject. This has not done much to restore the confidence required in subjects like biology, physics and chemistry.

Many schools do not have the facilities for practicals. The selection procedure to the universities is yet to be clearly spelt out.

Student strikes usually go with bad management or incompetence. Aringo thinks firing incompetent

heads should go along way to rectify this anomaly. We hope the plea will be implemented this time. It should also apply to the Board of Governors.

Auditing of school funds should be prompt and thorough to curb the misuse of school funds by those in charge. The functioning of the Ministry should be streamlined together with that of the T.S.C.

Without this, the problem will continue to manifest itself in the administration of educational institutions.

There is need to form a professional body like the Kenya Science Teachers Association with very noble objectives. Such an organisation would solve problems like delayed in-service course for 8-4-4 teachers to keep them abreast with what goes on in the profession.

Discipline should be a responsibility of all those involved in the teaching profession. A less authoritative approach to the administrator education should be dropped in favour of a more flexible approach. This would alleviate the problem communication breakdown. It will allow the students to develop confidence and self respect in themselves and be more responsible.

David Mbiti's remark that should aim at training not correcting, guiding not punishing, arranging conditions for learning not just restricting should be given a chance. Students should be guided to make reasonable decisions. They are capable of making judgments on matters affecting their lives. For example schools like Starehe should be emulated by others. Student unrests in schools should be eliminated once and for all in order to restore confidence in the educational system. Strikes-reports are mainly by those in their final year. It takes years to build can be destroyed in a matter of minutes.



It's the end of the road for these university of Nairobi students as the riot police squad dashes them to "safe" custody. But a nearby hospital probably offers the hope of speedy recovery in case of injuries.