

LETTERS

Nandi squatters

SIR—When the Europeans came to our country and occupied our land, evicting people from their arable farms to create space for large scale farms which were eventually put under tea bushes, the natives were pushed to unproductive rocky steep areas where it was even difficult to build a good house without levelling out and rolling away rocks and boulders.

This forced the locals to labour on the farms and a long process of dependence ensued. Being poor agriculturally, these people lived in a perpetual sea of hunger and starvation with little money to educate their children. The children, upon completion of primary school, dropped out of school due, mainly, to lack of fees. They ended up in tea farms as co-labourers with their fathers, always receiving rations in a land endowed with plentiful resources. The demanding responsibilities drained the resources and in no time the workers were expecting another round of pay. Agricultural productivity in these areas was a nightmare. Parents who wanted their children to further their education had to resort to unorthodox means of generating money, such as making and selling illicit brews. This caused attrition with the administration and constant arrests. What could these poor people do after being consigned to the barren grounds and relegated to squatters in their land?

In Nandi Hills and Manderet divisions, 30,000 plus acres are under tea bushes. This represents 95 per cent of the total arable land. The remaining 5 per cent is under trees used in these tea estate's factories. This effectively means that in this region of Nandi, the natives were robbed of their fertile land. Of what benefit are the tea farms to the native Nandi? They are 99 per cent foreign owned, foreign in the

sense that they are either owned by white farmers or non-Nandis. I suggest that, for the tea farms to have any meaningful contribution to the development of these squatters who squat on grabbed farms, each tea estate/company should provide the following to its squatters:

Treated, piped water; that each squatter should have unconditional access to health facilities unlike the present situations where only labourers in the tea estates are treated; at least one child of a squatter family be educated by each estate and, if possible, provided with a job upon completion of school. It is said that whereas 30,000 people work on these tea farms, only one tea estate has a secondary school to its credit. The others should follow suit.

The squatters on each tea estate should be provided with electricity; each estate should maintain rural access roads in the squatter areas.

It is not fair for a tea farm to make profits of over shs.40 million per year while the surrounding is occupied by people living in squalor and abject poverty with hardly enough to feed their families. In any sales of tea farms, the local people should be given priority.

Concerned citizens,
Nandi.

Useless exam

SIR—During the month of September teachers of Standard Eight and their pupils have sleepless nights as they prepare for and execute the practical skill assessment in music, crafts, arts, agriculture and home science. During this exercise, the candidates make items or engage in some practical aspects of these subjects as assessors (usually from outside their school) watch and award marks. The skills to be assessed are decided on

at the Kenya Institute of Education.

The most commonly assessed skills include crop husbandry, building of farm structures and making of implements; making tin lamps, kitchen stools, cloth hangers and bricks in crafts; drawing and painting in art; laundry work, cooking, washing and needlework in Home Science and making and playing of various music instruments (*orutu*, *nyatiti*, *litungu*, *ishiriri*, *kimeng'eng* etc). One of the aims of the controversial 8-4-4 system is to equip the graduands with skills that would make them self-reliant. Thus these assessments are the practical arm of the system through which the class 8 leavers are equipped to face the world.

However, this exercise is moribund and self-defeating. Writing with the wisdom of hindsight, I wish to say that this exercise is an irrelevant lame duck. First, it would be more sensible if the marks attained in these assessments formed part of Kenya Certificate of Primary Education. In the course of the assessment, the teachers prepare scores of mark sheets which are then dumped at the local education offices and no follow-up made. This makes the lives of teachers miserable as they work over-time on a perpetual time waster.

Secondly, teachers are not honest in this exercise. I have participated in this exercise since its inception in the mid-Eighties. In more than 90 per cent of the schools country-wide, the items to be assessed are bought either by the schools or individual pupils or the school employs an expert to do the required work. This lackadaisical approach among the teachers is understandable since they are not convinced that this exercise serves any meaningful purpose. Furthermore, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the education system is still greatly exam-oriented: a candidate's success in the course is heavily determined

by success in exams and since these assessments account for no points at KCPE, the teachers go about it with dust in their eye-brows only to please the retinue of their over zealous education officers.

The question begging for an answer is: does the exercise fulfil its desired aim of helping the children acquire the practical skills if the items assessed are bought? Then there are the schools in urban centres, located in the upper floors of buildings which have no grounds. Where do the pupils grow crops? Develop hanging gardens of Babylon?

Thirdly, the exercise is lagging centuries behind technological realities. While pupils make tin lamps, at every election year Kanu promises total rural electrification by the year 2000. If this succeeds, who will need tin lamps? Why not train these youths in relevant technologies? They make *orutu*, *nyatiti*, *obokano*, *kimeng'eng*. Supposing these graduands, after dropping out of school, opt for self-employment in making music instruments? Modern instruments have gone highly electronic and even computerised. Ten years on and we are yet to see class eight graduands self-employed basically from the skills attained in schools. We are yet to be shown girl carpenters or boys taking up knitting as self employment with the skills learnt at school exclusively. Some education officers make surprise raids on the schools to pick out some of the best items made for assessments allegedly for further "assessments" only for the officers to sell them for personal profit. Teachers who are foolhardy enough to resist this face the risk of interdiction for insubordination. The bottom-line is that the 8-4-4 curriculum at the primary school level is still bogged down by the redundant subjects *Richard Ong'wena, Nakuru.*