

DEFENDING INTERESTS OF TEACHERS': OUR ULTIMATE GOAL

The sporadic events of November 01, 2020 [Sunday] resemble a creepy scene in a comedy-cum-tragedy scene following the publication of the **SNAT Angle** Column headlined, 'TSC Chairperson [Simanga Mamba] should simply resign' by the Times Sunday.

The article touched a nerve from the most-feared man at the helm of the TSC, Simanga Mamba, who did not spare a minute in dashing to the Times Sunday Editor, threatening to sue the publication for defamation of character on the contents of the sanely-written piece. Well, the rest is history as the Sunday Times Editor called the author of this article in total panic, panting to say the SNAT Sunday article had ruffled some feathers from the echelons of power in the person of Simanga Mamba. That he was demanding that we extend an olive branch to him by apologising for the 'sensitive' contents of the article as 'erroneously' published by the Sunday Times.

As the SNAT, we could not stoop so low, going cap in hand in extending an apology amidst the verified material conditions around the person of Simanga Mamba. To nip the discussion in the bud, there was absolutely no logic in apologising for the truth. That is why even at this very juncture, we stand [determinedly] on what we espoused in that stunningly-knitted Sunday piece. We are not apologetic in reasonably positing that the integrity of the teaching fraternity is hanging in the balance with Simanga Mamba at the helm. since time immemorial, we have been maintaining this stance as the SNAT.

Some of us have had enough in helplessly watching fellow teachers' lives being devilishly toiled around with the same faces at the TSC claiming hefty allowances yet doing absolutely zilch to transform the sector, harmonising the irregularities,

benchmarking with other countries with the administrative and political with the sole purpose of adding the much-needed value to the lives of educators. Lest we forget, the entire mess in our education sector lies squarely and fairly on the shoulders of the dozing-off TSC, as led by Simanga Mamba. From the mess of sharing posts, casualisation, underpayment, selling of posts, unfair labour practices in hiring, promotions and dismissal [disciplinary issues] of teachers, payslips issued in previous schools, elongated probation [confirmations] etc. All this headache is a result of the glaring inefficiency of the TSC as led by Simanga Mamba.

To place a knife in the neck of the Times of Swaziland to chuck our article out of the public domain will not deter us from speaking truth to power. Even today, the question still pops up: what business does a Lawyer have to do with the Education Sector? A glimpse into the credentials of the six [6] Commissioners at the Teachers' Service Commission [TSC] in Kenya confirms an anomaly into our country's TSC. All the Commissioners thereat possess Education related qualifications. The Chairperson, as a case in point, Dr. Lydia Nzomo took an oath of office on 9th December 2014, marking the beginning of her six [6] years Term as the Chairperson of TSC as a Constitutional Commission. She brought with her a wealth of knowledge and extensive experience in Education, Administration, Management, and Curriculum development and implementation. She is the immediate former Director and Chief Executive Officer of Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD). She had previously worked for TSC, rising through the ranks to the position of Acting Commission Secretary/CEO. She is a teacher by profession and taught in various schools before joining the Secretariat.

Dr. Lydia holds a PhD in Educational Psychology from Kenyatta University, Master of Arts Degree in Counselling psychology from United States International University (USIU) and a Bachelor of Arts degree with Diploma in Education option from University of Nairobi. In addition, she has undertaken several courses in Education Management and Administration both locally and internationally. Talk about a fully qualified and relevant academic to hold the position of TSC. The Deputy Chairperson, Mbarak Twahir, holds a Masters of Education degree (Science Education) from University of Leeds and a Bachelors of Education degree (B.Ed. Science) from the University of Nairobi. He also holds an Advanced Diploma in Educational Studies from University of Leeds and a Diploma in Special Education from the County of Copenhagen in Denmark.

Is it not disconcerting that we have a barrister paraded as the best brains in leading the country's future [education]? Is it not weird that the Nation has been conditioned to think that Simanga Mamba is the best asset ever for the Teaching Fraternity that he has the guts to bully every Tom, Dick and Harry with everyone tucking his/her tail between their legs at the mention of his name? The mind-boggling question is: how did we come to such disturbing state of affairs as a sector?

To get down to brass tacks, educators in schools are qualified enablers. They don't need to go to the TSC cap-in-hand for posts, confirmations, transfers, promotions. Educators don't need to bribe anyone to meander through the bottled-up career path in the current senseless set-up which the TSC embraces as it is susceptible to manipulation.

So meaningless is our career path [horizontal and vertical] that we have become a laughing stock to other sectors of the society. Teachers notch from one to five and that is all. Teachers spend

four [4] years still on probation much against Regulation 7 of the 1983 Teaching Service Regulations though incongruous with Section 32 [2] of the Employment Act No.5 of 1980. In any case, a career structure or path which allows for progression and development over a teacher's career is crucial to attract, motivate and retain teachers, contributing to building a teaching force with the necessary knowledge, competence and attitudes to enhance learning. Providing career progression ensures experienced, competent teachers can mentor and train those with less experience; retaining teachers is more cost-effective than providing training for teachers who leave the profession soon after qualifying. A career path should provide meaningful rewards and incentives, financial and non-financial, to motivate teachers to progress; be linked to significant Continuous Professional Development [CPD] options. Such will never be understood by a Counsel [Lawyer].

There is no denying of the fact that there is a cabal at the MoET that needs immediate dismantling. This syndicate needs to be investigated for the sake of the health and proper functioning of the sector. We are aware of what has been happening thereat, Simanga Mamba can deny it all we care. Gallant teachers shall come forth to testify on the atrocities they have suffered in the hands of the All-powerful Simanga-led TSC.

One may flex muscles, pull some strings as that is the *modus operandi* herein [Swaziland], but the fact remains that every dog has its day. The mantra which says that make hay whilst the sun shines rings true for such degrading treatment of educators with one banking his hopes on his borrowed robes of brushing shoulders with the blue-bloodied. It won't be long though.

I shudder in shame each morning as I read the challenging working conditions teachers are exposed to each day in the 933

schools [primary and secondary] in the country. Not intending to sound ambiguous, many educators out there do share similar sentiments with me that Covid-19 has been a blessing in disguise as the pandemic provided the much-needed sigh of relief for teachers particularly in elementary level who are suffocating in schools with high teacher-pupil ratios. The Competency Based Education [CBE], Degreed teachers remunerated at C3 [Diploma] yet there are comparators paid at C5 in the same duty station, same employer, same responsibilities yet compensated differently.

Simanga Mamba has ensured that teachers are under-paid in schools with the latest casualties being new entrants in primary schools who are compelled to share a Diploma post [EDN069] thus remunerated at B2. Such irregularities have ensued in schools with no Teacher Recruitment Policy and Strategy that shall ensure equity in teacher recruitment, through fair, transparent procedures that do not disadvantage groups or individuals.

With Simanga steering the ship at the TSC, the Commission has failed to add any value to the teaching fraternity except a TSC that exhibits cronyism in its operations. That is why in 2020, we still have no Deployment Policy at the TSC. It is only a Chairperson relevant to teaching, not a Lawyer, that shall wake up from his slumber to realise that a deployment strategy, based on current needs, requires reliable, up-to-date information about the characteristics, needs and preferences of both teachers seeking deployment and schools seeking teaching staff; Teacher or Education Management Information Systems (TMIS/EMIS) as the most effective way of implementing and managing this.

For years, this has been normalised to ensure that helpless educators are pushed to a point of desperation thus induce the

corrupt officials at the TSC under the nose of Simanga Mamba. With all these known shenanigans at the TSC, which operate at the detriment of our members out there in schools, neither silly threats nor meaningless innuendos possess the potential to intimidate us to cower in silence at the peril of our members in schools. The elephant in the room at this moment is the corruption at the Simanga Mamba-led TSC which we shall stop at nothing to expose until the sector is weeded of shady elements wielding unchecked power. We submit.