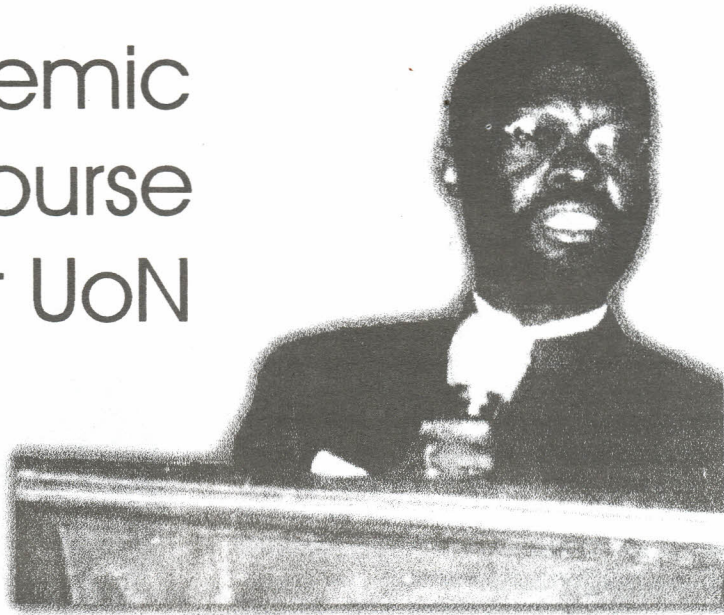


Academic discourse resumes at UoN

by mbara wa kambara



prof. peter anyang' nyong'o minister for planning & national development addressing a public lecture at the UoN

The worst form of poverty is that between the ears. So says Robert Mao, the Member of Parliament for Gulu Municipality of the Peoples Republic of Uganda. Any dictatorial regime thus cannot give a chance to intellectual discourse. This explains the long absence of academic discourse at our public Universities.

Keen followers of history will for sure agree that Kenyan historical banks are full of such evidence. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Micere Mugo, Prof. Akong'o Oyugi among many other scholars did find themselves on the wrong side of oligarchy when they for reasons beneficial to the country championed such discourse.

Though yet to be given clean bill of democratic health, the National Rainbow Coalition somehow, somewhat has allowed such discourse in our varsities. The "were" executors of "My own interest" policies oh no! Moi! have found the KANU hangovers stubborn and demanding to nurse. We thus celebrate skeptically though, an

atmosphere in which research and knowledge can be bred. Thanks to the Department of Political Science and Heinrich Boll Foundation.

The University of Nairobi has become the haven of intellectual discourse through the numerous public lectures that it has undertaken to organize.

Starting off the lectures, the Minister for Education, Prof. George Saitoti described the resumption as a step in the right direction. Describing the 24 years of the Moi regime as an era of misrule and thus wasted years, the former Vice-President described the lectures as a rebirth of the slain King. To him, the University thus was becoming the river that dissolved the rocks to define its natural course. His controversial topic of presentation, "The role of University education in a developing society" generated a lot of heat. Critically

Continued next page

the university of nairobi: a haven of intellectual discourse

Continued from previous page

analyzing this, the varsity fraternity thought that it would have been appropriate for him to present on the role of a developing society in a University education. It's here that students demanded an increase in their loans, which we today celebrate with reservations. Of course we don't forget the mass demonstrations in demand of the same.

This beginning also saw students take to task government Ministers and Members of Parliament over constitutional matters regarding the constitutional review process. In what was dubbed "The great Katiba Debate" the varsity community decried lack of representation of the youth constituency in an otherwise very important national issue. Contributing to the same debate, Tigania, East Member of Parliament, Hon. Peter Munya mentioned as not being in the interest of the public the terms of the memorandum of understanding between National Alliance Party of Kenya and the Liberal Democratic Party of Kenya. This was in regard to the agreement to give the 'LDP faction the institution of the premier. On his part former student leader and now a human rights activist, Meshack Suba Churchill dismissed as selfish the demand to leave constitution-making process to professionals. He noted that Kenya was for Kenyans and not Professionals. Former Kisumu Mayor Shakeel Shabir ran the crowd into laughter when he said that they were not going to take anything less of the bride they had been promised as LDP. At the same forum Prof. Makau Mutua and Hon. Kivutha Kibwana urged the delegates at Bomas of Kenya to put the interest of Kenyans at heart. The students however dismissed the delegates as "allowance earners" out to enjoy the city mood at taxpayers cost.

In another lecture, Prof. Peter Anyang' Nyong'o defended the NARC administration on its commitment to create five hundred thousand jobs explaining that the jobs need not



be direct employment. He said that infrastructural improvement was part of this. "If our roads are good, people travel by them and buy your maize as you roast by the wayside that will be one of the jobs" argued Nyong'o.

On a similar tone, Hon. Raila Odinga, expanded on the politics of coalition building and dispelled of fears that there was "a Mafia" in NARC. He recounted the dark days of the KANU regime and how he used tact to create implosion in KANU. He described the so-called Mafia as a power elite, which must be there to advise the government. He however cautioned that if that position was used by the same elite to unfairly benefit themselves, then the country would be headed for worse things.

As we celebrate this freedom, it must be remembered that governments are governments and would always behave so. Full responsibility must be taken by the varsity community as we jealously guard the democratic gains made so far. The depoliticization of the institution of Chancellorship is one step in the right direction which we must exploit to once again define our own destiny.

Allow the Mango tree to bear Mango fruits therefore.

The writer is the Editor in Chief of The Comrade Monthly.