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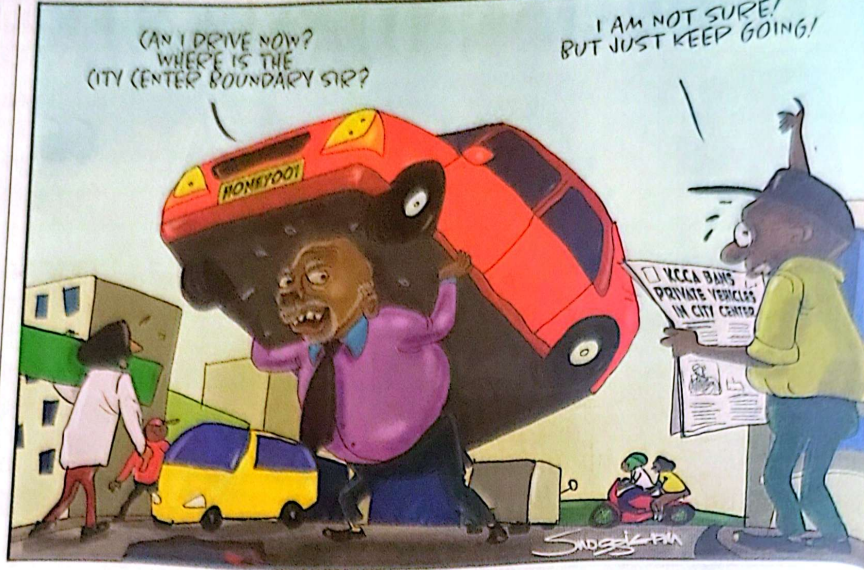
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MPs' kids should also attend UPE schools?

The way my maid is so agitated by the opening of schools, you may think she has a child or two. But I can understand her situation, since she is a TV addict, who is always watching *Agataliiko Ntufu*, when she is not glued on Nigerian and Indian movies, she certainly knows the cries of the people.

"So, whose children are enjoying UPE, since everybody is crying about school fees?" she swore as she hit the TV remote on the sofa.

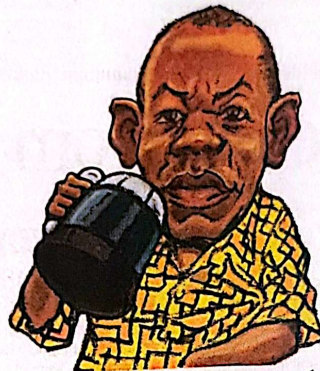
"Easy, easy," I warned. "You don't have to watch the news, if it annoys you."

"But how can I avoid it?" her voice was almost pleading. "It is the only issue people seem to be talking about. Whoever has a financial problem, and that seems to be everybody, says they won't be able to pay school fees. So I am asking, is there any single child in UPE, since everybody seems to be paying school fees?"

"There are extras like lunch and books..." I started to say.

"They are all talking about school fees, which is what you people call *simanyi* tuition," she interrupted. "You also hear them everyday, *mzee*. A market gets broken or burnt, and the women say, they don't know where to find school fees. People get chased from a piece of land, and they say, they won't get school fees. People are threatened with loss of jobs, and they talk about school fees. So I am asking, is UPE really there or not? Is USE real or not?"

"I am trying to tell you that there are other costs besides tuition fees," I repeated.



Joachim Buwembo

"Okay, people have been advised to pack whatever they can for eating, so don't tell me about lunch," she said. "So, what is the cost of the exercise books? Can a child use exercise books worth more than sh15,000 a year? Mind you, I am basing on the price in small shops, but you would expect that if a school insists that the books be bought at school, they should have been bought in large quantities at a lower price, and each child

How can they (MPs) allocate trillions to the system and then they avoid it?

should pay sh10,000 or less for a whole year."

"Maybe some people cannot even afford that," I heard myself saying.

"That is fine, if a parent refuses to buy four exercise books, a term at sh5,000, let their child stay in school without writing and doing exercises," she said. "You can then tell me if the parent will have peace with that child, going back home everyday and demanding the books. I mean, do you seriously believe that anybody can fail to send a child to school because of exercise books?"

"The teacher set other demands that you don't know about," I told her. "They will demand uniform, which must be bought at the school for probably sh100,000, maybe sh50,000 for the poor communities."

"And the teachers are not able to listen to reason, if a

parent says they can get the same uniform at sh10,000 or sh15,000 on the open market?" she fumed.

"They won't listen to that of course, and you know it," I answered.

"Then, what is the point of the government spending billions, trillions on UPE if the teachers will create reasons to block children from attending school?"

"Well, the parents are too helpless to stand up to the teachers," I answered.

"Are the teachers the most powerful people in the country?" she asked angrily.

"Are they more powerful than the Parliament which provides the billions for UPE," she hissed.

"Of course they aren't," I answered. "But the MPs' children don't attend UPE schools, so the MPs are not subjected to the exploitative tyranny of the teachers."

"Then what is wrong with the MPs?" she spat. "How can they allocate trillions to the system and then they avoid it? Why don't they take their children to UPE and USE, and we see if the teachers will also force them to pay unreasonable charges?"

"The MPs won't pay simply because their children will not go to government schools?" I repeated firmly.

"Then the MPs should be forced to take their children UPE and USE as a condition to remaining in Parliament," she suggested excitedly.

"And who would make the law?" I asked.

She stammered, but could not answer. I knew I had won this round.