

Letters

I will be glad if you expose this letter of mine in your columns.

In our township we have a high school — Alexandra High. In this school there are many things which do not satisfy me. For instance, we were told to nominate class prefects. We did that. But to my amazement we were not told to elect students' leaders. We were just instructed to obey and listen to what they say. I am against that. Why should the staff nominate our leaders, and worst of all only the senior students. Why should they not elect some from the form 1's and 11's? The only reason I get is that they are still **il**, and not yet mentally matured. That is not true: there are many things that do not satisfy them, like for example, being insulted, and given excessive punishment. So why should they not have representatives among the so-called students leaders?

The standard of teaching is very poor. In our classroom, if you don't grasp anything you are taught, it's up to you, and down to you! Some teachers don't even know what they are teaching; like knowing Grammar but being unable to teach Literature.

The situation at school is really in a bad state. The building is falling, but there's no action for repairs. Windows and even **ors** are broken. Some of the classes have no blackboard. There is no equipment for wood-work pupils, but fees are nevertheless paid by students. Children are packed in a small classroom. In these overcrowded classes there's a lack of desks and seats. School grounds are not healthy: toilets are small and filthy. Sometimes there is no water in the school and then the toilets don't work and then the children suffer, because the buckets are already full. They stay for a long time unrepaired. This has a serious effect on the children's health.

To make the situation worse there is a shortage of teachers. The present staff is weak and insufficient. Some of the teachers are not fit to teach the subject chosen for them. This results in pupils being confused. Some teachers don't even attend classes, because of not knowing what to teach. Some teachers have insufficient qualifications; some bully the pupils, but don't convey knowledge. Being bored, many pupils start roaming the streets. To add to this, the teachers don't make pupils aware of the educational

system they are confronted by. Honestly, the blame lies in the education department, not, as teachers claim, with the laziness of pupils.

AFRICAN HISTORY: A LETTER FROM A STUDENT

In 1981 we established the African History Study Group in our school, Alexandra High. At first there were about 10 scholars. This year there are now 4 of us studying the course, which is offered by SACHED. In 1980, the head-prefect of our school distributed pamphlets advertising the course, but there was very little response. But the following year a group of students felt that they should get the course going, and since then the group had continued to function. We are presently waiting for workbooks to be compiled.

History is a study of the past that helps us to understand how we arrived at the present. And in a way it foreshadows the problems and changes that are likely to be encountered in the future. The study of history is concerned with the selection, analysis and interpretation of facts. Generally, as there are many ways to tell a story, this is true also in history: thus historians tend at some stage to arrive at different conclusions as to what in fact did happen.

Often we find that the history of Africa is mystified and distorted. Many historians present Africa as a "dark" continent, and Africans as people with neither culture nor history of their own.

Africa, they seem to believe, started when Europe invaded and conquered it. In most cases African history was mystified so as to justify the exploitation of the indigenous people by their colonial oppressors. It is interesting to note that the African Studies writers look at the history of Africa with a different perspective from the classical, neo-classical and liberal approaches.

For those who want to understand contemporary Africa we strongly recommend that they enrol in the course.

We hope SACHED will make it a point that the course doesn't end up with those who are presently enrolled, but that it should continue. — JABULANI RADEBE

INTERVIEW WITH AN AFRICAN STUDIES GROUP

During September two African Studies Writers went to visit a group of African Studies Students. The group consisted of four young men who met once a week for two hours to read the course.

Q: Why did you choose to do this course in your free time?

A: We thought it would be interesting. We saw pamphlets advertising the course last year, and thought that the introduction was very interesting, but we did not do anything about it. At the beginning of this year we decided that it would be valuable for us to enrol because then we could learn about our history from a different perspective.

Q: Do you find the course interesting?

A: Yes. We think that it is important for us to study social and historical matters. If we don't know about history, then we can't understand the present world. Our roots are in the past.

Q: Do you think that the course gives enough information or would you sometimes like more information?

A: The course gives us a lot of extra information that we are not taught at school.

Q: What do you think is the most important thing you have learnt so far?

A: The African Studies Course helps us to assess other history books and distinguish the bias of the historian. For example, after the lesson on Theories of Imperialism, we can read any other history book on Colonialism and understand what kind of historian wrote the book.

Q: What kinds of things have you learnt that you didn't know before?

A: We have learnt to look critically at history and to be aware of bias. We have learnt about our origins. We have learnt about the aims and effects of

missionaries in Africa. We have learnt a lot about African history. We knew nothing before - at school we learn only about South African and European history as if the rest of Africa didn't exist.

Q: Have any people dropped out of your group, and if so, why?

A: Yes, our group started with 11 members. Now there are four people who still come regularly. The others

were not so committed and they have a lot of school work.

Q: How long does it take you to read one lesson?

A: It usually takes us two meetings of one and a half or two hours each.

Q: How much time do you spend discussing the things you have read?

A: When we do exercises, we try to watch the time limit that is given, but often

it takes us longer. We also stop reading and discuss an interesting point even if there is no exercise. And sometimes we talk about the course to our friends.

Q: What do you find the advantages are of working through the course as a group rather than alone?

A: In the group we can share ideas and discuss difficult new concepts. It is difficult to analyse ideas on one's own.

