On double standards

This week, police arrested a 22-year-old Grade 10 pupil of Mulanga Secondary School in Chinsali for intentionally aborting a three-month pregnancy. She has been charged with infanticide.

Meanwhile the debate about pupils falling pregnant continued, with yet another report of several girls going on maternity leave, this time in Eastern Province. Reportedly over 17,000 pupils drop out of school in Zambia due to pregnancy-related causes.

The past two weeks have also carried reports of two women dying after trying to terminate pregnancies. More than 2,000 women die in Zambia every year due to complications during pregnancy and childbirth. About 30% of them are caused by unsafe abortions.

Am I the only one who can see the double standards?

Editor’s note 1

PF cadres, with former Big Brother housemate Max Chongu (picture – in beret) in the lead, have forced Chicago’s Restaurant at Manda Hill Shopping Mall in Lusaka to reinstate a fired employee. The employee, security guard Kedrick Mweemba, explained that he had been dismissed for eating his dinner late. His boss, Spiro, had refused to listen to his explanation that the kitchen had been busy at the usual time – and had failed to pay him his outstanding salary since firing him. Mweemba further accused Chicago of firing workers at a whim, not giving them contracts and not paying NAPSA. The PF cadres arrived in buses, resulting in the restaurant quickly emptying, and after an hour of chaos, with the police standing by, another of Chicago’s owners, Savvas Christofi (picture – left), paid Mweemba K1,200 – and promised to reinstate him, with a contract, and sort out the missing NAPSA remittances. Chongu told Christofi and the crowd that the PF government was not going to accept Zambian workers being ill-treated by foreigners, reported the Post.

Editor’s note 2

On FISP

Three reasons why it is a bad idea to expand the Farmers Input Support Programme (FISP) as planned by government (see page 6):

1. FISP has been ineffective at raising yield (productivity per hectare) – with improvements largely linked to expanded area and favourable weather.

2. FISP has only been marginally successful at raising farmer incomes, as wealthy rather than poor farmers are more likely to participate.

3. FISP has not achieved food security – at least at community level. Despite running since 2002/03, 44 districts are in need of relief food in 2014.

Yes, we are drowning in maize – 3.4 million tonnes in the 2013/14 season, according to reports – but why is that good? We could have bought the same amount for a lot less than what it cost us to grow it. Even if we assign importance to self-sufficiency, Zambia only needs 1.9 million tonnes of maize a year. The rest we have to sell, but at a loss, due to all the subsidies provided by FISP and the Food Reserve Agency. And this week Zimbabwe, Zambia’s prime export market, announced that it expects a bumper harvest of its own in 2014.

Government got into power in 2011 with a promise to reform the maize system. Now it is probably too late, because who wants to upset 1 million voters ahead of a rapidly approaching election in 2016?