

# NUSWEL

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TO: WAGES AND ECONOMICS COMMISSION CHAIRMEN

CONFIDENTIAL

delivered by hand

Dear All,

The intention of this circular is to put down on paper some of the ideas that have been circulating in my head for some time about the aims and goals of the Wages and Economics Commission, (i) the method in which the commission should be structured and (ii) the basic method of communication within each commission.

I believe that it is absolutely essential that we in the Wages Commissions get our ideas clearly sorted out since what we are doing is definitely worthwhile and realistic and it is necessary that we ensure at this point that the projects are able to continue in the future on a sound and workable basis. This inevitably implies that (i) we are all aware of what we are doing and (ii) that we are able to relate the structure and organisation of the communication to these basic aims.

The primary aim of the Commission as I see it is to promote greater awareness amongst Black people of the rights that do exist that they do possess in order to promote organisation amongst Black people on fundamental issues such as wages, living and working conditions, increases in bus-fares etc etc.

A secondary aim of the Commission relating to this primary aim is to generate research (or do it ourselves) into these areas in order (i) that information on basic rights and on the issues which Black people may choose to organise on, may be made available and (ii) in order that notice of this information might be brought to the white channels of communication (viz English-speaking press) in order to promote greater concern and generate a general awareness amongst the white public and more specifically amongst students, about poverty, wages, etc.

Which brings me on to the third aim of the Commissions, as I see them, which is to utilise the concern generated amongst white people to build up a body of student 'workers' who are (i) informed about the situation of labour in this country, historically, economically and legally, in order to elicit student support on (a) the Wages on Campus Issue and (b) to ensure a steady stream of informed support in the future and at the present moment for the Wages and Economics Commissions.

I should like at this point to examine each of these aims in detail and extract tasks which each commission should consider it might need to fulfill in order to facilitate the promotion of these aims:

(i) Organisation of Black Workers

Tasks: Produce simplified information on (i) Black people rights  
(ii) on issues which are of current concern amongst Black people  
(iii) establishing a network of contacts

~~to (a) facilitate information gathering and (b) to act as~~  
National Union of Students through the Black Community Department (I am working on the assumption here that there are different channels of communication (viz Churches etc,) for Black people and White people (viz white newspapers etc.))

(iv) attempt to establish/initiate/encourage/support training programmes, seminars, workshops designed at getting workers to examine their situation, extract the problem areas and examine ways of meeting and confronting these problems.

(v) establish contact with trade unions where they exist

(vi) establish contacts with churches and other sympathetic organisations for instance the Young Christians workers who have regular contact with workers.

Wage Boards: Use the wage boards as an avenue for contact: we must realise that we cannot really get higher wages out of the Wage Board nor can we see ourselves in the light of trying to get higher wages solely. The Wage Boards must be used as an entree to getting through to Black workers, to carrying out legitimate research and finally showing Black workers a legal and recognised channel for organisation.

## (II) Information, collation and research:

A) Provide people with information for simplification and translation:

This involves research into (a) labour legislation

(b) current conditions in industries in which an investigation is to take place

(c) information of a general nature.

B) Compile research on topics for general circulation to white and black channels.

C) Establish channels of communication for information on topics that have to be researched ie official sources

D) Establish contacts with the Economics, Sociology, Law and Psychology departments or with honours students in these departments in order to get them to co-operate on research projects with us. Get their support in general.

E) Compile, catalogue and index the material that is likely to accumulate (and there will be a lot of it)

F) Enlist the co-operation of potentially economically and socially-orientated organisations on campus - the Commerce and Arts Councils, explaining to them what we are doing and eliciting their support. (This might also apply to AISEC to whom I have WRITTEN ASKING for their comments on the Commission.)

G) Eliciting the support of sympathetic organisations such as the Black Sash, the SAIRR, the Civil Rights League and Spro-cas on an informal basis.

H) Establish contacts amongst the white and black press who are sympathetic.

I) Send out a regular newsletter of interesting facts

J) Send out a regular newsletter of facts pertinent to Labour economics etc etc (viz Bulletin) Preferably to be co-ordinated on a national basis.

## III

Developing of an informed student core who will:

Inform students on (I) basic issues of labour legislation in South Africa,

(II) history of trade unionism in South Africa

(III) role and importance of Black labour in South Africa

(iv) implications of low wages in South Africa - poverty etc etc

(v) channels for student action: viz areas of concern where students can operate: (a) domestic servants

(b) campus workers

You will want to get students who will be able to distinguish between the value of raising wages simply for the sake of raising wages and students who will be able to see that unless Blacks make and formulate their own demands, raising wages becomes a pointless exercise because (i) It rests on the assumption that wages are static ie that they will not need raising again and that the initial action of getting raised wages is satisfactory in itself and thus

(ii) It does not provide for an organised force of workers who will be able to make these demands themselves

(iii) It assumes that students will always be around to make these demands for workers.

Thus what one wants to do here is to (i) Inform students of the basic situation  
 (ii) show them ways in which they can be helpful.  
 (iii) Indicate that we are essentially playing a secondary and supportive role  
 and (iv) train people who have shown interest into adopting carrying out the basic grind research, maintain files, running the bureaucracy.

You will need in each case to make clear to students what specific task they can play and this demands a clear division of the commission into functional groups. An amorphous group may allow for greater fluidity of ideas but at the cost, possibly of communication and sometimes at the cost of efficiency. All the wages commissions need a fair pool of typists, researchers, press-clippers, administrators etc etc and one must ensure that work is done on as wide a basis as possible and is not limited to a clique of students which could easily happen.

#### Structure of the Commission

Most of the commissions have adopted varying structures: roughly divided into research, administration, wage boards, publications, wages on campus, rural surveys, information etc etc.

My intention is not here to suggest how the Commissions should be structured since I believe that conditions vary from campus to campus and it is probably best to build the structure about the people who are keen to work for the wages commission. What I would like to suggest however, is that the commission be divided into two levels:

(i) a caucus of representatives from each major sector or task group who basically outline the strategy for each commission and generally seek to coordinate the commission. There are a number of reasons for suggesting this:

(a) the priorities of each commission should be kept in mind at all times. This is best achieved through a core of informed people who are able to keep these priorities in mind at all times.

(b) the commissions are potentially large things: It is extremely difficult for one person or two - chairman and vice-chairman to attempt to hold everything together. It is essential that the commissions be decentralised but at the same time, there should be clear provisions for a planning body to meet and thrash out strategies and maintain contact -

(c) It is necessary for the commissions to be segregated into "clear" sections: maintaining contact with black workers is a very different thing from going to see employers and there is a need for this distinction to be borne in mind. But the divisions should not be allowed to grow apart.

(d) It has come to my notice that a number of commissions are being infiltrated by unwanted people from the State. The Wages Commissions are tricky: we have always acknowledged this. Any organisation concerning itself with fundamental issues such as poverty wages automatically brings itself under surveillance and while, what we are doing, is legal, great interest will be shown in our activities by the powers that be. One way of keeping essential information to ourselves is by keeping your caucus a relatively closed group which can evaluate progress unimpeded by an over pressing need to use 'double-talk'.

(II) the second level in the Wages Commissions should be the sub-committees of the Commissions: viz Wage Boards, General Research, Information to students and members of the white public, contact with workers, publications etc etc. In each sector, a member of the caucus should be responsible for reporting back to his people and to the caucus. This will ensure a flow of communication and will to some extent protect the black people with whom we come into contact since obviously only trained and informed people can be concerned with contact with workers. (Although even here we must use the Churches and other organisations to try and promote this contact).

At the second level will be people who are interested who want to get involved and who can be trained up.

This system of levels should allow for decentralisation, broadly-based communication and efficient planning and direction - all essential to the success of the commissions.

This brings me onto another point: the question of seminars and workshops for students and workers workshops.

#### Seminars

Again, seminars should be held amongst students to train them in the role in which white students can be helpful.

(II) seminars could be held under the auspices of local Churches to train workers etc etc. This is very important. But must be handled carefully.

Will write in more detail later.

At this point, I have run out of breath and time so I hope you will accept the rather rushed state of this circular.

Please treat this circular confidentially

Much love,

JEN CURTIS  
SECRETARY-GENERAL

PS Next Issue: Chapter 2 in the story of the Wages Commissions: "What the other commissions are doing".