

national union of south african students
nasionale unie van suid-afrikaanse studente

NUSAS

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PP/IA P33

5th April, 1971.

TO. LOCAL COMMITTEES.
SRC PRESIDENTS.

Dear Sir,

Enclosed please find for your information a copy of a working paper on wage investigation and action drawn up at University of Natal, Durban.

Comments and discussions are welcomed.

Yours sincerely,

PAUL PRETORIUS.
DEPUTY-PRESIDENT.

5th April, 1971.

TO: LOCAL COMMITTEES.
SRC PRESIDENTS.

PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT OF A WAGES COMMITTEE UNDER THE STUDENTS REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

- A. Students and the Importance of wages.
 - B. The resolution and wages on campus.
 - C. The functions of the wage committee.
 - D. Students and municipal wages.
 - E. Method of operation of the wage committee Procedure.
 - F. Students and job reservation.
- A. Students may feel that wages as such are peripheral to student concern, but in a capitalist society wages are the key to food, shelter, health, education, clothes, transport and recreation. Wages are a variable in our society controlled by strict institutional procedures which have effectively excluded workers from putting the case for a living wage. The function of students is to redress then the imbalance by using the facilities provided by a University: information gathering, correlation and dissemination and undertaking social action to make people aware of the situation of poverty wages.
 - B. The proposal made at a recent student body meeting (11th March, 1971) that workers employed by the University and the Municipality should be paid wages equal to the poverty datum line, while apparently an issue of short standing, should be seen against a background of depressed wages in Durban. According to the Institute of Social Research 3/5ths of African workers in the city live in poverty. The matter is of real urgency, and the only responsible attitude on the part of students is to turn their energy to investigating further the situation, publishing information, and acting to bring the desperate conditions of poverty to the notice of employers particularly. A start should be made close at hand. While the social circumstances of workers at the University employed in the kitchens, residences, lecture theatres and research institutes are not accurately known, it is obvious that they live in conditions no better than the average black workers in the city. An immediate demand should be that these workers earn what the Institute for Social Research has estimated to be a minimum living wage: R16.30 per week. Improvement in their social circumstances, particularly opportunities for education, may be suggested following a report which should be directed by the Institute for Social Research and performed free by students of social science in particular or other departments. Discriminatory rates of pay exist for workers at certain levels.
 - C. The duty of the wages committee would be to gather information on university workers, through surveys and by directly requesting the information on wages from the administration. A report should be drawn up and presented to the student body for discussion and decisions.
 - D. The other matter covered by the resolution is the pay of municipal workers, which sets the standard for the wages of other unskilled workers. A Wage Board investigation open to the public has recently been made into the wages of unskilled workers employed by local authorities in Natal. Evidence

was given by the Institute of Race Relations for a general improvement, but there is no doubt that the low wages will not be raised to anything like the minimum poverty line. This is a concrete case of irresponsibility towards workers by a local authority which pays some of the lowest wages in the Republic. The Wage Board investigation is at the stage of a report which gives details of the ability of the municipality to pay higher wages and the increases recommended by the Wage Board. This document should be studied and a report handed in requesting that workers be paid the minimum living wage. This Wage Board determination will be crucial for wages in Durban as it covers the majority of the lowest paid workers in the town.

- E. Mention of a committee was specifically included in the resolution as the inquiries and dissemination of information on wages should be continuous. The wage committee should operate in conjunction with students of economics, sociology, industrial psychology, political science and mathematics in co-operation with the Institute for Social Research in gathering information on wages in particular industries (the cement industry is a good example) to present to the Wage Board investigation. Workers are unrepresented at these investigations. A particular task of the committee would be reducing wages to real terms which will indicate the extent to which wages are being diluted by a rapidly rising cost of living. Investigation of income and expenditure of workers in the particular industry would demonstrate the gap between the wages received and a minimum standard of living. The committee should initially be an ad hoc committee of the S.R.C.

WAGES COMMITTEE

The committee should be directly connected to the S.R.C. as the investigation of wages should be a function of organised student action. Students do not exist in isolation from the processes that have been described as they use facilities produced by workers in the construction industry which is at the moment employing workers on the campus at wages lower than the minimum living wage.

Procedure on organising the wages committee:

1. Agreement by the S.R.C. on the need for advocating wages at least equal to the minimum living wage and the need for further investigation of wages on the campus and under the municipality.
 2. Appointment of an S.R.C. member to inaugurate the first meeting of the committee to mobilise students.
 3. Co-operation with the Institute for Social Research in disseminating further data on poverty in Durban, requesting guidelines for investigating social conditions and wages of workers on campus.
 4. Reinforcing evidence presented by the Institute of Race Relations to the Wage Board on unskilled workers employed by local authorities after studying the increases recommended by the Wage Board.
 5. Establishing a working unit to gather, arrange and disseminate information on wages and budgets in various industries in Durban.
 6. Generating appropriate social action to reinforce institutions striving to eliminate poverty in Durban.
- F. A further responsibility of the committee would be to discourage students from taking up vacation jobs which help maintain the system of job reservation particularly in the railways and harbours. In many cases non-white workers have refused to do the work because they were offered about half the wage as whites are getting. Students working in such positions should be approached to find vacation employment elsewhere.