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EDITORIAL

THE STRIKES

White South Africa can think itself lucky that it seems to have emerged from the strike situation having used and encountered the minimum of violence. What makes strikers dance and sing is a difficult question. But only a fool believes that the dancing and the singing are simply what they appear to be. They conceal emotive forces which could sweep our society away.

So much has been written about the strikes, and so many opinions have been expressed, that REALITY can do no more than set out the plain and simple truth as to why they happened, and what must be done to avoid their happening again.

The idea that the strikes were the work of "agitators" is grotesque. In fact the contrary appears to be true, and ironically, it was their absence that gave the strikes their power. The strikers were not striking to topple the government. They were striking against their miserable wages. They were striking for wives, children, education, food, and relief from the burden of never-ending poverty. They were striking against a system that puts profits before people. And for the first time in the history of our country, a large proportion of the white population conceded the justice of their cause. Some of these were people who had never thought of it before. Here tribute must be paid to those

writers, speakers, teachers, students, trade unionists, and to those organisations that have made the poverty datum line a concept which has now taken up permanent occupancy of South African minds.

The concept of the poverty datum line has proved a powerful weapon in the hands of workers and all those who strive to advance their interests. The poverty datum wage does not allow of any luxury. But any worker who earns less is not receiving justice. A worker who earns half of the poverty datum wage is living in grinding poverty. And a worker who earns one-third of it is unspeakably poor.

Another cause of the strikes was the lack of communication, and the lack of any machinery of communication, between employer and worker. As Mr. Hemson points out in this issue, in his article USUTHU, the works committees, which are legal organs, are useless for raising the standard of wages. In any case there are less than 20 functioning works committees in the whole country. We believe that the establishment of trade unions for workers at present excluded is imperative.

There is another reform that is urgent. The Prime Minister has said that the government will learn the lessons of the strikes. It is imperative that there should be a revision of

minimum wages, and an overhaul of the wage determination machinery. What kind of wage determination is it that allows an employer to pay a woman worker R3,50 per week, and a male worker R6,50 per week? And what kind of society allows it?

There is yet another reform that is needed. There are some employers who are not in the least concerned about labour wastage. The wages are low and therefore the factory can get by: This employer is the first to complain of the low productivity of his workers, and therefore to justify the payment of poverty wages. It is clear that there are some inferior factories which profit by labour wastage. It is to be hoped that the Prime Minister will encourage the employers of labour to investigate the need for the more intensive training of workers, a training not necessarily confined to the job in hand, so that the employer can afford to pay better wages. The vast majority of African workers have never received any secondary education.

At least one more reform is required. Inflation, which now seems to be endemic, soon erodes pay rises. It is time that all wages, all earnings of all people, should be increased regularly to keep pace with the rising cost of living.

Whether the Government will join in consultation with employers is at the moment doubtful. If it discharges its duty in regard to wage determination, that would be something. But it is the largest employer of all. Then let it at least set a proper example, taking as its guide the

words of the Prime Minister that workers are not labour units but people.

REALITY would like to reiterate another truth which it would like to see take permanent occupancy of our minds. We shall never be able to build any worthwhile kind of society, whether common or federal or multi-national, while there is this gross disparity between white income and black income. And there is no better place to begin than with the wages of the workers. But it is only a beginning.

It would be fatal to be satisfied with the progress that has been made in the last few weeks. The rises are far from spectacular. In some cases they are disgusting, when one considers the misery of the conditions against which the workers were striking. White South Africa is at the moment experiencing a pleasant euphoria, largely because the confrontation that it dreads has again been avoided.

There is nothing to be euphoric about. We live in a parasitic society, in which whites live off blacks and blacks live off whites. Until all South Africans can feel that this society belongs to them, there can be no peace. There are signs that more white South Africans are beginning to understand this, for which we must be thankful. But the pace is perilously slow. One can only wish Good Luck to all those South Africans of whatever party or persuasion who are trying to speed it up.□

SPRO-CAS : MOTIVATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS

by Peter Randall

We are a deeply divided society and the needs of the black community and those of the white community are very different. To attempt to meet those needs through a "traditional" multi-racial strategy is likely to be unsuccessful - there is much evidence of this in our past history - and hence Spro-cas 2 is clearly demarcated into Black Community Programs and White Consciousness Programs, each with its own director and staff, the former based in Durban and the latter in Johannesburg. (Since a description of the Black Community Programs should clearly only be provided by those engaged in them, I shall refer interested readers to the BCP Director, Mr. Bennie A. Khoapa).

Spro-cas 2 is the second phase of a project working for a more just social order in South Africa. The initials stand for Special Project for Christian Action in Society. Spro-cas 2 is a follow-up to the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas 1), which began in mid-1969. The entire project is due to finish at the end of 1973, although certain independent on-going activities may emerge from it.

Spro-cas is sponsored by the South African Council of Churches and the Christian Institute. It thus has links with both the institutional Church and Christian bodies working in specialised fields. The work of Spro-cas is itself