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EDITORIAL

STUDENT AND WORKER

"Get back to your studies!" — a slogan often shouted by people who witness white student efforts to conscientize whites, irrespective of whether these efforts be in the form of pamphleteering, picket protests or marches.

In a certain sense some students have taken this advice to heart, both the literal message and the message implied by the tone of the speaker. A deeper analysis of the issues in South African society has led to a realisation that apartheid is, at very least, as much a result of economic oppression as of racialism. And a feeling that talking to white bigotedness is of minimal influence has led students to actively embark on a conscientization of the people who, by virtue of their real and potential economic strength, hold the future — but not the ballot form — in their hands.

The phenomenon of the Wages Commissions on the English-speaking University Campuses is scarcely two

years old, yet much of the South African labour movement's exciting resuscitation, particularly in Natal, must be attributed to their influence and to that of senior Wages Commission members who have "graduated" into Trade Union organization and allied fields of activity. Perhaps "scarcely" is the wrong word to use here for a description of student involvement ranging over two years, for such an involvement is a far cry from the isolated "reactionary" protests to which we are more accustomed. What is particularly impressive and promising among many Wages Commission members is the self-discipline and sacrifice they have shown. It is one thing to stand at a picket for an hour. It is a completely different thing to get out of bed before dawn day after day to pamphlet or recruit workers at factory gates, or to spend weekends in the bundu researching facts among farm labourers.

Yet perhaps it is precisely in the kind of contact with workers that such activities give rise to, that we can find

the secret of the continued efforts. The reality of apartheid is that workers *have* to be at factories in the dead of night to earn their pittance and that labourers are *obliged* to slave on remote farms to earn starvation wages. In picket lines we deal, of necessity, in abstractions, generalizations, ideals. Wages Commission activities deal more with the individual stabs of human anguish that make those ideals and abstractions alive, meaningful and worth fighting for.

Much important reform activity presently in progress in the labour field can be related to Wages Commission initiatives and assistance. The increase of overseas pressure on foreign investors to improve conditions for workers is an obvious example. Tucsa's recent return to a morally defensible stance after years of shilly-shallying and exclusion of Africans is a direct result of Wages Commission pressures inside some of Tucsa affiliates. In Natal, two African metal workers' unions are well under way. African textile, garment and leather unions are in the planning and inaugural stages. Management seems to be less intractable than before and almost everyone accepts the theoretical standard of the Poverty Datum

Line. Not all Wages Commission work, this, by a long chalk. The eagerness to organize of the workers themselves and their courage in the face of overwhelming odds has probably been the major catalyst. But student influence has been considerable.

There is, of course, a snag. Just around the corner lurks Schlebusch and company. The Nusas enquiry is not yet over. If Schlebusch does try to pin the Natal and other strikes on the Wages Commissions it will merely echo the thinking of the Security Policemen after the 1971 Durban Dock strikes — "Come on now. The Bantoes on strike were asking for R18 a week (the then P.D.L.). We *know* the Bantoes don't think like that. So it must be the students who have been making the Bantoes go on strike." If Schlebusch adopts this approach it will almost certainly mean that heads will roll among present and past Wages Commission members. Much worse, such an approach would mean that kragdadigheid is still the order of the day in the corridors of power. and kragdadigheid, if applied in the labour situation in South Africa at present means only one thing — blood.□

HELEN SUZMAN

Helen Suzman has received formal tributes from a great university for her sustained and articulate opposition to official policies in South Africa. Official South African response to this must be wry, at best; but it would be wrong to think of Mrs Suzman as not honoured in her own country, since there is probably no-one so much admired and respected here among the politically conscious of all races. Her achievement is recognised even by many determined Black Consciousness advocates (and perhaps their admiration is as significant in the circumstances as Oxford's).

So far from being daunted by her position as sole Progressive member in Parliament for a single constituency, she has spoken always as for a hundred other constituencies, from Soweto to Windemere. This is why her words have had a stature and reverbera-

tion greater than those of both official parties together. Fifteen million Black people in South Africa are politically non-existent; but in electing to speak for them she brings into parliament the pressure of their presence; and so the fantasy of the all-white deliberations is consistently challenged by sanity.

Her personal qualities — her sense, humanity, eloquence, doggedness, stamina, courage and humour — have matched her not only to the hour but to the continuing demanding years; and for South Africa, a country usually fated to political ill-luck, this has been a piece of superb good fortune. *Reality* endorses the accolades paid to Mrs Suzman by Oxford University, and congratulates South Africa on possessing so great an asset.□