

**Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Economic Science, honoris causa, David Harris Lewis.**

David Lewis is a man of courage. He had the courage to stand up to the apartheid regime. He had the courage to be an outspoken academic. And he **has** the courage to take on the might of powerful business collusions and cartels.

Imagine what it must have been like to be a trade unionist in the seventies and eighties in apartheid South Africa. Some of you were there.

Neil Aggett, organiser for the Transvaal Food and Canning Workers' Union, was found hanged in his police cell, after 70 days of detention without trial.

Zwelinzima Vavi was a volunteer for the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU) whilst he was still at high school. Though he was only seventeen, he was detained, beaten and tortured countless times.

Thozamile Gqweta, also of the South African Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU) was arrested, detained and tortured numerous times. His house was set on fire. Both his mother and uncle died from their burns. Whilst on the way home from his mother's funeral, his girlfriend was shot dead by police.

So being a trade unionist was not something that you took on lightly. Trade unions were a threat to the regime. They were not recognised by either business or the state. Trade union leaders were constantly under threat — and David Lewis was right in the thick of it.

As General Secretary of the General Workers Union between 1975 and 1990, he was part of a movement that was dedicated to re-building trade unions. To quote: "the African working class was brutally exploited and oppressed, subjected to racial legislation... and denied family housing in towns ...— thus turning African workers into mere units of labour" (South African Democracy Education Trust 2004).

As a UCT academic and Director of the Development Policy Research Unit from 1990-99, his dedication to the labour cause continued in the form of teaching and writing about unemployment, about trade union history and about industrial relations. He co-authored a book that analysed the smouldering ruins of [the South African] economy and the miserable conditions of [the workforce]", (Joffe et al. 1995).

Later, as a special advisor to Tito Mboweni, first Minister of Labour in the democratic South Africa, he co-chaired the Presidential Commission of Enquiry into Labour Market Policy. The Enquiry focussed on two things: firstly: on how the existing apartheid labour policy was fatally flawed and, secondly: on how the new government had been left with the remnants of the collapsed apartheid economic strategy — mass unemployment, poverty and a severe lack of skills.

In addition to all of this, arguably, David Lewis' most significant contribution to date has been as chair of the Competition Tribunal over the last ten years.

This is a body that might have ended up as a toothless beast, snuggled comfortably in the pockets of business and fixing deals and plea bargains behind the scenes. Instead, the Competition Tribunal has become an institution that is both high functioning and effective. It is holding South African corporations to account for the way that they do business. Since our economy is characterised by high levels of corruption, collusion and anti-trust behaviour, this is no trivial task.

Besides taking on the apartheid state, and the legacy of apartheid business, one of the other interesting achievements of David Lewis has been to actually **popularise** the workings of the Tribunal. The workings of a Competition Tribunal are not exactly a media-friendly subject, but nonetheless, this body, is now both popular and famous for taking on bread price fixing; pharmaceutical companies, steel pricing, furniture mergers and most recently, Sasol and the fertilizer cartel.

So: it's not only courage that David Lewis possesses in buckets but also professionalism and integrity as well as, according to Business Day, "acumen, skill and gritty intelligence"(Bethlehem 2009). In all his activities, he has shown a remarkable ability to strategise, to innovate and to lead.

People like Neil Aggett, Zwelinzima Vavi and Thozamile Gqweta, who suffered and sacrificed, did not do so in vain. The values that they stood for are taken forward by David Lewis and his contemporaries, people who've had the courage to step forward, to fight back and to stand up for what is right.

**Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Economic Science, honoris causa, David Harris Lewis.**

**References**

Bethlehem, L. 2009. In *Business Times*, 8 September 2009.

Joffe, A., D. Kaplan, R. Kaplinsky & D. Lewis. 1995. *Improving Manufacturing Performance in South Africa: The Report of the Industrial Strategy Project*: UCT Press.

South African Democracy Education Trust. 2004. *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: 1970-1980* Unisa Press.