

JCB-7  
Mrs. Helen Suzman: Lone Progressive

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29 Bay View Avenue  
Tamboer's Kloof  
Cape Town, South Africa

Mr. Richard H. Nolte  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
366 Madison Avenue  
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

I had tea the other day with Mrs. Helen Suzman, the only Member of Parliament to stand publicly for an undivided multi-racial South Africa.

This small and attractive Progressive Party MP from Houghton is one of a very few women to make a successful career in politics and, since she was the only Progressive to retain a seat in the last election, she now bears the full responsibility for keeping the spirit of her party alive in an antagonistic Parliament. Quite a job for a 45 year old mother of college-age daughters.



**MRS. HELEN SUZMAN  
HOUGHTON**

Never content with domesticity, although she celebrates her 25th Wedding Anniversary this year, she started lecturing on economic development at the University of Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg, soon after the birth of her children. At about the same time she became interested in politics, spurred by the Institute of Race Relations which asked her to prepare evidence for the Fagan Commission Report in 1948. She became active in the Women's Council of the United Party, and in 1953 she was persuaded to stand as the UP candidate for the House of Assembly from Houghton. An unopposed victory in this election started her somewhat stormy trek to the lone position she holds today.

In 1959 she and ten other MPs withdrew from the United Party because they could no longer accept a racial policy which did not take into account the rights of non-Whites to political participation in the South African government. These eleven did not resign from the seats to which they had been elected as UPs, but served out their terms representing their newly-formed Progressive Party, thereby incurring the undying wrath of their former UP colleagues.

Perhaps this bitter antagonism is in some measure responsible for their criticism that Helen is not a capable MP.

Certainly this lack seemed to go unnoticed during the seven years she actively served that party. I have the impression, however, that she is not really cut out for the often cut-throat political life. Politicians who love the good fight are usually able to let their enjoyment sustain them. She takes matters too seriously. She looks as if she would perhaps be more at home in the lecture hall.

All this makes more remarkable her aggressive stand for those things which she believes to be morally right; a stand she has taken from her very first days in Parliament. After all, she says, she entered politics to "get at the root, where the laws are made, hoping to do something practical about getting things changed."

In her maiden speech in 1953 she startled her colleagues (who usually find it prudent to speak cautiously on the floor of the House until they have 'settled in') by a direct attack on the Nationalist Party economic expert, Dr. Diederichs, challenging his contention that the Natives contributed little to the economy. "If the Europeans did a lot for the Natives," she said, "the Natives also did a great deal for the Europeans. Take away the half million Natives in the mines, the 400,000 in industry and the three million on European farms, and this country would indeed look sick."

Today, although she seems rather uncomfortable in the role of Progressive Party dyke-holder, she never lets an opportunity go by to puncture the balloon of fantasy which many parliamentary members send up. Over and above the respect given her as a woman, there is always considerable interest in her comments and questions.

#### Her record this year: Questions and Answers

Her opening speech in the present Parliamentary session, in response to the Prime Minister's announcement of independence for the Transkei, was one of her best. She made clear that she and her party opposed the Government's policy on principle as well as in method; something which no other speaker had done. The world, she concluded, did not want to see the implementation of apartheid. They wanted to see it abandoned.

A few weeks later she was on her feet again to introduce a motion to amend the Immorality Act, a law which few people like but which will never be changed except through Nationalist Party-introduced legislation. She may not be successful with such measures in Parliament by the very fact that she is alone, but she can focus public attention on matters of national importance. Already her questions to Cabinet Ministers have brought forth some interesting information.

She was told by the Minister of Justice that, since 1950, of the 5699 people charged under the immorality Act (for committing or attempting to commit an immoral or indecent act with someone across the color line) 3899 has been convicted. Of these,

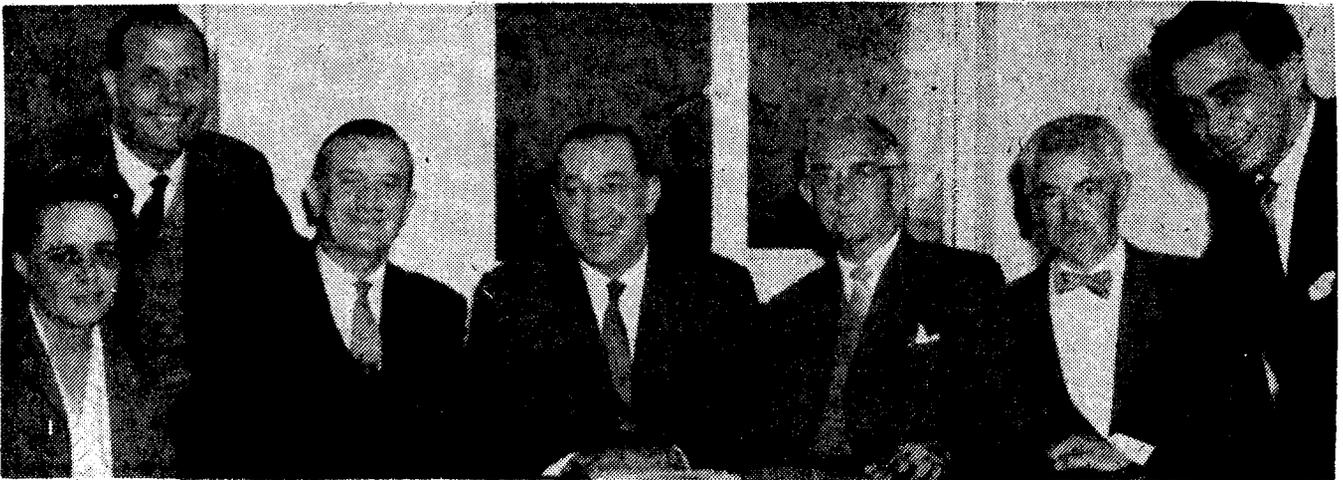
2034 were White, 871 were Coloured and 953, African. He also brought out, in answer to her questions, that the pass laws and influx control regulations which affect the Africans has been responsible for more than 3,500,000 convictions in the past ten years.

She was told by the Minister of the Interior that the infant mortality rate for every 1000 Whites was 30.1, for Coloureds, 172.2 and for Indians, 64.3. Life expectancy for Whites was 64.6 for men and 70.1 for women; for Coloureds, 44.8 for men and 47.8 for women; for Indians, 55.8 for men and 54.8 for women. He had no figures available for Africans.

#### Help on the home front - a panel of professionals

In order to carry on effectively as a one-woman party, she has an advisory committee of former Progressive MPs, including Mr. Harry Lawrence, the senior man in the House of Assembly until his defeat in the last election. They not only aid her with advice and information, but stump the country to educate the electorate to their cause. They would have it that Helen is only temporarily holding the fort until their return.

But will they return? It doesn't seem likely. Most White South Africans are not prepared at this time to accept a racial policy which seems to them close to saying "one man, one vote". The hope that Progressive leaders had of attracting wavering Nats has not proven itself valid. While there are dissatisfied Nationalists, they are not going to leave the security of the Nationalist Afrikaner laager until they are sure of joining a strong opposition, and today no really effective political opposition exists.



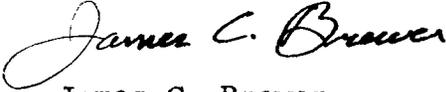
Cape Progressives, all of whom lost seats in the last election. They are (left to right): Mrs. J. Beck, Mr. Colin Eglin, Mr. Harry Lawrence, Dr. Jan Steytler, Prof. "Sakkies" Fourie, Mr. Andrew Brennan and Dr. Zac de Beer.

Progressives, with whom Americans here probably have the most rapport since their theories of government are similar, are considered by many South Africans to be too intellectual and too aloof.

More importantly, they have not been able to produce a victory other than Mrs. Suzman, even on a Provincial or Municipal level. And though the margin of defeat was sometimes very slim, all the Progressive incumbents who were United Party, except for her, have now been voted out of office. An internal crisis, or even increased pressure from outside, will more likely bring people together behind the present strong government than into the Progressive camp.

But whatever comes for the Progressive Party, it could be no more conscientiously represented by someone who epitomizes the best the party has to offer. And while the future doesn't show much basis for optimism, what hope there is lies with people like Mrs. Helen Suzman.

Sincerely yours,



James C. Brewer

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