

## SOUTH AFRICA

### Native Progress in South Africa

WITH the growth and development of industry in S. Africa there has likewise taken place a corresponding development among the black and coloured peoples. Owing to their greater cheapness and lower standard of living, the native workers have gradually encroached on industry and been responsible for the steady displacement of large numbers of white workers. And again arising out of this process a strong antagonism has grown up and been displayed towards the blacks by the whites, an antagonism which the employing class have only too readily helped to foster. The white owners inflamed by racial prejudice have attempted to keep themselves strictly apart from the blacks in their industrial organisations, refusing them admittance to the Trade Unions. Faced with this situation and subject to the worst forms of exploitation in workshops, factory, mine, etc., it was only natural that the workers of the Bantu races should set about building up their own industrial organisation.

At the beginning of 1919 what is called the I.C.U. (Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union) was brought into existence. This union commenced its activities by organising the native workers in the Cape Town docks, and in one or two other coast towns, such as Port Elizabeth, East London, etc. Early in its career it found itself involved in strike action for higher wages, and to a certain extent was responsible for securing increased pay for the dock workers. Since that time right up to the present day it has drawn ever increasing numbers of black and coloured workers into its ranks until its actual membership at the moment totals more than 30,000 members.

In contradistinction to this extremely satisfactory progress in native Trade

Unionism, the plight of the white workers' union has been very woeful indeed. From a membership of 80,000 in 1920 their strength has dropped to less than 40,000 in 1926. Some unions have been worse off than others, particularly those in the Transvaal where the colour bar still remains in force. In the Cape Province (formerly Cape Colony) the colour bar has been broken down for some time past, and many coloured workers have been admitted to the various unions. Things are much different, to a big extent, in the Cape Province owing to the big proportion of coloured workers who serve in many cases as a connecting link between black and white. On the political side also the Cape natives have the "benefit" of the franchise, though how long this is likely to last seems problematical in view of the recent proposals of Premier Hertzog in regard to segregation.

Nowadays however, even in the Transvaal, the necessity of including *all* workers in the Trade Unions is slowly being forced into the minds of the white Trade Unionists. The ground in this direction is being more or less prepared by the admission of coloured workers into the Building Workers' Union and also that of the Tailors. Both these bodies still rigidly oppose the inclusion of blacks, however, and the latter Union, the Tailors', states its intention of limiting the number of coloured members to the seven Malays who have recently been admitted. Nevertheless a straw often shows the way the wind is blowing and the black workers cannot be excluded from the white unions for ever.

Meantime the colour bar policy hits at the white unions themselves. The further growth and development of the I.C.U. is bound to make the white workers seriously consider the overhauling of their ideas, especially when the economic forces at work are persistently pointing out the imperative need of unity of all workers without distinction of colour.

Realising the danger which working class unity presents to private ownership, the minions of the ruling class now at the Government helm in S. Africa, the Pact Government, are making preparations to ensure the maintenance of hostile divisions in the workers' camp. Towards this end Premier Hertzog has outlined a scheme which aims at ostensibly segregating the black from the white. The purpose of the scheme simply amounts to the formation of a white and Cape coloured bloc against the black.

The African Native Congress, which adopts a wholly racial attitude, has attracted many to its ideas, but has little real organisation worth speaking about. Not so is it in the case of the I.C.U. with its large membership and its numerous branches existing all over the country. It is rapidly getting its message of organisation home to the wide mass of the natives, and taking its stand on a working class platform as opposed to racialism.

The Communist Party of S. Africa lends its assistance in propagating the unity of all workers, both black and white, and before many more years have passed the organised might of the black in industry is going to become one of the most powerful factors in ridding a fertile country of human exploitation.

J. SHIELDS.