

WHAT'S BEHIND CAPE FURNITURE STRIKE?

THE strike and lock-out of the 1,300 furniture workers is now nine weeks old.

What are the facts of this strike-lock-out?

Three weeks before the strike, the Cape Times announced "that about 3,000 workers in some 54 furniture factories would get pay increases ranging from 50 cents to R1.80 a week from 1st July, in terms of a two-year agreement arrived at by the Industrial Council for the Furniture Manufacturing Industry."

Mr. Edgar Deane, National Secretary of the Union (who was at that time contesting the Cape Town City Council elections and was defeated by CPC executive member George Peake), added: "The new wage rates would be the best in the furniture industry in South Africa." (Cape Times 14/2/61.)

Three Weeks Later

Three weeks later, the Union called a strike at Ospovat's furniture factory, whereupon the other employers in the trade declared a lock-out in sympathy with Ospovat.

The employers' statement issued on March 9 shows that in terms of the new proposed agreement the wages of the Cape furniture workers from labourers to artisans would be higher here than in the Transvaal.

Labourers Cape £3.15 p.w.; Tvl. £3.6.9. Journeyman Cape £13 p.w.; Tvl. £12.16.3. Seamstresses Cape £7 p.w.; Tvl. £6.8.1. Handsanders Cape £5 p.w.; Tvl. £4.9. Beltsanders, Single Drumsanders, Boring machines, etc. Cape £9 p.w.; Tvl. £8.9.3.

At long last the Cape furniture workers were to achieve their ob-

jective of eliminating the gap between themselves and the Transvaal workers, and were actually to obtain higher rates.

Working Hours

On the surface the strike appears to be over hours of work. The union demands a reduction of the working week from a 44 to a

Workers' 9-week Struggle

Analysed by
E. R. BRAVERMAN

42-hour week. But the reduction of the 2 hours is to come into operation 2 years from now.

The employers reply that the workers require more money and not shorter hours.

It is difficult, however, for the workers, let alone the public, to understand why such a long and costly strike should take place over a change in the working week which will not materialise before 1963.

The strike has the full support of the Transvaal Furniture Workers' Union whose officials, Messrs. Klopper de Villiers and Lucas Barnard, have taken a very active part. They have been staying in Cape Town and flying home for week-ends.

Transvaal Claims

The Transvaal union has itself been pressing for a reduction in the working week but has been told by the employers that they will agree to a 42-hour week as a condition of employment only when the Cape obtains a 42-hour

week. The Transvaal union apparently does not feel strong enough to call a strike on this issue owing to the big preponderance of Africans in the industry who outnumber the Whites by 3 to 1, and who are not allowed to strike because of the provisions of the Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act.

It seems therefore, that the Cape furniture workers are doing pioneering work for the industry throughout the Union.

To make matters more complicated the Transvaal White and Coloured workers have endorsed job reservation against the Africans.

Nationalists' Role

Coloured and White furniture workers in the Transvaal, as in the Cape, have separate unions but the same officials, who are known to be active and leading members of the Transvaal Nationalist Party. Many of the Coloured workers are suspicious of the intentions of the Transvaal trade union leaders, who are addressing the strikers' meetings and urging the strike to continue until the demands have been met by the employers.

The critics claim that the strike plays into the hands of the Transvaal furniture manufacturers who keep their factories going at full production level while the Cape furniture workers are involved in a strike and lock-out.

Appeals For Unity

Some strikers also draw attention to the discrepancy between the appeals of the Transvaal leaders for unity and their support of the Government's apartheid policy and particularly job reservation.

There is a fear that the Transvaal union will obtain a strong influence over the Cape union and work for the introduction of job reservation against the Coloureds.

UP MY ALLEY

CHEERS for the Mayor of Cape Town . . . the thousands of nie-blankes of the Mother City back up Her Worship's stand in giving the thumbs down signal to republic celebrations . . . And that's for sure . . . As for the 22,843 Nats whom she is supposed to have "insulted" . . . Well, they can have their bleeding ole republic . . . May it last for a thousand years —like Hitler's Reich did.

BUT in case there are some of us blacks crazy enough to want to dedicate ourselves to this republic, I hear that we will be "welcome" at the Goodwood Showgrounds where two females are organising some jollification on May Dirty-first . . . Guests of honour will probably be Uncle G.J., Booker Lakay and some UCCA types.

THIS story comes from one of those energetic characters . . . a field-worker in the end-of-the-month campaign . . . He came up against a lady the other day and she started beefing about all the money she was likely to lose by taking part in the demonstrations . . . Our boy gave her the you've-got-to-sacrifice line . . . "Okay,"

she snaps back. "I'll sacrifice, but I'm warning you, I'm not staying out for longer than a month."

IF Fuehrer Verwoerd cared to consult the stars he would be likely to discover that the advice for the end of May reads as

By ALEX
LA GUMA



follows: "There should be an opportunity to establish the basis of worthwhile relationship this week, if you are prepared to cooperate."

THE Anti-CAD, still tottering from the after-effects of their anti-everything stand during the March 1960 events, are giving a repeat performance this month.

A Headache For African Theatres

EQUITY DECISION AIMED AT S.A. COLOUR BAR

JOHANNESBURG.

EQUITY, the British Actors' trade union has taken another hard crack at the colour bar in South Africa's theatre. It has passed a unanimous vote telling its members not to work in any theatre where there is a colour bar unless a certain number of performances of exactly the same show are given to Non-Whites in the same theatre.

Equity's previous stand was that shows could be given to Non-White audiences at an alternative venue. The new resolution means that if African Theatres—which brings out most of the top stars—wants to continue to bring out the big names, they will have to ask the municipalities for permission to have Non-White shows in their theatres—or lose the

chance of being in the big money.

Equity's stand can be put into practice. It has been done in Johannesburg at both the Alexander and Playhouse Theatres, where the same show was put on for Non-White audiences, and the performances were a huge success.

The American Equity Association, although it has not passed any specific anti-colour-bar resolutions, is in close contact with its British counterpart, and is prepared to instruct its own membership to demand conditions for work in South Africa that are in conformity with the British decision.

(In 1959 the American cast of the 'Pyjama Game' gave a number of shows for Non-Europeans when the show played in Johannesburg.)

Round The Shows

"FRUSTRATED BLACK BOY"

JOHANNESBURG.

FRUSTRATED BLACK BOY, the 3-act jazz opera currently running at the Selborne Hall, is a sharp attack on everything connected with the policy of White domination/Black subjugation in South Africa.

As the doctor, one of the nine sons of Molate, the father, puts it: 'A car is the only thing they can't apply apartheid on—they haven't made separate roads for darkies yet!'

The aim of the musical is to show how Africans are frustrated at every turn in their efforts to develop.

Unfortunately the singing and acting are not always of a sufficiently high standard to ram the point home.

For example, the death of the youngest daughter of the family (from TB) evokes a very unconvincing attack of hysterics from the mother (Martha Montso), who is comforted in what almost seems a mocking way by Molate. On the other hand, the comedy of the courtroom scene, where the lawyer is not allowed to speak for his clients because he is Black, is much more truly portrayed, with a fine wry laughter.

THE MUSIC

Musically the show is poor, the tone of the singers thin, and heavy reliance is placed on the worst of today's commercialised jazz. What a pity we did not get more of the riches and warmth of African jazz, as demonstrated particularly well by the young group of penny-whistlers and dancers, who showed great verve and excellent tempo, and whose numbers had a vitality and tunefulness that the more commercial items sadly lacked.

The sincerity and enthusiasm of the author and producer, Godfrey Skosana and Julius Dambuza, were apparent throughout. But to put on a show like this successfully, greater technical knowledge is required—from how to get pre-show publicity and where to stage the show to the way people should move on a stage; from the acting of the chorus (who looked half-dead) to the pruning of a too-lengthy script.

Still, this was a very worthwhile

effort that deserved much better support than it got.

B.L.

DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE OF THE "MESSIAH"

JOHANNESBURG.

IN a beautiful and dramatic presentation of Handel's 'Messiah' at the City Hall recently the Johannesburg African Musical Society Choir, under the baton of Joseph Friedland, gave the audience an unforgettable evening of musical enjoyment.

To the choir itself, over 200 strong, must go the main praise for the evening's success. Composed of the Jabavu Choristers, the Christ the King Choir, the St. Augustine's Church Choir and the Mofolo Choristers, they were as one in their sweet-voiced precision and clarity, and sang the big choruses like 'For Unto Us a Child is Born' and 'Their Sound is Gone Out' with moving force and power.

Soloists Alice Mollson (Soprano) and Ben Xatasi (Tenor) were outstanding for purity and clarity of tone, although both of them, as well as the other soloists, still have a big potential ahead when it comes to developing a wider range and technique.

Contact between conductor Joe Friedland and the large group in front of him (the stage was full to overflowing) was excellent. There is nothing of the grand manner about this conductor. He has a simple and direct human approach which, coupled with his great technical power and skill, made him completely a part of the group he was directing.

The programme blurb said: 'It is hoped that this happy association between people of different colours who have joined together with a common purpose, will enrich the musical life of this country.' This was put into practice right there in front of all of us that Sunday evening.

B.L.

Don't Take Republic Medals — Advice To Schoolchildren

DURBAN.

CIRCULARS have been issued by the Congress Alliance in Natal to parents, teachers and students urging them to reject offers to schoolchildren of medals and flags to celebrate the advent of the Republic.

These "emblems of apartheid" must not be accepted, state the circulars.

"What have we to commemorate or celebrate? Are we to celebrate the Sharpeville shootings, imprisonment and banishment of thousands of our people without trial, the abortive Treason Trial of people's leaders, the indiscriminate banning of our leaders, organisations and newspapers, the Group Areas Act, Job Reservation, University Apartheid and the numerous other race-mad laws? Are we to celebrate unemployment and poverty which are the direct result of the Nats' apartheid policies?"

There is no cause for celebrating "our own oppression," state the circulars. A call is made on the parents not to send their children to school on the eve of Republic Day, May 31, and on all South Africans to boycott the Republican celebrations.

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