

all this noise, gratifying that bridges are being built. The absurdity of spelling the same words differently just because of tribal difference has almost been removed. One education department has instructed its examiners to refrain from penalising a candidate just because he has, in his composition, employed a word from another dialect.

The free borrowing of words is taking place in large industrial centres in the teeth of harsh protests by the linguistic "purists." Xhosas are importing many Zulu words, and vice versa. Tswana and Pedi speakers use Southern Sotho words and expressions to an increasing extent.

All this is as it should be. This mixture is a good thing and we should all encourage it. A conference should be summoned and a standard process of unification agreed upon. Nguni words should be freely Sothoised and Sotho words freely Nguniised. There is nothing revolutionary in this. It has been going on for a century in the Eastern part of the Orange Free State.

Transvaal Ndebele spoken at and around Potgietersrust is a combination of Nguni and Sotho which is spoken fluently by the Ndebeles of that region.

In my suggestions, I am not unaware that there may yet be another way out of this linguistic tangle. Unity among non-Europeans which is so essential in this country renders my proposed solution merely partial. English is our non-European Esperanto. The question is: "Should English be among us in South Africa what Swahili is in East Africa?"

This should be left for future discussion. Our job just now should be the throwing of our Bantu languages into one pot, and the putting of fire under the pot. For a start, however, two separate pots might be necessary.

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## THE ROAD TO SLAVERY

**L**ONG before the Nationalist Party came to power they made it clear in their programmatic declarations that the system of collective bargaining would have to be substituted by a system of State supervision and "State responsibility."

This picture of a benevolent "State" settling the workers' troubles for them was drawn in order to persuade the workers to drop their independent vigilance in defence of their own rights, to give up the idea of free class organisation, to weaken the Trade Unions.

Since coming to power the Nats have gone a long way in implementing their labour programme. Skillfully playing on the colour prejudices of the white

workers they first succeeded in dividing the Trade Union Movement. This was followed by starting to remove honest and class-conscious trade union leaders. Simultaneously, the Industrial Legislation Commission launched a full scale war on all traditional precepts of working class unity and defence. Trade Unionism and in a series of devastating recommendations laid the foundations for the removal of the present system of collective bargaining and for its substitution by a "National Labour Board."

The Nats also succeeded in roping in the support of collaborationist trade union "leaders" for their schemes. It must have come as a shock even to many backward white workers that their leaders agreed to accept such recommendations of *ministerial and state control over the funds of their trade unions.*

The Native Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Bill is one further step in this campaign of depriving the trade unions of their strength and influence. It is, of course, in the first place designed to defeat the increasing tendency of African workers to organise in trade unions. But it carries with it a number of threats not only to the freedom of the European trade unionists, but also to the hardwon indugns of work and standard of wages of many organised workers, who hitherto managed to achieve improvements by means of collective bargaining.

## The Native Labour Bill.

The Bill proposes to set up elaborate machinery "for the settlement of disputes." A string of bureaucrats are to deal in long succession with disputes affecting workers. It all looks very impressive. There is a native labour officer, who will be the chairman of a Regional Committee consisting of three Africans. Of course, the three Africans are to be appointed by the Minister — there is of course no representation on this Board by the African workers themselves, not even those who are directly affected by a possible dispute. Where no regional committee operates, an Inspector may exercise its functions.

The Regional Committee is to deal with the dispute in the first place and if they fail to settle it, it is to be referred to a Central Native Labour Board, which in turn may refer it to the Minister of Labour with sundry recommendations, who in turn may ask the Wage Board to intervene. Finally, the Minister may make an "order" (note the term, so revealing of the dictator outlook) which then has the force of law.

Nowhere in this imposing array of boards, committees and bureaucrats is there any provision whatsoever for the voice of the affected workers to be heard. There is no form of representations, either oral or in writing and the Wage Board, which in terms of the present Wage Act is compelled to give all interested parties an opportunity to make representations to it, will now only be obliged to "consult such persons or bodies as in its opinion ought to be consulted."

Obviously, such machinery can ~~never~~ effectively settle labour disputes. All it will do is to impose arbitrary decisions on unwilling workers.

The Bill is designed to remove all African workers from the effects of other industrial legislation. They are to be completely excluded from the Industrial Conciliation Act, including African women who, the Courts have held, were covered hitherto by that Act. The Bill also gives the Minister power to override in his orders the provisions of the Factories Act.

Generally, orders made by the Minister in terms of this Bill have far-reaching effects. The Minister may make such orders applicable to employees other than Africans, even employees who are already covered by agreements negotiated by duly registered trade unions and employers' organisations. In fact, ALL collective bargaining agreements will have to be submitted for approval to the Central

Native Labour Board and if the Board does not approve of them the Minister may be asked by it to issue an "Order" employing the wishes of the Board and overriding the conclusions of the negotiating parties!

## Savage Sanctions.

Strikes are prohibited under threat of the most savage sanctions. Thus the penalty for a worker striking for a possible increase in wages of 2/6 per week will be open on conviction to a penalty of £500, imprisonment of three years, or both such penalty and imprisonment. And the draughtsmen of this atrocious law have made quite sure that there will be a conviction in each case, for the onus is on the accused worker to prove that he has not taken part in a strike. All the prosecution has to do is to allege that he has taken part in a strike.

Moreover the definition of a strike is wide enough to cover any stoppage of work, including sympathy strikes or protest actions against political repression.

## What Should Be Done.

The entire trade union movement should unanimously oppose this Bill, for it is a threat to all workers, and to their established rights.

Experience has shown, however, that the methods of opposition hitherto adopted against the anti-labour legislation of the Government has had little effect, because it has usually taken the form of memoranda, written letters or deputations, which have been listened to politely but have just as politely been ignored.

...New methods of protest and opposition must be devised by the trade unions. The most important thing of all is to bring the danger of this legislation to the attention of the workers, not only at isolated branch meetings, but at the factories where the workers are assembled in numbers and where they can initiate their own methods of protest.

Resolutions signed by hundreds of workers at factory meetings should be sent to the Minister demanding the withdrawal of the Bill and insisting on the restoration of the workers' right of association and of free collective bargaining. Groups of workers should lobby their members of Parliament. Letters of protest should be written to the Press. Every device should be utilised to expose the anti-labour character of this Bill and to rouse every worker against it. Mass public opposition can yet win the freedom of collective bargaining for all workers.

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## Book Review.

# PETER ABRAHAMS DISAPPOINTS

**M**R. ABRAHAMS is a Coloured writer who left South Africa some years ago and has lived in England since. During last year he decided to visit South Africa again, and this book is an account of his

visit.

The book starts somewhat melodramatically; one gets the impression that Mr. Abrahams regarded his trip as an adventure from which he might not return alive. This will no doubt