

What Industrial Unionism involves in S.A.

It was recently proposed by the Management Committee of the I. S. L. to call a conference of 'industrialists' to discuss how best to bring present industrial organisation up to date on class struggle lines. Is it not one essential that any such organisation, to be thorough, shall forthwith boldly embrace the lowpaid 'unskilled' workers, to wit, chiefly the non-whites—not merely as auxiliaries in the white man's fights, but on the contrary, as constituting in this country the bulk of the working class, in whose cause the more fortunate few should rather consider themselves as in their turn the auxiliaries? The time is admittedly past for the movement to be run by more or less middle-class observers, looking down as it were from a balcony, no matter how sympathetically, on the hardships of the toiling mass below. Even the semi-masonic lodges of artisans, called Trade Unions, banded together chiefly to maintain their own higher rates of pay, tend to adopt at best that attitude towards the organised proletariat. Now, by all means let middle-class people adopt the Socialist standpoint; but beware lest Socialists adopt the middle class standpoint: as in this country all whites are too prone to do.

The colour bar is the coming divider of Labour, as indeed the unskilled bar always has been. A white miners' strike against coloured labour as such can only cause him that sitteth in the Corner House to laugh. The proposed amalgamation of the white unions in the building trade will be only an academic achievement: just as it leaves out the labourer, in a printers' assistants' strike, it is for the skilled journeymen to espouse their unskilled fellows' dispute, in preference even to their own.

It is not enough to abolish the colour bar in the Unions so long as the coloured mass de facto remain outside. It is not a question of teaching the nigger Socialism: only help him to appreciate the simple implications of his own actual economic position, and the time will come when, instead of the white Unions opening their doors to their black fellow workers, they will be asking the blacks to open their doors to whites.

Beware lest the capitalist class while we cold-shoulder the native worker, seduce him by flattery to their side. By means of the Black or Yellow Peril bogey, they are already setting white workers against non-whites, as they have set Allies against Centrals and vice versa all over the world, deluding the whites into the belief that the way to weather the competition of coloured labour is to fight the coloured labourer instead of joining with him against the common enemy. It is for us in South Africa to show the world the right and only road to 'Something now.'

All this, which the ruling class will persecute, when the propaganda gets going, more viciously than the War on War campaign, is involved in Industrial Unionism, propagation of which has recently been included in the League's objective. A hard saying, at which some, having great or even small possessions, 'may go away sorrowful,' but true, if we keep our minds elastic to the rapid development in the capitalism of to-day.

(Notes of an address given at the Trades Hall meeting on Sunday last by Com : S. P. Bunting: M. P. C).