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C & N 05

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1985 media warnings that were ignored:

WHAT HAPPENED TO OUR MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY AND THE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES THAT SHOULD BE HERE?

Introduction:

During the 1984 to 1986 period I was personally involved in the extension of the Industrial Council of the Furniture Manufacturing Industries agreement on minimum wages and allied restrictive conditions on area outside of the council members area.

The lengthy conflict clearly reflects the motivation that they were extending their restrictive control over all manufacturers in order to protect the existing formal businesses, part of the elite structures that still dominate today.

During this period the large employer body, their linked trade union and the council inspectors actions and comments reflected that they had no concern for the impact of the extension on the retrenchment of the workers involved in their target areas. Cleverly using and manipulating the emerging Trade Unions this activity, in all provinces and all industries, removed the opposition from the perceived 'unfair opposition' by the small manufacturers from 1984 through to 1990.

What was left of the small manufacturing industry collapsed completely as the political transition brought with it, the CCMA and the strictest Labour Legislation in the Western World.

As the factories closed, so the requirements of the consumer was met by the Chinese products that are now filling the shelves and our shopping bags.

To the media and other critics who question the politicians and sports administrators who purchase T-Shirts and other items from China, this is the result of the restrictions imposed on the manufacturing industry by the elite.

I discuss the 1984 to 1986 conflict in the Furniture Manufacturing Industry in a later section, but importantly, first look at what the academics, business people and politicians were forecasting in 1985:

As South Africans we are all inclined to reflect on the fact that the elite have dictated and restricted us in the interests of protecting their assets and wealth.

If you really believe that, then this is the ideal time to clear all the perceptions that have been implanted in our minds, minimum wages, living wages, don't work for slave wages, we have heard them all.

Let us stand back and look at the options, let us question why, with minimum wages legislated in the Domestic worker sector, we do not have minimum wages set in relation to the Sandton and Houghton areas. No, they are exploiting the poverty group, and do not need to protect themselves from unfair competition, so the wages are set off the Westdene affordable base.

I shall be telling this with a sigh

*Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I --
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.* Robert Frost

Comment:

Yes, we were successful in 1985, but I consider today I understand that the job is not complete.
I quote voices that were expressing their opinions during our conflict;

1: Professor Sadie, Cape Town, Article published in Natal Mercury, March 1985.

The number of unskilled workers without full employment in South Africa would grow to more than 5 million by the end of the century if present labour practices continued, Prof Jan Sadie, emeritus professor of economics at the University of Stellenbosch told an Industrial Court hearing yesterday.

Arguing against paying workers a 'living wage' Prof Sadie said such a wage, which caused labour to be overpriced, meant a 'no-wage' situation for millions.

Accelerating wage increases had corresponded to a decline in the rate of growth in employment, he said.

Giving evidence in the hearing to arbitrate on the wage dispute between the 11000-member Cape Town Municipal workers Association, and the Cape Town Municipality, Prof Sadie said there would be less capital available for the creation of jobs, the more the country's national income growth was absorbed by wage rises.

The 'demographic forces' of South Africa demanded a maximum employment of labour while present wage practices and labour unrest were enforcing a minimum of employment, he said.

A policy of paying a 'living wage' had to be weighed up against the poverty and squalor of those whose chances of employment were lessened by such wage practices.

The ripple effect of a disproportionate rise in wages of the Cape Towns Municipality would mean there was a 'real danger' that the Western Cape would become an economic backwater.

The social responsibility of employers was to use their factors of production as efficiently as possible, to invest as much as possible, to use initiative and expand businesses to create more jobs. (The hearing continues.)

2: Minimum wages mean minimum jobs. Sunday Times, March 3 1985

Pleas for enforced minimum wages can be beguiling to those who, out of ignorance, misplaced compassion or misguided commitment to interventionism, believe that they provide protection to workers on the lowest rungs of the ladder.

Such beliefs are profoundly mistaken.

And Dr. Zac de Beer, and executive director of the Anglo American Corporation and a former politician with impeccable liberal credentials, was right to stress the point this week.

There was a time, said Dr de Beer - when South Africa was more prosperous and black wages were unacceptably low, when job reservation was widespread and trade unionism closed to blacks - when it was justified to campaign for higher minimum wages.

But in the South Africa of today, its labour force increasingly unionised and job reservation almost a dead letter, the enforcement of minimum wages can only be hurtful to those in search of work.

In matters of employment, as in all areas of our economy, the market must be permitted to operate freely. When wages are maintained at artificial levels, jobs decrease; when wages are permitted to float naturally, supply and demand can find equilibrium.

Manipulated wages are also inflationary, rising process of our raw materials and manufactured products to a level where they cannot compete internationally against products from countries where market forces determine the cost of labour.

As it is, the supposedly free market in this country is distorted by such things as influx control and Group Areas, plus the pernicious effect of public service pay scales that bear scant relations to productivity.

Who would want to worsen matters by denying survival to the wretched unemployed who are willing to labour for any acceptable wage?

3: Help Needed for small businesses, says Minister. The Natal Witness, 05/06/85,

Cape Town: The Minister of Manpower Mr. P.T.C. du Plessis, yesterday called on Industrial Councils to be sympathetic towards small businesses and to help them wherever possible.

Opening a conference of Industrial Councils in Cape Town, Mr. du Plessis said small businesses made significant contribution towards the country's development and helped to alleviate unemployment by creating jobs.

Many of these small employers had emerged from back-yards and other obscure workplaces with the financial assistance of the Small Business Development Corporation.

"In many cases it is claimed that they are being driven back to the places from where they emerged because they simply cannot comply with the many prescriptions and minimum employment conditions imposed on them by industrial council agreements."

He appealed to industrial councils to give sympathetic attention to these small employers and to be of assistance wherever possible.

Industrial councils should also bring a greater deal of flexibility into their agreements in order to cater for the differences in supply and demand in the different regions. - Sapa.

Four months later, as our conflict increases, the Minister increases his comments.

4: Minister urges 'sympathy' for smaller firms. Natal Mercury, 25th October 1985.

Johannesburg - Industrial councils should give special and sympathetic attention to the problems of small businessmen in meeting regulations and minimum employment conditions because they could make a significant contribution to reducing unemployment, the Minister of Manpower, Mr. PTC du Plessis, said yesterday.

Speaking at a conference of industrial councils in Johannesburg he said he was fully appreciative of the problems and fears on the question of unfair competition, exploitation, and the lowering of standards.

'But it does seem clear to me that our times demand a more realistic and sympathetic approach to avert the stunting of growth especially in developing areas, and in doing so, the creation of more employment opportunities in general.'

Mr. du Plessis said his department was being approached almost daily by non-party employers who were dissatisfied with the reaction by the industrial councils to their applications for exemption from the councils's agreements.

Alarming:

'They complain that they are either unable to obtain exemption or that the relief which is granted is totally insufficient to meet their businesses as viable proposition seen against the background of present day circumstance.'

The number of unemployed people was taking on alarming proportions on an almost daily scale, and, when it came to small businessmen, they could do a lot to help combat unemployment he said.

'It cannot be denied that the small businessman can make a significant contributions to our country's economic development, and to alleviating the bite of unemployment through the creation of job opportunities, especially in the severe economic recession we are presently experiencing Mr. du Plessis said.

Simplified.

'I therefore wish to appeal to industrial councils to give special and sympathetic attention to this matter and to be of assistance wherever possible.

The minister also urged industrial councils to ensure greater representation of smaller members of their particular industry, or at least prior consultation, to ensure their interests were also taken into account.

Many councils' agreements had been drafted many years ago and their flexibility and adaptability to changed circumstances left much to be desired in many cases he warned.

Mr. du Plessis added that many of the agreements had become too complex and difficult to interpret over the years, and should be simplified. On the issue of extending agreements to non-parties and the inclusion of new areas, he said it had become clear to him the stage had been reached where an objective review was required. - (Sapa)

SUMMARY:

These media articles were published in the time period when small manufacturers were being pushed out of the industry by the elite employers.

My experience between 1984 and 2004 is filled with incidents and interaction with control restrictions aimed at protecting the elite from perceived 'unfair opposition'.

In all cases, the relationship between the Employer body and the Employee Representative/Trade Union had no concern for the unemployed.

Today, September to October 2012, the observation is confirmed as the Union is unable to find a home in the employee camp.

They should have been sitting on the hill at Marikana.

To the unemployed, the youth, those who are afraid of being exploited for slave wages, clear your mind of all perceived opinions, look at the situation in your interest, and you interest only.

Our country has been at the

TWO roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

You are now standing looking at the road less traveled,

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN -- Robert Frost

Beware, our food security is creating a vacuum that will allow foreign nationals to take control.

Don't let any preconceived opinion prevent your from taking the road that will make all the difference for you.

Cedric de la Harpe

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