

BLACK THEATRE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

by Lester Bostock

The idea of a theatre coming from Aboriginal people, run and controlled by them, based on what is generally termed European theatre yet with their own particular style has been attempted from time to time but to my knowledge has not been able to eventuate until the last decade and particularly within the last few years. Because of the efforts of a small but dedicated group of people who felt the need for such an enterprise there is now a National Black Theatre in New South Wales.

The failure of teachers to interest Aborigines in theatre and other art forms was due to the fact that they were attempting to teach European art forms without relating these to the social environment in which the Aborigines were living. Aborigines who have to cope with bad housing, unemployment, ill health and who are not over supplied with money had not come forward in large numbers to learn European art forms and values.

National Black Theatre was formed in 1972 to supply these people with art forms to which they could relate. It grew out of political struggles. Such a political struggle was the land rights demonstrations which at the time were being organized by the Black Moratorium Committee. Those who were not political celebrities found they could become involved as actors and dancers etc. and that they could show their convictions in this way. Many had not realized the political force that the theatre represented.

History of the National Black Theatre

Workshops and play readings were already in operation at this time but the first public performance by Black Theatre was street theatre—to publicise the Black Moratorium and the Aboriginal Land Rights claim against Nabalco. This performance was filmed by TDT and broadcasted nationally.

The next performance was to lead the Aboriginal Land Rights demonstration on 14th July, of that year where for the first time Aborigines with their families came out on the streets in large numbers to support their younger people.

A few days after the Land Rights demonstration the news came through that the Aboriginal

Embassy had fallen; it was at the re-erection of the Aboriginal Embassy that the Black Theatre Dance group had its first performance. It performed the dance of the Embassy, which was a symbolic re-erection of the Tent Embassy but portrayed the whole history of Aboriginal/European Conflict and gave powerful expression to the emotions of that event.

The Embassy was the crisis point of Aboriginal political action in Australia. When this subsided some of the activists found a new arena—*The Stage*. If you look around you, you will find some of those activists here at this seminar.

The first professional performance by Black Theatre was from the dance group, where on the

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