

BUKHARIN, BUNTING AND THE 'NATIVE REPUBLIC' SLOGAN

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'Stage' Theory and the South African Left

In early 1978, in the aftermath of the Soweto revolt, the *Review of African Political Economy* (No.11) carried a debate between Archie Mafeje (academician and anthropologist) and Ruth First (one-time leading member of the Young Communist League and then of the South African Communist Party—SACP) on revolutionary strategy in South Africa. My concern here is not their general views, but First's response to Mafeje's claim (p.26) that the transition to socialism in South Africa would proceed in a 'single stage' without having to go through an intermediary democratic form. First agreed. She said Mafeje was 'justifiably critical of the notion of any two-stage revolution' and that this was 'a notion long overdue for rejection' (p.97):

I agree with those who argue against the conception of a revolution having to pass through a national-democratic before a socialist stage. This is because I do not see any such thing as 'pure' national or 'pure' class oppression/exploitation. This is because workers are exploited as workers and also as members of a nationally oppressed group, and not even their national demands can be met without the destruction of the capitalist order (p.98).

First's conclusion is pertinent but there is much that she left unsaid. If the issue is exploitation, this must be seen in terms of the extraction of surplus-value inside the largest, most concentrated, industry in Africa; and if black workers are oppressed this needs exploration inside the context of the mine owners' ability to stop their organizing a union (until recently) and the determination of white workers to stop their advancement. The connection with 'national' oppression, (if 'national' is the correct word) is problematic, even if capitalists used race prejudice to prop up their barbaric treatment of the work force. But the theory of stages in the struggle for change in late capitalist society is absurd under any conditions. South Africa is an advanced capitalist society with a highly concentrated proletariat in

a single industry in a restricted geographical area. It is dominated by one mining house (Anglo American) which also controls one of the largest banks, many of the chemical and engineering industries and large tracts of land. The black proletariat provides the force capable of removing capitalist control and all discriminatory legislation at the same time and this above all calls for the elimination of a two-stage theory.

I have found no response to First's views in any open publications of the SACP, and the two-stage theory is maintained in tandem with the 'theory' of colonialism of a special type. Stage-theory has been policy since 1928 and, if there are to be no 'blank spots' in the history of struggle in South Africa (to borrow a phrase used recently in the USSR, where whole books are blank), a review of what happened then is instructive. Though events of 1927-28 (and beyond) in the USSR have been concealed for far too long, this is not the place to write an extended essay on the mass destruction of the peasantry and the forced march to industrialization in which tens of millions lost their lives. This was a period in which Marxist theory was perverted to allow Soviet theoreticians to advance the slogan of 'socialism in one country'. There was a massive cover-up to conceal the destruction wrought in Soviet society and destroy any signs of internal criticism.

During these vital years pseudo-left language was used to convince loyal party members that the victory of socialism was only a matter of time, and the overwhelming majority of communist party members throughout the world followed blindly. They accepted assurances that the Soviet economy was advancing towards socialism, and that workers everywhere were rallying to the USSR. To secure world-wide victory, they were told, all parties affiliated to the Comintern (Communist International) had to prepare for revolution. In this final period before victory, all opposing groups, particularly on the left, had to be exposed as social-fascists and destroyed. If Hitler were to succeed that would be of no consequence, because after him would come the turn of the Communist Party. The terrible tragedy that engulfed the world as a result of this suicidal policy is now well known. Millions upon millions died in gas chambers, in slave camps and on the battle fields. The new policy also led to the near destruction of working class movements everywhere, most particularly in the colonial world. The left opposition in the USSR fought valiantly to stop this march to destruction, and S.P. Bunting, one of the founders of the CPSA, stood up bravely in Moscow to oppose the new policy.

The slogans foisted on each country in 1928 differed, but in each and every case were absurd. In Germany the workers were told to

destroy the social democrats and communists concluded a pact with the Nazi Party; in China the workers were told to prepare for a fresh revolution after they had been all but exterminated in the large towns. In the USA the party was required to work for a Black Belt Republic in the southern states; and the CPSA was ordered to work for a 'Native Republic'. This, said J.H. and R.E. Simons, in one of their more absurd passages, was 'a great advance in the analysis of the relations between national and class forces in the liberation movement.' But that was not the opinion of S.P. Bunting. He fought against the policy at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, and dismissed the facile position of the proponents of the new policy with arguments that have stood the test of time. Bunting's contribution is not generally known. Even the version printed in *Inprecorr* in 1928 is virtually unknown. It is reprinted for the first time, from the fuller (uncensored) stenographic record, in this issue of *Searchlight South Africa*.

The architect of the new policy imposed on the world Communist movement was Bukharin, Stalin's main ally in the fight against the left opposition. Central to his view was the belief that socialism could be built 'at the pace of a tortoise' inside an isolated Soviet state. In alliance with Stalin he attacked the opposition's view that the Russian revolution was in danger if it remained isolated in a capitalist world. The struggle inside the USSR was bitter and ended with the execution of all the one-time leading Bolsheviks (excluding Stalin). Those events—tho 'blank spots' of Soviet history—cannot be recounted here: my concern is with events in so-called backward countries and the simplistic two-stage theory foisted on their communist parties.

Bunting believed at the time that behind the debate lay a hidden agenda and in a letter to Edward Roux on 5 December 1928 said:

the language about 'stages' represents ideological rather than chronological sequence (though I think it was dictated by the analogy of a bourgeois democratic native revolution in China, but of course I didn't say that) as really no black republic in SA could be achieved without overthrowing capitalist rule. And I think the 'stage' part of the formula is verbiage. (My stress) My idea is to carry on as best we can with the slogan and see how it goes, emphasizing about the 'minorities' so as to escape the N[ative] Ad[ministrations] Act, but to concentrate rather on agitation and indignation as hitherto, and, at the Cape election, to concentrate mainly on the Cape vote and the 101 degradations\disabilities etc. There is something not quite intelligible to the crowd about 'Independent Native Republic'. They all ask 'Well, if it doesn't mean driving the Whites into the sea, what does it mean?' and they don't want something that involves a lot of explanation. (My stress).

This was a remarkable statement by a remarkable man, who did not adhere to the left opposition in the USSR and remained loyal to the Comintern throughout his life. It is doubtful whether Bunting saw the opposition's documents (distributed secretly at the congress in the face of party opposition) which condemned the policy of building socialism in one country and the disastrous policy in China (where the Communist Party was ordered to subordinate its policy to that of the Kuomintang, the 'bourgeois' nationalist movement). Like most delegates to the Comintern congress Bunting did not intervene in discussions on policy inside the USSR, but he was too astute to miss the Chinese connection. However, he was concerned primarily with events in South Africa and in this analysis the South African situation will be placed first.

Colonies and 'National Liberation'

Soon after it was launched in 1915 the International Socialist League—ISL (led by Bunting, Ivon Jones and W.H. Andrews) called for a new international headed by Karl Liebknecht, the anti-warite in the German parliament. Consequently the ISL sought membership of the new Third International when it was formed in 1919 and as part of the Communist Party joined the Comintern in 1921. Delegates went to its Congresses in Moscow and returned with new ideas on the international economy, the revolutionary potential in European states, the problems of social transformation in the USSR and even more central to South Africa, the issue of 'national liberation.' S.P. Bunting, a delegate to the fourth Congress in 1922, reported back on 'The Colonial Labour Front' (typescript, 23 October 1922, Hoover Institute Microfilm Africa 484, reel 5). He wrote this eight months after the end of a general strike in which white miners fought to prevent their replacement by blacks at lower wages. The CPSA had erred grievously in supporting the strike, but although Bunting's paper addressed the problem of a divided working class, he did not refer to it specifically. He first quoted from the theses of the Second Congress (of 1920) which stated Comintern policy on the national and colonial questions as being:

chiefly to bring about a union of proletarian and working masses of all nations and countries for a mass revolutionary struggle leading to the overthrow of capitalism.

Quoting further, Bunting said that support for national liberation and peasant movements was to be given 'for the exclusive purpose of uniting the various units of the future proletarian parties there.' The

victory over capitalism required the complete union of the workers of Europe and the toiling masses of all nations, but to the delight of the capitalists, the workers of Europe and the colonial countries had not set up a 'united front'. Australian workers were antagonistic to Chinese and Japanese workers, US workers lynched and persecuted Negroes, and South African whites entrenched themselves against black competition, and vice versa. Continuing, he said:

The struggle against deep-rooted petty bourgeois national prejudices, manifesting themselves in various forms such as race hatred, national antagonism and anti-semitism [and he added, nigrophobia (sic) must be brought to the foreground.

Race prejudice, he said, was largely based on competition in the labour market 'and was most acute where such competition is most keenly felt.' The better paid white workers could not be expected to unite with 'cheap labour' that threatened to take their jobs, any more than cheap labour could co-operate with those (white) workers who 'became their masters' accomplices in "keeping them in their place", closing various avenues of employment and objecting to them getting "equal pay" for equal work.' Obstacles to united action had to be overcome, said Bunting, and he referred to a supplementary thesis:

The CI [Communist International] and the parties affected must struggle to develop class consciousness in the working masses of the colonies...But even such agitation or organization does not of itself produce the World United Labour Front, the 'joint struggle', the cooperation and 'union of the working masses of all countries' notwithstanding cumulative disparities of race, colour, language, pay, grade, standard of living and civilization, such as is required by the CI.

Effective propaganda needed an atmosphere of co-operation between the races but, in both South Africa and the US, most white workers were hostile to any work being done among the blacks. This was not acceptable:

We cannot leave the coloured workers alone. Men who are good enough to exploit are good enough to organize; especially in view of the enormous proportion of the world's profits that is made from the exploitation of this cheap coloured labour...

The struggle required the support of the black workers, and white workers had to be persuaded to join the fight for socialism on an international scale. In Africa, in the Pacific, and in the US,

where a real national liberation movement of the coloured people is hardly practical politics and a peasant party with hope of success hardly exists...the only revolutionary movement of the subject people is the movement of their workers organized as workers. At least that movement must be stressed as an additional weapon and not necessarily one to be postponed in order of time, for in the Labour movement nothing comes first, all arms must be brought into action at once. And as the Supplementary Thesis says, 'we must in any case struggle against control by bourgeois democratic national movements over the mass action of poor and ignorant peasants and workers for their liberation from all sorts of exploitation.'

Bunting concluded by saying that

It is as workers that whites and natives find their point of contact as well as of repulsion. The proletarian movement is, or eventually becomes, the strongest revolutionary weapon in every country; it is the one *Feste Burg* [strong fortress], now and hereafter, of the oppressed and exploited of the whole world.

There were problems in Bunting's formulations and these stemmed partly from the theses of the Communist International which failed to examine the nature of capitalism and the relative strengths of the ruling class, the working, peasant and middle classes in most colonial countries. The Comintern offered no guidelines for countries in which the working class was divided along race lines despite the extensive writings by Jones (in Moscow) on the 1922 strike in South Africa. Nonetheless, members of the CPSA accepted Bunting's report in late 1922 and it was this formulation that was so rudely discarded in 1928.

During 1923-1928 the CPSA oscillated between work with white and with black workers. It followed the example of the British party in seeking affiliation with the all-white SALP, and even supported the Labour-Nationalist alliance in the 1924 general election. Yet, simultaneously, leading party members worked with the rapidly growing Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa (the ICU) and won many leading members to the CPSA. The majority in the Young Communist League appealed to, and gained support from, the international body in Germany in directing attention towards the organization of black youth. The CPSA was making progress, but after the death of Lenin in 1924 it (and every communist party in the world), was drawn into the turmoil that enveloped the USSR.

The struggle against Trotsky and the Left Opposition commenced soon after the death of Lenin. On 13 December 1924 Bukharin led the theoretical assault. In his paper 'Concerning the Theories of Per-

manent Revolution' (reprinted in *Inprecorr*, Vol.5, No.13, 1925; extracts in R.V. Daniels, Vol.1, pp.261-65.). He said that Trotsky had underestimated the peasantry and, contrary to previous Marxist theorists (including Lenin who condemned the peasant based policy of the populists), Bukharin claimed that the peasantry was a 'great liberating force' and that consequent on the failure of the European workers to take power aid would come to the USSR from the colonial peasantry. He maintained subsequently that nationalist uprisings in the colonies would deprive imperialist nations of markets and materials, and without colonies western capitalism could not survive. Consequently, the agrarian revolution would be decisive and usher in communism.

On 22 August 1925 the Political Commission attached to the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) met in Moscow to discuss the South African situation. Bukharin was in the chair (Zinoviev having been deposed). Alexander Troyanovsky was specially invited. He had been a Bolshevik before 1913, was anti-Bolshevik in 1917; Soviet diplomat in Japan (1927-33) and the US (1933-35). He had assisted Stalin in his work on the 'National Question' but it is not known why he appeared before this sub-committee. He said little attention had been paid to South Africa, but 'the new colonial position of the Comintern,' required that the situation there be discussed. However, unable to propose any change in policy he concentrated on the role of the workers. He said that the demand by white miners for 'South Africa for the Whites...did not mean a desire to abolish black labour, but signified the supremacy of whites in South Africa and the oppression of the blacks.' The stumbling block was the lack of organization in CP activity.

He continued:

The ruling class in South Africa, and in no less degree the English government, make every endeavour to prevent any real agitation in favour of higher wages and better conditions for the native workmen, since they clearly understand that unrest among the natives would seriously affect the gold supplies for the world market. And of course the ruling class makes every effort to avert such a crisis.

Thus we see that the more educated natives are subsidized and it is firmly impressed upon them that the English government is the protector of the natives. It would be superfluous to mention that the government has at its disposal an expensive espionage system for the purpose of revealing the slightest sign of dissatisfaction and dealing with it on the spot. (Stenographic report, South African Department of Justice files, microfilm, London University).

Trojanovsky had apparently failed, but over the period 1926-30 new demands were made on the CPSA that it change its central slogan to conform with 'the new colonial position of the Comintern.'

Towards the Sixth Congress of the Comintern

After 1925 discussion on colonial liberation dominated the Comintern's agenda. First there was an abortive move in 1926 to launch a League of the Oppressed People, sponsored by veteran communists M.N. Roy (India), Pham Van Dong (Vietnam) and Korean nationalists. Thereafter the Berlin Branch of the CP convened a conference to launch the League against Imperialism in Brussels, using funds from Mexico (which aimed to lead the Latin American states against the US) and from the Kuomintang (which still projected a radical position).

The conference was attended by communists, socialists and leading nationalists from Asia. There were also black American communists, many of them former members of the African Blood Brotherhood which called for the world-wide liberation of the Negro race. South Africa sent three delegates: Josiah Tshangana Gumede, veteran member and forthcoming President of the ANC; James La Guma, formerly general secretary of the ICU and member of the CPSA; and Daniel Colrairie, secretary of the Garment Workers Union. According to *Inprecorr* (Vol.7, No.16, February 1927):

Gumede greeted the Congress in the name of the Zulu whose situation he described as socially and politically miserable. The natives were cut off from all forms of qualified work. The trade unions of the white workers refused to have anything to do with the negroes. The only party which represented the interests of the negroes and took the negroes into its ranks was the Communist Party.

In an atmosphere charged with nationalism the South Africans moved the resolution calling for 'the right of self-determination through the complete overthrow of capitalism and imperial domination.' This was carried unanimously and Gumede declared: 'We are waiting and longing for the liberation that must come'.

ECCI seized on the nationalism of the Black Brotherhood to advance the demand for 'national self determination in the southern states, where the negro forms a majority' with the right to secede from the US. Earl Browder (US party leader) later boasted: 'We could not have arrived at our programme only upon the basis of our own American experience.' (Quoted in Harvey Klehr, p.325). The 'Native Republic' slogan for South Africa was also Moscow made.

La Guma went to Moscow and met members of ECCI, the Anglo-American secretariat, and the Negro Commission, the sub-committee which took decisions on South Africa and the US. There are no reports of what was said, and Simons (p.390) gives only hypothetical reconstructions. But the background was ominous. In China, the Kuomintang had just massacred Communists and trade unionists; in Moscow, the left opposition had been defeated and was being hounded out of the Bolshevik Party; and with plans for accelerated industrialization in the USSR, Bukharin's tortoise-paced socialism was under attack.

In November Gumede and La Guma were in Moscow for the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution. The colonies were discussed under the shadow of events in China, leading in December to the expulsion of Zinoviev, Kamenev and Trotsky from the Communist Party. It is doubtful whether this background was known, or if known, was understood by the South Africans. They made no mention of them when they returned to South Africa, but they also did nothing about the League against Imperialism. Colrairie who had said that he would work to further its aims had a change of heart. Gumede again praised the Communists as the only sincere and honest fighters for the emancipation of the oppressed, but elected President of the ANC, did not set up a branch of the League in South Africa. He also accepted an engagement in the Cape to canvas for the South African Party (the party of General Smuts) in the forthcoming Cape election although Wolton, secretary of the CPSA, was a candidate.

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern

The Sixth Congress of the Comintern was due to meet in July 1928, and the new policy was sent by ECCI as a draft resolution to the Central Executive Committee of the CPSA. This document (printed in *Communist International*, Vol.6, No.2, 19 December 1928) stated that the central feature of South Africa was: 'the growing tendency to expropriate the land from the negroes and from a certain section of the white farming population...[and the endeavour by] legislative means to create a cheap market of labour power and a reserve army.'

In a crude historical sketch the resolution stated that

the country was seized by violence by foreign exploiters, and land expropriated from the natives, who were met by a policy of extermination in the first stages of colonization, and conditions of semi-slavery established for the overwhelming majority of the native masses...

'[South Africa was] a British dominion of the colonial type' [whatever that meant] and in the fight against British domination and the white bourgeoisie, the CPSA was required to advance the slogan of 'an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers and peasants republic with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.' This included the 'restitution of the land to the landless and land-poor population.' The CPSA had to build a mass party based 'chiefly upon the native toiling masses while continuing to work actively among the white workers'; bring Africans into 'the active leadership of the party, locally and centrally'; participate in 'the embryonic national organizations among the natives, such as the ANC...[which should be transformed] into a fighting nationalist revolutionary organ...based upon the trade unions, peasant organizations, etc.' The land programme of the CPSA (printed in *International*, No. 449, 2 January 1925) was criticized as insufficient. The party had called for the appropriation of the big estates and their division among landless Whites and Africans but that had to be made concrete:

The party must show that the basic question in the agrarian situation in South Africa is the land hunger of the blacks and that their interest is of prior importance in the solution of the agrarian question. Efforts should be made immediately to develop plans to organize the native peasants into peasant unions and the native agricultural workers into trade unions, while attention to the poor agrarian whites must in no way be minimized.

Besides containing crude historical generalizations the 'resolution' ignored the centrality of gold in the country's economy. The central question in South Africa in 1927 was not the land question, but the position of workers inside a highly exploitative industrializing economy. The expropriation of the land in wars of dispossession had opened the way for later proletarianization, and to revert back to peasant status (if that was indeed possible) would destroy the country's industrial base. South Africa was an advancing capitalist country and the proletariat that had been recruited to produce its gold and other minerals held the key to the social transformation of South Africa. In so far as that class was divided on racial grounds, and the uneven development of the country helped maintain that division, there was no possibility of change in South Africa in 1928. To seek such change through peasant unions and to suggest that the poor white farmers could be organized by the CPSA was patently absurd.

However, the proceedings of the Comintern Congress in July 1928 was not concerned with such niceties. Stalin gave the keynote speech

and declared that the 'stabilization' of capitalism had come to an end, giving way to a period in which imperialism was planning to attack the USSR. Socialism was being built in one country, and national communist parties should be so powerful that no capitalist country would dare attack the USSR. Accepting the analysis, the Comintern predicted a catastrophic economic crisis in capitalist countries followed by a chain of revolutions. Consequently, communists had to prepare for the seizure of power through a general strike and armed insurrection. The claim that the western powers were preparing to attack the USSR was patently false, but even more absurd was the contention that capitalism was about to be overthrown. How they could hit back and attack the USSR when they were about to be overthrown was not explained. However, to prepare for this revolution Comintern rules were altered, obliging parties to obey all ECCI directives.

Bunting's Criticism of the 'Native Republic' Slogan

When the South African delegates appeared at the Negro Commission, dominated by 'Comrade Bennett' (Petrovsky), they were given a poor hearing and treated with scarcely concealed contempt. Roux, who accepted the arguments of Bukharin and Petrovsky, wrote to Wolton of 5 September 1928 saying that he had proposed that the slogan be amended to call for 'an independent workers' and peasants' S. African Republic, with equal rights for all toilers irrespective of colour, as a basis for a native majority government.': this would meet the claims of black workers, and provide a means by which to approach white workers. The Commission rejected this and 'would not even allow a slight editorial change in the wording, because they said, any such slight change would be interpreted as a partial victory for the S. African delegation.' They had to accept the Native Republic slogan, or stand condemned as 'enemies' to be discounted, slandered and silenced. (Correspondence on Hoover microfilm.)

The confrontation was absurd. Black majority rule was not in question (this having been the unspoken policy of the CPSA for many years), and the party leadership knew that they had failed to work in the rural areas. But that was not really the issue. What was at stake was: firstly, Bukharin's insistence that the 'colonial masses', with a mainly peasant constituency, were ready for bourgeois democratic revolution; and secondly, as Bunting realised, policies in the Comintern were being shaped by the views of the Soviet leadership on events in China. It was this understanding that led to Bunting's letter to Roux of 5 December 1928 (quoted above).

Bunting's arguments followed the earlier resolutions of the Comintern and placed the proletariat at the centre of any revolutionary change. This was not a general lack of theory in the party, as Roux maintained. Bunting had far more understanding of Marxism than the time-servers in the Comintern. But something far worse was happening in the communist world. The turmoil in the Comintern had penetrated party ranks. In his letter to Roux of 5 December, after his return to South Africa, Bunting said that he had been informed of letters sent by Wolton and La Guma to the Negro Commission condemning the delegation [the Buntings and Roux]. This was inexcusable.

The party split over the new slogan. Many officials in the white trade unions, including Bill Andrews, refused to accept it. African members could not understand the need for the new slogan because they had always understood party policy to point to a black majority government, and the leaders of the communist-led black trade unions, Ben Weinbren and T.W. Thibedi, were totally opposed to the slogan. However, there was a new side to the issue that was not foreseen: racism appeared in the ranks of the CPSA in the period 1929-32. This was noted by Frank Glass (see *Searchlight South Africa*, No.1), and is contained in the coded message written by La Guma.

Of the three South African delegates to Brussels, La Guma was the only champion of the 'Native Republic' slogan. In a hand-written (and unpublished) document entitled 'Who's for the Third International: Thesis on S.A', snippets of which are quoted by Simons (p.409), La Guma asked:

whether it was 'in accord with Communist principles' to sacrifice or delay the freedom of the large majority 'in the interest of a small minority of imperialistically imbued white workers?' They had refused to hear the Party's message for twenty years...In 1922 they rose in arms on the Rand 'to perpetuate our serfdom'; now through the Labour Party, they supported anti-native legislation and the enactment of colour bars in industry. A 'ray of hope has appeared on the horizon in the shape of an effective freedom and equality with other peoples' for which 'the enslaved black masses of South Africa would be prepared to demonstrate their manhood and desire...'

But there was also dissension among party members who sided with the Comintern leaders. Wolton and his wife wanted to leave the country, and gave as their excuse the need for blacks to take over the leadership. It was suggested that La Guma should take Wolton's place as secretary, but (according to Bunting) La Guma had 'come into a small fortune' near Cape Town' and would not leave it. Also he was on bad terms with many party members and shortly thereafter

canvassed for an independent Nationalist candidate in the election in which Wolton was a candidate, and was expelled from the CPSA.

Bunting tried to soften the impact of the new slogan by talking of a Workers and Peasants Republic and denying that this would lead to a 'black dictatorship.' At the party conference he allowed 'full discussion for the sake of arriving at an understanding but in compliance with the new Comintern statutes he disallowed amendments or a reference back for further discussion (letter to Roux, 9 January 1929). In effect, he implemented a policy which ensured his own destruction and which crippled the CPSA.

Party activities did not change much after the Native Republic slogan was ratified by conference. Party members had been organizing in the smaller towns and villages and this continued. The CPSA did not organize peasant unions, and could not pay 'attention to the poor agrarian whites' as demanded by the Comintern. Then, in June 1929, before the shift to the 'left' was enforced, the CPSA scored its greatest success in the reserves. Bunting stood as parliamentary candidate in the Transkei. With Rebecca Bunting and Gana Makabeni he conducted a three month campaign, addressed crowds of thousands, and won a number of recruits to the CPSA. The three communists faced continual police harassment, and were charged on several occasions under the Native Administration Act, (which made it an offence for any person to incite racial hostility). Despite administrative pressure Bunting secured enough votes to save his deposit and that alone was a notable success.

At Manzana, Bunting started the League of African Rights, which he described as a 'designedly innocuous organization with the preservation and extension of the Native franchise and universal free education as the prime objective.' A national conference was planned for December with leading members of the ANC and ICU (as individuals and not in their official capacities) listed as sponsors. In a report to ECCI (undated) the secretary of the CPSA said the objective was to form local groups that would affiliate to the League and that the Party would maintain its full independence. There was 'no danger of the Party fusing with reformist organizations or losing its identity or its leadership of the mass struggle.'

The participation of native leaders and the affiliation of national organizations has been sought, and would be welcome if it were forthcoming, but primarily we are appealing to the native masses to unite in opposition to the Hertzog bills. It must be remembered that existing native organizations are weak and have a very small membership. The main mass

of natives throughout the country being completely unattached politically. To sweep into political activity the vast mass of unorganized natives is the main task of the League.

He said the League, which allowed the CPSA to extend its influence, would emulate the British Chartists by launching a 'Petition of African Rights' embodying 'popular demands of the democratic revolution.' This was not a reformist gesture and the 'reformist' leaders were fighting the petition and boycotting it. The party was promoting the slogan *Mayibuye!* (Return to us our country!) and would organize meetings and mass demonstrations., improving the Party's ability to resist moves by the government to introduce drastic legislation and possible banning.

ECCI was not moved and insisted that the League be dissolved. Douglas and Molly Wolton, the main proponents of the Comintern's slogan left for Moscow in July 1929 and claimed there that the existing Party leadership was reformist and tinged with white racism. On their return they demanded change. The CPSA was not revolutionary enough; it lagged behind mass discontent; it should not support reformists like Gumede or petty bourgeois nationalist bodies like the ICU and the ANC. The party had to 'strive to organize mass actions of the peasants,' linking such actions to an 'Independent Native Republic,' and the confiscation of all the land (Simons, pp.438-40).

A Case of Political Suicide

It is not my intention to provide a history of the CPSA, but only to trace the effect of Comintern policy on the CPSA in those crucial years when careful organizational work might have built a mass movement. However, the course was set by ECCI. Isolated and torn by internal squabbling, the CPSA launched an anti-pass campaign for Dingane's Day (16 December) 1930 under slogans such as that coined by Josiah Ngedlane, a party activist:

Freedom or Death. Let us go forward in the spirit of Dingaan, Makana and Moshesh to free our country from white imperialism.

The campaign failed. Approximately 150 passes were burned in Johannesburg; 300 in Potchefstroom; 400 in Pretoria, and 3,000 in Durban. In Durban, however, the slogan 'Freedom or Death' became reality when the party organizer Johannes Nkosi and three others were killed and twenty others seriously injured by police who came prepared for the skirmish and attacked the demonstrators. The party pressed on, saying the campaign was justified, and called for its

extension in locations, farms, mines and factories. The government banished party members, prohibited public gatherings, expelled organizers from towns. The CPSA was isolated, the Woltons resigned and went to Britain, and party membership plummeted. Alongside this debacle, the ICU in Natal was decimated, and with the ANC exerting little influence, there was little opposition left in the country. Not until the Comintern reversed its policy in 1935 (a move decided in Moscow with little to do with conditions in South Africa) was the CPSA allowed to drop the Native Republic slogan. By this time its total membership in the country had fallen to 150.

[The Native Republic slogan was opposed, for different reasons, by persons who supported the left opposition in South Africa. Their history, and Trotsky's critical response to their arguments, will be discussed in the next issue of Searchlight South Africa].

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