DOCUMENT 2:
Pamphlet ‘The Labour Party’s Duty in the War, a Reply to the “See It Through” Policy, Signed by Twenty Members of the South African Labour Party’.

At its Administrative Council on August 2nd, 1914, the South African Labour Party passed the following resolution, which is its latest pronouncement on the question of the war itself:

‘The SALP at a General meeting of delegates expresses its protest against the Capitalist Governments of Europe in fomenting a war which can only benefit the International Armaments Manufacturer’s Ring and other enemies of the working class, and appeals to the workers of the world to organise and refrain from participating in this unjust war.’

Against this it may be urged that most of the expressed resolutions of the Party in past years lean if anything towards a condonation of military necessities. In any case, the dead hand of the past cannot be tolerated as an authority in the solution of present problems within the Labour movement.

The one thing we have to guide us in seeking a reply to this important question is the Socialist objective of the Party, and all the ideals and aspirations which that objective implies.

Our Socialism is not a building laid upon a finished foundation, nor a compendium of electoral mandates given on bygone issues, but a living growth unfolding itself into ever newer and finer conceptions. The soul of it is freedom. We, the people of today, must be its interpreters; and we alone must decide in the light of fresh experience how it shall be applied.

As a Labour Party therefore infused with the Socialist ideal, we have duties towards the community in which we find ourselves. These are performed through the uplifting of the status of the working class by the application of principles based on the economic researches of the foremost thinkers of the industrial era. The iron law of competition is supreme in Society. One class imposes its will upon and exploits another class, which has to accept the moral but no less real slavery
of wages in lieu of starvation as the condition of existence. This inexorable struggle cuts a dividing line across nations, with the result that Labour follows Capital in becoming more and more international.

Because therefore the Labour movement has concentrated its activities on the interests of the workers, it has been the tactic of the defenders of Capitalism to describe it as a sectional movement, and an attempt to substitute one tyranny for another.

But the aim of the Labour movement is so to uplift the working class as to abolish all class distinctions, with a view to including all men in the realm of useful art and joyous labour. This is not to the taste of Capitalists as such; but it is for the truest welfare of all countries, commonwealths and Empires that the Labour movement adhere at all times to this, the only reason for its existence.

Let us then endeavour to apply this reason for our existence to the present situation.

There is no denying the fact that serious differences of opinion exist among members of the South African Labour Party on the subject of the war.

What then is our duty in the present crisis? One answer to this question has been given for a section of the Party in Mr Creswell’s manifesto.

Mr Creswell speaks of ‘duty to the country of which I am a citizen.’

Let us admit for the sake of argument that our first duty is to our own country. But what is that duty; to destroy or to save? And which is our country: South Africa or the Empire?

The Labour or democratic principle and the Imperialist principle cannot subsist in the one policy.

There are so-called Socialists who bow to the shibboleths of Imperialism, and Imperialists who glibly claim to be Socialists. But the answers to these questions are inevitably those of Imperialism versus Socialism.

Mr Creswell’s policy spells an autocracy from without; whereas Socialism must imply real self-government for South Africa.

His policy of seeing the Empire through, so far from embracing all sections of the community, is perniciously anti-national in its influence. In this policy ‘our country’ means the Empire. It seeks to drag South Africa into Imperial conflicts not of our making. It disregards the sentiments of a whole people in this country who cannot be expected to feel any of the ties of Empire (still less the ‘ties of blood’) other than the irksome and undemocratic ones; a disregard which has quite recently plunged them into endless dissension and misery to the exclusion of all real progress. How then, by insisting upon Imperial ties as paramount, can the policy of seeing the Empire through contribute to make ours that truly national Party for which Mr Creswell professes to yearn.

In January, 1914, Mr Creswell issued an appeal to our Dutch fellow workers. Can he appeal to them today with the same confidence that the object is as worthy? That is the test, and a sufficient one, of the extent to which the ‘ties of blood’ theory has enticed him from the true interests of the working class.

The Socialist attitude, on the other hand, declares that Imperialism is a delusion
and a snare. A Commonwealth of Nations drawn together by kindred thought and speech in the arts of peace is an ideal for which we can wholeheartedly work. But an Imperial authority committing without their consent, nominally self-governing communities to policies the consequences of which they are compelled to endure is a travesty of that ideal and of the essence of democracy. And we maintain that our first duty towards the consummation of such an ideal lies in the emancipation of South Africa from the anti-social evils which beset all countries alike under the present capitalist system.

To paraphrase Mr Creswell, we may also claim that we are no worshippers of phrases. It leaves us quite cold to be told that this or that course is made imperative by the necessities of Empire.

Our country is at all times in danger from within. It is in danger from without chiefly because it is tied to the wheel of Empire. Imperialism perpetuates racial dissensions within; and Imperialism, by rousing international jealousies, is largely responsible for any menace that may exist from without.

Are we then unmindful of the fate of our brothers in Europe? On the contrary, we have natural relationships beyond South Africa, not only with the British, but with the whole International working class movement; not only with the countries of the Empire, but with humanity at large. For while Imperial ties and commitments constitute the chief obstacle to the harmonious welding together of the peoples of South Africa, our relations with the International Socialist movement enlarge our conceptions of local needs, and enlighten us as to the methods of meeting them. Moreover, our duty to our brothers in Europe can only be performed by keeping alive our International working class relations. For it is only thus that we can be conscious that Labour in all countries, as in South Africa, is performing this paramount duty of making Governments pause for considerations of humanity. And without the influence of working class organisations operating internationally by propaganda or by economic pressure the limits to which the pride of rulers may prolong the senseless slaughter is hardly definable. We stand by International Socialism. We know that it is faithful in all countries. In spite of many failures and defections, in spite of the tremendous trial to which it has been put, in spite of the pressure of Governments, of censorships and suppressions, of the lure of public office and applause, we exult in the fact that it is still a magnificent reality and will triumphantly emerge from the present dark hour, hereafter to become the one and only power that can emancipate the world from the savagery of its military and capitalist institutions.

What then is our duty to South Africa and the Empire?

Mr Creswell wishes us to confine our efforts to gaining economic concessions from capitalism, and to making the Government realize that in a national emergency the people's interest come first.

We have many present day examples of how this works out in practice with those whose policy it is to 'see it through' without embarrassing the Government; as, for instance, in the South Wales Miners' strike, where the blindness of the Executive to everything but 'seeing it through' results in their siding with the Government
and the employers against the men, in the latter’s demand for decent life. If Governments cannot be forced to discuss peace, how can any substantial economic concessions be wrung from them?

Mr Creswell asks Labour to put salt on the tail of Capitalism, but to leave it to pursue its militarist depredations.

War is the great Niagara over which thunders the accumulated brutalities and deceits of the competitive system.

When war breaks out Labour cannot confine its attention to economic evils, but must attack war itself as the concrete expression of them. Otherwise Labour is degraded to being made the ambulance corps of militarism, content only to follow and pick up its victims wherever it cares to ravage and despoil. Such an auxiliary position, no matter what temporary political success it may bring, must mean the extinction of the Labour movement as a force by lowering its status from being a movement of emancipation to that of a charitable organisation. Mr Creswell says that when men are called ‘to sacrifice their lives in thousands… our duty is to see that inanimate property and the privilege rising from its possession bears its fullest share.’ In effect, tolerate the juggernaut which sacrifices ‘lives in thousands.’ See only to the salvage of its victims.

We most emphatically protest against such a reducing of the status of the labour movement, of which we form a component part. We shall attack war itself, confident that by so doing we are attacking the key to all the evils for whose abolition we exist.

The Imperialist solution of ‘seeing it through’ is therefore unworthy of the Labour Party.

It is the Labour Party’s duty to the country, not at all hazards to win the next elections, but to stand firm through every evil report to the principle of peace and international goodwill and to the identity of interest of the international working class in war and in peace.

If it is always the mission of Labour to give fuller life, still more so is it its duty to refrain from aiding or acquiescing in the destruction of life.

How alluring is the Capitalist applause bestowed upon those Labour men who forsake what they held as dear in time of peace! For it is to the interest of the Capitalist parties to endeavour to get Labour to relinquish its militant attitude. They want us to adopt their standards. They frantically strive to get us to sink our own identity in all countries by forsaking our special work of recalling humanity to reason. This they seek to do in order that Labour may be made accessory with them in the fell work of slaughter, against the evil day when a disillusioned and bleeding working class shall raise a terrible accusing finger at those who, for private or party ends, have so misled them into these orgies of fratricide and hate.

We repeat therefore that only by considering the claims of humanity as a whole can the Labour Party serve the people of this country in the present conflict. This is the rock upon which we stand in the firm faith that what is in the interest of humanity cannot but be the highest good of our own country also.
DECLARATION OF PRINCIPLES

We, the undersigned members of the South African Labour Party are concerned with the maintenance of its Socialist ideals as contained in its objective. We find ourselves in fundamental disagreement with the policy on the War for the Labour Party proposed in Mr Creswell’s recent manifesto. We are therefore resolved to take such steps as will give the best practicable expression to such Socialist ideals in their relation to the War at the forthcoming Conference of the Labour Party to be held on the 22nd August, 1915.

WE HOLD:

That the well-being of the country at the present juncture is to be found, not in the policy of ‘seeing it through’ expressed in such manifesto, but in the endeavour to substitute reason for the appeal to brute force as a solution of the present world conflict.

That inasmuch as the War has been caused mainly by the scramble of the financial and commercial interests of the various countries for markets and spheres of influence, by secret diplomacy, and Imperial ambitions resulting in huge competition in armaments, the Labour Party as representing the working class can accept no responsibility for the war or for its prosecution. And since war, however successfully waged, can only bring disaster to the working class, it is our supreme duty to agitate for the cessation of the fratricidal struggle to which the peoples of Europe have been blindly committed.

This is made still more imperatively our duty in view of the agitation for peace increasingly carried on by working class agencies in all the belligerent countries.

To this end we make the following proposals for a Labour Party policy on the War, believing that it is the duty of the South African Labour Party to endeavour to awaken public opinion to the futility as well as the iniquity of resorting to war as a solution of international differences:-

(a) In view of the vast suffering and distress caused by this war, and the certainty that any good results to be obtained can never compensate for the evils now obtaining, we consider that steps should be taken by our Government in conjunction with the Imperial and other Governments to end the war and thus relieve humanity from its present crushing burden.

(b) As a step towards this end we consider that the Imperial Government should immediately state the limits within which it is prepared to discuss terms of peace. This will enable the people of all countries, neutral and belligerent, to express their views and ultimately to put pressure on their various governments to come to a just arrangement.

(c) Since the mass of the people in each of the countries now at war believe themselves to be fighting, not as aggressors, but in self-defence and for their national existence, there can be no irreconcilable differences between them; and their common ideals afford a basis on which a magnanimous and honourable peace might be established. We therefore declare opposition to the despatch of any South African contingent to Europe.
(d) Further do we declare that in the event of such a contingent being raised we will oppose the use of compulsion in any form, economic or otherwise, in the recruiting therefore.

(e) As a general principle we declare that no territory ought to change hands at the conclusion of the present war except in accordance with the ascertained wish of the people in the territory concerned. We maintain that the territory known as German South-West Africa should be dealt with under this principle, provided the interests of the natives and coloured populations are adequately safeguarded.

(f) In view of the responsibilities placed upon the Dominions in war as a result of Imperial diplomatic acts, we demand that a place be found for the representatives of the Dominions in the sphere of Imperial diplomacy, so that their powers in peace shall adequately control their commitments in war. We desire to point out that the only alternative to this course is the acquisition of increased national autonomy for the Union and an absolute release from Imperial commitments, by e.g., the election of the Governor-General by the people or Parliament of this country.

(g) We bind ourselves to co-operate with the International Labour Movement in its efforts to restore peace in Europe.

(h) While not committing ourselves to every detail, we broadly subscribe to the following cardinal points in the policy of the British Union of Democratic Control as a policy of reconstruction after the war:

1. No province shall be transferred from one Government to another without the consent, by plebiscite or otherwise, of the population of such province.

2. No treaty, arrangement or undertaking shall be entered upon in the name of Great Britain without the consent of Parliament. Adequate machinery for ensuring democratic control of foreign policy shall be created.

3. The Foreign Policy of Great Britain shall not be aimed at creating Alliances for the purpose of maintaining the Balance of Power, but shall be directed to concerted action between the Powers, and the setting up of an International Council, whose deliberations and decisions shall be public, with such machinery for securing international agreement as shall be the guarantee of an abiding peace.

4. Great Britain shall propose as part of the peace settlement, a plan for the drastic reduction, by consent, of the armaments of all the belligerent Powers, and to facilitate that Policy shall attempt to secure the general nationalisation of the manufacture of armaments, and the control of the export of armaments from one country to another.

SIGNED:

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Christina Barnet  David Ivon Jones  Colin Wade, MPC
A F Crisp, MPC  W Light, MPC  Andrew Watson

JOHANNESBURG, 20th July, 1915
**Editorial Note:**

At the special conference in Johannesburg on August 22, Creswell put forward a resolution pledging wholehearted support for the war effort, while Colin Wade moved an amendment setting out the 'War on War' policy, opposing the dispatch of South African troops, calling for an end to the imperial commitment and pledging co-operation with the international socialist movement for peace and disarmament. Creswell's motion was carried by 82 votes to 30, whereupon the anti-war section walked out of the conference. They were not giving up the fight, however. Almost immediately they decided to form The International League of the South African Labour Party, hoping to be able to carry on their anti-war agitation from within the Labour Party. On September 10, 1915, they published the first issue of their weekly organ The International, which remained the organ of the League and later, under the names of The South African Worker and Umsebenzi of the Communist Party of South Africa until 1938.