

## SECTION I

# Socialists and Internationalists

### INTRODUCTION

The Communist Party of South Africa was formed on July 30, 1921, but socialist organisations and socialist thinking had existed in various forms in South Africa since the turn of the century. The South African Labour Party came into existence in 1910 with a socialist objective in its constitution. For historical reasons it grew out of the white labour movement and its membership was almost exclusively white. The backing it received from the white electorate may be gauged from the fact that by 1915 it had 8 members of Parliament and 23 members of the Transvaal Provincial Council—a reflection of the tense battles waged by the workers and their trade unions during the years since Union, and especially in 1913 and 1914. Socialist-minded men had risen into the positions of top leadership in the Labour Party, with W.H. Andrews as chairman and D. Ivon Jones as secretary. The 1913 conference of the Labour Party decided to admit Coloureds to membership and also to affiliate to the Second International, the aim of which was to secure the implementation of the *Communist Manifesto* slogan: 'Workers of all countries, unite!'

It was the outbreak of the First World War which sorted out the true socialists within the Labour Party and tempered the steel from which the Communist Party was eventually forged. For as Lenin pointed out, war is the inevitable product of imperialism, and no true socialist could allow himself to support an imperialist war.

At the Stuttgart conference of the Second International in 1907, a resolution opposing 'wars between capitalist states', in the drafting of which Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg had a hand, stated in part:

'If a war threatens to break out, it is the duty of the working class and of its parliamentary representatives in the countries involved to exert every effort to prevent the outbreak of war, using all appropriate means, which naturally vary and rise according to the degree of sharpness of the class struggle and of the general political agitation.

'Should the war none the less break out, it is their duty to intervene to bring it promptly to an end, and to strive with all their energies to utilise the economic and political crisis brought about by the war in order to stir up politically the masses of the people and hasten the downfall of capitalist class rule'.

## 2 *South African Communists Speak*

These two sentences were incorporated in the manifesto issued by the Basle congress of the Second International in 1912 which emphasised the responsibility of the international working class to prevent the threatening outbreak of war in Europe. A version of this resolution was endorsed by the 1913 Labour Party conference in South Africa, and influenced the Administrative Council of the Party to pass a resolution on August 2, 1914 (two days before the British Government declared war on Germany) expressing 'its protest against the capitalist governments of Europe in fomenting a war' and appealing to the workers of the world to 'organise and refrain from participating in this unjust war'.

Although the anti-war section was in the leadership of the Labour Party and dominated the Administrative Council and the Party machine, the membership was not united on the issue. The right-wing wanted to support the Botha government's war effort and the right-wing Labour leader Frederic Creswell immediately joined the forces and went on active service. More important, the Labour Party journal *The Worker* was edited by Wilfred Wybergh, a close friend of Creswell, who used the party organ to conduct a blatant pro-war policy in defiance of party policy and the decisions of the party conference and the Administrative Council. Fearing to provoke a split in the Party, the anti-war section, headed by Colin Wade, D. Ivon Jones, S.P. Bunting and P.R. Roux, refrained from using its positions of power to promote its policies, and instead formed the War on War League in September 1914. The League published a weekly journal *The War on War Gazette* to counter the chauvinist polemics of *The Worker*, but after 13 issues the Gazette was closed down by the censor at the end of November.

In its first issue the *War on War Gazette* (September 19, 1914) declared that its constitution was simple. Its members 'pledge themselves to oppose this or any other war at all times and at all costs'. That was all.

To many the League's pronouncements may have appeared sometimes to border on pacifism, and in fact the Labour Party chairman W.H. Andrews refused to join it for this reason, as well as for fear of splitting the party. But the basic plank of the War on War League members was international working class solidarity against capitalism and war. *The War on War Gazette* declared in its issue of October 24, 1914, that the anti-war struggle was inextricably linked with the world-wide social revolution:

'The War on War of the future, the beginnings of whose strategy we believe we in our small way are helping to prepare, must be something more world-shaking than even the present Armageddon; something involving unprecedented discipline and daring, sacrifice and heroism, desperate conflict with all Military Governments and ruling classes – a revolution, bloodless we hope, calling for profound patience and genius in its preparation and execution, but inspired by an inflexible determination to destroy utterly the Iron Heel which crushes the world with its ever-increasing weight of militarism and death'.

When the annual conference of the Labour Party met in East London in January 1915, it was found that the majority of delegates were sticking loyally to the Stuttgart-Basle declarations and supported the anti-war position of the

Administrative Council. But unwilling to impose an anti-war resolution which would have split the party, the leadership produced a compromise which allowed each party member 'freedom of conscience' to support or oppose the war. This 'neutrality resolution', as it came to be called, was passed unanimously. W.H. Andrews was re-elected chairman and D. Ivon Jones secretary and the Administrative Council remained in the hands of the anti-war section. Nevertheless, the controversy continued.