

2. Comrade Ivon Jones will also serve for South Africa on the Oriental Committee.

3. Comrade Barlin will sit on the Theses Committee on the 'World Crisis'.

We remain
Fraternally yours,

Sam Barlin

D. Ivon Jones

South African delegation for The Communist Party of South Africa.

RGASPI, 490/1/35/18.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

Stamped: 1) Archives of the Comintern

No. 380.

Moscow

2) 32.

(in Russian)

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Statement of South African Delegation to Comintern, 16 July 1921

MEMORANDUM TO THE SMALL BUREAU OF THE COMINTERN ON THE SITUATION IN AFRICA

The South African Delegation has already submitted a report on the state of the Communist movement in that country. Suffice it to say here that a United Communist Party¹ has now been formed by the linking of the ~~the~~ various groups with the International Socialist League, which was the Left Wing of the South African Labour Party that broke away from the latter body in 1915.

In the reports and articles already submitted by us to the International comrades, we have tried to emphasize the peculiar conditions of the South African Communist movement, namely:

(1). The presence in South Africa of two streams of the proletariat, white and black, performing complementary industrial functions, with two widely different standards of life.

(2). The very primitive character of the Negro race, just emerging from the tribal system, and the consequent exclusively white character of the Communist Movement.

1. Communist Party of South Africa (see footnote 1, document no. 5, vol. D).

(3). The Communist Party is forced by the logic of the class struggle to place the question of solidarity with the native workers in the forefront of its propaganda among the white workers. This principle is the touchstone of Communism for us. Nevertheless, owing to the slow development of the Native Labour Movement, the occasions on which this slogan can be made a burning issue are not so frequent as they otherwise might be with an accelerated native movement. A native strike gives the Communists ideal opportunities ^{of} placing the revolutionary test before the white workers, either to side with their masters ^{or} with their black fellow workers. But while the native workers remain unorganised, the white workers lag at the stage of Class Collaboration; and between the two, the Communist movement hangs fire.

(4). Normally, all the activity of the South African Communists is among the whites, although the subject matter of propaganda largely includes the native labour question. Our members and supporters find themselves in white Trade Unions, and are preoccupied with the fight against class collaboration there. There are hardly any native linguists among the white Communists.² The common medium of expression between whites and natives is 'Kitchen Kaffir', a very inadequate kind of native esperanto. On the occasions when we have issued leaflets in the native languages we have had to depend on native translators. All Communist activity among the native Africans has to be mainly illegal. For this, the Communist Party organisation, besides ^{being} inadequate, is wholly unsuited.

(5). South Africa is the entrance to the great territories further north. We have to consider not only the negro population of the Government of South Africa. The railway line runs right up for two thousand miles to the Belgian Congo. Members of the South African Communist movement are to be found there also, although no Communist Group; and one member was recently expelled from the territory for Trade Union agitation. For this vast native population, however, the Communist movement can only draw on white sources for financial and other support. All natives are under the strictest passport control. The few educated natives are easily lured away by the enticements of social equality and an assured existence equivalent to their education. Thus, as the native population of South Africa, (to say nothing of territories outside the Union), outnumbers the whites by six to one, the task of the Communist Party is beyond its resources at least in that proportion; in addition the presence of a slave cast side by side with white skilled labour makes the latter an unfavourable recruiting ground for obtaining the necessary minimum of Communist workers.

We would therefore suggest that, in a country like Africa, the small white working class should be regarded more as a purchase-hold for the direct action of the Comintern, than as wholly responsible for the Communist movement

2. White communists with the knowledge of African languages.

among the Africans. We white colonists are a shifting population. For some of us, the only tie with South Africa is the Communist Movement itself.

(In passing, we may point out that the presence of a small class of white skilled workers in India who have already given proofs of militancy by coming out on strike with their Indian fellow-workers, offers a good opening for the education of possible Communist elements, powerful and influential in proportion to their numbers, in India also.)

We consider that these conditions entitle us to urge upon the Comintern that the African Negroes, like the Indians, should come directly under its initiative. We have already shown in our Report that the South African natives, the most advanced in Africa, offer good material for the Communist movement. They have already given proofs of their willingness to fight against oppression.

We submit that the matter of the African Negroes is sufficiently important to send a Comintern representative to South Africa to survey the whole Negro question and its relation to the Communist Party. Comrade Rutgers, for instance, has taken a keen interest in the Indian and African movements. Incidentally, his Dutch nationality would make him a competent judge of the Dutch Nationalist movement in South Africa in its bearings on the negro question and its relation to the Communist movement.

In Comrade S.P. Bunting, of Johannesburg, the Comintern representative would find a member who has devoted his whole energy to the movement among the native Africans, so far as his work for daily bread allows. This comrade has been most active in forming education groups of young natives, and organising a native Union. But he is continually driven back by lack of funds and the pre-occupation of his fellow members in the work among the whites. He has tried to start a newspaper in the native languages. But the Party could not come to ^{his} aid without jeopardising the funds of its official organ, 'The International'.

Owing to their miserable conditions, the natives are not able to give financial help for the necessary preliminary work. What is required is to assure economic sustenance to a few native workers as agitators and organisers, such as Cetyiwe,³ Mashabala⁴ and others who have already made attempts, some successful, to organise their brothers. This primitive mass is waiting to be stirred. Given the necessary funds and a comrade like Bunting who is a capable administrator and journalist, we are convinced that great results could be achieved. A Communist newspaper in the native languages is a crying need; also schools for illiterate workers. The bourgeoisie are beginning to realise the need of satisfying the Negro's craving for education. It remains for us to decide

3. A. Cetyiwe (Cetyiwe), an ANC organiser in Johannesburg, was arrested and charged with incitement to violence after African sanitary workers' strike (1918) in Johannesburg.

4. Masabalala.

whether that education shall be given to him in a Capitalist or in a Communist medium.

We trust that the Comintern will take into consideration, and give us their instructions on the movement among the Africans. We hope that the Comintern will not content itself with Manifestoes from Moscow, which, owing to the lack of local machinery, will not reach the masses to whom they are directed. The pre-occupations of an early European revolution should not create an atmosphere of laissez-aller towards the Negroes. It should rather be an argument for forestalling the bourgeoisie against any attempt to use Africa as a base for the counter-revolution. Conversely, the idea of a prolonged lease of life for European Capitalism should also be an argument for action in the work of forming proletarian parties among the Indian and African populations to accelerate the world revolution. There is above all the supreme revolutionary duty of rallying all peoples to Communism irrespective of motives of strategy.

We hope that the Comintern will give us an opportunity for exchange of views on the matter before our return to South Africa.

With Communist Greetings,

D. Ivon Jones
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Sam Barlin  
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16 July, 1921.
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South African Delegation to the Third Congress of the Communist International.

N.B. The word 'Negro' is never used in South Africa, except its corrupted form 'Nigger' in an insulting sense. Technically, the Negro is the more northern native. The Southern race of Africa is known by their own term 'Bantu' to ethnologists. But we have used the better known word 'Negro' to cover the lot for the sake of clearness.

RGASPI, 495/64/25/24-7.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

Stamped: Archives of the Comintern

(in Russian)

No. 3895.

Moscow

Inscription: 26.  
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