

journey on or about the first of October. It is the opinion of the members of the firm here, that he should remain for a longer period until the local sales conference which will be convened towards the end of the year.²

We wish you would advise us immediately on this matter by cable and state whether our request will be granted. If not, kindly inform us the exact date when our friend must leave. It is most urgent, for a number of vital reasons, that we have this information at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely yours
Dennis

RGASPI, 495/64/119/19.

Original in English.

Handwritten.

Stamped: 17.SEP.1932. no. 6633.

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Letter from E. Dennis to Comintern, 22 October 1932¹

22.X.1932.

Dear Comrades,

I have just returned from a two weeks trip to Capetown and therefore have been delayed in sending this report. My trip to Capetown was made necessary because of the very unsatisfactory work of the Party (loss of 90% of the new

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2. The 'Main Office' was, obviously, the ECCI, the 'sales manager', Eugene Dennis himself, 'the firm' – the CC or PB of the CPSA, and the 'local sales conference' – the party conference that was to take place at the end of 1932.

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1. The date is established from an appendix to this document (RGASPI, 495/64/79/58) that is dated. The appendix also bears two stamps, the Comintern registration stamp (no. 8312, 26 November 1932) and 'strictly confidential', as well as two inscriptions ('Letter from South Africa' in pencil and 'Safarov' in pen, probably by Safarov himself. Of all Dennis's reports to Moscow during his stay in South Africa this seems to be the only one translated into Russian, obviously specifically for the Organisational Department of the ECCI where the translation was housed (RGASPI, 495/25/1224/23–40).

recruits, decline in the active membership of the S and HWU² from 120 to 20, loss of influence and members at the railway shops, failure to participate or respond to a number of spontaneous actions, fishermen's strike, slaughtermen's strike, dockers organised protests against speed-up, etc., etc. – this plus the beginnings of groupings within the DPC).

Instead of analyzing the reasons for this situation now, and the decided improvement effected, I will forward separately a copy of a letter which I sent to Capetown some two weeks prior to my trip, as well as will enclose a supplementary report to cover a number of points not raised in this letter.

In this report I will briefly comment on certain phases of Party work and on a number of points raised in your letter of August 4th.

1. Just a word about the size of the Party membership. Since May the Party has recruited some 550 workers. Of this number a little over 400 have been retained. In round figures the membership now stands at 500 in comparison with 53 in April. However, only 50% of the Party members are organised in functioning nuclei; the balance while carrying on a certain amount of Communist activity do not yet regularly participate in the work and life of the lower Party organisations. The CC is devoting the greatest attention to overcome this situation, to the problems of consolidating its organisational achievements; particularly to build and activate the nuclei, to retain, train and activate both new and old members; to develop struggles through the units.

In this connection the figures regarding the status of the Party in the mines is quite instructive (I refer only to the Rand – to the gold mines – we are not yet in a position to check up and confirm the work of the Party in the coal mines in Natal where we have recently established two mine nuclei). Since May about 125 native miners have been brought into the Party. Of these, 52 are set up in 8 functioning nuclei; contact is maintained with about 50 others, individually and through Umsebenzi, and they distribute Umsebenzi, carry on agitation, recruit, etc.; only some 25 of the mine recruits have not been retained.

While the Party's activity in the mines is still far from satisfactory, the small results achieved are of considerable significance. For today, as the above figures indicate, the number of Party members in the mines exceeds the total Party membership as of 5 months ago. The same holds true regarding the number of mine units, as well as of the daily ACTIVITIES of the mine nuclei. And not least in the way of importance is the fact that through the miners the Party is establishing valuable connections with the reserves and territories. One of the chief reasons responsible for the advances in the mines is that the entire activity of the Party in the mines is directly controlled and led by the P.B.

2. Seamen and Harbour Workers' Union.

In my opinion the start which has been made in the mines – together with the Party's activities at the docks and among the farm labourers – marks the real beginning of building a Bolshevik Party in South Africa. At least it signifies that the Party is now being rooted in the largest basic industry in the country and is beginning to solve the problems of Party building and consolidation, of developing mass work under conditions of complete illegality.

What is necessary now, of course, is not only the widest extension of all Party activities in the mines as well as of AFTU; is not only a firmer consolidation of the units, intensive training of each miner and the development of leading cadres from among the miners – but bound up with this is the immediate vital question of organising definite struggles under the independent leadership of the Party. This is the next step, the present burning task with which the Party is faced – a task which the Party is now in a position to solve in a much more decisive manner than it has in solving the heretofore 'impossible' task of penetrating into the mines. Needless to say, the problem of HOW to fulfil this task, occupies a central place in all discussions and decisions of the P.B.

2. A few words regarding AFTU. Generally, the organisational status and the mass work of AFTU remain most unsatisfactory. With the possible exception of the work of the Party in building and guiding the activities of the Seamen and Harbour Workers' Union (S and HWU), the Unemployed Councils and a few isolated trade union groups (railway, farm labourers, etc.) – the directives of the ECCI and the corresponding decisions of the CC for building mass Red trade unions and developing strike struggles, still remain to be carried out. I do not propose to go into the reasons for this as the analysis of the CC in its July resolution still applies. The essential question in connection with building AFTU, etc. is that of putting into practice our excellent resolutions and decisions, particularly those in regards to united front tactics from below and to independent leadership in the strike movement.

There are, however, a few positive features in the work of the Party in building AFTU and the Councils, outstanding of which is the building of the S and HWU. The S and HWU now has over 250 members (100 of whom have become passive as a result of the shortcomings of the Party in the Capetown District), has fairly strong committees in Durban and Capetown and active members in Mossel Bay, Knysna, Saldanha³ Bay and in several ports in South West Africa. With the opening of the Seamen's Clubs in Durban and Capetown the activities of the Union will be further strengthened. The Union has 7 functioning ship's committees and one dockers' group. 90% of the membership of the Union are non-Party. However, Party fractions now function in Durban and Capetown.

3. Saldanha.

The opening of the Seamen's Clubs was facilitated both by the initiative of the members of the Union and their support, and reflects the growth of the Union and its activities. As to strike action – in Durban the Union has organised 40% of the whaling fleet and was concretely preparing for strike struggles – but due to the early closing of the whaling season this month it was necessary to reconsider the call for strike action. At the docks, effective united front preparations for strike struggles are underway, both in Durban and now in Capetown. Also, this month the Party has received letters from groups of dockers both in East London and in Port Elizabeth requesting training and asking for guidance to build the Union and to prepare for strike action – these letters were the result of the agitation carried on by non-Party union members who had visited these ports. Concrete letters of directives and literature have been sent to these ports, as well as fares to send three dockers (2 from Port Elizabeth and one from East London) to the second national training school of the Party which has just opened in Capetown.

In general it can be said that in the past few months the S and HWU has been considerably strengthened, particularly in Durban. As in the mines, the question of organising concrete struggles round the burning daily demands of the dockers and seamen is the order of the day and is of decisive importance for extending the organisation and activities of both the S and HWU and the Party. In view of the extremely favourable objective possibilities, the fighting spirit of the workers and the growing influence and strength of the Union and Party at the docks, I believe with more intensive concentration and the correct application of the line of the Party and its specific directives that within the next few months we will be able to secure effective mass strike action in Durban, Capetown, Port Elizabeth and perhaps in East London. This is not an optimistic prophecy but a sober estimate based on the present work of the Party and the existing possibilities.

Under the leadership of the Party, Unemployed Councils in Johannesburg and Capetown are beginning to develop militant, mass actions. For instance, in Johannesburg as a result of a number of well prepared mass demonstrations the Unemployed Councils have been able to force sufficient food and supplies from stores and shops to feed 225 daily; furthermore, following several fighting demonstrations the unemployed through the Councils forced the Native Affairs Department in Johannesburg to stop tax collections and the deportation of the jobless natives.

The chief weakness of the work of the Councils is the lack of connection with the European unemployed and with the employed workers, Native as well as white. Likewise the activities of the Councils have not been effectively extended into the locations and working class districts. Steps are being taken to overcome this, especially to draw the organised workers in the reformist unions into joint actions round common demands (lower rents; against dismissals, evictions, pass regulations, tax collections, etc.).

3. The Party is now in a position to report slight inroads amongst the peasantry in Southern Natal. In the government reserves of Nilaza⁴ and New Germany, 20 poor peasants (and one petty chief!) have been recruited for the Party. And what is of great importance is, that under the leadership of the Party the peasants were organised to drive out the government tax and rent collectors and compelled the local magistrates and chiefs to suspend the collection of rent and taxes.

These activities were organised under the direction of the Party centre and the Durban and Pinetown committees. Specifically, they were the immediate result of the activities of groups of unemployed railwaymen and farm labourers (Party members) who were sent from Pinetown to the reserves. Of more than passing significance, is the fact that this movement is being developed and led as an anti-imperialist struggle.

The Party has issued a peasants' bulletin for this territory, as well as increased the circulation of Umsebenzi there by 48 dozen. We have taken up with the Pinetown and Nilaza comrades in a most concrete fashion the problems of Party building, the establishment of small, illegal peasant committees and broad, loose committees of action; the extension of the above-mentioned mass actions, both territorially and to a higher political level; the coordination of the peasant movement in Southern Natal with that in Zululand and the formation of a mass, semi-legal, anti-imperialist organisation.

There are also two field organisers of the CC working elsewhere in Natal (one in Central Zululand, in Giba's territory;⁵ where as you recall mass, armed anti-imperialist struggles, as well as inter-tribal fights took place last year). But we have no reports from them for the past 5 or 6 weeks. In the past month the Party has secured through the miners and the unemployed a number of new Umsebenzi readers in the Transkei and Basutholand, and is establishing direct correspondence with them. These connections should prove extremely valuable and certainly will be systematically followed up.

4. A few points concerning the organisation of the mass struggle against imperialist repression and the attempts to completely suppress the Party. Our activities in this respect have not kept pace with the intensified drive against the Party and the revolutionary movement as a whole. The last meeting of the PB was devoted mainly to this question and a number of measures were taken which should considerably strengthen the mass fight to retain and extend all open positions now held by the CP and other revolutionary organisations, as well as to tighten up and perfect the illegal apparatus, etc.

Among other things, in view of the non-existence of the LAI and IRA (except for a small branch in Capetown), the Party has begun to push the

4. 'Nilaza' – most probably, a distorted spelling of the Umlazi location.

5. The identity of Giba could not be established.

formation of the 'Shield of the Toilers' as a united front, anti-imperialist and defence organisation.⁶ A preparatory conference was held in Johannesburg and a provisional committee set up. Local united front committees are being established in the locations, factories, etc. and steps are being taken to draw in members of trade unions, IANC, etc. individually as well as to secure collective affiliation of these organisations.

While the activities in this connection are only a few weeks underway, in Johan. and Capetown (directives to all other Party districts and nuclei) a wide response has already been secured from amongst the Native workers and unemployed. This is primarily because a concrete approach is being made for the first time to organise the struggle against imperialist oppression for national liberation, round each specific act of imperialist repression, i.e. against the pass laws, lodgers' permits,⁷ tax collections, beer raids, police brutality in strikes, for freedom of movement, organisation, right to strike and picket, etc. and in this manner to connect each given struggle and issue up with the basic anti-imperialist slogans and aims, as well as with the class struggle and class demands of the workers.

In connection with the sharpened offensive against the Party and the entire movement, it is necessary to point out certain opportunist tendencies which have appeared and developed within the ranks of the Party. The greatest danger arises from the right in the form of legal opportunism, i.e. capitulation before the attacks without developing mass resistance (Unemployed Councils in Johannesburg); legalistic illusions and faith in juridical 'fights' (Germistan); under-estimation of the attempts to outlaw and illegalise the Party, and failure to carry through the decisions regarding the special apparatus as well as the combination of legal and illegal methods of work (Capetown, Johannesburg, Pretoria, etc.).

On the other hand a number of left sectarian tendencies have been manifested: proposal to abandon mass recruiting and to concentrate solely on training the present members of the Party (Durban); proposal to 'slow down' on recruiting and developing mass actions because of the alleged 'influx' of provocateurs (Capetown), etc. The P.B. is directing a ruthless struggle against both tendencies, especially against the manifestations of legal opportunism which are most prevalent.

5. The Party has been conducting its preparatory work in Germistan for the election campaign (Nov. 2 to the 30th) about a month. In spite of a series of arrests and concerted attempts of the CID and fascist gangs of the Nationalist Party to 'drive the Party out of Germistan', the Party has developed a fairly extensive and effective mass agitational and propaganda campaign; as well as

6. Obviously, Ikaka la Basebenzi.

7. According to the Natives' Urban Areas Act of 1923 any African coming to stay with a family in an urban area had to buy the lodger's permit. After a certain age even children of the family had to do the same.

in the past week has began to organise actions (not yet on a mass scale) against lodger' permits and for the immediate demands of the unemployed. 2 mass meetings at the location of 1,500 Natives, five railway shop meetings of 350 Europeans, one factory gate meeting of 100 Native workers, 2 mass meetings of 600 European unemployed, 6 illegal location group meetings and 3 illegal AFTU group meetings of railwaymen – have been held. 27 Natives have made application to join the Party (due to the difficulties of illegal work only 6 have been set up in a nucleus as yet) and 3 European railwaymen have been recruited for AFTU.

The Party's programme has met with wide response, especially from among the Native masses. The Party has also been able to win over ideologically hundreds of European workers in support of its slogans and demands and concretely in support of a united fighting front with the Native toilers. Furthermore, already the campaign, non-parliamentary struggles of the Party and its election programme is meeting with enthusiastic response far beyond the borders of Germiston. This is evidenced both from the endorsement and support from Native and European workers in Johannesburg, and from information which reaches us through the districts and outlying centres.

The chief tasks in Germiston remain to bridge the gap between the extending political influence of the Party and its weak organisational activities, and to carry forward and develop on a mass scale the non-parliamentary struggle.

Without elaborating further, especially in regards to the tremendous political effects of the platform and activities of the Party and the fact that it has put forward a native comrade as a demonstrative candidate, I want to call your attention to the election article and platform of demands which appeared in the October 1st issue of Umsebenzi. The series of political deviations in the article and demands were immediately corrected, though unfortunately not till after publication, as I did not see the article till in print.

6. The letter is much too lengthy and as I have a number of other questions to deal with, I will omit outlining the extensive and concrete detailed plans and preparations for the Nov. 7th meetings and recruiting campaign, as well as those for Dingaans Day.⁸

7. A few days before leaving for Capetown, on Sept. 30 I believe, I received your letter of August 4th and the instructions to publish a statement in the name of the CC regarding Bunting's 'appeal' to the Comintern. This I prepared and it was to have appeared in the Oct. 15 issue of Umsebenzi. However upon receiving a telegram concerning the publication of Marhapanga (?),⁹ the

8. See footnote 1 to document 73 (vol. I).

9. Maraphanga.

unofficial organ of the Communist League, I instructed this to be withdrawn and sent another draft statement which was published instead (unfortunately with a number of typographical errors and several omissions of a serious political nature, i.e. regarding the alleged aim of the League to organise only African workers, etc.). The statement along the lines indicated by you will appear in a later issue.

As far as comrades have been able to ascertain, the Communist League has exactly 5 Native members (only one – Thibede, being an ex-Party member) and a few Jewish shopkeepers (expelled members of the CP). Yet it is alleged by Thibede that the League has 50 Native members in Krugersdorp, Vereeniging, Brakpan and in Northern Transvaal. The only activities of the League that are known to the Party are confined to the distribution of the 'Militant' (U.S.A.),¹⁰ Communist opposition leaflets on fascism in Germany¹¹ and the publication of Marhapanga – though Makabeni and Thibede still retain control – 'independently' from the League – over a small section of Native clothing and laundry workers who were temporarily won away from the ranks of AFTU last January and February. Bunting who was instrumental in organising the League, has no 'official' connections with it, just as he has no 'formal' connections with the 'League of Soviet Friends' – which is now extinct. In addition to a systematic campaign of enlightenment in the press, mainly in the vernacular, to analyse and expose the counter-revolutionary character, aims and activities of the Communist League, the essence of Buntingism, etc., broad discussions have been started throughout the Party round these issues. These discussions which have already been held in the PB, DPC's and in a number of nuclei are being used as a part of the preparations for the national convention and should finally result in the complete clarification of the entire membership as to the nature of Buntingism, why Bunting and Co. were expelled, etc. They will serve to mobilise the Party for a sharper struggle against the heritages of Buntingism which still exist within the ranks of the Party.

The exposure of the C. League, etc., the struggle to win over any sincere worker within its ranks or under its influence, will not as formerly, be conducted as an isolated struggle. It will be made an inseparable part of the fight against national-reformism and social-fascism, of the sharp and widespread political struggle to root out the remnants of Buntingism and all forms of opportunism which still exist in the practical work and life of the Party and AFTU; and will be organically bound up with the tasks of extending and developing the mass work of the Party.

10. The 'Militant' – the journal of the American Trotskyist opposition led by James Cannon. It was first published in November 1928.

11. Possibly, also coming from the American Trotskyist movement.

It is obvious that in South Africa as elsewhere there is no social basis upon which the Communist League can develop as a mass organisation. However, what is important now is that the Party and the working class make it impossible for the League, etc. to secure even a partial organised footing or a short political breathing space. I believe the steps being taken by the CC clearly show that the Party does not underestimate the urgent necessity of conducting the most ruthless struggle against the renegades from Communism and their political allies, and indicates that the Party should and will effectively prevent even a temporary growth of the League, politically or organisationally.

In my opinion, judging from a previous cable and your letter of 4.8.32, you have somewhat over-estimated the political influence and organised strength of Bunting and his few European followers – though your directives have correctly served to overcome the gross under-estimation in the CC regarding the vital importance of waging a merciless struggle against Bunting and Buntingism – this because of the inadequate data and lack of reports from here. However, by now you should have at least received the material and reports which I sent on Bunting, etc. in March and again in July. If you disagree with the estimate given in these reports, please inform me immediately so that, if necessary, I may correct my position on this question and that of the CC.

8. The national convention of the Party will be held the latter part of December, unless you instruct otherwise. While it would perhaps be better to hold the convention in January or February, in order to allow far more adequate preparations – the end of December is more desirable as it will enable a larger number of workers to secure leave of absence over the Christmas holidays; particularly this is true in regards to the Native miners. So there is very little choice as to the date unless we decided to go through with the Congress with a delegation composed mainly of functionaries and unemployed. Also by holding the Congress in December we will be able to take advantage of the excursion rates, which will mean a saving of nearly £150.

The reports will include: a.) report on the XII Plenum of the ECCI; the political situation in South Africa. b.) Political activities of the CC since the last convention and immediate tasks of the Party. c.) Work in the trade unions, etc. d.) Peasant movement. e.) Either a report or a special conference on the building of the YCL. As to your recommendation for a special report on united front tactics – I don't think this advisable. I believe the question of the united front tactics must occupy a central place in each report and be linked up with practically every problem and task.

Preparations for the Convention have started with the nuclei discussions on the Communist League, etc. The draft resolution on the political situation, work and tasks of the Party (in the main, similar to the July resolution of the CC) will be in the districts next week – in four languages. In addition to the main

East Africa whom we have recently made contact with here. We are taking the necessary steps to develop activities in Lourenco Marques (plans were worked out and mutually agreed upon between myself and the Portuguese comrades in June – but circular instructions have not facilitated the fulfilment of these), including the immediate sending of an organiser; besides and what is most important, we will train the Native miners and utilise them on their return to East Africa. Also arrangements are being made again (they were supposedly completed in June during my trip) to secure two East African workers for 'higher education'. I will inform you as soon as something concrete materialises out of our present 'plans' and correspondence with the East African comrades.

11. I would like to call your attention that this letter is not intended as an exhaustive report, but rather as a series of remarks. I trust you will overlook the loose and disconnected manner in which I have dealt with various question, particularly the unsatisfactory way in which I have combined details with a number of general observations and conclusions.

With communist greetings,
Dennis.

RGASPI, 495/64/79/54-69.
Original in English.
Handwritten.

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**Letter from S.P. Bunting to ECCL,
26 October 1932**

P.O. Box 1915,
JOHANNESBURG, South Africa.
26 October 1932.

The Sec. E.C.C.I.
Moscow.

Dear Comrade,

Yet another wild outburst of lies against me in the C.P.S.A. organ 'Umsebenzi' of 22nd instant impels me, although my last communication to you on the matter has met with no response, to write again briefly lest silence should be interpreted as admission.

The following statement in the issue in question are total falsehoods: (page 3 col. 1) That I have formed the 'Communist League' or subsidised or guided it