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Letter from F., member of CPSA, to D.I. Jones,
16-20 March 1922¹

March 16th Thursday.

Dear Ivon Jones,

There will be no-one at liberty to write to you this next mail but myself. The letter may be incoherent & rambling for I am worn out & half diemented with anxiety for all our Family in the grip of the thugs, & imprisoned in the Fort. The past week seems² like seven years, not days – a tragedy for each day.

Must try to get down the facts. – Martial law was proclaimed last Friday at 9.45 a.m., half an hour later a large posse of mounted police surrounded the Trades Hall. The detectives poured into our office arresting all that were there but myself, – Comrades Andrews, G. Mason & Ernest Shaw; when they took them away, I had to look on while they ransacked the office. This time seemed the signal for all the shooting that went on continually for five days throughout the town – aeroplanes, bombs, machine & Lewis guns. On coming to the office on Saturday I had the news that the Printing Press was wrecked, parts removed, the motor smashed, & type scattered. On Sunday morning I went to the Rabb's flat & heard from the caretaker the awful news – they had both been arrested while distributing leaflets in the Market Square the evening before. From there I slogged up to Yeoville to give the news – but to find the detectives' motor car at the Buntings house – I was only there to see him taken away. I tramped back to town to find our comrades – to tell them all. Monday – a terrible day of waiting & receiving messages from comrades that came & went from & to the fight.

On Tuesday the bombing over Fordsburg was terrific – it shook the office – then a voice came from down below – 'By order of Colonel Truter everybody out of this building'. I came out of the office, & the police shut all doors, about a hundred of us were huddled on the stairs, & the gates of the building shut – 'Everyone of you will be searched before leaving this place' which was proceeded with. When we were all out the offices were again raided throughout the Hall & the gates locked. On coming the next day I found that the locked bar on our desk had been wrenched off, the wood splintered, and the cash box with contents (about £7) gone. And it had been left in my charge! I cannot tell you all there was to fear. On Wednesday we knew that the brave & resolute Percy Fisher & Harry Spendiff had shot themselves. (This was later contradicted – killed by shrapnel).

1. The identity of the author could not be established. The inscription on the document states only that she was Andrew's typist in the Party headquarters in Johannesburg.
2. There is a crossed-out word before 'seems' in the text.

Thursday – to-day – a Sergeant of police with rifle³ much in evidence came into the office & said he wanted to phone – without phoning – he then said 'Give me that letter you are typing', he then phoned Marshall Square⁴ calling for the officer in charge & said 'I believe there is matter here for an arrest'. He read the letter over the phone. Then we both waited about 20 minutes – a message came, and then he marched out saying – 'you are not to be shot this time – you can go home'.

Friday, March 17. To-day could not get into office, Trades Hall guarded, not allowed to pass in. There was to be an executive meeting at 10 a.m. regarding ballot for return to work.

Yesterday as many of ourselves as could muster & a crowd of workers – a goodly length of them – followed the bodies of Fisher & Spendiff ^{to their graves}. The undertakers must have had their orders – they whipped up the horses & galloped the hearse away from us to the cemetery. We all slogged on, not disorganised – to Brixton – not a bit of red allowed to be seen on anyone or thing (except our⁵ little soviet badges on dear devoted Mrs Margren, & myself. Over both graves we sang the 'Red Flag' & from the speeches I quote – 'the names of Percy Fisher & Harry Spendiff must be inscribed on the Red Flag in every land'. Their resolution & 'no surrender but to death' shall inspire us – forward.

You must have known Spendiff, his name is written by you on his subscription card. Doubtless you have read of Percy Fisher in the papers. He was only thirty-one. These two have been the militant lights of the Council of Action all through previous to the arrests. The 'unknown unnamed' rank & file that went down with them under the Red Flag hoisted at Fordsburg must have been shovelled into graves where they fell.

Comrades in Russia – a band of Workers here with but a few pistols, a little ammunition between them – have stood up to the Chamber of Mines with its infantry, cavalry, maxims & aeroplanes and defiantly passed away.

I cannot get news of friends in Benoni ^{yet}; feel anxious Comrades T.C. & E.J.B. Was relieved & glad to see Comrade F. this morning, he is anxious about H.B.⁶ I have been to the Fort with food etc. twice – no one is allowed to see Comrades there not even their wives. We cannot locate S.P. Bunting they refer us to Marshall Square from the Fort and back – Mrs B.⁷ ill with anxiety. A little note was received from Andrews – written on biscuit paper to say he was well.

3. The word 'rifle' is written above the crossed-out 'gun'.
4. Marshall Square – location of police headquarters.
5. There is a crossed-out word before 'our' in the text.
6. The identities of people whose initials are mentioned here could not be established.
7. Mrs B. – Rebecca Bunting.

Strangely enough your letter came through – like a draught of life giving wine in the midst of this welter of hopelessness. Let me express relish &⁸ appreciation of your remarks concerning Youngelson – what a doughy specimen, not a spot of yeast in him. So many of his kind come for credentials to Russia, so well dressed & shiny. Perhaps paid 3 months branch subs!⁹ Oh, always bought the paper if not a regular subscriber. After this late bloody sacrifice of super men it seems the great Lenin would say to any man ^{of sense} coming to Russia – you would have done well to have remained in the land you came from. As for the lice men they should have the sanitary work to do.

Regarding your valuable & valued self we are all so thankful you are in Harbour & not at the Fort.

Our foreman Printer was 'wanted' I do not know whether he is still at liberty. At one time the Press was in danger of being smashed (before Martial Law was proclaimed) by a certain element – you can guess the instigators – who said we were 'scabbing' when printing strike leaflets. All the printers came out loyally, except the 'Star' and S.T. & R.D.M.¹⁰ who stayed at work to print that the workers were 'riff-raff', 'a sorry lot' bandits, assassins. 'Bolshevik plot discovered!' 'Immense sums of money from overseas for ammunition', etc.

Poor Mrs Margren's room was raided at 2.45 am the day before yesterday.

I am collecting the daily Press & will cut the most necessary columns out to send to you as you say do not send bulky papers. I trust the others reached you which I sent regularly up to last week.

Saturday March 18th. Trades Hall still guarded, soldiers inside & out.

The Govt is talking about its friendship & protection for the Black Workers against the strikers banner for a 'White S. Africa'. You will know how our tiny ship 'Communism' has been tossed about from rocks to heavy seas. Is it to sink? As I approach some of our well dressed members à la Youngelson they say 'Oh the Party is finished now, quite finished in this country'.

But ^{again} Communism approaches as a dusty dishevelled Worker you have hardly seen before comes & grips your hand with 'By god, Comrade, we've got some organising work in front of us now'.

Sunday, March 19th – A little better news, the wives have been allowed to see prisoners for the first time since arrests and S.P.B.¹¹ is in the Fort. Another comrade's house raided. H.B. not yet found.

Monday 20th, Trades Hall still full of armed men, what will the office be if I see it again? I am taking the correspondence from the P.O. Box to my room of course.

8. There is a crossed-out word after '&' in the text.

9. Subscriptions.

10. The *Sunday Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail*.

11. S.P. Bunting.

I must post this now as must send it to Capetown Comrade to post for mail. Can you give me anything to do?

F.

RGASPI, 495/64/159/218–23.

Original in English.

Handwritten.

Inscriptions: 1) Letter from Comrade Andrews' typist, Party member.
(The hand-writing is different from that of the text)

2) South African insurrection
(The hand-writing differs both from that of the previous inscription and of the text).

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**Statement of D.I. Jones to ECCL,
25 March 1922**

FURTHER STATEMENT ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION.

25th March, 1922.

Moscow

To Comrade Kuusingen. Secretary, Comintern

The latest news by mail from Africa tend to modify my previous statement that there had been no outbreaks of violence between black and white workers. It appears that several tragic conflicts of minor character occurred between Black and white workers side by side with the main struggle with the Government forces.

These incidents are all the more tragic in that they make the task of the Communist Party far more difficult in the future, unless a great change of attitude takes place in the minds of the white workers as a result of the present events.

It is precisely because of the new political alignments that will result from the conflict that it may be wise for me to await some report from the Party before returning to South Africa, especially if in the meanwhile the proposed Anglo-American-Colonial Bureau will be formed.

The strike and insurrection was not officially led by the Communist Party, although participated in by Communist speakers. Comrade Andrews, our Secretary, was arrested with five other members of the Left Wing Movement, on a charge of 'inciting to¹ violence'. Meanwhile, the actual leaders of the

1. There is a crossed-out word after 'to'.