

**Report of J. Den Bakker and S. Barlin to ECCL,
(Extracts from Minutes of Meeting, ECCL)
25 January 1921¹**

MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE ON 25 JANUARY 1921.
[...] THE REPORT OF THE TWO MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OF ACTION,
THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIALIST LEAGUE OF SOUTH AFRICA,
TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE THIRD INTERNATIONAL
IN MOSCOW. THE PRESENTER – BAKKER.

Dear Comrades,

We would like to explain to you that we have not been mandated by the afore-mentioned organisation to speak in Moscow on its behalf but being young and curious we have come to the decision to visit Russia.

We feel that objective theories that can be offered by Russia exceed the sum of all previous theoretical knowledge.

Fully comprehending that unfolding historical events in Russia represent our future step in the social revolution we ask you to give us a chance to witness personally the colossus of development of the gigantic movement which has been started by the Russian proletariat [...]

In view of the fact that the situation in South Africa is almost identical to that in Russia we are coming to the conclusion that we shall be able to apply the knowledge that we get in Russia for the benefit of African movement. We are forwarding to you the following report about the situation in the labour movement in South Africa and about the origins of our League and its relative strength.

Our press organ The International [...] But we are facing new technical difficulties. Print foundries refuse to supply us with letters. Paper is very expensive and it is difficult to get it in South Africa. The prices go up all the time but the price of our newspaper is the same as five years ago. We would not like to raise the subscription price.

The newspaper and the press are the property of the Party and are controlled by it. The contents of the paper are clear due to the fact that it never gets any advertising [...]

The paper is supported by members because with its price of 10 shillings it does not cover the expenses. The weekly print run is about 2,500–3,000 copies. We have about 1,500 permanent subscribers.

1. In 1921 an abridged version of this report was published in Russian in *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional (The Communist International)*, No. 16 under the title 'Revoliutsionnoie dvizheniie v Yuzhnoj Afrike' ('Revolutionary Movement in South Africa'). The publication was signed by 'A delegate of the League'. We publish parts of this report that are omitted from this publication.

The election results. The main election of 1915 brought three delegates from the South African Labour Party to Parliament, all of chauvinistic orientation. They have solemnly committed themselves not to embarrass the government during the war. It was during this election that the South African International League² made its appearance on the political arena. Its candidates W.H. Andrews and J.A. Clark suffered a heavy defeat, they only got 67 and 73 votes. From that time on the League participated in Municipal, Provincial and Parliamentary elections with variable success [...]

In May 1919 our two comrades in Natal³ were sentenced to a fine of £ 75 or four months imprisonment and £ 10 or one month's imprisonment for the publication of the leaflet *The Bolsheviki Are Coming*. After the appeal the verdict was cancelled. To our great pleasure we are able to state that this time all trade union movement was on the side of the League, otherwise we would not have won the case.

Such consolidation of trade unions around the League prevented the passing of a number of bills aimed against the League. These advantages seem very small in comparison with the suffering of our European comrades but we mention them to note that it was considered necessary to suppress us both with arms and in courts [...]

Despite the existence of the developed organisation among white workers they are at present very far from political movement. The ties between trade unions and the Labour Party were very insignificant even before the split which resulted from the war. Road workers have never had any ties with the Party. Miners only joined the organisation in 1912. Among other associated trade unions are printers, joiners and carpenters, boiler-makers and other small groups. The Labour Party consisted and still consists of branches of associated trade unions. At present none of the above-mentioned unions is attached to the Labour Party with the exception of one or two small groups of joiners and printers. The growth of class consciousness among the best elements of industrial proletariat is particularly obvious from the fact that 10 out of 13 members of the Action Committee of the International Socialist League are real farm labourers and adherents of the idea of the utmost necessity of spreading the notion of proletarian solidarity amongst Native comrades-workers without the distinction of race and colour.

During the war our League found kindred in the Zimmerwald group.⁴

2. International Socialist League.

3. D.I. Jones and L.H. Greene.

4. Militant left-wing socialists, including V.I. Lenin, who met in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, in September 1915, splitting from the Second International and denouncing its leadership for their support of their corresponding governments' war efforts. Lenin considered the International Socialist Commission created at the Zimmerwald meeting to be the start of a new, Third International.

It had corresponded with the leaders of Russian proletariat and got more inspiration from them, as well as from the Italian Party, from Comrade Grimm,⁵ than from our British comrades, despite the fact that the Union Committee consisted mainly of the British. At its fifth conference the League has attached itself to the Third International which was greeted by singing The Red Flag. Coming to the end of this part of our report we inform you that in 1917 Comrade W.H. Andrews was sent on a mission to Europe for participating in the Stockholm conference as a delegate. According to instructions he was elected a delegate of the afore-mentioned conference. A special meeting that appointed Comrade Andrews as its delegate to Stockholm passed the following resolution:

'It is necessary to send a delegate on a mission of participating at the International Socialist Congress in Stockholm or any other place where it may be convened with the purpose of uniting Socialists of all countries, both fighting and neutral, for the creation of a new International. The delegate should be instructed to stand up for peace and vote for it on the basis of destroying the capitalist system and of the creation of the Socialist society.'

As you know, this Conference never took place. Comrade Andrews has done a valuable work in England. Despite his perfect credentials (confirmed by Arthur Henderson) our comrade was not allowed to attend the united Socialist conference in London. The South African Labour Party was represented at this conference by Colonel Cresswell although at that time the Labour Party did not exist. This shows the arrogance of the afore-mentioned conference. Industrial movement nominated two candidates, Comrade Andrews and Tom Mann from England to stand for its delegate to Stockholm. Tom Mann got two votes more than Com. Andrews and was confirmed as the delegate. The industrial movement, however, was not supposed to be represented by a member of the British Labour Party [...]

With fraternal greetings to all comrades at the
Third International we remain united with
you in the revolutionary struggle.

J. Bakker and S. Barlin

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Zinoviev:⁶ I think that it is expedient to organise a commission to study the question about the Blacks. This question has been superficially discussed twice but because of the absence of comrades from Africa this has not led to any

5. The identity of Comrade Grimm could not be established.

6. G.E. Zinoviev chaired the session.

conclusions. I ask to devise a document on this issue and to discuss the South African question together with the comrades.

A Finnish comrade from Stockholm: I would like to propose to unite all Parties in Africa, Australia which are subordinate to Britain in one Central Committee and to place it under the Executive Committee. It should, however, be transferred to another European city for Moscow is too far removed from these comrades.

Zinoviev: I propose Quelch, Jansen, Varga for this commission.

Quelch: I propose the fourth, Comrade Roy.

Zinoviev: The proposal is accepted. Both African comrades are invited to participate in the work of this commission. So the question is settled for the moment.

RGASPI, 495/1/22/31-53.

Original in Russian (Comintern translation of an English original text that has not been found in the Archive).

Typed.

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**Letter from J. Den Bakker to ECCL,
12 March 1921**

Tashkent
12th March 1921

The Secretary
III International
Moscow.

My Dear Comrade Kobetsky,

I don't know when I will be back in Moscow. The delegates intend to extend our trip from here to Baku.

I intend to return to South Africa soon after my return in Moscow, unless the International Socialist League or the Building Workers Industrial Union gives me definite instructions to do otherwise.

I expect to hear from both these organisations at any moment.

As far back as August 1917, before the Russian communists had actually taken power into their hands, the I.S.L. issued a leaflet under the name of the 'Call of the Bolsheviks'. An appeal to the workers of Africa to adopt the revolutionary methods of the Russian Communists. Ever since, it has supported the Soviet government whole heartedly.

At our fifth Conference Jan. 5th 1920, we affiliated to the III International.