

**Letter from M. Kotane to Comintern,
30 November 1932**

30/11/32¹
Leningrad

Dear Comrade,²

I thought it advisable whilst still in the Soviet Union, to give my opinion concerning the revolutionary movement in South Africa.

Perhaps you may think me insincere in this respects, or why didn't I tell you before! The main reason was and still is, that the opinion prevalent in the American section of the Communist International³ about the Negroes does not differ very much to that of Bunting, that is, the Negroes are merely opportunists and place seekers in the Communist Movement. My stay in the I.L.S, gave me the picture of the White American Communists on the one hand and Black American 'Communists' on the other.

I have the word Communists in quotation marks referring to Negroes because the so-called Negro Communists are just Workers who had only joined the Communist Movement 3–6 months previously and most of them still young boys. The behaviour of the I.L.S. Negro students is a prove of this, I hope and I am sure these were not the best type and representatives of the American Negro Workers, who have suffered the iron and brutal hand of capitalist lynching and exploitation; for how can such people exposed to the most oppressive laws and forming the highly exploited group of the American working class be 'opportunists and place seekers in Communism'?

But as I have said before that a nasty opinion prevails in the American section of the C.I. about the Negroes, and as the American section of the C.I. is the Authoritative body of all the English speaking sections in the Communist International, I could not but refrain from putting this point forward because otherwise would have meant something I did not want to convey – a justification of the Negroes being 'opportunists and place seekers in Communism'.

Now down to business.

The Comintern speaks about the Negroes taking the leadership of the Communist Movement in South Africa. Why? Because they are the majority.

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1. A crossed-out line follows the date in the original.
 2. The addressee is unknown. It is not clear whether the letter was sent directly to the Comintern or to one of Kotane's instructors and other contacts in Moscow for transmission to the Comintern.
 3. Here and further on in this document 'American section' of the Comintern is not the CPUSA, as would normally be the case, but the Anglo-American Secretariat of the ECCI.

But to put the question in that way in my opinion would be formalism. It is agreed that the Negroes form the majority of the population of South Africa – 6 to 1. But so far as Communism and Communist Theory is concerned the whites are the ideological leaders. First because most of them are all European products brought up under different circumstances and inherit a historical tradition peculiar to European Capitalism and European Working class struggles as such. Johnes⁴ who is a South African, has had a chance of almost 3 years training in the I.L.S. and sent to S. Africa well equipped theoretically. I being a Negro who the C.I. proposes to take the leadership, and despite the fact that I have had no training and education prior to joining the revolutionary Movement, I am only given 1 year's training in the I.L.S. and shipped back to South Africa, with heavy responsibility on my shoulders. The absurdity of this responsibility lies in the fact that I who have had no sufficient training (Theoretically and Politically) I am supposed to supervise the Communist Movement in South Africa. How can I? For today I may be right but to-morrow I'll find myself unconsciously on the Right-wing and next in the Centre, or in short, from one extreme to the other. I have heard Communists speaking about political estimation, and changing tactics with changed conditions, to me all these still remain a riddle to be solved.

The responsibility placed on me, I will carry out in so far as I understand the position before me. But otherwise I can do nothing except to surrender to those who are INTELLECTUALLY CAPABLE THAN myself.

For we cannot hold the movement back until such time when the Negroes will have advanced to be the ideological leaders of it.

So my work in the A.F.T.U. can be nothing but subordinate to those above me. Not because I am a Negro but because theoretically they are super to me, of course due to historical reasons, for instance, experience, education and environment. Let us not simply say that the Negroes must take the leadership irrespective of the situation. Of course, numerically the Negroes will and have taken the leadership but the ideological expression have been and will be that of the Whites, though they are the minority in leadership.

I will take a stand in any question in so far as I can reason my point out, beyond that I cannot be held responsible.

So in your letter to South Africa you have to recommend me to a subordinate position in the A.F.T.U. as well as in the C. Party.

4. Obviously, 'Johnes' – Victor Danchin.

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To consider me as a leader would be mockery to Negro people and the Communist Movement in South Africa in particular. Please give these to the Eastern Secretariat of the C.I. and Negro Bureaux in the Profintern for discussion.

J. Warren

I will not be leaving for few more days. Cherio.

RGASPI, 495/64/119/26-33.

Original in English.

Handwritten.

Stamped: 11391- .XII.1932⁵

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**Letter from M. Kotane to ECCL,
1 April 1933**

Johannesburg¹
April 1st 1933

Mr. Nicolaus²

Dear Sir,

I am indeed very sorry for having kept silence for such a long time, it was not my intention at all. But the effect of the situation I found myself in, was very much demoralizing. We had a meeting of our business directors early in February. The meeting was very instructive as regard the business and commercial situation in South Africa.³ There were some confusion in the organisational structure and the policy of our company. Though the meeting was called to clarify that confusion, I am afraid most of our directors are still confusion. The confusion is particularly dangerous in my opinion, towards the

Doc. 21

5. The day in the date is illegible.

Doc. 22

1. The word 'Johannesburg' in a different ink is pasted over a cut-out word; there is the number '2' in red pencil above it.
2. The name 'Nicolaus' in a different ink is pasted over a cut-out word; there is the number '1' in red pencil above it. Nicolaus – most probably, Nikolai Nasonov.
3. The word 'South Africa' in a different ink is pasted over a cut-out word; there is the number '3' in red pencil above it.