

**Letter from D.I. Jones to ECCI,
[8 January 1923]¹**

REMARKS ON PROPOSAL TO CALL A NEGRO CONGRESS AT MOSCOW

I wish to support the proposal to hold a Negro Congress at Moscow. I directed the attention of the Presidium to the two Bourgeois Congresses of Negroes held last summer under Garvey and Du Bois respectively,² and the confusionist effect of their propaganda.

1. There are certain difficulties to overcome. It will not be sufficient to send out a call to a Congress, but COMINTERN representatives would have to work on the spot to assure a representative gathering of proletarian and radical Negroes.

2. In South Africa, for example, where the native African Negroes are the most advanced industrially, the passport supervision of the negroes is very strict and underground work of shipping delegates would therefore be very difficult. I am inclined to think that a special All-Black route through Persia via Zanzibar would have to be organised for all or most African Negro delegates from the Congo Southwards. A Negro in Europe making for any Baltic port would be immediately marked.

3. Failing such a plan however, the delegates could work their way on ship as seamen. In any case it is necessary to bear in mind that if the Congress is to bear a proletarian complexion the problem of bringing the delegates here is a serious one, requires many months of preparation.

4. Regarding the objection that we should be exaggerating the race consciousness of the Negroes by calling such a world Congress, instead of their class-consciousness, it is only necessary to point out that the Negroes more than any other race are a labouring race, with only a slight crust of

1. This document is undated but it is mentioned with the date (8 January) in D.I. Jones' letter to the ECCI of 23 March 1923 ('Further notes...', RGASPI, 495/155/3/4-5). It is likely that this and the following documents were prepared by Jones for a commission appointed by the Orgbureau of the Comintern as background materials for the work of the World Negro Congress proposed at that time. The commission met in the first half of 1923 under the chairmanship of M. Borodin. Among its members were I. Amter (CPUSA), S. Katayama (Communist Party of Japan), W. Gallacher (CPGB), W. Hannington (CPGB), B. Stewart (CPGB), and Levy (Communist Party of France?). For records of two meetings of the commission held in early 1923 see RGASPI, 495/155/8/1-4.

2. No 'Congresses of Negroes' under either Garvey or Du Bois were held in 1922. Jones could mean a) The International Convention of the Negro People of the World which was convened by Garvey in New York on 1 August 1920 and which called upon the delegates 'to work towards... a free, redeemed and mighty nation' - a 'pan-Negro nation'; b) The Second Pan-African Congress which was convened by du Bois in London, Brussels and Paris on 28 August-6 September 1921 and which called either for full equality or for full segregation of 'races'.

Bourgeoisie in America. The Negro problem exists, and has to be tackled. It only remains to influence the content to be given to the common action of the Negroes as race. The capitalist class are quite glad to encourage militant, anti-white racialism among the Negroes a la Garveyism in order to divert them from the class issue, which is ever present owing to vast preponderance of worker in any Negro gathering. It remains for the COMINTERN to give this common feeling of the Negro race a proletarian content. The Moscow Congress of Negroes would have a resounding echo throughout the world. Not the liberal bourgeoisie but the Communist International, not Manchester but Moscow, would then become the known protector of the oppressed Negro masses.

5. The South African delegates and negro masses generally would derive enormous benefit from intercourse at Moscow with the best proletarian Negroes of America, such as the leaders of the African Blood Brotherhood.

6. Should the proposal be adopted I suggest that a committee be immediately appointed to consider the draft Manifesto sent from America. It requires some of its too literary turns of expression to be simplified for the average Negro reader, and also the avoidance of references to the 'Negro farmer' and 'peasant'. We should appeal the industrial and agricultural working masses. The word 'peasant' is also not used for any American section. It is a slavish copying of Russian conditions to bring in the word for all countries.

7. The term 'Negro' is not used in South Africa. The word 'Bantu' is the inclusive term for negro races South of the Equator. This word 'Negro' has also the stigma of slavery and association with the word 'Nigger' attached to it, although it is the widest understood. But if the COMINTERN should popularise the far more inclusive and more dignified term 'ETHIOPIAN' as a sign of the race's emergence to proletarian consciousness, it would be an achievement. But perhaps this had better be left to the Congress.

8. A special Manifesto would be necessary for Africa, if the present one is adopted for America. And a short all-embracing Manifesto to the whole Negro race suitable for Radio transmission, issued as well.

9. Here arises the question of publicity, the advisability or otherwise of making world wide public appeals to the Negroes, and thus increasing the difficulties of organising the appointment and despatch of delegates. But probably such difficulties would be greatly outweighed by the political 'reclame'³ among the Negro races of such a world-wide call to Moscow.

10. For America and South Africa the work can be undertaken by the respective Communist Parties on the spot. If the suggestion as to the admission of the Moors⁴ and Egyptians be adopted, the Egyptian Communist Party will also be able to help. Comrade Avigdor of the Egyptian section has already discussed the sending of Egyptian native delegates to Moscow.

3. 'Reclame' - a wrongly transliterated Russian word 'reklama' (advertising, advert).

4. Here: North Africans other than the Egyptians.

11. There remain the other parts of Africa, such as Kenya, Uganda, and Portuguese Africa. In the last named region there exists a pro-negro Social Revolutionary Party which would undoubtedly help to organise the Congress, and line itself up with Moscow in the process. In the British East Africa colonies and line itself up with Moscow in the process. The C.P. of South Africa has aforementioned we have no connections. The C.P. of South Africa has correspondents in the Belgian Congo with its fifteen million natives. But we have no connections with British Nigeria and the Gold Coast, nor with the French Congo, unless this can be worked through the French Communist Party.

12. Our experience in South Africa is that as soon as a Negro attains any measure of education he becomes spoilt as a proletarian and loses touch with the negro working masses, because he is immediately snatched up to be a lawyer's or agent's tout, or to be a parson. Hence great care will have to be exercised to select working-class delegates in touch with the labouring masses. The point here is that all this requires many months of preparation for the congress, which should be decided upon quickly if it is intended to hold it at the same time as the Comintern Congress. In that the short RADIO Call should be deferred till later, and the special manifestoes sent out now more privately for translation and circulation among Negro Masses.

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FURTHER NOTE ON THE PROPOSED NEGRO CONGRESS
MARCH 23RD 1923

I wish to supplement my note of the 8th January on the above with further consideration which suggest themselves against to idea. The former note contains information regarding problems of organising said Congress which may be yet useful.

I believe that some kind of a Congress of radical negroes for America and the neighbouring islands might be of value. But we have to regard the negro

race as a permanent section of the American population, and the encouraging of ideas of repatriation, 'back to Africa', has a confusing effect upon the classes, just as the 'back to Palestine' cry has had that effect upon the Jewish proletariat in the past. Garveyism depends on this diverting of the attention of the negro masses from the immediate class struggle to the distant hope of free Africa.

This danger is still more apparent in the case of South African natives. These natives have no highly developed intellegenzia like the American negroes, and practically no bourgeois class. It is a race of labourers newly emerging from tribal communism, individually uncultured but possessing a high sense of communist solidarity. Their emergence into industrial life breaks down their tribal animosities. But this break down of tribal animosity takes place in the actual necessities of the class struggle. For example, a few years ago, faction fights between tribes, in which fatal casualties occurred, were frequent among the natives working on the Rand mines. In 1920 all these natives in one mass upheaval forgot all their tribal distinctions and struck work to the number of 80,000 as fellow workers.¹ The Communists were blamed for this as for all other manifestations of awakening among the natives. There are two native newspapers subsidised by the Government which carry on a bitter warfare against the Communist propoganda of solidarity of labour irrespective of race, colour or creed. And the one antidote which they purvey to this class propoganda, and encouraged by the Government, is precisely this one of Garvey, solidarity with negro races against the white men. Garveyism is invading Africa. And the Africans are made to look to America, just as the Americans are made to look to Africa.

Before this lesson is properly learnt, that not the white man, but the capitalist, is the enemy of the negro, and before some measures of alliance has been achieved between the white and black on the international field, it would be a source of confusion to have a racial congress.

Therefore I think that we should limit ourselves to urging the Communist Parties to send negroes in the delegations whenever possible. In Africa, owing to the lack of Communist funds, the newly formed native Unions are in danger of being pocketed by bourgeois agents. If the Communist Party could retain control of these Unions and also have the means of a Native newspaper to fight the Government subsidised ones, it would have far more effect in the fight against Imperialism than any Congress. It seems absurd to speak about Congresses when we are not prepared or notable to this preparatory spade work. If Mahomed cannot go to the mountain, the mountain will surely not go to Mahomed. In Africa we witness a struggle where it is touch and go whether Imperialist Capital is going to win field for expansion. A little attention to these native masses in the past on the part of the International might have proved a

1. The strike of African miners on the Rand in February 1920 was the biggest African industrial action until 1946. The number of strikers involved quoted by Jones is approximately correct.