

We ask you to begin the work as soon as possible. We shall inform you as to the place and exact date of the general conference, as soon as we have conferred with the various parties involved. The conference will occur in the early part of May, in all probability.

With Communist greetings,
Fraternally,
Provisional Secretary for Calling
the Negro Conference³

RGASPI, 495/64/19/3.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

Inscription: 740.

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**Letter from Secretary for Calling Negro Conference to CPSA,
15 November 1923**

15/11/23.

To the EC of the CP of South Africa.

Dear Comrades: –

The Presidium of the Comintern has decided that the open Negro Conference¹ shall be held in New York. The date will probably be May 15.

As stated in our original letter on this question, we shall expect you to send a Negro delegate to the V Congress of the CI, at which the whole Negro question will be taken up and decisions made for the guidance of the Communist delegates to the open conference in New York. If possible, we also ask you to include a Negro among your delegates to the RILU Congress.

It is essential, however, that the open conference in New York be as well attended as possible, especially by representatives of the native population of Africa. We ask you, therefore, to make the greatest efforts to ensure the success of the New York conference.

Doc. 31

3. The name of the Provisional Secretary could not be identified.

Doc. 32

1. See document 31.

Do not fail to let us know at your earliest opportunity whether the Native Congress² will participate in the calling of the conference.

We have received considerable information on the situation of the African natives from Comrades Jones and Andrews, also from Com. Bunting's report to the Comintern. We should like to have a comprehensive report from you on the situation not only in South Africa, but other parts of Africa with which you are familiar and on which you have any material.

We do not doubt that you are beginning the work among the natives with energy. Please send us whatever propaganda matter you are getting out, in the form of articles, leaflets etc. Also please furnish us with clippings or newspapers containing matter on this question. If there are any native papers, we ask you to send them to us regularly, as there is a dearth of material in Moscow.

We would recommend that a member of your Executive Committee be especially charged with this work.

With Communist greetings,
Secretary for Calling Negro Conference³

RGASPI, 495/64/20/2.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

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**Minutes of Third Congress of CPSA,
27–30 October 1924 (Extracts)**

THE COMMUNIST PARTY.
(SOUTH AFRICAN SECTION OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL)

Third Congress held in the Council Chamber, Trades Hall, Johannesburg on December 27th–28th and No. 4 Trades Hall on December 29th and 30th 1924.

2. Obviously, the ANC.

3. The name of the Secretary could not be established.

MINUTES

The report of the credentials committee, consisting of Comrades C.F. Glass, E. Roux and W.H. Andrews, general secretary-editor, stated that the following delegates were present, and their credentials were in order:-

- Comrades E.R. Roux, W. Kalk, Mrs. Bunting, D. Cohen, Mrs. Green,
 C.F. Glass, representing Johannesburg branch.
 - " - S. Buirski, W.H. Harrison, Cape Town - " -
 - " - S.A. Rochlin representing Cape Town Y.C.L.
 - " - E.S. Sachs - " - Johannesburg - " -
 - " - R. Rabb, V. Danchin, Sam Barlin unattached members.

Later on in the day Comrade S.M. Pettersen (Durban) arrived and was appointed as an unattached delegate, and Comrades J. Chapman and E. Thomas representing Benoni Branch.

Admission of Press. Com. C.F. Glass moved, S. Buirski sec.¹

That the press be not admitted but that a report of the proceedings be supplied if requested. Carried.

Admission of non-members. Comrade S. Buirski moved, Mrs. Green seconded.

That members of Trade Unions and bona fide labour organisations be admitted if approved by the credentials committee.

This was an amendment to a motion moved by Mrs. Bunting, sec. S. Barlin - That only members of the Party be admitted.

The amendment on being put was carried.

Greetings. Telegrams were received from Cape Town Branch and Bloemfontein Socialist Circle, wishing the delegates success in their deliberations.

The chairman of the Party, Comrade S.P. Bunting, at 10.35 a.m. declared the Congress open and asked the delegates to appoint its chairman.

Comrade S.P. Bunting was elected by acclamation.

He then read the following address:-

Chairman address.

At last, after an interval of 20 months, we have managed to hold our 1924 Party Conference. Apart from our Constitutional rule that the Conference be held annually, we had waited for a psychological moment to call it, but are now, I think, all agreed that the time was ripe. At any rate, a periodical review of our programme of work and slogans is always valuable, especially to us as pioneers; our executive needs new blood, although unfortunately it has to be drawn from the Rand only; contact between the Cape and other distant centres

1. Seconded.

has to be renewed; we all need to be jolted from time to time out of our ruts; and the differences of viewpoint which are bound to arise in different centres, call for reconciliation through joint debate, a result that Communist above all, seeing that their foundation principles are identical, may be confident of attaining. Moreover, we meet soon after a C.I. Congress, although the 5th Congress last July had perhaps less of value to us than its predecessors.

With the approval of the branches, the C.E. has drawn up an agenda intended to ensure that the principal matters of interest to us shall not be forgotten or made dependent on haphazard criticism arising on say the C.E. report or isolated resolutions from Branches, but shall be located and debated systematically in their proper setting, as part of a comprehensive policy - just as we as a Party have learned to estimate ourselves, partly at last, according to our setting in the comprehensive Communist International. Most ordinary Congresses are arranged like this, and we are following, a long way behind no doubt, the example of the C.I. Congresses in particular. It may be said that we are in for an orgy of talky-talky. Well, discussion is essential at any time, and for the present, when we must confess ourselves unable to carry out any very big action, we may all the more usefully spend a day or two per annum clarifying our ideas and surveying our position, in preparation for more stirring times.

Having drawn up the list of special subjects, the C.E. still in consultation with the branches, has appointed introducers for each in the hope that better justice will thereby be done to them. There, however, it has stopped. Unlike the E.C.C.I. 'Cabinet', striving for continuity, it has not seen fit to inspire or concern itself in any way with what the introducers are to tell us; it almost washes its hands of them; they come before us as free lances, each with a little thing of his own, a surprise Christmas box up his sleeve - except in the case of the item 'programme', on which the C.E. appointed last week a sub-committee to draft a Party programme, but too late for the sub-committee to report back to the C.E. In other words, the C.E., in its wisdom, has shrunk on this occasion from commending any line of policy, or giving any lead. Nor has it actually asked the branches to formulate their views or even instruct their delegates under the given headings. Benoni and Cape Town branches have themselves done something in this direction, whereas Johannesburg has not. Indeed, as Branch Secretary I must confess that it has not even discussed the majority of the items. Personally I venture to think that all this is carrying 'democracy' and 'laissez faire' too far, although, of course, we are all against cast-iron voting mandates. All the greater responsibility, however, on this conference itself to give a united lead in its turn to the incoming C.E. and the Party and membership generally. The C.I. practice is to appoint sub-committees of the congress to evolve resolutions under the various headings as the congress goes along. This may be beyond our power in the two days available, and may be uncalled for in the case of several of the subjects; but where desirable we must endeavour, as we proceed, to find ways and means of registering our decisions, if any.

One more C.I. practice will, I hope be borne in mind here, as far as possible. At the 4th Congress I do not remember a vote ever being taken. Controversial matter was thrashed out in sub-committees until agreement had been reached. They do not believe in minority and majority reports or agreements to differ, but in unanimity; they aim not at outvoting or outmanoeuvring each other, but at convincing each other and smoothing out all differences. I see no reason why we should not attempt the same, if we concentrate on mutual goodwill and reserve our antagonism and intolerance for the enemy without.

As for the subject matter of our Conference, may I presume a little on this opportunity to add a few remarks of my own? We are all asking ourselves, not only what progress have we made since last conference, but in general, what are we doing? Do we justify our existence? And looking only at our small achievements, and at the present rather than the future, some may say that we are not, and that we ought to shut up shop. Let us face the fact that our membership is a good deal smaller than in 1920: there is more disappointment now than then, and we have no great masses behind us yet: they still follow false gods. Well, we are partly the creatures of outside factors; we cannot make the masses revolutionary at will; to a certain extent we ebb and flow with the world situation and in the world there has been a comparative, though by no means complete, lull after the revolutionary crisis of 1917–20. We cannot expect big accessions just now. But although we too may have lost a Newbold or a Philips Price here and there, (and we can usually discern a bread-and-butter rather than a political reason for it), the rest of us have not, I think, lost one jot of our belief in the prospect of revolution and in the great and increasing power of the C.I. as the leader of the effective Labour movement, especially in view of the increasing stability and progress of Soviet Russia. It is as a section of the world C.I. that our self respect rises highest: and equally it is when we survey the baneful part played by the Second International, that we recoil most from the suggestion of being swallowed up again in the Labour Party, and aspire rather to swallow it up.

The bourgeois press, and Bernard Shaw, tell us that the C.I. is going in: we see no sign of it – rather the contrary. Its hand is seen incessantly active in every country: 'Bolshevism draws on itself more and more of the exclusive fire of the bourgeoisie – e.g. in France, Germany and India. Even here they hate and fear us more than ever, in contrast with their tolerance of the S.A.L.P. A Communist of 1924 is worth ten or a hundred Communists of 1918–20. Our Party strength therefore means after all a good deal more today than it did in 1920. The apathetic have nearly all dropped out by now; those that remain are stalwarts. Nor are the excuses given by the backsliders at all convincing: while one says we are not revolutionary enough, another says we are too advanced. The fact is that in this between-time, we are bound more than ever to maintain and develop our forces and revolutionary perspective, and conversely to desert now, individually or collectively, is more than ever unforgivable. If we

are weak, all the more reason for not making ourselves weaker, but stronger. To liquidate would be to leave the capitalist class to all intents unopposed. Nor must we wait too long on external events for an opening, or we shall be making that the excuse for doing nothing. We must for ever be on the warpath against stalemate, stagnation, routine or paralysis.

Here in S.A., the C.I., through us, has enormous virgin fields to conquer. We alone can say 'the whole of the masses, voters and non-voters, are our constituents'. The C.I. distinguishes itself from the Labour Parties by its policy of sweeping in to the combined attack on capitalism and imperialism, not only the masses of the imperialist mother countries, but also the inferior races subjected and battered on by Imperialism in Asia and Africa; and, although locally it may seem remote, there is no doubt that from the point of view of the world movement, that is the direction in which our peculiar responsibility lies. We have two unique tasks in the world movement, first, in South Africa, to bring the European and the helot workers together in a united army – a more characteristically Labour task – and secondly, throughout the continent of Africa, to assist the native people on their own account to throw off the Imperial yoke – rather more of a nationalist task, the two combining as an anti-capitalist or anti-imperialist Pact. In the former task we act absolutely alone, without much useful advice even from Moscow. In the latter there is only the possibility of co-operation from our Egyptian brother party, with which at present we are quite out of touch. For the time being the peculiarly South African task, rather than Pan-African one claims our interest, and an epoch making task it is, for, as Comrade Ivon Jones used to say, we have here in South Africa a miniature of the world. In the world, as a whole, coloured labour stands to European in much the same proportion as it does here, and the estrangement and absence of co-operation between them is even more complete. If we can bring it about here, we shall have solved the whole problem of world labour unity. In this field no other party even attempts to compete with us: we have it all to ourselves.

I believe we are all absolutely agreed on this, in spite of talk about division on the subject; at any rate, in so far as race prejudice stands in the way, it is ashamed to announce itself, while differences on tactics are pre-eminently suitable for argument and solution on sane businesslike lines. Some comrades at the Cape, indeed, wonder at the stress laid on the matter of 'colour' by Rand comrades, but if they will look at South Africa in general they must admit that the 'native question', the gulf between black and white, is a real thing, a most palpable stumbling block to revolutionary progress. However, their serene failure to see any difficulty about it should at least be of assistance in enabling other in the Party to surmount their difficulties. For once more, we are here today not to stabilise any differences amongst us, but to eliminate them, so that whatever action we sanction shall not be considered as only the concern of a few enthusiasts among us, the rest washing their hands of it, looking askance at it, or saying 'serve them right' if trouble arises, but as action in the name of the

whole Party, and therefore of every member, where the actors feel they have the whole party whole heartedly behind them and ready to champion them against all comers. No party in the world has a more difficult task than this one of ours. No wonder we have made little progress with it as yet. If we differ it is because the subject is difficult: we are bound to express diverse opinions on one or another aspect of it; and none of us can afford to be cocksure about it. But if our Conference accomplishes no more than to remove mutual aloofness on the subject of native affairs, it will have justified itself; on the other hand, if it leaves us inharmonious, anarchistic, cynical, or mutually contemptuous, it will have failed. Disagreements in that spirit on any subject, whether avowed or smothered, quickly paralyse and petrify a party, a branch or a committee, rob it of political fighting power, and 'freeze the genial current of the soul'. Indeed, the whole Labour movement of South Africa, as it always seems to me, is paralysed and stultified by its failure to tackle its 'native question' (which, by the way, is a very different thing from the capitalists' 'native question'); but this is a case in which we must certainly not be the plaything of objective circumstances of that kind, but should strenuously resist any tendency to a similar paralysis. By all means let us be wise as serpents, but also courageous as lions, prepared for a rough and tumble if need be.

[...]

The best cure for disagreements, in fact the supreme slogan for our coming year, apart from anything of the sort, is to intensify our activity in all directions. We have not only to keep our tails up, but to redouble all our efforts, seek out new fields and stunts, maintain our reputation as the party with a punch, in short, do more. We have to lay our plans for a long struggle, and must not be surprised if some of us grow old and shrivelled or even narrow and soured before big results are attained. Other movements have fared that way and yet come out victorious. In every such cause some will I do not say desert, but fall by the wayside, worn out or, fed up. Just as farmers here and there may give up with a succession of bad seasons or locusts, but agriculture has got to go on, equally our soul will go marching on, in spite of all, and we are fortunate in having a younger generation coming along ready to carry on the flag and fight even better than their seniors.

The address was greeted with applause.

[...]

RGASPI, 495/64/33/4-8.

Original in English.

Typed.

**Documents of Fourth Congress of CPSA,
26-8 December 1925 (Extracts)**

FOURTH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF
SOUTH AFRICA HELD AT 145 LONG STREET, CAPE TOWN,
ON DECEMBER 26TH, 27TH AND 28TH 1925.

Johannesburg Branch – S.P. Bunting,

F.W. Kalk,

E.R. Roux,

B. Sachs,

J. Shields,

T.W. Thibedi,

Cape Town Branch – J. Gomas,

E.J. Khaile,

P. de Norman,

J. Pick.

Durban Branch – no representative,

Benoni Branch – Jessie Chapman,

Unattached Members – B. Kreel (Montagu C.P.)

Party members present during the Conference –

Johannesburg Branch – R. Bunting, J. Myerson, C. Grootewal, J. Righthouse,
J. Ogterop, R.G. Lake, (Y.C.L.).

Cape Town Branch – M. Wolton, L. Koush, M. Walt, J. Locks, S. Zegal,
L. Dirmeik, B.S. Madase-Shumba, S. Jacobson, S. Shlom,
D.G. Wolton, J. Walt, L. Dromerty, E. Sacks, F. Pearce,
Mrs. Pearce, G. Nuthal, G.H. Barnes, D.H. Julius,
E. Gaba, B. Sieff, A. Gamsu, D. Dryburgh, R. Blake,
J. Murray, J.A. La Guma, I. Vermont, P. Sieff, E. Richman.

Non-Members – S.M. Silwana, W.A. Harrison, A.G. Harrison

Agenda

1. Chairman opens Conference.
2. Minutes of Last Conference.
3. Report of C.E. for 1925.
4. Reports of Branches
5. The political situation, national and international, Imperialism and War (J. Shields).
6. Function and Policy of the Party; the Pact; Native Affairs; Asiatic Question; Trade Union Movement; Elections. (S.P. Bunting, E.J. Khaile, R. de Norman, W. Kalk, J. Pick).