

shortcomings and weaknesses and mobilize the Party members for rectifying these mistakes.

RGASPI, 495/20/654/268-73.

Original in English (Comintern translation of the Russian original text. See: RGASPI, 495/20/654/196-204).

Typed.

Stamped: 1) 2733 - 22.JUN.1934.

2) Russian original (in German).

3) FINAL TEXT (in Russian)

Adopted at the Meeting of Politcomm. on 3.6.34

Minutes no. 380 (in Russian)

4) Storage (in Russian)

Inscriptions: Foreign # 01292/ 26.VI.34. (in German)

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'5'<sup>4</sup>

6711/4

Copying EN

June 27, 1934<sup>5</sup>

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**Letter from Comintern to CPSA,  
27 June 1934**

Confidential

**LETTER ON THE QUESTION OF THE UNITED FRONT  
TO THE C.P. OF SOUTH AFRICA.**

Dear Comrades!

The imperialist attack upon the working class has called forth a broad mass strike movement in South Africa embracing almost all branches of industry. The main masses of the working class, the white as well as the native workers, were drawn into the struggle.

The strike struggles during the years of the crisis have raised the labour movement in South Africa to a new and a higher level and this was expressed in the fact that the Party succeeded in organising a number of joint actions of the white and native workers which increased the influence of the Party in the economic struggle of the working class.

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4. The text is unclear. It is either '5' corrected to '6' or vice versa.

5. Probably the date when this copy of the English text was typed.

The experience of the strike of the busmen and the tramwaymen in Cape Town, which took place under the leadership of the Party, showed that in the conditions of the colonial regime in South Africa, in the years of the crisis, the working class can obtain the fulfilment of its demands if it is guaranteed the correct and systematic leadership of the Party and its assistance.

But nevertheless, a considerable part of the strikes broke out and took place spontaneously without any help and leadership from the Party. The strike of the miners, where the AFTU (Federation of the Revolutionary Trade Unions) did not show any initiative, despite the possibilities for doing this, where the question of drawing the white and the native workers into the struggle was not raised, where the trade unions actually removed themselves from the struggle, can serve as confirmation of this.

The strike of the steel workers in Pretoria, where the AFTU made no attempt to head the strike and to mobilise the native workers to help the striking white workers, where the unemployed were isolated and where nothing was done to draw them into the struggle, where organised counter-action against using the Special Service Battalions<sup>1</sup> as strike-breakers was not shown, can serve as another example.

The Party and the AFTU were unable to head the growing strivings of the white and native workers for a joint struggle against the capitalist offensive.

The Party and the AFTU must understand, finally, that in the conditions of growing poverty, political disfranchisement, discontent of the masses and the growth of class struggles, their most important task is to efficiently organise the united front of the workers of all nationalities for joint defence against the capitalist offensive and for the counter-offensive of the workers. The breaking away of the reformist and national-reformist workers from their reactionary leaders and also the struggle for the unorganised workers can be successful only if the Party and the AFTU will place before the workers the question as to how to practically defend wages, the working day, etc., how to practically fight against social, economic and political oppression, in what forms the resistance to the capitalist offensive is to be organised.

The discontent of the workers with their reformist leaders is manifested in the fact that at the meetings of the reformist trade unions, the workers very often speak against the policies of their leaders, express themselves for more effective and revolutionary action, in the fact that the workers express mistrust in their leaders and remove the leadership of the reformist unions (miners, needle workers). And in these conditions, a number of leading comrades in the Party and in the AFTU did not yet understand that the essence of the united front consists in the organisation of joint struggles in the factories and not in

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1. Special Service Battalion was created and funded by Hertzog's government in the late 1930s in order to provide specialised training for unqualified white labour that opened job opportunities in the public sector (police, prisons, railways, etc.). The organisation was run on military lines.



negotiations with the upper stratum of the reformist trade unions; they still did not understand that the organisation of the united front is the duty of every Communist and member of the AFTU and not only of the paid functionaries, as has been the case up till now.

The united front, including the rank and file workers in the reformist, national-reformist and other reactionary unions, must be organised primarily in the factories for definite, concrete actions. The members of the Party and the AFTU in the factories should carefully study all the details of the discontent of the workers, and on this basis, formulate demands that are understandable for the workers and take the initiative in organising the struggle for these demands. The programme for struggle should be formulated in such a way that even the backward workers would understand that it is a matter of their vital interest.

The absence of revolutionary trade union groups in the factories, the lack of knowledge of the concrete, daily needs of the workers is the reason why the Party has up to the present not been able to organise the united front from below. Not having pillars of support in the factories, not being able to organise the struggles in the factories themselves, not heading the partial actions and conflicts of the workers, a number of Party comrades have evolved the theory that only a strike on a national scale can be successful, which has found its expression in the strikes of the fishermen in Port Nolloth,<sup>2</sup> the tobacco workers in Cape Town, the food workers in Johannesburg.

The Party must resolutely put an end to this opportunist theory and by heading all the partial actions of the workers in one factory it must attain an extension of the front of struggle.

Recently a number of cases can be noted where the left reformists and the national-reformists took the initiative regarding the united front. It is necessary to be very careful every time such proposals are made as in the main they have the character of manoeuvres against the Communist Party and the revolutionary movement. Vallinger's<sup>3</sup> proposal on the creation of the united front to defend the natives against the 'pick-up',<sup>4</sup> judging by information in the 'Umzebenzi', was not utilised in the interests of extending the struggle against imperialist rule.

In all cases the task of the Party should consist in determinedly coming out against negotiations behind the scenes and in proposing that all questions connected with working out a basis for the united front should be discussed at general meetings of workers or at special meetings of delegates from the shops and factories.

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2. Port Nolloth.

3. Ballinger.

4. See footnote 3 to document 34, vol. II.

The Party must direct the movement into the channel of struggle for the partial demands of the workers, both white and native, which ought to express the most vital and urgent needs of the workers and which can become an instrument for mobilising the masses for the revolutionary struggle. It is necessary to develop the struggle for putting through the law on social insurance and the payment of relief for sickness, compensation for disability, organisation of medical aid for all workers at the expense of the employers and the state. The Party must increasingly propagate the slogan of an independent native republic, on the basis of the class interests of the proletariat, connecting it up with the daily struggles and actions of the working class.

In the conditions of South Africa where the working class is divided by the barrier of 'colour', the task of the Party and the AFTU consists in explaining to the entire working class the essence of this division created by the imperialists for the purpose of being better able to plunder each separate section of the workers. Under the effects of the crisis, the white workers are already beginning to understand that the policy of 'civilised' labour<sup>5</sup> is the policy of plundering the white and native workers. It is the task of the Party to help the white workers to discover the real motive for this policy. For this purpose the Party should boldly come forward with a concrete programme of immediate demands for the white workers, such as the question of social insurance, help for the unemployed, against the lengthening of the working day and the intensification of labour, against the reduction of wages, etc.

Up to the present, the Party has not yet completely approached this question and not drawn the white workers into the struggle.

By organising the white and the native workers for the struggle against capitalism, the Party should not lose sight of the fact that a certain part of the native workers are still under the influence of national reformism in the person of Ai-Si-Yu<sup>6</sup> and others who distract the attention of the workers from the struggle against capitalism.

The opinion existing among various members of the Party regarding the organisational weakening of Ai-Si-Yu does not by any means signify that the Party and the AFTU should not conduct the most determined struggle against his influence.

With concrete facts in its hands, the Party should expose the national-reformist politicians like Ballinger, Champion, Kadani<sup>7</sup> and others, as betrayers of the interests of the native workers and should expose their collaboration with the imperialists. This is particularly important at the present time in connection with the growth of fascism as the positions of national-reformism are directed towards diverting the attention of the workers from the growing danger.

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5. See footnote 3 to document 14, vol II.

6. I.C.U.

7. Kadalie.



The Party should concentrate its main attention upon the organisation of the systematic struggle against fascism. The establishment of the open fascist dictatorship in Germany had a rapid influence upon the growth and the activation of the fascist elements in South Africa where there are at present a number of fascist organisations of which the most significant are the Special Service Battalions, subsidised by the government, and the Grey Shirts, at the head of which there are agents of German fascists – Weichart,<sup>8</sup> Dond<sup>9</sup> and others. The fascist movement is in the first place directed against the growing revolutionary movement of the working class and the basic population as a whole.

It must be noted that it was the Party that gave the first signal to the working class on the growing fascist danger but it did not completely understand its essence, considering it as a passing phenomenon, and it did not point out concrete measures of struggle. This was apparent in the holding of the Anti-Fascist Conference where the Party was unable to convert the anti-fascist movement into a genuine revolutionary mass movement against imperialist rule.

Instead of mobilising all its members and the members of the revolutionary mass organisations for the unfolding of a mass anti-fascist campaign in the factories, in the compounds, for the calling of a workers' anti-fascist conference, the Party confined itself to participating in the Conference called by the reformist leaders on this question and in that way allowed the initiative to go out of its hands. The Party must take into account the mistakes which have been committed and must transfer the center of the struggle against fascism into the factories, making this the central point in the tactics of the united front, and in this connection being guided by the decisions of the ECCI on the united front against fascism, which have been sent to you.

By its struggle, the Communist Party should show that it stands and will continue to stand in the first ranks of the struggle for the united front, not in

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8. Louis T. Weichardt, leader of Grey Shirts.

9. The identity of Dond could not be established.

words but in deeds, in the class battles against imperialism, for the revolutionary way out of the present situation.

RGASPI, 495/20/654/274-7.

Original in English (Comintern translation of the Russian original text. See: RGASPI, 495/20/654/205-8).

Typed. Copy.

Stamped: 1) 2733 - 22.JUL.1934.

2) Russian original (in German).

3) Adopted at the Meeting of Politkomm  
on 3.6.34.

Minutes no. 380 (in Russian)

4) Storage (in Russian)

Inscriptions: Foreign. # ... 1290/ 26.VI.34. (in German)

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EK/Copying.

BC/Tr. Russ.

6712/4.

27.6.34. (typed)

### 36

#### Letter from L. Bach to PB, CPSA, 9 July 1934

Johannesburg  
9th July 1934.

P.B. C.P.S.A.

Dear Comrades,

I submit this statement as a supplement to my statement in connection with the petition,<sup>1</sup> for I want to make clear the accusation of attempting to instigate guerilla warfare in Natal.

Actually the position was as follows. In 1932, in our work in the reserves in Natal, it became clear that the peasant movement could spontaneously develop to a higher level, than demonstrations, struggles to protect cattle from the police etc. Already at that time we had such actions in Mgeni,<sup>2</sup> Molweni, where the peasants armed with assegais,<sup>3</sup> drove out the police from the

1. See document 29.

2. Umgeni.

3. Assegai - a short spear used by the AmaZulu before the advent of firearms.