

**Letter from M. Kotane to ECCL,  
31 October 1934<sup>1</sup>**

Confidential

31.10.34

THE SLOGAN 'INDEPENDENT NATIVE REPUBLIC'

I maintain that the slogans 'Independent Native Republic' and the 'Workers' and Peasants' Government' are not identical. Even if, owing to the objective and subjective circumstances, the two may coincide, yet they cannot and should not be identified. The identification of these two different historical stages is nothing but rank opportunism; and this can only follow from non-Marxist-Leninist outlook and method of analysis – dialectical materialism.

The 'Independent Native Republic' is a slogan for the anti-imperialist stage of the revolution. It is a slogan for rallying the oppressed and exploited landless Native population against British and Boer imperialism; for national emancipation struggle of 'the diffused, scattered and unorganised' Native masses. It is a slogan for mobilizing ALL THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST FORCES and ELEMENTS FOR THE OVERTHROW OF IMPERIALISM and every vestige of foreign domination.

The slogan 'Independent Native Republic' is not much exclusive. Under this slogan will rally elements who may later on struggle against the 'Workers' and Peasants' Government', which I take to be an anti-capitalist government – a government based on class lines – Workers' and Peasants. A Workers' and Peasants' Government is exclusive, its basis is narrower than that of the 'Independent Native Republic' (class basis).

It is nonsensical to say that 'only the workers and peasants will fight for the Independent Native Republic' – Ramutla. Or take this naive assertion of theirs (Ramutla, Tefu and Bach)<sup>2</sup> that: 'The Independent Native Republic does not express the desire of every black man in Africa because amongst the black men there are imperialist agents, tribal leaders, intellectuals, missionaries (!)

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1. This letter was found in the files of the South African Commission. Attached to the document was a handwritten note by the head of the Commission, André Marty: 'A very important letter, about which I never had been informed. In many parts it is right. February 1936. A. Marty.'
  2. Kotane refers to the statement on the slogan of independent native republic that had, obviously, been submitted to the Comintern by his opponents in the party. This submission apparently contended that there was no reason to seek the support of the African bourgeoisie in the struggle against capitalism in South Africa, including the struggle for an independent native republic. The question of the proper interpretation of the slogan became a major issue in the dispute between Kotane and Bach and their respective supporters.

and the chiefs, whose desires are different to the desires of the workers and peasants.<sup>3</sup>

Or take this confused statement: 'It is true that there is not a united Bantu people, but that there are workers and peasants, semifeudal elements in the form of tribal leaders and finally the Native bourgeoisie (chiefs)' (!?) So today the chiefs are bourgeoisie and not feudal elements. I should like to know who are the feudal elements then, if not the chiefs?

This is a frank denial of the national aspiration of the Native people, the desire of every black man to be free from imperialist oppression and exploitation. Bach and his followers quite frankly admit that they 'do not agree that the Party by putting forward the slogan of Independent Native Republic was expressing in a political form the desire of every black man in Africa, the desire TO BE FREE AND TO HAVE OPPORTUNITIES OF DEVELOPMENT'.

I entirely disagree with Bach's attempt to reduce the tasks of the working class in South Africa simply to proletarian struggles. The Native people in this country are oppressed and exploited both as a nationality and as a class. There are laws which discriminate against and oppress the blackman as such irrespective of his social position; and which hinder his general development.

There can be no argument that the proletariat has its own aims; and that the 'Independent Native Republic' can only be successfully carried out under the leadership of the working class and its vanguard, the Communist Party of South Africa, but this does not necessarily mean that because the proletariat carried out certain tasks which historically belonged to the bourgeoisie this should be identified with a different historical stage – nationalist and class stages or anti-imperialist and socialist stages.

For the proletariat to be successful in the revolution it must seek the support of the other oppressed and exploited classes not necessarily proletariat or semi-proletariat. To ignore this the proletariat will be only playing into the hands of imperialism. It would be fatalism for the proletariat to simply regard the other oppressed and exploited classes as its irreconcilable foes.

A revolution is not as easy as the comrades take it to be. In a revolutionary situation crises may arise which demand supreme decisions and correct tactics on the part of the Communist Party and Communists. We must not think that things will go according to our schemes and 'theories' during the period of revolutionary crisis. Therefore it is essential that we be on the alert and not deceive ourselves. We must not overestimate our strength and influence; we must not minimise our task and difficulties, nor must we underestimate our responsibility.

Further I disagree with the proposition that there is a Native bourgeoisie and the magnifying of the exploiting character of this 'bourgeoisie'. I

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3. There are single lines in blue pencil in the left margin beside the 1st, 2nd and 4th paragraphs in the original.



categorically declare that there is no Native bourgeoisie in South Africa, but a petty bourgeoisie and that the exploitation of the toiling Native masses by this petty bourgeoisie IS VERY INSIGNIFICANT compared with the exploitation of the Anglo-Boer imperialist bourgeoisie. This petty bourgeoisie, in my opinion, is more oppressed and exploited than it itself oppresses and exploits.

Yes, there are imperialist agents (big chiefs, traders and some intellectuals) who will go against the revolution from the very beginning. But this does not justify the lumping together of all the non-proletarian and non-peasants elements into the counter-revolutionary camp. Such a characterisation I maintain is a non-Marxian one, and a dangerous 'left' sectarian opportunism. It is an endeavour to simplify the task of the proletariat and the denial of its participation in the national emancipatory struggle of the Native toiling masses, and destitute, landless population. No, according to these comrades, the Independent Native Republic will mean nothing to these people except the workers and peasants.<sup>4</sup>

Those who are not workers and peasants I suppose will still be subjected to the present anti-Native laws, e.g. colour bar, pass laws, etc. This ass-like ignorance is detrimental to the development of the revolution and also to the interests of the working class in general. The Communist Party as the leader of the working class and as a part of the proletariat, fighting above all for the class it represents, must fight against all the barriers which stand in the way of the development and the interest of the proletariat, and national oppression is one these barriers!

This absurd and gross ignorance flows from the ridiculous standpoint that 'all the colonial countries are the same, with regard to political, economical and cultural development'. To them there is no disparity between the political, economic and cultural development of China, India and South Africa. They see no difference in the national bourgeoisie of China and the Native South African 'bourgeoisie' – that is, both economically and politically.

There are strong national bourgeoisie in both China and India, and, a highly developed feudalist method of exploitation in both these countries. Consequently South Africa has the same! Such a way of reasoning is nothing but sheer absurdity. One cannot, in general, speak about a highly developed feudalist method of exploitation in South Africa; capitalism was introduced to the Natives before they passed the tribal stage.

Feudalist exploitation, centering around a chief, was just rising and would have developed highly had it not been for imperialism. Practically all the chiefs are paid by the Government, of course their salaries vary according to their importance; the largeness of the group being the determining factor in this instance.

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4. There are single lines in pencil in the left margin beside the last three paragraphs in the original.

The proletarian party must support the struggle of the non-proletarian elements against imperialism. For this matter even if the struggle is in itself a 'contradiction' to the general principles of this proletarian party; so long as this struggle facilitates the general task of the workers and poor peasants it must be supported.<sup>5</sup> We must make use of the contradictions in the enemy camp if by so doing our task is depleted. We must know the class composition of our own and the enemy forces. To say that the social forces in South Africa are the same with that of China and India, is trying to simplify by a magic stroke a most complex problem – and this will not work.

That this is so can be proved by the statement that, 'we cannot treat the problem of the State dialectically'. The reason for this rejection of the dialectical approach is 'because in the Party at the present time there exists confusion'. What nonsense! This is not the reason for the abandonment of the dialectical method, but an effort to avoid entanglement – opportunism!

I am rebuked for saying that<sup>6</sup> the 'Independent Native Republic' is, and it is not a 'Workers' and Peasants' Government'. As I have already stated above, the two are two different stages with different social forces. That is, the participants in the struggle for the overthrow of Anglo-Boer imperialism, for the establishment of an 'Independent Native Republic' which is a prerequisite for a socialist government. Under the 'Native Republic' the land is not yet nationalized; only the key industries which at present belong to the imperialists will be socialized whereas the subsequent stage will be a stage of general socialization.<sup>7</sup>

The subsequent stage will be a period of civil wars, suppression and general enlightenment which demands of the proletariat a strong organisation and the necessary efficient machinery to cope with the situation. This period will be a more difficult period which wants stern social measures. The dictatorship will have to be exercised exhaustively. Of course this can be skipped if we speak in terms of Socialist Soviet States of Europe, America and the East. Then it would perhaps be unnecessary for the working class to bother about allies!

If we think that just because we will have 'Soviets (councils) of workers and peasants' everything will be easy, it is an illusion. Soviets are organs of struggle, and they are not elected after the revolution – after the establishment of a state power, but before. Soviets being organs of struggle must be elected before or during the struggle against imperialism and in this period one cannot speak of socialist Soviets, and one cannot chase away the non-socialist but anti-imperialist fighters – nor can one say: 'to hell with' nationalist intellectuals at this juncture; it would be premature and by so doing one may be condemning

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5. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin beside this sentence in the original.

6. Obviously, 'what' should be substituted for 'that'.

7. There is a single line in pencil in the left margin beside this paragraph in the original.



the revolution to a failure – scattering the revolutionary forces and driving them into the imperialist camp.

It is also generally forgotten that the Native proletariat is culturally backward because of the colour bar and the other South African industrial legislations. Native workers are debarred from doing skilled work in the industry; in fact there is a strong tendency to exclude them from all the industries but mining and agriculture. It must not be forgotten too that among the Native masses there are very few proletarians in the real sense of the word. The majority of our toiling masses are semi-proletariat or periodical workers and this is a factor which should be taken into consideration whenever we discuss the fundamental problems of our revolution. To ignore these facts and simply to talk about the revolution in general is only phrasemongering and paying lip-service to the cause of the revolution.<sup>8</sup>

The movement for excluding Natives from industries goes parallel with a strong process of expropriation and proletarianisation of the Native people. Every movement for raising wages in this country means a vicious attack against the Native toiling masses by the protagonists of the 'civilized labour policy'<sup>9</sup> – the labour department, the press and the Government. The situation is very complicated and stereotyped phrases are not wanted, we must analyse and base our arguments on analysis.

Yours comradely.

Moses. M. Kotane

Johannesburg

31/10/34

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Inscription: Zusmanovich – familiarize and give for translation. A. Marty. 21.1  
(in Russian).

8. There is a single line in pencil in the left margin beside the last sentence of the previous paragraph in the original.

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