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Autobiography of J. Mpama
[1936]¹

My parents divorced when I was four years old. Being the only child and with my mother at the time of divorce the judge decided that I remain with my mother until such time that I decide whether I would like to stay with my mother or father. Thus meaning that none of the two should compel me to stay where I did not want to stay.

The case was decided in favour of my mother and the house belongings where to be mine. My father having lost the case had to pay all court expences which amounted to more than £50. How many years he worked hut to pay that debt I just wonder.

After the case was over my mother decided get her things packed and go and stay with her parents. My father would not let her take her clothing for what reasons it is impossible to guess. She went without them. When we got to the station and in the train my father came to say 'good bye'. As the second bell rang he took me through the window pretending to say 'good bye' thus he walked with me to his bicycle and rode of. My poor mother being mad but could do nothing until she got to the parents.

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1. The document is reproduced as is. No mistakes, corrections etc. have been marked for this would make the reading of the text extremely difficult.

The archives contain the following document with Mpama's biographical data that helps to understand the contents of her autobiography:

Josephina Mofutsanyana Beatrice Henderson Winifred Palmer

'Delegate of the VII Congress of the CI, mandate no. 162.

From the autobiography and the form: 10.V.1935

Josie Mofutsanyana

I was born in Potchefstroom, 1906, 21st March.

mother – coloured

father – dutch, speaking zulu, born in Kroonstad

I began to work when was 13 years old

have 4 children (one from Kotane)

my husband is Mofutsanyana (Greenwood)

Education – Wesleyan missionary school (std. II.)

From 1932 in Johannesburg

Member of the CPSA from 1928, membership card No. 516

Member of the PB in 1932 (six months)

in 1933 (six months)

Secretary of IRA for 6 months

Group leader of Sophiatown

Chair of the Women's section

took part in the Party conferences in 1928 and 1930'

(RGASPI, 495/279/65. Original in English with the name, aliases, the first two and the last two entries in Russian. The document contains Mpama's picture.)

She on her arrival at home told the story to the police station who could only to advise her to go to a lawyer after he had corresponded with the police department could only say that I will compel my father to hand me over (with all my screaming) while at that age I don't know how I responded to my father's wish.

But I very well remember that many a night I was left alone in a big house of five rooms. Of course I was already 7 years. Then my father got a young man who had not work and nowhere to stay so father decided to take him into the house where he would take care of me and the house.

My mother on learning about this went to the law and demand that father get a woman into the house instead of leaving me with a man.

The law taking the case up compelled father to get a woman or I shall be given to my mother.

My father sent me to stay with his eldest sister who had a family. This was just a few miles from mother who came to see me very often, and bought my clothing.

Neighbours of my auntie informed mother that clothing she bought were worn by my cousins (auntie's children) so to make sure mother came one Sunday without informing us. She found me at home with a nasty cut in my foot caused by a broken bottle and I was dirty as ever. Late in the afternoon my aunt came with my cousin who was dressed up in the winter cloth mother had bought for me including shoes. Well this affirmed what mother was told.

Again mother laid a complain father took me back home. This time getting his youngest sister stay with us and take care of me. Now I was so to say in jail. I was not allowed to go with any of my school friends either she or this young man Paul had to take me to school and back. It became unbearable I wanted to play with my friends. So one day we decided that in the afternoon I'll run away from home and together with them go to the velt where they were gathering dried con dough to cook (instead of coal). They brought a extra bag for me and I was so excited at being out. We walked to the nearest Europeans farms who specialised in cattle breeding and also snakes for what purpose the latter I cant tell.

I not knowing of the latter I had not the slightest thought.

So we started gathering this caw dough. Together with another girl I spied a big one. We both raced to get it. She reached it first and to her surprise it was a snake curled up. Anybody can understand my position being the first time on a adventure and a snake farm at that. I lost no time but dropped my sack and took my heels.

I got home when the world was upside my father having just one thought that my mother or her relatives must have stolen me was giving mad as my aunt and Paul they were running the grounds of the location hunting for me.

Now instead of father scolding me for my wrong doings he took me on his lap and wept together with me as was his habit.

After a time father's eldest brother decided that I should come and stay with him this time much nearer to mother than first time.

Seeing that my aunt was young and could not manage me (as I refused to be washed or combed by her and in order as to get it done she had to call in a ugly old man who was dressed very funny wearing a fur cap with a sheep skin round his waist, he had no other work than to frighten children who were naughty, who did not wash, did not go to church and to school (when my uncle saw this old man he shook his hand and said 'the thing is ugly enough to give any child the blue fits) father agreed that I should go.

My uncle's wife came to fetch me. My uncle had bought a bottle of wine which was easier and cheaper to get than at his home. We arrived at the station of our destination we got into a cab and drove town direction under the instructions of my uncle the cab halted in front of a store we all got down and entered the store leaving my suit case in the cab to my surprise we left the store through another door which led to another street where Uncle called another cab which took us home.

When we arrived at home I enquired about my case as I had no clothing to change. I was answered in a hush way by his wife not to ask questions.

Life in that house was something unheard of.

There was staying an old lady, and sisters child of my uncle's wife. This was on mine premises. Within a few weeks the mother of this girl came and fetched her. She told me that this aunt is so cruel and lazy and because of her bad treatment she is leaving.

So I started my new life. I had to walk to school where I had to attend a German school (Lutheran) with a few English classes each week. Coming from an English school I found it a tuff-business. But because this aunt of mine was Lutheran by religion I had to go there. My uncle had no say as he never attended church except on 'Good Fridays' and 'Christmas Day'.

I remember how many mornings was I in time for school.

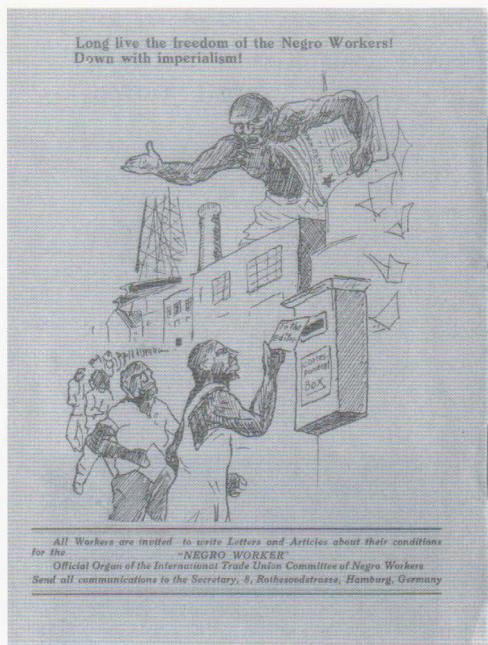
I had to get up early to tidy the house my auntie would get up 8 a.m. and just make her bad.

As for food we never got a piece of mutton or rice or green peas as to this was too expensive for no yet she bought only 'white bread' 'white sugar' 'mutton' and such things as cake etc. The rest of the food came from the mine.

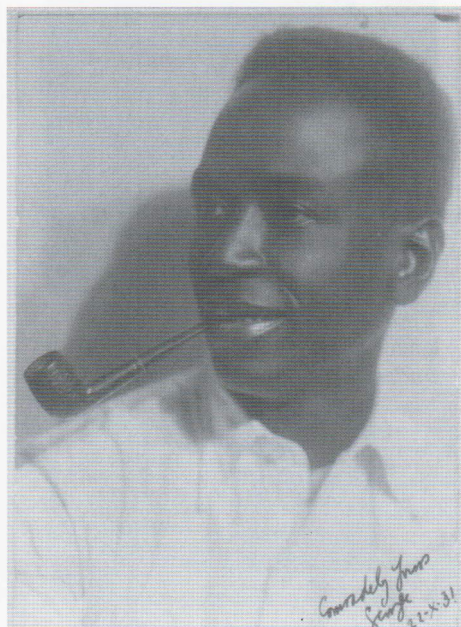
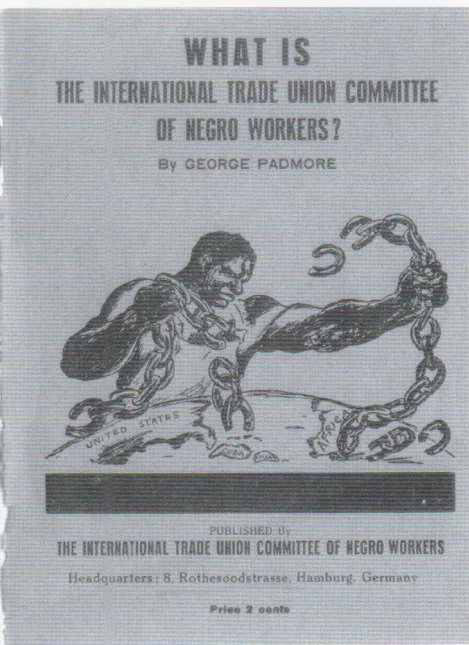
My uncle who found out that I was given not enough food use to make a lunch at home in the morning take it to his work and give it to me as I passed to school. If he had no chance to make lunch he would give me a 3d of to buy some thing to eat.

I use to get a good spanking for the slightest mistake I made. And besides what experience did I have of house work at the age of eight and when in my father house there was some body to do the work.

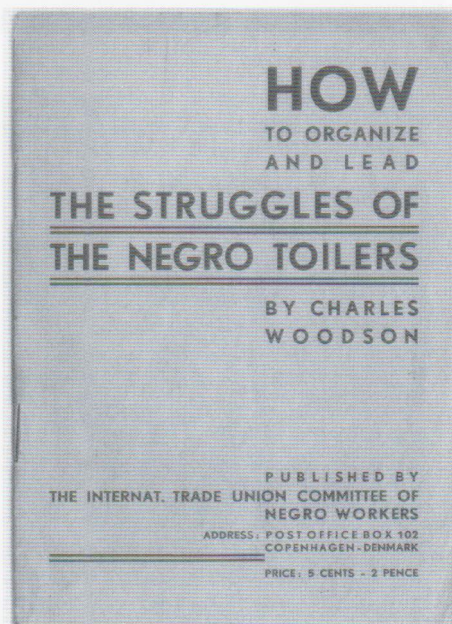
So one night she came home from tennis and found the suppert table not laid yet I got such a spanking that uncle had to interfere. She was so wild with me spoke about the way father spoiled me and what not that finally she was given such a threatening by her husband that when he finished with her a Doctor had to be called in.



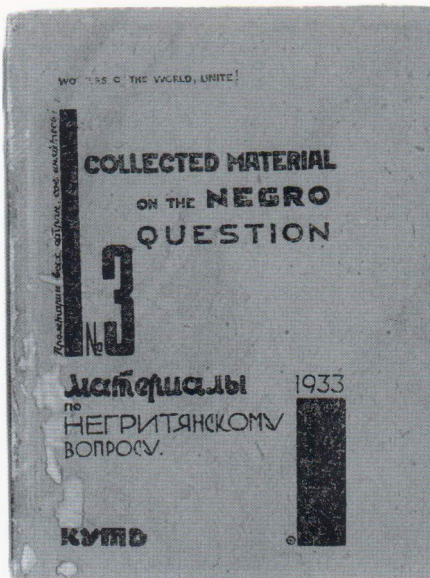
1. George Padmore's pamphlet.



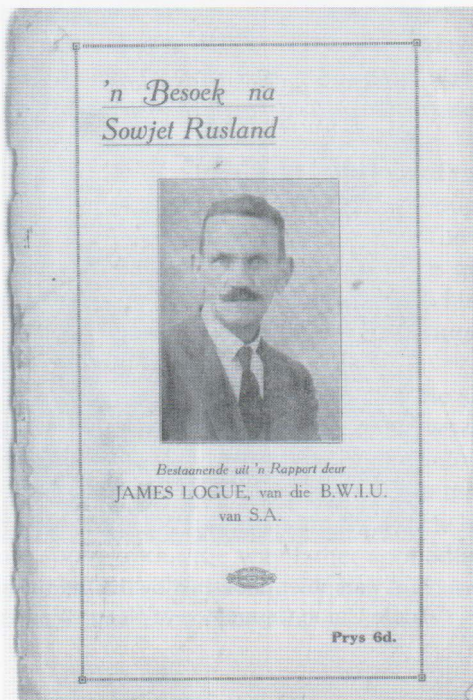
2. George Padmore, an ideologist of Pan-Africanism, who studied at KUTV together with several South African communists (1931).



3. A pamphlet published by the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers.



4. KUTV collected and published materials on 'the Negro question'. This is the third such publication.



5. George Padmore's Russian language pamphlet, *The Negroes under the Yoke of Imperialism* (1931).

6. J. Logue's booklet, *A Visit to Soviet Russia* published both in English and Afrikaans.

7. A poster of the South African Friends of the Soviet Union.

South African Friends of Soviet Union

THREE SOUTH AFRICANS
TOUR
SOVIET RUSSIA

MRS. FAY KING GOLDIE,
the well-known South African Journalist.

MISS JULIA KRUGER,
delegate Tailoring Workers' Union.

MR. EDWARD AUSTIN,
delegate Amalgamated Society of Woodworkers,
(who visited the Donbas mining area)


who have just returned from an extensive tour of the Soviet Union, will address a

PUBLIC MEETING

TRADES HALL,
30, KERK STREET.

Sunday, 27th, Sept., 1936,
at 8.15 p.m.

Come and hear the truth about the First Workers' Republic where exploitation has been abolished, where the workers have no fear of the future, of unemployment, of poverty, or starvation, but where socialism has been established and the workers are assured of a life of happiness.


8, Trades Hall, Johannesburg.  African Union Printing Works.

The Elections and Their Significance

Nominate and Elect the Revolutionary Fighter

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of South Africa, having seriously reviewed the question of the elections under the Native Representation Act and its significance to the Africans, especially the elections of the Natives in the Representative Council has come to the conclusion that in order to make use of and struggle against this law, which has been unreasonably forced upon us, and has taken away the rights of the Coloured Africans to vote, and which has brought to those of the North a first class bluff in the form of an indirect vote and representation, leaders should be elected who will wage a relentless struggle both from within and without these Councils on behalf of the exploited and oppressed Africans.

Further, the Communist Party warns the Africans that they should be on their guard against making the usual mistake of voting for the "good boy" type who will enter these Councils never to be seen or heard of until the next elections come again. Therefore, Comrade Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana is put forward by Communist Party of South Africa as



a candidate in these elections. His past and present devotion to the cause of the workers of this country in general and to the tolling oppressed Africans in particular, is a qualification of a real fighter; his firm attitude to questions of vital importance recommends him to every sincere African to give him the necessary support.

Edwin T. Mofutsanyana,
General Secretary, Communist Party of S.A. and Transvaal Prov., Secretary of the All-African Convention.

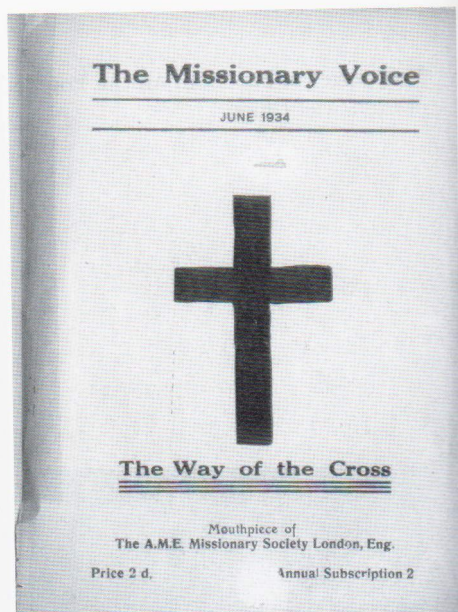
Nominate, Support and Elect this Militant Fighter

Issued by the Communist Party of S.A., (61 Albert St., cor Von Willegh) P.O. Box 4170, Johannesburg.

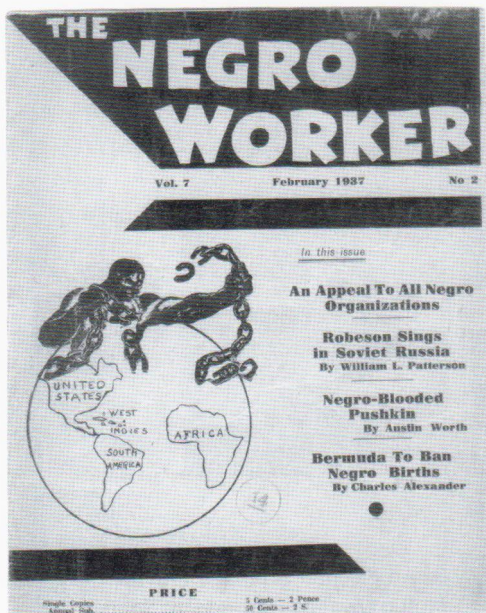
8. An election poster of Edwin Mofutsanyana, a prominent South African communist who studied at KUTV.



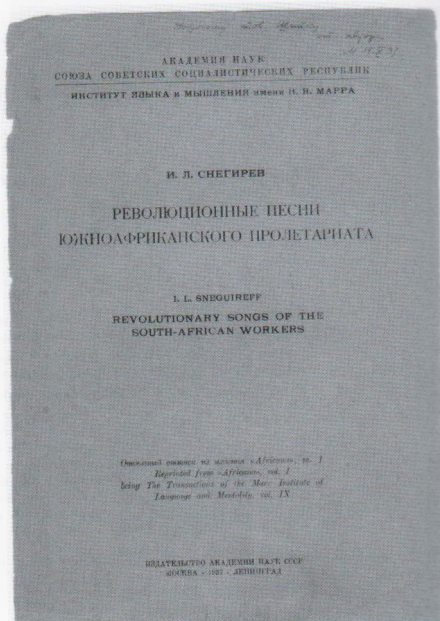
9. *The Negro Worker*, June 1934, no. 2 — an ordinary cover.



10. *The Missionary Voice*, June 1934; actually a disguise for *The Negro Worker*, published thus in order to facilitate the illegal distribution of the journal.



11. *The Negro Worker*, vol. 7, February 1937, no. 2.



12. An essay by I. L. Snegirev, *Revolutionary Songs of the South African Workers* which contained Russian translations of South African revolutionary songs (1937).



13. The apartment block where South Africans spent time with Snegirev's family and taught him the Zulu language.



14. *Forced Labour in British Colonies of South Africa*, a Russian-language booklet written by George Clark, a Comintern emissary to South Africa.

и разговоры. Насколько же было, и создавалось впечатление, что у них происходит тайное совещание».

На этом фоне уж совершеннейшим образом звучали обвинения в антисоветских злоупотреблениях тратой партийных денег (это уж точно партии!). Но эта часть дела победителя тем, что пока знает: Ночницкого был отведен не уж конспиративным приемлемым.

На одном из допросов Моисей Рихтер доказал, что когда он ездил из Москвы в Южную Африку, Зусманович да ему поручение купить автобус. На вопрос: «Как можно тратить эти деньги на личные нужды?» тот ответил: «Работники КПИ пользуются этим на определенную сумму».

В свою очередь, прекрасно зная о нравах старых товарищей в Москве, соответствующим образом поступали и южноафриканские борцы за свободу, давая бак попросили некоего канцелярия Браунштейна, систематически пополнявшего партийную кассу, дать деньги на покупку автомобиля. Тот обещал купить машину, но с условием — если его предвидят за сутки о готовившейся забастовке горняков. Руководство ЦКП, включая Котана, посоветовало и решило — предложение принять. В результате автобус, а бижутерий магазин попереву выгодное условие с продажи акций горнодобывающей компании.

Но вернулся с Советский Союз 37-го года. В те годы в надежде ходила молва: когда у человека уже совершенно нет никаких доказательств вины, значит, дело «танет на ветер». Особое совещание (ОСО) по левым антипартийным делам приговорило южноафриканских коммунистов к 5 годам лагерной ссылки. Их везли в Сибирь, в лагерь в Буту. Нагана. Заключение они отбывали на дозах, прискакивая Колымой и, как устал много лет спустя сын Пауля Рихтера — Яким-Павлович, сотрудник московского НИИ, где трое умерли в лагере.

Увы, ознакомившись при содействии работников Центра общественных связей МВР не только с делом 1937 года, но и вторым — № 125300, составленным в 1939 году уже в Магдальне, в сообщении В. Рихтеру, который пришел в редакцию «Известий», страшную правду о том, как закончили жизнь его отец и дядя.

Разглядев на Москву, чекисты известного «Дальстроя» задавали откровенно раскритикованным широкомасштабным заговором: террористической политической антисоветской организации на Коммуна, ставившей целью убийство



1938 год. Один из коммюнистических лагерников (можно представить, как его мучили) в списке заговорщиков по приписке «Партизан» под номером 27 называл Рихтера Моисея и под номером 28 — Рихтера Пауля.

1 марта тройка УНКВД «Дальстроя» вынесла приговор — расстрелять. Согласно митой бумашке — спячке — приговор был приведен к исполнению 10—14 марта. О точной дате никто не заботился...

В 1956 году после XX съезда этот приговор Магдальнинским областным судом был отменен, а дело производством прекращено. Но даже тогда начальник следственного областного МБД в

объявить сыну, что его расстрелянный отец «умер от meningitis 20 декабря 1941 года».

Когда архивное дело было затребовано в Москву, в нем появилась копия письма, от правленного Паулю Рихтеру. В письме сообщается правда о гибели его отца и выражается сожаление. Согласно справке четного стола 1 следственного НКВД «Севостоклага», Бах умер в заключении 10 февраля 1941 года.

Он не дождался всего надеждо до своего 35-летия. Рихтером было чуть более тридцати.

На снимках: П. Рихтер, М. Рихтер (Бикер) и Я. Бах (Юнин).

Communist Party of South Africa

Dingaan's Day Mass Meeting

City Hall Steps, Johannesburg

On Dingaans Day, Wednesday, 16th December, 1936 from 12 noon to 1.30 p.m.

Prominent Communist Speakers will address you: "MAKING DINGAANS DAY A STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL EMANCIPATION."

The Imperialists celebrate Dingaans Day as "a victory over black savages." The Afrikaner people dedicate Dingaans Day to the birth of their independent existence unfettered from British Imperialism. The Native people regard Dingaans Day as a day on which they were robbed of their land and the beginning of the feudal slavery in which many of them live to-day.

PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA! Make Dingaans Day a struggle for National Independence—free from the Bonds of British Imperialism. **Freedom, Bread and Work for all people in South Africa irrespective of their race or colour.**

100 Years have elapsed since Dingaans Day occurred in the history of South Africa.

WHAT IS THE POSITION OF THE PEOPLE AFTER 100 YEARS OF "VICTORY"?

South Africa is not free, it is chained to British Imperialism.

7,000,000 Native people—the huge majority landless, starving, with no freedom or democratic rights, slaves in the hand of their birth.

2,000,000 Europeans, which include 500,000 Poor Whites, also landless, starving and living on the same level as the Native people.

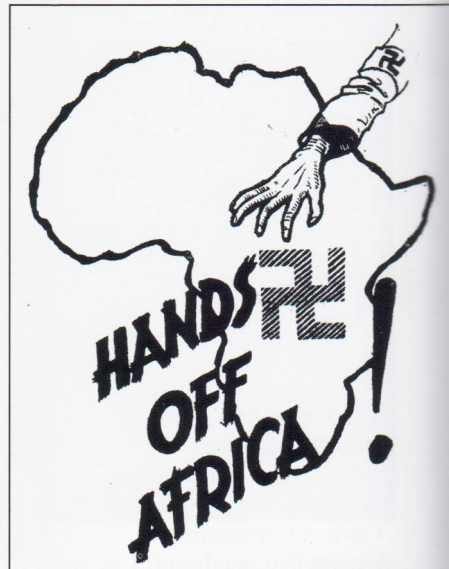
1,000,000 wage slaves at the tender mercy of the rich Chamber of Mines and the rich exploiters and bankers of South Africa.

PEOPLE OF SOUTH AFRICA! Unite against the common danger the common enemy—Imperialist oppression and Capitalist exploitation.

The united front of all oppressed people of all exploited and poor people, irrespective of race and colour is the only way to bring us a better life, freedom, bread, work, and land for all.

UP WITH THE PEOPLES' FRONT AGAINST IMPERIALISM—AGAINST WAR AND FASCISM.

16. The CPSA leaflet, *The Dingaans Day Mass Meeting* (1936).



17. The CPSA leaflet, *Hands off Africa* (n.d.).

5. The Richter brothers and Lazar Bach, the three South African communists who lost their lives in Stalin's purges, in prison. This rare picture comes from an article in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia*.

COMMUNIST PARTY of S.A.

WAR

HITLER is preparing an attack upon the
CZECHOSLOVAKIAN REPUBLIC
which will inevitably mean
ANOTHER WORLD WAR

Are there forces in the world to-day which
can stop the continual attack of Fascism
upon peace and liberty?

OUR ANSWER IS YES!

We maintain that the proper application of
collective security will put an end to Fascist
aggression and ensure world peace.

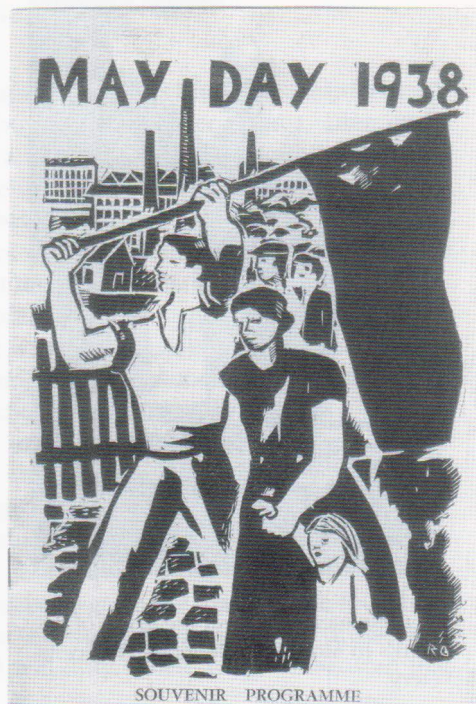
COME AND HEAR A COMMONSENSE EXPLANATION
OF THE WAR DANGER AND THE ONLY WAY TO
PREVENT IT AT THE

MASS MEETING

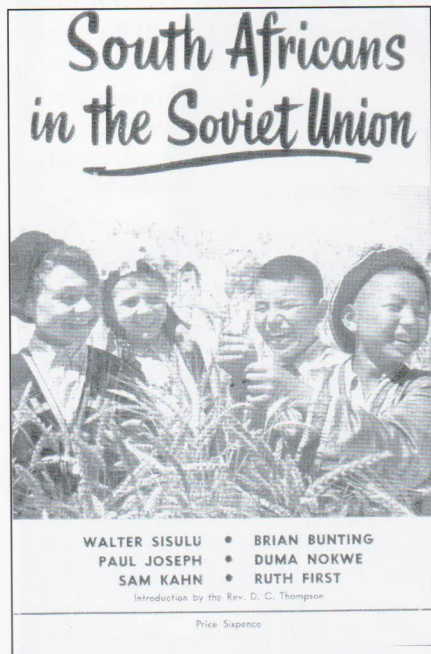
On SUNDAY, 11th SEPTEMBER, 1938,
at 8.15 p.m. AT THE
TRADES HALL
32 KERK STREET
PROMINENT SPEAKERS WILL ADDRESS YOU.

Issued by the Communist Party of South Africa. P.O. Box 6175, Johannesburg.
African Union Printing Works

18. The CPSA leaflet, *War* (1938).



19. The CPSA booklet, *May Day* (1938).



20. A booklet written by prominent South African communists about their visit to the Soviet Union.



21. John Marks, one of the leaders of the South African Communist Party, in the Soviet Union in 1971. Marks, who studied at KUTV, died in Moscow where he is buried.



22. The memorial over the grave of J.B. Marks in Moscow's Novodevichie cemetery.



23. The memorial over the grave of Moses Kotane in the same cemetery.

24. The memorial over the grave of David Ivon Jones in the same cemetery.



So that after that I never got spanking when he was home. She used to use a shambok made by the native mine boys out of moter ty but, after every spanking I lifted up a loose floor board and hide this schambok under the floor but, the result was that the more I hide away the more she got in.

In addition to all this treatment she was to sell wine to the natives at night. I had to sit on the watch for the detectives who if I see them coming should give her a warning.² So many a night I spent these in the dark, cold, wind and rain.

Mother was to come and see me more often here as it was much nearer but she could come only on Sundays as she was employed. It never dawned on me that I should tell her what was happening to me and she I suppose could not ask me as my auntie never gave us a chance to be alone.

So one Sunday mother came and informed me that I will come to her marriage with my Uncle and aunt.

For this affairs, she as usual, brought me a nice outfit. On the day of the marriage my aunt refused that I wear this nice dress and hat including shoes and socks to match. I wept bitterly.

When Uncle came home as he got leave to go to the marriage he found her dressed in a common day dress (where she was known as a good dresser) he inquired about me she made out that I will dirty. Uncle was so disgusted that he remained home.

We arrived at the church just before the bride came. The affair was quite grand as mother was earning £2 per month and she getting married to a man who came from the diamond country (Kimberly) and one of the best negro singers till this day.

After the ceremony we were directed into one of the bride carriage to go to the reception but my aunt refused the offer the excuse being that she's not well dressed. One of mamma's friends asked whether she (auntie) thought she was going to do washing? We had to return. I was in bitter tears to see such a nice wedding and yet be deprived the honour to attend the reception.

We got home and my Aunt had the nerve to tell my Uncle how nice every thing was and how she had to refuse the invitation (which was not only issued there, but months beforehand). All she answered was 'You disgraced me' and walked out.

So one morning I was late at school my teacher now refrained from punish me for being late she understood why it happened. On this day I was given a 6d to buy food by my Uncle. So instead of buying food I bought 1d bun spending a 3d on buying 1d toys and kept the remaining 2d. as I was sitting in the school yard with the other girls at play time. Somebody shouted to me that my mother was at the gate and wanted to speak to me. I got such a shock that I was afraid to go out, thinking that it is my Auntie who according to the native costum use to call mamma umkulu (Big mother thus to signify that she is wife

2. Drinking wine was a criminal act for Africans, and so was selling it to them.

of my father's eldest brother) and at the moment I could not understand that it was my own mother calling me. So they shouted again and got up leaving my toys behind and went to the gate.

To my surprise it was my own mother who asked me whether I would like to go with her to her house to stay there. I just jumped at the offer with all the excitement I forgot all about the toys.

Mother who had written a note which read as follows (what I can remember) 'don't look for Georgina. I have taken her. She is at my place and I shall only hand her up when the highest court in the country compels me too' handed it to my school mates together with the slate and books and instructed them to hand it over to my Uncle.

I got on the cart that my mother came with and she rapped me up in a warm rug she brought with as it was cold. For the first time I had a look at her husband.

I was there two days when father arrived who was called by phone. The next morning my mother who had a few days leave from her work was in my grannie's house ironing. I was at my mother house when I was called to my grannie's house. I entered the dinning room to find father and a friend of his there.

I greeted him. He then started speaking to me in zulu as that was the only language I use to speak to me (and I knew very little of my mother language since I was staying with father and his relatives who speak nothing but zulu to me). He asked me several questions about my being there and that I should go back with him and so forth. I blankly refused and made him understand that I am now with mother and intend to stay with.

After pleading in vain, he sot me to the left arm. I standing in the door that leads into the kitchen held on to the³ ... of the door with my right hand I got such a firm grip of it that I held for life he pulling by left arm with no success began to twist my arm knowing that through pain I'll let go my hold. But instead of giving in I started screaming for help. Mother, Granny and this friend of father was all the time watching the proceedings without interfering.

But when I started screaming mother jumped in. There the struggle began. I was now between two people. Well with mothers help I managed to slip away and ran home for dear life.

I locked the door and crept under the bed. There gathering all the shoes and what ever I could get hold off to throw him with if he entered. But where and how he could enter since I locked the door I just wonder and as if mother or grannie would allow him to follow me.

The fight that took place after I ran away was to be understood by the way he tore mother's clothings to pieces. When at that stage things were going so stiff that granny had to intervene and so that friend of his.

3. There is an illegible word after 'the'.

Well when they had been separated granny on her part took out a bundle of things. Then told him that she as God-mother (i.e. one who stood for a child when it is being christened) has never interested with what was going on as my mother was still alive and able to take care of me. (This is the law of both court and church that a God-mother to take care of the child stood for when something happens to the parents or they fail to take care of the child for one reason or the other). But now after all that has happened she is going to say what she thinks of the whole affair thus beginning by describing the way father was dressed (for it was winter) and ending by untying the bundle she had taken out taking one piece after another showing to him and his friend the ragged cloth I had on when mother took me at the school, boots that had no soles. Socks that had just the ups's and the feet rags, bloomers that had so many windows that one could see the whole earth without opening one. This Granny demanded an explanation for since mamma was a regular buyer of cloth for me. Being dressed as he was and a man of such a good post he had no other alternative but to leave me and clear out.

To show how ashamed he was is to be explained by the fact that when he got to my former home he frankly told his relatives that he had decided to leave me with my mother since they made a slave out of me, a detective watch girl and about the way they dressed me.

Everybody was against him and swore that they were not going to leave me with mother. They (as is the way of zulus) were not going to leave their blood with bushmans (i.e. the so called coloured of today a child born of mix blood white and black). This was information I got that is of the later part of the fight when mamma freed me.

When mother came home which was the next building leading through a yard and flower garden she knocked and I had to make sure that it was she before I opened the door. By this time arm was swelling and paining whereas in addition to that I had some fingers bandaged up. They were so cracked on the outside of the hands and the joints had such big cuts from the cold that when I tried to close the palm of my hand the blood streamed out in drops.

So mother had to attend to my arm which kept me for some days.

The time came for mother to go back to her work of course she slept at home.

Two weeks from the day that father was there, Sunday morning I was in the house when somebody knocked. I looked just to see two sisters of father and the husband of the one. I went to door on being asked were my mother was. I told them that she was at work. They told me that they had come to fetch me. I refused to go when one of them caught hold of my left arm. (this being the eldest sister with whom I was staying first). I had nowhere to hold on but the windows I screamed for help the husband of my mother who was in the next room ran out to see what was happening to me just to see that they are trying do drag me out of the house he jump and assisted me. The fight that took there was most terrible as my mothers brothers also came to help.

My cousin who was sitting in the next yard at grannys palace was just out of bed for a few days after a long illness of interec fever being still weak ran to grannies house to tell that there is a fight at our house.

My grandfather came and ordered them off his premises. They stood in the street using abusive language against my stepfather, finally telling him that he the Basuto should go and get children of his own and not steal other peoples children. They walked off being in great hurry that they could not get me.

Grandfather there and then sent his son (the one that taking part in fight) to the police station to warn the police of what has happened and to demand that the police should sent a warning to the relatives of my father that they should not put their feet on his premises again and not to cause such a scandal again.

As my Uncle turned the main road he saw them getting into a cab. This showing that they left the cab in the main road walking down the street to the house. So that if they got me they would run with me to the cab and clear off.

So the police must have sent the warning as they never came there again but this time sent mamma a summons to appear in court to answer a charge of having stolen a child.

The first case came off but was remanded as father was not present and mother demand that he should be present. Then a summons had to be sent to him since he refused to appear on the request of his relatives as I have stated before that he decided to leave me with mother.

The second hearing of the case I was called to tell how I was treated and only then did I make out that a neighbour of my uncle went and informed my mother of what was happening to me. This very man was called as witness. And he brought out the secret of the suitcase which was left in the cab on the day of my arrival. As my Uncle being a friend of his told him about it. And as this cab driver not knowing what happened to the owner's of the case took it to the police station told the story and handed it over. After that day among the 'Lost and Found' advertisements to the suitcase was included. I then learned that my case was left there because Uncle had a bottle of wine in it. And on noticing some detectives got it in his mind that there following us.

Well in this case my whole past was brought up. It came out that my Uncle wife was selling wine and I had to be on a detective watch till midnight. Again there the bundle of torn clothing which I wore was on show and I shall never forget the comment the magistrate made on fathers dressing compared with those cloths of mine. But, here I shall put my foot down that father was not guilty. This was only the wickedness of Uncle's wife. As I was always known as the little kaffir girl with the nice cloths before their divorce and at the time I was staying with father for instance he never allowed me to go bare foot. This was explained that I was being the fourth child and the first one that lived he was afraid that I would catch a cold and get ill.

So after that case were I was handed to mother it being proved that
1) father failed to carry out the order of the judge on the divorce case by

compelling me to stay where I did not want to 2) failing to keep me in the house with him thereby allowing me to be ill-treated by his relatives and 3) that mother being lawfully married and earning a good wage while having supplied me with cloths all these years would take care of me and give me a proper home.

But before the case of mother on grannie's suggestion allowed me to go and stay in grannies house as it was much safer since mother was at work during the day.

In my new surroundings I met with great difficulties as I could speak zulu well but a very bad Dutch, and my grandfather flew into such a temper whenever a word of Dutch was uttered in his house. He use to threaten us that he would ring our necks whenever he heard us speaking Dutch.

And my cousin use to whisper. Papa (as she called him since she grew up in the house) speaks so brave of ringing of necks as if we are birds. I bet he wont speak like that in front of colie (policeman).

So I had to fall with this foreign language for what else could I do since I did not want my neck rung.

In 1916 at the age of 12 we went to Potchefstroom on a invitation of a friend of mother who was getting married. We arrived a day before the marriage. I found it a difficult job to speak to the children as they all spoke Dutch.

Of course English was used in school which was the law but outside these poor children could not fall into the habit of speaking English.

Being at the wedding the following day I was taken into the yard where all the children were gathered. I found there⁴ basins of food standing on the ground out of which groups of children were eating with their hands as is the costum till this day. I was pointed to a dish together with other girls. On approaching the dish there was black stuff with meat in it. I refused to eat.

Mother was called from within the house. She demanded an explanation why I refused to eat. To this I answered that I did not eat black rice (Kaffir corn the staple food of the Basuto's) mother had to apologise and explain that where we are from there was no such a food used as Kaffir corn, except when it is made as gruel (this is, the corn is grinded at the mill and made into kasha).⁵

We stayed there till the beginning of 1917 so that I could get back for school. When in 1917 mother began complaining of her legs which were swelling she left work. Then her husband decided that we should go and stay in Potchefstroom while he remained in the center to work.

There we had a little house with three rooms and a little garden. This place was bought for £15 while mother was working the rent here was 5/- or 4/6 monthly.

4. There is an illegible word after 'there'.

5. 'kasha' - porridge in Russian.

Being there I attended school and mother was doing washing. But, finally she was laid up and I was confronted with my school, the house, and the washing. So we kept a gentleman bundle which I had to fetch early in the morning before school and do it in the afternoons.

On Saturdays when there was no school for me to attend I use to go and clean a little cottage of an old white lady who lived with her two daughters for cleaning windows, scrubbing the floors, cleaning the stove, and other dirty jobs. I got a 1/- a day. 4/- a month which is if she engaged a grown up person she would have paid twice more since she was not keeping a servant.

After a few months of school I had to leave. Mother manage to fix me up in native tailor shop as an apprentice where I earned 14/- per month with my own food.

In the beginning of 1918 we went back to Johannesburg where I got another job at an Indian tailor shop as button holemaker and hand-sewing for 4/6 a week. Where it not for my age 14 I could have earned from 20/- to 30/- weekly which was the wage at that time.

A year later I decided to do house work as I took this tailor job with the aim of getting on to the trade, but, I was kept just there except when I had no button holes to make or sewing to do then I was given something else to do since I knew how to make suits smaller or bigger and could put a trousers together which I learned in Potchefstroom because whenever they were stuck I had to give hand since we were only three people in the only native tailor shop serving a location with over (6) six hundred people and this excludes the poor whites who could not go to white tailor shops, because they could not pay the money that was charged.

So I made a new start in domestic service earning £2 per month as general housekeeper for an elderly family.

This post I changed from time to time always trying a get a post with higher pay. I finally looked for cooking jobs which had the highest wage and though I never attended a cooking school but when working as general house maid with the aid of cooking books and recipes in newspapers I managed to get a few references as a good house maid and cook with which I was able to get jobs that payed me £ 2-10.

But very often I had to do cooking and house cleaning for the same wage. I though hunting for higher wages had to take what came across my path as things were not so bright at home. Mother had turned the way of a regular invalid and her husband was no longer supporting her as he had done and should do.

In 1921 I was unemployed and fell in with the group of unemployed girls who tremped the street of Johannesburg from 5 five in the morning till eight or later in the evening going from house to house looking for work.

After a few days walk I came to a big house belonging to a 'Commissioner of Paths', as the cook who called me in informed me. I made arrangements to go in and start immediately.

In the morning I had to go and fetch my belongings but before going I gave my room a cleaning. On seeing light in the room girls from the neighbourhood came in to see the new house maid. They told me most funny stories about this place an elderly women advised me to tell the missus that I was going for my things but I should never return telling that women with her body had to leave that house straight for the hospital with bad legs which they inherited from polishing floors and stoops.

But I refused point blank to take such an advice giving the reason that there is no hope of getting work since the streets are flooded with men and women and I had a mother to take care off.

Here I got £2,1s. which meant that I was getting 15/- less than the other servants who had left and did the same work.

I came to understand that these people were Russian Jews. They told me that they were expecting the mother and sister of the missus from somewhere in Russia or outside it I cant remember the place. They spoke about a revolution in that country and me, not knowing anything about politics or the birth of a new world, took no notice of what they were speaking about. Until 1928 when I got an idea of the revolution of which they spoke.

I stayed on in spite of the hard work specially the polishing. When her mother and sister arrived their friends came in the evening to welcome them when late in the evening the guests were leaving. The old lady together with the others saw their guests out the door where the old lady slipped and fell on that hard stoop. The old missus nearly fainted. They found that the cause was because the stoop polishing. I had then just to wash the stoops.

So finally our work was discharged and I had to do the cooking and all the housework including the serving at the table on seven people for which I was paid £ 3-10-0.

They gave advertisements in the papers for a cook but the good cooks never turned up at our door as it is in local surroundings that one servant tells others of a bad place and thus the news is carried on.

In order to give the reader an idea why this true story of my youth life is written down it is necessary to give also my origin.

My Granny is the daughter of a fingo woman and the father a Boer. She married a Basuto of whom she had two girls mother and her sister. When mother was eighth months her father died.

Granny next married a Scotchman of whom she had three sons with this second marriage the house turned white. My mother who was darker in colours than her sister was given to her granny.

When mother was of age she wanted to marry a Zulu. Although father was born in Kroonstad, O.F.S. his father and mother came from Inanda, Natal was always looked as a detribalised zulus.

Granny was against my mother marriage. She wanted mother to marry a man of her class as her sister, who married a Scotchman. In this case granny did not mean a Scotchman but a man of her type. Coloured by origin. Mother was

in her wedding dress when granny gave her a hit with a broom stick from that day mother was the outcast of the family.

When she divorced father she married another detribalised Basuto.

Granny who educated those three white sons of her including mother's sister took care of them and shared her property with them only. Thus leaving mother out the 'will'.

Mother who became invalid when I was 13 became worse from year to year. During this time she broke her right leg after which she was laid up in bed for seven years before she died without putting her foot of the bed. During this time she broke her left arm and one of her right ribs.

Thus I was left the only dark child in the family from mother's side. Mother's three brothers who were in the army in the 1914 war who had a European education live amongst Europeans receive European wages and are entirely strangers to me.

RGASPI, 495/279/65 (Personal file: B. Henderson).

Original in English.

Handwritten.

Inscriptions: 1) Found in Henderson's room after her departure in 1936. A. Brigader
2) to personal file.

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Autobiography of L. Bach,

10 February 1936¹

a) I was born in 1906 in Latvia. My father at that time had a leather shop. Later the family emigrated to Smorgon (now Poland) where we lived till 1914. In 1914 with the approach of the front we emigrated to Rostov on Don where we lived till 1920. From 1920 till 1929 we lived in Latvia and from the end of 1929 in S. Africa. My parents were well to do people and the conditions of life in the family were good. In Rostov on Don, and in Riga, also in S. Africa my father was a factory owner.

I began to work in 1928 when in Latvia when our family was impoverished. Have worked on the docks and in a leather factory. Prior to that I studied being provided for by the family. Haven't served in the army and have not taken part in the civil war. Also none of the family and nearest relatives have served in the army or taken part in the civil war. Neither of them has been in any government service and do not belong to any political parties. My nearest

1. Most probably, Bach wrote this document soon after his arrival at KUTV. It is obvious that he was handed a list of questions for guidance.