

**M. Kotane's Statement to South African Commission,  
19 March 1936**

MEETING OF COMMISSION ON SOUTH AFRICAN QUESTION.  
MARCH 19, 1936.

Strictly confidential

Katane: I personally agree with what the comrades have said; they have shown us that our struggle has led to the breaking of the Party. Perhaps it will not be too much to say that some of us realised what it would lead to, that we did try to tell the C.I. that the struggle in the Party was undermining the prestige of the Party, but, at that time, there were certain people here that contributed to that position, not taking any steps, and so it went on until the opposition changed to be another opposition. It must be understood that I am not the first opposition leader there was; there was another opposition later, with the result that, with the coming of our students here, the opposition changed; it revolved round and round, and this in itself brought the Party to the position it is today. The seriousness of this we appreciate, and no honest person can deny it; it did a lot of harm to the Party, especially insofar as the Natives are concerned.

I must admit that, so far as the whites are concerned, I do not know much of their private opinion; I do not have the chance to discuss with them, but I know the opinion of the Native people; I know that they regard the C.P. as something that has no policy, nothing to do, but is only a sort of pick-up of people who know nothing, a scum, so to speak, and it cannot read the viewpoint of the Native people as such. You have such opinions in South Africa as far as the C.P. is concerned, and it is true that when I joined the Party, there were a lot of intelligent people; they all went away, and every year new people come; people come and go all along. We may have some who have been there for a number of years, among the Natives and whites. This is a result of the struggle that has been going on.

Comrade Marty correctly pointed out that this struggle has been going on for the last seven years, and no-one can deny it. We have learned a lot not only from the discussion but also from studying the speech of Comrade Dimitrov with Comrade Naumann, and we have seen some of our mistakes.

I want to point this out: that it is not honest to say that we can count four Natives in the Political Bureau, that they are the leadership. This is not so. You have people who do what they are told, but actually there are European people who may not <sup>in 1</sup> the leadership of the PB, but who are the people who

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1. The text should, obviously, read: 'who may not be in the'.

give the leadership from the outside. That is what is going on<sup>in</sup> the Party, and we should not deny this. I do not want to say they should not do that because I recognise that we have many Native comrades who are very new and who have just learned to read and write in the C.P. They just come in and learn a little from the C.P. and are pushed forward because we have no other people experienced in struggle who have been in the movement for a<sup>2</sup> long time, not only in the C.P., but in the ICU or Congress, or connected with the movement. Comrade Richter<sup>3</sup> said if we have a comrade there a short time, we put him forward, but if a man just joined, from just a little contact with the C.P., do you expect him to give political leadership, or any leadership? No, and this is the result of what we have at present.

We speak of having so many Native members in the C.P., but, in actual fact, they are supporters; they support the line put there and there is nothing they can argue against or put their point of view, and if they do<sup>4</sup> argue but there is someone who uses phrases, quoting Lenin and others, they drop their arguments: Lenin said that and you cannot argue about it.

That is what is happening in South Africa. It is quite correct that the leaderships are bankrupt; the comrades are quite correct in saying that; we are bankrupt; we ~~did~~ do not deal with the concrete situation as it arose in the country. Some did try; it was either the point of the opposition or of the other group and neither could support it because it was not his point of view; it was his partisan stand, and I think you, being experienced in fighting oppositions, do appreciate this better than we do. You know exactly what takes place when people become embittered, personally too. I reached a stage where I hated some people personally. Why? Because sometimes they distorted what I said. I hated them personally and politically. You get this in a struggle, when you fight with people who twist and turn things, and you develop that way.

What I think would do the Party a good turn is that, instead of talking about the Native Republic and the Native bourgeoisie, we should be given the task of going and doing work; I think that is the best remedy that could have been suggested in this Commission. We must go and do work and then later on, as a result of our work, the C.I. can appreciate what we have done, and most of us who are rotten, will have to be trampled under foot.

I must honestly say that, personally, whatever might have been, I felt that to be in the leadership is bad and prevents one from doing work, and it did in the past. I felt that if I personally could be out of the leadership and be given work to do among the people, I could show what I could do, right or wrong, and if worthless, I could account for it, not by sitting in an office or formulating

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2. There is a typed-over letter before 'a'.

3. Here and elsewhere in the text, Maurice Richter.

4. There is a typed-over word before 'do'.



policy, because I am incapable of formulating policy. I stick to a point when<sup>5</sup> I see it, but I must admit I am not good at formulating policy.

So, I think the suggestion that the comrades put forward here, that the leadership should be given a holiday, is a good one. The comrades spoke about leaders; we have leaders who are bankrupt, but they are the only ones we have in the Party, and the question of giving a holiday, in my opinion, might perhaps set the Party back for a certain period at the present moment. We have a few people who are good, working in the trade unions, but they are only one or two,<sup>6</sup> and if the leadership or the leaders are going to have a holiday right away, it will have a bad effect. The only thing that would correct it, I think, is to stop this abstract formula about the Native Republic, and what is going to take place, and go and do work, and, as a result of this, we will get people who will come forward; those we have who are good will come forward in this process of fighting for the interests of the workers and for the interests of the oppressed peoples in South Africa; we will get people to come forward when they see that we are fighting for their everyday interests. There are people like that; we have some. Some got disgusted because we are against this question of uniting and struggling against imperialism. We might not have said it in words, but in practical fact, we were against it. The question shows itself in practical life.

Many concrete things have taken place in South Africa, and, so far as the workers are concerned, or the position of the Natives, we have concrete and big fundamental things involved which the Party never said anything about, which we did not say anything about, which I did not say anything about. I raised certain questions but I did not insist and said I have a weapon to hit the others on the head. That is the fractional struggle; I do not know if it is so everywhere, but in South Africa, I got the impression that if<sup>7</sup> one fails, you got a hold on him. That is what has taken place.

I think that it is not correct, as Richter stated, that we try to all the time see the opposition and find fault; the opposition did not always find fault; it was not a stumbling block, as pictured here; it was not. Read what they said. Perhaps it was wrong, not Marxian; unfortunately, we are not Marxists, but read what they wanted to say.

I understand there was a declaration written by the opposition since I left South Africa, and the comrades here saw it; I did not see it.

RICHTER: I saw it in the country; I brought it with me.

KATANE: Some of the comrades saw it here. I do not know what they say but I know for a fact that what the C.I. decides, they will carry out. They have carried out the line of the C.I. wrongly, but they carried it out the way they

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5. There is a typed-over word before 'when'.

6. There is a typed-over letter before 'two'.

7. 'that if' is typed together and then corrected.

understood. There are people like Gomas; some people say he is in the opposition; when something goes wrong with him, they say he is in the opposition, but when he is right, they say he is their man. But people like that worked and have been in the movement for years and they suffered. Would anyone deny that these people would carry out the line of the C.I. I do not think so, and if they<sup>8</sup> do deny it, they are not stating facts because experience has shown that they do and will.

The programme suggested is <sup>a/</sup> very good one, and that programme can be the centre of gravity in South Africa. I do not see any opposition from any angle so far as the programme is concerned. I am not speaking about the bourgeoisie in South Africa, but about the workers and oppressed people; I do not see any opposition even from the right wing on this programme. The programme is one that is the demand of the people in South Africa. I think that if this programme is carried out, and properly, we can rally the workers and the people of South Africa for better working conditions and for land and democratic rights.

Further, I want to say a few words on the question of the slogan of the Independent Native Republic. I will not speak of the Party. First we have seen in South Africa whether I am wrong or whether someone else is right, or vica versa; we have seen as the comrade spoke and clearly pointed out, where the white workers were afraid to carry out the elementary instructions of the C.I. that were embodied in documents which were not all quoted; they were afraid to explain to the white workers what this means to them. In the Party, everyone could say anything he likes, but when they had to face the masses as such, they dare not say anything. So, their arguments were a compromise as far as the workers were concerned. They left it to us to say these things to the white workers – that they must stand with the Natives and must fight with them. They were afraid to do this and always wanted to say that the Natives were to blame. Perhaps, mixed up with sentimental reasons, some of us took up a strong line. There are some instances where demands were concluded and were on our side; we carried them out but when it came to the side<sup>9</sup> of the white workers, and the question of unity, they did not support the Natives. I do not deny I was at fault; I did not take a stand; I felt I was taking the point of view of the Natives; I took a stand that I was not going to see the Natives treated like that by the C.P., and I took it because I felt they are people who will do something and I considered this as being what the Natives wanted. We did have this and it came to a pitch because of the fractional struggle and what was going on there.

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8. There is a typed-over letter before 'they'.

9. 'came to' is typed together and then corrected. There is a typed-over word before 'the side'.



But we have realised the danger and the harm we have done to the Party, I take it today to state frankly, and I want to state to<sup>10</sup> this Commission that we (I am speaking for myself and for those I represent) will carry out what this Commission says, and personally I want to say in black and white that I will do what the Commission says, but I would like to put this to the Commission – let me be out of the leadership; let me do some work; give me some work in the Party and be out of the leadership because it is only then that<sup>11</sup> I can show my sincerity to the Party.

I want to conclude with this.

RGASPI, 495/14/349/191–7.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

Inscriptions: 1) Steno: Scherer/2.

2) KATANE – 19.3.36 (at the top of every page except the first one).

## 65

### **Statement of J. Mpama to South African Commission, 19 March 1936**

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HENDERSON: A few words on the Commission as a whole. I quite agree with Comrade Richter<sup>1</sup> when he says we are fortunate to be present here, especially we who have not known what the opposition really was fighting for; we heard a few things here and there but we did not know what was at the bottom of the whole thing. Now, we can go back and clarify the position and put before the party the line put before us here.

I do not agree with Richter when he wants to point out that the appearance of the article two days before the national convention was either laziness or an article was ready and it was put in the paper. In the first place, I want to say

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#### **Doc. 64**

10. There are typed-over letters before 'to'.

11. There are typed-over letters before 'that'.

#### **Doc 65**

1. Here and elsewhere in the text, Maurice Richter.