

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 to¹⁰ 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 that¹¹ 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).

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

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

Strictly confidential

HENDERSON: A few words on the Commission as a whole. I quite agree with Comrade Richter¹ 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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10. There are typed-over letters before 'to'.

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

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

that, in my opinion, our comrades have studied here and were in leading positions at home; they must have studied the history of the Party and of the revolutionary movement, and then, putting that article in the paper, shows that they have not as yet realised that they can use the leaders of reformist organisations to a certain stage of the revolution, at a stage when a united front is being formed; they still come out and attack the leaders of the reformist unions. I think this shows political weakness in our leaders, and we must not try to wipe it over and say it is because there was an article ready.

Also, another reason for that article appearing. Our paper is generally confronted with a shortage of articles, because if we are too lazy, it means we are confronted with a shortage of articles. The first reason is that our leaders do not encourage workers to write in the paper. This has been ever since I joined the C.P. You are in the country districts; workers are in the towns and they would write, but, because an article is not well polished, or written by a Marxian-Leninist student, they will throw it into the waste basket. I have from the very beginning pointed this out; we were working in the districts, wrote articles, carried on numerous struggles. When I came here and discussed these struggles with members of the C.I., no-one knew about it. Why? Because when these struggles were reported and articles written, they were not printed; they were not correct, but is it not necessary at least for the editorial board to write and say: we received this article but cannot use it; write another? Is it not necessary to put in the paper that such a person² who wrote this article should write another because we cannot print this one? A few days before I came here, I wrote an article, but it has never been published. If anything was wrong with the article, could it not have been corrected and put in? When I was here I wrote an article, an appeal to the African women; Eugene saw it, but I doubt as to whether that article reached Johannesburg, for two reasons: (1) that neither Eugene or Susmanovitch³ knew whether it was an article or not, because, when we were discussing my speech, it was included.

STEPANOV: When did you write this?

HENDERSON: Just before the Congress. When I wrote it, it was taken to be a part of my speech about the women's movement in South Africa to the Congress, but it was not included in the speech, nor was it printed in the paper. There are also two reasons for this – that our comrades at home get articles from here that appeal directly to the workers; they do not publish. The workers write an article to 'Umtetelli'.⁴ Could not our paper publish it if they find something good there for the workers?

One comrade went wholesale for the teachers; I made a reply but noone attempted to expose this man because he had attacked the teachers. I wrote an

2. There is a typed-over word before 'a person'.

3. Zusmanovich.

4. 'Umteteli wa Bantu'.

article in answer and our comrades either did not give this article to the paper nor did they publish it.

First of all, when speaking about the article of Dec. 14th, I come to the conclusion that only because our editorial leaders do not as yet understand the decisions of the VII Congress, and did not as yet, as students of the Lenin School, understand who are their allies in the struggle against imperialism at this stage, did that article appear.

Secondly, when we speak about the present leadership. One comrade is against the fact that the leaders⁵ should be removed, and I think that what remains is for us to find out what forces we have in the Party. It is true that our C.I. members here do not know what really exists in our Party, to what extent our⁶ people are politically advanced, who can take the leadership.

We work in the village, for example, and all the time we worked there we carried on our struggle more on economic lines, and now that I have studied, I find my political mistakes. But how can I develop the masses on political lines when I myself am politically backward? We have mass activities and in the factories too, but only on economic lines. Even if we did work in the C.P. and based the struggle on political lines and had influence⁷ on the masses who looked upon us as leaders of the masses, as those who can defend and lead the masses, what happened? All the comrades were put in the centre and would become helpless creatures. I am ashamed to think of what was done for the two years I was in the district. It seems to be pretty bad where all become just the same.

When speaking of political leadership and who will be in the leadership, maybe since I have left, there are people who are politically developed to take leadership into their hands, but when I left, only those people who participated in the fractional struggle were people whom we can say were a little politically developed. Anyone outside the PB just knew about his meetings,⁸ his paper-selling, etc.; he did not do anything else. Now we must explain why such⁹ a situation existed? During the time of Bunting, how many students came from there? – Two students came. Bunting was removed; someone else placed in the leadership. How many comrades came later? We had Mufutsanyana, Hilton, Henry, Marks, etc., altogether about 9 or 10. This leadership went back in 1934, and now I was the first person who came to the school, and I would not have been here if I did not take it on my own initiative. Comrade Mufutsanyana wanted to send another comrade who can neither read or write ^{English}/, Comrade Jane.¹⁰ It would have been good to send

5. There is a typed-over word after 'leaders'.

6. 'our people' is typed together and then corrected.

7. There is a typed-over word before 'influence'.

8. There is a typed-over phrase before 'meetings'.

9. There is a typed-over word before 'such'.

10. Jane Batwa.

Comrade Jane, but what would have been the result? It would have been necessary to teach her English. Who could do this? The fact is that these comrades have been in South Africa two or three years, and not a single student has come. Not only do they not send students to the Lenin School, but even at home the comrades do not try to develop the political level of the other members of the Party. That is the main reason we are in a fix when thinking about who will be in the future leadership.

I do not know all the European comrades, but I know the Natives and, as a matter of fact, I do not see four or five people who could take over the leadership.

Also, when Comrade Katane spoke, he spoke about white and black. Because of this fractional struggle that took place, Katane said he did not know what the white part said, what it did, because he could not speak to them; he only knew what his part could say about it. Richter says they were trying to cloak the fractional struggle. This is another thing that is strange to us – that the fractional struggle was cloaked to these people who really could and who are really in contact with the masses, and who have been leaders for years in the Party. But when Richter says the thing was cloaked, I do not think it was so cloaked as he says.

There is also the question of things leaking out of the Party; the Party is very loose. I heard many rumours, but I said I would not participate because I did not know who is right and who wrong; I will come here and study. I said if the comrades will not appear before the masses as leaders, I will not participate with these people; everywhere we worked with them – in the group meetings, etc., but not outside, because, through our undisciplined leaders, the Party degraded to the stage that it is today.

With regard to the programme. Katane also says that he excludes the bourgeoisie and agrees with the workers and toilers and will accept the programme. I think that even the reformist leaders and those people who today can be classed as a Native bourgeoisie will work on the programme as it is, and they will help us unite and struggle against imperialism on the basis of that programme.

In the latest discussions that took place, who took the leading part? The bourgeoisie. When speaking of them, I myself will not say anything about them because if we will underestimate the bourgeoisie as a class, it means we do not as yet understand the power of capitalism. I maintain there are bourgeois elements all over and it is they today who are fighting to the bitter end in the interests¹¹ of the decisions of the VII Congress, because they understand it has given the line for their development to capitalism also. They understand the VII Congress came out with such a line where, if they fight for the masses, they will inherit from what the masses will get.

11. There is a typed-over word before 'interests'.

Now that we have finished this discussion, the question lies as to whether we accept what we have said here and what is given to us here, and as to whether we will carry it out. No-one can say; the results will show, after a year or two, but I say a comrades should not say: 'I want to be removed from the leadership'; it is not Katane's duty to say that. Whether Katane was right or whether he was wrong; whether in the leadership or out of the leadership, after this Commission, Katane should prove he will carry out the decisions of this Commission. Whether the Commission does or ^{does}/ not put him into the leadership, it is his leadership; ^{if}/¹² he works in the leadership, his personal hatred must be put behind; his political hatred has been clarified, and he must go back, and if he works in the leadership, if the comrades are wrong, he should try to get them on the right side, on the right Party line and not say he cannot work in the leadership, because what existed before the Commission cannot exist after it if we clearly understand the mistakes made and how they have smashed the Party.

I also say this to Comrade Eugene. He says he will work, but the comrades must understand that the Party is going from bad to worse. In the Party there has been the same attitude – some comrades should know something, and some not. I understand my mistakes now, that I did not know anything that went on. I just sat down and did not attempt to force the comrades to carry out¹³ the Party line. I do not deny I was politically backward, but when I say that the PB has a line and the District Committee does not know it, I came to the conclusion that it was not my business, but I realise now I was wrong. But I promise, when I go back, I shall help show the comrades their mistakes and help them come up to our political level and struggle against imperialism.

RGASPI, 495/14/349/211–17.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

Inscriptions: 1) Steno: Scherer/2.

(typed)

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

12. 'if' is inserted above two typed-over words.

13. There is a typed-over letter after 'out'.