

Autobiography of M. Kotane [late 1931]¹

a) Born 9th August 1905, in the Transvaal, South Africa. Nationality Bechuana. Parents poor peasant, my father was 66 years old, worked most of the time in towns for the maintenance of the family but unable to work now owing to physical weakness. I began work at the age of 12 in farms until I was 17 years old when I left for the towns where I worked ever since until 1931, I worked on the mines for a time and then in a boarding-houses and at last was in a Bakery where the Party recalled me. I am a labourer. I have no military knowledge. I did not go to war because I was young. My children (2) are dependant on me. My wife has the same origin as myself. She is not a Party member but a member of I.R.A. Her parents are members of no Political Party. None of my relatives was ever employed by the Govt. I have not been abroad except this time.

b) I went to school for 2 years. No politics and no course, it was only a religious school. I went one for self-education by reading newspapers and bourgeois journals, none of Marx or Lenin's works except in the Lenin school very little too. Yes, I have experience of propaganda work not much. I know English as much as to make myself understood.

c) Political life.

Before I joined the C.P. I was in the African National congress for a year only as a rank and file. I left it because I did not see its usefulness, it had no programme or at least I knew nothing of its programme or the work it was doing for the cause of the toiling masses and the African people. Beside the African National Congress, I was member of no other organisation. I joined the Communist Party on 22nd February 1929 from the Red T.U. which I joined in 1928, recommended to the Party by Nzula and Baker. I have never dropped off the Party. I was

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1. Most probably, this autobiography was written soon after Kotane's arrival at MLSh in late 1931. Obviously, he had been handed in a list of questions to guide him. The file also contains a form filled in by Kotane during his second long stay in Moscow, in 1935-6:

Kotane Moses M.
Gurley Rio (pseudonym)

father
Samuel S. Kotane

mother
Madira Mlotse

nationality: MoChwana
family situation: single, have a child of 8.
address: Lux, room 238, ph. 238

12 November 1935

Kotane, Moses M.

(RGASPI, 495/279/8/124-5, original in Russian)
'Lux' - see footnote 2 to document 5, vol. I.

elected chairman of P.B. (of course, just as a tool since politically I was ignorant and the proceedings were conducted in high English as far as I was concerned) Old leadership in 1930. I was elected again to the Party C.C. in 1930, been manager of the Party organ (vernacular compositing and editing) for distribution; from February to August 1931. I have taken part in the Congress 1930 and Party C.C. Conference July 1931. I have no experience of illegal work. I have recruited some Party member but I do not know now how many. I was attached to a factory nucleus in March 1931, but I had much to do on the Paper – the Party organ, with results that I did not carry on the work as I ought to have done. I was in the Party faction in 1930 – against the Bunting Group, though I was not one of the leaders. The Bunting group was not interested in the T.U.s and did not want any Negro in the leadership, they were either considered spies or place seekers – and he went to the extent of saying that the Negroes were ‘embezzlers’. I have never been reprimanded for or expelled by the Party.

d) Participation in Social Life.

I was a member of the R.T.U. Since 1928, and was once vice-chairman of the South African Federation of Non-European Trade Unions (not paid, working in the factory). I have never been a member of a Sport organisation. In Transvaal, Natal and Orange Free State no Negro is allowed to participate in Govt. work.

e) Repressions and Prosecutions.

I was never arrested yet.

f) I have not yet occupied a recognisable position in my life, I have worked for £3 to £4 per month so far.

g) The following comrades can testify this statement: A. Nzula, J.P. Sepeng, C. Baker, Mofutsanyana and Marks.

James Warren (M. Kotane)

RGASPI, 495/279/8/121-3 (Kotane)

Original in English.

Handwritten.

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**Instruction for Eugene Dennis, ECCI Emissary to CPSA,
[19 January 1932]¹**

I. General task to mobilize, guide and assist Party in carrying out October Resolutions of ECCI. Immediate tasks in this connection:

1. This document has neither a title nor a date but the Russian translation of it (typed in one copy only and classified as ‘strictly confidential’) is dated 19.1.1932 (RGASPI, 495/25/204/20). It bears the title ‘Instructions for the Instructor of the ECCI at the CP of S. Africa’. The Russian text is edited, judging by the handwriting, by Boris Vasiliev, at that time – head of the