

made at this end to secure that one or more native comrades shall be able to leave.

The right wing danger in the Party is not a serious danger affecting Party propaganda, but is more of an academic character, conducted by intellectual European elements and it maintains itself in the form of a small group which does not actually participate in the main work of the Party, and is tolerated by the rank and file chiefly because of organisational assistance it can render during the present stage towards a stronger native cadre in the Party.

The difficulties of language constitutes another great obstacle for the Party, and literature needs to be printed in four languages, English, Sesutu (the Basutoland tribes), Zulu and Xosa (the tribes of the Transkeian territories).

The Party is woefully short of elementary pamphlets. It has only two pamphlets done in a native language. This is largely a question of resources to cover the necessary printing costs. Although considerable progress has been achieved since the four languages have been utilised in the Party paper, 'the S.A. Worker', it is very important that arrangements be made for the issuing of regular pamphlets in the different languages.

The present membership of the Party is approximately the same, namely 3,000, but if based on financial standing the number would barely reach 300. It has been found extremely difficult to secure the regular payment of dues, apart from cases of misappropriation, natives have objected to paying dues to 'white officials at Head office'.

The poverty of members is no argument, witness the phenomenal contributions by natives to I.C.U. funds. Under the circumstances it is exceedingly difficult to gauge the actual Party membership.

xxx xxx xxx

In conclusion, many of these weaknesses have received close attention and the measures introduced through the developing new leadership will correct them.

Enormous revolutionary struggles lies ahead of the South African masses in the immediate future, and the growing consciousness arising out of the sharpening contradictions will make very favourable opportunities for the Party in South Africa to place itself at the head of the revolutionary struggles of the masses.

(sgn) D.G. Wolton⁶

RGASPI, 495/64/81/125-9.

Original in English.

Typed.

Stamped: 1) CONTROL

2) Unclear

(in Russian)

(in Russian)

6. Despite the word 'sgn' there is no original signature in the text.

**Report of B. Idelson to ECCI,
25 September 1929 (Extract)**

Confidential.

REPORT OF COMRADE X (ECCI REPRESENTATIVE IN SOUTH AFRICA).

In accordance with the development of the labour movement since the imperialist war, our Party has gone through ~~a number of~~ ^{certain} stages ^{of development}. The first stage was that of its birth. That was in the period when the position of the white workers as a result of the war and ^{the} post-war crisis (which made itself felt also in South Africa) was greatly shattered. The labour aristocracy for the first time declared strikes against wage cuts (the railway workers in 1914, the miners in 1922), the white workers intensively began to organise. Hence the wave of passing radicalism and opposition tendencies in the organisations of the white workers – the Labour Party and the unions. At the extreme left were the founders of the future Communist Party. Neither their radicalism nor their anti-war stand as yet indicated their firmness. Not only workers who settled in the country were then anti-imperialists, but also that section of the bourgeoisie which considered South Africa its home and was not anxious to fight in the interests of Great Britain.

Thus the Communist Party originated as a Party of the white workers. When the situation improved and some categories of white workers again received higher wages (although not a single group of these workers had as yet reached its previous level of earnings), the tiny Communist Party began to melt away at a very rapid rate. A small handful of white comrades remained in the organisation. What contributed to this desertion was also the fact that for the first time the white worker began to feel the competition of the Negro and the fear of losing his position. For this reason, nothing helped so much in the cleansing of our Party as its position in relation to the Negroes, although it made a good many mistakes on this question. The chance elements that still remained in the Communist Party (in that period) withdrew from it as they could not agree with the Communists on the national question.

Then the second stage of development of the Communist Party began. That stage is characterised by the fact that the Communist Party devotes more attention to the Negroes than to the whites. The process of radicalisation of the white workers (of which I spoke above) became comparatively slow, the change of ideas in the ranks of the white workers, even the most dissatisfied with their fate, slowed down. One could not expect an influx to the Party from those quarters at the moment although many white workers undoubtedly realise that they have interests in ~~coming~~ ^{common} with the Negro labour movement and will eventually come to the Communist Party. On the other

hand, the Negro workers, although their class-consciousness still lags behind, are on the whole already gravitating not only towards economic, but also towards political organisation, which can be in the Communist Party only. Hence, the prospects of the Communist Party to become in the immediate future much more of a Negro Party than a Party of whites. Of course, all efforts of the Party must be directed towards a unification of the white and black progressive workers in its ranks.

This second stage of its development is now beginning. The Party enters that stage as a feeble organisation. It suffices to examine its organisational status to understand that situation. It is difficult to establish as to how many members the Party has, as no membership dues is paid in general. In some locals¹ the Party had big success in the first stages of its agitation. In Pochevstrom,² for example, a comparatively small town situated in a farming district, over 1,500 Negroes, almost all of them agricultural labourers, joined the Party all at once. However, that organisation cannot have a paid secretary, it is not divided into groups and does not function as a Party although the sentiment in Pochevstrom is excellent and every meeting called by the Party attracted thousands of people. The picture is the same in Ferrenihen,³ another town where the Party has 500 members who joined in the same way, but whom one could hardly call real Party members. Thus the organisational forms already universally adopted in Europe, do not yet exist in South Africa. Not only nuclei, but even what we used to call local groups, are non-existent. Local groups exist only where most of the Party members are whites, i.e. in Johannesburg and in Capetown. But among the white Party members there are no miners and no agricultural labourers. They are either intellectuals or office workers. Very few of them are politically active or political leaders.

It is also difficult to judge the social composition of the Party as there is no information on the matter and as no consolidated organisation exists. But wherever we have had Negro members, most of them were not industrial workers. The Party has Negro workers in its ranks in Johannesburg, in the recently organised branch in the Capetown Negro settlement (where the Negroes live outside of the town as they have no right to settle within the town limits). But these workers are employed in small and second rate industries. In Natal where there is an industry (food, agriculture, transportation, metallurgical) and where there are Negro workers, our Party has practically no members. The Party has no miners in its ranks, neither whites nor blacks. This is partly due to the great difficulty of reaching the black miners who live in camps and ^{are} always under guard.

1. Local branches.
2. Potchefstroom.
3. Vereeniging.

This situation in the Party organisations has a corresponding situation in the Party apparatus. The Polit-Bureau, for example, apart from the fact that it is politically very weak, functions from the organisational viewpoint poorly. Its composition changes too often and the comrades do not fully realise the responsibility and significance of their office. Questions discussed by the Polit-Bureau are therefore rarely of a political nature, attention is in most cases paid to organisational details. This is reflected also in the Secretariat. Since the Party Congress the latter consisted of one white and one black comrade, but it worked in general without any political guidance of the Polit-Bureau. These organisational defects which can to one degree or another be found in Europe became more pronounced chiefly because the leading body of the Central Committee had no political perspectives in its work and no realisation of the fact that the Party must always work politically, that it must work outside. The question of working methods, therefore, did not interest the comrades very much and as a result there is no division of labour within the leading bodies of the Party, no signs of departments, etc. Agitation and propaganda which in the given phase of development is undoubtedly of the greatest importance is thus carried ~~on now and then~~ ^{haphazardly} and its results are indefinite and very poor. For instance, the publication of pamphlets and leaflets, etc., which ^{is} such an important item, which might give good results ^{considering that} there is practically no literature for Negroes, even bourgeois literature and literature spread by the other opponents of the Communist Party, is practically unknown (of course the financial side plays an important, but not the only part) ^{in this}. The paper⁴ was also badly managed. In the past the Party secured much money for this ^{purpose} (money contributions), but all was in vain, and the monthly publication is now very very poor in every respect. There are possibilities for the dissemination of the paper, but they must ^{still} be taken. Its influence among the Negroes can be very great.

Control of trade union work equally suffers. Of course it is not only the lack of organisation that is to blame but also the insufficient understanding of the importance of that work. If we consider the question from the organisational point of view, there was no special attention paid to it and it was not regarded as a special sphere of work.

CC Plenums were very rarely held. The last Congress decided that such Plenums should be held every three months. More frequent sessions would be difficult as the distance from the various parts of South Africa is very great, railway fares very high, and the Party would not be in a position to pay the bill. But if we remember that the Secretariat has badly and even not at all instructed the comrades in the locals and carried on no correspondence with them, sent them no political information and no organisational advice, etc., this rareness in the holding of Plenums certainly did not tend to raise the activity of the Party. Besides, the comrades ostensibly have no experience in organising such

4. The Party official organ, *Umsebenzi*.

meetings. Practically no material is being prepared for Plenums, questions are not preliminarily dealt with and as a result whatever discussions take place are of an accidental character and lead to nothing. These defects are of course due to the fact that the Party is young and inexperienced. Not much can be expected from the white comrades. There are very few among them free from the old traditions and capable of grasping things in a new light. As to the Negro comrades there we still have a process of becoming. Among them we meet quite often with capable people, but the situation is not such as would favour their development. The fact, for example, that Laguma (not a Negro but a coloured man, once a Party delegate in M.)⁵ who was a man upon whom one could have great hopes and who made a very good impression on the comrades in M., very soon left the Communists and went over to the bourgeoisie for reasons far from being of an ideological character, is very characteristic of the situation in South Africa. The Communist Party has not yet become so influential, has not yet created an ideologically firmly welded group to be able to paralyse the demoralising influences from without. What also interferes with the promotion of native comrades is the fact that a very small percent of them are illiterate and sufficiently educated. The Party must reckon with the possibility of a repetition of cases similar to those of Laguma and other natives who were at one time on the side of the CP.

One should particularly mention the financial situation in the Party. I have never come across a Party as poor as that of South Africa. The comrades have been unable even to organise regular dues payments and collections among the masses for the Party. The Party always lived chiefly on contributions made by individuals. Formerly the 'radical' whites who belonged to the Party as well as the sympathizers made comparatively big contributions, but now they give little and most of them nothing. But apart from the quantitative side, this method as such has an extremely demoralising effect, and it is obvious that such 'collections' must by all means be discontinued. The motives prompting these people to make donations for the Party have nothing to do with sympathies towards the Communist movement. The comrades have hitherto been extremely lazy in the collection of funds among the masses firstly on the ground that the Negroes are very poor, and secondly that all authorities (like Kadali) appealed to the masses for money and deceived them afterwards. The argument is that we must not show that we appeal to them for money. Needless to show that this viewpoint is absurd and that it is advanced more as a means of justifying the Party's inactivity.

The main political impediment in the work of our Party was the failure to understand our position on the national question. The last decisions of the CI concerning South Africa remained most unclear for most (if not for all) of our comrades. This of course was reflected in all activities of the Party, the general political activity, work in the trade union movement and ⁱⁿ the various labour

5. Moscow.

organisations both of Negroes and whites, etc. etc. That was particularly clear in the last elections.

As to the last CI resolution on S.A. I found that the comrades loyally wanted to carry ^{it} into effect, but as they did not understand it they could not ^{properly} do it. The 'Negro Republic' slogan was used in their agitation, but the arguments ^{used} were extremely unconvincing and unclear. That was due to the fact that firstly the general position of the CI on the colonial question, our point of view, was not known, and but very few had studied it. There were even no documents on the subject.^x In general the political level of our South African militants is not high enough and their knowledge of the CI and its decisions, etc., is very poor.

Secondly, the comrades made no analysis whatever of the situation in the country, the correlation of classes, the driving forces in South Africa, politics, etc. As a result, it appeared to them that the resolution of the ECCI did not correspond to the situation in the country. Their arguments were extremely⁶ abstract, leaving entirely out of consideration the class problems. Thirdly, the traditions both of the white as well as the coloured comrades played quite a part. The whites wholly reflected the views of the white labour aristocracy in their arguments against the resolution. 'How can we go to the white worker and tell him that he will occupy a subordinate position in the country when he feels that the Negroes are not prepared to administer the country?' was their argument. Such was the essence of the traditional moods, of course expressed in extremely mild forms, showing doubts and openly objecting to the resolution. They were fully in its favour and passionately defended it, but without understanding the class elements in the resolution. They did it from the viewpoint of their general national position which they brought into the CP from without.

This having been the case, the resolution had to be taken up a second time by the Central Committee, although it was discussed once prior to my arrival, ^{so as} to give the comrades a correct understanding of the problem. In my subsequent activity, in newspaper articles, speeches, etc., I had to draw attention again and again to the point of view of the resolution so that the comrades may understand it in practice. It should be observed that on the whole this gave good results. The 'Negro Republic' slogan which was formerly entirely ignored by the bourgeois parties and the press, became a most unpleasant surprise for them and the nationalists, as well as the representatives

^x It is characteristic that the last Resolution of the CI concerning their own party was not in their possession (now they have it), and it was being discussed before my arrival without having read it first.

6. There is a crossed-out word after 'extremely'.

of the South African Party, began to attack it, and articles against the slogan have become ever more frequent.^{xx} It became a scarecrow with which the nationalists scared the white elector. For the Party itself it served (like any other resolution of course) as a political guide which introduced constancy and direction in its policy.

The trade union work of our Party also reveals certain peculiar tendencies. In relation to the white trade union movement and unions some of the comrades do not sufficiently understand the reactionary role of these organisations which indeed hamper the ^{unification of the} struggle of the white and black workers. Therefore, our comrades do not sufficiently work and fight for the idea of community of interests, they do not sufficiently agitate for that idea, for joint action on the part of all races, and do not popularise to a sufficient degree this thought so as to draw a sharp line between our viewpoint and the point of view of the non-Communist trade union leaders. Even if this line were unpopular among the white workers at first it would have gradually brought closer to us the most radical and the poorer sections of the white workers. Besides the constant worsening of the situation in the ...⁷ created among the South African trade union leaders, a peculiar type of 'Left' trade unionists (some of them ex-members of the CP, such as Andrews and others) standing 'in principle' for unity, ready even to express verbal ^{adherence} without, however, being willing to take any real and determined steps in this direction. Other Communists (whites and Negroes), on the contrary, will on no condition consider the white unions, believing that work in them is absolutely superfluous and of no importance, seeing no ^{good} reason why the ground should now be prepared ^{for the unification of} the white and black workers in the struggle. These comrades at the same time have a poor understanding of the role and the tasks of the trade union movement in general, and in relation to the native trade union federation which is under our influence ^{they think} that it must merge with the Party and that the Party itself, without the unions, should conduct the economic struggle. Needless to say that both of these viewpoints have been fought against by me and one can say that a certain amount of clarity has ^{consequently} already been introduced in the trade union question.

The position of the 'Federation of Non-European Workers' must become an object closely under the observation of the Profintern. The instructions ^{issued by} the latter were good and comprehensive ^{as far} as such instructions can be given at such a distance. But in future I think the Federation will have to be asked more often as to its concrete work, and by such means its activity ^{will have to be} stimulated. The fact of the matter is that the first successes of the Federation

^{xx} This was most clearly reflected in the 'Chamber of Mines' which found it very difficult to argue against the slogan. That of course showed the comrades the meaning of the slogan in practice.

7. The break in the text is in the original.

belong to the experimental phase, the Federation arose in opposition to and after the split of the I.C.I.,⁸ after the latter had played its treacherous role and actually fallen apart. It should be remembered that Kadali founded the I.C.I. not so much on the trade union principle, the principle of the class struggle, as on general national principles. Therefore, the members of the I.C.I. who were (at that time) estimated at 100,000 were weakly attached to the organisation. After Kadali's corrupt and adventurous moves many of the ICI members left the organisation and both of its sections (Kadali and Billinger⁹) are quite weak opponents. The ^{foundation of the} Federation was a reply to that development of the ICI. Its prestige is gradually growing although not at a very rapid pace. Its weakest side is its complete disorganisation. Until recently, the Federation did not have even any embryonic forms of organisation. Its finances were hopelessly neglected and there was the danger that another Kadali affair would arise. New members were recruited without any plan or purpose. The organisation of the trade union apparatus in the locals and in the factories made no headway. No leading bodies existed and the 'leadership' of our Party consisted in the fact that a member of our Party was at the head of the Federation (Comrade Weinbren, a white man). All this of course is something which must be speedily corrected. The first steps have already been taken, but the RILU must take control of things. The outlook is very good for the Federation. Apart from the organisational consolidation of the existing unions, it can extend its influence to such very important categories of workers which are not yet in its ranks, for instance the miners, agricultural labourers, transport workers, etc.

As to the activities of our Party in the agrarian districts, one must assert that it has practically as yet not begun. Outside of a few haphazard meetings, very little has as yet been done. During the election campaign Bunt¹⁰ had an opportunity to tour Transkai ^{where he won} the sympathies of the native Negro population. Notwithstanding the small number of votes received by B.,¹¹ the sympathies for the Party are great. In general, there are few Negroes having the right to vote, but many of these did not vote for B. or voted for the bourgeois party (the South African party) out of fear and under threat. But the masses of the native population met B. with the greatest enthusiasm. The trouble is that our Party has no programme of action as regards the native rural population. As to the agricultural labourers, the Party has not yet studied their demands, the methods of their organisation, etc. This question has only now been taken up for serious consideration. On the other hand, the Party (and also Bunt. in his campaign) has hitherto confined itself to general agitation on which basis thousands frequently joined the Party. But on the next day the Party did not

8. Here and further on in this document: ICU.

9. Ballinger.

10. Bunting.

11. Bunting.

know what to do with them as it could not give its new members anything but agitation. Instead of organising them on the basis of economic and political demands, they dubbed them Communists, without ^{going any} further. It would be a very difficult and drawn out process to train and develop these masses into real Party members, and the Party would do better if it would try to organise the most active, conscious, and prepared elements, give them an ideological foundation, develop them and give them some work to do. So long as the Party will not be ideologically strong and trained along international lines, it can never become a serious mass organisation.

The Party must pay much more attention to the native intellectuals. There can be no doubt that we could still snatch away from their ranks the uncorrupted elements who feel strongly on national questions, who stand close to the masses. Many of them are already under bourgeois influence as they have been poisoned in the schools with religious bunk, and have adopted many harmful views. But these influences have not gone deep and if ^{proper} work were done on our part, good elements would come to us from that camp. That work has already begun, but it is hard to tell how it will develop further.

Apart from the proposals arising from the given characteristics, I should like to offer a few others. Firstly, it would be advisable to give the Party a comrade for about a year or more (preferably an English-man) for organisational work, a comrade who could freely live and work in the country and who ^{would} be suitable for the job (a man with an independent political orientation), a practical politician, one who would be able to show the comrades how to work, one who understands the trade union movement and who could be an organiser). That would be of great help to the Party. Secondly, more instructions should be given to the comrades and correspondence carried on with them more regularly. They have no addresses, but chiefly they lack the desire to correspond with the ECCI. This perhaps is the result of some misunderstandings and personal impressions received by some of the comrades, but, be it as it may, this must be overcome. The same is true with regard to the British Party. They have paid very little attention to South Africa. Thirdly, the comrades should be better supplied with literature and propaganda matter. In this respect things are in a very ^{sad} state. The young and new comrades have nothing to read. They cannot develop theoretically. They should be provided also with international information. They are torn away from events. They should also be assisted in their agitation and particularly propaganda. The British Party ought to send them pamphlets in the English language for distribution (sale) as a means of popularisation of the Communist movement. Perhaps special pamphlets should be written. In this case they should be supplied with the available material. They should be helped to organise a library for the active Party members. Considering their poverty, they could not do that on their own, and yet it is of utmost importance. They possess a ^{most un} systematic and diverse collection of pamphlets. They have nothing of Lenin.

I make no proposals, 1) because I don't know how the question is going to be settled, 2) because they themselves must make some effort in this respect.

RGASPI, 495/64/81/45-56.

Original in English (Comintern translation of the Russian original text).

Inscription: K/JS/Tr. From Russian

8403/10

25.9.1929

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**Letter from Maphutseng Lefela to Profintern,
9 October 1929**

Lekhotleng la Bafo,¹

Mapoteng, Box 33

Fickburg

O.F.State

South Africa

9/10/29.

Mr. J.W. Ford

Sir

It is with due respect that I explain for your information that in Basutoland we have started an organisation known by the name of Lekhotla la Bafo. The aim and objective of this organisation is to champion the cause of the common people who are politically gagged and ostracised from the legislative bodies of the territory notwithstanding the fact that the late chief Moshesh, the founder and collector of the present Basuto nation, had established an institution known as Pitso through which his people were able to give their chiefs and the Government their opinion in regard to the national affairs under his government.

Since 1903 the Government abolished this Council and gradually but ruthlessly turned, through legal disabilities, the chiefs titulars, puppets, dupes, parasites and agents and tools of oppression to the people so as to sow the seeds of division and dissafocation of the people against their chiefs to prepare the way for him to deprive the nation of its rights. In doing this the Government officers have succeeded until we organised this Association to fight for the poor oppressed people of Basutoland. The Government officers

1. Lekhotla la Bafo.