

This is proposed by the Negro Section in agreement with the Eastern Secretariat.

The telegram should be despatched as a letter would not reach before the end of November or the beginning of December.

Nasonov.

RGASPI, 495/64/84/17.

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

Typed.

Inscription: Urgent. Confidential.

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**Coded Telegram from S.P. Bunting to Comintern,
25 October [1929]¹**

Petition form of mass protest involves local organisations no danger fusion reformist leadership suggestions December noted send up to date funds.

Bunting.²

RGASPI, 495/19/189/21.

Original in English.

Typed.

Inscriptions: 1) From Johannesburg 25/10, 16.10

(all typed)

2) Received 30/10, 13.00

(in German)

3) Decoded 1/XI, 09.45

(in German)

1. The year established on the basis of the contents of the document.
2. The Russian translation of the full text of the telegram follows on the same list with incorrect transliteration of Bunting's name: 'Bentink'.

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Letter from E. Roux to ECCL, 30 October 1929

Communist Party of South Africa
P.O. Box 4179,
Johannesburg.
30 October 1929

To the E.C.C.I.

Dear Comrades,

We have received the following cable, dated Berlin, 22 October:

'Struggle against native bills and all other oppression must be waged not through petitions, but (in a) revolutionary manner. (The) Party must take initiative and leadership in (the) struggle without fusing with or giving leadership to reformists, as is (the) case (with the) League of Rights. (Au)xiliary organisations can be utilised only if based on mass movement and on local organisations – committees (of) action, etc. Proclaim December 16 as day (of) national disgrace and struggle. Conduct broad militant demonstrations under the slogans: (1) Down with Native Bills, pass law, all restrictions of rights of natives. (2) Down with entire system of oppression and plunder of Natives' land. (3) Long live Native Republic. (4) United front of Native toilers and white workers under the leadership of the (Communist) Party. Factory meetings should be held on the eve of the demonstration. By all means penetrate the mines. With the help of Weinbren's and other organisations on December 14 call stoppage for the whole day; if not possible then stoppage before time under political slogans and demand pay for December 16. Inform us of receipt of cable. Your friend E.C.C.I.'¹

Our reply by cable was sent on 25 October, as follows:

'Petition (is a) form of mass protest; involves local organisations; no danger (of) fusion (or) reformist leadership. Suggestions December noted.'²

We enclose copies of the constitution, ~~petition form~~ and circular letter³ of the League of African Rights. In taking the initiative in the formation of the League, we have been acting on the decision of the Sixth Congress (and also the suggestion of Comrade Merker, when he was here in June) to try to unite 'existing embryonic national organisations among the Natives, such as the

1. For the draft version of the telegram referred to by Roux see document 77. Notice that the final version of the telegram quoted here contained an additional sentence demanding a general strike on 14 December. The words in brackets are, obviously, the result of the deciphering of the cabled text by the Party leadership.
2. See document 78, vol. I.
3. See document 73, vol. I.

African National Congress'. 'The Party, while retaining its full independence, should participate in these organisations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity'. (See 'The South African Questions': 'Communist International', English Edition, 15 December 1928).

As you will see from the circular letter, we do not aim at making the League a mere organisation of leaders, but desire to develop it on the basis of affiliation of local organisations, formation of local groups, etc. There is no danger of the Party fusing with reformist organisations or losing its identity or its leadership of the mass struggle. So far the bulk of the Native leaders have held aloof from the League. Kadalie is opposing it, ostensibly on the ground that his organisation has already put forward demands similar to those of the League, but really because he fears the League will still further undermine his own declining influence. Gumede has joined the League in his individual capacity. His organisation as such has held aloof, though in some districts members of African National Congress and of both I.C.U.'s are assisting the League. Modiagotla, of the Ballinger I.C.U., has joined, but other leaders of this organisation, including Ballinger, are opposed to joining. The participation of Native leaders and of national organisations has been sought and would be welcome if it were forthcoming; but primarily we are appealing to the Native masses over the heads of their leaders to unite in opposition to the Hertzog bills. It must be remembered that existing Native organisations are weak and have a very small membership, the main mass of Natives throughout the country being completely unattached politically. To sweep into political activity the vast mass of unorganised Natives is the main task of the League.

In an attempt to give some substance to the work of the League, other than mere haphazard propaganda meetings, and in order to get many hundreds of thousands of Natives to participate personally in the struggle for national freedom, we have started a 'Petition of African Rights'. Like the 'Great Charter' of XIX Century England, the petition embodies certain elementary popular demands of the democratic revolution. Together with the slogan 'Mayibuye!' ('Return to us our country!') it forms a programme of immediate demands on which we hope to unite the whole of the African people. This petition cannot be described as a mere reformist gesture. In fact the reformists have already taken fright at the petition and are boycotting it accordingly. They desire that a few 'good boy' native leaders should request the Government to modify its Native policy. The mass character of the petition, penetrating as we hope it will to every corner of the country and expressing the aspirations of millions of Africans, is such as the missionaries and other bourgeois reformists cannot countenance, though they cannot openly oppose its demands without discrediting themselves in the eyes of the masses.

The petition is couched in the form of a demand. Like an election campaign or a referendum (c.f. recent campaigns initiated by the German C.P. against the return of the Kaiser's property and the building of cruisers) it can be used to spread revolutionary propaganda among the broad masses who would not be

reached otherwise. The collection of signatures goes hand in hand with the holding of meetings, mass demonstrations and the campaign for a nation-wide protest with street processions on Dingaan's Day.⁴ We hope also to make the presentation of the petition to Parliament an occasion for mass demonstrations in Capetown, accompanied by a demand for the bearers of the petition to be heard at the bar of the House.

We are already meeting with evidence that the signing of the petition is not a 'safe' reformist gesture, but an act demanding a certain amount of courage and will on the part of those who sign. During Comrade Bunting's recent election campaign in Tembuland there were many sympathetic natives who failed to vote from fear. 'If we vote Communist we shall be killed', they said. Similarly some are afraid to sign the petition lest they be subsequently punished by the Government for this act of defiance. We have had great difficulty in persuading them that the Government is unlikely to prosecute individual signatories.

In view of these facts we cannot agree that the petition should be dropped as reformist in character. We hope that our reasons will convince you of this.

Another and more permanent use for the League is as an auxiliary organisation to spread the influence of the Communist Party among the Native peasantry and toilers in the small towns and country districts. We are not anxious to enrol directly in the C.P. those politically immature elements who nevertheless display at times considerable enthusiasm for the national cause and are anxious to join an organisation. It has already been agreed, in discussions with the C.I. and in conversations between ourselves and Comrade Merker, and between Comrade Roux and the colonial department of the C.P.G.B., that suitable nationalist organisations, peasant organisations, etc., should be set up to cater for these elements. It is of course understood that these organisations should come under the general political leadership of the Communist Party, while retaining their organisational independence and mass character. The league is such an organisation. It is also a step towards the unification on federal lines of all existing national organisations and leaders still capable of waging a fight against imperialism. Conditions are very complicated and difficult here and the C.P.S.A. must be allowed to experiment in finding out the best methods of awakening, organising and uniting the different sections of the African people.

We are also concerned with a probable approaching period of illegality. The Minister of Justice and the Minister of Native Affairs have announced their intention of revising the Native Administration Act of 1927, which was intended to stop revolutionary propaganda among Natives, but which proved unsatisfactory for that purpose. (You probably know how convictions of Communists under the 'hostility clause' have recently been squashed by the

4. See footnote 1 to document 73 and footnote 2 to document 77.

supreme court.) Now that the Government has learnt by its mistakes of the past, and particularly now that it has a complete majority and is assured of the co-operation of the S.A.P. opposition (see recent speech of Smuts advocating that the Native Administration Act should be 'tightened up') we may expect drastic legislation against Native agitators and particularly against the Communist Party. Pirow, Minister of Justice, has stated that he intends to introduce legislation enabling the Government to deport those who agitate among Natives, 'particularly Europeans not born in the country'.⁵

The organisation of the League of African Rights is thus in one sense a preparation for approaching illegality of the C.P. It is less likely to be proscribed than the C.P. itself, but this is not so important as the fact that, as a result of the formation of the L.A.R., we are broadening our influence and making contacts among natives all over the country, thus improving our chances of resistance should the Government attempt to drive us underground.

We agree with your suggestions regarding slogans for the C.P. and the demand for pay for workers on Dingaan's Day. As for a stoppage on Saturday, 14 December, we do not think we are strong enough to bring this off. The Federation itself is very weak as a result of internal divisions over a long period, and the big industries, even in Johannesburg, are unorganised. However, in co-operation with the Federation, we shall act, if sufficient support is forthcoming.

We shall report more fully later on the progress of the campaign and the results of the Dingaan's Day demonstrations.

Yours fraternally,

E.R. Roux

P.P. Executive Bureau

Communist Party of South Africa

RGASPI, 495/64/85/33-6.

Typed. Copy.

Stamped: 3900 - 27.NOV.1929

5. Roux stresses this point because of the prominence of East-European born Jews in the leadership of the Party.

**Statement of Executive Bureau, CPSA,
to Colonial Committee, CPGB,
5 November 1929**

REPLY TO POLITICAL LETTER OF THE COLONIAL COMMITTEE OF
THE C.P.G.B. BY THE EXECUTIVE BUREAU
OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY (S.A.).
5TH NOVEMBER 1929.

Dear Comrades,

We enclose a reply by Comrade S.P. Bunting to your letter of the 4th February 1929. We do not agree with all the statements made by Comrade Bunting, but we think his letter contains a wealth of information regarding conditions in South Africa, and we accordingly forward it for your consideration. It must be stated, however, that many divergent views on the subject are held by members of our Ex. Bu.

Our main criticism of the letter is that it rather belittles the importance and strength of the African Native Nationalist movement. It is no doubt true that this movement is still weak and divided, but the picture painted by Comrade S.P. Bunting gives a wrong idea of its revolutionary potentialities. The recent events at Durban,¹ and at Robertson in the Cape,² prove the militancy, on occasion, of the I.C.U. Yase Natal and the Cape African Congress.³ In view of these facts it cannot be denied that other organisations than the C.P. are capable of putting up a fight against imperialism. As a matter of fact, there are signs of a rising tide of nationalism among the natives. For instance, the Executive of the Cape African Congress recently adopted a resolution that 'the Slogan "Africa for the Africans" should become the settled policy of the Congress throughout the four

1. The so called 'beer riots' in Durban in June 1929 - the boycott of municipal beer halls which were created for Africans by local authorities in an attempt to regulate and restrict alcohol consumption by the urban African population and to curb 'illegal' beer brewing by local women. 'The Durban system' of municipals beer halls that was first introduced in 1909 and then developed throughout the British empire never worked; rather it created a point of discontent and a rallying issue for various political forces. The Durban boycott and demonstrations were harshly suppressed by police. Despite the prominent presence of Durban communists, first of all, of Johannes Nkosi, the boycott was not organised directly by the CPSA; ICU Yase Natal played the most important role on the ground.
2. A demonstration in Robertson on 24 May 1929 organised by the Western Cape branch of the ANC ended in clashes between the participants and white farmers and the police. This was followed by a night of rioting during which lights were broken and cars stoned in the town.
3. African National Congress in the Cape.