

**Minutes of Meeting, Politbureau, CPSA,  
12 June 1937**

Strictly confidential

MINUTES OF P.B. OF CPSA. HELD AT JOHANNESBURG  
ON SAT. JUNE 12TH 1937

Present: Comrades Mofutsanyana, Wolfson and Kalk.

Agenda: Investigation into conduct of (a) Com. L.C. Joffe, and (b) Com. J.B. Marks.

Comrade Mofutsanyana reported in dealing with case of L.C. Joffe that one of the sympathisers E.,<sup>1</sup> had informed him that Joffe said that he warned Bach not to go to the USSR and that it was his own fault that he was in trouble. Com. Mof.,<sup>2</sup> asked Com. Joffe why he made this statement and also to a non-party person.

Com. Kalk said that such statements alienate Party sympathisers.

Com. Joffe said that he saw E. last Wednesday evening and I mentioned about the expulsion of Bach to him. He asked me why Bach was expelled and I mentioned the article in the C.I. magazine. I also added something but do not remember the exact words. I said 'I told him not to go'. When the call came Bach was in a hurry to go and at that time we had plenty of work to do here, and I said that he must not be in a hurry. I was not in favour of Richter<sup>3</sup> going but he stampeded us into sending him. I always held the view that Bach was dishonest and took this question up with him. I conveyed this to E., but I must have used the wrong words.

Com. Kalk said that a stranger would say that in the USSR there was a dictatorship, after hearing Com. Joffe's remarks.

Com. Joffe said that his nervous condition was responsible for him often making statements where he used the wrong words. He justified the expulsion<sup>4</sup> when speaking to E.

Com. Kalk said that Com. Joffe knowing Bach's dishonesty allowed it to continue.

Com. Joffe said that he (Bach) had personal tendencies that were dishonest such as pushing himself forward and taking the credit for work done by others. I knew years ago that this which has happened would come to pass. I was wrong in speaking to E. When Bach left SA he had £100 or more of party money the secretariat has sanctioned to him.

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1. The identity of 'E' could not be established.

2. Mofutsanyana.

3. Maurice Richter.

4. The expulsion of Bach and the Richters from the Comintern.

Com. Mofutsanyana said that the Sec. sanctioned £75. Bach also collected sums of money from private individuals. Bach went to the railway station and came back saying that there was a detective on the platform and he could not go that day.

Com. Joffe said it was then decided that F..st<sup>5</sup> would take Bach to Beira by motor. On his return F..st claimed £60 for doing this and was paid out in full.

Com. Kalk asked why Joffe did not tell the Party that Bach was insincere.

Com. Joffe said he hoped that they would be able to fix him up overseas. He admitted that he should not have spoken to E. I accept what E. says and in speaking to him I justified Bach's expulsion.

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The P.B. then examined Com. J.B. Marks.

Com. Wolfson said that, before the case at Barberton, Com. Marks had approached the Sec., and said that he wanted to have a frank discussion with the Sec., as he felt it was in a cloud and the Sec., decided to await his return from B.,<sup>6</sup> when a full meeting would go into all aspects of the case. Com. Wolfson said that Com. Marks would also be questioned in regard to the case at B., which had just finished and then proceeded to examine Com. Marks. In reply to questions put by members of the Sec., Com. Marks made the following statement: – Com. Marks said: –

I was in a leading position in the Party for a number of years when whilst on a visit to Durban in 1935 I was removed in a very mysterious way from my leading position. I immediately noticed a change in attitude of people towards me and even in Joffe and Mofutsanyana. I approached them and told them that things were not normal. After a short time they informed me that for reasons known to themselves I would be removed from certain work. I asked to be removed but on account of the Bach-Kotane fight at the same time it was thought inadvisable. Then I decided that the reason for my removal was the rumours on my return from the USSR that I was an agent-provocateur. I worked patiently but I found that something was being exercised against me in the Party. In 1935 this question was put and discussed by members of the PB and their decision was that the whole question 'was an unfounded matter'. Seeing the nature of the trouble and the stigma cast upon myself if it would be revived, that is what I meant by 'cloud'. Adler, Bach, Susmanovich<sup>7</sup> and the whole gang were more informed than me and grew hostile towards me. This was obvious after Mrs. F...st<sup>8</sup> returned from the USSR. I was called overseas

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5. Julius First.

6. Barberton.

7. Zusmanovich.

8. Matilda First.



again in October 1935 and I went in February 1936. Mof.<sup>9</sup> and Joffe<sup>10</sup> made all the preparations for my journey. I took no Party documents with me. The comrades decided that I had to stay for the meeting of the All African Convention at Bloemfontein in December, hence my delay in going.

Com. Mofutsanyana said that there was a cable from overseas that he must not stay for the Convention but come immediately.

Comrade Marks, continuing, said: – I went by train to Lourenço Marques. I had a visa for L.M.<sup>11</sup> and at the border I signed a document saying that I was in transit for overseas. Portuguese officials took the necessary details. On my arrival I first stayed with a Greek and after a week or so I stayed with a Native comrade. I told this Native comrade I was going to Europe. I asked him for his address and said that I would send him some literature. I took his address and also another address in L.M. I sailed via the East Coast after being in L.M. four weeks. I changed boats at Mombasa and then landed at Marseilles proceeding to Paris landing in March 1936. I contacted Humanite and then the Party and also Huiswood of the Negro Worker. I was informed that due to the political situation the USSR they would not allow anybody to go to the SU. I left France 22nd October and came back by the same route. On landing at L.M., I had no trouble and went to the Greek whom I knew. This man said to me 'are you back? The Native Chembane was arrested three or four days ago because you left some literature with him.' The Negro Worker had sent literature through the post to the Native's address. I was not aware of the fascist dictatorship in the Portuguese colonies and in L.M. I left the same day for the Union of S.A. Before leaving I saw Native Chembane and on seeing me he ran away. I was informed that on Chembane's arrest he told the police that he gave his address to me and I was the only man that could have sent him the Negro Worker. This information was passed on to Pretoria. Another Native told me this news which he probably took for granted. On the train back to the Union I signed the necessary immigration form in the name on the passport (Fleet). I brought no literature or documents back with me. After filling the form I destroyed the passport. I did this because I feared they would arrest me. I travelled second class with a number of Indians. I burnt the passport in the lavatory. I came to Johannesburg on November 17th. I had two suitcases and one gramophone as luggage. It was a HMV gramophone which I purchased in Paris. I took the two bags into the compartment and the gramophone I had to book as luggage in the van for which I obtained a receipt. There was no name on the receipt. On arrival my gramophone and also some luggage of the Indian travellers was missing. They told us to wait it might be on the next train but it never came. I then put in a claim for the gramophone after waiting a week. I filled in the

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9. Mofutsanyana.

10. Louis Joffe.

11. Lourenço Marques.

claim in the name of Marks and gave the Party address. I only told Mofutsanyana about claiming after I had sent in the claim. I now realise the gravity of this, but it is too late. I signed the claim for the lost gramophone in my own name and after a long time a man from the Railway Dept. came to see me at the Party office. I admit it was gross negligence on my part to have done this. Later I received a Railway cheque made out in my name for £3.10/- in payment of the lost gramophone. Subsequently a summons was served on me at my house in Newclare in the name of John Joseph Marks, charging me with entering the Union under the name of Fleet or alternatively forging Fleet's name, to the Immigration document.

Further questioning to Com. Marks he added: – I was the only Native passenger on the train. At the court the crown witnesses included the immigration officer and C.I.D. men for identification purposes. I paid the fine imposed on me, £10 from the money £100, belonging to my mother for a stand she had sold, and which money is being held in trust by Dr. Joffe.<sup>12</sup>

Comrade L. Joffe said: – When our L.M. sympathiser, Cardiga,<sup>13</sup> was here a few months ago, I was in constant contact with him. He complained bitterly to me about Marks because Marks told the man with whom he was living in L.M. where he was going to and also told him the address for the Negro Worker. C. told me that the man was arrested but released shortly afterwards and he came to C. and said he knew where Marks was going, and he asked him for money. C. correctly thought the man was trying to blackmail him and chased him out. This was three or four weeks before Marks case that C. told me about it. It tried to get C. and Mofutsanyana in touch but it did materialise. I recalled what he told me, when I heard about Marks case and then I told Mof. about C. story. I know C. since 1931 when I went over to L.M. to send over the first student. He was recommended to me by two people I knew. At that time he was the leading man in the labour movement and editor of the labour paper 'Emancipador'.

Comrade Marks said that on his return he told several members that he was in the USSR. He knew nothing about the phone calls from the restaurant to Barberton. He had not used the phone. Basner may have done this.

Comrade Kalk said that Com. Marks' actions amounted to gross criminal negligence, which made the work of the Party much more difficult.

Com. Mofutsanyana concurred with what Com. Kalk said.

Com. Wolfson asked Com. Marks if he had any further statement to add.

Com. Marks said: – At this stage I feel and I realise the seriousness of my mistakes which condemn me and paly right into the hands of the rumours that were correct about me and give them a rope. My evidence to you is true and

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12. Max Joffe.

13. The identity of Cardiga could not be established.



correct. I am not employing any tactic to get out of it. I am in your hands and await your decision, whatever it may be.

After the Sec. discussed the evidence they took the following decisions:

L.C. Joffe. (1) to obtain further evidence from E. as to what he exactly said. To give him a strong warning and severely reprimand him for his action in speaking to non-Party sympathisers in the way he did. To publish reprimand against him in the press.

J.B. Marks. That he be removed from all Party positions and expelled from the Party. Comrade Wolfson to draft the reasons to be stated to Com. Marks who must be informed at a special meeting of the P.B. on Monday at 2.30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned...

#### Decision of the Political Bureau in the case of J.B. MARKS

The Political Bureau of the Communist Party of South Africa after having heard evidence from Com. J.B. Marks on the important and necessary work of the Party which was allocated to him, finds that Com. Marks in carrying out his Party duties, failed to observe the elementary rules in such work, which he as a Party member was aware of and should have carried out.

By his actions Com. Marks acted not as a trained revolutionary, steeled in the struggle, but by his criminal negligence he has in his own words 'committed serious mistakes'.

The Political Bureau finds Com. Marks guilty of

- 1) Of giving information of his journey to non-Party people who should never have been told one word about his travelling.
- 2) Taking addresses from people in L.M. for the purpose of sending literature from overseas, thus giving enemies of the revolutionary movement another clue to use against the Party.
- 3) Claiming lost luggage in his own name with the address of the Party, fully well-knowing the conditions under which he entered this country, thus giving the authorities further opportunities to attack our Party.
- 4) Failing to inform Comrade Mofutsanyana as Secretary of the Party of his intention to claim lost luggage, thus acting in an anti-Party and undisciplined manner.

The Political Bureau considers that the gross and criminal negligence committed by Comrade Marks is responsible for the authorities prosecuting him, gaining a full insight into our necessary illegal work, and implicating the Party, which undoubtedly must be connected by the police with the prosecution, although the name of the Party was not brought out publicly.

By his actions Com. Marks has done the Party irreparable harm, destroyed the work that has taken many years to build up, and is no longer deserving of the confidence of our Party.

The Political Bureau has therefore decided: -

(1) That J.B. Marks be removed from all positions and be forthwith expelled from membership of the Communist Party of S.A.<sup>14</sup>

(2) That a full statement of the facts of the case and the decision of the Political Bureau of the CPSA be sent to the International Control Commission.<sup>15</sup>

RGASPI, 495/64/158/68-72.

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26/11/37

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### Report of I. Wolfson to CPGB, October 1937 (Extract)

#### COMRADE WOLFSON. REPORT (OCT. 1937)

[...] I want to come now to the most important factor of my visit to you comrades, and that is the actual inner position of the Party of South Africa. I think that it is important because the future of the Labour movement in our country depends on the strength and the clarity in our Party. And I want to go into some detail also on this question and to give you an exact picture of what I see the position to be in South Africa.

As I have stated at the outset of my remarks, our Party had a hell of dog-fight. They were cutting each others throats, fighting each other, expelling each other, and concerned in hair-splitting about how the ultimate aim was going to be achieved and it left the Party in a very sorry state of affairs. It was only thanks to the assistance we received from the comrades from Britain<sup>1</sup> that we were able to make a sharp turn in the direction of the line and decisions of the 7th World Congress and that we were able to bring the Party down to reality and to face the political questions which face the people of South Africa, and to

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14. There is a typed-over word before 'S.A.'.

15. By the time when the information about the expulsion of Marks from the party reached Moscow not only the Anglo-American Secretariat but the International Control Commission itself lost many of its leaders and members to Stalin's purges. Out of five members of the Commission who took the decision on Marks a year earlier (see footnote 2 to document 71, vol. II) three had already been executed. Marks was reinstated in the party in less than two years by the same PB that expelled him in 1937.

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1. 'Britain' is encircled in pencil, and there is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite this word.