

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

(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.¹⁵

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 Britain¹ 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.

build our Party from a narrow sect into a political Party that will influence and that will be respected and have prestige and will be able to play its important role in the Labour Movement of South Africa. It is as the result of the assistance and the discussion, we were able to hold a conference, we were able to hold the conference which discussed political questions, which discussed the line in the light of the 7th World Congress, and drew up resolutions. It is correct that perhaps the resolutions were at some great² length, but nevertheless the resolutions assumed that we realise now what are the main political issues facing us and what we ought to do in order to improve the position of our Party. But despite the fact that we had such an excellent conference, I cannot report to you that we have made the progress³ we should have made. As a matter of fact I am of the opinion that there is a sort of stagnation in the Party and we have not made the progress we ought to have made as a result of the good conference which we had.

First of all as far as our inner position of the Party is concerned itself. The factional struggle is over.⁴ That has been rooted out of the Party. The Central Committee is united, but on the Central Committee and within the ranks of the Party there are one or two elements⁵ of which we must keep a careful eye. And I name these elements to you. They are people ~~connection~~ connected with the factional struggle in the Party before, and they are comrades Kotani, Gomes and Rue.⁶ This Comrade Kotani⁷ adopted an attitude that whilst ⁱⁿ agreement with the decision of the Conference, he did not say a word at the Conference but that he agreed with the conference, being appointed to a leading position in Johannesburg, said that he felt that the Party was paying too much attention to the industrial workers, and not devoting any attention or the attention it should devote to the workers in the rural and farming areas. And he could not agree with the policy of the Party, and felt he was not at home and a little later he came out with the decision that he was going to Capetown. He does not care what the Party thinks about it. Thus taking up the attitude he did not care what you do and was going to Capetown. We were compelled to take disciplinary action against him and he was removed from the Central Committee of our Party. He went to Capetown and is working I think,⁸ and

2. There is a typed-over word after 'great'.

3. There is a single line in the left margin opposite this text from 'discussed the line ...' to 'made the progress'.

4. There is a word 'Really?' and a separate question mark (?) in pencil in the left margin opposite this text.

5. There is a cross mark in the left margin opposite these words.

6. Kotane, Gomas and Roux. There is a double cross mark in the left margin opposite these names.

7. Kotane's name is put in a square frame in pencil.

8. The words 'I think' are put in a square frame in pencil. The decision to remove Kotane from the Central Committee was reflected as follows in the minutes of the meeting of the Politbureau of the CPSA, on 19 February 1937: 'Comrade Mofutsanyane reported on the decision of the Secretariat in connection with Comrade Kotane which was that as Comrade

I think is in connection with Comrades Rue, and Gomes who is the rather⁹ shaky member of our Central Committee. So far as Comrade Rue is concerned, Comrade Rue has expressed even prior to our conference somewhat sharp Trotskyite tendencies. Especially in connection with the trials of Zinoviev and Kamenev¹⁰ and the whole outlook of the Communist International. Sort of the idea that the¹¹ by shooting these traitors is antagonising the public opinion of the world and fighting against the united world.¹² It is hindering the united front and doing Spain a lot of harm by killing these people at this particular moment. And that the Communist International line on South Africa was wrong and only as a result of this, the position of the Party come about now as the result of the mistakes of the C.I. that it has changed its line since the 7th World Congress.

At that time we had discussions with Comrade Rue, but could not make any change and there was a movement that he should be removed from the Party,¹³ but owing to our weakness we did not carry through that movement and that decision. Some of our leading comrades felt it would be unwise to removed Comrade Rue and it would not be acting in the best interests of the Party. Since then Comrade Rue has drifted away from the Party almost altogether. He does not display any active Party interest. Seeking no political position of importance or in the D.P.C. in Capetown where he is domiciled.¹⁴ He has a post as a lecturer in the Capetown University and lectures from time to time in the October Club.¹⁵ Just before I came away from Johannesburg, it came to our knowledge and notice that Comrade Rue's wife had given expression to some of our sympathisers that the whole policy of the Communist International was wrong. Trotskyism was the correct policy and Trotsky was right and she stated that Comrade Rue holds the same views. We took up this question some time ago with the comrade from Capetown.¹⁶ We said that Comrade Rue holds Trotskyist views and sharp tendencies, and that he ought to be dealt with. Comrade Weinberg held the view that he cannot be

Kotane had broken the discipline of the Party he would be removed from the Central Committee and from the Political Bureau and his case would be referred to the ECCI. The members of the PB endorse this action and it was decided to inform all groups of this decision'. RGASPI, 495/14/350/10-11.

9. There is a typed-over word after 'rather'.
10. The trial of Kamenev and Zinoviev (1936) was one of the biggest of Stalin's show trials, resulting in arrests and executions of hundreds of Soviet communists. Both Kamenev and Zinoviev were executed in August 1936 as a result of non-sensical verdicts (e.g., an alliance with the Nazis).
11. There is a blank space in the text after the word 'the'.
12. There is a triple line in pencil in the left margin opposite the text from 'sort of the idea' to 'the united world'.
13. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence.
14. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence.
15. There is a line and a cross mark in pencil in the left margin opposite the words 'October Club'.
16. There is a triple line in pencil in the left margin opposite the text from 'Comrade Rue's wife' to 'Capetown'.

classified as a Trotskyite but that we must handle him very carefully and must try and sort of get him to do a certain amount of work, but not treat him very harshly. This is a question which we must take up.

Now so far as membership of the Party itself is concerned. Prior to the conference, the membership of the Party was strictly speaking in the whole of the Union, about 50 members. In Johannesburg the only natives who were members were the functionaries¹⁷ of the Party. Shortly after the conference, as a result of the conference, there was an influx of new members into the Party. An influe which increased the membership of the Party to approximately 250 members. Actually more than these have joined. I think another 70 members have joined the Party in Johannesburg and we have not been able to hold them. They have applied and been accepted as members, come to one meeting, and have not come to any more meetings and we have lost touch with them. The influx of membership has not been maintained. And there has not been a steady influx during the last six months as there was in the first six after the conference.¹⁸

What are our main weaknesses? I think we can analyse the position by stating that as far as the political level in the Party as a whole is concerned, it is very little. Our political level as a whole reflected in the membership in general is very low indeed and we will have to take steps to try our utmost to raise the political level of our members. This is reflected in the fact that members come into the Party and we lose them. We are not able to keep them. It is reflected in the fact that we are not in a position to do as much work as we should do.¹⁹ And another difficulty which we find in South Africa is the fact that we lack trained forces. Trained cadres.²⁰ We have very few people in South Africa who are of a higher standard than the average of the members of the Party, the political level is very low indeed and these trained workers are very few in numbers in our country.²¹ Particularly at this moment we find that there is a great need for training new people in political knowledge, in Party work and Party organisation, to try and improve the whole of our Party. We find also that there is far too little independent work, political work of our Communist Party as such. The prestige of the Party today and the feeling for the Party is much higher in South Africa than it has been for a number of years.²² It is respected today. Whereas formerly a few years ago, it was looked upon as a sort of sect where people were fighting each other etc. Today it is respected, it has some standing in the trade union movement, it is feared by the Government, there is

17. There is a typed-over word before 'functionaries'.

18. There is a slanted line in the left margin opposite the beginning of this paragraph.

19. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence.

20. There is a cross mark in pencil in the left margin opposite these underlined words.

21. There is a single line in pencil in the left margin opposite the text from 'in South Africa' to 'in our country'.

22. There is a triple line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence starting 'the feeling'.

no doubt about it. It is feared by the Chamber of Mines despite its numerical and organisational weaknesses, but notwithstanding this high respect which the Party has as such, we cannot take the credit for it, and say that it is due to our work that this position has come about. It is due to some extent to our work, our activity and the improvement in the work, but largely due to the objective situation in South Africa which is ripe for the building of a good strong Communist Party. The strength of the Soviet Union, the progress of the Soviet Union, notwithstanding the slanders which have been made, there has been a swing round to Communist lines. The feeling about fascism, the fight against fascism has brought many people over to left wing opinions and this widens our field of activity and gives us much greater field to work in. And this has also helped to bring out Party to that prestige which is needed.

When I speak of independent political activity, I must tell you that in Durban as such there during the last year, the Party has not been able to hold a single independent Party meeting. It is true that the Party in Durban is proscribed as a result of the riots and the shooting of and the burnings in 1932 when some of our comrades were killed.²³ Since that time the Party has been in a semi-legal status in Durban. The Party has an office in Durban but does not carry on active political work as a Communist Party.²⁴ You cannot say that the Party exists in Durban. In Capetown apart from the publication of a few pamphlets and meetings held on Sunday evenings at the bottom of (?)Street²⁵ which is a regular meeting place, also a lack of Party activity. The only centre where there is some independent Party activity is at V... (?)²⁶ where the Party holds meetings. We hold our regular Sunday meetings at the pitch at Town Hall Square but we are not making much headway. We hold meetings from time to time in the Transvaal.²⁷ We hold meetings in the locations. We hold meetings in a number of locations along the Rand where our speakers get to Speak, but we do not do sufficient work, and our work amongst the european workers as a whole is very much in the background. Absolutely neglected. We have not attempted to hold or attempted to get a foothold²⁸ for the Party in any of european working class suburbs in Johannesburg and to try and entrench the Party and bring about a movement against fascism which is now itself²⁹ at the moment entrenching itself in the suburbs of Johannesburg. Likewise in Pretoria where we have a good number of Party comrades, no

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23. There is a single line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence from 'the riots'.
 24. There is a single line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence from 'Durban but...'.
 25. The author must have meant 'Adderly Street' where the headquarters of the party were situated.
 26. Most probably, Vereeniging.
 27. The meaning of the sentence is not quite clear for some of the meeting points listed earlier are also in the Transvaal.
 28. foothold.
 29. There is a typed-over word before 'itself'.

independent Party activity so far as the Party is concerned, although we have made excellent members to the Party in Pretoria and elsewhere.

So far as the composition of the Party is concerned, it has improved very much. Formerly it consisted of a number of foreign Jewish elements from Lithuania,³⁰ Poland etc., the factional quarrel started mainly on the line of the Party in Jewish workers clubs. The Political Bureau meetings were held on what ought to be done in the Jewish Workers Club. Well, we are not concerned so much now with the Jewish Workers Club as we were formerly and we are getting into the Party elements native to South Africa.³¹ That is, the black people, and also European people who are born in South Africa, and we have today in our Party the composition whilst it is not what it should be, has improved since our conference a great deal. For example in Pretoria, Advocate Finlay has joined the Party. He is probably the most respected advocate liberal advocate in Pretoria. The man who is conducting a training class in the Trades Hall to teach the workers Marxism, which is attended by 60 trade unionists, in which they thoroughly go into Marx Capital,³² trade union organisation, the Soviet Union, and various sections of the work. We have many workers, European workers in the workshops.³³ We have a leading member of the Ironmoulders union. The relation of the Party to the trade unions has improved also. We have in the Party a number of members who hold leading positions in the Trades & Labour Council,³⁴ and in the Cape Federation of Labour, and also leading official positions in various trade unions as Secretaries, as Branch officials, as the Chairmen. We also find that there is also a lack of coordination between the Party leadership and the membership.³⁵ This is led somewhat to a breaking down of the connection between the rank and file and the leadership. The leadership sort of gives the directive, but there is no connection between the direction which³⁶ goes to the Party centres, and this tends to weaken the organisation, and you cannot get a correct check up on what the Party comrades are doing. And we must also emphasise that there is a lot of lazy people in our Party. Some of our leading comrades are lazy and this is a regrettable state of affairs which does not bring our leadership into the prestige that a leadership should hold. The influence that a leadership³⁷ should hold. When you find that leading comrades of the Party are lazy, they do not do any Party work, or they do not attend meetings or that they are merely

30. There is a cross mark in pencil in the left margin opposite this line.

31. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite the last two lines.

32. *The Capital*, the major work of Karl Marx.

33. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite the lines from 'teach the workers ...' to 'in the workshops'.

34. There is a single line and a notice 'NB' in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence.

35. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence from 'between the Party ...'.

36. There is a typed-over word after 'which'.

37. There is a typed-over word after 'leadership'.

critics, well it does not lead to any good ~~real~~ relations being established between, if a comrade who is looked upon as a leadership, as for example, Comrade Kalk, it is a bad reflection and reaction within the ranks of the Party.

Now our Party is also very weak in the publication of pamphlets and leaflets. It is true we have published more than we have published for many years prior to the conference, but what we failed lamentably to do was to bring home to our Party comrades the decisions of our conference in printed form. I think that is where we made a very big error. We ought to have brought home not only to our comrades but to the people of South Africa the gist of the resolutions, we would have been able to win many more members to our Party and able to raise the political level of our comrades. We neglected to do that, ~~purely~~ partly due to financial stringency and also due to the fact that ^{we} did not think it important enough, but we did other work in place of it.

I think that a very big weakness of our Party as such is in the Johannesburg district. The Johannesburg district is the most important district in South Africa and I feel that something radical will have to be done with Johannesburg. In Johannesburg there is an enormous field of activity, and unfortunately in our choice of D.P.O. for Johannesburg we have made a very bad choice. At the time of the Conference, Comrade Kotani³⁸ was appointed the d.p.o. He did not have his heart in the work. His mind was made up to go to Capetown and he went to Capetown. Then comrade Josie Mofatsanyana, the wife³⁹ of the leading comrade of the Party, was appointed. I feel she is not the right person in that job.⁴⁰ That in the job of D.P.O. Johannesburg we want a really first class man and if we can get a good comrade to take up that position we will be able to improve our work tremendously. I feel that comrade Josie Mofatsanyana has not made all of the job that she could have. She has domestic duties which interfere with her political activities, and that means she is not able to devote the time.

We have also the great difficulty of finance.⁴¹ And in that connection when the elections were on, we wrote to our brother Party in Britain asking them to help us financially and so far as finance is concerned that is a question which is one which leaves a lot of room for improvement even so far as the Party in South Africa is concerned itself. Since I was appointed in charge of finance just a year ago we have managed to hold our heads above water. But ^{it} is a job which I must say quite frankly I have not made the best of it. And I must admit that I am open to sharp criticism, that for example I have not informed the leading Party comrades from time to time when they were in crisis of the exact position. I have just told them – look here comrades, the position is bad and we will have to try and devise ways and means of improving the finances of

38. The words 'Comrade Kotani' are put in a square frame in pencil.

39. The word 'wife' is encircled in pencil.

40. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite two lines from 'Mofatsanyana, the wife...' to 'in that job'.

41. There is a cross mark in pencil in the left margin opposite this sentence.

our Party – it has led to a position where the finances of the Party became a sort of one man show. That is a question which we discussed just before I came away and we are taking some steps to improve the finances of the Party and to try and wipe off our debt. As a matter of fact we are in debt to the extent of approximately £250. Our income in Johannesburg is approximately £100 to £120 a month, our expenditure is approximately £150 to £175 a month. The bulk of that money goes⁴² to the running of our paper, the South African Worker which takes approximately £100 a month to run. We have in Johannesburg 5 Party functionaries and we have no Capetown one Functionary and in Durban one functionary.⁴³ These functionaries get the highest we pay to them which is 30/- per week. Our premises are approximately £8 a month for Johannesburg and £6 a month for our printing plant. We have no european functionary in the Party at all. And I think that is a question which we ought to take up,⁴⁴ because I feel, and it is the general feeling of the Party membership that we have neglected the european workers. We have not a single functionary working amongst the poor whites able to give a certain time to organising the poor whites and recruiting more workers into the Party. Our income and expenditure leaves a deficit but we feel that we have explored every field of financial assistance that we have in South Africa.

[...]

RGASPI, 495/14/355/46–54. For the full text of the document see: RGASPI, 495/14/355/1–61.

Original in English.

Typed. Copy.

Stamped: Incom. no. 299 | C (in Russian)

'15' III 1938

Inscriptions: 1) South African question
2) Illegible.

42. There are two typed-over words before 'goes'.

43. There is a double line in pencil in the left margin opposite the information about five functionaries in Johannesburg.

44. There is a single line in pencil in the left margin opposite the text from 'we pay to them ...' to 'ought to take up'.