

**Statement of H. Basner to A. Marty,
5 November 1937**

Confidential
South Africa

(STATEMENT OF COMRADE BASNER).
(Written by him on Nov. 5, 1937).

Report of Comrade Wolfson:

I think this is a very good report reflecting the true position in SA and in our Party. I have very little to add to this report, only 1) it must be very strongly emphasised that although General Hertzog's Native Bills have taken away the franchise from the Natives in the Cape and substituted a very complicated limited, indirect franchise, yet the present form of franchise has given the Native people a very powerful weapon for unity and organisation against their imperialist oppressors. The whole Native population is drawn into the election field – peasants who never heard of franchise before.¹

The chiefs, owing to the peculiar feudal structure of the tribes are compelled to explain and get approval of their tribesmen for their vote. The Native teachers and ministers who are in all reserves and locations invariably the leaders can now be won away from the Chamber of Mines organisations (Race Relations Institute,² Joint Councils) into an active and militant struggle for national liberation.

On the basis of the work done in the last election and the correct slogans and tactics for the All-African Convention we can unite the leaders who exercise a very strong influence on the backward masses: Chiefs, teachers and ministers, national Congress politicians with the workers and peasants into a great All-African Convention. The Coordinating Committee of the Unity Committee is well on the road for building such a movement, if it will do more work on the basis of resolutions taken.

2) It must be recognised that the collective leadership is not working as well as it should and that differences are beginning in the leadership and Party which must be immediately checked.

In the P.B. (Wolfson, Mofutsanyana, Basner and Kalk in Johannesburg). Comrade Mofutsanyana complains that Com. Wolfson does not show him

1. Hertzog's acts dealing with voting rights of the African population (1936) a) abolished the franchise of Cape Africans b) introduced a limited African vote in the whole of the Union, c) placed coloured population on a separate voters' roll.
2. The Institute of Race Relations, a liberal research body founded in 1929.

reports which he sends from Secretariat to centre³ and that he does not see all the reports which arrive.

Mofutsanyana and Basner have often complained that Comrades Wolfson and Kalk (especially Comrade Kalk) do not keep sufficiently in touch with membership and do not study the technical difficulties of the Native comrades, especially in running the paper and building Native trade unions.

It is necessary for these two comrades to drop a certain attitude of 'bossism' towards the Native members of the Party.

This goes further into the Party and white comrades do not give sufficient help to build unions by helping Native organisers in technical matters and advice.

Comrade Joe.⁴ TU organiser comes and complains that he does not get any satisfaction from leading comrades.

This can all be cured by patient and correct approach. More fact and understanding of Native 'backwardness'. In Durban at the end of September 1937 a serious situation arose in the Party in Durban. There was friction between white and black comrades. Comrade Mofutsanyana went and helped to put things right. He found the Natives complaining that white comrades were acting as bosses and not giving native comrades any help. They were working apart.

Comrade Mofutsanyana pointed out both sides were wrong. Native comrades must realise whites are busy and have lots of work to do and Natives must not rely on whites for everything like children.

But white comrades also wrong in not realising that Natives are 'backward' through lack of experience and education and also quick to take insults, to feel neglected. Native comrades need lots of help in ways that a white comrade can manage on his own.

In our Party, especially in the leadership, it cannot be stressed enough that great care must be exercised in dealing with Native comrades and in teaching the rank and file harmonious work.

Natives must learn to do things on their own. Whites must remember that Natives must constantly be taught before they can do things on their own.

The Resolution Drafted in Great Britain.⁵

I cannot accept the resolution drafted in Great Britain, as it seems to change the basis of the resolutions taken at our last Party conference which were worked out on the lines of a resolution which was brought to us from the centre. The resolution drafted in Great Britain seems to take SA out of the category of a

3. Here and further on, the ECCI.

4. The identity of Joe could not be established.

5. See footnote 5 to document 83, vol. II.

colonial country and is formulated in such a way as to express that a fundamental change of conditions can be brought about without the Native masses.

The centre resolution⁶ expresses that only unity between white and black toiling masses can bring about a change of conditions.

If the British resolution were to go forward to our Party in SA as a correct resolution there would be a great danger of the Party abandoning the demands of bread, work, land and freedom for ALL, because there are always two tendencies in the Party in the SA.

1) A tendency to black nationalism ignoring the claims of the whites, such as found expression when we pushed the slogan 'Black Republic.'

2) A tendency, very strong in white comrades coming from the trade unions and Labour Party (especially the English-speaking section) to advance the claims of the whites, on the argument – 'if we beat the government we will give bread, land and freedom to the Natives. The whites won't follow us now if we raise demands for the Natives. Let us first fight for the whites and then fight for the Natives.'

In the CPSA we have just finished with a factional struggle which left us weak just when we need a strong party to combat the rapid drive towards war and fascism.

It would be wrong to bring back now a resolution so formulated as the British resolution. It would lead to a lot of misunderstanding until we explained that it is only meant to emphasise the urgency of work among the white workers and poor farmers. It would also strengthen the hand of Kotane and Gomaz and lead Roux into the opportunity of a further struggle against the Party. Whereas the Centre Resolution is quite clear and cannot lead to any misunderstanding.

It is necessary to understand that there are differences in the ruling class (U.P.) Government on the native questions. (This is expressed in Wolfson's report). Among the followers of Smuts-Hofmeyr there are capitalists who represent secondary industries and want more land, pay and freedom for the Native. They disagree with the Hertzog-Pirow-Malan attitude towards natives.⁷

A great many Christians and democratic elements shocked by the brutalities and sufferings inflicted on Native people will vote against the government even at the expense of their economic interests, if anti-government forces raise the correct program and slogans.

It becomes doubly necessary therefore to fight to change policy of Labour Party on Native question – to abandon segregation.

6. The reference is either to March 1936 or to March 1937 resolution of the Secretariat of the ECCI (see footnote 2 to document 84, vol II.).

7. The reference is to the divisions within the United Party leadership between the 'liberals' (Smuts-Hofmeyr) and the hard-line Afrikaner nationalists (Hertzog-Pirow) to whom Basner added Malan of the Purified National Party.

It becomes necessary to form election blocs on the basis of

- a) Fight against Fascism and Against War.
- b) Retain democratic rights and extend democratic rights.
- c) Land, bread, work for all.

It is necessary to point out to Afrikaners, poor whites, white workers and Native masses that only unity of all toilers will decide the issue in SA.

This is all expressed in the centre resolution. It is not expressed in the British resolution. If we do not clearly express in our manifesto at the election the need of unity of all toilers, if we do not raise the program in the election bloc of land, bread, freedom for all, we are helping to split the toiling masses in SA and objectively helping the imperialists who want a strong Labour Party with a segregation policy (to split the workers). The Star and Daily Mail continually advocate a strong Labour Party. We are the only party who has this outlook at present. We must explain to the people of SA. We must work for the formation of blocs on the widest possible basis, but on the basis of demands for all, which will raise the slogans of bread, work, land, freedom for all.

It will help to sharpen the differences in the ruling class. It will assist the Labour Party. It will rally round this front workers, poor whites and liberal, democratic, Christian elements who now support the government.

There is no fight against the leadership of Com. Wolfson, and it was wrong of Comrade Kerrigan to suggest that it appeared to him that I was looking for a fight.

I had definite instructions from leading members of the Central Committee to put all the facts to the centre so that collective leadership is properly established and all the difficulties discussed with a view to harmonious work in the future. It must not be forgotten that for a period of five years, Walton⁸ and Bach (specially Bach) talked of 'native leadership must predominate in the Party' and made use of the Native for their own ends. They spoil the Native comrades by treating them like children and nothing that a Native would do could be wrong.

To bring about a change, to set all sections working and with responsibility a lot of tact is required and much patience to teach the Native comrades to stand and work on their own.

Much harm was done by an incorrect appreciation of the slogan 'Native Republic'. It is of the utmost importance not to give the enemies of the Party a further opportunity to lead a struggle among the Native comrades by very tactful handling of the Native comrades. The need for doing work among Afrikaners and whites is of paramount importance, but all the time the Native comrades must be made to understand necessity of this, and to be very careful not to insult or neglect Native comrades as otherwise immediately an impression can be created that we are turning away from them.

8. Douglas Wolton.

Our work in the youth movement where we have a number (or so⁹) Afrikaner youths and parall organisations of Native and coloured youths shows that all difficulties can be overcome with tact and the correct approach.

RGASPI, 495/14/355/70-5.

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**Report of R. Michel to A. Marty,
16 November 1937**

REPORT ON MEETING IN PARIS ON OCTOBER 28TH.

Strictly confidential
South Africa

Present: Comrades Marty, Hardy, Wolfson, Basner and Rosa¹ as secretary.

Wolfson submitted a resolution for the work of the South African Party which he had just written in London after the discussion in the special commission and in the British PB.

He declared that he had never seen the resolutions of the ECCI of March 1937² on the South African questions, neither in South Africa nor in London and only saw a 'resolution on the situation of the people in South Africa'.³

Hardy declared to have only got the inner resolution⁴ but not the other one 'which was not included in the package'. He turned everything he had re South

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9. There is an unintelligible word before 'or so' in the original.

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1. Rosa Michel was the secretary of A. Marty and almost certainly the author of this report.
2. See footnote 2 to document 84, vol. II.
3. Most probably, the reference is to the programme of action for the CPSA adopted by the South African commission (see document 67, vol II).
4. The reference is to the resolution of the Secretariat of the ECCI of March 1937 (see footnote 2 to document 84, vol. II).