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# South African Communist Party, 1921-1971

## Aspects of Party History

By a Member of the Central Committee of the  
Communist Party of South Africa

Tracing the antecedents of the Communist Party of South Africa, founded on July 30th, 1921, as a section of the Communist International, we must look in the first place at the *International Socialist League*, established in 1915 by revolutionaries who broke away from the chauvinist, South African Labour Party and fought against the imperialist war.

It is true that pioneers of liberationist, radical and even Marxist ideas existed before that time.

Early African organisations of a nationalist trend had existed since 1882, when *Imbumba Yama Africa* (the 'Aborigine's Association') was established in the Eastern Cape. The main political expression of the coloured people, The African People's Organisation established in 1902, expressed radical and socialist ideas.

The discovery of huge deposits of diamonds and gold at the close of the 19th century brought a rush to the country not only of foreign

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capitalists but also of tens of thousands of immigrant workmen, artisans and others, from Britain and elsewhere in Europe. Many brought with them their trade union and socialist ideas and established organisations to further those ideas: often branches of similar British organisations.

In 1910 the four British colonies in the region were combined into the Union of South Africa with wide powers of legislation and self-government transferred to the local white minority. With the backing of various socialist societies which had existed in the various colonies, and especially of the militant Witwatersrand trade unions, the South African Labour Party was formed in 1909.

### Foundation of South African Labour Party

Like most Social-Democratic parties of the time the Labour Party was a coming-together of widely-differing tendencies. On its right wing were conservative trade union officials and men ambitious for a parliamentary "career"; on the left, upholders of internationalism and socialist principles.

Influenced by the white chauvinism already widespread in the working class and the country as a whole, the Labour Party adopted an attitude at best ambiguous and sometimes hostile to the demands and aspirations of the oppressed majority. White trade unionists resisted the entry of non-whites to skilled jobs and excluded them from their unions.

In the meantime the Government introduced the Land Act in 1913 which made it illegal for Africans to own or hire land except in the meagre and barren areas set aside as 'reserves'. The African National Congress, established in 1912, campaigned bitterly against this law—without, it must be said, the support or sympathy of the white workers and their Labour Party. African miners on the Witwatersrand struck work in 1913, following the example set by their (infinitely better paid) white fellow workers. The Indian minority in South Africa, led by the great Mahatma Gandhi, who began his political life in our country, embarked on effective campaigns and a general strike, at the same time, against racialist measures of the Smuts-Botha government.

The growing resistance movement of 1913 among the oppressed people had far-reaching effects among a small section of the more class-conscious among the white workers.

The mood was reflected at the 1913 Labour Party conference, which decided, though not without opposition, to admit coloured members and elected an executive far more advanced and principled than its predecessor.

### During World War I

As with most of the Parties of the Second International, however, the onset of the First World War brought out within the Labour Party the deep internal conflict between revolutionary, internationalist elements on the one hand and opportunist jingoist elements on the other.

The Botha-Smuts government decided in September 1914 to join Britain and invaded German South West Africa.

The immediate reaction of the Labour Party leadership was to stand by the well-known resolution of the Second International—partly drafted by Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg—which foresaw the war and called on all workers to fight against it. A resolution adopted by the Executive on August 2nd, 1914, denounced the war as unjust and fomented by 'capitalist governments and armament manufacturers' against the interests of the working class. Similar resolutions were passed by the trade unions affiliated to the Industrial Federation, and the Cape and Natal Social-Democratic Movements. The Annual Party Conference in January 1915, returned the internationalist, anti-war group headed by Bill Andrews and Ivor Jones to the leadership of the Party, in the face of a determined effort of the Right wing headed by F. Creswell, a former mine manager and outspoken racialist, which was determined to drag the Party into support for the war.

The internationalists resisted the jingoistic onslaught. In September 1914 S. P. Bunting, Ivor Jones, Colin Wade and others within the Labour Party established the War on War League, with its own journal, *The War on War Gazette*. No bourgeois pacifist body, the League's propaganda was revolutionary and socialist in its content. It was finally strangled by government censorship.

The Internationalists, in the face of intensive censorship and persecution by the Botha-Smuts government, persisted courageously with their policy inside and outside the Party. The Creswellites, advocates of the "see-it-through" policy, by contrast resorted to underhand factional activities and relied on whipping up jingoism.

Finally, in August 1915, the 'see-it-through' imperialist faction succeeded in forcing a special conference, packed by the Creswellites, at which they carried a pro-war resolution.

The Right wing followed up this victory by demanding that all candidates for the coming elections pledge their support for the war: in protest eight executive members headed by the Chairman (Andrews) the Secretary (Jones) and the treasurer (Wainstock) resigned from their positions. A new body of internationalists, incorporating the War on War League, was formed, and

started its own weekly—*The International*. Within a few weeks it became clear that the Labour Party would not tolerate a revolutionary wing within its ranks.

In September 1915 they therefore quit the Labour Party and established a new organisation: the International Socialist League of South Africa.

### The New International

'Here we plant the flag of the New International in South Africa'. Those were the challenging words with which David Ivor Jones began his editorial in the very first issue of *The International*. For he and his comrades did not believe that the desertion of the leaders of the European socialist movement meant the end of that movement; they believed that out of that experience a new and greater movement would arise on sound, revolutionary foundations—the 'New International'. It was the very thought which Lenin had expressed in November 1914 when, unknown to the South Africans, whose knowledge of overseas developments was obscured by heavy censorship, he had written:

"The Second International is dead, overcome by opportunism. Down with opportunism, and long live the Third International".

"What the labour movement required is a return to the limpid, unequivocal affirmations of the *Communist Manifesto* of Karl Marx", wrote *The International* ("Back to the Manifesto"—December 10th, 1915). It was precisely these two main characteristics of the *International Socialist League*: its devoted internationalism and its determination to break with the opportunism of the Labour Party and return to the "limpid, unequivocal affirmations" of Marxism which were its chief strengths. These were the qualities which enabled it to survive and develop, to overcome all its inner difficulties and external hostility, to provide the main foundation upon which the Communist Party of South Africa was built in 1921.

The first Congress of the ISL, in January 1916, adopted a petition of rights, moved by S. P. Bunting. This document demanded the abolition of pass laws and indentured and compound labour, and equal rights, political and industrial, for African workers.

The League began to turn an ever-increasing proportion of its attention and activities towards the socialist enlightenment of the African and other non-white workers. In contrast with the indifference shown by the Labour Party towards the African majority, the League campaigned in protest against the Native Administration Bill of 1917, designed to complete the process of African

proletarianisation. A meeting held in Johannesburg in March that year was an historic occasion, for ANC leaders S. Msane and A. Mbele had accepted the League's invitation to share its platform: an extraordinary event for the times.

### The Russian Revolution

The upheavals in Russia in 1917, as in the rest of the world, burst with shattering impact upon the workers and oppressed people of South Africa. The significance of Russia had never been lost upon the South African radicals: many of them refugees from Tsarism because of their Jewish origin or Socialist principles.

*The International*, and particularly Ivor Jones its editor, responded to the Russian events not only with enthusiasm but also with profound Marxist understanding.

From July 1917 onwards *The International* began to receive and pass on to its readers information from actual Bolshevik sources. The July, 1917, issue reproduced almost in full an article from *Pravda* (described as "Lenin's Organ") and passages from *Pravda* appeared in nearly every issue thereafter, as well as from *Izvestia*. "Lenin on the Top" was the heading of an editorial (August 31st) declaring "The situation is developing in favour of the principles advocated by Lenin. Every week proves him right".

Hearty greetings for the revolution were expressed at the annual ISL Congress at the beginning of January 1918, and Bill Andrews, then visiting London, was instructed to meet the newly-appointed Soviet representative, Litvinov, to make contact between the League and the Bolsheviks.

### The Third International

The International Socialist League enthusiastically welcomed the news of the establishment of the Third International (The Communist International). It was in fact a development of the sort it had advocated since its establishment in 1915. The League was among the first Parties to apply for affiliation and it was represented at the Third World Congress of the Communist International, held in Moscow in 1921 by two delegates: D. I. Jones and Sam Barlin.

In accordance with the stringent stipulations deliberately formulated by the International—vigilant against any revival of opportunism in its ranks, the ISL called a meeting of 100 delegates from nearly all the socialist organisations—excluding the Labour Party, though some of its individual members took part. Meeting in Johannesburg on January 2nd, 1921, nearly all agreed on the Twenty-one Conditions of affiliation to the Comintern.

### Communist Party Founded

By March, 1921, a sufficient measure of unity had been attained to enable a Joint Unity Committee to be elected, to draft a Manifesto and Constitution and prepare for the founding Conference of the Communist Party. This took place in Cape Town, from July 30th to August 1st, 1921.

The Conference formally established the Communist Party of South Africa (South African Section of the Communist International), and adopted its Constitution and Manifesto.

It also elected an executive, with its headquarters in Johannesburg. W. H. Andrews was elected Secretary-Editor, C. B. Tyler Chairman and S. P. Bunting Treasurer. The organ of the new Party was to be *The International*, and it took over the ISL's press and offices.

Clearly, the Communist Party at its outset bore the powerful impress of its main constituent body: the International Socialist League—in its membership, leadership and character. Some commentators have concluded that the Party was “virtually a continuation of the League”; and as late as 1929 the national conference of the Party referred to its “origins in 1915”.

The 1921 Conference, however, signified far more than a mere change of name. For the first time it united the revolutionaries of South Africa in a single, disciplined and ideologically united Party of a new type. The Party members distributed and studied the works of Marx, Engels and other leaders of Marxist thought.

The exchange of experiences and ideas among the vanguard workers' parties and theorists of the whole world, to which the South African Communists contributed much and from which they gained a great deal more, was a decisive factor in the development of the Party.

Guided by Marxist Leninist theory and the Communist International, the Communist Party was to develop into the revolutionary vanguard of the oppressed working people and a close partner in the united front of national liberation, centred around the African National Congress.

### Early Struggles 1920-1922

From its formation the Communist Party of South Africa was faced with burning and complex problems. A violent onslaught was launched by the imperialistic Smuts Government against all sections of the working people, expressed in bloodshed and massacres.

The early nineteen-twenties were stormy and eventful years for South Africa. The economic crisis that swept through the world after the first world war had not left the country unaffected; nor had the revolutionary upsurge that followed the Russian Revolution of 1917. The African

National Congress raised a strong demand for democracy and freedom for the oppressed people, and sent a delegation to place the African case before the Versailles Peace Conference. Non-white dockers at Cape Town, African municipal workers and 80,000 mine workers on the Rand and the workers of Port Elizabeth came out on strike for better pay and conditions. The Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), supported by the ANC and the Communists, had launched out on a spectacular drive to organise African workers in the towns and the countryside.

In the early years it grew rapidly into one of the most powerful labour organisations in Africa, counting its members in tens of thousands, with branches in every area of South Africa and even in countries beyond its borders. The Smuts Government, agent of British imperialism and the dominant mining capitalists of South Africa, struck back at the working people in a series of bloody massacres.

In Port Elizabeth, in October 1920, a mass of demonstrators gathered outside the police station to demand the release of the ICU organiser, Samuel Masabalala, who had been arrested after demanding a minimum wage of ten shillings a day. Police opened fire, killing 23 and wounding 123 workers. At Bulhoek location, near Queens-town, 800 troops marched in to “deal with” an African religious sect (the “Israelites”) who had refused to move their camp and demanded to see Smuts. On May 24th, 1921, the Government's troops opened fire. 163 Africans were killed and 129 wounded.

The Bondelswarts, a small tribe of Coloured people of South West Africa, who had fought a bitter struggle against German occupation, demanded freedom and independence from Pretoria in terms of the League of Nations Mandate. The Smuts Government sent bombing planes and troops armed with artillery and machine guns to South West Africa. Men, women and children were killed in air raids on their village of Guruchas on May 29th and 30th, 1922: The Bondelswarts fled into the bush but were hunted down and overpowered by the superior weapons of the Union forces. Apart from those killed in the air raids, the South African authorities announced the casualties of this “campaign” to be 150 Bondelswart men killed in action; government losses, two.

The Witwatersrand was the scene of the most protracted and bloody strike in the history of the white workers movement of South Africa, from January to March, 1922. The employers, united in the Chamber of Mines, attempted to cut their goldmining costs by cutting down the number of highly-paid workers and replacing some of them

with Africans. The white workers resisted this attempt. This was the basic issue of the strike which began on January 22nd and was only terminated in March after bloody clashes between the workers and Smuts' army.

Military planes were used to bomb working areas; artillery, tanks and armoured cars were brought into action in addition to ground forces employing machine guns and rifles. A Government inquiry reported the casualties at 153 killed (including 72 soldiers and policemen) and 687 injured. Thousands of strikers and their leaders were arrested and four—Long, Hull, Lewis and Stassen—were executed.

The Communist Party executive had, at the outset, issued a manifesto supporting the strike committee, "convinced that essentially this is a fight against the capitalist class". The Party members proved among the most loyal and devoted workers during the strike. Two of them, W. H. Andrews and E. Shaw, served on the Council of Action which played a vital part in the leadership at a time when the official union leaders were ready to surrender without a fight.

But the predominant leaders of the workers were by no means Communists. The union leadership was mainly in the hands of Creswellite "white labour" racialists, who made "White South Africa" one of the main slogans of the strike. Indeed—though once it had pledged support it was given wholeheartedly—the Party had grave misgivings about the issue involved—the maintenance of a privileged position for white workers. The manifesto specifically declared that Party support was given "without necessarily identifying itself with every slogan heard in the strike" and Andrews himself in a personal letter expressed his "private opinion" that the strike would "inevitably be lost". It was "impossible" he declared "for white workers in South Africa permanently to keep the natives out of any form of industry . . ."

Much of the energy of the Party during the strike was expended on appeals to the strikers to remember that their enemy was the capitalist mine owners and the government, not their black fellow-workers. Without such tireless propaganda there can be no doubt that, encouraged by government provocateurs and extreme white racialists, more clashes would have taken place between black and white workers.

The demands that the white workers had failed to achieve through strike action were won at the polls in the 1924 General Election, when the Smuts Government was defeated by a coalition of the Labour Party and the Afrikaner Nationalist Party under General Hertzog. Even more outspokenly racist than Smuts, the Pact government secured a virtual monopoly of highly-paid,

skilled jobs for whites—a monopoly they have retained ever since. It was a Pyrrhic victory. As the Communist Party correctly commented in 1961 ("After Forty Years"):

"If 1922 was the high water mark of white labour in South Africa, it was also its greatest and *decisive defeat* as a force independent of the bourgeoisie. From 1922 onwards, the pure 'white' labour movement in this country was transformed step by step into an emasculated adjunct of the boss class, exchanging their independence for concessions and privileges, the price of their support for white imperialism in its brutal oppression and exploitation of the African people".

The Communist Party's reaction to the election pact was one of qualified approval: it had small confidence in either Party. *The International* (April 27th, 1923) called it an "alliance between bourgeois nationalism and labour imperialism", but added:

"Notwithstanding . . . the obvious insincerity of the whole arrangement we recognise that a general assault on the Smuts-Chamber of Mines combination must be made".

### The Fall of the ICU

In the meantime "Labour" imperialism expressed through the Amsterdam *International* and the British TUC abroad, bourgeois liberalism within South Africa—as well as the weakness and egoism of the ICU's secretary, Clements Kadalie, succeeded in weakening and ultimately destroying the ICU.

The Communist Party and its members had contributed immensely to building the organisation, and well Kadalie knew it.

Yet by the end of 1926, Kadalie suddenly forced a split with the Communists, carried a resolution excluding Party members from holding office in the ICU, and veered sharply towards a policy of "sensible, moderate" trade unionism, eschewing the radical political content which had drawn Africans to the organisation in their tens of thousands. The new policy was a dismal failure. Within the next two years the ICU dwindled and split until virtually nothing was left of this mighty body of organised workers. The failure of the "white" labour movement, the increasingly reactionary character of the Pact government, and the initial inspiring achievements of the ICU caused the Communist Party closely to scrutinise its policy and direction of work.

Many members questioned the weight and emphasis which continued to be given to Communist work among the white workers.

A full-scale debate took place at the Third National Conference of the Party at the end of

1924, on a motion that a fresh approach be made to the Labour Party for affiliation.

### Turn in Party Work

Arguing against this proposal, S. P. Bunting, E. R. Roux and others strongly emphasised the need to concentrate on work among the Africans. The Conference implicitly supported this view.

The terms of the final resolution on this subject were not new, but the emphasis was. It was a turn in the direction of Party work reflected also in the election of Bunting as Chairman and Roux as Vice-Chairman of the Party. Though it was long before the Party was to generalise the significance of the break with the past in theoretical terms, it was a real turning-point, and resulted in shifts of leadership.

Following the 1924 Conference the Party turned the main drive increasingly towards the organisation of the African workers, whom the ever-increasing pressures of the white-dominated economy and government were driving in their thousands from the countryside and into the burgeoning secondary industries of the towns. Under the direction of the Central Committee, members experienced in the trade union field directed their attention towards building African trade unions and attracting many militants seeking a new beginning after the collapse of the ICU. Party schools were established in which, under the general direction of the veteran Communist T. W. Thibedi, a drive was launched against illiteracy and educational backwardness inflicted upon Africans by deliberate state policy, as well as an introduction to Marxist theory.

A considerable number of African workers and revolutionary intellectuals came into the Party at this time. Many of these recruits were to play an outstanding role in the future of the liberation movement, the trade union movement and the Party. Among them were Albert Nzula (1906-1933), Moses M. Kotane, J. B. Marks, E. T. Mofutsanyana, Johannes Nkosi, Gana Makabeni, Josie Mpama, and many others.

### Relations with African National Congress

At the same time the Party's relationship with the African National Congress improved greatly. J. J. Gumede, Congress President, attended the International Congress of the League Against Imperialism at Brussels, Belgium, in February, 1927, together with James La Guma, representing the Communist Party. President Gumede told this great international gathering of anti-imperialists, whose delegates included Jawaharlal Nehru of India and Madame Sun Yat-sen of China, of the bitter lot of the enslaved African people. Speaking of communism, he said:

"I am happy to say that there are Communists in South Africa. I myself am not one, but it is my experience that the Communist Party is the only party that stands behind us and from which we can expect something".

On his return to South Africa, he repeated the same point in his Presidential report to the ANC annual conference in June 1927. "Of all political parties", he said, "The Communist Party is the only one that honestly and sincerely fights for the oppressed people".

The conference showed its confidence in J. Gumede and his militant policies by re-electing him as President-General for a further three year term, with Comrade E. J. Khaile, a member of the Communist Party as General Secretary.

In November 1927 Gumede went to Moscow to attend the tenth anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution. He was deeply impressed by his travels in the Soviet Union. "I have been to the new Jerusalem", he said later.

The shift in the Party's emphasis had brought a very substantial access of membership, transforming the composition of the Party. From a minority in 1924, African Communists by 1928, comprised the great majority—1,600 out of 1,750.

This transformation, however, was not adequately reflected either by the Party's leadership or in its policy and perspective. It is true that the fifth National Conference had elected Makabeni, Khaile and Thibedi to the Central Committee, but the officials were all whites as was the delegation appointed to the Sixth Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in July 1928.

### The Comintern Debate of 1928

This Congress was a notable one from the South African viewpoint. In addition to surveying international and, especially, colonial problems, it, for the first time, gave specific attention to a discussion on South Africa. The discussion had been preceded by talks between the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and James La Guma, who had represented the CPSA at the celebration of the revolution, the previous November. He reported the gist of those discussions on his return, and consequently the Party had an opportunity to discuss the views of the ECCI and to mandate its delegation accordingly. That mandate was one of uncompromising opposition to the new direction of policy being proposed by the leadership of the International, the relevant section being that:

"The Party must determinedly and consistently put forward the creation of an independent native republic, with simultaneous guarantees for the rights of the white minority, and struggle in deeds for its realisation".

The brief resolution that was adopted was not, nor was it intended to be, a detailed analysis of the South African situation. But it did pinpoint and stress the very weaknesses in the work and propaganda of the Party until then, and the erroneous position expounded by its delegation at the Congress.

A more thorough explanation and elaboration of the viewpoint of the international communist movement was embodied in a special resolution on "the South African question" adopted by the Executive Committee of the CI later in the year. In their arguments against the CI approach the South African delegation brought out quite clearly the fundamental differences which existed between the international movement and its South African section.

These differences were not confined to a pragmatic assessment of the suitability of a particular slogan considered as a formula. They went to the heart of the ideological approach to the colonial and national question. Arguing the South African case, S. P. Bunting as head of the delegation criticised the frequent practice of the CI in its documents of referring to the "proletariat" of the capitalist countries and the "masses" in the colonies. He contended that the distinction was incorrect, and the implication that no fundamental difference existed between the two kinds of struggle was underscored by the South Africans' insistence that class, not national, issues were uppermost in South Africa.

### In the Depression of the Thirties

It can be said with justice that many of the facts and formulations of the CI document need bringing up to date. But taken all in all it is a remarkable Marxist-Leninist appraisal of the fundamental structure of the character of South African society, whose aptness and relevance has been vindicated rather than made obsolete by the passage of time. Its emphasis on the "colonial type of country", on the "united white front for the exploitation of the native population" between British imperialism and the white South African bourgeoisie, recall the 1962 Programme adopted by the South African Communist Party, with the benefit of thirty years experience and study.

As a disciplined section of the Communist International, the Party in South Africa formally endorsed its decisions, at its Seventh Annual Conference in 1929.

Renamed *Umsebenzi* (in Zulu and Xhosa: "The Worker") the Party's journal, in several African languages, was reaching a bigger circulation than ever; vigorous efforts to build Party branches and African trade unions were

strengthened in various parts of the country under the leadership of comrades like Nzula, Kotane and Marks in the Transvaal, Nkosi in Durban, Dambuza in Bloemfontein, Gomas, Ngedlane Ndobe and Tonjeni in the Western Cape. The Party called for a united front to join in a massive attack on the pass laws, designed to culminate in the burning of passes throughout the country on the symbolical date of December 16th—Dingaan's Day, when Boer and Zulu fought at the battle of Blood River.

The call fell on deaf ears as far as the leadership of the African people's movements were concerned.

The African National Congress had entered a period of temporary regression. The retiring President, Gumede opened its April 1930 national conference with a rousing appeal for militancy. He denounced imperialism and called on Africans to rally against any attack on the Soviet Union "the only real friend of all subjected races". He called on Congress to organise and the people to fight for "equal economic, social and political rights", for 'a South African Native Republic with equal rights for all, and free from all foreign and local domination'.

The speech was strongly supported by militants and workers at the conference. But the right-wing conservative elements who packed the conference carried the day. They secured the defeat of Gumede's candidature for re-election as President and the return of an executive, headed by Dr. Seme, by then advanced in years, and dominated by compromisers who held back the growth of Congress for several years.

Nevertheless the Communist Party continued alone with its plan for Dingaan's Day demonstrations. The greatest of these was in Durban, where thousands of Africans gathered to the Party platform to hear Johannes Nkosi and other speakers.

At this demonstration Johannes Nkosi was murdered by the South African police, together with three other African workers attending the demonstration.

Following the Dingaan's Day murders, the Hertzog-Pirow government unleashed a storm of terror and repression in Durban and other Natal towns from which the movement took many years to recover, and the working class movement throughout the country was subjected to an unprecedented wave of repression.

Nevertheless the Communist Party, at a time when the national liberation movement was at a low ebb, courageously maintained its stand. Unemployment was rising steeply as a result of the world depression, and the Communist Party was in the vanguard of the movement to organise

jobless workers to demand bread and "work or wages".

Few leading active Communists escaped imprisonment at that period, even though the Party enjoyed formal legality.

### Inner-Party Strife

Unfortunately the thirties were also a period when the Communist Party itself was torn by internal strife of a sort which seriously undermined its strength and influence without truly enlightening its path. Indeed, the principle outcome was confusion.

A dogmatic, sectarian tendency had developed within the International Communist movement and the Comintern in the late twenties, and this was transmitted to South Africa by D. G. Wolton, who visited Moscow before his return to South Africa at the end of 1930, armed with the status of a "CI representative". Wolton had convinced the ECCI that Bunting was the chief representative of a "serious right-wing danger". An international campaign was then in progress against right-wingers who were considered the main danger within the international movement, and the ECCI apparently accepted Wolton's version implicitly.

Bunting was acting secretary at the time Wolton replaced him, and was elected general secretary in January 1931. He was joined in the leadership with Lazar Bach, a young Latvian immigrant. Accused of various right-wing deviations, a number of well-known members were expelled from the Party. They included two of the senior founders of the Party: W. H. Andrews and S. P. Bunting.

A furious debate arose within the membership, especially among the intellectuals, over the alleged extent, role and influence of the "native bourgeoisie". Arguing "from the book" and the documents of the Comintern, Bach greatly exaggerated the influence and importance of African capitalists, and accused those who disagreed with him of being virtually "agents of the bourgeoisie". The ANC and similar liberation movements were seen, in this view, as "bourgeois" movements, not broad alliances, including the workers. The effect of this arid and academic argument was to counterpose the Party against the liberation movement, to ignore the need for a united national front for the democratic revolution.

Kotane and other leading members challenged these views but unfortunately the debate was conducted against a background and atmosphere of suspicion and intrigue which repelled many members and supporters and failed to stimulate creative thinking. Kotane was removed from the editorship of *Umsebenzi* and a number of his

supporters were expelled from Party membership. He later expressed the view that, had he not left Johannesburg for Cape Town, he too would have been subjected to the same summary treatment.

The sectarian period finally ended. Andrews was subsequently readmitted to the Party, served for a number of years as Chairman and remained a member of the Central Committee to the end, as did J. La Guma. Many of the others expelled in the thirties had immersed themselves in trade union work or drifted out of politics. S. P. Bunting died on May 25th, 1936. *Umsebenzi*, the Party organ published a tribute to his memory, recalling his honesty and devotion, and his great contribution as the first to recognise the importance of the Africans. "Thousands of exploited and oppressed South Africans", it concluded, "will remember Comrade Bunting as a staunch fighter".

The acrimonious disputes of the early thirties left deep scars within the Party, especially in Johannesburg, the Party's headquarters, where bitter personal hostilities had developed among leading personnel.

### Fight Against Fascism

The rising tide of fascism in Europe had a major impact in South Africa. Especially after the Nazi victory in Germany, Hitler's ideas and methods found admirers among the white chauvinists, especially among Afrikaner nationalists, fertile soil for "Herrenvolk" propaganda. Openly Nazi movements, patterned unashamedly on the German pattern were set up, such as the Greyshirts. More significant was the obvious influence both of German imperialism and Nazi ideology at the highest levels of South African politics and within the Cabinet itself.

Oswald Pirow, who had been appointed Minister of Defence was the most outspoken admirer of the Third Reich. Even the Prime Minister, Hertzog, leaned increasingly towards Nazism. Malan's Nationalist Party became deeply infected with the virus: Influential Nationalists like Vorster, Verwoerd, Strydom, Eric Louw and others became increasingly outspoken in their Nazi sympathies.

These developments did not go unnoted and unchallenged. Foremost in alerting the South African people to the danger of fascism and war was the Communist Party.

In 1935 when Mussolini's troops and bombing planes launched a savage war of colonial conquest against the last remaining independent African state, the Party's "Hands off Ethiopia!" campaign won enthusiastic mass support, especially among Africans and other oppressed peoples. As a result of this campaign non-white dockers at



Cape Town gave a splendid example of international solidarity, refusing to load goods destined for the Italian army.

The trade union movement, represented by the Trades and Labour Council, began to take a more active part in the political struggle against fascism.

Supported by the Party, bodies such as the Anti-Fascist League carried out a series of effective campaigns, both in the towns and the rural areas. Demonstrations of solidarity with the Spanish and Czechoslovak people, protests against the Munich sell-out, and for friendship with the Soviet Union, received enthusiastic support.

At the same time, representing militant forces among the working class and the youth, several organisations arose to challenge the ineffective and reformist leadership which prevailed in various sections of the liberation movement at that time.

### **The Communist Party in the Second World War**

The outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 split the Cabinet and the "fused" United Party into its component parts. As in the first world war, Smuts demanded that the country go to war, together with Britain; Hertzog proposed neutrality. On a vote in Parliament, the Smuts section won. Hertzog resigned as Prime Minister. The country was at war.

The leadership of the Communist Party, like their predecessors of the ISL in 1914, assessed the character of the war from the viewpoint of the class interests of the workers, of working class internationalism. They said the war was being fought by British imperialism not to defeat fascism but "to maintain British dominance in Europe, to defend British colonies and retain British trade and investments overseas against a rival imperialism".

However the Party could not lose sight of the fact that the white opposition to the war was being conducted by the Nationalist Party, deeply penetrated by fascist ideas, whose proposed "neutrality" was one which would have drawn them into further support for German imperialism and lead to the imposition of a fascist regime internally. The Party's role during this period was to oppose the war and resist the pro-fascist Nationalist Party.

### **The Nazi Attack on the Soviet Union**

A profound change in the international situation, and in the character and direction of the war, resulted from the all-out Nazi aggression against the Soviet Union in June 1941. After prolonged discussions, the Party decided to sup-

port the war and demanded that South Africa make a full contribution to the common victory over Nazism.

South Africa's armed forces were confined exclusively to the white minority of the population. (Africans and other non-whites were recruited at a fraction of their pay for non-combatant duties.) The Party demanded that Africans be armed and recruited with equal status, and vigorously criticised the government's half-hearted prosecution of the fight against fascism at home and abroad. A *Call to the People* issued by the Central Committee in October 1941, declared "that the struggle against Fascism requires the extension of the fullest democratic rights to all sections of the people in South Africa, the suppression of the open supporters of Hitlerism, the removal from the army, the police, the civil service and Parliament of the agents of Hitler, the ending of capitalist inefficiencies, waste and profiteering".

On the basis of this policy the Party campaigned vigorously throughout the country. The left-wing, English-language, weekly — *The Guardian*—which was established with the aid of Party members in 1938, played a leading role in espousing this policy. So too, did the Party's official journal—*Inkululeko* (Freedom)—which published articles in Sotho, Zulu, Tswana, Ithosa, Venda and Shangaan languages. Both journals steadily increased their circulation throughout the country.

Constant public meetings and a stream of Party publications as well as the tremendous impact and impression created in South Africa by the heroic resistance of the Soviet people, aroused the political consciousness of the people of the country to a higher level. Servicemen and women flocked into the Springbok Legion, in which Communists played a prominent part.

A new drive to organise unorganised workers in trade unions was marked by a steady growth in the membership and activity of African unions.

Between 1941 and 1943 the membership of the Party grew fourfold. The growth of working class consciousness was paralleled by a new surge of militancy in the liberation movements. The Youth League of the African National Congress, headed by Anton Lembede, Walter Sisulu, Nelson Mandela, Joe Matthews and others, despite certain ideological differences with Marxism, found common ground with the Communists in their demands for a more positive and revolutionary leadership in the ANC and a change from stereotyped and ineffective methods of struggle to radical mass action.

Unity of Communists and non-Communists in the common struggle for national liberation was

carried an important stage forward with the dynamic anti-pass campaign of 1944-45, presided over by Dr. A. B. Xuma, then ANC President-General, and headed among others by Y. M. Dadoo, M. Kotane, E. T. Mofutsanyana, J. B. Marks and A. Maliba.

### After World War II

The end of the war in Europe, in May 1945 with the triumphant entry of the Soviet Army into Berlin, was celebrated by a gigantic demonstration organised jointly in Johannesburg by the African National Congress, the Transvaal Indian Congress, the Council of Non-European Trade Unions and the Communist Party.

With the ending of the war, a fresh wave of bitter struggles broke out between the oppressed peoples and the reactionary ruling classes of South Africa. To each new attack our people responded with rising militancy, unity and political awareness, with their Communist Party and its members ever in the front ranks.

The year 1946 saw a remarkable revival of the South African Indian Congress, after a long period under sterile sectional leadership of men of the merchant class, following the departure to India of Gandhi. Indian workers and revolutionaries elected our comrade Dadoo to Congress President in the Transvaal, and his close colleague Dr. Naicker in Natal. The Smuts government, attempting to introduce its anti-Indian Ghetto Act in June 1946 was met with a powerful resistance campaign, in which thousands of disciplined volunteers were arrested for defiance, which had widespread repercussions in South Africa and abroad.

### African Miners' Strike 1946

Profoundly significant was the African miners strike of 1946. The most exploited and oppressed workers of any, our miners had time and again begged the millionaires of the Chamber of Mines to give the workers an increase to the relatively small (compared with their mammoth profits!) wage of 10s. a day. The bosses refused even to meet the representatives of our Union, or to acknowledge their letters. At last on August 4th, at a mass, open-air conference, the workers unanimously decided to strike.

In the week that followed, August 12-19th, at least 100,000, a third of the African working force on the mines, took part in a stoppage that brought a large proportion of the mining industry to a standstill.

From the beginning to the end the Chamber of Mines and its agency, the government, "dealt with" this situation by means of force and terror. A special Cabinet sub-committee was set up to

implement this policy. Two thousand armed police were drafted to the Witwatersrand and placed at the disposal of the Chamber and its compound managers with one clear objective: to break the strike and get the miners back to work. When intimidation by armed police failed, they charged with bayonets or opened fire to force the workers down the shafts. Hundreds of workers were killed and wounded (no official figures were ever released).

Members and supporters of the Party responded magnificently. Many spent the week with little or no sleep, going from their jobs at factories or offices to report to the ANWU offices to volunteer assistance; helping to roneo Union leaflets—the only contact with the miners during the reign of terror—distributing them at dawn to compounds.

The 1946 strike was broken by lawless and ruthless violence by the state. It was followed by a wave of repression against the miners and their union. Massive victimisation was followed by even more intensive methods of regimentation, terror and espionage that ended open union activity among African miners for a generation.

### Attacks and Arrests

The week following the strike saw police raids on the offices of the Communist Party and *The Guardian*, and the homes of their officials and staff, in all the main towns of the country. Hundreds of documents and files were seized.

The mine workers chairman J. B. Marks, M. Kotane, the general secretary of the CPSA, and the members of the Johannesburg District Party Committee were among 52 accused in a mass trial in Johannesburg of a "conspiracy" to bring about the strike.

The charge of "conspiracy" was later dropped; nearly all those accused were found guilty of assisting the African miners in their strike, in itself of course illegal: a charge which they did not deny.

In November 1946 the members of the Central Executive Committee of the Party in Cape Town were arrested in connection with the strike and faced with a number of serious charges, including "sedition". The charges were flimsy and were ultimately thrown out by the court. The answer of the people and their organisations to the government's attack was to intensify and unify their struggle. 1947 saw the laying of the basis of the great Congress Alliance, the fighting united liberation front of South Africa, when the African and Indian Congress leaders signed the historic Xuma-Dadoo-Naicker agreement. The ANC discarded its old futile policies of representations and fruitless deputations. A turn was made to militant policies of mass action: of revolution.

### Struggle in Illegality

The attack of the Smuts government on the Communist Party, the working class and the national liberation movement was the prelude to even more vicious attacks by its successor: the neo-Nazi Nationalist Party, headed successively by Malan, Strijdom, Verwoerd and Vorster. The country was turned into an armed camp: a fascist police state. The people, deprived of all possibilities of peaceful advance turned more and more to the path of revolutionary armed struggle. The Suppression of Communism Act (1950) declared the Communist Party of South Africa to be an "unlawful organisation". It prohibited the advocacy of Marxism-Leninism and laid down stringent penalties for all who had ever been members or supporters of the Party.

That the Party had to some extent been influenced by legalistic illusions is evidenced by the hasty decision of the Central Committee to dissolve it; but the firmness of Marxist-Leninist principles of the great majority of its members, including most of the members of the former CC, was demonstrated by their courageous participation in the dangerous work of rebuilding the South African Communist Party in conditions of illegality.

Over the past twenty years, as our people have advanced from one united mass struggle to another, and to preparations for armed struggle and civil war, the revolutionary masses of South Africa and their Communist Party have reached their greatest heights.

The names of our martyrs: heroes like Mbeki, Fischer, Kathrada and many others are known to all the world, together with all those non-Communist revolutionaries whose very names are a banner to the oppressed people everywhere.

At the same time, our Party—particularly in its programme, *The Road to South African Freedom* adopted in 1962—has raised the Marxist-Leninist approach to the problems of our country to a higher level than ever before. In particular, our party has developed in theory and in practice a unity in struggle between the working-class and national liberation movements which has succeeded in harnessing the support of the oppressed masses and drawing tens of thousands of them into organised political activity. If political consciousness and experience at the rank-and-file level as well as amongst the leadership is richer in our country than anywhere else on the African continent, this is in no small measure due to the contribution made over the past 50 years by the South African Communist Party.

Standing always at the centre of resistance to

racist tyranny, our Party has sustained the heaviest blows of the enemy, but emerged with greater strength and confidence in the principles of Communism and internationalism; of victory for our people and for the working class. This confidence is fully reflected in our programme, in the documents issued by the party from time to time, in the pages of our journal the *African Communist* and in the proceedings of the leading bodies of our party.

It is not practicable to detail the history of an illegal, underground Party in an article of this sort, at this time; that is a task which awaits future historians. But we feel that the experience of these years justifies the confidence of our Party in the future of our country.

### On the Road to South African Freedom

The Augmented Central Committee meeting of the Party which was held in 1970 declared that "political and social developments in South Africa confirm the analysis made in our programme that the objective conditions exist for a national democratic revolution that will destroy South African imperialism, win the national liberation of the African and other oppressed people, and bring about profound democratic changes in line with the demands of the Freedom Charter" (adopted at the historic Congress of the People in 1955).

"In this situation the Party calls upon the working people of our country and especially the workers and oppressed African and non-White peoples to unite their ranks, to resist tyrannical domination in every sphere and by every means, and to work for the conquest of power by the people.

"Paying tribute to the heroism of the fighting men of Umkhonto we Sizwe, it pledges its unqualified support for the liberation army in its aim to recruit and train guerrilla fighters, to spread the area of guerrilla war to the heart of the Republic.

"Believing firmly that the building of our Party as the Marxist-Leninist vanguard of the working class is a vitally important contribution to the victory in the common struggle, the meeting instructs the Central Committee to direct its main efforts to the reconstruction of the Party at home as an organisation of professional revolutionaries, closely in contact with the working class and peasantry and able to carry on the propaganda and organisation of the Party in the face of police terror".

On its 50th anniversary the Party pledges itself to carry on with its great task until final victory is won.