

South African Communist Party Documents. 1929

Our Annual Conference — An Inspiring Gathering

Source: *The South African Worker*, January 31, 1929.

Transcribed: by [Dominic Tweedie](#).

The Seventh Annual Conference of the Communist Party of South Africa, which lasted from Saturday evening, December 29th to Wednesday night, January 2nd, was the finest ever held, although it had been preceded by much serious controversy during the year. There were 30 delegates, 20 black and 10 white. The visitors were guests of the party during the conference, and their daily meetings round the hospitable board of Comrade Mrs Jacobs, who did the catering, contributed not a little to the success of the conference.

OPENING GREETINGS

Beginning with a 'social' entertained by talent of a high order from Vereeniging, Potchefstroom and Johannesburg branches, the 'real business' was ushered in next morning by a procession with band and banners from the Party Headquarters to the Inchcape Hall where a great throng before entering the building sang the Internationale.

Inside, every seat was occupied by a keenly interested crowd consisting mainly of native workers with a very few from white trade unions, although they had all received invitations. The credential committee reported that a membership of nearly 3,000 was represented by the delegates.

Greetings were read from the British Communist Party, from our former chairman Jimmy Shields (recently arrested for free speech in Greenock, Scotland), from the African National Congress and from sundry trade unions and organisations, white and black, from the Cape to the Zambesi. In turn greetings were sent to Soviet Russia as the workers' 'fatherland', to the class war prisoners of the world and to the workers of Rhodesia and the Congo.

Comrade S.P. Bunting, opening the proceedings as chairman, spoke on the lines of the introduction to the new Party Programme (see pages 3 and 6) and hailed the coming into power of those now contemptuously dubbed 'kitchenboys' by labour Minister Sampson, or the 'Jim Fishes' for whom the chairman of the Labour Party pleaded his detestation as a ground for soliciting votes, whereas Lenin said every cook must become a politician and a ruler. If the masses seemed unripe today that was only the result of just this stunting oppression: once this was removed a rapid ripening would result under Communist leadership.

WAR DANGER

Comrade J Gomas (Capetown) on the WAR DANGER showed how the imperialists were doubling their armaments and using armed force on more fronts than ever, fomenting trouble everywhere, whether in the colonies or against the USSR. The USA having become Britain's great capitalist rival, Americans are now called 'too foreign blooded' as

the Germans were called 'Huns' by the British press. Meanwhile their whole system is challenged by the very existence of the USSR. If war comes, it must be made to mean 'disorder at home' leading to socialism. The non-Europeans, who are also being trained for the next war, must thus play their part in the campaign against imperialist war.

An ICU official in the audience recalled the king's personal promise of benefits to African soldiers, which remained unfulfilled.

POLITICAL REVIEW

The POLITICAL SITUATION was ably reviewed by Comrade D G Wolton, who stressed the growth of colonial liberation movements and the colonial workers' growing unity with the workers of the home countries. Witness the Pan Pacific Secretariat, to which even 'white Australian' labour had affiliated; also the growth of the Anti Imperialist League. The Chamber of Mines was for breaking down the Colour Bar with a view to rationalisation and cheaper labour. Social democracy had captured the TCU and hoped to kill the liberation movement 'by kindness' to a few chosen natives.

In discussion it was urged that the CP could now stand and lead the masses from slavery without the need for white leaders. Union with 'Home' workers was facilitated by the fall of their standard to 'Kaffir level', leading them to support the colonial revolt. The white unemployed here flocked to the CP for bread; when they had got it they disappeared, warned not to associate with 'Reds'. But only the CP offered any salvation to white workers; bywoners etc.: the alternative sjambok policy of the 'Boer-geoisie' and its 'Scabinet' Ministers could lead them nowhere. Native Trade Unions could not really flourish until special oppressions such as passes were removed: hence they must take up politics. Salaaming the bosses in the hope of favours was useless. It was resolved to contest one or more constituencies in the general election.

TRADE UNIONISM

Comrade E.S. Sachs, reporting on the TRADE UNION movement, denounced the Conciliation Act chloroform, which led to the Industrial Councils being preferred above Trade Unions, the latter in some cases surviving only as salary providers for Government controlled officials. The bright feature of TU life is the growth and heroism of our native Unions and their coming together with white unions. If the SAFNTU applied for affiliation to the TUC, it would be well supported. Anyway the native unions must fight for complete political freedom and equality, and the basic industries must be organised. These unions can exercise great influence in regard to war.

In discussion the dangers were mentioned of party members absorbed in TU work becoming lost to the party or debarred from doing party propaganda in TU's or of black and white TU unity being used to subordinate black militancy to white reaction.

THE NATIVE REPUBLIC

The new PARTY PROGRAMME was debated for over a full day. The point that raised most discussion was the 'Native Republic' slogan. The chairman ruled that any motions involving its rejection or modification were out of order under the CI statutes, but

welcomed discussion tending to its explanation. In the result it was understood that it implied, by whatever stages, a workers and peasants Republic, but with the necessary stress on its overwhelmingly native character; for practically all natives are workers and peasants, and again, probably only a workers' and peasants' victory can achieve such a republic. After further discussion the clause 'Self-determination of the African peoples' was adopted by 11 votes to 4.

Next a new PARTY CONSTITUTION was adopted, providing for delegates of branches on the Central Committee meeting quarterly, with an Executive Bureau meeting weekly in Johannesburg, and otherwise on the lines of the CPGB rules.

PARTY AFFAIRS

Comrade D G Wolton, General Secretary, explained his desire to leave for Britain, urging that his successor should be a non-European, and attacking alleged 'chauvinistic errors' in the party. Discussion was eventually cut short by a general request to him to remain at his post, to which he eventually yielded 'until', as he said, 'a non-European is ready to take my place.'

The most moving and inspiring of all the proceedings was 'Branch Reports'. The unvarnished yet splendid tales of struggle, heroism and sacrifice in the teeth of incredible persecution, intimidation and espionage (even at the hands of other native workers) which made up the story of the country branches especially, including the very live women's branches, brought tears to the eyes of more than one.

At the close a white comrade said: 'I came to this Conference somewhat prejudiced, but the comradeship and success achieved have given me enthusiasm, and I can see how worth while the propaganda among natives is.'

Head-office officials were elected as follows:- Chairman and Treasurer: S P Bunting; vice-Chairman: E S Sachs; General Secretary and Editor: D G Wolton; Members of Executive Bureau: R Bunting, M Wolton, T W Thibedi, J Nkosie; Organising and Assistant Secretary: A Nzula; Bookkeeper: S Malkinson.

<http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/sacp/1929/conference.htm>