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Baruch Hirson and Gwyn Williams (1995) *The Delegate for Africa: The Life and Times of David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924*, Core Publications.

Of the three people who played the central role in moving socialists in South Africa towards communism, two were commemorated over fifty years ago when RK Cope wrote *Comrade Bill*, the biography of WH Andrews and Edward Roux published his biography of *SP Bunting*. These brought the lives of two pioneer communists into the public domain. The third pioneer, David Ivon Jones, was mentioned briefly in both the biographies – he could hardly be excluded – but the descriptions were short, the details sparse and Jones was barely known in the party he helped prepare.

There was no excuse for the omission. Andrews, who provided his biographer with much of the material was an intimate friend of Jones, knew about his Welsh connections and had lived through some of the events that helped to shape Jones's consciousness. But he hardly mentioned Jones, as can be ascertained by a perusal of Cope's notebooks.

The witnesses of the time were silent but there is little excuse for the Communist Party historians who came later. HJ and RE Simons seem not to have searched the records for material on this remarkable man and he receives scant notice in their *Class and Race in South Africa: 1850-1950*. Michael Harmel, in his history of the CPSA/SACP, *Fifty Glorious Years*, failed to take the story any further. Nonetheless in the records of the Comintern, and in the journals of the CPSA and the British Communist Party, there is enough material for a substantial monograph.

Such an account would have been important but could not have revealed the full story of Ivon Jones. For the inner story of the man as religious philosopher, as traveller and as international socialist it was necessary to visit the National Library of Wales and read his diaries, his note-books and his letters. This is a rare feast that uncovers a passionate man who searched for the truth and eventually found it in the events of the Russian Revolution of 1917.

Gwyn Williams, doyen of radical Welsh historians, undertook the writing of Jones's life in Wales and then in New Zealand from 1907-1910. In so doing he painted a picture of the industrial development of the Welsh principality and set the scene of the conflict between the Calvinist Methodist and the Unitarian chapels in middle Wales. He provides an account of the intellectual flowering of Jones under the guidance of George Eyre Evans, his Unitarian mentor and life-long friend. Whatever lay in store for young Ivon in Wales was cut short by the appearance of that scourge of Wales and of the Jones family, tuberculosis.

Searching a cure, Ivon was sent on the longest available sea voyage of the time, to New Zealand. This sharp witted young man struck up a friendship with two socialists who had been involved in the Russian Revolution of 1905. Their stories were to stay with him and, in an echo of their experiences, he was to travel to and end his life as a propagandist for the Bolshevik regime in Russia.

Hirson takes up the account from 1910 when Jones landed in South Africa. In the same way as Williams cast the early years of Jones's life in the social development of Wales and then New Zealand, Hirson provides a social history of South Africa as a background to the biography. In this he was fortunate in having hundreds of letters which gave a personal account of the social and political life of South Africa, as seen through the sharp eyes of Jones.

There are completely new accounts of the white workers' strikes in 1913 and 1914, some taken from the columns of the British socialist press, others described in Jones's letters to Evans. This is followed by an account of the anti-warites in South Africa in the First World War and the events that led to the split in the South African Labour Party and the formation of the International Socialist League.

The achievements of this remarkable man include his role in the organisation of the first viable black trade union movement, the Industrial Workers of Africa, his prediction after the first revolution in Russia in March 1917 that the Russian worker would join the worldwide struggle for socialism, and his pamphlet, 'The Bolsheviks are Coming' which placed him in the dock in South Africa's first anti-Communist trial. He edited his group's journal through 111 copies, provided the first accounts of the factors forcing Mozambiquans to seek work in the Rand's gold mines and, after he left South Africa, to write one of the most penetrating accounts of the 1922 General Strike.

Gravely ill, Jones was returning to his home town in Wales, Aberystwyth, but was persuaded to journey to the Soviet Union. There he was a delegate to the Congress of the Communist International in 1921 where he first raised the need to convene a Conference of Negro Toilers, translated Lenin's early works from the Russian, wrote acute accounts of events in the USSR and of the founding conference of the Red International of Labour Unions.

His health could not hold up and Jones died in a sanatorium in Yalta, in 1924, but not before writing a lengthy letter to Andrews suggesting a change of tactics after the defeat of the General Strike. This book, which provides new insight to the early communists in South Africa can be obtained from:

Core Publications, 13 Talbot Avenue, London N2 OLS
price £8.50 — or £9.50 (inclusive of p&p) outside the UK.