

## Comintern and the Black Nation: Some Documents

### I

18.v.29.

To Comrade Kuusinen

Dear Comrade,

I should like the Eastern Secretariat to put a proposal before the Small Commission, which has already taken the decision to appoint a Negro comrade as practican in the Negro Bureau. This decision was taken a few weeks ago, but the name of a candidate was not put forward until I could ascertain what Negroes were available either here or in America. I have talked with the Negro comrades, with several, of the other members of the Bureau and with one or two of the Americans. I have come to the conclusion that the only comrade who would be really useful is comrade Haywood, who is at present the Vice-Chairman of the Negro Bureau. He is easily the strongest theoretically and has the advantage of a longer training than any other Negroes in Moscow. He has been here for 1½ years in Kutv and for another 1½ years in the Lenin School. He is a proletarian, who can work very well also on theoretical and propagandist lines.

The only difficulty about his appointment is that he is now in the Lenin School, and it is not usual for the Lenin scholars to do any other work at the same time, though it has occurred, and although some of them do a great deal of journalistic activity. Nevertheless I think Haywood is rather a special case and consider that his 3 years already in Moscow would make it possible for the Lenin School to arrange his timetable of practical work and special research, etc. so that it fitted in with the work of a practican of the Negro Bureau. I have already spoken to comrade Kirsanova about this, and she is discussing it with other members of the Lenin School. In my absence, however, the matter may get either held up or blocked because no one is pushing it. I therefore want to propose that the Small Commission should accept the candidature of comrade Haywood for the post of practican, which they have already set up, and should notify the Lenin School that it is necessary for them to make an arrangement whereby this fits in with the proper fulfilment of his studies. Unless they very strenuously object, this should be carried through.

It is necessary to take a decision immediately as the practical work for the summer of the Lenin School students is this week being carried through. I understand the proposal with regard to Haywood was that he should study the national question in Crimea and at the same time recuperate his health. If the Small Commission accept the proposal, then that would only require to be altered to the extent that his studies in the Crimea would be partly the national question and partly a study not of American, but of African national and agrarian problems, of which there are certain new books. This would enable us in the mid-summer to begin the drafting of a programme for the equatorial colonies.

The question of money (salary for the post of practican), of course, is one that the Small Commission can settle between itself and the Lenin School.

Yours fraternally,

L/11654/6,  
Copying.  
28.12.29.

**FOR THE SECRETARIAT - - APPROVED BY THE**  
**ANGLO-AMERICAN SECRETARIAT AND THE**  
**EASTERN SECRETARIAT.**

**DRAFT LETTER TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF THE USA**  
**RE: THE NEGRO CONFERENCE**

Dear Comrades,

The ECCI recognises certain successes achieved by the Party in the sphere of Negro work particularly since the VI Congress, namely, the establishment of the Negro Department, both within the Party and the TUSL, the drawing of the number of Negro comrades into the leading committees of the Party and revolutionary trade unions, the increase in Negro membership, the work in connection with the Negro Tenants' League in New York, and in strike activity, the presence of a considerable number of Negro delegates at the recent TUKL Conference in Cleveland, the demonstrations conducted against white chauvinism, the election of a labour jury for Gastonia with Negro representation, agitation against racial oppression in connection with the Gastonia case, organisational measures taken against chauvinist elements in Seattle, Washington and Norfolk, Virginia, Chicago, New York, etc.

We must, however, state that these achievements are by no means commensurate with the opportunities afforded by the present favourable objective situation, which shows a definite radicalisation of the Negro masses reflected in their growing feeling of distrust towards the old capital is parties as revealed in the last presidential election campaigns, active participation of Negro workers in the recent period in a series of strikes alongside of the white workers — coal miners, New Bedford fur workers, etc., response of the Negroes to our new trade union propaganda, etc.

In spite of this favourable situation, the Party's Negro work is still faced with grave shortcomings as manifested in:

a) Under-estimation of the political significance of the slogan of self-determination as a slogan for rallying the Negro masses in the South in the struggle against imperialism. This is shown in, the failure of the Party to popularise or to make any efforts to concretely apply this slogan, its absence from important party documents — no mention of the slogan in recently issued programme of the AHLC, the fact that Pepper's crude distortion of this slogan has not up to the present time been officially answered by the Party, and the unclearness revealed in the tendency to counterpose the slogan of self-determination to the slogan of social equality - a mistake which is even reflected in leading Party cadres (editorial note to Com. Gertsen's article, "Daily Worker", 25.5,29).

b) Inseparably bound up with the unclearness, we note the still insufficient fight of the Party against chauvinist tendencies in its own ranks, and among the white workers in general. Mistakes in Gastonia, anti-Party moods among Negro comrades in district 8 (Chicago), as a result of chauvinism, which existed in the Party apparatus and the continued existence among considerable sections of the membership of an attitude of indifference towards Negro work (articles by Com. Briggs in "Communist").

c) Weak position of the ANLC and the irregular appearance of its organ, the "Negro Champion".

d) A tendency to under-estimate the importance of work among the Negro workers and peasants in the South -- the failure to achieve positive organisational results in the Party's Negro work in the South, no Negro organiser in the South, no effort to prepare agrarian programme for the Negro peasantry called for in the October Resolution of the ECCI.

We consider that the above shortcomings reflect the continued existence in the Party of the lack of clarity in relation to this work, which situation is chiefly due to the FAILURE of the Party up to the present time to CLARIFY and POPULARISE the decisions of the VI Congress on the Negro question in the United States or to carry out a thoroughgoing self-criticism upon the basis of these decisions.

Taking into consideration the above facts, the ECCI deems it necessary for the Party to call a CONFERENCE OF NEGRO AND WHITE COMRADES active in Negro work for the purpose of CLARIFYING AND POPULARISING THESE DECISIONS AS WELL AS TO DEVISE CONCRETE MEASURES FOR THEIR APPLICATIONS. This conference

should lay the basis for the broadening of the work of the ANLC and the revision of its programme in line with the CI decisions.

In connection therewith, we recommend the following:

1. That the latter part of March or the first part of April, 1930, be set as a tentative date for the conference.
2. That the agenda be the following points:
  - a) Decisions of the CI on the Negro question in the USA and the task of the Party:
  - b) Negro trade union work and the general activity of the Party among Negroes in industry.
  - c) Work among the Negro agrarian masses,
  - d) Readjustment and strengthening of the Party apparatus to work among the Negroes.
3. That the conference should be preceded by careful preparatory work - a special committee should at once be appointed to handle the organisation of this work. The task of this committee should be:
  - a) The immediate initiation of a broad discussion on all phases of the Negro work upon the basis of the CI resolutions which should be republished in the Party press, including its foreign language sections;
  - b) To handle the publication of additional materials, some of which will be forwarded later by the Negro section of the CI.
  - c) The organisation of a conference arrangement committee to handle the preparatory work in the districts - these committees should call meetings of Party members in which leading comrades should be prepared to explain the resolution and lead the discussion.
4. That at the Conference should be present a minimum of 60 delegates, including Negro and white comrades on an approximate basis of two-thirds Negro comrades. Representatives of the following Party committees and Communist fractions in auxiliary organisations should participate: members of the Secretariat -Agitprop, editor of Daily

Worker, head of the trade union department, Young Communist league, Party schools, Women's Department, white and Negro comrades from Party Negro committees both in the centre and in the districts, members of the Party fractions and TUEL - miners, textile workers, seamen's clubs, etc., members of Party fractions of Anti-Imperialist league, ILD, WIR, United Farmers League and representatives of shop committees in factories with a large percentage of Negro workers. THE DELEGATES, AS FAR AS POSSIBLE SHOULD CONSIST OF WORKERS FROM THE ENTERPRISES. SPECIAL EFFORTS SHOULD BE MADE TO SECURE THE PRESENCE OF BOTH NEGRO AND WHITE PARTY MEMBERS FROM THE SOUTH. This is particularly important for the development of the work there.

5,                   That the preparation for the Conference and the Conference itself should be conducted in an atmosphere of real self-criticism,

6.                   That the work of preparation should be so organised as to achieve the maximum clarification of the general theoretical questions before the Conference, the Conference mainly devoting itself with the devising of practical measures for the concrete application of the CI decisions.

7.                   That after the Conference, special membership meetings in all Party units should be held in which the Negro question should be thoroughly discussed in the list of the results of the Conference.

In connection with the preparation, the Negro Section of the CI will prepare additional materials – pamphlet on the decision of the CI and tasks of the Party, outline of an agrarian programme, materials on the trade union question and a number of articles on different phases of the Negro question. This should be supplemented by similar activity upon the part of the comrades in America and the whole given the widest publication.

The Conference should be regarded as a PRELIMINARY STEP towards the calling in the near future of a LARGE CONGRESS OF NEGRO TOILERS. This latter, however, should be convened ONLY after the MOST THOROUGH preparatory work, which should include the working out of a programme of immediate demands for the Negro workers and poor peasants in the different localities, around which should be set up local committees of action which in turn, should send delegates to the Congress. Added to this all possible

effort should be exerted to secure delegates from all existing Negro workers' organisations, at the same time seeing to it that white workers from sympathetic organisations attend.

### III

#### **PROPOSALS ON THE RELATIONS AND WORK** **OF THE TWO NEGRO COMMISSIONS**

Since being appointed on the committee to fix the relations between the Anglo-American Negro Sub-commission and the Negro Sub-commission of the Eastern Section of the Comintern, I have been thinking about some of the shortcomings of the work. The shortcomings of the work of the two bureaus has been due to the fact the commissions have failed too orientate themselves properly to their respective duties. In the past the Eastern Dept. has centered the greater part of its attention on the American situation and as a result of this time has been lost and the work concerning the Congo, Latin America, Africa etc. has suffered. This has also created a situation where almost no work has been left for the Anglo-American to do and as a result of this it has hardly functioned at all.

I make the following proposals to remedy this situation:

1. All American and South-African questions and materials shall first be considered by the Anglo-American Sub-commission before being taken up by the combined commissions. This gives this commission something to do and at the same time provides time for the Eastern Sub-commission to concentrate more deeply on work in those countries under its jurisdiction.
2. The Anglo-American sub-commission should be strengthened by adding more active forces. I propose that Page Arnot and Bert Wolfe members if they are not - already so, and also that we add; Kratof (Youth) and Margaret Neal.
3. I propose that the forces for Eastern work be strengthened by cringing in representatives from those countries where work is most present and outstanding, France and Latin-America.
4. That the two commissions should be joined together and be regarded as one big commission to decide final action on all American questions.

Signed Farmer

**LETTER TO T.U.E.L. ON WORK AMONG NEGRO WORKERS**

Dear Comrades,

The Executive Bureau of the R.I.L.U. has had under consideration our work among Negro workers, with special reference to America. While being fully cognisant of the circumstances connected with this work, and the fact that there has been an influx of Negro workers into the new unions recently organised under our influence (New National Miners' Union, etc.), and also the fact of the industrialisation of large sections of Negroes in America and the industrialisation in the south which affects the Negro population, we wish to draw your attention to (a) the resolutions and decisions of the Fourth Congress of the RILU regarding Negro workers, and (b) the organisation of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro workers by the Executive Bureau of the RILU and the Program of Action. For the purpose of more efficiently and effectively carrying out this work, we outline the following Immediate tasks for the TUEL:

1. A special Negro Sub-Committee of the TUFL must be set up for coordinating our work among the Negro workers and organising them into unions, this Committee should work along the following lines:

a) Carry on broad agitation among the Negro workers regarding their joining the trade unions, especially the new unions under our leadership. "The Negro worker", the Bulletin of the ITUCNW should be widely circulated and material on the situation of the Americas. Negro workers supplied for publication. "Labor Unity" should likewise publish articles on this subject. Arrangements must be made with the Workers' Schools for the organising of special courses (in New York and Chicago) for the development of Negro comrades for trade union work, as well as the training of rank and file Negro trade union members. A research section should be set up to specialise on Negro work in connection with the research department organised by docent Dunn in New York.

b) A conference of Negro trade unions (Plumbers' Union of Chicago, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, Negro Workers' Relief Committee, American Negro Labor Congress, and other Negro workers' organisations), mixed trade unions and white trade unions, should be called for the purpose of planning campaign as for the organisation of Negro workers. Care must be taken to organise successful local and district



conferences before a national conference is called so that there will be sufficient mass basis to justify the calling of a national conference.

c) These conferences should be utilised for the purpose of setting up local committees for the existing Negro trade unions especially where there is a considerable Negro proletarian population as in Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Buffalo and Cleveland. Industrial and agricultural workers' committees should be established in Birmingham, Alabama for the South, and on the Pacific Coast.

d) The above should be carried out as part of the preparations for participating in the International Conference of Negro Workers to be called by the ITUCNW in the fall of 1929.

e) Direct contacts should be made with the West Indies with a view of assisting in establishing trade union centers there.

f) As the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters is the most important Negro Union and is led by reformists, Left Wing groups must be established inside this Union in order to combat the reformist leadership and bring the organisation under our influence.

2. In the TUEL Delegation to the Latin-American Conference provision must be made for the sending of a Negro Delegate.

3. TUEL fractions in the white unions must carry on a determined struggle against white chauvinism by fighting for (a) the amalgamation of white and colored unions in each industry, (b) the removal of all color-bars and full and equal right of membership for all workers regardless of color, and against "Jim Crow" locals, (c) the organisation of unorganised colored workers, (d) the same opportunity for advancement in the industry for Negro workers as for White workers.

In view of the ever-increasing efforts on the part of the bourgeoisie to widen the gap between the white and colored workers, and in view of the necessity of international solidarity of the proletariat of all races in order to defeat the splitting tactics of the bourgeoisie, the reformist and the labor fakers, and in order to unify the proletariat for struggle against and the final victory over capitalism and imperialism, we urge our American adherents to put into operation the above tasks.

Submitted to the Secretariat by the  
Anglo-American Group.

**RGASPI. F. 195, Op. 155, D. 80, LL 27,161-168.**