

The Star in the East: South African Socialist Expectations and Responses to the Outbreak of the Russian Revolution^{*}

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SUMMARY

Although the militant socialist left-wing of the largely conservative (white) South African labour movement was only a peripheral phenomenon, it identified itself closely with the left-wing international socialist movement overseas and promoted class solidarity. The outbreak of the First World War led to a schism in the South African Labour movement between the larger pro-war faction and the militant anti-war and revolutionary syndicalist left-wing. The latter saw the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 as confirmation that the dawn of the socialist millennium was breaking. The South African militant socialists enthusiastically identified themselves with the aims of the Russian Revolution. Left-wing socialists initiated militant municipal strike action by contributing to the short-lived existence of the Johannesburg and Durban Boards of Control, or "Soviets". The Johannesburg International Socialist League (ISL) and the Cape Town Industrial Socialist League vigorously endorsed the formation of the Communist International in 1919. The former also took the initiative to unite all the important followers of the Bolshevik Revolution in the country into the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) in 1921. In the wake of the 1917 Revolution left-wing socialist organisations, such as the ISL, the Industrial Socialist League and the CPSA, were among the first political organisations to endorse non-racialism and the class struggle in pursuing a socialist revolution and a future socialist South Africa.

^{*} Revised version of a paper presented to the Australian Historical Association Conference, July, 5 – 9, 2000, University of Adelaide, South Australia. It was also published in *The South African Historical Journal*, Vol.44, 2001, pp.40-71.

a. The Origins of Socialism in South Africa and the Position of the ISL

The discovery of diamonds in 1867 and gold in 1886 resulted in the economic balance in South Africa tilting towards the interior. South Africa was transformed from an agricultural into a mining country and the mining industry was destined to provide the impetus that would lead to gradual industrialisation.¹ The exploitation of minerals such as diamonds and gold required a highly mechanised and industrialised technology, especially for gold mining due to the low average mineral content of the ore. As South Africa initially lacked skills and technical expertise in hard-rock mining, skilled experts were recruited from the British Empire, Europe and America. The miners came from Cornwall, Scotland, Northumberland, Wales, Australia, California, Canada, Germany, etc. Jewish immigrants came from Poland, Latvia and Lithuania.² The immigrants who entered the labour force brought new ideas on labour and socialist organisation. Some of the workers, particularly miners, also came from America and introduced the American variety of industrial unionism and syndicalism.³ In essence, socialism was a European importation into South Africa.⁴

The first hints of socialist and labour organisations became visible in the Transvaal in the last decade of the nineteenth century before the Anglo-Boer War. The Italian socialists formed an Italian Socialist Group, while Germans organised the Vorwärts Club, a socialist organisation based on the practice of the Marxist Social Democratic Party. Branches of the Marxist Jewish Bund were organized among Jewish immigrants.⁵

A variety of socialist organisations, clubs and parties were established after the Anglo-Boer War, such as the Socialist Labour Party (Johannesburg, 1903), the Clarion Fellowship

¹ F.A. van Jaarsveld: *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652 – 1974*, Perskor Publishers, Johannesburg, 1975, p. 159.

² C.W. de Kiewiet: *A History of South Africa: Social & Economic*, Oxford University Press, London, 1957, pp. 117, 119, 211, 268; R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill. The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*, Stewart Printing Co., Cape Town, 1943, p. 43.

³ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag. The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914 – 1932*, Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1995, p. 25.

⁴ E. Roux: *Time Longer Than Rope. A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1964, p. 122.

(Durban, 1903), the Social Democratic Federation (Cape Town, 1904), the Independent Labour Party (Pretoria, 1906), the Social Democratic Party (Durban, 1908) and the Socialist Society (Johannesburg, 1909).⁶ The wide circulation of British and local labour and socialist literature hastened the growth of the South African labour and socialist movement. British socialist weeklies, such as Robert Blatchford's *Clarion* and *Merrie England*, as well as copies of *Labour Reader*, *Herald* and *Forward* were circulated among local socialists. Socialists in Cape Town started *The Cape Socialist* (1905). In Durban a monthly, *The Socialist Spark* (1905), was established and since 1908 the militant weekly, *Voice of Labour*, appeared as the organ of the Johannesburg Socialist Society.⁷

In October 1909 most of the South African trade union and political labour and socialist organisations were amalgamated with the establishment of the South African Labour Party (SALP). However, there were a few exceptions, notably the militant Johannesburg and Pretoria Socialist Societies, the Cape Town Social Democratic Federation, the Durban Social Democratic Party, the Johannesburg Socialist Labour Party and a few members of the Johannesburg Independent Labour Party.⁸ On the more general questions about the means to achieve socialism and the attitude of the party in the event of a "capitalist" war, the right wing and left wing of the SALP settled on uneasy compromises. In 1913 the SALP became affiliated to the International Socialist Bureau on the basis of its Stuttgart anti-war resolution.⁹ The advent of the First World War therefore profoundly influenced developments in the socialist movement.

The outbreak of the war in Europe in August 1914 quickly exposed the fragility of the left wing and right wing coalition within the SALP. The party's right wing, with the support of W.J. Wybergh, editor of *The Worker*, the official party organ, endorsed participation in the war. On the other hand, those SALP members who strongly opposed South African participation in the war on the basis of their socialist beliefs formed the War on War

⁵ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 24 – 26.

⁶ See D. Tickin: The Origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888 - 1910, Unpublished PhD, University of Cape Town, 1973, chs. II, V, VI, VIII.

⁷ *Ibid.*, chs. I, V – VIII and Appendix E; R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, pp. 98, 170; *Voice of Labour*, 08.07.1910, p. 315.

⁸ D. Tickin, *op. cit.*, pp. 414 – 424, 431 - 433, 441; *Voice of Labour*, 01.07.1910, p. 307.

⁹ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 30 – 31.

League, which published its own weekly, the *War on War Gazette*. The League strongly emphasised international socialist solidarity as the most effective antidote to war. It acknowledged its debt to the strong anti-war stand of the *Labour Leader*, *Forward* and *Avanti* and cited the protests of Liebknecht, Luxemburg, and other anti-war German socialists and those of “comrades in Russia”. In the course of 1915 it thus became clear that the anti-war and pro-war factions within the SALP were marshalling forces for a showdown. To resolve matters a special conference of the SALP met in Johannesburg in August. After a vigorous debate the anti-war SALP members were defeated on matters of principle and they left the conference. In September 1915 the anti-war faction formed the International Socialist League (ISL) with its own official organ, *The International*, and decided to sever all ties with the SALP. The ISL was also joined by supporters of two small revolutionary syndicalist groupings: former members of the defunct South African section of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), and members of the Socialist Labour Party (linked to the American party of the same name, led by Daniel de Leon).¹⁰

According to Johns, the formation of the ISL was a turning point in South African labour history. The militant left-wing socialists of the new organisation proclaimed themselves the guardians of the true principles of international socialism in South Africa and were to infuse a spirit of internationalism into the South African trade unions.¹¹ Indeed, the ISL’s organ ostensibly revealed leanings towards international socialism and anti-militarism. “*Here we plant the flag of the New International in South Africa*”, David Ivon Jones, the editor and secretary of the ISL, wrote in his very first editorial in *The International*.¹²

Jones was a remarkable personality in labour and socialist circles. His biographer describes him as the “apostle of socialism”.¹³ Born in 1883 at Aberystwyth, Wales, into a Methodist family, he was orphaned at an early age. He also contracted tuberculosis and much of his life was spent in search of better health. After an unsuccessful attempt to recover from the disease in New Zealand, he came to South Africa in 1910. In only a few years he

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 36 – 47, 50-51; D. Ticktin: The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914 – 15 (*South African Historical Journal*, November 1969, No. 1, pp. 59 – 80).

¹¹ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

¹² *The International*, 10.09.1915, p. 1 (The New International).

developed from a liberal to an international socialist. In 1911 he joined the SALP and was elected as its secretary in 1914. In 1915 he joined the war-on-warites that broke with the party to form the ISL. He became convinced that the black people of South Africa were the true proletariat of the working class. In 1920 Jones left South Africa for good and travelled to Russia to attend the Second Congress of the Communist International (Comintern). He remained in Russia and went to work for the Comintern. There he sat on Comintern committees and prepared documents as a specialist on colonial rule and nationalism. He also pioneered the translation of several of Lenin's works into English. In 1924 Jones died of tuberculosis in a Crimean sanatorium at Yalta.¹⁴

However, a recent in-depth study by Lucien van der Walt convincingly has brought the prevailing orthodoxy on the genesis of the ISL into question. Van der Walt refutes the conventional accounts on the history of the ISL that proceed from the assumption that the League was a basically Marxist organization similar to Lenin's Bolshevik Party in Russia; he also questions whether it was based on Marxist ideology or the direct predecessor of the CPSA. To Van der Walt, this "conflation" of the history of revolutionary socialism with the history of Marxism is not justifiable and based on "an exision of the rich tradition of libertarian socialist theory and practice from accounts of socialist history".¹⁵

Instead, he presents a new synthesis on the socialist foundations of the ISL. On the basis of a study by W. Thorpe¹⁶, Van der Walt categorises the ISL's political ideology as being anarchist and revolutionary syndicalist, also referred to as "libertarian" socialism. Revolutionary socialists argued that socialism could not be realised through the state. They advocated "direct action" outside of formal political channels in order to establish a "stateless" society, based on "free federations of free producers" engaged in self-

¹³ B. Hirson: Notes towards an Intellectual History of the Early Communist Party. The Influence of David Ivon Jones, University of the Witwatersrand, 2 September, 1991, p. 2.

¹⁴ See B. Hirson & G.A. Williams: *The Delegate for Africa. David Ivon Jones, 1883 – 1924*, Core Publications, London, 1995; G.M. Gerhart and T. Karis: *From Protest to Challenge. A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, Vol. 4, Political Profiles 1882 – 1964*, Hoover Institute Press, Stanford, 1977, p. 43.

¹⁵ See L. Van der Walt: "The Industrial Union is the Embrio of the Socialist Commonwealth" (*Comparative Studies of South Africa, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, 1999, pp. 5-8, 24-25).

¹⁶ *The Workers Themselves: Revolutionary Syndicalism and International Labour 1913-1923*, Kulwer Publications, London, 1989.

management of the economy. The working class could only emancipate itself from capitalism and the state through the formation of revolutionary trade unions which would perform a dual role. In the short-term the trade unions would organize the workers as a class-conscious force in defence of their immediate interests. In the long-term the revolutionary trade unions would provide the vehicle through which the workers would seize direct control of the means of production in a revolutionary general strike, replacing the political state and the capitalist system with socialism, self-management by workers and socialist economics. These views were also advocated by the De Leonite IWW and the American SLP.

Van der Walt states that, in contrast, “political” socialism is associated, among other things, with the Marxist tradition, which advocates a political battle against capitalism waged through centrally organised workers’ parties and aimed at seizing and utilizing state power to usher in socialism.¹⁷ Thus Van der Walt concurs that the ISL was, despite occasional Marxist influences, basically a revolutionary syndicalist organisation; its history is therefore, according to him, more properly situated within the historical tradition of libertarian socialism than it is within the Marxist tradition; he also claims that, like De Leon, the ISL invoked Marx and Engels in support of revolutionary syndicalist positions.¹⁸

b. Socialist Reaction in South Africa to the Outbreak of the Russian Revolution

As far as socialist responses to the outbreak of the Russian Revolution are concerned, Van der Walt argues that the ISL’s support for it did not follow from a belief that the revolution was a seizure of state power by a political party of the working class, but rather from an interpretation of the events of 1917 as a syndicalist revolution in action. He refutes John’s interpretation that the ISL’s greatest political affinity was with the Marxist left wing of the European socialist movement. Van der Walt also claims that it was not with the Bolshevik Party in Russia either, but with the international IWW movement.¹⁹ But these claims do not nullify the clear and ample evidence of an undaunted defense of and identification with the Russian Revolution and almost unbounded enthusiasm and support for the revolution as

¹⁷ L. Van der Walt, *op. cit.*, pp. 8,10,18.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5,7,10,20,24-25.

such, and the Bolshevik Revolution in particular, that initially prevailed among members of the ISL and other South African socialist organisations, as can be construed from a perusal of the existing ISL literature and CID files.

One of the most remarkable features of the leadership of the ISL was the way in which, despite the difficulties of communication, it kept abreast of developments in Europe and elsewhere. Roux claims that nowhere was the 1917 Russian Revolution greeted with more understanding and enthusiasm than by the ISL in South Africa.²⁰ Therefore, it was obvious that the League would respond, through its newspaper, as soon as details about the March Revolution that led to the overthrow of the Czar reached South Africa via cable news. In the period 1917 – 1919, especially, *The International* would devote considerable space in its columns to commenting on the dramatic events unfolding in Russia. Thus, the editor declared:

“Russia is the storm centre. That is why we are compelled to devote to events there so much attention”,²¹ and: “Somehow the Russian movement claims the bulk of our space week by week. All eyes are centred on it, for Russia is the inspiration of the Socialist world just now”.²²

As above all the ISL’s Jewish members, many of whom emigrated from Lithuania to South Africa to escape the pogroms of the Czars, eagerly awaited news from Russia, the sales of *The International* nearly doubled. The League’s Yiddish-speaking Branch (YSB) was established in August 1917 and was broadly based on *EVSEKTSIA*, the Jewish section of the Russian Bolshevik Party.²³ Indeed, when the news of Czar Nicholas II’s abdication

¹⁹ See *Ibid.*, pp. 21,22. See also S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

²⁰ E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting. A Political Biography*, Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1993, p. 186, footnote 14.

²¹ *The International*, 27.07.1917, p. 1 (South African Delegate to Stockholm).

²² *Ibid.*, 31.08.1917, p. 1 (Lenin on Top).

²³ E.A. Mantzaris: “Radical Community: The Yiddish-speaking Branch of the International Socialist League, 1918 – 1920” (B. Bozzoli, ed: *Class, Community and Conflict*, Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1987, pp. 160 – 166). Mantzaris explains that it is impossible to determine the exact membership of the YSB, but roughly estimates its membership to have been between 500 and 1000 people, excluding sympathisers.

reached Johannesburg, there was extravagant rejoicing in the suburb of Ferreirstown, where Jews danced in the street and embraced.²⁴

Initially, for some League members at least, the significance of the March Revolution seemed doubtful. J.M. Gibson, who contributed a weekly theoretical article to *The International*, did not expect a socialist state to eventually rise from the revolution. He took the attitude that the workers were incapable of carrying the revolution further, because the “material conditions” were not sufficiently developed in Russia.²⁵

But it was Jones who understood its significance for international socialism. In the months that followed the first revolution he was to chart the course of events in the columns of *The International*. The paths of capitalists and workers would diverge and give rise to new struggles in which the goal of the workers would be socialism. Jones predicted long before most western commentators that the Russian Revolution could not stop at the overthrow of the monarchy and he argued that the process of change had still to be completed.²⁶ Jones foresaw the proletariat of all countries mobilising for “*the Revolution by the side of which this [the March Revolution] and all previous ones are but ‘shopkeepers riots’ in immensity*”.²⁷ This brilliant insight was acknowledged by Bunting in his eulogy of Jones in 1924.²⁸ Jones wrote about the March Revolution:

“...the importance of this step forward in the world’s history can hardly be exaggerated... This is a bourgeois revolution, but arriving when the night of capitalism is far spent. It cannot be a mere repetition of previous revolutions. It partakes infinitely more of a victory for the proletariat, as well as for the industrial capitalist... Let us look forward with great hope to the entry of the Russian elemental mass into the International class struggle for human

²⁴ B. Sachs: *Multitude of Dreams. A Semi-Autobiographical Study*, Kayor Publishing House, Johannesburg, 1949, p. 132.

²⁵ *The International*, 23.03.1917, p. 2 (“J.M.G.”: The Russian Revolution).

²⁶ B. Hirson & G.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 160 – 161, 163 – 164.

²⁷ *The International*, 23.03.1917, p. 1 (170 Million Recruits).

²⁸ See *Ibid.*, 06.06.1924, p. 5 (S.P. Bunting: Ten Crowded Years of Glorious Life).

emancipation. The day of its coming seems immeasurably nearer by this awakening".²⁹

Against the background of the March Revolution the ISL put up three candidates for the Transvaal provincial council elections of June 1917. The ISL candidates ran as the harbingers of the final socialist revolution.³⁰ Bunting, an unsuccessful candidate for the Commissioner Street constituency, grandly invoked the Russian example of March 1917 in an article entitled "The Star in the East". As the socialists themselves never hoped for so "early a fruition of their movement", he wrote in euphoric and exultant terms about the "seeming miracle", the "New World" and the "Promised Land". He voiced confidence that events in Russia would hasten the day of revolution in South Africa and called on workers to emulate their Russian compatriots:

*"The wonderful proletarian revolution begun in Russia, but destined to encircle the civilised world, has completely thrown in the shade the parochial topics which Capitalism has hitherto allowed a Provincial Council to play with. It is a trumpet call to the nations of the earth to which South Africa too, backward though her Labour Movement is, cannot long be deaf... today we have the glorious opportunity by voting Socialist on June 20th of associating ourselves unmistakably with the magnificent lead of the Workmen's and Soldiers' Committees... Workers under the Southern Cross, will you not respond to this one clear call from Eastern Europe, whence cometh our salvation?"*³¹

From then on *The International* returned with mounting emphasis to the events in Russia. The paper implied that if a revolution was to break out in South Africa, the ISL would have followed the same path and tactics as did the Russian workers: "*Exactly what the ISL would have done...that is what the Russian workmen have done*".³² In another article the ISL organ openly declared its admiration for the achievement of the Russian workers and their pioneer contribution in fomenting world revolution:

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.03.1917, p. 1 (170 Million Recruits).

³⁰ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 78,81.

³¹ *The International*, 08.06.1917, p. 1 ("S.P.B": The Star in the East).

³² *The International*, 20.04.1917, p. 3 (The "Internationale" in Russia).

*“The Russian workmen are simply wonderful. The joyful part of it is that there is going to be so many of them. To lead the world back from savagery to humanity seems to be their great mission. They are leaving capitalist government severely alone... And from their dominating position in the great Russian Revolution, - and every new report enhances its greatness, - they are going out to reclaim the lost sheep of the Socialist International, bringing international workingclass action to bear for the confounding of the capitalist conspiracy to murder off the best of the sons of Europe. Hail to the coming Revolution, now within living sight”.*³³

In the issue of 15 June 1917 ***The International*** printed the March resolution of the Berne International Socialist Commission urging that the proletariat of the world support the Russian Revolution.³⁴ From July 1917 onwards ***The International*** began to receive and pass on to its readers information from actual Bolshevik sources, such as ***Pravda*** and ***Izvestia*** and carried excerpts from Lenin’s articles.³⁵

In August 1917 W.H. Andrews, a prominent ISL member and foremost trade union leader, and who would succeed Jones as secretary-editor of the ISL and ***The International*** in 1920,³⁶ was chosen as the South African delegate to a proposed peace conference of international socialists in Stockholm, Sweden. Although Andrews left to attend the conference, it was never held due to interference by the Allies. Instead, he visited England where he made contact with, among others, Maxim Litvinoff, the Russian representative in London. There Andrews also served as a conduit for messages from the Russian revolutionaries to the ISL.³⁷ In conversations with Litvinoff, Andrews developed an understanding of the implications of the Russian Revolution. On returning to South Africa he wrote a pamphlet, ***The Workers’ Revolution in Russia***, printed in English, Afrikaans and Yiddish. According to Andrews’s biographer, it was sold in “many thousands” and

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.05.1917, p. 1 (Russian Workmen Leading). See also *Ibid.*, 18.05.1917, p. 1 (Russian Workmen Vindicate Marx) and *Ibid.*, 25.05.1917, p. 1 (Notes on the Russian Revolution).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.06.1917, p. 1 (An Appeal to the Proletariat).

³⁵ A. Lerumo: *Fifty Fighting Years. The Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1971*, Inkululeko Publications, London, 1950, p. 35.

³⁶ R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, pp. 218, 249 – 250; *The International*, 26.03.1920, p. 8 (Our Special Effort Fund).

³⁷ R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, pp. 189 – 192.

gave to South Africa the first comprehensive account of the revolution, together with the constitution of the new state.³⁸ The publication was acclaimed by *The International* as “a wonderful and inspiring Magna Charta of the triumphant propertiless workers of that country”.³⁹ Back in South Africa the press described Andrews as the “Bolshevik Leader of South Africa”. At Cape Town he declared: “*I am not a pacifist... I never signed the war-on-war pledge. If I was in Russia I would be in the Red Guards!*”⁴⁰

Then the news of the Bolshevik Revolution of November 1917 reached South Africa. Whereas Johns and Roux implied that to the expectant ISL “this was a confirmation of their deepest beliefs”, and that the revolution was “welcomed by the South African socialists as tangible proof of the ultimate triumph of their faith” (in Bolshevism)⁴¹, Van der Walt argues that the immediate impact of the Russian Revolution on ISL politics was to reaffirm the organisation’s revolutionary industrial unionist beliefs, seemingly vindicated by the course of the revolution. In other words, the ISL believed that the Russian Revolution had been brought about through revolutionary industrial unionism.⁴²

Nevertheless, the South African socialists welcomed it as an event of epochal significance.⁴³ Commenting on the South African situation in relation to the Bolshevik Revolution, Jones, writing in *The International*, spelled out the duties and responsibilities of South African socialists towards spreading the revolutionary flames that were ignited in Russia:

“What we are witnessing is an unfolding of the world wide Commonwealth of Labour which, if the oppressed of all lands only knew...would sweep them into transports of gladness. It is this high ecstasy which animates the Russian people to-day... Our task in South Africa is a great one. We must educate the people in the principles of the Russian Revolution as we have never done

³⁸ R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, pp. 192 – 193. See also S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 85 – 86. However, E.A. Mantzaris, *op. cit.*, pp. 169, 176, footnote 68, claims that the pamphlet was written by a member of the Yiddish-speaking branch of the ISL and that 7 000 copies had been sold.

³⁹ *The International*, 25.10.1918, p. 1 (The Arch-Frame-up).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 26.07.1918, p. 4 (Cape Socialists Greet Comrade Andrews).

⁴¹ Cf. S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 81 and E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting*, p.81, respectively.

⁴² L. Van der Walt, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

*before, by tens of thousands of leaflets. No comrade can stand to-day with arms akimbo, no branch should languish. It were a desertion of the cause. We have to prepare the workers against any attempt to mobilise them against their Russian comrades, and in so preparing spread the flames of the most glorious and most peaceful revolution of all time”.*⁴⁴

At the annual conference of the ISL in January 1918 the Bolshevik Revolution was formally endorsed. On behalf of the advanced proletariat of South Africa the League pledged to stand by the Russian Workmen against the capitalist governments of the world, including that of South Africa.⁴⁵

V. Sidenko alleges that from this time on the members of the League called themselves the “South African Bolsheviks”.⁴⁶ Indeed, a report from the C.I.D. of the South African Police, which kept “an unrelenting watch” on the local “Bolshevist” movement, stated about the ISL that “*this body is, without doubt, the fountain-head of Bolshevik propaganda in South Africa*”.⁴⁷ Van der Walt argued that “Bolshevik” references towards the ISL at that stage were based on erroneous assumptions⁴⁸, but Benard Hessien explained that according to the public's perceptions of that time concepts such as “socialist”, “communist”, “Bolshevist” and even “Labourer”, were mutually linked and sometimes even regarded as synonyms. For instance, during the Rand strike of 1922 the ordinary miner perceived “socialism” to entail the nationalisation of the mining industry, while “Bolshevism” implied the violent overthrow of the capitalist mining magnates and their “friends”, the Smuts government.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, the ISL closely and explicitly identified with the revolutionary developments in Russia.⁵⁰ *The International* published biographical sketches of Lenin and Trotsky,

⁴³ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

⁴⁴ *The International*, 07.12.1917, p. 3 (“Long Live the Commissaries of the People”).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.01.1918, p. 1 (Our Annual Gathering).

⁴⁶ V. Sidenko: South African Communists-A Flashback (*New Times*, No. 52, 1969, p.6).

⁴⁷ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Report on Bolshevism in the Union of South Africa, 01.06.1920, p. 100.

⁴⁸ See L van der Walt, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁴⁹ B. Hessien: An Investigation into the Causes of the Labour Agitation on the Witwatersrand, January to March, 1922, Unpublished MA-thesis, U. Wits, 1957, p. 92.

⁵⁰ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 92, 105.

admired their heroic exploits in the Russian revolt and kept its readers abreast of the progress of the Bolshevik Revolution and the construction of the new Soviet state.⁵¹ ISL intellectuals also regularly held lectures on the Bolshevik Revolution.⁵²

The ranks of the Johannesburg libertarian socialists were augmented as a result of ideological divisions within the ranks of the Cape Town SDF. The conservative practice of the SDF provoked a group of its left-wing supporters, including members of the Jewish Socialist Society, to break away in May 1918. Headed by A.Z. Berman, Joe Pick and Manuel Lopes, they established the ultra-left revolutionary syndicalist Industrial Socialist League.⁵³ From the time of its creation, the Industrial Socialist League regarded Soviet Russia as the society of the future and the Bolshevik Revolution as the prime example of worker's emancipation. Following the example of the Johannesburg ISL, the leaders of the revolution were idolised. Likewise, the Cape Town Industrial Socialist League was not based on Bolshevik but on syndicalist slogans and actions. The methods used by the latter were a direct transformation of the anarcho-syndicalist tactics used by the American IWW, as Mantzaris clearly points out. Among its objects were industrial unionism and the establishment of a socialist commonwealth.⁵⁴

The new activist organisation established close contact with the management committee of the ISL in Johannesburg and its members contributed to *The International*.⁵⁵ However, the Industrial Socialist League's opposition to parliamentarism caused serious strains in the

⁵¹ See *The International*, 01.02.1918, pp. 1–2 (The Decline and Fall of Political Democracy) and p. 4 (Trotsky's Career); *Ibid.*, 15.02.1918, p. 3 (Lenin's Career); *Ibid.*, 08.03.1918, p. 4 ("DIJ": Labour's Triumph Dissolves all Armies); *Ibid.*, 05.04.1918, p. 1 (Notes of the Bolshevik Movement); *Ibid.*, 12.04.1918, p. 4 (Appreciation of Trotsky); *Ibid.*, 24.05.1918, p. 3 (Industrial Democracy); *Ibid.*, 21.06.1918, p. 3 (Report); *Ibid.*, 20.09.1918, p. 3 (Socialism A-Building); *Ibid.*, 27.09.1918, p. 3 (Lenin on the Soviets); *Ibid.*, 06.12.1918, p. 2 (Under Bolshevism); *Ibid.*, 21.12.1918, p. 4 (Under Bolshevism); *Ibid.*, 31.01.1919, p. 3 (Socialising Land and Houses); *Ibid.*, 07.02.1919, p. 4 (Who are the "Terrorists?"); *Ibid.*, 25.04.1919, pp. 4, 5; *Ibid.*, 27.06.1919, p. 3 (Progress of the Soviet Republic) and *Ibid.*, 07.05.1920, p. 1 (G. Lansbury: More Bolshevik Atrocities).

⁵² See *Ibid.*, 22.08.1918, p. 2 (The Light in the East); *Ibid.*, 25.10.1918, p. 2 (Announcements); *Ibid.*, 22.11.1918, p. 2 (League Notes) and *Ibid.*, 07.02.1919, p. 2 (League Notes); *Ibid.*, 30.01.1920, p. 6 ("T.R.M.W.": Lecture on "Russia").

⁵³ H.J and R.E. Simons: *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 215; S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁵⁴ E.A. Mantzaris: "The Promise of the Impossible Revolution: The Cape Town Industrial Socialist League, 1918-1921", in (C. Saunders, *et al*, eds: *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Vol. 4, Centre for African Studies, UCT, 1981, pp. 155-158).

⁵⁵ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

fraternal relations of the League with the Johannesburg ISL.⁵⁶ The Industrial Socialist League also started its own militant monthly, appropriately called *The Bolshevik* (but originally known as *The Bolshevist*), with A.Z. Berman as editor.⁵⁷ *The Bolshevik* very vividly demonstrated its allegiance to the Bolshevik Revolution by prominently displaying the Hammer and Sickle emblem, symbol of Bolshevik Russia, on the masthead of each edition.⁵⁸

When countries, including both sides in the war, launched their assault on Russia at the beginning of 1918 in an attempt to strangle the Bolshevik Revolution at birth with the aid of the local forces of counter-revolution, South African socialists launched a “Hands Off Russia” campaign. The ISL issued a pamphlet, *The Call of The Bolsheviks*, calling on South African workers to rally to the support of the Russian Bolsheviks.⁵⁹ The Industrial Socialist League in Cape Town also pointed to the efforts of the British workers to organise a “Hands Off Russia” campaign. Advocating strong syndicalist industrial organisation, *The Bolshevik* urged that the South African workers move beyond the position of the British workers through affiliation with the Industrial Socialist League:

*“There are two courses open. We shall either desert our Russian brethren in their hour of need, and allow our Churchill to finish his campaign for democracy by strangling the Russian Revolution, and cover ourselves with disgrace...or we will, like worthy comrades of the great martyrs, rise to the occasion and respond to the call. Let the workers of South Africa not satisfy themselves with the motto of ‘Hands off Russia’. This can be done – and easily done – by proper Industrial Organisation, through which the voice of South African Labour may be heard.”*⁶⁰

⁵⁶ E.A. Mantzaris (1981), *op. cit.*, pp. 161-163.

⁵⁷ L. and D. Switser: *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho. A Descriptive Bibliographic Guide to African, Coloured and Indian Newspapers and Magazines 1836 – 1976*, G.K. Hall & Co., Boston, 1972, pp. 71 – 72.

⁵⁸ See *The Bolshevik*, November 1919, p. 1.

⁵⁹ B. Bunting (ed): *South African Communists Speak. Documents from the History of the South African Communist Party 1915 - 1980*, Inkululeko Publications, London, 1981, pp. 34–35.

⁶⁰ Quoted from S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

As a result of the intervention by Allied and Central Powers in Russia and an anti-Bolshevik campaign being waged by the capitalist press, the ISL saw one of its prime tasks as spreading the “truth” about the Russian Revolution and quelling these antagonistic impressions against Lenin and the Bolshevik Party. Staff writers and contributors of *The International* dedicated themselves wholly to the defence of “Lenin’s Revolution”.⁶¹ “*The Capitalist lie factory has been busy with regard to Russia*”, Jones wrote in the issue of 16 November 1917.⁶² In ensuing editions Jones and other contributors, while defending the Bolshevik actions, repeatedly referred to the “frame-up”, “distortions”, “cooked news” and “deluge of press lies” produced by the capitalist press and Reuters.⁶³ Britain especially was accused of aggression against Bolshevik Russia.⁶⁴ Speakers on ISL platforms joined the fray in condemning the Allied intervention in Russia.⁶⁵

The Industrial Socialist League followed suit. It organised protest meetings in Cape Town against Allied intervention in Russia.⁶⁶ *The Bolshevik* accused the capitalist press and Reuters of vilifying the Bolshevik regime and called for the South African workers to support the Soviet state against the onslaught of capitalism. The paper stressed:

“We must fully realize that it is not a mere local revolution that is being brought about in Russia, that it is not merely a fight between the Bolsheviks and the remnants of the Czar’s supporters, - but a SOCIAL REVOLUTION that

⁶¹ V. Sidenko, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁶² *The International*, 16.11.1917, p. 1 (The Great Events in Russia).

⁶³ See *Ibid.*, 06.09.1918, p. 1 (Dirty Work); *Ibid.*, 18.10.1918, p. 2 (Save the Revolution!); *Ibid.*, 25.10.1918, p. 1 (The Arch-Frame-up) and p. 3 (War Aims Unmasked); *Ibid.*, 01.11.1918, p. 4 (“B.G.”: “Through Reuter’s Agency”); *Ibid.*, 22.11.1918, p. 2 (Chestnuts), p. 3 (“J.M.G.”: Distortion) and p. 4 (“Democratic” or “Proletarian”); *Ibid.*, 29.11.1918, pp. 1 – 3 (The Powers versus the Workers); *Ibid.*, 06.12.1918, p. 1 (Not in the Whirlwind); *Ibid.*, 21.12.1918, p. 2 (“J.M.G.”: Proletarian Dictatorship); *Ibid.*, 17.01.1919, p. 1 (From the War Front); *Ibid.*, 24.01.1919, p. 4 (“True Love”); *Ibid.*, 31.01.1919, p. 2 (The 1919 Offensive); *Ibid.*, 21.02.1919, p. 2 (More Truth About Bolshevism) and p. 8 (Russian “Atrocities”); *Ibid.*, 23.01.1920, p. 3 (W.H. Andrews: “Helping Russia”).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.11.1918, p. 1 (The “Economic Interrelation”); *Ibid.*, 17.01.1919, pp. 2 – 3 (Stop That War!); *Ibid.*, 21.02.1919, p. 1 (The Soviet’s Appeal to British Workers).

⁶⁵ SAB JUS Vol. 256, file no. 3/527/17 Part 4, Reports on Activities of ISL: R.A. Johnston - Commissioner South African Police, 09.02.1919, p. 88.

⁶⁶ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Memorandum III, 17.04.1919, p. 213; SAB JUS Vol. 566, file no. 1/201/21, Deportation of Lapitsky & Others: Memorandum, 17.04.1919; *The International*, 13.12.1918, p. 1 (Capetown Leads); *Ibid.*, 24.01.1919, p. 2 (L. Turok: Cape Notes).

takes place there, a fight even if only indirectly, between the International Working Class and the International Capitalist Class."⁶⁷

In November 1918 *The International* announced that a group had been formed "to coordinate the forces of class-conscious workers" on the Witwatersrand to expedite the coming of socialism to South Africa. The group, primarily ISL members, had met for a preliminary meeting to discuss how to receive "the coming wave from Europe". The gathering was convinced that the time had come for action to secure the rule of the working class in South Africa. Clearly aware of the Russian experience, the gathering endorsed the organisation of workers' committees or councils (Soviets) in South African cities for the ultimate purpose of exercising workers' control. Throughout December 1918 the Preparedness Committee, as this group came to be called, held weekly meetings in Johannesburg to discuss the prospects for revolution. The pace of developments in Europe had clearly convinced the Johannesburg international socialists of the ISL of the imminence of a revolutionary upsurge in South Africa.⁶⁸ Thus a columnist in *The Labour World* (a labour paper) declared: "...Bolshevism is in the air and nothing can stay its advance".⁶⁹

T.P. Tinker, the secretary of the Preparedness Committee, held lectures on "the spread of the revolution".⁷⁰ And in Cape Town, where A.Z. Berman also gave lectures on the Bolshevik Revolution, a joint meeting of the Industrial Socialist League, the SDF and the Jewish Socialist Society resolved to congratulate their Russian comrades on the success of the revolution. The meeting pledged to carry on the socialist propaganda and not to desist or slacken in their efforts until socialism is established in South Africa. It also protested vigorously against the Allied intervention in Russia, the "sole object" which was to "defeat the revolution" and to "re-establish capitalism."⁷¹

⁶⁷ *The Bolshevik*, February 1920, p. 1 (Shaking Hands with Murderers).

⁶⁸ See SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/19, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa, p. 208; *Ibid.*, Deputy Commissioner C.I.D.-Secretary South African Police, 14.04.1919, p. 237 (Appendix); *The International*, 22.11.1918, p. 1 (Preparing for Action); *Ibid.*, 29.11.1918, p. 3 ("Preparing for Action"); *Ibid.*, 06.12.1918, p. 2 (League Notes); *Ibid.*, 13.12.1918, p. 1 (Wheels within Wheels); S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁶⁹ *The Labour World*, 06.12.1918, p. 5 ("Oliver Crompton": The Social Revolution).

⁷⁰ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Deputy Commissioner C.I.D.-Secretary South African Police, 14.04.1919, p. 237 (Appendix); *The International*, 13.12.1918, p. 1 (Wheels within Wheels) and p. 4 (League Notes).

⁷¹ *The International*, 29.11.1918, p. 4 (Cape Notes); *Ibid.*, 21.12.1918, p. 3 (Cape Notes).

Thus, at the beginning of 1919, as the Simonses aptly puts it, “revolution appeared to be just round the corner”.⁷² The ISL, which also regarded itself as “the trustee of the revolution”,⁷³ resolved at its 1919 conference:

*“This League acclaims the glorious advance of the Socialist Revolution in Europe; pledges itself to support it in every possible way against the attacks or intrigues of the Capitalist Powers in Russia, Germany and elsewhere; and resolves to redouble its efforts to spread the working-class movement in South Africa so as to assist in hastening the triumph of the Revolution and establishment of the Co-operative Commonwealth throughout the world.”*⁷⁴

From then on reference to “the coming revolution” became a regular feature at the meetings of both the ISL and the Industrial Socialist League. At a meeting of the latter organisation, Percy McKillop, an elderly stalwart of the SDF, expressed the hope of living long enough “to see the revolution here”.⁷⁵ In the wake of the 1919 conference at which the ISL endorsed the socialist revolution overseas, the pages of *The International* were more and more focused on events abroad. Again a considerable proportion of its space each week was devoted “to chronicling phases and episodes of the revolutionary movement from all over the world.” From whatever socialist papers became available the ISL gleaned information about the progress of the new Russian Bolshevik state, the attempts of the Allies to overthrow it, and the activities of various socialist groups in support of it.⁷⁶

Even the ISL’s manifesto for the 1920 general election was imbued with notions of the socialist revolution and the successes of the Russian example. For the ISL the organisation of the workers in one great union by means of revolutionary syndicalism now found a

⁷² H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op. cit.*, pp. 216, 220.

⁷³ *The International*, 13.12.1918, p. 1 (I.S.L. Annual Conference).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.01.1919, p. 2 (1919 Annual Conference).

⁷⁵ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Memorandum III, 17.04.1919, p. 213; *Ibid.*, Commissioner South African Police-Secretary for Justice, 27.08.1920, p. 73 (no. C.6/672/19/8/A).

⁷⁶ See *The International*, 18.04.1919, p. 1 (Litvinoff’s Appeal to Wilson) and pp. 2 –3 (Russia’s Peace Terms); *Ibid.*, 15.08.1919, pp. 1 – 2 (The Entente’s Anti-Bolshevik Pogroms), p. 2 (Those “Volunteers”) and p. 3 (Southport and the Political Strike); *Ibid.*, 24.10.1919, p. 3 (The Drama of Brest Litovsk); *Ibid.*, 06.08.1920, p. 1 (“D.I.J”: Revolution, Westward Ho!); *Ibid.*, 27.08.1920, p. 4 (The Council of Action) and *Ibid.*, 17.09.1920, p. 3 (Wake Up! S.A. Workers).

practical application in the Soviet principle of workers' control. For them the industrial union principle, transformed into the *soviet*, became the social revolution. Therefore, to *The International* the Bolshevik Council of Workmen (the Soviets) was "the Russian form of the Industrial Union".⁷⁷

The Industrial Socialist League also began by 1920 to reformulate its revolutionary syndicalist tactics in terms of the Soviet model and called for the urgent "Sovietisation" of the trade unions.⁷⁸

The commemoration of the Bolshevik Revolution became a fixed date and all-important event on the social calendar of the South African socialists. *The International*, in its dedications, repeatedly praised and glorified the exploits of the Bolshevik revolutionaries using such phrases as "*the benign awakening of the (Russian) people*", "*that kindly Communism of the Hammer and the Sickle*", "*the Light from Russia*", "*the Soviet Union towers proudly like a glistering Matterhorn...a higher world on earth*" and stated that Russia "*is the torch in our darkness*".⁷⁹ *The Bolshevik* responded in similar vein and praised Russia, "*the luminous hearth of Communism*". In commemorating the Bolshevik Revolution the paper declared:

"It is a great day – the greatest and of infinitely more significance than any other red-letter day in the long memory of the Class Struggle... The dawn of the Socialist Commonwealth, the dream of so many generations of slaves in all parts of the world, is being celebrated on that day... Who is the working man who will not rejoice on the sixth of November? Is there one whose heart will not ring through with boundless happiness and enthusiasm on that historic

⁷⁷ *The International*, 18.5.1917, p.1 (Russian Workmen Vindicate Marx); *Ibid.*, 23.01.1920, p. 5 (The League's Election Manifesto). See also L. Van der Walt, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁷⁸ E.A. Mantzaris (1981), *op. cit.*, pp. 159, 162.

⁷⁹ See *The International*, 01.11.1918, p. 2 (League Notes); *Ibid.*, 15.11.1918, p. 3 (The Bolshevik Anniversary at Johannesburg); *Ibid.*, 17.10.1919, p. 8 (Notes of the Movement); *Ibid.*, 31.10.1919, p. 8 (Advertisement); *Ibid.*, 07.11.1919, p. 1 ("Berronia": November 7th), p. 8 (Notes of the Movement) and (Advertisements); *Ibid.*, 14.11.1919, p. 8 (The Bolshevik Social); *Ibid.*, 15.10.1920, p. 4 (Advertisement); *Ibid.*, 21.10.1921, p. 4 (Advertisement); *Ibid.*, 11.11.1921, p. 2 ("S.P.B.": The Year V) and p. 4 (The Russian Revolution); *Ibid.*, 10.11.1922, p. 3 (C.F. Glass: Hail Russia of the Soviets!); *Ibid.*, 19.10.1923, p. 4 (Communist Party Notes); *Ibid.*, 02.11.1923, p. 1 and p. 2 (The Meaning of the Sixth Anniversary) and *Ibid.*, 09.11.1923, p. 2 ("Soviet Russia: God Bless Her!").

*day?... We, the workers of sunny South Africa, in celebrating the birthday of the Social Revolution, will have our eyes turned Eastwards, to the snowy steppes of the great Russian Soviet Republic.”*⁸⁰

c. The Russian Revolution and the Position of Black Workers

The revolution also had a major impact on the ISL in shaping and formulating its policy towards black workers. By 1917 the organisation had come to realise that the proletarianisation of blacks was an irreversible fact, and was more likely to accelerate.⁸¹ Already in June 1917 D.I. Jones, who together with S.P. Bunting is regarded by some historians as the leaders of the so-called “negrophiles” within the League,⁸² wrote in *The International*:

*“What does sympathy with the Russian Revolution imply, comrades! It implies the solidarity of labour irrespective of race or colour. That phrase may be hackneyed, so let us be precise. The Russian revolution in South Africa means the welcome hand to the native workingman into the fullest social and economic equality he is capable of attaining with the white workingman. This is the bedrock on which we split in South Africa”.*⁸³

And W.H. Andrews wrote that “*the influence of the Russian Revolution is felt far beyond the boundaries of the vast Soviet Republic and probably has an even more immediate appeal to the enslaved Coloured races of the earth than to Europeans.*”⁸⁴ *The International* also declared: “*The movement of Labour in South Africa is beginning to find*

⁸⁰ *The Bolshevik*, November 1919, p. 1 (Hail the Workers’ Republic!); *Ibid.*, November 1920, p. 1 (Hail, Russia of the Soviets!).

⁸¹ M.A. Caldwell: *Struggle in Discourse: The International’s Discourse against Racism in the Labour Movement in South Africa (1915-1919)*, Unpublished MA Thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1996, p. 123. See also *The International*, 18.05.1917, p.3 (A South African Council of Workmen).

⁸² See D.J. Kotzé: *Communism and South Africa*, Tafelberg Publishers Ltd., Cape Town, 1979, p. 169; N. Weyl: *Traitors’ End. The Rise and Fall of the Communist Movement in Southern Africa*, Tafelberg-Uitgewers Ltd., Cape Town, 1970, p. 46; E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting*, p. 54; B. Bunting (ed): *Letters to Rebecca. South African Communist Leader S.P. Bunting to his wife 1917-1934*, Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1996, p. 59.

⁸³ *The International*, 08.06.1917, p. 3 (The Stockholm Conference).

*its centre of gravity, its home, among the real proletariat in this country. But we have a lot to do. The Revolution is knocking at the door, and the native and coloured workers must be told to wake up, and the white worker must be enlisted for the job of waking them up”.*⁸⁵

In accordance with its revolutionary syndicalist policies the ISL advocated a non-racial approach in fostering the idea of revolution locally:

*“To accomplish revolution in South Africa is the aim of the International Socialist League... As part of this task the white workers must be encouraged to educate, organise and co-operate with their native fellow workers at the place of work in mine, factory and workshop; in order that the Socialist Republic of South Africa may be inaugurated by the unanimous solidarity of all the workers.”*⁸⁶

Thus, in the light of the events occurring in Russia, it became clear that the debate within the ISL seriously contemplated the place of black workers in the revolution that was expected to spread in South Africa.⁸⁷ Jones held up the Russian urban proletariat as an example of how the peasants there were led along a revolutionary path they could “*never have hoped to tread alone*”. In his estimation the realisation of the revolution fell to the more politically experienced and educated white workers. It was his view that white workers would be the “*engine of revolution in South Africa just as the comparatively small industrial proletariat steered the big mass of the Russian people [peasants] into the Soviet Republic*”.⁸⁸ In writing to *The International* on the "coming revolution" from Moscow where he went to work for the Comintern, Jones explicitly stated: “*The African revolution will be led by white*

⁸⁴ Quoted by A. Odendaal and S. Forman (eds): *A Trumpet from the Housetops. The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*, David Philip (Pty) Ltd., Cape Town, 1992, p. 75.

⁸⁵ *The International*, 08.02.1918, p. 3 (Getting Under Way).

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 04.01.1919, p. 1 (Suggested Explanation of the I.S.L. Platform).

⁸⁷ M.A. Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸⁸ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 100; *The International*, 08.02.1918, p. 2 (The Natives on the Land); *Ibid.*, 11.04.1919, p. 3 (“D.I.J.”: The White Workers’ “Burden”); *Ibid.*, 04.06.1920, p. 7 (“D.I.J.”: Bolshevism East & West).

workers".⁸⁹ It appears that the Industrial Socialist League of Cape Town harboured similar ideas about the leading revolutionary role of the white workers.⁹⁰

But the debate within the ISL on the anticipated revolution revealed differences of opinion on the role to be played by black and white workers. Bunting, who grappled with the problem of the considerable inequalities in the material conditions of the black and white proletariat, however, warned that "*a slavish imitation of Russia, or any other imported methods, would fail, and particularly in Africa, where whites are in the main hostile to non-whites*". He implied that the black worker would be an important agent of the socialist revolution. Bunting even urged the formation of "Native Soviets" all over the country and the formation of "a Congress of Native delegates" to replace the South African Native National Congress,⁹¹ the latter at that stage being regarded by the ISL as conservative, reactionary and bourgeois.⁹²

The role of the black worker in the socialist revolution was further explored by *The International*. Commenting on the most effective industrial action to be taken by the working class in the event of the outbreak of a general strike on the Witwatersrand, the ISL paper reiterated the League's non-racial, revolutionary syndicalist tactics based on the *soviet* model:

*"The alternatives, then, before the white workers are (1) to be driven back to helotage with the natives, or (2) advance with the natives to freedom. We have to contemplate always the possibility of a Rand Soviet arising from a Rand general strike... A Rand Soviet can only get Socialist support on the basis of the solidarity of labour irrespective of colour...the Soviet is only practical politics on this basis".*⁹³

⁸⁹ *The International*, 26.08.1921, p. 2 (D.I. Jones: Communism in Africa).

⁹⁰ See *The Bolshevik*, March 1920, p. 4 (Trades Union Notes).

⁹¹ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa, p. 206; S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 99 – 100; *The International*, 18.01.1918, p. 2 ("S.P.B": No "Mystery" in Organisation).

⁹² As the SANNC was the forerunner of the ANC, the ISL initially did not hold it in high esteem for the above-mentioned reasons. See also S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 76, 100; B. Hirson & G.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 172, 205; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op. cit.*, pp. 207, 213 and R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, pp. 212 – 213.

⁹³ *The International*, 06.02.1920, p. 2 (The Strike Situation on the Rand).

In April 1919 the issue of “Bolshevism” and the ISL’s involvement with blacks in Natal caused quite a stir. While being treated for his consumption in the Sweetwaters Sanatorium in Pietermaritzburg, Jones collaborated with L.H.H. Greene, a local ISL sympathiser. Together they drafted a small leaflet, *The Bolsheviks are Coming*, addressed “to the workers of South Africa – Black as well as White”. It contained eight “lessons” for black workers in which they were urged to organise and link with the white workers in a common movement to bring freedom and equality to all workers. It was also translated into *isiZulu* and *seSotho* and 10 000 copies were distributed in Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The two authors were arrested and charged with contravening the Moratorium (War-Measure) Act and the Riotous Assembly Act, “*calculated to create alarm or excite public feeling, and exciting public violence*” through the distribution of the leaflet. Both were sentenced on two charges and fined £75 and four months imprisonment for the one and £10 or one month imprisonment for the other. Although they were acquitted on appeal to the Supreme Court, Greene lost his job and his wife was turned out of the cafe she kept. Jones was ordered to leave the sanatorium.⁹⁴

d. Russian “Emissaries” and Municipal Soviets

Some controversy arose within the ranks of the South African socialists when two alleged “Bolshevik emissaries”, Leo Lapitsky and Israel Sonsnovik, who declared they had come straight from “Red Moscow”, landed at Durban on 13 February 1919 in transit from India. According to Harrison Lapitsky was a Minister in the Kerensky government in Russia. In Johannesburg they addressed a crowded meeting of some 6 000 people in the town hall on the Russian Revolution amid “scenes of the most unbounded enthusiasm”. The meeting expressed its “emphatic disapproval” of the Allied “military intervention and economic strangulation” of “the working class revolution in Russia and elsewhere”.⁹⁵ Although

⁹⁴ See SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Rex versus D.I. Jones and L.H.H. Greene, pp. 175 – 185; S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 98; E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting*, pp. 86 – 87; *The International*, 25.04.1919, pp. 4 – 5 (Rex V. Jones and Greene). A.B. Davidson: *Yuzhnaya afrikastanovleniye sil proteska 1870-1924 (South Africa: The Birth of Protest)*, Africa Institute, Academy of Sciences, Nauka, Moscow, 1972, p. 398, claims that 7 000 copies of the leaflet were distributed, but could possibly also have mistaking it for W.H. Andrews's pamphlet *The Workers' Revolution in Russia*.

⁹⁵ E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting*, p. 83; W.H. Harrison: *Memoirs of a Socialist in South Africa, 1903-1947*, Steward Printing Co., Cape Town, 1947, p. 65; *The International*, 28.03.1919, p. 1 (Bolshevik Johannesburg). Harrison's assumption about Lapitsky's position in the Kerensky government could not be verified.

initially stating its reluctance to attend the meeting- which, according to Davidson, was only a decoy to lull the authorities not to prohibit the use of the town hall- *The International* had nothing but praise for “*the greatest Revolutionary Socialist demonstration ever held in Johannesburg*”. Davidson also claims that a number of complete sets of *The International* were handed over to Lapitsky and Sonsnovik, some of which were to be presented to Lenin and the Comintern as gifts.⁹⁶

After leaving Johannesburg Lapitsky and his wife went to the Cape where they arrived on 12 April 1919 and were supported by the whole left-wing movement of Cape Town. Mainly Russian Jews attended Lapitsky’s lectures on the Russian Revolution. Sonsnovik first proceeded to Durban, but eventually was deported to Europe via Cape Town in May 1919. Lapitsky and Sonsnovik’s presence in Cape Town seemed to have alarmed the local capitalist press. Both the *Cape Argus* and the *Cape Times* published several leading articles on them as “Bolshevist Emissaries”. In Johannesburg and in Cape Town they were carefully chaperoned by C.I.D. detectives and also given free railway travel and hotel expenses until a suitable ship was found to give them a free passage back to Europe.⁹⁷

The suspicions on the Bolshevik credentials of Lapitsky and Sonsnovik seem to a certain extent to be justified. Although they both approved of the Russian Revolution, Rebecca Bunting, wife of S.B. Bunting and herself a Russian *émigré* of Jewish origin, did not regard them as Bolshevik emissaries, but referred to them as “adventurers”.⁹⁸ A C.I.D. memorandum on their visit also suggested that they easily agreed to leave South Africa in exchange for free passages. The memorandum stated: “*It seems that they delivered [their] lecture[s] not so much by reason of their sentiments but as a means of livelihood*”.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *The International*, 21.03.1919, p. 1 and *Ibid.*, 28.03.1919, p. 1 (Bolshevik Johannesburg); A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 388, 390, 392.

⁹⁷ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Memorandum III, 17.04.1919, pp. 213 – 214; SAB JUS Vol. 566, file no. 1/201/21, Deportation of Lapitsky & Others: Acting Deputy Commissioner South African Police-Secretary for Justice, 23.04.1919; *Ibid.*, G. Evans – Deputy Commissioner South African Police, 19.04.1919, pp. 1 – 5; *Ibid.*, H.J. Trew – Secretary for Justice, 27.05.1919; W.H. Harrison, *op. cit.*, pp. 66 – 67; *The International*, 11.04.1919, p. 1 (Farewell to the Russian Visitors).

⁹⁸ See E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting*, pp. 81 and 187, footnote 16.

⁹⁹ SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Memorandum II, p. 211.

However, it seems that Lapitsky and Sonsnovik bolstered the Bolshevik spirit that prevailed among the Rand socialists in the wake of the Bolshevik Revolution. In March 1919 the city's tramway men and the power station employees and artisans went on strike due to wages lagging behind the soaring cost of living and also due to a resolution of the Johannesburg City Council favouring the retrenchment of a number of men in the power station. On 1 April 1919, under the leadership of the renowned stalwart strike leader, J.T. Bain, the Johannesburg "Provisional Joint Board of Control", also dubbed the "Johannesburg Soviet", was formed. It consisted of representatives of the strike committee and certain Labour Councillors. Apparently the idea for such municipal workers' council was suggested by W.H. Andrews.

The Joint Board of Control ousted the councillors of the majority party from the council chamber and usurped the functions of the elected Town Councillors of Johannesburg. As the City Council dithered on the demands that the retrenchment resolution should be rescinded, Johannesburg remained in darkness for two nights and there were no trams. Then the Joint Board of Control, without let or hindrance, ran the tram, power and other municipal services. The revenue was paid into a special fund which was controlled by the city treasurer. As the Town Councillors were made ridiculous by their helplessness, the Minister for Justice and the Transvaal Administrator hurried to Johannesburg to settle the dispute. The retrenchment resolution lapsed and a permanent joint board of councillors and employees was set up to prevent any further resort to direct action. The ratepayer majority on the Council, having unwillingly agreed to the settlement, by way of protest resigned from the Council. Their seats were filled by unopposed Labour candidates in the ensuing by-elections. Thus, for the first time control of the Council passed to the Labour Party.¹⁰⁰

According to V. Sidenko, the Johannesburg Joint Board of Control "*was probably the first [practical] attempt in Africa to draw on the experience of the Russian Soviets*".¹⁰¹ However, the "Johannesburg Soviet" incident aroused keen controversy inside the ISL.

¹⁰⁰ See M. Kentridge: *I Recall. Memoirs of Morris Kentridge*, The Free Press Limited, Johannesburg, 1959, pp. 78 – 81; E. Gitsham and J.F. Trembath: *A First Account of Labour Organisation in South Africa*, E.P. & Commercial Printing Co., Ltd., Durban, 1926, pp. 44 – 45; I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren: *2 000 Casualties. A History of the Trade Unions and the Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa*, SATUC, Johannesburg, 1961, pp. 63 – 64; R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, pp. 201 – 202, 210.

¹⁰¹ V. Sidenko, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

Bunting, editing *The International* at the time, took a critical attitude to the whole affair and did not conceal the fact that he was entirely out of sympathy with it. He ignored Andrew's leading part. A wave of widespread strikes, pass burnings and riots by black workers coincided with the strike of white municipal workers. Several members of the strike deputation promised assistance to the Town Council if called upon to quell the "native menace" and to prevent "outrages" on white women and children. This betrayal of class solidarity infuriated Bunting, who had an additional and personal cause of complaint, since he had suffered indignities from being severely manhandled and frog-marched by a mob of racists outside the court house where he was defending black resisters against the pass laws.¹⁰²

Bunting wrote a scathing article, "The White 'Soviet' and the Red Herring", which was published in *The International* of 11 April 1919. While conceding that the municipal strike and the Joint Board of Control was "Johannesburg's first attempt at practical Bolshevism", he wrote bitterly about white workers' indifference to blacks and who cheered Bolshevism and beat up blacks for daring to protest against passes. He inveighed against the white workers for "taking up this white against black red herring". The whites, he pointed out, never condemned the daily outrages on their fellow workers, or protected them from the police, or helped them to obtain higher wages. The municipal "Soviet" was a commendable venture, but owed its success to the fatal defect of being a sectional enterprise. It did not represent even the white workers as a whole, but only municipal employees. But not seeking to extend the "Soviet" outside Johannesburg and by announcing that they were only a temporary institution, they negated the whole idea of a workers' council. It was "after all only an aristocrats' revolution". The "Soviet", which claimed to be in control, did not include any of the black sanitary workers who had struck nearly a year earlier and whose demands for a rise in wages was haughtily ignored.¹⁰³

The example set by the Johannesburg Board of Control was repeated almost a year later in Durban. Early in January 1920 there was a serious dispute between the Durban Municipal Employees' Society and the Town Council. On 7 January 1920 the Employees stopped

¹⁰² R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, p. 202; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op. cit.*, pp. 222 – 223; S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p.99.

¹⁰³ *The International*, 04.04.1919, pp. 1 – 2 (The White "Soviet" and the Red Herring) and p. 2 (The Pogrom Begins).

work in protest against the alleged victimisation of the assistant town clerk, H.H. Kemp, a member of the Society and a parliamentary Labour candidate. One of the strike leaders was Harry Haynes, a member of the ISL, who had moved to Durban. The strikers brought all municipal services, including the trams, to a standstill for three days. Inspired no doubt by the example of the Johannesburg municipal workers, the strike committee then installed a “Board of Control”, dubbed the “Durban Soviet”, in the Town Hall and hoisted the Red Flag on the roof while lowering the Union Jack. Haynes referred to it as the “Bolshevik Soviet”. The various sub-committees set up by the strikers successfully usurped the functions of the Town Council for one day. Practically all the municipal employees had agreed to carry on as usual under the “Board of Control”. The Council then promptly settled on terms when it was once more permitted to control municipal undertakings and agreed to set up a permanent conciliation board of councillors and employees.¹⁰⁴

Commenting on the formation of the Durban Board of Control, *The International* stated that after the picketing system had been put in order by the strikers, it was then necessary to “create the Soviet ‘psychology’” to “create the Soviet”, which was “*the constitutional wish of the working class of Durban*”. The paper made special reference of the allegiance of the municipal police who stood guard at the Town Hall on behalf of the Board of Control and provocatively declared that the Durban bourgeoisie “*have been nightmared out of their wits by the spectre of revolution*”.¹⁰⁵

The proliferation of “Bolshevik” activities in South Africa, such as the visit of Lapitsky and Sonsnovik, the formation of the Johannesburg and Durban “Soviets”, the revolutionary talk of socialist speakers at meetings of the ISL and the Industrial Socialist League and their propaganda amongst blacks, as well as the militant language used by *The International* and *The Bolshevik*, seemed to have unnerved the authorities. The Comrades of the Great War (a pro-war organisation) and the police seriously recommended the suppression of Bolshevism, while the capitalist press demanded such a step.¹⁰⁶ The government thereupon

¹⁰⁴ E. Gitsham and J.F. Trembath, *op. cit.*, pp. 45 – 46; I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren; *op. cit.*, pp. 65 – 74; B.L. Reid: Organised Labour in Natal: 1918 - 1924, Unpublished MA-thesis, U.N., 1975, pp. 74 - 81, 93; *The International*, 16.01.1920, p. 2 (The Durban Strike).

¹⁰⁵ See *The International*, 16.01.1920, p. 2 (The Durban Strike) and p. 4 (The Durban Soviet).

¹⁰⁶ See SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Comrades-Acting Prime Minister, 29.04.1919, p. 219; *Ibid.*, J.S.G. Douglas – Secretary South African Police, 28.04.1919,

announced a Public Welfare and Moratorium Bill, which became known as the “Anti-Bolshevik Bill”. Its terms were so dictatorial and harsh that they amounted to a virtual suppression of free-speech and trade unionism. Contrary to what the government expected, the Bill had the effect of uniting the whole labour movement in protest. In Johannesburg a huge procession, half of which followed the ISL banners, demonstrated their solidarity, while mass meetings were staged in Durban and Cape Town. Under the lead of the National Union of Railway and Harbour Servants and the ISL, great meetings were called and emphatic protests against the government were launched. The ISL opened a Free Speech Fund and the Labour Party joined the demonstrations. Eventually, the government relinquished its efforts to pass the Bill.¹⁰⁷

e. Socialist reaction to Hertzog’s “Bolshevism”

An interesting feature of the appeal of Bolshevism to South Africans was the attraction it held, initially, to the Nationalist Party of Gen. J.B.M. Hertzog with its Afrikaner support base- although for different reasons than those of the socialists. In November 1919 Hertzog touched on the subject of Bolshevism at the Transvaal Provincial Congress of the NP. He tried to extrapolate the Bolshevik situation in Russia to apply to the economic and political position of the Afrikaners in South Africa. According to Van Deventer, Hertzog’s speech should be viewed in the context of the early Bolshevik emphasis on self-determination for the various peoples of the Czarist Russian Empire. In addition, South Africa’s support for the war effort led to a revival of anti-capitalist sentiments in certain Afrikaner ranks. The First World War had thus become an act of imperialist aggression which would benefit only a small number of capitalists. In portraying the war in these terms, a number of Afrikaners indeed aligned themselves with the stance adopted by the ISL.¹⁰⁸

p. 223; *Ibid.*, Commissioner South African Police–Secretary for Justice, 26.04.1919, p. 228; *Ibid.*, J.M.L. Fulford – Deputy Commissioner South African Police, 24.04.1919, p. 229; *Ibid.*, G.S. Gray – Secretary South African Police, 14.04.1919, pp. 234 – 235; *The Star*, 18.04.1919, p. 20 (Readers’ Views); *Ibid.*, 19.04.1919, p. 11 (The Comrades and Bolshevism); *Ibid.*, 22.04.1919, p. 7 (The Bolshevik Danger); *Ibid.*, 03.05.1919, p. 10 (The Incendiaries); *Ibid.*, 13.06.1919, p. 11 (“Anti-Bolshevik” Clause).

¹⁰⁷ R.K. Cope, *op. cit.*, p. 211; *The International*, 30.05.1919, p. 1 (“Living Dangerously”); *Ibid.*, 06.06.1919, p. 1 (Fight for Free Speech); *Ibid.*, 13.06.1919, p. 1 (The “Profiteers Protection” Bill at the Palladium); (Natal Protests) and (I.S.L. “Liberty” Meeting) and p. 2 (Lies upon Lies); *The Labour World*, 28.06.1919, p. 9 (Parliament).

¹⁰⁸ A. van Deventer: Afrikaner Nationalist Politics and Anti-Communism, 1937 – 1945, Unpublished M.A.-thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1991, pp. 6 – 13.

In his speech Hertzog said that Allied criticism of Bolshevism was an attempt by capitalists to mobilise public support for their venture to destroy the Soviet state and therefore also the freedom of the Russian people, successfully struggled from Czarist imperialism and oppression. This undertaking was motivated by economic exploitation and could lead to a new war in Europe. As a member of the League of Nations South Africa would be obliged to participate in such war and Hertzog wanted to prevent the Afrikaners being sacrificed. If threatened by Bolshevism, Hertzog declared, he would resist it to the utmost. Although not condoning its “excesses and wrongs”, Hertzog equated Russian Bolshevism with the desire for self-determination of the Russian people under Czarist imperialism. Hertzog declared self-determination to be the “death” of capitalism and imperialism. This was similar to the Afrikaners’ aspiration towards self-determination and liberation from (British) imperialism. In that sense, Hertzog said, the Nationalists in South Africa could actually also be regarded as “Bolsheviks”. Thus he paid homage to the “idea of freedom” behind Russian Bolshevism.¹⁰⁹ Van Deventer, quoting Oberholster, who stated that Hertzog’s utterances were a rather naïve defence of the principle of national self determination of nations, stresses that the promotion of self-determination and full national autonomy was of uppermost importance for Hertzog. Bolshevism, in this context, was in itself relatively insignificant and served merely to illuminate his arguments in favour of full national autonomy.¹¹⁰

However, the South African socialists felt the same distaste for Afrikaner nationalism as for the black nationalism of the SANNC. Afrikaner nationalism was regarded as a stumbling block towards the expressed goal of international socialist solidarity. *The International* attacked the petite bourgeois nature of the Nationalist spokesmen, accusing the party of not understanding the principle of Bolshevik self-determination in the way that Lenin intended it. Afrikaner nationalism served bourgeois interests, seeking nothing less than to address

¹⁰⁹ SAB A 32, Hertzog Collection, Vol. 84, Personal Correspondence: J.B.M. Hertzog – F.C. Eloff, 29.11.1919, pp. 127 – 129; *Ibid.*, Vol. 109, Newspaper Clippings: *Het Westen*, 25.11.1919 and *Die Afrikaner*, 02.12.1919, pp. 2, 5; F.J. du T. Spies (et al) (reds): *Die Hertzogtoesprake Deel 4 April 1918 – Junie 1924*, Perskor-Uitgewery, Johannesburg, 1977, pp. 139 – 143; *The Star*, 06.12.1919, p. 9 (Hertzog Explains) and *Ibid.*, 26.01.1920, p. 10 (Nationalists and Bolsheviks).

¹¹⁰ A. van Deventer, *op. cit.*, pp. 12 – 13. See also A.G. Oberholster: *Die Mynwerkerstaking Witwatersrand 1922*, HSRC, Pretoria, 1982, p. 53.

the grievances of one particular ethnic group against another.¹¹¹ For *The International* the aspirations towards self-determination of Afrikaners, who only paid “lip homage to the Russian Revolution”, in that context implied racism against blacks.¹¹²

Yet, Bunting showed particular sympathy for poor whites, who had become a *cause celebre* for the NP. Bunting saw these unfortunates, mostly poor tenant farmers driven off the land, as “ripe for socialism” by having been proletarianised in the towns. The political link between poor whites and the NP was, in Bunting’s discourse, founded on their failure to appreciate their impoverishment as a class and not as a nation. And in the 28 February 1919 issue of *The International* an ISL commentator contended that a Nationalist government for South Africa would be a progressive step inasmuch as it would lead to a more open conflict with imperialism and thus speed the Afrikaners to an awareness of socialism.¹¹³ In October 1919, however, *The International* modified its position. In a message “To the Bijwoners and Afrikaner Workers” the paper warned the Afrikaner against Hertzog and the NP. In the view of *The International*, the Afrikaner workers and landless farmers could gain their freedom only by working with the (South African) “Bolsheviks”. It called upon Afrikaners:

“We hear that in your despair you Afrikander (sic) people are beginning to turn to the Bolshevik movement: ‘Ons zal bijvoeg met de Bolsheviki’... Let the word go forth to the disinherited of Africa, white and black, that the sun of freedom has arisen in the East and is fast bathing the revolving world in its radiance. Let it be the duty of all Afrikanders (sic) to spread the news among their fellow workers of the veldt... Let your cry be more and more: ‘Ons zal bijvoeg met de Bolsheviki!!!’”¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 102; M.A. Caldwell, *op. cit.*, p. 161, *The International*, 05.10.1917, p. 2 (The Republican Red Herring); *Ibid.*, 19.04.1919, p. 1 (“S.W.”: “Poor Whites”).

¹¹² See *The International*, 18.01.1919, p. 1 (“Presbyter is only Priest writ Large!”).

¹¹³ See S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 102 – 103; *The International*, 13.04.1917, p. 1 (Industry Knows no Race or Colour); *Ibid.*, 13.07.1917, pp. 3 – 4 (Do we want a Republic?); *Ibid.*, 28.02.1919, p. 3 (“Cincinnatus”: Republicanism : Whither does it Lead?).

¹¹⁴ *The International*, 03.10.1919, p. 3 (To the Bijwoners and Afrikander Workers).

In December 1919 *The International*, although welcoming Hertzog's attack on international capital, repeated its criticism of the bourgeois nature of his "Bolshevism":

*"Some people are expecting great things from Hertzog's pronouncements on Bolshevism. There is no sinister design under his praise of Bolshevik aims. Any whip is good enough to beat the top capitalist class against which Hertzog rebels...the National Party is not a working class party, though it has workers in its ranks. Its mission is not to make the workers the ruling class, but to institute the political regime of the small farmers".*¹¹⁵

In December 1920 Bunting published a long statement, entitled "Socialism and the Dutch Nationalist Movement in South Africa". He proposed that the ISL annual conference of January 1921 discuss the statement as possible resolution, but it never did. He advocated qualified support by the ISL for the Afrikaner nationalist movement inasmuch as it would weaken the British Empire. He carefully indicated how such support should be used for exclusively socialist ends:

*"Hence a Socialist Party will support agitation for the SA Nationalist principle as such – without caring whether it is practicable or not – just to the extent that it weakens British Imperialism... The [Nationalist] party as such, even with its spurious banner of Labour reforms, it cannot support... Hence a Socialist party in South Africa can in practice do little more in this connection than, using sympathy with the separatist movement...as an introduction to win confidence, to enlighten the disinherited among the Dutch people in town and country on the false position they occupy as Nationalists and Republicans, and on their only true salvation, the Socialist Republic or International Commonwealth of all workers."*¹¹⁶

The Bolshevik also launched a scathing attack on what it called Hertzog's "emasculated Bolshevism". Hertzog was accused of siding with Gen. J.C. Smuts and sir Thomas Smartt,

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.12.1919, p. 4 (Hertzog's Bolshevism).

the leaders of the South African Party and the Unionist Party respectively, who were regarded by the paper as being manipulated by big mining capital. The paper insinuated that, as “enemies” of the working class, they would all be prepared to crush any working class revolt.¹¹⁷

f. Steps towards communist unity

Differences between the two groupings of the South African libertarian socialists, i.e. the Johannesburg ISL and the Cape Town Industrial Socialist League, were further complicated by the concurrent efforts of both groups to identify with the Russian Revolution and the left-wing international socialists overseas. In the process further potential for dissension and confusion were created. One of the outcomes of the Russian Revolution was the formation of the Third Communist International (Comintern) in March 1919. *The International* devoted increasing attention to the new International which it had advocated for such a long time. This was the realisation of Jones’s call in 1915 for a new International and his support for the Russian Revolution.¹¹⁸ Van der Walt concedes that from 1919 onwards, the ISL underwent a transition from revolutionary syndicalism to Leninism.¹¹⁹ In mid-1919 *The International* started to print the manifesto of the Comintern in serial form. The paper also regularly reprinted theses and resolutions from the Comintern through which ran the constant theme of the necessity for all left-wing international socialists to organise in support of, and for the extension of, the socialist revolution as manifested in Russia.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ S. Johns, *op .cit.*, pp. 103-104; *The International*, 17.12.1920, p. 2 (“S.P.B.”: Socialism and the Dutch Nationalist Movement in South Africa).

¹¹⁷ *The Bolshevik*, January 1920, p. 4 (The Strongest Weapon of Capitalism).

¹¹⁸ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108, 112; B. Hirson & G.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

¹¹⁹ L. Van der Walt, *op.cit.*, p. 7.

¹²⁰ See *The International*, 27.06.1919, p. 2 (The “Third International”); *Ibid.*, 22.08.1919, p. 2 (A new Communist Manifesto); *Ibid.*, 29.08.1919, p. 4 (Another Moscow Manifesto); *Ibid.*, 03.10.1919, p. 5 (G. Zinoviev: A Clarion Call to the Proletariat); *Ibid.*, 09.04.1920, p. 6 (The Tactical Principles of the Third International); *Ibid.*, 11.06.1920, p. 3 (C.M. Roebuck: The Basis of the Third International); *Ibid.*, 13.08.1920, p. 3 (Thesis of the Executive Committee of Communist International); *Ibid.*, 20.08.1920, p. 2 (Thesis of the Executive Committee of Communist International); *Ibid.*, 27.08.1920, p. 2 (Thesis of the Executive of Communist International); *Ibid.*, 10.09.1920, p. 3 (Thesis of the Executive of Communist International); *Ibid.*, 24.09.1920, p. 3 (The Second Congress of the Communist International); *Ibid.*, 09.09.1921, p. 3 (D.I. Jones: The Third International); *Ibid.*, 16.09.1921, p. 3 (D.I. Jones: The Third International) and *Ibid.*, 23.09.1921, p. 3 (D.I. Jones: The Third International).

Both the ISL and the Industrial Socialist League moved to translate their affinity for the Russian Revolution into formal affiliation with the new centre for the left-wing international socialist movement. At its January 1920 conference the ISL decided to affiliate with the new Comintern in Moscow.¹²¹ Yet its claim to be the single representative of international socialism in South Africa was challenged by the Industrial Socialist League. In a parallel decision the Industrial Socialist League also resolved to apply for affiliation to the Comintern.¹²²

The situation was further complicated when the Johannesburg supporters of the Industrial Socialist League, who apparently fused with some of the Yiddish-speaking anti-political elements which broke away from the ISL in early 1920, chose to call their new organisation the Communist League. Thus, the first socialist organisation using the word “communist” in its name came into being in opposition to the ISL, which proclaimed itself the representative of the Comintern in South Africa. By October the Industrial Socialist League of Cape Town and its Johannesburg branch, the Communist League, had merged to form (prematurely) the Communist Party of South Africa. The new party still espoused revolutionary syndicalist tactics. The constitution of the organisation endorsed non-racialism, the complete overthrow of capitalism, the class struggle, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the system of Soviets, mass action by the workers as a means of seizing power and affiliation to the Comintern.¹²³

Manuel Lopes, one of the leaders of the new party, wrote the following in *The Bolshevik*, that became the official party organ:¹²⁴ “*The masses are ripe now for the message of the Social Revolution. The Communist Party must devote all its energies to their task of teaching the workers the principles of Communism and to organize them to seize political power*”.¹²⁵ *The Bolshevik* called upon its readers to identify themselves with Soviet Russia

¹²¹ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 109; *The International*, 09.01.1920, p. 5 (The Fifth Milestone).

¹²² S. Johns, *op. cit.*, p. 109; *The Bolshevik*, January 1920, p. 4 (The League and the Third International); *Ibid.*, May 1920, p. 3 (A Year’s Activity).

¹²³ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 109 – 111; E.A. Mantzaris (1987), *op. cit.*, pp. 170 – 171; *The Bolshevik*, September 1920, p. 4 (The New Communist Party); *Ibid.*, October 1920, p. 1 (Communist Party of South Africa) and p. 4 (The Soviets); *Ibid.*, December 1920, p. 1 (Revolutionary Programme). See also E.A. Mantzaris (1981), *op. cit.*, pp. 159, 162.

¹²⁴ L. and D. Switser, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

¹²⁵ *The Bolshevik*, October 1920, p. 3 (M. Lopes: The Coming of Socialism).

and its symbols: “Let us, who are militant workers, recognise as our rallying-point the Red Banner, on which shines the Sickle and the Hammer crossed – the emblem of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Russia, and the World Revolution”.¹²⁶

However, among the rules adopted at the Comintern Congress, the “Twenty One Theses” formulated by Lenin, there was one which precluded the affiliation of more than one communist party from any country. Accordingly, the ISL took the initiative of bringing together all socialist parties, groups and individuals with the object of establishing a single, disciplined and centralised Communist Party.¹²⁷ In late December 1920 the ISL issued a formal call to socialist unity. Non-white organisations as well as socialist organisations and interested individuals were invited to send delegates to the annual conference of the ISL in January 1921 to discuss, *inter alia*, the role of a communist or socialist party and socialist unity in South Africa. The most crucial document accepted by the conference was the statement of the ISL on socialist unity which had also been published in *The International* on the eve of the conference. In a significant concluding move the conference appointed a sub-committee, known as the Unity Committee, to draft a report of the proceedings of the ISL conference as a basis for unity. The documents of the Unity Committee envisaged the projected organisation both as the leader of the coming socialist revolution and as an integral part of the Comintern.¹²⁸

The formation of the Unity Committee signalled the start of the final steps which led to the creation of a single, united communist party affiliated with the Comintern. In the meantime, however, despite various expressions of dissension and defections, elements within the Cape Town SDF, the (premature) CPSA and the Jewish Socialist Society endorsed the “Twenty-One Theses” and managed to form the United Communist Party of South Africa in March 1921.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, February 1921, p. 1 (Prepare for the World-Revolution).

¹²⁷ A. Lerumo, *op. cit.*, p. 37. See also *The International*, 15.04.1921, p. 3 (The Twenty-One Points).

¹²⁸ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 112, 114 – 115, 121; *The International*, 22.10.1920, p. 1 (“S.P.B.”: “Socialist Unity” What About?); *Ibid.*, 31.12.1920, p. 1 (The Role of a Socialist Party in South Africa) and (Socialist Unity in South Africa); *Ibid.*, 07.01.1921, p. 2 (I.S.L. Sixth Annual Delegate Meeting).

¹²⁹ S. Johns, *op. cit.*, pp. 115 – 116; *The International*, 25.03.1921, p. 3 (Socialist Unity); *Ibid.*, 08.04.1921, p. 4 (Socialist Unity); *Ibid.*, 15.04.1921, p. 1 (The South African Communist Party).

Then finally, on 30 July 1921 fourteen delegates, all English-speaking whites, assembled in Cape Town. The delegates represented the ISL, the United Communist Party of Cape Town, the Marxian Club of Durban (a study group established in August 1919 for discussions on the economics of Karl Marx) and the Poalei Zion of Johannesburg (a branch of the Jewish Marxist organisation which had arisen in Eastern Europe). The manifesto proposed by the Unity Committee was passed without any changes and the Communist Party of South Africa was officially launched. The dominance of the ISL in the proceedings of the inaugural meeting was underlined by the selection of officers for the new party. C.B. Tyler was elected chairman, Andrews as secretary and Bunting as treasurer of the party. The meeting also moved that the new party should apply formally for affiliation to the Comintern.¹³⁰

The manifesto of the CPSA rejoiced in the victory of the workers in Russia and prophesied that the remainder of the world was speedily approaching social revolution. It was time for the labour movement of South Africa to head the call of the coming revolution and to that end the new Communist Party dedicated itself to the mobilisation of all class-conscious workers for the final blow against capitalism. The immediate tasks of the new party were to “*establish the widest and closest possible contact with workers of all ranks and races, and to propagate the Communist gospel among them, in the first instance among the industrial masses, who must provide the ‘storm troops’ of the Revolution, and secondly, among the rural toilers*”. The document acknowledged that the new party would “*derive great strength and inspiration from its connection with the World Communist International, at present headed by the Russian Communist Party...*”. The CPSA’s acceptance of the “Twenty-One Theses” of the Comintern also marked the formal acceptance of the discipline of the Moscow-based organisation.¹³¹

According to Johns, the establishment of the Communist Party of South Africa (Section of the Communist International) signalled the bringing together of all the important supporters

¹³⁰ For a thorough and detailed discussion of the events leading to the formation of the CPSA, see S. Johns: The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa (*The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1976, pp. 371 – 400); A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 439 – 443 and *The International*, 12.08.1921, p. 2 (The Launching of the Communist Party of S. Africa).

¹³¹ See S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, pp. 121 – 122; and *The International*, 12.08.1921, p. 3 (The Communist Party of South Africa) and (Constitution and Rules).

of the Russian Revolution and the militant left-wing international socialism which it proclaimed.¹³² Davidson states that the foundation of the CPSA, which took place almost simultaneously with the formation of the communist parties of the leading Western European countries, bears indisputably witness to the high level of development and deep-rooted traditions of socialist ideas in contemporary South Africa.¹³³

g. Epilogue

Having left South Africa for good in November 1920 to work for the Comintern in Moscow, D.I. Jones, in addition to his numerous literary contributions to overseas communist publications, continued to contribute articles for *The International*,¹³⁴ which became the official organ of the CPSA since August 1921.¹³⁵ Jones travelled extensively in Russia and took a keen interest in events in that country, while visiting peasants in the countryside, locomotive works, mines, and metal and chemical industries. In his articles Jones depicted Soviet Russia as an idyllic communist, workers' paradise in which all the evils of capitalist society were being eradicated. In seeking to demonstrate the advance of socialism, Jones found no issue too small or too trivial. He discussed the minting of small coins and the progress at the Yalta sanatorium, where Bolshevik-trained doctors and administrative staff were replacing old Czarist officials. Jones could see no wrong. He printed a picture of the Crimea in glowing colours that was yet another advertisement of the glories of the Soviet state. In glowing tributes Jones also revealed an infinite admiration for Lenin and Trotsky, who were hailed as the architects of the new communist society and the inspirers of world revolution.¹³⁶

¹³² S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p. 125.

¹³³ A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 444.

¹³⁴ B. Hirson & G.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 199 – 200, 207, 210, 215 – 220, 241 – 243, 247; A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 446 – 449.

¹³⁵ *The International*, 12.08.1921, p. 2 ("The International").

¹³⁶ See B. Hirson & G.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 216 – 219, 241 – 243, 247; A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, pp. 447, 449, 451; *The International*, 12.08.1921, p. 1 (The Red International); *Ibid.*, 30.09.1921, p. 1 (Our Moscow Letter); *Ibid.*, 21.10.1921, p. 1 (A Gossip from Headquarters) and p. 4 (D.I. Jones: The Russian Situation); *Ibid.*, 28.10.1921, p. 1 (D.I. Jones: In A Russian Forest); *Ibid.*, 11.11.1921, p. 2 ("S.P.B.": The Year V); *Ibid.*, 15.09.1922, p. 2 (D.I. Jones: A Summer's Eve in Russia); *Ibid.*, 23.02.1923, p. 3 (D.I. Jones: News from Russia); *Ibid.*, 09.03.1923, p. 3 (D.I. Jones: In the Home of the Revolution); *Ibid.*, 18.05.1923, p. 1 (A Letter from Russia); *Ibid.*, 01.06.1923, p. 4 (D.I. Jones: Russia Day by Day); *Ibid.*, 08.06.1923, p. 4 (D.I. Jones: Russian Communist Congress); *Ibid.*, 14.03.1924, pp. 7 – 8 (D.I. Jones: Lenin The Immortal) and *Ibid.*, 04.04.1924, p. 5 (D.I. Jones: Lenin's Death and After).

Bunting, who visited Moscow in 1922 as the CPSA delegate to the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, followed Jones in his glowing glorification of Lenin, his people and the wonders of Soviet society in a series of articles published in *The International*. He wrote about the “stimulating atmosphere of Moscow” being “congenial”. Bunting described Soviet Russia as “a veritable and almost complete ‘paradise of the working class’”.¹³⁷ W.H. Andrews, who served one term as South African delegate in the executive of the Comintern from May 1923, also conveyed a very positive impression of his stay in Russia. From September to December 1923 many of Andrews's articles and excerpts - sometimes two or three per issue - appeared in *The International*, with titles such as "Scenes from Moscow Life", "Sketches of Soviet Russia", "The Kremlin", "Russian Wedding", "Fleeting Impressions of South Russia", ect.¹³⁸ *The Bolshevik* followed in similar vein, depicting idyllic Soviet life in Russia to its readers. It praised the Russian workers' resolve to work overtime without pay because they were “the masters of their country”. According to *The Bolshevik* “nobody [would] grumble, just as no working man objects to put in a couple of hours in his own home when he comes back from the workshop”.¹³⁹ Hirson, Jones's biographer, reflects on the implicit and uncritical admiration of the South African socialists and communists for the communist society of Russia by stating that this blind faith was to become one of the great obstacles for those who tried to reappraise the nature of the Soviet Union in the years to come.¹⁴⁰

However, as time passed and the Bolshevik Revolution failed to spread across the globe, the early spirited enthusiasm for the “coming revolution” in South Africa eventually withered, especially among its earlier Jewish supporters.¹⁴¹ Indeed, as early as 1920 the revolutionary spirit seemed to have lost steam and the South African socialists became

¹³⁷ See A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 454; *The International*, 13.10.1922, p. 2 (S.P. Bunting: Under the Red Flag); *Ibid.*, 27.10.1922, p. 3 (S.P. Bunting: The Freedom of the City); *Ibid.*, 24.11.1922, p. 3 (S.P. Bunting: Musical Moscow); *Ibid.*, 05.01.1923, p. 3 (S.P. Bunting: The Glorious Seventh); *Ibid.*, 19.01.1923, p. 3 (S.P. Bunting: The Moscow Congress); *Ibid.*, 26.01.1923, p. 3 (S.P. Bunting: The “New” Economic Policy); *Ibid.*, 25.01.1924, p. 4 (S.P. Bunting: Lenin: Personal Impressions).

¹³⁸ A.B. Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

¹³⁹ *The Bolshevik*, May 1920, p. 8 (“Produce More”). See also *Ibid.*, November 1920, p. 3 (B. Kreel: Control of Industry).

¹⁴⁰ B. Hirson & G.A. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 243. Cf. also Mia Roth's criticism of the orthodox versions of the history of the CPSA as portrayed in the publications of Roux, H.J. and R.E. Simons, Bunting, Cope, Switzer, ect., in “Eddie, Brian, Jack and Let's Phone Rusty: Is this the History of the Communist Party of South Africa (1921-1950)?” (*South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 42, May 2000, pp. 191-209).

somewhat disillusioned with the prospects of an imminent revolution at home. Apparently the South African proletariat were not ready for such revolt yet. In addressing a meeting of ISL supporters in Durban in October 1920, Jones admitted that “*the issues that required the institution of Soviets had not yet appeared in South Africa*.”¹⁴² And in November 1921 a dismayed Bunting wrote in *The International*:

“*Here in South Africa, indeed, we are still in the Valley of the Shadow. The Communist movement here has not yet developed the momentum required for effective attack. In particular, we have not yet awakened the masses of our native proletariat, our real task in the world campaign...*”¹⁴³

Bunting’s sentiments were echoed by Harry Haynes in *The Bolshevik*.¹⁴⁴ Even police reports of 1920 were doubtful whether Bolshevism would ever make much progress outside the larger towns. The reports also considered that Bolshevism “*calls for no alarm at the present time*”.¹⁴⁵ The belief that the communists became negatively inclined towards the realisation of a revolutionary Bolshevik ideal in South Africa was even further strengthened when in February 1922, at the time of the miner’s strike, *The International* expressly stated that conditions on the Witwatersrand were not ready for the step towards a Soviet Republic.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, the South African socialists and communists were successful in imitating their Russian comrades by establishing a united South African communist party on the basis of the Comintern. But the accomplishment of the socialist revolution and the establishment of a socialist workers’ republic, based on the model of the Soviet state, remained elusive.

¹⁴¹ E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting*, p. 87.

¹⁴² *The International*, 15.10.1920, p. 4 (Power of the People).

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 11.11.1921, p. 2 (“S.P.B”: The Year V).

¹⁴⁴ See *The Bolshevik*, April 1920, p. 2 (The Revolutionary Outlook).

¹⁴⁵ See SAB JUS Vol. 267, file no. 3/1064/18, Reports on Bolshevism in South Africa: Report on Bolshevism in the Union of South Africa, 01.06.1920, p. 106; *Ibid.*, Commissioner South African Police-Secretary for Justice, 30.10.1920, p. 55.

¹⁴⁶ *The International*, 03.02.1922, p. 2 (V. Danchin: The Communist Party and the Crisis); *Ibid.*, 17.02.1922, p. 4 (C.F. Glass: Correspondence).