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NOTES TOWARDS AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY OF THE EARLY COMMUNIST PARTY

THE INFLUENCE OF DAVID IVON JONES *

Baruch Hirson

Apostle of Change

One individual towered over the members of the early International Socialists in South Africa and determined that groups political destiny. He was its thinker, its ideologist, its direction maker. He provided the cultural milieu in which these socialists operated and he gave them organizational direction. Whether for good or for bad, the direction for the young Communist Party of South Africa stemmed from him, even though he had left the country before the formal constitution of the party. His name, barely known in South Africa today, was David Ivon Jones.

If I had to find one phrase to describe Jones' influence I would say that he was the *apostle of socialism.* He was the bearer of a message from the time he entered South Africa in November 1910; the bearer of a message when he departed in 1920, and the bearer of a message from Moscow where he lived until his death in mid-1924. Yet, apostle as he was, his message altered radically under the impact, first of events in South Africa, and then in Russia after the first revolution in February 1917. When he arrived in South Africa, seeking a cure for tuberculosis, Ivon Jones was first and foremost a Unitarian. He had spent his young manhood searching in the chapels of Wales for the true religion. He had wrestled with the faith of the narrow Methodist Calvinists and found liberation among the Unitarian. Persuaded by George Eyre Evans, who was to remain his life-long friend, Ivon moved into a faith that allowed him a freedom of thought that was not possible in the more conservative chapels of Wales.

Among the Unitarians of Wales were men who had sided with the radical working class and had been involved in the Monmouth rebellion of 1848. Members of the faith had joined the Independent Labour Party of Kier Hardie and contributed to the growing radicalism of the Welsh valleys.

Not all the Unitarians took that radical step. It was in fact a broad church whose members embraced a variety of political homes. They also sought out congenial thinkers in Britain and the USA, and Jones, a lover of nature with a keen sense of aesthetic values, read widely. Among those he loved reading were Emerson (a fountain head of unitarian thinking), Ruskin the aesthete, the Lake poets (Wordsworth and Shelley in particular), and the burgeoning Welsh literature.

Above all else he was a Welsh patriot and nationalist. This provided him with a life-long hatred of tyranny and national oppression, and also pride in Welsh achievements. David Lloyd George was one of his earliest political heroes, both for his fiery Welsh oratory that was `glowing and daring...teeming with apt scriptural allusions which make it a sermon and him a preacher rather than a political speaker', and because he piloted the National Insurance Act of 1911 through parliament, against the opposition of British employers and Labour leaders. In the South African context his passion for justice made him a protagonist of the Boer cause (and therefore anti-British). His first written references were to the battle-fields of the Boer war, and his first commendations were of General Botha, as the temperate Boer leader who also fought against `the machinations of Randlordism'.

Jones was too sensitive to remain uncritical of the Boer cause. Within a few months he found that few Boers retained the ideals they had once displayed in war. Then there had been the `bitter-enders' who refused to surrender and had shown `superb bravery'. The communities he saw, he said, were narrow and unenlightened, with no taste for books, no folklore or moral heroes, no ideals, and with only a self-centred love of liberty.

As the months went by Jones became even more scathing in his condemnations. In October 1913, after he witnessed the brutal suppression of a general strike he

condemned the Boers and their leaders in scathing terms as ignorant and indifferent to the ideas of the outside world. Their cultural life, centred around the rifle associations and shooting competitions, he treated with contempt. For their religious leaders, steeped in the dogmas of Calvinism he had no words harsh enough. This attitude hardened further after the abortive general strike in 1913 and confirmed Jones in his opinions. Then, in mid-1914, with the declaration of war in Europe and the South African government's support of hostilities, Jones and his companions broke with all other political tendencies in the country and condemned government and opposition alike.

Jones soon became aware of the colour question in South Africa. The race hatred that flowed through South Africa was fed by many streams and, although Jones's perceptions were not typical, his grappling with the issue is illuminating. His first recorded observations were of the African women he saw outside his brother's store in the OFS. He noted their subordinate position and was sympathetic, but language difficulties prevented close contact with the women who waited patiently for the whites to finish their shopping. There were barriers separating them and ultimately Jones was trapped in the contradiction that it took him years to unravel. That is, how to separate out prejudices that had no rational base, from his instinctive sympathy for the oppressed. He grappled with the issue and in the first instance sought the answer in moral terms. The `Kaffirs', he said, were `slaves in everything but name, almost. Yet happy enough I admit, although he cannot own land nor rent it'. He found a parallel problem in the local church. Religious thinking, he claimed, was `a thing far, far away from the tenor of South African thought', and this gave the `brotherhood of man' a hollow ring. This, he said, was a natural consequence of the situation in South Africa: `strenuous thought...is a necessary corollary of strenuous work, or should I put it vice versa. Kaffirs do all the work here...' That `glow of high thinking or high feeling' he claimed, followed `the proud consciousness of an arduous job well done...' The solution was for people to become religious liberals, but they `must first be *religious*'.

Jones worked his way through every possible answer to the colour question. He started with few biases before joining the South African Labour Party (SALP) in 1912 or 1913. Yet his acceptance of the Labour Party ideology was a retrogressive step. The SALP prided itself on having been the first party to demand total segregation in the country. It also called for the repatriation of Indians and gave no support to campaigns against discriminatory laws. And in his letters he repeated the racial stereotypes of white South Africa: he repeated what he read in the press and wrote, for example, of the great Boer pioneer General Pretorius, who defeated the Zulu hordes of Dingaan [Dingane] in 1838, after the treacherous massacre of Piet Retief.

Yet, his views on race were ambivalent. A few weeks after he wrote the above he also wrote to the *Star* (28 July 1911). In this he welcomed the announcement by Pixley ka I Sema, of the coming formation of a Union-wide South African Native National Congress (later renamed the African National Congress) as an appropriate step `for the process of striving towards national self-consciousness'.

This was not a break with segregation, but it broached the possibility of co-operation across the colour line, and for its time was remarkable in being a message of support for the formation of a black political movement. In a letter two days later he condemned the curt and abusive language used by whites in addressing blacks. `And yet', he continued, `the white man only considers his marketable value. When he begins to find that he has responsibilities towards the black man other than sending him missionaries, there will be a changed South Africa'.

Politics and the Labour Party

Ivon Jones political progress was speedy. His first tentative steps to intervention in public life were journalistic. He wrote letters to the local press, presenting `uplifting' views on culture and social values. He found no idealism, he wrote, no sense of purpose short of extracting wealth and departing. There were no bookshops,

and only one theatre. Even the church offered little inspiration. He wrote in despair to his Welsh friends: `Gold, rusting not itself, is here rusting into the soul of a people...I do not think I shall make any friends here. The atmosphere is against it.'

Despair gave way to elation when he found friends in the Labour movement. In doing so he chose the more conservative of the existing socialist bodies. He seems to have found nothing congenial in the syndicalism of the *Voice of Labour* group, or in Archie Crawford and (Pickhandle) Mary Fitzgerald their leading members, and he never referred to the organization or their members - although he was to work very closely with some of them (like L H H Greene and Dunbar) at a later date.

He found his home inside the South African Labour Party (SALP): his constituency being the white workers, on the mines and in industry - his enemy being first the Rand mine owners and De Beers, who he equated with mammon, and then the government of Botha and Smuts who he identified as their protectors. It was in th Labour Party that he met with W H Andrews and F A Lucas, and then with S P Bunting. At last he had found people receptive to his world outlook.

His first known public activity was as an assistant to Andrews in a parliamentary by-election in early 1912. He associated himself increasingly with the Labour Prty's ideology. Jones was not yet anti-capitalist, but he had a deep seated hatred of the Randlords. He hated them because they were vindictive and oppressive. Anyone know to be supporting the Labour Party was blacklisted across the Witwatersrand and could not get employment. Furthermore, in mid-1912 he still saw Botha as the great reconciliator and condemned the mineowners for their campaign of hatred between the white races.

At the end of 1912 he wrote urging the SALP paper, the *Worker*, and the party, to be Liberal as well as Labour; deprecating the `sneers for Lloyd George's endeavours at social regeneration, though we strive might and main to achieve here the half of what he has done,' He criticised the party for being too narrowly interested in class issues, saying that it should follow the guidelines laid down by Liberalism. His views were expressed most clearly in letters to Wales in which he wrote: `There is no Liberal Party. Labour is the liberal here. The whole country wants a Lloyd George to shake it inside out like a dusty sack.' More specifically, Jones explained his own adherence to the SALP: `I look upon it as a kind of religion. For nowhere is reform more urgent. Nowhere is political serfdom more rampant. Nowhere social injustice and inequality more unashamed than in South Africa. Men on the Rand dare not openly express their political principles if they are at variance with those of their employers'.

Jones looked set to becoming a right-wing social democrat, focusing exclusively on *the needs of the white worker, and totally ignoring the colour question. Indeed*, there was no possibility then, of his overstepping this programme: he never entered a black township nor ventured into the Reserves. The compassion he felt for the black workers (and he was fully aware of their miserable conditions) could be shelved until such time as they were returned to the land - where they would be outside this industrial society.

It was only the strike of May/June 1913 that led to a change of direction which would eventually turn a mild reformer into a blazing revolutionary. The strike started peacefully enough at the New Kleinfontein mine - although the miners were bitter and desperate. The over-riding issue was the length of time at the ore-face and this was a matter of life and death. The factor that lay behind the earlier strike of 1907 and now led them to the edge of revolt, was *the high incidence of phthisis.*

The number of miners, white and black, killed by the disease is unknown. Officially, it was stated that 4,500 whites contracted the `White Death' every year and this was a gross understatement. There were no figures for blacks, but John X Merriman said in parliament that during the decade 1903-1912 `no less than 100,000 Kaffirs have been virtually murdered...' Jones in a letter to *Reynold's Newspaper*, said that of the members of the Strike Committee of 1907, ten had died of phthisis, three were living but had the dread disease, one had died in a mine accident in Canada, and one was alive: the fate of two or three others was not known. He added

that at a recent meeting a union organiser `dropped the remark, "I've got it. We've all got it" , "it" being the spectre that lays low all miners'.
The pro-labour *Evening Chronicle* (5 June 1913), said that phthisis reduced the average working life of a miner to four years, and many died after a further three years on disability allowance. The only amelioration would be a shorter working day, as even the Governor-General stressed in a dispatch after the 1913 strike.
There were 38,500 white workers employed on the Witwatersrand at the time: 22,000 on the mines and 4,500 on the railways, the rest distributed in the building trade, tramways, print shops, electric power works, and small workshops. The mines employed some 200,000 Africans, mostly as underground labourers; other Africans on the Rand were employed in domestic service, as washermen, or in workshops. All were unskilled and were either manual workers, carriers or cleaners. The white workers stopped work and some African miners followed suit, demanding higher wages.
The government took immediate action to smash the strike. Troops were brought in to disperse the crowds, meetings were banned, and a public meeting was dispersed by the Dragoons who fired indiscriminately into a fleeing crowd, leaving over 20 dead and 200-400 wounded.
The crowd in Johannesburg ran riot. The railway station and the *Star* newspaper building were burnt down. Shops were looted in the city centre and lumpen elements looted Indian stores in Vrededorp, Fordsburg and Newlands. In Benoni, the centre of greatest violence, the goods station was burnt to the ground, scabs assaulted and some of their houses or possessions destroyed, wagons held up or destroyed, and according to a report: `The Red Flag has been supreme ...it waves from hundreds of houses and stores. The police and military have been impotent...' The government summoned 800-1000 cavalrymen to the Rand the following morning: and the red flags disappeared
Ivon Jones entered the fray in Vereeniging where he was employed on the clerical staff of the VFP power station. When the manual workers came out he was the only clerical worker yo join them. That was the end of his job, but also the beginning of his radicalisation. Liberalism was no longer relevant, the class war had assumed a new reality, and he went to work as a book-keeper for the Miners union.
Jones perceived the fight in 1913 as being against the perpetrators of the worst outrages: that is, the government, the mine owners, and the British army. Yet, the actions of white workers, which made them agents of repression were overlooked. He made no mention of the looting of Indian shops during the riots of July 1913; shooting down workers at Jagersfontein and Premier mines; acting as temporary warders to arrested Indians in the Natal colliery strike; and forming vigilante groups to stop Indians crossing into the Transvaal. Some white socialists, among them J T Bain and T W Ward spoke in support of the Indians in their 1913 campaign, characterising `the indentured system as [one] of slavery glossed over and disguised by law', but they were exceptional. Jones was not among their number.
The Rand remained in a state of tension and Smuts, who resolved never to be caught unawares by the unions again prepared contingency plans for mobilising all available imperial troops, the South African Defence Force and special constables. Draft proclamations were prepared specifying measures to suppress disturbances and maintain order and public safety, to be signed by the Governor-General and Smuts when required.
Then provocatively, a strike was triggered by notices of redundancy on the railways. On Friday 8 January, the Railwaymens' union called a general strike, but although most workshops closed the strike was ineffective, because too few of the train crews joined them. There were unsuccessful attempts to pull train crews or signalmen out and attempts at sabotage. On the 7th troops occupied railway stations and workshops in Johannesburg, Germiston and Pretoria.
Martial law was declared. The offices of trade unions and the SALP raided, as had printing shops that produced leaflets for the labour movement - and their machines destroyed. There were arrests, with no legal help allowed, of M.Ps, Provincial and town councillors, and candidates in forthcoming elections; and the entire executives of the engineering (ASE) and railway unions (ASRHS) were arrested although all opposed violence.

There were bans: on wearing SALP colours, the red flag, or using the words `scab' and `blackleg' said members of the Labour Party. `A man got 2 or fourteen days for looking "sneeringly" at a Policeman...' Meetings of more than six persons were banned; news censored; prominent persons restricted to their houses, or shadowed by police spies. Permits were needed to cross magisterial boundaries, or to use wheeled vehicles (and these were usually refused). Furthermore, an elaborate system of passports was used to stop strikers communicating; and persons approaching public buildings could be shot on sight.

On 15 January the mass round up of trade unionists and strikers began. The armed forces were instructed to root out the forces of `anarchy', and 4,000 troops invested the Trades Hall, trained a field gun on the building, and demanded the surrender of the incumbents - eleven members of the Federation executive, and thirtytwo pickets. Jones barely escaped arrest and deportation.

The strike was over by the 21st and the men went back defeated, `crushed and dispirited'. Their union was shattered, hundreds were dismissed and blacklisted, and those re-employed refused the right to write to the press or make their complaints public. Smuts then moved nine men covertly from prison in Johannesburg, on the night of 27/28 January, and placed them on the *SS Umgeni* in Durban on its way to Britain. Smuts claimed that there had been a `syndicalist plot' and was indemnified by parliament.

During the ensuing period of martial law Jones grew close to the two lawyers, F A W Lucas and S P Bunting, who acted as legal advisers to the SALP. In February he returned to his interrupted work on the books of the TMA, learning more about union activity. His friendship with Tom Matthews (of the TMA), already bonded by common Unitarian beliefs and the experience of two strikes, also deepened.

Later that month Jones moved to Germiston to act as agent for Colin Wade, a leading member of the SALP. The party fought 25 seats and won all but two, the 549 vote majority in Germiston being one of the biggest upsets experienced by the Unionists. Jones said in a letter that he was devoid of political ambition and sought no honour for himself, but noted that: `People do not know who to congratulate most, myself, or Colin Wade, the successful candidate'. He had a `delight at organization' and was being proposed for the General Secretaryship of the SALP, previously held by Bob Waterston, one of the deportees. Jones was prone to asthmatic attacks and concerned about working on the Rand but the movement needed him, and he accepted. At the beginning of August he was elected General Secretary of the SALP and commented: `the Labour movement out here is largely socialistic. Socialism of the large and glowing kind'.

In 1914 the SALP was very different from the small group Jones had joined in 1912. The party won over Unionists and Nationalists in town and country, some because of the government's failure to solve the economic problems of the country, or stem the widespread unemployment in the towns; and some repelled by the use of the armed forces against strikers on the Rand. The Labour Party was at its peak and the March elections were an index of its strength, but the euphoria generated by these successes concealed the tensions inside the party. The new members had taken a large step forward in joining the Labour movement - but they were conservative and bigoted. They claimed the right to the more highly paid jobs; or fought against being forced down to the level of the black wage earners. They found, among the older members of the SALP, many who agreed with them and together they acted to keep the party firmly in its racist mould.

While the rank and file moved (or kept) the party to the right, some party veterans, including Andrews, Bunting and Jones, questioned old ideas and moved to the left. This re-evaluation started during the miner's strike. Jones's former trust in Botha was shattered, but that was only the beginning. Events in South Africa and abroad were moving fast and, to answer questions that had become pressing, Jones turned to the British labour press and the pamphlets they advertised.

Some were sent by his Welsh friends, others Jones found by writing to Socialist parties in Britain. He received a heady mixture of journals covering a wide spectrum of politics, from Fabianism to Guild Socialism, syndicalism to parliamen-

tarism, from the ILP through Labourism, Christian Socialism, and ultimately radical pacifism and social patriotism. Besides introducing Jones and his friends to new ideas on socialism, on literature and the arts, they opened up a dialogue between socialists across the ocean, particularly with the editors of: *Clarion*, the vehicle for Robert Blatchford's ideas; *Labour Leader*, organ of the Independent Labour Party (ILP); *New Age*; and *Forward*, organ of the radical left in Scotland and highly recommended by Jones. In these journals Jones also found (and bought) works on socialism and pacifism, including Marx and Engels, Kautsky, Lewis Morgan, Paul Lafargue and August Bebel, and pamphlets on Industrial Unionism by de Leon, and works by Ramsay McDonald, H.G. Wells, Margaret McMillan and Leo Tolstoy. Ivon Jones was going through a profound personal crisis. He found less time for church going and, when he wrote in 3 August 1914 to say that he had come to South Africa `without a God in the world'. He wrote of depression and pessimism while in South Africa. Now a cure had been `found in the entirely spiritual enthusiasm for a new heaven and a new Earth, in which the publicans and miners do share, with which Labour's awakening fires us'. His old religious faith had been replaced, as he wrote on 8 October 1914, by the call to change society, art, religion and life itself. All other questions had become obsolete.

The Split Over the War

The outbreak of hostilities in Europe in 1914 split the SALP. The majority on the Executive stood by the Stuttgart resolution of the International Socialist Bureau of 1907 that called on Socialists to prevent war by all means available. But `in the event of the war breaking out, their duty was to intervene to bring it promptly to an end...[and] to use the political and economic crisis created by the war to rouse the populace from its slumbers and to hasten the fall of capitalist domination'.

Pacifists in the party formed the War on War League in September, employing a slogan, widely used before the war, as their name. The League claimed to be an independent body, but included in its ranks a majority of the SALP executive with Colin Wade as chairman. It had a two line constitution: `The members pledge themselves to oppose this or any other war at all times and at all costs.' The *War on War Gazette*, published by the League carried news of local activity and items culled from papers abroad.

The SALP continued as before, and nothing was altered at the annual conference. The opposing factions agreed to differ on the war and delegates put on a show of unity. Most of the out-going committee was returned, the majority being anti-war; and Jones was unanimously reelected General Secretary. The initiative stayed with the anti-war faction and, in Johannesburg on May Day, the resolution put to the assembled meeting in the name of the SALP reflected their views. It appealed to workers `belligerent and neutral, henceforth to concentrate their entire energy to the building up of such effective International labour solidarity and organization as can alone overthrow Capitalism, Militarism, and Imperialism, secure universal peace and emancipate the world'.

Although Jones did not join the War on War League, he said in his letters that he could write about little else than the war. He condemned journalists for whipping up war hysteria and spoke of the `colossal swindle in terms of religion and honour', that led to the mutual butchery of British and German workers in `fratricidal strife'. He chastised Christians who endorsed this carnage, and warned that `a day of reckoning' was coming.

It could not last. The pro-war faction called on the party to support the war. Jones drafted the reply under the title `The Labour Party's Duty in the War' signed by twenty prominent members of the party. This signaled the split in the party. The anti-warites broke reluctantly with the Labour Party. The years of work that had gone into building branches, winning recruits (among English and Afrikaans speaking workers) and fighting for their cause on Provincial Councils and the Legislative Assembly, were not lightly abandoned. Also, the memories of the two strikes, in which they had all fought together, bound the labourites together. When

he resigned his post as secretary, Jones still offered to serve the party and the War on Warites, ousted from the executive, did not leave the SALP. They had launched a paper the *International* on 10 September with Jones as editor. On the 24th the minority announced their break with the SALP, and launched the International Socialist League (ISL). Its objective, was `To propagate the principles of International Socialism and anti-Militarism, and to maintain and strengthen working class organization.' Shortly after the split became permanent they explained that they had stayed on in the hope that the SALP `might relent considerably in the application of its "see it through" policy, and afford some prospect of winning it back to what the Internationalists consider its native principles'.

International Socialist

One of Jones' first steps was to write to the International Socialist Bureau suggesting that a new international be formed, because the second international had succumbed to patriotism and its national sections had all sided with their governments in the war. Jones suggested that the new movement be headed by Karl Liebknecht and subsequently made contact with the anti-war socialists who constituted the Zimmerwald group in Europe. It was Jones who alone condemned the anti-German riots on the Rand, claiming that it had been devised by merchants to remove their German rivals.

In 1916 Jones wrote to the Socialist Labour Party in the USA, asking for literature by De Leon and asking for more details of the party's constitution. Even though the contact consisted of only two letters it is obvious that the SLP policy of industrial unionism made a profound impression on Jones. Thus it was that he was the moving figure behind the formation of the first all black trade union in 1917, the Industrial Workers of Africa. New evidence shows that this body participated actively in the strikes of African miners and workers in 1918, but collapsed under the pressure of state oppression and police penetration.

Jones went from strength to strength. He was one of the first world socialists to recognise the significance of the February revolution in Russia and he said that in the era of advanced capitalism the Russian workers would proceed to a second revolution. He guided the South African International Socialists through the intricacies of events in Russia, despite the scantiness of news that was available. His was the editorials in the *International* that greeted Lenin and Trotsky in October - and he continued through his life to support these two men. When Lenin died he claimed in the communist press in Britain and South Africa that Trotsky was the obvious heir. It did not happen that way - but his articles, read today, still demonstrate how correct he was in seeing this as the logical direction of socialist development.

Jones was no great theorist. On many occasions his insights were uncanny but he also erred on many important issues. One such occurred in 1919, the first months of which were marked by widespread pass burnings, riots and strikes of African workers. In Bloemfontein a strike centred in the black township led to the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union of Africa. Then, in April 1919, the white tramway men and power station engineers came out on strike in Johannesburg, leaving the town without lights or public transport for two days. W H Andrews proposed to them that they take control of the public utilities, and run them for the local inhabitants. The strikers set up a Board of Control (dubbed a `soviet') and restored the lights and trams. The authorities capitulated and after the workers' demands were granted, the `soviet' was disbanded.

There was little sympathy for the black workers from the white strikers, and men who had met to cheer their `soviet' in the Town Hall assaulted many black passers-by. The central strike committee also offered assistance to the government `to prevent outrages on white women and children' and although they added that Africans were entitled to organize to protect their positions, made no representation on their behalf. The ISL was not directly involved but Bunting, who defended many Africans in the magistrates court and was perceived as sympathising with their

cause, was frog-marched and severely manhandled by whites when he left the court at the end of March. On 4 April Bunting lambasted the Board of Control and the strikers in the *International*. In an editorial he noted first that it was a big advance to move from `old-fashioned strikes' to the control of industry and public institutions in the interests of the working class. But he condemned the Board on two counts. Firstly, they negated the whole idea of Workers' Council (even for whites) by excluding workers in industry, by not seeking to extend the Council outside Johannesburg and by announcing that they were only a temporary institution. Secondly, they had not sought to include the black municipal workers, and generally ignored or excluded `the vast mass of the workers of this country, the most flagrantly oppressed victims of the most glaring form of capitalist exploitation, the exploitation of the black races and their labour by white capital...'

Bunting was still groping for an answer and reverted to the SALP `solution', saying that under socialism the `Native problem' would be solved by Africans having their land restored and being provided with the facilities to develop their agriculture. This would remove the cheap labour basis of industry and the white man's fear of being undercut.

Jones saw more clearly that the black proletariat was at the very centre of the South African struggle - although he too was to provide a bizarre solution. Writing in the *International* on 14 February 1919, about Hertzog's appearance at the peace conference in Versailles, he said that he feared the Americans might favour the Nationalists and grant them state power in the northern regions, where they would use their poor white following `to crush the revolutionists and slaughter the native workers'. This made it imperative that the white workers be won over to the side of socialism.

This need to win the white workers was fed into Jones's rebuttal of Bunting in his article of 11 April. Here he compared South Africa and Russia, with their backward proletariat. ISL policy was directed towards class solidarity, he said, and it was pernicious to divide the working class, even if white and black workers were sharply divided in function by the colour line. It was wrong to look only at the mines, where whites were generally gangers (that is `contractors' who had their own gang of black workers and were paid according to the quantity of rock removed). In all other occupations blacks were labourers or hodmen, and this placed whites in a strong position, in that blacks had few skills, and could not be used as scabs against them. Only white workers were `as yet politically articulate,' and the functional gap between white and black workers made the former `masters of the political situation' and they could establish the dictatorship of the proletariat by themselves. Then, in a misconstruction of Trotsky's theory of `uninterrupted revolution,' Jones continued: `...as has been well said, *unless within twenty-four hours after the revolution the whole proletariat experiences the joyousness of freedom* (even though hungry), the revolution fails.'

To get the economy working (after this `revolution'), the white worker would be wholly dependent on his black fellow-worker and `the working class becomes one, knowing no demarcation of colour.' He then argued that the white workers were not themselves exploiters despite their supervisory duties. That was why there were no workers' political parties expressing an exploitative relationship: `The only way to account for this is by the assumption that the white proletariat is a revolutionary factor, it is the engine of revolution in South Africa, just as the comparatively small industrial proletariat of Russia steered the big mass of the Russian people into the Soviet Republic. Conceding that the black workers were `ultimately the true revolutionaries, with potentialities undeveloped, and that the clarity of the class struggle here is really due to their mass psychology,' he continued: `Be it so. The working class is interdependent...'

In conclusion, he said: `while not abating our cry for unity of the proletariat, white and black, let us not slide into the false idea of Unity which ignores or sneers at either section of the proletariat. For that is to be anti-proletarian again in the below-zero direction'.

Jones and those closest to him, unable to resolve the problem of colour within class, left behind a legacy that socialists would not easily overcome.

Jones did not have many years to live but in the few years left to him, although desperately ill, he was charged (together with L H H Greene) in the first major court case against communism in South Africa in 1919. The case revolved around a leaflet entitled `The Bolsheviks are Coming', which they wrote and distributed in Pietermaritzburg.
No short article can list all the contributions made by Jones to the young socialist movement. When he worked in Mozambique for a short period he wrote one of the very first articles in the socialist press on the pressures brought to bear on Africans by recruiters of labour for the gold mines. The telegrams between Lourenco Marques and Pretoria hummed over the presence of this undesirable man.

A New Lease of Life

Jones was an ill man when he finally left South Africa - but, after penning a report (while in Nice) on Communism in South Africa, he was invited to Moscow. This seemed to generate fresh energy and, weathering the famine and the cholera, he worked in as an international propagandist and interpreter of policy for the Comintern.
To describe his work over the next few yearts woul;d require a separtae paper. He learnt Russian and translated some of Lenin's works into English, and was the delegate for South Africa on the Executive of Communist International.
He wrote articles in the Russian press (in English) and was a contributor to the journals of the Communist Party of Great Britain and the CPSA. His analysis of the 1922 General Strike in South Africa, even where he was wrong, is still important for understanding the viewpoint of the South African left's position in that event. There can be little doubt that his writings helped the young party orientate itself during the strike, and there are suggestions that Jones' article on the subject led Lenin to look afresh at the role of South Africa in the world economy.
Jones' call on the Comintern at its conference in 1921 for the summoning of a world congress of Negro toilers was a further contribution that has yet to be recognized, and he was too ill to take the issue further. Nonetheless he was to circulate all relevant Communist Parties to assist in the calling of a Conference of Negro toilers. But Jones' work was cut short by a further deterioration of his health. In mid-1924 he died in a sanatorium in Yalta, leaving a legacy that lasted until the Comintern reversed the trend of work in South Africa in 1928 with its Black Republic slogan.

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* The above essay (which is a summary of the book written by Gwyn Williams and the author), is based mainly on several hundred letters written by Jones to George Evans in Aberystwyth, and a collection of articles found in the South African and British press, the journals of the British and South African Communist parties, and several Soviet journals between 1921-24.