

South African Communist Party 1935

For a United Front of the People Against Imperialism

Source: *Umsebenzi*, October 26, 1935.

Transcribed: by [Dominic Tweedie](#).

Editorial Note: After the Seventh Congress of the Communist International held in Moscow in July-August 1935, had endorsed Georgi Dimitrov's call for a broad united front to halt the drive to fascism and war, the Communist Party of South Africa acknowledged its own sectarian errors of the past and sought to ally itself with other anti fascist and anti-racist elements amongst both blacks and whites in South Africa. With the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, Italy's attack on Abyssinia, the Spanish civil war and Japanese aggression in the Far East, the danger of a second world war loomed ever more threateningly. At home Herzog's Native Bills heralded a new assault on the rights of the oppressed black majority, and Cabinet Ministers like Pirow openly expressed their admiration for Europe's fascist leaders. Fascist and racist organisations like the Greyshirts became active, stirring up hostility towards the Jews and the blacks and making physical assaults on the Communist Party's platforms.

The Communist Party took part in the great Bloemfontein conference on December 16, 1935, which gave birth to the All African Convention and also co-operated with the National Liberation League which had been formed in Cape Town. Party members also played a key role in the revival of the African National Congress towards the end of the 1930s.

During 1936 the name of the Party's journal was changed back to **The South African Worker**, though **Umsebenzi** remained as a sub-title. Possibly the intention behind this was to make the paper more acceptable to progressive whites whom the Party hoped to bring into the united front. A new slogan running across the head of the paper in each issue was: 'For a United Working Class Front Against Imperialism and War'.

Some leading representatives of the Native population of the Union of South Africa such as Prof Jabavu, Dr Seme, Matseke and others proposed a few months ago to call on December 16, this year, a joint convention of all existing Native organisations. These proposals could not but be greeted by all sincere fighters for the cause of the Native people, as such a convention is of great importance for our cause and a mass movement in favour of it was already called to life

The position of the Native population becomes ever worse. In the run for profits, in the desire to strengthen their power in our country, the Anglo-Boer imperialists are tightening the rope around the necks of our people. The prosperity in the mining industry, the improvement of the economic conditions of the Native population. It just brought tremendous profits to the mine shareholders and fat subsidies of the government to the rich landowners.

On the contrary, striving to retain their profits, imperialists started a new attack on the living conditions of our people. The colonial government wants to take away the vestige of our miserable political rights, it wants to rob the Native population of the Cape of its

franchise. The Native population suffers heavily of national oppression, landlessness and systematic robbery. It is now more than ever necessary, therefore, to unite the efforts of the whole Native population and its organisations for the defence of its human rights against the new brutal laws of the imperialist Union Government.

We fully agree with Mr John Chekedi, who says: 'We shall be made slaves indeed, unless we can unite and become a nation.'

The Communist Party pointed out many a time during the last years that the unity of action of the whole Native population and its organisations is the main and decisive condition which will bring our struggle to a victorious end. The Communist Party proposed many a time that united action with the African National Congress and the ICU should be established for the fight for the immediate demands of the people. But the leaders of the ANC and the ICU without explanation have continually refused our proposals. The more heartily we greet now the initiative of the ANC leaders in calling the JOINT NATIONAL CONVENTION.

In the fight for land and independence, our people have set up many organisations: political, economic, sport, religious and so on. Each of these has its program and particular principles. Each of these organisations offers its way to solve the questions that interest the Native population—to free our country from brutal imperialist slavery. In the same time the ANC, for instance, thinks it possible to regain our land and independence through co-operation with the Colonial Government and the Anglo-Boer imperialists, the Communist Party says that our people can fully free themselves from slavery only by driving out the Anglo-Boer exploiters from our country and by establishing an Independent Native Republic. Yet, let us put away the difference of the ways towards national liberation. All of us have one common cause, requiring the unity of our efforts, and however different we regard the solution of the question of national liberation, it is clear for all of us that in the interests of national freedom we cannot allow that the imperialists should tighten more and more the rope around our necks, that our last political rights should be taken away. The fight against national oppression and exploitation, the fight for the immediate, most necessary needs of the people — that is the basis for the united action of all the Native organisations, irrespective of their political differences. That is why we greet warmly the proposal to call a joint convention.

The necessity to call such a convention now is dictated also by other external events. Italian imperialism raises its fascist fist against the last and only independent Negro state in Africa-Abyssinia. The Italian fascists prepare for a bloody war against the peaceful Abyssinian people. We cannot remain indifferent in the fight of our Abyssinian Brothers for their independence. We must rally as a united people and stretch out our hand of solidarity to the Abyssinian people and hinder the Italian fascists in fulfilling their imperialist plans.

The significance of the convention is enormous. It will be the first convention in the history of our people's struggle for its freedom, on which there will be represented the vast masses of the Native population.