II. Moscow 1929-1930: The Negro Bureau, the (Provisional) ITUCNW and the World Negro Workers Conference

Although the Sixth Comintern Congress marked a decisive turn in Communist history, it was the Wall Street Crash during autumn 1929 and the subsequent global depression that was to have far-reaching global consequences. Not only were the economies of the industrial world shaken, resulting in massive unemployment in all affected countries, but it also negatively affected the living conditions of the colonial subjects. World market prices for colonial cash-crops stagnated and dwindled, investments in the economic and social sectors of the colonies had to be postponed, if not called off. As a remedy to the fiscal crisis of the colonial economies, most colonial governments decided to increase taxes and import tariffs. Following a Communist interpretation, the exploitation of the colonies by the metropolitan capitalists, including those of the USA, exacerbated the situation in the colonies, eventually paving the way for a virulent uprising of the oppressed masses. The question was: who would take the opportunity to lead the oppressed masses? Was it the bourgeois-nationalist leadership with whom the Comintern and its front organizations had tried to get in contact with or should one build up a new, radical one based on the grassroots movements of workers and peasants? However, the crucial question in Moscow was: was there at all such a radical grassroots movement in the colonies?

From the perspective of Moscow, the only radical movement in the African Atlantic was the American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC). Other groups, such as W.E.B. Du Bois N.A.A.C.P. and Marcus Garvey’s UNIA, were dismissed as either too bourgeois or too racial in their outline. The emphasize of both the Comintern and the African Americans working in Moscow at the end of the 1920s was not on political Pan-Africanism but on integrating the oppressed toilers in the African Atlantic into the global cause of the proletarian struggle against the capitalists. Class, not colour, was to be the unifying cause. Another group of potential allies were Africans and Caribbeans living in Western Europe. However, not much was known about their existence. The only potential organization was the Ligue de la Defense de la Race Negre (LNDR), a movement that tried to engage radical elements among African
workers and students living in France and which had been supported by the French Communist Party.

However, few direct contacts between radicals in the African Atlantic existed in early days of 1929. The only direct connections that were in place were the personal links between the African Americans in Moscow and those who had remained and were active in the USA. Of those radicals in Moscow, James W. Ford and Harry Haywood had by that time been placed in leading positions in the Negro Commissions of the Comintern apparatus: Haywood as vice-chairman of the Negro Bureau, Ford as chairman of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). Haywood and Ford, together with William L. Patterson, were engaged in the affairs of both units. While Haywood never left the Soviet Union, Ford and Patterson were to embark on various missions to Europe and the USA during the year. Ford toured France and Germany during the early months of 1929 and, together with Patterson, Jomo Kenyatta and Garan Kouyaté, participated at the Second Conference of the League Against Imperialism in Frankfurt in July 1929. At the end of the year, Ford left for the USA but returned to Europe in early 1930. By that time, George Padmore had joined the staff of the ITUCNW, arriving in Moscow in late December 1929.

According to Haywood’s reminiscence, the Negro Bureau devoted most of its attention to the work in the USA. The ITUCNW, too, at first emphasized the special case of the USA and demanded in March 1929 that the CPUSA focus on the “Negro peasantry of the Southern States of U.S.A.” However, as will be further discussed below, this was not entirely the case as the oppression and living-conditions of the ‘Negro toilers’ in Europe, Africa and the Caribbean were put on the agenda both by the Negro Bureau and the ITUCNW. Obviously the activities of the two committees were intermingled during 1929, perhaps mainly due to the fact that key activists, including the three African American comrades, were members of both. As a consequence, many of the statements issued in Moscow during 1929 where decided upon by the Negro Bureau whereas, it seems, the ITUCNW remained in the background. As will be discussed further below, the main objective of the ITUCNW was to organize the World Conference of Negro toilers, an activity that was to take momentum from the latter half of 1929.

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1 Many researchers have hitherto claimed that George Padmore also attended the Frankfurt Congress. However, as will be demonstrated below, his participation at the congress is dubious or even unlikely.
Back in the USA, party work had been paralyzed due to the internal division of the CPUSA and the rift of the Party between the Lovestone and Foster factions. On the other hand, this period also saw the rise into power of leading African American communists within the party: Otto Huiswoud, Otto Hall, Cyril Briggs and Richard B. Moore. The nomination of African Americans into leading positions in the Party, including the Party’s Central Executive Committee (CEC), was a direct reflection of the importance of ‘Negro work’ that had been stressed in the resolutions of the Sixth Comintern Congress. In 1929, the main vehicles for the engagement in ‘Negro work’ in the US South were the newly founded Negro Department of the Party and the ANLC, both chaired by Huiswoud.

Whereas Briggs, Moore and Hall remained in the USA and were engaged in the fight for the rights and against the oppression of the African American working class, Huiswoud was to embark on international missions. During spring 1929, Huiswoud was a member of the ‘proletarian delegation’ that participated in the Moscow hearings concerning the fractional division in the CPUSA. Arriving in Moscow in early April, Huiswoud was called to give a presentation about Negro work to the ITUCNW on April 16. On May 24, Huiswoud delivered his statement in the Lovestone affaire. Thereafter he seems to have started his ‘international’ career, perhaps, as Klehr and Thompson speculates, due to him being sidestepped by the Party as he was in opposition to the officially adopted Black Belt thesis.

The removal of Huiswoud from leading positions in the CPUSA as a form of public punishment has been questioned by Maria van Enckevort. She convincingly argues for a tactical manoeuvre and camouflage being orchestrated from Moscow rather than Huiswoud falling in disgrace during 1929. According to her, Huiswoud was recruited to work for the ITUCNW while he was in Moscow in April 1929. In order to have him removed from the CPUSA without arising suspicion that he was employed by the RILU, his ‘deviation’ from the official line was the underlying motive for him being ‘sidestepped’. In fact, her position is backed by the correspondence from the Negro Bureau to the CPUSA in early 1929, i.e., before the condemnation of Huiswoud. Already in mid-January 1929, the Anglo-American Secretariat had approached the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL) urging them to

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4 According to van Enkevort (2006, 50), Huiswoud stayed in Moscow from March until May 1929.
5 Minutes of meeting of the enlarged ITUC of NW of the RILU, April 16, 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fol 1-3. Present at the meeting were Foster, Bennet, [Vaughan] Mise, Haywood, Wilenkin, Meyerhoff, Ford (chairman) and Slavin (secretary).
6 As Haywood recollects, Huiswoud and the other members of the ’proletarian delegation’ arrived in Moscow on April 7, 1929. Haywood 1978, 292, 305.
establish a direct contact with labour organizations in the Caribbean.\(^9\) If such contacts were established at this point is not known.

The matter was taken up anew in July 1929, when the CPUSA – probably its Negro Department – decided to send a delegate to Jamaica to attend a congress of Marcus Garvey’s UNIA that was planned to be held in August 1929. Formally, the delegate was to represent the ANCL. Moscow was informed that Huiswoud had been unanimously appointed; his task being to show up the policy of the UNIA and to try to organize the radical delegates around the ANCL platform. As important was his mission to get in contact with local trade unions and local communist elements. To further strengthen Huiswoud’s mission to Jamaica, the Negro Bureau in Moscow was requested to publish a declaration in the press concerning the UNIA Congress in the name of the Negro Bureau’s of the Comintern and the RILU.\(^10\)

Huiswoud left for Jamaica in mid-July 1929. From Huiswoud’s and also Moscow’s perspective, his journey to Jamaica was a success. He was able to establish contacts with local radical elements and participated in the organization of trade unions on Jamaica. In December 1929, he claimed in a report published in *The Liberator*:

> Recently the American Negro Labor Congress through its Field Organizer, aided the workers in Jamaica to organize a union […] Committees comprising thirteen trades and occupations, such as carpenters, longshoremen, bakers, dressmakers, trainmen, etc, were formed and charged with the task of organizing local unions in their respective occupations […] Out of these committees has developed a permanent organization, “The Jamaica Trades and Labor Union”.\(^11\)

On August 13, 1929, Huiswoud challenged Marcus Garvey in a public debate on the class/race issue in Kingston when he attended the UNIA’s Sixth International Convention of the Negro Peoples. On the previous day, Huiswoud had outlined his position with regards to the ‘Negro Question’ in a newspaper interview:

> The Negro Problem is fundamentally a class problem and not a race problem, for race only serves to intensify the situation and gives an impetus to the further exploitation of the Negro.\(^12\)

\(^9\) Letter from the Anglo-American Secretariat to the 'Liga fuer Gewerkschaftspropaganda' (i.e., TUEL), draft dated 14.1.1929, signed J. Allison and L. Zoobock, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 1-3. Although not stated, it is likely that the letter had been prepared by the Negro Sub-Commission of the Anglo-American Secretariat.

\(^10\) Excerpt from ‘Letter from America’, dated 12.7.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 49.


\(^12\) *The Daily Gleaner*, August 12, 1929, quoted in Eckevort 2006, 247.
His class-conscious position was in contrast to Garvey’s race-conscious one. The message of the Garveyite movement was simple and clear: the ‘Negro Question’ in the USA was a race question, and its sole solution was the establishment of a free and independent ‘African nation’ in Africa. In contrast to Garvey, the communists – be it in Moscow or among the white leadership of the CPUSA – never regarded race to be a crucial issue. On the contrary, according to communist vocabulary, the ‘Negro Question’ was first and foremost a class question. In the public debate, Huiswoud – successfully – repeated his argument.13

Huiswood, together with his wife Hermine Huiswoud-Dumont, returned to the West Indies in the beginning of 1930. First he went to Jamaica, where he attempted to vitalize, with little success, the Jamaica Trades and Labor Union. Being expelled from the island by British colonial authorities as Communist agitators, the Huiswouds toured the Caribbean, visiting Haiti, Cuba, Columbia, Curaçao, Trinidad, Dutch and British Guiana.14 In June 1930, Otto Huiswoud attended the National Convention of the CPUSA. Officially, this meeting emerged as a turning point in his party career. Like several other African American, he ultimately rejected the ‘Black Belt theses’ and, as a consequence, lost his position on the National Negro Committee15. In October, he was called to Moscow, where he arrived on December, 11, 1930, was assigned to work in the Anglo-American Section of the Red International of Labor Unions (RILU).16 At that time, Harry Haywood and William L. Patterson had already left Moscow and had returned to the USA.

II.1. Ford in Western Europe: Critical Reflections and Practical Considerations

Lacking direct access to the African Atlantic, apart to America, one of the first tasks of the two Negro Committees in Moscow was to establish close links with the Communist Parties and anticolonial groups, especially the League Against Imperialism (LAI), in the colonial metropolises. Early in 1929, therefore, James W. Ford visited the Communist Parties in Western Europe to inform about the recent commitment of the Comintern and RILU in ‘Negro Work’ and to ensure the cooperation of the French and German Parties on this topic.

15 Cyril Briggs replaced Huiswoud as the Director of the Negro Department. In fact, Briggs served as Acting Director already during 1929.
On the top of his agenda was to ask the French and German party to assist the Negro Bureau and the ITUCNW in their efforts as well as to support the circulation of the *Negro Worker*. His first stop, however, was at Cologne where he participated and gave a speech at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (LAI) on January 16, 1929. After the meeting, he went via Brussels to Paris where he had a meeting with members of the Political Bureau and the Colonial Commission of the French Party on January 23, 1929. A few days later, he was in Berlin where he had discussions with the Political Bureau of the German Party.

Ford never touched in his reports upon the question whether or not he was travelling alone or as a member of a larger delegation. If he travelled alone his trip must have been organized in advance by someone in Moscow as Ford himself – presumably and most likely – did not speak German and French. Be as it may, having arrived at each stop-over, he would have reported at the Party Headquarters, who certainly would have been informed about his arrival and had arranged for the technical details at the meetings. Ford termed all his meetings as “conferences”, indicating perhaps that more persons did attend the event than only he and his local counterpart.

During his stop at Brussels, Ford had a meeting with Comrade De Brook who was the Secretary of the Belgian Party. In previous years, Brussels had been the meeting place for several meetings of the LAI and Belgium and its capital therefore had an aura of ‘neutral’ colonial metropolis. However, although the critical stance of the Belgian government towards the LAI were known in Moscow – Belgian colonialism was under no circumstances to be criticized, little was known about the state of infiltration in the colonies and anticolonial agitation of the Belgian Communist Party. Ford, therefore, eagerly inquired about the colonial (African) work of the Belgian party. To his disappointment, De Brook lamented that the Party itself was very small in Belgium and, consequently, had done little if any work in the Belgian Congo and practically no contacts existed with any African or local organization in the colony. Anticipated or not, De Brook’s information came as a blow, but he assured Ford that in future he and the Party would do their utmost to supply materials on the Congo and to establish contacts with Africans. Only one crucial problem was to be solved: the Belgian

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17 Speech of Comrade Ford at the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism, Cologne, Germany, January 16, 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 39-41.
20 See Ford’s various reports on his January-February 1929 tour in Western Europe as well as his report on the July 1929 Frankfurt Congress.
Party asked for detailed instructions about further actions and Ford was incapable to provide them with any.\footnote{James W. Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 62-68, this ref. to fol. 62.}

Ford’s next stop was at Paris where he held a “preliminary conference” with Comrade Semard in addition to “conferences” with the various sections of the French Party that were concerned with colonial work., such as with the Agit-Prop Director of the CPF Comrade Fountenay, with Comrade Herclet of the C.G.T.U. and with Comrade Ali who was Secretary of Colonial Work. Answering Ford’s inquiry about the colonial work of the CPF, Fountenay informed him that no agitation or propaganda work had been done in the African colonies or among African soldiers in the French army. Ford urged the Agit-Prop department of the CPF to make contacts with the African troops and distribute among them agitational literature among them as well as to prepare articles and materials on the ‘Nero question in the colonies’ and send them to the Party press. In addition, the Department was to assist in the distribution of the bulletin of the ITUCNW and to publish and popularize the Colonial Thesis of the Sixth Congress among the ‘native workers and peasants’, i.e., in the French colonies. Fountenay, however, doubted the practicability and possibility of executing Ford’s proposals with reference to the limited forces at his disposal.\footnote{Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 62.}

Ford also discussed the possibility of printing a French version of \textit{The Negro Worker} with Fountenay. It was outlined that about 2,300 copies were to be printed in the Party’s Bureau of Edition. The material for the bulletin was to be prepared in Moscow.\footnote{Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 62.}

The next meeting of Ford was with Comrades Herclet and M. Ali. This time the deliberations proved more successful from Ford’s perspective. Although Herclet and Ali admitted that the Party had little contact with the French African colonies, they had some contacts with African and Caribbean workers in France. The key problem for the Party was that despite continuous efforts to send material to Africa, they never get any reply from there: the comrades suspected that the mail was either not received or the recipients were afraid to answer. In their view, the only reliable method of accomplishing work in Africa was to send ‘Negro comrades’ there. Neither were the connections to the French Caribbean sustainable. The contact person on the spot, Comrade Ducadose, had not been able to achieve much
despite him having received some funds – 2,000 Francs – from the Party. It was agreed that he still was useful for local work “in his union” 24 but that a comrade from the USA be sent to the Caribbean to organize the general work there. 25 Interestingly, about half a year later Otto Huiswoud started his engagement in the region after having been to Moscow and met Ford and the Negro Bureau: coincidence or not?

Ford also ventilated with Herclet and Ali the plan of the ITUCNW to arrange a world conference of Negro toilers. The comrades backed the idea and argued that Paris was the ideal place of venue from a political point of view. The only crux of the matter was that the conference had to be organized illegally or ‘semi-legally’ if Paris was chosen and therefore suggested that a location in Germany was the best place to hold it legally. 26

Ford’s next meeting was with representatives of the Colonial Commission of the CPF. Ford also met ‘some African comrades’ on this occasion. Unfortunately, he did not reveal their identity in his report. However, it is possible that Garan Kouyaté participated in the discussion, as will be discussed below. Ford was informed that about 100 party members descended from Africa and the Caribbean and that ten of them could, in principle, be sent to Moscow for schooling. Positive news was that the Negro Worker had been well received and widely circulated. The French comrades even asked for more copies. However, in terms of the composition of the ITUCNW the French comrades urged Ford and the RILU to consider the nomination of a representative from the French colonies in Africa. 27 This request is perhaps an indication of the presence of Kouyaté as he was to become the West African member on the board of the ITUCNW?

However, much stronger evidence of the presence of Kouyaté at the meeting was the detailed information Ford received about the activities of the Ligue de la Defense de la Race Negré (LDRN; Ford: League for Defence of Negro Race). The League had been the cornerstone of direct communist engagement with Africans in France until the death of Lamine Senghor in late 1927. Since then, the League had split into two sections, one controlled by the CPF, the other by the Martiniquian born poet and novelist René Maran.

24 Ford does not specify which union he refers to.
26 Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 63.
27 Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 63.
Kouyaté’s position in the CPF-controlled section of the LDRN was at the time of the meeting unstable, and Ford noted – perhaps echoing Kouyaté – that

(a)t the present time we are gaining influence and winning a large section of the membership. However, the league is in need of strong and forcible leadership on our part. It is necessary to have in this league at the present time our best Negro comrades.28

Was this reference an indirect critique of Kouyaté and his position in the LDRN on behalf of the CPF and Ford? Or was the aim to boost his position? Unfortunately, Ford’s report is silent on this issue. What was important in his mind was the impressive African network of the LDRN. The League claimed to have branches at several locations in French West and Equatorial Africa as well as in the Belgian Congo, including Dakar, Abidjan, Douala, Bangui, Libreville, Stanleyville and Elizabethville.29 However, as for the CPF, the LDRN headquarters in Paris had little contact with the various branches in Africa. Therefore, the comrades at the meeting suggested that someone should be sent to Africa to organise these branches and to serve as a link to the headquarters in Paris.30

Last, but not least, Ford had a lengthy ‘conference’ with Comrade Semard where the tasks of the CPF with regard to its obligations in assisting the activities of the ITUCNW and the Negro Bureau were outlined. With regard to the cooperation with the ITUCNW, the CPF was asked to assist the ITUCNW in establishing contacts with trade union organisations in the French African and Caribbean colonies, to circulate the Negro Worker in and outside France, to make contacts with African seamen in the ports of France and to keep in contact with the British and Belgian parties on colonial work. In addition, the CPF was to establish a special Negro Trade Union Committee under the Colonial Commission. Concerning the cooperation with the Negro Bureau and its agenda, the tasks of the CPF were to make contacts with ‘Negro’ organisations and movements in the African and Caribbean colonies as well as with those in France, to establish a special programme for work among African troops in both Africa and France, to enlist Africans in the (party) schools in Paris for colonial work and to

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28 Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 64.
29 Ford listed a total of 21 branches of the LDRN in Africa: Dakar, Khombolo, Kuolak (Kaolak), Kedouge, Djourbel, Daloa, Dimbrokro, Ouidah (Whydah), Grand-Popo, Korsky, Bounaka, Grand-Basson, Abidjan, Lassondux, Douala, Libreville, Lambovini (Lambaréné?), Banghui, Muxtudi (Matadi?), Stanleyville and Elizabethville.
30 Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 64.
select suitable African students for further training in Moscow. Most importantly, a special committee on Negro work was to be set up under the Colonial Section. The task of this section was to establish regular correspondence with the colonies and the Comintern and to be in close contact with the British and Belgian parties.\textsuperscript{31}

The terms used by Ford in his report clearly reveal a shift in the emphasis of the two Negro commissions in Moscow. Whereas earlier textual references on ‘Negroes’, such as the ‘Negro question’, either included the USA and work among African Americans or particularly referred to this issue, Ford’s use of the word ‘Negro’ in his reports excluded any references to the ‘Negro question’ and African Americans in the USA. It can be argued that Ford’s agenda was a different one compared to Haywood already by the beginning of 1929 and was reflected in his discussions in Western Europe: his vision, it could be claimed, was that of a larger African Atlantic, Haywood’s rather being a more limited one and being restricted to the ‘American Atlantic’.

Ford’s next stop on his trip in Western European round trip was Berlin where he arrived on January 28, 1929. That day he had a conference with leading members of the Political Bureau of the KPD, among others Ernst Thälmann\textsuperscript{32}, Hermann Remmele\textsuperscript{33} and Heinz Neumann\textsuperscript{34}, about the possibilities for assistance in work in the colonies and among ‘Negro’ seamen. Following the proposal of the German comrades, Ford travelled to Hamburg where made a speech at the ‘Lenin-Liebknecht Celebration’ of the International Seamen’s Club and had a meeting with key Communists in Hamburg, the Secretary of the KPD-Hamburg Grube, the Secretary of the International Seamen’s Port Bureau Albert Walter and one Comrade ‘Deadman’ (?), unidentified.\textsuperscript{35}

While the cooperation with the French Party was an obvious one, the German Party had previously not been directly engaged in the Colonial Question. However, the inclusion of the German Party in the anticolonial front of the Comintern can be explained with the special situation that prevailed in Germany during the 1920s. In contrast to Great Britain and France, Germany and Soviet Russia had a close diplomatic relationship since the signing of the

\textsuperscript{32} Ernst Thälmann (1886-1944) became Chairman of the KPD in 1925. During the same year he was elected a member of the ECCI Presidium, a position he held for continuous years.
\textsuperscript{33} Hermann Remmele (1886-1939) was a member KPD Secretariat and Central Committee from 1921 to 1933. He was also a member of the ECCI Presidium from 191926 to 1933.
\textsuperscript{34} Heinz Neumann (1902-1937) was a member of the KPD Central Bureau and Politbureau and was the KPD representative to the ECCI.
\textsuperscript{35} Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 64-65.
Rapallo treaty in 1922. Although Germany had lost its colonial empire as a consequence of the Versailles treaty in 1919, there existed an influential colonial bourgeois lobby in the country. The Communists, especially the groups and institutions around Willi Münzenberg, such as the *Internationale Arbeiterhilfe* (IAH, Workers International Relief), the League Against Colonial Oppression and its successor, the League Against Imperialism, emerged during the latter half of the 1920s as important anticolonial and anti-imperialistic pressure groups. Most important, however, was the relatively free space for international activities that Weimar Germany presented for the Comintern. Apart of the IAH, the following communist organizations had their headquarters or secretariats established in Berlin: the European Bureau the International Red Aid (IRA or MOPR), the European Bureau for the Red Sports International, the International Union of Seamen and Harbour Workers (*Internationale der See- und Hafenarbeiter*, ISH), the Bureau of the Krestintern, the *Internationale Pressekorrespondenz* (Inprekorr), the League against Imperialism (LAI) and the *Europäisches Antifaschistisches Büro*. On top of these organizations was the Western European Bureau (WEB), which had been established after the Sixth Comintern Congress to serve as the watchdog of the ECCI and which also had its headquarters in Berlin.36

From the perspective of Moscow’s engagement in the African Atlantic, the most important connection to be established was with the International Seamen’s Club or *Internationales Hafenbüro für Seeleute* (*Club International des Marins*). This organization had established a series of so-called *Interklubs* in various ports of the world, the most important ones being in Leningrad and Hamburg. A central person was Albert Walter (1885-1980), who was the secretary of the International Seamen’s Port Bureau that, since 1924, had its headquarters at Rothesoodstrasse 8 close to the harbour area of Hamburg.37 Both he and the Secretary of the Communist Party in Hamburg were sent copies of Ford’s report of his discussions with the Political Bureau in Berlin to ensure a future cooperation between Hamburg and the ITUCNW.38

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As in Paris, Ford’s meeting with the party leadership in Berlin resulted in a number of suggestions for future cooperation. With regards of assisting the activities of the Negro Bureau, the KPD should engage in the establishment of contacts with the former German East African colonies as well as with Africans residing in Berlin. The KDP was also expected to support the activities of the ITUCNW, namely in circulating the Negro Worker, in contacting ‘coloured’ seamen who call at German harbours with the view of linking them to the ITUCNW network and to assist in organizing the World Conference of Negro Toilers. Ford even proposed that a special committee should be set up to assist in this work and in the general work concerning ‘Negro’ workers and the colonies. The most pressing issue on the agenda was to immediately secure a ‘Negro’ seaman at Hamburg to attend the forthcoming conference of the Transport Workers’ International Propaganda Committee which was scheduled to take place in Berlin in April or May 1929.39

Most important from Ford’s perspective was the meeting with Comrades Grube and Walter in Hamburg. The Germans presented Ford a detailed overview of the working conditions in the Hamburg harbour and the potentials for work with foreign seamen. Currently, they stated, work among Chinese and Indian was usually easy as they had their own sub-groups and restaurants where the Communists could reach them and spread propaganda leaflets. African seamen were more difficult to reach as they were not organized and had no special designated meeting places or clubs. In addition, propaganda and agitation work in the harbour itself was time consuming and was constrained due to the widespread area of the harbour and the limited personnel at hand. A further problem was the limited space of the Port Bureau’s housing quarters: it was too small and inadequate for general meetings, reading sections for the various national groups and for the general entertainment of the seamen. On the other hand, Hamburg was a key gateway to the Atlantic world. Ford was informed that there were 272 communists on 132 ships that leave Hamburg and call at various ports in West Africa on their way down to Cape Town. These comrades, Ford was assured, could be used for communication and contact with West Africa: “With good and reliable addresses in Africa […] our comrades can visit these places, hold conferences and carry out the directives which we sent them.” Not only that, Grube and Walter also suggested that they could work out some concrete plans for smuggling Africans out of the continent. Last, but not

least, Ford considered it advisable to have a ‘Negro comrade’ assigned for work in the Port Bureau at Hamburg.40

Back in Moscow in mid-February 1929, Ford sent a detailed report about his trip to the ECCI.41 He also presented a report to the Negro Bureau, including a detailed list of recommendations for future work. First, he pointed out that the French and the German Parties were to be sent a letter outlining the specific tasks of both the Bureau and the Parties. Second, a special letter was to be sent to the British Party, highlighting their task in concentrating on the work among the coloured seamen, on work in Africa and the (other) colonies as well as on the work among the Black population in England, especially in London. Third, Ford suggested that a representative from the Bureau should participate at the meeting of the Executive of the Ex-servicemen’s Organisation in America (United American Veterans) in March 1929, in order to discuss the question of African American (‘Negro’) soldiers42. (On this particular question, Ford suggested further that he were to report to the Anglo-American Secretariat on the function of that particular organization.) Fourth, to open direct connections with Africa, one or two comrades were to be sent there “for special organisational work.” Fifth, with regards to work in France, Ford proposed that the Negro Bureau was to establish a section in Paris with a comrade actively in charge. In addition, he recommended that “the paper which was started by the comrades in Paris,” i.e., the dormant journal of the LDRN, was to be revived and to be issued regularly. Last, but not least, referring to his experiences at the LAI meeting in Cologne, he proposed that “the Comintern raise and go more fully into the whole line and policy of the League Against Imperialism.”43

The last reference was clearly not directed to the Negro Bureau but to the ECCI, which also had received a copy of his recommendations.

40 Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 65.
41 Report by Ford on Trip in Interest of the Work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (Ford) [no date; probably written 14.2.29?], RGASPI 534/3/450, p. 53-59. Copies of Ford’s report are located in 495/155/70, p. 61-76 and 495/155/78, p. 34-49.
42 Ford had discussed the question of the ‘Negro’ veterans and African soldiers at two ‘conferences’, the first in Paris, the second in Berlin, with the Secretary of the International Ex-Servicemen’s Organization Comrade Richter. See Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 66-67.
43 Report of Comrade Ford to the Negro Bureau, 14.2.1929, RGASPI 495/155/77, fol. 222. Same document filed as (Ford), Recommendations to Negro Bureau, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 61.
II.2. The 1929 Manifesto of the Negro Bureau

One of Ford’s recommendations to the Negro Bureau in February 1929 was the urge to issue a more detailed and concrete plan of action with regards to France and the French colonies. The Bureau immediately took upon this proposition. It had already received a lengthy and very detailed description by the French Communist and ECCI-member Henri Barbé (1902-1966) on the dreadful conditions and brutal repression of an uprising in French Equatorial Africa. William Patterson consulted the report in addition to the French Party Organ, *L’Humanité*, which had uncovered the revolt in the French Congo, when he drafted a manifesto condemning the atrocities of French colonialism. On February 20, 1929, the Negro Bureau discussed and approved the Manifesto. It was to become the first public statement by Moscow directly dealing with the conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Patterson’s manifesto was a vivid combination of communist rhetoric and anticolonial language, addressed to “all workers and peasants of the world[,] all oppressed colonial peoples [and] the soldiers and sailors of the capitalist armies and navies.” The manifesto started with a declaration of sympathy and support to the revolt in the French Congo. The revolt, it stated, had been the consequence of “inhuman exploitation, ruthless oppression and persecution” which had forced “the defenceless people of French Equatorial Africa, in face of slaughter, to revolt against the pitiless course of course of French imperialism.” It accused both the French government and the Socialist press for silencing the atrocities in the French Congo, which, the manifesto pointed out, were “equal in savagery the barbarous tortures of the Leopold regime in the Belgian Congo.” Praise was given to the Communist press for having exploited the inhuman conditions in the Congo: a clear reference to that only the Communists had a truly anticolonial agenda.

After the particular case of the French Congo, the manifesto condemned on a more general level colonial oppression as well as the activities of the imperialist regimes and the social democratic parties. Colonialism, the manifesto declared, had nothing to do with the so-called ‘civilizing mission’ of the West but was in effect a predatory regime for capitalist exploitation of the oppressed masses. The outcome in the French Congo, the manifesto

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accused, was a reign of terror, forced labour and extortion that had reduced the population from 9 millions in 1910 to a mere 2 and a half millions about twenty years later.46

Echoing Comintern and Soviet fears for an impending war, the manifesto – as many others that were issued at this time – attacked the forceful conscription of Africans into the French colonial army: “in frantic preparation for the next war, a war to be waged against the Workers' and Peasants' Republic of Soviet Russia.”47

In conclusion, the manifesto issued an appeal to the working class throughout the world, highlighting the common interest of the colonial and the class struggle. In line with the Colonial Theses, the manifesto declared:

The heroic struggle of the Negro masses in the Congo against French Imperialism is part and parcel of the general struggle of the oppressed workers and peasants of the world against their common enemy Imperialism. The interests of this struggle demand from the exploited masses in general and particularly from the workers of the exploiting Imperialist nations, the fullest and most energetic support, as well as practical assistance, to the revolutionary Negroes in the Congo.48

A most interesting part of the manifesto was the self-declaration of the Negro Bureau to be the (sole) “representative of the Negro workers of the world.” In fact, this was the first time the African American Communists through the Negro Bureau publicly challenged the existing Pan-African and anti-colonial organizations and movements. The Negro Bureau put itself in the centre of anticolonial work not only in sub-Saharan Africa but throughout the African Atlantic. At the same time did the manifesto and its statement position the Negro Bureau as a radical proletarian organization: it represented the toilers, not the nationalistic bourgeoisie in the colonies.

II.3. The Negro Bureau and the British Communist Party

If the links between the Negro Bureau and the German Communist Party was to be of strategic importance, as noted above, the connections to the French and British Parties were crucial for the establishment of an African Atlantic network. Ford’s visit to France had

opened some avenues – at least, this was the impression in Moscow for the moment. Britain, however, proved to be a different and complicated case. Already in mid-January, a letter had been sent from Moscow to the CPGB informing about the tasks of the Negro Bureau and requesting the appointment of liaison person.49 As there was no reply from London to the request, a special meeting of the Negro Bureau was called on the 11th of March.

As a result of the meeting, a new letter, this time signed both by the Negro Bureau and the Anglo-American Secretariat, was sent to London. It included both a critique for the inactivity, if not neglect, of the CPGB in colonial work and a list of immediate practical actions to be taken by the Party.50 The Party was asked to establish at once “the closest connections between the party and all revolutionary groups and organisations in these colonies”, and instructed the Party to give direct support and practical assistance to all such groups and organisations. In addition, work among the African population in Great Britain should immediately be begun – implying that so far nothing had been done before. Special focus was to be on African sailors as they were regarded to be of utmost importance as a liaison between Moscow and the colonies:

Work must be carried out among the Negro seamen arriving in British ports. This is of particular importance in regard to the establishment of connections with the colonies. All party members and sympathisers among the white seamen sailing to Africa and West Indies should be also used for this purpose. The need for carrying propaganda in particular amongst native levies and other black troops is of special importance.

The Party was further asked to utilize all possible contacts with the African Atlantic through the League against Imperialism and the Labour Research Department. In Great Britain, the Party was instructed to investigate about the existence of a non-Party organisation among the

49 A copy of this letter, dated January 16, 1929, has not yet been located in the Comintern Archives in Moscow. Reference to the letter is made in a subsequent letter dated March 11, 1929.
50 Letter on Negro Work to the CC of the CPGB (draft), dated 11.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 2-6. Reference to the letter is also made in Marika Sherwood, “The Comintern, The CPGB, Colonies and Black Britons, 1920-1938,” Science & Society 60: 2 (1996), 140. It is likely that the draft version of the letter was discussed on March 11, after which it was sent for further corrections. This is indicated by another, later version of the letter which is dated 25.3.1929. The recipient of the letter was either the Central Commission (CC) of the CPGB. The second (corrected) version of the letter is filed as Letter from the Negro Bureau/Anglo-American Secretariat to the C.C. of the CPGB, London, dated 25.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 7-9.
51 Letter on Negro Work to the CC of the CPGB (draft), dated 11.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67.
Black population in Great Britain through which the Party could lead the work in the African and Caribbean colonies.53

Another immediate task was to build up a cadre of trained Black revolutionaries. For this purpose, potential and suitable persons were to be secured both from the African and Caribbean colonies and the Black population in Great Britain to be trained in the Party schools in Great Britain and the Eastern University and Lenin schools in Moscow.54

The letter ended with three instructions that directly echoed the Negro and Colonial Theses and positioned the Negro Bureau as a radical Pan-African organization. First, to counteract the “reactionary and counter-revolutionary doctrine” of Garveyism a special investigation should be made to ascertain to what extent “this as well as other bourgeois and petty-bourgeois segregation tendencies among Negroes” is prevalent among the African and African Caribbean population in Great Britain and the colonies. It was underlined that only the “truly revolutionary movements”, i.e., the Negro Bureau, could fight White chauvinism and support the anticolonial struggle. Second, the Party was ordered to keep its general propaganda among the population in the colonies with simple economic slogans but be based on studies of the concrete conditions in each country. Third, in accordance with the decisions of the Comintern, the Party was reminded to advocate the complete evacuation of all British colonies and to give their unreserved support to the fight for national independence and state sovereignty of the (Negro, i.e. African and Caribbean) colonies.55

In addition to the letter, a delegation was sent to Britain to further discuss the colonial work of the CPGB. The ‘Negro Delegation’, which possibly also included George Padmore, met Harry Pollit, the leader of the CPGB at the end of March.56 Although the discussions were held in a positive atmosphere, not much was achieved during the next months. Even Clemens Palme Dutt (1893-1974), who had been in charge of the 1925 established Colonial Committee of the CPGB,57 had to admit in an article in the Communist Review that although

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52 The term ‘Negro’ is used in the letter, meaning both Africans and African Caribbeans. I decided to use the term ‘Black’ instead.
53 Letter on Negro Work to the CC of the CPGB (draft), dated 11.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67.
54 Letter on Negro Work to the CC of the CPGB (draft), dated 11.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67.
55 Letter on Negro Work to the CC of the CPGB (draft), dated 11.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67.
56 Meeting with Negro Delegation (handwritten notes, submitted by Harry Pollitt, 30.3.1929), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 7-13. Pollit’s reference to Padmore as a member of the Negro Delegation has to be studied further.
57 Clemens Dutt had ample experience of colonial work as he had worked, together with his brother Rajani Palme Dutt, at the Comintern’s Colonial Bureau in Paris during the mid-1920s and had been a member of the Labour Research Department since 1922. In 1931-1933 he was one of the International Secretaries of the League Against Imperialism.
the Party had agreed on the struggle against British colonial policy, the decisions taken by the Party Congress of January 1929 still had to be translated into concrete actions.58

II.4. The Negro Bureau, the LAI and the Münzenberg-network

The League Against Imperialism (LAI) had been established as an outcome of the First Anti-Colonial Congress, which had assembled in Brussels in February 1927. Although the LAI had been established as a non-partisan platform to rally radical bourgeois and left-wing critical intellectuals, anti-colonial activists and organizations, its core group – and most influential – was its ‘Communist faction’, led by the German Communist Willi Münzenberg. Officially, the LAI was outlined as an independent radical anti-colonial organization, with the Radical Socialist and ILP-leader James Maxton59 (1885-1945) as its President and several distinguished European intellectuals listed as members of its Presidium, such as Albert Einstein and Henry Barbusse, but neither did Western authorities nor the Social Democratic parties, the Socialist (Amsterdam) International or the right-wing pro-colonial lobby believe such a claim. In their view, the LAI was nothing but another organization of the Comintern – which it certainly was. Political and practical propaganda and agitation campaigns were outlined in Moscow by the Eastern Secretariat and planned and reformulated in the headquarters of the LAI, which was located in Berlin and headed by Münzenberg, who was the Secretary General of the LAI, and his close aides Louis Gibarti (Laszlo Dobos) and Virendranath Chattophadyaya (1880–1937).60

Although the LAI had anticipated an active engagement in anti-colonial and anti-imperial campaigns, not much had been achieved after the 1927 Brussels Congress because its activities were hampered by internal quarrels and structural problems. On top of it, the main focus of the LAI was to be on Asia, especially India and China, whereas Africa was to remain in the background. The main reason for the LAI turning its back to Africa seemed to have been first and foremost due to problems in establishing effective channels for communication.61

In fact, Münzenberg and the LAI had tried to develop some connections with West African intellectuals and organizations over the years to come, but the overall picture of the

59 James Maxton had replaced Fenner Brockway as President of the LAI in late 1927.
60 See further Fredrik Petersson, ”We are no visionaries and utopian dreamers” – Fragments and Reflections Regarding the League Against Imperialism, CoWoPa – Comintern Working Papers 1/2005.
61 See further Fredrik Petersson’s forthcoming PhD thesis on the LAI.
Münzenberg/LAI-web with regards to Africa is still somewhat unclear. For example, the connections with E.A. Richards and the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union – initially via Münzenberg and the LAI, but effectively via Lozovskv and the RILU – indicate that links with African activists were used by several communist organizations. However, it is unclear whether or not the Africans were aware of this. Thus, for example, although the Gold Coast intellectuals had been in contact with the LACO and the LAI only, Münzenberg listed Gold Coast organizations, among others the GCFA, as an associated member of the IAH.

Contacts or not, the political conditions for the LAI had totally changed by the end of 1928. Due to the new course of ‘Class-against-class’ tactics adopted Moscow at the Sixth Congress of the Comintern, Münzenberg’s and the LAI’s ‘United Front’ approach had become obsolete. If Moscow had remained in the background before 1928, only indirectly trying to influence tactics and strategies and only monitoring the activities of the LAI and its headquarters via correspondence, a new approach was taken in 1929, culminating in the clash between the hard-line Moscow delegation and the socialist and ‘reformist-nationalist bourgeois’ delegates at the Second Conference of the LAI at Frankfurt and the ultimate purge of the latter ones from the LAI.

Despite the inactivity of the LAI in their engagement with the African Atlantic, Moscow still anticipated the organization as a potential network and platform. Already during the Sixth Congress, the LAI had been designated as the future central anti-imperialist supra-organization through which to forge ties between the colonial nationalist movements, the proletarian parties in the metropolises and Moscow, i.e., the LAI was to be tied to the Comintern apparatus to become one of its front organizations. In one of its resolutions, the Congress declared that henceforth it was ‘imperative’ for the Comintern to strengthen its relationship with and support to the League.

The new approach by Moscow towards the LAI was already felt at the meeting of the LAI Executive Committee in Cologne in January 1929. Among the delegation from Moscow was James Ford, who made his first international appearance at the meeting. Ford attended...
the meeting in his own words, as a representative of the Executive Committee of “the League at Chicago,” the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the American Negro Labour Congress. Whether or not he actually was a representative of the TUEL and the ANCL can be discussed, however what mattered was his claim of representing not only the African American perspective but also an African Atlantic one. Ford’s global African approach was directly articulated in his declaration that the ITUCNW was planning to organize a World Negro Workers Conference. For this, Ford and the ITUCNW needed the assistance of the LAI.

In line with other members of the Moscow delegation, Ford criticized the LAI for hitherto having failed to emerge as a mass-organization and to support the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle in the world. Ford condemned the incapability of the League of rallying behind the anti-imperial struggle of the Chinese, Indonesian, Arabian and Negro toiling masses, and of its lethargy in protesting against British and Dutch colonialism. Turning to the issue of self-determination of the colonial peoples, Ford criticized the League for its lack of support to the demands of the ‘Negro’ workers and peasants in South Africa, in the Caribbean and in the USA. He further warned about falling to the flirt of various reformist ‘Negro’ organizations, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Garvey Movement, the Pan-African Congress, and the Negro Intellectuals, accusing them all for cooperating with the imperialists and capitalist and for not offering any real fundamental resistance to imperialism:

In many cases they only ask for reforms under imperialism, for the support from imperialists to help build a government off Negro capitalist to further exploit the Negro toiling masses. This is the whole trend of thought of Negro intellectuals in and outside America. The League must support a fight against reformism in all its forms.

Ford’s use of language in his speech clearly reveals his staunch support to the new ‘Class-Against-Class’ tactics of the Comintern. By rejecting any cooperation with the various African American organizations and intellectuals and stamping them all as ‘reformist’, he

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67 Probably the Trade Union Educational League (TUEL). Ford had been its representative in Moscow already at the Fourth Congress of the RILU in 1928. In late 1929, when Ford had returned to the USA, he became the Head of the Negro Department of the Trade Union Unity League, TUUL (Haywood 1978, 328). The TUUL had replaced the TUEL in August 1929.

68 Ford’s speech at the meeting of the EC of the LAI, Cologne, January 1929 (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 74-76.

69 Supplement 3. Speech of Comrade Ford at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism, Cologne, 16.1.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 75.
indirectly declared that the only and genuine mouthpiece of the oppressed masses in the African Atlantic were the representatives of the Negro Bureau and the ITUCNW. In his evaluation report to the ECCI, Ford argued for a thorough revision of the policies of the LAI:

> It is clear however that the League is dominated by the reformists. In the future if we are to pursue and carry out our new line, especially at the World Congress of the League we must begin immediately to mobilise our forces and bring large masses of workers and peasants, especially of the colonies, who are under our influence, into this congress. We must begin immediately to prepare organisationally and ideologically.⁷⁰

Echoing the new tactics to be applied, he called in his speech in Cologne for a “organised, systematic, campaign against imperialism,” and ultimately for a militant struggle against imperialism. To meet this end, the LAI was to have a strong workers and peasants basis as well as a strong trade union basis. The global outreach of the LAI was to be achieved if it was to link up with three upcoming conferences – all to be organized – either directly or indirectly – via the RILU or its subcommittees: the Latin-American Conference in May, the Pan-Pacific Conference in August, and the Conference of the ITUCNW “which will take place in early fall.” With regards to the last mentioned conference, Ford’s declaration was rash: at this point there existed only a vague idea and a commitment to organize such a conference but no practical plans. However, in his mind the upcoming LAI Congress should be postponed until after the abovementioned conferences “so that we may have the opportunity to draw these masses into the League” as Ford envisaged them to bring together millions of workers eager to fight against imperialism and colonial exploitation.⁷¹

Neither Ford nor the rest of the members of the two Negro committees in Moscow were able to concentrate on their relationship with the LAI during spring 1929. Other more pressing questions, such as the connections with the CPGB and CPF as well as the situation in the USA, seem to have consumed all energy of the African Americans in Moscow. Among the leading circles in the Comintern itself, the lethargy, if not apathy, of the metropolitan Communist parties in their non-engagement with the colonial question was to be heavily criticized during spring 1929. By mid-March 1929, the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI had established a commission under the chair of Robin Page Arnot to organize a Colonial

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⁷⁰ Ford, Report on trip in interest of the work of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU and the Negro Bureau of the Comintern, and the Meeting of Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism (copy), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 68.

⁷¹ Supplement 3. Speech of Comrade Ford at the meeting of the Executive Committee of the League Against Imperialism, Cologne, 16.1.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 76.
Conference to discuss the colonial work of the Western European parties, including those of France, Britain, Belgium, Italy and the Netherlands. Reports of the parties on the situation in the colonies and their respective activities were to be discussed, in addition – and most pressingly – “all sections of work on all colonial territories hitherto not dealt with” as well as “practical steps to realisation.” The metropolitan parties were asked to deliver detailed accounts about their colonial activities, in particular outlining:

i. Work among the peasantry,
ii. Study of the conditions of the peasantry,
iii. Building of connections,
iv. Despatch of metropolitan workers to colonies,
v. Supply of literature,
vi. Ideological guidance,
vii. Economic and social analysis of the colonies, and
viii. Anti-militarist work.

Other issues to be discussed were the work among colonial representatives in the metropolitan countries as well as the colonial in the trade unions and in the party press. Arnot subsequently visited London to discuss colonial work and the plans for the Colonial conference with members of the CPGB. After his return to Moscow, the British Party was requested to send detailed reports on its colonial work as well as on South Africa, India, the Near East and the Arab countries, Equatorial Africa and the Caribbean by the end of March.

Although the neutral tone, the agenda of the conference was an open accusation on behalf of the Comintern for the lack of interest on the Colonial Question and on colonial work among the Western European parties. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the conference was planned to be held in Berlin in May 1929. The Colonial Conference was outlined to be a closed-door event with a restricted number of attendants, including members of the political bureaus of the various parties, specialists in colonial work and colonials. Apart from the delegations from the metropolitan parties, various units of the Comintern-Apparatus were to send delegates: the Comintern and KIM, including the Eastern Secretariat, four persons, the

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72 Minute of Commission appointed to prepare conference on colonial work of Western European parties, 19.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol. 1-2. The (aborted) Colonial Conference will be dealt with in dept by Fredrik Petersson in his forthcoming PhD thesis on the League Against Imperialism (Petersson, forthcoming).
73 Proposal from Eastern Secretariat (undated) Proposed Colonial Conference of West European Parties, based on internal evidence the document can be dated to ca. 19.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol 3-5. See further Petersson (forthcoming).
74 Letter to the Communist Party of Great Britain, dated 25.3.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 10-12.
LAI, the WEB, and the OMS one delegate each. The Negro Bureau was proposed to send one delegate.75

A few weeks later, a confidential resolution by Comrade L. Magyar about the organisation of the colonial work of the European parties was discussed by the members of the Colonial Commission. Starting with a notion that practical work in the colonies cannot be organized directly through the ECCI but had to be organized by the corresponding metropolitan parties, the report admits the increasing difficulties in maintaining such contacts due to the minutely surveillance of government mail and postal services. In effect, it had become more or less impossible to use ordinary mail services and channels. However, according the report, such a situation had resulted in the false presupposition of the metropolitan parties that the solution to the problem was to be found in Moscow:

It is generally considered that it is the duty of the centralised OMS apparatus to establish connections everywhere and to take care of the sending of material. This is entirely false. The Parties must change their attitude with regard to this and discover for themselves ways to forward material to comrades in the colonies.76

The report underlined the need for the metropolitan parties to do their utmost to establish and strengthen various ways in establishing and maintaining regular contacts with the colonies – in one or the other way. Party members were to be sent to the colonies on agitation and propaganda missions and, when possible, to give direct technical assistance to the colonial parties. In addition, party members were to be sent to the colonies as emigrants to work for a definite period in the colonies at their own trade and at the same time carry on their Party activities among the local population. A third duty was to engage sailors, workers, soldiers and students from the colonies resident in the European metropolises.77 In fact, this part of the resolution emerged not only as an agenda for future action in general but presented a strategy and detailed plan of practical agitation to be adapted by all Comintern and RILU groups which were engaged in anticolonial activities:

75 Proposal from Eastern Secretariat (undated) Proposed Colonial Conference of West European Parties, based on internal evidence the document can be dated to ca. 19.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol 3-5. See further Petersson (forthcoming).
76 Confidential resolution: The Organisation of the Colonial Work of the European Communist Parties, no author [author of the original version in German: L. Magyar], dated 28.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol. 49-55.
77 Confidential resolution: The Organisation of the Colonial Work of the European Communist Parties, no author [author of the original version in German: L. Magyar], dated 28.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol. 49-55.
In the great sea ports groups must be formed by the members of our seamen’s and transport worker’s nuclei, whose PARTY ACTIVITY [original emphasis] consists chiefly in work among the sailors coming from colonies. They must carry on agitation among colonial sailors, distribute leaflets and literature, take the soldiers with them to meetings, make acquaintances among them which may be useful later in the selection of contact people, etc., etc. Attempts must be made to draw the workers from the colonies into the Party, make good Communists of them, provide opportunities for them to maintain contact with their friends and relatives, to explain to them how and what they must write to the people at home and thus to prepare the way for these workers to be able to carry on party activity in their home countries later on. Of special importance is the work among the soldiers in the colonial troops, etc. The students studying in the universities of the big European cities often belong to branches of the national-revolutionary movements. By tenacious and careful work some of these can be made into good Marxists. […] Our Communists must penetrate into the ranks of these students, into their organisations, meetings etc., in order to make the Communist influence felt among them.78

Although the circulation of the confidential March 1929-Resolution within the Comintern-Apparatus is not (yet) known, the above quoted tactical considerations were within a year to evolve as the practical guidelines for work within the African Atlantic, as will be seen in the next Chapter.

Meanwhile, the Colonial Commission faced some problems in their preparations of the conference as none of the metropolitan parties, apart from the Dutch CP, had sent any reports on their colonial activities by the end of April. As a consequence, the date of the conference was postponed to early June 1929.79 At this point, Arnot turned to Ford and Haywood and asked them to prepare an account of the situation in Africa since with special focus on the situation since the Sixth Comintern Congress. Arnot underlined that the focus of the report was on the political situation, not to be drafted as a resolution, and apart of a general overview of conditions in Sub-Saharan Africa the report should include separate sections on South Africa and Kenya.80 Arnot’s request about the special information on South Africa and Kenya is perhaps a reflection of the Colonial Commission’s earlier desire to put a special emphasis on these two countries – a lengthy ‘thesis’ by Magyar on the political situation in the colonies paid special attention to these two countries under the heading of the Negro Question.81

78 Confidential resolution: The Organisation of the Colonial Work of the European Communist Parties, no author [author of the original version in German: L. Magyar], dated 28.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol. 49-55.
80 Confidential Letter from Arnot to Ford, 29.4.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol 78., confidential letter from Arnot to Haywood, 29.4.1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol. 79 (same content as Ford’s letter).
81 Confidential report to Magyar by Eastern Secretariat/Arnot, April-May 1929, RGASPI 495/18/670, fol. 22 (original report/thesis not included?)
At first, Moscow planned to keep the Colonial Conference separate from the upcoming LAI Congress which was planned to be held in Frankfurt at the end of July 1929. However, by the end of May, the Eastern Secretariat once again had to inform the delegates that the conference had been postponed as at least the British still had not delivered the reports on its colonial activities. A new date was suggest to mid-July and to be connected with the preparations of the LAI Congress. Eventually, as Fredrik Petersson has demonstrated, the conference never materialized. Instead, the critical issues on the agenda of the conference, i.e., the colonial work of the metropolitan parties, were discussed by the 10th Plenum of the ECCI which commenced shortly before the Frankfurt Congress.

The Negro Bureau was engaged in the preparations for the upcoming LAI Congress in early May 1929. On May 3, 1929, the Eastern Secretariat delegated Comrade Arnot to prepare a resolution on ‘the struggle for emancipation of the Negroes in Africa and America’ which was to include separate paragraphs on East and South Africa either as a separate special resolution or as part of the main one. In addition, Comrade Moirova was to draft the text for a resolution on ‘the social, political and economic situation of women in the colonial and semi-colonial countries’. It is likely that Arnot turned to the Negro Bureau and assigned its members to prepare the draft versions of the documents. The task to write a resolution on the Negro Question in the USA and Africa was given to Haywood and Comrade Mingulin. The three other resolutions were to treat conditions in Africa, namely South Africa (to be prepared by Haywood and Mingulin), French Congo (Wilson, i.e., Patterson) and on Indians in Kenya (Wilson). The distribution of the duties for Haywood and Patterson clearly reflect their position as experts in particular areas: Haywood’s was on the Negro Question, which included also South Africa, Patterson’s was on Africa – at least, he had drafted the previous text by the Negro Bureau on the French Congo. On the same meeting, Ford was asked to prepare a chronicle on all events in British Africa since mid-1928 and, together with Haywood, to prepare a two-page thesis on the political situation in Africa in addition to a detailed report on the same issue for the Political Secretariat. As noted above, the thesis and the report had been commissioned by Arnot as background material for the planned – but postponed and finally suspended – Colonial Conference.

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83 See Petersson (forthcoming).
84 Confidential decision on resolutions for the second LAI congress, Annexe (b), 3.5.1929, RGASPI 495/60/134a, fol. 35.
85 Ivan Mingulin (1900 - ?) was an official of the ECCI from 1927 to 1937.
86 Memo on Negro Work for Month of May, May 3, 1929, RGASPI 495/155/74, fol. 8.
The draft versions of the four resolutions were discussed at a meeting of the Negro Bureau on the end of May, which nominated an editorial committee to finalize the texts and asked Haywood and Wilson to make revisions and shorten their documents.\(^87\) Two days later, on May 29, 1929, the resolutions were accepted with amendments by Ford. The editorial committee, consisting of Ford and Haywood, was asked to prepare the final version of the texts and thereafter to submit them to Comrade Bittelman who, at that time, was Münzenberg’s main contact in Moscow during the preparations of the Frankfurt Congress and was a key member of the Organisation Sub-Committee of the Eastern Secretariat for the preparation of the Frankfurt Congress.\(^88\)

At this time, the Negro Bureau was ready for its next move. In a letter, dated May 31, 1929, Ford proposed to Münzenberg that the latter should engage a large African participation at the upcoming Frankfurt Conference. These Africans, he suggested, would form a kind of sub-committee and could start the preparation for the planned congress of African workers.\(^89\) Ford’s proposal was backed by the Organisation Sub-Committee,\(^90\) and Alexander Bittelman\(^91\) informed in one letter to – presumably – Ford at the Negro Bureau that they should send a delegation to Frankfurt.\(^92\) In addition, the Organisation Sub-Committee nominated a member of the Negro Bureau to be included in the American delegation.\(^93\) On May 6, the Negro Bureau, this time under the chairmanship of Nasanov and Lovett Fort-Whiteman (alias Charlton) being present – while Harry Haywood for some reason was absent – had on its agenda the selection of a ‘Negro Comrade from the Comintern’ to the Frankfurt Congress. According to the outline, the Negro Comrade had ‘apparently to be from the A.N.L.C.’ Comrade Bittelman informed the meeting that these orders had come from the Small

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\(^{87}\) Minutes of Meeting of Negro Bureau, 27.5.29, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 15.
\(^{88}\) Minutes of Meeting of Negro Bureau, 29.5.29, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 16. On Münzenberg’s and Bittelman’s connections during 1929, see Petersson (forthcoming).
\(^{89}\) Letter from John Ford to the Commission on the Anti-Imperialist League Congress, Profintern, 31/5-1929, RGASPI 542/1/30, fol. 48.
\(^{90}\) Minutes of meeting of Organisation Sub-Committee for the preparation of the Anti-Imperialist Congress, 5.6.1929, RGASPI 495/60/134a, fol. 37. Ford’s proposal had already been approved by the Small Organisational Commission for preparation for the Anti-Imperialist Congress on May 31, see Letter to J.W. Ford, dated 7.6.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 28. Ford had been informed about the decision on the same day.
\(^{91}\) Alexander Bittelman (1890-1982). Russian-born emigrant, who was elected to the central executive committee of the CPUSA in 1919, who participated in several meetings and congresses of the Comintern during the 1920s. In 1929 he was relieved of his functions in the Politbureau of the CPUSA by a Moscow decision and was recalled to Moscow for two years. He returned to the USA in 1931 but ceased to play a leading role in the party. In November 1960 he was expelled from the party as a “revisionist”. See further Branko Lazitch (in collaboration with Milorad M. Drachkovitch), *Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern*, Stanford: The Hoover Institution Press 1986, 31.
\(^{92}\) Letter from Bittelman to the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI, Moscow June 7th 1929, RGASPI 542/1/30, fol. 71.
\(^{93}\) Minutes of meeting of Organisation Sub-Committee for the preparation of the Anti-Imperialist Congress, 5.6.1929, RGASPI 495/60/134a, fol. 37.
Commission of the Eastern Secretariat which was in charge of the preparations of the Congress. The Negro Bureau selected Comrade Wilson (Pattersson) to attend the congress.\(^{94}\) A few days later, Bittelman informed Münzenberg that Patterson was to attend the congress as a representative of the CPUSA.\(^{95}\)

By 1929 it was evident that the Münzenberg/LAI-web did not extend over Sub-Saharan Africa apart from the South African connection.\(^{96}\) Consequently, there was no delegate directly from West Africa at the Second Conference of the LAI that was held at Frankfurt from the 20\(^{th}\) to the 31\(^{st}\) of July 1929. Certainly E.A. Richards did not participate in the conference; the only West African present was Garan Kouyaté who represented the LDRN.\(^{97}\) Richard, in fact, had informed the LAI Secretariat about his difficulties to attend the conference, thus indicating that at least the connection between Berlin and Freetown still existed:

\[
(I)t\text{ is with deep regret that I have to inform you our Union will not be represented in the forthcoming Congress, much as we would have liked to be with you in November, and lay all our grievances before the Congress, we cannot afford to undertake that as our Union, though it comprises nearly all the artisan staff is relatively a small one and the little fund we had was nearly exhausted by the last railway strike here… Signed E.A. Richards and U.J. Cole.\(^{98}\)
\]

However, although the 1929 Conference marked the nadir of Münzenberg’s connection with Africa, at the same time it witnessed the beginning of a new attempt by the Comintern to establish links with African intellectuals.

It seems as if Münzenberg’s direct contacts were less important than was the platform and the web he had created. One key link between Münzenberg and the British colonies was Reginald Bridgeman, the Secretary of the British Section of the LAI. Bridgeman and Münzenberg were in close contact, as was noted by British Intelligence,\(^{99}\) but even more so, Bridgeman served as the link between the LAI and Arnold Ward and his Negro Welfare Association. In fact, it was even claimed by the British Section of the LAI that it had

\(^{94}\) Minutes of Meeting of Negro Bureau, 8.6.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 17.
\(^{95}\) Letter from Bittelman to Willi Münzenberg/Berlin, [copy], Moscow 11.6.1929, RGASPI 542/1/30, fol. 72.
\(^{98}\) Copy of letter from the West African Railwaymen’s Union to the LAI, 1929, TNA 323/971/1.
organized the London Negro Welfare Association. Even more important, Bridgeman was at this time the key contact person between the LAI, or at least its British Section, and various African intellectuals such as the Gambian politician and trade union activist E.F. Small. Further indication of Bridgeman’s central position is evident from a letter from the LAI Secretary Chattopadhyaya to Bridgeman in 1930. Bridgeman was asked to provide the address of the West African Student Union (WASU) and for a report on the possibilities of getting into touch with students from the Gold Coast. By 1930 British Intelligence was convinced that Münzenberg was at the centre of the spider’s web of Communist activities in Germany and regarded the LAI as a highly troublesome: “As is well known, the League exists foment unrest and sedition in colonial countries, especially British possessions.” Not surprisingly, Münzenberg’s plan to visit London in March 1930 for a meeting with Bridgeman was prohibited by the British authorities.

Nevertheless, Bridgeman attended the 1929 Frankfurt Congress as did other key persons, namely James Ford, William Patterson and Jomo Kenyatta. Johnstone Kamau, later Jomo Kenyatta, was a Kikuyu intellectual from Kenya who had arrived in England during spring 1929. Although he at this point was not a communist, his critical approach towards British colonial rule in Kenya soon made him to contact Fenner Brockway and Reginald Bridgeman. Most probably it was through Bridgeman that Kenyatta was made to attend the Frankfurt Conference. However, it was Münzenberg who paid for Kenyatta’s trip to Frankfurt.

The 1929 Frankfurt Congress marked a break in the development of the LAI: the organization was put closely under the surveillance of the Comintern and its watchdog in Berlin, the Western European Bureau (WEB). The International Secretariat of the LAI was supplemented with a reliable member of the ECCI, Bohumir Smeral (1880-1941), who was to serve as one of its secretaries as well as a link between the ECCI, the WEB and LAI.
the Congress itself turned out to be fiasco from Münzenberg’s perspective, it marked the rise of the African Atlantic dimension of the Comintern network. Whereas Patterson and Kenyatta remained in the background at the congress, Kouyaté and Ford delivered anti-imperialist harangues in an extremely militant tone, anticipating that all past rebellions in Africa against European rule were but a ‘prelude’ to the clashes to come and calling for the complete national independence for all of the colonies in (West) Africa.\(^\text{108}\) In another appeal, carefully prepared in Moscow, the Negro toilers were urged to join the international struggle against the imperialist war, inciting them to organise strikes and demonstrations against imperialist wars, the Negro soldiers to organise revolutionary groups and to refuse to take up arms against the proletariat, and the Negro colonial constabularies “to refuse to go against your brothers for the imperialists.”\(^\text{109}\) In its concluding manifesto, the Frankfurt Congress affirmed its support for the anti-imperialist struggle in Africa by declaring:

> The revolt of the African peasantry and the struggle against the inhuman oppression of English, French, Belgian, Italian and Portuguese imperialism and its agents, as well as the recent insurrection in French Equatorial Africa, are only the beginning of few more extensive struggles against imperialist domination in Africa.\(^\text{110}\)

Ford and Koyaté were Münzenberg’s key partners in his African network to be established, manifested in a photograph of the three of them that later was to circulate in various publications. Ford was elected to the Executive Committee of the LAI, but the claim in his report that other ‘Negro comrades’ were elected to the General Council of the LAI is dubious as the existence of such a Council of the LAI after the Frankfurt Congress is doubted by Fredrik Petersson.\(^\text{111}\) To further strengthen the African dimension of the LAI, the Congress decided to establish sections in Africa and to link up with revolutionary African organizations  


\(^\text{109}\) Appeal to Negro toilers (copy, no date, but based on circumstantial evidence it is probably drafted before 15.7.1929), RGASPI 495/155/76, fol. 5-7.  

\(^\text{110}\) Wilson 1974, 180, quotation from ‘Manifeste du Deuxième Congrès Mondiale de la Ligue Anti-Impérialiste,’ Correspondence Internationale IX: 68. It is likely that both the ‘Appeal to negro toilers’ and the LAI Resolution bear the same author, namely R. Page Arnot. At a meeting of the Polit-Secretariat Commission of the LAI on May 3, Arnot had been given the task to prepare the text for a resolution on ‘The struggle for emancipation of the Negroes in Africa and America’, see ‘Confidential decision on resolutions for the second LAI congress, Annexe (b), 3.5.1929, RGASPI 495/60/134a, fol 35. The Resolution on the Negro Question was approved by the Congress on July 26, 1929, Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz (InPreKorr) 67, 1929, 1565.  

\(^\text{111}\) Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, p. 50-52. See further Petersson (forthcoming) and HW/FP/email correspondence 12.9.2008
already in existence.\textsuperscript{112} Both tasks proved much more difficult to accomplish in practice as the LAI or Moscow did not have any links to Sub-Saharan Africa and the search for ‘revolutionary African organization’ turned out to be a quest of a chimera. Nevertheless, from the perspective of the Africans and African Americans present in Frankfurt during the summer heat of July 1929, the promises of an anticipated revolution in Africa looked better than ever.\textsuperscript{113}

Previous research has almost unanimously declared that George Padmore participated at the Congress.\textsuperscript{114} According to his biographer, J.R. Hooker, Padmore was sent by the CPUSA as a delegate to Frankfurt and never returned to the USA,\textsuperscript{115} whereas Wilson claims that it was Ford who had brought Padmore from the USA.\textsuperscript{116} However, there are several flaws with these propositions. First, it is most unlikely that Ford could have visited the USA before the Frankfurt Congress as he reportedly was in Moscow from March to June 1929. Second, Ford listed all members of the Negro Delegation in his report on the Frankfurt Congress. Seven of the ten members were Africans or African Americans, namely himself (representing the ITUCNW), William Patterson (ANLC), Johnstone Kenyatta (Kenya East Africa), Garan Kouyaté (France West Africa), William Pickens (NAACP as well as the John Brown Memorial Association), Henry Rosemond (Haitian Patriotic Union of the USA as well as the Furriers’ Union of New York) and Mary Burroughs (ANLC as well as the American Section of the LAI). In addition, there was a white comrade from the Colonial Commission of the CP Belgium, DeKeersmaecker, a white representative of the South African Trade Union Congress, Comrade Andrews\textsuperscript{118}, and Comrade M. Ali from Algeria who represented the C.J.G.U. in France.\textsuperscript{119} Curiously, Padmore’s name is missing from the list! Third, Padmore edited the July and September issues of the \textit{Negro Champion} while Cyril Briggs was away.

\textsuperscript{112} Wilson 1974, 180.
\textsuperscript{113} Jonathan Derrick, \textit{Africa’s ‘Agitators’: Militant Anti-Colonialism in Africa and the West, 1918-1939},London: Hurst 2008, 185
\textsuperscript{114} Derrick 2008, 199. Among the few who does not claim Padmore’s presence at the Frankfurt Congress is Mark Solomon, \textit{The Cry was Unity. Communists and African Americans, 1917-1936}, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi 1998
\textsuperscript{116} Wilson 1974, 181.
\textsuperscript{117} Berman 1996, 318. An indirect proof for Kenyatta’s participation at the 1929 Frankfurt Conference is found in a letter from Padmore to Kenyatta: “[---] And as you know, Kouyaté was with you in 1929, at the Frankfurt Congress of the League.[---]” (Letter from Padmore to Kenyatta, dated 1.6.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 77.).
\textsuperscript{118} William Henry Andrews (1870 – 1950), founder member and leader of the International Socialist League and the CPSA.
\textsuperscript{119} Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 50-52. A copy of Ford’s report is filed in RGASPI 495/155/77, fol. 184-186.
He also participated as a delegate at the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL) convention in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 31, 1929. Also during August 1929, Richard B. Moore suggested at a meeting of the National Sub-Committee on Negro Work of the CEC that Padmore be assigned to send news articles to the newly established ITUCNW bulletin *Negro Worker*. In theory, Padmore could have left the USA in early July, participated at the Congress in late July, and thereafter immediately have returned back to the USA but when would he have had time to edit the July number of the *Negro Champion*? Until further evidence comes up from the archives, Padmore’s participation at the Congress is dubious, if not fictitious.

Be as it may, the Congress itself gave Ford the opportunity to assemble the Negro delegates for a shadow conference as he had planned and Moscow had approved to. Termed as ‘First Negro Trade Union Conference’, the group held a meeting on July 25, and on the next day, the ‘Second Negro Trade Union Conference’ gathered. Apart from the Negro delegates, representatives of the Indian National Congress, Gupta, the Chinese Workers Union, the TUEL as well as Saklatvala and Burns attended the both conferences. At the first conference, the situation of the native (‘Negro’) workers in Africa, the Caribbean and in the USA were discussed. Saklatvala made a lengthy presentation on the difficulties with regard to wage conditions among African workers as compared to Indian and other workers, on the relationship between Indian and African workers in East Africa as well as commented upon the conditions in the mining areas in South Africa and urged for a closer relationship between African and Indian in East Africa with the Indian National Congress in India. Saklatvala’s presentation was commented by Kenyatta who notified that while the relationship between the Indians and Africans in East Africa was a friendly one, there was no common meeting place between them.  

However, Ford’s main agenda for the conference was to discuss the idea of the ITUCNW of convening a World Negro Workers Conference. Saklatvala proposed London as the site of venue for the world conference. In his mind, the Labour Government should be directly confronted with an application and promised the full support of the British section of the LAI. Comrade Ali, with whom Ford had discussed the matter during his visit to Paris in January, made a counter-suggestion and argued in favour of Paris. Eventually, Ford was successful in his negotiations, London was selected as the site and a Provisional Committee was elected with Ford as its chairman and was given the responsibility of organizing the

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120 Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 50. The *Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz* (InPreKorr) 66, 1929, 1546, only referred to the Negro Trade Union Conference that convened on July 26.
conference. In a typical Bolshevik way, the Provisional Committee was officially referred to as the Provisional Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, or the ‘Provisional ITUCNW’, indicating that the ITUCNW as such did not yet exist and casting smoke screens on its intimate link to the RILU.\footnote{Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 51. Interestingly, according to the \textit{Internationale Presse-Korrespondenz} (InPreKorr) 66, 1929, 1546, the Negro Trade Union Conference on July 26 had decided that the World Negro Workers Conference was to be held in Berlin in 1930!}

After the meeting, another provisional committee consisting of Ford, Saklatvala, Patterson and Burroughs discussed the projected London conference with Bridgeman and Maxton. At this meeting, Maxton promised to back the application when it was to be discussed back home in Parliament, while Bridgeman was to serve as the key link between Moscow and London. Both of them suggested to Ford that he immediately would write a letter of inquiry about convening a conference in London to Arthur Henderson of the Labour Government. Finally, it was decided that Ford or some other ‘Negro’ representative should come to England to appear before parliament on the question.\footnote{Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 51.} As will be discussed further below, the person who went to London was not Ford but Patterson.

In addition to the two official conferences, Ford held several private meetings with various members of the Negro delegation in Frankfurt. Special reference was made in his report on his discussions with DeKeersmaker about the conditions in the Belgian Congo, with Kenyatta on the conditions in East Africa and with Comrade Rosemond on the failed furriers strike in New York. Ford learned from Kenyatta that his organization, the Kikuyu Central Association, “while not a trade union organisation is made up of workers and peasants and has a membership of 3000.” Ford was somewhat dubious about the usability of the organization as it was led by the native chiefs and even claimed to be under the guidance of white settlers who were opposed to the encroachment of capitalist agriculture in Kenya, but eventually regarded the organization as the best possible local contact for the time being: “I think that this contact if used to the best advantage will be of considerable benefit to us.”\footnote{Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, p. 51.}

After the Frankfurt Congress, Kouyaté, Kenyatta and Mary Burroughs were invited by the Russian Trade Unions through Comrade Melchnitchansky to visit the Soviet Union. Ford had to take care of all the technical details in connection with their travel to Moscow, including securing their passports in Berlin, complaining in his report about the extra time and
expenses it had cost him. Ford himself was back in Moscow and engaged in the Negro Section (i.e., the former Negro Bureau) of the Eastern Secretariat by the end of September; most probably he had returned to the Soviet Union together with Patterson and his three guests. At the first meeting of the Negro Section after the summer break on September 20, Ford reported about the ‘Negro work’ of the LAI and, together with William Patterson, was asked to prepare a proposal – presumably – on how the LAI could engage in ‘Negro work’, i.e. organizing the workers and peasants in the African Atlantic. Another item on the agenda was to contact the LAI headquarters in Berlin to remind them about the agreement to pay the fare of two Negro delegates. Two Negro delegates, who had attended the LAI and RILU Congresses, where stranded in Berlin due to financial difficulties and misunderstandings, and Münzenberg was asked in a letter to settle the question “as amicably as possible” and to send the comrades to their respective designations at once, “according to agreement.” Unfortunately, the names of the two delegates are not mentioned. All of the three Negro delegates who had participated at the RILU Congress already left Moscow by that time, Kenyatta making his way to England and Mary Burroughs to the USA. It is likely that Mary Burroughs did not pass over in Berlin on her return whereas Kenyatta might have done so. Garan Kouyaté, on the other hand, certainly did not immediately return to Paris but stopped in Berlin in September. During his visit in Berlin, Münzenberg played a central role in arranging a meeting between Kouyaté and a group of Africans from Togo and Cameroon, including a certain Joseph Bilé who was to become a close associate in the ITUCNW-network. The encounter resulted in the establishment of the German Section of the LDRN, the *Deutsche Sektion der Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse* (DSLVNR).

Back in Moscow, the Negro Section made a suggestion to the Small Commission of the ECCI in late September 1929 that Vaughan Mice and William Patterson were to be transferred to the Lenin School to participate for a nine-month course. The proposal was backed, although it is unclear if the two comrades ever enlisted in the course. The Negro Section met twice in October to discuss matters in conjunction with the LAI. On October 4, an extended meeting of the Section discussed Ford’s report on the work of the LAI

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124 Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, p. 52.
125 Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section, 20.9.1929, (Present: Nasonov [chairman], Haywood, Ford, Wilson, Mays as well as Idelson and Norel as non-members), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 18 fp+bp.
126 Letter from the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat to Comrade Münzenberg, dated 20.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 74a.
127 Letter from the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat to the Small Commission of the ECCI, 26.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 77.
128 Patterson, at least, makes no reference to him attending the Lenin School in his autobiography.
concerning the ‘Negro Question’, i.e., anti-imperialist and anti-colonial work in the African Atlantic. Among his recommendations to the Section, Ford considered the need to investigate the possibilities of giving financial assistance to the LAI Secretariat in the furtherance of ‘Negro’ work. In addition, he recommended the appointment of a ‘Negro comrade’ to work in the secretariat of the LAI in Berlin. However, the main issue on the agenda was to expel William Pickens (1881 – 1954) from the LAI. This was part of the larger purges through which the LAI was to be cleaned from bourgeois nationalist elements, such as Nehru, and reorganized as a ‘front organization’.

William Pickens was an African American journalist and activist (Field Secretary) of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). He had been invited to attend the Frankfurt Congress and to report about the Negro Question. The NAACP had been affiliated with the LAI, and African American communists, such as Moore and Huiswoud had during previous years participated in its activities, among others the Fourth Pan-African Congress held in New York in August 1927. However, by early 1929 the NAACP was not anymore regarded as a radical enough organization by the Negro Bureau. In March 1929, William Patterson sent a letter to the LAI where he portrayed the NAACP as a reformist body and rejected the selection of Pickens as the sole African American speaker at the Congress. In Patterson’s view, the NAACP had not protested against recent imperialist extortions and colonial atrocities in Africa, such as the Firestone Liberian project or the uprising in the French Congo or protested against the weak performance of the Mandate Commission of the League of Nations. Neither had the NAACP, in his view, taken a determine stance against US American imperialism in Latin America. In Patterson’s mind, the NAACP was an extremely suspicious organization, if a potential dangerous ‘fifth-columnist’: “The NAACP had upon its Executive Committee some of America’s leading imperialists and derives the greater part of its financial support from these sources.” In Pickens’ case, though he was a well-known orator, Patterson vehemently warned that his speech would not serve the needs of neither the LAI or the cause of the ‘Negro masses’:

129 Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section of Eastern Secretariat, 4.9.29 (Present: Nasonov, Haywood, Ford, Wilson, Mice, Noral, Ballal; Idelson, Phillips, Sheik [non-members]), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 27.
130 Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 52.
131 On the purges in the LAI, see further Petersson (forthcoming).
132 Pickens had also been invited to attend the Brussels Congress in 1927 but failed to attend it. Turner 2005, 146.
133 Turner 2005, 147.
We fully appreciate that the League seeks through the use of such internationally known personages, to
attract the masses of the race to which they belong to its programme. This is as it should be, but in the use
of Mr. Pickens, do you accomplish your end? We believe not. On the contrary, we believe that the Negro
masses can get no clear and concrete picture of the role of Imperialism from anything Mr. Pickens say.
We believe that these masses can secure no clear and definite understanding, either of the significance to
them of an uncompromising struggle with imperialism, or of the historical role they are destined to play
in the destruction of imperialist forces. We do not feel that Mr. Pickens can link the struggle of these
masses up with imminent danger of imperialist war, with the feverish preparation of the imperialists for
an attack upon the Soviet Union and of the tremendous importance the continued existence of the
Fatherland of the exploited toiling colonial masses has for them. We do not believe that any report Mr.
Pickens might make would enhance the development of the revolutionary moment, … We do not feel that
Mr. Pickens can draw a clear picture of the uncompromising position of the league, towards the
international bandits who have raped and ravished Africa and degraded and dehumanised the Negro
masses elsewhere.134

Patterson’s use of language raises some interesting questions. First, the use of the plural form
–we– makes the recipient of the letter to believe that Patterson was speaking as the
representative of a collective. Second, although the reference to the Soviet Union as ‘the
Fatherland of the exploited masses’ was common among the Bolsheviks and in Comintern
circles, its use among the African American communists and radicals was more seldom. On
the other hand, all of the African Americans living in Moscow at that time had been
indoctrinated by Bolshevik language in their day-to-day dealings with people in the Soviet
Union and in the classes of the KUTV and the Lenin School. However, there is a third
problem with Patterson’s letter: the draft version of it was filed among the papers of the ECCI
Secretariat and is not found in the files of the Negro Bureau! Was it, therefore, written at all
by Patterson or by someone else? As previously noted, Ford had protested against any
cooperation with the NAACP already at the Cologne meeting of the Executive Committee of
the LAI in January 1929. It is possible that the draft version in the ECCI file was a copy of a
letter – perhaps hand written? – by Patterson, which had been transferred to the higher boards
for notice and consideration. It is much likely that the latter possibility was the case; the filed
draft letter had Patterson’s name added in bracelets, but that the ECCI at that point did not
consider reacting.

Be as it may, Patterson (or whoever wrote the letter) proposed to the LAI a ‘diplomatic’
solution to their dilemma:

134 Draft letter to the League Against Imperialism by Comrade Wilson, 25.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/664, fol. 1-3,
quotiation from fol. 2-3.
We sincerely believe that the League has no desire to be represented by an agent of a vacillating reformist conciliatory organisation. Yet we are aware that you have probably obliged yourselves to use Mr. Pickens. For these reasons we are requesting that as a co-reporter with Mr. Pickens, one of our strongest Negro comrades should be allotted an equal amount of time. Perhaps it will be best to draw this comrade from the American party. Perhaps one of the comrades on our Bureau should be chosen. We are desirous of hearing your opinion on this.\footnote{Draft letter to the League Against Imperialism by Comrade Wilson, 25.3.1929, RGASPI 495/18/664, fol. 1-3, quotation from fol. 3.}

Not surprisingly, the LAI gave a positive response to Patterson’s plea. As earlier noted, Münzenberg approached Ford, who approached the Organisation Sub-Committee of the Eastern Secretariat, who agreed to the nomination of a Negro member – Patterson – to the American delegation… Interestingly, the comrades at the Negro Bureau had also sent a letter to the CPUSA in early April, protesting against the nomination of Pickens as representative of the American Section of the LAI to the Frankfurt Congress and asked to replace him and the NAACP with a representative of the ANCL.\footnote{Draft letter to the CP of the United States, 1.4.1929, RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 13-15. It seems, however, that the request was not even approved by higher officials in Moscow as the letter has a handwritten add, “turned down”.} During the Congress, Ford and Patterson deliberately avoided, if not neglected Pickens, he himself felt being a pariah in the eyes of the Black delegates\footnote{On Pickens and his relation with the communists, see further Sheldon Avery, \textit{Up from Washington: William Pickens and the Struggle for Equality, 1900-54}, Newark: University of Delaware Press 1989.}\. In the eyes of the African American radicals, Pickens revealed his ‘reformist’ position as he opposed to any attacks on the British Labour Party and in the naming of Clemens Kadalie and A. Philip Randolph as reformists when the Negro delegation discussed the Negro Resolution. Ford further attacked Pickens in his report for having an opportunistic attitude: he rejected the idea that the imperialist powers were designing a world war and he did not regard the Soviet Union to be the fatherland of workers and oppressed peoples. On top of it, Pickens even summarized his objections in written form!\footnote{Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 50; Patterson 1971, 110-111.} 

However, the Pickens’ affaire was not over with the Frankfurt Congress. Instead, the members of the Negro Section started their second attack against Pickens, this time aiming at his final expulsion from the LAI. In his report on the Frankfurt Congress, dated October 3, 1929, Ford urged the Negro Bureau immediately to prepare a statement on Pickens and his role in the LAI.\footnote{Report by Ford on the Negro Question at the League Against Imperialism Congress, [91.3.X.29.242.8.], RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 52.} At their meeting on October 4, the Negro Bureau assigned Ford and
Patterson to draft a letter to the LAI containing the reasons for Pickens’ expulsion as well as to outline a statement on the issue. In addition, the Bureau decided that a Negro comrade was to be appointed to work in the LAI, although the question of selection a suitable candidate was postponed until “the Comintern discusses [the] general questions of the League.” Finally, Haywood and Ford were asked to draft a resolution on the ‘Negro Question’ for the League.140 Both matters were discussed again at a meeting a couple of days later. This time the Negro Bureau decided to transfer the Pickens-affaire, including all draft statements and letters, to the Anglo-American Section. The LAI-resolution, on the other hand, was to be carried over to the next meeting.141 Unfortunately, the minutes of the next meetings of the Bureau have not (yet) been located in the Comintern Archives. However, it seems as if Haywood’s and Ford’s draft letter had been forwarded to the ECCI. In a letter, (draft version) dated October 9, 1929, the ECCI Secretariat informed the Communist Faction of the LAI of the expulsion of Pickens:

After very carefully considering the reports of Comrades [Ford?] and Patterson concerning the attitude activities of Prof. William Pickens during the sessions of the League’s Congress in Frankfurt, and after as carefully examining the document which he submitted to the League containing his objections to its Negro resolution and his more recent statement to the Negro press relative to the activities and attitude of the Communists within the League, and concerning the perspectives of the League we are satisfied that the conduct of Prof. Pickens in no way coincides with the aims and purposes of the League and that his further affiliation with the League only affords him a greater opportunity for carrying into life a policy which objectively offer aid to the forces of imperialism… we hereby recommend Prof. Pickens expulsion from membership of the LAI.142

In fact, the letter reveals that the expulsion of Pickens was carefully monitored and planned in Moscow. The recipient of the letter received a draft statement on Pickens expulsion which was to be publicized when Pickens removal of the LAI was announced. In Moscow’s mind, the statement was to form the basis for a general attack against ‘Negro bourgeois elements’ and the Pan-African Congress, the ultimate goal to be the break of contacts between the LAI and the NAACP. In the eyes of Moscow, Pickens and the NAACP never had been reliable

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140 Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section of Eastern Secretariat, 4.X.29 (Present: Nasonov, Haywood, Ford, Wilson, Mice, Noral, Ballal; Idelson, Phillips, Sheik [non-members]), RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 27.
141 Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat, 11.X.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 29.
142 (Confidential) Draft letter to Communist Faction of LAI, unknown author, ECCI Secretariat, 9.10.1929, RGASPI 495/18/664, fol 108-112, quotation from fol. 108. Another copy of the draft letter is filed in RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 81-85. Another letter to the Communist Faction of the LAI dealing with the expulsion of Pickens was drafted on 28.10.1929, filed in RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 92-94.
allies and, ultimately, had revealed themselves as enemies of the oppressed masses in the colonies:

Enough! We welcome the announcement frank and open as it is. One more betrayer of the masses has proclaimed himself. The membership role of the League can know his name no longer. Farewell “friend” Pickens.143

The Pickens-affaire demonstrated that conditions had changes in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist work of the Comintern. A new agency, the Negro Bureau, had emerged by 1929, whose members were eager to portray themselves as the key figures in the future work in the African Atlantic. Both the central organs of the Comintern and the African American comrades identified the LAI as a vital partner and co-operative unit in their attempts to establish a radical global African Atlantic web. To meet this end, the Negro Bureau and the Eastern Secretariat were eager to clean the LAI of ‘nationalist-reformist Negro bourgeois’ elements and to replace them with radical African American comrades from Moscow.

II.5. Focus Africa: Prospects and Difficulties

One of the most immediate and crucial tasks of the Negro Bureau was to collect and compile data and information about the political and economic conditions in Africa. Such information was utterly needed in Moscow both by the policy makers in the Political Secretariat as well as for the members of the Negro Bureau themselves – none of them had any first-hand information about the political realities in the colonies. After Bankole Awoonor-Renner’s departure from Moscow in early 1928, any information about Africa had to be collected indirectly by collecting data from printed information, such as government publications and statistics, newspaper articles, pamphlets and books or any other accessible source. Such reports were thereafter circulated among the various departments of the Comintern and served as the basis for policy making and tactical decisions.

The crucial question during the spring of 1929 was if there existed any potentiality for revolutionary work in the African colonies. Following the logic of the theoretic outlines of Lenin, Stalin and the Sixth Comintern Congress, the political and economic exploitation of the African continent had reached a stage where the capitalistic extortion had created a highly

143 (Confidential) Draft letter to Communist Faction of LAI, unknown author, ECCI Secretariat, 9.10.1929, RGASPI 495/18/664, fol 108-112, quotation from fol. 112.
unstable situation: a majority of downtrodden Black people harassed and oppressed by a tiny minority of White colonialists. However, if revolution was to be exported to the African continent, further facts about the African and the colonial reality were needed.

In May 1929, James Ford – probably on order by Comrade Arnot – drafted a memorandum on the political and economic conditions in West Africa. Although the document itself is undated and has no author, it is likely that the memo is the investigation Ford via Arnot had been commissioned to prepare for the planned Colonial Conference.\(^{144}\)

Starting with an overview on the general economic situation in West Africa, the memorandum notified the increase of British exports from 1924 to 1928, highlighted the development of transportation, especially the expansion of the railway haulage, and claimed that the railways and mines of the West Coast of Africa are the largest employers of labourers, listing 500 Europeans and 17,503 Africans to be employed in these industries. Further, commenting different colonial administrative praxis (the French policy of assimilation versus the British of ‘indirect rule’) the memo remarked that labour migration from French to British colonies – claiming that the migration reached a total of 100,000 migrants annually – was causing tension between French and British interests. In Liberia, the report pinpointed at the effects of the US American Firestone rubber plantations: 10,000 Africans being engaged by the company as plantation workers, earning less than 30c per day.\(^{145}\)

The next section of the memorandum dealt with the political conditions in the British West African colonies. With regard to the Gold Coast, the report noted recent political changes namely that the number of local chiefs had been increased to six in the Legislative Council of the Colony. It was also claimed that there existed an ‘intelligentsia’ who were gaining influence over the chiefs. Although the author of the memorandum was not totally wrong in his description of the relationship between the local coastal African intelligentsia and the chiefs, the memorandum missed the tension that had erupted between Hayford and

\(^{144}\) Copy of Memo by Ford addressed as RW/8 :29. "Significant and outstanding facts about British West Africa and Liberia" (no date, a copy), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 12-13. My conclusion that Ford is the author of the document is based on the following observation. On its section on labour union activity, the memorandum makes particular reference to the Railway Workers Union of Sierra Leone. This union and its leader E.A. Richards were well known in both Berlin and Moscow. Richards had been corresponding with both Münzenberg and the RILU-boss Lozowski and his union was an associate member of the RILU. Thus, the organ in Moscow which was most keen about the whereabouts of Richards and the Sierra Leonian union was the RILU and, by extension, the ITUCNW. I also conclude that the report was written during the earlier part of 1929 as the report summarizes the political and economic development in British West Africa covering the period 1924 to 1928 and does not include any political event after 1928. Subsequent investigations in Moscow by Ford and others about the conditions in West Africa are updated with later political and economic developments in the region. It is much likely, therefore, that this particular report was the first of its kind, and most likely it is the draft version of the memorandum Ford had been assigned to compile in May 1929.

\(^{145}\) Copy of Memo by Ford (Profintern) addressed as RW/8 :29. "Significant and outstanding facts about British West Africa and Liberia" (no date, a copy), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 12.
Nana Ofori Atta in the debate concerning the Native Administration Ordinance. Concerning Nigeria and Sierra Leone (the conditions in the Gambia were never discussed), the report declared that both colonies were controlled by the Governor but that the Legislative Council had ‘native members’. It further noted the existence of the National Congress of West Africa (NCBWA) in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria and its demand for self-government but argued that the opposition of the British has prevented it from gaining outward mass influence amongst the West Africans. In the last section on the political conditions, the memorandum highlighted the dubious juridical praxis in the British colonies where the judge acts as jury, defence and prosecutor in all cases in West Africa and stated that hundreds of West Africans had been sentenced to death and executed without a chance to defend or place his case before a jury.

Concerning the labour movement and the prospects for communist agitation, the memorandum must have been a disappointment for its readers in Moscow. The labour force outside the agrarian sector was small; it was noted, the main employers being the railroads and the mines. Other industries in existence, reference is made to repair shops and electric boiler making, employed only small numbers of workers. Even worse from the perspective of the writer was the almost total lack of information about labour and trade union activity in British West Africa, lamenting that the Railway Workers’ Union of Sierra Leone seems to have disappeared. Whatever the case, the memorandum had to admit that there was no Communist influence in West Africa at all at the moment.

Nevertheless, there were a few positive signs for the potentials of communist agitation. What Moscow was desperately looking for were outright indications of anticolonial unrest and tension in Africa. According to Ford, two incidences gave evidence of unrest “smoldering” in British West Africa. The first one was the killing of a person during a demonstration organized by one Quansop Solomon in Accra on September 6, 1928. Ford himself did not have any particular details on the insurrection or on the consequences of the demonstration, presumably he had attained his information from one of the journals or newspapers the Negro Bureau had access to. The other incidence was that of an editor named Olusha in Lagos District, Nigeria, being fined 50 shilling (\(\approx -50\)) for printing in his paper an article on a ‘Gun Powder Plot’. Most certainly Ford had not direct access to the article itself;

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146 See further Weiss CoWoPa 9.
147 Copy of Memo by Ford (Profintern) addressed as RW/8. 29. "Significant and outstanding facts about British West Africa and Liberia" (no date, a copy), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 13.
148 Copy of Memo by Ford (Profintern) addressed as RW/8. 29. "Significant and outstanding facts about British West Africa and Liberia" (no date, a copy), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 13.
he only indirectly knew that it was regarded by the colonial authorities as potentially seditious, if not politically dangerous, as it was claimed in his sources that its content inflicted “one class of the community against another class.”

Ford’s May 1929 memorandum painted a challenging picture for the comrades in Moscow in their aspirations to establish direct contacts with British West Africa. However, such a policy had to be considered as both the CPGB and the LAI had few, if any, links with the region. French West Africa, in contrast, was believed to be a different and a more promising case. At least, one can assume this was the case following Ford’s discussion with and directives to the CPF. Although the French Party itself had few, if any, direct contacts with West Africa, it had been more successful in attracting Africans to the Party in France. In addition, and most importantly, in comparison to any other colonial metropolis, there existed a radical African organization in Paris, the Ligue de la Défense de la Race Noire (LDRN), or the ‘League’. In his report on the ‘Negro work’ of the CPF of February 1929, Ford was very positive about the potentials of the LDRN, especially as it claimed to have local branches all over French and Belgian West and Equatorial Africa. It is much likely that Ford even met Garan Kouyaté, the Secretary of the LDRN, for the first time in person already during his Paris visit in January 1929. They cooperated at the Frankfurt Congress of the LAI in July 1929, and Kouyaté was part of the inner circle around Ford and Patterson during the congress. Kouyaté also belonged to the ‘Negro delegation’ travelling to Moscow after the congress.

Certainly Kouyaté’s visit to Moscow was more than a mere tourist trip. At some stage he must have had a rather lengthy conversation with somebody about the prospects of the LDRN, resulting in a report to the Negro Bureau. Although the author of the document is not known, it is much likely that it was Ford as the author is familiar with the internal problems of the LDRN and makes rather personal (positive) references to Kouyaté. Haywood did not meet Kouyaté or if he had, the acquaintance left no traces in his memory and his autobiography. Patterson could have met Kouyaté in Moscow, but the entries in his autobiography about his (first) stay in Moscow during the late 1920s give no information about it. The document itself is undated, but as it reports that the LDRN “is entering the third year of its existence” – the LDRN had been established in 1927 – and in stating that Kouyaté is “now” in Berlin, it is evident that the document was written in late September 1929.

149 Copy of Memo by Ford (Proftintern) addressed as RW /8. :29. “Significant and outstanding facts about British West Africa and Liberia” (no date, a copy), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 13.
150 Report on the League for the Defence of the Negro Race (no date, no author), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 23-27.
Whoever had interviewed Kouyaté in Moscow had not heard much about the LDRN since Ford’s visit to Paris in January 1929. The earlier split of the organization into two factions was not anymore the case; instead, there existed now two competing camps, one comprising of “opportunist Negro elements and partisans of colonisation”, the other of the “anti-imperialist Negro elements.” The first one, the report claimed, had retained the name of ‘Committee for the Negro Race’ and demanded political citizen rights for the French ‘Negroes’. The second group pushed for the complete independence of the colonies and had taken over the LDRN. However, much to the dismay of the reporter, and contrary to the information provided by the CPF to Ford, the LDRN was not at all dominated or controlled by the Communists:

The League is not a Communist organisation whatever attempts have been made to make it appear so. The majority of members of the League are nationalists who dream of the establishment of a Negro State or of several Negro States patterned after the democracies of Europe. The Communist members of the League are in the minority. Nevertheless it is they who dominate on the Executive so that a definite Communist influence is reflected within the League thanks to the work of these comrades. But the Communist fraction of the League must be prudent and diplomatic in its work in order to avoid antagonising non-Communist members. It must be noted that 2 of these have been brought over to the CP.151

The majority of the members of the LDRN believed that the best way to achieve the political goals of the organization was to be independent of any political party. Not surprisingly, such a position was attacked by the Communist minority of the LDRN. As a consequence, there were internal frictions LDRN due to the agitation and propaganda of the Communist fraction, which tried its best to enlist sympathetic LDRN-members into the CPF. Commenting upon the activities of the LDRN, the report stated that few members of the Paris section of the LDRN were active in the trade unions. The reporter – or was it Kouyaté? – explained that this was due to the social position of its members, most of them being lawyers, engineers and office workers. Any reader in Moscow must at this point have become suspicious about the suitability of the organization to emerge as a strategic tool of the Comintern. On the other hand, the report underlined that work among the African population in France had been “fairly good.” The journal of the LDRN, La Race Negre (referred to in the report as “The Negro Race”) which in the previous report by Ford was said to be dormant, had resumed publication and claimed a circulation of 6,000 copies. However, as the distribution of the

151 Report on the League for the Defence of the Negro Race (no date, no author), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 23.
journal to the French African colonies had become more or less impossible, the circulation of the paper was reduced to 2,500 copies in order to eliminate expenses.\footnote{Report on the League for the Defence of the Negro Race (no date, no author), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 24-25.}

Apart of publishing the journal, the League’s activities were mainly concentrated to its sections. In France there existed at least two sections, in Paris with some 100 members, and in Marseilles. However, there was no activity of the organization in the big ports of Le Havre and Bordeaux, where many Africans were living. According to the report, the biggest constraints of the LDRN were lack of resources and structures. The funds of the League were meagre and it received a subsidy amounting to 800 francs a month from the CPF. Neither had it any proper headquarters; all that existed was a small office together with several other organisations badly situated in a section far removed from the centre of Paris. As a consequence, although the League had branches in French West and Equatorial Africa, there was no contact between the Paris headquarters and the African branches.\footnote{Report on the League for the Defence of the Negro Race (no date, no author), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 26. According to the report, the LDRN had branches in Dakar, St. Louis, Khombol (all Senegal), Grand Bassam (Ivory Coast), Libreville, Bengerville [Bingerville], Dembroko, Kaslack, Lome (Togo) and in Dahomey.}

Further, despite the plans of the CPF and the Negro Bureau no African students had so far been sent to Moscow as there were no contacts with the French colonies on the continent. On the other hand, a Caribbean comrade had been sent to Moscow in July and Comrade Kouyaté – “now in Berlin” – was said of having similar intentions. However, Kouyaté’s plans were not backed as his presence in Paris was of an utmost importance for Moscow: he was the secretary of the League. His replacement was a difficult matter as the League’s secretary had to be an African and there were few eligible persons who could fulfil his position – at least from the perspective of Moscow. Still, the issue of sending African students to Moscow was felt to be a pressing one. It was even suggested in the report that the Negro Bureau consider the possibility of sending a ‘Negro’ comrade to Africa – “the sending of a white delegate to Africa is doomed to failure” – in order to recruit African students. In conclusion, the report urged the Negro Bureau to carefully study the extent to which it could financially assist the League.\footnote{Report on the League for the Defence of the Negro Race (no date, no author), RGASPI 495/155/78, fol. 26-27.}
II.6. Organising Africans in Berlin

As noted above, Kouyaté was not anymore in Moscow at the time of compilation of the report on the conditions of the LDRN in September 1929. On his way back to Paris, he had stopped in Berlin, where he and Willi Münzenberg were engaged in the formation of a new platform for Africans residing in Germany.156

Little is known about African political activism in Weimar Germany. One of the earliest African political organizations was perhaps the African Association for Solidarity, which existed already in 1918. Not much is known about the Association: it is unknown how long it existed, its purposes and goals, or its relationship with the state. However, according to a membership list from June 1918, the Association claimed among its membership 32 Africans all across Germany, including Berlin, Hamburg, Breslau and Bavaria.157 At least in 1919 most of its members were still politically active as they were among the signatories of the 1919 petitions sent by representatives of the Duala community to the Reichskolonialamt (German Colonial Office) and the German Parliament in 1919 in connection with the outcome of the Versailles treaty and the transfer of the German colonies to France and Britain.158 Among the signatory in the petition to the German Parliament one Joseph Bille is listed. Ten years later Joseph Bilé (Bille)159 together with one Viktor Bell, who was also among the signatories of

155 This is a revised and abridged version of Weiss, CoWoPa 6/2006.
157 See further Clarence Lusane, Hitler’s Black Victims: The Historical Experience of Afro-Germans, European Blacks, Africans and African Americans in the Nazi Era (New York: Routledge 2003), 84-85. Lusane obtained a copy of the membership list from Theodor Michael whose father, Th. Wonja Michael, had been a member of the association.
the 1919 petition, were the key propagators behind the establishment of a Berlin section of the Ligue de la Defense de la Race Negre (LDRN), the Deutsche Sektion der Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse (hereafter DSLVN).

On a few occasions, African political engagement has left some traces. Two West Africans, Makube and Munumi,\(^{160}\) are listed among the participants of a meeting in the Berliner Ratshauskeller on February 10, 1926 – an event that resulted in the foundation of the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO), the forerunner of the LAI. Makube was listed as representing an organization called Verein der Kameruner whereas Munumi was referred to a representative for ‘West Africa’.\(^{161}\)

If Münzenberg’s organizations, the LACO and the LAI, were able to engage the local African community in their activities in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany is not known. Münzenberg perhaps had the establishment of such a connection in mind when he invited Lamine Senghor, the leader of the Comité de Defense de la Race Noire (CDRN) to visit Berlin in 1927. Senghor had been the founding member of the CDRN as well in 1926 and it was with Senghor representing the CDRN that Münzenberg and the LACO had established contacts – presumably by the end of 1926. Senghor participated at the Brussels Conference in February 1927 and visited Berlin shortly afterwards.\(^{162}\) Not much is known about the outcome of Senghor’s Berlin visit. However, shortly after his visit to Brussels a break followed with the CDRN in March 1927. Although the CDRN had links to the PCF, it remained outside the orbit of the party. Senghor, on the other hand, had been active in the party before he founded the Comité. When his attempt to reintegrate the CDRN to be closer linked to the party failed during spring 1927, he and Kouyaté established the LDRN which was to have good relations with the party. By August 1927 the LDRN had replaced the CDRN as a member of the LAI. However, Senghor’s premature death in December 1927 resulted in a standstill of organization and during the following year the LDRN, now under the leadership of Kouyaté,

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\(^{161}\) Protocol for ”der im Berliner Rathauskeller am 10. Februar abgehaltene Konferenz der deutschen (sic) Organisationen und der Kolonialvertreter,” including list of participants, no date, RGASPI 542/1/4, fol. 2-6.

\(^{162}\) Margarete Buber-Neumann, Kriegsschauplätze der Weltrevolution. Ein Bericht aus der Praxis der Komintern 1919-1943 (Stuttgart: Seewald Verlag 1967), 306. This visit is not mentioned by Philippe DeWitte, Les Mouvements Negres en France 1919-1939, Paris : L’Harmattan 1985. However, according to him Senghor received an invitation, presumably by Münzenberg, to visit Germany in August 1927.
was struggling to organize itself and to create a political platform for the Africans in France.\footnote{On the CDRN and the LDRN, see further DeWitte 1985, 150-154, and Derrick 2008, 216-226.}

The next notice of a direct contact between the Africans and representatives of the communist/radical platforms is that of the meeting with Kouyaté in September 1929. It is not known who called and organized the meeting of the Africans. According to DeWitte, Münzenberg played a central role in calling for the meeting between Kouyaté and the Cameroonian and Togolese living in Berlin.\footnote{DeWitte 1985, 193.} Among those who attended the meeting were Viktor Bell, Thomas Ngambi Ul Kuo, Joseph Bilé and Madeline Guber.\footnote{Lusane 2003, 84.} According to Robbie Aitken, the Camerounians had already met in mid-September 1929 and formed the political group the \textit{Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse} (LzVN)\footnote{Aitken 2008, 597.}. In Aitken’s presentation, the actual foundation of the LzVN/DSLVNR occurred before Kouyaté’s sojourn to Berlin. Nevertheless, Aitken on the other hand recognizes that “almost from its very foundation”, the group was linked to the Comintern-sponsored anticolonial and anti-imperialist movement in Berlin, i.e., the LAI.\footnote{Aitken, 2008, 602.} However, some further hints are given a report on the activities by the DSLVN written sometimes during the latter part of 1930. It was stated in that report that Kouyaté founded the section in September 1929 and that its headquarters were located at Friedrichstrasse 24, sharing the same office as the League Against Imperialism. The DSLVN was regarded as a branch of the LDRN, although the section was said to have some degree of autonomy towards the central headquarters of the LDRN at Paris. On the other hand, political work of the Berlin section was led from Paris.\footnote{‘Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht der Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse’, no date and no author but marked 30.IX.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408.}

At first, at least, there existed a close link between the LAI and the DSLVN. Shortly after its establishment, the LAI officials sent the representatives of the DSLVN to a solicitor to get registered by a German court and to a printer to order letterheads. LAI Secretary Chattopadhyaya promised to pay all expenses (160 Marks) for the registration and the stationery. Further, Chattopadhyaya declared that the secretary of the DSLVN would receive a monthly payment of 300 Marks for his work in the office at Friedrichstrasse. In addition,
'political courses’ and lectures for selected members of the group were to be organized by Bohumir Smeral who at that time was one of the Secretaries of the LAI. However, in spite of the promising start, the relationship between the DSLVN and the LAI soon deteriorated, reaching its nadir during 1930.

II.7. Further Criticism: the Lack of Emphasize in Colonial Work

By September 1929, the African American comrades had been engaged for more than a year in their engagement with the African Atlantic but with little results. No direct contacts with either Africa or the Caribbean had been established, although there was a promising start with Ford’s and Patterson’s cooperation with the LAI and Kenyatta and Kouyaté visiting Moscow. But the most crucial agents, the British and French Parties, had remained depressingly inactive in the fulfilment of their tasks to open avenues to the African continent. Similar frustrations must have been felt by Nasanov and Haywood with regards to the implementation of the ‘Black Belt Thesis’ in the USA: looking from Moscow one could not escape the feeling that the CPUSA did not place the ‘Negro Question’ high on its agenda.

At a meeting of the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat in mid-September 1929, a plan of action was outlined in for the rest of the year. As much as it was a roadmap for immediate future action, it was a reflection of how little had been achieved so far. First, indicating the lack of support and lukewarm engagement in Moscow among the various segments of the Comintern-Apparatus, the plan called on all available and interested persons, including individuals at the Agrarian Institute, the Bureau of Scientific Research and the KUTF, to assist in the preparation of materials and investigations for the Section – perhaps reflecting a stage of exhaustion of Ford, Haywood and Patterson in their previous assignments? Second, in order to strengthen the flow of information on current issues and problems in ‘Negro work’, regular reports were to be compiled by members of the Sections and to be disseminated among African and African American students.

Third, and most importantly, a renewed impetus on activating the metropolitan parties in the colonial question was envisaged. The plan once again brought forward differences in France and Britain. Whereas the CPF was (only) to be stimulated to pursue its activities among African workers in France and the African soldiers in the French colonial troops, the

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169 ‘Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht der Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse’, no date and no author but marked 30.1X.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408.
170 Plan of work for the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat (3 months – 15.9.1929-1.1.1930), RGASPI 495/155/74, fol. 18-21.
British Party was once again criticized for its lethargy and was to be pushed to pursue at least elementary work among the African and Caribbean population in Britain as well as in its Atlantic colonies. A ‘Negro Bureau’ was to be established in Paris, its task being to connect up with the French and Belgian Parties. In addition, the “political leadership of the French Party in the League for the Defence of the Negro Race” was to be strengthened, i.e., to achieve the total control of the Communists of the LDRN. Even more so, the cooperation between the Negro Bureaus of the CPUSA and the CPF were urged. If the situation in France looked relatively promising, despite the fact that the proposed plans were only repetitions of earlier outlines, the British cases was as deadlocked as ever. One again, the intention was to discuss ‘Negro work’ with the representatives of the CPGB, an indication that not much had been achieved during the previous consultations. However, the fanciest proposal of the plan was the suggestion to investigate the possibilities of using South Africa as a base for communist infiltration (“penetration”) into neighbouring ‘protectorates’, listing Kenya, British East Africa and Rhodesia.171

If work in Europe and the African Atlantic had been patchy at best, the close relationship between the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat and the ITUCNW had been perfectly functioning and cooperation was envisaged to be expanded. One idea was to issue a bulletin together with the ITUCNW although the latter already was publishing a publication of its own, albeit irregularly. The activities of the ITUCNW in France were to be supported by the Negro Section in its collaboration in drawing up a letter to the French Unitarian trade unions. The most crucial issue, however, was to support the ITUCNW in its plans to work in the various Port Bureaux as a means to draw African seamen into its orbit and, as the ultimate goal, to disseminate agitational material among them.172

The plan of work was discussed at a meeting of the Negro Section on September 20.173 Added to the draft version of the plan was the task to focus on developing ‘Negro leading cadres’, i.e., the inviting of students from the African Atlantic to Moscow.174 Comrade Ford and Wilson (Patterson) were at the same meeting assigned to prepare materials and proposals for work among Africans to be sent to the CPF.175

171 Plan of work for the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat (3 months – 15.9.1929-1.1.1930), RGASPI 495/155/74, fol. 18-21.
172 Plan of work for the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat (3 months – 15.9.1929-1.1.1930), RGASPI 495/155/74, p. 18-21.
173 Present: Nassonov (chair), Haywood, Ford, Wilson, Mays [Mice?], Non-members: Idelson and Norrel [Noral].
175 Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section, 20.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 18.
Patterson’s draft memorandum concerning the activities of the CPF in the French colonies was ready by the end of September. Similar to earlier evaluations of the Negro work of the metropolitan parties, Patterson criticized the CPF for lack of interest and for having done little in popularizing and disseminating the theses of the Sixth Congress concerning Negro work. He further blamed the Party for white chauvinism and for underestimating the danger of the impending war against the Soviet Union as it had undertaken no agitation campaign among the 150,000 African soldiers stationed in France. A similar disinterest existed towards the claimed 11,000 civil Africans living in France. Even worse, according to Patterson, “the French comrades disclosed an abysmal ignorance of all things in Africa,” and believed that French ignorance of protesting against colonial atrocities in the French Congo prevented the British, Belgian and American Parties from making the most of the affair and to use it as a prime example of colonial exploitation. Patterson also repeated Ford’s negative analysis of the conditions of the ‘League for the Defence of the Negro Race’ (LDRN): “today little more than a paper organization.” On the other hand, Patterson underlined the central position the League was to have in the work among Africans in France:

Every phase of the Negro work of our French Party is intimately co-related. Without the League and that under our influence our Party cannot make contact with France's civil black population or with its black troops. Without a well edited publication the League cannot carry out the tasks confronting it. Without the port bureaux functioning efficiently contact with Africa is cut off and the publication will not reach those centres where it is most needed. Without a trained cadre of Negro comrades we can do little or no work.

However, approaching self-criticism, Patterson noted in the same vein that too much energy had been put by the Negro Section on activating and steering the CPUSA engagement in Negro Work, highlighting the importance of directing the attention on the work of the French, British and Belgian parties. Patterson ended his memorandum with a nine-point list of demands for the French Party in accordance to fulfil its duties towards Negro work. In fact, the list more or less repeated Ford’s earlier proposals.

At a subsequent meeting of the Negro Section on October 4, 1929, decided that Nasanov and Haywood, together with Patterson, redraft the paper and to add a paragraph on

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176 Negro work of the French Party (no author), 30.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 51-56. Another copy of the memorandum is found in RGASPI 495/155/77, fol. 178-183

177 Negro work of the French Party (no author), 30.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 54

178 Negro work of the French Party (no author), 30.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 51-56
French colonialism in Africa, after which it was to be sent to the Eastern Secretariat for confirmation.\textsuperscript{179} On October 7, Patterson delivered his final version of his memorandum, including a ten-point list of proposals for the Negro work of the CPF. Apart from the earlier demands of establishing a Negro Sub-Section under the Colonial Commission of the CPF, supporting the LDRN, campaigning among African soldiers and seamen and protesting against all forms of white chauvinism, the tenth proposal urged the Party to extend its activities into the French African colonies:

The Party must take up seriously the possibilities for establishing Communist Parties and workers' organisations in the colonies, setting up branches of the League, arranging for the dissemination of our literature, investigating the economic and political basis of the insurrection in Equatorial Africa, stimulating revolutionary movements.\textsuperscript{180}

More than anything else did the proposals to the CPF reveal that not much had been achieved since Ford’s discussions in January 1929!

Another pressing issue discussed at the meeting of September 20 was the projected Pan-African Congress in Tunis. This Congress had been called by W.E.B. DuBois to be the first meeting on African soil.\textsuperscript{181} In accordance with their earlier critical, if not dismissal, position to political Pan-Africanism and 'bourgeois nationalist-reformist' movements, which included by definition the Pan-African Congresses, the Negro Section decided to take a negative attitude to the projected congress. The Negro Section decided to inform both the CPF and CPUSA about its attitudes to the Congress, urge them to arrange demonstrations against it and to publish statements in the press exposing the Congress as an agent of imperialism, and asked Harry Haywood to draw up the letters and materials to be sent to the party bureaus.\textsuperscript{182} Nasanov informed the Political Secretariat about the decision of the RILU to send Ford to Tunis, although not as an official delegate: “Naturellement, le camarade Ford ne pourrait

\textsuperscript{179} Minutes of Meeting of Negro Section of Eastern Secretariat, 4.10.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 27. Present: Nasonov, Haywood, Ford, Wilson [Patterson], Mice, Noral, Ballal; idelson, Phillips, Sheik (non-members).

\textsuperscript{180} Memorandum addressed as EK/WW/Dictation 8818/3. and dated 7.10.29, “Proposals for the Negro work of the French Party” (WW = William Wilson = William Patterson), RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 57-58. A French version of the proposal, “Propositions pour le travail du parti francais parmi les negres” is filed in RGASPI 594/155/70, fol. 94-95.


\textsuperscript{182} Minutes of Meeting of the Negro Section, 20.9.1929, RGASPI 495/155/67, fol. 18 fr+bp. Haywood’s letter to the CPF is filed in RGASPI 495/155/80, fol. 80. In it, he advised the CPF not to participate in the congress and to protest against the delegations which were to attend the congress.
participer à ce congrès qu’en qualité de représentant de l’I.S.R., car le fait qu’il travaille à l’I.S.R. est bien connu.” Nasanov explained to the Political Secretariat that the Negro Section decided not to support DuBois’ call. In his mind, an official participation of a representative of the Comintern or RILU at the congress was equivalent in supporting French colonialism in North Africa. Even worse, the congress itself was to be held under the protection of the French colonial authorities. In addition, the organizers themselves were depicted as bourgeois ‘Negro’ intellectuals. On the other hand, Nasanov noted that Ford’s visit to Tunis could serve a strategic purpose as several radicals had announced their participation at the congress, including Otto Huiswoud. Last, but not least, Nasanov repeated the call for public manifestations against the congress to be organized in Paris and New York.183

About one month later Harry Haywood presented a critical evaluation of the weak performance of the Communists in the African Atlantic since the Sixth Congress: the CPUSA had so far failed in fighting white chauvinism within its own ranks, the CPSA orientated itself solely upon the small stratum of white workers and none of the metropolitan parties had any connections to Africa at all. Once again, the French Party was criticized for inactivity at home among the African soldiers and workers and for giving insufficient support to the LDRN. As depressing was the situation in Great Britain where neither the CPGB nor the Minority Movement gave any support to the labour movement in the British Caribbean and African colonies. Haywood argued that the all these shortcomings and defects were due to the underestimation of the ‘Negro’ work and warned that“(t)he under-estimation of this task reflected in the indifference on the part of certain Parties towards this work constitutes a form of the expression of the Right danger and must be strenuously combated.”184

So far, the Negro Section had devoted most of its energy towards addressing and directing the situation in France. Having finished its proposals for the CPF, the attention of the comrades was slowly to be directed towards the situation in Great Britain and the apparent incapability of the CPGB to engage in colonial work. Reflecting an increasing state of frustration, someone of the Section drafted in late November a memorandum about the tasks of the GBCP. The identity of the author is not known but it is likely that it was not Ford as he – most probably – was already on his way to the USA. It could have been Patterson as the list of proposals was similar to his text to the CPF. Haywood and Nasanov, on the other hand, usually drafted the memoranda dealing with the USA. Opening with a perplexed notion of the

“deep revolutionary fermentation among the Negroes” in the British African and Caribbean colonies and the total lack of engagement by the Party, the author made a strong call for beginning “serious work” in the colonies. Thereafter, an eight-point list of proposals was presented. A comrade of the Colonial Committee of the CPGB was to be made responsible for ‘Negro work’. The Party was urged to direct its attention towards the African and Caribbean population living in the United Kingdom, to draw the most conscious elements into the Party, to explore the possibility of building up and (thereafter) steering auxiliary organisations among the African and Caribbean population in Great Britain and to enlist the most promising of the ‘Negro cadres’ for training in Moscow. As important was the duty of both the Party and the Minority Movement to do their utmost in obtaining connections with revolutionary organizations and labour unions in British Africa and the Caribbean. In addition, demonstrations in support of revolts in the colonies were to be arranged in Britain. Last, but not least, hereafter the Colonial Committee was asked to maintain the closest contact with the Negro Section.185

The various proposals and reports that had been sent to the French and British Parties during fall 1929 unmistakably pointed towards the fact that neither the Negro Section nor the metropolitan parties had yet been able to establish any connections with the African Atlantic. As problematic was the disinterest of the French and British Parties in work among the African and Caribbean populations in the metropolises and elsewhere in Britain and France. The African American comrades were certainly right in their assumption that this lack of engagement to some extent, at least, was rooted in various degrees of open or hidden ‘white chauvinism’, if not racial attitudes among Western European Communists. Therefore, it could be even claimed that the Negro Section in its aspirations of working through the metropolitan parties as a way of getting access to the African Atlantic had entered a cul-de-sac, if not backfired, by the end of 1929.

185 Memorandum addressed as VL/3, “Work of the CPGB in the Negro Colonies” (no author), 21.11.1929, RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 59.