The Road to Hamburg and Beyond: African American Agency and the Making of a Radical African Atlantic, 1922-1930. Part Three

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III. Towards a Global Agenda: The ITUCNW and the World Negro Workers Conference

If working with the metropolitan parties had been the core task of the Comintern’s Negro Bureau and its successor, the Negro Section, the planning of a World Conference of Negro Workers was the main occupation of the Negro Bureau of the RILU, the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). Although James Ford appeared in 1929 to be the chief propagator for the mission, it was not his idea nor was it an outcome of the RILU’s strategic considerations in 1928. During the first phase of the Comintern’s engagement with the African Atlantic during the early 1920s, calls were made by both Otto Huiswoud at the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922 and Lovett Fort-Whiteman at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924 to organize a World Negro Conference. Both times the calls of the African American comrades did not materialize despite some initial interest and activities in Moscow.¹

The idea of a World Negro Conference was again put on the agenda of the Comintern in 1928, albeit under different conditions than earlier. Whereas the earlier attempts had been outlined and planned by the Eastern Secretariat, the new attempt was to be handled and directed by the RILU and its Negro Bureau, i.e., the ITUCNW. In line with the ‘united font’-tactics, the earlier outlines had envisaged a broad meeting that would gather both communist as well as bourgeois radical and liberal activists including both African American and African participants.

The earlier outlines in Moscow for a World Negro Conference followed the general pattern of establishing a ‘neutral’ platform that would be controlled by the Communist faction. Such plans were seriously discussed during summer 1923, when the Provisional Secretary for Calling the Negro Conference informed the British and American Parties of the plans to arrange a Negro Conference. The original plan had been to convene the conference in

Moscow at the time of the next Comintern Congress but for tactical considerations the idea was skipped and the organizers oscillated in proposing London, Paris or New York as the new site of the event. However, whatever place was chosen for the ‘open’ conference, a preliminary (secret) gathering was to be arranged in Moscow for the ‘Negro’ Communists. Neither the Communist Parties nor the Comintern was to appear in public as the primus motor of the event, therefore a ‘neutral’ body such as the NACCP was to be asked to send the official call to the conference. If realized, such a conference would be riding on the tidal wave of early political Pan-Africanism. However, there were serious pitfalls in Moscow’s strategy. Officially the communists, under the cloak of a non-partisan organisation, such as the African Blood Brotherhood, were to cooperate with other similar-minded activists and groups, but the ultimate end was to monitor, if not infiltrate and dominate the movement. Ultimately, the tactics backfired: the engagement of the radical African Americans in Garvey’s UNIA or at the Negro Sanhedrin only resulted in open animosities, if not outright hostilities, between the communists and the other radical African American organizations.

Following the new strategy of Moscow and the Comintern, the agenda of the ITUCNW of 1928 had a narrower outreach. Its goals were to no longer work on cooperation with the bourgeois Pan-African movements and focus was on establishing a global network of African Atlantic proletariat. As any global communist undertaking was still viewed with deep suspicion by the colonial powers, the previous tactic of cover-organizations officially calling for a conference was regarded to be the best solution. In the typical way of Comintern operations, the ITUCNW had to be portrayed in public as a non-partisan and non-communist labour movement if it was to be successful in organising a world conference somewhere in Western Europe. As in 1923, for obvious reasons, Moscow could not be the venue. Brussels, too, had to be ruled out due to the negative attitude of the Belgian government after the 1927 LAI conferences. As it was of prime importance to enlist the participation of African delegates, the colonial metropolises, either London or Paris, were the most logical sites for the meeting.

Interestingly, neither London nor Paris was preferred in 1928. Instead, the ECCI decided to convene the ‘First International Conference of Negro Workers’ in Berlin “not later than October 1929.” The original plan – which was to serve as Ford’s guiding line for the

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2 Letter from the Provisional Secretary for Calling the Negro Conference to the CEC of the W (?P [Workers’ Party of America], 16.7.1923, RGASPI 495/155/14, fol. 1. Similar letter to the Executive Committee of the CPGB, 16.7.1923, RGASPI 495/155/14, fol.2.

next year – projected a conference of a maximum of 25 delegates covering all parts of the African Atlantic: five from the USA, three each from South Africa and French West Africa, two from the Caribbean, and one each from South America, Cuba, Belgian Congo, Sierra Leone and Rhodesia. In addition, one representative each from ‘Negro’ seamen in British and French ports, one representative of the ‘London Students’ Organisation, i.e., the WASU (West African Student Union), and two representatives of the ‘Paris Negro group’, i.e., the LDRN, were to be invited. The delegation of the ‘International Negro Committee’, i.e., the ITUCNW, was to include not less than five members.

The ECCI also issued a preliminary agenda for the conference. In line with the accelerated anti-colonial ambitions of the Comintern, the conference’s core task was to focus on capitalist expansion in the colonies, on the conditions of the working class and on the potentials for trade union work in the African Atlantic, and on forced labour and modern slavery. In addition, the programme of the ITUCNW was to be presented and discussed and a ‘Negro Committee’ was to be elected.

The decision of placing the conference in Berlin was not illogical from the perspective of Moscow in 1928 as the British and the French parties, for various reasons, were regarded as incapable of organizing such an event. The German Communist Party (KPD) was the most important party outside the Soviet Union, as was the Communist Trade Union in Germany. Although the situation in France resembled that in Germany, the Party, Communist Trade Union, and Minorities movement were all very small in Great Britain. However, it can be argued political considerations were the main reason for suggesting Berlin. Official links between the Soviet Union and Great Britain had reached its nadir following the Arcos raid and the rupture of diplomatic relations in 1927. Compared to Britain, the Third Republic of France was openly hostile towards Soviet Russia throughout the 1920s. Last, but not least, throughout the 1920s co-operation between the French and the British Party was pathetic, if not practically non-existing.

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4 ECCI: (Resolution) On the Convening of the First International Conference of Negro Workers (no date, written probably in 1928 as Berlin is mentioned as the site of venue and the conference is called to convene “not later than October 1929”. By mid-1929, London was to replace Berlin as the site and the date of the congress had been postponed.), RGASPI 495/155/53, fol. 3.
5 ECCI: (Resolution) On the Convening of the First International Conference of Negro Workers, RGASPI 495/155/53, fol. 3.
Equipped with the instructions of the ECCI and the RILU, Ford embarked on his January 1929 mission to Germany and France. Apart from discussing the connections between the Negro Bureau/Section of the Eastern Secretariat and the metropolitan parties, his main interest was to ensure the French and German Parties’ assistance in organizing the forthcoming World Conference of Negro Toilers. Although the French comrades did not regard Berlin as the ideal place for the conference – initially, they preferred Paris as the site for the venue – but finally backed the plan when they realized that such a conference could only be held illegally or ‘semi-legally’ in France while it could be legally arranged in Germany.\(^7\)

Nevertheless, the plans for the conference were changed a few months later. Perhaps during the preparations of the Frankfurt Congress of the LAI in May 1929, and definitively during the meetings of the ‘Negro delegation’ at the Congress in late July, Berlin was skipped as the proposed site for the venue and was replaced by London. One reason for the change of city could have been the positive response of Reginald Bridgeman, with whom Ford had been in contact, about the favourable political prospects for holding a Negro workers conference in Britain. Nevertheless, at the second meeting of the ‘Special Negro Trade Union Conference’ that occurred during the Frankfurt Congress, the delegates unanimously decided to change the place and date of the venue to London in July 1930.\(^8\)

The decision at the Frankfurt Congress was approved by the RILU at a meeting in October 21, 1929. Following the tactical and strategic considerations in Moscow, neither the RILU nor its Negro Bureau, i.e., the ITUCNW, was officially to be connected with the conference. Instead, it was decided that the Provisional Committee, i.e., the Provisional ITUCNW, which had been organized in Frankfurt at the Special Trade Union Conference and had no official links to the RILU or its Negro Bureau (apart from Ford being its chairman), was to be the official organizer of the conference. All public calls were to be made in its name whiles all planning and preparations, including the drafting of all resolutions, were to be conducted in Moscow.\(^9\) However, the final approval of the plan was made by the Political Secretariat of the ECCI several months later on 6 February 1930.\(^10\)

Having prepared the grounds for a Conference of Negro Workers in London, Ford and his African American comrades in Moscow were ready for the next phase in their work,

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\(^7\) Ford, Report on trip [1929], RGASPI 495/155/70, fol. 63.

\(^8\) (Copy of) letter from Ford to [???], Oct 9, 1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 34.

\(^9\) Auszug aus dem Protokoll Nr 62 der Sitzung des Sekretariats der RGI vom 21.10.1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 87. A copy of same document is filed in RGASPI 495/3/151, fol. 27. A French version is filed in RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 18.

\(^10\) Protokoll Nr 75 der Sitzung des Politsekretariats des EKKI, 6.2.1930, RGASPI 495/3/150, fol. 2.
namely to select the conference’s delegates. This phase marked the beginning of a global African Atlantic network. Ford travelled to the USA in November 1929, officially in order to assume the leadership of the newly established Negro Department of the TUUL and to carry out the organization of the Negro Workers Conference.\(^\text{11}\) This move must be interpreted as a strategic one. By transferring the Provisional ITUCNW to the USA and representing himself as its chairman, the intention was to ‘neutralize’ the organization in the eyes of the colonial governments. While he was away from Moscow, George Padmore took over his position at the RILU Negro Bureau in late December 1929.

1. Moscow

The ITUCNW Provisional Committee consisted of eleven members. Five of them had participated at the LAI Conference in Frankfurt, namely James Ford, who served as the chairman of the Committee and (officially) representing the National Committee of the Trade Union Unity League (TUUL), Mary Burroughs, Johnstone Kenyatta, Henry Rosemond and M. Ali. In addition, there was Lucas Prentice from the Furriers’ Union (New York, USA), Isaac Munsey from the National Miners’ Union (Pittsburgh, USA), and Otto Hall, representing the Negro Department of the TUUL. It is likely that the American comrades joined the Committee after Ford had arrived in the USA. Further, there were W. Thibedi from the South African Federation of Non-European Trade Unions, M.E. Burns from the Transport Workers’ Union (UK), and George Padmore, representing the “Negro T.U. Committee of the R.I.L.U.”\(^\text{12}\)

The aim of having the ITUCNW operating at two locations, officially in New York but effectively in Moscow, was to secure a smooth operation for the conference’s

\(^{11}\) Letter from Ford to Comrade Slavin, New York 23.12.1929, RGASPI 534/3/450, fol. 89-90. Ford informed Slavin that he had arrived in New York on December 2, 1929. On Ford’s tasks in the USA, see Ford, Life and activities (1932), page 7, RGASPI 495/261/6747, fol. 68. The decision of the RILU and the ITUCNW to organize a ‘Negro Conference’ can be confused with the decision of the ECCI PolCom to order the CPUSA to organize a ‘Negro Conference’ to examine the shortcomings of the Party in its Negro work (see Protokoll Nr 64 der Sitzung des Politsekretariats des EKKI, 26.11.1929, and Draft letter to the Communist Party of the USA, 24.10.1929, RGASPI 495/3/135, fol. 1, 6a-8).

\(^{12}\) (ITUCNW,) Report of the Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers 1930, p. 1. However, the original membership of the Provisional Committee was slightly different as outlined in a call issued in October 1929, viz. South Africa: Thibedi (Federation of Non-European Trade Unions) and Andrews (T.U. Congress), East Africa: Johnstone Kenyatta (Central Association of Kenya [sic]), Haiti and West Indies: George Padmore (Printers Unions [!] ), Henry Rosemond (Furriers Union, USA) and Ducadesse, France: Ali (CGTU), England: M.E. Burns (T&CW), Chairman: J.W. Ford International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU. See ‘A call for an International Conference of Negro Workers for July 1930. Issued by the Negro delegation at the 2nd World Congress of the League Against Imperialism’, 31.10.1929, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 4-5.
preparations. Ford’s assignment was to handle visa applications and logistics, while Padmore and the Negro Bureaus in Moscow handled political and operative planning. This tactical division of labour was highlighted in the instructions Padmore sent to Moscow while in London in mid-April 1930:

You should advise J.W.F[ord] that all non-British delegates should get their passports vised for London as in transit passengers going to Germany. If this is done then they will have no difficulty in landing, otherwise they will not be permitted to enter. This is important.

Padmore’s strategic planning reveals that he was aware about the negative attitude that the British government had towards having colonial radical elements gathering on British soil. A trick commonly used by the Communists to outsmart the authorities was to give vague or false information about one’s intentions; in this case a cover-event in Germany was established to enable the participants to the Negro World Conference to apply for a passport and a transit visa.

Much, if not all, of the operational planning for the conference was undertaken by Comrade Slavin, William Patterson and George Padmore in Moscow. Their activities were filled with a positive energy and confidence in the success of their undertaking. The euphoric mood was reflected in a memorandum written by Patterson in late January 1930. The conference was of “tremendous significance” for the “internalisation of the Negro Problem”. In contrast to earlier events, the conference’s focus was to articulate the conditions of the ‘Negro working class’ as part of the global struggle of against colonial and capitalist exploitation. Following the Comintern’s general line of argumentation, this global struggle was first and foremost a class conflict and the ‘White’ and ‘Black’ proletariat were both aiming for a common goal. In its essence, therefore, Patterson argued for linking the world

13 According to Hooker, quoting the memoirs of Y. Berger, Padmore is said to have moved to Vienna in early 1930 (James R. Hooker, Black Revolutionary. George Padmore’s Path from Communism to Pan-Africanism, London: Praeger 1967, p. 19). As with many other details in Padmore’s whereabouts during 1929 and 1930, I am doubtful of this claim as I have so far found no reference in the Comintern Archives of a relocation of Padmore from Moscow to Vienna during winter or spring of 1930. Hooker, i.e., Berger, refers to have met Padmore in Vienna in May 1930, but Padmore was certainly not living in the Austrian capital at this time but was touring West Africa! In March, Padmore edited in Moscow an edition of The Negro Worker, Volume 3 Number 4, dated March 15, 1930, filed in RGASPI 495/155/92.

14 Letter from G.P[admore] to ‘Dear Comrades’, 15.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 20. Padmore’s location during early and mid-April 1930, i.e., arriving shortly after April 8 to Berlin and staying in London from April 13, can be established via information obtained from a letter written by William Patterson to the Negro Bureau/Profintern, dated 18.4.1930 (see below).

15 It is (still) unclear if Patterson’s memorandum was published, i.e., if the text is to be regarded as a semi-official resolution. This could have been the intention at the time Patterson drafted the text as it addresses a general audience, not the comrades in Moscow.
revolution of the proletariat with the worldwide anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. They were two sides of the same coin.16

Patterson’s text depicts the African and African-descent working class as the target group for the conference. Echoing a Pan-African mantra, the ‘Negro working class’ of the African Atlantic (he even makes a reference to ‘Negro masses’ on the Pacific islands) were living in isolation and in separation from each other, and under the common heritage of inhuman exploitation and oppression were forced to adopt alien tongues and to assimilate alien culture. In his mind – and clearly criticising the earlier Pan-African Movement and Congresses of the NAACP and Du Bois – the planned conference was the first occasion ever to put an end to this “unfortunate situation,” and therefore it was to be the beginning of a truly African Atlantic era.17

Patterson underlined that London, rather than any other place in Europe or America, was both practically and politically the most suitable place of venue for the conference. More than half of the ‘Negro’ population were subjects of the British Empire, an empire that boasted itself of propagating and practicing a ‘civilising mission’. But if the British audience perhaps was aware about the glorious achievements of the Empire, nothing was said about the dark side of imperialism, its degradation and demoralisation of the colonial subjects. A conference of ‘Negro workers’ in the heart of the Empire, therefore, would be a dramatic reminder about imperial ignorance and neglect and an overt attack against the Labour government and Socialist/Social Democratic lip-service to the anti-colonial struggle:

What will be the answer of the Labour Government to these Negroes of the Empire who ask leave to discuss in London this phase of their problem. To be sure, to the overwhelming mass of them, the British Empire and particularly the Labour Party still stands for justice and fair play. They see their humiliation only in terms of the "misgovernment" on the part of the colonial officials. They know nothing of the Empire’s economic basis. They know nothing of the position to which this Labour Party committed them in the colonial resolution of the 1928 Congress of the Second International. But recent events in Gambia, Nigeria and Kenya, leave little room for speculation after the nature of the “Labour” Government's answer. The enlightening effect of this answer will be truly tremendous. For this reason the choice of place for the conference was a particularly happy one and the position of the Labour Party enhances the value of the choice.18

17 Patterson January 1930 Memorandum, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 28.
18 Patterson January 1930 Memorandum, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 29.
In Patterson’s mind, the conference’s timing was perfect. Throughout the world, there was a rising revolutionary activity among the working class, if not a rising wave of revolutionary activities in the colonies – at least, if one made such observations through the lenses of Moscow and the analytical filters of the Comintern. Input was local anticolonial riots or strikes; output was an intensified world-wide revolutionary movement:

A picture the Congress cannot fail to examine presents, the upsurge in South Africa with the Durban dead and wounded in the foreground, the uprising in Kenya, where the black masses, denied access to all land which can be profitably cultivated, are in a position of extreme poverty. The savage attacks upon the workers of Gambia, West Africa whose only "crime" was that they sought to organise themselves, French Equatorial Africa, a sea of blood from the millions of black men and women done to death by the robber-seeking exploiters and wrecking with the stenching [sic] of tens of thousands of more who have died of starvation, Nigeria with the bleeding carcasses still lie on the ground, Haiti, groaning under the iron heel of American imperialism, millions of Negroes in Latin America, living in virtual slavery, the "independent" Republic of Liberia, governed by the children of the victims of American slavery now in turn, forced by imperialism to enslave the natives of the country to which they turned in quest of freedom.\(^\text{19}\)

But Patterson also identified the negative challenges to the ‘Negro working classes’, if not the global proletariat. The world economy was rapidly deteriorating in wake of the ongoing economic depression. Patterson anticipated that the recession will result in a deepening rift between the colonial metropolises and the colonies as a result of the ‘mother country’ transferring the burden of the crisis upon the backs of the working class in their own countries and the “exploited and oppressed” masses of the colonies. From his perspective, the aim of the capitalists was to divide the proletariat and that various governments in Europe backed such a policy. Even worse, Patterson predicted that ‘Social fascism’, i.e., the Social Democrats, and fascist organisations were joining their forces against the ‘Negro’ working class. This argument, too, was much in line with the official mantra in Moscow depicting the Social Democratic parties as the traitors and enemies of the working class:

We will witness an increased utilisation of the theory of inherent inferiority of coloured peoples to broaden the base of the exploitation and oppression of the Negro masses and to quash any tendencies which the white workers may exhibit to accept the racial struggles of the Negro masses as an integral part of the struggle against world capital.\(^\text{20}\)

\(^{19}\) Patterson January 1930 Memorandum, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 29-30.

\(^{20}\) Patterson January 1930 Memorandum, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 31.
According to Patterson, the Labour party and the Social Democrats had exposed themselves as the enemies of the ‘Negro’ workers and “treacherous Negro reformists” allying with such enemies. Not surprisingly, in line with the rest of the memoranda produced in Moscow, Patterson ends his text with the obligatory reflections on the imminent danger of an attack against the Soviet Union and the conference’s potential in raising the anti-militarist tendencies among the ‘Negro toilers’.  

The next step was to decide on the instructions to be given to the parties and unions involved in the organization of the conference. Consequently, the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau sent a proposal to the RILU Secretariat concerning the tasks of each individual unit. The TUUL was to undertake preparatory work in the USA and in the Caribbean and it was proposed that ‘Comrade Francis’ was to be mandated to carry out propaganda work on Haiti, the Virgin Island, Jamaica and Trinidad. The CGTU was to be instructed to undertake preparatory work in Madagascar and the French colonies in Africa – plus Liberia and the British West African colonies [sic!] – the Caribbean, whereas the NMM in turn was to concentrate on Southern and Eastern Africa and the Latin American Labor Confederation on Latin America and Cuba. In addition, the NMM was to be instructed to be in charge of the practical matters arising with organizing the conference in London. As the instructions needed the approbations from higher instances, the RILU Secretariat sent them to the ECCI where they were sanctioned two days later.

After having received the final approval to organize the conference by the ECCI Secretariat, the comrades at the Negro Bureau of the RILU issued another text in mid-February 1930 that addressed the forthcoming conference. This time the document was in the form of a resolution, i.e., to serve as a guideline for action. Starting with a call to protest against the (recent) British use of troops against women demonstrating in Nigeria, killing 44 of the women and addressing “widespread revolts” throughout Africa, the Resolution underlined the importance of action.

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21 Hakim Adi’s provides a slightly different reading of Patterson’s memorandum. According to him, Patterson’s analysis suggested that the Labour government was unlikely to support the conference (Adi 2008, p. 244). However, Patterson’s activities during spring 1930 do not support a defaitist perspective: all of the organizers were at that moment still confident about convening in London.

22 ITUCNW, (Letter) To the RILU Secretariat, 4.2.1930, RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 27.

23 Protokoll Nr 75 der Sitzung des Politsekretariats des EKKI, 6.2.1930, RGASPI 495/3/150, fol. 2.

24 International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (signed), “Resolution on the Resent Revolutionary Situation Among Negro Toilers” (copy, typewritten, 15.II.30., no author), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 14-18

25 Noting “widespread revolts have swept over French Equatorial Africa, Belgian Congo, British East Africa (General strike in Kenya) Madagascar, Nigeria, Gambia and Basutoland.”
The Resolution stressed the need for as wide as possible participation of activists from the African Atlantic. If successful, the projected conference in London, which was to convene on the 1\textsuperscript{st} of July 1930, was to become the landmark in the global revolutionary struggle of the Negro working class. The RILU member organizations were asked to mobilize the ‘Negro workers’ in their representative countries, to assist in the circulation of the journal of the ITUCNW, \textit{The Negro Worker}, and to make contacts with existing ‘Negro’ trade unions in sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean and in the USA. Further, the close link with the RILU was to be cemented with the participation of the London Negro delegations at the forthcoming Fifth Congress of the RILU that was to be held during the summer of 1930 in Moscow. The emphasis was on action: “Where no such organisations exists, steps should be taken to create workers’ and agricultural unions,” the resolution underlined. Cooperation with existing African and African American middle-class organizations, such as the NCBWA or others, or with the African intellectuals was ruled out. This was definitively a more radical stance than what earlier memoranda or reports had envisaged.\textsuperscript{26}

In practice, agitation and propaganda was concentrated around the national RILU apparatuses. Both the national revolutionary trade unions and their journals and newspapers were to highlight the colonial situation in order to prepare the ground for the London conference as well as to inform their readership about the plight of the colonial working class. The aim was to articulate and consolidate the international struggle against ‘white chauvinism’ both at home and in the colonies along the supra-class/race paradigm: the struggle against colonial exploitation was part and parcel of the global class struggle. Class, rather than colour, was the unifying glue.

The Resolution can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it painted a positive picture of a small, but also vibrant community that sincerely believed it was opening a new chapter in the history of global class struggle. Their reading of the ‘signs of the hour’ was that the structural conditions for creating a radical network in the African Atlantic were better than ever. On the other hand, the Resolution can also be read as a critical comment on the general lack of cooperation among the revolutionary movements and an incapability of engaging, not even approaching the working class in the African Atlantic. Rather overtly, the metropolitan parties and radical/communist trade unions were once again criticized for lack of engagement. The Resolution referred to Negro TU organizations, but at the time of the text’s drafting, it

\textsuperscript{26} International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (signed), “Resolution on the Recent Revolutionary Situation Among Negro Toilers” (copy, typewritten, 15.II.30., no author), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 15-17. Hereafter: ITUCNW February 1930 Resolution. The text is also filed in RGASPI 534/3/499 but dated March 1930.
must have been well known by the comrades in Moscow that the ANLC was more or less
defunct. Little was known of labour union activities in Africa apart from those in South
Africa and Sierra Leone and the situation in the Caribbean did not look bright. The
Resolution’s call to give special attention to the work among women, the youth and the
agricultural workers in the African Atlantic, too, underlines the dualistic message of the text:
there were immense potentials but they had not yet been apprehended.

Last, but not least, the urge for better communication between the various parties and
the centre in Moscow underscored the present offside position of Moscow in the African
Atlantic. All national sections of the RILU engaged in ‘Negro work’ were ordered to send
monthly reports to the ITUCNW headquarters in Moscow:

All organisations affiliated with the RILU engaged in Negro work must send monthly reports to the
Negro Bureau of the RILU in order to keep the Bureau informed of the work and activities carried on.
Very fragmentary connections have been maintained in the past between the centre [sic] and its
sections. This must be remedied at once. The Bureau must be kept regularly informed of all events
taking place in the colonies in order that we shall be able to give more concrete attention to these
problems. The closest relationship is absolutely necessary at this time in view of the fact that all our
efforts are being directed to make the forthcoming International Conference of Negro Workers a big
success.27

In addition, to further strengthen the position of the centre, a comrade was to be specially
assigned to organize and supervise the various campaigns among ‘Negroes’ in France,
England and the USA.28 However, it is not clear from the text if the intention was to nominate
one comrade in Moscow or if the metropolitan parties were urged to do so. It is likely that the
authors of the document had the second position in mind as the next sentence refers to the
‘splendid beginning’ of the Negro Department of the TUUL under the chairmanship of James
Ford.29

The Resolution’s official version was solely directed towards the metropolitan parties
and trade unions and the working class in the African Atlantic. However, given the recent
quarrel in the Comintern and its front organizations about the participation of ‘reformists’ and
other left-wing bourgeois intellectuals – not to mention the 1929 Pickens-affaire in the LAI, it
is hardly surprising that the comrades in Moscow had little thoughts of directing their efforts
to engage reformist and nationalist bourgeois Negro movements at the London conference.

27 ITUCNW February 1930 Resolution, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 16.
29 ITUCNW February 1930 Resolution, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 17.
Seemingly aware of the ‘risk’ for the participation of ‘Negro intellectuals’, the Resolution’s unknown author(s) vehemently emphasized that

Only the broad toiling masses of Negroes can supply the power which is necessary for militant struggle. The Negro intellectuals as a whole must not be depended upon. The few sincere ones support the struggle must be willing to subordinate themselves to the will of the revolutionary proletariat, carrying out its militant tactics and revolutionary programme. A ruthless struggle must be conducted against all shades of reformism, in order to guarantee a correct line of action.30

Interestingly, someone in Moscow, who read and commented the draft version of the Resolution, did not approve the section that mocked the ‘Negro intellectuals.’ With reference to the above discussion about the Pickens’ Affaire, it is likely that one or more African American comrades drew up the resolution. If the author(s) asked for an open confrontation with those parties among the elite and intellectuals in the African Atlantic he/they disapproved with on political reasons, someone in Moscow had not (yet) cemented the frontlines.

2. First contacts with Africans

Although Ford and Padmore certainly had existing links to African American workers’ unions, their contacts with Africans must have been rather weak. In fact, none of the organizers had yet to have any direct knowledge about the local conditions there: “(W)e know very little about the industrial and economic situation of the Negro workers [in West Africa],” Ford had to admit.31 The only existing connections of the comrades in Moscow during winter 1929/30 were with E.A. Richards and the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union (through the RILU), with Garan Kouyaté and the LDRN, with Joseph Bilé and the German section of the LDRN (through the LAI) and with Johnstone Kenyatta. However, in a report to the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat, dated 6 February 1930, a promising development was registered for West Africa and the suggestion was made to send two comrades to the region. However, a close look on the situation in West Africa revealed that any activities were to be limited to Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria:

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30 ITUCNW February 1930 Resolution, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 18. The whole page is crossed-over, indicating that the text was either to be revised or to be omitted from the final version of the Resolution.
31 Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 6.
Two comrades. In these colonies industries are comparatively highly developed. However, only in Gambia and Sierra Leone does there exist any independent native workers' organisations. There also exist (sic) a nationalist organisation embracing this whole group of colonies (West African Congress). But this is of a (unreadable word) reformist character its membership composed largely of chiefs, merchants, and intellectuals, and it has no mass basis. Several big strikes have occurred in Sierra Leone, the largest of which took place in 1919 and assumed a high political character. We have connections however only in Gambia, where the Minority Movement gave certain support mostly of a propaganda character in organising a trade union. The attempt on the part of the British Government to suppress this union recently led to a big strike. Nigeria was recently the scene of a great revolt. Our centres should be in Bathurst (Gambia) and Freetown (Sierra Leone).32

While the information about activities in Sierra Leone is not surprising, the references to the Gambia and Nigeria are interesting.

In 1929, Gambia had witnessed a successful strike and the organization of the first trade union in the colony, the Bathurst Trade Union. The organizer of the strike and the unions had been Edward F. Small (1890–1958), one of the Gambian delegates at the 1920 Accra Conference and a member of the 1921 NCBWA delegation to London. Since 1922 he had lived abroad, first in Dakar and thereafter in London, but had returned to Bathurst (Banjul) in 1926. He had been the first secretary of the Gambian branch of the NCBWA, but the organization was at the time of his return virtually moribund and controlled by Small’s conservative opponents. Not much is known about Small’s visit abroad, or about his political affiliations at this time. However, he was known to be an outspoken critic of the Gambian colonial government and his newspaper, The Gambia Outlook and Senegambia Reporter (first established in Dakar in 1922, re-established in Bathurst in 1926), had emerged as an important critical, if not anti-colonial, platform.33

The 1929 strike in Gambia caused tremendous interest among communist observers and had been noted by Ford in his speech at the Frankfurt Conference. In fact, as Hughes and Perfect claim, Small’s activities in 1929 had been supported by a left-wing organization in

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32 “Proposals in regard to sending instructors to the Negro colonies and for the establishment of a course for training of such instructors” (copy), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 43-50, report addressed as VL and dated 6.2.30 (no author). Marked “for the Political Secretariat (Approved by the Eastern Secretariat)”, this ref to fol. 43. Similar information (but shorter version) in “Proposals in regard to sending instructors to the Negro colonies and for the establishment of a course for the training of such instructors in Moscow,” RGASPI 495/155/86, fol. 3-5, marked “Confidential report for the Political Commission, K/Dict./H. 5372/3, dated 20.5.30 (copy, no author). A copy of the proposal of sending instructors to West Africa is filed in RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 44-47.

London, the Labour Research Department (LRD)\textsuperscript{34}. Incidentally, Reginald Bridgeman, who was the secretary of the LAI’s British section, was also on the LRD’s executive.\textsuperscript{35} Not surprisingly, British Intelligence had become rather nervous about Small’s activities by early 1930 and was suspicious about his contacts with Bridgeman.\textsuperscript{36}

The unruly situation in Nigeria, too, seemed promising from Moscow’s perspective. Between December 1929 and January 1930 riots shattered the Igbo town of Aba and other districts in southeastern Nigeria, where about 25,000 women protested against British tax reforms. The British authorities deployed troops to restore order, killing about 50 women in their actions.\textsuperscript{37} Further, another report written in 1930\textsuperscript{38} highlighted an increased critique against colonial rule in Nigeria as well as the Gold Coast:

There is much dissatisfaction with this thinly veiled imperialism which uses the chiefs to serve it. Indirect rule is said to be based on self-determination. Resistance to the breaking down of native institutions, to suppression of self government, to continued alienation of land + drain on wealth of country to firmer domination by whites has taken form of trade union organization in Gambia, Cooperative Ass’n on Gold Coast, Nigerian Democratic Party and the Aborigines Rights Protective Society.\textsuperscript{39}

Consequently, potential radical movements existed in all British West African colonies. However, the crux of the matter was that the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau did not have any direct contacts with these organizations. Time and again, they had asked the National Minority Movement (NMM), the communist-dominated labour union in Great Britain, to provide them information about their connections to the West and East African

\textsuperscript{34} The Labour Research Department was founded in 1912 as a research organization linked to the British Labour Party. However, by 1924 its membership consisted primarily of British communists.

\textsuperscript{35} David Perfect, “The Political Career of Edward Francis Small,” in: The Gambia: Studies in Society and Politics, ed. Arnold Hughes, Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham 1991, also \url{http://listserv.icors.org/SCRIPTS/ICORS.EXE?A2=ind0506&L=gambia-l&D=0&F=P&P=10825} [20.11.2006]); Arnold Hughes and David Perfect, A Political History of the Gambia, 1816-1994, Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press 2006, p. 97. Perfect (1991) suggests that Small was not aware of the fact that the LRD had moved to the left. However, if Small lived in London during the mid-1920s, it is likely that he had already been in contact with the organization and could have had some knowledge about the communist influence in the LRD.

\textsuperscript{36} League Against Imperialism (destroyed documents): minutes, letter to Bridgeman from the Managing editor of The Gambian Outlook (February 1930); report (April 1930), TNA CO 323/1113/15.


\textsuperscript{38} Culture of West Africa (handwritten text, add: 11432 [?]5[?]) [ca 1930]), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 92-97. This report is filed among the RILU-files (fond 534), indicating that the author was perhaps tied to this apparatus. As the spelling of the report is American English, I suggest that the author was Ford as Padmore used UK English.

\textsuperscript{39} Culture of West Africa, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 93-94.
colonies. But no such information was forthcoming. The only one was a vague reply by J.A. Mahon that the only connections so far being to Negro seamen groups in various ports and to organizations in the USA. However, he assured that additional information would be sent as soon as the NMM had set up a committee to conduct this activity. However, nothing was thereafter heard from London and in March 1930 Slavin sent a critical reminder to the NMM leadership about its anti-colonial obligations: “The N.M.M. is one of the sections of the RILU which bears the responsibility for Negro work in the colonies and which will have to give an account of its activities in this field at the forthcoming V Congress of the RILU,” and issued a stiff warning: “We must point out that so far the N.M.M. has not shown any signs of interest in this work, and must be severely criticised for having ignored the directives of the Secretariat and the E[xecutive] B[ureau] of the RILU in this respect.” The comrades at the NMM strongly protested against such charges and argued that they certainly had provided such information:

The only [N]egro organisations whose addresses we were aware of were those affiliated with or in connection with the T.U.U.L. of the U.S.A., those who might be reached through the South African Trade Union Congress, or the South African Party, and the organisation in Gambia which was in communication with the L.R.D. and whose address is: Bathurst Labour Union, 3, MacCarthy Square, Bathurst, River Gambia, and the enclosed paper from Trinidad address [added in handwriting]: V Henry, 1 Shine St, Port of Spain, Trinidad.

Allison concluded his letter by making himself a critical, if not sarcastic, observation: “We have made efforts to discover additional addresses but have been unsuccessful, and in view of the fact that reports and communications from the colonies go direct to you and not to us, we feel that you should be in a better position to find this out than we are.” Ergo, don’t lay the blame on us for not knowing what was going on and whom to get in touch with!

Criticism or not, Padmore had been able to gather enough information about potential participants for the conference. In order to draw these organizations into the orbit of the

40 Letter of J.A. Mahon to The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 4.2.1930, RGASPI 534/7/48, fol. 58.
41 Letter of Slavin to National Minority Movement, 10.3.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 32. Earlier inquiries had been sent in February 1930. I have not yet located them but a reference to them is found in a reply of the NMM to the RILU Negro Bureau that arrived in Moscow on 30.3.1930, RGASPI 534/7/48, fol. 88-89.
42 Allison to International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, RILU, stamped 30.3.1930, RGASAPI 534/7/48, fol. 88. Allison’s signature is hardly visible on the copy of the letter. The recipient was the RILU Negro Bureau.
43 Allison to International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, RILU, stamped 30.3.1930, RGASAPI 534/7/48, fol. 88.
revolutionary world movement, Padmore outlined a plan of action in early April 1930. His idea was that once the West African delegates had arrived to London to participate at the World Negro Conference, officially a non-partisan event, they would proceed via Germany to Moscow to participate at the Fifth World Congress of the RILU:

It is necessary for you to send to the V Congress one delegate from each of the following: (1) Gambia, (2) Sierra Leone, (3) Liberia, (4) Gold Coast, (5) Nigeria. You must provide them with the necessary means to enable them to reach Hamburg by boat, 3rd class (improved), or, should there not be any third class, then 2nd. Upon the arrival of the delegates to Hamburg they must register at our Point, the address of which you will get in Berlin. The delegates must present a certificate identifying their person. It is desirable that the documents should be signed by you or by a local comrade who is personally known to you.

About one month later, the ECCI was presented with a proposal of immediately sending agitators to Africa to make use of the situation:

(T)he necessity of immediately sending instructions to the Negro colonies, concentrating first of all upon those colonies where there exist (sic) independent labour movements, revolutionary organisations, or in which big revolts have taken place recently [...].

In fact, the May 1930 proposal outlined future strategic work in Africa. One ‘comrade’ each was to be sent to South Africa, East Africa (planned to be stationed in Nairobi), French West Africa (Dakar to be the centre of activities), the Sudan as well as French and Belgian Congo (the centre to be French Congo, “which has been the centre of a number of large revolts in the past ten years”). British West Africa was also to be covered. Two ‘comrades’ should be sent to Bathurst (Banjul) and Lagos. According to the plan, the instructors to be sent were to be secured from the British, French, American and Belgian parties but also to be drawn from

44 Note by George Padmore, typewritten + handwritten signature, dated 2/IV 30 (=2 April 1930), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 46. It is not known to whom Padmore addressed his note. It was certainly not Ford as he was in New York at that time. It could have been William Patterson, who was at that time about to proceed from Moscow to Berlin. Padmore’s exact location at the time of writing the note is also unclear. He was still in Moscow on April 9 as he sent that very day an inquiry to Harry Haywood asking him to write an article for the Negro Worker, see Handwritten note from Padmore to Haywood, (Moscow) 9.4.1930, RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 83.
45 “Proposals in regard to sending instructors to the Negro colonies and for the establishment of a course for the training of such instructors in Moscow,” confidential report for the Political Commission addressed as K/Dict./H. 5372/3 and dated 20.5.30 (no author), RGASPI 495/155/86, fol. 3-5. Hereafter: Proposals/Instructors/Negro Colonies [1930].
46 Proposals/Instructors/Negro Colonies [1930], RGASPI 495/155/86, fol. 3.
African students in Moscow. In Africa, one of their main objectives was the selection of students for training in Moscow.47

The crux of the matter was, however, that either there were no African students in Moscow in spring 1930 or that those few Africans who were there were considered unsuitable for the task.48 Neither was there anyone ready in the above-mentioned parties who could immediately be sent to work in Africa. Therefore, a course for training instructors was to be organized in Moscow. The course’s outline read as follows:

1) A permanent course should be organised in Moscow under the Lenin School for the training of instructors for the Negro colonies.

2) The students for this course should include both white and Negro comrades to be selected from among the contingents for both KUTVA and the Lenin School.

3) In this connection we propose that Communist Parties of the metropolitan countries having Negro populations, Great Britain, France, Belgium and the American countries with large Negro populations, United States, Brazil, Panama, Cuba, etc.; should be instructed at once to send Negro students both to KUTVA and the Lenin School.

   a) The Lenin School: the Negro comrades be included in all contingents from these respective countries.

   b) KUTVA, that the following (5) numbers be sent by the respective Parties; Great Britain - 10, France - 15, Belgium - 5, United States - 30, Brazil - 5, Panama - 2, Cuba - 3, total - 70.49

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47 Proposals/Instructors/Negro Colonies [1930], RGASPI 495/155/86, fol. 3-4. As noted above, the proposals had been prepared for some months, an earlier, more or less identical version of the text is headed “Proposals in regard to sending instructors to the Negro colonies and for the establishment of a course for training of such instructors,” dated 6.2.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 43-50. The February proposal had been approved by the Eastern Secretariat and been sent to the Political Secretariat of the ECCI. The full document is also available in Apollon Davidson, Irina Filatova, Valentin Gorodnov and Sheridan Jones, South Africa and the Communist International: A Documentary History. Volume I. Socialist Pilgrims to Bolshevik Footsoldiers 1919-1930, London: Frank Cass 2003, pp. 240-241.

48 A confidential report presented to the ECCI in January 1930 raised the problems of ‘Negro’ students at the KUTV: the students sent to study in Moscow had a weak (ideological) background and the training and education process in Moscow was problematic, too (“On the question of Negro students,” confidential report addressed as K/Dict. 233/10, dated 7.1.1930 (no author), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 3-4). According to Padmore, there were more than a dozen of Africans at the KUTV – although he does not indicate which period he is referring to (George Padmore, Pan-Africanism or Communism? The Coming Struggle for Africa, London: Dennis Dobson 1956, p. 318), while McClellan claims that the number of African and African Americans who attended between 1925 and 1938 did not exceed ninety (Woodford McClellan, “Black hajj to Red Mecca: Africans and Afro-Americans at KUTV, 1925-1938;” in: Africa in Russia, Russia in Africa: Three Centuries of Encounter, ed. Maxim Matusevich, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press 2007, p. 64). Neither McClellan’s nor Filatov’s studies list any Africans at the KUTV for the year 1930 (Woodford McClellan, “Africans and Black Americans in the Comintern Schools, 1925-1934,” International Journal of African Historical Studies 26:2, 1993, 371-390; Irina Filatova, “Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923-1937,” Paedagogica historica XXXV:1, 1999, 41-66; McClellan 2007, p. 69, is unclear about whether or not Joseph Bilé was enrolled at the KUTV in 1930 although this certainly was not the case – he studied in Moscow in 1932/1933). As will be argued below, a new group of African students were enlisted in the KUTV only in 1931.

49 “Proposals in regard to sending instructors to the Negro colonies and for the establishment of a course for the training of such instructors in Moscow,” RGASPI 495/155/86, fol. 4-5.
Despite the grandiose scheme, the ambition to train a large number of instructors to be sent to Africa was never fulfilled. Only a limited number of Africans studied in Moscow during the following years. However, as will be argued below, most of the Africans who came to Moscow between 1931 and 1933 were in one way or another tied to George Padmore. Thus, although the ECCI remained informed about activities and strategic plans for actions in Africa, the establishment of a network with Africans was to become the objective of the Negro Bureau of the RILU.


It was well known in Moscow that the success of the forthcoming London conference depended on an active cooperation and assistance by the metropolitan parties and trade unions, especially those in Britain. In addition, the International Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism in Berlin and the British Section of the LAI were projected to render close assistance to the organizers. Already in late January, the West European Bureau (WEB) put the preparations in its agenda and notified that it was to receive information from all parties and organizations that were to be involved in the practical planning of the conference. By early February, calls to send delegates to the forthcoming congress had been distributed at least in English and curiously also in German! For example, the German Communist newspaper *Rote Fahne* issued a call in German to all ‘Negerorganisationen’ (Negro Organizations) in the world to send representatives to the London Conference. Much to the dismay of Padmore, Patterson and Slavin, however, communication between Moscow, London and Berlin was slow and patchy but time as time was passing quickly. Even worse, the comrades in London seemed to have no idea about what to do. In their opinion, neither Ford nor the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau had sent them detailed instructions about their obligations in connection with the conference. By March the comrades in Moscow became desperate as the aforementioned letter by Slavin’s to the NMM demonstrated. Nothing had been heard from the NMM concerning who was supposed to be actively engaged in the local preparations of the conference. The comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau even started to question the advisability of locating the event in London and urged the NMM to...

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50 Agenda for the WEB, 23.1.1930, RGASPI 499/1/17, fol. 59.
51 ‘Weltkongress der werktätigen Neger’, *Die Rote Fahne* No. 27, 1.2.1930, BArchB R/1501/20200, fol. 1.
52 Mahon to ITUCNW, 4.2.1930, RGASPI 534/7/48, fol. 58; Allison to ITUCNW/RILU, stamped 30.3.1930, RGASPI 534/7/48, fol. 88.
take actions: “Can we depend on London as the place of the Conference or must we make preparations for the transfer of the Conference to Germany?”

Allison’s reply – which seems to have arrived in Moscow at the end of March 1930 – finally clarified some of the most pressing questions. He stated that the NMM had engaged the British Section of the LAI for the organization of the conference. Their obligation was to send out invitations and to publicize the event. At least in the Bulletin of the British Section of the LAI had addressed the forthcoming conference. The NMM, on the other hand, promised to make the technical arrangements for the London conference, but Allison remarked that he needed definite information “as to the date, the time you want the Conference to last, and generally what the instructions are for its conduct.” Allison concluded his letter by reminding about the importance for the delegates to have valid passports and visas and proposed to discuss all practical matters with someone to be sent from Moscow: “If you will arrange for him to meet us we will settle this matter with him.”

Allison had put forward a list of open questions that needed to be clarified and must have hoped for an immediate reply or at least a response from the RILU Negro Bureau. But not a word was heard from Moscow for about two weeks. Mahon was worried and sent an urgent inquiry to the RILU headquarters and pledged for practical information about the congress. He had received news that a Negro delegation consisting of 15 persons was to be sent from the USA to participate at the forthcoming Fifth World Congress of the RILU and that the secretary of the Bathurst trade union (i.e., E.F. Small) had indicated that their union considered sending a representative to the congress. But were these potential delegates also to participate in the conference of the Negro toilers? He asked, how many delegates did they estimate would be attending? Was the London conference planned as an open event requiring a large hall where many visitors could be admitted “or do you desire it to held in a small hall where businesslike procedure and debate will be more effective?” Last, but not least: was the NMM expected to organise fraternal delegations from trade unions and factories to participate in the conference and to bring greetings? Even more pressing was the status of the conference, i.e., was it to be a legally or illegally organized event? “Do you desire us to make an approach to the appropriate Government department in connection with getting permission to hold the

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53 Slavin to NMM, 10.3.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 32.
54 Allison to ITUCNW/RILU, stamped 30.3.1930, RGASPI 534/7/48, fol. 89.
conference here, or do you desire the delegates to arrive and leave the onus to the Labour Government to refuse to admit them or to close down the conference?”

In fact, Padmore had sent a reply to London after he had received Allison’s inquiry. He confirmed the starting date of the conference – 1st of July 1930 – and informed that the conference was projected to convene for two to three days. Although a total of 30 delegates were expected, he asked for a large enough meeting place so that additional spectators could participate at the sessions. Padmore ordered the NMM to appoint a special reception committee to receive the delegates as they arrive and underlined that the committee was responsible for all practical details during the conference, including making publicity about the coming conference, in popularizing it among the English working class, sending information about the conference to South Africa and in arranging demonstrations against white chauvinism and for working class solidarity of white and Negro workers. Padmore in his turn needed immediate information from the Committee on the approximate up-keep expense (accommodation and food) per delegate for 3 to 4 days, “under average conditions.” Padmore was aware of the practical challenges in organizing a Negro conference in London and urged the comrades to take note of this: “It is understood that the majority of the delegation will be composed of Negro Comrades. This should be considered, and preliminary arrangements made to accommodate the Comrades in case they are refused accommodation at the last minute.” Another practical detail to be dealt with was the need of potential additional session halls in case there was a need relocate the conference. And finally: “(Y)ou must send us an address that will serve as a connection for delegates who may miss meeting your Committee at the railway station. This should be a reliable address, not of a meeting hall or place of business, but a place that the delegates may be able to find even if he arrives late in the night. A place that a taxi-cab driver can easily find.” The only thing the Committee did not have to concern about was the delegates’ passports. Although he did not state it in his reply, his message was clear enough: Moscow would take tare of this matter.

Padmore’s instructions to the NMM must have been part of the strategy that seems to have been discussed in Moscow at the RILU Negro Bureau. Another part was to speed up preparations in Berlin. Therefore, first Patterson and shortly thereafter also Padmore travelled

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56 Padmore to ‘Dear Comrades’, 8.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 54. The letter was addressed to the NMM as is evident from its content.
to Berlin in early April 1930. What they did not know was that the activities at the LAI headquarters had been paralyzed since the Frankfurt Congress in July 1929, and work in Berlin had been ineffective, if not in total chaos by early spring 1930. On top of it, the employees of the LAI General Secretariat at Friedrichstrasse were exhausted and work more or less had collapsed when Chattopadhyaya was on sick leave in March 1930.

Padmore’s trip to Germany had perhaps already been planned in March 1930. As the NMM did not have any connections to the British colonies, the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau seemed to have proposed to send an envoy from Moscow via London to the British colonies. Unfortunately, I have not been able to consult the original letter from Moscow, but Allison commented on plan’s the practical details in his reply – although not revealing the final destinations of the projected tour. In any case, “(i)n regard to the visit to the places mentioned, there should be no difficulty in getting there provided the necessary resources are at the disposal of the comrade.” As none at the NMM headquarters in London had any information about any local organizations in the colonies, Allison suggested to the comrades to study the colonial press that was available at the RILU headquarters in Moscow and “on his arrival he takes the usual steps to secure contact with the organisations in existence.” Whatever Allison wanted to indicate with his answer, there could only be one way to interpret it in Moscow; the comrades in London were of little use in terms of serving as a meaningful relay station between Moscow and the African Atlantic.

The apathy and lack of engagement in Berlin and London must have been a shock for the two African Americans. Both the Berlin headquarters and the British Section of the LAI as well as the Minority Movement had remained passive and had not disseminated any information about the upcoming conference. The only (?) practical decision taken was that the LAI was to be the official contact address of the delegates to the London conference and this had been approved in early April. Immediately after his arrival, Patterson called for a meeting with the representative of the WEB, Aitken Ferguson, as well as Chattopadhyaya.

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57 Patterson arrived on April 8, Padmore not later than on April 11 as he participated that day at a meeting in Berlin.
59 See further Petersson (forthcoming).
60 Allison to ITUCNW/RILU, stamped 30.3.1930, RGASPI 534/7/48, fol. 89.
61 Minutes of Meeting of the LAI, 3.4.1930, RGASPI 542/1/39, fol. 85-87.
62 It is likely that the meeting was held around April 11. According to the minutes of the WEB of April 11, 1930, comrade Neptun was assigned to discuss the London conference with the two ‘Negroes’ (copy of minutes = Auszug aus dem Protokoll des WEB vom 11.IV.30 [Mu/1 Expl.], RGASPI 495/155/83, fol. 94. Neptun was the alias of Ferguson, as can be deduced from Patterson’s letter and the WEB protocol. The Scottish Communist
Interestingly, the agenda for the first meeting was not practical matters concerning the upcoming conference but the question of sending African students to Moscow and working through Hamburg. The African student who Smeral, Chattopadhyaya and Patterson recommended to be sent to Moscow was Joseph Bilé. All of them were full of praise of Bilé – though too old to officially qualify (he was 35 years old), his qualifications for propaganda work were regarded as very valuable. It was further noted that work should be started in Hamburg as there existed excellent “liaison possibilities” and Patterson recommended that the WEB and the Negro Bureau should join their efforts as neither the KPD nor the LAI had hitherto been able to focus on ‘Negro work’ in the port city. In his next letter to Haywood, dated the same day, Patterson remarked that he had run into E.F. Small, “leader of the Bathurst (Gambia) strike,” “yesterday”, i.e., on April 9. Small did not know anything about the upcoming conference neither about the plans of sending African student to Moscow. While the weak dissemination of information about the conference was disturbing, Small’s suggestion that he could send five students immediately from the Gambia was encouraging. Even going from British West Africa to Europe was not difficult at all: although the British colonial authorities had refused to issue a British visa to British subjects for travelling to Europe, the French did not and Small at least had been able to travel from Dakar to Marseilles. Patterson and Small decided to discuss the matter again after two weeks when they planned to meet in Paris.

Padmore and Patterson notified Ferguson about the ignorance and laxity in Britain as well as lack of correspondence between the Berlin headquarters and the British Section of the LAI concerning the upcoming conference, and together with Chattopadhyaya and Smeral of the LAI headquarters and Ferguson laid out a plan for further actions. It was decided that the two African American comrades were to travel to England, while matters of publicity of the conference were left in Chatto’s hands. Further, it was decided that a member of the German
section of the LDRN (DSLVN) was to be nominated as a fraternal delegate to the conference.\(^65\)

While he was in Berlin, Patterson also held meetings with the DSLVN members with whom he discussed the conference and other matters regarding the development of their organisation. Patterson was little impressed about the organization. According to him, it had little strength and its members were totally unaware of the conference. This, according to him, was in part due to the apathy and passivity that marked the overall situation in Berlin: the LAI made no effort in distributing the Negro Worker among the members of the DSLVN, the WEB and the regional RILU headquarters were equally ignorant about the conference and the DSLVN. Patterson urged Ferguson and the WEB to press the LAI into greater activity. In addition, he underlined the need to engage the Hamburg Port Bureaux in the preparation of the conference at it had, so he believed, direct African connections:

Tremendous amount of work can be accomplished (students, African connections for party, league, LDAR, etc.) Situation will not be greatly remedied under existing conditions.\(^66\)

Although reflecting a critical mood, Patterson’s letter to the comrades in Moscow was not desperate. The conference was still on track and would not be called off. Much depended upon the situation in Britain.

Nevertheless, someone in Moscow must have realized that communications with the British Party had perhaps not been forthcoming. On April 15, instructions were sent to Harry Pollitt notifying him that an ‘International Negro Labour Conference’ was to be held in London on July 1, and that the NMM was responsible for organising it! About 25 to 30 participants were expected but the meeting place was not only to accommodate the delegates but also visitors. Expenses were to be calculated for three to four days. A special reception committee was to be nominated and special arrangements should be made to find accommodation for the ‘Negro’ delegates in case they were refused in the hotel at the last moment. Further, Pollitt was assured that “all materials for the conference will be sent from this side [i.e., prepared in Moscow]” and “do not concern yourselves about passports, this is being done.”\(^67\) However, these instructions came rather late - at this point it was already obvious for anybody that the preparations for the conference were more than chaotic.


\(^{66}\) Patterson to RILU/Negro Bureau, 18.4.1930, London, 18.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 5.

\(^{67}\) Instructions sent to Harry (Pollitt), 15.4.1930, RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 87b.
Padmore and Patterson arrived in London on April 13 and immediately realized that nothing had been done, never mind actually achieved. No contacts had been established with the African and Caribbean colonies in order to disseminate information about the conference and to select the delegates. Even worse, no one had applied for permission to organize a conference in London! A meeting was called with Harry Pollitt and the Colonial Commission of the CPGB and after lengthy discussions a new plan of action was outlined. Padmore was to travel to West Africa, Patterson to remain in Europe and to take care of practical arrangements of the conference as well as to assist the Minority Movement. Alas, it is possible that Padmore had already decided to travel to West Africa when he left Moscow and was provided with a – most likely – fake English passport in Berlin and disembarked with a visa granted by the British consul in Berlin. Back in Berlin, the LAI finally managed to activate itself and issued an invitation to the Negro Workers Conference to be held in London on May 7 in its news leaflet, notifying that an Organization Committee had been appointed there and further inquiries were to be sent to “The Secretary International Negro Labour Conference, 23, Great Ormond Street, London W.C.1.”

The biggest blow was the almost total breakdown of communication with the NMM. Allison had not received Padmore’s instructions and Mahon’s inquiries had arrived in Moscow when Padmore and Patterson had already left for Germany. Neither did those still at the office of the RILU Negro Bureau know about the discussions in Berlin and Patterson’s and Padmore’s move to London. Instead, whoever was in charge in Moscow believed that the NMM was in desperate need for Padmore’s instructions. Consequently, a new letter in Padmore’s name was sent to Britain, repeating his instructions with some clarifications. A large meeting hall was definitively requested as it was expected to have some 230 participants (30 delegates plus 200 visitors) – although their final number depended on the successful cooperation of the NMM in organising delegations from fraternal unions and factories. In addition, as part of the popularization of the conference, the person wanted the NMM to organize a mass meeting where the delegates would be speakers. “About the form of such meeting we will write you in the near future.” Of utmost importance, however, was to secure permission to hold the conference. Interestingly, Moscow had started to doubt if the British

68 Patterson to RILU/Negro Bureau, 18.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 5-6; Letter from GP to ‘Dear Comrades’, 15.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 20.
69 Draft letter to MI5, dated 9.6.1930, Gambia National Archives S131-4/38. I am grateful to Marika Sherwood for providing me this information. The OMS bureau in Berlin was the central unit for providing faked documents for clandestine operations. Padmore’s forged passport could even have been his original one – it was issued for Malcolm Nurse.
authorities would grant permission to hold the conference as it was even hinted about an alternative plan:

In case permission is refused, you must make a prominent political issue in the press and by protest demonstrations of the workers. In such case you must notify us by wire immediately. Such permission should not be sought for before the beginning of June (not later) in order not to demoralise our campaign to get organisations to elect delegates for the Conference, in case permission is refused. This refers especially to South Africa.\(^{71}\)

The letter also included a tentative agenda for the conference. Six main issues were to be dealt with. The first point was the presentation of a report of the International Trade Union Committee. The next three points concerned the conditions of the Negro working class, listed as Economic Struggles of the Proletariat and the Negro Workers, Struggle Against Forced Labour, and Struggle Against Imperialist War and Negro Toilers. Most likely, Padmore planned to have written presentations presented on each of the topics. The fifth and sixth points dealt with practical matters, namely the projection of a Programme of the International Negro Committee and the Election of an Executive Committee.\(^{72}\)

Moscow’s instructions must certainly have added to the confusion that prevailed among the NMM about their tasks and duties in organizing the conference, especially as it arrived in London at a point when Padmore and Patterson already had put up a totally new agenda. The activities in Moscow also show the existing gaps in the communication network between the Comintern centre and its various associated units: whenever secret dispatches were to be exchanged, there was the risk for them being lost, as alternative routes of communication had to be used, or letters were at risk of being confiscated by the government mail services. The RILU Negro Bureau at least was not aware of Padmore’s plan to go to West Africa. Patterson’s information about his activities seemingly had not reached the headquarters by the 23\(^{rd}\) of April when Padmore’s replacement sent a new inquiry about “Negro contacts that you have, either in Europe or in the colonies.” The organization to which the letter was addressed to was asked to cooperate in the preparation of the forthcoming conference of Negro workers. Apart from contacts, the organization was asked to aid the RILU Negro Bureau in sending literature about the conference to the African and Caribbean

\(^{71}\) (“Padmore”) to Minority Movement, 22.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 65. The letter seems to have been signed by Padmore, but a critical analysis reveals that Padmore could not have written it – he had at this point already disembarked in Bathurst! In fact, the person who signed the letter addressed himself as ‘Assisting Chairman, Negro Bureau, RILU’, i.e., someone who had been put in charge while Padmore was away.

\(^{72}\) (“Padmore”) to Minority Movement, 22.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 65.
colonies. Although the recipient of the letter is not known, it is likely that it was sent to the Seamen’s Minority Movement (SMM). It had been established in 1929 and, by April 1930, it included a committee of ‘militant coloured seamen’, chaired by the Barbadian Chris Jones (born Braithwaite). Not surprisingly from Moscow’s perspective, the SMM appeared at the time to be the most promising spearhead to open contacts with workers and especially seamen from the African Atlantic.

4. Caribbean and West African sojourns

Padmore and Patterson’s frustration about the lack of contacts to the Caribbean was by the time of their visit to London already overdue. Already in February 1930, Otto Huiswoud, together with his wife Hermine Huiswoud-Dumont, embarked on a tour in the Caribbean, on Ford’s order. Calling at Jamaica, Haiti and Trinidad, Huiswoud informed Padmore, whom he believed to be in Moscow at that time, about his difficulties in finding potential delegates for the conference: the communist movement more or less did not exist on the islands, the trade unions, where they existed, were weak, whereas the ‘Garveyites’ held a strong position. However, although he could not make it to the conference, Huiswoud was able to secure the participation of a few Caribbean delegates. In Haiti, Huiswoud told Padmore, the election of delegates was left to Henry Rosemond. In Jamaica, a delegate was elected through the Jamaica Trades and Labour Union (JTLU), an organization he had formed in 1929. In Trinidad, however, the Huiswouds run into trouble with the colonial authorities and was therefore not able to secure any delegate.

James Ford presented a somewhat different interpretation about Huiswoud’s success and troubles in the West Indies. According to Ford, it had been a mistake to engage Rosemond in the first place and declared his activities to be “unsatisfactory” as he had not been able to orientate himself to the workers of Haiti. Ford blamed Rosemond for having

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73 (“Padmore”) to ‘Dear Comrades’, 23.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 66.
75 Ford to Losovsky, New York 7.3.1930, RGASPI 534/7/491, fol. 62-63.
76 According to Maria Gertrudis van Enckevort, The Life and Work of Otto Huiswoud: Professional Revolutionary and Internationalist (1893-1961), PhD Thesis, University of the West Indies, Mona 2000, pp. 59-61, the Huiswouds visited Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad, Suriname and British Guiana, and stopped over at Santa Marta in Colombia and in Venezuela on their February to June 1930 journey in the Caribbean.
78 Huiswoud had returned to the USA on June 17, 1930 (van Enckevort 2000, p. 93 fn 92).
misunderstood his position by claiming to be Haiti’s delegate. According to Ford, his belief rested on a misreading the contents of a letter he had received from Padmore. The letter dealt with a curious decision of the Executive Committee of the LAI which, following Ford, Padmore “was not in the position to understand the situation and did not know the facts.” Rosemond took the letter to mean that he was endorsed by the RILU and even reported so to Ford, who did not believe a word of it. “(Rosemond) particularly stated to me that he not only had instructions from Comrade Padmore, but had a letter from a “Russian” comrade endorsing him. Who this “Russian” is I don’t know.”

Another problem was Cuba. The Latin American Section had tried to engage its agents on the island but eventually failed to collect a delegation for the Negro Conference. When Slavin was informed about the failure, he ordered Ford to take over the responsibility for securing representation from Cuba for the Conference. “You can do the work best,” he assured him.

A much bigger challenge was the West African-connection. Until Patterson’s and Padmore’s trip to Berlin and London, no one in Moscow had had any direct contacts with West Africa. The only connections that existed were indirect, either via Paris or via London, and apart from Bankole Awoonor Renner and E.A. Richards, no African radical was known in Moscow. To Patterson’s big surprise, therefore, he run into E.F. Small, the organizer of the 1929 strike in Gambia, in Berlin! Small had participated at the First European Peasant Congress in Berlin, an event that had been organized by the Krestintern. Much to his dismay, Patterson found Small “totally ignorant” of the upcoming World Negro Conference. After inquiring about Small’s connections, he found out that although Small had been in contact with the Minority Movement, the British Section of the LAI and “corresponding circles in Berlin” (probably the LAI headquarters), none of the these bodies had provided him any information about the conference. Patterson was furious, but at least he and Padmore had now established direct contact with an African radical!

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81 (Copy) letter from Slavin to ‘Dear Comrade Ford’, [Moscow] 8.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/139, fol. 121.
82 The Congress had opened on March 30, 1930 in Berlin. German authorities were highly suspicious of the congress, accused it to be orchestrated by the Comintern, and had arrested 21 delegates on the ground that they had no valid passports. “Peasant Congress Spoit by Police,” The Canberra Times 1 April 1930, 1, http://ndpheta.nla.gov.au/ndp/de/article/2290238 (26.9.2008).
Patterson and Padmore met Small again a few days later in London. At this point the decision to send Padmore to West Africa had already been taken. Therefore, the meeting with Small concentrated on practical matters in connection with Padmore’s trip and he was able to secure ‘important addresses’ from Small. In addition, Padmore’s cover was established and Small left Britain in order to prepare the ground for Padmore’s visit. Small’s key position in tactical planning was further underlined by being charged with disseminating information about the upcoming conference if by an unforeseen event Padmore was prevented to proceed with his mission.84

Padmore travelled in West Africa under the cover of his original name, Malcolm Nurse. While he rightly assumed that the communist radical George Padmore already was well known to the metropolitan and colonial police authorities, no files existed about the West Indian Nurse. Padmore’s route was to include all of the British West African colonies as well as Liberia, a plan he already had outlined in his memo concerning the African delegates to the Fifth RILU Congress of early April 1930. According to records of the British officials in the Gambia, Padmore arrived at Bathurst on the 26th of April and was believed to have left for Sierra Leone on the 29th on the same month.85 Padmore, under his former name Nurse, even published an account of his visit in Small’s newspaper, The Gambia Outlook:

[...] (A)bout a week ago I arrived in Bathurst on a visit through British West African colonies for the purpose of gathering certain facts and information in order to complete a book which I am writing on Imperialism in Africa. It was only after some difficulty and the guarantee of £60 cash deposit that I was permitted to land, and even at that my stay was limited to a week by your immigration authorities. [...]86

Padmore then went to the French consulate to apply for a visa for Senegal, handed over his passport, which, among others, bore a Russian Visa. Later, he was requested to pay a visit to the Commissioner of Police, who interrogated him as he was informed that Padmore/Nurse had been in Russia and was believed to be a communist. Padmore did not state in his article, whether or not he gave a positive answer to the Commissioner’s question. Padmore also informed Patterson about his safe arrival in Bathurst and about his troubles with the local authorities. According to Padmore, although they questioned him very closely and took

85 Gambia National Archives S131-4/38. I am grateful to Marika Sherwood for providing me this information.
copies of his documents, he was confident about continuing his mission. Patterson, on the other hand, immediately sent a letter to the USA “to warn those who are supposed to have written recommendations to support him,” in order to make sure that Padmore’s cover was not exposed.\textsuperscript{87}

Despite the troubles in Bathurst, Padmore was able to continue his journey. His next stop was at Dakar, where he faced “a little trouble” with the French authorities. He then proceeded to Sierra Leone, where he stayed at the Grand Hotel in Freetown. Obviously, his visit in Dakar was not a fruitful one as he did not make any reference of his activities there. On the other hand, his stay in Freetown was more successful as he reported that “things are progressing favourable” and that he had been able to enlist two delegates to the conference.\textsuperscript{88}

Padmore’s next planned stop was Liberia, although it is not known if he ever made it to Monrovia. In his letter from Freetown, he anticipated that the Liberian authorities would not let him disembark. However, Padmore made it to the Gold Coast, arriving in Takoradi on May 11. The next day he arrived in Accra. There he established contacts with the ‘Mechanics Union’ and secured a delegate from them for the conference. He further reported that he was planning to leave Accra for Lagos on May 20, to leave West Africa on June 6, and anticipated to arrive in London on June 23.\textsuperscript{89} For reasons not known, Padmore had either miscalculated his route or faced further problems after he left the Gold Coast because he arrived at Bathurst on June 14 and left West Africa only four days later.\textsuperscript{90} In a later assessment of the preparations for the conference, Ford admitted that Padmore had faced problems in West Africa and that meetings were held only in Gambia and in Nigeria. No mass campaigns could be organized and the only party with which contacts had been established was the Nigerian Democratic Party – an indication that Padmore had made it to Lagos during his trip.\textsuperscript{91}

Whom did Padmore meet during his West African journey and who were the delegates he was able to invite for the conference? Evidently, he closely cooperated with E.F. Small. The link with Sierra Leone is obvious, too: it was Richards with whom – presumably –

\textsuperscript{87} Original letter from WW to ‘Dear Comrades’, Paris 1.5.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 10 fp+bp.
\textsuperscript{88} Original letter from G.P. to ‘Dear Comrades’, dated Grand Hotel Freetown Sierra Leone 2.5.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 21-22. The letter was written on a paper marked ‘The British and African Steam Navigation Company, Limited’. The recipient of Padmore’s letter was most likely somebody residing in Moscow as the letter is filed in its original version, not as a copy.
\textsuperscript{89} Original letter from G.P. to ‘Dear Comrades’, Accra, Gold Coast, 12.5.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 23fp. The recipient of this letter certainly resided in Moscow as it included instructions to comrades of the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat.
\textsuperscript{90} Hughes and Perfect 2006, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{91} “The international conference of Negro workers,” dated 29.7.1930. The author is not indicated but it is likely that Ford wrote the report as it is gives a lengthy description of the preparations of the conference and Ford was in charge. Filed in RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 244-245.
Padmore was able to get in touch. Both Small and Richards were to travel to Hamburg. However, the candidates from the other countries are all but clear. Padmore seems to have had some connections with Liberia already during his years in the USA (and later on, while he was running the ITUCNW bureau in Hamburg, he was corresponding with several Liberians). Despite his hopes that someone would come from Liberia, no Liberian eventually attended the Hamburg Conference. The Gold Coast and Nigerian connections are even more puzzling.

The Nigerian delegate who attended the Hamburg Conference was Frank Macaulay (1891-1931). He was the son of Herbert Macaulay (1864-1945), at this time the leading African politician in Nigeria. Herbert Macaulay had established himself as the spokesman of the opposition to British colonial rule in Lagos and Nigeria. He belonged to the founders of the NCBWA. In 1923 he had organized the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). The aim of the Party was self-government for Lagos, the introduction of institutions of higher education into Nigeria, compulsory primary school education, the Africanization, i.e., the replacement of Europeans with Africans, of the civil service, and nondiscrimination in the development of private economic enterprise. Since 1925 Macaulay was also the editor of the party’s newspaper, The Lagos Daily News.92 His son, Frank Macaulay, was also politically active, being a member of the NNDP and working as a journalist for the Lagos Daily News.93 If Padmore visited Lagos in May 1930, he certainly invited Frank Macaulay to attend the Hamburg Conference. But who made the initial contact – if there was any?

Part of the answer is given in a letter sent by Padmore to I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, dated 16 November 1931.94 In the letter, Padmore recalls Frank Macaulay’s positive appearance at the conference:

[---] We had hoped to get a workers’ delegate from Nigeria, but to our surprise and great disappointment, we discovered that Nigeria, although the biggest British colony in Africa, and second only to India in size and importance, did not have an organized labour movement, while in the smaller sister colonies of Sierra Leone, Gambia and the Gold Coast, labour unions have long been in existence. […] The delegate from Nigeria at our conference, although sent by a political organization – the Nigerian Democratic Party – nevertheless spoke in the name of the workers of Lagos and of the oppressed masses of Nigeria. His account of the low wages, terrible conditions and widespread

93 Delegates to the Fifth RILU Congress 1930: Frank Macaulay (Questionnaire), RGASPI 534/1/178, fol. 130.
94 At this point Padmore did not yet know Wallace-Johnson, as is evident from the letter – in fact, it was Padmore’s first contact with Wallace-Johnson.
illiteracy in which British imperialism keeps the native masses in order to better oppress them, made quite a great impression on the conference, especially the American Negro delegates who for the first time heard how their black brothers are pushed down under the iron heel of white imperialism.

The conference elected the Nigerian representative to the executive Committee of I.T.U.N.W. and pledged to give the fullest support to the Nigerian workers in helping them to organize and build up a strong Labour Movement.[---]

It is not known whether Padmore or Ford actually had contacted the NNDP and sent an invitation to them or if the NNDP had heard the news about the planned conference and had decided on their own to send a representative. On the other hand, it is evident from the letter that Padmore had personally visited Lagos.

According to a report written after the Hamburg Conference, the Negro Bureau, i.e. Padmore or Ford, had to rely on external contacts and that meetings were held in Nigeria but no campaigns could be organized. According to Frank Macaulay’s testimony, Padmore’s arrival in Lagos occurred at a moment when the NNDP had split into two quarrelling factions, where the “younger” elements hoped to replace the present leadership of the “senior” members. The nomination of a delegate for the Hamburg Conference mirrored the split. At first, a lawyer was chosen, but the younger faction challenged his nomination and he was criticized for only playing in his own pockets. Instead, through the intervention of the so-called “Ilu-Komitee” (Illo Committee), Macaulay was eventually nominated.

As puzzling, is the Gold Coast-link: who could have been involved in sending a delegation from the Gold Coast to Hamburg? The two participants from the Gold Coast at the conference were T.S. Morton, who represented the Gold Coast Driver and Mechanics Union, and J.A. Akrong, representing the Gold Coast Carpenters’ Association. However, no correspondence has so far been found in the Comintern Archives that could shed some light on who established the contact between them and Padmore when the latter visited the Gold Coast. My suggestion is that neither Padmore nor Ford had previously been in direct contact with them, but used a middleman. This person had to be a trusted ‘comrade’ and the only person with such a status was Bankole Awoonor Renner. Awoonor Renner’s links to Padmore are unclear at this stage. Compared to Richards, he was not a trade unionist but a journalist. In fact, so was Padmore. As noted above, no trade union activities in and no direct links to the

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95 Letter from Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 51-53, this ref to fol. 52.
96 The international conference of Negro workers, report addressed as K/Copying 7603/10, dated 29.7.30 (no author), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 243-251, this ref. to fol. 244-245.
97 Macaulay’s testimony is part of his presentation of the political conditions in Nigeria that he gave in Berlin in October 1930, see Beilage I zum Brief No 2, Protokoll der Sitzung des Internationalen Sekretariats mit den Negerfreunden am 14. Oktober 1930, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 84.
Gold Coast had been listed in the 1930 February Report to the Eastern Secretariat (see above). Exit Awoonor Renner? Or should one consider Awoonor Renner to be Padmore’s connection in the Gold Coast? Was his main task at this time to get into contact with political and trade union activists in the Gold Coast and to inform them about Padmore and the ITUCNW? Unfortunately, Padmore makes no reference to Awoonor Renner in his letters from West Africa.

5. Meanwhile in the USA…

If Padmore and Patterson had met confusion in Western Europe, the situation was hardly better for James Ford in the USA. Here, he tried to establish the ITUCNW as an independent, non-partisan but anti-imperialist organisation. One of its first public demonstrations was an open letter/resolution on the situation in South Africa. Condemning the activities of the Smuts government and hailing the Durban riots, he issued an open invitation to the ‘Negro toilers’ in South Africa to participate in the London Conference:

The London Conference will occordinate (sic) the struggles of the South African workers into a movement that will solidly cement the forces against Imperialism, the Native Bourgeoisie, and all their agency, and will establish powerful trade unions of class struggle.

In another release, Ford echoed the Bolshevik argument when he accused the colonial powers of preparing a joint attack against the Soviet Union. Ford explained that the need for the Negro toilers to assemble an international conference in London was due to the Great Powers to plan a Naval Congress in London. Calling for the formation of a ‘central united front of struggle against colonial oppression’ which purpose it was to consolidate the militant forces of the world, he issued a ‘global’ declaration:

The International Trade Union Congress at London will point out to the Negro that they are not the only people suffering from oppression of capitalism and imperialist wars, although their burdens are heaviest. The workers and peasants of Europe and Asia and of America are also the victims of imperialism. The struggle against imperialism is not the struggle of any people, but of all the peoples of

the world. In India, China, Persia, Turkey, Egypt, Morocco, etc., the oppressed Negroes are struggling heroically against their exploiters.  

Although Ford did not make any hints about a RILU or communist affiliation, the release’s critical tone was markedly ‘left-wing’ and created a stir in both South Africa and in London.

However, Ford’s main mission in the USA was to build up the Negro work of the TUUL. As a result, he directed most of his time to build a National Committee in New York, to develop the District TUUL Negro Departments and to establish Negro Departments and Committees in the National Unions and Leagues of the TUUL. Not surprisingly, there was not much time left for the preparations of the ITUCNW and in early May he excused himself to Slavin due to being overburdened with work. He explained that it had been impossible for him to make more detailed reports about the progress of the preparations of the upcoming conference. The main problem, he explained, was that he had not received any information about the preparations’ progress in London. Several times he had tried get in touch with the comrades in Britain, but with little success. Bitterly he remarked about the appalling silence in London in a report to the comrades in Moscow in May. He lamented that although he had written a number of articles dealing in detail with the political and organizational background of the conference, even an address, which appeared in The Worker, but nothing was forthcoming from London. Even worse, as he had no information from London, he could not send any directives to the delegates. On the other hand, Ford had been able to get in touch with the Executive of the American Section of the LAI and even sent them some background material for the conference.

Ford underlined in his report the importance of preparing enough publications and pamphlets for the Conference. He himself had mimeographed material and distributed it in the USA and to ‘comrades’ in the Caribbean, in addition to the English and French versions of the pamphlet The Negro Imperialist War, which had been produced in Moscow. Most important, however, was The Negro Worker’s distribution and Ford asked Moscow to send more copies of both the English and the French versions, both of which him and the American Section of the LAI would distribute at home and in the Caribbean. “We will find great use for

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99 “International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers,” release by the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, signed by J.W. Ford, no date, RGASPI 495/155/92, fol. 3-4.
100 Letter of Ford to Slavin, 10.5.1930, RGASPI 534/7/491, fol. 127-133b.
it in our general Colonial work, which by the way is taking on a much wider scope,” he emphasized.\textsuperscript{103}

Ford also gave a detailed report about Huiswoud’s Caribbean tour. Huiswoud had received from Ford detailed instructions about how to elect delegates to the Conference and which preparations were to be made with regards to sending these delegates across the Atlantic. Although Ford was impressed by Huiswoud’s tour, the cooperation with Comrade Rosemond in Haiti was, in Ford’s mind, unsatisfactory. According to Ford, Rosemond had been unable to orientate himself to Haitian workers and his political and organizational skills were pathetic. Ford and been in contact with Rosemond several times, sending him instructions, but with little success. Further confusion in Ford’s and Rosemond’s correspondence was added when Rosemond received a letter from George Padmore, while the latter was in Berlin:

> While Comrade Rosemond has written me agreeing that he will carry out instructions I outlined and the instructions of the Secretariat, he continued to write to me trying to justify his position as a delegate from Haiti. He was encouraged by this by a letter which he received from Comrade Padmore, in the executive of the League Against Imperialism in Berlin. Of course Comrade Padmore was not in a position to understand the situation, and did not know the facts; and his letter was a more or less formal letter to Comrade Rosemond. But Comrade Rosemond took this letter to mean that he was endorsed by the RILU; and particularly stated to me that he not only had instructions from Comrade Padmore, but had a letter from a “Russian” comrade endorsing him. Who this “Russian” is I don’t know.\textsuperscript{104}

Perhaps Ford felt sidestepped by Padmore and someone in Moscow? In Ford’s mind, he and not Padmore or anyone else was in charge of strategic planning. Or, should one interpret Ford’s report as an indication of the confusion that was at work and his reply being a critical comment to someone in Moscow who was endangering the ‘neutral’ outlook of the conference? The grand strategy of Ford and the ITUCNW had been to portray the organizing committee and the conference as an ‘non-partisan’ body; therefore any indication of the direct involvement of the RILU or official delegates portraying themselves as representing the RILU would reveal the hidden agenda and expose the Conference as yet another Comintern-orchestrated subversive activity. Be as it may, Ford notified the comrades in Moscow that he was about to select the members of the US American delegation to the London Conference and was planning to leave New York around the middle of June.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{103} Ford, Report on the Preparations, 12.5.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 57-58.
\textsuperscript{104} Ford, Report on the Preparations, 12.5.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 55.
\textsuperscript{105} Ford, Report on the Preparations, 12.5.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 58.
In retrospect, Ford’s ambitions to launch a broadside campaign to popularize the forthcoming conference in the USA met several setbacks and he himself was rather critical about his achievements. In a report to the RILU Executive Bureau he pointed out that the preparations for the conference were confined largely to the activities of TUUL. This was a mistake, he argued, as the campaign never broadened itself to include the great masses of unemployed African Americans. In addition, there were difficulties in holding meetings: in Chicago and in other places the meetings were suppressed and prohibited by the police, in the South were held in an atmosphere of great hostility against the organizers. The Caribbean campaign also backfired and on Haiti and Jamaica the local comrades ended up in internal quarrels about the nomination of their delegates. Eventually, no one from Haiti was sent and the delegate who was first selected in Jamaica declined to come although a substitute was found for him.106

6. Instructions and Plan B

Ford’s May report had been a response to a letter he received from Slavin in April 1930. This letter is a key document as it reveals how the upcoming conference was to be minutely organized and contains detailed instructions to Ford. First, he was to make a short report on the International Trade Union Committee, “that is,” Slavin highlighted, “the provisional committee which was organised at the world Anti-Imperialist League Congress.” The intention was more than obvious: to present the ITUCNW as an ‘independent’ organization and to squash any links with Moscow. His second report was to outline the ITUCNW’s programme. Slavin assured him that he would receive help in the preparation of the materials and that comrades in Moscow tried their best to send him the documents, but as communications were patchy, he might receive the material only when he arrived in Europe. All reports were to be brief, Slavin underlined, “because you know, the conference will last only 2 days.” In addition to Ford’s two reports, other comrades were to make presentations on ‘the economic struggle and Negro workers’, ‘the struggle against forced labour’, and ‘the struggle against war danger and the Negro workers’. These presentations, too, were to be prepared in advance.107

Slavin also instructed Ford and Briggs to write articles about the conference for a planned special issue of The Negro Worker. He also inquired from Ford if Huiswoud could

107 (Copy) letter from Slavin to Ford, [Moscow] 8.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/139, fol. 121.
send something for the journal. All of the material was to arrive by early May as the special issue was to be published in mid-May. Additionally, two other special bulletins on the Conference were to be published at that time.\(^{108}\)

However, due to Ford and Briggs being tied up with other engagements in the USA, the special Conference issue of *The Negro Worker* was never materialized. Slavin also had problems with publishing the special Bulletins in Moscow and by the end of May it was clear that they would reach the USA only after the delegates had left for the conference. More problematic was that news from the Caribbean was still depressing – nothing seemed to be happening in Jamaica and it was totally unclear if there was to be a delegation from Cuba. News from Africa, on the other hand, was positive, Slavin informed Ford at the end of May. In South Africa, a campaign for getting passports for the delegates had been started and a West African delegation had been elected. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge for the organizers was the situation in London as it was still uncertain if the British Government would restrict or even prohibit the venue.\(^{109}\)

Anticipating a negative response from the British authorities, the comrades in Moscow had come up with an alternative plan. If the conference could not be arranged in London then the delegates were to travel to and assemble in Hamburg. Whether in London or in Hamburg, the conference was to last for two, the maximum being three days. Only short presentations were to be given and the resolutions, too, were to be kept short and concrete. The main attention, Slavin underlined, should be given to the discussions. These were to be arranged in such a manner as to give different delegates the possibility to draw a picture of conditions in their respective countries. The main work of the conference, it was stressed, was to take place in Moscow during the Fifth Congress of the RILU “where all the questions pertaining to the future of the work of the Negro Committee will be discussed in detail.”\(^{110}\)


In mid-May James Ford still believed that the conference would convene in London at the beginning of July. So did all the other comrades. However, none of the organizers had received official approval by the British Government for a meeting in London! This crucial organizational detail created confusion and was representative of the state of communication

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\(^{108}\) (Copy) letter from Slavin to Ford, [Moscow] 8.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/139, fol. 121.

\(^{109}\) (Copy) letter from Slavin [?] to Ford, [Moscow] 22.5.1930, RGASPI 534/6/139, fol. 149.

\(^{110}\) (Copy) letter from Slavin [?] to Ford, [Moscow] 22.5.1930, RGASPI 534/6/139, fol. 149.
between Moscow and London. As late as in their instructions to the NMM from April 22, the RILU Negro Bureau ordered the organizing committee in London not to rush with contacting the British authorities. In their mind, one should be tactical in their manoeuvres. Permission to organize a conference was to be applied as late as possible, “not before the beginning of June (not later) in order not to demoralise our campaign to get organisations to elect delegates for the Conference, in case permission is refused.” Clearly, what the comrades had in mind was that the British authorities would acquiesce to demands for an application if the delegates were already on their way to London. However, while Moscow was writing its instructions, the comrades in London had already taken actions into their own hands and had opened for a total different approach.

On April 17, one day after Padmore’s departure for West Africa, Patterson called for an informal meeting with Bridgeman, Evans, Burns and Johnson to outline a plan for immediate actions. Apart from the pressing need to notify the Labour Government about the conference, the group discussed matters about the conference’s publicity and housing of the delegates. The composition of a ‘Seamen’s Delegation’ as well as of the ‘Fraternal Delegation’ to the conference was also discussed. Thereafter, Patterson had another meeting with Evans and George Allison about the tasks of the National Minority Movement (NMM), underlining its duty to support the conference and stressing the importance to include one or two Africans in the NMM delegation to the forthcoming Fifth Congress of the RILU.

Patterson’s next move was to lobby in the House of Commons for the Conference. He and Bridgeman went to Westminster to enlist well-disposed Labour MPs, such as Brown and James Marley, but were only able to meet James Maxton of the ILP, who advised them to directly approach the Secretary of State for the Home Office. Without hesitation, Patterson drafted a letter, and after consultations with Bridgeman and Maxton, he posted it.

Patterson’s letter is a fine example of the Communist strategy of pursuing ‘open and hidden’ agendas. Everyone knew that anything that could be tied to Moscow or the Comintern would be regarded with deepest suspicion, not unlike a red cape to a bull, outside the Soviet Union. Therefore, under any circumstances were the RILU or any other Communist organization, national or international, to be connected with committees and other instruments that were working under the cover of ‘neutral’ and ‘non-partisan’ bodies such as the

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111 (“Padmore”) to Minority Movement, 22.4.1930, RGASPI 534/6/17, fol. 65.
113 Difficult to identify as there were several Labour MPs at that time with the surname Brown, such as Charles Brown, James Brown and William John Brown.
114 Patterson to RILU/Negro Bureau, 18.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 6.
Provisional ITUCNW. Consequently, in his letter to J.R. Clynes, the Secretary of State for the Home Office, Patterson tried his utmost to portray the organizing committee for the conference as neutral as possible. In fact, at the first sight, the Provisional ITUCNW figured as yet another of those African American international Pan-Africanist agencies:

The specific purpose is to link up the movement of the Negro workers nationally and internationally and thus to give more forceful voice and more perfect organisational form to their struggle against slavery, forced and contract labor, the Color Bar, and other form of exploitation and oppression.

Further, Patterson portrayed himself as the representative of a committee whose other members were in the USA.115

Patterson’s anxiety associated with trying to white wash the provisional ITUCNW for the British authorities was understandable. One day after he had posted his letter, an article in The Worker directly stated that the RILU was the promoter of the Conference. Patterson was furious and most emphatically advised against publishing such claims.116 If the authorities perceived the planned conference to be nothing but an attempt by the communists to criticize British colonialism, it would be difficult to get a positive reply from the authorities.

Patterson avoided ‘communist’ language and jargon in his letter to the Home Office. Instead, although directly criticizing the British colonial authorities for turning a blind eye to slavery and forced labour, he referred to ‘objective’ sources that even the British Government had to approve: a report on forced labour by the International Labour Office (ILO) from 1929 and a chapter on slavery in Lady Kathleen Simon’s book Slavery.117 Patterson presented two main arguments to back the application for arranging a conference in London. First, the moral justification of British imperialism and colonialism rested on the paradigm of abolishing slave trade and slavery in its colonies as well as the imperative of the ‘civilizing mission’, i.e., to propagate ‘Western’ values of modernity and to counteract ‘traditionalism and barbarism’. Second, the Labour Government had promised to invest in the welfare of its colonial subjects. However, Patterson noted that such positive intentions were in contradiction with the colonial

115 Letter from William L. Patterson, member of the Provisional Committee, to The Right Honourable J.R. Clynes, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department, Home Office, Whitehall, April 17th, 1930 (copy), TNA CO 323/1096/10, fol. 8-9.
116 Patterson to RILU/Negro Bureau, 18.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. fol. 6.
117 The book had been published in 1929 and became the rallying cry for British activists on international slavery, she herself became an internationally influential antislavery and campaigner. In 1930, she published Britain’s Lead Against Slavery for the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society. See further Sarah Paddle, “The Limits of Sympathy: International Feminists and the Chinese ‘Slave Girl’ Campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s,” Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History 4:3, 2003, pp. 1-22.
reality. People were denied basic political rights such as political expression, freedom of speech, and of organization and assembly. Nevertheless, despite rising critique against the atrocities of colonial exploitation and political oppression, Patterson reminded the Home Secretary that the mood of the colonial subjects was still positive to the Labour Government, although there was an utmost need for a fresh interaction – one that the forthcoming conference could provide for:

These masses have not forgotten the promises of the Labor Party and the Independent Labor Party to the colonial peoples. They believe that an open discussion of their grievances here can only be of assistance to the Labor Government in carrying into life those promises. They believe that the sympathy of the Labor Government must rest with those aspirations for freedom, for organisation, and for international union which are the most cherished ideals of black colonial workers.118

Thus, Patterson portrayed the planned event more as a potential gathering of sympathetic activists rather than a conspiracy planned by radicals. He told the Home Secretary that the intention was to invite delegates from USA, Brazil, Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba, Columbia, and from the British, French and Belgian African colonies. They were to stay for one week in London; the actual conference was to start on the 1st of July and last for two days.119 Not a single word about the RILU, Moscow or even the GBCP and the MM was mentioned. The official picture of both the organizers and the conference were as neutral as they ever could be – at least in the mind of Patterson, Bridgeman and Maxton.

In accordance with Comintern routine, Patterson enclosed a copy of the application to the Home Office in his subsequent report to Moscow. In it, he underlined the double-edged policy that had been outlined at the various meetings in London. Even a positive signal from Whitehall would not change the ITUCNW’s attitude towards the Labour Party but will try to fully exploit publicity possibilities. If they received a negative decision, the Labour Government would face a full propaganda attack.120

While Maxton promised to push the issue in the House of Commons, Patterson made efforts to engage with the African communities in Britain. Backed by the Minority Movement, Patterson made arrangements to travel to Cardiff and Liverpool and establish

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118 Letter from William L. Patterson, member of the Provisional Committee, to The Right Honourable J.R. Clynes, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department, Home Office, Whitehall, April 17th, 1930 (copy), TNA CO 323/1096/10, fol. 8.
119 Letter from William L. Patterson, member of the Provisional Committee, to The Right Honourable J.R. Clynes, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department, Home Office, Whitehall, April 17th, 1930 (copy), TNA CO 323/1096/10, fol. 8.
120 Patterson to RILU/Negro Bureau, 18.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 6.
contacts to the local African communities of workers and seamen. His impression of the Africans’ political engagement in Britain was largely negative. Most Africans that Patterson met were not politically motivated and a general mood of passivity prevailed. Much of the blame was on the communists themselves. Neither the CPGB nor the MM had directed any attention to them. Even worse, none read *The Negro Worker* as it did not circulate among them. But there was some light in the dark tunnel of passivity. Here and there one could detect African activist who, with proper guidance, could become useful for the movement:

Objectively good field for Negro work. Subjectively extremely bad. No one has conception of what to do or how to do it. Met group of about 30 Negroes. Very poor lot, but contained very good elements in one or two cases.

Among others, he had met Johnstone Kenyatta, although Patterson questioned his activities and commitment. Kenyatta had published an article in the *Manchester Guardian*, which was regarded as a deviation from the official line of the Negro Bureau. Patterson was not convinced of Kenyatta’s credentials: “Saw Kenyatta, discussed Manchester Guardian article. He pleads coercion. I feel he is an unsafe element. Will talk further with him however.”

The next news of him was from Paris, where he arrived in mid-April 1930, still confident about a positive answer from the British authorities on his application. In his first letter, he was disappointed about the about the bleak prospects for ‘Negro work’ in Cardiff, Liverpool and London – great potentials existed as there lived a fairly substantial Black population in the cities but nothing had been done so far. Even worse was the situation in Paris, Patterson lamented, “colonial work not only neglected but support of League [LDRN] almost nil.” As in Berlin and London, nothing had been done there with regards to the upcoming conference and Patterson issued a fierce critique about the passivity of the French comrades. This was not surprising, as the French Party was facing a tough time with the French authorities and Patterson described his activities in France as being illegal, secret and underground – in fact, he did not even register with the French police. Patterson, who could read and write French freely (although he could not speak the language freely), recalled later that he had been sent to Paris to carry on propaganda work among the “Negro elements” in

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121 Patterson to RILU/Negro Bureau, 18.4.1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 6.
122 Handwritten letter from Patterson to Haywood, Paris 30.4.1930, RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 88fp-89bp. Patterson informed Haywood that he had to leave London as his funds were running low and had arrived in Paris “one week ago.” He also notified him that he was going to write a long report on Colonial and Negro work in Britain, France and Germany and asked Haywood to send him his suggestions and criticism on the subject.
123 Original letter from WW (Wilson = Patterson) to Dear Comrades, Paris April 29, 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 9fp+bp.
Paris and to strengthen the Negro work of the PCF. Perhaps he even had been send as a ‘instructor’ or ‘organizer’ of Negro work in France. His correspondence with Harry Haywood at the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat (instead of communicating with someone at the RILU Negro Bureau) seems to indicate that he was on a special mission in France. He tried to cooperate with the Colonial Commission of the PCF but received little support either morally or financially from the French Party. “Plenty of work to be done,” he declared but in the same vein acknowledged the fact that he had not been able to do much as his funds were almost exhausted and communications with Moscow were bad.

One month later Patterson sent an even more depressing report to Haywood. He had not received any news from Moscow and Negro work in France was pathetic. “Objectively extremely favourable, but subjectively extremely serious,” he lamented. The comrades at the PCF regarded the Comintern resolutions on the Negro question to be only ‘Open letters’ to the CPUSA without any reference to the European parties. Little assistance was rendered to Kouyaté and the LDRN. Generally, the attitude of the French communists towards Negro work was “racialist and individualistic” and Patterson’s attempts to fulfil his mission had so far been abortive. “No Negro organisation in Europe can have concrete value without strong Poert Buros and a liason with Africa that functions more or less smoothly. There is little attention paid to this work, altho [sic] there is much talk,” he critically asserted.

Meanwhile, Patterson was eagerly awaiting news from London. In early May, Reginald Bridgeman informed him that there had been little progress made in pursuing the application to the Home Office. Time was running out, there had been no news from Whitehall and he (Bridgeman) was about to leave for a meeting at the LAI Secretariat in Berlin to discuss the matter. Patterson pondered about whether or not he should join him.

Meanwhile, the British authorities were discussing Patterson’s application. Not surprisingly, the Home Office was highly suspicious about the request and asked the Colonial Office and Scotland Yard for background information about the organizing committee. The
officials at the Colonial Office were, from the beginning, rather critical about the motives of the organizers and the conference. They soon established a link between Ford, the ITUCNW and the RILU, although a definite connection between the organizers and the RILU could at the time not be proven. The crux of the matter was what kind of policy to pursue: to reject or to approve? If the application was rejected, the likelihood of the event being transferred to Moscow, or somewhere else, was considered to be as problematic as if the meeting was to take place in London – in the former case one had little chances of monitoring the meeting, in the latter case the significance of a meeting of radicals on British soil could only lead to troubles in the colonies. 129

While the officials at the Colonial Office discussed various solutions to the dilemma, the Scotland Yard intercepted a letter from Moscow to the CPGB that shed further light on the background of the conference. The mail included a report written by a certain Vaughan Mise. Almost nothing was known about the author and his identity could not be established, except that he had previously contributed an article to the International Press Correspondence, the organ of the Third International, on Negro matters, the Scotland Yard reported. In his intercepted article, Mise had attacked colonial exploitation and oppression in the Belgian Congo and British East Africa, and had ended his article with a call to participate at the London conference:

> The International Negro Labour Conference which meets in London on July 1st has as its task this awakening of the class-consciousness of these oppressed colonial peoples, to stimulate, direct and organise their evolutionary struggle which is part of the world wide struggle of the proletariat against imperialism. This conference will elaborate plans of work for the fighting organisations composed of white and black workers and all the toiling masses... For further information, apply to James W. Ford, Chairman, International Committee of Negro Workers, 2 West 15th St., New York City, USA. 130

If the language of Patterson’s application was ‘neutral’ and had avoided any communist vocabulary, Mise’s article made it clear that the planned conference was to be something other than an inoffensive gathering. Although the ‘International Committee of Negro

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Workers’ would not definitively be labelled as being a Communist organization, the Colonial Office strongly rejected the approval of the application.\textsuperscript{131}

By May 21, more than one month after Patterson’s inquiry, the Home Office was about to make its final decision on the matter. At this point, however, the affair became an issue in Parliament. As had been promised by Maxton, an attempt was made to make an official inquiry about the application in the House of Commons. On May 22, James Maley made a request in Parliament and asked the Home Secretary if the Home Office had received an application from the Provisional International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers in America for permission to hold the first international conference of negro workers in London in July next; whether a reply has been returned and whether the Secretary of State for the Home Office will acquaint the House (Parliament) of the attitude of His Majesty’s Government towards the matter. Maley’s move was a clever one: portraying the organizers as an American committee, he underlined the ‘Atlantic’ and not ‘Russian’ connection of the establishment. However, much to the dismay of Maley, the answer of the Home Secretary was as short as it was utterly disappointing: he was unable to give any sanction to the proposed conference or to authorize any facilities for the attendance of delegates. The matter was closed.\textsuperscript{132}

Patterson was chocked when the received the negative news about the rejection of his application. At the moment, he still held some hopes that the matter was again debated in Parliament. His biggest problem, however, was that he had no instructions on how to proceed. Ford was on his way to London from New York, Padmore somewhere in West Africa and none of them could be reached. The comrades in London were of no help either, so he decided to discuss the dilemma in Paris and in Berlin and to activate ‘Plan B’: to prepare Hamburg as a replacement for London as the site of the venue. Patterson proposed to Moscow that Chatto and the LAI Secretariat in Berlin were to take over as the main organizers of the conference.\textsuperscript{133}

One week, later Patterson informed his comrades in Moscow about the definite cancellation of the London Conference. Patterson was confronted with an almost impossible mission. The delegates were already on their way, the conference was scheduled to start on July 1 but all of the practicalities concerning the conference were as unresolved as they had

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{131} 1st International Trade Union Conference of Negro Workers, London, Minutes 9.5.1930 and 15.5.1930, TNA CO 323/1096/10.

\textsuperscript{132} Extract of Debates in House of Commons, included in Minutes, 22.5.1930, TNA CO 323/1096/10.

\textsuperscript{133} Handwritten letter from WW to Negro Bureau Profintern, London May 24, 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 13fp+bp.
\end{footnotesize}
been when he and Padmore had arrived in Berlin in mid-April. He himself was in no position to give orders. “Who will handle things now in Germany? This matter must go forward at once,” he desperately urged the Negro Bureau.134

8. Activating Plan B: Berlin to organize the conference

News about the negative response from the British government reached Moscow at the end of May. Patterson’s first warning about a possible negative response of the British government had prompted the RILU headquarters to launch an alternative plan for the conference, namely to relocate it to Germany. On May 26, Ford was informed about the new arrangements and was urged to make sure that the delegates, who were on their way to Europe, also had a German Visa. “This will be necessary,” it was underlined, “if it should not be possible to hold the conference in London. If the delegates also have a German Visa, then the meeting place can be changed without a delay.”135 Further actions were taken a few days later when it was evident that the conference could not be arranged in London. An extended session for the ITUCNW was called on May 29 and was attended by influential Comintern members. In addition to the members of the Negro Section, Harry Haywood, Vaughan Mise, Comrade Slavin and Comrade Williams136, the other participants were Comrades Heller, Emondez [Hernandez?], Jones, Kratoff, Adams, Bennet and Torasova.137 Although the Labour Government’s refused to sanction the conference in London, the meeting’s participants decided to go ahead with preparations for the conference. Delegates from all over the African Atlantic were already on their way to Europe and cancelling the conference could only be interpreted as a capitulation by the Comintern in front of the enemies of the international working class movement. To find a replacement of London was regarded as being practically problem. In fact, at the very beginning of the planning of the conference in 1929, Berlin and not London had been put forward as the place of venue for the conference. Therefore, the

134 Handwritten letter from WW to Negro Bureau Profintern, May 30, 1930, RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 14 fp+bp. It is likely that Patterson wrote this letter while he still was in London. Hakim Adi, on the other hand, claims that Patterson had returned to Germany at the end of May, but gives no references (Adi 2008, 246). In my opinion, it is unlikely that Patterson stayed in Germany at this point; instead, it is more likely that he went to Paris, where he is known to have lived in June 1930 – at least one letter of him to Harry Haywood is dated Paris, June 24, 1930 (filed in RGASPI 534/4/330, fol. 15).
135 Copy of letter from NN to Ford, 26.5.1930, RGASPI 534/8/139, fol. 69.
136 Boris Danilovich Mikhailov.
137 The identity of these participants – apart from Bennet (alias David Petrovsky alias Max Goldfarb, the Head of the AgitProp Department of the ECCI) – has yet to be established.
negative news from London only meant that Plan A had to be replaced by plan B, i.e., to relocate the conference to another site, preferably in Germany.\textsuperscript{138}

The meeting also decided that all preparatory work for the conference had to be finished by June 10 and that the material should be on place by June 15. Comrade Slavin further suggested that besides the resolutions already in the process of preparation, i.e., on forced labour, war danger, economic struggles, three additional resolutions should be prepared. The first resolution was to be a protest against the prohibition of the conference in London and was to be prepared by prepared by Slavin himself. Another resolution was to be prepared by Comrade Heller on solidarity with the struggles going on in the colonial world, particularly India and China. The third resolution was to be prepared by Haywood, dealing with the role of reformism in the movement of Negro workers and toilers. Slavin’s suggestions were all approved.\textsuperscript{139} A few days later he sent a telegram to Ford: “Negro Conference positively not postponed.”\textsuperscript{140}

Despite the existence of a Plan B for the conference, almost nothing is known about the activities in Moscow or elsewhere for the next month. Most certainly, Moscow informed Berlin about the change of plans and the urgent need for a replacement for London. But who in Berlin was approached – the KPD, the RILU bureau in Berlin, the WEB or the LAI? From Moscow’s perspective, the change of site was regarded to be a minor problem; the biggest challenge had been to summon the delegates from the African Atlantic. However, the call from Moscow to relocate the conference posed immense problems in Western and Central Europe. The Great Depression that followed after the Wall Street Crash in October 1929 had hit the European economies by summer 1930. In Germany, Chancellor Müller’s centre-left government had to resign in March 1930, after which a minority government under Chancellor Brüning took over. The Brüning Cabinet applied a tough economic policy, including the reduction of salaries, to counter the economic crisis; its policy was tolerated by the Social Democrats in the Parliament. Political tension marked the next months, and the KPD (as well as the right-wing parties) took the fight to the streets and the factories. If Moscow had sent a call to the KPD headquarters in Berlin, the Karl-Liebknecht-Building, to assist in organizing a conference of Negro Workers in Germany, such an order must have received little attention. Perhaps Moscow’s main address was the LAI headquarters at

\textsuperscript{138} Minutes of the Meeting of the Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU, 29.5.1930, RGASPI 495/155/63, fol. 96.
\textsuperscript{139} Minutes of the Meeting of the Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers of the RILU, 29.5.1930, RGASPI 495/155/63, fol. 96.
\textsuperscript{140} Telegram from Slavin to Ford, [Moscow] no date, handwritten add: 4/VI 30, RGASPI 534/6/139, fol. 155.
Friedrichstrasse in Berlin – but what could they achieve? Who and which organization had the capacity to organize the conference on the spot? Even more problematic was the fact that none of the original organizers were in Germany at that time: Ford was on his way from the USA, Padmore somewhere in West Africa and Patterson had returned to France.

Moscow’s connection in Berlin was Max Ziese, who was in charge of the RILU bureau in Berlin. He had probably already been informed about the possible change of the conference’s location at the end of May and seems to have then received some general instructions about how to proceed. But once again, communications from the RILU Negro Bureau were either not forthcoming or had been lost and by mid-June Ziese sent a concerned note to the RILU headquarters that he was still awaiting for detailed instructions. In his mind, the most pressing one concerned financial matters: who was to pay for the delegates and their stay in Germany? Ziese, who was in charge of all financial transfers via Berlin, informed Moscow that unless he did not receive any authorization from the headquarters, he could not grant any money for the conference.\footnote{Letter from Paul [i.e., Max Ziese] to “Herr Simon”, 17.6.1930, RGASPI 534/8/139, fol. 81.}

While Ziese begged for further instructions from Moscow, he started to take practical steps towards organizing the conference. In a letter to someone in Hamburg – most likely to a leading person at the Interclub or the Port Bureau – he gave detailed instructions to start the preparations for the conference. Most importantly, a local commission for the preparations was to be established and led by the recipient; officially, on the other hand, the LAI was to be responsible for the conference. The conference was to start on July 1 and to last for two to three days but was to be opened on the evening before by a local summit of delegations that were to be invited and organized from crew members onboard on ships in the harbour of Hamburg. As Ziese had no information about the financial resources that were at his disposal, he suggested that the conference was to convene in a meeting space above the Interclub. This will save us money, Ziese underlined, but assured that the location had the advantage that the Negro and other seamen, who knew the Interclub, could easily be directed to participate at the opening event of the conference as to give it a more festive framing. For the time being, he underlined, Ziese could authorize some 60 to 100 Reichsmark to cover for the costs of the preparations of the conference. Last, but not least, Ziese notified his colleague that the delegates are supposed to travel to Leningrad after the conference but, he stressed, this piece of information had not yet been confirmed.\footnote{Letter from NN [Max Ziese] to NN, 17.6.1930, RGASPI 534/8/139, fol. 82. Max Ziese as the author of the letter can be established through a critical analysis of its content and a comparison with the letter Ziese wrote to
About two weeks later Ziese finally received the instructions he had been waiting for and informed Albert Walter that he, i.e., the RILU bureau in Berlin, would cover all expenses for the upcoming conference. However, no excessive expenditure was to be allowed. The conference was to convene in the Port Bureau, the delegates were to be accommodated there and each delegate was to get a per diem of 12 Reichsmark. Further, the conference was only to convene for three days. Afterwards, the delegates were to be transferred via Leningrad to Moscow. Ziese ended his note that he would himself travel to Hamburg in a few days to discuss the other practical details with Walter.

Apart from the RILU bureau in Berlin and the Port Bureau in Hamburg, three other organizations were activated: the LAI, the Berlin bureau of the Internationale Rote Hilfe (IRH, International Red Aid), and the WEB. The IRH Bureau’s exact involvement in Berlin during June cannot (yet) be established. However, it is likely that someone at the IRH Bureau was engaged: in April, when Patterson and Padmore visited Berlin, a representative of the IRH Bureau was present at their meetings, in late June, when Padmore (unexpectedly) turned up in Berlin, he called at the IRH Bureau (see below), and at the Hamburg Conference itself, an IRH representative, Comrade Willi Budich, participated. Chattopadhyaya and the LAI Secretariat, on the other hand, bore the main responsibility for practical arrangements.

Even more crucial was the WEB’s involvement. In April, WEB Representative Aitken Ferguson (alias Neptun) was involved in the surveillance of the event. However, the decision to relocate the conference from London to Hamburg took the WEB and the RILU-Apparatus in Berlin by surprise. The biggest challenge to the offices in Berlin was that the financial matters were totally unresolved in late June when Padmore arrived with his African delegation. The chaotic situation in Berlin is openly addressed in a curious report, dated 9 July: as its author is not yet established, it remains a mysterious document. It is unlikely that someone at the WEB wrote the document as the Bureau eventually was prevented from engaging in the immediate arrangements and surveillance of the conference. The document’s author, on the other hand, gave an eyewitness report of the immediate days before the conference was opened. A possible clue to the identity to the author comes from the

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143 Letter of NN to “Herrn Walter,” 4.7.1930, RGASPI 534/8/139, fol. 91. The letter was most likely written by Ziese and addressed to Albert Walter.

144 Auszug aus dem Protokoll des WEB Nr. 109 vom 16.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 11; letter from Stassova to Losowsky (original letter, 5.8.1930), RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 11.

145 Protocol of the WEB (extract), 11.IV.30, RGASPI 495/155/83, fol. 94.
information that the Head Office (“Hauptgeschäft”) had sent a telegram to the author about how the financial matters were to be resolved. The Head Office, most probably the RILU Headquarters in Moscow, had been extremely late in reacting: the instructions reached Berlin by early July.\footnote{Report by an unidentified WEB official about practical problems with organizing the Hamburg Conference, dated 9 July 1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 71 fp.} 

9. Hamburg, eventually…

The turmoil in Germany regarding the ad hoc, if not chaotic, arrangements for the conference became evident when Padmore arrived with four Africans in Berlin on June 24, 1930. To their big surprise, no one seemed to know anything about the matter. Problems had already started when they arrived in Liverpool about one week earlier. Nobody seems to know anything about what to do or who was in charge. Being chased all over in Liverpool and London by detectives, Padmore decided to take his African delegation to Berlin in hopes of receiving definite instructions as to where the conference was going to be held and who would be in charge of it. Nothing was heard from Ford or Patterson either – the former was still on his way to Europe, the latter was probably still in Paris.\footnote{Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 10; Mush (Nigeria), (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 27. Mush can be identified as Frank Macaulay. His report, however, is wrongly dated; the correct date is August 5. Macaulay gave a vivid description about the fate of the African delegation in Liverpool, London and Berlin. Some of his recollections, however, must be doubted. He claimed that one comrade from the Gambia became sick – he had been suffering from dysentery and malnutrition - and had to go back. Who was this delegate? It cannot have been E.F. Small, the only delegate from the Gambia, as he certainly participated at the conference and also at the Fifth World Congress of the RILU in Moscow a few weeks later. Was it perhaps E.A. Richards – apart from his alleged speech at the conference, nothing else is known about his participation at the conference and his did not, to my knowledge, participate at the RILU Congress in Moscow. The two delegates from the Gold Coast left during the conference and Frank Macaulay participated both in Hamburg and Moscow.} Chaos and confusion continued in Germany. Padmore had almost no money, he was in charge of the Africans and the comrades in Berlin did not respond to his pleas for assistance and support! Max Ziese at the RILU bureau in Berlin, with whom Padmore had a meeting on June 25, bluntly refused to provide Padmore any money for food and accommodation for the Africans, arguing that he had not received any instructions from Moscow or anyone else to do so. He also rejected to send a cable to Moscow inquiring about Padmore’s credentials and the high-level decision made in Moscow that Padmore and his delegation was to be supported.\footnote{Confidential letter from Padmore, dated Berlin June 30th, 1930 (typewritten, copy), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 61. Although the recipient of the letter is not indicated, it is evident that it had been addressed to the WEB Bureau in Berlin as is stated in a letter from Alarich [Richard Gyptner] to "K.I.", 3.7.1930, RGASPI 499/1/22, fol. 146. The letter was received by Heimo in Moscow, who notified that Losowsky was immediately to be sent a a copy of the letter. According to a handwritten add, the copy was sent on 12 July.}
Padmore was furious. A few days later he critically remarked about the Ziese-incidence to the WEB, whose representative Comrade Alarich alias Richard Gyptner notified the Comintern headquarters and asked them to immediately send a telegraph to Münzenberg and Ziese to clarify the confusion.\textsuperscript{149} He also cabled Harry Haywood, outlining his desperate situation:

Stranded here with four other. Situation desperate. Immediate help needed because assistance of any kind categorically refused here. Most urgent that you instruct by wire to give immediate help.\textsuperscript{150}

Even worse, none of the material that had been drafted and prepared in Moscow for the conference had been sent to Germany! Padmore urgently called Haywood to send the material by air-mail directly to “Walter in H.”, i.e., Albert Walter.\textsuperscript{151}

Padmore’s next move was to contact Willi Münzenberg. He had already contacted the LAI Headquarters upon his arrival in Berlin, but although the comrades at Friedrichstrasse had rendered all possible assistance, they too informed him that they were unable to grant any financial relief because the Negro Conference was officially a Profintern affair. Faced with this desperate situation Padmore interviewed Münzenberg, asking him to meet with Comrade Ziese in order to straighten out the situation. Much to their dismay, Comrade Ziese refused to participate in any group discussion and instructed Padmore not to return to him again.

By June 30, having been stranded for a week in Berlin, the mood of the African delegation was reaching its nadir. Padmore was more frustrated than ever before:

Comrades, it is now one week since I have had these Negro workers in Berlin during which period I have not been able to provide them with a penny for food. As a result of this the men are entirely demoralised and are demanding to be sent back home. In view of this situation, and having exhausted every possible means to get relief, it becomes necessary for me to place the situation before you with the hope that your intervention will remedy matters.\textsuperscript{152}

As noted above, Padmore’s inquiry had been addressed to the WEB and he pledged for an opportunity to meet someone at the earliest convenience to discuss his precarious situation. If Padmore ever met anyone is not known. Nothing could been done to remedy the

\textsuperscript{150} Telegram from G.P. (Padmore) to Harry (Haywood), Berlin 26.6.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 60.
\textsuperscript{151} Telegram from G.P. (Padmore) to Harry (Haywood), Berlin 26.6.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 60.
\textsuperscript{152} Confidential letter from Padmore, dated Berlin June 30\textsuperscript{th}, 1930 (typewritten, copy), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 61.
embarrassment of Padmore and the African delegates at the WEB Headquarters in Berlin either with regards to financing the Hamburg Conference. At this point it had not yet been decided in Moscow! Only in the last minute – perhaps as a consequence of this telegram to Haywood, the RILU European Bureau received instructions from Moscow to deal with the Africans in Berlin.

Padmore’s arrival in Berlin marked the final leap for the gathering in Hamburg. Initially, the start of the conference had been set for July 1, but it had to be postponed for one week. When Willi Budich, Comrade Lehman and a representative from the RILU-Office in Berlin arrived at the Seaman’s Club (Seemannsklub) in Hamburg on July 6, Albert Walter informed them that the opening of the conference was to be delayed an additional day as James Ford and the North American delegation had not yet arrived. Ford had sent a telegram to the organizers informing them that he and seven African Americans were expected to arrive on board the German steamship Dresden at Bremen on July 6. From there, they would immediately proceed to Hamburg. Most delegates had arrived the following day, including Padmore and the African delegation, and although the North Americans were still missing, the conference was provisionally opened by Patterson at noon as the two delegates from the Gold Coast had to leave Hamburg the same afternoon! Only at six o’clock in the evening on July 7, did Ford and the African Americans arrive. The conference was officially opened.

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153 Report by an unidentified WEB official about practical problems with organizing the Hamburg Conference, dated 9 July 1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 70bp.


155 The identity of the other representative from Berlin is not known. He – presumably it was a male person – is the author of the critical report dated 9.7.1930 (see RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 70-71). It is likely that it was the representative of the RILU as Budich refers in his report to him but whose identity was not known to Budich (RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 12). Be as it may, the person had travelled to Hamburg on Sunday 6 July to monitor the final preparations of the conference and belonged to the group who decided to postpone the conference with one day. Thereafter, it seems, he left Hamburg as he notified the recipient of his report that he did not know anything further of the conference apart what had been revealed in a short notice in the Rote Fahne. The only clue about the identity of the author is indirect: in the report, the author refers to “unser Herr Anton” (our Mister Anton), “unser Herr Lehmann” (our Mister Lehmann) and “unser Vertreter Ford” (our representative Ford). The identity of Anton is not known, perhaps it is an alias. Lehmann, on the other, might refer to Kurt Lehmann (1906-1986) or his brother Werner Lehmann (1904-1941): both were members of the KPD and at least Kurt Lehmann was linked to the Port Bureau and later the ISH. The reference to James W. Ford is the strongest indication that the author was someone connected to the RILU-Apparatus.

156 Ford had planned to travel onboard the Hamburg-German line but the company refused to transport a group of African American workers. He therefore had on a short notice to change the travel arrangements for the American delegation and find another ship that would take them to Germany. Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 10.

157 Patterson, Biography, 16.4.1932, RGASPI 495/261/3072-I, fol. 103.
this point, however, both the delegates from the Gold Coast and the RILU-representative had already left Hamburg. The conference lasted until July 9.\textsuperscript{158}

Not all delegates who intended to participate were able to make the trip to Europe. Despite a strong interest in South Africa in rallying and electing several delegates for the conference, only one white person eventually made it. Three of the delegates were denied passports by the South African authorities. Ford had been informed that they had disappeared after taking a boat – thus trying to reach Europe illegally – and feared that the ship’s captain had killed them. The French authorities, too, refused to grant visas for delegates from Paris, and the British customs authorities did their utmost to prevent any African to enter or leave British ports. Consequently, neither Jomo Kenyatta nor Garan Kouyaté was able to participate in the conference. The delegates from Panama and Cuba never arrived.\textsuperscript{159} On the other hand, the German police did not take any notice of the extraordinary gathering at Rothesoodstrasse. The police in Hamburg did learn about the meeting first after an announcement had been published in the local Communist press, the \textit{Hamburger Volkszeitung}, on July 17!\textsuperscript{160}

At least Kenyatta’s failure to attend the conference was only partly due to British restrictions. Communist bureaucracy rather than the British authorities actions had prevented him from reaching Hamburg in time. Padmore had asked the LAI and the CPGB to nominate an African delegate from Britain to attend the conference but the Party decided to send Kenyatta to Germany. For reasons not known, Kenyatta turned up in Berlin one day after the conference had closed and the participants were ready to proceed to Moscow for the RILU Congress. Kenyatta contacted the LAI International Secretariat and asked for new directives. Here he met Chattopadhyaya who told him to wait until he had discussed with Ford about Kenyatta’s transfer to Moscow. What then happened was a break of communication not untypical for the Comintern Apparatus. Either Chattopadhyaya did not reach Ford or the latter’s reply was lost but nothing was heard from Ford or any other comrade about what to do

\textsuperscript{159} “The international conference of Negro workers,” report dated 29.7.1930 (no author, but as will be argued in footnote 164, it is likely that it was Ford), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 246, 249.
\textsuperscript{160} “Internationale Konferenz der Neger-Arbeiter,” being an inquiry by one Dr. Kaiserberg to the Police Office in Hamburg about information on the international meeting for the support of the Communist Negro Movement, dated 17.7.1930, BArchB R 1501/20224, Reichsministerium des Inneren. Internationale Hafenbüros und Seemannklubs, Jan. 1930 – Nov. 1933, fol. 10.
with Kenyatta. After weeks of waiting in Berlin, Chattopadhyaya advised Kenyatta to return to England.\(^{161}\)

Despite all the hardships and drawbacks, Ford, Huiswoud, Padmore and Patterson\(^{162}\) were able to gather a rather impressive representation to Hamburg in July 1930. In total, seventeen\(^{163}\) delegates and three ‘fraternal’ delegates attended the conference. Eight of the black delegates came from the USA and one the British Caribbean.\(^{164}\) The African delegates were the aforementioned E.F. Small, E.A. Richards, Frank Macaulay, T.S. Morton and J.A. Akrong. Other participants were Emil Solomon Sachs alias Albert Green from South Africa\(^{165}\), and Joseph Bilé who represented the DSLVN. Also present were the LAI Secretary V. Chattopadhyaya as well as Willi Budich, the representative of the International Red Aid.\(^{166}\) The WEB representative, however, was not able to attend, which was to cause some critique against the organizers.\(^{167}\)

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\(^{161}\) The ill fate of Kenyatta in Berlin was brought forward by George Padmore several years later in one of his critical communications with the LAI headquarters. See letter from George Padmore to ‘Dear Hans’, 11.5.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 70. The recipient of the letter has been identified as Hans Thørgersen, see CoWoPa 21/2010.

\(^{162}\) Patterson participated at the conference but it is not known when he arrived in Hamburg.

\(^{163}\) The actual number of participants is somewhat mysterious, if not confusing. According to the report Ford had prepared in July 1930, there were 19 delegates and three fraternal delegates. ‘The international conference of Negro workers’, report dated 29.7.1930 (no author, but as will be argued below, it is likely that it was Ford), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 246. Most authors, on the other hand, follow the ‘official’ version of 17 delegates as stated in the published account of the Hamburg Conference, Report of Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers, Hamburg: International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers 1930 [Hereafter: ITUCNW, Report of Proceedings, 1930]. Interestingly, the photograph attached in the publication also depicts seventeen persons but one of them is a white female person. The only white/European persons participating at the conference were Budich, his female assistant and the South African delegate Sachs (Green). Another person who can be identified but was not a delegate is Chattopadhyaya (he was one of the fraternal delegates). At least the two delegates from the Gold Coast were missing from the group picture – they had already left Hamburg. Therefore, the photograph only shows fifteen of the delegates. Who else was missing? Does Ford’s first notion about 19 delegates include the two delegates from the Gold Coast who actually never participated in the meeting?

\(^{164}\) Adi (2008, p. 247) claims that there were two delegates from the Caribbean, Henry Rosemond from Haiti and M. De Leon from Jamaica, but according to Ford’s assessment reports, there was only one. If Ford’s report and the published Report of Proceedings are compared, it seems likely that the Caribbean participant was De Leon. Also in his report to the RILU Executive Bureau, Ford stated that eight delegates came from the USA and one from the West Indies, see Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 13.

\(^{165}\) Emil Solomon (Solly) Sachs (1900-1976) was a South African socialist and a member of the National Executive of South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC) since 1926. In November 1928, he had been elected as Secretary of the Garment Workers’ Union of South Africa (GWU). He attended the Hamburg Conference under the alias A(lbert) Green. He joined the CPSA in 1919 and in 1921 the Communist Youth League, but was expelled from the party in 1931. See further Davidson I, 2003, pp. xxxvi and 251; for a full biography, see South African History Online, http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/sachs-es.htm.

\(^{166}\) See further ITUCNW, Report of Proceedings, 1930, p. 40. There was also an – unidentified – representative of the International Seamen’s Club, another front organization of the Comintern. Budich name is not mentioned in the official report. Archival sources in Moscow, on the other hand, clearly indicate that it was Budich who was the representative of the International Red Aid.

\(^{167}\) Protocol of the WEB Nr. 150 (extract), 7.7.30, RGASPI 495/155/83, fol. 98.
Euphorically, the published report of the conference claimed that the 17 delegates represented 20,000 workers, 7 countries, 11 different trade unions, 2 national trade union centres, one national political party and 2 non-trade union organizations. The biggest African organization that was represented was the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions in South Africa (5,000 members) and the Gambia Labour Union that claimed a membership of 1,000 workers and 2,500 peasants. The two trade unions present from the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast Driver and Mechanics Union and the Gold Coast Carpenters’ Union, had 2,000 respectively 500 members, whereas the railway workers’ union of Sierra Leone counted some 750 members. Macaulay’s Nigerian National Democratic Party, the national political party referred to in the report, boasted with some 5,000 members. In fact, compared to the Caribbean and American organizations that were represented, the African ones boasted the largest Black membership, at least on paper. The American trade unions represented counted African American membership in hundreds: the National Miners Union had 200 ‘Negro’ members, the Railroad Workers’ Industrial League 200, the Food Workers’ Industrial Union 500, the Needle Trades Industrial Union 200, the Agricultural Workers’ Committee 350, and the Metal Workers’ Industrial League 500. Also represented was the American Negro Labor Congress, claiming some 1,000 members, but this allegation had little to do with realities: by 1930 the ANLC was more or less defunct. The only Caribbean trade union represented, the newly founded Jamaican trades and labour unions, was said to have 250 members.

Impressive as the list of participating delegates and organizations was, it was not totally correct. As noted above, the ANCL did hardly exist anymore at the time of the conference. William Patterson represented the ANCL and used his real name, not his alias, when he attended the meeting. Ford is listed as the national organizer of the Trade Union

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168 Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 14; ITUCNW, Report of Proceedings, 1930, p. 40. In his July 1930 report, Ford claimed that the delegates represented 20,500 workers. Nine of the delegates, he claimed, were Communists. 'The international conference of Negro workers’, report dated 29.7.1930 (no author, but as will be argued in footnote 164, it is likely that it was Ford), RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 246.


170 ITUCNW, Report of Proceedings, 1930, 40. Ford gave some slightly different numbers of the membership of some of the above mentioned organizations in his report to the RILU Executive Bureau, e.g., the Gambian Labour Unions representing 1,000 workers and 25,000 peasants (sic) and the Gold Coast Carpenters Union having 5,000 members. Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 13.

171 Harry Haywood, on the other hand, claimed that Patterson was a ‘fraternal delegate’ of the LAI (Harry Haywood, Black Bolshevik. Autobiography of an Afro-American Communist, Chicago: Liberator Press 1978, p. 329). Patterson himself does not discuss his affiliation in his autobiography or his 1932 biography.
Unity League, and only Padmore was officially said to represent the RILU. Consequently, by downplaying and withholding the Comintern connections of two of three organizers, an image of a truly international, all-inclusive, gathering was to be created.

IV. From Hamburg to Moscow and via Berlin to Hamburg

Hamburg marked the beginning of the radical African Atlantic network. It had started as a vision that had merged political Pan-Africanism with radical, socialist and communist aspirations. Its key activists had been African Americans but the objective of the network was to include all parts of the African Atlantic. However, as will be argued below, collaboration with the Comintern-Apparatus provided the making of the network with an agenda that collided with that of its propagators, namely that of Moscow. From Moscow’s perspective, the ITUCNW was to be an integral part of the RILU and of the Comintern’s anticolonial agitation. The question was whose agenda was to be in force: that of the Comintern and the RILU or that of the participants in Hamburg. The former made no compromise in their ’class before race’-approach, whilst the latter seemed to oscillate between the dogmatic approach of Moscow and Pan-African notions of ’race before class’.

The two different approaches had already collided during summer 1930 when the political consequences of the Hamburg Conferences were evaluated (see below). For the time being both Ford and Padmore stood firmly behind Moscow’s official dogmatic, although between the lines, a rift between the ITUCNW activists and their African and African American collaborators and the Comintern and RILU in Moscow can be discerned. In the eyes of Ford and Padmore, the crucial matter was to engage the various anticolonial forces in the African Atlantic, regardless of them being radical bourgeois and nationalistic movements or peasants and workers unions. Such a ’Pan-African’ vision collided with the normative approach of various Comintern functionaries who were doubtful, if not critical, about the usefulness of such an approach.

The transformation of the Provisional ITUCNW to the (proper) ITUCNW was achieved in Hamburg. The meeting laid the foundation and scope of a network although not its agenda. The density, intensity and content of the radical African Atlantic network that the ITUCNW wanted to establish had yet to be formalized. However, similar with the organisational scuffles in the Provisional ITUCNW during the preceding years of the

172 Patterson is listed in the Report of Proceedings under his alias but Chattopadhyaya refers to him under his name. V. Chattopadhyaya, “First International Conference of Negro Workers,” Daily Worker 7.8.1930.
conference, the actual work of the ITUCNW in establishing contacts with individuals and organizations throughout the African Atlantic was a time consuming process and did not start before October 1930. At this point the Comintern and the RILU had decided to split up its agitation and propaganda operations that were addressing the ‘Negro’ workers. Apart from the RILU Negro Bureau in Moscow, a new secretariat was established for the ITUCNW in Hamburg. Officially and nominally, the ITUCNW and its secretariat were to be regarded as ‘independent’ and to seek assistance from similar ‘independent’ front organizations such as the LAI and the ISH. However, political decisions and matters regarding finance and tactics were decided in Moscow via the WEB Bureau in Berlin or partisan institutions in Hamburg.

1. The political consequences of the Hamburg Conference

An assessment of the Hamburg Conference’s political consequences is a problematic undertaking. According to Ford and Padmore, it was a successful event and ushered in the beginning of a new era. From a short-term African Atlantic perspective, such claim is valid. The conference was the first occasion when African American, Caribbean and African trade union activists and radical intellectuals were able to form a unified platform. The ITUCNW’s approach and political ambitious activists were different than earlier Pan-Africanist gatherings of intellectuals and members of the Black bourgeoisie. In the radicals’ minds, Hamburg opened totally new perspectives for international class-conscious cooperation for the overthrow of imperialism and capitalist oppression. Their aim was to establish a radical African Atlantic network.

However, not everybody regarded Hamburg as a turning point or a historical event. Contemporary partisan observers in Berlin and Moscow were dubious, if not critical, of the conference’s immediate. The potential and effectiveness of the radical African Atlantic platform were doubted, if not overtly questioned. From the perspective of Moscow, some of the participants’ credentials were dubious as few of them were communists. Also, from a strategic perspective, Moscow was fully aware of the rift between rhetoric and reality, did the delegates really represent the masses, as they claimed, or were they rather individual players without any backing among the working class? Not surprisingly, the strategists at the WEB in Berlin as well as the Comintern and RILU in Moscow were lukewarm in their apprehension

173 Similar claim by Adi 2008.
of the platform’s potential. Hamburg, in their mind was an opening, but not yet a landmark (see below).\textsuperscript{174}

In the long-run, this pessimistic perception proved right. Whatever Atlantic network that the African American comrades were able to establish, the collapse of the international and national communist platform in Germany during spring 1933 was a severe blow to the formation of a radical African Atlantic ideology. It did survive, however, but with a different agenda. But such a long-term assessment of the political consequences of Hamburg is a backward reading of history, answering only the question of why Hamburg and the ITUCNW failed. In 1930, such a perspective did not exist, not even in Moscow. Although the grand strategies of Ford, Padmore and others were certainly idealistic in 1930, the long-term vision of a radicalization of the oppressed American, Caribbean and African masses was a probable future.

A third perspective on the Hamburg Conference's outcomes highlights the clash of interests between actors and institutions. The events in Hamburg were certainly orchestrated from Moscow and Berlin, but the African and African American participants all had their own agendas. The meeting in Hamburg was to result in the establishment of a Moscow-monitored radical African Atlantic network. At least, this was the intention of the various Comintern- and RILU-Apparatuses. Ford and the other comrades were only useful gears in the Comintern machinery. The conference itself was closely monitored and orchestrated from Moscow as well as the auxiliary offices and institutions in Berlin and Hamburg. However, a different standpoint prevailed among the African and African American participants. In their view, including that of Ford and Padmore, Hamburg was to be, first and foremost, a platform for the Black delegates where the particular problems of the Black race were put first on the agenda. From this perspective, it could be argued that Moscow and Berlin assisted in establishing an institution, but its contents, strategies and visions were formulated by the Black delegates. Not surprisingly, therefore, the legacy of the Hamburg Conference is hardly noticed in Communist and Comintern/Profintern studies. At most the ITUCNW and the Hamburg Conference are mentioned as mere footnotes or examples of the incapability of the communists to gain a profound impact in the anti-colonial struggle in the Atlantic world until 1945. On the other hand, in the discourses of political Pan-Africanism and postcolonialism, the legacy of Hamburg is different. It marked the beginning of George Padmore’s ascendency

\textsuperscript{174} The ambitions of the Comintern-Apparatus in Moscow with regards to the ITUCNW are discussed in Wilson 1974. However, the collision of ambitions of those the ITUCNW activists and those of the Comintern functionaries in Moscow is developed by him as it is only revealed in the internal correspondence and reports which were not available to him.
as one of its key figure and constituted the first attempt to form a global radical African Atlantic network.

An objective assessment of the Hamburg Conference is difficult to make for two reasons. First, there exists no first-hand information about the meeting’s discussions. The only eyewitness report that exists is the one Willi Budich sent to Elena Stasova at the IRA headquarters in Moscow. So far, I have not been able to locate any summary of the discussions by either Ford or Padmore that was written during or immediately after the meeting. Second, the published proceedings of the meeting, the *Report of Proceedings and Decisions of the First International Conference of Negro Workers*, was put together months after the meeting and was finally published in 1931 and not 1930 as claimed on the cover of the publication. Further, the report does not contain the agenda of the meeting, neither any summary of discussions. In addition to Budich’s report, there was a report by the WEB. However, this document is not a primary source as the WEB was not present at the meeting. Instead, the WEB report is a critical evaluation of the political impact of the Hamburg Conference based on the reports by Chattopadhyaya and Lehmann. Unfortunately, these two reports have not (yet) been located.

Thus, only Budich’s report provides any clues about what happened in Hamburg. However, Budich himself was rather critical about the whole event and his personal opinion is strongly reflected in the document. In his letter to Stasova, he complained that the conference had neither been a demonstration nor a real strategic meeting (“weder eine Demonstration, noch eine richtige Beratungskonferenz”)\footnote{Letter from Budich to Herta (pseudonym for Elena Stasova, 1873-1966, president of the International Red Aid from 1927 to 1938), dated 24.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 12.}. The WEB reached a similarly negative conclusion. They concluded that the political and practical impacts of the conference were minimal.\footnote{Extract from minutes of WEB meeting Nr. 109, dated 16.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 11.}

Budich’s main problem was that he could not speak English and thus could not directly intervene in the discussions when he was present. To his big annoyance, much of the discussions had taken place behind closed doors where only the Black delegates convened

\footnote{However, an assessment report, dated 14.8.1930, Ford presented an outline on how the conference had been conducted, see RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 295.}

\footnote{See further CoWoPa 23/2011.}

\footnote{However, it is likely that the core elements and outlines of Chattopadhyaya’s report were repeated or reformulated in articles by Chattopadhyaya that were published under the headlines ‘The First International Conference of Negro Workers’ in *Inprecorr* 10 (34), 25 July 1930 and as ‘First International Conference of Negro Workers’ in *The Daily Worker* (USA), 7.8.1930. The two English articles are more or less identical. A French version was published as “La Première Conférence Internationale des Ouvriers Nègres,” *Correspondence Internationale* X, 62 (23.7.1930).}

\footnote{Letter from Budich to Herta (pseudonym for Elena Stasova, 1873-1966, president of the International Red Aid from 1927 to 1938), dated 24.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 12.}

\footnote{Extract from minutes of WEB meeting Nr. 109, dated 16.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 11.}
and none of the other participants were invited to participate in these meetings. During the first day, Monday July 7, 1930, the various delegates delivered their greetings. Some of these were later published in the Report of Proceedings, although it is not known to what extent the speeches were published in verbatim. According to Budich, he gave the longest speech, but this was not the case with his published speech. Further, the greetings and speeches were in his mind laconic and short, although his negative perspective might reflect his incapability to understand them. On the other hand, he was critical about Ford for not making use of the female shorthand typist who had travelled with him from Berlin; consequently, nothing was put on paper during the presentations. Therefore, either some of the delegates had prepared their speeches in advance or made some written outlines of their speeches and delivered them to Ford or then they were reproduced afterwards when the Report of Proceedings was compiled by Ford.

Fourteen greetings were published in the Report of Proceedings. Their order perhaps reflects the first day's agenda as the greetings of the representatives of the Gold Coast came first in the publication. T.S. Morton’s (Gold Coast) presentation focused on the long working hours and the distressful working conditions of the Gold Coast's carpenters, the low salaries and high cost of living and housing in Accra as well as criticized the colonial government’s salary regulation. Most importantly in the ears of the organizers, Morton ended his presentation by claiming that there was a rising militancy among the ‘rising generation’ in the country. The presentation from the other Gold Coast delegate, ‘Comrade Akrong’, continued to depict the effects of the economic Depression for African drivers and lorry owners in the country resulting in agitation for higher wages and government persecutions and restrictions. The next greetings were made by ‘Comrade Roberts’, who represented the Food and Packing Workers’ Union in Chicago, and Albert Green (alias E.S. Sachs). Whereas Roberts mocked the American Federation of Labor (AFL) for its inability, if not racist neglect, to assist the Negro Workers in their struggle, Green complained about the problems and racial hurdles of organizing black South African workers and condemned the expulsion of militants from the unions. In his mind, “the Negroes [in South Africa] are probably more oppressed than in any other part of the world. They are treated as slaves every minute of the day, and are not

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180 In addition, telegrams and messages of solidarity from the RILU, the Red Sport International, the Japanese Section of the LAI and the Proletarian Congress of Labor of the Philippines were read.

181 Budich omitted to mention in his report that Chattopadhyaya of the LAI also made a speech. V. Chattopadhyaya, “First International Conference of Negro Workers,” Daily Worker 7.8.1930.
allowed even one minute of freedom during day or night,” and castigated the African National Congress (ANC) for being ‘soft’ and for having sided with ‘the bosses’.\footnote{ITUCNW, \textit{Report of Proceedings}, 1930, pp. 13-18, quotation from p. 17.}

The next speaker listed in the \textit{Report of Proceedings} was ‘Comrade Williams’, representing the (American) Railroad Workers’ Union. He, too, was critical of the AFL and condemned the oppression and segregation of Negro workers both in society and in the unions. Thereafter, E.A. Richards from Sierra Leone gave an overview of the 1926 railway strike in his country and the measures taken by the colonial government in the aftermath of the strike to quell his union. Next, Helen McCain from Philadelphia made a short comment on the difficulty of organizing the Negro and Italian workers in Leftist unions and, being the sole female participant, urged the delegates to pay special attention to the conditions of women workers. Her call was, in fact, the only ‘gender-sensitive’ appeal. The next speaker was E.F. Small, who gave a vivid description of the successful 1929 strike in Gambia. However, as with the other African delegates, he gave a critical assessment of the colonial economy, attacked government regulations and the establishment of trust pools which further curbed the already distressful conditions of the peasants. Especially the trust pools were portrayed as the institutions of ‘underdevelopment’: “These pools are formed to exploit cheap labor and effect economies at the expense of the worker and peasant. Their natural consequences are large overstocks of goods and unemployment.” Even stronger in his condemnation of the colonial economic and political system was ‘Comrade Bile’ (Joseph Bilé). In his mind, the use of compulsory labour in the African colonies converted the Africans (again) into slaves and foreign African workers were compelled to work under slave-like conditions. African workers were ‘terrorized’ by the colonial state if the expressed a desire to organize themselves and not even the Christian missionaries sided with the downtrodden: while preaching Christian love they acted like capitalists and were frequently their partners in business.\footnote{ITUCNW, \textit{Report of Proceedings}, 1930, pp. 18-25, quotation from p. 23.}

The next three speakers came from the USA.\footnote{Comrade Hawkins from the National Miners’ Union, Walter Lewis from the (Southern) Agricultural Workers and Comrade Murphy from the Metal Workers’ Union.} All of them addressed the same issue: the segregation and oppression of the African Americans, the effects of Jim Crow legislation and organizations. After them came M. De Leon from Jamaica who represented the Jamaican Railroad Workers Union. He did not refer to his union or its struggle in his speech, but gave a lengthy description of the working conditions and the negative influence of American
plantations on the island. The last – printed – greetings were those of Budich who made a call for proletarian solidarity.¹⁸⁵

Whether or not the greetings and speeches actually were printed in verbatim is questionable. At least Small’s text was edited by Ford afterwards. Small most certainly was using British English and Ford did not. It is therefore unlikely that Small would have written – if he had a written speech – ‘labor’ as the *Report of Proceeding* has it. On the other hand, the purpose of the publication was not to serve as a document of the conference but as a means for agitation and propaganda in the African Atlantic: by reading about the struggles of the African, African American and African Caribbean workers the presumptive audience was believed to identify with the cause of the radicals and the ITUCNW.

On Tuesday July 8, 1930, the meeting commenced behind closed doors. On the agenda was the presentation of various reports, among others, one by Ford that seems to be the one that is published in the *Report of Proceedings*. Budich was able to communicate with the (white) South African delegate, Albert Green (E.S. Sachs)¹⁸⁶, and through him get some information about the discussions and via him tried to influence the debates. Padmore later claimed in his *Life and Struggle of the Negro Toiler* that the topics discussed concerned not only trade union issues, but also addressed the social and political oppression of and racism against black people in the African Atlantic. More specific issues such as land alienation, pass laws and other forms of racial legislation in Africa, racism and segregation in the US South, and the effects of the Great Depression upon the black working class throughout the world, i.e., unemployment and the danger of starvation.¹⁸⁷

According to Ford, time constraints kept the general reports short – about 20 minutes each – whereas the delegates’ reports were given more time. A new committee for the ITUCNW was elected but no officials were selected or nominated. Neither was there a decision about where the headquarters of the committee were to be located. All in all, Ford concluded that the proceedings were conducted in great haste but nevertheless following the rather vague instructions he had received from Moscow.¹⁸⁸ Neither before nor during the conference had he received any detailed directives from the RILU headquarters about what

¹⁸⁵ ITUCNW, *Report of Proceedings*, 1930, pp. 25-29. Interestingly, the greetings by Chattopadhyaya from the LAI were not included!
¹⁸⁶ Sachs was born in Lithuania and had moved to South Africa as a child. It is therefore likely that he spoke German.
exactly should be done. Instead, he had been informed that the conference was only to convene for two days!\textsuperscript{189}

On Tuesday evening, an ad hoc gathering was organized at the International Seamen’s Club where the delegates were able to socialize with the harbour workers and foreign seamen.\textsuperscript{190} The next morning on Wednesday July 9, 1930, the last day of the conference, the delegates discussed and approved the six resolutions that had been presented, including resolutions on the “Economic struggle of Negro Workers”, the “Struggle against Forced Labour”, “Against British ‘Labour’ Government”, on the “Negroes and the War Danger”, “Against Lynchings” and on “International Solidarity”. All of the resolutions had been prepared in Moscow and were included in the \textit{Report of Proceedings}. According to Ford, the resolutions followed the RILU line, but during the discussions the floor had been opened for new or additional ones. It was also decided that the resolutions were binding for the delegates after they had been approved.\textsuperscript{191} However, Budich also noted that a resolution about the International Red Aid and its tasks, which had been prepared by its bureau in Berlin, was approved.\textsuperscript{192} For reasons not known, this resolution is missing in the \textit{Report of Proceedings}!

From Chattophadyaya’s article, on the other hand, one gets a slightly different perspective. According to his outline, it was Padmore who had produced the statement on the ‘Economic struggles and tasks of the Negro workers’, Patterson who had made the appeal against forced labour and Frank Macaulay who had presented the resolution on the war danger.\textsuperscript{193} Be as it may, there is no doubt that none of them had written their presentations themselves: all of the texts had been drafted in Moscow and had been approved by the ECCI Secretariat on June 18.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{189} Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 10, 14.
\textsuperscript{190} In Chattopadhyaya’s article, the evening meeting was ‘crowded’ and the local workers ‘extended their enthusiastic welcome’ to the delegates. Chattopadhyaya – but not Budich – also mentions that the conference was visited on the first day by a delegation from the Hamburg branch of the ‘Revolutionary Trade Union Movement (Trade Union Opposition)’, i.e., the RGO. V. Chattopadhyaya, “First International Conference of Negro Workers,” \textit{Daily Worker} 7.8.1930.
\textsuperscript{192} Budich’s report about the Hamburg Conference (Bericht über die Negerkonferenz in Hamburg), dated 24.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 13.
\textsuperscript{193} V. Chattopadhyaya, “First International Conference of Negro Workers,” \textit{Daily Worker} 7.8.1930.
\textsuperscript{194} The following draft versions are filed among the documents of the ECCI Secretariat, implicating that they were approved in Moscow: 1. Draft resolution, “For a more victorious struggle against forced labour,” filed as 134/Ex.9. No. 99 18/VI/30; 2. Declaration “To all Toilers of the World. To all Negro Workers,” (i.e., the declaration against the British Labour Government), filed as 134/Ex.9. No.102 18/VI/30; 3. “The Economic Struggle of the Negro Workers,” filed as 44/100/9 June 18, 1930; 4. “The Negro Workers and the War Danger,” filed as 134/Ex.9. No.101 18/VI/30, RGASPI 495/18/809, fol. 104-110.
Many of the anti-colonial activists were enthusiastic in their evaluation of the impact and potentials of the Hamburg Conference. Padmore himself hailed the conference to be the beginning of a new era.\textsuperscript{195} Ford argued that the conference stimulated trade union organization in Africa and was in his mind one of the forerunners of the World Trade Union Federation.\textsuperscript{196} The ITUCNW, he declared, had, for the first time, made contact “with large bodies of workers in West Africa and the West Indies […] backward elements of the Negro workers who lack trade union experience, who understood nothing about trade union movements. We have therefore a basis for work among these workers.”\textsuperscript{197} Frank Macaulay envisioned the ‘Negro Conference’ to be the first step towards the formation of trade unions in West Africa.\textsuperscript{198} Other radical contemporary activists, such as Harry Haywood, were euphoric and presented the conference as a remarkable achievement and a milestone in the history of politicization and mobilization of Africans and African Americans.\textsuperscript{199} Chattopadhyaya regarded the conference as an important event, writing a very positive article about it in the \textit{Daily Worker}.\textsuperscript{200} E.S. Sachs (Albert Green), who returned to South Africa by the beginning of October, submitted to the Executive Bureau of the CPSA a report on the Conference,\textsuperscript{201} and Albert Nzula, the General Secretary of the Federation of Non-European Trade Unions (FNETU), regarded the conference to be the most important event of the year. “We managed to make the broad masses of the toiling Negroes in this country aware of the importance of that Conference,” he declared on the Ninth Annual Conference of the CPSA in December 1930.\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{195} Padmore 1931, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{197} Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 15.
\textsuperscript{198} Mush [i.e., Frank Macaulay] (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), [5.8.1930], RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 28.
\textsuperscript{199} Haywood 1978, p. 329.
\textsuperscript{200} V. Chattopadhyaya, “First International Conference of Negro Workers,” \textit{Daily Worker} (New York), 7 August 1930, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{202} Minutes of Ninth Conference, CPSA, 26-8 December 1930 (Extracts), reproduced in Davidson et alii, I, 2003, pp. 251-252. Albert Nzula (1905-1934) used the aliases Tom Jackson, M. Jackson, and Conan Doyle Modiagkotla. He had joined the party in 1928, was elected first black secretary of the CPSA one year later and became the editor of the party organ, the \textit{South African Worker}. In 1930 he was shifted to head the FNETU. In 1931 he moved to Moscow where he stayed until his premature death in 1934. (See further South African History Online, http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/bios/nzula-a.htm.) Nzula was engaged in the national preparations for the Hamburg Conference but was prevented by the South African officials to attend the
If the official image of the organization and impact of the Hamburg Conference has generally been a positive one, a closer reading of the various assessments reveals a rather different picture. As noted above, Budich and the WEB were highly critical about the outcome of the conference. One of their main criticisms concerned the haphazard, if not chaotic manner, in which the conference actually had been organized in June 1930. Another of their criticisms was the decision to relocate the conference from London to Hamburg, a point that had already been raised in the report of 9.7.1930. In Budich’s mind, it was not even clear who had been in charge for calling and organizing the conference.

The same critical observation was made by the WEB who questioned the need to relocate the conference as the Labour government had not explicitly banned the conference to convene in London. Even worse, it seems as if no one ever had thought of informing the WEB in advance about the relocation of the conference to Hamburg! E.S. Sachs, who also produced a critical assessment of the conference, even argued that the conference should have been held illegally in London: “Rather that all delegates would be arrested so that we could make good propaganda out of this.” In addition, due to the haphazard and uncontrolled conditions in Hamburg the WEB demanded that all of the resolutions and statements that were made by the conference had to be thoroughly revised in Moscow. Chattopadhyaya, on the other hand, pointed towards the obvious discrepancies between the interests of the African American working class and the aspirations of the African peasants and radical petty-bourgeoisie. In his article, he underlined that

(1)he conditions of the problems in Africa necessitates different methods and tactics from those in the U.S.A. and there may be a tendency for the Negro workers from the U.S.A. to look at the African Negro question too much from the American point of view.

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204 (Copy of) Letter from Budich to Herta (i.e., Elena Stassova), dated 24.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 12.

205 Extract from minutes of WEB meeting Nr. 105, dated 7.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/63, fol. 98; Extract from minutes of WEB meeting Nr. 109, dated 16.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 11.

206 Green, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 25. Green was an alias of E.S. Sachs. The document is wrongly dated; the accurate date is August 5. Green/Sachs refers in this document to his original report; the above document is a stenographic report of his speech at the meeting of the RILU Executive Bureau in Moscow. The original report is filed as letter from Green to NN, Moscow 2.8.1930, RGASPI 534/7/77, fol. 88-94.

207 Extract from minutes of WEB meeting Nr. 105, dated 16.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 11.

Chattopadhyaya’s observation was certainly correct but highly problematic from the perspective of the organizers. In fact, Chattopadhyaya indirectly criticized the organizers for mixing Pan-Africanist visions with a ‘united front’-approach. It could be argued that Chattopadhyaya called for a reformulation of the ‘Negro’ and the ‘Colonial’ question: the former one being solely for the USA, the latter one for Africa and the Caribbean.

It is likely that Chattopadhyaya articulated the WEB’s position in his article with regards to the challenges and possibilities for the future of international ‘Negro work’. Already in its July 16 minutes, the WEB highlighted the total difference (“ganz unterschiedlich”) of the conditions of the African and African American working population, and suggested to the ECCI Political Secretariat to reconsider the objectives and strategies for the Negro Secretariat. In their view, the Negro Secretariat was to focus only on the USA and that work in Africa and other ‘non-American’ region was to be taken up by other bodies, including the RILU, i.e., the ITUCNW, the Comintern itself and the LAI.\footnote{Extract from minutes of WEB meeting Nr. 109, dated 16.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 11.} In essence, the WEB urged for a split in the ‘global’ orientation of ‘Negro work’: the ‘Negro Question’ was to be that of the USA, the ‘Colonial Question’ that of the Caribbean and Africa.

Ford must have been aware of the critical attitude about the achievements of his conference among the partisan functionaries in both Berlin and Moscow. On several occasions after his arrival in Moscow he had to outline and defend his and the organizers position. His first assessment was presented at a meeting of the RILU Executive Bureau in early August.\footnote{Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 4-16, and Ford, (Concluding Remarks to Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 32-36. See also Adi 2008, pp. 248-249. Another report, probably written by Ford (see next footnote), dated 29.7.1930, is filed in RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 243-251. It is yet to be established if the latter report is a copy of the former one.} He produced an extended version of the report for the ECCI in mid-August. The conference's shortcomings were addressed in both assessment reports. While acknowledging to the various criticism of the haphazard organization of the conference, he eventually put the blame on the various shortcomings in the lack of support of the metropolitan parties and trade unions. Yes, it had been a political mistake to make a formal request to the British Government for arranging the conference in London, but to relocate the conference to Hamburg further added to the confusion. Little help was received from the LAI and neither did the German Party render any assistance in the preparation of the conference. Therefore, he concluded, “in the first place the Conference had been prepared badly, that it was insufficiently prepared – and as a matter of fact, we could state that the Conference was
not a success. It was badly prepared and badly organised, and as a result of this the composition of the Conference was also bad.”

Even harsher was E.S. Sachs' criticism of the conference's bad preparation and organization in his report to the RILU Executive Bureau. The pathetic fate of the stranded Africans in Berlin led him to conclude that “the South African Communist Party, with all its mistakes, could not have arranged a worse Conference than this was.” The reports and resolutions were presented in an entirely automatic working, he bashed, written in a mechanical way and were not even discussed or read before the delegates. Even worse, the presentation of the Africans such as Small’s, were simple and focussed only on increased wages and shorter hours. “We know quite well we did not meet to consider this question, but we know also that these comrades should have been developed and had things explained to them.”

However, Ford did not agree on this point with Sachs negative impressions. Instead, he accused him of being entirely off the mark. Yes, most of the resolutions that had been put forward were hastily prepared but, he strongly noted, they had been checked at the RILU and the Comintern Bureaus. “We did not go into detail in every resolution,” he explained, “but the Committee in charge instructed the comrades to read the resolutions the first day, and talk about them on the floor of the Conference. It was not necessary to read every one of these resolutions that would have taken all the time of the Conference, when we had only two days to get through all the material. We could not judge the reports of the comrades from the different countries. They all made their own reports. We were there to listen to what they said, and to correct them if they were incorrect. We did not tell them what they should read in their reports. This would have been wrong.”

Green’s and especially Ford’s presentations pointed out the weak political radical mentality of the delegates of the conference. While all the American organizations were identified as ‘revolutionary’, none of the African ones were. Although the South African organization was portrayed as ‘revolutionary’, it was only in an ‘embryonic stage’ of organizational development. Even less promising were the participating West African organizations:

The organisations of West Africa were very weak in organisational structure as well as backward in revolutionary class-consciousness. In Nigeria the workers have little conception of the function of a

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211 Green, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), [5.8.1930], RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 25.
212 Ford, (Concluding Remarks to Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 34.
trade union organisation. The Gold Coast organisations although trade union organisations have little understanding of the full meaning of a trade union. The Gambia and Sierra Leone organisations were the only two that had a semblance of trade union organisational understanding, both having conducted serious strike struggles.213

However, if African participation proved problematic, so, too, was the Comintern connection. Little help had been received from Moscow and Padmore was especially left alone with solving problems concerning practical details.214 In the August reports to the RILU Executive Bureau and to the ECCI, Ford was extremely critical about the lack of support he and Padmore had received not only from the British, French and German communist parties but also from the WEB and the other Comintern organizations.215 “We need to criticise strongly and severely these Communist Parties and other organisations,” he declared, “because once we begin to cover up these organisations, we will never get any work out of them.”216 In his report to the ECCI, therefore, he ended up in criticizing the whole Comintern apparatus and blamed it for the shortcomings of the conference:

[---] 7. All of these organisations acted in a bureaucratic manner -- no definite instructions, no work. The Western European Bureaux of the Comintern and Profintern made no effort to find out about the Conference and to assist the comrades in Berlin. These comrades were so bureaucratic that they would not help the delegates who arrived in Berlin. Some of them arrived without means for food and practically had to be fed. Some of the African delegates became so desperate that they threatened to go to the police for food and assistance. The attitude of some of the comrades can be judged by the statement of a responsible comrade in a report referring to the conference as the “Negro Drama”. 8. The European R.I.L.U. Secretariat and the revolutionary movement of Germany gave very little attention to publicity and failed to see the political significance of the Conference.

213 “The international conference of Negro workers,” report dated 29.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 243-251, this ref. to fol. 249. My assumption that Ford is the author of the assessment report is based on a comparison between text of the July report and the August report. The latter report, filed as ‘The first international conference of Negro workers and future tasks’, is dated 14.8.1930, another lengthier version was dated the same day (RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 290-296 and fol. 297-302). The author of both reports is Ford. The content of all three reports is identical; the main difference is the length of each report. The difference between the shorter and the longer version of the August report is that the latter one has a more detailed list of proposals. Ford’s analysis of the backwardness of the West African organizations was similar his report to the RILU: no class development, backward in their trade union point of view and backward in trade union organization. Alas, they only represented nationalist tendencies and nationalist outlooks. Ford, (Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 14.
216 Ford, (Concluding Remarks to Report to the RILU Executive Bureau Meeting), 5.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/490, fol. 32.
9. All of this shows on the part of the CPs, the unions and the sympatetic [sic] organisations, under-estimation of Negro work, Right tendencies and opportunism in practice.

10. Besides these factors and shortcomings the Conference was handicapped by a number of difficulties; the refusal of visas, lack of civil rights, the arrest of a delegate from Panama, the losing (sic) of delegates from South Africa, by what methods we do not yet know, the banning of the conference by the British "Labour" Government, the Jim Crow practices of steamships resulting in late arrival of American delegation; the backwardness and the isolation of the Negro organisations from the International Labour Movement.

11. The Eastern Department and the Negro Bureau of the E.C.C.I. did nothing to popularise the conference and did not sufficiently activise [sic] the CPs. The Secretariat of the E.C.C.I. likewise did not follow up its instructions and activise [sic] the Parties.

12. All of this resulted in the conference itself being conducted poorly and unsatisfactory representation. [---]217

One main difference between Ford’s two reports was in the different suggestions on what kind of policy the Comintern and the ITUCNW was to embark upon. The July report recommended that the Comintern, through the Communist Parties, should organise and strengthen local unions. Ford also suggested that workers should be enlisted from the colonies to be trained as cadres and that efforts should be made to establish a Communist party in West Africa.218 In his second report, Ford was much more frank in his outlines and proposals for future work. First, he demanded that a resolution was to be drawn up and sent to all parties pointing out the shortcomings of the conference. Second, the metropolitan parties were called to strengthen their Colonial Commissions and to focus on work among Negroes. The LAI, the International Red Aid and other central (front) organisations were to establish Negro sections. Third, the ITUCNW was to be based in Berlin with sub-sections in the USA, the Caribbean and in South Africa. Fourth, in Moscow the Negro Section of the Comintern's Eastern Secretariat was to be strengthened, the Anglo-American Secretariat to systematically place the Negro Question on its agenda and the work of the Negro Section of the CI and Negro Bureau of the RILU was to be better coordinated.219

The conflicting assessments of the Hamburg Conference had resulted in a full-blown quarrel in the Comintern's Apparatus. At this point, the ECCI decided to intervene and on

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218 "The international conference of Negro workers,” report dated 29.7.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 243-251, this ref to fol. 251.
August 23, the Political Commission (Politcom) of the Political Secretariat held a meeting to discuss the matter.\textsuperscript{220} Considering both the critical reports by the WEB and Ford, the Politcom decided to acknowledge Ford’s accusations. On August 22, The Eastern Secretariat produced a resolution text that summarized Ford’s criticism and proposals. In addition to approving the above mentioned resolution, the Politcom decided in favour of sending letters of reprimands to the CPGB and the CPF, reminding the parties of their duties to activate their efforts to activate the African population (‘Negro workers’) in their countries and in their colonies.\textsuperscript{221}

The Resolution on the First International Negro Conference echoed Ford’s bitterness about the non-commitment of the metropolitan parties to Negro work and their incapability for rendering the organizers any substantial help in the preparation of the conference. Not only were the American, British and French parties chastised but also the Comintern- and RILU’s apparatus was rated. The RILU Bureau in Berlin was criticized for its bureaucratic performance and lethargy, the WEB for its incapability of grasping the political importance of the conference. Although the LAI was praised for the assistance its Berlin Secretariat had been forthcoming with, the Resolution notified the obvious lacuna of whatsoever contacts between the LAI and the colonial world. The ECCI Negro Secretariat performed poorly and demonstrated that it did not have any contacts with the Colonial Commissions of the metropolitan parties or any other radical Negro organizations. Finally, as a way of self-criticism, the Political Secretariat was blamed for not having followed up its own instructions to the parties.\textsuperscript{222}

The Resolution further confirmed Ford’s proposals on how to strengthen the Negro work of the Comintern. Apparently, Ford’s assessment report had been received and discussed by the RILU Executive Bureau that had approved his proposals. Thus, the Resolution demanded the establishment of an International Negro Committee, i.e., the ITUCNW. This Committee was to be located in Berlin and to have sections in the USA, in the British Caribbean and in South Africa. The Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat was to

\textsuperscript{220} This discussion is missing in Adi’s 2008 presentation.  
\textsuperscript{221} Protokoll Nr 77 der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol-Sekr., 23.8.1930, RGASPI 495/4/47. According to the minutes, one Wilson is said to have participated at the meeting. Could this have been William Patterson? His whereabouts after the Hamburg Conference are not known but there are a few obscure references about him residing in Berlin at the end of August. On the other hand, Harry Haywood (1978, p. 331) claims that Patterson participated in a meeting to the Negro Commission of the CI under the chairmanship of O.V. Kuusinen in late August 1930. Consequently, based on these two observations, it is much likely that Patterson had returned to Moscow by late August, if not earlier.  
work more closely with the Latin American and Anglo-American Secretariat. Black students in Moscow were to be enlisted in the various sections. Last, but not least, the Negro Bureau of the RILU and the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat were ordered to improve the coordination of their activities.\footnote{Resolution über die 1. Internationale Neger-Konferenz,” dated 22.8.1930, RGASPI 495/155/85, fol. 9-10.}

A few days later, yet another resolution criticising the disinterest and neglect of the CPGB and CPF in Negro work was approved in Moscow. As in the earlier resolution, their weak performance in rendering any assistance to the organizing committee for the Negro conference was condemned.\footnote{Resolution on Negro Work,” dated 27.8.1930, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 130.}

2. The Fifth RILU Congress and a new focus for the ITUCNW

At the last day of the Hamburg Conference, the delegates nominated a new ITUCNW leadership. The composition of the Presidium reflected the ambitions of the delegates to have all parts of the African Atlantic represented. In fact, it more than its earlier ‘African American’ bias, the newly elected body had a definitive African focus. Macaulay, Richards and Small represented various African countries, Ford the USA and M. De Leon from Jamaica. In addition, Harry Thuku from Kenya, Albert Nzulu, E. Story and Herbert Newton, the latter two from the US South, were elected as honorary members in their absence. Macaulay and Small were also nominated to the new Executive Committee in addition to James W. Ford, I. Hawkins, Helen McCain, George Padmore, Garan Kouyaté, Albert Nzulu and E. Reid. The last mentioned represented the Jamaican Trades and Labour Unions.\footnote{ITUCNW, Report of Proceedings, 1930, pp. 3, 40.} All delegates were thereafter officially invited to attend the Fifth Congress of the RILU in Moscow; eleven of the delegates accepted and embarked on a ship to Leningrad on June 9, 1930.\footnote{Budich, “Bericht über die Negerkonferenz in Hamburg,” 24.7.1930, RGASPI 534/3/527, fol. 13; van Enckevort 2000, p. 104.}

The idea to invite an African delegation to participate at the Fifth Congress of the RILU had been made sometimes in April 1930, if not earlier. Padmore was given the task of collecting the African delegation who managed to get three West Africans, namely Joseph Bilé, Frank Macaulay and E.F. Small, to join him and Ford for Moscow. Patterson remained in Europe for the time being. The other Africans had either returned to London or to West
Africa. The case of E.A. Richards is puzzling: his name is not found among the participants of the RILU Congress although his trade union was a member of the RILU and thus his participation would have been a logical one. On the other hand, Garan Kouyaté, who had been prevented by the French police from attending the Hamburg Conference was able to travel to Moscow where he joined the African delegation on August 25, 1930.

The eleven African and African Americans constituted a small delegation among the 538 delegates who participated at the RILU Fifth World Congress that convened in Moscow from the 15th to the 30th of August. Ford was nominated as member of the Political Commission of the Congress. At least Macaulay and Small were to give detailed accounts on the conditions of the workers and peasants in their home countries. So did Comrade Green (alias E.S. Sachs). Ford made a general presentation of the activities of the ITUCNW and the Hamburg Conference, while Padmore spoke about the need to agitate for labour union organisation among the Negro toilers, the positive potentials for doing so in the USA, in Europe and Africa, and the disinterest of the unions and parties to concentrate on Negro work.

The presentations of the Africans and African Americans were later published in a special issue of The Negro Worker. In an attempt to evade the suspicions and potential harassment of the colonial governments were Small’s and Macaulay’s accounts published under faked names: George Miller (Small) and Tom Marsh (Macaulay).

The presence of the Africans and African Americans at the RILU Congress was noted by high-ranking functionaries. In the mind of Lozovsky, the General Secretary of the RILU,

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227 At least the two delegates from the Gold Coast, Morton and Akrong, had left for London.
228 Wilson 1974, p. 340 fn 101. The exact amount of Africans participating at the RILU Congress in Moscow in August 1930 is unclear. Wilson (1974), referring to French reports, claims on page 185 that several Africans of the LDRN and more than a dozen Conference delegates [if so, this must have included the Afro-Americans who attended the Hamburg Conference] went to Moscow, but on page 199 that up to 25 Africans participated in the RILU Congress. However, according to an article published in The Negro Worker, there were 17 ‘Negro’ delegates from Africa, USA, West Indies and South America. “What is the Red International of Labour Unions?,” The Negro Worker, 1: 4-5, April-May 1931, filed in RGASPI 532/4/94.
229 Protokoll Nr 90 der Sitzung des Solitsekretariats des EKKI, 7.8.1930, RGASPI 495/3/172, fol. 2.
231 An issue of the French version of the journal, L’Ouvrier Negre, Numéro spécial, 1 Novembre 1930, is filed in RGASPI 495/155/92. Another contributor to the special issue was Mary Adams. This was the pseudonym of Williana Burroughs (1881-1945), an African American activist who lived in the Soviet Union and worked for Radio Moscow. She had written a detailed report, “Woman and child labour in the colonies,” describing the situation of Black women and children in Africa and the Americas. The report is dated 30.7.1930, filed in RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 261-266. It is not clear if the report was presented at the RILU Congress or if somebody had commissioned it. On Burroughs, see further Joy Gleason Carew, Blacks, Reds, Russians. Sojourners in Search of the Soviet Promise, Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press 2008, pp. 86-87. The identification of Macaulay alias Marsh and Smeral alias Miller is based on circumstantial evidence. First, there were only one delegate each from Gambia and Nigeria at the RILU Congress. Second, Kouyaté stated in a letter that he travelled together with March, Miller and Morris from Moscow to Berlin after the Congress. Morris was Billé’s pseudonym. It is known that Small and Macaulay visited Berlin after the RILU Congress. See further letter from Kouyaté to ‘Chère Camarade’, dated Berlin 27.10.1930, RGASPI 542/1/44, fol. 75.
their participation marked a new beginning of a renewed thrust towards bridging the efforts of the workers throughout the world. In particular, he promised his full backing of the aspirations of the ITUCNW to develop into a continent-wide organization and repeated former calls to the metropolitan parties and RILU organizations to recognize the political significance of the work among Negroes. Eventually, the RILU Congress gave its official endorsement to the operational strategy outlined at the Hamburg Conference namely, that economic demands of Negro workers should serve as the principal means for obtaining political objectives. From the perspective off the RILU, the embryos of trade union movements in the African Atlantic were to serve as the cornerstones for future Comintern work in the region. Even more so, according to the decisions of the Fifth RILU Congress, especially in Africa, where there existed hardly a working class at all, the focus of the Communists, including that of the ITUCNW, was to include the agrarian proletariat in their attempts to organize the toiling masses.232

In Moscow, the African and African American delegates also met Harry Haywood who attended a number of the sessions.233 Haywood, whose three years term at the Lenin School was drawing toward a close, had together with Nasanov become the leading members of the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat and been in sporadic contact with Padmore, Patterson and Ford while they had been away from Moscow. Haywood and Nasanov had been closely watching the developments in the USA, as their interest in other parts of the African Atlantic being minimal. However, although Ford had criticized the Negro Section for not having been committed enough to the arrangements of the Negro Workers Conference, part of the inactivity of the Negro Section can be explained by the increasing division of focus of the two Negro Bureaus in Moscow: the Negro Section was to concentrate on the ‘Negro Question’ in the USA, the Negro Bureau on the Caribbean and Africa.

Maria van Enckevort already noted the division of spheres of interest. She points out in her analysis the differences of the two versions of the Comintern Resolution on the Negro Question. In the first version of 1928, the American Negroes are still part of the ‘oppressed Negro race in the world’, van Enckevort notes; in the 1930 resolution, a differentiation is made between the American Negroes and ‘other oppressed people’. Following van Enckevort, and in contrast to what most researchers have argued, Moscow did make a difference between

233 Haywood 1978, p. 331. He mentions that he listened to Ford’s and Padmore’s presentations at the RILU Congress, but does not indicate that he had met Patterson or listened to an address by him. Could this indicate that Patterson did not participate at the Congress?
the struggle against European colonialism in Africa and the Caribbean and the struggle of the African Americans against institutionalized racism and legal segregation.\textsuperscript{234}

In a sense, therefore, the division of focus was cemented by the Negro Commission of the Comintern who convened under the chairmanship of O.V. Kuusinen in late August 1930. Among its members were Ford, Patterson and Haywood. On its agenda was the new resolution on the Negro Question in the USA. The resolution solely concentrated on the problems of the CPUSA and its work among the African American population; it eventually became the resolution of the American Party on the Black national question.\textsuperscript{235} This must have been one of the last political events in Moscow where Haywood participated. In late September or early October he left Russia and returned via Berlin, Paris and Le Havre to the USA.\textsuperscript{236}

### 3. Meetings in Berlin and the outlines of an African agenda

The two West Africans, Macaulay and Small, as well as Garan Kouyaté and Joseph Bilé,\textsuperscript{237} returned via Kiel to Berlin in October 1930 where they had several meetings at the Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism.\textsuperscript{238} At the meetings, the agenda for a common plan of action was discussed as well as the potentials for communist activities in (West) Africa.

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\textsuperscript{234} van Enckevort 2000, pp. 88-89.

\textsuperscript{235} “Resolution on the Negro Question in the United States,” *The Communist International*, 1.2.1931. See also Haywood 1978, pp. 331-338. The 1930 Negro Resolution is discussed by Solomon (1998, p. 84) although he does not refer to the change in the content of the text. Campbell (1994-1995) and Berland (2000) do not at all refer to the 1930 Negro Resolution!

\textsuperscript{236} Haywood 1978, p. 341.

\textsuperscript{237} It is not clear, if Ford accompanied the West Africans to Berlin. Lazitch and Drachkovich (1986, p. 121) claim that he returned to the USA after the RILU Congress and became Vice-President of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights (LSNR). However, there are several flaws with this statement. First, the LSNR, which was the successor of the ANLC, had been founded at a meeting in St. Louis on 15 November 1930. Ford could not have participated at the meeting as he attended a meeting in Hamburg on 16 November. Secondly, Ford does not mention a visit to the USA in late 1930 or even having been elected as vice-president for the LSNR in his autobiography!

\textsuperscript{238} Smeral, Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, dated 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 78-81. The same report is filed in RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 73-76. The English text is a translation of a report in German, Brief No. 2, Fraktion der Liga, to “Liebe Freunde”, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 69-72. This letter contains handwritten corrections by and the signature of Smeral. The German letter is enclosed by five attachments that contain detailed accounts of each of the meetings and its discussions. The first two attachments, Beilage I zum Brief No.2 and Beilage II zum Brief No 2, and the last attachment, Beilage V, deal with the discussions and are filed in RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 77-84, 84-89, 102-103, whereas Beilage III and IV are the German and English versions of an action plan for West Africa. At least the German version is filed in RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 90-93, whereas the English version of the action plan is located in RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 76-78. According to the report, five meetings were held from the 14th to the 18th of October 1930. The last one was held at Willi Münzenberg’s private residence. In addition, a copy of the English translation is filed in RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 93-96.
Especially in the latter question, the debates unmasked the constrained relationship between the class- or race-conscious positions. Small criticized the ‘class-before-race’ perception of the African Americans he had met in Moscow, arguing that racial oppression could not be subsumed into class oppression. However, when he was asked if he declared that all Negroes should unite, he backed and stated: “No, only the Negro workers. One should not unite with the Negro bourgeoisie.”\footnote{Beitrag II, Zweite Sitzung am 15. Oktober, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 85-86, quotation from fol. 86 (“Nein, nur die Negerarbeiter, mit der Negerbourgeoisie soll man nicht zusammengehen.”).} Bilé backed Small accusations, accusing the African Americans in Moscow for a chauvinistic approach – perhaps referring to Harry Haywood or Lovett Fort-Whitman and the paradigm of the African Americans being the avant-garde in the ‘Negro Question’. Another disappointing experience that Small addressed was the narrow-mindedness of the RILU Negro Bureau which, in his mind, downplayed and belittled the importance of the League Against Imperialism. From his perspective it was the LAI rather than any other radical organization that could and should promote and support the anticolonial struggle in Africa and had, during his stay in Moscow, time and again highlighted the important support that the labour strike in Gambia had received from the (British Section of the) LAI.\footnote{Beitrag II, Zweite Sitzung am 15. Oktober, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 86.} On the other hand, the four West Africans were themselves divided over questions concerning the political future of West Africa: Kouyaté favoured a united African republic, the others an individual course of development for the various colonies. Radicals or not, but when asked about their standpoint towards the question of expropriation none of the Africans were in favour of it and had severe doubts if the African peasants and workers would understand its meaning – Small even depicted the peasants in the Gambia as being “contra-revolutionary.”\footnote{Beitrag II, Dritte und Vierte Sitzung am 16. und 17. Oktober, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 88-89. The discussions in Berlin are also summarized in Aitken 2008, p. 608.}

Bohumir Smeral, at that time one of the Secretaries of the LAI, as well the other representatives of the LAI present at the meeting,\footnote{The LAI report was signed by Münzenberg, Smeral, Chatto and Ferdi. It is likely that Smeral wrote the report as he included a personal add in it. Certainly he and Münzenberg met the Africans, but it is not known if the others did so. According to the minutes of the meetings, the LAI representatives present at the meetings were Smeral (chair), Chattopadhyaya, Leitner, Hussun and Chantor.} was rather positive about the opportunities to engage Macaulay and Small in future political work, at least in establishing contacts with potential students and allies in their countries. In the same vein, however, he was cautious about the immediate progress to be made:
Our general impression is that both of them can be used, at least we shall try to establish connections with through them and subsequently with other elements in the country. But we must wait and see how far they will be active at home and what resistance they will have to overcome.  

A programme of action for West Africa, titled “The Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the West African People,” was discussed. (It was thereafter sent to the ECCI for approval.) Smeral was at this point not yet sure about the programme’s actual nature. Was it to be regarded as an advice, a basis for activity or, as he suggested in his report to the ECCI, should it be published as an open letter either directed to Gambia and Nigeria or to the whole of West Africa or even all of Africa, including East and South Africa? However, when it came to sign the programme, the Africans hesitated:

They [i.e., Macaulay and Small, HW] expressed their consent but when asked to sign it became obvious that they hesitated. We did not wish to urge them. They promised to act at home in accordance with our suggestions and advice but would not sign any statement.

Why were the West Africans not willing to sign the programme? Was there something in it that they felt was disturbing? Perhaps they could not agree with the proposed role of the LAI as it was outlined:

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V. In view of the deliberately maintained isolation of each colony, of the employment by imperialism of the people of one colony against that of another, and of the united front of the Imperialist Powers against the subject races, it is absolutely necessary, for the successful overthrow of imperialist exploitation, to establish a united front of the masses in all the colonies of West Africa, with the ultimate object of establishing a strong West African Federation of independent Negro States.

VI. This struggle for independence of the West African people must be politically and organisationally coordinated with the struggle of the various oppressed peoples of the world that are suffering under imperialist domination, and with the international working class.

VII. In order to conduct the struggle for national independence of each West African colony, all those classes in each colony that are the victims of imperialist exploitation and oppression must be

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243 Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 78.
244 The resolution is filed in RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 76-78, (Confidential.) The Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the West African People. A careful reading of Smeral’s report reveals that the ECCI and the LAI had previously corresponded about engaging the two West Africans and to issue a statement on Gambia and Nigeria that was to be drafted in Moscow. Smeral included in his letter the German and English versions of Small’s and Macaulay’s presentations in Berlin which were to be used as the basis for the statement.
245 Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 78.
organised for the struggle and drawn into a common anti-imperialist political organisation – the League Against Imperialism.

VIII. The task of the League Against Imperialism in each colony will be not only to expose to the masses the real nature and the terrible results of the whole system of imperialist plunder and oppression in its various forms and aspects, but also to formulate the political and economic aims of the oppressed masses and to take all possible organisational steps for conducting the struggle for the attainment of the immediate as well as the ultimate demands.246

Or was it the argument about the envisioned independence struggle, a suggestion which at least Small and Macaulay perhaps felt a bit unrealistic or even – at the moment – undesirable?

The two Africans also raised doubts about approaching workers and sending students to Moscow. Although their reaction is not outlined in the report,247 based on Small and Macaulay's background and the restricted size of the local African working class, their vision was perhaps to concentrate on engaging the African intellectuals. Similarly, Smeral notified Moscow that sending West African students to Moscow was ‘undoubtedly’ to meet some ‘technical difficulties’ and urged Moscow to draw up a plan for action in this matter. The biggest problem in Smeral’s mind was that the West African’s assumed that the LAI had immense sums at their disposal for supporting their work back home: “It seems to us that the Negro friends are under the illusion that we can give them substantial material aid. Naturally, this is impossible.”248

The most important decision at the Berlin meeting was the plan to channel all anti-imperial and anti-colonial agitation and activities in West Africa via the Berlin headquarters of the LAI. This had been Small's most central demand during the discussions. His earlier positive experience about cooperating with the LAI must certainly have influenced his viewpoint as did his critical impression of the RILU Negro Bureau. As noted above, he criticized the Comintern and the RILU for its African American approach to Africa in Moscow and told Smeral and the others at the LAI that a new policy had been envisaged after the RILU's Fifth World Congress. According to him, apart from the two existing Negro Bureaus in Moscow, a third Bureau should be established, namely one that was to solely concentrate all of its efforts on (Sub-Saharan) Africa, in addition to a bureau for the Africans in Berlin. Most importantly, he underlined, the comrades in Moscow at unanimously declared

246 (Confidential) The Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the West African People, RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 76.
247 A summary of the discussions was included in a supplement which is not included in the same file as the report. It has yet to be located in the archives in Moscow.
248 Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 79.
that the future centre for work in Africa should actually be in Africa. What was Small referring to? No one in Berlin had been informed about such plans or that a reorganization of work in Africa was under way in Moscow. Could Small have misunderstood some of the discussions he had in Moscow? At the moment there is little documentary evidence that supports Small’s testimonies and, as will be seen below, if there were such plans, they never materialized.

However, it seems as if the LAI – at least for the moment – was sanctioned by Moscow to take a leading role in cooperating anti-colonial activities in sub-Saharan Africa. This new role had been hinted at in Moscow – or at least this was the impression one had at the LAI headquarters in Berlin. An inquiry was sent to the Comintern: “Die Negerfreunde berichten uns, dass Eurer Ansicht nach zwei Negerfreunde (ein amerikanischer, ein afrikanischer) für die Profintern und ein (afrikanischer) bei uns arbeiten sollte. Ist das richtig?” Alas, Small’s information about the policy had to be checked in Moscow, namely that in the future, the RILU Negro Bureau was to be staffed with one African American and one African, while the LAI International Secretariat was to have one African Secretary. Certainly the LAI headquarters could make use of a new secretary but if the LAI was to put a special focus on sub-Saharan Africa, one would also need to send somebody there. The problem was that the LAI International Secretariat did not have any financial resources at its disposal for any expansion of personnel and it lacked contacts in Africa. Therefore, Moscow was informed that the employment of any new personnel and the development of its work in Africa could only be achieved if the International Secretariat received additional financial support from Moscow. Could it be arranged? Whether or not the LAI headquarters ever received the applied funds remains unclear. An African Secretary was never employed although the discussion about the advisability to do so continued for some time.

While the plan to engage an African at the Berlin headquarters backfired, the question of monitoring the selection of African students and sending them for training in Moscow became the only practical activity for the LAI. Macaulay, at least, immediately started to propagate among fellow Nigerians about the possibility of studying in Moscow. Already in London, on his way to Nigeria, Macaulay had sent Smeral a note, informing him about his activities:

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250 Brief Nr. I, Die Franktion (Münzenberg, Smeral, Chatto, Ferdi) vom 18.10.1930, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 28. According to Fredrik Petersson, the recipient of the letter was Heimo.
251 Brief Nr. I, Die Franktion (Münzenberg, Smeral, Chatto, Ferdi) vom 18.10.1930, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 29-31.
We have just received a letter from Macaulay from London dealing with the travelling expenses of the Nigerian students. Macaulay says he received information from Nigeria that the students are ready to leave as soon as he returns. He will leave London this week [i.e., early November 1930, HW] for Nigeria. He estimates that the trip of a student from Nigeria via Liverpool to Berlin will cost £60. He expects that as soon as he sends a telegram upon his return to Nigeria we shall send him £300 for five students.\textsuperscript{252}

If nothing else, Macaulay’s enthusiasm clearly had raised hopes in Berlin that the prospects for extending the LAI network to West Africa was more promising than ever before. And, as will be discussed further below, Kouyaté too had been informed that there were five prospective African students in France who could be sent to Moscow…

4. Any hopes for African radical activism in Western Europe?

While most of the delegates at the Hamburg Conference either had left for Moscow or were on their way home, William Patterson remained in Western Europe during the summer of 1930. The precise itinerary for his sojourn outside Russia cannot (yet) be definitively established, but by putting together the few available pieces of information, a rudimentary picture of his activities can be established. In mid-July, Patterson met Kouyaté in Paris;\textsuperscript{253} by the end of August, he was back in Moscow and participated at the PolitCom Meeting of the ECCI and the RILU Congress. It is even possible that Kouyaté accompanied Patterson on his way to Moscow.

Patterson wrote two lengthy reports in early August, once again analyzing the potentials and constraints for Negro work in France and Britain.\textsuperscript{254} Both reports were based

\textsuperscript{252} Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 79.

\textsuperscript{253} Kouyaté, ‘Rapport sur l’activite du apri communiste français parmi les negres’, 10.9.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 360. The report was written in Moscow – a subsequent one by Kouyaté is dated Moscou, 26.9.1930. At some stage, he claimed to have participated at a World Conference Against Racism and Anti-Semitism in Paris in 1930 (Patterson 1971, p. 102), although I have not yet been able to establish the exact date or even the organizers for this conference. Almost certainly his reminiscences are faulty on this regard as the same photograph is reproduced in Turner 2005, p. 224/225, referring to the Anti-Imperialist International Congress held in Paris in 1937. Both Patterson and Huiswoud can be identified in the photograph. Huiswoud did not visit Paris in 1930. However, according to van Enckevort (2000, p. 136), the Congress convened in March 1938.

\textsuperscript{254} William Wilson (Patterson), “Report on Negro work in France and England,” dated 4.8.1930, and William Wilson (Patterson), “The alliance of the Negro and white masses,” dated 9.8.1930. Both reports are filed in RGASPI 495/155/87. I have not yet been able to establish where the reports were written – somewhere in Europe (Paris?) or in Moscow. Copies of the reports were sent to the ECCI Secretariat, see “Negro Work,” filed as 7665/10/Dictation. WW/FS/2.8.30., RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 6-13, and “Report on Negro Work in France and England,” filed as K/Dict./W. 7706/12 4.8.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 14-22.
on first hand experience, thus indicating that he either was summarizing his earlier experiences or made an evaluation after a new trip to the countries.

His first report was a critical analysis of the state of affairs in France and England. In this one and like his earlier reports, the inactivity and disinterest of the communist parties was attacked:

It is impossible to make a report on the work of our French and British parties. To attempt this would be to infer that concrete work on this sphere of Party activity had been accomplished. In the case of the British Party no such assertion can be made, while with reference to our French Party only a little more can be said.\(^\text{255}\)

Having thus disqualified the metropolitan parties for their inertia and passivity, he still held a positive view of the potential for Negro work in France and Britain. In his mind, the main objective for future work was the formation and strengthening of ‘Negro auxiliary organisations’ both in the metropolitan countries as well as in the colonies. His vision was that strong national liberation movements were to be established in France and Britain and be used by the communists as vehicles for consolidating the anti-imperialist sentiment and activities of the ‘revolutionary Negro elements’ there. In France there existed the ‘Leaguer for the Defense of the Negro Race’, an organisation that according to him had been captured by ‘our French comrades’ (i.e., Kouyaté), but the CPF had failed to grasp the momentum and lost influence in the LDNR. Consequently, the organisation continued to be infused by the nationalist ideology of its bourgeois members and due to the CPF’s lethargy had become completely isolated from the ‘revolutionary movement of the French proletariat’. As poor was the situation in Germany where a branch of the LDRN existed. Here, too, the KPD had remained passive. In England, on the other hand, “an auxiliary Negro organisation has recently been formed,” and Patterson called for the utmost importance to avoid the mistakes of the French and German parties with regard to supporting this organisation.\(^\text{256}\)

Patterson concluded his analysis by providing an outline of action. First, the Negro work of the parties should concentrate on establishing links with Negro seamen via the Port

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\(^{256}\) William Wilson (Patterson), “Report on Negro work in France and England,” dated 4.8.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 279-281. Patterson also noted the non-existence of a radical Negro press in England and Germany. In France, there existed the ‘Race Negre’, the organ of the LDRN, but the journal faced huge financial constraints and had received no support from the CPF.
Bureaux. In this way, the contact between the metropolitan parties and the colonies could be established:

These are the very nerve centres of our liaison system… We may get our organs and other propaganda into Africa across this bridge. Elements from the colonies scheduled for study in our schools may be immeasurably aided by our bureaux.  

In fact, such bureaus existed in several European countries already, although there had been little, if any, work that concentrated on engaging Negro seamen. In France, these activities had degenerated, in Britain they had just begun; in Belgium extremely little was done. Patterson noted that only in Germany was there a functioning system. In this section, he clearly was reflecting upon his recent experiences. Either by himself, or after his discussions with Albert Walter, the then central functionary of the IP Transport and head of the Port Bureaux in Hamburg, Patterson outlined a plan of action that a few months later was to be realized at least in Hamburg:

All the times in these port bureaux must be kept a supply of the official organs of the Negro sections of the centre [i.e., Moscow] and the Negro papers of our auxiliary Negro organisations, the paper of the American Negro Labor Congress included. Sailor elements must be approached in the matter of getting these organs into those black colonies where they are now banned.  

In order to focus on Negro sailors, Patterson underlined the need to create Black Cadres and to work among the Black Troops. Not surprisingly, not much had been achieved in Western Europe in this respect. He also suggested that the Colonial Commissions of the metropolitan parties were to be strengthened by members who were actively engaged in Negro work. Also, the revolutionary trade unions in Europe were to concentrate on work among the Negro working population in their countries, eventually integrating the Negro toilers in the unions and not to establish separate unions. These proposals were later picked up by Ford in his August assessment report and presented first to the RILU and then to the ECCI which basically approved them.

Interestingly, Patterson’s second report on ‘The alliance of the Negro and white masses’ dwelt on the conditions in the USA. Perhaps it was an unintended division of the two

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reports – the first focussing on Africa and the ‘Colonial Question’, the second on the USA and the ‘Negro Question’ – but effectively presented the different positions of the two realms of the radical African Atlantic. On the other hand, Patterson was at this point still closely in line with the ‘class before race’ approach when dealing with the conditions in the American South:

The Negro masses need only look around them to see on every side elements of their own race whose material position much more clearly coincides with the position of the ruling class of the dominant whites than it does with their own. They need only look around them to see millions of indescribably poor white workers and farmers, whose position much more nearly resembles their own, than it does that of the ruling class of the white race or the more favoured section of the black world.\(^{260}\)

Patterson, too, returned to the USA after he had accomplished his term at the KUTV. His actual departure from Russia is difficult to ascertain. His autobiography is extremely vague for the period between his participation at the LAI Congress in Frankfurt in July 1929 and his activities back in the USA, the earliest date being March 1931. Not much is known for his activities during the latter part of 1930 apart from his two reports from early August 1930 and his participation at the end of August at the PolitCom Meeting in Moscow – and an obscure note in a letter by one F.C. Moore in late August.

In a letter dated 'Moscow, August 26, 1930,' a certain F.C. Moore informed a ‘Dear Comrade’ that he should choose one or two Negro comrades from among those he (the author) had got into contact with and send them ‘here’ to Moscow to attend the KUTV or the Lenin School. Moore informed the letter's recipient that the plan was to train the Negro comrades so that they will be able to carry out work among Negro seamen as well as to establish and maintain contacts with Africa. The two Negro comrades to be selected should not be over 35 years old, preferably be unmarried and have a background as seamen. Moore also notified that he had already discussed the matter with one Walton and together made a shortlist of potential candidates, namely “Stewart, Heynes, Thomas, Gibson, Evans.” The matter, Moore stressed, was urgent and should be taken up at once. At the end of the letter, Moore instructed the Comrade: “Reply to William Patterson c/o Anti-Imperialist League, Berlin. It must be sent through safe channels.”\(^{261}\)


\(^{261}\) Confidential letter from F.C. Moore to 'Dear Comrade’, Moscow, 26.8.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 73.
The identity of the letter’s author, F.C. Moore, is puzzling and almost mysterious. The day before he wrote the letter, he had conducted a lengthy report about the political situation among Africans living in Liverpool. This report was an eyewitness report about Moore’s visit to Liverpool and inquiries about the social and political conditions of the about 300 Africans living in the town. Most of them were seamen, others had a permanent employment, chiefly in Lyle’s Sugar refinery, the report declared. In effect, the report gives a close description about the attempts by three members of the Liverpool D.P.C. (District Party Committee?), Douglas Walton, Molly Walton and F.C. Moore, to engage in Negro work and to establish a Negro Committee. They had started their work on April 1, 1930, a Negro Society and a Committee were established after a meeting in a local chapel that had gathered 80 participants. Soon, however, the organization had run into troubles with the local person, who agitated against them and resulted into a drop out of members. Although the Society had been in favour of sending a representative to the forthcoming Negro Conference to be held in London, the conference’s rescheduling to Hamburg only became known to them when they read about the opening of the conference in the Daily Worker. Moore and the two others had in the mean time been active in the harbour front, setting up an International Seamen’s Club, and were planning to integrate the Negro Society within the Seamen’s Club. At least Moore had thereafter left Liverpool at the end of July for Moscow.  

F.C. Moore almost certainly was a local English Communist and a member of the local branch in Liverpool. Walton, to whom he referred to in his letter, must have been either Douglas or Mary Walton. But what about the reference to Patterson? It is much likely that Patterson had met Moore and the Walton’s when he made his own investigations in Cardiff and in Liverpool in April or May 1930. However, Patterson was – presumably – still in Moscow at the time of writing. Does Moore’s letter indicate that there were plans of sending Patterson to Berlin to work at or through the LAI?

5. Kouyaté, the LAI and the lack of support to the DSLVN

As previously noted, Kouyaté and Bilé had travelled with Small and Macaulay from Moscow to Berlin and had participated at the meetings at the LAI Secretariat in October 1930. Kouyaté was not happy about hearing that the LAI was not able to give any financial support to the LDRN. In matters of sending students to Moscow, on the other hand, the prospects were

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rather bright in France. Kouyaté informed Smeral that there were about five potential candidates available for immediate transfer, and it was decided at the meeting to send them without further delay to Moscow. However, the practical details were to be sorted out with the CPF and the CGTU in Paris. In Berlin, Bilé was to be supported by Smeral in his ambition to join the KPD. Smeral further suggested that Bilé was to move to Hamburg and be employed there. Unfortunately, he did not state by whom, although he made an indirect reference in his letter to the German Party but doubted if they would find any use for him: “(Bilé) expects to get a paid job. Of course, we are not in a position to know whether the Party will agree to this. After all, his abilities are limited and he could not be of much use.”

Kouyaté angrily responded about the reluctant engagement of the LAI to their cause. In a letter to the ECCI, he criticized Smeral and Chattopadhyaya for being obstructive and for disregarding the potentials of the Africans in Berlin. According to him, both of them were actually hostile to the idea of Bilé joining the KPD. In his mind, their argument of him lacking a ‘revolutionary spirit’ was a subjective, if not racist opinion:

Ils allegent que ce camarade, comme les autres negres de Berlin, n’a pas l’esprit suffisamment révolutionnaire. C’est la une nouvelle ideologie, ba, je pense que l’esprit revolutionnaire se renforce, se développe ou s’acquiert par l’éducation et l’action militante; la situation economique de la personne y aidant de façon essentielle.

Even worse, Chatto’s preferences for supporting colonial activists were biased. According to Kouyaté, while rejecting any support to Bilé, Chatto had given support to a ‘Hindou’ while the West Africans were in Berlin! He issued an indignant protest in his letter about the state of affairs at the LAI Secretariat: “En le signalement, je crois protester contre un état d’espirit inttolerable.” He further mentioned in his letter that Bilé, too, had written a letter of complaint to Moscow, outlining the deplorable conditions of the German section of the LDRN and the lack of support it hitherto had received from the LAI Secretariat.

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263 Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 80.
264 (Handwritten) Letter from Kouyaté to ’Chere Camara de’, dated Berlin 27.10.1930, RGASPI 542/1/44, fol. 75.
Joseph Bilé’s report to the Eastern Secretariat must have been a depressing read in Moscow. Chattopadhyaya’s and Smeral’s promises in late autumn 1929 to render financial and technical support to the Berlin Section of the LDRN, the Deutsche Sektion der Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse (DSLVN), had not been materialized and the relationship between the two organizations soon deteriorated. In fact, the 1930 report of the DSLVN amounts to a fierce critique for the lack of support from the LAI and its officials towards the organization and the problems its members were facing. The author of the document accused the LAI for having broken its promises to the Africans: Neither the expenses for the establishment of their organization nor the remuneration to its secretary had been paid. Consequently, the association had no funds at its disposal as the central bureau in Paris had no resources to spare for the German section. Thus, the members of the DSLVN had to try with their meagre private incomes to pay off debtors. A further constraint was put on the group when one of its members, Richard Dinn, died impecunious in a Berlin hospital during the winter of 1929/1930. Despite promises by the LAI Secretariat to pay for his funeral, no relief had been forthcoming and the cost had to be covered by the African community of Berlin. According to the report, this lack of support and especially the non-commitment of the LAI Secretariat towards the hardship the Africans were facing when they tried to meet the cost for Dinn’s funeral caused deep embitterment among them against the LAI. Also the special courses organized by Smeral, who at that time was one of the LAI Secretaries, had ended with embitterment: after having held 5 sessions within three weeks he suddenly left Germany and had not resumed his engagement although he had been in Berlin for six months after his return from abroad.

Further friction between the DSLVN and the LAI was caused by the lack of support by the LAI in defending Wilhelm Munumé during spring 1930. Munumé had been jailed in 1929 and was charged for forgery. The German authorities thereafter tried to deport him.

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266 (DSLVN), Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408. The report itself has no recipient, no author and no dating, but crosschecking it with Kouyaté’s letter, it is obvious that it was Bilé who wrote it to the Eastern Secretariat in September 1930. Kouyaté, too, had addressed his letter to the Eastern Secretariat. The filed version is a copy. One page of a handwritten version of the report is filed in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArchB). The report is also discussed in Aitken 2008, pp. 609-610.

267 (DSLVN), Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408.

268 Munumé was a member of the DSLVN and had in previous years been actively engaged in anticolonial propaganda, notably in the meetings of the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO) in 1926. In 1927 he had been jailed due to his political activities. See further R.J.M. Aitken & E. Rosenhaft, “Edimo Wilhelm Munumé and Peter Mukuri Makembe,” Schwarze Biographien. Afrikaner im deutschsprachigen Raum vom 18. JH bis zum Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden, Berlin: Kai Homilius Verlag 2008, pp. 157-165.
Two times he appealed for his release, maintaining his innocence and his absolute loyalty to the German nation and Empire, but with little success. Chattopadhyaya again promised to do his best to defend Munumé’s case, to make it a political issue and to engage influential politicians and lawyers. Chattopadhyaya’s – and behind him most certainly Münzenberg’s – aim was to use Munumé’s case to raise the still unresolved question of the nationality of individuals from former German colonies who had been living in Germany since before the war and due to the Versailles treaty had lost whatsoever nationality they had possessed. However, nothing came out of this plan. In the end, it was only the Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte that was forthcoming. In late February 1927, the Liga appealed to the German Foreign Ministry to revoke the expulsion order. However, the answer from the Ministry was disappointing. They refused to even consider the case as it was an issue of the ‘Länder’, not the ‘Reich’.

In retrospect, one could argue that Chattopadhyaya’s engagement was more than lip service. The Liga was one of those organizations that had close connections with Münzenberg’s network; its chairman Otto Lehmann-Russbült was one of Münzenberg’s fellow travellers. Eventually, Munumé was not expelled and about one year later he took part in an attempt to denounce Joseph Bilé.

Another drawback for the DSLVN was its failed attempt to engage in agitprop theatre. Early in 1930, the group had staged a propaganda play that was written by the African actor Louis Brody. Initially, the group had turned to Kouyaté requesting funding, but this was rejected since the LDRN lacked funds. Bilé did not refer to the incidence in his report and neither did he blame the LAI for not supporting the initiative. Indirectly, however, both the LAI and the CPF could have been criticized for not having been forthcoming in their support.

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269 Munumé’s problems with the German authorities stemmed back at least to 1925. Doomed by the authorities as a crook some of them already at this point propagated to have Munumé shipped back to Cameroon. Luckily enough for Munumé, his case was dropped at this time. Instead, he was among a group of (unemployed) Africans in Germany who was to receive monthly financial assistance from the German state through the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Eingeborenenkunde. 

270 Letter from Mumuné to the German Foreign Minister Stresemann, April 1929, and letter from Mumuné to the German Chancellor Hermann Müller, 12.12.1929, filed in BArchB R1001/4457/7, fol. 136-138, 212-219.

271 (DSLVN), Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408.

272 Letter from Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte to Auswärtiges Amt, 27.2.1930, and letter from Auswärtiges Amt to Deutsche Liga für Menschenrechte, 19.3.1930, BArchB R1001/4457/7, fol. 254fp+bp, 256fp+bp. A copy of the answer of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs is also filed in BArchB R1001/6751, 126-127.

273 Louis Brody or (Ludwig) M’bebe Mpessa (1892-1951), born in Duala, was a film actor in Germany. At times Bilé also worked as a performer.

to Kouyaté and the LDRN in 1929 and early 1930 when he and his organization were in need for financial support. This, at least, had been one of his complaints in an earlier report he had written while in Moscow\textsuperscript{275}. Such accusations, on the other hand, were not novel: both Ford and Patterson had produced similar critical analyses in 1929 and 1930 on the pathetic conditions in Paris with regards to CPF support to the LDRN.

A final blow in the LAI - DSLVN relationship came in mid-1930 in connection with the World Conference of Negro Workers in Hamburg. According to the report, the Berlin section was invited to send a participant to the conference and was told that there would be another representative from the Paris LNDR bureau. The DSLVN secretary, Joseph Bilé, went to Hamburg, only to find out that nobody from Paris had been able to come to Hamburg. Again, blame was put on the LAI and its secretariat for mismanagement and a laissez-faire attitude.\textsuperscript{276}

By the time of writing the over-critical 1930 September evaluation report, the relationship between the DSLVN and the LAI had reached its nadir. The association had received little support and even less material backing from the LAI. Its board highly questioned the advisability of being connected to the LAI instead of some other organization. In fact since its establishment, the DSLVN had participated in local activities by the German Communist Party (KPD) and the German section of the IRH, the \textit{Rote Hilfe Deutschland} (RHD). By the end of 1930, the DSLVN leaders were more than keen to break with the LAI and insisted in establishing direct contacts with the KPD and the RHD. This was the 1930 report’s main argument, which ended with a four-point list of suggestions – most likely to the KPD Zentralsekretariat (Central Secretariat) as the (presumably) original handwritten version of the report was sent to the Berlin headquarters of the KPD although no recipient is indicated:

I. if agreement is given by the central bureau of the LNDR, the Berlin section will establish a direct connection to the KPD and that a ‘Negro comrade from Africa’ is to be included in the Colonial Section of its secretariat whose task would be to serve as a link between the DSLVN and the party;

II. to establish a direct contact with the RHD;

III. to organize courses for DSLVN members by the KPD;

\textsuperscript{275} Confidential rapport by Kouyaté to unknown recipient, dated Moscou 26.9.1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 380-384.

\textsuperscript{276} (DSLVN), Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408.
IV. to send young Africans to Moscow for schooling and to send them back to Africa as cadres.277

So for the document, it is not known what happened to the report and its suggestions. Nevertheless, the critique of the LAI's ineffectiveness did not come as a surprise. The organization had been in turmoil since the 1929 Frankfurt Congress, work at its headquarters in Berlin had oscillated between chaos and lethargy. Last, but not least, in times of activity and when the organization was functioning, the plight of a few stranded Africans in Berlin was the last issue the comrades seemed to be interested to tackle and put little energy and time in assisting the Africans and their association. Besides, the LAI's directives mandated a focus on anti-colonial work and support to national minorities. Their dilemma was to find some use for an organization that aimed to defend the position of Africans in Germany.

6. The establishment of the RILU Negro Bureau and the Hamburg Secretariat

While the Hamburg Conference had resulted in the official establishment of the ITUCNW and outlined its political agenda, many of the practical details for the organisation were still unresolved when the West Africans left Moscow. First and foremost was the location of the secretariat of the organization. This was a crucial question as everybody in the Comintern Apparatus were well aware of the fact that a too obvious link between Moscow and the ITUCNW directly blackmailed the organization in the eyes of the colonial and Western metropolitan governments. As the explicit aim of the ITUCNW had been to summon all kinds of radical and anti-colonial elements in the African Atlantic, it had officially to be presented as an independent body that only (indirectly) was supported by the RILU and the Comintern.

The reorganization of the African and Caribbean agenda of the RILU was outlined in late August 1930. The former International Trade Union Committee of the Negro Workers, i.e., the unit that had been established by the RILU in 1928, was to be renamed as the Negro Bureau of the RILU and was to have the same status as the other Sections or Departments of the RILU. The RILU Negro Bureau was to be composed of representatives from the USA, South Africa, West Africa and the Caribbean, “and such other territories that have Negro populations.” (Eventually, as will be outlined in the next chapter, these objectives could never be realized.) It was to be in close contact with the TUUL as well as the Colonial Sections of the British, French and Belgian Parties as well as with the Latin American

277 (DSLVN), Kurzer Tätigkeitsbericht 1930, RGASPI 495/155/87, fol. 404-408.
Confederation of Labour. Its main task was to pay attention to Africa, including the strengthening of existing labour organizations and assisting in the formation of such organizations where there such did not exist. Special emphasis was to be given the establishment of regional bodies for coordinating the work in West, East and Southern Africa as well as to work out a common policy for the different African organizations.278

The new RILU Negro Bureau, not the ITUCNW, was to be “the ideological leader in the international work among the Negro masses for stimulating the trade union work, for struggling against white chauvinism, for initiating […] the solving of the different problems of the Negro labour and peasant movement.” At this point, the geographical outreach of the RILU Negro Bureau was the total African Atlantic, including the USA and Latin America.279 The new ITUCNW, i.e., the body established at the Hamburg Conference, was to be detached and subordinated to the RILU Negro Bureau. Called the ‘International Committee’ at this point, its main objective was to assist and organize workers’ and peasants’ organizations and to connect them with the RILU and the Krestintern.280

As an attempt to camouflage the subordination of the ITUCNW within the RILU and its Negro Bureau, the Headquarters of the ITUCNW had to be located outside Soviet Russia. At first the ECCI put Berlin forward as the seat for the ITUCNW secretariat.281 At least when Kouyaté and Small left Moscow, they still believed that this still was the case.282 However, there had been suggestions for other sites, such as Brussels.283 Eventually, the ECCI decided during autumn to locate the headquarters in Hamburg.284

Although not stated, the decision to locate the secretariat of the ITUCNW at Hamburg was not logical. The port city had reasonable good connections with all parts of the African Atlantic. However, why not choose Berlin since the main bodies of the Comintern for international agitation and control were located there? The obvious answer has to be linked with the overall plans for global agitation of the Comintern in connection with its need to

278 Resolution on Negro work, 30.8.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 75.
279 Resolution on Negro work, 30.8.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 75.
280 For the Secretariat: On the Organisation of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 5.9.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 77.
281 For the Secretariat: On the Organisation of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers, 5.9.1930, RGASPI 495/18/810, fol. 77. In fact, at this point the plan was to establish an African Secretariat of the ITUCNW with headquarters at Berlin and two sub-committees, one in the USA and the other in Latin America. The working staff in Berlin was to consist of a chairman and two secretaries.
282 Letter from Kouyaté to ‘Chere Camarade’, dated Berlin 27.10.1930, RGASPI 542/1/44, fol. 75; Beitrag II, Zweite Sitzung vom 15. Oktober, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 87. In fact, Kouyaté and Small do not explicitly refer to the ITUCNW in his letter but to the creation of a Negro secretariat at the League Against Imperialism.
maintain a functioning system of communication between the centre in Moscow and the various corners of the world. Hamburg was not preferred as being the best location for agitation in the African Atlantic – it would have been Berlin, London or Paris – but as it was the relay station of the secret communication network of the Comintern.

The ITUCNW’s activities and its secretariat in Hamburg were outlined by directives that were approved by the ECCI in mid-November 1930, the 1930 November Resolution. Its main concern was the demarcation of the objectives of the ITUCNW and its relationship to the RILU. Following the typical outline of any organization within the Comintern Apparatus, the relationship between the units in Hamburg and Moscow were strictly hierarchical: “The International Trade Union Committee of Negroes works under the directions of the European Secretariat of RILU.”

In effect, this meant that there were actually two Negro secretariats of the RILU: the Negro Bureau of the RILU and the ITUCNW. Although not stated by the ECCI, there is little reason to believe that within the internal hierarchy of the RILU its Negro Bureau in Moscow was higher than the Hamburg Secretariat of the ITUCNW. In essence, therefore, although nominally independent, the Hamburg Secretariat was projected to be the mouthpiece of the Negro Bureau of the RILU and the RILU.

The ECCI resolution also outlined the objectives and functions of the ITUCNW. The need to improve and establish new contacts with ‘Negro’ workers goes without saying but could also be connected with the hidden aspirations of forming new connections and secure links by using African crewmembers onboard transoceanic ships. The ITUCN concentrated on agitation and propaganda “according to the tasks in the programme of the RILU” among the ‘Negro proletarians’, to struggle against ‘white chauvinism’ among the working class in general and ‘social-reformism’ and the reformism of the Negro middle class. The last task, however, was a clear demand: the ITUCNW was called to organize a new international conference of Negro workers. As its official organ, the Hamburg Secretariat was to issue its own bulletin, The International Negro Workers’ Review. Last, but not least, in order to carry out its work effectively (read: not to rely too much on assistance from the KPD or Moscow), the ITUCNW was to collect money and membership fees from affiliated and sympathising organisations.

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Having outlined the agenda of activities of the Hamburg Secretariat, the last decision to make concerned the nomination of personnel in Hamburg. Who was to go to Germany and build up the new platform and construct the radical African Atlantic network? The only two suitable persons remaining in Moscow were Ford and Padmore. Unfortunately, there is no written documentation about the decision of sending Ford to Hamburg. Whatever the case, Ford arrived in Hamburg in November 1930. Padmore, on the other hand, took over the Negro Bureau of the RILU in Moscow.