The Radical African Atlantic, 1930-1933: Writing Class, Thinking Race

Holger Weiss, Åbo Akademi University

The International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW), also known as the “Negersekretariat” (Negro Secretariat), Hamburg Committee or Hamburg Secretariat, was a leftwing anti-colonial association established in July 1930. For the next three years, the organization was to manifest itself as a radical trade union for ‘Negro workers’ throughout the world. The objective was simple: to challenge colonial hegemony and to achieve national independence for colonial subjects. The Empire – be it the British, French, Belgian or any other – was to be attacked both in the metropolis and in the colonies by anticolonial and anti-imperialist activists, groups and organizations. Propaganda and political agitation were the two main pillars of the way to success. Only organized and politically motivated colonial subjects could lead the way to freedom and the task of the comrades at the Hamburg Committee was to light the fires of hope and spread the gospel of anti-colonialism throughout the African Atlantic.

In my previous working papers, I have focussed on the organisational links between the Hamburg Secretariat and various units with the Comintern-Apparatus until the relocation of its headquarters from Hamburg to Paris in March 1933. In this working paper, I will focus on the ‘African dimension’ of the ITUCNW, namely the attempts by James W. Ford and George Padmore to establish a radical African Atlantic network.

The Hamburg Committee was projected by the comrades at the headquarters of the Comintern and RILU to serve as their tool and mouthpiece in the African colonies and the Caribbean. In the continental outlook of the Comintern’s grand strategy, the most important task of the Hamburg Committee was to participate in the construction and running of the underground communication network of the Comintern-Apparatus. In the continental orientation of the Comintern’s and the RILU’s organizational hierarchy, the ITUCNW and its Secretariat in Hamburg, the so-called Negersekretariat (Negro Secretariat), was on the lowest level of the RILU’s international order. Its peripheral position was reflected both horizontally and vertically as I outlined in the previous chapter. The Hamburg Committee received orders and instructions from Moscow, Berlin and Hamburg and could only issue pleas and criticism to others. It would therefore be reasonable to argue that the Hamburg Committee’s two

---

secretaries, James W. Ford and George Padmore, were nothing more than Moscow’s lackeys and yes-man and the Committee itself merely a peripheral annex in the RILU-Apparatus.

This critical perspective misses a crucial point, namely the capability and capacities of the individual actor to act on his or her own within the organization. If the Hamburg Committee stands out as a weak institution with limited room to manoeuvre from a continental perspective, a different interpretation can be presented if the Atlantic dimension of the Hamburg Committee is reconstructed and evaluated. Ford had been instructed to establish a global network and Padmore was sent to replace him and to expand and tighten the web. One can certainly conclude that a radical African Atlantic was in the making from the perspective of Hamburg with the two comrades as its main architects.

Although much of the correspondence seems to have been lost, there is still enough documentary material available to reconstruct the African Atlantic outlines of both Ford’s and Padmore’s network. Apart from correspondences, Ford’s and Padmore’s reports to Moscow as well as the printed material, such as the various pamphlets and the ITUCNW journal, are key sources. The available documentation contains enough information about the Hamburg Committee’s ambitions and activities. Most importantly, however, it also contains information about the aspirations and expectations of those Africans who were in contact with the comrades in Hamburg. Therefore, in this working paper I will highlight two central aspects of the radical African Atlantic: its dimension and extension. In the first part, Ford’s and Padmore’s networks will be reconstructed and the African dimension of the ITUCNW will be discussed. In the second part, I present an outline of the activities in the four British West African colonies.²

**The establishment of a radical African Atlantic network**

The embryo for an African Atlantic network had already existed when James W. Ford arrived in Hamburg in November 1930. The Hamburg Conference in July 1930, the participation of most of the conference delegates at the Fifth World Congress of the RILU in Moscow in August 1930 and the meeting of the West Africans with members of the LAI International Secretariat in Berlin in October 1930 served as rallying points where he and the comrades at the various Negro Bureaus in Moscow could establish personal connections with individuals

---

² This section is an expanded and revised version of my previous working paper: Holger Weiss, Kweku Bankole Awoonor Renner, Anglophone West African intellectuals and the Comintern connection: a tentative outline - Part 2, *CoWoPa* 10/2007.
from the Caribbean and Africa. At this point, the overall ambition was still to include African American activists. However, there was already a clear difference already about whom to address and with whom one was to engage. The guiding line was the trade and labour union connection, but such organizations with Black membership existed almost exclusively in the USA whereas the organization of the working class was either undeveloped, as was the case on most of the Caribbean islands, or did not exist, as was the case in most African colonies. A second guiding line was that anti-colonial and anti-imperial agitation and propaganda was to be exclusively directed towards working class. A third was the language question: although the ITUCNW presented itself as an organization for all Negro workers, in practice it was to direct its efforts towards the Anglophone African Atlantic, leaving political agitation in the French, Belgian and Dutch colonies to either the metropolitan parties and their sections in the colonies or to affiliated organizations, such as the Ligue de la Race Negré (LDRN). Consequently, the activities of Ford – and later Padmore, too – had to take into account these different circumstances.

Thus, Ford started with few connections in the African Atlantic. Not surprisingly, his closest and most widespread contacts were with various African Americans and organizations. The Caribbean connections were weak, and Otto Huiswoud established those that existed when he toured the region in 1930. Apart from the well-established connections to South Africa, he knew in person only the five West Africans that had participated at the Hamburg Conference: E. Small from the Gambia, E.A. Richards from Sierra Leone, T.S. Morton and J.A. Akrong from the Gold Coast, and Frank Macaulay from Nigeria. In addition, there were three Africans who at that time were living in Europe: the Cameroonian Joseph Bilé who lived in Berlin, the Kenyan Johnstone Kamau (Jomo Kenyatta) who lived in London and Garan Kouyaté from the French Sudan who lived in Paris.

Ford was convinced that the time had come for political agitation and propaganda in the African Atlantic. Plans were made to establish sub-committees of the ITUCNW in South Africa, West Africa and the USA.³ He noted in his first report to Moscow that the effects of the economic depression in the USA were being felt in all parts of the Atlantic world. The South African mining and export industries were hard hit, unemployment was rising and salaries were cut. In West Africa, as well as the Caribbean, cocoa growers and other

³ Plan of work and immediate tasks of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers at Hamburg, no author, no date, filed 28.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 6. It is likely that the document was written by Ford – the author referred to “comrade Ford” in the same way as James Ford did in his first report to Moscow when he outlined his activities, namely by writing “comrade Ford” instead of “I”. It is also likely that the document was written about the same time as Ford wrote his report, i.e., sometimes in January 1931.
producers of colonial staples faced a stiff time when the various market pools drastically cut prices. As elsewhere, salaries were cut and imported consumer goods became extremely expensive, which added to the local populations’ hardship. He therefore contacted Small and Nzula and gave them directions for organizing subcommittees of the ITUCNW in their countries. In addition, he asked the Negro Department of the TUUL to establish and coordinate the Caribbean link of the ITUCNW. Finally, he also invited the CPUSA and CPSA to cooperate in the work of the subcommittees to be established.4

Ford’s biggest challenge was to establish reliable connections with people outside Europe. The idea was to enlist African and German seamen and through them send material to Africa and the Caribbean as well as Chinese seamen for the connection with South Africa. A corps of the most reliable of such comrades was to be set up who could be utilized by Ford for the shipment of confidential material. Central organizations and individuals, such as the African Federation in South Africa, E.F. Small in West Africa, the Jamaica Trades and Labour Union and the TUUL, were to receive the material by mail in bundles and were directed to handle the material’s regional distribution.5 Through his contacts to the ISH, most of the obstacles could be overcome. Contacts with South Africa, for example, were maintained by a rather complicated system. Usually, he sent two batches to South Africa, one through Chinese seamen who regularly travelled between Hamburg and Cape Town, and another by mail via various points in the British Empire. A similar procedure was taken to communicate with West Africa.6

By the end of January 1931, Ford had been able to establish the beginning of a global network. Letters had been sent from him to the members of the Executive Committee of the ITUCNW and the delegates who attended the Conference outlining the plan of work and asked for reports on the conditions of the ‘Negro’ working class in their country. The responses were to be published in subsequent issues of The Negro Worker. In addition, it seems as if this material was either to be sent directly to Moscow and analyzed there or was to form the basis of a databank in Hamburg for later use. It is likely that both Ford and later Padmore made use of the collected data. In South Africa, he was in contact with Albert Nzula, whom he had sent a letter with directions for organizing a sub-committee of the ITUCNW. In his reply, Nzula informed Ford that he had started to establish a sub-committee in South Africa, using the AFTU as the platform for future activities. Ford, however, was not

5 Plan of work and immediate tasks of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers at Hamburg, no author, no date, filed 28.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 6-7.
in favour to this proposal, and informed Nzula in a subsequent letter not to mix the two bodies. According to Ford, the Federation was to be the leading force in forming a wide united front committee of workers and organizations out side of the Federation. This was, according to him, the most effective way in “popularizing the Hamburg Conference”, not only in the South African Union but elsewhere in the region. The aim was, Ford underlined, that the ITUCNW branch in South Africa was to be built from below from unorganized workers and that would make the organization more appealing to people outside the Federation.7

Ford also had contacted Frank Macaulay and E.A. Richards. Frank Macaulay, whom Ford believed had returned to Lagos, turned out to reside in London where he had organized a new African organization, the Negro Welfare Association in Liverpool and was planning to participate in the forthcoming conference of the British Section of the League Against Imperialism. Ford instructed him to prepare material for the conference and to highlight the case of forced labour in Nigeria. E.A. Richards, with whom Ford had some trouble in communicating as some of the dispatches were lost on their way to and from Sierra Leone, informed Ford that he had reported about the Hamburg Conference to the Railroad Workers Union and that he awaited further orders. He also told Ford that he had sent the proceedings of the Hamburg Conference to the local press. “It is possible therefore that in the future we may be able to maintain good contacts with Freetown,” Ford assured.8

Other potential links remained silent in January 1931. Ford had sent letters to Small in Bathurst and to Akrong and Morton in Accra but had not yet received any answer. Similarly, his attempts in establishing contacts with East Africa and the West Indies had so far failed. There had been no reply to his letters, no news, no contacts.9

On the other hand, the American dimension of the ITUCNW-network was easier to establish. Ford contacted the American delegates to the Hamburg Conference and planned to engage them for his web. At the same time, the ITUCNW was to participate in the agitation and propaganda work among African American workers and to organize them in the various unions. In January 1931, his key contacts were an African American comrade in the Metal Workers Union’s Ohio District and another one in the Food Workers Union’s Chicago District. He had also been in contact with the CPUSA and its Negro Department. All his American contacts promised close cooperation, but also underlined that some of the tasks

were challenging, especially the idea that the Caribbean contacts could be arranged and organized through comrades and units in the USA. In Galveston, Ford noted, he had a reliable connection and the port could serve as the future relay station between the Caribbean and the Hamburg Secretariat. On the other hand, neither the CPUSA nor the TUUL had any contacts with the Caribbean. Even worse, the comrades from the region who had participated at the Fifth World Congress of the RILU had all been arrested on their return to the Caribbean. Last, but not least, through the assistance of a German seaman, Ford believed he could establish a radical cell among African American workers in the Canal Zone in Panama: “This contact with the West Indies is very important and is the first that I have had so far.”

If Ford regarded his achievements in a positive way, the comrades in Moscow did not. Padmore issued a sharp reminder to him and underlined the need to focus on Africa and the Caribbean. The Hamburg Secretariat should not focus on the USA or Latin America, as there were already avenues and organizations in place with whom the RILU headquarters was communicating. Instead, Ford was to put more effort in establishing links to Africa and the Caribbean. Most importantly, Padmore underlined, all addresses should also be sent to Moscow:

Have you written these contacts informing them of the establishment of the Hamburg Committee, explaining its programme and asking them to help us? All this must be done. Copies of the Hamburg decisions as well as the Fifth Congress must be sent to all these people together with copies of the Journal appealing to them to popularise our literature among the workers and take an active part in contributing articles on local problems of the workers to the Journal.

In a subsequent letter, Padmore also emphasized that the planned sub-committee in New York should merely concentrate on the Caribbean connection – the ITUCNW had nothing to do in American labour union affairs:

Its function must not be to carry on trade union activities among the Negroes in America. This is the task of the TUUL. The New York sub-committee must concern itself primarily with developing the work in the British West Indies. We say British West Indies because the Latin-American committee will take care of Haiti, Cuba and the Latin American countries where there are Negroes.

---

11 Padmore to Ford, 13.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 57.
12 Padmore to Ford, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 60.
Orders were orders and Ford directed his efforts to fix the African and Caribbean network. When he left Hamburg about half a year later the contours of a radical African Atlantic were fully visible (see Figure 1).

Ford’s most promising contact in Africa was his South African connections. Apart from Albert Nzulu and his African Federation of Trade Unions, his network included Elliot Lonjeni in Port Elizabeth and D. Wolton in Johannesburg. Lonjeni seemed to be an especially interesting acquaintance as he presented himself as President of the Independent African National Congress. Other contact persons existed in Cape Town (J. Gomas and P.A. La Tuna), Pretoria (G.E. Daniels), Durban (E.R. Roux), Kroonstad (E.E. Lithebe and J.K.B. Crutse), Bethlehem (Paul Gwala), Ficksburg (Elliott Mabesa) and Bloemfontein (S.W. Keable Moto, E.J. Dambuza and Simon Elias). Maphutseng Lefela, who lived in Ficksburg (O.F.S.), was the Secretary of the Basutoland Peasant Organization. In addition, Joseph Pick at 119 Harrington Street in Cape Town was the main confidential address for seamen through which materials and letters were sent for comrades in South Africa.\(^\text{13}\)

Nzula organized The South African sub-committee of the ITUCNW. Its task was to open avenues for the ITUCNW in Southern Africa. Padmore informed Ford in March 1931 about the outlines of the South African subcommittee and issued a stiff warning for it interfering into South African affairs:

\begin{quote}
The Committee in South Africa which Comrade Nzula has promised to organize should merely be an instrument not of working in South Africa but to carry on activities in the surrounding countries such as Rhodesia, Buchanaland [sic!] and the East African colonies. Because of the proximity of the South African Union to these countries it is possible that it functioning sub-committee can do much to help us in making contacts with certain parts of Africa. It would be a dangerous policy to have the sub-committee in South Africa carrying on trade union activities itself because this will immediately bring it into conflict with the Federation whose task is to organise and lead the economic struggle in South Africa.\(^\text{14}\)
\end{quote}

It is likely that Ford informed Nzula about Moscow’s directives and guidelines. He certainly tried to fulfil his mission and some progress was noted in the 1931 September Report, stating that links existed to Portuguese East Africa and Rhodesia.\(^\text{15}\)

Several contact persons existed in West Africa although Ford had to admit that some of them were unreliable or had difficulties in corresponding with him. This was at least the

\(^{13}\) (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 234-237.
\(^{14}\) Padmore to Ford, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 60.
\(^{15}\) (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 228.
case with the contacts in Gambia and in Sierra Leone. E.F. Small and the Gambian Labour Union no longer was part of the network. Initially, contacts had not been very good, Ford noted, and at the time of writing his report no longer existed. The United Seamen’s Club in Freetown and the Sierra Leonean Railway Workers Union were still listed, but Ford lamented that the British colonial authorities in Sierra Leone had strictly prohibited any mail to pass between Richards and the Hamburg Secretariat. The connection had to be upheld through the clandestine communication network of African seamen, but as the colonial authorities had started to minutely search any ship that called at Freetown; this link became also difficult to operate. However, a positive sign was that Ford had been able to add other individuals on his list of contact persons in Sierra Leone: Walter C. Freeman and Mrs. Casely Hayford (who represented the Lagos Women’s League).  

Equally difficult was the Gold Coast connection. Comrades Morton and Akrong tried to organise some work in Accra, but it was restricted to their existing organizations, the Carpenters’ and Drivers’ Associations, and Ford criticized them for not having established a central organization. Instead, literature was channelled to the Gold Coast via various individuals outside their associations, such as S.G. Owoo.  

For reasons not known, Ford did not make any references to existing links to Nigeria or what had happened to his connections to Frank Macaulay. On the other hand, he listed several contact persons in Liberia: Kail Tamba (who most probably was Holle Seleb Tamba, Padmore’s future key Liberian contact and one of the African students whom Padmore managed to transfer to Moscow) and L.O. Logeweh, a local farmer who worked at the Jorquelleh Industrial Farm. In addition, two contact persons were also listed for the Belgian Congo. The first one was a certain De Meyer, Esq., in Kinshasa, but he too, was an unreliable link: “We have sent literature and letter but no reply has come. We are not sure about who the person is.” The other was Backe Ant in Leopoldville. In fact, the connection to the Belgian Congo had been difficult to establish and only in July did Ford understand the reason for it - his main contact had been a Belgian fellow who had participated at the LAI 1929 Frankfurt Conference who turn out to be a spy and had hampered and upset the contact with the Congo.  

Progress was also noted in the Caribbean and in Central America. Although Ford at one time lamented that he had no good contacts in the West Indies, he had been able to get in

---

16 (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 228, 234, 236.  
17 (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 228-229, 236.  
19 Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 83.
touch with people in British Guyana, Panama and even Brazil.\textsuperscript{20} Several contact persons existed in British Honduras, Panama, Haiti, the Dominican Republic and in the British and French Caribbean colonies (Saint Lucia, Barbados, Bahamas, Trinidad, Martinique, French Guyana). Their main duty was to circulate the ITUCNW publications, including the \textit{Negro Worker}. Some of the addresses listed local associations and societies, such as the Friendly Society in Belize, the British Guiana Labour Union, the Saint Michael Society Castries and the Mutual Friendly Society Castries in Saint Lucia as well as the \textit{Ligue de la Jeunesse Partiote} in Haiti and \textit{Societe Scours Mutuel} in Panama. Others referred to local newspapers, such as the \textit{Belize Independent} and the \textit{Barbados Standard}. However, much to the dismay of Ford, the promise of a radical cell in the Canal Zone never came to fruition. Following a revolt in January 1931, the leader was arrested and deported and Ford had lost all contacts.\textsuperscript{21}

Apart from the African and Caribbean network, Ford also managed to establish links to organizations and contact persons in the USA and in Western Europe. The main contacts in the USA were the Trade Union Unity League, the League of Struggle for Negro Rights and the CPUSA. Connections in Britain and France were more important. Ford reported about the existence of small groups working in connection with Negro seamen in Liverpool (Comrade Jones), Cardiff (Comrade O’Connell) and London (Comrade A. Ward). Ford’s connection to Ward was much esteemed as he was said to work both for the ITUCNW and the British Section of the LAI. In addition, he was the key person in the Negro Welfare Association. In France there was Comrade Kouyaté who, as outlined in Chapter Seven, had started to establish a sub-section of the ITUCNW in Marseilles through which, Ford hoped, the ITUCNW could reach the French African colonies.\textsuperscript{22}

\textbf{5000 copies of the Proceedings…}

The Hamburg Secretariat’s main task was the production and distribution of propaganda and agitation material. Another, equally important one, was to establish contacts with people in Africa and the Caribbean. The strategic outline had been established by the activities of the Provisional Committee, namely the publication of journals and pamphlets as well as identifying and engaging activists who could be used as spearheads for the organization in their home countries.

\textsuperscript{20} Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 83.
\textsuperscript{22} (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 232-233.
Ford’s first objective in Hamburg in late 1930 was to prepare and publish a pamphlet on the proceedings of the Hamburg Conference as well as to re-launch *The Negro Worker*. The idea was to use the pamphlet as the principal means of popularizing the Conference. However, the production of the pamphlet was met with several difficulties. In late December 1930, the police suppressed the KPD Party press, and after it reopened in January 1931, labour troubles where the Social-Democratic printers at the printing establishment hampered the work. Despite these drawbacks, the *Proceedings* of the Hamburg Conference were published in mid-January and the first issue of *The Negro Worker* followed one week later. While the *Proceedings* were printed in 5,000 copies, the *Negro Worker* appeared with 1000 copies. In addition, Ford had printed a leaflet – probably containing the two declarations of the ITUCNW, *What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers?* and *What we fight for*; each in 2000 copies.  

Ford relied on his existing contacts and the ISH network in distributing the publications. By the end of January 1931, he had already been able to send 500 copies of the *Proceedings* to organizations and individuals in Africa, the Caribbean and the USA as well as the UK. Some recipients received the publication in bundles, such as "The Federation in South Africa" (i.e., the AFTU), the West African participants of the Hamburg Conference namely Small, Akrong, Morton and Richards, the Jamaica Trades and Labour Council (Huiswoud’s established organization?), the TUUL and the NMM (National Minority Movement). In addition, Ford claimed that 4,000 copies were sent to his contacts in the African Atlantic during the course of the following months.  

Besides the printing and distribution of the *Proceedings* detailed letters of instruction of on how to popularise the Hamburg Conference in the localities were sent to the delegates who attended the conference and the national sections of the RILU. According to Ford, some of his contact persons had fulfilled his instructions and meetings had been arranged in Freetown in Sierra Leone, in South Africa and in Paris by the LDRN.  

The distribution of the *Negro Worker* had been even more promising, Ford boasted. About 800 copies had been distributed by mail and through the ISH network to various points in Africa. However, Ford soon realized that the distribution of the Negro Worker became difficult to handle. He decided to change the distribution system as some of his contacts
notified him that they were unable to distribute all copies they had received. Beginning with
the March issue of the *Negro Worker*, the numbers distributed to the CPUSA, the CGTU in
France and to South Africa (via Nzula) were reduced. Instead, he was able to add several new
recipients on his mailing list, including his contact persons in the Caribbean and Central
America as well as those in Liberia.\(^{28}\)

Additional problems with the printing and distribution of the *Negro Worker* occurred
a few months later. The journal’s June issue was delayed because the local party printer
refused to print it before they had been paid for some back work. Once again Ford quarrelled
with Walter and accused him for the delay; Walter responded that it was due to some
misunderstandings on their part. More problematic was the news that the journal was barred
and confiscated in England and banned in several British colonies. Ford found a practical
solution to evade the British authorities. Instead of sending the journal in bulk to a certain
address, it was delivered in smaller dispatches by Negro seamen. On the other hand, progress
was reported in the distribution of the journal in British Guyana and Panama - Ford had been
asked by his contacts to deliver up to one hundred copies. News had even arrived from Brazil
about a plan to translate and reprint the journal in Portuguese (although this was never
realized).\(^{29}\)

Despite the progress that Ford reported to Moscow in his letters, the comrades there
seemed only modestly impressed. A constant complaint by Padmore and the others was that
Ford did not spend enough time and energy on establishing the African and Caribbean
contacts. Even worse, in their mind, he had neglected his most central duty: to report about
his activities to Moscow. Ford, on the other hand, countered his critics by pointing to the
immense workload he had in Hamburg. He devoted much of his time for work among the
Negro seamen. “I hope you understand,” he wrote to Padmore, “that it keeps me very busy
here visiting ships, holding meetings, carrying on all my work and at the same time doing
active work in the I.S.H. and the Club. Therefore when I delay in writing you must
understand.”\(^{30}\) However, his first report of activities was not forthcoming until August. Once
again he excused himself for the delay – daily visits onboard the ships and the work at the
ISH headquarters and in the Inter-Club had prevented him from finding enough time to
prepare the report. On the other hand, as he stressed in a letter to Alexander Zusmanovich [or
Losovsky?], he regarded his work in Hamburg to be “absolutely necessary in connection with

\(^{29}\) Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 82.
\(^{30}\) Letter from Ford to Padmore, (Hamburg) 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 84.
Ford finally wrote a report on his activities covering the period from his arrival in Hamburg until mid-September 1931. The report itself impressed the comrades in Moscow. Ford claimed to have accomplished all tasks of his mission, notably the “popularization” of the Hamburg Conference and the Fifth Congress of the RILU. He had published several pamphlets and leaflets, among others 500 mimeographed copies of the *Resolution of the Fifth Congress on Work among Negroses*, 200 copies of a Scottsboro appeal, 100 copies of the *Open Letter to Working Class Organisations* to rally to the defence of the Scottsboro Boys, 200 copies of his speech at the Save the African Children Conference, and 2000 copies of the leaflet on the *Imperialist War Danger*. He further listed that he had distributed 500 copies of a *Special Colonial Bulletin* with an article on Africa, 500 copies of the *ISH Colonial Resolution*, 500 copies each of the English and French version of the *1929 Trade Union Programme in Action* issued by the RILU Negro Bureau, and 100 copies of the special bulletin on African Children that had been prepared by the LAI Youth Section. In addition, eight issues of the *Negro Worker* had been released and were read all over the African Atlantic, 1000 copies each of the pamphlets *An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone* and *An Open Letter to the Workers of British Guiana* had been printed (although not written by him but by the comrades in Moscow), 5000 copies of George Padmore’s pamphlet *The Negro Workers and the Imperialist War Intervention in the USSR* and 100 copies of Padmore’s pamphlet on Liberia had been released.32

Reading Ford’s report there was little doubt that the Hamburg Committee had established a radical African Atlantic network. But had Ford accomplished all those tasks he had outlined? To Padmore’s big surprise, part of Ford’s description seemed to be more fiction than fact. When Padmore arrived in Hamburg in late October 1931 and was finally able to enter Ford’s bureau at Roothesootstrassee, he was met by a total mess. When he started to reorganize the room, he found piles of pamphlets and publications that Ford claimed to already have distributed:

First of all, I had to send off the September issue of the magazine [i.e, the Negro Worker]. Then I found 5,000 copies of the pamphlet on the war danger which I also had to distribute. I also discovered about

2,000 copies of the open letter to British Guiana, 2,500 of the protocol of the Hamburg conference which was printed about a year ago [in fact, it had been printed in January 1931, HW], all of the French editions of the Negro Worker, and pamphlets of one kind or the other buried away on shelves in our room. I was more than surprised to find all of this material still lying around, for having heard comrade F.’s report, one would think that all of this had been distributed. However, I am getting rid of the material in the colonies, and we will turn over a new page in our work.33

Although the RILU Secretariat acknowledged Ford’s achievements, such as establishing individual contacts in South Africa, West Africa and in the Caribbean as well as his attempt of rendering political and organizational instructions to labour unions in Sierra Leone and British Guiana, the comrades in Moscow were rather disappointed with the slow pace of activities and called for a more focused approach in widening and intensifying the present contacts and to prepare the grounds for direct agitation.34 As a consequence, therefore, the RILU Secretariat and the RILU Negro Committee decided to make some strategic changes in the organizational outline of the Hamburg Committee: “The major attention of the Committee must be concentrated upon the development of the work in Africa as well as the West Indies. Systematic and persistent attempts must be made, utilizing every possible mean to set up contacts in these colonies, and to give concrete leadership to the workers’ movement.” Although Ford had laid the foundations of an organizational setup of the ITUCNW, the objectives of the sub-committees in Marseilles, New York and Cape Town had to be clarified – indicating, in fact, that the units were hardly functioning at all. It was therefore proposed that the sub-committee in Marseilles should cooperate with the UGCL and establish connections with the French colonies. The UGCL, in its turn, was to acquaint itself with the activities of the LDRN in Paris and to push this organization into a closer cooperation with the Hamburg Committee. In similar ways, the NMM was to focus on the Negro Welfare Association (NWA) in London so that better connections between the NWA and the Hamburg Committee could be established. The New York sub-committee seemed to be dormant; therefore the RILU Caribbean sub-committee in New York was ordered to simultaneously perform the functions of a sub-committee of the Hamburg Committee for the West Indies. Last, but not least, the African sub-committee never seemed to have been properly established. Therefore, repeating Ford’s and Padmore’s demand that the sub-

33 Padmore to ‘Dear Comrades’, Hamburg 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 120a.
34 Resolution on the Work of the Hamburg Committee, dated 18.10.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 44.
committee was forbidden to conduct work inside the South African Union, the sub-committee was only to connect with labour organizations in the rest of (Southern) Africa.  

The Padmore-net, 1931-1933

The October 1931 Resolution on the work of the Hamburg Committee laid the basis for the strategic outline. Compared to the earlier directives, the October 1931 Resolution firmly put Africa and the Caribbean in the centre of activities of the Hamburg Committee. Of special importance were the unemployed workers: in the previous strategic outlines they had not been mentioned. Now they were identified as the main pool for radical and anti-colonial labour unions:

The Hamburg Committee must give the closest attention to the developing struggles of the unemployed Negro workers in Africa, the West Indies and those other countries where there are no sections of the RILU. The Committee must do everything to stimulate these spontaneous mass actions of the Negro unemployed by giving them concrete organisational directives as to methods of building up the unemployed movement and assisting them in working out their programme of demands.

The resolution text clearly demarcated the dividing line of an upcoming struggle for the souls of the African and Caribbean workers: the Hamburg Committee was to work for the workers but against the nationalist reform movements. The Resolution identified the National Congress of British West, the Jamaica Native Defense League and the British Guiana Improvement Association as the main rivals in the mobilization of the unemployed in Africa and the Caribbean. Hitherto, it was argued, work among the unemployed had been underestimated and if the Hamburg Committee did not fully engage in this question, there was the danger that the unemployed masses would rally behind the nationalist reform movements.

“Our object is … to stimulate the revolutionary spirit of the masses”

Padmore put all of his energy in re-establishing Ford’s network by writing to all of the latter’s contacts throughout the African Atlantic. The message in all of the letters was more or less

36 Resolution on the work of the Hamburg Committee, 18.10.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 45.
the same: we are back in business and are determined in carrying out the revolutionary objectives of the ITUCNW. Focus was to be on Africa and the Caribbean but Padmore tried to push the limits of the ECCI decision by rejecting the idea of a Black International by trying to engage as much as possible African American activists from the USA. One of them was Isaac Hawkins of the Miners Union, one of the participants at the 1930 Hamburg Committee. In early December 1931, Padmore wrote him a letter and invited him to participate in the activities of the ITUCNW. “The work in Africa is going forward with much success,” Padmore assured Hawkins and claimed that the Hamburg Committee was making ever wider connections in all parts of the continent – even “our” ideological influence, he assured, “has met with much success.” The biggest task of the Hamburg Committee was to “stimulate the revolutionary spirit of the masses” and thereafter to organize the African toilers. Padmore concluded, perhaps a little too self-confidently: “The African workers have great confidence in us and are prepared to follow our leadership.”

Hawkins, as all the other African American members of the Executive of the ITUCNW, who much likely also had received a similar letter from Padmore, was urged to contact the African members of the Executive and to tell them about the struggle against racism and segregation in the USA as well as the struggle against the Depression. Send them your and other newspaper, Padmore advised him. And most importantly: “In all your letters you should encourage them to write to our Committee and to keep as close to us as possible.”

The Black workers in the USA were not directly called to join the ITUCNW – that would have been against the ECCI decision. However, Padmore tried to circumvent the ruling by presenting *The Negro Worker* as the common platform for all Black workers in the African Atlantic. Hawkins, therefore, was asked to do his utmost to get his fellow union members to write to the journal: “You should also get the Negro comrades in the mining fields to write articles and special workers correspondence for the magazine telling all about their life and struggles. This will help the Negroes in Africa and the West Indies to know about their brothers in America and the magazine will inform those in America what is going on in Africa.”

**Dreaming of a Caribbean Sub-Committee in New York**

One of Padmore’s main ambitions as head of the RILU Negro Bureau was to establish in one or another way a Caribbean sub-committee of the ITUCNW in New York. His objective was tactical, as it had been difficult to establish direct contacts with the Caribbean from Hamburg and Moscow. Instead, one should utilize the large Caribbean emigrant population in the USA. This was a dilemma as the Hamburg Committee was not supposed to be active among American Black workers. As a consequence, Ford had not been very successful in spreading the material of the Hamburg Committee to the Caribbean and at the time of Padmore’s arrival in Hamburg, there hardly existed any direct contacts anymore.

Padmore’s solution for the Caribbean cul-de-sac was to reopen his old plan for a sub-committee in New York. By mid-November, he contacted Robert Minor of the Negro Department of the CPUSA with two suggestions. The first was a proposal to establish closer relationship with the CPUSA through the Negro Department. Padmore duly noted that the RILU had decided that there was no necessity of the ITUCNW work in those countries where a Communist Party and revolutionary trade unions already existed: “Our Committee is not been held responsible for the work among Negro masses in the United States and South Africa.” On the other hand, in Padmore’s mind the co-operation between the Hamburg Committee and the Negro Department of the CPUSA “you can be of tremendous assistance to us in helping to carry out our task in Africa and elsewhere.” One way was to disseminate the Negro Worker among the “Negro masses in the United States” whereas Padmore in his turn was to help in distributing the Liberator and other materials.\(^{40}\)

The second suggestion concerned the establishment of a sub-committee of the ITUCNW in New York. Padmore reminded Minor about the fate of the directives he had sent to the Negro Department of the TUUL several months ago. What he did not disclose was that it was a quite harsh letter criticizing the TUUL for its weak colonial work and informing that the RILU Negro Bureau together with the ITUCNW had decided that they would assist the TUUL in overcoming this and that the RILU was planning to setup a sub-committee of the Hamburg Secretariat in New York.\(^{41}\) Nothing was heard from the TUUL or had happened since then. Padmore therefore asked Minor to do something about it especially as he intended to send two comrades to the Caribbean, one to Jamaica and the other to Trinidad.\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\) (Copy) Letter from Padmore to Robert Minor, Hamburg, 17.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/140, fol. 81.

\(^{41}\) (Copy) Letter from Padmore to TUUL Negro Department, 14.9.1931, RGASPI 534/6/140, fol. 41

\(^{42}\) (Copy) Letter from Padmore to Robert Minor, Hamburg, 17.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/140, fol. 81.
In late November Padmore claimed to have received new instructions from Moscow. The New York sub-committee, he informed Minor, was to be set up and to be composed of a representative of the CPUSA, the TUUL, the Marine Workers’ Industrial Union (i.e., the US-branch of the ISH), as well as comrades Briggs, Williams, Alexander and other comrades with Caribbean connections. Its objective was to focus on the English-speaking Caribbean, plus Haiti. He stressed that part of the job was to mobilize the West Indian workers in New York to support the movement in the islands. But had he really received such instructions? In another letter to Comrade Hynes, the ISH representative in New York, he stated that he was about to write to the comrades at the RILU “to send me a concrete plan of action for the committee, and to empower me to give you full charge to start the work and to direct it in America.” On the same day, he wrote to Minor telling him a slightly different version: “I have received instructions from the Profintern to the effect that this [i.e., the establishment of the sub-committee, HW] can no longer be delayed,” and informed Minor than James Ford was to be added to the committee when he returned to the USA.

Be as it may, the New York sub-committee was officially to be known as the West Indian Section of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers. It was to work among West Indian seamen and workers in New York and Boston, organizing meetings with the aim to mobilize the workers for the Caribbean campaigns of the Hamburg Committee. Additionally, it was to send comrades to the West Indies to collect information about trade unions in the Caribbean and report directly to Hamburg. For this purpose, the RILU was said to have voted a sum of USD 175 per month but only to be used for maintaining one or two comrades as organizers in the islands. The Hamburg Committee, on the other hand, was prepared to pay USD 80 per month as salary for two comrades working as organizers in Jamaica and Trinidad. Padmore certainly realized that he was walking on thin ice as his proposition almost sounded as if he tried, behind the curtains, to transform the ITUCNW into a Black International:

We are not trying to organise the West Indian workers in New York, we want to organise them in their country. But in view of the fact that there are many thousands of them in New York, the committee must have as one of its central tasks the mobilisation of these workers in support of their comrades back.

43 (Copy) Letter from Padmore to Robert Minor, Hamburg, 27.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/140, fol. 86.
Most importantly, he declared, the sub-committee was not to under any circumstances duplicate or assume the work of the Caribbean Sub-Committee of the Latin American Trade Union Federation that was based in New York. While this organization worked with the Spanish and French islands and on those islands where radical trade unions already existed, there existed no sections of the RILU on the English-speaking islands. It is not known if Minor was convinced by Padmore’s arguments. Whatever the case, he never replied to Padmore and by the end of the year Padmore anxiously inquired from the Central Commission of the CPUSA Negro Department if Minor ever had received his letters or if he was away? The issue had to wait and seemed to have been postponed for the time being.

Apart from the (failed) attempt to establish a Caribbean sub-committee in New York, Padmore made an attempt to contact H. Crichlow, Secretary of the British Guiana Labour Union, in late November 1931. Crichlow, with whom Ford had corresponded, was offended by the Open Letter issued by the ITUCNW, i.e., directives and instructions on how to organize and develop trade union activities published in the form of a pamphlet or a public announcement, but since then not much had happened. Finally, in mid-December the first positive news from the USA reached Padmore when he received a letter from the Caribbean Sub-Committee of the Latin American Trade Union Federation. In his answer two weeks later he notified them about the plan to send two comrades to Jamaica and Trinidad but at the same time criticized the Negro Departments of the TUUL and the CPUSA for their lethargy: “Although this matter has been taken up with the TUUL and the CP nine months ago we can get no action.”

In early 1932, Padmore had to admit to Ford that very little progress had been made and that the Caribbean Sub-Committee in New York was not functioning at all.
work in the Spanish Caribbean had ceased to be an obligation of the Hamburg Committee, yet the French Caribbean was still to be dealt with by Padmore. In principle, the Hamburg Committee was to establish both its own contacts and to work through the PCF. Not surprisingly, however, neither of them had good connections. This is evident from letters that Huiswoud and Zusmanovich sent to Padmore in early 1932. Huiswoud notified Padmore that an extremely interesting situation had arisen in Guadeloupe. Reading the *Cri des Nègres*, apparently Padmore did not have access to it in Hamburg, Huiswoud paid attention to a letter from workers from Guadeloupe and their demands of forming a union. “We should take up this question immediately and from this side try to prepare something in order to begin some activities at once,” Huiswoud suggested.⁵⁴ Huiswoud tried to engage the Colonial Commission of the CGTU and asked them to render practical assistance,⁵⁵ but without much success. A few months later Zusmanovich considered the Hamburg Committee to react on the situation on Guadeloupe: “Since we don’t know sufficiently [about the] movement there and want to wait until it takes a more definite form and character under the leadership of the Hamburg Committee.” Therefore, it was of utmost importance to get in [or to strengthen the] contact with this movement. An Open letter similar to the earlier ones to British Guyana and Sierra Leone was drafted in Moscow at the RILU Negro Bureau and had been accepted by the Executive Committee of the RILU. Zusmanovich notified Padmore that it had been addressed in the name of the Hamburg Committee and was both to be sent to Guadeloupe and to be published in *The Negro Worker* and the *Cri des Nègres*.⁵⁶

**Reconnecting with Africa**

The immediate pressing need of Padmore at his arrival in Hamburg was to find a replacement for Albert Nzula in South Africa. After his transfer to Moscow, the South African subcommittee had been dormant. However, Nzula had tried to engage other South Africans to serve as his replacement. This was perhaps Comrade Dumah, who had contacted the Hamburg Committee in early October 1931. Padmore found his letter in the Hamburg office and immediately sent a reply to him asking him to become his collaborator in the Oranje Free

---

⁵⁴ Huiswoud to Padmore, 11.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 34.
⁵⁵ Huiswoud to La Comission Coloniale de la CGTU, 10.2.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 98.
⁵⁶ Mansy [Zusmanovich] to Padmore, Moscow, 21.3.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 178. The letter was published as “For a Revolutionary Trade Union Movement in the West Indies,” *The Negro Worker* II:3, 1932, pp. 14-18. One Charles Alexander was listed as the author – another pseudonym of Zusmanovich.
State. Padmore enclosed in his parcel the July and August issue of the *Negro Worker* and ten copies each, of the pamphlets *The Negro Worker and the Imperialist War* and the *Proceedings* of the Hamburg Conference. However, Padmore’s main idea was to enlist Dumah as the new agent of the ITUCNW for Southern and Eastern Africa. “Do you have any friend or connections in the Congo, Mozambique or East Africa whose names [and] addresses you could send us? We would like them to also become agents for us and send us news about the workers in the colonies,” Padmore inquired from Dumah.57

Padmore’s open question to Dumah about the latter’s connections to Southern and Eastern Africa clearly reveals that the Hamburg Committee had not yet been able to establish direct contacts to these regions. In fact, Padmore made several attempts to open links to the adjacent regions to South Africa by enlisting South African contact persons. Dumah was one, Comrade Ndobe another. He seems to have been an African worker from Basutoland whom Padmore asked the same questions as he earlier had to Comrade Dumah: could he provide him with names and addresses in Southern, Central and Eastern Africa?58

A similar problematic situation existed with the connections to West Africa. Padmore notified Small on 20 November 1931 that there had been no signs of life from him since he had left Berlin in October 1930.59 What had happened? As will be discussed further below, it turned out that Small had already started to distance himself from the ITUCNW. But Padmore was not aware of the political developments in Gambia and tried in vain to reconnect with Small over the next months.

More promising was the news from Nigeria. Through an announcement in the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph* Padmore learnt that a labour union had been established in Lagos, the African Workers’ Union of Nigeria (AWUN). He further read that a certain I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson claimed to be the union’s General Secretary. While the connections with Frank Macaulay were still problematic, the notion of a potential workers’ organization in Nigeria opened a totally new window for the operation of the Hamburg Committee in West Africa. On 16 November 1931 Padmore sent a lengthy letter to Wallace-Johnson where he outlined the objectives and global agenda of the ITUCNW and proposed a close cooperation between the two of them: “We in our part welcome this opportunity to be of some aid to you in the work which you have undertaken in the interest of the working class of your country.”60

---

57 Padmore to Comrade Dumah, Hamburg, 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 119.
60 Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, Hamburg, 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 51-53. This was Padmore’s first letter to Wallace-Johnson. The AWUN was the first radical trade union, see further Arnold Hughes and Robin
Padmore’s opening to Wallace-Johnson was to result in a life-long connection between the two of them. For the next year, they corresponded on a regular basis and both of them were convinced that a close relationship between Hamburg and Lagos had been established.

Another interesting avenue had opened to the Gold Coast. Padmore found a letter from K.A. Obuobi near Nsawam at his arrival in Hamburg. He had read the Negro Worker and was eager to hear more about the ITUCNW. Padmore promptly replied to him, asking him to become his agents and to distribute the journal. Over the next months he received similar inquiries from the Gold Coast, and in 1932 he had a list of at least six persons in Nsawam who wanted to receive a copy of the Negro Worker. Perhaps the most promising connections were with two rather different persons in Accra: Ayika Okai and Benjamin Wuta-Ofei. The former was a young schoolboy with whom Padmore corresponded and who dreamt about coming to Europe and to work for Padmore, the other was the editor of the Gold Coast Spectator and became Padmore’s most promising link in the Gold Coast. In addition, he was able to connect with Kobina Sekyi, one of the Gold Coast’s most prominent politicians.

Padmore had also managed to reopen the Liberian connection. Ford had listed Holle Seleh Tamba as one of his contacts but it was perhaps not to him that Padmore addressed a letter in mid-December 1931. The letter contained a lengthy description of the aims and ambitions of the ITUCNW; arguably, Tamba would have already known them. Padmore wrote that the letter was “merely an introductory [sic] letter” and that he had received the recipient’s address from Liberians abroad who urged Padmore to contact the person as he (presumably) held an interest in promoting the welfare of the masses in Liberia. Quite openly Padmore asked him to become his agent and collaborator: “In replying please send us the names of your friends and organisations interested in the public life of your country. In future


Padmore to K.A. Obuobi, Hamburg 25.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 55. Obuobi’s address was P.O.Box 22, Krabo, Gold Coast via Nsawam, Accra. He had sent a letter to Padmore on 21 October 1931.


Those listed are J.K. Abadoo (Anglo Guinea, Nsawam), E.Y. Owusu (Cocoa buyer Adoagisi Nsawam), Abadoo Mensah (Anglo Guinea, Nsawam), Benjamin Acquaah (St John’s school, Nsawam), Kwabina Abadoo (St John’s school, Nsawam), and Joseph Kwame (Anglo Guinea). The list is filed in RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 110. The document is not dated but is filed in a folder that contains correspondence from July to December 1932.


Padmore to W.E.G. Sekyi, Hamburg, 23.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 67.
correspondence we shall inform you more about our plans in connection with aiding Liberia.”

Perhaps the recipient was S. Siaka Massaquoi, Repoo Karlee or Thos. J. R. Faulkner, all of who later were in contact with Padmore? Several months later he tried to establish contacts with two newspaper editors, Samel A.D. Thompson of the Maryland News (Cape Palmas, Liberia) and E.T. Williams of the Liberian Patriot in Monrovia, but these feelers did not generate a positive feedback. Eventually, the only really promising contact in Liberia turned out to be Holle Seleh Tamba.

The other West African connections that Padmore assumed still existed were more problematic. Apart from Small’s silence, no news had been heard from Richards, Akrong and Morton. Especially trying was the situation in Sierra Leone: what was going on there, why had the comrades not responded to Ford’s communications? More disturbing news reached Padmore in December 1931: Frank Macaulay had died. “This is unfortunate as he was helping us to build the movement in Nigeria,” Padmore admitted Comrade O’Connell in England.

“We are simply at a loss to know what has gone wrong”

Padmore’s activities in Hamburg came to a standstill at the end of 1931 due to the police raid of the headquarters of the Hamburg Committee. Prospects for any legal operations looked dark, he admitted to Louis Engdahl: the raid disorganized his office, the political situation was tense and Padmore believed that the British “Imperialist robbers” were doing their utmost to bring pressure on the German authorities to have him expelled. To others, he signalled more positive prospect: the raid had certainly caused a damage and there was the threat of being expelled but “we shall nevertheless try to get together some English and French material for distribution in Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba and Panama whenever the opportunity presents itself to do so.”

He devoted most of his time in January in re-establishing the

---

67 Padmore to S. Siaka Massaquoi (Monrovia), Hamburg 3.1.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 58; Padmore to Repoo Karlee (Monrovia), Hamburg 9.1.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 59; Padmore to Thos. J.R. Faulkner (Monrovia), Hamburg 3.2.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 61.
68 Padmore to Samuel A.D. Thompson and to E.T. Williams, both letters dated Hamburg 23.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 69-70.
69 Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, Lagos 17.12.1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 29.
70 Padmore to O’Connell, Hamburg 5.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3754, fol. 24.
71 Padmore to ‘Dear Hans’ (Thørgersen), 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3754, fol. 25.
73 (Copy) Letter from Padmore to The Secretary, Caribbean Sub Committee, Latin American Confederation of Labor, [Hamburg] 29.12.1931, RGASPI 534/6/140. fol. 43-44.
network for the global distribution of the *Negro Worker*, sending letters of inquiry about how many copies of the journal and the ITUCNW pamphlets that were to be ordered at different locations and addresses, such as the various Inter-Clubs and ILD committees, the committees of the Friends of the Soviet Union and the LAI as well as trade unions and party bureaus.\(^{74}\) Once again, he also tried to inquiry from his African contacts about their wellbeing and what had happened to the journals and pamphlets they supposedly had received and sold.\(^{75}\)

Finally, in early February Padmore sent a desperate note to his West African contacts: Frye and Small in Bathurst, Wallace-Johnson in Lagos, Akrong, Morton, Oshong and Quarcoopame in Accra. At stake were the West African connection of the Hamburg Committee and Padmore was extremely concerned.

> We have not received any word from you for quite a long time, although we have been sending you copies of the “Negro Worker” every month, as well as other popular literature from time to time. In spite of this, we have not got any acknowledgements from you. We are simply at a loss to know what has gone wrong. Why this long silence? especially [sic] at this time, when the workers in your country are confronted with such vital problems as unemployment, retrenchment, and taxation.\(^{76}\)

Padmore lamented that ‘no news was not good news’ as it was impossible for the ITUCNW to support the struggle of the exploited African workers if the leaders were not sending him any information about what was going on in the colonies. Or, even worse, had their organizations failed to understand the seriousness of the current situation? Padmore’s directive was nothing but a stiff reprimand:

> Surely you are making some effort to lead the members of your organisation in some form of struggle against the conditions which are getting worse from day to day. Since this is the case, we expected that you would appeal to us for some assistance by this time. Not having heared [sic] from you, we are forced to take the initiative in appealing to you to send us some news about your activities. Let us know what we can do to help you.\(^{77}\)

\(^{74}\) See Padmore’s correspondence in January 1931, filed in RGASPI 635/3/754. The microfilm is not properly made and several of the copies are in a bad shape. The biggest problem, however, is the fact that the page numbering is not consistent, is changing in the folder and on many documents the page number is unreadable.

\(^{75}\) Copy of fetter from Padmore to Africans regarding *The Negro Worker*, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 38-39.


\(^{77}\) Padmore to ‘Dear Comrades’, Hamburg 7.2.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 88.
The tone of the letter became even harsher and the rest of the paragraph echoed much of Moscow’s declarations about what should and ought be done. Put shortly, Padmore issued an order, despite trying to wrap his paternalistic order in a Pan-African comparison: “Our congress made certain promises to the Negro workers, especially the African natives.” – Saying that you, too, signed the agreement. – “We are trying our best to fulfil our pledges, but this requires your closest help and cooperation.” He criticized them for failing to meet the agreement and turning their back to the African working class as a consequence of their silence. – “Our work is meeting with tremendous success in America and the West Indies, chiefly because the comrades who attended the conference are carrying on active work among the negroes organising them into labour Committees and trade unions.” – Painting a rosy picture which the West Africans could not check: in reality, work in the USA and in the Caribbean also faced huge challenges. But Padmore’s jargon was typical for communist officials. – “West Africa cannot afford to be lagging behind!”

Padmore’s appeal was serious as he accused the West African comrades of neglecting their core duties. Even worse, he seemed to indicate that the comrades had not grasped the seriousness of the global economic depression since West Africa was the only place on Earth were labour union activities were almost nil and few if any mass demonstration and protest were heard from. The latter part of the letter started with an open call in the best ‘class-against-class’ and ‘class-before-race’ manner:

WAKE UP! WAKE UP! If you do not begin to fight back now you will soon find yourselves completely enslaved and starved to death. The capitalists and their government do not intend to give you one penny relief, unless you force them to, just as how the workers in England and America are doing. It is no use praying and crying. You must wake up and begin to fight like free men.

The declaration ended with an echo of the hidden agenda of Soviet foreign policy:

The situation is so serious for the capitalists who are preparing for another world war [i.e., against the Soviet Union, HW], in order to kill out millions of workers and thereby avoid the revolution. […] For the white capitalists will soon be calling upon us to fight for them, just as they did in 1914. It is because of all of this that we want to hear from you, so that we can help you. Write us at once and let us know all about the situation.

What followed was virtually complete silence. Only Wallace-Johnson sent a reply. One moth later Padmore sent a new copy of the same letter to the comrades in the Gold Coast. The result was as depressing as in February: not a single line from the comrades.

“Our Committee appeals to the young men of Africa”

Padmore applied a systematic approach when he tried to build up the network of the Hamburg Committee. The first contact was usually made through the *Negro Worker*. The journal was intended as an eye-opener: presenting itself as the mouthpiece of the oppressed and downtrodden in the African Atlantic, its aim was to challenge the reader and to make him or her to accept the challenge and to write to the Hamburg Secretariat. In this way did Padmore not only get access to new addresses but also a potential contact person who could be integrated in the ITUCNW’s web.

Padmore’s correspondence with one C.B. Basie in Takoradi in the Gold Coast serves as a good example for his way of working. Basie had presumably read the *Negro Worker* and had written a letter to Hamburg where he declared his ambition to cooperate with the dissemination of the journal in his hometown. Basie must have been an interesting chap: he was working as an officer in the local Sanitary Department and Padmore seems to have felt that he fit perfectly as a local agitator. He therefore included in his reply letter the key document that outlined the ITUCNW’s objectives, the pamphlet *What is the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers*, and urged Basie to study it carefully. The pamphlet was crucial, Padmore stressed, as it gave Basie the tools for his new mission in life: “Herein you will recognize that our aim is to help the working class of Africa to organize trade unions, so that they will be able to get better wages, shorter hours, more education and cultural opportunities.” A rather Pan-African vision with a highly critical political message – but with no hints about the RILU- or Moscow-connection: European capitalists and officials, Padmore declared, came to Africa as exploiters and “to suck the life blood of the masses,” they held a racist attitude towards all Africans and did their best to keep the masses poor and ignorant.

Padmore was highly critical about the African educated middle class and blamed them for collaborating with the European exploiters:

---

81 Basie’s letter dated 3.2.1932 has not (yet) been located in the Comintern Archives but its contents can be reconstructed through Padmore’s reply to him on 26 February 1932.
82 Padmore to C.B. Basie (Takoradi, Gold Coast), Hamburg 26.2.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 137.
Unfortunately the men who have had an opportunity of coming to Europe to study are among the greatest traitors in your country. When they return to Africa they forget the masses from whence they have come. They play the rôle [sic] of agents of the European oppressors and exploiters, with the hope of being rewarded with some little petty government official stupid title, which the imperialists have created in order to corrupt them.  

Directed to Basie, Padmore stressed that these “traitors” or “black Europeans”, as he belittled them, could never lead the downtrodden masses out of their misery, not to speak about them being able to take the lead in the fight against colonialism. Instead, the workers and peasants “must provide their own leadership from the ranks of those who toil and who know the pangs of hunger and starvation.” It was here that Basie’s future mission was to be found – people like him held the future of the continent: “This is why our Committee appeals to the young men of Africa who have the advancement and welfare of their country at heart, to join us in arousing the masses, so that they will realize their true interest.”

Therefore, what was the mission for the young Africans? In Basie’s case, Padmore argued, he should first and foremost provide the Hamburg Secretariat with names of trustful Africans, persons who he identified as having the potential for becoming future leaders. Padmore realized that Basie himself might find it problematic to come over to Europe but perhaps he could find someone else “to study in our school” the art and science in organizing workers and peasants. What he did not mention was that the schools that he had in his mind were located in Moscow…

Padmore ended his letter with a word of warning: be careful and watch out for the spies of the colonial authorities! He advised Basie to send him his home address or another secure one as it was not good to correspond with him through the address of his office (as Basie had done in his previous letter). Also, he urged him to be careful to whom he gave the journal: “You must understand this clearly, that the British government don’t wont you Africans to have any connections with the outside world less your eyes might become too open.” Much to the dismay of Padmore, Basie gave an evasive reply to his invitation. As so many times, a once promising opening ended in a cul-de-sac.

83 Padmore to C.B. Basie (Takoradi, Gold Coast), Hamburg 26.2.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 137.
84 Padmore to C.B. Basie (Takoradi, Gold Coast), Hamburg 26.2.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 137.
87 Basie to Padmore, Takoradi 4.4.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 10.
Impossible connections: the Belgian and Portuguese African colonies

Although the prime objective of the Hamburg Committee was to engage with the British colonies in Africa, the French, Belgian and Portuguese colonies were also targeted. However, for several reasons these ambitions were never fulfilled. Already in March 1931, Padmore grew impatient with the lack of any success and ordered Ford to inquire from Kouyaté about what was going on in France and why neither he nor the CGTU had made any progress. He suggested to Ford that the French comrades should utilize African seamen in order to establish contacts in French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa. Padmore also proposed that a Sub-Committee under Kouyaté’s leadership should be established in Marseilles to direct work in the French colonies.\(^\text{88}\) Eventually, as noted above, the sub-committee came to exist although was never very effective.

Even more problematic were connections with the Belgian and Portuguese colonies in Africa. News from both regions was promising – an uprising was taking place in the Congo and somebody from Mozambique had attempted to contact the Hamburg Committee. At first, Padmore was confident about the possibilities of collaborating with the ISH and other RILU-units in Antwerp as to engage African seamen leaving from there to the Congo. Padmore asked Ford if he had any direct information concerning the uprising, but Ford explained that his only source of information was the Belgian press.\(^\text{89}\) More challenging was the task of contacting the Portuguese colonies, as Padmore had to admit that he knew of nobody in Portugal whom he could contact: “(B)ut I am going to make inquiries and see how I can help in boring into this important section of Africa.”\(^\text{90}\)

Time went on, but nothing happened. When Padmore arrived in Hamburg, he tried to revive his old ambition although in a more limited setup. While he skipped the futile attempt to find somebody in Portugal and Kouyaté had started to make some progress with his work in France, he decided to concentrate on the Belgian question. By mid-December he already noted some progress: connections with the Belgian Communist Party were established and he received a report about the situation in the Belgian Congo. From it, Padmore concluded that the situation for work was very favourable, as there were some groups that could be engaged in anti-colonial work. However, as these groups seemed to be off-shots of the Belgian party, he needed to engage the LAI in accordance with the Comintern’s anti-colonial policy

\(^{88}\) Padmore to Ford, Moscow 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 61.
\(^{89}\) Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/688, fol. 83.
\(^{90}\) Padmore to Ford, Moscow 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 61.
directives. He therefore sent an inquiry to the LAI International Secretariat and asked them to provide him with propaganda literature:

If you have any in French, send it to me and I will forward it. But for god’s sake don’t send me any bug books. The smallest pamphlets you have! The Belgian comrades have prepared a little pamphlet of a few pages, directives for the Congo. They are asking you to publish it for them. Here is a good chance for the League to help the comrades in the Congo.91

Although his correspondence was interrupted for a few weeks due to the police raid against his bureau, he was still positive about the success of the Congo campaign when he contacted the Belgian Party in late December.92 However, nothing came out of this project as the German police raided the LAI headquarters and everything came to a standstill in Berlin.

Nevertheless, the objective to connecting with the Belgian Congo resurfaced again three months later. This time, however, the activities were directed entirely from Moscow. For several years the Negro Section of the Eastern Secretariat had devoted little, if any, energy on work in the African colonies. When it was realized in Moscow that the Congo-connection had been established through the Belgian Communist Party, the issue had to be dealt with by the Comintern and not the RILU Negro Bureau or the Hamburg Committee. In late March 1932, the Eastern Secretariat (presumably via its Negro Section or at least asking for comments) started to draft instructions for the Belgian Communist Party (PCB) concerning work in the Congo. Although the positive efforts by the Party to aid in the organization of the anti-colonial struggle in the Congo and the anti-colonial campaigns in Belgium itself, the PCB was criticized for a basically incorrect orientation on the Party on the colonial question:

Completely failing to treat the struggle of the Congo peoples for national liberation from the Belgian yoke as an organic part of the struggle of the Belgian and world proletariat from the proletarian revolution, the PCB falls into a vague humanitarian position that frequently becomes almost indistinguishable from the social democratic advocacy of a “humane” colonial policy under imperialist rule of social democracy.93

93 Directives to Belgian Communist Party on Activities Relating to Belgian Congo, 31.3.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 7. A reversed version of the draft paper changed the paragraph as “the strong remnants of social-democratic ideology in the approach of the Party to the national liberation movement in the Congo has seriously hampered its activities in this field.” Draft Directions to PCB on Colonial Work of the Party, 3.4.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 12.
Criticizing the Party newspaper for applying a chauvinistic and racist attitude in its reporting about the Congo, the PCB was instructed to make a complete reversal in its orientation in relation to the political development in the Congo. The key objective, it was underlined, was to place the struggle in the Congo as an “organic” part of the class struggle in Belgium:

The Party must thus mobilize the Belgian proletariat for the support of the Congo struggle not only on the basis of vague humanitarian motives, but because the revolutionary alliance of the Belgian workers of the Belgian proletariat with the struggling Congo masses is indispensable for the accomplishment of the proletarian revolution in Belgium. \(^{94}\)

The resolution ended with a list of directives for the PCB for its work in the Congo. First and foremost, the Party was ordered to intensify its activities among the Congo seamen in the port of Antwerp with the object of establishing regular communication with the Congo. A key aspect was the planned mission of the Congolese seamen in their home country where they were to serve as spearheads for the ISH. In the Congo, their central duty was to take steps toward the organization of a transport workers’ union of seamen, river, railroad and dockworkers. This proposition clearly reflected a grand strategic plan – to enlist the seamen in the ISH, not the ITUCNW, and to open the Congo for communist propaganda and agitation. The main goal was to create new links and to strengthen existing anti-colonial groups or, in places where none existed, to establish cells, especially in the army and in the big plantation and mining enterprises, among the unemployed in Matadi and Kinshasa as well as with the “Kibanguists, the Simonites and the workers’ Mutual Aid associations.” Second, the Party was urged to establish contacts with the Congolese residing in Belgium, to recruit the best elements illegally to the party and to send some of them to Moscow for training. \(^{95}\)

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the above directives resemble more or less in verbatim earlier similar demands that both Ford and Padmore had made in connection with the Hamburg Committee’s attempts in engaging the Belgian Party and to open a branch in Antwerp. Also, it is obvious that some of the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau were involved in the drafting of the instructions although no documentation is found in the RILU-files – Huiswoud, at least, had outlined his engagement with the Congo in a letter to

---

\(^{94}\) Directives to Belgian Communist Party on Activities Relating to Belgian Congo, 31.3.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 9-10. A similar but more elaborate critique of the “incorrect orientation” of the PCB was put forward in the reversed version of the draft paper; see Draft Directions to PCB on Colonial Work of the Party, 3.4.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 13-17.

\(^{95}\) Draft Directions to PCB on Colonial Work of the Party, 3.4.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 17. The directives are missing in the March draft version of the instructions as the filed copy is incomplete.
Padmore. The source for the above references to the Kibanguists and Simonites could have been Padmore’s book-pamphlet *The Life and Struggle of Negro Toilers*. In it, Padmore depicted Simon Kibangi (Simon Kimbangu) and his movement, the Kibanguists (i.e., Kimbanguists; Simonites being another name of it but seems to have confused the comrades in Moscow), as being one of the most formidable anti-imperialist movements in Central Africa. Although having in Padmore’s mind a “semi-religious political character”, he highlighted its potential as a revolutionary movement. Referring to an article in the Paper News Agency *Fides* of November 1st, 1930, a renewed wave of Kibangi propaganda had erupted in Mitadi in the Lower Congo, aiming at the natives' independence and hostility to the Christian missionaries and white capitalists – a clear sign of its anti-imperialist potential of the movement.

Huiswoud’s seems to have had a central position in the Congo-affaire. The RILU Negro Bureau discussed the political conditions in the Belgian Congo already in January 1932 and decided to prepare a programme of action. In addition, they had held long consultations with a Belgian comrade about immediate future activities. First, the Belgian comrade was urged to set up a small Commission in Antwerp that was to draft an outline for work among Negro seamen in the port. Second, someone had to be selected and to be sent to the Congo as a political agitator, either a high-ranking member of the Belgian Party (as Huiswoud demanded) or a “politically developed sailor (as the Belgian Comrade suggested). Third, propaganda material was to be translated into the local African languages. Four, Padmore was to travel to Antwerp as an emissary for the RILU as to propel Negro work in the port and Huiswoud promised to send him further material as soon as possible. But he was not immediately to rush away to Antwerp “until we have further discussions on this questions,” Huiswoud ordered.

If anything happened, it is not clear from the available documentation. Whatever the case, Moscow’s engagement with the Congo continued during spring 1932. Huiswoud participated as an external member at the meeting of the Political Commission of the Political Secretariat in late April 1932 when the Congo declaration was discussed. Apart from the presentation of the Eastern Secretariat on the work of the PCB regarding the Congo, the meeting approved a draft version of an Open Letter-type of declaration about the Congo:

---

96 Huiswoud to Padmore, 11.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 34.
98 Huiswoud to Padmore, 11.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 34.
Programme d’action de la Ligue du Peuple du Congo pour la Liberté.\textsuperscript{99} Most likely the RILU Negro Bureau originally drafted the two documents.

The Eastern Secretariat completed the final version of the Congo declaration in early May 1932.\textsuperscript{100} Its objective and content is curious: what was the Ligue du People du Congo pour la Liberté (Congo Peoples League for Freedom)? Did such an organization exist or was it the figment of the comrades in Moscow? There is much that points towards the latter. First, no such organization was ever mentioned in earlier descriptions and overviews that the comrades at the CI and RILU Negro Bureaus had put together about the political situation in Africa. Second, the organization or group was neither mentioned in the March/April directives to the PCB and neither did Padmore refer to it in his book-pamphlet. A letter from the Eastern Secretariat to the Colonial Commission of the PCB revealed the truth: it was the brainchild of Moscow in its attempt to intervene in the Congo. From May to December 1931, an uprising among the Pende (Bapende) people shattered the Kwango region.\textsuperscript{101} Another uprising broke out in the south-central part of the Congo in the Kasai Province and in the Lower Congo in early 1932 and soon affected the Equatorial Province. Colonial officials linked the rebellion with the Kimbanguists and had to combine all efforts to crush the uprising and halt its spread.\textsuperscript{102} The outcome of the rebellions was still unclear when the Eastern Secretariat prepared the Action Programme and it urged the Colonial Commission of the PCB to translate the document into leading Congo languages within two weeks and thereafter to return it to Moscow where the pamphlet was to be printed.\textsuperscript{103}

The Ligue du People du Congo pour la Liberté was projected as the revolutionary platform in the Congo. Although the text especially addressed the situation in the Kwango region,\textsuperscript{104} the ultimate idea was to present the organization as an already existing body as it was outlined in the instructions of the Eastern Secretariat:

\textsuperscript{99} Protokoll Nr 238 der Sitzung der Politischen Kommission des Pol.Sekr am 27.4.1932, RGASPI 495/4/186, fol. 135-149.
\textsuperscript{100} Programme d’action de la Ligue du People du Congo pour la Liberté, dated 5.5.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 18.
\textsuperscript{102} The uprising generated much interest in Moscow. An early outline of the rebellion and its brutal suppression by the Belgian colonial army was produced by A.T. Nzula, I.I. Potekhin and A.Z. Zusmanovich in their book Forced Labour in Colonial Africa. The book was first published in Russian in 1933; the English translation appeared in 1979.
\textsuperscript{103} (Draft) Letter from the Eastern Secretariat to the Colonial Commission of the Belgian Communist Party, filed 17.5.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 25.
\textsuperscript{104} Programme d’action de la Ligue du People du Congo pour la Liberté, dated 5.5.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 18.
Special attention should be given to translating the name “Congo People’s League for Freedom”, in such way that the League appears before the Native masses not as an alien organization, but as an indigenous organization of the Congo people; not as an organization to carry on the struggle for Congo liberation from the outside, but an organization for the mobilization of the Congo masses themselves for the struggle for their national independence.\footnote{105}

The whole concept resembled the typical tactics of the Comintern: to create an outwardly “indigenous” body, which Moscow would direct and maneuver behind the scenes. The Action Programme itself was intended to give the political and organizational line for future revolutionary cells in the Congo aiming at the future foundation for a mass revolutionary national organization under “our leadership” and for the creation of independent, i.e., revolutionary, organizations of the workers in trade unions.\footnote{106}

The 1932 uprising in the Belgian Congo was never an issue for the Hamburg Committee in spite of the engagement of the RILU Negro Bureau. Nevertheless, the uprising in the Kwango region had been addressed by Zusmanovich and Huiswoud in articles in *The Negro Worker*,\footnote{107} as was the 1932 rebellion,\footnote{108} but the Hamburg Secretariat itself did not issue any statements, engage in rallies or launch protest movements. The RILU Negro Bureau, on the other hand, planned to concentrate on the Belgian Congo in June 1932. Part of its energy was to be devoted to the collection and evaluation of reports from the Congo, part to draft a letter to the Belgian revolutionary trade union organization about work in the Congo.\footnote{109} The Belgian Communist Party also activated itself in the Congo-affaire. A workers delegation was sent to the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, a resolution in defense of the Congolese rebels was published, leaflets were issued explaining the events in the Congo and demonstrations and meetings were held. The Communists made the rebellion an affair of the Belgian Parliament after which the bourgeoisie and social democratic press lifted its silence and started to discuss the bloody suppression of the uprising in the Congo.\footnote{110} However, this was all in vain since by the end of 1932 the Belgian colonial army had assumed control of the situation.

\footnote{105}{Draft) Letter from the Eastern Secretariat to the Colonial Commission of the Belgian Communist Party, filed 17.5.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 25}
\footnote{106}{(Draft) Letter from the Eastern Secretariat to the Colonial Commission of the Belgian Communist Party, filed 17.5.1932, RGASPI 495/155/100, fol. 25}
\footnote{107}{Mansy [i.e., Zusmanovich], “Bloody Suppression of Native Rising in the Belgian Congo,” *The Negro Worker* I:8, 1931, pp. 5-8; Huiswoud, “The Congo Uprising,” *The Negro Worker* I:10-11, 1931, pp. 16-18.}
\footnote{108}{Lukutate [unknown author], “Atrocities in the Congo,” *The Negro Worker* II:7, 1932, pp. 7-9; “Mr. Vandervelde “Discovers” the Congo,” *The Negro Worker* II:7, 1932, pp. 10-11.}
\footnote{109}{Plan of work of the Negro TU Committee for February-July, 1932, 3.5.1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 8.}
\footnote{110}{Nzula, Potekhin, Zusmanovich 1979, pp. 112-113.}
The Congo People’s League for Freedom never gained a footing in Central Africa. Neither did the promise for work among Congolese seamen in Antwerp become realized. Padmore declared the lack of systematic activities in Antwerp as a major failure and in his 1932 Annual Report criticized the Belgian comrades for having a lukewarm, if not negative attitude towards Negro work. In fact, nothing at all had happened in 1932. Padmore therefore proposed to the RILU headquarters that it should once again instruct the Belgian Party to strengthen its Negro work and to correct its weak commitment to the anti-colonial struggle.\textsuperscript{111}

**Reaching out to West Africa**

Padmore’s main activity during the years in Hamburg was establishing networks with African activists, especially in British West Africa, in Liberia and in South Africa. The first contact with Africans was usually established through the journal of the ITUCNW, *The Negro Worker*, where Padmore had replaced Ford as editor-in-chief in November 1931. The original idea was to smuggle the journal to the African colonies by making use of African seamen and sailors as the colonial authorities had banned the journal’s distribution. However, despite the ban, the journal reached its destinations most of the time. The initial contact was thus established. Thereafter Africans, who had read the journal, contacted Padmore for further information of how to express their gratitude, sometimes even sending their own texts to be published.\textsuperscript{112}

Despite some success in enlarging the network, Padmore and the ITUCNW experienced some serious drawbacks. For reasons to be discussed below, the connections to the key existing collaborators – Richards, Macaulay and Small – were defunct by early 1932, as Padmore lamented in a letter to J. Galba-Bright\textsuperscript{113} in Nigeria:

[---]We hav[e] had enough experience with West Africans. We have had Macaulay, we have had [Rich]ards in Sierra Leone, Small and others on our hands. What we have spent upon […] people would have built up the biggest mass movement in West Africa that wou[…] demand respect from the government, - but again they lacked what you talk abo[ut] in your letter, namely, the spirit of sacrifice. Therefore you will excuse us[…] if we are forced to be distrustful of newcomers. Nevertheless our

\textsuperscript{111} (Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931-1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 124.

\textsuperscript{112} This is evident from the correspondence between West Africans and Padmore as filed in RGASPI 534/7/74.

\textsuperscript{113} J. Galba-Bright worked for Bunting’s Advertising Service in Lagos in 1932. He had been contacted by Padmore in January 1932. Galba-Bright knew Frank Macaulay – while Macaulay had been the editor of the *Lagos Daily News*, Galba-Bright was the manager of the Nigerian Press Ltd and the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph*. Galba-Bright also knew E.F. Small, whom he had met in Sierra Leone. See further letter from J. Galba-Bright to Padmore, dated 6.2.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 47-48.
interest remains and will always remain ready to give our utmost for the advancement of the toiling masses of Africa. We know that one swallow does not make a summer neither does a Macaulay mean 20 million inhabitants of Nigeria.\[---\]\(^{114}\)

On the other hand, Padmore had by this time established contacts with a promising young Sierra Leonean in Nigeria: I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson. Eventually, Wallace-Johnson travelled to Moscow and study there in 1932-33, as were Joseph Bilé, Johnstone Kenyatta and others.

**A revolutionary in Gambia?**

Both from Padmore’s and from Moscow’s perspective, Eduard Francis Small and his Gambia Labour Union\(^{115}\) must have been the most promising connection in 1930. As earlier noted, Small had organized the 1929 Bathurst strike and demonstrated some radical tendencies. In February 1930, he had been in contact with Reginald Bridgeman, the Secretary of the British Section of the LAI.\(^{116}\) His political credentials were somewhat dubious. Apart from being a trade union leader, he presented himself in Moscow as an active member of the National Congress of British West Africa. When asked about whether or not he had been imprisoned due to his political activities, he gave a negative answer: “No repressions or persecutions because of revolutionary activities.”\(^{117}\)

Small presented his report on the economic and political conditions in Gambia at the RILU Congress in August 1930.\(^{118}\) Although the filed copy of the report has no author, it is most likely that Small was the author of the report as it revealed a profound knowledge not only of the conditions in Gambia but also gave inside information about labour union activities.

Small started his report by commenting upon the activities of the NCBWA. While he praised the organization for its programme of legislative, municipal, administrative, judicial and other reforms in the British West African colonies, he concluded that the NCBWA was not a mass movement: “But while the Congress holds its mandate from the toiling masses it

\(^{114}\) Letter from Padmore to J. Galba-Bright, Lagos, Nigeria, 3.4.32, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 71.

\(^{115}\) This is the name given by Small in Moscow. However, in other sources the same union is referred to as Bathurst Trade Union (BTU). See further Hughes and Perfect 2006, p. 96.


\(^{117}\) Fifth RILU Congress, Participants (Questionnaire): Eduard Francis Small, dated 13.8.1930, RGASPI 534/1/175, fol. 239.

\(^{118}\) Report on the economic situation in the Gambia with particular reference to the struggles of the workers and peasants. Presented at the Fifth World Workers Congress (44/185/10 August 16, 1930) [copy, typewritten, no author], RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 1-6. A copy of the text is filed in RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 63-67.
presents nothing like a trade union programme of action for the oppressed workers and peasants of British West Africa.” Instead, the only existing mass movement was the Gambia Labour Union (GLU), which had been formed during the 1929 strike. Previously, there existed the Shipwrights Union, an organization which Small describes as “the nearest approach to a trade union”, which was founded in 1889. Small described the beginning of the 1929 strike as an unorganized struggle, which had been started by the Shipwrights Union. Only when the GLU was formed, the strike became better organized. At this point the Union listed some 1,000 shipwrights, carpenters, masons, builders and engineers in addition to the sailors.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 2.}

Initially, the strike was a reaction to the European merchants and employers attempt to reduce wages by 50 percent. In addition, underemployment was becoming a problem:

Not only were the workers doing more work for lean pay, but a large proportion of them were unemployed; while the period of the trade season in which the rest could be employed had been curtailed with the sanction of official regulation from 8 to 9 months, October to June, to not more than 5 – December to April. Actually the season now lasts barely 3 months.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 3.}

The Bathurst Chamber of Commerce (the official organ of the employers) immediately rejected the GLU’s demands, which included an increase in wages and the right for the employers to organize themselves. The result was a general strike, which lasted for twenty days (the sailors’ strike lasted 50). Small’s analysis of the background and impact of the strike reveals his previous engagement with the left-wing Labour Research Department (LRD):

The unions’ ultimate victory afforded full proof of the claims of the revolutionary movement on the workers of the world. The struggle of the Gambia Labour Union was, in fact, from the start of a revolutionary character. There was the clearest indication that British imperialism has reached the stage when the State machine is by no means the benevolent protector of the worker and the poor peasants, as it pretends to be. The role of the Government was directed rather in the interest of the capitalists. They were not prepared to conduct an arbitration at the instance of the Union even before the strike, but were ready to do so by request of the Chamber of Commerce during the strike. The Union naturally expressed its lack of faith in the employers’ belated proposal.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 3.}
In fact, Small underlined the importance of the existence of an international network for the positive outcome of the strike and the formation of the GLU. Support, he declared, had been received from abroad: the GLU became immediately affiliated with the LRD and was brought into line with the LAI. There was even a workers’ boycott in Britain of the firms that were engaged in Gambia.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 4.}

As a result of this successful issue new sections of workers, such as pilots, clerical and port workers, joined the Union after the strike and better conditions have been obtained for most of them, Small continued. Even part of the peasantry has become politically active and 4,000 of them were organized as a section of the GLU and more were in line to join: “No less than 15,000 more have expressed a desire to enrol, they were being registered at the time I left home [= E.F. Small, HW].” According to Small, these represent about 50% of the local peasants, including the female peasants. The workers of the Union total about 2,000, no less than 80% of the Gambian workers.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 3.}

Each trade formed a branch or section of the Union, and elected its own committee to deal with its own affairs. The Trade or Branch Committee elected their representatives to the Executive Committee of the Union, of which Small was the chairman. In similar ways the peasants established District Branches in the 36 Districts of the Gambia Protectorate. These branches elected delegates to take part in the work of the Executive Committee.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 6.}

According to Small, the GLU’s tasks were twofold: to improve the living-conditions of the workers and, most importantly, to focus on the farmers’ overall conditions. Small’s outline represents typical trade union demands. As the eight-hour days was general in Gambia, the GLU demanding the forty-two-hour week for all workers in addition to regular holidays, a decent living wage as well as sickness and unemployment insurance. More special were its demands for the farmers: demanding a repeal of the law of compulsory sale, protesting against the poll tax and to call for a focus on rice plantation and the introduction of modern agricultural methods.\footnote{Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 4.} Great emphasis was to be put on the formation of farmers’ cooperatives – and to vitalize the export of farm products to the Soviet Union:

Accordingly the peasants mobilised 2,000 tons of groundnuts last February for direct cooperative marketing. A mission was dispatched at the instance of the G.L.U. to ascertain what could be done for the relief of the farmers through the cooperatives [sic] in England, France, Germany and Holland, but
preferably through Centrosjus [sic]. Part of the expenses were even defrayed from the Union’s funds. Everywhere the cooperatives took a plain capitalist view of the matter, and were directly influenced by the capitalist trusts. Centrosojus\(^\text{126}\) alone showed real sympathy with the poor peasants.\(^\text{127}\)

However, the appeal to the Soviets had so far resulted in only meagre results. But Small was still positive about future cooperation and sent an appeal to the RILU Congress:

But they [the Centrosojus, HW] pointed out that as there was no demand for oil seeds in the Soviet Union they were unable to suggest any arrangements for the exchange of commodities between the workers of the Union and their poor peasant comrades in the Gambia. It is proposed that inquiries should be made as to the possibility of some mutually beneficial arrangements whereby the peasants could have their groundnuts crushed by oil mills of the Soviet Union and sold to better advantage, rather than filling the coffers of exploiting capitalists. It is also highly necessary for the same reason to investigate what arrangement can be made for an exchange of other commodities. After all the ultimate goal of the trade union movement, is to vest the workers with the necessary power to control the means of production, whereby alone they can live a higher social and political life. It is therefore hoped that special consideration will be given by this Congress to these problems of the G.L.U., and more generally to organising wherever possible, as in Gambia, revolutionary cooperatives among workers and peasants.\(^\text{128}\)

Small concluded his report by highlighting the importance of press propaganda, and pointed to the existence of a reliable channel, *The Gambia Outlook*, of which he was the editor.

But was Small to be Moscow’s contact in the Gambia? He himself must have been rather hesitant about such an idea and already articulated his doubts about the appropriation of the communist dogma in Africa at his meeting with Smeral at the LAI headquarters in Berlin in October 1930. Although his visit to the Soviet Union had, in his mind, been an interesting one from the point of studying the practical organization of workers and peasant collectives, he delivered a harsh critique against the narrow-minded approach to and understanding of the plight of the social and cultural realities in the African colonies. According to him, the comrades at Negro Bureaus totally misunderstood the conditions in Africa and declared that the most crucial issue was to raise the racial awareness of the masses in Africa rather than to declare it of being a secondary question. He therefore mistrusted the idea of sending African students to Moscow and to send them back to Africa brainwashed with inappropriate ideas and plans. The Negro toiler in the various countries, he declared,

\(^{126}\) The Russian Co-operative Society.
\(^{127}\) Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 5.
\(^{128}\) Report on the economic situation in the Gambia 1930, RGASPI 495/64/165, fol. 5.
cannot only be looked at from the standpoint of class only; it would be a big mistake to have future cadres educated in Moscow with such a limited understanding of the realities of the African masses. Africans are exploited as a mass and not a class and the Negro problem can only be solved if it is analyzed from a racial rather than a class perspective, he concluded.\textsuperscript{129}

Smeral, at least, was rather disappointed and concerned about Small’s approach. Was he at all a believer of the class-before-race principle that the Comintern wished to apply in the Negro and Colonial Question? His report, which included as an attachment Small’s presentation, had been sent to the ECCI but only the English summary of the general report seems to have been copied and distributed to other Comintern and RILU units in Moscow, including the Negro Bureaus. Consequently, neither Ford nor Padmore seems to have been aware of Small’s “inappropriate” articulation of the Negro Question, which explains why both of them tried – in vain – to be in contact with him for the next years.

Small returned to Gambia in November 1930.\textsuperscript{130} Ford and Padmore tried to be in contact with him, although with little success.\textsuperscript{131} His relationship with the Hamburg Committee was complex. Although he had been elected to the Executive Committee of the ITUCNW and he was listed as one of the associate editors of the Negro Worker, his direct engagement with the ITUCNW must have been meagre – the Executive Committee never met again and he corresponded very seldom with the comrades in Hamburg – if at all. For much of 1931 he was still referred to in various memoranda as being the most valuable contact in

\textsuperscript{129} Stenographic report of Small’s presentation at the meeting in Berlin in October 1930, Beitrag II. Zweite Sitzung am 15. Oktober, RGASPI 542/1/40, fol. 85-86. Small made his presentation in English but the report is only available in German. It is likely that he did not have a written text. The German summary of his frontal attack against the class-before-race perspective of the Negro Bureau is as follows: “Die Neger werden nicht nur als Arbeiter, sondern auch als Masse ausbeutet und wir können das Negerproblem überhaupt nicht lösen, wenn wir es nicht von diesem sozialen Standpunkt aus betrachten. […] Die Probleme können auch nicht gelöst werden, ehe die Neger nicht ein Rassenbewußtsein bekommen, nicht nur ein Klassenbewusstsein, (unter sozialen Gesichtspunkt meint er nach seiner eigenen Erklärung immer den Rassengesichtspunkt. […] Ich halte es für gefährlich, wenn die ausgebildeten Kaders herausfahren und alles nur vom Klassenstandpunkt und nicht auch vom Rassenstandpunkt betrachten, sie werden dadurch Fehler begehen. […] Der Negerarbeiter kann in den verschiedenen Ländern nicht allein vom Standpunkt der Klasse betrachtet werden, da dies nicht erschöpfend ist.”


\textsuperscript{131} The RILU, too, regarded Small and his Gambia Outlook as a potential entry on one of the mailing lists of their bulletin \textit{Der Osten und die Kolonien}. Other Gambian recipients were the \textit{Weekly News}, the \textit{Aurora}, the \textit{Guardian} and the \textit{Trade & Mail Gazette}. See Adressenliste zur Belieferung unseres Bulletins “Der Osten und die Kolonien”, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/8/177, fol. 58. It is doubtful if the German version was sent to Africa, although there are no references in the document that could give any clues to the question. It is likely that the bulletin was dispatched to any potential interesting address in the colony but I have no information if the bulletin was ever sent to Africa. The bulletin was also mailed to newspapers and trade unions in the Gold Coast (see below), Nigeria (see below), Southern Rhodesia (the Railway Workers’ Union of Southern Rhodesia) and South Africa (the South African Trade Union Congress, the Cape Federation of Trade Unions, the \textit{Forward}, the \textit{Umsebenzi}, the South African National Congress, in addition to T.G. Lawe and Jas. D. Mogaecho in Bloemfontein, and the Lekhotleng la Bafo in Ticksburg, OFS) as well as to Johnstone Kenyatta in London.
West Africa whom the Hamburg Committee was to use for the dissemination of its publications. More important, Ford even asked Small to organize a sub-committee of the ITUCNW in West Africa but he never received a reply from him.

Nevertheless, the Gambia connection was still regarded as valuable: the GLU was listed among West African trade unions, having a membership of 1,000 industrial workers and about 3,000 ‘semi-proletariats’. Among the West African trade unions – small and ineffective, as they were belittled in Moscow – the Gambian one stood out as one that had attracted the largest membership. But there were doubts about Small’s commitment to the cause of the Hamburg Committee. Ford noted in September that contacts with him had not been very good; in fact, Small himself had never been in direct contact with Ford but news from the Gambia and Small had come either via seamen or via Small’s cousin in the Gold Coast. Even more bothering was that the latest time one had heard anything from him was in June!

What Ford and the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau perhaps never realized or take into account, was his unwillingness to make contacts with the Hamburg Committee itself. Although Small had gained a reputation as an ardent critic of colonial mismanagement, he was never a left-wing radical – despite the accusations of the colonial government of him being a communist during the early 1930s. Small’s reputation as a communist was based on his links with the LRD, the LAI (British section) and the ITUCNW. However, as Perfect underlines, Small himself never claimed to be a communist. Whereas connections to radical organizations were needed when there was no other assistance to be forthcoming, he never applied for his trade union’s membership to the RILU or any other radical organization. In fact, it seems as if he was already assuming different positions when he was in Moscow. Here, he referred to himself as a representative of the Gambia Labour Union – the name was to stick in subsequent reports by the Comintern and ITUCNW – not the Bathurst Trade

132 (Ford), Plan of Work And Immediate Tasks of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers at Hamburg, no date, stamped/filed 28.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 7; Ford, January 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 95.
133 Ford, January 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 95, 97.
134 Report of International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (copy, typewritten, no date/author), RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 102fp-108bp. A critical analysis of the text reveals that the report must have been written after October 1931 – the last date mentioned in the text (strike of marine workers in the Gold Coast in 1931). The report was most probably written by Ford (“we have established contact with some of these unions…”) and is most likely a copy of (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669.
135 West Africa, no author, no date, filed as 126. No.287. Negro Bureau, 12/XI-31, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 36. A critical analysis of the two-page document reveals that it had been written in late October or early November 1931 by somebody in Moscow. Most likely, the report had been conducted by the comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau, i.e., either Ford, who at that time resided in Moscow, Padmore before he left for Hamburg, or Huiswoud.
Union. Was this on purpose? Did he choose the term ‘labour’ instead of ‘trade’ as it sounded more radical? Perfect’s conclusion seems to be a valid one: Small was interested in getting practical benefits out of his external contacts rather than being based on ideological grounds. When there was no support forthcoming – as he must already have realized in Moscow in 1930 – he severed his ties with the communists. For a while, he communicated with the LAI headquarters in Berlin. He seems to have regarded this organization more than the Hamburg Committee for having a potential of coordinating the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and suggested that a special anti-imperialist bulletin for Africa should be published. However, as the idea ever developed beyond the stage of wishful thinking, he seems to have cut his links with the comrades in Berlin.

As noted earlier, Padmore regarded the Small-connection as lost by 1932. He had in vain tried to contact him in November 1931, reminding him about his obligations as being one of the contributing editors of the Negro Worker (“you have entirely forgotten us”) and urged him to get in contact with other fellow Africans to send articles to the journal. He even tried to attract his attention by (falsely) alleging that the ITUCNW was planning to organize another conference... All in vain, Small never sent any response to Padmore. Following David Perfect’s biographical notes on Small, this comes as no surprise. His link to the left-wing radical world had initially been through the London-based Labour Research Department (LRD), which had assisted the 1929 strike in Gambia. The strike of the Bathurst Trade Union in 1929 had been a successful one, but subsequent measures of the colonial authorities, most notably the so-called ‘Passfield Memorandum’ of 1930, had calmed the situation down. Named after the Colonial Secretary, Lord Passfield (Sidney Webb), the despatch urged colonial governments to grant legal status to trade unions. In Gambia, the BTU was soon split into two factions, one under Small, the other under the leadership of a Wolof shipwright, J.L. N’Jie. Both parties accused each other of misappropriating funds. Eventually, the trade union was split in 1933 when N’Jie registered the BTU, and having failed to regain control of the union, Small formed a rival union in 1935, the Gambian Labour Union. The situation was further complicated by an attempt by Governor H.R. Palmer’s planned codification of Gambian laws. By the summer of 1932, Bathurst was divided into two political camps. One

---

138 Die Lage der Neger in Gambia. (Aus einem Brief vom Mai ds.Js.) stamped/filed 4595 – 5.Sept.1931, RGASPI 542/1/53, fol. 6. The content of the letter reveals that its author must have been Small. The original English text has not been located.
139 Letter from Padmore to Small, Hamburg 20.11.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 123.
was the conservative faction, called the ‘Gambia Representative Committee’, under S.J. (later Sir Samuel) Forster, senior unofficial member of the Legislative Council. The opposition was initiated by the Bathurst Ratepayers’ Association (BRA), formed in May 1932 and controlled by Small. Earlier in 1931, Small had founded the ‘Committee of Citizens’, the embryo of the BRA.\textsuperscript{140}

\textit{The problematic Sierra Leone Connection}

Regular contacts had more or less existed between Sierra Leone and the Comintern apparatus since 1927. Although the connections with the Ernest Alfonso Richards, the President of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union, had been sporadic, he had for several years been the ‘man-on-the-spot’ of the RILU. Perhaps it was due to his long-standing relationship with Moscow that he was promoted into the Presidium of the ITUCNW?

Be as it may, Richards made his last (known) appearance at the Hamburg Conference in July 1930. He had not participated in the meetings in Moscow and Berlin but had returned to Freetown and might not even have been aware of the plans for expanding the activities of the LAI and the Hamburg Committee to West Africa. On the other hand, a report indicated that contact between Sierra Leone and the Hamburg office did exist:\textsuperscript{141}

The Railroad Union sent a representative to the International Negro Conference in July 1930. Since then, the Hamburg Committee has been in close communication with the Union, which is making every effort to reorganise on a broader industrial basis and to recruit new membership.\textsuperscript{142}

This report poses some challenging question, not least on authorship. The report itself resembles that of the reports by Small on Gambia and Macaulay’s on Nigeria. Was Richards the author? The content of the report outlined the political, economic and labour conditions of Sierra Leone, suggesting someone who was very familiar with the local situation:

[---] Skilled workers receive on the average between 2/- to 3/- a day while unskilled workers get from 10d to 24d a day. As a general rule women and children receive less wage than the men. The average working day is between 10 and 12 hours. Skilled workers, especially on the railroads and other forms of


\textsuperscript{141}Information on Sierre [sic] Leone (copy, typewritten, no author, no date) RGASPI 534/3/614, fol. 150-153.

\textsuperscript{142}Information on Sierre Leone, RGASPI 534/3/614, fol. 153.
public work toll about 10 hours a day, while unskilled labourers work for unlimited time. Forced labour is also used by the government in the construction of roads and other public undertakings in the Protectorate.\textsuperscript{143}

Next, the author presented an analysis of the strike movement in Sierra Leone, commenting upon both the 1919 and 1926 railroad strikes. With regard to the 1926 strike, the report noted that it had been brutally crushed by the colonial government: “Since then the Railroad Union has suffered a number of similar defeats and has declined in membership.” Consequently, not much labour union activity existed around 1930 in the country, the majority of the workforce being unorganized. The only ‘mass organization’ that still existed was the Railway Worker’s Union, but its membership had declined to 600 “at present.” However, the author – Richards? – was not pessimistic about the future:

The Union is also desirious of carrying on organisational activities among other sections of the working class, with the object of building up a revolutionary trade union center in Sierra Leone. Efforts will also be made to conduct organisational work among the peasantry in order to build up peasants’ leagues.\textsuperscript{144}

Whoever was the author of the report on Sierra Leone, the information on 600 union members was to be reproduced in subsequent reports of the ITUCNW during the following years.\textsuperscript{145}

Nevertheless, in contrast to Small, Ford had been able to get in contact with Richards by January 1931. Although several of the dispatches and letters from Hamburg had never reached Richards, he eventually had received both the \textit{Proceedings} and copies of the \textit{Bulletin}. In his turn, Richards had arranged a rally for his union and reported on the Hamburg Conference. He also had sent some copies of the \textit{Proceedings} to the local press.\textsuperscript{146} Soon, however, Richards run into troubles with the colonial government in Sierra Leone, which strictly prohibited any mail to pass between Richards and the Hamburg Committee. Communication slowed down, but was never cut. Instead, the illegal communication networks of the ISH via the Negro seamen were used and Richards confirmed its functioning: “I have received the bundles of pamphlets and letters which you sent to through various

\begin{footnotes}
\item[143] Information on Sierre Leone, RGASPI 534/3/614, fol. 152.
\item[144] Information on Sierre Leone, RGASPI 534/3/614, fol. 152.
\item[146] Ford, January 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 97.
\end{footnotes}
channels.” Soon, however, this method run into troubles as the local police had started to search all ships for literature as they arrive in Freetown from Hamburg.\footnote{147}

Richards corresponded with the Hamburg Committee for as long as possible. At an early stage he sent a letter to Ford, where he expressed some criticism about his union lacking a member on the Executive Committee of the ITUCNW. It was unfair, he declared, for a delegate from another colony to represent Sierra Leone – perhaps protesting about Small’s position? As the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union was affiliated both to the RILU and the LAI as well as communicated with the IRH, he concluded, what more credentials were needed to have a representative onboard?\footnote{148} Ford was positive to Richard’s proposal and informed all members of the Executive Committee of the application,\footnote{149} attached with a written agreement to the nomination of a representative from Sierra Leone only to be signed by the members and which was to be returned to Ford.\footnote{150} Whether or not Richards’ application resulted in success is not known: no official decision was ever made to nominate a representative from Sierra Leone to the Executive Committee of the ITUCNW. Perhaps this, too, was a reflection of the dwindling connections between Hamburg and Freetown?

On the other hand, it almost looked as if the Hamburg Committee had been able to multiply its connections in Sierra Leone. One of the new contacts was Foster Jones (Comrade Jones), a seaman from Freetown, who published an article in the 1931 May issue of the \textit{Negro Worker}, where he painted a rather grim picture of the working conditions in Sierra Leone.\footnote{151} He, more than Richards, was to become Ford’s and especially Padmore’s trusted agent provocateur and emissary, as already outlined in Chapter Eight. Interestingly, his name never figured in Ford’s or Padmore’s official reports. Another potential avenue was the Kroomen’s or United Seamen’s Club in Freetown. Although this connection was supposed to be linked to the ISH network, information about the association and its branches in Accra, Freetown, Lagos, Monrovia was included in Ford’s 1931 September Report, indicating the prospective of a potential future cooperation\footnote{152}. As has been noted in Chapter Seven, the link never materialized.

In the same 1931 May issue of \textit{The Negro Worker}, the readers were informed that the Sierra Leone trade union was still weak. Such information and apparently the need to send...
detailed directives for strengthening and broadening the work in the country made the RILU Negro Bureau draft an open letter to the workers of Sierra Leone,\textsuperscript{153} which was published in the 1931 September issue of \textit{The Negro Worker}.\textsuperscript{154} The earliest version of such a letter seems to have been drafted already in 1930, although it is not known whether this version was ever published.\textsuperscript{155} Whether or not Padmore was the author of the letter is not known; certainly it was not Ford who in a letter to Padmore commented upon it being “very timely”.\textsuperscript{156} Similar Open Letters were subsequently drafted and published calling on the toilers in the Gold Coast and in Kenya (see below). Officially, they were all signed by the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers.

The Open Letter to Sierra Leone was at least brought to the notice of the ECCI as one version of the report, perhaps even one of the first, is filed among the ECCI-papers (fond 495). It had two target groups, one specific and one general. The letter was addressed in particular to the members of the Sierra Leone Railwaymen’s Union and to the ‘toiling masses’, workers and peasants, of Sierra Leone in general. Starting with introducing the ITUCNW, notifying that the Sierra Leone Railwaymen’s Union had a representative in the organization, the first part of the letter discussed the world economic crisis and its effect in Africa, particularly on Sierra Leone. The next part raised the question of the impoverishment of the African working masses and the effects of imperialism. The last part of the letter focussed on actions and union activities as the solution to the crisis of the African working class. The answer in the letter to the question “What must be done?” was: “Organise and Fight!”\textsuperscript{157}

The Open Letter was highly critical about the activities of the Railway Worker’s Union: despite organizing the two strikes, little more had been achieved and union work was rather ineffective:

Although the union led thousands of workers in strike for better conditions in 1919 and 1926 we find it in a weak condition today. Why is [69] this so? Simply because the leaders of the union have failed to

\textsuperscript{153} An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone (dated 13/V-31), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 54-73; same as Lettre aux travailleurs de Sierra Leone and An Open Letter to the Workers of Freetown, to the toiling masses of Sierra Leone (English version dated 1/VII-31), RGASPI 534/3/615, fol. 22-30 and fol. 31-34, and RGASPI 534/3/615, fol. 154ff (English version). Only the French version is signed Padmore.


\textsuperscript{155} An Open letter to the workers of Freetown [and] to the toiling masses of Sierra Leone (1930), RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 2-8.

\textsuperscript{156} Letter from Ford to Padmore, Hamburg 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 84.

\textsuperscript{157} An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone (dated 13/V-31), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 68.
carrying on day to day activities and thereby drawing the workers into struggle for their immediate demands. Because of the inactivity of the union, membership has fallen off during recent years.\textsuperscript{158}

It was suggested that the union should focus on the conditions of the workers. The activities of the union should concentrate on issues which were in concern of the individual worker: freedom to organize and strike, equal pay for equal work regardless of race, sex or age as well as eight hour working day:

Only by doing something to help the workers better their conditions will the union be ever able to regain its former membership. Therefore, the first thing to do is to immediately begin a campaign to recruit members. For example, there are hundreds of mechanic blacksmiths and fitters in the repair shops in Freetown, engine-drivers, firemen, lines-men, breakmen [sic], freightmen [sic], porters and day labourers in the good sheds as well as telegraphists [sic] and clerks, who are still unorganised. All of these workers must be drawn into the Union on the basis of the immediate everyday demands which should be linked up with their general class demands.\textsuperscript{159}

In addition, the Railway Worker’s union was given the special duty in offering assistance with the formation of other labour unions and in organizing the peasants. Although not stated, the Railway Worker’s Union was envisaged as a kind of a spear-head organization in Sierra Leone, perhaps to form in future the core of a ‘Sierra Leone Labour Union’ similar to the Gambian case that unified under one umbrella-organization both labour and peasant unions – under the surveillance of the ITUCNW, i.e., RILU.

(T)he railroad men’s union… should show the dock and marine workers how to proceed with the formation of a union. This union, like the Railwaymen’s Union must be organised on the basis of one industrial union.[…] (T)he carpenters, the blacksmiths, the painters and other constructional workers must also take immediate steps to form a union of building trade workers.\textsuperscript{160}

The immediate task, however, was to focus on the unemployed and to start the agitation for state relief for the unemployed and their families:

(T)he executive committee of the Railwaymen’s Union should call a meeting of all the unemployed at some suitable place such as the Wilberforce Memorial Hall. This meeting should be well advertised beforehand. The Union should undertake the printing of the leaflets announcing the meeting which

\textsuperscript{158} An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone (dated 13/V-31), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 68-69.
\textsuperscript{159} An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone (dated 13/V-31), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 69.
\textsuperscript{160} An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone (dated 13/V-31), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 70.
should be distributed as widely as possible… No money should be charged for attending the meeting. Instead, a collection can be raised to defray the expense of printing the leaflets.\textsuperscript{161}

However, the advice and orders given by the ITUCNW did not have any impact. Union work in Sierra Leone was highly constrained by the activities of the colonial authorities as Ford had already lamented. When Padmore took over in Hamburg he tried to reconnect with Richards, but without much success; the last reference of their correspondence is from March 1932.\textsuperscript{162}

By April 1932 Padmore was rather pessimistic about the Sierra Leone connection, which seemed to have more or less disappeared. Apart from having lost his connections with Richards, the contact with Foster Jones proved problematic, too. In November 1931, Padmore had received a letter from one Joc Bo Kami, who informed Padmore about an uprising in the Cambia district in Sierra Leone and, in critical tones, summarized Jones’ activities there.\textsuperscript{163} Jones had visited the district, distributed pamphlets and held discussions with the people in the district where they addressed the poor conditions and the exploitation of the working class. However, Jones position was problematic – he was not a stranger in the region but had visited it previously. Thus, at first the local people were suspicious about Jones intentions: “(I)s this not the same man that came many years past and collected a lot of money from us telling us we shall soon ahve [sic] our own Flag and ships?” This statement can be read as Jones previously being a supporter, if not emissary, of Marcus Garvey and the UNIA. Joc Bo Kami, too, gave such a hint. However, conditions in Cambia district were by 1931 at a low point – “here we are with poor wages and a lot of unemployment,” Kami informed – and the local people, it seems, were desperate. What was needed, it was argued, was a leader: “These people well know they can rise against these things, but as we all know they are looking forward to us for leadership.”\textsuperscript{164} It was hoped that Jones could take the role of a leader, but he did not take full responsibility:

Mr. Jones who we know and can lay hands on, simply comes on a ship and gives us books and papers and in a meeting tell all everything, next minute he is gone. Here we are again left to ourselves to struggle with government on what we do not understand.\textsuperscript{165}

\textsuperscript{161} An Open Letter to the Workers of Sierra Leone (dated 13/V-31), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 71.
\textsuperscript{162} Reference in a letter by Padmore to one E. Jos. Gabbidon, dated 1.3.1932: “P.S. We are enclosing a letter to Mr. Richards. Will you please be good enough to give it to him or post it for him.” This letter is filed in RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 64.
\textsuperscript{163} Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 22-23.
\textsuperscript{164} Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 22.
\textsuperscript{165} Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 22.
In retrospect, it seems that Jones never saw himself as a leader, only as a messenger. Being a seaman, his opportunities to stay ashore were limited if he did not want to arise the suspicions of the colonial authorities. Neither did he have any capabilities to lead a strike, lest a rebellion. Instead, it is evident from the letter that Jones regarded himself only as a middleman of the ITUCNW, and by disseminating subversive literature and informing local people about the existence of the Hamburg office, it seems as he felt to have done his duty as a ‘fellow traveller’. But the Cambia people, especially Joc Bo Kami, were not satisfied with mere information about their rights and a lip service of support to their struggle. They demanded concrete actions to support their call for better wages and lower transport costs to get their produce to the market in Freetown. Sometimes in October 1931, an association, called the Sierra Leone Workers Association, was formed and a public meeting was held – resulting, among others, in the aforementioned letter to Padmore.

Although Comrade Jones had not fathered the formation of the Sierra Leone Workers Association, there was a clear link to him and the ITUCNW. Spurred by the pamphlets, the Association decided through Joc Bo Kami to contact Padmore and ask him for further assistance in their work. However, it seems as if Jones’ position was not really understood by Kami and the others: they believed him to held an influential position in the organization:

The only thing I am proposing now is that Mr. Jones ask the International Trade Union of the Negro Workers to finance the start of this movement and that they should have Mr. Jones himself about us, then we can have confidence and again we cannot pay any more than 3 d a week the very highest under present. In fact we want a cheaper rate.  

Whereas the first part of the paragraph referred to above deals with the proposed assistance to the Association, the meaning of the latter part is unclear. Does Kami refer to the sum to be paid by the Association as membership fee to the ITUCNW (or to the payment of the publications of the ITUCNW)? Or is he complaining about the high transportation costs for local produce? Kami further suggested to Padmore that the ITUCNW should concentrate more efforts on Sierra Leone – seemingly unaware about the fact that this had been the intention of the RILU since many years. Writing from a peripheral district, Kami believed that the social and economic conditions in the colony were more or less unknown in the rest of the world, and underlined to Padmore the opportunities to organize the working class:

---

166 Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 22.
Mr. Jones should be able to tell these officers of the International Trade Union of Negro Workers that we have in Sierra Leone being the most important Port [sic] for shipping in Africa, at least about 9,000 seafarers including fishermen all over the colony and Canoe boys, then we have the peasants in the Northern, Southern and Central provinces which would estimate at least 50,000, then the toilers of the Rura district 20,000, Bonthe Shubro, Monroe Salija and Sulima about 20,000.\textsuperscript{167}

Kami was confident with future success and at the same time outright to Padmore in that the conditions for fruitful activities, even a ‘revolution’, he conjectured, were depending on financial assistance as well as support from other unions and (revolutionary) movements:

\begin{quote}
(S)hould the International Trade Union of Negro Workers[...] ask the support of other movements (white class) finance the start of this movement with say two and a half hundred Pounds, in a few months they could not only have realised their outlay but will be astonished in their success and it is only here we want a good start. The instinct will work up the other colonies, then with Mr. Jones and us, as leaders, we can succeed in creating any violent revolution required for better conditions.\textsuperscript{168}
\end{quote}

A closer look on Kami’s reference to a ‘violent revolution’ indicates that his and the communists meaning of the word were different. Whereas Kami used the word more as a metaphor, hard-line communists would regard this as a typical ‘bourgeoisie’ misapprehension. The rest of Kami’s letter seemed to confirm such suspicions. What Kami and the Sierra Leoneans had in mind was not the ultimate overthrow of the colonial system (i.e., anti-imperialism or anti-colonialism) but only the improvement of their living conditions:

\begin{quote}
(T)he unemployment question can have with us to rally them [i.e., the unemployed would rally behind the Association and its demands for better living conditions, HW] and compelled government to do something for them, the general public will support us as long as they see our start is independent and they know of our foreign supporters.\textsuperscript{169}
\end{quote}

Padmore must have felt that the Hamburg Committee had no resources to provide any help for the Sierra Leonean association and neither had it any means to build up an international

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{167} Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 22.
\textsuperscript{168} Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 22.
\textsuperscript{169} Letter from Joc Bo Kami to Padmore, October 1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 23.
\end{flushright}
campaign in support of their cause. Consequently, he turned to the one organization he hoped to be effective enough to make use of the conflict in Sierra Leone – the LAI.\footnote{Padmore’s proposal to the LAI about concentrating on the situation in Sierra Leone has not been located. However, reference to it is found in a subsequent letter from Padmore to the LAI, 5.6.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 119.}

However, Padmore’s attempt to engage the LAI for Sierra Leone backfired. By 1932 the LAI had few, if any contacts anymore left in Africa not to speak about the capacity to start the mobilization of peasants in Sierra Leone or to assist the formation of peasant organizations there. Padmore bitterly complained about the lethargy at the LAI headquarters in Berlin. Even worse – whatever goodwill that existed for the LAI or the Hamburg Committee in Sierra Leone was lost or at least had received a big setback: “It was very unfortunate because they were all very enthusiastic for I had often spoken to them about the League and its willingness to help the Africans.”\footnote{Padmore to the LAI, 5.6.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 119.}

**Setbacks and new contacts in the Gold Coast**

The Comintern’s connections with the Gold Coast date back to 1926-1927, as has been noted in Part One. The first contacts were made through the forerunner of the LAI, the League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO). The aim had been to invite leading nationalist intellectuals, such as Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi, to participate at the two conferences in Brussels in 1927. However, these contacts did not result in much. Neither had Bankole Awoonor Renner’s return to the Gold Coast in 1929 sparked off any notable subversive activities in that colony. On the contrary, it seems that Awoonor Renner for the next years tried to build up links and cooperate with the Gold Coast middle-class intelligentsia and nobody in Moscow had heard from him anything since then. Notwithstanding, Padmore visited the Gold Coast during his West African sojourn in May/June 1930 and picked up two delegates for the Hamburg Conference. Although the two West Africans, J.A. Akrong and T.S. Morton, only participated for one day at the conference and then returned to the Gold Coast, the comrades both in Moscow and in Hamburg were confident of having established potential links in the colony.

Gold Coast politics were overshadowed by two events during the early 1930s: the 1930 cocoa hold-up and the agitation against three Bills\footnote{The proposals were the Government’s tax income proposal, the waterworks ordinance and the Criminal Code (Amendment) Ordinance No. 21 of 1934. All of them caused widespread opposition and were much debated during the early 1930s. See further Stanley Shaloff, “The Gold Coast Water Rate Controversy 1909-1938,”} to be passed by the Legislative
Council. The 1930-1931 cocoa hold-up was an attempt by cocoa farmers and brokers to sell cocoa beans at depressed prices and to protest against produce-buying cartels by European firms. The Gold Coast economy – as all other West African colonial economies – was hard hit by the World Depression and the world slump that started in 1929. Barter and income terms of export producers underwent a rapid and serious deterioration, resulting in a number of protest movements, including the cocoa hold-ups of 1930-1931 and 1937. One attempt by African producers and cocoa entrepreneurs to bypass the European firms was to organize cooperatives that aimed to control marketing and to raise producer prices. The most influential of these cooperatives was the Gold Coast Farmers Association (GCFA), which had been founded by John Ayew in 1919. As noted in part one, the GCFA had close links with the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS) and both organizations had unsuccessfully been approached by the LAI in 1926-1927. Ayew, together with Alfred J. Ocansey, who was one of the leading African businessmen in Accra, were the organizers of the 1930-1931 cocoa hold-up. Anti-colonial groups in Europe, including the ITUCNW, gladly welcomed such activities.

The contacts between the Hamburg and the Gold Coast were at the best informal. Nothing was ever heard of the two Gold Coast labour unions that attended the 1930 Hamburg Conference. Ford tried to keep in touch with his West African contacts and had regularly sent them letters and printed materials but there was no reply from his contacts in Accra for a significant period of time. Akrong and Morton were initially regarded as working class representatives, the former being a delegate of the Drivers’ Association in Accra, the latter of the Carpenters’ Association in Accra. Both of them were eventually able to contact Ford and reported about external police persecution and internal restrictions to their activities. Ford concluded that organisational work in the Gold Coast would be challenging: the two comrades and their associations were not ideal tools for the establishment of a radical


(Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931-32, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 102-108.,

working class movement. The biggest drawback was that there existed no central labour union organization through which the ITUCNW could operate.  

Morton, on the other hand, explained to Ford that the white employers had sacked more than 400 of the drivers after they had learned that he had participated at the Hamburg Conference and the Drivers’ Association had been branded as a potential trouble-maker. Union work was extremely difficult under these circumstances and therefore Morton suggested that “you send a man to this country to work.” Moscow never sent an agitator to the Gold Coast. Padmore tried to communicate with the two West Africans after his arrival in Hamburg. However, he never received any news from them.

While the Hamburg Committee gained some information about the labour union scene in the Gold Coast, it was never successful in penetrating or even enlisting any of the associations. The Motor Drivers’ and Mechanic’s Union (2,000 members), the Building Trades Union (1500 members), the Fishermen’s Union and the Marine Workers’ Union were four associations listed in an assessment at the end of 1931. In addition, the assessment noted the existence of “a number of peasant organisations, into which thousands of peasants are enrolled.” A potential working field and, as it was noted, “we have established contact with some of these unions and gained some influence.” But this assessment was already a dead paper at the time of its writing: the influence of the ITUCNW in “some of these unions” proved to be a chimera.

Whereas trade union agitation proved more or less impossible to establish by the ITUCNW or even the RILU in the Gold Coast, the Hamburg Committee was able to establish some contacts with individual activists. All of its contacts seemed to have been established in the same way. Through legal or illegal ways, the ITUCNW journal The Negro Worker was distributed in the Gold Coast and found a readership. Several individuals contacted Ford and Padmore after they had read articles condemning the colonial exploitation in Africa. Others, such as a certain S.G. Owoo from Accra wrote to Ford and explained that “T.S. Morton who recently came to our conference told us to get in touch with you.” Unfortunately, nothing more is known about this inquiry – neither about Owoo’s identity or the body he belonged to. On the other hand, the few words do indicate that at least Morton tried his best to propagate the cause of the ITUCNW in Accra.

179 Extract of letter from Morton to Ford, enclosed in Ford, September 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 235. Morton’s original letter has not been located.
181 Extract of letter from S.G. Owoo, to Ford, enclosed in Ford, September 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 236. Owoo’s original letter has not been located.
While most, if not all of the original letters to Ford are lost, some of the correspondences between the Gold Coast and Padmore have been filed in Moscow. A typical contact was Mark A. Ocansey from Kpong. He informed Padmore that he had heard from him and the ITUCNW by others who had read the Negro Worker and declared his utmost admiration to Padmore’s work:

I am so much impressed, convinced and moved in spirit, and do quite agree with all your views set out. I do heartily and sincerely appreciate your works. I have therefore siezed [sic] this opportunity of importance asking you to enrol me as a suscriber [sic] to that Newspaper “The Negro Worker”. Write me of all particulars. 182

Another was one K.A. Obuobi in Krabo to whom Padmore sent a reply in November 1931. Padmore enclosed in his despatch two copies of the *Proceedings* and six copies the pamphlet *The Negro Worker and the Imperialist War*, which he hoped Obuobi would distribute to others.183 C.B. Baisie, a Sanitary Officer from Takoradi, received ten copies of the *Negro Workers* and Padmore urged Baisie to acquaint himself with the objects of the ITUCNW for, as Padmore underlined, “as a sanitary officer you will immediately realize that the sanitary and health condition of a people depends upon their economic condition.” What Padmore wanted Baisie to understand was the necessity for the radical approach the ITUCNW propagated for: no improvement could occur unless the colonial system had been swept away.184

Further, there was Ayikayi Okai, who was a schoolboy at the Wesleyan School in James Town, Accra.185 Padmore was engaged in a rather lengthy correspondence with his “young friend.” Although Ayikai Okai’s first letter to Padmore has not yet been found, the contents of the correspondence can be reconstructed via Padmore’s letters. Ayikai Okai must have written his first letter to Padmore sometimes in January or February 1932, sending a request to join the ITUCNW. Padmore was delighted: “We are very glad to receive an application from you that shows that you are interested in the program and aims of our Committee,” he answered him, but in the same vein asked for further details about him:

182 (Original letter) Mark A, Ocansey to Padmore, Bana Hill, Box 4, Kpong, Gold Coast, 4.8.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 57.
183 Padmore to K.A. Obuobi, 25.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 55. Obuobi’s letter to Padmore, dated 21.10.1931, has not yet been located.
185 Padmore to Ayikai Okai, 23.3.1932, and Padmore to Ayikai Okai, 16.6.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 68 and fol. 80.
You should let us know whether you are still in school and what are your plans for the future. Do you have any friends or relatives among the workers? If so you should send us their names and addresses so that we can send them also magazines. […] You must also write and let us know all about yourself so that we may know in what way we can help you. Believe us to be your good friend.

Ayikai Okai had either got hold of a copy of the 1930 Conference Report or, which is more likely, an issue of The Negro Worker. The political aims of the ITUCNW were listed on the back cover of each issue of the journal.

The young Gold Coast boy must have appreciated Padmore’s trust in him as he immediately collected a list of addresses and sent them to Hamburg. In his reply to Padmore, he informed him that he was of fifteen years age and had planned to leave school last year but owing to his weakness in arithmetic he was dropped and had to redo his class. He asked Padmore to help him to successfully finish his education. Thereafter he planned to go to France. Finally, he pleaded for Padmore’s active engagement: “Write again. I am alone, and I am [not?, HW] finding work. I can get some so please help me /and show me/ how to get some.” Padmore was very pleased and asked for more names and addresses and gave him further instructions: “Enclosed you will find a form but you should write in pencil, as the ink blots.” He also encouraged the boy to study hard and to finish school, despite the hard conditions the Gold Coast – and seemingly also the boys family – were facing. When he had finished school, Padmore promised him that he was to be engaged in union work:

By the time you have finished with your school we shall try to help you to study the workers movement so that you may become a leader of the poor people and help them to organise so that they will get better wages, they would not have to work so hard and pay such high taxes, while their children would get better education, food, and a happier life.

What Padmore did not tell the boy was that this meant a lengthy sojourn to the KUTV or the Lenin Institute in Moscow. Padmore ended his letter by summarizing the aims and the activities of the ITUCNW, including the boy’s immediate task and his future position in the web:

You see, my young friend, our Committee is for the working class, - not for the rich. We are trying to help the poor people, but in order to do this we have to first educate them about their own needs ad [sic]

186 Padmore to Ayikai Okai, 23.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 68.
188 Padmore to Ayikai Okai, 16.6.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 80.
how to struggle against the European imperialists who have come to their country, and with the native traitors are oppressing the people, we publish our magazine and other reading material for them that will explain these things. So when you help us to get more and more people to read, our little books you are doing a great service to the workers of your country, even though you are still a schoolboy.  

This letter was one of Padmore’s most open to anyone in Africa, one where clearly explained and stressed the need of agitation and propaganda. In fact, the above quotation comprises the actual work of the ITUCNW and its agenda: enlightening the workers about the plight was eventually to lead to concrete action, namely the formation of unions and collective agitation. Unfortunately, no further correspondence between Padmore and the boy has been found.

Another person who whole-heartedly declared his support to the cause of the ITUCNW and Padmore was one D.O. Oshosanwo, a (Yoruba?) tailor from Lagos who was living in Asuboi near Accra. His letter to Padmore is a vivid statement of an African who had seen the light. “I shall never despair till the fight is over. And instead hand to help the Internation [sic] trade union committee of negro workers,” he assured. He informed Padmore that he had carefully read the Negro Worker and affirmed its role as the only voice of the downtrodden Negroes throughout the world:

Your institution [i.e., the Negro Worker, HW] which means to help we [us] poor negros [sic] of any where – about negros. And when I have made a careful reading throughout of which I found full encourage to have a part in this fighting in the interest of the black – masses in among the negros worker in spreading the there are institution in my Country into business Connection in push forward fight for freedom.  

The second part of Oshosanwo’s message is somewhat unclear but he seems to claim of having contacts in Lagos – he had already sent a copy of the journal there – and was confident to secure additional recipients of the journal in the near future.

While most of the correspondences to Padmore consisted of letters of support for the cause of the ITUCNW and announcement of subscriptions, the Battor [?] Youngmen Improvement Association tried to approach Padmore more directly and asked for financial support from the Hamburg Committee to cover the cost of an education project they had started. It seems that Padmore had been in contact with the association in June 1932, probably announcing his usual declaration of support for the fight of the Negro workers and against

---

189 Padmore to Ayikai Okai, 16.6.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 80.
190 (Original letter) D.O. Oshosanwo, High Class Lagos Tailor & Draper, Asuboi Gold Coast via Accra, P.O.Box 2, 18.8.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 73.

colonial oppression in addition to sending them the journal and some pamphlets. In his reply to Padmore, the Secretary of the association thanked Padmore for his endeavour to “promote and develop a good welfare towards the Association.” He informed Padmore that “the Youngmen are in spirit of anxiety to develop the country more and more with a strong education for the present generations and upwards,” and that they had started to build a school building and were now looking for stationary apparatus. Was the Youngmen Association really aware of whom they were communicating with? In their next paragraph, the Secretary proclaimed:

In source of all those conditions; believing you would be of good assistance to them, as it has been hoped manifestedly [sic] there is however a Board of trading in International Trade Union Committee of the Negro Workers – Therefore in view of this peculiar channel all necessary extensions shall come to success for country[?] management.191

Was it a similar association as the WAFU who had contacted the LAI in 1928 and turned out to represent the African capitalist middle-class? Much of the content of the letter seems to indicate that the sender was not aware of the ITUCNW’s political orientation– or what the organization stood for. On the other hand, the letter contains a critical evaluation of the current situation in the Gold Coast – unemployment due to the economic depression in almost every District and those few who are “under employments of the white Imperialist exploiters, have eanning[?] scanty wages.” Taxation is already heavy, he complained, “but the white Imperialist exploiters still enacting another strong law against same for their own convenience.” “The white imperialist exploiters” prevented anyone to engage in any other trade or commercial activities. The Battor Youngmen Association was certainly not a group of African middle-class businessmen. At least they knew how to make use of a language that they must have learned by reading the Negro Worker. In fact, the last part of the letter is more or less an attempt by the Secretary to inquire from Padmore the delay of certain “commodities” he had promised to send to them: the Association had engaged its members in the distribution of the journal and were promised to be reimbursed by Padmore for their engagement. Or, at least this was their impression.192

191 (Original letter) Battor Youngmen Improvement Association, Secretary’s Office, Battor, Asessimeh[?], 5.9.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 84-85.
192 (Original letter) Battor Youngmen Improvement Association, Secretary’s Office, Battor, Asessimeh[?], 5.9.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 85-86.
Others even wrote anti-colonial manifestos, which they hoped that Padmore was to publish in the *Negro Worker*. One of them was Quacoo Hamilton. Only the last page of his letter and text was found in the archives. The few remaining paragraphs reveal a politically conscious person who fully backed the radical message of the Negro Worker: “Who is our saviour? Our saviour is the organisation of ourselves to fights [sic] and to brings [sic] our lifes [sic] as human beings but not as our present negroes situation.” In the last paragraph of his declaration ends with a bombastic salutation:

New Blacks born let us have human feelings in our hearts. Let us save our situations. Let us follows [sic] our comrades in U.S.S.R. The only land of new civilisations, no race prejudice, abolished of feudal systems and all sorts of crooked ways which capitalist of old Tsarist Russia created to dim the eyes of our Russian comrades. Long live Lenin if he could be seen!!! The saviour of human [?] Long lives the workers of U.S.S.R., may Stalin also live long and to guides U.S.S.R. into invaders in time of capitalist uexpected [sic] attacks.  

The tone of Hamilton’s text reads like a mixture of the voices of a convinced Black Bolshevik, the demands of a radical New Negro, the greetings of a propagator of the ‘Class-before-Race’ perspective and the salutations of a potential future Stalinist.

Finally, another political activist who established contacts with Padmore was Kobina Sekyi. He had arrived in London in June 1932 and stayed there for the rest of the year. His business in London was twofold. On behalf of the ARPS and the Gold Coast Farmers’ Association, his task was to get in touch with British, French and American financiers, the ultimate goal being to form a cocoa-buying group. Sekyi’s other business was the Privy Council appeal case between his client, the Ohene of Asamangkese, and Nana Ofori Atta, Paramount Chief of Akim Abuakwa.

It is unclear when Sekyi first learnt about Padmore and his journal, *The Negro Worker*. According to Rohdie, Sekyi made his first contact with Padmore in March 1932 when he still was at home in the Gold Coast, asking Padmore for a copy of *The Negro Worker*.

---

193 (Original letter) Quacoo Hamilton, Gold Coast, to Padmore, no date [first page(s) missing], RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 113.
194 In 1932, the case was already ten years old and had emerged into a political issue involving both the chiefs, the ARPS and the Gold Coast Government. The background of the affair was that Akim Abuakwa claimed paramountcy over Asamangkese. Although the local ruler, the Ohene, was willing to accept political subordination, he was unwilling to pay the price of his subordination, namely a one-third interest on all land concessions. On the other hand, Akim Abuakwa’s claim was supported by the Gold Coast Government, whereas Nana Ofori Atta had won the Governor’s favour by sponsoring the Native Administration Ordinance in 1927. Following the 1927 Ordinance, the Provincial Council system was introduced in the Gold Coast Colony. The ARPS, too, had rejected the 1927 Ordinance as it feared exclusion from the Provincial Councils and, ultimately, from the Legislative Council. See further Rhodie 1965, pp. 390-391.
Worker. Their correspondence continued over the next months. Sekyi asked Padmore to send more copies of the journal to the Gold Coast as there were others who were interested in the journal, as he claimed. Padmore, whom Sekyi had told was about to arrive in London soon, urged Sekyi to contact Arnold Ward, Secretary of the London Negro Welfare Association, and Reginald Bridgeman of the British Section of the LAI. Padmore assured that both men would assist Sekyi in his “fight against imperialism.”

Padmore also asked Sekyi to help in a scheme to send African workers from the Gold Coast to study in Europe. As has previously been noted, the idea to invite Africans to study in Europe or, which was the actual plan, in Moscow at the KUTV, was not Padmore’s but was a well-established policy of the Comintern at this time. However, as Rohdie notes, Sekyi misunderstood Padmore’s invitation and asked him whether he could help his brother to study engineering in Germany. Interestingly, this was the second time when Sekyi and others from the Gold Coast misunderstood the communists’ intentions. Padmore, again, was evasive and replied that the conditions in Germany were at the time unsuitable for study.

Eventually, Padmore’s attempts to enlist Kobina Sekyi in his network failed. In August 1932 he made yet another attempt to get Sekyi’s active participation. This time he urged Sekyi to get into contact with the “International Labour Defence,” i.e., the International Red Aid, at their (European) headquarters in Berlin and to participate as a representative of the ARPS at their forthcoming congress in November. What Padmore did not tell Sekyi was that the Congress was to be held in Moscow. But that did not matter: Sekyi replied that he could not represent the ARPS if the organization had not nominated him and suggested that Padmore send the invitation to the Gold Coast. Thereafter Sekyi’s and Padmore’s correspondence is silent. Padmore went to Moscow, while Sekyi did not. If he had sent an invitation to the Gold Coast is not known.

“Yours sincerely R.B. Wuta-Ofei”

Another politically active person who was in contact with Padmore was R. Benjamin Wuta-Ofei, editor of the Gold Coast Spectator. Alfred J. Ocansey, its owner, established the paper in 1927. Its first editor was R.W. Dupigny, followed by Wuta-Ofei. Initially it was published

---

196 Rhodie 1965, p. 393.
197 Rhodie 1965, p. 396. Padmore was referring to the Second World Congress of the International Red Aid in Moscow.
on an irregular basis, but eventually emerged as an influential political organ during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{198} Wuta-Ofei was a friend of Kobina Sekyi and, according to Rohdie, it was Sekyi who had told Wuta-Ofei about Padmore, presumably before he left for London in 1932. Rohdie also claims that Wuta-Ofei was another possible candidate for study abroad.\textsuperscript{199}

However, investigations in the Comintern Archive in Moscow reveal that Wuta-Ofei had been in contact with Padmore before 1932.\textsuperscript{200} In total, six letters from Wuta-Ofei to Padmore have been found in Moscow, all dating before Sekyi’s correspondence with Padmore. In the first letter, dated 7 October 1931, Wuta-Ofei introduced himself as the editor of the Gold Coast Spectator and had presumably addressed the letter to Ford. He informed that he had been endeavouring for some time to get in touch with the Hamburg Committee to make a “business proposition”, namely an inquiry to the ITUCNW about the possibility to obtain a printing press:

A few friends have approached me to write to you to enquire whether you can get them a complete printing press for a fairly large size newspaper, to be published solely in the interest of the Negro Workers. No doubt you are aware of the fact that any propaganda which will be effective in raising the living standard of the workers, in Africa, must be carried out in the country. Information will then be first hand, + local conditions can be tackled on the spot with great conviction. Please consider this carefully.

What arrangements you can effect there for us, to get the complete equipment, including one lino-type, or payment of a deposit, the balance to be paid by monthly instalments. Secondhand machines, I am sure, will suit, + will last provided it is carefully operated.

In reply, kindly ask the firm to send me a catalogue, to the under-given address.\textsuperscript{201}

Wuta-Ofei must have been aware of the fact that contacts with the ITUCNW could be viewed with suspicion by the British colonial authorities. Not surprisingly, therefore, he asked not to address any letters to himself using the title ‘editor’ nor sending them directly to him, and suggested that letters should be securely sealed.

Padmore found the letter when he took over in Hamburg and must have been rather excited about the prospects of the establishment of a working relationship with a newspaper

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{199} Rhodie 1965, p. 393.
\textsuperscript{200} In fact, both the Gold Coast Spectator and J.A. Ocansey were on the mailing list of the RILU publication \textit{Der Osten und die Kolonien}. Other recipients in the Gold Coast were several other newspapers, such as the Independent and the Leader, and, curiously, the “West African National Congress via Secretary A. Casely Hayford!” See Adressenliste zur Belieferung unseres Bulletins “Der Osten und die Kolonien”, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/8/177, fol. 58.
\textsuperscript{201} (Original letter) Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, letter dated 7.10.1931, RGASPI 535/7/74, 20fpbp.
\end{flushright}
in Africa. He sent Wuta-Ofei two catalogues about German printing machines, but Wuta-Ofei thankfully responded in April 1932 that he preferred to make his transaction with an English trading company, since the Pound Sterling was flighty. In an earlier correspondence, Padmore must have indicated that he would use his contacts in England and Russia to address the issue of the printing machine.\(^{202}\) He had even have mentioned that a “friend” of him was going to London and Wuta-Ofei was anxious to know if the “friend” had already been able communicate to Padmore about the machine.\(^{203}\)

Padmore’s reply to Wuta-Ofei’s inquiry in April 1932 must have been disappointing and he friendly, but firmly, reminded him in late May 1932 that the whole matter remained unresolved. At this point, Wuta-Ofei must have been somewhat uneasy with Padmore’s incapability of providing a clear answer about the state of affairs and again reminded him about the importance of getting the machine:

> The press, as I have on many occasions explained to you, will be worked solely in the interest of the labouring classes (or class in this country). I hope, therefore, that you will do your best over there to further the arrangement on your side in my behalf. What about asking your friends over in London to take this matter up. Possibly they can fix up something better.\(^{204}\)

Yet Padmore remained silent for the next three months, although not inactive. Perhaps he or his contact in London had been able to find a potential dealer in second hand machinery – Wuta-Ofei, at least, had received a tender from the London-based company F.W. Woodroff & Co for second-hand machinery. The only problem was that the costs for the machine, including its delivery to the Gold Coast, amounted to £1,600. He therefore asked Padmore to approach Mr Woodroff to negotiate the terms of payment including the possibility for a one-year credit. Once again Wuta-Ofei highlighted the importance of having one’s own printing press: “While the press is own[ed] by another person, the Editor cannot act freely in the best interest of the people.”\(^{205}\)

Padmore’s connection with Wuta-Ofei was not a one-sided exchange of letters between two editors. Clearly, right from the beginning Wuta-Ofei recognized the radical language of *The Negro Worker* as attractive, perhaps even resembling his own private views.

\(^{202}\) Although the correspondence is missing in the RGASPI-files, its content is revealed in Wuta-Ofei’s letters. Padmore sent his first letter to Wuta-Ofei at the end of November 1931 as is evident from Wuta-Ofei’s subsequent correspondence.
\(^{203}\) (Original letter) Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, Accra 23.4.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 41.
\(^{204}\) (Original letter) Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, Accra 28.5.1932, RGASPI 535/7/74, 62fp+bp.
\(^{205}\) (Original letter) Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, Accra 23.4.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 29.
concerning the colonial situation. Padmore, on the other hand, must have regarded Wuta-Ofei’s initial request as the “historical moment” he was waiting for: a potential influential ally in West Africa had contacted him, one with whom the ITUCNW perhaps could establish a fruitful relationship? It seems that Padmore’s first reply to Wuta-Ofei must have been a lengthy one, perhaps outlining the colonial oppression and exploitation in the African Atlantic and almost certainly presenting the goals and objectives of the ITUCNW. It is evident from the existing correspondence that Padmore’s first letter to Wuta-Ofei was a lengthy and substantial one as he had at least published part of it in the *Gold Coast Spectator.*

He could even have touched upon more concrete issues, such as about the possibilities for the ITUCNW to establish a branch in the Gold Coast. He must have been pleased with Wuta-Ofei’s positive answer of late December 1931; in fact, it revealed that he rather than the earlier contacts of the ITUCNW in the Gold Coast were sincere and trustworthy future comrades:

You suggest that you may place all the affairs of the Committee in my hands. Well, you shall have no cause for complaint or regret. Only, all letters must be securely sealed + addressed to my name, co Box 217, Accra.

I know that sometimes ago you had delegates from this colony. In fact on their return, one of them came to see me in my office, +something (I cannot clearly recollect what) was published for them. But they are persons without “guts” for the simple reason that they are not educated. In this fight, “push” alone is not sufficient, you must know something of the whiteman + his ways so as to beat him at his own game. This is only possible through education. Am I wrong?

However, as far as Padmore’s part of the correspondence is (still) missing, one can only speculate about what ‘Committee’ Wuta-Ofei was referring to. Was it the ITUCNW? Did Padmore suggest to Wuta-Ofei to establish a branch of the ITUCNW in the Gold Coast? Although Wuta-Ofei indicated that he would be the right person for Padmore’s cause, it is evident from the rest of his letter that his main object continued to be the issue of the printing press:

The first step must be the press which will (a) get the masses together + (b) make their voices heard by the world. At the start it will be impossible to get capital out here owing to the strickler [?] + often

---

206 This is missing in the Comintern Archives, but its content can be outlined based on Wuta-Ofei’s subsequent answers to Padmore.
207 (Original letter) Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, Accra 29.12.1931, RGASPI 535/7/74, 30fp+bp. Padmore’s text was printed in the *Gold Coast Spectator* issue of the 24th of December 1931.
208 (Original letter) Wuta-Ofei to Padmore, Accra 29.12.1931, RGASPI 535/7/74, 30fp+bp.
swindles hence my appeal to you. Besides, the press must be independent so that it might be free in its criticism. Local capital, which must be subscribed [?] by several persons, will only be a hindrance. Naturally there will be many weak-kneed among the management, + the result will be constant blue-pencilling of perfe[...] safe although very strong + candid criticism. This is my trouble + worry at this moment.

I remember that sometimes ago, I approached Mr Garvey with this suggestion. He took it up warmly, but suddenly no replies came to my letter. I am sure you will appreciate the urgent nature of the case + write to me early.209

Although Wuta-Ofei was keen to corroborate his connection with Padmore and the ITUCNW, Padmore – for reasons not (yet) known – was more hesitant. Following the patchy correspondence, Padmore never gave any reply to Wuta-Ofei’s invitation. Wuta-Ofei was certainly perplexed and at least once reminded Padmore about concrete orders: “By the way, since promising you my undivided attention to the movement + to act for you here, I have received no definite instructions from you.”210

Padmore’s silence is difficult to explain, as there was no further correspondence about the plan to establish a direct connection to the Gold Coast. Perhaps had Wuta-Ofei misunderstood Padmore’s first letter – maybe the intention was not to establish an office and engage Wuta-Ofei for the ITUCNW but to use him as a useful middleman, local connection and “fellow traveller” of the ITUCNW? On the other hand, Wuta-Ofei activities certainly looked promising from the Hamburg Committee’s perspective as The Gold Coast Spectator seemed to develop into a hidden mouthpiece of the radical anti-colonial workers movement.

In March 1932, Wuta-Ofei approached Padmore and asked him for permission to reproduce a photograph that had been published in a recent edition of The Negro Worker. The picture appeared in an article about American lynching justice and Jim Crowism and depicted a young Black man being hanged with a rope on a branch of a tree in his shirt and trousers and boots handcuffed and appeared. “This picture tells a story of human misery and woe which, we believe, should be brought to the notice of Africans in this country,” the requestor underlined, and asked Padmore to send him a stereotyped block of the picture together with a short account of the incident.211 In April 1932, Wuta-Ofei informed Padmore that a review of Padmore’s book The Life and Struggle of the Negro Toilers had appeared in The Gold Coast Spectator...
Spectator. He also suggested that his paper was to be sent to Hamburg on a regular basis as it even should be of the interested of the comrades in Moscow: “Again, do you get our papers regularly since, I think, the labour movement will be studied in the USSR, can’t you get them over there interested in the suggestion?” If anything, Wuta-Ofei’s sentence reveals that he was aware about Padmore’s and the ITUCNW’s connection to Moscow. Unfortunately, neither Padmore’s answer nor reaction is known, although it is likely that he at least must have made an attempt to provide the newspaper with such ‘hot’ political material. However, Wuta-Ofei never got the printing blocks. The police had most likely confiscated them, perhaps even in the Gold Coast.

However, the most important issue for Padmore was not the dissemination of material to the Gold Coast but to enlist one or two young Africans for enrolment at the KUTV in Moscow. In his letter dated 23 March 1923, if not earlier, he had indirectly raised the question with Wuta-Ofei. In this matter, too, did Wuta-Ofei signal a positive attitude towards being engaged by the Hamburg Committee. However, there were some practical details that had to be solved before he could send the prospective students to Europe, not least the question of who was to cover the cost for sending them away?

As I already explained to you, we cannot raise money by public subscription here, for the reason, before anything could be got going, all the county may hear about it + that would be a terrible download. That is my one great reason why I wish to arrange for the press privately. Once things have started capital can flow in; + owing to treachery we can then pick + to choose whom to accept + all that. Please let me know (a) how long the workers will be away; (b) what will be the cost; (c) who will bear the cost. Can the be borne on your side until we get things going here + then we pay back? I must here draw you attention to the fact that no Workers Association worth the name has yet been started here.

Wuta-Ofei’s answer gave a conflicting message to Padmore. First, he clearly had misunderstood the idea of getting Africans to Europe, as he seemed to believe that Padmore was planning to arrange a workshop for workers to be trained in trade union activities. On the other hand, second, he clearly had the potential for enlisting Africans. What to do? It seems as if Padmore at this point had decided to turn Kobina Sekyi and asked him to help in sending workers from the Gold Coast for training in Europe. However, as noted above, this attempt resulted only in a cul-de-sac. On the other hand, at one point in their correspondence, the

---

possibility of engaging even Wuta-Ofei was put on the table. It is not clear who raised the issue, but according to Rohdie, Padmore in a reply letter to Kobina Sekyi, dated 9 July 1932, judged Wuta-Ofei to be a very interested and progressive man. It is also clear that Sekyi must have approached Wuta-Ofei himself about the matter, although the correspondence is missing. In fact, Wuta-Ofei had sent a letter to Kobina Sekyi, (also) dated 9 July 1932, requesting a recommendation and pointing out that a man of his talents should not be considered to write on a small African newspaper. He urged Sekyi to discuss with Padmore about the practical details for his planned training: who would pay for it and what prospects of employment where there after the training?²¹⁵

The question of finding a suitable African candidate for training in Europe was debated in length by Wuta-Ofei in his letter from August 15, 1932. In it he proposed himself to Padmore as the most suitable candidate and notified him that he had already discussed the matter with Kobina Sekyi:

About the two men for training, I have asked Mr Sekyi to inform you that I should like to come myself, together with another friend who contributes powerful articles to the “Spectator”. Unfortunately we are all above the age-limit but if you really wish to have candidates who can gra[...] things properly + can organize the people, you cannot do better than accept us.²¹⁶

Thus, Wuta-Ofei believed that it was the age factor that played against him and his mysterious friend. Wuta-Ofei, who only at this point revealed Padmore his age (“I am 39.”) never realized that it was not his age but his middleclass background that was the main problem. He did not belong to the working class but the West African intelligentsia whom the comrades in Hamburg, Berlin and Moscow did not regard as the revolutionary avant-garde. Still, Wuta-Ofei was keen on going to Europe and being trained, and stressed to Padmore that he would never find any more suitable one than himself:

It will be impossible to get the same spirit in a young man who has just left school, or who has not moved about the country sufficiently to understand things properly. Most of the young men are only good when led. They cannot lead themselves; and to organize, the leader must have some experience. ²¹⁷

²¹⁵ Rhodie 1965, p. 393.
Wuta-Ofei held himself certainly capable of becoming the needed organizer of the workers and downtrodden in the Gold Coast. From his perspective, the argument of the need of an experienced and elder leader made perfectly sense and was a realistic one. However, the crux of the matter was that neither Hamburg nor Moscow ever reacted to Wufa-Ofei’s proposal. Did Padmore and the comrades in Moscow regard him to be only a similar petty bourgeoisie activist as was the group behind the West African Farmers’ Union? Or did Padmore consider Wuta-Ofei to be a more valuable man ‘on the spot’ in the Gold Coast, someone who already had an established network which could be used for Comintern/ITUCNW purposes. Perhaps Padmore regarded The Gold Coast Spectator as a potential radical organ that could be used in the dissemination of anti-racial and anti-colonial propaganda? Last, but not least, who was the mysterious second prospective candidate whom Wuta-Ofei had mentioned in his letter? Was it perhaps even Bankole Awooner-Renner?

Bankole Awoonor Renner’s position as a possible link between Padmore and the Gold Coast radical elite (in Sekyi’s case “radical conservative”\(^{218}\)) is unclear. Although I have earlier proposed that he could have served as a potential link between Moscow and West Africa, there is little factual proof for such an assumption. However, circumstantial evidence points towards the fact that Awoonor Renner by 1932 knew all key activists. Kobina Sekyi was his godfather, Danquah perhaps his mentor? His link to Wuta-Ofei is intriguing – most probably they got to know each other through their profession as journalists. Via Wuta-Ofei, most probably, Awoonor Renner must have known Alfred J. Ocansey, the proprietor of the Gold Coast Spectator. Be as it may, as will be outlined in Part Four, the interaction between the Gold Coast radicals was to remain intensive during the rest of the 1930s.

**The Nigeria–option: a promising start and disappointing end**

Padmore’s connections with Nigerians proved to be more fruitful. Frank Macaulay served as representative of the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) to both the 1930 Hamburg Conference and the Fifth Congress of the RILU. Although the party was regarded as a nationalistic platform, i.e., not a radical mass movement, Macaulay must have left a positive

---

impression on his hosts in Moscow, especially as he claimed that the membership of his organization was “90 percent of the total masses.”

In Moscow, Macaulay gave a presentation about the political and economic conditions in Nigeria. Most of the four-page report was a mere outline of the colonial administration and it discussed agricultural, forestry and minerals as well as the impact of the trade depression on labour and employment. From a RILU-perspective, there was nothing astonishing to be learnt from it, neither did Macaulay reveal any deeper knowledge of trade unions or other political activities. On the other hand, as stressed by Macaulay, little else could be expected:

There are no trade unions at present properly organised but there exists three or four political parties, the Union of Young Nigerians, the Peoples’ Union, Reform Club, the Berbers’ Union, the Gold and Silversmiths’ Union, the Farmers’ Association and the Nigerian National Democratic Party, whose official organ, “The Lagos Daily News”, I have the privilege to be the Editor [i.e., F. Macaulay].

However, speaking about the Nigerian National Democratic party, Macaulay did make a point about its attempt to rally the masses in the elections (although he never stated what he meant by the term ‘masses’):

(S)ince its inauguration sometime in 1923, it has always enjoyed the confidence of the masses throughout Nigeria, and about 90% of the Electorate of the municipal area of Lagos (the Capital) with the result that at every election it ha[s] always swept the polls by an overwhelming majority. Its meetings are held under the full glare of public and official scrutiny; for according to the existing local law, no one can convene a public meeting or demonstration with impunity without first obtaining a permit or licence from the police, and at every meeting there has always been present police and detectives to watch the movement.

---

219 (Questionnaire) Frank Macaulay, 16.7.1930, RGASPI 534/1/178, fol. 103. His father Herbert Macaulay as well as their mouth piece, the Daily News, were added on the mailing list of the RILU publication Der Osten und die Kolonien (or rather its English version), in addition to other Nigerian newspapers, such as the Spectator, the Labour Bulletin, and the Daily Telegraph. See Adressenliste zur Belieferung unseres Bulletins “Der Osten und die Kolonien”, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/8/177, fol. 58.

220 Macaulay’s report is filed as Nigeria (109/44/10 July 28, 1930) [copy, typewritten, no author], RGASPI 495/64/168, fol. 9-12. An internal analysis of the document indicates that its author was Macaulay. It is likely that the document is a stenographic report from his presentation in Moscow. Both Macaulay and Small gave similar presentations in Berlin at their meeting at the LAI headquarters in October 1930 (Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 78).

221 Nigeria, [28.7.1930], RGASPI 495/64/168, fol. 9.

222 Nigeria, [28.7.1930], RGASPI 495/64/168, fol. 9.
On the other hand, the party had demonstrated its critical, anti-colonial position by being constantly harassed by the colonial authorities:

The Democratic Party in its struggles against the government for the liberty [sic] and protection of native rights and interests, has not found its path lined with a bed of roses, nor in its political overtures was it ever accorded a smooth sailing. Many of its leaders have been persecuted and prosecuted by being mulcted with heavy fines, terms of imprisonment and even deportation.223

At least at this point, Macaulay still seemed to have been convinced that the party of his father could emerge as the rallying point for a future anti-colonial movement. But contrary to Small, Macaulay had not come to Hamburg and Moscow to seek financial assistance but – perhaps – to find potential allies. Whether or not Padmore or other radicals had influenced him to do so, his visit to Moscow had been an eye-opener. Seemingly impressed with what he had experienced in the Soviet Union, Macaulay ended his speech with the following conclusion and appeal:

I [= Frank Macaulay, HW] should like, in conclusion, to make an appeal for help for a wide and extensive propaganda of the Soviet Union in these parts of the British Empire so as to bring home to the natives the real truth of the workings of the U.S.S.R. and not the wholesale distorted, envying and malicious news usually circulated through the Imperialists’ or Capitalists’ Press. It is an arduous task of self-sacrifice but it will not be an energy or time wasted because the natives are still groping in the dark and it is only an outside help that will show the light.

I am now in Russia after encountering so many obstacles on the way; but I am glad that on my return to Africa, especially Nigeria, I will be able to say, “I have been”, “I have seen” and “all is well.” And this is the only way of “nailing” to the counter as bad coins, the many anti-Soviet lies and misrepresentations which are constantly being spread abroad through the Capitalists’ and Imperialists’ agents.224

Whether Macaulay’s praising of the Soviet system was mere lip service or was an expression of someone who had “seen the light” is an issue that can be discussed. In contrast to Small, who was equally impressed by the achievements of Soviet collectivization but rather critical about his experiences at the RILU congress, Macaulay did not air his doubts about the advisability of the ‘Class-Before-Race’ perspective during the negotiations at the LAI

223 Nigeria, [28.7.1930], RGASPI 495/64/168, fol. 9.
224 Nigeria, [28.7.1930], RGASPI 495/64/168, fol. 9.
headquarters in Berlin in October 1930. Therefore, LAI Secretary Bohumir Smeral regarded Macaulay as a more important contact in West Africa than Small.

However, it is possible that Macaulay had already established close contacts with the LAI on his way to (or while staying in) Moscow in July 1930. On 22 July 1930, the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph* informed its readers that the newspaper had opened a “fresh source of news” – the newspaper was to make use of the International Secretariat of the League Against Imperialism press service. In fact, the Nigerian newspaper was using the news service ‘Anko’, i.e., the International Press Correspondence or *Inprekorr* (Internationale Pressekorrespondenz), which had its headquarters in Berlin and was one of the Comintern affiliations. In June 1930, the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph* had already published two telegrams from the Anko – seemingly without any connection to Macaulay’s visit to Germany. The July note in the newspaper corresponded with Macaulay’s stay in Moscow. Was he the connection between the LAI and the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph*? British Intelligence was alarmed, notified the danger of Communist infiltration, discussed the possibility to warn the editor of the newspaper about the background of Anko and asked him to refrain from publishing further telegrams. However, the crux of the problem was that Nigerian Law did not permit any actions, the Colonial Office lamented. The warning seemed to have had its effect and no further disturbing news was received from the Nigerian press.

Frank Macaulay’s transformation into a ‘fellow traveller’ lasted for the rest of his short life. The negotiations in Berlin had resulted in a plan to enlist West African students for training in Moscow and Macaulay had promised to find potential candidates from Nigeria. However, this task turned out to cause some confusion. It was to be coordinated through the LAI headquarters and not the Hamburg Committee. While he had notified Bohumir Smeral about his plans when he arrived in London after his visit in Germany, not much was heard from him thereafter. Ford, who knew nothing about the arrangements, informed Padmore in early February 1931 that he believed Macaulay had not yet returned to Lagos. Instead, Macaulay had written him in January and informed him that he was still residing in London.

---

225 Perhaps I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson was already at this point the acting editor of the *Nigerian Daily Telegraph*? (Coleman 1971, p. 208.) In February 1932, another well-known radical intellectual, Duse Mohammed (1966-1945) took over as managing editor of the newspaper.


228 Subversive propaganda, Minutes 6.10.1930 and 1.11.1930, TNA CO 583/174/1.

229 Confidential report re discussions with Macaulay and Small, 3.11.1930, RGASPI 495/155/90, fol. 79.

230 Ford to Padmore, Hamburg 7.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 52.
where he was watching the proceedings of a deportation trial of one of local Princes who had been deported from Lagos. In subsequent letters he notified Ford that he had organized a “Welfare Association” in Liverpool and was planning to attend a forthcoming conference of the British Section of the LAI. Ford suggested to Macaulay to prepare some materials dealing with the situation in Nigeria.\(^{231}\) The note about the so-called Welfare Association was interesting for both Ford and Padmore since neither of them knew about the existence of such an association and they were eager to learn more about it. It turned out to be a dayfly and existed only for a few months. When Padmore visited Liverpool in April 1932 he found no traces of it: “I was in Liverpool in April and know what we have got and what we have not got there.”\(^{232}\)

Padmore, too, was anxious to know what Macaulay was up to. The Nigerian had not written a single line since he had left Moscow although it was known that he had participated at a conference of the British Section of the LAI in London, and urged Ford to get in contact with him and his father Herbert Macaulay:

> You should write him [i.e., Herbert Macaulay, HW] a sort of friendly letter on behalf of the Committee saying how glad [we are] to have Nigeria represented by a son and hope that the Committee will be able to render every assistance in the struggles of the oppressed peoples of Nigeria against British imperialism.\(^{233}\)

In addition, Padmore asked Ford to include copies of the resolution of the Hamburg Conference and the Negro Worker and to ask Herbert Macaulay to reprint the resolution in his paper.

If Macaulay ever received Ford’s correspondence is not known. In fact, the only reference to any correspondence is a two-and a half page long report about the political situation in Nigeria, which was sent to the LAI headquarters sometimes in April 1930. Its content is similar to Frank Macaulay’s earlier presentation about the pathetic political conditions in the colony but it is unclear if he was the author of the text.\(^{234}\) The only thing known about Frank Macaulay’s whereabouts in 1931 was that he returned to Nigeria. Back in Lagos, he put all his energy in the organization of the first Nigerian trade union, the African

\(^{231}\) Ford, January 1931 Report, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 96.
\(^{233}\) Padmore to Ford, Moscow 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 60.
Workers’ Union of Nigeria (also known as Nigerian Workers’ Union, NWU), which he established in June 1931.\textsuperscript{235}

Whether or not Macaulay’s activities in Nigeria in 1931 were the outcome of an explicit plan outlined and encouraged in Moscow or Berlin is not known. However, there exists a (undated) memorandum filed among the papers of the ECCI, which presented a strategic plan for action of the RILU in British West Africa, including Nigeria. A handwritten addition to the memorandum states “1930” and perhaps the memo was produced during the RILU Congress, or was the outcome of the meetings of the West Africans in Berlin in October 1930. Referring to Macaulay as a “partisan of the RILU”, the task in Nigeria was:

To start a campaign to organize the workers, artisans and poor peasants on the basis of the following immediate demands: a) 8 hour day for all wage workers, b) equal wages and equal pay, c) abolition of all forced labour slavery, d) a minimum wage of [not stated, HW], e) double pay for overtime, f) freedom of organisation, press, assemblies, g) right to strike, h) abolition of all poll and hat [sic] taxes, i) annulment of all leases or mortgages of land to Europeans to the communities they formally belonged, k) no land to be sold, leased or mortgaged but given to all who are willing to work on it, L) return of all so called crown land and of land held now by Europeans to the communities they formerly belonged, m) natives to have a right to occupy any position in trade, industry and administration, n) election on the basis of universal suffrage of all administrative and juridical [sic] officials, o) the election of tribe, city and province councils which are to be the highest authority in the respective election districts, p) abolition of all missionary schools and the establishment of a system of universal free education in native languages, q) free medical help and organisation of maternity homes.\textsuperscript{236}

However, contacts between Ford and Macaulay were erratic, if they existed at all after 1930. So far, no further correspondence between them has been located in the Comintern Archives. Ford made no reference to him or Nigeria in his September 1931 Report. Additionally, Padmore even stated in a letter to H.E. O’Connell [O’Connell?] in Cardiff in November 1931 that there had not been any news about Macaulay’s activities in Nigeria and was disappointed about his performance: “He had promised to help us in forming a trade union in Nigeria, but has failed to line up to his promise.”\textsuperscript{237} It was only after an announcement in the Nigerian Daily Telegraph about the African Worker’s Union of Nigeria that Padmore had realized that

\textsuperscript{235} The African Workers’ Union of Nigeria, as stated in their letter-head.
\textsuperscript{236} British West Africa (copy, typewritten; handwritten add: 1930 RT.32/p), RGASPI 495/64/166, fol. 74-75.
\textsuperscript{237} Padmore to H.E. O’Connell [sic], (Hamburg) 23.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/18, fol. 161.
something was going on in Nigeria and after his arrival in Hamburg tried to establish contact with the organization.\textsuperscript{238}

\textit{Our man in Lagos: I.T.A Wallace-Johnson}

The information about the establishment of an African trade union in Nigeria must have come as a surprise to Padmore. News from Nigeria had been depressing in 1931. The descriptions of the political conditions in the colony were pathetic at best. A highly critical, unsigned article commenting upon the situation in Nigeria was published in the December 1931 issue of \textit{The Negro Worker}:

\begin{quote}
(The) conditions of the working class (in Nigeria) are deplorable; two main forces in charge: the colonial government (creating laws to hinder the scope of development of the Africans) and the capitalists (exploiting the Africans by means of the opportunities given by these laws). The laws of the country are based on a Criminal Code which makes the smallest offence a felony and as a result the country can boast with the largest roll of Criminals, and this roll is being augmented day after day. There are over a hundred of practicing barristers here – the majority of whose positions are no better than the ordinary worker, for the simple reason that the Code prohibits their going to certain extent in their practice.\textsuperscript{239}
\end{quote}

The author of the article was I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, as will be argued below\textsuperscript{240}. The article was probably written during the middle of 1931 as there are no references to either Macaulay or his attempt to establish a trade union, perhaps indicating that Wallace-Johnson was not yet associated with Frank Macaulay at this point.

Isaac Theophilus Akunna Wallace-Johnson was not a Nigerian. Born in 1895 in Sierra Leone, he enlisted in the British Carrier Corps in 1914 and participated in the campaigns in the Cameroons, East Africa and the Middle East. Demobilized in 1920, he returned home but was unable to find a niche for himself, moving from one job to another. During the mid-1920s he was working in various capacities for the Freetown Municipal Council, but was

\textsuperscript{238} (Original letter) Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 51. The break in communication between Ford and Macaulay could explain why there is no reference to trade union activities in Nigeria in the 1931 report of the activities of the ITUCNW (RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 102-108).
\textsuperscript{239} “British Oppression in West Africa by a Correspondent,” \textit{The Negro Worker} 1:12, 1931, pp. 20-24.
fired from the Council in April 1926 and thereafter left the country to seek opportunities elsewhere.\textsuperscript{241}

However, his activities during this year on up to 1931 are unclear. The general outline of his sojourns during this period, as presented by Spitzer and Denzer, states that he obtained sea-going employment, visiting various ports and harbours in the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{242} According to his own testimony, he first lived South Africa but moved to the Gold Coast in 1930. Due to financial circumstances, he claimed, he had to “surgeon [sic]” to Lagos in March 1931.\textsuperscript{243} At what stage he and Frank Macaulay had started to cooperate is not known but when Padmore contacted Wallace-Johnson the latter already belonged to the inner circle of the African Workers’ Union of Nigeria.

Previous research has claimed that Wallace-Johnson used the alias E.A. Richards in the late 1920s.\textsuperscript{244} According to Wilson, Richards alias Wallace-Johnson was blacklisted by the British colonial government in Sierra Leone after having organized a strike there in 1926 went to sea and appeared in 1927 at the first conference of the LAI in Brussels. Wilson also claims that it was at this gathering that Wallace-Johnson first came into contact with the Bolshevists and was invited to visit Russia in late 1927.\textsuperscript{245} However, it is highly questionable whether Richards/Wallace-Johnson ever attended the February Brussels Conference. Neither of the names was listed among the participants of that conference. On the other hand, Richards was certainly invited to the General Council meeting, i.e., the Second Brussels Conference, in December 1927. Further, Spitzer and Denzer argue that Wallace-Johnson, using the alias E.A. Richards, attended the First International Trade Union Conference of Negro Workers held in Hamburg in July 1930.\textsuperscript{246} This assumption, too, is dubious.

\textsuperscript{241} Leo Spitzer and LaRay Denzer, “I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League,” International Journal of African Historical Studies VI:3, 1973, pp. 414-417. According to an investigation report in 1938, Wallace-Johnson had first been employed as a clerk first in the office of the West African Regiment, subsequently in the Customs Department, and afterwards in the Waterworks Department of the Freetown City Council. About 1926, the report claimed, he went to the sea as clerk to a purser in one of the American Line ships, visiting the USA while so employed. Douglas Jardine, Governor of Sierra Leone, to Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State, 30 June 1938, Gambia National Archives, Gambia n.179-4/73. I am grateful to Marika Sherwood who sent me a copy of the document.

\textsuperscript{242} Spitzer and Denzer 1973, p. 418.

\textsuperscript{243} (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 31.


According to sources found in the Comintern Archive there is little proof to support the claim that that Wallace-Johnson organized the 1926 strike in Sierra Leone or attended the 1927 Brussels and 1930 Hamburg Conferences. The ultimate evidence for Wallace-Johnson not being Richards is a letter by Wallace-Johnson to George Padmore, dated 7 January 1932. In this letter Wallace-Johnson informed Padmore that he had been “one of the supporters of the Railway Workers Union of Sierra Leone before I left for South Africa.” Spitzer and Denzer claim that Wallace-Johnson must have met George Padmore in Hamburg, yet it is evident from the opening lines of Wallace-Johnson’s letter that they had never met in person before:

Dear Comrade,

Further to my last letter to you, which I hope would have safely got to your hands by this time, I think I should write you this one as a reply, not in my official capacity, but in my private capacity as a Negro Worker, and one interested in the development of the condition of the working class.

First of all, it may interest you to know that I am not a Nigerian but a Sierra Leonean. But having had the opportunity – not only all though West Africa but South and East Africa and of studying the position of the Negro Race of which I am proud to be one, I am able to realize the need for a United move for the bettering of our conditions.

Wallace-Johnson’s letter was an account of his life, focusing on the situation in Nigeria, namely the oppression by the colonial economy and the colonial justice. Curiously, Wallace-Johnson’s four-page letter is to some extent similar, if not identical with the above-mentioned article, “British Oppression in West Africa by a Correspondent”, published a few months earlier in the December 1931 issue of The Negro Worker. This “correspondent” could have been nobody else than Wallace-Johnson as the life-story, which introduces the article, is identical with Wallace-Johnson’s life-story in his 1932 letter to Padmore. However, it is much likely that Padmore, when he published the article in 1931, had no clue about the identity of the anonymous correspondent.
Wallace-Johnson’s position totally changed with the unexpected death of Frank Macaulay in October 1931. It is likely that Padmore learnt about Macaulay’s fate only by Wallace-Johnson’s letter of 17 December. He must have been quite shocked, as Macaulay’s demise meant that the Nigerian connection of the Hamburg Committee became a blank sheet.

“Comrade Macaulay is dead. This is unfortunate as he was helping us to build the movement in Nigeria,” he lamented in a letter to one of his contacts in England. The situation was problematic, not least for the Nigerian union, Padmore noted in his letter of condolence to Herbert Macaulay. Frank Macaulay’s premature departure meant that West Africa had lost one of its most promising potential ‘revolutionaries’. His appearances at the Hamburg Conference and Moscow Congress had made a deep impression on Padmore:

At both congresses, comrade Macaulay, by his honest devotion to the interests of the toiling masses of Africa, won the admiration of the delegates [...]. In return, comrade Macaulay assured us, that on his arrival in Nigeria he would devote his energy to help the working class organize, as a step towards their liberation from the terrible capitalist exploitation imposed upon them by the British imperialists. [...] (T)he message which Frank Macaulay brought back to his people on his return from Europe will serve as an inspiration to the broad toiling masses of Nigeria and inspire them with that self-confidence which alone can enable them to assume the historic mission which only the working class can fulfil, namely – the overthrow of Imperialism.

The crisis in the Nigerian labour union was solved when Wallace-Johnson took over as president and trade union activities resumed. In fact, when Padmore first contacted Wallace-Johnson, the latter was already in charge of the union and held the position of Secretary-General. Their correspondence mainly concentrated on four themes: the prospects of labour union work in Nigeria, the oppressive nature of the colonial state, the relationship with the Nigerian National Democratic Party and the task of sending someone to study in Europe.

As noted above, Padmore made the first move in establishing contacts. In his first letter of 16 November 1931, he welcomed the formation of the African Workers’ Union of Nigeria. In a second letter, dated 20 November 1931, he urged Wallace-Johnson to maintain close connections with him and advised him on how to proceed in the future: “You should send the name of some private address where we could mail letters to,” warning him about the danger for the connection to be exposed to the colonial authorities: “For as soon as the government knows about your connection with the outside world they will try to oppress

251 Padmore to O’Connell, 4.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 24
the movement by confiscating all of your correspondence.” Further, he notified Wallace-Johnson that the twelve copies of pamphlets he had sent to him were to be sold and the money received should be transferred back to him either by a reliable person or through the post in the form of stamps.

In his first letter, Wallace-Johnson admitted that although the sudden death of Macaulay in October 1931 had been a severe blow to the union, the union had started to make plans for the future, including the establishment of its own journal. For Padmore’s information, he included in his letter a copy of the rules and regulations of the union. (These rules have not yet been located. Perhaps Padmore had never sent them to the RILU Negro Bureau?)

In his next letter, Wallace-Johnson was more critical about the conditions to work in Nigeria: “We have got a hard and up-hill task but we must try to conquer it whatever the obstacles may be that lies in our way […].” One problem was to engage the right people in union work, the other was to disseminate Padmore’s journal which had been one of his tasks. The Nigerian authorities had banned the circulation of *The Negro Worker*, and even the possession of a copy of the journal could lead to imprisonment and deportation. Therefore, Wallace-Johnson warned Padmore not to expect too much success with the sale, but promised to do his utmost to get at least some union members to subscribe to the journal.

Interestingly, the dissemination of *The Negro Worker* in Nigeria was not only touched upon by Wallace-Johnson but also by other Nigerians who were in contact with Padmore during the same period. Early in February 1932, Padmore received several letters from Nigerians, all contemplation about either selling the journal in the colony or subscribing to it. The first was an inquiry of one D.R. Bowlay-Williams, addressing himself as Manager and Proprietor of ‘The Peoples Intelligence Bureau & General Agency’. Reading his inquiry, Padmore could not have regarded him as a serious contact. Bowlay-Williams turned out to be more of a local business than a potential ‘fellow traveller’, his intention was to make a good bargain through the sale of the journal:

(I have) no objection in carrying on the Agency of the paper (Negro Worker) in Nigeria which you have requested me to undertake. It is important, however, to have an Absolute Agency, that is to say that all sales and distributions of the Negro Worker in this Dependency should be done by and through

---

254 These were the pamphlet ‘Against the coming war’ and the report of the 1930 Hamburg Conference.
255 Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 20.11.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 54.
256 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 17.12.1931, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 29.
257 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 31-34.
258 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 33.
my Agency. I should then be better able to organise propaganda work and swell the sales within a short
time. […]

He claimed to have made some investigations with the colonial authorities and found out that
there was no ban on the importation of the journal into Nigeria:

Kindly send me 24 copies of each issue – commencing from January 1932 – to see how it takes with
the populace. If it fires the people I should be able to increase the supply to between 200 and 500 copies
monthly within a very short time.  

However, after some further inquiries Bowlay-Williams came to realize that there was a ban
on the journal. He therefore cancelled his order and cut his connections with Padmore: “(I)t
will not be advisable therefore to send me any supplies of same and I shall be glad if you will
consider my order in that letter as cancelled.”

The two other letters from Nigeria were more promising. One J. Galba-Bright
informed Padmore that he had received copies of the journal through E. Foster Jones
(Padmore’s Sierra Leonean middleman) but warned him of the difficulties to circulate the
journal in the country. Although he put himself at Padmore’s disposal and promised to help
distribute the journal, there was a pessimistic undertone in his letter:

It is indeed very hard to do anything for the Race out here. A good many of us have tried and are still
trying, but on this side one is exposed to incassiration [sic] for no just cause and he ultimately loses his
character for life amongst his own people for whom he fought.

Similar information about the difficulties to distribute the journal was also given by R.A.
Macarthy (Senior), who presented himself as Secretary of the Ibadan Agricultural Society.
Macarthy, however, stated that he was inclined to make contributions to the journal.

Another issue which Wallace-Johnson and Padmore discussed in their correspondence
was the affiliation of the AWUN. At an early stage, Padmore seemed to have contacted the
International Seamen’s Club and the Seamen Minority Movement (SMM) in London and

259 (Original letter) D.R. Bowlay-Williams to Padmore, 5.2.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 44-45.
260 (Original letter) D.R. Bowlay-Williams to Padmore, 5.2.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 49-50.
261 (Original letter) J. Galba-Bright to Padmore, 6.2.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 47-48.
262 (Original letter) R.A. Macarthy to Padmore, 6.2.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 51.
asked them to get in touch with the Nigerians. Early in 1932, SMM Secretary, Jas Headley, approached Wallace-Johnson and suggested the affiliation of the AWUN with the International Seamen’s Club. The Management Committee of the AWUN discussed the subject in January 1932, and a decision was made to send a positive reply to the invitation. However, before a formal application was sent to London, Wallace-Johnson inquired to Headley for further information about his organization and the implications of an affiliate membership. In fact, Wallace-Johnson was not too sure about whether or not the AWUN could enlist many African seamen in Nigeria, as Lagos was not the right environment for such activities:

(R)ight here in Lagos there is hardly any possibility of getting seamen to join the Union as this is not a port wherein ships recruit or discharge men as may be found in Sierra Leone […]

Padmore was informed by the London office about the planned affiliation of the AWUN to the International Seamen’s Club, but did not make any suggestions to Wallace-Johnson about the matter. Neither did Wallace-Johnson hear much from them anymore, as he informed Padmore in a subsequent letter:

Re the Seamen’s Minority Movement, I do not remember having received any communication from them, since I wrote them through the instruction of Comrade Foster Jones […]

Interestingly, Comrade Foster Jones, the Sierra Leonean seaman who was Padmore’s middleman, is featured again in the correspondence.

Nevertheless, the Seamen’s Club’s silence could be explained by Padmore (or someone else) having decided upon a different approach with the Nigerians. Instead of linking the Nigerians with the London organization, the AWUN was directly connected with the Hamburg Secretariat and the ITUCNW. Padmore made such a proposition in his March letter to Wallace-Johnson. In the letter, he informed his Nigerian counterpart that the Executive Committee of the ITUCNW had decided to offer full assistance to the AWUN and

263 I have not yet located this correspondence, but the existence of it is indicated in the letters of Wallace-Johnson and Padmore.
264 Wallace-Johnson to J. Headley, 8.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 35. It is likely that this letter is a copy that was sent to Padmore from London.
265 “Our comrades in London, connected with the seamen’s Minority Movement, have informed us that they wrote you on some of these questions some time ago.” Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 7.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 66-66bp.
266 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 58.
encouraged it to establish “ties of international solidarity” between the militant labour movements of Europe, America and Africa. He underlined the positive effects for the AWUN to be affiliated with the ITUCNW:

Once this official connection has been established to give you advise and assistance in the ways and means of building up your movement. + to bring your union into close connection with the militant trade union and labour movement in England, so that you will have friends and supporters in the home country to stand back of you.  

Furthermore, Padmore gave Wallace-Johnson the advice to learn as much about union work as possible, especially by the recent experiences of global labour union activities:

As a young movement you must learn from the experiences and mistakes not only of the labour movement in such countries as England and France, Germany and America, but you must try to avoid those committed by our comrades in China, in India, in South Africa, in the West Indies, etc. Once you know the experiences of the workers in these countries you need not be afraid of your enemies.

Wallace-Johnson responded positively to Padmore’s invitation in his next letter but stated that the task of organizing a union in Nigeria proved much more difficult than he had expected:

As you might have been able to realise, the task before us in Nigeria is no small one and the greatest difficulty that one has to confront here is that of bringing about a united movement wherein individualism and partisanship reign supreme.

Writing in April 1932, Wallace-Johnson had to admit that not much progress had been made. Importantly, harassment by the colonial authorities had had a negative effect and many members had left the union:

The progress of the African Workers’ Union of Nigeria, I am directed to say is at present dragging on in a camelionic [sic] speed. But for a limited few ones, the whole organisation would have, by this time, come to a stand-still as the majority of the members have been scared away. We can hardly hold any public meeting without having a representative of the Police therein & listen deliberations and most of the members are therefore not only afraid to express their opinions […]

---

267 Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 7.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 66-66bp.
268 Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 7.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 66-66bp.
269 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 55.
270 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 55.
While ‘Police terrorism’ scared away some members, others were afraid to join, because they feared losing their job. The situation was further complicated by the depression in trade and the actions of the employers, who branded union members or forbade the African workers in supporting the union. The plans of launching a union journal was also hindered, not so much due to government tactics but due to the shortcomings of the members of the union:

[…] our effort to launch out our own literature have so far been held in abeyance owing to the timidity of those of the members whose duty it was to execute the necessary bond with the Government. Out of the three requested by the Union to execute this duty I was the only one who was prepared to sign the Bond.  

Therefore, when Padmore proposed the affiliation of the AWUN to the ITUCNW, Wallace-Johnson heartily welcomed the invitation and hoped for Padmore’s assistance in activating his union:

(O)nce an official connection with your Union has been established the work here would be made more simplified and the members of the working class would feel more braced up and place better confidence in the organization.

Nevertheless, by the end of the summer the situation had, in Wallace-Johnson’s words, gone from bad to worse. Police terror and harassment had further chased away the members of the AWUN. As a consequence, the union’s membership had been reduced to a mere scanty by early August.

Not only were the colonial authorities against the activities of the union. Even worse was the lack of assistance of the progressive elite and its party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). Wallace-Johnson’s evaluation of the NNDP was highly critical. In his second letter he declared that “on close examination [the NNDP] is found to be inimical to the interest of the development of the Colony and the mass of the working class.” In his view, the NNDP claimed for itself to work for the emancipation of the Africans and the development of the conditions of the working class, Wallace-Johnson stated that this was not the case. He argued that the party was not a mass movement but only made up of a few

271 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 56.  
272 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 58.  
educated Africans whose aim was – in his view – to “exploit on the peasant class and the greatest majority of illiterates.” In sum, his experience was that the party echoed the voice of the elite and defended the position of the elite. Last, but not least, it was soft in its critique of the colonial authorities:

This party also is invariably responsible for all the ills and errors committed within the Colony. It is always too premature in lauding European Officials for little deeds of what may be nothing short of the administration of their official duties in the right way. They are prepared to heap up songs of praises upon that one as they have done with and to the present head of Administration and should that individual take another turn after a short while as the Colony is now experiencing with the present administration, this party would start to combat mostly in the wrong way.\(^{274}\)

The main problem with the NNDP was its negative stance towards the African Workers’ Union of Nigeria. Wallace-Johnson criticized the party for attacking the union in its newspaper and painting the foundation of the union in an extremely negative way:

When the African Workers Union of Nigeria was established, in June last year, several destructive articles were published in one of the organs of this party “The Daily Herald” making all kinds of false representations and accling [sic] us all kinds of names and making suggestions to the Government to rule us out and with the pioneer criminally.\(^{275}\)

In Wallace-Johnson’s mind, the leaders of the NNDP were afraid of competition by the union. The root cause, he argued, was that the NNDP feared that the union could open the eyes of the illiterates and they would lose their position among the masses:

These publications were all traced down to the leading members of the Party and the cause for such action is just because they realise the fact that the Union was not for exploitation but for the development of the conditions of the people.\(^{276}\)

In his April-letter, he was even more outspoken about the negative role of the NNDP:

Another great opponent we have to combat with is the Democratic Party whose policy is to divide and exploit the mass and seeing that the Workers’ Union policy is to bring the mass together in a common

\(^{274}\) (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 33.
\(^{275}\) (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 33.
\(^{276}\) (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 33.
bond of unity in order to solve the problem of a better living, this Party has constituted itself a formidable foe to the Union […] 277

A few weeks later he fired a similarly critical description about the political awareness of the Nigerian intelligentsia in a letter to Arnold Ward of the Negro Welfare Association in London. “The African Workers Union would have by this time become a power in Nigeria if the entire inhabitants especially the Yorubas who are leading were not such celebrated cowards,” he blasted, and continued with an outspoken frustration on Nigerian political engagement:

The Nigerians are always up to something. They do not believe in working and waiting in patience for reward. So soon as they join an organisation, without having done anything, they want to see the result. Invariably, those who are always wanting to know what the result would be are those who have done nothing towards the stabilizing of the movement. They care more to hide themselves in a corner and watch. If things go bad they say: “Thank God I had long left them.” If things prosper they say: “WE have done it.” 278

Padmore, who had received a copy of his letter, hailed his attack against the lethargy of the Nigerian middle-class and immediately informed Wallace-Johnson that part of the letter would be published in the forthcoming July-issue of the Negro Worker. 279

Wallace-Johnson’s continued his rhetorical crusade against the Democratic Party and its leadership for the next several months. In August 1932 he warned Padmore not to engage with Dr. C.C. Adeniye-Jones, one of the NNDP’s leaders who was visiting England and was rumoured of planning to get in contact with the ITUCNW. He was a wolf in sheep’s clothing, Wallace-Johnson warned, accusing him for being a political spy and an agent for the colonial authorities. According to him, Adeniye-Jones had orchestrated the political agitation against the AWUN in the local papers. “The party is but an agent for the powers that be to exploit upon the peasant class and create entanglement for the people,” Wallace-Johnson concluded. 280

277 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 55.
278 Wallace-Johnson to A. Ward, 30.4.1932, RGASPI 534/3/755, fol. 53. The document is a typed copy; the original version must have been filed in London.
279 (Padmore) to (Wallace-Johnson), no date, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 112. A critical examination of the contents of the letter clearly indicates that it was written by Padmore after April 30, 1932 and directed to Wallace-Johnson.
Wallace-Johnson’s various outcries were well received by Padmore. Already in his reply from March 1932, he declared:

The policy of the Nigerian ruling class and the capitalists is, to prevent the African workers from having any connections with the workers in the civilised countries. Their policy is to keep you bottled up, as it were, in Nigeria, so that when they are ready to smash up your union and to throw the leaders and workers in jail, you will have no friends in Europe and America to raise a word of protest.\(^{281}\)

Padmore’s advice to Wallace-Johnson was to focus on the masses. Such an engagement, he claimed, would reveal the true face of the elite and underline the union’s determination. Contrary to the vague Pan-Africanist or nationalist calls of the NNDP or the NCBWA or other movements who highlighted racial or tribal issues, the focus should be on class-consciousness:

You must know no distinction between races and tribes. The only distinction which we know is between workers and capitalists, the rich and the poor, the exploiters and the exploited. Our task is to unite all of the oppressed against the oppressors, and in order to do this, our slogan must be: ‘Workers of Africa, unite!’\(^{282}\)

The third central theme in Padmore’s and Wallace-Johnson’s correspondence was the issue of sending Africans to study in Europe. In his second letter, Wallace-Johnson discussed the possibility of him going to Europe and to discuss matters with Padmore in private.\(^{283}\) Padmore referred to the question in his letter from March 1932. In it he proposed to Wallace-Johnson that he was willing to assist the AWUN to send a few young “active and intelligent” workers to study in Europe – “in one of our labour schools,” as he wrote, without mentioning that he most certainly was thinking of the educational institutions in Moscow such as the KUTV. Padmore stressed to Wallace-Johnson the importance for educating union members:

No more so than good wishes will help one to fly an airship across the Atlantic. To do so one has to learn how to fly first and to manage the airship. In the same way, to build up a real trade union movement which will fight for shorter hours, higher wages, better housing conditions, relief for the unemployed and other demands of the working class, - you must have educated leaders and

\(^{281}\) Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 7.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 66-66bp.
\(^{282}\) Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 7.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 66-66bp.
\(^{283}\) “It is unfortunate that my present position cannot make me proceed to Europe as the struggle we have requires face to face talk.” (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.1.1932, RGASPI 534/774, fol. 34.
functionaries, who have studied the science of the trade union movement, etc. […] Our Committee is quite prepared to help your union in this respect.  

Not surprisingly, Wallace-Johnson’s reply was a positive one to Padmore’s invitation and they agreed that such a procedure would be of great benefit to the Nigerian union. In his view, the opportunity for someone to spend some time at a Labour School in Europe could even have the positive effect of attracting more members to the union. Perhaps he was even referring to himself when he answered:

I am to add that as far as men are concerned, my Committee guarantees that whoever they may place at your disposal would be one who is borne with the true spirit of patriotism and the right perspective and who would be prepared to sacrifice his very self to pull the programme through successfully, and you can therefore rest assured with confidence of being supplied with the best.  

Nevertheless, Padmore wanted to make sure that the right candidates were selected. Therefore he sent detailed instructions to Wallace-Johnson about whom to choose and on what purposes. He underlined to Wallace-Johnson that this question was of utmost importance because “unless you have trained leaders you will continue to experience great difficulties in building up your organisation.” Be careful of not making an official announcement, he warned, otherwise the colonial authorities would start to harass them even further. Instead, the whole selection process was to be discussed only among a few leading members. As for the selection of the presumptive candidates, Padmore presented the following guidelines:

[They] should be young men, from the working class, in good health, able to read and write, and if possible they should know a native language. As to their character, their honesty and their devotion to the cause, - we depend upon your recommendation.  

As soon as Wallace-Johnson had secured the candidate(s), he was to secure their passports and inform Padmore about the state of affairs. Thereafter, Padmore was to provide more “technical details.” Whatever the case, “the Union need not worry. We shall take care of everything,” he assured Wallace-Johnson. Not only was the Hamburg Committee to take care

284 Padmore to Wallace-Johnson, 7.3.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 66fp.
285 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 57.
286 (Original letter) Wallace-Johnson to Padmore, 7.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 58.
287 (Padmore) to (Wallace-Johnson), no date, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 112.
of transportation to and from Nigeria, but schooling, accommodation including clothing, books and pocket money was to be provided for the candidates.288

By August the union had finally reached a decision about whom to send to Europe. While some candidates were afraid of losing their job if they went on a training course, others were felt not trustworthy enough to be selected. Eventually, only three candidates were put forward, namely Wallace-Johnson, the 22-years old John C.L. Hocquarts and the 30-years old A. Lijadu. It was further decided that Wallace-Johnson should first proceed alone and study the conditions at the school before the two others were to be sent away.289 Anticipating a positive reply from Padmore, Wallace-Johnson included in his next dispatch a photograph of himself.290

Wallace-Johnson left Lagos for Europe in October 1932.291 It is not clear if he travelled via Germany (as was claimed by colonial intelligence) or when Padmore told him that he was to study at the KUTV and that he was to proceed to Moscow. Nevertheless, in November 1932 he attended the Second World Congress of the IRH in Moscow. In Moscow, if not earlier, Wallace-Johnson started to use the alias Walter Daniels – in his earlier correspondence he still signed the letters using his own name.

**Establishing a radical cell in Liberia**

One of the Hamburg Committee’s main objectives for its activities in West Africa was to establish a foothold in Liberia. This African republic had the dubious reputation of being politically and economically controlled by US-American interests, most notably the Firestone Rubber Company. Its human rights record was notorious, economic exploitation and political corruption so blatant that even the League of Nations launched an investigation about alleged claims of slavery and forced labour on the rubber plantations in the late 1920s. In the eyes of the Comintern analytics, its independence was a mere chimera and was consequently labelled as a semi-colonial state. Not surprisingly, Liberia was portrayed in communist rhetoric and propaganda, including by Padmore, as a prime case to test the class-before-race argument: here there existed a Black bourgeoisie that had no interest in defending the rights of the African workers. It was claimed that the Liberian workers and peasants were as much under

288 (Padmore) to (Wallace-Johnson), no date, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 112.
291 Douglas Jardine, Governor of Sierra Leone, to Malcolm MacDonald, Secretary of State, 30 June 1938, GNA, Gambia n.179-4/73.
the yoke of American imperialism and bourgeois exploitation as the rest of the Black toilers in the African Atlantic.

The challenge for Ford and later Padmore was to find a contact person in Liberia. Already in 1930 they had tried to enlist a delegate for the Hamburg Conference, but failed in their mission. A new possibility emerged through the campaign to launch the *Negro Worker* as the main propaganda tool of the ITUCNW. The transportation of the journal and pamphlets to Monrovia, Liberia’s capital, was not a problem, it could be handled though the ISH-network. However, for direct agitation and propaganda one needed a reliable person on the spot. This person was Kail Tamba or Holle Seleh (Kolliseleh) Tamba. It is not known when Ford established contacts to him, but he is listed among the local disseminators of the *Negro Worker* in Ford’s September 1931 Report. However, apart from Padmore’s pamphlet on Liberia, of which 100 copies were mimeographed and circulated, Ford did not report on any further actions regarding Liberia in his report.292

The focus on Liberia was to gain momentum only after Padmore took over in Hamburg. On the 16th of December 1931 he wrote a circular letter, which was posted to several addresses in Liberia. The letter itself included a general call to join the ITUCNW’s cause. Padmore highlighted the keen interest his organization had in promoting the welfare of the country, “not in the interest of selfish political clique, but of the great masses of people.” His ambition was to extend the Liberian contacts and asked the recipient to provide him with addresses as well as issued a call to write articles about the condition in Liberia to be published in the *Negro Worker*. His organization, he underlined, had already published several pamphlets on Liberia, including *American Imperialism Enslaves Liberia*. Thus, he urged them to join the ranks and file by becoming a regular distributor of our publications: “sell them among your countrymen in order to acquaint them with the work of our Committee as uncompromising fighter for the independence of Liberia and the emancipation of the one and a half million brutally oppressed and exploited masses.”293

Padmore’s attempt to disseminate the publications of the Hamburg Committee in Liberia met the same response as elsewhere in West Africa. While some of those who he had contacted initially sent a positive reply to him, few of them, it seems, engaged in longer correspondence. For example, one S. Siaka Massaquoi praised the contents of the *Negro Worker*: “These evils as pointed in the contents of these articles, are most prevalent in our

292 (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 228, 236.
293 Padmore to ‘Dear Friend’, Hamburg 16.12.1931, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 57fp+bp. It is evident from the content of the letter that it was sent to several addresses. Similar letters were sent to S. Siaka Massaqui (3.1.1932) and Repoo Karlee (9.1.1932), both in Monrovia, filed in RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 58 and 59.
country and I have not the least doubt that this movement will serve as a sort of salvation to us."\(^{294}\) Others, such as Thos. J.R. Faulkner, sent a lengthy answer outlining the political misery of the “working class” in the country, depicting political corruption and despotism. Faulkner himself was perhaps not Padmore’s ideal partner when he explained “speaking of the organization of the workers of Liberia, any such organization among natives and working class, would be constructed as a menace to the ruling class and would be at once condemned.” The remedy to the exploitation and robbery of Liberia, he stated, was “to clean up the dishonest politician and create a steadfast confidence in their ability to do constructive and not destructive [sic] administering of the affairs of Government.”\(^{295}\) This thinking made him not the ideal radical that Padmore was looking for. Nevertheless, he wrote him a reply but Faulkner never responded.\(^{296}\) He tried to contact Liberian editors and asked them to publish articles from the Negro Worker,\(^{297}\) but few did and most of them were mainly interested in the advertisement of “people and places” either in their Liberian journals or in the Negro Worker.\(^{298}\) None of them that Padmore had contacted had any radical inclinations. The only person who turned out to be a potential Liberian radical was Holle Seleh Tamba.

Ford’s contact with Holle Seleh Tamba had only been established in June or July when he received a letter from him. According to Ford, Tamba had read the journal and was very enthusiastic about the aims of the ITUCNW. Ford responded to him and sent further materials.\(^{299}\) Perhaps Padmore found some further correspondence from him in the bureau of the Hamburg Secretariat. In any case, it is likely that he contacted Tamba in late 1931 and sent him a parcel containing copies of the *Negro Worker*.\(^{300}\) This shipment opened the way for an intensive correspondence between the two radicals, which continued for the next year.

The content of Padmore’s correspondence with Tamba resembled much that of his with Wallace-Johnson, namely after having identified a reliable contact person, the two ventilated the issues of establishing a radical movement in Liberia as well as selecting potential students for training in Moscow. Tamba proposed to become actively engaged for the ITUCNW in his January letter:

\(^{294}\) (Original letter) S. Siaka Massaquoi to Padmore, Monrovia 11.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 37.
\(^{295}\) (Original letter) Thos. J.R. Faulkner to Padmore, Monrovia 11.1.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 38-42.
\(^{296}\) Padmore to Thos.J.R Faulkner, Hamburg 3.2.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 61.
\(^{297}\) Padmore to Samuel A.D. Thompson (editor of the Maryland News, Liberia) and Padmore to E.T. Williams (editor of the *Liberian Patriot*), both dated 23.2.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 69 and 70.
\(^{298}\) (Original letter) James W[?], editor-in-chief, *Liberian Pioneer*, Monrovia 25.7.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 42-43. It is likely that Padmore corresponded with more than the three editors but only these letters have been located.
\(^{299}\) Ford to Padmore, Hamburg 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 83. Tamba’s letter has not been located.
\(^{300}\) I have not been able to locate Padmore’s letter. Tamba refers to the delivery in his letter to Padmore, dated 10.1.1932.
I conceive it is your desire or objective to have the ideals of this great movement inculcated and diffused throughout Africa. This is a very splendid idea. In this connection, however, although you have not requested me to start any organisation in behalf of your Committee, I would suggest that in course of time, not very long, we should have a branch of this world-wide movement organised right in the city of Monrovia.\(^{301}\)

Padmore must have felt anxious to deepen his link to Tamba and sent a positive reply to him and urged him to go ahead with his plan.\(^{302}\) However, as he did not receive any response from him, he renewed his call in a letter in March.\(^{303}\) Perhaps the March letter included detailed instructions about how to establish cells in the workshops and plantations. This is at least outlined in an undated and unsigned letter to an unknown recipient in Liberia – presumably Tamba:

> In beginning (this) work for organising the workers (stronghold) you must create [strongholds] for your work in those places where the working masses concentrate. Inasmuch as most of the workers are occupied in the shops of this company, it is urgently necessary that TU groups lining up the workers of various trades are established there. What is most important at first is to create cadres of activists from among the midst of these workers, explaining to them the aims and tasks of their organisation, uniting them in groups and thus lay the basis for our work. The task of trade union groups on the Firestone plantations must be to organise the workers occupied permanently or temporarily on these plantations for the struggle for improving their economic conditions, for higher wages and improved living conditions. When setting up trade union groups on these plantations it is necessary to patiently explain to the toilers that without any struggle, without organising they will not be able to improve their conditions. As the workers are lined up in TU groups on the plantations, efforts must be made to establish a union of plantation workers. (Added in handwriting: which should carry on the struggle on the basis of the following demands.)\(^{304}\)

Finally, Tamba sent him a letter, giving as the reason for his silence his absence from Monrovia for some months. Nevertheless, he was pleased to notify Padmore that some progress had been made in the establishment of a branch of the ITUCNW in Monrovia:

\(^{301}\) (Original letter) Holle Seleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 10.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/74, fol. 36.
\(^{302}\) Padmore to (Holle Seleh) Tamba, Hamburg 3.2.1932, RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 62fp+bp.
\(^{303}\) I have not been able to locate this letter. Its content can be reconstructed through Tamba’s reply to Padmore, dated 30.4.1932.
\(^{304}\) Original letter (part of, the document starts on page 3), no author, no date, no recipient, RGASPI 534/3/546, fol. 89. A critical analysis of the document indicates that it was written between 1930 and 1931 as it is filed in a folder that contains material from these years.
I have already made a selection of few energetic men who are quite willing to join us in the struggle against capitalism. I shall of course presently withhold the names of these gentlemen until, as I expect, I shall have received documents of full particulars as to the basis of action and the modus operandi. You will therefore without delay, kindly send me under registered cover, such literature as are actually necessary. 305

He further inquired about the possibility to have a Liberian representative to serve upon the Executive Committee of the ITUCNW as well as the editorial board of the Negro Worker. However, other news was not as good. Almost all of the copies of the Negro Worker had to be distributed for free due to the high rate of unemployed – but interested – potential readers. On the other hand, Tamba noted that public opinion in the capital was favourably disposed towards the movement and even listed high-ranking politically influential members of the political opposition who seemed to have taken an interest in the journal. “But,” as Tamba expressed, “you are very sane, when you say ‘we do not want to come in connection with the Officials’”, and warned that “for the moment they enter into [our movement], people will inevitably term us as politicians and they will commence to fight us when we have not made a stronghold on the people in general.” 306

Tamba had also enclosed in the above letter a text that he had written and asked Padmore to publish it. After Padmore had edited it, the text was published as an article in the Negro Worker. 307 Interestingly, the author was claimed to be Kolliseleh Tamba, Secretary of the Liberian Workers’ Progressive Association – as if such a body already existed! Tamba himself had never made any references to such a group or even claiming to be a secretary of a radical or progressive organization.

Contacts between Hamburg and Monrovia became messy during the next months. Padmore sent two deliveries to Tamba, one in early April and the other in late May, but only his letters but not the parcel that contained additional documents and pamphlets reached Tamba. 308 Padmore’s lengthy and critical comment about the situation in Liberia in his May letter had made a great impact on Tamba and to those he had shown the letter: “It creates a wonder among the natives to know that there is outside of Liberia a group of their fellowmen who are studying their interest and wellbeing. This makes many of them ask whether you –

305 (Original letter) Kolli-Selleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 30.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 60.
306 (Original letter) Kolli-Selleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 30.4.1932, RGASPI 534/7/74, fol. 60-61.
308 (Original letter) Kolli-Selleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 19.7.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 32. A copy of Padmore’s letter to Tamba, dated 31.5.1932, is available in RGASPI 534/6/23, fol. 74-76. His April-letter has not been located.
George Padmore – have ever been to Liberia.” Padmore had not, but he certainly had been studying the Liberian question for several years.

While the establishment of a branch or cell of the ITUCNW was making slow progress in Monrovia, Padmore had started to raise the question of enlisting prospective students for training abroad. Tamba informed him that he had chosen three young men, Ambolai Sirleaf, Samuel Freeman and Reuben Stevens. “They are anxious to go and I am sure that when they return to Liberia they will become essential assets to our movement out here,” he ensured Padmore.\(^{309}\)

Most important, however, was Padmore’s suggestion that Tamba himself went to Europe. Tamba enthusiastically replied:

> Your suggestion that I should try to go to Europe myself is received with great satisfaction. I am quite willing to go to Europe in order to come in contact with those who are championing the cause of the oppressed millions, and with your goodself [sic], and further to get such knowledge as is really necessary for this work.\(^{310}\)

Nevertheless, he was somewhat hesitant in immediately leaving the country. The organization was still in its infancy and he was afraid that it would collapse while he was away. But, if Padmore demanded him to do so, he was ready to come.

It is not known when Tamba received Padmore’s formal invitation to come to Europe. The last item of their correspondence is a letter by Tamba written in mid-August and he did not raise the question of his transfer to Europe in it. On the contrary, he had not received any decision about the three Liberian students and inquired from Padmore about what to do with them. His main concern at the time, however, was a more pressing problem. His critical article about the labour question in Liberia that had been published in the *Negro Worker* had caused a political tumult in Monrovia and some people had started to persecute Tamba for it. The situation was critical, he warned, “all those whom I had spoken about organisation and whose consent I had secured are hesitating. Our people do not realise what it means to unite. This is of course due to illiteracy.” He therefore felt that he had to write an apology and asked Padmore to publish it – after necessary corrections – in the *Negro Worker*.\(^{311}\)

Tamba’s apology was never published. Instead, he left Liberia sometime in autumn 1932. The next reference of him is in the list of the students of the 9\(^{th}\) Section (Negro) of the

---

\(^{309}\) (Original letter) Kolli-Selleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 19.7.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 33.

\(^{310}\) (Original letter) Kolli-Selleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 19.7.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 33.

\(^{311}\) (Original letter) Kolliseleh Tamba to Padmore, Monrovia 19.8.1932, RGASPI 534/3/756, fol. 75.
Padmore had managed to get one of his closest contacts to Moscow for training. Here was given the pseudonym (Martin) Nelson.

**The rise and fall of the West African connection**

"WAKE UP! WAKE UP!" Thus sounded Padmore’s call to his West African contacts in February 1932. The situation for the working class was alarming, the effects of the economic depression was felt everywhere and Padmore prophesied that the capitalist system was experiencing its greatest crisis ever. Unemployment was rising on every continent and the working class had started to organize and demanded from the government free food, low rent, abolition of taxes and social welfare relief. But what was happening in West Africa, Padmore asked? Nothing!

Padmore had sent the letter to his contact persons in West Africa: Frye and Small in Gambia, Akron, Morton, Ashong and Quarcoopame in the Gold Coast and Wallace-Johnson in Nigeria. None but Wallace-Johnson replied.

The silence of the West Africans begs for an analysis – one that Padmore himself never conducted. When Ford and he had started their West African engagement, they soon were able to establish links in all British West African colonies. Nevertheless, already the first “objective” assessments within the RILU Apparatus in 1930 were critical about the West Africans’ potential. None of them had any working class background; none of the organizations they represented could be termed as radical labour movements. Although it was evident for all that one would have to search in vain for such movements or organizations, the comrades of the Hamburg Committee still believed – or at least articulated such belief – that one could either join forces with the existing nationalist and petty bourgeois radicals in West Africa or to organize small radical cells in the colonies. The challenge was to identify the right persons whose objective it was to be the local agitators.

Padmore’s problem was that none apart from I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and Holle Seleh Tamba had the right profile to become an agitator. Had he been present at the meeting at the LAI headquarters in Berlin in October 1930 he would have reached the similar conclusion as LAI Secretary Smeral had already made: neither E.F. Small nor Frank Macaulay were their

---

312 McClellan 1993, p. 380.
313 Signature of Martin Nelson in Resolution in Connection with Derogatory Portrayal of Negroses in the Cultural Institutions of the Soviet Union, RGASPI 532/1/441. McClellan (1993, p. 373 fn 7; 2007, p. 64) mistakenly identifies Holle Seleh Tamba as one of the Black students who arrived in 1925. Tamba’s correspondence with Padmore clearly indicates that the former had never been in Europe lest Moscow. In addition, the pseudonym of the Black student in 1925 was John Nelson.
ideal connections. Small was much too Pan-African and racialist in his articulation, Macaulay had no real understanding of labour union activities. Small’s silence was therefore in retrospect quite understandable: he never agreed to the political objectives of ‘class-before-race’. He never severed his ties to the ITUCNW but neither was he ever in contact with the comrades in Hamburg. The Gambia connection did never exist in reality.

Frank Macaulay was a different story. Had he not died, he might have reconnected with the Hamburg Committee. Wallace-Johnson, however, proved to be the perfect replacement for him. Lagos had definitively the potentials to emerge as a strongpoint of the ITUCNW. However, such an assessment clearly downplayed the political conditions in the colony. The police left little room to breathe for Wallace-Johnson’s tiny union.

The Gold Coast connection, too, witnessed ups and downs. The old contacts through Akrong and Morton were weak and withered away in 1931. On the other hand, Padmore was able to establish two valuable new contacts: Kobina Sekyi and R.B. Wuta-Ofei. Bankole Awoonor Renner’s silence, on the other hand, is puzzling – almost as if he never had been in touch with the Bolsheviks. However, politically the situation in the Gold Coast was as problematic as in Nigeria: the colonial government tried its best to block the mushrooming of radical movements.

The development in Sierra Leone was perhaps the biggest drawback for Padmore. Gone was the oldest West African connection, the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union. E.A. Richards, who had been in contact with the RILU since 1927, had disappeared by 1932 and Padmore’s attempts to build up a new connection via his agent provocateur Foster Jones had failed. On the other hand, Padmore’s achievement of getting a reliable contact in Liberia through Holle Seleh Tamba was a success.

However, the West African network did not really exist when Padmore arrived in Moscow to participate at the Second World Congress of the International Red Aid in November 1932. Two of his main contacts, Wallace-Johnson and Holle Seleh Tamba, were in Moscow. Only R.B. Wuta-Ofei remained on the spot.

The global link: The Negro Worker

The Negro Worker emerged as the global link of the ITUCNW and is usually presented as George Padmore’s most important journalistic responsibility during his career with the
In Brent Hayes Edwards’ view, the journal emerged as the key channel for Padmore’s radical Pan-African vision; in his mind it was Padmore’s determination to make the Negro Worker a space for the “points of view” and “daily life” of workers of African descent, rather than a place for the Communist hierarchy to debate the “Negro question.” In a sense, Edwards and other contemporary observers are right in their positive assessment when basing their analysis on the contents of the journal. Containing articles about the plight, hardship and suffering of Africans in the Atlantic world, the outspoken aim of the editors was to establish the journal as the leading radical political Black magazine of its time. This vision was already underlined in the first number of the journal in January 1931:

It is our aim to discuss and analyse the day to day problems of the Negro toilers and connect these up with the international struggles and problems of the workers. It is therefore necessary that we receive the fullest cooperation of Negro workers. This means that articles, letters, points of view and pictures of your daily life must be sent to us. It is only in this way that we can build a much needed popular journal, taking up the broad international problems of Negro workers. ("Our aims,” NW I:1, January 1931)

The Negro Worker certainly lived up to its radical statement if one only focuses on analysing its output. However, critical scholars, such as Wilson, also highlight the influence and authority of Moscow and refer to Rolf Italiaander’s interview with Ivan Izosimovich Potekhin who argued that much of the editorial work was actually done by the RILU Negro Bureau: “We determined its direction from Moscow.” Wilson’s final analysis of the journal’s content, results in him postulating that the journal was nothing but a creature of Soviet intentions. Most notably, Wilson argues, was the notion that the workers and downtrodden in Africa could do no better than to emulate the experience of Soviet Russia. Key emphasis was put on the Soviet economic system as a model to abolish exploitation and to achieve rapid economic and social progress. Further, the federally organized political structure of the Soviet Union was presented as the answer to both the general problem of obtaining political emancipation and to the more specific problem of securing full and equal rights for national

315 Wilson 1974, p. 213.
minorities. Finally, the Soviet model was presented as the only one that aimed at genuine racial equality.\textsuperscript{319}

In addition, Wilson highlights that the \textit{Negro Worker} also sought to present to Africans the communist interpretation of world affairs. Not surprisingly, a dual, if not Manichean interpretation of an evil imperialist exploitative tyranny was contrasted with the urgency to defend the workers’ paradise. In Wilson’s words, the fundamental premise of the journal’s didactic message was that Africans should place no faith in the promises of their colonial rulers and their emissaries, the Christians missionaries, but instead should work for the overthrow of the imperialist system.\textsuperscript{320}

In his final assessment of the journal, Wilson is rather impressed despite his critical presentation of the journal. It was the first journal of its kind ever to circulate among Africans and although the British colonial authorities tried their best in prohibiting its circulation in Africa, the \textit{Negro Worker} was able to boost a readership. Most importantly, Wilson even regards the journal to have made an impact in radicalizing indigenous political attitudes in Africa: “Through the Negro Worker’s polemics, moreover, the more educated strata of the African population were encouraged – some perhaps for the first time – to promote the cause of colonial independence.”\textsuperscript{321}

Wilson’s critical and Edwards’ romantic evaluations of the \textit{Negro Worker} reflect the problem of building ones argument on a too narrow source basis. Both of them overestimate the role of Padmore and have little, if anything, to say about James W. Ford’s position as the first editor of the journal. Both of swallowed uncritically the claim of the journal that it had several corresponding editors in Africa – Jomo Kenyatta in East Africa, Albert Nzula in South Africa and I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson and E.F. Small in West Africa – while Kenyatta for most of the time was residing in Britain, Nzula in Moscow and Small probably never contributed a single article.\textsuperscript{322}

The focus in this chapter is not on the contents of the journal but on political ambitions and aspirations behind its publication. Italiaander’s and Wilson’s claim of Moscow’s dominance will be tested in the light of the correspondence of the Hamburg Committee. Given the discussion about the close supervision the RILU Secretariat and the RILU Negro Bureau tried to establish over the Hamburg Committee, it is obvious that the \textit{Negro Worker} was no exception to this policy. The question is: how much room to

\textsuperscript{322} Wilson 1974, p. 219; Edwards 2003, p. 258.
manoeuvre had the African American comrades to develop the journal? Or, to be precise: where was the journal edited and by whom?

From the Negro Worker to the International Negro Workers’ Review and back

According to bibliographic data, the *Negro Worker* was published from March 1931 to October 1937. As Susan Campbell highlights, previous to the first number of the *Negro Worker*, the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers had published the journal as *International Workers’ Review*. The *Review*, as it was called, was itself not a new product but a renamed version of an earlier mimeographed magazine of the RILU Negro Bureau, *The Negro Worker*. This magazine had been published on an irregular basis in 1928 and 1929 under the editorship of James W. Ford.

An integral part of the official establishment of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers and its secretariat in Hamburg was the idea to relaunch the *Negro Worker* as the *International Workers’ Review*. The magazine had been dormant in 1930 but it was Ford’s ambition to develop the publication to become the mouthpiece of the ITUCNW. However, the situation about what was published under which title remained confusing for the first months and it seems that Ford also published – or planned to publish – a bulletin or magazine called the *Negro Worker*. Perhaps in order to avoid a total mess, Padmore instructed Ford in early February 1931 that the RILU Negro Bureau had decided to stop the publication of the Negro Worker and that Ford should concentrate his energy in developing the Review. Clearly underlining the dominance of the RILU Negro Bureau, he further informed Ford that he and the comrades at the Bureau were to gather materials to be published in the journal: “We have already sent you a number of articles on unemployment. These were written for the RILU, but they should be used as materials for publication in the “Review”. The ones on the “Economic Situation among Negroes” and “The Soviet Union” should be reprinted. Perhaps you might find it necessary to cut down a little. The other articles could be summarised and published from time to time.”

---

324 Plan of work and immediate task of the ITUCNW at Hamburg, filed 28.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 6.
325 There are no direct sources for the existence or non-existence of a parallel bulletin or magazine in late 1930/early 1931 apart from a few indirect indications. Two are from Padmore’s correspondence with Ford (8.2.1931 and 13.2.1931) about the renaming of the various journals, a third from a note from Ford to Padmore about his problems in disseminating a publication called the ”Negro Worker” (Ford to Padmore, 7.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 52).
326 Padmore to Ford, 8.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 55.
The same letter also informed Ford that an editorial board had been established for the Review. Apart from Ford serving as editor-in-chief, he was to be assisted by Albert Walter and George Hardy. The Board, Padmore underlined, was to be politically responsible for the line of the Review. Walter and Hardy remained on the editorial board for much of 1931 although their effective assistance remained rather limited. When Padmore took over as editor-in-chief he was supposed to cooperate with Max Barek.

The decision to publish the Review did not last long. About one week later Padmore informed Ford that the long title of the journal was unattractive and should be changed and replaced with a more affective one, namely the Negro Worker: “Since it has been decided to cease the publication of the ‘Negro Worker’ we are suggesting that the name should be given to the ‘Review’ instead of the present long title which it bears. In our opinion the title ‘Negro Worker’ is more attractive and more easily remembered by the workers.” The change in the name was proudly announced in the third issue of the bulletin – the first issue of the Negro Worker.

Padmore also urged Ford to listen to the advice and assistance he was to receive from the comrades of the RILU Negro Bureau who already had sent him a number of articles. In Padmore’s mind, the journal could be further improved upon in the way of organising the material and suggested to Ford to study the Pan-Pacific Worker as a model. In addition, Padmore urged Ford to do something about the design of the journal and all other publications of the Hamburg Committee:

> You should get a stiff coloured cover instead of the soft white paper for your organ. This would make it more attractive. The design showing a Negro worker breaking chains should be used as a permanent design not only on the Magazine but on all our literature – protocols, programmes, etc, etc. This would give a more symbolic impression to the workers.

The logo “Negro Worker Breaking Chains” was to become the distinctive logo of the ITUCNW but in February-March 1931 this was not yet the case. Twice Padmore had to remind Ford about the propagandistic value of the proposed logo. “You must always use the block showing the Negro breaking chains on the cover of all our literature. This will help to establish a certain familiarity among the workers for our literature and at the same time

---

327 Padmore to Ford, 8.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 55-56.
328 Padmore to Ford, 13.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 57.
330 Padmore to Ford, 13.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 57.
convey the idea that only the workers themselves can break their chains,” he wrote in late February. About three weeks later he reminded Ford about always using the logo and suggested to have it further improved upon by way of colour and stiffness. It seems however, that Ford’s main problem with the logo was not its design but to produce a block and Padmore suggested that if it could not be made in Germany he could get it from Moscow. By early April the design of the logo had been established as can be seen from the instructions Padmore sent to England about the graphical outline of his book-pamphlet The Life and Struggles: “A block showing a Negro Worker breaking his chains of slavery should be the design on the cover. The background should be red, while the figure of the Negro should be black.”

“The Negro Worker should be built into a popular mass journal”

Ford, and later Padmore, too, devoted much of his time rewriting and editing the Negro Worker – perhaps not always under the close direction of the RILU Negro Bureau then at least under its guidance. However, as will be outlined below, whoever was the editor in Hamburg, he also articulated his own perspectives about what could and should be done and several times reminded the comrades in Moscow to be more forthcoming in sending material for the journal.

In the beginning, the RILU Negro Bureau projected and provided the guidelines and outlines for the contents of the journal, if not all of the articles. At least the issues of 1930 were all written and edited in Moscow and new procedures had to be developed with Ford’s relocation to Hamburg. Ford was informed that the first issue of the Review was to deal with the situation in South Africa as well as contain a statement about the plans and aims of the ITUCNW, some articles about Africa in general and West Africa and the West Indies in particular, the War Danger and the Soviet Union as well as some news about the immediate international strike situation to highlight the joint struggle of Black and White workers. In addition, it should carry an outline for establishing international contacts towards beginning the international education of Negro workers on international trade union and labour

331 Padmore to Ford, 25.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 58.
332 Padmore to Ford, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 59.
questions and to include a section on “Workers Correspondence.” Last, but not least, Ford was prompted to publish photos about the life in the USSR and amongst Negro workers.  

Following Moscow’s outlines, Ford devoted the Review’s first edition on South Africa opening the issue with an article about South Africa. In fact, all numbers until the June issue contained much material on and about South Africa. But Padmore’s advice did not end with the second issue of the journal. Although he noted an improvement of the journal, “I was glad that you reacted to the forced labour campaign as quickly as you did. Your article on the subject was good,” he directed Ford to make use of comic strips: “It is very easy to get this done by writing to the Daily Worker by asking Ryan Walker the cartoonist who makes similar strips for the Daily Worker to send you some monthly cartoon depicting the class struggle in which the Negro worker are engaged.” Further, he urged Ford to get in contact with Cyril Briggs and Harry Haywood and ask them to write for the magazine. Most importantly, however, Ford was urged to establish contacts with potential writers all over the African Atlantic: “I know from experience that most people are lazy to write, but it is our duty to wake them up, and once they are awakened they will not go back to sleep in a hurry.” Last, but not least, Padmore informed Ford that he was sending him a short “statement to our readers” (about the purpose of the journal and the programme of the ITUCNW) which was to appear in every issue of the journal. The statement, he told Ford, was to be printed on the first inside page of the cover in a sort of block.

A couple of months later Ford again received a note about the contents of the Negro Worker. This time Padmore criticized Ford for having published pictures of the leading members of the ITUCNW in the May issue. Ford apologized for this by underlining that his intention was to give a human face to the movement – an idea he had taken up from his conversations with African seamen. In response, he reminded Padmore and the comrades in Moscow to send him articles and material as they had promised to do – Otto Huiswoud, for example, had promised “sometime ago” to write an article on the West Indies and Ford was

334 Plan of work and immediate task of the ITUCNW at Hamburg, filed 28.2.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 6.
335 See Ford’s outline of the Negro Worker’s contents in (Ford,) ITUCNW Report 1930-1931, RGASPI 534/3/669, fol. 226; “White terror in South Africa” and “Organisational advances made by workers of South Africa” (February; the latter was an article by Albert Nzula); “Advancing struggles in South Africa” and “Who is Ghandi?” [Ford’s comment: reference to reformism like Garveyism among Negroes] (March; the latter was a reprint from an article by Shapurji Saklatvala in The Labour Monthly); “Conference of the African Federation” and “South African Farm Tenants” (April-May; by Nzula and R.A. Duman); and “May 1st in South Africa” (June; by J.P. Sepeng). In addition, a letter of organizational instructions by the RILU to the AFTU was published in the June-issue of the Negro Worker.
337 Padmore to Ford, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 59.
anxious to know what had happened.\footnote{Eventually, Huiswoud sent him a text that was published as “Imperialist Rule in British Guiana,” \textit{The Negro Worker} I:8, 1931, pp. 3-5.} On the other hand, he had received an article from Moscow about the conditions in England. On the positive side was that much material had been coming in from South Africa and other places, “some of it is OK but requires a lot of work on my part to retouch it and get it in order.” In addition, the Chinese comrade at the ISH was drawing some cartoons for the \textit{Negro Worker}.\footnote{Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/668, fol. 82.}

It seems as if there was little interference or intervention in Ford’s editing after the June correspondence (or then the correspondence is missing). At least Ford was relatively pleased with his achievements as editor-in-chief when he proudly outlined the contents of the first eight issues of the \textit{Negro Worker} in his September Report to the RILU Secretariat. When Padmore took over his duties in Hamburg in late 1931, the editorial and journalistic policy was outlined in the October 1931 Resolution. The new guidelines did not differ from the old ones: “The Negro Worker should be built into a popular mass journal, the articles should be written in simple style, and should deal with the burning everyday problems of the Negro Workers as well as all problems confronting the international working class such as the war danger, the defence of the USSR, etc. Every effort should be made to establish “Workers’ correspondence” by drawing in the contacts that the Committee has already established in different countries to become the Shock Brigades in this work.”\footnote{October Resolution 1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 46}

When Padmore arrived in Hamburg, among his first job was to organize the distribution of the September issue of the \textit{Negro Worker}. Thereafter he started to outline the next number but run into troubles: the police had confiscated all information material and colonial magazines during their raids at the ISH and ITUCNW headquarters in October 1931 and Padmore had to ask his colleagues at the RILU Negro Bureau to send him the material he had left behind in Moscow. Due to the delay, the next issue of the \textit{Negro Worker} appeared as a double issue in November 1931. The December issue, he noted, was to focus on unemployment. For this, he asked Huiswoud and Zusmanovich to participate with material, the former with an article on the situation in British Guiana, the latter should write about how to organize and lead the unemployed.\footnote{Padmore to ‘Dear Comrades’, 16.11.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 120a-121. Both of them were forthcoming to Padmore’s appeal. See O. Huiswoud, “Starving Workers Demonstrate in Demerara,” \textit{The Negro Worker} I:12, 1931, pp. 15-17, and Mansey [i.e., Zusmanovich], “How to Organize the Unemployed,” \textit{The Negro Worker} I:12, 1931, pp. 17-19.}

Padmore’s arrival in Hamburg did not result in a change in editing the \textit{Negro Worker}. While Ford previously had communicated with Padmore about outlines and contents,
Padmore communicated with Otto Huiswoud who had replaced him at the RILU Negro Bureau. Huiswoud, too, was active in proposing themes and directing the contents of the journal. Although the correspondence between Huiswoud and Padmore is patchy for 1932, several of the existing letters deal with editorial matters. In January 1932 he ordered Padmore to include articles and material that had been produced in Moscow for the Scottsboro campaign. However, as Padmore already had made plans for the first issues of the journal, Huiswoud suggested to reserve the April 1932 issue for a special Scottsboro number – in fact, Padmore could not reject Huiswoud’s plan as the publication of a special issue had already been decided by the RILU Secretariat. Eventually, the special Scottsboro number was published as the April 1932 issue of the *Negro Worker*. In one of Huiswoud’s last letters to Padmore in early September 1932, he informed him that the comrades in Moscow were preparing a declaration on Kenya that was to be published in the *Negro Worker*. However, for reasons not known, the preparations in drafting the declarations were delayed for several months and the final version was published almost one year later.

Global dissemination, African participation?

Ford and Padmore’s ambition was to establish the *Negro Worker* as a mass publication. Each of the first eight issues of the *Negro Worker* was printed in one thousand copies. In early 1932, Padmore decided to distribute the journal for free in order to speed up its distribution. The campaign was successful, the circulation steadily increased, and had reached 5,000 copies per issue by the end of 1932.

At first, however, Ford’s ambitions were hampered due to the Hamburg Committee’s budgetary restrictions. The costs of first issue of the Review were already far above his allocated funds: the printing of the 32 pages bulletin had cost 409 Reichsmark and postage had amounted to another 600 Reichsmark. Far above our margins, he lamented to Padmore, and the expenses would be even higher if the bulletin was to include more pictures. While the printing costs could be covered by the funds at his disposal, there was not enough to cover

---

342 Huiswoud to Padmore, 11.1.1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 34. Huiswoud’s Scottsboro material was published in *The Negro Worker* II:4, 1932.
343 Huiswoud to Padmore, 21.2.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 124.
344 Huiswoud to Padmore, 5.9.1932, RGASPI 534/3/754, fol. 85.
postage. He therefore tried to rely on the help of the International Secretariat of the LAI in Berlin, although this channel proved problematic, too.\textsuperscript{348}

While the question of funding was resolved in spring 1931 via a special decision at the RILU Secretariat, Ford had to encounter other “technical” problems. The double number of April-May 1931 was perhaps a result of the late decision in Moscow about the new arrangements for funding the \textit{Negro Worker}, but with the June 1931 a new problem had occurred. Ford had sent the issue to the printer before he had left for Geneva to participate at the African Children Conference, but when he returned he was informed that the Party printer had delayed its printing as they claimed that Ford had not paid for the work. Ford had to raise hell before anything happened and accused Albert Walter for being counter-productive (the latter defended himself by saying that it was a misunderstanding on their part). Much delayed, the June issue was published in July. At this point, Ford had to face an even bigger challenge as the British authorities had barred its distribution in England and had started to confiscate the journal when sent in bulk. Even worse, the British colonial authorities in Nigeria forbade anyone to read the \textit{Negro Worker} and threatened to sentence everyone who broke against the law to jail punishment. Nevertheless, in Ford’s mind, the British actions could be easily circumvented by making use of “other ways”, i.e., the clandestine communication network of the ISH.\textsuperscript{349}

Legally or not, by mid-1931 the \textit{Negro Worker} was reaching all parts of the African Atlantic – to South Africa and to several points in West Africa, to British Guiana and to Panama. Ford excitedly reported to Padmore that a group of comrades even planned to translate the journal into Portuguese and to publish it in Brazil\textsuperscript{350} Padmore, on the other hand, time and again urged the various radical African American groups to cooperate with the Hamburg Committee, first and foremost to write articles about the conditions of life of the Black workers in the United States for the \textit{Negro Worker} and, secondly, to assist in disseminating the journal in the USA and beyond. A crucial link was the \textit{Liberator}, the mouthpiece of Briggs and the Harlem branch of the CPUSA Negro Department. Padmore’s intention was to swap connections – the \textit{Liberator} was to be circulated in the African Atlantic by way of the contacts of the ITUCNW whereas the \textit{Negro Worker} was to be circulated

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{348} Ford to Padmore, 7.2.1931, 534/3/668, fol. 52.
\textsuperscript{349} Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/668, fol. 82.
\textsuperscript{350} Ford to Padmore, 13.7.1931, RGASPI 534/668, fol. 82.
\end{flushright}
through the Crusader News Services’ mailing list. Much to Padmore’s dismay, the plan was never carried through.\(^{351}\)

Padmore made an attempt to bring new life to the *Negro Worker* by reorganizing its editorial board in December 1931. One of his plans was to invite and secure a more active participation from Black activists all over the African Atlantic. Claiming that the “executive board” of the ITUCNW – which by that date had ceased to exist – “recently” had made “certain decisions” in connection with the publication of the journal, namely the reorganization of the editorial board, Padmore inquired from an impressing list of activists whether they would accept the position of contributing editor: Briggs, Amis, Huiswoud, Alexander [?Lozovsky?, HW], [Foster?] Jones, Small, Kouyaté, Nzula, Moloingue [Moloinyane], Mansey [Zusmanovich?]. The task, he assured them, was not to be too burdensome:

The only demand, which we make upon you is that you should contribute something occasionally to the magazine, assist us in popularising it among the Negro workers and be merciless in your criticism, with the object of helping us make the “Negro Worker” a popular organ carrying on the struggle against imperialism and for the emancipation of the black toiling masses.\(^{352}\)

Small never answered. The two Black comrades in the United States, Briggs and Amis, were too busy. The others participated by occasionally contributing an article or two for the journal.

While the Brazilian edition never materialized, the plan to issue a French version of *Negro Worker* was initially more successful. The idea was to translate the articles in Moscow but proved right from the beginning to be a challenge as there were only a few translators at the RILU headquarters. Another problem was the lack of funding and therefore Padmore decided only to mimeograph the French version until the French distributors, the CGTU and Garan Kouyaté, could guarantee its widest distribution. As a result, the first French issue of the *Negro Worker, L’Ouvrier Nègre*, had 1,500 copies printed in March and were sent to four addresses for circulation: to the International Secretariat of the LAI in Berlin, the CGTU

\(^{351}\) (Copy) Letter from NN to Comrade Briggs, 5.9.1931, RGASPI 534/6/140, fol. 38. The author of the letter can be identified as Padmore, the letter was written before he left Moscow for Hamburg.

headquarters in Paris, and the Hamburg Committee as well as to Comrade Rosemond in Haiti.  

The L’Ouvrier Nègre was never a success. Both Ford and Padmore had continuous problems in its distribution. In May 1932, it had become evident for all that it made no sense to continue its publication. At their meeting in Altona, Padmore, Kouyaté and Mason therefore decided to suspend the French version of the Negro Worker. Instead, Kouyaté’s journal, the *Cri des Nègres*, was to be developed into the French mouthpiece of the ITUCNW. The journal was to be regularly supplied with articles in French translation as well as blocks for pictures from the Negro Worker. In return, Kouyaté was to send pictures and material that could be used in the Negro Worker.  

While it is evident that the Negro Worker achieved its distribution goal, a total different question is whether it emerged as a voice of the African working class and downtrodden during its existence. To what extent were the articles fabricated in Moscow as I.I. Potekhin claimed? The previous chapter has indicated that much of the material that Ford used had come from Moscow, but with some notable exceptions. While it is evident from a critical examination of the journal’s contents that E.F. Small never contributed a single line in 1931 – the only article in his name was his speech at the 1930 RILU World Congress in Moscow,  much likely it had been edited in Moscow at the RILU Negro Bureau before being published. Neither did Garan Kouyaté publish any signed articles in 1931; his first article appeared in the December 1931 issue and another in the March 1932 issue. In similar ways, Johnstone Kenyatta was rather silent. His first signed article appeared in January 1933. The only active African corresponding member was Albert Nzula who published a series of articles in 1931 in his own name and from December 1931 under his pseudonym Tom Jackson. Other South Africans who had an article published in 1931 were M.M. Kotane (Moses Mauane Kotane), R.A. Duman, J.P. Sepeng and P.G. Moloinyane; in 1932 apart from Jackson/Nzula the South Africans included Bransley H. Ndobe (Bransby Ndobe), James Warren (one of Kotane’s aliases).  

---

353 Padmore to Ford, 17.3.1931, RGASPI 534/3/668, fol. 61.  
356 J. Kenyatta, “An African looks at British Imperialism,” *The Negro Worker* III:1, 1933. However, it is possible that he can be identified as the person behind the signature J.E.’s article “The Situation in Kenya,” *The Negro Worker* II:8, 1932.  
357 See the online table of contents of the Negro Worker, http://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/negro-worker/table.htm (1.6.2010). Most of the South Africans can be identified via Davidson et alii 2003.
A general feature of the *Negro Worker* was to list Africans in the editorial board once they had participated with one article – and usually not more. This was the case of Foster Jones and Holle Selleh Tamba: the former was included in 1931, the latter in 1932. I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson’s participation, on the other hand, was a different case. His first signed article was published as late as January 1933 – under the pseudonym of Wal. Daniels. However, it is likely that several earlier communications from Nigeria were based on his letters to Padmore. The first article was signed “From a Correspondent” and was a frontal attack on British rule in West Africa.\(^{358}\) As I have demonstrated earlier its context was similar to one of Wallace-Johnson’s first letters to Padmore in late 1931. The July 1932 and the double issue of September-October 1932 contains articles on Nigeria whose author could have been Wallace-Johnson.\(^ {359}\) Finally, the last African author who can be identified is Joseph Bilé who contributed with at least one article in the July 1932 issue but could also be the author of a couple of others – provided that the initials J.B. or B.J. were (sometimes) used by him.\(^ {360}\)

In sum, at least during its first two years of appearance, the *Negro Worker* was time and again capable to articulate voices from Africa (and the African Diaspora). However, the voices of the RILU Negro Bureau were also present – Padmore (as long as he was in charge in Moscow), Otto Huiswoud, Alexander Zusmanovich (who used his alias Mansy or Mansey – but did he also use the pseudonym Charles Alexander? – an author who published several articles on the West Indies between 1931 and 1937) and I.I. Potekhin. Still, both Ford and to an even larger extent Padmore, were confirmed that they were in charge of the publication and perceived the directives from the RILU Negro Bureau as positive guidelines rather than negative instructions. After all, both of them firmly backed the official line of the RILU and the Comintern.

In Padmore’s opinion, what mattered was the reception of the journal in the African Atlantic. His interpretation in December 1932 was a positive, in that the amount of both subscribers and contributors were rising. However, in his mind the best indication for the popular support was the reaction of the colonial authorities:


\(^{360}\) J. Bile, “How the workers live in Cameroon,” *The Negro Worker* II:7, 1932. Bilé was most likely the author of the article of one B.J., “Scotsboro campaign in Europe,” *The Negro Worker* II:6, 1932, as he had been heavily engaged in the campaign in Germany. The December 1931 issue contains both articles of J.B. and B.J. – perhaps all compiled by Bilé? On the other hand, in 1932 one finds articles signed by a certain B. Jan – was it Bilé or someone else?
The systematic persecution of the Negro Worker in the colonies is the best indication that our organ is meeting with popular support. In West Africa as well as the West Indies, Negro toilers found in possession with the magazine were put in prison. Thru our sub-committee in London a campaign was organised in August against this form of imperialist terror, and delegation of Negro workers called upon ILD Parliamentary Fraction and forced Maxton to register the protest of the Negroes against the banning of the magazine in the colonies. As to be expected the Minister for the Colonies replied that the Governor of every British colony has the authority to legislate against the Negro workers. Our sub-committee is now organizing a broad campaign among the white workers.  

More than anyone else, Padmore underlined the central objective of the journal: to serve as the mouthpiece of the African Atlantic. He had defended this position vehemently time and again, especially when he demarcated the lines of operation between the Hamburg Committee and the ISH. The *Negro Worker* was the organ of the ITUCNW, not the ISH or the NMM. The ISH and the NMM had their own bulletins, he declared in August 1932 to the Colonial Committee of the SMM. "You comrades are politically off the track when you comrades want the *Negro Worker* to become the black baby of the Seafarer," he blasted and stressed: "Despite many shortcomings, which we are very conscious of, the Negro Worker is tremendously popular among the colonial workers. Why? Besides giving them a political line for struggle we try to make it readable by realizing that the Negroes are also human beings who have a variety of human interests. If we crowd our paper with only the seamen’s activities in England, our readers will soon get bored."  

**The Negro Worker and the activities of the Hamburg Secretariat**

The *Negro Worker* was published regularly in 1931 and 1932. The final aspect concerning the journal deals with its publication. Why did it sometimes appear as a double-issue? Nothing in the available correspondence points towards financial constraints as being the reason for it. Instead, more than once had either Ford or Padmore been able to postpone the publication for a variety of reasons ranging from police raids to being away from Hamburg. Therefore, the rhythm of publication could perhaps give a hint about when Ford and Padmore were residing

---

362 Padmore to Colonial Committee of the SMM, Hamburg 31.8.1931 [sic!], RGASPI 534/6/18, fol. 137. A critical analysis of the contents of this letter reveals that it cannot have been written in 1931 as it refers to articles in the Negro Worker about the ISH World Congress that were published in 1932!
in Hamburg. Especially in the latter’s case, this could give a hint about his whereabouts in 1932.

Figure 1: The Negro Worker 1931-1932

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1931</th>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Month</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5</td>
<td></td>
<td>April-May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11</td>
<td></td>
<td>October-November</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>January-February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td></td>
<td>September-October</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-12</td>
<td></td>
<td>November-December</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The only double-issue published when Ford was editor-in-chief was the April-May 1931 number. The reason for this is not clear. To my understanding Ford was not absent from Hamburg for longer periods. However, the break could be due to the changes in the financial transactions between Moscow and Hamburg via Berlin as outlined in Chapter VIII.2.5. The next break is more evident: the double-issue in October-November 1931 was due to reshuffling in the ITUCNW. When Ford left Hamburg in September there was nobody to take over his duty and the *Negro Worker* resurfaced again in November 1931 when Padmore started his work in Hamburg. The break in early 1932 could be a consequence of the December 1931 – and subsequent? – police raids.

The long break during autumn 1932 is the most interesting one. Could it be explained by Padmore’s absence from Hamburg? The latter double-issue covering November-December 1932 was certainly due to his participation at the IRH World Congress in Moscow: it is likely that he stayed in Moscow for a rather long period. Perhaps he even went to Soviet Russia as early as September 1932. The double-issue from September-October 1932 does not include...
any signed articles by Padmore – perhaps an indication that comrades at the RILU Negro Bureau had edited the whole publication? An indication for this was Langston Hughes’ poem “The Same” – Hughes visited the Soviet Union in 1932 and could have been asked by Huiswoud or someone else to contribute with a poem for the *Negro Worker*. It is unlikely that Padmore or anyone else had been in contact with Hughes from Hamburg. The latter double-issue, on the other hand, included both another poem by Langston Hughes, “Good-bye Christ”, and a signed article by Padmore, “The Land of Socialist Construction - Fifteen Years of Soviet Russia.” It is likely that Padmore’s praise article dealt with a theme when he visited the Soviet Union (it could, of course, have been written earlier or by somebody else).

“Thousands of new connections”: The radical African Atlantic in late 1932

In 1931 the Hamburg Committee had about 60 contacts in Africa and the Caribbean. One year later Padmore counted his contacts in the African Atlantic to be over a thousand. In his annual report he claimed that within the first six months of operating in Hamburg, he had been able to gain “thousands of new connections” in Africa and the Caribbean. Apart from the monthly dispatches of the *Negro Worker*, nearly 100,000 copies of pamphlets in English and French had been distributed in 1932, such as *The Life and Struggle of the Negro Toilers, The Negro Workers and the War Danger*, the *Appeal to Negro Seamen and Dockers*, the *Open Letter to the workers of British Guiana*, *The Scottsboro Case in America* and *What is the Hamburg Secretariat*. The radical African Atlantic network had been established (see figure 2).³⁶³

However, Padmore had to admit that most of these connections were short-lived contacts with some individuals. Only a few of them turned out to be more interesting ones. In order to strengthen these individual contacts, Padmore time and again raised the question of the establishment of trade unions and committees with them. Here, his achievements had been more modest as cells and groups had only been established in Senegal, Madagascar, Haiti, Cameroon, Liberia, Guadeloupe, Ivory Coast, St. Lucia and Panama.³⁶⁴

---

In order to consolidate these groups, the HC has already succeeded in drawing up directives for some of the groups and set before them concrete tasks and activities. This work, however, because of lack of time, has not yet been definitively organised.\textsuperscript{365}

In addition, Padmore boasted that he had established connections with a number of “working-class organizations” in the African Atlantic: the African National Congress [unclear if he referred to the ANC or the NCBWA], the Nigerian Workers’ Union, the Gold Coast Native Workers’ Association, the British Guiana Labour Union, the Trinidad Workers’ Association, the Grenada Workers’ Association, the Kikuyu Central Association, and the Negro Workers’ Association [i.e., either the Negro Welfare Association in London or the Liberian Workers’ Progressive Association]. However, none of these organizations had a truly class- or radical appearance, Padmore had to admit: “(I)t is to be noted that these organisations although of a mass character do not yet conform to our revolutionary organisational principles.”\textsuperscript{366}

In fact, most of the above-mentioned organizations had either a very limited following and, consequently, were hardly noticeable on the political scenes in the colonies. Others, it has to be admitted, had a substantial membership and were sometimes even regarded as potential heavyweight political platforms, such as the Kikuyu Central Association. On the other hand, one has to admit that the very nature of the contacts between the ITUCNW and these organizations was sometimes rather fictional. For example, it has to be doubted whether the leadership of the Kikuyu Reform Association in Kenya were aware of that their organization had established links to the ITUCNW. Also, even if Kenyatta had informed the leadership about these links, how would they have interpreted this situation? The situation is somewhat simpler with other associations, such as Wallace-Johnson’s Nigerian Worker’s Union: it was Wallace-Johnson who made all vital decisions; the whole union centered round its leading character.

On the other hand, Padmore’s claim of half-dozen established links was perhaps never meant to be published but had been put forward in his report to impress upon the comrades in the RILU Negro Bureau and the other authorities who were the potential readers of his report: the RILU Secretariat and perhaps even the ECCI. Was Padmore playing a game with the comrades in Moscow by painting an utmost positive picture of substantial expansion within only one year?

\textsuperscript{365} (Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931-1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 123.
\textsuperscript{366} (Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931-1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 123.
Nevertheless, although he had been successful in making individual contacts in the African Atlantic, the record of establishing and developing the Atlantic outreach of the Hamburg Committee was still as bleak as it had been one year earlier. None of the sub-committees of the ITUCNW continued functioning. Although the Hamburg Committee and the TUUL had worked out several directives for the sub-committee in New York, nothing had happened and the ambitions ended in a total fiasco. "When action was taken our line was completely distorted with the result that the comrades assigned by the TUUL to make possible the success of this work completely failed even to initiate our program."\(^{367}\)

A similar situation prevailed in South Africa. With Nzula’s departure from the country in 1931, nothing had happened and no sub-committee existed there anymore.\(^{368}\)

On the positive side were the developments in France and England. The *L'Union des Travailleurs Nègres* (UTN) had been established in early 1932 – in spite of the stiff resistance of the CGTU, Padmore sarcastically noted – with branches in the port cities of Rouen, Marseilles, Bordeaux and Le Havre. The organization based itself on the program of the HC and functioned as its sub-section in France. Even more important was the Atlantic dimension of the UTN: through its members Padmore envisaged to open new connections in the French, and even British, colonies in the Caribbean.\(^{369}\)

In similar ways, the Negro Welfare Association (NWA) served as the sub-committee of the ITUCNW in London. This organization, Padmore noted, was only active among Africans and African Caribbeans residing in England but here too, he envisioned a more central role for the organization, namely to emerge as "the means through which the British colonies are being maintained due to the difficulty of maintaining direct connections between Hamburg and certain British colonies."\(^{370}\)

The two subcommittees in France and Britain had nothing to do with the mobilization and organization of Negro seamen in these two countries. This duty was part of the Hamburg Committee’s obligations towards the ISH in establishing a worldwide clandestine communication network for the Comintern. Here, too, Padmore had been fairly successful. Negro seamen activities had been established in London, Liverpool and Cardiff, and had succeeded in organizing over 600 Negroes, Padmore claimed. Through similar efforts in France, some 200 Negro sailors had been politically organized, chiefly in Bordeaux and

---

\(^{367}\) (Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931-1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 126.
\(^{368}\) (Padmore,) ITUCNW Report 1931-1932, RGASPI 534/3/753, fol. 126.
Marseilles. In both countries the Negro seamen were members of their own organizations as well as the SMM respectively the Revolutionary Seamen’s Union in France.371

In Hamburg, on the other hand, the conditions for work continuously deteriorated during 1932. This was mainly due to the sharpening political situation in Germany. After the police raid against the office of the Hamburg Secretariat in late December 1931, the premises of the Hamburg Committee and the ISH were subject to a number of periodical police attacks. Their effect was a negative one as it hampered the systematic functioning of Padmore’s work. Negro comrades who had been engaged by Padmore were arrested and deported (Padmore does not give their name). Work in the harbour of Hamburg became more restricted, too, as the police started to check the Negro crew onboard the ships calling at the port. The effect was a "tactical retreat," according to Padmore, and instead of utilizing legal forms of agitation, illegal ones were utilized.372