Kweku Bankole Awoonor Renner, Anglophone West African intellectuals and the Comintern connection: a tentative outline (Part 1)¹

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I. Introduction

This is a study about Anglophone West African intellectuals and their links to various communist and radical movements during the interwar period. The key objective is to outline and analyze the connections between political active West Africans and individuals and organizations that were tied to or part of the Communist (Third) International, the Comintern. Although the existence of such links has been known and has been discussed both by the colonial authorities and contemporary researchers, the overall picture is still superficial as previous research either regarded the Comintern-connection as a mere episode in the nationalist awakening in West African or portrayed it as an unsuccessful attempt by the Comintern and the Bolsheviks to infiltrate in West Africa. Both perspectives are not totally wrong: there were never many West Africans who had direct links with Moscow and Comintern infiltration was never successful. However, as this study will argue, such a backwards-reading of history somewhat distorts the relative intensity of networks that were planned to be established – and, eventually, did exists, though only for a short period. Thus, instead of treating the Comintern-link as a failed story in the overall development of African nationalism between 1925 and 1940, this study will use an actor-oriented and forward-looking perspective in which connections with communist and radical movements is discussed as one rational option by those engaged.

The negative reading of the Comintern-connection started at the latest with George Padmore’s influential monograph *Pan-Africanism or Communism.*² In his book, Padmore concludes that the attempts to establish links with African radicals by the Communists during the late 1920s and early 1930s ended in a total failure, much due to the inability of the Communists to include a pan-africantist perspective in their

¹ I am grateful to the comments of Fredrik Petersson, David Killingray, Jonathan Derrick and Jerker Widén.
aspirations. In his mind, the dogmatic perspective of the Communists and Bolsheviks and the non-existence of an African working class was an equation that was doomed with failure. Later research, such as that of Immanuel Geiss on Pan-Africanism or Toyin Falola on Nationalism and African Intellectuals, underline Padmore’s negative perspective. Other historians, who have studied the relationship between West African interwar intellectuals and communism from a reverse, i.e. Moscow, perspective have reached similar conclusions. This position is summarized in Edward T. Wilson’s groundwork on the relationship between the Bolsheviks and Africa. As Wilson has been able to demonstrate, Bolshevik activities in Africa, or at least the aspiration of the Comintern to establish and monitor links with Sub-Saharan Africa was part of their grand plan on how to work for ‘world revolution’. However, Wilson as well as other researchers, including my colleague Risto Marjomaa, underline that the activities of the Bolsheviks and the Comintern in Africa have to be linked with what was termed in the Comintern the ‘Negro Question’ and the ‘Colonial Question’. At times these issues were linked with each other, but not always. Whereas the ‘Negro Question’ was limited to the problems of the Afro-American population and US race discrimination, sometimes including the situation in South African as well, the ‘Colonial Question’ was linked to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist agitation in Africa but especially in Asia. From such a perspective, the position of and links to West African intellectuals were never as important as those of Chinese, Indian or Indonesian revolutionary movements.

But what were the contacts and networks of West African intellectuals? This study argues that West African intellectuals were already at the beginning of the 1920s part of a global intellectual web. Paul Gilroy has underlined the importance of the ‘Black Atlantic’, i.e., the existence of personal links and connections between Africans in Sub-Saharan Africa and Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Americans on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Since the nineteenth century, at least, Africans went (or were sent) to study abroad, mainly to Britain and the USA. With the emergence of a West African middle-class during that century, intellectual connections were

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established between various persons throughout the ‘Black Atlantic’. At the end of the century the organized Pan-African movement started, which further strengthened the bonds between African intellectuals and those in Europe, North America and the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, therefore, leading West African intellectuals at the beginning of the 1920s, such as Joseph Ephraim Casely Hayford, had extensive networks which linked them with both local and global activists, as Langley already has underlined.

The network-concept is central in this study. My aim is to study the various social, political and intellectual links of those individuals who at some point or another were in contact with – or were contacted by – communist organizations and communist activist. The central focal point will be Bankole Awoonor Renner (1898–1970), a Gold Coast activist who was one of the few ‘Bolshevists’ of his time. This focus is not by choice: he was – presumably – the first Black African to study in Moscow during the 1920s, and when he returned to the Gold Coast in 1928 became active in Gold Coast politics for the next thirty years. Although his position in the Gold Coast nationalist movement was a crucial one – being among the founders of the West African Youth League (WAYL, 1934) and the West African National Secretariat in London (WANS, 1945) as well as a leading participant at the 1945 Pan-African Conference in Manchester – but has hitherto been little noticed. Part of this was due to his later activities in the Muslim Association Party (MAP) and his critique of Nkrumah, whose ardent supporter he had been before his break with Nkrumah and the CPP in 1954.

Focussing on Awoonor Renner and his network, i.e., his family contacts and links to other West African radicals and nationalists (as he had to both groups), a very interesting picture emerges of an extremely vibrant intellectual community. Awoonor Renner’s family background linked him to the leading West African intellectuals of his time and through his own activities he was to establish links with various

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9 I am inspired by the research of my colleague Roman Loimeier on networks of Muslim scholars, see Roman Loimeier (Hrsg.), *Die Islamische Welt als Netzwerk. Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Netzwerkansatzes im islamischen Kontext*, Würzburg: Ergon Verlag 2000.
radicals. Some of these links have been known, such as his connection to Isaac Theophilus Akunna Wallace-Johnson and Benjamin Wuta-Ofi, others hitherto not, as with the Sierra Leonean trade union activist Ernest Alfonso Richards.

However, the novelty of the study does not only lie in applying an actor-oriented network analysis but also by the use of new archival sources. All previous research on African nationalism and the Comintern-connection has used colonial archival material in addition to printed sources from Moscow. Archival sources in the Comintern-Archive in Moscow, the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RSGAPI), has hitherto only been used by a few studies which have been conducted after the opening of the Comintern-Archive in 1991. Not surprisingly, the opening of the archive has resulted in a totally new direction of historical research and a reinterpretation of previous assumptions. So far research has mainly concentrated on the re-evaluation of Comintern history and the national dimensions in Europe, the Americas and Asia. The only exception is the research conducted by Apollon Davidson and his colleagues on the South African Communist Party and the links between Moscow and South Africa. For the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Comintern material is still mainly unused, although already John Hargreaves noted the existence of new sources for African political history. However, whereas Hargreaves only concentrated on a limited section of the Comintern material, namely that of fond 542 (Material concerning the League Against Imperialism), my research group has – so far – checked also fond 495 (Material concerning the Executive Committee of the Comintern) as well as files of the Profintern. In addition, archival research has been conducted in the Bundesarchiv in Berlin-Lichterfelde and in The National Archives (TNA, formerly Public Record Office) in Kew outside London.

An bibliographic outline of Awoonor Renner is found in his anthology of poems, *This Africa*. This book was originally published in Moscow (in Russian) in 1928. An English version was planned to be published the same year, but was delayed until 1943. The 1943-version includes two bibliographic sketches, one by J.B. Danquah, dated 7 January 1943, another by Awoonor Renner himself, dated Paris 18 May 1928. It seems as if Awoonor Renner’s own sketch was written for the unpublished 1928-version, but was updated with the last sentence, where he expresses gratitude to Danquah and Kobina Sekyi for writing a foreword and the bibliographical note.

Formerly Moscow’s Center for the Preservation of Documents of Modern History (RTsKhIDNI).


The research group consisted of Professor Risto Marjomaa, MA Fredrik Petersson and Dr Tatjana Androsova. The research was funded by research funding from the Academy of Finland (2003-2006).
The study will present a tentative outline of the connections and networks of Anglophone West African intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s. The regional limitation is in part due to the internal division in the Comintern: while the French Communist Party was supposed to establish links with radicals in the French colonies, the same obligation was given to the British Communist Party. Further, in West Africa itself links between the British and French colonies were rudimentary if not minimal, the common language of the West African intellectuals often being either English or French. However, a further dimension is added to the already complicated picture through the activities and aspirations of two communist front organizations, the League Against Imperialism (LAI) and the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers (ITUCNW). Both were stationed in Germany, the LAI in Berlin and the ITUCNW in Hamburg, and both were linked to the Comintern apparatus. But whereas the LAI was part of what has been labelled the ‘Münzenberg-web’ (see below), the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern and the Comintern itself, the ITUCNW was part of the Red International Labour Union (RILU or Profintern) and was to become the centre of George Padmore’s network. Previously, the assumption has been that much of the various networks either dissolved after 1933 (due to the Nazi takeover in Germany and the ban on all communist activities) or crumbled due to the disposition of Padmore in 1933/34 and the reorientation of Soviet foreign policy. However, as will be claimed in the second part of the study, despite the crisis in 1933/34, much of the network in West Africa still existed in 1935, if not beyond.

This study is divided into three parts. The first part of the study focuses on the period between 1925 and 1929/30, culminating in Münzenberg’s and the LAI’s – but also the RILU’s – attempt to establish a network in West Africa. During this period Awoonor Renner was studying in Moscow (1925–1928) and returned to the Gold Coast. An intriguing, but still open, question is whether or not Awoonor Renner can be identified as being the key connection between Moscow and West Africa: was he the spider in the net? The second part of the study (CoWoPa 10/2007) focuses on the 1930 Hamburg conference and the establishment of George Padmore’s network (1930–1933), continuing in part three (CoWoPa 11/2007) with what can be labelled as the ‘Wallace-Johnson’-connection (1933–1937). Awoonor Renner’s activities during this phase are crucial: although he cannot be directly linked with Padmore, his activities in the Gold Coast and his links with Wallace-Johnson are intriguing.
II. Introducing Bankole Awoonor Renner: From the Gold Coast to the USA

Edward Clarke Lewis Renner alias Kweku Awuna Renner alias Kweku Bankole Renner alias Bankole Awoonor Renner was born in Elmina on the 6th of June 1898. His father was Peter Awoonor Renner and his mother Awuba Affra. The Awoonor Renner-family belonged to an old Western-educated West African family, descending from Sierra Leone. Peter Awoonor Renner had been educated in England and Germany and had entered Lincoln’s Inn. He was called to the bar in 1883 and thereafter went to the Gold Coast where he established himself as a lawyer and barrister in Accra in 1884. His brother, William Renner, who in 1912 took the name Awunor-Renner, and studied medicine at Liverpool and at the University College, London and took an M.D. Brussels. He was appointed Assistant Colonial Surgeon and served in Sierra Leone since 1884, acting at various periods up until 1902 as head of the Sierra Leone Medical Department. Bankole’s mother descended from the royal family of Nana Kobina Gyan I, the Omanhen (Omanhene) or paramount chief of the Edina state, who was exiled to Sierra Leone by the British after having taken over control over Elmina in 1873. Her father was a Dutchman, Captain Jan Van der Brutton.

Peter Awoonor Renner soon became engaged in Gold Coast politics and became an active member of the 1897 established Gold Coast Aboriginal Rights Protection Society (ARPS). The ARPS had been launched as an attempt by the local African elite and intelligentsia to protest against the Lands Bills of 1894–1897 and tax reforms. At that time the British colonial government made an attempt to take over ‘vacant’ and ‘waste’ land by the government. In their counterargument the protest movement, which included both the traditional elite and the Western-educated intelligentsia and was articulated through newspaper articles, petitions, cablegrams.

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and memoranda, argued that there was no waste or public land and that the bill would reduce the Africans to mere squatters and lead to the abrogation of their ancestral land rights. After its foundation, the ARPS propagated to be heard by the Legislative Council in Accra on the land question. This request was granted and in early June 1897 John Mensah Sarbah and Peter Awoonor Renner appeared at the Bar of the Council. In 1898 the ARPS had generated enough funds to send a deputation to London. The delegation was able to meet the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, and to discuss the Gold Coast issue with him. Although Chamberlain rejected their demands for constitutional reforms, he accepted their views on the land and tax question. As an outcome of the meeting, both the Lands Bill and the British taxation schemes were dropped.21

Through Peter Awoonor Renner’s political engagement and his activity as lawyer, the Awoonor Renner family became part of the Gold Coast African political elite and its central mouthpiece, the ARPS. Although Peter Awoonor Renner does not seem to have been part of the inner circle of the ARPS, he must have known them all: leading activists such as John Mensah Sarbah, J.B. Brown, Kobina Sekyi and J.E. Casely Hayford. In other words, Bankole Awoonor Renner had been born in a family that both had a large family network, comprising at least the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, and a political network.22 In fact, Kobina Sekyi was his godfather.23

Not much is known about Bankole Awoonor Renner’s childhood. He was educated at Government Boy’s School in Cape Coast, and at King’s College, Freetown, indicating his family network.24 After ending his education in Freetown, he returned to Accra where he started to work as a journalist. According to the Gold Coast authorities, Bankole Awoonor Renner was connected with the Awoonor Press

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22 The familial networks of Sierra Leonean and Gold Coast middle-class families are also highlighted in Akintola J.G. Wyse, H.C. Bankole-Bright and Politics in Colonial Sierra Leone, 1919-1958, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 30.
located at Pagan Road, Accra, whereas other sources claim that he was the manager of Awoonor Press.

For reasons not known, Bankole Awoonor Renner decided to go to study abroad. According to his own information, he wanted to study journalism: first in Europe and thereafter in the USA. In 1921 he obtained a passport for going to the USA, where he went via Southampton in the following year. There, he attended Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, thereafter he continued his studies at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pennsylvania in 1924. Between 1922 and 1924 he was the secretary of the African Students’ Union of America and wrote for the NAACP-journal *The Crisis*. The NAACP or the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People had been founded in 1909 by a group of black and white civil rights activists. Its most influential member was W.E.B. DuBois (1868–1963), who had established himself as a militant black critic of Booker T. Washington. DuBois had emerged as a leading forerunner and exponent of Pan-Africanism by the mid-1920s. He was the organizer of a series of Pan-African Congresses during that decade and was the editor of *The Crisis*. He had links with...

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27 Several decades later, the Governor of the Gold Coast recalled that “It was rumoured at the time that he financed his trip by stealing money from his father, and from what we know of him, this is thought not to be unlikely.” (TNA KV2/1840, Bankole Awoonor Renner, personal file I, letter from the Governor of the Gold Coast to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22.11.1942.) Perhaps the young Bankole had had a quarrel with his father and decided to go abroad? Perhaps the quarrel was about his future career, as hinted by J.B. Danquah: “According to custom Gold Coast sons of promise, especially if they are sons of lawyers, usually leave their country for abroad to study law or medicine – the ‘professions,’ later they become journalists and leaders. Bankole Awoonor-Renner did just the opposite. He left first to study journalism, a vocation which in the Gold Coast is hardly accounted one of the professions.” (Danquah’s emphasize; J.B. Danquah, “Bibliographical note,” in: Bankole Awoonor-Renner, *This Africa*, London: Central Books 1943,7-13, quote from p. 8.)
28 “Author’s word,” in: Awoonor-Renner 1943, 17.
29 As indicated in his poem 'The Majestic – the Sea and Me', in: Awoonor-Renner 1943, 55.
30 The Hayford family, among other West African elite families, seems to have had good links with the Tuskegee Institute and Booker T. Washington. Mark C. Hayford attended Booker T. Washington’s International Conference on the Negro held at the Tuskegee Institute from 17 to 19 April 1912. J.E. Casely Hayford, too, had sent greetings to the 1912 Conference (Geiss, 1974, 219).
32 Danquah 1943, 11.
34 The first Pan-African Congress conveyed in Paris 1919, the second in London/Brussels/Paris 1921. Before the 1921 Congress DuBois had been in contact with Casely Hayford, but the latter could not attend the Congress (Geiss 1974, 240). The Third Congress med in London and Lisbon in 1923. This
West African intellectuals and published in his earlier journal, *The Horizon*\(^{35}\), texts by Mensah Sarbah and Casely Hayford.\(^{36}\) During the 1920s, DuBois and the NAACP were engaged in a bitter conflict with another Pan-Africanist, Marcus Garvey (1887–1940) and his Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). At that time DuBois also adopted strong socialist leanings, and was contacted by the Bolsheviks. They invited him to the Soviet Union which he visited in 1926.\(^{37}\)

Coming from a politically motivated family, it is much likely that Bankole Awoonor Renner also got into touch with the radical Garveyite movement, the UNIA.\(^{38}\) However, it is unlikely that his possible link to the Garveyite movement goes back to the Gold Coast as, according to Okonkwo, the Gold Coast intellectuals did not actively engage in the UNIA: compared to Sierra Leone and Nigeria, no branch of the organization was ever established in the Gold Coast.\(^{39}\) According to Wilson, there is evidence that the communists tried to infiltrate the movement in the USA during the mid-1920s and, although they failed to take over the organization, they were able to persuade a small group of African and Afro-American youths to leave the USA in 1925 to come to study in Moscow.\(^{40}\) McClellan, on the other hand, claims that Bankole Awoonor Renner came under the influence of the Communist Youth League.

\(^{35}\) The *Horizon* was published between 1907 and 1909.
\(^{36}\) Geiss 1974, 215.
\(^{38}\) Marcus Garvey founded his organization, the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League or generally known as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in Jamaica. In 1916, Garvey went to New York where he, in 1917, founded a branch of the UNIA in Harlem. Following a schism in the reorganization in December 1917, the New York branch was reorganized in January 1918 and Garvey took over its presidency. In the same month the journal of the UNIA, the *Negro World*, was launched. In 1919 the Black Star Line started, although the shipline turned out to be an economic failure. Garvey’s other organizations were similar economic flops. However, Garvey’s success and the impact of his movement were not economic but psychological and political. Proclaiming himself as ‘Provisional President of Africa’, he became a conspicuous figure who organized mass rallies and set petitions to the League of Nations on behalf the ‘Negro Race’. During the heydays of Garvey’s and the UNIA’s political activism during the early 1920s, the UNIA was the key Panafriicanist movement aiming at the liberation of Africa. However, his mission to Monrovia in 1924 ended in a fiasco and in 1925 Afro-American intellectuals, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, launched a campaign against him, accusing him of irregularly issuing Black Star Line shares through the mail. Garvey was arrested, freed on bail, but on 2 February 1925 sentenced to several years’ imprisonment. With its leader imprisoned, the UNIA started to crumble and when Garvey was expelled from the USA in 1927, the activities of the UNIA were but a shadow of its former days. See further Geiss 1974, 263-272.
\(^{40}\) Wilson 1974, 146-147.
in Pittsburgh which arranged for him to continue his studies in Moscow, whereas Roberts argues that he attended, in 1925, the first meeting of the Comintern-inspired American Negro Labor Congress (ANLC) and was thereafter sent to Moscow. Interestingly, neither Awoonor Renner himself nor Danquah do not touch upon the question for his move to Moscow.

It is possible that Awoonor Renner came under the influences of the American communists while he was studying at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1924 the Fifth Comintern Congress had started to emphasize the need to improve the cohesion of communist activities internationally. One of the outcomes was the establishment of the Negro Propaganda Commission and the attempt to call together a Negro Congress. The Workers Party of America (WPA) was urged to increase recruitment among black workers and to form its own organization, the future ANLC. One key activist was Afro-American Lovett Fort-Whiteman (1895–1939), who used the alias James Jackson while residing in Moscow during the 1920s. Fort-Whiteman himself was a Tuskegee graduate but had joined the WPA and was sent to be educated at the University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow in 1924. While in Moscow, he wrote proposals and memoranda for future work among Black workers and the ‘Negro Question’, including an outline for the ANLC. After his return from Moscow in (early) 1925, Fort-Whiteman headed the Provisional Committee for Organizing (the) American Negro Labor Congress. Sometimes during the summer of 1925 he arranged for Bankole Awoonor-Renner together with nine Black students to be sent to the KUTV.

Bankole Awoonor Renner, who had renewed his passport in Philadelphia in 1923, went to Montreal in 1925 where he obtained a visa for Germany and thereafter left the continent. Thus, at least Roberts claim has to be refuted at once. The first

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41 McClellan 1993, 371-390, 373.
43 According to Danquah, Awoonor Renner had been admitted into the Institute of Journalists of Great Britain (Danquah 1943, 11). Evidently, he never went to study at the Institute in 1925.
44 The name of the WPA was changed in 1925 to Workers (Communist) Party of America. In 1929 a new name was adopted: Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA).
47 TNA KV2/1840, Bankole Awoonor Renner, personal file I.
meeting of the ANLC was in Chicago in October 1925\(^{48}\): at this time Bankole Awoonor Renner and the other Black students were already in Moscow.\(^{49}\)

**III. The Moscow years (1925-1928)**

Bankole Awoonor Renner arrived in Moscow via Berlin during the summer of 1925. It seems as if he and the others in his group, four other Blacks, namely the Jamaican Aubrey C. Bailey (alias: “Jean Dessolin”), the Afro-American Carl Jones (alias: “Dzhons”) and the Africans Holle Sella Tambo (alias: “Nelson”) and Sonya Kroll,\(^{50}\) first were taken care of by John Pepper\(^{51}\), who represented the Workers (Communist) Party of America at the Comintern in Moscow. In a letter, dated 30.7.1925, Pepper introduced them to the KUTV (University of the Toilers of the East):

> Werte Genossen,
> Beiliegend übersenden wir Ihnen einen Briefwechsel dreier Studenten (Jean Dessalines, Jones und Kweka Awuna Bankole), die von der Workers (Communist) Party an die Ostuniversität delegiert wurden mit dem [,]K. der Workers (Communist) Party of America, die bei ihrer Überführung in die W.K.P.(B.) nur als Kandidaten aufgenommen wurden. Es wurde ihnen mitgeteilt, dass dieses auf Anordnung der Workers (Communist) Party of America geschehen ist. Der Generalsekretär der Workers (C) [sic] Party of America, Genosse Ruthenberg, teilt mit, dass die W.P.A. keinerlei derartiger Anordnungen gegeben hat und ersucht, die Aufnahme der drei genannten Genossen in die W.K.P. (B) als vollständige Mitglieder durchzuführen, wenn die Statuten der W.K.P. (B) dies gestatten. Seitens der Kommunistischen Partei Amerikas werden gegen die Überführung in die W.K.P.(B) keine Bedenken erhoben.
> Wir bitten, die Angelegenheit noch einmal zu prüfen und wenn moeglich, die Aufnahme in die W.K.P. durchzuführen. Das Z.K. der Workers (Communist) Party of America, wuenscht auch von der Erledigung der Angelegenheit in Kenntnis gesetzt zu werden.

\(^{48}\) Wilson 1974, 145.


\(^{50}\) McClellan 1993, 373 fn. 7.

Mit kommunistischem Gruss, Pepper, Vertreter der Workers (Communist) Party of America

Pepper’s letter reveals some interesting points. It seems as if the status of the Blacks was unclear. They had been introduced to Pepper as candidates of the W.K.P. (B) and had been told that this was due to an arrangement ordered by the Communist Party of the USA (CPUSA), i.e., the Workers (Communist) Party of America. After inquiries back in the States, Pepper was informed by Charles E. Ruthenberg (1882–1927), the Secretary of the CPUSA, that this had not been the case. Instead, Ruthenberg argued in favour of enlisting Bailey, Jones and ‘Kweka Awuna Bankole’ as full members of the W.K.P. (B). Strangely, in Bankole Awoonor Renner’s personal file one finds an entry in a chart stating that he was a member of the CPUSA in 1925. Unfortunately, no further correspondence about the matter has so far been found in Moscow.

Awoonor Renner’s unclear party position was no hindrance for him to start at the KUTV where he registered in November 1925. He and the four other were among the first Blacks to enrol at the KUTV after Fort-Whiteman/James Jackson. This institution had been founded in 1921 under the aegis of Stalin’s Commissariat for Nationality Affairs (Narkomnats) to train cadres for the eastern borderlands. During its first years, the KUTV admitted East and South Asians, Arabs, Jews, and Turks and others from the Middle East. However, admission policies were soon changed, and South African whites were admitted already in 1922. Further changes occurred after the liquidation of Narkomnats and the transfer of the KUTV under Comintern jurisdiction in July 1923. As a consequence of this change, the institution began the recruitment of Africans and black Americans.

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53 Ruthenberg was among the founding members of the Communist Party of America in 1919, and was elected as its national secretary. Since 1920 he had used the name David Damon, and was elected under that name as an alternate member of the ECCI in 1924 (full member and alternate member of the ECCI Presidium in 1925). Another of his aliases was Sanborn. In November 1926 he became a full member of the ECCI Presidium. He died in 1927 during an operation in Chicago, his ashes were placed in the Kremlin wall. See further Branko Lazitch in collaboration with Milorad M. Drachkovitch, Biographical Dictionary of the Comintern, New, Revised, and Expanded Edition, Stanford, Cal.: The Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University 1986, 409-410.
54 WKP (B) = RCP (B) = Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), changed in 1925 to All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (VKPB) ? Or Workers Kommunist =Communist Party = CPUSA?
56 McClellan 1993, 372-373. A recent evaluation on the operation and curricula of the KUTV and the African students is provided by I. Filatova, “Indoctrination or scholarship? Education of Africans at the
III.1. The Zinoviev incidence (1926)

Bankole Awoonor Renner’s position as a conscious anti-colonialist and anti-racist was to cause some embarrassment in Moscow. The most well-known incidence occurred in April 1926 when the then chairman of the Comintern, Grigori Zinoviev (1883–1936)\(^{57}\), gave a lecture at the KUTV on Soviet foreign policy. During the public question period after the lecture, Awoonor Renner asked Zinoviev to specify the Comintern’s policy towards Africa, a matter which he, according to Awoonor Renner, had not touched upon. Zinoviev did not reply. A few weeks later Awoonor Renner sent Zinoviev the following letter:

Dear Comrade,

Pardon me for the liberty I have taken in writing to you. I am an African Journalist from British West Africa a party member and at present studying in this country. About a month and a fortnight ago I heard the speech You gave at the KUTV club and among the questions asked after the speech by some of the students I also asked You the following: - “What is the Comintern’s attitude towards the oppressed natives of Africa and why you did not mention anything about these most oppressed peoples in your speech although you only mentioned Morocco and Egypt?” To this you replied that you had no sufficient information in hand at that time.

Being desirous to know for the benefit of future enlightenment of my people, will you kindly permit me to again ask this question?

Further might I pray you to grant me an interview with You at Your convenience for the purpose of discussing series of African questions – particularly conditions in British West Africa.

May this request meet with your kind approval.

With communist greetings, Yours fraternally Kweku Bankole.\(^{58}\)

Zinoviev most certainly received the letter – it was translated into Russian by the Comintern secretariat – but, again, did not reply. It is much likely that, as McClellan argues, Zinoviev never corresponded with students and that he had more pressing

\(^{57}\) Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986, 528-530.

\(^{58}\) RGASPI 532/1/27 KUTV papers (miscellaneous letters), fol. 10fp+bp-11fp+bp letter from Kweku Bankole to Comrade G. Zinoviev, handwritten original, written on Carnegie Institute of Technology stationery, dated Eastern University, 3 Strasnoya Ploshad, Moscow, May 31, 1926
worries in 1926: in July he lost his seat in the Politburo and by the end of the year he was removed as chairman of the Comintern.  

## III.2. Visioning political activity in West Africa (1927)

Bankole Awoonor-Renner’s political consciousness gained momentum while he was studying at the KUTV. Perhaps assigned by his teachers, he concentrated on collecting material on the colonial situation in West Africa. This research resulted in a lengthy study, Report on West Africa, which he presented in April 1927. The study is a remarkable one as it presents a vision for future political activity in West Africa and outlines Awoonor-Renner’s strategic plans about whom to engage in anti-colonial activities. In addition, the study is an early example of an (critical) analysis of the colonial order and colonial economy produced by an African.

The first part of the report presents an analysis of the colonial situation, focussing on British West Africa. Awoonor-Renner highlighted the fact that British West Africa was holds a second place after India in supplying the manufacturing centres of England with raw materials. Referring to British investigations about the economic potentials of the Gold Coast, who claimed that the colony had ample but still undeveloped mineral and other resources, such as gold, diamond, cocoa, manganese, ivory, palm oil, palm kernels, hide, rubber, kola, groundnuts, timber and cotton, he warned: “British and even the American capitalists to cast keen eyes upon this country with ‘greater and brighter future’ as a spot for exploitation.”

However, although – from a colonial capitalist perspective – the future of the Gold Coast and other British West African colonies had the potential to become a major exporter of natural resources, Awoonor-Renner rightly noted that West Africa is an agricultural country. Colonial economic development was in its infancy and except the gold, diamond, tin and manganese mining industries there were no large factories but one, a soap factory in Nigeria. Further, the economic structure was biased: All industries were owned by European capitalists with head offices in London, Awoonor-Renner argued.

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59 McClellan 1993, 373-374.
60 RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 9-22, (handwritten) Report on West Africa, signed Kweku Bankole, dated Moscow 4 April 1927.
One consequence of the underdeveloped colonial economies was that there existed very little trade union and political activity. The African working class was in its infancy and only a rudimentary political consciousness had so far emerged. Awoonor-Renner’s analysis was critical:

Trade Unions in West Africa are decentralized and premitive [sic], and have no political programme, only immediate demands – such as increase of wages, etc, and when these demands are not fulfilled they go on strike, hence the strike of 800 railway workers of Sierra Leone in September 1926. Through the import of finance capital industries as thee imperialists allow into the colonies are increasing and will in future increase much faster which will determine the steady growing of the working class. Firestone & Co’s rubber project in Liberia will be one of the factors. 63

According to Awoonor-Renner, both the African working class and the African farmers were heavily felt the negative effects of the colonial economy, resulting in their structural exploitation not only by the European capitalists but also by some ‘semi-African’ capitalists:

Owing to lack of sufficient material at present it is difficult to state the conditions of the West African worker in details, but suffice it to say that he suffers the self-same indignation and brutal exploitation as comrades in other colonies – India and black South Africa. The circumstances under which he labours are too dreadful for description. He receives for his labour less than 1/- per day with the additional reward of horrible sanitary conditions and unlimited length of working hours. With the peasant there is a sort of different situation, he cultivates his little plot of land owned by him and his family, sells his produce to either the middleman – an African or to an agent of a combine firms for little or no profit. The middleman in turn sells the produce for no encouraging profit to a European capitalist or some semi African capitalist. Of course, this does not hold true with all the peasants for the poor or plotless [sic] peasants are in most instance force economically to work on the farms of some planters or in the mining areas. 64

Thus, although not all African farmers might directly feel the negative effects of the colonial system and be exploited through the colonial economy, Awoonor-Renner’s analysis seems to claim that a growing politicization among the Africans was to be expected in the future. The question was only what direction political agitation would take. The second part of the report therefore presented an analysis of political activism

64 RGASPI 495/64/166, Report on West Africa, fol. 15-16.
in British West Africa, in fact, it can be identified as a kind of blue-print for future actions. But was one to focus on aspiring trade unionism, such as the striking workers in Sierra Leone, or the politically motivated African middle-class?

Awoonor-Renner presented an overview of the background and aspirations of the Gold Coast Aborigines Right Protection Society (ARPS) and National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), both organizations which he must have been very familiar with as his father was linked to both of them. In the Report, Awoonor-Renner presented both the ARPS and the NCBWA as nationalist movements of the African middle-class ‘intelligentsia’. Although the NCBWA had so far failed in their demands for self-government, Awoonor-Renner noted that the NCBWA at the moment held considerable influence in West African politics. He further noted that the NCBWA had been invited to participate in the Anti-Colonial Congress which was held in February 1927 in Brussels, but due to financial and time constraints had been unable to send a delegation to the congress. Although Awoonor-Renner had some sympathies with the African nationalists, his conclusions were negative as whether the NCBWA could be used as a vehicle for the politicization of the Africans:

The National Congress is essentially a bourgeois movement. It therefore cannot successfully carry through a real revolutionary demands. Nevertheless, this movement could be used for the time being.

Even worse, the African middle-class was hardly a very radical one. In fact, Awoonor-Renner seems to claim that Moscow had little to hope from an engagement with them as their interest is nationalistic, not radical and class conscious:

(T)here are growing native bourgeoisie and feudal lords some of whom have insignificant financial interests in the various mining and other commercial interprices [sic]. Also petty bourgeoisie as doctors, lawyers, journalists[,] the clergy, store keepers, clerks and traders.

Awoonor-Renner’s option – to use the NCBWA for the time being – was symptomatic and not surprising from a communist perspective. By infiltrating in the movement and tying it to the anti-imperialistic front, the organization and its network could be used for tactical purposes as the NCBWA was an existing political platform.

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65 The 1927 Colonial Congress in Brussels will be discussed further below!
66 RGASPI 495/64/166, Report on West Africa, fol. 17-19, quote from fol. 19.
67 RGASPI 495/64/166, Report on West Africa, fol. 15.
though which one could organize ones own, radical, network and agitation. Whether or not the NCBWA eventually should be hijacked by the radicals and turned into a ‘workers mass movement/party’, Awoonor-Renner did not discuss. In any case, Awoonor-Renner proposed to establish a ‘tactical alliance’ with the African politically conscious middle-class.

However, Awoonor-Renner’s strategic vision was not the alliance with the African intelligentsia but – surprisingly – the full engagement with the African Muslim population! Awoonor-Renner’s grand plan was the politicization of the Muslims and to tie them to the communist/radical movement. Already in the beginning of his report, he argued that the overwhelming majority of the population in West Africa were Muslims, a fact which seems to have been forgotten in Moscow. According to him, real resistance against the colonial order was found among the Muslim population:

Among the Mahomedans [sic] there is feeling of hatred for foreign domination – this particularly is true of the Mallams of Negeria [sic] who because of this refused to have their children to be educated in Government Educational Institutions.

The West African intelligentsia had few, if any contacts with the Muslims and their leadership, partly because of their own Christian-Western background, partly because the colonial authorities did their utmost to prevent such contacts. Consequently, if there was to emerge a radical mass-movement among Africans, one should concentrate on the Muslim segment. Awoonor-Renner ended his report by outlining his strategic vision:

The Mahomedon [sic] detest of foreign domination, the growing discontentment of the native bourgeoisie together with the workers and peasants forcast [sic] a bright prospective of a militant national movement which will embrace the whole of Western Africa with a Bolshivik [sic] Party as its vanguard.

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68 RGASPI 495/64/166, Report on West Africa, fol. 10. The report opens with the following sentences: “West Africa lies on the Atlantic Ocean boarded by the Gulf of Guinea. It consists of four scattered colonies, namely Gold Coast including its dependencies – Ashanti and Northern Territories, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria with a population approximating 25 Millions of which almost 20 millions are Mohammedans, the remaining being pagans and christians [sic]. The greater fraction of the Moslems are inhabited in Nigeria a country with an area twice as large as that of Great Britain.”


70 RGASPI 495/64/166; Report on West Africa, fol. 19.

71 RGASPI 495/64/166; Report on West Africa, fol. 21-22.
However, at the moment neither Awoonor-Renner nor Moscow had any links with West African Muslims. Therefore, an interim strategy had to be developed. In his report, Awoonor-Renner already suggested the ‘tactical alliance’ with the West African intelligentsia and to back their nationalist aspirations. But this was not enough. Awoonor-Renner urged that political agitation had to be started among African immigrants in Europe, especially the African working class and seamen in England. Further, to his own surprise, after he had finished his report, he received statistical data on the labour force of African and European workers in the mining industry Gold Coast: 13,227 African and 266 European workers! For Awoonor-Renner, who himself was of middle-class background and presumably had had little personal experience of the conditions, even existence, of the African working class in the Gold Coast this gave momentum for his claim that the party should do its utmost to reach the proletariat, not the middle-class, in West Africa.

In retrospect, Awoonor-Renner’s report served as a kind of (unconscious) guiding line for him. When he returned to the Gold Coast, he first tried to establish a ‘tactical alliance’ with the nationalist intelligentsia, but soon formed a radical platform together with I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson, the West African Youth League. During the 1940s he established contacts with the Muslim leadership in the Gold Coast and became active in the Gold Coast Muslim Association. However, as will be outlined in part 2 of my study, central to his activities were his radical motives: he was to serve the movement and party as its vanguard.

Political activity was not to be limited to the Gold Coast or its coastal nationalist segment. Probably at the end of his term in the KUTV, Bankole Awoonor Renner contacted the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. His inquiry concerned, he explained, whether or not it was possible to obtain material in Hausa and Fanti and “other African ethnology”. A copy of the postcard was sent by the British Intelligence to the Governor in Accra, asking for information. In their reply, the British authorities in Accra identified ‘Kweku Bankole’ as being Bankole Awoonor-Renner and issued a warning: “(H)e may be contemplating the issue in West Africa of Soviet propaganda in Hausa and Fanti.” Back in London, however, a

72 RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 5 (handwritten, no signature but same handwriting as Kweku Bankole) Supplement to the Theses on West Africa (no date).
73 RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 6 (handwritten, no signature but same handwriting as Kweku Bankole) According to “West Africa” No 531 April 2, 1927 (no date).
person named ‘Kweku Bankole’ was not known and it seems that the issue was shelved for the time being.\textsuperscript{74}

Awoonor-Renner’s 1927 report did not remain a dead letter. In the same file as his report one finds a type-written strategic plan about future activities in Africa. The document contains of three pages type-written in English. Unfortunately, the document has no author and no dating. A source-critic analysis of the document reveals that it was written after Awoonor-Renner’s report, the first page had two hand-written dates, 4.VII.27 and 5.VII.27. In addition, someone has added “Bankoli” on top of the first document. The two other pages are stamped ‘1714 19.1.1928’. It is most certain that the document was circulated in the ECCI and up for discussion. As Awoonor-Renner’s name was added it could either mean that he was the original author of the plan or that he was (to be) nominated by the ECCI for a mission. However, an analysis of the documents reveals that it is not likely that Awoonor-Renner was the author as the plan although echoes the ideas and considerations he had put forward in his report.

The first page of the document is headed ‘African Bureau’ and contains the outline and task for such an institution to be established:

1. For the purpose of studying the economical, political and social conditions of the Continent of Africa.
   a. The systematic study of the economic relations between the semi-colonial and colonial countries of Africa and the Imperialist countries of Europe – particularly Great Britain and France.
   b. The growing Trade Union movements.
   c. Nationalist Movements.
   d. Colonial politics.
   e. African languages.
   f. As the centre of the present world conflict will, undoubtedly, manifest itself in Africa, after Asia the study of future tactics is salient.
   g. The potential part that the oppressed colonial peoples of Africa are destined to play in the world revolution, must be placed before the class-conscious workers of the world.
   h. There are some twenty thousand Africans and West Indians dock workers on the various ports of Great Britain. This working class element should be drawn into our party by the British Communist Party as in case of Indian workers in England. Nor must we forget the national revolutionary students from Africa who are to be found at present in England.

2. Racial Prejudices in the Colonies between blacks, coloured and white be investigated.\textsuperscript{75}

\textsuperscript{74} TNA KV2/1840, Bankole Awoonor Renner, personal file I, file M.S. 46492.
The content of this page indicate that the author was someone in the Comintern apparatus, perhaps even someone in the ECCI, whose responsibilities included the colonial question. The following two pages of the document, perhaps not even written at the same time as the first page as the future location of the African Bureau is discussed, present a strategic plan and an agenda of activities, including the organization of an All-African Conference in Africa:

II. Future task.
   a. All-African Conference (To be held in Africa).
   c. “Colonial World”. Monthly magazine (to be established in London). Aim: The economic and political position of the colonial and semi-colonial and races or nationalities economically placed under colonial status in the capitalist countries be treated fearlessly from the point of view of the revolutionary working class. To be non-party newspaper. Why non-Party? [handwritten: Explain…]

III. Questions before the All-Africa Conference.
   To be held in some part of Africa-Portuguese West Africa be considered. Conference non-Party miscellaneous.

AGENDA.
I. The economic and political position of the African masses with Imperial Europe.
II. The League of Nations and the oppressed masses of all colonial and semi-colonial Africa.
III. African masses and the Proletarian World. The right to form trade unions.
IV. What attitude the masses of Africa are to take on the coming of capitalist attack on the Soviet Union.
V. Encouragement of Internationalism between African and the other continents.
VI. The solutions of these problems.  

These pages, too, seem to have been produced by someone inside the Comintern, not Awoonor-Renner, who had no links with the Comintern or the ECCI. Both the ‘future tasks’ and the ‘agenda’ are written as suggestions rather than actual directives, perhaps the document was used as a proposition at one of the ECCI meetings. However, the content of all three pages is highly interesting as it can be both linked with Awoonor-Renner’s report and the growing interest of the Comintern in the

75 RGASPI 495/495/64/166, fol 23 (copy, typewritten) AFRICAN BUREAU (no date, no author).
76 495/64/166, fol 24-25 (typewritten, copy, no author; stamp: 1714 19.1.1928) [seems to be the continuation of fol 23].
colonial (African) question. As will be discussed further below, Awoonor-Renner was nominated by the Comintern in 1928 to realize the plan in West Africa.

III.3. Political and military training (1927)

After his study at the KUTV for more than one year, Comintern authorities decided that he was ready for the next step in his education to become a full-fledged revolutionary, namely political and military training. As McClellan and Filatova have pointed out, both political and military training were part of the teaching curricula. The KUTV installed most of the Blacks who studied in Moscow between 1925 and 1938 in Section 9 of the Special Sector (or Sector “A”), assigning a few to the Scientific Research Institute for National and Colonial Problems (NIINKP). Some of them took classes at the International Lenin School (ILS, founded 1926). Courses included lectures in, among others, political economy, Leninism, historical materialism, party-building, military science, and current politics. Apart from teaching classes, the students were engaged in two months of practical work and fifteen days in party organizational work. Although it was never publicly acknowledged, the program of study included training in the principles and techniques of conspiratorial and underground political work. Hidden in the “military science” and “Leninism” parts of the official curriculum were instruction in, among others, underground work, small arms, guerrilla warfare, codes, rules of conduct under surveillance, arrest and interrogation.

It is much likely that Bankole Awoonor Renner did receive military training. It seems, however, that the Russian communists at first were somewhat hesitant in seconding him for military training. Already in March 1927, he sent an enthusiastically apply to the Comintern asking to be enlisted in the Chinese revolutionary army:

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77 According to Filatova, African and African American students were grouped together in a particular sector within the Special Sector which at different stages was called Section 9, Section 8, Section 1 and Section 5. Sometimes this section was also referred to as the ‘Negro Section’ or ‘Com. Zusmanovich’s Section’. Filatova 1999, 44.


79 McClellan 1993, 375-376; Filatova 1999, 47, 54-56.
Dear Comrades,

I have the utmost desire to enlist in the Peoples’ Revolutionary Army of China, as a volunteer for the present fight that is going on in that country. As a humble revolutionary I desire to extend my little quota to the emancipation movement of the oppressed Chinese masses from the imperialist yoke. I therefore ask the Eastern Section of the Comintern to consider this matter.

I am a West African student of the KUTV [spelled in Cyrillic letters] – Have been a member of the Workers (Communist) Party of America since April 1925 and at present Candidate (BKN [spelled in Cyrillic letters??]) Candidate Card No 103884.

With Communist greetings
Kweku Awuna Bankole (signed)

PS. I am forwarding a copy of this letter to the Central Committee (BKN [spelled in Cyrillic letters??] = KAB[?])

The reactions of Comintern and Bolshevik authorities are not known. A few months later, Awoonor-Renner made several attempts to call for a meeting with Comrade Petrov to discuss his plans with him, and in the end he wrote an appeal to Petrov:

Dear Comrade,
On several occasions I have tried to see you, but this has been a very difficult problem. For each time I come to the Comintern, Comrade Agapo informs me that you are either ill or she is coming down to see me, which she never did. It is a pity and sometimes discouraging when such obstacles are placed on a comrade’s way.

The only means therefore is to write to you. Kindly forgive me for the liberty I have taken in doing so.

Some few months back during my first interview with you, I expressed my utmost desire to enter the Commanders’ Academy of Red Army. Now that I am about to finish with the Eastern University, permit me to press this permit again for the consideration of the Eastern Section of the Comintern. As you told me to make the enquires, I was informed by the Secretary of Comrade Vorsheroff of the Army Headquarters that with your recommendation there will be no difficulty of my entering the Academy.

Awoonor-Renner must have been rather frustrated with the silence of the Bolshevik authorities. Perhaps Petrov’s hesitation to engage with Awoonor-Renner was due to

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80 RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 7-8, letter from Kweku Awuna Bankole to the Eastern Section of the Comintern, dated 3 Strasnoya Ploshad, Moscow, 3rd March 1927.
81 Petrov was the alias of Fedor Raskolnikov, who was working for the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI during the 1920s. Early in 1925, he was also a member of the newly established Negro Commission. See further Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986.
82 RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 3fp+bp, letter from Kweku Bankole to Comrade Petrov, dated Moscow May 22, 1927.
racialism? Some years later, racial problems were to make headlines in Russia. In 1930 when the Stalingrad party organization tried two men accused of assaulting a black from the British Caribbean. In 1932, Afro-American and African students complained about racialism and chauvinism in the Comintern schools which prompted the ECCI to appoint an investigative commission in 1932. Further, McClellan refers to several African students, who complained about racialist attitudes of ordinary Russians.  

Awoonor-Renner never directly complained about racial attitudes among the Bolsheviks, although reading between the lines it seems obvious that he, too, at times felt discriminated. However, when he approached Comrade Petrov with his letter in May 1927, other things were on his mind. He just recently had finished his Report on West Africa where he had outlined his vision for future action in West Africa. Military training was certainly part of this plan, but much more important was the plan to engage the Muslim population of West Africa in the anti-colonial agitation. It seems as he felt the need to get first hand experience with Bolshevik activities and cooperation with Muslim; this he could study and learn from by visiting Muslim areas in the Soviet Union. Therefore, he made the following suggestion to Petrov:

Further might I remind you, with reference to the proposition I made as to the necessity of my traveling to such Republics as Turkestan, Georgia and Asabajan [sic], in order to study first hand the relation existing between the Moslems of these Republics and our movement, i.e. How Mohammedanism embraces Sovietism. As conditions in these countries can be compared favorably with that of West Africa where there are over twenty millions Mohammedans including the French and Spanish territories.  

May I further say that Comrade Duncan, the representative of the American Com-Party also agrees with these vital propositions in there entirety.  

I forwarded to you some time ago through Comrade Vagner the report on British West African Nationalist Movement. I doubt not that you have by now seen this report.  

With Communist Greetings  
Kweku Bankole of British West Africa

It is possible that Awoonor-Renner was able to make his suggested trip in 1927. On the other hand, the issue of getting military training was dragged on. In a

84 RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 4fp+bp, letter from Kweku Bankole to Comrade Petrov, dated Moscow May 22, 1927.
letter, dated 16.6.1927, Edward Dunkan from the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI noted that the CPUSA was in favour of sending Awoonor Renner to military training. Thereafter, the plan was that he should be sent back to British West Africa where he was to work for the party. Awoonor Renner himself backed the idea enthusiastically and underlined in a letter to the American Section of the Comintern that the idea of gaining political and military training already had come into his mind when he was enlisted by the American communists to go to Moscow:

Regarding to my going to the army I desire to state the following facts:- It was in America that the idea of gaining political and military training which will enable me to work effectively for our movement in Africa first came into my mind. As soon as I arrived in Moscow I placed these views before the University commission and Com. Kuchimoff (?) who was then connected with the Eastern University. Com. Kuchimoff agreed with my views but said I should stay in KUTV for at least a year. Later on Com Kutchimoff sent me to Com Petrov of the Eastern Section of the Comintern to see about may going to the Crimea. My conversation with Com Petrov was on general condition of West Africa and my going to the Army [sic]. Com Petrov then suggested that I should enquire if it will be possible for me to get into the army. Also I should prepare theses on the West African National movement, which I did on my return from the Crimea. While in the Crimea Com Kuchimoff and I again discussed the question. He once more assured me of his consent and told me to remind him when we return to Moscow so as to take the matter up with the Comintern. I told him that according to Com Petrov’s suggestions I am to make enquiries from the military school as to how one could get it.

Following Petrov’s advice, he continued at the KUTV and perhaps started writing his thesis – the inquiry he sent to the SOAS might be in connection with writing an analysis of the 1920 founded National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA). However, as Awoonor Renner continues in his letter, he continued to press the Comintern officials about his military training:

Few months after our arrival in Moscow I reminded Com Kuchimoff. This unfortunately occurred at the time the American group was having some misunderstanding with the old administration of the school. However, Com Kuchimoff again sent me to the Comintern this time to a comrade whose name I do not at present remember. Com Sheilk[???] acted as the interpreter. I told the comrade of the inquiries I have made from the military school and that Com Petrov knows about the case. The comrade told me that it was too late to

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85 RGASPI 495/261/2642 Kweku Bankole – personal file, fol. 11.
86 RGASPI 495/261/2642 Kweku Bankole – personal file, fol. 13-14, letter from Kweku Bankole (signed) to the American Section of the Comintern, 18.6.1927.
make arrangement this year (February 1927) and that I should wait till Com Petrov who was then away returns.  

The inability of the apparatchiks to make up their mind must have frustrated him. However, finally there was news about a change in the attitude of the authorities. Awoonor Renner continued in his letter:

It was later rumored [sic] that Com Kumchimoff [sic] changed his mind about my going to the military, because he thought I was the leader of the group which made certain logical complaints against the old administration of the school, and wanted to re-educate me in KUTV.

I did not on my account apply to the military secretariat [sic] to be admitted to the academy I only sought information according to Com Petrov’s suggestion I made this fact known to the Secretariat – Com Volshiroff’s secretary. And he was kind and polite enough to give me the necessary information.

I did not under any circumstances made the enquiries without the knowledge of the Comintern. (signed Kweku Bankole)  

Whether or not Bankole Awoonor Renner actually received a military training is not known, although it is likely that he did. An indication of his engagement in the Chinese war theatre is his poem ‘The Entreat’, which was written in Mukden in 1927:

Desist! those gods to whom you unknowingly pray:
Throw your fate with the rising tide,
March! with Asia bleeding to freedom;
Sunnyland! to you I entreat.

At last the friend in need you’ve found
Stands he, the fighter of your foe, the worker bold,
Before China the hand you seek is thrown
Can the oppressed of Africa be forgotten?

Be as it may, it seems that he was back in Moscow by November 1927 and met a certain E.A. Richards (see below).
IV. The Münzenberg Connection

Anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism were to gain an increased momentum within communist organizations while Bankole Awoonor Renner was studying in Moscow. Inviting students from Africa and Asia to Moscow was one part of the concept; the other was the attempt to create a global network of the revolutionary masses. The central steering organization behind this plan was the Comintern (Third or Communist International, founded in 1919). However, as open communist agitation was forbidden or checked in most countries, an indirect approach which rested on the activation of front organizations was chosen. Front organizations, such as the League Against Imperialism (LAI), were founded as platforms with the aim to draw support from bourgeoisie radical and left-wing intellectuals, anti-imperialist and anti-colonial groups of any political nomination and pacifist groups. In other countries, especially in Britain and in France, the national (legal) communist parties were given the task to activate colonial subjects living in the mother country as well as to support the upsurge of communist cells in the colonies.

Although the colonial question was debated during the first congresses of the Comintern, most notably at the First Congress of Peoples of the East held in Baku in September 1920, not much had been achieved before the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922. At this gathering a resolution was adopted which dedicated the international communist movement to the task of promoting revolution among the world’s black population. Although the plight of the Africans in the colonies was acknowledged, their political readiness for revolution was unclear, especially as seen from the perspective of Moscow there was not much of an African working class – apart from South Africa, where a communist party had been founded as early as 1921. However, a totally different situation existed in the USA. Hence, the ‘Negro Question’ was, first and foremost, to concentrate on agitation among the Afro-American working class.

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91 This Congress was devoted primarily to the question of anti-colonial work in Asia and the Muslim world, although thoughts about staging Bolshevik activities in Africa were also discussed. See further Wilson 1974, 124-125.
92 In Egypt, too, a communist party was formed in 1921. However, the party was short-lived and was dissolved in 1924.
93 Wilson 1974, 127. It was at the Fourth Congress that representatives of the Afro-Americans, Claude McKay and Otto Huiswood, first participated in Comintern proceedings.
Further principles were outlined at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924. Both the French and the British Communist Party were criticized for taking a passive attitude on the colonial question. As an outcome of the congress, a renewed focus on anti-colonial activism and the ‘Negro Question’ was laid. One consequence of this policy was the establishment of the ‘Negro Propaganda Commission’. A double strategy soon developed. Whereas the Profintern or the Red International Labour Union (RILU, founded in 1921) was to concentrate on activating Negro workers in the USA and in Africa, the communist parties were given responsibility to put the colonial question on the national political agenda. Special interest was put on Negro sailors, who were to be drawn to communism through seamen’s clubs, such as those in Boudreaux and Hamburg. In the USA, communist agitation resulted in the establishment of the American Negro Labor Congress in 1925.

Whereas anti-colonial agitation and work among Africans was already part of the French Communist Party (PCF), little was achieved by the British Communist Party during the 1920s. The French communists had established close contact with the West African radical Lamine Senghor (1889–1927) and the Le Comité de Défense

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94 The most authoritative analysis of the Profintern is by Reiner Tosstorff, *Profintern: Die Rote Gewerkschaftsinternationale 1920-1937*, Paderborn: Schoenigh 2004. The RILU existed between 1921 and 1937. The foundation of the RILU was, in essence, a Soviet reaction to the re-foundation of the ‘reformist’ or Social Democratic International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU), which had its headquarters in Amsterdam. Whereas syndicalism had a major influence in the RILU during the early years, the movement became a firmly communist one after 1923-24 when syndicalism had either abandoned or joined the party. After 1924 the Profintern became merely the trade union-arm of the Comintern. From the mid-1920s, the RILU looked upon the colonial and ‘semi-colonial’ world as a new forum for world revolution, thereby extending its activities outside the European and North American context. In 1927, a ‘Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat’ was set up to co-ordinate policy. Attempts were also made to set up ‘red trade unions’ at the national level and specialists ‘sub-internationals’ for black workers (the International Trade Union Committee for Negro Workers or ITUCNW, 1930), stevedores (the International of Sea and Harbour Workers, 1930) and Latin America (the Latin American Federation, 1929). However, all of these efforts turned out to be but paper tigers. (Reiner Tosstorff, “‘Moscow’ or ‘Amsterdam’? The Red International of Labour Unions, 1920/21-1937,” *Communist History Network Newsletter* 8, July 2000).

95 Wilson 1974, 140, 145.


97 The International Colonial Bureau (ICB), which closely collaborated with the French Communist Party, was established in Paris in 1924. See further Mustafa Haikal, “Das Internationale Kolonialbüro der Komintern in Paris,” *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung/The International Newsletter of Communist Studies*, 1993, 126-130. According to Haikal, work of the ICB was concentrated to Paris only during the first years. Another organization was the Union Intercontinentale (Intercolonial Union) which had been formed in 1921. Concurrent with the union, the was the Comité d’Études Coloniales (Colonial Studies Committee), which existed between 1921 and 1924. See further Claude Liauzu, *Aux Origines des Tiers-Mondismes. Coloniséés et anticolonialistes en France 1919-1939*, Paris: L’Harmattan 1982 and Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Shadow of Shadows,” *positions* 11:1, 2003, 11-49.

98 For example, already in 1924 the British Communist Party was criticized by the ECCI for not actively championing the anti-colonial struggle in British territories. Similar critique was put forward at the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1925. See further Wilson 1974, 140.
de la Race Nègre (CDRN, founded in 1926) and organized colonial clubs in France.99 However, neither Paris nor London was to evolve as the centre for communist anti-colonial agitation. Instead, the axis Moscow-Berlin emerged as the focal point.

Weimar Germany turned out to be an ideal centre for future international communist agitation. Germany had lost its colonies as an outcome of the Versailles Treaty, but this decision was highly criticized by the still powerful and influential colonial lobby. In addition, Germany and especially Berlin had already during the war become a haven for anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist British and French colonial subjects. German communists, such as Willi Münzenberg (1889–1940), MP and Secretary General of the Internationale Arbeiterhilfe (IAH, also known as Workers International Relief/WIR)100, and foreign ones living in Germany, such as the Hungarian radical Lazlo Dobos alias Louis Gibarti101 and the Indian revolutionary Virendranath Chattophadyaya (1880–1937)102 – both men belonged to Münzenberg’s circle of aides and close associates – actively participated in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic work.103

Although the German Communist Party (KPD) had not been involved in direct anti-colonial agitation – the KPD was occupied in healing its wounds after several failed attempts to launch a revolution in Germany, most notably the failed uprising in

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100 Willi Münzenberg is one of the most controversial twentieth century German communists. Were as some authors portray him as one the most influential propaganda masters of the 1920s and 1930s (Helmut Graber, “Willi Munzenberg’s German Communist Propaganda Empire 1921-1933,” Journal of Modern History 38:3, 1966, 278-297), others see him as the vehicle of Moscow’s conspiratorial plans (Sean McMeekin). In East Germany (GDR) his name was deliberately erased from the communist memorial of key persons. See further Hermann Weber & Andreas Herbst Deutsche Kommunisten – Biographisches Handbuch 1918 bis 1945, Berlin, 2004, 521-523.
101 The following data for Gibarti is found in Gestapo-files in Berlin: "156. Dobos, Otto, Ladislaus, 26.4.95 Nikols geb., Deckname: „Gibarti“, Schriftsteller, St.A. Ungarn. Ist Generalsekretär der Liga gegen Imperialismus und bei der IAH tätig gewesen.“ (BArchB FBS 278/12611, Kaderfragen [Namensliste über in- u. ausländische Mitglieder der KP, Gestapo]).
103 Apart of the IAH, the following communist organizations had their headquarters or secretariats established in Berlin: the European Bureau the International Red Aid (IRA or MOFR), the European Bureau for the Red Sportsinternational, the Internationale See- und Hafenarbeiter (ISH), the Bureau of the Krestintern (Bauerninternationale), the Internationale Pressekorrespondenz (Inprekorr), the League against Imperialism (LAI) and the Europäische Antifaschistische Büro. On top of these organization was the Western European Bureau (WEB), which served as the watchdog of the ECCI and had also its headquarters in Berlin. See further Richard Gyptner, “Das Westeuropäische Büro der Kommunistischen Internationale (1928-1933), Erinnerungen an Georgi Dimitroff,” Beiträge zur Geschichte der deutschen Arbeiterbewegung. Herausgegeben vom Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus beim Zentralkomitee der Sozialistischen Einheitspartei Deutschlands, Berlin, 3/1963, 481-489.
Hamburg in October 1923 (the so-called German October 1923)\textsuperscript{104}, and was undergoing an internal reorganization during the mid-1920s – other communist organizations, such as the \textit{Internationale Arbeiterhilfe}, started to engage in the colonial question. The IAH was Willi Münzenberg’s central apparatus. Founded by Lenin and Münzenberg in 1921 as an international relief organization for the support of starving Russian workers,\textsuperscript{105} the tasks of the IAH were soon broadened by Münzenberg and the organization transformed itself into an international workers organization with branches and sections all over the world. Officially the IAH was not a party organization and not linked to any communist party.\textsuperscript{106} Instead, its aim was to rally workers, radicals and intellectuals regardless their political affiliation,\textsuperscript{107} although the dominant core was to consist of the ‘Communist Section’. Münzenberg himself, who served as the Secretary General of the IAH, was a communist: serving a MP for the KPD in the German Parliament and being a member of the presidium of the KPD. In addition, and most importantly, Münzenberg had excellent links to leading members of both the Bolsheviks and the Comintern apparatus in Moscow.\textsuperscript{108}

By 1925 Münzenberg in person and the IAH as an organization were already heavily engaged in the colonial question.\textsuperscript{109} Following French examples, the IAH as well as radical (usually communist) student groups organized campaigns against colonial atrocity in Syria and Morocco as well as imperialist agitation in China during 1925.\textsuperscript{110} It was at that time that Bankole Awoonor Renner stayed for a while in Berlin


\textsuperscript{105} Mezhrabpom. See further Willi Münzenberg, \textit{Brot und Maschinen für Sowjet-Russland: ein Jahr proletarischer Hilfsarbeit}, Berlin 1922.

\textsuperscript{106} A critical and objective analysis of the IAH is yet to be written. For an outline, see Gruber 1966, 284-285.


\textsuperscript{108} Münzenberg had been active in various socialist and anarchist organizations before WWI. In 1910 he went to Switzerland. Since 1915 he belonged to the inner circle of Lenin’s social life and became one of Lenin’s earliest non-Russian followers. Among his contacts were Zinoview, Bronski, Radek, Axelrod, Martov, Felix Kohn, Angelica Balabanoff and Henri Guilhaux. Other close contacts were established with Clara Zetkin. However, during the leadership struggle within the KPD during the late 1920s and early 1930s, Münzenberg supported the opposition around Heinz Neumann and Hermann Remmele against Ernst Thälmann and Walter Ulbricht. The right-wing group of the KPD around August Thalheimer and Heinrich Brandler also belonged to his enemies within the party. See further Gruber 1966.

\textsuperscript{109} This is evident from a letter from Münzenberg to Comrade Müller in Moscow, dated 26.1.1925, RGASPI 538/3/47, page 9-13.

on his way to Moscow in 1925. Whether or not Awoonor Renner met any of the aforementioned radicals during his stay is not known. However, as he by that time already moved within communist circles and their networks, it is likely that he must have met some German or foreign Comrades. The only information about his stay in Berlin concerns his arrangements to travel to Russia. The Soviet embassy in Berlin had not issued a visa for travelling to Moscow. Instead, according to his own testimony, he had been given several papers by the Russian embassy which enabled him to travel to the Soviet Union and through its various states, including Turkestan.¹¹¹

In the next year, the Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung or League Against Colonial Oppression (LACO) was formed, originally serving as a platform against German colonial revisionism. Just as the IAH, the LACO was officially portrayed as an independent, pacifist non-party organization directed by Louis Gibarti and Lucie Peters. The LACO soon established contacts with students from China, Indochina, Indonesia and the Arab countries which were living in Berlin, Paris and London. However, documentary evidence from the Comintern Archive in Moscow clearly demonstrates that the LACO was but another of Münzenberg’s, and indirectly the Comintern’s, undercover organizations.¹¹² In fact, by the end of 1926 German and British Intelligence, too, believed the LACO to be but an offspring of the IAH and regarded both the LACO and the IAH to be Comintern controlled organizations.¹¹³

By the mid-1920s Münzenberg had established a remarkable international network. His Berlin home at the address In den Zelten 9a¹¹⁴ had become an international meeting point for Comintern emissaries and other foreigners visiting Berlin. His guests were, among others, the Indian communists V. Chattophadyaya (who later became Münzenberg’s close ally and secretary of the LAI) and M.N. Roy, the secretary of the Kuomintang-bureau in Berlin Liao Hansin (he, too, was later

¹¹² See further Marjomaa CoWoPa, Petersson CoWoPa and Petersson’s forthcoming monograph on the LAI.
¹¹³ BArchB 1507/111/8, Reichskommissar – Analysis on subversive activities and movements in Germany, 1/11-1926; BArchB 1507/112/107, Reichskommissar – Analysis on subversive activities and movements in Germany, 1/11-1926; TNA CO 323/966/1, Letter from R. C. Lindsay at the British Embassy in Berlin to Sir Austen Chamberlain in London, 18/11-1926, and Report re LACO, 16.12.1926.
¹¹⁴ Officially, this was the address of Dr Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institut für Sexualwissenschaft. Münzenberg and his life companion Babette Gross rented a flat in the building. See further Babette Gross, Willi Münzenberg. Eine politische Biographie. Mit einem Vorwort von Arthur Koestler, Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt 1967, 201.
engaged by Münzenberg in the LAI) and the Vietnamese communist Ho Chi Ming. In
1927 Lamine Senghor visited Münzenberg’s home, and a few years later Garan

Münzenberg’s main occupation with the LACO in 1926 was to organize an
international anti-colonial conference. However, Münzenberg’s original idea was to
use the IAH as the organizer of the conference but this concept was rejected by the
ECCI, which put the LACO in charge for the preparations.\footnote{RGASPI 542/1/3, fol 15-17, letter from the ECCI Secretariat to Münzenberg, 6.7.1926.} Consequently, Gibarti
was put in charge of organizing the conference and for establishing contacts with
presumed anti-colonial circles, associations and persons world-wide. Making use of
his and Münzenberg’s LACO and IAH connections as well as with the help of the
French and British communist parties, the organizers were able to establish contacts
with ‘national-revolutionary’ organizations in China, India, Indonesia and Egypt.
They were also able to enlist prominent intellectuals for their cause, such as Albert
Einstein, Henri Barbusse and Manuel Ugarte.\footnote{As part of his various campaigns for the IAH, starting with the 1921 committee for Russian relief, Münzenberg had developed close contacts with leading German and international left-wing, pacifist and other bourgeois intellectuals and personalities on whose support he counted: Käthe Kollwitz, Albert Einstein, Alfons Goldschmidt, Georg Grosz, Anatole France, Herni Barbusse, George Bernhard Shaw, Martin Andersen-Nexö and Henriette Roland-Holst, to mention a few of them. In fact, as Gruber underlines, Münzenberg’s contacts comprised a virtual Who’s Who of Weimar German intellectuals and artists. See further Gruber 1966, 284, 288.} Eventually, as will be discussed
further in detail, Gibarti was even able to get in touch with leading West African
intellectuals, such as Casely Hayford, and to engage them for the idea. However, in
Moscow members of the ECCI were at first sceptical about Münzenberg’s idea of
organizing a conference at all. After changing its mind, the ECCI made it clear to
Münzenberg that the conference should not directly have communist ties:

While influencing and directing the entire work of the League, the Communist
Fraction should try to remain as much as possible in the background, so that
neither the League nor the Congress is too obviously identified with the
Communists.\footnote{RGASPI 542/1/3, fol 16, letter from the ECCI Secretariat to Münzenberg, 6.7.1926; also RGASPI 542/1/8, fol 72-73, Liga gegen koloniale Unterdrückung und antikolonialer Kongress in Brüssel (no date, no author).}
Another problem was to find a suitable place of venue for the conference: Moscow was at first in favour of Berlin, Münzenberg not. When the socialist Emile Vandervelde became foreign minister in Belgium, Münzenberg sent Gibarti to Brussels to sort out the possibilities for organizing the conference in Brussels. Despite British and French protests, the Belgium government agreed to LACO’s proposal. By the end of 1926 everything was set for the next stage.119

According to Gibarti and Münzenberg, the response they had received to their call was overwhelming and by the end of 1926 it looked as if the congress would turn out to be a truly global anti-colonial and anti-imperialist gathering.120 British Intelligence was at first sceptical about the claim that the LACO had been able to generate a world-wide support for the conference:

The League claims that it has established connections with various bodies in China, Japan, Persia, Arabia, Syria, Indo-China, India, Indonesia, Egypt and the Sudan, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, French West Africa, Madagascar, Liberia, Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Rhodesia, French Somaliland, South Africa, the United States, Mexico, Cuba, the West Indian Islands, various countries of Central and South America and the Philippine Islands. The League may, however, have exaggerated the extent of its ramifications.121

The list was impressive, but even more of a success was the actual conference. Although in the only a handful representatives of the ‘colonial and oppressed people’ were able to travel to Brussels, in Münzenberg’s opinion the 1927 anti-colonial conference marked a turning point. The aim of the conference had been to establish an effective liaison between socialist organizations and national liberation movements. The actual congress took place in Palais Egmont in Brussels between the 10th and the 15th of February 1927. A total of 174 delegates attended, representing 134 organizations and 37 countries; 104 of the delegates came from Africa, Asia and Latin America, whereas 70 came from Europe and North America (among others, including a delegation from the UNIA and the NAACP).122 Münzenberg had succeeded in

120 For example, RGASPI 542/1/7, fol. 2, letter from Münzenberg to Sekretariat der Komintern, 3.1.1927.
121 TNA CO 323/966/1, report re LACO, 16.12.1926.
122 Figures given by Münzenberg in his speech, RGASPI 542/1/102 fol.37-49, manuscript of speech by Münzenberg, February 1927. In a letter to Moscow by an unknown author (probably Gibarti or
gathering leading left-wing bourgeois and socialist (but not communist) intellectuals
and politicians as well as leaders of nationalist and anti-colonial movements,
including Mohammad Hatta from Indonesia, Jawaharlal Nehru from India and
Messali Hadj from Tunisia. Some thirty years later, the assembled leaders of the
Third World that met at the 1955 Bandung Conference would refer to the Brussels
Congress in February 1927 as their starting point and as the “First Bandung.”

If African representation in Brussels was meagre (see below), the British
dlegation – which was the largest one at the conference – included some interesting
individuals, who were to emerge as important persons in the network that was to
combine Africans in British West Africa, Berlin and Moscow. First, there was
Reginald Bridgeman (1884–1968), a retired Foreign Office official and the head of
the British delegation. He represented the British Section of the LACO, which had
been established in December 1926, thus having already close links to – at least –
Gibarti and, as will be seen, Münzenberg. Second, another LACO member was the
Indian MP S. Saklavala, a radical and socialist. Although he himself did not
participate in the Conference, he was nominated to the Presidium of the LAI. Other
high-ranking members were George Lansbury MP (Labour), James Maxton MP

Münzenberg) it was claimed that the congress had about 180 to 200 participants, RGASPI 542/1/9, fol

123 See further Willi Münzenberg, Das Flammenzeichen vom Palais Egmont (Berlin, 1927); also Rolf

124 Gross 1967, 203; Wilson 1974, 151. A critical assessment of the 1927 February Conference will be
presented by Fredrik Petersson in his forthcoming PhD thesis. The reference to the 1927 Brussels
Conference at the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung was made by President Sukarno in his
opening speech, “Let a New Asia and a New Africa be born,” http://www.pu.go.id/publik/asiain-
afican/Docs/PART%20I/Statement%20(3)/Let%20a%20New%20Asia%20and%20a%20New%20Afri
can%20born(2).pdf (19.4.2007).

125 See also Risto Marjomaa, The LACO and the LAI: Willi Münzenberg and Africa, CoWoPa 4/2005.

126 Bridgeman’s career in the diplomatic service took him eventually to Teheran in 1920, where his
pro-Russian sympathies resulted in his being pensioned off. Thereafter he was engaged in politics, first
as a member of the Labour Party. However, his membership in the LAI led to his becoming ineligible

127 There existed also an American, a Belgian and a French Section of the LACO (TNA CO 323/966/1,
Report on the activities of the “League against oppression in the colonies”, December 1926). British
Intelligence identified Saklatvala, Lansbury and Bridgeman as the key activists in the British Section
of the LACO (TNA CO 323/966/1, report re LACO, 16.12.1926).

128 Saklatvala was a London-based Indian CPGB member who was MP for Battersea in 1922 and again
from 1924 until 1929. He also seems to have developed an interest in African colonial question: as
early as 1921 he gave a speech at the Second Pan-African Congress in London (Geiss 1974, 244).
Saklatvala was touring India at the time of the 1927 February Conference (Sahri Saklatvala, The Fifth
Commandment: Biography of Shapurji Saklatvala, Chapter 24, http://www.maze-
in.com/saklatvala/index.htm [21.11.2006]).
(Independent Labour), Fenner Brockway MP, Ellen Wilkinson MP, John Beckett MP and the communist Harry Pollitt. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the Russian delegation or even the communist fraction – apart from Münzenberg – deliberately kept itself in the background, forming a ‘Small Bureau’ which in fact steered and controlled the congress from behind closed doors.

The Brussels congress served first and foremost to exchange information about conditions in various parts of the globe and to establish personal contacts. However, the most lasting effect of the 1927 February Brussels Conference was not in the adopted manifestos and resolutions, but in the organization founded to carry on the work of the conference. At the closure of the congress, the ‘Presidium’ of the congress (presumably, as Wilson argues, under Münzenberg’s direction), presented the participants with the proposal of establishing an organization which would continue with anti-colonial and anti-imperialist work that had begun in Brussels. The proposal was approved unanimously; the result was the formation of the League Against Imperialism and for Colonial Independence (LAI). Taking over the already existing structures and apparatus of the now defunct LACO, the LAI immediately had three national sections: a German (headed by Gibarti and Münzenberg), a British (headed by Bridgeman) and a French one. Other sections, such as those in the USA, in Japan and in Australia, were established during the next years. At first Münzenberg (and the Comintern) pondered about the question of where to establish the headquarters of the LAI, its International Secretariat. The first choice was Paris but due to political reasons this plan had soon to be abandoned and Berlin was chose as the site. Münzenberg, in his turn, was elected as the Secretary General of the LAI.

In Berlin, Chattopadhyaya soon replaced Münzenberg and Gibarti at the League’s International Secretariat to run the daily business, while the other two focussed on strengthening the organizational structures and international network of the organization during the rest of 1927. A meeting of the General Council of the LAI

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129 Members of the ‘Small Bureau’ were at least Münzenberg, the Englisch communist Arthur MacManus and the Japanese communist and Comintern representative Sen Katayama. RGASPI 542/1/7, fol. 131-132, Confidential letter from Sen Katayama to Comrade Petrof/Petrov [F. Raskolnikov] in Moscow 24/2-1927.
130 On the rapports delivered by Senghor, Bloncourt, Gumede and Moore, see further Geiss 1974, 326-329.
131 Sections were also established in Ireland, several Latin American countries, such as Mexico, Nicaragua, Argentina, Brazil and Cuba, and in South Africa. See further Kate O’Malley, “The League Against Imperialism: British, Irish and Indian connections,” Communist History Network Newsletter 14, Spring 2003, http://les.man.ac.uk/chnn/CHNN14LAI.html (7.11.2006).
132 On the LAI, see further Petersson (forthcoming).
was planned to take place during fall, but the organizers were (again) in troubles of finding a suitable place of venue for the conference. The first option was Amsterdam, but due to the agitations from the Social Democrats (Amsterdam was the seat of the Second, i.e., Socialist International) the plan had to be skipped. Equal problems arose when Paris was chosen. Eventually, the first meeting of the General Council had to be held again in Brussels, where it conveyed between the 9th and 12th of December 1927.

IV.1. Approaching Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi (1926-27)

Although Münzenberg (who at the 1927 February Brussels Congress represented the IAH) and Gibarti were able to organize a world-wide, if not the first global assembly, Africa and the ‘Negro question’ received only little attention. Africans themselves were little represented: the only Black Africans who were able to attend the Brussels Congress were the Senegalese Lamine Senghor, representing the CDRN, and two Black South Africans, J.T. Gumede of the African National Congress and J.A. La Guma, Secretary of the Non-European Trade Union Federation. In addition, there were several participants from North Africa as well as Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American delegates. Although Senghor lived in France, he and his organization represented French West Africa. However, despite the efforts in inviting representatives from the British African colonies, none of those who planned to attend was in the end able to make it to the congress.

Colonial travel restrictions were the main reason for the meagre African participation at the 1927 February Brussels Conference. Already in March 1926

133 A third South African participating at the congress was Daniel Colonne of the South African TUC.
134 The North Africans were Messali Hadj and Hadjali Abdelkader, representing the L’Étoile Nord-Africaine, Chadly Ben Mustapha from Tunisia, Ibrahim Youssef of the Egyptian National Radical Party and Mohammed Hafiz Ramadan Bey of the Egyptian National Party.
135 Carlos Deambrosis Martins, representing the Union Patriotique, came from Haiti. The Union Intercoloniale of the French Antilles was represented by Max Bloncourt, Elie Clainville-Bloncourt, Camille Saint-Jacques and Danae Narcisse.
136 Richard B. Moore represented both the American Negro Labor Congress and the UNIA! William Pickens represented the NAACP, while Roger Baldwin represented the League for Human Rights and Urban League
138 Ahmed Hassan Matar had been sent on a mission to West Africa and Brazil by the LACO and the IAH during spring 1926. The purpose of this mission was to rally for the planned congress. However, although he tried to enter all British West African colonies, the colonial authorities denied him to enter. Only in Dakar, he was able to leave the ship and establish contacts with local activists. From Dakar he left for Brazil, and by the end of 1926 he returned to Germany. See Martin 2005, 264.
Gibarti had received a list including contacts for about one hundred Negro organizations in Africa and the West Indies from the “Amerikanischen Negerkongress” (presumably the ANCL), but a similar list, which included the mailing address of Casely Hayford and S.R. Wood in the Gold Coast, did exist already in January 1925 and was included by Münzenberg in one of his letters to Moscow. By the end of 1926, Gibarti and the LACO (i.e., Münzenberg) had been able to establish contacts with an impressing list of African organizations and individuals who all expressed their interest in attending the conference. The Sudan government had been able to obtain a copy of a list of organizations and individuals who had been invited to attend the conference in Brussels; this list was immediately circulated to all British colonies in early January 1927. According to the list, the LACO had sent invitations to a range of African associations and individuals representing West Africa, Madagascar and Southern Africa, including the CDRN, M. Rolainmongou of the Ligue des Bras Croises (Madagascar), Hon. Hadj Sidi Affarile (Liberia), Hon. Casely Hayford, Mr. S.R. Wood and Korbine E. Sashie Esq. (all Gold Coast), Hon. Dr. Bankole Bright (Sierra Leone), the editor of the ‘Rhodesia Railway Review’, Mr. A. Benevilla (French Somaliland), Secretary General Andrews of the General Council of South African Trade Union Congress, Secretary General Kadalie of the (South African) Industrial and Commercial Workers Union, E.S. Sachs of the (South African) Workers International Relief, the South African Indian National Congress, and the editor of ‘imwo Zaboutsundu’. Among the West Africans referred to in the above list, Joseph E. Casely Hayford (1866–1930) was perhaps the most well-known. He was a Sekondi-based lawyer and journalist, a leading member of the Gold Coast ARPS and one of the founders of the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA). After the death

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139 RGASPI 542/1/5, fol 4-5, letter by Gibarti dated 23.3.1926.
141 TNA CO 323/966/1, (secret) circular letter from L.S. Amery to all governors, 7.1.1927, dispatch from War Office to Colonial Office, 24.11.1926 (includes list). The circular letter was sent to the following British colonies in Africa: Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Gambia, Tanganyika Territory, Northern Rhodesia, Nyasaland, Somaliland Protectorate, Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar. The intercepted list is the same as RGASPI 542/1/64, fol. 11-34.
142 Kobina Sekyi.
143 TNA CO 323/966/1, list included in dispatch from War Office to Colonial Office, 24.11.1926. Also RGASPI 542/1/64, fol. 68-69, 73
144 Casely Hayford had first studied at home, then in Fourah Bay College, Freetown, and finally in London where he was called to the Bar in 1896.
145 He was the publisher of his own paper, the Gold Coast Independent, and editor of another, the Gold Coast Leader.
of John Mensah Sarbah in 1910, Casely Hayford became the dominant personality in the ARPS. In 1912 he belonged to the Gold Coast delegation which on behalf of the ARPS gave evidence before the West African Lands Committee (WALC) in London. At this time he started to take an active interest in various Negro and pan-African movements and the demand for racial equality in the USA and London. While he was attending the WALC meeting in London, his brother, the Rev. Mark Hayford, was one of the delegates of the ARPS at the 1912 Pan-African Conference at Tuskegee. Casely Hayford himself was further to develop contacts with both Marcus Garvey and W.E.B Du Bois. His pan-African and anti-colonial ideas led him to advocate already in 1913 for a United West Africa. This ideological programme was to evolve as a corner-stone of the 1920 founded NCBWA.146

Although the NCBWA turned out to be a rather conservative body, the organization served as meeting place for many West African ‘modernized intellectuals’ (Geiss). Thus, the NCBWA-web linked activists from the Gold Coast, such as J.E. Casely Hayford, T. Hutton Mills, H. Van Hein, as well as from Nigeria (Chief Oluwa, J. Egerton Shyngle and Herbert Macaulay), Sierra Leone (Dr H.C. Bankole-Bight and F.W. Dove), and the Gambia (E.F. Small and H.M. Jones)147. As the NCBWA was opposed by older members of the ARPS as well as the highly influential chief Nana Sir Ofori Atta, Casely Hayford and his supporters launched a counter-attack and in 1922 they were able to depose the conservative wing of the ARPS148. From then on until 1927, the ARPS were in total control by Casely Hayford and his supporters.149

It is not known who suggested to Gibarti or Münzenberg to contact Casely Hayford about the planned anti-colonial congress. Perhaps it was one of Münzenberg’s contacts in England or though Gibarti’s contacts with the NAACP. Be as it may, sometimes in July or August 1926, Gibarti probably sent a letter to Casely

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147 All these men belonged to a deputation of the NCBWA which was sent to London in 1920. The NCBWA delegation ended in external failure: neither were they able to meet the Secretary of State for the Colonies (who refused to see them) nor did they win the sympathies of the local governors for their act. At the beginning of 1921 the delegation returned to Africa empty-handed. On the other hand, as Geiss underlines, the stay of several months in London by nine West African nationalists intensified British interest in West African nationalism, at least in left-wing circles. All of them gave lectures and held private as well as public discussions, which contributed to the politicization of the West African colony in London, especially the students. (Geiss 1974, 289).

148 Among Casely Hayford’s supporters were Kobina Sekyi and S.R. Wood, who were running the Axim branch of the ARPS and were also active in the Congress (Geiss 1974, 291).

149 Adu Boahen 133-134; Edsman 1979, 62-66.
Hayford inquiring about his interest in attending at the conference. However, Casely Hayford himself was never reached by this letter, instead his younger brother, Sydney S. Hayford, sent the following reply to Gibarti: “Casely Hayford not in the Gold Coast but at present in England, invitation to attend congress will be handed over to him when he returns.” In another letter, Sydney Hayford wrote: “We are in sympathy with your League, and shall therefore be very pleased to hear more of the activities of the League…” Gibarti, it seems, had a somewhat different reading of the correspondence with the Hayfords. The following letter was claimed to have been sent by – presumably Casely – Hayford to the editor of the LACO-journal *Der koloniale Freiheitskampf*:

Vom Westafrikanischen Negerkongress schreibt uns Herr Hayford aus Sekondi: Ich beeile mich Ihnen mitzuteilen, dass wir gewisse Schwierigkeiten mit der Sendung der Delegierten zum Kongress möglicherweise haben können und bitten Sie dringend um die Mitteilung des Zeitpunktes, wann der internationale Kongress zusammentritt.

British Intelligence, at least, came by December 1926 to the conclusion that Casely Hayford was about to develop a connection with the LACO – as soon as he was to return to West Africa.

However, it is not at all clear to what extend Casely Hayford was engaged with the LACO and its follower, the LAI. Certainly Sydney Hayford was interested in establishing such a contact, although according to the Governor of the Gold Coast, it was much likely that Casely Hayford might be interested in developing a contact with the LACO/LAI:

Sydney S. Hayford uses P.O.Box 18 Sekondi, which is rented by his brother Casely Hayford. He also uses ‘Anona Chambers’ as his address. This again is owned by his brother Casely Hayford. S.S. Hayford is at present doing a small business as a bookseller in Sekondi; he contributes articles to the ‘Gold Coast Leader’. He has often been used by Casely Hayford in political matters. He is

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150 This letter has yet to be located.
151 TNA CO 323/971/1, letter from S.S. Hayford to Gibarti, 26.8.1926.
152 TNA CO 323/971/1, letter from S.S. Hayford to Gibarti, 18.11.1926.
155 In fact, information provided by Gibarti that the NCBWA could consider nominating Casely Hayford to be their delegate at the February Conference indicates that Casely Hayford himself had not been in direct contact with Gibarti. See RGASPI 542/1/64, fol 73.
a member of the Gold Coast ARPS and goes out into the country districts in the interests of the Society. He is about 48 years of age.156

Although Casely Hayford did not attend the 1927 February Brussels Conference, Gibarti and Münzenberg anticipated engaging him in the LAI. Their next attempt was to invite him to the autumn meeting of the General Council of the LAI:

Unabhängig […] korrespondierten wir mit dem Mitglied des Westafrikanischen Negerkongresses in Axim und Sekundi, Goldküste, Caseley Hayford (nr. 21) Auch dieser Brief ist zusagend, obwohl die Schwierigkeiten einer Delegationen infolge der englischen Spionage ausserordentlich gross sind. [p. 214]157

However, despite the problems both in the Gold Coast as in Europe – the uncertainty of whether or not a delegation could be sent to the LAI meeting and the problems of Münzenberg to find a suitable place for the meeting as the Dutch and French authorities denied the LAI to organize its meeting in Amsterdam and Paris – the preparations in Berlin with the autumn meeting of the LAI went ahead. Casely Hayford [referred to as representing West Afrikanischer Negerkongress, i.e., the NCBWA; address: Annona Chambers, Secondee – sic], S.R. Wood [General Congress Secr., Axim], and Kobina Sekyi [Korbina F. Sashie Esqu., Cape Coast] were listed among African individuals and associations to be invited to attend the 1927 autumn congress. At least the NCBWA, in a reply to Münzenberg, informed that Casely Hayford, who was still in England at that time, could “unter Umständen” [i.e., “possibly, HW] be nominated as their representative and to attend the meeting.158

Another political activist in the Gold Coast that Münzenberg and the LAI tried to establish contacts with in 1927 was William Essuman Gwira Sekyi or Kobina

156 TNA CO 323/971/1, letter from the Governor of the Gold Coast to Hon. L.M.S. Amery, 18.3.1927.
157 RGASPI 542/1/8, fol 211-214, “Auf Veranlassung des Genossen M ü n z e n b e r g  geben wir nachstehen eine Darstellung des bisheringen Standes des Vorbereitungsarbeite bszw. der Korrepsondenz [sic] zur Herbeifürung eines internationalen Kongress gegen die imperialistische Kolonialpolitik.“ [211] (No other explanation, no date, no writer. Seems like an abstract of a longer text, but has no real conclusions).
158 RGASPI 542/1/64, fol. 68, List(s) of individuals and organizations to be invited/had to be financially supported to be able to attend the 1927 congress, do date, no author. There is strong support to assume that the list deals with the second meeting in Brussels in December 1927. For example, the President of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers Union, E.A. Richards, is said to have arrived in Moscow. According to Wilson (1974, 153), Richards – whose identity and actions will be considered further below – had been invited to the Soviet Union in the name of the LAI and toured Russia during fall 1927.

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Sekyi (1892–1956). As Casely Hayford, Sekyi was a successful Gold Coast barrister and a key figure in the Gold Coast ARPS. In addition, he had been a defender of the Garvey movement and a supporter of Pan-Africanism, although underlining in his pamphlet *The Parting of Ways* (ca. 1925) – contrary to Garvey – that political leadership in Africa must come from within Africa. Sekyi, as many other members of the ARPS, was also a member of the Gold Coast Farmers’ Association (GCFA). This organization had been formed in the early twentieths and was an attempt on the part of farmers and merchants to offset the power of the European cocoa-buying firms in the Colony by combining to deal directly with overseas manufacturer. What was not known by Münzenberg and the LAI was despite its ‘proletarian-sounding’ name the GCFA consisted of cocoa farm owners and local merchants, not farm labourers. It is likely that the name of the GCFA confused Münzenberg and the LAI secretariat in Berlin as they were keen in establishing contacts with an assumed labour organization. Be as it may, contact were established with the GCFA’s branch in Nsawam sometimes during spring or summer 1927 and the organization received an invitation to attend the first meeting of the General Council of the LAI, i.e., the Second Brussels Conference in December 1927. The Gold Coast Farmers Association replied to Münzenberg that they, too, “unter Umständen” [i.e., “possibly, HW] could send a delegation to the congress.

Neither Casely Hayford nor Kobina Sekyi ever attended the Second Brussels Conference. For reasons not yet known the contacts between the two Africans and the LAI were cut and neither of them nor the organizations they represented, the NCBWA

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161 Rohdie 1965, 390. The key figure behind the Gold Coast Farmers’ Association (GCFA) was John Ayew, a cocoa farmer from Mampong. He had made several attempts to organize farmers’ unions which would bypass the foreign firms by making collective shipments of cocoa direct to Europe. He was the organizer of the 1930 cocoa holdup (together with A.J. Ocansey) as well as that in 1937. See further Gareth Austin, “Capitalists and chiefs in the cocoa hold-ups in South Asante, 1927-1938,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, 1988, 63-95.

162 RGASPI 542/1/16, Report on the Activities of the League Against Imperialism in the different countries February to May 1927, p. 31: “The Gold Coast Farmer's Association, the Sierra Leone Railwaymen’s Union and the Mozambique Railwaymen’s Union are further important links in the chain of the organised Negro Labour trying to gain Africa.”

163 RGASPI 542/1/10, fol. 24-25, Münzenberg to Kuusinen, 15.9.1927.

164 RGASPI 542/1/64, List(s) of individuals and organizations to be invited/had to be financially supported to be able to attend the 1927 congress, do date, no author. But see fn. 38. Unfortunately, the actual correspondence between the GCFA and the LAI has so far not been located in the Comintern Archives.
and the ARPS, were ever mentioned in the LAI correspondence or in Münzenberg’s or Chattopadhyaya’s reports. The only organization from the Gold Coast that still seemed to have some contacts with the LAI in 1928 was the GCFA, which was classified by the LAI as a ‘sympathizing’ organization. However, by 1929 the GCFA also ceases to be listed in the LAI correspondence.

One reason for the break in communication between the Gold Coast intellectuals and organizations and the LAI can be found in local political developments in the Gold Coast. The big political issue on which Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi had been involved was the debate around the Native Administration Ordinance (NAO). The Ordinance was an attempt to regulate the chiefs’ jurisdiction and its relationship to British executive and judicial authority. When the Native Administration Bill was made public in February 1927 it sparked off an intensive debate. The main fault lines that emerged were between the traditional rulers, whose most influential member was Nana Sir Ofori Atta, and the ARPS intellectuals. Although both Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi at first opposed the government proposal, Casely Hayford had since the autumn of 1926 shown inclinations to compromise. After April 1927 he drifted closer to acceptance of the new constitution and eventually, in early 1929, arranged a public reconciliation with Nana Sir Ofori Atta and expressed his whole-hearted support for the Provincial Councils. Sekyi and the Cape Coast Branch of the ARPS as well as Kojo Thompson, on the other hand,

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165 RGASPI 542/1/26, fol. 100. LIGA GEGEN IMPERIALISMUS, Angeschlossene und sympathisierende Organisationen (list dated December 1928). In other lists, undated but circumstantial evidence points towards 1928 as the date for these other lists, the GCFA is referred to as „bereits kollektiv angeschlossen” (already collectively joined), RGASPI 542/1/26, fol 74 and 80.

166 According to the Bill, ‘native’ administration was to be largely the concern of the executive of the colonial government, with the judiciary excluded from practically everything except land disputes. The chiefs’ were to be given much of a free hand in their own affairs and British control of the chiefs’ administration was to be light. The governor was given powers to make final decisions, to confirm and to arbitrate, but not to make active investigations or to direct interfere with any proceedings. (Edsman 1979, 112-113.)

167 Already in December 1920 Nana Ofori Atta had collected some chiefs together and launched an attack on the NCBWA delegation in the Gold Coast Legislative Council on the grounds that the members of the delegation did not have valid rights of representation (Adu Boahen, 133).

168 A.W. Kojo Thompson (1880–1944) was a prominent figure in Accra politics in the 1920s and 1930s. He had been educated at various Methodist schools and had worked for some years as registrar and interpreter for colonial officials before he left government services in 1910 and was admitted to Lincoln’s Inn the following year. In 1914 he was called to the Bar. After returning to the Gold Coast, he became a member of the ARPS and worked as a lawyer first in Cape Coast before he established himself in Accra. During the NAO debate in 1927 he rose to speak against Ofori Atta in the Legislative Council. In 1928 he was involved in the Ga Mantse conflict, i.e., an attempt to destool the local chief in Accra. This conflict turned out to become something of a clash between two political classes, namely Kojo Thompson and the Mambii Party and the Accra Ratepayers’ Association (ARA). The ARA had been formed in June 1927 to stand in the upcoming Accra municipal elections and counted many old
continued their opposition to the Ordinance and the establishment of the Provincial Councils System. Before the internal differences within the ARPS could be sorted out the NAO was enacted. As a consequence, Casely Hayford left the ARPS and in late 1927 he returned to the Legislative Council and during 1928 he did his best to make the Western Provincial Council work. Sekyi and Thompson, on their part, drafted a petition against the NAO in 1928, carrying with it a fierce attack on Ofori Atta, but without any result. One could claim that one end effect of the political debate in the Gold Coast in 1927 and 1928 was that Casely Hayford cut his ties with radical international organizations or at least lost interest in them, whereas Kobina Sekyi perhaps distrusted the LAI as also had contacts with Casely Hayford. However, in Kobina Sekyi’s case, some years later he anew made contacts with the LAI, this time with Reginald Bridgeman (see below, Part 2).

Finally, an interpretation for the aborted attempt to enlist Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi could be as follows. When the LAI made their first contacts with them in 1926, both were engaged in their opposition to the NAO and the chiefs. In their case, they presumably regarded the LAI-connection as a possible arena to articulate their critique and possibly to enlist international support for their cause. However, due to the developments in the Gold Coast and the break between Casely Hayford and Kobina Sekyi, the LAI-connection became useless. One could even argue that the LAI was not even aware of the break as the LAI-people in Berlin still tried to enlist both parties to the meeting of the General Council the LAI in 1927.

IV.2. Meeting Mr. Richards (1927)

In 1927, the League Against Imperialism (LAI) was in contact with a certain E.A. Richards, who introduced himself as President of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers. Interestingly, E.A. Richards is said to be one of I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson’s (1894–1965) aliases, another being Wal(ter) Daniels. However, whether E.A. members of the NCBWA and were all faithful followers of Casely Hayford’s. The Ratepayers were challenged by Kojo Thompson and the Mambii Party, which consisted of ARPS members and supporters. The political struggle in Accra was to continue during the 1930s when, as will be discussed further below (Part III), Thompson was to be part of Bankole Awoonor Renner’s network (Edsman 1979, 114-116, 125). On Kojo Thompson’s political activity, see S.S. Quarcoopome, “The Politics and Nationalism of A.W. Kojo Thompson: 1924-1944,” Research Review, New Series, 7:1-2, 1991, 11-21. Edsman 134; Edsman 1979, 113, 116-122, 124. RGASPI 542/1/64. Spitzer and Denzer 1973
Richards in fact was Wallace-Johnson has puzzled historians.172 According to Wilson, Richards alias Wallace-Johnson was blacklisted by the British colonial government in Sierra Leone 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 Soviets and was invited to visit Russia in late 1927.173 However, it is highly questionable whether Richards/Wallace-Johnson ever attended the February Brussels Conference: neither of the names is listed among the participants of that conference. On the other hand, Richards was certainly invited to the meeting of the General Council, i.e., the Second Brussels Conference, in December 1927 (see below). 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 1930.174 As will be seen below, this assumption, too, is dubious.

According to sources found in the Comintern Archive there is little to support the claim that that Wallace-Johnson organized the 1926 strike in Sierra Leone or attended the 1930 Hamburg Conference. 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.”175 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.176

172 Spitzer and Denzer; Wilson, Kevin Shillington, Encyclopedia of African History Vol 3 (2005)
174 Spitzer and Denzer 1973, 419. Hooker (1967, 51), Wilson (1974, 243) and Bush (1999, 289 fn 90) also claim that Wallace-Johnson attended the 1930 Hamburg Conference. According to Kimble (1963, 549), Wallace-Johnson also participated at the Sixth World Congress of the CI in 1928 in Moscow, although he gives no references for this claim and it seems very unlikely that he did so.
175 RGASPI 534/7/74, 31-34, letter (original, typewritten, signed) by Wallace-Johnson to George Padmore, Lagos 7.1.1932 (this ref. to page 31).
176 Wallace-Johnson refers to an official letter he had written to Padmore in the capacity of General Secretary of the African Workers’ Union of Nigeria, dated Lagos, 17th December 1931. This letter deals with the sudden death of Frank Macaulay, the President of the Union, and Wallace-Johnson’s
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 a private 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 an article, “British Oppression in West Africa by a Correspondent”, published about one year earlier in the December 1931 issue of Padmore’s publication, The Negro Worker. This “correspondent” could have been no-one else than Wallace-Johnson as the life-story which starts the article is identical with his life-story in his 1932 letter to Padmore. However, it is much likely that Padmore, when he received the article in 1931, never had a clue about the identity of the anonymous correspondent.

British reports, on the other hand, make it totally clear that Richards had been the organizer of the 1926 strike. In a report by the Governor of Sierra Leone, A.R. Slater, E.A. Richards as well as one U.J. Cole are said to have been employees on the Sierra Leone Government Railway until February 1926. In January and February 1926, Richards had organized a wide spread strike of African employees which lasted for six weeks and, according to the Governor, was accompanied by serious acts of sabotage. Not surprisingly, the Governor had a very negative opinion about the aims of the strikers:

The strike never had the smallest justification and stern measures had to be taken to punish the strikers who sought to paralyse our only communications and intimidate Government.
Interestingly, Governor Slater also claimed that it was certain that neither Richards nor Cole or any other known local African ever proceeded from Sierra Leone to the 1927 February Brussels Congress. Finally, he asked that the London Post Office should examine any correspondence from Germany or Belgium or France to the following Africans: E.A. Richards (Railway Workers Union, Freetown), U.J. Cole (Railway Workers Union, Freetown), Sampson Cole (Railway Workers Union, Freetown), Hon. Dr. Bankole-Bright, T.C. Woode, J. Fowell, N.J.P.M. Boston, J.C. Shorunkeh-Sawyer, H. Ade Morrison and Hon. E.S. Beoku-Betts.¹⁸¹

Who was E.A. Richards? According to Wyse, Ernest Alfonso Richards was the President of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union and leader of the 1926 strike.¹⁸² In his 1926 correspondence with the LACO (probably with Secretary Gibarti), Richards signed the letter as President (Sierra Leone Railway Workers Union).¹⁸³ Strangely, in September 1927 Münzenberg sent a list of people to be invited to the planned November 1927 meeting of the General Council of the LAI in Paris, listing one Smith as ‘Vorsitzender des Eisenbahnerverbandes’ of Sierra Leone.¹⁸⁴ However, as noted before, Münzenberg had to change his plan and relocate the meeting to Brussels where it was held 9–11.12.1927. Curiously, in Münzenberg’s correspondence with Moscow, Richards is again referred to as the President of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers Union and was supposed – if he was to receive funding – to attend the (Amsterdam/Paris/)Brussels meeting.¹⁸⁵

Richards was unable to attend the 1927 February Congress in Brussels – if he ever was invited. A new attempt to bring into the orbit of the LAI was undertaken during 1927. In October 1927, Münzenberg informed Comrade Benett¹⁸⁶ in Moscow

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¹⁸¹ TNA CO 323/971/1, letter (copy) from A.R. Slater, Governor of Sierra Leone, to Sir Vernon Kell, April 1927. J.C. Shorunkeh-Sawyer, H.C. Bankole-Bright, E.S. Beoku-Betts, J.F. Boston were members of a committee of ten Africans and five Europeans, the so-called Committee of Citizens, which was set up to deal with the situation and to put an end to the strike but also the Strike Fund Committee (Wyse 1981, 104, 110).
¹⁸² Wyse 1981, 100, 105; Wyse 2003, 215 fn. 115. The Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union was founded in April 1925.
¹⁸³ TNA CO 323/971/1, enclosure to letter addressed to Sir Vernon Kell, ‘West African Railwaymen’s Union endorsing the International Congress of the Oppressed People’. In this letter, Richards informs the General Secretary of the League (i.e., the LACO, not the LAI), Gibarti, that none will be able to attend the conference. In the reply, which is also included, the LACO General Secretary informed Richards that the conference had been postponed to the middle of January ’27. This dating provides a clue to suggest that Richards was corresponding with the LACO already in 1926.
¹⁸⁴ RGASPI 542/1/10, fol. 21-22, letter from Münzenberg to Petrov, 10.9.1927, similar information in 542/1/10, fol. 26, letter from Münzenberg to O. Kuusinen, dated 15.9.1927.
¹⁸⁵ RGASPI 542/1/8, fol 171-172, letter from Münzenberg to Benett, 1.10.1927.
¹⁸⁶ A.J. Bennett was the pseudonym of D. Petrovsky, born Max Goldfarb (Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986, 361). Petrovsky was secretary of the British Commission of the CI and frequently travelled
that Richards, provided that he would receive funding, would come to Moscow as part of a delegation to the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution.\footnote{RGASPI 542/1/8, 171, Münzenberg to Benett, 1.10.1927.} In fact, Richards went to Moscow in November 1927 but,\footnote{RGASPI 542/1/64, fol. 69, List(s) of individuals and organizations to be invited/had to be financially supported to be able to attend the 1927 congress.} for reasons not known, declined to attend the December Congress of the LAI in Brussels. However, at some point – perhaps while he still was in Moscow – Richards was referred to as Secretary of the LAI for West Africa.\footnote{Hargreaves 1993, 258-259. However, Hargreaves’ reference to the Comintern source is faulty, his RGASPI 542/1/8 fo. 165-6 Gibarti to Bennet, 1.10.1927 does not refer to this letter and the actual reference (fol. 171-172) is the letter written by Münzenberg!} Thus, Wyse’s suggestion that Richards did not participate at the RILU Conference in Moscow is faulty – Richards was in Moscow despite the fact that the British authorities had refused him a visa to attend the conference – Richards could have argued that it was wiser to return to Africa before news about his appearance in Moscow would reach the British authorities (and deny his return to Sierra Leone) than go to Brussels.\footnote{Wyse 1981, 105 fn 45.} 

The documentation about a planned LAI West African secretariat is scanty. Before the 1927 December Congress, Gibarti had sent a plan for action to Moscow. This plan included a proposal to activate West African labour unions in an attempt to launch a campaign against ‘Amsterdam’, i.e. the Social Democrats and the Socialist International. Richard’s and the Sierra Leone Railway Workers were the only mentioned persons/organizations. Also, it was suggested by Gibarti that the African labour unions, namely those in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Mocambique and South Africa, could be grouped under the umbrella of a African Labour Union.\footnote{RGASPI 542/1/10, fol. 27-34, Report "Politische und organisatorische Auswertung der Tagung des Generalrates (sic) am 6. Dezember 1927" by Gibarti as LAI secretary.} Another report – no author, most probably written soon after the 1927 December Congress – reveals that some of the proposed structural changes had been put forward at the Congress:

The International Secretariat cooperates with the central secretariats of the League in the following countries [...] 5. West African Secretariat
As noted earlier, the LAI had been able to establish contacts with several Gold Coast organizations, but the NCBWA-link through Casely Hayford had never realized. On the other hand, the link with Richards and the Sierra Leoneans proved more constructive and was, from a LAI/Moscow perspective, a more promising one.

Richards met Bankole Awoonor Renner during his visit in Moscow. Whether or not these two radicals ever had met before is unclear. However, Richards must have identified Awoonor Renner as a potential ally as he nominated him to represent the Sierra Leone railwaymen at the 1927 December Brussels Congress. Richards notified Lozovsky about this decision in a letter dated 14.11.1927:

Dear Comrade,
As I am unable to be present at the Conference to be held in Brussels on December 6th, permit me to ask Comrade Bankole of West Africa to act on behalf of the Railway Workers’ Union of Sierra Leone, British West Africa at the Conference. Fraternally Yours,
E.A. Richards
President, Railway Workers’ Union, Sierra Leone

On the same day, Bankole Awonoor Renner wrote a letter to the Eastern Secretariat, informing them about Richards’ decision to nominate him as being the representative of the Sierra Leoneans:

Dear Comrade,
Having been delegated on behalf of the Railway Workers’ Union of Sierra Leone, West Africa, to the Anti-Imperialist Conference to be held in Brussels on December 6th, permit me to submit a copy of the letter of the President of the Union for the consideration of the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern. With Comradely greetings
Kweku Bankole (signed)

RGASPI 542/1/10, fol. 59, “Organising Report” (no date, no author).
RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 1-2 handwritten letter from Kweku Bankole to The Eastern Secretariat, Comintern, Moscow, dated November 14, 1927.
Awoonor Renner apparently also sent a letter to Münzenberg, asking for further information about the congress and expressing his interest to participate at it:

> Zur Ergänzung der Dossiers über die Einladungen der Neger legen(?) wir noch (Nr. 23) einen Brief des Gen. Kweku Bankole bei, der an der Moskauer Ostuniversität im Auftrage der amerikanischen Partei studiert und sich für unsere Vorbereitungsarbeiten interessiert.\(^\text{195}\)

Unfortunately, Awoonor Renner’s original letter has not (yet) been located in the Comintern archive. Neither is it known whether or not Awoonor Renner received an invitation to attend the congress.

Richards, in his turn, returned to Sierra Leone by the end of 1927 and resumed his trade union activities. His visit to Moscow seemed to have generated new and direct contacts with the RILU. Two letters of Richards to the head of the RILU, Alexandre Lozowksy (1878–1952), bear witness to his attempts to enlist communist support. In the first letter sent from Freetown, dated 23.12.1927, Richards inquired about the possibility for him and the secretary of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers Union to meet Lozowsky in Moscow in March 1928, “pending arrangements be made by you for travelling expence [sic] to Moscow,” lamenting about the poor financial condition his union was facing after the strike. The key aim for his letter was to secure some support for the dismissed railway workers in Sierra Leone and closed his letter by noting:

> Some people are trying to get hold of our correspondence please strike of the words President and Railwaymen’s Union. Address all letters as stated below send money under Registered [sic] cover avoid Cable [sic] except in case of urgent matters. E A Richards Mechanical Engineer No 20 Padember Road Freetown Sierra Leone.\(^\text{196}\)

In his following letter, dated 16.1.1928, Richards went one step further in establishing contacts with the Profintern:

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\(^{195}\) RGASPI 542/1/8, p. 211-214 [p. 211] “Auf Veranlassung des Genossen Münzenberg geben wir nachstehen eine Darstellung des bisheringen Standes des Vorbereitungsarbeite bszw. der Korrepondenz [sic] zur Herbeifürung eines internationalen Kongress gegen die imperialistische Kolonialpolitik.” No other explanation, no date, no writer. Seems like an abstract of a longer text, but has no real conclusion. Unfortunately, a copy this letter has not yet been located in Moscow or in Berlin.

\(^{196}\) RGASPI 534/7/74, letter from E. A. Richards to A. Losovsky [sic], 23.12.1927.
[I] have the honour to inform you that the members of my Union asked [sic] me to inform you that we would like our Union in Sierraleone [sic] be affiliated to the Union of the R.I.U.L. [sic] […] I may point out for your information that the total numbers of members at present in our Union are 1,322 and we just received 45 fresh application [sic] from Workmen [sic] who are not actual members […] I hope something has been done with regards to the traveling [sic] expense for my Secretary and I so as to enable us to leave Freetown in time for the Congress. 197

Seen from a Moscow perspective, the Sierra Leonean proposition was an interesting one. On the meeting of the Vollzugbüro of the RILU on 21 February 1928, Losovsky presented the apply of Richards, and after a discussion, the Sierra Leone Machinists’ Union [sic!] was declared to be an affiliated member of the RILU. 198

It is possible that Richards actually made it to Moscow in 1928 and attended the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. Although no hard evidence has so far been found, Kimble’s note that Wallace-Johnson had attended the congress – based on the argument that Wallace-Johnson at this time was not in contact with the Bolsheviks – could be reinterpreted as it had actually been Richards who was in Moscow. 199 On the other hand, Wyse states that Richards was put under police surveillance after returning from Moscow, which could explain the lack of any correspondence between him and Moscow during the following years. 200

Be as it may, late September 1928 Münzenberg informed Moscow that the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union collectively had joined (Kollektivbeitritt) the LAI, 201 and at the end of 1928 the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union was to be one of the first African trade unions that were listed by the LAI as a full member. 202

Soon, however, communications between Moscow and Freetown turned out to be problematic. In a report, probably written by James W. Ford on behalf of the Negro Bureau of the RILU during spring 1929, the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union

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197 RGASPI 534/7/74, letter from E.A. Richards to A. Losovsky [sic], 16.1.1928.
198 RGASPI 534/3/289, protocol of the RILU meeting, 21.2.1928. Three versions of the protocol were made, all making different references to the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union: one in German (Metallarbeiterverband von Frituan, Sierra Leone), one in French (syndicat des métallurgistes de Freetown et Sierra-Leone) and one in English (Machinists’ Union of Freetown Sierre-Leone).
199 Kimble 1963, 549. Kimble also claims that George Padmore attended the 1928 Congress, but Padmore’s biographer, James R. Hooker, refutes this claim (Hooker 1967, 12).
202 RGASPI 542/1/26, fol. 100, Liga gegen Imperialismus. Angeschlossene und sympathisierende Organisationen (list dated December 1928).
was believed to be still existing,\textsuperscript{203} a second report by Ford, dated 4.6.1929, was more sceptical about the whereabouts of the union and stated that the “R.R. Workers’ Union of Sierra Leone seems to have disappeared.”\textsuperscript{204} In fact, it had not. It is not known how Ford or Padmore were able to establish contact with Richards during 1929, but somehow they did as Richards was among the participants of the July 1930 Hamburg conference of the International Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers.\textsuperscript{205} Thereafter, there are few traces of him. He did not seem to have participated at the following 1930 RILU conference in Moscow (which some other Africans, such as E.F. Small from The Gambia and Frank Macaulay from Nigeria did) – his name was not included among the list of participants. The only – so far – identified note on Richards in the Comintern Archive is to be found in the following letter written by George Padmore to one E. Jos. Gabbidon in Freetown, Sierra Leone in March 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.”\textsuperscript{206} At least at this time Padmore and Richards still tried to be in touch with each other, although nothing of the correspondence is – so far – found in Moscow.\textsuperscript{207}

IV.3. The Münzenberg Web

Münzenberg and the LAI tried to develop some connections with West African intellectuals and organizations over the years to come, but the overall picture of the Münzenberg web with regards to Africa is still somewhat unclear. For example, the connections with Richards and the Sierra Leone Railway Workers’ Union indicate that links with African activists were used by several communist organizations. However, it is unclear whether or not the Africans were aware of this. Thus, for example, although the Gold Coast intellectuals had been in contact with the LACO and the LAI only, Münzenberg listed Gold Coast organizations, among others the

\textsuperscript{203} RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 35-36 (copy, typewritten, no author, stamp: 1251 8 Mai 1929) Add to report on British Africa.
\textsuperscript{204} RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 37-45 (copy, typewritten) 4813/10/Copying FS/4.6.29. Significant and Outstanding Facts about British West Africa and Liberia + Outstanding Events in South Africa (reports by Ford, Profintern).
\textsuperscript{206} RGASPI 534/6/23, fol 64-64bp letter from Padmore to E.Jos. Gabbidon, 64 Westmoreland Str, Freetown, Sierra Leone, 1.3.32.
\textsuperscript{207} At least part of Padmore’s correspondence with Africans while he was running his bureau in Hamburg is filed in Moscow in 534/6/23. Several letters to Padmore from Africa are filed in 534/7/74.
GCFA, as an associated member of the IAH! Also, in 1928 and 1929, the activities of the LAI were hampered by internal quarrels and structural problems. On top of it, the main focus of the LAI was to be on Asia, especially India and China, whereas Africa was to remain in the background. The main reason for the LAI turning its back to Africa seemed to have been first and foremost due to problems in establishing effective channels for communication.

By 1929 it was evident that the Münzenberg web did not include Black Africa save the South African connection. Consequently, there was no delegate directly from West Africa at the Second Conference of the LAI which was held at Frankfurt from the 20th to the 31st of July 1929. Certainly Richards did not participate in the conference, whereas the Gold Coast connection did not anymore exist; the only West African was Garan Kouyaté who represented the LDRN. Richard, in fact, had informed the LAI Secretariat about his difficulties to attend the conference, thus indicating that at least the connection between Berlin and Freetown still existed:

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

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

It seems as if Münzenberg’s direct contacts were less important than was the platform and the web he had created. One key link between Münzenberg and the British colonies was Reginald Bridgeman, the Secretary of the British Section of the LAI. Bridgeman and Münzenberg were in close contact, as was noted by British Intelligence, but even more so, Bridgeman served as the link between the LAI and the British Communist Party as well as with Arnold Ward and his Negro Welfare

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210 TNA 323/971/1, copy of letter from the West African Railwaymen’s Union to the LAI, 1929.
212 RGASPI 495/155/67 (1929)
In fact, it was even claimed by the British Section of the LAI that it had organized the London Negro Welfare Association. Even more important, at this time Bridgeman was one, if not the key contact person between the LAI and various African intellectuals such as the Gambian E.F. Small and I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson. Further indication of Bridgeman’s central position is evident from a letter from the LAI Secretary Chattopadhyaya to Bridgeman in 1930. Bridgeman was asked to provide the address of the West African Student Union (WASU) and for a report on the possibilities of getting into touch with students from the Gold Coast. By 1930 British Intelligence was convinced that Münzenberg was at the centre of the spider’s web of Communist activities in Germany and regarded the LAI as a highly troublesome: “As is well known, the League exists foment unrest and sedition in colonial countries, especially British possessions.” Not surprisingly, Münzenberg’s plan to visit London in March 1930 for a meeting with Bridgeman was prohibited by the British authorities.

Bridgeman, again, had attended the 1929 Frankfurt Conference as did two other future key persons, namely James W. Ford (1893–1957) and George Padmore (1902/1903–1959). Ford was an Afro-American communist who had attended the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern, 17 July – 1 September 1928, where he had raised the importance to enlist the Negro toilers within the communist movement and their engagement in the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist agitation. Ford was at that time engaged in the RILU, where he headed the International Negro Workers Information Bureau (or: Negro Bureau). Since then, his plan had been to organize an international meeting for African workers. Ford proposed to Münzenberg in May 1929 that the latter should engage a large African participation at the upcoming Frankfurt Conference, these Africans would form a kind of sub-commission which

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213 RGASPI 495/100/875
214 RGASPI 495/100/875, Report of the 2nd Annual Conference of LAI/GB, 21-22.5.1931.
215 TNA CO 323/1113/15, League against Imperialism (deleted file!), minutes: letter from the Managing Editor of the Gambia Outlook (i.e. E.F. Small) to Bridgeman, February 1930; Langley 1973, 310 fn 70.
216 TNA CO 323/1113/15, League against Imperialism (deleted file!), minutes: letter from Chatto to Bridgeman 1930.
217 TNA KV2/772, Willi Münzenberg personal file I, secret report [by British Intelligence], 29.1.1930.
218 TNA KV2/772, Willi Münzenberg personal file I, secret note [by British Intelligence], no name, 12.3.1930.
219 Hooker 1967, 12.
would start the preparation for the planned congress of African workers. At least in Moscow, this claim was backed and Comrade Bittelman informed in one letter to – presumably – Ford at the Negro Bureau that they should send a delegation to Frankfurt, whereas in another he told Münzenberg that the Afro-American Comrade Patterson from the CPUSA was to attend the conference, too.

Among the members of the RILU African/Afro-American delegation at the Frankfurt Conference were George Padmore and Johnstone (Jomo) Kenyatta. Padmore, who was a Trinidad-born Afro-Caribbean intellectual who had studied international relations, Negro sociology, botany and zoology at Fisk University and sociology at Columbia University. He had also worked as a journalist in Trinidad and the USA. In 1926 he established correspondence with Nnamdi Azikiwe (1904–1996), a Nigerian studying in the USA. Both were to enrol during the following year at Howard University, where Padmore studied law. At that time Padmore seems to have come into contact with the communists and in 1927 he joined the CPUSA and became active in the ANCL. In 1928, if not earlier, he had adopted the pseudonym of George Padmore instead of using his former name Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse. Azikiwe and Padmore were to remain in contact for the rest of their life. In 1929,

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221 RGASPI 542/1/30, fol. 48, Letter from John Ford to the Commission on the Anti-Imperialist League Congress, Profintern, 31/5-1929;
222 Alexander Bittelman (1890-1982). Russian-born emigrant, who was elected to the central executive committee of the CPUSA in 1919, who participated in several meetings and congresses of the Comintern during the 1920s. In 1929 he was relieved of his functions in the politbureau of the CPUSA by a Moscow decision and was recalled to Moscow for two years. He returned to the USA in 1931 but ceased to play a leading role in the party. In November 1960 he was expelled from the party as a “revisionist”. See further Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986, 31.
223 RGASPI 542/1/30, fol. 71, Letter from Bittelman to the Negro Bureau of the Eastern Secretariat of the ECCI, Moscow June 7th 1929.
224 William L. Patterson (1891–1980) was a leading member of the CPUSA and executive secretary of the International Labor Defense (ILD), a group that offered legal representation to communists, trade unionists, and African-Americans in cases involving issues of political or racial persecution. Patterson had studied law at the University of California and was a member of the NAACP before he joined the CPUSA. As a lawyer, Patterson was involved in the defence of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti in 1927 and later worked on the Scottsboro Case in 1931-2. He went to the Soviet Union in 1927, studied at the KUTV for three years and took part in the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. In 1930 he returned to the USA. See further Africana. The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience, eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., New York: Basic Civitas Boos 1999, 1504).
225 RGASPI 542/1/30, fol. 72, Letter from Bittelman to Willi Münzenberg/Berlin, [copy], Moscow 11/6-1929.
226 Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe studied first at Howard University and thereafter at Lincoln University, from where he graduated. In 1934 he returned to West Africa and, at first, settled in the Gold Coast, where he was to become involved in local politics and engaged with the local African intelligentsia. See further pPart 2.
Padmore was sent by the CPUSA as a delegate to Frankfurt and never returned to the USA.227

Johnstone Kamau, later Jomo Kenyatta, was a Kikuyu intellectual from Kenya who had arrived in England during spring 1929. Although he at this point certainly was not a communist, his critical approach towards British colonial rule in Kenya soon made him to contact Fenner Brockway and Reginald Bridgeman. Most probably it was through Bridgeman that Kenyatta was made to attend the Frankfurt Conference.228 However, it was Münzenberg who paid for Kenyatta’s trip to Frankfurt.229 Here, Kenyatta met Padmore and Ford and after the conference, he was taken by Padmore on a trip to the Soviet Union.230 Kenyatta returned to England in October 1930, whereas Ford and Padmore remained in Moscow. In fact, as will be discussed in detail further below, the advent of Ford and Padmore in the communist network and especially their engagement in the RILU/Negro Bureau was to mark a new beginning of a new era in the contact between African intellectuals and the Comintern.

However, Münzenberg and the LAI did not remain inactive neither did they lose interest in the Negro Question and in anti-colonialism, although their activities rarely focussed on African issues and the plight of the Negro workers. However, sometimes it did. The International Secretariat of the LAI assisted Ford’s and Padmore’s Negro Conference which was held in Hamburg in July 1930. In 1931 the LAI supported the cocoa hold-up in the Gold Coast.231 Later during the same year, the Münzenberg newspaper *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* (AIZ) published a special number on the life and struggle of the black race. Münzenberg himself regarded this special issue to be one of the best he ever had produced, as he told Harry Pollit:

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227 Hooker 1967, 12; Geiss 1974, 351.
229 PRO CO 323/1113/15, League against Imperialism (deleted file!), minutes: communication with Kenyatta (1930).
230 Berman 1996, 318. An indirect proof for Kenyatta’s participation at the 1929 Frankfurt Conference is found in a letter from Padmore to Kenyatta: “[---] And as you know, Kouyaté was with you in 1929, at the Frankfurt Congress of the League.[---]” (RGASPI 534/6/23, fol 77, letter from Padmore to Kenyatta, dated 1.6.1932). However, more archival research has to be conducted about Kenyatta’s visit to Moscow in 1930.
231 RGASPI 542/1/47, fol. 10-11, Proposals relative to activities of Anti-imperialist League in West Africa (typewritten report, 15.2.1931).
I think that this number is from political and technical points of view one of the strongest edited by the A.I.Z. up today. After having collected material for longer than a year and having corresponded with different Negro Departments and bureaus it has been finally possible to edit this number in a direct contact with the big campaign against the [unreadable] execution of the 8 young Negroes.

In fact, by 1931 the International Secretariat of the LAI even declared that the organization was to become more active involved in anti-colonial and anti-imperialist activities in West Africa. In a programmatic outline, the LAI called for a ‘united front’ in the struggle against imperialism and the exploitation of the West African farmers and workers:

3. …it is absolutely necessary, for the successful overthrow of imperialist exploitation, to establish a united front of the masses in all the colonies of West Africa, with the ultimate object of establishing a strong West African Federation of Independent Negro States.

4. This struggle for independence of the West African people must be politically and organisationally coordinated with the struggle of the various oppressed peoples of the world…

5. In order to conduct the struggle … all those classes … must be organised for the struggle and drawn into a common anti-imperialist political organisation – the LAI.

6. The task of the LAI in each colony will be not only to expose to the masses the real nature and the terrible results of the whole system of imperialist plunder and oppression … but also to formulate the political and economic aims of the oppressed masses and to take all possible organisational steps for conducting the struggle…

If the LAI was ever successful in implementing their programmatic outline for West Africa is highly doubtful. Not much is known of the activities and connections of the International Secretariat of the LAI before the Nazi take-over in Germany in January 1933. After the fire of the Reichstag and the ban of the KPD and other communist organizations, Münzenberg relocated his activities and his organizations, including the IAH and the LAI, to Paris. However, by autumn 1933, the LAI

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233 RGASPI 542/1/47, Page 2-5, Draft of a program from the LAI, 13th February 1931: 1657/12/Copying. Confidential. DRAFT PROGRAMME SUBMITTED BY ANTI-IMPERIALIST LEAGUE (re West Africa).
Secretariat was transferred to London and Bridgeman was put in charge of the organization.

After the relocation of the LAI to London, the organization gradually ceased to be a communist-controlled front organization. Contacts with Moscow faded away, only occasionally did Bridgeman send any reports to the Comintern headquarters.\textsuperscript{234} However, a strange note by the Nazi newspaper \textit{Völkischer Beobachter} in 1936 claimed that Münzenberg was still in charge of the direction of the African and Asiatic zones of the Comintern.\textsuperscript{235} If this was the case has yet to be checked.

V. The making of a new network in West Africa

Communist contacts with West African intellectuals turned out to be highly problematic and at most unstable during the latter part of the 1920s. Most of the attempts by the LACO and its successor, the LAI, to enlist West African intellectuals and political activists had failed. Despite the promising start in the Gold Coast and in Sierra Leone, only the latter did materialize into a lasting connection. However, the reason for the bleak performance in the Gold Coast was mainly due to local political conditions: whatever contact Casely Hayford and other activists were at time looking for, it was not a communist but an anti-colonial one at most. Rather, from the perspective of the ARPS and the NCBWA, support was needed in their struggle with the colonial authorities and the traditional chiefs over the right of representation. However, by the end of the 1920s, things were to change and small groups which articulated a more profound political activism started to emerge. Curiously, this period coincided with Bankole Awoonor Renner’s return to West Africa.

Almost nothing is known about Awoonor Renner’s international contacts during these years. Earlier research usually portrays him as an African communist, perhaps assuming that he still had contacts with Moscow and the Comintern.\textsuperscript{236} However, how independently was he acting? Was he an agent provocateur whose task was to establish radical cells in West Africa? The files in Moscow give, perhaps, some further clues to Awoonor Renner’s activities during the late 1920s and early 1930s. According to the evaluation in the Comintern personal file on Awoonor

\textsuperscript{234} See further Petersson (forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{235} TNA KV2/774, Willi Münzenberg personal file III, report: “B2B Summary: Willi Münzenberg,” no date [ca 1940].

\textsuperscript{236} Wilson 1974.
Renner, he was described as an intelligent and very nationalistic person. However, the conclusion in the testimonial was somewhat negative: although Awoonor Renner had started as a very active student, his interest had faded and he had made little progress and was not able to combine theory and practise. Thus, the testimonial recommended that he should work under the surveillance of others.\textsuperscript{237} The stopovers during his return trip, Berlin and London, could indicate that he had received orders by someone in Moscow, perhaps the Negro Committee of the ECCI or the Negro Bureau of the RILU, to make contacts with the liaison bureaus there and to discuss further activities.

V.1. Via London to Sierra Leone (1928)

Early in 1928 Bankole Awoonor Renner was ready to leave Moscow and to return to Africa.\textsuperscript{238} Did the Bolsheviks have any plans for him? As previously has been shown, the ECCI seemed to have discussed plans for future activities and outlined some strategies during 1927. Already at this point the ECCI seemed to have had plans to use Awoonor Renner or some other Africans to establish direct links. At the beginning of 1928, the ECCI had made its decision: Awoonor Renner was to become the Comintern-connection in West Africa. This is clearly stated in the directives given to the Anglo-American Secretariat of the Comintern:

\begin{quote}
On behalf of Comrade Bankole:
1. To return to West Africa as soon as his health permits him to do so.
For the purpose of:
\begin{enumerate}
\item Establishing a party (Workers and Peasants) in this part of Africa embracing both British and French West Africa which will be the basis of a Communist Party in tropical Africa.
\item To study closely the economical and political position of the masses.
\item To temporary work within the Nationalist Party.
\item To arrange sending students to the Eastern University and the International Lenin Institute in the immediate future.\textsuperscript{239}
\end{enumerate}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{237} RGASPI 495/261/2642, Bankole Awoonor-Renner personal file, page 8: testimonial (certificate?)
\textsuperscript{1928???}.

\textsuperscript{238} Before leaving Moscow, Awoonor Renner published a book of poems, \textit{This Africa}, in Moscow in 1928. An English version of this book was published in 1943 (Owusu-Ansah and McFarland 1995, 49).

\textsuperscript{239} RGASPI 495/64/166, fol 26, (typewritten, copy, no author; stamp: 1714 19.1.1928).
Thus, Awoonor Renner’s tasks were similar to those he already had outlined in his 1927 Report and which had been discussed by the ECCI. The agenda was not an easy one: to establish links with the ‘nationalist’ parties and movements (i.e., infiltration), to start agitation work among the workers, to enlist Africans to study in Moscow and, eventually, to establish a Communist Party. At least the last point reveals, in retrospect, an extremely naïve position of the ECCI.

One immediate problem was his passport: it had not been renewed during his stay in Moscow. Thus, on the 28th of February 1928 he applied at the Royal Norwegian Legation in Moscow for a temporary extension of his passport, which was granted. The extension was valid for three weeks “in order to enable the bearer of the passport to reach a British Consulate which may decide about the further renewal of the passport.”

Having secured Latvian and Lithuanian transit visas, Awoonor Renner left Russia and arrived in Berlin in mid-March 1928. Here he contacted the British Consulate for the extension of his passport. The British authorities in Berlin made an interview with him as to determine whether or not to forward his application. According to the British sources, Awoonor Renner presented himself as a journalist and a representative of the American paper ‘Asia’ and stated that he was also a member of the British Institute of Journalists. It was also found out that he had published articles under various pseudonyms, including ‘Bankole’.

Not surprisingly, the British authorities in Berlin were suspicious about Bankole Awoonor Renner’s intentions. Asking him why he had not renewed his passport earlier, Awoonor Renner declared that the Russian authorities had taken away his passport when he arrived in Moscow in 1925. It was only returned just before he was about to leave Russia. The British authorities were also doubtful about Awoonor Renner’s plans and intention to travel from Germany via Italy to England. As a consequence, the passport was only renewed for a few weeks, compelling Awoonor Renner to take a direct route to England where he had to arrive not later than by the end of March 1928.

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Not much is known about Awoonor Renner’s stay in London in 1928. It not clear how long he stayed or whom he met. It is likely that he met the British-Indian MP Saklatvala – at least he was in possession of a letter of introduction from Robin Page Arnot to Saklatvala. Further, someone with the pseudonym/alias ‘Victor’ had informed one ‘Albert’ – perhaps a member of the British Communist Party? – about the arrival of him:

Dear Albert,

Herewith I wish to inform you that Comrade Bankoli is in possession of a letter of introduction from Arnot to Saklatvala, to the effect that having finished the Eastern University, he is returning to his own country. We do not know very much about him, as an active Party member, except that he has finished the University. We do not know of his activities in the Party before that; but he was in the American Party and we are now looking forward to what he will be able to do for the movement in his own country.

In any case, he has had some education, and he is going to a country where nothing, except a small workers’ Union, exists, and he needs not only our advice, but also the advice of the British party. Please help him in the way of supplies of literature and generally on technical matters.

Yours fraternally, Victor (signed)

Awoonor Renner’s return trip via Berlin to London leaves many question marks. Did he meet Willi Münzenberg or anyone of his close aides in Berlin, Gibarti or Chattophadyaya? As has been underlined, Münzenberg was at that time the key person, if not spider, in the Comintern web who tried to establish an international anti-colonial and anti-imperialistic network? In fact, Awoonor Renner had been in contact with someone at the LAI already in 1927. In a letter to perhaps Münzenberg, he expressed his interest to participate in a planned forthcoming anti-colonial conference – probably the General Council Meeting in Brussels in late 1927.

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243 Awoonor Renner dated his ‘author’s word’ Paris May 18, 1928. In his text, he refers to a trip to the French capital, where he “dashed from café to café in Montparnasse” and visited the graves of Rousseau, Voltaire, Victor Hugo and Jean Jaures. See further “Author’s word,” in: Awoonor-Renner 1943, 18.

244 Robin Page Arnot (1890–1986), one of the founder members of the British Communist Party and leading party theoretician. In February 1928 he was elected to alternate membership of the Presidium of the ECCI and attended the Sixth Congress of the Comintern. In 1931 he was promoted to full membership of the Presidium and made an alternate member of the Comintern political Secretariat. See further Lazitch and Drachkovitch 1986, 11-12.

245 Saklatvala is said to have written a foreword to the – unpublished – 1928 English version of Awoonor Renner’s book of poems (Danquah 1943, 12).


247 RGASPI 542/1/8, “Auf Veranlassung des Genossen M ü n z e n b e r g  geben wir nachstehene eine Darstellung des bisheringen Standes des Vorbereitungsarbeite bszw. der Korrepsondenz (sic) zur Herbeifürung eines internationalen Kongress gegen die imperialistiche Kolonialpolitik.”, p. 211-214
Sometimes during the latter half of 1928 Bankole Awoonor Renner arrived in West Africa. Instead of travelling directly to the Gold Coast, he disembarked—destitute, according to British sources—at Freetown in Sierra Leone, where he stayed with his brother for the next year.\(^{248}\) His return to West Africa and his stay in Freetown raises some questions. Was it for personal reasons that he went to Sierra Leone, perhaps because he was uncertain about his relationship with his father? Did he make use of his family network only for personal reasons? Or was his stop at Freetown due to political reasons, perhaps serving as a link between the European LAI-cells and the Sierra Leonean trade union activists? The British claim that he was destitute is dubious, especially when one considers the common habit of using one’s family ties, if existing, to draw support for one’s existence. Awoonor Renner was most probably not too well off when he started his return trip via Berlin and London to West Africa, but while he was moving in Europe, he did so as part of a well-established network which both in Berlin and in London could and most probably did support him financially. Thus, it could be argued that the reason for his disembarkation at Freetown was not due to financial constraints but other reason. However, which ever other reasons there were, one can only speculate about as there are—so far—no archival sources or any other information about his stay in Freetown.

An intriguing question is whether Awoonor Renner met E.A. Richards while he lived in Freetown. The only certain assumption one can make is that Awoonor Renner and Richards knew each other: they had met in Moscow in late 1927. A discussion about their relationship in Freetown can only be speculative as it is—so far—not known for certain if Richards participated in the Sixth Congress of the Comintern in Moscow in 1928. Neither is the exact date for Awoonor Renner’s arrival in Freetown known. However, if one allows of a ‘conspiracy approach’ then the following hypothesis could be put forward. Considering that Awoonor Renner was in fact a ‘fellow traveller’ and had been sent back to West Africa with the task of

\(^{248}\) TNA KV2/1840, Bankole Awoonor Renner, personal file I, letter from the Governor of the Gold Coast to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 22.11.1942.
strengthening the existing contacts in Sierra Leone and in the Gold Coast – at this
time there being not others – one of his tasks could have been to get in touch with
Richards and provide him with the money (and passport?) the latter needed to make
the journey to Moscow. Awoonor Renner then remained in Freetown while Richards
went to Moscow. Perhaps already in Freetown he learned via his family about the
political development in the Gold Coast. Awoonor Renner then decided to wait for
Richards return to receive further information about how to deal with the situation in
the Gold Coast. It is most likely that he and Richards continued to stay in touch after
the latter’s return from Moscow.

Apart from the relationship between Awoonor Renner and Richards, another
West African connection seemed to have emerged at this period. In 1926 Edward F.
Small (1890–1958), one of the Gambian members at the 1920 Accra Conference and
of the 1921 NCBWA delegation to London, had returned to Bathurst (Banjul). Since 1922 he had lived abroad, first in Dakar and thereafter in London. He had been
the first secretary of the Gambia branch of the NCBWA, but the organization was at
the time of his return virtually moribund and controlled by Small’s conservative
opponents. Not much is known about Small’s visit abroad, neither about his political
affiliations at this time. However, he was known to be an outspoken critic of the
Gambia government and his newspaper, The Gambia Outlook and Senegambia
Reporter (first established in Dakar in 1922, re-established in Bathurst in 1926), had
emerged as an important critical, if not anti-colonial, platform.

Due to the opposition in the Gambian Section of the NCBWA, Small had to
find a new political base. Hughes and Arnold assume as one possibility that “perhaps
inspired by another prominent West African nationalist, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson,
Small decided to organize amongst urban workers.” However, following my
argument that Wallace-Johnson never had organized the 1926 strike in Sierra Leone,
the links between Small and Sierra Leone – if existing – must have between Richards
and him – or, following the ‘conspiracy approach’, perhaps even Awoonor Renner

1&D=0&F=P&H=1&O=D&P=10825 (20.11.2006).
251 Hughes and Perfect 1989, 553.
and him. Further, although the NCBWA-connection is problematic, the link could indicate that the 1926 strike in Sierra Leone, supported by the NCBWA section in Sierra Leone,\textsuperscript{252} was known by other members in the NCBWA network such as Casely Hayford and Small. As will be seen further below, there is strong circumstantial evidence for a close relationship between Richards and Small during these years and up until 1930 when both participated at the July 1930 Hamburg Conference.

V.2. Political activism in the Gold Coast (1929-1933)

For reasons not known, Awoonor Renner returned to the Gold Coast in 1929\textsuperscript{253} where he first settled in Sekondi and started his career of a political activist. In 1930 he founded the ‘African Academy’, a society for the propagation of art for Africans. However, the African Academy was only short lived and had ceased to exist by the end of the year. At the end of 1930 he joined the staff of Casely Hayford’s newspaper \textit{The Gold Coast Leader}. After the latter’s death, Awoonor Renner became the editor of the paper.\textsuperscript{254} Due to economic constraints and as a result of a libel section, the paper went into voluntary liquidation in 1932.\textsuperscript{255} Awoonor Renner was then employed as assistant editor for a short time by J.B. Danquah’s \textit{The Times of West Africa} and, on leaving that employment, worked as a free-lance journalist, writing under the name ‘Bankole’.\textsuperscript{256}

Awoonor Renner’s activities in the Gold Coast raise some interesting questions. First, why did he decide to join Casely Hayford’s paper? Was it an attempt by him to rebuild the link between Casely Hayford’s platform and the LAI? Second, what was his relationship with Kobina Sekyi, his godfather and the other African intellectual with whom the LAI had tried to establish contacts? At the time of his return to the Gold Coast, Kobina Sekyi controlled the ARPS and was one of Casely...

\textsuperscript{252} Langley 1973, 162.
\textsuperscript{253} According to Danquah, Awoonor Renner had returned to the Gold Coast in 1930. (Danquah 1943, 11.)
\textsuperscript{254} TNA KV2/1840, Bankole Awoonor Renner, personal file I, Extract from Gold Coast Police Report re the West African National Secretariat mentioning Renner, 13.2.1947. Also Danquah 1943, 11.
\textsuperscript{256} TNA KV2/1840, Bankole Awoonor Renner, personal file I: Governor to Secretary of State, letter dated 2.11.1942; Extract from Gold Coast Police Report re the West African National Secretariat mentioning Renner, 13.2.1947. Also Danquah 1943, 13.
Hayford’s and the NCBWA’s (Gold Coast Section) main critics. By joining the staff of the Gold Coast Leader, Awoonor Renner once again made use of his family network, this time perhaps only for strategic reasons? Interestingly, as will be outlined below, Awoonor Renner was to develop a close link to both Kobina Sekyi and another critical Gold Coast intellectual, Benjamin Wuta-Ofei.

The founding of the African Academy, too, needs some further contextualization. As noted before, Gold Coast politics and the nationalist movement were marked by internal division and opposition by the end of the 1920s. The chiefs were divided into those who, like Nana Ofori Atta, supported the 1925 Constitution and the 1927 Native Administration Ordinance, and those who did not. The educated elite were also divided along the same lines. At this point a new form of political organization was arising in the Gold Coast, namely the emergence of clubs, societies and unions. By the late 1920s, a huge range of such literary and social clubs as well as ethnic unions and associations had been established in the main towns in the South, i.e., in the Colony and in Ashanti. The main reason for the original formation of these clubs was partly the need to improve the education of their members, party to discuss the social, economic and political problems of the day.257 Perhaps Awoonor Renner’s African Academy was but another of such a social-cum-educational society. Or, following a ‘conspiracy approach’, was it established as to evolve into a radical, even communist, cell? Unfortunately, not much is known about the activities of the African Academy.

One of the most prominent persons and a spear-head in the formations of clubs and associations in the Gold Coast was Joseph Kwame Kyeretwi Boakye Danquah (1895–1965). He had returned to the Gold Coast from London in 1927, where he had studied law and earned a Ph.D. degree in ethics. In March 1929, he published a pamphlet, An Epistle to the Educated Youngmen in Akim Abuakwa, in which he advocated the formation of a ‘national assembly of youth to study the problems facing the country’, and in response to this call, the Youth Conference Movement was launched the same year. The Conference thereafter emerged as a platform for already existing societies and clubs. Its aim was to heal the breach between the chiefs and the

257 These were, among others, the Achimota Discussion Club (Accra), the Literary and Social Club (Cape Coast as well as Sekondi), the Eureka Club (Cape Coast), the Optimism Club (Sekondi), the Railway Club (Sekondi), the Young People’s Literary Club (Accra), the Cosmos Literary Club (Accra), the Anum Improvement Society, the Ewe League, the Asante Kotoko Society (Kumasi) and the Bekwai Kotoko Union. See further Adu Boahen 1975 [2000], 137.
Western Intelligentsia, an effort which was to some extent achieved at the first conference of the Youth Conference in April 1930, when Nana Ofori Atta and Casely Hayford were reconciled.\textsuperscript{258} It must have been at this point that Bankole Awoonor Renner, perhaps via his connections to Casely Hayford and his position at the Gold Coast Leader or his engagement in the African Academy, that he established contacts with Danquah and became active in the Gold Coast Youth Conference. As noted above, a few years later, in 1932, he was for a short period writing for Danquah’s newspaper.\textsuperscript{259}

V.3. Aborted contacts: The WAFU and the LAI (1929)

Kobina Sekyi’s position at this stage is somewhat unclear. As is evident from the discussion above, Sekyi had been or was to be contacted by the LAI to be invited to the Second Brussels Conference in 1927. Eventually, he never participated at the meeting and it is not known if the LAI continued to get in touch with him. Back in the Gold Coast, Sekyi continued his political and other engagements. In 1928, he was listed as member of the newly founded West African Farmers’ Union Ltd (WAFU).\textsuperscript{260} This association had been registered in Accra in December 1928 in an attempt to form yet another scheme to safeguard the interests of Gold Coast cocoa and palm oil farmers. The main aim of the WAFU was to markets the produce of its members as well as to establish agents in all principal overseas consuming markets. Another plan was to establish its own banking organisation to grant credits to members on certain securities which were not suitable as collateral to the existing banks. As an outcome of the proposed credit arrangements, the WAFU was planning to contact banks and organizations in Europe that would be friendly disposed to their aims, i.e., to provide for financial assistance.\textsuperscript{261}

\textsuperscript{258} Adu Boahen 1975 [2000], 137-138.
\textsuperscript{259} Owusu-Ansah & McFarland 1995, 49.
\textsuperscript{260} According to the register, the directors of the WAFU were J.B. Koranteng (solicitor and advocate, Accra), J.N. Alema (planter, Nsawam), C.M. Apeatu (planter, Nsawam), Dr. Ojo Olarigibe (Accra) and J. Barkers Quagrainie (merchant, Saltpond). Members of the Advisory Board were: Omanhene Mbra iii (Paramount Chief of Ogua, Cape Coast), Hon. J.P. Brown (President of the Gold Coast ARPS, Cape Coast), Omanhene Essandoh iii (Paramount Chief of Nkusukum, Saltpond), 8 other Paramount Chiefs [not mentioned by name] and Kobina Sekyi. As solicitor of the WAFU served Hon. J. Glover-Addo and as its secretary J.K. Mensah. RGASPI 535/1/208, pp 8-16: Material on the West African Farmers Union Ltd, p. 8.
\textsuperscript{261} RGASPI 535/1/208, pp 8-16: Material on the West African Farmers Union Ltd, p. 9.
What then happened is rather curious, but perhaps indicating the activity, if not aspirations, of politically motivated Africans. In a letter, dated 20th of March 1929, the WAFU Secretary J.K. Mensah introduced the organization to the LAI. He claimed that the Gold Coast farmers were handicapped because of their lack of financial facilities and the dictates of overseas merchants in determining the buying prices of agricultural products. Following the aims of the WAFU, Mensah explained that the task of organization was to establish contacts with individuals and organizations in Europe who could support their mission:

[W]e are desirous of getting in touch with some group of Leading Philantropic Europeans [sic] and Financiers who are in sympathy with the African who is being daily exploited by merciless Europeans that such speculative elements may be arrested in the future if the Africans as a Race [sic] are to develop that inate [sic] desire of building themselves up into Nationhood and to command respect among the other accredited races in the world.262

Mensah’s purpose was to ask the LAI if it could assist the WAFU to establish contacts with influential individuals and organizations which had an interest in providing capital to the WAFU:

We shall therefore be glad if you will put us in touch with some influential individuals or group of European Gentlemen who are interested in the African and his welfare at heart so that we may negotiate for a possible understanding of backing us in Finance under some understanding for the building up of this Company and its aims.

If the best minds and business technic [sic] of the native African are combined with Pro-African Europeans for a common purpose there can be nothing less than a speedy triumph of our cause. For we feel that it is time we became partners with Foreign Capitalists for the development of our Race and not sellers only.263

Mensah further informed the LAI that a representative of the WAFU was due to travel to England by the end of April 1929 and suggested that a member LAI in Britain should meet him to discuss further details.

Mensah’s letter raises several questions. First, why did he contact the LAI? Second, was a contact ever established between the WAFU and the LAI? In the

262 RGASPI 535/1/208, pp 8-16: Material on the West African Farmers Union Ltd, p. (15-)16, letter from J.K. Mensah to the LAI, 20.3.1929.
263 RGASPI 535/1/208, pp 8-16: Material on the West African Farmers Union Ltd, p. (15-)16, letter from J.K. Mensah to the LAI, 20.3.1929.
opening paragraph of his letter, Mensah explained that although the LAI probably never had heard of the WAFU, “through certain channels copy of your letter dated 18th. [sic] February last has reached us and we may be permitted to ask you to accept our thanks.”

It is not known which letter Mensah was referring to, although it could be argued that it had not been directed to the WAFU but someone connected to the organization. One possible candidate is Kobina Sekyi – if he still corresponded with the LAI? Another possible channel was someone else in the ARPS. Mensah himself stressed in his letter the close connection between the ARPS and the WAFU. Or are there reasons to assume the existence of a third party, someone who both had contacts with Kobina Sekyi as well as other political activists in the Gold Coast and the Münzenberg/LAI-network?

The second question is easier to answer. Münzenberg, who was the recipient of Mensah’s letter was rather puzzled with it. In fact, it seems that neither he nor any other in the Berlin bureau of the LAI had any knowledge about the WAFU or the persons connected to it. In a letter to the Secretary of the Krestintern in Moscow, Comrade Kornblum, he informed him about Mensah’s application and enclosed the letter as well as the statutes and outlines of the WAFU (which had been enclosed in Mensah’s dispatch to him), asking for further information about the organization and what policy to pursue:

In der Anlage ein Brief der West African Farmers’ Union. […] Wir bitten, uns raschestens [sic] mitzuteilen, ob sich Organisationen bei Euch gemeldet haben oder welche Organisationen wir nach Eurem Vorschlag in Eurem Auftrag oder von uns aus zur Teilnahme am Weltkongress auffordern sollen.

Kornblum, who was as puzzled as Münzenberg, transferred the whole issue to be dealt with to the ECCI:

Comrade Arnot Page. Herewith we send you the letter of comr. Munzenberg with the informations of the West African Farmers Union Limited in order, to

264 RGASPI 535/1/208, pp 8-16: Material on the West African Farmers Union Ltd, p. 15(-16), letter from J.K. Mensah to the LAI, 20.3.1929.
265 “You will notice that the President of the Gold Coast Aboriginees Rights Protection Society [i.e., J.P. Brown, HW] whose headquarters are at Cape Coast is a signatory to the Memorandum and Articles of Association and at the same time on the Advisory Board.” RGASPI 535/1/208, pp 8-16: Material on the West African Farmers Union Ltd, p. (15-)16, letter from J.K. Mensah to the LAI, 20.3.1929.
266 Krestianskii Internatsional, Peasants’ International, founded in 1923.
267 Izaak Romanowicz Kornblum.
268 RGASPI 535/1/212, letter from Münzenberg to Kornblum (Kresintern), 17.4.1929.
get you informed. We request you, to send them – after having read – back to us.

The reactions and discussions among the ECCI are not (yet) known. However, it is much likely that anyone who was fluent in English (which Münzenberg was not) came to realize that the WAFU was not a likely candidate for the LAI-network. Neither was it a peasant organization that could form the spearhead of anti-colonial work in the Gold Coast. On the contrary, a reading in Moscow of the statutes of the WAFU made it clear that the organization was nothing else than a petty-bourgeoisie association not worthy any support of the Comintern or its front organizations. If this was the case, then it is not surprising that there never were any further contacts between the WAFU and the LAI.  

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269 RGASPI 535/1/208, confidential letter from Kornblum to R. Page Arnott, May 1929.

270 The WAFU, on the other hand, continued in their attempts to establish contacts with European counterparts. In December 1930, another member of the cooperative, Mr. Kofi Sunkersette Obu, a Accra-based merchant, was able to get in touch with J.F. Horrabin, MP – according to British Intelligence reports probably through the British Section of the LAI – in an attempt to arrange a meeting between Obu and the Secretary of State for the Colonies. However, the CO was skeptical and in a meeting with CO-officials, the proposed scheme of economic support to the WAFU was rejected. See further TNA CO 554/86/11, West African Farmers’ Union Movement (1920).