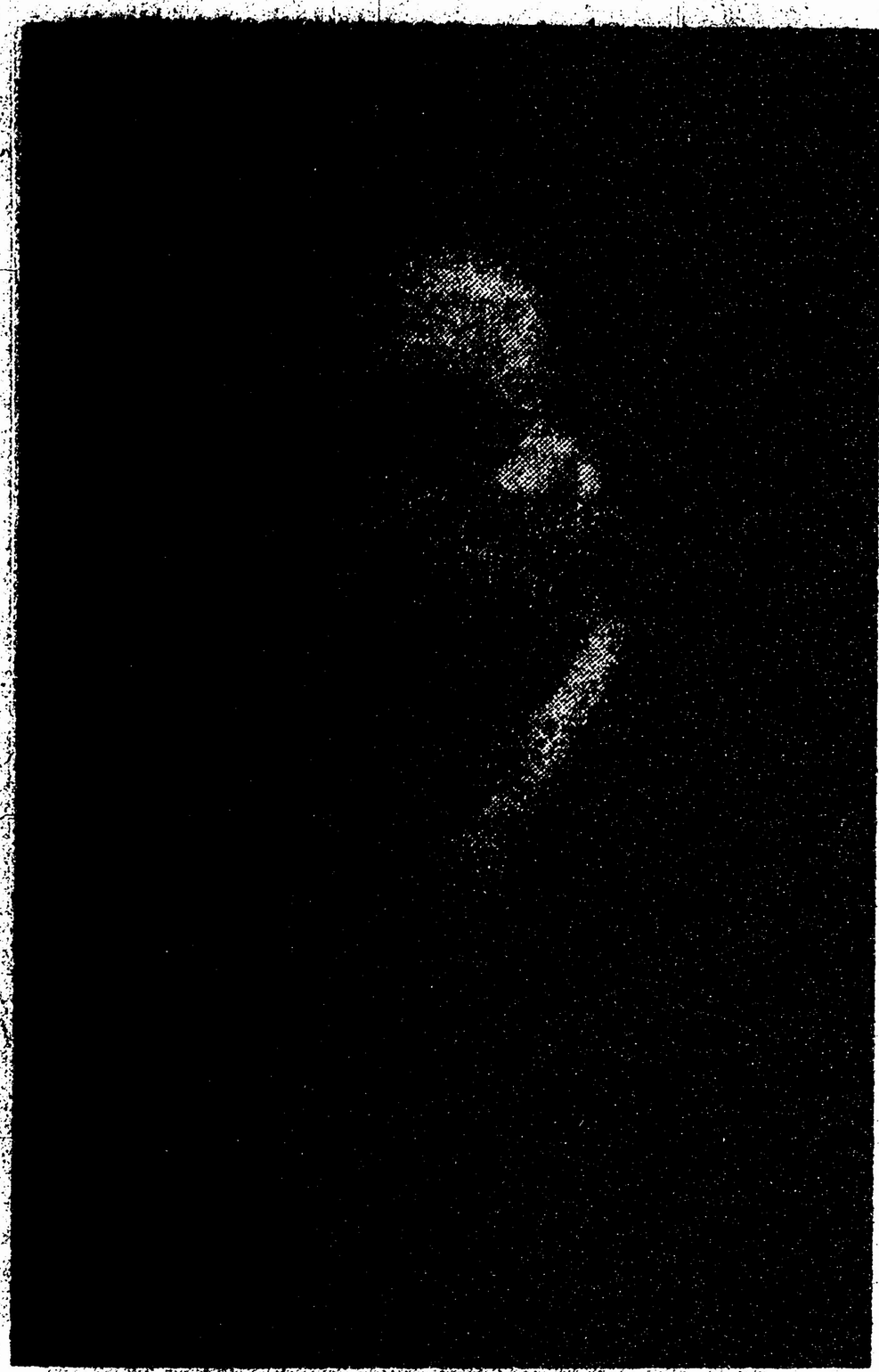

DAVID IVON JONES.

TEN CROWDED YEARS OF GLORIOUS LIFE.

So David Ivon Jones has gone to "his locker" at last, a "Crimean hero," yes veteran, for though "dead ere his prime" from the scourge that "slit the thin-spun life," his last and best ten years, even to the end in far-away Yalta, were one concentrated fight for the cause of the working-class and particularly the workers of South Africa. Travelled as he had over three continents in search of health, South Africa became to him far more of a home than even his native Wales, and to the last his thoughts and aspirations and suggestions converged on the land where the greatest work of his life had been done.

From the office of the Transvaal Miners' Association, where he had been bookkeeper, Jones was stimulated into political life by the tragic "collapse of the Second International" as it took shape in this country. It was the War, and the vacillation and final surrender of the bulk of organised labour, taking service in the cause of its own and only oppressors, that brought home to him, as to many others of us, the reality of the Labour movement as contrasted with the Social-Patriot counterfeit that swept the majority by the million off their feet and into the Imperialist slaughter-pit—a massacre infinitely more serious and outrageous, and involving its abettors in an infinitely greater blood-guilt than any mere affairs of July, 1913, or even March, 1922.

Quickly passing through the stage of reformism (or was it rather a desperate clinging to unity?) which kept him from joining the War on War section, and assimilating with astonishing rapidity the point of Marxism as well as its immediate daily application, Comrade Ivon, then secretary of the Labour Party, had already by the time of Creswell's notorious See-it-through Conference made up his mind on the proper duty of a working-class party in the War crisis. Knowing little then of the preparatory work done by Lenin and his associates at the Stuttgart and other conferences of the Socialist International of those days, he grasped at once the necessity for the class-conscious workers not only to oppose and try to stop the War, which could be carried on only so long as workers willed it, but to do their utmost to give this opposition in every land the revolutionary turn which in Lenin's own country at least resulted in so brilliant a victory for all time over the capital power.

As secretary of the International Socialist League and Editor of the "International" from August, 1915, on and off, until he left us for Europe in May, 1920, Ivon was the heart and soul of our activities and propaganda, amazing us all by his vitality, courage and power, when all the while his frail body was fighting a rearguard action with death. Who could help acknowledging and saluting both his faith and energy and his penetrating vision into the future of the movement even while it was being spat upon and mobbed by the then infatuated workers themselves? Who could fail to recognise the flashes of real genius in his buoyant, spirited, and often poetic writings? And from the time when the "Red Light in Russia" first broke through a world of gloom, it was Jones in this country who first seized its full import and was least bewildered by the staggering events of 1917. At once he caught the scope of the Revolution which had been brewing in the Councils of the Zimmerwaldians (with whom he, too, had been maintaining contact), and when the Bolsheviks came to power he had already helped us to realise that this was no miracle but a great milestone on the march to human freedom in which the workers of South Africa, too, had been and were taking part. He it was, accordingly, who, at our I.S.L. Conference next after that event, carried through a motion to apply for affiliation to the new-formed Communist International. While some of us still thought it only a pious if not premature gesture in favour of the unknown, to him it was a very solid and realist accession of strength and outlook, if not to the International, at any rate to the I.S.L.

In those days of impatience and agitation, Jones, who since 1915 had well understood and emphasised on every occasion the part the native worker was to play in the South African revolution, carried his understanding into deeds, being prosecuted in 1918-19 for handing out his leaflet, "The Bolsheviks are Coming," to natives at Maritzburg—but eventually acquitted on appeal, as he had also been acquitted on appeal in 1916 for his famous satire on the barbaric religious celebration of the outbreak of war anniversary, "Let Saints on Earth in Concert Sing." His report to the second C.I. Congress, "Communism in South Africa," deals fully, if still somewhat prophetically, with this most difficult but ultimately, perhaps, most important part of our task; and right up to his last letters from Russia he had very near his heart the cause both of "getting the black workers" and, as equally essential, of inducing recognition of and co-operation with them on the part of the white workers' organisations, to the advancement of both white and black and the strengthening of the whole international proletarian movement.

His last activity among us was the organisation of the most successful May Day celebrations of 1920—a change from those of 1917, which were broken up by Labour leaders, at whose incitement the crowds threatened Jones' life in the darkness of the Town Hall steps. But though increasing ill-health drove him from our midst, his activities continued in the Commintern, and gained for him an international reputation as one of the most brilliant of Communist publicists and one very highly thought of by the foremost of the Commintern leaders.

Without offence it may be said that his departure meant to us a loss of generous enthusiasm and inspiration which we perhaps have never quite made good since. However, to all of us who knew him and worked with him, his memory will itself serve as an abiding inspiration to put forward our best, better efforts than ever before, to bring about the victory in the hope and sight of which he lived and died.

S. P. BUNTING.