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STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

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APARTHEID: THE U.P. REACTION

W.B. WHITE

Poor organisation was primarily responsible for the U.P.-L.P. alliance's loss of the May 1948 General Election. Of particular importance in this regard was the U.P.'s inability adequately to register voters or, where necessary, delete them from the voters' roll. The consequent under-registration of urban voters, and the relative ease with which the H.N.P. was able to remove U.P. supporters from the roll, not only reduced the possible total of urban constituencies but also exacerbated the effects of the weighting of the urban vote, the geographic concentration of U.P.-L.P. support in the urban areas and the mismanagement of the U.P.'s 1947 delimitation proposals. In order to regain power therefore, the U.P. stressed organisational reform while making expedient adjustments to its paternalistic race policy so as to retain the support of marginal voters.

Because it was committed to a "volkseenheid" which embraced the entire white community, the U.P.'s relatively low degree of intrinsic cohesion was compensated for by the supreme ability of both Hertzog and Smuts to align behind them a wide spectrum of political elements. But the weakness of this reliance became evident in 1939 when Smuts refused to acknowledge, even as a gesture, the country's right to neutrality. His refusal, by destroying the already strained consensus upon which the Party rested, politically discredited the moderate wing of Afrikaner nationalism[1] and precipitated a 25 per cent decline in the Party's Afrikaans-speaking support.[2]

This structural shift at its base obliged the Party to place greater reliance upon its English-speaking urban supporters to maintain its organisation. Because this more affluent group did not see in politics, as did the bulk of those who supported the H.N.P., a means to improve its position,[3] the disorganisation consequent upon the 1939 split[4] was compounded by a decline, particularly between elections, in both the branch system and in formal Party membership.[5] The change in the Party's leadership was also, in this respect, not without significance. Smuts, attempting to set a precedent for the all-embracing white South Africanism which was his ambition, consistently opposed the building of a disciplined party with a paid-up membership. He preferred instead that the system should be contractual with loyalty to the Party's principles as the only binding cement.[6]

In contrast to the U.P., the H.N.P. membership was limited to those who subscribed. The bulk of Party funds was derived from this source and from sympathetic contributors. The twin benefits of this system was the personal commitment it encouraged among the Party's following and the close estimate it provided canvassers of the degree of support enjoyed by the Party.

Smuts could initially afford to indulge his concept of the contractual nature of Party membership because his close relationship with mine owners, financiers and industrialists ensured a significant, if ad hoc, flow of funds into the Party's coffers. Reliance upon these sources, however, exacted a heavy long-term cost. A U.P. memorandum observed:

> Few want to contribute to our Party funds because they cannot reconcile themselves to the belief that we are not getting good and plenty from the 'Capitalists'... it must not be thought that we do not attempt to raise funds, nor that we altogether fail in that direction, but there is no 'Party Chest' and no reserve for 'Organisation' on a large scale.[7]

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The enthusiasm engendered by the war effort and the diversion of the thrust of the H.N.P. attack to the O.B., the New Order and the A.P. as the "wreckers of Afrikanerdom",[8] masked the more blatant of the U.P.'s organisational deficiencies during the 1943 General Election campaign. Also concealed was the tenuousness, despite its apparent election triumph, of the Party's hold on power. Of 49 seats won countrywide by majorities of under 1 000, 28 had been won by the government. Despite its 64 seat majority, the Smuts Government was, in fact, secure in only a relatively small number of safe urban seats.[9] Herein lay the importance of the 1943 General Election: It made the balance of power between the U.P. and H.N.P. sufficiently close for the marginal voter to become a matter of crucial importance.[10]

But, at this critical period when political survival demanded an improvement in organisational efficiency, the U.P.'s voluntary workers were, unlike those in the H.N.P., "almost entirely diverted from the Party to the war effort..."[11] Moreover, between 1946 and 1948, post-war fatigue among U.P. supporters and their concern with re-adjusting to peace-time conditions prevented any improvement in the degree of voluntary assistance offered to the Party.[12] By July 1947 674 of 1 696 U.P. branches countrywide were moribund.[13]

Smuts's prolonged absences overseas during and immediately after the war also contributed to the Party's organisational decay for, during these periods, it was run on a caretaker basis only. Unlike the position in the federally organised H.N.P., the unitary structure of the U.P. prevented its provincial officials from exercising effective authority.[14] The Party's Central Head Committee was unwieldy, its Central Executive met too infrequently to provide effective alternative control and its General Secretary, O.A. Oosthuizen, had both too many functions to fulfill[15] and was significantly less effective in that office than was his predecessor, Louis Esselen.[16]

During the course of 1944, while U.P. supporters were concentrating their efforts upon collecting war funds,[17] the H.N.P. launched a Republican Fighting Fund. The object of the Fund was to raise £100 000 to finance the Party's next General Election campaign.[18] By June 1947 slightly more than £50 000, primarily from the Cape Province and the Orange Free State, had been collected.[19] Facing a considerable deficit and a suspension of contributions by its major benefactors because it lacked adequate financial accounting,[20] the U.P., towards the end of 1947, made, for the first time, a similar appeal when it launched the General Smuts Election Fund.[21] Not only was the drive made far too late but, as in the Party's previous fund raising efforts, it attracted only a fraction of the money required.[22]

The U.P.'s administrative and financial difficulties were compounded because it was more sensitive than was the H.N.P. to international opinion. Its struggle to come to terms with a changed post-war environment placed in question the Party's bona fides among its marginal supporters for the aims of the war, which it had so enthusiastically supported, had been couched in essentially liberal terms while the prominence of J.H. Hofmeyr in the Government lent it a liberal aura.[23] The Government's difficulties were aptly illustrated when, in 1946, it attempted to forestall international criticism of its treatment of the country's Indian community by trading segregation for a qualified franchise. This ended in humiliating failure and lost prestige.[24]

Far more significant, however, were the consequences of the Government's war-time restoration of some measure of mobility to the labour market in order to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding economy.[25]. The primary result of this

relaxation was a 63 percent increase, between 1936 and 1946, in the country's urban African population.[26] This rapid growth, which occurred simultaneously with a virtual suspension in housing construction,[27] not only made possible effective African political mobilisation but also enhanced white fears for their own security.

Acknowledging these fears, but recognising the permanence of African urbanisation, Smuts pursued a pragmatic "social policy away from politics."[28] Inthe pursuit of this policy Smuts was not a mere defensive protagonist of the status quo.

During its term in office, the Smuts Government went beyond what was politically acceptable to the majority of the white electorate. It had, though at the price of segregation,attempted to extend political rights to Indian South Africans and real advances were made in African education.[29] Beginning with the 1941 van Eck Report on the industrial and agricultural requirements of the country, a report which Margaret Ballinger considered to be a "highly encouraging document",[30] there followed a series of what were, in contemporary terms, enlightened reports.[31] These series of reports, which culminated in the April 1948 Report of the Native Laws (Fagan) Commission,[32] reflected Smuts's pragmatic, evolutionary approach.[33]

Smuts was not so naïve though as to believe that African aspirations could be satisfied by mere social and economic reform. The question of the extension of a meaningful franchise to Africans could only be adequately dealt with, he felt, once white fears had been addressed. His policy priority therefore, at a time when Africans were vociferously pressing their claim to political rights and the H.N.P. was preaching the virtues of Apartheid, was immigration.[34] Only this, he felt, would allow his Party's pragmatism to bear fruit. Envisaging the establishment, in the new Orange Free State goldfields, of an authority similar to that which had controlled the development of the Tennessee Valley, Smuts, at an August 1946 U.P. Transvaal Head Committee meeting, said:

> If we were to put our problems in due order, I would first put this matter of strengthening our European population in South Africa. It is no use talking of our future, and taking measures for our future, unless we put first of all this paramount question of our European population and this problem of immigration that lie before us.[35]

But this approach, quite apart from the threat which immigration posed to the white Afrikaner electorate's numerical preponderance, left the U.P. vulnerable to H.N.P. attack, for adherence to a policy of "uplift", which acceptance in particular of the Fagan Commission's findings implied,[36] raised the question of Smuts's policy's ultimate compatibility with continued white supremacy. Vociferous repudiation of this implication did little to prevent equally vehement Opposition accusations that Government actions exposed a glaring contradiction between declared intentions and actual policy.[37]

The successful implementation of Smuts's pre-1948 race policy demanded that the U.P. remain in office for at least one more term. Smuts's failure adequately to comprehend the inherent political danger stemmed from a miscalculation of the time that was available to him.[38] His defeat can largely be attributed to his failure to take active steps to reinvigorate his Party and Cabinet. The

consequence of his reliance upon intelligence obtained from the U.P.'s flawed organisation and his intolerance of criticism was a tragic ignorance of the deficiencies of his administration.

The H.N.P.-A.P. victory was, however, scarcely overwhelming, for the alliance won nineteen seats with majorities of under 400.[39] It only polled, moreover, about 39,4 per cent of the total and estimated votes as opposed to the 53,3 per cent attracted by the U.P.-L.P. A number of the reasons for this distortion: the liability which the U.P. suffered as a consequence of the concentration of its support in urban constituencies with a resultant high "wastage" of votes together with the negative effect of the urban "load", have been well documented.[40] Less has however been written about the fact that single-member constituency boundaries are notoriously easy to gerrymander if a political party can easily identify its supporters and is sufficiently well organised so as to enable it to present a coherent and persuasive argument to the Delimitation Commission. For the tightly controlled H.N.P., an ethnically-based party in close touch with its grassroots support, this was relatively easily done. For the U.P., drawing its support from a broader base, identification was more difficult.

The U.P., moreover, compounded its inherent disability by mismanaging both the compilation and presentation of its Transvaal Delimitation proposals. The U.P. Witwatersrand Delimitation Commission's performance, in particular, was labelled a "lamentable fiasco."[41]

An important reason for this mismanagement was that the undermanned U.P. organisation had proved incapable of effectively registering the relatively mobile urban electorate. It was also for this reason that the loads imposed on urban constituencies by the Delimitation Commission were, in reality, significantly higher than those stated in the report.[42] The average increase, for example, in the number of voters registered on the 31 May 1947 electoral roll, the roll upon which the report of the Ninth Delimitation Commission was based, between that date and polling day in the thirty urban constituencies most affected, was not less than 1392 voters per constituency.[43] The better organised H.N.P., in a claim subsequently acknowledged as valid by the U.P., further distorted the effect of the urban load by succeeding in removing the names of some 12 000 U.P.-L.P. supporters from the voters' rolls of the Witwatersrand alone.[44] Non-recognition of the inability of the U.P. adequately to register or to prevent the deletion of the names of its supporters has resulted in an under-estimation of the degree of white Afrikaans-speaking support for the U.P. for, primarily because of these factors, Afrikaans-speakers who, in 1948, made up about 61 per cent of the total white population of the Union, constituted, in fact, about 66,3 per cent of the electorate.[45] In May 1948 about 39,5 per cent of white Afrikaans-speakers supported the U.P.-L.P. rather than the 20-25 per cent or even 18 per cent which have been proposed.[46]

Sensitive to the importance of these voters in its quest for power the U.P. was unable to give sufficient emphasis to the importance of immigration, the immediate and drastic curtailment of which left it without the main plank in its race policy. The Party was thus faced with a poor choice of alternatives. The first was to take cover in the call to "take the colour problem out of the political arena." The second was progressively to give ground.

The first clear indication of the latter was evident in its response to T.E. Dönges' 10 June 1948 announcement that Part II, that part of the 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act which provided for

communal Indian Parliamentary representation, was to be repealed.[47] In an act of transparent evasion, it proposed instead that Part II be investigated by a Select Committee which would also be called upon to seek ways to achieve "international co-operation for a policy of repatriation."[48] Repatriation was an option which Smuts had implicitly repudiated with the passing of the original 1946 Act. This retrogression in the Party's policy towards South African Indians was carried a stage further when, in November 1948, in an attempt to pre-empt Donges who was soon expected to announce the contents of a new bill which was expected to contain just such a provision, the U.P. proposed that, failing the achievement of repatriation, a more vigorous policy of segregation should be pursued by tightening the restrictive provisions of Section I of the 1946 Act.[49] As a face-saving gesture, the policy concluded with a statement that "any further rights of Union franchise to Indians (shall) be on the basis ofthe Natives' Representation Act of 1936 as introduced by General Hertzog."[50]

Hofmeyr's surrender of principle in regard to the Indian franchise, a franchise which he had insisted upon in 1946,[51] was also reflected in his role in the reformulation of the Party's policy towards Africans. This was because the only way in which Smuts had been able to settle U.P. fears about the prospect of facing a snap General Election with Hofmeyr still in the Party's Central Executive was by undertaking to ensure that the U.P. would, as soon as possible, enunciate "a clear, simple Native policy which every Party member should subscribe to."[52] Significantly, the U.P. Central Executive Committee agreed that Smuts and Hofmeyr "consult each other in regard to this matter and draft a policy for submission to the members."[53]

The "Re-statement of the Native Policy of the United Party" was submitted to the Party caucus on 24 September and was soon afterwards made public. Both the old policy and the new emphasised that Christian Trusteeship formed the basis of the Party's "Native Policy", but the new policy went on to state that the Party stood for "European leadership and authority", while the old merely stated that it stood for "European civilisation". The old policy had not specifically rejected equality while the new did, explicitly accepting social and residential separation and the avoidance of "race intermixture".[54] The new policy did recognise, however, and here it departed fundamentally from H.N.P. policy, the permanence of African urbanisation. It stated that African urban areas would "progressively be administered by the Natives themselves, under European guidance."[55] But the most important alteration, from the Party point of view, was contained in Clause 5 of the Re-statement:

> In respect of Native political rights, the United Party stands for the maintenance of the 1936 settlement, with the provisions made by it for the existing representation of the Natives by Europeans in the Senate and the House of Assembly, the Cape Provincial Council, and for the establishment of the Natives' Representative Council. It favours, further, the development and expansion of the function and usefulness of the Council in relation to Native areas, under the general authority of Parliament.[56]

Despite this clause being in direct conflict with Section 6(b) of the Programme of Principles of the U.P. which stipulated that the matter of African political representation should be left to the "free exercise of the

discretion of the individual members representing the Party in Parliament,"[57] the U.P. caucus appears, apart from K. Rood, M.P. for Vereeniging, who subsequently resigned over the issue, to have accepted the "Re-stated" policy, if not enthusiastically, at least compliantly. Aware of the significance of the new policy to his own position in the Party, Hofmeyr's judgement of it was: "Negative but not unsatisfactory".[58]

That compliance with such tactical retreats did not find universal agreement within the Party became evident at its November 1948 Union Congress in Bloemfontein. Here the younger delegates and backbenchers, "voicing their dissatisfaction with some of the old gang whohave occupied high positions in the United Party for many years", demanded a greater say in the formulation of Party policy and tactics.[59] The outcome was an announcement by Smuts of the Party's intention to establish an Action Committee which would, in effect, replace the Central Executive Committee "for the period and duration of the emergency."[60] The new Committee was to consist of the eight members of the existing Central Executive and ten additional members who, much to the disappointment of those who had called for reforms, were to be nominated by that Executive.[61] Despite such tentative evidence of renewal, the Congress failed, even when in committee, to encourage delegates "to speak their minds quite freely on the colour problem about which there is still some confusion."[62]

But what took place at the Congress was of less significance than what was, at that time, taking place behind the scenes. In attempting to undo the consequences of the Party's 1947 repudiation of Havenga's offer of an alliance,[63] it appears that Hofmeyr, despite his earlier fear that such a "link-up would strengthen the reactionary elements in the United Party...",[64] was, by November 1948, prepared "in the interests of the country, to stand down as second-in-charge to General Smuts in favour of Mr Havenga."[65] Smuts too appears to have been willing to stand down. An intermediary between the U.P. and the A.P. reported: "As gnl. Smuts saamreis...sal dit bloot wees om finale reelings vir sy uittrede uit die Politiek."[66]

Whatever thoughts Havenga might once have entertained of leaving the Government were stillborn. It is likely that, acutely aware as he was of the alienation of a considerable majority of the white Afrikaans-speaking electorate from the U.P., he had come round to the view that a more viable means of restoring power to the white political centre would be via Malan's wing of the H.N.P.

Nevertheless, faced with the possibility of Havenga's defection and a March 1949 Provincial Election stalemate the Nationalists had to "abandon any thought they had of another quick appeal to the country and fall back on a defensive policy of 'digging in'."[67] An important element in this policy was a hardening of the H.N.P.'s determination to eliminate the Coloured common roll vote.[68]

Although Coloured voters constituted only 8,6 per cent of the total common roll electorate in the Cape Province, there were six constituencies in which they constituted over 20 per cent of the total electorate, thirteen where they constituted between 10 and 20 per cent and fifteen where they constituted between 5 and 10 per cent.[69] Had the Coloured people's voting rights been repealed prior to the General Election, the H.N.P. would have won three Cape seats which it narrowly lost in May 1948 and March 1949, and it would also probably have held Paarl and Bredasdorp, which it won in May 1948 but lost in March 1949. In all probablity the Government would also have emerged more firmly entrenched in five of the seats in which its majority was below 1 000 in May 1948.[70]

Furthermore, although the apportionment of Parliamentary seats between the provinces was based on their total white populations, the delimitation of

constituencies within the Cape Province was based upon the number of voters on the common roll. Removal of the Coloured common roll vote would therefore have resulted in a substantial alteration in constituency boundaries.[71] The Cape Peninsula, for example, which, in 1949, was represented by one H.N.P. and thirteen U.P. M.P.s, would very likely have lost two seats as a consequence of Coloured disenfranchisement.[72]

Although unable to launch an immediate assault on the Coloured franchise until Havenga's agreement had been obtained, the H.N.P. was nevertheless able, through the introduction of bills to prevent "mixed" marriages, to "suppress" Communism, to provide for comprehensive commercial and residential segregation, to "register" the population and to amend the Immorality Act, to both prepare the ground and successfully alienate marginal voters from the U.P. Though the latter weakly professed to find no fault with the principle of any one of the bills it nevertheless, either because it questioned the viability of any attempt, as proposed in a number of the bills, to define the term "Coloured", or because it objected to the arbitrary powers which all of the bills proposed to vest in the state, put up a vigorous opposition to them.

The Party's attempt to limit the alienation of marginal voters, which its opposition to the bills had provoked, by taking cover in the call to "take the colour problem out of the political arena" merely brought it full circle, for the contradiction implicit in this strategem could not be concealed. It was clear that the proposal would find Government approval only if the U.P. surrendered its support for constitutionality, the one area in which the Party was most clear in its opposition to the Government.

Seen against this background, the U.P.'s organisational reforms took place in a vacuum. While the reforms, particularly those which enabled the Party more effectively to register and delete voters, succeeded - as the 1953 election results confirmed - in bringing more of its supporters to the polls, they could not in themselves bring in converts to the Party. Moreover, not only did re-organisation inhibit the U.P.'s ability to provide stable and continuous support to its ally, the United National South West Party, in the crucial 1950 S.W.A. elections, it also involved an expansion of the Party's structure beyond its ability to finance itself without the assistance of the United South Africa Trust Fund. The reasons for the establishment of this body lay in what Smuts considered was "a major weakness"[73] of the U.P.: The lack of a means to ensure a constant and reliable flow of donations to the Party.

Building on proposals which Smuts had made in July 1948, representatives of mining and business interests together with U.P. officials drew up a blue-print to formalise relations between the Party and its major donors. The document, entitled "A National Campaign to Create a United South Africa Through the United Party", and which provided for the establishment of a National Advisory Committee and a national network of regional sub-committees, was approved by the U.P. Central Action Committee on 30 August 1949.[74]

The National Advisory Committee's initial fund-raising drive in September 1949 was, however, only a qualified success. H.F. Oppenheimer, member of both the U.P. Central Action Committee and of the National Advisory Committee reported that "people found it difficult to contribute direct to the Party and it had been suggested that it would be desiable to form a Trust to which people could contribute."[75]

While the objectives of the subsequently established United South Africa Trust Fund were closely correlated to the declared policy of the U.P., the

agreement with the Party stipulated that "the Trustees will, in each instance, be satisfied that the money will be well and effectively spent."[76] This stipulation was to assume major significance because the Trust, originally envisaged as an additional agency which would collect only those donations which could not be given directly to the Party, became the sole recipient of all major donations.[77] It had, moreover, by 1951, evolved into an independent organisation collecting funds on its own behalf and able to expend such funds at its own discretion. While U.P. officials conceded that the Party itself "would not have been able to raise a fraction of the moneys which the Trust have, in fact, raised",[78] the existence of the Trust was not an unmixed blessing. It not only served to perpetuate the pre-1948 organisational cleavage between the Party and its grass-roots support but also exposed the Party to the damaging accusation that it was dependent upon "Hoggenheimer" money. When it is borne in mind that annual U.P. Head Office expenditure in the years immediately preceeding the 1948 election had been about £40 000, then Oppenheimer's 1951 statement that the "Trust was assisting at the rate of £100 000 per annum, that it would continue to do so at approximately that rate, and it could, in addition, be reasonably expected to find £100 000 for the General Election,"[79] indicates the extent to which the latter accusation was justified.

While the Trust oversaw the extensive elaboration of the U.P. organisation with the establishment of Divisions of Fund Raising, Organisation, Information and Publicity, all of which were run on "business lines" by a Trust imposed Party "Director", it proved to be as evasive as was the U.P. in regard to race policy. This was clearly illustrated when, in May 1951, during the debate on the Separate Representation of Voters' Bill, Government speakers portrayed the Trust as "organised money power" committed to the abolition of the colour bar in industry. In support of this assertion, they quoted one of the Fund's primary objects: "To foster, encourage and protect the ideals of freedom of speech, language, worship and the Fundamental Rights of Man as recognised by the member states of the United Nations."[80] Oppenheimer countered by carefully distinguishing the Fundamental Rights of Man, which the Government itself had publicly supported at the United Nations, from the Declaration of Human Rights. The latter, he said, "went far beyond stating the fundamental rights of man, and included undertakings in regard to many other matters which, for various reasons, were not acceptable by South Africa."[81]

This public face did not however accurately reflect Oppenheimer's role in the U.P. While his first priority was to assist the Party to win the next General Election his second was to liberalize its race policies. Although the offer was suspended after the U.P. defeat, both he and Sir Ernest Oppenheimer had, for example, just prior to the 1948 election, undertaken to assist Hofmeyr to create a country-wide press syndicate.[82] Defending this strategy H.F. Oppenheimer had argued that the pro-U.P. press could "at any moment become a stick to beat him. If he has his own press, he would at least have something to lean on in the event of a clash, say over Native urbanisation, in which Argus Press might oppose him."[83]

The shock of the 1948 defeat and the subsequent death of Hofmeyr, had served temporarily to still the voices of those within the U.P. who wished to see its policy develop in an increasingly liberal direction. Their change of attitude was not only a reaction to Government policy, but also to the overall conservative trend in the U.P. policy. During the course of 1950 R.D. Pilkinton Jordan, U.P. M.P. for Rondebosch, legal advisor to the Party and former close associate of Smuts, considering that the "time for insincerity and subservience to causes of expediency is past",[84] drew up a manifesto which proposed the

abolition of the colour bar in industry and the revival of Cape Liberalism's "civilized rights for all civilized men."[85] Despite the fact that the original intention was to limit the circulation of the manifesto to a group of eleven U.P. M.P.s, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, convinced that it was "positive dynamite", gave Pilkington Jordan a "dressing down" and tried unsuccessfully to have it withdrawn.[86]

Ironically, the most important consequence of the manifesto was the arrangement of a meeting, at the home of H.F. Oppenheimer, "for the specific purpose of the formation of a Liberal Group within the United Party."[87] Miles warren, one of the six M.P.s who left the U.P. in 1953, reported that the group formed as a result of the meeting "represented the bulk of those who walked out of the Party in Bloemfontein in 1959..."[88] When the existence of the group was later drawn to Strauss's attention, he was reported to have said that "there was nothing to worry about as they had sworn loyalty to him."[89] If this report is correct then the logic of Strauss's statement was that it was to the left wing of the Party to which he had to look for allies, for it was from the conservative wing of the Party, the wing to which Strauss himself belonged,[90] from which most of the opposition, based on personal rivalry,[91] had been expressed to his designation as Smuts's successor. But, until the 1953 General Election, just as an overriding concern for the maintenance of a common front governed the actions of liberals operating outside the U.P., so the same imperative served to mask the latent differences within the Party.

It was unfortunate for the U.P., and in particular for Strauss, to whom much of the credit for the Party's rejuvenation must go, that the transformation of its archaic structure had gone hand in glove with defeats both in parliament and in by-elections. In terms of the efficiency of its organisation, the Party of early 1951 was a considerable advance on that of May 1948. The realisation of its potential was stunted though by its lack of achievement. The assessment that the growth, in 1951, of white extra-parliamentary political activity in response to the first direct attempt to repeal Coloured common role franchise rights during the course of that year, was a tacit vote of no-confidence in the U.P.'s ability to oppose the Government,[92] is thus not entirely without validity. But such an assessment is an inadequate explanation for the establishment of the Torch Commando. It ignores the urgency of the U.P.'s need to establish a highly motivated, voluntary organisation which could match that of the N.P. It also ignores the significant role which the U.P. played in the formation, though the initiative in this regard lay with the Springbok Legion,[93] and in the subsequent direction of the Torch Commando.[94]

While the Torch Commando undoubtedly revitalised the U.P.'s voluntary organisation, its utility beyond that particular purpose was limited. Its members, and the issues which aroused them, inhibited the organisation's role as a non-partisan defender of constitutionalism. The N.P. was easily able to paint it as a mass ex-servicemen's movement established to oppose a mass Afrikaner movement. The Torch Commando's role was thus, by its very nature, limited to mobilising the traditional opposition vote. Whatever advantages the U.P. derived from the Torch Commando's efforts in this regard were, moreover, negated by the consequences of the separate agendas of a number of the movement's leaders. The N.P. was, for example able very effectively to use the Torch Commando led separatist movement in Natal for what it was: a vote of no-confidence in the U.P. because of its transparent inability to win the next General Election. The Torch Commando's National President, Louis Kane Berman's attempts to adopt a more militant opposition posture at a time when the A.N.C. was about to launch the Defiance Campaign,[95] enabled the Government to portray

the U.P. as unfit to defend white interests.

It was considerations such as these which played a major role in prompting the U.P., in an attempt to exert greater control over its ally, to agree to the formation, in April 1952, of the United Democratic Front. But this Front also involved the U.P. in a formal alliance with a Labour Party which, by 1947, had shed its right wing. The necessity for the L.P.'s inclusion in the alliance lay not only in the fact that it controlled the balance of power in at least eight Witwatersrand parliamentary consituencies,[96] but also because the Torch Commando executive had made support for the L.P. a cornerstone of the Commando's policy. It had done this because it had become convinced that, while Afrikaans-speaking working-class voters could never be persuaded to vote U.P., they might be persuaded to vote L.P.[97]

But that the U.D.F. could avail the U.P. little became evident on 25 June 1952 when, in the Wakkerstroom parliamentary by-election, the N.P., in retaining the seat, received 4,9 per cent more votes than it had been given in the 1948 election.[98] Summing up the reasons for the magnitude of the defeat, a U.P. memorandum stated that the N.P. was "able to lump us into a 'bonte opposisie' with the Torch commando, the Labour Party, Kahn, Sachs, Carneson, the African National Congress .... and they claimed that the issue was, 'die siel van die Afrikaner' against all this."[99] Unable adequately to propogate the Party's line in rural constituencies because of the financial collapse in 1950 of the U.P. supporting Afrikaans-language press,[100] the U.P. Executive at a 17 July meeting, felt it had little choice but to move the Party's platform even closer to that of the N.P. The need to regain the support of Afrikaans-speaking voters, it was felt, "should condition all United Party propaganda."[101] To this end, since N.P. propaganda portrayed the U.P. as favouring race equality, the Party's propaganda "should, therefore be dominated by the aim of countering this line."[102] For a not unrelated reason, it was also decided to pursue a "more specific anti-communist line."[103]

These decisions had an immediate impact on the Executive's perception of the U.P.'s relationship with its United Democratic Front allies. Not only had they proved to be an electoral liability, the constitutional crisis itself, ostensibly the very raison d'être of the alliance, had not proved to be a "vote catcher." A subsequent secret initiative by Strauss, H.F. Oppenheimer and Sir de Villiers Graaff effectively to absorb the Torch Commando by establishing a new party, the United Democratic Party,[104] failed both because the Torch Commando wanted more "than a new signboard outside the old firm,"[105] and because, once the initiative became known, there was a consensus of opinion in the U.P. that rural supporters would be alienated.[106] This latter fear aptly illustrated the Party's dilemma, for the original initiative had been an attempt to prevent such alienation taking place. In a dilemma the Party fell back on a scheme to extend, on a national scale, Joint Election Committees with the Torch Commando. At the same time it tried to de-politicise the Commando by requesting its Executive to stop issuing propaganda material[107] and by attempting to secure the resignation of Kane Berman.[108] Despite Torch Commando protests the L.P., by being excluded by the U.P. from the Joint Election Committees, was, in effect, excluded from the U.D.F.[109] This did not however prevent the two parties later arriving at a mutually beneficial agreement to prevent three-cornered election contests on the Witwatersrand.[110]

The L.P., which had a much narrower and more clearly defined support base than either the U.P. or the Torch Commando, was able to adopt a much more consistent opposition than either of the other two to the N.P. Government. This was

particularly apparent in January and February 1953 when the U.P., as a result of the decisions taken by its Executive in July 1952, de-emphasised its support for the retention of the Coloured common roll franchise and came out in support of the Public Safety Bill and the Criminal Law Amendment Bill. The Torch Commando rejected the latter Bill but accepted the principle of the former.[111] The L.P. not only opposed these Bills but had also, in response to the Defiance Campaign, further liberalised its race policy.

The U.P.'s support for the Bills failed to halt the ongoing swing of marginal voters away from the Party. While it received 54,9 per cent of the total and estimated vote in the April 1953 General Election, a 1,6 per cent increase on the approximately 53,3 per cent it had received in 1948,[112] its support among the 66,3 per cent of the electorate made up of Afrikaans-speakers fell from the approximately 39,59 per cent it had received in 1948 to just over one-third.[113] What was particularly important in this regard was the U.P.'s loss of support among young Afrikaans-speaking voters. That this was a significant weakness was evident in the fact that this group had increased by approximately 691 per contested constituency between 1948 and 1953, as opposed to an equivalent English-speaking increase of only 215 per contested constituency during the same period.[114]

The difficulties which the U.P. faced after the 1953 General Election were infinitely more acute than those which it had confronted in May 1948. The primary reason for this was a general feeling that never again would the parliamentary opposition be able to mount such a concerted effort. The result was demoralisation and a consequent withdrawal of financial contributions to the U.P.

With the benefits of its structural reforms largely negated by the effects of the sharp decline in immigration, the Citizenship Bill, by the N.P.'s S.W.A. representation and by the latter's ability to manipulate white fears and dispense patronage, it became clear that only policy changes significant enough to attract the support of substantial numbers of marginal Afrikaans-speaking voters would enable the Party to return to power. But, isolated in primarily urban, English-speaking constituencies, how could it do so and yet retain the loyalty of its existing supporters? The intractability of this problem was to cripple and ultimately fragment the Party. The schism it experienced in 1953 was merely a prelude to this later development.

Although not clearly recognised at the time, those white South Africans who rejected political impotence or absorption by an N.P. which was striving, on its own terms, to form a common white front, had only one place they could look for allies: across the colour line. Seen from this perspective, the April 1953 increase in the size of the liberal wing of the U.P. from 11 to 19 M.P.s,[115] a possible consequence of Torch Commando influence during nomination contests, and the policies of the Liberal, Labour and Union Federal Parties were but the first hesitant steps towards an eventual rapprochement between the South African parliamentary opposition to the left of the Government and those extra-parliamentary forces which were already assuming their place as the real opposition to the National Party.

FOOTNOTES

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