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UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

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Title: The Germiston By-Election of 1932: The State and the White Working Class During the Depression.

by: Jon Lewis

No. 056

The Germiston By-election of 1932: the state and the white working class during the Depression.

Jon Lewis

I The Germiston by-election of 1932 was signigicant in itself. At the time it attracted detailed national coverage. It was marked by an intensity of campaigning which often errupted in violence, but also ensured a very high turn out at the poll. Five government ministers and several opposition spokesmen visited the constituency to speak in support of their respective candidates. Moreover there was no shortage of candidates. Five parties stood in the election, and a further four candidates, including one black, proposed to stand at some time or other during the election period. The election was influenced by specifically local factors: particularly by a bitter strike in the clothing industry.[1] However, the by-election was of truly national signigicance. Not only did the outcome of the election represent a crushing defeat for the Nationalist/Pact Government of the time, and thus rendered Hertzog more amenable to the idea of coalition. More than this, the by-election raised more general questions about the whole relationship between the 'power bloc' and the 'white working class', and highlighted very clearly the impact of the Depression on certain sections of white workers.

These questions have been discussed by Kaplan in his analysis of the South African state during this period.[2] He argues that during both the Pact and Fusion periods the state remained under the hegemonic control of 'national capital'. This hegemony was secured initially by an alliance with white labour. More specifically, the white new petty bourgeoisie (white collar and supervisory groups) and the white labour aristocracy (skilled, productive workers) formed an allied class - represented at the party political level by the Labour - Nationalist Pact - whilst the newly-proletarianised white 'lumpenproletariat (the 'poor whites') constituted a supporting class to the hegemonic fraction of capital. Fusion did not represent any change in the 'form of state'. The only change which occurred in the composition of the power bloc concerned the role of white labour, which was finally dropped from the alliance. This was manifested at the party political level by the dropping of the Creswellites from the Fusion Cabinet. Fusion must then, it is argued, be understood rather as a change in the 'form of regime'; that is, a change purely at the party political level, necessitated by a disjuncture between the political interests of the power bloc, and its party political representation. The immediate cause of this disjuncture was Hertzog's refusal to abandon the gold standard, in the face of opposition from all sections of capital. Coalition was not, then, a response to general economic crisis. In the first place, the Depression was relatively mild in South Africa, and its impact uneven. Gold mining, in fact, expanded during the period. Moreover, by the time of Fusion - in 1934 - the economy was already coming out of depression. Nor is there any suggestion in the writing of Kaplan or his associate writers that the struggles of classes outside the power bloc may have influenced events in the direction of Fusion. The primary characteristic of the Depression and the period up to Fusion is, then, seen to be a crisis of party political representation for the power bloc.

transitory activities of the political actors who occupy the front of the historical stage.

1. Although this did affect Johannesburg as well.

2. Kaplan D. : 'Capitalist development in South Africa: Class conflict and the state', IDS Discussion Paper, 1974.
Kaplan D: 'An analysis of the South African state in the "Fusion" period 1932-39, ICS 1976.
Kaplan et al: 'Davies/Kaplan/Morris/O'Meara - 'Class struggle and the periodisation of the state in South Africa', Review of Africa Political Economy No 7.

3. N.M. Stultz - 'Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948' (1974) pp. 25-35.

4. Kaplan et al p. 13.

5. Poulantzas N. 'Political Power and Social Classes' pp. 243-5.

6. This judgement is based upon my own research into the process of deskilling in the metal and engineering industries over the period 1920-1956.

7. The SALP'S later electoral pacts with the United Party would have to be seen in terms of 'alliance'.

8. Kaplan et al, p. 19.

9. Davies R. 'Capital, the state, and white wage earners: An historical materialist analysis of class formation and class relations in S.A. 1900-1960 (Phd, Sussex, 1977) p. 212.

10. This is not to accept completely the iconoclasm of Innes and Plaut - 'class struggle and economic development in South Africa: the inter-war years' ICS, 1977.

11. 'Star' 31/8/32 'Critical test for Labour Party'.

12. Rand Daily Mail 12/8/32.

13. RDM 12/8/32.

14. RDM 1/12/32.

15. RDM 2/12/32.

16. RDM 2/12/32.

17. Lewis J. - 'Trade Unions and Changes in the Labour Process in S.A., 1925-30' ICS 1978.
I discuss the employment of whites as operatives in certain sectors of secondary industry - particularly the consumer products industries.

18. Union Statistics (1960) G6: The number employed in private industry fell from 161,349 to 141,906 between 1929 and 1933. (However the number of white males employed dropped only slightly: from 43,934 to 41,083, whilst the figure for white women increased: 12,971 to 16,731. There are no statistics for the actual Depression years 1930-1 and 1931-2).

The degree of alienation amongst the skilled railway workers was demonstrated by their threat to stand their own candidate in the by-election. [62.]

It is significant that on the one occasion that the SAP attempted to hold an election meeting among white railway labourers, on the Germiston-Elsburg deviation scheme, it ended in chaos and a free fight was only narrowly averted by the sounding of the hooter, signifying that it was time to return to work. [63.] The relationship of the white labourers to the government is perhaps best expressed in the words of one of the hecklers at the meeting:
"Put some money and butter in our pockets; they talk better than words."

In fact the whole background to the Elsburg deviation scheme is quite revealing. The scheme had been planned for some years. It was the advent of the by-election, however, which reminded Government ministers of the urgency of the project. Mr Malcolm Hill of the Centre Party charged that some 600 unemployed men were being brought to Germiston to work on the Elsburg deviation, and would be registered as voters in order to vote for the Nationalists. [64.] This was an exaggeration, but it does seem that support for the Nationalist Party was a prerequisite for a job on the scheme. [65.] Furthermore, it appears that many railway labourers were unaware that their individual votes would remain secret, and feared that they would lose their jobs if they voted against the Government. [66.] Similarly, techniques of intimidation and employment inducements had been used by the Nationalists during the earlier Colesburg by-election. [67.] On that occasion the Nationalists were victorious. However, the composition of the crucial railway vote was very different in the two towns. On the eve of the Germiston elections the Nationalists were still predicting victory:

"They base this confidence on the result at Colesburg, where they claim that the railway vote was solidly theirs. They admit, however, that there is a vast difference between the railwaymen of Colesburg and the railwaymen of Germiston. At Colesburg a large proportion, if not the majority are labourers. In Germiston the labourers are in a considerable minority, and the artisans and running staff men have the issue in their hands. The Nationalists definitely fear a landslide against them among the higher grades of railwaymen; and in other parties this expectation applies to the whole railway service". [68.]

It is, then, hardly surprising that Government spokesmen who visited Germiston stressed the success of the Railway Administration in increasing the ratio of white labour employed in the service, rather than the severe wage cuts suffered by the higher grades. [69.]

IV There remains one other significant section of white wage earners in Germiston which has not been considered so far: the miners. It has been argued that by this time, this group formed part of a new petty bourgeoisie. [70.] They no longer performed productive work, but were solely responsible for policing the black workers under their authority. Along with white artisans, this group had entered into alliance with national capital in 1922-4. However, the Pact victory of 1924 did not enable miners to regain their pre-1922 economic position. [71.] "On the other hand, the white miners did, during this period gain an important concession in the form of statutory protection for their existing positions in the division of labour." [72.] It might be argued that the position of the white new petty bourgeoisie (miners) had much in common with that of the white lumpenproletariat employed as labourers by the state. Both groups saw themselves threatened by cheaper black labour. Also, both looked to the state to guarantee their employment. [73.]

Whilst in agreement with much of the foregoing analysis, it does seem that certain questions remain unanswered. In the first place, Kaplan employs chronology to show that Fusion - which took place in 1934 - could not have been a response to the economic crisis, which was by this time over. But equally true, coalition occured five months after Hertzog had abandoned the gold standard, whilst Fusion was only finally sealed some two years after the event. [3] If the main problem was the gold standard, its solution did not necessitate the break-up of the two-party system. Furthermore, given the weakness of the Nationalist Party, as demonstrated by the Germiston by-election, would not the interests of the South African Party, and its main backers - mining capital - have been better served by hanging on for a year until a general election was called in the Knowledge that they would be able to take complete control of government. At the level of the 'form of state' 'national capital' may have remained dominant, but nevertheless ' mining capital' would have been better placed to defend its interests by virtue of its greater representation at the level of the 'form of regime'. On the evidence and arguments Kaplan presents, one would be forced back into seeing coalition/ fusion as a magnanimous gesture on the part of Smuts, inspired by patriotism, and facilitated by Hertzog's fear of losing an election.

As regards white wage earners, there seems to be some confusion when dealing with the changing class positions of the class fractions which comprise this group. Initially, under the Pact, the white labour aristocracy and the white new petty bourgeoisie were in alliance with national capital, whilst the white lumpenproletariat constituted a supporting class. However, with the transition to modern mass production during the 1920's , white skilled workers came increasingly into conflict with capital. This was reflected in divisions within S.A. Labour Party, and growing opposition to Creswell, who is said to represent fractions of the new petty bourgeoisie. Eventually, in 1928, the SALP split, with Madeley and the Councillites, representing the skilled workers, withdrawing from the Pact to establish an independent social democratic movement. It is argued that from 1928 national capital was in alliance with only a fraction of the new petty bourgeoisie: "A considerable proportion of the rest of the new petty bourgeoisie and white working class were however, being dominated by a racist and parliamentary cretinist ideology, still in the position of a supportative class- though to the form of state rather than to national capital exclusively". [4]

It is at this point that certain questions must be raised. What characterises the white labour aristocracy (i.e. skilled workers) at this point in time is its increasing struggle with capital over the question of deskilling; and its withdrawal from the alliance with national capital. Yet it is argued that it remains a 'supportative class ' by virtue of its domination by 'racist and parliamentary cretinist ideology'. This is not a sufficient argument. Indeed, one might say that such an ideology is characteristic of the working classes of most advanced capitalist countries. To establish that the white labour aristocracy was a supporting class, it would be necessary to satisfy the second characteristic which Poulantzas lays down:

"The particular support of the supporting classes is due to the fear, whether real or imaginary of the power of the working class". [5]

This leads to a 'power fetishism': the belief in the state as guardian of their interests against those of the power bloc, and against advances made by the working class. In the South African context it would have to be argued that the white labour aristocracy looked to the state to guarantee its position against the encroachment of black labour. I would suggest that at this stage this was not the case. White skilled workers saw clearly that it was the employers' introduction of new machinery and mass production techniques which threatened their position in the labour process. [6.] Furthermore, Poulantzas argues that a supporting class is incapable of achieving autonomous political organization. The continued existance of the Labour Party might suggest that this was not the case with the white labour aristocracy in South Africa. [7.]

Kaplan's treatment of the 'white wage earners' during the period of the Depression and up to Fusion also raises certain questions. He argues that mechanization continued to undermine the position of skilled white workers:

"The alliance of this fraction of 'white labour' with national capital, already as we have seen considerably undermined during the Pact period, was further weakened. They now were in the position of a supportative rather than an allied class and this was manifested at the party political level by the dropping of the Creswellite wing of the Labour Party from the 'Fusion Cabinet". [8.]

This must surely be incorrect - since it has already been decided that Creswell represented the new petty bourgeoisie. If the dropping of the Creswellites signifies anything, it must be the demotion of the new petty bourgeoisie from the status of a class allied to national capital to that of a supporting class. This seems more tenable. The new petty bourgeoisie lost any autonomous party political representation, and it is this class - the white miners, for instance - which looked increasingly to the state to guarantee their position within the labour process. Alternatively one might argue that the expulsion of the Creswellites from the Fusion Cabinet signified nothing at all, since, as Davies himself has shown, with the reconstitution of the Labour Party in 1931, Creswell and Sampson by 1934 represented no one but themselves. [9.]

There is one final, and more general criticism which can be made of Kaplan's thesis. This is its failure to take into account the struggles of classes outside the power bloc: the struggles of both white and black workers. [10.] This paper will seek to analyse the impact of the Depression on sections of the white working class, and the struggles which this precipitated. It will be argued that the subsequent coalition/fusion can be seen, at least in part, as a response at the party political level to the withdrawal of political support by sections of the white working class from the power bloc, which weakened the political conditions necessary for continued dominance by the ruling classes in general. Finally, it may be argued that Fusion was eased by the existence of the 'gold premium', after the rejection of the gold standard, which made possible the accommodation of conflicting interests between fractions of capital.

II Germiston began life in the 1880's as a mining settlement. By the 1920's it had become the major rail junction and distribution centre of the Southern Transvaal. During the secondary industrialization of the 1920's, Germiston's industry was diversified in the direction of manufacture, particularly clothing, and later engineering. The overwhelming majority of the town's population worked in one or other of these sectors. The electorate of Germiston was then, predominantly white working class and new petty bourgeoisie.

The town experienced massive population growth over this period: increasing from 42,355 in 1921 to 79,440 in 1936. An increasing proportion of the white population (which constituted C. 50% of these figures) was made up of dispossessed Afrikaners from the land. One Labour leader, analysing the Labour Party's chances in the Germiston by-election remarked on the "marked shrinkage in recent years in the number of English-speaking workers in the urban constituencies. These English-speaking workers were the mainstay of the Labour Party". [11.] In fact by 1932 Germiston was predominantly Afrikaans-speaking (as far as the white population was concerned) and contained more Afrikaans-speaking people than any other constituency on the Rand, with the exception of Vrededorp. [12.] Although Germiston had been held by the Labour Party since 1924, this was only by virtue of the Pact electoral alliance with the Nationalist Party. Thus when Geroge Brown, the incumbent Labour Party M.P. died in August? 1932, the Nationalists were confident of taking the seat:

"The Nationalists firmly believe that Germiston, even under the present delimitation, is one of their strongest seats, and the Cabinet openly laughs at the suggestion that it cannot comfortably be won at this election for the party". [13.]

Thus the final result when it was announced on what was a record poll for South Africa, represented a crushing defeat for the Government: [14.]

J.G.W. Strauss (SAP)	4,257
H.J. Schlosberg (N.P.)	3,076
W.J. Dalrymple (Labour)	132
F.P. Steinhobel (National Economic Bond)	51
M. Hill (Centre Party)	33

SAP majority - 1,181
voters roll - 8,585
turnout - 7,800

F.A. Joubert, the organising secretary for the SAP in the Cape Province aptly remarked:
"Germiston has proved to be General Hertzog's Wakkerstroom". [15.]
General Smuts was quick to claim this result as a defeat for the Government's policies of maintaining the gold standard, and 'racialism' (i.e. anti-English measures) [16.] However, a close examination of the election campaign shows quite clearly that these issues were not in the fore front of most people's minds. In fact election speeches dealt overwhelmingly with the questions of wage reductions and unemployment.

The by-election result must be seen against a background of sustained attack against sections of white workers: firstly, those whites who remained productive workers, usually operatives, in secondary industry [17]; and secondly, productive skilled workers - the old white labour aristocracy. Kaplan emphasises the fact that economic crisis was not so severe in South Africa as elsewhere. There may not have been a crisis of capital in general, but, nevertheless, unemployment was widespread [18] and wage cutting did take place in certain sectors. Furthermore, economic crisis traditionally provides an opportunity for capital to reorganise the work process in its favour, and here there is evidence of 'speeding-up' and an intensification of the process of deskilling. The reaction which was provoked is evidences by the figures for industrial disputes during this period. The total number of persons on strike for the years 1931 and 1932 was 6,284 and 4,011 respectively, whilst the number of man-days lost for the same years was: 54,745 and 26,034. [19] Whites accounted for the majority of man-days lost: 42,164 in 1931 and 20,714 in 1932. These years witnessed the greatest intensity of industrial disputes since 1922, and this was not matched again until the early years of the second World War.

III These tensions and struggles, intensified by the Depression, were dramatically manifested in a general strike of clothing workers which broke out in August 1932. The Garment Workers' Union had been fighting against low pay and sweated labour in the industry since the late 1920's. In 1929 the employers on the Industrial Council, representing the larger factories, had finally agreed to a more thorough supervision of the industry to eliminate illegal underpayment of wages. [20] However, this new-found accord was shattered with the Depression. Sachs describes the plight of 'hundreds' of government workers, thrown out of work. [21] In 1931, the GWU called a general strike of its members when the employers demanded wage cuts of 25%, which would have brought wages on the Rand into line with coastal rates. As a result of an inconclusive strike, it was agreed to hold wages at their existing rates for 9 months. [22]

Despite this temporary truce, attacks upon the workers continued. The employers contravened the agreement by underpaying their employees. [23] The task work system was intensified and a general enforced 'speed up' took place. [24] European male workers were gradually being eliminated from the industry in favour of female labour at lower wages. [25] Qualified workers on the top rate of pay were being sacked in favour of beginners who were paid much lower rates. Finally, after their defeat in 1931, the employers had resolved to smash the union, in order to secure the desired wage cuts. Shop stewards and active Union members were victimised, and attempts were made to establish a rival 'Bosses Yellow Ticket Union'.

When the agreement expired in August 1932, the employers again demanded a 25% wage cut. They had by this time become openly hostile to the Union. A pamphlet was issued denouncing the Union and urging the workers to accept the terms offered. Police protection was promised to strike-breakers. The Union's strike call was only partially successful. In Germiston, where employers had been particularly hostile to the formation of a trade union, it was necessary to prevent the use of scab labour by mobilizing groups of pickets, known as 'shock brigades', and run on the lines of the 'flying picket.' [26] At this stage, fearing the effects of a long-drawn out strike on the outcome of the by-election, the authorities moved rapidly to break the strike. Mounted

police were used to breach picket lines, with inevitable injuries and arrests. These actions brought an immediate protest from white workers in Germiston. When it was announced that two girl strikers (one of whom was a future president of the Union - Johanna Cornelius) had been imprisoned, a crowd of over one thousand threatened to march on the local police station unless they were released. The GWU retaliated against the use of police by the authorities by calling for opposition to the Government's candidate in the by-election.[27] At one stage the Union was seriously considering entering its organiser, G. Malan, as a protest candidate in the election.[28]

Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Nationalist leaders were seeking to end the strike. After meeting with the employers, Pirow was told that Sachs presented the only obstacle to a settlement. Subsequently Sachs was visited by two leading Nationalist Party officials, Moll and Wentzel, and warned of the consequences should he continue the strike.[29] In fact the strike was already crumbling in the face of police violence and lack of funds and support. At this stage the Government stepped in with an offer of arbitration. The result was a 10% cut in wages, the figure which the employers had agreed to settle for. This defeat severly weakened the union. Trade union activists were victimised and the Union's membership fell to a few hundred. The final blow was delivered when Sachs, along with four Communists, was banished from the Witwatersrand by Oswald Pirow under the Riotous Assemblies Act (Amended 1930) for allegedly promoting racial hostility.

Pirow justified these steps in terms of a 'communist threat'.[30] In fact the Communist Party was active at this time, organising the unemployed and recruting amongst blacks. Indeed during the by-election, the Communist Party held meetings outside the Germiston location, and organised resistance to the lodgers tax, which in a period of high unemployment was particularly irksome.[31] However, in the case of Sachs, who had been expelled from the Communist Party the previous year, Pirow's actions were interpreted as a sop to the clothing manufacturers.[32] Sachs himself drew attention to the strong links between the Nationalist Party and the Germiston clothing employers, who had 'contributed liberally to the funds of the Nationalist Party'.[33] The breadth of opposition to the banishments was particularly significant. A mass protest meeting of 2,000 people in Selbourne Hall was addressed not only by representatives of the Communist Party and the GWU, but also by Madeley and Dalrymple of the SALP.[34] A meeting of railwaymen at the loco sheds in Germiston, called by the Labour Party on 16 November, also passed a resolution calling upon the Minister of Justice to rescind the banishment orders.[35] The Government's use of the Riotous Assemblies Act was clearly seen as a threat to working class organisation in general.[36]

III The heaviest area of retrenchment and wage-cutting during this period was on the railways. [37.] This was only partly due to the Depression. One of the effects of the Government's stand on the gold standard was to increase the burden of interest payments, payable by the railways. [38.] However, the wage reductions which were introduced were carried out selectively. It is the way in which the cuts were administered which reveals most clearly the state's relations with different sections of white wage earners. It was the artisans and running staffs who bore the brunt of the Administration's economy measures. It was alleged that artisans lost between a quarter and a half of their earnings. [39.] In 1931 the Administration proposed to cut artisans' bonus earnings by 50%. [40.] After protest from the unions it was decided that there should be instead a reduction of 5 minutes per hour on all items of all bonus earning schedules. In fact, railway iron moulders in Pretoria, at least, believed that this represented an even greater cut than the 50% reduction. [41.] Moreover, these wage cuts were seen as "a direct lead from the Government to other employers ... what effected the Railwaymen today would effect other sections tomorrow". [42.] In addition to wage cuts and 'speed ups' the railway artisans also had to suffer extensive short-time working. [43.]

The activities of the Railway Administration, *vis a vis* its skilled employees, must be seen as part of capital's attempts, in conjunction with state intervention, to undermine the position of autonomy which white artisans had gained within the labour process. The Pact Government, in the late 1920's, had sponsored committees and conferences to promote mass production in the Engineering industry. [44.] This included attempts to get the craft unions to agree to amend the apprenticeship system and to agree to tasks, formerly reserved to skilled men, being performed by 'operatives'. In fact, as far as private engineering was concerned, capital was only able to achieve widespread deskilling during the Second World War. However, on the railways, the position of the craft unions was already being undermined. The Railway Administration was in a strong position: it was a large employer; it had close links with government; and it was exempted from the provisions of the Industrial Concilation Act, whilst conditions of service on the Railway made it illegal to strike. [45.] The unions on the other hand were divided, especially with the growth of the Artisan Staffs Association, which proved more amenable to the Administrations demands to relax demarcation lines. [46.] Already by the late 20's, the Administration was engaged upon a course of mechanisation and job reorganisation wherever possible: [47.]

"By the introduction of improved labour saving machinery it has been possible to speed up output in many instances. The question of setting reduced bonus work times for operations performed on such machines is being closely watched".

Supervision of work was increased, [48] and bonus work inspectors were employed to revise piece rates. [49.] This was at a time when skilled unions, such as the Iron Moulder's Society, would have nothing to do with piece-work in private industry. [50.]

The Depression and the consequent threat of unemployment allowed the Administration to intensify its campaign. Craft union executives received complaints that unskilled labour was being used to carry out skilled work. [51.] As part of its campaign of economies, the Administration

downgraded many artisans to the level of labourer, [52] thus securing skilled workers at labourers' rates, and thus breaking down traditional demarcation lines. The resulting chaos finally provoked a strike of railway ironmoulders in Pretoria in 1934 directly over the issue of dilution. The strike was successful in re-establishing a Line of Demarcation', [53] but many of the defeats suffered during the Depression period proved permanent. [54].

The other aspect of the Administration's attitude towards its employees was bound up with the governments policy of 'civilised labour'. In Parliament, the opposition attacked the Government with the charge that on the railways the artisans and higher grades were financing the white labour policy. [55]. Labourers were permitted to do the work of skilled men, who had been put on short-time. [56]. Already certain grades of work - artisan schedule 'B' (which included coremaking, which in private industry, the Iron Moulders' Society was trying to retain as part of the work of a skilled man) - had been separated off, and alloted to white labourers as part of a policy of providing promotion opportunities. [57]. It is instructive to compare the evidence of different trade unions to the 1934 Railway Commission. The Mechanics Unions' Joint Executives demanded that the white labour policy be financed out of General Revenue, and protested against the encroachment on skilled work which had taken place. 'Die Spoorbond', which included labourers and lower grades, on the other hand, was content to praise, the benefits of the 'civilized labour policy'.

These divisions amongst white railway workers were very evident during the Germiston by-election. Out of some eight and a half thousand voters, it was estimated that three thousand were railway employees or their families. [59]. It was, therefore, perhaps not surprising that railway issues should dominate the by-election. What was striking, however, was the degree to which railwaymen were subjected to election speeches at their place of work. At least thirteen such occasions are reported. All but one of the election meetings took place outside the repair yards or the loco sheds - that is, they were directed towards skilled workers and running staffs, rather than labourers. Again, all but one of the meetings were held by one or other of the opposition parties. On the one occasion when the Nationalist candidate - Mnr Schlosberg - turned up to address a meeting of railwaymen outside the repair shops he was given a very mixed reception. Mnr Schlosberg subsequently explained that: "it was not his intention to have many meetings among the railwaymen, for he preferred to meet them personally and listen to their grievances". [60].

In contrast the various opposition parties - SAP, SALP, New Economic Bond and Centre Party - were all enthusiastically received. Even the Communist Party - which was attempting to stand a black member, J.B. Marks, as a protest dandidate - was given a hearing by the railwaymen:

"... at the railway workshops where the audience consisted mainly of English-speaking artisans, the whites were urged to write "communist" across their ballot papers. Most of them replied that they prefered to vote SAP, because though they did not think very highly of the Smuts party they wanted to show their disapproval of the Government, which had been cutting the wages of railway workers". [61].

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"Put some money and butter in our pockets; they talk better than words."

In fact the whole background to the Elsburg deviation scheme is quite revealing. The scheme had been planned for some years. It was the advent of the by-election, however, which reminded Government ministers of the urgency of the project. Mr Malcolm Hill of the Centre Party charged that some 600 unemployed men were being brought to Germiston to work on the Elsburg deviation, and would be registered as voters in order to vote for the Nationalists. [64.] This was an exaggeration, but it does seem that suppor for the Nationalist Party was a prerequisite for a job on the scheme. [65.] Furthermore, it appears that many railway labourers were unaware that their individual votes would remain secret, and feared that they would lose their jobs if they voted against the Government. [66.] Similarly, techniques of intimidation and employment inducements had been used by the Nationalists during the earlier Colesburg by-election. [67.] On that occasion the Nationalists were victorious. However, the composition of the crucial railway vote was very different in the two towns. On the eve of the Germiston elections the Nationalists were still predicting victory:

"They base this confidence on the result at Colesburg, where they claim that the railway vote was solidly theirs. They admit, however, that there is a vast difference between the railwaymen of Colesburg and the railwaymen of Germiston. At Colesburg a large proportion, if not the majority are labourers. In Germiston the labourers are in a considerable minority, and the artisans and running staff men have the issue in their hands. The Nationalists definitely fear a landslide against them among the higher grades of railwaymen; and in other parties this expectation applies to the whole railway service". [68.]

It is, then, hardly surprising that Government spokesmen who visited Germiston stressed the success of the Railway Administration in increasing the ratio of white labour employed in the service, rather than the severe wage cuts suffered by the higher grades. [69.]

IV There remains one other significant section of white wage earners in Germiston which has not been considered so far: the miners. It has been argued that by this time, this group formed part of a new petty bourgeoisie. [70.] They no longer performed productive work, but were solely responsible for policing the black workers under their authority. Along with white artisans, this group had entered into alliance with national capital in 1922-4. However, the Pact victory of 1924 did not enable miners to regain their pre-1922 economic position. [71.] "On the other hand, the white miners did, during this period gain an important concession in the form of statutory protection for their existing positions in the division of labour." [72.] It might be argued that the position of the white new petty bourgeoisie (miners) had much in common with that of the white lumpenproletariat employed as labourers by the state. Both groups saw themselves threatened by cheaper black labour. Also, both looked to the state to guarantee their employment. [73.]

The Depression did not seriously effect white miners, since the Mining industry actually prospered during the Depression years. [74]. It is not surprising, therefore, that miners did not figure largely in reports of the Germiston by-election. However, they did not remain completely silent. C.J. Andrews, a former executive member of the S.A. Mine Workers' Union, condemmed the Nationalist Government's record on wages, quoting the Lucas Award and wage cuts on the railways, as well as voicing opposition to the Government's handling of the garment workers' strike which proved, he wrote, that "the Nationalist Government is prepared to treat all sections of the working class with merely a cynical contempt". [75].
Moreover, it seemed likely at one stage that the Germiston branch of the MWU would nominate its own candidate for the by-election. In fact, this threat seems to have been largely a protest against the particular candidate selected by the Nationalists, on the grounds that he was neither a local man, nor a "worker" (i.e. was not clearly identified with the cause of white miners). [76].

I have suggested that the Depression witnessed an intensification of conflict between capital and certain sections of white workers. This was reflected in the increasing use of the repressive apparatus of the state - particularly the Riotous Assemblies Act - which was matched by a massive withdrawal of political support by these workers from the Government. The Germiston by-election, demonstrated the degree of alienation which had taken place. It remains, however, to analyse why this rejection of the Nationalist Government took the form of support for the SAP (as the election results show that it did). It was, after all, the SAP which had been responsible for the brutal suppression of the 1922 General Strike.

In the first place, there is some evidence, that white workers did not vote SAP with any great enthusiasm. [77]. A vote for the SAP was a vote against the Government. One might argue that the fact that white workers voted SAP, at all, demonstrated the extent of their hostility to the Nationalist Government. Certainly those who defected publicly, from the Labour Party, during the by-election, justified their position in these terms. [78]. The Nationalists certainly blamed their defeat in Germiston on those Labour Party supporters who had switched their votes to the SAP. [79].

Secondly, there was no credible alternative political party to vote for. The old SALP was compromised by its alliance with the Nationalist Party, and its subsequent internal feuding. It was the split in 1928 which put an end to negotiations for the trade unions to affiliate to the Labour Party, thus depriving the Party of vital support. [80]. Furthermore at the time of the election, *Forward* traditionally the official organ of the SALP, was supporting Dr Bruwer's National Economic Bond, and to a lesser extent the Centre Party. [81]. The Communist Party, on the other hand, in line with the 'Third Period' policy of 'bolshevisation' had succeeded in isolating itself from the registered trade union movement, and was busy trying to establish its own 'red unions'. [82]. During the 1932 garment workers' strike, the Communist Party called for opposition to the leadership of Sachs and Malan, and attempted to build its own 'rank and file' movement through the African Federation of Trade Unions. [83]. Given the popularity of Sachs amongst his membership, this position would not have endeared the C.P. to the ordinary garment workers of Germiston. In any case, the C.P. in standing J.B. Marks as a protest candidate, was using the by-election primarily as a platform to further its work amongst the location dwellers of Germiston. [84].

Nor did the two new parties which stood in the by-election - the Centre Party and the National Economic Bond - attract the votes of disillusioned white workers. In drawing attention to the proliferation of new political parties

during this period, Kaplan attributes this phenomenon to a "dislocation between class interest and the party political representation of this interest", and the consequent attempt by capital to represent itself outside the traditional two party system. [85]. This may have been true of, some of the parties established, but the 'Workers and Farmers' Bond, for instance, was specifically formed to represent the interests of the white unemployed. [86]. Furthermore, spokesmen for the two parties which contested the Germiston election - the Centre Party and the National Economic Bond - spent a great deal more time on the plight of the railwaymen and 'poor whites', then they did talking about the gold standard. [87]. Although Dr Bruwer was firmly opposed to the gold standard policy and attacked the two-party system, the thrust of his speeches and propaganda was directed towards questions of unemployment and wage cutting, and was designed to appeal to white workers and unemployed. [88].
It is for this reason that the Nationalists reserved their roughest treatment for the Centre Party and the National Economic Bond. The Nationalists feared that these parties - both claiming to represent the Afrikaner dispossessed - would draw off the votes of Afrikaner workers and unemployed. Dr Bruwer was physically attacked, sustaining serious injury, [89] whilst the meetings of the Centre Party were forcibly disrupted. [90]. Dr Steenkamp was seen by Nationalists as a traitor to Afrikanerdom, who had come to split the vote. [91].

VI It would be wrong to conclude this analysis of the Germiston by-election in terms of the success or failure of particular political parties. Such an electoralist approach would be forced to conclude that the subsequent coalition and Fusion was the result of selfless patriotism on the part of Smuts, since the SAP stood to win outright at the next General Election. Similarly, as I have already argued, it is not adequate to conceptualise Fusion as the outcome of a disjuncture between the interests of capital and the form of party political representation. [92]. Rather, it is possible to regard 'Fusion' as a response to a minor 'crisis of Authority' [93]: a crisis at the level of party political representation precipitated by the withdrawal of electoral/political support by sectors of the white working class. The immediate background to this crisis was the Depression, and the intensification of conflict between these white workers and capital. The increasing intervention of the state to secure the interests of capital led to a general withdrawal of political support from the Government by these sectors of white workers. The SAP, on the other hand, although it might expect to win a general election was also discredited, in the eyes of white workers, by its record in the early 1920's. South Africa's system of electoral representation had narrowed to the point where its function as a means of 'integrating the state into the society' had been severly weakened. [94].

In the short-term capital sought to restructure the relations of exploitation at the expense of white and black workers alike. [95]. However, in the long-term, given the rapid growth of a black urban proletariat, which was already developing trade Union and other forms of opposition to its conditions of exploitation, it was essential for capital to re-establish the maximum political support which was necessary for its continued dominance. The Communist Party was certainly very influential amongst black workers and town dwellers at this time. [96]. Moerover, the Party's work amongst the unemployed produced incidents of non-racial class unity. Thus on May Day 1931, 2,000 Africans and 1,000 whites marched through Johannesburg to protest against unemployment. [97]. Teilman Roos may have been exaggerating the position, but it is significant that when he called for a national government on 22 December 1932, it was for the purpose of 'abandoning the gold standard and saving the country from communism'. [98].
Coalition and Fusion represented a reorganisation of the process of party political representation for the purpose of seeking to regain the electoral/

political support of white workers, thus preventing any possible alliance with the emerging black proletariat, and guaranteeing the political conditions necessary for the continued rule of capital.

At a more concrete level, there is evidence to support such a thesis. Smuts himself stressed the need to allow white labour electoral representation, under certain conditions. In return for support for the coalition, the South African Party was willing to provide three safe seats to labour men:

"We are making them a present of these seats, and we did it as a message of good will to the workers of this country. And the workers may rest assured that, not only are we doing our best to keep their representation in parliament - if we did not do so they would probably not have representation at all - but they may be assured that we shall continue to watch over their welfare, and we shall look after the interests of the workers of this country to the very best of our ability". [99.]

In class society, I would suggest, a primary function of parliamentary institutions is to afford apparent representation to the dominated classes (in the South African situation, of course, only certain racially defined sections of the dominated classes are in question). This is one of the ways in which the state is integrated into society. Kaplan's work, on the other hand, seems to suggest that Parliamentary institutions can be seen as an arena in which various fractions of capital (acting through party political representation) battle for dominance (if not hegemony).

This paper has dealt with the urban dimension of the Depression. It should be remembered, however, that the crisis was also a rural phenomenon. Agricultural prices fell, a process which was exaccerbated by Hertzog's decision to stay on the gold standard. Smuts commented on the consequent disaffection in the countryside:

"Half the country is bankrupt; Bolshevism is invading the platteland where all the talk is of moratorium, repudiation and like dangerous stuff". [100.]

It was exactly such issues as rural debt which provided ammunition for the new populist parties which emerged during this period. The political and ideological ramifications of the Depression are demonstrated in Smuts' private correspondence, where repeatedly he feels obliged to justify the capitalist system against the challenge offered by a communist alternative. [101.] Thus he wrote:

"There has never been such a test applied to our economic civilization, and it is still a question whether we can pull through without serious challenge to our spritual heritage." 102.

This paper has tried to suggest that Fusion was a response to social and political crisis brought about by an intensification of conflict between capital and labour. However, it would not be possible to 'explain' Fusion at this level alone. Such a course would deny any autonomy to the 'political'. In the first place, the existence of a tradition of 'hereniging,' dating from at least the mid-1920's, meant that Fusion was a concrete option during the crisis of the early 30's. [103.] One must also take account of the role of Roos in precipitating coalition. (In passing, it was the result of the Germiston by-election which prompted Roos to call for a national government in the first place [104.]). Roos's activities certainly frightened the traditional party leaders, and made them more amenable to coalition. Even Smuts hinted on one occassion that the emergence of a third party led by Roos might affect the SAP'S chances of victory in an election. Roos, however, was only a catalyst. For a short time he was borne along by a wave of popular discontent. Smuts himself emphasised the role of mass pressure in bringing about coalition. [106.] It is, then, in this popular disaffection, that the roots of Fusion must be sought, rather than in the

transitory activities of the political actors who occupy the front of the historical stage.

1. Although this did affect Johannesburg as well.

2. Kaplan D. : 'Capitalist development in South Africa: Class conflict and the state', IDS Discussion Paper, 1974.
Kaplan D: 'An analysis of the South African state in the "Fusion" period 1932-39, ICS 1976.
Kaplan et al: 'Davies/Kaplan/Morris/O'Meara - 'Class struggle and the periodisation of the state in South Africa', Review of Africa Political Economy No 7.

3. N.M. Stultz - 'Afrikaner Politics in South Africa, 1934-1948' (1974) pp. 25-35.

4. Kaplan et al p. 13.

5. Poulantzas N. 'Political Power and Social Classes' pp. 243-5.

6. This judgement is based upon my own research into the process of deskilling in the metal and engineering industries over the period 1920-1956.

7. The SALP'S later electoral pacts with the United Party would have to be seen in terms of 'alliance'.

8. Kaplan et al, p. 19.

9. Davies R. 'Capital, the state, and white wage earners: An historical materialist analysis of class formation and class relations in S.A. 1900-1960 (Phd, Sussex, 1977) p. 212.

10. This is not to accept completely the iconoclasm of Innes and Plaut - 'class struggle and economic development in South Africa: the inter-war years' ICS, 1977.

11. 'Star' 31/8/32 'Critical test for Labour Party'.

12. Rand Daily Mail 12/8/32.

13. RDM 12/8/32.

14. RDM 1/12/32.

15. RDM 2/12/32.

16. RDM 2/12/32.

17. Lewis J. - 'Trade Unions and Changes in the Labour Process in S.A., 1925-30' ICS 1978.
I discuss the employment of whites as operatives in certain sectors of secondary industry - particularly the consumer products industries.

18. Union Statistics (1960) G6: The number employed in private industry fell from 161,349 to 141,906 between 1929 and 1933. (However the number of white males employed dropped only slightly: from 43,934 to 41,083, whilst the figure for white women increased: 12,971 to 16,731. There are no statistics for the actual Depression years 1930-1 and 1931-2).

19. Union Statistics (G18).

20. Sachs E.S. - 'Garment Workers in Action' (1957) pp. 49-50.

21. Sachs p. 58. In fact this claim is contradicted by the official statistics on employment in the clothing industry (Union Statistics L10). However, it may have been the case that production and employment was transfered to the coastal areas where wages were much lower. Manufacturers were certainly threatening to do this (RDM 2/9/32).

22. Account of 1931 and 1932 strikes in Sachs pp. 58-71.

23. The list of complaints comes from GWU archive file 370. Document 'Facts about the present strike in the clothing Industry, Witwatersrand' 1/9/32.

24. Umsebenzi 20/8/32 'New Wage Cut Threats'.

25. Lewis J. 'Trade Unions and changes in the Labour Process in South Africa 1925-30' ICS 1978 - where I discuss industrialization, diskilling and the cheapening of labour.

26. GWU Archive 370.

27. RDM 22/8/32.

28. RDM 8/9/32

29. Sachs p. 67.

30. 'Star' 7/11/32 - 'Mr Pirow's speech at Germiston'
'Star' 19/11/32 - 'Mr Pirow's defence of the Government'

31. Roux E. 'Time Longer than Rope' (1972) pp. 260-2.
Simons H.J. and R.E. - 'Class and Colour in S.A. 1850-1950' (1969) pp. 460-1

32. Star 15/11/32 'Mr Kentridge attacks Mr Pirow'

33. Forward 11/11/32 'Mass Banishment Protest'.

34. Forward 11/11/32.

35. Star 17/11/32 'The Banishment Orders Condemned'.

36. Star 9/11/32 'Criticism by Mr Madeley - Deportation of Communists'.

37. Union statistics G-15
Between 1929 and 1933 the number of jobs on the railways was cut from 100,095 to 77,653. The cuts for whites, however, only amounted to a reduction from 58,562 jobs to 49,665. But more important to stress is the massive expansion of white employment on the railways since 1924. Numbers employed:

	Whites	Non-Whites
1924	39,024	47,157
1929	58,562	41,533
1933	49,665	27,988

38 SAR Reference Library: 'Gold Standard Debate 1932: Extracts of Debates in the House of Assembly levelled against the Railway Administration
Mr Giovanetti 9/3/32
Mr Deane 11/2/32

39. Ibid - this is frequently refered to by opposition members e.g.
Mr Deane 11/2/32
Mr Madeley 15/2/32
Mr Brown 23/2/32

40. An 541-1931 'Economy Proposals affecting artisans in Railway Workshops'.

41. Iron Moulders Society - Executive Minutes 17/6/31.

42. IMS Joint Executive meeting 17/9/30 - T. Chaplin.

43. UG39-32 Report of the General Manager of Railways and Harbours for the year ended 31 March 1932, p. 112.

44. Pretoria Archive: Department of Labour ARB 1362.

45. A special Act of Parliament had to be passed to imdemnify those employees who had taken part in the 1934 moulder's strike.

46. ARB 210.

47. UG50-29 General Manager's Report for the year ended 31 March 1929, p. 45.

48. UG45-30 General Manager's Report for the year ended 31 March 1930, pp.46-7.

49. UG50-29 pp.124-5.

50. This is based on my own research into the craft unions.

51. Eg. Analgamated Engineering Union, Monthly Journal August 1930, April 1932.

52. UG34-33 General Manager's Report for the year ended 31 March 1933 p. 117.

53. I.M.S. records.
Interview with Bob Plunkett, Secretary of the Pretoria Branch of the IMS, and one of the leaders of the strike. Interviewed 28/7/77.

54. This is shown in the work and conclusions of the 'Encroachment Committee' set up after the 1934 strike to deal with complaints of dilution and deskilling SAR Ref Library -
Report and Decision of the Encroachment Committee 1935.

55. Gold Standard Debate 1932: Extracts; Major Richards 23/2/32.

56. Ibid. Mr Deane 16/3/32.

57. SAR Special Bulletin No 135 - 'European Labour' 1929 pp. 324-5.

58. UG 36-34 p. 90 Annex B.

59. Star 26/11/32 'Deciding Factors at Germiston'.

60. Star 31/10/32 'Mr Schlosberg's Railway Plan'.

61. Roux, p. 260.

62. RDM 24/8/32.

63. Star 27/10/32 'Rowdy Meeting in Germiston'.

64. RDM 23/9/32.

65. Forward 21/10/32 'Verkiesingskantoor word Arbeidsburo'.
Star 29/10/32 'Big SAP Meeting at Germiston'.

66. Star 24/11/32 'Nationalist Spell'.

67. Umsebenzi - 22/10/32 'Germiston and Unemployment'
Star 27/9/32 'Behind the scenes at Colesburg'.

68. Star 29/11/32 'Summing up at Germiston'.
Forward 4/11/32 'The Nominations:-
"The Government Party are sure to have the support of the White labourers on the railways, but I doubt whether they will be so successful with the artisan staff or the running staff".

69. Star 14/10/32 'Nationalists at Germiston'.
21/11/32 'The Minister of Mines at Germiston'.
28/11/32 'The Miniter of Railways at Germiston'.

70. Wolpe H. 'The white working class' in S.A. Economy and Society Vol 5 No 2 (1976) Simson H. 'The Myth of the White Working Class in S.A.' African Review Vol 4 No 2 (1975).

71. Davies p. 160-3: Strikes occured in 1925 over the non-implementation of the de Villiers award, and in 1927 over the magnitude of the Lucas Award.

72. Kaplan et al p. 11. - by virtue of the Mines and Works Act of 1926.

73. These are characteristics of a 'supporting class'

1. fear of the working class
2. power fetishism

Poulantzas p. 244.

74. Kaplan, et al p. 14.

75. Forward 25/11/32 - letter to the Editor.

76. Star 16/9/32 'Demand for a "Worker" candidate'.
Star 24/9/32 'Mine Worker as candidate'.

77. Roux p. 260.

78. Star 24/11/32 'Nationalist Spell'
Star 28/11/32 'Advice to Labour'
Star 29/11/32 'Labour and Germiston'

79. RDM 2/12/32 'Repercussions of Germiston Election'.

80. Simons and Simons p. 349.

81. Forward editorials and reports during the period August - December 1932.

82. Umsebenzi 20/8/32 'Red Unions to lead the Struggle.

83. Umsebenzi 10/9/32 'Garment Strike at the Crossroads'. The CP'S opposition to Sachs revolved around Sachs' refusal to broaden the strike, and to involve the African workers. I know of no reply by Sachs to this charge of failing to consult with African workers affected by the strike. It is fair to assume, that in the face of unemployment, Sachs was forced back into a purely sectional defence of his own members' interests.

84. Roux p. 259-265.

85. Kaplan, et al p. 17.

86. Simons and Simons p. 456-7.
formed by T.B. Rutherford of the 'Typos', P. Mostert, editor of 'Forward' and Gideon Botha, one of the few Afrikaners from the old International Socialist League. It's programme was racist and called for the extension of the colour bar. "Botha returned to the radical camp in 1933. His temporary defection was a sign of the pressure applied to the left-wing of the labour movement". - presumably the pressure refered to was that exerted by the threat of unemployment.

87. The Workers' and Farmers' Bond, along with United People's Party, was absorbed by the Centre Party, which had been formed by the renegade Nationalist M.P., Dr Steenkamp (Star 7/9/32 '3 Parties Amalgamate). Dr Bruwer formed the National Economic Bond, and not the Centre Party, as appears in Kaplan's account (Star, Forward and RDM reports for this period).

88. Articles by Dr Bruwer appear in almost every issue of 'Forward' during the period of the by-election.

89. Star 24/11/32 'Dr Bruwer's injury.

90. Star 25/11/32 'Uproar at Election Meeting'.

91. Star 26/11/32 'Deciding Factors at Germiston'.

92. (A) This did not necessitate a break with the two-party system, since the Nationalist Government had already been forced to abandon the gold standard before entering the coalition.

(B) If it is to be maintained that rivalries between different fractions of capital had a crucial affect on the 'form of state'; and if it is to be maintained that these rival fractions were in some way 'represented' by their own political parties, then there seems to be no basis for the amalgamation of these parties, especially since one of the parties clearly held an electoral advantage.

93. To use a Gramscian term:
Gramsci A. 'Prison Notebooks' (1973) pp. 210-11, pp. 275-6.

94. Clarke S. - 'Capital, 'fractions' of capital and the state: 'neo-Marxist' analysis of the South African state'
to appear in Capital and Class 1978

95. Plaut and Innes ICS 1977.

96. Accounts of Roux, and Simons and Simons e.g. Simons p. 446-7 described Bloemfontein township as a " 'storm centre' of the liberation movement", where hundreds had been recruted to the C.P.

97. Simons and Simons p. 445, p. 456.

98. Simons and Simons p. 462-3.

99. ed J. van der Poel: Selections from the Smuts Papers volume V, document 330, Smuts' Speech on coalition 7/3/33.

100. Ibid. document 336, Smuts to C.P. Crewe 4/4/33.

101. Ibid. documents 309, 311, 313, 316.
In document 311 (4/2/32), Smuts commiserates with his friend, A.B. Gillet, over the fact that the latter's sons had recently been converted to communism.

102. Ibid. document 309.

103. W.K. Hancock: Smuts volume II.
Gys Hofmeyr first called for reunion in 1926 (p. 239). This call was taken up by his nephew, J.F.H. Hofmeyr in 1928 (p. 240) and explains the latter's retiscence to join either of the two political parties until the 1929 election. ed. J. van der Poel - document 302, L. Esselen to T. Roos 11/11/31 - discussing the formation of a new party.

104. W.K. Hancock p. 244.

105. ed. J. van der Poel, document 336, 4/4/33 Smuts to C.P. Crewe. This seems like Smuts' attempt to reconcile a supporter to coalition, on the grounds that the SAP would not necessarily have won the 1933 General Election.

106. Ibid. document 330.