

THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY 1932-34: THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS  
FUSION.

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## PREFACE

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Finally, in compliance with the regulations of the University of Natal, I declare that this whole thesis, including translations from Afrikaans texts, is, except where specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, my own original work.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Fusion of the South African Party and the National Party in December 1934 marked the end of an epoch in South African political history. By this act, party political divisions which had existed virtually since Union, focussing on the personalities and political philosophies of Smuts and Hertzog and deriving much of their force from the personal rivalry of the two leaders, were resolved. The great issues which had divided the two Parties - the sovereign independence of South Africa and her relations with Great Britain and the Empire, the relations between English- and Afrikaans-speaking South Africans, "Native policy", <sup>(1)</sup> and the claims to priority of agriculture and industry, labour and capital - remained thereafter as firmly at the centre of political controversy as ever. But Afrikaner Nationalist solutions to these problems, formerly associated with and personified in the career of General Hertzog, were henceforth to find more radical expression in a group of extremists led by Dr. D.F. Malan, who refused to accept the "path of moderation". When the period of co-operation between Hertzog and Smuts ended with the outbreak of war in 1939, Hertzog found himself almost as unacceptable to the new brand of Nationalists as was Smuts. <sup>(2)</sup>

Coalition and Fusion, though part of a theme deeply rooted in South African history, were not the result of any gradual process of evolution. The political co-operation instituted in 1933 followed hard upon a year which had been characterized by the most acrimonious exchanges between Government and Opposition and in which Party differences seemed to have become more firmly entrenched than ever before.

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1. Until fairly recently - as recently perhaps as the beginning of the Verwoerd era in 1958 - the term "racial" had a peculiar meaning in the South African context. It was a term used to imply the distinctiveness of the Afrikaans and English sectors of the population. Hence a "racialist" was one who favoured one language group at the expense of another. The problems of the Black people of South Africa were attended to by the administrators of "Native policy".
  2. See M. Roberts and A.E. Trollip, The South African Opposition 1939-45 (1947) chapter II.

In May 1932, Harold Mosenthal, chairman of the South Africa section of the Chamber of Commerce in London, described the political condition of South Africa in these terms:

To-day General Hertzog is driving the car of State with lamps full on, and General Smuts is approaching, also with lamps full on. Neither is willing to dim or dip, with the result that one cannot see South Africa for the headlights of mutual hatred. A crash can be the only end. (3)

Against this background of Party confrontation, the decision in February 1933 to form a Coalition Government, with the accent placed upon national rather than Party interests, came as a dramatic and unexpected stroke - "a thunderclap from the blue skies" was the reaction of Hertzog's Minister of the Interior, Dr. D.F. Malan.<sup>(4)</sup> What made the impact of the Coalition agreement more powerful still was the fact that it was presented as the successful conclusion to the attempts at the restoration of the political unity of Afrikanerdom which had taken place over the last two decades.

The vision of the unity of Afrikanerdom in the idyllic, pre-1899 Republican past was mythical, but it was a myth which had considerable appeal to the defeated Boers after the termination of hostilities in 1902, fostering a spirit of nationalism which sought not only the material but also the spiritual rehabilitation of the Afrikaner. Political parties were brought into being in both of the former Republics as instruments of the new nationalism. Leadership was given by the former Boer generals, Smuts, Botha and Hertzog, who aimed at ending wartime divisions among the Boers and creating solid Afrikaner support for the new political parties, Het Volk in the Transvaal<sup>(5)</sup> and Oranje Unie in the Orange River Colony.

Even before their victory in the 1907 election which

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3. The Star 26 May 1932.

4. D.F. Malan, Afrikaner Volkseenheid en my Ervarings op die Pad Daarheen (1959) p.152.

5. See N.G. Garson, "'Het Volk': The Botha-Smuts Party in the Transvaal, 1904-11", Historical Journal, IX, i, 1966.

followed the granting of responsible government to the Transvaal, Botha and Smuts had modified their attitude towards the Empire. This was in part an attempt to impress the British Liberal Government, in part a recognition of the need to capture English-speaking votes, and in part a realization that the war of independence had been fought and lost. In addition, Smuts saw that the unification of South Africa necessitated the creation of a new, "compact" South African nationalism which could not be based on an appeal to sectional interests.<sup>(6)</sup> Botha and Smuts supported the movement for the unification of the four colonies as a logical conclusion of this policy. In the area of party politics, the concomitant of national unification was the merger after the 1910 election of the three Afrikaner Parties in the Transvaal, the Cape, and the Orange Free State in the creation of a single, national Afrikaner party, the South African Party. It must be stressed that at the time of its foundation, the South African Party could not seriously compete with the Unionist and Labour Parties for English-speaking support, although it could on most issues count on the co-operation of the Labour Party, which saw its principal enemy in the "capitalist-dominated" Unionist Party.

Once Union had been achieved in 1910, Botha and Smuts accepted - for the time being at least - the view that South Africa was an integral part of the British Empire, and that the Colonial Laws Validity Act of 1865, in terms of which a law passed by a colonial parliament was declared void and inoperative if it contradicted a law of the British Parliament, applied as much to South Africa as to the rest of the Empire.<sup>(7)</sup> Smuts and Botha never accepted that this condition of subservience was desirable; on the contrary, Smuts had insisted from the beginning that the British Empire could continue to exist "only on the basis of complete freedom and equality" among the Dominions, and his speeches and memoranda on the subject of the future organization of

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6. See W.K. Hancock, Smuts: The Sanguine Years 1870-1919 (1962).

7. G.D. Scholtz, Hertzog en Smuts en die Britse Ryk (1975) pp.49 et seq.

the Empire played a considerable part in the genesis of the Balfour Declaration of 1926.<sup>(8)</sup> Smuts's vision of a commonwealth of free, equal nations left untouched the question of the right of any member nation to secede or to remain neutral when the rest of the Empire was at war.

Until 1914, however, constitutional theorizing was less influential than emotional appeal in formulating Afrikaner attitudes towards the Empire. The hard core of Afrikaner Nationalists felt disgusted at incidents such as the spectacle of Botha's attendance at the Imperial Conference of 1911. This repulsion reflected the fact that the Botha-Smuts policy of racial reconciliation, so necessary in the interests of stability, was not a true index of popular sentiment amongst the Afrikaners - had, indeed, won more genuine support among the numerically smaller, politically-divided English-speaking population, who approved the maintenance of a close relationship with the Empire. Many Afrikaners feared that racial reconciliation at this stage would lead to wholesale Anglicization, that the Dutch language and culture would be overwhelmed and the Calvinist religion undermined. They found a champion in General Hertzog, who had successfully carried on a struggle for mother-tongue instruction in schools and had been the most prominent advocate of language equality at the time of the drafting of the Union constitution. Hertzog left the Cabinet in 1912, and in 1914 formed an opposition group - the National Party - which aimed at securing practical equality between Dutch and English in South Africa on the basis of a "two-streams" policy, in terms of which the two white races would develop separately until union could take place on the basis of genuine equality between Dutch and English. The National Party was also frankly Republican in its outlook - although the sincerity of Hertzog's own attitude on the Republican issue is open to speculation<sup>(9)</sup> - and was determined to effect a more "rational" solution to the problems of the Black peoples of

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8. W.K. Hancock, Smuts: The Fields of Force (1968) chapter III.

9. See, for example, N.G.S. van der Walt, Die Republikeinse Strewe (1969) chapter V.

South Africa, the first step towards which was to be the abolition of the franchise of the Coloureds and Africans in the Cape. (10)

The rebellion in 1914 sparked off by South Africa's involvement in the Great War provided an index of the depth and extent of Afrikaner discontent with the policies of Botha and Smuts. (11) Further, Afrikaner nationalist opposition to the Botha government had received reinforcement when, the previous year, Smuts had alienated a large proportion of the country's white working-class by his "ruthless" suppression of a miners' strike. During the war years, the foundations of the alliance between nationalism and labour, which was eventually to overthrow the Smuts government in the election of 1924, were forged. At the same time, Botha and Smuts were forced into an ever-closer co-operation with the Unionist Party, which was regarded with bitter enmity by the Nationalists for its "jingoism" and by white labour for its association with capitalism and the interests of the mine-owners.

By 1921, political divisions which had been latently present since Union had become real and the party alignment which was to characterise South African politics until 1933 had taken shape. The South African Party had brought to completion the process of approach towards the Unionist Party by absorbing it in October 1920. No formal understanding existed as yet between the National Party and the Labour Party, but the absorption of the Unionist Party into the South African Party had increased their sense of mutual hostility to the Government, and the March 1920 elections showed clearly that a working agreement between the two

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10. For a study of the evolution of Nationalist "Native" policy, see N.J. Rhodie and H.J. Venter, Die Apartheidsgedagte (1959).
  11. See T.R.H. Davenport, "The South African Rebellion, 1914", in English Historical Review, 1963.



Parties would make them a formidable competitor for power.<sup>(12)</sup> For the first time, the South African Party was second to the National Party both in parliamentary representation and popular support. Significantly, nearly all of the Nationalist victories had been gained in straight fights against the South African Party in country constituencies.

Smuts, who had succeeded Botha as Prime Minister in 1919, was confronted with the necessity of co-operation with a party whose representation was sufficiently large to guarantee his government a parliamentary majority. This had been Smuts's motive in seeking a closer alliance with the Unionists, but even before the 1920 election, he had sought to take advantage of the movement for "hereniging" - the reunion of Afrikanerdom in a single political party - to stabilize his own position. His approach to the "hereniging" movement was not unprincipled - as an Afrikaner he felt greatly disturbed by the "most fatal matter" of "the division among our people".<sup>(13)</sup> But he was not prepared to compromise on the issue of South Africa's constitutional relationship with the Empire (specifically, the South African Party denied the Union's right to secede from the Empire and refused the National Party's demand for freedom to make propaganda in favour of a republic) and upon this rock negotiations for Afrikaner political regrouping foundered.<sup>(14)</sup> In addition, Smuts probably feared that a reunited Afrikaner

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12. The results of the 1920 elections were as follows:

	Candidates returned	Votes	Votes as % of Total
South African Party	41	90 357	31.57
National Party	44	100 583	35.14
Unionist	25	45 720	15.97
Labour	21	39 943	13.96
Independent	3	9 610	3.36
National Party gain ; 17	South African Party loss : 12		
Labour Party gain ; 15	Unionist loss : 13		
	Independent loss : 3		

(Source: W.K. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.30).

13. P.G. de Vos to Smuts, 4 October 1919; published in J. van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V (1973) p.14.

14. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.28.

party would be tainted by the racial excesses of the Nationalists, who were no closer to approving "conciliation" than they had been seven years before.

The ideal of "hereniging", with its sense of the tragedy of the division among the Afrikaner nation, remained in the forefront of the Afrikaner consciousness and prompted a series of attempts to achieve reunion in the 1920's. The establishment in 1916 of the Broederbond, a secret organization aiming at the promotion of Afrikaner language, culture and political unity, was one such attempt.<sup>(15)</sup> The Broederbond soon formed a close association with the National Party, and it seems a reasonable proposition that the Nationalists' refusal to agree to a negotiated "hereniging" settlement in the 1920's was in part the result of the Bond's preference for the tactics of persuasion and its belief that reconversion of the prodigal Afrikaners who supported the South African Party must take place on the basis of the approved Broederbond ideology, which should under no circumstances be compromised. Most of the initiative in the hereniging movements of the 1920's came from the South African Party, whose espousal of the cause more or less ensured its failure, for in the eyes of Afrikaner nationalists the South African Party had become the political home of jingoism, capitalism and liberalism - in short, of nearly everything which represented a threat to Afrikanerdom. Neither Hertzog nor Smuts responded to the appeal made in July 1926 by Gys Hofmeyr, a former administrator of South West Africa, for political reunion, although Smuts did at least take sufficient notice of the appeal to mention to Louis Esselen in February 1927 that hereniging "seemed to be quite dead".<sup>(16)</sup> Shortly after this, the hereniging struggle

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15. Not surprisingly, little information is available about this secret organization. G. Carter, The Politics of Inequality (1958) and A. Hepple, Verwoerd: A Political Biography (1968), contain speculative discussions of the history of the Broederbond. E.G. Malherbe, Education in South Africa, vol.II (1977) has an appendix in which the author recounts his personal experience of the Bond. A neo-Marxist interpretation of the Broederbond has been attempted by D. O'Meara, "The Afrikaner Broederbond 1927-48: Class Vanguard of Afrikaner Nationalism", published in Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers, vol.XXI, 1977.

16. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.240.

was taken up by J.H. Hofmeyr, the brilliant young administrator of the Transvaal, who broadcast an appeal on 31 May 1928 to both Parties to bury their differences and join together in a new party of like-minded men, devoted to no cause other than the promotion of the unity and well-being of the South African nation.<sup>(17)</sup> Hofmeyr was, at this time, politically uncommitted - although closer in sentiment to Smuts than to Hertzog - and politically naive, for he does not seem to have grasped that a difference of opinion about the nature of South African nationhood lay at the centre of party division. However, Hofmeyr's intrusion into the hereniging debate gave it a new character, for it created a small but significant body of opinion which believed that reunion would be impossible until Smuts and Hertzog had retired from the political scene, leaving the work to younger men. It indicated, also, that hereniging was beginning to acquire a broader meaning in the minds of some Afrikaners, for the merger of the National Party and the South African Party was no longer synonymous with a political reunion of Afrikaners alone. Such a merger now presupposed the inclusion of the larger proportion of the English-speaking electorate.

The idea of Afrikaner political reunion was thus present as a perpetual background to the politics of the 1920's, but was a high-minded ideal rather than an objective of practical politics. The truth of the matter seems to have been that both of the major Parties - and their leaders - felt that they represented principles far too valuable to be compromised or risked upon the venture of hereniging. During this period, Party conflict intensified, as did the personal rivalry between Smuts and Hertzog, but significant developments occurred which were to facilitate ultimate reunion.

The attitude of the National Party towards the status question underwent a dramatic change. In 1919 Hertzog led a mission to the Versailles Peace Conference asking for the

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17. Alan Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) chapter 14.

restoration of independence to the two former republics, basing his request upon the "national self-determination" clause in Wilson's Fourteen Points.<sup>(18)</sup> In 1924, he concluded an electoral pact with the predominantly English-speaking Labour Party, one of the terms of which was a Nationalist guarantee that the Republican issue would be shelved; then, in 1926, Hertzog as Prime Minister attended the Imperial Conference at which the Balfour Declaration, the guarantee of sovereign independence to the Dominions, was issued. In 1928, the National Party expressed its satisfaction with the new status of the Union by altering Article V of its constitution to read:

The National Party accepts the Declaration of the Imperial Conference held in 1926, and it is agreed that it is tantamount to our attainment of sovereign independence and of powers to exercise our function as a State at our own discretion. (19)

Even the avowedly republican Dr. D.F. Malan declared that

The freedom we now possess is greater than that of the former Republics. To-day there is not the least vestige of subordination to Great Britain. Secession can be in the interests of the country only if it means greater freedom and greater security, but the position to-day is that South Africa has the greatest freedom a nation can possess. (20)

Malan also declared that the achievement of national independence had an additional significance in that it removed the last obstacle to hereniging. (By hereniging, Malan meant a reunion of the people ("volk") who had constituted the old South African Party, and not a simple fusion of the existing South African Party and National Party. Hertzog, on the other hand, accepted the latter interpretation of hereniging but insisted that it could only take place on the understanding that the agreement enshrined all of the principles for which the National Party stood).

18. See Van der Walt, op.cit., pp.109-110.

19. O. Pirow, J.B.M. Hertzog (n.d.) p.131.

20. Ibid., p.153.

A second development which seemed likely to facilitate political reunion was Hertzog's gradual abandonment of an extreme nationalist stance, one symptom of which was the removal of Republicanism from the National Party's platform. The Pact's electoral victory in 1924 had raised the hopes of Nationalists for a complete political reorganization of the country and for a redistribution of offices which would place the National Party firmly in control of the most important posts in the civil service, the army and the police. Obviously Hertzog was unable to satisfy these expectations, even if he had wanted to. His insistence upon bilingualism in the civil service meant that far more Afrikaners were drafted into government jobs, but the supply of jobs lagged far behind the demand. Disappointed office-seekers - who tended to represent a section far more attracted to extremism - began to lose sympathy with Hertzog, and he with them. This group of malcontents joined forces with a hard core of Republicans to constitute a significant pressure group within the National Party.<sup>(21)</sup> They aimed at the removal of Hertzog from the Party leadership and his replacement by a more extreme nationalist. The effect of their efforts was to divert Afrikaner extremists from Hertzog. This helped to enhance Hertzog's new reputation for moderation.

By 1929, then, differences of principle between the National Party and the South African Party were fast disappearing or becoming irrelevant. The sovereign independence of South Africa seemed to have been affirmed by the fact that she had concluded a separate trade agreement with Germany,<sup>(22)</sup> was participating as an independent nation in the League of Nations and had established a Foreign Ministry and a diplomatic corps. The Native question was introduced into party politics by the 1929 election platform of the Nationalists - who took advantage of Smuts's controversial "Black Manifesto" speech at Ermelo<sup>(23)</sup> - but this was really an artificial issue in that the policy of

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21. C.M. van den Heever, Generaal J.B.M. Hertzog (1944) p.516.

22. Ibid., p.521.

23. See Hancock, The Fields of Force, pp.218-9.

neither Party envisaged any real concession to the Blacks.

Why then was reunion between the South African Party and the National Party, apparently desired in one or other form by both major political parties and by their leaders, achieved only in 1933, and then only as a temporary measure to deal with a crisis situation? Was there any logical connection between or identity of purpose in the hereniging attempts of the 1920's and Fusion in 1933-34? Why, in particular, did the South African Party decide to abandon its position of advantage in 1933 and to forego an almost certain victory in the elections scheduled for 1934? The Party regrouping of the period 1933-34 raises many questions, few of which have been satisfactorily answered. The motives of the leading protagonists of Fusion, especially those of Smuts and the South African Party, remain obscure.

Modern scholarship has thrown little light upon these problems. There has, as yet, been no published study of Fusion, although interpretations and explanations have appeared in a host of biographies and books covering the entire span of post-Union South African politics.<sup>(24)</sup> Many of these works are characterized by a simplistic and unmethodical treatment of the problem. For example, F.S. Crafford<sup>(25)</sup> maintained that Smuts's participation in Fusion is explained by his determination to ensure South Africa's participation, in the interests of Imperial solidarity, in the world war which he had foreseen as early as 1933. He went into Coalition and Fusion in the knowledge that it would find only partial acceptance among the Nationalists, and that in this way the party of neutrality would be split. This argument, which is supported by Pirow and by Meiring,<sup>(26)</sup> seems to be based on hindsight, and does not explain how Smuts was to ensure that the "neutrality party" would not reunite on the outbreak of war, or why a simple parliamentary majority for the South African Party -

24. The most recent is T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (1977).

25. F.S. Crafford, Jan Smuts: A Biography (1945) p.270.

26. Pirow, op.cit., p.153; P. Meiring, Smuts the Patriot (1975) p.135.

which even Hertzog seemed to think was inevitable at the 1934 election<sup>(27)</sup> - was not sufficient for his purposes. Unfortunately, Smuts's most reputable biographer, Sir Keith Hancock, deals rather too briefly with the Fusion episode. He appears to suggest that Smuts felt that the opportunity for the resolution of political differences was too good to be allowed to pass, and that his own position - and that of his Party - would suffer considerably if he did so.<sup>(28)</sup>

There is considerably more agreement concerning the motives behind Hertzog's participation in Fusion. D.F. Malan, in his memoirs, cites Hertzog's own justification for seeking co-operation with the South African Party: in the interests of Afrikanerdom, a general election on the lines of existing political divisions had to be avoided, for the South African Party would surely win; Smuts's government would then remain in power only as long as it satisfied the demands of the Natal members, whose representation would probably be greater than the South African Party's parliamentary majority; the agitation of the Natal members would probably lead to the exclusion of Afrikaans from that province.<sup>(29)</sup> Hertzog's biographers have, on the whole, agreed with this explanation, and have emphasized also his readiness to accept hereniging at any time, but on his own terms, that is, provided that attention was paid to all the principles of the National Party.<sup>(30)</sup>

This thesis attempts to examine and explain the decision of the South African Party to participate in Fusion by studying the period between 1932 - the year in which the political consequences of the world-wide economic depression made themselves felt in South Africa - and 1934. It rejects the presumption that Fusion or a political reunion of any kind was inevitable and that it merely waited upon the right

27. Malan, op.cit., p.154.

28. See Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.257.

29. Malan, op.cit., pp.154 et seq. See also B.C. Vickers, Natal and the Provincial Councils 1924-32 (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1970).

30. Pirow, op.cit., p.155; Van den Heever, op.cit., p.628. See also A.C. Cilliers, Generaal Hertzog en Hereniging (1941) pp.27-29 and S. Kierman, "On the Hertzog Monument", New Nation, October 1968.



stimulus to become reality. It treats as problematic the decision made by Smuts in January 1933 to sacrifice the political advantage the South African Party had gained over the past year, and attempts to determine the extent to which Smuts was led by his Party into Fusion, and whether he viewed the Coalition agreement of February 1933 as a forerunner of "hereniging" or as a temporary expedient.

It should be emphasized at the outset that this thesis has been based largely on published primary sources and newspapers, and that its conclusions may be drastically affected when a more thorough examination of private manuscript collections is undertaken. The results of this study should, therefore, be looked upon at this stage as tentative and exploratory rather than in any way definitive.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY: A PARTY WITHOUT PRINCIPLES?

Speaking in the House of Assembly on 24 January 1933 to a motion introduced by the Leader of the Opposition calling upon the Government to resign and make way for a National Government, the Minister of Justice, Oswald Pirow, described the South African Party as "itself a coalition".<sup>(1)</sup> The Minister of the Interior, Dr. D.F. Malan, expanded on this theme in claiming that the South African Party was a party without principles:

The South African Party has already been engaged for so many years to open its doors just to anybody who wanted to come in. It did not matter what the inner feelings of a person were: it did not matter what his political programme was, so long as a person will only enrol himself under the umbrella of the South African Party he is welcome. (2)

Malan and Pirow were giving expression to a feeling common among Nationalists that the South African Party was in reality no more than a conglomeration of the opponents of the National Party's clear-cut principles and policies. Alternatively, the South African Party was seen as an alliance of separate pressure groups interested in maintaining or extending certain existing "privileges". Four such groups could be positively identified: pro-British Natalians; Rand capitalists; old Afrikaner followers of Botha; and the group of Cape liberals who were determined to preserve the Native franchise in that province.<sup>(3)</sup> The dominant personality and vague principles of Smuts held this unholy alliance together.

The diversity of the composition of the South African Party stood in the eyes of Nationalists in stark contrast to what they believed was their own homogeneity and unanimity

1. House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX col.57.

2. Ibid., 26 January 1933 vol.XX col.143.

3. D.W. Krüger, The Age of the Generals (1958) p.153.

on matters of principle.<sup>(4)</sup> The National Party emphasized spiritual compatibility as the qualification for Party membership;<sup>(5)</sup> the South African Party, on the other hand, seemed prepared to embrace anyone who subscribed - even with reservations - to the rather flexible set of principles upon which the Party was based. The difference between the two Parties was seen, therefore, not as a clash of ideologies, but rather as a difference between ideology and expediency, or at least between a single great ideology and a multitude of lesser ones.

If the Nationalist analysis is correct, two conclusions may be drawn. In the first place, the South African Party was the "conservative" party in South Africa, in the sense that it drew its inspiration from the past, or from existing situations and institutions, while the National Party envisaged for the future radical changes in the constitutional, socio-economic and racial character of South Africa; and in the second place, the South African Party was more suited to the role of Opposition than to the task of government, because a South African Party government might be crippled by the conflicting and irreconcilable demands which Party factions could be expected to make of it.

The Nationalist interpretation of the South African Party was intended to demonstrate to the electorate the moral superiority of the National Party and the practical unfitness of the South African Party to govern. It was thus, on one level, an unsubtle and transparent piece of political propaganda which reflected the climate of party warfare in the decade before 1933 while saying very little about the issues over which the parties disputed. The Fusion controversy and the formation of the Purified National Party in 1934 produced a new wave of Afrikaner Nationalism in its most exclusive form and gave a new purpose to

4. The ideological heterogeneity of the National Party after 1926 has been examined by T. Dunbar Moodie, The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Civil Religion (1975) p.120 et seq.

5. Cf., for example, this comment made by Hertzog: "Co-operation in politics must be amongst men and women who feel themselves drawn together by common convictions in political matters - spiritually related." House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX col.46.

orthodox Nationalist views on the *raison d'être* and political aims of the South African Party. In this way, a political device of the 1920's and 1930's eventually became an orthodoxy of modern Afrikaner historiography,<sup>(6)</sup> and the tradition was fed by the publication in 1959 of the political memoirs of D.F. Malan, Afrikaner Volkseenheid en my Ervarings op die Pad Daarheen.

Contemporary Nationalists and modern Afrikaner historians introduced further distortions into their analyses of the South African Party by too ready an acceptance of the platitude that the appeal of the South African Party was to English-speaking urban voters - a fault of which even English-speaking writers have been guilty<sup>(7)</sup> - and by an oversimplistic description of South African Party policy on leading issues. In regard to economic questions, the South African Party was represented as the Party of big business: "What is the South African Party but the party of the rich man? Your capitalists and the mining magnates can mould the South African Party as they like. It is as putty in their hands." For that reason, the South African Party in collaboration with capital connived at the exploitation and oppression of white labour and its wholesale replacement by cheaper black labour: "Do you want all your places taken by blacks? That is what will happen if the South African Party comes in! South Africa will then be a country for the blacks."<sup>(8)</sup> These charges have not been entirely dispelled by the recent trend towards a more sympathetic treatment of

6. See, for example D.W. Krüger, op.cit.; F.A. van Jaarsveld, Van van Riebeeck tot Vorster (1976) and J. Kruger, President C.R. Swart (1961).
7. An example is the claim by N.M. Stultz in Afrikaner Politics in South Africa 1934-48 (1974) p.8, that "it seems likely that just over 4/5 of the Afrikaner electorate supported the National Party" in the election of 1929. Even given numerical equality of the language groups within the electorate, it is difficult to understand Stultz's calculations in view of the fact that the total non-Nationalist vote exceeded that for the National Party by nearly 62 000 votes.
8. General Kemp (Nationalist Minister of Agriculture) quoted in The Star 31 October 1932.

Smuts's handling of the 1922 strike.<sup>(9)</sup>

The "rich men" who played the tune to which the South African Party danced were mining magnates based in Britain. It was these foreigners who "came to South Africa to take possession of her riches and then invest the money overseas". These men possessed not only the wealth of the country but also every English daily paper and could therefore control public opinion. (So influential was this "Hoggenheimer" press<sup>(10)</sup> that the National Party had been formed to combat its work.)<sup>(11)</sup> Obviously, the business of exploitation was likely to be facilitated considerably by the maintenance of a close Imperial connection between South Africa and Great Britain; for this reason, the South African Party was guided by its manipulators in the direction of an Imperialist policy. This Imperialism - which was in reality inseparable from capitalism - was reinforced by a group of incorrigible "jingo", located mainly in Natal and the Eastern Cape. This latter group was not so much pro-British as anti-Afrikaner. In the words of General Hertzog, "Natal, together with other enemies of our South African nationhood, desires the victory of the South African Party because it seeks the downfall of everything that is Afrikaans."<sup>(12)</sup> The label "Imperialist" thus subsumed a wide range of enemies of Afrikaner Nationalism, all of which were readily accommodated by the principal rival of the National Party. The real issue involved in South African politics, in the eyes of Afrikanerdom, was "between Nationalism on the one hand and

9. Such a treatment is provided by W.K. Hancock, The Fields of Force, chapter 4. In this work (p.78 n) Hancock cites as an example of unfair connection of the South African Party with rampant capitalism a work by Ivan L. Walker and Ben Weinbren, 2 000 Casualties (1961). The "capitalist" interpretation of the South African Party is endorsed by a group of modern writers, prominent among whom is M. Legassick ("The Dynamics of Modernization in South Africa", Journal of African History XIII No.1 1972).
10. "Hoggenheimer" was the name given by D.C. Boonzaier to his cartoon representation of the gross, rapacious capitalist which appeared - ironically - in the pro-Het Volk Transvaal press in the post-Anglo-Boer War period.
11. A.J. Werth - a prominent Free State Nationalist - reported in The Star 19 January 1934.
12. Hertzog's message to the electors at the Colesberg by-election, The Star 2 July 1932.

Imperialism on the other".<sup>(13)</sup>

Modern historians have not gone so far as to adopt the Nationalist slogan of "Imperialism" in their assessments of the South African Party. Two considerations in particular might explain their more cautious approach. In the first place, emergent Black African states during the period of decolonization saw in "Imperialism" their major enemy; it was obviously undesirable for South African opponents of the Imperial connection to be associated by a common slogan with militant African nationalism. In the second place, the Natal and Eastern Cape jingoes made no secret of their extreme disaffection with the Status Bills of 1934 - legislation of which the South African Party officially approved and which even the Malanite section of the National Party grudgingly endorsed.<sup>(14)</sup> Thus the evident link between the South African Party and the "jingoes" was broken. Instead, the tendency has been for Afrikaans-speaking historians to emphasize the opposition of the South African Party to republicanism.<sup>(15)</sup> (A notable exception is G.D. Scholtz,<sup>(16)</sup> who has done justice to the positive aspects of South African Party policy on the constitutional status of South Africa by citing Smuts's opinion that South Africa could derive definite benefits from her membership of the Commonwealth, and that she should bear these in mind rather than continually thinking in terms of centrifugal policies).

The South African Party's consistent refusal to give its approval to Hertzog's Native Bills, which were first introduced in 1926 and finally passed ten years later, together with its failure to state any coherent alternative policy, provoked a flood of Nationalist criticism. Once again, their arguments and their judgments have been passed on, wholly or in part, to a later generation of historians.

13. Rev. C.W.M. du Toit quoted in The Natal Mercury 20 October 1933.

14. For a discussion of the effect of the Status Bills upon party politics, see ch.VI below.

15. See, for example, J. Kruger, op.cit., p.79; G. Coetsee, Hans Strydom: Lewensloop en Beleid van Suid-Afrika se Vyfde Premier (1958) p.18; and N.G.S. van der Walt, Die Republikeinse Strewe (1969).

16. G.D. Scholtz, Hertzog en Smuts en die Britse Ryk (1975) p.106.

The question of South African Party dependence upon the Cape Native vote provides a case in point. In 1932 Oswald Pirow had gone on record as having expressed the fear that any Government action taken against the agitation of the Communist Party - a party which, he said, had great popular appeal amongst Natives - would cause an outcry on the part of the South African Party, who were "so frightened of losing the Native vote in the Cape that they will put up with anything".<sup>(17)</sup> A year later, at the Cape National Party Congress in October 1933, the Chairman of the Rand National Party, Rev. B.R. Hattingh, justified his support of Fusion by arguing that the disfranchisement of the Native could not otherwise come about, as under the pre-Coalition dispensation the South African Party stood to lose several seats in the Cape if it supported the Native Bills.<sup>(18)</sup> A generation later, Sir Keith Hancock echoed this statement in his biography of Smuts:

Smuts did not expound, but no doubt had in his head, a more down-to-earth objection to Hertzog's franchise proposals: namely, that they were likely to reduce the number of seats held by the South African Party in the Cape. <sup>(19)</sup>

It does not necessarily follow that, because so much historical comment on the South African Party reflects very closely National Party pronouncements of the pre-Coalition period, it is therefore necessarily inaccurate. But it does suggest the possibility that re-examination of some of their assumptions might be fruitful.

For example, the South African Party had been charged by its Nationalist opponents with being an expedient coalition of interest groups<sup>(20)</sup> - a party vague on principles and lax in discipline. The available evidence does not support this contention. The South African Party, modelled at its formation in 1910 on the Transvaal Het Volk party, was, unlike the National Party, unitary in structure.

17. The Star 7 November 1932.

18. The Star 4 October 1933.

19. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.212 n.

20. See above, p.14.

Its ultimate forum was the Union Congress, with which lay final decision on all matters affecting Party principles, organization and discipline. It could be summoned at any time, without preliminaries, by the Head Committee - the Party's chief executive. Delegates to the Union Congress were elected in equal numbers from each of the four provinces. The structure of the Party within each province reflected the Union structure. The Provincial Congress and Head Committee were responsible for the Party's affairs within that province. Congress was composed of delegates elected by the local Party branches in the electoral constituencies. Its powers and prerogatives were strictly limited; all of its decisions were subject to review by the Union Congress, although its resolutions were regarded as binding upon members of the Party within that province until contradicted by a resolution of the Union Congress. The structure of the National Party, by contrast, was federal in character. The Party in each province was a sovereign, independent unit, and decisions of the Party's Federal Council, or of its Union Congress, were only in the nature of advice and were not binding upon any of the provincial Parties. (21)

Ideally, the pyramidal structure of the South African Party was meant to resemble the "classical model" of a democratically centralized party. A party adopted this structure in the hope of achieving the following aims:

First to make known to the centre with the greatest possible accuracy the point of view of the rank and file, so as to allow it to make valid decisions; second, to ensure that the decision taken by the centre is applied at all levels, strictly and exactly but with understanding, that is to say with the agreement of the rank and file. (22)

Usually, practice fell far short of this ideal. The most democratic form which the formulation of Party policies

21. The Party organizations are compared and contrasted in The Star 30 June 1933.

22. M. Duverger, Political Parties (1967) p.57.



often took was consultation by the party leaders with the parliamentary caucus. Even this was generally intended more to ensure normal parliamentary discipline than to determine what grass-root opinion was on any particular issue. The Party line was more often than not decided by discussion and consensus among the Party leaders; their decision was laid first before the Party caucus during parliamentary sessions, and then before Provincial Congresses and local Party branches. The final stage was the presentation of Party policy at public meetings - the abundance of which was a prominent feature of political life in the 1930's - where the securing of popular approval was seldom difficult in view of the facilities the Party enjoyed for the manipulation of public opinion.<sup>(23)</sup>

There was thus a powerful tendency in the South African Party towards centralization. The Party was dominated at national level by the leader - Smuts - and his chosen group of lieutenants, chief among whom were Duncan, Deneys Reitz, J.H. Hofmeyr, and the Party's general secretary, Louis Esselen. It is worth noting that all of the members of this group were based in the Transvaal. On the fringes of the inner circle, and also highly influential, were Senator A.M. Conroy, who succeeded to the chairmanship of the Party in the Cape in October 1933, Col. W.R. Collins, an old Boer War comrade of Smuts and the Party's Chief Whip, and - more because of the position he occupied than because of the esteem in which he was held - the chairman of the Party in Natal, Senator C.F. Clarkson.

This central Party directorate had, to all intents and purposes, secured for itself unchallenged primacy within the Party. It had appropriated the function of policy-making as well as that of disciplining the Party, and

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23. The English-speaking press in South Africa was, in general, staunchly pro-South African Party. The only exceptions to this rule were The Natal Mercury and the East London Daily Despatch, both of which opposed South African Party policy only on specific issues, notably the Status Bills and the question of Home Rule for the provinces. The only significant Afrikaans daily which supported the South African Party was the Transvaal paper Die Vaderland. This fact should not, however, be taken as proof of the accusation (see above, p.17) that "the Capitalists" controlled the press.



controlled - or at least strongly influenced - the means by which authorization for its actions could be obtained through normal Party channels. As will be seen,<sup>(24)</sup> on certain leading policy issues there was a wide spectrum of opinion within the Party; in these cases the Party leadership could not intervene to discipline members into adherence to an official Party line without seriously risking the collapse of Party unity. However, on issues on which there was a definite majority opinion within the Party - for example, the Devolution question - disciplinary action by the Party leaders could be both swift and drastic. Five Natal MP's, who had "made the fatal mistake of hesitating weakly between a loyal and unswerving adherence to the ideals which have always been the basis of Natal's political faith and a slavish loyalty to the Party"<sup>(25)</sup> were refused renomination for the general election of 1933. The Natal Mercury attributed this to the interference in local party nomination contests of the Natal Party chairman, Clarkson.<sup>(26)</sup> Clarkson was involved in a similar incident later in 1933 when he was accused of forcing through a Natal caucus meeting the election of the South African Party's paid organizer in Natal, Col. Blaney, to a vacant senatorship over the protest of two prominent Natal MP's, Heaton Nicholls and J.S. Marwick.<sup>(27)</sup> It is a reasonable assumption that he acted not unilaterally but on instructions from the inner circle of the Party leadership.

The composition of the Party's "inner circle" itself highlights an important aspect of South African Party organization. Only two of its five members - Smuts and Esselen - occupied any official position in the Party. The remaining three were front-bench MP's, and Duncan and Reitz

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24. See, for example, the discussion on South African Party Native policy below, pp.36-37.

25. The Natal Mercury 14 April 1933. The MP's concerned were Acutt, Anderson, Borlase, Richards and Williamson.

26. The Natal Mercury 13 April 1933. There is perhaps some significance in the fact that the more tractable Star (14 April 1933) reported but did not comment upon the axing of these MP's.

27. The Natal Mercury 12 September 1933.

were former Cabinet ministers, but it appears almost certain that they owed their prominence in the Party only partly to their political credentials and mainly to the fact that they enjoyed the confidence of the Party leader, Smuts. The case of Hofmeyr is particularly interesting. He was allowed an unusual degree of freedom of expression, differing, for example, from the Party's official standpoint on an important tactical issue - the anti-gold standard agitation of 1931-1932.<sup>(28)</sup> Yet this deviation from party orthodoxy - a deviation which incurred prompt censure from the local branch of the South African Party in his own constituency<sup>(29)</sup> - never impaired Hofmeyr's influence at the centre of the Party. Against this can be set the cases of two other prominent Party members, Senator F.S. Malan,<sup>(30)</sup> chairman of the Party in the Cape before October 1933 and of the Party's Union Congress, and G. Heaton Nicholls,<sup>(31)</sup> virtually the spiritual leader of the Party in Natal, who could not be excluded from holding office within the Party but whose influence was nevertheless minimized by the fact that they were frequently at odds with Smuts and had forfeited his confidence.

The evidence therefore suggests that the "inner circle" of the Party leadership was no junta of equal partners. Smuts enjoyed unrivalled paramountcy within the Party and the inner circle of its leadership, and the South African

28. An article he published in the Manchester Guardian in defence of the gold standard was reprinted in The Star 11 October 1932. Hofmeyr, it appears, felt "considerably honoured that he should have been allowed to differ from his party on this matter". (Alan Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) p.186).

29. The Star 19 January 1932.

30. F.S. Malan's ostracism from the Party's inner circle was completed with his omission from the Coalition Cabinet in March 1933. His biographer however implies that membership of such an elite would have been inconsistent with the fact that, throughout his political career, F.S. Malan had preferred to maintain an independent position from which he could freely express his opinion. (B. Cloete, Die Lewe van Senator F.S. Malan (1946) p.394).

31. That Heaton Nicholls saw himself as the leader of a minority Devolution movement in the South African Party is confirmed by his autobiography, South Africa in My Time (1961) p.234. Heaton Nicholls also caused the Party some embarrassment by his hard-line segregationist approach to Native policy. (See below, p.37).

Party's pyramidal structure found in him its true apex. (Party restraint, observed the Natal MP C.P. Robinson, was much more difficult during the periods when Smuts was overseas, as his absence tended to remove from the Party its focus<sup>(32)</sup>). His pre-eminence can be put down in part to his personal prestige and the moral authority he had won during his long and versatile public career, but he consolidated and maintained his position by controlling the mechanism of Party power, and by ensuring that all of the strands by which the Party was manipulated ultimately ran through his hands.

A comparison at this point with the National Party suggests itself. Members of the South African Party owed their loyalty ultimately to the Party as a national unit and to Smuts as national leader. In the National Party, loyalty was dispersed; the provincial Party and the provincial leader were frequently able to make first demand on the loyalty of members. Cape Nationalists, for example, acknowledged the national leadership of Hertzog, but often only as a remote and abstract fact - they were more concerned with loyalty to their provincial leader, D.F. Malan, and more anxious that their Party's unity be preserved at provincial than at national level. This was to be demonstrated by the sequel to the Cape Nationalist Congress of October 1933, when a large number of Nationalists who had supported Hertzog's Fusion proposals declared their intention to abide by the Congress's anti-Fusion resolution rather than risk splitting the Party in the Cape.<sup>(33)</sup> Similarly, in the Transvaal before 1929, Tielman Roos's authority as Party figure counted for more than did that of Hertzog. As late as January 1933, at a meeting of the Transvaal National Party Head Committee, one member could state, "We are all Roos people. Is that not so?" and elicit an enthusiastic affirmative response.<sup>(34)</sup> After 1929, the influence of the provincial leader in the Transvaal did not represent any

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32. The Natal Mercury 30 June 1933.

33. The Star 7 October 1933.

34. The Star 9 January 1933.

serious alternative to Hertzog as a focal point for the loyalty of members, as the personal pre-eminence of the leader, P.G.W. Grobler, was offset by his association with two powerful deputies, Oswald Pirow and General J.C.G. Kemp. The Transvaal Party was no less provincial in character than that of the Cape, but its independent action was hampered by its need to work in collaboration with the moderate Hertzog majority in the Free State National Party to counteract the influence at national level of the more overtly republican Cape Party.<sup>(35)</sup> Thus Hertzog retained a greater degree of personal influence over the Party in the Transvaal than in the Cape, although the possibility remained that if Roos returned to politics this influence would decrease. (This was almost certainly the reason for Hertzog's determination not to accommodate Roos by taking him back into the Cabinet should he express a desire to return to politics.<sup>(36)</sup>) The Party in Natal was small and insignificant. It contributed only one member to parliament and contested parliamentary elections only in Northern Natal, and its voice was of importance only at meetings of the National Party's Federal Council, to which it contributed delegates on an equal basis with the other three provinces.

It can be concluded that the Federal structure of the National Party encouraged a tendency towards the dispersal of power within the Party. The pre-eminence of its national leader was further circumscribed by the fact that the National Party's close association with the Dutch Reformed Church<sup>(37)</sup> brought forth serious rivals to the moral authority of Hertzog - Dr. D.F. Malan and the Free State Republican Dr. N.J. van der Merwe were cases in point.<sup>(38)</sup>

35. C.W. van den Heever, General J.B.M. Hertzog (1944) p.517 mentions the divisive effect on the National Party of Cape-Transvaal rivalry after 1924. The antagonism between the two provincial leaders was exacerbated by the personal rivalry between Malan and Roos.

36. O. Pirow, J.B.M. Hertzog (n.d.) pp.139-141.

37. See Moodie, op.cit., ch.1, for a discussion of the association between the Calvinist Church and the National Party in the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism.

38. W.A. de Klerk, The Puritans in Africa (1975) p.114, claims that Hertzog singled out Malan and Van der Merwe in a bitter denunciation of Dutch Reformed ministers who entered politics.



The comparison with the National Party also reinforces the idea that, from one point of view, the South African Party was the personal power base of Smuts, the agent through which his political goals were to be achieved.

This conclusion raises two further questions: of what elements was Smuts's power base composed, and what common bond linked them together in membership of the South African Party?

An analysis of the results of the 1929 general election and of the by-elections between 1929 and 1932 reveals very clearly that common assumptions about the electoral appeal of the South African Party, if not definitely erroneous, certainly overstate the case. It is true that the South African Party drew the majority of its parliamentary support from predominantly English-speaking urban constituencies. After the general election of 1933 43 out of 61 South African Party MP's represented urban constituencies, 21 of which were in the Cape, 16 in the Transvaal and 6 in Natal, and roughly two-thirds of the 65 MP's representing urban constituencies belonged to the South African Party. The case for the predominance of English-speaking support for the South African Party is strengthened by the fact that in the two cities in which Afrikaans-speakers were in the majority, Bloemfontein and Pretoria, the National Party was strongly represented, winning 2 out of 3 seats in Bloemfontein and 4 out of 6 in Pretoria. The remaining 6 National Party-held urban seats were all in constituencies in Johannesburg and on the Reef in which there were large concentrations of Afrikaans workers. On the other hand, the South African Party held only 18 out of a total of 85 rural seats - 8 in the Cape, 4 in the Transvaal, and 6 in Natal - as against 64 occupied by the National Party. (39)

However, these statistics are, for two reasons, rather

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39. All analysis of the 1929 and 1933 elections is, unless otherwise stated, based upon the results published in The Natal Mercury 13 and 15 June 1929 and The Star 18 and 19 May 1933. In addition, the classification of "urban" and "rural" seats follows the contemporary classification made by these newspapers.

misleading. In the first place, no meaningful comparison of the relative appeal of the South African Party and the National Party in urban constituencies is possible. Nationalist support in urban constituencies was never really tested. Both in 1924 and in 1929 the National Party was bound by its agreement with the Labour Party to contest only a few urban seats, and, particularly in 1929, after the Labour Party had split into Pact and National Council factions, the prospect of casting a pro-Nationalist vote via the moribund Creswell Labour faction could not have appealed greatly. Nor can statistical trends revealed in voting patterns of the 1950's and 1960's be used to demonstrate the basic non-appeal of the pre-Coalition National Party to urban voters, as the party of the 1920's and 1930's was a different proposition altogether. In the second place, the South African Party appears to have enjoyed more rural support than it is generally given credit for. As late as 1929, Deneys Reitz could win back the Barberton seat for the South African Party, and the Party could later recover in a by-election the Bethal seat it had lost in 1929. While it is true that the National Party gained 5 rural seats from the South African Party in 1929 - 3 in the Transvaal and 2 in the Cape - the evidence suggests that the parties in the rural constituencies were more evenly balanced than is generally assumed. A sample of 20 rural seats in the Transvaal contested in a straight fight between the National Party and the South African Party in 1929, with the National Party winning the seat in each case, reveals that the average majority for the Nationalists was only about 320 - a surprisingly low figure in view of the fact that roughly 3 000 voted in each contest.<sup>(40)</sup> National Party majorities were on the average higher for Cape rural constituencies, and the South African Party won

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40. The constituencies used in the sample were: Bethal, Christiana, Delarey, Heidelberg, Klerksdorp, Lichtenburg, Losberg, Lydenberg, Magaliesberg, Marico, Middelburg, Pietersburg, Potchefstroom, Potgietersrust, Rustenberg, Vereeniging, Ventersdorp, Waterberg, Witbank and Zwartruggens.

very little support - and no seats - in the Free State.

In the absence of a census which could give precise numbers of Afrikaans- and English-speaking voters in 1929 and their location in relation to parliamentary constituencies, no finality can be reached on the question of the relationship between the white language groups and the two political Parties. What can be stated with a fair degree of certainty is that party divisions did not closely resemble language divisions. Hertzog's statement that "about half of the South African Party consists of Afrikaans-speaking members"<sup>(41)</sup> is probably closer to the truth than the estimate given by N.M. Stultz that approximately 4/5 of the country's Afrikaans-speakers supported the Nationalists.<sup>(42)</sup> Smuts, certainly, would have been greatly displeased by any insinuation that his Party had become the peculiar province of English-speaking South Africans. He had once stated his views on English-speakers in South African politics in the most forthright terms to Sir Percy FitzPatrick:

Your people /the English-speakers/ are useless to a government wanting to do a great constructive work. They will never be a party on which /one/ could rely as a working majority. They all want to direct, each one wants to discuss every question from his own point of view. Most of them want to be leaders. Your people jeer at ours as a stupid lot who don't talk or think but do what they are told. Now, they are not stupid, but that's exactly the sort of party that leaders who mean to get work done require; when they have time to do their work and are sure of their backing, something is accomplished....Your people, who are so wonderful in their conviction, their courage and their work of building up new countries, are beneath contempt as politicians. (43)

It is also significant that the fortunes of the Parties in the urban areas were not greatly affected by the movement of Afrikaners from the land to the towns during the

41. The Natal Mercury 6 March 1933 quoting Hertzog's Smithfield address of 4 March 1933.

42. See above, p.16.

43. J.P. FitzPatrick, The Foundations of Milner's Administration (Unpublished MSS, FitzPatrick Papers, A/MSS VII). I am grateful to my supervisor, Dr. A.H. Duminy for having brought this extract to my attention.

agricultural depression of the early 1930's (44% of South Africa's Afrikaners lived in the towns by 1936<sup>(44)</sup>). The tentative conclusion that can be drawn is that the South African Party appealed to a wider spectrum of the electorate, both in geographical and in racial terms, than is usually assumed. The converse of this is that the National Party was not a purely Afrikaner party, but enjoyed a measure of support from English-speakers.

A socio-economic analysis of South African Party electoral support is difficult, particularly in regard to urban constituencies. The South African Party could hardly avoid a commitment in its programme of principles to the pursuit of a "civilized" labour policy - i.e. the reservation of skilled and semi-skilled positions for White workers - and to the maintenance of good relations between capital and labour. Yet these principles for long had no meaning to the hard core of the Labour Party which supported the socialist National Council faction. It remained the party of unbridled, all-consuming capitalism. The Coalition agreement did not remove the stigma, but merely extended it to the National Party. (A Labour MP, J. Christie, described the coalition as "a political fraud on the people of South Africa to obtain control of the gold premium".)<sup>(45)</sup> The mouthings of Labour MP's against the South African Party never decreased in intensity during the years 1932-1934, but they rang less and less true. In part this was because the Labour Party itself faced a crisis situation, particularly in 1932, when "a prominent Labour leader" advanced this explanation for the decline of the party:

There has been a 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. In the Government service, on the mines and in industry generally the number of English-speaking workers have dwindled steadily while the numbers of Afrikaans-speaking workers have

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44. David Welsh, "Urbanization and the Solidarity of Afrikaner Nationalism", *Journal of Modern African Studies* VII, 2, 1969.

45. *The Star* 28 April 1933.



commensurately increased....The result has been that the number of Labour supporters, whether confirmed or merely sympathetic, have very substantially decreased; and unless and until the Labour movement can attract the Afrikaans-speaking workers to its banner, the Labour Party has lost its function in South Africa. (46)

More important was the fact that the South African Party showed considerable profit from the decline of the Labour Party. During the first six years of the Pact government, the South African Party had been unable to exploit economically difficult times to demonstrate its solidarity with Labour, as the Nationalists had done before 1924. But from the time of the onset of economic depression after 1930 the South African Party found for the first time in the anti-gold standard agitation a common denominator with Labour. The Party became aware of the possibility of absorbing a significant part of the Labour vote by emphasizing a common opposition to the economic policies of the National Party Government.

The politics of the first half of 1932 had been characterised by the appearance of a host of splinter parties, most of which were led by dissident Nationalists. There was, for example, a Republican Party, led by the former Nationalist MP, A.S. van Hees; the Farmers and Workers Bond of Dr. W.P. Steenkamp, who styled himself an "independent Nationalist"; and a Centre Party, under the leadership of Dr. A.J. Bruwer.<sup>(47)</sup> Common to all of these rather bizarre parties was an economic programme "populist" in character and committed to the abandonment of the gold standard. None of these parties

46. The Star 31 August 1932.

47. Bruwer's case was particularly pathetic. His political career was attended by a whole series of misfortunes: the inaugural congress of his Centre Party was broken up by a piece of hooliganism on the part of the Natal delegates; his attempted candidature for the Colesberg by-election was foiled by the failure of any of his supporters to turn up at the nomination court; and on the eve of the Germiston by-election he was rather severely beaten up at a Nationalist meeting. His career seems to symbolise the shabbiness and obscurity of the splinter party movements.

enjoyed more than the most ephemeral existence. During the latter half of 1932, the process of fragmentation within the party system was dramatically reversed. The bitterly contested by-election at Colesberg in July 1932 ushered in a period of party consolidation, during which politics became more than ever polarized around the two principal Parties. Strong centripetal forces were brought to bear on the remnants of the Labour Party. Afrikanerized or not, the urban working-classes, particularly on the Rand, began to appreciate that political action outside of the two major Parties was futile at a time when there was acute party rivalry - which would discourage political adventure on the fringes of the major Parties - and serious economic distress. The force of Afrikaner Nationalism drew many towards the National Party, but as many, if not more, sought refuge in an economic programme which seemed to hold out more hope of immediate recovery, and turned to the South African Party.

The Germiston by-election, more than anything else, brought the South African Party to a realization of the profitability of wooing the working-classes. A high percentage of the voters in this constituency were railway-workers. The Government's austerity measures, which included extensive cuts in railway salaries, gave the South African Party its opportunity. It chose H.G. Lawrence, MP for the Cape urban constituency of Salt River, to spearhead its electoral drive. Lawrence enjoyed a particularly close rapport with Labour, as had been demonstrated in the 1929 election when he had won the traditionally Labour Salt River seat for the South African Party. The South African Party's electoral campaign was able to associate national distress directly with Government policies. The argument was that "racialism" - the determination to favour the Afrikaner at the expense of all other sections of the population - prevented the Government from viewing even economic questions on their merits, and created political uncertainty which would stifle economic recovery by driving away foreign capital.<sup>(48)</sup> The South African Party could

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48. The Star 14 October 1932 (speech of Leslie Blackwell).

even ascribe their own major worry - the secessionist movement in Natal - to Government policy, and imply that a change in government would remove this threat to the Union.<sup>(49)</sup> A comparison of the election results at Germiston in 1929 and 1932 is a self-evident index of the success of the South African Party's appeal to Labour and of the decline of the Labour Party:<sup>(50)</sup>

<u>1929</u>		<u>1932</u>	
G. Brown (Pact Labour)	1618	J.G.N. Strauss (South African Party)	4257
J. Allen (National Council Labour)	<u>741</u>	H.J. Schlosberg (National Party)	3076
Pact Labour majority	<u>877</u>	W.J. Dalrymple (Labour)	132
		F.P. Steinhobel (Economic Bond)	51
		M. Hill (Centre Party)	<u>33</u>
		South African Party majority	<u>1181</u>

The Star ascribed the election result to several factors: the sophistication of South African Party organization; the solid support of railwaymen and the part played by Lawrence in securing it; the determination of Labour to protest against Government policies; the rejuvenation of the South African Party as an entity, particularly through the efforts of young men like Lawrence and Hofmeyr; and the personality of the South African Party candidate, J.G.N. Strauss.<sup>(51)</sup> The Transvaal National Party leader, Grobler, put the Nationalist defeat down to "Labour's curious and absolute support of the South African Party cause".<sup>(52)</sup>

During the following two years, the South African Party was not diverted from its attention to Labour even by the Coalition and Fusion movements. One week after Germiston, at the South African Party's Union Congress, Smuts directed a particular appeal to workers to unite with the South African Party to overthrow the Government, and declared:

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49. The Star 29 October 1932 (Smuts).

50. The results were published in The Natal Mercury 13 June 1929 and 1 December 1932.

51. The Star 1 December 1932.

52. The Natal Mercury 2 December 1932.

I think that we should shape our social policy for the future in such a way that the workers may with safety and goodwill join our Party. We should make whole-hearted co-operation with them an easy and a natural thing. (53)

A group of Labour Party members, including one MP (Morris Kentridge) responded to Smuts's appeal by joining the South African Party. (54) The following year, Smuts declared his objection to Hertzog's desire to include Col. Creswell, former leader of the Labour Party, in the Coalition Cabinet. (55) This can be seen as an instance of Smuts's determination to remain on good terms with the working-classes, as Creswell had long been viewed by an important section as a traitor to the Labour cause. (56) During 1934, on the eve of the conclusion of the Fusion negotiations - a period when the Labour Party was experiencing a significant revival - Kentridge promoted the establishment within the South African Party of an Industrial Wing. This was a definite attempt to retain the degree of control over Labour which the Party had achieved, to act as "a counterblast to the growing drift of trade and industrial unions to the ranks of the Labour Party". (57) That this Wing was never put to much use can be attributed to the fear in National Party circles that it would tend to the creation of town/country divisions. (58)

The evident popularity of the South African Party amongst Labour during the period under discussion should be sufficient to dispel the impression that the South African Party was a "capitalist" party. It is, however, possible to cite additional evidence which points in the same direction. There is, in the first place, the fact that, although an impressive number of South African Party MP's

53. The Natal Mercury 8 December 1932.

54. The Star 13 December 1932.

55. Pirow, op.cit., p.156. Smuts's opposition to Creswell's inclusion in the Cabinet is confirmed by M. Creswell, An Epoch of the Political History of South Africa in the Life of F.H.P. Creswell (n.d.) p.144.

56. The South African Party itself, by 1932, did not accept Creswell's credentials as representative of Labour. (See, for example, Deney's Reitz's speech quoted in The Star 21 January 1932).

57. The Natal Mercury 5 May 1934.

58. The Natal Mercury 10 May 1934.



were businessmen or closely related to financial interests, only one - R.H. Stuttaford - enjoyed any real prominence within the Party, and even he owed his influence largely to his token inclusion as Minister without Portfolio in the Coalition Cabinet as a Cape representative.<sup>(59)</sup> In the second place, there is the fact of official South African Party support for the budget of 1933, which was regarded by mining interests as definitely injurious to the industry.<sup>(60)</sup>

So far from being a capitalist party, the South African Party at the end of 1932 was establishing for itself a new and broader electoral base, which would include both the middle-classes and the working-class, without excluding the South African Party's existing rural support, and which seemed to point in the direction of the establishment of a true populist party in South Africa. Class distinctions would not be obliterated, but they would cease to be a source of political difference. Economic questions would be solved by reference, not to the interest of any social class, but to the well-being of the nation as a whole. Above all, "racialism" would be brought to an end. Problems like the agricultural depression and the poor white question would be viewed purely as economic problems to which economic solutions must be found, and not as crises for one or other of the white races. Political moderation and the treatment of national questions on merit would become the keynote of government under the new dispensation.

An awareness - conscious or unconscious - of the new spirit of "social expansiveness" in the South African Party lay behind the profusion of appeals for the establishment of a National Government issued by party leaders during the

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59. According to the biographical data given by Ken Donaldson (ed.), South African Who's Who: Social and Business (1934) the following South African Party MP's in 1934 can be classified as belonging to the commercial/financial group: W. Bawden, J. Chalmers, A.H.J. Eaton, C.W. Giovanetti, R.H. Henderson, W.B. Humphreys, C.F. Kayser, Sir E. Oppenheimer, R. Stuttaford, A.P.J. Wares, S.F. Waterson. A fuller analysis of the occupation of South African Party MP's is given by A.W. Stadler, The Party System in South Africa 1910-1948 (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1970).

60. For a discussion of the political context of the 1933 budget, see ch.IV below.

course of 1932. Smuts's speech at De Kroon in August of that year is an example:

I see only one hope for South Africa now. We have lost our way and must find the high road again - the high road of co-operation, not the selfish, foolish policy of the present Government. I speak not as a party man, for there are Nationalists who are suffering as surely as we are. I call upon them before we have lost everything for which we have sacrificed so much to turn and work with us now. I am prepared to work with them on that basis. (61)

The South African Party's campaign against the National Party Government thus ceased to be a purely party struggle. It amounted to the enunciation of a new philosophy of non-racial, inclusive South African nationalism, led by a truly National Government, as opposed to the exclusive form of Afrikaner Nationalism which found expression in the policies of the National Party and the Government it supported. At the same time, the South African Party stressed through its semi-official organs that it was the true Centre Party in South Africa. (62) Clearly, the South African Party had begun to equate itself with a National Government alternative to the National Party Government.

The expansion of the South African Party's electoral appeal and its assumption of a new populist dimension should not be taken as an indication of any greater democratization of the party or of an erosion of Smuts's pre-eminence. On the contrary, the party began more and more to assume the character of the practical instrument of Smuts's political philosophy. As such, it continued to reflect the strengths and weaknesses of Smuts's attitudes on more emotionally contentious issues, in particular native policy and the question of South Africa's sovereign independence.

The South African Party's opposition to Hertzog's Native Bills had convinced South African blacks that it was the champion of their interests and rights, and the National

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61. The Star 17 August 1932.

62. The Star 22 April 1932.

Party had not been slow to make political capital out of this aspect of the South African Party's image.<sup>(63)</sup> Smuts personally had, "within strictly defined limits", appeared to the Natives as their champion:

His steady resistance to Nationalist colour policies was on record in the parliamentary debates on the industrial colour bar and Hertzog's Native Bills. Moreover, his public statements throughout the long years of parliamentary opposition had been consistently in accord with what he said privately. He called himself a Fabian, and with good reason. In the politics of culture contact, as in everything else, he was temperamentally and philosophically an evolutionist. He believed it impossible for Hertzog or anybody else to produce any comprehensive, once-for-all settlement of the innumerable political, economic and social problems which confronted South Africa's diverse races and cultures. 'Hertzog's settlement', he wrote, 'is the beginning of a new unsettlement'.<sup>(64)</sup>

Shortly after the conclusion of the Coalition agreement with Hertzog, Smuts in a major speech on the Native question urged that a solution be approached objectively and scientifically, and that it should not be arrived at merely by concentration on the political aspects of the problem, for in this way many other concomitant problems would be overlooked. Above all, caution and patience were essential in the formulation of Native policy, for it was a problem which concerned not only South Africa but the whole of the African continent.<sup>(65)</sup>

Smuts's "evolutionist" approach to Native policy envisaged temporary administrative solutions to specific problems rather than a permanent legislative solution which would define a blueprint for future Native political and economic development. These were not excluded altogether, but the crucial proviso was that they should be arrived at by consensus between political parties. The South African Party had

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63. See above, p.16.

64. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.259.

65. The Star 10 March 1933.

traditionally demanded the exclusion of Native policy from the arena of party politics.<sup>(66)</sup> Majority opinion in both parties differed very little on the essentials of Native policy; both parties agreed in principle to white domination "in a spirit of Christian trusteeship", no mixing of races, and allowing the Native the opportunity to "develop himself according to his natural inclination and capacity".<sup>(67)</sup> However, the South African Party opposed Hertzog's bills, not so much out of determination to make a political football out of the Native question, nor out of fear of losing the Cape Native vote,<sup>(68)</sup> but because they followed Smuts in balking at any definite commitment of South Africa to a programme of restrictive Native development. Similarly, the South African Party's overwhelming support for the bills in 1936<sup>(69)</sup> can be seen as an indication of how little emphasis Smuts placed on the Native question in his political scheme. The presence in one political party of hard-line segregationists like Stallard and Heaton Nicholls<sup>(70)</sup> and of liberals like Hofmeyr and F.S. Malan testifies to the fact that the South African Party never found it necessary to seek consensus of its members on a definite native policy. Native policy was a subject which should not be allowed to introduce divisions where there was agreement on more immediately important issues.

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- 66. N.G. Garson, "Party Politics and the Plural Society: South Africa 1910-1929" (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London, Unpublished Seminar Paper 1970).
  - 67. National Party Programme of Principles, article 10(e) - quoted in N.G. Garson, *op.cit.*
  - 68. Professor Garson (*Ibid*) argues that there were probably only 4 seats in which abolition of the Cape Native franchise would have involved loss to the Nationalists of South African Party-held seats.
  - 69. At the joint sitting of both Houses on the Native Bills, 6 former South African Party MP's voted in opposition. They were J.H. Hofmeyr and 5 Cape members - Sen. F.S. Malan, M. Alexander, R.J. du Toit, J.M. Chalmers and A.J. MacCallum (Paton, *op.cit.*, p.251).
  - 70. For the views of Stallard and Nicholls on Native policy see T.R.H. Davenport, "The Triumph of Colonel Stallard: The Transformation of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act", *South African Historical Journal* 1970 no.2; M.J. Walker, *Heaton Nicholls and the Native Land Bill* (Unpublished B.A. Hons. thesis, University of Natal 1972); and G. Heaton Nicholls, *South Africa in My Time* (1961).



No issue in post-Union South African politics had as strong an emotional content as did the question of South Africa's relationship with Great Britain and the Empire. The determination to maintain this connection provided the South African Party with an emotional bond which was, in the final analysis, probably as strong a unifying factor as Afrikaner Nationalism became for the post-Fusion Herenigde Nasionale Party. But sentimental attachment to the Empire was in the South African Party in general reinforced by the realization that South Africa stood to gain a positive advantage from its membership. Smuts, in the years immediately following the end of the First World War, had been one of the prime movers in the struggle for separate South African nationhood within the framework of the Empire, in which South Africa would participate as a free and equal partner. Once equality among the Dominions was recognized, unity of decision among the component parts of the Empire would be a powerful force making for world peace, and the free association of the Dominions within the Empire would provide the basis for economic co-operation.<sup>(71)</sup> Membership of the Commonwealth, he argued in a speech to the House of Assembly in 1920, was no more than a form of South African participation in world affairs:

The major premiss of his speech was that the nations of the world were members one of another and that South Africa's membership of the League and the Commonwealth must be positive, active, co-operative. He said explicitly that he wanted South Africa to exercise her influence in the world. He went on to say that he wanted her to exercise it in association with the other nations of the British Empire - 'protecting her own rights and continuing her status', he insisted, 'and determined always to do the best for herself, but never in a selfish way - to co-ordinate her own interests with those of the British Empire and the world as a whole'.<sup>(72)</sup>

In 1928, the National Party had altered its constitution, replacing its republican objective with a new clause accepting

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71. Hancock, The Fields of Force p.40.

72. Ibid., p.41.

the declaration of Dominion status issued by the Imperial Conference of 1926. Earlier, Hertzog had declared that the secession of South Africa from the Empire was no longer a real political issue:

I say that, as far as the Empire is concerned, the Englishman need have no fear that we shall be prepared to say farewell to that. And why not? Because it is not in our interest to do so. It would be stupid, and I do not think that if it were proposed today five percent of the population of South Africa could be secured to approve of it. (73)

He followed this up by declaring at the Orange Free State National Party Congress two years later that the Party had never really been a Republican party, although 99% of its members were in favour of a republic and he himself considered it the ideal form of government. (74)

In general, there was thus very little difference of interpretation between Smuts and Hertzog on the Empire question. There was, however, a very fundamental difference between the two in the spirit of their approach to the Commonwealth. Hertzog made an intellectual shift from his republican convictions to acceptance of what was, given the circumstances of the times, a more realistic solution to the question of South Africa's search for national independence. Smuts, with his wider international horizons and his more cosmopolitan spirit, embraced the Commonwealth more readily as a kind of forum for international co-operation, whose unity was all the more assured by the common sovereignty of the king in Britain.

Smuts's reasoned justification of his support for the Commonwealth connection probably represented majority opinion in the South African Party. There was, however, a significant minority on the extreme fringe of the Party to whom the Empire appeared as a defensive ally against the onslaught of expansionist Afrikanerdom; a guarantee of the continued pre-eminence of British culture in South Africa.

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73. Pirow, op.cit., p.131.

74. Ibid., p.132.

The emergence in Natal of this minority wing of the South African Party in the late 1920's and early 1930's provided the Party with a major problem, in that a significant portion of its parliamentary support was based in Natal; 15 out of 16 Natal MP's at the end of 1932 belonged to the South African Party. Public opinion in Natal, as voiced by movements such as the Natal Devolution League, responded to Nationalist attempts to scrap the Provincial Council system<sup>(75)</sup> by demanding not only the retention of the Provincial Councils but also the federalization of the South African constitution,<sup>(76)</sup> with the threat of secession from the Union in the background.

Initially, the South African Party attempted to placate the Natal group by holding out the prospect that their grievances would disappear once the National Party Government was removed. Deneys Reitz, for example, warned that a Nationalist victory at the next general election would cause every province to consider breaking away from the Union.<sup>(77)</sup> This was no comfort to the Natalians, and the South African Party MP's in that province took matters a stage further by declaring their intention to form a Federal group within the Party.<sup>(78)</sup> Smuts took a serious view of this development in view of the fact that

...federation is not the policy of this party, that it will be resisted by the other provinces, and that (as is well known) the leader of the party took a principal share in the defeat of the federal proposals at the National Convention in Durban 23 years ago. <sup>(79)</sup>

Party unity was saved when the Natal South African Party accepted in October 1932 the Hollander memorandum, which provided for the entrenchment of the provincial system and

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75. For a study of the working of the Provincial Council system in Natal see M.J. Walker, The Provincial Council and Natal 1924-32 (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal 1976).

76. See Donald B. Craig, Lost Opportunity: A History of the Federal Movement in South Africa (1953).

77. The Star 4 May 1932.

78. The Star 8 June 1932.

79. The Star 20 June 1932.

the extension of the powers of the Provincial Councils. In December, the South African Party's Union Congress confirmed the decision made by the Natal party, but this accommodation could not disguise the genuine threat which the Federalist movement in Natal posed to the future of the South African Party. If and when a South African Party government came into power, it could fully expect the Natal party contingent to use their continued support as a bargaining counter in seeking more and more concessions for Natal.

The Natal insistence upon emphasizing race and culture differences meant that this group was less easily assimilated into the populist programme towards which the Party was moving. On the other hand, to construct a political base which excluded Natal would be to encourage disunion and lend more strength to the Devolution movement. Smuts was, therefore, in something of a cleft stick position in regard to Natal. The only solution which presented itself was for him to attempt to influence political developments in Natal by the force of his own personality and by stressing the need for moderation in politics. The sequel to the Coalition-Fusion period, during which the Dominion Party won much support in Natal, suggests that this strategy would have been unlikely to bring much success.

South Africa's next general election was scheduled for 1934. During the latter half of 1932, it was predicted with increasing confidence that the South African Party would win. One estimate - that of F.C. Sturrock, a Rand MP - suggested that the South African Party would win 92 seats out of 150.<sup>(80)</sup> The Party's Union Congress in December 1932 had closed on a note of absolute confidence and determination to fight and win the next election. Yet the South African Party decided rather to sacrifice almost certain victory a year hence and to accept instead an accommodation with the National Party. An explanation of this move may lie in the fundamental change in character which the South African Party underwent during the last six months of 1932.

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80. The Star 7 December 1932.



## CHAPTER TWO

### COALITION: THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY AND ROOS

DECEMBER 1932 - JANUARY 1933

The South African Party's annual Union Congress opened on 7 December 1932 in an atmosphere of optimism and confidence in the future of both the Party and the country. The Germiston by-election, held a week before, had been "a ray of light in a pitch-black night"<sup>(1)</sup> and in confident expectation of shortly coming to power, the Party addressed itself to the tasks of increasing its popular support, securing its unity, and improving the efficiency of its organization. It produced a programme which included investigation of the means of alleviating unemployment, an enquiry into the poor white problem, the limitation of hours of work, the abandonment of the gold standard, and the restoration of cuts in railway salaries; it secured unanimity on the principle of the extension of the powers and functions of the Provincial Councils; and it concluded with an appeal for national unity and an invitation to the National and Labour parties to co-operate to pull South Africa out of its economic rut.<sup>(2)</sup> That the Congress was an over whelming success was demonstrated by its immediate sequel: the Party's Head Committee met shortly afterwards and nominated a committee to work out a fighting programme for the next election;<sup>(3)</sup> its economic programme received endorsement when a substantial portion of the Labour Party's Rand leadership joined the South African Party;<sup>(4)</sup> and its electoral appeal was confirmed by its massive victory in a straight fight against the Nationalists in the Roodepoort Provincial by-election.<sup>(5)</sup>

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1. The Natal Mercury 8 December 1932.
  2. The Star 9 December 1932.
  3. The Natal Mercury 12 December 1932.
  4. See above, p.33.
  5. The Star 15 December 1932.

In short, the South African Party was in mid-December 1932 on the crest of a wave which had been gathering momentum rapidly since the middle of that year. The Party owed its ascendancy not only to economic conditions and popular disillusionment with the Nationalists, but also to the consolidating effect of the Parliamentary by-elections at Colesberg and Germiston, to its enunciation of a popular economic policy, and to its apparently successful placation of a potential revolt on the part of its Natal wing.

Precisely at the moment when the political scenario was beginning to suggest that the eclipse of the National Party was inevitable and a matter only of time, South African politics was given a new dimension by the return to active politics of the former Transvaal Nationalist leader and Deputy Prime Minister, Tielman Roos. This dynamic and unpredictable character, who had been an Appeal Court judge since his retirement from politics due to ill-health in 1929, staged his reappearance in typically dramatic fashion. On 16 December - a day of peculiar sacredness to the Afrikaner<sup>(6)</sup> - he addressed a gathering at Hakboslaagte, a village in his former constituency of Lichtenburg in the Western Transvaal. The body of the speech contained nothing sensational, in that he merely referred to the economic distress of the country and spoke of the need for racial co-operation, not only in time of crisis but also as a prerequisite for the maintenance of white civilization. Implicitly, he blamed the Afrikaners for their reluctance to accept the bona fides of English-speakers as South Africans. However, what gave significance to his speech was the note of promise (or warning) on which it ended: "It is four years ago that we last met, but I can assure you that it will not be four years before we meet again."<sup>(7)</sup>

His platitudes about racial co-operation apart, Roos had made no firm commitment to a political return and given

6. For a discussion of the religio-political significance of 16 December (Geloftedag, or the Day of the Covenant), see T. Dunbar Moodie, The Rise of Afrikanerdom (1975) pp.20-21.

7. The Star 17 December 1932.



no indication of his intentions should he do so, yet his speech attracted considerable attention, partly because of his political reputation, partly because of the impropriety of a judge involving himself in politics, but mainly because it seemed to fulfil prophecies and confirm rumours which had been rife virtually since 1929.

These rumours were well-founded. In August 1929, immediately after his retirement from politics, Roos had been in correspondence with J.H. Hofmeyr, who was as yet politically uncommitted. The two had agreed on the necessity of the consolidation not only of the two races, but also of the two political Parties, and Hofmeyr had at the time considered working with Roos towards this end, but, for reasons which are not apparent, nothing came of this correspondence.<sup>(8)</sup> At the time of his retirement both Oswald Pirow, Minister of Justice, and P.G.W. Grobler, Transvaal Nationalist leader and Minister of Lands, had secured from Roos a promise that, should he desire to return to politics, he would communicate this wish to them, whereupon Pirow would resign his Cabinet portfolio and Grobler his leadership of the Party in the Transvaal to facilitate his return. Early in 1930, Roos was encouraged by "various groups of dissidents" within the National Party to return to politics in opposition to Hertzog. In May of that year, Pirow was informed by Hertzog that Roos was contemplating a comeback, and that if he did so, there would be no room for him in the Cabinet.<sup>(9)</sup> Hereafter, Pirow was for the next two years in regular correspondence with Roos, encouraging him to make his comeback as a loyal Nationalist and offering to make room for him, but eliciting only the deadpan response from Roos that, despite the rumours, he had no intention of resigning from the Bench.<sup>(10)</sup>

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8. Alan Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) p.161.

9. O. Pirow, J.B.M. Hertzog (n.d.) p.140.

10. Pirow's approaches to Roos were probably not genuinely meant, since his own political career would not have been furthered by bringing Roos back into politics. If Pirow was sincere in his encouragement to Roos, then he probably had in mind no more than ensuring that Roos would not return as an enemy of Hertzog or the National Party.

At the height of the currency crisis at the end of 1931, the South African Party General Secretary, Louis Esselen, conceived the idea of a coalition as a first step towards a solution of the country's monetary difficulties. To this end, he contacted both Roos and Pirow, in the hope that through these intermediaries Smuts and Hertzog might be brought into negotiation. Esselen's plan was revealed in a letter to Roos of 11 November 1931:

Pirow has indicated to me that if it can be arranged by Oom Jannie /Smuts/ he will meet you two so that matters can be discussed, and I may add that this has the concurrence of General Hertzog. Oom Jannie is quite willing and the only thing that remains as to (sic) how you want me to arrange the meeting. I would suggest that you and the Chief first have a conversation and he can then send for Pirow.

For the good of South Africa and all of us, I want to make an earnest appeal to you to help us in obtaining what you and I and many others have striven for for a long time. With a little give and take I feel confident that our efforts will be crowned with success. The new Party must come and the sooner the better, and I feel sure that in a year or two you will emerge a greater man than you have ever been before. (11)

The reason why no action was taken on this plan can only be guessed at, but it does appear that difficulties emerged on the Nationalist rather than on the South African Party side. Towards the beginning of 1932, Smuts anticipated that the Nationalist Government would have difficulty remaining in power, but "was not anxious to upset the Government too soon", and replace it with a South African Party government, as "once we are in harness again it will be a slave's job." (12) He would at this time have preferred at least a section of the National Party to be associated in any alternative government. Besides, Roos himself seemed more interested in re-appearing as a Nationalist, perhaps even

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11. Quoted in Hancock, The Fields of Force, pp.242-3.

12. Smuts to Gillett, 12 April 1932, quoted in Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.243.

challenging Hertzog for the leadership of the National Party. It was probably with this aim that Roos approached Grobler, Malan and even W.P. Steenkamp during 1931.<sup>(13)</sup>

In any event, Roos left for a holiday in Europe towards the end of 1931, from which he returned in February 1932 to find his name freely mentioned in connection with the rumoured formation of a party which aimed at the establishment of a National Government.<sup>(14)</sup> (Also connected with this rumour was the name of Roos's future sponsor, the financier Sir Abe Bailey). Roos hastened to deny any involvement with this movement, and to declare his intention of resuming his career on the Bench. Two weeks later, Die Burger referred to "a secret intrigue afoot to divide the people, and further, to bring General Hertzog to a fall and to break the National Party." This intrigue, it claimed, had as its strongest weapon the name of Mr. Justice Tielman Roos.<sup>(15)</sup> Roos denied the truth of these new rumours as firmly as ever, and refrained from public appearances, but rumour soon gave way to popular demand for Roos's return. Petitions were issued in Krugersdorp and later in Durban calling for his return to the political arena:

We feel that with your tremendous influence over all existing political groups, you would be able to stem the frightfully increasing tide of poverty by political, economic, scientific or other justifiable means. Also that under your leadership the reunion of the races will be accomplished. (16)

When Pirow referred in his correspondence with Roos to the rumours concerning his political activity, Roos replied that his future conduct would depend upon what results the petitions produced. It was at this point, Pirow claimed, that he and Roos reached the parting of the ways. Perhaps it was at this point, too, that Pirow realized that Roos might actually return.<sup>(17)</sup>

13. Paton, op.cit., p.189.

14. The Star 19 February 1932.

15. Die Burger 3 March 1932.

16. The Star 5 March 1932.

17. Pirow, op.cit., p.141.

However, Roos probably judged the political climate at this time to be inopportune for whatever political adventure he had in mind, since he took no action on the petitions. It seems possible that he feared that his political re-emergence in the early months of 1932 would be regarded as merely the appearance of yet another eccentric alternative to the two established Parties. An editorial in The Star later suggested that Roos's ill-health prevented him from putting himself at the head of a Centre Party movement in April. (18)

Whatever the reason for Roos's non-activity in March and April, he disappeared from prominence for another six months. Then, probably in September 1932, two determined opponents of the gold standard policy, Arthur Barlow, editor of the Rand Daily Mail and a former Labour MP, and Dr. Colin Steyn, son of the former President of the Free State Republic, approached Roos with a proposal. In his memoirs, Barlow recalled:

Colin Steyn and I discussed the matter and came to the conclusion that Tielman Roos, at this time an Appellate Court Judge, was the only man who could drive Hertzog off gold, so we approached him and discussed whether he would assist us in breaking up the Nationalists in Parliament and so put Hertzog out of power. (19)

Roos made no definite reply to Barlow and Steyn, but undertook a canvass of Transvaal Nationalist MP's to determine to what extent he could expect their support if he returned to politics as an opponent of the gold standard. (20)

This canvass was sufficiently favourable for him to

18. The Star 19 December 1932.

19. A.G. Barlow, Almost in Confidence (1952) p.238. Like most writers of memoirs, Barlow is extremely hazy about dates, but that this discussion took place in September 1932 seems to be confirmed by the circumstantial evidence. It is, of course, also possible that Barlow's claim to have put Roos up to his political adventure may be entirely spurious.

20. Hjalmar Reitz (Nationalist MP for Brits) recalled receiving a letter from Roos in September 1932 asking what attitude he would adopt to such an action on Roos's part. Reitz replied that he would be prepared to join him against Hertzog if necessary. (H. Reitz, The Conversion of a South African Nationalist (1946) p.158).

make overtures to the South African Party. Early in October, Barlow maintains, Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, South African Party MP for Kimberley, was taken into Roos's confidence, and despatched to visit Smuts at Irene on his behalf. The result of this discussion, in Barlow's words, was that "we understood Smuts to have told Oppie that he was interested in Tielman's move to shift the Government and that he would (or might) assist."<sup>(21)</sup> By November, reports of negotiations between Roos and Smuts had filtered through to Hertzog, as this entry in his diary confirms:

Tielman has seen Smuts. The revolutionists now also accept the idea of having Roos as leader. Jan Pen /Wessels/ (22) says that people are talking enthusiastically of the need to have Tielman back in politics. I am no longer any good. (23)

These meetings took place in the strictest secrecy, and no report of them reached the press. In the absence of evidence, it is impossible to state what matters were discussed, what form the discussions took, or who was involved. What is certain is that no progress was made in persuading the South African Party, individually or corporatively, to fall in line with Roos's plans - whatever they were at this time. This is suggested by the fact that Roos made further attempts to sound out South African Party opinion by using intermediaries<sup>(24)</sup> to contact individual party members attending the South African Party's Union Congress.<sup>(25)</sup> Smuts himself was approached by Roos's representatives, but appears "not to have encouraged the idea" of co-operating in the formation of a Roos-led

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21. Barlow, op.cit., p.238. Anthony Hocking's biography Oppenheimer and Son (1963) contains no mention of Sir Ernest's role as intermediary between Roos and Smuts.
  22. Nationalist MP for Frankfort.
  23. Quoted in Piet Meiring, Smuts the Patriot (1975) p.134.
  24. For example McKenzie, owner of the Bloemfontein newspaper The Friend.
  25. G. Heaton Nicholls (South Africa in My Time (1961) p.265) was one member contacted by a Roos agent. He maintained that he was "adamant in his refusal" of any projected co-operation with Roos at the time of the South African Party Union Congress.



National Government. (26)

The South African Party leadership was, thus, aware of Roos's intention to resume his political career, although the timing of the Hakboslaagte speech seems to have taken everyone, including his promoters, Barlow and Steyn, by surprise. (27) The South African Party press, taking its cue from the party leaders - who preferred to maintain silence and wait for events to develop on their own - generally welcomed Roos's speech, interpreting it as a call for a National Government, and agreeing with Roos that it was an expedient which was necessary for a solution of the country's economic difficulties. While welcoming the idea of a National Government, however, The Star was quick to point out that "however unexpected the developments in the near future may be, it does impose a strain on the imagination to picture Mr. Roos being called by general acclamation to be the head of such an administration", (28) and that any aspirations he may have had in the direction of the formation of a National Government depended wholly on his ability to work with the South African Party. If Roos's call for a National Government was sincerely meant, and if as he claimed he intended to achieve this aim by detaching from the National Party a group strong enough to combine with the South African Party to defeat the Government in Parliament, then the implication was that he was prepared to accept the South African Party's claim to constitute in itself a potential National Government, since the South African Party would naturally dominate such a government. From the South African Party's point of view, then, a merger with the Roos-led Nationalists would be no more than a further extension of the Party's base, an absorption into the Party of a section which, like the Labour group led by Kentridge, was dissatisfied with the performance of its own party, and sought the establishment of a National Government - that is, membership of the South African Party, in effect if not

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26. The Natal Mercury 22 December 1932.

27. Barlow, op.cit., p.238.

28. The Star 19 December 1932.



in fact. That the South African Party hoped the re-emergence of Roos could be used to swing an important section of the Nationalists to its own cause is confirmed by the early reactions of South African Party spokesmen to the Hakboslaagte speech. J.G.N. Strauss emphasized the fundamental compatibility between the attitudes of Roos and of the South African Party, declaring that Roos's speech was an enunciation of the policy for which General Botha had lived, while F.C. Sturrock<sup>(29)</sup> suggested that Roos would certainly be welcomed by the South African Party if he returned to politics on the basis of the policy expressed in his speech.<sup>(30)</sup> In general terms, the South African Party was anxious to absorb the Roos movement, partly to demonstrate the sincerity of its appeal to racial conciliation, partly to broaden its popular base, and partly to neutralize a potentially dangerous and disruptive catalyst and remove it from the political arena.

On the other hand, Roos did not conceive of his movement as one designed merely to bring over Nationalists to the side of the South African Party. This much can be said with certainty, although it is difficult to go further and say what precisely Roos's motives were in launching his assault upon the two-party system. However, particular aspects of his programme, the course of subsequent negotiations with the South African Party and the timing of his return to politics all suggest that uppermost in his mind was a concern for the future of the National Party and of Afrikanerdom in view of the new-found popularity of the South African Party, which threatened to turn the next election into a landslide. It should be borne in mind that Roos, despite his cavalier approach to politics, was in reality deeply committed to the cause of Nationalism, and that an appeal to racial conciliation was not necessarily incompatible with the National Party's "two streams" policy. In the past, Roos had "surpassed even Hertzog as

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29. South African Party MP for Turffontein.

30. The Star 21 December 1932.

a protagonist of Nationalism."<sup>(31)</sup> The Natal Mercury thus struck a more realistic note when it warned the South African Party that Roos "was no candidate for admission to the Smuts kraal":

/Rather/ we think his intervention is far more likely to have the result of establishing a sort of Salvation Army shelter for the National Party - a fresh point of assembly at which the present steady drift of supporters of the Hertzogian policy of economic independence may be held in a state of suspended conversion against the day when they can be put to fresh use. (32)

Roos and the South African Party thus approached the question of co-operation from wholly divergent standpoints.

Despite the obstacles in the way of agreement with the South African Party, popular confidence in Roos's ability to achieve his objectives was sufficient to cause heightened activity on the stock exchange and a flow of capital from the country in anticipation of the abandonment of the gold standard.<sup>(33)</sup> This confidence was in reality nourished by nothing more than press speculation - much of which was reckless and uninformed<sup>(34)</sup> - since neither Roos nor the South African Party leaders made public their attitudes and predictions. Nevertheless, all of Roos's moves in the days between 16 and 28 December, when Smuts first reacted in public to the new developments, enhanced the impression of his strength which press rumours had created. For example, on 22 December he held court in Johannesburg at the Carlton Hotel, receiving a stream of callers, among whom were five

31. F.S. Crafford, Jan Smuts: A Biography (1945) p.263.

32. The Natal Mercury 22 December 1932.

33. For a contemporary impression of the causes and effects of the abandonment of the gold standard, see C.S. Richards, "Economic Revival in South Africa", Economic Journal XLIV 1934.

34. A case in point is a suggestion made by The Natal Mercury (21 December 1932) that Roos's re-entry into politics was likely to be well received in the Orange Free State in view of the fact that the impoverishment of the province had caused serious disillusionment with the National Party Government. All indications pointed to the Nationalists being as firmly entrenched as ever in the Free State.

Nationalist MP's. (35) The non-committal press statements of the MP's who attended Roos only increased the mystery, as did his first public pronouncement since his Hakboslaagte speech, a letter to Die Vaderland in response to its question, under which flag did he propose to sail if he re-entered politics? Roos replied:

In connection with the leader in your issue of the 21st instant, I am coming into public life as a Nationalist. There is nothing in my principles as far as I know which is not in accordance with the principles of the National Party of the Transvaal, in the establishment of which I played a large part. It is often forgotten that there are four Nationalist parties in South Africa, bound to each other by an advisory body. I am of opinion that a Coalition Government is today necessary in South Africa, because the parties must help each other to pull the country out of its present miserable condition. I further regard devaluation as necessary to bring back the money which has flowed out of the country, to bring new capital to a country where its investment would be perfectly sound and where money alone is lacking, to assist the export trade and to place the prices of South African produce on a reasonable basis. Money ought to be the servant of industry. In South Africa, owing to the scarcity of currency, the servant has become the master. (36)

At the same time, the National Party's response to the Roos developments did nothing to alleviate the crisis. It was only the party in the Transvaal whose loyalty then gave any cause for concern, but even here Hertzog and Grobler seriously mishandled the situation. Press reports of anxious canvassing of Transvaal Nationalists and of widespread smelling-out operations conducted by the Party's leadership created the impression that the National Party was in full retreat and on the verge of schism and collapse. Obviously, this impression only intensified the Government's difficulties. At a Cabinet meeting held in Pretoria on 26

35. The MP's who visited Roos at the Carlton were General S. Alberts (Magaliesberg), H.H. Moll (Christiana), H. Reitz (Brits), A.S. van Hees (Brakpan), and C. Potgieter (North-East Rand).

36. The Star 22 December 1932.

December - two days before Roos opened his campaign with a public meeting in Johannesburg - the three Cape ministers, D.F. Malan, C.W. Malan and A.P.J. Fourie, showed their concern about the situation in the Transvaal Party, arguing that the Government should resign and call for a new election.<sup>(37)</sup> Presumably, they believed that only in this way could the rot in the Transvaal be stopped. A split in the Cabinet was narrowly avoided on this occasion, probably by Hertzog's insistence on waiting to see how much support Roos actually commanded before deciding on any action.

The South African Party meanwhile maintained an official silence. Such statements as were forthcoming were on the whole friendly to the idea of co-operation with Roos, but only given certain provisions, which in effect amounted to a demand that the South African Party should remain firmly in control of any such coalition. Smuts, who was on holiday in the Eastern Transvaal, was officially informed of developments only on 23 December. He registered surprise, said the position was "very obscure", and declined to make any public statement before December 28, when he and Roos would address meetings simultaneously, the one in Germiston and the other in Johannesburg.<sup>(38)</sup>

On the eve of the two public meetings in Germiston and Johannesburg, the tide seemed to be running more strongly than ever in Roos's favour. The Roosites claimed that there had been "a landslide from the National Party towards Roos", and stated with confidence that already ten Transvaal Nationalist MP's had committed themselves to his cause.<sup>(39)</sup> This was a number sufficient to bring about the Government's defeat in the no confidence debate which would ensue when

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37. The Star 26 December 1932.

38. The Star 23 December 1932.

39. The Star 28 December 1932.



Parliament assembled on 20 January.<sup>(40)</sup> The Labour swing towards the South African Party appeared to have been diverted instead to Roos, to whom officials of the South African Mineworkers Union brought assurances of support.<sup>(41)</sup>

At the same time, the wave of financial speculation caused by the expectation that Roos's political return would lead to the abandonment of the gold standard reached such a level that the Government was forced on the night of 27 December to announce a change of currency policy. In a statement issued on 29 December, the Minister of Finance, N.C. Havenga, confirmed that the country was no longer on either the gold bullion standard or the gold exchange standard. Instead -

The Chamber of Mines is free to dispose of the gold output of the mines in such a manner as it may consider is to the best advantage of the gold producers. The banks have a free hand in fixing the rates of exchange between South Africa and other countries. The Government has no intention in the present circumstances of influencing these rates in any respect - they will find their level in accordance with the current monetary and trade conditions. <sup>(42)</sup>

The South African pound was thus free to return to parity with sterling. The abandonment of the gold standard was apparently a triumph for Roos, the achievement of the first of the two major planks in his platform. The agitation which had made it possible was, from one point of view, an impressive vote of confidence in Roos and his policies, but at the same time the removal of this plank considerably

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40. The composition by Party of Parliament on the eve of the 1933 session was:

National Party	75	South African Party	63
Creswell Labour	4	Council Labour	3
		Independent	2

It could be predicted with certainty that the Creswell Labour group would vote with the Government in any no confidence motion. Therefore, provided the Madeley Labour group and the two ex-Nationalist Independents voted with the South African Party, it would require the defection of six Nationalists to defeat the Government.

41. The Star 27 December 1932.

42. The Star 29 December 1932.

weakened his movement in the future.

The abandonment of the gold standard was "a major defeat for the Government",<sup>(43)</sup> particularly since Hertzog had formerly declared that he would resign rather than capitulate on this issue. (Hertzog later explained away his refusal to carry out this promise by claiming that it had referred only to a voluntary departure from gold<sup>(44)</sup>). However, neither the defeat of its economic policy nor the popularity of the Roos movement induced the Government to make any move to resign, but this was put down, not to any confidence in its ability to survive, but rather to a decision by Hertzog to defer an assessment of numerical strengths and weaknesses until a caucus could be summoned before the opening of Parliament.

On 27 December, Smuts returned to his residence at Irene and was in conference with "other members of the South African Party".<sup>(45)</sup> At this meeting it was probably decided what tone Smuts should adopt in his Germiston speech and what tactics the Party should follow in its negotiations with Roos. The Party leaders were increasingly coming to look upon these negotiations not only as desirable - the Party might yet be able to swallow the Roos movement - but also as unavoidable, since Roos had evidently been able to persuade a large section of popular opinion that coalition was a magical idea which, once realized, would remove at a stroke all of the country's difficulties. Thus, for the South African Party to reject him out of hand, or to be seen as responsible for the failure of a coalition attempt could be politically damaging. Besides, Hofmeyr had not forgotten his earlier correspondence with Roos,<sup>(46)</sup> and "his main political aim was still hereniging".<sup>(47)</sup> He advised Smuts to adopt a friendly attitude towards Roos's

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43. Pirow, op.cit., p.146.

44. House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX col.43.

45. Presumably all or some of Duncan, Reitz, Hofmeyr and Esselen. The only reference to this meeting which I have found is in The Star 27 December 1932. Neither Hancock nor Paton, who relied in the main respectively on the papers of Smuts and Hofmeyr, makes any mention of this meeting, so it can be assumed that no record survived.

46. See above, p.44.

47. Paton, op.cit., p.175.



overtures, and attended the latter's meeting the following night, exchanging with him "a few friendly but non-political words".<sup>(48)</sup>

However desirable an accommodation with Roos might have been, Smuts seems never really to have expected that negotiations with him would come to anything.<sup>(49)</sup> Also, he was reluctant to give the impression that recent political developments had in any way detracted from the popularity and strength of his Party. For these reasons, Smuts's New Year Message, published on 28 December, was cautiously phrased, and emphasized that the inspiration and strength of any opposition movement must come from the South African Party:

My advice to members and supporters of the Party is to remain steadfast, and to do nothing that will weaken the position of the Party. I feel convinced that the welfare and recovery of the country depends to a large extent on the South African Party, and that it is the power that can rectify matters again.

We welcome with open arms all help and support from elsewhere. We applaud the fact that our attitude is being embraced and upheld by others. Even a section of the National Party is now beginning to see the light. Even the Government now admits that the gold standard policy has been impossible....

But the position has become untenable and dislocated and the end is at hand. The South African Party is the lever of South Africa that will lift the Government and the depression. Let us remain steadfast to our principles and strengthen our organization in every possible way, and by so doing make victory certain. (50)

Similarly, Smuts's speech at Germiston emphasized the pivotal significance of the South African Party as a true National Government alternative to the National Party Government. The country had recently seen the Labour Party falling into line with the South African Party and, he argued, the Roosite movement represented a parallel development in the National Party. The foundations of Roos's

48. *Ibid.*, p.190.

49. Hancock, *The Fields of Force*, p.245.

50. *The Star* 28 December 1932.

policy, he continued, were exactly the same as the two cardinal points of South African Party policy - an end to racialism and the abandonment of the gold standard. There was thus a basic compatibility between the two groups, but the implication was that, this being the case, it was up to Roos to throw in his lot with the South African Party. After declaring that principles and not personalities should take precedence in men's political thinking, he concluded with an appeal for continued party solidarity:

...I say this in no narrow Party spirit, because I am imbued with no narrow Party spirit myself, but from a sense of duty to this country, and it is that I firmly believe the South African Party will be the bulwark of this country - that it will be the real centre of attack on the Government and that nothing should be done or any changes be made which will weaken the position of the Party. (51)

Roos hoped for more from Smuts than a thinly-veiled invitation to join the South African Party. In an interview with The Star, he expressed disappointment at the tone of Smuts's New Year Message. This had done harm, he said. He concluded that Smuts had been badly advised. (In reality, Smuts seems to have followed his own counsel in compiling the Message). Party victories, Roos declared, were now out of the question. He issued a warning to Smuts not to stand in the way of popular will:

The rank and file of both parties, with few exceptions, will see that anybody who stands in the way of racial unity will be swept aside. If General Smuts forces a war against himself, the war will not be carried on by his rank and file. The man who forms the coalition has to be a man who can swing both sections. To-day neither General Hertzog nor General Smuts can swing both sections. Unless that is conceded, all other arrangements with the South African Party leaders will fall to the ground. But the movement will be carried on with the rank and file of the South African Party, and in the rank and file of the South African Party there are potential leaders as good as, or better than, the present leaders of the South

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51. The Natal Mercury 29 December 1932.

African Party. Those potential leaders will come to the fore if the present leaders fail the country.

Roos also expanded on his next moves. He said efforts were being made to bring about a meeting with Smuts, but regarded negotiations with Hertzog as extremely unlikely - Hertzog had refused to invite Roos to discuss the position with him. If no agreement with Smuts was forthcoming, the Government would not be overthrown, but Roos would establish a party to press for his political aims. Finally, he declared that he did not contemplate entering Parliament through a by-election. <sup>(52)</sup>

The same evening, Roos addressed a huge crowd at the Johannesburg City Hall. The presence of ten Nationalist MP's on the platform added to the impressiveness of the turnout. <sup>(53)</sup> Roos criticised the Government for the way in which it had gone off gold, predicting that this step would not have the desired result of bringing money back into the country, and devoted the remainder of his speech to threatening Smuts and Hertzog with dire political consequences should they stand in the way of Coalition. "There are times in the history of all nations", he declared, "when the nations have to set aside the leaders, and the people themselves have to dictate a policy." He was going to work together with the rank and file of the South African Party and other parties, and with those leaders who wanted to work with him. He warned Smuts, in particular, to pay attention to the political changes which had taken place over the past three weeks:

I assure General Smuts that he has no chance of achieving what he says in his manifesto /the New Year Message/. The stream that was running towards him three weeks ago has been dammed and stopped. If General Smuts pursues

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52. The Star 29 December 1932.

53. The Nationalist MP's present were Rev. B.R. Hattingh (Krugersdorp), Rev. S.W. Naude (Potgietersrus), G.P. Britz (Losberg), H.H. Moll (Christiana), C. Potgieter (North-East Rand), A.J. Swanepoel (Lichtenburg), Gen. S. Alberts (Magaliesberg), H. Oost (Wonderboom), F. Roberts (Vrededorp), and Dr. Hjalmar Reitz (Brits), who was in the chair.

his present policy the next election will result in a stalemate with a slight majority in favour of the National Party and the balance of power would be held by a few people who should not hold it.

He concluded with a direct reply to the principal implication of Smuts's New Year Message. Coalition under Smuts was unthinkable, he said, in view of the past history of Party conflict. (54)

The South African Party's hopes of an immediate absorption of the Roosite movement into its own ranks seemed further than ever from fulfilment. The day after the public meetings, the South African Party inner circle met at Irene. Smuts reported to his colleagues that he had decided to approach Roos and offer him the Deputy Premiership and three Cabinet seats in a Coalition Government. He further stated that he would even agree to the appointment of a third party as Prime Minister provided he was of the South African Party. The inner circle refused to agree to this sacrifice, but accepted Smuts's first proposal, and delegated Hofmeyr to act as negotiator with Roos. Smuts probably had in mind no more than an offer which would take the wind out of Roos's sails, since if Roos turned it down, as he could be expected to do, it would be difficult for him to continue to proclaim his support for "Coalition". With its second plank removed, his platform would then inevitably collapse.

Patrick Duncan, however, disliked the whole idea of these negotiations, and asked for another meeting the following day, at which he argued that Roos had no real policy to offer, except that Hertzog must be ousted and Roos set up in his place. He suspected that Roos's political intrigues were motivated merely by personal ambition. He argued that, if the South African Party really wanted to form a Coalition Government, it would be far better to negotiate with Hertzog. Smuts, "who had so often sat silent under Hertzog's attacks", declared

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54. The Star 29 December 1932.

emphatically that this was out of the question, as he could never work with Hertzog.<sup>(55)</sup> The South African Party inner circle had reached an impasse, and for the next week it reverted to the policy of remaining silent and waiting for events to develop on their own.

Meanwhile, opposition to Roos in both parties was mobilizing itself. In the Free State and Transvaal Hertzog and Grobler organized meetings of Party divisional council members, MP's and Senators for the purpose of reasserting Party discipline. It became apparent that Roos could expect no support from the Free State - indeed, the Nationalists in this province were inclined to view Roos as a traitor. It also now appeared that defections from the Party in the Transvaal were unlikely to be as widespread as Roos had predicted and the Party leaders had feared. There was now little talk of the resignation of the Government.<sup>(56)</sup> In Natal, Heaton Nicholls - usually a reliable mouthpiece of opinion in that province - expressed doubt about Roos's motives, suggesting that he was "up to his old tricks again of providing a smoke-screen behind which the scattered Nationalist forces may re-form their ranks". He pointed to the fact that Roos had "failed to disclose any practical steps of any kind whereby racialism could be destroyed and the economic chaos of the Union brought to a close". He had given no evidence that he had sufficient Parliamentary support to achieve his goals - "the names of ten good men would have decided the issue immediately". Further, he had spoken of the glorious future of the National Party in a speech "which should have been an appeal to all Parties".<sup>(57)</sup> Besides, he argued, any agreement with Roos would bring into jeopardy the Home Rule

55. This account of the South African Party inner circle meeting of 29 and 30 December is based on Paton, *op.cit.*, p.190.

56. The Natal Mercury 30 and 31 December 1932.

57. The Natal Mercury 30 December 1932.



pledges given by the South African Party at its Union Congress. (58)

By the end of the year it seemed certain that no Coalition would be arranged between Roos and the South African Party. However, in the first few days of 1933 the South African Party was provided with a new incentive to reach an agreement. It seems likely that two developments in particular prompted the South African Party to reconsider the possibility of negotiating with Roos. In the first place, Labour support for Roos was on the increase, as suggested by a statement now issued by the Labour leader Madeley welcoming his return to politics. (59) There was a strong possibility of an electoral pact between the two groups; this was dangerous to the South African Party, which stood to lose its own newly-won Labour support. In the second place, there was evidence that, even if the parties had rejected Roos, the people had not. The overwhelming reception accorded him on his arrival in Cape Town (6 January) and the impressive, responsive crowd at his Pretoria meeting (5 January) were demonstrations of popular support which the South African Party could not afford to ignore. On 4 January, Smuts addressed the Transvaal Provincial Executive of the South African Party, and broached again the question of Coalition with Roos. The main stumbling block to the success of these negotiations, he declared, was Roos's claim to the Premiership. While the South African Party might not be prepared to accept this claim, he himself did not covet the office, and he sought a mandate from the meeting to stand aside in favour of a third party. This was refused, but the meeting passed a resolution declaring its support in principle for a Coalition pact with Roos. (60)

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58. Heaton Nicholls's fears on this point were probably groundless. Roos never committed himself on the Provincial question, but at a later stage, when an agreement with the South African Party seemed imminent, he sought to placate Natal opinion by recalling that at the time of Union he had been a Federalist and had warned of the dangers of over-centralization: (The Natal Mercury 11 January 1933).

59. The Natal Mercury 2 January 1933.

60. The Star 6 January 1933.



The Transvaal South African Party Executive resolution re-opened the way for discussions. Roos acknowledged the resolution in his speech at Pretoria, taking it to mean that the South African Party was prepared to consider all his Coalition proposals, and challenged the Transvaal Nationalist Head Committee to pass a similar resolution.<sup>(61)</sup> At this time, the groundwork for formal negotiations between Roos and the South African Party was laid. Nationalist expectations of the successful conclusion of these negotiations were revived. Dr. D.F. Malan summoned a caucus of Cape MP's, Senators and MPC's at the time of Roos's arrival in Cape Town and extracted from it a motion expressing the fullest confidence in Government policy. An amendment proposed by Louw Steytler<sup>(62)</sup> extending a welcome to Roos and requesting Hertzog to form a National Government to include both Smuts and Roos received no seconder.<sup>(63)</sup> A spokesman for the National Party in Pretoria expected the conclusion of a Coalition pact between the South African Party and the Roos-led Nationalists, with Patrick Duncan as Premier-elect, within a few days.<sup>(64)</sup> In addition, Roos while in Cape Town gave an interview to Reuter, and his answers suggested that agreement was more possible then than it had been a week before. In particular, he stated his belief that he had the power to turn out the Government - although, it is true, he still provided no definite proof of this power - and dealt with the issue of the Premiership by implying that he would support any person "who is capable of swinging over sufficient numbers of both sections of the population to ensure the success of the policy which I have enunciated". He implied that Smuts was not such a person.<sup>(65)</sup>

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61. The Star 5 January 1933. The Transvaal Head Committee obliged, but only in part - it passed a resolution welcoming Roos provided he co-operated with Hertzog and the Government. (The Star 9 January 1933).  
 62. MP for Albert.  
 63. The Star 6 January 1933.  
 64. The Star 6 January 1933.  
 65. The Natal Mercury 6 January 1933.

Smuts and Roos were not expected to meet in person, as Smuts's arrival in Cape Town on 9 January would coincide with Roos's departure the same day, but Smuts appointed Hofmeyr and Esselen - both of whom had in the past corresponded with Roos over the matter of a National Government<sup>(66)</sup> - to remain in Johannesburg and negotiate on behalf of the South African Party. Roos was assisted by Dr. Colin Steyn, whom Barlow mentioned as a sort of co-sponsor of the whole movement,<sup>(67)</sup> and Advocate A.C. Malan. No member of the South African Party outside of the inner circle seems to have been consulted in the matter of these negotiations.<sup>(68)</sup>

Hofmeyr and Esselen met Roos, Steyn and A.C. Malan at the Carlton Hotel on 10 January for discussions which lasted less than an hour.<sup>(69)</sup> The South African Party negotiators did not have full powers to make an agreement, but had "come to see Roos to embark upon a friendly discussion in the spirit of his speech at Pretoria". From this speech, they said, they understood that Roos's offer was one of co-operation in a National Government. As the attitude of Hertzog made a National Government in the full sense impracticable,<sup>(70)</sup> the South African Party agreed in principle with the proposal of a Coalition between the South African Party and those who followed Roos. Hofmeyr and Esselen then asked Roos on what terms he envisaged such a Coalition. Roos began to reply, when the South African Party delegates interrupted him, saying that before terms could be discussed, it would be necessary to refer to the underlying implication - that Roos commanded enough Parliamentary support to eject the Government. Roos again gave no guarantees but assured Hofmeyr and Esselen that it was a

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66. See above, pp.44-45.

67. See above, p.47.

68. L. Blackwell, African Occasions (1938) p.228, records this fact without complaint.

69. This account of the negotiations of 10 January is based on a report in The Star 14 January 1933.

70. Three days before, Hertzog had refused an appeal made by a deputation from Ventersdorp to resolve his differences with Smuts and form a National Government on the grounds that "the differences between the two parties were too great to be bridged". (See below, p.78).

"political certainty" that sufficient support would be forthcoming. They expressed doubt over the phrasing of this assurance but were prepared to accept it as a basis for discussions, while making the reservation that they "could not regard his ability to substantiate this claim as anything but problematical".

Roos then put his terms. He proposed that the Government be composed of five Nationalist Cabinet Ministers, five South African Party Ministers and one Labour Minister, the five South African Party Ministers to be selected by Smuts, the remainder to be nominated by the Prime Minister. The man selected to be Prime Minister should be acceptable to both Parties. As the National Party was in power, he would probably have to be a Nationalist.<sup>(71)</sup>

Hofmeyr and Esselen replied by raising a point not so far discussed; would there be a Coalition in the event of the Government resigning of its own free will? They suggested that this question be left over pending reference to Smuts.<sup>(72)</sup> They then referred to the question of the Premiership. In practice, they said, Coalition was not with the National Party but with a section of it, so the argument that a Nationalist should be Prime Minister did not hold. The section of the National Party which followed Roos could not demand the Premiership in the way that the whole Party might reasonably do. Roos accepted this argument, but said that unless there was a Nationalist Prime Minister "it would be quite impossible to swing anybody from the Nationalist ranks into the Coalition movement". Hofmeyr and Esselen then pointed out that it was impossible to expect that a Coalition of sixty-four South African Party

71. When Roos used the term "Nationalist" in discussions concerning the composition of the Cabinet, he meant, in fact, a supporter of his policy drawn from the National Party. He had in mind a definite group, which did not include any of the existing Cabinet. One of his spokesmen specifically excluded members of the Hertzog Cabinet from participation in a Roos-led Coalition in a statement to The Star on 21 December 1932.

72. So far as I have been able to determine, this question was never raised again.

members and an unknown number of Nationalists should have a Nationalist leader. They then dealt with Roos's proposal regarding the composition of the Cabinet, saying that it implied that Smuts was ruled out as far as the Premiership was concerned. They did not believe that the South African Party as a whole could or would agree to this. Roos then asked for the South African Party counter-proposals. These were that Roos should have the Deputy Premiership and three seats in a Smuts-led Cabinet of ten, with Ministers on both sides to be selected by mutual consultation between Smuts and Roos. Roos did not reply to this counter-proposal, but suggested a suspension of negotiations so that the proposals could be more fully considered, and requested Hofmeyr and Esselen to transmit his offer directly to Smuts.

Immediately after the adjournment, Smuts received Roos's terms by coded telegram. He consulted with "friends and supporters" in Cape Town, reiterating his willingness to stand aside, but he was against Roos's proposals in toto. The only hope for agreement was that Roos would moderate his demands, especially his claim to the Premiership for himself or for another Nationalist. That there was not much chance of this happening was shown by Roos's actions in the three days between the opening of discussions and the collapse of the negotiations. During this period, he attempted to pressurize the South African Party into coming to a settlement. In a speech at Kroonstad on 11 January, he repeatedly urged the necessity of a speedy conclusion of the negotiations. Intermingled with the emphasis on urgency was a warning to the South African Party leaders that if they proved intractable he would appeal over their heads to the Party rank and file.<sup>(73)</sup> The day after his Kroonstad speech, he despatched the following telegram to Hofmeyr:

Find conditions make early decision essential.  
Therefore we must decide in Bloemfontein on  
Friday or Saturday /13 or 14 January/. If  
agreement reached, I propose to make it public

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73. The Natal Mercury 12 January 1933.



at Saturday night's meeting. If not, I propose to disclose two proposals to the public then. The public is entitled to this full disclosure. (74)

The threat to make public the full story of the negotiations is significant, for it suggests that Roos's impatience was not merely a desire to catch the tide of public opinion at its flood. He hoped that the South African Party, out of fear of being saddled with responsibility for the breakdown of the negotiations, could be hurried into going a long way towards accepting his terms. (75)

The South African Party, however, had made no secret of the fact that it entered the negotiations half-heartedly and without much expectation of success. On the evening on which Roos met the South African Party negotiators, Duncan addressed a meeting at Volksrust. He suggested that Roos had "missed the bus" in talking of a new "non-racial" National Party, because "it had already been done". (76)

The implication was that, since Roos had not chosen to come back into politics as a member of an existing party which already stood for the principles which he proclaimed, some doubt must be cast on the sincerity of his motives. The South African Party was "bound to go into the matter" of co-operation with him with "the fairest interest", but it could not be expected to make itself available as a vehicle for the personal ambitions of a scheming politician. The South African Party thus had at its disposal a very strong counter-propaganda with which to fight Roos's threat of making the public accusation that it had broken off talks because of its selfish reluctance to sacrifice party advantage. For this reason, Roos's attempt to pressurize the South African Party into a settlement favourable to him was a forlorn hope. On the evening of 12 January Hofmeyr

74. The Star 14 January 1933.

75. He later attributed the collapse of the negotiations in part to the fact that the South African Party was "flushed with its Germiston success". (The Star 14 January 1933). He was in fact claiming that the South African Party was intractable because of its determination to cling to party advantage.

76. The Natal Mercury 11 January 1933.



sent the following reply to his telegram:

At Tuesday's interview we indicated that your proposal, as set forth and elucidated by you, would not be accepted by our party. We have now consulted our leader as requested by you and we confirm previous statement that the Party cannot agree. We now await your reply to our counter-proposals. We are willing to resume negotiations whenever desired by you with this as the starting-point, in the hope that our joint efforts will lead to co-operation on a wide national basis. Reply in time to enable us to leave for Bloemfontein on Friday evening if necessary. (77)

Roos replied the following day that negotiations were at an end because it was impossible for him to go beyond his original proposals. (78)

On January 14 Smuts issued a statement on the breakdown of the negotiations. He blamed nobody for their failure, declaring that they never really had any chance of success. Roos's demands, he said, were "based on the assumption that he is in individual control of the National Party and already occupied the position of General Hertzog". The truth, however, was that "the strength of Mr. Roos is still a matter of much doubt and obscurity". The South African Party, he said, was

bound to look beyond the mere defeat of the Government, and not to agree to steps which would inevitably land the country in a hopeless mess in the near future. We are not in a fit of impatience or in a wave of popular feeling to hand the country over to the unknown. (79)

The South African Party seems to have been unanimous in its approval of Smuts's rejection of Roos's proposals. Even before the exact terms of the proposals were known, at a meeting of the Natal South African Party Executive on 12 January there was much support for a motion proposed by Heaton Nicholls calling for the Party "to have nothing to

77. The Star 14 January 1933.

78. The Star 14 January 1933.

79. The Star 14 January 1933.

do with Roos".<sup>(80)</sup> Later the Natal South African Party came out solidly behind non-acceptance of Roos's terms.<sup>(81)</sup> A group of Transvaal MP's, among them Leslie Blackwell,<sup>(82)</sup> found Roos's proposals "preposterous" and regarded Smuts's counter-offer as "foolishly generous".<sup>(83)</sup> The Natal Mercury repeated its doubts about Roos's motives, claiming that recent developments proved beyond doubt that he was bent on creating a "Salvation Army shelter" for the National Party.<sup>(84)</sup> It further added that his offer of a seat in the Cabinet to the Labour Party was aimed at checking the movement of Labour towards the South African Party.<sup>(85)</sup>

Roos's failure to conclude an agreement with Smuts at this time virtually killed whatever chances he may have had of realizing his political ambitions. A week or so after stalemate was announced - probably on Sunday 22 January - Hofmeyr approached Smuts to tell him that there was a good chance of a Coalition between the South African Party and the whole National Party, if Smuts cared to make an offer in Parliament.<sup>(86)</sup> If this was a real possibility, then Roos had become irrelevant overnight. However, this was still in the future. In the week between the end of the first round of negotiations and Hofmeyr's suggestion to Smuts of the possibility of agreement with Hertzog, both Roos and Smuts emphasized that the door to Coalition was still open.

On 15 January Smuts addressed a meeting in Cape Town. He expressed the belief that "South Africa would get a Coalition Government sooner than people thought", and

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80. Heaton Nicholls, op.cit., p.266.

81. The Star 14 January 1933.

82. South African Party MP for Bezuidenhout.

83. Blackwell, African Occasions, p.228.

84. See above, p.51.

85. The Natal Mercury 14 January 1933.

86. J.C. Smuts (junior), Jan Christiaan Smuts (1952) p.326. The background to the formation of a Coalition between the South African Party and the National Party forms the subject of Chapter III, so I shall do no more here than refer to early developments in this direction.

evidently had an accommodation with Roos in mind in making this statement. The difficulty with the round of negotiations just completed, he said, was that Roos "had never thought out the position and was dominated by only one idea, and that was the importance of his role as saviour of South Africa and the position of Prime Minister." This speech suggests that Smuts was confident that Roos would soon fall into line with the South African Party's proposals, since he simultaneously stated that no National Government dominated by Nationalists could ever guarantee the principles of non-racialism and Empire co-operation for which the South African Party stood.<sup>(87)</sup> On the other hand, if Roos resisted an accommodation with the South African Party on its terms he would stand revealed as a political adventurer, out for personal gain. The day after this meeting Smuts summoned Duncan, Reitz, Hofmeyr and Esselen to Cape Town; this is a further indication of the fact that he anticipated either the resumption of negotiations with Roos or their final collapse. The Government too expected new developments. It was learned that the Cape Ministers had reverted to the position of favouring an immediate resignation and an appeal to the country, on the ground that it would be the only method of out-maneuvring Roos and saving the National Party from being split into factions. On the other hand, another section of the Cabinet, reportedly led by Havenga and Pirow, wanted Hertzog to forestall Roos by himself seeking an agreement with Smuts.<sup>(88)</sup>

The Roos camp, meanwhile, prepared the way for the re-opening of negotiations by publishing a statement - issued in the name of Advocate A.C. Malan - claiming that the South African Party negotiators had been unskilful, and that difficulties could most easily be resolved by a face-to-face meeting between Smuts and Roos. On the vital issue of the Premiership, Roos's preliminary offer - a

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87. The Star 16 January 1933.

88. The Star 17 January 1933.

Prime Minister acceptable to both parties - had been countered by Hofmeyr and Esselen with a definite proposal - General Smuts was to be Prime Minister, and only on the strict understanding that this was to be the case could further negotiations be continued. Hofmeyr's reply to Roos's telegram of 12 January had had as its starting point the stipulation that Smuts should be Prime Minister, and Roos would have been honour-bound to accept this had he allowed Hofmeyr and Esselen to come to Bloemfontein on that understanding. Thus Roos had no alternative but to break off negotiations when he did. Only by taking a direct part in future discussions, this statement concluded, could "a great South African like General Smuts" successfully ensure that "the ambitions of some of his party stalwarts be very definitely subordinated to the welfare of South Africa." (89)

On his arrival in Cape Town, Smuts had been impressed by the demonstrations of popular support for Coalition which he had encountered. It was obvious that this pro-Coalition feeling embraced a large portion of his own Party. In the interests of maintaining Party unity, Smuts decided to renew contacts with Roos and to restate his personal offer to stand aside in the interests of Coalition, if only to demonstrate to Party supporters once again that Roos's demands were unreasonable. On 17 January Smuts suggested to a meeting of the inner circle that they accept Roos or his nominee (probably Charles Te Water, then Union High Commissioner in London) as Prime Minister. However, as before, no member of the inner circle was prepared to accept this suggestion, and it was abandoned by Smuts. (90) Had this issue been debated in a Party caucus, it is likely that matters would have turned out differently, as it was already evident that there was considerable backbench support for an agreement with Roos on the terms that he should have the Premiership.

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89. The Natal Mercury 17 January 1933.

90. Paton, op.cit., p.191.



Nevertheless, further negotiations with Roos were put in train. On 19 January, he and Steyn arrived in Cape Town from Durban and met Smuts and Hofmeyr at Smuts's house. These discussions showed conclusively that no agreement was likely to be reached on the question of the Premiership, and without a solution to this issue the parties could never come to terms. Roos explained that he had no alternative but to demand the Premiership for one of his own Party, as it would otherwise appear that he was merely leading true Nationalists into support of Smuts's cause. He would be regarded as a traitor to the Afrikaner cause, and his influence would be at an end. He now made another offer; the Cabinet would consist of five South African Party men, four Nationalists and one Labour member, and the Prime Minister would be chosen by the last five. He also added that he could give no guarantees of being able to turn out the Government, as his Parliamentary position was weak, although it would become stronger. (Roos obviously hoped that more Nationalists would throw in their lot with him once Coalition with the South African Party had been agreed upon). The meeting closed shortly afterwards with the parties probably further from agreement than before.<sup>(91)</sup>

Parliament opened on 20 January, and hereafter supporters of Coalition devoted their attention to developments arising from Smuts's motion, introduced on 24 January, calling for the Government to resign and make way for the formation of a National Government.<sup>(92)</sup> There were further attempts to revive negotiations between Roos and the South African Party, and a further offer from the Roosites - a Cabinet of eleven, consisting of four Roosites, one of whom would be Prime Minister, six South African Party men and a Labour member nominated by the South African Party.<sup>(93)</sup> The composition of the Cabinet was an issue of secondary importance, however. Without an agreement on the issue of

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91. Paton, op.cit., pp.191-192.

92. See Chapter III, pp.75 et seq.

93. The Star 28 January 1933.



the Premiership, no concessions in regard to numbers of Cabinet ministers had any point. The symbolic importance of this office prevented any concession from Roos, and his inability to prove his claim to the office stood in the way of his acceptance by the South African Party.

The South African Party leaders' handling of the negotiations with Roos had a sequel in the Party's parliamentary caucus. Smuts was "castigated for letting the talks founder"<sup>(94)</sup> by a section in the South African Party, and it was to demand an explanation from him that the Party's rank and file called for a caucus meeting. For nearly a week, (25 to 31 January) the caucus debated the Coalition issue in general and the Party leaders' conduct of the talks with Roos in particular. Several prominent Party members - and probably about thirty in all<sup>(95)</sup> - including F.S. Malan,<sup>(96)</sup> Heaton Nicholls and Stuttaford, supported an agreement with Roos. The argument used by Stuttaford, and supported by Heaton Nicholls,<sup>(97)</sup> was that "the turning out of the Government by [Smuts's] playing second fiddle to Tielman for six months, is worth the sacrifice that [he] will make."<sup>(98)</sup> Their argument was considerably strengthened by the fact that, since the meeting of 19 January, Roos had provided for the first time a guarantee of sorts that he had sufficient Parliamentary following to turn out the Government; the South African Party Chief Whip had been handed a signed list of eleven Nationalist MP's who had given an undertaking to vote against the Government when instructed by Roos to

94. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.246.

95. Crafford, op.cit., p.266.

96. B. Cloete, Die Lewe van Senator F.S. Malan (1946) p.392.

97. Heaton Nicholls's change of attitude (see above, p.60 and p.67) is rather puzzling. In his memoirs, South Africa in My Time (p.268) he offers no explanation beyond recording shamefacedly that "after listening to the arguments for and against" at the South African Party caucus meeting, he "spoke in favour of accepting Roos's offer". Perhaps Nicholls was tempted by the fact that Parliament was in session, and an agreement with Roos could go into operation and turn out the Government immediately.

98. Heaton Nicholls, op.cit., p.268.

do so.<sup>(99)</sup> Others, like Blackwell, favoured agreement with Roos but only on condition that Smuts was Prime Minister.<sup>(100)</sup> Another group, probably in a minority but including Duncan, Reitz, Hofmeyr and Van der Byl were against any agreement with Roos, but solidly in favour of negotiations with Hertzog.<sup>(101)</sup>

Smuts did not speak until near the end of the caucus. No record of his speech is to hand, apart from a brief precis in Hancock's biography, but he published a press statement a week later which probably embodied the arguments he used in the caucus speech. He addressed himself to two questions in particular: What will be secured as the result of acceptance? What is the price that will have to be paid? In regard to the first, he said, a Coalition Government such as that envisaged by Roos would not be a Coalition in the full sense. "The great mass of the National Party will remain outside it. Party strife will continue as before, the racial struggle will not be suspended, it will be accentuated." In regard to the second, it should be remembered that defeat of the Government would in all probability be followed by a dissolution and a general election. The South African Party would have to fight this election under the leadership of Roos. Sooner or later, basic differences of principle would appear in the ranks of the Coalition, and a numerical majority in the Cabinet would not be an adequate safeguard to the South African Party for the maintenance of its principles. "Before long the South African Party majority in the House may be faced with the alternative of either abandoning its South African Party principles or incurring the odium of breaking up the Coalition, with probably disastrous results in the resultant general election." Smuts therefore concluded that the price to be paid for acceptance of Roos's offers was "entirely incommensurate with the problematical advantages

99. *Ibid.*, p.267; *The Star* 9 February 1933.

100. Blackwell, *African Occasions*, p.232.

101. *Ibid.*, p.232; P.G. Van der Byl, *Top Hat to Velskoen* (1973) p.98.

to be secured". (102)

This speech mollified the Party's back-benchers, and the caucus concluded by passing a unanimous resolution, leaving the conduct of future Coalition negotiations unreservedly in the hands of Smuts. (103)

From Smuts's point of view, the Roos episode was thus brought to an apparently satisfactory conclusion. All of his tactical objectives had been achieved. Party unity had been maintained and little blame had attached to the Party for the failure to conclude an agreement with Roos. True, the South African Party had failed to absorb the Roos movement, but this had never been more than a remote prospect, and Smuts had built up no expectations of concluding a Coalition agreement on his own terms. However, the incident had not left the Party unscathed. Roos had denied the South African Party the triumph of having forced the Government to renounce its economic policy. His advent had provided a new political alternative for dissident members of the National and Labour Parties, and the flow of support from these parties to the South African Party appeared to have been stopped. If Roos's real motives had been to check the growing popularity and ascendancy of the South African Party and to restore the fortunes of Nationalism, he had achieved at least the first, for when the stream of support flowing from the National and Labour Parties to the South African Party ceased, so too did the South African Party's hopes of realizing its objective of establishing a populist party in South Africa. The clear identification of the South African Party with a National Government alternative to the National Party Government had become obscured.

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102. The Star 8 February 1933.

103. The Star 28 January 1933.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### COALITION: THE SOUTH AFRICAN PARTY AND HERTZOG

JANUARY - MARCH 1933

On 24 January 1933, Smuts rose in the House, not to propose the customary motion of no confidence in the Government, but instead to move that

...in view of the fact that the Government, despite the assurances repeatedly given by it, has remained in office while abandoning the gold standard, and has therefore now to give effect to a policy which it has condemned as fatal to the interests of the country, and in view further of the grave economic conditions which prevail today, this House considers that the Government should tender its resignation forthwith and so afford an opportunity for the formation of a National Government.

He explained that this motion, apparently in the form of a motion of no confidence, was in reality "an appeal for a new start in the politics of this country". This "new start", Smuts claimed, was profoundly desired by the people of South Africa, who were sick of unnecessary political wrangling and of racial hatred. It was this force of popular opinion in favour of a new political dispensation which accounted for the spectacular success of Roos, but, he said:

...it would be a mistake to identify the spirit we see in the country to-day with the appearance of Mr. Roos. It would be the biggest mistake to minimize the intensity of this feeling which exists in all parts of the country - the feeling in favour of a cessation of party strife...I have never seen anything like it. It is not a press campaign. You find it in all parties. The ranks opposite to me to-day feel the impulse of this great movement almost as much as the rest of the country.

By its declared intention to remain in office until 1934, the Government was acting in defiance of popular opinion. The result of the next election, Smuts declared, could not be in doubt, but the South African Party derived no satisfaction from the certainty of its victory, since



bitterness would remain. A South African Party Government's best efforts to govern in a manner which would promote constructive reform would be "poisoned" by "factional oppositions". The Government's refusal to accommodate public opinion was the more surprising in view of the fact that the Prime Minister need not lose the initiative by resigning to make way for a National Government, as was proved by the case of Ramsay MacDonald in Britain in 1931.<sup>(1)</sup> But, Smuts continued, if he was not prepared to do this, he should "let others have an opportunity to form a National Government in this country". He gave an assurance that if he were called upon to form a Cabinet, he would not look upon it as a party occasion to be used for the purposes of the South African Party. After making an appeal for the extrusion of personalities from politics, Smuts shifted his emphasis by declaring that he was directing his motion "to those [on the other side of the House] who are dissatisfied with the Government and profoundly so, and have given expression to their dissatisfaction", warning them that if they did not turn out the Government, the country would not understand this and would not forgive them. (A Nationalist Member interjected at this point, "You are letting the cat out of the bag"). Smuts repeated the major charge against the National Party Government -

I have said before in public, and I repeat it now, that if the worst enemy of this country had wanted to punish South Africa with the direst calamity, it could not have done it more effectively than the Government did in the way in which they carried out the gold policy.

He then concluded by anticipating the Nationalist rejoinder that his motion was in effect an expression of his lack of confidence in his own Party. He had "absolute confidence that the South African Party is going to have a great victory if an appeal is made to the country", but Smuts claimed, his motion pointed to a "better way", and that was the extinction of excessive party spirit.<sup>(2)</sup>

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1. See A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-45 (1965) pp.366-370.

2. Smuts's speech is reported in House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX cols.31-41.



National Party speakers in the debate which followed almost without exception cast doubt on Smuts's sincerity in introducing his motion. They implied that its tone and content were inconsistent with his political behaviour, particularly with his actions over the last year. Pirow, for example, declared that "this need of a National Government only became an urgent matter when it became necessary for the South African Party to protect the booty which their friends had made by speculation".<sup>(3)</sup> C.R. Swart<sup>(4)</sup> reminded Smuts that the South African Party had always stood in the way of co-operation between Parties in important matters such as the settlement of the Native question.<sup>(5)</sup> N.C. Havenga, Minister of Finance, asked when Smuts had come to the conclusion that Coalition was necessary, since "only a few weeks ago...our friends opposite were so provocative".<sup>(6)</sup> Grobler recalled the accusations "of infidelity, of dishonesty, of incapacity, and similar things" which Smuts had made against the National Party Government, and asked how he could now bring himself to form a Coalition "with people who are dishonest, unfaithful and incompetent".<sup>(7)</sup>

In the light of the history of Party conflict, the Nationalists were probably right in suspecting that a deeper motive lay behind Smuts's apparently self-denying motion, but their allegations of inconsistency and their suggestions that Smuts was acting out of a sense of the weakness of his own and his Party's position demonstrated an incomplete understanding of Smuts's strategy. Malan had accused the

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3. Ibid., 24 January 1933 vol.XX col.54. He is referring to the extraordinary profits made by some speculators - particularly mining houses - on account of the appreciation of the gold price following the country's departure from the gold standard. The government had made no secret of its intention, in Pirow's words, "to take a reasonable share of the profits of the mines". At least two more Nationlists, D.F. Malan (col.146) and C.W.M. du Toit (col.104) echoed Pirow's argument.
  4. MP for Ladybrand.
  5. House of Assembly Debates 25 January 1933 vol.XX col.78.
  6. Ibid., 30 January 1933 vol.XX col.210.
  7. Ibid., 25 January 1933 vol.XX col.87.

South African Party of seeking Coalition with the National Party because of the failure of the Roos negotiations.<sup>(8)</sup>

In fact, even before discussions with Roos had begun in earnest, Smuts had already conceived of a "plan for the opening of parliament". On 6 January Smuts wrote to J. Martin:

Many thanks for your note which I very much appreciate. The idea you suggest has already formed the basis of my plan for the opening of parliament, if nothing happens before to necessitate a change. (9)

The contents of the note from Martin referred to by Smuts cannot be known,<sup>(10)</sup> but it is a reasonable assumption that the "plan" to which Smuts refers involved an offer of co-operation to Hertzog. A coincidence fortunate for the historian bears out this assumption. On 7 January a deputation from Ventersdorp, which included two Nationalist MP's,<sup>(11)</sup> waited on Smuts and Hertzog for the purpose of communicating to them an appeal made by the farmers of the district for the formation of a National Government. Hertzog did not reject the appeal out of hand, but made no effort to disguise his uncompromising hostility to the suggestion. He argued that the concessions which the National Party would have to make in order to come to terms with the South African Party were too great. Smuts, on the other hand, expressed willingness to co-operate with Hertzog at any time in the formation of a National Government on a reasonable basis. He emphasized that the country's problems were too great for any single party to deal effectively with them, and expressed the belief that Party differences, although great, were not too great to be overcome.<sup>(12)</sup>

Smuts's National Government motion appears to have been the implementation of a strategy which had been decided

8. *Ibid.*, 26 January 1933 vol.XX col.144.

9. J. van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers vol.V (1973) no.324.

10. According to Van der Poel (*ibid.*) this letter from Martin is not in the Smuts Collection.

11. L. Boshoff (Ventersdorp) and J.D. Verster (Zwartruggens).

12. The Star 7 January 1933.

upon well in advance and which was not affected by the developments arising from the collapse of the negotiations with Roos. . It was a strategy adapted to the needs created by the new political climate introduced by the re-emergence of Roos, but at the same time consistent with the political behaviour of Smuts and the South African Party in the immediate as well as the more remote past.

During the last six months of 1932 the South African Party's platform had emphasized the Party's appeal to a racial and economic cross-section of the country, and had offered as its own solution to the economic difficulties of the country the establishment of a National Government representative of all the elements in the electorate.<sup>(13)</sup> The call for the establishment of a National Government did not in any way imply that the South African Party as a party had become irrelevant or that it had lost its function; on the contrary, South African Party spokesman claimed that, by virtue of its claim to represent all socio-economic classes and both white language groups, the Party was in itself a potential National Government. The "National Government" slogan thus enabled the South African Party to secure a Party advantage through the appearance of abandoning purely Party objectives. Later, the South African Party had responded positively to Roos's Coalition initiative, but had used the question of the Prime Ministership as a public test of his sincerity. In this way the Party was able to demonstrate in practical terms its claim to be the essential core of any National Government or Coalition, while at the same time side-stepping the accusation that it had failed to conclude terms with Roos because of its determination to retain the Party advantage which it had secured during the economic crisis.

At the time when Smuts met the Ventersdorp deputation, the collapse of the Roos negotiations was still in the future, but the working-out of one of the most important side-effects of Roos's political re-emergence had become apparent; his

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13. See above, p.35.

advent had produced a sharp decline in the numbers of dissident Nationalists and Labourites throwing in their lot with the South African Party, and his movement also threatened to capture a large slice of the "floating vote" in both urban and rural constituencies. In the circumstances, the South African Party's claim to constitute in its own right a potential National Government began to ring hollow, since it was no longer the only alternative of members of other Parties who desired a new political dispensation. The popularity of Roos, which was evidenced by the enthusiastic reception accorded to him by the large crowds at his Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town meetings made it necessary for the South African Party carefully to reconsider its future strategy. The logic of the political situation and the impetus of its own propaganda demanded that the South African Party should continue to base its strategy upon the demand for a National Government, partly for the sake of consistency but mainly because of the obvious demonstrations of popular support for this policy. It has already been shown<sup>(14)</sup> how the South African Party, in its dealings with Roos, had attempted either to absorb the Roos movement, or, failing that, to convince the public that it, the Party, genuinely desired a National Government and an end to racial and Party strife, but that its efforts were being frustrated by Roos's personal or Party ambitions. Smuts never anticipated that the negotiations with Roos would come to anything, but he must have expected that each side would blame the other for the breakdown of the talks and that a vigorous propaganda battle would follow. For this battle, he had at his disposal a trump card which would finally ensure that the South African Party emerged unscathed from the Roos ordeal; he would make a public offer to the National Party of South African Party co-operation in the formation of a National Government, and would use the opportunity presented by the opening of Parliament to make this dramatic move.

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14. See above, p. 74.



Could Smuts reasonably have anticipated that the National Party would reject this offer? The evidence suggests that his strategy was based upon the expectation that any suggestion of formal co-operation between the Parties would be rejected out of hand by the Nationalists. P.G. Van der Byl<sup>(15)</sup> recalled in his memoirs:

I had a suspicion that the General /Smuts/ was not anxious to join a Coalition....He was certain that, if a Coalition was formed, it would fail once the immediate urgency had passed.

In justification of his claim that Smuts was not sincere in his pro-Coalition gesture, Van der Byl related the following anecdote:

...I heard that as Smuts was walking out from the Caucus with Morris Alexander, (16) the latter asked: 'But what if Hertzog accepts your offer, General? Have you thought of that?' And Smuts replied with a laugh: 'You need have no fear of that!' (17)

A second-hand anecdote written forty years after the event is flimsy evidence on which to base an argument, but the circumstances surrounding Smuts's introduction of his National Government motion support this interpretation. There was, in the first place, the vagueness of the terms in which Smuts phrased his motion. During the course of the debate, several Nationalist speakers remarked on this fact. C.R. Swart, for example, declared: "All we heard was high-sounding words, vague generalities, expressions to make our flesh creep, pious, valueless talk, but no clear and concrete proposals."<sup>(18)</sup> It was at least to have been expected that Smuts would provide a statement of the proposed aims, composition and terms of reference of such a Coalition, and that he should indicate how a Coalition Government could achieve ends which could not be realized

15. South African Party MP for Bredasdorp.

16. South African Party MP for Cape Town Castle.

17. P.G. Van der Byl, Top Hat to Velskoen (1973) pp.102-103.

18. House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX col.69.



by any other government. In the second place, as D.F. Malan pointed out,<sup>(19)</sup> it was highly irregular for proposals of this nature to come from the Opposition rather than the Government. In addition, Smuts had made no effort to consult or sound out Hertzog beforehand. Harm Oost<sup>(20)</sup> rightly saw this as an obvious first step if Smuts had been serious in his intentions, since "things like this are not dealt with over the floor of the House".<sup>(21)</sup> (It is, of course, true that members of the two Parties had been in contact with each other in the matter of the formation of a Coalition or National Government. Paton cites the correspondence between Hofmeyr and Wessels as a case in point,<sup>(22)</sup> but it is worth remembering in this connection that theirs was a purely personal contact. Neither acted on behalf of his Party, nor is there any evidence to suggest that Hofmeyr received the slightest encouragement from Smuts to promote contacts with the National Party; in fact, such evidence as does exist suggests the contrary.<sup>(23)</sup>).

But perhaps the truest indication of the sincerity or otherwise of Smuts's approach to the National Party is to be found in the tone and content of the South African Party leader's speech itself. He accused Hertzog of stirring up animosity between the language groups, of insensitivity to public opinion, of bringing public institutions and public life generally into disrepute by failing to carry out his promise of resignation following the abandonment of the gold standard, and condemned the Government's handling of the economic crisis in the strongest possible terms. Further, his appeal to the Prime Minister to "let others have an opportunity" to form a National Government if he was not prepared to do so himself, and his direction of his message to dissident Nationalists hinted at another purpose which

19. Ibid., 26 January 1933 vol.XX col.140.

20. Nationalist MP for Pretoria District.

21. House of Assembly Debates 26 January 1933 vol.XX col.132.

22. See above, p.68 and Alan Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) p.193.

23. Ibid., p.193.

Nationalist Members were not slow to detect.<sup>(24)</sup> A genuine move towards conciliation and co-operation would have been couched in more conciliatory terms.

Coalition, or at least some form of political agreement, between the National Party and the South African Party had been mooted in the press several days before Smuts's motion in the House, but it was assumed that the initiative in any movement towards a full Coalition of parties would come from the Nationalist side. It was believed in some circles that the Government felt no more secure after the collapse of the Roos-South African Party negotiations, since there was no guarantee against future treachery on the part of the unknown number of Nationalist MP's who supported Roos. Press commentaries represented this feeling of insecurity as finding expression in two ways: on the one hand, the Cape Ministers, D.F. Malan, C.W. Malan and A.P.J. Fourie, favoured the resignation of the Government and the calling of a general election; on the other hand, Havenga and Pirow, two Ministers particularly close to Hertzog, were reportedly urging upon the Prime Minister a settlement with Smuts on the basis of the proposals of the Ventersdorp deputation.<sup>(25)</sup> Pirow later denied that either Havenga or he had in any way influenced Hertzog's decision to follow up his rejection of the National Government motion with a positive behind-the-scenes approach to Smuts - indeed, he claimed that he was taken by surprise when Hertzog informed him of his decision.<sup>(26)</sup> Hertzog's diary account confirms the independence of the Prime Minister's initiative,<sup>(27)</sup> but there can be little doubt that the thoughts of Havenga in particular tended in this direction, and that he would have attempted to use his unusually close personal and political friendship with Hertzog to urge on him an approach

24. House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX cols.31-41.

25. The Star 17 January 1933.

26. O. Pirow, J.B.M. Hertzog (n.d.) pp.148-9.

27. See C.M. Van den Heever, Generaal J.B.M. Hertzog (1944) p.592.

to Smuts. (28)

There can also be little doubt that this decision on Hertzog's part - taken on 25 January, the day after Smuts's motion was put - rather than any single act on the part of the South African Party determined the course of political developments. Hertzog records in his diary no reason for his decision, merely that on 25 January he discussed, first with Pirow and then with Havenga, the desirability of an approach to Smuts and a suggestion that they discuss the possibility of co-operating in a government, once Smuts's motion had been defeated in the House and Hertzog's amendment expressing confidence in the Government passed. Both Havenga and Pirow, Hertzog wrote, were in agreement with him. (29) The initial feelers were to be put out immediately via intermediaries. Pirow and Havenga were asked to see Duncan and to request him to tell Smuts in his reply to the debate "not to close the door to co-operation". (30)

Pirow, at least, seems to have been genuinely baffled by Hertzog's apparent change of attitude, for which he offered this unconvincing explanation:

When he replied to the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister was not prepared to consider co-operation in any shape or form. He was determined to fight Roos and Smuts to a finish. His position had been badly shaken and he was furious at what he considered the betrayal by Tielman and the hypocrisy of Smuts. He made one of his angry speeches which did more credit to his fighting spirit than his common sense. But this loss of temper was, as always, followed by a rigorous self-inquisition, and led, as had happened before, to a change of front. (31)

Hertzog's reply to Smuts's motion was, in fact, anything but

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28. See A.M. Van Schoor, "Die Harmonie van Hertzog en Havenga", Hertzog-Annale (1957), for a somewhat romanticized account of the political friendship between these two Nationalist leaders. Van Schoor, of course, does not suggest that Havenga in any way influenced Hertzog's decision to seek agreement with Smuts.

29. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.592.

30. Pirow, op.cit., p.148.

31. Ibid., p.148.

an "angry speech"; its tone was considerably more moderate than Smuts's had been, and it contained much less invective. Hertzog attempted to justify the past actions of his Government, particularly its economic policies, and to counter Smuts's accusation that the Government had broken a pledge given to the people by remaining in office after abandoning the gold standard. Alone among Nationalist speakers during the debate, he publicly accepted - even if he did not privately believe - that Smuts's proposals for a National Government were "not accompanied by anything but only the purest and most altruistic objects customary with him in party politics". He rejected the idea of a National Government not on principle but because Smuts had failed to supply details of how Party antagonisms were to be set aside, and because he had not shown how such a government could achieve objectives which would elude a normal Party government. Taken in context then, his statement that "along the way of coalition there is nothing to be obtained for the people of South Africa" was not an absolute but a qualified rejection of political co-operation.<sup>(32)</sup>

Acceptance of Smuts's motion would have been tantamount to his own and his Party's political capitulation and, short of this, Hertzog in his speech had gone as far as he could to indicate his willingness to co-operate with Smuts. There was thus no dramatic change of front by Hertzog on 25 January; he, too, had decided well in advance to tailor his strategy to suit the new political circumstances created by the demonstrations of popular support for Coalition provided by the Roos movement. The fact that the adoption of this strategy remained secret and surprised one of its most determined advocates, Pirow, suggests no more than that Hertzog feared that an early disclosure of his intentions would allow too much time for the mobilization of intra-Party opposition and, perhaps, for some kind of counter-stroke by the South African Party. It is true that on the

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32. Hertzog's speech is reported in House of Assembly Debates 24 January 1933 vol.XX cols.41-46.



day on which Smuts's National Government motion was introduced in the House, the National Party caucus had, on Hertzog's insistence, passed a resolution precluding any Nationalist from furthering the cause of Coalition.<sup>(33)</sup>

Soon afterwards Nationalist sources issued statements explaining that the anti-Coalition resolution referred only to the Roos movement,<sup>(34)</sup> but it is probable that Hertzog insisted on the passing of this resolution for a number of reasons. He must have been anxious to curb or at least to regulate private Coalition initiatives on the part of Nationalist Members, such as those set in motion by Wessels in his communication with Hofmeyr,<sup>(35)</sup> and it is also possible that he intended to use the resolution as a decoy which would lead Smuts into believing that a National Government motion could be introduced in the certainty that it would be rejected by the National Party.

Havenga and Pirow delivered Hertzog's message to Duncan, probably on the day on which it was given, i.e. 25 January. The following day Hertzog approached D.F. Malan and discussed with him the desirability of negotiations with Smuts. As Hertzog must have anticipated, Malan declared himself opposed to this suggestion.<sup>(36)</sup> It was almost certainly by design that Malan was consulted only after the first approaches to the South African Party had been made. On 28 January Hertzog discussed the question with the full compliment of Nationalist Cabinet Ministers. Havenga, Pirow, Grobler and Kemp were definitely in favour of the approach, but in the two days which had passed since his discussion with Hertzog, Malan had "attempted to influence certain Ministers against the idea of co-operation", and his efforts had evidently been at least partially successful. C.W. Malan also opposed conciliation with Smuts, while Jansen and Fourie for various reasons regarded the idea as highly dubious at

33. The Star 24 January 1933.

34. The Star 30 January 1933.

35. See above, p.82.

36. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.592.



best.<sup>(37)</sup> After listening to the arguments put forward, Hertzog said that since the Cabinet was divided "he would now act on his own as leader instead of consulting with [the Cabinet], as had been his intention, step by step as the negotiations progressed".<sup>(38)</sup> (Pirow suggests that Hertzog was prompted to act independently of the Cabinet "by the conviction that anything he told Dr. Malan would be utilized for propaganda against Coalition".)<sup>(39)</sup>

Rumours of a Coalition agreement with Smuts meanwhile began to circulate amongst National Party backbenchers, and at the weekly caucus meeting on 31 January, E.A. Conroy<sup>(40)</sup> asked Hertzog whether they contained any truth. Hertzog replied that he had no doubt that Smuts's offer of co-operation could not be left unanswered. He would invite Smuts to discuss the question of co-operation and to investigate the extent to which it was possible. The procedure would be as follows; he would issue a declaration of a general nature which would include certain principles which he regarded as an essential basis for co-operation. At the time of publication he would send a copy to Smuts with a covering letter explaining that it was sent with an eye to his speech in the House and the invitation contained therein. He then emphasized the necessity of a positive response to Smuts's invitation, as rejection would later be used as propaganda against the National Party. The Party would not then be able to blame Smuts for making common cause with the Natal Devolutionists and Federalists, and the cause of Afrikanerdom and of the Afrikaans language would be dealt an irreparable blow. The National Party would in any event, he declared, have to contest the next election under its own power. It could not, under the circumstances, hope to win that election, and by rejecting Smuts's overtures they would be driving him into the arms of Roos and of the Natal jingoes, who would force Smuts to grant Natal the

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37. *Ibid.*, p.592.

38. Pirow, *op.cit.*, p.150.

39. *Ibid.*, p.150.

40. MP for Vredefort.

degree of federation necessary to ban the Afrikaans language from that province. After discussion and argument for and against, the caucus concluded with a request to Hertzog that at the next meeting (to be held a week later) he present the caucus a list of the principles upon which he intended to base a Coalition agreement.<sup>(41)</sup>

The immediate result of the Cabinet meeting of 28 January and of the caucus meeting of 31 January was that Hertzog decided to take a personal initiative in the negotiations which he hoped to set in train with the South African Party. He recorded his reasons for this step in his diary:

It had meanwhile become clear to me that, with the obvious division in the Cabinet and also in the caucus, it was not advisable for me to accede to the request of the caucus, and that the time had now arrived for me to act as leader, to pay attention to my instinct [gevoel] regarding what was in the interests of the Party and so to do my duty. It was clear to me that to expect a decision from the caucus, or even from my Nationalist colleagues in the Cabinet, would be to give the impression that I was trying to shift my responsibility as leader, to investigate what was in the interest of the Party, upon my fellow-Ministers or upon the caucus. I therefore decided to go ahead with the preparation of a declaration in the spirit of co-operation, a copy of which would be sent to Smuts. Should Smuts indicate his willingness to discuss the matter, I would meet him, and should this lead to anything acceptable in the interests of the Party, I would lay it before my Nationalist colleagues and also before the caucus. If either of these bodies were divided over the acceptability of what I proposed, I would lay my case before a general Congress of the National Party, to whose decision I would submit - provided that somebody else took my place as leader. At this point I again summoned my Nationalist colleagues - including Dr. Malan - to my office and informed them that my plan was to proceed as indicated above, and that I would immediately devote my attention to the drafting of the necessary declaration and that I would invite

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41. This account of the National Party Caucus of 31 January is based on Hertzog's diary, quoted in Van den Heever, op.cit., p.593.

them to assist me with their advice. (42)

By the end of January, Hertzog was in a position to exploit the divisions within his own Party to free his hands for the negotiations he planned with Smuts. Numerous explanations have been advanced for Hertzog's determination to secure agreement with Smuts: his desire for the political reunion [hereniging] of the Afrikaner people;<sup>(43)</sup> his fear of the political consequences for the Afrikaner of a South African Party government;<sup>(44)</sup> his hope that an agreement with the South African Party would cause both Parties to lose their extremist wings, leaving a stable majority in the centre;<sup>(45)</sup> his view of the urgency of a settlement of the Native question and of the necessity of co-operation with the South African Party to secure such a settlement; his belief that the time had arrived at which a convergence of the "two streams" of the white population could take place;<sup>(46)</sup> his perception of the need for unity in the face of the "crisis of Western civilization", a perception which originated in the profound influence exercised upon him by Spengler's Der Untergang des Abendlanders;<sup>(47)</sup> his impending retirement from politics, and his wish to close his career on a peaceful note and to secure Havenga as his successor.<sup>(48)</sup> These explanations, as well as Hertzog's own justification for his move, have repeatedly been subjected to analysis and evaluation, without any finality being reached,<sup>(49)</sup> and it seems pointless to continue this debate any further. It is sufficient to conclude, lamely but probably accurately, that any combination of these reasons may explain Hertzog's desire for conciliation.

For the purposes of this study, the essential point is

42. Hertzog's diary (translation), quoted in Van den Heever, op.cit., pp.593-594.

43. A.C. Cilliers, Generaal Hertzog en Hereniging (1941) p.27.

44. Ibid., p.27.

45. Paton, op.cit., p.196.

46. S. Kierman, "On the Hertzog Monument", New Nation (October 1968).

47. G.D. Scholtz, Hertzog en Smuts en die Britse Ryk (1975) pp.1089.

48. The Star 1 February 1933.

49. The relative merits of these explanations are considered by S. Kierman, op.cit.

that soon after Smuts introduced his National Government motion in the House, a reversal of roles took place. Hertzog became the suitor with whom the initiative lay. His positive response to Smuts's appeal for a National Government presented the South African Party with a major dilemma. In effect, Smuts's bluff had been called. The invitation to participate in a National Government obviously could not be retracted, nor could Hertzog's communication be left unanswered. Was the South African Party then to treat with Hertzog sincerely towards the end of resolving difficulties which stood in the way of a reconciliation of Parties, or would it attempt to exploit these difficulties to avoid Coalition while at the same time emphasizing the breadth of its appeal to the electorate? Coalition obviously implied the sacrifice of Party advantage and the loss - at least temporarily - of Party identity; the alternative course would require sure-footed tactical manoeuvres to avoid leaving the impression that the Party merely used "Coalition" as a propaganda slogan - it was clearly necessary that the South African Party should be able to lay the blame for the breakdown of any negotiations firmly upon the intractability of the National Party.

The communication to Smuts of Hertzog's invitation to discuss the possibility of common participation in a Coalition Government coincided with the working out of the aftermath of the Roos negotiations within the South African Party. On 25 January, a caucus demanded by the South African Party backbenchers met for a discussion of the Party leaders' failure to conclude Coalition terms with Roos.<sup>(50)</sup> At this meeting, a considerable section of the Party's parliamentary contingent (one press report, later denied by Hofmeyr, claimed that the figure was as high as 39 out of 61 members<sup>(51)</sup>) supported an acceptance of the most recent offer from Roos, which gave the South African Party 6 seats in a Cabinet of 11. Perhaps partly in defence of their

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50. See above, p.72.

51. The Star 4 February 1933.

position regarding Roos, several members of the Party's inner circle - including Duncan, Reitz and Hofmeyr - suggested instead that the Party should seek reconciliation with Hertzog. A backbencher, P.G. Van der Byl, suggested that certain senior South African Party frontbenchers be authorised to negotiate with senior Nationalist leaders to see if Hertzog would consider a Coalition in view of the grave economic position of the country.<sup>(52)</sup> This suggestion confirms that knowledge of the meeting which had taken place between Havenga, Pirow and Duncan had not filtered through to the Party's backbenchers, but had remained a close secret among the inner circle. The support for co-operation with Hertzog expressed by Duncan, Reitz and Hofmeyr during the caucus of 25 to 31 January, together with Smuts's silence until the final day, probably reflect the course of the debate amongst the inner circle. Hofmeyr, it is known, was urging upon Smuts the full acceptance of the consequences of his National Government motion.<sup>(53)</sup> Hofmeyr hoped that a Coalition settlement with Hertzog would achieve two of his main political objectives - "hereniging", the political reunion of the Afrikaner people, and, flowing from this, the planning of a Native policy which, he hoped, "would still the fears of white people, meet the aspirations of black people, and satisfy the watching, critical, sometimes hostile world".<sup>(54)</sup>

Van der Byl wrote that Smuts, "under duress from the caucus,...agreed to repeat the Coalition gesture when he made his speech at the end of the debate".<sup>(55)</sup> In fact, the caucus took a decision which left the issue of Coalition negotiations unreservedly in the hands of Smuts, while making no stipulation that these negotiations should take place with any definite politician. The caucus had, however, made known to Smuts its support of, at the very least, an investigation of the possibility of a reconciliation between

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52. Van der Byl, op.cit., p.98.

53. Paton, op.cit., p.194.

54. Ibid., p.197.

55. Van der Byl, op.cit., p.102.



the Parties, and Smuts could not afford to ignore this. Agreement with Hertzog was particularly difficult for Smuts because of the long-standing political rivalry and personal enmity which existed between them.<sup>(56)</sup> Smuts's first reaction to the pressure brought to bear on him by the inner circle was to ask whether it would not be possible to establish a National Government to which he could give moral support whilst refraining from direct participation. It was clear that after appealing for a National Government, he could not remain aloof from it, and the inner circle - particularly Hofmeyr - reminded him of this fact. While the caucus meeting was still in progress, Smuts sent for Hofmeyr, and told him that he was prepared to discuss matters with Hertzog, but asked to see Havenga first. Havenga, feeling that his position in the National Party would be compromised by a meeting with Smuts - he had a reputation among die-hard Nationalists for being too "Sapperig"<sup>(57)</sup> - refused to see him until he had made formal communication with Hertzog. Smuts then decided to defer any meeting with Hertzog until he had wound up the National Government debate in the House.<sup>(58)</sup>

Pressure on Smuts to come to terms with Hertzog also made itself felt outside the parliamentary circle. On 1 February Roos addressed a meeting at Rustenburg. He accused Smuts of being in reality anti-Coalition in the round of negotiations which had just ended:

It was quite obvious to me that they /Smuts and Hofmeyr/ did not want a Coalition, but that they were simply using these negotiations to place the blame on me if a Coalition did not result. General Smuts in his New Year Message showed that what was in his mind was victory for the South African Party and for the South African Party only.

Smuts's National Government motion, he suggested, probably had a similar motive. He had not asked Hertzog to form

56. Paton, op.cit., p.194.

57. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.517.

58. Paton, op.cit., pp.194-5.

such a Government, but had asked him to resign to enable such a Government to be formed. Had he been in Hertzog's position, Roos added, he would have called Smuts's bluff by immediately offering to form a Coalition. He warned, too, that if the Party frontbenchers on both sides failed to "rise to the opportunity offered to them", they would be "swept into the limbo of forgotten things at the next election".<sup>(59)</sup> This interpretation of Smuts's policy sounded sufficiently plausible, and its dissemination would have been politically damaging to the South African Party should Smuts's behaviour in any way have seemed to give it validity. There was in addition the fact that Roos remained politically active and ambitious. Soon after the opening of Parliament, Hjalmar Reitz invited Hertzog and Smuts to lunch with Roos and himself to discuss the formation of a Coalition which would include all three leaders. (Both Smuts and Hertzog refused the invitation, Hertzog not even bothering to reply).<sup>(60)</sup>

On 1 February Smuts wound up the debate on the National Government motion in the House. He expressed disappointment at the turn the debate had taken, saying:

Perhaps I am to blame. Perhaps I have handled the subject unskilfully, but there is no doubt that the original intention of my motion has not been carried out in this debate....I did not want to start a general indictment of the Government or a general dog fight. If I did I erred, for that was not my intention.

The conciliatory gesture was made, but it was if anything overshadowed by criticism of Hertzog's role in the debate:

Apparently I took the Prime Minister by surprise in the line I took, but he was not very helpful in the reception he gave my motion. He did not bang the door but went very close to doing it. I shall do my best to keep that door open. I shall do my best to see whether it is not possible for the people of this country, for us MP's and the representatives of the people of South Africa still to carry out that wish, that

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59. The Natal Mercury 2 February 1933.

60. H. Reitz, The Conversion of a South African Nationalist (1946) p.162.

longing which is in the people's hearts for a pulling together in the public life and in the Government of the country.

That Party spirit should be kept in abeyance was all the more evident since the reasons for the existence of Party divisions had disappeared. There was full agreement among all South Africans - including Natalians - on the status of the country and also on the equality of the languages. The flag settlement had also been accepted. Smuts replied to the charges of insincerity which had been made by several members of the National Party:

I have made the appeal for a National Government, and I think that ought to be proof enough that there is this sincere desire to get away from the old state of things.

He also made a defence of his behaviour in negotiating first with Roos rather than Hertzog:

I have been convinced from the very start that Coalition was the thing for this country. Mr. Roos was the first man to approach me. I have had nothing but discouragement from the public declarations of the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister has, for years, and also quite recently, taken the line that the difference between the two Parties is so great, the difference on fundamental issues is such, that there is practically no scope for co-operation. Mr. Roos, on the contrary, came to me, and I did not refuse to enter into discussion with him. He was the first to approach me, and I have discussed the matter with him, and I have done my best to explore with him a way to a new policy in South Africa.

But an arrangement with Roos was simply incompatible with the nature of South African politics:

I think we have to reckon with facts, and we have this basic fact in the public life of South Africa that the vast bulk of the people are ranged in two powerful political parties. You cannot easily shake that. Hon. members who think that a party can be stampeded or broken up, or can easily be discarded, will find that it is not so. The people of this country are ranged in two big parties, and there will be no crossing on a large scale from one party to the other. If we want to co-operate, it will have to be the co-operation of Parties.

He concluded by predicting that Hertzog's amendment of confidence would be passed, but with the vote of "those who have expressed their want of confidence in him", the Roosite section which could break the Government at will. A division was then taken, in which Smuts's motion was defeated by 83 votes to 63, and Hertzog's amendment of confidence in the Government passed by 80 votes to 66. (61)

Smuts's speech was sufficiently conciliatory, for shortly after the division in the House Wessels - of whose services as an intermediary Hertzog had apparently decided to make use - approached Hofmeyr and told him that Smuts need take no further steps, as Hertzog would communicate with him after the National Party caucus of 14 February. (62) Despite these private assurances to Smuts, however, Hertzog made no public announcement of his intentions. On 6 February, in an interview with Die Burger, he denied that any Coalition negotiations were proceeding between the National Party and the South African Party. (63) This denial seemed to confirm an earlier press report that Hertzog had rejected proposals put to him by Nationalists who had been working for Coalition within their own Party and independent of the Roosites. (64) On the South African Party side, too, certain press statements suggested that Coalition was as yet a remote possibility. The Natal Mercury claimed that in the time which had passed since the conclusion of the National Government debate, opinion among Natal MP's had hardened against any form of Coalition which would include such opponents of decentralization as Hertzog, Malan, Kemp and Havenga. (65) Neither Smuts nor Hertzog made any move to dispel the impression that Coalition was as far from attainment as ever. Smuts remained committed in principle and by his public pronouncements to a Coalition policy; Hertzog had no such public commitment but sought a

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61. House of Assembly Debates 1 February 1933 vol.XX cols. 318-323.

62. Paton, op.cit., p.195.

63. Die Burger 6 February 1933.

64. The Star 4 February 1933.

65. The Natal Mercury 6 February 1933.



majority vote in the Party caucus as a mandate to open formal negotiations.

The National Party caucus met on 7 February, the day after the death of the Nationalist Minister of Railways, C.W. Malan.<sup>(66)</sup> The death of the Cabinet Minister probably delayed the opening of negotiations with the South African Party, but did not prevent Hertzog from putting the case for a Coalition before the caucus. Hertzog informed the caucus of his decision to take an independent initiative. He told the meeting that he regarded it as vitally necessary to win the co-operation of Smuts and the South African Party, because the National Party would otherwise suffer an election defeat which would be a severe blow, since Smuts would be forced to heal the breach between jingo and Afrikaner in his Party by bending to the wishes of the Natal Devolutionists and Federalists. Smuts would thus have to sacrifice Afrikanerdom and the Afrikaans language in Natal in order to retain Party unity. The "volk" would never forgive Hertzog if this happened, and would accuse him of treachery in submitting to the wishes of the caucus or of the Cabinet, instead of attempting to prevent this by means of an appeal to Smuts. He therefore felt himself obliged as leader to negotiate with Smuts.<sup>(67)</sup> Hertzog also gave a specific assurance that there would be no fusion of the Parties, but that each would retain its identity.<sup>(68)</sup> A discussion of Hertzog's policy by caucus members then followed. Malan declared emphatically against Coalition, seeing in such a move a serious threat to the cultural and national identity of the Afrikaner. N.J. van der Merwe was also against Coalition in principle, but believed that Coalition was only dangerous to Afrikanerdom were the National Party to split

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66. There may or may not be truth in the story that after C.W. Malan's funeral, Smuts accepted a lift home from Hertzog and reconciliation was born in the car. (Paton, op.cit., p.195). Personal reconciliation may have come about as a result of this incident; political reconciliation owed more to Smuts's commitment to and Hertzog's desire for a Coalition Government.

67. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.594.

68. D.F. Malan, Afrikaner Volkseenheid (1959) p.154.



over the issue. He felt certain Hertzog would discover that co-operation with the Unionist-ridden South African Party was impossible, and that a united National Party would then come out of the Coalition experience unscathed. Van der Merwe therefore recommended to his Free State Nationalist followers that they subscribe, with reservations, to any Coalition settlement.<sup>(69)</sup> No vote was taken, but it was evident to Hertzog that his Coalition policy enjoyed the support of the majority of the caucus.

The day after the National Party caucus meeting, Smuts published in the press a statement on the Coalition movement and of the South African Party's position. It was intended more as a public defence of the Party's failure to conclude terms with Roos,<sup>(70)</sup> but it was perhaps as far as Smuts could go to show a positive response to Hertzog's private overtures and to remind the public of the South African Party's close identification with the Coalition movement. He reiterated the arguments he had used in favour of Coalition in his parliamentary speeches, but left out all anti-Nationalist invective. Two circumstances had produced in South Africa a desire for a fresh start in politics, he argued. In the first place, there was the fact that, "although the causes of difference between the two great Parties have in large measure been removed, the spirit of Party strife remains unchanged". Party divisions encouraged the periodic reappearance of racial divisions:

...as long as Parties continue to be ranged against each other, as they are at present, it seems almost inevitable that racial strife, sometimes artificially stimulated, should constantly be flaring up. But of this the great mass of the people of South Africa have become intensely weary. They want to get out of the old ruts; they want to make a fresh start.

In the second place, South Africa had been "reduced to such a desperate plight that its economic restoration can only be

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69. G.D. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe (1944) p.233.

70. See above, p.73.

tackled adequately on national, not on Party lines". Neither agriculture nor the mining industry could be re-established in an atmosphere of Party strife. For these reasons, he had introduced his motion in Parliament for a National Government. Unlike the arrangement which had been mooted with Roos

such a National Government would have been a Coalition in the fullest sense of the word, since it would have meant that the two Parties, as such, would have come together on an agreed programme for the economic restoration of our country. It would have meant a real suspension of the racial struggle; it would have meant the complete removal of our urgent problems from the arena of Party strife.

But a "fresh start" in politics could come about only on the basis of secure political foundations. The indispensable foundation of any new political dispensation was the South African Party:

For that reason I ask our supporters to be at once patient and vigilant, not allowing themselves to be carried away by the fake glamour of some external coalition movement but standing firm by the Party without which that fresh start which the country so earnestly desires cannot effectively be made or successfully carried through. In the present uncertainty it is of paramount importance that our Party should remain intact and united.... (71)

By February 8, Smuts was probably privately more enthusiastic about Coalition than he had been during the National Government debate. The sincerity of Hertzog's Coalition initiative had been demonstrated by his willingness to risk a split in the Party in order to secure his goal. There was, in addition, the consideration that a significant proportion of the National Party seemed likely either to opt out of a Coalition settlement altogether or to come in only with reservations and under protest. In either case the South African Party would thus be able to command a

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71. The Star 8 February 1933.

working majority within the Coalition. The fact of Nationalist leadership would be counter-balanced or even outweighed by the numerical strength of the South African Party in the parliamentary following of the Coalition Government. In this way, Smuts's influence on the formulation of policy at national level would not be significantly less than under a South African Party government. Compromises on certain issues, particularly Native policy, might be necessary, but in return Smuts and the South African Party would receive what amounted to full endorsement by Hertzog and the National Party of the policies of racial conciliation and maintenance of the Commonwealth connection for which they had traditionally stood. There was one crucial proviso, however, and that was that the South African Party should go united into any Coalition agreement. Smuts demanded this not only as an insurance policy in the event of the failure of Coalition (in which event the South African Party's willingness to join a Coalition would stand to its credit). He appreciated that any split in the Party arising from the issues raised by Coalition would tend more or less to follow the lines of division between the two language groups. The Coalition would then take on the character of an exclusive racial bloc; it would amount to no more than the reunion of Afrikaners into a single political party (hereniging), an end which Smuts had opposed since it had first been mooted in 1919. Towards the middle of February, therefore, Smuts approached the question of Coalition with a guarded optimism and in the belief that, whether negotiations succeeded or failed, the South African Party stood to benefit, either indirectly through the triumph of its principles in their enshrinement in the terms of a Coalition settlement or directly through an accretion of popular support.

The effect of Smuts's statement of 8 February was to renew rumours of agreement between him and Hertzog. Roos, for example, declared with confidence on 10 February that a Coalition between the two Parties would come about in one or two days, and added that his work now was to drive the

Parties into each other's arms.<sup>(72)</sup> But in other circles optimism was more guarded. The Star regarded the Nationalists of the Cape and the Orange Free State, including Hertzog, as "inflexibly opposed to Coalition", and anticipated that the statement promised by Hertzog after the caucus of 7 February would take the form of an invitation to those outside the National Party to join it. The same newspaper quoted Smuts as saying that he had heard nothing from the National Party about Coalition.<sup>(73)</sup> Again, neither leader made any more to correct the impression created by these rumours.

In reality, Hertzog remained determined to secure agreement with Smuts, but at the same time was making attempts to preserve the unity of the Party and to carry it whole into Coalition. Towards this end, he held meetings with Malan over the weekend of 11-12 February. Neither of Hertzog's biographers nor Malan himself makes any mention of the substance of these discussions, but it seems likely that Malan made clear to Hertzog his own and his "followers'"<sup>(74)</sup> intention to give no more than nominal support to a Coalition Government. This deduction is confirmed by the fact that immediately after the weekend's discussions the press which supported Malan repeated its denunciation of Coalition, warning that it would divide the Party from top to bottom.<sup>(75)</sup>

Hertzog made a final presentation of the case for Coalition at the National Party caucus of 14 February. His arguments in favour of Coalition were supported by Havenga, who gave his opinion that a strong government was necessary in order to be able to resist the excessive demands for

72. The Star 10 February 1933.

73. The Star 10 February 1933.

74. Malan's "followers" were a rather amorphous group, drawn mainly from the Cape but including also some Nationalists in the other three provinces. Pirow (op.cit., p.154) identified four main constituents of this "large and somewhat mixed crowd": would-be Cabinet ministers whose chances of getting into office were diminished by Coalition; die-hard Republicans; those to whom Smuts was personally anathema; and a section who "saw the only hope for the survival of the Afrikaner in complete isolation".

75. Die Burger 13 February 1933.



state assistance made by the farmers.<sup>(76)</sup> Malan repeated his objections to Coalition and called upon Hertzog to delay the publication of the press statement setting out the terms on which the National Party was prepared to consider a reconciliation between the Parties.<sup>(77)</sup> He further accused Hertzog of having acted autocratically and without consulting a single Party organ; the Federal Council and the Provincial Congresses were simply to be presented with Coalition as an accomplished fact.<sup>(78)</sup> (Hertzog had in fact already replied to this criticism in justifying his adoption of an independent initiative.<sup>(79)</sup> The fact that the question remained at issue pointed to a fundamental difference in interpretation of "leadership": Hertzog believed in individual leadership for which he would take personal and ultimate responsibility; Malan was "a more democratic type, believing in leadership-in-council, and a divided responsibility towards the people".<sup>(80)</sup>) Hertzog, however, was sure of his majority in the caucus, and the meeting closed with the decision to leave the whole matter of Coalition negotiations in Hertzog's hands.<sup>(81)</sup>

On the afternoon of 14 February Hertzog sent first to Smuts and then to the press a statement entitled "The National Party and Co-operation".<sup>(82)</sup> This statement began with a reference by Hertzog to his speech in Parliament on 24 January, in which he had said, *inter alia*, the following about co-operation:

To bring about the desired feeling of national unity, that feeling of trust and confidence

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76. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, p.228. J.J. Haywood, a Free State Nationalist MP, confirmed in a letter to Die Burger (27 July 1934) that Havenga had used this argument. Haywood quoted Havenga as having said, "They /the farmers/ ask too much and no weak government can withstand them. Now with the Unionists on our side we can say 'no'."

77. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.595.

78. D.F. Malan, op.cit., p.156.

79. See above, pp.77-78.

80. Cilliers, Generaal Hertzog en Hereniging, p.9.

81. The Star 14 February 1933.

82. Hertzog's statement was published in The Star 15 February 1933.



without which no feeling of national unity can ever come into its rights, it is necessary that Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking people should stand by each other in every department of life, from the highest to the lowest...as equals. This is the spirit in which I have always hitherto invited our English-speaking fellow citizens to come and co-operate with me and the National Party, where they are in agreement with the principles of the Party, and it is in this spirit that I and my fellow-Nationalists persist in our invitation to them to co-operate with us; and again to-day I wish to extend to them the hand of national friendship and whole-hearted co-operation.

The National Party, he wrote, could not have expressed its willingness to co-operate "with greater clarity or with more emphasis". At the end of his speech he had gone still further in repeating the invitation to "English-speaking fellow-Afrikaners "to take the hand of Nationalist South Africa and to identify themselves with her in her devotion to our common fatherland and its interests". Patrick Duncan had interpreted this as an invitation to English-speakers to join the National Party. This interpretation was not in fact correct:

...Although in the case of individuals, co-operation by means of joining the Party is likely to be the rule, co-operation in the case of definite organizations consisting of groups of individuals - as, for instance, in the case of a political party - must of necessity take place along other lines, provided the identity of the party or parties is to be retained.

Co-operation which involved the sharing of government, it went without saying, required that certain conditions and principles be laid down upon which such co-operation would take place. A statement of "those principles which I have in mind as essential for the purposes of an agreement leading to co-operation" followed. Seven essential principles were enumerated: South Africa's sovereign independence; the retention intact of the unitary basis of the country as laid down in the South Africa Act, and recognition of the national flag; equality of language rights for Afrikaans and English-speakers; the commitment to

make the care of agriculture "the subject of particular effort and application"; the maintenance of a "civilized labour policy"; and a statement of determination to secure the economic future of the Union by "protecting our money values, as well as capital assets and sources of capital". This programme of principles also included a statement on the Native question:

An earnest attempt to obtain a satisfactory solution of the native question along lines which, without depriving the native of his rights of development, recognize as paramount the essentials of a white civilization, and which provide for separate representation of white and black. For this purpose, the discussions of the Joint Committee on the Representation of Natives, etc., will be accelerated, in order, as soon as possible, to lay before Parliament the necessary legislation.

Adherence to this programme of essential principles, Hertzog contended, would produce "a contractual or pact form of co-operation", which would not be "afflicted with the defects and shortcomings of a Coalition or National Government, as proposed by General Smuts in the motion in the House of Assembly":

In place of a Coalition Government without principles or policy previously fixed, and without any particular object to which the united forces of co-operation must be applied, it would be a government inspired by national principles, subject to definitely fixed conditions of co-operation, and with definite objects, the attainment of which will be attempted with united efforts.

At the time he received Hertzog's statement, Smuts retained some doubts about the wisdom of the acceptance of the Coalition proposals. The achievement of Coalition promised many benefits. If sincerely undertaken, it would provide the ultimate triumph of the populist programme of the South African Party in which was embodied the political philosophy of Smuts himself. But for Smuts, some doubts remained as to Hertzog's sincerity. Reassurances on this point were forthcoming from Hofmeyr,<sup>(83)</sup> however, and Duncan

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83. Paton, op.cit., p.196.

drafted a reply to Hertzog's statement inviting discussion on the terms of a Coalition agreement. This reply was circulated to the press for publication:

I have read the statement sent with your letter of to-day. What I had in mind in the proposal which I made in the House was the formation of a government in which both parties could co-operate on a basis of more or less equal participation and upon agreed principles, retaining their identity, but co-operating cordially as members of the Government on agreed lines of national policy. If, as I understand it, your statement is designed to open the way to a consideration of such a proposal, I shall be glad to come and talk over matters with you. (84)

Almost immediately after the National Party caucus meeting on the morning of 14 February, rumours of an agreement between Smuts and Hertzog were rife in the House. On the motion of Madeley, who saw that "the minds of hon. members were preoccupied with Coalition", which he hoped would "have a happy outcome", (85) the House adjourned that afternoon until Friday 17 February. The adjournment of the House, together with the press statements issued by the two leaders, made it clear to the public that some form of settlement was imminent. Press responses were largely predictable. On the extreme wing of the National Party, Die Burger reiterated its warning to Hertzog that Coalition was "not in the interests of our people" and that it would split the Party. (86) In Natal, it was evident that co-operation with Hertzog was widely regarded with suspicion. The Natal Mercury welcomed the fact that a Coalition would give South Africa "for the first time in years...a real Business Government, with its eye on economics rather than on the Platteland", but warned Smuts to be careful that Hertzog did not lead him into a political trap. At the same time, it declared that unless the terms of agreement

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84. The Star 15 February 1933.

85. The Star 14 February 1933.

86. Die Burger 15 February 1933.

included adequate guarantees for the maintenance and extension of the Provincial system within the Act of Union, no Natal support for Coalition would be forthcoming.<sup>(87)</sup> Provided these guarantees were secured, however, Smuts need fear no large-scale rejection of Coalition by the Natal wing of the South African Party.

On the morning of 15 February, Hertzog sent a note to Smuts saying that what the Leader of the Opposition had read into his statement had been correct.<sup>(88)</sup> Later in the day the two men met in a cordial atmosphere in the Prime Minister's office for a brief discussion. Smuts had in the meantime secured the approval of his caucus for the initiation of negotiations with Hertzog, and Duncan had been appointed to assist him.<sup>(89)</sup> He now presented Hertzog with a list of proposals in two sections, the first consisting of the general principles which he viewed as essential for co-operation, the second including what Hertzog described as a "programme of action". It was decided that formal discussions involving Smuts, Duncan, Hertzog and Havenga would begin at a date to be determined by the Prime Minister. Hertzog also informed Smuts that any agreement between them would have to be ratified by the Party Congresses. Smuts agreed to this, but asked that matters should be dispatched as quickly as possible in order to minimize the influence of "undesirable elements", and that the reconstruction of the Cabinet should be followed immediately by a general election, at which each of the Parties should contest only the seats it held, while agreement would be reached on the disposal of the remainder. Hertzog then told Smuts that he wanted, if possible, to retain Creswell in the Cabinet.<sup>(90)</sup> (Creswell supported a Coalition agreement in the belief that it would lead to a speedier settlement of the Native question.<sup>(91)</sup>).

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87. The Natal Mercury 16 February 1933.

88. The Natal Mercury 16 February 1933.

89. Paton, op.cit., p.196.

90. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.595 (quoting Hertzog's diary).

91. M. Creswell, An Epoch of the Political History of South Africa in the Life of F.H.P. Creswell (n.d.) p.144.



Smuts probably made no reply at this stage, since neither leader had raised the issue of the composition of the Cabinet, but later would agree to Creswell's inclusion only at the expense of a Nationalist Minister.<sup>(92)</sup> One of the results of the meeting of 15 February was that Smuts's "last doubts of Hertzog's sincerity were removed".<sup>(93)</sup>

Talks between Smuts, Duncan, Hertzog and Havenga began in earnest at the Prime Minister's office on Friday 17 February. It was evident that there was broad agreement on most of the seven points mentioned by Hertzog in his statement, and only slight modifications to the first two points were suggested on the South African Party side. It was put forward that the reference in point (1) to "national principles" should be preceded by the qualification "South African", and that the section referring to the national flag should be altered to make some mention of the Union Jack. Difficulties arose, however, over the Native question. Smuts's objections to Hertzog's Native Bills, with their provision for the abolition of the Cape Native franchise, had in no way receded, and he wanted an assurance from Hertzog that no legislation affecting Native and Coloured affairs be introduced during the period of co-operation. Hertzog and Havenga would not agree to this. Smuts also required the acceptance by Hertzog of a programme of essential principles which he (Smuts) had drawn on the Provincial question. In brief, Smuts wanted the Coalition Government to honour the South African Party's pledges, given at the Party Congress in December 1932, to work for the maintenance and extension of the Provincial system. The Nationalist representatives agreed to negotiate on this point, but informed Smuts that they could not agree to the inclusion of his proposal in the form in which it was stated. Shortly hereafter, the meeting adjourned.<sup>(94)</sup>

92. Ibid., p.144.

93. Paton, op.cit., p.196.

94. This account of the meeting of 17 February is based on Hertzog's diary entry, published in Van den Heever, op.cit., p.596.



Over the weekend of 18-19 February, it became evident that Nationalist opposition to Coalition was mounting. Three Ministers - D.F. Malan, A.P.J. Fourie and E.G. Jansen - were known to be opposed in principle to Coalition, and, while it was not likely that they would split the Party by opting out of Coalition, it was entirely feasible that they would challenge Hertzog's position as national leader. They were able to command the support of a large body of Nationalists in all four provinces, particularly in the Free State and the Cape. It was evident, also, that this dissident group enjoyed considerable popular support. For example, A.J. Stals, chairman of the National Party in the Cape, addressed a well-attended meeting at Somerset-West on 18 February, at which he declared:

Coalition in the present circumstances can only mean one of two things; either the people have lost confidence in the Government or the Government has lost confidence in its cause. The people trust the Government more than ever and the only conclusion I can draw is that the Government has lost confidence in its cause and in its people. (95)

These sentiments were well received and the implication was that they were widely endorsed. This knowledge provided both Hertzog - who feared losing the support of the majority of his Party - and Smuts - who feared that a reconciliation between Hertzog and Malan would make the retention of unity within his own Party difficult - with a powerful incentive to come to terms without delay. Roos, too, was still politically active, and in the next few days was to make severe criticisms of the delay in reaching agreement. (96)

Talks resumed on 20 February. By this stage a compromise had been reached on the Provincial question, with Hertzog agreeing to the retention of the Provincial system and to the establishment of a Parliamentary commission to inquire into the functioning of the Provincial Councils. (97)

95. Die Burger 18 February 1933.

96. The Star 22 February 1933.

97. See M.J. Walker, The Provincial Council and Natal (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1976), pp.182-4.

A compromise was not so easily forthcoming on the Native question. Several suggestions were made on both sides, but none were acceptable to both Smuts and Hertzog. Hertzog wrote in his diary that the meeting ended with the feeling that this could prove to be an insuperable difficulty, since neither he nor Havenga was of the opinion that their proposals in respect of Native policy could be thrown overboard.<sup>(98)</sup>

The following day the meeting reassembled. Smuts repeated his objections to Hertzog's Native policy, and then requested that he and Duncan might withdraw to discuss the matter privately.<sup>(99)</sup> Hofmeyr joined Smuts and Duncan in an effort to find a solution. Smuts, wrote Hofmeyr, "was very much upset and talked of the possible breakdown of the negotiations". Hofmeyr suggested that Smuts did not make adequate provisions on Native policy a condition of Coalition, but that he should rather seek agreement after Coalition; but Smuts was reluctant to give his consent to a formula in terms of which the Parties agreed to enter Coalition and thereafter to treat the Native Bills as non-party measures. A compromise along these lines was eventually agreed to on 22 February.<sup>(100)</sup> Instead of a definite commitment to pass the Native Bills, the Coalition was bound to no more than making an "earnest effort" to solve questions along lines that would protect white civilization and allow Natives their right to develop, with separate political development for black and white.<sup>(101)</sup> The South African Party was thus bound only to remove official Party constraint against support of the Bills, leaving each member free to follow his own conscience in regard to the Native question.

Once agreement had been reached on the principles upon which the Coalition was to be based, discussion followed on the composition of the Cabinet. Smuts suggested, and Hertzog agreed, that each Party should contribute six members to a

98. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.596, quoting Hertzog's diary.

99. Ibid., p.596.

100. Paton, op.cit., p.199.

101. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.251.

Cabinet of twelve. There was to be no Labour representative. Smuts told Hofmeyr that the South African Party seats would go to Smuts, Duncan, Hofmeyr, Stuttaford, "a man from Natal", and either Reitz or a second man from the Cape. He refused Hofmeyr's offer to stand aside in favour of Reitz, and decided on Clarkson of Natal and Conroy as a second Cape representative. Conroy, however, was "noted for frequent attacks on the Dutch Reformed Church", and he was therefore unacceptable to Hertzog. Smuts then opted for Reitz, "whom he had wanted all along", and decided to risk having only one Cape representative.<sup>(102)</sup>

On 24 February the caucus of both Parties met. The Coalition terms were presented and passed, unanimously by the South African Party, and by 42 votes to 28 by the National Party.<sup>(103)</sup> The same day, Hertzog informed the Governor-General officially of the developments, and on 28 February he announced in the House that he and Smuts had decided "to co-operate in the establishment of a Government which will enable us to co-operate on a basis of more or less equal participation and on the basis of principles laid down beforehand". An election, preceded by the reconstruction of the Cabinet, would follow as soon as possible, and in order to facilitate the assumption of office by the new Government, Parliament would adjourn as soon as the necessary financial measures had been passed.<sup>(104)</sup>

Parliament adjourned on 2 March. Four weeks later (30 March) Hertzog resigned and was invited by the Governor-General to form a new government. The composition of the Cabinet was publicly announced the same day. It was to consist of Hertzog, (Prime Minister and External Affairs), Smuts (Justice), Havenga (Finance), Duncan (Mines), Grobler (Native Affairs), Pirow (Railways and Harbours, Defence), Kemp (Agriculture), Fourie (Labour and Industries), Reitz (Lands), Hofmeyr (Interior, Public Health and Education),

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102. Paton, op.cit., pp.199-200.

103. The Star 24 February 1933.

104. House of Assembly Debates 28 February 1933 vol.XX cols.1066-7.

Clarkson (Posts and Telegraphs, Public Works), and Stuttaford (Without Portfolio).

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The Coalition settlement was a logical outcome in terms of long-term South African Party propaganda, although not in terms of the political tactics which Smuts had employed between December 1932 and early February 1933. His intention had been to exploit the popular demand for political peace, as expressed in the slogan "Coalition", in order to secure political supremacy for his Party, either through a straight electoral victory or through combination with another party or a section of another party which would secure for the South African Party a commanding voice in the government. Political power was not for Smuts an end in itself, however, but a means of securing definite political objectives. Coalition was, from one point of view, no more than an indication that he was prepared to transfer, for the present at least, the responsibility for the achievement of these objectives from himself and the South African Party to a combination which in the political circumstances then held out a greater chance of success: Hertzog and Coalition.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### REACTION TO COALITION AND THE GENESIS OF FUSION MARCH - JULY 1933

From the point of view of the South African Party in general and of Smuts in particular, the events of the first two months of 1933 were a signal triumph for the disciplinary machinery of the Party. Faced with a serious backbench revolt and with the possibility of public censure for its failure to come to terms with Roos in January, the Party leaders had successfully countered by declaring their preference for an accommodation with Hertzog.<sup>(1)</sup> The result had been the successful negotiation of Coalition terms with Hertzog during February. Although Smuts had probably not anticipated this outcome, he embraced Coalition enthusiastically, for, despite the retention of a Nationalist Prime Minister, it seemed likely to guarantee indefinitely the application by the Government of the principles of racial conciliation and Empire co-operation for which the South African Party stood. This guarantee was provided not so much by the seven principles of the Coalition agreement, as by the de facto numerical preponderance of the South African Party in the parliamentary following of the Government. In absolute terms, of course, the South African Party's representation in Parliament was less than that of the National Party, but its MP's were unanimous in accepting Coalition without reservations. Against this, perhaps as many as 1/3 of the National Party's parliamentary representatives rejected Coalition in principle, although, for the time being, concern for the maintenance of Party unity prevented this group from going openly into opposition to the new Government.

The conclusion of the Coalition agreement presented the South African Party leadership with new disciplinary and

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1. See above, p.73.



organizational problems. In terms of party political alignments, Coalition aimed at no more than the suspension for an indeterminate period of party conflict. All that was intended was an attempt "to bring the principles of the two Parties as far as possible into harmony in order to ensure effective co-operation during the state of emergency."<sup>(2)</sup> Both Parties were to retain their identities and their machinery intact. In the weeks which followed the conclusion of the Coalition agreement, no hint was given by either of the Party leaders that they envisaged a co-operation which went further than they had so far outlined. Hertzog, in fact, gave the opponents of Coalition within his Party emphatic assurances that there would be no merger of Parties.<sup>(3)</sup> The intention of the leaders on both sides was that Party machinery would suspend indefinitely its former political function and aim instead at securing as large a body of support as possible for the programme of the new Government. This request for the suspension of political activity in Party branches presupposed a high degree of confidence in the Party leaders amongst the rank and file membership, who were now being asked to place their trust in a single man, or a very small group of men, rather than in a political party, for the safeguarding of their interests and the realization of their political aspirations. (As far as the South African Party was concerned, this would be no new departure, since the Party had of late tended more and more to function as the agent of Smuts's political ideas, but this development was to have important repercussions for the future). Immediately after the adjournment of Parliament, therefore, Hertzog and Smuts summoned Provincial Congresses of their respective Parties, not only to present for their endorsement the terms of Coalition, but also to secure from them reaffirmations of confidence in the Party leadership and acquiescence in the new role which the leaders had conceived for them. An expression of public support for

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2. G. Heaton Nicholls quoted in The Natal Mercury 17 March 1933.

3. See, for example, Hertzog's speech at the Cape National Party Congress, reported in The Star 15 March 1933.

Coalition was hoped for in the general election scheduled for the middle of May.

The National Head Committee of the South African Party met in Cape Town on 4 March and gave its full approval to the agreement with Hertzog.<sup>(4)</sup> Subject only to revision by the Union Congress, this decision formally bound the Party to support of Coalition. Smuts then published a statement, addressed to supporters of the South African Party, in which he gave an account of the developments which had taken place in the last month.<sup>(5)</sup> He repeated the claim that there was a desire on the part of the "people of South Africa" to end racial strife and to make a new beginning, and a common view of the necessity of tackling the country's economic restoration on National and not on Party lines. A brief description of the negotiation of the Coalition terms then followed. There had been difficulties on only two points; the Provincial problem and the Native question. In regard to the first of these, Smuts reminded the Party that "the Nationalist Government appeared to have committed itself to a policy of abolition". Bearing this in mind, the new dispensation represented a considerable advance, since -

The policy of the new Government is to be based on a maintenance of the status of the Provinces coupled with an inquiry into financial relations in connection with which favourable consideration will be given to the extension of Provincial powers and functions within the framework of the South Africa Act.

As far as the Native question was concerned,

...we had to face the position that an agreement had not been attained on the question of the principle of separate political representation of White and Black. It is, however, obviously desirable that the new Government should not introduce legislation dealing with this matter save on a basis of agreement.

Besides, Smuts pointed out, any legislation on Native policy

4. The Star 4 March 1933.

5. This statement was published in The Natal Mercury 9 March 1933.

in the immediate future was out of the question since "the Government's hands...will be full with the urgent economic questions that await it". Dealing with the composition of the new Government, he remarked that "the principle of equality of the two parties was unhesitatingly accepted". Smuts also appealed to members to note the fact that the Party itself was not to be sacrificed on the altar of racial conciliation. Its identity and principles were retained and safeguarded by the Coalition agreement. But, he added, "there are things which we are called upon to surrender and which it will not be easy for our stalwarts to give up". He referred, of course, to "the fruits of victory which seemed to be within our grasp".<sup>(6)</sup> The status quo agreement would apply to both parliamentary and Provincial Council seats in the forthcoming elections, and a large number of potential candidates would thus be denied the opportunity of contesting Nationalist constituencies. He concluded:

For individuals, for branches, the sacrifices to be made will be heavy, but I believe that they will make those sacrifices cheerfully, with good courage, and in that spirit of service to a united South Africa which has always been our Party's pride.

The initial wave of optimistic unanimity in the South African Party following the conclusion of the Coalition agreement passed very suddenly as disaffection with the new dispensation took root, particularly in Natal. This reaction was largely provoked by injudicious statements on the part of Nationalist supporters of Coalition, which reawakened the suspicion amongst Natalians of the basic intransigence of Afrikaner Nationalists. For example, in a speech in his

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6. In private, Smuts was less confident of the South African Party's victory in the election which was to have been held in 1934. In a letter to C.P. Crewe (4 April 1933), he justified Coalition by arguing that victory in 1934 was by no means certain. He wrote:

You say we would have won next year. Would we - with Roos creating havoc in the ranks of the South African Party? The Rand members, the Cape peninsula members confessed in caucus that with Roos in the field a large number of our seats were in danger and would be lost. We would have had three parties next year, and it was doubtful whether we could win.

constituency towards the end of February, General Kemp stated:

Natal wanted federation because she did not wish to grant the Afrikaner his rights under the Act of Union. Natal would find that sixty to seventy percent of the country was now against the Hollander memorandum and she will have to abandon her hopeless opposition. Before Coalition can become a fact assurances will be obtained on these points. In any case there could be no solution of the national question along Provincial lines. A strong Union Government is required to handle the country's problems on a national basis. (7)

Heaton Nicholls responded to this challenge in conciliatory vein, expressing the belief that Kemp was not yet apprised of the terms of the Coalition agreement.<sup>(8)</sup> He then made a speech in Parliament denying that Natal's federation policy was directed against the Afrikaner and explaining Natal's attachment to the British connection in terms of the similarities which existed in black/white population ratios between the province of Natal and other British possessions in Africa.<sup>(9)</sup> These statements were obviously intended as an invitation to Nationalists to moderate their vehemence against Natal. Conciliatory gestures towards Natal, however, cut across the official Nationalist rationale of Coalition. On 4 March Hertzog, in a speech at Smithfield, repeated the argument that Coalition had saved South Africa from its "enemies" in Natal, whose object was

by means of a Government, which they can influence and to which they can dictate as they please, to place Natal - and with the effluxion of time also the other provinces - in a position to ban the Afrikaans-speaking South African and his language as an official language for ever and to doom them to subjection in South Africa. (10)

Not surprisingly, Natalians - both within the South African Party and amongst the public at large - soon experienced doubts about the sincerity of Nationalist

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7. The Natal Mercury 25 February 1933.
  8. The Natal Mercury 27 February 1933.
  9. House of Assembly Debates 1 March 1933 vol.XX cols.1107-1110.
  10. The Natal Mercury 6 March 1933.



declarations of support for racial conciliation and began to feel an increasing sense of alienation from the Coalition. The Natal South African Party was now placed in the invidious position of mediator between the Natal public and the Government. Several MP's published statements appealing for Coalition to be given a fair chance and declaring their satisfaction with the clause in the Coalition agreement regarding the provinces. On 16 March, the Provincial Executive of the Natal South African Party met and passed a resolution expressing its "gratification" at Coalition and its fullest confidence in Smuts. Heaton Nicholls declared that this resolution marked "the translation of the basic principles of the South African Party into active operation". Continuing, he turned inside out the argument used by Hertzog to justify Coalition:

It is particularly desirable that the Province of Natal should give its wholehearted approval of Coalition because the Prime Minister has told us that it is largely due to Natal and to the policy pursued by Natal that Coalition had been brought about. I cannot imagine a greater compliment to the work of the Natal team. If the influence which Natal has exerted upon the situation be as powerful as the Prime Minister states then we must all hope that the influence will remain as potent in the future as it has been in the past. (11)

Despite the efforts of Nicholls, however, the process of disillusionment with both Coalition and South African Party in Natal gathered momentum during March. It was considerably accelerated by Smuts's failure to rebuke Hertzog for his attempt to patch up differences with the Malanite section of his Party at the Cape Nationalist Congress by extending to them the protection of the status quo agreement in the forthcoming election. (12) The Natal Devolution League, which two weeks before had declared its willingness to give Coalition a chance, now came out into open opposition. A

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11. The Natal Mercury 17 March 1933.

12. For a full report of the proceedings of the Cape National Party Congress, see Die Burger 16 and 17 March 1933.



spokesman for the League saw Coalition as the culmination of Smuts's strategy, a master-stroke aimed at the destruction of the Devolution movement.<sup>(13)</sup> In the past, disaffection amongst members with the official policy of the South African Party could have found expression in moves to alter that policy by means of pressure from within; since the suspension of what might be termed the "conflict" function of the Party, these internal changes were no longer possible, because the Party was rigidified by an external condition, namely the seven principles of the Coalition agreement. The point was not that Smuts, having entered Coalition, "had no longer to keep looking over his shoulder for the approval of Natal".<sup>(14)</sup> Far from this being the case, Smuts was if anything more anxious than ever to retain a strong influence in Natal, for the unity of his Party was his only assurance against Nationalist domination in the Coalition, and the support of English-speaking Natal was his best guarantee against Coalition turning into a solid racial bloc of politically reunited Afrikanerdom. The difficulty was that Smuts was unable, as in the past, to conciliate Natal via changes in emphasis within the South African Party, since the Party's flexibility was reduced by the Coalition agreement and the Party leader's room for manoeuvre was circumscribed by the need to retain a working relationship with the Nationalists.

This process of disaffection in Natal was sufficiently covert not to disturb Smuts during March. At least, he made no mention of difficulties in this quarter in his correspondence with his political confessor, M.C. Gillett. He complained instead that in the new Government "the Nats (had) reserved all the big patronage portfolios for themselves...railways, agriculture, Natives included".<sup>(15)</sup> Meanwhile, the announcement of the composition of the Cabinet did nothing to diminish the gathering discontent in South African Party circles. In Natal, the selection of the

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13. The Natal Mercury 18 March 1933.

14. G. Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in My Time (1961) p.272.

15. Smuts to Gillett, 29 March 1933; J. van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.552.

Provincial South African Party Chairman, Senator C.F. Clarkson, rather than Heaton Nicholls, was unpopular,<sup>(16)</sup> as was the reappointment on the Nationalist side of Kemp.<sup>(17)</sup> In the Cape - where Party differences had been particularly acrimonious, and Coalition had not taken as deep a root as in the Transvaal<sup>(18)</sup> - there was considerable frustration at the omission of the spiritual leader of the South African Party in the province, F.S. Malan,<sup>(19)</sup> and a feeling that the Cape, with only two Ministers as against the Transvaal's seven, was grossly under-represented in the new Cabinet.<sup>(20)</sup>

The immediate priority of the Coalition Government was to secure as decisive a mandate as possible in the forthcoming general election. Quite apart from the need of public support for the reconstruction policies of the Government, however, both Parties were aware of the necessity of retaining intact their parliamentary representation, as a significant loss on either side would drastically affect the balance between the Parties in the Coalition. The desire for the retention of the inter-Party balance was arguably the most powerful motivation of the election effort of both Parties. Official candidates on both sides could reasonably have expected an easy passage. On nomination day (21 April), Coalition candidates in 78 out of 150 seats were returned unopposed. In the remaining 72 constituencies, the opposition was scattered and divided. The most important single opposition group were the followers of Roos. Although not yet organized as a political party, 21 Roosites, mainly in the Transvaal and Free State, and including Roos himself, stood for

16. It was the subject of questions from the floor during Smuts's pre-election tour of Natal in May. (See, for example, The Natal Mercury 6 May 1933).

17. The Natal Mercury 1 April 1933.

18. Smuts later wrote to Gillett (7 October 1933):

The Saps there [in the Cape] don't love the Nats, and have not yet forgiven me for surrendering the prospects of power when it was within my grasp. It is a difference between the near and the far view of things.

(Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.566).

19. T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (1977) p.215.

20. Smuts had anticipated Cape indignation at its under-representation in the Cabinet, but decided to "risk" the appointment of Reitz rather than a second Cape man in the South African Party Cabinet contingent. (Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) p.200. See also above, p.109).

election.<sup>(21)</sup> The Madeley Labour group put up 9 candidates, the Natal Home Rule Party 8, and for the rest the opposition consisted of a multitude of Independents. Moreover, the Coalition candidates enjoyed the support of almost the entire Press, and possessed funds and organization beyond the range of any of the opposition groups.

Despite the popularity of Coalition at the time of its formation in late February, and despite the electioneering of Coalition leaders on both sides, the Government steadily lost ground in terms of popular support in the six weeks preceding the general election. Two considerations explain the general incidence of discontent. In the first place, Coalition had naively been expected to provide immediate relief from economic distress. Popular perceptions of "Coalition" tended to be heavily influenced by the original propagandist of the Coalition idea, Tielman Roos, who had offered it as an instant remedy to all of South Africa's maladies. In fact, Coalition produced little alleviation of economic hardship in the short-term.<sup>(22)</sup> In the second

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21. Throughout March and April, Roos's involvement in politics had been an on-off affair. He had interspersed declarations of his retirement from politics with expressions of exasperation at the failure of Hertzog and Smuts to carry Coalition through to its logical conclusion, a full merger of Parties. Finally, accusing Hertzog of autocratic tendencies, and pointing out the need for a "watchdog" of Coalition, he committed himself to the election. He simultaneously claimed that, unknown to the Party leaders, he had a number of followers among the official candidates. (*The Star* 20 April 1933).
22. Professor Hobart Houghton (*The South African Economy* (1967), 2nd ed., pp.15-17), assessing South Africa's economic development by the criteria of W.W. Rostow's five stages of economic growth, argues that 1933 was the beginning of the "take-off" stage in South Africa's economy. This should not be taken to suggest that the performance of the South African economy improved dramatically during 1933. In fact, 1933 saw no more than the arrest of the process of economic decline:

<u>GROSS VALUE OF ARABLE FARMING AND LIVESTOCK PRODUCTS</u>		<u>VALUE OF MINING OUTPUT: GOLD AND OTHER MINING</u>			
(R MILLION) :		(R MILLION) :			
		GOLD OTHER TOTAL			
1928	129				
1929	124	1929	88	33	121
1930	102	1930	91	28	119
1931	85	1931	92	17	109
1932	76	1932	98	11	109
1933	75	1933	94	12	106
1934	110	1934	145	12	157

(Figures published in Hobart Houghton, *op.cit.*, p.247 and p.251).

place, parliamentary nomination contests tended to promote both inter-Party and intra-Party divisions. These contests were particularly vitriolic since it was generally accepted that the nominee of the Party which had held the seat before the dissolution of parliament would as a matter of course represent that constituency in the Coalition Parliament. Nomination by the Party machine was regarded as replacing the decision of the electorate as the determinant of parliamentary representation. Within the South African Party, nomination contests were especially acrimonious in Natal. Here, intervention by the Party's central directorate in the person of the Provincial chairman, Clarkson, in an attempt to secure a more tractable Natal representation, provoked a serious split. Four Natal MP's were refused renomination,<sup>(23)</sup> and a fifth, V. Nicoll, declined renomination, stating:

I am not at all satisfied with the political situation in Durban, and I consider that matters have been very badly handled since the election campaign commenced. Frankly, a little spring-cleaning in the South African Party would not do any harm. (24)

There were, similarly, examples of grass-root Nationalist disaffection with official National Party nominees; in the Transvaal constituency Ventersdorp, the unofficial Nationalist candidate won sufficient support to defeat the Government nominee convincingly. The "status quo" agreement also constituted an important source of inter-Party division, since the Party which had formerly been in opposition in a particular constituency was bound to support, but was powerless to influence the selection of, the nominee of the Party which held that seat. In the Klip River constituency in Northern Natal, for example, local Nationalists openly declared their refusal to support the South African Party nominee, who had repeatedly stated himself to be a Home Ruler and a Federalist.<sup>(25)</sup>

23. See above, p. 22.

24. The Natal Mercury 29 March 1933.

25. The Star 15 April 1933.



In specific areas, there were also more particular causes of complaint against the Coalition Government. Smuts's assistance to D.F. Malan in his electoral campaign in the Calvinia constituency aroused indignation amongst many English-speakers, who feared the reconciliation of the Afrikaner Nationalist "extremists" to Coalition.<sup>(26)</sup> On the Rand, the Government's failure to provide any definite programme for unemployment relief and for the stimulation of the gold-mining industry provoked the suspicion that the new Government, like its predecessor, would pander to agricultural interests and ignore the needs of commerce and of labour - a suspicion which seemed justified by the singling out of agriculture for particular attention in the section of the Coalition agreement dealing with economic reconstruction.<sup>(27)</sup> The personal popularity of Roos, particularly amongst Afrikaner workers, compounded and gave direction to opposition to the Coalition Government on the Rand. Then, too, in the areas in which Coalition was thought to be most strongly entrenched, it proved difficult to mobilize electoral support for Coalition candidates, whose victory was regarded as a foregone conclusion.

The tendency among students of South African history has been to view the 1933 election as an "overwhelming victory" for the Coalition.<sup>(28)</sup> Superficially the statistics seem to bear out this assessment, since 144 out of 150 MP's - 75 Nationalists, 61 South African Party, 2 Coalition Labourites and 6 independents - were committed to the support of the Government. There was no co-ordinated parliamentary opposition.<sup>(29)</sup> The total opposition vote in

26. The Star 29 April 1933.

27. Point 4 of the 7 Points of the Coalition agreement reads:

While the interests of the various sections of the population will all enjoy equally the attention and care of the Government, the maintenance of a healthy rural population will be the subject of particular effort and application.

(The Star 15 February 1933).

28. For example, Eric Walker (A History of Southern Africa (1957), 3rd ed., p.635), wrote:

...the wave of good feeling summoned up by the very act of coalition carried the allied parties to overwhelming victory at a coupon election.

29. Hjalmar Reitz (The Conversion of a South African Nationalist (1946) p.168) gives an amusing account of his dispute with Madeley for the title "Leader of the Opposition".



the election was 138 149 as against 181 786 votes for Coalition, but, as The Star pointed out, a vote for an Independent was not necessarily a vote against Coalition; the number of votes for Independent candidates was large because of "domestic disputes in the Parties as between officially nominated candidates and their rivals for nomination".<sup>(30)</sup> As we have seen, however, both the National Party and the South African Party had a stake in the election which went beyond the need to secure a mandate for the policies of the Coalition Government. Both Parties regarded the maintenance of the balance between Parties in the Coalition Parliament as vitally necessary, and, from this point of view, the election was in the nature of a minor disaster for the South African Party.

The South African Party fought 30 seats, winning 23. Six out of the 7 constituencies in which the South African Party candidate was defeated were regarded as Party strongholds. The Party's performance in the Transvaal alone gave any cause for satisfaction. Here 9 seats were contested. The Party's candidate failed to unseat Madeley in the Benoni constituency, but for the rest, 7 seats were held with convincing majorities, and an eighth was won from the Council Labourite, Christie. In the 7 seats which were retained by the South African Party, the average majority was 1464. There were several reasons for the South African Party's good showing in the Transvaal; pressure for Coalition had been strongest in this province, and, in addition, Roos's influence was at a minimum in these urban, predominantly English-speaking middle-class constituencies. In the Cape, the Party's performance gave cause for alarm. Three seats<sup>(31)</sup> were lost and a fourth - Sea Point - held by the veteran frontbencher G.B. van Zyl with a majority of only 33. In the 7 seats which were retained, the Party's average majority was 1103. This figure is less impressive when it is borne in mind that South African Party candidates enjoyed

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30. The Star 19 May 1933.

31. Wynberg, Port Elizabeth South and Griqualand.

strong support from the Nationalist branches in all of the Cape constituencies, where the Independent opposition tended to be overtly pro-British in their sympathies. In Natal, too, 3 seats were lost<sup>(32)</sup> and 8 retained, the average majority in the case of the latter being 889, a figure considerably lower than the average majority for the seats retained in the other two provinces. The most disturbing statistic in the Natal elections was the fact that the highest proportion of anti-South African Party votes were recorded in this province, 21 656 as against 23 808 for South African Party candidates. In Natal's 9 urban constituencies, only 427 more votes were cast for the South African Party than for the Home Rule, Labour and Independent candidates.

Hertzog published a post-election message of thanks to the electorate for "the fine and unequivocal manner in which they have given expression to the desire for co-operation and racial good will",<sup>(33)</sup> but neither he nor Smuts could have felt satisfied with their respective Parties' performance in the election. Like the South African Party, the Nationalists suffered serious setbacks, losing one urban and one rural seat in the Transvaal to Independents. From Hertzog's point of view, there was no satisfaction to be derived from the fact that some of the Party's most impressive majorities were recorded in Cape rural constituencies by followers of Malan who tolerated rather than embraced Coalition. Both leaders were right in refusing to see the large opposition vote - 138 149 as against 181 786 for Coalition - as necessarily anti-Coalition, but they could not ignore the fact that Independents tended to secure the votes of those who were disillusioned with the Parties they had traditionally supported. The elections provided the first indications to both Hertzog and Smuts that, while Coalition itself enjoyed a sufficient degree of popular support, there was widespread discontent with the Parties

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32. Greyville, Umbilo and Umlazi.

33. The Star 22 May 1933.

within the Coalition. In large measure this discontent was focused at local rather than national level; there was still agreement with the fundamental aims and purposes of each Party, but the feeling had developed that the Parties were losing touch with the local interests and aspirations of their supporters. For as long as the manoeuvrability of each Party was circumscribed by the Coalition contract, the erosion of the Parties at local level would be a difficult process to reverse. The danger was that the Coalition Government, based on the support of the two major Parties, would turn into a "best-man"<sup>(34)</sup> government relying for its support on an uncoordinated and therefore unreliable body of popular approval for its policies. This would be the end of the two-party system in South Africa. Moreover, for as long as erosion of the Party bases continued, neither Smuts nor Hertzog could view with confidence their own or their country's political future in the event of the breakdown of Coalition.

The obvious solution to this problem was to rationalize Coalition by carrying it through to its logical conclusion, a full merger of Parties. This eventuality had first been mooted by Smuts during an election speech in late April, when he declared that, if the National Party and the South African Party ever fought each other again, they would not be led by Hertzog and himself.<sup>(35)</sup> This statement was probably intended only as a pre-election demonstration of the solidarity of the Coalition, and no further initiatives in the direction of a fusion of Parties were forthcoming in the weeks immediately before and after the election - although as early as 22 May it was rumoured that "influences" were at work to create a new Centre Party which would have the blessing of Hertzog, Smuts, Duncan, Havenga and Pirow.<sup>(36)</sup>

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34. Smuts had rejected the notion of a "best-man" government suggested by the Unionist Party in 1910. (See Smuts to F.S. Malan, 23 February 1910, published in W.K. Hancock and J. van der Poel, Selections from the Smuts Papers (1966), vol.II, p.616).

35. The Star 22 April 1933.

36. The Star 22 May 1933.

The outcome of the election did not, however, provide any of the leaders with an immediate incentive to work towards this end. Rather, their thoughts were turned by the approaching opening of Parliament on 26 May towards the necessity of a redefinition of the Party structure of South Africa.

The principal *raison d'être* for the Coalition Government was the economic reconstruction of South Africa. The consideration of a blueprint to attain this end was the main purpose of this Parliamentary session. Before Havenga could present his budget, however, an indiscretion on the part of Hertzog raised for the first time the problem of the maintenance of parliamentary discipline within the Party under Coalition. Hertzog moved in the House that Tuesdays and Fridays be reserved for Government business. A South African Party MP, H.G. Lawrence, spoke out strongly against this motion, claiming that it "entrench~~ed~~" on the rights and privileges of hon. members".<sup>(37)</sup> Although the motion was carried easily, the impression was created that the Coalition leaders intended to use their huge majority to steamroller all opposition and to deny a hearing to private members and opposition speakers. Earlier, Hjalmar Reitz, now a Roosite MP, had accused Transvaal Nationalist MP's of signing a document which bound them "to vote for anything unconditionally" which Hertzog brought forward.<sup>(38)</sup> Both of these incidents lent some credibility to the allegations of autocratic behaviour made by Roos and Madeley against Hertzog. Under Coalition, each Party retained its own caucus, but discipline was difficult as the effectiveness of the Whips was considerably reduced by the fact that the Party line was determined by a body which transcended the Party, namely the Coalition Government. At the start of the Parliamentary session, the disciplinary problem was compounded by the fear of giving justification to the allegations of authoritarianism which had been made against the Government.

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37. House of Assembly Debates 26 May 1933 vol.XXI col.17.

38. Ibid., 26 May 1933 vol.XXI col.11.



The debate over Havenga's "reconstruction" Budget highlighted the Parties' disciplinary problems, and, for the South African Party at least, the progress of this debate seemed to reveal a development at parliamentary level which reflected the erosion of the Party's power bases at local level before the general election. (It should be noted that Nationalist opposition to the Budget was of quite a different nature, in that it came in the main from Cape rural members, who were in principle opponents of Coalition anyway). The details of the Budget need not concern us in this study. Briefly, controversy arose because of Havenga's provision of an elaborate scheme of state aid to farmers, which was to be financed in large measure by a tax of 50% of the premium on gold - the excess profits which had accrued from the Union's departure from the gold standard. This tax was expected to yield £6 million. Havenga justified this measure by claiming that the increased profits of the gold mining industry were a result of Government action and were not an appreciation of the assets of shareholders.<sup>(39)</sup>

Shortly after presenting his Budget, Havenga left with Smuts and Pirow to attend the World Economic Conference in London, leaving Duncan, as Acting Minister of Finance, to conduct the Budget debate. Throughout the economic crisis of the previous year, the South African Party had argued that the gold mining industry was the mainstay of the South African economy;<sup>(40)</sup> when it prospered, it created more employment than any other industry, stimulated the development of associated industries, promoted overseas investment, and ensured a high price for agricultural produce by giving rise to large concentrations of population in urban areas. The Budget now committed the South African Party - or at least its ministerial wing - to a policy which appeared to aim at the curbing of the gold mining industry. Almost without exception, Rand South African Party MP's reacted violently

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39. For a full report of Havenga's Budget speech, see The Natal Mercury 31 May 1933.

40. See, for example, Smuts's speech at New Modderfontein, reported in The Star 17 September 1932.



to the proposed mining taxation. Sturrock condemned Duncan and the Party leaders for having acquiesced in a short-sighted policy of milking the gold-mines.<sup>(41)</sup> Stallard spoke of the inequity of the Budget's proposal to make "a huge transfer...[of] the earnings of one section of the population to the pockets of another", but, in mitigation of the vehemence of his criticism, added that he saw himself as making use of one of the great advantages brought by Coalition - that of constructive criticism, frankly and freely expressed.<sup>(42)</sup> Kentridge followed Madeley in criticizing the Budget for its failure to make adequate provision for unemployment relief, and argued further that the severe taxation of the gold-mining industry was pointless since the money apportioned for the relief of farmers was insufficient to provide a salvation of their position.<sup>(43)</sup> Speaker after speaker turned against Duncan the full force of his criticism, and for a time it seemed likely that the South African Party would be seriously embarrassed by a confrontation between Party leaders and backbenchers representing urban constituencies in the division on the Budget.<sup>(44)</sup>

More serious still for the South African Party were the extra-parliamentary repercussions of the proposed mining taxation. The Budget gave rise for a brief period to feverish selling of gold mining shares on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange.<sup>(45)</sup> This gave impetus to the Chamber of Mines' campaign against the mining tax. In addition, Rand labour, fearing that the tax would act as a disincentive to the increase of employment opportunities, linked up with the

41. House of Assembly Debates 1 June 1933 vol.XXI cols.134-8.

42. Ibid., 1 June 1933 vol.XXI col.151.

43. Ibid., 1 June 1933 vol.XXI col.177.

44. In economic terms, it seems that the Rand MP's had some justification for their indignation at the imposition of heavier taxes on the mines, since taxation was increasing at a rate which was greater than the rate of increase of mining production. C.W. de Kiewiet (A History of South Africa: Social and Economic (1942), p.259) wrote: "In 1937 the gold output of the mines was twice as great as in 1914. The taxation paid by the mines was twelve times as great."

45. The Natal Mercury 2 June 1933.

Chamber in voicing its opposition. A series of public meetings under the joint sponsorship of capital and labour interests demonstrated the extent of the Rand's displeasure. There was talk of forming an Urban Party to further the interests of town dwellers and small investors,<sup>(46)</sup> a development which threatened to institutionalize the growing town/country polarisation in Parliament. A deputation from the Chamber of Mines, as well as a delegation of Rand mayors, held discussions with Duncan in an attempt to persuade him to modify or drop altogether the proposed taxation. Most of the feeling on the Rand was directed against the South African Party, whose attempts at mediation between the Government and the gold mining industry via its Rand Executive failed dismally. Amongst the rank and file membership of the South African Party, disenchantment with its Party leaders' role in the presentation of the mining taxation was rife. The Star, formerly staunchly pro-South African Party, became unsympathetic to the Coalition Government,<sup>(47)</sup> and in Rand circles the idea of Devolution was widely mooted.<sup>(48)</sup>

In terms of its effects upon the economic development of South Africa, the mining tax in the 1933 Budget was not a significant development, since in the modified form in which it was finally presented by Duncan, it did not fulfil the direful predictions of its Rand opponents by inhibiting the growth of the gold industry. Its political implications were, however, far-reaching. Support for the South African Party under Coalition had, as we have seen,<sup>(49)</sup> been most reliable in the Transvaal during the general election. The mining tax issue now brought the ferment of discontent with the South African Party to the Transvaal and initiated there the process of erosion of the Party base which had already begun in the Cape and Natal. As in the latter two provinces,

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46. The Star 7 June 1933.

47. See, for example, the editorial in The Star 14 June 1933.

48. The Natal Mercury 17 June 1933.

49. See above, p.122.

the rank and file's quarrel was not with the fundamental principles of the Party, nor yet with the idea of Coalition; it was essentially a revolt against the Party leadership and an expression of frustration at the distance which had emerged between the Party's highest level and its grass-roots membership.

On 22 June The Natal Mercury published a survey of the political situation in South Africa on the eve of the prorogation of the first Coalition Parliament. It offered this analysis:

The two big Parties which have ruled since Union are fast crumbling, mushroom growths sprung from the seeds of dissension are appearing in the Cape, the Transvaal and Natal, and overall there sits in power a Government stronger than any other the Union has known, yet with a following lacking in discipline and groping for something hidden in the murkiness of the future.

The position was then assessed province by province. In the Cape, there were the followers of Dr. Malan - who constituted a future Republican Party - a "greatly dissatisfied South African Party", the "remnant of a torn Nationalist Party", and a vast and amorphous citizenry which backed the Coalition but found itself politically homeless. The Transvaal was "in a state of utter chaos". The South African Party had suffered a serious setback recently, and the Nationalists were subject still to infiltration by the Roosites. In both Parties there was "a strong dissentient element which, like Joseph's coat, is composed of many colours". Rumours of the formation of a Townsman's Party, "exploiting all the inflammable material which exists all along the Rand", were still current. In Natal, the Mercury wrote:

...there is the same state of chaos. Through blundering and mismanagement and because of its vacillating policy during the last two years, the South African Party is definitely moribund and various political and semi-political growths sustain themselves on the wave of dissatisfaction directed mainly against the Party as distinct from the Coalition Government. As in the Cape, thousands of serious-minded worthy citizens of Natal today find themselves politically homeless.

It continued:

The condition of affairs throughout South Africa may be likened to a beaker of cooling liquid around which the alchemists stand anxiously waiting for the crystals to appear. They hope for one large crystal and several smaller ones, but none can tell for certain what the solution will produce.

The Natal Mercury's analysis erred only in that it envisaged as an immediate prospect a situation in which the Party leaders on both sides would attempt consciously to manipulate the reservoir of "politically homeless" Coalition supporters in such a way as to create a more clearly defined Party basis through the formation of a Centre Party. In fact, the initiative in this movement towards a new political redefinition tended to come from the "politically homeless" themselves. In the month which followed the prorogation of Parliament, the Party leaders remained as strongly out of touch with grass-root feeling as they had been for the previous four months. Not even the heavy defeats suffered by Coalition candidates from both Parties in the Transvaal Provincial elections in late June<sup>(50)</sup> persuaded them of the extent of popular disenchantment with the existing Party situation. Alone among politicians of the first rank, D.F. Malan was conscious of the reaction against Coalition which was setting in all over the country.<sup>(51)</sup>

Contrary to the expectations of The Natal Mercury, the first steps towards a full merger of Parties and the creation of a new Centre Party were unilaterally taken by local Party branches in the Transvaal country districts. This was because the general election had helped to promote a high degree of solidarity between Party organizations on the Platteland.<sup>(52)</sup> In the first week of July, the Head

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50. See The Star 24 June 1933.

51. Die Burger 24 June 1933.

52. In several Transvaal rural constituencies, nomination contests for the 1933 election had been acrimonious and had produced unofficial Nationalist candidates as rivals to the Coalition Nationalist nominees. In these constituencies, the loyalty of South African Party members to the official Coalition candidates greatly benefited the electoral effort of the National Party on the Platteland.



Committees of both Parties in Potchefstroom and Standerton - Smuts's own constituency - passed resolutions suggesting that district committees give practical effect to the Coalition by forming central committees and making representations through such joint committees. What was proposed amounted to a merger of Parties at local level, although a spokesman for the National Party in Standerton gave a motive for this action which smacked of piety rather than a cool perception of the necessity of Party realignment:

Prominent Nationalists here admit that the circumstances of the last election brought home to them that their old suspicions in regard to the South African Party were unwarranted, and that there are many points on which they can take united action. (53)

This over-zealous gesture of goodwill between old political enemies was probably prompted by the statements of prominent politicians to the effect that Fusion of the two Parties was inevitable,<sup>(54)</sup> but it failed to elicit a positive response from Party leaders or from Party branches in other parts of the country. For example, Duncan did not reject Fusion outright, but felt that it should await a more favourable opportunity. He wrote to Smuts<sup>(55)</sup> on 11 July:

In the country the Nat and Sap branches want to amalgamate - at least in the Transvaal. I feel that we must go a bit slow over that so as to take our own people with us. Cape Town is suspicious and on the Rand Stallard has been carrying on a campaign against the mines tax which (though he professes loyalty to the coalition) has alienated from us a number of our people who say they were let down by the South African party. Stallard, of course, is a political comet but we shall have to give people on the Rand a little time to cool down. (56)

Clearly, Duncan envisaged Fusion only after the South African Party had reconstructed its power base, and not as a remedy

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53. The Star 7 July 1933.

54. See, for example, an interview given to The Star (29 June 1933) by the Transvaal Nationalist MP J.H. Grobler.

55. Smuts only returned from England in September 1933.

56. Quoted in Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.563.



for the erosion of that power base. He seemed to condone Fusion only if the South African Party could enter it from the same position of unity and strength as it had entered Coalition, and was prepared to do nothing in the meantime to encourage or promote this movement. His belief in the salvageability of the South African Party was rather unrealistic, since, short of dissolving the Coalition or drastically altering the terms of the Coalition agreement, the Party leaders could do little or nothing to deal with the root causes of disintegration.

Fortunately for Duncan, the zeal for Fusion on the Transvaal Platteland was not shared by the Rand South African Party - which inclined rather towards his more cautious approach<sup>(57)</sup> - nor by the leadership of the National Party in the Transvaal. At the quarterly conference of the Rand National Party on 15 July, the Transvaal leader, Grobler, supported a motion approving the ultimate Fusion of the two Parties, but upbraided the Platteland branches which had already united and formed joint branches. He warned that "branches could not anticipate possible action by their Congresses", adding that such branches could be denied a vote at any future Congress held to discuss the question of Fusion.<sup>(58)</sup> (At the same meeting Grobler learned "with surprise" that feeling amongst Nationalists on the Rand was not as strongly pro-Fusion as he had believed).

The drive towards Fusion took place in distinct phases. In the first, the motivating force was the spontaneous action of local Party branches. For a number of reasons, this was a short-lived phase, embracing only the first weeks of July 1933. It failed to become a sustained and growing movement partly because of its failure to spread from the Transvaal Platteland to the remainder of the country, and partly because of the coolness of the reception given it by the leaders of both Parties. Nevertheless, this movement was an essential component of Fusion, in that it forced the Party

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57. The Star 17 July 1933.

58. The Star 15 July 1933.

leaders to face the issue and to commit themselves in principle to a complete merger of Parties.

The second phase was much more protracted, beginning in August 1933 and lasting until the creation of the United South African National Party in December 1934. This phase involved an initiative from the Party leaders on both sides and an attempt on their part to manipulate Party opinion at grass-root level towards acceptance of Fusion. On the South African Party side, it was ushered in by a realization on the part of the leadership that reconstruction of the Party base under Coalition was not a viable proposition.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### FUSION: KEEPING OUT MALAN JULY 1933 - FEBRUARY 1934

At the quarterly conference of the Rand National Party on 15 July, a motion supporting in principle the ultimate Fusion of the National Party and the South African Party was passed with the approbation of the Transvaal Party leader, Grobler. This motion provoked no more than non-committal responses from the organizations of both Parties in the remaining provinces and from the South African Party organization in the Transvaal,<sup>(1)</sup> but it ensured that the question of Fusion would be prominent on the agenda of the Transvaal National Party Congress, which was to open on 9 August. It also ensured that Hertzog would be forced at this Congress to clarify his position in regard to Fusion. Clearly, the proceedings of the Transvaal Nationalist Congress would in large measure determine the stance adopted by the South African Party leaders, who in the meantime avoided any public statement on Fusion and did nothing to encourage the spread of the spontaneous initiatives in this direction taken by South African Party branches on the Transvaal Platteland. Smuts was to be overseas till mid-September. At a distance, he guided the Party managers such as Esselen and Duncan,<sup>(2)</sup> but was anxious that no more than a minimum positive response should be made to the Nationalist Fusion initiative, until such time as he was able to assess the situation at first hand and determine a coherent line of policy.

In his speech at the Transvaal National Party Congress,<sup>(3)</sup> Hertzog came out strongly in favour of a gradual transition to Fusion. While Coalition had been an unqualified success, he argued, it could not be permanent since it meant the maintenance of the identity of both Parties. This arrangement

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1. See above, p.132.

2. Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.252.

3. Reported in The Natal Mercury 10 August 1933.

tended to give rise to new disruptions, and in all provinces there had been signs of dissatisfaction. "People had pressed for closer co-operation because of the difficulties in regard to nominations." These considerations apart, the perpetuation of co-operation was essential for the survival and growth of Afrikanerdom - a term which Hertzog used to denote not a narrow racial or language group, but all white South Africans who endorsed the principle of "South Africa first".<sup>(4)</sup> At the same time, Hertzog gave an assurance that the new Party alignment he envisaged would not involve the sacrifice by the National Party of any of its traditions or ideals or of the Afrikaner language and culture. All of these points had already been accorded full and ready recognition by the South African Party. At question time, Hertzog expanded on the organizational difficulty of continuing Coalition along the lines at present existing:

If by urging that the identity of the Parties be maintained, we mean that the separate Party organizations be continued as at present, then I say that that is the very reason why Coalition is breaking. Two separate organizations cannot be maintained.

Closer co-operation was needed for the solution of the Native problem, since under Coalition the South African Party was not bound to the support of the Native Bills. Regarding the question of South Africa's sovereign independence, the problem of whether or not South Africa possessed the right to remain neutral in the event of a war which involved Great Britain had been represented by opponents of Fusion as one requiring urgent solution. But, said Hertzog:

[The question of South Africa's right to neutrality] would not prove an impediment as the League of Nations had made war impossible, and the question of South Africa remaining neutral in the event of England going to war was therefore of negligible importance.

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4. In many of his speeches in 1933 and 1934, Hertzog used the terms "Afrikaner" and "South African" as interchangeable. (For an examination of Hertzog's use of the term "Afrikaner", see H.B. Giliomee, "The Development of the Afrikaner's Self-Concept", in H.W. van der Merwe (ed.), Looking at the Afrikaner Today (1975) pp.20-22).



With only 9 out of 600 delegates dissenting, the Congress passed a motion declaring that "it will be in the best interests of the Party to fuse the two Parties".

As a gesture of goodwill between Parties, Duncan attended this Congress as South African Party representative. In a brief speech delivered in Afrikaans, he endorsed fully the remarks made by Hertzog. Since he gave no details as to the basis on which he envisaged Fusion taking place, he committed the South African Party to no more than an eventual investigation of the extent to which such a Party merger was possible. But his speech did serve as an assurance to Party members who were dissatisfied with the Coalition agreement that the Party leaders would, at the appropriate time, take action to correct existing anomalies and rationalise the relationship with the National Party. Duncan probably hoped in this way to restrict spontaneous action by local Party branches and so to reassert the control of the Party leaders over the Fusion movement in the constituencies. Duncan appears at this stage to have perceived the beginnings of a wide-spread demand for Fusion at the Party's grass-root level, and to have acted on this impression.

A statement by F.S. Malan condemning Fusion as premature and ill-considered, especially since the Coalition Government had not yet achieved the objectives for which it had been formed,<sup>(5)</sup> went some way towards dispelling this impression of an irresistible demand for Fusion, but its effect was mitigated by the fact that Malan's influence was limited to the Cape, and even in this Province it may have been on the wane since the Roos incident earlier in the year. Meanwhile, new pro-Fusion stimuli were provided from outside the South African Party. On 12 August the Natal Nationalist Congress endorsed Fusion,<sup>(6)</sup> and Roos, too, stated his approval of the Transvaal Nationalist Congress's decision.<sup>(7)</sup> In addition, the South African Party suffered a further electoral setback

5. The Natal Mercury 12 August 1933.

6. The Natal Mercury 12 August 1933.

7. The Star 11 August 1933.

when it lost three seats in the Cape Provincial Council elections in mid-August.<sup>(8)</sup> This served as a warning to the South African Party of the danger of continuing in its contractual relationship with the National Party, and indicated that Duncan's idea of restoring Party unity as a necessary prelude to Fusion was unrealistic. A further indication of the apparently irreversible erosion of the Party base under Coalition was provided by the South African Party's indifferent performance in the Natal Provincial Council elections on 22 August. This prompted The Natal Mercury to comment: "The rot in the South African Party seems to have set in badly, and talk of 'spring cleaning' is likely now to be...ineffective."<sup>(9)</sup>

The political circumstances of August 1933 thus demanded that the South African Party give immediate consideration to Fusion without waiting for the clear lead which could be expected on Smuts's return. On 18 August, the Head Committee of the South African Party in the Transvaal met and unanimously passed a motion that Fusion with the National Party was in the best interests of the country.<sup>(10)</sup> Three days later, Smuts, interviewed in London, gave his opinion that Fusion would follow inevitably from Coalition, but added that the Party leaders should choose their moment carefully and should not attempt to force the pace. The first major statement by a South African Party leader on Fusion was made by Duncan in an address to his constituents at Yeoville on 26 August. Emphasizing that "I do not speak as committing the South African Party in any way, but as expressing my own personal opinion", he traced the history of co-operation under Coalition and concluded that many of the shortcomings of the present Government were attributable to the fact that co-operation was not yet close enough. He echoed Hertzog's dissatisfaction with the nomination procedures under Coalition, then showed a clearer awareness of the extent to which the Fusion ideal had

8. The Star 17 August 1933.

9. The Natal Mercury 24 August 1933.

10. The Star 19 August 1933.

permeated the white electorate. That there was a strong demand for Fusion in the rural areas of the Transvaal was beyond doubt, but:

On the other hand, I find among our friends in the towns a feeling that more time is needed to satisfy themselves as to the working of the Coalition Government. One hears it said in some quarters that so far the town population has got nothing out of the Coalition except taxation for the benefit of the country people. ...I do not agree with it, but it is a criticism which one hears and which makes certain sections of the town people hesitate as yet in giving whole-hearted support to a proposal to abandon their old party allegiance in favour of a permanent Coalition. I mention these points to show that in this question of Fusion we may have to deal at the moment with a sharp difference of opinion between our country and town supporters, and it seems to me most desirable under present conditions not to force that difference to an issue if, by a little more time, we can bring the two points of view nearer to each other.

Thus, while undue haste in promulgating Fusion was rejected as likely to alienate certain sections, there were "already signs of a development in the political situation which may compel us to an early decision", in which case he "could not contemplate going back to the old Party division". Coalition had occurred at "one of those rare and happy moments in our South African history when a sense of our common nationality enabled us to rise above party strife and racial division". The opportunity it provided for the permanent settlement of the differences of the past should on no account be missed.

The desire of the South African Party leadership to make a positive response to the Nationalist Fusion initiative was probably considerably enhanced by the increasing evidence that a large body of Nationalists were likely to remain outside of the projected Fusion Party. During August, a number of National Party branches in the Orange Free State - including Hertzog's own constituency, Smithfield<sup>(11)</sup> - declared with varying degrees of vehemence their opposition to Fusion. These anti-Fusion resolutions could have two

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11. The Star 22 August 1933.

possible effects on Hertzog's strategy: either he would accept an accommodation with Smuts on the basis of terms which effectively excluded much of his Party's right wing from participation in the new Party; or he would move first to secure the unity of his Party and only then approach Smuts on the basis of principles decided upon in consultation with the most prominent right-wing leaders of the Party, Dr. Malan and Dr. N.J. van der Merwe. Hertzog's response to this dilemma was to investigate the practicability of a middle course between these two options, a line of strategy which would retain as much Party unity as possible without relinquishing the co-operation of Smuts and the South African Party.

At the beginning of September, Hertzog undertook a speaking tour of the Orange Free State in an attempt to win support for Fusion. He had been under pressure from N.J. van der Merwe to say or do nothing which would exacerbate latent conflicts in the Party.<sup>(12)</sup> In National Party circles there was much controversy as to whether Hertzog's projected new Party would be based on the principle of "hereniging" - the political reunion of the Afrikaners in a single party, thus healing the breach of 1913-14 - or "vereniging" - by which was meant a broader union which would include English-speakers in a political party based on the principle of national unity. In his speech at Smithfield on 1 September,<sup>(13)</sup> Hertzog argued that this controversy was based on a false distinction. Explaining the origin of Coalition, he declared:

Both Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking sections felt the need for co-operation to become a united people; but with us Afrikaans-speaking people was felt the further irresistible impulse towards hereniging, and the re-establishment of the national bonds which had been broken in 1913.

This definition of "hereniging" within "vereniging" was wholly compatible with the interpretation of the South African

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12. G.D. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe (1944) p.246.

13. Reported in The Natal Mercury 2 September 1933.



Party, and was probably included partly as a reassurance to Hofmeyr, who two days before had declared that the South African Party would have nothing to do with "hereniging in the sense of the reunion of Afrikaans-speaking Nationalists and South African Party men."<sup>(14)</sup> Hertzog also repeated the arguments he had used as justification for Fusion at the Transvaal Nationalist Congress and for Coalition earlier in the year. The Afrikaner, with the assistance of the English-speaking Labour Party, had achieved full sovereign independence for South Africa and full recognition of the equality of his language and culture. Thus the main objects of the National Party had been achieved,<sup>(15)</sup> and their achievement had under Coalition been accorded full recognition by the South African Party. There was therefore no reason why the National Party should not merge with the South African Party without sacrificing any of the principles for which it stood. Furthermore, Coalition had been the salvation of Afrikanerdom, and in Fusion would lie its permanent safeguard. On the attitude of the anti-Fusionists, he stated:

The policy of isolation advocated by Dr. Malan is calculated to lead to nothing else than a dishonourable grave for the National Party, accompanied by a loss of all the advantages which have been achieved by the Afrikaans-speaking South Africans through Coalition and co-operation. I regard it as my duty to disapprove and fight against such a policy with all my power.

There was, in any case, no going back to the old state of things, since the Transvaal Nationalists had stated openly that whatever might be decided by the National Party in the other three provinces, they would "not abandon co-operation with their fellow South Africans in the South African Party."

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14. The Star 30 August 1933.

15. Scholtz (Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, p.242) commented on this statement as follows:

What has been a struggle for conquest (verowering), later became a struggle for retention (handhawing). In 1933, General Hertzog would not see that the struggle was not at an end, but had simply changed in character.



As far as the new Party was concerned, its name was immaterial to him. Its principles were all-important, and these would have to be "such as were agreed upon by the leaders of the Parties and approved of by the congresses of the two Parties". Among these principles would have to be included the seven points of the Coalition agreement. Hertzog denied the charge that the Party leaders were forcing the pace of Fusion, pointing out that the Transvaal Congress had urged that matters be delayed for a year or more. At question time, he clarified the likely position of the new Party in regard to republicanism. He emphasized that the National Party had never been a republican party, but had merely permitted its members to make propaganda for a republic. This was no more than the recognition of the elementary right of freedom of speech, a principle which he was sure General Smuts would concede.

Hertzog's speech was received with acclaim by his audience. Dr. N.J. van der Merwe concluded from it that Hertzog and Malan were separated only by personality differences and were not really at variance on matters of principle,<sup>(16)</sup> and set in motion the establishment of a committee to act as intermediary between the two leaders. Hertzog meanwhile continued his tour of the Free State. The reception accorded him at the centres he visited amounted in many cases to a reversal of the local Nationalist branch's rejection of Fusion. The anti-Fusionist leaders of the Free State National Party were themselves enthusiastic about the results of Hertzog's tour: they understood him to have declared in a speech at Bethlehem on 4 September that the "Unionists"<sup>(17)</sup> in the South African Party would be excluded from Fusion, and at Boshof on September 8 that any permanent co-operation would be on the basis of National Party principles.<sup>(18)</sup> Their suspicions were not entirely removed -

16. *Ibid.*, p.247.

17. In Parliamentary terms, the surviving Unionist remnant in the South African Party included the following MP's: C.W. Giovanetti, M. Alexander, G.B. van Zyl, J.S. Marwick, L. Blackwell, J.J. Byron, P. Duncan and C.P. Robinson.

18. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, pp.247-8.

on September 7 the Free State Head Committee passed a resolution opposing Fusion<sup>(19)</sup> - but reconciliation, at least with the Malanites in the Free State, seemed to be not far from realization. Such a reconciliation would obviously affect the attitude of the South African Party towards Fusion. It became urgently necessary that some official statement of South African Party policy regarding future co-operation should be made.

Smuts returned to South Africa on September 4. On that day he wrote to G.B. van Zyl:<sup>(20)</sup>

I think the Transvaal /South African Party/ executive acted with undue haste (21) and I shall have to tone down somewhat the roseate picture they have attempted. But the fact is that in the rural Transvaal the urge towards Fusion is very great and the executive probably had its hand forced. I shall see that there is proper consultation and co-operation between all sections of the Party. But of course I agree and believe fully that in the end there is likely to be fusion. Dr. Malan and his stalwarts may soon split off, and that may ease the position for many troubled Saps.

Smuts evidently planned to force Hertzog to choose between himself and Malan. At the same time, he hoped that the group which might follow Malan out of Fusion could be kept as small as possible, since he was aware of the danger of easing the situation too much in favour of the South African Party at Hertzog's expense. This would mean "Sap predominance, with a Nat Prime Minister with a small following of his own. You have that situation in England and it does not work well."<sup>(22)</sup> On September 5 he wrote to M.C. Gillett:<sup>(23)</sup>

Our political situation here is somewhat troubled and complicated because a strong section among the Dutch in both great parties are pressing hard for a complete fusion instead of a coalition, and Hertzog has espoused this

19. The Star 8 September 1933.

20. J. van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V (1973) p.565.

21. In passing their pro-Fusion resolution of 18 August.

22. Quoted in Hancock, The Fields of Force, p.253.

23. Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.566.

cause for tactical reasons of his own. Dr. Malan in his party and to a lesser extent the English following in my party are resisting this - Malan because he is a racist and loathes co-operation with the English, my English friends again because they do not trust the Nats, and do not feel safe in that camp. I shall have my work cut out to meet these difficulties and prevent a rupture between the two wings of the Coalition. The English naturally do not feel quite at home with the Nats; and Hertzog keeps harping on "nasionaal" and "Afrikaners", which words are not liked by the English, as you can understand.

On 11 September, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe's "peace delegation" began its overtures to Hertzog and Malan. (24) Against this background of impending reconciliation in the National Party, Smuts made his first public policy statement on Fusion at a meeting of the Rand South African Party General Council on 14 September. (25) He spoke of the Coalition Government, tracing its origins and arguing that its success lay behind the urge towards a full union of Parties. The South African Party, which had practised a spirit of national unity and "stood for racial co-operation all these years" welcomed the emergence of this desire for Fusion. As leader of the South African Party, Smuts was "pleased beyond words" that Hertzog had taken up the struggle on behalf of Fusion. But, he added, the Party was not going to rush headlong into this arrangement, but would first examine carefully the details of any proposed Fusion basis:

Our Parties are going to have the fullest opportunity to consider the matter in all its bearings. There will be no stampede, no compulsion. It is not going to be a marriage of convenience. There must be willingness and cordiality in this...I want no misunderstanding. I want nobody to say afterwards that we acted in the dark.

Smuts then enumerated the conditions which he regarded as essential for Fusion. In the first place, he wanted the new Party to be based on principles which would be wide

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24. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, pp.248-9.

25. Reported in The Natal Mercury 15 September 1933.

enough to accommodate all of the interests which had been represented by the South African Party. If any of the Party sections - English or Afrikaans, Northern or Southern, rural or urban - felt that they could not follow him into Fusion, it would "be a matter of the greatest grief to me and it might deflect my course of action very considerably". He added:

Quite bluntly, I am dead against a racial bloc. Our whole effort has been to bring the different sections together. We have brought and kept together the old and new populations. I do not want to go back on that achievement. If I thought the result of any union would be to constitute a Dutch bloc on the one side and an English bloc on the other, I would not do it....It would set the clock back a generation. I want to carry both sections with me and if one of them stands aloof I shall have to reconsider my position.

Smuts was emphatic that he was not prepared to consider Fusion on the basis of the Malanite demand for the exclusion of the "Unionists". On what basis, then, was a union of Parties to take place? Smuts answered that for him there was only one basis, the seven points of the Coalition agreement. He was not prepared to add to or subtract from this basis. Malanite demands that the basis of Fusion should include points such as the right of neutrality, the right of secession and the right of republican propaganda within the Party were merely "apples of discord, which are being flung to the people of South Africa". He then concluded by emphasizing the need for the South African Party to take an initiative in the matter of Fusion, for if its members hesitated "the call would come elsewhere". (26)

In the eyes of Nationalist opponents of Fusion, Smuts's speech amounted to a declaration of disapproval of the unity efforts in the National Party and an ultimatum to Hertzog, since on many points it contradicted statements Hertzog was understood to have made during his Free State tour. Writing in Die Burger, Malan welcomed Smuts's speech as a "clearing of

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26. Probably an allusion to the continuing agitation by Roos for the establishment of a centre party.



the air". It was apparent, he said, that Smuts wanted Fusion ("vereniging") and rejected "hereniging", and that, to make this possible, he demanded that the National Party should drop certain of its cardinal principles. Insofar as he understood the Prime Minister's declarations in the Free State, Hertzog, on the other hand, wanted "hereniging" - which Malan took to mean "the bringing together only of those who, by reason of their inner convictions, belonged together" - and rejected Fusion. In short, as he understood it, Hertzog rejected union with all elements within the South African Party as it then existed. If this was the case, then there was no fundamental difference between himself and Hertzog.<sup>(27)</sup> In a press interview, Dr. van der Merwe drew the logical conclusion of this interpretation of the course of events, when he said that Fusion on Smuts's terms was now out of the question.<sup>(28)</sup>

The timing and content of Smuts's speech suggest very strongly that it was his intention to present Hertzog with a choice between Fusion with the South African Party - on terms which would in practice exclude the Malanite group - or cessation of Party co-operation. Neither option would allow Hertzog to consolidate the unity of his Party, since if he moved to accommodate the Malanites in the Cape and Free State he would probably alienate the strongly pro-Fusion Transvaal Nationalists. A return to the pre-1933 two-party system was likely to mean the end of Nationalist predominance on the Transvaal Platteland. In this event, the National Party could not reasonably expect to be returned to power at any time in the foreseeable future. These considerations apart, Hertzog and several other leading Nationalists, including Havenga and Pirow, had staked their political reputations on the future of Party co-operation, and could not withdraw without conceding the leadership of the Party to Malan. On the other hand, Fusion on terms agreed upon between Smuts and Hertzog would almost certainly entail the defection of the Malanites. This would not only improve the chances of

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27. Die Burger 16 September 1933.

28. The Star 17 September 1933.



the South African Party going into Fusion as a united Party, but promised to check and even reverse the process of grass-root erosion of the Party base. In the course of things, the South African Party would then enjoy a slight, but effective, numerical majority in the new Party, sufficient to ensure that it resembled in character and emphasis the South African Party rather than the National Party. By mid-September 1933, Smuts had thus won a considerable tactical advantage over Hertzog, which he was not to lose during the fifteen months which preceded the eventual foundation of the new Party in December 1934.

For his part Hertzog, in the weeks which followed, probably appreciated the disadvantageous position in which he stood in relation to Smuts. At his meeting with the Free State "peace delegation", which took place on 22 September, he appears to have been more concerned with ensuring his own blamelessness in the event of the breakdown of negotiations than with the settlement of differences. Discussion centred mainly on constitutional questions,<sup>(29)</sup> on which the Malanites demanded certain assurances from Hertzog. In regard to South Africa's right of secession from the Commonwealth, Hertzog argued that, because South Africa was a sovereign independent state, this right went without saying. He was not prepared to include a statement of this right in the new Party's programme of principles, as this would create the impression that the Party doubted of South Africa's sovereign independence. On the question of the right of neutrality, he claimed that since South Africa's membership of the League of Nations, and particularly since the signing of the Kellogg Pact in 1927,

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29. There was also some discussion of procedural matters. According to Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, p.252, Hertzog assured Van der Merwe that the principles of the new Party would first be decided upon within and to the satisfaction of the National Party, and would then be presented to Smuts for his approval. Van der Merwe understood Hertzog to have stated that if either this procedure or the principles themselves were unacceptable to Smuts, then no Fusion would take place. Hertzog's diary account of the meeting (quoted in C.M. van den Heever, Generaal J.B.M. Hertzog (1944) p.608) merely records that he promised to lay the programme of principles before the National Party Federal Council before the final conclusion of an agreement with Smuts.

war had become unlikely if not impossible, and the question had therefore lost its practical value. He would not allow strains and tensions to be introduced into the new Party for the sake of a purely academic question. On the question of the right to make propaganda for a republic, Hertzog repeated the assertion he had already made publicly, namely his confidence that Smuts would not object to the inclusion of a clause guaranteeing this right in the programme of principles of the new Party. Asked by Van der Merwe for his comments on Smuts's recent speech, Hertzog replied only that he was certain Smuts would not refuse any reasonable demands which the National Party might make.<sup>(30)</sup>

In his dealings with the Free State "peace delegation", Hertzog revealed for the first time the strategy which he was to follow consistently for the next four months. He seems to have accepted as inevitable - it might be argued that he welcomed as desirable - that the whole of the National Party would not enter Fusion. His efforts were now directed more towards the securing of as large a body of Nationalist support as possible for his Fusion policy rather than towards the salvation of Party unity. This strategy entailed his involvement in a protracted propaganda battle with the Cape and Free State opponents of Fusion. The first indication that Hertzog recognized the political incompatibility of Smuts and Malan and intended to throw in his lot with the former was given on 23 September when Havenga, in a speech at Jagersfontein, endorsed Fusion on the basis of the seven points of Coalition.<sup>(31)</sup> Two days later, Havenga spoke at Fauresmith and explicitly rejected "hereniging".<sup>(32)</sup> These statements corresponded exactly with the conception of Fusion enunciated by Smuts in his speech of 14 September, and were taken by Malan and Van der Merwe as a sign that Hertzog had gone back on his earlier assurances and was now contemplating union with the whole of the South African Party.<sup>(33)</sup> In the

30. Van den Heever, *op.cit.*, pp.607-8.

31. *The Star* 23 September 1933.

32. *The Star* 25 September 1933.

33. See Malan's letter to N.J. van der Merwe, 30 September 1933, quoted in Scholtz, *Dr. N.J. van der Merwe*, p.255.

eyes of the Malanites, the final demonstration of Hertzog's capitulation to Smuts was provided on September 28 by his first public reaction to Smuts's speech; he declared that, as he understood the speech, he found himself in agreement with it.<sup>(34)</sup> This declaration effectively brought to an end all possibility of reconciliation between Hertzog and Malan on the issue of Fusion.

The apparent finality of the breach between Hertzog and Malan was clearly shown by the events of the Cape National Party Congress, held at Port Elizabeth on 4-6 October.<sup>(35)</sup> Here Hertzog sought to make the Fusion issue a question of confidence in the Party's national leader, and gave assurances that the membership of the new Party would not be unregulated but would be determined by an individual's willingness to subscribe to a programme of principles approved by the National Party's Federal Council. Malan, however, argued that Fusion was ruled out as Smuts had not yet agreed to the constitutional points which had led to the breakdown of the hereniging negotiations in 1920. He further pointed out the virility and ability to exist independently of the Cape National Party.<sup>(36)</sup> The result of this debate was the rejection by 141 votes to 30 of Hertzog's motion calling for the Fusion of the two Parties. Hertzog's defeat was made complete by the removal of his supporters from the Cape Head Committee.

An unexpected result of Hertzog's defeat at the Cape Congress was a marked swing towards his policy in the Free State. At that province's National Party Congress on 11 October, Hertzog against all prediction carried a pro-Fusion motion with only 29 dissentients.<sup>(37)</sup> Equally pronounced were the effects of the Cape Congress in South African Party circles. To the extent to which Malanite opposition

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34. Ibid., p.252.

35. For a full description of the events of this Congress, see The Star 5-7 October 1933 and D.F. Malan, Afrikaner Volkseenheid en my Ervarings op die Pad Daarheen (1959) pp.166 et seq.

36. On 19 September, Die Burger had announced an increase in Cape National Party membership of over 4 000 in the last year.

37. The Star 13 October 1933.

gathered force, it seemed, so too did South African Party enthusiasm for Fusion - provided Hertzog made no move to placate this opposition. On 6 October, The Natal Mercury remarked that Hertzog might have lost the Cape Congress, but he had probably won the nation. The following day, a group of Durban MP's expressed the opinion that the outcome of the Cape Congress was likely to resolve disunity in Natal on the question of Fusion and arrest the process of Party fragmentation.<sup>(38)</sup> At the same time, Smuts wrote to Gillett:<sup>(39)</sup>

The whole position is clarified by this break-away of the die-hard Nats; but on the other hand it is going to make things frightfully difficult for Hertzog. It may be a case of Sap predominance, with a Nat prime minister with a small following of his own. You have that situation in England and it does not work well. In South Africa it will work even less smoothly. The Cape Saps may also take the bit between their teeth and say (like Dr. Malan) 'we prefer to go our own way rather than join the Nats whom we don't really like'. Then I too shall be beaten....I hope with caution and patience to carry the day but nobody knows in this count. Hertzog felt certain of victory at his congress and got badly beaten.

Clearly, Smuts anticipated that the disillusionment with the South African Party in the Cape which had been evident since the formation of the Coalition<sup>(40)</sup> would find expression in the proceedings of the Cape South African Party Congress, which was to open on 11 October. He further expected that the Malanite demonstration of intransigence at the Cape Nationalist Congress would provoke a corresponding reaction against Fusion on the part of the Cape South African Party. In fact, the Congress exhibited an opposite reaction. Smuts referred in his speech<sup>(41)</sup> to the recent developments in the National Party, paying tribute to Hertzog for his

38. The Natal Mercury 7 October 1933.

39. Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.567.

40. See above, p.118.

41. The Star 12 October 1933.



courageous performance at the Cape Congress:

If there is anyone in the Party who had doubted the bona fides of General Hertzog then I say no man had proved his bona fides more than General Hertzog at Port Elizabeth. (Applause)

Smuts declared that for his part he was prepared to go on with Coalition, but "the Port Elizabeth Congress was the signal for a move forward". Hertzog had "nailed his colours to the mast" and had shown that he would make any sacrifice in the cause of union, and "under these circumstances it was not for anybody in the South African Party to hang back". Smuts's speech was well received throughout, as was that of General Kemp, the Nationalist representative at the Congress, who gave an assurance that the decision of the Port Elizabeth Congress did not reflect the feeling of all Cape Nationalists. When the Fusion issue was put to the vote, it was approved virtually unanimously. Some delegates made it plain that they endorsed Fusion only on the understanding that the supporters of Malan were to be excluded. C.W. Coulter<sup>(42)</sup> argued that the Government should seek a fresh mandate from the electorate for the creation of a new Party, and others suggested that the move towards Fusion should be made more gradually so as to ensure full unanimity in the Party. The overwhelming impression left by the Congress, however, was that Smuts's policy had won a significant and unexpected victory. This was confirmed by the election of a "Smuts man", Senator A.M. Conroy, as Chairman of the Party in the Cape in succession to the declared opponent of Fusion, F.S. Malan. (F.S. Malan was overseas at the time, and it is possible that his absence considerably weakened the opposition to Fusion in the Cape South African Party).

By mid-October, Smuts and Hertzog had arrived at a definite identity of interest in the promotion of the cause of Party unity and were in fundamental agreement on the terms on which they envisaged such a union taking place. The position of both leaders vis-à-vis the rank and file of

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42. MP for Cape Town Gardens.

their respective Parties had been enhanced by the Malanite demonstration at the Cape Nationalist Congress; Hertzog had won much sympathy in the Free State, which felt resentment at the way in which he had been treated by the Cape Nationalists,<sup>(43)</sup> and the virtual certainty of Malan's exclusion from the new Party had reawakened South African Party enthusiasm for Fusion. Smuts, anxious that there should be no more than a slight South African Party predominance in the new Party, supported Hertzog's efforts to win Nationalist converts for Fusion. He began to take an active role in the increasing of Nationalist support for Fusion by attempting to bring about a reconciliation between Hertzog and Roos.<sup>(44)</sup> During November and December it appeared that reconciliation would be successful and that it would be followed by the participation of Roos and his supporters in the Fusion Party.

At the same time, the Nationalist elements opposed to Fusion were divided by a dispute over tactics between the Cape and Free State opposition leaders. Malan declared himself opposed to Fusion in principle and decided on immediate action to prevent its promulgation. Van der Merwe, on the other hand, believed that premature opposition would exacerbate relations between Afrikaners and make ultimate hereniging more difficult. He argued that no action should be taken against Fusion until the appearance of the draft programme of principles for the new Party.<sup>(45)</sup> Perhaps out of frustration at the negative consequences of their Port Elizabeth Congress victory and at the "dragging" of their Free State allies, the Malanite position on Fusion became consistently more extreme and their rhetoric more impassioned. For example, Malan, speaking at Burghersdorp, described Fusion as a device of the Rand capitalists, who,

43. The Star 7 October 1933.

44. See the correspondence between Roos, Esselen and Smuts, 11 November 1933 and 1 December 1933, published in Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.568.

45. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, pp.261-2.

he said:

...wanted General Smuts and General Hertzog together in one party, so that if it came to shooting down the workers of the Witwatersrand once again, General Smuts would be in a position to shelter himself behind General Hertzog. (46)

A protracted tour of the Cape rural areas by Malan, during which rhetoric of this type formed the basis of his speeches, consolidated the existing anti-Fusion forces in the Cape but apparently did little to extend the appeal of the Malanite policy. Nor did the revival in the Transvaal of the Republican Bond - an inner-party pressure group within the National Party practically defunct for the last three years - win much support. It extended invitations to both Hertzog and Malan to "embrace the active republican ideal". The former responded with no more than an acknowledgement of the receipt of the invitation, the latter expressed his enthusiasm for a republic but made no move to associate himself with the Bond. (47)

The position of the Government in regard to the Fusion policy of its constituent Parties continued strong throughout the remaining months of 1933. One analyst's estimate held that Hertzog could count on a parliamentary following of 119 out 150 members if he went ahead with his Fusion policy. (48) Meanwhile, further hurdles facing Fusion were cleared without difficulty. The fortunes of the South African Party in Natal during 1933 might have led Smuts to anticipate considerably more opposition to Party union in this province than in the Cape, but here too, the jettisoning of the Malanites had an enormous positive effect. At the Natal South African Party Congress, which opened on 15 November, (49) Smuts enunciated the three cardinal principles upon which Fusion would be accomplished. These were:

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46. Die Burger 17 October 1933.

47. The Natal Mercury 6 November 1933.

48. The Star 8 November 1933.

49. Reported in The Natal Mercury 16 November 1933.

That South Africa was a nation and that South Africa was first; That the Constitution and South Africa's membership in the British Commonwealth of Nations would be maintained and continued; That there would be no racialism.

The projected Party union, he claimed, was "the translation into fact" of the South African Party's principles of conciliation and co-operation. Membership of the new Party would not be a "hotch-potch affair", but the distinction would be between a "wider" nationalism and the "narrow" nationalism of the Afrikaans- and English-speaking extremists. It would be a case of "nationalism" versus "sectionalism". In passing, Smuts provided a defence of his assistance to Malan during the election campaign earlier that year. He said:

...I understood what I was doing. I understood that if ever there were a stirring of the waters again, no one could blame the South African Party. We played the game. We stood honourably and scrupulously by our undertakings.

This extract from The Natal Mercury<sup>(50)</sup> shows the degree of enthusiasm with which Smuts's speech in particular and the Fusion policy in general were received:

General Smuts rose amid tremendous applause to reply to the debate. He wished, he said, to express his deepest gratitude to Natal. Never in his political life had he been more heartened than by the line taken by this Congress. There was no doubt that the present Congress had been regarded as being likely to express dissent. It was expected that there would not be unanimity. In actual fact the Congress had proved more unanimous than any of the other Congresses. Natal had set an example....

This statement exaggerated the extent to which Fusion was welcomed by the people of Natal, but in respect of popular support the South African Party was unquestionably beginning to improve its position. A parliamentary by-election was held in the Durban constituency of Umbilo on 23 November. The South African Party failed to recover this

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50. 16 November 1933.



seat, which it had lost at the General Election, but it significantly reduced the Labour majority.<sup>(51)</sup>

At the beginning of December, Hertzog and Havenga undertook extensive speaking tours of the Cape, hoping to wean as many Cape Nationalists as possible away from Malan. In the speeches of both leaders, the effort was made to place Party union firmly within the context of Nationalist ideals. This "ministerialist invasion" provoked strong reaction from the Malan group, but in South African Party circles there was no evidence of an adverse response to the association of Fusion with Nationalist principles. On the contrary, the Transvaal South African Party Congress, which opened on 6 December, passed a resolution unanimously opposing the principle of Fusion.<sup>(52)</sup> The agenda for the Congress included only one item which could be construed as disapproval of Party union. This motion came from a Party branch which complained that under the Fusion agreement the Nationalists would have a permanent majority in both Cabinet and Parliament. However, the trend of political developments showed the absurdity of this contention, and it did not receive serious consideration in the deliberations of the Congress. On 11 December the Free State South African Party Congress opened, and here too a unanimous vote in favour of Fusion was obtained, together with a vote of appreciation for "the great courage displayed by General Hertzog in his efforts to bring about the fusion of the Nationalist and South African Parties".<sup>(53)</sup> Smuts evidently felt sufficiently confident of pro-Fusion verdicts at these Congresses to devote comparatively little time in his speeches to the question of Party union and to give outlines

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51. The election results in the Umbilo constituency were:

<u>May 1933</u>		<u>November 1933</u>	
Colonel R.T. McArthur (Labour)	2960	D.C. Burnside (Labour)	1459
J.R. Walker (South African Party)	1349	H.P. Borlase (South African	
Majority	<u>1611</u>	Party)	1282
		E. Ashburner (Provincial)	678
		H. Dold (Independent)	55
		Majority	<u>177</u>

52. The Star 7 December 1933.

53. The Star 12 December 1933.

instead of certain economic projects planned by the Government - for example, a scheme under which unemployment relief would be extended to blacks and provisions for the expansion of the mining industry and increased aid to agriculture. Thereafter, Smuts undertook a speaking tour of the Cape, in which his eagerness to facilitate union with the Hertzog Nationalists showed itself in signs of a less determined stand on his part in regard to the Native question.<sup>(54)</sup>

Despite some setbacks in October, then, the political developments of the last three months of 1933 showed the ascendancy of the forces working towards a Fusion of the two major Parties. In January of the new year, new developments began to check the tide which had been running so strongly in favour of Party union. In the first place, there was the failure of the attempt to reconcile Hertzog and Roos. The reasons for this failure are shrouded in obscurity. The publication of Roos's correspondence with Smuts in early December<sup>(55)</sup> led the public to assume that the Roosite group would join the projected United Party. Yet the most immediate sequel of this correspondence was the summoning on 30 January 1934 of a congress of Roos supporters at Bloemfontein for the purpose of founding a new party, the Centre Party. Roos later explained why he had dissociated himself from the Fusion movement, saying that since the correspondence of early December he had heard no word from the Party leaders.<sup>(56)</sup> Possibly Hertzog had no desire to include in the new Party the potentially disruptive, although partly played-out, charisma of Roos. Secondly, the publicity which preceded the impending visit to South Africa of Prince George,<sup>(57)</sup> brother of the Prince of Wales, in February 1934, tended to influence feelings on the status issue. This was

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54. Smuts was said to have actively promoted the appointment to the position of South African Minister Plenipotentiary in Washington of Ralph Close, an ex-South African Party MP, who was described by The Natal Mercury (20 December 1933) as "one of the most stubborn opponents of the Northern outlook on Native Affairs".

55. The Star 6 December 1933.

56. The Natal Mercury 6 February 1934.

57. Later King George VI.

particularly dangerous in view of the fact that the most important piece of legislation planned by Hertzog for the 1934 Parliamentary session was an Act defining South Africa's sovereign independent status in terms of the Statute of Westminster of 1930. This Act was seen by Hertzog as a necessary prologue to the conclusion of the negotiations on Fusion. <sup>(58)</sup>

The most significant new development in January 1934 was the healing of the breach between Malan and N.J. van der Merwe. On 9 January, a member of the Civil Service Commission on bilingualism resigned because he felt the new Government placed less emphasis on bilingualism than had its predecessor. Van der Merwe himself had had some misgivings about the language policy of the Government, but this resignation came to him as "a great shock". <sup>(59)</sup> The same day, he met the other leading Free State opponents of Fusion, and a decision was taken to fight against Party union and to work for the retention of the National Party. On 18 January, a congress of Free State anti-Fusionists was held at Bloemfontein. There, for the first time, Van der Merwe accepted the active leadership of the group. <sup>(60)</sup> Malan now resumed correspondence with Van der Merwe, and it became apparent that Hertzog could expect the presence of a united and vocal anti-Fusion fifth column in his Party caucus during the Parliamentary session which was to commence at the end of January. This presented Hertzog with a different problem, for he was reluctant to expel or take any action against this group, the majority of whom he hoped ultimately to reconcile to the idea of Party union.

The Malan-Van der Merwe pact promised to become the vanguard of a reborn, purified Afrikaner Nationalism with a more pronounced consciousness of race and an open commitment to the severance of the Commonwealth connection. This group would clearly present itself as the sole champion of Afrikaner sectional interests, taking over the role

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58. See below, p.166.

59. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, p.264.

60. Ibid., p.265.

traditionally associated with Hertzog and in this way making inroads upon Hertzog's projected new political base, the United Party. On 13 January, a new split occurred along racial lines in the Labour Party. A group of Afrikaner Labour leaders left the Party after their motion calling for the inclusion of an acknowledgement of divine guidance in the programme of principles had been rejected by the Labour Party Congress.<sup>(61)</sup> Die Burger<sup>(62)</sup> now claimed that the resignation of the Afrikaner Labourites was the prelude to a larger defection of Afrikaners from Labour, arguing that these Afrikaners now saw their salvation in the National Party, and were joining forces with the Malan-Van der Merwe group to work for the Party's retention. A Malanite economic programme, based on an appeal to the Platteland and to the working-classes, was now enunciated in a press interview.<sup>(63)</sup> The Malanite group meanwhile remained within the National Party and continued to attend caucus meetings, in the knowledge that Hertzog could not easily take steps to dislodge them, and that they could choose their own moment to constitute an independent opposition party.

For the most part, the changing political circumstances of January 1934 brought about no weakening of the bond between the South African Party and the Hertzog Nationalists. Perhaps in an attempt to drive Smuts and Hertzog apart and reunite the National Party under his own leadership, Malan opened correspondence with Hertzog on 29 January, ostensibly for the purpose of reconciling differences within the Party on the question of Fusion. Hertzog replied the following day welcoming "another attempt in the interests of the Afrikaner people to prevent further division and dispute".<sup>(64)</sup>

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61. The Star 13 January 1934.

62. 16 January 1934.

63. The Natal Mercury, 20 January 1934, described this programme as "a plan for the nationalisation of construction on a scientific basis, which has a touch of President Roosevelt and Herr Adolf Hitler about it".

64. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.611.



Malan's motives in this approach have been guessed at;<sup>(65)</sup> Hertzog, on the other hand, probably realised that Malan "refused under any circumstances to work together with Smuts in one Party",<sup>(66)</sup> and hoped that the negotiations would provide him with another opportunity to demonstrate the "reasonableness" of his position in regard to Malan. That Hertzog did not expect any positive result from the reconciliation talks is supported by the fact that he chose this moment to promote the passing of a resolution by Free State Senators and MP's calling for the expulsion of the three declared Free State Malanite MP's<sup>(67)</sup> from the central executive of the provincial Party and from the Nationalist caucus.<sup>(68)</sup>

Discussions between Hertzog and Malan opened on 4 February and continued at intervals for roughly a week.<sup>(69)</sup> The substance of the discussions was confirmed in an exchange of letters between Hertzog and F.C. Erasmus, organizing secretary of the Party in the Cape. These letters were subsequently published in the press on 16 February. Briefly, the Cape Head Committee, for whom Malan acted, asked for reassurances from Hertzog on four specific points. In the first place, they asked that the new Party should be composed of South Africans of either language group with the same inner political convictions, this provision to be tested by the founding of the Party on a fixed basis of national principles reconcilable with the principles of the National Party. Secondly, they required that South Africa's sovereign independent status should be described in unambiguous terms

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65. T. Dunbar Moodie (The Rise of Afrikanerdom (1975) p.136) believes that genuine commitment to the cause of Afrikaner Volkseenheid prompted Malan's "determined efforts" at reconciliation in January and February 1934. He also suggests that Malan was under grassroots pressure from local branches of the National Party, where support for Hertzog was much stronger than the decision of the Cape Congress of October 1933 might have suggested.

66. A.C. Cilliers, Generaal Hertzog en Hereniging (1941) p.28.

67. C.R. Swart, N.J. van der Merwe and J.J. Haywood.

68. The Natal Mercury, 2 February 1934, suggested that Hertzog was following a "divide and rule" policy towards his opponents.

69. See van den Heever, op.cit., pp.612 et seq.

in the programme of principles of the new Party. Thirdly, that members of the new Party should enjoy the right to make propaganda for a Republic. Finally, that "existing constitutional anomalies" - including the appointment of non-South African Governor-Generals, the retention of the right of appeal to the Privy Council, and the continuing existence of British or dual nationality in South Africa - should be removed.

Hertzog replied to these points as follows. In regard to the first, adherence to the principles of the new Party would alone determine membership. The principles would be "such as are agreed upon by the leaders of the Parties and confirmed by the congresses of the two Parties. Seeing that the basis of principles of the new Party must first be approved by the congresses of the National Party, there can be no doubt that it will have to be...reconcilable with the principles of the National Party". Covering the second point, he replied that there was no doubt regarding South Africa's sovereign independent status, and no principle should be included which gave the impression that South Africa doubted of her sovereign independence. In regard to the third, he gave an assurance that no member of the new Party would be denied the right to advocate any form of government. Finally, he answered that constitutional anomalies would be attended to, and there was a Bill shortly to be introduced into Parliament for that purpose.

A further exchange of correspondence followed, in which Hertzog elaborated to the satisfaction of the Cape Nationalists on the replies he had given. On February 15, Erasmus wrote to Hertzog: <sup>(70)</sup>

After the satisfactory outcome of this correspondence the representatives of the four organizations of the National Party on the Federal Council, working in co-operation, shall draw up a preliminary basis for the new Party. If with a view to attainment of our mutual purpose any alterations may subsequently seem to you or to any other member to be desirable

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70. The Star 16 February 1934.

these shall be submitted to the Council for its approval. Thereafter the basis shall be submitted to the National Party Congresses for their own approval.

Hertzog replied the same day:

With regard to the procedure suggested by the Head Committee, I have no objection that in the drawing up of the basis of principles there should be co-operation with the Federal Council as suggested, with this alteration, however, viz. that if it should happen...that I should differ from the Federal Council on one point or another, the basis as put forward by me...shall be laid before the National Party Congresses, with the simultaneous laying before them of the basis as recommended by the Federal Council, leaving it then to the Congresses to decide on the respective recommendations.

Hertzog was in fact doing no more than defining the consultative process within the National Party, but the absence of any mention of Smuts created the impression that the South African Party was to be presented with a fait accompli in the form of a basis of principles which it was to be called upon to accept or reject. The implication was that Smuts would not be consulted in the compilation of a programme of principles. While Malan praised Hertzog for "the cordiality and deep seriousness with which he had striven to come to an agreement",<sup>(71)</sup> reaction in South African Party ranks was swift and violent. The Natal Mercury accused Hertzog of betraying Smuts, and its Parliamentary reporter declared that the opinion amongst the majority of English-speaking South African Party MP's was that Fusion was off. A deputation of these MP's was reported to have visited Smuts and conveyed this opinion to him. Smuts in his turn visited Hertzog, and was reported to have come away from the meeting "looking extremely worried".<sup>(73)</sup>

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71. O. Pirow, J.B.M. Hertzog (n.d.) p.173.

72. 17 February 1934.

73. The Natal Mercury 17 February 1934. An account of this meeting is published in Pirow, op.cit., pp.176-7.

Smuts was aware that the South African Party had accepted Fusion only on the implicit understanding that Malan would be excluded. He saw, too, that public indignation at the Hertzog-Malan reconciliation was directed not so much at the fact that South African Party leaders were apparently to be excluded from participation in the drawing up of the programme of principles as at the principle of Malan's inclusion in the new Party. To accept this would be tantamount to capitulation to the National Party. If Fusion were to go forward upon the basis conceived of by Smuts, it was necessary that he should provoke from Hertzog a statement which would be interpreted by both the Malanites and the South African Party as a recantation. At their meeting of 17 February, Smuts obtained from Hertzog a full explanation of the ground covered in his correspondence with the Cape Nationalist Head Committee. Hertzog claimed - not without justification - that he had given no assurances on constitutional questions of which Smuts had not already been aware, and that the draft programme he had mentioned in his correspondence with Erasmus would in fact be one negotiated and agreed upon between Smuts and himself. These assurances, because privately given, were insufficient, and Smuts now addressed a letter to Hertzog setting out his views on the situation, together with a message to the effect that he intended to hand it to the press.

In penning this letter, Smuts appears to have come close to over-reaching himself, because its tone and content<sup>(74)</sup> brought the future of Party co-operation into peril. Esselen eased the situation, however, by urging Smuts to delay the publication of this letter and by arranging a second meeting with Hertzog the following day.<sup>(75)</sup> At this meeting, Smuts attempted to achieve his objective through a less aggressive

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74. This letter appears to have been destroyed; it is, at least, not published in Van der Poel's edition of Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V. The objection against its "tone and content" were noted in Hertzog's diary, quoted in Pirow, op.cit., p.178.

75. Alan Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) pp.203-4.



approach. He expressed surprise that Hertzog had responded in the way he had to his letter; "that was never his intention. He had intended the very opposite and it was written to find a bridge".<sup>(76)</sup> He requested that Hertzog should return his letter and he would write another, less crudely phrased.

This meeting and the exchange of correspondence<sup>(77)</sup> which followed at once sealed the doom of Hertzog-Malan co-operation and ensured that the path of Fusion as envisaged by Smuts would be considerably smoothed. Malan made no immediate move to withdraw from his agreement with Hertzog, although certain of his supporters advised him to do so,<sup>(78)</sup> but it was clear that the Smuts-Hertzog exchanges of 17 and 18 February ruled him out of Fusion. On 21 February 1934 Smuts claimed victory in a letter to M.C. Gillett:<sup>(79)</sup>

...you will be amused to hear that I have had this week a most hectic time politically. General Hertzog took it upon himself to make peace with Dr. Malan and to conclude the peace in an exchange of letters which left the poor South African party in the air. My little plan seemed all gone and I was beginning to make other plans for the future. But then I tackled the General with the result that he left the Doctor in the air, and again returned to unity with the South African party. A right-about-face in one week! That is how we carry on in South Africa. What Dr. Malan is thinking of it all Lord only knows. But I am not yet rejoicing as there may be another somersault soon. The Malanites are determined to wreck the fusion of parties and the coming together of races. But Hertzog cannot now drop the South African party without coming a nasty cropper, and I think he genuinely desires racial peace.

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76. Pirow, op.cit., pp.178-9.

77. The Smuts-Hertzog letters of 18 February were published in The Star 19 February 1934.

78. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.629.

79. Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, p.578.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FUSION: THE TRIUMPH OF SMUTS FEBRUARY 1934 - DECEMBER 1934

The Hertzog-Smuts accord of 18 February was not immediately received by either the South African Party or the Malanites as a dramatic turn-about in the situation which had been developing over the past two weeks. Strictly speaking, Hertzog had retracted none of the pledges he had recently made to the Cape Head Committee, although the assurances he had given Smuts showed that he was prepared to give priority to agreement with the South African Party rather than with the Nationalist anti-Fusionists. In signifying his goodwill, Hertzog could not really have gone any further than this. In the absence of a public recantation by Hertzog, however, much of the apprehension regarding Fusion which had been generated in South African Party circles by the correspondence with Erasmus, remained. A South African Party caucus meeting was held on 20 February, at which it was suggested that the Fusion terms should be published earlier than the end of the Parliamentary session, as had been agreed by Smuts and Hertzog. This suggestion clearly aimed at precipitating a decision before Hertzog could be manoeuvred into making still more concessions to Malan. Commenting on this meeting, The Natal Mercury reported the "strong impression" that Fusion was now out of the question.<sup>(1)</sup>

For his part, Malan did nothing to allay South African Party fears that Fusion as they had conceived it was now dead. He embarked upon a speaking tour of the Transvaal, during which he attempted to offset the Hertzog-Smuts agreement of 18 February by emphasizing his own interpretation

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1. The Natal Mercury 21 February 1934. This newspaper was evidently wrong in forming so pessimistic an impression, as Smuts's letter to Gillett of the same date (see above, p.162) gives no indication that the caucus now contained a significant anti-Fusion component.

of the significance of the Hertzog-Cape Head Committee agreement. At a mass-meeting in Johannesburg on 20 February, Malan said that Hertzog was bound in his forthcoming negotiations with Smuts by his earlier contract with the Cape National Party. He rejected the idea of a centre party embracing the moderates of both Parties, declaring: "I do not believe in moderates, in people who will not battle for an ideal. A party of moderates never does anything." The significance of the new Party, he said, was that it would range "national-minded" elements against those who were not "national-minded". One test of a person's "national-mindedness" was his willingness to accept the full implications of South Africa's sovereign independence.<sup>(2)</sup> At Brits the following day Malan went even further, stating that the new Party would be created only on the basis of lines decided upon by Hertzog and himself, and adding that any advantage the South African Party had hoped to gain from Fusion had been removed by his agreement with Hertzog.<sup>(3)</sup> Later the same day he pronounced: "As far as I can judge, Fusion is now off for good. Fusion is dead."<sup>(4)</sup> In practice, Malan was declaring support for a Party realignment which would involve no more than the accession to the National Party of those in the South African Party who, by virtue of "inner conviction", belonged with the Nationalists.

Clearly, these pronouncements were intended as a provocation to the South African Party and were meant to take the edge off the reassurance which had been provided by the Hertzog-Smuts agreement. Hertzog was quick to repudiate Malan, saying that he had "misunderstood" the correspondence with the Cape Head Committee.<sup>(5)</sup> (At the same time, Hertzog in his diary expressed doubts about the sincerity of Malan's "peace initiative". He feared that Malan was simply "carrying on the struggle in a new manner".<sup>(6)</sup>) In the face

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2. The Star 21 February 1934.

3. The Star 22 February 1934.

4. The Star 22 February 1934.

5. The Natal Mercury 24 February 1934.

6. C.M. van den Heever, Generaal J.B.M. Hertzog (1944) p.629.

of Hertzog's censure, Malan retreated a little. On 28 February he gave an interview to Die Vaderland, in which he appeared to accept without reservation Hertzog's non-racial definition of "Afrikaner". He also denied that the Cape Head Committee's correspondence with Hertzog had aimed at preventing negotiations between Smuts and Hertzog on the terms of Fusion. The assurances he had demanded on constitutional issues were not matters to be included in the Party programme, he said, although they "could be included in the programme of action if there were still a need for this when the New Party came into being".<sup>(7)</sup>

The conciliatory tone adopted by Malan in this interview caused some consternation among his followers.<sup>(8)</sup> It also led The Star to believe that Malan would be a member of the new Party,<sup>(9)</sup> but it did not alter the rather sullen "wait and see" attitude which prevailed in Natal and Cape South African Party circles. Here, South African Party opposition to Nationalist extremism as typified by the Malan group was too deep-rooted to be shifted by a single conciliatory statement. Particularly amongst English-speaking Party supporters, the confusing events of February must have gone a long way towards dissipating the confidence in Smuts's policy which had been built up over the last six months. This confidence had been based on the feeling that Fusion would cast the radical Nationalists into the wilderness forever and tame the group which remained behind, establishing a permanent South African Party preponderance in the politics of the country. To many, the Hertzog-Smuts agreement of 18 February signified no more than Smuts's acquiescence in the retention of the radical Nationalist strand in the new Party. The feeling was that Smuts had betrayed the South African Party to the Nationalists. From now on certain elements in his Party remained suspicious of every step which Smuts took.

These suspicions were presently increased with the

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7. Quoted in The Natal Mercury 1 March 1934.

8. The Natal Mercury 2 March 1934.

9. The Star 1 March 1934.



announcement by the Government of the introduction of two Bills to "translate the Statute of Westminster into South African law". Both Parties saw the definition of South Africa's sovereign independence as an essential prerequisite for Fusion. It was, in a sense, the price demanded by Hertzog for Fusion, as it signified the acceptance by the South African Party of national independence and of the cultural and political equality of the Afrikaner for which the National Party had fought. As one writer has expressed it:

The two demands, for equality between Afrikaners and British on the soil of South Africa, and equality of status between South African and Great Britain, were interwoven. Afrikaner pride saw in the latter the sign and symbol of the former. (10)

There are also grounds for believing that Hertzog - possibly under pressure from Malan - deliberately raised the status issue at this stage with the intention of creating difficulty for Smuts. He believed that Smuts would never carry his whole Party with him and after a South African Party split, he would be better able to dictate the terms of Fusion and thus dominate the new Party.<sup>(11)</sup> If this was Hertzog's intention, then it occurred at a particularly favourable moment, since it distracted attention from the campaign, both within and outside Parliament, against the mismanagement of farmers' problems by the Minister of Agriculture, Kemp.

The political controversy over the Status Bills opened even before the terms of the new legislation had been made known. The Status Bills were first presented as a contentious issue on 5 March by the Malanite MP, C.W.M. du Toit. At a meeting at Fransch Hoek, he announced that Hertzog would soon introduce legislation on the constitutional question which

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10. W.K. Hancock, Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, vol.I: Problems of Nationality 1918-36 (1937) p.269.

11. See Smuts's own comment in his letter to A.B. Gillett, 26 May 1934, quoted on p.178 below. There are serious objections to this interpretation, however, since Hertzog was well aware of Smuts's determination not to enter Fusion without the support of his whole Party.

would re-unite the National Party and tear the South African Party asunder, adding that the South African Party was, for this reason, "dead scared" of the Status Bills.<sup>(12)</sup> The Natal Mercury - which pointed out ironically that Du Toit was, technically speaking, co-operating with the South African Party in a Coalition Government - saw this attack as part of a fresh wave of Malanite provocation of English-speakers in the South African Party, the aim of which was to drive a wedge between men like Marwick, Nicholls, Stallard and Coulter and the remainder of the Party.<sup>(13)</sup> Other South African Party organs were less alarmist - The Star<sup>(14)</sup> did not accept the rumour that the Status Bills were to be drafted on a Malanite basis - but grass-root Party suspicion of the Bills was confirmed by a speech made by Malan at Stellenbosch on 8 March. He claimed that the new Bills would enshrine the rights of neutrality and of secession, adding that this would mean the end of Fusion, since Smuts denied these rights.<sup>(15)</sup> Smuts replied to this speech "deeply deploring" Malan's efforts to wreck Fusion and warning him that he would never split the South African Party on the status issue,<sup>(16)</sup> but Hertzog made no attempt to repudiate the interpretation Malan had put on the Status Bills. The obvious conclusion for the public to draw from Hertzog's silence was that he endorsed the Malanite interpretation.

The evident Malanite determination to highlight the difficulties created by the Status Bills for the South African Party probably did more than anything else to provoke the exaggeratedly alarmist reaction to the Bills in certain English-speaking South African Party circles. For example, Die Burger<sup>(17)</sup> alleged that the South African Party caucus of 13 March had split over the issue of the Bills. The Natal Mercury<sup>(18)</sup> responded by describing the Bills as proof of

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12. Die Burger 6 March 1934.

13. The Natal Mercury 7 March 1934.

14. 8 March 1934.

15. Die Burger 9 March 1934.

16. The Star 10 March 1934.

17. 14 March 1934.

18. 15 March 1934.

Hertzog's lack of goodwill in regard to racial co-operation, adding: "It is now obvious why Dr. Malan declared himself to be satisfied with the Prime Minister's constitutional intentions." In Natal, the Eastern Cape, and in parts of the Western Cape and the Rand, it was clear that disillusionment with the South African Party, with Coalition and with the policy of Fusion, would flow from the feeling that the Status Bills were objectionable per se and doubly pernicious because they seemed to represent the capitulation of Smuts and Hertzog to Malan. From Smuts's point of view, the obvious danger was the loss of a large section of English-speaking support. Fusion carried out in these circumstances would in effect amount to no more than the creation of a racial bloc, a hereniging settlement upon the basis of National Party principles as advocated by Malan.

For the moment, however, the South African Party leadership took no steps to meet this situation apart from making occasional replies to Malanite propaganda. On 20 March the Bills were laid before the Party caucuses. The Nationalists, including the anti-Fusion group, gave the legislation their full approval. The South African Party caucus, probably to the surprise of the Party leaders, showed very little opposition, only 3 MP's - Stallard, Coulter and Marwick - dissenting.<sup>(19)</sup> This vote probably gave the Party leaders confidence in going ahead with their support of the Bills, and Party organs in the Transvaal and Cape now joined in an attempt to minimize the effect of English-speaking disapproval of these measures. The Star had consistently supported the Government and the South African Party leadership on this issue, and on 21 March, the Cape Times and the Cape Argus both contained editorials which sided with the official Party line and took The Natal Mercury severely to task for its "premature protest" against the Status Bills.<sup>(20)</sup>

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19. The Star 20 March 1934.

20. The Natal Mercury 21 March 1934.

On 22 March the text of the Bills was published. Briefly,<sup>(21)</sup> the first of the two proposed Acts<sup>(22)</sup> "implied the theory that the sovereignty of the Union was self-derived".<sup>(23)</sup> Sections of this Act reasserted that acts of the British parliament applied to South Africa only when re-enacted by the South African parliament, provided that the Statute of Westminster should be deemed to be an act of the parliament of the Union; and ruled that the executive government of the Union was vested in the King (or in his representative) acting upon the advice of his ministers in the Union. Further sections provided for the deletion of the words "of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland" from the oath of allegiance to be taken to the king, and in defining the qualification for membership of the Union parliament deleted the phrase "a British subject of European descent" and substituted for it the phrase "a person of European descent who has acquired Union nationality". The second of the two Acts<sup>(24)</sup> provided the Union with its own Royal Great Seal and Signet.

These two Acts together seemed to commit the South African Party to the support of a constitutional position which it had hitherto consistently denied. In particular, these Acts appeared to confirm the Malanite - and indeed the Hertzogian - argument that the Crown was divisible, and that South Africa enjoyed the right of neutrality and of secession from the Commonwealth.<sup>(25)</sup> It was probably to avoid the

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21. For a recent exposition of the constitutional significance of the Status Acts, see D.O. Rhoodie, Van Koloniale Onderhorigheid tot Soewereine Onafhanklikheid (1974) pp.200 et seq.
  22. U.G. 69 of 1934.
  23. Hancock, Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, vol.I, p.279.
  24. U.G. 70 of 1934.
  25. This study cannot attempt to examine the finer constitutional points which were at issue. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Hancock - a leading exponent of the Commonwealth - wrote in 1937:  
/The effect of this Act/ was to remove all limitations upon the delegation of the King's executive power. Under its provisions, it would be in order that while the King's ministers in Great Britain were advising him to declare war, his ministers in South Africa should be advising his representative there to declare South Africa's neutrality.  
(Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, vol.I, p.680).



appearance of claiming a victory over Smuts and the South African Party that Hertzog remained silent throughout the debate,<sup>(26)</sup> entrusting the passage of the Bills instead to Pirow. In the course of the debate, the three South African Party MP's who had opposed the Bills at the caucus of 20 March used constitutional arguments to demonstrate that the proposed legislation in fact went beyond the provisions of the Statute of Westminster. They claimed, for example, that common allegiance within the Empire was not compatible with the differential limitation of the powers of the Crown in separate Dominions. Such a limitation of the powers of the Crown was entailed in the provision that the executive power of the Union was vested not in the king but in "the king on the advice of his Ministers".<sup>(27)</sup> Stallard, in fact, went as far as to take the unusual course of opposing the first reading of the Bills.<sup>(28)</sup> During parliamentary recesses, Stallard, Coulter and Marwick supplemented their constitutional arguments by addressing mass meetings in most of the centres in which there were large concentrations of English-speakers. At these meetings, they laid heavy emphasis on the emotional bond felt by English-speakers for the British connection, and, stressing the link between these Bills and the movement towards Fusion, began to mobilize English-speaking opposition to the proposed merger of Parties. The Status Bills were represented as a capitulation to extreme Afrikaner Nationalism, and as a renunciation of the position in regard to the constitutional status of South Africa which had traditionally been adopted by the South African Party. For example, at a meeting in Durban, Stallard declared:

We of the South African Party have stood for  
that the Crown is one and indivisible....Now

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26. Van den Heever, (op.cit., p.622) suggests this reason for Hertzog's silence. Rhodie (op.cit., p.202n) points out that Nationalist Ministers Havenga, Grobler, Kemp and Fourie were also silent during this debate. Smuts, who himself took a leading part in the debate, explained in the House that the Bills had been entrusted to Pirow because he was regarded as "more neutral" than Hertzog or himself. (House of Assembly Debates 11 April 1934 vol.XXII col.2284).
27. House of Assembly Debates 9 April 1934 vol.XXII col.1877.
28. Ibid., 22 March 1934 vol.XXII col.1715 et seq.

that has been challenged. I say that the intention of these Bills is to give an interpretation to the Constitution, not upon the lines we have hitherto held but to give the interpretation claimed hitherto by the Prime Minister and Dr. Malan. (29)

The implication was that this surrender to Afrikaner Nationalism on the status question was merely the prelude to the wholesale surrender of South African Party principles and their engulfment in an enlarged National Party under Fusion. This view received some endorsement from the English-speaking press in the Transvaal when the Pretoria News came out in opposition to the Bills, saying that they "contained the terms upon which Malan was prepared to back Fusion". (30)

Extra-parliamentary opposition to the Status Bills in Natal, the Cape and Transvaal gathered momentum during April, under the influence of organizations such as the New Guard - a semi-political body pledged to the propagation of the Imperial cause in South Africa. In Natal, the campaign was spearheaded by the Provincial, Home Rule and Democratic<sup>(31)</sup> Parties. Several meetings organized by local MP's in defence of the Bills were broken up and the speakers refused an audience.<sup>(32)</sup> In the Eastern Cape and on the Rand, meetings in several South African Party constituencies<sup>(33)</sup> passed resolutions instructing their MP's to vote against the Bills. A petition began to circulate in Durban requesting the Governor-General to withhold his assent.<sup>(34)</sup> The politically impotent black population, too, began to express protest against what it took to be the loosening of the bond with Britain and the Empire. At a meeting of voters in the Transkei constituency on 20 April the MP, A.O.B. Payn, was

29. The Natal Mercury 5 April 1934.

30. Quoted in The Natal Mercury 26 March 1934.

31. Founded in 1933 by Major G.R. Richards, until April 1933 South African Party MP for Greyville, and later absorbed into the Dominion Party.

32. The Natal Mercury 6 April 1934.

33. These constituencies included Grahamstown (The Natal Mercury 5 April), East London North (The Star 7 April), Von Brandis (The Natal Mercury 7 April), Queenstown (The Natal Mercury 9 April) and Transkei (The Star 20 April).

34. The Natal Mercury 12 April 1934.

warned that the Bills were "causing grave anxiety among Natives". On the same day, the Transkeian Bunga passed a resolution declaring that it "viewed with alarm" the possibility that "the protection of the British Crown may be interfered with to the detriment of the Native people of the Union". Fears were expressed for the safety of the Cape Native franchise:

The vote of the King having been taken away there remained only a two-thirds majority, which was a sufficient safeguard under a normal Party government but of diminished value now that Coalition was an accomplished fact and that Fusion was under serious consideration. (35)

Apprehensions concerning the effect of the Status legislation on the black population seem to have been confined in South African Party parliamentary circles to Hofmeyr.<sup>(36)</sup> But this reservation, like the other reservations about the Status Bills which must have been felt by many South African Party parliamentarians did not detract from the impressive solidarity of South African Party support for the Bills. In the debates in the House, frequent mention was made of the opposition in the constituencies, but the tendency was to write this off as the result of a mischievous propaganda campaign in the press. Public opinion in Natal and the Eastern Cape was, it was asserted, solidly behind the Bills.<sup>(37)</sup> South African Party solidarity on the Status issue was another testimony to the efficient working of the Party disciplinary machinery at parliamentary level, but it was considerably aided by four other factors. In the first place, Malan was absent from the House owing to an attack of appendicitis. He had made his views known in an interview

35. The Natal Mercury 21 April 1934. Hancock (Survey of Commonwealth Affairs, vol.I, p.276) points out that at the time of the Statute of Westminster, the South African Government had given assurances that the powers which flowed from its enhanced status would not be used in defiance of existing moral obligations. He quotes as his source, House of Assembly Debates vol.XVII cols.2736-63. These assurances were not repeated at the time of the translation into South African law of the Statute of Westminster.

36. Alan Paton, Hofmeyr (1964) p.205.

37. See, for example, House of Assembly Debates vol.XXII, speeches of L. Egeland (11 April 1934, cols.2107 et seq) and J.A. Bowie (12 April, cols.2152 et seq).



with Die Burger,<sup>(38)</sup> in which he had given the Bills his full support, describing them as "the acceptance of its sovereign independence by South Africa itself", but his absence considerably diminished the possibility of the presentation of a "Malanite" interpretation of the Bills such as could give offence to the South African Party. In the second place, the South African Party was able to give some force to its claim that the majority of English-speakers were behind the Bills by quoting a circular letter sent out by the influential Sons of England organization. This letter commended the Bill as "a stepping stone to the lasting peace between the races in this country".<sup>(39)</sup> Thirdly, the budget introduced by Havenga on 11 April must have had a placatory effect, since it was a "prosperity" budget which reflected the country's economic recovery.<sup>(40)</sup> Finally, the parliamentary effort of the South African Party was considerably assisted by a masterly speech by Smuts, the main assertion of which was that "there was no object to be achieved by these Bills other than the declared one of expressing the existing constitutional position". He made a gesture of goodwill towards the dissidents in his Party, paying tribute to Stallard, Coulter and Marwick for their "honesty and sincerity" in opposing the Bills, and, in concluding, reminded the House that one of the intentions behind the Bills was to establish the basis for lasting racial peace:

We have had two roots of division in the past; one root was racial, the other root was constitutional. The racial root is withering. More and more you see people fraternizing, and doing away with the dead racial issues of the past....Let us now cut the other root. I hope that his Bill will cut the root of the constitutional controversies which, for a generation, have divided South Africa and

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38. 28 March 1934.

39. House of Assembly Debates 12 April 1934 vol.XXII col.2158.

40. It provided for a surplus of £4½ million, and promised a reduction in customs duties and income and super-taxes, simplified and more equitable mining taxation, further assistance to farmers, concessions to labour and a liberal programme of public works. (The Natal Mercury 9 April 1934).



convulsed it to its foundations. (41)

The virtual unanimity of the parliamentary South African Party in the debates on the Status Bills could not detract from the fact that there was wide-spread English-speaking disaffection with the Party and with Fusion. This disaffection obviously went deeper than the malicious press campaign alleged by the South African Party in the course of the debate. The Party's position in regard to its grass-root English-speaking support was not made easier by the attitude of the Malanites. Die Burger,<sup>(42)</sup> for example, offered Smuts ironic congratulations for his speech in the House, while at the conclusion of the debate F.C. Erasmus made a statement describing the Bills as "an undeniable triumph of Nationalism".<sup>(43)</sup> As English-speaking support for the South African Party and for Fusion dwindled, so the likelihood of Malanite participation in Fusion increased. So also did the possibility that the new Party would resemble a racial bloc rather than a broad-based centre party representative of all interests. A major South African Party effort was clearly necessary to recover English-speaking support.

On 4 April, Hertzog had handed Malan, and some days later Smuts, a copy of a "concept programme of principles" for the new Party,<sup>(44)</sup> based on the conclusions reached in negotiations between Hertzog and Smuts during the last few months. This "concept programme" made no mention of any constitutional stipulations which went further than the explicit provisions of the Status Bills. There was no mention of South Africa's possession of the rights of neutrality and of secession - the agreement of Smuts and Hertzog to differ on these points<sup>(45)</sup> was thus enshrined in the "concept programme". Smuts was therefore free to give

41. House of Assembly Debates 11 April 1934 vol.XXII cols.2071-2082.

42. 12 April 1934.

43. Die Burger 17 April 1934.

44. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.631.

45. For a discussion of the earlier differences between Smuts and Hertzog on the questions of neutrality and secession, see G.D. Scholtz, Hertzog en Smuts en die Britse Ryk (1975) pp.108-9.

his English-speaking supporters any reassurances on constitutional matters which did not exceed the limitations of the Status Bill.

Smuts planned his offensive for 9 May, when he was due to address a Rotary luncheon in Cape Town. In the interval, however, his position improved suddenly and unexpectedly as relations between Malan and Hertzog deteriorated once more. Malan made no response to the "concept programme" and on 8 May Hertzog approached him to ask for his opinions.<sup>(46)</sup> Malan replied that the enactment of the Status Bills had not facilitated agreement between them. The failure of Hertzog and the other Nationalist ministers to make an unambiguous statement of the divisibility of the Crown and of the rights of neutrality and secession had left the impression that a larger proportion of the "jingo elements" in the South African Party would now join the new Party. He declined to discuss the principles contained in the programme, but gave it as his opinion that Hertzog's concept came too close to Fusion (samesmelting), which conflicted with the decision of the Port Elizabeth Congress of the previous October. In reply to further questions from Hertzog, Malan declined to press charges of any specific act of commission or omission, but repeated that the feeling existed that people who were "not intended" to join the new Party would now do so. He added that the Cape Head Committee would shortly draw up its own programme of principles, to which Hertzog replied that he would wait and see how far they were in agreement. Afterwards Hertzog wrote in his diary:<sup>(47)</sup>

Malan's interview with me has left an extremely unfavourable impression. I cannot but come to the conclusion that he is preparing himself for a second split in the National Party when the next Congresses meet.

The difficulties with Malan apart, the Coalition Government, and its Nationalist component in particular, were faced with a threat from a revived Labour Party in the second

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46. Hertzog's diary account of this meeting is published in Van den Heever, op.cit., p.630.

47. Van den Heever, op.cit., p.631.

quarter of 1934. The Labour Party had recovered remarkably quickly from the loss of a large body of Afrikaner supporters in January, and had consolidated its position sufficiently to win the Krugersdorp parliamentary by-election from the Coalition Nationalists in March. Two reasons were offered for Labour's shock win in this predominantly Afrikaans-speaking constituency.<sup>(48)</sup> One was that it was a miners' protest against the Government's "indifference" to their claim to a share of the profits arising out of the gold premium, the other that the Nationalist vote was split by a disputed Party nomination contest. The swing towards Labour, particularly on the Rand, continued throughout the following two months. On 18 April the Roosite MP Bouwer joined the Labour Party. The Natal Mercury<sup>(49)</sup> reported that several Rand and Cape Nationalists were thinking of following suit, and attributed this swing partly to "the Government's blunder in introducing the Status controversy when the country was crying out for bread and butter measures". This report added that this reaction was so widespread that Grobler had called together the Transvaal Nationalist MP's to discuss the situation. It further asserted that the Labour Party was confident that it would win at least 17 seats in all parts of the country at the next election. On 1 May Roos warned the Government that the poorer classes would never support Fusion on the basis of the present economic policy, and expressed the fear that the Government's insensitivity might further strengthen the Labour Party.<sup>(50)</sup> The South African Party responded to the Labour upsurge with the creation of an Industrial Wing,<sup>(51)</sup> but the greater threat was to the National Party, as Labour's appeal was strongest in Nationalist constituencies on the

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48. The Star 22 March 1934. The result was:

M.J. van den Berg (Labour)	1964
B.J. Pienaar (Coalition Nationalist)	1252
W.G. Delport (Independent)	1214

49. 19 April 1934.

50. The Star 1 May 1934.

51. See above, p.33.

Rand in which Afrikaans-speaking workers predominated.

Against this background of difficulty for the Nationalists in the Coalition, Smuts made his appeal for English-speaking support in his speech at the Rotary luncheon in Cape Town on 9 May.<sup>(52)</sup> He set out his vision of the Commonwealth and of South Africa's place in it under the new status legislation. He argued from this premise:

The British Commonwealth is the greatest political structure that has arisen in the course of human history - by far the greatest. It is a system covering a quarter of the globe and ensuring peace and co-operation to a quarter of the human race. It is a wonderful thing and we live in this system without noticing its vast significance to the world at large.

The recent legislation, Smuts claimed, did not weaken the bond which existed between South Africa and the Commonwealth. On the contrary, he said, there were in the Status Acts "factors which make not for secession but for loyalty". But in any event it was wrong to think of the Commonwealth bond as existing only on account of some constitutional abstraction:

You can make a contract and break it, but you cannot break the roots that take you into the soil of the past. This spirit is to-day stronger than ever before in the history of the Empire. Do not let us continue to think in terms of legal bonds. They do not exist any more. Their place has been taken by this fundamental sentiment, which nothing can touch.

The effect of Smuts's speech on English-speakers - and Nationalist extremists - was redoubled by the fact that Malan, speaking on the same day at Moorreesburg, emphasized the liberating rather than the binding effect of the Status Acts ("the Acts meant that South Africa was today as free as any country in the world"), and accused Smuts of working for Fusion because he aimed at an enlarged and strengthened South African Party and a divided and weakened National Party.<sup>(53)</sup> Although he affirmed that he would work with

52. Reported in The Natal Mercury 10 May 1934.

53. The Star 10 May 1934.



Hertzog while Hertzog remained true to the assurances which he had given, the distance which separated Smuts and Malan on issues of fundamental principle had received unambiguous expression. A week later, Malan made a statement in which he confirmed his intention of joining the Fusion Party,<sup>(54)</sup> but he soon struck a more realistic note. At Paarl on 24 May he referred to the speeches made by Smuts and himself on 9 May and declared: "On that day two standpoints were set out which cannot be reconciled with each other." He concluded that his only line of action was "to fight Fusion tooth and nail".<sup>(55)</sup> A day later he spoke at Cape Town and asserted that he and his followers would never enter into Fusion while Hertzog and Smuts held conflicting interpretations on the constitutional issue. He further alleged that Smuts, the agent of Hoggenheimer, was witnessing with satisfaction the achievement of his real objective, which was to destroy the structure of Afrikanerdom. As evidence of the success of this manoeuvre, Malan pointed to the recent establishment of a Centre Party by Roos on May 12 and of a Platteland Party on May 22.<sup>(56)</sup>

On 26 May Smuts gave his impressions of the political situation in a letter to A.B. Gillett:<sup>(57)</sup>

We have weathered the storm over the status bills. Many expected confidently that my party (mostly English) would not follow me here and would go to pieces. But so far the indications are the other way. On the contrary Hertzog, who thought he would strengthen his party position by these measures, has suffered, and I doubt whether he will keep his party together when we come to amalgamation of the two parties.

In his letter, Smuts made no attempt to amplify this comment on the possibility of National Party disintegration, but The Natal Mercury<sup>(58)</sup> remarked upon the same fact and attributed

54. The Natal Mercury 16 May 1934.

55. Die Burger 25 May 1934.

56. The Star 25 May 1934.

57. J. van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V (1973) p.601.

58. 25 May 1934.

it to a "behind the scenes offensive" by South African Party leaders against the inclusion of Malan in the new Party, adding that it regarded Smuts's Rotary speech as designed more to antagonise Malan than to impress English-speakers. Meanwhile, Malan remained nominally bound to the February agreement with Hertzog and made no move to leave the Party caucus or to commit himself finally to non-participation in the Fusion Party.

On 4 June the parliamentary session ended, and on the following day the basis of Fusion as agreed upon between Smuts and Hertzog was published in the form of a constitution for the new Party.<sup>(59)</sup> The preamble declared the Party's desire for the development of the people of South Africa along "Christian-national lines". Its object was "the development of a predominant sense of South African national unity" based on the recognition of the equality of the English and Afrikaans language and culture. To this end, it sought to unite in political co-operation all who were prepared to endorse the Party's aims and principles. It further stated that the Party took "as its starting point the seven points of co-operation between the South African Party and the National Party". The Fusion basis, too, consisted of seven main points. The first, headed "Principles and Spirit of Government", provided for the conduct of government "in a spirit of South African national independence in harmony with our sovereign independent status as confirmed by the Statute of Westminster and the Status of Union Act, 1934". The Party also stated that it aimed at "the realization of the national aspirations and convictions of the people of South Africa", and "the promotion of a healthy feeling of national pride based on the fullest appreciation of the nation's spiritual and cultural heritage".

The second point elaborated on the Party's attitude towards South Africa's constitutional position. It provided for the maintenance of the unitary basis of South Africa as laid down in the South Africa Act, for the maintenance of

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59. See The Star 5 June 1934.

the status of the provinces "with the extension, when necessary...of provincial powers and functions within the framework of the South Africa Act", and for the affirmation of the existing relationship between the Union and the British Commonwealth. It confirmed the Union Flag Act, and provided for maintaining and safeguarding "the rights and privileges guaranteed to each section of the people". Clause 2(d) contained the seeds of controversy:

While the Party stands for the maintenance of the present constitutional position, no one will be denied the right to express his individual opinion about or advocate his honest convictions in connection with any change of our form of government.

This inclusion of the Nationalist demand for the right to make propaganda for a republic probably did not mean that Hertzog was still trying to persuade Malan to enter Fusion, but rather that both he and Smuts were attempting to win as much Nationalist support as possible by dispelling the impression that Fusion represented a departure from Nationalist principles. Further points guaranteed equal language rights between Afrikaans and English, declared that "the maintenance and welfare of a healthy rural population will be the subject of special effort and application", and affirmed the Party's commitment to a "civilized labour policy".

The sixth point dealt with Native policy. The document repeated the undertaking given in the Coalition agreement that a satisfactory solution of the Native question would be sought "along lines which, without depriving the native of his right of development, will recognise as paramount the essentials of European civilization", and repeated its adherence to the "fundamental principle" of Christian trusteeship, together with "the definite avoidance of race intermixture". The Fusion basis, however, added this significant clause (clause 6b):

It is recognised that a solution of the political aspect of this question on the basis of a separate representation of Europeans and Natives, or otherwise, being fundamental in character and not having hitherto been a matter of Party division,

should as far as possible be sought through agreement, and should be left to the free exercise of the discretion of individual members representing the Party in Parliament.

Because Fusion involved the loss of the identity of the two component Parties, it went without saying that the Party restraint which had operated to defeat the Native Bills since their introduction in 1926 would be removed. That the new Party declined to impose on its membership an explicit commitment to support of the Bills may perhaps be taken as a concession to the "liberal" wing of the South African Party. The final point was an unremarkable statement of the general economic policy of the new Party.

The Malanite response to the Fusion basis was predictable and followed the lines foreshadowed in the Hertzog-Malan discussions of 8 May. The Cape Head Committee published on the same day as the appearance of the Fusion statement a programme of principles setting out the terms on which it was prepared to envisage a realignment of Parties. This programme included such points as the demand for an unambiguous declaration of South Africa's sovereign independence, steps towards the abolition of British citizenship and the statement that loyalty to the Crown was voluntary on South Africa's side and might be abolished unilaterally. The Head Committee further stated that this would be presented as an alternative to Hertzog's programme at the National Party Federal Council meeting on 20 June.<sup>(60)</sup> Malan, furthermore, lost no time in publicly denouncing Hertzog's Fusion plan. The National Party would continue with or without Hertzog, he said.<sup>(61)</sup>

The reaction to the Fusion terms in certain English-speaking circles was, from Smuts's point of view, unsatisfactory. The continued antagonism of the hard-core opponents of the Status Bills - Stallard, Coulter, Marwick and The Natal Mercury<sup>(62)</sup> - was to be expected, but the unfavourable

60. The Star 6 June 1934.

61. See his speech at Heilbron, reported in The Star 6 June 1934.

62. The Natal Mercury, for example, published the Fusion basis on 6 June under the heading "Hands Up to Nationalism".



response among more moderate English-speakers gave cause for alarm. The Natal Advertiser, which had hitherto been a staunch Party organ, gave its opinion that Natal would not accept clause 2(d), and claimed that the spirit of Fusion would be destroyed if Party members were given the right to make propaganda either for a republic or a return to colonial status.<sup>(63)</sup> The frontbench MP, Leslie Blackwell, issued a statement two days later in which he deplored the "aggressive and provocative" attitude of "a militant section of Nationalists, who instead of looking upon the Status Bill as a settlement of all our constitutional problems and difficulties...regard it as a starting point for a new set of propositions and demands", one of which, the inclusion of the right to make propaganda for a republic, had weakly been included in the terms of the Fusion agreement. Blackwell had formerly given his full support to the Status Bills, but he announced his intention to oppose Fusion, as clause 2(d) was an invitation to the Malanite group to participate, and "Mr. Erasmus and I can never lie under the same political blanket".<sup>(64)</sup>

Blackwell's main objection was that he feared the Malanite group would now agree to Fusion. Whether or not this was Hertzog's intention, wholesale loss of English-speaking support for Fusion now seemed likely. Heaton Nicholls, for example, was adamant that he would not join if Malan did, although he was prepared to adopt a "wait and see" approach. He cabled to C.P. Robinson on 8 June:<sup>(65)</sup>

Backing Fusion provided Malan remains outside....  
Terms designed to offer wide umbrella to cover  
varying and private political faiths....Unless  
this done no possibility of tackling successfully  
native problem and many social and economic  
measures long overdue. Rights of private political  
conscience granted in 2(d) carry no threat to  
party's principles to maintain British connection  
since all Republicans will be with Malan. If

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63. Quoted in The Star 6 June 1934.

64. The Star 8 June 1934. See also L. Blackwell, African Occasions (1938) pp.256-7.

65. G. Heaton Nicholls, South Africa in My Time (1961) p.274.

English-speaking stood aside from Fusion it would drive academic non-racial Republicans who desire to co-operate with us into party pledged for first time to establish a republic on racial lines. Resurrected Unionist Party suffering from attitude Stallard Marwick will be extremely small and politically impotent and merely serve to strengthen Malan. If Malan joins Fusion as incited to do by Stallard Marwick manifesto (66) my future course very difficult as whole character of Fusion thereby changed since Malan would enter with little Afrikaner group professedly anti-British having Karroo outlook backed by Die Burger and thus change the whole purpose of Fusion.

Blackwell's conditional rejection and Nicholls's conditional acceptance together probably expressed the grass-root South African Party response to Fusion more accurately than did the unconditional rejection given by Stallard and The Natal Mercury. There was evidence of much discontent with the Fusion terms in Natal, the Eastern Cape and on the Rand, (67) but this discontent was probably the expression more of apprehension lest the republican propaganda clause should encourage the Malan group to enter the new Party than of a rejection in principle of the Fusion idea or of the terms under which it was to take place. This can be deduced from the fact that this opposition died down rapidly once it became increasingly clear that the Nationalist extremists would not enter Fusion after all. On 11 June a manifesto was issued by the Vigilance Committee of the National Party in the Free State - whose members included C.R. Swart and Dr. N.J. van der Merwe - denouncing the Fusion terms and demanding the recognition of the right of neutrality as a principle of the new Party and that the Party should stand for the "acceptance" rather than the "maintenance" of the British connection. (68)

On 12 June the Head Committees of the two Parties in

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66. The three opponents of the Status Bills and of Fusion had published a manifesto in The Star 7 June 1934.

67. See The Natal Mercury 11 June 1934.

68. G.D. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe (1944) pp.280-1.

the Transvaal approved the Fusion terms, unanimously in the case of the South African Party.<sup>(69)</sup> Four days later Smuts addressed his constituents at Standerton. Here he encountered the Platteland disillusionment with the agrarian policy of the Coalition Government. This had been overshadowed by the controversy surrounding the Status Bills, but had not subsided. The Fusion terms received relatively little attention in Smuts's speech. He referred to the recent parliamentary session as "the most blessed...the country had ever known" and reassured his audience of Hertzog's sincerity, but the main emphasis of his speech was on economic matters, particularly the distress of maize farmers, who continued to receive low prices for their product. The "truculence"<sup>(70)</sup> of Platteland South African Party followers was evidently caused not by suspicion of the Fusion terms - in this regard the only remarkable questions from the audience required an explanation of Roos's non-participation - but by annoyance at Kemp's "mismanagement" of the agricultural problem. This discontent with the Government's agrarian policy was manifested in demands for Kemp's resignation, and not in calls for a different political dispensation. The depth of Platteland support for Fusion can be gauged by the failure of Roos's repeated attempts to make political capital for his Centre Party out of the distress of Platteland farmers.

The most decisive prelude to Fusion occurred on 20 June, when the South African Party National Head Committee and the National Party Head Committee met separately in Pretoria to consider the Fusion terms. The Nationalist meeting began slightly earlier in the day, and news of developments there affected very largely the deliberations of the South African Party Head Committee. At the Nationalist meeting, it was apparent from the outset that there was no longer any possibility of a reconciliation between Hertzog and Malan. The Malanite group were determined to find

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69. The Star 12 June 1934.

70. This term is used by The Natal Mercury in its report of Smuts's speech 18 June 1934.

grounds to justify a break with Hertzog. They accused Hertzog of a breach of trust in publishing the Fusion agreement before its submission to the Federal Council, particularly in view of the fact that he was aware that the Cape Head Committee was still busy formulating proposals of its own. They also took exception to the statement made by Hertzog at the Federal Council meeting that, in his view, any assurances he had given in his correspondence with the Cape Head Committee were binding only on himself and not on the new Party. Finally, they argued that Hertzog had forfeited the confidence of the National Party by refusing to follow Malan's example in making an unambiguous statement on South Africa's sovereign independence.<sup>(71)</sup> The outcome of the accusations, defences and counter-accusations exchanged at the Nationalist meeting<sup>(72)</sup> was a vote of 13 to 7 in favour of acceptance of the Fusion basis. Among the dissenters were several individuals who had been over the last eighteen months the most prominent antagonists of co-operation with the South African Party - D.F. Malan, F.C. Erasmus, N.J. van der Merwe, W.A. Hofmeyr and Mrs. E.G. Jansen.<sup>(73)</sup>

News of division in the National Party meeting probably considerably enhanced the harmony of the South African Party meeting. Heaton Nicholls, at least, refused to propose the motion in favour of Fusion until he had received Smuts's assurance that Malan had opted out.<sup>(74)</sup> In the end, only one of the twenty-five members of the South African Party Head Committee - Stallard - voted against Fusion, and, at the conclusion of the meeting, Smuts issued the following statement to the Press:

This has been a most successful meeting, probably the most successful the Head Committee has ever had. The spirit of the delegates from the four provinces was magnificent. The feeling

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71. D.F. Malan, Afrikaner Volkseenheid (1959) p.170.

72. The main charges levelled by the Malan group against Hertzog are repeated and countered by O. Pirow, J.B.M. Hertzog (n.d.) pp.185-188.

73. Malan, op.cit., p.171.

74. Heaton Nicholls, op.cit., p.276.



that something big had to be done for the sake of South Africa was uppermost in their minds. They felt that this was a supreme occasion which had come to South Africa to put her house in order for the future. In that spirit they came to the decision for the cause of Fusion and the working away from the bitter party strife of the past.

The only contrary note was struck by Colonel Stallard, who, however, did so not so much because he objected to the basis of Fusion, but because of his opinion that the Status Bill had so altered the position in regard to the British Empire that he could not thereafter support Fusion. (75)

Heaton Nicholls, in another press statement, was more prosaic and more realistic in ascribing the demonstration of South African Party unity to the Malanite defection, which he referred to as "the bursting of a long, painful abscess in the body politic". Anticipating the disappearance of early apprehensions about the Fusion terms amongst English-speakers, he said:

The passing of Dr. Malan from the councils of the nation completely shatters the campaign against Fusion which has been urged by a section of the English-speaking people. All their prognostications have been falsified. Dr. Malan has been held up as the bogey to frighten the simple-minded. For weeks past we have been asked to consider Dr. Malan as the real author of Fusion for his own ends....All this moonshine can now be seen for what it is - the working of suspicious and prejudiced imagination. (76)

Stallard, meanwhile, issued a manifesto declaring his intention to form a new Party and expressing his belief that he would be supported by "a large minority" of South African Party MP's. (77) He received instant support from The Natal Mercury, (78) which referred to the proceedings at the Pretoria meetings as a "mockery and a farce" and remained unconvinced that Malan intended to remain outside Fusion. But the spectre of Malan was no longer a convincing

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75. The Star 20 June 1934.

76. The Star 21 June 1934.

77. The Star 21 June 1934.

78. 21 June 1934.

rallying point for English-speaking opposition to Fusion. The public exchange of acrimonious accusations between Hertzog, Malan and Van der Merwe, and the publication of a detailed statement by the seven opponents of Fusion on the Nationalist Federal Council showed conclusively that Malan intended the break to be final.<sup>(79)</sup> Further, Stallard's hope of catalysing a large-scale defection of English-speaking MP's was obviously going to be still-born, as, Marwick and Coulter apart, no other South African Party office-bearer or parliamentarian made any move to follow him. Even Blackwell, who had repeated his opposition to Fusion in a statement on 20 June,<sup>(80)</sup> made no serious approaches to Stallard and was evidently planning a reconciliation with Smuts. The split in the National Party, as Smuts anticipated, produced a movement towards consolidation in the South African Party which in turn ensured that the Party entered Fusion as the majority Party.<sup>(81)</sup>

The Cape Peninsula Council of the South African Party accepted the Fusion terms on 22 June, and the same day the Witwatersrand General Council of the Party voted with eleven dissentients for Fusion. Speaking at the latter meeting, Smuts accused Stallard of a racialism as naked as that of Malan and dealt with the criticisms of Fusion which had been made by Blackwell. The republican propaganda clause, he said, had been discussed at length by the South African Party Cabinet Ministers, who had agreed that "if they could get the willing acceptance of the British connection they could safely make this small concession of free speech". He also made the somewhat remarkable claim that he had tested the feelings of English-speakers in the provinces on this point "and had concluded that on the whole it was regarded as a fair settlement". He added that the event had proved

79. The Star 23 June 1934.

80. The Star 20 June 1934. For Blackwell's attitude to the Stallard group, see his African Occasions, p.257.

81. According to an estimate made by The Star on 8 November 1933, Malan could count on the support of approximately 20 Nationalist MP's, 15 in the Cape, 4 in the Free State and 1 in the Transvaal. This left Hertzog with 54 Nationalist and, after the defection of the Stallard group, 58 South African Party supporters in Parliament.

that the Fusion document was no surrender to Malan. (82) On  
25 June Smuts wrote to M.C. Gillett: (83)

...I have a very busy week behind me. All about fusion of parties. I met our Sap Head committee, the Transvaal head committee, and the general council of the party at Johannesburg - all agreed to fuse with the Nats. Dr. Malan and his friends have definitely split off. The Cape Province will largely follow Malan, and in the Free State a small party under Dr. van der Merwe. These people have definitely a racial complex and think the Dutch should keep together and apart. To me that attitude is utterly hopeless, and we see in Ireland what in the long run it leads to. Here in South Africa the position is complicated by the fact that among the English there is also a fairly strong party who favour English isolation, and they will probably form an English party under Colonel Stallard. Our work is just now also made difficult by the turmoil among our mealie farmers who are hit by low prices following on depression and severe drought in past years. Tielman Roos is exploiting this dissatisfaction, and as he is a past master in political agitation we have to be up and doing. Much of this work falls on me and I am kept on the move all the time. Hertzog is singularly silent and taking things comparatively easy. I think he is ageing and his mind is not retaining the necessary suppleness and adaptability for politics.

Smuts, here, showed some concern lest the predominantly Nationalist platteland base of the new Party should be undermined by Roos's exploitation of the agricultural distress. Probably to take the edge off the propaganda of Malan and Roos and as a counter-attack against the Labour revival, (84) he and Hertzog announced on 26 June the insertion of two additional clauses into the Fusion agreement

82. The Natal Mercury 23 June 1934.

83. Van der Poel (ed.), Selections from the Smuts Papers, vol.V, pp.603-4.

84. The revival of the Labour Party after March 1934 proved to be ephemeral and had probably lost its impetus by June 1934. This was almost certainly due to the rapid economic growth which took place in 1934. (See tables on p.119 above).

which aimed at fighting class warfare and guarding against the sacrifice of any interests to organized capitalism.<sup>(85)</sup>

Smuts probably overestimated the strength of this initial outburst of English-speaking opposition to Fusion particularly in view of the fact that the vigorous and vitriolic campaigning of the Malanites could be relied upon to consolidate English-speaking support for the new Party. On 29 June the Free State Head Committee voted by the slender majority of 9 to 6 to go into Fusion.<sup>(86)</sup> The Nationalist Vigilance Committee in this province responded by publishing a statement accusing Hertzog of "rigging" representation in the Head Committee.<sup>(87)</sup> Shortly afterwards C.W.M. du Toit went a long way towards facilitating English-speaking acceptance of clause 2(d) when he described it as "an insult to the intelligence of Nationalists".<sup>(88)</sup> In the Transvaal, the Republican Vigilance Committee added its voice, once member suggesting that "British capitalism was acting through the present Government to rob South Africa of its national spirituality".<sup>(89)</sup> This Malanite demonstration had an effect upon the non-Nationalist public similar to that which had been produced by the Nationalist split upon the South African Party Head Committee meeting at Pretoria. On 5 July, The Natal Mercury admitted that there was a majority for Fusion in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Zululand, although it claimed the Natal midlands supported Stallard.

Nevertheless the agitations of the Malan, Stallard and Roos groups continued throughout July. All three groups claimed spectacular successes during this month. Malan secured the rejection of Fusion by 164 votes to 18, and the final abandonment of attempts at retaining Party unity, at the Cape National Party Congress on 25 July.<sup>(90)</sup> Roos, who

85. The Star 26 June 1934.

86. The Star 29 June 1934.

87. Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, p.288.

88. The Star 2 July 1934.

89. The Natal Mercury 5 July 1934.

90. Die Burger 26 July 1934. See also Malan, op.cit., p.170.



toured extensively in the Free State and Transvaal in July, achieved his most impressive triumph in absentia when Havenga and Grobler held a meeting at Rustenburg on 16 July. They attempted to reverse the Platteland trend towards Roos, but were badly received.<sup>(91)</sup> Stallard's campaigns in Natal and the Eastern Cape bore fruit when public meetings in Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth endorsed his policy, and his hopes of winning support from within the South African Party were buoyed up by motions rejecting Fusion from Party branches in East London, Port Elizabeth and Northern Natal. But, with the possible exception of Malan's party, none of these groups could pose as a serious threat to the new Party. Roos's support depended to a large extent on the continuation of economic depression, and as the economy improved during the latter half of 1934, so his power base in the Platteland dwindled. Because his Centre Party's emphasis was on bread-and-butter issues rather than on political principles, it soon outlasted its usefulness, as was shown by its absorption into the United Party in 1935. Stallard's group (not yet named the Dominion Party) at this stage drew its strength largely from a phenomenon which turned out to be of only temporary duration - English-speaking suspicion of the political influence of Malan and his band of radical Nationalists. As early as 24 July Stallard suffered his first significant reverse when his programme was rejected at a public meeting at Grahamstown.<sup>(92)</sup> The clear evidence which had been provided by then that Malan was not to be associated with the government of the country persuaded many English-speakers that their interests lay in making the ruling Fusion Party as strong as possible and in increasing their own strength within the Party. One example of the subsidence of English-speaking suspicion of Fusion occurred on 31 July, when Blackwell declared that since the defection of Malan, his own objections to clause 2(d) would not keep him out of Fusion.<sup>(93)</sup>

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91. The Star 17 July 1934.

92. The Star 25 July 1934.

93. The Star 31 July 1934.

The Free State National Party congress held on 1 August accepted the Fusion terms by 107 votes to 27. The exchanges at this meeting were as acrimonious as those which had occurred at the Federal Council meeting six weeks before,<sup>(94)</sup> and the sequel was the election by the Free State Malanites of a Head Committee which included four MP's and a Senator - obviously the prelude to the establishment of a new and "purified" National Party. This was another confirmation of the genuineness of the Nationalist division.

On 6 August, a special congress of the Transvaal South African Party met to consider Fusion. Smuts emphasized at this meeting that the issue was one of acceptance or rejection of the terms which had been drawn up, and that amendments at this stage were out of the question. Finally, only ten out of more than 250 delegates - including Stallard - voted against Fusion.<sup>(95)</sup> Two days later, the Transvaal National Congress approved Fusion by the equally overwhelming majority of 291 votes to 28.<sup>(96)</sup>

A more searching test of popular support for Fusion was provided by the Natal South African Party Congress which opened on 10 August. Smuts argued in his speech that Fusion had been brought about not by his own and Hertzog's efforts but by "the people taking the bit between their teeth". He then devoted the balance of his speech to the Status question. Stallard's concept of Empire was outdated, he declared, since "it was not in the Fusion Parliament but at the Peace of Versailles that South Africa received her independent status". Smuts defended clause 2(d), claiming that it was not a sop thrown to Malan,<sup>(97)</sup> but rather "to

94. See Scholtz, Dr. N.J. van der Merwe, pp.289 et seq.

95. The Natal Mercury 7 August 1934.

96. The Star 8 August 1934.

97. Smuts did not miss the opportunity to make capital out of Malan's non-participation in the Anglo-Boer War. The Natal Mercury reported: Well, he did not know that Dr. Malan was such an ardent Republican, said General Smuts. He himself had fought for a Republic when Dr. Malan had not.

meet the case of thousands of good Republicans whom the leaders wished to have in the Party". He also announced that there would be no general election following on the formation of the new Party. After speakers from the floor had been heard - chief among whom was Marwick - the Congress voted in favour of Fusion, 347 to 27. Marwick's amendment demanding provisions ensuring that the Union would remain in the Empire and that South Africans would continue to enjoy the rights of British subjects found only thirty supporters.<sup>(98)</sup>

The Cape South African Party Congress, held some ten days later, showed a degree of unanimity as pronounced as that displayed in the Transvaal and Natal. Senator A.M. Conroy, the Chairman of the Congress, declared in his opening address that 98 per cent of 300 South African Party branches in the Cape had expressed their confidence in Smuts and their approval of the principle of Fusion, while R.H. Struben, MP for Albany, corrected the "erroneous impression" that the English-speaking people of the Eastern Province were opposed to Fusion. Over the opposition of Coulter and with the reluctant support of F.S. Malan, the Congress endorsed the terms of Fusion, only 12 out of 300 delegates dissenting.<sup>(99)</sup> A day later, the Orange Free State South African Party Congress unanimously supported Fusion.<sup>(100)</sup>

After these demonstrations of support for Fusion by the provincial congresses, the final dissolution of the South African Party was debated at its Union Congress in Bloemfontein on 23 August. Only 10 out of 460 delegates - including, of course, Stallard, Coulter and Marwick - voted against Fusion. The Congress's deliberations centred on the familiar constitutional debate, the highlights of which were a masterly treatment of the neutrality question by Smuts<sup>(101)</sup>

98. The Natal Mercury 11 August 1934.

99. The Natal Mercury 22 August 1934.

100. The Star 22 August 1934.

101. He noted that Britain had put a provision into the Locarno Treaty (1925) stipulating that the Treaty "does not impose any obligation on any Dominion...signified its acceptance thereof", and concluded, "This is not a repudiation by South Africa - it is a repudiation by Great Britain".

and a full recantation of his earlier position by Blackwell, who "did not see how Colonel Stallard could decline to enter Fusion because of the Status Act, which was a law passed and complete". This Congress marked the final split between the three "rebel" MP's and the South African Party. Stallard, Coulter, Marwick and their seven adherents left the Congress after the passing of the pro-Fusion motion, and announced the establishment of the Dominion Party. In their absence, the Congress began the task of creating the machinery for the new United Party. The completion of this work was entrusted to a joint provisional Central Executive Committee, which was to consist of nine members from each Party in each province.<sup>(102)</sup> This body's first responsibility was the preparation of the new Party's inaugural Congress.

The inaugural Congress took place in Bloemfontein on 5 December after three months of intensive campaigning and canvassing by Party leaders and supporters. Amid scenes of great enthusiasm, the new Party took the name "The United South African National Party", a name which signified, in Smuts's words, that "We are witnessing here not only the birth of a great Party, but in a very true sense the birth of a Nation".<sup>(103)</sup>

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102. The Natal Mercury 24 August 1934.

103. The Natal Mercury 6 December 1934.



### CONCLUSION

Typical interpretations of Fusion have held that the creation of the United Party in December 1934 signified the final submission of Smuts to Hertzog after a struggle lasting two decades. According to this view,<sup>(1)</sup> Hertzog safeguarded the Nationalist achievements of the past ten years in the face of a certain South African Party electoral victory by agreeing to the initial step of Coalition and then entrenched these achievements by creating a new Party in which he could exercise a permanent control over his erstwhile opponents. The defection of a significant group of Nationalists at the time of the foundation of the United Party did not, in the view of some writers, represent a defeat for Hertzog. On the contrary, Hertzog saw the split in the National Party over Fusion as the logical outcome of incipient ideological differences present since 1926.<sup>(2)</sup> This interpretation claims further that Smuts's support for the Status Bills and the cessation of his opposition to the Native Bills amounted to an abandonment of the position traditionally held by the South African Party. Seen from this angle, Fusion was a defeat for the South African Party.

By contrast, the major contention of this thesis is that the foundation of the United Party in December 1934 was the culmination of Smuts's attempts over the previous two years to establish a Party which would be representative of the broadest spectrum of national interests and form the basis for the creation of a new, inclusive South African nationalism, as opposed to the narrowly exclusive Afrikaner nationalism propounded by the radical Nationalists under the leadership of Malan.

The movement towards the Fusion of the National Party and the South African Party had its origins in the political developments of 1932. In the first half of that year, economic distress caused widespread opposition to the National Party

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1. See, for example, D.W. Krüger, The Age of the Generals (1958) p.168.
  2. See T. Dunbar Moodie, The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and the Afrikaner Civil Religion (1975) pp.116 et seq.

Government. This opposition initially found expression in the emergence of splinter parties, common to all of which was a programme of "populist" economic reform, to be carried out in conjunction with the formation of a National Government. Because of organizational weaknesses and their failure to attract support from the two major Parties, these splinter parties collapsed soon after their creation. From the date of the By-election at Colesberg in July 1932, the South African Party became the unrivalled focal point of opposition to the Government, and began to attract disgruntled former supporters of the Labour and National Parties. In this way, part of the "populist" image which the splinter parties had attempted to project was transferred to the South African Party. Smuts now took advantage of his Party's broadened base of support to claim that the South African Party was in itself a potential National Government, since it represented to some degree all racial and socio-economic groups.

The re-emergence of Roos as the leader of a group of dissatisfied Nationalists in December 1932 altered the prospects of the South African Party, introducing an alternative rallying-point for opponents of the Government's policies. This development threatened, furthermore, to divest the South African Party of its newly-won support. Smuts countered by negotiating with Roos, in the hope of either absorbing the new movement or discrediting it by portraying Roos as an ambitious and unprincipled opportunist. To some extent, the latter hope was realized, but it now became necessary for Smuts to demonstrate anew his commitment to the establishment of a National Government and to re-emphasize the compatibility of such a government with a party government under the South African Party.

Smuts's appeal in the House of Assembly for Hertzog to resign and make way for the formation of a National Government was probably made in the expectation that the National Party would be further damaged and the position of the South African Party advanced by the Government's rejection of this apparently self-denying motion. Hertzog's private overtures to the South African Party after the defeat of Smuts's motion

presented the South African Party leadership with an awkward situation. However, Smuts perceived that the division amongst Nationalists on the question of a proposed Coalition could be exploited to guarantee South African Party domination of any Coalition Government. If Coalition meant that Hertzog's Nationalists subscribed to the principles of racial conciliation and Empire co-operation for which Smuts stood, then the South African Party's ends might best be served by the self-effacement of both Smuts and his Party. Accordingly, he concluded the Coalition Pact with Hertzog in March 1933.

Smuts's espousal of Coalition was based on his anticipation that the South African Party would be the majority Party. But Coalition threatened to undermine Smuts's power base, because the Party leaders were bound in their actions by the terms of the Coalition agreement and were therefore unable to take steps to appease grass-root dissentients, whose high expectations of Coalition were slow to materialise. The general election of May 1933 and the Rand agitation against Havenga's mining tax a month later showed the depth of popular disillusionment with the South African Party in its traditional strongholds.

The impetus towards Fusion was given by the spontaneous merging of Party branches on the Transvaal Platteland. This in some measure forced the hand of the Nationalists, and Hertzog responded by coming out strongly in favour of Fusion. Smuts followed with a similar declaration, but he insisted that the amalgamation take place on terms which would effectively exclude Malan and the radical wing of the National Party. In Smuts's view, a merger of Parties on these terms would ensure that the whole of the South African Party backed Fusion. The effective predominance enjoyed by the South African Party in the Coalition would thus be entrenched and institutionalized in the new Party. The rejection of the principle of Fusion at the Cape National Party Congress in October 1933 suggested that the Malan group would remain outside of the new Party. South African Party opinion was now strongly consolidated behind Smuts's policy. Hertzog,

however, felt the need to demonstrate to his Party the correctness of his position vis-a-vis Malan, and in February 1934 entered into negotiations with the Cape Head Committee with a view to reconciliation. These negotiations produced strains between the Coalition leaders, which were largely removed by Hertzog's subsequent reassurances to Smuts, but a reservoir of suspicion in South African Party circles remained.

For most of 1934, Smuts's major effort was directed towards securing as large a body of South African Party support as possible for Fusion. This was made more difficult by the fact that the two leaders had agreed that legislation to define the constitutional status of South Africa was an essential prelude to the formation of a new Party. The Status Bills were, in Smuts's view, a small price to pay for the capture of the National Party by the South African Party, but many English-speaking supporters of the Party did not share this larger perspective. The Bills, which won the support of the Malan Nationalists, produced a minor revolt in the Party's parliamentary ranks - the incubus of the Dominion Party - and more serious opposition at grass-root level. Smuts's response was more stenuous action to emphasize the continuity between the traditions of the South African Party and the principles and objectives of the new Party. His ultimate aim was to force Malan into abandoning any thought of entering Fusion, hoping in this way to allay English-speaking suspicion of the Party merger. Smuts's anti-Malan offensive bore fruit when, at the National Party Federal Council meeting on 20 June, Malan and six supporters finally rejected Fusion. The final success of Smuts's policy was evidenced by the virtually unanimous acceptance of Fusion at the South African Party provincial congresses held in August, and at the inaugural congress of the United South African National Party on 5 December 1934.

The argument that Fusion was a triumph for Smuts rather than Hertzog has long been advanced by Smuts's admirers and



Hertzog's critics.<sup>(3)</sup> The claim to originality of this thesis lies in the assertion that this outcome was arrived at in pursuance of pragmatic politics and not of a sinister design, such as Smuts's "imperial obsession", which included securing an assurance of South Africa's participation in a European war on the side of Great Britain and the destruction of the political machinery of Afrikaner nationalism. Smuts's long-term political objectives were, it is true, seldom articulated; they were more often implicitly present in his philosophical perspective, a weltanschauung in which the members of his Party showed implicit faith. If Smuts's political career had a single major theme, it was the pursuit of conciliation and co-operation, whether between races and socio-economic classes in South Africa, or between the Mother Country and the Dominions in the Commonwealth. Smuts probably never thought in terms of the destruction of the National Party, and he certainly never made this a conscious aim of his policy. Rather he sought to emphasize and act upon the points of compatibility between the two Parties in 1933-1934, hoping in this way to win the National Party to the cause of conciliation. He accepted the bona fides of Hertzog in concluding the Coalition agreement, but he required a more substantial guarantee of the sincerity of his Party. This guarantee Smuts provided for himself by manoeuvring to ensure that the South African Party predominated, first in Coalition, then in Fusion.

This study emphasises the need for South African political history to be seen in terms of the structure of Parties and of constituency politics as well as in terms of principles and personalities. Without this dimension, coherent explanations of the behaviour of political leaders are likely to be shallow and inadequate. For example, it has been argued that Smuts sought Fusion in order to relieve himself of the necessity for making concessions to the Natal

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3. These arguments have been used respectively by F.S. Crafford, Jan Smuts: A Biography (1945) pp.270-271, and F.A. van Jaarsveld, Van Van Riebeeck tot Vorster (1976) p.284.

schismatic movement.<sup>(4)</sup> This thesis suggests, on the contrary, that Smuts, so far from desiring to rid himself of reliance on Natal, was anxious to retain as strong a base of support as possible in this province. After Coalition, Smuts required the support of Natal no less than before to maintain the balance between Parties. The priority of reclaiming the dwindling support for the South African Party in Natal during 1933 faced Smuts with the need to institute a new political dispensation via a merger of Parties, and much of his strategy during 1934 - particularly during the months of May and June - was determined by the political situation in Natal.

This study has attempted to account for the South African Party's participation in Coalition and Fusion by presenting an analysis of day-to-day responses to the changing stimuli of South African politics. It is a study of white politics and it has left the major themes of black-white relations, the growth of Afrikaner Nationalism and capital-labour conflict largely untouched, except insofar as they impinge upon the politics of the South African Party. No attempt has been made, for example, systematically to evaluate the argument that Fusion came about in response to the need for white solidarity in order to push through the Native Bills, since this argument has generally been used to explain Hertzog's motive for Fusion rather than that of Smuts.<sup>(5)</sup> On this point, however, it is important to note that the South African Party subsumed a wide variety of opinions on what was then termed the "Native question". For this reason, it never claimed a coherent "Native policy" as one of its priorities, but saw this as an area in which sacrifices could be made for the sake of agreement on the "more important" issues, such as the establishment of a

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4. See B.C. Vickers, Natal and the Provincial Councils 1924-32 (Unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1970) and T.R.H. Davenport, South Africa: A Modern History (1977), p.213.

5. See S. Kierman, "On the Hertzog Monument", New Nation, October 1968.

harmonious *modus vivendi* between English- and Afrikaans-speakers and the securing of South Africa's place in the Commonwealth. The case of Stallard may be cited as typical of South African Party attitudes on Native Policy; long an advocate of racial segregation,<sup>(6)</sup> he opted out of the Party which promised to introduce this because it also threatened, in his opinion, the Imperial connection. Similarly, South African Party "liberals" like Hofmeyr and F.S. Malan did not oppose Fusion. In this connection, if it was Hertzog's intention to clear the way for the passing of the Native Bills, then it should be remembered that the Fusion agreement to some extent contradicted this, because it stipulated that the Party machinery would not be employed to force the Bills through Parliament.

Nor does this study enter the "liberal-radical" debate on the interpretation of South African history<sup>(7)</sup> by a detailed examination of the argument that Fusion was a consolidation of the dominant white capitalist class.<sup>(8)</sup> This interpretation, however, seems to fall between two stools: either it makes the dubious assumption that white capital can be grouped together with white labour in the definition of the "dominant white capitalist class"; or it ignores the vital role played by Labour's association with the South African Party during the latter half of 1932 in bringing about Coalition.

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6. See T.R.H. Davenport, "The Triumph of Colonel Stallard; The Transformation of the Natives (Urban Areas) Acts between 1923 and 1937", South African Historical Journal, 1970 no.2.

7. See Harrison M. Wright, The Burden of the Present (1977).

8. As presented by David E. Kaplan, "An Analysis of the South African State in the 'Fusion' Period, 1932-39", published in Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Collected Seminar Papers, vol.XXI, 1977.

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