

From 'conscience politics' to the battlefields of political activism

The Liberal Party in Natal, 1953 to 1968

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which the Liberal Party — the Natal Division in particular — attempted to become an effective political force in South Africa. The Party was formed in May 1953 as a non-racial political party. Initially, it concentrated on working among the white electorate, and on achieving political change through parliamentary means. The Party gradually shifted its attention to the voteless black majority, and took its active opposition beyond the boundaries of parliamentary politics. Members of the Natal Division played a leading role in this shift. The party gave expression to a distinctive strand of radical liberalism, within a broader spectrum of South African liberalism. The Party was unsuccessful in preventing the entrenchment of the apartheid policies it so vehemently opposed. However, the Natal LP succeeded in developing a good working relationship with Congress Alliance, especially the African National Congress, in the region, in attracting a large number of black members through its grass-roots involvement, and in keeping liberal principles and priorities in the public eye in inauspicious circumstances. From 1960, Party leaders attracted increasing government persecution for their anti-apartheid activism. The Party deserves more attention than is commonly given to it in the South African historiography of resistance politics. The Liberal Party's continued existence as a non-racial political party was rendered impossible by government legislation in 1968. The Party disbanded, rather than compromise its non-racial principles.

List of Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
APC	Alan Paton Centre
ARM	African Resistance Movement
COD	Congress of Democrats
COP	Congress of the People
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
ICS	Institute of Commonwealth Studies
IDAMF	Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation
LP	Liberal Party
LPSA	Liberal Party of South Africa
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NIO	Natal Indian Organisation
NNALA	Northern Natal African Landowners' Association
NNC	Natal Native Congress
NP	Nationalist Party
NRC	Native Representative Council
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACPO	South African Coloured Peoples' Organisation
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SALA	South African Liberal Association
SALG	South African Liberal Group
SANNC	South African Native National Congress
SAP	South African Party
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
UFP	Union Federal Party
UP	United Party

Note on Terminology

1. The descriptive term 'black' includes African, Indian and Coloured people.
2. Liberal used with a capital 'L' is used to describe those liberals belonging to the Liberal Party.

PREFACE

This thesis is concerned mainly with the Liberal Party (LP) in Natal from the Party's formation in May 1953 until its dissolution in early 1968. The Natal Division started out as the least-distinguished and smallest of the three Divisions, but it subsequently developed a dynamic character of its own and played an increasingly significant role on a national level.¹ Through a process of radicalisation, the Natal Liberal Party changed its focus from that of a predominantly white parliamentary political party to that of a principled non-racial organisation committed to bringing about social and political change in South Africa through extra-parliamentary methods of opposition.

The black liberation struggle was not part of the official curriculum when I studied history at high school level during the early 1980s. Consequently it is a period of South Africa's history of which my (white) generation is largely ignorant. However, I was fortunate enough to have this gap partially filled for me when I studied history at university. The political changes in South Africa in the early 1990s renewed my interest in the liberation struggle, and what interested me in particular was the participation of white people, other than those in the South African Communist Party.

I was interested in what motivated those liberal whites who had not just apathetically 'followed the crowd', but had decided to oppose actively what they believed to be an unjust system. What paths did they take? Of further interest was the fact that the membership of the Liberal Party became predominately black. The complex nature of liberalism, especially in the South African context, became apparent while researching the development of liberal thought in the country. A further interesting angle was the manifestation of this liberalism as seen against the background of prevailing, and changing, political attitudes of both black and white people. Why had liberalism in South Africa acquired such a bad name?

¹ The Party consisted of three Divisions: the Natal, the Transvaal, and the Cape. A Free State Division was created later but never attracted a significant membership. Each Division was divided into branches.

The essential questions which motivated this thesis about the involvement of the LP in the struggle against apartheid were: how this had come about? What was the extent and nature of the Party's involvement? How did the Liberal Party's role relate to, and compare with, other organisations opposing apartheid? In applying these questions, I concentrate on the Natal Division of the LP, and some of the reasons behind this are that Natal's white electorate was hardly a bastion of liberalism, that the Division had a number of influential and interesting political figures, and that the Party attracted a large number of African members in the region. The LP is often portrayed as a whites-only organisation, but the membership of the Natal Division was predominantly black by the mid-1960s. Furthermore, the Natal Liberal Party has not been studied in depth before. In writing a regional history of an organisation such as the Liberal Party, one is confronted with the difficulties of how much emphasis to give to specifically regional questions, and how to relate these to developments in other regions. This study is not intended to be a general history of the Liberal Party of South Africa. The history of the Natal Liberal Party needs, however, to be placed in a national context. This provides not only a comparative dimension but it is necessary because of the influential participation of the Natal leadership at local, regional and national levels.

A further difficulty encountered in writing this thesis was that of defining liberals and liberalism in South Africa. The diffuse nature of liberalism is bound to present problems in any study of the topic. There is also the complication of distinguishing between white and black liberals in a racially ordered society. This study focuses on liberals in the LP, and not on a broader group of white liberals who were opposed to apartheid, such as those in the Union Federal Party, the Progressive Party, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), or elsewhere. The overall problem is exacerbated by the presence of African liberals, who generally espoused a liberalism infused with aspects of African nationalism. Many ANC members were liberals (a few also became members of the LP), and the organisation developed a liberalism of its own. Since the LP was a non-racial party, the role of liberals of all races in the Party are discussed. As with the analysis of any political organisation, developments must be seen in the context in which they occurred. It is thus essential that the development of the LP be seen against the background of the entrenchment of apartheid by the Nationalist government.

A variety of sources have been used in order to gather information for this study. As far as primary sources on the LP are concerned, the archives at the Alan Paton Centre (APC) on the University of Natal's Pietermaritzburg campus provided a wealth of data. The Liberal Party Papers are a collection of wide-ranging primary material including the minutes of meetings of various committees and LP Congresses, correspondence, newspapers, Party publications (*Contact* and *Liberal Opinion* in particular), etc. There is a comparative lack of information from 1960 onwards, as detailed records were not kept by the Party during the 1960s as a security measure. I was able to take advantage of the interviews conducted as part of the Centre's oral history programme, which complemented my own interviews. The unpublished manuscript by Peter Brown in the Alan Paton Centre, 'A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa', proved particularly useful. It is a narrative account of the history of the LP and much of this is taken verbatim from material included in the Liberal Party Papers. It is written from a contemporary perspective as it was compiled during the latter half of the 1960s (after Brown was banned in 1964). He included valuable insights and reflections on the LP and its members, especially with regards to Natal, where he was more involved. The manuscript has information which I have been unable to locate elsewhere.

There is no shortage of secondary literature on the development of liberalism in the earlier period prior to 1950. Much of it is from the perspective of historians critical to liberalism, such as Martin Legassick and Paul Rich², while some later work, for example J. Butler, R. Elphick and D. Welsh's *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*³, is more sympathetic to the role of liberals. Detailed information on the LP is limited in secondary sources, as the Party receives little extensive analysis in prominent works on the liberation struggle. Certain studies concentrate on the black organisations, where prominence is given the roles of white communists.⁴ Those that examine the development of active white opposition to apartheid

² For example: M. Legassick, 'The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism: Its Assumptions and Its Social Base', Seminar Paper, The African Studies Faculty, University of Sussex, 1973; P. Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1984).

³ J. Butler, R. Elphick & D. Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987).

⁴ For example: T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, Longman, 1983); T. Karis & G.M. Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964, Volume 3* of T. Karis & G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977); T. Karis & G.M. Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1990, Volume 5* of *From Protest to*

generally contrast the roles of Liberals with those of members of the Congress of Democrats.⁵ There is a tendency to focus on the anti-communist sentiments of Liberals and to see them as undermining the militancy of black politics. I found David Everatt's thesis valuable in my understanding of the wider involvement of whites in the liberation struggle and for providing an alternative viewpoint on the LP. The later years of the LP are neglected in such studies, which tend to concentrate on earlier developments of the Party, up to the early 1960s. In a recent publication on the liberation struggle, there are two brief chapters dealing with the LP, which are less critical of the LP than one would have expected.⁶

There is a lack of literature which provides a specific organisational analysis of the Liberal Party as a political party. There are a number of general works whose material is associated with liberalism and the Liberal Party, for example the writings of Alan Paton, Margaret Ballinger, Edgar Brookes, Peter Alexander and Phyllis Lewsen.⁷ None of these, however, offer a detailed organisational analysis of the Liberal Party. Before the recent publication of Randolph Vigne's book, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, the main sources on the LP were Janet Robertson's *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963*, and the chapter by Douglas Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968', in *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa*.⁸ Robertson's comparative study of liberalism in South Africa examines liberalism in the United Party, the Progressive Party, the LP and the ANC, and ends in the early 1960s. Irvine's chapter is not intended to be an in-depth and detailed account. Vigne provides a fuller record of the history of the LP, and a more detailed analysis of the Party. He has made extensive use of the archives at the Alan Paton Centre. Vigne's book is essentially a general narrative history of the LP, and

Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990 (Pretoria, Unisa, 1997).

⁵ For example: J.N.Lazerson, *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid* (Boulder, Colo., Westview, 1994); D.Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid 1945-1960.', D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990.

⁶ I.Liebenberg et al. (eds), *The Long March* (Pretoria, HAUM, 1994).

⁷ A.Paton, *Journey Continued* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988); M.Ballinger, *From Union To Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation* (Cape Town, Juta, 1969); E.H.Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977); P.Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Bibliography* (Oxford, OUP, 1994); P.Lewsen, *Reverberations: A Memoir* (Rondebosch, UCT Press, 1996).

⁸ R.Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (London, Macmillan, 1997); J.Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971); D.Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), Chapter 6.

it contains more detail on the earlier years of the Party and on events in which Vigne was involved. He is largely uncritical of the Party, and attempts to establish the LP's role in the liberation struggle and to show how the liberalism of the LP has survived into the 1990s. The above works all concentrate on the initial period of the Party's development and examine the Party from a national perspective. In this study I chose to examine the development of the LP in Natal, looking more closely at local personalities and membership, distinguishing features, and the Party's work amongst African communities, as well as giving a fuller account of the latter years.

This thesis consists of five main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter One serves as an introductory chapter on the development of liberalism in South Africa from the Cape Liberal Tradition of the mid-nineteenth century until about 1950. This chapter attempts to show the complexity of liberalism in South Africa and to examine the forces which have shaped it. The section dealing with Natal explores the emergence of a particular political situation in the region, which provides a background to the subsequent development of liberalism and the LP in the region. Chapter Two deals with a time of change after the shock Nationalist Party victory in the general election of 1948 and what this meant for liberalism. Liberals found themselves less able than previously to exert influence over either the government or African political opinion. Many liberals had become disillusioned with the United Party, and by 1952 a considerable number of white liberals were proposing a more assertive alternative. The decision to form a political party after the second United Party loss in the 1953 general election was a reluctant one in many respects. Nevertheless, the Party established itself from a number of disparate groups, over which the prominent Cape Liberals dominated. Their comparatively conservative viewpoints held sway in the initial years and the Party followed the conventional path of a white parliamentary political party. By 1955, the Natal Division of the LP had begun to take on a character of its own and to establish itself in the region. The foundations, which allowed for the Division to play a more significant role in the Party in the future, were laid during these years.

Chapter Three concentrates on the Natal LP's radicalisation and its ascendancy on a national level during the years 1956 to 1958. The reasons for the Natal Division moving in the direction

that it did are explored. It had not found much support amongst the white electorate, and attracted increasing numbers of African members instead. Its progressive views on the franchise and extra-parliamentary opposition, together with the high level of activity and the stability of the Division, enabled it to play a larger role on a national level and to influence the LP's adoption of a more radical line. The Division also developed a good working relationship with the Natal ANC and the Natal Indian Congress. Chapter Four deals with an intensely turbulent period in South Africa's history, from 1959 to 1962. It was during this period that the LP, both nationally and in Natal, reached its height. The year 1960 is taken as a turning point in the history the country and in the development of the LP. The transformation process within the Party continued with the adoption of the universal franchise and an increasingly active extra-parliamentary role, and the Party reached closer identification with black political aspirations as its African membership multiplied.

Chapter Five is a shorter chapter than the others, as it deals with last years of the LP from 1963 to its dissolution in 1968, by which time Party activity was much reduced. During these years the LP became a target of the Nationalist government, and its members endured state persecution in an attempt to cripple the Party, as the state had already done to black opposition in the country. Despite the odds, the Natal Division remained as active as possible, largely due its well-organised Party structure. With the passing of a government Act banning multi-racial political parties in 1968, the Liberals chose to dissolve the Party. By the 1960s, Liberals espoused a radicalised strand of South African liberalism, which differed from that of other liberals, such as those in the Progressive Party.

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CHAPTER ONE

More than just 'Friends of the Natives'? : Liberalism in South Africa before 1950

Introduction

In charting the evolution of liberalism in South Africa and establishing the political views of the early leaders of the Liberal Party (LP), it is necessary to look at liberalism during the late nineteenth century and the half-century prior to the formation of the party itself in May 1953. In such an analysis the different interpretations of liberals and of liberalism that were held during this time can be explained. This diversity does, however, present problems of analysis. The following chapter attempts to grapple with these differing interpretations of liberalism in the South African context as essential background to the study of the Natal Liberal Party during the 1950s and 1960s. It must be stressed that the purpose here is merely to give an outline and is not a comprehensive essay on liberalism in South Africa.

In order to facilitate the discussion, the chapter is structured along chronological lines. The development of liberalism before 1950 is charted in three sections. First, the liberal tradition which developed in the Cape Colony during the nineteenth century; second, the social welfare activities of inter-war liberals (1920s and 1930s) and their attempts to find solutions to the 'native question'; third, the challenges faced by the liberals of the 1940s in a rapidly changing South Africa. The last section deals with liberals and liberalism in Natal before the 1950s and highlights those features which distinguished the region.

1.1 Towards a definition of liberalism in South Africa before about 1950

Liberals in South Africa up until the present-day have always held widely diverging views, and there has never been a clearly defined liberal policy. Before the formation of the LP in 1953, no explicitly liberal political party existed. Liberals were found in various welfare, liberal and administrative government bodies, as well as in certain political parties. It is largely a matter of interpretation whom one considers a 'liberal' or not. The matter is further complicated by the

presence of both black and white liberals, who were different in many ways. This chapter will be concentrating on white liberals, and ‘liberals’ in this context are taken to mean white liberals, unless indicated otherwise. The reason for this is that in the racially-ordered society of South Africa, it was white liberals who took the lead and defined liberal policy. In the earlier part of the century, liberals were generally defined as ‘friends of the natives’ who ‘advocated policies towards Africans more generous than those of mainstream white South Africans’.¹ South African liberalism by the end of the 1950s, as espoused by liberals in the LP, could be described as an ‘attempt to solve the problems of racial conflict by creating interracial solidarity and cooperation on the basis of equal rights and shared values and roles’.² In other words, this advanced the idea of a ‘common society’. In general, the emphases of South African liberalism have been ‘on non-racism, on freedom from racial discrimination, and on the protection of individual liberty’.³ Liberalism in South Africa before 1950 was largely dominated by the personalities of certain individuals, rather than by any specific organisation. Their personal idiosyncrasies, together with the fact that they were numerically small, widely-dispersed group and rarely co-ordinated in their efforts, makes any attempt at generalisation questionable.⁴

In attempting to define liberalism in South Africa one comes up against a number of problems with what liberalism has *become* to mean. For example, the common every-day usage of the term liberal by many white people today means ‘non-racial’.⁵ Much of the available literature on liberalism in South Africa was written by critics of liberalism during the 1970s and 1980s when strong anti-liberal views prevailed. Its policies were attacked from both the left and the

¹ R.Elphick, ‘Mission Christianity and Interwar Liberalism’ in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg & Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p.66.

² H.Dickie-Clark, ‘On the Liberal Definition of the South African Situation’ in P.van den Berghe (ed), *The Liberal Dilemma in South Africa* (London, Croom Helm, 1979), p.49.

³ H.Kuper, ‘Commitment: The Liberal as Scholar in South Africa’ in P.van den Berghe (ed), *The Liberal Dilemma in South Africa* (London, Croom Helm, 1979), p.30.

⁴ B.White, ‘Maurice Webb: A Case Study in Social Welfare Liberalism in Natal, 1926-1953’, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol XV (1994/1995), p.1.

⁵ C.J.Driver, ‘Between The Hammer and The Anvil: The Quandary of Liberalism in South Africa’ in R.Hunt Davis (ed), *Apartheid Unravels* (Gainesville, University of Florida Press, 1991), p.59.

right.⁶ Liberalism became ‘almost a term of political opprobrium’ in certain contemporary black political circles in South Africa.⁷ The term had a derogatory meaning attached to it where liberals were portrayed as ‘do-gooder’ white paternalists or as capitalists bent on preserving their privileged status quo, or as ‘kaffirboeties’ (literally: brothers of African people) and enemies of the state on an equal footing with communists. However, with the changing political scenario in South Africa during the 1990s, liberalism is acquiring a measure of respectability in political and academic circles. Many basic values of liberalism are included in the country’s new constitution. Nevertheless, a good deal of the available literature on liberalism in South Africa consists of those historians’ views critical of liberalism, which were only countered in the late 1980s by a liberal response.⁸ Liberal writers maintain that liberalism in South Africa has largely been defined by its critics. Accordingly, it has frequently been misrepresented in South African historiography by discrediting liberals and liberalism, and suppressing its multi-racial and non-racial character.⁹

Liberalism as it developed in South Africa has to be seen in a particular context, for these liberals were a product of, and operated within, a conservative society. In the South African situation it seems that racial issues are central to the definition of ‘liberal’. Certain early twentieth century liberals might be considered ‘benevolent paternalists’ rather than ‘liberals’ in the strict western European definition of the term. Martin Legassick raises the question of ‘perhaps whether in the context of South Africa there exists a liberalism which is not mere benevolent paternalism’.¹⁰ (He is speaking here, obviously, of white liberals.) Be that as it may, the point is that the parameters defining South African liberalism are wide and not clearly marked. The term indicated a ‘South African-specific position, rather than a position at one with western democratic liberalism’.¹¹ For instance, white liberals were considered as such

⁶ Kuper, ‘Commitment’, p.30; Driver, ‘Between The Hammer’, p.60; Dickie-Clark, ‘On the Liberal Definition’, p.48.

⁷ P.Rich, *Hope And Despair* (London, British Academic Press, 1993), p.41.

⁸ D. Everatt, ‘Liberals, Liberalism and the Liberal Party’, Review Article, *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, vol.XI (1988).

⁹ Kuper, ‘Commitment’, pp.36-41.

¹⁰ M. Legassick, ‘The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism: Its assumptions and Its Social Base’, Seminar Paper, The African Studies Faculty, University of Sussex (1973), p.3. Legassick’s emphasis.

¹¹ Everatt, ‘Liberals, Liberalism and the Liberal Party’, p.163.

because they held basic liberal values, thought of themselves as part of the liberal establishment and worked within liberal organisations. Liberalism did not and does not necessarily require a political party through which to express itself, which makes definitions of any sort more difficult to make. The diffuse nature of liberalism is both a weakness and a strength. On the one hand it is open to various interpretations and misrepresentations, while on the other hand liberalism was able to change with the times. Its members were not stuck in a set doctrine dictated to them by an international body nor by nationalist leaders. Instead, liberals have constantly revised and reassessed their approaches to the political situation.¹² Individuals changed their views on issues such as segregation and later the franchise. Of course this diversity led to a lack of unity which might have otherwise allowed liberals to make a greater impact. Liberalism was ultimately unsuccessful in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century in that it failed to develop a cohesive political programme which had any real impact on the body politic.

Liberalism in South Africa was not static and underwent many changes during the first half of the twentieth century. In general, the approach of South African liberalism was essentially a gradualist one which could be described as reformist rather than revolutionary. There was an ever-present optimism amongst liberals that the white electorate and the government could gradually be influenced in the right direction. The views of liberals changed with changing international trends in political thinking and with changes in the socio-economic and political development of South Africa. For example, the achievements of African-Americans and progress made in 'race relations' in the United States influenced liberals during the 1920s¹³, and many liberals had rejected segregation by the late 1920s after initially supporting it. The various approaches of inter-war liberalism had developed into distinct strands by the early 1950s. In this evolution there was an incremental transformation from the prevailing gradualist approach to a more democratic one, which can be seen as a move away from Cape Liberalism to a brand of South African liberalism which was espoused by liberals in the LP by 1960. By that time the views of liberals in the LP represented a more radical strand of liberalism

¹² Dickie-Clark, 'On the Liberal Definition', p.48.

¹³ R.Haines, 'Dr Edgar H. Brookes and the Liberalism of the 1930's', B.A.Hons.thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1975; Rich, *Hope and Despair*, p.48.

compared to those that had left the party and joined the Progressive Party (formed in 1959) or those that had remained in the United Party (UP).

Liberals were involved in the politics of South Africa until 1948 in a number of ways, although generally not in the parliamentary party arena. Although there were liberals in the South African Party (SAP) and later in the UP, the majority of mainstream liberals (such as those under discussion) did not belong to a political party. Rather, they were active at the administrative level of government. Many early liberals were prominent figures who enjoyed varying degrees of political influence with government. Their playing-card was their influence over the African political elite.

As discussed above, it is very difficult to define liberalism in South Africa and to generalise about liberals. However, there are certain generalisations that can be made. Liberalism was marginal to the dominant views of the white population in South Africa, and the liberals formed a small minority within it. Liberals were mostly (but not only) English-speaking, and were usually middle-class intellectuals in academic or professional fields. There were, however, some well-known Afrikaans-speaking liberals such as the Marquard and Molteno families. The late nineteenth-century Cape liberals, too, were of mixed English and Afrikaans-speaking origins. Many early liberals were active Christians, who had some personal contact with missionaries or missionary organisations.

The essentials of liberalism appealed to certain groups of African people. Early African liberals were generally mission-educated with middle-class backgrounds. Liberalism did have a considerable influence over Africans educated at missionary institutions.¹⁴ Leading members of the African National Congress (ANC), such as Pixley Seme, Dr A.B.Xuma, Professor Z.K.Matthews and Albert Lutuli espoused a broadly liberal ideology, as did Selby Msimang, a founder member of the ANC and later a prominent member of the LP in Natal. Hilda Kuper knew Lutuli personally and describes him as 'the very embodiment of liberal ideals'.¹⁵ The basic principles of the ANC, in fact, were essentially liberal in the first half of the twentieth

¹⁴ Dickie-Clark, 'On the Liberal Definition', p.50.

¹⁵ Kuper, 'Commitment', pp.31-32.

century.

One of the most common criticisms of liberalism is that liberals came from a class base that was too narrow to have any effect on South African society or even on the government. According to radical historians, liberalism in South Africa was the ideology of capitalism.¹⁶ This, on further examination but not in the scope of this study, is an overstatement and would not accurately describe liberals.¹⁷ On the whole, liberals were not wealthy businessmen but professionals such as university staff, lawyers, clergymen, schoolteachers, writers, social workers and journalists. Some liberals were described as having socialist leanings. The UP was more likely to be representative of English-speaking capitalism, and thus if one were to stretch the definition of liberalism to include liberally-inclined members in this party, the allegation becomes more plausible for those concerned. While those early liberals who were involved in government may have expected their reforms to revitalize a capitalist economy, the advance of capitalism was not their primary motive. Liberals did not 'actively promote segregation as a means of hastening the process of capital accumulation', but by attempting to preserve political and social stability they may have inadvertently helped to 'maintain the conditions for the long-term reproduction of capitalist relations' in South Africa.¹⁸

1.2 *The Cape Liberal Tradition and its Legacy*

Most scholars trace the roots of South African liberalism during the first half of the twentieth century to the liberal tradition which developed in the Cape Colony in the second half of the nineteenth century. While the Cape Liberal Tradition, as it became known, bore some of the trademarks of its English origins, the brand of liberalism which had developed in South Africa by the 1950s had its own distinctive characteristics. It had been moulded by the unique political

¹⁶ P.van den Berghe, 'The Impossibility of a Liberal Solution' in P.van den Berghe (ed), *The Liberal Dilemma in South Africa* (London, Croom Helm, 1979), p.63; P.Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics and Administration, 1936-1948' in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Johannesburg & Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p.115.

¹⁷ For the following discussion: Van den Berghe, 'The Impossibility', pp.64ff; Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics', p.115.

¹⁸ S.Dubow, 'Liberalism and Segregation Revisited' in *Collected Seminar Papers on The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol 15 (1990), pp.7-8.

circumstances and socio-economic conditions which developed in this country. Regional differences are a further characteristic of South African liberalism which emerged as it developed. These had their roots in the pattern of colonial conquest of southern Africa.

The prominent nineteenth-century Cape liberals were a small white minority who were not all English-speaking and who were drawn from a variety of fields, including financial and commercial enterprises, the legal profession and Christian missionary organisations.¹⁹ The adherents of Cape Liberalism were not many but were people of exceptional ability, for example James Rose-Innes and John X. Merriman. The principles of Cape Liberalism and the liberal institutions founded in the colony had been imported from Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. These included a respect for parliamentary government and other guarantees of freedom, such as the rule of law, an independent judiciary and the freedom of speech. The British had attempted to remedy certain inequalities at the Cape from their take-over in 1806 and this initiative was taken up again by the colonial office under Earl Grey after the Whig return to power in 1846.²⁰ This led to the granting of Responsible Government in 1853.

Probably the best known feature of Cape Liberalism was the non-racial qualified franchise policy that was introduced into the Cape Colony in 1853. The approach of Cape liberals was a gradualist one which reserved the right to vote for all 'civilised' men, regardless of colour, and which asserted the view that all men should have the opportunity to become 'civilised'. Furthermore, it was the responsibility of 'Europeans' to provide for the education of black people in this 'civilizing process'.²¹ Even if the franchise qualification was by criteria of 'civilisation' which was based on Western ideas of education and wealth, the 'acceptance of a shared humanity' was nevertheless 'unquestioned' by Cape liberals.²² Nineteenth-century Cape

¹⁹ S. Trapido, ' "The friends of the natives" : merchants, peasants and the political and ideological structure of liberalism in the Cape, 1854-1910' in S. Marks & A. Atmore, *Economy and society in pre-industrial South Africa* (London, Longman, 1980), pp.251-252.

²⁰ R. Davenport, 'The Cape Liberal Tradition to 1910' in J. Butler, R. Elphick & D. Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa* (Cape Town & Johannesburg, David Philip, 1987), pp.22, 31.

²¹ J. Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford, Clarendon, 1971), p.5.

²² Kuper, 'Commitment', pp.30-31.

Liberalism did not entertain the idea of a democracy in the modern-day sense of the term.²³ They did not believe in racial integration or suggest the adoption of a universal franchise. Although their liberalism was based on a strong belief in the superiority of whites, there was a genuine humanitarian desire to see others 'better' themselves and become 'civilised'.²⁴ Cape Liberalism 'sought to protect the members of all groups in what it regarded as a common society' rather than 'attach itself to the rights of one particular group'.²⁵

The Cape Liberal Tradition was idealised to some extent by early twentieth century adherents and has been the subject of debate amongst latter-day academics. Cape Liberalism was by no means free of contradictions and inconsistencies, and neither was it static.²⁶ Its political manifestations were shaped by economic as well as social and political factors, reflecting the changes in Cape society from a primarily agrarian society to a increasingly industrialised one.²⁷ Although the liberal import developed along its own lines in the colonial situation, Cape Liberalism did not develop in isolation and continued to be influenced by liberal developments in England to some extent before the turn of the century.

The liberalism of the Cape was influenced by the humanitarian and philanthropic movement in England in the first half of the nineteenth century. This was infused into Cape Liberalism mainly through missionary organisations, most notably the London Missionary Society led by Dr John Philip. This connection between liberalism and the missionary movement continued into the twentieth century. A further aspect to the missionary influence on liberalism is relevant in this study. The Cape Tradition had a profound influence on African political thinking into the twentieth century.²⁸ The combination of a missionary education and liberalism produced a group of African political leaders in the Cape, as well as in Natal and to a lesser extent in the

²³ P.Lewsen, 'The Cape Liberal Tradition - Myth or Reality?' in ISMA Paper No.26 (November 1969), p.11; Trapido, 'The friends', p.258.

²⁴ Lewsen, 'The Cape Liberal Tradition', p.17.

²⁵ Davenport, 'The Cape Liberal Tradition', p.30.

²⁶ Ibid., pp.247-248.

²⁷ P.Rich, 'Segregation and the Cape Liberal Tradition' in *Collected Seminar Papers on The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol 10 (1981), p.33.

²⁸ P. Walshe, *Black Nationalism in South Africa* (Ravan, Johannesburg, 1973), p.5.

Transvaal, in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century.

The disparity in franchise laws caused heated debate at the National Convention to discuss the proposed union in 1908. The non-racial franchise policy of the Cape was not found in the other colonies. In the northern Boer states of the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal Republic only white men could vote and sit in parliament. In the Colony of Natal white men were subject to economic criteria, while black men were restricted by much higher qualifications and all but a few were excluded. The Cape delegates proposed the implementation of the Cape model for the union. The other three delegations strongly opposed this proposal. The opinion in Natal was expressed by its delegates who refused to extend political rights to Africans in the province. Thus the Cape delegates failed to extend their franchise provisions to the rest of the country. Most delegates saw Boer-British unity and the unification of South Africa as more important than provisions for black political representation. The Cape liberals hoped to further their cause after union.²⁹ Hence a compromise was reached: only white men would sit in parliament and the provinces would retain their respective franchise laws (black membership was to be allowed in the Cape Provincial Council). This could only be amended by a two-thirds majority reached in a joint sitting of both houses of Parliament. These provisions in the South Africa Act in 1910 were to prove significant later.

1.3 'Race Relations', the 'native question' and urbanisation : The Inter-war Years

Liberal activity in South Africa in the 1920s and 1930s was essentially welfare-orientated and flourished in the climate created by a strong missionary presence in South Africa. New kinds of class conflict and social need were developing after the First World War. There was rapid African urbanisation as the demand for labour increased and the economic viability of the reserves steadily declined. Liberal concern was aroused by the lack of government interest in African welfare and their primary aim was to alleviate hardships.

In the political field liberals worked at promoting dialogue and maintaining contact between black and white, and attempting to influence 'native policy' by appealing to enlightened whites

²⁹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.7.

in the government and amongst the general public.³⁰ Consultation between black leaders and various interested parties, including white missionaries, educationalists and welfare workers, was a trend which had been encouraged in the 1920s. Examples of this were the ‘European-Bantu’ Conferences held between 1923 and 1933. Although liberals may have been critical of government policy, they did not believe in direct political action in confronting the government. Rather, liberals preferred to work with the administration, hoping to encourage it in a liberal direction. The general view was that liberal activity should be limited to welfare matters rather than pursuing contentious political issues. A few liberals were unhappy with this relatively passive role and they resented the attempts of prominent, more conservative liberals to depoliticise liberal associations, such as the Joint Councils and later the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR).³¹

Since liberals in South Africa in the first half of the twentieth century believed in working within the constitutional framework to modify government policy in a more liberal direction, they participated in various segregationist government structures and were involved with ‘native policy’ on a number of levels. Some gained limited direct access to governmental policy formation.³² Liberals from this period placed great faith in the *reasonableness* of both government and black leaders.³³ The influence of white liberals on the African political leadership was considerable in this earlier period. The *modus operandi* of inter-war liberalism was to form associations in order to spread liberal ideas. The Joint Councils and the SAIRR are two examples of non-governmental organisations that liberals worked through, while governmental bodies included the Native Affairs Commission (formed in 1920) and the Native Economic Commission (1931). The focus in the inter-war years was on the ‘native question’, with Indian and Coloured issues receiving less attention.

³⁰ Elphick, ‘Mission Christianity’, p.66.

³¹ P.Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1984), pp.27-28. The Joint Councils and SAIRR are discussed later.

³² P.Rich, ‘The South African Institute of Race Relations and the debate on “race relations”, 1926-1958’ in *Collected Seminar papers on Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol.12 (1981), p.78.

³³ Elphick, ‘Mission Christianity’, p. 72. Elphick’s italics.

The main ideological debate amongst liberals during this period revolved around the policy of segregation and the proletarianisation of Africans. The centre of the liberal movement in South Africa up until Union had been in Cape Town, but after the First World War it shifted to Johannesburg. The University of the Witwatersrand became the focus as a number of leading liberal ideologues worked there. Segregation was a complex response, with roots in earlier historical trends, to the process and pattern of industrialisation in early twentieth century South Africa. It was formulated in the search for a solution to the 'native question'. Segregation was portrayed as a compromise between 'repression' and 'assimilation'.³⁴ Racist discourse was prevalent worldwide from the late nineteenth century and racist assumptions and attitudes were commonplace in political debate in early twentieth century South Africa.³⁵ In the early 1920s a 'new form of pro-segregationist liberalism' emerged³⁶ where segregation was seen as a 'pragmatic, moderate and flexible policy'.³⁷ Most liberals were likely to have supported some form of territorial segregationist policy. Certain liberals, such as Howard Pim, Edgar Brookes and C.T.Loram, were involved in the elaboration of segregationist policy in the early 1920s.³⁸ Alfred Hoernle spoke of the necessity of adapting liberalism to segregation as this was the prevailing creed in South Africa and had to be taken seriously.³⁹

The liberals' search for a solution which led them to segregation arose from their concern to protect and preserve traditional African society from the harsh realities of industrialisation. The development of anthropology in South Africa in the 1910s and 1920s had a significant influence on segregationist ideology.⁴⁰ The image of a cohesive and unchanging rural culture was presented which idealised the traditional African lifestyle. Africans were seen as 'naturally' rural and 'alien' in cities. Much of the earlier writing included crude definitions of race which

³⁴ S.Dubow, 'Race, civilisation and culture: the elaboration of segregationist discourse in the inter-war years' in S.Marks & S.Trapido, *The politics of race, class and nationalism* (London, Longman, 1987), pp.74,88.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.71-75.

³⁶ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p.77.

³⁷ Dubow, 'Liberalism and Segregation', p.2.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.1. See E.H.Brookes, *History of Native Policy in SA* (Pretoria, Van Schaik, 1927).

³⁹ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, pp.48-49.

⁴⁰ Dubow, 'Race, civilisation and culture', p.81.

were later dispelled.⁴¹ W.H. Macmillan, a professor of History at the University of the Witwatersrand, had become an increasingly controversial figure in the liberal establishment during the 1920s. He criticised the conservative influence of anthropological studies on the liberal establishment and on liberals such as the Hoernles and J.D. Rheinallt-Jones.⁴² Hoernle's wife, Winifred, was the head of the department of anthropology at the University of the Witwatersrand.⁴³

The Joint Councils for Europeans and Natives were established from 1921 in an attempt to maintain contact between black political leadership and liberally-inclined whites on a local level. The movement was the initiative of C. T. Loram and was influenced in particular by Dr J.E.K. Aggrey, an African member (from present-day Ghana) of the Phelps-Stokes Commission and who had been educated in the United States. A variety of people participated in the councils, including prominent liberal professionals, academics, churchmen, social workers and African politicians. By 1931 there were approximately thirty African and three Indian councils, and one Coloured council in the process of being formed.⁴⁴ There was debate amongst liberals whether the Joint Councils should become more active as political pressure groups, or retain their essentially welfare character. Joint Councils varied in political outlook. For example, the Johannesburg council was comparatively radical under the leadership of Macmillan.⁴⁵ According to Paul Rich, the Joint Councils allowed for the accommodation of inter-war liberalism with the government's segregation policy.⁴⁶ The councils were no doubt of help to black political leaders and were one of the few avenues open for black political expression, but some black leaders criticised the councils for stifling more strident political stances against government policy. The Joint Council movement gradually petered out during the late 1930s with the increasing disaffection of black political leaders with moderate, petition politics.

⁴¹ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, p.53.

⁴² W.H. Macmillan, *My South African Years* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1975), p.214.

⁴³ Rich, 'South African Institute of Race Relations', p.80.

⁴⁴ Haines, 'Dr. Edgar Brookes', pp.15-16.

⁴⁵ Macmillan, *My South African Years*.

⁴⁶ Rich, *White Power*, pp.18-26.

The SAIRR was founded in 1929 on the initiative of two prominent liberals, Loram and Rheinallt-Jones. The majority of well-known liberals belonged to the Institute and its membership was open to people of all races. The SAIRR was broadly liberal but it was liberalism of a somewhat conservative brand. It was not aligned to any political party (most of its white members probably supported the SAP and then the UP). Its aim was to collect and publish information on the effects of racial discrimination and segregation and conduct research into 'race-relations', thus combining political activity and research. In doing this it hoped to alter the attitudes of whites in South Africa, especially those in government. Members of the Institute had a Fabian belief that reliable and correct facts could change white attitudes, but they found that this was seldom the case.⁴⁷ Direct political action was to be avoided. Instead, informal political pressure would be exercised on the government. The Institute was never an active political body and similar debates about political activism occurred in it as had arisen in the Joint Councils. Macmillan suggests that the SAIRR was formed to take the 'political sting out of the study of African disabilities' and to replace the Joint Councils.⁴⁸ According to Brookes the Institute was a 'Ministry of Munitions' rather than a 'Ministry of War'.⁴⁹ The development of radical tendencies within some Joint Councils was certainly a worrying factor to certain elements in the liberal establishment.⁵⁰

Paul Rich criticises the SAIRR, under the leadership of Loram and Rheinallt-Jones, for compromising liberalism by having no firm political standpoint and accepting government policy.⁵¹ According to Martin Legassick, liberals 'did not step outside the assumptions of segregationism' during the inter-war period and when they did 'it was for the most part defensively rather than aggressively'.⁵² When they criticised segregationist policies they did so from within the framework of segregation and so many of the reform measures they recommended were 'intended to resolve the contradictions of segregation rather than challenge

⁴⁷ Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics', p. 101.

⁴⁸ Macmillan, *My South African Years*, p. 216.

⁴⁹ E.H. Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1977), p. 42.

⁵⁰ Rich, 'South African Institute of Race Relations', p. 79.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Rich, *White Power*, p. 18.

⁵² M. Legassick, 'Race, Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: The Case of R.F.A. Hoernle', *African Affairs*, vol. 75 (April 1976), p. 237.

its premises'. There is no doubt some truth in this. However, it should be kept in mind that these liberals operated in a conservative society and that segregationist principles were not unique to South Africa.

The majority of liberals had rejected segregationist ideas by the late 1920s. The reasons for this are important in the evolution of liberalism in South Africa. Firstly, it became clear that the break-down of pre-colonial African societies had gone too far and that the reserves were incapable of maintaining the populations within them. Furthermore, the repressive nature of forced segregation was difficult to ignore.⁵³ The idea of economic interdependence in the political economy of South Africa which rendered separate development meaningless began to be stressed by certain schools of thought, most notably by Macmillan and the economist S.H.Frankel.⁵⁴ Secondly, there was disillusionment with Hertzog, whose Pact government⁵⁵ resisted liberal influence for an enlightened type of segregation and was seen to be passing blatantly racist measures like the 1926 Colour Bar Act. Liberals were also placed under more pressure by Africans in the Joint Councils after the publication in 1926 of Hertzog's bills on proposed segregationist legislation. Perhaps the biggest turnaround in ideas came from Brookes, who had recanted his earlier support for segregation by 1928. He was followed by other former advocates of segregation. Another Pact victory in 1929 and the liberals' apparent inability to influence 'native policy' (the Hertzog administration passed more legislation in favour of whites (specifically Afrikaners) from 1924 to 1933) led to a general pessimism amongst liberals in the 1930s. Liberals felt that they needed to reassess their policies in order for liberalism to have an impact on the prevailing mood of racial domination and consequently on government legislation.

An analysis of liberalism in South Africa would be incomplete without including some background of the development of African politics, not only because of liberals' influence on it, but also because many of the early African political organisations were broadly liberal. The

⁵³ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, pp.78-79.

⁵⁴ Dubow, 'Liberalism and Segregation', p.4; Macmillan, *My South African Years*, pp.196-7.

⁵⁵ The Nationalist Party, under the leadership of J.M.B.Hertzog, had come to power in 1924 in an electoral pact with the Labour Party. It was known as the Pact government.

most prominent, well-established and longstanding of the formal black political organisations was the ANC. It was formed in 1912 from a number of previously colonially based associations as the South African Native National Congress (SANNC), and later became the ANC. Its early leadership was elitist and conservative, and its demands moderate. Most leaders were mission-educated Christians with a middle-class background. The African political elite was influenced by liberalism as the higher education of Africans was partly administered by missionaries at institutions such as Lovedale in the Eastern Cape⁵⁶ and Adams College in Natal, where pupils received a comparatively liberal Western education. Most African leaders in this early period had attended such institutions, while a few had received further education abroad.

The connection between liberals and the missionary movement in South Africa is important in understanding the type of liberalism that developed during the inter-war years, where the emphasis was on urban social welfare. This was an important area of liberal concern as they tried to reduce the ‘physical and moral “decay”’ of urbanisation.⁵⁷ The government had failed to develop any sort of structure to deal with African welfare since the reserves were supposed to be economically self-sustaining and, hence, to supply a safety-net to the indigent. According to Richard Elphick, the line between ‘liberals’ and ‘mission Christians’ was often not clear-cut, and their activities were intertwined in the ‘network of Christian humanitarianism’.⁵⁸ Liberalism in the 1920s and 1930s was rooted in the solid presence of the ‘benevolent empire’ of missionary enterprise and in the ‘missionary tradition of practical Christianity’.⁵⁹ In 1928 there were 48 mission organisations operating in South Africa which were involved in education, health and social welfare amongst the African population.

The search for a solution to the ‘native problem’ occupied much of liberal discourse in the inter-war years. The proposed segregationist legislation by Hertzog was debated amongst liberals in the late 1920s to the early 1930s. These measures included the removal of the Cape Africans who qualified for the vote from the common roll, and placing them on a separate one.

⁵⁶ Most of the staff were in fact from the Cape Education Department, which also helped fund these institutions.

⁵⁷ Dubow, ‘Race, civilisation and culture’, p. 76.

⁵⁸ Elphick, ‘Mission Christianity’, pp. 67-70.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

Those who opposed the so-called 'Hertzog Bills', which were initially introduced in 1926 and then retracted, 'fought under the banner of liberalism'.⁶⁰ When the amended bills were presented in 1935, the political scenario had altered with the formation of the UP.⁶¹ At the time English and Afrikaner unity appeared more important to Smuts, who supported Hertzog.⁶² J.H. Hofmeyr, a liberal cabinet minister, opposed the bills in Parliament with the support of only ten followers in the UP.⁶³ The large majority of UP members were conservative segregationists, and Hofmeyr was increasingly isolated.⁶⁴

The ineffectiveness of liberal opposition was clearly demonstrated when the 'Hertzog Bills' were passed with relatively little opposition in Parliament. Liberal opposition to the bills was organised through the Joint Councils and the SAIRR after the initial publication of bills in 1926. The protest action of the SAIRR in Cape Town and Johannesburg was better organised than in Natal.⁶⁵ Since most liberals were critics rather than direct opponents of the government's segregationist policies, it is not surprising that compromise and accommodation blunted their attack. Some agreed with certain aspects of the bills and the end result was an acceptance of the bills on the condition that a more equitable distribution of land be granted in compensation for the loss of the common franchise.⁶⁶ According to Rich, leading liberals in the SAIRR opposed the bills but had too much at stake to risk a complete confrontation with the government.⁶⁷ The conservatism of the SAIRR, and Rheinallt-Jones in particular, was criticised by liberals such as the Ballingers and those in the Non-Racial Franchise Association and the Cape Native Franchise Vigilance Committee, who were uncompromising in their support for the common franchise.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.9.

⁶¹ The Nationalists under Hertzog formed a coalition with General Smuts of the SAP in 1933. In December 1934 the two parties fused to form the UP with Hertzog as prime minister and Smuts as his deputy. This was seen as a move towards Anglo-Afrikaner conciliation.

⁶² Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁶⁴ Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics', p.110.

⁶⁵ White, 'Maurice Webb', p.6.

⁶⁶ Dubow, 'Liberalism and Segregation', p.5.

⁶⁷ Rich, *White Power*, p.64.

⁶⁸ Dubow, 'Liberalism and Segregation', p.5.

Liberals entered a new phase of political representation with the passing of the 'Hertzog Bills' as the Natives Representation Act and the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936. The former Act allowed for three elected white representatives in the House of Assembly to stand for Africans in the Cape. These spokespersons were known as the 'Natives Representatives' and a number of prominent liberals filled these seats, most notably Margaret Ballinger and Donald Molteno. Africans in all four provinces were represented in the Senate by four indirectly elected white senators. These included liberals such as Brookes, Walter Stanford, William Ballinger and Rheinallt-Jones. A Native Representative Council (NRC), which had advisory powers, was also created by the Act. Through this council African political leaders were to consult with the Natives Representatives and the government. These included liberally-inclined nationalists such as Selby Msimang and Albert Lutuli from the ANC.⁶⁹

It has been suggested that the passing of the 1936 Act played a crucial role in the development of African political awareness and was the start of a movement that grew away from the control and influence of white liberals.⁷⁰ The All African Convention (AAC) met in Bloemfontein in December 1935 to organise opposition to the bills. (Black opposition was also expressed through the Joint Councils.) It was organised by D.D.T. Jabavu (son of the well-known Cape African liberal J.T. Jabavu) and included delegates from a variety of African organisations. The ANC's influence was at a low ebb at this time. The Convention enabled African politics to become organised on a more national basis for the first time.⁷¹ However, its tactics differed little from those of the ANC, namely petition and 'moderate reformism', and it met with little response from the government.⁷² Selby Msimang was elected secretary for the AAC and was included in the deputation to see Hertzog in Cape Town.⁷³ According to Msimang, Hertzog refused to compromise. The failure of the AAC deputation was criticised by, and had the effect of revitalizing, the ANC.

⁶⁹ E.H. Brookes & C. de B. Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1965), p.296.

⁷⁰ P. Rich, 'African Politics and the Cape Native Franchise, 1926-1936' in *Collected Seminar Papers on The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol.9 (1978-79), p.133; Walshe, *Black Nationalism*, p.21.

⁷¹ Rich, 'African Politics', pp.131-132.

⁷² Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p.85.

⁷³ APC, PC 24/1/1/13 & PC 12/1/1/2, Selby Msimang Papers, Notes for proposed biography.

During the inter-war years the majority of liberals still had faith in their political influence, and this was typified by the establishment of the SAIRR. It was also during these years that more progressive views had begun to develop in response to the blatant racism of the Pact government's legislation. Although liberals were increasingly critical of government policy they failed to thoroughly challenge segregation or provide workable alternatives. There was a genuine concern for the welfare of Africans, particularly those recently urbanised, and this was the focus of liberal activity during the 1920s and 1930s. It was during the next decade of rapid change that liberal calls for economic integration and permanent African urbanisation became more vocal.

1.4 The 1940s : Times of change — From 'high point' under Smuts to 'retreat' from resurgent Afrikaner and African nationalism.

The divisions which had been developing in South African liberalism during the previous decade became more defined and established after the Second World War. Far-reaching socio-economic changes had taken place in South Africa during the war and in the immediate post-war years, as a result of widespread African urbanisation in response to extensive industrialisation. This provided a challenge to liberals as they now had to grapple with an increasingly complex political situation. Furthermore, liberals faced a challenge to their position of helping articulate black responses to white policies as a result of the radicalisation of mainstream black political opinion.

The influence of liberalism in government reached its peak during the early 1940s under the Smuts Administration. Liberals took advantage of the war-time conditions of increased industrialisation and unchecked black urbanisation which challenged existing government policy. There was hope for liberal reformers during the Second World War. Hertzog had resigned in 1939 over his objection to South Africa joining the war on the side of Britain, and Smuts took over the leadership of the UP and the government. The Secretary of Native Affairs (who presided over the NRC), Douglas Smit, was sympathetic to reform initiatives. The Natives Representatives in Parliament continuously pressed for reforms from the late 1930s into the 1940s and achieved some marginal successes. Hofmeyr, then deputy prime minister

and likely successor to Smuts, gave encouragement to liberals with his more progressive views. However, he was inconsistent in his liberal convictions.⁷⁴ Furthermore, he was outnumbered and increasingly unpopular in the UP. He tended to follow Smuts' more conservative line, thus compromising many useful reform efforts. Nevertheless, the limited reforms and concessions that were made by the government were the result of pressure from liberal Natives Representatives and the initiatives of Hofmeyr.⁷⁵

By the mid-1940s liberals had become more cosmopolitan in South Africa.⁷⁶ The changing political situation in South Africa from the late 1930s had stimulated liberal debate and encouraged a diversity of views and discussion topics amongst liberals. Furthermore, the views of liberals like the Ballingers had begun to diverge from those progressive thinkers within the UP. There was the development of more critical, deep-rooted analysis of the South African situation. Although the number of dissenting voices in opposition to the SAIRR increased, there was no sufficiently strong alternative viewpoint to challenge that of the Institute until after the Second World War. The more social-democratic wing of left liberals, which had centred around Macmillan and the Ballingers in the 1930s, began to assert itself.⁷⁷

The left-liberal camp of the Ballingers was joined by other liberals, such as Donald Molteno, against the conservative liberalism of the SAIRR which had been fostered by Loram, Rheinallt-Jones and Hoernle.⁷⁸ A small group within the Institute wanted a more active political approach but were outvoted.⁷⁹ This, together with a letter sent by Dr Alfred Xuma, president of the ANC, to the SAIRR requesting clarification of the Institute's policies in 1942, proved to be a catalyst in defining different liberal positions. In essence the clash was between those favouring an increasingly assertive political role who disagreed with the Institute's 'apolitical' standpoint, and those wanting to continue with a more 'race relations'-type of approach. For example, William Ballinger and the liberal association, the 'Friends of Africa', became involved

⁷⁴ P. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Bibliography* (Cape Town & Oxford, OUP, 1995).

⁷⁵ Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics', p.109.

⁷⁶ Rich, *White Power*, p.126.

⁷⁷ Macmillan, one of the SAIRR's main critics, had left South Africa in 1932.

⁷⁸ Rich, *White Power*, pp.73-75.

⁷⁹ Rich, 'South African Institute of Race Relations', p.83.

with the development of trade unionism amongst African workers from the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁸⁰ His interest was in contrast to certain liberals in the SAIRR, who considered this type of involvement too radical.

During this period there was a noticeable increase in the number of reports written by liberals outlining possible solutions which were based on an economic analysis.⁸¹ An academic economic liberalism had developed in the 1930s through liberal figures such as Macmillan, Frankel and the Ballingers. Liberals urged the Smuts Administration to accept economic integration and permanent urbanisation of Africans. The work of the influential liberal historian, C.W. de Kiewiet, was amongst those pressing this viewpoint.⁸² While the influx of Africans into cities and towns created a problem for the government's segregationist policies, liberals saw this as a natural process which would require basic socio-economic reforms. They believed that economic growth would necessitate political reform and dissolve the structures of racial segregation. The government had tried but had failed to prevent the permanent settlement of black people in towns during the war, and Smuts had announced in 1942 that 'segregation has fallen on evil days'.⁸³ However, any optimistic hopes that liberals may have entertained in the early 1940s faded after 1946. The government became increasingly reactive as it came under mounting pressure from opposition on the right to deal with the demands of black political organisations.

During the 1940s there was an increase in political activism amongst liberals. Many came to recognise that black people needed direct political representation, rather than indirectly through the existing structures. These liberals warned that unless some concessions were made, it might be too late to halt the complete radicalisation of black political opinion. By 1946 Brookes, Molteno and Margaret Ballinger favoured a common-roll for all with a qualified franchise.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ William Ballinger had experience in this field as he had originally come to South Africa in 1928 to advise the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU).

⁸¹ D. Everatt, 'The making of a liberal programme 1947-1950', *Collected Seminar Papers on The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol. 15 (1990).

⁸² See: C.W. de Kiewiet, *History of South Africa, Social and Economic* (London, OUP, 1941).

⁸³ Quoted in Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics', p. 105.

⁸⁴ Lewsen, 'Liberals in Politics', p. 110.

Liberal activity was still limited to working within government structures in order to influence it in right direction, and members of the white liberal establishment called on the black political leadership to moderate its demands. According to Brookes they had hoped to influence government 'slowly and steadily ... in the right direction'.⁸⁵ Unfortunately, they only realised after 1948, when it was too late, that their pace had been too slow.

The influences on African political thought increased in number and diversity after the First World War. As discussed, the older generation of African political leaders was conservative, and the ANC represented their elitist interests. The organisation had rejected the radicalism of the ICU during the 1920s, and had gone through both a decline and a conservative phase under Pixley Seme's leadership in the 1930s. Black political demands were not radical in the inter-war years in the sense that they did not amount to any major changes in the existing political system. Reform measures were to be obtained through acceptable constitutional channels, which included working with white liberals in attempts to influence government. Demands included an equal access to education, a more equitable distribution of land, and an extension of the Cape franchise. They anticipated a gradual process toward a 'common society'. These demands, however, seemed radical to the majority of the white population. As their avenues of political expression were limited, African political leaders were dependent to a large degree on the white liberal establishment. During the 1940s black politics had begun to enter a more assertive phase with the growth of African nationalism. As part of this process, some African political leaders became critical of the leadership provided by white liberals, and the liberal guidance of the Joint Councils and the SAIRR was no longer accepted as automatic.⁸⁶

Expectations had been raised during the war, and there had been a significant rise in black, especially African, political activity. The ANC had been revitalised by its reorganisation under Alfred Xuma (elected president in 1940) and by an upsurge of popular protest in the 1940s.⁸⁷ Although the ANC was still essentially a liberal organisation during the 1940s, its demands and methods had changed reflecting the sense of urgency and frustration felt by its leaders. The

⁸⁵ Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, pp.79, 101.

⁸⁶ Rich, *White Power*, p.67.

⁸⁷ Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa*, p.85.

shift to a more radical position in the ANC became evident during the 1940s as younger intellectuals in the Youth League (established in 1944) rose within the ranks. Tom Lodge regards the emergence of the ANC Youth League as one of the most important developments (besides the radicalising influence of communism) in African politics during the 1940s.⁸⁸ It introduced into the ANC ideas of African nationalism that it had hitherto lacked. These younger members were impatient with the traditional conciliatory methods of the ANC and dissatisfied with its failure to become a mass movement.⁸⁹ The liberal establishment called for the ANC to moderate its demands and methods, which elicited hostility from the organisation, mainly from Youth Leaguers. Even moderate African leaders in the NRC were demanding direct political representation by this time.⁹⁰ From the mid-1940s onwards the idea of possibly using extra-parliamentary methods and passive resistance to initiate political change was gaining acceptance. This is evident in the ANC's policy document, the 1949 'Programme of Action'. The political activity of the South African Indian Congress (SAIC)⁹¹ had also increased with organised passive resistance campaigns against the state's assault on Indian rights during the 1940s. By 1950 talks on co-operation had taken place between the ANC and the SAIC with the 'Doctors' Pact' of 1947.⁹²

The alternative non-African influence to that of liberalism on African politics was that of communism. Although the Communist party of south Africa (CPSA) had been multi-racial in character, it had not made much of an impact on black politics before the 1940s.⁹³ According to Lodge, the growing ties between the ANC and the CPSA was one of the most important developments in African politics during this decade.⁹⁴ The CPSA had begun to experience a revival towards the end of the 1930s after experiencing a period of decline. Its influence

⁸⁸ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, Longman, 1983), p.20.

⁸⁹ T.Karis & G.M.Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964, Volume 3* of T.Karis & G.M.Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977), p.4.

⁹⁰ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, p.81.

⁹¹ The SAIC was formed in 1919. The Natal Indian Congress (NIC) (formed in 1894 by Gandhi) and the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) formed part of the organisation. By the late 1940s the SAIC had come under the radicalising influence of communism, as a number of its leaders were communists.

⁹² Drs. A.B.Xuma (ANC), Yusuf Dadoo (TIC) and G. M. ('Monty') Naicker (NIC).

⁹³ Walshe, *Black Nationalism*, p.34; Lodge, *Black Politics*, Chapter 1.

⁹⁴ Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.20.

increased during the course of the 1940s, and helped to radicalise both African and Indian politics. There was initially suspicion of white communists from the ANC, especially from members of the Youth League and other Africanists who resisted the influence of communists in the late 1940s. The CPSA's involvement in black politics was opposed by the government which had conducted raids on its offices after the 1946 Mineworkers' Strike, and the organisation was banned in 1950 (The Suppression of Communism Act).

In the light of the above discussion it is interesting to note the differences, generally speaking, between communists and liberals which may have accounted for the success of the former in black politics in the political climate of 1940s. Besides obvious ideological differences, the political styles of communists and liberals differed. Communists were prepared to work more closely with black political organisations and supported extra-parliamentary methods of opposition. They provided a radicalising influence to black politics while liberals urged black leaders to moderate their demands. Many white liberals in the late 1940s were anti-communist. One characteristic, however, that communists and liberals in South Africa had in common was that they were small in number and were mostly white intellectuals, although most liberals were solidly middle-class while communists were more likely from a working class or lower middle class background.

The radicalisation of black political thought and activity during the 1940s resulted in the marginalisation of the liberal influence over the African political leadership. During the Second World War the SAIRR came under increasing pressure from African leaders to make its political position clear. It chose to remain 'apolitical' and by the end of the War was increasingly out of touch with African political opinion, especially after the 1946 Mineworkers' Strike and the adjournment of the NRC.⁹⁵ There was already evidence of the shift away from the white liberal influences of the SAIRR with the election of Hymie Basner, an ex-Communist, as a Natives' Representative in 1942. He defeated the director of the SAIRR at the time, Rheinallt-Jones. Brookes's influence in the SAIRR had increased by the late 1940s (after the retirement of Rheinallt-Jones) and he was successful in pushing the organisation into

⁹⁵ Rich, 'South African Institute of Race Relations', p.83.

a more assertive but still neutral position.⁹⁶ The Institute established more active ‘front’ organisations, such as the Civil Rights League in 1948.

It was during the late 1940s that ideas about forming a new political party began to circulate amongst liberals. On the whole, liberals supported the UP, and Hofmeyr was seen as their only hope in the party. He was considered the likely leader of a potential liberal party. Overtures had been made to him from as early as 1938 to lead a new party but he declined, feeling that the time was not right and that liberals should rather form associations to spread liberal ideas. It was felt that Hofmeyr would lead a new party but would not take the first step in starting it. Leo Marquard, a lawyer and well-known liberal, tried to persuade him in 1946 to lead a new party but nothing developed.⁹⁷

During the 1940s, and especially after the 1948 general election defeat of the UP by the NP, African and Afrikaner nationalism came to dominate the political terrain. The position of liberalism as some sort of ‘middle-ground’ was thus threatened by African nationalism on the one hand and Afrikaner nationalism on the other. The growth of African nationalism has already been discussed above. An increasingly radical Afrikaner nationalism became a political force as the colour question superseded the ‘Boer-British’ issue during the 1930s and Afrikaner nationalists wanted to ensure the survival of white supremacy as well as of the Afrikaner. Liberalism became the ‘ideological antithesis to militant Afrikaner nationalism’.⁹⁸

1.5 Natal: A Different Sort of ‘Liberal Tradition’?

A liberal tradition did not develop in the Colony of Natal during the nineteenth century as it had in the Cape. At the talks over the proposed Union in 1910 Natal fitted more easily into a category with the two Boer Republics than with the Cape Colony. The small liberal tradition which did emerge amongst Natal’s white population had strong ties with Christian missionary

⁹⁶ White, ‘Maurice Webb’, pp.8-9.

⁹⁷ APC, PC 2/6/6/1, P.M.Brown, ‘A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa’, unpublished manuscript, pp.4-5.

⁹⁸ Legassick, ‘The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism’, p.29.

activity. Of more interest perhaps than the lack of a noteworthy liberal tradition amongst the white population was the development of a liberalism amongst the African Christian converts who formed part of an economically successful group, the *khotwa*, from which the political leadership came. As has been demonstrated so far in this chapter, there is no straightforward definition of liberalism in South Africa, and this is particularly true in the case of Natal. Many of those who were considered liberal, both black and white, might only be accepted as such in the South African context.

The small white liberal presence in Natal in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century was neither effective nor influential enough to have any major impact on political developments in the Colony. While individuals like Bishop Colenso⁹⁹ had personal influence, no distinctive liberal tradition similar to that of the Cape ever developed. Despite their mid-nineteenth century Victorian English origins, British settlers did not display any signs of producing ‘an indigenous liberalism’ in Natal.¹⁰⁰ The situation in Natal did not lend itself to the formation of a settler liberalism as

‘the resilience of African society and the weakness of the colonial state (together with the unwillingness of the British to foot the bill) had led almost from the start to set of policies dependent on conserving and manipulating aspects of the African precapitalist social order’.¹⁰¹

A segregationist ideology had therefore developed together with a ‘virulent British racism’ which was ‘only partially modified by a more liberal missionary ethos’.¹⁰²

There were particular features of Natal’s political situation that allowed for its unique character in the South African context and which need to be taken into consideration when examining the development of liberalism in this region. Firstly, there was a strong missionary presence which provided a base for the growth of liberalism. Secondly, the white population was vastly

⁹⁹ John Colenso came to Natal from England in January 1854 as the new Bishop of the Anglican Church, and subsequently became a controversial figure in the Colony. See J.Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso, 1814-1883* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁰ Trapido, ‘The friends’, p.252.

¹⁰¹ S.Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa* (Johannesburg, Ravan, 1986), p.58.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.58.

outnumbered by Africans. This, together with the large number of Indians, allowed for the development of a strong reactionary response amongst whites. Thirdly, there was the fear that the Colony and later the Province might lose its ties with Britain. The desire of white Natalians to maintain their 'English-ness' and their British traditions was often seen to be as important as black/white racial issues.

The vast majority of white colonists in Natal were British and were culturally homogenous at the turn of the century. Their fears and interests were often pandered to by the colonial government. Members of the (white) Natal Parliament were mostly successful farmers and businessmen, and were anxious to preserve their positions and privileges.¹⁰³ The Colony had eventually been granted Responsible Government in 1893, and this gave the Natal Parliament a free hand in shaping the colony's 'native affairs'. The African population suffered the most from the 'unpredictability of the choppy sea of Natal politics' after the granting of Responsible Government, with the enactment of several racialistic measures by the Natal Parliament.¹⁰⁴ The general view of the Natal colonists was against the extension of political rights to Africans. The massive disparity in numbers helps explain the fear of the white colonists of being 'swamped' by Africans and therefore their hostility towards even a qualified 'native' franchise. The Indian population did not escape either. They were deprived of the parliamentary franchise in 1896, and further moves were made to deprive them of the municipal vote.¹⁰⁵ It also became increasingly clear that it was unlikely that the majority of Indians would be repatriated.

There was a noticeable increase in the racial prejudices of Natal's white colonial population from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, and the 'native question' began to receive more attention. Economic factors were probably the most determining in this development. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century the balance of political power in Natal had swung towards settler commercial and agrarian interests.¹⁰⁶ The development of

¹⁰³ A. Dunimy, 'Towards Union, 1900-1910' in A. Duminy & B. Guest (eds), *Natal and Zululand, From Earliest Times to 1910* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal Press & Shuter&Shooter, 1989), pp.407-408.

¹⁰⁴ Brookes & Webb, *A History of Natal*, p.216.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, *A History of Natal*, p.288.

¹⁰⁶ S.Meintjes, 'Edendale, 1850-1906: A case study of rural transformation and class formation in a South African mission station in Natal', PhD, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

merchant capital and white commercial farming resulted in a demand for labour and land, and fear of competition. The racist sentiments of the white colonists were further fuelled by the Bambatha Rebellion in 1906.

There was no significant liberal movement amongst colonists in the early twentieth century that had much effect on government. But there were attempts to improve the lot of Africans. A group of sympathisers formed the Native Reform League whose members included Maurice Evans (Durban member of the Legislative Assembly), Marshall Campbell (member of the Legislative Council) and Harriette Colenso (daughter of Bishop Colenso). Evans drew a distinction between the 'civilised' *khofwa* and the 'tribal' Africans. He suggested that the system of exemption and enfranchisement should be retained for the former while the latter should have a paternalistic type of self-government.¹⁰⁷ This was not the view of the majority of white Natalians who supported the system of customary ('native') law and 'rule by chiefs' which had been implemented by Theophilus Shepstone, the then Secretary for Native Affairs, in the mid-1800s for all Africans.

There was no evidence of any liberal inclination amongst the Natal delegates at the National Convention in 1908 and of the attempts by concerned groups to influence the Natal Parliament to protect the rights of its black population. The delegates felt even more strongly about the question of the extension of the Cape 'native' franchise to the rest of the union than they did about the federation issue. (The Colony was strongly in favour of a federal system rather than a union.) Frederick Moor, the Natal Prime Minister and one of the delegates, even suggested that the franchise be dropped in the Cape. He felt that Africans were incapable of becoming 'civilised' and explained that this was the opinion of white Natalians. All five of the Natal delegates voted against the compromise eventually agreed on for Union.¹⁰⁸

The small number of more progressive thinkers in 1910 was not enough to organise an effective lobby for African rights, let alone form some sort of political organisation. A group of

1988, p.320.

¹⁰⁷ Duminy, 'Towards Union', p.407.

¹⁰⁸ Brookes & Webb, *A History of Natal*, pp.240-241. See Section 1.2.

white sympathizers, including Harriette Colenso, formed a Committee to promote the interests of the African people in the discussions over the Union proposals. They assisted the Natal Native Congress (NNC) in its attempts to influence and put pressure on the Natal Parliament, as well as the British government, to protect African interests in the drafting of the Act of Union. However, their efforts seem to have had very little success, as the interests of the Indian and African populations of the Colony were ignored at the National Convention as well as in the drafting of the Union agreement.

The leadership of formal African political organisations in Natal was drawn from the *kholwa* and could be described as espousing broadly liberal values. A modern political consciousness amongst the African population in Natal had first developed within this group. The *kholwa* had converted to Christianity through the efforts of many missionary endeavours in the Colony, and it was through missionary influences that they absorbed European values and ideas. Their conversion to the Christian faith thus included a cultural transition:

‘Through the church and literacy, the *kholwa* were in contact with a broad set of beliefs in which the importance attached to Christian faith for spiritual life was matched in social and political life by the importance attached to the values of Victorian liberalism.’¹⁰⁹

The *kholwa* formed the nucleus of a ‘new and self-consciously distinct social group in Zulu-speaking society’ which constituted part of an emerging middle class or petty bourgeoisie.¹¹⁰ Most of this group had received some sort of basic education from the missionaries and their number included land-owning commercial farmers, clergy, teachers, lawyers, interpreters, clerks and traders.

The missionary presence in Natal provided at least some fertile ground for the growth of liberalism in Natal. There were Anglican, Methodist and Roman Catholic missionary organisations, as well as the congregationalist American Board of Missions, which were active in Natal and Zululand. Missionaries had up until 1910 provided the only education for Africans and after Union they continued with this tradition. Perhaps the most well-known institution

¹⁰⁹ N. Cope, *To Bind The Nation* (Pietermaritzburg, University of Natal, 1993), p.23.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.23.

was Adams College on the south coast of Natal. Most leaders of African political organisations in the first half of the twentieth century had been taught at a mission institution and so been influenced by liberalism. Missionary organisations also played an important role in the welfare of Africans by providing medical and social welfare care, such as clinics and orphanages. An illustrious example of the missionary tradition in Natal was Bishop Colenso. From the beginning 'it was clear that Colenso looked upon his missionary work among the Zulus as his most important duty'.¹¹¹

The *kholwa* wanted to be distinguished from the rest of the African population and felt that they should receive 'civilised status' on a par with white settlers in recognition of their conversion to the Christian way of life.¹¹² The white settler population were hostile to the idea of any change in the status of the *kholwa*, and the Natal colonial government steadfastly refused to contemplate their exemption from customary ('native') law as a group (they could apply for exemption on an individual basis only). This was an ongoing contentious issue between the colonial government and the *kholwa* from the 1860s into the 1900s. The changing circumstances at the turn-of-the-century were unfavourable to the economic and political development of the emerging African middle-class in Natal. The Natal Native Congress (NNC) was formed in 1900 to represent the political interests of the *kholwa* and was led by John Dube. This organisation was conservative, and its members were typical of the African petty bourgeoisie in Natal. The political priorities of the *kholwa* were the extension of the franchise, freehold land tenure, and 'overall their inclusion as full members in a non-racial South African middle-class'.¹¹³

It was more likely that issues concerning Natal's constitutional status would divide white opinion than questions of colour.¹¹⁴ White Natalian politics was provoked into action by issues such as Anglo-Afrikaner conciliation, a bilingual South Africa and support for the British

¹¹¹ Brookes & Webb, *A History of Natal*, pp.105-106.

¹¹² For the following discussion: S.Meintjes, 'Edendale' & 'The Ambiguities of Ideological Change: The Impact of Settler Hegemony on the amakholwa in the 1880s and 1890s', Conference Paper, Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal (1985).

¹¹³ Cope, *To Bind The Nation*, p.23.

¹¹⁴ For the following discussion: P.Thompson, *Natalians First* (Johannesburg, Southern Books, 1990).

Empire rather than any bills about limiting rights of black people. After 1910, the majority supported the SAP and then the UP on both national and provincial levels. A minority were secessionists and wished to defend Natal's place in the British Empire. There was very little support for the Afrikaner Nationalists up to 1950; this was largely confined to the northern districts of Natal which included a larger percentage of Afrikaans-speaking people.

According to Barry White, the most important sphere of liberal activity in the inter-war years in Natal was urban social welfare.¹¹⁵ The particular 'social geography' of Natal after Union impacted on, and is important in understanding, the type of liberalism which developed. The majority of the African population in Natal was rural and remained so into the 1940s. This owed much to the legacy of Shepstone's 'native reserve' system which was implemented in the mid-1800s in an effort to control African settlement. The basic structure created during the late 1800s remained in place and allowed for the development of a migrant labour system which offered workers low wages in urban centres, as the rural economy of the reserves was meant to sustain their families. Economic developments and industrialisation as a consequence of the First World War created a demand for labour which led to increased urbanisation amongst Africans and Indians in the inter-war years. There was also pressure created by the economic decay and overpopulation in the African reserves. Although urbanisation was largely permanent with the Indian population, the nature of the African workforce remained mainly migrant.

The effects of black urbanisation in the 1920s were of concern to liberal whites, besides missionaries. As discussed earlier, the emphasis was on social welfare rather than any sort of direct political action during the inter-war years. This type of activity was fostered by an active missionary presence in the case of Natal. Many liberals were involved with missionary organisations or people in some way. Liberals' endeavours in social welfare have been criticised for alleviating but not solving the problem. Their concern was not effective nor influential enough to achieve radical changes, but their interest and practical welfare work should be credited with some value.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ White, 'Some Thoughts'; White, 'Maurice Webb', pp.3-4.

¹¹⁶ Brookes & Webb, *A History of Natal*, p.299.

As elsewhere in South Africa, Natal liberals shared a gradualist non-assertive approach to politics and justified working within government administration and segregated structures as an attempt to influence developments in a liberal direction. The attitudes of the majority of these liberals about segregation were not always clear. Natal liberals included some of the leading ideologues of segregation, notably C.T.Loram. The African political leadership in Natal maintained a close association with the white liberal establishment, and white liberals continued to exert an influence on it. White liberals acted as useful intermediaries between African leaders and the government.

Liberal activity in Natal was mainly through the Joint Councils, and there was little in the way of liberal research going on in Natal in the 1930s until the establishment of a branch of the SAIRR office in Durban in 1940.¹¹⁷ The Institute was influential in Natal liberalism.¹¹⁸ It was directed for many years by Maurice Webb in Durban, and since he gave financial assistance to the Institution, he was largely able to dictate its activities.¹¹⁹ He supported the Institution's decision not to become an active political body and resented attempts by certain liberals to influence it in a more politically active direction.

Natal had little to offer when compared with Johannesburg and Cape Town as centres of liberalism in South Africa. The white liberal establishment in Natal from the 1920s was composed of an eclectic group of people. The following discussion on well-known liberals is perhaps the best way of illustrating this. C.T.Loram was a prominent liberal figure in the inter-war years and a proponent of the more conservative liberal political line. Brookes maintains that in hindsight Loram was more of a 'broad-minded conservative' than a liberal, but at the time he was considered a liberal and was sincere in his desire for the advance of Africans.¹²⁰ He was involved in African education, in the Native Affairs Commission (1920) under Smuts and played a significant role in the formation of the Joint Council movement and later the SAIRR. He encouraged those with an interest in African advancement to form or join 'Native Welfare

¹¹⁷ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, p.77.

¹¹⁸ Brookes & Webb, *A History of Natal*, p.297.

¹¹⁹ White, 'Some Thoughts', p.6.

¹²⁰ Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, pp.28, 36.

Associations', which led to the formation of 'Social Clubs' where black and white could meet. African liberals were very often influenced by lectures given at these clubs by prominent liberal figures.¹²¹

Maurice Webb and Mabel Palmer were considered liberal in South African context and this seems largely based on their activism in social welfare and liberal organisations rather than their actual beliefs.¹²² Both had emigrated from Britain in the 1920s and brought with them the Fabian socialist ideas popular in England at the time. Webb also had strong Quaker sympathies. These leanings point to an interest in the less fortunate and an obligation to help, which formed the basis of the pragmatic, social welfare type of liberalism. According to White, Webb was the epitome of inter-war social welfare liberalism in Natal.¹²³ He was involved in the administration of over thirty welfare committees and two Joint Councils, he was the chairman of the Board of Governors at Adam's College, a Council member at the Natal University College, and the regional representative of the SAIRR (he became president of the national body in 1943). Mabel Palmer was representative of the liberal presence at the University of Natal in Durban, where she was a lecturer during the 1930s. She played a significant role in the welfare work of the Durban Joint Council, and in organising tertiary education for Indian and African students.¹²⁴ Although mainly concerned with education, she had some contact with the ICU in the 1920s, and with the Ballingers' co-operative schemes in Natal in the 1930s.

Edgar Brookes was an important liberal figure in Natal from the 1930s, who was also well-known on a national level. Besides holding a number of positions and serving as Principal of Adams College (1934-1945), his most important position as a Natal liberal was probably his term as the Natives' Representative Senator for Natal from 1937 to 1952. Brookes's recantation of his earlier support for the policy of segregation has already been documented. His eventual acceptance of the 'Hertzog Bills' as they appeared in 1936 is also interesting.

¹²¹ Rich, *White Power*, p.14.

¹²² For the discussion on Mabel Palmer: S.Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer and Black Higher Education in Natal c 1936-1942', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, VI (1983); and on Maurice Webb: W.B.White, 'Maurice Webb: 35 Years of Race Relations in Natal, 1921-1956', Conference Paper, Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal (1985).

¹²³ White, 'Some Thoughts', p.6.

¹²⁴ Vietzen, 'Mabel Palmer'.

After initially rejecting any compromise over the Cape franchise in the early 1930s, he began to have second thoughts in 1935 when it appeared that the bills would become law.¹²⁵ He then considered a position representing Africans in Parliament and accepted a nomination for the position of senator from the Zulu Regent, Chief Mshiyeni ka Dinuzulu. Brookes was also active in the SAIRR from the early 1930s, although his influence of was only really seen in the late 1940s.

What of the African liberals in Natal? This question raises more questions than can be answered here. Suffice it to say that basic liberal ideals remained central to the political convictions of liberally-inclined Africans, alongside the influences of both Zulu ethnic nationalism and African nationalism. African liberals did not have a set of rigid political principles, but rather a variety of encompassing beliefs allowing for different aspects to develop to their political orientation. Shula Marks describes the ideology of the African political elite in 1910 as ‘an inclusive, liberal-democratic nationalism’.¹²⁶ In the changing and often contradictory world of Natal politics, an ambiguous position was sometimes expedient for political survival.¹²⁷

Both Selby Msimang and John Dube were involved with the formation of the SANNC (later the ANC) in 1912, where the NNC merged with the new organisation. Dube became the first national president, but was ousted from this position in 1917 for his ambivalent view on segregation. The ANC in Natal then split with a small branch staying loyal to the national body and the more conservative NNC being dominated by Dube. He was now forced to mobilize his own support in Natal and seems to have turned increasingly towards the Zulu royal family.¹²⁸ The alliance between Dube and the NNC and the Zulu royal family, represented by Solomon, can be seen as a move on Dube’s part to provide an alternative focus to growing radicalism after the First World War and as a bulwark against radical change.¹²⁹ The political hopes of the

¹²⁵ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, pp.78-79.

¹²⁶ Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence*, pp.60-61.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.14.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.67.

¹²⁹ S.Marks, ‘Natal, the Zulu Royal Family and the Ideology of Segregation’, in *Collected Seminar Papers of The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol 9 (1977-78), p.118.

kholwa had been dashed by legislation since Union, and they now looked to the rural tribal elite for new political allies.¹³⁰

On the whole, African politicians were conservative in Natal in the first half of the twentieth century. The NNC was practically the only active political organisation in Natal, except for a period from the mid-1920s until the early 1930s when the ICU dominated. There was generally a lack of political mobilisation and organisation amongst the African working class, mainly because of its migrant nature, before the 1940s.¹³¹ From 1946 the Natal ANC was controlled by A.W.G. (George) Champion, who was comparatively moderate.¹³² When Brookes toured Natal as a Senator he found that ‘bread and butter’ issues, especially requests for more land, were more commonplace than questions about the franchise or the general status of Africans in South Africa.¹³³ The radicalising influence of the ANC Youth League was only seen in the late 1940s as it expanded into Natal during 1947.¹³⁴ Champion’s conservatism is clearly demonstrated by his angry reaction to the enrollment of a large group of young ANC supporters from Durban by Selby Msimang, the provincial secretary.¹³⁵ At a subsequent meeting, Lutuli was voted in as the Natal president of the ANC, and Msimang remained the secretary.

Reactions to the 1935-1936 version of the ‘Hertzog Bills’ seem to have been varied and complicated by a series of alliances between various interest groups in Natal. Brookes’s alliance with John Dube to get the proposal for a Native Representatives’ Council (NRC) passed by the ANC was successful, but it carried the proviso that the Cape franchise was not abolished.¹³⁶ Some African leaders thought the proposed NRC might open up further channels of influence with the government.¹³⁷ Dube, Champion, Msimang and Albert Lutuli belonged to

¹³⁰ N.Cope, ‘The Zulu *Petite Bourgeoisie* and Zulu Nationalism in the 1920s: The Origins of Inkatha’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.16, No.3 (1990), p.441.

¹³¹ White, ‘Maurice Webb’.

¹³² Champion united the NNC and the Natal ANC after Dube’s death in 1946.

¹³³ Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, p.84.

¹³⁴ Rich, *White Power*, p.106.

¹³⁵ APC, PC 24/1/1/2, Selby Msimang Papers, Notes for proposed biography.

¹³⁶ Rich, *White Power*, p.65.

¹³⁷ Rich, *Hope and Despair*, pp.78-79.

the NRC.¹³⁸ They did not, however, represent the ANC in this capacity.

Msimang had returned to Natal during the 1940s.¹³⁹ He had been active in labour organisation in Bloemfontein during 1930s where he had been arrested and detained. He settled in Edendale near Pietermaritzburg (then a freehold area) after having managed some family farms at Driefontein, a freehold area near Ladysmith. In Edendale, he was involved with the local branch of the ANC and became the provincial secretary. He was also involved with community issues and served on a number of organisations, including the Local Health Commission and the Edendale Advisory Board.

White liberal philanthropists in Natal extended their social welfare concerns to the urbanised Indian communities. Contact between Indians and white liberals was also maintained through the Indo-European Joint Councils. The vast majority of South Africa's Indian population was (and still is) based in Natal.¹⁴⁰ In the early twentieth century the Indian community was fractionalised by differences in religion, language and class. Politics was dominated by the conservative trader and professional classes in the SAIC and the NIC. During the 1940s a radical element, which was strongly influenced by communism, was gaining prominence in Indian politics. These educated younger members of the Indian population were looking to include the working class which up until this point had been excluded. This increase in political activism in 1940s was in response to increased legislation discriminating against Indians. Indian politics was split with the 'accommodationist' element still working with the government while the more radical section sought to oppose segregationist legislation with a passive resistance campaign. Liberals in parliament tried to prevent measures like 1946 'Pegging Act' from being passed by the Smuts Administration.

¹³⁸ Brookes & Webb, *A History of Natal*, pp.296-297.

¹³⁹ APC, PC 24/1/1/2 & PC 12/1/2/2, Selby Msimang Papers, Notes for proposed biography.

¹⁴⁰ For the following discussion: U.Mesthrie, 'The Cape Town Agreement and its effect on Natal Indian Politics, 1927 to 1934', Conference Paper, Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal (1985); M.Palmer, *History of the Indians in Natal* (Westport, Conn., Greenwood, 1977); M.Swan, 'Ideology in organised Indian politics, 1891-1948' in S.Marks & S.Trapido, *The politics of race, class and nationalism* (London, Longman, 1987); W.B.White, 'Passive Resistance in Natal, 1946-48', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, vol.V(1982).

Conclusion

There is no definition of South African liberalism in the first half of the twentieth century which could adequately describe all liberals. South African liberals occupied positions which were unique to that liberalism and which must be viewed in context of the time and place. Liberals were found in various types of organisations, and in groups as disparate as the UP and the ANC. What held them together was a desire to see improved 'race relations' in South Africa and the belief that change should be achieved through constitutional gradualism. Liberalism in South Africa was shaped in many respects as a response to developments in the country, and did not develop in a logical progression from the Cape Tradition to the more democratic liberalism of the LP in the late 1950s.

No endemic liberal tradition developed amongst Natal's white settlers as it had in the Cape Colony, although the missionary presence influenced a small minority of whites and a larger number of African Christian converts, the *khotha*. The liberal ideals and political methods shared by this group were typical of moderate African politics into the 1940s. The small group of white liberals failed to influence the colonial government before Union, and thereafter the focus of white liberals concentrated on social welfare and education. Those who were involved in politics tended to be conservative and opposed a more active role in politics, preferring to influence the government in 'the right direction'.

Liberals, like the majority of the South African population, did not expect the UP to lose the 1948 general election to the Nationalists. This defeat had important repercussions for liberalism in South Africa. The set of principles guiding the new government were so contradictory to those of the liberals that it made any compromise between them and that government impossible.¹⁴¹ The possibility of liberals losing their political influence under the new government became a reality. For example, Brookes was immediately under pressure to resign from the Native Affairs Commission but waited until 1950 to do so.¹⁴² Furthermore, liberals no longer had access to government ministers as they had with the UP.

¹⁴¹ White, 'Maurice Webb: 35 years of Race Relations in Natal', p. 19.

¹⁴² Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, pp.95-98.

A prime consideration of the liberal establishment after the 1948 electoral defeat of the UP was to ensure the return of that party in the forthcoming general election in 1953. Although the bulk of the group of liberals under discussion had by this time developed major policy differences with the UP, they still supported it as a political party. It was seen as the only option for the return to constitutional gradualism and to prevent a further breakdown in relations with black political leaders, and a split in the opposition was to be avoided. But it was during these years that liberals recognised the ineffectiveness of the UP in halting the apartheid legislation of the Nationalist government and its failure to modify party policy in a liberal direction. Furthermore, the radicalisation and shift towards militancy within organised black political opposition, especially the ANC, in response to new restrictive legislation made liberals aware of their loss of influence in black politics and of the urgency of finding a political solution. The events after 1948 forced them to seriously consider forming a political party as an alternative option to the UP.

CHAPTER TWO

What alternatives? Reluctant choices and liberal principles in the formation of the Liberal Party, 1950 - 1955

Introduction

The 1948 general election victory of the Nationalist Party (NP) had serious repercussions for liberalism in South African. The changes that took place in the following years — the beginnings of the policy of apartheid implemented by the new government, the radicalisation of black political organisations which resulted in the Defiance Campaign of 1952, and the critical importance of the 1953 general election for progressive whites in South Africa — realigned political boundaries and forced liberals to face up to their commitment to the extension of political rights to black South Africans. By 1953, the first serious legislation of the apartheid policy of the Nationalist government had been passed, and the United Party (UP) seemed unable to reverse the general political direction that South Africa was taking. Furthermore, the trend towards militancy in African political organisations was an indication of growing black nationalism. Liberals found themselves unable to exert influence over either the government or radicalised African political opinion.¹

The failure of the UP in the 1953 general election galvanised liberals into forming a separate political party, something which had been discussed with increasing frequency from the late 1940s. The formation of the Liberal Party (LP) in May was welcomed by neither the left nor the right. These Liberals had progressive views in the context of the time in that they were more advanced than the rest of the white electorate, but their views lagged behind those of the far left. In Natal, the formation of the LP was somewhat overshadowed by that of the United Federal Party (UFP), but it still managed to attract attention, particularly amongst the black political organisations.

¹ D. Everatt, 'The making of a liberal programme 1947-1950', in *Collected Seminar Papers on The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, ICS, London, vol.15 (1990), p.149.

The Party itself was not free from internal disputes over policy in the early years as its members faced dilemmas over its main role in the South African political arena, which nearly resulted in the break-up of the Party. Although the dominance of the conservative leadership was challenged by an emerging more radical section, the view of the former group held sway as the Party was not yet strong enough to survive without the respectability lent to it by this prominent group of Liberals. Although the Natal Division contained a mixture of radical and conservative elements at its formation, the developing radical trend had manifested itself in the Division by 1956 — a year which marked a new path in the history of the party.

2.1 1948- early 1953: Years of tumult in liberal circles

The liberals' political party of choice had of necessity been the UP, and the party's defeat in the 1948 general election by the NP, led by Dr D.F.Malan, was a shock to the liberal establishment. It was a blow from which the UP would never recover. Many liberals had tried to influence UP policy in a liberal direction and to secure the nomination of progressive candidates before the election. Hopes of liberalising the UP from within were dashed with the death of J.H. Hofmeyr in December 1948, and there was no obvious successor to him in the party. By the late 1940s the general views of the group of liberals under study had diverged sharply even from those in the progressive wing of the UP.

Despite being unable, so far, to influence UP policy, and set back by the death of Hofmeyr, the liberals nevertheless felt that they should support that party as it was the only parliamentary alternative to the NP. It was of prime consideration not to split the opposition in order to oust the Nationalists in the next general election scheduled for 1953. They saw the UP as the only hope for a return to the path of constitutional gradualism in the reform of race relations. According to Edgar Brookes, however, liberals were in fact deluding themselves by thinking that the 'triumph of apartheid was only a temporary aberration of the electorate'.²

Although there was talk amongst diverse groups of liberals about starting a new political party, particularly after Margaret Ballinger's announcement in 1949 that she was considering such an

² E.H. Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), p.105.

option, nothing concrete developed. Liberals had looked to Hofmeyr to start a new party. Since his death, Ballinger was considered the next choice. Not all sections of the liberal establishment agreed with the idea of starting a political party, though. The South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), under the directorship of Quintyn Whyte, was against liberals entering the arena of party politics.³ The SAIRR supported the UP and expected it to return as the governing political party.⁴ However, both Whyte and Brookes saw the need for the SAIRR to adopt a more assertive political policy after 1950.⁵ Whyte asked Alan Paton's opinion in late 1952 of establishing a 'Moderate Liberal Party'.⁶ Paton's reply gives an indication of the difference in liberal opinion. He pointed out that it was meaningless to have a moderate liberal party, as the UP's efforts at being 'moderately liberal' had achieved nothing. Paton approached Maurice Webb in November 1952 about establishing a liberal party after the 1953 election, but Webb felt it better to work from within the UP.⁷ This view seems to have been shared by others in the liberal establishment.

What was clear by the early 1950s was that liberals had failed to provide a challenging liberal solution to the country's racial problems. Liberals had been active in producing programmes and reports during these years which dealt mainly with economic issues (mainly the economic integration of black people) while ignoring political ones, especially pertaining to the colour question.⁸ These reports were largely dismissed by both the government and black leaders. Meanwhile, the Malan Administration took the first steps towards developing apartheid legislation during the early 1950s, and its policies undid any progress that had been made under the previous Smuts Ministry. The character and momentum of the Native Affairs Department began to change, too, with the appointment of Dr H.F. Verwoerd as Minister of Native Affairs in October 1950. A number of laws were passed discriminating against black people in almost every aspect of their lives, from education, through employment, to areas of residence and land

³ Everatt, 'The making of a liberal programme', p.147; P. Rich, *White Power and the Liberal Conscience* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1984), p.117.

⁴ J.D.Rheinalt-Jones, 'At the Crossroads', SAIRR Presidential Address, 20 January 1953.

⁵ W.B. White, 'Maurice Webb: 35 Years of Race Relations in Natal, 1921-1956', Conference Paper, Conference on the History of Natal and Zululand, University of Natal, July 1985, pp.20-21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See: Everatt, 'The making of a liberal programme'.

ownership. The government also took firm action against any opposition with measures such as the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), which it used indiscriminately against any person or organisation whom it deemed to be a danger to the security of the state.

The Nationalist government's proposal in 1951 to alter the constitution by removing the Coloured voters from the common roll in the Cape, as Hertzog had removed the Africans in 1936, elicited an outcry from liberals and UP supporters. It was more the fact that the NP was trying to alter the constitution than the question of Coloureds losing their rights that troubled most liberally-minded whites. For example, the Black Sash started out as a largely English-speaking middle-class white women's organisation opposing the attack on the constitution, but did not at that time suggest that political rights should be extended to other racial groups.

Similarly, but more significant politically, there was the formation and growth of the Torch Commando in response to the latest move by the government. This extra-parliamentary organisation was made up largely of white ex-servicemen. It was a mass protest movement with principles generally recognised in South Africa as liberal values. It aroused much interest and its paid-up membership increased to 125,000 within a year.⁹ It opposed the arbitrary manner in which the NP had tried to alter the constitution but did not advocate the extension of political rights to black people. Its membership was exclusively white, and it was for this reason that white liberals like Peter Brown did not join the organisation.¹⁰ The Torch Commando became closely linked to the UP, something that many members had sought to avoid. This was especially true in Natal.¹¹ The independence of the movement failed as it joined the UP on its platform for the 1953 general election together with the Labour Party¹² in a United Democratic Front. The movement gradually dissolved after the election.

Liberal activity increased during 1952, with a number of groups being formed and discussion between them intensifying. This year has been described as a 'year of ferment' which made

⁹ J. Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), p.54.

¹⁰ Interview with P. Brown, 25/3/1998.

¹¹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.59.

¹² A socialist party that had become more progressive about colour issues after the Second World War.

liberals think about their position.¹³ Although the call for a new political party was being championed by various liberal groups, the South African Liberal Group (SALG) was the first attempt at forming a more explicitly political liberal organisation. It was founded by Oscar Wollheim, a prominent Cape liberal, in January 1952 in Cape Town. Its main aim was to put pressure on the UP, which was the typical response of the white liberal establishment at the time.

Although the centres of South African liberalism in the early 1950s were Cape Town and Johannesburg, there was renewed liberal activity in Natal. The first meeting of liberals took place in June 1952 in Pietermaritzburg at the invitation of Peter Brown.¹⁴ He was contemplating an organisation ‘something between a political party and a discussion group’. It was formed mainly in response to the realisation that the UP was ineffective and the political situation in South Africa was deteriorating. The group continued to meet during 1952. While the group was mainly white, a few leading Indians and Africans also joined. Most noteworthy was the membership of Selby Msimang. Paton, who had moved back to Natal in late 1948, had become more politically active by late 1952. He attended a meeting of Brown’s group in October and joined. He then later formed a group in Durban with Father Bill Evans from the Tochi settlement at Botha’s Hill. The Berea branch of the UP in Durban contained a number of progressive university staff members, such as Hans Meidner, Hilda and Leo Kuper, and Jean and Ken Hill, who supported a move away from the UP. Meidner was born in Germany of Jewish parents, and had fled that country in 1938. They became some of the Natal LP’s first active members and were to form the basis of the Durban branch of the Party.¹⁵

Msimang had met Brown in Edendale, where Brown worked for the Local Health Commission and later the YMCA. Msimang’s increasingly active position within the Natal ANC in the early 1950s had lost him his job.¹⁶ Since the African National Congress (ANC) could not afford to

¹³ APC, PC 2/6/6/1, P.M.Brown, ‘A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa’, unpublished manuscript, p.7.

¹⁴ For the following discussion: Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998; Brown, ‘History’, pp.9-10; A.Paton, *Journey Continued* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988), pp. 62-63, 67.

¹⁵ APC, PC 2/2/1/3, H.Meidner to P.Brown, November 1964.

¹⁶ For the following discussion: APC, PC 12/1/2/2, Selby Msimang Papers, Notes for proposed biography. .

keep him on as a full-time secretary, he resigned his position as the provincial secretary but remained a member. His resignation from active politics was a condition of his new employment as a Messenger of the Court with the Bantu Affairs Commission, which he got with the help of Edgar Brookes. He became an active member of the Pietermaritzburg liberal group which he found 'fulfilled all my beliefs in the liberation of my people'.

In Natal, liberals were able to meet socially with people of all races with similar ideas about a 'common society' in South Africa.¹⁷ The International Club in Durban had a multi-racial and varied membership and was well supported during the late 1940s and early 1950s. It seems that many lasting friendships were made here, especially between white liberals and Indian people belonging to the Natal Indian Congress (NIC). The Club in Pietermaritzburg, unfortunately, did not last long. The SAIRR in Durban had a number of keen members and organised various functions. Although the above meetings were not directly political, they gave progressive whites a chance to mix with people of other races, something that was practically unheard of at the time and impossible anywhere else.¹⁸

Despite the formation of liberal groups and the suggestions of forming a separate political party, there remained a diversity of liberal opinion in South Africa, a factor which was to cause problems later in the LP. The following illustrates this point well. In the Transvaal two groups had formed in Johannesburg, but were distinctly different from each other.¹⁹ The first group was the 'Ballinger Group' and was seen as the more 'respectable' of the two. The other group was radical in comparison and was led by Jack Unterhalter and Jock Isacowitz. The members of this group were more in touch with the mood of black political opinion and more flexible over policy and strategy. Isacowitz had been a member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), but had left before 1948.²⁰ It is indicative of the changing mood of politics in South Africa (and somewhat ironic) that the Ballingers were now considered conservative, whereas

¹⁷ APC, R.Vigne's interviews with J.Hill, 15/2/1995, & C.K.Hill, 1/3/1995; P.McKenzie interviewed by P.Merrett, 8/6/1996.

¹⁸ Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

¹⁹ Brown, 'History', pp.11-12; R.Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of south Africa* (London, Macmillan, 1997), pp.13-14.

²⁰ The CPSA had disbanded in 1950 before its ban under the Suppression of Communism Act (1950) came into force.

they were seen as progressive during the 1930s and early 1940s.

This changing mood was evident, too, in the arena of black politics. There had been a transformation in the nature of black political demands inspired by the Atlantic Charter during the mid-1940s, and the change in strategy came in the early 1950s. The ANC had come under the increasing influence of the ANC Youth League and the CPSA by 1949, and the new militancy reflected an underlying sense of urgency and frustration. This was evident in the 1949 Programme of Action, inspired by the Youth League, which endorsed tactics of strike, boycott and civil disobedience. The South African Indian Congress (SAIC) (the NIC in Natal) had organised passive resistance campaigns during the 1940s against urban segregation. The ANC, together with the SAIC, organised a non-violent passive resistance campaign known as the Defiance Campaign which began in June 1952. This campaign was important in the political development of South Africa, especially when coupled with the importance of the upcoming 1953 general election.

The Defiance Campaign was organised to oppose and highlight discriminatory apartheid legislation, and it was successful in that more than 8000 people were arrested, but it was marred and later abandoned because of incidents of violence. The Campaign also attracted support for the ANC and was the prelude to the transformation of the organisation into a mass movement.²¹ It was also the first time the African and Indian political organisations had successfully co-operated. A few whites in Johannesburg and Cape Town joined the Defiance Campaign. Amongst these were communists, trade unionists and members of the Springbok Legion. Belonging to none of these, but perhaps the most notable, was Patrick Duncan, son of the former Governor-General of South Africa and a future LP member.

There was limited participation in the Campaign in Natal with only 300 arrests in Durban and none outside it.²² Indeed, Brown does not recall the Campaign as having much of an effect in

²¹ The membership of the ANC increased to approximately 100, 000 after the Defiance Campaign. A. Stadler, *The political economy of modern South Africa* (Cape Town & Johannesburg, David Philip and London, Croom Helm, 1987), p.151; T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, Longman, 1983), p.61.

²² Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.45.

Edendale and Pietermaritzburg.²³ Members of the ANC in Natal were not as keen as their counterparts in the Transvaal to co-operate with the SAIC.²⁴ This has been blamed on the deep-seated animosity between Indians and Africans in Natal, evidence of which were the 1949 'Durban Riots'. Albert Lutuli (national president of the ANC from November 1952) expressed doubts that the Natal ANC was ready to organise mass action in Natal, and Msimang voiced his concern about joint African-Indian leadership as being inappropriate.²⁵

What effect did the Defiance Campaign have in arousing sympathies among whites? Janet Robertson claims that it divided whites between those that supported a liberal policy towards blacks and those that did not, as it 'was a challenge without precedent to those whites who professed to hold liberal views about colour'.²⁶ Furthermore, it provided the spark to those liberals who were thinking more definitely in terms of forming a separate party. The Defiance Campaign seems to have had a marked effect on white opinion if we judge it by the activity and regrouping of the white left, which included both socialists and liberals, during and after the Campaign.²⁷ Although the SAIRR disapproved of the Campaign, there were liberals who sympathised with it. A statement by leading liberals from Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban sympathetic to the Campaign was issued and published in the liberal journal, *The Forum*, in October 1952. Prominent names among the 22 signatories were Edgar Brookes, Alan Paton, William and Margaret Ballinger, Donald Molteno and Leo Marquard, who all joined the LP in 1953, except for Brookes who joined in 1962.

An examination of the content of this statement highlights the differences between the group of liberals under discussion and black political opinion. It also gives an insight into prevailing liberal viewpoints among the prominent liberals who formed the LP a few months later. The statement expressed the urgency that South Africa should adopt a policy whereby it would 'attract the support of educated, politically conscious non-Europeans by offering them a

²³ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998; APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 1, 1995.

²⁴ W.B.White, 'Passive Resistance in Natal, 1946-48', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, vol V (1982), p.17; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.60.

²⁵ Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.42.

²⁶ Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.83-5.

²⁷ Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.62.

reasonable status in our common society'.²⁸ This could be achieved by reviving the Cape Liberal Tradition whose basis was 'equal rights for all civilized people, and equal opportunities for all men and women to become civilized'. They appealed to African and Indian leaders to accept the fact that this process would take 'time and patience'. However,

'The gap between militant ANC Youth League aspirations and Parliamentary liberal standard-raising seemed immeasurably wide. And yet the very recognition of the Defiance Campaign by Margaret Ballinger and her co-signatories gave cause for hope.'²⁹

Liberalism within the ANC had been transformed by the late 1940s, and the difference between liberally-inclined African political leaders and white liberals became increasingly apparent and the gulf between their aims and methods widened.³⁰ The demands of African political leaders by the early 1950s were for immediate equality: not a 'reasonable status' that would be achieved gradually. Lutuli had publicly rejected the gradual extension of political rights to Africans as well as 'methods of petition and deputation'.³¹ The majority of white liberals were unable to accept the immediate implementation of a universal franchise. Although they supported a non-racial franchise, it had to be qualified. Furthermore, these liberals supported change through a process of constitutional gradualism. The extra-parliamentary tactics of non-co-operation being promoted by the ANC in the Defiance Campaign were unacceptable to most white liberals. However, years of consultations through the Native Representative Council (NRC) and various deputations had failed to achieve any results. The NRC had been abolished by the Nationalist government in 1951, and its abolition signified the end of any possible direct contact between the government and black opposition leaders.

African political leaders during the Defiance Campaign had hoped for the emergence of a white organisation that would work closely with the ANC in preparing South Africa for a non-racial

²⁸ Quoted in *J. Frederikse, The Unbreakable Thread* (Bloomington, Indiana University, 1990), p. 59.

²⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p. 13.

³⁰ Everatt, 'The making of a liberal programme', p. 142; Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp. 29ff, 40, 64ff.

³¹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p. 102.

future.³² A diverse group of left-wing whites sympathetic to the Campaign, including liberals, were invited to a meeting at the Darragh Hall in Johannesburg in November 1952. A number of liberals and ex-CPSA members attended. The liberals at the meeting were opposed to the inclusion of communists, but differences in basic policy were also a problem. The South African Congress of Democrats (COD) was formed shortly after this meeting and included several ex-CPSA members. The COD identified fully with the aims of black political organisations and promoted an equal franchise. This organisation was to become part of the multi-racial Congress Alliance (or Movement) together with the ANC, the SAIC and the South African Coloured Peoples' Organisation (SACPO). The Congress Alliance was structured on a multi-racial, as opposed to a non-racial, basis. However, there was close co-operation between members of the different Congresses and friendships developed across racial lines. Furthermore, several Indian and African members espoused communist ideas whilst belonging primarily to their respective Congresses.

During late 1952 the liberal movement gathered momentum with discussions taking place between different groups. Wollheim had circulated an invitation to start a national liberal association in an attempt to co-ordinate liberal activity. Younger people had begun to join liberal groups and they 'introduced a new tone, a sense of urgency, and a desire to work closely with Africans'.³³ The group that had been meeting in Pietermaritzburg held a public meeting in the City Hall in December which about forty people attended.³⁴ It was decided to form a local liberal association and consider the offer from Cape Town. Such a meeting was also held in Durban to consider the idea, with the same result.

There was a meeting in January 1953 in Cape Town to consider the proposal of forming a national liberal association.³⁵ Four delegates from Natal, including Paton, attended. A

³² J.N. Lazerson, *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid* (Boulder, Colo., Westview Press, 1994), pp.68-69.

³³ T. Karis & G.M. Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964, Volume 3 of T. Karis & G.M. Carter (eds), From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977), p.8.

³⁴ Brown, 'History', pp.15-16.

³⁵ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.67; P. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Bibliography* (Oxford, OUP, 1994), p.282.

constitution for the South African Liberal Association (SALA) was duly adopted. There were objections to certain points in the constitution from the Pietermaritzburg and Durban branches, but both decided to adopt it and affiliate themselves to the SALA.³⁶ They would raise their objections later. The Pietermaritzburg and Durban groups formed a Natal Regional Association with members from both areas serving on the committee. Paton was the chairman, Selby Msimang the vice-chairman and Brown the secretary. The committee was predominantly white, with two African and two Indian members.

The belief was widely held that the UP could win the general election in April 1953, and liberals closed ranks in support of the party. It was therefore felt that the question of forming a separate political party should be postponed until the election was over.³⁷ It was generally thought better to safeguard existing rights in the face of apartheid than to advocate further 'non-white' rights. This attitude did not help the liberals' attempts to influence black political opinion. The differences between the COD and the liberals (and hence the differences in how they were perceived by black people) were highlighted by the former's siding with the ANC and remaining vocal in its call for political equality prior to the election. The importance of the 1953 general election for South Africans cannot be underestimated. The 1948 election had caught people by surprise, but the build-up to the 1953 election 'made it perfectly plain that what was at stake was the future of South Africa, and that in particular the Nationalist Party was seeking a mandate to shut all but white South Africans permanently out of power'.³⁸

2.2 The formation of the Liberal Party, May 1953

'Disillusionment was not sufficiently widespread' among liberals to start a new political party until the second victory of the Nationalists in 1953.³⁹ Not only did the NP win the general election in April 1953, but it increased its lead to include a majority of seats. Liberals could no longer escape the reality of the situation — the possibility of the UP returning power was

³⁶ APC, PC 2/9/11/1, Minutes, Inaugural meeting of the Natal Regional Association of the S.A.L.A., Botha's Hill, 25 March 1953; Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.17-18.

³⁷ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.41.

³⁸ Alexander, *Paton*, p.278.

³⁹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.27.

becoming increasingly remote.

Calls came from various groups within the liberal camp to launch a political party after the general election. When the Interim Council of the SALA met in Cape Town immediately after the election (only Cape members were able to attend), it appears that the general impression was that the Transvaal and Natal members supported the idea of launching a political party. According to Brown, the 'Transvaal certainly wanted a party but Natal was in two minds'.⁴⁰ The Transvaal Regional Committee was in favour of the immediate formation of a political party. By contrast, members in Natal were concerned about forming a party immediately without a detailed political programme. It was decided at a meeting of the Natal Regional Committee in early May that the SALA should emerge as 'an active political Association' prior to becoming a political party so that it could produce such a programme.⁴¹

The meeting of the SALA on 8 and 9 May 1953 in Cape Town included representatives from the three provinces. From Natal, Peter Brown and Selby Msimang attended, while a proxy was held for Alan Paton by Leslie Rubin (from the Cape) and for Geoffrey Durrant (from Pietermaritzburg) by Brown.⁴² Msimang was the only African person present. Although there was general support in Natal for the formation of a separate party⁴³, there seems to be some discrepancy as to whether or not Natal supported the formation of the party at that particular time. While Everatt maintains that the Natal delegates carried a mandate to oppose the launch of a party⁴⁴, Robertson states that Brown attended the meeting 'without a clear mandate', but he was persuaded to support the move as he was aware of the respect many Natal liberals had for Jock Isacowitz (the leading member of the Transvaal Committee pushing for a new party) and of the 'sizeable backing that existed in the Natal groups for the formation of a party'.⁴⁵

Paton had supported forming a separate party after he had become more active and influential in

⁴⁰ Brown, 'History', p.22.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.23.

⁴² Ibid., p.24.

⁴³ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁴⁴ D.Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid 1945-1960.' D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990, p.175.

⁴⁵ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.111.

liberal circles; he had indeed been a representative for Natal at the formation of the SALA in January 1953. He had been pessimistic about the chances of a Liberal Party in South Africa because he knew so few whites were prepared to support a political party that advocated the sharing of power. However, he realised that such a party needed to be formed to fight Afrikaner nationalism and to educate white South Africans, and that he had to be a part of it.⁴⁶ He thus supported the mandate to form a new party.⁴⁷

Margaret Ballinger and her group opposed the launch of a new party at this time. It was felt that the move was immature as a political programme was yet to be prepared. Ballinger, Donald Molteno and some of the Natal delegates voted against such a move on the 8 May 1953.⁴⁸ The vote also did not have the required majority and therefore the formation of the party was deferred. However, on the following day, the Natal delegates voted in favour of the launch of a new party after Brown moved:

“(1)THAT this Association form a political Party forthwith.

(2)That a conference be called at an early date to formulate the programme of the new Party”.⁴⁹

The vote was 18-2 in favour of the resolution, and since neither Ballinger and Molteno had changed their votes, it was the Natal delegates who swung the decision, and the LP was launched.⁵⁰

What persuasive arguments were offered for the Natal delegates to change their minds? First, there was pressure from the Transvaal branch of the Association. It appears that the Transvaal was likely to form its own political party, regardless of what happened at this meeting.⁵¹ The Transvaal delegates sought to counter the influence of the COD in black politics in their province.⁵² Second, a point which was used by the Transvaal delegates, and of which the Natal

⁴⁶ Alexander, *Paton*, pp.276-278.

⁴⁷ APC, 95APA16, Alan Paton Lecture by P.M. Brown, ‘Alan Paton: The Man and the Politician’, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 6/9/1995.

⁴⁸ Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.175.

⁴⁹ Brown, ‘History’, p.26.

⁵⁰ Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.175.

⁵¹ Brown, ‘History’, p.26; Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.174.

⁵² Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.110; Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.174.

delegates were fully aware, was the imminent formation of a political party by the leadership of the Touch Commando, the Union Federal Party (UFP). This was perhaps the most important factor, as the UFP's political programme was expected to be similar to that which was being proposed by liberals for their new party. The two parties were thus hoping to attract members from the same section of the electorate, and the liberals wanted 'to get in first'.⁵³ Third, if the SALA did not take the initiative at that point and form a party, there were doubts whether it would ever be formed.⁵⁴

The Liberal Party of South Africa (LPSA) was launched officially on 9 May 1953 in Cape Town. The majority of its leadership came from the Cape liberal group, except for Alan Paton (vice-president) from Natal, and was led by Margaret Ballinger (president).⁵⁵ As discussed above, she had thought the move immature and not been fully in favour of it, but had reluctantly agreed to lead the Party. The prominent Cape liberals, and Ballinger in particular, were distinguished political figures and they lent respectability to the new Party. Although more radical liberals did not agree with this conservative group on many issues, they did recognise their contribution.

The launch of the UFP came within a day of the LP's. The Press, especially in Natal, tended to give the launch of the UFP more attention. Although both stories were carried and comparisons made, the LP lost the opportunity for valuable publicity. The *Natal Mercury* dealt mainly with the UFP as it 'claims more immediate attention in Natal', but felt that 'a Liberal Party is long overdue'.⁵⁶ However, 'the support [the LP] will receive for the time being is likely to be comparatively limited' since 'its objects are probably far in advance of public opinion'. In comparison, there would be 'considerable support for the Union Federal Party in Natal'. The *Daily News* expressed a similar opinion: that the LP was 'rather too far in advance of prevailing colour sentiment in the Union to recruit a multitude of members' and that the UFP

⁵³ Interview with P. Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁵⁴ Brown, 'History', p. 26.

⁵⁵ Ballinger actually came from the Transvaal, but since she was a Native Representative she spent the majority of her time in the Cape and shared the viewpoints of the so-called Cape liberals, she was considered part of the Cape liberal group.

⁵⁶ *Natal Mercury*, 12 May 1953.

was likely to recruit more, especially in Natal.⁵⁷ The UFP was expected to be the LP's main opposing contender for electoral support in Natal as it was likely to have more appeal and its published statement was 'just liberal enough' to attract those in the white constituency who might otherwise have supported the LP.⁵⁸ Although the UFP was mainly concerned with developing a federal system in South Africa in which Natal would have a degree of autonomy, it acknowledged the extensive economic integration of Africans and recognised that they would have to be included in the political process at some point in the future.

When these newspaper articles refer to members, support or public opinion, it means that of the white population in Natal, which was the only group eligible to vote in parliamentary elections. The majority of white Natalians were staunch UP supporters and had a distrust of the Afrikaner-dominated NP which had only recently come into government. Thus, they were neither liberal, in the sense that prospective LP members were, nor did they support Afrikaner nationalism. They also shared a certain set of racial attitudes and prejudices, the result of a history of being a small reactionary white minority of colonists in Natal. An article in the *Leader* on the launch of the new parties nevertheless predicted the alternatives this group would ultimately opt for: 'One thing is certain. Sooner or later the Europeans of Natal will make a clear choice between their racial prejudices and the principles of justice and fair play which they so freely profess.'⁵⁹ The new parties might well have been expected to influence such a choice in the near future.

The formation and policies of the LP, as opposed to the UFP, attracted attention in black political circles because its membership was open to people of all races. Although membership of the Party at its inception was almost exclusively white, that it was promoting a non-racial character was unique for any political organisation at that time. While the membership of the CPSA had been mixed, the COD had a whites-only membership in accordance with the multi-racial structure of the Congress Alliance. (There were African and Indian communists who had belonged to the CPSA before its dissolution in 1950, and who now belonged to the ANC and

⁵⁷ *Daily News*, 11 May 1953.

⁵⁸ APC, PC 2/9/11/1, P. Brown to M. Rodger, 25 May 1953.

⁵⁹ *Leader*, 15 May 1953.

SAIC respectively.) Furthermore, with the exception of the Communist Party and the COD, no other white-dominated political party had previously endorsed the extension of full political rights to black people (such as the LP was proposing).⁶⁰ The difference was that while the COD supported a universal suffrage in 1953, the LP officially promoted a non-racial but qualified franchise.

In a commentary in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, the formation of the LP was seen, for a number of reasons, as a 'significant development in South Africa today'.⁶¹ The colour policy of the UFP was regarded as too similar to that of the UP, and another article suggests that those who were too timid for the LP should join the UFP, 'leaving the true democrats to join the Liberal Party'.⁶² Both articles warn that the LP would receive a mixed reception in African political circles. Even though the Party's policies may be in advance of 'European' opinion, they lagged behind those of certain African schools of thought. An article in *Bantu World* expressed similar sentiments. It congratulated both new parties, but felt that the LP was the more promising of the two with regard to the rights of African people.⁶³ Furthermore, these parties should not 'expect non-Europeans to show much enthusiasm at present'.

The reaction by various political organisations to the formation of the LP was criticism from all sides. Although it was reported that 'Non-European leaders' in Durban had adopted a 'wait-and-see' attitude to the LP⁶⁴, there were members of the ANC and the Congress Alliance who regarded the Party as ineffective and accused it of trying to usurp their position and recruit potential Congress members. According to Paton: 'They were angry with us for not joining the grand Congress movement.'⁶⁵ Why had the white members of the LP not joined the Congress Alliance? The most likely answer is that they would have been expected to join forces with other left-wing whites who were not liberals and who advocated different solutions to South Africa's problems. The majority of liberals were hostile to communism and saw the COD as a

⁶⁰ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.112.

⁶¹ *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 23 May 1953.

⁶² *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 16 May 1953.

⁶³ *Bantu World*, 16 May 1953.

⁶⁴ *Leader*, 22 May 1953.

⁶⁵ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.117.

front for communist activity since many of its members had previously belonged to the CPSA. Furthermore, they objected to the multi-racial structure of the Alliance.

Perhaps the strongest attack on the LP came from Dr. Yusuf Dadoo, former president of the SAIC, who described the party as 'half-baked and comprising' and could not be expected to 'persuade the Nationalists to desist their path to fascism'.⁶⁶ Two prominent members of the NIC, J.N. Singh and I.C. Meer, accused the LP of 'dividing the people'.⁶⁷ P.R. Pather from the comparatively conservative Natal Indian Organisation (NIO) was more complimentary, as he welcomed the formation of the LP.⁶⁸ A strong attack on the LP also came from J.G.N. Strauss, leader of the UP.⁶⁹ Although no Member of Parliament from the UP left in order to join the LP, electoral support might be lost to the new party.⁷⁰ Besides this, the Liberals were accused of splitting the opposition by retracting their support from the UP.

The Party was launched in Natal towards the end of June 1953. Public meetings were held in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, with smaller meetings in the Natal Midlands. The meetings were considered well-supported (about 450 people in Durban and about 200 in Pietermaritzburg) and the audiences consisted of people of all races.⁷¹ Questions from the floor dealt mainly with the Party's franchise policy, and most attacks came from members of the NIC. They questioned the sincerity and commitment of a party promoting only the gradual extension of political rights to black people while still seeking support from them.

2.3 A dilemma of priorities: Liberal Party policy formation, 1953 - 1955

In spite of initial reservations among some of its prospective members, the LP had been formed, and its launch was greeted with a mixed reception in the political community. The new Party

⁶⁶ Quoted in *Leader*, 22 May 1953.

⁶⁷ Quoted in Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.68.

⁶⁸ *Leader*, 22 May 1953.

⁶⁹ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.68.

⁷⁰ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.123.

⁷¹ Brown, 'History', pp.28-29; Reports in *Natal Mercury* and *Daily News*, 26 June 1953, & *Natal Witness*, 30 June 1953.

was now faced with a number of challenges in establishing itself as a viable political organisation. Looking at the development of the LP's policies, one notes that there were a number of contentious issues which at times threatened to split the Party. The members of the LP did not constitute a homogenous group who agreed unanimously on a particular set of political objectives. Although they held divergent political views, they were bound together by a common goal: that of opposing the discriminatory apartheid policies of the Nationalist government.

The contrasts in opinion which surfaced as the LP developed were over ideological political issues and not over questions of racial equality.⁷² In the early years, these differences in the LP had a 'rough geographical correlation': the Cape was regarded as conservative, the Transvaal as radical, and Natal was in the centre.⁷³ The prominent members of the Cape group saw the LP as a manifestation of the Cape Liberal Tradition, and since the Cape members had the prestige and dominated the leadership, their views held sway for a number of years. As mentioned, this group contained a number of distinguished politicians who lent respectability to the party, and thus their relative conservatism was tolerated by the more radical members in the interests of Party unity.

The early membership of the Natal Division of the LP contained a cross-section of liberal views, and it seems to have suffered less from internal cleavages than the other Divisions, especially the Cape. Members such as Leo Kuper, Hans Meidner and Violaine Junod (all originally Durban members) occupied a more advanced position on issues such as the franchise than did Peter Brown and Alan Paton. Brown notes in the report on the first National Conference in 1953 that it should be recognised that in a place like Pietermaritzburg 'where things move slowly and we do not feel any great pressure of events, we are almost bound to find ourselves on the Right, at the most, in the Centre. It is perhaps difficult for us to understand the deep sense of urgency which grips people in a place like Johannesburg'.⁷⁴

⁷² Paton, *Journey Continued*, pp.118, 132-133; J.Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* (London, Pall Mall Press, 1963), p.197.

⁷³ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.133.

⁷⁴ APC, PC 2/9/26/1, Report on the First National Conference of the LP, July 1953.

The principles⁷⁵ which the LP adopted in May were essentially those of the SALA. Since the formation of the Party had been largely unanticipated, a detailed political programme had yet to be formulated. The Party suffered from internal policy disagreements from the start. Early formulations of policy for the Party proved too conservative for certain sections of the LP membership on a national scale, and the main points of contention became apparent shortly after the formation of the party at the first annual Congress (then called Conference) in July 1953. First, there was the issue of whether the franchise should be qualified, and if so, what these qualifications should be. That the franchise would be non-racial and on a common roll was not in dispute, but the possibilities of a wider or narrower vote remained disputed. Second, there was the question whether or not the LP should restrict its activities to the accepted parliamentary arena ('constitutional means' only). Third, the Party's opposition to communism was an issue in the light of potential co-operation with the Congresses.

At the centre of these debates was the problem of what role the LP was to play in black politics and how this would affect the Party's position as a parliamentary party. What relationship should the LP adopt towards the ANC and the Congress Movement? Considering the non-violent civil disobedience tactics and demands for equality recently expressed during the Defiance Campaign, as well as the influence of communists in the ANC, it is not surprising that many Liberals were apprehensive about closer relations. However, there were those that realised that in order for the LP to play a greater role in South African politics and encourage a non-racial membership, some identification had to take place between the Party and the Congresses. Since the LP was promoting equal rights for all citizens and its membership was open to people of all races, its policies were of particular interest to, and came under the scrutiny of, black political organisations. As expected, the two policies which were criticized by the Congress leaders were the qualified franchise and the 'constitutional means' which the LP meant to employ.

The franchise question was a controversy which was to almost destroy the unity of the Party. At the 1953 National Conference of the LP there was 'no important body of opinion which ...

⁷⁵ See Appendix One. The common emphasis was on typical liberal principles, such as a high regard for individual rights, the freedom of speech, an independent judiciary, and the rule of law.

argued for a policy of immediate adult franchise'.⁷⁶ It was accepted that the policy should be a qualified, non-racial franchise, and that compulsory education should be available to all in order that the qualifications could be met. Whether or not universal suffrage was ultimately the aim of the Party was part of the debate, but the main point of controversy was the nature of the qualification. This debate showed up the differences between the three regions: the Transvaal members were the most radical, the Cape the most conservative, and the Natal delegates occupied 'a position between the two extremes, but nearer the Cape'.⁷⁷ Certain members wanted Std. VI as the qualification for the vote, while others felt this was too low. The Pietermaritzburg branch had wanted Std. VI together with a further qualification.⁷⁸ As was to be expected, certain members considered the qualifications too high, while others felt they were too low. The dilemma for the LP was that, if the qualifications were set too high, it would discourage potential black supporters, while if they were set too low, any expected support from the white electorate would be lost. As an African member of the Pietermaritzburg branch pointed out, the qualifications should not be set too high if the LP wanted to appeal to Africans in any great numbers as these were presently unobtainable to the vast majority.⁷⁹

Brown says in his Report on the 1953 Conference that he realised that there would be members in Pietermaritzburg who would find the Std VI qualification, which had been decided on, too low.⁸⁰ There was considerable discussion of the question at the committee meeting of the Pietermaritzburg branch at the end of July after the Conference. Certain members, notably the chairman, Simon Roberts (a prominent Pietermaritzburg lawyer), felt the qualification was too low and that the loss of 'European' support would greatly reduce the chances of any electoral success for the Party.⁸¹ Roberts vacated the chair over this issue at a later meeting in September (but remained a member of the Party).⁸²

⁷⁶ Brown, 'History', p.34. Brown's emphasis.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.35.

⁷⁸ APC, PC 2/9/26/1, Report on the First National Conference of the LP, July 1953.

⁷⁹ APC, PC 2/9/23/1, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch, 6 July 1953.

⁸⁰ APC, PC 2/9/26/1, Report on the First National Conference of the LP, July 1953.

⁸¹ APC, PC 2/9/23/1, Minutes, Interim Committee of the Pietermaritzburg branch, 30 July 1953.

⁸² APC, PC 2/9/23/1, Minutes, Interim Committee of the Pietermaritzburg branch, 21 September

It was at the 1954 National Congress that the franchise issue exploded and caused serious rifts in the Party. The chairman of the Franchise Committee, set up in response to the objections raised at the 1953 Conference, reported that the Committee felt that the qualified franchise had to be dropped as a permanent feature of party policy.⁸³ Jimmy Gibson, a radical Cape member and chairman of the above Committee, had introduced a resolution suggesting this at the Cape Provincial Congress, which had been defeated.⁸⁴ The members of the Franchise Committee, with the exception of Rodney Davenport (Cape), supported his views. This included Peter Bullen from Natal. It appears that the franchise question was not on the agenda for the National Congress of 1954, but a resolution was introduced at the last minute by the Transvaal Division which was similar to that of Gibson's. This was a suggestion which was unlikely to elicit much support from the Party leadership in 1954, but which obviously had support from a number of members.

After much debate a statement of policy was released to the effect that the ultimate aim of the LP was to introduce the universal adult suffrage, but that a qualified franchise was necessary in the interim. This would be based mainly on educational criteria still to be established.⁸⁵ The Std. VI qualification was thus removed.⁸⁶ The outcome was considered a victory for the more radical members of the Party over the more conservative Cape members, who had envisaged a qualified franchise as permanent.⁸⁷ Stating that the ultimate aim of the Party was a universal adult franchise may have sunk any chances the LP ever had of electoral success under the existing dispensation.⁸⁸ It was, however, a bold step for the Party to have taken, especially when compared to the other white parliamentary political parties at the time (excluding the COD). It was, furthermore, evidence of the beginning of a process of change in direction within the LP.

In the debate on the franchise issue which followed, Natal opinion seems to have been divided.

⁸³ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, July 1954.

⁸⁴ Brown, 'History', p.49.

⁸⁵ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, Statement by the National Committee on the Franchise Policy as decided at the National Congress in July 1954.

⁸⁶ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, P.Brown to A.Brusse, 16 August 1954.

⁸⁷ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.116.

⁸⁸ Alexander, *Paton*, p.297.

For example, Mlahleni Njisane (an sociologist with Kuper from the University of Natal, Durban) pointed out that black political organisations were suspicious of the motives of the LP, and felt that any qualification would be seen as another form of discrimination.⁸⁹ He added that the ‘Non-Europeans had not the time for gradualism’, and that they ‘wanted the franchise on the basis on which the Europeans now had it’. Selby Msimang, on the other hand, supported the motion against the resolution because ‘the direction of the Party must depend for its success entirely on the influence of the people who at present enjoyed the vote’.⁹⁰ Furthermore, ‘Africans must not make it difficult for the Party to make headway by proposing things which the [white] electorate would not accept’. Herein lay the LP’s dilemma, as policies to attract black members would alienate potential white support.

At this point, Brown and Paton supported a franchise with some sort of qualification.⁹¹ Both were not convinced at the time about the advantages of a universal franchise and were furthermore unhappy with the manner in which the whole question had been before the National Congress.⁹² Brown considered resigning from the Party, while Paton, who had been in the United States of America, was very angry that he had not been consulted. The question of the franchise was put ‘on hold’ after the National Executive Committee Meeting in late 1954.⁹³

The debate over the LP’s choice of using ‘constitutional means’ only to achieve change and their role as a strictly parliamentary party became more of an issue from 1956, but it was a point of concern in Natal before this because of the provincial leadership’s desire to work more closely with the Congresses from the beginning. At the National Committee meeting prior to the National Congress in 1954, representatives from the Natal Division were divided into two roughly equal groups over this issue.⁹⁴ There were those who argued that the Party should focus on the black population, while others were more conservative in maintaining that the Party should try to convert the white electorate to liberalism. Members of the latter group saw

⁸⁹ Minutes, National Congress, July 1954, quoted in Brown, ‘History’, p.51.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998; Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.29.

⁹² Brown, ‘History’, p.52; Alexander, *Paton*, p.297.

⁹³ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Region branch, 2 November 1954.

⁹⁴ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 9 July 1954.

the role of the LP in black politics as vital, but felt that the party should not exclude itself from a role in parliamentary politics. It was clear at this meeting that a large number of Party members felt that there was a need for closer identification with black peoples' aspirations and a need to recognise the possibility of individual members becoming involved in activities that might not be strictly 'constitutional'.

2.4 The Natal Division: off to a good start

At the launch of the LP in 1953, the Natal Division had the smallest membership and was the least-distinguished of the Divisions. By the end of 1956 it had the largest membership, including the largest percentage of black members, and had increased its stake in the national leadership. The Division contained a cross-section of political views in the earlier years but had managed to contain internal disputes, something for which Natal became well-known. It was largely due to the hard work and dedication of several active members in the years after the launch of the Party that the Natal Division found itself in this position by late 1956.

The efforts of the leadership in Natal to encourage membership were energetic. At the first meetings after the launch of the Party, the need to increase membership and the number of branches was seen as a priority.⁹⁵ Furthermore, these leaders had realised the importance of a black membership (Africans and Indians) at the Party's inception and had worked actively towards this. At the formation of the Party in 1953, the overwhelming majority of members were white, while the national leadership was completely white. The latter was to change during the 1950s, and it was from Natal that the black leaders came. Indeed, by 1954 the National Committee had black representatives from Natal on it.

The two original SALA groups were founded in Pietermaritzburg and in Durban, and it was from these two groups that the two regional branches of the Natal Division of the LP were formed: the Inland and the Coastal. The Natal Inland Regional branch, comprising of Pietermaritzburg and surrounding areas, the Midlands and northern Natal, and the Coastal Regional branch grew to include an increasing number of active branches. By the end of 1953

⁹⁵ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Regional Committee, 7 June 1953 & 28 July 1953.

the Natal Division had increased its membership to 201.⁹⁶ In comparison, the Transvaal had 329 members, while the Cape had 380 members. Paid-up membership figures at the end of 1955 show that the Cape (595) and Natal (416) Divisions continued to flourish while the Transvaal (254) seemed stagnant.⁹⁷ During the following year the membership of the Natal Division overtook that of the other Divisions.

Much of the growth in the Natal Division can be attributed to the work of Peter Brown, and it had become clear already at this stage that he was an important element in the Division. As provincial secretary for the Division, he travelled around the province, from the Midlands to northern Natal to the coastal regions. He visited towns where interest had been expressed and canvassed support for the Party. Meetings usually took place at some person's home. Any interest, whether from house-meetings or otherwise, was followed up with a letter and information about the Party. Paton often accompanied Brown and gave speeches. No doubt Paton, the famous author, was a drawcard, but Brown did the groundwork. In a letter to Brown from Walter Stanford in October 1955, the latter congratulated Brown on his part in making Natal such a successful Division:

‘I am glad to see from your minutes the activity amongst the branches and the energy with which Natal is going along, I think with more energy than in the other Provinces at the moment. This is good to see, and many congratulations to you personally for your part in it.’⁹⁸

The leadership of the Natal Division actively encouraged the development of a black membership from the Party's inception and the success of these initial attempts could be seen by the mid-1950s. This was not only an attempt to reflect the Party's desired non-racial character, but also an attempt to realise in practical terms the firm belief that the role of the Party should include working through both black and white communities. However, this non-racial emphasis was not without its problems as efforts to attract black members had the potential to alienate

⁹⁶ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 27-28 February 1954.

⁹⁷ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 14 January 1956.

⁹⁸ APC, PC 2/9/17/1, W. Stanford to P. Brown, 11 October 1955.

white members.

Although there had been keen interest in the policies and development of the Party, there had been no rush initially by black people to join the Party. It had been difficult to make inroads into the black communities, a fact which took many white members by surprise.⁹⁹ According to Jordan Ngubane, Africans were distrustful of white overtures.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, there was interest in the Party and its policies. People of all races had been present at the inaugural public meetings of the Party in Pietermaritzburg and Durban in late May 1953.¹⁰¹ The national secretary noted in a letter to Brown in July 1953 that it was 'especially interesting to find how much interest there [was] among the Non-Europeans in Natal'.¹⁰² By 1955 membership in the Natal Division was composed of approximately a third each of Africans, Indians and whites.¹⁰³ Not only was the membership racially mixed in Natal, but so was party leadership. Black members were represented on regional and provincial committees. Prominent African and Indian leaders from Natal also served on the National Committee.

As expected, the LP did not make significant inroads into the white community in Natal, although white members were recruited in the most numbers initially. The policy of recruiting black members did not go down well with the more conservative white element of the Party in Natal.¹⁰⁴ For example, in letters of resignation Mary and Grace Lee from Pietermaritzburg objected to the acceptance of the aim of a universal franchise as well as the possibility of the party co-operating with the Congress Movement.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, they objected to the acceptance of 'Non-Europeans' to full membership without 'screening [for] real' political views and felt that the Party was going too far in attempting to recruit 'Non-European' support. No doubt there were other members who felt this way, and would in due course transfer their allegiance to either the UP or the UFP.

⁹⁹ APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 2, 1995.

¹⁰⁰ Ngubane, *An African*, p.194.

¹⁰¹ *Natal Mercury & Daily News*, 26 June 1953; *Natal Witness*, 30 June 1953.

¹⁰² APC, PC 2/9/11/1, National secretary to P.Brown, 3 July 1953.

¹⁰³ Alexander, *Paton*, pp.288-289; Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.68.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

¹⁰⁵ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, M.Lee & G.Lee to P.Brown (provincial secretary), 24 October 1954.

There were also attempts to widen the sphere of LP effectiveness. Natal had, along with the Transvaal Division, pushed for the compatibility of joint Congress-LP membership at the 1953 National Conference.¹⁰⁶ At a meeting with the ANC Executive in October 1953 attended by Paton, Brown and Msimang from the LP, the ANC stipulated that, while it would not encourage dual membership, it would not prevent it.¹⁰⁷ When asked if action would be taken against those with dual membership who might take part in non-constitutional activity, Paton replied that no action would be taken as long as such activity was not done in the name of the LP.

Although the LP did not recruit a great number of ANC members, it did succeed in attracting individuals who were to play an important part in the LP. In Natal, members such as Selby Msimang and Jordan Ngubane, a well-known journalist and influential figure in Natal who joined the Party in 1955, had been prominent members of the ANC before joining the LP, and still maintained their membership of the former. Msimang was a founder member of the ANC and had been the Natal provincial secretary, while Ngubane was a founder member of the ANC Youth League. Msimang set-up the initial meetings with the ANC which gave the party in Natal access to ANC members.¹⁰⁸ Mlahleni Njisane was active in the LP but still maintained his ANC membership. Elliot Mngadi, who became a member in 1954 after attending a house-meeting in Ladysmith and who later organised efforts to prevent forced removals in northern Natal, was a member of both the LP and the ANC. He was a Messenger of the Court in Ladysmith, and was a community leader in the freehold area (Roosboom near Ladysmith) where he lived. Certain other ANC members may have supported the LP without becoming members. For instance, Franklin Bhengu replied to Brown's letter that, although he had 'read with interest the policy of the liberal party, and found it not to differ from the ANC policy', he considered himself a liberal and would thus work within the ANC to promote liberal ideals.¹⁰⁹ He did, however, wish the Party every success. Mlahleni Njisane, referring to Africans in general, disagreed with those

¹⁰⁶ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', p.187.

¹⁰⁷ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 15 October 1953.

¹⁰⁸ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Regional (Provincial) Committee, 7 & 28 June 1953; PC 2/9/26/1, H.S.Msimang to P.Brown, 23 May 1953.

¹⁰⁹ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, F.Bhengu to P.Brown, 22 September 1954.

who felt that they could serve no useful purpose in the LP.¹¹⁰ To him, converting Africans to liberalism was as important as converting the white electorate.

Active encouragement of a non-racial membership and involvement with black community issues by members of the Natal Division resulted in a change of direction for the Party at an early stage. The LP had begun as, and at this time its main purpose was still that of, a parliamentary political party. However, the white electorate was not the only group which the Party focussed on, as would be expected, and since the main problems facing the disparate groups of white and black were so different, the Party was pulled in two different directions. The course along which the Nationalist government was taking South Africa no doubt nudged the Liberals in the direction of the voteless majority. That people like Jordan Ngubane and Elliot Mngadi had joined the Party showed that it was beginning to move in a direction in which Africans felt was the right one.

There were concerns that black membership, whether in the ranks or in the leadership, should be genuine and not token.¹¹¹ In this the Division appears to have been successful, as black members came to participate fully in the activities of the Party. According to Dr D.M. Bassa, an Indian member of the Durban branch, the LP carried out its policy of a common franchise in its domestic affairs as well, for 'non-white members of the Party actively and fully participate[d] in shaping its policy at all levels — national and provincial'.¹¹² Members such as Selby Msimang, Elliot Mngadi and Jordan Ngubane were 'not men to be patronised'.¹¹³ Patrick Duncan remarked after the Natal Provincial Congress in October 1955 that all races had been represented and that he 'saw no signs that those present gave thought to their racial group'.¹¹⁴ Although black members could not stand for provincial and parliamentary elections, election platforms were shared by LP speakers of all races.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ APC, PC 2/9/23/2, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch, 16 May 1955.

¹¹¹ *Contact*, January 1954.

¹¹² Quoted in *Leader*, 26 March 1954.

¹¹³ D. Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in J. Butler, R. Elphick & D. Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p. 119.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in C.J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (London, Heineman, 1980), p. 128.

¹¹⁵ APC, PC 2/9/26/1, Secretary's Report, Pietermaritzburg branch AGM, 9 March 1955.

The LP in Natal was especially successful with rural African communities. Indeed, the majority of the expanding black membership consisted of rural African people. The LP's involvement with African communities threatened with removal, especially the so-called 'black spots', began in late 1953 when not much was known about the government's proposed rural resettlement schemes nor the communities involved. This was to become a vital part of the Party's activity. 'Black spots' were African freehold areas that, due to the Nationalist government's policy, were now in areas that had been proclaimed as 'white areas' and therefore the communities needed to be moved into an area reserved for black settlement. The largest number of 'black spots' were found in Natal, and in many cases the communities had been established during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century.

Initially research into the affected areas required the gathering of information from both the threatened residents and government departments. This meant several journeys had to be made, mostly by Brown. He was often accompanied by other prominent Natal leaders. Although several areas were under observation, Charlestown was the first and perhaps the most well-known case. Selby Msimang had investigated the problem when he was a councillor in the NRC. Peter Mtimkulu, a member of the ANC but working under the auspices of the LP, spent two weeks in April 1955 investigating residents' claims to property and the possible effects of proposed removals. In a letter to Walter Stanford about Charlestown, Brown expressed his fears about the government's removal plans. He felt that the 'most dangerous feature ... is that this process is going along slowly while nobody knows about it. Even if we can only give it publicity it will be something.'¹¹⁶ The Natives Representatives who were members of the LP, such as William and Margaret Ballinger, Leslie Rubin and Walter Stanford, were briefed to raise the question in Parliament and in the Senate.

The LP in Natal had some early success in recruiting Indian members.¹¹⁷ Paton records that by 1955 one third of the party's membership was Indian.¹¹⁸ Although Paton felt that the party had

¹¹⁶ APC, PC 2/9/17/1, P.Brown to W.Stanford, 31 August 1955.

¹¹⁷ There is a lack of information on the attraction of liberalism amongst the Indian population in Natal in the general sources consulted. This topic is a point for further research.

¹¹⁸ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.68.

‘a deep appeal’ to Indians¹¹⁹, the LP was more likely to attract the more conservative, middle-class group threatened by the Group Areas Act, as opposed to the intellectually-inclined members of the NIC, from which the newly-formed LP had received some of its harshest criticisms. There were also those in the LP who were very opposed to the communist influence in the NIC, such as Pat Poovalingham (Durban member).¹²⁰ Manilal Gandhi joined in late 1954, and the following year invited members to contribute to the columns of *Indian Opinion*, of which he was editor.¹²¹ He corresponded frequently with Patrick Duncan and Jordan Ngubane. He was perhaps the most likely Indian member who could have become influential in the LP, but he unfortunately died prematurely in 1956. E.V.Mahomed, who joined in 1954, established a successful branch at Stanger, served on the National Committee and later became National Treasurer. He had a close relationship with Lutuli, which was useful in co-operation efforts between the LP and the ANC.

It was not expected that the LP in Natal would be successful when contesting elections. In the Election Commission Report given at the First National Conference in 1953, the UFP was seen as a ‘complication’ and, furthermore, the white electorate was ‘on the whole not very liberal’.¹²² It appears that earlier fears that the UFP would rob the LP of potential votes were realised. In the 1954 election for provincial seats, Peter Brown stood in Pietermaritzburg, while Violaine Junod and Ronald Morris contested two seats in Durban. Brown polled the most votes with 154.¹²³ Of the 1954 election, Brown maintains that although the Party expected to do better in Durban, they never expected much.¹²⁴ There was a major contest between the UP and the UFP, and people voted for the UFP because they feared that the UP would win and vice versa.¹²⁵ In this contest the LP’s issues were seen as irrelevant.¹²⁶ But, according to Brown, gains were made, such as publicity and the training of speakers of all races who shared election platforms.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.203. Paton’s emphasis.

¹²⁰ APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 3.

¹²¹ APC, PC 2/9/12/2, M.Gandhi to P.Brown, 12 March 1955.

¹²² APC, PC 2/2/8/1, Minutes, First National Conference, 11-13 July 1953.

¹²³ Brown, ‘History’, p.40.

¹²⁴ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, P.Brown to C.Biggs, 22 June 1954.

¹²⁵ Ibid.; Brown, ‘History’, p.40.

¹²⁶ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, 10-12 July 1954.

He added that members should not be discouraged.¹²⁷

The Natal Division had an active and able leadership which was, overall, neither radical nor conservative, but was progressive enough to move in the direction which its increasing contact with the disenfranchised was taking it. The Division had gained the reputation on a national level as a stable and dynamic branch; a reputation it deserved from the perseverance and hard work of its members. A further positive point was the relatively good relations it had with the Congresses in the province.

2.5 Relations between the Natal Liberal Party and the Congress Alliance

Party leadership in Natal had been in favour of co-operation with black political organisations from the outset, and constant efforts were made to improve relations with the NIC and the ANC. The issue was discussed in depth at the first Provincial Congress in November 1953, where the ‘importance of regular consultation with all representative Non-European organisations, and of collaboration where possible’ was identified.¹²⁸ Brown, in early 1954, suggested that the LP should ‘increase [its] knowledge of and strengthen connections with non-European political organisations’ and recognised that these connections were ‘likely to be informal rather than alliances’.¹²⁹ Of the regions, the Natal Division of the LP developed the most cordial relationship with the Congress Movement, especially the ANC in Natal. This was not the case initially, and members in the LP in Natal worked actively to improve relations and to build-up a working relationship with the ANC. This took longer to achieve with the NIC.

The first important meeting between the ANC and members of the Natal Division of the LP took place at Lutuli’s home in Groutville on 14 October 1953. Paton, Brown and Msimang attended, while Jordan Ngubane was one of the ANC representatives.¹³⁰ Although the discussion was friendly, the ANC made their position clear:

‘There could be no complete identification between the two organisations but

¹²⁷ APC, PC 2/9/26/1, Secretary’s Report, Pietermaritzburg branch AGM, 9 March 1955.

¹²⁸ APC, PC 2/9/4/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, 7 November 1953.

¹²⁹ *Contact*, January 1954.

¹³⁰ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 15 October 1953; *Contact*, October 1953.

there could be profitable co-operation on specific issues.’¹³¹

The stumbling blocks included the franchise issue and the fact that the LP had limited itself to ‘constitutional means’ only while the ANC was committed to using ‘non-constitutional, but non-violent, methods’. It was reported at the National Congress in July 1954 that the ‘Franchise Policy and the policy re Constitutional Action had proved a barrier’ in efforts to improve relations with the Congresses.¹³² Significantly, too, Msimang had been concerned at the LP’s launch in May that consultation with African leaders should take place before the franchise policy was finalised.¹³³

Although the policies of the LP in 1953 ‘were consistent with those of the A.N.C in the mid forties’ and were ‘not compatible with the outlook of the A.N.C.’ in 1953¹³⁴, there was common ground between the two organisations, and the ANC was eager to gain white support. However, communists within the Congress Alliance were hostile towards the Liberals. After the October meeting Paton reported that it was ‘the Communist element which is bitterly opposed to the Liberal Party’.¹³⁵ Brown identified two factions within the ANC in early 1955: one leaning towards communism which ‘won’t have anything to do with [the Party] at any cost’, and one which was liberal and would have liked to work more closely with the LP.¹³⁶ The situation in Natal was shaped by the weakness of communist influences in the region, and Lutuli was friendly towards the LP. He even went as far as saying at an ANC Congress that he was ‘grateful for the existence of the Liberal Party’.¹³⁷ But there were pressures within the ANC which were progressively beyond his control.¹³⁸

Although the ANC was officially boycotting elections for Natives Representatives, certain members approached the LP in Natal through Msimang in early 1954 about the forthcoming election. They wanted the present representative, Senator Cowley, replaced and they were

¹³¹ Quoted in Brown, ‘History’, p.42.

¹³² APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, Provincial Report for Natal, National Congress, 10-12 July 1954.

¹³³ Brown, ‘History’, p.27.

¹³⁴ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.119.

¹³⁵ A.Paton to L.Rubin, 22 October 1953, quoted in Alexander, *Paton*, p.290.

¹³⁶ APC, PC 2/9/12/2, P.Brown to J.E.Stanley, 4 February 1955.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ Alexander, *Paton*, p.291.

hoping to find a LP candidate to replace him. The ANC could not, however, publicly support this candidate. Every effort was made to find a suitable Liberal candidate who would also be acceptable to the ANC, but unfortunately none was found.¹³⁹

The NIC had initially been extremely hostile towards the Party, with harsh criticism coming from its leaders, who criticised the Party for its franchise policy and its commitment to 'constitutional means'.¹⁴⁰ However, at the NIC Annual Conference in early 1954 J.N. Singh, a member of the NIC Executive, stated that this would not stop the organisations from co-operating on issues which they did agree on.¹⁴¹ Relations between the two organisations became progressively more cordial as co-operation increased. Leo Kuper was mainly responsible for initiating meetings with and improving relations between the LP and the NIC. In addition to the Natal Division's Indian membership, Party members had good relations with individuals in the community and within the NIC. Liberal speakers from Natal addressed NIC rallies in 1954 and 1955.¹⁴²

The LP's relationship with the ANC and the Congress Alliance was weakened by its non-participation in the Congress of the People (COP) in 1955. The COP was an idea of Professor Z.K. Matthews, a liberally-inclined but relatively middle-road member of the ANC, that the opinion of all people in South Africa be sought to draw up a 'Freedom Charter for the Democratic Future of South Africa'. The idea was for discussions to take place throughout the country and for delegates to be sent to a national convention. The ANC did not have a clearly articulated ideological position in the early 1950s and were looking at ways of sustaining the following they had gained from the Defiance Campaign.¹⁴³ The COP took place in Kliptown, a township near Johannesburg, in June 1955.

The LP had been invited by the Congress Movement during 1954 to participate and had initially

¹³⁹ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 19 February & 11 March 1954.

¹⁴⁰ Brown, 'History', p.43.

¹⁴¹ *Leader*, 12 February 1954; *Indian Opinion*, 19 February 1954.

¹⁴² Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', p.201.

¹⁴³ Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.69.

agreed, while the question of co-sponsorship would be debated further.¹⁴⁴ The fact that the LP had been invited was an indication that relations between the organisations were improving. Already at this point, however, there was concern amongst certain members over the participation of the COD. The Cape, in general, was opposed to any contact with that organisation, while certain members of the Transvaal and Natal Divisions were not eager for co-operation.¹⁴⁵ Jordan Ngubane had recently joined the LP, and warned the Party not to collaborate with COD members who in this view were turning the ANC towards communism.¹⁴⁶ However, there existed a number of Party members who saw the potential benefits of participation. The reason given for the Liberals' reluctance to fully support the proposed event, and the Party's subsequent withdrawal, was a distrust of COD members and a suspicion that they were running the COP.¹⁴⁷ The COD, according to the Liberals, had a disproportionate influence in the drafting of the Freedom Charter (the form in which it was presented at the COP), which prevented it from being 'genuinely representative'.¹⁴⁸ According to Robertson, the Party's 'reputation was to suffer immeasurably' from its decision.¹⁴⁹

Although the general consensus of opinion in Natal was to proceed with the co-sponsorship, it was not unanimous.¹⁵⁰ According to Paton, a number of members including Brown, Meidner and Junod, 'were not enthusiastic'.¹⁵¹ However, there is evidence which suggests that this was not the case in the initial stages. Robertson concludes that there appeared to be little dispute amongst the Natal leadership over co-operation with the Congress Alliance as the COD was less active in Natal, and relations between the leaders of the LP, the NIC and the ANC were good.¹⁵² Liberals attending COP meetings in Natal were welcomed, 'especially by the

¹⁴⁴ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 9 July 1954.

¹⁴⁵ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.135.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ For discussion on the LP's role in the COP: Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', pp.249-252; Irvine, 'The Liberal Party', pp.127-128; Lazerson, *Against the Tide*, pp.164-167; Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.72; Paton, *Journey Continued*, pp.135-136; Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.161ff; Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.44ff.

¹⁴⁸ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.165.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 30-31 October 1954.

¹⁵¹ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.135.

¹⁵² Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.166.

moderates' in the Alliance.¹⁵³ It was a dilemma for Liberals who wanted closer relations with the ANC and the NIC but who were concerned at the same time about the communist influence.

Brown had been concerned that a genuinely representative consensus of members' views in Natal on the COP should be taken to the National Committee meeting, not just a decision reached by the Provincial Committee.¹⁵⁴ He had attended a meeting in Kokstad, where the opinion was about evenly divided, and was hoping to attend meetings in Ladysmith and the Midlands. He suggested that Junod organise a similar meeting of the Coastal Regional branch. Ismail Meer, a member of the NIC Executive, came to address Liberals on the COP at a joint meeting of the Edendale and Pietermaritzburg branches in mid-October 1954.¹⁵⁵ A resolution was moved by Meidner at this meeting: 'That this branch of the Liberal Party recommends that the Party accept the invitation to co-sponsor the Congress of the People.' Co-sponsorship received overall support as the motion was carried by 33 votes to five, with a number of abstentions.

Junod had supported the idea at the National Committee meeting in late October 1954 as she felt that the Party could play a significant role in the COP and that it could lead to closer co-operation with the Congress Movement.¹⁵⁶ Msimang and Njisane believed that this was an opportunity for co-operating with the Congresses which should not be missed, but added that the conditions under which the Party was prepared to do so should be stated.¹⁵⁷ Ken Hill (a leading Durban member) supported Msimang, and he felt that this was an opportunity to counter the communist influence in the Congress Movement.¹⁵⁸ Paton had supported co-sponsorship 'without any strings attached' at the National Committee meeting, but later felt that the party had perhaps been 'wise to stay out'.¹⁵⁹ Brown himself had afterward become

¹⁵³ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 30-31 October 1954.

¹⁵⁴ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, P.Brown to V.Junod, 1 October 1954.

¹⁵⁵ APC, PC 2/9/23/2, Minutes, Combined Meeting of the Pietermaritzburg and Edendale branches, 12 October 1954.

¹⁵⁶ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 30-31 October 1954.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', pp.248-249.

¹⁵⁹ APC, PC 2/9/12/2, A.Paton to M.A.Wilson, 4 February 1955.

somewhat disillusioned with the whole affair, as the ANC in Natal appeared not to have had the organisational capacity to carry out the idea properly.¹⁶⁰

It seems that although the three Divisions all agreed that the party should co-sponsor the COP in late October 1954, there was nonetheless a degree of uncertainty in each.¹⁶¹ The Cape was largely against the idea, while the strongest support came from the Transvaal, with Natal not far behind it. There were certain conditions that the Party felt ought to be met before it could give its full support, as the following National Committee resolution states:

‘The Liberal Party ... is not prepared to accept the invitation to co-sponsor the Congress of the People without qualification.’¹⁶²

The Party heard nothing from the organisers of the COP for some time until two weeks before the event was due to take place. The LP had therefore not been consulted on any of the arrangements.

There is controversy over the withdrawal of the Party from the COP. It would appear that certain conservative members orchestrated the move because of their fears of COD control and the lack of LP control over the COP. They managed to rally enough support, and it was decided at a National Executive Committee meeting on the 6 June 1955, which was attended by Cape members only, to neither participate in, nor to co-sponsor, the COP. The Transvaal and Natal Divisions were not consulted in the National Executive Committee’s decision. According to Brown, ‘Natal didn’t even know what was happening’.¹⁶³ The Transvaal members wanted to defy the National Executive’s decision, but then decided to abide by it in the interests of Party unity. The disagreement over the COP helped to widen the gap between radical and conservative wings in the LP even further.

The LP’s withdrawal resulted in some hostility towards the Party from the Congresses. This was an opportunity to identify with the African cause which was missed because of the Party’s

¹⁶⁰ Interview with P. Brown. 25/3/1998.

¹⁶¹ Brown, ‘History’, p.62.

¹⁶² APC, PC 2/9/21/1, Motion adopted by the National Committee, 30-31 October 1954.

¹⁶³ Brown, ‘History’, p.65.

ideological stand against communism. The leadership of the ANC had accepted the necessity of working with the communists¹⁶⁴, and Lutuli warned the LP that ‘Africans will judge you by what you do for them, not by your ideologies’.¹⁶⁵ According to Paton, the Party’s decision to withdraw in June 1955 ‘displeased’ Lutuli.¹⁶⁶ He suspects the reason for this being that Lutuli was ‘pushed ... further into the arms of the left’. In retrospect, many Liberals feel that the Party should have taken part.¹⁶⁷

From 1954 the Party became involved in, and supported campaigns in opposition to, specific aspects of apartheid policy. (Such co-operation had nothing to do with the COP.) The basis of future co-operation with the NIC and the ANC was laid during these early years. The Division as a whole had pushed for closer relations with the Congresses in Natal at the formation of the Party, and it continued to do so. Relations however, remained on an informal basis. The campaigns were mainly against the Group Areas legislation, but also included protests against education and influx control or ‘pass’ laws. The avenue of protest was seen as an opportunity for co-operation with black political organisations as early November 1953, in discussion over a resolution at the first Natal Provincial Congress rejecting the Group Areas Act.¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

Liberals in South Africa had been shocked by the 1948 election victory of the Nationalists. Although some liberals had already lost faith in the UP and were considering forming a separate party, they nevertheless banded together in support of the UP in the 1953 general election. Their confidence that the UP would win was shattered and they were forced into action. The alternatives open to them were either to join the Congress Movement, to stay with UP and attempt to influence it and the white electorate by forming liberal associations, or to form a new political party. To most liberals, joining the Congress Movement was not an option mainly

¹⁶⁴ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.167. Also discussed in Lodge, *Black Politics*.

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.253.

¹⁶⁶ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.136.

¹⁶⁷ For example: Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998; APC, M.Dyer interviewed by R.Vigne, 28/3/1995.

¹⁶⁸ APC, PC 2/9/4/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, 7 November 1953.

because of the communist influence and its multi-racial structure. The route of 'liberal influence' in parliamentary politics was, for obvious reasons, outdated, and the UP was no longer capable of rendering effective opposition to the apartheid government of the NP. Thus the decision to adhere to their principles and to form a new political party seemed the only choice, although liberals knew that such a party had little hope of ever gaining political power. It was against this background that the LPSA was formed in May 1953.

The Natal Division of the LP had established itself in the political sphere of the region by the end of 1955. This is noteworthy since the largely reactive white population of Natal did not have the reputation of being liberal, and even the liberal establishment had been relatively conservative. It had progressed from the smallest and least-prominent Division of the LP to an active, stable and progressive Division. Although its paid-up membership of over four hundred at the end of 1955 hardly constituted anything close to a mass movement, the fact that the Party leadership thought this an important achievement gives an idea of the difficulty of the Liberals' task.

The central issues around which internal disputes had arisen were the franchise question and the perception of the Party's main role: should it proceed as a conventional parliamentary party appealing to the white electorate or should it become more involved in black politics by encouraging the growth of its own black membership and co-operating with black political organisations? These decisions were particularly significant in Natal, as this Division of the LP suffered appalling election defeats, and was unlikely to attract large-scale white support but had a growing black membership. The foundations had been laid for co-operation with the Congresses, especially the ANC (despite the LP's decision not to participate in the COP), with the LP taking on causes related to apartheid legislation. By late 1955 the Natal Division of the LP had begun a process of moving in a more radical direction — a process which accelerated in the years to come.

CHAPTER THREE

Choosing the extra-parliamentary option: the Natal Liberal Party's radicalisation and ascendancy, 1956 - 1958

Introduction

Liberals' experiences in the mid- to late-1950s, coupled with the changes in the composition of membership of the Liberal Party (LP) and closer ties with the Congress Alliance, gave cause for the re-examination of some of the Party's policies and drove them in a direction of fundamental change. This process was no doubt influenced by events and the changes in the political situation in South Africa. The Party began to move along an increasingly radical path, and Liberals became more actively involved in publicising and opposing the enactment and enforcement of oppressive apartheid legislation under the Strijdom government. Dr H.F. Verwoerd's succession as Prime Minister after Strijdom's death in August 1958 left South Africans under no illusion that government policy was now apartheid policy.¹

The year 1956 proved to be a turning point for the LP in Natal. The Division established a firm regional foundation during the latter half of the 1950s which provided a basis for change within the Party on a national level. With the moving of the Party's national office to Pietermaritzburg during 1956, prominent Natal members became increasingly involved in the national leadership. By this time Party membership was becoming progressively radicalised and members began looking beyond the confines of previously accepted political boundaries in an effort to bring about change in South Africa. The effect of this was to transform, and to shift the focus of, the LP during the following years, a change which occurred despite some opposition from within. The Party's disastrous election results in the general election in April 1958 and Peter Brown's election as national chairman in mid-1958 cemented the transformation of the LP.

¹ Verwoerd had been Minister of Native Affairs since 1950 and had been responsible for drafting much of the existing apartheid legislation.

3.1 *Opposition beyond Parliament?*

Up until 1956 there had been a series of checks and balances on more radical tendencies within the Party. This was a watershed year in the LP in the sense that there was a noticeable shift towards a more radical position which began with the first real forays into the uncharted territory of activity which was not strictly 'constitutional'. There were, too, increasing calls for the policy of the qualified franchise to be dropped and for closer relations with the Congress Movement. From 1956 onwards there was a movement for Liberals to become directly involved in active opposition politics to an increasing extent, and to move away from their previous concentration on debating party policy. However, policy issues remained contentious within the Party as a whole. By the latter 1950s consensus had been reached in Natal on the franchise issue and on opposition outside of parliament. This was also the case in the Transvaal, but certain prominent western Cape members were unhappy with the direction in which the Party was going.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the question of the franchise was put 'on hold' after the National Executive Committee meeting in late 1954.² It had been a victory for the more radical section of the Party when the official policy acknowledged that a universal franchise was the ultimate aim of the Party. However, the franchise question remained a contentious issue and was brought up again in 1957, where it was discussed at the National Committee meeting in January. Resolutions were put forward by the Transvaal and Cape Divisions which highlighted their differences.³ While the former wanted, in effect, the immediate introduction of a universal adult franchise, the latter wished to re-introduce the qualifications from the 1953 policy statement. The leadership and a majority of the membership of Natal Division were, by 1957, in favour of the adoption of a universal franchise.⁴

At the Natal Provincial Congress in November 1957, there was considerable discussion over a

² APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Region branch, 2 November 1954.

³ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 11 January 1957.

⁴ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

resolution dealing with this issue.⁵ The resolution called for all qualifications to be dropped and it was passed by 43 votes to eight. Alan Paton proposed that the debate over the franchise resolution be held over until the 1958 Provincial Congress for further discussion and possible forwarding to the National Congress. This suggestion was made by Paton in his role as 'peacemaker' in the Party and owing to his awareness of the sensitivity of the issue amongst the prominent older liberals on a national level. The section of the Division which had been more conservative in the early 1950s, including Paton and Brown, had changed their views remarkably quickly 'to catch up with the accelerating pace of change' in the Party.⁶ They had no doubt been influenced by the increasing number of black people who were joining the LP in Natal. Although the adoption of a universal franchise seems to have received considerable support in the Party on a national level by this time, the official policy remained that of a qualified franchise.

The other issue which was vigorously debated in the Party during these years was the question of extra-parliamentary activity. This was partly because of increasingly closer co-operation with the Congresses, and partly because of the burgeoning numbers of black members within the LP. The question of whether or not the LP would restrict its activities to the parliamentary arena became increasingly important. The Party's lack of electoral success and its growing role in black politics contributed to a shift in focus away from white parliamentary politics.

Obviously, the more conservative members wished to remain within the boundaries of parliamentary politics, while the more radical members supported activities outside those boundaries. Since the LP was started as a political party which sought to gain power through the established channels, this meant focussing on the white electorate. However, an increasing number of members felt that the Party should have closer ties with black political organisations and develop in such a way as to appeal to black people.

Patrick Duncan, who joined the Party in 1955 while attending the Natal Provincial Congress, felt that the LP needed to move away from seeing itself as an essentially white parliamentary

⁵ APC. PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, November 1957.

⁶ R. Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (London, Macmillan, 1997), p.30.

party and to look to black South Africans for the power for change.⁷ To this end he corresponded with a number of LP members, especially Paton, Manilal Gandhi and Jordan Ngubane in Natal, before and after he joined. Duncan became the Party organiser, a post created for him during 1956. His main functions were fund-raising and co-ordinating the Party on a national level, and for this reason he travelled throughout the country visiting LP branches. Duncan was known for his comparatively radical line within the LP. His views were often contrary to Party policy, and his open expression of them frequently resulted in an uproar from more conservative members. He also espoused strong anti-communist sentiments. He resigned from this position in 1958 to take up the editorship of *Contact*.

A shift in the general view in the Natal Division about the Party's participation in extra-parliamentary activity was evident during 1956. At the Natal Provincial Congress in October, the overwhelming majority voted for the deletion of the clauses in the Party's manifesto about the use of 'constitutional means' only.⁸ During 1956, too, there was a feeling of frustration amongst those LP members who wanted closer ties with the Congress Movement, but felt restricted by the Party's policy on extra-parliamentary activities. Jordan Ngubane, in a public speech entitled 'African Political Movements', remarked that the phrase 'constitutional means' needed further discussion as it was a point of concern to many people.⁹ It seems that by 1957 a consensus had been reached in the Natal Division which supported such activity. This was also the case in the Transvaal Division and the eastern Cape branch. There was no general agreement, however, from Liberals in the western Cape.

Paton's views had changed since 1953, coming more into line with a growing number of members in the Party. This is significant, as he became the national chairman in 1956 when he took over from Margaret Ballinger, who shared the views of the conservative Cape Liberals. By May 1956 the change in Paton's views was already clear in a letter to Leslie Rubin where he stated that 'he was sorry the Liberal manifesto had ever committed its members to employing only constitutional means in achieving its objects, and would like to take out that

⁷ C.J. Driver, *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (London, Heineman, 1980), p.127.

⁸ APC, PC 2/9/4/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, 27 October 1956.

⁹ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Executive Committee, 21 March 1956.

clause'.¹⁰ Furthermore, he was leaning towards the left in the LP and wanted closer ties with the African National Congress (ANC), despite the latter's co-operation with the Congress of Democrats (COD).

Towards the end of 1956 there were two incidents involving prominent Natal members which brought to the fore the whole issue of extra-parliamentary activities and the Party's role in the struggle against apartheid. The Nationalist government showed its intentions towards extra-parliamentary political opposition with the arrest in December 1956 of 156 members of the Congresses who had taken part in the Congress of the People. This demonstration of the arbitrary power by the state was a shock to Liberals.¹¹ Paton and Leo Kuper were arrested in Durban under a municipal by-law¹² after speaking at a meeting about the creation of the Treason Trial Defence Fund, which was established to support the trialists. The other incident involved Violaine Junod and six other Liberal women, who were arrested in Pietermaritzburg in November 1956 for taking part in a protest march against passes for African women. Both events were organised in conjunction with the Congress Movement. For the LP, this was breaking new ground. However, these examples of extra-parliamentary activity did not receive the support of more conservative members. According to Brown, they were 'enough to make the more sober Party members' hair stand on end'.¹³ Junod assured the Party that their arrests had not been deliberate on their part, and Paton concluded that the arrests were a form of intimidation, as those detained had been released without charge.¹⁴ Paton and Kuper's trial attracted much publicity during 1957. They were charged and fined, but later won the case on appeal.¹⁵

¹⁰ A.Paton to L.Rubin, 19 May 1956, quoted in P. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Bibliography* (Oxford, OUP, 1994), p.307.

¹¹ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

¹² Natal Provincial Notice No. 78 of 1933, which prohibited a meeting of Africans without first obtaining the permission of the Mayor of Durban.

¹³ APC, PC 2/6/6/1, P.M. Brown, 'A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa', unpublished manuscript, p.82.

¹⁴ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 11 January 1957.

¹⁵ A. Paton, *Journey Continued* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988) pp.161-162. See also reports in the *Natal Mercury* and the *Natal Witness*.

As the Party in Natal became increasingly involved with the Congresses in protest campaigns, so the likelihood of its becoming involved in extra-parliamentary activity increased. The march in which Violaine Junod and several other Liberal women took part had been inspired by the demonstration led by the Federation of South African Women, a non-racial organisation affiliated to the Congress Alliance, through the streets of Pretoria to the Union Buildings in August 1956. The march in Natal had been organised in association with the Congress Alliance and was clearly beyond the limits of constitutional action as then defined. That these Liberals were prepared to work with black political organisations and face possible arrest by protesting against apartheid laws made an impression on the black community: 'The effect on non-Europeans could without exaggeration be described as sensational.'¹⁶ Party members also participated in another Pietermaritzburg march in January 1957, which proceeded without incident.

Junod's views give an idea of the thinking of many Liberals at this time. She regarded the 'participation of whites in the extra-parliamentary front' as vital in preventing the conflict becoming purely racial.¹⁷ Such a white person had to 'be prepared firstly to identify fully with the non-whites and secondly to accept readily any hardships or restrictions on [their] personal freedom which the Government may see fit to impose'. She further points out that whites would more than likely be ostracised in their own communities for their participation in the liberation struggle, while blacks would be hailed as heroes in theirs.

The Party's collaboration with members of the Congress Movement in establishing the Treason Trial Defence Fund involved Liberals in an appeal for funds for the defence of those Congress members who had taken part in the Congress of the People. The state had considered the Congress in Kliptown a serious enough threat to initiate charges of treason against those involved.¹⁸ The Freedom Charter was central to the state's argument that the Charter's aims of the elimination of all racial discrimination and the granting of equal rights to all was

¹⁶ 'The Pietermaritzburg Arrests' by Chundra Gesa in *Contact*, December 1956.

¹⁷ *Africa South*, 1, 3 (April - June 1957), p.26, quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.88.

¹⁸ Many of those arrested never stood trial. The Trial eventually came to an end in 1961 with no convictions.

unattainable in South Africa without the use of violence.¹⁹ One of the main points of the trial was whether or not ANC policy was non-violent. By supporting the accused, the LP was clearly siding with the extra-parliamentary opposition movement. This, together with Paton's and Kuper's arrests in Durban in December after attending the inaugural meeting of the Fund, did little to allay fears amongst the more conservative members, especially in the Cape, that the Party was becoming increasingly involved in extra-parliamentary activities.

The Party had taken a major step in the process of its transformation when a consensus was reached in early 1957 that extra-parliamentary activity should be seen as complementary to activity in the parliamentary field.²⁰ This was after much debate at the National Committee meeting prior to the National Congress in January 1957, and a split in the party was averted. Again, the conservative Cape members had their reservations, but had modified their views 'in the face of the insistence of Natal and Transvaal members that the Party's extra-Parliamentary function was as important as its electoral function'.²¹ Paton felt that parliamentary and extra-parliamentary activities should not be divided; both could be used to achieve the Party's goals.²² The Party's representatives in Parliament, especially Margaret Ballinger and Leslie Rubin, continued to fight government legislation. However, Parliament had become increasingly hostile to liberals since 1948. By the late 1950s it was no longer perceived as a democratic organ for the white electorate by Liberals, but rather as a Nationalist rubber-stamp which gave a 'mark of respectability to their obnoxious laws'.²³

The National Committee of the LP expressed its concern in mid-1957 at the indications that the government might ban the ANC and considered that such an action was likely to 'drive many of the African people into a position where revolution [would have appeared] to them to

¹⁹ T. Karis & G.M. Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964, Volume 3* of T.Karis & G.M.Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977), p.64.

²⁰ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, January 1957; PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Region Committee, 28 January 1957. My emphasis.

²¹ Quoted in Brown, 'History', p.85.

²² APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 11 January 1957.

²³ *Contact*, 4 October 1958.

be the only way of achieving social and political change'.²⁴ During 1957-1958 the ANC was to come under increasing legislative and judicial attacks from the Nationalist government. The organisation even drew up plans in case it had to go underground to survive.²⁵ Not only was its leadership incapacitated by the Treason Trails, but rising dissent from the group of Africanists caused rifts within the organisation. This faction eventually broke away in November 1958. However, the Natal branch of the ANC remained united and was not affected by internal disputes.²⁶ Lutuli was still in command and was re-elected for a third three-year term as ANC national president-general in December 1958, with no opposition.

There is evidence that by 1958 a good working relationship had been established between the ANC and LP in Natal. Lutuli had proved to be an influential figure among Liberals and had encouraged the trend towards closer relations. In his speech at the 1958 Natal Provincial Congress, Lutuli expressed the wish of the ANC to work with the LP: 'we do usually co-operate in those matters where we agree and as the years have gone by, we have found ourselves more and more in agreement with the Liberal Party'.²⁷ He added that he welcomed the presence of the LP as it stood for and represented 'lasting values, values which would make South Africa a country to be honoured'.²⁸

The LP in Natal increasingly collaborated and shared platforms with the Congresses from 1956. They were very often called upon to organise these events. Members were invited to an ANC Study Conference on the Tomlinson Report in Durban in October 1956, where four of the eight speakers were from the LP.²⁹ Ngubane and Msimang attended and spoke at the Interdenominational African Ministers' Federation's (IDAMF) Conference of African leaders, in Bloemfontein in October 1956, to discuss the implications of the Report. It was attended by

²⁴ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 27-28 April 1957.

²⁵ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.273.

²⁶ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, Longman, 1983), p.80.

²⁷ Quoted in Alexander, *Paton*, p.290.

²⁸ Quoted in G. van der Westhuizen, 'The Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-1968' in I.Liebenberg *et al.* (eds), *The Long March* (Pretoria, HAUM, 1994), p.89.

²⁹ *Contact*, October 1956; J.Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), p.177.

almost every prominent African figure.³⁰ The Party assisted in organising, and participated in, protests with the ANC and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) in Natal against the extension of passes to women (in Pietermaritzburg), and against the proposed 'Verwoerd Bill' (Native Law Amendment Act) (in Pietermaritzburg and Durban).³¹ It was this participation in extra-parliamentary opposition politics which was a factor in changing the policy of the Party when the leadership began to realise its effectiveness in gaining a foothold in the arena of black politics. This is substantiated by Junod's comment on her experience in the November 1956 march, that white Liberals', 'readiness to identify to the hilt with Africans in their protest and face the consequences immediately made for a warm atmosphere of solidarity which no amount of talking could previously encourage'.³²

Experiences relating to the Treason Trial drew the LP and the Congress Alliance closer together. It was also a chance to mend relations after the withdrawal of the LP from the Congress of the People.³³ LP members got involved in practical problems relating to the detainees and their families, such as organising cases for the defence and organising accommodation and meals. Paton was a trustee of the Treason Trial Defence Fund and used his reputation as a well-known liberal and literary figure in collecting funds in South Africa and abroad. According to Lutuli, the difference the Fund made to the detained members' lives was 'beyond calculation'.³⁴

The Indian community of Natal, in particular, was threatened by the Group Areas Act. Since the Party had a number of Indian members, the Act and its possible effects was a matter of concern to it, although it no doubt would have opposed it regardless. The main area of co-operation between the NIC and the LP was in campaigns against such legislation, and relations between the two organisations in Natal grew stronger. The NIC invited the LP to send delegates to the All-In Group Areas Conference in Durban in May 1956: 'We are looking forward to a close co-operation from members of your Party in making this conference a

³⁰ *Contact*, October 1956.

³¹ *Contact*, December 1956, January 1957, May 1957, & July-August 1957.

³² Quoted in Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.177.

³³ Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.161,179; Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.274.

³⁴ A. Luthuli, *Let My People Go* (Glasgow, Collins, 1962), p.151.

success and we are keeping in contact with Professor Kuper in Durban.³⁵ Brown reported that the conference had taken place in a ‘friendly atmosphere’ and commented on the ‘unanimity of views expressed’.³⁶ Paton and Ken Hill became members of the Group Areas Vigilance Committee and travelled throughout Natal speaking on the Group Areas Act with other Congress members. Paton recalls how he spent many weekends travelling to towns in Natal and speaking at large protest meetings against the Act, which were supported by almost the entire Indian population of the town and usually a few white people.³⁷ The Natal Division was invited to send delegates to NIC annual conferences. In a message of goodwill to the NIC Provincial Annual Conference in November 1957 Brown noted that relations had grown closer during 1956-1957, and he hoped they would continue to do so.³⁸ Paton was invited to open the NIC Annual Conference in late 1958.³⁹

The results of the 1958 general election, and their implications, had a role to play in the transformation of the LP. This election had been important for those who were in opposition to apartheid in light of the further development of this policy by the government. Lutuli had urged Africans not to be indifferent to this election: even if there were no African voters the ‘whole of South Africa’s immediate future’ would be ‘determined by these white voters’.⁴⁰ Furthermore, it was becoming increasingly obvious by the late 1950s that the United Party (UP) was no longer able to offer any effective opposition to the Nationalist Party (NP) government. By this time the UP could no longer be described as ‘broadly liberal’ (as ‘liberal’ was understood at the time) — its colour policy was only progressive when compared to that of the Nationalist government.⁴¹ In addition, the UP had been subject to increasing internal strain over differences of opinion on the colour question before the election.

As might be expected, the LP did not fair well in the general election. The Party contested

³⁵ APC, PC 2/9/13/1, N.T.Naicker, General-Secretary of the NIC, to P.Brown, 5 March 1956.

³⁶ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Executive Committee, 18 May 1956.

³⁷ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.158.

³⁸ APC, PC 2/9/13/3, NIC to LP, Natal, 8 October 1957 and LP reply (message), 7 November 1957.

³⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.100.

⁴⁰ Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, p.162.

⁴¹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.185-187.

three seats: Sea Point in Cape Town, Orange Grove in Johannesburg, and Pietermaritzburg. Brown stood for the Pietermaritzburg District seat which included the city and the outlying smaller towns, and was therefore a mixed urban and rural seat. Five public meetings were held in Pietermaritzburg and were well supported.⁴² But a public meeting held in Howick proved to be the greatest success. Besides about 100 white voters, there were many African and Indian factory workers who attended. Since the hall was filled to capacity, a second meeting was held outside, which Jordan Ngubane addressed. The campaign was run on a non-racial basis and all public meetings were open to people of all races, which created problems as some small towns did not have halls to accommodate multi-racial audiences.

The general election in April 1958 was the third successive victory for the NP (under the leadership of Strijdom), and the UP's defeat further divided that party. After the election, Paton wrote in his column in *Contact* that he never expected the UP to be in government again. Furthermore, he did not see it as 'an opposition with any future'.⁴³ What the result of the general election also indicated was that the majority of the white electorate supported the apartheid policies of the Nationalist government. This was a blow to the minority of the white electorate, such as the Liberals, who actively opposed apartheid. The NP victory thus proved to be a 'decisive factor' in closer relations between the Congress Movement and the LP.⁴⁴

The Cape and Transvaal candidates achieved better results than did Brown in Natal, although both he and the Transvaal candidate lost their deposits. Judging from the result, it seems that the Party had made very little impact on the white electorate in Natal. Brown received 604 votes to his opponent's approximate 6000.⁴⁵ The majority of the white electorate, not only in Natal, were indifferent to an active involvement in anti-apartheid politics.⁴⁶ What Paton found while canvassing in the Pietermaritzburg district for Brown's candidacy was that voters were

⁴² APC, PC 2/9/4/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, 17-18 October 1958.

⁴³ A.Paton, 'Liberals and the Nationalist Party' in E. Callan (ed.), *Alan Paton: The Long View* (London, Pall Mall Press, 1968), p.70.

⁴⁴ J.Lazerson, *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid* (Boulder, Colo., Westview, 1994), p.206.

⁴⁵ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 31 May 1958.

⁴⁶ Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

either '*kwaai nasionalis* {hotly nationalist}' while others were 'staunch United Party'.⁴⁷ The prevailing consideration amongst the more liberally-inclined voters was still to support the UP in the hope of defeating the NP. Some understood that the real issue was the future relationship between black and white in South Africa, but most of these would vote for the UP: why 'swop horses in midstream, when they expect to be swamped anyway?' Although the UP lost seats to the Nationalists in Natal, the party retained its dominant position in Natal under the leadership of Douglas Mitchell.⁴⁸

The Congress Movement organised a national stay-at-home over the three-day election period. This was intended to highlight both the absence of political rights and the 'inadequacy of prevailing wage rates among a population to whom the right of collective bargaining was denied'.⁴⁹ The purpose of Government Notice 526, which was imposed during the general election period and which restricted the number of Africans attending an unauthorised meeting to ten, was to prevent a possible strike. However, the planned stay-at-home was a failure and was called-off after the first day. This was more likely the result of a lack of organisation and interest than any intrinsic observance of Government Notice 526. It seems that the worlds of white and African politics were too removed from one another for a national demonstration by Africans to take place because of a white election.⁵⁰ The failure of the national strike lowered morale inside the ANC and discredited the reputations of its leadership on both national and local levels, at a time when the organisation was fighting dissension from within the ranks. It also cast doubt amongst Liberals over the organisation's abilities.

One important implication of the general election result for the transformation of the LP was that it reinforced the belief that the LP had a negligible chance of gaining any political influence through parliamentary means. The Party had thus to find alternative means of finding political influence. According to Brown,

'From the later 1950's it was clear to the leadership of the party that the

⁴⁷ Paton, 'A Calm View of Change' in Callan(ed), *The Long View*, p.68.

⁴⁸ P.S. Thompson, *Natalians First* (Johannesburg, Southern Books, 1990), pp.57-59.

⁴⁹ M. Ballinger, *From Union To Apartheid: A Trek to Isolation* (Cape Town, Juta, 1969), p.418.

⁵⁰ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.75; Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, pp.283-284.

emphasis should be much more on extra-parliamentary pressures. The hope was still one of eventually attaining power, but by a different route.’⁵¹

The position of national chairman became vacant with Paton’s decision to stand down in order to pursue his literary career. At the National Congress in May 1958 Brown was the only nomination for the chairmanship. He wished to make it clear that he held certain views which might differ from others in the Party and would only accept the position if his standpoint was acceptable to the National Committee. He felt that the main role of the Party was extra-parliamentary, although the Party would still continue to contest elections. The Party would still take part in elections ‘simply to prepare White minds for change’, and he felt that the Party should become more closely identified with ‘existing Non-White political movements’.⁵² Furthermore, if it became necessary, the Party should defy the ban imposed by Government Notice 526.⁵³ Brown was elected unanimously, with Leo Kuper as deputy national chairman. Paton became national president, a non-executive post created for him, and was still very involved in LP affairs.

The Party had thus, under the leadership of Brown, made a stand on the extra-parliamentary issue. The Liberals conceded their failure in the parliamentary field — ‘the path chosen at the LP’s formation. This step had the effect of releasing the Party from the constraints placed on it by having to attract white voters. There had always been the dilemma of trying to keep and encourage the support of the white electorate while promoting policies likely to alienate it. One of the advantages was that the Party’s position would now allow for closer identification with the Congresses. The extra-parliamentary option was not straightforward, however, as consensus was needed on which alternative means (in line with the party’s principles) would be selected.

To have got to this point was a natural progression for Brown and many other Liberals, as they had been influenced by their experiences and the manner in which the country was being

⁵¹ Quoted in Alexander, *Paton*, p.287.

⁵² Quoted in Brown, ‘History’, p.115.

⁵³ Brown, ‘History’, p.116.

governed by the Nationalists, and they could see it going in no other direction.⁵⁴ This came with the acknowledgment by Liberals of the fact that, in Paton's words, '[they were] *not* living in a democratic society'.⁵⁵ They had accepted the necessity of political action outside of Parliament. But pursuing such activity did not mean that the leadership had a clear vision of where it would take them — it was something they felt impelled to do once they sensed that the impetus for change came from black pressure, which needed to be harnessed.⁵⁶ The decision to break from 'constitutional means' only led to debate within the party and raised questions about how the LP now perceived change to come about (i.e. no longer simply a question of constitutional gradualism). Some members maintained that the path of extra-parliamentary opposition was followed by those who favoured revolutionary means, rather than the evolutionary means which were the liberal ideal.⁵⁷ They saw such activity as illegal as it entailed breaking the law. Paton, and the emerging new leadership of the Party, believed that this view was hypocritical. Remaining with 'constitutional means' was playing into the government's hands and only lent credence to its farce that 'it [was] really a constitutional game we are playing in South Africa'. Paton believed that 'massive evolutionary changes must come' and that a non-racial body like the LP should be instrumental in providing guidance in this process of change.

Although the situation looked somewhat bleak after the general election, there was a prevailing mood of hope during the late 1950s after the gaining of independence by Ghana in 1957 and the possibility that this would precipitate changes throughout the continent. Liberals were also encouraged and influenced by events in the rest of Africa after Ghanaian independence.⁵⁸ Jordan Ngubane attended the All-African People's Conference in Accra in December 1958 as the official LP representative, while Patrick and Cynthia Duncan attended in a private capacity. The Congress Alliance delegation was headed by Ezekiel Mphahlele, who lived in Nigeria. The

⁵⁴ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁵⁵ A.Paton to M.Ballinger, 27/12/1956 (emphasis in original), quoted in D. Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid 1945-1960.', D.Phil.Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990, p.217.

⁵⁶ APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 3, 1995.

⁵⁷ For the following discussion, correspondence between A.Paton and L.Marquard, quoted in Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', pp.217-218.

⁵⁸ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.195.

message of the Conference expressed the preference for a non-violent option in gaining independence and the positive rise of Pan-Africanism.⁵⁹ It boosted a sense of identity among Africans in South Africa with movements in the rest of the continent for independence and for ending racial discrimination.⁶⁰ Ngubane and Duncan spoke about the Conference at a series of public meetings on their return, and this brought the LP publicity and boosted its prestige. According to Brown, ‘Africans could not hear enough’ about it.⁶¹ The impact of this Conference on the people of South Africa, both black and white, was ‘immense’ in Lutuli’s opinion.⁶²

The LP had progressed along the path which had led it away from parliamentary politics and closer to its new role in the arena of extra-parliamentary opposition. The transformation of the Party and the development of a more radical liberalism came about as a result of changing attitudes in the Party with regard to its main purpose and how to achieve its goal of a new society in South Africa. This must be seen against a background of the political situation in the country. The question of the franchise and the party’s decision to follow the extra-parliamentary path remained, however, contentious issues. This showed that the voice of prominent conservative Liberals could not yet be discounted despite the radicalisation of the majority of the membership.

3.2 The Natal Division: transformation from within

The changing composition and outlook of the Party leadership in Natal was reflected in the change of focus of the Party towards the extra-parliamentary arena. A number of other factors contributed, such as the lack of electoral success and political developments in the country which caused Party members to re-consider the question of non-parliamentary political activity. Natal was the first region to attract a significant African membership. The change in the composition of Party membership was a crucial factor in its radicalisation, and was at the

⁵⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.82-83.

⁶⁰ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.286.

⁶¹ Brown, ‘History’, p.126.

⁶² Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, pp.187-188.

same time a result of the radicalisation process. Why did the Party move in the direction it did? The seeds for the process may well have been sown in the earlier years, but from 1956 the Division made a more distinct move along this path.

The Natal Division had been at the centre of the LP's political spectrum on a national level in the early 1950s, as it contained a mixture of both radical and relatively conservative members. By the mid-1950s there were still members who saw the Party's primary role as a parliamentary political party, while increasing numbers campaigned for the Party to develop along a different path more in line with black political organisations. However, differences of opinion which had arisen had been successfully resolved, and the Party had avoided internal divisions. It seems that the leadership made an effort for various viewpoints to be accommodated:

'Natal might have [had] its fair share of conservative opinion but at least its membership represented a cross-section of all views within the Party and these members were able to discuss their differences amicably and without building up the tensions and frustrations which seemed to result in Cape Town from the differences of opinion which existed there.'⁶³

The change in the composition of the membership in the Natal Division, the growing proportion of African members in particular, was reflected in the change of composition of the leadership, as well as the outlook of certain members who remained in the leadership. The number of black members represented on the Provincial Committee increased. Furthermore, the changes in the attitudes of key figures such as Brown and Paton, who must be seen as two of the most important figures in Natal, and later in the LP nationally, must be taken into account.

Paton and Brown were most certainly more conservative in the initial period, although both had altered their views by the mid-1950s and had moved with developments in the party.⁶⁴ Commenting on the change in policies and the increased emphasis on extra-parliamentary

⁶³ Quoted in Brown, 'History', p. 70.

⁶⁴ Interview with P. Brown, 25/3/1998.

politics in the Party, Brown noted that there was no doubt that this new orientation was partly due to changing composition, but also that older members had changed their views since 1953.⁶⁵ In a letter to Jack Causton, the Cape vice-chairman, Brown noted that his 'own personal views [had] changed a great deal since [he had] been in the Party'.⁶⁶ Although not a conservative in 1953, he was definitely not on the left-wing of the Party (he supported a qualified franchise but wanted closer ties with the Congress Movement). His increased exposure to discrimination against black people and his growing belief that they had the right to be full-scale citizens modified his views.⁶⁷ In addition, he was influenced by articulate people like Ngubane who convinced him that a qualified franchise was not acceptable.

The addition of African personalities like Jordan Ngubane and Elliot Mngadi to the Provincial Committee pushed the Party further in this direction. That Ngubane had joined in 1955 was evidence of the change in the LP towards the left. He also preferred the non-racialism of the LP as opposed to the multi-racialism of the Congress Movement, and his anti-communist sentiments and his dislike of the communist influence in the ANC were well-known. Ngubane provided a crucial stimulus to the radicalisation process of the LP, not only because of his extensive writing in a number of publications, but also his frequent public speaking, at which he was exceptionally talented.⁶⁸ He influenced the thinking of Liberals of all races in Natal, not only white members.⁶⁹ He was an outspoken critic and sought to change the Party further when he joined.⁷⁰ Mngadi was neither the political sophisticate nor the public speaker that Ngubane was, but he and others like him nonetheless contributed in their individual ways to the transformation of the LP in Natal.

The Natal Division had begun to attract increasing numbers of African members. It was the start of a development in which the results were really only seen in early 1960s when Africans joined the LP in substantial numbers. To what extent did having an increased proportion of

⁶⁵ 'Long View' in *Contact*, quoted in Brown, 'History', p.137.

⁶⁶ P.Brown to J.Causton, 18 June 1959, quoted in Brown, 'History', p.139.

⁶⁷ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁶⁸ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.67.

⁶⁹ APC, P.Poovalingham interviewed by R.Vigne, 1/4/1995.

⁷⁰ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

African members' contribute in the radicalisation of the Natal Division of the LP? There is no doubt that having black members created a certain pressure for change. According to Ngubane, the increase in African membership 'started a series of tensions that were to lead [the LP] through a number of crises and in the end left it a changed body'.⁷¹ The views of the majority of the African membership, who were from rural communities, were not radical when compared to that of their urban counterparts. Through personal contact, white members became aware of black members' hardships and were to experience first-hand the discrimination endured by them. Thus it was more likely the response of white members to this exposure which led to the radicalisation of the Division, rather than the views of the majority of the African membership.⁷²

It was this political responsibility which impressed white members and convinced them of the unfairness of the qualified franchise. Part of the change in Paton's views came from meeting ordinary African people, like the residents at Charlestown.⁷³ Although Brown had started off as 'a strong advocate of a qualified franchise on a high basis of qualification', he had been persuaded by the mid-1950s that it was 'impossible to lay down a franchise qualification that will guarantee a responsible electorate'.⁷⁴ What he had found while canvassing for elections was that most white South Africans voted out of habit. What he encountered amongst the increasing number of black people that he had come into contact with was a degree of responsibility in discussion which the white electorate, on the whole, lacked.

Most analyses of the LP concentrate on the influence of prominent black people and a growing black membership as the main forces behind the radicalisation of the party in Natal, and on a national level. However, a closer look needs to be taken at the existence of the more progressive faction amongst the white members in the Division whose contribution should be noted. Those who had espoused more radical tendencies in the initial period included prominent members such as Leo Kuper, Violaine Junod, and Hans Meidner. They wanted to

⁷¹ J. Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* (London, Pall Mall Press, 1963), p.195.

⁷² Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

⁷³ APC, 95APA16, Alan Paton Lecture by P.M.Brown, 'Alan Paton: The Man and the Politician', University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 6/9/1995.

⁷⁴ P.Brown to J.Causton, 18 June 1959, quoted in Brown, 'History', p.139.

identify strongly with the Congresses from the beginning, and disagreed with the qualified franchise.⁷⁵ Meidner and Kuper, in particular, were articulate intellectuals whose importance in the Party cannot be underestimated. According to Brown, this so-called left-wing in the Natal Division began to have 'more clout' from 1954.⁷⁶ Their radical voice was then joined by other like-minded individuals from all races. Catherine Shallis joined the party in 1955 and describes herself as part of a younger generation which bolstered the radical faction in the LP in Natal.⁷⁷

It was difficult for the LP to attract white members in Natal. Thus it was encouraging that the number of younger, more progressive white members, mostly students from the University of Natal, had increased. It was noted from the Party's participation in the 1958 general election that 'the younger generation is far more sympathetic to us than their parents'.⁷⁸ This trend was especially evident in Pietermaritzburg, where membership had increased dramatically during 1958.⁷⁹ (However, overall numbers were small.) These students mixed with others of all races who belonged to their respective Congresses in Durban and Pietermaritzburg.⁸⁰ There were a number of debating-type societies where discussion of political topics took place. They were thus exposed to a number of views which were more left-wing than their own, and which proved to be intellectually stimulating and thought-provoking.

Judging from the lack of electoral success (provincial and general), the LP in Natal failed to make an impact on the white electorate in the region. The policies of the 'middle-of-the-road' political parties at the time, such as the UP and the Union Federal Party (UFP), proved progressive enough and not as far-reaching as those of the LP. The Natal Division contested fewer seats and had worse results than the Cape and the Transvaal. What this highlights is the lack of appeal of liberalism in Natal, largely because it had no tradition amongst the white population. That the Party leadership in Natal was 'very agreeably surprised when Peter

⁷⁵ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', p.201.

⁷⁶ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁷⁷ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998. Catherine Brubeck was formerly Catherine Shallis.

⁷⁸ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Chairman's Report, Natal Coastal Regional branch AGM, 30 September 1958.

⁷⁹ Brown, 'History', p.122.

⁸⁰ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

Brown secured 604 votes' in the 1958 general election is testament to this.⁸¹ A consequence of the Natal Division's poor election record was that in its search for greater membership amongst all race groups, it came closer to the non-racial ideal than either the Cape or the Transvaal.⁸²

The substantial growth of African membership in Natal was not matched by Indian membership, which showed no appreciable growth. Although there were some prominent members, they were not as influential as the African members in the LP.⁸³ The most politicised Indians were in the NIC while those who joined the LP tended to be more conservative. This does not mean that they had no part to play in the Party. For example, E.V.Mahomed was a close friend and a 'virtually...unpaid, spare-time secretary' of Lutuli's in Natal⁸⁴, and he was often consulted and requested to liaise and to set up meetings with Lutuli.⁸⁵ Sam Chetty, from the Edendale branch, was an active member in the Division who was thanked personally at the Provincial Congress for this help during the 1958 general election.⁸⁶

Another factor which influenced the transformation of the LP to some extent was the connection maintained by African members with the ANC by means of their dual membership or otherwise. That the ANC had an impact on the LP was to be expected from the closer ties which the organisations continued to form. The joint membership for the Party's African members with the ANC proved useful in Natal, as members retained their memberships and therefore their contacts within the other organisation. For instance, a prominent local ANC leader in Pietermaritzburg, Archie Gumede, was a member of both organisations. Although he was more involved with the ANC, he maintained close contact with local Liberals.⁸⁷ It became increasingly obvious during the late 1950s that the two organisations shared many of the same

⁸¹ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Chairman's Report, Natal Coastal Regional branch AGM, 30 September 1958.

⁸² Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.67.

⁸³ Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

⁸⁴ Brown, 'History', p.43.

⁸⁵ APC, PC 2/9/12/1, P.Brown to E.V.Mahomed, 24 August 1954 & 18 February 1956.

⁸⁶ APC, S.Chetty interviewed by R.Vigne, 10/4/1995; APC, PC 2/9/4/1, Provincial secretary's Report, Natal Provincial Congress, 17-18 October 1958.

⁸⁷ APC, A.Gumede interviewed by R.Lundie, 12/4/1995.

basic goals, and the leadership of Lutuli was a factor here, too. Africans in the LP had to justify their point of view and reasons for joining the LP to members in the ANC, since the more intellectual Africans and people of Jordan Ngubane's and Hyacenth (Bill) Bhengu's (a lawyer in Durban) political standing were more likely to be in the ANC than the LP.⁸⁸ Liberalism had also acquired a bad name amongst politically sophisticated urban blacks, and consequently membership was difficult to build from this group.⁸⁹

A further indication of the Natal Division's move to the left was the decision, strongly endorsed by Paton, to ignore the Native Laws Amendment Act of 1957. A clause in the proposed Bill (known as the 'church clause') was intended to prevent racial association in 'church, school, hospital, club or any other institution, or place of entertainment'.⁹⁰ The restriction on the holding of non-racial meetings in certain areas would have severely affected the LP. The decision by the Natal Provincial Executive Committee was unanimous in refusing to accept provisions of the Bill, 'even if this should involve certain members in prosecutions'.⁹¹ The intention of the government was clear. According to Verwoerd,

'In view of the Liberal Party's attitude of coming with threats about causing mixed conditions in various spheres of social life, it is not at all unnecessary for Parliament to take steps timeously to curb these activities of theirs.'⁹²

Amendments were made to the Bill before it was passed through Parliament which lessened its impact somewhat. However, the Act resulted in the closure of the International Club in Durban, as the Minister refused to issue a permit as required under the new law.

⁸⁸ APC, J. Didcott interviewed by R. Vigne, 22/6/1995.

⁸⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp. 67, 69.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Paton, *Journey Continued*, p. 164.

⁹¹ PC 2/96/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Executive Committee, 5 March 1957.

⁹² Quoted in Ballinger, *From Union to Apartheid*, p. 357.

3.3 *Gaining new followers and meeting new challenges*

Why was the Natal Division so successful in recruiting African members? The Division had a wide range of members, and this was also true when one looks at the composition of the African membership in particular. It is essential to distinguish between rural membership and that of prominent educated urban Africans, like Jordan Ngubane, Bill Bhengu, Selby Msimang (a moderate compared to the previous two), and Mlahleni Njisane. Besides the more prominent members mentioned, the Natal Division began to recruit increasing numbers of 'rank-and-file' working-class, predominately rural, African members during the late 1950s. The recruitment of black members had been a policy of the Division from the start and members actively worked at it, which was a contributing factor to the subsequent success of the policy. This view was echoed by Ngubane, who felt that if such a party were to make real progress amongst Africans, Liberalism should be taken 'to the man in the Location'.⁹³ Also, there was the fact that a number of prominent black people had joined, such as Msimang and later Ngubane, which must have been a further drawcard. Members held meetings in around the province and acted on interest shown. Rural Africans joined the party in Natal mainly as a result of the LP's involvement with communities on a grass-roots level, especially when the threat of 'black spot' removals took the Party into the northern Natal countryside. Members from rural communities may not have been *au fait* with the ideological debates, but they had a clear idea of their problems and, understandably, were keen to take advantage of offers to help them. Within the national LP, Natal was the most successful region in multi-racial joint enterprises in the 1950s (good relations between the ANC and the LP in the region no doubt helped).

Liberals identified themselves with the needs of Africans through protest or publicity and a 'basic kind of social work'.⁹⁴ According to Brown, it was generally accepted that the 'straightest road to African hearts was by taking up issues which affected them directly and

⁹³ Quoted in Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.177.

⁹⁴ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.176.

immediately in their daily lives'.⁹⁵ This is what Lutuli had termed 'Ambulance Work'.⁹⁶ Ngubane emphasized 'the need for a crusading spirit as is the work of the Liberal Party'.⁹⁷ Specific issues were taken up, mostly dealing with the Group Areas Act and forced removals. The strategy adopted by the party in Natal was to go into the community where interest was shown, to focus on the problems, and then engage the local leaders in dealing with these problems.⁹⁸ By 'involving themselves in the mundane problems of non-whites..., they short-circuited the whole system of *apartheid*' and 'came to know Africans on their own terms, as individuals rather than representatives of a racial group'.⁹⁹

One of the most successful aspects of the Natal Division was its involvement in campaigns against the destruction of African freehold rights and the forced removal of communities in accordance with the Group Areas Act. The main focus of the LP amongst the African people in rural areas of Natal was the 'black spot' campaign, which really made progress during 1958 with the formal establishment of the Northern Natal African Landowners' Association (NNALA). Elliot Mngadi was offered a permanent position as an organiser for the LP's campaign against removals in northern Natal in late 1956, which he took up in April 1957. His salary was paid by the LP, although the campaign had the dual support of the ANC and the LP.¹⁰⁰ The party in Natal was careful to consult with the ANC in these areas before progressing, and the official stamp of approval from Lutuli and the ANC Executive for ANC-LP co-operation had been obtained. Both Brown and Kuper had on separate occasions been to see Lutuli, and Brown had also spoken to Gabriel Nyembe, the ANC's leading figure in northern Natal. Both were eager to work with the LP in publicising and opposing removals.¹⁰¹ Although Mngadi liaised with local ANC representatives, the ANC was never actively involved in these rural areas. Urban issues were more of a priority with the ANC and although the

⁹⁵ Brown, 'History', p. 78.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Robertson, *Liberalism*, p. 178.

⁹⁷ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Regional branch AGM, 11 August 1955.

⁹⁸ Interviews with P. Brown, 25/3/1998, & C. Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

⁹⁹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁰ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Executive Committee, 6 November 1956.

¹⁰¹ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 5 March 1957; PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 21 March 1956.

organisation was not active in this campaign, it took an interest in it.

Mngadi organised landowners and tenants in opposing the destruction of African freehold rights in the 'black spots' and to tried prevent the government from proceeding with its plans to remove established communities. He visited threatened areas, informing the people about the government's intention and about the proposed landowners' organisation, and made contact with the local ANC representatives to enlist their support.¹⁰² Mngadi had done a survey during 1958 of the 'black spot' communities in northern Natal and had estimated that approximately 100,000 to 250,000 people were threatened with removal.¹⁰³ The Party in Natal organised frequent meetings and protests addressed by leaders such as Brown, Ngubane and Msimang. Catherine Shallis often accompanied them as provincial secretary. Community forums were set-up to inform people of their rights and to try to stall removals. Simon Roberts, a lawyer and Liberal from Pietermaritzburg, acted as the Party's legal adviser.

Mngadi's work amongst the threatened communities proved so effective that 'the party was flooded with Africans' applications for membership'¹⁰⁴, and the Party opened several new branches in northern Natal. The LP's involvement in Charlestown, for instance, led to the establishment of a branch consisting of only African members. The Party did much in this area to increase the political awareness of the local people, and according to Brown, most rural Africans joined the LP rather than the ANC.¹⁰⁵ There is no doubt that the residents threatened with removal were grateful for the work that the LP did. The provincial secretary recalls how she got the feeling that the Liberals, white ones in particular, were the first 'outside' people to take any notice of the communities' problems.¹⁰⁶ In a letter to Brown, Jeremiah Mkwanzazi, a Charlestown resident, thanked him for his help: 'I greatly appreciate the services you are prepared to render me and thank you for all the trouble you have taken on my behalf.'¹⁰⁷

Mngadi became the Party's organiser in northern Natal in October 1958 as there was a need to

¹⁰² APC, PC 2/9/14/1, Monthly Reports by E.Mngadi, 1957.

¹⁰³ Brown, 'History', p.122.

¹⁰⁴ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.178.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

¹⁰⁷ APC, PC 2/9/17/1, J.Mkwanzazi to P.Brown, 11 February 1956.

co-ordinate the Party's efforts here due to the increase in membership. The ANC was consulted and agreed, providing that he remained secretary of the NNALA.¹⁰⁸

Much of the Natal Division's success in rural areas and the recruitment of African members can be attributed to Brown, who spearheaded the LP's involvement here. He made an impact on Africans, especially since he could speak Zulu fluently.¹⁰⁹ He was thus able to communicate on a level at which racial differences became less distinct. According to Paton, he 'certainly had the gift of communicating with black people'.¹¹⁰ It was the 'unequalled dedication' (Mlahleni Njisane's opinion)¹¹¹ and the quiet and patient political work¹¹² of Brown that resulted in the party's success with rural communities. This view is substantiated by many LP members.¹¹³ Brown was held in high esteem by these people. Pat Poovalingham recalls a certain meeting where the African delegates waited for Brown to vote before casting theirs in accordance with his.¹¹⁴

There was a concern that the politics of the LP was too intellectual for a certain section of the African population as it lacked a more emotional appeal. For example, political meetings amongst the 'rank-and-file' Africans were often characterised by singing and dancing. LP meetings tended to be more serious affairs and the party never really 'struck an emotional cord' with Africans.¹¹⁵ This is a criticism that Msimang had of the LP, that it did not have a 'dynamic programme' to really 'captivate' Africans.¹¹⁶ In other words, African members would not join the LP as they would the ANC, and the LP would never become a mass movement. Didcott had commented in 1956, and Ngubane agreed, that more 'militancy' was needed in the Liberal program, such as popular slogans, as the Party was in danger of being too purely

¹⁰⁸ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, 17-18 October 1958.

¹⁰⁹ This is the opinion expressed by many Liberals in the interviews listed.

¹¹⁰ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.142.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.178.

¹¹² Driver, *Duncan*, p.140.

¹¹³ Interviews, my own and those done by R. Vigne.

¹¹⁴ APC, P. Poovalingham interviewed by R. Vigne, 1/4/1995.

¹¹⁵ APC, P. McKenzie interviewed by R. Vigne, 5/6/1995.

¹¹⁶ APC, PC 12/1/2/2, Selby Msimang Papers, Notes for proposed biography.

intellectual in certain quarters.¹¹⁷

Besides increasing involvement in rural areas the Party was also active on the urban front. The Durban and Pietermaritzburg (including Edendale) branches were the only real urban branches in Natal. The focus of the Durban branch was more on urban issues than that of the Pietermaritzburg branch. Much LP activity involved holding both protest and party meetings. The Party tended to focus on specific issues, such as the Group Areas Act, and one of its main goals was consciousness-raising, especially amongst the white population. The enforcement of the Group Areas Act and Native Affairs legislation directly affected the Party, as it discriminated against many of its members. In their total rejection of these government policies, the Party became involved in protests and campaigns against it. However, protests were not only limited to the Group Areas legislation, but also included issues such as 'Bantu education'. This brought about closer co-operation with the NIC and with the ANC.

There were a number of districts where Party activity increased and new branches were established. These were mainly in the rural areas of Natal, and the overall number of predominately African branches increased.¹¹⁸ In the Bergville area, new branches were established at Khumalosville by Michael Ndlovu and at Rookdale by Roy Coventry, a local farmer, during 1958.¹¹⁹ The branch at Charlestown had a completely African membership, while other new branches, such as Greytown and Kokstad, had a mainly black membership. By 1958 two predominately black urban branches had been formed. In Durban, the members of the Red Hill branch were mostly workers from the nearby tea factory, while those in the Howick branch were mainly from the local rubber works. The Howick branch was thriving under the leadership of Christopher Shabalala, a local factory worker who later became party organiser for the Midlands region.

The Natal Provincial Congress in October 1958 was the largest and most representative to

¹¹⁷ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Region Committee, 18 September 1956.

¹¹⁸ Brown, 'History', p.124.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.122.

date, and was an indication of the success of the party in the region.¹²⁰ It took place at the Pietermaritzburg City Hall, and over 400 people arrived to hear Lutuli give the opening address. Ngubane thanked him sincerely, despite the differences between them over the influence of communists in the ANC. The growth in the membership of the Natal Division had been the most consistent nationally — it had increased from its approximately 400 members in 1954 to over a thousand in 1958.¹²¹ By the end of 1956, Natal had overtaken the Cape (western and eastern Cape branches) with over 700 members to its 500. Activity in the Transvaal was high and the membership had increased to 412.¹²² During 1957 the figure for the Transvaal had doubled to over 800,¹²³ with the total number of members for Natal also exceeding 800.¹²⁴ The Free State Division never had a significant number of members compared to the other regions.

There is evidence that by late 1958 the LP was beginning to make a noticeable impact on the African population on a national scale. Besides Natal, the Transvaal and Cape Divisions had also experienced an increase in African membership.¹²⁵ The latter Divisions never experienced this influx on the same scale as Natal, though. The Transvaal Division saw the benefits of grass-roots involvement with the considerable increase in African membership during 1957 after the Party's involvement in the protests against the removals at Sophiatown, a suburb of Johannesburg.

Amongst other difficulties faced by the Natal LP as a non-racial organisation in South Africa at this time was finding suitable venues for meetings. These became more and more difficult to organise as the Party's non-racial character became established. Multi-racial audiences could not be accommodated in venues normally reserved for white people. A meeting of the Midlands branch had to be postponed as the Nottingham Road Farmers' Association refused

¹²⁰ Brown, 'History', p.123.

¹²¹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.66.

¹²² APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, January 1957.

¹²³ APC, PC 2/9/13/2, National secretary to provincial secretary, Cape Division, 9 July 1957.

¹²⁴ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Executive Committee, 3 April 1957.

¹²⁵ Brown, 'History', p.124.

permission for the use of their hall.¹²⁶ During 1957 the Winterton branch had to hold its meeting in a cowshed which belonged to its only white member. Later that year Brown, Ngubane and Paton addressed a meeting of about 90 people (including members of the Security Branch police) in the saleyards adjacent to the Mooi River Farmers' Association Hall. The Association refused to allow the meeting to be held in the hall after it was discovered that the audience would be multi-racial, but then allowed it as it began to rain heavily.¹²⁷ There were also other difficulties. For example, in the so-called Native Reserves no more than ten Africans could attend a meeting without first obtaining permission.¹²⁸

As the Party in Natal attracted more African members and became more involved in black politics, so it attracted the attention of an increasingly repressive government. A police presence became more frequent, with the names and car registration of people attending LP meetings being taken. These members were then later questioned by the police.¹²⁹ For example, members in Kokstad were visited and questioned by police after they had attended a LP meeting, on the pretext that permission had not first been obtained from the Native Commissioner.¹³⁰ The names of those attending the trial of Paton and Kuper in early 1957 on charges of holding an illegal gathering in Durban in December 1956 were also noted.¹³¹

The government's clamp-down in April 1958 on opposition, with Government Notice 526 and a ban on all political meetings over the general election period, was only lifted country-wide in September. This created problems in Pietermaritzburg as the branch's Annual General Meeting was due to be held in the City Hall in May 1958. Since the Native Commissioner refused permission, the meeting was held at the home of the Browns in partial defiance.¹³² Permission for a house-meeting was also refused at the home of the Patons in Kloof.

¹²⁶ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 28 April 1955.

¹²⁷ Brown, 'History', pp.89-90.

¹²⁸ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 15 October 1953.

¹²⁹ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 11 January 1957.

¹³⁰ APC, PC 2/9/13/1, P.Brown to Station Commander, South African Police, Kokstad, 24 April 1956.

¹³¹ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 27-28 April 1957.

¹³² APC, PC 2/9/23/2, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch AGM, May 1958.

3.4 Taking the lead on the national stage: the ascendancy of the Natal Division

The Natal Division made an impact on the Party on a national level as it became increasingly radicalised from 1956 onwards, and the ‘most significant pressure for change from party activists came from Natal’.¹³³ That Natal was relatively free of internal division, as well as having active and committed members, was certainly a factor in allowing for a transformation to take place without jeopardizing the functioning of the Division. A combination of factors had allowed for its radicalisation and from the mid-1950s the Natal Division of the LP was consistently the most stable and dynamic Division. By contrast, the other Divisions tended to have periods of high and low activity.¹³⁴ The Natal Division played a role on a national level in that it provided a firm foundation which helped transform the Party. The leadership of the Natal Division had moved with developments in the Party, and as such played a vital role in the adoption of a more radical line.

The Division in Natal was to set the tone when the national office was moved to Pietermaritzburg from Cape Town in early 1956. The National Committee had taken the decision in late 1955 that the national office should be rotated around the Provinces.¹³⁵ Brown in particular expressed his hope that by moving the national office to Pietermaritzburg the Natal Division would influence the way in which the party was developing:

‘It does mean, I hope, that we will be able to guide it in the way we have been trying to guide developments in Natal during the last couple of years.’¹³⁶

During 1955 the Natal and Transvaal Divisions had complained that the National Executive Committee was loaded with conservative Cape members who did not reflect the views of the Party as a whole.¹³⁷ With the move to Natal the Party began to take on a more radical complexion, and this was reflected in the election of Jordan Ngubane and Patrick Duncan to the National Executive Committee.¹³⁸ Thus Ngubane not only had an effect on the

¹³³ Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.201.

¹³⁴ Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998. & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

¹³⁵ The national office remained in Pietermaritzburg until the party was dissolved.

¹³⁶ APC, PC 2/9/26/1, P.Brown to H.Meidner, 3 February 1956. Brown’s emphasis.

¹³⁷ Brown, ‘History’, p.70.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.73.

radicalisation of the Natal Division, but also of the Party on a national level.

There was a difference in opinion between Natal and the Cape over the role of the Party: the latter wanted an orthodox political party which appealed to the white electorate whereas the former had supported a non-racial image and a multi-racial membership from the beginning. From the early days of the Party, the Natal leadership was 'seeking a way towards a non-racial movement which would set an example in the first instance and grow into a major political force in the country'.¹³⁹ National policy was therefore bound to change, and the Transvaal felt more at ease with the new national leadership. Natal, too, increased its representation on a national level. Paton accepted the national chairmanship in June 1956, with Brown and Kuper as deputy-chairmen. In 1954 black representatives from Natal had been elected onto the National Committee, and this number was to increase. In mid-1958 Brown became the national chairman and Paton the national president, and Hans Meidner took over the provincial chairmanship from Brown in late 1958.

The Natal Division had a role to play in the radicalisation of the Party, but it also had an impact because of way the party head office was run from Pietermaritzburg. The provincial head office was also there, so it was a practical consideration that both offices were run from the same venue. According to Catherine Brubeck, who was provincial and then national secretary in the late 1950s, it was more than just a question of where the party national office was.¹⁴⁰ The Natal Division tended to lead the way and this vibrancy was projected onto the party on a national level.

According to Brown, Natal's takeover of the national leadership in early 1956 'proved decisive in holding the party together' over the following two years.¹⁴¹ By 1956 there were still very divergent views within LP, ranging from conservatives (mostly in the Cape) like Margaret Ballinger, Donald Molteno and Oscar Wollheim to more radical people like Patrick Duncan,

¹³⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.30.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

¹⁴¹ Brown, 'History', p.87.

Jock Isacowitz and Violaine Junod.¹⁴² Furthermore, the growing black membership, which ranged from moderates to more radical figures, also created tensions. Brown attributed some of this success to Paton as ‘[his] influence... in the chair was to hold meetings together and his infinite capacity to bring together conflicting views into a resolution acceptable to all, was to carry the day’.¹⁴³ Paton writes in his autobiography that his and Brown’s opinions were respected and that they ‘played the major part in holding’ the disparate groups of the Party together.¹⁴⁴ According to Douglas Irvine, Brown ‘exercised a profound influence through his good humor [sic], his sanity, and his dedication’.¹⁴⁵ Patrick Duncan, as Party organiser, paid tribute to Brown for his ‘indefatigable work on behalf of the Party’.¹⁴⁶ The Natal Division as well as the LP in general were fortunate to have the membership of Paton and Brown. Not only did they both work tirelessly for the Party, but were to also to donate a considerable portion of their income to it.¹⁴⁷

Another area where the LP in Natal influenced the Party on national level was its development of a good working relationship with Congress Movement in the region. Relations between the LP and the ANC in Natal were more cordial than in the other regions from the start and ties between them were strengthened from 1956.¹⁴⁸ Although relations with the NIC had not been as friendly, they improved after 1956. The LP in Natal collaborated with both organisations in campaigns protesting against the government’s apartheid legislation. According to Brown, relations between the LP and the Congresses in Natal had their ‘ups and downs’.¹⁴⁹ Overall and especially compared to the other regions, there were very few problems with collaboration between the LP and the NIC and the ANC in Natal. Lutuli encouraged this, and friendships between Liberals and Congress Alliance members helped relations. An obstacle to closer

¹⁴² Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.59.

¹⁴³ Brown, ‘History’, p.87.

¹⁴⁴ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.121.

¹⁴⁵ D.Irvine, ‘The Liberal Party, 1953-1968’ in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p.120.

¹⁴⁶ APC, PC 2/9/23/1, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch AGM, 20 March 1956.

¹⁴⁷ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.121.

¹⁴⁸ Roberston, *Liberalism*, p.176; Driver, *Duncan*, p.140; Everatt, ‘Politics of Nonracialism’, p.201.

¹⁴⁹ Brown, ‘History’, p.119.

relations with the Congress Movement on a national level was the anti-communist inclination of many Liberals. However, the COD was neither as active nor influential in the Congress Alliance in Natal as it was elsewhere. The hostility which had been a feature in the Transvaal and the Cape was not present in Natal¹⁵⁰, and several Liberals had contact with COD members as part of the Congress Movement in Natal.¹⁵¹ The COD in Natal's telegram to the LP in Natal to wish the Division every success at its 1958 Provincial Congress read: 'Look forward to cooperation between all Democrats working for a South Africa where all people can enjoy freedom in every sphere of life.'¹⁵²

The working relationship which continued to develop in Natal between the Party and the Congresses was not matched in the other Divisions. Official relations between the ANC and the LP in the western Cape remained cautious. There was, however, some co-operation later between the two in joint ventures such as the Group Areas Co-ordinating Committee.¹⁵³ The radicals in the Cape LP were in direct conflict with the majority of the conservative Cape leadership in wanting closer relations with the Congresses.¹⁵⁴ The COD presence was a problem, too. The LP branch in the eastern Cape, formed in the mid-1950s and based in East London, established good relations with the local ANC.¹⁵⁵ The Transvaal Division had great difficulty in making contact and maintaining a working relationship with the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) and the ANC in the region.¹⁵⁶ The head offices of both the ANC and the COD were based in Johannesburg, and these organisations were very active there. Co-operation with the black organisations was often blocked by the LP's antipathy towards the COD and the latter's criticism of the former.¹⁵⁷

In Natal, both formal discussions and informal social meetings took place with members of the

¹⁵⁰ APC, J.Didcott interviewed by R.Vigne, 22/6/1995; Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

¹⁵¹ APC, R.Vigne's interviews with V.Junod, 21/8/1995, & P.McKenzie, 5/6/1995.

¹⁵² APC, PC 2/9/3/6, Telegram dated 14 October 1958, Natal Provincial Congress, October 1958.

¹⁵³ Brown, 'History', p.75.

¹⁵⁴ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', pp.197-199.

¹⁵⁵ Brown, 'History', p.75.

¹⁵⁶ APC, PC 2/2/9/2, Minutes, National Executive Committee, 24 June 1956.

¹⁵⁷ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', pp.199-200.

Congress Movement. Although it is difficult to single out members from the Natal leadership who were responsible for improving relationships with the Congresses, particular mention should be made of Brown and Leo Kuper. Mlahleni Njisane and Violaine Junod also participated in many of the meetings. Junod attributed the 'present close relations with the various congresses' in late 1956 to Kuper, as he had assisted in the breaking-down of suspicions.¹⁵⁸ Paton's close personal relationship with Lutuli was an influential factor in the cordial relations enjoyed by the ANC and the LP in Natal.¹⁵⁹ The personal friendships between certain members from the different organisations played an important part in helping to foster closer relations and meant that these members met on an informal social basis as well. A number of Liberals in Durban had formed friendships with members of the NIC at the International Club even before the formation of the LP¹⁶⁰, such as the Kupers and the Meers (members of the NIC). Paton and his wife, Dorrie, often dined at the home of Dr G.M. (Monty) Naicker, president of the NIC.¹⁶¹ ANC and NIC members attended a 'braaivleis' held in July 1956 at the home of Sam Chetty, an LP member in Edendale.¹⁶² Lutuli attended informal gatherings at the home of E.V. Mahomed in Stanger.¹⁶³ There was frequent socialising on the University campuses, particularly in Durban, between Liberal and Congress students.¹⁶⁴

Conclusion

If one compares the LP in 1953 to that organisation which had emerged by late 1958, the transformation of the Party with the adoption of a more radical liberalism can clearly be seen. This phase of transition in the LP's history began in 1956 and was completed by 1958. Developments, such the growth in the Party's black membership and the increase in its co-operation with black political organisations, led to inevitable policy changes. The Natal Division of the LP had established itself in the political sphere of the region by 1958. It had

¹⁵⁸ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Region Committee, 11 September 1956.

¹⁵⁹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.176.

¹⁶⁰ This is mentioned by several LP members in the interviews listed.

¹⁶¹ Paton, *Journey Continued*.

¹⁶² *Contact*, September 1956.

¹⁶³ APC, PC 2/2/5/2, National Organiser's Report, December 1957.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

also progressed from the smallest and least prominent Division of the LP to the largest, most stable and progressive one, virtually providing the main leadership of the Party.

The seeds of change had been sown earlier in Natal, but the turning point signifying its change in direction came in 1956. The Party in Natal had come to the realisation by this time that in order to fight apartheid legislation the path of extra-parliamentary politics was fast becoming the more effective option. The Party had moved away from primarily debating party policy to an active involvement in extra-parliamentary opposition by 1958. It was a combination of factors which allowed for the Natal Division to transform itself, and to develop a dynamism which led to its ascendancy and influence on a national level. Its membership base had been broadened, with the increase in African membership in particular, and the Party progressed to a truer non-racialism. Notable achievements had been attained in evoking black responses through concerted campaigns against forced removal and Group Areas policies, usually in co-operation with the Congresses, especially the ANC.

Although the LP had started out as a strictly parliamentary party and was seen by critics on the left in almost the same genre as the UP and the UFP, differences soon became apparent as the LP became increasingly involved in black politics, of which the other parties wanted no part. By 1958, the LP had moved significantly away from the Cape Liberal Tradition and towards a non-racial democratic stand which 'was to give the Liberal Party its later validity'.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.32.

CHAPTER FOUR

Testing times: Liberalism pushed to new limits in Natal and elsewhere, 1959-1962

Introduction

From the evidence gathered for *Liberalism in South Africa*, Janet Robertson claims there was 'common agreement among leading Liberals that the years 1960 and 1961 saw their party at the height of its achievement'.¹ It was also a dramatic period in the history of South Africa. The Liberal Party's (LP) response to the almost revolutionary political climate of the early 1960s played a role in the Party's further radicalisation and its closer identification with the causes of black politics.

Extra-parliamentary political opposition in the country entertained cautious expectations about the new decade on the eve of 1960. It had been influenced by events in the rest of Africa (the actual and impending independence of many states) and the international interest in South Africa.² In the country there was, on the one hand, an increasingly repressive regime entrenching white power, and on the other, African leaders were struggling to keep up with popular frustration and impatience. However, after Sharpeville (March 1960) and the declaration of a state of emergency, it became increasingly obvious that the government would no longer tolerate the opposition from extra-parliamentary political organisations. Sharpeville, in the context of the time, can be seen as the event which 'burst the bubble' that had hitherto contained African discontent. The banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in early April 1960 was testament to the government's intolerance, and the gulf between it and black opposition widened.

¹ J. Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1958-1963* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), p.215. This claim is supported by evidence gathered from interviews and research done by myself.

² T. Karis & G.M. Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964, Volume 3* of T. Karis & G.M. Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977), pp.295-296.

The two most important developments in the LP during these years were the further radicalisation of the Party as it continued to re-examine its policies, and the substantial increase in African membership. Also, during these years the leadership of the Natal Division established its presence in the national leadership. The decision taken during 1958, that the main role of the party was no longer in the electoral field, became a reality as the Party became increasingly involved in extra-parliamentary opposition politics, which took the form of direct protest and the use of the method of boycott. The franchise issue was finally resolved in the interests of the majority of the LP's membership. The increase in African membership and the changing composition of the Party was both a cause and effect of its transformation. One of the consequences of the LP's opposition to the government was an increase in intimidation and harassment by the state, which began with the detention of a number of prominent members, mostly in Natal, during the state of emergency. The continued involvement of Liberals in protests against Group Areas, especially the 'black spots' in Natal, was no doubt a reason behind this. It was only from 1963, however, that this attention took on the form of a systematic campaign and began to seriously affect the Party.

4.1 The boycott issue and the universal franchise

Despite the radicalisation of the LP on a national level and the consensus reached by the majority of the membership on transformation in Party policy, the two contentious issues of the Party's main role and the franchise still dominated discussion among members during 1959. Both these issues brought out the still divergent views within the Party. The decision that it would concentrate on extra-parliamentary opposition politics raised questions about its choice of protest methods, and the use of boycotts in particular. The influence of the conservative group gradually faded as members left the Party³ because they were unable to reconcile themselves with the growing radicalism within the LP, or alternatively, were outvoted.⁴

The Party's commitment to extra-parliamentary opposition and to the struggle to achieve

³ Some joined the Progressive Party, formed in November 1959. See later discussion.

⁴ D.Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid 1945-1960.' D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990, p.186.

social and political change in South Africa was tested with a new tactic adopted by the Congress Alliance, namely the use of boycotts as a means of political protest. This had been under discussion at the ANC's annual Congress in late 1958, and the organisation had initiated a boycott of 'Nationalist products' in mid-1959. The topic of boycotts was first discussed by the LP in early 1959 and, as was to be expected, there no overall agreement. This was covering new ground in the area of political protest, and supporting such means was not a decision to be undertaken lightly. Peter Brown, as national chairman, supported the idea in principle.⁵ The Pietermaritzburg branch decided by the 'narrowest of margins' to support the boycott initiative but support was to be on an individual basis.⁶ Brown informed the ANC of the Natal Provincial Committee's decision to give its support, but not wholeheartedly, as it was felt that no preliminary survey had been done to establish the effectiveness of the campaign.⁷ The Transvaal Division was prepared to give its cautious support, while the Cape was divided on the issue.

The Congress Alliance announced its intention to launch a boycott of South African goods overseas during mid-1959. The leadership of the LP, after some initial uncertainty, decided in November 1959 to endorse the method of boycott as a legitimate means of political protest.⁸ They envisaged short-term economic boycotts which would have a political effect rather than an economic one. The Party had thus moved a step further along the extra-parliamentary path and closer to identifying with the Congresses by giving the use of boycotts its official stamp. In their *Statement on the Overseas Boycott*, Alan Paton and Brown saw passive resistance and boycott as the last two remaining non-violent political weapons left to Africans.⁹ The LP did 'not like the use of the boycott weapon' but believed that 'under certain conditions its employment [was] justifiable' as it was the 'only effective form of expression left' to the majority of South Africans who were excluded from political activity.¹⁰ However, not all

⁵ P. Brown to O. Wollheim, April 1959, quoted in APC, PC 2/6/6/1, P.M. Brown, 'A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa', unpublished manuscript, p.140.

⁶ APC, PC 2/9/23/2, Minutes, Special Meeting, Pietermaritzburg branch, June 1959.

⁷ Brown, 'History', pp.140-141.

⁸ APC, PC 2/4/11/2, Statement by P. Brown and A. Paton.

⁹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.196.

¹⁰ APC, PC 2/2/5/3, Statement issued at National Congress, May 1960.

boycotts would necessarily be supported by the Party. Each would be considered as a separate case.

The National Committee carried Brown's request that the Party should give its consent to Patrick van Rensburg, a Transvaal member, to represent the LP in organising the ANC-sponsored Boycott Movement initiated in London.¹¹ It was to be launched in late February 1960 and to last for four weeks. The LP issued a statement which described the attitude of most members. Although the Party was aware of the shortcomings of, and the hardships caused by, boycotts, the use of the method was one of the few non-violent means available in influencing the government. Therefore the party approved of its use in South Africa and abroad as a legitimate political weapon.¹² Brown and Albert Lutuli signed a joint statement at the launch of the overseas boycott on 20 February 1960, which was published on 1 March 1960 in the *Rand Daily Mail*.¹³

The majority of the African membership supported the use of boycotts and there is no doubt that this influenced the leadership of the LP, especially in Natal. Brown had spoken to number of African members — they supported the use of boycotts and wanted the LP to support it.¹⁴ In fact, the Party supported this means of protest partly at 'the insistence of its African members'.¹⁵ Those who did not support the use of boycotts pointed out the hardships to be experienced by African people as a possible result. According to Selby Msimang, Africans were prepared to bear the hardships if it would lead to ultimate improvements.¹⁶ Jordan Ngubane, in an article in *Indian Opinion*, said that Africans 'should be lucky merely to starve in order to break apartheid's back'.¹⁷ It was felt that Africans had no duty to protect an economy which paid 80% of its labour force less than a living wage. The overseas boycott was

¹¹ D.Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p.126; Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.196.

¹² APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 6 April 1959.

¹³ APC, PC 2/4/11/2, Statement signed by A.Lutuli and P.Brown, 20 February 1960.

¹⁴ APC, PC 2/2/5/3, Statement issued at National Congress, May 1960.

¹⁵ APC, PC 2/4/11/2, Statement by P.Brown and A.Paton.

¹⁶ Brown, 'History', pp.141-142.

¹⁷ APC, PC 2/4/11/2, Quoted in statement by P.Brown and A.Paton.

also supported by the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU). The general feeling was that even if Africans were to lose jobs it was better than apartheid. Lutuli did not view the economic isolation of South Africa as 'desirable from every point of view' but it seemed the only chance for a 'relatively peaceful transition'.¹⁸ Furthermore, he did not doubt that it would entail hardship for Africans but it was the price that had to be paid to shorten the days of suffering under apartheid.

The overseas boycott campaign had received overall Liberal support in Natal.¹⁹ A resolution was passed, with two dissentients, by the Natal Provincial Congress in March 1960 which backed the boycott: 'general approval of the campaign was shown, especially by the African members'.²⁰ A resolution for National Congress was submitted by the Edendale branch which welcomed the use of boycotts in the struggle against apartheid and thanked the leadership of the party for the stand they had taken.²¹ However, the use of the method of boycott did not find support among more conservative white members, especially in the Cape. Brown was aware that the Party was divided on this and that it might lose members. However, he felt at the time that 'one had reached the point where one felt enough accommodation had been made'.²² As mentioned, the initial boycotts were supported on a local Party level or on an individual basis only, but from late 1959 the use of boycotts gained the Party's official support. The boycott issue was one of several of which certain white members disapproved and which resulted in a number of resignations.²³

Brown personally did not like boycotts but '(liked) apartheid less'.²⁴ He pointed out that it was better that such non-violent methods that remained be used now rather than later when it might be too late, for how much longer would black leaders stay non-violent? This echoes a sense of

¹⁸ A. Luthuli, *Let My People Go* (Glasgow, Collins, 1962), p.186.

¹⁹ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998. Brown does not recall any particular opposition here, and mentions the support of the Africans members for the use of boycotts by the Party.

²⁰ APC, PC 2/9/3/7, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, March 1960.

²¹ APC, PC 2/2/5/3, Resolutions for National Congress, May 1960.

²² Everatt's interview with P.Brown (1987) quoted in Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', pp.259-260.

²³ Irvine, 'Liberal Party', p.125.

²⁴ 'Long View' in *Contact*, quoted in Brown, 'History', p.160.

urgency and frustration felt by the ANC leadership, most of whom were tied up with the Treason Trials (which ended in 1961) or were restricted under the conditions of the Suppression of Communism Act. Furthermore, there was the mounting pressure of popular African discontent. Oliver Tambo, an ANC leader and a Treason Trial detainee, warned in a speech in Alexandra in 1959 that whites in South Africa should follow the policy of the LP as soon as possible, 'before Africans reach a point of no return'.²⁵ There was a general feeling of frustration amongst those opposed to the government at its unwillingness to meet African leadership. Paton and Brown gave this as a reason for their support of the overseas boycott.²⁶ For, what other avenues were left open for political protest? Had the government taken note of other protests held so far by the Congress Movement? It had 'made impossible any kind of democratic action by non-white people' and even 'crippled white democratic opposition'. In their opinion, it was thus necessary to apply pressure to the government to avoid a revolutionary situation from developing.

The LP was widely criticised by the white electorate and parliamentary political parties in South Africa for its support of the overseas boycott. This boycott was an important development in the political history of South Africa — '[n]o other single campaign has caused so much and such prolonged concern amongst those who support white supremacy in South Africa as has this one'.²⁷ Amongst the critics (besides the Nationalist government) were the United Party (UP) and Dr. A.J.R. van Rhyen, the South African High Commissioner in London. That the boycott had received the support of the Labour Party in Britain was one of the latter's major concerns. The Johannesburg-based newspaper, *The Star*, accused the LP of 'playing with fire'.²⁸ According to Ernie Wentzel, a member of the national and Transvaal leadership, the Party's support of the use of boycotts as a means of protest changed the party irrevocably from 'a moderate party devoted to constitutional change' into a player 'in the mainstream of black power-politics'.²⁹

²⁵ Quoted in *Contact*, 2 June 1959.

²⁶ APC, PC 2/4/11/2, Statement by P. Brown and A. Paton.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *The Star*, 7 January 1960, quoted in R. Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (London, Macmillan, 1997), p. 106.

²⁹ Ernie Wentzel Papers, Memoir, quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p. 109.

While the debate on the use of boycotts was progressing, the still-contentious question of the franchise was raised again. Although it seems that the general consensus throughout the Party by this stage was for universal adult suffrage, it was not yet official Party policy. The membership of the Natal Division was by the late 1950s overwhelming in favour of a universal franchise.³⁰ The 1957 resolution of the Natal Division dealing with the franchise, whereby all 'explanatory paragraphs' (qualifications for the franchise) were to be deleted, which Natal had agreed in 1957 to postpone sending to the National Committee, was discussed at a National Executive Committee meeting in January 1959. It was decided that the Natal Division should not press the issue at the National Congress to be held in April. The Cape Division was divided on the issue and was the stumbling block to further change, and the leadership wanted to avoid a possible split.³¹ The Natal Division did not press the issue in the interests of Party unity at the request of Hans Meidner, the Natal provincial chairman.

However, problems arose at the National Congress in Johannesburg in April 1959. Although Meidner had persuaded the Natal Division to withhold their resolution on the franchise, it appears that a resolution from the Alice branch, in the eastern Cape, by-passed the normal channels by being sent directly to the national office and was thus included in the agenda.³² This resolution was similar to that of the Natal Division — deletion from the policy of any references to possible transitional steps to a universal franchise based on certain qualifications. The resolution was withdrawn, but it had resulted in heated debate over the issue and had shown the diverse opinions still held.

As decided at the 1959 National Congress, there was discussion in and between branches and between Divisions to clarify opinion on the franchise issue. The results of these interchanges would be considered at the 1960 National Congress.³³ The only area where problems arose was, predictably, in the Cape. The western Cape branch was, on the whole, more conservative than the eastern Cape branch. The former still contained a number of distinguished older

³⁰ See discussion in Chapter 3. Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

³¹ Brown, 'History', pp.127-128; Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

³² Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.109; APC, PC 2/2/5/2, Resolutions, National Congress, April 1959.

³³ For the following discussion: Brown, 'History', pp.138-140.

liberals who were most opposed to a universal franchise, while the eastern Cape was more radical. Oscar Wollheim was pushing for a return to a qualified franchise and the view that the Party's electoral role should be its main one. This view also clashed with that of the younger, more radical Liberals in the Cape Town branch, such as Peter Hjul, Joe Nkatlo and Randolph Vigne. Hjul, in a letter to Brown, predicted that the Cape Division could lose between 100 to 200 members if Wollheim left the Party and a universal franchise was accepted. A Franchise Committee was set-up at a National Committee meeting in October 1959 with representatives from all regions with the purpose of reaching some consensus between Divisions.

The transition within the Party towards the adoption of a universal franchise had taken place from the mid-1950s and was thus a continuation of a process rather than a new development³⁴, although it was no doubt influenced by the political atmosphere at the end of the 1950s and early 1960, and the Party's desire to project a more radical image. The National Committee met before the National Congress in Cape Town at the end of May 1960. A Franchise Commission was elected on which Natal was represented by Selby Msimang, David Evans, and Jack Spence.³⁵ The overall consensus of the Party in favour of scrapping the qualified franchise was the verdict, and the desire of Party members for this to become official Party policy was realised. The 'right of franchise on a common roll to all adult persons' was adopted by Congress.³⁶ In accepting the resolution for Natal, Leo Kuper (acting provincial chairman) stressed that his Division was firmly in favour of a universal franchise.³⁷ He did not want to leave any loophole in the policy whereby a qualification could be introduced via the 'back door'. The Party had thus taken the step of removing one of the remaining obstacles to its co-operation with the Congress Alliance and in identifying more closely with black people in South Africa.

With the shift in focus to the voteless majority, the Party began to increase its extra-

³⁴ In interviews with P. Brown (25/2/1998), C. Gardner (6/2/1998), and C. Brubeck (19/2/1998), they all stress that the majority of the Party, and Natal in particular, supported a universal franchise by the late 1950s and it was a mere formality that it became official Party policy in 1960.

³⁵ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 28 May 1960.

³⁶ APC, PC 2/2/5/3, Franchise Resolution, National Congress, May 1960.

³⁷ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, May 1960.

parliamentary activities and gradually ceased to function as a parliamentary political party. The party in 1959 was still endeavouring to influence the white electorate and the decision was taken to contest the provincial elections in that year. Lutuli had made a public statement supporting the LP candidates and urging people to vote for them.³⁸ A large number of Liberals in Natal had felt it better not to take part in the election in the province. Nevertheless, the election in Natal was contested by Guinevere Ventress, while three other seats were contested nationally: Sea Point, Houghton and Pretoria. The Natal Division's set-back in this election served only to highlight its lack of support amongst the white electorate. The number of votes received in each of the three other seats was close to 1,500, but only 150 were received in Natal.³⁹ To be fair, Ventress had to change the seat being contested from Pinetown to Ixopo and had to fight candidates from the UP and the Union Federal Party (UFP), and an Independent.

The 1959 provincial election was the last election to be fought by the Natal Division as it did not contest a seat in the general election in October 1961. However, the general election was contested by Liberal candidates in Cape Town and Johannesburg.⁴⁰ A further blow to the LP's diminished parliamentary role was the loss of the only Liberal Members of Parliament. The Party was represented by four Natives Representatives, Margaret Ballinger and Walter Stanford in the House of Assembly, and Leslie Rubin and William Ballinger in the Senate. In early 1959 Verwoerd introduced a Bill which aimed to give Africans self-government in independent homelands, also known as 'Bantustans'. A consequence of the 1959 Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act was that the Native Representatives seats in Parliament would be abolished in mid-1960.

³⁸ Brown, 'History', p.148.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.143; Irvine, 'Liberal Party', p.123.

⁴⁰ See later discussion.

4.2 Closer identification with black political movements

As extra-parliamentary opposition became increasingly central to the LP's activities, so co-operation with the Congresses continued. In Natal, relations between them were not much different to any other year and it seems that the question of closer co-operation remained unchanged during 1959.⁴¹ At a national level, the relationship between the LP and the ANC was complicated by the formation of the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC)⁴², and the communist presence in the Congress Movement was still a stumbling-block to closer relations. This is something which frustrated Lutuli in his efforts at closer relations with the LP. He saw the primary aim of the Congress Alliance as that of attaining liberation, and the role of communists was to assist in that aim, but this did not mean that the ANC had adopted communism.⁴³ In early 1959 Lutuli had appealed to the LP in the COD journal, *New Age*, to drop its anti-communist stance in the interest of co-operation with the Congress Alliance.⁴⁴

Relations between the LP and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) and the ANC in Natal remained cordial. The party worked closely with the NIC in protest against Group Areas in the Durban area, which was particularly affected. As previously discussed, members of the party were supportive of the ANC boycott initiatives in the region. Besides sharing platforms and organising protests, there was co-operation on a more local and low-key level. For instance, during 1959 Meidner and Archie Gumede from the local ANC held talks with the Superintendent at Edendale Hospital where it appears that nurses were being pressured to join a government organisation which subscribed to apartheid's principles.⁴⁵

Lutuli continued to encourage closer relations. He saw the LP as a source of encouragement to Africans as it provided evidence that there were white people who shared the belief in a non-

⁴¹ Brown, 'History', p.148.

⁴² A section of the ANC, describing themselves as Africanists who resented the communist influence in that organisation, had broken away in late 1958. They formed the PAC under the leadership of Robert Sobukwe in March 1959.

⁴³ Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, pp.138-139.

⁴⁴ A. Paton, *Journey Continued*, (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988), p.191.

⁴⁵ Brown, 'History', p.130.

racial democracy: 'The LP has striven fearless[ly] for the extension of democratic rights and civil liberties to the African people.'⁴⁶ He was banned again in late May 1959 after a successful tour of South Africa. Brown and Paton issued a statement condemning the ban by the government as 'cruel and stupid'.⁴⁷ Protest meetings were organised by the Congress Movement and the LP in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, while a LP one was organised at Stanger by E. V. Mahomed.⁴⁸ The meeting in Pietermaritzburg was chaired by Brown and addressed by Meidner, F.J. Sithole (a member of the LP and the ANC in Natal), and Dr M.M. Motala from the NIC. About 2000 people, mostly African, turned up in support at the City Hall.

In late 1959 Paton, Lutuli and Dr G.M. Naicker wrote an open letter to Harold Macmillan (the Prime Minister of Great Britain) in the *London Observer* over his proposed visit to South Africa in 1960.⁴⁹ The three leaders expressed their concern that the rest of Africa and South Africans might interpret the visit as support for apartheid. When in the country, Macmillan refused to meet with representatives from the LP and the ANC. His famous 'wind of change' address to the South African Parliament on 3 February 1960, however, was a source of encouragement to opposition and an indirect indictment on the policies of the Nationalist government.

Overall, the relationship between the LP, the Congress Alliance and the PAC was complex and fluctuated over time and in various parts of the country. The rivalry between the ANC and the PAC was intense and there was no co-operation between them. The PAC was never a strong presence in and did not have an impact in Natal.⁵⁰ Its support was concentrated in parts of the Witwatersrand and the Western Cape, which were traditionally not ANC strongholds.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Quoted in Brown, 'History', p.148.

⁴⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.147.

⁴⁸ Reported in *Umhlanganisi*, July-August 1959.

⁴⁹ For the following discussion: Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.192.

⁵⁰ Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998; APC. J.Didcott interviewed by R.Vigne, 22/6/1995.

⁵¹ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, Longman, 1983), p.85.

Lutuli's popularity in Natal may have been a factor for its lack of support in the region.⁵² However, Jordan Ngubane had been involved with members of the movement and supported the formation of the PAC. He was well-known for his outspoken criticisms of the communist influence in the ANC, which had resulted in his estrangement from Lutuli and elicited hostility from ANC. It was Ngubane's support of the organisation which was responsible for the complications between the LP and the Congress Alliance, especially with the ANC in Natal.

The inaugural Conference of the PAC was held in Orlando, a suburb of Johannesburg, at the same time as the National Congress of the LP in Johannesburg in April 1959. Ngubane had been invited by the Natal delegation of the PAC as an observer. The National Committee was aware of this as the Natal Provincial Committee had given its approval.⁵³ The complication was that an observer could not attend the closed session and thus Ngubane was given delegate status. It was therefore reported in the *Rand Daily Mail* that he had attended as a delegate. John Didcott, a member of the National Committee from Natal, felt that Ngubane had embarrassed the Party and complicated relations with the ANC (which Didcott supported). Following a discussion on the issue, certain members expressed fears that Ngubane was indeed an Africanist. Sometime afterwards H.S. Ngcobo, the leader of the Natal PAC, wrote to *Contact* confirming that Ngubane was not a member of his organisation.⁵⁴ However, the harm had been done as Ngubane was criticised by certain leaders in the Congress Alliance and the ANC Youth League for his attendance at the PAC Conference.⁵⁵

There was also discussion over the perception that the PAC endorsed an anti-white and anti-Liberal policy, and that the Party should steer clear of any co-operation with the organisation. The majority of the National Committee, including Brown, and other members of the Party in Natal, wanted the party to keep an open mind and co-operate where possible with both the ANC and the PAC.⁵⁶ Ngubane stressed that he wanted closer co-operation with the ANC and

⁵² Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.313.

⁵³ APC. PC 2/2/5/2, Minutes, National Congress, April 1959.

⁵⁴ *Contact*, 25 July 1959.

⁵⁵ Brown, 'History', p.147.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.135,148; Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

the Africanists (in the PAC).⁵⁷ He saw the PAC as a counter to, as he perceived it, the communist-dominated ANC.

Turning to white parliamentary politics, the UP split in August 1959 opened up a number of possibilities. A group of liberal UP members, unable to tolerate that party's vacillation on the race question, resigned and formed the Progressive Party in November 1959.⁵⁸ Members of the LP had been hopeful that the breakaway members should either join the LP or that they form a party which differed significantly from the UP on race policy. Although the Progressive Party's policies were a liberal step forward compared to what the UP had offered in the past, its qualified franchise policy was almost identical to the LP's in 1953.⁵⁹ Paton and Brown, as well as Lutuli, Ngubane and other prominent African leaders, tried to get the party to accept a more liberal franchise policy, possibly a universal franchise, but in vain.⁶⁰ The LP's relationship with the Progressives varied. Since the LP's focus had shifted to the extra-parliamentary arena and it no longer entertained the hope of an electoral victory, the Progressives were not a direct threat to it. The official policy of the LP to the Progressive Party was critical but not hostile.⁶¹ Relations in Natal were reported as 'friendly' during 1960 after an initial strain.⁶²

What the Progressives did offer was a more viable option as a parliamentary political party. Hence, it was joined by those who felt the LP had no chance of ever gaining an electoral victory, and by disillusioned Liberals who were dissatisfied with the radical direction in which the LP was developing. The emphasis on extra-parliamentary activity and the acceptance of a universal franchise, coupled with loss of the only Members of Parliament, signalled that the Party was functioning mainly as a political pressure group as opposed to a parliamentary political party. An African person, writing in the December 1959 edition of the Congress Alliance journal *Liberation*, felt that although the Progressives were saying nothing to white

⁵⁷ APC, PC 2/2/5/2, Minutes, National Congress, April 1959.

⁵⁸ See: H.Suzman, *In No Uncertain Terms* (Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball, 1993).

⁵⁹ Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.192-193.

⁶⁰ Brown, 'History', p.186.

⁶¹ Reported in *Umhlanganisi*, November-December 1959.

⁶² APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, May 1960.

South Africans which the LP or the COD had not said already, the former party offered some assurance of respectability and security to a predominately 'timid and conventional' white public.⁶³ Colin Webb, an academic at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg and an associate of Colin Gardner, felt that, although he largely agreed with the policies of the Liberals, he would rather support a party that had some hope of electoral success.⁶⁴ Judging from the 1961 general election results, the Progressives had won considerably more electoral support than the Liberals ever had.⁶⁵

4.3 Liberals in the battlefield: Sharpeville and the state of emergency

The year 1960 proved to be a watershed in the history of South Africa.⁶⁶ The beginning of the new decade ushered in a dramatic period where the climate was ripe for political change, although normal legal constitutional political activity was ineffective. Black opposition leaders hoped for fundamental changes during the decade, influenced by events in the rest of Africa. In South Africa, there were signs of increasing grassroots discontent as ordinary African citizens endured the everyday hardships of apartheid. The increasing frustration of black leaders coupled with the political agitation amongst the masses threatened to spill over into open violence. The incidents of violence at Cato Manor in Durban in late 1959 and early 1960, and later at Sharpeville and in the Cape in March 1960, were symptoms of this African discontent.

These events and the subsequent state of emergency changed the political scenario in the country. The effects of Sharpeville were 'immense', both inside and outside the country.⁶⁷ There was massive world-wide attention and the withdrawal of foreign capital. However, far from bringing down the government as some had hoped, especially after the pass laws were briefly suspended, it recovered and proceeded to implement even stronger measures against its opponents.⁶⁸ The economy improved and continued to grow. This shattered any illusion that

⁶³ Quoted in Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.193.

⁶⁴ Interview with C.Gardner, 6/2/1998.

⁶⁵ Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.209-210. See later discussion for results.

⁶⁶ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.219.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.202.

⁶⁸ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.204.

apartheid was about to crumble.

Neither the PAC nor the Congress Alliance leadership had abandoned their stance on non-violence in early 1960. Both organisations had plans for a campaign against influx control and the compulsory carrying of passes. The PAC announced their plans first and the demonstration held as part of its campaign resulted in the police shootings at Sharpeville near Vereeniging on the Witwatersrand on 21 March 1960. People were to leave their passes at home and surrender themselves for arrest. However, police panicked as a crowd gathered and this led to a loss of control. The police fired indiscriminately on the crowd killing 69 people and wounding many more. Sharpeville was followed by violence breaking out in Langa near Cape Town. (The Vereeniging area and the townships of the western Cape were PAC strongholds.) The ANC blamed the PAC for launching their campaign before that of the ANC's proposed anti-pass campaign in order to get the upper-hand. Nevertheless, Lutuli burnt his pass and declared a day of mourning for those killed at Sharpeville.⁶⁹

'The events of the next three weeks', writes Vigne, 'shook South Africa to its foundations'.⁷⁰ In the weeks that followed Sharpeville, the government declared a state of emergency on 31 March (lifted at the end of September 1960), and banned the ANC and the PAC in early April by hurriedly passing the Unlawful Organisations Act. Members from the PAC, the Congress Alliance and the LP were detained under the state of emergency. Those from the LP were mostly from Natal and were part of the national and/or provincial leadership. This was the first time that LP members realised the high price they may have to pay for opposing the Nationalist government. According to Paton,

'One always expected to pay some kind of price for one's opposition to *apartheid*; one has seen other people paying it, and one did not expect to remain immune. But now for the first time some of our own friends, some of our closest associates, have had to pay the high price of imprisonment, and of separation from their families.'⁷¹

⁶⁹ Luthuli, *Let My People Go*; G.Mbeki, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: A Short History* (Cape Town, David Philip & Mayibuye Centre, 1992), pp.85-86.

⁷⁰ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.116.

⁷¹ Speech given by A.Paton, National Congress, May 1960, quoted in *Contact*, 18 June 1960.

LP members of all races were detained on 30 March 1960. The list included some of those active in the Transvaal and one member in the Cape, but consisted mainly of Natal members: Peter Brown (national chairman), Hans Meidner (Natal provincial chairman), Derick Marsh (Pietermaritzburg branch chairman), Elliot Mngadi (party organiser in northern Natal and National Committee member) and Frank Bhengu (National Committee member from Ladysmith). Three more were arrested in Ladysmith, and four members were arrested in the Bergville area. However, the Special Emergency Regulations did not apply to the latter magisterial district and the members were released. Numerous leaders from the Congress Alliance, including Lutuli, and from the PAC, such as its leader Robert Sobukwe, were arrested.

Brown was held together in a cell with Meidner and Marsh in the Pietermaritzburg Prison, while the black members of the LP and the Congresses were held in a separate section.⁷² Brown speaks of his detention as a painful but important experience, and adds that it was 'good for the party'. They were not treated badly nor interrogated harshly, for these were 'early days' of the 'detention regime'. He was offered an early release but refused to leave prison unless LP members of all races were also released.⁷³ According to Ngubane: 'This showed the Africans that the white liberal was determined to destroy white supremacy.'⁷⁴ The majority of Liberals were released by the end of July.

This was a time of action for the party and the work done by members during the state of emergency enhanced the party's reputation amongst black people.⁷⁵ According to Brown: 'The Liberal Party's reaction to the 1960 State of Emergency was quite magnificent'.⁷⁶ The Natal provincial chairman, Meidner, spoke of the 'magnificent response of the Party to the occasion'

⁷² APC, P. Brown interviewed by N. Bromberger, Tape 3, 1995.

⁷³ P. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Bibliography* (Oxford, OUP, 1994), p.318; E. Callan (ed.), *Alan Paton: The Long View* (London, Pall Mall Press, 1968), p.35; J. Ngubane, *An African Explains Apartheid* (London, Pall Mall Press, 1963), p.196; APC, P. Brown interviewed by N. Bromberger, Tape 3, 1995.

⁷⁴ Ngubane, *An African*, p.196.

⁷⁵ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.215.

⁷⁶ Brown, 'History', p.169.

and expressed gratitude to all members involved in the Natal Division.⁷⁷ Members in all the provincial Divisions were active in giving legal assistance and relief to detainees and their families. There had been incidents of unrest in many urban areas, including Durban, since Sharpeville, and more arrests were made across the country (18,011 by 6 May 1960⁷⁸). Due to the party's activity during the state of emergency, there was an upsurge of interest in it. Provincial Reports given in August 1960 at a National Executive meeting (held illegally at Brown's house in Pietermaritzburg) spoke of 'great activity and a growing interest in the Party'.⁷⁹

Despite the number of arrests and detentions amongst Natal members during the state of emergency, the Division as a whole continued to run smoothly, as did the national office in Pietermaritzburg. This was testament to good branch management in the Division, but Meidner warned that organisation needed to be improved to withstand the anticipated trials of the future.⁸⁰ Emergency funds were set-up for members who had been detained and their families, and legal advice was also offered. Elliot Mngadi and Frank Bhengu thanked those who had been active in organising funds in Durban and Pietermaritzburg, thus removing 'much of the anxiety about their families from the detainees themselves'.⁸¹ Mngadi also thanked the Party for paying his salary (as a Party organiser) and providing for his family while he was in prison. Paton and other LP members were also involved in the Defence and Aid Fund⁸² which was formed in June 1960 to provide funds for legal assistance and for the dependents of detainees on a national and non-party basis. Kuper had been asked to establish a branch of the Fund in Durban.⁸³

Paton stepped into Brown's position as national chairman while the latter was in prison. The reason for Paton not having been arrested was most likely because of his internationally-held

⁷⁷ APC, PC 2/9/3/8, Provincial chairman's report for 1960, Natal Provincial Congress, 1961.

⁷⁸ *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa, 1959-1960*, quoted in Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.205.

⁷⁹ Minutes from National Executive meeting, quoted in Brown, 'History', p.179.

⁸⁰ APC, PC 2/9/3/8, Provincial chairman's report for 1960, Natal Provincial Congress, 1961.

⁸¹ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 20 September 1960.

⁸² This Fund differs from the Treason Trial Defence Fund, although formed from the same basis.

⁸³ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 22 November 1960.

reputation as author of *Cry, the Beloved Country* and as a liberal, and the publicity that would have been caused by arresting him.⁸⁴ He used his high profile to continue publicising events in South Africa, both in and out of the country. He was kept under constant surveillance by the security forces, and his passport was taken away in December 1960 after he returned from the United States where he had received the Freedom Award in New York. Although shocked, he supposes he 'should have expected it'.⁸⁵

With the banning of the ANC and the PAC, and the restrictions placed on many members of the Congress Alliance, a vacuum was created in black politics. This political vacuum was partly filled by the LP which 'briefly inherited the political centre stage in South Africa'.⁸⁶ There remained few avenues of expression open for Africans who wished to remain politically active, and the LP was still legal.⁸⁷ Kuper urged the Party to take advantage of this 'vacuum' that had been created, as it 'presented an opportunity for leadership which should be seriously explored'.⁸⁸ This new interest in the LP led Verwoerd to '[warn] the white community that the greatest threat to its dominance came from the Liberal Party'.⁸⁹

There was discussion within LP circles after the banning of the ANC and the PAC as to where the 'political homeless' would go.⁹⁰ Perhaps some sort of new political organisation needed to be created. Brown put the idea to Lutuli but there was no interest from the ANC and nothing came from the move. He thinks that, in retrospect, Liberals were naive in thinking that the LP or something similar would provide a home for banned Congress members.⁹¹ Ngubane felt that the vacuum needed to be filled and efforts made to consolidate, and build unity amongst, the African opposition.⁹² It seems that there were plans afoot amongst black opposition as a

⁸⁴ Alexander, *Paton*, p.317.

⁸⁵ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.211.

⁸⁶ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', p.274.

⁸⁷ Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.217.

⁸⁸ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, May 1960.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Ngubane, *An African*, p.174.

⁹⁰ Brown, 'History', pp.190-192.

⁹¹ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁹² Ngubane, *An African*, p.168.

Consultative Conference of African leaders was planned for the 16 December 1960 at Orlando in Johannesburg with the aim of consolidating African unity. Some LP members were invited: Selby Msimang, Jordan Ngubane, Hyacinth (Bill) Bhengu, Julius Malie (Party organiser for the Transvaal) and Joe Nkatlo (ex-ANC member and national vice-chairman from the Cape). Msimang could not attend as he only received the invitation on 10 December. Ngubane was elected as chairman of Continuation Committee at the Conference, with Bhengu and Malie serving on the Committee.⁹³

A number of delegates, including the LP members, became convinced that the communists from the Congress Alliance were in control of the Committee. The source of large sums of money at the Committee's disposal was never disclosed and this served to heighten suspicions and tensions.⁹⁴ According to Ngubane, the Committee was merely a rubber stamp to the 'invisible hand' which had its own agenda.⁹⁵ Ngubane and Bhengu resigned, after two independent delegates and the PAC members had walked-out. All three LP members on the Committee were arrested in March 1961 under the Suppression of Communism Act, but managed to appeal successfully against their convictions.⁹⁶

The All-In African Leaders Conference went ahead as planned and was held in Edendale near Pietermaritzburg on 25 and 26 March 1961. It turned out to be an almost exclusively ANC affair with Nelson Mandela as the main speaker, calling for the government to hold a national convention.⁹⁷ One of the reasons behind Ngubane's resignation had been the refusal by the Committee to consider postponing the event in order to convince the PAC delegation to return. The LP did not give its official support but it did not repudiate the Conference either.⁹⁸ Some Liberals from the Springs branch (Johannesburg) did attend but the northern Natal Liberals, probably the most organised body of African political opinion in that region, were not

⁹³ Irvine, 'Liberal Party', p. 129; Robertson, *Liberalism*, pp.217-218.

⁹⁴ Ngubane, *An African*, p. 170.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁹⁶ Irvine, 'Liberal Party', p. 129.

⁹⁷ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, pp.357-358.

⁹⁸ Brown, 'History', pp.195-202.

invited.⁹⁹ There was dissatisfaction expressed amongst these members about their exclusion.¹⁰⁰ The Conference raised questions about the possibilities of African political unity in South Africa. Brown wrote in the *Natal Witness* that there was ‘considerable disenchantment amongst Liberals and others who, in spite of their earlier experiences, might still have been sympathetic to the results of the Conference, if there had been any real [attempt] to achieve unity’.¹⁰¹

Liberals realised the necessity of consolidating opposition to apartheid after democratic opposition was all but destroyed by the government, and the idea of holding a national convention was mooted. It had been one of the Liberals’ objectives to hold such a convention along the lines of the successful Multiracial Conference held in Johannesburg in December 1957.¹⁰² It was decided at the Natal Provincial Congress in October 1960, on the suggestion of the Pietermaritzburg branch (the ‘moving spirit was Peter Brown’¹⁰³), to hold a non-racial convention of Natalians from different spectrums of public life to discuss the political future of the country. The aim was an attempt to find solutions to the problems faced by South Africa. It was to be a non-party affair with delegates attending on an individual basis. About 1000 people attended the meeting in the City Hall to hear speakers from the LP, although not officially speaking for the party, on the idea of such a convention. The floor voted in favour of such a meeting. A working committee was elected under the chairmanship of Dr Edgar Brookes.¹⁰⁴ Natal had ‘taken the first step in what was to become one of the most important opposition political movements of 1961, the Convention movement’.¹⁰⁵

The Natal Convention was held in Pietermaritzburg in April 1961 and, in Brown’s opinion, it

⁹⁹ Irvine, ‘Liberal Party’, p.129; Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.141-142.

¹⁰⁰ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 29 March 1961.

¹⁰¹ *Natal Witness*, 27 March 1961, quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.143.

¹⁰² Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.77-78. The Multiracial Conference had been organised in conjunction with the IDAMF and Paton had used his prestige to attract support.

¹⁰³ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.359.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 1. A leading Natal liberal who was to join the Party in 1962.

¹⁰⁵ Brown, ‘History’, p.190.

was a 'tremendous success'.¹⁰⁶ It was attended by people of all races and a wide range of views were expressed. The only group not represented was the conservative white right, including the UP. That the official opposition to the government was not represented was a weakness of the Convention. Brown described much of the Report as 'surprisingly radical'. For instance, a non-racial franchise and an integrated education system were agreed upon. The need for a national convention was emphasized and the possibility of achieving this was discussed.¹⁰⁷ According to Brookes, the Natal Convention was a 'courageous and significant event' in the political atmosphere of 1961, but it came to nothing in the end.¹⁰⁸ Colin Gardner agrees — in one way it was a big event, while in another it was a non-event.¹⁰⁹ It was an important step in that from the number of diverse views represented, a non-racial political system was agreed upon, which showed that there was common ground between opponents of the Nationalist government. However, without the forum of a national convention, the resolutions reached at the Natal Convention could not become a reality. Unfortunately, such a national convention was never to be held despite Liberal efforts.¹¹⁰

The LP was involved in anti-government publicity before Republic Day (31 May 1961) but ensured that these events did not clash with any ANC-planned activities.¹¹¹ The Action Committee elected at the All-In Conference in March had planned a stay-away for 29-31 May 1961. A number of successful meetings were held in Natal by the LP. The Natal Division had long been against the creation of a republic, not *per se*, but because of the manner in which it had been brought about. The Party's objection was based on the decision having been made by the minority of the population. Natal was the only province in which the majority of whites did not vote for a republic in the 1960 referendum.¹¹² According to Brown, if a republic would have led to a non-racial society then the Liberals would have no doubt supported it.¹¹³ He,

¹⁰⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Report: See Brown, 'History', pp.220-228.

¹⁰⁷ *Liberal Opinion*, December 1961.

¹⁰⁸ E.H.Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), p.129.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with C. Gardner, 6/2/1998.

¹¹⁰ See: Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, p.130; Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.146-148.

¹¹¹ Brown, 'History', p.204.

¹¹² Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.208.

¹¹³ Brown, 'History', p.215.

Paton and Ngubane wrote a open letter to Verwoerd condemning the new republic, especially since Verwoerd had withdrawn South Africa from the Commonwealth in March 1961 because of international criticism of apartheid.¹¹⁴

There was increased tension countrywide during May before Republic Day as the Congress Alliance organised its planned stay-at-home. Brown even prepared a statement to be released in the event of his being arrested.¹¹⁵ A Bill was passed through Parliament allowing detention without bail for 12 days, and the government banned all public meetings before Republic Day. Police made swoops in the townships where some LP members were arrested, while certain other members' houses were raided.¹¹⁶ The stay-at-home was a failure on a national scale, although it was well supported in some areas, and Mandela called it off on 30 May. The strike was successful in Howick, where both SACTU and the LP were popular.

The Nationalist government's policy of apartheid was gaining the approval of an increasing number of the white electorate. The results of the 1961 general election showed a further swing to the Nationalists and a massive defeat for the UP. The hardening of white political attitudes allowed for the Nationalist Party (NP) to gain its greatest victory since coming to power in 1948. Although the UP was the official opposition, it was by this stage no longer advocating any progressive solutions for the future. Only one of eleven of the Progressive Party's Members of Parliament, Helen Suzman, was returned. In sixteen urban, largely English-speaking districts, the Progressives obtained about 56,000 votes to the 83,000 votes for the UP.¹¹⁷ Surprisingly the two LP candidates, in Constantia and Hillbrow, managed to save their deposits. The conclusion reached by Liberals from this was that it was obvious that opposition had to be 'carried on outside of Parliament' (this was something the Progressive 'still had to learn'), although they stressed that it should be non-violent and disciplined.¹¹⁸ The UP was no longer functioning as an effective opposition, and parliamentary politics in South Africa was reduced to a white racist government faced with a white racist opposition.

¹¹⁴ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.220.

¹¹⁵ Brown, 'History', p.207a.

¹¹⁶ Ngubane, *An African*, p.196; Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.363.

¹¹⁷ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, pp.656-657.

¹¹⁸ *Liberal Opinion*, December 1961.

The other important development in late 1961 were the first acts of ‘organised violence’ against property.¹¹⁹ Additional pressure was placed on leaders to consider militant campaigns by younger members and by ‘[p]opular impatience with ineffectual political action and danger of all-out retaliation by the government in the wake of violent eruptions’.¹²⁰ This was despite the fact that ‘both ANC and PAC leaders had behind them a long African tradition of public commitment to nonviolence, as well as a record of action by leaders to curb and condemn disorder and rioting’. There was much discussion in ANC circles during early 1961 on the ‘apparent unavailability and feasibility of violent methods’ and growing criticism within the ANC of non-violence. Mandela and some of his colleagues had decided, reluctantly, by June 1961 to abandon the ANC’s policy of non-violence, although recognising that political action was still essential, and to pursue violent methods of struggle with the formation of a military wing. According to Mandela, five decades of non-violent opposition had brought the African people nothing but more repressive legislation. It was decided to use sabotage only, in an attempt to avoid civil war (which was considered a real possibility at the time), and if this option failed to produce results, other methods would have to be considered. *Umkhonto weSizwe* was formed in November 1961 and its first acts of sabotage were on 16 December 1961. This organisation was not structured on the multi-racial basis as the Congress Alliance had been and was open to people of all races, hence its ranks were joined by white communists who had been in the COD.¹²¹ It is not clear how Lutuli felt about this drift to violence.¹²² It is most likely that he understood the frustrations of younger members, although he did not personally agree with the move. In any case, there was not much he could do by this stage to influence the ‘rank-and-file’.

In early 1962 the leadership of the LP re-stated its adherence to the principle of non-violence and the use only of non-violent methods to bring about change in South Africa.¹²³ Those who

¹¹⁹ Reported in *Liberal Opinion*, March 1962.

¹²⁰ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, pp.645-648.

¹²¹ The South African Communist Party (SACP) became a separate and distinct political force during 1960. It had been formed in 1953 and had remained a secret organisation until 1960. Most of its members had belonged to the COD. Lodge, *Black Politics*, p.87; Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.350.

¹²² Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, pp.649-651.

¹²³ *Liberal Opinion*, March 1962.

were contemplating such steps were advised to leave the Party. In his provincial chairman's report at the Natal Provincial Congress in 1961, Meidner highlighted the fact that the Party was in danger not only from the government, but also from the 'plans, actions and tempers of frustrated people' who would contemplate abandoning non-violence.¹²⁴ The Party's first requirement remained 'to organise the people' in a political party 'which aimed at fundamental change in society' and the LP could not 'approve or participate in this type of political action'.

4.4 Heightened activism in the Natal Division

National membership grew significantly from 1960, particularly African membership. This was especially true for the Natal Division, where a keen interest in the party had developed as a result of the Liberals' activities during the state of emergency and their involvement in the government's rural resettlement schemes. The substantial increase in African membership in the Division, which begun in 1960 and continued into 1962, presented the leadership of the Division with new challenges. A large percentage of the new recruits were of working-class origin and predominantly rural in composition. By 1961 the majority of members in Natal were no longer white, although the provincial leadership was still largely white. However, local leadership often comprised only African people in the rural branches. As the number of rural branches increased in Natal, so party organisation needed to be reconsidered. Local leaders, often uneducated and often semi-literate, needed to be taught the basics of branch administration. On-going programmes were held to raise political consciousness as well as to teach the principles and policies of the LP.

The increase in black membership was somewhat counteracted by the loss of white members. Provincial reports from 1961 indicate the number of white members on a national level was declining. The national chairman stressed the importance of retaining white members to ensure a non-racial outlook within the party.¹²⁵ Although the Natal Division never had a significant number of white members, many of them were active and committed party members. The party

¹²⁴ APC, PC 2/9/3/8, Provincial chairman's Report, Natal Provincial Congress, 14-15 April 1961.

¹²⁵ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, July 1961.

lost a few white members to the Progressive Party¹²⁶, while more were lost through emigration. It was not a case of numbers, but rather that of active members lost. The Coastal Regional branch reported that about 30 white members from that branch had left the country by late 1962, many of whom had been active.¹²⁷ The Division lost some its most able members from 1961 for academic reasons rather than political, such as Violaine Junod (who had spent 1958 in the United States), the Kupers and Derick Marsh. Catherine Shallis had left for England in 1959, and returned to Durban in late 1963. There was also a loss of a few members who were not prepared to become politically involved in the face of government persecution.

Dr Edgar Brookes joined the party in Natal in early 1962, and his membership was announced at the Natal Provincial Congress to much applause. He had made the decision to join at the Natal Convention the previous year, but had been persuaded to wait lest his affiliation to the LP should jeopardise his neutrality as chairman of the Convention. Although the Progressive Party also appealed to him, he found that the LP's unequivocal stand on non-racialism and the 'shining personality of its leaders, Alan Paton and Peter Brown, attracted [him] irresistibly'.¹²⁸ He had been to see Brown in prison during his detention in 1960, and was much impressed by him.¹²⁹

As mentioned, the high level of activity in all provincial Divisions during state of emergency resulted in a growing interest in the party and there was a general increase in membership in all three from 1960, particularly amongst Africans. The reports of the National Congresses from 1959 to 1961 reveal a trend. The attendance at each increased, as did the proportion of black delegates. In 1959 there were over 200 delegates, which exceeded all expectations¹³⁰, and the number increased to about 270 at the 1961 Congress.¹³¹ At the time of the 1961 National

¹²⁶ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998. There were more defections from the Transvaal and particularly from the Cape to the Progressive Party. Although there was no enormous loss of members to the Progressives, there were a number of prominent members, such as Donald Molteno, Walter Stanford and Oscar Wollheim, who had left.

¹²⁷ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Regional Committee, Coastal Region Report, September 1962.

¹²⁸ Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, p.130.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.121-122.

¹³⁰ Reported in Brown, 'History', p.130.

¹³¹ Reported in *Ibid.*, p.240.

Congress, held in Durban, the national membership figure stood at about 5000.¹³² The membership of the Natal Division had increased each year from 1958, and stood at about 1100 paid-up members by mid-1960.¹³³ The membership for 1961 exceeded expectation and stood at about 1600, although not all were paid-up.¹³⁴ The membership for 1962 remained about the same, and the Division had 40 active branches.¹³⁵

The number of predominantly African rural branches in Natal increased dramatically from 1960.¹³⁶ Branches were formed in areas where previously there had been none, such as the Himeville-Underberg region of southern Natal, while in other areas branches had to be split-up to accommodate increasing numbers. This was the case in the Bergville area, where there were a number of 'black spots'. The branches in northern Natal continued to flourish. The number and membership of predominantly African urban branches also increased. The branch at Red Hill in Durban gained a considerable number of new members from the local Five Roses factory during 1960.¹³⁷ The branch at Howick continued to flourish under the charismatic leadership of Christopher Shabalala. New branches at Umgeni and Congella were started by Jack Nkosi, the Party organiser for the Coastal Region.¹³⁸

Although interest in the party in Natal increased dramatically during 1960, increasing interest in the LP in Natal was already evident during 1959 with a number of successful public meetings taking place.¹³⁹ Ngubane's speeches on the Accra conference, held in late 1958, were very popular, especially in Stanger and Howick, where 60 people joined the party. The first public meeting to be held in Ladysmith, at which Ngubane spoke, attracted a crowd of about 600

¹³² Irvine, 'Liberal Party', p. 119; Robertson, *Liberalism*, p. 217.

¹³³ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, May 1960.

¹³⁴ APC, PC 2/9/25/3, Natal provincial chairman's Report for 1960.

¹³⁵ APC, PC 2/9/3/9, Provincial chairman's Report, Natal Provincial Congress, 23-24 March 1962.

¹³⁶ The information for the following discussion (unless otherwise stated) is gathered from reports in the minutes of regional branch and Natal Provincial Committee meetings, and Provincial Reports given at National Congresses.

¹³⁷ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 22 November 1960.

¹³⁸ Brown, 'History', p. 259.

¹³⁹ *Contact*, February 1959; *Umhlanganisi*, March-April 1959.

people in June.¹⁴⁰ The Party's involvement in 'black spot' removals and Group Areas protests continued in Natal and drew large audiences. Rural support from Africans was apparent — about 500 residents at Charlestown assembled to hear Brown speak.¹⁴¹ Rural areas continued to draw good audiences especially after the state of emergency.¹⁴²

The LP in Natal continued its association with communities threatened with removal in the 'black spots'. The Liberals' involvement intensified with the passing of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act in 1959. The government's intention to remove settled communities in urban and rural areas were spelled out more clearly during the early 1960s. The Minister of Bantu Administration and Development announced plans to get rid of all 'black spots'¹⁴³ and opposition to these removals was a major concern for the party in Natal during 1962.¹⁴⁴ The party continued to publicise the plight of these 'black spot' communities in the press and to provide legal assistance. Paton's booklet, *The Charlestown Story*, was published in 1959. The party worked with the Northern Natal African Landowners Association (NNALA) to try and prevent or delay as many removals as possible. It was successful in preventing the removal of residents, for example, from Charlestown in early 1959, when legal advice was sought on notices that had been served on a number of the residents which were found to be invalid.¹⁴⁵ Again in 1960 the Party organised legal representation for residents of Charlestown to participate in a Commission of Enquiry into the affairs of the Town Board.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, legal assistance was organised for people threatened with removal in Kokstad.¹⁴⁷

The Party in Natal was also active in urban areas where Party members, especially in Durban, continued their co-operation with the NIC on the Group Areas Resistance Committee, which organised protest meetings against the Group Area proposals which had been announced by

¹⁴⁰ *Umhlanganisi*, June 1959

¹⁴¹ Brown, 'History', p.150.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp.188, 254.

¹⁴³ Reported in *Liberal Opinion*, July 1962.

¹⁴⁴ APC, PC 2/9/3/9, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, March 1962.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, 'History', pp.129-130.

¹⁴⁶ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 4 July 1960.

¹⁴⁷ Brown, 'History', p.259.

the government for the Durban area in early 1959. Kuper stressed that this should become a major concern for the LP during 1959, and plans on how best to protest and raise public awareness were discussed.¹⁴⁸ Paton had been asked by the NIC to write a booklet detailing the effects of the Group Areas Act on the Indian communities in Durban, which was entitled *The People Wept*.¹⁴⁹

One of the remaining obstacles was removed to closer identification with black people when the universal franchise became official party policy in May 1960. By 1961 there was a feeling that policies should be more in line with many South Africans who lived at a poverty level, since this group was increasing its representation in the Party, especially in the Natal Division. At the National Congress in 1961, a number of the Party's policies were re-drafted in order that it could become 'a really effective force in South Africa'.¹⁵⁰ The policies included education, civil rights, foreign, land, economic and social welfare policies. Drafts for a land policy spoke of the necessity of redistribution of land while the economic policy bordered on that of a welfare-state.¹⁵¹ The Party also supported an integrated school system. The Party's economic policy proposals, somewhat ignored until now, began to take on a more socialist tone. A 'minimum living wage' was accepted as party policy at the 1959 National Congress. By 1961 the LP no longer had to tow a conservative economic line in the hope of attracting white voters. Instead, it had to offer something to counter the promises of the Freedom Charter in order to attract and retain black membership. As it was, 'Africans already within the party provided a crucial additional pressure'.¹⁵² Policy re-drafts at the 1961 National Congress included the increase of wages for semi-skilled and unskilled labour in order to bridge the gap between white and black incomes, a comprehensive welfare programme, and non-racial trade unions with the right to collective bargaining.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ APC, PC 2/9/28/1, Minutes, Natal Coastal Regional Committee, 9 February 1959.

¹⁴⁹ Paton, *Journey Continued*, pp.180-182.

¹⁵⁰ Report on the 1961 National Congress in *Liberal Opinion*, September 1961.

¹⁵¹ Everatt, 'Politics of Nonracialism', p.259; Ngubane, *An African*, pp.197-198; Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.198.

¹⁵² Robertson, *Liberalism*, p.198. Also in Ngubane, *An African*, pp.197-198.

¹⁵³ Report on the National Congress, *Liberal Opinion*, September 1961.

A new perspective was added to membership needs with the influx of Africans of working-class origin who joined the party in Natal from 1960. The Natal Division had accepted the necessity of a 'minimum living wage' in 1958 and had been part of a wage campaign initiated by the Congress Movement in Natal.¹⁵⁴ The Durban office had received numerous requests for assistance from African workers about possible unfair labour practices from the late 1950s¹⁵⁵, and these were to increase. In Pietermaritzburg, too, the assistance of the LP had been requested after labour disputes.¹⁵⁶ Hence, members in the leadership of the Division began to develop an active interest in trade unionism. David Evans, a National Committee member from Pietermaritzburg, was assigned to investigate how the party could be most effective in this field in Natal.¹⁵⁷ The branches at Red Hill and Howick formed a basis for trade union activity. However, the initiative never really took off in Natal as it had in the Transvaal.¹⁵⁸ This interest in trade union activity was likely to attract criticism from the government and cause complications with SACTU.¹⁵⁹

Grass-roots discontent amongst the African population during the late 1950s manifested itself in a number of widespread, largely spontaneous demonstrations and sometimes violent disturbances in both rural and urban parts of Natal during 1959.¹⁶⁰ The most notable examples were the violent clashes which occurred at Cato Manor, outside Durban. Incidents also occurred in Sobantu Village, outside Pietermaritzburg, where no resistance had previously been shown.¹⁶¹ The unrest spread to the countryside, where incidents led by women were reported, which was a new development. The conclusion by members of the Natal Division was that one of the main causes of these riots was poverty, which was the result of a number

¹⁵⁴ APC, PC 2/9/3/6, Minutes, Natal Provincial Congress, 1958; Reports in minutes of the Pietermaritzburg and Natal Coastal branches for 1959.

¹⁵⁵ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Executive Committee, 31 July 1958.

¹⁵⁶ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 28-29 January 1961.

¹⁵⁷ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 21-22 October 1961.

¹⁵⁸ APC, P. Brown interviewed by N. Bromberger, Tape 4, 1995.

¹⁵⁹ Irvine, 'Liberal Party', p. 126. See later discussion on Natal LP and SACTU relations.

¹⁶⁰ Reports in *Umhlanganisi*, September-October 1959 and January-February 1960. Also in Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p. 291.

¹⁶¹ See: S.M. Mkhize, 'Contexts, Resistance Crowds and Mass Mobilisation: A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Apartheid Politics in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the 1980s', M.A. Thesis, University of Natal, 1998.

of other factors. Reasons other than poverty included the extension of the carrying of 'passes' to women and dissatisfaction over the municipal beer-hall system, the state of the reserves, influx control and increases in taxation.¹⁶²

In early 1960 the Pietermaritzburg branch undertook a study into the wages received and the cost of living of African families living in the city and found that most wages fell below the cost of living. The branch made a representation to the Wage Board, which was sitting in the City, to increase wages paid to Africans. The deputation was received well. However, when the second representation was to be made, the LP spokesperson was refused permission to speak and the members were ejected from the sitting.¹⁶³ The only tangible result derived from this effort was the good publicity gained, as it was well reported by the press, but this was not the aim of the exercise. The Coastal Region branch had also done similar surveys, such as one on the working conditions of the stevedores on Durban's docks.¹⁶⁴ Resolutions submitted by branches in Natal for Provincial and National Congresses continued to highlight the wage issue, as many LP members were affected. Mngadi, in an address to the Natal Provincial Congress in 1962, spoke of the questions concerning wages which were always raised when he toured the province.¹⁶⁵

There had been some initial hostility from the ANC in Natal about the LP recruiting possible Congress members in the early 1950s, and a similar situation developed between the Party and SACTU in Natal. The increase in the 'industrial membership' of the LP was a development which created some tension with SACTU.¹⁶⁶ There were reports in 1961 of SACTU elements disrupting meetings at the Red Hill branch, which consisted almost entirely of African factory workers.¹⁶⁷ The Howick branch, which also consisted mostly of African factory workers, also experienced problems with disruptive elements and conflicting loyalties between the LP and

¹⁶² Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, p.174.

¹⁶³ APC, PC 2/9/23/2, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch AGM, March 1960.

¹⁶⁴ Brown, 'History', p.146.

¹⁶⁵ APC, PC2/9/3/9, Copy of Elliot Mngadi's speech, Natal Provincial Congress, March 1962.

¹⁶⁶ APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 24 January 1961. Tension with SACTU is discussed in my interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & APC. N.Bromberger's with P.Brown, Tape 4, 1995.

¹⁶⁷ APC, PC 2/9/10/2, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 29 March 1961.

SACTU amongst members. The ANC in Natal had come increasingly under the influence of radical SACTU leaders, such as Moses Mabhida (once a member of the LP in Natal).¹⁶⁸ Since SACTU was well supported in Natal and Lutuli and his closest officials had been banned in mid-1959, SACTU threatened to dominate the ANC completely.¹⁶⁹ This left-wing of the ANC in Natal was centred in Durban (where support for SACTU was strongest) and did not view the LP favourably. Kuper reported that relations with the Congress Alliance were 'strained' in Durban in mid-1960.¹⁷⁰

The Natal LP's close association with Lutuli continued. The party was involved in organising meetings in honour of Lutuli when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1961. Two successful meetings organised by E. V. Mahomed were held in Stanger.¹⁷¹ About 1000 people attended the first at which Paton paid tribute to Lutuli in a speech, while Brown, Ngubane and 'Monty' Naicker from the NIC spoke at the second meeting to welcome Lutuli back from Oslo. Further meetings were organised in Durban at which the LP was represented. Lutuli sent a personal telegram to the Natal Division of the Party wishing it every success at its Provincial Congress in 1962.¹⁷²

The expanding membership in the Natal Division called for increased organisation, as the leadership stressed the importance of keeping in touch with each branch and its members. Elliot Mngadi had been the Party organiser for the northern Natal region for some time. The national chairman, at the National Congress in 1959, attributed the success of the LP in outlying areas of Natal to the efforts of Mngadi.¹⁷³ As the Party grew in the province it became obvious that more Party organisers would have to be appointed to cope with the influx of African members, although the Division was not able to do this for some time due to financial constraints.

¹⁶⁸ Mabhida was elected acting president of the Natal ANC in 1959 and chairman of SACTU in 1960. T.Karis & G.M.Gerhart, *Political Profiles, 1882-1964, Volume 4* of T.Karis & G.M.Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977), p.27. He was influenced by communism. Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

¹⁶⁹ Brown, 'History', p.146.

¹⁷⁰ APC. PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, May 1960.

¹⁷¹ *Liberal Opinion*, March 1962.

¹⁷² APC. PC 2/9/3/9, Telegram from A.Luthuli, Groutville, Natal Provincial Congress, March 1962.

¹⁷³ APC, PC 2/2/4/1, Minutes, National Congress, April 1959.

Branches in Natal had been divided into regional branches to facilitate the administration of the Division. These were: northern Natal, the Midlands and the coastal region (Durban and its surrounding areas). A new regional branch was formed in southern Natal in 1961 as there had been much interest in the party in this area. Three full-time Party organisers had been appointed by 1961 (Mngadi in the northern Natal region, Christopher Shabalala in the Midlands and Jack Nkosi in the coastal region) whose function it was to co-ordinate events and meetings, and to cultivate new interest in the Party with the objective of starting new branches. The organisers were an integral part of the Party's machinery in the rural areas, and were a factor in the success of the Party in these areas. Unfortunately the Division was always low on funds and had to release Nkosi from his position in 1962, which was taken over by Shabalala. Mngadi also served on both the National and Provincial Committees.

Raising, and even creating, political consciousness in the countryside became an important part of Party work from the late 1950s.¹⁷⁴ This applies to Natal in particular. Meidner, who had taken over the Natal provincial chairmanship from Brown in late 1958, realised that Party organisation in the Division was a priority if the Party was to be effective in the region and stressed the need for solid organisation. Despite the Party's performance during the state of emergency, he warned that '[t]he Party in Natal [was] not strong enough yet by far, to withstand the tests of the times to come'.¹⁷⁵ He devised what became known as 'organisational schools', where Party organisers and local leaders were taught English, basic administration skills and the essential principles of liberalism.¹⁷⁶ These 'organisational schools' or workshops were to be held in various parts of Natal over the weekends and commitment was needed from active members to run these. Neil Alcock (a white farmer active in the Underberg area) ran a workshop in Bulwer during 1961 and reported that he 'found that there were big gaps in the knowledge of [local] organisers, concerning the work of the Party and current political affairs'.¹⁷⁷ Both the local leaders and the instructor learned from this type of interaction. The Natal Division took the lead with both Party organisers and workshops to train new members

¹⁷⁴ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p. 163.

¹⁷⁵ APC, PC 2/9/3/8, Provincial chairman's Report for 1960, Natal Provincial Congress, April 1961.

¹⁷⁶ Brown, 'History', p. 152; APC, PC 2/9/25/3, Natal provincial chairman's Report for 1960.

¹⁷⁷ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 21-22 October 1961.

in positions of leadership, as similar events were later held in the Transvaal and the Cape. These 'get-togethers' also served to break down barriers between members of different groups.

Political education campaigns were another part of Meidner's efforts to build a strong and effective organisation in Natal. He 'wanted to see a strong Liberal Party with mass support doing real political work'.¹⁷⁸ He felt that the Party needed a properly trained membership in order to produce results, and thus leaders in a branch or an area needed to be given basic training to enable them to organise the Party's growing African membership. By 1962 the leadership of the Natal Division recognised 'that instead of expanding, we should, for the present, build on what we have got'.¹⁷⁹ This was echoed by Mngadi in his proposed organiser's programme for 1962, that the Division should consolidate its membership and provide intensive political training, especially in the country towns and rural areas: 'Some of our members are really hungry for political education, [and] I think it is the duty of the Party to satisfy this hunger.'¹⁸⁰

Meidner made a valuable contribution to the Natal Division. More radical from the beginning, his ideas and innovative thinking were influential in the growth and transition of the Division, and thus ultimately of the Party. His fellow-Liberals in Natal praised his dedication and commitment, as well as his organisational skills.¹⁸¹ On a more practical note, a simultaneous translation system was pioneered by him and was first used at the Natal Provincial Congress in 1962, as many members could not speak English very well or at all. The system was subsequently used at National Congresses.

Despite the lifting of the state of emergency regulations at end of September 1960, the government clamp-down on all political opposition continued. Some political activity now became practically impossible for the LP.¹⁸² Permission had to be obtained from the Native

¹⁷⁸ APC, PC 2/2/5/2, Minutes, National Congress, April 1959. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁹ APC, PC 2/9/1/2, Sub-Committee on Regional Organisation in Natal, 1962.

¹⁸⁰ APC, PC 2/9/3/9, Copy of Elliot Mngadi's speech, Natal Provincial Congress, March 1962.

¹⁸¹ Information gathered from my interviews and from other interviews consulted.

¹⁸² For the following discussion: APC, PC 2/9/10/1, Natal Provincial Committee, Minutes for 1960 and 1961.

Commissioner to enter African townships or to hold a meeting in a black area. These requests were invariably refused. The problems with finding suitable venues, such as halls, for multi-racial meetings increased. Venues, such as church, municipal or Farmers' Association halls, which had been used before became more difficult to obtain for meetings. The Howick branch, in particular, had trouble with the Town Board for the use of the local hall. It became even more difficult after the successful strike in May 1961.¹⁸³ This was a problem as the branch had no other meeting place. Meetings often had to be held in the open over weekends.¹⁸⁴

Members of the LP in Natal had become used to the presence of Special Branch police at meetings and some form of harassment from the state. But the scale of state and police harassment increased noticeably during 1960. Special Branch police attended meetings in increasing numbers and frequency after the state of emergency. During 1962 they also began to pay regular visits to and raid members' houses, including prominent leaders such as Ngubane and Paton.¹⁸⁵

In January 1961, Mngadi reported an increase in police harassment in northern Natal. The Special Branch attended meetings and reported those who had attended to their employers. This was apparently a new tactic by the Special Branch.¹⁸⁶ There were similar incidents elsewhere, for example in Kokstad where a police informer had been attending LP meetings. Brown was charged with holding an illegal meeting in the Kokstad area, as there were more than ten Africans present. He pleaded guilty and received a suspended sentence.¹⁸⁷ Christopher Shabalala, the LP secretary in Howick, was under constant police surveillance. All public meetings had been banned before Republic Day in 1961, and several members' houses had been raided. Although membership had increased overall in Natal, there was a decline in activity in certain areas due to intimidation by police.¹⁸⁸ The Southern Natal Regional

¹⁸³ Brown, 'History', p.210.

¹⁸⁴ 'Liberal Party News' in *Liberal Opinion*, December 1961.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, October 1962.

¹⁸⁶ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 28-29 January 1961.

¹⁸⁷ Brown, 'History', p.239.

¹⁸⁸ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 28-29 January 1961.

Committee reported in late 1961 that due to intimidation there were problems with branches in the southern coastal area, which had previously been active.¹⁸⁹ The southern Natal region was particularly affected, perhaps because of its proximity to the Transkei where there had been political trouble.¹⁹⁰

A further threat to the LP were the restrictions contained in the General Laws Amendment Bill ('Vorster Bill'), should this Bill become law.¹⁹¹ The Minister of Justice would have increased powers to ban meetings and organisations, and individuals from attending meetings, or to confine them to a particular place.¹⁹² Congress Alliance members had been banned since 1959, and further restrictions would be placed on them. The Bill was 'a threat to everything the Liberal Party stands for' and was meant to '[c]ow apartheid's opponents into silence'. The LP in Natal initiated a campaign against the Bill together with remaining ex-Congress, Black Sash and Progressive Party members. As was to be expected at some point, the COD was banned in September 1962.

Conclusion

The year 1960 began 'almost hopefully for the opponents of apartheid' as the 'tide was moving perceptibly in their favour'.¹⁹³ However, as the months progressed after Sharpeville and the cataclysmic events which followed it, the tide began to turn against them. The extra-parliamentary political opposition in the country failed to consolidate after the banning of the ANC and the PAC, as long-standing suspicions and differences undermined any momentary unity amongst a diverse group of African leaders. Instead, members of these banned organisations went underground and decided to abandon non-violent means of protest.

The LP was presented with a number of challenges during the turbulent years from 1959,

¹⁸⁹ APC. PC 2/9/10/1, Minutes, Natal Provincial Committee, 8 August 1961.

¹⁹⁰ *Liberal Opinion*, December 1961.

¹⁹¹ The Bill was passed during 1963.

¹⁹² *Liberal Opinion*, July 1962 & October 1962.

¹⁹³ Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, p.121.

especially after the state of emergency in early 1960. The party continued its transition and in the process became more militant and reached a closer identification with black political aspirations. Extra-parliamentary opposition had become central to its activities and it accepted the universal franchise unconditionally. In its attempt to fill the political vacuum left by the banning of the ANC and the PAC, the Party attracted substantial numbers of African members. The early 1960s was a time of growth for the Party in Natal, and its leadership met well the challenges created by a changing membership. The Division had weathered the storms of having members of its leadership detained, some of its members arrested and the constant attention of the Security Branch police. It had managed to organise a party consisting of a number of disparate groups, which stood the Division in good stead in the difficult years which followed.

CHAPTER FIVE

The final years of the party, 1963-1968 : Mounting odds against survival, and Natal's resilience

Introduction

It was during 1963 that the Liberal Party (LP) began to feel the full force of state persecution as 'the government steadily applied to the Liberal Party the techniques of intimidation, harassment, and repression the African movements had long suffered, until the party was scarcely able to function'.¹ The government's increasingly repressive laws to prevent the organisation of effective resistance against it had begun to have an effect by 1964 — this year 'marked the nadir of black resistance to the apartheid system'.² In 1963 the first members of the LP were 'warned' and banned under the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), and a smear campaign was instigated against the LP, linking liberalism with communism. The functioning of the Party began to be seriously affected from 1964 with the number of bans increasing and with widespread intimidation of Party members, and further restrictions were imposed through legislation against extra-parliamentary political opposition. The arrest of a number of younger Party members involved in the African Resistance Movement (ARM)³ in July 1964 gave the government justification to further persecute the LP. The death-knoll for the Party came in early 1968 with the passing of the Prevention of Political Interference Act, which outlawed multi-racial political parties. Since to become a whites-only organisation (the only way to remain a parliamentary political party) was not an option, the Party chose to disband rather than comply.

¹ T.Karis & G.M.Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964, Volume 3* of T.Karis & G.M.Carter (eds), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964* (California, Stanford University, 1977), p.655.

² T.Karis & G.M.Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1990, Volume 5* of *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990* (Pretoria, Unisa, 1997), p.15.

³ Founded as the National Committee of Liberation (NCL) in late 1961, it was later renamed (in June 1964) and is better-known as the African Resistance Movement (ARM). Less than twenty of its members were also members of the LP, and its existence was not known publically until July 1964. See later discussion.

The bulk of the membership of the Natal Division was made-up of rural African people, and it was against this group that much of the police intimidation was aimed. Members of the leadership endured harassment of a more sophisticated nature, and many paid the price of opposing the government, by being banned. The Division as a whole withstood the pressure well and remained as active as possible until the end (unlike other Divisions of the party), although activity was much reduced from the early 1960s.

5.1 “*Hard Times, Getting Harder*”⁴ —

The Liberal Party as a target of the Nationalist government

By the end of 1962 the LP was the only remaining ‘active, legal, extra-parliamentary political force in the country’.⁵ The level of public protest began to decrease amongst both black and white people in South Africa during 1963.⁶ Natal Indian Congress (NIC) members were being banned, the Congress of Democrats (COD) had been banned in 1962 along with its publication, *New Age*, and a list of ‘named’ communists had been published. Members of the banned African National Congress (ANC) and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), as well as the South African Communist Party (SACP)⁷, were arrested and there were numerous political trials during the early to mid-1960s which politically disabled black resistance in the country. Until the LP was systematically and ruthlessly immobilised by the banning and house-arrests of its office-bearers by the mid-1960s, it was to some degree ‘able to step into the shoes of the banned African liberation movements’.⁸ According to Randolph Vigne, B.J. Vorster’s policy of ‘destroying the Party without actually banning it made it only a degree more viable than the Congresses and the PAC’.⁹

The ‘mopping up of the liberation movements proceeded’ in the courts.¹⁰ A number of

⁴ Article heading, *Liberal Opinion*, October 1964.

⁵ R. Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (London, Macmillan, 1997), p.200.

⁶ *Liberal Opinion*, September 1963.

⁷ See Chapter 4. The SACP openly announced its existence in 1960.

⁸ ‘What Hope Democracy?’, article in *Contact*, October 1965.

⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.200. J.B. Vorster was the then Minister of Justice.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.219.

Congress Alliance members (mainly ANC and SACP) and PAC members had been arrested and 'political trials were many and widespread' during the early and mid-1960s. Many belonged to the ANC's insurgent offshoot, *Umkhonto weSizwe* (including SACP), and the PAC's, *Poqo*. The government sent many of its opponents to prison for 'the broadly defined crimes of sabotage, "communist activity" and attempting to further the aims of the banned ANC and PAC'.¹¹ By the mid-1960s the state had destroyed the ANC's network in South Africa. The internal leadership of the ANC was decimated after the Rivonia arrests, and political leadership shifted to the movement that had been established in exile.¹² Alan Paton spoke in mitigation of Nelson Mandela and his co-accused at the Rivonia trial in Johannesburg during 1964. Paton was harshly questioned by the prosecuting counsel, Dr Percy Yutar, who attempted to link Liberals with communists and force Paton to admit that he supported the actions of the ANC.¹³ Albert Lutuli was banned again in 1964, although he had been out of the mainstream of Congress politics for some time due to the restrictions placed on him, and had been virtually replaced by Mandela as the pre-eminent ANC leader.¹⁴

The smear campaign started by Vorster against the LP during late 1962 became a systematic campaign from 1963 onwards. Government persecution took the form of ceaseless and increasing harassment and intimidation of members by the Security Branch police, while a number of active leaders were banned. Such measures either frightened off, or hardened the resolve, of Liberals.

The basis of the government-orchestrated campaign against Liberals and the LP implied that liberalism was in fact communism 'in disguise'. Vorster's accusations were followed by those of other ministers, which were often broadcast by the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Paton was denied permission to speak on SABC radio to refute such allegations.¹⁵ Vorster is reported to have said: Communism kills, but Liberalism leads into ambush in order

¹¹ Karis & Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, p.14.

¹² T.Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (London, Longman, 1983), pp.295-297.

¹³ P.Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Bibliography* (Oxford, OUP, 1984), pp.335-336. Discussed in detail in A.Paton, *Journey Continued* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1988).

¹⁴ Karis & Gerhart, *Challenge and Violence*, p.678.

¹⁵ Reported in *Liberal Opinion*, June 1963.

to kill.¹⁶ Paton refused to bow to this and prove to Vorster that Liberals were not communists, as anti-communism should not be ‘the sum and substance of our Liberalism’. On the other hand, communists criticised the Liberals for condemning violence and sabotage in the name of the liberation struggle.¹⁷ According to Paton, it was not an option to Liberals, but many could understand why others had chosen it.

The campaign was an attempt by the Nationalists to play on white fears, as they had done in the 1961 general election, and to isolate Liberals from ‘respectable’ white opinion. It aimed to scare off those who might think of joining the Party, or to at least to ignore Liberals’ protests about bannings, and to frighten uncertain members into inactivity.¹⁸ According to Catherine Brubeck, a characteristic of the majority of white South Africans at this time was a ‘knee-jerk reaction’ to any mention of the political left, whether communist or not.¹⁹ They labelled them as ‘bad’ without any further examination. The LP was, by this time, perceived to be ‘beyond the pale’ as the Party had sided with the left and operated outside the arena of parliamentary politics. It was reported that the UP had referred to the Progressives as ‘extremist’. To the Liberals, the Progressives were conservative.²⁰ Thus it follows that the LP should not have expected much support from the white electorate.

The methodical campaign of police intimidation, reported in all Divisions, increased from 1963 onwards.²¹ This intimidation took the form of blatant ‘scare tactics’ to induce fear and uncertainty. In Natal, such tactics were mainly used against the African members. The Security Branch police would burst into Party meetings, attended meetings in increasing numbers, and paid follow-up visits to members after meetings. They would take leading members to the local police station for questioning in dramatic ways to maximise publicity. Members were often taken from their places of work for questioning, or the police would speak to their employers

¹⁶ Speech by A.Paton, LP Meeting in Durban, quoted in *Liberal Opinion*, February 1963.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Report on intimidation, *Liberal Opinion*, June 1963.

¹⁹ Interview with C. Brubeck, 19/2/1998. Also interview with C.Gardner, 6/2/1998.

²⁰ *Liberal Opinion*, April 1964.

²¹ APC, PC 2/4/16/1, ‘Intimidation’, Memorandum prepared by the LP detailing incidents of such tactics from 1962 to 1965.

about their membership. This was particularly successful if a government permit was required for business. The homes of members of the leadership and LP offices were raided on a regular basis, especially prior to meetings. The Natal Youth Group published a booklet on intimidation in late 1963, detailing the experiences of Natal members at the hands of the Security Branch police.²²

The majority of the membership in Natal remained undeterred, however, and party activity continued as far as was possible under the circumstances. However, activity was gradually reduced after the mid-1960s. Rural branches seemed to be a target, with incidents being reported from the Underberg area from 1963, and a more persistent programme of intimidation in northern Natal from 1964.²³ Christopher Shabalala was detained for questioning while travelling to Underberg by train, which the police stopped between stations. The secretary of the Nongoma branch's house was raided everyday for a month by Security Branch police. The home of Enoch Mnguni of the Stepmore branch (a 'black spot' near Underberg) was regularly raided and he was taken in for questioning. He and the Nongoma branch secretary had been members of the ANC before joining the LP. Before the 1964 Natal Provincial Congress, Roy Coventry from the Bergville branch was raided three times in one week, while a lorry transporting members from northern Natal to the Congress was stopped near Mooi River by the police and was not allowed to proceed.²⁴ Members from Pietermaritzburg had to fetch the stranded members by car. Urban branches were not immune either — members in one factory in Durban asked to be taken off the Party's mailing list as members had been threatened with dismissal if they continued their membership.²⁵ Some measures were more malicious. For example, Mike Ndlovu's car was petrol-bombed²⁶, while Paton had his car windows smashed.²⁷

By early 1964 the national leadership of the Party was realising the destructive impact on the

²² APC, PC 2/6/6/1, P.M.Brown, 'A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa', unpublished manuscript, p.298.

²³ APC, PC 2/4/16/1, 'Intimidation'. The following examples are taken from here.

²⁴ 'Liberal Party News', in *Liberal Opinion*, April 1964; APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 4, 1995.

²⁵ Reports in Brown, 'History', p.302.

²⁶ APC, P.McKenzie interviewed by P.Merrett, 8/6/1996.

²⁷ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.243.

Party as a result of magisterial warnings and banning orders given under the Suppression of Communism Act.²⁸ While the aim of a banning order was to silence a political opponent, a warning was aimed at frightening the opponent out of activity. The national leadership decided to ignore warnings, but infringements of banning restrictions were far more serious. An article was published in *Liberal Opinion* in January 1964 which explained the implications and restrictions of warnings and banning orders. The Minister of Justice issued these orders at his discretion, and no reasons, other than that the individual was somehow involved in activities ‘calculated to further the aims of communism’, needed to be given.²⁹ Furthermore, the order could not be challenged in a court of law.

Certain Cape members of the LP, who had been involved in the Transkei independence elections during 1962, were the first to be banned.³⁰ The first member in Natal to be banned was Jordan Ngubane in May 1963. Ngubane was an active and outspoken critic of apartheid, serving on both national and provincial levels of leadership. He was a journalist and travelled widely — now he was stripped of his means of livelihood as he could no longer publish anything or attend meetings, and was restricted to the Inanda district, north of Durban. Since he was in Swaziland at the time, he stayed on there rather than return to South Africa under these conditions. Later in that year, E.V. Mahomed (Party treasurer), David Evans (secretary of the Natal Division) and Bill Benghu (national vice-president) were banned. All three were active Provincial as well as National Committee members. A blow to the Natal Division’s efforts in the region was the banning of Elliot Mngadi in early 1964. He was an integral part of the Division’s machinery in northern Natal, particularly with the ‘black spots’.

The banning orders received so far by LP members had had a serious effect on the Party, but a bigger blow was to fall with the arrest in July 1964 of several members who had been involved with the ARM.³¹ The national leadership had been unaware of the existence of this

²⁸ *Liberal Opinion*, April 1964.

²⁹ *Liberal Opinion*, January 1964.

³⁰ Included Patrick Duncan, Randolph Vigne, and Peter Hjul. Duncan went into exile in Lesotho rather than face a banning order in South Africa.

³¹ Twelve members were arrested in Natal, the Transvaal and the Cape on sabotage charges; three escaped into exile: John Harris was prosecuted for murder after planting a bomb in the Johannesburg Station (killed one person).

organisation, which had begun its activities during late 1961. The majority of those involved were younger, more radical members, and were mostly from the Cape and Transvaal. According to Randolph Vigne, who was a member, Liberals were not the only members of the ARM and the organisation did not actively recruit LP members.³² Nevertheless, the leaders were prominent LP members and thus the Party was associated with the ARM and its activities. Although most of the membership of the ARM was against the communist influence in the Congress Alliance, they had hoped to unite with *Umkhonto weSizwe*, but were rebuffed. The ARM was not very active in Natal, with David Evans and John Laredo the only members from here. Patrick McKenzie (a National Committee member from 1962), who was living in Durban at the time, was approached by Laredo in late 1961 to join the organisation, but he declined.³³

The ARM reflected a 'transitional phase of confusion' in the history of the LP, as younger white members became disillusioned with the realisation that the LP was no longer able to aim for political power. There was a 'certain aimless confusion as to what legislatively ever-shrinking role [the Party] could play' in the 'authoritarian environment' created by the Nationalist government.³⁴ According to Brubeck, she and some other younger members in the Natal Division 'remained confused about the issue'.³⁵ They had become frustrated with the restrictions on political activity, but felt that morally one could not betray their own and the LP's principles on non-violence. Besides this, they questioned the possible achievements of violence. However, there was a feeling that those involved with the ARM were 'doing something' at a time when it felt like the party could achieve nothing. Members such as herself had supported the ANC in the past and could sympathise with the decision taken by certain members of its leadership to resort to violence.

Many members of the Party were deeply shocked by the revelations about the ARM and angry

³² Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.202-206. The ARM is also discussed in Karis & Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, pp.21-23; Lodge, *Black Politics*, pp.240-241; A.du Toit, 'Fragile defiance, the African Resistance Movement' in I. Leibenberg *et al* (eds), *The Long March* (Pretoria, HAUM, 1994).

³³ APC, P.McKenzie interviewed by R.Vigne, 5/6/1995, & by P.Merrett, 8/6/1996.

³⁴ 'What Hope Democracy?', article in *Contact*, October 1965.

³⁵ Interview with C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998.

about the strain placed on the Party because of it. Paton was ‘bitterly wounded by what the Liberal members of ARM had done to him and to the Party’.³⁶ In his speech at the 1964 National Congress in October he expressed his feeling that these members had betrayed the Party and could not consider themselves liberals, and he suggested that any Liberal contemplating such a move should resign from the Party immediately.³⁷ Peter Brown seems more understanding than Paton.³⁸ Although he was never tempted to abandon non-violence, he could understand why others had. According to Vigne, a ‘degree of sympathy and understanding towards ARM Liberals was evident throughout’, which he supports with evidence, even from Paton.³⁹

One of the most crushing repercussions for the LP, both on a national level and for the Natal Division, was the banning of Brown on 30 July 1964.⁴⁰ This was almost certainly because of the ARM, although it probably would have happened at some point.⁴¹ Other members of the National Committee were banned, including Dempsey Noel, a prominent Coloured member in Pietermaritzburg. Several meetings were held in Natal to protest against Brown’s ban and were especially well supported in Pietermaritzburg, Hambrook and Charlestown.⁴² Hambrook (a ‘black spot’) was a relatively new branch in the northern Natal countryside, which had grown considerably and consisted entirely of African members. Edgar Brookes stepped into Brown’s position as national chairman. Brookes was still considered a ‘respectable’ liberal of the older generation of the Ballingers and was not as radicalised as the rest of the leadership.⁴³ Nevertheless, it ‘was a long road to have travelled for someone who had supported the Hertzog Bills in 1926’.⁴⁴ It was necessary in light of recent events that someone like Brookes,

³⁶ Alexander, *Paton*, p.334.

³⁷ A.Paton’s speech, ‘Liberals reject Violence’, National Congress, 9-10 October 1964. quoted in *Liberal Opinion*, October 1964.

³⁸ APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 4, 1995.

³⁹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.205.

⁴⁰ On the expiration of his ban in 1969, he was given a further 5-year banning order.

⁴¹ APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 4, 1995.

⁴² *Liberal Opinion*, October 1964.

⁴³ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁴⁴ E.H.Brookes, *A South African Pilgrimage* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1977), p.134.

who was 'above suspicion', took over the national leadership of the Party.⁴⁵

The bannings in Natal from mid-1964 seemed to concentrate on those involved in the rural areas and the 'black spots'. This is consistent with the increased intimidation reported in Natal and the persistent programme of harassment in northern Natal.⁴⁶ John Aitchison, a Pietermaritzburg member, had become more involved in rural areas and 'black spot' removals since the banning of Mngadi. He and Selby Msimang, who had been involved since the early 1950s, were banned during the first half of 1965.⁴⁷ During the second half of the year, the Party in Natal suffered further blows to its efforts in the rural areas with the banning of Christopher Shabalala, Michael Ndlovu and Enoch Mnguni. Shabalala was the Midlands Party organiser and a very active member. Ndlovu, from the Bergville area, had become the Party organiser in that region as well as in northern Natal, and had been actively involved in the 'black spots', as he came from Khumalosville (a 'black spot' near Bergville). Mnguni was the chairman of the Stepmore branch, a freehold area near Underberg. The loss of these Party organisers reduced the Party's work in the rural areas considerably, although meetings were still being held.⁴⁸ In early 1966, Heather Morkill, the secretary of the Pietermaritzburg branch, was banned. She had become increasingly active in visiting the rural areas, and this must be assumed to be the main reason for her ban.

The banning of a Durban couple, Jean and Ken Hill, who had been active members from the formation of the Party in 1953, should be mentioned. In October 1965 Jean Hill was banned, most likely because she was the secretary of the Defence and Aid Fund in Natal and the Fund's office was in her home.⁴⁹ (The Fund itself was banned in March 1966.) She had also helped E.V. Mahomed with Lutuli's correspondence after he won the Nobel Peace Prize. Ken Hill had received a 'magisterial warning' in November 1963, and had written an 'Open Letter to the

⁴⁵ Brookes, *South African Pilgrimage*, pp.133-136; See also: Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.212.

⁴⁶ APC, PC 2/4/16/1, LP memorandum, 'Intimidation'; Brown, 'History', p.343.

⁴⁷ On the expiration of Aitchison's ban in 1970, he was given a further 5-year banning order.

⁴⁸ 'Liberal Party News' in *Liberal Opinion*, March 1966.

⁴⁹ APC, J.Hill interviewed by R.Vigne, 15/2/1995.

Minister of Justice of South Africa — from one threatened with banning'.⁵⁰ He accused Vorster of 'a deliberate campaign to destroy the Liberal Party', and that he had 'no alternative but to continue my political activities in opposition to apartheid and to your government to the best of my ability'. The letter was widely quoted in South Africa and abroad as 900 copies had been sent to prominent people and journalists.⁵¹ He received a five-year ban in April 1966, with a twelve-hour house arrest.

The uncertainty of who was to be banned next and for what reason was a further strain on the Party in Natal.⁵² Why did the government not ban the LP outright? The most probable reason, according to Leo Marquard, was because of the membership of too many well-known figures, internationally and locally, like Edgar Brookes, Alan Paton and the Ballingers.⁵³ (Margaret Ballinger and Marquard, amongst others, had become active in the Party again in order to step into positions left open by bannings.) According to Paton, the government preferred to cripple the Party by banning its most active and outspoken members, rather than ban it.⁵⁴ This provokes the question of the actual danger that the LP posed to the Nationalist government. Although the 'apartheid government of the early 1960s certainly regarded the Liberal Party as significant', was 'that repression a true reflection of the challenge the Liberal Party posed?'⁵⁵ This type of question is easier to ask in retrospect, and in answering it, the situation has to be seen in context. The likelihood of a revolutionary-type situation breaking out was thought a real possibility at the time. It seems that the government considered the LP a threat, not necessarily to its existence, but to the acceptance and implementation of its policies.

The issuing of banning orders slowed down on a national level during 1966. Only two were issued in Natal during the year. Just as no reason was given for issuing banning orders, so no reason was given for lifting them. By late 1966 the bans on Mngadi, Ndlovu, Shabalala,

⁵⁰ Correspondence, Office of the Minister of Justice, State Archives, Pretoria, quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.194.

⁵¹ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.194-195.

⁵² Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, C.Brubeck, 19/2/1998, & C.Gardner, 6/2/1998.

⁵³ APC, PC 2/4/16/1, LP memorandum, 'Intimidation'.

⁵⁴ Speech by A.Paton, National Congress, July 1965, quoted in *Liberal Opinion*, August 1965.

⁵⁵ C.Saunders, 'The Liberal Party Reassessed', Review of *Liberals Against Apartheid* by Randolph Vigne, *South African Historical Journal* 37 (November 1997), p.202.

Mnguni and Msimang had been partially or totally lifted.⁵⁶ Ken Hill and others had had theirs' lifted by early 1968. Perhaps it had something to do with the new Minister of Justice, J.C. Pelsler, and Vorster's succession as prime minister on the death of Verwoerd in September 1966.⁵⁷ The National Committee had written to Pelsler him requesting clarity on the legal position of those released from their bans, and requested a review on the lifting of all remaining bans.⁵⁸ The Minister refused to give a general review, but invited individual applications. Mngadi was thus able to attend a Pietermaritzburg branch meeting in October 1966, where he thanked those Liberals from Durban and Pietermaritzburg who been to see him while he was banned: 'Each visit had been widely noticed in his area, and had served to boost Liberalism.'⁵⁹

By 1966 the Party had reached its lowest point. The campaign by the government had all but destroyed it. The Party had lost much of its vibrancy and its sense of purpose and hope gained from the political climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s. However, there was no question of giving up. According to Paton: 'Vorster did great damage to the Liberal Party, not to its principles or ideals but to its organisation.'⁶⁰ About forty members had been banned by the end of 1966, and thirty of these were active and influential.

The LP's policies had been re-drafted in 1961 in line with its radicalisation and transformation along a social democratic path. Paton contemplated in his opening speech at the National Congress in July 1963, the tenth anniversary of the party, how the LP had 'come a long way, and done a great deal, during the past ten years'.⁶¹ But it seems that it had perhaps come as far as it might as a radical liberal party. Ernie Wentzel, a prominent Transvaal member who held the Labour portfolio in the National Committee, had the backing of a number of younger white members who were responding not only to the substantial black, largely proletarian, membership that the party had attracted, but also to 'the atmosphere of political change which

⁵⁶ *Liberal Opinion*, September 1966.

⁵⁷ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.223. Verwoerd was assassinated on 6 September 1966.

⁵⁸ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 25 February & 27 July 1967.

⁵⁹ APC, PC 2/9/23/4, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch meeting, 19 October 1966.

⁶⁰ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.264.

⁶¹ Report on the National Congress, July 1963, in *Liberal Opinion*, September 1963.

the early 1960s brought'.⁶² Although the party's policies had been re-drafted and taken on a socialist bias in 1961, some felt that the Party should develop its social democratic character further. However, any further radicalisation along this path was halted by the priority of the Party's survival, as well as some opposition within the Party to the idea of it taking on an overtly socialist character.

Wentzel's resolution at the 1963 National Congress suggested that the Party change its name (to the Socialist Party of South Africa), and proposed a new and radical economic programme with strong socialist overtones.⁶³ This resulted in heated and 'emotional' debate.⁶⁴ The party was, after all, based on liberal principles, and was not a socialist party even though some of its policies may have had a socialist slant. Although there was 'majority support' for a 'social welfare tone'⁶⁵, it was widely felt that the primary aim of the party was to fight racial discrimination and it should not divide on questions of economic ideology.

Paton and Brown had not supported Wentzel's original resolution, although they 'supported a socialist bias in [LP] policy'.⁶⁶ Brown recalls that there was not the opposition that one might have expected within the Party, which shows how much it had changed.⁶⁷ Colin Gardner does not recall any major ideological debates taking place in Natal during the 1960s, where the Party concentrated its efforts on protesting against aspects of apartheid.⁶⁸ Paton suggested amendments and a 'watered-down' version of the original, which still allowed for the re-statement of the Party's policies in light of its social-democratic character. The Party's role would be to take 'the lead in the building of a non-racial democracy ... in which one of the prime concerns [would] be the economic and social welfare of its citizens', but this would not entail a name change.⁶⁹ The resolution that a commission be appointed to look into this was

⁶² Ernest Wentzel Papers, Memoir, quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, pp.207-208.

⁶³ APC, PC 2/2/6/3, List of resolutions, National Congress, July 1963.

⁶⁴ Brown, 'History', pp.329ff.

⁶⁵ P.Brown interviewed by G.M.Carter, Durban, 29/1/1964. in J.Robertson, *Liberalism in South Africa, 1948-1963* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1971), p.223.

⁶⁶ Ernest Wentzel Papers, Memoir, quoted in Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.210.

⁶⁷ Interview with P.Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁶⁸ Interview with C.Gardner, 6/2/1998.

⁶⁹ APC, PC 2/2/6/3, Minutes, National Congress, July 1963.

passed with only one vote against. However, by the 1964 National Congress, '[s]urvival had replaced social democratic restatement as the Party's priority'.⁷⁰

5.2 The Natal Division: undaunted till the end

The rural African membership became the backbone of the Natal Division during the 1960s. Overall, this group refused to be deterred and remained largely undaunted by police intimidation aimed primarily at them. Although the combination of government pressure and a shortage of funds affected the party's work in Natal, there remained a degree of activity, albeit reduced from the early 1960s. By 1966 the Natal Division was still active compared to the Cape and the Transvaal, where activity had ceased in the rural areas. The Natal Division continued to hold meetings and Provincial Congresses up until 1967, although the number of delegates dwindled.

No decline in the Division's membership was reported in 1963 despite the increase in intimidation, although branch activity in certain areas had declined.⁷¹ Natal still had the largest membership. New members were still joining, a 'surprising number of whom were white'.⁷² The provincial chairman reported a '[s]mall but steady inflow of white members'⁷³, which Brown found 'astonishing'.⁷⁴ After the banning of Brown in July 1964, intimidation increased and a 'systematic attempt' to destroy the party in Natal was made by the government⁷⁵, but ultimately failed. There were almost twice as many Natal delegates at National Congress in October 1964 than at the 1963 Congress. The leadership of the Division had changed its thinking in terms of membership in the face of increasing government repression, and efforts were now concentrated on keeping in touch with existing numbers rather than trying to attract new ones.

⁷⁰ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.211.

⁷¹ *Liberal Opinion*, June 1963.

⁷² Report on the Natal Provincial Congress, May 1963, in *Liberal Opinion*, June 1963.

⁷³ APC, PC 2/9/3/10, Chairman's Report, Natal Provincial Congress, May 1963.

⁷⁴ Brown, 'History', p.340.

⁷⁵ *Liberal Opinion*, October 1964; APC, PC 2/4/16/1, LP memorandum, 'Intimidation'.

By 1967, remaining members were still standing firm against intimidation. Problems were reported from rural areas in Natal after a series of meetings: 'The difficulties facing rural members, mostly Africans' included 'the fantastic intimidation to which they were subjected and the fantastic courage with which they faced it'.⁷⁶ Furthermore, 'Peter Brown had been the core of these rural branches and, since the work was in danger of being banned, it was thought that the PMB (sic) Branch should make every effort to maintain these contacts for as long as it was possible.' The Pietermaritzburg branch, and the younger members in particular, had made great efforts in maintaining contact with the mainly African rural branches.⁷⁷ The Pietermaritzburg Youth Group (established in 1961) maintained activity from 1964, especially by visiting outlying rural branches and attempting to keep members politically informed and train them along the lines set by Meidner and his concept of the 'organisational school'. These political training exercises were being run on a regular basis in 1963 and early 1964 by Meidner.⁷⁸ It was a great blow to the Natal Division when Meidner left for the United Kingdom in mid-1964.⁷⁹ It is not entirely clear why he emigrated. The most likely reason is that he had become frustrated by this time because he felt that there no opposition in the country to really challenge the Government.⁸⁰ Since he suspected that he might be banned, he believed that he could serve the liberal cause better from abroad rather than as a banned person in South Africa.⁸¹

It appears that, in Natal, African members generally experienced a more blatant form of intimidation than that used on white members of the LP.⁸² (However, there are no reports of physical assault being used against any member.) Although the homes of both black and white members of the Division's leadership were raided frequently, the raids on the homes of local African leaders were usually followed by a questioning at the local police station. The police

⁷⁶ APC, PC 2/9/23/4, Minutes, Pietermaritzburg branch meeting, 19 October 1967.

⁷⁷ Provincial reports in 'Liberal Party News' in *Liberal Opinion*; APC, Pietermaritzburg branch meeting minutes; Interview with Peter Brown, 25/3/1998.

⁷⁸ 'Liberal Party News', in *Liberal Opinion*, April 1964.

⁷⁹ Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Brubeck, 19/3/1998.

⁸⁰ Interview with C.Gardner, 6/2/1998.

⁸¹ APC, P.Brown interviewed by N.Bromberger, Tape 5, 1995.

⁸² As discussed in section 5.1. For the following discussion: APC, PC 2/4/16/1, LP memorandum, 'Intimidation', and information obtained from the my interviews and R.Vigne's in the APC.

attended all LP meetings where they would take notes and record speeches. They also followed Liberals around by car. Brown was continually harassed by the Special Branch. Colin Gardner was charged for quoting Brown at meeting to protest Brown's ban in 1964, but the charges were dropped due to a lack of evidence. According to Catherine Brubeck, it was easier to be radical if one was white as the government was less harsh on whites than blacks. Gardner, Brubeck and Marie Dyer all felt that white members were protected to some extent by their occupations, especially those at university. According to Ken Hill, the management of the University of Natal in Durban 'made a fuss' when he was banned and this may have contributed to his ban being lifted.

One of the Party's priorities in Natal remained its involvement in the government's rural resettlement schemes, both in publicising and exposing the effects of 'black spot' removals and opposing these evictions. This was to be expected, as many African members of the LP in Natal were either directly affected by removals and/or belonged to the Northern Natal African Landowners' Association (NNALA). The threat to 'black spots' in Natal intensified as the government's efforts to remove and resettle residents from these areas slotted into its policy on the formation of 'Bantustans'. It was estimated by the government that there were still about 250 'black spots' in Natal in early 1963 and every one had to be moved as soon as possible⁸³ — black freehold areas could not exist within white areas under the proclamation of Group Areas.

While most communities resisted the government's plans, some did not.⁸⁴ The community at Besterspruit, near Vryheid, made no attempt to defy the government and they were removed in February 1963. The freehold landowners of Charlestown, one of the first areas in which the LP was active, gradually lost their fight and were moved to various areas surrounding Newcastle. The fight was eventually lost, too, at Khumalosville, where the government began to remove residents in late 1963. Landowners in Charlestown and Khumalosville fought for due compensation and the right to move where they chose (in accordance with the Group Areas Act) once they realised that removal was inevitable. Booklets were published by the party

⁸³ 'The Long View' in *Contact*, 3 May 1963.

⁸⁴ For the following discussion: articles in *Contact* from 1963 and 1964.

highlighting the peoples' plight in Khumalosville, Charlestown and Besterspruit, and articles continued to be published regularly in *Contact*. The LP continued its interest with follow-up stories on where the people had been moved and their continued hardships. Brown concluded that 'it [would] take a long, long time for any "Blackspot" family to re-establish itself at anything like the same level of life to which it has struggled up over the years'.⁸⁵

The LP's 'black spot' campaign was severely hampered by the banning of members active in these areas, especially that of Elliot Mngadi in early 1964. In September 1963 Mngadi, as secretary of the NNALA, had been instrumental in organising a prayer meeting at Roosboom, a 'black spot' near Ladysmith.⁸⁶ The meeting was very successful with over 1200 people, from all over Natal, attending. The event was not even reported in the Natal newspapers and there was little response to Mngadi's letter, 'Appeal to the white citizens of Natal', which had been sent to many prominent white Natalians. It seemed that the government was trying to break LP influence in rural parts of Natal. Anonymous pamphlets, in English and in Zulu, smearing the LP as 'communist hangers-on' and urging the people to move, were distributed in areas like Charlestown.⁸⁷ However, the party continued its involvement in the 'black spots', holding meetings and informing people of their rights. The objective was to try and delay removals, to get due compensation if the removal was inevitable, and to put up a show of resistance, especially to raise awareness amongst whites as to what was happening and that there was resistance to it.

The Party in Natal continued to hold protest meetings over apartheid legislation, often organised together with ex-Congress Alliance, Black Sash, and even Progressive Party members. For example, the General Law Amendment Act, which was changed from a 90-day detention period without charge or trial in 1963 to a 180-day period in 1965, after which the period of detention became indefinite with the Terrorism Act in 1967. The Bantu Laws Amendment Act was also altered during 1964, adding further restrictions to the everyday existence of African people. Already, 'the weight of discrimination ... fell on the Natal

⁸⁵ 'The Long View' in *Contact*, 3 May 1963.

⁸⁶ 'Liberal Party News' in *Liberal Opinion*, September 1963.

⁸⁷ Reported in *Contact*, 4 October 1963.

Division's predominately African membership'.⁸⁸ The Party protested against the Group Areas Act, which also affected Indians and Coloureds in Natal, and the 'Bantustan' policy. More specifically, the LP and ex-ANC members opposed the formation of a 'Zulustan' (independent homeland for ethnic Zulu-speaking people) proposed for Natal.⁸⁹

The banning of prominent members, either LP or Congress, were usually marked with some sort of protest. Meetings were held for Brown and Mngadi, for instance. There was a joint meeting held in Pietermaritzburg during 1963 to protest against the house arrest of Helen Joseph (COD member from Johannesburg) by ex-Congress, LP, Black Sash and Progressive Party members.⁹⁰ Members in Natal had maintained contact with Congress members, for example Paton with Dr 'Monty' Naicker and Lutuli. Naicker received a year's suspended sentence, except for one week, for breaking his ban by having Paton and his wife, Dorrie, to dine at his home in Durban.⁹¹ He was soon to lose his home in Innes Road under the conditions of the Group Areas Act, and had to move to an 'Indian area'. Lutuli had been banned again in 1964, although he was no longer at the forefront of Congress politics. He was killed in a train accident during 1967, and Paton was requested by Lutuli's wife and family to pay a tribute to him at the funeral.⁹²

The resolve to continue despite the difficulties under which the Party was operating was reiterated from 1965 onwards. Years of Nationalist assault had decreased the area of Party activity drastically. According to Brookes, the LP had 'reached its nadir' in 1966:

'Repeated bannings have deprived us of the instructed manpower which we have built up and through which we were able to keep in touch with country branches. Never have there been so many of our members under restriction as at the present time.'⁹³

He repeated the Party's stand not to dissolve, as the country needed liberal principles when

⁸⁸ Brown, 'History', p.313.

⁸⁹ APC, PC 2/2/7/1, National Chairman's Report, December 1962-April 1963.

⁹⁰ Reported in *Liberal Opinion*, June 1963.

⁹¹ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.256.

⁹² Reported in *Liberal Opinion*, September-October 1967.

⁹³ Article by E.Brookes in *Liberal Opinion*, March 1966.

change came. It was not a question of if the Party should continue, but how it should proceed under the circumstances.

By 1966 the loss of Party organisers had reduced branch activity considerably in Natal, although meetings were still being held.⁹⁴ The Durban and Pietermaritzburg branches continued to meet regularly. At the National Congress in July 1966 the Natal Division, and the Johannesburg and Pretoria branches were the only really active areas remaining.⁹⁵ There were no Cape delegates and the Cape Division was reported to be in serious decline. During 1967 'general activity' was reported as 'low' on a national level, with a reduced membership.⁹⁶ In Natal visits to country branches had been continued by Mngadi (whose ban had been lifted) and Ruth Lundie (a Pietermaritzburg member), while these had not taken place in the Transvaal for the past two years and had been impossible to hold in the Cape for some time.

5.3 *The Prevention of Political Interference Act, 1968*

The Nationalist Party (NP), under Verwoerd, won a landslide victory in the 1966 general election. This was the first time that the LP had not put up any candidates in a general election. (The Natal Division had not contested the previous one in 1961 either.) About sixty per cent of the white population voted for the NP. The country had finally recovered from Sharpeville and the economy was buoyant. The black resistance movement had been crippled within the country, and it now remained for the government to silence its remaining opponents.

The Prohibition of Improper Interference Bill (later the Prevention of Political Interference Bill) was first brought forward by the government for discussion during 1966. The main aim was to prevent whites from participating in black politics ('Bantustan', Coloured or Indian elections) and make it a criminal offence to belong to multi-racial political organisation. Since this applied only to the Progressive and Liberal Parties, they were clearly the targets.⁹⁷ A

⁹⁴ Provincial reports, 'Liberal Party News', in *Liberal Opinion*, March 1966.

⁹⁵ Report on National Congress, July 1966, in *Liberal Opinion*, September 1966.

⁹⁶ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 25 February 1967.

⁹⁷ Alexander, *Paton*, p.350.

combined meeting of the Natal Provincial and National Committees was held in Pietermaritzburg in September 1966 to discuss the bill and its implications for the LP.⁹⁸ A resolution was needed from the national leadership, should the bill become law. The contents of the bill posed a serious threat to the Party, as no mixed-race political parties would be allowed. Clearly, then, LP activities would be illegal. The alternatives open to the National Committee were that the Party become a whites-only political party, dissolve itself, or continue as it was and defy the law. The first option was not a choice, as non-racialism was the basic liberal tenet of the party and it would stand by this principle. The penalties would be harsh for defying the law, and the party could not continue in this way. It was felt, too, that the African membership would suffer more than white members.⁹⁹ Thus a resolution was passed by the National Committee that should the bill become law, 'the Party shall be dissolved immediately'.¹⁰⁰ In the interim it would continue as actively as was possible. As it turned out, the Party earned a reprieve as discussion on bill in Parliament was postponed until 1967.

However, the bill was passed and became law in early 1968. The National Committee resolution from September 1966 thus came into effect and the Party was to dissolve itself before the enactment of the bill.¹⁰¹ The Progressive Party decided to continue as a whites-only parliamentary political party. The final meeting of the National Committee was held in Johannesburg on 16 March 1968.¹⁰² Colin Gardner, from Pietermaritzburg, was in the chair as acting national chairman (as Brookes in the United States). Paton and another fourteen members were present, and the party was officially dissolved. Its demise was to be publicised in the press, and any remaining funds were to go to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR) for educational purposes. Party papers of historical value were to be saved, while everything else was to be destroyed.

⁹⁸ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, Combined meeting of National and Natal Provincial Committees, 25 September 1966.

⁹⁹ Interviews with P. Brown, 25/3/1998, & C. Gardner, 6/2/1998.

¹⁰⁰ APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, Combined meeting of National and Natal Provincial Committees, 25 September 1966.

¹⁰¹ Act No. 51 of 1968, 9 May 1968.

¹⁰² APC, PC 2/2/11/1, Minutes, National Committee, 16 March 1968.

There were calls for defying the law and continuing as a non-racial political party by some of the younger members in Natal.¹⁰³ However, the majority certainly wanted to dissolve the party. It had been so weakened by this stage that continuation in defiance of the law was not a viable option, and it would mean placing an unfair burden on the black membership. Deneys Schreiner, however, felt that it was wrong to dissolve the party and that the LP should have continued as a whites-only political party while having a non-racial liberal association affiliated to it.¹⁰⁴ This constituted a compromise which was not supported by the majority of the membership.

The closing meetings of the Party took place around the country during April and May 1968. Paton spoke at the meeting held at Darragh Hall in Johannesburg, held together with the Progressive Party, the Black Sash, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), and the Students Representative Council of the University of the Witwatersrand, which 600 people attended.¹⁰⁵ In Natal, meetings took place in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Hambrook in northern Natal. The Durban meeting, held in the Caxton Hall where many National and Provincial Congresses had been held, attracted a large audience. Paton, Ken Hill, Elliot Mngadi and Henry Pietersen (Pietermaritzburg branch) were the speakers. Paton recalls the meeting at Hambrook, a branch consisting of rural African people, clearly.¹⁰⁶ It took place in a humble building used as both a school and a church. It seems that this meeting touched him the most — the fact that the LP had brought people of such diverse backgrounds together. An African woman asked after Peter Brown, and requested Paton to send her regards to him. It seems unjust that he had put so much into the establishment of these rural branches, and yet was not allowed to attend, nor to be quoted at, such final meetings.

¹⁰³ For the following discussion: Interviews with P.Brown, 25/3/1998, & C.Gardner, 6/2/1998. APC, R.Vigne's interviews with S.Chetty, 10/4/1995; M.Dyer, 28/3/1995; P.Poovalingham, 1/4/1995.

¹⁰⁴ APC, G.D.Schreiner interviewed by R.Vigne, 12/4/1995.

¹⁰⁵ Paton, *Journey Continued*, p.277; Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, p.223.

¹⁰⁶ Paton, *Journey Continued*, pp.277-278.

Conclusion

The Party had continued despite tremendous odds and a persistent attempt by the state to destroy it. This was particularly true in the Natal Division, with police intimidation becoming relentless after July 1964 and the Division losing the services of some its most able members through banning orders. The Party's further radicalisation and its move towards social democracy was halted by the repressive assault of the government, as 'analysis and the development of principles yielded to the more urgent business of mere survival'.¹⁰⁷

Although restrictions on political activity must have been frustrating, the LP had stood by its principle of non-violence in the achievement of social and political change in South Africa. Furthermore, its decision to disband rather than comply with the Prohibition of Political Interference Act highlighted its commitment to its principle of non-racialism. These two principles had been the part of the reason behind the continuation of the existence of the LP up until it was forced to dissolve — the Party was the only example of a genuine non-racial political organisation remaining in South Africa which had not abandoned its stance of non-violence. Liberals had a strong conviction to uphold their liberal ideals in a hostile political environment in the belief that these would be an invaluable contribution to change.

¹⁰⁷ D.Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1987), p.118.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this thesis was to examine the nature and activities of the Natal Liberal Party (LP). Although this was the central focus of this study, the history of the Party on a national level had to be included to give a contextual dimension. As a result of the extensive interaction between regional and national, the histories of each overlapped to a large extent. Also, some analysis of the black liberation movement in South Africa was necessary because of the Party's involvement with the Congress Movement in struggles against the apartheid government.

In doing research for the first chapter, the problems of defining liberalism in South Africa became clear. Such difficulties with interpretation have allowed for conflicting perceptions of liberals to develop. There is an abundance of literature on liberalism in the period before 1950, and it was difficult at times to limit the study to an overview only. The points which stood out clearly concerning the *modus operandi* of the earlier liberals was that they could exert influence, whether with the government of the day or with African politicians, and that they were optimistic that they could bring about gradual constitutional change in the direction of more liberal policies. When the idea of forming a new political party was mooted in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it indicated that many liberals had lost faith in such methods and in the more enlightened currents within the opposition United Party. They were looking for a more assertive approach.

The basic theme of the thesis was the process of transformation of the LP, how it moved in an increasingly radical and activist direction over time. The best indicators of this are changing policy stances over issues such as the franchise, extra-parliamentary activity, and co-operation with the Congress Movement. The diversity of the Party's membership often threatened to halt the radicalisation process, especially in the initial stages, and to split the Party. The prominence within the Party of the more conservative Cape Liberals could not be discounted until the late 1950s. Reasons for the Party's changes in policy included the lack of electoral success in white politics, the changing composition of the membership (both black and white), and closer co-operation with the black liberation movement. Certain members of the leadership, Peter Brown

and Alan Paton in particular, moved with these developments in the Party and so steered the Party along a new path.

It is vital to see the transformation process of the LP against a background of the Nationalist Party government's development of apartheid legislation and the ways in which this shaped the political situation in South Africa. The year 1960 is taken as a turning point in the history of the country, and this is also true for the LP. Although the process of radicalisation was already under way, there is no doubt that it was influenced by the state of emergency and the political atmosphere of the early 1960s.

The success of the Natal Division of the LP, as chronicled in this thesis, can largely be attributed to its committed and active leadership. The Division had started off in the middle, but closer to the conservative Cape, on the political spectrum of the LP. It is thus somewhat surprising that its subsequent radicalisation was achieved so rapidly and with little conflict within the Division. Instead of splitting the Division, the process served to strengthen it. It was this dynamism of the Natal Division which was projected on to the Party at a national level.

The radicalisation of the Natal Division was due to a combination of factors. The composition of the membership of the Party in Natal, both black and white, was crucial in its transformation. The progressive white faction already in Party allowed for the injection of a more radical line. The increase in the number of African members and the joining of prominent figures like Selby Msimang and Jordan Ngubane influenced the Division in a number of ways. Furthermore, white members' direct exposure to the discrimination faced by the black membership served to radicalise their political standpoints. The above factors brought about changes in the views of white members who were initially more conservative. Indian members made a valuable contribution to the Party in Natal, although the membership of this group was not as influential or numerous as that of African members.

The good relations which developed between the LP and the Congress Alliance in Natal, specifically the African National Congress (ANC) and the Natal Indian Congress (NIC), had an impact on the Party on a regional as well as a national level. The Natal LP had supported co-

operation (mainly with the ANC) from the beginning, although it was not explicit at this time that any collaboration would entail, or could lead to, extra-parliamentary activity. Perhaps this was a somewhat naive view on the part of the Liberals. As it happened, the Division was the first to co-operate with the Congresses in such activity during 1956. And with increased co-operation, further changes in political outlook were inevitable. The personal contact between members of the LP and the ANC and the NIC helped to break down barriers and build trust. This is a sentiment expressed by many of the Natal members in interviews. There is no doubt that Albert Lutuli had an influence on Liberals and on LP-ANC relations in Natal. Furthermore, several African LP members had maintained their links with the ANC. Although a hostility to communism was present amongst Natal Liberals, Jordan Ngubane in particular, the absence of a strong Congress of Democrats' presence in the Congress Alliance in Natal was certainly a factor in shaping good LP-Congress Movement relations.

Natal was fortunate to have people of exceptional ability in its leadership, as well as having a 'workforce' of committed and active members. It was due to this factor that the Party was able to continue functioning so well in the region during the 1960s. To have made the Party a success in Natal as the leading members did, as well as providing leadership on a national level, was evidence to their dedication to liberalism and the LP's cause. Judging from the research that I have done, the leadership qualities of Alan Paton and Peter Brown were instrumental in keeping the Party, both in Natal and nationally, together. What was remarkable was how their views changed. This had an impact on the Party, as it took a new turn with the addition of more radical members to the National Committee after Paton took over the national chairmanship in 1956, and the implementation of far-reaching policy changes when Brown was elected to the post in 1958. They were, incidentally, the only nominees for these posts. Brown must also be singled out for the Party's success in building an African membership in Natal. Jordan Ngubane's influence went beyond the Natal Division and was significant in the Party's transformation. Another figure whose influence cannot be underestimated in Natal was Hans Meidner. The radical trend he set was already evident in 1953 when he questioned the adoption of certain South African Liberal Association principles. Besides this, his organisational ability was a valuable asset to the Division. The role of Selby Msimang was also important as he was one of the Party's founding members and had been the ANC provincial

secretary in Natal, although he was comparatively moderate compared with the younger generation in the ANC. There were others in the Division, too, who made valuable contributions.

A further factor which pushed the Natal Division in the direction it took was its record of the worst parliamentary election results amongst the Divisions. This influenced its change of direction, and was a decisive factor in encouraging a black membership and the consequent shift of focus away from the white electorate. The 1958 general election results gave impetus to the movement towards extra-parliamentary activity in the Natal Division.

The Natal Division's direct involvement with rural African communities made a deep impression on Africans and was largely responsible for its success in building its black membership. The LP's grass-roots involvement in the Natal countryside not only attracted members and established branches, but spread liberal ideas and helped foster a political consciousness amongst the local people. The leadership in Natal was mindful of the ANC presence when dealing with African communities, although that organisation had largely neglected the rural areas. The Party's opposition to the Nationalist government's rural resettlement schemes, in particular, brought in substantial numbers of African members, especially during the 1960s. Furthermore, the Party's activity during the state of emergency in early 1960 attracted much interest. The Natal Division had started out with the smallest, but most racially representative, membership in 1953. By the late 1950s it had the largest membership, with the largest percentage of black members. The majority of the Division's membership was African by the mid-1960s. Much of this membership was rural and of a working class nature, which presented the Division with new challenges. That the Natal Division remained the most active in the final years was the result of effective party organisation in response to such challenges.

Even though the LP followed an increasingly radical and activist path, Liberals never really saw themselves as activists in the militant sense that communists might. They became involved in extra-parliamentary activity in the defence of values which, to them, were universal and based on common sense. It was the political situation in South Africa and the development of

apartheid which forced them into direct political action. They adapted to political developments in the country in the search for political and social change, but still believed in evolutionary change. In this sense Liberals had lost their 'political innocence' from the 'conscience' politics of the early days of the Party. Liberals had the attitude that they were compelled to act in a situation where apartheid was totally at odds with liberal western ideas of democracy. Their feelings of compulsion had, by the late 1950s, moved away from primarily trying to influence the white electorate to a closer identification with black political causes.

Another aspect of this study were the changing perceptions of liberalism as Liberals became increasingly active in the extra-parliamentary field. This study has focussed on liberals in the LP, and does not take into account liberals in the United Party, the Progressive Party or elsewhere. This is an example of the problem of defining the meaning of 'liberal'. Furthermore, little analysis is made of African liberals in the ANC. The liberalism of the LP by the 1960s constituted a radical strand of South African liberalism. According to Everatt, 'the LP does not offer the simple opportunity to analyse South African liberals and liberalism: rather, throughout its existence, the Liberal Party maintained an internal critique of the methods and application of liberalism in South Africa.'¹ It was the evolution of a radical liberalism which was not simply trying to preserve pockets of liberalism in an illiberal society, but one which sought to create a new society. The Party's policies already had a socialist bias when the priority of its survival cut short any possible further radicalisation along a social democratic path from the mid-1960s. A criticism of the Liberals' approach, even from within the LP's ranks, was they were good at ends but it was the means which often created problems.

The role of the LP has been marginalised in the historiography of the liberation struggle. Indeed, the Party did not develop into anything close to a mass movement and it could never hope to have a following like that of the ANC. But the LP was more than just an irrelevant pressure group. Although it was too small to ever make a dramatic impact on South African politics, it was nevertheless the only liberal non-racial political party in South Africa. With regard to liberals involved in political parties in South Africa, the liberalism of the Progressive

¹ D.Everatt, 'The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid 1945-1960.', D.Phil.Thesis, University of Oxford, 1990, p.219.

and United Parties did not espouse non-racialism in the same sense as the LP did. Furthermore, the radical liberalism of the LP fought for the unconditional freedom for all the citizens of South Africa, which was not matched by the Progressive Party nor the United Party. Since the LP was not controlled by capitalist interests (it was always short of funds and often relied on contributions from its own members), it was relatively free to support whatever policies it chose, even those with a socialist bias.

The LP was caught between the rivalries of Afrikaner and African nationalisms, and it could not easily compete them once violence seemed to be the only answer in the revolutionary climate of the 1960s. Alan Paton characterised liberalism as an alternative position in the struggle between the two nationalisms.² Liberalism's contribution was to provide another option in a situation of deepening, violent conflict and it was a 'voice of reason' in a potentially revolutionary situation. The Liberals had become political activists while defending the values of liberalism in an attempt to bring about change in South Africa. Liberals, with very few exceptions, never doubted their adherence to the principle of non-violence. As another sign of its principled approach, the LP chose to disband in 1968 rather than compromise its principle of non-racialism. According to Irvine: 'Nonracialism was the Liberal party's guiding principle. It was its great strength, in the end its only remaining strength.'³ The Party had begun as a matter of principle, and so it ended.

² Quoted in D.Irvine, 'The Liberal Party, 1953-1968' in J.Butler, R.Elphick & D.Welsh (eds), *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa:Its History and Prospects* (Cape Town,David Philip,1987),pp.120-121.

³ Irvine, 'The Liberal Party', p.116.

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Appendix One

i) Principles and Objects of the South African Liberal Association, 1953.¹

South African Liberal Association

PRINCIPLES

The Association subscribes to the following fundamental tenets:

- (i) The essential dignity of every human being irrespective of race, colour or creed, and the maintenance of his fundamental rights;
- (ii) The right of every human being to develop to the fullest extent of which he is capable consistent with the rights of others;
- (iii) The maintenance of the rule of law;
- (iv) That no person be debarred from participating in the government and other democratic processes of the country by reason only of race, colour or creed.

OBJECTS

The Association's programme, based on the above fundamental tenets, shall include, *inter alia*:—

- (i) Equal political rights based on a common franchise roll for all civilised persons;
- (ii) Freedom of worship, expression, movement, assembly and association;
- (iii) The right to acquire and use skills and to seek employment freely;
- (iv) Access to an independent judiciary;
- (v) The application equally to all sections of the population of compulsory, state-sponsored education;
- (vi) The right to own and occupy immovable property;
- (vii) The right to organise trade unions and other economic groups and associations.

The Association will employ only democratic and constitutional means to achieve the foregoing objects, and will oppose all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism.

Note.—The Constitution of the Association has a clause whereby the Association can become a political party should it so desire, by a two-thirds majority decision of its governing council. When this is done, all the assets and the programme of the Association will become those of the political party.

All members will thereupon be invited to join the new political party.

BAP A4671/16/2/53

¹ APC, PC 2/9/11/1, Natal Provincial Division, Correspondence, 1953-1954.

Appendix One

ii) Principles and Objects of the Liberal Party adopted in May 1953.²

THE LIBERAL PARTY OF SOUTH AFRICA

PRINCIPLES

The Party subscribes to the following fundamental tenets:

- (i) The essential dignity of every human being irrespective of race, colour or creed, and the maintenance of his fundamental rights;
- (ii) The right of every human being to develop to the fullest extent of which he is capable consistent with the rights of others;
- (iii) The maintenance of the rule of law;
- (iv) That no person be debarred from participating in the government and other democratic processes of the country by reason only of race, colour or creed.

OBJECTS

The Party's programme, based on the above fundamental tenets, shall include, *inter alia*:—

- (i) Equal political rights based on a common franchise roll for all suitably qualified persons;
- (ii) Freedom of worship, expression, movement, assembly and association;
- (iii) The right to acquire and use skills and to seek employment freely;
- (iv) Access to an independent judiciary;
- (v) The application equally to all sections of the population of the principle of compulsory, state-sponsored education;
- (vi) The right to own and occupy immovable property;
- (vii) The right to organize trade unions and other economic groups and associations.

The Party will employ only democratic and constitutional means to achieve the foregoing objects, and is opposed to all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism.

The addresses of the Party are:—

CAPE PROVINCE: Parliament Chambers, Parliament Street, Cape Town (Box 3618).

NATAL: c/o 10-11 Rand Provident Buildings, 240 Church Street, Pietermaritzburg.

TRANSVAAL: 511, Auto-Mutual Buildings, 57, De Villiers Street, Johannesburg (Box 6156).

Issued by R. F. Spence, 47, Parliament Street, Cape Town, and printed by The Rustica Press (Pty.) Ltd., Court Road, Wynberg.

² APC, PC 2/9/17/1, Natal Provincial Division, Correspondence, 1955-1959.