

STRIJDOM'S 'TRIUMPH'

E. S. Sachs*

THE victory of Strijdom's Nationalist Party in the South African general election held April 16, is a clear exposure of the cant and hypocrisy of 'Parliamentary Democracy' as practised by some of the 'free nations' whom we are pledged to support against 'totalitarian communism' even by the use of H-bombs.

Of the 14½ million people in the Union, only the electors among the three million whites voted. The 9½ million Africans whose fate featured prominently in the election campaign were mere spectators—not altogether silent—without a vote. Even the three whites who represent them in parliament will soon be 'booted out' according to a statement by Dr. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs. The 1¼ million Coloured voters had to content themselves with electing four Europeans two weeks prior to the general election. The 400,000 Indian people have no franchise right whatsoever. Even so far as the white voters are concerned parliamentary democracy has become a mockery in South Africa due to Nationalist gerrymandering. The Nationalists polled a total of 642,069 votes as against 503,828 cast for the United Party, the major opposition party. In 24 constituencies with a total voting strength of over 250,000 the Nationalists did not put up candidates: these are anti-Nationalist strongholds and had they been contested the majorities against Strijdom would have been at least ten to one. In one such constituency (Kensington, Johannesburg) where the Nationalists put up a candidate he lost his deposit. It may be accurately estimated that had all seats been contested the Nationalist aggregate vote would not have exceeded 665,000, and the anti-Nationalist vote would have been at least 700,000. In spite of receiving a minority vote, the Nationalists will have 103 seats in the new parliament as against 53 for the United Party. Since they first came to power in 1948, the Nationalists, employing all the tricks and chicanery of Hitler, made sure that they will remain in the saddle. Thus some 25,000 voters in South-West Africa including many Germans, by an act passed in 1953 were given the right to elect six

*Solly Sachs, widely-known for his leading role in the South African trade union movement including the National Treasurership of the South African Labour Party and extending over a quarter of a century until the ban on his activities (he was General Secretary of the Garment Workers' Union) was imposed by the infamous C. R. Swart, is now in exile in Britain. He has written, together with Lionel Forman, *The South African Treason Trial* (John Calder, pp. 216 illustrated, October, 1957, 18s.), a vividly written account of the background to the trial that has aroused so much protest in Britain.—Ed., L.M.

M.P.s—all urban constituencies average about 12,000. The average for the rural areas which are overwhelmingly Nationalist is well under 10,000. The Coloured voters of the Cape whose vote influenced, in some cases decisively, some ten constituencies were removed from the Common Voters roll by a series of underhand tricks. In addition the Delimitation Commission consisting of three recently appointed judges fixed the boundaries of constituencies in accordance with the wishes of the Nationalists.

What is of real importance to the people of South Africa and more especially to the 75 per cent who are disfranchised is the fact that, unless something unforeseen happens, the government of the country, parliament, the police, the army, the prisons and all the other coercive forces of the state will for the next five years be in the hands of Strijdom, Verwoerd, Swart, de Klerk and company, who are determined to maintain and extend ruthlessly the policy of 'Baaskap' (white supremacy).

Could Strijdom have been Defeated?

An analysis of the alignment of forces in South Africa will conclusively show that the Nationalists have been able to capture and maintain power for the past ten years, not because of their innate strength, but only because of the weak-kneed and cowardly policy pursued by the United Party. The Nationalist Party draws its strength mainly from the backward rural areas and from some of the Afrikaner workers, of whom several hundred thousand have only in the last thirty years migrated from the poverty-stricken Platteland into the industrial areas. The overwhelming majority of the backward white farmers has always voted Nationalist and will not change their allegiance in the foreseeable future. There are, however, well over 30 industrial constituencies where the vote of the Afrikaner workers is decisive and which could have been won from the Nationalists. Three factors dominate the outlook of the several hundred thousand Afrikaner workers engaged in mining, transport, manufacturing and other occupations: these are Afrikaner Nationalism, fear of the non white, and the economic problems common to workers the world over (e.g., high cost of living, lack of security, housing, etc.). For nearly thirty years I worked in close contact with these workers and from my own experience and the experience of other trade union leaders I can positively state the following.

The unskilled and low-paid Afrikaner worker is almost all Afrikaner Nationalist and bitterly anti-African. As his skill and

living standards improve he is inclined to lose his extreme nationalism, thinks increasingly as a worker, and his attitude towards the non-white worker fluctuates between fact and fantasy. The facts indubitably prove that the influx of non-white workers in industry and improvement in their skill constitute no threat whatever to the employment opportunities and standards of the white worker: on the contrary the all-round economic progress of the country saved the Afrikaners from being dragged down in mass into the abyss of Poor Whitism. The Colour Bar offers no protection to the white worker; it only hampers progress and undermines his standards and employment opportunities.

The leaders of the Nationalist Party, having swallowed the Nazi technique, come to the Afrikaner worker with an appeal to his basest emotions, *i.e.*, incitement of hatred for the non-white, enmity towards the British and in addition skilfully flog the Communist bogey. Events in the last thirty years have proved beyond doubt that the only effective reply to the Nazi fascist adventurers is a relentless challenge to all forms of reaction, an unequivocal, energetic exposure of all racial and other myths and fantasies and a clarion call for the defence of elementary economic and political rights. Any pandering to backwardness or equivocation must inevitably lead to a triumph for reaction.

Instead of fighting on an independent, progressive policy, co-operating with the Labour Party, the trade unions and all other progressive elements, in short, following the New Deal example of Roosevelt and the Democratic Party in the 30's, the poltroons of the United Party came out with a wretched, contemptible 'Me Too' policy and spent more time and energy during the election campaign in trying to convince the white voters that they too stood for 'Baaskap', than in drawing them away from the irrational, the emotional fear cunningly spread by the Nationalists. The confused white voters reacted as one might have expected: 'If "Baaskap" means the saving of the Whites from being overwhelmed by the Blacks, then we prefer to entrust our fate to the hands of Strijdom who is more ruthless and clear on the matter than you are', and they voted Nationalist.

The United Party is composed of three social groups with identical yet conflicting interests; the all-powerful mining interests, the backward more prosperous agrarians who are becoming less important, and the industrialists, the most progressive section whose

influence and importance are growing. So far, the colonialist mining interests and the feudal agrarians have dominated United Party policy. Their principal concern is a vast reservoir of cheap African labour which they would like to secure without the extravagance and ruthlessness of Verwoerd, Swart, de Klerk and Co. The hard-boiled mineowners are more concerned with the survival of their dividends than in the survival of the white race. They will support, employ or accept any expedient that will serve their interests and supply them with a vast army of indentured labourers. Thus they support the Colour Bar to keep the African down, and at times oppose it with the object of reducing the wages of the White workers. They prefer their depredation to proceed peacefully but will not hesitate to use violence against Africans who demand higher wages. They talk liberalism but accept apartheid. There is a sort of unholy pact between the Chamber of Mines and Strijdom; the former looks after the cash and the latter after the Afrikaner soul and white civilisation. The 16,000 factory owners are opposed to apartheid and are fearful of de Klerk's job reservation tactics—under the Industrial Conciliation Act, 1957, he has unchallengeable power to exclude all non-whites from industries, trades and occupations.

There is no data available to indicate the factors which influenced the white voters in the election. This, however, is clear: the one million English-speaking South Africans voted solidly against Strijdom. How many of these are against apartheid and how many are against Strijdom due to his violent anti-British tirades and pin pricks (*e.g.*, barring the Union Jack from public buildings, also 'God Save the Queen' from being sung at public functions, etc.) is hard to say. What is common knowledge is that the voters who voted United Party were more anti-Strijdom than pro-United Party. Most of them look upon the United Party leadership and tactics with utter contempt. What is also known is that 25 per cent of the Afrikaners voted against Strijdom, but the young Afrikaners voted solidly Nationalist.

To defeat the Nationalists and thus crack the front of solid reaction is a difficult job but not impossible. If all the anti-apartheid forces united, the United Party adopted an independent progressive policy instead of a 'Me Too' line, a Labour Party were built which championed the cause of the Afrikaner workers without supporting the Colour Bar, and more work were done to educate the Afrikaner workers along democratic lines, there would be a good chance of ousting the Nationalists.

The major factor in South African politics is the growing strength of the non-white people, but democratic progress would be furthered if all progressive whites concentrated their attention on the white workers instead of merely waiting for the inevitable clash to come. The Afrikaner workers have been left to the tender mercies of the race haters for too long, and it is time that the left in South Africa took the message of progress to the homes and places of work of these workers and did not write them off as hopeless racialists.

The Not So Silent Disfranchised Eleven Million

The mass of Africans are not only disfranchised, but are even denied the elementary right of protest against their enslavement. To demonstrate their resentment against their helotry, the African National Congress called upon workers to stay away from work from April 14 to 16, a call supported by the other Congresses. The campaign was to be conducted along the lines of passive resistance, free from violence or disturbances, a dignified protest of millions of human beings who are denied the most elementary rights in the land of their birth.

The champions of Baaskap, however, would not allow any form of demonstration, however passive, from the oppressed. Jan de Klerk, Minister of Labour and brother-in-law of J. G. Strijdom, addressing voters in South-West Africa, said with fury: 'There will be a counter demonstration in which the white man will not only talk white supremacy but will prove white supremacy'. To strike terror among the Africans and fear in the hearts of the whites, C. R. Swart, Nationalist Minister of Justice, staged endless parades of armoured cars and policemen armed to the teeth. Offices of various democratic organisations throughout the country were raided and several hundred people were arrested. The United Party and its press joined the furious campaign of intimidating and demoralising the Africans, and the factory owners also played an active role by threatening to victimise Africans who stayed away from work. The division in the ranks of the African National Congress and the lack of organisation no doubt contributed to the failure of the demonstration. The indignation in the hearts of millions of Africans, however, and their craving for liberty will not be stifled by terror and intimidation. The masses of African people are rapidly awakening.

What of the future? In recent months racist reaction has not only scored a triumph in South Africa but also further north in the

Rhodesias and Kenya, but these triumphs have in no way solved the final problems facing the twenty million non-white and three million whites in those parts of the African continent. On the contrary, there is a deeper and more widespread feeling of insecurity and of fear among the whites now than there has ever been, and every victory of the racists accentuates that fear. The oppressed people of the African continent, Black and Arabic numbering well over two hundred million, are awakening. There are many differences—cultural, economic, social, political and in historical background—among the people of Africa, but they are all united in their demands to put an end to colonial oppression and racial discrimination. Whilst the whites were counting the votes in Pretoria and Johannesburg, and Sir Roy Welensky was vilifying the British Labour Party and talking the arrogant language of Strijdom, for the first time in history eight independent African states met at Accra to consider problems facing the African continent as a whole. Further north the Algerian people are heroically fighting with arms in their hands the mighty military power of France. The Colons* of Algeria are as stupid and depraved as the majority of the whites of Southern Africa.

The triumph of the twelve hundred million Asian people over their oppressors seems to have had no effect upon the three million whites in Southern Africa, who have lost all sense of reality and are guided in their actions by fear and *herrenvolk* nonsense. The world is moving rapidly towards freedom, but they are obstinately determined to build for themselves a slave state with the whites as masters and the non-whites as slaves.

Southern Africa has made considerable economic progress in the last decade, but the streets of Johannesburg are deserted at night and further north white men carry guns when they go to bed or to the lavatory. In the interests of the millions of Africans, and the interests of the Whites themselves, the inhuman policy of Baaskap must be brought to an end as quickly as possible. The leaders of the African people, whose ability, foresight and courage puts the self-appointed saviours of white civilisation to shame, will have to pay more attention to organisational problems and more especially to the building of African trade unions. When two hundred thousand African workers in South Africa are organised in effective trade unions the unarmed African workers will have tremendous

*French and other settlers from Europe, many of them big landlords.

economic power, which no repressive laws of Verwoerd will be able to destroy. The several hundred thousand white workers, the majority of whom feel extremely unhappy with the Nationalist government but whose leaders are as yet too weak-kneed to fight with courage and determination, will accept unity with the African workers only when the latter are strong. The policy of apartheid is bound to cause a serious crisis in the South African economy, and this crisis may be expedited by international factors, the recession in the U.S.A., the drying up of capital inflow and the fear of the future which investors will feel. The task of freeing South Africa from racial oppression and tyranny is primarily one for the people of South Africa themselves, but the British and international labour movement and all who have the cause of African freedom at heart can do much to further the cause of freedom by rendering maximum support to the democratic organisations within Southern Africa. It is sincerely hoped that the British Labour Party, which has come out openly on the side of democracy, will not be frightened by the abuse of Mr. Strijdom and the threats of Mr. Welensky. The protagonists of the Master Race theory, whether championing openly the brutal policy of apartheid or masquerading under the hypocritical guise of 'partnership', are not only the enemies of the Black people but, if allowed to pursue their pernicious policies, will bring inevitable ruin to the Whites, and their insane policy must receive no support whatever from Britain. The British and international trade union movement must establish close contacts with the workers of Southern Africa and give them maximum organisational, technical and financial support. International opinion, which has consistently denounced apartheid, must not relax its effort because of Strijdom's successes; on the contrary, it must move from verbal attacks to positive action. The independent African states must cease using diplomatic language in fighting colonial oppression and racial discrimination, and must instead employ the maximum effort to obtain the whole-hearted co-operation of all civilised countries in their aim to put an end to African oppression.
