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An Historical Analysis of Current South Africa Politics

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by

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From the perspective of the late 1980's, the Republic of South Africa remains an anachronism to western observers. While the nation's 4.6 million whites recline blithely in the genial sunlight of the Cape of Good Hope, 25 and one-half million blacks, 3 million Coloreds, and 1 million Asians stand obscured in the shadow of the imposing edifice of apartheid. To anyone other than a student of South African history, that a racially stratified political system can perpetuate into the 1990's without a monumental transformation of racial policy is, at best, perplexing.

Accordingly, western journalists and politicians and "enlightened" South Africans continue to scan the horizon, and since the late 1960's have consistently interpreted each ephemeral liberal coalition, ambiguous political statement, and expression of black consciousness as a harbinger of a new dawn promising political reform and social liberalization, if not social justice. Yet this anticipatory approach fails to put into historical perspective the stolid electoral values of the 13 percent of South Africans comprising the nation's intransigent white electorate. Compounding the deep-seated conservatism of the white electorate, and presenting a further challenge to the conventional wisdom, are several inherently conservative structural forces, entrenched during the unification of South Africa and expanded thereafter through white parliamentary politics.

In 1987 a significant portion of the white electorate revealed a reevaluation of the incumbent party's representation of their interests. The immoderate resulting shift of electoral votes threatens to increase a widening electoral chasm within the reigning National Party. Encouraging government instability is the rising specter of the Conservative Party, whose appeal to the far right bears a striking resemblance to developments preceding South Africa's two most fateful elections, both of which resulted in electoral coups from the right. What liberal politicians and the western media continue to miss, is that while the ironic juxtaposition of the nation's two major right wing parties, in their efforts to secure the fidelity of the white electorate, monopolizes parliamentary debate, the electorate, more than either party, has set the agenda.

False Expectations in 1987

From the offices of the *Manchester Guardian* to those of Nairobi's *Daily Nation*,¹ journalists around the world displayed an uncharacteristic unanimity in incorrectly forecasting the outcome of the South African general election of May 6, 1987. For instance, the European *Financial Times* pointed to the failure of South Africa's two right wing parties, the Reconstituted National Party (Herstigte Nasionale Party--HNP), and the Conservative Party (CP) to agree on an electoral pact. The journalist nonchalantly concluded that the absence

of a united right signalled the unchallenged continuance of the anti-apartheid Progressive Federal Party (PFP) "as the official white parliamentary opposition."¹ Allistar Sparks of the *Johannesburg Star* put it more bluntly: "Apartheid is dead."² The May 4 cover of *Time* boldly proclaimed "Hints of Hope. The Afrikaners Begin to Unbend," and alluded to a "new Afrikaner discontent," concluding that "the embattled Afrikaners seem at last to be losing their oft proclaimed determination to maintain apartheid at all costs."³

International journalism was not the only institution to board the bandwagon of optimistic euphoria. Liberal politics had its takers as well. Amichand Rajbansi, Chairman of the Ministers' Council in the House of Delegates, announced with approval that South Africa was at the "beginning of the grand highway of reform."⁴ Wynand Malan, an Independent candidate, spoke of a "new spirit" of reform.⁵ Progressive leader Colin Eglin looked forward to the liberal PFP-New Republic Party (NRP) pact precipitating "the biggest shake-up in South African politics" since the National Party upset Jan Christiaan Smuts' "moderate" United Party in 1948.⁶ It is one of the regrettable twists on South African political reality that Eglin was concurrently dead right and hopelessly wrong, an

¹ *Financial Times*, March 13, 1987 P. 4.

² *Johannesburg Star*, February 28, 1987, P. 5.

³ *Time*, May 4, 1987.

⁴ *Johannesburg Star*, February 14, 1987 P. 5.

⁵ *Johannesburg Star*, February 7, 1987 P. 3.

⁶ *Nairobi Daily Nation*, May 8, 1987 P. 9.

irony he has since learned to appreciate. Both journalistic and political analyses pointed to the same conclusion: traditional apartheid was in danger; reform was the agenda. The most striking phenomenon is not that such a varied array of political analysts would unite so uncontroversially, but that they would be so wrong.

While the 1987 election administered a douse of cold water to global expectations of an electoral turn-around, the results also ominously fanned the flames of the Conservative Party, which had previously attacked P.W. Botha's modest reforms from the political wilderness of the far right. The CP, in their first ever general election, usurped the PFP's standing as the official opposition party. Since 1948, the election in which the National party upset Smuts and the United Party, the official opposition has always stood to the left of the ruling party, exploiting its official status to check the government's application of apartheid policies. The NP recaptured some support at the expense of the liberal PFP and the New Republic Party, the small, battered relic of Smuts' conciliatory United Party, which, having lost four of its five seats, has effectively been eliminated as a political force. The upshot is that for the first time in thirty-nine years the government began apprehensively to peer over its *right* shoulder to contend with the official opposition.

Why have analysts so consistently and so dramatically misread the South African electorate? The most judicious

explanation is that most analyses of South African politics have been predicated on wishful thinking. Journalists and politicians attentive to South Africa's plight, viewing through the distorting influences of compelling hope and historical myopia, have created a delusionary chimera of imminent reform which flies in the face of political reality. An example is the trend away from the left: in 1977 the collective far right received a mere three percent of the popular vote, increased it to fifteen percent in 1981, and nearly doubled that figure to reach twenty-nine percent in 1987. Meanwhile, NP support gradually sunk to its lowest ebb in twenty years. An abundance of CP near-victories in marginal districts confirms the trend. A rule of thumb in analyzing current South African politics is to remain cynically immune to the reformist optimism which has pervaded the liberal, predominantly English-speaking opposition and the world press since the 1960's. The better method however, is to understand the historical stagnation of the South African electorate and the system in which it operates.

Historical Continuity in White Politics

Antagonism between Afrikaners and English-speakers developed soon after the British entered South Africa, disrupting the established lifestyle of the Boers. In the first wave of European conquest in South Africa, immigrants from the Netherlands, France, and Germany arrived with the establishment of the Dutch East India Company, which

reigned over a law of company policy between 1652 and 1795 in the Cape Colony. The arrival of British officials who sought to deny the French control of the sea route connecting Europe with Asia precipitated a period of British domination which continued until the formation of the South African Union in 1910. To escape British rule, oxwagons filled with earlier settlers, the *Voortrekkers*, withdrew from the Cape Colony to the Northeast to form the Boer Republics: the South African Republic (the Transvaal), and the Orange Free State. The *Great Trek*, as Afrikaner historians have termed the Boer exodus, signified an embryonic Afrikaner nationalism, and the purposeful cultural and religious cohesion of the Afrikaner *volk* (an Afrikaans term nearly as rich in connotation as its German counterpart) in defense against British encroachment, and has ever after played a central role in Afrikaner folklore. Under these conditions, the Boers would have viewed a political fusion of the two white tribes with contempt. They could hardly have anticipated that they themselves would dominate such a system.

THE UNIFICATION OF THE TWO WHITE NATIONS

On May 31, 1910, Louis Botha, a Boer general who merely eight years previously had fought, and lost, a war against British domination, officially assumed the leadership of the newest union in the British Commonwealth, the Republic of South Africa. This ironic turn of events, roughly analogous to Americans welcoming General Lee as President

of the United States shortly after the Civil War, followed a period of Anglo-Boer conciliation after three harrowing years of bloody intercolonial war. The greatest and most costly legacy of the series of compromises between Boer and Briton which led to unification continues to be the legally enforced inferior status of South Africa's indigenous Africans and Coloreds (to use the official term for the ancestors of the Khoikhoi tribes and those of mixed lineage). In an effort to acquire the mutual prosperity and security which they would enjoy in a unified South Africa, the delegates of the Constitutional Convention, stalemated by disagreement over Native policy, postponed a definitive settlement on the status of nonwhites until after unification. Having thus decided not to decide, the delegates established a proportionally unrepresentative electoral structure which sounded the knell for the existing liberties of nonwhites, and virtually ensured a future of white supremacy. Although many of the delegates, predominantly English-speakers, hoped for a liberalization of Native policy and for the eventual unionwide extension of the qualified franchise for "civilized" Africans and Coloreds which existed in the Cape Colony, they unwittingly paid for unification with the political voice of black South Africa. Natal's

The Boer War, which lasted from 1899 to 1902, was given the ill-fitting sobriquet, "the last of the gentlemen's wars," due to a mutual agreement not to arm natives. The "gentlemen's war" consisted of a scorched-earth policy ruthlessly pursued by British generals, inconsistent British adherence to the

Gentlemen's agreement, and concentration camps with appalling casualty rates in which the colonial forces housed demoralized Boer families. It was to these conditions that Afrikaner nationalists would later repeatedly point for confirmation of the need for the cultural and political cohesion of the Afrikaner volk. In 1902 the British Crown annexed the Transvaal and the Orange Free State under the authority of the British Empire, thus crystalizing the humiliation of the Boers.

At the end of the Boer War, both sides had seriously depleted their resources, while the agrarian former Boer republics suffered the ravages of the war. The postwar depression of the inland Boer regions was exacerbated by the effect of the withdrawal of British troops on local economies. Ironically a labor shortage limited the expansion of gold mining, while workers in other industries faced increasing unemployment. While the sluggish expansion of gold mining and some agricultural activity salvaged the inland colonies from further decline, the depressed postwar economy hit hardest in the coastal colonies, Natal and the Cape.⁷ Customs and railway revenues, together comprising 80 percent of the total revenue of the Cape Colony and 77 percent of Natal's

⁷ Both Natal and the Cape remained British colonies. While Natal's nonwhite franchise was highly restrictive, that of the Cape was considerably less so, although never representative. Therefore both colonies could claim a multiracial franchise, as opposed to the Boer republics (see below for statistics on Natal franchise).

revenue in 1903, declined steadily after the war.⁸ This was in part due to the extension of a railway line from the Witwatersrand mining region in the Transvaal to the Mozambique port of Lourenco Marques in 1894, which had the effect of attracting the Transvaal trade which would otherwise have gone to the Cape or Natal, thus increasing intercolonial tensions.⁹ A destabilizing rate war erupted in 1906 between the individual colonial railways, each seeking to acquire a greater share of rail traffic, in disregard of an agreement prohibiting fare alterations. After a mutually injurious year-long competition between the independent railways, the failure of the customs union illustrated the advantages of a political union which would promote and protect internal trade. As a further inducement, Boer political leaders in the Transvaal considered the advantage of preferential trade with the extensive market of the British Commonwealth, while British capitalists jealously eyed the mining wealth of the Witwatersrand. Richard Feetham, an English-speaking Transvaal businessman, concisely explained the principal benefit of a unified South Africa:

Under present conditions we cannot expect to reach economic stability. We may patch up customs conventions for short periods but as long as the negotiators have to act as the delegates of five or six different States instead of as

⁸ Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 21.

⁹ Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 54-55.

representatives of one people, it is extremely improbable that any durable fiscal arrangements can be arrived at.¹⁰

British politicians and businessmen also feared that the solidarity of the agriculturally-based Boer community would allow it to submerge the urban-based British culture, which would increasingly decline as British commerce deteriorated through continued intercolonial disputes. Although the Boers were more numerous, Lord Selbourne, High commissioner of South Africa, viewed a South African union within the British Commonwealth as a necessary first step to attract British immigrants, thereby insuring a British political majority. Meanwhile, in London, the British government had begun to recognize the possibility of an Anglo-German confrontation, and that a united South Africa could better withstand a conflict with its German-controlled northeastern neighbor, South West Africa (now Namibia.) Unification also provided what many Boer and British leaders saw as the solution to the peril of contrasting Native policies. A series of African rebellions in Natal had brought the status of nonwhites to the attention of unionists. A pervasive fear amongst white political leaders was that Africans and Coloreds in one colony, seeing the comparatively elevated status of their nonwhite comrades in another colony, might incite a rebellion, or worse, begin a massive migration of Africans to the more liberal colony. Of all

¹⁰ Richard Feetham, "Some Problems of South African Federation and Reasons for Facing Them," an essay read to the Fortnightly Club, Johannesburg, on Oct. 4, 1906, and quoted in Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 63.

of the "solutions" unification promised, the solution to the "Native problem" was to become the most elusive.

Of the many prominent figures who worked toward unification, John X. Merrimen, Prime Minister of the Cape Colony, held very definite ideas as to the most suitable structure for the Union of South Africa. Merrimen saw proportional representation as detrimental to the true interests of the state, which should be decided by those with a vested interest in it: landowners. In spite of his British heritage, he ardently advocated colonial autonomy, and was correspondingly decidedly anti-imperialist. Merrimen adamantly maintained that South Africa was singularly unsuited to any form of government other than an aristocracy. He expressed grievous misgivings over the pretended democracy suggested by Smuts in a characteristically well-meant harangue to the Transvaal delegate, with whom he corresponded regularly. His private critique during the National Convention remains valid today of a nation which continues to present itself as a democratic republic:

You accept a faulty basis and then proceed to build illogical conclusions thereon. How can you without blushing talk of manhood suffrage and exclude of design 2/3 of the population--God forbid you should dream of including them on that basis--but then what becomes of your shibboleth? South Africa is, and I hope will remain, a society on an aristocratic basis... When the yeoman poses as a democrat he does not cut a very admirable figure.¹¹

¹¹ W. K. Hancock, Smuts I: The Sanguine Years 1879-1919 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

Despite his patrician convictions, Merrimen was also capable of pragmatism. His experience as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony had convinced him that the education and property qualifications used to determine eligibility for the Cape franchise effectively eliminated all but the most "civilized" nonwhites, while acting as a "safety valve" which sufficed to appease their political aspirations, and thus preventing the otherwise inevitable "volcano" which would develop as a result of African and Colored dissatisfaction. Of the remaining political leaders in the Cape Colony, few suggested the abandonment of the color-blind franchise in unification, although most viewed the Colored franchise with more sympathy than that of enfranchised Africans.

Jan Christiaan Smuts, deputy to Transvaal Prime Minister Louis Botha, indefatigably pursued unification, and as a result his vision of union contributed largely to the eventual republic. As a Boer general during the war, Smuts' outlook was inherently anti-imperialist. A cosmopolite who wrote both philosophy and much of his personal correspondence in English, Smuts defies the stereotypical characterization of the provincial Afrikaner. Although a personal friend of Merrimen, Smuts, junior to the elder statesman by nearly thirty years, accepted the relatively young doctrine of proportional representation, and manhood suffrage for all white men. Both Transvaal and Orange Free

Town: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 213.

15 Leonard Thompson, *Unification of South Africa 1892-1910* (Cape

Town: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 213.

State representatives united in opposition against any extension of the Cape franchise to a unified South Africa.¹²

In small coastal colony of Natal, particularly austere franchise requirements disqualified all but about 200 nonwhites from a electoral role consisting of 23,686 voters in 1907.¹³ Natal leaders, therefore, held a middle ground, remaining aloof from the Cape's color-blind franchise for "civilized" men without adopting the racially defined franchise of the Northern colonies which required no educational qualification.

Amongst the delegates of the intercolonial National Convention, which met from 1898-1899, debate over the voting status of Africans and Coloreds divided roughly upon regional and cultural lines. J.B.M. Hertzog, a nationalist-minded Free State Afrikaner, warned: "There would be constant pressure to lower the qualification standard in the near future and the native voter would swamp the European."¹⁴ De Wet, Hertzog's associate from the Free State, claimed that "if the Native Franchise were embodied in the Constitution not five percent of the electors of the Orange River Colony would support Union..."¹⁵ Louis Botha, Smuts' superior in the

¹² Although Natal maintained a modicum of Colored, African, and Indian enfranchisement, its size made it less threatening to whites, and the enfranchisement of nonwhites was typically referred to as the "Cape franchise."

¹³ Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 111.

¹⁴ Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 218.

¹⁵ Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 219.

Transvaal, chastised Malan of the Cape for trying "to force the rest of South Africa to accept the principle of the Native franchise of the Cape Colony," suggesting, "If this were done he might just as well go home."¹⁶ W.P. Schreiner, an outspoken advocate of the nonwhite franchise, drew a prophetic comparison, equating the establishment of a union separated by race with erecting "a grand building upon unsound and sinking foundations."¹⁷ Edward Greene of Natal attempted to bridge the two views by proposing that "only persons of European descent shall be eligible as Members of either House of Parliament," a principle which was embodied in the eventual Constitution.¹⁸ The intractable opposition of delegates from the former Boer republics convinced the proponents of a unionwide color-blind franchise that, despite the best efforts of Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, (representing English-speakers in the Transvaal), and Cape Delegates Malan and Merrimen, colonial disagreement would frustrate the inclusion of an extended Cape-style franchise in the Constitution. Merrimen suggested to Smuts that the stalemate could be broken:

by leaving the question of the franchise to the provinces themselves and providing that *the local franchise should not be altered except on a two-thirds majority to be ascertained*

¹⁶ Malan's personal notes on the National convention, P. 56-59, quoted in Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 219.

¹⁷ W. K. Hancock, Smuts I: The Sanguine Years 1879-1919 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), P. 256.

¹⁸ Minutes of the National Convention, P. 56-59, quoted in Leonard Thompson, Unification of South Africa 1902-1910 (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), P. 220.

*by a plebiscite of registered voters in the province [emphasis added].*¹⁹

Smuts approved of the compromise, noting, "I also feel pretty certain that a native franchise imported into the Constitution would make Union impossible of acceptance by the people. Let us therefore adhere to the comfortable gospel of *laissez-faire*..."²⁰ The juxtaposition of motives which led both Merrimen and Smuts to promote a policy of "union first" aptly explains its immediate success and its eventual failure to achieve the ultimate policy goal of Cape liberals: a uniform nonracial franchise of "civilized" South Africans. Afrikaner politicians assured Free State constituents that the containment of the nonwhite franchise to the Cape was preliminary to removing it, while Cape politicians insisted to dissatisfied liberals and blacks that retention of the existing Cape franchise held the door open for a unionwide color-blind franchise, awaiting more liberal times. Ultimately, the Convention accepted the compromise, although the final Constitution required a two-thirds majority only in a joint sitting of both the Senate and the House of Assembly, allowing the possibility of an amendment without the approval of the local parliament in the Cape. This loophole was to become a critical shortcoming from the perspective of African and Colored voters over the next forty years. Stymied on Native policy, the British and Boer representatives agreed to differ on

¹⁹ W. K. Hancock, Smuts I: The Sanguine Years 1879-1919 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), P. 254.

²⁰ W. K. Hancock, Smuts I: The Sanguine Years 1879-1919 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962), P. 257.

the African vote and placed the burden of creating an acceptable uniform franchise law to the "wiser and broader shoulders of the future," a suggestion proposed by Smuts.

The debate over the seemingly mundane issue of constituency size drew the unrestrained participation of many prominent delegates. Percy Fitzpatrick insisted on proportional representation, arguing the merits of "one vote, one value." Delegates from rural regions claimed that equal populations within each constituency would create cumbersome districts in agricultural regions, where rural isolation would prevent representatives from adequate communication with their constituents. Unable to elicit enthusiastic support from his fellow English-speaking delegates, Fitzpatrick found himself opposed even by Merrimen, whose aristocratic sympathies for the landowning classes assisted in the establishment of an electoral system which would diminish the voice of his own English-speaking, and principally urban, supporters.

In its final form, the South Africa Act accepted the principle of proportionally smaller rural districts, and provided for commissions of Supreme Court judges to redilimit electoral divisions at ten year intervals. The commissions were directed to allow a variation of fifteen percent on either side of the established mean, in consideration of community interests, communication, existing electoral and physical boundaries, and most significantly, "sparsity or density of

population."²¹ In practice, the commissions invariably created urban districts at the high population limit, and rural constituencies at the lower extreme, delivering a decisive rural advantage.

The Afrikaner numerical predominance has been a key to Afrikaner hegemony over the electorate. The word "Boer," which translates literally as "farmer," is an indication of the extent to which Afrikaner prepotency has dominated South Africa's agricultural regions. English-speaking whites, unlike the majority of the Boers (who were overwhelmingly agrarian), entered South Africa after the urbanizing effect of the industrial revolution had transformed European society. Imbued with a moderate post-Enlightenment egalitarianism, English-speaking South Africans have remained historically consistent throughout the twentieth century in voting more liberally and living in comparatively large urban districts.²² The two white groups remain to a large degree culturally distinct, separated by language and a history of mutual antagonism interspersed with tranquil periods of symbiotic conciliation.

The legacy of the compromise of unification continues to limit the political status, or rather the lack thereof, and thus also the social and economic status, of over eighty-five percent

²¹ 1910 Constitution, sections. 42-45.

²² This egalitarianism was less than complete, but the term remains valid relative to the prevailing Boer notion of Africans as the accursed sons of Ham.

of South Africa's population.²³ Had Cape colonial officials refused unification without a uniform Native policy, they might have eventually induced Boer representatives to accept a modicum of representation for an elite of westernized, "civilized" Coloreds and Africans nationwide, although the chances for a timely agreement remained remote. Unfortunately for proponents of a color-blind franchise, the urgency of the economic situation in the more liberally governed Cape and Natal instilled in the delegates of these colonies an urgent inclination to negotiate. The Cape delegates to the National Convention, however, might more easily have insisted on Merrimen's terms for *local* approval of changes in the Cape franchise. Such a compromise would have allowed the possibility of a gradually increased nonwhite franchise due to either a liberalization of opinion, international pressure, or increased westernization by nonwhites. However, by postponing a unionwide, uniform franchise without insisting on Cape approval of franchise changes and accepting the inclusion of rural loading, the liberal-minded delegates of the National convention condemned South African Africans, Indians, and Coloreds to political exclusion, while diminishing the power of their own future liberal successors. The result was a logical procession to contemporary South Africa, in which liberals are politically disadvantaged by the conservative

Afrikaners, who felt a greater sense of ethnic kinship with the

²³ Including all of South Africa's nonwhite groups, residents of the reservation-like "homelands" as well as the euphemistically-termed "independent homelands."

influence of rural loading, Africans and Coloreds despair of an ever changing series of toy telephones offered to them in the form of impotent "representative counsels," and the smoldering "volcano" of black resentment rises in intensity.

POST-UNIFICATION AFRIKANER ASCENDENCY

By presenting a moderate and experienced image in a party with leaders from both sides of the Boer War, Louis Botha and Jan Smuts, both of whom led the war against British South Africa, headed the union's first administration. Given the benefit of rural loading, a slight Afrikaner numerical advantage, and the support of eminent English-speakers, Afrikaners would exclusively occupy the Prime Minister's office thereafter. A maxim which has become hackneyed in the pages of South African history remains nonetheless valid: The Boers lost the war, and won the peace. As a direct result, they came to dominate the electorate from the union's inception to the present.

A precarious balance defied competing nationalisms until the first World War. In 1913 Barry Hertzog bolted the South African Party to form the first National Party, the grandfather of P.W. Botha's NP. The war marked the beginning of the end of the union's first period of Anglo-Afrikaner conciliation. Nationalists labelled Botha and Smuts Anglophiles, and some Afrikaners, who felt a greater sense of ethnic kinship with the Germans than the British, raised arms against the Imperial

Defense Force in German South West Africa in what was to become known as the Afrikaner Rebellion.

THE RAND REBELLION AND THE "POOR WHITE PROBLEM"

The Witwatersrand miner rebellion of 1922 reveals in microcosm the dimensions of the "poor white problem" which has plagued the union as early as the seventeenth century, and persists today as the motor which has propelled the CP into the national and international spotlight. The Conservative Party has drawn much of its support from the ranks of the white working class, and this extraordinarily cohesive group's role in South African politics is both more vigorous and more reactionary than in other westernized societies largely because of the nation's unique demographic makeup. The white South African working class has, throughout the history of white domination in southern Africa, actively pursued its economic and cultural interests. Since before the unification of South Africa in 1910, the nation's political leaders have, to varying degrees, recognized the formidable force of this group and the necessity to balance its demands with those of other powerful political forces, especially rural white landowners, British capital, and the mining industry. Ironically, because of their legally enforced inability to wield political power through the vote, with the exception of the limited franchise of the Cape and Natal, the demands of the indigenous black majority have gone largely unheeded by the white government, which has consistently

sacrificed black interests in favor of those groups to which they are held politically accountable.²⁴ The dispute between white mine workers and mine owners which led to the Rand Rebellion of 1922 reveals the government's difficulty in maintaining the precarious balance of white political pressure groups, despite their ability to thoroughly ignore the equally affected black population.

The economic conditions affecting the mining industry contributed importantly to the rebellion of 1922. After the first World War, a postwar deflation in gold prices pushed the mining industry into a crisis. In addition, due to increased wages, and to the inflated price of mining supplies resulting from the trade disruption caused by Germany's submarine campaign, the cost of mining had risen approximately forty percent since 1913, thus confronting mine owners with higher costs and lower prices. Meanwhile, skilled workers who had left the mines for combat were returning to resume their jobs only to find the mining industry in disarray. These workers had been replaced by younger workers during the war, and as the postwar industry was contracting rather than expanding the resulting insufficient demand for skilled labor threatened to create a mass of unemployed white workers.

²⁴ The Natal and Cape franchises effectively restricted franchise rights to a small and politically impotent minority of educated, propertied blacks. The minimum property requirements in order to obtain the franchise caused them to have more in common with the white bourgeoisie than most blacks.

The point which aroused the most vehement opposition from the skilled and semi-skilled laborers of the South African Industrial Federation, the umbrella organization for unions representing the miners, was not the altering of the established contract system, nor was it the Chamber of Mines' proposal to modify the structure of underground work (in order to achieve greater efficiency). The brunt of the unionist onslaught was a proposal to tamper with the Status Quo Agreement established during the war. The Chamber of Mines (a cadre of almost exclusively English-speaking capitalists) proposed a moderate increase in the ratio of black workers to white, while remaining within the statutory quota passed by parliament, excluding black miners from positions as skilled laborers. Thus, a Colored or African worker could not, after the agreement, replace a white worker in a given position and vice-versa. The mine owners announced their intention to alter this ratio from one white per 8.5 blacks to one white per 10.5 blacks. White workers viewed this as an unabashed affront against the "civilized work force." Even the Chamber of Mines, however, never seriously considered abolishing the statutory color bar. The mine owners voluntarily agreed to the Status Quo Agreement in 1917 to prevent a white labor strike.

Nationalists gained increasing support from a working class critical of Smuts and his South African Party's protection of mining interests in the manifold strikes between 1910 and 1922. Before the Johannesburg Town Hall, mine workers revealed a startling and seemingly incongruous moral

dexterity in assailing the forces oppressing the white labor force while in the same breath advocating the continued oppression of black workers. One such unionist remarked:

In order to fill their pockets, the Chamber of Mines are murdering the workers; if the color bar is abolished, the souls as well as the bodies of the workers will be murdered, and the authority of the white race in South Africa will come to an end.

The statement not only presented a representative opinion of Rand miners in 1922, in the nearly timeless continuum of South African social perspective, it retains an acutely contemporary flavor. Pauline H. Baker described a 1987 parallel:

During the black mine-workers' strike, for example, the *Nationalist*, the NP newspaper, stated flatly that white workers alone could not meet the growing labor needs of the mines. But the CP disputed that claim, arguing that private industry was pleading a labor shortage so that it could lower costs by hiring blacks.²⁵

The correlation between the NP position and that of Smuts' SAP is unmistakable. South Africa's white working class vision of race relations has managed to defy mutation, and remains a testimony to historical continuity.

With both sides refusing to budge, the mainstay of the South African economy threatened to collapse, or so felt Prime Minister Smuts. In the greatest show of union solidarity in history, the white "labor aristocracy," anticipating impending government intervention, formed heavily armed commandos

²⁵ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 69.

led by former Boer generals. Smuts raised the ante and mobilized the defense force, civilian forces, artillery, tanks, and squadrons to bomb the miners from the air. After a week-long battle and several hundred casualties, the machinery of war did what a slip of paper issued by the Chamber of Mines failed to do, and the miners returned to work on the terms originally proposed by the mine owners. The poor white problem, however, had not reared its ugly head for the last time.

The 1924 Election

In the 1924 election the miners and the Afrikaner nationalists combined in an electoral vendetta to revenge the Rand Rebellion. In order to gain a majority, Hertzog's National Party, composed mainly of Afrikaner nationalists, joined in a peculiar alliance with the predominantly English speaking and socialist-leaning Labor Party. The lesson Smuts learned in 1924 is one which P.W. Botha is now belatedly recognizing: the white working class is a conservative, wholly stagnant, yet formidable political force.

The victory of Hertzog's NP, no less a surprise to NP leaders than to Smuts, did not signify Anglo-Afrikaner conciliation. The unlikely alliance is dramatically explained by Smuts' biographer, S.G. Millin:

Among the Nationalist Members there was not a single Briton. Among the Laborites not a single Boer. Their principles were hostile. Their association was based on two hatreds: hatred of the black man and hatred of Smuts.²⁶

²⁶ S.G. Millin General Smuts, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1936).

Ethnic divisions between Afrikaners and English-speakers had proven subordinate to white workers' perceived need to be coddled at the expense of blacks. The moral of the story: no governing party in South Africa can afford to alienate its working class constituents.

The parallel between the election of 1924 and the coming election of 1989 bodes ill for Botha, who also has traversed linguistic barriers in incurring the wrath of an immoderate portion of the English-speaking working class and of poor white Afrikaner traditionalists. Economic conditions and the August 1987 parliamentary repeal of legislation restricting blacks from certain mining jobs has caused 50,000 to 60,000 blue-collar and mining voters to distance themselves from the NP.²⁷ The challenge of black workers has further threatened the jobs of blue-collar whites, who, despite all advantages, faced 5 percent unemployment in 1985.²⁸ Drought and decreased prices have compounded dissatisfaction amongst the nation's 250,000 farmers, whose votes are weighted due to rural loading.²⁹ While the traditional answer to unemployed Afrikaners (English-speakers have historically fared better economically) has been to join the civil service, which employs a staggering forty percent of adult Afrikaners, even the NP's thinly veiled jobs-for-votes policy has its limitations.

²⁷ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 66.

²⁸ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 67.

²⁹ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 66.

AFRICAN DISENFRANCHISEMENT

In the years between 1930 and 1936, Afrikaner nationalists in parliament gradually diminished the already indistinct voice of the African in union politics. In 1930 African representation was effectively reduced by half with the enfranchisement of white, but not black, women. The crippled African vote was further weakened by the abolition of white, but not black, educational franchise restrictions in 1931. Now any idiot could vote . . . as long as he was white.

The last vestiges of a multiracial democracy vanished in 1936 with the removal of Africans from the common voters roll in the Cape and Natal, to be replaced by the right to elect three white representatives to parliament, who were easily ignored. As if that were too much, the white parliament later withdrew this right to replace it with a toy telephone in the form of a wholly impotent Native Representative Council. Already weakened by the legislation of the early 1930's, the later 1936 legislation delivered the coup de grace to the African franchise. Yet, despite the dehumanizing humiliation dealt blacks through disenfranchisement, it was not until after the historic 1948 election that racial segregation would become systematically and legally applied in all aspects of life through a doctrine of absolute separation which, in superficially altered forms, persists into the 1990's.

The 1948 Election

The elections preceding the fateful 1948 NP victory, particularly that of 1938, bear an alarming resemblance to the 1987 election. In 1938 the NP won twenty-seven seats, while today's CP holds twenty-three. In both cases the far right, as a young opposition party, gained relatively few seats, but began to pose a major threat in several previously ultra-safe constituencies. The seats once occupied by "moderate" Prime Ministers Smuts and Vorster are now held by CP MP's, an enormous symbolic victory for the far right. While CP strength in 1987 has been confined, so far, to the Transvaal, NP support in 1938 was regional, with strongholds only in the Orange Free State and the rural Cape. The CP's apparent regional weakness has one further qualification: With a staggering 52 percent of the white electorate in the Transvaal (46 percent of the elective House of Assembly seats), the CP could conceivably supplant Botha's NP with trifling support from the other provinces. With nearly half of all Afrikaners voting for the CP in 1987, the NP can no longer claim to be the party of the Afrikaner. Thus Botha's position is analogous to that of Smuts in the 1940's, and the wrong tactics could prove fatal, a painful reality for the NP in times of economic and political instability. Much of the NP increase from 27 seats to 43 in 1943 was most likely due to increased NP credibility, after its creditable showing in 1938, to voters who previously viewed the NP as a wasted vote, an historical parallel which CP leaders are counting on. In one respect, today's CP has

surpassed its predecessor's performance in 1938. While it took Malan's NP until after 1943 election to eliminate competition from the far right, the Conservatives have emerged from their first general election as the only parliamentary opposition on the right. While the current Conservative threat may appear to have its limits, the emerging NP seemed no more promising in the early 1940's.

For the past forty years, historians have provided, at vast intellectual expense, a profusion of verbiage, fraught with superlatives, to explain the role of the 1948 election in South African history. It has been called the "most momentous" election, "a watershed," "decisive," and, amongst other things, "a revolution." Its effect was to transfer the government from Jan Christiaan Smuts and the comparatively moderate United Party to the National Party (NP) of Malan, which has tenaciously refused to relinquish its grasp on the electorate. Because it was under the auspices of the NP that the systematic segregationist policy of apartheid (separate-ness) was implemented, many of the authors of the above superlative descriptions of that election have maintained that it was in 1948 that South African democracy was decisively laid to rest and a profound break from historical continuity initiated.

While the 1948 election has often been cited as a decisive change in electoral will, an analysis of the election in historical perspective reveals not a public action, but a *maintenance* of electoral will, based upon traditional white South African values. The election campaign saw a united NP, which had

absorbed the far right after the 1943 election. A postwar rationing of some foods and a shortage of housing and jobs following demobilization combined to further drive poor whites and farmers into the expanding and increasingly attractive NP. Sufficiently alienated by Smuts' imperial entanglements in Europe's Great Wars, the National Party correctly estimated public perception of the race issue, indefatigably pursuing it to the ballot box. Meanwhile Smuts improvidently chose 1946, two years before the election, to introduce a bill enabling Indians in the Transvaal and Natal to elect five white representatives to parliament. In conjunction with such myopic planning, the 78 year-old Smuts supplied the NP with ample ammunition by acknowledging his top lieutenant, Jan Hofmeyr, as his successor. Hofmeyr was undeniably and unequivocally more liberal on the race issue than the majority of the white electorate--then and now. Significantly, Malan conscientiously based the NP campaign on the "black peril" issue, exploiting the Hofmeyr connection. An NP campaign leaflet implored the white bearers of "civilized" culture to "Vote against Hofmeyr and Save South Africa from Ruin." The electoral "surge" to the National Party resulted more from the timely opportunism of the National Party in playing upon Smuts' false estimation of the white public's racial views than a change in the intransigent values of the electorate. If Hofmeyr was to be the future, they would vote for the past.

The "surge," in fact, was not so much the result of a new electoral decision as an established historical tradition. In

both the 1948 election, which brought the National Party to power, and in the 1953 election, which kept them there, the United Party had obtained a larger share of the popular vote than the National Party. In 1948 the United Party actually acquired 81,511 more votes than the NP/Afrikaner Party pact, out of a total of 1,054,049, with a clear majority in two of the union's four provinces, and a plurality in another, yet were allotted fourteen less Assembly seats. It was rural loading that had initiated the change in ruling parties. The tradition of South African gerrymandering glaringly insured that if the white electorate would equivocate, the decision would be made for it. South African history had run full circle, from British dominion to unabated Afrikaner rule.

THE NATIONAL PARTY AFTER 1948: GRAND APARTHEID IMPLEMENTED

South African history from 1948 to the early 1980's was characterized by the systematic and legal application of separatist policies. The 1950 Group Areas Act and its amendments divided all urban areas into zones in which members of one race alone may own real estate, reside, or conduct business.³⁰ The specific guidelines have been altered throughout the laws' history. Before 1964 no African could legally be in an urban area unless he had resided there continuously since birth or had worked there continuously for

³⁰ Leonard Thompson and Andrew Prior, South African Politics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), P. 67-68.

one employer for ten years or for different employers for fifteen years; or was the wife, or unmarried child of such a person; or had been given a special permit, which were rarely issued.³¹ A 1964 amendment enabled officials to remove any African whom they judged to be "idle and undesirable."³² A 1970 amendment allowed local authorities to detain Africans illegally present in urban areas in work colonies and subject them to compulsory labor, similar to laws passed in the American South following the Civil War.

Having completed the disenfranchisement of indigenous Africans in the Cape in 1936, Malan's NP moved to paralyze the minute Colored and Indian voice in parliamentary politics. In the early 1950's, the South African Appeal Court disputed the parliament's recent passing of a bill removing Coloreds and Indians from the common voters roll by a simple majority, rather than by the two-thirds majority required in the Constitution. Through a complex process involving an NP attempt to create its own High Court with powers of final review, and the constitutional invalidation of the High Court itself by the Appeal Court, NP leaders enlarged both the Appeal Court and the Senate in order to appoint sympathetic nationalists. The bill was then passed by the required two-thirds majority. Colored voters then voted on a separate role to elect four white MP's to parliament until 1968, when all

³¹ Leonard Thompson and Andrew Prior, South African Politics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), P. 68.

³² Leonard Thompson and Andrew Prior, South African Politics. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), P. 68.

Colored representation in the House of Assembly was abolished, creating for the first time a parliament responsible to an exclusively white constituency.

Thereafter began a series of laws designed to systematize segregation and mute dissent: repressive pass laws for blacks; race registration laws; forced eviction of thousands of blacks from newly designated "white" neighborhoods in the largest peacetime mobilization in history; deprivation of South African citizenship for Africans; a myriad laws which precluded any effective democratic opposition to apartheid; and innumerable measures to provide cosmetic representation to unrepresented masses. The sheer breadth of the complicated apartheid system displays the phenomenal, if perverse, creativity required to erect a facade of democracy before a representatively indefensible system of government.

An understanding of South African history reveals the inherent reactionary nature of the electorate. White South Africa--through a combination of isolation, fear, conservative entrenchment, and poor whites' will to retain an artificial advantage over blacks--has stood still. In every historical instance in which the governing party has challenged the white electorate with mild reform, that party has either seen a decreasing majority or been replaced. White South Africans did not "surge" to the right in 1987 any more than they did in 1948; they remained, and expect to continue, in stasis. The 1987 election, coming on the heels of modest and largely

superficial reforms by Botha's NP, confirms the persistence of electoral values. While Botha sought to reduce international tension with mild reform, the white electorate responded to government initiative by protecting its interests.

The 1987 Election

In 1987 the white electorate demonstrated a decisive and revealing shift in electoral support. As in 1924 and beginning again in 1943, white voters rewarded a new party which appealed unequivocally for racial stratification. In a decisive sweep, the CP acquired 22 of the 166 elected seats in the all-white House of Assembly, while the PFP's representation plummeted from the 27 it had held since the 1981 election, to nineteen. Not only did CP displace the official opposition, it now threatens 15 marginal districts in which it is within 1,000 votes, and 33 in which it is less than 2,000 votes from victory.

While the election results show the National Party loss as a mere two seats, CP gains from the NP are much more spectacular than the figures suggest. The seats held by the CP before the 1987 elections cannot be considered CP strongholds because, of the 18 seats held by CP parliamentarians before the general election, only two were elected as Conservatives by voters in by-elections. The others had been gained in 1982 when a group of National Party MP's broke off and "crossed the floor" to the opposition benches to form the new Conservative Party. Significantly, the original CP MP's defected from the National Party over the proposed

Constitution (passed in 1983), allowing for a triparliamentary system in which racially exclusive Colored and Indian Houses were added in the latest blueprint for feigned representation (neither House wields power over issues of concern to whites, such as budgetary decisions). Thus, the total NP seat loss was 20. Yet, even this number is unrepresentative of the 26 percent of the popular vote received by the CP despite fratricidal vote splitting between far right parties.

By refusing a right wing alliance with the HNP, a pact which could have delivered the far right an additional nine Assembly seats (lost due to vote splitting between the two parties), the Conservatives have sought to give the HNP no alternative but to assimilate into the CP, unifying the right in preparation for the next scheduled election in 1989. The most extreme Afrikaner group, the AWB (Afrikaner Resistance Movement), began collaborating closely with the CP even before the election. Immediately after the election, Conservative Party leader Andries Treurnicht began the process of consolidating the right by inviting HNP supporters to join the swelling ranks of the CP. Because of vote splitting in certain constituencies, the May election results actually underestimated the strength of the Conservative onslaught.

The greatest stumbling block separating the two parties is ethnic focus. While the HNP draws its support almost exclusively from blue-collar, urban Afrikaners, the CP attracts a broader base. The Conservatives, who also have a large blue-collar Afrikaner constituency, have managed to attract a large

white-collar rural and small town bourgeoisie. English-speaking CP supporters, while relatively few in number, indicate that the CP is achieving crucial inter-ethnic support. Clive Derby-Lewis, Johannesburg regional chairman for the CP, typifies the white-collar, reactionary character of the English-speaking CP supporter. HNP insistence on Afrikaans as the only official language (instead of both English and Afrikaans, as it now stands) was the immediate catalyst for the breakdown in coalition agreements in February. The results of the 1987 election, which lost the HNP its only Assembly seat in the battle for the right, have provided increased incentive for them to soften their bargaining terms--or as the CP hopes, terms of surrender. A similar stance against black advancement also conspires to bring the parties of the far right to the bargaining table. Journalistic optimism aside, the spotlight which now illuminates the right may be merely a break on the horizon in the twilight of a bright new day for the CP.

The 1987 electoral outcome encouraged CP leaders to shatter the PFP's ethereal monopoly on electoral optimism. "The National Party is in its death throes," proclaimed an overjoyed Clive Derby-Lewis after the election, apparently taking the PFP demise as a matter of course. He proceeded cheerfully to explain that the CP intends to pressure the Botha administration to reinstitute restrictive pass laws for blacks and to enforce stringent residential segregation. Three months before the election, Connie Mulder, then the chairman

of the CP's strategy committee, confidently told reporters: "The Nationalists will fail. If we don't take over this time, we definitely will in 1989."³³ Significantly, Botha merely filled the void as National Party head left by Mulder after the latter fell from grace in a government information scandal in the 1970's. Mulder's death in December 1987 has not hindered the leadership of the CP. His remarks might be attributable to the excessively optimistic visions of a doddering reactionary ideologue, but the election results offer no support to this contention, and visions which would be attributed to absurd paranoia in the west have had an historic proclivity to materialize in South African reality.

To the chagrin of liberals, the NP was cowed into regression on reform in reaction to the May electoral outcome. "Now is not the time for dramatic new initiatives," said Stoffel van der Merwe, Deputy Minister for Information, "there is no agenda for reform." Van der Merwe, as a member of the "enlightened" wing of the National Party, is given to understatement. Botha himself viewed the results as "a clear mandate from the electorate to pursue security for the country and its peoples as a primary objective."³⁴ Translated from South African Newspeak, this means a return to strict enforcement of restrictions on blacks, and a regression from debates over the pace of reform, to debates over the wisdom of

³³ *Nairobi Daily Nation*, May 9, 1987 P. 9.

³⁴ *Nairobi Daily Nation*, May 9, 1987 P. 9.

reform, revealing, in effect, that the CP has already placed one hand firmly on the steering wheel of South African politics.

The NP's hasty reversal on reform policy probably reflects a more reliable interpretation of the collective white South African will than the received opinion of the global press. The electorate did not "surge" to the right and jettison the reformist PFP in reproof of a blistering pace of reform. The principal reforms consisted of the legalization of interracial marriage and the abolition of passbook laws for blacks. Ironically, it was Botha with these modest reforms who shifted too far to the left for the white electorate. Indeed, the white electorate has remained static.

The conditions under which the elections were held affirm the inherent conservatism of South African voters. In the pre-election months the National Party offered the South African electorate, amongst a plethora of repressive government actions, a year-long national state of emergency, denial of habeas corpus, the expulsion of foreign journalists for "biased reporting", criminal punishment for reporting on prison conditions, military raids on suspected African National Congress headquarters in neighboring countries, and xenophobic outbursts, such as Botha's "The Kremlin's work is being done in Washington," in response to U.S. boycotts. The electorate felt these conditions were so insufficient as to impel them to issue Botha a mandate for law and order.

POST-ELECTION GOVERNMENT POLICY

In the months following the election the Botha administration met words with deeds. Botha has acted on his mandate for "security" by pursuing draconian policies in hopes of diverting support of the swelling far right. A spot check of the *Johannesburg Star*, a moderately liberal newspaper, reveals the nature of NP policy during these months.

At the time of the 1987 election in May, 158 South Africans were incarcerated under the conditions of section twenty-nine of the Internal Security Act. This law, commonly used for detainment of political prisoners, is extremely effective in isolating leaders of anti-government groups, and thus neutralizing catalysts for political and social unrest, as illustrated by the confinement of many leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement in the early 1960's and the subsequent lack of organized protest. Section 29 allows for indefinite solitary confinement for purposes of interrogation. With the threat of the CP rising, the Botha administration raised the number incarcerated under this section to 208 in early July and 221 by July thirty-first, sixteen of whom were under 18 years of age.³⁵

On August 29, 1987, as well as every other day since the 1986 state of emergency began in June 1986, the bottom fringe of the *Johannesburg Star* contained the notice: "In terms of the State of Emergency regulations, news, pictures

³⁵ *Johannesburg Star*, July 11, 1987. P. 4; August 15, 1987, P. 4.

and comment in this newspaper may be restricted." However, on this particular date the notice took on an emphatic significance. Above the announcement an article described another round of yet more stringent proscriptions of free journalistic expression and news coverage. The new regulations, announced by Minister of Home Affairs Stoffel Botha in late August, were to be retroactive, holding publications accountable as of June 11. The new regulation, published in the *Government Gazette* on August 28, allowed the Minister to completely halt publications for three months at a time which, in his opinion,

make themselves guilty of the systematic or repeated publishing of material which, inter alia, has the following effect:

Promotion of revolution or uprisings in the Republic.

Promotion of the breaking down of the public order.

The stirring up of feelings of hatred or hostility towards a local authority or security force.

Promotion of the public image of unlawful organizations.

Promotion of the activities of unlawful structures.

Promotion of boycott actions and acts of civil disobedience.³⁶

In other words, the sweepingly vague guidelines allow for a broad spectrum of interpretations, enabling the Minister great

³⁶ Johannesburg *Star*, August 29, 1987. P. 3.

latitude in adjusting enforcement to the prevailing political climate. This could include quelling journalists' support of reforms in order to appease right-wing pressure on the ruling National Party. The increased restrictions on media coverage, which could be interpreted to make mentioning the A.N.C. a press-stopping offense, were obviously aimed at liberal publications, but Conservative Party members who publicly supported the regulations privately worried that the government might use it to restrict right-wing publications as well.³⁷ The new curbs on the media represent yet another government act which betray the bankruptcy of South African pretensions to democracy and the closure of one of the few remaining safety valves which acts as a ventilating force to stave off the eruption of John X. Merrimen's feared "smoldering volcano" in South Africa. The Minister of Home Affairs may well have plagiarized a chapter from George Orwell's 1984: "Ignorance is Strength."

That censorship continues to permeate all aspects of South African society is evidenced by the detention of nine actors in September 1987 during a performance of Gibson Kente's play "Sekunjalo" (The Hour Has Come). As the writer Nade Gordimer remarked, "The detentions are an indication of the increasing extent of censorship invading every area of South African life."

³⁷ Johannesburg *Star*, August 29, 1987. P. 1.

In foreign policy Botha maintained continuity. The official news agency in Angola, Angop, reported that on June 30, South African Defence Force bombers, supported by army units and helicopters, attacked military positions in Ongiva, bordering on Namibia. South Africa has had an extensive interest in the Ongiva region for years, represented by its control, largely under the S.A.D.F., from 1981 to 1985. While officials representing the South African government maintain that its troops enter into Angola only in pursuit of South West African Peoples' Organization (SWAPO) guerrillas supporting Namibian independence from South Africa, the Angolan government, which strongly criticizes South African apartheid, continues to attribute South African raids on Angolan military bases to an effort to aid conservative Unita guerillas seeking to usurp power in Angola. Although an SADF spokesman in Pretoria unhesitatingly derided the Angolan claims as "part of an orchestrated campaign against South Africa," the government later confirmed South African involvement. Support of Unita rebels in a nation supported by 30,000 Cuban soldiers and an untold quantity of Warsaw Pact forces is consistent with vehement National Party (and CP) anti-communist rhetoric, and what may cause anguish to Angolan authorities may win votes for their South African counterparts.³⁸

³⁸ Johannesburg *Star*, July 4, 1987. P. 6.

Across the South African border in Dakar, Senegal, a conference between white South Africans and members of the African National Congress, an anti-apartheid group anathemic to conservative South Africans and long-outlawed in South Africa despite its extensive support amongst the country's political left, attracted a handful of powerful whites, such as Dr. Van Zyl Slabbert, head of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA). In response, P.W. Botha announced strict passport controls for South Africans "who collaborate with enemies abroad," and threatened to restrict foreign funding for extra-parliamentary groups such as IDASA defined by the government as used for "undermining the State and promoting extra-parliamentary politics." Slabbert, who continues to await the outcome of the latter measure, replied uncertainly as to the Institute's future: "In terms of the stated goals of IDASA, we will have to see to what extent we can continue pursuing them and how it will affect our structure and organization."

Parliamentary debate on the repeal of the 1951 Groups Areas Act in September 1987 was uncontroversial enough for the Deputy Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, Piet Badenhorst, to say that the government "won't budge" on the principles of the Act, which "protect the right to own community life in own areas."³⁹ The word "own" translates from Natspeak (the specific derivative of Newspeak

³⁹ Johannesburg Star, September 16, 1987. P. 1.

used by National Party officials) as "segregated." He further quoted Amichand Rajbansi, chairman of the Ministers' Council in the Colored House of Delegates, that "within the context of present legislation the Group Areas Act does not say land must not be distributed equally and fairly."⁴⁰ On the other hand, neither does the Act say that land must be distributed fairly. In other words, the Deputy Minister upheld the "separate but equal" interpretation used to legitimate separate amenities in the American South, and eventually struck down by the American Supreme Court, by not preventing fair distribution.

While the above examples of government policy after the election represent merely a few amongst a broad spectrum, they give an indication of the National Party's strategy to restore the lost confidence of *verkrampte* voters (hard-liners). The CP's performance in the 1987 election, as with the NP in 1943, may instill new confidence in an electorate otherwise reluctant to waste votes. CP leaders have taken up the torch of traditional white South African values, and the impending threat posed by them was not lost on policymakers in the ruling NP. The arduous task ahead for the governing party will

⁴⁰ The accuracy of the context of the use of the Deputy Minister's quotation of Rajbansi remains open to question. Rajbansi, an outspoken opponent of the Group Areas Act who pragmatically stated that, in case a repeal of the Act was not possible, a modification might be acceptable as a "pragmatic" necessity, would seem an unusual source to quote in favor of retaining the Act.

be beating the far right at its own game without alienating its *verligte* adherents (the "enlightened" wing of the party).

MEDIA RESPONSE

Since the Progressive Party's unseasonable degeneration into political irrelevance, its subsequent replacement by the Conservatives, CP by-election gains, and the resulting political shuffle to the right, including the sweeping bans of relatively moderate anti-government groups, many journalists seem quixotically determined to defy logic--and political reality--in forecasting future events in South Africa. Reviewing the election in July 1987, Richard Brookhiser wrote in *National Review* that, "over the long run, the swing has been away from apartheid," citing the following statistics: "In 1978, when Botha first came to power, the pro-apartheid party in parliament, the Nationalists, held 134 seats. Now the pro-apartheid party, the Conservatives, holds 23," as if the NP had disavowed apartheid since 1978.⁴¹ Brookhiser's assumption that the National Party--the party which coined the term, established, implemented, and relentlessly promoted apartheid, whether by name or by euphemisms such as the currently favored "separate development"--is anything but *pro-apartheid*, betrays a breathtaking *niaveté*. Brookhiser's statistics merely indicate the support given two approaches to apartheid (together comprising an enormous pro-apartheid

⁴¹ Richard Brookhiser, "Democracy in South Africa" *National Review*, July 31, 1987. P. 36.

constituency), and perhaps a proclivity for self-deception. Despite an otherwise excellent analysis of the 1987 "lurch to the right," in *Foreign Policy* Pauline Baker concludes that "the NP's declining fortunes could create opportunities for antiapartheid forces to promote negotiations for a transition to a true, nonracial democracy."⁴² Baker's analysis is founded on the idealistic premise that "the impact of white fragmentation . . . could improve the West's ability to influence South African Policies," illustrative of the West's shallow perception of South African historical reality.

Time magazine has shown itself to be an intractable bastion of optimistic myopia in this respect, an audacious stand for a journal whose chimerical pre-election predictions betrayed themselves as a tragicomical study in ludicrous, if unintended, self-satire after the 1987 election returns.

The February 22 *Time* reported an "embarrassing setback" for the Pretoria government when a group of rebels temporarily usurped power from President Lucas Mangope of "independent" Bophutatswana, a reservation-style "homeland" for blacks.⁴³ Because the South African government regards Bophutatswana as an independent nation, it portrayed itself the savior of a "legitimate" black government by its victory over the rebels, snatching a measure of victory from apparent defeat. The phenomenal power and

⁴² Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 62.

⁴³ "Stopping a Coup in Bop" *Time*, February 22, 1988. P. 43.

efficiency of the South African military machine were also illustrated in the ease with which South African troops rescued Mangope and captured the rebels within fourteen hours of his kidnaping, thus instilling greater confidence in white power in the white South African electorate.

One week later, the heading "The New Black Middle Class" adorned another *Time* article subheaded, "With drive and talent, an affluent élite shakes up the old order."⁴⁴ The article stressed the rise of black, upwardly mobile South Africans, or "buppies," who were credited with no less than a "peaceful but dramatic revolution" in black economic power, and concluded grandiloquently that "Far from serving as quislings for the white establishment, the new black élite is emerging in its own right as a powerful arm of the liberation struggle." *Time*, perhaps conveniently, gave no figures for this ostensibly massive, revolutionary movement, realistically consisting of an infinitesimal minority of blacks which the South African government has prudently coopted (as in the repressive, and also black, homeland governments, which exercise extensive police powers) in order to derail movements seeking broader and more substantive gains. While a picture of a Soweto community contained the caption, "On the march to freedom: upscale housing in Soweto," it remains true that the small, boxlike houses pictured (which resemble somewhat the multiple housing tracts in cities like Daly City, South of San

⁴⁴ "The New Black Middle Class" *Time*, February 29, 1988. P. 56-57.

Francisco) are situated in a legally designated exclusively black area, where blacks were recently allowed the "privilege" to lease for 99 years, but never to own (and thus to pass on accumulated wealth in the form of inherited property) their houses. The sites of such "homelands" were usually agreed upon because whites had chosen *not* to live on them. It is also true that those few, fortunate blacks who live in areas designated as white are subject to immediate removal without recourse to judicial procedure at the discretion of the police. In addition, the article centers ironically on Soweto, where crowds ransacked black businesses symbolic of white cooptation in 1976. Finally, that the modest "middle class" of blacks are actually the antithesis of a revolutionary, or even reformist, vanguard is evinced by their continuing status without *any* form of political representation to establish or protect possible economic gains, and their willingness to work *within* the constricting structure of apartheid, at the absolute mercy of white legislators responsible to entirely white constituencies.⁴⁵ Therefore, it would be more accurate to say that this handful of middle class blacks, heralded as silent revolutionaries, buttresses rather than "shakes up" the old order.

⁴⁵ Although South Africa's tricameral legislature includes Houses for Indians and for Coloreds (although *none* for indigenous Africans, who comprise over 71% of the population according to South African government statistics), all legislation with which the white public has an interest remains the domain of the all-white House.

Visionary media optimism is not only reflective of, but also perpetuates, public misinformation and false expectations of South African politics. More importantly, propitious analyses often promote complacent inaction. The international community satisfies itself that, indeed, South Africa's racial underclass is making progress, if somewhat belatedly. In continually promising that the fulfillment of liberal hopes lie just around the corner, the media performs a disservice to those whose aspirations remain unfulfilled at every turn.

The Future of the Electorate

The combination of the structure of the South African political system, demographic realities, South African history, and the white electorate's perceived interests conspire to perpetuate the racial and political realities which have dominated the nation's race relations since its inception. The delegates of the Constitutional Convention entrenched racial exclusiveness in the 1910 Constitution by allowing for the removal of even the minimal guarantee of the Cape's limited nonracial franchise without Cape approval. Having done so, the overrepresentation of rural regions amplified the traditionally conservative rural political voice. Thereafter governmental policy has maintained a course nearly as consistent as the values of the electorate. Because the unrepresentative electoral structure persists, and because the electorate has demonstrated its unwillingness to alter it, we may expect more of the same for a long time to come.

If white South Africans are to move in any direction, immigration statistics indicate that they will further confound the predictions of journalists and liberals. In particular, the seemingly far removed Revolution of the Carnations which threw Portugal into turmoil in the 1970's, had deep ramifications for South Africa. The Portuguese withdrawal from Angola and Mozambique in 1975 created a growing population of white Portuguese emigres amongst the South African electorate which has only begun to exert its franchise privileges.

The Portuguese, admiring the strength of the South African government, a strength which Portugal lacked in its colonial affairs, have shown a preference to vote with conservative Afrikaners. Although reliable statistics are hard to come by, it is estimated that conservative immigration from former Portuguese colonies and lower class immigrants from Northern Europe have provided the seven percent solution for the far right in South African elections.

Former Rhodesians represent another white group likely to vote with conservative Afrikaners. Since the independence of Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia), approximately 40,000 whites immigrated to South Africa rather than submit to black government rule.⁴⁶ Alan Simon, Professor at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, has written that, "Since

⁴⁶ Alan Simon, "Rhodesian Immigrants in South Africa: Government, Media and a Lesson for South Africa" *African Affairs*, January, 1988, P. 53.

the immigrants who have come to South Africa are for the most part *verkrampste* 'Rhodesians', it comes as no surprise that they are extremely bitter about the cessation of white minority rule and concomitant privileges."⁴⁷ Simon also cited figures from his research of former Rhodesians in South Africa in which 36 percent of those surveyed actually answered that "South Africa betrayed [white] Rhodesia" in halting military assistance in 1975. Thus, not only are ex-Rhodesian South Africans instinctively suspicious of reformism, a sizable minority retains profound bitterness toward the National Party. Although their numbers are small, Rhodesian communities may provide key CP communities in certain constituencies.

Exacerbating the effect of right wing immigration is an alarming escalation of liberal emigration. In both 1983 and 1984, South African net white immigration figures reached over 10,000. Yet in 1986 the nation experienced a net emigration of approximately 6,000.⁴⁸ These figures represent the increasing exodus of liberals, unable to cope with the continuing turbulence of South African life. A cartoon in the *Johannesburg Star* portrayed two blacks watching as planes fly overhead. The caustic caption reveals the deteriorating condition of South African liberalism: "If it's not white liberals

⁴⁷ Alan Simon, "Rhodesian Immigrants in South Africa: Government, Media and a Lesson for South Africa," *African Affairs*, January, 1988, P. 64.

⁴⁸ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 72.

leaving for Australia, it's foreign newspapermen being deported."⁴⁹

The Conservatives' ascendancy divided more than politicians. In early July, 1987, the one and a half million member Ned Gereformeerde Kerk (New Reformed Church) lost nearly two thousand dissident members who left to form the Afrikanse Protestantse Kerk (Afrikaans Protestant Church), whose English name is indicative of their disaffection: The Church of Christ for White Afrikaners.⁵⁰ The new APK formed in opposition to anti-apartheid decisions made by the NGK's general synod the previous October. The APK opened its doors to white South Africans against all forms of racial mixing. Within two weeks of its founding, the APK boasted fifteen congregations, all of them in the rural Transvaal except for a single congregation in Natal.⁵¹ Dissatisfied members of another of South Africa's three white Afrikaans reformed churches, the Gereformeerde Kerk, may swell the ranks of the APK. The Gereformeerde Kerk, popularly considered the most racially liberal of the three, is strongest in the western Transvaal, not coincidentally, the bulwark of the Conservative Party in the 1987 election.⁵² Conservative whites may have to sever long enduring ties in order to adjust to a new political reality.

⁴⁹ Johannesburg *Star*, May 23, P. 2.

⁵⁰ The A.P.K. was originally named the Afrikanse Gereformeerde Kerk (Afrikaans Reformed Church) until it was discovered that a Colored A.G.K. already existed and, ironically was open to members of all races.

⁵¹ Johannesburg *Star*, July 18, 1987. P. 2.

⁵² Johannesburg *Star*, July 4, 1987. P. 12-13.

Compounding rightist influences, rural loading, the "weighting" of votes in rural districts, continues to overrepresent agrarian constituencies, significantly magnifying the relative strength of the characteristically conservative rural vote. Afrikaner rural predominance stems from the agrarian Boer lifestyle which began at their arrival in South Africa. The Afrikaans-speaking population has always outnumbered English-speakers, comprising 55.9 percent of the white population in 1936, and an estimated 60 percent today.⁵³ In agricultural districts, however, the ethnic disparity between whites is greater. In 1960, three out of four rural whites spoke Afrikaans at home, and the number is increasing due to a higher Afrikaner birth rate and English-speaking emigration.⁵⁴

A vast majority of South African liberals are English-speakers. Only 7 percent of Afrikaners voted for either independents of the PFP-NRP pact.⁵⁵ Thus, liberals are concentrated in comparatively large and predominantly English-speaking urban districts. Their numbers enable effortless and uncontested victory in a few urban constituencies, a prodigal waste of politically expensive votes. In contrast, rural South Africa elects three to six more representatives to the House of Assembly than their numbers

⁵³ Union Statistics for Fifty Years, P. A-18; South African Statistics, 1978, P. 1 & 9.

⁵⁴ The emigration of English-speakers is discussed below.

⁵⁵ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 66.

would allow, were equal proportional representation the method determining parliamentary districts.

Rural Afrikaners remain the unequivocal beneficiaries of the oblique weighting of districts. In practice, the disparity between constituency sizes can be ludicrous due to woeful state of voting roles and legislation holding the number of MP's in each province at their 1977 level, despite a continuing rural exodus to the cities. The most extreme contrast occurs between the districts of Walvis Bay, with a constituency of 4,592 in 1987, and North Rand, with a constituency of 33,783. The result is that voters in one rural Cape district have the same representation as over seven times as many voters in the urban Transvaal. In effect, rural loading acts as a conservative governor in an already unprogressive system. As further evidence of Afrikaner entrenchment, the twelve non-elected House seats are apportioned according to the distribution of seats, the election of which have been shown to incorporate an inherent rural Afrikaner advantage, again, not according to distribution of the white popular vote. As a result of South Africa's peculiar electoral mathematics, parties which lost the popular vote have won several crucial elections, betraying the electoral system's highly unrepresentative nature--even amongst the country's white constituency.⁵⁶ It is also not coincidental that in every such case the victorious party has

⁵⁶ Barry Hertzog was allowed to stay in power in 1929, after having usurped premiership from Jan Smuts, Malan's National Party won its historic 1948 upset victory (again, over Smuts) and retained power in 1953 all without having won the popular vote.

been more conservative and more Afrikaner-oriented than the winner of the popular vote.

Ironically, the rural loading which empowered the NP in 1948 and again in 1953 threatens to operate against them in the 1980's-90's in support of the Conservative Party, further evidence of the white public's perception of Botha's reformism as excessive in the extraordinary quagmire of South African politics. The reason is a shift in the NP's voter base. Counteracting a tremendous Afrikaner exodus from the NP to the CP in 1987 was a corresponding shift of the nation's 1.8 million English-speakers from the liberal PFP-NRP alliance to the National Party. While only 31 percent supported the NP in 1977, 57 percent cast their ballots for the NP in 1987.⁵⁷ With 90 percent of the English-speaking population living in cities, the NP faces the poetic justice of an overrepresented rural CP vote. The NP have become tragicomical prisoners in a history of their own making in seeking reform and international recognition, while facing the reactionary forces of the white South African electorate.

Increasing English-speaking NP support is most likely due to a combination of the NP's vague pre-election reform rhetoric (despite contradictory actions designed to appeal to the far right) and a perception that a vote for the PFP is a vote wasted. In this case, the NP would be torn by the polarization created by CP ascendancy, with NP *verkramptes* pulling

⁵⁷ Pauline H. Baker, "South Africa: The Afrikaner Angst" *Foreign Policy*, Winter 1987-88. P. 65.

rightward and *verligtes* seeking moderate reform. In this case, NP leaders would be forced to either threaten solidarity with policies which alienate one wing of the party, or espouse ambiguity at the risk of satisfying neither.

The situation in Johannesburg's legally designated "white" suburbs indicates that the governing party has begun to face just such a dilemma, and chosen ambiguity. In forging a residential segregation policy sufficiently vague to avoid alienating either wing of the divisive National Party, Botha has incurred the wrath of formerly loyal constituencies, while playing into the hands of the vigilant CP. The Botha administration hoped to quell criticism by leaving the Group Areas Act unenforced in some "grey" areas, but is under fire from the white residents of such regions. Even South African liberals betrayed the extent of their reformist zeal in the wake of the moderate reform which preceded the 1987 election. Previously safe PFP constituencies rebelled, refusing to elect Progressives. One such region, Hillbrow, a Johannesburg district with a burgeoning black population tolerated by the government, revealed the reluctance of white liberals to pursue reform in practice. As one Johannesburg housewife said, "If they are clean and not noisy, I won't object. But I hope my children finish school before the blacks are allowed in."⁵⁸ Although NP electoral strength allowed them to win a narrow victory over Hillbrow's PFP favorite with 3455 ballots, the CP

⁵⁸ *Time*, May 4, 1987 P. 30.

candidate rose from apparently nowhere to receive 1196 in what was formerly a characteristically liberal district.

Mayfair is another example of a Johannesburg suburb which betrays an increasing polarization and racial tension. Allan McCabe, chairman of the local ratepayers association, expressed in September 1987 the sentiments of whites living in an area increasingly populated with Indians:

This is Waterloo! As far as I am concerned this is the last ditch before we take the law into our own hands...We are not prepared to give an inch any more. The Government is selling us out. This is a white area yet this Government does nothing about it. It is totally inadequate. Botha and his henchman haven't the guts to make a decision...Now we are threatening the government that we will take our own action. We can't do much once people have moved in, but we will stop them from doing so. Hell, that is the law of the country. I know I can't go and live in Soweto. I don't have to be told.⁵⁹

It is a sufficient commentary on the inequality of the two areas, and on the logic of Mr. McCabe's statement, that nobody *wants* to live in Soweto.

To voters such as Allan McCabe and the white ratepayers association of Mayfair, dissatisfied with inattentive government enforcement of the Group Areas Act, the CP's unequivocal posture on residential segregation has become an increasingly attractive feature on the upcoming 1989 ballot. The National Party's refusal to repeal the Group Areas Act while leaving its provisions unenforced represents yet another indication of the governing party's endeavor to straddle a

⁵⁹ Johannesburg *Star*, September 16, 1987. P. 9. Johannesburg *Star*

divergent electorate, without appeasing either side. In Mayfair, as elsewhere, while the NP maintains cautious ambiguity, CP policy rings with a clarity rivalled only by that which hurled the National Party into an upset victory and through forty years of uninterrupted rule: apartheid.

A reform gap has widened between the increasing international pressure on the South African government to reform its racial policies, and the all-white electorate to whom the government is accountable, who have remained consistent, recalcitrant, and reactionary. The lesson of the South African electorate is the painful lesson of historical consistency. The lofty visions of hopeful liberals were again swept in 1987 aside by an intransigent and mulish South African electorate. In the immediate future, it is difficult to say whether the Conservative Party will repeat the right wing victories of 1924 and 1948, or whether Botha will be able to backpedal fast enough to block increasing support to the CP. In either case, the policies will remain the same: reform, as an issue, is dead. When Anglican Bishop Desmond Tutu, in the wake of the collapse of the PFP and the ascendancy of the CP, bemoaned South Africa's "darkest stage," he might have added what he knew too well: the burden which reform promised to uplift rests squarely and indefinitely on the back of black South Africa. 1987 election results notwithstanding, global journalism seems intent on duly continuing the optimistic perspective of imminent reform. While the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Johannesburg Star*

continue to dwell on stories like the one about the handful of Afrikaners who, since the election, crossed the South African border to meet with members of the African National Congress in Senegal, a worker in Pretoria pensively reviews the stacks of blank passbooks against a warehouse wall, idle since their abolition in 1986, wondering if he should move them to the front, where he can get at them.

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