

WHITE TRADE UNIONISM, POLITICAL POWER

AND AFRIKANER NATIONALISM

A review of: Louis Naude, 'Dr. A. Hertzog, Die Nasionale Party en Die Mynwerkers' (Pretoria, Nasionale Raad van Trustees, 1969)

by Dan O'Meara

The years between the formation of a coalition of the Nationalist Party of General Hertzog and the South African Party of Smuts in 1933, and the wafer-thin electoral victory of the "Reunited" Nationalist Party coalition in 1948, were of the most significant in South African labour and political history.

Not only were they a period of enormous economic growth, with the final emergence of a genuine industrialised economy; not only did they witness the emergence and political victory of a more thorough going and militant Afrikaner Nationalism than the rather woolly brand practised under General Hertzog, but more fundamentally, they were also a period of intense social and political conflict at all levels over the nature of South African society and the pattern in which it should develop. During this period, as perhaps in no other, the basis of social conflict in South Africa was laid bare and the class nature of the system of exploitation and racial exclusion revealed. A strong and militant African trade union movement developed to seriously challenge the structure of exploitation and was broken only by sustained and ruthless force. While the registered trade unions did little to assist the African movement, and in most critical areas actively opposed it, white workers were still organised and mobilised along class rather than cultural lines. The depoliticisation of *class interests* amongst white workers and their mobilisation in *cultural terms* and the seizure of key Unions in the Trade union structure, was *the essential*

step to secure a Nationalist victory.

NAUDE'S HISTORY

In this context Naude's is a fascinating and important, though thoroughly cynical history. It tells of the organised and cold-blooded assault by a small clique of petty bourgeois politicians on a key group of white workers and their all white trade union during the late Thirties and Forties. The cynical manipulation of miners' grievances against the hopelessly corrupt Mine Workers' Union for petty bourgeois ends. The attack on and takeover of the MWU had the explicit, and eventually successful, goal of breaking the solidarity and power of the organised white working class, and in particular its two key organisations, the South African Trades and Labour Council (SAT & LC) and the still powerful South African Labour Party (SALP). It put into power a class alliance which through making a few concessions to the white fraction of the working class, forever ended its independent political power, and set out to thoroughly suppress the interests of black workers. It entrenched the political power of elements of the petty bourgeois as a means by which they were able to transform themselves into a fully fledged bourgeoisie; a capitalist class pure and simple.

HERTZOG'S POLITICAL TESTAMENT

At the same time, this book is quite blatantly Dr. Albert Hertzog's political testament. Published by one of the many powerful pressure groups controlled by him (Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees) at a critical stage of the vicious conflict within the Nationalist Party just before the Herstigte split, it is clearly designed to justify his position, and in particular, his view of the class basis of the Nationalist Party. The message to an ungrateful party leadership is quite clear, and suitably decoded reads "look what I did for you lot. If it wasn't for me you'd still be in opposition, so beware!". The issues it raised within the Nationalist Party have still not been settled within the Party, (despite the Herstigte split) and remain

important areas of conflict.

DISTORTIONS AND OMISSIONS

The book is in fact badly written, and the chapters constructed in such a way as to be deliberately misleading. For instance, Naude hints on page 106 that the withdrawal of financial support for the Hertzog organisation by the Ekonomiese Instituut of the F.A.K. in 1944, left it virtually penniless, while 8 pages later we are told that by this stage the Pieter Neethlingfonds was providing them with a steady £3,000 p.a. The time dimension is similarly distorted. The reader is offered almost no guide to even the approximate dates of important events and decisions. The author is guilty too of very serious and deliberately misleading omissions, and in a few instances of outright falsification. Two examples will suffice. Quite incredibly, given the fact that it was behind the entire operation, the Afrikaner Broederbond is mentioned only once, and then in quoting the 'Rand Daily Mail'. Secondly the corruption of the leadership of the Mine Workers' Union is repeatedly, and quite correctly, emphasised, yet the Hertzogite successor as Secretary of the MWU from 1948, Daan Ellis, is praised to the skies for his ability, strength and integrity. No mention is made of the fact that in 1952, this valiant Hervormer was found guilty of the gravest corruption and sentenced to eighteen months hard labour. Released on a legal technicality he continued in his post till his death in 1963. Other anomalies must be mentioned. Naude attacks, often very movingly, the poverty, humiliation, deculturalisation and naked exploitation of the mineworkers' by the Chamber of Mines aided and abetted by a docile government

Yet not once in 284 pages are the migrant Africans, who comprise over 90% of the mining labour force, even mentioned. Let alone their appalling working and living conditions, desperate exploitation and ruthless oppression by Chamber and government, aided and abetted by white miners. There is also a long, sick, passage (pp. 78-82) in which the author describes the glorious, innocent, and

apparently quite legal enjoyment the Bloemfontein Blackshirts found in beating in the heads of the (largely Afrikaans-speaking) female members of Solly Sach's Garment Workers' Union with "verskillende wapens". Sachs was the red rag to the Nationalist bull in that he (as a Jew, none the less) found the secret of utilising Afrikaner cultural symbols for effective class mobilisation. That of course was the ultimate threat!

THE CENTRAL THESIS

Yet, despite all this, the central thesis of the book is sound! But for the sustained attack on the trade unions by Albert Hertzog and his associates in Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees, the by then largely Afrikaans-speaking, white fraction of the working class would have continued its long tradition of support for the Labour Party. The Nationalist Party would not, for the first time ever, have won the six working class constituencies on the Rand which put it (in coalition with the Afrikaner Party) into political power with a Parliamentary majority of five on a minority vote in 1948. So despite its pathetic quality as serious history, its tendentious nature and myriad faults, this is an important book, because of both the conjuncture and class view it represents. It is full of direct and indirect clues on the role of the Broederbond in South African politics; the changing nature of that role; and the particular class concerns of the so called "ethnic" ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism. Though notable more for what is left unsaid than said, it illuminates and raises most of the critical questions about the specific type of industrial society which developed in South Africa. Particularly issues relating to the control of the working class, white and black; the role of the state in relations between capital and labour; the development of a racially divided working class and the changes affected by Afrikaner Nationalist rule in the relationship between fractions of this class and the state.

NEED FOR A STRUCTURAL EXPLANATION

If these important issues are to be fully grasped, it is essential that analysis transcends that of the propaganda of the actors involved and goes behind the personalities (Naude's is a personality oriented History) to seek structural explanations for the developments in white trade union politics during this critical phase in South African labour history. In this approach it is necessary to see what it was about the mining industry and the composition of its white labour force which made it the focus of the attack on trade unions.

CENTRAL IMPORTANCE OF MINING

Since the discovery of diamonds in the late 1860's, South Africa's social history has been dominated by the needs of, and the conflicts surrounding the mining industry, particularly gold mining. The historical and contemporary economic importance of the mining industry speaks for itself and need not concern us here. What is relevant is a brief outline of how the class structure, and particularly divisions within the working class, are largely a function of mining interest. From 1890 onwards, intense class conflict between fractions of Labour and Capital developed on the mines, centering almost exclusively on the question of cheap labour and the relationship between skilled and unskilled. Initially the skilled labour requirements of the mining industry had been met through the importation of experienced workers from the coal and tin mines of Britain. For a significant part of the early period of mining, the skilled work force was composed largely of foreigners. These "Cousin Jacks" as the British miners were commonly known, brought with them their habits of trade unionism, and sought to protect their interests by organising themselves into *craft* unions. The key to the power of craft unions lies in the fact that they, and not management, lay down the criteria for, and control admission to, the craft. Where craft unions are operating successfully, no person can enter these skilled trades without the consent of those already in them. Where the need for skilled labour is

strong, this craft unionism is obviously a potent weapon in the skilled workers' arsenal. It is in their interests to keep admissions to the craft low, and the criteria rigorous, to ensure strong demand for their skills and correspondingly high wages. The apprenticeship system was generally the means by which this was effected. Thus by their nature, craft unions are elitist and exclusivist, concerned primarily to protect the position of the skilled worker from competition from other less, or unskilled workers.

MOTIVATED BY ECONOMIC INTERESTS

The often vicious and bloody conflict between capital and labour on the gold mines up to 1924 centred largely on this issue - the right of the skilled workers to control admission to their crafts and exclude less skilled workers. It is crucial to note that from the outset this exclusivism was motivated by blatantly economic, rather than racial, interests. Initially at least, the Cousin Jacks' directed their concern at both the major sources of cheap labour, migrant Africans, *and* the increasing numbers of Afrikaans-speakers who had been forced off the land by the devastating economic effects of the British scorched-earth policy during the Anglo-Boer War. The initial impetus for the large scale proletarianisation of Afrikaners was, just as for Africans, conquest! Yet despite the often extreme poverty of the urban Afrikaner, there was a critical difference between the position of unskilled African and unskilled Afrikaner workers. After 1906, every white male in the Transvaal, however humble, had the vote. His interests thus became a source of political competition in which he had some say. As Afrikaners moved into the cities, those who could find employment filled low paid, unskilled or semi-skilled positions - a pattern which persisted for years. In 1939, 60.2% of all unskilled white workers were Afrikaans-speakers, as opposed to only 19.1% of artisans. The first large scale influx of Afrikaner workers onto the mines occurred in 1907 when striking British miners were simply replaced, at lower wage rates, by unemployed Afrikaans-

speaking workers. Yet these workers were at best only semi-skilled, and only a stop gap replacement. Though the British exclusivity had been broken, Afrikaans miners as a group filled the lower ranks of the occupational hierarchy on the mines. Their economic position too was precarious. The Chamber of Mines was forever seeking cheaper sources of labour, and thus these Afrikaans workers too began to act collectively to protect their position from undercutting by semi-skilled black labour. The vote was a powerful weapon in this struggle which waged for two decades culminating in the bloody "Rand Revolt" of 1922 on precisely this issue.

Thus the *racial* division of labour between skilled and unskilled was finally laid down by the intense *class* conflict 1890-1922. The development of the so-called "white labour aristocracy" has been well covered by Johnstone and others(1). The point to note for the purposes of this paper is that it was the product of thirty years of bitter and always very violent class conflict between capital and labour. Between the Chamber, interested only in cutting its steep operating costs and raising often low profit margins, and skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled white workers, interested only in protecting their positions from undercutting *from whatever source*. Moreover, and this point is crucial for the understanding of Hertzog's successful assault on the Trade Union establishment, labour was lead by skilled, organised, English-speaking workers. The leadership of the white trade union movement came from an exclusivistic, long-proletarianised group. On the other hand, the largely Afrikaans-speaking membership had been proletarianised by conquest and its economic effects, and despite their large numbers, were not represented in either the Trade Union or Labour Party leadership (at least till the fairly late Thirties). Yet, Afrikaans workers responded socially and politically in terms of their perceived economic interests, displaying a healthy interest in working class organisations, and appear to have voted solidly for the Labour Party. They made *no attempt* to organise themselves along cultural, "Christian-National" lines. On the other hand, their skilled, English-

speaking class fellows displayed a strong susceptibility to the imperialist message of the South African and Unionist Parties. The Labour Party's loss of 12 seats to the South African Party in the 1921 General Election was due to large desertions by the British miners to the blatantly jingoistic appeal of the S.A.P. Afrikaner workers remained loyal to the Labour Party, which in 1924 entered a "pact" with Hertzog's Nationalists and won the election. From this date till its eventual demise in the 1958 elections, the Labour Party lost its independence, remaining closely and cosily identified with the Nationalist till 1933, and the United Party thereafter.

THE PACT GOVERNMENT

The pact government represented a class alliance. On the one hand the Nationalist Party represented Cape and Free State commercial farming interests, nascent Cape Afrikaner Capital (Sanlam and Santam), the smaller dispossessed or severely threatened farmers of the Northern Provinces and the Afrikaans-speaking element of the urban petty bourgeoisie. On the other the Labour Party represented English speaking skilled labour and recently proletarianised Afrikaners. The groups represented in the class alliance attacked the imperialist interests of mining capital, and through the state appropriated part of its surplus (a) to allow the emergence of a national bourgeoisie based on industry and agriculture, and (b) to protect white labour in a position of privilege(2). It took important steps to establish some form of economic independence for South Africa (protection, ISCOR etc), set up statutory entrenchment for white labour's privileges and provided subsidised employment for the newly proletarianised unskilled through the "civilised labour policy". The crisis of South African capitalism during the Depression and the Gold Standard crisis in particular, broke this coalition. The Fusion between Smuts' South African Party and elements of Hertzog's Nationalist Party in 1934 weaned industry, the Free State commercial farming interests and organised white labour out of the Pact coalition into an alliance with Transvaal commercial farming,

and, more importantly, mining capital. Given the nature of the boom following the abandonment of the Gold Standard, the mining interests rapidly gained the upper hand in the United Party - just as the core of the national bourgeoisie who remained with Malan in the "Purified" Nationalist Party had predicted.

TWO REMAINING AREAS OF LABOUR UNREST

The industrial and political conflict 1933-1948 did not centre on the struggle of white workers for peripheral incorporation into the system of privilege. Rather it reflected the changing structure of production. The emergence of an industrialised economy simultaneous with the final collapse of the Reserve economies which had provided the key to the accumulation which facilitated this industrialisation. The leadership of the white trade union movement had been incorporated into the formal structures of power with the Pact government, and continued in this position under the United Party regime of General Hertzog. Confrontation between capital and organised white labour was thus ruled out.

Yet two important potential and real areas of labour unrest remained, centering on the two most recently proletarianised fractions of the working class: Afrikaans-speaking whites and Africans. The former are discussed below, but during this period an organised, militant black proletariat emerged to severely threaten the structure of exploitation⁽³⁾. Intense and bitter conflict developed centering on these two groups. In this struggle, whichever political party managed to *win the support* of white labour *and control* the militant African proletariat, was bound to achieve power. By 1948, the Herenigde Nationalist Party had managed the first (through gaining the support of a key group of white workers) and appeared to have policies which would achieve the second. The U.P. hopelessly divided by the conflicting interests of its class constituents, failed in both areas and narrowly lost the election.

STRUGGLE FOR THE SOUL OF WHITE TRADE UNIONISM

Naude's book is Dr. Hertzog's suitably edited version of the achievement of control over the strategic Mine Workers' Union. But moreover, it sheds much light on the intense struggle for the soul of white trade unionism during the Thirties and Forties. During the historic conjuncture which saw the rise and apparent fall of Fascism and the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major power, a small group of lawyers (Dr. Hertzog and Danie Malan), Academics (most prominently the ubiquitous Dr. Diedrichs), Bankers (Frikkie de Wet and J.J. Bosman of Volkskas) and cultural agitators (particularly one Dr. P.J. Meyer), decided to try and capture strategic trade unions for Afrikaner Nationalism. In 1936 they formed Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees. The force behind this group was the Afrikaner Broederbond, of which all were important members. Whilst not wishing to indulge in the conventional 'Sunday Times' type conspiracy theory of the Broederbond as a be hooded and insidious band of fanatical conspirators running the entire country, an understanding of the role of the Broederbond is crucial. The particular rationale behind its activities and its links with emerging Afrikaner capital in the North is critical to an understanding of the political forces at work during this period.

THE FORMATION OF THE BROEDERBOND

The Broederbond had been founded in 1918 by a railway clerk and a clutch of theologians as an organisation to foster "Afrikaner interests", and operated as a secret society after 1922. During the Twenties its operations were confined to the Northern Provinces, and it attracted support from petty bourgeois groups, particularly teachers and railway clerks. Until 1927 the Bond functioned as a semi-masonic organisation, but two events in the Twenties and Thirties were to alter its functions and lead to an expansion of its role.

After the 1926 Imperial Conference General Hertzog announced that the constitutional aims of the Nationalist Party had been largely achieved, to the great dismay of the many ardent Republicans in his Party. It would appear that the formation of a Broederbond clique within the Nationalist Party dates from this event, with the decision that Hertzog was no longer to be fully trusted, and the Bond was definitely reorganised during the late Twenties. Its major achievement was the formation in 1929 of a cultural front, the Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigings (the FAK) which soon came to dominate Afrikaans cultural life. Yet it was the shock of Fusion which provided the real stimulus to the Broederbond's activities. Given its petty bourgeois nature, the vast majority of its 2,500 members, opposed Fusion as a sell out to imperialism. It was only after Fusion that Dr. Malan joined the Broederbond, and General Hertzog claimed in a famous speech to his constituents at Smithfield that the Bond and the "Purified" Nationalist Party were one and the same body merely operating on different social planes. The Bond was again reorganised along much more vigorous lines and began to play a critical policy making and catalytic role in political and social life. Its three major areas of operation were: in the ideological and organisational redefinition of "Afrikanerdom" during the Thirties(4); the assault on the trade unions, and; the establishment and promotion of Afrikaner business interests.

CLASS STRUCTURE OF THE BROEDERBOND

The class nature of the Broederbond is the key to an understanding of its role and of "Afrikaner Nationalism" during this and subsequent periods. For much of its existence it was a petty bourgeois organisation pure and simple. The importance of clerks, which had been crucial to its growth during the Twenties, declined during the Thirties. Though designed to cover the occupational spectrum in any area in which it operated, it was dominated by professional groups after 1933, the most important being academics (particularly those at Potchefstroom), teachers and lawyers. It was mainly an *urban movement*

operating in the Northern Provinces which catered for those groups which had been moved/pushed off the land, yet did not have to sell manual labour in order to subsist. Its influence and importance among the Cape commercial farming and financial interests which remained in the "Purified" Nationalist Party under Dr. Malan was small. Indeed, Naude discusses the powerful opposition by "a large Afrikaans Trust Company" (obviously Santam) to the provision in Pieter Neethling's will which established a trust fund to finance Die Nasionale Raad Van Trustees. Santam's Chairman, Senator W.A. Hofmeyer was an immensely powerful figure in the Nationalist Party, often at variance with Northern elements. Hofmeyer virtually founded the Cape Nationalist Party in 1915, refused its offered leadership and had been responsible for Dr. Malan's appointment. During the fusion crisis, he was largely responsible for holding the Branch organisations for Malan. As the founder and chairman of Nasionale Pers, he had also established Voortrekker Pers in 1936, and was its chairman until he fell out with its Broederbond editor, Dr. Verwoerd, in 1939. His relationship with the Broederbond was always stormy, reflecting the different class bases of support for the Nationalist Party in the Northern & Southern provinces. This north/south division in the Bond's influence remains largely true today.

THE ORGANISATION OF AFRIKANER CAPITAL

For the Afrikaans-speaking petty bourgeoisie in the first half of the Twentieth Century, economic opportunities in the system of capitalist exploitation were limited not only by class position, but also by language. The economic system was dominated and controlled by foreign interests, and run as an appendage to the British economy. For Afrikaners who owned no land, who possessed a modicum of training which rendered them unsuitable for manual labour, and who were not prepared to assimilate to the dominant British culture, integration into the economy was difficult. The only broad avenues of available employment were the lower levels of state bureaucracy (the senior posts were long

dominated by those trained under the hated Lord Milner), education, law and the church. As an organisation explicitly designed to foster the interests of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, the Broederbond sought ways out of this economic impasse. In the Thirties it set about organising explicitly Afrikaans capital in the Northern Provinces (again in the Cape, with the relatively early establishment of Nasionale Pers, Santam and Sanlam, the position was somewhat different). In 1934 it established Uniewinkels, and with Albert Hertzog prominent in the proceedings, set up Volkskas as a co-operative Bank. In 1939, it organised the Ekonomiese Volkskongres which led directly to the founding of Federale Volksbeleggings (with massive aid from "non-Broederbond" Sanlam), Die Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, and numerous other concerns. One of the critical products of the 'Kongres' was the Reddingsdaadbond, the Broederbond's economic front designed to make the Afrikaner "Economically conscious". The strategy established at the Volkskongres concentrated on the consolidation of Afrikaans financial capital, rather than commerce and industry, and then the gradual filtering of ownership of the means of production downwards.

If infant Afrikaner capital was to grow in the face of tremendous hostility and competition from established capital, it was faced with a number of priorities. It had to organise the Afrikaans market by persuading Afrikaners to invest in infant and not very promising ventures when much more attractive avenues were available. But there were very few Afrikaners in the North with capital to invest, and they were largely associated with the United Party. Thus the only source of capital was the savings of Afrikaans farmers and workers. If these individually small sums were to provide the large amounts of capital needed, both groups had to be mobilised extensively. The only available mobilisational device which could unite their diverse interests was that of ethnicity, their common "Afrikaans" culture. Political power too was essential to this aim, not only because government contracts could be awarded to the "right" people, but because of the role of government in

determining economic policy and its power of appointment to the critically important advisory boards, planning councils and control boards.

THE AFRIKANER WORKERS' SAVINGS

Thus in this Broederbond co-ordinated, petty bourgeois attempt at independent accumulation, the savings of Afrikaans speaking workers were to be a major source of finance, the basis for accumulation. Higher wages for these workers, gained at the expense of either black workers, or less likely, the English-speaking capitalists who controlled mining and private industry, provided greater potential for accumulation and could be wholeheartedly supported. There was however, one serious flaw in this scheme. Despite sustained attempts at cultural mobilisation, Afrikaans-speaking workers displayed a dangerous tendency to act in terms of class rather than cultural interest. To respond as workers - admittedly protected from and therefore hostile to the aspirations of black workers, but as workers none the less - rather than as Afrikaners. The basis of this tendency was the trade union organisations, led by English-speaking artisans, and dominated by the craft unions which clearly had no interest in cultural mobilisation. Afrikaans workers thus belonged to class organisations, had their interests articulated in these terms and voted for the Labour Party. They had thus to be weaned from both. This was quite clearly the aim of the Hertzog Group's assault on the unions. As Naude writes:

"In teenstelling met die meeste Westerse lande waar die werker hom georganiseerd tot die Sosialisme gewend het in sy strewe om volle erkenning van sy regte te kry, het dit hier in Suid-Afrika presies die teenoorgestelde uitwerking gehad. As sogenaamde beskermheer van die werker het die Labour Party oor 'n tydperk van jare 'n magtige faktor in die Suid-Afrikaanse politiek geword Hierdie verband tussen die werker en die Labour Party moet verbreek word, want dan alleen sou die Stryd van Dr. Hertzog en sy klein groepie manne enige sin en betekenis kon kry. Dit was dan die

oorheesende boodskap wat van hulle uitgegaan het Geleidelik het hy (die Afrikaner werker) sy rug op die Labour Party begin keer en daardeur ook die socialistiese stelsel in Suid-Afrika vernietig" (page 257-258, my emphasis).

THE SPOORBOND

In point of fact, the MWU was not the first Union to bear the brunt of the Broederbond attack. In 1934, H.J. Klopper, the railway official who had virtually founded the Broederbond (and was later to become Speaker of the House of Assembly) set up a railway workers' union, Spoorbond. Despite initial success, Spoorbond was wrecked on the rocks of craft unionism. Interestingly enough, the final Death blow was dealt by Oswald Pirow, then United Party Minister of Railways and a self confessed Nazi. Given the role of the Broederbond in fostering Afrikaner capital and its relationship with worker organisations, another illuminating feature of Spoorbond was its establishment of a savings bank - Spoorbondkas - with an operating capital of £170,000, a mere three years after this trade union was founded. It was on the initiative of Spoorbondkas that the first Afrikaans building society was established, which, after a change of name, became Saambou.

WHY THE MINEWORKERS' UNION?

However this still leaves the question "why the Mineworkers' union?" unanswered. The strategic position of the Mining Industry has been discussed at some length. The Mine Workers' Union was a key union within the Trades and Labour Council, potentially the largest white Union, contributing a large portion of the T & LC funds. Yet after the 1922 Strike it had split, the artisans forming their own separate craft unions. By the 1930's of the 8 white unions in the mining industry, the MWU was the only non-craft union. Over 90% of the workers at the lower level of technical skills were Afrikaans-speaking, and therefore members, or potential members of the MWU. The depression began another exodus from the rural areas to the cities,

which, together with the expansion of mining after the rise in the price of gold, saw a large increase in the number of semi or unskilled Afrikaans-speaking whites employed on the mines. Yet once again the craft unions responded exclusivistically. The T & LC's delegates to the 1934 Volkskongres on the Poor white problem indignantly reported back to the T & LC congress that attempts were being made to solve the poor white problem by relaxing the apprenticeship system and other craft safeguards against labour dilution. Skilled workers, they insisted were in danger of being ousted by lower paid rural migrants, white and black. The craft unions on the mines reacted in true fashion.

At this stage the Leadership of the MWU had been captured by Charles Harris by dubious means. Harris quickly struck a bargain with the Chamber which protected his position, and like the infamous John Lewis, ran a thoroughly corrupt union which ignored the interests of the (largely Afrikaans-speaking) membership. Yet, throughout the twelve year struggle for control, it was *not cultural* but *class issues* on which the membership attacked the corrupt Harris clique, and its equally corrupt successors under Broderick, after Harris had been assassinated in 1938 by a young Afrikaner Miner. Because of the crucial position of the MWU within the SAT & LC, the Labour Party made the fatal, though inevitable, error of supporting the Harris clique against the bitter complaints of a very seriously aggrieved membership. The Labour Party had been founded to represent politically the class interests of white workers. Within the limitations of the South African social structure it had done so fairly and faithfully. But when it took the side of Harris in this dispute, it was seen by the membership to be supporting the Chamber of Mines (who backed Harris and Broderick), rather than their class interests. In a very real sense it *had sold out* its constituents to the bourgeoisie for a taste of political office: first in its alliance with the rural bourgeois in the Pact, then with the mining and industrial bourgeoisie of the U.P. regime. It thus gradually

alienated unskilled white workers whose share of the fruits of the vicious exploitation of blacks was minimal, whose economic position was precarious, and who through the workings of South African history happened to be largely Afrikaans-speaking. The evidence suggests that electorally at least these workers continued to support the SALP until 1943. However by the late Thirties they were available for mobilisation by any group which would articulate their interests, and particularly their precarious economic circumstances.

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE MWU

It was on these legitimate grievances against the trade union and Labour Party Leadership that the Hertzog group fastened, and for twelve long years fought both the Labour Party and the State for control of the MWU. They formed first a rival trade union, the Afrikanerbond van Mynwerkers, and then, when Harris concluded a closed shop agreement with the Chamber (in return for a promise of industrial docility from the MWU), the "Reform" movement within the MWU. Throughout its struggle for control, and despite its Afrikaner Nationalist ideology, these Hervormers were aided by English-speaking miners. Impervious to pleas for "Christian-National" unionism, they fought for their interests which the MWU leadership clique ignored. When the Hervormers eventually won control of the MWU in 1948, their success was in no small measure due to these workers.

By 1948, Afrikaans-speaking workers in the MWU had been successfully weaned from the Labour Party and the T & LC. Their votes in six mining constituencies put the Nationalists into power. Soon after gaining control, the new MWU leadership under Daan Ellis led the Union out of the T & LC (hitherto the only co-ordinating body) to form the right-wing Koördineerende Raad. Yet despite Hertzog's success with the MWU other white trade unions with large Afrikaner membership were slow to adopt his "Christian-National" trade unionism. It was only when left-wing trade union leaders (many of them Afrikaans-speaking) were removed from office by the State under the

Suppression of Communism Act in the fifties, that the back of white trade union opposition was broken, and "Christian-National" trade union ideology made substantial progress. (5)

There are two important lessons of the struggle for control within the MWU, one obvious from a critical reading of Naude's uncritical account, the other emphasised by him, albeit indirectly.

THE MYTH OF AN INHERENT CROSS CLASS AFRIKANER UNITY

The first is the myth of an all pervasive, monolithic Afrikaner Nationalism - a mystic cultural unity which allegedly establishes a priori bonds between all members of the volk, welding them into an overriding organic political and ideological unity; whatever their socio-economic position. In this myth, class cleavages are irrelevant for social action as the ideological vision common to all Afrikaners, derived from Calvinist theology, unites them into a much broader social unity. It is obvious, but equally needs constant reiteration, that Afrikaner nationalist ideology developed historically as a *response to social change*, and is no immutable *weltanschauung*. Afrikaner Nationalism has always been articulated by a shifting class alliance, until very recently, dominated by a relatively deprived petty bourgeoisie. Indeed, the emergence of a fully fledged Afrikaans-speaking bourgeoisie has discernably loosened the ideological hold of Afrikaner Nationalism per se. It is the petty bourgeois groups over whom the ideology still holds the strongest sway. Only after 1945 were Afrikaans-speaking workers incorporated into the Nationalist class alliance, and the petty bourgeois nationalists of Die Nasionale Raad van Trustees had to work long and extremely hard to win these workers to their cause. It was class factors, sheer naked economic interest, rather than the supposedly common cultural unity, which achieved this in the end. That the myth of Afrikaner cultural unity was, and is, at its weakest among Afrikaner workers is shown by the continuing opposition of such groups, but

particularly the less technologically skilled, to elements of government policy which appear to threaten their position of privilege (eg. the 1965 refusal of the MWU rank-and-file to allow labour dilution despite the agreement between the union leadership and the Afrikaner Nationalist government). That Naude should spend 284 pages describing the twelve year struggle of the Afrikaans-speaking fraction of the petty bourgeoisie to wean just a small group of Afrikaans-speaking workers away from the Labour Party, and that it was the Hertzog group's manipulation of the day to day economic concerns of workers rather than the emphasis on cultural symbols, which finally achieved this goal, highlights the myth of an inherent cross class Afrikaner cultural, political and ideological unity.

THE CHANGING CLASS BASIS

Both the ideology of Afrikaner Nationalism and the class alliances which have articulated it, have undergone many changes since the formation of the Free State Nationalist Party in 1914. And they will undergo many more, precisely because Afrikaner Nationalism was the basket which historically could hold the interests of various class fractions as they were subjected to the intense economic and social pressures associated with the development of first mining and then industrial capitalism. Whether it can continue to perform this function is debateable. The interests of the groups which composed the 1948 alliance are now clearly diverging, primarily as Afrikaner capital begins to articulate its interests as capitalists rather than as nationalists. As the continuing conflict within the Nationalist Party since 1960, but particularly after 1966 would seem to indicate, it is now doubtful whether the painfully forged cultural bonds can hold the nationalist alliance together.

DIVIDING THE WORKING CLASS

The second point relates to the inherent tendency of South African capitalism to divide the fractions of the working class off from each other as the prime

means of bourgeois political control. While this is a tactic common to all capitalist social formations, in South Africa it is facilitated by the existence of various racial categories. This is not the place to begin an analysis of racialism in South Africa, but rather to point out that through the operation of the interests of all fractions of the bourgeoisie, white and black fractions of the working class have been irreconcilably divided, to the point where the economic and social position of the former rests on the economic exploitation and political oppression of the latter.

There is much evidence (eg. the recommendations of the Van Zyl Commission and the utterances of the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut of late) to suggest that similar tactics are in the offing to divide black workers, not only ethnically within Bantustans, but hierarchically as well. A small group of technologically skilled blacks would be bought off (at the same time allowing a small black bourgeoisie with limited political rights to emerge), leaving a vast, rightless army of operatives ripe for exploitation. This has long been the cherished tactic of certain industrial, financial and mining interests represented mainly in the Progressive Party. That Afrikaner capital is no longer a struggling infant to be protected from competition and in need of regular doses of nationalism to shore up its strength, but has grown into a vigorous and efficient adult, in search of higher productivity and new markets, adds to this possibility. For the first time in South African history, all elements of the urban bourgeoisie have a common interest in higher productivity, and to achieve it are prepared to invest in higher wages for limited numbers of blacks. A united bourgeois front, independent of the demands of other white groups can emerge.

Naude's book is the heavily biased yet fascinating story of one critical phase in the division of workers from each other in the interests of a fraction of the bourgeoisie. That phase is clearly over, and, as the acrimonious departure of his major protagonist from the Nationalist Party indicates,

would seem to have outlived its usefulness as the once common interests of the Afrikaner urban bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie and workers diverge. The crucial questions now are:

- *How will these groups respond to the demands of black labour?
- *What political alliance will they forge in response?
- *How will black labour meet the threat of division?

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