

# AFRIKANER NATIONALISM AND THE JEWS

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DR. N. DIEDERICHS is an important member of the Nationalist party. Acknowledged as something of an economic expert, both within and beyond the ranks of his party, he delivers well-prepared and thoughtful speeches. As a rule he sticks to his specialised field. He often talks about industrial matters, and was chosen by the Government, early in the parliamentary session of this year, to move the motion urging an increase in the price of gold. He is thought to be in the running for Ministerial honours if the cabinet should be enlarged.

Dr. Diederichs recently had something to say which referred to the Jews in South Africa. He said it in the course of an address to an Afrikaner commercial organisation which received wide publicity. The Afrikaner, he said, could be congratulated upon the progress he had made in recent years in the industrial and commercial fields, but other sections of the population still had a disproportionate share of the country's economic wealth, and the Afrikaner must continue the struggle to alter this undesirable state of affairs. (Although the Jews are not mentioned, there is no doubt that the statement refers to them as one of the sections, the other being the English.)

This is, of course, an oblique restatement of the familiar thesis of economic anti-Semitism: the Jews are not ordinary citizens of the country, but a distinct competitive group threatening the rightful economic destiny of Afrikanerdom. For many a discerning South African Jew, the statement recalled memories of those frightening days, in the thirties, when a number of versions of overseas Jew-baiting movements flourished in a greater or lesser degree, in this country; or—what is more important—reminded him that there was a time when the garb worn by the Nationalist Party was quite different from its present post-1948, rather consciously pro-Semitic, new look.

When Dr. Malan came to power in 1948, his party set itself the task of wooing the Jews. It was a difficult task. The Nationalists sided openly with the Nazis while they were practising the cold-blooded destruction of millions of Jews and preaching the total elimination of the Jewish people. In Parliament (during

the war) prominent Nationalists offered up fervent prayers for a Nazi victory. In 1943 the Witwatersrand Local Division of the Supreme Court of South Africa held that Dr. Verwoerd, as Editor of *Die Transvaler*, had knowingly made himself a tool of the Nazis in South Africa. Eric Louw kept up an unremitting attack upon South African Jews. His main thesis was their unassimilability; he sometimes developed the thesis with arguments reminiscent of Streicher's "Der Stuermer". Dr. Verwoerd used the columns of *Die Transvaler* to maintain that Jews should be relegated to an inferior position in the life of the country. At one stage, for example, he urged strongly that a *numerus clausus* should be introduced in the universities, thus limiting the participation of Jews in professional activities.

Extracts from some of Eric Louw's speeches before and during the war will illustrate Dr. Malan's difficulty. Speaking in the House of Assembly on the 5 February 1941: "Then the Government also gets support from another section which in no sense can be regarded as part of the permanent population of South Africa, namely, the Jewish population . . . The Prime Minister will admit that the Jews are people who do not look upon any country as their fatherland. We saw evidence of that in France. When matters became serious there the Jews took their money and left the country. We notice the same thing in South Africa." On the 13 May 1940: "The fact remains that the Jew, right throughout the world, be it South Africa or Europe or anywhere else, has remained unassimilated, and he will remain so in South Africa." On the 16 May 1939: "Let me tell the Minister . . . that the public feel strongly about . . . the fact that that particular race is engaged in getting control over the business places in South Africa. They feel concerned about the extent to which that race is commencing to get control over the professions and occupations of the country." On the 29 February 1944: "They are loyal to the country in which they reside so long as things go well, but they shake the country's dust off their feet as soon as things do not go well; then they make a fresh start in some other country, and there they are again just as loyal until things go wrong there. We are told there are exceptions, but one swallow does not make a summer, nor do half-a-dozen swallows make a summer."

Two factors assisted the wooing process. First, the Jewish businessman (and, in this respect, the English businessman was no different) was ready to overlook Eric Louw's past, as long as

he was accorded normal facilities for pursuing his trade; and as Minister of Economic Affairs, Eric Louw was in a position to emphasise the sweet reasonableness of the Nationalist government. The impartial (and often—when compared with the previous government—very efficient) issue of import permits made it easier for the Jewish businessman to accept the argument that the unpleasant things said during the war years were “just politics” which no one takes seriously, or the kind of things that a party says but does not really mean when it is in opposition.

The second factor was the creation of the State of Israel. A strange mixture of motives made it easy for Malan (and Strijdom has faithfully followed his lead since) and the Nationalists to offer enthusiastic support to the new state. There was a sense of affinity with the Israelis in having thrown off the British yoke. A psychologist might have called it admiration for the achievement by another of what was for them still a suppressed desire. Then—this is a view which was put to me by a leading Afrikaner intellectual with genuine feeling—many Nationalists saw the success of the Jews against the Arabs as a victory of White over non-White. Malan himself, growing old, displayed and voiced with much fervour a highly emotional people-of-the-book enthusiasm for the restoration of the Jews to their ancient homeland in accordance with Biblical prophecy. This may well have been genuine, but there is no doubt that it combined with more practical expressions of the new Government’s goodwill to make the sympathy of the Jews inevitable.

Smuts had played into Malan’s hands by displaying some hesitation in declaring unequivocal support for the new state which came into existence before the Election of 1948. He had given to it South Africa’s *de facto* recognition only. The lifelong supporter of Zionism was persuaded by political considerations to withhold full support for Israel for fear of the capital that would be made of his action by Malan and his party. It is one of the ironies of recent South African history that Malan, leader of a party which had attacked the Jews, was able to use this half-hearted action by Smuts to peg a claim as the real friend of the Jewish people. Shortly after the election the new Government granted *de jure* recognition to the new state.

South African Jewry, one of the most actively pro-Zionist communities in the world, responded with understandable gratitude. When the new Government added practical support to its sympathy, by permitting assistance in money and kind to

go from South Africa to the struggling new state, Malan's victory was wellnigh complete. The Nationalists' black record of the war years was soon forgotten, and before long Malan was being honoured by the community upon which one of his important Ministers had until quite recently been heaping the grossest insults.

It was important that the new Government should cultivate its newly-acquired reputation with the Jews, particularly in the beginning when it was not quite sure of its strength and its capacity to remain in power. So the party line was established and assiduously guarded: Be friendly to the Jews. It expressed a policy which had a twofold justification: the march of Afrikaner nationalism must not be hampered by the opposition or hostility of a group like the Jews, and, in any event, all Whites must be encouraged to stand together.

The party line stands, but it has encountered strains and stresses. People encouraged to give the fullest expressions to their weakness for Jew-baiting over a period of years will, sometimes, with the best intentions in the world to honour the dictates of their party leaders, forget themselves and say what they really think about Jews, rather than what the Party wants them to say. At times a man is provoked. Or he is caught off his guard. When that happens the Party shows great concern, and every effort is made to emphasize its pro-Jewishness.

Last year some newly-appointed Senators made anti-Semitic remarks in the course of a debate. Reporting the occurrence, the Parliamentary correspondent of the Bloemfontein *Friend* said: "On that occasion Dr. Dönges (Minister of the Interior) was in the House and he showed signs of real agitation." He added that since then, several members of both Houses, formerly "notorious for their anti-Semitism", had "gone out of their way to greet and be friendly to Jewish members in the lobby and in the coffee rooms", the result of a hint by the Cabinet to remember that the Party was "strictly officially pro-Jewish". In its editorial comment the same newspaper said it was hardly surprising that Nationalist leaders were concerned at the incident because the Government "can hardly afford to have another item added to its already formidable category of hates".

One of the Senators present during this incident was Louis Weichardt, formerly leader of an anti-Semitic movement known popularly as the Greyshirts, which became active in South Africa shortly after the Nazis assumed power in Germany. The

fact that he was chosen by the Nationalist Party as one of those to be rewarded with a seat in the enlarged Senate, might conceivably be regarded as inconsistent with the Party's protestations of pro-Semitism. It has certainly not made it easy for Jews (and non-Jews, for that matter) who recall the activities of the Greyshirts, to accept those protestations as genuine. The Constitution of the Greyshirts, under the heading "The Jewish Menace" declared that it stands, *inter alia*, for: (a) the prevention of any Jew whatsoever from holding any official position in South Africa; (b) the treatment of all Jews merely as temporary guests in accordance with the provisions of an Alien Statute; (c) the disability of Jews to hold immovable property, directly or indirectly, except with the permission of the State. Senator Weichardt, in speeches and through the columns of a newspaper called "Die Waarheid" disseminated, for several years, vicious anti-Jewish propoganda designed, in the words of Smuts "to create ill-feeling and racial prejudice and in the end to lead to breaches of the peace", including extracts from the alleged Protocols of the Elders of Zion, repeatedly exposed as an impudent forgery. Documents seized by the Attorney-General at the Nazi headquarters in South West Africa before the war described Senator Weichardt as "leader of the South African Nazis".

An associate of Senator Weichardt in those days was J. von Moltke, to-day a well-known Nationalist Member of Parliament. In 1934 an action for damages was heard in the Supreme Court at Grahamstown, which became known as the Greyshirt trial. The Rabbi of the Port Elizabeth Hebrew Congregation claimed damages for defamation against three men in respect of a document alleged to have been stolen from the synagogue and testifying to a secret Jewish plot to destroy the Christian religion and civilization. The Court held that no such document had in fact been in the synagogue, and that it had been concocted by some Greyshirts in order to advance the aims of their movement. One of the defendants was von Moltke, at that time provincial leader of the South African Gentile Socialists, against whom the Court awarded damages to the sum of £750. Another of the defendants, was H. V. Inch, a provincial leader of Weichardt's Greyshirt movement. He was ordered to pay damages of £1,000, subsequently found guilty in respect of the evidence given by him at the trial of uttering a forged document and perjury, and sentenced to imprisonment for several years.

Quite often comment in the Nationalist press is inconsistent with the party line. For no apparent reason a report on some event will make a point not otherwise relevant which is calculated to arouse anti-Jewish feeling. There are two recent examples of this tendency. The treason trials were reported at length and in great detail in the South African press. It was *Die Burger* alone that found it necessary to include in its front page description of the opening of the hearing a statement that a journalist had said "that it was remarkable how many Jews there were among the White persons arrested." Similarly only *Die Transvaler* had occasion to refer to the number of Jewish students active in the campaign against University apartheid, a topic extensively reported in all the newspapers.

These are some of the factors that are beginning to worry Jewish apologists for the Nationalist Party. They are wondering whether the party has in fact undergone a change since the days of Eric Louw, or whether its pre-1948 anti-semitism has been suppressed merely as a matter of political tactics. Some are even arguing that genuine sympathy with and aid for the State of Israel must not be confused with friendship for the Jews in South Africa.

This questioning is a recent manifestation, and it is still only tentative. Jews react as Jews only when they are singled out as Jews. Otherwise they display the wide range of views to be found among White South Africans as a whole. Many of them have come increasingly to excuse and condone many aspects of Government programme and policy that they condemned in 1948; or to submit more and more to indirect intimidation; the fear, for example, that opposition to the Government will be penalised by the refusal of a passport. Some of them, on the other hand, are in the forefront of the fight against Nationalist apartheid and authoritarianism. The majority, unhappily, are to be found in the first group. And in this they do not differ at all from their non-Jewish fellow South Africans. Of all the generalisations about the Jews of South Africa, that which charges them with being unassimilable is the least valid. They have, in fact, assimilated only too well.

There are wider and more fundamental questions. Is racialism not indivisible? Does not apartheid, therefore, though directed to Africans, Indians and an arbitrarily classified coloured group, contain an implied threat to any racial minority? Such questioning can only cause uneasiness among many South African

Jews, and the uneasiness is there; because for them, as for all thinking South Africans, the test is not past assurances of goodwill, but the actions and pronouncements of Afrikaner nationalism from day to day.

## THE NATAL MENACE

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SOME years ago I delivered a lecture to the Durban Indo-European Council after which questions were invited. A quiet, friendly, Indian business man stood up and asked: "Why do the White people hate us?"

Just that. I had known the questioner for many years. This was the first and the only time that I have known him to speak in public.

I gave the only truthful answer that I could: "I do not know." It is useless to deny that Indians are hated in South Africa. The commonly advanced reasons for the hatred do not hold water.

In this article I am mainly concerned with Natal, where I live and where four-fifths of the Indians in South Africa live. This former British Colony is still the predominantly English speaking province of the Union. To me, an English speaking South African, the question becomes: "Why do the people of Natal, who are predominantly British, hate the Indians?" Or, "Why are the English in Natal so un-English in their hatred of Indians?"

English settlement in Natal began around 1830. Natal was annexed by Britain in 1845. The first indentured Indian labourers, many of them for work in the sugar plantations, arrived in 1860. Does the trouble go back to there? Did the white settlers who came a little earlier resent the arrival of newcomers in the way that even the best mannered of a ship's passengers will resent new arrivals who come aboard at a port of call? They may have felt that the large strange Zulu population that they had not yet had time to know was problem enough without another strange element being added. Whatever the cause, English-Indian relations in Natal did not start off so well as those of the British settlers in New Zealand with the Maoris they found well established there when they arrived in 1840.