

**THE POLITICS OF NONRACIALISM:
WHITE OPPOSITION TO APARTHEID, 1945 - 1960.**

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ASLIB Abstract.

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The African National Congress [ANC] led the struggle against apartheid in the 1950s. Unlike comparable national liberation struggles elsewhere in Africa and Asia, however, the resistance movement comprised an alliance of Congresses representing the four main ethnic groups in South Africa. This thesis traces two major developments in opposition politics over the 1945-1960 period: the development of a nonracial resistance movement and the emergence of organised white opposition to apartheid.

In the years following the second world war, the ANC sought to both develop a popular African support base and to co-operate with non-African organisations. This gave rise to wideranging debate among African nationalists over the efficacy of co-operating with organisations which were unconcerned with the encouragement of African nationalism and were potential competitors for African support. As a result, ANC leaders rejected calls for a nonracial or 'all-in' body in favour of a multiracial alliance of Congresses maintaining organisational and ethnic separateness. This in turn generated disputes among socialists over the relationship between national and class struggle, and the best means of pursuing the latter in a period dominated by African and Afrikaner nationalism. Both disputes came to focus on a particular issue: the form that racial co-operation in opposition to apartheid should take.

White opposition to apartheid in the 1950s was largely divided between two organisations. The South African Congress of Democrats [SACOD] was a white partner of the African, Indian and Coloured Congresses organised in the multiracially structured Congress Alliance. Formed in response to a call from the ANC and SAIC for a white Congress, SACOD supported extra-parliamentary opposition in pursuit of ANC demands for full and immediate equality for all. The second organisation was the nonracial Liberal Party [LP]. The LP supported the gradual parliamentary evolution of a nonracial meritocracy marked by a qualified franchise and increased social services for blacks. Extra-parliamentary action was initially rejected as inimical to peaceful development, itself seen as a by-product of industrialisation and black urbanisation.

SACOD and the LP differed over the means by which racial discrimination should be ended and the nature of post-apartheid society. SACOD's position as an equal partner in the Congress Alliance led some white LP members to join Africanists (who rejected racial co-operation in favour of an African-only struggle) and others in claiming that the structure of the Alliance had led to the ANC being dominated by 'white communists.' From the time that the ANC broadened the struggle against apartheid to include all ethnic groups, the form given to racial co-operation became and remained an issue of ideological and strategic disputation.

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This thesis is concerned with the development of racial co-operation in the South African resistance movement in the years between 1945-1960. It focusses in particular on the emergence of a white opposition to apartheid. The years immediately following the end of the second world war saw the African National Congress move towards developing a mass support base and adopting extra-parliamentary methods in support of a national liberation struggle. At the same time, the ANC entered a formal alliance with the South African Indian Congress [SAIC] which was joined in 1953 by both the South African Coloured People's Organisation and the (white) South African Congress of Democrats. The *Freedom Charter*, a statement of principle adopted by the Congress Alliance in 1956 (and which remains the ANC's guiding document) called for complete nonracial equality in all fields of life.

Behind the formal statements and organisational arrangements which committed the Congress movement to a nonracial future lay a host of ideological and strategic debates and disputes which are ignored in existing historiography. Disagreement existed over the relationship between class and national struggle, co-operation with communists, the efficacy of extra-parliamentary methods of opposition, and the goals of the ANC: disputes over these issues came to focus on the question of the form that racial co-operation in the struggle against apartheid should take.

The emergence of the ANC as the premier body in an extra-parliamentary liberation struggle in the late 1940s obliged liberals, socialists and others opposed to apartheid to reassess their ideological and strategic standpoints. This was particularly true of whites who opposed racial discrimination but who were wary of African nationalism, alienated by anti-white sentiment and unable to join the ANC. As a result, both liberal and communist ideology and strategy were significantly modified. Such changes flowed in large part from debates undertaken by white activists and intellectuals in the late 1940s, and were compounded by interaction with the black Congresses in the 1950s.

Whites joined the Congress movement through the South African Congress of Democrats [SACOD], a white body which worked alongside the African, Indian and Coloured Congresses. SACOD had a considerable number of former members of the Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA] in its ranks, and became the focus of hostility from a number of organisations which accused the ANC of being dominated by (white) communists. Such attacks emanated from African nationalists opposed to racial co-operation, from anti-communist white liberals, and from marxists who supported class struggle rather than national struggle. White liberals in 1953 formed the Liberal Party [LP],

a nonracial amalgam of prominent parliamentarians and younger activists brought into the political arena as the ideals fought for in the second world war were overturned by the Nationalist Party government. The LP initially opposed extra-parliamentary activity and universal suffrage, but a growing black membership and grass-roots co-operation with the Congress movement gradually radicalised the LP programme.

The incorporation of whites in the black liberation struggle and co-operation with those who broadly supported the aims of the Congress movement cemented ANC commitment to nonracialism. The adoption by the Congress Alliance of the *Freedom Charter*, which opened by stating 'that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white,' bore testimony to the role of whites in maintaining nonracial values in a racially polarised society.

The first two chapters offer a review of economic and political changes in the 1942-1952 period, a watershed in South African politics. During the war, industrial manufacturing became the largest single sector of the economy. The need of secondary industry for a stable urbanised black labour force came to compete with the migrant labour system. With increased demand for labour and the partial relaxation of discriminatory legislation, black urbanisation increased markedly, as did civic and industrial organisation and action.

In the broad context of a war fought in defence of democracy and domestic black political and industrial mobilisation, three main themes are discussed: the growth and radicalisation of the ANC, the emergence of racial co-operation, and the response of whites opposed to racial discrimination. In 1943 the ANC adopted *Africans' Claims in South Africa* which demanded universal suffrage, land redistribution and immediate equal rights for all. Six years later the ANC endorsed extra-parliamentary action including strikes, civil disobedience and passive resistance. The ANC also entered a formal alliance with the SAIC and co-operated informally with the (Coloured) African People's Organisation and trade unions.

The radicalisation of African politics required a response from whites opposed to segregation, who fell into three broad categories: liberals, white Communist Party members, and activists in the trade union movement and elsewhere. White liberals rejected extra-parliamentary activity as inimical to evolutionary development, which they argued would flow from the reproduction of urban labour. Liberals in parliament, welfare organisations and research bodies such as the Institute of Race Relations appealed for restraint on the part of ANC leaders and for concessions by the UP government as a means of encouraging the growth of a black middle class.

The Communist Party, a nonracial organisation with a predominantly African membership but a significant number of white activists and intellectuals, supported national liberation as the initial phase of a broader social revolution. With the growth of African nationalism and the increasing prominence of the ANC, the CPSA and the broader white left disputed the relationship between class and national struggle. The postwar reaffirmation of the CPSA's national democratic programme in support of a 'two-stage' revolution was disputed, with some CPSA members arguing that the national movement was led by and

represented the interests of the black bourgeoisie.

Such claims were given added weight by the actions of the ANC Youth League, an organisation dominated by young urban black intellectuals who saw the CPSA as a competitor for African support. The ANCYL successfully stymied ANC/CPSA co-operation in various campaigns in the late 1940s, and violently opposed the 1950 May Day stay-away supported by the CPSA. Disputes were cut short by the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act, in the face of which the CPSA disbanded itself.

In 1951 the ANC, the SAIC and the Franchise Action Committee [FRAC], a predominantly Coloured body, organised the Campaign of Defiance against Unjust laws. The Defiance Campaign saw over 8000 volunteers imprisoned for breaking apartheid regulations and ANC paid-up membership rose to 100 000. Whites sympathetic to the goals of the ANC and SAIC agitated for an active role in the Campaign. By November 1952 the Defiance Campaign was becoming marked by anti-white sentiment, and white defiance was sanctioned with whites arrested in Johannesburg and Cape Town.

At the same time the War Veteran's Torch Commando was launched in opposition to the constitutional abrogation which attended government attempts to disenfranchise Coloured voters. The Commando, an overwhelmingly white organisation, soon had a paid-up membership of some 250 000 people attracted by the non-party nature of the Commando and the dramatic torchlit demonstrations it organised. As the Commando grew in size and significance, however, the United Party [UP] removed white radicals and the militancy they brought to the Commando, and in 1952 the Commando joined the UP in registering voters in preparation for the 1955 general election.

The political mobilisation of the early 1950s saw the emergence of two distinct forms of white opposition to apartheid. White liberals worked closely with the Torch Commando and UP; while sympathetic to the goals of the Defiance Campaign, liberals appealed to the ANC for restraint and for 'reasonable' demands such as the qualified franchise. Radical whites in contrast supported and eventually participated in the passive resistance movement, and called for a direct role in black extra-parliamentary politics.

As a result of the white sympathy and support evoked by the Defiance Campaign, in 1952 the ANC and SAIC jointly hosted a meeting at which they proposed the creation of a white Congress. Liberals present at the meeting refused to support the demand for universal suffrage, to join a white organisation, or to co-operate with the former CPSA members present. The Congress of Democrats formed at the meeting was a small organisation committed to the goals and strategies of the Congress movement, and initially made up to a large extent of former CPSA members.

Having traced the broad lines of development of white opposition politics, the thesis focusses in detail on debates over the form that racial co-operation should take, and its implications for the resistance movement. The Congress Alliance was multiracially structured: that is, ethnically separate Congresses co-ordinated activities by means of committees at local, regional and national levels. The roots of multiracialism lay in large part in the hostility which marked relations between the ANC Youth League and CPSA in the 1944-1950 period.

Both the CPSA and ANCYL sought to influence the ANC at a time of black political

mobilisation, and the conflict between them was at one level a power struggle. At another level, however, the conflict was ideological. The struggle in South Africa, for the ANCYL, was part of a Pan-African anti-colonial movement. The ANCYL called on the ANC to radicalise its policies and methods so as to capitalise on the growth of African nationalism, and attacked other organisations which sought to rally African support. The League became an increasingly powerful lobby within the ANC, winning six seats on the National Executive Committee in 1949, while the ANC radicalised its strategies and grew in significance. As a result, the CPSA was forced to reassess its approach to the national movement.

The reassessment of the relationship between class and national struggle, undertaken by the CPSA in the late 1940s and continued in discussion clubs formed after the CPSA disbanded in 1950, is analysed in detail. Opinion in the party diverged sharply, and regional differences between the Cape on the one hand, and Natal and the Transvaal on the other, became clear. For some CPSA members, particularly in the Cape, South Africa was a capitalist society in which racial discrimination was seen as the remnant of a colonial past. The role of the CPSA, they argued, was to be the independent organisation of the working class, with its structures separate from the national movement, which was seen having been both launched and led by the black bourgeoisie. The ethnically separate Congresses were seen to be further emphasising racial differences in place of class unity, and in 1950 the CPSA Central Committee proposed the formation of a single, nonracial organisation in which the working class would predominate through sheer force of numbers.

For CPSA members in the Transvaal and Natal, who co-operated closely with the Congress movement and later emerged as founders of the South African Communist Party, South African society represented 'Colonialism of a Special Type.' The permanently settled white community was seen to operate an oppressive system little different from colonial regimes elsewhere. African nationalism was taken to be a natural response to such conditions, and the role of communists was to co-operate closely with the national movement in mobilising Africans in an African organisation and prosecuting the first stage of the revolution.

Both the ANCYL/CPSA dispute, as well as the internal differences of the CPSA, focussed on the question of the form that racial co-operation should take. Chapter five analyses the formation of the South African Congress of Democrats in the light of disagreement amongst former CPSA members and the broader white left. It questions the assumption of most authors that SACOD was a 'front' for white communists unable to gain membership of the ANC but intent on directing its activities. The formation of the white Congress, rather than being the consensual act of white ex-communists, further exacerbated existing differences within their divided ranks. These were compounded by SACOD's role within the Congress Alliance, which was to bring whites into the struggle against apartheid rather than organising among blacks.

Chapters six and seven analyse developments in liberal thinking and the emergence of an organised liberal opposition in the 1948-1958 period. During that time, liberalism was transformed from a cautious incremental creed restricted to a small group of white

parliamentarians and educationalists concerned to influence the UP, to an increasingly coherent programme based on equal rights, the redistribution of land and wealth, and the pursuit of the objectives by extra-parliamentary as well as parliamentary means through the Liberal Party.

In the late 1940s, liberals published a series of programmes which outlined the means by which the evolutionary development of a nonracial society could be attained. Wartime industrialisation had accelerated the development of a permanently urbanised black population; liberals argued that the extension of social services and limited political rights to urban Africans would lead to the growth of a black middle class with a stake in the system and less amenable to the influence of the ANC or the CPSA. By 1952, the political terrain had become increasingly polarised between African and Afrikaner nationalism. Liberals formed the South African Liberal Association in an attempt to bring pressure to bear on the UP to outline and follow a middle course between the two nationalisms. The Association was led by liberals who had been prominent in the 1940s, and included a number of less experienced activists brought into the political arena by the Torch Commando.

Following the 1953 general election, the Liberal Party was formed under the leadership of Margaret Ballinger, the leading liberal parliamentarian of the period. The new party was almost immediately beset by differences over both ideology and strategy. The leaders of the LP saw the party as a vehicle for furthering the aims they had set out in the late 1940s. Other party members, in contrast, saw the party as a means of generating black support for liberal ideals, and called for the endorsement of universal suffrage and participation in extra-parliamentary campaigns. Although almost all LP members were anti-communist and attacked SACOD as a communist front, differences also existed over anti-communist attacks on the ANC and SAIC. Finally, the LP was unable to develop a coherent economic policy as the left and right wings came to compete for leadership of the party.

The LP remained deeply divided until the party leadership was changed in 1956. Thereafter, the party co-operated with the ANC in organising grass-roots resistance to forced removals, and with the SAIC in opposing implementation of the Group Areas Act. As a result, black party membership grew, and the LP programme was altered. By 1960, the LP endorsed a set of policies little different from the *Freedom Charter*, and participated in boycotts and other extra-parliamentary activities.

The final chapter offers an analysis of white participation in the Congress of the People campaign [COP]. The COP gave birth to the *Freedom Charter* which enshrined the commitment of the Congress Alliance to nonracialism. Most existing literature neglects the COP in favour of speculation over the extent to which SACOD's white 'communists' wrote the *Freedom Charter*. In contrast, the COP campaign is here analysed in detail, with emphasis on the way in which the campaign organisers sought to encourage broad white support and participation. Liberals had begun calling for a national convention on South African race relations from the time that the NP won power in 1948; the ANC proposed the COP as a mass-based national convention which would represent the views of all South Africans by giving ordinary people the power to write the *Freedom Charter* through

submitting demands for inclusion in the final document.

Despite appeals for white participation, SACOD was the only white organisation to co-sponsor and participate in the COP. The LP was racked by internal disputes, and the COP rapidly became subsumed in a tactical battle taking place between party conservatives and radicals. As a result, the LP did not attend the Congress of the People. The COP campaign saw nonracial teams of volunteers collected demands from as wide a range of people as possible. As such, it allowed SACOD members to overcome their dissatisfaction with attempting to organise among whites by allowing them to canvass in townships, on factory floors and in the rural areas. The *Freedom Charter* which emerged from this process sought to express the aspirations of ordinary people in South Africa: its unequivocal endorsement of a nonracial future bore testimony to the role of SACOD members.

The final section of the thesis briefly traces the major developments in opposition politics in the years between 1956-1960. During this time the distinction between nonracialism and multiracialism, previously interchangeable terms, was given an ideological content. The *Freedom Charter* was opposed by 'Africanists,' ANC members opposed to racial co-operation; their attacks on both the *Charter* and SACOD were couched in the language of anti-communism, and won the support of some white LP members opposed to SACOD's place in the Congress Alliance. These Liberals and the Africanists argued that through the equal representation for all Congresses guaranteed by multiracialism, white communists were dominating the ANC.

At the same time, members of SACOD revived the debate over the efficacy of national as opposed to class politics; as in the late 1940s, support for the organisation of the working class was expressed in terms of calls for a single nonracial Congress in which the working class and working class demands would predominate. This in turn fed on existing dissatisfaction within SACOD over organising among whites. In 1959, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) was launched by former ANC members who claimed that white communists were controlling the ANC. The PAC won immediate support from some prominent LP members who began to mobilise anti-ANC support around calls for 'One Congress.' Events were overtaken by the imposition of a state of emergency following the deaths of 69 Africans in Sharpeville township, and the banning of both the ANC and the PAC.

The ANC, having been forced underground, endorsed a campaign of sabotage against economic and military installations. In practice its organisation became nonracial. Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, was a nonracial organisation in which whites occupied prominent positions. Legal organisations operating in South Africa maintained multiracial structures; by contrast, individual membership of the ANC for non-Africans was accepted in 1969.

The Politics of Nonracialism: White Opposition to Apartheid 1945 - 1960.

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DEDICATION.

*"We had that misfortune of being born in days
which we saw as turbulent, but our fellows did not."*

Ernie Wentzel: Memoirs.

**This thesis is dedicated to all the activists of the 1950s
who struggled against the brutality and bullets of apartheid
armed only with ideals.**

**In particular, it is dedicated to Helen Joseph:
a great friend
a great heart
a great life...**

Abbreviations used in the text:

ANC	African National Congress
APO	African Peoples Organisation
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
COP	Congress of the People
CPC	Coloured People's Congress
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CRL	Civil Rights League
FRAC	Franchise Action Committee/Council
FSAW	Federation of South African Women
FSU	Friends of the Soviet Union
LP	Liberal Party of South Africa
MRC	Multi-Racial Conference (1957)
NAC	National Action Council
NC	National Committee [LP]
NEC	National Executive Committee [ANC & SACOD]
NEUM	Non-European Unity Movement
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NP	Nationalist Party [before 1949, the Herenigde Nasionale Party]
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
SACOD	South African Congress of Democrats
SACPO	South African Coloured People's Organisation [later the CPC]
SACP	South African Communist Party
SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SALA	South African Liberal Association
SALG	South African Liberal Group
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
T&LC	Trades and Labour Council
UFP	Union Federal Party
UP	United Party

Introduction.

In June 1955, some 3000 delegates attended the Congress of the People where they endorsed the *Freedom Charter*; adopted by the African National Congress [ANC] a year later, the *Freedom Charter* committed the resistance movement in South Africa to a nonracial future:

We, the people of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of the people... We the people of South Africa, black and white together equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this FREEDOM CHARTER. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing nothing of our strength and courage, until the democratic changes set out here have been won.¹

In 1990, when the ANC had its first ever formal meeting with the South African government, the ANC delegation included members of all the ethnic groups in South Africa. The *Freedom Charter* remained the blueprint for the society the ANC sought to bring about in South Africa.

The emergence and development of racial co-operation in the struggle against racial discrimination, and in particular the incorporation of whites in a struggle against white supremacy, was a long and difficult process; however, it remains under-researched. In the late 1940s and early 1950s the ANC emerged as the premier African political organisation. During the same period, ANC leaders argued that

while the African National Congress must naturally work for its own growth, yet it is equally committed to the policy of forming a multi-racial united Democratic Front to challenge the forces of reaction in this country.²

Uniquely amongst African national liberation movements, the struggle against apartheid was undertaken by an alliance of Congresses representing the four main ethnic groups in South Africa: African, Indian, Coloured and white.³ The Congresses were bound in a *multiracial* alliance: that is, each maintained ethnic and organisational separateness, while co-ordinating campaigns through consultative committees at local, regional and national levels. In this way, ANC leaders argued, Africans could be mobilised and organised by an all-African organisation while a nonracial consciousness would be built through racial co-

¹ Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin: Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter (Johannesburg 1986), p.262.

² ANC papers, University of the Witwatersrand AD1189/2/Ba.1: Albert Lutuli: Presidential Address, 1954 ANC Annual Conference, December 1954, p.4.

³ Use of the term 'Coloured' does not denote acceptance of racist classification or terminology.

operation in jointly co-ordinated campaigns.

Multiracialism represented an attempt to marry African nationalism and racial co-operation. It contrasted with the *nonracialism* of the Communist Party of South Africa and the Liberal Party, which included members of all ethnic groups within a single organisation. In the early 1950s, the differences between multiracialism and nonracialism were seen as largely technical or structural, and Congress leaders described the Congress Alliance variously as multiracial, nonracial or inter-racial. By the end of the 1950s, however, both nonracialism and multiracialism had been given a clear ideological content, as critics hostile to the Alliance argued that multiracialism was the creation of white communists who were unable to join the ANC but who sought to direct it through the consultative committee structure.

Underlying the ANC's commitment to a nonracial future was an acceptance of South Africans of all ethnic groups as equal and permanent citizens of the country; that is the sense in which it is used here. In 1955 the National Treasurer of the ANC, Dr.D.W.Z.Conco, noted:

In view of our numbers, we could have taken the narrow Nationalism that venerates only Negro-blood. We could have taken a narrower road of struggle for "AFRICA FOR AFRICANS" only. I am happy to say that at no time did the leaders of the African National Congress ever entertain the idea of "AWAY WITH WHITES" in Afrika.⁴

ANC leaders did not espouse exclusive African nationalism; it nonetheless remained an undercurrent in the ANC throughout the period under study, culminating in the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress [PAC] in 1959. The PAC was formed in large part in opposition to the dominant role whites were accused of playing within the Congress Alliance. Focussing on *white* opposition to apartheid provides a particular prism through which the problems associated with the development of nonracialism are highlighted and analysed.

The emergence of the ANC as the leading organisation in an extra-parliamentary

⁴ AD1812 E/1.6: Dr.W.Z.Conco: The Struggle for Liberation (speech), nd.1955 (emphasis in original).

struggle initiated a period of ideological debate and disputation as liberals, socialists and others opposed to apartheid reassessed their ideological and strategic positions. This was particularly true of whites, unable to join the ANC, wary of militant African nationalism and alienated by the extreme nationalism espoused by some ANC members. The locus for the wide range of disputes generated by the growth of African nationalism and the rise of the ANC was the form that racial co-operation should take. African nationalists insisted on maintaining the ANC as an African organisation. Both communists and liberals responded by calling for an all-in, nonracial organisation. Communists argued that a national or racial consciousness was being encouraged in place of nonracial class unity. Liberals warned that individualism would be lost within a nationalist movement which emphasised racial consciousness. Multiracialism was a structural arrangement intended to incorporate both an all-African ANC and broad racial co-operation.

In November 1952, at the height of the Defiance Campaign - a campaign of passive resistance which saw over 8000 volunteers imprisoned for breaking apartheid laws and ANC membership reach over 100 000 - leaders of the African and Indian Congresses called for the creation of a white Congress and the full incorporation of whites in the black liberation struggle. In response, two organisations were formed: the Congress of Democrats, which unequivocally endorsed the ANC demands and strategies and later became an equal partner in the Congress Alliance as the nationally constituted South African Congress of Democrats [SACOD]; and the Liberal Party, which endorsed a qualified franchise and committed itself to using parliamentary methods of opposition.

Liberals appealed to ANC leaders to restrict their protests to constitutional channels, to make reasonable demands of the authorities, and opposed the co-operation between the ANC and members of the Communist Party [CPSA]. ANC President-General Albert Lutuli responded by noting that "if a man is working with me for liberation, I do not enquire into his lesser politics."⁵ During the 1950s, black membership of the Liberal Party increased and in some areas the LP co-operated closely with the ANC in grass-roots resistance work. As

⁵ Quoted in *The New African* February 1962, p.15.

a result, the conservative liberalism of LP founders was transformed into a programme scarcely different from the *Freedom Charter*. SACOD was an organisation comprising former Communist Party members, non-CPSA socialists and pro-ANC democrats. SACOD members were drawn from the trade union movement, the universities, welfare organisations and the churches, and are here loosely termed white radicals. Its allotted role in the Alliance was to organise whites; throughout the 1950s, however, SACOD members complained of the difficulty of recruiting whites, and the organisation operated most effectively when part of nonracial campaigns. This was most clearly evident in the Congress of the People campaign, and the nonracialism of the *Freedom Charter* bore testimony to the effectiveness of whites in SACOD.

By the late 1950s, the resistance movement was deeply divided by disputes over the form that racial co-operation should take. Paradoxically, some white Liberal Party members joined the exclusive African nationalists who founded the PAC in accusing the ANC of being dominated by white communists through the equal representation afforded to all Congresses in the multiracial Congress Alliance. At the same time, those who emphasised the primacy of class struggle called for the Alliance to be collapsed into 'One Congress' where nonracial working class consciousness would grow. The 1950s ended as they had begun, with a host of disputes being fought out over nonracialism.

The fifteen years following the end of the second world war were dominated by mass struggles against the implementation of apartheid. They were also marked by ideological debate and disputation, as the ANC sought to generate African nationalist sentiment behind a nonracial anti-apartheid struggle. Whites in the Liberal Party and SACOD sought to participate in the liberation struggle, and to maintain the nonracial ideals of Congress leaders. In 1960, when the ANC was forced underground and adopted armed struggle, the principle of nonracialism was entrenched in its ideology and practice, and remain so today.

Chapter one.

White responses to the African National Congress 1945-1950.

Introduction.

Resistance politics in South Africa has been dominated by the African National Congress [ANC] at least since the end of the second world war. The guiding principle of the ANC since that time has been its commitment to a nonracial future. The 1940s saw the rise of African nationalism, and the transformation of the ANC from a small elite body using constitutional forms of protest to an extra-parliamentary organisation attempting the widespread mobilisation of all the unenfranchised social classes. At the same time, the ANC entered an alliance with the South African Indian Congress [SAIC] in 1947, joined in September 1953 by the South African Coloured People's Organisation. It was followed a month later by the white South African Congress of Democrats [SACOD]. In 1956 the Congress alliance endorsed the *Freedom Charter*, a statement of principle which envisioned a future South Africa with complete equality between black and white.

The nature of the Congress Alliance was considerably influenced by the problems attendant on integrating all ethnic groups in the struggle against apartheid, and behind a national liberation struggle led by the ANC. The incorporation of whites in the struggle against white supremacy was particularly difficult. This chapter reviews the rise of the Congress movement, and the response of whites who supported a nonracial future but differed over its precise nature and the means by which it should be achieved.

The impact of the war years.

The Second World War years were a remarkable phase in twentieth century South African history, marked by the partial relaxation of discriminatory legislation, a 50 per cent rise in real average earnings for black industrial workers, and the encouragement of hopes for a more liberal government policy.¹ During the war, industrial manufacturing became the largest single sector of the economy. Uninterrupted industrial production was essential for

¹ D.O'Meara: Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism, 1934-1948. (Johannesburg 1983), chapter 15.

the war effort, and the labour requirements of heavy and manufacturing industry began to compete with those of the formerly unchallenged mining and agricultural sectors. Representatives of organised industry opposed the migrant labour system and called for a permanent urban black labour force to meet their demand for skilled and semi-skilled labour. The privately owned commercial and manufacturing sectors joined the call for an urbanised labour force, and saw a potential black consumer market 'going to waste.'

Black workers restricted to tribal Reserves in the rural areas poured into the urban areas under the compulsion of economic necessity and attracted by the growing demand for labour. The 1943 Landsdowne Commission reported that the reproductive capacity of the Reserves, on which the migrant labour system was premised, was "a myth."² Deneys Reitz, Minister of Native Affairs, relaxed influx control in the industrial centres of the Transvaal and Natal in 1942, increasing the number of urban Africans. The 1943 Fagan Commission found that women accounted for one third of urban Africans, and concluded that black urbanisation was a permanent factor.³

Black urbanisation led to an acute housing shortage, and gave rise to squatter movements as thousands of homeless Africans built villages on deserted land and provided their own services and infrastructure.⁴ The direct action of the squatters was matched in other urban struggles such as bus-boycotts.⁵ Black unionisation and industrial action also increased. Although officially unrecognised, by 1945 over 40% of commerce and privately owned industry was unionised.⁶ According to O'Meara, 145 522 African workers went on strike during the 1940-1948 period, accounting for a loss of 409 299 work-days.⁷ Organised manufacturing industry called for the recognition of black trade unions as a necessary step to curbing militancy and normalising worker relations. The Transvaal Chambers of Industry

² The Landsdowne Commission (1943) quoted in O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme* op.cit., p.230.

³ UG-48: The Native Laws Commission 1946-1948 [the Fagan Commission], paras 18-28.

⁴ A.Stadler: *Birds in the Cornfield: Squatter Movements in Johannesburg, 1944-1947*, *Journal of Southern African Studies* October 1979, pp.93-123.

⁵ A.Stadler: *A Long Way to Walk: Bus Boycotts in Alexandra, 1940-1945* in P.Bonner (ed): *Working Papers in Southern African Studies* Vol.2 (Johannesburg 1981), pp.228-257.

⁶ O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme* op.cit., p.228.

⁷ *ibid.* (these figures include the 1946 miners strike).

argued: "if Natives are to enter industry in ever increasing numbers, it is clear that their being organised and disciplined in proper unions is an indispensable pre-requisite to their development as stable and productive workers."⁸

The war years also witnessed a growth in liberal discourse, not restricted to educational or research bodies but espoused by a series of government commissions whose reports supported the central demands of organised industry. The 1942 Smit Report called for the recognition of black trade unions, and for the state to bear the costs of urban labour reproduction. The 1942 van Eck Commission proposed the abolition of pass laws, while the Lansdowne Commission described the reproductive capacity of the Reserves as a myth and called for the payment of a full living wage to urban African workers.⁹ Liberal values were popularised by the war itself. The war was fought against fascism and in defence of individualism, the rule of law and self-determination, the tenets of liberalism. These ideals were set out in Churchill and Roosevelt's *Atlantic Charter*, and their necessary domestic propagation as a means of maintaining support for the war directly affected political developments in South Africa.

The United Party [UP] government faced a wide range of problems in the early 1940s. The Allied powers suffered set-backs in the war, the threat of an invasion grew as the Japanese fleet entered the Indian Ocean, and the government had to fight a general election in 1943.¹⁰ In response, the government made unprecedented moves to secure black working class loyalty and not to face a challenge on too many fronts at the same time. Pass laws were partially relaxed, and the government adopted a largely pragmatic approach to labour unrest. African unions were allowed to develop unofficially; in 1942 Walter Madeley, the minister of Labour, promised black union recognition in return for worker's loyalty, stating: "Don't be too explosive on the question ... Recognition of your unions will come about; but

⁸ *ibid.*, p.230.

⁹ See P.Lewsen: Voices of Protest: From Segregation to Apartheid, 1938-1948 (Johannesburg 1987), pp.15-40.

¹⁰ See T.Lodge: 'Class Conflict, Communal Struggle and Patriotic Unity: the Communist Party of South Africa during the Second World War'. Seminar paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985.

you must rely on me."¹¹ Black strikes in areas of industry important to the war appear to have been settled in a manner favourable to the workers rather than employers.¹²

In addition, the government sought the loyalty of organisations which had the potential to cause either political or economic disruption. Following the entry of the USSR into the war in 1941, the Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA] threw itself into supporting the war effort with a 'Defend South Africa!' campaign and soon gained a degree of political respectability. The CPSA, the Friends of the Soviet Union [FSU], nonracial trade unions and other organisations were allowed considerable freedom by the Smuts government.¹³ Cabinet ministers joined communists on public platforms, Smuts opened a 1943 'Soviet Friendship' conference in Johannesburg while his wife was a patron of the FSU. Those organisations in turn concentrated on generating support for the war.¹⁴ After 1941 the CPSA placed support for the war above purely domestic issues. The CPSA programme exhibited a studied vagueness over black political rights while declaring:

In the forefront we put the principle that it is the responsibility of the government to see that the whole population is adequately fed, housed and clothed, and provided with medical attention and hospital services.¹⁵

In 1942 the CPSA Central Committee stated: "in the interests of South Africa's well-being, particularly in these serious times, every effort should be made to avoid strikes."¹⁶

As a result of the particular conditions of the war years, organisations such as the CPSA and FSU were able to penetrate the white community in a manner unseen before or after the war. Over 6000 people gathered to welcome the first Soviet consul to Johannesburg in 1942, and Medical Aid for Russia received over £80 000 in its first two months.¹⁷ The Red Army offensive led the Minister of Justice Colin Steyn to conclude: "A

¹¹ Quoted in J.Simons and R.Simons: Class and Colour in South Africa, 1850-1950 (London 1983), p.556.

¹² I.Edwards: The Durban Communist Party, 1940s: South African Labour Bulletin 11/4, 1987, pp.44-64.

¹³ See C.Burns: An Historical Study of the Friends of the Soviet Union and the South African Peace Council. (Hons thesis, University of the Witwatersrand 1987).

¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp.46-54.

¹⁵ CPSA: What Next? A Policy For South Africa (1945), p.11.

¹⁶ Quoted in Lodge: CPSA op.cit., p.4.

¹⁷ Burns: Study op.cit., p.42.

Russian victory will mean a victory for democracy."¹⁸ The CPSA won City Council seats in elections in Johannesburg, East London and Cape Town; the party fielded nine candidates in the 1943 general election, and although all lost they polled an average 11% of the vote.¹⁹

The war boosted industrialisation, which in turn challenged the migrant labour system. Government commissions argued that African urbanisation and 'economic integration' - of blacks into the 'white' economy - were irreversible processes. As a result, a degree of consensus emerged over the direction which future government policy should take. The ANC and CPSA, as well as liberals in the UP, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), and among the Native Representatives (indirectly elected by African voters), claimed that 'nothing could be the same after the war' - that government policy would have to acknowledge that segregation had failed to maintain racial separatism. In 1942 Julius Lewin, a liberal academic involved in army education, stated:

We have a definite sense of taking a new direction. The van Eck Report ... expresses this and the war itself means that no new disabilities will descend. On the contrary, old ones are being shaken - the hated pass laws have been relaxed and Native trade unions are to be recognised ... We [can] get along faster now that the principle of this and that is conceded...²⁰

Optimism for a change in direction by the government was boosted by a speech made by Smuts in January 1942. Speaking in the 'dark days' of the war, Smuts stated:

The whole trend both in this country and throughout Africa has been in the opposite direction [to segregation]. The whole movement of development here on this continent has been for closer contacts to be established between the various races and the various sectors of this community ... Isolation has gone and segregation has fallen on evil days too ... A revolutionary change is taking place among the Native peoples of Africa through the movement from the country to the towns - the movement from the old Reserves in the Native areas to the big European centres of population. Segregation tried to stop it. It has, however, not stopped it in the least. The process has been accelerated. You might as well try to sweep the ocean back with a broom.²¹

Taken with his commitment to the *Atlantic Charter*, the relaxation of discriminatory

¹⁸ Quoted in B.Bunting: Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary (London 1986), p.109.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.115.

²⁰ Fabian Colonial Bureau Papers, Rhodes House, Oxford: FCB 94/1.38: J.Lewin to R.Hinden, 19-8-1942.

²¹ W.K.Hancock: The Fields of Force (Cape Town 1968) pp.476.

legislation and the Commission findings, Smuts appeared to confirm a new direction for the UP.

The ANC and Africans' Claims.

In 1943, in this context, the ANC published a major statement of principle, *Africans' Claims in South Africa*. In the same year the ANC adopted a new constitution which abolished the 'House of Chiefs' set out in the original 1912 constitution, centralised authority with a working committee of members living within a fifty-mile radius of the President-General, and attempted to create an effective branch structure.²² The ANC in 1943 was a small organisation dominated by professionals. Nonetheless, under the influence of its pragmatic President-General, medical doctor Alfred Bitini Xuma, the ANC began to show signs of "a more vigorous reaction to the new pressures and challenges created by a rapidly industrialising society."²³ The ANC sought to capitalise on the liberal ethos of the period and to place the vision of nonracial citizenship before the government. *Africans' Claims* articulated western liberal-democratic demands in a nonracial South African context, and sought to delineate the ideological path which the government, apparently backing away from segregation, should follow.

Africans' Claims was divided into two main parts following a preface written by Xuma. The first part placed the *Atlantic Charter* in its South African context and analysed the nature of South African oppression; the second comprised a Bill of Rights. *Africans' Claims* sought to generate African support for the ANC while appealing for wider acceptance of the principle of nonracial participation in government. *Africans' Claims* effectively demanded equality of treatment with whites. The Bill of Rights called for equal political participation and universal suffrage, breaking with previous ANC demands for a qualified franchise. It also demanded "a fair redistribution of the land as a prerequisite for a just settlement of the land problem." freedom of movement, residence and equality before the law, as well as equal pay for equal work, employment insurance and unemployment benefits.²⁴ The

²² T.Lodge: Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945 (London 1983), pp.24-25.

²³ *ibid.*, p.24.

²⁴ *Africans' Claims in South Africa*, in T.Karis: Hope and Challenge (California 1977), p.218.

economic sections of the Bill demanded equality with whites, and the removal of laws which hampered African economic mobility. *Africans' Claims* was drawn up by a committee dominated by doctors, lawyers, teachers and ministers of religion. It was, moreover, intended to attract "distinguished University graduates" to the ANC.²⁵ *Africans' Claims* was a moderate, nonracial restatement of democratic goals and aspirations in tune with international opinion as set out in the *Atlantic Charter*. It also flowed from the apparent liberalisation of government policy.

Following the 1943 general election, which the UP won with a landslide victory, and the changed balance of forces in the war, the UP increasingly shed the reformist rhetoric which had marked it in the early years of the war. Smuts, through his secretary, rejected *Africans' Claims* as "propagandist" and stated that he was "not prepared to discuss proposals which are wildly impracticable."²⁶ Influx control measures which had been relaxed in 1942 were restored in 1943. In contrast with his promise to recognise African trade unions, Madeley enacted War Measure 145 which made strikes illegal. In 1946, Hofmeyr (Acting Prime Minister in Smuts's absence) presided over the violent suppression of a strike by some 70 000 African miners, following which the CPSA Executive Committee was tried for sedition.

The *Atlantic Charter*, to which the South African government was a signatory, continued to inspire black political activity. The 1945 *United Nations Charter*, which Smuts co-authored, increased black demands for the domestic application of liberal principles. Smuts himself noted:

The fully publicized discussions at UNO are having a great effect in all directions. We even hear about them from our domestic and farm Natives who really have nothing to complain of, but are deeply stirred by all this talk of equality and non-discrimination.²⁷

The Native Representative Council (NRC), an indirectly-elected African body set up in 1936 to assess legislation affecting 'native affairs', adjourned over government handling of the miners strike. NRC member James Moroka, a wealthy doctor and later ANC President-

²⁵ Resolution: 1942 ANC Conference in Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.199.

²⁶ Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.113.

²⁷ Quoted in Hancock: *Force op.cit.*, p.486.

General, accused the government of a

post-war continuation of a policy of Fascism which is the antithesis and negation of the letter and the spirit of the Atlantic Charter and the United Nations Charter.²⁸

Africans' Claims failed to fill the growing ideological vacuum created by a government unable to please the competing sectors of a rapidly industrialising economy, or to generate a legitimating ideology to replace segregation (which it had assisted in undermining). Nonetheless, *Africans' Claims* committed the ANC to a more 'radical' programme than it had previously endorsed, and within the ANC pressure grew for the use of more militant methods of protest. Moves to radicalise Congress were led by the ANC Youth League [ANCYL], formed in 1944 and comprising able young men such as law students Anton Lembede, Ashby Mda, Nelson Mandela and Oliver Tambo. The ANCYL committed itself to "rousing popular political consciousness and fighting oppression and reaction."²⁹ The war years saw the ANC move towards creating a mass base, a process that lasted for the rest of the decade and beyond.

Black unity.

During the war, economic necessity and governmental pragmatism combined to generate widespread African militancy. African urbanisation and unionisation increased dramatically. In 1945 the Council of Non-European Trade Unions claimed an affiliation of 119 unions, representing over 40% of Africans represented in industry.³⁰ In August 1946, 70 000 African miners went on strike; within three days 18 had been killed and the strike bloodily broken. As migrant miners fled police brutality in the compounds, they crossed paths - on Germiston Station - with the Native Representative Councillors, on their way to their Pretoria meeting. The NRC met in a state of high tension and adjourned indefinitely after requests to debate the strike were turned down. The suppression of the miners strike and the refusal to offer concessions to the NRC was presided over by Hofmeyr, while Smuts attended the United Nations. There he was joined by a delegation from the ANC and SAIC, as well as former CPSA member and Native Representative Hymie Basner. World attention was focussed on South African racial oppression.

²⁸ Margaret Ballinger Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand: A410/B2.14: NRC resolution, 14-8-1946.

²⁹ ANCYL: Congress Youth League Manifesto (March 1944), in Karis: Hope op.cit., pp.304-305.

³⁰ E.Webster (ed): Essays in Southern African Labour History (Johannesburg 1979), p.209.

The war years witnessed the radicalisation of Indian politics and unity between the Transvaal and Natal Indian Congresses with the formation of the SAIC. The tabling of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill, which offered partial Indian representation in return for economic restriction, generated Indian unity and militancy. Under the new leadership of medical doctors Yusuf Dadoo and 'Monty' Naicker, the SAIC organised a passive resistance campaign against what it described as a "diabolical attempt to strangulate Indians economically and degrade them socially."³¹

The campaign, as its organisers stressed, was entirely nonracial; over 2000 volunteers of all races (predominantly Indian) were imprisoned.³² The Joint Passive Resistance Council stated:

The non-white population of South Africa is on the march, in tune with the forward surge of the peoples of Asia and Africa and the democratic forces throughout the world ... we feel confident that the decision of the N.R.C. will hasten the day when the alignment and unification of all Non-European forces against racial oppression will become a reality ... We believe that the struggle of the non-whites in South Africa against colour oppression is one and indivisible.³³

The need for a common front to oppose black oppression was an insistent theme of postwar Congress and CPSA propaganda. Informal co-operation between the ANC, SAIC and African Peoples Organisation [APO] (a Coloured organisation) began in 1946; a year later they jointly organised what Xuma described as an "historic unity rally."³⁴

In 1947 Dadoo, Naicker and Xuma signed the 'Doctor's Pact' which formally allied the African and Indian Congresses. Unity moves among the black Congresses were supported by the CPSA. The pro-Congress newspaper *The Guardian*, edited by CPSA members Betty Radford and Brian Bunting, gave prominence to speeches and articles calling for a black united front. CPSA Conference resolutions called for the creation of a "broad fighting alliance" to struggle for equal rights for all.³⁵

Attaining unity at the grass-roots level, however, was not a smooth process. In early

³¹ Quoted in E.Walker: *A History of Southern Africa* (London 1957) p.760.

³² Interview with Yusuf Cachalia (1989), transcript p.2.

³³ *The Guardian* 5-12-1946, p.5.

³⁴ *The Guardian* 8-5-1947, p.4.

³⁵ *The Guardian* 9-1-1947:p.1: CPSA 1947 Annual Conference resolution.

1949 violence flared between the African and Indian population in Durban, leaving 123 dead, 1300 injured and some 40 000 homeless.²⁶ The Durban riots were the most violent demonstration of the difficulties of attaining racial unity. They also provided the context for a reaffirmation of the 1947 Pact, and the ANC and SAIC issued a statement which traced the roots of racial oppression and strife not to 'racism' but "the political, economic and social structure of this country, based on differential and discriminatory treatment of the various groups."²⁷

Various factors continued to impede the emergence of a unified alliance. During the late 1940s, while many ANCYL members were drawn into mainstream ANC politics, some continued to espouse a racially exclusive form of African nationalism as well as considerable opposition to the CPSA.²⁸ In addition, both the ANC and SAIC were concerned with internal struggles and winning endorsement of more radical policies and strategies. In brief, the transformation of the ANC from a smallish, petty-bourgeois organisation which used the methods of petition and constitutional action, into a mass-based extra-parliamentary organisation demanding full and immediate equality, was not a task swiftly achieved.

White responses to African nationalism.

The growth of African nationalism, the emergence of the ANC as the premier African political organisation with an increasingly radical programme, and its alliance with the SAIC, confronted whites who supported a nonracial future with a set of ideological and strategic questions. In response, both white liberals and socialists warned of the dangers of nationalism; for liberals, it threatened to submerge individualism within the fervour of mass action, while the CPSA warned that nationalism obscured class alignments which cut across racial barriers. Both warned that nationalism could degenerate into racial exclusivity and race war.²⁹

²⁶ *The Guardian* 20-1-1949, p.1.

²⁷ African National Congress Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand: AD1189/5/Fa/17: Statement Issued by the Joint Meeting of African and Indian Leaders; Durban, 6-2-1949.

²⁸ See chapter 3.

²⁹ See chapters 3 to 6 for a detailed treatment of these issues.

Whites calling for the dismantling of segregation were largely divided between liberals and radicals, who parted ways over a series of issues at the core of which lay the related questions of relations with the ANC and SAIC; the parliamentary or extra-parliamentary nature of their struggle for equal rights; the goals for which they struggled; and the prominence of communists within the Congresses and supporting organisations. Definitions of radical and liberal, and even of communist, centred not so much on ideological or economic questions but relations with and attitudes towards the liberation struggle.

Liberals premised their vision of a nonracial future on the development of an African middle-class through the extension of educational and social-welfare services, and gradual African incorporation in state structures which the government was called on to create. No liberal political organisation existed; liberals were found in welfare organisations, the SAIRR, the UP, and amongst the Native Representatives. Radical whites called for the immediate application of universal suffrage, and supported mass-based extra-parliamentary campaigns, strikes and similar forms of protest. As such, radical whites included communists, Trotskyists, christians and others, and were found in the CPSA, the trade union movement, and the Springbok Legion. The Legion was an ex-service organisation formed in 1942 which operated as a soldier's trade union, campaigning for housing, jobs and training schemes for ex-servicemen and women.

The main political home of radical whites was the Communist Party, a nonracial party which supported equal rights for all. According to Native Representative Hymie Basner, who left the CPSA in 1943,

there was no possible party to which a progressive young South African, whether he was a Marxist or ... of moderately liberal views, if he wanted to work in an organised group ... against racialism, if he wanted to work even for common social decency, never mind about world revolution or South African revolution ... there was no room for him to work in any organisation at that time except the communist movement. And during that period hundreds of middle-class youth who normally, in other countries would be joining the Labour Party or the Liberal Party, say in England or in France ... would join the Communist Party.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Interview with Hymie Basner, (nd. Institute of Commonwealth Studies London), transcript pp.10-11.

Socialist support for the ANC, in contrast with liberals, was premised precisely on the *absence* of a significant African bourgeoisie and the resultant belief that the movement would not therefore become a home for black capitalists.⁴¹ Liberals called on the Congresses to restrict themselves to constitutional methods of protest as the only means of controlled and evolutionary societal development; radical whites, in contrast, joined the ANCYL in criticising the ANC for failing to develop a branch structure and exert mass-based extra-parliamentary pressure.

White opposition to apartheid in the 1950s was divided between the Congress of Democrats and the Liberal Party, between radicals and liberals. Rather than being overly economic or ideological, differences between the two were dominated by approaches to the methods and aims of the ANC-led struggle. In 1947 Edgar Brookes, a Native Representative and a leading liberal figure, stated: "If Liberalism be interpreted as an economic doctrine in opposition to socialism, not all of us would be very enthusiastic to defend it."⁴² As we shall see, both Marxist and liberal theoreticians argued that segregation and apartheid restricted economic development, and that the government would have to adopt a 'commonsense' policy and acknowledge the fact of black urbanisation and economic integration with the award of political representation.⁴³

Moreover, both Marxists and liberals developed a theoretical understanding of oppression and resistance in South Africa based on the theory of internal colonialism. White South Africa, it was argued, was a colonial power whose subject colony (the black population) lay within its own borders. Through internal colonialism, the CPISA sought to resolve the contradictions between class and national struggle; for liberals, internal colonialism acknowledged South Africa's future status as a nonracial society but with a black government.⁴⁴

⁴¹ See chapter 4.

⁴² SAIRR: Survey of Race Relations 1946-1947, p.22.

⁴³ See chapters 3 to 7.

⁴⁴ Internal colonialism is discussed in detail in chapter 4. For the first published statement of the theory, by a leading liberal intellectual, see Leo Marquard: South Africa's Colonial Policy: SAIRR Presidential Address, 1957.

Ideologically, liberals and radicals operated within a remarkably similar framework, dominated by the shared demand for the cessation of racial discrimination and the introduction of a policy based on individual merit not race. They differed over the speed at which a nonracial solution could be arrived at, and the means by which it should be pursued. Liberals called for the detachment of a middle-class strata from the mass African population, and their incorporation in state structures. As such, liberalism was premised on a quiescent working class, with extra-parliamentary action seen as potentially revolutionary and anathema to controlled development. Liberals called for the extension of social services as necessary preconditions for black advancement to a 'civilised' status and incorporation in a western state. In contrast, radical whites both supported and worked for the organisation of the working class through mass-based extra-parliamentary campaigns. White radicals assisted with the formation of black trade unions, and offered support for strikes, bus boycotts and other campaigns.

Despite the hostile rhetoric which marked relations between liberals and radicals, the white liberal/left comprised a relatively cohesive social grouping. Largely drawn from the professional, English-speaking middle-class, dominated by academics, lawyers and journalists, the liberal/left was interwoven with professional and personal relationships which crossed ideological and organisational divisions. Differences between liberals and radicals in the 1950s reflected the political developments of the late 1940s as the ANC radicalised its programme and methods, and called for unqualified white identification with both.

The Communist Party 1945-1950.

The Communist Party of South Africa, formed in 1921, was the only nonracial political party in South Africa. The CPSA was a predominantly African organisation, with a small white membership; white Communists were the only organised body of white opinion to offer full support for the goals of the ANC. The CPSA during the war years converted political respectability into minor electoral successes in the Johannesburg and Cape Town Council elections. The onset of the Cold War marked the end of white voter support, while in 1948 the CPSA won the Cape Western Native Representative elections, with Central

Committee members Sam Kahn and Fred Carneson elected to parliament and the Provincial Council respectively.

Black party membership increased significantly during the war. Party organisers such as David Bopape and J.B.Marks concentrated on African mobilisation around civic and trade union issues.⁴⁵ The combination of increased African urbanisation and militancy created conducive conditions for the organisational work of CPSA members. The ANC during the war years concentrated on drawing up and popularising *Africans' Claims*; grass-roots organisation was largely left to black CPSA members, many of whom were also ANC members. In 1944, the CPSA Central Committee noted the growth of African industrial and economic action, but the dearth of political organisation:

The need for an influential and strong political organisation will be increasingly felt by the workers ... Let us therefore take upon ourselves our share of the responsibility in building up this movement. Our members working in the various national organisations have done much in an individual way. A central and active leadership in this direction has been lacking for a long time.⁴⁶

The CPSA was a heterogenous organisation. Some (predominantly white) leading party members played a high-profile role in support of the war, and in fighting white elections. At the same time, black party members were involved in the 1944 Anti-Pass Campaign, trade union work and civic organisations, and black party membership increased. Following its successes in various areas, including elections, some sections of the CPSA "began to think in terms of a mass membership."⁴⁷ The CPSA had a significant section of opinion which regarded legal parliamentary activity as the main field of party work and, according to the official history of the CPSA, suffered "legalistic illusions."⁴⁸

In 1928 the CPSA had accepted a Comintern thesis which placed South Africa in the ambit of 'colonial and semi-colonial countries,' and endorsed

⁴⁵ See H.Sapire: 'African Political Mobilisation in Brakpan in the 1950s'. Seminar Paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989.

⁴⁶ G.M.Carter and T.Karis: South African Political Materials: Co-Operative African Microfilm Project [CAMP] Reel 3A:2:CC1:62/2: 1944 CPSA Central Committee Report, pp.2-4.

⁴⁷ Bunting: Kotane op.cit., pp.110-111.

⁴⁸ South African Communist Party: The Road to South African Freedom (London 1962) p.40.

an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.⁴⁹

The CPSA developed a national democratic programme which called for the immediate transfer of power to the majority population and in effect left socialist reconstruction to a later, secondary stage. In the late 1940s as the ANC grew in size and seemed to provide the leadership necessary to prosecute the first stage of the revolution, CPSA/ANC co-operation grew despite opposition from ANCYL and some older ANC members.⁵⁰

The postwar CPSA programme was set out in a 1945 pamphlet entitled *What Next? A Policy for South Africa*, which called for democratic rights for all, the nationalisation of the land and banks, a national health service, free and compulsory education, and supported increased industrialisation.⁵¹ In view of the heterogenous nature of the CPSA, it is perhaps unsurprising that the postwar reaffirmation of a national democratic programme met internal opposition. Academic Jack Simons, a leading Central Committee member, defending *What Next?* at the party's 1945 Conference, noted: "Some of our comrades describe this pamphlet as 'wishy-washy' ... they do not consider it revolutionary in content." He continued:

Comrades, there are times when to be extreme ultra-revolutionary is to betray the cause for which we are working. Which is the more revolutionary to-day - to say you want the vote and equality of rights for the non-Europeans? Isn't it more revolutionary to take up the struggle for housing for the people, for fair distribution of supplies and a Ministry of Food? We must find a policy which gives expression to the innermost needs of the people of our country. What we lack too much is the spirit of sacrifice, the determination to get among the people and to take up the issues which most nearly affect them.⁵²

The CPSA programme was clearly more radical than *Africans' Claims* in its talk of nationalisation, an influence which found increasing sympathy within the ANC and ultimately found expression in the 1955 *Freedom Charter*. Many ANCYL members remained hostile to the CPSA and the high profile of white communists, as did some leading ANC members.⁵³ However, the role of white CPSA members in providing full support for the

⁴⁹ Quoted in Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*: p.31.

⁵⁰ See chapters 3 and 4.

⁵¹ CPSA: *What Next op.cit.*

⁵² *The Guardian* 4-1-1945, p.1.

⁵³ The CPSA/ANCYL conflict is discussed in chapter 3.

black liberation struggle was of considerable importance. By endorsing Congress aims and activities, CPSA whites adopted a position which both set the pattern for radical whites in the 1950s, and against which white liberals were judged.

CPSA participation in alliance politics - rather than adopting a programme calling for the immediate revolutionary transfer of power to the working class, the creation of a socialist society, and the shaping of its activities accordingly - had considerable effects on opposition politics. The party encouraged the creation of a 'broad fighting alliance' against racial discrimination. Of particular significance was its role in working with the Congress movement to develop a form of grass-roots mobilisation around the production of statements of principle, which found its fullest expression in the Congress of the People campaign of 1954/55.⁴

In 1944 the CPSA proposed that "[t]he idea of a People's Charter of Rights should be taken up jointly by the three sections [the three national groups]."⁵ The CPSA and ANC both expressed the desire to 'get among the people' and reunite formal organisations with the widespread black militancy of the period. In order to effect this, the CPSA in 1945 called for the summoning of "a Peoples Convention."⁶ The aim of such a Convention - which became a common goal of the CPSA and the Congresses in the postwar period - was to produce a coherent, popular statement of national democratic goals, and to symbolise and give concrete form to the emerging black organisational unity.

The drawing up of such a charter could not and did not precede the emergence of a unified alliance of forces opposed to racial discrimination. However, the method of drafting what finally emerged as the *Freedom Charter* in 1955, was envisaged in the late 1940s. In 1947 Yusuf Dadoo, president of the SAIC and a leading CPSA member, began implementation of a joint resolution of the Transvaal ANC, the SAIC and the APO

to convene a countrywide conference of all progressive organisations to draw up

⁴ See chapter 8.

⁵ CAMP Reel 3A:2:CC1:62/2: Central Committee Report to the 1944 CPSA Conference, p.4.

⁶ *The Guardian* 4-1-1945, p.6: CPSA Conference Resolution.

a charter for democracy for all in South Africa. It may be a prelude to a national convention truly representative of the South African people irrespective of race or colour.⁵⁷

In early 1948 delegates were invited "from factories and workshops, townships, hostels, advisory boards and vigilance committees, farm settlements and country towns in all corners of the provinces" to assist the drawing up and endorsement of a charter for 'Votes For All.'⁵⁸ Their goal was "to launch a campaign for the democratic principles of the United Nations Charter", concentrating on universal suffrage and nonracial political participation.⁵⁹

The Assembly, which was restricted to the Transvaal and Orange Free State, suffered from the disputes which marked both ANC/CPSA and intra-Congress relations.⁶⁰ The ANCYL and 'old guard' ANC leadership jointly attacked what was seen as CPSA dominance of the Transvaal ANC and its activities. In particular, the Assembly organisers were accused of attempting to by-pass the existing multiracial alliance of Congresses and create a new, nonracial competitor to it.⁶¹ The Assembly organisers attempted to clarify relations with the Congresses:

It is not our aim to compete in any way with, or take over the functions of the great national organisations of the African, Coloured or Indian people. It is our aim to secure friendly co-operation and mutual assistance of the South African people in championing the great democratic cause of the franchise.⁶²

Despite Youth League opposition, the Assembly met in Johannesburg and was opened by Michael Scott, a radical churchman and a leading figure in the 1946 passive resistance campaign. The 322 delegates present endorsed the *People's Charter for Votes for All*.⁶³ The Assembly was significant for the nonracial rank and file co-operation it produced, compounding that of the 1946 passive resistance campaign. Moreover, the popular mobilisation and participation in the drawing up of the *People's Charter*, and the penetration of urban and rural areas, the Assembly clearly set a precedent which informed Z.K. Matthews' 1953 call for a 'Congress of the People.'⁶⁴ The Assembly ended by calling

⁵⁷ *The Guardian* 28-6-1947, p.5.

⁵⁸ *The Guardian* 8-4-1948: Peoples Assembly: Manifesto.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ See chapter 3.

⁶¹ *The Guardian* 29-7-1948, p.5.

⁶² *The Guardian* 29-4-1948, p.5.

⁶³ Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.399-400.

⁶⁴ See chapter 8.

for a further assembly where delegates from the whole country could endorse a 'People's Charter.'

The People's Assembly marked a shift away from the cautious style of earlier ANC activity. Propaganda issued by the Assembly organisers stressed the illegitimacy of the 1948 general election and called for the election of delegates "who will represent more citizens than those voting in the General Elections."⁴⁶ Where *Africans' Claims* had tentatively proposed an alternate legitimating ideology for the state based on nonracial citizenship, the Assembly challenged "the election of the new Parliament by a minority of the people."⁴⁷ The Assembly marked a move from deputation towards confrontation with the state. The *People's Charter*, anticipating the *Freedom Charter*, concluded:

Where there is no freedom the people perish. Raising high the banner of freedom, the banner of the liberation of our people
WE PLEDGE that we shall not rest until all adult men and women have the right to stand for, vote for and be elected to all the representative bodies which rule over our people
WE CHALLENGE the existence of a Parliament from whose election the majority of its citizens are excluded, in a country which upholds in words the principles and practices of democracy.⁴⁸

The People's Assembly has been criticised for not producing a programme of action by which it would achieve the aims it set out.⁴⁹ In view of the conflicts which surrounded the Assembly, it is perhaps more explicable. Moreover, the ANC at the time was debating what emerged in 1949 as the *Programme of Action*, largely inspired by the ANCYL. The *Programme* endorsed the 1943 Bill of Rights, repeating demands for universal suffrage and nonracial political participation. It was more concerned with methods than aims, calling for effective propaganda and a fund-raising committee. The changing nature of the struggle, suggested by the People's Assembly, was made clear in the *Programme* which resolved to work for

the abolition of all differential political institutions the boycotting of which we accept and to undertake a campaign to educate our people on this issue and, in addition, to employ the following weapons: immediate and active boycott, strike, civil disobedience, non-co-operation and such other means as may bring about the accomplishment and realisation of our aspirations.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ People's Assembly: *Manifesto* op.cit.
⁴⁷ *ibid.*
⁴⁸ Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.399-400
⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.117.
⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.338.

Liberals and liberalism, 1946-1949.

During the war, as Martin Legassick has noted, "[l]iberalism acquired its greatest influence, both in describing and in shaping South Africa..."⁷⁰ Government commissions reported the breakdown of segregation under pressure from industrialisation, and Smuts acknowledged the irreversibility of black urbanisation. Liberals in the SAIRR and among the Native Representatives, who emerged at the forefront of liberal thinking in the late 1940s, adopted a pragmatic stance in response to apparent shifts in government thinking.

In challenging the economic and political stranglehold of agricultural and mining capital, industrialisation was seen to be an inherently progressive process. Native Representative Donald Molteno argued that the struggle in South Africa lay between vested economic interests which benefitted from the *status quo*, and industry, which challenged the *status quo* and strengthened liberals in the political arena. For Molteno, industry speeded up both economic and political change with the result that "the objective forces that make for progress are on [our] side."⁷¹ As such, liberals felt themselves to be on the side of 'common sense', the title of one of their journals.⁷²

Leo Marquard, head of the Army Education Service during the war and later a leading Liberal Party and SAIRR member, noted in 1943 that

there is ample evidence that a Bantu bourgeoisie has come into being in the urban areas ... their economic position, as they see it, is associated with the European rather than with the depressed Bantu worker.⁷³

Marquard argued that white liberals and the emergent black middle class were natural allies, participating in the Joint Councils set up by the SAIRR to generate consensus over municipal affairs. Such co-operation, Marquard argued, together with the "relatively good

⁷⁰ M.Legassick: 'The Rise of Modern South African Liberalism: Its Assumptions and its Social Base.' Institute of Commonwealth Studies: Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, seminar paper, 1972, p.30.

⁷¹ Donald Molteno Papers, University of Cape Town: BC579 D1.1: D.Molteno: Memorandum on the Position of the Natives Representatives in the Senate and the House of Assembly (nd.?1943), p.6.

⁷² Common Sense was the journal of the 'Society of Christians and Jews', founded by R.F.A.Hoernle.

⁷³ J.Burger (pseud. Leo Marquard): The Black Man's Burden (London 1943), pp.95-96.

economic position" of the black bourgeoisie, "makes them feel that they have more to lose than their chains."⁷⁴

Liberals argued that the emergence of an urban African bourgeoisie would flow inevitably from industrialisation, and would require representative structures with powers greater than the NRC; in other words, political reform was seen to be the inevitable result of economic development. Liberals oppose extra-parliamentary strategies which imperilled the gradual parliamentary evolution of a nonracial meritocracy. Native Representative Edgar Brookes claimed:

The liberal-minded South African who takes the line of going all out for a policy which will conform immediately to world liberal opinion has virtually made his decision for rebellion and direct action.⁷⁵

Liberals supported incremental change, stressing the need for black socio-economic advancement, and encouraged the UP in its moves towards a more liberal policy. Demands for significant political reform were premature, liberals argued:

Ultimate objectives such as democracy or socialism are will o' the wisps until the basic social and material conditions for an advance towards them have been achieved.⁷⁶

With economic developments pointing towards change in government policy, liberals called for restraint on the part of the Congresses. Buoyed by the seeming congruity between industrialisation and their political goals, the Native Representatives saw the main task of all who supported a nonracial future to be "to assist, at every point, the forces making for the evolution of the Bantu people into a modern community."⁷⁷ As Legassick has noted,

their argument that progress could only come by the evolutionary acceptance of 'civilised' Africans into the community, became transformed into the belief that because progress had come (as measured in terms of economic indices), acceptance of 'civilised' Africans would follow.⁷⁸

In 1943 the UP was supported by industrial, mining and agricultural capital; by 1946, however, unity in support of the war had given way before competition for black labour.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.96.

⁷⁵ J.H.Hofmeyr Papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand: A1/Lm6: E.H.Brookes: The Dilemma of the South African Liberal (article nd.1946) p.4.

⁷⁶ Molteno: Memorandum *op.cit.*, p.6.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.7.

⁷⁸ Legassick: Liberalism *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁷⁹ O'Meara: Volkskapitalisme *op.cit.*: chapter 15.

As a result, according to O'Meara, "the UP government fell between at least three stools" in attempting to appease the demands of the three main sectors of the economy.⁸⁰ In addition, the UP faced a concerted attack on its 'liberal' policies by the Nationalist Party [NP], as well as organised black opposition which expressed itself through industrial action and passive resistance.

The UP response was varied. Smuts attempted to implement the gradual black inclusion in state structures which liberals called for by offering Indians white parliamentary representation in return for restrictions on Indian ownership and occupation of land in Natal. In response to the NRC adjournment, Smuts offered to enlarge the Council to fifty elected members. Hofmeyr shared the liberal desire to separate perceived black moderates from radicalising influences, and warned Smuts of "the disturbing fact that the moderate intellectuals of the Professor Matthews type have committed themselves to a policy of non-co-operation."⁸¹ Both proposals were rejected by the black Congresses. Non-UP liberals appealed for black restraint, arguing that South Africa was not analogous to societies such as India, where mass-based passive resistance campaigns were effective, but to nineteenth century Britain. Brookes called for evolutionary development along lines similar to the British franchise settlements of the 1800s:

Most of us believe that given time and opportunity we can do in South Africa in the twentieth century what was done with signal success in England in the nineteenth century; namely, step by step obtain majorities in the privileged groups for the extension of rights to the unprivileged.⁸²

Faced with black determination and the NP challenge, however, the UP responded to black protest with repression. In 1946 the miner's strike was crushed, the NRC adjourned, and the offices of the CPSA, *The Guardian*, the Springbok Legion, various trade unions, as well as the homes of prominent leftwing individuals were raided by the police. Finally, in attempting to rationalise its 'Native policy' and provide the labour demanded by the different economic sectors, the UP convened Fagan Commission to investigate influx control with regard to the growth of urban industry and its effects on migrant labour. The Fagan

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.234.

⁸¹ Hofmeyr Papers: A1/Db3: J.H.Hofmeyr to J.Smuts, 16-9-1946.

⁸² Brookes: *Dilemma op.cit.*, p.3.

Commission was intended to ease the growing legitimisation crisis faced by the Smuts government as segregation became increasingly undermined by industrialisation, urbanisation and the liberal discourse they generated.

The Fagan Report, issued in 1948, was an internally contradictory document which favoured both a permanent black urban presence and continued migrant labour.⁸³ The Fagan Report did not elaborate a legitimating ideology; rather, it operated within a framework of economic necessity and expediency. As Adam Ashforth has argued, the racist assumptions of the report were in common with the 'grand tradition' of South African 'Native commissions'; however, the Fagan Report was unique:

the Fagan report ... does not provide a scheme for the legitimate division of rights and obligations within the state on racial grounds. Fagan accepts the racial division of the state as it stands and rationalises it in purely 'racist' terms ... For Fagan the divided State can be accepted as legitimate merely on the basis of administrative expedience; there is no need for any of the rhetorical paraphernalia of 'civilising mission' or 'development.'

By 1946, liberals were faced with a radicalising Congress movement, and a government which resorted increasingly to repression rather than concession. Leo Marquard warned Hofmeyr that "the United Party is frightening off its possible friends by vainly trying to attract its known enemies," and claimed that liberals were "profoundly disturbed and bewildered by what we feel to be a drift away from liberalism and an appeasing of reaction."⁸⁴ In response, liberals firstly strove to break an election boycott proposed by the ANCYL, so as to maintain a 'moderate' ANC with which dialogue was possible. Secondly, liberals in parliament, the SAIRR and elsewhere produced a series of programmes designed to highlight the political reforms which should accompany the empirical findings of the Fagan Report.⁸⁵

The two central planks of liberalism in the 1940s were economic integration and African urbanisation, seen as the natural results of a modernising economy. Liberals argued that

⁸³ See A.Ashforth: *Structures of State Ideology; A Study of some Commission Reports on the "Native Question" in South Africa* (M.Phil. thesis, Oxford, 1981), pp.81-83.

⁸⁴ Leo Marquard Papers, Jagger Library, University of Cape Town: BC587 C71.2: L.Marquard to J.H.Hofmeyr, 25-9-1946.

⁸⁵ See chapter 6.

political reform had followed industrialisation and urbanisation in western Europe, and would do so in South Africa as well. Brookes noted: "Our cause is logically so strong that we are tempted to put our whole faith in logic."⁴⁶ Liberals aimed to establish in South Africa what leading Native Representative Margaret Ballinger later described as "a Western state, maintaining Western standards and based on Western values."⁴⁷ The evolutionary attainment of such a society was premised on parliamentary gradualism; this in turn required governmental concessions to 'reasonable' black demands. The alternative, Brookes warned, was anarchy:

[Black] resistance, whether by armed rebellion or by general strike or by a non-co-operation movement on a national scale would arouse fierce passions and produce results which none could foresee. The whole structure of parliamentary government through ordered democratic channels would be destroyed, and that before the non-European himself is ready to accept the responsibilities which would be thrust upon him.⁴⁸

No liberal programme of action was developed; rather, the Representatives and leading SAIRR members attempted to influence the policies and programmes of the UP and the ANC and thereby play a mediating role between black demands and the white parliament. Facing the 1946 NRC adjournment and proposed electoral boycott, however, liberals discovered their inability to influence either side.

The NRC adjournment had a particular urgency for the Native Representatives because, as Margaret Ballinger noted, it amounted to a "repudiation of the whole representation embodied in the 1936 Act under which we hold our seats."⁴⁹ This was compounded by the Youth League call for a boycott of all Native Representation elections. As a result, the Representatives called on Councillors to rescind their adjournment which, Ballinger argued, had been emotional and spontaneous and "did not involve any planned approach to the problems which such a decision must necessarily raise."⁵⁰ As such, Ballinger argued, fundamental principles were not at issue; rather, "the maximum issue that is to be decided

⁴⁶ E.H.Brookes: The Man of the Country in The Forum 3-12-1949, p.14.

⁴⁷ Ballinger Papers: A410/F3.5: M.Ballinger: Presidential Address, 1953 Liberal Party Conference, p.4.

⁴⁸ Brookes: Dilemma *op.cit.*, pp.4-5.

⁴⁹ Ballinger Papers: A410/B2.14.16: M.Ballinger: Memorandum on the Adjournment of the Natives' Representative Council, 22-8-1946, p.1.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p.2.

... is the condition or conditions upon which the Council will resume its functions."⁷¹ In September 1946, Margaret and William Ballinger advised leading NRC member Z.K.Matthews that "the African people are not yet ready for a complete repudiation of the Council" and

that probably the best next move would be for the Councillors simply to accept the next summons to meet, to turn up at Pretoria as if nothing had happened, and then to begin to argue about the future of the Council when you reassemble."⁷²

In response to the NRC adjournment, the ANCYL proposed an electoral boycott. The boycott was opposed by some NRC members but supported by ANC/CPSA members such as Moses Kotane, and by James Moroka and other Councillors. The Native Representatives supported those Councillors opposed to the boycott, and the Ballingers and Hymie Basner attended an emergency conference of the Transvaal ANC in June 1947, called to discuss implementation of the boycott.⁷³ Supported by NRC members Paul Mosaaka and Selope Thema, the Ballingers called on the conference to reject the boycott, and to call a national ANC conference to do the same. The Representatives described the boycott as a "silly" idea and warned the conference that "before you carry it out you will have the fight of your lives."⁷⁴

While the battle was being carried to the ANC, Edgar Brookes attempted to convince Hofmeyr to grant concessions to the NRC, claiming that "the more I think about it, the more I am convinced that there is a real case to meet from the Native point of view."⁷⁵ By making concessions, Brookes argued, the government would assist liberals in "strengthening ... the moderate section in the Representative Council so that they might find it possible to carry out the policy of co-operation which in their heart of hearts they would prefer."⁷⁶ Brookes argued that "the most important thing" was the development of personal friendships between Hofmeyr and "a handful of key men among the non-Europeans"; this

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Ballinger Papers: A410/B2.14.16: M. and W.Ballinger to Z.K.Matthews, 3-9-1946.

⁷³ *The Guardian* 12-6-1947, p.1.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ Hofmeyr Papers: Aa1822: E.H.Brookes to J.H.Hofmeyr, 9-8-1946.

⁷⁶ Hofmeyr Papers: Aa1838: E.H.Brookes: Racial Tension in South Africa (article), 3-12-1946, p.2.

would result in a commonality of interests:

if a few men ... could be encouraged to visit you from time to time, to open their hearts to you, to feel your friendship, to know your difficulties, political and otherwise, to feel free to write confidentially to you, their influence, spread far and wide among their people, would counteract all the negative propaganda, and help the people, through having confidence in your intentions, to wait for the right moment for drastic reforms.⁹⁷

Hofmeyr in turn warned Smuts that NRC moderates supported the adjournment. Nonetheless, he refused to accept responsibility for announcing concessions to the NRC, which adjourned.⁹⁸

By January 1948, the electoral boycott, never a popular strategy with the ANC leadership, was openly rejected by Xuma and others.⁹⁹ Sustaining the boycott became impossible in the confused situation, and the ANC and CPSA proposed the election of 'boycott candidates' who would call for the 1936 legislation to be repealed.¹⁰⁰ In justifying the change of tactics, the ANC argued that insufficient organisation had taken place to carry through a boycott, and that NRC candidates should use their positions to undertake such organisation.¹⁰¹ By the time the change came about, liberals were seen to be actively opposed to the boycott. A year later, faced with a choice between Margaret Ballinger and a Nationalist Party candidate, the secretary of the Port Elizabeth African Organisations advised his members: "DO NOT VOTE FOR EITHER OF THEM!"¹⁰² By linking their activities with conservative ANC/NRC members, the Representatives alienated themselves from radical ANC opinion, most notably the ANCYL.

By the late 1940s, the Congress movement evinced widespread hostility towards liberals. Significantly, liberals were not criticised on ideological grounds, but for their failure to support the methods by which the ANC and SAIC pursued their goals. Leading Transvaal Indian Congress member Ahmed 'Kathy' Kathrada defined liberals in terms of their refusal to support the strategies and campaigns of the Congresses. Accusing "the men and women

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ Hofmeyr Papers: A1/Db5: J.H.Hofmeyr to J.C.Smuts, 16-9-1946.

⁹⁹ *The Guardian* 22-1-1948, p.3.

¹⁰⁰ *The Guardian* 8-1-1948, p.1.

¹⁰¹ *The Guardian* 15-1-1948, p.1.

¹⁰² ANC Papers: AD1189/6/ha/8: Appeal to All African Voters: Boycott the Coming Elections: leaflet, 23-10-1948 (emphasis in original).

of the liberal creed" of cowardice, Kathrada stated:

Our experiences have been that these individuals, who are usually vociferous in their claims for justice and fairplay for the black man, have on every occasion when their assistance was required, sadly failed us.¹⁰³

At a meeting in Durban, liberals were characterised by their use of "humble petitions and respectable deputations" which failed to "deliver the goods."¹⁰⁴ In 1949 Jordan Ngubane, a founder member of the ANCYL and later prominent in the Liberal Party, stressed that white liberals had failed to constructively intervene in black political life.¹⁰⁵ A year later he argued:

the collapse of African Moderation has been largely occasioned by the failure of the European Liberals as a group to take an unequivocal and unfaltering stand on the vital colour question.¹⁰⁶

By 1948, liberal attempts to mediate between the UP and the ANC had failed. The ANC endorsed extra-parliamentary protest in pursuit of unqualified equality, and Youth Leaguers became increasingly hostile to the perceived caution and obstructionism of liberals. In May 1948 the Nationalist Party won power, and seven months later Jan Hofmeyr died. In parliament, the Representatives faced ostracism from both the UP and the NP. Edgar Brookes noted:

The lot of the European who claims to be in any sense of that much abused word, a "liberal," is hard. He stands, as it were, on a shrinking isthmus, with the oceans of European passion and non-European passion encroaching on it from day to day.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion.

The socio-economic changes brought about by the second world war led to a significant increase in black, and particularly African, political activity. African trade unions grew alongside civic organisation shown by the bus boycotts and squatter movements. In response, the ANC both radicalised its programme and entered an alliance with the SAIC. The People's Assembly for Votes for All revealed the ANC and SAIC seeking ideological unity and popular support by mobilising people around the production and endorsement

¹⁰³ *The Forum* 30-7-1949.

¹⁰⁴ *The Guardian* 10-11-1949, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ J.Ngubane in *The Forum* 15-4-1950, p.29.

¹⁰⁷ Hofmeyr Papers: A1/Lj7: E.H.Brookes: Presidential Address, SAIRR, 1949, p.11.

of a statement of principle.

White liberals, communists and others opposed to segregation sought an adequate response to the rise of the ANC. The CPSA reaffirmed its support for a 'two-stage' revolution through which it would co-operate with the national movement in pursuit of national liberation. The radicalisation of the ANC, however, was instigated in large part by the ANC Youth League which strongly resisted attempts by the CPSA to co-operate with or influence the ANC. White liberals met with similar ANCYL hostility as they called on the ANC to moderate its demands and methods of protest; at the same time, liberal attempts to influence the UP government came to nothing. After the 1948 general election victory of the NP, Afrikaner and African nationalism came to dominate the political terrain. Chapter two analyses organised white opposition to apartheid as it emerged in the early 1950s.

Chapter two.

The emergence of white opposition to apartheid, 1950-1952.

Introduction.

In November 1952 the ANC and SAIC attempted to capitalise on anti-Nationalist Party sentiment and called for the creation of a "parallel white organisation" to work with the them.¹ In response, liberal and radical whites divided over universal suffrage, relations with ex-communists, participation in a multiracially structured alliance, and the efficacy of extra-parliamentary opposition - the issues which separated them throughout the 1950s. White radicals, including a number of former members of the CPSA, formed the Congress of Democrats. Liberals remained within the UP fold until after the 1953 election, when one strand of liberal opinion broke with the UP and formed the Liberal Party. White opposition to apartheid took organisational form during the political upheavals of the early 1950s; the organisations, and their strategic and ideological differences, were marked by the twin experiences of the Torch Commando and the Defiance Campaign.

The Wider Context.

Political conditions in the 1950s were dominated by the NP government and the onslaught on civil liberties, legal rights and conventional practices in South Africa. For the black population, the period was one of unremitting repression, falling real wages, and personal and employment insecurity. The 1948 election was followed by a slowing of capital inflows and a balance of payments crisis which peaked in 1949; by 1950 the economy exhibited real growth, which the opening of new gold and uranium mines promised to sustain.²

The 1950s were marked by a strengthening economy and a 'strong' government promising an end to black protest. The legislative bedrock of apartheid was laid in the 1949-1953 period, with the Group Areas Act enforcing residential and business segregation;

¹ Duma Nokwe, interviewed by Janet Robertson: Liberalism in South Africa (Oxford 1971), p.38.

² Moll, T.: Growth Without Development: The South African Economy in the 1950s. Paper presented South Africa in the 1950s Conference, Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, 1987, p.6.

the Population Registration Act which embedded racist classification; the Separate Representation of Voters Act which ultimately disenfranchised Coloured voters; the Separate Amenities Act which entrenched the principle of unequal amenities for different races; and the Suppression of Communism Act which led to the dissolution of the CP SA and gave the government an armoury of repressive powers. The rise of the NP was paralleled by the decay of the UP, and its continued inability to offer a policy different in anything other than method from apartheid. When NP backbenchers proposed concentration camps for participants in the 1952 Defiance Campaign, Julius Lewin, organiser of the liberal 'Hofmeyr Society' within the UP, reported:

It is already possible to visualise certain United Party members of Parliament solemnly declaring that the principle of concentration camps for Non-European resistance leaders is sound, but that the diet proposed is inadequate and there should be more latrines.³

Internationally, the Cold War saw anti-communist legislation tabled in Canada, Australia and elsewhere. Domestically, the NP brought out Sir Percy Sillitoe, head of MI5, to advise them on the best means of combatting communism. Through what liberal academic Leo Kuper described as "the progressive redefinition of communism as synonymous with non-discrimination on the basis of race or colour"⁴, a growing suspicion of any message of racial equality emerged. As George Heaton Nicholls, later leader of the Union-Federal Party, put it:

If Liberalism manifests itself in a humanitarian impulse to assist the downtrodden, if it is a matter of the heart, then I am a Liberal: but if it is a system of government, or aims at a system of government which considers a Hottentot equal in political stature to the Astronomer Royal, then I am not a Liberal.⁵

Following Native Representative Hymie Basner's action in taking segregation to the UN in 1946, the Representatives were all attacked by the NP as the destroyers of white racial purity. This was exacerbated by the election to parliament of CP SA Central Committee member Sam Kahn as Cape Western Native Representative. Kahn generated a singular degree of Nationalist antipathy, as the *Rand Daily Mail* reported:

³ *Agenda* 2-1-1953; the Hofmeyr Society is discussed in chapter 6.

⁴ Leo Kuper: *The Background to Passive Resistance (South Africa 1952)*. *Race Relations Journal* XX/3 1953, p.18.

⁵ Quoted in *The Forum* 8-12-1950, p.6.

With his eyes glued on Mr Sam Kahn, the Nationalist member for Swellendam ... said that if he had his way, all agitators would be put against a wall and shot.⁶

The constitutional crisis and white opposition.

The early 1950s were dominated by the government's battle to disenfranchise Coloured (and Asian) voters, who were a significant electoral factor in some seven Cape constituencies.⁷ The battle began with a warning from the government of impending legislation in 1948 and lasted through to the packing of the Senate in 1956.⁸ The extended constitutional crisis saw the Appellate Division set aside both the Separate Representation of Voters Act passed with only a simple majority in 1951, and an attempt by the government to constitute the legislature as the High Court of Parliament. The crisis gave rise to the most widespread anti-NP demonstrations of the 1950s and 1960s. On the one hand, the War Veteran's Torch Commando mobilised had a paid-up membership of over 250 000 (overwhelmingly white) ex-servicepeople in 1952; on the other, the ANC and SAIC embarked on a passive resistance campaign which saw over 8000 volunteers arrested and paid-up membership of the ANC rise to over 100 000 in 1952.⁹

The period 1950-1953 was marked by widespread mobilisation. The ANC and SAIC and supporting organisations such as the Franchise Action Committee [FRAC] organised protest meetings and strikes in opposition to apartheid; this culminated in the 1952 Defiance Campaign. The Torch Commando, supported by organisations such as the Civil Rights League [CRL], mobilised former members of the voluntary wartime defence forces who opposed the unconstitutional actions of the NP government and staged massive torchlit demonstrations. The early militancy of the Torch Commando was provided by Springbok Legion members, and disappeared with an internal purge of Legionnaires.¹⁰ Thereafter, the Commando became a mass-based electoral adjunct to the UP. The Defiance Campaign,

⁶ Rand Daily Mail 27-4-1950, p.7.

⁷ L.Thompson: The Cape Franchise (SAIRR 1951).

⁸ See T.Karis, and G.Gerhart: Challenge and Violence (California 1977) pp.10-11, and Robertson: Liberalism op cit, pp.48-51.

⁹ M.Fridjhon: 'The Torch Commando and the Politics of White Opposition, South Africa 1951-1953': seminar paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1977; and T.Lodge: Black Politics in South Africa since 1945 (London 1983), p.61.

¹⁰ See below and chapter 5.

marked by the controlled militancy of its volunteers, grew throughout 1952 until repressed by draconian legislation - supported by the UP and the Torch Commando.

Initial opposition to Coloured disenfranchisement was undertaken by the Civil Rights League and the Franchise Action Committee; the two organisations highlighted the emergence of two different forms of resistance in the early 1950s, using different methods and pursuing different goals. The CRL was overwhelmingly white and saw the parliamentary arena and strengthening the UP as its main area of activity. Accordingly, like the later Torch Commando, the CRL stressed the need for constitutional (ie. parliamentary) action and saw its role as "building up a strong body of enlightened opinion throughout South Africa."¹¹

FRAC on the other hand was a nonracial amalgam of black and white ex-Communists, conservative members of the Coloured Peoples National Union and others, which organised voters threatened with disenfranchisement, and Coloured workers threatened by the white protectionism of apartheid legislation.¹² Where the CRL organised petitions and meetings, FRAC concentrated on organising workers and staged a successful one-day strike in the Cape in May 1951, and was represented on the planning council of the Defiance Campaign alongside the ANC and SAIC. FRAC also stressed the 'constitutionality' of its actions, by which was meant the legality of extra-parliamentary activity for an unrepresented population. As ANC President-General James Moroka argued:

a general strike in any civilised country at all is constitutional. Today in South Africa, America, everywhere the white people settle issues by strikes. It is only when a man is oppressed that he is not allowed to strike when the occasion warrants it.¹³

Both forms of struggle contributed towards and capitalised on the political ferment which attended the government's battle to force disenfranchisement legislation onto the

¹¹ BC587 E11.1.1: L.Thompson: The First Weeks - A Survey of the Work of the Civil Rights League (CRL, nd.1948), p.2.

¹² T.Karon: 'Vryheid nie op 'n "skinkboard" nie': The Coloured Peoples' Congress and the National Democratic Struggle in the Western Cape, 1951-1962 (University of Cape Town, Honours thesis, 1983).

¹³ The Guardian 15-2-1951, p.11.

statute book. The political mobilisation of the 1951-1953 period, and in particular the organisation of previously politically quiescent sectors of the population such as Coloured voters and anti-NP whites, boosted hopes for the emergence of large white and Coloured organisations to work alongside the African and Indian Congresses. When the ANC and SAIC called for the formation of a white Congress in November 1952, an initial membership of 5 000 -one-fiftieth of Torch Commando membership - was expected.¹⁴ In its place, however, there emerged a series of competing political organisations, pursuing different goals and strategies, some marked by antipathy towards the Congresses.

The CRL grew out of the Cape SAIRR and aimed to rally white opinion against the unconstitutional manoeuvres of the government.¹⁵ As the first response to the constitutional crisis, the CRL soon gained a popular following and attracted large audiences to its meetings. The CRL was led by senior SAIRR figures and recruited whites radicalised by the war but with little previous political involvement.¹⁶ In contrast, FRAC included communists Fred Carneson and Sam Kahn amongst its leaders and a number of former CPSA activists in its membership. The effect of both organisations was to fix white anti-Nationalist attention on the black franchise. The apartheid onslaught on black rights similarly obliged liberals to confront political issues they had previously avoided. This was most clearly true of the black franchise, ignored by liberals in the 1940s and threatened by the Separate Representation of Voters Bill. For some liberals, such as Leo Marquard who had long called for a qualified nonracial franchise, this was a 'relief':

It is a good thing that we have at last been forced by recent events to face this issue squarely. For far too long we have evaded it, gone around it, behind it, and over it. We have pushed it into the background, as an uncomfortable thing, an embarrassing thing, with which we hoped we would not have to deal. Our children and grandchildren perhaps, but not we...¹⁷

The CRL marked a change of strategy by liberals, as they moved from attempting to play a mediating role to directly appeal for public support. The CRL was launched at a

¹⁴ Patrick Duncan Papers, University of York: DU8.9.8: Notes of interview with Jack Hodgson (SACOD founder), October 1953.

¹⁵ Thompson: *CRL op cit*, p.2.

¹⁶ Marquard Papers, University of Cape Town: BC587 E2.88: L.Marquard to P.Brown, 27-12-1964.

¹⁷ Marquard Papers: BC587 H2.2: L.Marquard: Citizen's Rally speech, 14-9-1948.

'Citizens Rally' attended by 10 000 people; *The Guardian* welcomed the CRL and its ability to rally white support, stating: "Now, resistance to these attacks is taking shape."¹⁸ The leadership of the CRL comprised senior SAIRR members, and its appeal was to English middle-class voters alienated by the NP. The CRL was an inherently cautious and defensive organisation, committed to defence of the *status quo* and the established rights of all races, and calling for resistance to "the inordinate curtailment of the liberties of the individual."¹⁹ The CRL organised public meetings, and its main activity was a petition of 100 001 signatures opposing the Separate Representation of Voters Bill. As Leo Marquard put it: "That was all in public. Behind the scenes we continued to work on the U.P..."²⁰

CRL leaders and senior UP members worked closely together, and the CRL mobilised public opinion without articulating a programme of resistance to Coloured disenfranchisement other than voting for the UP. It was soon overtaken by the Torch Commando, and both were affected by similar tensions, most notably the close links with the UP which reduced both to little more than a mouthpiece for the larger body. Equally significant were the different tendencies visible within the CRL itself. The CRL attracted a younger generation politicised by the second world war, who welcomed the opportunity to clearly articulate a 'liberal' racial policy.²¹ The CRL leadership however maintained a staunchly 'apolitical' stand, claiming "[o]ur Constitution is in danger ... This threat must be resisted on the grounds that it is immoral."²² In place of a political platform, the CRL relied on the 'practical' approach of the SAIRR and others, stating:

With the economic integration of the Non-Europeans and the Europeans proceeding apace - and this process cannot be stopped - the internal peace of South Africa depends upon amicable relations between the different groups.²³

The CRL strove to maintain a 'moderate' image in contrast with the 'radical' activities of FRAC and other extra-parliamentary organisations. In contrast with claims by Gavin

¹⁸ *The Guardian* 9-9-1948, p.1.

¹⁹ Marquard Papers: BC587 E11.2: CRL: Programme (nd.?1948).

²⁰ Marquard Papers: BC587 E2.88 L.Marquard to P.Brown, 27-12-1964.

²¹ See for example Oscar Wollheim Papers, University of Cape Town: BC627 M1.2: Oscar Wollheim's speech launching the East London CRL branch (nd. 1948).

²² CRL: Programme op cit.

²³ *ibid.*

Lewis that the CRL provided "impressive support" for a strike organised by FRAC in Cape Town²⁴, pressure from younger CRL members for such support and active participation was quashed by the CRL leadership.²⁵ When approached by the Witziehoek Defence Fund for a donation to the costs of defending those on trial for resistance to cattle-culling, the CRL refused, stating: "No question of civil liberties is involved."²⁶

Many of the tensions between liberals and radicals were magnified by the Torch Commando.²⁷ Ex-service organisations began forming protest committees following the early release from prison of Robey Leibbrandt, a Nazi trained saboteur imprisoned for wartime activities, and the premature removal of senior English-speaking Defence Force officers. Protests organised by the Combined Ex-Servicemen's Associations drew crowds of 10 000 in Johannesburg and Cape Town.²⁸ Characterising the NP as 'Nazis,' ex-service organisations soon gained large followings around the country. In 1952, the Torch Commando mobilised whites by emphasising the comradeship of the war, and through a studied vagueness over specific goals combined with a virulent opposition to the 'fascists' in power. Commenting on Coloured disenfranchisement, a spokesperson for the 'Ex-Servicemen's Protest Organisation' commented:

The men who fought did so for principles they can only vaguely express. But we know that legislation like this is a direct negation of what we fought for.²⁹

The Springbok Legion was a prime mover in the development of ex-service opposition and the formation of the Torch Commando; the Legion's flair for dramatic street protests invigorated the movement and gave it an appeal beyond existing party-political affiliations. One commentator noted that the Commando's "great attraction to the ordinary man was the very fact that it was not a political party, for it thus became a haven for people of all political faiths."³⁰ The Commando was formed following a Legion demonstration at the

²⁴ G.Lewis: Between the Wire and the Wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics (Cape Town 1987), p.267.

²⁵ The Guardian 27-5-1951, p.3.

²⁶ The Guardian 25-1-1951, p.1.

²⁷ See M.Fridjon: The Torch Commando: A study in opposition politics in South Africa, 1951-1953. Honours thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1975.

²⁸ The Guardian 24-6-1948, p.1.

²⁹ The Evening Post 14-4-1951.

³⁰ Joel Mervis: The Torch Commando, The Forum May 1952, p.7 (emphasis in original).

Johannesburg cenotaph in March 1951, where a symbolic constitution was laid to rest.³¹ The Legion injected a degree of militancy to the Commando entirely lacking from the CRL, calling for the immediate resignation of the government and threatening to "bring the country to a standstill."³²

The Torch Commando, unlike the CRL, was launched after the constitutional crisis began, in 1951, and soon gained a significant following. Legionnaires in the Commando organised the Steel Commando - a convoy of jeeps which converged on Cape Town from across the country.³³ In Cape Town, however, the massive protest meeting - with an estimated attendance of some 75 000³⁴ - degenerated into violence, with police baton-charging crowds of Coloured sympathisers. The UP used this as an occasion to purge the Commando of its Legion members.³⁵ Thereafter the Commando, with a quarter of a million paid-up members, dedicated itself to house-meetings and registering UP voters prior to the 1953 election.

From this attenuated account it is evident that similar tensions affected both the CRL and the Commando. On the specific issue of the franchise, the Commando blurred its message and concentrated on defence of the *status quo*. The two issues which most directly confronted the Commando, however, were those of nonracial membership, and the use of extra-parliamentary means of opposition. The Cape Commando was nonracial with a large Coloured membership³⁶; elsewhere, the Commando was a white organisation whose members stated: "We are South Africans and as such the colour bar is an accepted part of our lives."³⁷ Alex Hepple, leader of the Labour Party and a senior figure in the 1953 electoral pact between the UP, Torch Commando and Labour Party, later stated:

the Government kept attention focused on the race issue and the Torch Commando eventually faltered at this hurdle ... it fought on one flank against the curtailment of the political rights of the coloureds and on the other lined up with the forces

³¹ *The Guardian* 23-4-1951, p.1.

³² Quoted in E.Walker: *A History of Southern Africa* (London 1957), p.838.

³³ *The Rand Daily Mail* 26-4-1951, p.2.

³⁴ *The Guardian* 31-5-1951, p.1.

³⁵ Interview with Springbok Legion member Issie Heymann (1987), transcript p.15; and Len Lee-Warden (Torch Commando Cape Secretary): *Memoirs* (nd.?1980, unpublished).

³⁶ Interview with Len Lee-Warden (1987), transcript p.8.

³⁷ *The Guardian* 20-9-1951, p.7 (South West African branch statement).

of discrimination.³⁸

More significantly, the issue of extra-parliamentary action emerged as a dividing line between radical and liberal opponents of the government. Following the Cape Town violence, according to Hepple, the UP exerted "political influence and intrigue" to bring the Commando within its ambit.³⁹ The removal of Legion members from the Commando was a key element in this process, and following their departure the Commando confined itself to purely electoral work. In so doing, however, the essence of the Commando's appeal was destroyed -its massive extra-parliamentary demonstrations. Thereafter, the UP successfully transformed the Commando into a junior electoral partner. By mid-1952 radical whites declared the Torch Commando dead.⁴⁰

Whites and the Defiance Campaign.

The decline of the Torch Commando was matched by the rise of the Defiance Campaign, and the direct intrusion of the Congress movement into the political calculations of white liberals and radicals. The Campaign generated a flurry of ideological and strategic debates amongst radical and liberal whites, and divisions between the two emerged more clearly as the Campaign developed into a mass-based passive resistance movement, and Congress leaders called for full white identification with their aims and methods. From those debates there eventually emerged the South African Congress of Democrats, the white wing of the Congress Alliance, and the nonracial Liberal Party.⁴¹

The Defiance Campaign was launched on 6 April 1952, the tercentenary of Van Riebeeck's landing at the Cape, and marked out for protest the Group Areas Act, the Bantu Authorities Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Stock Limitation Act, the pass laws and the Separate Representation of Voters Act. The SAIFR responded by "deploring" the "insensitivity" of the date chosen by Campaign organisers, and criticised the ANC for

³⁸ A.Hepple: *South Africa* (London, 1966) p.128.

³⁹ *ibid.*; interview with Len Lee-Warden, p.8; and *The Guardian* 9-8-1951.

⁴⁰ *The Clarion* 21-8-1952, p.4.

⁴¹ See chapters 3 to 6.

"unrealistically demand[ing] the immediate abolition" of the six statutes.⁴² The SAIRR concluded that it

shares with the Prime Minister his concern that public order must be maintained and appreciates the reasons that prompt him to declare that any outbreak of violence must be firmly met.⁴³

The Defiance Campaign ran parallel to important developments in white politics, particularly the legal setbacks of the government in its disenfranchisement battle and a new optimism on the part of the UP having largely absorbed the Torch Commando. More importantly, the Defiance Campaign initiated highly significant political developments among radical and liberal whites, where its influence increased in proportion to the campaign itself. The Campaign began slowly, but grew in size and popular appeal until by the end of 1952 over 8 000 volunteers had been imprisoned. The government responded with increased repression, including the introduction of whipping for defiers.

In response to calls for white support for the Campaign, the white liberal/left began to reveal ideological gradations in its commitment to the Congress-led struggle. On the one hand, leading FRAC members participated in planning the Defiance Campaign. Similarly, the Springbok Legion endorsed the Campaign and called on the Torch Commando to join the ANC and SAIC in organising a national strike.⁴⁴ This contrasted with the antipathy of the SAIRR. The Native Representatives publicly distanced themselves from both the SAIRR and the Legion; in a statement written by Margaret Ballinger and published in October 1952, twenty-two leading liberals called for a positive white response to the Campaign which they described as "clearly no sudden impulse, ... [ied] by men who are acknowledged leaders among Africans and Indians."⁴⁵ The statement, around which the initial organisation of the Liberal Party took place⁴⁶, continued:

We believe that it is imperative that South Africa should now adopt a policy that

⁴² ANC Papers, University of the Witwatersrand: AD1189/5/ G2: SAIRR: The Government and the A.N.C. (nd.March 1952).

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Cecil Williams (Springbok Legion chairperson) in *The Clarion*, 17-7-1952, p.1.

⁴⁵ *The Forum* October 1952: Equal Rights For All Civilised People, signed by: Margaret and William Ballinger, Edgar Brookes, Leo Marquard, Trevor Huddleston, Arthur Keppel-Jones, Julius Lewin, Donald Molteno, Mabel Palmer, Alan Paton, Saul Solomon, Rabbi Rabinowitz, Bishop Reeves, Ellen Hellmann, Winifred Hoernle, George Gale, Harold Hanson, J.B.Webb, Hugh Parker, C.Coblans, M.Mck.Malcolm, and J.S.Marais.

⁴⁶ See chapter 6.

will attract the support of educated, politically conscious non-Europeans by offering them a reasonable status in our society. This can be done by a revival of the liberal tradition which prevailed for so many years with such successful results in the Cape Colony.⁴⁷

The statement called for the reintroduction of a policy of "equal rights for all civilised men, and equal opportunity for all to become civilised." At the same time, it called on Congress leaders "to recognise that it will take time and patience substantially to improve the present position." Finally, with an eye on the UP, the twenty-two offered their proposal "in the hope that it will make negotiations possible and their success probable."⁴⁸

By November 1952 informal discussions between the Congresses and the UP had begun. ANC Secretary-General Walter Sisulu was approached by leading UP and Torch Commando members, directors of the Oppenheimer Trust and others.⁴⁹ Influenced by growing white concern over the Defiance Campaign and the announcement of the 1953 general election, according to *Forum* editor and UP MP John Cope, the UP approached Congress leaders

to discover what their terms would be for calling off the passive resistance campaign on the eve of the parliamentary general election. Such a move, it was considered, would have a reassuring effect on the white electorate which was becoming anxious about the defiance campaign. It would be to the advantage of the United Party to demonstrate that it could influence non-white opinion.⁵⁰

Defiance Campaign organisers highlighted six laws in particular so as to facilitate their easier repeal, rather than demanding the immediate destruction of the entire apartheid state. For some liberals, this was evidence of common ground with the ANC. Leading liberal theoretician Leo Kuper argued:

No immediate claim is made for direct political representation and for full democratic rights, which are held out as goals for the future. The time element is thus conceived in the spirit of liberalism. It is evolutionary.⁵¹

According to Cope, the ANC offered to end the Defiance Campaign in exchange for a

⁴⁷ *ibid.*; for the importance of this statement, see P.Brown: The Liberal Party: A Chronology With Comment (Rhodes University, 1985); and Robertson: Liberalism *op cit*, p.86.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ J.Cope: South Africa (London 1965), pp.54-55; and Carter and Karis: South African Political Materials: Co-Operative African Microfilm Project [CAMP] Reel 12A 2:XM65:47/6: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 22-8-1952.

⁵⁰ Cope: South Africa *op.cit.*, p.54.

⁵¹ Kuper: Background *op.cit.*, p.29.

public statement from the UP that it would repeal the six laws:

the A.N.C. leaders did not ask for these things as a condition for calling off the passive resistance campaign. All they demanded was that the United Party, if it came to power, should undertake publicly to halt the tide of apartheid and set the flow in the opposite direction.⁵²

By the end of November, according to Campaign organiser and ANCYL President Joe Matthews, Ernest Oppenheimer - "the highest official in the Millionaire organisation that is behind a great deal of U.P. activity" - had joined "the wooing of Congress."⁵³ At the same time, however, the UP suffered a growing rightwing revolt. In order to pacify the party, UP leader Strauss reaffirmed his commitment to 'white leadership with justice' and a programme scarcely different from that of the Nationalist Party, barring constitutional sacrosanctity. The tentative UP/ANC discussions ended almost immediately.

As the Defiance Campaign continued, anti-white sentiment grew. As the sentences passed down to resisters became harsher, Matthews warned of the dangers of black racism, noting in October 1952 that "the attitude of those who have been to jail is uncompromisingly opposed to any talks with the whites unless all our demands are going to be met."⁵⁴ At the same time, whites supportive of the Defiance Campaign began agitating for a role greater than that of fund-raising or writing supportive letters to the press.⁵⁵

This pressure increased markedly when Patrick Duncan, son of a former governor-general, offered his services to the Campaign organisers.⁵⁶ Duncan's offer promised massive publicity for the Campaign. More importantly, it promised to counter the increasingly racial nature of the Campaign. As Planning Council member Yusuf Cachalia put it, "Pat's offer to defy came as a gift from Heaven: it stopped the campaign becoming racial."⁵⁷ Duncan's offer was replicated by whites in Cape Town. Lucas Phillips, chairperson of the ANC in the western Cape, stated: "Our reason for accepting Europeans into the movement is to

⁵² Cope: *South Africa op.cit.*, p.55.

⁵³ CAMP Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/16: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 30-11-1952.

⁵⁴ CAMP Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/9: J.M.Matthews to Z.K. Matthews, 2-10-1952.

⁵⁵ See chapter 5.

⁵⁶ C.J.Driver: *Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African* (London 1980), pp.92-94.

⁵⁷ Quoted in A.Sampson: *Drum* (London 1956) p.137.

dispel the idea among many Africans that all Whites are oppressors."³⁸ In early December, a large crowd including Duncan and six other whites entered Germiston location without a permit, and after speeches and freedom songs, were duly arrested.³⁹ At the same time, four young white resisters broke post office apartheid laws in Cape Town⁴⁰; a week later, Arnold Selby of the Textile Workers Union did the same.⁴¹

Liberals and Radicals Divide.

Calls for white support for the liberation struggle had been a strong theme of ANC and SAIC propaganda in the late 1940s. In 1947 Monty Naicker called for the creation of a new party to carry the struggle to white voters; at the same time, he insisted that "a progressive party can only be forged by unity among all progressive European organisations."⁴² At a superficial level, white support for the Defiance Campaign, and the growing distance between liberals and the UP, suggested that such unity was possible.

White liberals and radicals were however deeply divided, belonging to small, separate organisations and discussion groups. Relations between white liberals and radicals were increasingly hostile, exacerbated by the coming to power of the NP. Through an ideological attack and legislative onslaught on *all* opposition as traitorous, the government fuelled liberal anti-communism. The Suppression of Communism Act - described by Eric Walker as providing "almost dictatorial powers to deal decisively with anyone who was even faintly tinctured Red"⁴³ - placed liberals in an awkward position in supporting the aim but not the method of the legislation. Edgar Brookes claimed: "the terms 'Liberal' and 'Communist' are as separate as fire and water ... You could not slander a Liberal more than by calling him a Communist," and warned that liberals were being placed in danger since ex-communists would henceforth attempt to act "under the wings" of liberal

³⁸ *The Cape Argus* 28-11-1952, p.1.

³⁹ The six defiers were author Freda Troup; Percy Cohen, a dentist and later SACOD member; Bettie du Toit of the T&LC; students Sydney Shall and Margaret Holt; Selma Stamelman, an anthropologist.

⁴⁰ The four were students Albie Sachs and Mary Butcher, and Arnold Harrison and Hymie Rochman.

⁴¹ *The Cape Argus* 9-12-1952, p.1.

⁴² *The Guardian* 25-12-1947, p.2.

⁴³ Walker: *History* op cit, p.810.

organisations.⁴⁴

The *Cape Argus* reported the breakdown of a CRL meeting attended by some 2 000 people, called to oppose the Suppression of Communism Bill in May 1950. One of the speakers stated that the struggle against communism would go on with or without the Bill, and that the CPSA was 'Cominform-controlled'. Guest speaker and CPSA MP Sam Kahn objected, and the meeting descended into "uproar" and some physical exchange.⁴⁵ The dissolution of the CPSA in June 1950 increased liberal suspicion of communist infiltration of their organisations. As a result, liberal groups formed in the 1951-1953 period adopted an anti-communist 'screening' clauses.⁴⁶ The 1950s witnessed a growing hostility towards 'Stalinism' and the perceived closeness of links between the USSR and the disbanded CPSA. Winifred Hoernle, 1950 SAIRR President, stated:

In our own day we have seen Russia develop first into a communist state ... From that time it has developed into a police state ... Man in all the areas controlled by the Russian Communists is subservient to the state in all the phases of his life.⁴⁷

The notion of a Soviet-controlled CPSA was commonly accepted amongst South African liberals and confirmed for them by such works as Eddie Roux's biography of CPSA founder S.P. Bunting and his history of the liberation struggle, *Time Longer Than Rope*, in which he claimed that the CPSA repeatedly subordinated "the South African struggle to the needs of the world situation."⁴⁸ The internal vicissitudes of the CPSA in the 1930s and early 1940s, the policy changes, purges and loss of membership, had projected an image of a party following Comintern directives above domestic demands. This was exacerbated by the anti-CPSA activities of former Party members such as Hymie Basner.⁴⁹ In the 1950s, suspicion and hostility of the CPSA continued to be fuelled by former CPSA members who joined the Liberal Party, particularly Jock Isacowitz and Eddie Roux. Roux is said to have

⁴⁴ Quoted in S.Kavina: The Political Thought and Career of Hon.Dr.Edgar H.Brookes of South Africa (D.Phil. thesis, Bombay University, 1972), p.156.

⁴⁵ *The Cape Argus* 16-5-1950, p.2.

⁴⁶ See chapter 6.

⁴⁷ A.W.Hoernle: Liberalism Versus Communism, *Race Relations News* XII/8 August 1950: p.75.

⁴⁸ E.R.Roux: Time Longer Than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa (Madison 1949), p.317; and S.P.Bunting: A Political Biography (Cape Town 1943).

⁴⁹ See Hymie Basner in *The Guardian*: 16-1-1947, p.6; 6-3-1947, p.2.

told stories of his attempted assassination by KGB agents following the 1928 Comintern meeting (not mentioned in any of his published works), while Jock Isacowitz warned liberals that they would be outmanoeuvred by former CPSA members if they attempted to co-operate with SACOD.⁷⁰

The ANC and SAIC nonetheless expected a significant response to their appeal for a white Congress.⁷¹ The precise role that whites would play within the Congress movement was unclear. Joe Matthews stated simply: "The Whites will have to form a party that is prepared to make definite changes or join Congress."⁷² The Planning Council discussed the issue of white participation and in November 1952 called a meeting at the Darragh Hall in Johannesburg to capitalise on white support and sympathy for the Defiance Campaign. Some 300 whites attended the meeting which was chaired by former CPSA member Bram Fischer. Although well-known liberals such as the Ballingers, Marion Friedmann and others attended, most of those present were former CPSA members.

The Darragh Hall meeting proved to be a turning point in the development of white opposition to apartheid, for it was at the meeting that the division between white liberals and radicals became clear and the gap between them was organisationally fixed. The meeting was addressed by Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Cachalia, who called for a progressive white grouping "to co-operate with us, to be supportive ... to assist us in bringing justice to this country."⁷³ The precise nature of the organisation was left to the meeting, the only condition being that it should be fully committed to the common Congress ideal of equal rights for all.

White support for the Defiance Campaign had revealed differences previously obscured by common anti-fascism and later anti-Nationalist sentiment. Anti-apartheid whites faced a hostile NP government, and an ANC and SAIC increasingly determined to bring about

⁷⁰ Interviews with Alan Paton, Oscar Wollheim and others; see also Ernie Wentzel: *Memoirs* (nd.?1982, unpublished).

⁷¹ Interview with Yusuf Cachalia, p.1; see chapter 5.

⁷² CAMP Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/8: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 16-9-1952.

⁷³ Interview with Yusuf Cachalia, p.1.

widespread extra-parliamentary mobilisation in order to achieve full and immediate equality. In response, white liberals and radicals finally parted, as the Darragh Hall meeting divided over the issues which were to separate liberal from radical whites throughout the 1950s. The ANC and SAIC demand for universal suffrage, only previously endorsed by the CPSA, proved an immediate and intractable stumbling block. Margaret Ballinger, acting as liberal spokesperson, rejected the universal franchise out of hand.⁷⁴ As a secondary issue, liberals rejected the idea of a white Congress working in a multiracial alliance, calling rather for an 'all-in' nonracial Congress. Finally, with considerable liberal support, Margaret Ballinger refused to co-operate with the large number of former CPSA members present. This was later explained by liberal claims that white communists 'packed' the Darragh Hall meeting and controlled its proceedings.⁷⁵

In their reactions to the Defiance Campaign, both the SAIRR and the October manifesto revealed a continued desire to separate a black 'middle-class' and co-operate with it in isolation from radical influences. Both claimed that time for such action was running out because

the political consciousness of the educated and otherwise sophisticated African has begun to permeate the masses of the African people at least in European areas. While the former are determined not to acquiesce in laws which derogate from human dignity and to demand citizen rights, the latter are rendered unhappy and sullen by the misery of inadequate housing, high food prices and the tensions caused by political and administrative measures.⁷⁶

The underlying division between liberal and radical whites was over parliamentary or extra-parliamentary action. Yusuf Dadoo had earlier called for an alliance between the UP/Torch Commando/ Labour Party election partners and the two Congresses, stating: "Intra-parliamentary struggle is played out. It is now for the masses of the people to act."⁷⁷ For the Native Representatives, the SAIRR and others, however, the closeness of extra-parliamentary and 'revolutionary' strategies closed the question.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ *Advance* 27-11-1952; interviews with various people who attended the meeting (liberal and radical).

⁷⁵ See Brown: *Chronology* op cit, pp.3-5, and Wentzel: *Memoirs* op cit.

⁷⁶ *Race Relations News* XIX: 12-12-1952, p.136.

⁷⁷ *Daily Despatch* 19-5-1952.

⁷⁸ See chapters 1 and 6.

The Darragh Hall meeting was followed by three further meetings which attempted to reach a compromise that would lead to the creation of a large liberal/left organisation.⁷⁹ The failure of these discussions was followed by the formation of the Congress of Democrats [COD]. COD was committed to: (1) expose the effects of discrimination and the colour bar; (2) mobilise support for the abolition of all discriminatory laws and practices; (3) to stand for equal political rights and economic opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of race, colour or sex; (4) win for all South Africans the freedom of speech, assembly, movement and organisation.⁸⁰

Conclusion.

The period 1950-1953 witnessed the separation of liberal and radical whites. Liberals who attended the Darragh Hall meeting rejected the call to operate outside parliament as an ally of the ANC and SAIC, and returned to the UP fold in time for the 1953 general election. Radical whites in Johannesburg joined COD; a Founding Committee was elected to draw up a constitution and programme of action.⁸¹ In 1953 COD became a full and equal partner of the Congress Alliance. By the end of 1952, radical and liberal whites had irrevocably split. The next four chapters offer a detailed analysis of liberal and socialist responses to African nationalism.

⁷⁹ interview with Pieter Beyleveld (1986), transcript p.13.

⁸⁰ *Advance* 27-11-1952, p.1.

⁸¹ The Committee included Bram Fischer, Eddie Roux, Guy Routh, Jack Hodgson, Cecil Williams, Ruth First, Beatta Lipman, Helen Joseph, Trevor Huddleston, and Padre du Manoir; the last three were not former CPSA members.

Chapter three:

The Origins of Multiracialism.

Introduction.

Resistance politics in the 1950s was dominated by the Congress Alliance, which succeeded in mobilising people of all races against apartheid in a manner previously unseen in South African history. The internal politics of the resistance movement, however, was dominated by wide-ranging and bitter disputes over the form that racial co-operation should take. That dispute centred on the *multiracial* nature of the Congress Alliance - that is, an alliance of separate Congresses comprising members of a single ethnic group¹, co-ordinated at regional and national levels. Multiracialism afforded each Congress equal representation on all co-ordinating structures. As a result, the South African Congress of Democrats, with an average membership of 250, was equally represented on Alliance structures with the ANC which had an average paid-up membership of between 30 000 and 50 000.² The multiracialism of the Congress Alliance stood in marked contrast with the *nonracialism* of organisations such as the disbanded CPSA, the South African Communist Party and the Liberal Party.

Multiracialism generated a wide range of criticism, at the centre of which lay SACOD, "the white wing of the Congress Alliance."³ SACOD was a small white organisation which supported extra-parliamentary campaigns in pursuit of equal rights, and included a number of former CPSA members. SACOD's place in the Congress Alliance provided a focus for a wide range of organisations which regarded SACOD as a 'communist front' and multiracialism as the means by which communist influence was being entrenched in the Alliance. Africanists saw the alliance of Congresses as a "somersault on principles" set out in the 1949 *Programme of Action*.⁴ The Liberal Party attacked SACOD as a communist front and criticised the ANC for co-operating with it, while some LP members attacked the

¹ In March 1955 the South African Congress of Trade Unions [SACTU] joined the Alliance. TU was a nonracial organisation, comprising members of all ethnic groups.

² Figures from Lodge: *Black Politics in South Africa* (London, 1983), p.75.

³ Helen Joseph: *Side By Side* (London, 1987) p.40.

⁴ *The Africanist* December 1955, in Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge and Violence* (California: pp.207-208).

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⁴ *The Africanist* December 1955, in Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge and Violence* (California 1977): pp.207-208.

the CPSA's nonracialism and the ANCYL's multiracialism, stated: "let us not be confused by semantics."¹⁰ The distinction, however, was more than semantic; the hostility between the ANC Youth League and the CPSA resulted in the strategic debate over nonracialism or multiracialism being imbued with heavily ideological overtones. This chapter analyses the dispute between the CPSA and the ANCYL in order to locate the ideological roots of multiracialism. In so doing, it highlights the tensions within the CPSA over the relationship between class struggle and national struggle, which grew in the late 1940s as a result (in part) of CPSA/ANCYL hostility.

The Communist Party and the African National Congress.

The ANC in the 1940s and early 1950s, as we have seen, was transformed from a small organisation concerned to enroll "distinguished university graduates,"¹¹ to a mass-based nationalist organisation pursuing national liberation by extra-parliamentary means including stay-aways and passive resistance. Those changes were largely brought about by the ANCYL, formed in 1944 and comprising a group of highly able students of law, medicine, and teaching; non-professionals such as former miner and bakery worker Walter Sisulu were important but rare. Congress politics in the late 1940s was dominated by the ANCYL as it set itself the twin tasks of "impart[ing] to Congress a truly national character," and opposing those who sought to provide "foreign leadership of Africa."¹² Youth Leaguers stressed "the need for vigilance against Communists and other groups which foster non-African interests."¹³ In practice the ANCYL programme entailed gaining control of the direction of Congress, while isolating organisations and individuals who either exerted influence over the ANC or sought to develop their own African support base outside the ANC.

The transformation of the ANC took place largely in the postwar years. As we have noted, the ANC during the war concentrated on drawing up and popularising *Africans' Claims in South Africa*. Influenced by the liberal ethos of the period, the ANC attempted

¹⁰ B. Bunting: Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary (London 1987), p.159.

¹¹ 1942 Annual ANC Conference Resolution, in Karis: Hope op.cit., p.199.

¹² ANCYL: Congress Youth League Manifesto, March 1944: in Karis: Hope op.cit.: pp.300-308.

¹³ Notes of ANCYL drafting committee, in Karis: Hope op.cit.: p.100.

to delineate the ideological path that should be followed by a government which appeared to be backing away from segregation. In so doing, the ANC continued the constitutional petitioning of the pre-war years. Grass-roots organisation around civic issues was left to other organisations. Black trade unions grew, while squatter movements and bus boycotts represented a spontaneous popular response to the hardships faced by the black population.

In contrast with the wartime ANC, the Communist Party was directly involved in grass-roots organisation in some townships, most notably on the East Rand. As Hilary Sapire has demonstrated in the case of Brakpan location, the CPSA mobilised residents around immediate local concerns such as wages, employment practices, the extension of passes to women, the shortage of housing and pass law raids. The CPSA contested Advisory Board elections and used the Boards and Vigilance Associations as means of establishing "footholds in location communities."¹⁴ According to Sapire, CPSA members such as David Bopape and Gideon Ngake used their elected positions as platforms to defend local interests and instituted the CPSA as "the undisputed political force in the region."¹⁵ The CPSA also ran night-schools in the major centres which, according to the Johannesburg District CPSA secretary, were "a very big factor in the development of the membership of the Party."¹⁶ Elsewhere in the country the CPSA also successfully contested Advisory Board elections, winning all six seats in East London in 1942, as well as winning local council seats in Cape Town, East London and Johannesburg.¹⁷

The CPSA, with organisations such as the Springbok Legion and Friends of the Soviet Union, successfully mobilised large sectors of the white population. CPSA members were active in the black trade union movement, while Hilda Watts won a seat on the Johannesburg City Council in the whites-only Hillbrow ward.¹⁸ As a result of its high political profile and success in various spheres of operation, some elements within the

¹⁴ Hilary Sapire: 'African Political Mobilisation in Brakpan in the 1950s': seminar paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1989, p.6.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.7.

¹⁶ Interview with Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein (1988) transcript p.7.

¹⁷ Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.110.

¹⁸ See chapter 1.

CPSA began to think of the party in terms of a potential mass movement.¹⁹ By the end of the war, the CPSA had emerged as a significant force in black organisation. However, it remained CPSA policy to work with the ANC and build it up. In 1929 the CPSA had accepted a Comintern directive which stressed the need to work within "the embryonic organisations among the natives, such as the African National Congress" so as to transform the latter into a "fighting nationalist revolutionary organisation against the white bourgeoisie and British imperialists..."²⁰ This remained CPSA policy, despite being affected by the internal ructions of the CPSA in the 1930s, and the anti-fascist 'Popular Front' strategy of the 1940s.

The national organisations, according to the CPSA, were to spearhead a national revolution aimed at abolishing racial discrimination and attaining equal rights for all. Thereafter, the struggle for socialism could take place. Nonetheless, in 1940 the ANC was a small, weak organisation of the black elite. As the CPSA complained,

The year 1940 has arrived with hardships and misery for the oppressed and poor peoples of the Union of South Africa ... Unfortunately the year finds the forces of freedom as scattered as sheep in the presence of wolves. When talking of the forces of freedom, one cannot lose sight of the fact that the African people are potentially the most important of these forces. Therefore, if the Africans do not pull themselves together to face the enemies of freedom vigorously, not only will they let themselves down, but they will let their allies down also.²¹

Black CPSA members moreover expressed a reluctance to join the ANC. Elias Motsoaledi, a leading ANC/SACP member jailed for life in 1964, recently stated:

[the] Party taught me the struggle. I attended ANC meetings but was not happy with it at the time [the late 1940s]. To me, the ANC did not interpret the aspirations of the masses. But the Party taught me that it was my responsibility to tell the ANC about our aspirations ... at the time, the ANC was dominated by sophisticated intellectuals who only spoke in English.²²

Rusty Bernstein, the CPSA Johannesburg District secretary, confirmed that black members resisted joining the ANC: "They thought the ANC was rather reformist bourgeois nonsense - 'that's not for us, we're revolutionaries!'"²³

¹⁹ Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.111.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p.31: Comintern Resolution on South Africa, 1928.

²¹ *Inkululeko* January 1940, p.2.

²² *New Nation* Supplement: October 27-November 2 1989, p.7.

²³ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.47.

The CPSA extended its township organisation during the war years, but it remained concerned with the state of the ANC on which it focussed critical attention. At the same time, CPSA members such as David Bopape, J.B.Marks, Edwin Mofutsanyana and Moses Kotane were also senior ANC members. The CPSA insisted that national liberation struggles "fought in the colonial and semi-colonial territories" were "no mere side issue," but were an integral part of a global anti-imperialist struggle.²⁴ By the end of the war, signs of change were visible within the ANC. During the war years black trade unions grew apace and strike action increased markedly over the 1930s. Black militancy increased as black urbanisation and proletarianisation was met with an acute housing shortage, soaring prices and, after 1943, the harsh implementation of influx control.²⁵ The ANC however failed to capitalise on these conditions and rival organisations aimed at mobilising black opinion were formed or revitalised. The African Democratic Party [ADP] was formed, while the All-African Convention [AAC] agitated for a 'non-collaborationist' strategy. Within the ANC, young urban intellectuals who favoured mass mobilisation and extra-parliamentary action formed the ANCYL and began to criticise the ANC's moderation and its failure to establish a branch structure and win a mass following.

The CPSA accepted that the ANC remained "the premier political organisation", both because of historical ties and possibly affected by the fact that both the ADP and the AAC were influenced, in differing degrees, by Trotskyist thinking.²⁶ As a result, CPSA statements in the 1942-1948 period stressed that black communists had a responsibility to work within the ANC and SAIC; the Johannesburg District passed a resolution declaring it "to be the duty of all Communists belonging to oppressed nationalities to join their respective national movements, so as to work for the strengthening of such movements..."²⁷ As we have seen, such a resolution was made necessary through the reluctance of some black CPSA members to join the ANC.

²⁴ CPSA: The Foundation of Socialist Teaching from the Manifesto of 1848 to the 1926 Programme. (Pretoria nd.?1943).

²⁵ See chapter 1.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp.107-114.

²⁷ Democracy In Action!: Proceedings of the Johannesburg District Annual Conference of the Communist Party: March 1945 (Johannesburg, 1945), p.30; repeated at the 1947 conference.

CPSA literature and internal reports during the war reflect three related themes in discussing the ANC and the broader national liberation movement. In the first place, the CPSA acknowledged the progress made by Xuma in reorganising the ANC, but criticised the Congress for failing to provide political leadership in a period which witnessed considerable black industrial and civic action. In a 1943 report on *National Movements of the Non-Europeans*, the CPSA Executive Committee noted that "the lack of a strong and influential organisation among the Non-Europeans, has been felt time and time again" and criticised the ANC for failing "in its main task - that of uniting its membership and carrying out the formation of branches in a systematic manner."²⁸

In 1945 the CPSA Johannesburg District stressed the "unity and solidarity ... militancy and readiness for action" evident in the Alexandra bus boycotts, protests over train fare increases, and the squatter movements, but criticised itself and the ANC for failing to provide leadership.²⁹ The CPSA noted that Mpanza, the squatter leader, "may seem a figure hardly worth taking seriously", while the ADP "suffers from all the faults of sectarianism, political inexperience and stupidity."³⁰ Nonetheless, they "gave the people what they demanded ... they were advocating something positive...."³¹ The CPSA analysis concluded that "the people demand leadership," and called for a "practical plan of campaign and action" which could channel such militancy.³²

Flowing from this, a second theme of CPSA commentary on national movements was to consistently call for the elaboration of a minimum shared programme between national organisations, the CPSA and the trade union movement. Such a minimum programme, it was argued, would allow for both ideological and organisational unity. The third theme comprised repeated calls for the development of a united front of organisations opposing racial discrimination.³³ The CPSA argued that "[a]ll genuine movements towards national

²⁸ CAMP Reel 3A:2:CC1:62/2: CPSA Executive Committee Report: National Movements of the Non-Europeans, 6-12-1943, p.2.

²⁹ CPSA: Democracy op.cit., p.7.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.6.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*, p.7.

³³ See chapter 1.

liberation are progressive," but warned against the tendency to racial exclusiveness which would obscure the underlying reality of the class oppression of all workers.³⁴ The CPSA supported the emergence of a "broad fighting alliance"³⁵ or "wide democratic front"³⁶ which would oppose segregation while underplaying exclusive nationalism.

As we have seen, the postwar programme of the CPSA was internally contested, as some members called on the party to capitalise on its wartime successes and concentrate on class struggle in place of the 'two-stage' revolution.³⁷ In part, this flowed from the changing nature of the ANC, as the ANCYL grew increasingly prominent. CPSA members and reports expressed concern that

the realities of the class divisions are being obscured ... Nationalism need not be synonymous with racialism, but it can avoid being so only if it recognises the class alignments that cut across the racial divisions.³⁸

The Youth League voiced criticisms of the ANC similar to those of the CPSA, calling for the development of a branch structure and mass membership, and the utilisation of extra-parliamentary means of opposition. At the same time, however, the late 1940s saw the spreading influence of the ANCYL and its twin hostilities:- towards the CPSA, and towards anything other than "occasional cooperation" with other racial groups.³⁹

The ANC Youth League.

The ANC began to show signs of change following the formation of the Youth League in 1944. The *ANCYL Manifesto*, issued in March 1944, noted criticism of the ANC as an organisation "of gentlemen with clean hands" which had failed to organise the mass of the African population.⁴⁰ The ANCYL was formed as "a protest against the lack of discipline and the absence of a clearly-defined goal in the movement as a whole" and was committed to "rousing popular political consciousness and fighting oppression and reaction."⁴¹ More

³⁴ CAMP Reel 3A:2:CC1:14/2: Programme of the Communist Party of South Africa (draft), nd.1941, p.7.

³⁵ *The Guardian* 9-1-1947, p.1: 1947 CPSA Annual Conference.

³⁶ *The Guardian* 24-6-1948, p.5: CPSA Central Committee statement.

³⁷ See chapter 1.

³⁸ 1950 Central Committee Report, *op.cit.*

³⁹ Lembede: Policy *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ ANCYL: Manifesto, *op.cit.*, pp.304-305.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.306.

significantly, it stressed that "the national liberation of the Africans will be achieved by Africans themselves. We reject foreign leadership of Africa."⁴² The ANCYL programme was based on an interpretation of African nationalism which rejected non-African leadership and "the wholesale importation of foreign ideologies," while emphasising African pride and self-sufficiency.⁴³

The ANCYL was influenced in part by the growth of anti-colonial movements in the postwar period. Anton Lembede, a lawyer and the League's first President and leading ideologue, stated:

The history of modern times is the history of nationalism All over the world nationalism is rising in revolt against foreign domination, conquest and oppression in India, in Indonesia, in Egypt, in Persia and several other countries. Among Africans also clear signs of national awakening, national renaissance, or rebirth are noticeable...⁴⁴

The ANCYL saw its "immediate task" as the need "to overhaul the machinery of the A.N.C. from within," remoulding the ANC into a mass-based organisation pursuing national liberation and mobilising support by means of a militant African nationalism.⁴⁵ The ANCYL stressed "the divine destiny of the African people"⁴⁶ and the need for "high ethical standards" to "combat moral disintegration among Africans."⁴⁷

Both the ANCYL and the CPSA aimed to radicalise the ANC. For the Youth League, part of their task was seen to be the removal of non-African nationalists from influencing Congress. Lembede argued:

No foreigner can ever be a true and genuine leader of the African people because no foreigner can ever truly and genuinely interpret the African spirit which is unique and peculiar to Africans only. Some foreigners Asiatic or European who pose as African leaders must be categorically denounced and rejected.⁴⁸

In calling for the development of African nationalism as a mobilising force sufficient to challenge the *status quo*, the Youth League came to see both liberalism and communism as competing ideologies. The first task of Ashby Mda, elected ANCYL President in 1948,

⁴² *ibid.*, p.308.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Anton Lembede: *Policy of the Congress Youth League: Inkundla ya Bantu*, May 1946.

⁴⁵ A.P.Mda to G.M.Pitje, 10-10-1948 in Karis: *Hope* *op.cit.*, p.321.

⁴⁶ Lembede: *Policy* *op.cit.*, p.318 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁷ ANCYL: *Manifesto* *op.cit.*, p.308.

⁴⁸ Lembede: *Policy* *op.cit.*

was to clarify the League's position with regard to communism and liberalism.⁴⁹ In attaining its objectives - providing a radical, African leadership intent on developing a mass base - the ANCYL came to see the CPSA as a competitor.

The ANCYL and the CPSA 1944-1949.

The conflict between the ANCYL and the CPSA between 1944 and 1951, and its resolution in the 1952 - 1955 period, has been widely discussed.⁵⁰ That discussion has nonetheless remained within the bounds set by Youth Leaguers themselves, who stressed that Africans in South Africa suffered national, and not class oppression, and therefore rejected CPSA analysis as spurious. The ANCYL opposed 'Vendors of Foreign Method' who

seek to impose on our struggle cut-and-dried formulae, which so far from clarifying the issues of our struggle, only serve to obscure the fact that we are oppressed not as a class, but as a people, as a Nation.⁵¹

However, a closer analysis of Youth League antipathy towards the CPSA is required in order to elucidate the precise nature of the conflict between the two organisations, and the ramifications of that conflict. Such an analysis challenges existing views of the ANCYL as an expression of anti-communism or exclusive nationalism (or both), and sheds light on the internal politics of the resistance movements in the 1940s and 1950s.

The conflict between the ANCYL and CPSA operated on two main levels. Firstly, the ANCYL reacted strongly to the Communist Party's repeated calls for a broad nonracial front of organisations opposed to segregation and apartheid. The broad front proposed by the CPSA was to "conduct mass struggles against race discrimination" while underplaying exclusive nationalism by "develop[ing] class consciousness in the people" and "forg[ing] unity in action between the oppressed peoples and between them and the European working class."⁵² The ANCYL rejected the class content of nonracialism as proposed by the CPSA. In its place the League insisted that "the national liberation of Africans will be

⁴⁹ See Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.103.

⁵⁰ See *inter alia* Karis: *Hope op.cit.* pp.98-110; Lodge: *Black Politics op.cit.* chapter 1; P.Walsh: *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa* (Johannesburg 1987) chapter XIII; Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.* chapter 8. By contrast, Meli: *South Africa Belongs To Us* (London 1988) does not mention the conflict.

⁵¹ ANCYL: *Basic Policy of Congress Youth League, 1948*, in Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.330.

⁵² 1950 Central Committee Report *op.cit.*

achieved by Africans themselves"⁵³; co-operation between the oppressed groups was acceptable only when the racial groups were organised multiracially, in "separate units."⁵⁴ Secondly, both organisations sought to influence the development of the ANC at a time of growing black political mobilisation. As will be seen, the programmes of the two organisations were in many respects not dissimilar. As a result, the conflict appears to have mixed ideological disputation with elements of a power struggle. That conflict moreover worked itself out over a particular issue: the form that racial co-operation should take.

The programmes of the ANCYL and the CPSA had many points of similarity. The Youth League, in insisting on the national basis of black oppression in South Africa, argued that black South Africans "suffer national oppression in common with thousands and millions of oppressed Colonial peoples in other parts of the world."⁵⁵ Moreover, Lembede argued: "After national freedom, then socialism."⁵⁶ In this he was joined by Ashby Mda, a lawyer and leading Youth Leaguer, who argued that the interests of the mass of Africans could be protected only by "the establishment of a true democracy and a just social order."⁵⁷ By 1951 Mda defined 'a just social order' in terms of "full political control by the workers, peasants and intellectuals" combined with "the liquidation of capitalism" and "equal distribution of wealth."⁵⁸ While the ANCYL as a whole did not explicitly endorse socialism, Lembede argued that "Africans are naturally socialistic as illustrated in their social practices and customs," and concluded that "the achievement of national freedom will therefore herald or usher in a new era, the era of African socialism."⁵⁹

In essence, nothing in the above programme conflicted with the CPSA analysis of the South African situation. Strategically, both organisations called for the radicalisation of the ANC leadership and the development by the ANC of a branch structure and mass base as necessary preconditions for a successful national revolution. Ideologically, the CPSA had

⁵³ ANCYL: *Manifesto* op.cit., p.308.

⁵⁴ Lembede: *Policy* op.cit.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p.323.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, (emphasis in original).

⁵⁷ A.P.Mda: *Statement to the Youth League of Congress in Inkundla ya Bantu*, 27-8-1949.

⁵⁸ A.P.Mda: *The Analysis* (nd.1951) in Gail Gerhart: *Black Power in South Africa* (California 1978) p.130 and n.7.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

accepted the primacy of the national question following adoption of a 1928 Comintern thesis which placed South Africa within the ambit of 'colonial and semi-colonial countries.'

The 1928 thesis endorsed

an independent native South African republic as a stage towards a workers' and peasants' republic, with full equal rights for all races, black, coloured and white.⁴⁰

The vision of a socialist revolution taking place in phases meant that the CPSA programme largely tallied with Lembede's vision of national revolution followed by (African) socialism. Finally, the CPSA accepted the premier position of the ANC in the national liberation struggle.

The ANCYL, with a belief "in the unity of all Africans from the Mediterranean Sea in the North to the Indian and Atlantic Oceans in the South," saw the struggle for equal rights as part of a pan-African anti-colonial movement.⁴¹ For the CPSA, the notion that black South Africans were colonially oppressed was at least implicit in the 1928 slogan. The idea of internal colonialism was hinted at but not developed by CPSA member Eddie Roux in 1928:

[In South Africa] we have a white bourgeoisie and a white aristocracy of labour living in the same country together with an exploited colonial peasantry. Here the participation of the workers of the ruling class in the exploitation of the colonial workers is very apparent ... the exploitation occurs within the confines of a single country.⁴²

Caught up in the factionalism of the 1928-1935 period, and thereafter in the Popular Front politics of the anti-fascist period, internal colonialism and its implications were not assessed by the CPSA until the period under study.

The Politics of Nonracialism.

The above discussion should not imply that there were no differences between the ANCYL and the CPSA. Rather, it should serve to focus analysis on the precise location and nature of the ANCYL/CPSA conflict. As we have seen, the CPSA switch from opposition to active participation in the second world war following the invasion of the Soviet Union generated

⁴⁰ Quoted in Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.31.

⁴¹ ANCYL *Manifesto: op.cit.*, p.308.

⁴² Quoted in Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.35.

widespread hostility.⁶³ The CPSA expended much energy during the war in popularising the Soviet Union and was seen by the ANCYL to have an agenda which stretched beyond national liberation and was informed by a 'foreign ideology' using "methods and tactics which might have succeeded in other countries, like Europe."⁶⁴

The issue on which Youth League suspicion of the CPSA came to focus most directly was the form that racially integrated structures should take. The CPSA was concerned to avoid the emergence of a racially exclusive African nationalism which would obscure and retard the class struggle. The CPSA in the 1940s stressed the need for the liberation struggle to be waged by a broad front of organisations led not by the black bourgeoisie but by "the class-conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned" so as to foster class-conscious racial unity.⁶⁵ While both the ANCYL and the CPSA called for the development of the ANC, the Communist Party supported the emergence of a broad front of organisations (including the ANC) representing Africans, Indians, Coloureds and trade unions.⁶⁶ In co-operation with such an alliance, the CPSA could

carry out its task of exploring the class purposes of race oppression, creating a working class consciousness, breaking down national prejudices and providing leadership in the struggle for socialism.⁶⁷

In addition, as Lodge has noted, joint CPSA/ANC members enjoyed the support of more conservative and established members of the ANC national executive.⁶⁸ Both rejected the Youth League call for a complete electoral boycott, while the more pragmatic ANC leaders supported CPSA calls for broad unity in opposition to racial discrimination. As we have seen, black unity increased markedly in the late 1940s. In 1947 Doctors Xuma, Naicker and Dadoo, representing the ANC, Natal Indian Congress [NIC] and Transvaal Indian Congress [TIC] respectively, signed the 'Doctors' Pact' which accepted "the urgency of co-operation between the non-European peoples and other democratic forces for the attainment

⁶³ See chapter 1.

⁶⁴ ANCYL: *Policy* op.cit., p.330.

⁶⁵ 1950 Central Committee Report op.cit.

⁶⁶ See *The Guardian* 9-1-1947, p.1: Report on CPSA Annual Conference.

⁶⁷ 1949 CPSA Central Committee Report: in Bunting: *Kotane* op.cit., p.155.

⁶⁸ Lodge: *Black Politics* op.cit., p.29.

of basic human rights...⁶⁶ In 1946 the NIC began to mobilise support for a passive resistance campaign against the 'Ghetto Act' which lasted for two years and saw over 2000 resisters of all races (predominantly Indian) imprisoned. Rallies and public meetings began to be held under the joint auspices of the African and Indian Congresses, as well as the (Coloured) African People's Organisation.⁶⁷

The Youth League position on racial co-operation was complicated by the presence of both an exclusive approach which rejected such co-operation, and a more inclusive approach.⁶⁸ The leadership of the League, however, was drawn increasingly from the latter category, comprising men who accepted greater racial co-operation while laying stress on the centrality of a strong African nationalist organisation. In 1946 Lembede stated that co-operation between Africans, Indians and Coloureds "can only take place between Africans as a single unit and other Non-European groups as separate units."⁶⁹ The ANCYL endorsed the 1947 Pact, stating in its *Basic Policy* that: "The National Organisations of the Africans, Indians and Coloureds may co-operate on common issues."⁷⁰

The CPSA had endorsed a similar position in 1943, calling for separate organisations representing Africans, Indians and Coloureds, co-ordinated at regional and national levels.⁷¹ With the rise of the Youth League and the spreading influence of its nationalist programme, however, the CPSA increasingly supported the idea of one mass organisation with which it would co-operate. At the end of the decade, in its 1950 Central Committee Report, the CPSA called for the transformation of the existing separate national organisations

into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeoisie, linked together in a firm organisation ... guided by a definite programme of struggle against all forms of racial discrimination in alliance with the class-conscious European workers and intellectuals.⁷²

⁶⁶ ANC papers: AD1189/5/Fa/17: Joint Declaration of Cooperation, 9-3-1947.

⁶⁷ See chapter 2.

⁶⁸ See Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.106-107.

⁶⁹ Lembede: *Policy* op.cit.

⁷⁰ ANCYL: *Policy* op.cit., p.329.

⁷¹ CPSA: *National Movements* op.cit., p.4 Proposal 1: "We should strive for one organisation for each of the three racial groups. Unity among these groups should be based on the basis of a joint Committee, both on a national and regional scale."

⁷² 1950 Central Committee Report op.cit.

The language of the report was imprecise and unclear. For the Youth League, however, it implied the creation of a nonracial organisation and served to cement their rejection of the CPSA approach to the integration of structures. As a result, the question of racial co-operation - that is, the form that racial co-operation should take - became an issue of contention between the Youth League and the Communist Party.

The nature of this conflict became apparent in the CPSA/ANCYL dispute over the 1948 People's Assembly for Votes for All.⁷⁶ In 1948 the Transvaal branches of the ANC, CPSA, APO and TIC proposed the calling of a nonracial People's Assembly as a means of highlighting the franchise issue on the eve of the general election. As we have seen, the Assembly soon became caught up within the ANCYL/CPSA conflict. Youth Leaguers on the ANC Transvaal Executive committee declared themselves willing to participate in the Assembly only if the organising committee was restricted to representatives of the ANC, TIC and APO - in other words, accepting co-operation between national organisations but not with the CPSA.

As a result of Youth League agitation, the ANC refused to officially participate in the Assembly. Transvaal ANC President C.S. Ramohano later faced a motion of no confidence for issuing a statement in support of the Assembly.⁷⁷ The point at issue was not mere anti-communism. Rather, as law student Nelson Mandela of the Transvaal ANC Executive (and a leading Youth League member) made clear in a report carried by *The Guardian*,

the Working Committee of the People's Assembly had invited the African National Congress to send delegates to the Assembly. The A.N.C. Executive was not in opposition to the general aims of the People's Assembly, but felt that it was being summoned in an incorrect manner, in that the established national organisations were being by-passed.... The organisers of the People's Assembly had departed from ... agreed methods, and there were suspicions that a permanent "unity movement" was being formed.⁷⁸

The 1948 clash between the ANCYL and CPSA is important in two respects. The Assembly dispute highlighted the way in which ideological differences were being fought

⁷⁶ See chapter 3.

⁷⁷ *The Guardian* 29-7-1948, p.5.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

out over the issue of nonracialism - not simply on the basis of Youth League racism or exclusivity, but because moves towards nonracialism were seen to be part of an ideology which stressed class above race, and would retard the emergence of a strong African National Congress. Although a number of strands of thought co-existed within the ANCYL, including anti-communism and exclusive nationalism, its leaders included men such as Oliver Tambo, Walter Sisulu and Nelson Mandela, who led the Congress Alliance in the 1950s. Their position in some degree paralleled that of CPSA member James La Guma who first proposed the national democratic struggle as the initial phase of a socialist revolution in the 1920s. From different perspectives, both stressed the fact that, as the Simons put it with reference to La Guma,

equality could be achieved only when Africans were powerful enough to win respect from the whites.⁷⁹

Secondly, the dispute reflected the way in which ANCYL influence was growing within the ANC. The League had initially set itself a three to five year programme to change Congress⁸⁰, but over the next four years the ANC made few moves towards developing a mass base or radicalising its methods of opposition. At the same time, the squatter movement was organised by Mpanza into the Sofasonke party and contested Advisory Board elections, the ADP gained representation on the Native Representative Council with the election of Paul Mosaka, and the CPSA extended its township base. By 1948 the Youth League described its task in more assertive terms:

From the very outset, the Congress Youth League set itself, inter alia, the historic task of imparting dynamic substance and matter to the organisational form of the A.N.C. This took the form of a forth right exposition of the National Liberatory outlook - African Nationalism - which the Youth League seeks to impose on the Mother Body.⁸¹

In a private letter, 1948 League President Mda acknowledged that a clash between the ANC and the Youth League was "inevitable" because "the Congress Senior leadership reflects the dying order of pseudo-liberalism and conservatism, of appeasement and compromises."⁸²

⁷⁹ Simons and Simons: *Class* op.cit., p.404.

⁸⁰ ANCYL: *Manifesto* op.cit.

⁸¹ ANCYL: *Policy* op.cit., p.327.

⁸² A.P.Mda to G.M.Pitje 24-8-1948, in Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.319-320.

The Rise of the Youth League.

In order to successfully implement its programme, the Youth League had to transform the ANC. To achieve this, it had to gain a position from which it could determine Congress policy. In the first instance this entailed building up its own ranks, and branches were established in Durban, Cape Town and at Fort Hare (although the majority of Youth Leaguers remained in the Transvaal). At the same time, League members moved into ANC provincial structures. Secondly, as we have seen, it entailed combatting the competing ideologies which sought to influence the development of the ANC. In the first place, the Youth League turned on white liberals such as the Ballingers, Edgar Brookes and members of the Institute of Race Relations who had influence over certain leading Congress personalities. Hostility towards the liberals was exacerbated by the 1946 dispute over the NRC adjournment and the League's call for the boycott of all 'Native Representation' elections. As we have seen, the weaning of Congress from the influence of white liberals was largely completed by 1947.⁸⁰

Finally, if the Youth League were to direct a militant movement for national liberation under the aegis of the ANC, competing organisations had to be isolated. The AAC remained a small organisation largely based in the eastern Cape and increasingly dominated by the Non-European Unity Movement [NEUM] to which it had affiliated, while the ADP had begun to collapse by 1947. Both were accused of causing 'rifts] on the national unity front at this critical moment' which would have the effect of 'inviting] more oppression for Africans.'⁸¹ In essence, all those who sought to mobilise Africans in support of organisations other than the ANC, or ideologies other than African nationalism, were attacked. This included the CPUSA, which had largely set the pace in township organisation in the 1940s, and which proposed to 'draw in thousands of members of each racial and national group, provide them with a Socialist education, and organise them for work among their own people...'⁸²

⁸⁰ See chapter 2.

⁸¹ ANCYL: *Manifesto* op.cit., p.307.

⁸² 1944 CPUSA Central Committee Report, in Bunting: *Kotane* op.cit., p.112.

Paradoxically, however, as ANCYL power and influence within the ANC grew in the late 1940s, older ANC leaders revealed a preparedness to work with Communists. The League failed in 1945 and 1947 in attempts to have all CPSA members removed from Congress, while Communists and older leaders jointly outvoted the ANCYL call for a boycott of all elections.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, Youth Leaguers increasingly occupied important positions within the provincial structures of the ANC, and by 1948 were sufficiently entrenched to stop ANC participation in the People's Assembly. By 1949, the League was powerful enough to insist that endorsement of the *Programme of Action* should be a precondition for election to the post of President-General of the ANC. At the 1949 ANC Annual Conference, the League succeeded in ousting Xuma from the post and securing the election of Dr. James Moroka, while ANCYL members Mda, Mboobo, Njongwe, Pitje, Tambo and Sisulu were elected to the ANC National Executive Committee (Sisulu in the important post of Secretary-General). Two years later, Youth Leaguers were able to remove A.W.G. Champion as President of the ANC in Natal, securing in his place the election of Albert Lutuli, later elected ANC President-General.

While the Youth League grew in importance and influence within the ANC, the fortunes of the CPSA declined markedly. Following the 1946 African miners strike, the CPSA Executive Committee was tried for sedition, in a case which lasted from 1946 to 1948. White wartime support for the CPSA disappeared as the Cold War gathered force, and organisations such as the Springbok Legion, Friends of the Soviet Union and the Left Book Club either shrank or disappeared, along with their wartime ability to reach a large white audience. The Trades and Labour Council was divided as the Nationalist Party made a concerted bid for white working class support. The attacks on the CPSA by both the United and Nationalist Party governments culminated in the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 which outlawed the CPSA and any doctrine "which aims at bringing about any political, industrial, social or economic change within the Union."⁸⁷ Finally, the rise of the ANCYL threatened to remove CPSA influence within the ANC. The CPSA/ANCYL dispute covered a number of interrelated factors. Central to the dispute was a growing stress

⁸⁶ Walshe: *Nationalism* op.cit., p.357.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Karis: *Hope* op.cit., p.429, n.4.

placed on class struggle by the CPSA in reaction to the apparent rise of an anti-communist petty-bourgeoisie in the shape of the Youth League. Moreover, on the critical issues of approaches to the national question and relations with national organisations, differences appear to have existed within the CPSA.

The CPSA and National Democratic Struggle, 1947-1950.

The CPSA in the late 1940s revealed differing approaches to the national question and the national movements in South Africa. Reduced to its simplest elements, the differences revolved around the emphasis laid on the place of class struggle in relation to the national struggle waged by the ANC and SAIC. Differences moreover revealed themselves to a large extent in regional terms, with the CPSA in the Cape differing from the Natal and Transvaal regions.⁸⁸

The headquarters of the CPSA had been moved from the Transvaal to Cape Town following the internal vicissitudes of the 1930s. As a result, both the Executive and Central Committees were dominated by Communists from the western Cape. Throughout the late 1940s, the Transvaal without success exerted pressure for CPSA headquarters to be returned to Johannesburg, arguing that the centre of political developments was located in their region.⁸⁹ More pertinently, CPSA members in the Transvaal and Natal (and some in the Cape) argued that the Cape leadership revealed an approach to the national organisations that was grounded in "traditional concepts of Communist Party activity" and did not "adequately understand the national movement."⁹⁰

The differing emphases placed on class and national struggle by the Cape CPSA appear to have resulted from a number of factors. Firstly, the Cape Town branch of the ANC was small and weak in contrast with similar centres elsewhere. This was in part the result of demographic factors, Cape Town being the only centre where Africans were a minority, in addition to which migrant labourers made up a large part of the African population.

⁸⁸ Interviews with Rusty Bernstein p.42, and Ben Turok (1988), transcript pp.4-6.

⁸⁹ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.50.

⁹⁰ Interview with Ben Turok, p.12.

As Cape CPSA Secretary Fred Carneson put it,

the majority of the population were coloureds, down in Cape Town. And they were articulate, they had been well organised for years, they were used to participating in trade unions and the whole atmosphere was different down in the Cape. So certainly, Johannesburg and Durban and Port Elizabeth, we were each operating in a different political ambience.⁹¹

The Cape Town branch of the ANC was led by Thomas Ngwenya, who later worked closely with the Liberal Party.⁹² Leading Congress and Youth League personalities were concentrated in the Transvaal and, to a lesser extent, Natal. By comparison, the CPSA in Cape Town worked with a small ANC, and an even smaller Youth League. In addition, the Coloured population was partially enfranchised and had a long tradition of trade unionism and the Cape CPSA faced competition from organisations such as the NEUM and the Coloured People's National union.

The major political battles of the late 1940s were largely fought out within the Transvaal ANC, where Youth Leaguers clashed with ANC/CPSA members over a series of initiatives including the People's Assembly.⁹³ Leading Transvaal CPSA members such as Marks, Bopape, Mofutsanyana, Tloome, Dadoo and others worked within the Congress movement and supported moves to radicalise the ANC and SAIC. CPSA politics in the Transvaal was to a large extent bound up with Congress politics, as Communist Party members rejected the strand of exclusive nationalism within the ANCYL while supporting the militancy it injected into the ANC. Black Communist Party members involved in Congress politics emerged as leading CPSA personalities in the Transvaal and Natal.

Unlike the Transvaal CPSA, the dominant personalities in the Cape were white. As Cape CPSA member Ben Turok put it, in contrast with the Cape, Johannesburg

was a different world. In Cape Town the whites were the strongest personalities, around the *Guardian* - you could on two hands pick out a good number of intellectuals, very experienced political cadres - Jack Simons, Brian Bunting, Carneson, Ray Alexander, a whole group of them. Whereas the African group was small, inexperienced, and much less senior.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Interview with Fred Carneson (1988) transcript p.28.

⁹² See chapter 8.

⁹³ For ANCYL/CPSA clashes over the 1950 Defend Free Speech Convention, see Lodge: *Black Politics* op.cit., Chapter 2.

⁹⁴ Interview with Ben Turok, p.6.

The Cape-based CPSA Executive and Central Committees were predominantly white, which added fuel to Youth League attacks on 'foreign' bearers of non-African ideologies.⁶⁶ To some extent, the dominance of whites in the Cape arose from the political activities undertaken by the Communist Party in Cape Town, which differed from those of Communists elsewhere. As Fred Carneson put it, "we had to tailor our approach, it had to be completely different in the different areas, and so it was."⁶⁷ Cape Town was the headquarters of *The Guardian* (later published as *The Clarion*, *People's World*, *Advance* and *New Age*). *The Guardian* was a leftwing newspaper which focussed on the struggle against racial discrimination and carried news of the African and Indian Congresses and other organisations largely ignored by mainstream newspapers. Its foreign news was consistently pro-Soviet and anti-American. In the late 1940s *The Guardian* was edited by CPSA Central Committee member Brian Bunting, and its editorial board comprised many leading Cape CPSA members. A large number of CPSA members worked for *The Guardian* as journalists and in selling the newspaper. *The Guardian* was in itself a major focus of activity - as CPSA member Ben Turok put it, "you ... joined *The Guardian* when you joined the movement; ... you joined *The Guardian* and its circle."⁶⁸

Lacking a strong Congress presence, the focus of CPSA activity in the Cape was divided between *The Guardian* and trade union work in which Ray Alexander, James Phillips and others had been involved for many years. A third distinguishing feature of Cape activity was continued and successful participation in parliamentary and provincial council elections. The wartime electoral successes of the CPSA had disappeared elsewhere; in the Cape the CPSA continued to win seats on the city council, and in 1948 won the Cape Western Native Representative and Provincial Council seats.

The political milieu in which Cape Communist Party members moved was in many ways different from elsewhere. Debates in the nonracial Forum Club, the Africa Club, and

⁶⁶ Of the 17-strong 1950 Central Committee, 10 were white. For an acknowledgement of criticism of the racial composition, see Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ev.1.1.6: Jack Simons: *Economics and Politics in South Africa* (lecture) nd.1954, p.8.

⁶⁷ Interview with Fred Carneson, p.28.

⁶⁸ Interview with Ben Turok, p.5.

in organisations such as the Modern Youth Society, centred on class struggle and hostilities between Communists and Trotskyists.⁹⁸ The major ideological conflict faced by the CPSA in Cape Town was not with nationalist Youth Leaguers, but with the Marxist-cum-Trotskyist NEUM, the major political influence among Coloured intellectuals. NEUM intellectuals such as Benny Kies and Kenny Jordaan produced a sustained critique of national struggle and its supporters (including the CPSA) for having "as [their] objective the triumph of capitalist democracy."⁹⁹

Some CPSA members in the Cape expressed similar opinions regarding the limitations and dangers of nationalism. Fred Carneson has noted that

it was not only the communists that did not see things, at that stage, as a struggle for national liberation. Africans themselves did not see it as clearly as they see it now.¹⁰⁰

Central Committee member Jack Simons stated in 1954 that "the history of nationalism, whether of the progressive or imperialistic kind, is intimately bound up with the history of capitalism ... and the rise of bourgeois democracy."¹⁰¹ He continued:

Communism is not necessarily the antithesis to Nationalism. It is the antithesis to Capitalism. But it must be remembered that the rise of capitalism is closely associated with Nationalism.¹⁰²

Simons argued that "nationalism is progressive in so far as it is aimed at the removal of discrimination and the achievement of democracy"; at the same time, however, nationalism "can be exploited by an aggressive movement directed towards the suppression of another group or nation."¹⁰³

A similar viewpoint was strongly evident in the 1950 CPSA Central Committee report, which stressed that

South Africa is entering a period of bitter national conflict.... On all sides the national and racial divisions are being emphasised and the realities of the class

⁹⁸ Interviews with Ben Turok, Amy Thornton and others.

⁹⁹ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ev2.2/Et.1: Kenny Jordaan: What are the National Groups in South Africa? p.4.; Forum Club: Symposium on the National Question, June 1954. See also Discussion (Forum Club journal) for the relevant period.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Fred Carneson, p.31.

¹⁰¹ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ev.1.1.6: Jack Simons: Lecture nd.1954, p.18.

¹⁰² Simons: Economics op.cit., p.7 (emphasis added).

¹⁰³ Simons: Lecture op.cit., p.18.

divisions are being obscured.¹⁰⁴

In such a situation, the Report argued, "nationalism need not be synonymous with racialism, but it can avoid being so only if it recognises the class alignments that cut across the racial divisions."¹⁰⁵ The need to emphasise class struggle was heightened by the accession to power of the Youth League, and the anti-communist agitation of Selope Thema and others within the ANC.¹⁰⁶ In response, the CPSA called on its members to "make a practice of issuing immediate and critical comment on the statements of the bourgeois leaders" and disallow "the bourgeois elements in the national movements" from attacking "the working class movement, ... the Party, or ... adopt[ing] a negative or hostile attitude to the international working class forces."¹⁰⁷

In contrast, the CPSA in Johannesburg debated with those engaged in nationalist rather than class politics. As we have seen, many leading members of the Communist Party were simultaneously ANC or SAIC members. Where leading CPSA members in Cape Town emphasised the primacy of class struggle, in the Transvaal and Natal CPSA members in the Congress movement fought to prove the party's commitment to national struggle. The Transvaal, and in particular Johannesburg, was the centre of political developments in South Africa. This was reflected in CPSA activity in the region. The squatter movements, bus boycotts and the 1946 African miners strike had all been located in the Transvaal. The Transvaal ANC was the largest and most radical ANC branch in the country. As we have seen, the Johannesburg District of the CPSA urged black CPSA members to join the Congress movement, while leading members were at the forefront of attempts to radicalise the ANC and SAIC. Central Committee member Yusuf Dadoo was a leading figure in the TIC, which with the NIC had shed its conservative leadership during the war years and moved into an alliance with the ANC. The ANC in the Transvaal was led by men such as J.B.Marks and David Bopape, joint ANC/CPSA members.

Bopape, as we have seen, succeeded in making Brakpan location the political centre of

¹⁰⁴ 1950 Central Committee Report *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ See Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, pp.408-409.

¹⁰⁷ 1950 Central Committee Report *op.cit.*

the East Rand, and establishing the CPSA as the dominant force in its politics; however, he was at the same time Transvaal ANC Secretary and a member of the Youth League. The organisational skills of J.B.Marks were largely credited with the successful stay-away on May Day 1950, which resulted in his election as Transvaal ANC President.¹⁰⁸ ANC/CPSA members worked closely with ANC President C.S.Ramohanoe, who expressed little support for the ideological battle waged by the ANCYL against the CPSA, characterising Leaguers as "armchair politicians who keep on going from place to place preaching Congress and doing nothing."¹⁰⁹

The Transvaal ANC, however, was the political home of leading Youth League members such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, and Oliver Tambo. As a result, the conflict between the Youth League and the CPSA was to a large extent fought out in the Transvaal. The late 1940s saw a political ferment within the Congress movement, as the ANC grew in size and militancy and sought alliances with Indian and Coloured organisations. In this situation, according to Rusty Bernstein, Transvaal Communists sensitive to the Congress movement

began to adjust the Party's view of the significance of the national liberation movement. It placed the national liberation movement much more in the forefront than it had done.¹¹⁰

This was made easier at the end of the decade as leading members of the Youth League began to show signs of changing their former hostility towards both racial co-operation and the CPSA.

The resolution of the ANCYL/CPSA conflict.

In the early 1950s, the Youth League began to divide into two camps; one remained strictly Africanist, while the other supported racial co-operation in the form of the Congress Alliance. In the same period the conceptual language of leading Youth Leaguers came to resemble that of the CPSA, particularly the language of anti-imperialism. By 1953 Nelson Mandela spoke freely of the ANC "uncompromisingly resist[ing] the efforts of imperialist

¹⁰⁸ Karis: *Hope* op.cit., p.409.

¹⁰⁹ *The Guardian* 29-7-1948, p.5.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.42.

America and her satellites to draw the world into the rule of violence and brute force," and condemned "the criminal attacks of the imperialists against the people of Malaya, Vietnam, Indonesia and Tunisia."¹¹¹ As Mandela, Tambo, Sisulu and others moved into leadership positions within the ANC (Mandela was co-opted to the ANC NEC in 1950), leadership of the Youth League passed to a younger generation of Fort Hare intellectuals, of whom Z.K. Matthews' son Joe Matthews was the most prominent.

As Walshe has shown, by 1951 Matthews was clearly linking the South African struggle to a broader international struggle against the "indirect enemy," the United States.¹¹² According to Matthews, Africans were exploited under capitalism in "the final stage of monopoly capital gone mad, namely fascism."¹¹³ Support for communist countries amongst some Youth Leaguers grew because of the clear opposition to racism and support for decolonisation which distinguished them from the western countries. Joe Matthews wrote in 1952:

I must say I am pretty fed up with the U.S.A., their stand is rotten and the Eastern nations have beaten the West on the colour issue ... I ... think America has lost African friendship. As far as I am concerned I will henceforth look East where race discrimination is so taboo that it is made a crime by the state.¹¹⁴

At the same time, leading Youth Leaguers came out in support of extra-parliamentary action. With Mda, Bopape and others, Matthews argued that the "labour power of the African people" was the key to success in the struggle.¹¹⁵

The relationship between CPSA and the ANCYL in the late 1940s and early 1950s was clearly more dynamic than earlier in the decade, as both organisations underwent significant changes. During this period some sections of the CPSA adjusted their understanding of and relations with the national organisations as those organisations became increasingly prominent and active. At the same time, the Youth League was itself changing, and ANCYL members such as Mandela, Matthews, Sisulu and others increasingly utilised the tools of Marxist analysis.

¹¹¹ Nelson Mandela: 1953 Transvaal ANC Conference speech, in Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.187.

¹¹² J. Matthews: 1951 ANCYL Presidential Address in Walshe: *Nationalism op.cit.*, p.361.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ CAMP: Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/15: J. Matthews to Z.K. Matthews, 20-11-1952.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*; see Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.103.

As we have seen, some CPSA members argued that the ANC was an anti-communist petty-bourgeois nationalist organisation aiming to maintain capitalist relations in a nonracial society.¹¹⁶ As such, it was argued, the possibility existed of a rapprochement between the ANC and the 'progressive industrialists' which had emerged during the second world war. Joe Matthews rejected the argument, asserting that "the possibility of a liberal capitalist democracy in South Africa is exactly nil" because the "political immorality, cowardice and vacillation of the so-called progressives ... render them utterly useless as a force against fascism."¹¹⁷ Mda went further: the removal of legal statutes which enshrined discrimination

might under certain circumstances very well mean that the African middle class joined hands with the European, Indian and Coloured middle class in order to impose further chains and to exploit the black peasants and toiling millions.... It has happened before in many Colonial territories even in Africa. It must not happen here.¹¹⁸

More significantly, Youth League members who had taken up positions within the ANC began to accept the strategic need for allies. The passing of laws which discriminated against the entire black population, such as the Population Registration Act (1950), the Group Areas Act (1950), and in particular the clear implications for all resistance movements in the Suppression of Communism Act (1950), led to a reassessment by Youth Leaguers of the need for a broad alliance of anti-apartheid forces. The reassessment included some of the most virulently anti-communist League members. For example, Jordan Ngubane, editor of *Inkundla ya Bantu*, castigated the CPSA in 1950 for "stampeding our people into the May Day demonstrations" in which eighteen Africans were shot by the police.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, Ngubane argued, while "Communism and apartheid are two similarly vicious evils"

the most dangerous of those at the moment is apartheid. The African Nationalists will do well to exercise a little more statesmanship and realise that they can carry their fight against the Communists only up to a certain point if they are not going to play right into the hands of [Prime Minister] Malan ... it is more important to exercise statesmanship in our dealings with the Communists than to help the

¹¹⁶ See for example Danie du Plessis: The situation in South Africa today in Viewpoints and Perspectives (journal of the Johannesburg Discussion Club) 1/3, February 1954, p.41.

¹¹⁷ Matthews: Address op.cit., p.349.

¹¹⁸ A.P.Mda: African Nationalism: Is It a Misnomer?: *Inkundla ya Bantu*: 27-8-1949.

¹¹⁹ J.K.Ngubane: Post-Mortem on a Tragedy: *Inkundla ya Bantu* 20-5-1950, in Karis: Hope op.cit., p.441.

Malanites by weakening their political enemies.¹²⁰

Attempts to extend the ANC/SAIC alliance to include trade unions and Coloureds under threat of disenfranchisement, failed. Following the 1950 May Day deaths and facing the imminent enactment of the Suppression of Communism Bill, June 26th was declared a Day of Protest, and a stay-away was called. This followed ANC consultation with the SAIC, the CPSA and the APO. ANC leaders hoped to create a Co-ordinating Committee of the Congresses and trade unions, but in the event the CPSA disbanded while the APO and trade unions sent only moral support.¹²¹ In June 1950, the alliance remained limited to the ANC and SAIC.

By the end of 1950, Youth Leaguers were in control of the ANC, which was committed to a programme of extra-parliamentary action. In 1951 plans were laid for the Defiance Campaign, which transformed the ANC into a mass movement. The CPSA disbanded in June 1950, and individual black communists worked increasingly within the ANC. By 1952, debates taking place amongst former CPSA members across the country highlighted the growing emphasis amongst communists on national liberation struggle.¹²² The power struggle which partly characterised ANCYL/CPSA relations in the 1940s had been settled in the Youth League's favour.

Existing explanations for the resolution of the CPSA/ANCYL conflict stress the diminution of hostility following the election of Youth Leaguers to the ANC National Executive Committee, where "their personal experiences of close co-operation"¹²³ with communists resulted in their "anti-communist tendencies ... [being] modified."¹²⁴ It is suggested here that such explanations are partial; although undoubtedly significant, the context in which CPSA/ANCYL hostility diminished was one of ideological shifts on both sides and the entrenchment of the Youth League within the ANC hierarchy.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.442.

¹²¹ Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.408.

¹²² See chapter 4.

¹²³ Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.409.

¹²⁴ Walshe: *Nationalism op.cit.*, p.359. See also Gerhart: *Power op.cit.*, p.117.

Class and race in South Africa: The CPSA in 1950.

The relationship between the ANCYL and the CPSA at the end of the 1940s, it has been argued, was dynamic. Youth Leaguers made increasing use of Marxist analysis, shared anti-imperialist attitudes with Communists, and, once in control of the ANC, began to include the CPSA in their search for allies. In response, sections of opinion within the Communist Party began to adjust the party's understanding of and approach to national struggle. In doing so, the regional differences within the CPSA again became visible.

Despite changes within the ANC and the Youth League, the CPSA in the Cape maintained what one Cape member described as "a long tradition of suspicion of the ANC" as a bourgeois, anti-communist organisation.¹²⁵ This was a perception by no means restricted to the Communist Party in the Cape, or shared by all Cape CPSA members. The Johannesburg CPSA chairperson, Danie du Plessis, argued that the ANC should be assessed not in terms of its constituent membership, but its leadership. The latter represented an "incipient" black bourgeoisie which aimed "to integrate themselves into the existing local capitalism rather than to oust the oppressors."¹²⁶ The ANC leadership, du Plessis argued, were "bourgeois or bourgeois agents" who, at a point of crisis, "would join forces with the government against the workers, and would first protect their own interests."¹²⁷

Nonetheless, the characterisation of the ANC as a reformist bourgeois organisation was strongly identified with the Cape CPSA. According to some former CPSA members, the party in the Cape placed a lesser emphasis on national liberation struggle than elsewhere. Rusty Bernstein recently stated:

In Cape Town, where the national movement was really not significant in that way [ie. as in the Transvaal], the same emphasis did not exist and there began to be an emphasis on the Party as the leading element in the whole struggle and the national liberation movement to be somewhat insignificant. So this political difference began to show itself.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Interview with Ben Turok, p.20.

¹²⁶ Danie du Plessis: Notes on certain points raised in the discussion, *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/3, p.44.

¹²⁷ du Plessis: Situation op.cit., p.41.

¹²⁸ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, pp.42-43.

In contrast with the Cape, sections of the Transvaal CPSA began to argue that black South Africans suffered both capitalist and colonial oppression, and that the growing national movement was a natural response to colonialism. Eddie Roux, former CPSA member who had hinted at this in 1928, stated in 1952:

I do not agree that South Africa is a capitalist country. I think one may say that here we have an imperial and colonial relationship coexisting in the same country. The African people cannot only be considered to be the subjects of proletarian exploitation as in other countries; they are subjected to an extra exploitation because of their colour, something which is not usually found in other countries with laissez-faire.¹²⁹

Over the next two years, as will be seen, leading members of the new SACP elaborated Roux's statement and developed the theory of 'Colonialism of a Special Type.'¹³⁰

The significance of internal colonialism for the present discussion lies in the approach to national struggle implicit in the theory. Those who emphasised class struggle argued that the "businessmen, financiers, landlords" and others in the ANC leadership would always "place their vested interests first", characterising them as a 'traitor class.'¹³¹ In contrast, Bernstein, Transvaal Central Committee member Michael Harmel and others argued that segregation and apartheid, in oppressing all blacks equally, had successfully stunted the growth of an indigenous black bourgeoisie. As a result, the 'traitor class' was not to be found amongst blacks - rather, "the traitor class in South Africa is the European bourgeoisie."¹³²

The adumbrators of internal colonialism argued that the Congress Alliance, and the ANC itself, represented "an alliance of the working class and the petty-bourgeois strata of the colonially oppressed peoples of South Africa..."¹³³ Within that alliance, the working class represented "the most energetic, whole-hearted and thoroughgoing section of the fighters for bourgeois democracy, for national liberation."¹³⁴ Moreover, it was argued, precisely

¹²⁹ Eddie Roux: Notes on discussion 16-9-1952; in *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/1: March 1953, p.14.

¹³⁰ The elaboration of CST is discussed in chapter 4.

¹³¹ du Plessis: *Situation* op.cit., p.41.

¹³² Rusty Bernstein: *The role of the bourgeoisie in the liberatory struggle: Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/2 January 1953, pp.31-33; and Michael Harmel: *A Note by the Speaker* in *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1\3, February 1954 p.38.

¹³³ Bernstein: *Bourgeoisie* op.cit., p.32.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

because of the colonial oppression of blacks and the lack of a significant black bourgeoisie, the working class predominated in Congress membership and increasingly in leadership positions. Pointing to the adoption of extra-parliamentary strategies by the ANC and SAIC, Harmel argued that "[i]n recent years, the militant working class tendency has wielded increasing influence in our national movements." As a result, "the policy of genuine workers' leaders" should not be "to drive out the allied classes, but rather to broaden out the movements..."¹³⁵

In the postwar years, black Communist Party members began to emphasise black demands such as abolition of the pass laws above the traditional CPUSA concern with the white working class.¹³⁶ The latter, according to Fred Carneson, stemmed from "the fact that your most active section amongst the working class was either your white workers or your coloured workers."¹³⁷ The change in direction for the CPUSA was supported by Harmel, Bernstein and others, who castigated

the pedantic arm-chair socialist types of "theoreticians" who are apparently unable to see that on practically every main issue of home and foreign policy, the outlook and aims of such bourgeois elements as, for example, Dr. Moroka, are far more progressive in content than such working class elements as the Mineworkers Union, the S.A.R. Staff Association or the S.A.T.L.C. [Trades and Labour Council]¹³⁸

Transvaal communists argued that while colonial oppression blurred class oppression, it also ensured that the national organisations were overwhelmingly working class in composition.

According to Harmel, changes in ANC policy and strategy - brought about in part by the ANCYL - were evidence of growing working class influence. As the struggle intensified and the working class influence became even stronger, Harmel argued, so the national movements would move away from formulating political demands and concentrate on economic issues. Moreover, because of internal colonialism, the content of such demands would not represent the interests of the bourgeoisie; rather, they would highlight the economic content of national liberation. For Harmel, this entailed land redistribution and

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.38.

¹³⁶ Lodge: *Black Politics op.cit.*, p.29.

¹³⁷ Interview with Fred Carneson, p.30.

¹³⁸ Harmel: *Note op.cit.*, p.37.

"nationalisation of the principal means of production (for the power of imperialism in this country can only be broken by divorcing the imperialists from the means of production)."¹³⁹ The Transvaal Communists who put forward the notion of internal colonialism concluded that the role of communists was to work with the national movements for the attainment of national liberation. This would lead to "the clearing away of the race versus class issue," highlighting class oppression and leaving it "exposed for all to see."¹⁴⁰

In brief, differences existed within the CPSA in the late 1940s as to the nature of the ANC (especially as the ANCYL grew in significance), and thus over the role of the Communist Party viz the national liberation struggle. As Ben Turok put it, the Cape CPSA had a "rather rigid conception of the role of the Party" in contrast with the Transvaal, which attempted to work closely with the ANC and SAIC.¹⁴¹ In the event, the tension between race and class was not resolved before the CPSA dissolved in June 1950; the elaboration of internal colonialism by members of the new SACP represented an attempt to strike a new balance.

The 1950 Report of the CPSA Central Committee - the last it issued - revealed the tensions within the CPSA. The Report tentatively put forward the notion of internal colonialism, arguing that South Africa exhibited "the characteristics of both an imperialist state and colony within a single indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity."¹⁴² The black bourgeoisie, which should be leading the national struggle, was
small, fragmentary, pinned down in the poorest areas, forced to use subterfuge and illegalities to evade discriminating laws, starved of capital, and exposed to constant insecurity. It is not a class that could provide effective, militant leadership.¹⁴³

Transvaal Communists argued that this meant that the ANC "is not dominated by the unstable and potentially treacherous elements which have led similar movements elsewhere," and that Communists should therefore work in and with the national organisations.¹⁴⁴ The 1950 Central Committee Report, in contrast, argued that the black

¹³⁹ Harmel: *Imperialism op.cit.*, p.34.

¹⁴⁰ Bernstein: *Bourgeoisie op.cit.*, p.32.

¹⁴¹ Interview with Ben Turok, p.19.

¹⁴² 1950 Central Committee Report, *op.cit.*

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Harmel: *Imperialism op.cit.*, p.33.

Congresses were vague, contradictory and revealed a "tremendous capacity for evasiveness and ambiguity."¹⁴⁵

In essence, the 1950 Report attempted to weld together the colonial analysis of the Transvaal with the class bias of the Cape. The Report argued that while nationalism need not be racist, it could avoid being so only through the transformation of existing national organisations into a single party of "workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeois ... in alliance with the class-conscious European workers and intellectuals."¹⁴⁶ The aim of such a party, which would work in co-operation with the CPSA, would be to strive for national liberation. However, it would have to be led by "the class-conscious workers and peasants of the national group concerned" so as to "develop class consciousness in the people, and to forge unity in action between the oppressed peoples and between them and the European working class."

In contrast, Transvaal Communists acknowledged the class content which was attached to nonracialism and against which the Youth League reacted. Rusty Bernstein claimed that while "[t]here is no doubt scope for an organisation representing all races," it was "only possible under a philosophy of socialism." In present circumstances, he argued,

It is difficult to believe that the national liberatory struggle can be waged by any organisation other than that representing the people who are nationally oppressed.¹⁴⁷

The CPSA was a heterogenous organisation participating in a variety of forms of struggle including parliamentary elections, black trade unionism and Congress politics. Throughout the 1940s the CPSA called for the emergence of a militant mass-based national organisation to prosecute the first stage of the 'two-stage' revolution. However, when the ANC began to grow in size and militancy, it was largely at the instigation of the Youth League, which endorsed an aggressive African nationalism and hostility towards the Communist Party. The CPSA was divided in its response.

¹⁴⁵ 1950 Central Committee Report *op.cit.*

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Bernstein, quoted in du Plessis: *Notes op.cit.*, p.46.

One section of opinion within the CPSA, strongly associated with the Cape-based party leadership, called for a greater emphasis to be laid on class struggle, arguing that the rise of African and Afrikaner nationalism was, in the words of Jack Simons, "camouflag[ing] the Universal Exploitation of All Workers, whatever their race."¹⁴⁸ In response to ANCYL insistence on multiracialism, the supporters of class struggle called for one Congress for all, claiming: "Real and absolute unity between all races can only be achieved in a workers' struggle."¹⁴⁹ A second strand of CPSA opinion, which assumed leadership of the SACP after 1953, stressed the working class content of national liberation in South Africa, and called on Communists to work in close co-operation with the emerging Congress Alliance. The 1950 Central Committee Report represented an attempted compromise between the two; it utilised an analysis of oppression in South Africa developed in the Transvaal, but reached conclusions associated with the Cape which stressed the primacy of class struggle and the need to under-emphasise nationalism. The CPSA remained unsuccessful in attempting to balance the requirements of national and class struggle.

Conclusion.

Multiracialism was commonly perceived by many outside the Congress movement (and some within it) to be a mechanism of control engineered by the CPSA after it disbanded in 1950. In fact, multiracialism represented a clear setback for those CPSA members who argued that class struggle was obscured by nationalism. The dissolution of the CPSA (discussed in chapter four) and the emergence of the Congress Alliance, generated a wide-ranging debate amongst former CPSA members over the relationship between class and national struggle in South Africa. In the middle of that debate, both the South African Congress of Democrats and the South African Communist Party were formed. Chapter four discusses the formation of the SACP in the context of the on-going debate over national and class struggle; chapter five analyses the effects of the debate on the formation of SACOD.

¹⁴⁸ Simons: *Economics op.cit.*, p.3.

¹⁴⁹ du Plessis: *Situation op.cit.*, p.42.

Chapter four.

From CPSA to SACP: Socialist responses to African nationalism, 1952-1954.

Introduction.

By 1953 the ANC had emerged as the major extra-parliamentary organisation in the struggle against apartheid. The ANC's political philosophy and its strategic thinking became, therefore, a matter of concern to communists, liberals and others who hoped to influence events. The result was an extended and wide-ranging review of the political situation amongst all anti-apartheid organisations and groupings. This was particularly necessary for white opponents of apartheid who were unable to join the ANC, who were wary of the militant nationalism of the Youth League, and were alienated by the anti-white sentiments which marked the final stages of the Defiance Campaign. Whites opposed to apartheid were forced to reassess their political strategies in the light of an increasingly active ANC and SAIC. The debates and discussions of the early 1950s set the parameters within which white anti-apartheid groupings operated throughout the 1950s. This chapter analyses the debates undertaken by the white left, communist and non-communist, in attempting to accommodate the pursuit of class struggle to the reality of national liberation struggle.

White opposition to apartheid: the wider context.

The period 1946-1953 witnessed two major developments within the forces opposed to apartheid. The ANC underwent a process of change, radicalising its demands and methods of protest; in the process, the leadership of the 1940s was largely replaced by a younger generation of more assertive and militant African nationalists. Secondly, the period witnessed a growing unity amongst black organisations. The African and Indian Congresses moved into alliance and, with representatives of the largely-Coloured FRAC, co-ordinated the 1952 Defiance Campaign. Although the attainment of unity was not a simple or linear process, the lines of development were clear. With the formation of SACPO in September 1953, representatives of the Coloured population formally joined the Alliance. The 1952 Darragh Hall meeting called by the ANC and SAIC represented an attempt to capitalise

on white opposition to apartheid, which had emerged in the early 1950s.¹

White opposition to apartheid came into being in large part because of black resistance to apartheid; the Defiance Campaign in particular generated widespread debate amongst liberal and radical whites, and led to the formation of the Congress of Democrats and the South African Liberal Association.² As ANC President-General Albert Lutuli stated: "as soon as the African people started to be militant ... more whites have begun to think more of our needs."³ In a speech in Port Elizabeth, ANC Secretary General Walter Sisulu argued:

No matter what anyone feels or thinks about the Defiance Campaign, the fact is that it changed the political life of South Africa. The vacillating elements, both in our camp and in that of the ruling class, have been exposed; they have been forced to make their clear choice. Whilst we have gained considerable strength, the ruling class has been confused and divided. The coming into being of different parties is very significant.⁴

For Lutuli, SACOD and the Liberal Party were "the children of the Defiance Campaign."⁵ The Defiance Campaign was singularly important for its effects on white opposition to apartheid. The twin processes of black unity and radicalisation, however, were precisely the factors which exacerbated ideological differences and led to organisational fragmentation amongst whites.

For whites opposed to apartheid, the 1950-1953 period was marked by theoretical debate and the emergence of organisations committed, by different means and to different degrees, to ending racial discrimination. The process and content of debate, and the creation of organisations, were not unified. White radicals - those who supported the complete nonracial restructuring of the South African political economy by extra-parliamentary means - debated the best means of pursuing class struggle, while liberals sought a reasonable middle course which would restrain the excesses of African and Afrikaner nationalism. As a result, there existed two parallel streams of activity, in which mutually suspicious radical and liberal whites participated.

¹ See chapters 2 and 5.

² These became the South African Congress of Democrats and the Liberal Party; see chapters 5 and 6.

³ Treason Trial transcript AD1812: Volume 57/11480.

⁴ *Advance*: 8-4-1954, p.4.

⁵ Treason Trial transcript AD1812: Volume 57/11654.

The cause of this separation has commonly been traced back to the Darragh Hall meeting of November 1952. The failure of that meeting to produce a single, unified white anti-apartheid organisation has been ascribed to the prominent role played by "former Communists and other left-wing whites" in forming the South African People's Congress (later the Congress of Democrats).⁶ For most commentators, the Congress of Democrats, and later SACOD, were either "Communist-controlled" or operated as a 'front' for white communists.⁷ Working backwards from this assumption, the Darragh Hall meeting has been presented as a lost opportunity where white unity was squandered through the actions of those intent on creating a 'communist front' and who thereby alienated white liberals.⁸

Such claims, however, are premised on an understanding of the CPSA, and the broader white left, as a monolithic entity which acted in concert on agreed goals. As such, little understanding is shown of the differences between former CPSA members and within the white left, over approaches to African nationalism. Moreover, they ignore the fundamental differences in ideology, strategy and tactics, between liberal and radical whites. These differences were made clear at the Darragh Hall meeting and were replicated nationally. In Durban, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Johannesburg and elsewhere, radicals and liberals disagreed over the means by which the anti-apartheid struggle should be waged, and the nature of post-apartheid society. As a result, most major centres in South Africa hosted parallel and separate discussion forums incorporating either liberal or radical whites; these gave rise to separate local organisations later incorporated into either the Liberal Party or SACOD.

This chapter analyses the broader ideological and organisational context within which white radicals operated in the early 1950s. That context was marked on the one hand by the growth of the ANC, and on the other by the dissolution of the CPSA and the secret

⁶ Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit., p.13.

⁷ Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.165.

⁸ See for example E.Feit: *Urban Revolt in South Africa 1960-1964* (Northwestern 1971) p.268.

⁹ See Karis: *Hope* op.cit., p.422; Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op cit, p.13.

formation of the SACP. The debates within the CPSA in the late 1940s over the relationship between class and national struggle were taken up nationally in the early 1950s as white radicals (communist and non-communist) responded to the growth of African nationalism. At issue was the role of theories of class struggle and of working class organisation in the changed conditions of the early 1950s. The debates of the period represent an attempt to marry the theories of class and national struggle; the debate was soon dominated by the notion of internal colonialism, briefly mentioned in the 1950 CPSA Central Committee report but central to the later SACP programme. It was from this context that SACOD, as a political home for radical whites, emerged.

The dissolution of the CPSA.

The Communist Party of South Africa disbanded itself on June 20, 1950, in the face of the Suppression of Communism Bill, passed at the end of June. Announcing the dissolution of the Party in parliament, CPSA MP Sam Kahn stated:

Communism will outlive the Nationalist Party. Democracy will still be triumphant when members of this Government will be manuring the fields of history. Millions in South Africa will echo my final words: 'Long Live Communism.'¹⁰

Kahn's bold statement, however, belied confusion within the ranks of the Communist Party regarding the demise of the Party, the future role of communists, and ideological differences over the nature of their activities.

The dissolution of the CPSA has received only cursory mention in most works covering the period.¹¹ Moreover, discussion of the event has remained almost exclusively with former CPSA members.¹² Even then, few details have emerged regarding the debates in the Central Committee which led up to the decision to disband, and no detail has been offered regarding the attitude of the general Party membership to dissolution. The disbanding of the CPSA has been presented as a largely consensual act necessitated by the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act. The formation of the SACP three years later has been portrayed as the reconstitution of the old Party with a new name and with new operational

¹⁰ Quoted in Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.165.

¹¹ See for example Lodge: *Black Politics op.cit.*, p.34, 87; Karis: *Hope op.cit.*, p.404.

¹² See Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, pp.165-167; A.Lerumo [pseud. Michael Harmell]: *Fifty Fighting Years* (London 1987 ed) p.82, 87-88; Simons and Simons: *Class op.cit.*, pp.605-609.

imperatives resulting from conditions of illegality.

This interpretation of events is questioned here. It will be argued that the disbanding of the CPSA represented a hasty decision taken by the Central Committee; the general Party membership was left confused and without direction at precisely the same time as the ANC and SAIC were successfully mobilising mass support for the Defiance Campaign. In an attempt to gain theoretical and analytic clarity on the swiftly unfolding events of 1951-1952, former CPSA members as well as non-CPSA whites initiated a wide-ranging debate which focussed on the nature and goals of the ANC. Discussion was soon dominated by the theory of internal colonialism, developed by Transvaal communists in the late 1940s.¹³ In 1953 the same Transvaal communists founded the SACP; under their leadership, the new Communist Party tailored its policy and strategy towards an intimate working relationship with the Congress movement. The roots of both the SACP and SACOD lie in the debates and disputes of 1952-1954.

The passage through parliament of the Unlawful Organisations Bill (renamed the Suppression of Communism Bill) gave rise to a major campaign against the Bill by extra-parliamentary organisations. The campaign was significant in that, following disputes between the CPSA and the ANC Youth League in the late 1940s, the Congresses and the CPSA acted in concert against the Bill. As we have seen, ANCYL antipathy towards the CPSA waned considerably following the accession to power within the ANC of senior Youth Leaguers and their subsequent search for allies. The ANC national working committee in May 1950 convened a conference in Johannesburg to which representatives from the SAIC, the ANCYL, the CPSA, the APO and the Council for Non-European Trade Unions [CNETU] were invited. The conference focussed on the need for united resistance to the Unlawful Organisations Bill which, conference organisers stated, would convert South Africa into "a fully fledged fascist state."¹⁴ The conference concluded:

The NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS present here jointly pledge themselves to take immediate steps to mobilise all sections of the South African people and offer

¹³ See chapter 3.

¹⁴ Quoted in Karis: *Hope* op.cit., p.443.

concrete mass opposition to this vicious Bill with the aim of defeating it.¹⁵

It was bitter irony for the CPSA that the moment at which it became an accepted and equal partner campaigning in concert with all existing national organisations was the point at which its existence was under direct threat. The CPSA responded by throwing its energy into campaigning against the Bill, issuing thousands of fliers and stickers and holding public meetings. It appears, however, that little thought was given to the future of the CPSA. As leading Transvaal CPSA member Rusty Bernstein put it,

we'd concentrated so much on a campaign to oppose the Bill and to try and frustrate the Bill, we didn't really concentrate our attention on what was going to happen after [it] became law! We almost talked ourselves into thinking we could stop it. So to some extent when it happened ... we weren't prepared for it.¹⁶

Significantly, Bernstein concluded: "And that goes for the Central Committee like anybody else."¹⁷

In parliament, only the Native Representatives and Labour Party MPs opposed the Bill, which became law at the end of June as the Suppression of Communism Act. Sam Kahn announced the Party's response to the enactment:

Recognising that the day the Suppression of Communism Bill becomes law every one of our members, merely by virtue of their membership, may be liable to be imprisoned without the option of a fine for a maximum period of ten years, the Central Committee of the Communist Party has decided to dissolve the Party as from today.¹⁸

The CPSA dissolved itself on June 20, 1950; as its official historian noted, moreover, it did so "by majority vote and without consulting the membership ... [of] the Party."¹⁹ The decision was taken at "a hastily convened" Central Committee meeting in early May 1950²⁰, where the then Unlawful Organisations Bill was considered. No formal discussions had been held within the ranks of the Party, and Central Committee members "hadn't had time to really think through a position before they got there."²¹ Put to the vote, fifteen out

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ Interview with Rusty Bernstein (1988) transcript p.45. See also Bunting *Kotane: op.cit.*, p.166.

¹⁷ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.45.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bunting: *Kotane: op.cit.*, p.164.

¹⁹ Lerumo: *50 Years op.cit.*, p.82.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.44.

of seventeen Central Committee members supported disbanding the CPSA.

The decision was opposed by two Central Committee members: veteran Party member Bill Andrews, and Transvaal journalist Michael Harmel. Twelve years later the SACP publicly criticised the dissolution, stating:

Despite its great achievements and struggles, the Communist Party of South Africa proved incapable of surviving under illegal conditions. Legalistic illusions had penetrated into the ranks of the Party, including its leading personnel. The Party was unprepared and unable to work underground. These errors culminated in the dissolution...²²

The 'legalistic illusions' referred to by the SACP have been taken by most commentators to be adequate comment on the dissolution of the CPSA, the three year gap before the SACP was founded, and the non-appearance in the ranks of the new Party of such leading communists as CPSA MP Sam Kahn, former CPSA Johannesburg District Secretary Danie du Plessis, Cape lawyer Harry Snitcher, and others.

It would appear that the Central Committee was influenced in part by a legal opinion they had sought on the Unlawful Organisations Bill, which argued that if the Party agreed unanimously to dissolve itself (there being insufficient time to call a national conference to do so), it would safeguard against the persecution of Party members.²³ Fears for the future ran high in the Party. The Bill was introduced in parliament by C.R.Swart, the Minister of Justice, who spoke of communist plans for armed insurrection and the poisoning of water supplies.²⁴ The United Party proposed an amendment to the Bill which would make communism a treasonable offence punishable by death.²⁵ In the anti-communist hysteria of the time, as one CPSA member noted,

when the Party was declared illegal, none of us knew what it meant - whether we were going to be picked up and put into concentration camps, we had visions of Nazi Germany...²⁶

While influenced by considerations of safety, Central Committee members who voted

²² *The Road to South African Freedom* (SACP 1962) p.40. The quotation is reproduced in Bunting, Lerumo and Simons and Simons.

²³ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.43.

²⁴ *The Cape Times* 8-5-1950.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ Interview with Rowley Arenstein (1987) transcript p.4.

in favour of dissolution did so from two mutually antagonistic positions. On the one hand, some voted for dissolution having "convinced themselves that there was no future for the Party in the new conditions."²⁷ Others, however, saw the dissolution as a means of sidestepping the legal sanctions of the Suppression of Communism Act. Michael Harmel, historian of the CPSA and one of the two dissentients to the decision, stated:

Subsequent events made clear the distinction between those among the former leadership who regarded the dissolution as a temporary and tactical expedient and those who had come to doubt the need for the very existence of the independent Marxist-Leninist Party of the working class.²⁸

Voting for different reasons, the Central Committee nonetheless overwhelmingly supported dissolving the CPSA.

The Central Committee decision having been taken, Moses Kotane toured the country to explain it to the Party membership and to receive the required unanimous endorsement. CPSA members Jack and Ray Simons have stated that the dissolution was "accepted without dissent."²⁹ This however is misleading as to the nature of the process. In the same way as Central Committee members voted for dissolution for a variety of motives, so the unanimity of the rank and file obscures different attitudes towards dissolution.

The overwhelming feeling within the ranks of the Party appears to have been the belief that dissolution was a 'ploy'³⁰: as Transvaal member Hilda Bernstein put it,

We thought that what they intended was officially above-ground to say the Party had been dissolved, whereas actually it would continue.³¹

The Party rank and file, believing dissolution to be a cosmetic attempt to outwit the government, gave Kotane the unanimous mandate he requested. As Durban CPSA member Rowley Arenstein explained,

most of us got the impression that this was a legal ploy. And the next thing was that Moses Kotane arrived in Durban, called everybody together and said 'Look, I'm just telling you something, whatever motion I'm going to put I want a unanimous decision, it has to be a unanimous decision.' Now, the ploy was that we didn't have enough time to disband the Party in terms of the Constitution, so

²⁷ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.43.

²⁸ Lerumo: *50 Years* op.cit., p.82.

²⁹ Simons and Simons: *Class* op.cit., p.608.

³⁰ A term used by CPSA members Rusty and Hilda Bernstein, Rowley Arenstein, Fred Carneson, Ben Turok and others.

³¹ Interview with Hilda Bernstein (1988) transcript p.41.

the advice we got was that every district must unanimously agree that the Party must be disbanded. In other words we were given instructions that we must unanimously decide to disband the Party. So, after he told us to do it unanimously, we did it unanimously!²²

A similar feeling appears to have influenced the CPSA in Johannesburg, according to former District Secretary Rusty Bernstein:

I think the majority of the rank and file, certainly in the Transvaal, didn't believe that the thing was serious. That's why at a general meeting in Johannesburg where the decision was explained to us by Kotane, we hardly discussed it. Nobody opposed it ... People thought, this is a con-job. We're going to con the government into thinking we're doing something which we're not doing.²³

In short, the overwhelming feeling among Party members was that dissolution was a deception, and the almost immediate reappearance of the CPSA underground was widely expected.²⁴ Earlier calls for the CPSA to move into underground work, however, had been rejected by the Central Committee which argued that it was not possible to convert the legal CPSA into an illegal party.²⁵ Central Committee members argued that the CPSA had operated "in the full glare of publicity"²⁶; its members were known to the police who had seized membership lists in 1946, in addition to which many members had joined the Party during its period of wartime 'respectability' and could not be expected to operate under illegal conditions.²⁷ Central Committee member Fred Carneson, speaking "from my point of view and from the organisation's point of view, being [Cape] Party secretary", stressed that on the one hand "you couldn't take the apparatus that we had at that stage and take it underground"; on the other, the Party wanted to control its own disbanding "rather than wait until the bloody Special Branch struck at us with all that that meant."²⁸

This analysis of the situation, however, was not universally shared. For Michael Harmel, the 'legalistic illusions' of the CPSA leadership were represented precisely by the unpreparedness of the Party which, "[d]espite the open threats of the Nationalist Party to

²² Interview with Rowley Arenstein, p.4.

²³ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.44.

²⁴ Interviews with Ben Turok (1988) transcript p.3; Rusty Bernstein, p.41; Hilda Bernstein, p.45; Issie Heymann (1987) transcript p.28; Willie Kalk (1987) transcript p.13.

²⁵ Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, pp.165-166; Simons and Simons: *Class op.cit.*, p.607.

²⁶ Simons and Simons: *Class op.cit.*, p.607.

²⁷ Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, pp.165-166.

²⁸ Interview with Fred Carneson (1988) transcript p.23.

ban the C.P." had taken "no effective steps ... to prepare for underground existence and illegal work."³⁹ As Rusty Bernstein put it, "we'd had a long period of legality and we'd got used to being legal."⁴⁰ Harmel wrote not simply with the benefit of hindsight. The Transvaal Division of the CPSA had unsuccessfully attempted to institute a second-string leadership which could operate in the event of mass arrest⁴¹, and a number of Transvaal members had agitated for full preparation for underground work.⁴²

Such proposals had been rejected by the Central Committee, whose members argued that "if your Party is threatened, you concentrate your attention on beating off that threat."⁴³ Differences on this issue were significant, for they fed into existing regional disharmony between the Cape and the Transvaal.⁴⁴ The Central Committee decision to dissolve the Party came to be seen (in part) in the light of such regional differences; as Rusty Bernstein put it, "more than half of the Central Committee were Capetonians ... and the Cape Central Committee dissolved the Party."⁴⁵

Central Committee members had supported dissolution believing there to be "little alternative at that stage."⁴⁶ Even then, Committee members had different understandings of their future role, which only became clear once the CPSA had been disbanded. Where some Central Committee members had seen dissolution as a tactical manoeuvre, for others it was final: Fred Carneson noted that "all sorts of arguments were put forward but basically they didn't want to get mixed up in anything illegal, didn't want to stick their necks out."⁴⁷ The unpreparedness of the CPSA Central Committee resulted in confusion and anger amongst Party members, particularly in the Transvaal; it was from that context that the South African Communist Party emerged.

³⁹ Lerumo: *50 Years op.cit.*, p.82.

⁴⁰ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.43.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.43; Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.166.

⁴² Interview with Willie Kalk, p.22.

⁴³ Interview with Fred Carneson, p.23.

⁴⁴ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.43; see chapter 3.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, pp.42-50; repeated by Willie Kalk, p.13.

⁴⁶ Bunting: *Kotane op.cit.*, p.166.

⁴⁷ Interview with Fred Carneson, p.24.

The formation of the SACP.

The majority of Party members supported the disbanding of the CPSA assuming it to be a ploy. Disquiet over the decision grew, however, when dissolution was not followed by the reconstitution of the Party. As Hilda Bernstein put it:

The ones who took the decision on the Central Committee intended that it should be disbanded. We waited to be contacted to be told 'you're appointed to such-and-such a group,' and 'you're going to work with so-and-so' - we sort of innocent or naive or stupid members of the Party.⁴⁶

For the general membership it appeared that the decision to dissolve the Party, which they "didn't believe ... was serious," was in fact final.⁴⁷ Members of the CPSA remained active in a number of organisations, while waiting for news of the underground reconstitution of the Party - "...and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and it didn't happen!"⁴⁸ The period 1950-1951 was "a very strange time"⁴⁹ during which "a lot of people [were] running around saying, 'what's happening to the re-formation?' Nothing was happening."⁵⁰ During that time two processes were in fact taking place. At a local level, small socialist groups were formed, while at the national level the former CPSA leadership met irregularly to review political developments and discuss their future strategy.

Following the dissolution of the CPSA, former leaders in Cape Town held informal meetings "to discuss current political issues and always, invariably, what about restarting the Party."⁵¹ It was as part of this process of discussion that the differences between former Central Committee members regarding the future of the Party became clear. A national meeting of the CPSA leadership was called in 1951 to discuss the question of restarting the Party; as Fred Carneson put it,

it became clear at this last meeting we had where we were all together, the old leadership, that there was an unthinkable gap there between those who were determined to reform the Party on an illegal basis and those who weren't prepared to come in. So it was at that stage that we parted company as far as the Communist Party organisation was concerned.⁵²

The lengthy reassessment taking place amongst the national leadership, however, did not

⁴⁶ Interview with Hilda Bernstein, p.41.

⁴⁷ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.44.

⁴⁸ Interview with Hilda Bernstein, p.45.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Interview with Ben Turok, p.3.

⁵¹ Interview with Fred Carneson, p.25.

⁵² *ibid.*, pp.25-26.

include the rank and file Party membership. As a result, in the absence of any national initiative, communists at a local level began "a slow process of feeling each other's attitudes out."⁵⁵ The different attitudes towards dissolution amongst Central Committee members were reflected amongst ordinary Party members. For those who supported the permanent disbanding of the CPSA, it was a period when many ceased their active political involvement.⁵⁶ For those members who had regarded the decision to disband as a ploy, however, the period was one of disillusionment. According to SACP members, dissatisfaction grew amongst rank and file ex-CPSA members who were excluded from moves to reconstitute the Communist Party. Ben Turok has noted that former CPSA members in the western Cape confronted Congress organisers in the 1950s on the issue:

I came across a Coloured village in the western Cape where the members buried their cards in a tin box with plastic around it. When I came there for the Congress of the People in 1954, they spoke to us in very angry terms. They said before we talk to you about the Congress of the People you must please explain to us what happened to the Party because we were told to dissolve, we buried our cards - they sent somebody out and brought the cards in - and as far as they were concerned they were totally opposed to dissolution. I'm told this story could be repeated up and down the country. It's quite clear that the membership was neither consulted nor accepted the decision. I can't put a figure on it but I think that a substantial number of members were in that position.⁵⁷

Many former CPSA members who had regarded dissolution as temporary maintained contact and formed a number of small and informal socialist groups and *ad hoc* committees; in some cases, these groups included leftwing whites who had not been CPSA members.⁵⁸ The situation was confused, as Hilda Bernstein has explained:

After a while when we weren't approached and nothing happened, people tentatively began to speak to others and little groups began forming. It was at that time that ... some people in Johannesburg decided, well, its going to be dangerous. Everybody's going to be forming little Communist Party groups, we'd better get together and establish a proper Party.⁵⁹

The roots of the South African Communist Party lie in the initiative taken by the Transvaal group, which was headed by Michael Harmel and included (amongst others) Rusty and Hilda Bernstein, Moses Kotane (who had moved to Johannesburg), Yusuf Dadoo, J.B.Marks, Jack Hodgson, Bram Fischer, as well as a number of members of the Young Communist

⁵⁵ Interview with Ben Turok, p.17.

⁵⁶ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.48.

⁵⁷ Interview with Ben Turok, pp.16-17.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.5.

⁵⁹ Interview with Hilda Bernstein, p.48.

League such as Joe Slovo, Ruth First and others. The Transvaal initiative appears to have cut across the discussions taking place amongst former CPSA leaders; the precise relationship between the two processes is unclear. The founders of the new Party however were former CPSA Transvaal District Committee members: "It started with them, and later it was canvassed around the country."⁴⁰

Following their initiative, the Transvaal group began a process of national consultation prior to forming the SACP.⁴¹ With new rules on recruitment and observing strict security, the SACP was formed between 1951 and 1952; its first national conference was held in 1953, and by the time its second national conference took place in 1954 "a pretty solid skeleton" with some one hundred members was in place.⁴² Having decided to combine legal work within existing organisations with "persistent planned illegal work to rebuild and strengthen the Party as the vanguard of the most advanced class, the working class," the existence of the SACP was not made public until 1960.⁴³

The SACP is commonly presented as the *reconstitution* of the CPSA.⁴⁴ It is implied, in other words, that the ideology of the CPSA, as well as those members prepared to work underground, were taken over intact by the SACP. Because the SACP operated under illegal conditions, the non-appearance within its ranks of some senior CPSA members has been ascribed to an aversion to the stringencies of underground work. Discussing those CPSA members who did not join the SACP, Brian Bunting commented:

While not disavowing any of their former ideals, they felt either that they as individuals could not meet the requirements of underground work, or that the Communist Party itself could not survive in the face of the expected Government attack. Later, inevitably, some of them were to rationalise their own weakness and develop "ideological differences" with the party and its leadership.⁴⁵

The SACP "came out of the old Party" according to one of its founder members.⁴⁶ It

⁴⁰ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.50.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.48.

⁴² Interview with Ben Turok, p.17.

⁴³ Lerumo: *50 Years* op.cit., p.88.

⁴⁴ See in particular Bunting: *Kotane* op.cit., Chapter 11: 'The Party is Reconstituted' (pp.184-198).

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.167.

⁴⁶ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, p.50.

did so, however, with its headquarters in the Transvaal and with a new leadership dominated by Transvaal members. It was influenced in particular by Michael Harmel, described by a former SACP member as "the theoretical giant of the movement" and a leading proponent of internal colonialism.⁹ As we have seen, the last two years of the CPSA's existence were marked by tension over the question which, according to one commentator, had "almost obsessed" the CPSA since its inception - that is, the relationship between class struggle and national struggle, and of a class party to a national liberation movement.¹⁰

The centre of power within the new Party shifted from the Cape to the Transvaal, and came under the control of former CPSA members who had pressed for a closer relationship with the Congress movement and greater support for national struggle. While the basis for the SACP was being laid in the 1951-1953 period, former CPSA members freely debated the relationship between class struggle and national struggle. The debate was dominated by the theoretical perspectives of leading SACP members, and given fresh urgency by the concurrent Defiance Campaign. In this context, ideological differences emerged which represented more than the rationalisations of timorous former CPSA members.

From CPSA to SACP - the debates of 1952-1954.

The debates of 1952-1954 were crucial in setting the ideological and strategic context within which white radicals - communist and non-communist - operated throughout the 1950s. Those debates are nonetheless almost entirely ignored in existing historiography. The only analysis of the period has been provided by Rob Lambert, in which he analysed the implications for trade unionism of internal colonialism. Lambert however ignored the wider context of CPSA politics in the late 1940s, of which the debates of the 1950s were essentially an extension. Moreover, Lambert restricted his analysis to the journal *Viewpoints and Perspectives*, issued by the Johannesburg Discussion Club. In so doing he missed an essential point: that the debates took place *nationally* and involved the South African left

⁹ Interview with Ben Turok, p.20.

¹⁰ Karis: *Hope* op.cit., p.107; see chapter 3.

as a whole, not just former CPSA members.⁶⁶

The debates of the early 1950s were in many ways an extension of the internal discussions of the CPSA in the late 1940s. Both saw communists searching for an adequate response to the rapidly changing political terrain of postwar South Africa, which was dominated by the rise of African and Afrikaner nationalism. As Cape CPSA Secretary Fred Carneson put it:

Until the African National Congress, or the Congress movement, emerged as a real political force in South Africa, I think there was a tendency among the activists inside and outside the Party, to see things in class terms more than in national liberatory terms. Particularly so, I think, amongst some of the white communists, though it was not confined to the white communists by any manner of means.⁶⁷

In the reassessment generated by the increasing strength and militancy of the ANC, the central point at issue for the white left as a whole was the place of class struggle in a period dominated by nationalism and nationalist organisations. This was exacerbated by the confused interlude between the dissolution of the CPSA and formation of the SACP, and the fact that while black former CPSA members worked in the Congress movement, white communists were left without a political home.

A similar debate over class and national struggle had begun to take place in the CPSA in the late 1940s, but was suddenly made real in 1950 when the CPSA disbanded while the ANC continued to grow. Former CPSA Central Committee member Jack Simons explained in 1954:

the problem has become even more complicated than it used to be by reason of the attacks which the Nationalist Government has carried on against the working class organisations. The old balance, arrived at by constant interaction between the two sections, has been seriously upset, and the working class point of view tends to be overlooked.⁶⁸

The reassessment of the ANC undertaken by the white left was given added urgency in the 1950s as the Defiance Campaign grew in size and significance. The increasingly anti-white nature of the late stages of the Defiance Campaign generated fears that extreme

⁶⁶ R.V.Lambert: Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-1965. D.Phil. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand 1988. See especially chapter two, pp.53-100.

⁶⁷ Interview with Fred Carneson, pp.29-30.

⁶⁸ Treason trial collection: AD1812 Ev1.1.1: Jack Simons: Lecture (to the Durban Study Circle), January 1954, p.18. See chapter 3.

nationalist sentiment was spreading within the ANC. Such fears were not restricted to former communists, or whites generally. Defiance Campaign Volunteer-in-Chief Nelson Mandela appealed for whites to identify themselves with the Campaign and not unite in opposition to it; if they did so, they would be "digging their own grave" by "turn[ing] the whole movement into a racial front with disastrous consequences for all."⁷³

The white response to Mandela's appeal was twofold: on the one hand, organisations such as the Congress of Democrats and the Democratic League were formed. On the other, socialists and former CPSA members debated the best means of highlighting underlying class alignments which, they argued, were being obscured by rising nationalism. Following the dissolution of the CPSA, discussion groups were set up in the major centres across South Africa with the aim of "furnishing an opportunity for frank theoretical discussion."⁷⁴ Participants in the debates stood "solidly behind the broad aims of the Liberatory struggle" but were not committed "to the policies of any particular group, tendency or movement within the democratic camp."⁷⁵ The debates of the early 1950s were marked by free and open discussion as former CPSA members, without the discipline resulting from membership of a party, joined socialists and Trotskyists in debating the place of class struggle in a period dominated by nationalist organisations. In Cape Town, Durban, Johannesburg and elsewhere communists and non-communists alike sought to redress the balance that had been threatened by the rise of the ANCYL and upset by the Suppression of Communism Act.

Leading members of the new SACP called for closer relations with the Congress movement, and for all progressive whites to work in and for the Congress Alliance. In so doing, however, they alienated a number of former CPSA members and others, who warned that nationalist movements would stop short of the complete social transformation desired by the working class. As a result, some members of the white left called for the building of a "cohesive organisation ... [of] the major protagonist, the industrial working

⁷³ *People's World* 2-10-1952, p.2.

⁷⁴ *Viewpoints and Perspectives* (Johannesburg Discussion Club journal) 1/1, March 1953: Editorial, p.1.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

class," and an alliance with its "natural" allies, "the rural workers and the migrant labourers."⁷⁵

It would be inaccurate to characterise the whole process of debate as polarised between two coherent and well-defined opposing positions. Nonetheless, by the time the last edition of *Viewpoints and Perspectives* was issued in 1954, two clearly different positions had become clear. As stated at the time,

the two most frequently heard formulations of the liberation struggle depend on this assessment of 'a capitalist or imperialist exploited South Africa.'⁷⁶

These differing analyses of South African society generated different understandings of the best means of pursuing class struggle - through an intimate working alliance with the Congresses, or by building an independent working class organisation which would enjoy limited co-operation with the Congresses but would retain separate structures.⁷⁷

CPSA members were to be found supporting both positions. Lambert has suggested that the two positions which emerged during the debates represented "subtle" differences of "emphasis"⁷⁸; those who called for the independent organisation of the working class are described as marking "a shift of emphasis within the dominant position."⁷⁹ This analysis will be questioned here. The debates have to be understood within the broader context of the period, particularly the internal politics of the CPSA and SACP, and the influence of the Youth League on communists. At the centre of debate lay the ANC: its programme, leadership and tactics were analysed, and its commitment to the fundamental restructuring of society questioned.

Differing perspectives on South African oppression.

Almost all participants in the debates of the early 1950s agreed that South Africa was 'unique.' This stemmed from a number of factors of which the most important was the

⁷⁵ Dr Z. Sanders (pseud. Zena Susser): Aspects of the Rural Problem in South Africa in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/1, p.36.

⁷⁶ Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/2: Editorial p.v.

⁷⁷ See below.

⁷⁸ Lambert: SACTU: op.cit., p.70.

⁷⁹ ibid., p.80 (emphasis in original).

presence of a white community which, while permanently settled in the country, nonetheless controlled a system of exploitation whose main features (discrimination against the entire indigenous population, migrant labour, a racially divided working class) were found in colonial situations elsewhere. Secondly, under this system the growth and development of an indigenous black bourgeoisie had not been encouraged; in fact, all agreed, it had been deliberately frustrated. Moreover, it was agreed that the 'industrial revolution' which had been generated by the second world war promised to increase the size and significance of the industrial proletariat; as yet, however, black South Africans were seen to exhibit little evidence of class consciousness.⁸⁰

These different factors had considerable implications for the resistance movement in South Africa. As in colonial situations elsewhere, racial discrimination had given rise to a national liberation movement. In South Africa, however, the lack of a significant indigenous bourgeoisie affected both the nature and goals of the national movement which, some argued, was overwhelmingly working class in composition and increasingly in its leadership. Moreover, while the working class grew in size, its ability to organise was restricted by the lack of basic black citizenship rights. As a result, according to the trade unionist and CPSA/SACP member Eli Weinberg,

It is natural that in these conditions the African workers have developed a class consciousness tinged with nationalism.⁸¹

These various factors led participants in the debates of the early 1950s to conclude that orthodox models of resistance in colonial and semi-colonial countries did not apply to South Africa.

The debates of 1952-54 were significant precisely because it was argued that the resistance movement could not be assessed or understood in terms of models developed elsewhere. Jack Simons, a leading CPSA theoretician, argued in 1954 that "the solution to our problems here will call for a great deal of Original, Independent, Creative thinking."⁸²

⁸⁰ See *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/1 to 1/3.

⁸¹ Eli Weinberg: *Problems of Trade Unionism in South Africa* in *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/3, February 1954, p.23.

⁸² Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ev1.1.6: Jack Simons: *Economics and Politics in South Africa* p.7, (lecture to the Durban Study Circle), nd.1954.

Simons exhorted the white left to think independently of models developed in different circumstances: "In order to be true Marxists ... we must be truly Africanist (this is a term of convenience to describe Marxists today)."⁴⁰ The early 1950s witnessed a free and wide-ranging debate over the relationship between race and class in South Africa. That debate saw CPSA and SACP members questioning the usefulness to South Africans of both Stalin's contribution to thinking on the national question, and the various positions adopted by the Communist Information Bureau [Cominform].

The relationship between national liberation and socialist struggle had been the subject of intense Marxist debate throughout the twentieth century. Early meetings of the Communist International [Comintern] in the 1920s were dominated by debates between Lenin and the Indian Communist Roy over the correct approach to colonial movements which were simultaneously bourgeois and anti-imperialist. Roy argued for the complete separation of working class movements from national movements, while Lenin supported temporary alliances between the two in the broader anti-imperial struggle. The second Comintern congress resolved to support what Lenin termed 'national revolutionary movements' where they did not hinder working class mobilisation, but stressed the need for separate working class and national organisations.⁴¹

As Hudson has shown, positions on these issues fluctuated in subsequent Congresses, largely in response to the needs of the Soviet Union's foreign policy. The Cominform, created in 1947, initially accepted Zhdanov's analysis of a postwar world divided into two hostile camps - the 'anti-imperialist democratic' and the 'imperialist anti-democratic'.⁴² Bourgeois-led nationalist movements were seen to be part of the latter category. Two years later the Cominform changed tack, arguing that the national bourgeoisie in colonial situations could best attain their goals through an alliance with the working class and peasantry against imperialism. National movements would bring about 'national democracy'

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ See Fernando Claudin: The Communist Movement From Comintern to Cominform, Part 1, chapters 1-4 (London 1975).

⁴² Peter Hudson: Images of the future and strategies in the present: the Freedom Charter and the South African left; in Frankel, Pines and Swilling (eds): State, Resistance and Change in South Africa (London 1988), p.262.

- a state neither capitalist nor socialist in which the bourgeoisie could flourish, and increase the productive forces and size of the working class.⁶⁶

Shifts in Cominform thinking came at the same time as conditions in South Africa were rapidly changing, and forcing communists to undertake a domestic review of the relationship between socialist struggle and national liberation. As a result, South African socialists consciously strove to evolve indigenous theories of change. Participants argued that "the South African liberatory movement has no exact precedent;" as a result, South African conditions required "an amended theory of struggle."⁶⁷

Early debates within the white left were dominated by speakers hostile to nationalism and supportive of class struggle. The broader context within which the debates took place, however, was that of the underground regrouping of communists and formation of the SACP in 1953. After 1953, leading SACP members made highly significant interventions in the on-going process of debate, in which they outlined 'Colonialism of a Special Type.' In so doing, SACP leaders appealed for what they saw as a middle course between the poles of class and national struggle. This could be attained, they argued, by merging the two.

The minority view: The primacy of class struggle.

Two differing perspectives on the liberation movement in South Africa became clear in the debates of the early 1950s. Summarising the two, former CPSA member Myrtle Berman stressed South Africa's "unique" position in having "neither a well-developed Non-European bourgeoisie nor a class conscious Non-European proletariat."⁶⁸ Because of this, two conflicting interpretations of the course the resistance movement would follow had arisen. The first argued that

in the course and realisation of the National Liberatory Struggle an African bourgeoisie will develop, and the classic pattern will follow from then onwards. The proletariat will have gained certain political freedoms but not its economic freedom.... only when this political freedom has been achieved, will the proletariat

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/3: Editorial p.5.

⁶⁸ *Viewpoints and Perspectives* 1/1: Myrtle Berman, in minutes of discussion, p.25.

become truly aware of the nature of their still present economic disabilities and develop [sic] class consciousness.⁸⁸

The second, however, argued that South Africa's specific conditions would directly affect the nature and course of the national liberation struggle:

just because there is no well-developed bourgeoisie it is just as likely that the class conscious elements will assume leadership and that the interests of the bourgeoisie will be pushed aside. In this case, the nature of the struggle will broaden to include economic demands, ie. the demands will be not only for the extension of existing freedoms and privileges to all, but a fundamental change in economic relations.⁸⁹

The CPSA in the late 1940s stressed the primacy of class struggle and the dangers of nationalism in obfuscating class oppression by racial divisions.⁹⁰ In the changed conditions of the early 1950s, however, support for continued stress on class struggle and the development of separate working class structures lacked the support and legitimacy of leading black communists, and emerged as the minority viewpoint within the white left. In analysing this perspective it should be stressed that it lacked the coherence provided by a single leading theoretician (as Michael Harmel was to provide for the SACP⁹¹). Rather, in response to calls for close working links with the Congress movement, a number of counter arguments were put forward. Some argued that South Africa was a capitalist country in which national struggle served to obscure class oppression. Others focussed critical attention on the dangers of nationalism generally, and on the weaknesses of the ANC in particular. All reached the same conclusion: that the interests of the working class could not be safeguarded within a nationalist movement.

Those who contended that nationalist movements were a home for bourgeois emancipation but not working class freedom, as summarised by Berman, argued that the focus of activity for the white left should be the organisation of the working class in separate working class structures. In the first place, it was argued, as the size of the working class grew, its independent organisation was made possible. With rapid industrialisation and the creation of modern factories with large concentrations of workers,

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ See chapter 3.

⁹¹ See below.

"the possibility and likelihood of powerful, stable, mass social and political working class organisations coming into being is created."⁶⁹ Because the size of the working class within the population as a whole was growing rapidly, conditions were seen to exist which allowed for nonracial class unity: "the immediate value of the colour bar has become much less by comparison with the long-term value to the white workers of working class unity."⁷⁰

Industrialisation, it was argued, had transformed South Africa into a capitalist country. The massive growth of secondary industry with its need for a stable, urban labour force, its stated opposition to migrant labour, and the higher wages it paid to black workers, was seen as a turning point in the economic development of South Africa. Summarising the "industrial revolution" of the war years, CPISA member and economist Guy Routh stressed the challenge to the migrant labour system and the colour bar which had emerged as "[w]hole new industries have come into being, staffed almost entirely by non-whites, whilst others have been converted from a white to a non-white working force."⁷¹

Routh's assessment of the economic changes of the late 1940s was taken by some to mean that colonial forms of exploitation - migrant labour, the racial division of the working class, the industrial colour bar and so on - were no longer determining factors in the economy. While all agreed that secondary industry was too closely tied to mining capital to mount a serious challenge to existing relations, its effect was seen by some to expose colonial forms of exploitation as mere "forms or external appearances."⁷² According to one commentator:

The fact that the ruling class was overwhelmingly white and the working class overwhelmingly black should not affect the conclusion that this is a class society and that it is a class struggle that is being waged.⁷³

For those supportive of class struggle, colonial forms of exploitation served merely to

⁶⁹ D.Holt: White and Black Relationships in South Africa, Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3, p.14.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Dr.G.Routh: Class Conflicts in South Africa Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/2, p.2.

⁷² Michael Hathorn: minutes of discussion: Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/1, p.14 (emphasis in original).

⁷³ *ibid.*

obscure the underlying reality of capitalist exploitation, and they argued that the resistance movement should act accordingly. As one participant put it:

To my mind, the absence of a conscious class struggle should not obscure the fact that a class struggle actually exists. If one accepts as I do that South Africa is a capitalist country it should be clear that however the struggle manifests itself, it nevertheless remains a class struggle ... it is only lack of experience and technique that holds back the development of the class struggle.⁹⁸

Capitalist relations, it was argued, were not restricted to mining and industry but were spreading to the rural areas. The capitalisation of agriculture was leading to the replacement of labour tenants with waged labour; in the process, a rural proletariat was coming into being. The techniques of class struggle could be exported to the rural areas precisely by means of migrant labour, through which the rural population experienced "growing contact with the towns and with the concepts of the industrial worker and miner."⁹⁹

Finally, because South Africa had "no [black] bourgeoisie worth speaking of," the needs of blacks were said to be "largely in accord."¹⁰⁰ Taken with the claim that white workers had a diminishing interest in the maintenance of the colour bar, it was concluded by some that national struggle was obfuscatory:

the problems are those of a capitalist country with remnants of colonialism still existing, and the chief opposing forces are the capitalists and the industrial workers.¹⁰¹

As such, the first task of the liberation movement should be to concentrate on organising "the major protagonist" in the struggle, the industrial proletariat.¹⁰²

As has been suggested, while some argued in favour of class struggle because of conducive prevailing conditions, others focussed on the dangers to working class struggle of nationalism and nationalist movements. Critics from the NEUM to former CPSA members argued that "[e]very national movement has as its objective the triumph of

⁹⁸ *Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/1*: Dr.Z.Sanders [pseud. Zena Susser] in minutes of discussion, p.15 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁹ Sanders: *Rural Problem* op.cit., p.34.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, pp.35-36.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.37.

capitalist democracy."¹⁰³ The weakness and slow growth of the ANC before 1952 was ascribed to "its failure to bring the economic (or class) issues before the people."¹⁰⁴ This failure was in turn traced back to the class composition of the ANC leadership. According to former CPSA Johannesburg District chairperson and Building Workers Union official Danie du Plessis, ANC leadership was overwhelmingly bourgeois, he continued:

In South Africa, where a strong local capitalism has developed, the aim of the incipient bourgeoisie among the oppressed people is to integrate themselves into the existing local capitalism rather than to oust the oppressors. The demand is for equal rights and not 'quit South Africa.'¹⁰⁵

du Plessis went further and argued that the ANC, because of its bourgeois leadership, would by no means be immune from the crises which would afflict capitalism as decolonisation speeded up. For du Plessis, capitalism had reached its highest stage, imperialism, and as its access to colonial markets contracted, so the opposing classes would coalesce into two hostile blocs. Such a situation, he argued, provided "the necessary conditions for working class unity."¹⁰⁶ It also allowed for a closer alliance between working class organisations and the national liberation movement, but with an important caveat: the leaders of the national movement would not be unaffected by the polarisation of society:

it must be remembered that businessmen, financiers, landlords, etc., place their vested interests first.... The Liberatory Movement is to be assessed by its leadership and policy, irrespective of its constituent membership. The leaders are bourgeois or bourgeois-agents. The class composition of its leadership, the slogans adopted by them, the passive methods of struggle, are proof of the weaknesses of the movement ... In a depression [the leaders] would join forces with the government against the workers and would first protect their own interests.¹⁰⁷

du Plessis's comment highlights a number of key assumptions which informed discussion of national movements in the early 1950s, many of which had been raised in the Lenin/Roy debates. The first was that national liberation movements were launched by the oppressed national bourgeoisie, who maintained control of the movements even

¹⁰³ Kenny Jordaan: What are the national groups in South Africa?, p.4; in Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ev2.2/Et.1: Forum Club: Symposium on the National Question, June 1954; and Danie du Plessis: Notes on certain points raised in the discussion in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3, p.44.

¹⁰⁴ du Plessis, cited in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3: Editorial: p.viii.

¹⁰⁵ du Plessis: Notes op.cit., p.44.

¹⁰⁶ D.du Plessis: The situation in South Africa today: Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3, p.41.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

where they gained a mass following. The second assumption, flowing from this, was that the aims of the movement reflected the aspirations of the oppressed bourgeoisie - that is, the desire for integration in existing structures where they could operate freely.¹⁰⁸ Consequently, national liberation movements were seen to be characterised by political rather than economic demands, which distinguished them from working class organisations. As Kenny Jordaan of the NEUM put it in 1954:

a national liberatory movement must not be confused with the movement for the social ownership of the instruments of labour. The one involves a political revolution, nothing more, nothing less; the other argues a social revolution to change the very economic basis of society.¹⁰⁹

du Plessis argued that in South Africa the realisation of national liberation would result in a situation where "[s]egregation between the races may disappear but social segregation between classes will remain."¹¹⁰

As a result, a number of participants in the debates called for the building up of working class structures separate from what was characterised as a bourgeois-launched and led national movement. While limited co-operation on specific campaigns was possible, it was stressed that

the two classes can and should retain their separate identities. Also, it is clear that the two classes can only co-operate when, and in so far as, their interests are the same. This situation has never and can never last for long. The bourgeoisie only wishes to carry the democratic struggle far enough to remove the restrictions on their business interests.¹¹¹

The various individuals who called for greater stress to be laid on class struggle than national struggle did so for a variety of reasons. For some, South Africa was a capitalist society in which remnants of a colonial past still existed; as such, African nationalism was seen to be a response to the external forms adopted by capitalism, and was misleading as to the nature of South African oppression. Others argued that the aims of the working class could not be realised through national struggle, and called for the development of independent working class structures. The early debates of the period took place while the

¹⁰⁸ See for example D.Holt: Nationalism and Internationalism in South Africa: Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/2, p.14.

¹⁰⁹ Jordaan: National Groups op.cit., p.4.

¹¹⁰ du Plessis: Notes op.cit., p.44.

¹¹¹ Holt: Nationalism op.cit., p.14.

SACP was being launched, and were dominated by such speakers. After 1953, however, with the SACP in existence, debate was soon dominated by the ideological perspective of leading SACP theoreticians and the theory of colonialism of a special type.

The majority view: Colonialism of a Special Type.

As the ANC grew in size and significance in the late 1940s, the CPSA was obliged to reassess its approach to nationalism and nationalist organisations. This move, as we have seen, was led by the Transvaal and Natal Districts of the CPSA, where Party members worked closely with the growing Congress movement.¹¹² In 1950, the CPSA Central Committee argued that South African society represented 'Colonialism of a Special Type'[CST] - that is, it exhibited

the characteristics of both an imperialist state and a colony within a single, indivisible, geographical, political and economic entity.... The Non-European population, while reduced to the status of a colonial people, has no territory of its own, no independent existence, but is almost wholly integrated in the political and economic institutions of the ruling class.¹¹³

The SACP was formed by former CPSA members from the Transvaal, and adopted CST as its policy.¹¹⁴ The implications of CST were spelled out at the Johannesburg Discussion Club by two founder members of the SACP - Michael Harmel, who was SACP chairperson throughout the 1950s, and Rusty Bernstein. Equally significant contributions to the elaboration of CST, however, came from outside Johannesburg. University lecturer Jack Simons gave an important series of lectures outlining the implications of the theory in 1954¹¹⁵, while the Cape Town Forum Club hosted a symposium on the national question in the same year.¹¹⁶ Finally, it will be argued that the theory of internal colonialism drew to a considerable degree on the colonial analysis of South African oppression proposed by the ANC Youth League, and in 1954 former ANCYL President Joe Matthews made one of the first public speeches outlining CST.¹¹⁷

¹¹² See chapter 3.

¹¹³ SC.10-53: Report of the Select Committee on the Suppression of Communism Act Enquiry: Central Committee Report to the CPSA Annual Conference, January 1950.

¹¹⁴ SACP: *Freedom op.cit.*

¹¹⁵ Simons: *Lectures op.cit.*, 5-13 January, 1954.

¹¹⁶ Forum Club: *Symposium op.cit.*, June 1954.

¹¹⁷ CAMP Reel 12A:2:XM65:81: Joe Matthews: *African Nationalism To-Day*, January 1954.

The propounders of CST started from what they saw as an essentially pragmatic position. South Africa, as the 1950 CPISA Central Committee Report had argued, had entered a period of heightened national conflict, while the CPISA had been forced to disband. The situation imposed its own constraints on the actions of socialists generally, and whites in particular, as Rusty Bernstein explained:

We could, in other times ... have blueprinted ideal schemes, and formulated ideal organisational arrangements. To do so today would be to isolate ourselves from the forces that are already in action for democratic advance.... We have to work with what we have.¹¹⁸

In the first place, Bernstein, Harmel and others set about explicating the relationship between class and national struggle as it existed in prevailing conditions. Secondly, founding members of the SACP recognised that the debates of the white left were in large part a product of the confusion generated by the disbanding of the CPISA. The elaboration of CST should be seen in context: it was first public elaboration of the ideological standpoint of the new communist party. It was an ideological intervention specifically aimed to resolve the confusion engendered by the disbanding of the CPISA and the tardy formation of the SACP.

Transvaal communists, having taken the initiative in establishing the organisational framework of the SACP had also to make an ideological intervention in the debates of the period which were marked by support for class struggle and hostility towards national struggle. Both Bernstein and Harmel roundly attacked those "who stand outside the struggle; who stand on a lofty peak of class purity, and condemn the struggle for the alliance and the co-operation of classes within it."¹¹⁹ Stressing the need to tailor strategies to existing conditions, CST supporters turned on those

even amongst former Communists who reject the movement because it does not conform to their ideas of a pure exclusive working class movement, struggling alone and unaided against all other classes.¹²⁰

Those hostile to national struggle were seen "to disrupt the movement, confuse the active

¹¹⁸ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ef3.1.2: Rusty Bernstein: The Road to Liberty October 1953, p.1 (emphasis added).

¹¹⁹ Rusty Bernstein: The Role of the Bourgeoisie in the Liberatory Struggle in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/2, p.28.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

people in it, and if unchecked and uncountered in the field of ideology will destroy it."¹²¹

CST had as its starting point the assertion that South Africa was unique, marked by the singular social and political arrangements which flowed from the permanence of a large white community:

The whole character and aims of the national question is complicated by this white element which is not a feature of any other colonial or dependent country.¹²²

According to Michael Harmel, although whites had settled permanently in South Africa, there existed

no qualitative difference between the status of the Africans (and, in the main, the other non-white population groups) in the Union and those elsewhere in Africa - or the people of any other colonial territory. 'Colonial' living standards, deprivation of political rights and constitutional liberties, the deliberate efforts to prevent their economic and cultural developments - all these are characteristics of colonialism. Similarly, the relationship between the white rulers of South Africa and the non-white masses is essentially imperialistic. In a word: there are two nations in South Africa, occupying the same state, side by side in the same area. White South Africa is a semi-independent imperialist state: Black South Africa is its colony. This almost unique dualism has its roots in our history.¹²³

The historical roots of internal colonialism were traced back to the discovery of gold in the 1880s: thereafter, the main drive of the South African state had been the maintenance of "a mass, stable, cheap labour force" which was crucial "if they were to derive maximum profits from gold-mining."¹²⁴

Supporters of CST accepted, as Michael Harmel put it, that "of course, every question is at its roots 'a class question'..."¹²⁵ They also agreed that the organisation of race relations in a capitalist society facilitated racial exploitation which "serves the same purpose as the usual type of class exploitation."¹²⁶ According to Jack Simons, however, South Africa did not fit such a pattern:

the special features of race exploitation are often so numerous and marked, as is the case in South Africa, that it is almost qualitatively different from class exploitation.¹²⁷

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.29.

¹²² *Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3: Editorial*, p.5.

¹²³ M.Harmel: Observations on certain aspects of imperialism in South Africa *Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3*, p.29.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.32.

¹²⁵ M.Harmel: A note by the speaker in *Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3*, p.38.

¹²⁶ Simons: Lecture op.cit., p.15.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

Because of the special features of racial discrimination in South Africa, which were seen to stem from the essentially colonial relationship existing between black and white, "the class struggle is greatly affected by divisions based on racial features."¹²⁸ The major factor which affected the class struggle was the fact that, in response to colonial forms of oppression, black South Africans had launched an increasingly popular national liberation struggle. As a result, the ANC lay at the centre of debate over CST.

The ANC: bourgeois nationalism or peoples' movement?

A central argument used by those hostile to or suspicious of national struggle was that colonial movements comprised an alliance of classes which were dominated by the oppressed national bourgeoisie; the latter sought inclusion in capitalist structures, rather than their overthrow. Michael Harmel accepted that in South Africa the national movement was an alliance of classes, "a familiar characteristic of such movements among oppressed colonial peoples everywhere."¹²⁹ He further noted that colonial movements were commonly "marked by the dominance of the bourgeoisie" which, at times of crisis, "betrayed the movement in order to reach a compromise with imperialism at the expense of the masses."¹³⁰ Harmel, Bernstein, Simons and others all argued, however, that it was entirely wrong

to generalise mechanistically from overseas experience and assume that the Congresses are mere "bourgeois affairs" which "pure working class elements" should stand aloof from, or attempt to disrupt.¹³¹

In the first place, it was argued, comparisons with overseas experiences did not take account of the fact that a particular function of racial oppression in South Africa had been to deliberately restrict the development of a black bourgeoisie:

The special feature of imperialism in South Africa is the existence of the large population of the dominant imperialist nationality, side by side in the same territory as the oppressed colonial people. This has resulted in the virtual exclusion of the non-white peoples, especially the Africans, from the commercial and other opportunities which the development of imperialism afforded to a small minority in other colonies...¹³²

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, p.16.

¹²⁹ Harmel: *Note op.cit.*, p.28.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*

¹³² *ibid.*, p.37.

As a result, black South Africa had no bourgeoisie of note; as Rusty Bernstein put it, “[t]he South African bourgeoisie of the oppressed consists of petty traders, money lenders and landlords.”¹³³ Because of this, it was argued, the ANC was not comparable to colonial movements elsewhere. The difference between the ANC and other colonial movements was further apparent, it was argued, in its demand for equality rather than self-determination. As Jack Simons put it, “that demand is not the same as the programme of ‘cultural autonomy’ or ‘secession’ ... it contemplates a common society with the Europeans on a completely equal basis.”¹³⁴

Legal equality, however, could be realised within a capitalist state, as du Plessis and others had predicted would occur. Moreover, the ANC’s concentration on formulating political rather than economic demands seemed to point to the dominance of bourgeois elements. Up to this point, differences within the white left had to some degree been questions of emphasis; subsequent analyses however diverged sharply. The central argument used by Simons, Bernstein, Harmel and others in favour of working closely with national movements was that the Congress movement was in a transitional phase. This applied to its leadership, the strategies it adopted, and the demands it made. All argued that the influence of the working class was increasingly evident within the ANC in particular, marked by the endorsement of extra-parliamentary action in the 1949 *Programme of Action*. The opponents of national struggle argued that the central question was the place of the bourgeoisie in the national movement; those who outlined CST, on the other hand, argued that the central point was the place of the working class within a rapidly changing ANC.

None of those arguing for CST claimed that the working class led the ANC. For Bernstein, “[t]he question of which class leads is still in the melting pot and may stay there for a long time.”¹³⁵ For Jack Simons, the national organisations as constituted at the time “must ... be described as a form of inter-class nationalism which embraces both an

¹³³ Bernstein: *Bourgeoisie op.cit.*, p.30.

¹³⁴ Jack Simons: *Nationalisms in South Africa* in *Forum Club Symposium op.cit.*, p.5.

¹³⁵ Bernstein: *Bourgeoisie op.cit.*, p.33.

exploiting and an exploited class."¹³⁶ Nonetheless, all argued that what was significant in the Congress movement was not the position it had already reached, but the future trends evident within it. All called for a close working relationship between communists and nationalists because

conditions ... are conceivable, where the working class is dominant and therefore tends to assume the leadership of the struggle for national liberation.¹³⁷

For journalist and SACP member Lionel Forman, the transformation of the Congress movement was already well under way. Control of the Congresses, he argued, had

[t]o a great extent [been] wrested from the hands of the bourgeois and more conservative elements, and leaders who understand the need for struggle against both national oppression and its imperialist economic roots have come to the fore.¹³⁸

Michael Harmel was more restrained but equally definite, arguing that in recent years "the militant working class tendency has wielded increasing influence in our national movements."¹³⁹ The new leadership of both the ANC and SAIC were pointed to as evidence; the results of their "progressive working class policy"¹⁴⁰ was the use of the Defiance Campaign as a tool for mobilisation rather than the "consent by submission" of Gandhian satyagraha.¹⁴¹

The growing influence of the working class, according to Simons and Harmel, would come to be reflected in the methods and demands of the national movement. As the working class took control of the national struggle, according to Simons, so "this struggle will develop characteristics of the class struggle."¹⁴² The political demands of previous years would give way before a growing emphasis on economic demands. For all supporters of CST this point was central: according to Harmel, the ANC represented "the advanced progressive anti-imperialist tendency in our country"¹⁴³ and as such would increasingly highlight the economic aspects of national liberation:

¹³⁶ Simons: Nationalisms op.cit., p.6.

¹³⁷ Simons: Lecture op.cit., p.21.

¹³⁸ Lionel Forman: Nationalisms in South Africa, in Forum Club: Symposium op.cit., p.3.

¹³⁹ Harmel: Note op.cit., p.38.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.38.

¹⁴¹ Harmel: Imperialism op.cit., p.34.

¹⁴² Simons: Lecture op.cit., p.21.

¹⁴³ Harmel: Imperialism op.cit., p.33.

The liberation movement has concentrated on formulating political demands. But the economic content of national liberation in South Africa must centre in the redistribution of the land and the nationalisation of the principal means of production (for the power of imperialism in this country can only be broken by divorcing the imperialists from the means of production). As the movement grows in strength, confidence and political clarity it is bound to give expression and emphasis to such demands.¹⁴

The white left clearly shared a similar set of assumptions regarding the national movements in South Africa, but reached very different conclusions from them. The lack of a significant black bourgeoisie was seen by some to clear the way for working class unity in a socialist struggle. For SACP leaders and others, however, it provided conditions in which the national liberation struggle and the class struggle could be merged into one. Those who remained hostile to nationalist movements because of their perceived incompatibility with working class demands were accused on an "undigested and misunderstood reading of a formulation by Stalin that 'the slogans of nationalism arise in the market place.'¹⁵ According to Bernstein, the slogan's implication that only the bourgeoisie had a stake in national liberation, in South African conditions, was incorrect.

The central point at issue for SACP theorists, it has been suggested, was the place of the working class (and working class demands) in a national liberation struggle. For Bernstein and others, the working class represented "the most energetic, whole-hearted and thoroughgoing section of the fighters for bourgeois democracy, for national liberation" precisely because it had "nothing to fear from a revolutionary solution to the crisis of liberation."¹⁶ Moreover, it was argued, the working class would make specific gains with the realisation of national liberation; these would include political experience, the most conducive conditions under which to organise along class lines, and the abolition of the colour bar "and the clearing away of the race versus class issue, which will leave the class issue clear and exposed for all to see."¹⁷

For these various reasons, SACP theorists argued that it was incorrect to call for

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁵ Bernstein: *Bourgeoisie op.cit.*, p.31.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.32.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.32.

separate working class structures. The national movement was growing in appeal and militancy, it was argued, because of the influence of the working class within it:

It is such an alliance - an alliance of the working class and the petty-bourgeois strata of the colonially oppressed peoples of South Africa that is now gaining ground and conducting the defiance campaign.¹⁴⁸

As such, they argued rather that "it is precisely the working class that should lead the struggle and that must lead if the struggle is to be completely victorious."¹⁴⁹ From this essentially pragmatic perspective, the supporters of CST called for the broadening of the Congress Alliance, rather than a narrow concentration on working class politics. Speaking directly to the white left, the leading SACP theorists concluded: "at present it is correct for all democrats to struggle in the national liberation movement of the masses."¹⁵⁰

The SACP and CST.

The theory of internal colonialism was a self-consciously pragmatic analysis of South African oppression and the form that the resistance movement should take. It drew on the analytic framework which had been implicit in the programme of the CPSA following its endorsement of a 'two-stage' revolution in 1928.¹⁵¹ Under pressure from a growing national movement, however, the CPSA in the late 1940s had been unable to balance the requirements of national struggle and class struggle. One section of opinion within the CPSA stressed the primacy of class issues while another was "much more sensitive to colour issues and the national question."¹⁵² As SACP member Ben Turok put it: "these two things had to be resolved and clearly they were slowly resolved through the internal colonialism theory."¹⁵³

CST thus clearly had a contemporaneous political project. It was developed by Transvaal communists who had called for a closer relationship between the CPSA and the national movements, and who constituted the leadership of the SACP. When the SACP was formed, it was in a context dominated by the Defiance Campaign and the confusion

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.33.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ Simons: *Economics op.cit.*, p.9.

¹⁵¹ See chapter 3.

¹⁵² Interview with Ben Turok, p.19.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

amongst communists brought about by the disbanding of the CPSA. The first aim of CST, therefore, was to resolve differences over race and class. The second, equally important function, was to establish a rapport with the former Youth Leaguers now in senior ANC positions. The SACP sought to ally itself in particular with African nationalists; according to Ben Turok, this was given "very high priority ... [it] was the first issue on the agenda."¹⁵⁴

As we have seen, the ANCYL saw itself as part of a Pan-African anti-colonial movement, and by the end of the 1940s was increasingly anti-imperialist and anti-American.¹⁵⁵ As Youth Leaguers moved into senior ANC positions and began to look for allies from amongst Coloureds and whites, they did so explicitly in terms of an internal colonial analysis. The search for non-African allies was explained by the Youth League journal *Afrika!*:

The path of liberation for the colonial people in the twentieth century lies in the building of powerful national movements which, united with progressive forces in the metropolitan countries, will defeat the imperialists. South Africa is both colonial and imperial at the same time, the liberation movement having to be built in close proximity with advanced elements in the oppressor group.¹⁵⁶

For the SACP, CST was a means of marrying class struggle to national liberation struggle. For the Youth League, internal colonialism performed a similar function in reverse, incorporating both a nationalist analysis and the growing class analysis utilised by Youth Leaguers in the late 1940s. Former ANCYL President Joe Matthews outlined CST from a nationalist perspective in a public speech in January 1954. His starting point closely approximated that of Bernstein, Harmel, Simons and others who stressed South Africa's 'unique' conditions. Matthews argued: "South Africa is colonial country. But it is not a typical colonial country."¹⁵⁷ South Africa's atypicality derived from its white population which, because it had settled permanently in the country, was able to exert "a more complete control of political and economic power than is possible in a typical colonial country..."¹⁵⁸ White South Africa did not have to win the support of "a middle or capitalist

¹⁵⁴ Ben Turok, quoted in Lambert: *SACTU op.cit.*, p.74 (emphasis in original).

¹⁵⁵ See chapter 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Afrika!* quoted in *Advance* 17-12-1953, p.1.

¹⁵⁷ J. Matthews: *Nationalism op.cit.*, p.1.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

class from among the oppressed," and as a result "no middle class (or capitalist class) worth talking about among the Africans has emerged, nor is there ever likely to be one."¹³⁹

For Matthews, an analysis based on internal colonialism served to emphasise the Youth League's central assertion that Africans suffered dual oppression - "economic exploitation as workers and labourers and oppression and humiliation as a Nation." To remove both necessitated an anti-imperialist struggle, in alliance with "all oppressed and colonial peoples" against "the major Western powers who are supported in their plans by the U.S.A." The aims of the national liberation struggle in South Africa, in Matthews' words, were "Political Power and Independence; Complete Equality, Land, Economic Progress and Culture for all peoples in Afrika."¹⁴⁰

Colonialism of a Special Type was a pragmatic theoretical tool evolved by a variety of activists in the 1950-1954 period. CST was a means of resolving what Jack Simons described as "[t]he major problem confronting the Non-Europeans," that is, "the relationship between the national liberatory struggle and the struggle for socialism."¹⁴¹ Drawing on the differing analytic frameworks of the SACP and former ANCYL members, CST was taken to mark a major turning point in the South African liberation struggle: "The class struggle had merged with the struggle for national liberation."¹⁴²

Conclusion.

For the SACP, the adoption of CST brought about "a very perceptible difference" in its approach to the ANC than that which had prevailed in the CPSA.¹⁴³ CST provided an ideological mid-point at which both nationalists and communists could meet. This in turn was the result of a move away from extreme nationalism by ANCYL and ANC members, and support for national struggle by SACP members. For the white left, the calls from Harmel, Bernstein, Simons and others for whites to work within the Congress Alliance gave

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp.3-4.

¹⁴¹ Simons: *Lecture op.cit.*, p.17.

¹⁴² Simons and Simons: *Class op.cit.*, p.609.

¹⁴³ Interview with Miriam Hepner (1990) transcript p.1.

added ideological sanction to the call from the ANC and SAIC for whites to participate directly in the national liberation struggle. As will be discussed in chapter five, it was from this context that SACOD emerged.

Chapter five.

The formation of the South African Congress of Democrats.

Introduction.

In 1953 a number of new organisations were formed to oppose the government and its policy of apartheid. These included the Liberal Party, the Union-Federal Party, and the South African Communist Party. The same year saw the formation of the South African Coloured People's Organisation [SACPO] and the white South African Congress of Democrats [SACOD], which were brought into being by the ANC and SAIC and jointly formed the Congress Alliance. This chapter analyses the formation of SACOD, and the debates generated by the emergence of a white Congress working in alliance with African, Indian and Coloured Congresses in pursuit of national liberation.

In November 1952 the ANC and SAIC intruded directly into white liberal/left politics and called for "a parallel white organisation" which could join the Congress Alliance.¹ The Congress initiative cut across a continuing process of debate and reassessment taking place amongst liberal and radical whites, triggered by the growth of the Congress movement. The Congress of Democrats [COD] was formed following the Congress call; a year later, SACOD was launched nationally. SACOD emerged as a small, highly vocal and visible white partner of the Congress Alliance. It had two main aims: to educate whites as to their "real interests" - a nonracial future with equal rights for all - and to ensure that political conflict took place between "the progressive forces and the forces of reaction" and did not degenerate into "a clash on colour or racial lines."²

SACOD provided a political home for whites who supported the aims and methods of the black Congresses, and ensured that white concerns were aired within the Congress Alliance. SACOD's formation, however, highlighted and exacerbated differences within the white left over the relationship between national and class struggle. This chapter locates the formation of the South African Congress of Democrats within the wider context of

¹ Duma Nokwe quoted in Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.88.

² Treason Trial collection: AD1812:Ef8.1.2: Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein: The Road to Liberty (SACOD Launch Conference paper), October 1953, p.2.

ideological and strategic debate which marked the early 1950s.

White opposition to apartheid, 1951-1953.

The early 1950s saw growing opposition to the unfolding Nationalist Party programme. The legislative bedrock of apartheid was laid between 1950 and 1953, with a series of laws including the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act, the Suppression of Communism Act, the Mixed Marriages Act and others being passed onto the statute book. The desire of the Nationalist Party government to disenfranchise coloured voters led to abrogation of the constitution and an extended constitutional crisis ensued. In response, blacks and whites were mobilised in unprecedented numbers against the implementation of apartheid.³ The ex-service movement emerged as the leading white opponent of the government, and by 1952 the Torch Commando had a quarter of a million paid-up members.⁴ In the same year the African National Congress, South African Indian Congress and Franchise Action Committee launched the Defiance Campaign. By the end of 1952, over 8000 resisters had been imprisoned for breaking apartheid regulations, and the stature and membership of the Congresses had improved dramatically. In September 1952, an editorial in the liberal journal *The Forum* summed up political developments thus:

Let us be frank and confess that things are not going very well in South Africa at present. The Africans are openly flouting the law; the Prime Minister is more or less openly flouting the courts; and racial tensions, between white and white as well as between white and black, are mounting. Why have our affairs been brought to this stage? Why are we moving into the zone of perpetual crisis?⁵

For both liberal and radical whites the political upsurge of the early 1950s had two related effects. Both were left largely as observers of events whose direction they were unable to control or influence; as a result of their relative political isolation, both initiated lengthy internal debates in attempting to accommodate themselves to the new political conditions. Organisational responses - in the shape of the Liberal Association and the Congress of Democrats - did not flow organically from the process of debate but were forced on anti-apartheid whites by the need to respond to a rapidly changing political

³ See chapter 2.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ *The Forum*: Editorial September 1952, p.1.

situation.

The disbanding of the Communist Party of South Africa created a political void for whites who supported the unqualified nonracial restructuring of South African society. Black former CPSA members were able to work in the Congress movement; whites however had no political home. Radical whites in the early 1950s were ideologically divided and disorganised, belonging to a host of often tiny campaign-oriented organisations as well as small discussion groups scattered across the country. Although unable to act in concert on national campaigns, whites remained active in organisations such as FRAC and the Springbok Legion. The Legion, although only a few hundred strong, provided a home for many leading white activists; it also maintained channels of communication with the ANC and SAIC through which it later played a decisive role in bringing about the formation of COD.⁴

Amongst the smaller organisations of the time there was the Personal Liberties Defence Committee, a Johannesburg-based body which protested against inroads on civil liberties made by the Suppression of Communism Act; the Western Areas Protest Committee, formed by Trevor Huddleston to protest against the forced removal of black residents of the racially-mixed suburbs of Sophiatown and Newclare; the Modern Youth Society, a nonracial Cape-based organisation which organised lectures and social events; Anti-Ban committees which protested against the bans imposed on political and trade union activists; an anti-Group Areas Act committee in Durban; and other *ad hoc* committees in different centres. A number of former CPSA members became increasingly active in the Springbok Legion [SL]. Legion members were fully involved in the creation and early campaigning of the Torch Commando, to which they brought their flair for dramatic extra-parliamentary action. Responding to anti-communist sentiment, however, the Torch Commando purged Legionnaires from its ranks.⁵ In addition, organisations such as the Civil Rights League and liberal discussion groups were markedly anti-communist.⁶ In 1952 the Torch Commando

⁴ See below.

⁵ See chapter 2.

⁶ See chapters 2 and 6.

formed an electoral alliance with the United Party and Labour Party, and moved away from extra-parliamentary action in favour of house-meetings and voter registration.⁹ The political prominence enjoyed by the Commando was rapidly taken over by the Defiance Campaign. As described by Len Lee-Warden, later SACOD vice-chairperson and MP, "while the fever of the Torch Commando cooled off, the temperature in the congress alliance increased."¹⁰ The white left were rendered inactive in the Torch Commando; their lack of an organisational base left them as supportive spectators for most of the Defiance Campaign.

The Defiance Campaign highlighted both the long process of radicalising the ANC, which had begun in the mid-1940s, and the assertiveness of its new leadership, drawn in large part from the ranks of the ANC Youth League. The Campaign was primarily intended to mobilise blacks while popularising Congress. Characteristic of much Congress activity in the 1950s, however, it was also aimed at white South Africa.¹¹ By submitting to arrest for breaking apartheid regulations, defiers hoped to highlight their lack of status in the country; as ANCYL President Joe Matthews noted: "We have the White man flat in the moral battle."¹² In this, the influence of Gandhian satyagraha was apparent. In addition, Campaign organisers hoped to influence the white parliament and white voters to repeal the six 'unjust laws' singled out for protest. As Nelson Mandela argued:

if the government refused to [repeal the Acts], we would expect the voters, because of this situation, to say we can't go on with a government like this, we think that this government should make way for a government that is more sensible, more responsible, a government which will change its policy and come to terms with these people, and then they would vote it out of power.¹³

The Defiance Campaign aimed to generate a political cleavage along lines of principle rather than race. By the end of 1952, however, political divisions closely followed racial lines. This resulted in large part from the absence of an unequivocal white rejection of

⁹ See chapter 2.

¹⁰ Len Lee-Warden: *Memoirs* (nd.?1985 unpublished), p.69.

¹¹ See chapter 8.

¹² Carter and Karis: *South African Political materials* (Co-operative African Microfilm project), University of the Witwatersrand: A/1454-mfm-Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/2: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 23-7-1952.

¹³ Treason Trial transcript: AD1812 Volume 95/15794.

racial discrimination, previously expressed by white CPSA members. The Torch Commando, faced with the 1953 general election, appealed for race to be 'taken out of politics', while the United and Labour parties campaigned for 'white leadership with justice.' White liberals were alienated by the increasingly forthright assertion of demands for universal suffrage by the Congresses and returned to the UP fold in time for the 1953 election.¹⁴

Some Congress leaders expected the Campaign to have specific effects on whites who had expressed sympathy or support for the Congress movement. Joe Matthews noted:

At the beginning of the campaign I predicted that the country would gradually divide up into reactionaries behind the Nats and progressives of all shades behind the A.N.C. The Whites will have to form a party that is prepared to make definite changes or join Congress.¹⁵

To highlight principle above race, however, the Defiance Campaign required substantial and public white support. In the event, it met only with the liberal 'manifesto' of October 1952 which counselled moderation and called for the resuscitation of the old Cape liberal tradition.¹⁶ The Defiance Campaign presented the white left with two particular problems. Firstly, as we have seen, the emergence of a militant and popular national liberation movement highlighted ideological and strategic differences over nationalism and nationalist movements within the white left.¹⁷ Secondly, radical whites had no national or regional structures which could be incorporated into the organisation or prosecution of the Defiance Campaign. By late 1952, the anti-white sentiment which marked the final stages of the Campaign led to fears of racial polarisation. As a result, a number of whites called for direct participation in both the Defiance Campaign and the broader Congress movement in order to ensure that "the pending clash [does] not ... take place on racial lines."¹⁸

For those whites who supported the Defiance Campaign and wished to participate in it, the situation was complicated by the reluctance of Campaign organisers to endorse white defiance before the Campaign had served its objective of mobilising blacks. According to Albie Sachs, the youngest white defier in 1952 and later a SACOD member, white

¹⁴ See chapter 6.

¹⁵ CAMP Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/8: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 16-9-1952.

¹⁶ See chapters 2 and 6.

¹⁷ See chapter 4.

¹⁸ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.2.

participation in the Campaign was not easily or speedily endorsed. Sachs attended an early Defiance Campaign meeting in the western Cape:

People were rushing forward saying, 'Take my name, take my name!' and everybody was given great cheers, and I was saying to the comrade next to me, 'You say it is a freedom struggle - why can't whites participate? It is for everybody. We believe in a non-racial South Africa, why can't I join?' They responded with, 'Wait, wait, it is not time yet - we are just starting ... we will take up the question.'¹⁹

The sanctioning of white defiance came through "from the leadership in Johannesburg"²⁰ only towards the end of 1952, following the outbreak of violence in Kimberley, Port Elizabeth and East London. Writing from Port Elizabeth's New Brighton township, Joe Matthews noted that angry crowds of protestors "started the anti whiteman cry."²¹ Faced with the possible spread of extreme nationalism, Cape ANC President James Njongwe reasserted the ANC's rejection of black racism, noting that "[e]ven if it is popular it is dangerous."²² In November 1952 Lucas Phillips, chairperson of the ANC in the western Cape, introduced Sachs and three other white volunteers to a Defiance Campaign meeting, noting that their participation was intended "to dispel the idea among Africans that all Whites are oppressors."²³ In early December, the four white Cape defiers were arrested for breaking post office apartheid a week after Patrick Duncan and six other whites had been arrested in Germiston.²⁴

White defiance took place in the last few weeks of the Campaign, and was intended to combat the spread of extreme nationalism. While anti-white sentiment had begun to mark the Defiance Campaign, white support had also become evident. This took the form of full endorsement of the Campaign by the Springbok Legion; calls for direct participation from Sachs, Duncan and others supportive of extra-parliamentary action; and the more muted liberal 'manifesto' and statements of qualified support from the South African Institute of Race Relations.²⁵ Faced with a range of white support for their cause, the ANC

¹⁹ Albie Sachs, quoted in Julie Fredrickse: The struggle for nonracialism in South Africa (draft 1990), p.57.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ CAMP: Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/12: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 5-11-1952.

²² *Advance* 6-11-1952.

²³ *The Cape Argus*, 28-11-1952.

²⁴ *The Cape Argus*, 9-12-1952; see chapter 2.

²⁵ See chapter 2.

and SAIC made a direct and dramatic intrusion into white liberal/left politics by summoning a meeting of all whites who had shown sympathy or support for the Campaign, and inviting them to create a white Congress which could join the Alliance.

Both liberal and radical whites were disorganised and involved in an ideological and strategic reassessment occasioned precisely by the rise of the ANC. The November 1952 Darragh Hall meeting called by the ANC and SAIC (the first time Congress leaders addressed a white meeting) cut across those internal debates and aimed to give organisational form to white support for the Congresses. As Lutuli later explained,

being a national movement we really couldn't deal with individuals, and that's what gave rise to the need for having a body on a national level, to make it possible for us to co-operate with whites.²⁸

The Darragh Hall meeting did not lead to the creation of a single unified white organisation; rather, it marked the point at which liberal and radical whites finally separated. The meeting however led to the creation of the Congress of Democrats, and the sanctioning for the first time of white participation in the Congress movement. As such, the Darragh Hall meeting was a turning-point in the history of white opposition to apartheid.

The formation of the Congress of Democrats.

The formation of the Congress of Democrats, initially called the South African People's Congress, has received scant mention in most works covering the 1950s. Moreover, in most cases it is analysed contemporaneously with the national launch nine months later of SACOD.²⁹ This ahistorical approach disregards the differing conditions under which COD and SACOD were launched; its purpose would appear to be to allow comparisons to be made between COD and SACOD on the one hand, and the Liberal Party on the other. In this, authorial sympathies for the latter are apparent.³⁰

According to Karis and Gerhart, in calling for a white Congress, ANC and SAIC

²⁸ Treason Trial transcript: AD1812 Volume 57/11601.

²⁹ See Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.422-4; Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit. pp.8-14; Robertson: *Liberalism* op cit pp.87-9.
³⁰ *ibid.*

leaders envisaged

the creation of a body that would generally support the ANC's aims and appeal to a wide spectrum of whites rather than a tiny activist group that would be identified with the ANC.²⁹

The founders of COD and SACOD, described as "former Communists and other left-wing whites," are seen by Karis and Gerhart to have subverted the Congress proposal by taking the initiative at the Darragh Hall meeting and alienating white liberals through an unnecessary insistence on universal suffrage and extra-parliamentary action.³⁰ The result was the creation of an organisation described as so closely identified with the ANC "that it proved unable to win the wide sympathy from whites that had been hoped for."³¹ As a result, according to the editors of volumes two and three of *From Protest to Challenge*, Congress leaders were "disappointed" with the Congress of Democrats (and SACOD).³²

In fact, neither the ANC and SAIC leaders who called the Darragh Hall meeting, nor the provisional committee it elected, had a clear conception of the nature or role of what became the Congress of Democrats.³³ Yusuf Cachalia, who addressed the meeting on behalf of the SAIC, recently stated that "we wanted the progressive element among the whites to co-operate with us," but that "we left the matter to the people who had gathered there to, if possible, bring about an organisation."³⁴ The only qualification was that the new organisation should endorse basic Congress principles. As described by senior ANC member Dan Tloome,

Congress ... took the bold and unprecedented step of calling a meeting of Europeans who had expressed their sympathy [for the Defiance Campaign], and there called upon them to form an organisation which would work for Congress principles of freedom and equality among their own people. One section present at the meeting asked whether Congress insisted on a policy of full equality, or whether it would not be satisfied with, for example, a qualified franchise. They were told by Mr. Tambo, on behalf of the ANC, that nothing less than full equality would be acceptable, and they thereupon went their own way.³⁵

The Darragh Hall meeting was followed by talks between radical and liberal whites in

²⁹ Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.422-443.

³⁰ Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit., p.13.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*, p.8; Karis: *Hope* op.cit., pp.442-443.

³³ Interview with Yusuf Cachalia, p.2; interview with Helen Joseph (elected to the interim committee), p.8.

³⁴ Interview with Yusuf Cachalia, p.1.

³⁵ Dan Tloome: *The Africanists and the Congresses*, in *Fighting Talk*, August 1958, p.9.

search of a formula which would enable both to belong to a single organisation. Liberals refused to endorse universal suffrage, extra-parliamentary action, or close working links with former CPSA members. The breakdown of talks was followed, in January 1953, by the launch of both COD and the South African Liberal Association.²⁶ By the beginning of 1953, the division between radical and liberal whites was organisationally fixed.

By running together the formation of COD and SACOD, Karis and Gerhart allow themselves to contrast both with the Liberal Party, which they describe as fulfilling the aims of Congress leaders in that it "did serve as a link between black and white and generally supported the ANC's aims."²⁷ The hostile criticism with which the ANC and SAIC greeted the formation of the LP is ascribed to "the more radical nonwhites" in Congress.²⁸ Its causes are seen to stem from possible competition between the ANC and LP for African members, and the loyal defence of COD and SACOD by the black Congresses. Taking as their starting point the assumption of a direct and determining link between the dissolution of the CPSA and the formation of COD and SACOD, Karis and Gerhart present the split between liberals and radicals as the result of communist manipulation of a Congress initiative. The formation of COD is presented as the wilful squandering by former CPSA members of the possibility of a unified white Congress, with the aim of entrenching themselves in positions of influence within the Congress Alliance. Such an analysis ignores divisions on issues of principle, most notably over universal suffrage, between white liberals and radicals, and between liberals and the Congresses. Moreover, it is premised on a perception of the white left as a monolithic entity acting in concert on agreed goals, and ignores the deep differences which emerged in the white left discussion clubs of the early 1950s. This analysis, it will be argued, is both chronologically confused and factually inaccurate.

The origins of the Congress of Democrats.

The 1952 Darragh Hall meeting represented an attempt by the African and Indian

²⁶ See chapters 2 and 6.

²⁷ Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit., p.8.

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.8-9.

Congresses to capitalise on the growth of white support for the Defiance Campaign and the Congress movement. The formation of a white organisation committed to the goals of the Congresses was intended to highlight both the colour-blind principles which had precipitated the Defiance Campaign, and Congress commitment to a non-racial future. The call for a white Congress took place in a context marked by significant but diverse white support for the Congresses. More significantly, it resulted from discussions between Springbok Legion representatives and ANC and SAIC leaders regarding the creation of a direct role for whites within the Congress movement. It is in the context of various calls for white participation in the Congress movement, and varied expectations on the part of Congress leaders, that the formation of the Congress of Democrats and its reception in the wider Congress movement, should be assessed.

The Defiance Campaign both transformed the ANC into a mass-based organisation and raised fears over the spread of extreme nationalism. Both led to calls for direct white participation in the Congress movement from radical whites and Congress leaders. The immediate concern of all those calling for a white role in Congress was the need "to prevent the African liberatory movement from assuming an exclusively anti-white complexion."³⁹ The urgency of this concern was stressed by both Oliver Tambo and Yusuf Cachalia in their addresses to the Darragh Hall meeting.⁴⁰ Calls for white participation in the Congress movement, however, came from a number of different sources - from individuals such as Patrick Duncan; from former CPSA members acting in their individual capacity; and from representatives of the Springbok Legion. In each case, the role envisaged for whites differed significantly.

One of the main actors in attempts to find a permanent white home in the Congress movement was Patrick Duncan, the most prominent white defier in 1952. Duncan resigned from the colonial service in Basutoland and participated in the Defiance Campaign; he combined support for universal suffrage and Gandhian extra-parliamentary methods with

³⁹ Fabian Colonial Bureau papers, Rhodes House, Oxford: FCB 95/3.34: Eddie Roux: A Statement on the Situation in South Africa To-Day, nd?March 1953, p.2.

⁴⁰ Interview with Yusuf Cachalia, p.2.

a hostility towards communism and the broader white left in South Africa, which grew throughout the 1950s.⁴¹ Duncan's support was sought by members of the Springbok Legion who were negotiating with the ANC and SAIC for a separate white Congress, while accepting that their ideas were "fundamentally on the right lines," Duncan argued that there were

difficulties which make it difficult [sic] for many South Africans particularly if they are (in overseas language) right-wing or centre, to join...⁴²

As a result, Duncan spent much of 1953 attempting to gain individual membership of both the ANC and SAIC. According to his biographer, Duncan applied for membership of both organisations "several times."⁴³ Duncan's local ANC branch in Ladybrand (in the Orange Free State) appears to have accepted his membership application; however, the national leadership of neither the ANC nor the SAIC concurred.⁴⁴ This resulted from a number of factors, one of which was the announcement of Duncan's decision to stand for election as a Native Representative. Duncan thereby earned the hostility of ANC leaders who, as Youth Leaguers in the 1940s, had led the movement for a complete electoral boycott.

More significantly, ANC leaders rejected the call for individual white membership of Congress, particularly at the end of the Defiance Campaign, in favour of a multiracial alliance. While endorsing the ideal of a single, nonracial Congress, ANC leaders argued that the time for such a move had not yet arrived; according to Albert Lutuli, multiracialism was

purely a matter of present policy, representing as we do, a large section of people who think tribally. We have to carry our people with us.⁴⁵

Moreover, Duncan's call for individual white membership of Congress was made at the same time as SL members were negotiating the creation of a separate white Congress.

⁴¹ Quoted in C.J.Driver: Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan-African (London 1980), chapters 7 and 8.

⁴² Duncan papers, York University: DU 3.9.8: Patrick Duncan to Cecil Williams, 12-2-1953.

⁴³ Driver: Duncan op.cit., p.90.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Treason Trial transcript: AD1812 Volume 57/11575.

While Duncan sought individual membership of Congress, former CPSA member Dr. Guy Routh, General Secretary of the Industrial Council and editor of the Labour Party newspaper *Forward*, proposed the formation of a broad white group in support of the general aims of the Congress movement. In 1952 Routh began discussions with leading Congress and trade union members "of all political complexions," aimed to create an organisation which would continue to articulate the white sympathy for black aspirations generated by the Defiance Campaign.⁴⁶ The organisation outlined by Routh was to express support for black emancipation while providing legal, financial and other assistance to the Congresses and trade unions. Routh aimed to create an organisational home for whites who had expressed support for the Congress movement.⁴⁷ Its political standpoint would be based on the qualified franchise; as Routh recently put it, by insisting on adult suffrage

you immediately cut off a whole lot of well-intentioned, wealthy many of them, and well-disposed people. It seemed to me needless since there was absolutely no hope of getting universal suffrage ... why cut off those people who might otherwise be led to join it, and possibly change their views?⁴⁸

The most important negotiations regarding the future role of anti-apartheid whites were undertaken by theatre producer Cecil Williams and Jack Hodgson, wartime 'desert rat' and former miner, both of whom were prominent Springbok Legion members. Of those calling for a new white organisation, Hodgson and Williams were the only mandated representatives of an organisation; as such, their position carried more weight than the individual efforts of Duncan or Routh. Moreover, the Legion proposal was premised on an acceptance of multiracialism, and of the leading role of the ANC. As Jack Hodgson put it:

The form and content of the activity of the new organisation are determined by factors beyond its control. The organisation exists as part of a Movement which has to meet a particular and immediate historical need; it exists in a particular situation and has to work in an existing set of conditions to achieve certain relevant immediate and long term objectives.⁴⁹

Clearly sensitive to past disputes between the CPSA and ANCYL over nonracialism, Hodgson emphasised the "sectional" nature of the proposed organisation. This, he argued,

⁴⁶ Interview with Guy Routh (1989), transcript p.25.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.26.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, pp.25-26.

⁴⁹ Treason Trial collection: AD1812: Ef3.1.2: Jack Hodgson: Draft of the Immediate Programme of Action, nd.1953, p.1 (emphasis in original).

stemmed from the fact that as black South Africans bore the brunt of apartheid, they would bear "the main burden of the struggle." The task of the white Congress was "organising and leading the whites and all other unorganised sections." Hodgson was optimistic that there existed "a large immediate potential of known, unorganised progressives scattered throughout South Africa" who could be contacted and recruited.⁵⁰ Such optimism stemmed from the Springbok Legion's analysis of apartheid as a form of domestic fascism.⁵¹ According to Hodgson, while the "compelling and urgent motivation" which mobilised blacks did not affect whites in the same way or to the same degree, the spread of fascism would result in the diminution of civil rights for all South Africans.⁵² As COD Executive Committee member Eddie Roux put it in 1953:

Those freedoms hitherto denied in large measure to the Non-Europeans, are now being taken away bit by bit from Europeans also. This development, long prophesied ..., is the outcome of the traditional indifference of the white minority to the injustice suffered by their fellow South Africans. We must either go forward to full democracy or witness the rapid growth of a fascist dictatorship.⁵³

The Congress of Democrats, launched in Johannesburg in January 1953, was to highlight white support for a nonracial democracy. According to Hodgson, "unless some political relationship was formed between Black and White," South Africa would enter "a Black/White struggle ... This the Congress [of Democrats] was determined to prevent."⁵⁴ The nature of that political relationship, however, was disputed. For Legionnaires and others, the only way to defuse black racism was through an unequivocal white endorsement of Congress principles: as stated by COD chairperson Bram Fischer, and Cecil Williams, SL President and COD vice-chairperson:

What is urgently needed today is a body of Europeans who will ally themselves with these organisations - a body which will not seek to bargain with or buy off the non-Europeans, but will march with them to the attainment of their legitimate democratic demands. Only in such a body can Europeans make a real contribution to democracy and racial peace in South Africa.⁵⁵

This was by no means universally accepted. Guy Routh and his supporters called for a

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp.2-3.

⁵¹ 'Fascism' as used in this period is analysed below.

⁵² Hodgson: *Programme op.cit.*, p.1.

⁵³ Roux: *Statement op.cit.*, p.1.

⁵⁴ Duncan papers: DU 8.9.7: Report of an interview with Jack Hodgson, 15-10-1953.

⁵⁵ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Eu.3: Bram Fischer and Cecil Williams: Circular (to all COD members), 16-7-1953, p.2.

postponement of COD's launch until liberals had organised themselves, in order to see what common ground existed between liberals and radicals, and opposed universal suffrage for the same reason.⁵⁶ Routh was heavily outvoted, the majority opinion stressing the urgent need for a white organisation which had the support of the Congress movement. As one participant at the meeting put it,

it was felt that a "liberal" party would not, with its restricted franchise, obtain non-European support. The crux of the matter was whether one should alienate the 8 million non-Europeans for the sake of possibly winning some additional support from Europeans.⁵⁷

COD's programme merged the proposals of Routh and the Legion. COD was to rally white support for the Congress movement; to educate whites by means of propaganda, lectures, conferences, and petitions; and to provide practical support to the Congresses in the form of speakers, witnesses to police actions, legal advice, assistance with transport, and so on.⁵⁸ In the short term, COD was "to harass, hamper and retard the programme of the Nationalists" by challenging each repressive piece of legislation through an unambiguous adherence to equal rights for all, and the "active and militant assertion of the legality of these concepts and aspirations."⁵⁹ The long-term objective of the organisation was "the mobilisation and preparation of the people for decisive action to bring about the defeat of fascism."⁶⁰ COD was a Johannesburg-based organisation which worked in isolation from similar radical white bodies in other centres. Those organisations merged to form SACOD in October 1953. As such, the roots of white participation in the Congress movement lay in the approaches made to the Congresses in the early 1950s; the nature of SACOD itself was affected by differences in membership and operation between the various organisations which were its component parts.

Radical white organisations, 1952-1953.

SACOD grew out of the merging of the Johannesburg Congress of Democrats, the Democratic League [DL] of Cape Town, the Durban Congress of Democrats, and small

⁵⁶ Interview with Guy Routh, p.26.

⁵⁷ Ivan Schermbrucker to Irene Manderstam, 10-1-1953 (private possession of author).

⁵⁸ Congress of Democrats: Draft Constitution, January 1953 (private possession of author), p.3.

⁵⁹ Hodgson: Programme op.cit., p.2.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.3.

white groups in Port Elizabeth and elsewhere. It took over the offices and equipment of the Springbok Legion as well as its active membership; the Legion itself disappeared soon after the launch of SACOD. The three main organisations - COD, the SL and the DL -all brought distinctive traits to SACOD, which require analysis if the nature of SACOD is to be adequately understood.

The Democratic League of Cape Town was launched in 1953, following a meeting protesting against the Public Safety and Criminal Law Amendment Acts.⁴¹ At the meeting, Labour Party MP Leo Lovell suggested that those present form a "watch-dog organisation" to protest against similar measures being passed.⁴² The League was formed by Harry Wright, chairperson of the western Cape Trades and Labour Council, and Len Lee-Warden, local Torch Commando secretary and printer of *The Guardian*.

Unlike the Civil Rights League, which was formed to fulfil a similar role, the Democratic League was nonracial and favoured extra-parliamentary action and an overtly political public profile. The Democratic League mobilised Coloureds threatened with disenfranchisement, and sought to rally liberal-minded whites by stressing the threat posed by the NP to the rights of all South Africans. A DL pamphlet argued:

Don't believe the Nationalists when they say that the [Public Safety] Act is to be used only against the African and Indian people ... The punishments are not for Africans, Indians and Coloureds alone. They may be applied to any person who commits an offence by way of protest or in support of a campaign against any law.⁴³

By passing the Public Safety and Criminal Law Amendments Acts, the League argued, parliament had "committed suicide, just as surely as did the German Reichstag ... This is Fascism!"⁴⁴ The DL, which adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, started as a small *ad hoc* body which organised public meetings in protest against various apartheid measures. Within three months, however, it had over 150 members: at that point, according to Lee-Warden, "we began to take it more seriously and organise more efficiently."⁴⁵

⁴¹ Lee-Warden: *Memoirs op.cit.*, p.69.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Es5.2: *Rule by Sjambok* nd.1953, p.2.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.1.

⁴⁵ Lee-Warden: *Memoirs op.cit.*, p.70.

One reason for the rapid growth of the DL was the fact that, unlike COD, it was nonracial. As we have seen, calls for nonracial organisations emanated largely from the western Cape.⁶⁴ In 1951 S.M. Rahim, a leading FRAC member, called for the abandonment of multiracialism, arguing:

We are all in the same boat ... We do not want sectional groups any more. The South African Indian Congress and the African National Congress must prepare the ground amongst their followers so that we can all be in one organisation, where we will also have the Europeans who want to see equal rights for all South Africans.

Nonracialism, Rahim argued, was not a new idea but had "been debated in progressive circles in South Africa for years."⁶⁵ Rahim's call met with considerable support in the western Cape. Leading ANC member Dora Tamana spoke out against the transformation of FRAC into a purely Coloured Congress.⁶⁶ Johnson Ngwevela, a former CPSA member and a senior ANC figure, directly endorsed Rahim's proposal.⁶⁷ Support came also from Joe Nkatlo, an ANC and former CPSA member, who joined the Democratic League and soon became its vice-chairperson.⁶⁸ Opposition to multiracialism also came from members of the Non-European Unity Movement; Kenny Jordaan, a leading NEUM intellectual, noted:

It is unfortunately an indication of our political primitiveness that certain groups and individuals can conceive of our struggle, our organisational forms and the future of South African society only in terms of those racial categories foisted on us by Herrenvolkism.⁶⁹

Cape Town hosted both the Modern Youth Society [MYS], an organisation of young socialists which held inter-racial functions, and the Democratic League. Both were nonracial, enrolling African and Coloured members in considerable numbers; over half the DL membership was Coloured.⁷⁰ As we shall see, the merger of the Democratic League into SACOD served to highlight the nonracial tradition of the Cape, and brought disputes over multiracialism to the fore.⁷¹ Both the DL and MYS attracted white ex-CPSA members;

⁶⁴ See chapters 3 and 4.

⁶⁵ *The Guardian* 23-8-1951, p.4.

⁶⁶ *The Guardian* 20-3-1952, p.3.

⁶⁷ Letter to *The Guardian* 6-9-1951, p.4.

⁶⁸ Interview with Len Lee-Warden (1987), transcript p.22.

⁶⁹ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Ev2.2/Et.1: Kenny Jordaan: What are the national groups in South Africa?, p.2; in Forum Club: Symposium on the National Question, June 1954.

⁷⁰ Lee-Warden: Memoirs op.cit., p.71.

⁷¹ See below.

because of the weak local ANC branch in the western Cape, black former CPSA members also joined the two organisations. Anti-communism affected almost all anti-apartheid organisations during this period, and the appearance of communists in the DL "caused some concern to some committee members who felt that the organisation would fall into the hands of the radicals if they were allowed to occupy executive posts."⁷⁶ Liberal organisations responded to anti-communist pressure by removing or barring the white left from membership *en bloc*. The leadership of the DL, however, comprised people who had close working links with former CPSA members, most obviously chairperson Len Lee-Warden who printed *The Guardian* in the late 1940s. Lee-Warden's response was

to point out that I would not allow myself or the organisation to be used as a front for any political party. But also that I would not be a party to any witch-huntings. So it was left at that.⁷⁷

With the Democratic League, the two main organisations which founded SACOD were the Springbok Legion and the Congress of Democrats. They undertook a large amount of joint work, and shared both offices and activists. This resulted in part from the Legions' political involvement, which had steadily increased in the late 1940s. As a Legion circular put it:

The aims and objects of the Legion, our aspirations for ex-soldiers, economic, political and social, are now inextricably tied up with the fate of democracy in South Africa. Increasingly over the last few years the emphasis of our efforts have had to be directed towards the struggle for democracy.⁷⁸

COD and the Legion jointly submitted a lengthy memorandum on racial discrimination to the United Nations, hosted public meetings protesting against the Public Safety Act, assisted in forming the Western Areas Protest Committee, and submitted evidence to the Group Areas Advisory Board and the Select Committee studying the possible removal from parliament of former CPSA member and Native Representative, Brian Bunting.⁷⁹

The Legion, as we have seen, played a significant role in negotiating the formation of

⁷⁶ Lee-Warden: *Memoirs op.cit.*, p.71.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.71.

⁷⁸ Treason Trial collection: AD1812 Eu13: Springbok Legion: *Urgent and Important* (Circular to all members), 15-6-1953, p.1.

⁷⁹ Springbok Legion papers, William Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand: A617: P.Beylveld: *Chairman's Report*, 1953 Springbok Legion National Conference, p.2.

COD with the Congress movement. Legionnaires called for a new organisation

not restricted by our ex-service exclusiveness, and not tarred with our past record as it has been presented in distorted and contorted form to the public.⁷⁹

The motivation for an organisation such as COD flowed from the need for an adequate white response to the Defiance Campaign which would highlight principles above race and thus defuse tendencies towards extreme nationalism. With the announcement of a general election for April 1953, however, the activities of COD and the Legion focussed on the white parliamentary arena.

The 1953 general election and anti-fascism.

Radical white organisations in the 1950s occupied an awkward position in attempting to straddle both black and white political arenas. COD rejected parliamentary politics as unrepresentative and undemocratic, and saw both the UP and the NP as committed to the maintenance of white supremacy. Attempts to liberalise the UP from within, it was argued, had produced nothing. The COD leadership concluded: "South African democrats must, then, seek a solution outside the Parliamentary parties" - and outside the parliamentary system, from which blacks were excluded.⁸⁰

COD's approach to white politics, however, was heavily influenced by the colonial analysis evolving in the discussion clubs of the time. As we have seen, the dominant theoretical position of the early 1950s held that South African oppression represented 'Colonialism of a Special Type'[CST].⁸¹ This had considerable implications for both COD and SACOD. The task of the Congress movement was seen to be the building of the broadest possible alliance of forces in opposition to colonial oppression. According to Moses Kotane, former CPSA general-secretary and ANC NEC member, that alliance should include the United and Labour Parties,

the churches, business and professional organisations, women's associations, the multifarious local vigilance, tenants, civic, educational, patriotic and sectional bodies. All must be drawn into the broad alliance of the people of South Africa against the

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ Fischer and Williams: *Circular op.cit.*, pp.1-2; Hodgson: *Programme op.cit.*, p.1; Bernstein: *Liberty op.cit.*, pp.1-2.

⁸¹ See chapters 3 and 4.

Malanazi menace...⁸¹

The proponents of CST argued that there existed "two nations in South Africa, occupying the same state, side by side in the same area."⁸² For the white community, South Africa was an independent and democratic state, and COD had been set the task of organising whites. To do so required participation in the white political process. COD had moreover to make the link between the two 'states,' to win over what were seen as the "considerable" white forces opposing apartheid (including sections of the UP, Labour Party, Torch Commando and others) and educate them:

Their natural allies in defence of democracy are the ten million Non-Europeans. In union with the Non-Europeans, democrats and democracy will survive in South Africa. There is no other way.⁸³

COD clearly occupied a potentially awkward position. In outlining CST, leading SACP theoreticians (some of whom, such as Rusty Bernstein, were also leading COD and SACOD members) argued that all capitalist sectors were committed to the maintenance of the *status quo*. This included secondary industry, a vocal critic of migrant labour and influx control championed by the liberal wing of the UP. Michael Harmel, outlining CST, criticised those "who chatter about 'progressive capitalism'" for making analogies with countries fundamentally different from South Africa:

The secondary industrialists of this country are basically the junior partners of imperialism; the last thing they would advocate would be the abolition of the imperial system on which they depend.⁸⁴

At the same time, however, the liberal wing of the UP were seen as potential anti-Nationalist allies. In January 1953, the SL and COD jointly hosted a meeting of all anti-Nationalist organisations in Johannesburg to develop a common electoral platform. According to the SL chairperson,

the spirit of fear and election compromise had eaten deep into the majority of the organisations, and no agreed basis for co-operation and unity to oust the Government could be found.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Advance 19-6-1952, p.4.

⁸² Michael Harmel: Observations on certain aspects of imperialism in South Africa in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3, February 1954, p.29.

⁸³ Roux: Statement op.cit., p.3.

⁸⁴ Harmel: Imperialism op.cit., p.33.

⁸⁵ Beyleveld: Report op.cit., p.1.

COD continued to issue election propaganda which reflected its contradictory position. In a leaflet issued in March 1953, COD argued that South Africa had been brought "to the edge of fascist dictatorship!"⁶⁶ The only factor which could save the country was "the power of the people to call a halt to martial law fascism!" The immediate task of all "supporters and upholders of democracy" was to call on the UP to retract its support for the Public Safety Act and to oppose the NP with greater vigour. COD did not explicitly call on whites to vote for the UP; rather, "supporters ... of democracy" should

encourage the United Party to come down firmly, with both feet, in the democratic camp ... They must force the United Party to fight without appeasement against the threat of home-grown fascism. This is the way forward for all South Africa's democrats, to the defeat of the Martial Law Acts, to the ousting of the Nationalists.⁶⁷

COD and the Legion attempted to overcome the contradictions inherent in their effort to bridge the gap between black extra-parliamentary politics and white parliamentary politics by campaigning under an anti-fascist banner. The NP government had long been described as 'fascist' by various organisations, most notably the Legion and the Torch Commando. For ex-service organisations, anti-fascism was a means by which they hoped to rekindle the sense of purpose of the war years. As such, the NP was accused of fascist tendencies because of their wartime Nazi sympathies, the early release of convicted fascist saboteur Robey Leibrandt, and the simultaneous removal of a number of senior, English-speaking military personnel. Anti-fascism was essentially a means of harking back to the liberal ethos of the war years and thereby winning white support.

In analysing usage of anti-fascism by radical whites in the early 1950s, Lambert concluded that the acts of the NP (such as Leibrandt's release) were being confused with the nature of the South African state.⁶⁸ In fact, anti-fascism had a wider set of associations and uses than Lambert acknowledged, having been at the centre of the Springbok Legion's programme for ten years, and in the political lexicon of the DL, COD, and the broader Congress movement. It also had a specific political function.

⁶⁶ COD: *Defeat the Nationalists!* March 1953 (private possession of author).

⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸ R.V.Lambert: *Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-1965*. D.Phil. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988, pp.84-85.

Through the language of anti-fascism, radical whites sought to utilise conceptual terminology similar to the Congress movement while attempting to mobilise whites; in effect, anti-fascist slogans focussed attention on the diminution of the civil rights of all South Africans, rather than the lack of black rights (which would not necessarily win white support). As a result, fascism and apartheid became largely interchangeable terms. The NP was seen to be the source of both, and the solution to South Africa's political crisis was equated with the removal of the Nationalist Party from power. As Jack Hodgson put it,

We are presented with the need to withstand and defeat fascism ... fascism can be defeated only by the defeat of [the] Nationalist Government.⁸⁹

Within the white left and away from the public arena, however, fascism was widely and variously defined. For the white left, the capitalist world was seen to be rapidly approaching a point of crisis as markets and sources of raw materials shrank under the impact of decolonisation and the spread of socialism. Participants in the discussion clubs of the early 1950s agreed that "[i]t is against [the] background of growing economic crisis and the consequent regrouping of forces that the future must be considered."⁹⁰

In this context, fascism was a term used to describe the final stage of colonialism; Jack Simons argued:

Today we live in a fascist country ... Fascism is imperialism gone mad. Imperialism is the final stage of capitalism.⁹¹

The drive for profits, it was argued, would lead to more ruthless exploitation of the country's resources, in the interests of Anglo-American capital and carried out by "[t]his Government, which is a bossboy for monopoly capitalism..."⁹² In extending and strengthening their control over South African society necessary to extract profits, COD leaders argued, the NP would increasingly resort to "totalitarian" methods.⁹³ The result of this was that

⁸⁹ Hodgson: Programme op.cit, pp.1-2 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁰ Danie du Plessis: The Situation in South Africa Today in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3, February 1954, p.41.

⁹¹ Treason Trial collection | ADS1812 Ev1.1.6: Jack Simons: Economics and Politics in South Africa (lecture), nd.1954, p.1.

⁹² du Plessis: Situation op.cit., p.39.

⁹³ Fischer and Williams: Circular op.cit., p.1.

all anti-Nationalist South Africans must be affected, both white and non-white ... since - like Hitler and Goering - the Nationalists' ultimate aim is to control the economic wealth of South Africa.⁶⁶

Anti-fascism clearly resonated with the Congress movement. For some ANC members, fascism was equated with extreme racism.⁶⁷ For others, and most clearly reflected in the 1954 report of the ANC National Executive Committee, fascism, apartheid and capitalist exploitation were interchangeable terms:

After six years of Nationalist rule, fascism has arrived in South Africa ... Fascism does not arise until conditions call for it. It arises when the ruling class can no longer look forward to unlimited profits and to acquiescent people willing to be exploited.⁶⁸

In essence, anti-fascism was a means by which COD and the Springbok Legion sought to straddle the black and white political arenas. The victory of the NP in the 1953 general election however served to widen the separation between the two. A month after the election, Albert Lutuli noted:

the African peoples have lost faith in the good intentions of the Whites to improve their conditions, and the Congress movement has become more and more a liberatory one. It is no longer possible for an African leader to appeal for better conditions only: what the people demand is political rights.⁶⁹

Such expressions served to re-focus the attention of white radicals on the black, extra-parliamentary arena.

The Congress Alliance and white politics in 1953.

In a joint statement following the general election, the ANC, SAIC and FRAC argued that the NP victory highlighted electoral support for white supremacy, reinforced by the commitment of the United Party to a similar policy.⁷⁰ For Dr. Dilitanzaba Mji, ANC Acting Secretary-General, the difference between the NP and UP was "as a thief from a pick-pocket."⁷¹ Z.K. Matthews, President of the Cape ANC, noted that the government had been returned to power "with a majority which in the view of some of its supporters entitles it to put into effect a policy of 'white South Africa' first, second and last..."; the policies

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ See for example Dilitanzaba Mji in *Advance* 26-2-1952, p.2.

⁶⁸ ANC papers: AD1189/2/Ba.1: NEC Report to the 1954 Annual ANC Conference, p.1.

⁶⁹ *DRUM* May 1953, p.10.

⁷⁰ *Advance* 23-4-1953, p.1.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

of the opposition parties, he continued, were "pale reflections" of apartheid.¹⁰⁰

ANC leaders argued that the Defiance Campaign and the election result had "so sharpened the political issues in the country as to leave no room for middle-of-the-road individuals or groups."¹⁰¹ For Lutuli, whites opposed to apartheid had

to accept the justice of the claim of the Non-whites for freedom and work unreservedly and openly for its realisation or be guilty of directly or indirectly assisting the Nationalist party in its relentless and unmitigated oppression and suppression of the Non-White peoples in their claim for free democratic rights.¹⁰²

The ANC, SAIC and FRAC called on "all those sections of white South Africans who still treasure freedom, liberty and democratic traditions to join the non-white peoples of this country."¹⁰³ In response, COD and the SL began to focus on the need to bring into being a single national organisation of whites which could join the Congress Alliance.

It was in this context also, three weeks after the election, that the Liberal Party was launched. The LP programme was based on a qualified franchise for all 'civilised' people, and a commitment to using "only democratic and constitutional means" of opposition.¹⁰⁴ The LP bore the brunt of post-election anger from the black Congresses. Karis and Gerhart, as we have noted, claim anti-Liberal hostility emanated from 'radical' blacks in defence of SACOD. In fact, the LP was attacked by leaders including such 'moderate' figures as Z.K. Matthews and Lutuli; moreover, such criticism attended the formation of the LP, which preceded SACOD's existence by five months. For Z.K. Matthews, all political parties

from the extreme right wing of the Nationalists to the Liberals are anxious to preserve a portion of privilege for one section of the population; whether they describe it as 'white' or 'civilised' makes no difference.¹⁰⁵

Albert Lutuli warned Congress to be "on guard against members of the A.N.C. becoming members of political Parties whose objectives are different from our own"; any African "desiring an unqualified emancipation," he continued, should join not the LP but "the

¹⁰⁰ Z.K. Matthews: Presidential Address, Cape ANC Conference, 15-8-1953; in Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.101.

¹⁰¹ A. Lutuli: Presidential Address, ANC Annual Conference, December 1953; in Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.121.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Advance 23-4-1953, p.1.

¹⁰⁴ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: 1953 LP Principles and chapter 7.

¹⁰⁵ Matthews: Address op.cit., p.103.

Liberatory movement through the African National Congress."¹⁰⁶ For Transvaal ANC President Nelson Mandela, "talk of 'democratic and constitutional means' can only have a basis in reality for those people who enjoy democratic and constitutional rights."¹⁰⁷ The LP, he concluded, feared the liberation movement and sought "to divert it with fine words and promises and to divide it by giving concessions and bribes to a privileged minority."¹⁰⁸

Congress leaders called for whites to join the Congress movement, but insisted that co-operation could only take place "ON THE BASIS OF EQUALITY AND MUTUAL RESPECT."¹⁰⁹ Natal Indian Congress President 'Monty' Naicker summed up Congress feelings:

Let me say most categorically that only those Europeans belong to the democratic camp, who without reservation accept the inherent fundamental right of all the oppressed people in South Africa to exercise equal franchise with those who enjoy it at present. Any person who denies the right of the non-Europeans to have equal franchise and speaks of a qualified franchise for them, by his very stand places himself outside the democratic camp, whether such a person happens to be White or non-White.¹¹⁰

In contrast with the claims of Gerhart and Karis that the LP effectively fulfilled the requirements of the white organisation proposed at the Darragh Hall meeting, Congress leaders unanimously spoke out against the policies and programme of the LP. In doing so, Congress spokesmen went further and called on radical whites to join the Alliance.

Dilitzaba Mji contrasted the LP with those whites "who had come out courageously and associated themselves with the defiance campaign."¹¹¹ Such whites, Congressmen argued, should join the Alliance and thereby "challenge directly the contention of the racialists from the Nats to the Liberals that the liberation of all Africans is an express or implied threat to the Europeans in this country."¹¹² It was in a context marked by the 1953 election result, the hostile criticism directed at the LP and its programme, and the call for a nonracial endorsement of democratic ideals, that SACOD was formed.

¹⁰⁶ Lutuli: *Address* op.cit., p.123.

¹⁰⁷ Nelson Mandela: *Searchlight on the Liberal Party*, Liberation No.3, June 1953, p.7.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.9.

¹⁰⁹ Lutuli: *Address* op.cit., p.122 (emphasis in original).

¹¹⁰ *Indian Opinion*, 19-2-1954.

¹¹¹ *Advance* 26-2-1953, p.2.

¹¹² Walter Sisulu, quoted in *Advance* 8-4-1954, p.4.

The formation of the South African Congress of Democrats.

The 1953 general election proved to be a significant factor in the formation of both the LP and SACOD. Following the election, the pro-Congress newspaper *Advance* counselled radical whites against "losing heart at the election result," calling on them to turn to "the task of forging that democratic alliance of all races which will be the only protection of the people against the Nationalist tyranny."¹¹³ Rusty Bernstein, founder member of both the SACP and SACOD, argued that "the long-standing United Party monopoly of allegiance of progressive and democratic Europeans has been shattered."¹¹⁴ The result of this was that a white Congress should make

a bid for the allegiance and support of the sincere European democrat who had been finally disillusioned with the United Party and the Torch Commando and was seeking a new way out.¹¹⁵

As the Congress movement distanced itself from white parliamentary politics, the need for a nationally constituted white Congress was increasingly felt. In a reversal of COD's support for the UP during the election, Executive Committee member Eddie Roux pointed to the commitment of both the UP and NP to white supremacy and the repression of legal black protest. In such circumstances, Roux asked, what could stop black political organisations from becoming anti-white:

In this situation Europeans of democratic and liberal views would be failing in their duty ... if they did not take immediate steps, firstly to demonstrate that there still exist many white people who are not hostile to the legitimate human aspirations of the Non-Europeans and who sympathise with them in their struggles; secondly, to work for the overthrow of the present unjust and dangerous system [sic] which will ultimately bring disaster to the country.¹¹⁶

Following the general election, discussions were begun between the Springbok Legion, the Democratic League and COD with the aim of creating a single white Congress. The time for such an organisation was seen to be apposite: COD members argued that the decline of the Torch Commando and the NP election victory had led to "the development of new, more radical, more progressive and more democratic concepts ... than have existed for

¹¹³ *Advance* 23-4-1953, p.2.

¹¹⁴ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.4.

¹¹⁵ Beyleveld: *Report* op.cit., p.2.

¹¹⁶ Roux: *Statement* op.cit., p.2.

many years."¹¹⁷ White society was seen to be witnessing "a ferment" of debate "all of which inevitably comes to revolve around the basic question of the rights ... of non-white South Africans."¹¹⁸

The South African Congress of Democrats was formed in October 1953 at a two-day conference called by COD, the SL and the DL. The meeting was attended by eighty-eight delegates from the three convening bodies, white organisations in Durban and Port Elizabeth, individual whites from other areas, and the black Congresses. The nature and programme of SACOD were outlined in two papers presented by Rusty Bernstein and Jack Hodgson respectively. Both stressed the broad nature of the proposed organisation, and the need for a white Congress to take its place in the existing multiracial Alliance. Neither Bernstein nor Hodgson put forward a detailed programme of action; rather, they argued that the first task of the new organisation was to show that

the struggle is one between white and non-white democrats on the one hand and white and non-white reactionaries on the other.¹¹⁹

SACOD's aims were set out in general terms. In the short term the organisation was to "react rapidly to every single issue that arises in South Africa" and assert a democratic programme in opposition to apartheid.¹²⁰ The longer term objective was the mobilising "of the people ... to bring about the defeat of fascism."¹²¹

The founders of SACOD were deliberately vague regarding SACOD's future programme. SACOD was an activist body and did not require policies covering all aspects of national life. Moreover, SACOD was a projected political home for the white left which was deeply divided over a host of issues, none of which had been resolved by the time the ANC and SAIC called for a white Congress.¹²² SACOD was intended to encompass the white left as well as the growing number of whites who, it was argued, would be driven to understand "that ours is the only alternative future to the grim and primitive future of

¹¹⁷ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.4.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ Hodgson: *Programme* op.cit., p.2; Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.1.

¹²⁰ Hodgson: *Programme* op.cit., p.3.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² See chapter 4.

full-fledged Nationalist fascism."¹²³

As a result, the aims and objects of SACOD were deliberately restricted. The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights was adopted as SACOD's statement of principle. The hostile reception of the LP's programme had highlighted the need for a white organisation based on complete equality; "a body," as Fischer and Williams put it, "which will not seek to bargain with or buy off the non-Europeans, but which will march with them."¹²⁴ Moreover, by keeping SACOD's programme as limited as possible, the aim was to include within its ranks

people who agree upon our limited aims, but who differ on the legislative programme to be adopted by a truly democratic South African government, and who accordingly belong to different political parties and hold differing political ideologies even while being loyal and effective members of our new organisation.¹²⁵

As Bernstein noted, SACOD's aims and objects were limited to "cover in reality only one great subject, the subject of fundamental human rights."¹²⁶

Perceptions of SACOD.

Most discussions of SACOD take as their starting point the assumption of a determining link between the dissolution of the CPSA and the formation of COD and SACOD. In 1958 Anthony Sampson, a former editor of *DRUM* magazine, characterised SACOD members as "the familiar band of white communists and fellow-travellers who had for years been associated with Congress."¹²⁷ Edward Feit claimed that the leadership of SACOD was "virtually the same" as that of the disbanded CPSA.¹²⁸ For Janet Robertson, SACOD was "Communist-controlled"¹²⁹; for Douglas Irvine it was "Communist-influenced."¹³⁰ Gail Gerhart, commenting on Africanist claims that SACOD was formed so as to allow white communists to subvert African nationalism, states that this was "probably not a primary factor behind

¹²³ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.4.

¹²⁴ Fischer and Williams: *Circular* op.cit., p.2.

¹²⁵ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.2.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.3.

¹²⁷ Anthony Sampson: *Treason Cage: The Opposition on Trial in South Africa* (London 1958), p.101.

¹²⁸ Edward Feit: *Urban Revolt in South Africa 1960-1964* (Northwestern 1971), p.268.

¹²⁹ Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.165.

¹³⁰ Douglas Irvine: *The Liberal Party, 1953-1968*, pp.127-128; in Butler, Elphick and Welsh (eds): *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa: Its History and Prospect* (Cape Town 1987).

the participation of most members of COD"; she nonetheless describes SACOD as an organisation of "white Marxists."¹²¹

As these quotations suggest, SACOD has commonly been seen as a 'front' for the disbanded Communist Party. Such assertions have been premised on the prominence of former CPSA members in the ranks of SACOD, rather than an analysis of the programme and activities of the organisation, or its wider membership. Commentators have, on occasion, chosen to avoid an accurate analysis of SACOD by means of circular arguments. Feit accepted that "some members were not communists"; he nonetheless concluded: "that is, of course, the aim of a front."¹²² Karis and Gerhart ask why SACOD adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "rather than ... any Marxist program."¹²³ In answering their own question, they fall back on Gwendolyn Carter's 1958 assertion that regardless of its programme, SACOD's "emotive language" was "characteristically Communist."¹²⁴

In essence, SACOD has been characterised in most existing literature as a communist-dominated organisation. As such, support for 'leftwing' ideas such as nationalisation and anti-imperialism (and anti-Americanism) within the black Congresses are traced back to the influence of SACOD, and some commentators attempt to distance the ANC from SACOD. Gerhart argues that the ANC/SAIC decision to create a white Congress did not represent what Lutuli referred to as a "step along our road towards a broader South Africanism."¹²⁵ Rather, it "was simply a 'realistic' effort to tap every readily available resource in the African's favour."¹²⁶ Gerhart concludes, in the face of a wealth of evidence to the contrary, that for ANC leaders the decision to bring SACOD into being was "primarily a tactical, not an ideological one."¹²⁷

¹²¹ Gail Gerhart: Black Power in South Africa: The evolution of an ideology (California 1978), pp.115-116 (emphasis added).

¹²² Feit: Urban Revolt: op.cit., p.268.

¹²³ Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.13.

¹²⁴ G.M.Carter: The Politics of Inequality: South Africa Since 1948 (London 1958), p.378; quoted in Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.13.

¹²⁵ Albert Lutuli: Let My People Go (London 1962), p.126.

¹²⁶ Gerhart: Power op.cit., p.119.

¹²⁷ ibid., p.119.

SACOD and multiracialism.

Existing commentary on the formation of SACOD is most commonly informed by anti-communism, and flows from a perception of the white left as a single cohesive entity which acted in concert in pursuit of clear and accepted goals. In reality, however, the formation of SACOD occasioned a serious dispute within the white left over the 'racial' structure of SACOD. That dispute, moreover, saw former CFSAs members ranged against each other, and ultimately led to a number of senior members of the disbanded CFSAs refusing to join SACOD.

As we have seen, disputes over multiracialism had appeared in the CFSAs in the late 1940s, increasing as the ANC grew in size and significance.³²⁸ At the time of SACOD's formation, ANC membership was at its highest for the 1950s, and the Congress movement as a whole was infused with the confidence engendered by the Defiance Campaign. As a result, the founding documents of Hodgson and Bernstein concentrated not on details of SACOD's programme, but on its subordinate position within the Alliance. The black Congresses insisted on multiracialism for a variety of reasons. As we have seen, ANC leaders argued that the black population was not yet ready for a non-racial organisation, however desirable it may be.³²⁹ Congressmen also argued that multiracial structures "had their roots in the realities of the situation" - that is, of geographically and politically separated ethnic communities.³³⁰ In addition, they pointed to the flurry of new white political parties as evidence that "the ruling class has been confused and divided," and called on radical whites to further the process by working amongst whites.³³¹ Albie Sachs recently described Congress feelings on the issues; Moses Kotane, according to Sachs, gave him a little lecture:

You whites, [he said] you all love running to the location. You get big cheers from the people.' He says, 'Water always follows the path of least resistance. We don't have access to the whites, we can't organize amongst them. That is really where you people have to be, but you always run away from that. Because it is more

³²⁸ See chapters 3 and 4.

³²⁹ See above.

³³⁰ Interview with Yusuf Cachalia, p.2.

³³¹ Walter Sisulu in Advance 8-4-1954, p.4.

difficult.¹⁴²

SACOD founders Hodgson and Bernstein, both former CPSA members, revealed extreme sensitivity to the possibility of new disputes breaking out over the question of nonracialism. Hodgson argued that the "social, economic and political structure of South Africa" had imposed on the entire Congress movement "this sectional form of organisation."¹⁴³ Each Congress was given responsibility for "that group to which it alone has the most ready access, and of whose problems it alone has the clearest understanding." With regard to SACOD, Hodgson stressed:

We should recognise at the outset that the new organisation is but a section of the Movement ... As a consequence in general therefore the character and tempo of the struggle can only be determined together with the mass organisations of the Non-White people.¹⁴⁴

SACOD, Bernstein and Hodgson argued, would have no colour bar and would "welcome into its ranks all those South Africans, irrespective of their race or colour, whose understanding of democracy is the same as ours."¹⁴⁵ At the same time, however, the new organisation had the "responsibility for organising and leading the Militant democrats not catered for by the Congress movement."¹⁴⁶ Aware of the tortuousness of the proposal, Bernstein continued:

I do not want to be misunderstood - and on issues like this in our race-conscious country it is too easy to be misunderstood. I am proposing the formation of an organisation which will have no colour bar ... But I am simultaneously proposing the formation of an organisation which will, from the outset, understand that the democratic cause in South Africa is today predominantly represented by the Congress movement. I am proposing the formation of an organisation which will not attempt to supersede the Congress as it is presently constituted, which will not attempt to take [on] itself the status of a super, all-in, non-national Congress...¹⁴⁷

SACOD's founding conference endorsed a policy statement which stressed the deep impression left on all sections of the population by decades of racial discrimination, and reinforced by differing educational, cultural and social patterns which divided communities. The statement accepted the ideal of "a single, united democratic organisation of people of

¹⁴² Albie Sachs, quoted in Fredrickse: *Nonracialism* op.cit., p.58.

¹⁴³ Hodgson: *Programme* op.cit., p.1.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.2.

¹⁴⁶ Hodgson: *Programme* op.cit., p.3.

¹⁴⁷ Bernstein: *Liberty* op.cit., p.3.

all races"; it warned, however, that it

would be visionary and impractical to imagine that the acceptance of a policy of full and equal rights for all racial groups automatically sweeps these factors aside.¹⁴⁸

The founding conference endorsed a maxim to guide SACOD's work, namely: "what is good for one Congress is good for all."¹⁴⁹

Opposition to multiracial forms of organisation came most strongly from the western Cape.¹⁵⁰ This was equally true of the formation of SACOD. The nonracial Democratic League, a convener of the founding conference, was deeply divided over the question of merging into a white Congress. League chairperson Len Lee-Warden has noted that "I, for one, was against joining up with an organisation that was for whites only, even if the ANC had wanted it that way."¹⁵¹ Put to the vote within the League, the majority supported the merger; the League's delegates to the founding conference nonetheless "argued all the way to Johannesburg."¹⁵² The main concern of the League was the fate of its Coloured members (SACPO being not yet a month old) in an all-white organisation. DL delegates "argued our case for two days" and won acceptance of continued Coloured membership until SACPO was operational.¹⁵³

The objections of the DL to multiracialism were essentially practical, regarding the future of existing members. The League's objections, however, served to trigger off a far more widespread dispute over the nature and future direction of SACOD. The formation of a white Congress, whose members would work to break "the hidebound prejudices of Europeans,"¹⁵⁴ exacerbated differences within the white left. CST had partially reconciled supporters of class struggle to working for national liberation by stressing the need to concentrate on building the existing national organisations. Supporters of CST pointed to the existence of large and active national organisations which were "not artificial but based

¹⁴⁸ CAMP Reel 4B:2:DC2:30/22: SACOD: Draft Policy Statement, October 1953, p.1.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ See above and chapters 3 and 4.

¹⁵¹ Lee-Warden: Memoirs *op.cit.*, p.71.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ SACOD: Statement *op.cit.*, p.2.

on strong national feeling among the people."¹⁵⁶ Senior CPSA members such as Jack Simons argued that internal colonialism had divided the working class along racial lines, and concluded that while the white working class should not be ignored, "it might also be better strategy to concentrate for some time on the largely unorganised but reliable elements of the working class (mainly African)."¹⁵⁶ ¹⁵⁷ In essence, former CPSA members were to continue their previous work but for the benefit of the ANC and SAIC rather than the CPSA.

The formation of SACOD, however, further divided the white left. Working within SACOD, white ex-CPSA members would have to switch their focal point of activity away from organising blacks to working amongst whites. For some CPSA members who had endorsed CST, this further shift in activity marked a final concession to racial division above class unity, and was unacceptable. In 1954, Jack Simons, who never joined SACOD, stated:

As far as the National Democratic Movement is concerned in South Africa, it is true that the immediate task is to secure freedom from National Oppression. But there is no such thing in social movements as freedom by the instalment plan ... There can be no liberation apart from class liberation.¹⁵⁸

The most vocal critics of SACOD, and of multiracialism more generally, were those former CPSA members and others of the white left who rejected CST. For Danie du Plessis, former CPSA Johannesburg District chairperson, multiracial structures were seen as the final capitulation before nationalism. du Plessis started from the premise that nationalist organisations were "school[s] for herrenvolk ideology, narrow-mindedness and race prejudice."¹⁵⁹ A number of separate national organisations combined in a multiracial alliance, he argued, simply multiplied the problems:

Nationalist organisations and federalism can in the end only lead to disintegration and their own destruction. A national liberation movement either assumes a mass character and grows, which it can do only when all the forces of liberation are

¹⁵⁵ Lionel Forman: Nationalisms in South Africa, p.4; in Forum Club: Symposium op.cit.

¹⁵⁶ Simons: Economics op.cit., p.3.

¹⁵⁷ ibid.

¹⁵⁸ ibid., pp.7-8.

¹⁵⁹ Danie du Plessis: Notes on certain points raised in the discussion in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/3 February 1954, p.47; see also David Holt in Viewpoints and Perspectives 1/2 June 1953, pp.14-21.

organised and actively fight for its aims under a common leadership, or it is converted and degenerates into a series of petty squabbles over whose right it is to sit on which bench, or who enters which door.¹⁶⁰

du Plessis argued that whites who "desert the camp of the oppressor" should be incorporated within a single national organisation, and not be treated "as a freak group."¹⁶¹

du Plessis opposed the formation of SACOD and called for a single, nonracial Congress. With support from within the Johannesburg Discussion Club, he proposed "one organisation with its ranks open to all South Africans who are prepared to fight for its programme and aims and under one leadership elected by all."¹⁶² The easiest way to attain such unity, he argued, was for the ANC "to open its ranks to all who want to fight for freedom."¹⁶³ Congress leaders, as we have seen, opposed the call for a single Congress for a variety of reasons. One of the most significant of these were the ideological connotations which had become attached to nonracialism as a result of the disputes of the late 1940s. For du Plessis and his supporters, however, the notion of a single nonracial Congress remained premised on the primacy of class above national struggle. du Plessis argued that "there is no room for numerous small organisations functioning separately and shouting unity, but in practice remaining in separate camps."¹⁶⁴ In place of the nationalist alliance, du Plessis argued that "real and absolute unity between all races can only be achieved in a workers' struggle."¹⁶⁵ In complete contrast with the call for SACOD members to organise more whites into the struggle, and with Jack Simons' call for work within the black national organisations, du Plessis argued that the primary task was the building of "a strong and powerful trade union movement ... and a peasant's organisation" as the backbone of black emancipation.¹⁶⁶

Disputes over the need to work amongst whites took place within SACOD throughout the 1950s. Nonetheless, as SACOD Executive Committee member Helen Joseph has noted,

¹⁶⁰ du Plessis: *Notes op.cit.*, p.48.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.46.

¹⁶² du Plessis: *Situation op.cit.*, pp.41-42. See also David Holt, Dr.Z.Sanders and others in *Viewpoints and Perspectives*.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.42.

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

those former CPSA members who joined the white Congress were "only too happy to find a political home where they could really renew their contacts with the political world."¹⁶⁷ The dispute over multiracialism had two effects. Firstly, a number of senior communists, including both Simons and du Plessis, as well as a considerable number of rank and file CPSA members, refused to join the white Congress. Secondly, the dispute led to the founders of SACOD blurring the precise demarcation of SACOD's sphere of operation.

SACOD's policy statement, adopted at its founding conference, stated that the organisation had no colour bar; in evidence of this, Maulvi Cachalia of the SAIC was elected onto the Executive Committee.¹⁶⁸ The statement stressed that SACOD did "not seek to compete with the existing Congress organisations for membership or for first place in the struggle," and committed SACOD to "winning the support of Europeans for the fight against all aspects of race discrimination and hostility."¹⁶⁹ SACOD members were to work amongst "groups not eligible for membership of existing organisations, or catered for by them."¹⁷⁰ At one level this blurred phrasing referred to the Coloured members of the Democratic League. At another, however, it was an attempted compromise with those who objected to white work. The document stated that SACOD members should work to improve "the membership and prestige of whichever organisation is most appropriate and readily accepted by the local population."¹⁷¹ Aware of resistance to working amongst whites, the statement concluded:

There can be no rigid pattern for C.O.D. branches, their composition and their activity. Local conditions vary considerably. Each branch and region must adapt the general policy of co-operation and mutual assistance of the three Congresses to the real situation existing in the area. Where there is no local A.N.C. branch, the S.A.C.O.D. may well work mainly amongst Africans to recruit [them] to the S.A.C.O.D. and to urge the most enlightened to form an A.N.C. branch.¹⁷²

SACOD was launched at a time when many of the advances made during the Defiance Campaign were being rolled back in the face of a renewed legislative onslaught on black

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Helen Joseph, p.3.

¹⁶⁸ Treason Trial collection! AD1812 Ef1.5.3: Report of SACOD Founding Conference, 10/11-10-1953, p.4.

¹⁶⁹ SACOD: Statement op.cit., p.1.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*

¹⁷² *ibid.*, p.2.

rights. SACOD members noted the lack of a clear strategy which was forcing a defensive posture on Congress campaigns.¹⁷³ SACOD had to develop a strategy for work in white areas while forging links with the broader Congress Alliance. As a result, SACOD immediately endorsed the proposed Congress of the People, which was to further the mobilisation of the Defiance Campaign and produce a coherent and popular statement of principle which would unite the whole Congress movement.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion.

By October 1953 whites were full partners in the Congress Alliance. SACOD's birth, far from being the consensual act of white communists intent on controlling the ANC, occasioned a major dispute within the white left. As a result, SACOD emerged as an organisation lacking the support of both liberals and a significant number of former CIPSA members. For the black Congresses, however, SACOD stood in stark contrast with the UP, "the liberals and reformist trade unions":

Our policy of co-operation with other racial groups through their national organisations has made great strides and constitutes a very real threat to the present regime which is anchored on the idea of racial exclusiveness and domination.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³ Hodgson: Programme op.cit., p.2.

¹⁷⁴ See chapter 8.

¹⁷⁵ 1954 ANC NEC Report op.cit., p.2.

Chapter six.

The Formation of the Liberal Party of South Africa.

Introduction.

The Liberal Party of South Africa was launched on 9 May 1953. Led by Margaret Ballinger, with Donald Molteno, Leo Marquard and Alan Paton in senior positions, the LP seemed to mark the culmination of liberal activism of the 1940s and early 1950s. For its founders, the launching of a party which freely expressed a 'liberal' race policy was a liberation from the constraints of working within the United Party. Margaret Ballinger went further and described the new party as "the significant product of the history of the last forty years."¹

The LP endorsed a qualified franchise, and bound members to use "only democratic and constitutional means" of opposition.² The LP constitution proclaimed its opposition to "all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism."³ With the formation of the LP, liberals were for the first time forced to compete for popular support. Not all members of the South African Liberal Association [SALA], from which the LP emerged, nor of the South African Institute of Race Relations, accepted the call to form a new political party in competition with the UP. In addition, the LP programme was attacked by the Congress movement, and this hampered attempts to enroll black members. The LP was an umbrella organisation: party members had varied political outlooks and were drawn from different political traditions. They were united in opposition to the Nationalist Party government, the need to 'bridge the racial gap,' and to "win out against Communism."⁴ Although nonracial, the LP concentrated on parliamentary politics, and saw white voters as its main constituency. Younger party members, in contrast, saw the party function to be the development of black support, and campaigned for the alteration of the 1953 policy settlement. As such, the LP was a vehicle through which liberalism was challenged and amended throughout the 1950s. This chapter analyses the emergence of organised liberal opposition in South Africa, tracing its development from the late 1940s, through the liberal

¹ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.5: M.Ballinger: Presidential Address: Liberal Party National Conference, 11-7-1953, p.1.

² Liberal Party papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: LP Programme, nd.1953.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Minutes: Pietermaritzburg Liberal Group [LG]: 7-7-1952.

groups formed in 1951 and 1952, to the formation of the Liberal Association and of the Liberal Party.

Liberals and liberalism.

The early history of the SALA and LP were sketched by Janet Robertson in *Liberalism in South Africa*. Robertson does not offer a detailed contextual analysis of liberalism as it developed in the late 1940s and early 1950s, under pressure from both a growing Congress movement and the Nationalist Party apartheid programme. Rather, she roughly equates liberals and liberalism with moderation and non-communism, and presents the LP as the South African representative of an internationally recognised liberal creed which found fullest expression in the United Nations Charter, and was contrasted with "the communist-controlled C.O.D."⁵

Paul Rich, in *White Power and the Liberal Conscience*, rejects what he describes as Robertson's "pluralist party politics model" and attempts to sketch the wider political and intellectual context within which white liberals operated.⁶ Both fail to recognise the emergence of new liberal thinking: postwar liberals, in *White Power*, are seen as the tail-end of nineteenth century Cape liberalism. As such, the wider context Rich provides is concerned to delineate the containment of 'paternalism,' and the Native Representatives and other liberals are presented as the last heirs of the Cape liberal tradition. The specific attributes of South African liberalism in the 1940s and 1950s, and the wider ideological functions of the political activities of the Native Representatives and others are not recorded, or their significance is missed.

In his work on intellectual history, Rich loses sight of the contemporary political context, and the immediate issues to which the political actors under study responded. He thus paints a picture which emphasises "the more general state of political despair to which liberals had been driven" attendant upon the decline of 'paternalistic Cape liberalism.'⁷

⁵ Robertson: *Liberalism op.cit.*, p.165.

⁶ Paul Rich: *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism, 1921-1960* (Johannesburg 1984), p.117.

⁷ *ibid.*, pp.98-119.

Martin Legassick similarly draws a determining line from the Hoernle-Hofmeyr era to the LP in the 1950s, and concludes that "liberals found themselves united not by any positive vision, nor, uniquely, in standing for any principles ... but by *negative* factors, dislikes of nationalism or communism or populism, and by *guilt*."⁸ Neither pay heed to the effect of the war years in creating a potential constituency which the Torch Commando later successfully approached, and in bringing into the political arena a significant number of highly able young ex-servicemen and women who brought to the LP an understanding of liberalism influenced by the Atlantic and United Nations Charters.

Rich, Robertson and Legassick all paint a clear line of development from the formation of the SAIRR in the 1920s, the anti-Hertzog white activism of the 1930s, through the work of the SAIRR and Native Representatives in the 1940s, and point to the Liberal Party as the culmination of such activity in the 1950s. As we have seen, however, the development of South African liberalism was a more complex process than such an analysis suggests. Moreover, the development of liberalism in the 1950s was not a linear process. The formation of the LP marked a split between the Native Representatives and the SAIRR leadership as the latter rejected the call for a more activist political role. At the same time, the LP throughout the 1950s was marked by internal strife as the broader party membership came to challenge central aspects of the 1953 policy settlement authored by the early LP leaders.

The development and radicalisation of liberalism in the 1950s resulted in part from the younger generation of liberal activists enrolled by the LP, and from attempts to enroll black support for liberal principles. The gradualist and cautionary liberal creed developed by the Native Representatives and others in the late 1940s suffered successive challenges from within the Liberal Party. As calls increased for the party programme to move away from supporting restrictive participation and an adherence to 'free market' economics, the early leaders of the party had to be removed from positions of influence. As a result, many LP members of the early 1950s left for the Progressive Party when it was launched in 1959.

⁸ Martin Legassick: 'Liberalism, Social Control and Liberation in South Africa': seminar paper, University of Warwick 1977, p.14 (emphasis in original).

As Julius Lewin later commented:

Under the new dispensation, the older liberals lost heart. The elderly ones were due to disappear from the scene, anyway. After an interval of some years - an unfortunate break in continuity - new and younger men, who had served no apprenticeship in public life, brought a more indignant tone and a new style to the situation.⁹

The assumption has been made that there was a direct link between the values of the Cape liberal tradition and the political creed of liberals in the 1940s and 1950s, although there exists little detailed analysis of postwar liberalism.¹⁰ As we have seen, the end of the war saw the ANC and its allies endorsing a liberal-democratic programme based on universal suffrage, the rule of law, a mixed economy, and with an emphasis on social-welfare provision. White liberals, on the other hand, developed a programme which called not for the end of segregation but its modification and streamlining, aimed at the separation of a black urban bourgeoisie from the bulk of the black population. Liberals proposed a nonracial qualified franchise while applying social and residential segregation to the 'black middle class.'¹¹ Liberalism in the 1940s was an incremental administrative creed which denied black rights and opposed calls for nonracial equality made by the Congress movement.

Within the Liberal Party, people of different political outlooks came to work alongside the Native Representatives and their conservative supporters (located largely in the Cape). These included former ANC member Selby Msimang as well former Communist Party member Jock Isacowitz, and later Eddie Roux. The LP also attracted a small number of socialists seeking a political home who rejected the perceived closeness of SACOD and the Communist Party, and who would not join the Labour Party despite its adoption of a more liberal programme in the early 1950s.¹² The LP also enrolled a large number of social-democratic members such as Leo and Hilda Kuper, Christopher Gell and others, who maintained a steady critical commentary within the early LP, where they were joined by

⁹ Julius Lewin: Looking Back at the Liberals in The Star 25-4-1967.

¹⁰ See *inter alia* Robertson: Liberalism *op.cit.* chapters 1 and 2; Legassick: 'Liberalism' *op.cit.*, pp.1-19.

¹¹ See chapter 1 and below.

¹² Interview with Violaine Junod (1988), p.2. For detail on the Labour Party, see G.M.Carter: The Politics of Inequality (London 1958) pp.341-342.

Leo Marquard and Julius Lewin.¹³ As black party membership grew, so the attitudes of white party members began to change, and the social-democratic critics found increasing support for their calls for closer relations with the Congresses and acceptance of universal suffrage as the ultimate aim of the organisation. Their influence on the LP was considerable, maintained through newspaper articles, letters and private discussion.

The LP was the point at which various political traditions met and subjected the political creed of the Representatives and their supporters to a series of challenges which focussed on the franchise and the question of extra-parliamentary activities. The LP was not the culmination of a single strand of twentieth century liberal thinking, but the meeting point of a number of political traditions. As such, the LP was itself the vehicle which challenged and amended liberalism in South Africa. The cumulative effect of the launching of the Liberal Party was to draw together a wide spectrum of white political opinion; through interaction with the Congresses, participation in grass-roots black opposition politics, and because of the growing black party membership, an initially elitist party was democratised.

South African liberalism.

The postwar years witnessed growing co-operation between the ANC and SAIC and the CPSA in support of a liberal-democratic programme, pursued by extra-parliamentary means. South African liberals in contrast developed an incrementalist strategy which aimed to influence the implementation of 'Native policy.'¹⁴ In these circumstances, it has been argued, the terms 'liberal', 'radical' and 'communist' came to be defined and understood not simply by reference to an internationally accepted lexicon, but rather to predominantly domestic circumstances. This was compounded by the government's redefinition of communism and its effects.¹⁵ Liberals claimed their political creed to be concerned above all with the deterioration in race relations attendant upon postwar government policy. Julius Lewin remarked in 1952 that "[l]iberals have always held that race relations are the vital

¹³ Their political creed is discussed below and in chapter 7.

¹⁴ See chapter 1 and below.

¹⁵ See chapters 1 and 2.

problem."¹⁶ Similarly, Alan Paton later stated:

Liberalism in South Africa, though it has common roots with liberalism in other countries, and though its roots are the roots of liberalism everywhere, has nevertheless one characteristic which is especially its own, and that is its particular concern with racial justice.¹⁷

South African liberalism, as we shall see, was associated with a clear political agenda and set of political practices.

After the 1948 election, the UP became the main focus of liberal activity as the Native Representatives and SAIRR sought to rekindle its' progressive embers. In this, liberal thinking was strongly influenced by the Fagan report.¹⁸ The SAIRR and Native Representatives presented evidence to the Commission, and although disappointed that the final report did not explicitly espouse a liberal programme, liberals highlighted the passages which spoke of the inevitability of economic integration and the permanence of black urbanisation.¹⁹ The Fagan Report relied on economic necessity in place of ideological legitimisation in support of a permanent black urban presence.²⁰ Liberals in turn attempted to create a broad area of non-ideological concurrence on 'practical' issues of economic necessity. In essence, liberals argued that urbanisation and 'economic integration' - of blacks into the 'white' economy - were unavoidable side-effects of an industrialising economy. From these premises, liberals argued firstly that a stable urban black labour force required access to health, education and other facilities. Secondly, liberals argued that black urbanisation necessitated some form of political dispensation, if only as a safety valve. Without it, the stagnation or disruption of the economy would follow.²¹

In 1948 both the UP and NP were finalising their policies in the light of the Fagan and Sauer reports, the two major proposals of the postwar years.²² The Ballingers argued that

¹⁶ Julius Lewin: Strategy for Political Progress in The Forum November 1952, p.22.

¹⁷ Alan Paton: Hope for South Africa (London 1958), p.6.

¹⁸ UG-48: The Native Laws Commission 1946-1948 [the Fagan Commission].

¹⁹ Helen Suzman, A Digest of the Fagan Report (SAIRR 1949), and Julius Lewin in The Forum 2-4-1949, pp.22-23.

²⁰ See chapter 1.

²¹ These are analysed in detail below.

²² The Native Question Commission [the Sauer Commission] was an internal Nationalist Party Commission which provided the first programmatic elaboration of apartheid.

the time was ripe for a "reasonable and sensible" liberal intervention²⁹, and in 1948 and 1949 a series of programmes were presented by leading liberals. The programmes shared two main thrusts: the first was to outline an area of 'practical politics'; the second was the development of an incrementalist programme by which liberals could assist evolutionary change.

As we have seen, liberals called for incremental change and deprecated demands for significant and sudden political reform, particularly universal suffrage. J.D.Rheinallt Jones, SAIRR President, argued in 1948 that blacks "must be brought within the influence of our civilisation" because

before a people of another and lower civilisation can claim citizen rights, it is just that they should prove that they have been imbued with the principles of our civilisation. It will be necessary to demand proof of participation in and an understanding of our culture.³⁰

The 1948-50 liberal programmes neither accepted nor acknowledged the ANC demand for universal suffrage. The insistence on black 'reasonableness' entailed a return to pre-1943 demands and methods of protest.

Margaret and William Ballinger based their *Programme for Progress* on the Fagan Report, and submitted it to the ANC in time for adoption at its 1948 Conference. Margaret Ballinger described her main role following the 1948 general election as "helping Africans to build up their own policy."³¹ Privately she stated that Africans had to do "some fresh thinking ... instead of drifting on a sea of old thoughts and emotions."³² The Ballinger *Programme* avoided political demands and concentrated on influx control and urbanisation. For the Ballingers, these were 'practical' issues on which pressure could successfully be exerted. The Ballinger *Programme* outlined a policy of separating 'civilised' from 'uncivilised' blacks, stating:

Let us have locations for the new and untrained people but for all the others there should be freedom to live as Europeans do (although we shall probably have to

²⁹ A.B.Xuma papers: ABX.480709b: M. and W.Ballinger: Outlines of a Programme for Progress for Africans, 9-7-1948, p.3.

³⁰ J.D.Rheinallt Jones: 1948 SAIRR Presidential Address, in Race Relations Journal XIX, February 1952, p.48.

³¹ Ballinger papers: A410/B2.5.13: M.Ballinger to Rev.J.Calata, 12-8-1948.

³² Ballinger papers: A410/B.2.8.2: M.Ballinger to E.H.Brookes, 29-6-1948.

accept separate areas).²⁷

The *Programme*, in carefully seductive language, attempted to translate the need for a permanent urban black labour force into the vision of a fully integrated black middle class, to which influx control and social (if not residential) segregation need not apply. In January 1948, Donald Molteno presented a *Democratic Programme* at a public lecture.²⁸ Molteno's *Programme* echoed the Ballingers' in rejecting demands for the black franchise, and delineating a 'practical' area of political activity. Molteno argued that

the main features of a democratic programme ... would be the elevation of practical achievements above doctrinaire considerations, the fostering of inter-racial goodwill and the avoidance of all rigidities in legislation and administration, thus leaving the door open to adjustment in accordance with changing conditions.²⁹

Black rights - in the areas of trade unions, urban freehold tenure, and abolition of the pass laws - were seen to be necessary concessions if economic growth were to be maintained. The NRC adjournment revealed the urgency of providing adequate means of political expression for 'civilised' or middle class Africans. Liberals also called for improvements in black housing, sanitation, medical facilities, education and other areas of social policy.³⁰ This stemmed from both humanitarian concern, and the perception that the CPSA, in mobilising Africans around civic issues, was making political capital from their socio-economic position. As Edgar Brookes put it:

The only real way to deal with Communism in the Union of South Africa, particularly among the depressed classes, is to remove the grievances from which they suffer ... They have grievances and they have aspirations. You must remove those grievances and satisfy those aspirations. Communism will never take root among a satisfied people.³¹

Confronted with ideological developments to the left and right as African and Afrikaner nationalism came to dominate the political arena, liberals attempted to withdraw into a non-ideological area of consensus politics. Their political role, as outlined in the various programmes, comprised entrenchment in the opinion-forming and administrative machinery

²⁷ The Ballingers: *Programme op.cit.*, p.4.

²⁸ Molteno papers: BC579 D1.32: D.B.Molteno: Segregation and Democracy: 8-1-1948.

²⁹ *ibid.*, pp.13-14.

³⁰ *ibid.*

³¹ Quoted in S.B.D.Kavina: The Political Thought and Career of Hon.Dr.Edgar H.Brookes of South Africa (D.phil. thesis, Bombay University, 1972), p.157.

where, through an objective acceptance of economic facts which were unacceptable to white voters, they would advise on areas of 'adjustment.'

The notion of 'adjustment' was a key component of liberalism in the late 1940s. Liberals initially saw themselves as mediators between the government and its extra-parliamentary opposition.²² By 1948 this had given way to a more incremental position, with liberals arguing that their sphere of operation lay between policies dictated by ideology but conditioned by economic reality. Liberals would not arbitrate between two opposing political forces; rather, with a creed based on "a sane belief in reasonableness"²³, they would mediate between 'unreasonable' policies and their implementation. Such a role was seen to be urgently necessary following the 1948 election and the threat that the new NP government would legislate according to ideology rather than economic necessity and roll back the advances of the war years. SAIRR Director Quintyn Whyte argued that conflict between economic integration and apartheid was inevitable; as a result,

there must be constant adjustment and it will fall to the lot of the liberal mind to try to ensure that those adjustments are made with the minimum friction. This will not be an enviable task; it will please neither the radical nor the reactionary; but it is an essential function in our society.²⁴

Liberalism was premised on evolutionary and parliamentary gradualism, a developing organic political participation for the 'civilised' of all races. The main force supporting such change was, for liberals, economic integration:.. This entailed the enmeshing of all races in the economic infrastructure of the country, and the dependence of industrial production in particular on skilled or semi-skilled urban black labour. Economic integration was acknowledged by industrialists as an inevitable by-product of economic development. I.G.Fleming, 1949 President of the Federated Chamber of Industries, stated:

The urban Native has been integrated into every level in the economic system, and whether in the producing stage, in the distributing link, or at the consumer end his function is unquestionably permanent.²⁵

²² See chapter 1.

²³ Quoted in SAIRR: *A Survey of Race Relations 1947-1948*, p.23.

²⁴ Quintyn Whyte: *Apartheid and other policies together with a suggested practical programme* (SAIRR 1948), p.11.

²⁵ Cited in Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.44.

For the Native Representatives and the SAIRR, the inclusion of blacks in the economy, increasingly at skilled levels, was both a cause of change and a peaceful means of achieving such change.³⁶ For economic integration to fulfil its political function, it relied on the presumed colour-blindness of industrial labour requirements, the need for skilled black labour, and its concomitant urban reproduction. Liberals argued that economic integration and the requirements of economic progress would challenge job reservation as well as streamline the migrant labour system. In effect, liberals sought to attach a particular political dispensation to the labour requirements of industry, and thereby to detach a black urban bourgeoisie which would participate in (undefined) political structures "in unity but not in equality."³⁷

Economic integration drew on the social-welfare commitments of the government, tentatively acknowledged by Hofmeyr during the war years. The SAIRR called for the relaxation of economically 'restraining' apartheid measures: "only by liberating the potential energies of both the European and Non-European peoples," the SAIRR argued, would the government be able to pay for "those social welfare measures which are recognised today as the basic duty of the State to provide for all its people..."³⁸ The defeat of the UP in the 1948 election meant that the Fagan Report was not implemented and threatened to further erode the socio-economic status of blacks. As a result, liberals attempted to influence the implementation of the Sauer Report, the apartheid plan of the NP.

The Sauer Report, as Deborah Posel has demonstrated, was an internally contradictory document.³⁹ Its areas of confusion were similar to those of the Fagan Report: the precise implications of economic integration, and the status of 'urbanised' blacks. What Posel has termed the 'practical' faction within the NP alliance controlled the Native Affairs Department in the early 1950s. 'Practical' Nationalists accepted economic integration as an

³⁶ See Merle Lipton: *Capitalism and Apartheid* (Aldershot 1986), pp.140-142.

³⁷ Jan Hofmeyr quoted in Tom MacDonald: *Hofmeyr: Heir to Smuts* (Johannesburg 1948) p.75.

³⁸ Hofmeyr papers: A1/DC: SAIRR: *Memorandum to the Prime Minister*, 2-9-1948.

³⁹ Deborah Posel: 'The Construction of Apartheid, 1948-1961': seminar paper, African Studies Institute, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988. The 'practical' faction attempted to control urbanisation rather than eradicate it; the 'purists' saw economic integration as the death knell of white supremacy and called for complete economic segregation.

established fact. Their viewpoint, as expressed in *Volkshandel* in 1948, shared common assumptions with the liberal position:

It must be acknowledged that the non-white worker already constitutes an integral part of our economic structure, that he is now so enmeshed in the spheres of our economic life that for the first fifty to one hundred years (if not longer), total segregation is pure wishful thinking. Any government which disregards this irrefutable fact will soon discover that it is no longer in a position to govern.⁴⁰

Liberals sought to attach their political dispensation to the integration acknowledged by Nationalists. In the first instance, they pointed to economic integration as evidence of the failure of segregation and apartheid, which Margaret Ballinger characterised as “segregation writ large”, to maintain racial separation alongside economic growth. The second and more important part of liberal strategy lay in the area of black urbanisation.

Both the Sauer and Fagan Reports acknowledged the existence of permanently urbanised Africans, as did the ‘practical’ Nationalists.⁴¹ According to Posel:

Central to the design of the NAD’s influx control policy was the ideological and administrative differentiation between Africans who were “detrribalised” and “urbanised”, and those who were still “tribalised.” The architects of NAD policy went along with the “practical” blueprint [for apartheid] in accepting that “detrribalised” city-dwellers, who had no “tribal” ties or base in the reserves, had the “residential right” to remain in the urban areas permanently...⁴²

The Ballinger *Programme* attempted to elide the apartheid concept of ‘detrribalisation’ with their own of ‘civilisation.’ The ideological and administrative function of both was the location and control of the labour supply. The Ballingers called for locations and influx control for rural migrants with their “special problems”; ‘civilised’ Africans would enjoy freehold rights while subject to social and residential segregation.⁴³ Their political status was not discussed by the Ballinger *Programme*.

The point of difference between the liberal and NAD positions lay with the proposed means of dealing with the increased black proletarianisation, politicisation and unionisation of the 1940s. For liberals, the political and industrial ferment of the 1940s was the result of a contradiction between the Reserve-based cheap labour system and steady industrial

⁴⁰ Cited in O’Meara: *Volkskapitalisme* op.cit., p.175.

⁴¹ Quoted in *African World*, March 1949.

⁴² See Posel: *Construction* op.cit., p.8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁴⁴ The Ballingers: *Programme* op.cit., p.4.

development. As such, liberals called for the creation of co-optive structures on the labour front and in the political arena to separate 'civilised' or 'urbanised' Africans and absorb them in state structures. As Leo Marquard put it: "I am not afraid of being swamped by civilised non-Europeans."⁶⁵

In attempting to influence apartheid and its implementation, liberals relied on economic integration as a pointer to the need for a new political dispensation. For the NP government, however, the labour control crisis of the 1940s was evidence of a weak state, which early apartheid legislation aimed to rectify. As a result, liberals were rapidly alienated by the NP government. Running parallel to the diminution of liberal parliamentary influence after 1948 was a growing isolation from the Congress movement. Liberals were moreover increasingly alienated from the international community.⁶⁶ Leading South African liberals considered themselves part of an international community of 'enlightened' opinion. The SAIRR had close American ties, and a number of leading liberals, such as Hoernle and Margaret Ballinger, had attended British universities. Liberals claimed a legitimacy from their links with a body of 'disinterested' opinion which operated above the ideological battle-ground of white South African politics.⁶⁷

By the late 1940s, however, the situation had significantly altered. The formation of the United Nations and organisations such as the World Council of Churches (in 1949) witnessed the international mobilisation of a human rights consciousness. This coincided with the onset of postwar decolonisation, and the growth of the non-aligned movement. At the UN, India led newly independent countries in a series of attacks on South Africa's race policies, beginning in 1946. By the late 1940s, South African liberalism was not a rights-based discourse; its proponents mimicked the Fagan Report in judging segregation by standards of efficiency and commonsense rather than on moral grounds. Moreover, where liberals did call for black rights it was in a qualified manner, for 'civilised' Africans. The Congress movement, in contrast, was far more successful in gaining international

⁶⁵ Marquard papers: BC587 H2.2: Leo Marquard: Speech, 14-9-1948.

⁶⁶ See Rich: *White Power* op.cit., pp.120-122.

⁶⁷ See Hamish Dickie-Clark in v.d.Berghe (ed): *The Liberal Dilemma in South Africa* (London 1979).

support for its call for equal rights for all. Liberals lacked an organised support base and were estranged from the ANC, the UP and the NP. Edgar Brookes noted:

unfortunately for the modern South African statesman, South Africa does not live in a vacuum ... the catchwords of communism and extreme nationalism form a kind of wine of freedom which has gone to the heads of many ... and which renders the sober handling of practical issues on practical lines very difficult.⁴⁸

Liberals and the Defiance Campaign.

Nineteen fifty-two was a watershed year in white opposition politics. The dual mobilisation of anti-Nationalist opposition by the Torch Commando and the Defiance Campaign heightened the political ferment created by the constitutional crisis and growing black militancy. The Defiance Campaign marked a peak in ANC activity and membership, and led to a flurry of activity amongst liberal and radical whites in the 1952-1953 period. As we have seen, the Campaign generated a range of white responses, including the disapproval of the SAIRR, the call for a return to the old Cape dispensation, and the formation of the Congress of Democrats.⁴⁹

The Defiance Campaign put particular pressure on liberal opinion through its assertion of mass passive resistance techniques. During 1952 the Defiance Campaign grew in size and significance while the Torch Commando declined as a potentially liberal organisation (that is, an organisation which would fight for nonracial but qualified participation in state structures). Commenting on the Commando, Leo Marquard noted:

Liberals threw themselves heart and soul into the movement but never thought it was a liberal movement ... The Torch Commando could never be a liberal movement but it could scare the U.P.; it certainly did scare the Nationalists; it put new heart into opposition; it gave many non-whites the feeling that all whites were not illiberal; and it might just possibly accustom a few more people to liberal ideas.⁵⁰

As such, while liberals participated fully in the Torch Commando, liberal groups emerged in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth and elsewhere during 1952. These groups later formed the basis of the Liberal Party.

⁴⁸ Hofmeyr papers: A1/Lm6: E.H.Brookes: The Dilemma of the South African Liberal (article nd.1946) p.3.

⁴⁹ See chapter 2.

⁵⁰ Marquard papers: BC587 E2.88: L.Marquard to P.Brown, 27-12-1964.

Liberals revealed a wide range of responses to the explicit and implicit challenges of the Defiance Campaign. Before the Campaign began, the SAIRR - the only organised body of liberals in the country - drafted a statement which stated: "The Institute can in no way associate itself with the sweeping and impractical demands made" and deplored the "wilfully provocative" choice of the van Riebeeck tercentenary as the starting date for the Campaign.³¹ It was amended by an SAIRR member who objected to an appeal for police restraint stating: "This casts a slur on the Police and contains an implied criticism of their actions."³² The SAIRR exhibited increasing opposition to the ANC programme and campaigns in the early 1950s. The SAIRR relied on the power of economic integration to effect change within existing societal structures:

[the SAIRR] accepts that the lines of certain developments in South Africa are set, for example, economic integration and residential and general social separation, but it demands the transfer of the material and cultural values of civilisation.³³

The SAIRR argued that the Defiance Campaign revealed that the politicisation of the "educated and otherwise sophisticated African" had begun to "permeate" throughout black society, and repeated the call for the co-option of 'civilised' urban blacks.³⁴ The SAIRR suffered increased internal pressure following the 1948 election, as members called on the Institute to play a more overtly political role.³⁵ Internal divisions grew during the Defiance Campaign as some members called for direct negotiation with the ANC.³⁶

As the Defiance Campaign grew in size and significance during 1952, so the SAIRR stance altered. In August 1952, with over 3000 volunteers imprisoned, the SAIRR called on the government to negotiate with the ANC, and accepted black passive resistance as legitimate "because there is no real avenue of approach and expression."³⁷ By October 1952 over 5000 volunteers were in prison; the *Forum* statement published in October went further than the SAIRR in calling for the reintroduction of the old Cape franchise and its

³¹ ANC papers: AD1189/5/G.3: SAIRR: The Government and the A.N.C., March 1952.

³² *ibid*: Ds.Reyneke amendments: 11-3-1952.

³³ Whyte: Apartheid op.cit., p.13; see also Go Forward in Faith (SAIRR 1952).

³⁴ Race Relations News XIX, December 1952, p.136.

³⁵ SAIRR: Survey 1947 op.cit., pp.13-14.

³⁶ In March 1952 the SAIRR sent out draft copies of The Government and the A.N.C. The assertions made above are visible in the different responses to the draft; see AD1189/5/G: draft and responses, March 1952.

³⁷ Fabian Colonial Bureau papers: FCB 95/2.60: SAIRR Press Bulletin: The Defiance of "Unjust Laws" Campaign 25-8-1952, p.1.

Union-wide implementation. Both statements shared a central message: namely, that "the country [is being] hurried towards a position in which honourable compromise will no longer be possible."³⁸ Both centres of liberal opinion - the SAIRR and the Native Representatives - characterised the Defiance Campaign as resulting from the closure of channels of political expression to 'civilised' blacks. Both called for the detachment of 'civilised' African from the mass of the migrant and rural black population. The October statement published in *The Forum* continued:

We believe that it is imperative that South Africa should now adopt a policy that will attract the support of educated, politically conscious non-Europeans by offering them a reasonable status in our country. This can be done by a revival of the liberal tradition which prevailed for so many years with such successful results in the Cape Colony.³⁹

Liberal faith in the progressive nature of secondary industry suffered disabusement in the early 1950s. In 1952, for example, Margaret Ballinger attempted to win the support of industrialists for the *Forum* statement. The reply of the President of the Federated Chamber of Industries, G.E. Williamson, indicated the gap which lay between the labour requirements of secondary industry and the political dispensation self-proclaimed liberals attempted to attach thereto. Writing at the height of the Campaign, Williamson professed his Federation opposed to the abolition of the pass laws, and unopposed to the Group Areas Act. "Speaking ... primarily for the Cape", Williamson continued, "I do not think that social segregation is opposed by any section of the community".⁴⁰ The growing ideological distance between secondary industry and liberal opinion resulted in part from the changed political climate of the 1950s, which saw conservative figures such as Representatives Brookes and Molteno portrayed as extremists.⁴¹ As such, liberal industrialists may well have found it expedient to distance themselves from the activities of liberals in the early 1950s. Williamson's reply to Margaret Ballinger concluded: "What really worries me is an inability to say who the 'we' in the circular may be!"⁴²

³⁸ *The Forum*, October 1952: Equal Rights for all Civilised People. The statement was drafted by Ballinger and Lewin; responses to a draft sent out in September 1952 are as revealing as those to the SAIRR draft mentioned above. See A410/B2.14.18: draft and replies.

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ Ballinger papers: A410/B2.14.18: G.E. Williamson to M. Ballinger, 21-9-1952.

⁴¹ See NP Minister Erik Louw in *The Guardian* 23-3-1950, p.1.

⁴² Ballinger papers: A410/B2.14.18: G.E. Williamson to M. Ballinger, 21-9-1952.

The Defiance Campaign was a mass-based campaign which drew its main strength from the rural areas of the Eastern Cape. With over 8000 volunteers imprisoned and ANC paid-up membership reaching some 100 000, the Campaign extended beyond liberal descriptions of a cleric's revolt. This was emphasised by ANC Youth League member Joe Matthews, writing to his father in America, discussing the *Forum* statement:

the Whites do not realise that the educated are just not in this thing to the extent that one would expect. I for one am not prepared to tolerate any suggestion that will give the benefits of the Defiance campaign to people who did not actually suffer, or work for its success...⁴³

Discussing the call for the reintroduction of the Cape franchise, Matthews commented: "The U.P.group is completely mixed up. The liberals are trying to stage a comeback but I think their campaign died two days after they had issued their statement." Of the qualified franchise itself, Matthews noted simply: "Can papa think of anything more unrealistic?"⁴⁴ The Defiance Campaign highlighted the gap which lay between liberal and radical whites in South Africa; it similarly marked the ideological distance between Congress opinion and white liberals. The exclusion of white liberals from influencing Congress was compounded by their rejection of calls for equal rights for all and extra-parliamentary methods.

By 1952, white liberals were under attack on all fronts. Edgar Brookes had earlier described the gloomy portents for liberalism, stating:

those who believed in constitutional methods ... found themselves ground between the upper and nether millstones of conservatism and what they felt to be the undesirable elements of direct action and boycott.⁴⁵

At the same time, however, the Torch Commando indicated that a potential constituency existed for white anti-Nationalist opposition. In this uncertain context a series of liberal groups were formed in various centres in 1951-52, aimed at formulating a clear liberal policy and launching a political vehicle of some sort as a means of attracting support for liberal ideals.

⁴³ CAMP: Reel 12A:2:XM65:47/9: J.M.Matthews to Z.K.Matthews, 2-10-1952.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ E.H.Brookes in *Race Relations Journal* XV 1948, p.2.

Liberal resurgence.

The formation of liberal groups in the 1951-1953 period was influenced by a number of factors. The exclusion of liberals from influence over a wide range of areas was clearly significant. At the same time there existed considerable optimism engendered by the rise of the Torch Commando. There also existed enthusiasm at the prospect of developing and articulating a clearly 'liberal' policy, rather than (in Marquard's words) having "to choose the lesser of two evils as between the two major parties."⁶⁶ The first liberal group was the Hofmeyr Society, formed in August 1950. Founded by university lecturer Julius Lewin, the Society worked "to maintain in the public life of South Africa the aims and ideals that inspired the late Jan H. Hofmeyr."⁶⁷ It was restricted to UP members and aimed to 'liberalise' the UP from within. As Lewin himself put it, "we don't want another body of liberals avoiding party politics."⁶⁸ As such the Hofmeyr Society did not affiliate to the SALA, and opposed the launching of the Liberal Party.⁶⁹ The Hofmeyr Society had a tiny membership, and enjoyed the disapproval of UP leader Strauss who, Lewin noted, "is unfriendly to the idea and even to our name!"⁷⁰ Overtaken by the Defiance Campaign and its effects on white politics - in particular the flurry of liberal-left activity and Strauss's restatement of traditional segregationist beliefs at the 1952 UP Conference - the Hofmeyr Society faded away by the end of 1952. Its importance lay firstly in its journal *Agenda* which was distributed within the UP and amongst South African liberals. Secondly, and of greater significance, the Hofmeyr Society was the last champion of 'economic liberalism' before the emergence of the Progressive Party in 1959.⁷¹

Early in 1951 the South African Liberal Group [SALG] was formed in Cape Town. Led by Oscar Wollheim, a school teacher and social worker, the SALG also included a Springbok Legion member among its six founding members.⁷² By mid-1952, similar groups -

⁶⁶ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: SALA General Meeting, 16/17-1-1953.

⁶⁷ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.5: Hofmeyr Society Launch Statement: September 1950, p.1.

⁶⁸ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.4: J.Lewin to O.Wollheim, 21-3-1951 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁹ *Agenda* 15: Liberals and Conservatives, 3-6-1953.

⁷⁰ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.4: J.Lewin to O.Wollheim, 21-3-1951.

⁷¹ See below.

⁷² Interview with Oscar Wollheim (1987), transcript p.5.

none with a membership of more than twenty - had been formed in Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Port Elizabeth, East London and Johannesburg.⁷³ By October 1952, Johannesburg boasted three separate liberal groups - the remnants of the Hofmeyr Society; a second group led by Jock Isacowitz and advocate Jack Unterhalter, which sought contact with the SAIC and ANC; and finally a group of prominent academics, church people, SAIRR members and others, led by Margaret Ballinger.

The emergent liberal movement was soon dominated by the Ballinger group which was a study group set up "to clarify the specific implications of a liberal programme."⁷⁴ The Ballinger group was formed in response to the *Forum* statement and included most leading white Johannesburg anti-Nationalists (apart from those already in COD); it soon dominated the other liberal groups.⁷⁵ The Ballinger group was however isolated in its open opposition to moves to form a new political party or association. Despite its objections, the South African Liberal Association was formed in Cape Town in January 1953, with Oscar Wollheim as the moving force. Margaret Ballinger, as the leading liberal figure in the country, was elected chairperson; her own liberal group, however, refused to affiliate.⁷⁶

The SALA, for Wollheim, was formed because "the time had come for a lead from the intelligent people of the country."⁷⁷ The liberal groups of the early 1950s retained the Fabian inclinations of the liberal programmers of the 1940s, and saw themselves as an explicitly elitist grouping. The function of the groups, and later of the SALA, was to canalise liberal opinion while developing and popularising a liberal policy. Oscar Wollheim insisted: "Any really Liberal group must have the support of the intellectuals."⁷⁸ He argued further that it was

⁷³ The Ballinger group had some 20 members, as did Durban and Pietermaritzburg; the SALG had 126 members by December 1952, including UP MPs Colin Eglin and Bernard Friedmann.

⁷⁴ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.2: Minutes: Johannesburg LG, 26-11-1952.

⁷⁵ The Ballinger group included Winifred Hoemle and Ellen Hellmann of the SAIRR, Louis Kane-Berman of the Torch Commando, Jack and Phyllis Lewsen, Thelma Philip, Ambrose Reeves, Trevor Huddleston, Arthur Blaxall, Julius Lewin, Arthur Keppel-Jones, Jack Unterhalter and others.

⁷⁶ Conversation with Professor Phyllis Lewsen.

⁷⁷ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: SALA General Meeting: 16/17-1-1953.

⁷⁸ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.11: O.Wollheim to J.Sutherland, 9-6-1952.

time to bring into the political field that large body of educated, cultured and articulate opinion represented by the professions, universities, teachers etc. We feel that a large proportion of the mass would be prepared to follow the lead of such a group of persons who have never joined a party because existing parties sicken them and who are known for their integrity, common sense and good judgment.⁷⁹

All the liberal groups maintained a degree of secrecy as to their existence so as not to embarrass the UP, of which most were members. As small educative units working with an eye on the UP, the liberal groups restricted their size, while the Ballinger group maintained a white-only membership.⁸⁰

A SALG *Newsletter* published at the height of the Defiance Campaign outlined liberal thinking at the time. Black society, the *Newsletter* argued, was stratified along similar lines to white society. This included a small "cultured and highly developed" upper class, a trading middle class "who have reached a stage of development comparable with similar groups of whites"; and the black working class "which stretches from similar groups of whites down to the most primitive forms of tribal culture."⁸¹ The danger of apartheid, the *Newsletter* warned, lay in ignoring such stratification and treating all blacks in the same manner. The black 'upper class' individual, it warned, "cannot be expected eternally to gaze with philosophical calm at 'Europeans Only' notices wherever he goes" or disregard maltreatment by those "much below his own cultural standards."⁸²

In a similar vein Margaret Ballinger asked of apartheid: "Will it not lead, must it not lead to the emergence of a united anti-European bloc?"⁸³ The liberal groups of 1951-53 repeated Margaret Ballinger's warning, and began to develop common strategies as a means of dealing with black radicalisation. Oscar Wollheim claimed that politicised Africans were "intransigent and radical," and would only speak with white radicals.⁸⁴ Apartheid was rapidly extending this to cover Indians and Coloureds as well. Wollheim argued that liberals had to act soon in order to "hold them," to stop the wholesale black political

⁷⁹ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.8: O.Wollheim to J.Lewin: 8-4-1951.

⁸⁰ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.2: Minutes: Johannesburg LG, 28-4-1953.

⁸¹ LP papers: A/1671-rfm-Reel 1: SALG: *Newsletter*, November 1952, p.1.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Quoted in *African World*, March 1949.

⁸⁴ LP papers: A/1671-rfm-Reel 3: O.Wollheim to R.Stratford, 18-7-1953.

estrangement apartheid was producing.⁸⁵ The chairperson of the Pietermaritzburg liberal group repeated this sentiment more frankly in a speech in June 1952, stating that liberals had to "split [the] Non-Europeans ... [they are a] solid block and regard us as [the] same..."⁸⁶

In essence, liberal strategy comprised the cultivation of a black support base from amongst 'civilised' blacks, who would be enfranchised under the qualified suffrage endorsed by the SALA and LP. This would stop wholesale black political estrangement, and would also allow liberals "to win out against Communism."⁸⁷ The main focus of the early LP, however, was on parliamentary politics. As such, the qualified franchise was also intended to appease white fears of swamping at the polls.

The formation of the Liberal Party.

Central to the various liberal strategies developed in the early 1950s was the need for an active political organisation of some sort to popularise liberal values, and to rally electoral or other support for them. Liberals in various centres had made calls for a 'liberal party' at regular intervals after 1936, mainly directed at Jan Hofmeyr, but nothing had happened.⁸⁸ Following Hofmeyr's death, Margaret Ballinger was frequently approached with the same request, and although she showed more interest, she too refused to launch or lead a new party.⁸⁹

The Ballinger liberal group similarly rejected calls for the transformation of the SALA into a political party; at the centre of their objections lay what Margaret Ballinger argued was

a fundamental difference between liberal principles and seeking mass support. In sticking to the former we would largely forego the latter.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: P.Brown: Notes for speech, 21-6-1952.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, 7-7-1952.

⁸⁸ See Alan Paton: *Hofmeyr* (Cape Town 1964) p.214, pp.230-232. See also Marquard papers: BC587 C71.2: L.Marquard to J.H.Hofmeyr, 25-9-1946; 8-6-1948; 21-6-1948.

⁸⁹ See for example: Ballinger papers: BC345 G2.2.1a: K.Kirkwood to Ballinger, 21-8-1948; A410/B2.10.1: CRL to Ballinger, 11-5-1950; *The Guardian* 28-4-1949; *The Forum* 30-4-1949, 7-5-1949, 14-5-1949.

⁹⁰ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.2: Minutes: Johannesburg LG, 28-4-1953.

The Ballinger group was the most explicitly fabianite of the 1951-53 liberal groups. It was able to influence the development of liberal thinking amongst the various groups, most clearly in its insistence on the adoption of a constitutional clause endorsing "only democratic and constitutional means" and opposing "all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism."⁴¹

Despite its evident intellectual authority, however, the Ballinger group was isolated in its opposition to calls for a more activist liberal role. The political 'new blood' in the various liberal groups pushed with increasing assertiveness for the formation of a political party. Margaret Ballinger was looked to as the natural leader of such a party, despite the resistance of her own liberal group. In response, the chairperson of the Pietermaritzburg liberal group stated: "we have been hoping for a lead from someone in authority' ... [but with] no sign of that ... we'll have to do it ourselves."⁴²

Political conditions in the 1950-52 period influenced the development of liberalism and liberal strategies. This was made evident by the opposition to extra-parliamentary action enshrined in the programmes of the various liberal groups, adopted at the height of the Defiance Campaign. The United Party rather than the Congress movement remained the central focus of liberal attention. The aim of the emerging liberal movement, according to Wollheim, was to act as "a pistol pointed at the head of the U.P."⁴³ While doing all they could to avoid embarrassing the United Party through close public association with it, the liberal groups focussed their attention on influencing the U.P.⁴⁴ Groups of liberals were active in UP constituency organisations in Durban, Johannesburg and elsewhere, and succeeded in influencing candidate selection in a number of cases.⁴⁵ The 1953 general election saw Helen Suzman, John Cope and other UP liberals first elected to parliament.

⁴¹ These clauses were adopted by the SALG following comments by the Ballinger group on the SALG Programme; they were then adopted in Pietermaritzburg and elsewhere, and were included in the SALA and LP constitutions.

⁴² LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: P.Brown, notes for speech, 21-6-1952.

⁴³ Wollheim papers: BC627 D28: O.Wollheim to J.Lewin, 8-4-1951.

⁴⁴ Ernie Wentzel papers: Minutes: SALA Federal Council, 26-4-1953.

⁴⁵ Interview with Terence Beard (1986), transcript p.2.

Nonetheless, the various liberal groups (apart from the Ballinger group) envisaged the formation of a new party at some future date.⁹⁶ The failure of the UP to 'liberalise' its policies was compounded by its failure to defeat the NP in April 1953. The SALA Federal Council concluded that liberals were "thinking that they might just as well have been defeated on an honest liberal programme as on the compromise which they had adopted."⁹⁷ SALA's Transvaal Region, following the 1953 election, were reported to be "almost unanimously" in favour of launching a 'liberal party.'⁹⁸ In May 1953, the Transvaal called a national SALA meeting to debate the issue.

The manner in which the Liberal Party of South Africa was launched, on 9 May 1953, reveals the confusions and contradictions which beset postwar South African liberals. At the SALA meeting called by the Transvaal Region, those in favour of a new party pointed to the imminent formation of the Union-Federal Party in Natal, and to possible unilateral action by the Transvaal SALA, as reasons for launching a party. It was also argued that, following the launch of the Congress of Democrats, there existed a "need to provide an alternative to Communist influence on African organisations, especially on the Rand."⁹⁹ Margaret Ballinger however urged liberals to refrain from precipitate political action, repeating her argument that "a lot more precise thinking [is] needed on liberalism."¹⁰⁰ Marquard advised that consultation with black leaders would have to take place before such a step were taken, which Donald Molteno phrased more bluntly, stating: "The leadership of the Non-Europeans would not have anything to do with Liberalism at present anyway."¹⁰¹

The opposition of the three most prominent liberal figures - Ballinger, Molteno and Marquard - to the formation of a new party had clearly to be overcome if such a party were to have any chance of success. Oscar Wollheim and Leslie Rubin, a Cape lawyer

⁹⁶ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: SALG Constitution: "It is the object of the Group to become a political party when so decided at a general meeting."

⁹⁷ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.6: Minutes: SALA Federal Council, 18-4-1953.

⁹⁸ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.6: Minutes: SALA Federal Council: 29-5-1953.

⁹⁹ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.6: Minutes: SALA General Meeting, 8/9-5-1953.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*; see Johannesburg LG, 26-11-1952.

¹⁰¹ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.6: Minutes: SALA Federal Council: 18-4-1953.

prominent in Torch Commando and the SALA, therefore tipped off the press before the SALA meeting. The *Cape Times* on 6 May carried a story reporting the history of the SALA (which had previously shunned publicity), and associated the names of Moltano, Marquard, Ballinger and author Alan Paton with moves to form a new party.¹⁰² Margaret Ballinger was mandated by her liberal group to oppose the formation of a new party.¹⁰³ Natal delegates carried a similar mandate.¹⁰⁴ The voting on the issue on the first day was 15:5 in favour of a party, not the required majority. On 9 May, the Natal delegates switched their votes, and only two votes opposed formation - those of first Liberal Party chairperson Margaret Ballinger, and Vice-Chairperson Donald Moltano.¹⁰⁵ Leo Marquard later explained that Rubin and Wollheim

to some extent jumped the gun by publishing our names (Moltano, Margaret Ballinger and me) and facing us with a *fait accompli*. Once that was done we had either to dissociate ourselves from the move or help to found a Liberal Party.¹⁰⁶

The immediate reaction within the SALA was enthusiastic and optimistic. A number of members believed that there existed a large constituency that would vote for their progressive racial message.¹⁰⁷ An approach from the Labour Party calling on liberals to join it rather than continue with a separate organisation was rejected, liberals arguing that they would soon be the larger organisation.¹⁰⁸ Alan Paton spoke of the Liberal Party enjoying up to 40% of the popular vote, and claimed that "the Party could be launched in every town and city."¹⁰⁹ Other party members predicted a UP split and the accession by the LP of parliamentary representation.¹¹⁰ As it was, the Liberal Party was launched with some 500 members; a year later this had risen to 971.¹¹¹ The only representation the party enjoyed

¹⁰² *The Cape Times* 6-5-1953, p.1.

¹⁰³ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.2: Minutes: Johannesburg LG, 26-4-1953; conversation with Group member Phyllis Lewsen.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Peter Brown (1987) transcript p.22.

¹⁰⁵ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.6: Minutes: SALA General Meeting: 8/9-5-1953; the Minutes do not record names against votes, but negative mandates were held by Ballinger, Moltano and the Natal delegates; the former did not switch their votes. UP MP Colin Eglin thus voted for the LP while remaining a UP member.

¹⁰⁶ Marquard papers: BC587 E2.88: L.Marquard to P.Brown, 27-12-1964. See also CAM? Reel 9A:2:XB2:96/4: Interview with M.Ballinger, 18-1-1964.

¹⁰⁷ Interviews with O.Wollheim, P.Brown, and J.Unterhalter.

¹⁰⁸ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.19: O.Wollheim to A.Paton, 23-2-1953.

¹⁰⁹ Ballinger papers: A410 B2.14.18: A.S.Paton to M.Ballinger, 22-9-1952, and A.S.Paton to Q.Whyte, 3-2-1953.

¹¹⁰ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: O.Wollheim to R.Stratford, 18-7-1953.

¹¹¹ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: National Committee, 30-6-1953 and 30-

were the Native Representatives.

The SALA Constitution was adopted by the LP. As a result, the LP in 1953 emerged as a nonracial party with constitutionally enshrined anti-communist sentiments, and which supported a qualified franchise. Moreover, both the SALA and LP stated their opposition to extra-parliamentary activity. This bore the clear imprint of the Ballinger group which in its statement of principles used a phrase adopted by the liberal groups, the SALA and the LP, that they would use "only democratic and constitutional means" of opposition; the Ballinger group statement had ended by repeating: "the Liberal group affirms its faith in the Parliamentary system."¹¹²

By endorsing only parliamentary activity, an important section of liberal opinion (led by Margaret Ballinger) was concerned to distance itself from the extra-parliamentary activities of the Congress movement, and more particularly from the newly-launched Congress of Democrats. In so doing, however, the leadership of the LP was also at odds with much of the party membership. The tensions within both the SALA and the LP set up a series of contradictions which were played out within the LP throughout the 1950s. On basic issues of strategy and party policy the LP suffered internal ructions, as competing factions sought to maintain the party focus on white parliamentary politics, or to shift it to the black extra-parliamentary arena. This basic division was compounded by the wide range of political perspectives included within the SALA and LP. As a result, a number of important issues were subsumed within a more wide-ranging internal dispute.¹¹³ This will be illustrated by an analysis of economic issues within the emergent liberal movement and in the LP.

Economic liberalism?

Both the SALA and LP were marked by the almost complete absence of an economic policy or set of economic proposals. The administrative thrust of liberalism as it had developed

6-1954.

¹¹² W.Ballinger papers: BC347 E1.10: Johannesburg LG: Principles and Aims, nd.1952.

¹¹³ See chapter 8.

in the late 1940s began to give way, in the 1951-53 period, before a growing stress on civil rights and the affirmation of moral values. The United Party MP and SALA member Robin Stratford warned early in 1951 that

it is too readily assumed ... that policies dictated by goodwill and reason have only to be widely proclaimed to be as widely accepted ... [liberals] are content with principles and tend to shy away from practical politics...¹¹⁴

The liberal movement was held together by opposition to racism, to the NP government, and to the mass-based extra-parliamentary campaigns of the Congress movement. Unified in these three areas, the LP was formed despite the deep differences between liberals on other issues.

As a result, common opposition to racial discrimination was taken to be of greater importance than developing a liberal economic policy. Christopher Gell, formerly with the Indian civil service and confined to an iron lung for all but a few hours each day, was an influential liberal critic with close ANC and SAIC links. Gell called on the LP to avoid committing itself to either a socialist or laissez-faire programme "in order to fight the main issue of colour domination."¹¹⁵ In the early 1950s, the affirmation of principle took almost complete precedence over the development of a liberal economic policy.

'Economic liberalism' was a concept widely debated in the liberal journal *The Forum* and elsewhere in the late 1940s. In a series of articles and editorials, *The Forum* called for the creation of a 'black middle class' which, with a stake in society, would not be amenable to 'communistic' influences. Articles in *The Forum* claimed that South African "salvation" lay in economic progress and a steadily rising black standard of living.¹¹⁶ *The Forum* accepted that political separation was incompatible with 'economic integration'; it proposed solving this by a return to the old Cape franchise. Faced with the intractable problem of white fears of being 'swamped' by black voters, *The Forum* in turn explained that this could be overcome "by heavily loading the franchise of the non-European in comparison with that of the European."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.1: R.Stratford to O.Wollheim, 13-3-1951.

¹¹⁵ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: C.Gell to R.F.Spence, 1-8-1954.

¹¹⁶ *The Forum* 16-7-1949: The Liberals' Policy for Natives, p.3.

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

The Hofmeyr Society followed a similar line to *The Forum*, and attempted to put itself in line with commercial and industrial capital, which it described as "the forces of progress."¹¹⁸ Eleanor Hawarden, a noted educationalist and Hofmeyr Society founder, stated: "We should stand for a liberal capitalism."¹¹⁹ The Society argued that this meant that, within an expanding economy, black income and opportunities could be increased without threatening the protected white standard of living. The Society called on liberals to concentrate on developing a sound economic policy because the NP was "weak on such subjects and because we can't compete with them on racialism."¹²⁰ The Hofmeyr Society, however, was unable to convince liberal groups formed after it to concentrate on economic issues. The SALG was the only liberal group other than the Hofmeyr Society to raise the question of economic liberalism, including economic proposals in its 'Ten Point Programme' circulated amongst the various liberal groups for debate. The draft economic clause called for the development of human and material resources "for the benefit of all," and for "the regulation of our economic machine to eliminate the unhealthy exploitation of the many for the few."¹²¹ This was later amended this to call for "the need to control state or other monopolies."¹²²

The Ballinger group rejected the SALG formulation "for its Socialist orientation", but offered no alternative.¹²³ The other groups were unable to reach agreement on the issue, and as a result largely ignored the economic arena. The SALG in Cape Town concluded: "it was felt that the necessity existed for some reference ... to an economic policy" but that it "should not be worded so that it could be interpreted as favouring either Socialism or free enterprise..."¹²⁴ Lacking consensus, no coherent statement of liberal economics was produced by any of the various groups. As a result, the SALA Principles were unspecific in dealing with economic issues; the Association endorsed economic integration and called

¹¹⁸ Wollheim papers: BC627 D2.2: E.Hawarden: How to Strengthen the United Party (Hofmeyr Society speech) 1-11-1950.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

¹²¹ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: SALG (draft) Ten Point Programme, nd.1951.

¹²² LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: SALG Ten Point Programme, June 1952.

¹²³ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.2: Minutes: Johannesburg LG, 26-11-1952, p.2.

¹²⁴ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: SALG, 24-6-1952.

for the "stabilization of labour and sound family life."¹²⁵

The economic debate was further complicated as it became caught up in an internal LP power struggle, which afflicted the LP after its rushed formation in May 1953. In most of the internal LP disputes there were two clear opposing sides: what was called the 'radical' wing of the party, which supported universal suffrage, the endorsement of extra-parliamentary action and close links with the Congresses; and the more conservative wing, which regarded the qualified franchise as a principle, and saw the LP as a parliamentary political party. As Christopher Gell pointed out, "the 'Left' and 'Right' wing division in the party ... coincide[s] so nearly with provincial boundaries."¹²⁶ The Transvaal was most frequently associated with the more 'radical' position, in opposition to the more conservative Cape.

The LP economic policy became embroiled in the Transvaal/Cape power struggle which raged throughout the 1953-1957 period. By the end of 1953, although Liberal Party candidates were already contesting provincial elections, the LP had still not agreed on an economic policy.¹²⁷ The Cape Division had the majority of LP members and could thereby ensure its influence was translated into policy. As such, the Cape elected economists Sheila van der Horst and Ralph Horwitz to the 1953/54 Labour and Economic Commission, thereby excluding any Transvaal representatives.¹²⁸ In 1954 Horwitz advised the LP National Committee that to attract financial support from industrial concerns the party would at least have to clearly state its support for free enterprise.¹²⁹ The Transvaal delegates rejected Horwitz's argument, warning that if forced to they would call for a fully socialist policy in opposition to such a statement. The National Committee, unable to negotiate the impasse, left the issue alone; the party's economic preferences, the Committee argued, should be understood "by implication."¹³⁰ The resultant policy document, like its SALA predecessor, was unspecific and obscure. In 1954, Leo Marquard described it as "vague

¹²⁵ Molteno papers: BC579 E1.26: SALA Principles, February 1952.

¹²⁶ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: C.Gell to R.F.Spence, 1-8-1954.

¹²⁷ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: National Committee, November 1953.

¹²⁸ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: National Committee, 1953-54.

¹²⁹ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.6: Minutes: National Committee, 27/28-2-1954.

¹³⁰ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: J.Boerne [LP secretary] to M.Ballinger, 20-7-1954.

and full of pious sentiments."¹³¹

We have seen the failure of liberal attempts to rally industrial support during the Defiance Campaign, and the gap which lay between the labour requirements of secondary industry and even the conservative proposals of the liberal programmes in the late 1940s. The early 1950s witnessed the implementation of apartheid measures alongside a strengthening economy, and wartime liberal faith in the incompatibility of economic expansion and segregation came to be expressed in terms of the inescapability of economic integration. The SALA and the LP took economic integration as their starting point, and concentrated not on winning support for such integration but on outlining the political dispensation which should result from it.

The LP drew into its ranks social-democrats and others who proposed an increasingly democratic political dispensation to be demanded by the LP. In effect, the middle ground which liberals hoped to tread became increasingly untenable. The LP could not develop an economic policy capable of appeasing the left and right wings of the LP itself; at the same time, industrial capital had rejected even the conservative proposals of the 1940s. As the LP programme became less conservative during the 1950s, so the gap between organised liberal opinion and industrial capital grew. Liberal faith in the transforming power of economic integration was undermined by the steady economic growth of the 1950s despite (as they saw it) the increasingly harsh implementation of influx control regulations. This was compounded by the changed political climate of the 1950s, which saw the Liberal Party roundly attacked by both the government and the UP opposition as idealists (at best), negrophiles or extremists. Julius Lewin later noted:

The businessmen whom one might have expected to rally round a liberal party, did nothing of the kind. They even discouraged their wives from doing so on the grounds that it was bad for business if their own private sympathies were suspected.¹³²

The Liberal Party received no capitalist support throughout its fifteen year existence.¹³³

¹³¹ Marquard papers: BC587 E2.66: Leo Marquard: General Notes on the Liberal Party, nd.1954.

¹³² Julius Lewin: Why Liberalism Failed in The Cape Times, 28-4-1970.

¹³³ Interviews with Peter Brown, Alan Paton and others. See also Lipton: Capitalism op.cit., p.293.

Attempts to generate financial support from industrial capital in particular were unsuccessful.¹³⁴ The party survived on membership dues, donations and fund-raising events such as book and cake sales; its main source of financial income came privately from members Peter Brown and Alan Paton.¹³⁵

'Not yet liberal enough.'¹³⁶

Although the majority of liberals agreed on the need for a new party, the liberal movement was internally divided on a number of fundamental issues. The economic dispute revealed confusion amongst liberals and later Liberal Party members as to what interests they should represent, and consequent lack of clarity as to how to frame their policies and political activities. At base, liberals were not agreed as to whether the prime focus of their activity should be in the white parliamentary arena or in black politics. This lack of clarity threw up a series of specific issues which divided the SALA and early LP. One such issue was the question of nonracialism.

Recently described as the 'guiding principle' of the LP, nonracialism was not automatically accepted by the liberal movement.¹³⁷ The Ballinger group, as we have seen, maintained a white-only membership; most of the other groups accepted nonracial membership. The claim made by the editors of *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa* that the LP "was formed with many African members and some African leaders" is patently inaccurate.¹³⁸ None of the liberal groups succeeded in enrolling more than one or two black members.¹³⁹ In attempting to change this situation the LP adopted what later party chairperson Peter Brown described as a "genuine anomaly" - namely, open party membership alongside a qualified franchise.¹⁴⁰ By this means, the LP enrolled members

¹³⁴ Party Treasurer Robin Spence attempted to rally such support in 1954 and was unsuccessful; sporadic attempts thereafter had similar results. See A/1671-mfm-Reel 1.

¹³⁵ See Alan Paton: *Journey Continued* (Cape Town 1988).

¹³⁶ Christopher Gell in *The Forum*, September 1953.

¹³⁷ Douglas Irvine: *The Liberal Party, 1953-1968* in Butler, Elphick and Welsh (ed.s): *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa* (Cape Town 1987), p.116.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.6.

¹³⁹ The only prominent black member of a liberal group was Selby Msimang in Pietermaritzburg; the SALG had four black members; liberal groups elsewhere had no black members.

¹⁴⁰ CAMP:Reel 9A:2:XB26:96: Interview with P.Brown (1964).

regardless of whether they would be enfranchised under the party's electoral proposals or not.

The Ballinger group, typically, had analysed the motivations behind nonracialism. In debating the issue, one member pointed out that to refuse black members would mean that "we would be falling behind even the U.P. which had a Coloured branch."¹⁴¹ Torch Commando chairperson Louis Kane-Berman, later closely linked to the Union-Federal Party in Natal, stated more bluntly: "We [have] two instruments, 1. Natal and 2. the Non-European." He noted that having black members

might be dangerous but bold measures were needed and the Nats would be really alarmed at any overtures made to the Non-European.¹⁴²

The need to enroll black liberals as a bulwark against the spread of 'communist' influence was widely expressed.¹⁴³ The opening of party membership to all was opposed by those LP members who saw the parliamentary arena as the prime focus of liberal activity. One such member warned: "we are letting the liberal idea run away with us. It is possible to be so liberal that we have no standards at all."¹⁴⁴ Another stated:

the movement can only achieve results if it gains public support, which will be alienated if the Group is stampeded into flaunting its liberalism by giving office to non-Europeans, particularly if the latter are not very carefully selected.¹⁴⁵

The basic LP dispute, over the status of black or white political work, affected other areas of liberal strategy. For those who focussed on black political work and sought closer relations with the ANC and SAIC, the 'civilised' franchise was seen as a major obstacle, and the LP soon split over the franchise issue. Anti-communism, which also engendered Congress hostility, soon split the party as a section of the LP 'left wing' campaigned for its deletion from the party programme. Each of these disputed attempts to democratise the party programme was opposed by precisely those leaders the LP had 'hi-jacked' in May 1953.

¹⁴¹ Ballinger papers: A410/F3.2: Minutes: Johannesburg LG, 28-4-1953.

¹⁴² *ibid.*

¹⁴³ See for example LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Pietermaritzburg LG, notes for meetings 21-6-1952, 7-7-1952.

¹⁴⁴ Marquard papers: BC587 E2.26: I.Grant to H.Meidner, 10-6-1953.

¹⁴⁵ LP papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: member of the Pietermaritzburg LG to chairperson [names illegible] 9-12-1952.

Conclusion.

The election of prominent liberals from the 1940s as leaders of the LP obscured the nature of the party itself. The Representatives were respected, in some cases almost revered figures¹⁴⁶; their political creed, however, was conservative. The Liberal Party was a political hybrid which fed off a number of political traditions, born moreover in the specific conditions of the 1952-53 period. The socialists, social-democrats and others who joined the LP because of its anti-communist stance, or its nonracialism, were soon drawn into open conflict with the party leaders and their supporters. Within a year of its formation, LP leader Margaret Ballinger tendered her resignation, complaining:

I find it quite impossible to carry the burden of responsibility that the leadership requires in this formative period, without the active support of a group of people of my own type in whose judgement and integrity I can have confidence.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ For example, see the introduction to Phyllis Lewsen: *Voices of Protest* (Johannesburg 1987).

¹⁴⁷ Marquard papers: BC587 E2.62: M.Ballinger to L.Marquard, 19-6-1954.

Chapter seven.

The internal politics and external relations of the Liberal Party, 1953 - 1957.

Introduction.

The Liberal Party was beset by internal disagreement over issues of ideology and strategy throughout the 1950s. Disputation centred on three particular issues: the qualified franchise, and constitutional clauses which committed the LP "to oppose all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism" and limited the party to constitutional means of opposition.¹ Disputation stemmed from the nature of the LP, an umbrella body with members of widely divergent political outlook, and from the different activities in which LP members participated, ranging from white electoral politics to grass-roots co-operation with the Congress Alliance. Underlying LP disputes were differing conceptions of liberalism.

By 1956, with a new leadership, the LP articulated a vision of change to the apartheid state based on mass non-violent pressure in which the LP would play a part alongside the Congresses. This replaced the notion held by earlier LP leaders that by offering a living example of racial co-operation and "by argument, much organisation, and ceaseless constitutional action,"² the LP would emerge as the only vehicle for evolutionary change. While influenced by Congress criticism, changes in the LP resulted largely from an internal critique of liberalism initiated by party radicals and intellectuals in 1953. This chapter traces developments in liberalism as illustrated by the Liberal Party in the mid-1950s.

The Liberal Party in 1953.

The formation of the LP followed publication of the 1952 *Forum* statement calling for the national application of the Cape liberal tradition.³ The party was led by well-known liberal figures including the Ballingers, Donald Molteno, Leo Marquard, Alan Paton and others, and was hailed in the English press as "a new party formed to revive and keep alive an

¹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Principles 1953.

² T.W.Price: The Liberal Party Replies, in *Liberation* September 1953; see below.

³ See chapter 6.

old idea.⁴ Margaret Ballinger saw the party as a support group for the Native Representatives and the principles they espoused in parliament:

the policy of the Liberal Party is an evolutionary policy aiming at the progressive widening of the field of personal liberty for all sections of the population.... By general admission, this line has always been taken by those of us who have represented Africans over the last seventeen years, and who are now identified with the Liberal Party.⁵

The Liberal Party emerged from its first National Conference in July 1953 with a statement of principle almost entirely derived from the Liberal Association [SALA]. The LP endorsed a qualified nonracial franchise, endorsed segregation by consent but not by force⁶, and opposed "all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism."⁷ Moreover, the party was committed to using "only democratic and constitutional means" of opposition.⁸ Margaret Ballinger claimed that the LP's constitutional approach would ultimately offer blacks "a full share in the life of this country" and obviate another "unparliamentary outbreak like the Defiance Campaign."⁹ Margaret Ballinger, joined by her husband Senator William Ballinger (and LP members Walter Stanford and Leslie Rubin, elected Native Representatives in 1954), advised the LP to concentrate on the general principles it had endorsed and to leave "practical decisions on day to day issues" to the parliamentarians.¹⁰

Ballinger called on the 1953 party conference to concentrate on strengthening the central machinery of the LP, and raising funds for a newspaper and national Organiser. Above all, the party had to avoid "being stampeded" into "hasty" policy formulation.¹¹ In this Ballinger was supported by a number of leading LP members who reacted to the hostile reception the Congresses had given the LP by claiming that the "enemies" of the party "want ...

⁴ *The Cape Argus* (leader article), 6-5-1953.

⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: M.Ballinger: What Does the Liberal Party Stand For?: nd.1955.

⁶ *Advance* 11-6-1953, p.4: at the first LP public meeting, Alan Paton stated: "Let us have 10 000 colour bars by consent if necessary, but not one imposed by one race on another."

⁷ LP: *Principles* op.cit.

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ *Advance*, 25-6-1953.

¹⁰ Ballinger papers A410/F3.5: M.Ballinger: Presidential Address, 1953 LP National Conference, p.2.

¹¹ *ibid.*

something to twist."¹² Leading LP members argued that the acceptance of a 'common society,' reflected in the nonracial franchise proposals, was sufficient for a party barely two months old; it would give the parliamentarians "plenty of time to give the best elaboration of our principles."¹³

The LP was a hybrid body. It was united by opposition to racially discriminatory apartheid legislation, and the constitutional abrogation of the Nationalist party in attempting to disenfranchise black voters. The party also included members opposed to various aspects of the Congress Alliance including its multiracial structure, the methods it employed and the presence of former members of the Communist Party of South Africa in all four Congresses. As such, LP members held widely divergent political views. The rushed formation of the LP had precluded all but the most general discussion of the policies the party should adopt, or the strategies it should follow.¹⁴

As we have seen, both the Natal and Transvaal Divisions of the LP included socialist and social-democratic members who saw the party as a vehicle for working with both black and white communities. Jock Isacowitz, former CPSA member and a leading personality in the Transvaal LP, envisaged a party "acceptable to whites but with an entree to blacks. A party of today but tuned to tomorrow."¹⁵ Many LP members were concerned primarily with organising blacks, and party members in Natal turned immediately to developing a black membership.¹⁶ The confusion over aims and strategy within the LP meant that the party *Principles* were themselves contested by the Transvaal and Natal Divisions. As a result, the 1953 Conference ignored the advice of its leaders and adopted a wide range of policies. These covered education, health, labour and economics, relations with other organisations, the franchise and other issues.

The conflictual nature of the LP economic policy, as we have seen, saw the Transvaal

¹² LP papers A1671-mfm-Reel 3: L.Marquard to M.Ballinger, 19-6-1953.

¹³ Ballinger: *Address op.cit.*, p.2.

¹⁴ See chapter 6.

¹⁵ Quoted in Ernie Wentzel: *Memoirs op.cit.*, A35.

¹⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Natal report to National Committee [hereafter NC], 21/2-11-1953. Interviews with Natal members Peter Brown, Leo Kuper and Violaine Jurod.

directly opposed to the Cape¹⁷; as such, it was representative of almost all the policies adopted in 1953. All the LP office bearers elected in 1953, apart from Alan Paton, were members of the Cape Division. The Cape also had a numerical preponderance, with 380 members against the Transvaal's 329 and Natal's 201 members.¹⁸ As a result, the challenge from the Transvaal in support of universal suffrage and close co-operation with the Congress Alliance was overridden by the Cape, and the SALA *Principles* were adopted by the LP.

The basis of disagreement at the 1953 Conference was the role of the LP in black politics. For many, the black political arena was the major area in which the LP should work; for others the LP was a parliamentary party concerned with winning white voter support. The LP policy on 'Relations With Non-European Organisations' was contested but Cape dominance ensured that the LP stopped well short of endorsement of the struggle waged by the Congresses. The policy professed "profound sympathy" with the black struggle; only in 1954 did the policy name the African National Congress and South African Indian Congress as representative black political organisations.¹⁹ Pressure from Natal and the Transvaal Divisions however succeeded in committing the LP to accepting the compatibility of joint Congress/LP membership.²⁰

The most hotly debated issue at the 1953 National Conference was the franchise policy. After "considerable discussion,"²¹ the conference endorsed a qualified but nonracial franchise, with the Cape representatives arguing that

there is ... a justification for withholding political rights from people who are not sufficiently civilised to use them in a responsible manner. It is therefore necessary to lay down a test as a means of distinguishing between civilised and uncivilised South Africans, and to grant political rights to all who can pass that test ... It is desirable that the test should be a fairly stiff one in a country where there is a wide range of cultural levels.²²

The Transvaal delegates in contrast called for the endorsement of universal suffrage, or at

¹⁷ See chapter 6.

¹⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: NC 30/31-6-1954.

¹⁹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: 1953 National Conference, 11/13-7-1953.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Cape Division: An Electoral Policy for South Africa: July 1953 (private papers of Ernest Wentzel).

least its inclusion as the 'ultimate goal' of the LP. Pressure from Natal - the only Division with influential black members - succeeded in altering the franchise qualifications from 'civilised' to 'suitably qualified' and linked to a policy of universal compulsory education. The Cape delegates compromised on their call for high qualifications and the LP policy proposed the enfranchisement of those over 21 years of age who had a standard six education, or earned £250 a year, or owned property valued at £500 or more; it also proposed a tribunal for those over the age of 35 not enfranchised by the above criteria but who were "adjudged ... to deserve the franchise on the grounds that they occupy positions of special responsibility or have rendered meritorious service to the community."²⁵

Transvaal delegates also called for deletion of the clause in the party *Principles* which called for opposition 'to all forms of totalitarianism such as communism and fascism, arguing that the clause should also include the party's main antagonist, apartheid.'²⁶ This was defeated. In essence, Cape dominance of the early LP ensured the formation of a party with policies tailored to gently nurturing the emergence of a racially tolerant white electorate. Calls for the LP to become active in the black political arena were rejected by the party leadership which insisted that "the Liberal Party is an ordinary normal political Party, pledged to attain its objects by normal methods."²⁷ The LP accordingly turned to contesting the 1953 Johannesburg City Council elections, where after a vigorous campaign LP candidates received an average of 29% of votes cast.²⁸ Although the party was soundly defeated by United Party candidates - no Liberal Party candidate ever won an election²⁹

the LP in 1953 functioned as a conventional political party, concentrating on electioneering, fund-raising and membership drives.

The 1953 party leadership and membership were predominantly white, drawn from the

²⁵ Minutes: National Conference *op.cit.*, July 1953.

²⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 6: Resolutions from Kensington branch to 1953 National Conference, 11/13-7-1953.

²⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: O.Wollheim: Liberal Party Memorandum: nd.?1954.

²⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Transvaal Report, 11-7-1954.

²⁹ The LP enjoyed parliamentary representation through the Native Representatives - Margaret and William Ballinger, Walter Stanford and Leslie Rubin. All stood as Independents in the 1954 elections, despite being members of the National and Executive Committees of the LP. In 1957 B.P.H.('Bunny') Curran, Eastern Cape Provincial Councillor, joined the LP after his election.

professional English-speaking middle classes. The National Committee was entirely white and included one professor, three university lecturers, an author, a publisher, a surveyor, four lawyers, a chemist and a social worker alongside Margaret and William Ballinger, and Bishop Parker of Cape Town. In 1954 an enlarged National Committee revealed a similar composition, with ten university lecturers and seven lawyers out of a total of thirty-two Committee members. The Executive Committee, which effectively ran the party in day to day matters, was restricted to office-bearers, all of whom were white.²⁸ The various Provincial Committees were overwhelmingly made up of lawyers and academics.

In 1954, however, black representatives from the Natal Division were elected to the National Committee. This followed an increase in black party membership in Natal, and pointed to a growing divergence within the LP over the nature and function of the party itself. Within the LP there existed different interpretations of the party's function - to concentrate on wooing white voter support, to enroll black members and instill liberal values in them, to co-operate with the Congresses, or to transform the LP into a significant black political organisation in its own right. As a result, party Divisions undertook differing political activities. These divergences in turn both reflected and stemmed from a deeper ideological debate taking place within the LP, over the nature of liberalism in South Africa and the correct organisational form it should adopt.

Liberalism and the Liberal Party.

The disputes within the Liberal Party centred on the party's role in black politics. Relations between the LP and the Congress movement were soured from the start as the LP was seen to have been formed in competition with SACOD, and threatened to compete with the Congresses for membership. Joe Matthews advised the 1953 Cape ANC Conference not to trust "the appeal of those who call themselves 'Liberals' or 'friends' of the African people."²⁹ His father, Z.K. Matthews, stated in the same year:

The question is whether they have enough strength and enough ability to overcome

²⁸ The Executive Committee in 1953 comprised Margaret and William Ballinger, Leo Marquard, Donald Molteno, Oscar Wollheim, Leslie Rubin, Robin Spence, Alan Paton and Professor T.W. Price.

²⁹ Quoted in Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.98.

the reluctance of the average liberal white South African to work with instead of for the African.²⁰

The general antipathy which the Congress movement directed towards the LP - accusing the party of standing "outside the democratic camp"²¹ and offering the Congress movement "little sops" which were of "no value"²² - was replicated in formal meetings between representatives of the LP and the Congresses across the country in 1953.

Natal Indian Congress [NIC] representatives criticised the LP for both its franchise policy and rejection of extra-parliamentary means; a meeting with Natal ANC leaders produced similar criticism, as did meetings with Thomas Ngwenya and Joe Nkatlo of the Cape ANC and with ANC Secretary-General Walter Sisulu in Johannesburg.²³ Jock Isacowitz reported that hostility towards the LP in Johannesburg - the headquarters of SACOD and the ANC - was such that even informal meetings with representatives of the ANC were all but impossible to arrange.²⁴ At the 1953 ANC Annual Conference, President-General Albert Lutuli accepted co-operation with the LP on agreed issues but rejected the LP policy of joint membership:

We must be on guard against members of the A.N.C. becoming members of political Parties whose objectives are different from our own. Divided allegiance would be difficult for the individual concerned.²⁵

Congress criticism focussed the attention of those LP members who sought closer relations with the ANC and SAIC on the franchise and extra-parliamentary activity. The same policies stood in the way of those who sought to penetrate the black community without developing close links with the Congress movement. As a result, these two issues became the centre of a party-wide dispute which lasted throughout the 1950s. The dispute centred also on a third issue, the question of anti-communism.

²⁰ Quoted in Anthony Sampson: Treason Cage (London 1958), p.102.

²¹ G.M.Naicker quoted in Indian Opinion 19-2-1954.

²² Dr.Yusuf Dadoo quoted in Advance 14-5-1953, p.5.

²³ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: J.T.R.Gibson: Report of Meeting With Cape A.N.C., 21-1-1954; Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: Minutes: Natal Provincial Committee [hereafter NPC], 15-10-1953.

²⁴ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 6: Minutes: Transvaal Provincial Committee [hereafter TPC], 25-6-1953.

²⁵ Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.123: Albert Lutuli: Presidential Address to the 1953 ANC Annual Conference.

The anti-communist clause in the LP *Principles* was matched by attacks on SACOD as a scarcely-veiled communist front intent on manipulating the other Congresses. Jimmy Gibson, a young Cape lawyer and one of the more radical members of the early LP, claimed that in the Cape "the regional branch [of the ANC] had become the plaything of politically interested persons and had no power whatsoever."²⁶ Gibson and his supporters saw the best means of contesting perceived communist influence as being an all-out attack on SACOD, under the auspices of the Cape Western by-elections which followed the unseating of Brian Bunting and Ray Alexander from parliament.²⁷

Where party radicals saw the task of the LP to be the development of a black support base, the first LP leaders were primarily concerned with gaining white voter support. Vice-chairperson Leo Marquard stressed that the LP "must consult Africans and Coloureds and Asians"; but, he argued:

We should not place ourselves in the position of negotiating with the A.N.C., except on a purely informal and almost personal basis.²⁸

In its initial phase, many LP leaders were openly hostile to the methods of opposition endorsed by the Congresses, and to the prominent position of former CPSA members in the Congress movement. As such, opposition to the aims of the disbanded CPSA influenced the rejection of extra-parliamentary action. Oscar Wollheim stated:

Few people of liberal thought would complain about the basic principles of what ... [the Congresses] eventually aim at but many disapprove heartily of the methods envisage[d], of the tempo at which they wish to attain their ends and many shudder to think of the chaotic consequences likely to ensue if false hopes are raised among large sections of the non-white population and if agitation to form a liberation front is engaged in.²⁹

The LP's Cape Division was dominated by conservative members, who exhibited a general antipathy towards the ANC. In June 1953 Nelson Mandela concluded an article

²⁶ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: J.T.R.Gibson: Report on the ANC Conference on Bantu Education, 9-4-1955.

²⁷ See below.

²⁸ Marquard papers BC587 E2.66: Leo Marquard: General Notes on the Liberal Party, nd.1954 (emphasis in original).

²⁹ Wollheim papers BC627 D2.64: O.Wollheim to G.M.Hauser, 24-12-1956.

hostile to the LP with the question: "Which side, gentlemen, are you on?"⁴⁰ In reply Professor T.W.Price of the University of Cape Town, a member of the National and Executive Committees of the LP, attacked Mandela's article as "the usual critical mumbo-jumbo, a sort of intellectual throwing of the bones."⁴¹ Price's attack centred on the Defiance Campaign as a "hazy, romantic and over-ambitious" plan which ended in "mob-murder." He continued:

The present shaky control which African leaders have over their followers is no guarantee that any Campaign of this sort in the future can be carried out peaceably. No constitutional party, however sympathetic to Africans, can in any way encourage or contemplate a movement which, it seems inevitable, will end in useless tragedy for hundreds of Africans - or, for that matter, for Europeans ... [The LP] believes that by argument, much organisation, and ceaseless constitutional action it can arrive at the objective of true freedom for all - and that without any storming of bastilles ... or waving of tattered banners.⁴²

The dispute between conservative and more radical elements within the LP was a dispute over the party's constituency. Radicals called for policy changes in order to effect closer working relations with the ANC, and to allow the enrolment of a significant number of black party members. Only then, they argued, could the LP wield any influence over future political developments.

The conservative and radical wings of the LP also disagreed over Margaret Ballinger's claim that the LP embodied the principles of the old Cape liberal tradition. Party leaders were intent on welding the LP into a support group for the Native Representatives and stressed the nineteenth century Cape heritage of the LP, launched in the centenary of the introduction of nonracial voting qualifications in the Cape. Margaret Ballinger, a historian before entering politics, stated in 1953 that liberalism and the LP had "the oldest formal political tradition in the country ... with great names in our calendar, and a great practical tradition to guide us."⁴³

For Margaret Ballinger, liberalism, as expressed by her nineteenth century forebears and contemporary Representatives, was an "acceptance of the right of all to aspire to full

⁴⁰ N.R.Mandela: Searchlight on the Liberal Party in Liberation, June 1953.

⁴¹ Price: Reply op.cit.

⁴² ibid.

⁴³ Ballinger: Address op.cit., p.1; see CAMP Reel 4A:2:CL2: 41/15: Alan Paton: Letter On the Occasion of the Launching of the Liberal Party in Cape Town, May 1953.

citizenship in the land of their birth."⁴⁴ The LP was to further this tradition, and was therefore concerned with the long-term education of the white electorate "as to the nature of its true interests" - that is, common citizenship.⁴⁵ The nonracial qualified franchise was taken to be the cornerstone of the liberal tradition; those who challenged the party leadership over the issue were characterised as "the newer converts to liberalism" who lacked an understanding of liberal history and its contemporary application.⁴⁶

In contrast with party leaders, liberal intellectuals such as Christopher Cell called for the development of a modern South African liberalism, arguing that the principles of the Cape tradition should be re-interpreted "in the light of to-day's conditions."⁴⁷ Behind Cell's call lay a differing perception of liberalism, which argued that "the Congresses are fighting for liberal and democratic ends by liberal and democratic methods," and that the LP should work in alliance with the Congress movement.⁴⁸ Cell was joined by the more radical party members - most of whom were a generation younger than the Ballingers - who questioned the political lineage traced back to Rhodes, Schreiner and others prominent in the liberal canon. The radicals saw themselves as a new and essentially 'modern' political phenomenon borne of the rise of twentieth century socialist movements as well as the Cold War and anti-Soviet opinion. Later LP radicals such as Patrick Duncan were also deeply influenced by Gandhian passive resistance and satyagraha.⁴⁹ LP radicals were firmly anti-Soviet, and saw themselves as acting in concert with the aims and ideals of the United Nations Organisation (as it then was). Peter Hjul, one of the leading Cape radicals active in the 1950s, stated in 1964:

The Liberal Party, wrongly, at that time was linked with the old Cape Liberal tradition ... A lot of us joined without any sort of feeling for Cape liberalism. We were pure radicals, probably more radical socialists almost than Liberals. We liked this party; we felt that here was something being done at last; that here was a group which was non-racial in character.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Ballinger: Address op.cit., p.1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁴⁷ Christopher Cell: Not Yet Liberal Enough in The Forum September 1953, p.16; see below.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; see chapter 6.

⁴⁹ See C.J.Driver: Patrick Duncan: South African and Pan African (London, 1981).

⁵⁰ CAMP Reel 10A:2:XH: Interview with Peter Hjul (1964), transcript p.1.

Neither the conservative nor radical camps were cohesive. Jock Isacowitz observed at the 1953 Conference that "one couldn't generalise about the political 'line' of delegates. People who were most uncompromising on one issue, took an entirely different attitude on another."⁵¹ Those who were labelled 'radicals' within the LP campaigned for universal suffrage, an economic policy based on nonracial social-welfare provision, extra-parliamentary activity, and deletion of the clause opposing communism from the party *Principles*. On each issue, however, the composition of the internal pressure group changed. The Cape radicals - who supported universal suffrage and extra-parliamentary action - fiercely opposed the deletion of the party's anti-communist clause, which had been accepted under pressure from the Cape in 1953.⁵² They also called for a clear rejection of socialism.⁵³ By the same token, some party leaders such as Leo Marquard were not unhappy with universal suffrage being accepted as the ultimate goal of the LP, following an interim period in which universal compulsory education would be introduced; they rejected calls for its immediate application. Nonetheless, on the three basic issues which divided the LP almost immediately after its formation, there existed clearly defined conservative and radical positions.

The dispute between the opposing sides became increasingly apparent as different strategies were evolved for the development of the LP. Younger radicals, building both on liberal faith in economic integration as an ineluctable force for change, and their own sense of being in tune with world opinion, argued simply that "world trends being what they are," blacks would inevitably have to be brought into the structures of government.⁵⁴ In this they were encouraged by black commentators such as Jordan Ngubane, a founder member of the ANC Youth League and later LP member, who argued that decolonisation showed that the South African future was black; the issue was whether that future would be attained "with or without the co-operation of the local European minority."⁵⁵ The question was not when, but how, such change would come about. Peter Brown, secretary of the

⁵¹ Marquard papers BC587 E2.35: J.Isacowitz to M.Ballinger, 18-7-1953.

⁵² Interview with Peter Brown, p.15.

⁵³ See chapter 6.

⁵⁴ Ballinger papers A410/F3.8.2: LP: *Canvasser's Notes*, nd.1953.

⁵⁵ Jordan Ngubane: *A Native's View of the Liberal Party* in *The Star*, 28-8-1953.

Natal Division and later party chairperson, argued in 1956:

Against the background of world opinion and particularly against the background of what is happening in the rest of Africa, perpetual white domination is out of the question in South Africa. It is the manner of its going that is important.³⁴

Party radicals did not develop a coherent theory of change, but relied on the 'impossibility' of maintaining apartheid in the face of worldwide hostility and condemnation. As such, the radical wing of the LP saw the main role of the party as the building of a sizeable black membership. This would both maintain liberal values in an increasingly polarised political arena, and give the LP a voice in black politics. It would also militate against the onslaught of apartheid legislation which, it was argued, by treating all blacks in the same manner, was ensuring "that they will vote as a block when they get it [the vote]."³⁷

The more conservative party leaders shared the view of apartheid as anachronistic in the era of decolonisation; however, they saw the LP as formed to fulfil "the real function of a political party, which was to win over the White electorate."³⁸ The aim of the LP, according to vice-chairperson Oscar Wollheim, was to replace the United Party as the new "middle-of-the-road" party in South African politics.³⁹ Attacks on the LP from both left and right, for Wollheim, proved the political health of the party which "in any context other than the South African one would be regarded as a 'safe' Party with nothing alarming in its proposals."⁴⁰

The competing visions of the nature and function of the LP - which saw the LP alternately as a predominantly white political party concentrating on electioneering, or as a nonracial organisation operating primarily in black political life - were not contradictory. For much of the 1950s the LP operated in both spheres, though with growing emphasis on extra-parliamentary black organisation. The two views nonetheless came to be seen as

³⁴ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: Peter Brown: South African Liberals, nd.1956.

³⁷ Ballinger papers A410/F3.8.2: LP: Canvasser's Notes, nd.1953.

³⁸ Ballinger papers A410/F3.1: Leslie Rubin in Minutes: Cape Provincial Committee [hereafter CPC], 15-10-1954.

³⁹ Wollheim: Memorandum op.cit.

⁴⁰ ibid.

directly opposed as the dispute became increasingly bitter and spread throughout the party.

Regional differences within the Liberal Party.

The debate over extra-parliamentary activity and the qualified franchise was at one level a dispute over strategy and tactics; however, it also flowed from a deeper debate over the nature of liberalism. The dominant view within the LP in its first months was that it was a political vehicle for the continuation and development of 'Hofmeyrism,' taking up the liberal tradition the UP was accused of discarding and calling on the government to partially accommodate black political demands before it was too late. The LP, Margaret Ballinger argued, aimed to create "a Western state, maintaining Western standards and based on Western values."⁴¹ Its primary task was the education of white voters and the eventual winning of power or, at least, influence.

In contrast, party radicals and intellectuals argued that "the resistance movement is conceived in the spirit of liberalism [but] with ... the rejection of a passive role."⁴² As such, they asserted, the Liberal Party's role should be in support of the moderate ANC leadership and aimed at maintaining liberal values in the Congress Alliance. The Liberal Party, they argued, should moreover develop a black membership so as to give it political weight and to counteract the influence of the Congress of Democrats.

The dominance of the Cape leadership ensured that the initial focus of liberal activity was not black politics but the white parliament. The internal conflicts of the LP centred on the correct balance the party should strike between the imperatives of black extra-parliamentary political developments and the white parliamentary arena. By the time the party held its 1954 National Congress⁴³, the party was deeply divided. Opposition to the dominant views of the LP leaders operated at a number of different levels within the LP. Activists in all three Divisions exerted considerable pressure for policy changes in order to facilitate co-operation with the Congresses and to develop black party membership.

⁴¹ Ballinger: *Address op.cit.*, p.4.

⁴² Leo Kuper (LP Natal Chairperson): *The Background to Passive Resistance: Race Relations Journal XX/3 1953*, p.18.

⁴³ Nomenclature changed from Conference to Congress in 1954.

Grass-roots pressure from activists differed regionally, reflecting both the different political forces confronting them in various areas, and the different strategies they developed for penetrating the black community. Their demands however focussed on the franchise and the centrality of extra-parliamentary action, and coincided with an intellectual critique of the LP begun by social-democratic members almost as soon as the party had been launched.

1. The Cape.

When the LP was launched, the Cape Division was overwhelmingly made up of supporters of Margaret Ballinger. It also included a small number of more radical members, led by Jimmy Gibson, who participated directly in black politics in the western Cape. Gibson supported universal suffrage and extra-parliamentary action, and was a highly significant figure in the LP as the radical voice on the National and Executive Committees.⁴⁴ He was supported by journalist Peter Hjul, and younger party members such as journalist Benjamin Pogrund. All rejected the "adulation of the leadership" of the early LP and were in continual conflict with the Cape Provincial Committee.⁴⁵

The Cape radicals, while calling for universal suffrage and extra-parliamentary action, were also fiercely anti-communist and called on the LP to explicitly endorse private enterprise and a clearly capitalist economic programme.⁴⁶ Cape radicals called for co-operation with the ANC and participation in its campaigns because, as they saw it, "ex-communists" - particularly in SACOD - were trying to "control" Congress.⁴⁷ In order to pursue his battle with SACOD, Gibson was nominated as candidate in the two Cape Western Native Representative elections of 1954, opposing first Ray Alexander and, following her ejection from parliament, Len Lee-Warden.

Gibson's election platform was based on anti-communist attacks on the SACOD

⁴⁴ Interview with J.T.R.Gibson (1987), transcript p.2.

⁴⁵ CAMP: Interview with Peter Hjul *op.cit.*, p.8.

⁴⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: J.Boerne to M.Ballinger, 20-7-1954.

⁴⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: Minutes: CPC 1-6-1955; interviews with J.T.R.Gibson and B.Pogrund.

candidates; such attacks, Gibson reported, "went down well" with ANC members such as Thomas Ngwenya and Joe Nkatlo.⁶⁶ Nkatlo had been a member of the CPSA and the Democratic League; with some Cape-based former CPSA members, Nkatlo rejected the multiracialism of the Congress Alliance and later joined the LP. Gibson and Hjul were aware of arguments within the ANC over co-operation with former CPSA members, and the related dispute over multiracialism which had been particularly noticeable in Cape Town.⁶⁷ As a result, Gibson's election propaganda echoed the anti-communism of the ANC Youth League, arguing: "The liberal voice is a free voice. It is not tied to any foreign ideology."⁶⁸

Gibson and his supporters attempted to woo the Cape Western ANC away from its unofficial support for SACOD candidates. At the height of the second election in late 1954, Thomas Ngwenya was banned by the government. In response, Gibson wrote a "highly confidential" letter to Justice minister C.R.Swart requesting that Ngwenya's ban be lifted.⁶⁹ Gibson assured Swart that he opposed "many aspects of your Government's policy. One thing we have in common, however, is a hatred of Communism and all the disruption it means in the political scene." The LP, Gibson claimed, was "struggling against a powerful machine" in the Cape, and the ban (which Gibson and his supporters had previously assured Ngwenya would not be imposed if he voiced anti-communist sentiments⁷⁰) had deprived them of an ally. Gibson concluded his appeal, which was ignored, by stating:

I have made it number one priority in my life to smash Communist influence amongst the African people and have had a good deal of success. The one time dominance of Communist ideology in the Cape Western area is a thing of the past and for this we in the Liberal Party have been largely responsible.⁷¹

While Gibson found support for his anti-communist views from some sections of the Cape ANC, it was insufficient to override opposition to the LP franchise policy or its proscription of extra-parliamentary activity. The Cape radicals called for changes to the

⁶⁶ Gibson: *Report op.cit.*, January 1954; J.Boerne to M.Ballinger, 29-6-1954; interview with J.T.R.Gibson p.12.

⁶⁷ Interviews with Gibson and Hjul; see chapter 5.

⁶⁸ *Liberal News* 26-2-1954, p.2.

⁶⁹ CAMP Reel 4B:2:CL2:41/23: J.T.R.Gibson to C.R.Swart, 6-11-1954.

⁷⁰ CAMP Reel 10A:2:YH9:47: Peter Hjul to J.T.R.Gibson, 15-9-1954.

⁷¹ CAMP Reel 4B:2:CL2:41/23: Gibson to Swart, 6-11-1954.

party programme, and began developing black membership to give weight to their demands. They attempted to develop a branch structure in black townships, and formed an all-African Cape Western branch in 1954.⁷⁴ In attempting to win ANC support, the Cape radicals successfully proposed a resolution at the 1954 Cape Provincial Congress, calling on the LP to take "all possible steps" to co-operate with the ANC.⁷⁵

In contrast, the Cape Provincial Committee was overwhelmingly made up of supporters of the 1953 policy settlement, and was increasingly antipathetic towards the radicals. LP vice-chairperson Oscar Wollheim advised Margaret Ballinger that he was "perturbed" by the increase in black party members, and feared that radicals were "doing it with a purpose."⁷⁶ A provincial committee member complained of the lower membership fees paid by African members, and noted that "Gibson can lead his followers anywhere ... [they] could easily outvote us."⁷⁷ Attempts to remove Gibson from the Committee failed however because he was taken to represent African opinion and to be "one of the few" Committee members in touch with black opinion.⁷⁸

II. The Transvaal.

Activists in the Transvaal worked in very different political conditions from the Cape. The LP was based almost exclusively in Johannesburg and its surrounding areas, which was also the headquarters of the ANC and of SACOD. The Provincial Committee, in contrast with the Cape, unanimously rejected the qualified franchise.⁷⁹ A strong body of opinion in the Transvaal called for participation in extra-parliamentary activity, as well as deletion of the anti-communist clause from the party principles.

The Transvaal LP was hemmed in by the proliferation of political organisations active in Johannesburg. UP candidates consistently defeated their LP opponents in City Council

⁷⁴ Ballinger papers A410/F3.1: Minutes: CPC 29-7-1954. The Cape Western branch had 20 members.

⁷⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: Minutes: Cape Provincial Congress, 30-5-1954.

⁷⁶ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 10-1-1954.

⁷⁷ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: H.Pittman to M.Ballinger, 2-8-1954.

⁷⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: Minutes: CPC 1-6-1955.

⁷⁹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: TPC 11-11-1954.

elections, while areas such as Rosettenville and Benoni were Labour Party strongholds. In attempting to co-operate with the ANC, the LP had first to contend with its hostility and SACOD criticism. SACOD focussed attention on the qualified franchise and the proscription of extra-parliamentary means, and in 1954 published a lengthy booklet which stated:

To talk of using only "parliamentary" methods is to treat the movement for political rights in this country as one for whites alone; for this community alone has parliamentary power ... South African Liberals must shed any illusion that the Europeans will bring liberty to the Non-Europeans. The Non-Europeans will emancipate themselves by their own political actions.⁸⁰

The LP nationally exhibited considerable mistrust of SACOD, and was hostile to co-operation between the organisations. Approaches from SACOD in 1953 and 1954 for a joint campaign against the 'police state' being constructed by the government were summarily rejected by the LP.⁸¹ The Transvaal LP sought to co-operate with the black Congresses but not with SACOD. As a result, the LP withdrew from Trevor Huddleston's Western Areas Protest Committee following a dispute with SACOD as to whether the ANC and SAIC should be invited to join the Committee.⁸² Unable to co-operate with the black Congresses or to penetrate black areas, the Transvaal Committee led the struggle for changes to the 1953 policy settlement. As such, it became the focus for continual criticism from party leaders in the Cape. When Jock Isacowitz organised a series of public meetings to promote the newly launched LP in 1953, Margaret Ballinger stated herself to be "doubtful about the wisdom" of such meetings, arguing "it is not the normal procedure of parties."⁸³

As a result of political conditions in Johannesburg, the Transvaal Division of the LP turned almost immediately to alliance politics, seeking to co-operate on civic matters with the Labour Party, UP liberals such as City Councillor Jack Lewsen (who later joined the LP), and the Black Sash after it was formed in 1955. Having left the Western Areas Protest Committee, the Transvaal LP in 1956 formed the Civic Vigilance Association. The Association was intended to widen the base of co-operation on civic issues to include the Congresses, the Federation of South African Women and other organisations, in an

⁸⁰ SACOD: *The Threatened People* (1954), pp.16-24.

⁸¹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: correspondence between P.Beyleveld and J.Børne, 1953-1954.

⁸² *Advance* 25-3-1954, p.1.

⁸³ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: M.Ballinger to J.Isacowitz, 27-7-1953.

umbrella body which would monitor the implementation of apartheid policies by the UP-controlled City Council. Disputes between representatives of the different organisations involved soon killed the Association.

III. Natal.

The most significant pressure for change from party activists came from Natal. The Natal Division, initially concentrated in Pietermaritzburg and Durban, included socialists such as Hans Meidner, and social-democrats such as Leo Kuper and Violaine Junod, all of the University of Natal. Natal also included author Alan Paton, initially a supporter of the 1953 policy settlement, and Peter Brown, a wealthy young farmer (and fluent Zulu and Xhosa speaker) of similar political views. Both Brown and Paton moved with developments in the party such that under their leadership, Natal assumed national leadership (after 1956) over a radicalising and expanding LP.⁶⁴

The Natal Division was unable to penetrate the white political arena where it was opposed by the UP, the Labour Party, the secessionist Union-Federal Party which had a policy "just Liberal enough" to draw off potential LP support⁶⁵, and later the Anti-Republican League. As a result, the Natal Division consistently produced the worst electoral results in the LP.⁶⁶ In contrast, it enjoyed the least conflictual relationship with the Congress movement in the country. Natal members argued that there existed room for both the Congress movement and a nonracial political party, fulfilling different tasks but co-operating closely. Leo Kuper led the LP into co-operation with the NIC, and LP speakers addressed NIC rallies in 1954 and 1955.⁶⁷

The Natal Division refrained from publicly attacking the Congresses, and in contrast with other Divisions soon established a cordial relationship with the Congress movement. This resulted at one level from the close personal relationships between some LP members and Albert Lutuli, Monty Naicker and others. More significantly, the LP had direct access

⁶⁴ See below.

⁶⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: P.Brown to W.Stanford, 27-5-1953.

⁶⁶ See LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: Natal Reports 1953-1959.

⁶⁷ Interview with Professor Leo Kuper (1988) transcript p.8.

to senior Congress members through Selby Msimang, a founding member of the ANC and the LP, who was Natal ANC Secretary after 1951. Msimang arranged meetings between the ANC and LP in Natal, and advised other LP Divisions on 'moderate' ANC leaders they should approach.⁸⁴

In 1953 Hyacinth 'Bill' Bhengu, a Durban lawyer and ANC National Executive Committee member, joined the Liberal Party. The LP was also supported by Durban ANC member Franklin Bhengu, who wrote to Peter Brown stating:

I ... feel I ... can serve no purpose as a member of the Liberal Party. I can definitely be of great service to your party and mine, as a liberal member of the A.N.C. in terms of your party's policy.⁸⁵

Jordan Ngubane, a well-known journalist who increasingly opposed what he saw as communist domination of the ANC, was sympathetic to the LP in the early 1950s while remaining an ANC member. Ngubane attended a series of ANC/LP meetings in Natal in 1953, at which the LP met with senior ANC members including Albert Lutuli, M.B. Yengwa, and others.⁸⁶

Co-operation between the LP and the Congresses was eased by the dual threat to African freeholders in what were designated 'white' areas, and to the Indian community under the Group Areas Act. At the first official meeting between LP and ANC representatives, Lutuli criticised the 1953 LP programme but invited the party to co-operate with the ANC in undertaking a survey of freehold areas in northern Natal. The LP, with Mary Draper of the Institute of Race Relations, surveyed the threatened communities and publicised the threat to Charlestown, the first targeted area. Between 1954 and 1956 LP members undertook tours of the area with ANC members including P.Mtimkulu and Dorothy Nyembe.⁸⁷ In early 1957, the LP and ANC jointly formed the Northern Natal African Landowner's Association [NNALA] to canalise resistance to the removals.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ See LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: P.Brown to W.Stanford, 27-5-1953; A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: Executive Committee [hereafter EC], 8-12-1953.

⁸⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: F.Bhengu to Natal LP, 22-9-1954.

⁸⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Minutes: NPC September-December 1953.

⁸⁷ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: Minutes: NPC 15-10-1953 and January-May 1956; LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: P.M.Brown to E.V.Mahomed, 24-8-1954.

⁸⁸ Ballinger papers A410/F3.3: Minutes: NPC 5-3-1957. For detail on the NNALA, see Peter Brown: The Liberal Party: A Chronology with Comment, Rhodes University,

The LP also had access to the Indian community. The collapse of the Natal Indian Organisation, a conservative body set up by former NIC leaders in disfavour with (and deposed by) the more militant Naicker and Dadoo, gave the LP an entree to middle-class Indian areas in Natal. Manilal Gandhi, editor of *Indian Opinion*, supported the LP and invited party members to write leader articles for his journal.⁶³ The LP also recruited well-known Indian moderates such as E.V.Mahomed and Pat Poovalingham.⁶⁴ Access to the Indian community was further eased by growing co-operation with the NIC, which increased as Indian communities came under threat from the Group Areas Act.

The concrete co-operation between the LP and the Congresses led Brown to report an improvement in relations over the initially hostile reception of 1953, with "misunderstandings removed."⁶⁵ Natal soon began to recruit black party members, and grew in size by an annual average of 60% between 1954 and 1957. At the end of 1953, the Natal Division had 8 branches (more than either the Cape or Transvaal) including African branches at Edendale and later in Charlestown. By late 1954 Natal reported a 50% increase in branches, including Indian branches in Stanger and elsewhere.⁶⁶ In 1955, the Natal Division had a paid-up membership of 424, which comprised 188 whites, 128 Indians, 104 Africans and 4 Coloureds.⁶⁷ In February 1955 Alan Paton wrote to Margaret Ballinger, querying the predominantly white membership of the LP in other areas, asking: "Do you know that our Party has a deep appeal for Indians?"⁶⁸

Despite the relatively good relations between the LP and Congresses in Natal, Congress leaders continued to criticise the LP programme. LP leaders in Natal, although initially supportive of the 1953 settlement, revealed a different understanding of the role of the LP from that of the national leadership. Peter Brown had noted early in 1953:

Grahamstown 1985.

⁶³ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: M.Gandhi to M.Ballinger, 7-6-1953.

⁶⁴ Both remain politically active in the 1980s, Poovalingham having joined the Progressive Federal Party.

⁶⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Natal report, 30/1-10-1954.

⁶⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Natal Report, 30/1-10-1954.

⁶⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: Natal report, 5-3-1955.

⁶⁸ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: A.Paton to M.Ballinger, 26-2-1955 (emphasis in original).

Anything we do must have the confidence of non-Europeans. Certainly anything political. Until we have got something that will inspire their confidence we would probably be better not to start.⁹⁹

In response to Congress criticism of the LP programme, Natal advised the LP National Committee that if the party were to increase its black membership it would "have to become more militant but not identify ourselves altogether with one side."¹⁰⁰

The 1953 Natal Provincial Congress passed resolutions calling for "regular consultation ... and ... collaboration" with black organisations, noting:

the Party has constitutional means at its disposal - they do not. To ask them to transfer their allegiance [to the LP] would be merely to add insult to injury.¹⁰¹

By 1954, pressure from activists in all three party Divisions focussed on demands for universal suffrage and an endorsement of extra-parliamentary activity. Pressure also grew for closer co-operation with the black Congresses. The Cape leadership remained opposed to too close relations with the ANC, and rejected policy changes aimed to facilitate co-operation. Above all, the leadership opposed calls for the deletion of the clause committing the LP to constitutional means. Leo Marquard argued:

The urge to delete those words from the Constitution springs, I believe, from the desire for identification with those non-Europeans who, deprived of Constitutional power, are forced to think in terms of revolt.¹⁰²

In the face of hostility from party leaders, Jock Isacowitz refused to organise further LP/ANC meetings, and summarised the feelings of both Transvaal and Natal LP members:

I am reluctant to take this much further personally, because I was not happy with the attitude of many members of the National Committee towards the A.N.C. as expressed at our last ... meeting. I recognise the difficulties arising from personality differences within the A.N.C. but I am afraid that some of our members can't divide this from a proper appreciation of the historic role of the A.N.C. I do not feel justified in opening discussions again and carrying them on further, until we have clarified our own basic attitude towards the A.N.C.¹⁰³

A new liberalism?

Pressure from activists for policy changes was linked to an intellectual critique of the 1953 party programme which had far-reaching effects. The LP had been formed in opposition

⁹⁹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Peter Brown: Notes, ?March 1953.

¹⁰⁰ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Natal Report, 30/1-10-1954.

¹⁰¹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Minutes: Natal Provincial Congress, 7-11-1953, p.1.

¹⁰² Marquard papers BC587 E2.71: L.Marquard to A.Paton, 20-11-1956.

¹⁰³ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: J.Isacowitz to J.Boerne, 2-2-1954.

to racism and the repressive legislation which enforced apartheid. The party presented itself as the "obviously practicable and reasonable alternative ... It is essentially the child of humanity and common sense."¹⁰⁴ LP leaders called on the party to establish itself before becoming involved in ideological and political battles. Alan Paton later noted:

Liberalism is not an ideology. It allows a freedom of thought and opinion to its members that an ideology does not allow. But some of our members were more ideologically inclined than others.¹⁰⁵

Activists and intellectuals together attacked the 1953 policy settlement, arguing for an interpretation of liberalism in tune with the UN Declaration of Human Rights and an acceptance of the legitimacy of non-violent extra-parliamentary tactics. As we have seen, a leading figure in the debate was Christopher Gell, who supported the creation of a non-communist and nonracial political party but refused to join the LP because of its commitment to parliamentary means, which he saw as "a declaration of inactivity."¹⁰⁶ Gell also called for co-operation between the LP and SACOD, stating:

I entirely deprecate your continued battle with the far left ... [it is a] luxury, to start a factional struggle within the all-too-weak movement for liberation against those suspected of Communism.¹⁰⁷

Gell developed close contacts with SAIC and ANC members - ANC volunteers carried his coffin at his funeral in 1958 - and wrote a stream of articles for journals and newspapers which urged the LP to recognise the liberal aims and methods of the Congresses, and to co-operate with them.

Gell and other party radicals stressed that the Congresses had to be recognised as the representative voice of black political opinion.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, Gell argued,

Since the declared Congress policies are liberal in principle, this recognition should be without qualification.¹⁰⁹

Gell argued that the LP should play two roles: "educating White-supremacists" into

¹⁰⁴ L.Rubin and O.Wollheim: To Those Interested In Liberalism, LP flier, n.d.1953.

¹⁰⁵ Alan Paton: Journey Continued (Cape Town 1988), p.121.

¹⁰⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: C.Gell to O.Wollheim, 28-4-1955; see chapter 7.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ See C.Gell: Advice to Liberals (1): Evening Post 4-7-1953.

¹⁰⁹ Marquard papers BC587 E2.23: C.Gell: Some Immediate Suggestions for Liberals, nd.?June 1953. See also above.

changing their voting patterns, and creating a political meeting ground for black and white.¹¹⁰ This was rendered impossible by the rushed formation of the LP and the 1953 policy statement which he characterised as "vague" and "unfortunate."¹¹¹

The critique of LP policy launched by liberal intellectuals focussed on the same issues which party activists proposed deleting or amending. Gell criticised the 1953 settlement for "elevating a political step or tactic (the qualified franchise) to the status of a 'principle.'"¹¹² The main focus of criticism, however, was the LP commitment to parliamentary means. The party leadership argued that an existing democratic state was in danger of being dismantled by the Nationalists and should be protected by constitutional means.¹¹³ Liberal critics started rather from the point of view expressed by *The Forum* at the height of the constitutional crisis over Coloured disenfranchisement, arguing: "The dictatorship is here already. The revolution is in the process of being completed."¹¹⁴ Leo Kuper extended the intellectual critique by arguing:

The goal of equality is set, but at the same time the means for its realisation are denied. Two of the basic tenets of a democratic creed, respect for the law and respect for constitutional procedures, are the very instruments by which domination is maintained. Domination is rooted in the sanctity of the law.¹¹⁵

The critique of liberalism both influenced and advanced the pressure exerted by party activists. The underlying theme of both was a different conception of the role the LP should play, and thus of the nature of liberalism itself. Both activists and intellectuals argued that liberalism had to be nonracial and unqualified in appeal and application. Gell asked Margaret Ballinger in 1953:

If we cannot show that a genuine White liberalism evokes a Black response, have we any justification for existence as a separate party?¹¹⁶

The 1954 National Congress.

Liberal Party radicals and intellectuals aimed to alter the 1953 policy settlement so as to

¹¹⁰ Gell: *Not Yet op.cit.*, p.13.

¹¹¹ C.Gell: *The Policy of the Liberal Party: The Star* 8-7-1953.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.14.

¹¹³ See for example G.Gordon: *Is South Africa Losing Its Democratic Freedom?: The Cape Times* 28-1-1954.

¹¹⁴ *The Forum*, May 1952, p.1.

¹¹⁵ Kuper: *Background op.cit.*, p.18.

¹¹⁶ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: C.Gell to M.Ballinger, 24-7-1953.

put the LP more in step with the Congress movement and to facilitate the growth of black party membership. At the 1954 LP Congress, a series of resolutions were tabled calling for universal suffrage, the endorsement of extra-parliamentary activity, the development of a clear economic policy (with resolutions calling for both a commitment to socialist and free enterprise policies), and the deletion of the anti-communist clause from the party *Principles*.

The 1954 National Congress became a showdown between the LP leadership and party activists. The party leaders were clearly unprepared for the range of issues on which they would be challenged. The Ballingers, Leo Marquard, Donald Molteno and others did not attend the Congress, leaving Leslie Rubin and Oscar Wollheim to represent their views. Despite the extent of the radical critique, calls for party unity and loyalty to Margaret Ballinger resulted in a victory for the party leadership. Radicals from different regions lacked consensus on economic policy, relations with the Congress movement, the nature of extra-parliamentary activities they supported, and the deletion of anti-communism from the party constitution. The only issue on which they agreed was the demand for universal suffrage.

As a result, the only change to the party *Principles* was to the franchise policy. After a full day debating the issue, the party endorsed a compromise formula which aimed to

achieve the responsible participation of all South Africans in government and democratic processes of the country, and to this end to extend the right of franchise on the common roll to all adult persons. As it may be impracticable to introduce universal adult suffrage immediately, some transitional period may be necessary in which it may be brought about in stages.¹¹⁷

The 1954 franchise policy, in effect, was a conditional universal franchise, explicitly adopted as the only means of maintaining party unity and not losing the parliamentary leaders.¹¹⁸

On all other issues, the party programme remained as it had been. The Cape leaders present carefully chose the concessions they were prepared to make. Leslie Rubin explained to Margaret Ballinger that without "the big guns" present to defend the 1953 settlement, "the franchise decision was the best we could achieve in the circumstances." Rubin

¹¹⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: 1954 National Congress, 11-7-1954.

¹¹⁸ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: J.Boerne to M.Ballinger, 16-7-1954.

strategically gave way on the franchise for two reasons - "[a]t one stage it looked very much like being adult suffrage without any reference to an interim period of qualified franchise at all;" moreover, Rubin argued, "what is more important is that we stopped deletion of 'democratic and constitutional' from the objects."¹¹⁹

The party leadership regarded the 1954 Congress as a victory for their views, and renewed calls for the development of the party bureaucracy in place of divisive ideological debates. Oscar Wollheim demanded "less waffling about all these matters of doctrine and theory"¹²⁰ and threatened to "get tough if swathed in dialectics" at the next National Committee meeting.¹²¹ Margaret Ballinger described the 1954 franchise policy as "a collection of nonsense" but one that could be stretched to include the principle of qualified suffrage.¹²² According to William Ballinger, "it is all a question of a formula."¹²³

The conservative Cape Provincial Committee, on the other hand, regarded the new franchise policy as "a departure from the principles upon which the Party was founded."¹²⁴ LP candidate Peter Charles was in the midst of an election campaign for the Cape City Council when the national congress took place; with the support of the majority of the Provincial Committee, he decided to ignore the new policy and continue campaigning for a qualified franchise. The Cape Committee decided that it could "not accept the policy."¹²⁵ The only Cape members to oppose the decision were Peter Hjul and the two representatives of the African Cape western branch, which welcomed the new franchise policy and unanimously dissociated itself from the Provincial Committee decision.¹²⁶

According to the LP secretary, the majority of Cape Provincial Committee members "felt

¹¹⁹ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: L.Rubin to M.Ballinger, 18-7-1954.

¹²⁰ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 10-9-1954.

¹²¹ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 26-10-1954.

¹²² LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: M.Ballinger to J.Boerne, 22-7-1954. See also J.Boerne to L.Marquard, 23-7-1954: "[Ballinger] feels that this is sufficiently wide and can be construed to contain the principle of qualified franchise."

¹²³ Ballinger papers A410/C2.4: W.Ballinger to C.Gell, 16-8-1954.

¹²⁴ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: Minutes: CPC Special Meeting, 14-7-1954.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Ballinger papers A410/F3.1: Minutes: CPC 29-7-1954.

that some stand should be made."¹²⁷ The Committee described the new franchise policy as an attempt by "the left element" to "push out the moderates."¹²⁸ According to one member, "by taking this stand we may be able to get rid of the communist gang."¹²⁹ The Cape leadership furthermore called for the Transvaal Provincial Committee to be "drastically altered."¹³⁰ Oscar Wollheim noted that the Transvaal were under financial obligation to the National Committee which "weakens their position", and called on the Cape to send "a substantial array of conservative forces" to the next National Committee meeting in Johannesburg.¹³¹

Margaret Ballinger was advised by Ellen Hellmann of the SAIRR that the 1954 franchise decision had convinced any liberal "waverers" to stay with the UP rather than join the LP.¹³² The Cape leaders attempted to recruit former Torch Commando leaders to take over the Transvaal Division, and to thereby win over liberals who had remained in the Civil Rights League, the SAIRR and elsewhere.¹³³ Leslie Rubin and others began discussions with Labour Party representatives regarding a possible merger, which would allow the Transvaal leadership question to "be fairly easily solved."¹³⁴ Oscar Wollheim later commented:

if the Johannesburg side of the thing had been played properly we would have had Ellen Hellmann and Helen Suzman and that crowd coming in. Instead of which Jock Isacowitz who was an ex-communist leapt in and kidnapped the whole thing ... and the more reasonable crowd hived off.¹³⁵

Following their victory at the 1954 Congress, party leaders demanded that the franchise should not be raised again for five or six years.¹³⁶ They repeated the call for National Congresses to set only broad policy outlines: the details of LP policy should "crystallise" out of parliamentary speeches.¹³⁷ Margaret Ballinger threatened to resign if the disputes

¹²⁷ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: J.Boerne to M.Ballinger, 16-7-1954.

¹²⁸ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: H.Pittman to M.Ballinger, 16-7-1954.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 9-8-1954.

¹³¹ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 30-9-1954.

¹³² Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: M.Ballinger to J.Boerne, 22-7-1954.

¹³³ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 9-8-1954, 21-7-1954, 10-9-1954; see also A410/B2.11: M.Rodger: Notes on the Liberal Party, 19-6-1956.

¹³⁴ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 3-10-1955.

¹³⁵ Interview with Oscar Wollheim (1987) transcript p.5.

¹³⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: O.Wollheim to NC members, 26-11-1954.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*

continued; her supporters argued that

after 15/16 years of taking up a particular point of view ... Mrs. Ballinger finds herself in extreme difficulties when she is expected to change the stand which she has always taken so that it may be in conformity with the Congress decision.¹³⁸

Moves towards a radical liberalism.

By 1955 the Liberal Party had reached a point of stasis. Ideological struggles continued to rack the Party, and Margaret Ballinger accurately noted that "there is no national party - there are three segments, each doing what seems to it best, without guidance or control in the matter of either principle or practice."¹³⁹ The Cape Division in particular suffered deep division between conservatives and radicals, and by the end of 1955 was "paralysed" with both sides having withdrawn from active participation in party activities.¹⁴⁰ In the Transvaal, the LP fought a series of battles with SACOD members over the Western Areas campaign; nationally, the LP had withdrawn from participation in the Bantu Education boycott and the Congress of the People campaign.¹⁴¹ As a result, Congress hostility, which had begun to wane during 1954, was renewed.

Four years later, the LP and the ANC jointly organised the first overseas boycott of South African goods, and the LP was a significant force in resisting removals in Natal through the NNALA. Disputes over the party programme waned as party activists effectively ignored constitutionally-enshrined strictures. The party began developing a policy calling for radical land-redistribution, and an economic policy which emphasised wealth redistribution and the creation of a welfare state. In 1960, disputes over the franchise were resolved as the LP finally endorsed universal suffrage.

The political impasse which marked the LP in 1954 was resolved in part by Margaret Ballinger's resignation as party leader in 1955, complaining that she was no more than a "so-called leader" and that her political position "is being damaged."¹⁴² Her conservative

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ Marquard papers BC587 E2.62 M. Ballinger to L. Marquard, 19-6-1954 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁰ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: Cape Report, nd.1956.

¹⁴¹ See chapter 8.

¹⁴² Marquard papers BC587 E2.62: M. Ballinger to L. Marquard, 19-6-1954.

supporters became less active in LP politics, and were increasingly outnumbered by younger, more radical members. The Natal Division, which had effectively steered a middle course through the disputes which saw the Transvaal and Cape Divisions pitted against each other, assumed national leadership of the party and called for "matters of doctrine" to be placed in "cold storage."¹⁴³ The radicalisation of the LP, which saw the 1960 LP programme scarcely different from the *Freedom Charter*, resulted at one level from the conscious avoidance of internal strife encouraged by the new party leaders. More significantly, however, the LP after 1955 began to confront the question of how to bring about change in South Africa, and to tailor its policies and activities to the attainment of such change.

The Liberal Party was hastily formed in response to political developments in the white parliamentary sphere, most notably the 1953 general election result and the emergence of the UFP; the influence of black extra-parliamentary politics was significant but less immediate. Martin Legassick has argued that the LP was unified "not by any positive vision ... but by *negative* factors," opposition to nationalism and communism.¹⁴⁴ It could, however, be argued that the major unifying was opposition to racial discrimination, which brought together people "whose views may vary from true-blue conservative to outright socialist."¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the LP was soon deeply divided over the best means of ending racial discrimination, and the nature of the system which should replace it.

Leading party members argued that the party was an embodiment of the old Cape liberal tradition - "not an extraneous growth but an essentially South African product."¹⁴⁶ LP policies were premised on the notion of evolutionary development. For Margaret Ballinger,

the policy of the Liberal Party is an evolutionary policy aiming at the progressive widening of the field of personal liberty for all sections of the population.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴³ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: EC 26-1-1955, quoting Alan Paton.

¹⁴⁴ Martin Legassick: 'Liberalism, Social Control and Liberation in South Africa': seminar paper, University of Warwick, 1977, p.14 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: Peter Brown: South African Liberals nd.1956.

¹⁴⁶ Ballinger: Address op.cit.

¹⁴⁷ Ballinger: Liberal Party op.cit., p.1.

The evolutionary growth inherent in liberalism was contrasted with the revolutionary goals of communism and the mass fervour of extreme nationalism. Both were seen to lead to the submergence of individualism in categories of race or class, and of the individual to the state.

Liberals presented the 1953 LP programme as the product of reason, in contrast with the emotional nationalism of the Nationalist Party and the ANC, arguing that "emotion and prejudice have too often and for too long been allowed to hold the stage at the expense of reason and fact."¹⁴⁸ More bluntly, Alan Paton noted that the party was "not a set of well-intentioned fools."¹⁴⁹ In 1953, however, the notions of evolution and gradualism were largely interchangeable. The most marked change in the Liberal Party after 1955 was the replacement of stress on the inevitability of gradualism with calls for rapid 'massive evolution.'¹⁵⁰

The LP in 1953 was a white parliamentary party with policies tailored to gently courting a racist white electorate. The LP, in the eyes of *Advance*, was "a sort of political Institute of Race Relations."¹⁵¹ The LP programme called for the gradual extension of existing democratic processes to 'civilised' blacks. For LP leaders, liberalism was essentially a European import; blacks had to be educated into its practices and philosophy. In order to effect change, the LP issued a 'Sincere Challenge' to the UP to liberalise its programme¹⁵², and contested local and provincial elections. As we have seen, however, the LP attracted members of widely divergent political viewpoints and perspectives. Alan Paton, while asserting the political *gravitas* of LP members, noted that "[w]e were, on the whole, a moral set of creatures."¹⁵³ According to Peter Brown, "many people who started the party were there for, to put it grandly, moral reasons"; their experience in the LP however forced them to confront questions of ideology and strategy.¹⁵⁴ As a result, the LP

¹⁴⁸ Ballinger: *Address op.cit.*, p.4.

¹⁴⁹ *Advance* 11-6-1954, p.4.

¹⁵⁰ See below.

¹⁵¹ *Advance* 14-5-1953, p.2.

¹⁵² *The Star* 12-11-1954, p.4.

¹⁵³ Paton: *Journey op.cit.*, p.60.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Peter Brown, p.7.

became a battle ground between two competing conceptions of liberalism.

LP leaders argued that South Africa was a democratic society under immediate threat from nationalism, and a longer-term threat from communism. As such, they argued that white South Africa had the responsibility to educate and inculcate 'civilised' standards of political practice and process into the black population, and gradually draw those who reached the required levels into state structures. Margaret Ballinger argued that the Liberal Party

stands again for what the Cape brought into Union - a tried policy and a practice which appealed, and which appeals again, to all those people who believe that it is the destiny of the European in South Africa to establish and maintain the principles of Western civilisation and that he can only do this by sharing them.¹⁵⁵

Hostile to extra-parliamentary action, party leaders insisted that the only orderly means by which such changes could be brought about were parliamentary, which entailed winning white votes.

Party radicals and intellectuals rejected the direct link drawn between liberalism and parliamentary gradualism, particularly in the South African context. Leo Kuper argued that while democratic practices regulated white South African society, their function was to secure and maintain white supremacy. The nonracial realisation of democratic values would subvert the entire structure of apartheid. As a result, Kuper argued, whites were under pressure to abandon liberal values "while it is among the Non-Whites ... that we find the staunchest and most uncompromising upholders of democratic values."¹⁵⁶ Christopher Gell, deprecating the 'means' clause in the LP constitution, pointed out that "what is democratic in the western sense is not necessarily constitutional in South Africa."¹⁵⁷

At a strategic level, the disputes within the LP centred on those aspects of the party programme which hampered the growth of black party membership. At a deeper level, however, some party radicals and intellectuals called for an understanding of liberalism which went beyond the bounds set by the LP programme. The central tenet of South

¹⁵⁵ M.Ballinger: Revival of the Liberal Tradition in The Forum June 1953, p.8.

¹⁵⁶ Kuper: Background *op.cit.*, p.18.

¹⁵⁷ C.Gell: The Policy of the Liberal Party in The Star 8-7-1953.

African liberalism, it was argued, was its approach to race relations, "because it is in this field that the most serious encroachments are made on individual liberty."¹⁵⁸ From this perspective, according to Natal's Peter Brown, "Liberals are found in the leading African, Indian and Coloured Congresses, in the Congress of Democrats ... the S.A. Labour Party, in some trade unions, and a few will even be found in General Smuts' old United Party."¹⁵⁹

From their nonracial starting point, party radicals argued that the hallmarks of South African liberalism were not set by parliamentary gradualism but by non-violent methods and resistance to extreme nationalism and to communism. As such, they argued, a black liberal constituency already existed within the Congress movement. According to LP member Ken Hill,

there is a great deal of the liberal spirit in the present non-European leadership in the liberation movements. Many are disciples of the non-violent technique of Mahatma Gandhi, surely the most civilised technique for a liberation movement the world has known? In so far as these men are patriots of their own sections they may be compared with the elder Hofmeyr rather than with Dr.Malan.¹⁶⁰

Gell appealed to the LP to "sustain the [Congress] leadership in its hitherto heroically patient refusal to yield to purely anti-white nationalism." The LP, Gell argued, could offer resources and parliamentary access denied to the black Congresses; more importantly, it should strengthen liberalism within the Congresses in opposition to extreme nationalism and to SACOD, seen as a front for white communists.¹⁶¹

In this context, the principal debate in the early LP came to focus on the question of extra-parliamentary activity. For conservative LP members, extra-parliamentary activities were associated with illegality; for party radicals, they were the only means of developing a black liberal constituency, seen as their premier task. The conservative element held sway over the direction followed by the LP in the 1953-1955 period. At the same time, however, the intellectual critique led by Gell, Kuper and others gathered force within the party and gave added weight to calls for LP activity to focus at least equally on black politics. As

¹⁵⁸ Brown: Liberals op.cit.

¹⁵⁹ ibid.

¹⁶⁰ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: C.K.Hill: Liberation Movements, nd.?1955, p.2.

¹⁶¹ C.Gell: Advice to Liberals (1) in Evening Post, 4-7-1953.

Peter Hjul noted:

in the old school they could sense, I think, that this intellectual ferment was building up and they tended to tolerate it. I think they were very sympathetic in many ways but what really upset them was when it began to transfer into actual action. I think we were very unfair in the sense that we were very contemptuous of them, I think wrongly so in retrospect, but we were very impatient and we worked very actively against them.¹⁴²

LP radicals in the three Divisions established "an undercover link" with each other while gaining increased representation on provincial committees.¹⁴³ At the same time, they became increasingly involved in black grass-roots work in the Vigilance Associations set up to resist implementation of the Group Areas Act, in the Western Areas campaign in Johannesburg, and similar initiatives.

As the activities of party members altered, so did their profile. In 1956 Alan Paton and Leo Kuper were charged with addressing a black meeting which did not comply with municipal regulations, and police took the names of all who attended their trial; Violaine Junod and LP secretary June Somers were arrested for demonstrating against the extension of passes to women, while LP Organiser Patrick Duncan, who joined the party in 1955, was charged with entering Queenstown location without a permit. Within the LP, differences over the content and direction of party activities were compounded by differences over political style, as the Cape's Peter Hjul recently described:

We had this backroom for African members and Arden Winch [LP member] used to turn up there at lunchtime and play the clarinet, and all the Africans used to turn up and have a big jolly. The Ballingers would be having a meeting next door and get terribly upset. This is when the divisions began to build up between the established people and the newcomers. We then got out to the townships.¹⁴⁴

The early years of the LP were marked by considerable internal tension. Party leaders deprecated attempts to radicalise the LP programme, characterising radicals as political *ingenue*. National chairperson Oscar Wollheim advised Margaret Ballinger to ignore the radicals, arguing that "one is sympathetic and understanding, but one goes one's own way which, in the end, they will follow since they cannot do without us."¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, tensions increased, as described by Peter Hjul:

¹⁴² Interview with Peter Hjul (1989), p.20.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁴⁵ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 2-8-1955.

we'd have these committee meetings and there would be Jimmy [Gibson], myself and one or two others causing all this ruckus. I'll never forget one evening when Tom Price blew up and said: 'If I wasn't a gentleman Mr.Gibson I'd punch you on the nose.' It was quite a hectic period.¹⁴⁶

The growing focus on black politics by radical LP members led Patrick Duncan and Jordan Ngubane to join the party. Duncan had become increasingly hostile to the communist influence he saw as active in the ANC and in SACOD, and brought to the LP an overt Cold War antipathy towards all suspected of communism. Duncan moreover openly stated his opposition to both the LP franchise policy and the 'means' clause, and soon emerged as the dominant personality in the Cape LP. As a result, the LP enrolled a growing number of younger and more radical white members, while black party membership increased nationally. The main result of these differences was that a political separation took place within the LP. The two wings of the party operated in different areas, and with differing interpretations of party policy. What appeared to the pro-Congress newspaper *Advance* as political duplicity was in fact a reflection of a fundamental division within the LP: *Advance* described the LP as

spea[ing] one language to their European audiences and another to Non-Europeans. To the Europeans there is stress on the go-slow, the reservations, provisions, interim qualifications and so forth. To an African audience there is nothing but a bold demand for equal rights, including the right to vote.¹⁴⁷

Legassick, Robertson and Rich have all seen the LP as the culmination of white liberal thinking and activism in the twentieth century.¹⁴⁸ Legassick has argued that the LP was an expression of a liberal impulse "primarily concerned with *saving* what they believed to be existing democratic values," in contrast with white democrats in SACOD "concerned with the *creation* of democratic values, with the transformation of white or fascist domination *into* democracy."¹⁴⁹ Legassick described his distinction as 'crude' and indeed it ignores the fact that both SACOD and the LP appealed for white support by arguing that existing democratic structures were being dismantled by the NP; moreover, it ignores the very different currents of thinking within the LP. The transformation of the LP, and the

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.8.

¹⁴⁷ *Advance* 5-8-1954, p.2.

¹⁴⁸ See chapter 6.

¹⁴⁹ Legassick: 'Liberalism' *op.cit.*, p.14 (emphasis in original).

evolution of a more radical liberalism, came precisely with the acceptance by leading LP members that "we are *not* living in a democratic society."¹⁷⁶

Characteristically, LP members such as Alan Paton were forced to confront the nature of South African society by the 'church clause,' an amendment to the Native Laws Amendment Act which imposed a limit on the number of blacks allowed to congregate in white areas. Paton declared himself willing to defy the law which threatened to prohibit the right of Africans to attend churches in white areas, and called on the LP to follow suit.¹⁷⁷ By late 1956 the early LP leaders and their replacements were divided by a fundamentally different perspective on the nature of South African society, and the best means of changing it. The difference is clearly expressed in an exchange of letters between Leo Marquard and Alan Paton; significantly, the exchange was initiated by concern on Marquard's part over renewed calls for the deletion of the 'means' phrase. Marquard argued that all agreed that apartheid was fundamentally unstable and could not last. Divisions arose, he argued, because LP members allowed their concern with questions of when and how the system would go to over-influence an assessment of what the role of a liberal in such a situation should be. Underlying Marquard's letter was the contention that extra-parliamentary action was the path followed by those who "are forced to think in terms of revolt."¹⁷⁸

For Marquard, the basic premise of liberalism was acceptance of the evolutionary attainment of a just society:

It seems to me that the 'policy' of a liberal is clear: to state his belief in the attainment, by evolutionary processes, of a just and common society, and to try to convert others to that belief. The evolutionary process by no means excludes a sudden break-down. In fact, history is full of sudden break-downs. But a liberal cannot, I believe, assume or in any way countenance working towards that end - not because it is unconstitutional, but because it is not a real end; it is only a violent means which destroys where the liberal hopes to construct.¹⁷⁹

Marquard insisted that the task of the LP was to persuade white voters of the need for

¹⁷⁶ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: A.Paton to M.Ballinger, 27-12-1956 (emphasis in original).

¹⁷⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: Minutes: Cape Provincial Congress, 17-11-1957.

¹⁷⁸ Marquard papers BC587 E2.71: L.Marquard to A.Paton, 20-11-1956.

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*

change. Deletion of the 'means' clause, he argued, was "dangerous" in that it threatened the sanctity of the law, basic to any liberal programme: extra-parliamentary action meant "in plain words, breaking the law." Secondly, Marquard argued that extra-parliamentary action by a white political party was essentially a "hypothetical test ... I don't have to steal in order to demonstrate my undoubted sympathy with those who steal through force of circumstance." Marquard ended his letter by warning Paton that "once the Liberal Party commits itself to the possibility of unconstitutional action it has become a facade for something else."¹⁷⁴

Paton's reply noted that all liberals "desire to be governed constitutionally"; however, "more and more do I realise that these words have also a hypocritical content":

The Government would like nothing better than an Opposition which confines itself to constitutional means, because this lends colour to the view that it is really a constitutional game we are playing in South Africa. I find this impossible to accept...¹⁷⁵

Paton's letter summarised the thinking of those liberals who had emerged as LP leaders by 1956 and who steered the party through to the 1960s; he ended by stating:

My own view is that massive evolutionary changes must come, and to my mind a non-racial body of opinion devoted to the ideals of democracy is the only force which will be able to guide such an evolution without allowing it to fall into the hands of evil men.¹⁷⁶

Under the influence of Paton, LP chairperson Peter Brown and others, the Liberal Party in the late 1950s and 1960s reinvigorated liberalism in South Africa. Brown noted in 1959:

the alternatives which face South Africa are not between the maintenance of the status quo, gradualism and revolution. They are between revolution and what Alan Paton terms 'mass evolution.' And in the nature of political arrangements in South Africa many of the pressures to induce 'massive evolution' are bound to be mounted outside Parliament.¹⁷⁷

Conclusion.

The Liberal Party in the 1950s moved through a series of changes, from the constitutional gradualism of the 1953 programme to acceptance by new party leaders of the need for 'massive evolution.' Under new leadership after 1955 the LP began to elucidate a positive

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ Marquard papers BC587 E2.75: A.Paton to L.Marquard, 4-12-1956.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Peter Brown: The Long View in Contact 7-3-1959, p.9.

vision of the means by which change could be effected; it was only in the 1960s that the party offered a coherent vision of the future South Africa it sought.¹⁷⁸ The formation of the LP set in motion an intellectual critique of liberalism which continued throughout the party's existence. By 1960, the radicals of the early 1950s had in turn become the LP moderates, as sections of the party moved into alliance with exclusive nationalists in the Pan-Africanist Congress as a means of opposing 'communist' influence.¹⁷⁹

The LP was an umbrella organisation, marked by opposition to apartheid and initial hostility towards the goals and strategies of the Congress movement. As such, the LP does not offer the simple opportunity to analyse South African liberals and liberalism: rather, throughout its existence, the Liberal Party maintained an internal critique of the methods and application of liberalism in South Africa.

¹⁷⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: LP: Blueprint for the Future (1962).

¹⁷⁹ See Conclusion.

Chapter eight:

White participation in the Congress of the People.

Introduction.

In June 1955, 3000 delegates attended the Congress of the People [COP] and endorsed the *Freedom Charter*, a statement of principle distilled from demands submitted by people across South Africa during a sixteen month campaign sponsored by the Congress Alliance. According to Albert Lutuli, President-General of the African National Congress,

Nothing in the history of the liberatory movement in South Africa quite caught the popular imagination as this did, not even the Defiance Campaign. Even remote rural areas were aware of the significance of what was going on. The noisy opposition in most of the white Press advertised the Congress and the Charter more effectively than our unaided efforts would have done. So the awakening spread further. The participation of all race groups in this effort underlined the scale of awakening resistance.¹

The COP campaign marked the culmination of a process begun by the Congress movement in the 1940s: that is, using nonracial popular participation in the production of documented statements of principle as tools of mobilisation and organisation. The *Freedom Charter*, a dramatic and poetic document, declared "that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white."²

The COP campaign was initiated in a context dominated on one hand by the renewed zeal with which the Nationalist Party, strengthened by the 1953 general election, turned to the implementation of apartheid. On the other hand, the Congress movement was faced with the need to reverse "the alarming decline which began in the Congresses during the post-Defiance Campaign period,"³ while realising in practice the formal Congress Alliance. In the words of Z.K. Matthews, who first proposed the COP, the campaign was to

galvanise the people of South Africa into action and make them go over to the offensive against the reactionary forces at work within this country, instead of being perpetually on the defensive, fighting rear-guard actions all the time.⁴

¹ Albert Lutuli: *Let My People Go* op.cit., p.142.

² Suttner and Cronin: *Freedom Charter* op.cit., p.262.

³ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef.1: SACOD National Executive Committee: *Notes on the Political Situation*, 24-6-1955, p.2.

⁴ ANC papers AD1189/2/Ba.1: Z.K. Matthews: *Memorandum on the Congress of the People*, nd.1954, p.3.

The COP campaign envisaged the creation of local committees across the breadth of South Africa, based on discussion of a simple theme: "Let us speak together of freedom."⁵ The COP was to be "a campaign of national awakening"⁶ with its main aims being the mobilisation and organisation of people, and the instilling of a "Freedom Consciousness."⁷ For the Congresses, the COP was of singular importance in providing a unifying national campaign which was to further the mobilisation of the Defiance Campaign. Rusty Bernstein, a leading member of the South African Congress of Democrats and who was a central figure in the COP campaign, recently observed:

The Freedom Charter was NOT the aim; it was like the crown cork on the Coca Cola bottle - a capping to prevent the fizz evaporating.⁸

The COP campaign was the largest and longest undertaken by the Congress Alliance in the 1950s. This chapter locates the COP campaign within the broader tradition of 'charterist' activity of the Congress movement, and focusses on the role of whites in the COP.

The wider context.

By 1954 the political boundaries in South Africa had been redrawn by the rise of African and Afrikaner nationalism, and the growth of the ANC and NP. The effects of this political polarisation were felt in both the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary fields. The United Party polled more votes than the NP in 1953, but returned to parliament with a smaller number of MPs. New MPs included Helen Suzman, John Cope and others who joined the liberal wing of the UP and later led the Progressive Party. They were, however, unable to influence UP policy in any markedly liberal direction.

For the Labour Party, 1953 was the last election it fought in alliance with the UP and was guaranteed four seats uncontested by UP candidates. Under the leadership of John Christie and Alex Hepple, the Labour Party adopted steadily more liberal policies, including a qualified nonracial franchise, free compulsory education for all and the

⁵ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Eg.1: Call to the Congress of the People, nd.1954.

⁶ The Congress of the People: Annexure A, 1954 ANC National Executive Committee Report; in Karis and Gerhart: Violence op.cit., p.163.

⁷ Ballinger papers A410/F3.8.3 Marion Friedman to Liberal Party National Committee [NC]: Report of a meeting with the COP National Action Committee (quoting Joe Slovo) 5-8-1954.

⁸ Communication from Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein, 28-11-1989.

abolition of the pass laws.⁹ The Union-Federal Party, formed in May 1953, also called for the gradual inclusion of qualified Africans into state structures, although its policies remained blurred and unclear.¹⁰ The Liberal Party inherited parliamentary representation through Native Representatives Margaret and William Ballinger. As we have seen, the LP adopted a programme which, while criticised as conservative by the Congresses, was nonetheless the clearest parliamentary antagonist of apartheid.¹¹

In the extra-parliamentary arena the successful mobilisation which took place around the Defiance Campaign saw the ANC win mass support and resulted in the creation of SACOD. Undeterred, however, the NP government continued with the implementation of apartheid legislation. Section 10 of the 1952 Native Laws Amendment Act aimed to drastically curb the rights of Africans to remain in urban areas, and the 1952 Natives (Abolition of Passes and Co-ordination of Documents) Act required all Africans (including women and those previously exempted) to carry a pass. Group Areas evictions and 'blackspot' removals increased, the largest target being the 60 000 people living in Johannesburg's mixed-race Western Areas. The Bantu Education Act placed control of African schooling in the hands of the Native Affairs Department and introduced a differential syllabus. Trevor Huddleston, active in the struggle against the Western Areas removals, noted in 1953:

the thrust and speed of these measures is getting beyond anything and seems to have the effect of mesmerising whatever opposition there may be.¹²

The ANC recognised that it had to organise itself into an efficient unit which could withstand the growing number of banning orders placed on its leading officials, sustain the influx of new members brought into Congress by the Defiance Campaign, and meet the wide-ranging attacks on black rights. Thus the Transvaal ANC President Nelson Mandela noted: "It is our own weakness, the lack of unity and solidarity, the defensive nature of

⁹ Ballinger papers A410/E15.8: South African Labour Party: Non-European Policy 10-1-1953, pp 2-4.

¹⁰ See B.Reid: The Federal Party, 1953-1962: An English-Speaking Reaction to African Nationalism (Phd. thesis, University of Natal, 1979).

¹¹ See chapters 6 and 7.

¹² Ballinger papers A410/B2.8.10: T.Huddleston to M.Ballinger, 19-8-1953.

our struggle, that gives the Nationalists the chance to strike us one by one and to cripple our organisation."¹³ Mandela devised what became known as the 'M-Plan' which envisaged the creation of street, block and area committees across the country to develop grass-roots membership as a bulwark against the restriction of leadership figures. The M-Plan, however, was only effectively implemented in parts of the Eastern Cape. The ANC/SAIC Joint Co-Ordinating Committee set up during the Defiance Campaign reported in December 1953 that "a disquieting lull ... has descended over the mass activities of Congress."¹⁴

The Congress movement faced a range of problems. At a formal level there existed an alliance representative of the major ethnic groups in South Africa. However, no coordinating machinery existed beyond the National Action Council [NAC], which replaced the Co-Ordinating Committee. At a local level, branches of different Congresses operated largely in isolation from each other. In an editorial, the pro-Congress newspaper *Advance* complained that previously criticised failings within the Congress movement "still exist today ... we do not yet seem to have found an effective way of co-ordinating our campaigns, of uniting all who are fighting the same enemy on different fronts."¹⁵ In addition, the ANC (and the Alliance) did not have a clearly articulated ideological position. The 1949 *Programme of Action* was concerned with means rather than ends; its ideological content dealt specifically with African nationalism and, as Lodge has noted, was vague and open to "differing interpretations so that opposed factions within Congress could each legitimise their position by reference to it."¹⁶ The racial exclusiveness which marked a significant section of the ANCYL in the 1940s was taken over in the 1950s by 'Africanists,' a small group of ANC members who accused Congress leaders of betraying the principles of the *Programme of Action*. Africanists claimed that African nationalism was being diluted by racial co-operation, and opposed SACOD in particular, claiming that whites had joined the Congress Alliance in order to convert it to a Marxist programme.¹⁷

¹³ *Advance* 17-9-1953, p.4.

¹⁴ CAMP Reel 2b:2:2DA:14/4:62: NAC Report to the ANC Secretary-General and SAIC Joint Honorary Secretaries, 5-12-1953.

¹⁵ *Advance* 25-3-1954, p.2.

¹⁶ Lodge: *Black politics* op.cit., pp.69-70.

¹⁷ Gerhart: *Black Power* op.cit., pp.115-116.

At the same time, racial hostility continued to hamper organisational co-operation, most notably in Natal. Lutuli warned that Natal Africans "are being misled by the Indian bogey" and called for the development of closer relations between the ANC and Natal Indian Congress:

I have deliberately referred to the need for a multi-racial democratic front because there is much confusion on the subject ... All people in their struggle seek allies. Africans must get it into their heads that the stumbling block to progress are the many discriminatory laws made by a white Parliament and not by Indians. What privileges Indians enjoy which we do not enjoy were given to them by a white Parliament. Why blame the recipient and not blame the giver for not giving Africans those rights and privileges?²⁴

Finally, Congress membership began to decline, particularly in the rural areas reached by the Defiance Campaign. The ANC National Executive Committee [NEC] warned in 1954 that "there is a danger of the African National Congress becoming an urban-based and urban-orientated organisation."²⁵

The Congress of the People in Context.

The mid-1950s were marked by campaigns against the Western Areas removals and the implementation of Bantu Education.²⁶ Lodge has demonstrated the complexity of issues which confronted the ANC in the campaigns, which saw grass-roots responses vary across the country and the ANC insufficiently organised to provide effective leadership. Both campaigns showed the Congresses to be "isolated from the people" and not involved in work "which brings us closely in contact with people," according to a document drawn up by SACOD's National Executive Committee and distributed within the Alliance.²⁷ According to SACOD, both campaigns highlighted the need for political understanding to go "hand in hand with organisational work"; what was happening, it claimed, was that

we allow our activities to go on in our own branches, amongst our own members, losing our contact with the people outside ... From this has flown, on the one hand, (as in the Western Areas) the issuing of unreal 'calls' for say, strike action; and on the other hand, (as in the schools' boycott) a lagging behind the people and a hesitation to call for action for fear that the people are not ready.²⁸

²⁴ Albert Lutuli: Presidential Address: 1953 Natal ANC Conference, in *Advance* 5-11-1953, p.1.

²⁵ ANC papers AD1189/2/Ba.1: ANC National Executive Committee report, December 1954, p.4.

²⁶ Neither of these campaigns are discussed in detail here: see *inter alia* Lodge: Black Politics op.cit., chapters 4 and 5; Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., pp.24-35.

²⁷ SACOD NEC: Notes op.cit., p.2.

²⁸ *ibid.*

The two campaigns compounded the decline in Congress membership and enthusiasm following the Defiance Campaign. This, according to NIC President 'Monty' Naicker, was characteristic of the Congress movement:

We ... find that during the previous chapters in our struggle we were able to rouse people by mass propaganda and at the cessation of our activities we lost support and general interest in the struggle waned.²⁵

By the end of 1953 the situation was nonetheless cause for concern within the Congress movement, as Albert Lutuli made clear: "At the moment we are only concerned with rescuing ourselves out of the mire, and we cannot yet say which direction we shall follow after that."²⁶

Congress leaders recognised the need to initiate a campaign which would both unify the Congress Alliance and "capture the imagination" of the people.²⁷ Such a campaign, according to SACOD, had to be "designed to bring our organisations closer to the ordinary people of South Africa."²⁸ In response, Cape ANC President Z.K. Matthews formed a small discussion group which proposed a series of nonracial public meetings, culminating in a national convention which would adopt a manifesto.²⁹ By the time the Cape ANC Conference took place in August 1953, Matthews had considerably refined the idea, arguing that Congress had to rekindle grass-roots mobilisation on a mass scale:

I wonder whether the time has not come for the African National Congress to consider the question of convening a National Convention, A CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE, representing all the people of this country irrespective of race or colour to draw up a FREEDOM CHARTER for the DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA OF THE FUTURE.³⁰

At the ANC Annual Conference in December 1953, Matthews described the COP "to which ordinary people will come, sent there by the people. Their task will be to draw up a blueprint for the free South Africa of the future."³¹ Matthews then took his idea to a joint

²⁵ Quoted in Community Resource and Information Centre: Until We Have Won Our Liberty ... Thirty years of the Freedom Charter (Johannesburg 1985), p.13.

²⁶ Quoted in DRUM May 1953, p.10.

²⁷ Z.K. Matthews in Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., pp.56-57.

²⁸ SACOD NEC: Notes op.cit., p.2.

²⁹ Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.57.

³⁰ Z.K. Matthews: Presidential Address: 1953 Cape ANC Conference; in Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.105 (emphasis in original).

³¹ Advance 31-12-1953, p.1.

meeting of the Congress executives. His initial proposal was not simply for a mass assembly of people. Rather, Matthews proposed that the Congresses draw up a voters roll of the entire population, divide South Africa into constituencies, and hold nonracial nationwide elections to a constituent assembly. Rusty Bernstein, present at the meeting, recently suggested that Matthews' proposal was "deliberately provocative in order to shape peoples' thinking" -

coming from a professor of law - if you take it seriously - this constituent assembly, he didn't describe what it would do, but a constituent assembly would presumably draw up a new South African constitution. That really was seditious!³⁰

A sub-committee assessed the idea and concluded that the Congresses lacked the resources to undertake the task set out by Matthews. As a result, his original proposal was whittled down to the holding of a Congress of the People which would produce not a constitution, but "a vision of the future - a Freedom Charter."³¹ The COP campaign envisaged the creation of a corps of Freedom Volunteers who would spread the message of the COP across the country. Urban and rural COP committees would be set up to discuss the nature of a democratic future South Africa, draw up demands for inclusion in the *Freedom Charter*, and select delegates to the COP. Initial COP plans retained the proposed national election of delegates.³² From the start, the emphasis was on popular mobilisation; as Bernstein has argued:

I think what's not understood by most people is that in the forefront of our minds at that time was not the Freedom Charter. That wasn't the big thing, that was the spin-off. The big thing was going to be going out and consulting people and saying to them 'look here, what do you want in the future?' This was the central aim of the campaign.³³

The focus on mobilisation resulted in part from the expectation that the final Congress would be banned.³⁴ Matthews stated that the aim of the COP was "the instilling of political

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.58.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² See Treason Trial collection AD1812 Eg 3.2.1.3: NAC: Elections to the Congress of the People nd.1954.

³³ Interview with Rusty Bernstein, pp.58-59. See also ANC papers AD1189/2/Pa.1: Supplementary ANC Secretariat report on the Congress of the People, 1954 ANC Annual Conference.

³⁴ ANC papers AD1189/10/m.2: SAIRR: Notes of a discussion with Yusuf Cachalia,

consciousness into the people and the encouragement of political activity."³⁶ The ANC noted that "the creation of a network of local committees in every corner of South Africa will in itself be a major political achievement."³⁷ The COP presented the Congresses with the opportunity to fulfill their two main needs: the politicisation and mobilisation of a wide section of the population, and the production of a unifying ideological statement. The COP campaign, it was argued "opens the way for the rectification of weaknesses."³⁸ ANC Secretary-General Walter Sisulu summed up the advantages of the COP campaign:

There is wisdom in the change of tactics according to the objective conditions and circumstances of each given situation. The important thing in a struggle for national liberation is to raise the level of political consciousness of the people to the highest possible level through struggles, to mobilise all potential forces and to create a clear vision of the future.³⁹

The Origins of the Congress of the People.

The Congress of the People drew inspiration from a number of different sources, some immediate and others long-term in nature. As we have seen, the Congress movement and the Communist Party of South Africa in the late 1940s evolved a tradition of popular mobilisation around the production of statements of principle. Organisational and ideological unity, however, were hampered by a number of factors, most notably the exclusive nationalism espoused by sections of the ANC Youth League, and the hostility between the ANCYL and the CPSA. Nonetheless, the 1948 People's Assembly for Votes for All set a precedent in using urban and rural participation in the drawing up and endorsement of a charter for *Votes for All*. The Assembly ended by calling for a future assembly where nationally elected delegates would endorse a 'People's Charter.'⁴⁰

The call for a 'People's Charter' was a recurrent theme of both the Congresses and the CPSA. The production of such a Charter could not precede the emergence of a coherent alliance of forces opposed to apartheid; nonetheless, the need for unity amongst anti-apartheid forces kept the idea high on the agenda of Congress leaders. SAIC President

nd.1954.

³⁶ Quoted in Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit., p.57.

³⁷ 1954 ANC Secretariat Report, in *Advance* 24-12-1954, p.1.

³⁸ SACOD NEC: *Notes* op.cit., p.2.

³⁹ *Advance* 8-4-1954, p.4.

⁴⁰ See chapter 1.

Yusuf Dadoo, in his 1951 'new year message,' called on the ANC to issue "a clarion call" for

a mass National Convention in the immediate future: to bring together at a central conference representatives of all sections of the South African population both white and non-white, in order to resolve on a programme which would oppose apartheid in every form, and work for the ... basic human rights of all groups of people in consonance with the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights.⁴¹

In 1952 former CPSA General Secretary and ANC NEC member Moses Kotane argued that the Congress movement should concentrate on raising black political consciousness: "a new spirit is needed [if] the great mass of Non-Europeans are [to be] brought actively into the struggle against fascism."⁴² Kotane called for campaigns to be grounded in the realities of everyday existence, through which the Congresses could develop a 'people's policy' and avoid "the academic drafting of paper Utopias."⁴³ Similarly, the ANC/SAIC National Action Council argued that to be effective, future campaigns had to arise from "the concrete conditions under which people live."⁴⁴ Calls for a mass assembly and the development of a 'people's policy' increased in the early 1950s. This stemmed in part from the fact that after the 1948 general election, unity became an imperative for the Congress movement. More significantly, the years which lay between the People's Assembly and the COP were marked by the resolution of the most divisive disputes within the Congress movement, most notably that between the ANCYL and CPSA, and acceptance of the need for racial co-operation. At the same time, the ANC grew in size and significance, to the point at which it could encourage the formation of SACPO and bring SACOD into being. Within the Congress Alliance, the ANC remained the senior partner; Lutuli stressed that the COP campaign was initiated by all the Congresses, "but at the invitation of the African National Congress."⁴⁵

By 1954 the alliance of anti-apartheid forces necessary to develop a consensual statement of principle had emerged. The COP campaign moreover looked beyond the

⁴¹ The Guardian 11-1-1951, p.2.

⁴² Moses Kotane: The People's Task: Advance 19-6-1952, p.4.

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ NAC: 1951 Report *op.cit.*

⁴⁵ DRUM January 1955: How Red Is Congress?, p.29 (emphasis in original).

formal Congress Alliance by placing ordinary people at the forefront of the entire campaign. By collecting demands for inclusion in the *Charter*, Rusty Bernstein has noted, the COP was "an exercise in getting the people to tell the leadership and self-regarded elite what THEY ought to work for in the name of the people."⁴⁶ The COP was the culmination of a process the roots of which lay in the 1940s. In proposing the COP, however, Z.K. Matthews also responded to immediate circumstances. Characteristic of much Congress activity in the 1950s, Matthews outlined the COP as a campaign aimed at both black and white. Matthews noted that "various groups in the country ... are considering the idea of a national convention at which all groups might be represented."⁴⁷ Through the COP, he argued, Congress could capitalise on concurrent thinking in white politics and "the need for a new approach" reflected in the flurry of new political parties formed in 1953.⁴⁸

The ANC and white politics.

Following the second world war, as we have seen, the ANC began to develop strategies aimed at attracting a mass African support base, while remaining committed to a nonracial future. ANC leaders argued that in contrast with Afrikaner nationalism, "our nationalism should be progressive and liberal and thus embrace co-operation with other communities on the basis of equality."⁴⁹ For ANC leaders, the main danger facing the Congress movement was not its possible subversion by communists, stressed by liberals and other critics outside the ranks of Congress; rather, it was the growth of black racism equal to white *baasskap*. Lutuli argued:

What in fact South Africa is hearing from the African National Congress is the voice of African Nationalism rather than Communism. African Nationalism will become a much more powerful and appealing force than Communism. In fact our task as leaders is to make this Nationalism a broad Nationalism, rather than the narrow nationalism of the Nationalist Party ... Extreme nationalism is a much greater danger than communism, and a more real one.⁵⁰

Congress commitment to nonracialism was further strengthened by the fact that both

⁴⁶ Communication from Rusty Bernstein 28-11-1989 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁷ Matthews: *Address op.cit.*, p.105.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Lutuli: *Address op.cit.*, p.1.

⁵⁰ DRUM: *Red op.cit.*, p.29.

liberals and Marxists argued that apartheid and economic development were contradictory.⁵¹ Some Congress theoreticians argued that the 'fascist' NP was creating contradictions within the capitalist class itself, resulting from the use of

the machinery of State not only against the working class and in the interests of the capitalist class but also to increase, to enlarge its own share of the economic spoil. It does this at the expense of other *sections of its own class*.⁵²

As a result, it was argued, the "less reactionary section" of the white population, "if they are to survive ... find themselves - howbeit unwillingly - allies of the anti-fascist majority." To argue that all whites bar "the enlightened few" would remain in the NP camp, it was concluded, "is based on racial patterns of thought and not on objective factors."⁵³

White politics remained the perceived centre of political power in the country. ANC strategies aimed to exert the pressure of mass struggles on the existing economic and political system, rather than working for its complete overthrow. Lutuli argued:

The African National Congress has consistently, through its presidents and other leaders, indicated that they are interested in democracy *within the present framework of the Union*.⁵⁴

As a result, campaigns such as the Defiance Campaign aimed to persuade through moral example, thereby influencing white opinion and weakening NP hegemony.⁵⁵ Congress leaders were sensitive to developments in white politics, strengthened by the formation of SACOD and the space given to articles on white politics in pro-Congress journals and newspapers such as *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, *Liberation* and *Counter Attack* (all edited entirely or in part by SACOD members⁵⁶). This in turn compounded ANC speculation over the possibility of a loss of white support by the NP, based on the belief that there were "thousands of honest democrats amongst the white population who are prepared to take up a firm and courageous stand for unconditional equality."⁵⁷

⁵¹ See chapters 5 and 6.

⁵² Joe Johnson: Can the Congress of Democrats Win Mass Support?, *Liberation* October 1955, p.20 (emphasis in original).

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ *DRUM Red* *op.cit.*, p.29 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁵ See chapters 2 and 5.

⁵⁶ *New Age* was edited by Brian Bunting, *Fighting Talk* by Ruth First and Rusty Bernstein; Michael Harmel was on the editorial board of *Liberation*; *Counter Attack* was SACOD's internal newsletter.

⁵⁷ Nelson Mandela: Searchlight on the Liberal Party in *Liberation* June 1953, p.10.

A new national convention?

The Congress of the People campaign aimed to influence white opinion and draw white liberals into closer co-operation with the Congress movement. In proposing the COP, Z.K. Matthews was influenced by preparations begun by the SAIRR for the staging of a national convention. UP members such as former justice minister Harry Lawrence argued for a national convention because "in dealing with our multi-racial relationships, White South Africa should speak as one."³⁸ In contrast, non-UP liberals called for black participation in a convention.

In 1950 Native Representatives Edgar Brookes and Margaret Ballinger, following the violence which attended the May Day stay-at-home, called for

the sinking of party differences in a round-table conference between all parties, including the Africans, to see what can be done to counter the unrest ... and to re-establish confidence among White and Black alike.³⁹

Their call was supported by Labour Party leader John Christie and former SAIRR director J.D. Rheinallt Jones, who argued that racial conflict stemmed from the "fierce political partizanship" which attended debates on racial issues.⁴⁰ Two years later Leo Marquard argued that "we have failed lamentably in the matter of political integration." For Marquard, the most serious problem was "the lack of political contact between the races," the only solution to which had become "the urgent matter for the leaders of all population groups to meet in a new national convention."⁴¹

Calls for a new national convention by liberals outside the UP were marked by appeals for black leaders to be brought into the debating forum as a preliminary to their inclusion in state structures. Following the 1953 general election, the SAIRR and Labour Party began preparatory work for a national convention. In the first week of August, 1953, a private conference was held at Adams College in Natal, paid for by Harry Oppenheimer of the Anglo-American Corporation, to which both black and white representatives were invited.⁴²

³⁸ *The Cape Argus*, 8-4-1950.

³⁹ *The Cape Times*, 4-5-1950.

⁴⁰ Ballinger papers A410/B2.5.3: J.D. Rheinallt Jones to D.F. Malan, 5-5-1950.

⁴¹ Marquard papers BC587 H2.14: Leo Marquard: *Speech*, nd.1952.

⁴² Marquard papers BC587 E1.19: Q. Whyte to L. Marquard, 27-3-1953.

Eight Africans and eight whites were invited to discuss "the question of how Africans can be more fully associated with the government and development of the country".⁴³ The SAIRR approached the undertaking with caution, advising white invitees that "there may be no necessity for eating together."⁴⁴ The Africans invited included leading ANC members Albert Lutuli (who did not attend) and Z.K. Matthews, Jordan Ngubane of the ANCYL, as well as formerly prominent conservative ANC members A.B.Xuma, James Moroka and Paul Mosaka. Amongst the whites invited were Leo Marquard, Margaret Ballinger, Winifred Hoernle of the SAIRR, and the industrialist H.J.van Eck.

The Conference condemned the migrant labour system and agreed on short-term economic reforms such as the extension of the provisions of the Industrial Conciliation Act to Africans - both UP policy before its electoral defeat in 1948. On more fundamental issues - black political rights and the franchise - there was no agreement. The white members of the conference suggested a number of different possible qualifications for the franchise. One such proposal, presumably put forward by Leo Marquard, was the then LP (qualified) franchise policy. All were rejected:

The attitudes of Non-European members of the Conference was that they would not be able to take part in furthering the attainment of the alteration of the present franchise laws along one or other of the ... lines suggested by European members. They indicated that, if the European members wished to work for alteration along those lines, this was the concern of the European members.⁴⁵

The growth of the ANC, its successful adoption of mass-based extra-parliamentary strategies, and the political polarisation of the 1950s, forced liberals to accommodate themselves to the demands of both the NP and the Congress movement and seek a middle course between right and left. Liberals claimed: "We are not extremists. We are sitting in the middle, between two nationalisms."⁴⁶ It was in this context that liberals, lacking a significant support base, supported a national convention in which 'race relations' could be discussed away from the party political arena. The SAIRR conference was an initial

⁴³ Marquard papers BC587 E1.26: Conference Invitation, 13-5-1953.

⁴⁴ Marquard papers BC587 E1.19: Q.Whyte to L.Marquard, 27-3-1953.

⁴⁵ Marquard papers BC587 E1.52: Notes on the Discussions at the Conference on Franchise Rights, 5-8-1953, p.1.

⁴⁶ Alan Paton in *Advance* 11-6-1953, p.4.

attempt to find some common ground between UP liberals and perceived 'moderates' in the ANC. Despite the lack of agreement, the conference called on the SAIRR to "explore the possibility of convening further inter-racial conferences preliminary to a National Convention."⁶⁷

The SAIRR dress-rehearsal between white liberal and ANC opinion affected the COP campaign in two ways. Firstly, as will be seen, the immovability of even conservative African leaders on the question of universal suffrage served to deter leading white liberals from participation in the COP. Secondly, eight days after leaving Adams College, Z.K. Matthews proposed the COP,⁶⁸ pointing to the SAIRR initiative as an idea which the ANC should take over. In a supporting memorandum, Matthews argued that NP "despotism" was forcing anti-Nationalist whites to revise "policies and programmes which have outlived their usefulness."⁶⁹ Matthews cited the formation of the LP and "the changed outlook of the Labour Party" as evidence that

the time is long overdue for a thorough-going re-examination of the place of different sections of the population in the South African body politic.⁷⁰

If the SAIRR conference revealed to liberals the political gap between themselves and the ANC, it did the same for those ANC members present. As a result, Matthews warned that the SAIRR convention, by restricting itself to established political organisations and working to a liberal agenda, would not adequately reflect South African conditions.⁷¹ The Congresses advised the SAIRR that it was "most appropriate" that they had taken over the proposed convention since the issue was one

which is primarily and in the first place the concern of the non-European people themselves, who are most directly affected and who form the majority of the population.⁷²

Finally, Congress leaders pointed to the United Nations Commission on racial affairs in South Africa, which had called for "a round-table conference of members of different ethnic groups of the Union."⁷³ Yusuf Dadoo argued that the COP "lays the basis for a further

⁶⁷ Marquard papers BC587 E1.49: Summary of Discussion, 6-8-1953, p.1.

⁶⁸ Matthews: Memorandum op.cit., p.1.

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *ibid.*, quoting a letter from the SAIC to the SAIRR.

⁷² Advance 12-8-1954, p.2.

extension of co-operation to include all national groups" in tune with domestic and international calls for a national convention: the COP, he concluded, "answers the historical need of the time."⁷³

Whites and the Congress of the People.

Congress leaders hoped that by taking over moves towards organising a national convention, those organisations interested in the idea would join them in the COP. Invitations to co-sponsor the COP were sent to the SAIRR and the Liberal and Labour Parties, and further invitations to participate in the COP were sent to all political organisations in the country, including the United and Nationalist parties. In discussions with the LP and SAIRR, Congress members emphasised the importance of adequate white participation in the COP both in strengthening nonracialism and making the Congress truly representative.⁷⁴

On the eve of the COP, however, SACOD's NEC noted that "all other national bodies, who claim to hold the key to the future of South Africa, have abandoned the field to the Congress Alliance," and correctly predicted that "it is now clear that the Congress of the People, for all time, will be coupled in people's minds with the Congresses."⁷⁵ COP sponsorship and participation were restricted to the Congress movement and its allies, such as the Federation of South African Women [FSAW], as was adoption of the *Freedom Charter*. The COP was nonetheless intended to draw in non-Congress organisations, particularly the LP and SAIRR.

Former LP members, and commentators such as Janet Robertson, have argued that the LP refused to co-sponsor the COP because the party was only invited to make work a pre-existing plan over which they were offered no control.⁷⁶ Such claims belie the open approach made by the Congress Alliance to white liberals in 1954. Elements within the

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ SAIRR: Cachalia discussion *op.cit.*; Friedmann to NC *op.cit.*

⁷⁵ SACOD NEC: *Notes op.cit.*, p.3.

⁷⁶ Robertson: *Liberalism op.cit.*, pp.164-165; Peter Brown: *The Liberal Party: A Chronology with Comment* (Rhodes University 1985).

ANC were clearly encouraged by the proposed SAIRR/Labour Party national convention, and the limited co-operation which had developed between the Congresses and the LP. Lutuli, a year after rejecting joint ANC/LP membership, spoke of the LP "between whom and ourselves there exists a warm and sympathetic understanding and friendly co-operation on specific issues where our policies agree."⁷⁷

The LP and other organisations invited to co-sponsor the COP were offered equal representation with the four Congresses on the NAC (which co-ordinated the campaign) and regional COP structures. The invitation stressed that only the broad outlines of the campaign had been settled:

'Let us speak together of freedom.' This sums up the conception we have of the range and purpose of the Congress of the People...⁷⁸

The invitation, left open until the first day of the COP, emphasised the flexibility of COP arrangements and thus highlighted the influence non-Congress organisations could exert. The COP campaign aimed to unite formal organisations with popular sentiment through the creation of a nationwide network of local committees, the development of a 'Freedom Consciousness' in ordinary people and granting them control over the contents of the *Freedom Charter*. All organisations were invited to participate in the mobilisation taking place around the COP. In effect, non-Congress bodies were invited to enter the COP and compete openly for support with the Alliance. As the NAC stated:

We do not intend to put a preconceived "Charter" before a hand-picked "Assembly." We seek rather to canvass the entire country, asking ordinary people everywhere, in every walk of life, to say in their own words what they need to make them happy.⁷⁹

Aware of liberal hostility towards universal suffrage, extra-parliamentary action and other central tenets of the Congress movement, the NAC stressed that organisations would be able to influence the COP and the *Charter* through participation in the NAC; moreover, they would remain ideologically free:

In extending this invitation, we make it clear that acceptance of the 'Call' and participation on the National Action Council does not in any way bind your organisation to accept our views - or any other views - of what is freedom. You

⁷⁷ Lutuli: *Presidential Address op.cit.*, p.139.

⁷⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: NAC Invitation to the LP to co-sponsor the COP, 6-7-1954.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

will remain free to put forward and campaign for your own views.⁸⁰

The COP campaign was intended to operate in both black and white political arenas. Elections were seen as a means of generating white support by posing a challenge in a medium central to white political practice. An unsigned article in *Fighting Talk* argued that whites were commonly seen as "mummified in their attitudes of prejudice and racial isolation, and that nothing will ever change them;" the reverse, it was argued, was true:

Every new democratic forward movement of the Non-White people, contrasting so sharply with every new Government inroad on our peace and liberties, brings more Europeans to the point of breaking with the traditions of race discrimination and oppression. The Defiance Campaign did so, leaving in its wake the Congress of Democrats, the Liberal Party and a more thoroughly democratic Labour Party. The ... Congress of the People campaign can do it again, on a wider scale.⁸¹

By staging national elections to the COP, it was argued, "it can be made impossible for them to stay out":

Will it be possible for those who repeatedly advise the non-European people to be "restrained," and who criticise the Congress movement for its rash impetuosity to allow election contests in European areas to go by default to the only European body thus far committed to support the Congress of the People, the S.A. Congress of Democrats? I believe not.⁸²

Faced with both the logistical difficulties of staging such elections, and a growing awareness of the legal dangers of talking of electing "a new Parliament - a people's Parliament,"⁸³ the idea of national elections was dropped in mid-1954.⁸⁴

Congress leaders hoped that the LP and SAIRR in particular would become full participants in the COP. As such, the COP represented a second approach from Congress leaders to white liberals, following their refusal to join the Congress of Democrats in 1952, and a further attempt to broaden the Congress Alliance. Commitment to a nonracial future had emerged as the guiding principle of the Congress Alliance by the early 1950s. As Albert Lutuli stated:

I have said it in the past, and I repeat it here, that to me Afrika is a land for all who are in it who give it undivided loyalty, whatever their racial origin might be. I believe in and work for the acceptance of the conception of all in Afrika being

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ *Fighting Talk* April 1954, p.4.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *Advance*: Editorial, 8-4-1954; see also Walter Sisulu in *Counter Attack* July 1954, p.3.

⁸⁴ Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit., p.57.

known as Africans...⁸⁵

That conception, as we have seen, was by no means universally accepted within the Alliance, and Congress leaders stressed to the LP and SAIRR that their participation in the COP was essential in maintaining and building nonracialism.⁸⁶

The SAIRR and LP were also approached for more immediate reasons. The participation of prominent public figures such as Alan Paton, Margaret Ballinger and Donald Molteno of the LP, could be expected to restrain the anticipated repression the COP would suffer. Moreover, as the LP's Marion Friedman noted after meeting NAC representatives,

the original sponsors are extremely anxious to get the Liberal Party in as sponsors - they made it quite clear that they wished us to come in so that we could have a hand in what was being decided. Furthermore it is evident that in receiving our support they believe, and probably rightly too, that other organisations will then be more willing to come in.⁸⁷

The COP campaign was an attempt by the black Congresses to capitalise on a perceived receptivity to new ideas in white liberal circles, and to draw them from the cautious middle-ground into co-operation with the Congress movement. Far from being asked merely to implement a preconceived Congress plan, liberals were invited to help co-ordinate the COP campaign, to participate in the creation of local committees, and to canvass black support for their ideals and programme. It was an invitation rejected by all white organisations barring SACOD.

SACOD and the Congress Alliance.

The South African Congress of Democrats was formed in 1953 and set itself three main goals:

to prove itself the most zealous guardian of our peoples' rights; to permit no attack from the government to pass unchallenged; to forge a militant unity of all South Africans for Democratic rights for all.⁸⁸

SACOD was a small activist organisation, with an average membership of 250⁸⁹ but with a public profile which belied its size. SACOD issued a large amount of anti-apartheid

⁸⁵ ANC papers AD1189/5/G4: Lutuli: On the African National Congress, 5-6-1956, p.11.

⁸⁶ SAIRR: Cachalia discussion *op.cit.*

⁸⁷ Friedman to NC *op.cit.*

⁸⁸ Counter Attack November 1953, p.1.

⁸⁹ Interviews with leading SACOD officials.

propaganda, and ran campaigns in the white areas on a wide range of issues by means of letters to the press, the collection of signatures for petitions at tables in the streets, and public meetings. SACOD suffered a high degree of repression; by 1954, for example, 42 of the ANC's estimated 30 000 members had been banned, while 40 SACOD members were banned.⁹⁰ The NEC noted that assessing SACOD "could almost be the story of the bannings."⁹¹ Funds were raised through subscriptions, the sale of SACOD literature, and cake and book sales. Finances were precarious throughout the 1950s: in 1954 SACOD had a liability of £256.8.11; four years later, income and liabilities balanced out at £213.5.7. apiece.⁹²

As part of the multiracial Congress Alliance, SACOD had a "special mission to convert white South Africans."⁹³ Throughout the 1950s, however, SACOD struggled to find a point of conjunction between participating in campaigns initiated by the black Congresses, and working with whites. SACOD was a political home for the white left - former CPSA members as well as socialists from the trade union movement, Springbok Legion activists, churchmen such as Trevor Huddleston and Padre du Manoir, academics, and others. SACOD membership included some who rejected the call to work with whites but joined the organisation because it provided the opportunity of "going into the townships as a Congress member."⁹⁴

As we have seen, the formation of SACOD and the call for whites to work amongst whites occasioned a major dispute within the white left.⁹⁵ SACOD members were drawn from the ranks of those who, "by long campaigning for what were formerly ridiculous and scorned ideas, have planted the seed of progressive and radical outlook in South Africa."⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Lodge: *Black Politics* op.cit., p.76.

⁹¹ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef1.3: *Organisational Report*, SACOD National Conference, 24-6-1955, p.1.

⁹² Cited in A Berman: *The South African Congress of Democrats 1953-1962* (Hons thesis, University of Cape Town, 1978), p.50, 82.

⁹³ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef1: Albert Lutuli: *Our Common Task*: message to SACOD National Conference, March 1956, p.1.

⁹⁴ Interview with Baruch Hirson (1986), transcript p.1.

⁹⁵ See chapter 5.

⁹⁶ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef8.1.2: Rusty Bernstein: *The Road To Liberty*, October 1953, p.4.

Such work, however, had focussed on and been located within the black community. As SACOD National Secretary Ben Turok has noted, white radicals entered a tradition of working in the townships rather than the white areas:

Even the Congress of Democrats, although it constantly reassessed its role and its duty to work among the whites, nevertheless a tradition had been established - and tradition in politics is a very powerful thing.⁹⁷

In working with whites, SACOD faced both internal differences and external hostility. Attempts to work in alliance with other organisations operating in the white areas were largely precluded by the anti-communist suspicion with which SACOD was regarded. Relations between the LP and SACOD were particularly hostile. LP members accused SACOD of acting as a front for former CPUSA members who dominated the ANC and SAIC; SACOD in turn attacked the LP for conducting a 'whites-only' struggle by rejecting extra-parliamentary action.⁹⁸

SACOD members were active in the Western Areas Protest Committees formed in the white suburbs of Johannesburg, organising the despatch of thousands of postcards to City Councillors opposing the removals while sending speakers "Sunday after Sunday after Sunday" to Sophiatown.⁹⁹ SACOD also supported moves to form a broad committee of representatives from the LP, UP, Torch Commando, Labour Party and the churches to co-ordinate opposition to the removals. However, moves by SACOD to gain representation for the black Congresses were blocked by the other organisations who feared a hidden motive on SACOD's part, and the committee collapsed.¹⁰⁰ A member of the SAIRR noted that at a Congress meeting in Johannesburg, the registration of delegates was "clearly in hands of C.O.D. - no Non-Europeans at registration tables."¹⁰¹ Lacking further evidence of SACOD dominance, the SAIRR reporter nonetheless elliptically concluded:

My own impression that whole line of action dictated by people, probably C.O.D., whose one aim is to heighten resentment.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ Interview with Ben Turok (1988), transcript p.16.

⁹⁸ See chapter 7.

⁹⁹ Interview with Helen Joseph, p.9.

¹⁰⁰ Advance 18-3-1954 p.1 and chapter 7.

¹⁰¹ ANC papers AD1189/10/M.1.g: SAIRR: Report on Transvaal COP meeting, 25-7-1954.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

Members of SACOD, the LP and the SAIRR were largely drawn from the same strata of middle-class white intellectuals, and a host of personal and professional relationships cut across organisational hostilities. SACOD and LP membership revealed a similar preponderance of lawyers, academics and professionals, and both organisations found the English-speaking universities to be their major recruitment area. SACOD also included a number of highly able working class whites, some of whom had been CPSA members.¹⁰³ LP members were largely brought into the political arena by the post-1948 growth of anti-Nationalist sentiment; SACOD members in large part had been active in the 1940s in organisations such as the CPSA, the Springbok Legion, and the trade union movement. Describing LP/SACOD hostilities, LP member Ernie Wentzel noted:

We were suspicious of the COD because in varying degrees we believed it to be Communist controlled or influenced, but our differences were also of temperament and emphasis. We were less radical than they were; less involved with the Congress movement.¹⁰⁴

As a small body shunned by other organisations working in white areas, SACOD could not demand attention alone: its influence derived from its position as a partner in the Congress Alliance. Where Congress strength was less evident, SACOD's influence waned. SACOD's Cape Secretary noted: "the crux of the matter is joint Congress weakness, which allows other groups to avoid us at present."¹⁰⁵ As a result, SACOD activists in the early 1950s strove to establish close working relations with the Congress movement.

SACOD's NEC, based in Johannesburg, reminded members of their place in the Congress movement. Where the Congress movement was strongly represented, as in Durban and Johannesburg, SACOD members concentrated their political work on white areas while providing technical, legal, administrative and other assistance to the Congresses. In both cities, SACOD was represented on joint Congress committees. In Cape Town, where the ANC was relatively weak and some leading members sympathetic to the LP, relations were more difficult. Cape members were reminded that while

of course you must maintain contact with the congresses and co-ordinate your work

¹⁰³ For example, printers Len Lee-Warden and Piet Beyleveld (former Labour Party members), former miner Jack Hodgson, salesperson Issie Heymann, and electrician/builder John Matthews.

¹⁰⁴ Wentzel: *Memoirs op.cit.*, p.94.

¹⁰⁵ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Cf.2: B.Gottschalk to Y.Barenblatt, 1-10-1956.

... we hope you do not think that C.O.D. can build S.A.C.P.O. or the A.N.C. Apart from assisting them when they ask for assistance, there is little that C.O.D. can do to strengthen them organisationally.¹⁰⁶

In Cape Town, however, the tradition of working in black areas was most pronounced. The Cape Town branch reported that of a book membership of eighty, "15 can be called upon to do regular active work," of whom only four were prepared to do door-to-door work in the white areas.¹⁰⁷ SACOD's Cape secretary stated: "So long as there is resistance to this primary form of activity, so long will we remain small and isolated." In contrast, "the best aspect" of SACOD's work in Cape Town was the introduction of study classes run by SACOD and attended by ANC, SACPO and SACTU members.¹⁰⁸

In Johannesburg, the work of SACOD members was largely restricted to branch and local activities. Senior SACOD members, however, were represented on national and provincial Congress Alliance consultative committees. The participation of leading members in nonracial Alliance committees generated grass-roots criticism, with members arguing that SACOD's lack of growth resulted from "the failure of leading members to take over the responsibilities of secretaryship"¹⁰⁹; as the SACOD journal *Counter Attack* noted:

Too many of us spend far too much time at Committee meetings ... a few less meetings and we might have won still more support by having more time canvassing among the people.¹¹⁰

SACOD was a small organisation with a shaky financial basis which participated in a wide range of campaigns and maintained a highly visible public profile. The result was that it was over-stretched:

We have sprung from one campaign to another without consolidating our work, without reviewing our potential, and making the necessary plans to cope with new contacts. Area work has been haphazard and unplanned ... Much has to be done with small numbers, over-burdened with too many meetings and little time for careful analysis.¹¹¹

SACOD was at its most active when involved in assisting other Congresses in nonracial

¹⁰⁶ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Cf.2: Y.Barenblatt to B.Gottschalk, 20-11-1956.

¹⁰⁷ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef1.6: Cape Western Report, 3i-3/1-4-1956, p.1.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁰⁹ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef1.6: 1956 NEC Report, p.1.

¹¹⁰ *Counter Attack* November 1954, p.2.

¹¹¹ SACOD: Organisational Report *op.cit.*, p.5.

campaigns. Leading SACOD members were well integrated in Alliance structures; branch members, however, "plodded along" in campaigns in the white areas.¹¹² As such, SACOD welcomed the COP campaign, which was both nonracial and promised to integrate a larger number of SACOD members into Alliance structures. Analyses of the role of SACOD, however, almost universally claim that SACOD members dominated the Congress Alliance.

SACOD was, and was intended to be, a political home for the white left. According to national chairperson Pieter Beyleveld, SACOD was

a loose association of like-minded people, bound together by a common belief in the necessity for and the desirability of a democratic society based on the equality of all citizens regardless of race or colour.¹¹³

Beyleveld noted that SACOD did not have "an all-embracing programme and policy on everything that happen[s] here and abroad, to which every member must owe allegiance publicly, or resign." Rather, consensus covered the struggle for equal rights and the primacy of the ANC in that struggle; thereafter, SACOD members had "diverse political allegiances" and included communists, anti-Soviet (and anti-CPSA) socialists, non-socialists, christians and others. That some former CPSA members joined SACOD, according to Helen Joseph, was "not surprising": it was the only organisation to which they could belong which unequivocally supported the struggle for equal rights.¹¹⁴

Most existing comment on SACOD flows from a prior assumption, that SACOD provided "earnest Marxists" with an entree to the Congress Alliance.¹¹⁵ Such assertions take no account of the role of black communists in the ANC, SAIC and SACPO. Moreover, they are premised on the prominence of some former CPSA members in SACOD, rather than an analysis of the programme and activities of SACOD itself. Even then, commentators have chosen to ignore SACOD members who had never joined the CPSA, who had left the Party before it disbanded, or the significant number of SACOD members hostile to the

¹¹² Interview with Helen Joseph, p.7.

¹¹³ SACOD papers AD1196/C: Chairman's Address: 1958 SACOD National Conference, p.2.

¹¹⁴ Helen Joseph: Tomorrow's Sun: A Smuggled Journal from South Africa (London 1968), p.52.

¹¹⁵ Gerhart: Power op.cit., p.157.

former CPSA.¹¹⁶ The latter category included Trotskyists, former CPSA members hostile to the party, and ANC supporters such as NEC member Helen Joseph who described herself as "almost anti-communist" in the early 1950s.¹¹⁷

SACOD was a small organisation which acted in support of campaigns initiated by the black Congresses. Commentators have nonetheless gone to extreme lengths in attacking SACOD's role in the 1950s. Gerhart has argued that by means of the

dozens of ... favors, large and small, which radical whites on account of their relative wealth and influence were able to offer their African allies, inevitably created a debt which Africans could repay only by lending their support to the pet causes of the white left - the peace movement and propaganda efforts on behalf of the Soviet Union and China. It seemed a small price to pay...¹¹⁸

Gerhart argues that for those "most promising ... in their sympathy towards the ideas preached by some of the COD's earnest Marxists" there was "a special bonus" - paid trips to Eastern Europe.¹¹⁹ She concludes that black support thus engendered "hardly constituted a commitment on any issue close to the immediate struggle in South Africa."¹²⁰

Mary Benson has argued that SACOD members used their position in the Congress Alliance to "forc[e] forward ... extraneous issues" such as the Korean war; in contrast with Gerhart, Benson claims that such issues were "sharply divisive."¹²¹ The support of black communists and nationalists for such issues is not commented upon. Rather, Gerhart argues that SACOD set a

definition of political 'reality' [which] distracted Africans from making their own objective assessment of where black interests lay.¹²²

In 1967 Edwin Munger took this perspective to its extreme, arguing that SACOD, "a lily-white organization," was "the leader of the Congresses."¹²³ According to Munger, SACOD from time to time manipulated the upper echelons of the A.N.C., sometimes by the

¹¹⁶ See chapter 5.

¹¹⁷ Interview with Helen Joseph (1989), transcript p.1.

¹¹⁸ Gerhart: *Power: op.cit.*, p.118.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.157.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, p.118; for the growth of ANCYL anti-imperialism and anti-Americanism, see chapter 3.

¹²¹ Mary Benson: *The Struggle for a Birthright* (London 1985) p.202.

¹²² *ibid.*, p.122.

¹²³ Edwin Munger: *Afrikaner and African Nationalism: South African Parallels and Parameters* (Oxford, 1967), p.92.

simple means of giving a hungry man a job at £20 per month.¹²⁴

Tom Lodge, while not offering a detailed discussion of SACOD, has analysed the organisation in terms of its positive effects on the Congress Alliance. Lodge notes that SACOD members were "highly experienced in the fields of political and trades union organisation"; their high political profiles derived not from the machinations of multiracialism but the abilities of SACOD members, many of whom had been active for two decades in black politics. Lodge described SACOD members as

highly experienced politicians with considerable intellectual ability. Whatever their colour one would expect such people to play a dynamic role.¹²⁵

SACOD and the Congress of the People.

The COP promised to galvanise SACOD members in a nonracial campaign, to give concrete form to relations between the Congresses, and draw white liberals into a closer working alliance with the Congress Alliance. As such, in contrast with claims made by various commentators¹²⁶, SACOD immediately endorsed the COP campaign, describing it as "political job number one for the future."¹²⁷

The COP campaign saw SACOD membership peak at some 500 nationally¹²⁸ with SACOD described as "a tower of strength in the whole preparatory work" for the COP.¹²⁹ The campaign harnessed SACOD's full energies because it was entirely nonracial. SACOD member Ben Turok was appointed COP organiser for the western Cape and was "deeply involved in the townships."¹³⁰ SACOD members worked in both black and white areas; demands were not collected on an organisational basis, but by nonracial teams of organisers. The COP campaign released SACOD from a single focus on white areas, and its members participated in the collection of demands, spoke extensively in the townships,

¹²⁴ *ibid.*

¹²⁵ Lodge: *Black Politics: op.cit.*, p.69.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.69 and Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge op.cit.*, p.58 claim that SACOD did not initially support the COP.

¹²⁷ *Counter Attack* February 1954, p.1.

¹²⁸ Interview with Helen Joseph, p.3.

¹²⁹ SACOD NEC: *Notes op.cit.*, p.3.

¹³⁰ Interview with Ben Turok, p.10.

provided transport and produced propaganda for the COP. In the Cape, SACOD members worked in rural and urban areas, holding late night meetings in shanty towns and villages.¹³¹ At the COP itself, SACOD members built the staging and provided a lighting system; as Helen Joseph put it, "the whites did the dirty, hard, donkey work."¹³²

SACOD members were involved at all levels of the COP campaign, and in the final Congress. Rusty Bernstein co-ordinated a committee which analysed demands received for inclusion in the *Freedom Charter*, while Helen Joseph and Ben Turok introduced clauses of the *Charter* at Kliptown. SACOD was represented on the NAC and provincial committees, which continued when COP structures were transformed into consultative committees. SACOD was the only white organisation to co-sponsor and fully participate in the COP campaign. Whites also participated through membership of SACTU and FSAW. At the Congress of the People itself, 112 whites were among the 2884 delegates present, and the *Freedom Charter's* unequivocal commitment to a nonracial future including whites bore testimony to their role.

The COP campaign saw SACOD and SACPO fully integrated into the established ANC/SAIC alliance. At the end of the COP campaign, SACOD's NEC concluded:

the Congress of the People has cemented the alliance of the Congresses more firmly than ever before, with each section now being recognised and accepted not just as an ally but as a full partner with equal responsibility. Here is being forged the future alliance of the South African people...¹³³

As we have seen, however, SACOD faced resistance to work in white areas. In the COP campaign, the NAC was to co-operate with white organisations at a national level; SACOD's task was to canvass white support for the COP, electing white Volunteers and

making the European population Congress-of-the-People conscious, and ... winning the most enlightened and democratic of them for the Congress.¹³⁴

With SACOD members already fully involved in the collection of demands from black areas, SACOD leaders called for a "many-sided campaign" in the white areas, including house to house canvassing, "chalking and sticking" of COP slogans, letters to the press,

¹³¹ Interviews with Ben Turok p.10, and Amy Thornton (1987) transcript p.1.

¹³² Interview with Helen Joseph, p.9.

¹³³ SACOD NEC: *Notes op.cit.*, pp.2-3.

¹³⁴ CAMP Reel 4B:2/DC2:41/25: To all SACOD members (circular), 6-8-1954.

meetings with other organisations and organising talks on the COP.¹³⁵ SACOD branches in Johannesburg and elsewhere accordingly began a selective canvass of white areas, which elicited both support for the COP and some new SACOD members.¹³⁶ An internal document noted that

the response has been better than expected. Why? Because we have been so out of touch with our section of the public that whatever would have happened we would have been surprised.¹³⁷

SACOD's white work was limited and less popular than campaigning in the townships. SACOD members were reminded of their "difficult but necessary task of canvassing the white community ... THEY MUST GET DOWN TO IT!"¹³⁸

SACOD's work in white areas was complicated by its members' preference for township work and compounded by the perception that building nonracialism necessitated the demonstration to blacks of white commitment to democracy. Such work, however, was not without its problems. Lutuli warned SACOD that while state persecution should be expected, "even worse than this you may find yourselves suspected of ulterior motives by some of the people you are trying to liberate."¹³⁹ COP National Organiser Thembekile Tshunungwa, reporting on a tour of the western Cape, reported "extreme confusion" arising when SACOD members were found

taking a lead in the ANC meetings ... a politically raw African who has been much oppressed, exploited and victimised by the Europeans sees red whenever a white face appears.¹⁴⁰

By the same token, however, Walter Sisulu later noted:

most Africans come into political activity because of their indignation against Whites, and it is only through their education in Congress and their experience of the genuine comradeship in the struggle of such organisations as the Congress of Democrats that they rise to the broad, non-racial humanism of our Congress movement.¹⁴¹

¹³⁵ CAMP Reel 4B:2:DC2:45/28: SACOD: Congress of the People Campaign, nd.?November 1954, p.1.

¹³⁶ Counter Attack November 1954, p.1.

¹³⁷ CAMP Reel 4B:2:DC2:45/31: SACOD (Johannesburg): The C.O.P. and C.O.D. (nd.1955) p.1.

¹³⁸ Counter Attack November 1954, p.1 (emphasis in original).

¹³⁹ Lutuli: Task op.cit., p.1.

¹⁴⁰ Quoted in Lodge: Black Politics op.cit., p.71.

¹⁴¹ Walter Sisulu: Congress and the Africanists, Africa South July/September 1959, p.33.

The means by which whites could be brought into the anti-apartheid struggle in considerable numbers was subject to considerable debate. As we have seen, some argued that mass white support for the Congress movement would follow as the government was forced to "pander to [the] prejudices" of the its support base, the reactionary elements in South African society, and thereby alienate "the less reactionary sections."¹⁴² Theoreticians in SACOD and the black Congresses argued that "apartheid is an inhibiting factor in the economic development of South Africa ... what progress has taken place ... has been in spite of racial discrimination and not because of it."¹⁴³ As such, some SACOD members argued that SACOD would not win mass support but that whites would join "as the contradictions of fascism become more economically apparent."¹⁴⁴ White support would also grow because apartheid had

a logic of its own, which cannot be kept in a carefully separate and "Non-European" camp ... The destruction of the liberties of the Non-European is the forerunner of the destruction of liberty for the European.¹⁴⁵

The most obvious means of drawing whites into the Congress-led struggle was through a broad anti-apartheid alliance. By opening co-sponsorship of the COP, the Congress movement invited liberals to participate in the construction of the ideological basis of such an alliance. In the event, no non-Congress-supporting organisations accepted the invitation.

The Liberal Party and the Congress of the People.

In July 1954 the Liberal Party was invited to co-sponsor the COP. The invitation arrived at the height of the internal battles taking place at the 1954 National Congress, which left the LP deeply divided and close to collapse.¹⁴⁶ The National Congress voted in support of full participation in the COP, and the LP publicly endorsed the COP and the proposed *Freedom Charter* while leaving the question of co-sponsorship open to discussion with the NAC.¹⁴⁷ The possibility of forging closer working links with the Congresses clearly

¹⁴² Johnson: *Mass Support?* op.cit., p.20 and see above.

¹⁴³ SACOD papers AD1196/K: SACOD: *Speaker's Notes* 1956, p.2.

¹⁴⁴ Dennis Goldberg: *Can the Congress of Democrats Win Mass Support?*, *Liberation*, March 1956, p.7; see also Ronald Press: *Can the Congress of Democrats Win Mass Support: A Criticism*, *Liberation*, April 1956.

¹⁴⁵ SACOD NEC: *Notes* op.cit., p.1 and chapter 5.

¹⁴⁶ See chapter 7.

¹⁴⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: LP to NAC secretary, 10-7-1954.

motivated LP support for the COP.¹⁴⁸

Participation in the COP immediately increased contact between the LP and the Congress movement. A LP delegation met the NAC, and SACOD chairperson and NAC member Piet Beyleveld addressed the LP National Committee. A COP newsletter advised regions that "wherever possible the co-operation of Liberal Groups must be sought" while the NAC was to involve the LP at a national level.¹⁴⁹ LP members attended NAC meetings as observers while the party debated co-sponsorship, reporting the visibly less hostile reception granted to the LP, and stressing that SACOD members were not controlling the COP campaign.¹⁵⁰ Finally, LP members were elected to COP committees in the Transvaal and Cape.

Support for participation in the COP came largely from those party members who argued that the LP had to develop a black support base if it were to become a "real political force."¹⁵¹ To do so, party radicals called for the alteration of the 1953 LP *Principles* in order to lessen black hostility, and initiated a lengthy and bitter dispute within the party. In this situation, the COP became subsumed in a party-wide dispute between radical and conservative elements.

LP radicals argued that the COP was an opportunity to overcome Congress hostility while allowing the LP to take the fight against communism into Congress structures: in effect, accepting the NAC challenge to canvass popular support for the LP programme in competitive co-operation with the Congress movement. Durban LP member Ken Hill, supported by Selby Msimang and other black party members in Natal, argued that through the COP the LP should work to

strengthen the liberal forces at work in the movement and to oppose quite openly the communist and the nationalist (non-White) forces. There are considerable communist influences at work but there is also much genuine liberalism amongst the non-White leaders. This ... would involve at once a struggle with the Congress of Democrats which would be intense and would certainly be bitter and unprincipled on their side ... We must not be afraid of ... trying to convert

¹⁴⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: 1954 National Congress and NC meeting, 9/12-7-1954.

¹⁴⁹ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Egl.2.1: NAC: Newsletter, 9-11-1954, p.2.

¹⁵⁰ Friedmann to NC *op.cit.*

¹⁵¹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: NC, 30/31-10-1954.

everyone we can to liberalism.¹⁵²

At the same time, however, conservative elements in the LP became increasingly hostile to the COP. Despite evidence that SACOD was not controlling the COP campaign, leading LP members stressed that behind the COP lay the hidden hand of communism, in the shape of SACOD members. Meetings with Congress members centred on the "hidden motive" behind the request for LP co-sponsorship.¹⁵³ Conservative LP members characterised the Freedom Volunteers as a means of "causing agitation and frustration,"¹⁵⁴ and LP involvement in an extra-parliamentary campaign was described as "frightfully dangerous."¹⁵⁵

That danger was exacerbated by claims that the LP would not be able to exercise a controlling influence in the COP because of SACOD, seen as desiring "the kudos as fighters for freedom and democracy for themselves alone" who "will try to damage [the LP] if they can."¹⁵⁶ Conservative LP members argued that the party would be rendered powerless if it participated in the COP, and painted a picture of the LP duped by communists and the victim of "disturbances which the Party could not control."¹⁵⁷

Support for the COP divided along a similar axis to the internal disputes of the LP. Moves to alter the party *Principles* was led by the Transvaal Provincial Committee and a minority in the Cape division, where Native Representative candidate Jimmy Gibson sat on both the National and Executive Committees. Gibson and Peter Hjul, his election agent, were elected to Cape COP committees while the 1954 elections were under way; as Hjul noted, "it would have been a very silly thing for us politically to have rejected it ... we were highly suspicious, of course, of what was behind the whole movement."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵² Ballinger papers A410/F3.5: Ken Hill: Memorandum: nd?November 1954.

¹⁵³ For example, LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: joint Edendale/Pietermaritzburg LP meeting addressed by the NIC, 12-10-1954.

¹⁵⁴ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: NC, 31-10-1954.

¹⁵⁵ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: W.Stanford to M.Ballinger, 17-8-1954.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: NC, 30/31-10-1954.

¹⁵⁸ CAMP Reel 10A:2:XH: Interview with P.Hjul (1964), p.4.

Following Gibson's electoral defeats by SACOD candidates, he informed party leaders that his support for the COP had waned: "in the absence of [LP] co-sponsorship, the COP had taken a direction he could no longer support."¹³⁹ Gibson recommended that the LP take no part whatsoever in the final Congress. His supporters circulated a memorandum designed to win support for withdrawal from the COP, which claimed that COP organisers

are interested in power. They will use any weapon they can find to further their ends. Most of these men are white. They include lawyers who use the grievances of the African people to make their names as 'fighters for the people,' deliberately fighting hopeless legal cases to establish themselves - and getting paid handsomely for it. They include men and women who set up bogus organisations as cover for the normal Communist aims...[their aim is] to rig control of the machinery of the Congress, making it a pure Communist front organisation.¹⁴⁰

The call from Cape radicals for a withdrawal from COP structures because of communist influence gained widespread support amongst party leaders. Alan Paton wrote to National Committee members in September 1954 asking "whether we are struggling against Communism for the African soul or whether we are moving into a common front."¹⁴¹ Party leaders declared themselves "frankly frightened" of the combination of communist dominance in a black extra-parliamentary campaign.¹⁴² A number of LP members called for the resuscitation of the SAIRR national convention "with organisations rather than 'the people' represented."¹⁴³ LP chairperson Oscar Wollheim finally suggested:

we may possibly suggest a joint delegation to discuss the whole business with [Justice minister] Blackie Swart - I mean ourselves, the Institute, Labour and Federal parties.¹⁴⁴

Behind the anti-communist rhetoric lay two prime concerns. The first was a perceived lack of LP control over the COP, and over the final form the *Freedom Charter* would take. Wollheim noted plainly that "it boils down to whether we can achieve real leadership in the C.O.P. or not."¹⁴⁵ The second major concern of the party leadership was its internal struggle LP party radicals, particularly in the Transvaal. The COP had become subsumed in the internal struggles of the LP, and in June 1955 the Executive Committee (with

¹³⁹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: Executive Committee, 6-6-1955.

¹⁴⁰ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: A.Winch: Memorandum, 18-8-1954.

¹⁴¹ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: A.Paton to M.Ballinger, 4-9-1954.

¹⁴² Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 21-8-1954.

¹⁴³ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: P.Brown to D.R.Calder, 2-11-1954.

¹⁴⁴ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 21/8/1954.

¹⁴⁵ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to M.Ballinger, 30-9-1954.

Gibson's support) ruled that the LP should send neither a message nor observers to the COP.¹⁶⁶ Transvaal objections to this clear breach of National Committee and National Congress policy were overridden. In a private letter Gibson explained that his changed position on the COP was

not so much that I am concerned about what we [did] about the C.O.P. The real question at issue was whether or not this was a suitable issue on which to defy the Executive.¹⁶⁷

Following Margaret Ballingers' threatened resignation as party leader, radicals were under pressure to maintain party unity in all three provinces.¹⁶⁸ Gibson argued that as the radical voice on the National and Executive Committees, he was in a weak position:

any open defiance can merely split the Party and serve little purpose ... it hardly seems to me desirable to force a split in the Party. But even if it were desirable this issue can not be considered important enough.¹⁶⁹

By 1955, party conservatives had rallied sufficient support to withdraw the LP from the COP. At the COP in June 1955, the LP was not represented in any way.¹⁷⁰

Liberal Party non-participation in the COP has been ascribed to the lack of influence the party was offered over a pre-set plan. Re-written in fictional form by Alan Paton, the withdrawal of the LP was cause for regret by Albert Lutuli who states, in an imaginary conversation, "it's a pity you didn't come to Kliptown. You could've saved us from putting in all the Marxist doctrines."¹⁷¹ The real Albert Lutuli, in contrast, noted that the LP

grumbled rather that we had got things going and only then invited them in. We found their complaint odd, since all we had done was to define what we, the sponsors, were inviting them to join us in.¹⁷²

A second factor which influenced the LP was described by Alan Paton as resulting from the LP's

distrust of the white Congress of Democrats, and its suspicion, almost strong enough to be called its belief, that the Democrats were in fact the moving force

¹⁶⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: Executive Committee, 6-6-1955.

¹⁶⁷ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: J.T.R.Gibson to W. van der Willigen, 8-7-1955.

¹⁶⁸ See chapter 7.

¹⁶⁹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: Gibson to van der Willigen, 8-7-1955.

¹⁷⁰ Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit., p.61 state inaccurately that LP observers were present at Kliptown.

¹⁷¹ Alan Paton: *Ah but your land is beautiful* (London 1981) p.131.

¹⁷² Lutuli: *My People* op.cit., p.140.

behind the Congress of the People.¹⁷³

Anti-communism was a central tenet of the LP programme, and was directed almost exclusively at SACOD members. Faced with mounting evidence (from LP members) that SACOD was not dominating or directing the COP campaign, those opposed to participation nonetheless argued that the COP was "a blatant communist front."¹⁷⁴ Anti-SACOD scare tactics served to mask the power struggle taking place within the LP, as well as deeper Liberal fears over mass-based extra-parliamentary action.

Most existing commentary neglects the COP campaign in favour of speculation over the extent to which the "white Marxists" of SACOD were able to control the nature of the final *Freedom Charter*.¹⁷⁵ Janet Robertson, for example, has claimed that

the communist-controlled C.O.D. appeared to have a dominant role in preparations for the Congress ... the extent to which the communists engineered the preparations for the Congress and prearranged the terms of the Charter itself is difficult to assess.¹⁷⁶

In most cases, commentators question the veracity of Congress claims that the *Charter* emerged from the demands of the people by quoting the views of LP members.¹⁷⁷ The LP was an actor on the same political stage as the Congress Alliance, in some areas competing for support, membership and prominence with the Congresses, in others opposing mass-based extra-parliamentary campaigns, and almost universally attacking SACOD as a communist front. The views expressed by LP members are those of an interested party to events, rather than objective assessments made by disinterested commentators.

At the Congress of the People in June 1955, messages of support from a wide range of organisations, including the Labour Party, were read out. The LP withdrawal from the COP served to renew Congress hostility which had begun to wane in the 1953-54 period. In northern Natal, where LP/ANC co-operation was at its closest, ANC members were

¹⁷³ Alan Paton: *Journey Continued* (Cape Town 1988), p.136.

¹⁷⁴ Ballinger papers A410/B2.11: O.Wollheim to J.Unterhalter, 8-7-1955.

¹⁷⁵ Gerhart: *Power* op.cit., pp.115-116.

¹⁷⁶ Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.165.

¹⁷⁷ For example E.Feit: *South Africa: The Dynamics of the African National Congress* (London 1962), p.33; D.Irvine: *The Liberal Party 1953-1968*, in Butler, Elphick and Welsh (eds): *Democratic Liberalism in South Africa* (Cape Town 1987), pp.127-128; Lodge: *Black Politics* op.cit., p.72; Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.166.

reported to have "attacked the Liberal Party as a bourgeois organisation interested only in advancing the interests of highly-educated and well-to-do Africans."¹⁷⁸ Albert Lutuli warned the LP that "Africans will judge you by what you do for them, not by your ideologies."¹⁷⁹ Pointing to "fundamental deficiencies" in the LP programme, Lutuli noted that "as a Congressman I cannot conscientiously work in an unqualified alliance with the Liberal Party."¹⁸⁰

Conclusion.

The Congress of the People campaign cemented the Congress Alliance and entrenched racial co-operation as its guiding principle. The Liberal Party refused to participate in the COP; SACOD members in contrast were highly active participants in the campaign, and elected to national and provincial structures. The *Freedom Charter* marked the culmination of the search for a unifying ideological statement which had marked the resistance movement throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. For white radicals, the nonracialism of the *Freedom Charter* and the Alliance was "our most cherished possession, and must be guarded and strengthened."¹⁸¹ Their work, with that of whites in SACTU and FSAW, ensured that the *Freedom Charter* unambiguously endorsed the vision of a nonracial and democratic future South Africa.

¹⁷⁸ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 4: J.K.Ngubane: Report on Charlestown, nd.1956.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in *Drum*: January 1955, p.29.

¹⁸⁰ Lutuli: ANC op. cit., p.13.

¹⁸¹ SACOD NEC: Notes op.cit., p.3.

Conclusion.

The Freedom Charter and the politics of nonracialism, 1956-1960.

Introduction.

The ten years from the end of the second world war to the Congress of the People were dominated by mass-based resistance to apartheid. The nature of the South African resistance movement differed from anti-colonial liberation movements elsewhere in Africa because of the acceptance by nationalists, socialists, liberals and others of the permanence of white South Africans, and the development of a national liberation struggle based on broad racial co-operation. Multiracialism evolved from attempts to marry African nationalism and racial co-operation, and by 1955 the Congress movement had attained the organisational unity necessary to prosecute the Congress of the People campaign. The *Freedom Charter* was to symbolise that unity, provide ideological coherence and a vision of the future legitimated by its origin in the demands of ordinary people. In this concluding and brief review of political developments in the 1956-1960 period, however, it becomes clear that multiracialism and the *Freedom Charter* failed to harmonise the disputes which had marked the Congress movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The endorsement of the *Freedom Charter* by the ANC in 1956 was followed by the arrest of 156 Congress Alliance members on charges of treason. The resultant power vacuum was used to good effect by Africanists opposed to the nonracial character of the *Charter* and the Alliance. Africanists focussed their attacks on the South African Congress of Democrats, which they characterised as an organisation of white communists which dominated the ANC and wrote the *Freedom Charter* so as to further communist aims. By couching their attacks in predominantly anti-communist rather than anti-white terms, Africanists won the support of a significant section of the Liberal Party, as well as some former Communist Party members and others who called for the pursuance of class struggle by means of a single, mass-based nonracial Congress. At the same time as nonracialism was entrenched in the ideology of the Congress movement, widening disputation broke out over the politics of racial co-operation.

The ANC and the Freedom Charter.

The *Freedom Charter* endorsed at the Congress of the People in 1955 was a lyrical statement of nationalist and democratic demands which stressed the transfer of power and privilege from the white minority to the population as a whole.¹ The ANC President-General, Aibert Lutuli, described the *Charter* as

line by line, the direct outcome of conditions which obtain - harsh, oppressive and unjust conditions. It is thus a practical and relevant document. It attempts to give a flesh and blood meaning, in the South African setting, of such words as *democracy, freedom, liberty* ... The *Freedom Charter* is open to criticism. It is by no means a perfect document. But its motive must be understood, as must the deep yearning for security and human dignity from which it springs.²

The *Freedom Charter* differed from previous ANC statements of principle most clearly in its method of production. Moreover, where *Africans' Claims* and the *Programme of Action* dealt with specifically African demands, the *Freedom Charter* began by stating "that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white" and was phrased in entirely nonracial terms. The *Charter* restated demands for equality in all spheres of political, social, educational and cultural life, and for land redistribution. Where *Africans' Claims* had called for the removal of economically restrictive laws, the *Charter* went further:

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans, shall be restored to the people;
The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole.

The economic clause of the *Freedom Charter* has frequently been taken by critics to denote the hidden hand of communist authors; as a result, comment on the *Charter* has focussed to a considerable extent on speculation as to its author/s.³ To ask who wrote the *Freedom Charter* however obscures the way in which the document - the fruit of almost two years' campaigning - was produced. SACOD member Rusty Bernstein has noted:

Most commentators focus ... on the matter of "who wrote the Charter?" The question is wrongly conceived; the people "wrote" the Charter, in the sense of deciding its contents. The demands collected in their thousands are the matrix of

¹ All quotations from the *Freedom Charter* are taken from Suttner and Cronin: *Thirty Years of the Freedom Charter* op.cit., pp.262-266.

² Albert Lutuli: *Let My People Go* (London 1962), p.142.

³ See inter alia Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op.cit. p.60; Lodge: *Black Politics* op.cit., p.72; Gerhart: *Black Power* op.cit., pp.115-116; Robertson: *Liberalism* op.cit., p.165; J.Ngubane: *An African Explains Apartheid* (London 1963), p.164.

the Charter, its text *in extenso*; Congress sub-committees classified, grouped and sorted; I crafted the classified matter into a fairly uniform shape and verbal style.⁴

Bernstein 'crafted' what he recalled as "literally thousands" of demands, in various styles and on scraps of paper.⁵ Regional structures of the various Congresses held meetings in 1955 in order to analyse the demands collected and to discuss what the final *Charter* should look like; resolutions from these meetings were sent to COP headquarters in Johannesburg. Calls for nationalisation and land redistribution were included in *Demands of the People*, a summary of demands collected by SACOD, and were submitted by SACPO for inclusion in the *Charter*.⁶ According to Bernstein

there were fewer demands on macro-economic matters than others, because who other than the students or the commercially oriented puts the "capitalism/socialism" issue in the forefront of their demands. The formulation in the Charter on these issues derived from "demands", but from *few* demands. The issue of the land and its redistributive proposals are [vague, representing again the paucity of demands actually collected from the reserves and the rural cultivators ... If I had "written" the Charter as unthinking commentators often suggest, I would surely have had something more specific - nationalisation, collectivisation, confiscation or whatever to suggest. The formulations are the best we could devise.⁷

Focussing on authorship obscures the nature of the *Freedom Charter* and its object. The *Charter* was a consensual document which aimed to express the common aspirations of South Africans and to thereby reunite the Congress movement with its constituency. However, while the *Charter* provided a single ideological statement to which all the Congresses could adhere, its endorsement by the ANC triggered off a damaging dispute which ultimately led to the formation of the Pan Africanist Congress.

Opposition to the Freedom Charter.

A meeting of the joint Congress Executives in July 1955 unanimously endorsed the *Freedom Charter* and called on "the peoples of South Africa, of all races and creeds to strive for the realisation of the principles embodied in the Charter."⁸ Lutuli described the *Charter*

⁴ Communication from Rusty Bernstein, 28-11-1989.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ SACOD: *Demands of the People*, nd.1955 (private possession of author) and interview with Ben Turok (1988), transcript p.13.

⁷ Bernstein *op.cit.*, 28-11-1989 (emphasis in original).

⁸ ANC Papers, University of the Witwatersrand: AD1189 Eo.3: Minutes: Joint Congress Executives, 31-7-1955, p.3.

as "a practical document which leans towards Socialism, having regard to the practical situation that obtains." Z.K. Matthews commented: "Being the chief person responsible for the idea of the Congress of the People, I am happy that it has gone through successfully."⁹

ANC endorsement of the *Freedom Charter* was delayed by the fact that the 1955 Annual Conference was an elective conference¹⁰; a special conference was called in March 1956, where the *Charter* was adopted. In the intervening nine months, the *Charter* was the subject of attack by a range of disparate elements. That attack was led by Africanists within the ANC who described themselves as "sea-green incorruptibles" and the true inheritors of African nationalism as set out in the *Programme of Action*.¹¹ Africanists argued that the struggle in South Africa was a straightforward anti-colonial battle between "the conquered and the conqueror, the invaded and the invader, the dispossessed and the dispossessor."¹² As such, Africanist antipathy focussed on the *Charter's* nonracialism:

African Nationalists have repeatedly and forcibly made their standpoint clear, namely that the Kliptown Charter was not, and is not the Charter of the African people, for the simple reason that the African is not prepared to forfeit his claim to his fatherland...¹⁴

According to leading Africanists (and later leading PAC members) Peter Raboroko and Zeph Mothopeng, the *Freedom Charter* blamed black oppression on "the system" whereas "[t]he truth is that the African people have been robbed by the European people."¹⁵

For Africanists, the nonracialism of the *Freedom Charter* reflected the interests of whites and Indians, and they described ANC leaders as "clients receiving economic benefits from the 'Marshall Aid Plan' of the C.O.D. and the S.A.I.C."¹⁶ Africanists did not launch a racist attack on all the non-African Congresses or offer detailed criticism of the *Charter*; rather,

⁹ Treason Trial transcript AD1812 Volume 57/11595.

¹⁰ SAIRR Auden House Collection, University of the Witwatersrand: AD1180 Eo.3: Minutes: Joint Congress Executives, 31-7-1955, p.3.

¹¹ ZKM: Z.K. Matthews: *Autobiography* (nd. Institute of Commonwealth Studies, London), p.24.

¹² Peter Raboroko quoted in M. Benson: *The struggle for a birthright* (London 1985), p.213.

¹³ Potlako Leballo: *What of the future?* in *The Africanist* December 1957, p.7.

¹⁴ *Africanist Statement* in *The Africanist* June/July 1958, p.6.

¹⁵ Ufford Khoruba [Raboroko] and Kwaine Lekwane [Mothopeng]: *The Kliptown Charter* in *The Africanist* June/July 1958, p.15.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.16.

they claimed that ANC leaders had "made a catastrophic blunder by accepting foreign leadership by the whites" and made SACOD the main target of attack.¹⁷ The *Freedom Charter*, Africanists argued, had been written by SACOD and did not reflect African aspirations:

The Kliptown Charter did not emanate as a finished document from the A.N.C. It emanated as such from the Vodka Cocktail parties of Parktown and Lower Houghton ... The black masses who met at Kliptown were merely pawns in the game of power politics.¹⁸

ANC leaders were characterised as "lackeys, flunkeys and functionaries of non-African minorities"¹⁹, particularly the "Curse Of Democracy," the Congress of Democrats:

In 1953 C.O.D. was born. Who her parents were and who the midwife was we unfortunately do not know. But rumour persists that she is the product of an incestuous union ... The C.O.D. controls and dominates the A.N.C. ... We declare, here and now, that we shall never submit to C.O.D. domination.²⁰

Africanist attacks on SACOD resonated with existing anti-white sentiment²¹, and with organisations such as the LP which had long attacked SACOD as a communist front. LP anti-communism was strengthened in 1956 when journalists Patrick Duncan and Jordan Ngubane, bound by what Alan Paton called "an almost fanatical anti-communism" joined the party.²² Both were Africanist sympathisers; Ngubane was a delegate to the inaugural conference of the PAC in 1959²³, while Duncan later became the only white PAC member. Duncan was an erratic and unpredictable figure who talked of "pamphleteering South Africa by plane"²⁴ and rejected a proposed boycott of South African minerals in favour of frozen lobster tails which, he argued, "would be very telling."²⁵ Duncan brought a Cold War anti-communism to the LP and to the newspaper *Contact* which he edited. Duncan claimed that SACOD members "proudly, unashamedly, backed the communist cause"²⁶ and a *Contact* policy memorandum dedicated the newspaper to "support for the democratic

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.16.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ Editorial: *The Africanist* June/July 1958, pp.1-4.

²¹ See chapter 8.

²² Alan Paton: *Journey Continued* (Cape Town 1988), p.191.

²³ LP Papers: A/1671-mfm-Reel 1: Minutes: LP National Congress, 3-6 March 1959.

²⁴ Duncan papers DU 5.2.15: P.Duncan to G.M.Hauser, 7-3-1955.

²⁵ Duncan papers DU 5.8.41: P.Duncan to G.M.Hauser, 28-10-1959.

²⁶ P.Duncan to A.Paton, 24-11-1958 quoted in Driver: *Duncan op.cit.*, p.159.

front, but never of COD."²⁷

Duncan and Ngubane launched a series of public attacks on SACOD and the *Freedom Charter in Contact*, and in *Indian Opinion* to which Ngubane contributed. For Duncan, the *Charter* was "unexceptionable ... But it was the creation of communist-minded people, not of the African National Congress."²⁸ Ngubane similarly accepted that the *Charter* was not a communist document, but argued that its very broadness was intended "to condition the African people for the purpose of accepting communism via the back door."²⁹ On joining the LP, Jordan Ngubane noted:

The atmosphere inside the Party is that of well-intentioned, sincere and decent people unconsciously awed by the fearful complexity of race problems. We act as though the evils we oppose are amenable to reason of the type we respect.³⁰

Ngubane appealed to liberals to "tak[e] Liberalism to the man in the Location" and party leaders sought to radicalise the LP in order to effect this.³¹ LP leaders praised the "truly democratic nature" of the *Freedom Charter*³² but rejected its "socialistic provisions" as "not compatible with the Party's declared policy."³³

By 1960 the latter was no longer true: the LP endorsed a draft land policy which talked of confiscation and collectivisation, and a welfare-state economic policy³⁴; black strikes and boycotts were accepted because "no other methods are available to them" and the LP criticised those who described such methods as 'agitation'³⁵; LP chairperson Peter Brown stated: "What we want here ... is to see the Universal Declaration of Human Rights become the law of the land in South Africa."³⁶ In 1959 the LP and the ANC jointly organised the first month-long overseas boycott of South African goods. The move generated considerable opposition from conservative LP members; according to Peter Brown, "one had reached the

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.149.

²⁸ Duncan papers DU 5.8.21: P.Duncan to G.M.Hauser, 20-2-1956.

²⁹ Quoted in Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* op cit, p.64.

³⁰ Ballinger papers A410/F3.8.4: J.Ngubane: Memorandum on the African and the Liberal Party, September 1956.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Alan Paton: *Hope For South Africa* (London 1958), p.76.

³³ Peter Brown in *Contact* 22-8-1959, p.16.

³⁴ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 2: Draft Land Policy, adopted in 1961; and draft economic policy, 1960.

³⁵ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 6: Transvaal LP Statement on the 1958 Stay-Away.

³⁶ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 3: P.Brown: Speech, 10-12-1959.

point where one felt enough accommodation had been made" and a number of conservative LP members left for the Progressive Party, launched in 1959.³⁷ LP leaders in Natal and the Transvaal saw the party as "an organised articulate pressure-group among both whites and blacks"³⁸, maintaining liberal values in the ANC by co-operating with it while opposing the closeness of the ANC and SACOD. Peter Brown noted:

it is only by being more active that we can hope to persuade Africans in particular that what we offer is better than what COD has to offer.³⁹

For LP activists in the Cape, "COD was Communist Party"⁴⁰ and ANC leaders in the region were described as "little more than faceless images of their COD bosses."⁴¹ Led by Duncan, the Cape rejected the relative closeness of LP/ANC relations elsewhere in the country which they described as "the rather humiliating attempt to horn in on other people's parties".⁴² Duncan argued:

The Liberal Party has no hope of achieving support or even favour in the eyes of the African masses by such co-operation so long as what Eddie Roux calls "the dynamic activities of the Reds" inside the A.N.C. continues ... in politics the major factor remains power, and ... there is no substitute for the Liberal Party making its own way and developing its own membership if it wishes to win the respect of South Africa. I believe that our stand as a Party, i.e. non-racial, South African and anti-communist, is so powerful a position that if we use energy and skill we can put all differing movements on to the defensive.⁴³

Duncan claimed that the influence of white communists in SACOD had "changed the character of the A.N.C." to the point at which it had "ceased to be a body of Africans, led by Africans and quite independent of White control"⁴⁴; he welcomed Africanist attacks on SACOD as "the comeback against Communist control".⁴⁵ LP leaders criticised Duncan's "one-man guerilla war against the COD" and warned of the dangers of over-emphasising communist influence within the ANC. In 1959 Duncan published an 'Open Letter to Chief Luthuli' appealing "to him to use his eyes, and to see where he is allowing his Congress to be led."⁴⁶ The letter generated calls for Duncan's expulsion from the LP, and raised

³⁷ Interview with Peter Brown (1987), transcript p.2.

³⁸ Wentzel [Transvaal Provincial chairperson]: *Memoirs op.cit.*, A42.

³⁹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 6: P.Brown to J.Unterhalter, 30-7-1958.

⁴⁰ Interview with Peter Hjul [Cape Provincial chairperson] (1989), transcript p.6.

⁴¹ LP papers A/1671-mfm-Reel 5: P.Hjul to P.Brown, 19-5-1959.

⁴² Duncan papers DU 5.14.40: P.Duncan to P.Brown, 20-4-1959.

⁴³ Duncan papers DU 5.14.38: P.Duncan to P.Brown, 14-5-1959.

⁴⁴ *Fighting Talk* February 1956.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Driver: *Duncan op.cit.*, p.135.

⁴⁶ *Contact* 2-5-1959, p.8.

questions about his possible links with American agencies which funded anti-communist bodies.⁴⁷

The Freedom Charter and alliance politics.

Attacks on the *Freedom Charter* were bound up with hostility towards SACOD and its supposed misuse of African nationalism for communist ends. Such attacks came to a head at the 1956 ANC Special Conference. Extracts were read from a letter by former President-General Alfred Xuma, who argued that ANC leaders had "turned their backs on the African National Congress Nation-building Programme of the 1940's" in favour of the *Freedom Charter* which served to "defer and confuse the Africans' just and immediate claims." For Xuma, the ANC had

lost its identity as a National Liberation Movement with a policy of its own and distinct African Leadership. One hears or reads statements by the 'Congresses' and one hardly ever gets the standpoint of the African National Congress ... One and all must realise no one else will ever free the Africans but the Africans themselves.⁴⁸

Africanist disruption of the Conference led to a lengthy dispute over the accreditation of delegates, and with "ranks ... closed against what was regarded as obstructionism," the *Charter* was adopted with little debate.⁴⁹ Africanists accused "the Chameleon National Organisation called the Congress of Democrats" of controlling conference proceedings⁵⁰ and concluded: "We are merely being made tools and stooges of interested parties that are anxious to maintain the status quo."⁵¹

Following the Conference, ANC President-General Albert Lutuli rounded on critics of the *Charter* and the Congress Alliance. In a lengthy statement, Lutuli attacked LP critics, particularly Ngubane, for insisting that whites in SACOD dominated the ANC:

Shall we infer from this allegation of his that in the Liberal Party he is suspicious of his fellow-members who belong to other racial groups than his own: white, coloured and Indian? If he is not, why should he insinuate that relations among

⁴⁷ See Driver: *Duncan op.cit.*, p.148, 1970:198; Paton: *Journey op.cit.*, p.177.

⁴⁸ Letter from A.B.Xuma to the ANC Special Conference, March 1956, in Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge op.cit.*, pp.242-245.

⁴⁹ Lutuli, quoted in Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge op.cit.*, pp.70-71.

⁵⁰ N. ka Linda: *Congress and Other Organisations* in *The Africanist* April/May 1956, p.2.

⁵¹ Potlako Leballo: *What of the Future?* in *The Africanist* December 1957, p.6.

the allied Congresses are governed by suspicion of one another?³²

The ANC, Lutuli argued, was "an omnibus liberatory movement" which included members "with different political inclinations, but all subjecting their personal inclinations to the overriding needs of our day which are to fight and defeat apartheid..."³³ Lutuli noted that the ANC "has always had amongst its ranks people who are communistically orientated." Two CPSA members had been signatories to *Africans' Claims*: "I do not see anything red there ... or are we seeing with different spectacles?"³⁴

Turning to the *Freedom Charter*, Lutuli noted claims by Ngubane and others that the ANC in Natal opposed the *Charter* but had their hands forced by SACOD. Lutuli, who described himself as a socialist who in England would vote for the Labour Party³⁵, noted ironically: "Here, surely, is naked Communism for all to see." Lutuli argued that the ANC in Natal "accepted unreservedly the principles reflected in all the main clauses of the *Freedom Charter*" but "thought it unwise to have padded the *Charter* with variable details in an all-time charter." In conclusion, Lutuli stated:

The most that could be said about the *Freedom Charter* is that it breathes in some of its clauses a socialistic and welfare state outlook, and certainly not a Moscow communistic outlook.³⁶

The *Freedom Charter* marked the culmination of a number of processes which had marked the Congress movement in the years following the second world war, most notably the search for ideological unity and broad nonracial resistance to racial discrimination. At the end of the COP, the nonracial committees which had co-ordinated the campaign were transformed into permanent consultative committees at local, provincial and national levels. Racial co-operation was entrenched both in the ideology and practice of the Congress movement. Having attained broad ideological consensus with the adoption of the *Freedom Charter* by all the Congresses, the ANC leadership called for the widening of resistance

³² ANC papers AD1189/5/GA: Albert Lutuli: On the African National Congress (mimeo), 5-6-1956, p.10.

³³ *ibid.*, p.14.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.5.

³⁵ Anthony Sampson: *Drum* (London 1956), p.141.

³⁶ Lutuli: ANC op.cit., p.8; see also ANC papers: AD1189/5/ G4: Lutuli to ANC Secretary General [Oliver Tambo], 19-3-1956.

to the Nationalist Party by building alliances with non-Congress organisations. The *Charter* was not championed by the Congress movement in its search for new allies.

After 1956 the ANC called for the development of a united front with the Liberal and Labour parties, the churches, the Black Sash and other anti-apartheid bodies. Most of these organisations were white, and seen to be "at present ... not prepared to accept the challenging vision of the Charter."⁵⁷ As a result, the basis of unity was to be opposition to racism and the Nationalist Party government. Congress leaders argued that there existed

a steadily growing number of serious thinking White South Africans who ... may not care to be associated with our Freedom Charter [but] are aware that the future of this country lies in the policy of equal rights...⁵⁸

ANC leaders were sensitive to developments in white politics and attempted to develop strategies which could capitalise on any loss of support by the NP, and hopes for a diminution of white support for apartheid increased in the late 1950s.⁵⁹ Whites from a wide range of organisations attended the 1957 Multi-Racial Conference [MRC] organised to "discuss and explore the steps which can bring about friendly and effective co-operation among the different racial groups in our country."⁶⁰ With 350 participants, and over 300 observers including UP and NP members, the findings of MRC commissions all condemned apartheid. At the same time, a small number of prominent Afrikaners publicly distanced themselves from various aspects of apartheid, including Professor L.J. du Plessis, a founder member of the Broederbond, who criticised Prime Minister Verwoerd and called for greater inter-racial contact.⁶¹ In addition, informal discussions were held between Congress leaders and members of the South African Bureau of Racial Affairs [SABRA], a body of Afrikaner intellectuals formed in 1948 to research and prepare the public for the greatest possible racial separation. This followed the passing of a resolution calling for a second multiracial conference at the 1958 SABRA conference.

⁵⁷ Moses Kotane: *The Great Crisis Ahead* (New Age pamphlet, 1957), p.10.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.7.

⁵⁹ See Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge* *op.cit.*, pp.296-307.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.301.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.303.

In the extra-parliamentary field, the Liberal Party radicalised its policies and worked closely with the ANC in northern Natal and elsewhere. In 1955 the Women's Defence of the Constitution League was formed, comprising predominantly English-speaking middle-class women. The organisation soon evolved a dramatic form of protest, standing in silence wearing a black sash (from which they took their later name) in mourning for the constitution and the abrogation of civil rights.⁶² In Natal, the Anti-Republican League organised public meetings in protest at plans to transform South Africa into a republic. Tensions within the United Party increased and in August 1959 twelve UP MPs resigned to form the Progressive Party, following which they held extensive talks with Africanists and Congress leaders.⁶³

As we have seen, all organisations operating in the white areas expressed hostility towards and refused to co-operate with SACOD.⁶⁴ SACOD in turn criticised white organisations for refusing to acknowledge black demands for full equality⁶⁵, and insisted that the principles of the *Freedom Charter* "are the only basis on which the Nationalists can be defeated."⁶⁶ Africanist attacks on SACOD and the *Charter* elicited support from LP members and others, and in August 1956 Lutuli privately questioned the efficacy of

making the Freedom Charter the basis for co-operation with any other group in the future. Why should we tie ourselves so fast to the Congress of Democrats? We should form a Freedom Front as wide as possible.⁶⁷

Lutuli's comment was followed by public statements from senior Congress figures arguing that the *Freedom Charter* should not be the basis of unity. Campaigning under the slogan 'The Nats Must Go!', the alliances pursued by the Congresses were largely concerned with winning white support.⁶⁸ Joe Matthews argued that "[a]s the Nationalist's oppression becomes worse, the call for a united front composed of all genuine opponents of Apartheid becomes ever more insistent" and as a national liberation movement it was "historically correct ... to rally the people on the widest possible scale." He continued:

⁶² See C.Walker: *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London 1982), pp.173-175.

⁶³ Karis and Gerhart: *Challenge op.cit.*, p.307.

⁶⁴ See chapters 5-8.

⁶⁵ See chapters 5-8; see also *Counter Attack* November-December 1956.

⁶⁶ *Counter Attack* August 1955, p.1.

⁶⁷ Treason Trial collection AD1812 57/11599: A.Lutuli to Dr.A.Letele, 22-8-1956.

⁶⁸ FSAW papers AD1137 Ec3.2: NCC: To All National Executives, 12-11-1957, p.2.

But should the Charter be the main programmatic condition for the United Front? Should we insist that all allies must accept the Charter? We must bear in mind that the essence of a united front policy is that it is always based on *Opposition* to dictatorship rather than common adherence to long term objectives and aims. To expect the policy of United Front to go beyond the defeat of the Fascists is mere wishful thinking ... to accept the Charter means to be in the progressive camp. To be a part of the United Front requires a different generalisation.⁶

The National Consultative Committee [NCC] called for a non-Charter based united front, arguing that not all anti-Nationalists supported the Charter but "we are all allies against the same main enemy ... this unity, growing every day and in every struggle ... is the key to victory."⁷ The announcement of a general election for April 1958 further focussed Congress attention on white parliamentary politics. Clearly under pressure, SACOD in turn criticised "the sectarian attitude of our members" and called on them "to get together with other organisations on the basis of mutual respect for each other's differences and the right of organisations to a separate membership and existence."⁸

1958 saw the Congress Alliance attempting to implement the united front strategy: at the same time, however, the ANC suffered power struggles in both the Cape and Transvaal. With senior Congress figures banned or appearing in the Treason Trial, less experienced activists were elected to Provincial Committees. In the face of continued Africanist dissent, the Transvaal Provincial Committee attempted to force decisions through at the 1957 Provincial Conference and demanded their re-election *en bloc* as an act of support for the Trialists.⁹ Africanist opposition in the western Cape, where the ANC was weak, led to the emergence of two rival Executive committees (one loyalist, one Africanist) which co-existed throughout 1958.¹⁰ At the same time both SACOD and the ANC suffered internal disagreement over attempts to form alliances with liberal white organisations. As had occurred in the late 1940s and early 1950s, disputes over a range of issues -the racist attacks of Africanists, the alliance strategy, and the efficacy of national as opposed to class

⁶ Joe Matthews: Building a United Front in Liberation November 1956, pp.19-21 (emphasis in original).

⁷ FSAW papers AD1137 Ec3.2: NCC: To All National Executives, 12-11-1957, p.3.

⁸ Counter Attack June 1956, p.1; see also A.Berman: The South African Congress of Democrats 1953-1962 (Honours thesis, University of Cape Town, 1981), chapters 4 and 5.

⁹ Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit, pp.307-309.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.313.

struggle - came to be fought out over the question of the form that racial co-operation should take.

1958-1960: The politics of nonracialism.

The 1950s were dominated by African and Afrikaner nationalism. Liberals, socialists and others opposed to apartheid were forced to reorientate their ideological and strategic standpoints in relation to the ANC as the representative African political organisation. ANC leaders noted that "fighters for freedom in this country are continually being drawn from all sections of the population,"⁷⁴ and amended the militant African nationalism of the Youth League in attempting to build a broad anti-apartheid front. By the late 1950s, however, those hostile to the ANC and/or the Congress Alliance - including LP members, former CPSA members, Trotskyists, Africanists and others - attempted to capitalise on the power vacuum which emerged in the ANC. Although their long-term objectives differed markedly, all focussed hostile criticism on the same immediate target: the preponderant influence SACOD members were accused of wielding over the ANC through the multiracially structured Congress Alliance. SACOD did include a number of communists, from both the CPSA and SACP. Many had been active in black politics for two or three decades, had earned the trust of Congress leaders, and wielded commensurate influence in black political circles. Nonetheless, by ignoring black communists and accepting SACOD as a front for white communists, a disparate array of forces identified the abolition of multiracialism with the excising of communist influence.

In the early 1950s, the terms multiracial, nonracial and inter-racial were used interchangeably. By the end of the decade, forces hostile to SACOD focussed attacks on the multiracial structure of the Congress Alliance. The attack was led by Patrick Duncan and *Contact*, which argued that

non-racialism and multi-racialism are two very different things. The non-racialist sees each human being as first and foremost a human: less important facts about him are his education, his race, etc. But the multi-racialist, like the out-and-out racialist, sees each human being first and foremost as a member of a racial block.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Lutuli: *ANC op.cit.*, p.11.

⁷⁵ Editorial: *Contact* 16-5-1959, p.6.

Contact's lead was followed by former members of the Non-European Unity Movement who published *The Citizen*, a fortnightly western Cape newspaper. *The Citizen* asked: "Where is this country, 'Non-Europe', from which four out of every five South Africans would appear to have come?"⁷⁶, and attacked both the Congress Alliance and the NEUM for "building organisations which serve to maintain and entrench the status quo."⁷⁷ Multiracialism was criticised for transplanting apartheid into the Congress Alliance; the target of attack, however, was SACOD:

It is multi-racialism - a gratuitous concession to apartheid - which is at the root of all other evils in Congress.... And it is precisely the multi-racialism of Congress which enables the "Whites-only" Congress of Democrats to dominate the Congress "racial" alliance and to subordinate its struggle against oppression to the interests of "sympathetic", "White" patronage.⁷⁸

As we have seen, multiracialism stemmed from the insistence of African nationalists that Africans should be organised into an all-African body while co-operating with other national organisations.⁷⁹ A number of white CPSA members had refused to join the Congress Alliance, and SACOD members of all political persuasions were unhappy with their allotted task of working with whites rather than blacks.⁸⁰ In a harshly ironic *volte face*, in the late 1950s multiracialism came to be seen by a wide range of forces as the creation of white communists who sought to direct the ANC but were unable to join it. By positing SACOD as a communist front, multiracialism was seen to provide massively disproportionate representation to communists.

As such, attacks on multiracialism commingled with anti-communist and anti-SACOD sentiments. One critic of the Congress movement argued:

The phenomena of Stalinist multi-racialism originally arose as an adaptation to the NEUM. Thinking Non-Europeanism to be the rising force the Communist Party, at that time of largely "white" composition and predominantly "white" orientation, with characteristic opportunism abandoned its old "non-racial" organisational form in favour of working in and building racial organisations, to be aimed at making political capital out of the stirring "black" masses.⁸¹

⁷⁶ Introducing 'The Citizen': *The Citizen* 31-3-1956, p.1.

⁷⁷ Peter Dreyer: *Against Racial Status and Segregation: Towards the Liquidation of Multi-Racialism and Non-Europeanism*. (Cape Town, 1959), p.3.

⁷⁸ Kenneth Hendrickse: *The Opposition in Congress in The Citizen* 4-3-1958.

⁷⁹ See chapter 3.

⁸⁰ See chapters 4 and 5.

⁸¹ Dreyer: *Liquidation* op.cit., p.7.

Attacks on SACOD and multiracialism were led by the Africanists. Following the expulsion of Potlako Leballo and James Madzunya from the ANC, hostility towards SACOD was extended to include the ANC leadership, and a showdown appeared inevitable. A leader article in *Bantu World*, which championed the Africanist cause, noted of the ANC leadership:

They speak of Alliance with the C.O.D. and with the so-called Indian and Coloured Congresses, when in fact it is these very alliances which makes them work against African Nationalism. It is the C.O.D. together with the Indians and Coloureds who have expelled the African Nationalists from our own home, the A.N.C. We must, therefore, dismiss these foreigners from our A.N.C. and with them the present leadership. All of them must march out for we have no time to pick and choose between them.⁸²

The mounting attacks on SACOD attracted Cape-based ex-communists Joe Nkatlo and John Gomas, both of whom had become increasingly vocal critics of the CPSA and who became increasingly sympathetic to the Africanists.⁸³ Nkatlo stated:

I accept being called an 'Africanist' if it means an "African" who refuses to be politically subservient to "European" leadership and who refuses to entrust his destiny to some "European" careerists who exploit him.⁸⁴

Patrick Duncan recruited Nkatlo into the LP, as well as former NEUM members grouped around *The Citizen*; he also began talks with the NEUM, noting that "it may be that this will lead to a fusion" which would "immensely strengthen the party".⁸⁵

In 1958, ANC conferences were held in the Transvaal and the western Cape in attempts to resolve disputes with the Africanists. Both failed in their object; three western Cape branches broke away from the ANC, while both sides brought "strong-arm stewards" to press their case at the Transvaal conference.⁸⁶ Transvaal Africanists also left the ANC, stating: "We are launching out on our own as the custodian of A.N.C. policy as formulated in 1912 and pursued up to the time of Congress Alliance."⁸⁷ Duncan welcomed the break, noting that if it led "to a national rejection of the COD alliance by the ANC ... it will in South African terms be as important as was the rejection of the Communists by the

⁸² *Bantu World* 28-6-1958.

⁸³ See chapter 7, and D.Musson: *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the Working Class* (Cape Town 1989).

⁸⁴ Quoted in *The Citizen* 4-3-1958; see also Musson: *Gomas op.cit.*, p.121.

⁸⁵ Duncan papers DU 5.14.42: P.Duncan to P.Brown 3-5-1959 and 30-6-1959.

⁸⁶ Benson: *Birthright op.cit.*, p.206.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.207.

Chinese in 1927."⁸⁸

A year later, the Pan Africanist Congress was launched, with university lecturer and former Youth Leaguer Robert Sobukwe as its President. PAC speakers argued that the ANC was led by a "white pseudo-leftist directorate" as a result of which it had

betrayed the material interests of the African people. They have sacrificed these interests upon the political altar of an ungodly alliance, an alliance of slave-owner, slave-driver and slave.⁸⁹

An Africanist and former Youth League colleague of ANC Secretary General Oliver Tambo appealed to him to return to the policies of the League:

It was and it still is the first duty of an African Nationalist, to destroy a Communist in every possible way. Right from the founding of the A.N.C.Y.L. it was the principle and practice to annihilate Communists under all situations and circumstances ... African Nationalists, then as now, believed strongly that Communists had no interest in African Freedom, except to use us as pawns of Russian foreign policy, and as revolutionary expendables...⁹⁰

At the centre of PAC hostility lay SACOD which, it was argued, had forced on the ANC a policy which "consider[s] South Africa and its wealth to belong to all who live in it, the alien dispossessor and the indigenous dispossessed, the alien robbers and their indigenous victims."⁹¹

The call for 'One Congress'.

Attacks on SACOD reached a point where a participant in the third SACOD National Council meeting in May 1959 "asked if we did in fact lead the A.N.C. by the nose."⁹² By the end of the 1950s, SACOD was badly weakened: with the banning of Transvaal chairperson Vic Goldberg, 51 SACOD members, roughly one-fifth of its total membership, had been banned. SACOD was also weakened by "continual disagreements among ourselves as to the role we have to play" which stemmed from "the fact that many members have not accepted the original role of the C.O.D."⁹³ This flowed in part from

⁸⁸ Duncan papers DU 8.9.10: P.Duncan: Assessment of the victory of the Africanists in the Transvaal ANC (mimeo), nd.1958.

⁸⁹ Quoted in Francis Meli: South Africa Belongs To Us: A History of the ANC (Harare 1988), p.137.

⁹⁰ Micr.Afr.484 Reel 8: P.Tsele to O.R.Tambo, 25-5-1958.

⁹¹ Micr.Afr.484 Reel 8: Manifesto of the Africanist Movement: Africanist National Convention, 4/5-4-1959, p.2.

⁹² SACOD papers AD1196/D: Minutes: SACOD National Council, 30/1-5-1959, p.3.

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.1.

frustration at having to attempt to win white support, described by one member as "slow, slogging and tenacious political work amongst our mentally depressed bretheren, the Europeans."⁵⁴ SACOD was also weakened in the late 1950s by a resurgence of calls for the prosecution of class struggle. As had occurred in the late 1940s, calls for class struggle were couched in the language of nonracialism or 'One Congress'.

SACOD included a range of political viewpoints. While some former CPSA members refused to join SACOD, others opposed to multiracialism did so, as did socialists of various hues. Baruch Hirson, a university lecturer later imprisoned for sabotage, noted that members of the Socialist League of Africa, a small Johannesburg Trotskyist group, joined SACOD because "we were terribly isolated, a small handful of people"; within SACOD, League members "could put a socialist line and win friends."⁵⁵ SACOD was a forum in which battles within the white left were fought out; characteristic of ideological disputation in South Africa, its locus was the form that racial co-operation should take.

Within SACOD, the strictures of working with whites produced continual complaint and frustration. As part of the alliance strategy pursued after 1956, SACOD was called on to "broaden out or stagnate"⁵⁶ - to tone down its adherence to the *Freedom Charter* in favour of forming alliances with other organisations working in the white areas. Further removed from grass-roots black work, SACOD members were reported to be "bored to tears" with "an almost incessant round of jumble-sales."⁵⁷ Disagreement over SACOD's role was given a dramatic focus by Cape member Ronald Segal, the flamboyant editor of *Africa South*. Segal was invited to address the 1958 Workers Conference on the economic boycott; in place of his speech, however, Segal called for a single nonracial Congress. According to Segal, "I took a pound out of my pocket and I said - 'I hereby apply to join the ANC - will you accept me?' And there was a tumultuous 'Yes! Yes!'"⁵⁸ Within a year SACOD's student branch, based at the University of the Witwatersrand, voted to disband itself and

⁵⁴ Treason Trial collection AD1812 Ef.2: B.Gottschalk to Y.Barenblatt, 17-8-1956.

⁵⁵ Interview with Baruch Hirson (1986), transcript p.1.

⁵⁶ SACOD papers AD1196/D: Some Suggestions (internal discussion document), nd.1958, p.2.

⁵⁷ Organisational Problems of the S.A.C.O.D., in *Counter Attack* August 1956, p.4.

⁵⁸ Interview with Ronald Segal (1988), transcript p.4.

form a nonracial Youth Congress including African and Indian students.⁹⁹ SACOD members in Johannesburg made moves to begin organising African domestic workers, and the Cape Town branch queried the watering down of policy so as to form alliances:

This we are putting a stop to. If our policy is right and we offend - then, we can't help it. Being broad, we have decided, means nothing more than working with other organisations and individuals on agreed issues while disagreeing - and not working together - on others.¹⁰⁰

Attacks on multiracialism from non-Congress members were seen by SACOD leaders as the actions of those "never friendly to us [who] have now found a stick with which they hope to beat us, a 'policy' with which they hope to sow dissension."¹⁰¹ This appears to have been the case: Peter Hjul has noted that criticism of multiracialism was "our point of argument, I wouldn't say it was a huge ideological point of difference but it was a very good stick to beat the Congress movement with."¹⁰² Within SACOD, calls for One Congress resulted in part from dissatisfaction over both working with whites and calls for broad alliances. The initial response of SACOD leaders was to point out that all SACOD members would rather belong to a nonracial body but that "there were many obstacles in the way of this" - most notably the clear opposition from ANC and SAIC leaders. As such, they argued, "change would only be possible when the other Congresses were strong and confident enough" to instigate it.¹⁰³

Calls for a nonracial congress, however, were soon given a class content by leftwing SACOD members who argued that by pursuing alliances and concentrating on electoral politics, liberal ideology had "already seeped deeply into the movement."¹⁰⁴ In a series of broad-sheets and in the pages of *Counter Attack*, the building of alliances was equated with neglecting the militant organisation of blacks, and with "treating S.A.C.T.U. as an unwanted foster-child."¹⁰⁵ Hirson, writing under a pseudonym, argued that the planned

⁹⁹ SACOD papers AD1196/D: SACOD National Council, 30/1-5-1959, p.7.

¹⁰⁰ *Discussion Corner* in *Counter Attack* December 1958, p.2.

¹⁰¹ 'Treason Trialist': *Other Thoughts on One Congress* in *Counter Attack* May 1959, p.9.

¹⁰² Interview with Peter Hjul, p.9.

¹⁰³ SACOD papers AD1196/D: SACOD National Council, 30/1-5-1959, p.7.

¹⁰⁴ K.Shanker [Baruch Hirson]: *The Congresses and the Multi Racial Conference in Analysis 1*, January 1958, p.3.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

ANC anti-pass campaign should point out

that passes are part of the capitalist system ... The passes are one link in the chain that binds us ... Again and again it is necessary to explain that in fighting to break these links in the chain of oppression, our objective is to get rid of the whole chain. Our goal, which we must keep ever in sight, is to change the whole social system in South Africa.¹⁰⁶

Vic Goldberg, writing in *Counter Attack*, argued that SACOD's white work should focus on organising white workers rather than forming alliances with middle-class intellectuals in the LP and elsewhere. Goldberg, strongly echoing Danie du Plessis ten years earlier, argued firstly that the organisation of the working class should be the first priority of the liberation movement. Secondly, Goldberg argued that class politics could not be pursued in a multiracial alliance: "We are agreed that whites and non-whites are inter-dependent in the developing of this country, in the struggle for freedom this must be even more applicable."¹⁰⁷

The supporters of class struggle fought against the ideology of the South African Communist Party, particularly the theory of internal colonialism through which socialists were called on to work with and for the national movement. That battle was fought out over calls for nonracialism, which resonated with existing frustration over SACOD's role in the Alliance. Goldberg argued that South Africa was a capitalist country, exploited by and for local capitalists; as such, all had a stake in a common struggle. However,

If we conceive of white South Africa being a colonial power and non-white South Africa being the colonial people, then the struggle can only be likened to one of national liberation. In this context it is obvious however that the Africanist position of Africa for the Africans would be correct and that a black versus white struggle would be the one progressives should support.¹⁰⁸

In response, SACOD and ANC leaders argued that they all supported the ideal of One Congress:

every Congress leader of today would be willing - and even eager - to belong to and join a multi-racial [sic] Congress. But political success in the fight against race domination is not to be won by the leaders alone. For success, leaders need the masses. Are the masses ready for a multi-racial Congress? Would the tribes people of Sekhukhuneland or the dock labourers of Durban feel that a multi-racial body

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ 'V' [Vic Goldberg]: *After Conference* in *Counter Attack* supplement, nd.1959, p.2 (emphasis in original).

¹⁰⁸ 'V': *Conference op.cit.*, p.3.

was 'their' organisation, as they today feel about the A.N.C.?'¹⁰⁹

ANC leaders argued that however attractive a single Congress may appear, "would there not immediately be a need felt amongst Africans for a purely African organisation to put forward the views of Africans?"¹¹⁰ This was borne out with the formation of the PAC, whose founders argued that the new organisation was made necessary "following the capture of a portion of the black leadership by the white ruling class."¹¹¹

Multiracialism had given rise to what SACOD and NCC member Ben Turok described as a "quite horrendous" build up of committees, with a large degree of wastage and duplication of effort.¹¹² The local, provincial and national consultative committees, which lay at the heart of claims that SACOD dominated the ANC, had begun to break down by 1958. The committees had been given no executive powers precisely so as to avoid the encroachment of one Congress in the affairs of another; because of their lack of power, however, the committees had "fallen short of what was desired"¹¹³ and were largely replaced by joint meetings of Congress Executive Committees.

To the class content being injected into calls for one Congress, however, Congress leaders responded with a defence of the two-stage theory which underlay CST. On the one hand, it was argued that similar debates over class and national struggle had taken place when SACOD was formed, but "ideological questions were put aside ... for the sake of unity on the main questions before us in the country."¹¹⁴ At the same time, an anonymous SACOD member argued that "the winning of full democracy ... is an essential stage in the progress of the popular movement", whereas critics sought

to skip the historic stage of the achievement of full democracy in South Africa, and 'go it alone' towards the final break down of all economic restrictions on the working class. In this [they] should realise that [they] would lose the co-operation of broad masses of the population not particularly affected by or desiring such an

¹⁰⁹ 'Trialist': Thoughts op.cit., p.9.

¹¹⁰ NEC Report to the ANC Annual Conference, December 1959, in Karis and Gerhart: Challenge op.cit., p.485.

¹¹¹ Africanist Manifesto op.cit., p.2.

¹¹² Interview with Ben Turok, pp.28-30.

¹¹³ Auden House collection AD1180 Eo 3.1.5: NCC: Report to Joint Congress Executives, nd.1957, p.1.

¹¹⁴ Communism and C.O.D., in Counter Attack January 1959, p.1.

economic change.¹¹⁵

Towards the future.

Disputes over non/multiracialism grew throughout 1959, covered by a variety of Congress journals. In part they represented a resurgence of disputation over the place of class struggle in a decade dominated by nationalism; combined with the hostile attacks of the PAC and LP, however, disputes over the form that the struggle should adopt, and the goals for which it should aim, were blurred. Debate was soon overtaken by events. The Sharpeville and Langa murders in March 1960 led to a state of emergency being declared and both the ANC and PAC were banned. As a result, the LP briefly inherited the political centre stage in South Africa, and ran successful campaigns against blackspot removals in Natal and against the first Transkeian elections in 1962. It also attracted growing repression, and most of its leading activists - over 70 of them - were banned by 1964. The party disbanded in the face of the Political Interference Act of 1968 which disallowed nonracial political parties.

In 1961, the ANC and SACP jointly formed Umkhonto we Sizwe [Spear of the Nation] and undertook a campaign of sabotage. By the time the ANC was forced into underground and military activity, however, the unity of organisations representing all the ethnic groups in South Africa in the struggle against apartheid had been integrated in its practice and ideology. At the third ANC Consultative Conference in Morogoro in 1969, individual membership of the ANC was opened to all races. While nonracialism was finally adopted by the ANC in exile, however, multiracialism continued to guide the form of legal organisations opposing apartheid within South Africa.

From the time that the ANC emerged as a leading element in the resistance movement in South Africa it faced an array of problems over the nature and form the struggle for equality should take. At the base of those problems lay South Africa's white population. The ANC leadership accepted the permanence of whites while seeking to mobilise Africans

¹¹⁵ 'R.A.L': After Conference: Another Viewpoint, in *Counter Attack Supplement*, nd.1959.

and organise them in the ANC. Multiracialism was the means by which the ANC sought to mobilise Africans while co-operating with national organisations representing all the ethnic groups in South Africa.

Outside its ranks, the rise of the ANC initiated political discussion and debate amongst liberals, socialists and others opposed to segregation and apartheid. All were forced to acknowledge the significance of African nationalism, and to amend their theory and practice accordingly. As a result, the 1950s were a decade of both mass struggle and ideological and strategic debate, as liberals and socialists sought to win the incorporation of their goals in the nationalist programme of the ANC. The disputes which followed the rise of the ANC - over the place of class struggle, the efficacy of parliamentary action, and others - were fought out over the form that racial co-operation should take, and the place of whites in the struggle against apartheid.

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ANC for being dominated by white Communists.⁵ In a pamphlet issued in Cape Town in 1956, Liberals and Trotskyists on the Bus Apartheid resistance Committee stated:

COD is a boss organisation in an alliance of racial organisations and is a great believer in the big stick. The organisations allied to it are boy organisations. COD dictates its instructions to them. They never meet as equals: theirs is simply to obey...⁶

In essence, multiracialism was seen as a mechanism of control engineered by white communists unable to gain individual membership of the black Congresses following the disbanding of the CPSA in 1950.

Existing explanations of the emergence of multiracialism stress its strategic content: that is, the fact that it acknowledged the differing material conditions affecting ethnic groups which had been politically and geographically divided under both segregation and apartheid.⁷ The ideological content of multiracialism has been ignored. The roots of multiracialism lie in part in the hostility which characterised relations between the CPSA and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). Both organisations called for the radicalisation of the ANC and the development of a mass base as the only means to a successful national revolution. However, the CPSA warned that nationalism could serve to obscure class oppression, and called for the transformation of existing organisations "into a revolutionary party of workers, peasants, intellectuals and petty bourgeois."⁸ The ANCYL brought to the ANC a new militancy, a strident (and at times exclusive) African nationalism, and marked anti-communism. The ANCYL strongly resisted what it saw as an attempt by the CPSA to by-pass existing national organisations and create a permanent "unity movement" emphasising class above national consciousness.⁹ In response, as we shall see, the ANCYL insisted on ethnically separate or multiracial structures.

Brian Bunting, CPSA Central Committee member, discussing the distinction between

⁵ See chapters 6 and 7; see also Jordan Ngubane in E. Feit: African Opposition in South Africa (California 1967) p.136.

⁶ Bus Apartheid Resistance Committee: The Attitude of the Propaganda Committee to the Behaviours of SACPO and COD (pamphlet, quoted in New Age 21-8-1956, p.8).

⁷ Interview with Helen Joseph (1986), transcript p.2.

⁸ SC.10-53: Report of the Select Committee on the Suppression of Communism Act Enquiry: Central Committee Report to 1950 CPSA Annual Conference [hereafter 1950 Central Committee Report].

⁹ Nelson Mandela in The Guardian 29-7-1948, p.5.