

WORKERS' STRIFE:

The Uneasy Electoral Relationship between Socialists and the South African Labour Party, 1910-1924¹

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SUMMARY

Since the inception of the SALP in 1909, conservative, reformist right-wing and militant socialist left-wing elements within the party would compromise uneasily on issues such as the colour policy and the socialist objective. Party and ideological schisms eventually took place in 1915 between pro-war and anti-war factions within the SALP on the question of Labour participation in the First World War. As a result the anti-war, left-wing militant socialist faction broke away from the SALP to form the ISL and which would eventually culminate in the formation of the CPSA in 1921. From 1915 onwards these two factions of the white labour movement would more and more diametrically and ideologically oppose one another as all efforts at reconciliation failed. This was especially the case since 1924 when the SALP became absorbed in protective and racial white labour policies, whereas the CPSA would embark on a policy to organise black labour politically and economically.

OPSOMMING

Werkerstwis : Die Onverkwiklike Verkiesingsverhouding tussen Sosialiste en die Suid-Afrikaanse Arbeidersparty, 1910-1924

Sedert die ontstaan van die SAAP in 1909 sou konserwatiewe, reformisties-gesinde regse elemente en militante links-gesinde faksies

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binne die party ongemaklike kompromieë aangaan oor kwessies soos die kleurbeleid en die sosialistiese doelwit. Party- en ideologiese skeurings tussen pro- en anti-oorloggesinde faksies binne die SAAP het uiteindelik in 1915 plaasgevind oor die kwessie van Arbeid se deelname aan die Eerste Wêreldoorlog. Gevolglik het die anti-oorloggesinde, linkse, militante sosialistiese faksie van die SAAP weggebreek om die International Socialist League te stig – 'n proses wat uiteindelik sou kulmineer in die stigting van die Suid-Afrikaanse Kommunistiese Party in 1921. Van 1915 af het hierdie twee faksies van die blanke arbeiderbeweging mekaar al hoe meer lynreg en ideologies geopponeer aangesien alle pogings tot versoening misluk het – veral na 1924 toe die SAAP in 'n proteksionistiese en rassistiese blanke arbeidsbeleid vervleg geraak het. Daarteenoor sou die KPSA hom ten doel stel om swart arbeid polities en ekonomies te organiseer.

1. Socialists and the founding of the South African Labour Party

The closer union movement, which after the Second Anglo Boer War eventually led to the unification of South Africa in May 1910, also induced the South African labour movement to unify its ranks politically.² Pending the negotiations on the unification process, by October 1909 organised labour made a determined effort to consolidate the ranks of labour on a national basis culminating in the formation of the South African Labour Party (SALP).³ Socialists, being very prominent in the inaugural process, managed to include a socialist objective into the constitution of the party.⁴

However, big differences existed between moderate, or so-called “reformist” labour leaders, and the militant socialists in particular on issues such as general principles, the

² D. Ticktin: *The Origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888-1910*, Unpublished PhD thesis, UCT, 1973, p.307.

³ E.N. Katz: *A Trade Union Aristocracy. A History of White Workers in the Transvaal and the General Strike of 1913*, African Studies Institute, U Wits, Johannesburg, 1976, pp. 190-201; D. Ticktin, *op. cit.*, pp. 397-424.

⁴ D. Ticktin *op. cit.*, pp. 406-408; *Voice of Labour*, 16.10.1909, p.4.

name of the the party, the native policy and the affiliation of (conservative) trade unions.⁵ The debate on the SALP's proposed native policy revealed wide and insolvable differences amongst the delegates – the moderate trade unionists opting for territorial segregation between black and white, whereas the militant socialists preferred a colour blind policy.⁶

Not surprisingly therefore, in mid-November 1909 the Johannesburg Socialist Society threw down the gauntlet when it announced its intention to pursue independent political action. Thus Archibald Crawford came forward as the Socialist candidate for the Fordsburg constituency in Johannesburg ten months before the polling day of the first Union parliamentary elections in 1910.⁷ Therefore, the militant socialists became some of the most bitter enemies of the SALP.⁸

Voice of Labour, the Socialist Society's militant weekly, even advised its readers to abstain from voting in constituencies where there were no socialist candidates. The paper was very much opposed to any working class support to SALP candidates.⁹ F.H.P. Creswell, the parliamentary leader of the SALP, was a staunch champion of a white labour policy or "civilized labour" as it became known.¹⁰ This was a thorn in the flesh for the militant socialists. The ***Voice*** therefore strongly condemned the SALP's white labour policy or "Creswellism".¹¹

In the general election of 15 September 1910 the SALP only managed to win four out of nineteen contested parliamentary seats.¹² Ironically, however, Crawford and J. Davidson,

⁵ See *Voice of Labour*, 18.9.1909, p.4; 2.10.1909, p.8; 9.10.1909, p.1; 16.10.1909, p.1.

⁶ D. Ticktin, *op.cit.*, pp. 421-422; *Voice of Labour*, 6.11.1909, p.4.

⁷ D. Ticktin, *op.cit.*, p.432; *The Star*, 20.6.1910, p.9.

⁸ D. Ticktin, *op.cit.*, p.433.

⁹ *Voice of Labour*, 9.9.1910, pp. 404-405.

¹⁰ See D. Ticktin, *op. cit.*, pp.436-442.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.462.

¹² R.K. Cope: *Comrade Bill. The Life and Times of W.H. Andrews, Workers' Leader*, Stewart Printing Co. Cape Town, 1943, p. 116; L.M. Thompson: *The Unification of South Africa, 1902-1910*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1959, p.476; H.J. and R.E. Simons: *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969, p. 145.

the two militant socialist candidates, did even worse in the elections. Crawford received only eight votes and Davidson 25 in the Johannesburg constituencies of Fordsburg and Commissioner Street, respectively. The elections proved that militant socialism and an outspoken non-racial attitude towards the colour issue had no standing with the white electorate.¹³ ***Voice of Labour*** acknowledged that socialist propaganda at that stage did not succeed in making any electoral progress.¹⁴

But ***Voice*** also played a significant role in bringing the Labour Party into discredit. The paper openly boasted that its propaganda on the so-called Labour-Het-Volk-alliance contributed to the election defeat of the Labour and Het Volk candidates for Fordsburg. It also claimed of having a stake in reducing the majority of H.W. Sampson, the SALP candidate for Commissioner Street, to a mere 40 votes.¹⁵

2. The Labour Split and the 1915 “Khaki” Elections

By 1914 the SALP was at its peak. As a result of the government’s bloody suppression of the Witwatersrand miner’s strike in 1913, and the smothering of the 1914 general strike by Martial Law and subsequent deportation of nine strike leaders the ranks of Labour swelled with new adherents. The SALP’s victory in the March 1914 Transvaal provincial elections was an index of its strength. However, these successes concealed the tensions within the party. In the more general questions on the means to achieve socialism and the attitude of the party in the event of a “capitalist” war, the right wing and left (socialist) wing of the SALP continued to compromise uneasily. Influenced by its left wing the party in 1913 endorsed affiliation of the SALP to the International Socialist Bureau on the basis of its Stuttgart anti-war resolution. Yet, at the same time the right wing succeeded in diluting

¹³ D. Ticktin, *op.cit.*, pp.472,474; *Voice of Labour*, 23.9.1910, p.418; (KGB) A215, Trembath Collection, Vol. I, p.348: Newspaper Clipping.

¹⁴ *Voice of Labour*, 23.9.1910, p.420.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.9.1910, p.413; 23.9.1910, p.418. Het Volk was an Afrikaner orientated, nationalistic party.

the party's socialist objective. Thus, for the labour movement and the SALP in particular, the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 was most inopportune.¹⁶

While the majority of the party became entangled in the sea of patriotism and pro-war spirit that engulfed the country after the Legislative Assembly voted to declare war on Germany, the opponents within the SALP of South African participation in the war, or so-called "advance guard"¹⁷ did not remain idle. Under the leadership of Colin Wade (chairman), P.R. Roux (secretary) and Sidney Bunting (treasurer) the pacifists founded at the beginning of September 1914 the War on War League.¹⁸

Amidst increasing tension within the ranks of the SALP on the war issue, the party's much-awaited annual conference, held from 28 December 1914 to 2 January 1915, took place at East London. In order to save the SALP from disruption and for the sake of party unity the delegates opted for the so-called "neutrality resolution". However, a special conference, called to consider the SALP platform for the impending general election of 1915, was held in Johannesburg on 22-23 August. Already in June 1915 F.H.P. Creswell, the party leader, issued his "See It Through" manifesto, urging conference delegates to vote for a pro-war policy. After lengthy discussion and vigorous debate the pro-war motion was carried by 82 votes to 26.¹⁹

In the hope that an absolutely final break with the established Labour Party could be avoided the dissident anti-war-group formed the International League of the SALP on 1 September 1915. When it became known that the dissident internationalists formed the new body, the SALP dissociated itself from the League. Therefore, on September 22 the

¹⁶ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag. The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1995, pp.30-31, 33-35; B. Hirson and G.A. Williams: *The Delegate for Africa. David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924*, Core Publications, London, 1995, p.133; D. Ticktin: The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15 (*South African Historical Journal*, No. 1, November 1969, pp. 59-62).

¹⁷ An expression used by S. Forman and A. Odendaal (eds): *A Trumpet from the Housetops. The Selected Writings of Lionel Forman*, David Philip (Pty) Ltd., Cape Town, 1992, p.45.

¹⁸ D. Ticktin: The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15 (*South African Historical Journal*, No. 1, November 1969, p.64).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.66,69-71.

membership of the latter decided to sever all connection with the SALP and convert the International League of the SALP into the International Socialist League (ISL). W.H. Andrews became president of the ISL, and D.I. Jones and Gabriel Weinstock became secretary and treasurer, respectively, all ex-members of the SALP's executive committee.

Thus the schism within the SALP became official and final. The founding of the ISL symbolised the parting of the ways for organised labour in South Africa. The ideological differences that generated the breach would, in the years to come, prove to be an unbridgeable gap between the conservative right wing (including the white trade unions and the SALP) and progressive (socialist) left wing of the labour movement. Therefore, as Johns declares, the formation of the ISL, which also proved to be the forerunner of the Communist Party of South Africa, was a turning point in South African labour history as militant left-wing socialists grouped themselves into an organisation outside of the SALP. The new organisation proclaimed itself the guardian of the true principles of international socialism in South Africa.²⁰

Initially, the object of the ISL were: "*To propagate the principles of international socialism and anti-militarism*", to which "industrial unionism" in 1917 was formally added. But according to Caldwell and Johns, at most, the war was seen merely as the occasion of the ISL breaking away from the SALP; and anti-militarism as an interregnum which occupied the ISL until it woke up to the more urgent issue of racism. It recognised that its activities ought to include the non-white working class *vis-à-vis* the SALP's white labour policy.²¹

Since the inception of the ISL the international socialists through their organ, ***The International***, constantly criticised, attacked and heaped abuse on the SALP and Creswell, the party leader. The SALP's "mis-leaders", or "Labour Fakirs" betrayed the

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.71-72; S. Johns, *op.cit.*, pp. 46-51; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp.174-175; S. Forman and A. Odendaal, *op.cit.*, pp.47-48; E. Roux: *S.P. Bunting. A Political Biography*, Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1993, pp.71-72; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.184.

²¹ See M.A. Caldwell: *Struggle in Discourse: The International's Discourse against Racism in the Labour Movement in South Africa (1915-1919)*, Unpublished MA thesis, U. Rhodes, 1996, p.3; S. Johns, *op.cit.*, pp.49,65.

workers and thus became the enemy of the working class. Therefore, the party became irrelevant to the class struggle.²²

The International severely criticised Creswell for instigating the international socialists' expulsion from the SALP. **The International** also criticised Creswell and his party's negative attitude towards socialism as they would not concede that only a revolutionary class struggle could liberate labour from capitalism. They were denounced for their willingness to accept a reformist, half-hearted and peaceful transformation of society.²³ In addition, the paper condemned the SALP's white labour policy and preference for the preservation of the industrial colour bar as being antiquated.²⁴

Under these circumstances the SALP, representing the majority faction, and the ISL, representing the minority faction of a divided labour movement, entered the so-called 1915 "khaki" general election. Obviously, the war issue was the main contention in the election campaign and the gulf between the two groups was unbridgeable.²⁵ **The International** attacked the SALP and Creswell's "see it through" policy and stated that the first duty of a working class party (such as the SALP) was towards the international working class to bring about combined pressure on the belligerent governments to discuss terms of peace.²⁶ ..**The International** also severely attacked the party's British imperial connection.²⁷

²² See *The International*, 15.10.1915, p.2; April-December 1916; 19.1.1917, p.1; 6.12.1918, p.3; 19.11.1920, p.4; 31.12.1920, p.1; 17.2.1922, p.1 and H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.257.

²³ See *The International*, 10.9.1915, p.2; 19.7.1918, p.7; 5.9.1919, p.1; 19.9.1919, p.1; 9.4.1920, p.1; 26.11.1920, p.2; 25.3.1921, p.3; 27.4.1923, p.1; 7.12.1923, p.1; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp.175,208-209,216; W.H. Harrison, *op.cit.*, p.28.

²⁴ *The International*, 24.9.1915, p.4; 12.10.1917, p.3; 9.11.1917, p.3; 14.3.1919, p.2; 11.7.1919, p.2; 12.11.1920, p.2; 1.6.1923, p.2; 21.9.1923, p.1; E. Roux, *op.cit.*, p.79.

²⁵ E. Roux, *op.cit.* p.74; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, p.176; B. Hirson and G.A. Williams, *op.cit.*, p.148; N. Levi: *Jan Smuts*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1917, p.275; T. Boydell: *"My Luck Was In"*. *With Spotlights on General Smuts*, Stewart Printing Company (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town, n.d., p.123; W.K. Hancock: *Smuts I: The Sanguine Years, 1870-1919*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962, p. 403; *The International*, 22.10.1915, p.1; 31.5.1918, p.2.

²⁶ *The International*, 17.9.1915, p.1; 15.10.1915, p.3.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.4.1916, p.2; 12.11.1920, p.2; 26.11.1920, p.2.

The SALP suffered a crushing defeat in the elections. Only four of its 44 candidates were successful at the polls.²⁸ *The International* blamed the party's losses on the deviation from its socialist principles.²⁹ However, the international socialists fared even worse. The ISL's two candidates, W.H. Andrews and J.A. Clark, managed to poll only 63 and 77 votes respectively.³⁰ Not discouraged by the election results for labour, to which the schism in the labour movement contributed considerably, the ISL stated its continued intention to be involved in election politics and hinted that it would take on the SALP again in this regard.³¹

3. Failed Efforts at Reconciliation

Towards the end of the First World War the SALP sank into political apathy.³² But with the impending general election of 1920 the party, anxious to mobilize all white labour support behind its banner, extended an olive branch to the wayward ISL. The administrative council of the SALP resolved in November 1918 to rescind its resolutions of October 1915 which ended the membership of anti-warites and extended a welcome to all who would accept the socialist objective of the party. However, the ISL still could not forgive the SALP for its expulsion and contemptuously rejected the suggestion that its members rejoin the party. Citing their concern for the non-whites, the ISL reiterated its fidelity to the socialist objective at all times and for all workers, not merely for the safe times of peace or for white workers. Proclaiming the breach between the ISL and the SALP to be final, the ISL asserted anew its identification with the socialist revolution, both at home and overseas.³³

²⁸ T. Boydell, *op.cit.*, pp.123-124; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, pp.184-185; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, p.177; E. Roux, *op.cit.*, pp.74-75; S. Johns, *op.cit.*, p.56; S. Forman and A. Odendaal, *op.cit.*, p.51.

²⁹ *The International*, 22.10.1915, p.1.

³⁰ H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.186; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, p.177; S. Johns, *op.cit.*, p.56; S. Forman and A. Odendaal, *op.cit.*, p.51.

³¹ *The International*, 2.11.1915, p.1.

³² D. Ticktin: The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15 (*South African Historical Journal*, No. 1, November 1969, p.72).

³³ S. Johns, *op.cit.*, p.79; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.215; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp. 206-207.

Notwithstanding the ISL's reaction to its gesture of rapprochement the SALP in September 1919 instituted a series of "unity conferences" in another attempt to consolidate the ranks of labour in view of the forthcoming parliamentary elections. However, the ISL's attitude towards the SALP was still unyielding and the League decided to contest the elections under its own banner.³⁴

The ISL put up five candidates and fought the election for propaganda purposes only. The duty of ISL members was to distribute the election manifesto and 150 000 leaflets on bolshevism, soviet power, the colour bar, rising prices and the Labour Party's double-talk on race- the latter being regarded as "*white socialism*". ***The International*** accused the SALP of being driven "*more and more into the lap of the Money Power*". Creswell's preference for the "Imperial connection", which was in accordance with the policies of the pro-capitalist South African Party (SAP) and the Unionist Party (UP) was also criticised. Therefore, the SALP could no longer be regarded as a home for Labour.³⁵

Economic circumstances favoured the SALP in the 1920 general election. A depression followed the brief post-war boom resulting in a soaring cost of living. The force of general discontent pushed forward the Labour Party whose parliamentary representation increased from four seats to 21. The ISL candidates, however, were badly beaten and lost their deposits. The 78 votes received by Andrews were the most given to any socialist candidate.³⁶ In the face of the ISL's poor performance to Labour's promising results at the polls ***The International*** ambiguously welcomed the SALP's progress, while simultaneously also criticising the influence of Creswell's "imperialism" on the party.³⁷

³⁴ *The International*, 21.11.1919, p.4; 28.11.1919, p.4; 12.12.1919, p.7; 9.1.1920, pp.4,5; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, pp.244-245.

³⁵ See *The International*, November 1919 – February 1920; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, pp. 245-246; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp. 216-217; S. Johns, *op.cit.*, pp.104-105.

³⁶ S. Johns, *op.cit.*, p. 105; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp.216-217; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, pp.246,248; D.W. Krüger: *The Age of the Generals. A Short Political History of the Union of South Africa, 1910-1948*, Dagbreek Book Store, Johannesburg, 1958, p.112.

³⁷ *The International*, 12.3.1920, p.4.

The ISL was not disheartened by the election results. In the rise of the strength of the SALP and the Nationalist Party (NP), the League saw portents of its own future success. ***The International*** asserted that the ISL was the inevitable successor to the SALP and it was from the ranks of the SALP that the ISL would recruit its forces for the final victory of socialism.³⁸

The results of the 1920 general election created a hung parliament and politically a stalemate situation. Eventually, gen. J.C. Smuts's ruling SAP managed to amalgamate with the Unionists, which provided the former with a sorely needed political blood transfusion. In order to consolidate his newly-won position Smuts called another general election in February 1921.³⁹

The SALP was not ready for another election which caught the labour movement in a state of disunity. Trade unions were indifferent or hostile to the political wing. In reaction to the amalgamation of the UP and the SAP and in anticipation of the 1921 general election, the SALP in November 1920 initiated an informal conference for unity talks between the Labour Party, the ISL and various other labour organisations. ***The Labour World***, a pro-SALP weekly, conceded that the chief points of difference between the Labour Party and the ISL were the colour question and the conception of state. The SALP was still in favour of maintaining the colour bar and social segregation. Alas, the conflicting ideological viewpoints seemed to be irreconcilable. Creswell argued that political change could only take place by peaceful constitutional means, while the ISL firmly believed in revolutionary methods.⁴⁰

In the 1921 general election the ISL only put up three candidates in Natal.⁴¹ Once again the SALP was targeted as its main election opponent. The League's manifesto for the

³⁸ S. Johns, *op.cit.*, p.105; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, p.217; *The International*, 12.3.1920, p.5.

³⁹ D.W. Krüger, *op.cit.*, pp.112-115.

⁴⁰ H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.250; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp.208-209; *The Labour World*, 20.11.1920, p.6; *The International*, 12.11.1920, p.2; 26.11.1920, p.2; 10.12.1920, p.2.

⁴¹ B.L. Reid: Organised Labour in Natal: 1918-1924, Unpublished MA thesis, UN, 1975, pp. 105-106.

sixth annual conference stated *inter alia*: "... a Socialist party must continue to do as the ISL has done, viz, to show up the SALP, to oppose it at elections, to goad it if possible into being more revolutionary..."⁴²

In the 1921 general election Labour's gains from the previous election were almost halved and the party's parliamentary representation dropped to 9 seats only. Smuts's clear majority of 79 seats was at the expense of Labour. Although untrue, his election propaganda succeeded in skillfully portraying the SALP as being pro-bolshevik which scared off the electorate.⁴³ ***The International***, in its post-election review, reproachfully stated that the SALP once again has failed to win the support of the workers on a (pro-British) patriotic issue. Since its progress in the 1920 general election the party under Creswell betrayed their election promises to the workers by voting themselves an increased salary and by supporting the government whenever it was in danger of defeat. To ***The International*** the ISL's election results were not discouraging at all. The paper pointed out that the SALP polled a total of 2 310 votes in the three constituencies in which socialist candidates opposed it. The League candidates polled 140 votes in total. Thus one vote in every sixteen was "a class-conscious revolutionary vote".⁴⁴

⁴² *The International*, 31.12.1920, p.1.

⁴³ D.W. Kruger, *op.cit.*, p.115; A.G. Barlow: *Almost in Confidence*, Juta & Co., Limited, Cape Town, 1952, p. 166; I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren: *2000 Casualties. A History of the Trade Unions and the Labour Movement in the Union of South Africa*, SATUC, Johannesburg, 1961, p.322.

⁴⁴ *The International*, 11.2.1921, p.2; 18.2.1921, p.2. See also B.L. Reid, *op.cit.*, p.107.

4. The Communists and the Pact

The year 1922 saw the biggest and bloodiest industrial upheaval in South African labour history when the conflict between state and labour reached its zenith in the Rand strike. Eventually, the Smuts government intervened and proclaimed Martial Law, resulting in a bloody suppression of the strike. Labour lost to the government and to mining capital. Thousands of strikers were arrested and convicted of which four were executed. Eventually between 12 000 and 14 000 miners lost their jobs.⁴⁵

The 1922 strike would have far-reaching political consequences. Indeed, in labour circles the resentment and hatred for Smuts reached fever pitch. Already since 1921 rapprochement took place between the SALP and the NP (who also represented Afrikaner workers), ultimately culminating in forming an electoral alliance, also known as the Pact. The two parties agreed to co-operate and to support one another in the next general election with the main purpose to oust Smuts from government. After suffering a series of by-election defeats, Smuts in 1924 decided to go to the polls to test his government's popularity with the electorate.⁴⁶

With regard to the general election of 1924 the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), established in July 1921,⁴⁷ found herself in a predicament. Where the CPSA's predecessor, the ISL, at its sixth annual conference in January 1921 still resolved not to co-operate with any "bourgeois" parties at election times, the 1922 strike and its consequences drastically changed the political scene. With the end of Martial Law and the release of many of the prisoners, a short-lived united front movement was formally organised from communists, SALP members, NP members and white trade unionists. It

⁴⁵ See N. Herd: *1922 The Revolt on the Rand*, Blue Crane Books, Johannesburg, 1966, chs. 1-12; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp. 219-220, 227-283; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, pp. 271-299; I.L. Walker and B. Weinbren, *op.cit.*, pp.93-127, 150-151; E. Roux, *op.cit.*, pp.91-94; S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, pp. 128-144.

⁴⁶ See A.G. Barlow, *op.cit.*, pp.174-175, 179, 182; D.W. Krüger, *op.cit.*, pp.124-131; W.K. Hancock: *Smuts 2: The Fields of Force, 1919-1950*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 70, 150-151, 157-161.

⁴⁷ S. Johns: The Birth of the Communist Party of South Africa (*The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1976, pp. 371-400).

undertook *inter alia* a series of campaigns on behalf of the remaining strike prisoners, but its ultimate aim was to replace Smuts with a so-called “people’s government”.⁴⁸

Although some communists continued to criticise the SALP, and Creswell in particular, for “reformism” and their segregation policies others, however, urged full support for any SALP-Nationalist alliance. They argued that the CPSA temporarily had no choice but to rely on the SALP, the party of the white workers, to work for the advancement of all workers until the non-whites would become active politically.⁴⁹ However, in order to soothe the Nationalists’ fears for socialism the SALP at its annual conference in January 1923 diluted its socialist objective. In addition, the Labour leaders denounced the united front and withdrew the party from its committees. Naturally, this step evoked a lot of criticism from ***The International***.⁵⁰ However, the communists argued that a victory over the Smuts government would encourage the white workers’ class-consciousness and pave the way for a genuine revolutionary socialist party. Therefore, with the announcement of the conclusion of the NP-SALP electoral pact, ***The International*** critically endorsed the Pact as a necessary step.⁵¹

By 1923 the CPSA was convinced that the most direct path to greater influence for its cause was through work among the white workers. The party’s second congress decided by a two-thirds majority to apply for affiliation to the SALP.⁵²

However, ***The International*** went further and explicitly stated that the CPSA wanted to use affiliation with the SALP to reach the white workers with the correct CPSA viewpoint in order to hasten the inevitable disintegration of the moderate SALP.⁵³ But ***The***

⁴⁸ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p. 147; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.302; *The International*, 26.5.1922, p.1; 30.6.1922, p.3; 7.7.1922, p.2; 18.8.1922, p.2; 10.11.1922, p.3; 18.5.1923, p.3.

⁴⁹ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p. 146. See also *The International*, August 1922 – April 1923.

⁵⁰ R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, p. 286; *The International*, 10.11.1922, p.2; 5.1.1923, pp.1,4; 26.1.1923, p.4; 2.2.1923, p.4; 18.5.1923, p.3.

⁵¹ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, pp. 146-147; *The International*, 27.4.1923, p.2.

⁵² S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, pp. 148-150; R. K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp. 286-287; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.309; *The International*, 4.5.1923, p.2; 11.5.1923, p.2; 18.5.1923, p.3; 25.5.1923, p.2.

⁵³ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p. 150; *The International*, 15.6.1923, p.3.

Guardian, a SALP-orientated Durban newspaper, strongly lobbied against any CPSA affiliation to the Labour Party.⁵⁴ Therefore, the SALP's rejection of the CPSA's application for affiliation came as no surprise. Citing its adherence to political action within the existing representative institutions rather than outside them, and its faith in economic and social change through evolution rather than through revolution, the SALP indicated that its policies had little, if anything, in common with those of the CPSA. Furthermore, the SALP estimated that any association with the CPSA would decrease the growing strength of the SALP and that such association would also ruin the party as it had existed in view of the stated intentions of the communists to transform the SALP. The SALP reply also implied that the attention of the CPSA to non-white workers was a further barrier to any cooperation with the Labour Party.⁵⁵

The SALP's rejection of the CPSA's rapprochement clearly underlined the latter's predicament regarding the election as could also be derived from ***The International's*** reaction. Although criticising the SALP's rejection the CPSA nevertheless decided to support the Pact with the prime goal of ousting the Smuts government at all costs. The CPSA therefore resolved to support and not to oppose any Pact candidates in the election. The CPSA would rather approach the rank-and-file of the SALP directly. The communists were confident that the truth of their message would win them adherents among the white workers who supported the SALP. Simultaneously the CPSA reaffirmed that it did not support either the programs or the outlooks of both the Nationalists and the SALP. Thus the CPSA continued to criticise aspects of the "bourgeois" Pact's policies in the columns of ***The International***, such as segregation, "imperialism" and Labour's dilution of the socialist objective.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ *The Guardian*, 13.7.1923, p.2; 20.7.1923, p.1; 27.7.1923, p.5; 17.8.1923, p.1.

⁵⁵ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, pp.150-151; *The International*, 27.7.1923, p.4; *The Guardian*, 27.7.1923, p.1.

⁵⁶ See S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p.151; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, pp. 313-316 and *The International*, June 1923 - June 1924.

The CPSA also repeated that any Nationalist – SALP victory would merely be a necessary stepping stone to the eventual communist victory. Bunting, who drafted the party's election manifesto, stated *inter alia* that the CPSA's aim was: "*To bury Ceasar [Smuts], not to praise the Pact...the defeat of the SAP Government will in itself mean quite an appreciable step in the march towards complete emancipation.*"⁵⁷

The result of the 1924 general election was a crushing defeat for the SAP government. The NP won 63 seats, the SAP 53 and the SALP 18 seats. A Pact government was then formed with gen. J.B.M. Hertzog as Prime Minister. It consisted of eight Nationalists and two Labour ministers, Creswell and T. Boydell.⁵⁸

With the election results a foregone conclusion and the negotiations between Hertzog and Creswell on Labour's participation in the cabinet made public, the CPSA turned on its heels and through pamphlets and its organ, ***The International***, started a vigorous campaign against the SALP and against involvement in the cabinet. The CPSA, which had urged workers to support the Pact at the polls, now in vain urged the SALP "*in the interests of the toiling masses of South Africa to vote against the coalition*" on the grounds that the most effective concessions for the white workers could be obtained through pressure from outside the government rather than from cooperation within. The SALP was also accused of having surrendered its principles to the Pact for the sake of "political adventurers" and "political office-seekers" within the party. In this way the SALP would merely become a "wing" of the NP.⁵⁹

The International severely criticised the Labour leaders, Creswell in particular, for accepting cabinet posts in what was regarded as "treason" and "*the final extinction of the*

⁵⁷ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p.151; E. Roux, *op.cit.*, pp.103-104; *The International*, 18.4.1924, pp.4,.6; 16.5.1924, p.6.

⁵⁸ T. Boydell, *op.cit.*, pp.206-207; O. Pirow: *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*, Howard Timmens, Cape Town, n.d. pp. 98-99.

⁵⁹ S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, p. 152; H.J. and R.E. Simons, *op.cit.*, p.323; R.K. Cope, *op.cit.*, pp.293-294; *The International*, 20.6.1924, pp.2,4,5; 27.6.1924, pp.3,5,6,8 and pamphlet appendix; 11.7.1924, p.2.

SALP as an independent working-class organisation". For *The International* the SALP changed into the "Creswell-Boydell Party".⁶⁰

5. Conclusion

The program of the Hertzog government posed a direct threat to the appeal of the communists among the white workers, which explains the CPSA's antagonism towards the Pact since the election. By focusing on trade unions and unemployment, the government weakened the argument that the communists alone would take proper care of the interests of the white workers. By instituting a "civilised labour" policy, the new government appealed directly to the prejudices of the white workers, and more importantly, it stopped what appeared to be a direct and immediate threat to their means of existence. By expanding the role of the government in securing benefits for the white workers the new government removed sources of discontent which might have been used by the CPSA to harness the white workers to a revolutionary movement.

This, to a certain extent, was the final parting of the ways of the South African labour movement and the uneasy relationship between the SALP on the one hand and the socialists and communists on the other. As organised white labour became more absorbed in the Pact government's protective and racially segregated "civilised labour" policies, the SALP and the CPSA would drift further and further apart, never to be reconciled again. Indeed, from 1925 onwards the CPSA would turn its back on white labour to embark on a policy to organise black labour, the "true" South African proletariat, politically and economically.⁶¹

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⁶⁰ *The International*, 4.7.1924, pp.3,4,5; 11.7.1924, p.2.

⁶¹ See. S. Johns: *Raising the Red Flag*, pp. 152-162.

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