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POLITICAL RIGHTS AND THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

The system of race discrimination practised in South Africa operates not against a minority, but against the great majority of the people : the Non-Whites (Africans, Indians and Coloureds) who number over 10 million of the country's total population of 12½ million.

The Non-Whites are denied any voice in the government, and are excluded from participation in the administration of the country.

The Union's Constitution - the South Africa Act, passed in 1910, enshrines the principle of race discrimination. Successive governments have held power under this constitution, calling the system of race discrimination variously "segregation" (the United Party under Smuts) or "apartheid" (the Nationalist Government), but under the Nationalists political rights have been still further restricted and whittled away.

The basis for the rise to power of the fascist Nationalist Government lies in the basic structure of South Africa's political economic and social system. The structure is characterised by:

1. The predominance of financial and gold-mining groups in alliance with the big farming interests and closely linked with British and American imperialism.
2. The amassing by these interests of super-profits derived from the exploitation of the Non-White masses, who are regarded purely as sources of cheap labour. They are deprived of land and democratic rights, held in a state of colonial subjection and terror, and deliberately denied access to education and the benefits of civilisation.
3. The granting of numerous concessions and monopolies (e.g. of political representation, commercial opportunities, skilled trades and professions) to the European middle class and working classes with a view to buying their support and maintaining some stability for this top-heavy structure.

South Africa's undemocratic constitution has permitted the Nationalist Party to become the government of the country, although it represents a minority in the country.

THE CONSTITUTION.

All members of Parliament must be Afrikaners descended with few minor exceptions (detailed below)

So the indigenous inhabitants, the majority of the people, are barred from exercising the first right of a citizen, the right to choose his government by popular vote.

Taking the two Houses of Parliament (the Senate and the House of Assembly) together, out of a total of 197 members, 190 members represent 22 per cent of the population and 7 members represent 68 per cent. The remaining 10 per cent are totally unrepresented. The entire African population (8½ million) is represented by 7 members in the two Houses, and of these 7, 4 are indirectly elected. The four Senators are elected by the Africans of three of the Union's four provinces and under this system of indirect election, the constituency of the Transvaal-Free State must be the largest in the world represented by only one man. The remaining three representatives are elected by the Africans of the Cape Province, who are registered on a separate voters' roll, and have to satisfy educational and property qualifications.

The only Indians in the country who may vote are included in the 1500 Asians (Indians and Malays) who, in the Cape, are registered as voters.

Only the Coloured people of the Cape Province may vote, and in this province there are 25,000 Coloured voters compared to 390,000 White voters.

As a contrast to the disfranchisement of the great majority of the Non-Whites, every White man or woman over the age of 21 years has the vote.

Only in the Cape are Non-Whites represented on provincial councils, and only on Cape municipal councils may Non-White Councillors sit.

Everywhere else City and Town Councils are exclusively White.

Not satisfied with the gross disparity in voting rights, the Nationalist Government has set out to destroy the last vestiges of democratic rights enjoyed by some Coloureds and Africans. They have repeatedly threatened to abolish the 3 African representatives in the House of Assembly who are elected by the Africans in the Cape, and in fact, have expelled three African representatives elected to Parliament (Kahn, Bunting and Alexander), using the terms of the Suppression of Communism Act. The Nationalists have also threatened to remove all Coloured voters in the Cape from the common roll. To this end, they passed the Separate Representation of Voters' Act, removing the Coloureds from the voting roll, and flouting the entrenched clause in the Constitution which safeguards the Non-White franchise of the Cape. This act provoked a major constitutional storm in South Africa. A Court application upset the validity of the government's action, and a countrywide campaign against the Government's action on this issue caused the government temporarily to abandon its plans. However, the Nationalists will undoubtedly make new attempts to remove Coloured voters from the rolls.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES.

All the political parties in South Africa are based on a policy of restricting political rights to the Non-Europeans, and exploiting the cheap labour of the Africans.

Since Union in 1910, there have been various alignments between the parties, but basically there has been little difference between the Government party and the official

official Opposition parties. For example, the present Nationalist Government was in power in 1924, in an alliance with the Labour Government Party, and with Smuts (who drowned the 1922 Miners' strike in blood) in Opposition.

The distinctions between the Nationalist and United Parties are often blurred because of their similarity in policy, but originally the Nationalist Party represented predominantly farming interests, while the United Party was the party of the Chamber of Mines, and of secondary industry. The Inroad made by Afrikaner farmers into industry and business has now made this distinction in economic interests less clear.

An examination of the statute books show that all the laws being legislated and administered by the Nationalist today were present in some milder form under the previous government. The political campaigning and election battles between the Nationalist and United parties have resolved themselves into a hollow sham fight between rival oppressors.

The Nationalists have not been halted by the feeble and half-hearted opposition they have met at the polls or in Parliament, but with the marked advance in the leadership and effectiveness of the Non-European liberation movement, they have turned more and more to the use of terror and force in order to maintain the colour-bar system. The Nationalist Government differs from its predecessors chiefly in that it is carrying the infamous system of race superiority to its extreme of barbarity and ruthlessness.

The United Party does still pay lip-service to democratic principles. It is a less homogenous party than the Nationalists and there are sections and members of it that from time to time do attempt to whip up opposition to the Government's programme and activities. But on countless vital issues the a parent conflict between the Nationalists and the United Party has grown more and more superficial as the Opposition compromised with the Government, rather than join in united opposition to the Nationalists with the Non-White people and organisations.

The Public Safety Act, and Criminal Law Amendment Act, passed in order to crush the Defiance Campaign of 1952 give the Government power to suspend existing laws and legislate by unrestricted decree; to punish without recourse to the courts of law; to inflict lashes and terms of imprisonment for committing any offence by way of protesting against any law.

The Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act (before Parliament during the 1955 session) gives the police even greater power, and permits searches without warrants as well as ~~xx~~ as

Also before the 1955 session of Parliament is the Departure from the Union Regulation Bill which makes it a crime punishable by imprisonment without the option of a fine for anybody over 16 to leave the Union without a passport issued by the Government.

Anti-Trade Union Legislation.

Severance on the Trade Unions.

Rigid Control of Labour.

Several laws carry further the rigid control of African labour by tightening up the pass laws, preventing workers from moving freely about the country and competing for work employment in the best markets. For example the Native Labour Regulation Act makes it a criminal offence for an unemployed African to be in a town longer than 72 hours without a permit. This Bill makes it a criminal offence for an African worker to refuse to obey any lawful command or use insulting language to his employer. The Native Laws Amendment Act applies the passlaws to African women and juveniles. It gives the Government power to banish tribes or individuals from the areas in which they were born or grew up. Other laws empower the authorities to deport African men or women from the towns. The effect of these laws and the operation of the passlaws generally is to control all African labour, so that it remains cheap and docile. Africans who fall foul of the pass laws are brought to court (there are over one million convictions each year), and those found guilty are liable to be sent out to work on the mines and farms, where conditions are worst and wages lowest.

Enforced Apartheid.

The Group Areas Act aims at the establishment of race ghettos for each of the various Non-white groups. It empowers the Government to expropriate communities from their land and properties without compensation. ~~xx~~ This year the Government started its first enforced population removal scheme (under the Native Resettlement Act) when it moved African families from a freehold area of Johannesburg to a controlled, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ township in the area set aside for Africans. A law before Parliament is to empower the Government to remove all Africans (except domestic workers) who live in European apartment-buildings.

The Native Building Workers' Act prohibits Africans from building in an area proclaimed by the Minister.

The Mixed Marriages Act makes illegal all marriages between Whites and members of any other Non-White groups.

The Native Land and Trust Act is to be used to uproot Africans on the land.

The Bantu Authorities Act sets up dummy tribal councils for the Africans and makes this pretence of consulting them instead of giving them the full franchise.

The LABOUR PARTY.

This Party was originally formed by the skilled white workers to protect their standards. As a major political party the Labour Party declined years ago until today it is a spent force, with some limited connections with some European trade unions and with its representation in Parliament dependent on electoral pacts with the United Party. It has no support among the mass of the people. In Parliament this party's representatives have in recent years taken a courageous stand in defence of the democratic rights of the people. But the party still concentrates on purely parliamentary activity and as a result tends to discount the struggles of the Non-White peoples' movements, roused to action outside Parliament.

THE LIBERAL PARTY.

This party, with a reformist programme, was formed at a time, during the Defiance Campaign, when the Non-Europeans were conducting a militant campaign for the repeal of anti-democratic and unjust laws. This Party holds that unless some concessions are made to the Non-Europeans' demand for political rights, there will be trouble. Accordingly it advocates limited franchise rights and other moderate demands. The party has no mass basis or membership, and has a leadership mainly of intellectuals. Though theoretically against the colour bar, the nature of the Liberal Party's programme and work (limited to parliamentary activity) means that Non-whites can not, and do not, participate in it effectively.

~~THE~~

The COMMUNIST PARTY was suppressed by the ~~Nationalist Party~~ passing in 1950 of the Suppression of Communism Act.

THE RECORD OF THE NATIONALIST GOVERNMENT.

Since May 1948 when the Nationalist Government came to power, there have been continuous and mounting attacks on the freedoms of association and speech, movement and assembly. The trade unions and national liberatory movements have been under fire, as have all democratic bodies -- all this aimed at stifling criticism from those outspokenly opposed to the Nationalists.

Below are some of the measures passed in these years by the Nationalist Government:

The Suppression of Communism Act gave the Minister of Justice dictatorial powers, and these have been used to ban newspapers (The Guardian, and Advance); to proscribe and ban individuals (up to now 574 people have been "named"; 158 prohibited from attending all gatherings; and 38 forced to resign from trade unions and other bodies.)

Raids on homes and offices have become commonplace, telephones are tapped, the mail scrutinised, books and journals banned, meetings surrounded by armed police and the names of all those attending recorded by the Political Police .. all this ostensibly to fight 'Communism', but aimed at crushing the democratic movement and intimidating South Africans.

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TREASON TRIAL, 1956 1961

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