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THE LABOUR PARTY IN PARLIAMENT.

Nov
1958

Labour Party men have sat in South Africa's Parliament ever since the establishment of the Union in 1910. This unbroken record of Labour representation ended at the 1953 general elections, when the Labour Party candidates were heavily defeated. Now, for the first time in forty-eight years, there are no Labour members in the Union House of Assembly.

The elimination of the Labour Party from the Parliamentary scene was an inevitable outcome in a society where racial discrimination overrides everything. The surprising thing is that the Labour Party survived as long as it did.

From its beginning, the Labour movement in South Africa has been restricted in its development because of racial distractions. In the industrial field, the barriers which have been erected to preserve white domination have limited the potential strength of organised labour to one-third of the working population.

2/ On the Parliamentary....

Note: This Chapter is not intended to present a complete history of ^{THE} Labour Party in Parliament. It is merely a report on ~~the~~ Labour's last ten years in Parliament (1948 - 1958), during the first ten years of Nationalist rule. It is drawn against white working-class attitudes in a society dominated by a white minority, to provide a clearer understanding of the problems which have thus far retarded Labour progress in S. A.

On the Parliamentary front, because all Non-Whites are excluded from the common franchise for the election of the Government, these and other barriers have similarly limited the Labour Party's appeal to White workers.

In an electoral system of this kind, where two-thirds of the working class are denied the franchise, no Labour or Workers' Party can hope to secure the election of its candidates to Parliament.

Apart from this tremendous drawback, the Labour movement is further handicapped because even the White workers have failed to rally to ~~the~~ its support. Racial privilege has generated a superior attitude in White workers, who have tended to become an aristocracy of their own, disdainful of labour associations.

In addition, the Labour movement has suffered because of the attitude of Afrikaner workers towards trade unionism and socialism.

When Afrikaners were driven from the rural to the industrial areas by poverty, they found great difficulty in adjusting themselves to industrial society. They lacked a trade union tradition and background and were ignorant of the continuous struggle between capital and labour. As far as they were concerned, the real struggle was that of the Afrikaner, against exploitation by foreigners. They saw all English-speaking South Africans, whether workers or bosses, as the agents of ^{the} British conqueror, against whom they bore an undying bitterness.

The trade unions, as events showed, failed to break through this wall of confusion. Except in a few cases, the unions ~~failed~~ were unable to teach the Afrikaners

from the rural areas the politics of trade unionism or to convey to them an understanding of workers' solidarity.

Those Afrikaner workers who grasped the problem and learned the ideals of labour organisation, became outstanding trade union leaders. In the main, however, Afrikaner workers remained suspicious and aloof where trade unionism was concerned. This attitude was fostered by leading Afrikaner cultural and religious organisations, which were extremely hostile to the unions and actively campaigned against them.

Faced with the difficulty of overcoming this opposition, many trade union leaders took the line of least resistance. To avoid argument and controversy in their organisations, they adopted a policy of "no politics in the unions". This retreat from realism soon led to a falling off of trade union affiliations to the Labour Party.

This was a surprising development, for it had been the trade unions which established the Labour Party, to make their demands for a better life more effective. In the formative years of the labour movement in South Africa, White workers realised that they could not ignore the force of political power. It was then that they decided that Parliamentary representation was essential, if workers' interests were to be adequately promoted.

The Labour Party was established in 1908 by trade unionists, because they saw ~~that~~ the necessity of having their own representatives in the lawmaking institution of the land. Workers' leaders in those days were constantly engaged in one conflict after another with the mining magnates of the Witwatersrand. The working class movement was militant, ~~aggressive~~

aggressive, and active in both the industrial and political fields.

When the Labour Party was established in 1908, South Africa was still separated into four independent provinces. It was only two years later, in 1910, that the British Colonies of Natal and the Cape joined together with the conquered Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, to form the Union of South Africa.

The elections for the first Union Parliament took place in 1910. Four Labour Party candidates were successful and went to Cape Town to sit in the Union's first House of Assembly, comprising 121 members.

At every election thereafter, the Labour Party put up candidates and its strength in the successive Parliaments ~~xxxxxxx~~ was as follows :-

First Parliament	-	1910 - 1915.....	4 members
Second	"	1915 - 1920.....	4 members
Third	"	1920 - 1921.....	21 members
Fourth	"	1921 - 1924.....	9 members
Fifth	"	1924 - 1929.....	18 members (a)
Sixth	"	1929 - 1933.....	8 members (b)
Seventh	"	1933 - 1938.....	2 members
Eighth	"	1938 - 1943.....	3 members
Ninth	"	1943 - 1948.....	9 members (c)
Tenth	"	1948 - 1953.....	6 members (c)
Eleventh	"	1953 - 1958.....	5 members (c)
Twelfth	"	1953 -	0 members

5/..... The ~~reasons for~~ *circumstances*

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- (a) Pact with the Nationalist Party
 - (b) 5 Creswellites and 3 National Councilites (The Party split in 1928, one section under Creswell continuing the pact with the Nationalists and the rest fighting ~~independently~~.)
 - (c) Pacts with the United Party.

As the official Labour Party

The circumstances which swayed the fortunes of the Labour Party, and caused the fluctuations in its Parliamentary strength, cannot be examined in this short record. The ~~xxx~~ ruinous split which took place in 1928 is in itself worthy of wider examination. There is a great deal which can be written about the ups and downs of the Labour Party. One thing, however, that must be explained here, is the various pacts which the Labour Party has made with other parties, because these have a strong bearing on recent events.

THE 1924 PACT.

The pact which the Labour Party made with the Nationalist Party in 1924, was an outcome of the disastrous general strike of 1922, which developed into a bloody civil war, in which many lives were lost. Among the victims were several trade union leaders, some of whom were executed and others sent to jail for long terms.

General Smuts, as leader of the South African Party government of the time, aroused the ire of workers and their friends throughout the country for his handling of the situation. Workers looked upon Smuts as the ruthless protector of the mineowners' interests.

A determined campaign began to oust Smuts and his party from power, bringing the Labour and Nationalist Parties closer together. It was a remarkable alliance, for the Labour Party was comprised overwhelmingly of English-speaking workers, while the Nationalist Party was conservative, agrarian and totally Afrikaans.

These two parties entered the 1924 Parliamentary elections as allies. Their effort was entirely successful,

6/..... bringing down -

bringing down the Smuts' government. The Nationalist Party won 63 seats, the Labour Party 18, the South African Party 53 and Independents 1.

The pact between the Labour and Nationalist parties did not end with the elections. It was followed by a closer link in government. The Labour Party accepted two (this was later increased to three) seats in the Cabinet.

During the period of this pact, the Labour Party secured the passage of several important improvements in South Africa's labour laws. Some of these laws are dealt with elsewhere in this book.

It should be noted in passing that the Nationalist Party of those days did not have the character of the Purified Nationalist Party of to-day, which came into existence in 1934 and is now the government of South Africa. The totalitarian/^{devices}~~influence~~ of Hitlerism had not/^{then influenced}~~inspired~~ the ~~despotic~~ formulation of the despotic policies which form the basis of present-day Nationalist programmes.

As a matter of fact, it was because of the dangerous changes in Nationalist Party policy that the Labour Party later formed its alliances with the United Party.

^{have} There/~~has~~ been some peculiar explanations of the agreements between the Labour and United Parties. These have caused considerable misunderstanding, at home and abroad, of the Labour Party's motives in making them. The ~~is~~ true story is simple and straightforward.

THE 1943, 1948 and 1953 PACTS.

The first electoral agreement between the Labour and United Parties arose as a result of the outbreak

7/..... of war in 1939.

of war in 1939. At that time, the ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ United Party, under the leadership of General Hertzog, held the reins of government. His party was divided on the question whether South Africa should ~~xxxxxx~~ enter the war on the side of the allies. He, and several of his followers wanted South Africa to remain neutral.

When the vote was taken in Parliament, Hertzog and his followers, supported by the entire Nationalist Party, were defeated ~~and~~ by the narrow margin of 13 votes (80 votes to 67). Smuts and his followers, supported by the Labour and Dominion Parties, had succeeded in committing South Africa to go to war against Hitler and Mussolini.

Smuts thereupon assumed the Premiership and invited Walter Madeley, ^{Parliamentary} leader of the Labour Party, to accept the portfolio of Minister of Labour. The Labour Party promptly gave its approval and Walter Madeley entered the Cabinet.

(A) In the 1943 general election, fought while the Nation was at war, both the United Party and the Labour Party recognised the danger of losing seats to the anti-war Nationalists. This was possible in three-cornered contests, involving Nationalist, United and Labour Party candidates, where a split pro-war vote could bring victory to the Nationalist candidates on a minority vote.

To avoid such three-cornered contests, the Labour and United Parties made an electoral arrangement, in terms of which each party was allotted specific seats to fight as "win the war" candidates, agreeing not to put up candidates in any other constituencies.

Neither party was committed to the others'

g/..... policies under -

policies under this arrangement. The Labour Party sacrificed none of its principles. It advocated its own policy and went to the polls on its own programme. Its only commitments were to back the war effort, which it had decided to do at the outbreak of war, and not to put up candidates against those of the United Party in specified seats.

As a result of this ~~xxx~~ commonsense arrangement, the Nationalists were heavily defeated, and General Smuts was assured of a strong Government to carry on with the war effort, against fascism.

When the 1948 Parliamentary elections took place, a new situation had developed. Despite the signal victory of the anti-Nationalists in 1943, there were clear signs that the Nationalists were rapidly recovering from the setback and had a good chance of coming to power.

In view of the Nationalists' war record and their anti-democratic tendencies, to say nothing of their dire threats of retaliation, the possibility of a Nationalist victory was viewed with apprehension by the large, loyal section of the community.

Something had to be done to ensure that the Government that had won the war should be given a chance to win the peace. General Smuts, ^{anxious} ~~anxious~~ to continue playing a part in the gigantic task of handling the many problems of the post-war world, once again sought the aid of the Labour Party. He proposed that the successful electoral arrangement of 1943 should be repeated. To this the Labour Party agreed and so came about the second of the Labour Party's alliances with the United Party.

9/..... Unfortunately -

Unfortunately, even this arrangement did not prevent a Nationalist victory. Despite the united effort of the United and Labour Parties, the Nationalist Party won with a majority of five seats, and became the Government of South Africa.

The first five years of Nationalist rule proved that the forebodings of their opponents were not unjustified. Slowly but surely the Nationalist programme^{*} was applied through legislative and administrative measures.

The programme, described by the Nationalists as "The Road to a New South Africa", ^{aimed at "a disciplined, C-N"} ~~has many alarming~~ similarities with ~~that of a fascist, corporative state.~~

The events of the troubled years since 1948 are well enough known without being repeated here. Step by step the Nationalists have pushed South Africa towards their ideal "disciplined, Christian-National, Republican State". They have imposed intolerable restrictions upon the Non-Whites; they have interfered with the trade unions and destroyed their unity; they have passed many laws which violate the U. N. Declaration of Human Rights. There is hardly any section of the community which has escaped their tyranny.

These are the things which brought into being the United Democratic Front ~~in~~ in 1952. This front was spearheaded by the Torch Commando, an ex-servicemen's organisation. Actively demonstrating against Nationalist gerrymandering the Constitution, and strenuously organising normally passive citizens to rally in defence of democratic institutions, the Torch Commando soon had a large following.

As the 1953 Parliamentary elections approached, the Torch Commando urged the unity of the United and Labour Parties. The latter, as parties to the United Democratic Front, agreed that nothing should be done to weaken the anti-Nationalist forces. In consequence, the third electoral agreement between the United and Labour Parties was made, for the purpose of opposing the Nationalists at the 1953 Parliamentary elections.

But, once again, the Nationalists were victorious. The vigour and determination of the United Democratic Front, although it rallied a majority of votes, fail to defeat the Nationalists. A favourable delimitation and the loading of the vote in favour of the rural constituencies, enabled the Nationalists to win a majority of seats on a minority vote.

At the 1953 elections, the Nationalists increased their strength in Parliament. In defeat, the United Party began to look for scapegoats and finally decided that the arrangements with the Labour Party had been harmful to their interests.

Actually, it had been the Labour Party which suffered because of the repeated pacts. By putting the national interest before its own, the Labour Party cut the ground from under its own feet. The alliances certainly had a debilitating effect upon the Party.

In retrospect, it can be seen that the Labour Party sacrificed its future by making the electoral arrangements. The Party's activities diminished everywhere because the Party limited itself in the nomination of candidates.

For three successive elections, covering a

period of no less than fifteen years, only a handful of party branches were allowed to nominate candidates, in terms of the alliances with the United Party.

Branches which sacrificed the right to put up candidates became despondent and a spirit of futility reduced organisational and propaganda work to sporadic, listless ventures. As members lost interest, the Party's opponents found it easy to spread the subtle propaganda that the Labour Party was a spent force and could never again warrant the support of workers, who were assured ~~that by the~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ that their only hope lay with with one of the major, capitalist parties.

The irony of this situation was that the United Party identified itself with other critics of the Labour Party and sought to portray the Labour Party's role as one of opportunism and self-interest.

In spite of this, the record shows that in the period 1948 to 1958, the Labour Party sent to Parliament some outstanding men. It shows that it was the Labour Party which supplied Parliament with the type of representative which it needed to give force and character to the Opposition. The Labour men won widespread admiration for their ability, tenacity and clarity of mind. As a team, they reacted intelligently to Government proposals, subjecting them to severe and critical analysis, and revealing their true character and purpose.

It was the Labour Party which ~~properly~~ assumed the role of the Parliamentary Opposition, while the official Opposition Party, the United Party, floundered in uncertainty. ~~xxxxxxx~~ The frequency with which the Labour Party took the initiative in meeting the Nationalist

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challenge in Parliament, kept the United Party on the alert and compelled it to oppose Nationalist measures, when it would rather have acquiesced.

There is no doubt that the presence of the small Labour group in Parliament considerably delayed the imposition of many Nationalist measures, designed to enforce the policy of baasskap apartheid, and establish the "disciplined Christian-National Republican State".

The Labour men showed themselves to be shrewd Parliamentary tacticians. They did not resort to petty tricks or guile. In a forthright manner, they put up a strong resistance to many important Bills, using every Parliamentary procedure to best advantage. Their debating ability was outstanding and they tackled their work with a will.

In the midst of the 1953 Parliamentary elections, the Parliamentary Leader of the Labour Party, Mr. John Christie, died. He had held the position since 1946, when Walter Madeley parted from the Labour Party on the issue of Smuts' Indian Representation Bill.

Alex. Hepple, M. P. for Rosettenville, was elected Parliamentary leader in succession to John Christie. Alex. Hepple, who had been a member of the Transvaal Provincial Council, quickly revealed himself to be an able Parliamentarian. It was under his leadership that the Parliamentary Labour Party asserted itself as a true Socialist Party, attaining a reputation higher than it ever had. Friend and foe alike were gnuux full of praise for the courageous and unequivocal stand taken by the Labour group, in their tireless fight for the underdog, their opposition to racial discrimination and their defence of the institutions of democracy.

In the protracted struggle on the Coloured vote issue, the Labour Party stood as a shining example of Parliamentary Opposition at its best. The many Nationalist manoeuvres to remove the Coloured voters of the Cape from the common roll, were attacked and exposed by the Labour Party with a tenaciousness that often rallied the wavering United Party.

The English press, although normally strongly partisan to the United Party, acclaimed the Labour Party's Parliamentary effort with the highest praise. Mr. George Clay, the gallery correspondent of the "Cape Times", said of the Labour group in 1954 :-

" The five representatives of the Labour Party in Parliament play a role out of proportion to their size as a political party. This is due mainly to their individual ability.

Regularly, they arouse the envy of the United Party Parliamentarians with their loud and unequivocal "No!" to Nationalist proposals when the best the U. P. can manage is a "Yes...but..."

The Labour M. P.s have taken a stand and they stick to their guns. They have searched their consciences and produced a colour policy that is neither obscure nor contradictory..... They have already proved their worth in Parliament beyond dispute. Last Session they WERE the Opposition. They kept up a fight against Nationalism

"throughout the period when the United Party, distracted by its internal trouble, was making only nominal contribution to the political struggle...."

The Labour Party was particularly powerful in the debates on industrial and labour matters. In the fight for social justice they were often a lone voice in Parliament, yet they clearly demonstrated ~~that~~ the necessity for criticism and dissent.

When the Industrial Conciliation Bill, amending a reasonably good existing law, first came before Parliament in 1954, the Labour Party showed itself to be the authentic voice of organised labour.

The two-hour speech ^{BY} ~~of~~ Alex. Hepple, Parliamentary Leader of the Labour Party, was a masterly dissection of the sinister Nationalist plan to break the back of trade unionism and twist it into a mockery of the traditional ideal. This speech is considered to be one of the most memorable made in the South African Parliament.

Session after Session, the reputation of the Labour Party continued to rise. It seemed that at last Labour was winning favour and support. Certainly, the public generally were pleased with the Labour effort and continually asked why the United Party did not follow the Labour Party lead.

Alex. Hepple and Leo Lovell were singled out for particular praise. ~~xxxxxxx~~ As the 1958 general elections drew near, newspapers throughout the country urged that everything should be done to secure their return to Parliament. Never had the stock of the Labour Party been

15/..... higher.

higher.

But a high reputation and personal popularity were not enough. A fine record of courage, ability, and unrelenting effort were of no avail. The South African political situation is such that the party label is the only requirement to secure election to Parliament.

The fears and counter-fears of the privileged White electorate have reduced Parliamentary elections to frightening simplicity. On the one side, the overwhelming majority of Afrikaans-speaking voters automatically cast their votes for the Nationalist candidates in the belief that their security depends upon this loyalty and so-called "Afrikaner Unity".

On the other side, the overwhelming majority of English-speaking voters just as firmly believe that loyalty to the United Party is essential to save them from the worst evils of Afrikaner Nationalism, and that small parties like the Labour Party, merely split the anti-Nationalist vote and enhance the chances of the Nationalists.

~~The irony of~~ ^{AT} the 1958 elections ~~was that~~ there were never more popular candidates than the Labourites. Workers helping in the ^{election} ~~sketch~~ campaigns of Hepple and Lovell declared that they met with nothing but praise for these two candidates. Yet the voters were blinded by the ballyhoo of the two major parties. Many pleaded ~~for~~ that the Labour men should abandon their own party and stand as United Party candidates, so that their return to Parliament should be assured. People wanted them in Parliament, because of their high principles and great ability, yet ~~propaganda~~ demanded that they should become craved opportunists in order to get votes.

In this great confusion and the stampede which followed, the Labour candidates were heavily defeated. And so, for the first time in the history of the Union Parliament, there were no Labour men.

It is worth recording that the disappearance of the voice of Labour has made Parliament a poorer place. In reviewing the first Session of the new Parliament, the "Sunday Express" found it necessary to say, "..... it makes one realise all the more just what a tragedy it is for South Africa and for Parliament that Mr. Alex. Hepple and Mr. Leo Lovell are no longer in the House of Assembly".

E N D.

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