

# SOUTH AFRICA IN THE WORLD CRISIS\*

CHRISTOPHER STEEL

**S**OUTH AFRICA has a population of some 10 millions, of whom 7 millions are African, one-half million "coloured" half-castes with some white blood, over one-quarter million Indian, about 100,000 Chinese and 2 millions Europeans. The entire political power rests in the hands of the Europeans, of whom 55% are of Dutch extraction. Of these, the majority are opposed to the British connexion, so that the position is delicate. There are six main parties in Dominion politics.

## *I. Political Parties in South Africa*

First, the Government Coalition, under Marshal Smuts. This consists of three groups, viz., the main body of the old South African Party of Louis Botha, which stood for a sinking of racial differences after the Anglo-Boer war, and combined British settler and Afrikaner Boer on a platform of common allegiance to the Crown. Its leaders to-day are Smuts himself, Col. Denys Reitz and Jan Hofmeyer. Next comes the Dominion Party of Col. Stallard, Minister for Mines, which stands nominally for 100% preservation of the Imperial connexion, but actually represents the big business interests of the Rand (gold and diamonds), interests which have their control located in the City of London. It finds its voting strength exclusively in the Province of Natal, smallest and most British of the four Provinces. Lastly, there is the Labour Party, whose leader, Maddeley, is Minister for Labour and Social Welfare. The fatal defect of this party, in common with all other principal groups (except the Communists), is that it is based upon the unquestioned continuance of the colour bar. Hence official Labour represents only a thin crust of white labour aristocrats, and has so far confined itself to working against any dilution of skilled labour, since such dilution (absolutely necessary if South Africa's war production is to go ahead without handicaps) must come, in a country 80% Non-European, from the African and "coloured" worker, and Labour fears that a general levelling down of wage-rates would result. However, at its annual Conference in December, 1941, a radical change was propounded

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in the party platform. The adoption of the New Zealand Security Code, regardless of colour or sex, was then voted for the first time. Much remains to be done, however, if this is to become anything more than mere window-dressing. For one thing, labour organization for the African worker still remains illegal, although the "coloured" workers—employed chiefly in the State-owned Docks, Harbours and Railways—have legal unions, which also cover the Tobacco, Sweet-Making and Garment Worker industries.

The opposition of Dutch-speaking Afrikaners is also divided into three sections, but instead of standing together these tend to fight among themselves. The country is legally bi-lingual, but it is difficult to calculate how many of the Europeans are equally at home in English and in Afrikaans. Certainly Afrikaans is the more generally used of the two languages, although some limited knowledge of English is widespread.

The original Opposition group is the party of "old" Republicans, led by Dr. Malan. This irreconcilable had always been the most right-wing of Afrikaner politicians, until the modern Nazi Fascists arose to dispute this. He stands for a Dutch republic, rooted in the past glories of the vanished colonial epoch, but economic developments are gradually undermining his position. He represents the intensely individual, religious, small-scale Dutch farmers, men whose fathers and grandfathers fought the entire strength of the British Empire for nearly three years, rather than give in to the large-scale capitalist development which the discovery of gold and diamonds rendered inevitable. He wants a Calvinist Dutch State of agricultural slave-owners in South Africa, in which the African shall live on reserves and labour for the small white farmer, while the big Trusts of the City of London shall be ousted from a country which Malan still wants to keep pre-eminently agricultural.

The majority of Afrikaners, however, do not follow Malan. He lives too openly in the past, and the Afrikaner, whatever his faults, is hard-headed. In September, 1939, the Coalition United Party fell to pieces on the question of war or neutrality. General Hertzog, the former Premier, took the majority of Afrikaners with him into opposition and founded the Nationalist Party, while the erstwhile Deputy Premier and leader of the old South African Party, Marshal Smuts, formed a new Government on the basis of full participation in the war. In contradistinction to Malan's Republicans, this new Nationalist Party, largest of the Afrikaans-speaking groups, would offer genuine

guarantees to the English-speaking Europeans, but aims at a slow, peaceful, evolution into *de facto* independence rather along the lines pursued by de Valera in Eiré. Hertzog himself has now dropped out of politics, the leadership of the Nationalists passing to General Conroy, but "Hertzogism" remains a convenient name for this policy of gradual evolution into peaceful independence of the British Empire.

There remains the small but dangerous party of openly declared Fascists, the "New Order Group" of Doctor Oswald Pirow, who was formerly Foreign Minister in the pre-war Coalition United Party Government. While in office, he consistently set out to strengthen—"appease" is too mild a word—the Nazi position not only in Africa but, so far as lay in his power, throughout the world. He has openly proclaimed his design to act as a Japanese Quisling, in the event of invasion from the Indian Ocean, since he asserts that Japanese domination would be only temporary: once the Axis had won their world struggle, South Africa would fall to the Nazi share, and Pirow reckons his country is far enough away from Europe for the post of Gauleiter to be worth holding in a culture which he considers to be so closely akin to the old Dutch tradition.

The "New Order Group" is closely allied to the para-military organization known as the *Ossewa Brandweg*, whose history must accordingly be sketched, in order to complete the picture of political alignment within the Union.

## II. *The Ossewa Brandweg*

Among the celebrations of the centenary of the Great Trek in 1936 was the founding of a cultural organization named the *Ossewa Brandweg*, or Ox-Waggon Fire Watchers. Under this title, the nomadic pioneer movement of the early Boers into what later became the Orange Free State and Transvaal Republics was sought to be preserved, under the guise of harmless rifle-club associations. Nevertheless, though nominally cultural, this organization was essentially para-military, a rigid military discipline being enforced throughout the apparently harmless associations of rifle club amateurs.

The founder, Colonel Laas, for reasons which still remain obscure, was soon forced to resign, and the control of the movement passed to the new Commandant-General, Doctor J. F. van Reensburg. This man is a capable, ruthless and efficient Fascist, who at one time held a commission in the South African

Army and was Secretary for Justice under Smuts, when the latter was Minister for Justice and Deputy Premier in the United Party Coalition that collapsed with the declaration of war in September, 1939. Van Reusburg has several times attended the annual military manoeuvres of the Fascist German Reich. He was Administrator for the Orange Free State, but resigned that post in order to become Commandant-General of the O.B.W., although he still draws an annual pension of £400 from the Government in respect of his old administrative post. This pension has not prevented him from identifying himself closely with Dr. Pirow's "New Order Group" of openly declared Fascists. He poses as a rabid anti-Communist, and never tires of flogging the dead horse of "Red Revolution".

On Van Reusburg assuming control, a triangular scheme of forces was set up which it is important to grasp. First, there was the *Federation of Afrikaner Kultur* (F.A.K.), machinery whereby all the Afrikaans-speaking cultural organizations were grouped together, including the O.B.W., whose function was to impart efficient military discipline and control throughout. Secondly, there was the *Reddings Rand Bund*, a relief organization for needy Afrikaners who were economically hard hit. Thirdly, there was Dr. Pirow's *New Order Group* in Parliament, which is nothing more than the open political aspect of the O.B.W.

In 1941 the O.B.W. began to interfere in politics. Van Reusburg issued a circular on the subject of an Afrikaner republic, which led to a clash with Dr. Malan, the leader of the "old" Republicans. Malan won, and forced the withdrawal of the circular, but the rift continued to widen. The O.B.W. was expelled from the F.A.K., and Malan proceeded to form his own cultural organization, on military lines resembling those of the O.B.W., so as to be able to steal its thunder. The answer of the O.B.W. was to begin a series of terrorist dynamite outrages, directed primarily against the extensive network of high tension cables worked by the Victoria Falls and Power Company. The Government's hand was thus forced, and an Act introducing the death penalty for sabotage followed. How far this will be enforced, is another matter. At the end of March, 1942, a test case was *sub judice*; the facts of it are as follows:

The defendant, facing a charge of treason, was Sydney Robey Liebbrandt, who first started into public notice as a professional boxer, being built up by skilful publicity as a South African "white hope", contestant for the world's champion-

ship. With this end in view, he proceeded to Europe, but he does not appear ever to have had any fights: in 1938 he is found in Nazi Germany, ostensibly studying the local methods of organizing physical culture. He next re-appears in South Africa, having been landed by Nazi submarine in 1940, and issues a manifesto to the political police of the Johannesburg area, in favour of armed action in support of Nazi Fascism. This was more than the Smuts Government could stand, and his arrest followed, but he was at once enabled to escape, with deliberate connivance. He was, however, later re-arrested and committed for trial. About the same time (February, 1942) some 400 of the Johannesburg police, to whom his manifesto had been addressed, were interned for reasons of national security. About half of these were later released, at the end of March. It is conjectured that they were all members of the O.B.W., which had been disbanded by the Government some time previously, although, if the organization's own statements are to be believed, it is still able to lay its hands on arms at will.

The O.B.W. thus stands revealed as the open Storm Trooper movement for the setting-up of a Fascist, Nazi-dependent, Afrikaner Republic, based on racial hatred and concentration camps for all political opponents, whatever their class, colour or political opinions.

How strong this Fascist organization actually may be, is difficult to state: its noise and activity vary directly with the success of Axis arms on a world scale. Like all Fascist bodies, it exaggerates its own size and importance, but an analysis of the economic structure and recent development of the Union may help one to arrive at a correct evaluation.

Forgetting, then, for a moment, the complicated political cross-sections sketched above, let us try to look at South Africa from a purely economic point of view.

### *III. The Economic Background*

The First World War had a "foreign-house" effect on South African development. Shipping became scarce and valuable, and the development of primary industry went ahead. Between the two wars this tendency continued at a reduced *tempo*, but the existence of the two white cultures in South Africa led to the rapid development of two rival capitalist classes. The original Boer farmers broadened out into small-scale industrialists, still largely dependent on agriculture, while the British

settlers tended to be sucked into the vortex of large-scale imperialist development, through the growth of the London-controlled mining and finance houses of the Rand.

Thus one-half of European South Africa found itself bound even tighter to the City of London and its increasingly dominating partner, Wall Street. Some two years ago, Smuts himself made a very revealing speech, in which he asserted that for the future the four British Dominions would tend more and more to look to Washington for help and guidance rather than to Whitehall, while preserving the sentimental ties with the Mother Country. This recognizes economic fact and explains why, during the Nationalist Labour coalition of the decade 1925-35, N. C. Havenga, the Finance Minister, devoted all his skill to reducing the burden of London-held South African debt, both absolutely and relatively, by sinking fund repayments and conversion operations.

But what of the Afrikaner half of white South Africa? In the modern world, divided up among the Great Powers and shared between international corporations whose tentacles slide effortlessly across political boundaries, South Africa cannot remain isolated. Either she must go with the Anglo-American grouping, or she must fall within the sphere of their great rival, the Nazi New Order of Berlin. The vast majority of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans do not realize this, and may therefore yet be won for the United Nations, but it is no fortuitous coincidence that the Fascist leaders of South Africa should have been so closely identified with Germany over so many years. Van Reusborg and Pirow see clearly that they must choose one of two clearly defined paths: they have made their choice accordingly, and their actions follow logically enough upon their decision.

The fact that 80% of South Africa's population consists of disfranchised Non-Europeans has been allowed to obscure realities. The colour-bar question affords a very convenient means of hopelessly confusing the basic issue, which is, simply, Freedom or Dictatorship. Freedom must extend not only to the European in South Africa but to the Non-European as well. Hence the strength of the Fascist position, which bases its propaganda solely upon race prejudice, and strives to stampede the European majority, conscious of its numerical inferiority in the country as a whole, into preserving at all costs its privileged rank.

Increasingly large concentrations of industry, however, are undermining the old white *v.* black controversy. Agriculture is passing out of the small-scale stage, so wistfully and obstinately desired by Malan, into large-scale capitalist farming, pushing the back-block Afrikaner off the land, and forcing him to migrate to the big towns in search of a living. At the same time, identical developments—this time, statutory enactment—were also forcing the African off the best land. Bad pay, poor working conditions and the absence of social services rendered the mines incapable of handling all this new labour force, and many black workers were thus also driven into the towns. It must be remembered that any form of labour organization for Africans was, and still is, illegal, so that the chances of their bettering labour conditions were non-existent. Only by entering the "coloured" (half caste) unions could the African obtain protection, since any union over 50% "coloured" is entitled to legal recognition.

The inevitable result was the creation of two proletariats, black and white, with a common misery of unemployment. Under this growing tendency the colour bar has shown the first faint signs of beginning to bend and break. For nearly a dozen years this was delayed by the political combination of Hertzog's Nationalists with the white labour aristocrats to provide a majority in Parliament. The capable Havenga produced a series of Budget surpluses, and the job-hungry Afrikaners, pushed off the farms by the tractors of the Agricultural Finance companies, found a respite in the Union civil service and police, while Labour, as its share of the partnership, kept "white" wages relatively high.

#### *IV. War Production*

The present war has ended all this. Industrial development has leaped ahead again: the Union produces armoured cars and artillery, much of the latter of heavy calibre, and shortage of labour is acute. The "coloured" worker is still denied the right to enter skilled engineering, although eager to do so, as figures for the year 1939 in the Cape Province prove. Here out of 3,000 would-be "coloured" apprentices, fewer than 1% were accepted. The Union Government has started a scheme for white engineering apprentices, but the numbers who came forward are inadequate—below 6,000 in two years since the scheme was started. Further, the vested interests of the Chamber of Mines have been pressing for a continuation of gold production, although this causes a disproportionately heavy

drain on the relatively small labour force, in addition to devouring too much of the limited steel production South Africa can turn out.

This battle between primary and secondary industry, however, seems now to be going in favour of the new war industries. The potentialities of the Union are enormous, estimated reserves of coal and iron ore running into thousands of millions of tons, while chrome, manganese, tungsten and limestone—to mention only a few basic war commodities—are in good supply. Further, the Union possesses the greatest quantity of industrial diamonds in the world.

By a bill introduced in February, 1942, and expected to pass during the same session, the Government has assumed the right to prospect and work base metals anywhere within the Union, thus cutting beneath the Mining Companies, who had bought up the mining rights in many localities and then proceeded to leave them unprospected, in order to preserve their monopolies. The working out in practice of this bill will probably go to Dr. van der Bijl, who has a fine record as head of the *Iron & Steel Corporation* (ISCOR) and the *Electricity Supply Corporation* (ESCO). He is known to favour secondary industry as essential if war production is to develop healthily.

One further objection is often made by the apologists of the Rand finance houses to wide scale development of war industries. They allege insufficiency of funds, asserting this in turn to be due to the Government's "penal" taxation of mining profits. This, however, is not so. The situation is due to two clearly marked reasons. First, the Government, in common with orthodox capitalist finance, is paying for the war largely by means of funded debt. This offers a safe, if low, return to investors. Secondly, rather than tie up their money at long term in new industrial development, investors prefer to keep it liquid, in the hope of finding some avenue of quick and high return. It is computed that between forty and fifty million pounds are thus lying idle in the banks. Nothing short of a penal taxation of idle capital will cure this, perhaps coupled with tax concessions for finance directed towards the creation of new base-metal war industries.

#### V. *The Policy of the Union Government*

The recent series of spectacular Japanese successes in the Far East may have the effect of driving the Smuts Government



towards national unity, although by end of March, 1942, it had not proceeded very far in that direction. There is now, through the threat of Japanese invasion, for the first time a real chance of European unity, though this by itself will not be enough to stem external attack.

The Union Government has so far failed to take advantage of the favorable situation in which it finds itself, its sins of omission falling into three channels.

First, it has made no concerted general effort to win the broad mass of Afrikaner opinion towards co-operation in the war. The mass of Afrikaners still regard the war with Nazi Germany as an imperialist squabble which is none of their business, but they do realize that Japan offers a real menace, and they are ready and willing to co-operate to defeat that menace. Official Nationalist policy demands a recall of the two S.A. Divisions in Libya (a demand difficult to refuse, in view of the Australian precedent); immediate peace with Germany; and a strong programme of immediate re-armament. Its leaders profess to regard Japanese attack as impossible, and were therefore opposed to preventive action in Mozambique and Madagascar.

A genuine move towards reconciliation, on the part of the Smuts Government, would definitely cause such pressure from Nationalist rank and file that their leaders would be forced to fall into line. If, for instance, Smuts were to offer Havenga, the most capable Nationalist, at present without a seat in Parliament, his old post at the Treasury, it would be difficult for him to refuse, even if he wanted to do so. So far, however, there is no indication that this is in the offing.

On the contrary, and this is the second government error, the war effort has been presented as purely a "Smuts" effort, which is almost a deliberate slight to the Afrikaners, in a country where the Anglo-Boer war is still unforgotten and where, in the strong language of local politics, Smuts has often been called "the lackey of British Imperialism." The new patriotic song, with the refrain, "Smuts, we love and adore you," amusingly crystallises this error, by setting up an alternative, pro-British, Fuehrer concept, as it were, in place of that wide national drive which is essential if South Africa is to play her part with the other United Nations in the smashing of Fascist dictatorship.

Finally, and most serious error of all, the Smuts Government has made no attempt to interest the remaining 80% of the Union's population in the war. As Molteno, one of the

four European Native Representatives in the Government, has bluntly put it, the Non-Europeans have no interest whatever in the outcome of the war. The story of Malaya and of Burma proves how disastrous can be a home policy which is based exclusively on "white" supremacy. Whether the Europeans like it or not, they cannot maintain the colour bar and win this war. They must give some tangible form of political, social and economic status to the Non-Europeans, and they must do it now. So far the Government has not gone beyond a radio speech by the Prime Minister, in which he stated that he would arm the Non-Europeans in the event of Japanese invasion but not if a European power were to attack. This plays right into the hands of those misguided Non-Europeans who mistakenly see in Japan a deliverer from their white taskmasters. Not realizing that Japanese Imperialism is the most cold-blooded exploiter of all, large numbers of the politically subject races have greeted each Japanese success with fireworks and demonstrations of support. True, Denys Reitz has made a speech advocating repeal of the Pass Laws (ordinances which effectually prevent *any* African, however cultured, being out of doors after dark), but it will take more than this to undo years of harmful oppression.

What is needed in South Africa now, therefore, is above all some concrete approach to the Non-Europeans, and that immediately. They must be armed and trained *now*, before it is too late, so that they can have a stake in the country they may soon be called upon to "scorch". They must be admitted on terms of equality to an A.R.P. service which is still a spasmodic, local affair, and not—as it should be—a Union Government matter. If the Government were to do this, it would at once become so strong that it could proceed forthwith to scotch the Fascist snake in its midst and grapple—as at present it definitely can not—with its self-proclaimed Quislings and Fifth Columnists. It can not the stale old cry of a white civilization in danger from a black menace that is appropriate to-day. Rather is it clear that unless the colour bar is smashed for good, white, black and brown will go down together before a yellow flood that threatens to engulf them all alike.