

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JCB-3

The Republic's First General Election

November 16, 1961

29 Bay View Avenue

Tamboer's Kloof

Cape Town, South Africa

Mr. Richard Nolte  
 Institute of Current World Affairs  
 366 Madison Avenue  
 New York, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

"The Government has established the Republic," said Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd, "but there is still a great task to get it safely on the road." There is danger ahead. It is necessary to let those people who are opposing the Government know "that at least for the next five years nothing can shake the elected Government in this country."

Thus, on August 8th of this year, Dr. Verwoerd announced, as had been anticipated, that an election would be held in two month's time.

General elections in South Africa are usually held every five years. However, a new election may be called early, before the end of a full term, if there seems to be need for one. This election was called two years before the present Government's term would normally have ended in 1963.



THE Prime Minister

Former Justice H.A. Fagan, Leader of the newly born National Union Party (NUP), objected to the early election and the Prime Minister's pessimistic interpretation of the future. He knew of no newspaper or Opposition speaker who had painted such a sombre picture as that dangled before the public's eyes by the Prime Minister himself. "He even held up to us the spectre of an active rebellion (aktiewe opstand teen die staatsbestuur) in 1963."

Matters would indeed become worse by 1963, agreed leaders of the other Opposition parties, unless the Government's "apartheid" policy was changed. They believed the election was called early because in two years time things would have become so much worse that the Nationalists could not possibly have been returned to power.

As expected, the Nationalist Party (Nats) won an easy victory. The Opposition had conceded the election even before it was called. Although political parties do not often put up candidates in constituencies where there is little chance of winning, in the last general election (1958), the major Opposition party, The United Party (UP), had contested all seats. In this election the UP and the NUP left as many Nationalist seats uncontested (50) as they were able to win.<sup>1</sup> When the votes that might have been cast in the uncontested seats are added to the total, it gives the Nats, for the first time in a general election, the majority! The Cape Argus and The Cape Times, pro-Opposition newspapers, estimated the majority at 30,000 and 130,000 respectively. The average of these two figures is about the same majority as that by which the Nationalists won their Republic in last year's Referendum. However, compared with the 1958 general election results, the Nats now have a 9% increase, from 46% to approximately 55% of the voters.

Due to a disproportionately large number of rural seats, as compared with the number representing urban areas, the National Party's voting percentage gave it 105 of the 156 European seats in Parliament's House of Assembly.<sup>2</sup>

Although some pro-Nationalist newspapers evidenced surprise over their party's increased voting strength, the only major surprise was the support given the Progressive Party (Progs). This new political organization, formed two years ago when eleven members of Parliament resigned from the UP, polled roughly 33% of the votes in the 24 seats it contested. Of the 800,000 Europeans who went to the polls across the Republic, 70,000 or about 9% voted Progressive. Almost half of the voters in Johannesburg supported Progressive Party candidates. This was a surprising showing for a party that many political observers believed would be wiped out. While it won only one contest, seven of its candidates came amazingly close; a matter of a few hundred votes would have given them victory, less than a hundred in one case!

Election results show that the new Parliament will be made up of:

105 members representing 790,000 Nationalists  
 50 members representing 585,000 UP members  
 4 members representing 30,000 Coloured voters

---

1 - While the Nats did not challenge UP candidates in 46 seats, the UP had to face contests from other candidates in all but 20 of these.

2 - There are 160 seats in all, but four are considered "Coloured". They can only be occupied by Europeans, elected separately by the Cape Province Coloured voters. Coloured people in the other three provinces and South-West Africa do not have the vote, nor do the Africans throughout the Republic. In this election, the Coloured seats were won by the UP. The Liberal Party and the Progressive Party did not contest the seats as a protest against the separate Coloured Voters Roll.

1 member representing 70,000 Progressives  
 No members representing 11,000,000 Africans

Tony Delius, the Cape Times editorial writer who worked out these statistics, also commented: "The Nationalist members represent the most conservative element amongst the Nationalists, and the 50 United Party members represent the most conservative element in the UP." In the new Parliament there will be 124 Afrikaans-speaking members and 36 English-speaking.

In an election that was surprising for its total lack of debate<sup>3</sup> five national parties fielded candidates.

On the left of the political spectrum, the Liberal Party, becoming more and more an extra-parliamentary organization, contested only two seats. The two candidates, who were badly defeated, wanted only the opportunity to put forward Liberal Party Policy, the necessity of political and economic rights for all, regardless of race. The Party has a multi-racial membership (it is the only one backed to any extent by Africans), and thus was handicapped at the polls since its non-White members had no vote. Since many of its members see governmental change coming only through controlled strikes and boycotts, and continued outside pressure, no doubt its future will be turbulent. Already some members have been banned by the Government (under the Suppression of Communism Act) from attending any meetings for five years. Its Leader, noted author, Alan Paton, has had his passport withheld to prevent his travelling outside the country.



*Dr. Z. J. de Beer*

The Progressive Party, while accepting the principle of an integrated multi-racial society, believes in a qualified voting franchise, based on education, not race. Dr. Zac de Beer, 33 year old Chairman of the Party's National Executive Committee has succinctly stated his party's policy: "A Political program based on a qualified franchise and a protective constitution giving to the Black man the assurance that no bar would prevent him from attaining power on his own merit; to the White man the assurance that he would not be subjected to rule by uncivilized people; and to all sections the assurance that the constitution would stand above Parliament as the protectors of their rights."

Progressives are generally young Afrikaans and English speaking men and women who believe they have found the reasonable 'middle road'.

---

3 - During the campaign opposing candidates did not meet on the same platform; the radio carried no political speeches, except for capsule summaries in its regular "news" broadcasts. There is no television.

The party has the support of former Parliament member, millionaire Harry Oppenheimer (Chairman of the Anglo-American Corporation) and the backing of many non-European business, educational and political leaders.

Many Nationalists, since the election, frankly admit that the Progressives are their future Opposition. On this subject the Progressives, of course, totally agree. "The choice is clear-cut," says Dr. Jan Steytler, Leader of the Progressives. "It is between the Nationalist Party and the Progressive Party. So called centre parties (UP and NUP) have no function to perform in South Africa."



Dr. Steytler

It does seem likely that when and if voters become dissatisfied with the Nationalists, their switch will not be to a party which is as conservative, but to one which will present a more clear-cut policy.

The Progressives have already gained the support of people from quite different backgrounds. On election eve, Dr. Louis de Plessis, Professor of Law and Politics at the University of Potchefstroom, former Chairman of the Nationalist "Broederbond", the Afrikaner bank, Volkskas, and the Board of the Nationalist newspaper, Dagbreek, announced his support of the policies of the Progs. A week after the election, Mr. Jack Steyn, a former Nat and a founder of the National Union Party, announced that he had joined the Progressives. Just after he had received word of the 1960 Nobel Peace Prize, ex-chief Luthuli, ex-President of the banned African National Congress, said, among other things, that he thought the support given the Progressive Party was an encouraging sign, "but no more than that." Its voice, he continued, "is yet a small one. To save this country, I believe it will have to grow in strength very quickly."

"The political horizon is charged with racialism, suspicion and fear," commented Dr. W.F. Nkomo, giving one African's view of the election in the Bantu World. And while "those who exercise the right to vote are tense, restless and fearful of the future, the millions of voteless Africans are watching the situation very calmly.....Africans do not see much difference between the National Party and the United Party .... both advocate 'baaskap' in one form or another. The only hope seems to lie in whatever support the Progressive Party may muster."

Progs realize that they cannot as yet take many votes away from the Nationalists. They do not look upon their party as rising immediately to a majority status. Their main object is to keep before South Africans a reasonable alternative to apartheid, looking toward the day when people in disillusionment abandon the present Government.

The Progressives' strength is in the future. How fast it grows will depend on racial developments near and inside South Africa, and on the ability of its leaders to get its message across to the public.



*Hon. H. A. Fagan*

The National Union Party, founded by Mr. J. du P. Basson, highly critical of Government domination by a one-language party<sup>4</sup> and its inflexible policies, merged with the UP, sharing with it what they called a "middle of the road race policy".

The election results showed little future for this infant party, although it had allied itself with a political old-timer. It received only 4.48% of the total vote and won only one seat, a "safe" seat given it by the UP. The Europeans who had hoped this Afrikaner party would be a Nationalist leaven have been disappointed. There has been little change in Nationalist policy - if anything it seems more firmly set than before. And there has been little attraction of dis-satisfied Nats to the NUP. While former Nationalist, the Hon. H.A. Fagan (the NUP Leader) is widely respected, respect has not been enough to cause any measurable movement of voters to his party. Many

Afrikaners did not approve of one of their own joining a pro-English anti-Afrikaans-Government force. This may explain why many of his meetings were enlivened by the presence of Nats who booed and jeered, and occasionally broke into violence. As yet, the NUP, of itself, has little grass roots voter organizational support, and without this there can be no future.

Although the United Party polled a sizeable vote, its future is also in doubt. The percentage of its support has decreased in the last three elections and it has now lost four successive general elections. In addition, its stand against a South African Republic was defeated in the 1960 Referendum.

The UP has been caught in a shift of the political axis. Previously, the political wars waged back and forth over Afrikaans-English differences. The Nationalist Party, by appealing exclusively to Afrikanerdom, made the UP stand out as the party of the English (though in fact the UP was made up of both Afrikaans and English-speaking members). This picture of the UP was strengthened when it fought against the long-time Afrikaner dream of a Republic, and for

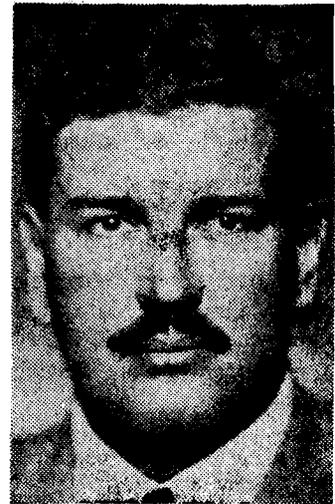
---

4 - Two weeks after the election Dr. Verwoerd tried to overcome this criticism by appointing two English-speaking members to his Cabinet. Mr. A.E. Trollip, Administrator of Natal, became Minister of Immigration and Labour, and Mr. F.W. Waring, an unsuccessful Independent candidate, became Minister of Information. Both, of course, have joined the Nationalist Party, and are in agreement with its policies.

remaining in the British Commonwealth. It tried to counter its "English" image by joining with the NUP and by adopting a policy which it felt would appeal to both the conservative English and Afrikaans voter. In doing so, it lost the support of its liberal members, who withdrew in 1959 to form the Progressive Party.

In this election, the Nationalist Party, with most of the Afrikaner vote behind it, shifted the axis by appealing to the total White electorate as the "Party of the White Man". Again the UP was on the defensive. It was caught between two extremes. Either it had to prove it was all out for the White man, or be labeled a Black man's party. Since it had to appeal to a White electorate, it announced a racial policy which closely resembled that of the Nats.

The United Party (and its partner, the NUP) with the Nationalists, accept the principle of White supremacy and race differentiation as opposed to integration (proposed by the Liberal and Progressive Parties). However, the UP and NUP would substitute race federation for apartheid, and flexibility for granite rigidity. In the UP federation, the central government would take charge of all matters of common concern, but would leave each constituent element the right to govern itself in matters immediately concerning itself. "What is new," writes a UP spokesman, "is that federation will not be based purely on geographical units; its constituent elements will be the races making up the population of South Africa." In contrast, apartheid's eventual goal would be completely independent racial states, without an over-all central government. Apartheid, contends Sir de Villiers Graaff, Leader of the UP, places "the base on which civilization rests in jeopardy by leaving the African vulnerable to poverty and attack...by unscrupulous powers in Bantustan states."<sup>5</sup>



*Sir de Villiers Graaff*

From hearing Graaff outline his policy during the early days of the campaign, I felt it was a close copy of what had been the policy of the Government before 1948, the year the Nats

---

5 - The proximity of federation to apartheid was satirized earlier this year by a columnist in the East London Daily Dispatch. In Gilbert and Sullivan fashion he had choruses like the following:

"When black rules black and white rules white  
Then everything will come aright  
The plan is still to separate  
But now we'll call it 'federate'....  
No matter what they choose to call their plan  
It's nothing but an Opposition Bantustan!"

Bantustan is the word used for the separate racial areas that are to be developed.

came into power. In effect, it was a return to the good old days. As the campaign wore on it became more and more evident that the major difference between the Nats and UP was, and is, only in method of application. Often it seemed the UP was spending more time and energy fighting the Progressives than the Nats, who were supposedly their worst enemy.

Obviously, from the election returns, the difference between the two major parties was not enough for any Afrikaner to switch parties. But there was difference enough in principle for UP members, and even some Nats, to join the Progressives.

Nationalists and the pro-Nationalist press seemed to be in agreement about the UP's future. Die Burger, for instance, in a post-election editorial, thought ".....the danger from the Left to the United Party has now been proved to be greater than we expected. This makes the United Party's traditional dilemma (whether to move Left or Right) more acute than ever. It seems doomed either to be torn apart or to fall deeper into impotence."<sup>6</sup>

The Nationalist Party, led by Prime Minister Verwoerd, stood strongly and unhesitatingly for White civilization. The best way to preserve it, according to Nat policy, is by a strict policy of race separation. This means the creation of a state for each race within South Africa, with the White government giving leadership to the states until they are economically and politically able to take care of themselves.

Dr. Verwoerd has reiterated that "it is essential as far as the Bantu is concerned, to start off with the tribal system which they know, and then gradually work on to Western concepts of democratic government. The peoples of Africa cannot be transplanted suddenly into a Western form of society." United Party policy, the Nats contend, would lead to eventual integration and the result would be Black domination. The Progressives and Liberals with policies which could only mean "one man-one vote" would destroy White standards even faster.

The success of the National Party at the polls was, as I have said, foreseen. The majority of European voters come from Afrikaans homes, and the number of these voters was increased with the passage of the "teenage vote bill" (Electoral Laws

---

6 - Dr. de Beer, now on his way to the United States as a recipient of a State Department Leader's Grant, again summed up his party's views by saying, "Political expediency has had its reward. The UP, feebly flapping about between the Progressives and the Nationalists, is doomed. It will be ground between the upper and the nether millstone. The electorate will say to the United Party as the Lord said to the Ladoiceans in the Book of Revelations: 'Because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth'."

Amendment Act) just after the 1958 election. This lowered the voting age to 18, enabling many Afrikaans young people to become voters over the last three years. Previously too, the strength of the Nationalist Party came from the Afrikaners living in the rural platteland areas. One of the effects of the lowered voting age and the steady migration of younger South Africans from the farms to the industrial centers, has been the extension of Nationalist political power beyond the rural seats into several urban areas. Dr. Verwoerd mentioned that the greatest Nationalist gains were obtained in constituencies where young people played an important part. "We fought this election to make South Africa habitable for the youth." "The question was whether you were going to live in a White man's country or whether you were going to live in a country like Kenya where the White man will be buried in 50 years. The decision made by the electorate was unequivocal."

The UN motion to censure South Africa's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Eric Louw, for a speech he gave "explaining" his Government's race policy, was adopted just before the election. In the light of this action, the Nationalist victory at the polls was interpreted by Mr. Louw and numerous political commentators as in part a reaction to the UN censure. The election results gave, said Mr. Louw, "a very clear indication of how the people in South Africa feel about integration."

The election did show that most voting Europeans do believe in race separation, be it apartheid or federation, but I found no evidence that the UN vote of censure had influenced the election results in any way. I didn't find anyone who had changed his affiliation or his vote because of the UN incident. Those voters who were most upset were already Nats. Nor did voters charge to the polls in reaction, to demonstrate White South Africa's overwhelming support of non-integration. A smaller percentage of people voted in this election than in any recent one. In the 86 contested seats, less than 78% of the registered voters went to the polls, as compared, for instance, with the more than 89% in 1958, and more than 87% in 1953.

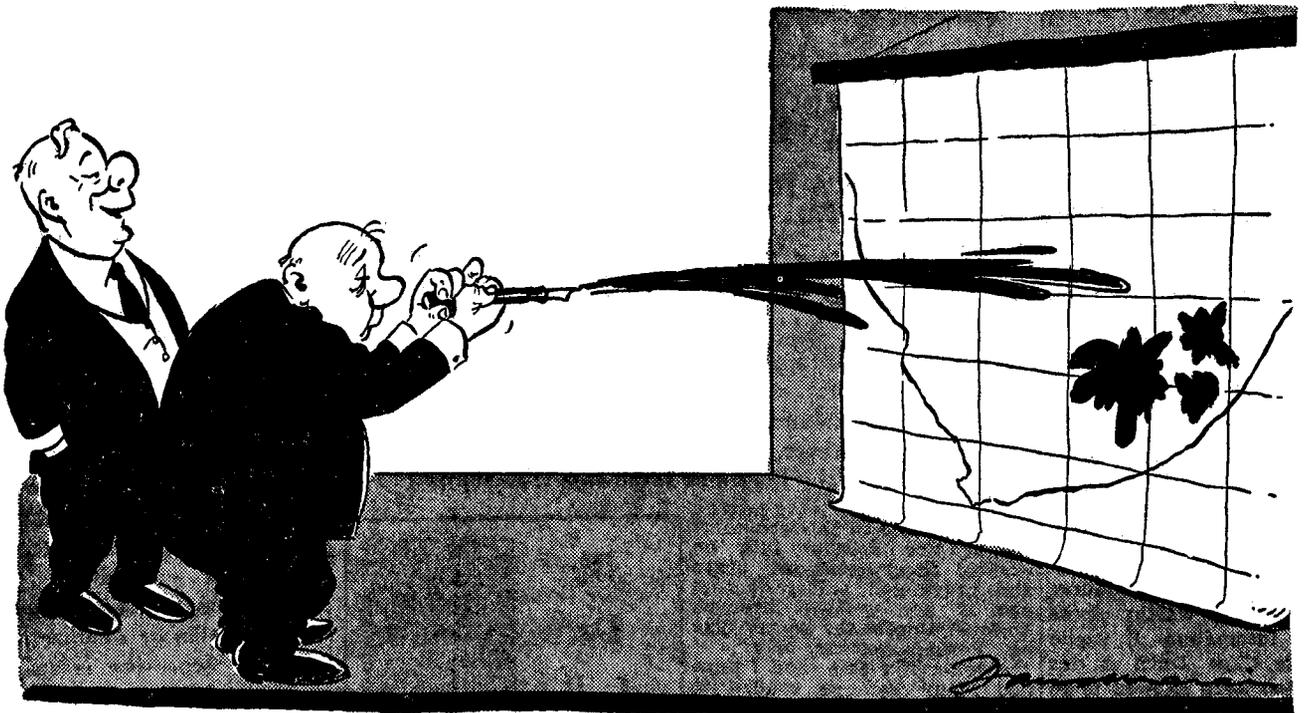
Many Nationalist newspapers seem to feel that the vote was an endorsement for the Government to do what it will to make apartheid work. Indeed, strong measures will have to be taken, for to make apartheid work; to relocate people in their respective group areas; to build homes, schools, towns; and to develop new industry will cost a great deal of money. A Commission on Socio-Economic Development of the Reserves (The Tomlinson Commission) which was authorized by the Government to thoroughly examine the practical application of apartheid, estimated in 1954 that to build up the African Reserves sufficiently to take care of the Africans who then lived in South Africa (not considering population growth) economically, would

cost 104 million pounds spent over a ten year period; an average of 29 million dollars a year. This cannot be done unless taxes are heavily increased. And the Government will have to act firmly to make South Africans swallow any large increase in taxes.

While many Nationalists have told me they wish the Government would speed up the application of its policy, to show the world its good intentions, the Prime Minister, in his first post-election speech, seemed to indicate that he was not planning to go full speed ahead.

"We shall continue to build the structure of the future with caution, and with a firm hand so that our non-White peoples will not be subjected to chaos or dictatorship by their own leaders because their progress was guided by undue haste with an eye to popularity rather than to their benefit and real advantage. The progress with differentiation during the next five years will be well planned and carefully executed in cooperation with those who do not fail their own people."

The Government states that one third of the proposed Bantustans have already been "planned". But pro-Opposition newspapers picture Verwoerd fumbling among his blue prints with no intention of carrying out plans that are virtually impossible to accomplish. Already one of the Bantustans (in the Transkei) is publicly demanding independence by 1963 - and this demand has come from a son of the Paramount Chief, who has been considered one of those "who do not fail their own people."



★ "Ah! Bantu Homelands making good progress, I see."

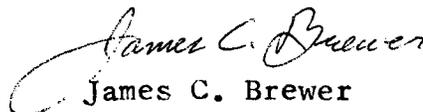
Time is running out. Many of the UF members I have talked to predict that a new election will be demanded by the people in another two or three years, and that that election will go their way, for federation plans in the Rhodesias and Nyasaland will by then have shown South Africa the way. Others, with a more liberal outlook, feel that the Government will never allow another free election, and that the appointment of men like B.J. Vorster, the newly appointed Minister of Justice who threatened press-censorship during the election, point the way to an inevitable dictatorship, where opposition will be less and less tolerated.

I have even heard South Africans, feeling that everything would work out if only left to themselves, speak hopefully of a third world war which would take eyes off South Africa's problems, and give it the backing of Western nations who would feel it necessary to keep this country on their side.

And still others predict that some kind of internal revolution will have to take place before the next general election - either of arms or of the heart.

Only time will tell!

Sincerely yours,

  
James C. Brewer

Received New York November 22, 1961

Pictures through the courtesy of the Cape Times and the Cape Argus  
Cartoon, courtesy of David Marais

Received New York November 22, 1961