

The uneasy electoral relationship between socialists and the South African Labour Party, 1910-1924

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1. Introduction

Over the years a comprehensive historiography on the history of the socialist left in the South African labour movement and the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) has emerged.¹ Recently a critical reassessment of these works was also published which brought the prevailing orthodoxy of some of these publications,

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1. See e.g. R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader* (Steward Printing Co., Cape Town, 1943); H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, (IDAAF, 1983); S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, (Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1995); B. HIRSON and G. A. WILLIAMS, *The delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924* (Core Publications, London, 1995); S. FORMAN and A. ODENDAAL (eds), *A trumpet from the housetops: the selected writings of Lionel Forman*, (David Philip (Pty) Ltd., Cape Town, 1992); E.R. ROUX, *Time longer than rope: a history of the black man's struggle for freedom in South Africa*, (UWP, Madison, 1964); E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography* (Mayibuye Books, UWC, Bellville, 1993); E. and W. ROUX, *Rebel pity: the life of Eddie Roux* (Rex Collings Ltd., London, 1970); A. LERUMO, *Fifty fighting years: the Communist Party of South Africa 1921-1971* (Inkululeko Publications, London, 1980); A. B. DAVIDSON, *Yuzhnaya Africa – stanovleniye sil protesta 1870-1924 (South Africa: The Birth of Protest)*, (Academy for Sciences, Moscow, 1972); H. R. PIKE, *A history of communism in South Africa*, (CMI, Germiston, 1985); and W. H. HARRISON, *Memoirs of a socialist in South Africa, 1903-1947* (Steward Printing Co., (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town, 1947).

purporting to be the authentic history of the CPSA, into question.² But the history of the (white) right-wing of the labour movement, especially the South African Labour Party (SALP), has to a large extent been neglected.

A number of published and unpublished labour histories shed a partial and incomplete light on certain aspects of the political history of the SALP and its leading figures³, while only a few studies have entailed comprehensive research on particular periods in the history of the party. David Ticktin's pioneering doctoral thesis covered the origins and founding of the SALP⁴ and he also published an article on the split in the party in 1915.⁵ Marie Wentzel's MA thesis dealt with the history of the SALP and the white labour movement to 1915,⁶ while B.L. Reid's MA thesis concentrated only on the history of organised labour in Natal from 1918 to 1924.⁷

Apart from these studies, no comprehensive research has been published of the SALP up to 1958, the year of the party's demise. This article, emanating from the author's doctoral thesis on the history of the South African labour and socialist press,⁸ explores the political relationship between left-wing socialists and the SALP. In the general elections between 1910 and 1924 both these groups vied for the electoral support of the white labour electorate.

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2. M. ROTH, "Eddie, Brian, Jack and let's phone Rusty: is this the history of the Communist Party of South Africa?" in *South African Historical Journal*, 42, May 2000, pp. 191-209.
 3. See e.g. E.N. KATZ, *A trade union aristocracy: a history of white workers in the Transvaal and the general strike of 1913*, (African Studies Institute, UW, Johannesburg, 1976); T. BOYDELL, *My luck was in: with spotlights on General Smuts*, (Steward Printing Company (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town, n.d.); T. BOYDELL, *My Luck's still in: with more spotlights on General Smuts* (Steward Printing Company (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town, 1948); A.G. BARLOW, *Almost in confidence* (Juta & Co., Limited, Cape Town, 1952); 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); E. GITSHAM and J.F. TREMBATH, *A first account of labour organisation in South Africa* (EP & Commercial Printing Co., Limited, Durban, 1926); M. CRESWELL, *An epoch of the political history of South Africa in the life of Frederic Hugh Page Creswell* (AA Balkema, Cape Town, n.d.); M. KENTRIDGE, *I recall: memoirs of Morris Kentridge* (The Free Press Limited, Johannesburg, 1959); F.J. GROBLER, *Die Invloed van Geskoolde Blanke Arbeid op die Suid-Afrikaanse Politiek van 1886 tot 1924*, (D. Phil, PUCHO, 1968); A. HEPPLER, *South Africa: a political and economic history* (Pall Mall Press, London, 1966) and A. HEPPLER, *The South African Labour Party, 1908-1958: a memoir*, (Unpublished Typescript, JPL, 1984).
 4. *The origins of the South African Labour Party, 1888-1910*, (Ph. D., UCT, 1973).
 5. "The war issue and the collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15" in *South African Historical Journal*, 1, November 1969, pp. 59-80.
 6. *Die Suid-Afrikaanse Arbeidersparty: agtergrond, stigting en algemene ontplooiing tot 1915*, (MA, US, 1984).
 7. *Organised labour in Natal: 1918-1924*, (Ph. D., UN, 1975).
 8. W.P. VISSER, *Die geskiedenis en rol van persorgane in die politieke en ekonomiese mobilisasie van die georganiseerde arbeiderbeweging in Suid-Afrika, 1908-1924*, (Ph.D, US, 2001).

The first hints of the existence of labour and socialist organizations became visible in the Transvaal in the last decade of the nineteenth century before the Anglo-Boer War.⁹ The primary institutions used for linking up the various labour organizations were the trades and labour councils that were formed in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Kimberley and Durban. Both in the Transvaal and in the Cape Colony the formation of trades councils proved an important stepping stone towards the emergence of a labour party. The strongest and most influential council was the Witwatersrand Trades and Labour Council (W.T. & L.C.) (formed in 1902) which was the driving force behind labour politics in post-war Transvaal. Already in November 1903 it described itself as the 'Labour Party'.¹⁰ The W.T. & L.C. became South Africa's foremost political and industrial organization until its political functions were taken over by the SALP in 1910.¹¹ Indeed, Alexander Hepple claims that the SALP was actually born from the W.T. & L.C.¹²

A variety of socialist organizations, clubs and parties were established after the Anglo-Boer War, such as the Clarion Fellowship (Durban, 1903), the Social Democratic Federation (Cape Town, 1904), the Independent Labour Party (Pretoria, 1906), the Social Democratic Party (Durban, 1908), the Socialist Society (Johannesburg, 1909) and the Socialist Labour Party (Johannesburg, 1910).¹³

2. 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.¹⁴ 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).¹⁵ Socialists, being very prominent at the founding conferences, managed to include a socialist objective into the constitution of the party.¹⁶

9. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 24.

10. D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp. 25,117; E. GITSHAM and J.F. TREMBATH, *A first account of labour organisation in South Africa*, p. 12.

11. R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, p. 66.

12. A. HEPPLER, *South Africa: a political and economic history*, p. 63.

13. See D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, chs. 2,5,6,8.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 307.

15. E.N. KATZ, *A trade union aristocracy: a history of white workers in the Transvaal and the general strike of 1913*, pp. 190-201; D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp. 397-424.

16. D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp. 406-408; *Voice of Labour*, 16.10.1909, p. 4.

However, a perusal of the columns of the *Voice of Labour*, the Socialist Society's militant weekly, reflects major differences between moderate, or so-called 'reformist' labour leaders,¹⁷ and the militant socialists in particular on issues such as general principles, the name of the party, the native policy and the affiliation of (conservative) trade unions.¹⁸ For Archie Crawford, a revolutionary socialist of the Socialist Society, the SALP's programme of gradualist change was anathema, consisting as it did of 'palliatives' that might distract from the struggle for socialism. In addition Crawford doubted the sincerity of the party's formal commitment to socialism. He hoped instead that a revolutionary Socialist party could be formed in opposition to the SALP.¹⁹

The debate on the SALP's proposed native policy also 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. The latter preference was, however, defeated by a majority of delegates.²⁰

Elaine Katz explains that the moderates' commitment to the 'socialisation of the process of production' was combined with a 'White Labour policy' based on demands for political and social segregation, racially based job reservation and the repatriation of Asians. Such views reflected those of the conservative trade unionists, who were the dominant force in the SALP. Faced with the threat of being undercut by cheap black labour, white workers often resorted to a crude racism and demanded the exclusion of other groups of workers from skilled trades. From the 1890s onwards calls for job colour bars were a central part of white trade union demands.²¹

F.A. Johnstone attributes the persistence of the (white) right-wing of the labour movement in maintaining job colour bars in industry to their proletarianisation. This, in turn led to their structural insecurity which was largely aggravated by exploitable, cheap non-white labour. For the skilled white workers, especially in the mining industry, this structural insecurity represented a real threat that they would be

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17. According to LUCIEN VAN DER WALT, "A class-conscious revolutionary organisation embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or colour: The IWW and the origins of revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa, 1908-1912", p. 9. (Paper presented at the South African Sociological Association Congress, Saldanha Bay, 6-9 July 1999), reformist socialism envisages a situation in which the unions sponsor a labour party that can get access to the state, which is regarded as the real instrument of socialist change.
 18. See *Voice of Labour*, 18.9.1909, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 2.10.1909, p. 8; *Ibid.*, 9.10.1909, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 16.10.1909, p. 1.
 19. L. VAN DER WALT, "A class-conscious revolutionary organisation embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or colour: The IWW and the origins of revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa, 1908-1912", p. 12; *Voice of Labour*, 20.11.1909, p. 6.
 20. D. TICKTIN, The origins of the South African Labour Party, pp. 421-422; *Voice of Labour*, 6.11.1909, p. 4.
 21. E.N. KATZ, *A trade union aristocracy: a history of white workers in the Transvaal and the general strike of 1913*, pp. 59-65, 70-71, 230-231, 449-450, 456-457.

replaced. For the unskilled white workers it foreshadowed the restriction of employment opportunities. There was no economic reason why black workers – who acquired the necessary skills - could not be used in place of white workers. The white mineworkers were therefore constantly faced with the potential threat of undercutting and displacement by cheap black labour.²²

Thus the question of segregation had helped to separate the anti-racist socialism of the anarchists and revolutionary syndicalists, such as the Industrial Workers of the World, the Socialist Labour Party and the other small socialist groups associated with *Voice of Labour* from the ‘white labourite’ tradition represented by the SALP. Van der Walt asserts that the racial question isolated the revolutionary socialists from the bulk of the labour movement and that this issue was a key point of division between the two groups.²³

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 Archie Crawford came forward as a socialist candidate for the Fordsburg constituency in Johannesburg ten months before the polling day of the first Union parliamentary elections in 1910.²⁴ Therefore, the militant socialists became some of the most bitter enemies of the SALP.²⁵ Justifying Crawford’s action *Voice of Labour* declared:

We do not believe in attacking Labour, if we can cross swords with Capitalism, but to the extent that it departs from a revolutionary basis for its action, the Labour Party becomes part and parcel of the forces of Capitalism – Seeking always to – what is impossible – moralise Capitalism, and not to completely overthrow...It is now Socialism versus Labourism. We should prefer to have tackled Capitalism first, but then we are helpless in the matter of choice.²⁶

Voice of Labour adopted an increasingly antagonistic stance towards the Labour Party and 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 for SALP candidates: “...they merit the absolute disregard and scorn of right-thinking members of the working class.”²⁷

22. F.A. JOHNSTONE, *Class, race and gold: a study of class relations and racial discrimination in South Africa*, (UPA, Lanham, 1976), pp. 57-59,64-82,145-150.

23. L. VAN DER WALT, “A class-conscious revolutionary organisation embracing all workers regardless of craft, race or colour: The IWW and the origins of revolutionary syndicalism in South Africa, 1908-1912”, pp. 12, 35 and L. VAN DER WALT, “Race and the Early Radical Left in South Africa: Marxism, Revolutionary Syndicalism and the National Question in South African Socialism, 1910-1933” (Paper presented at the African Studies Institute Seminar, UWits, 21 May 2001), p. 24.

24. D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, p. 432; *The Star*, 20.6.1910, p. 9.

25. D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, p. 433.

26. *Voice of Labour*, 20.11.1909, pp. 6-7.

27. *Ibid.*, 9.9.1910, pp. 404-405.

Inevitably race became a central issue in the election campaign. F.H.P. Creswell, the parliamentary leader of the SALP who in contrast with most of his followers came from a middle-class background, was a staunch champion of a white labour policy or 'civilized labour' as it became known.²⁸ The *Voice of Labour* strongly condemned the SALP's white labour policy or 'Creswellism' and denounced it for being a 'farce', a 'bumkum fallacy' and a 'White Kaffir Policy'.²⁹

In the general election of 15 September 1910 the SALP only managed to win four out of nineteen contested parliamentary seats.³⁰ In characteristic fashion *Voice of Labour* blamed the party's election tactics for its poor election results:

The almost rout of the S. African Labour Party was well merited and it should now be clear to its myopic leaders that in entering into a compact with the National Party, they sold their principles for a mess of pottage. The National Party [Het Volk] had everything to gain and the Labour Party everything to lose. Had the Labour Party stood aloof from the National Party and sought the co-operation of the Socialists which might have been gained if the principles of Socialism had been clearly established – they would have carried several more seats.³¹

However, Crawford and J. Davidson, 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.³² *Voice of Labour* acknowledged that socialist propaganda at that stage did not succeed in making any electoral progress.³³

But *Voice of Labour* 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 a stake in reducing the majority of H.W. Sampson, the SALP candidate for Commissioner Street, to a mere 40 votes.³⁴

28. See D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp. 436-442.

29. *Voice of Labour*, 14.9.1909, p. 9; *Ibid.*, 18.3.1910, p. 129; *Ibid.*, 19.8.1910, p. 381.

30. R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, 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*, p. 145.

31. *Voice of Labour*, 16.9.1910, p. 412.

32. D. TICKTIN, *The origins of the South African Labour Party*, pp. 472,474; *Voice of Labour*, 23.9.1910, p. 418; GERICKE BIBLIOTEEK, University of Stellenbosch (hereafter, KGB) A215, Trembath Collection, Vol. I, p. 348: Newspaper Clipping.

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

34. *Voice of Labour*, 16.9.1910, p. 413; *Ibid.*, 23.9.1910, p. 418. Het Volk was an Afrikaner orientated, nationalistic party. However, no substantial evidence on *Voice of Labour's* accusations of a formal Labour-Het Volk electoral agreement could be traced.

3. 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 in protest to the government's harsh tactics. 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 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.³⁵

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'³⁶ 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.³⁷

Amidst increasing tension within the ranks of the SALP on the war issue, the party's 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'. Subsequently, 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 26.³⁸

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

35. S. JOHNS: *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 30-31, 33-35; B. HIRSON and G. A. WILLIAMS, *The delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924*, p. 133; D. TICKTIN, "The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15" in *South African Historical Journal*, 1, November 1969, pp. 59-62.

36. An expression used by S. FORMAN and A. ODENDAAL (eds), *A trumpet from the housetops: the selected writings of Lionel Forman*, p. 45.

37. D. TICKTIN, "The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15" in *South African Historical Journal*, 1, November 1969, p. 64.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 69-71.

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 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 organization outside of the SALP. The new organization proclaimed itself the guardian of the true principles of international socialism in South Africa.³⁹

Initially, the object of the ISL was: "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 black working class *vis-à-vis* the SALP's white labour policy.⁴⁰

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 Labour Party was described as 'racist', 'reactionary', 'reformist', 'bourgeois', 'centristic' and 'degenerate'. The party members were 'political opportunists, adventurers and turncoats', 'social-traitors', 'schemers', 'rogues' and 'labour lieutenants' of the capitalist class. The party was denounced for its middle-class pretensions as 'a mere wing of the capitalist class' and a 'Mugwump Labour Party' with 'easy access to office and career seekers'. Its election candidates were "mainly of the small shopkeeper or commission agent fraternity" that soothed

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72; S. JOHNS: *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 46-51; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, pp. 174-175; S. FORMAN and A. ODENDAAL (eds), *A trumpet from the housetops: the selected writings of Lionel Forman*, pp. 47-48; E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, pp. 71-72; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 184.

40. 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: *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 49, 65.

lower middle-class interests and the party was only scrambling for parliamentary seats. The SALP's 'mis-leaders', or 'Labour Fakirs' betrayed the workers and thus became the enemy of the working class. Therefore, the party became irrelevant to the class struggle.⁴¹

The International severely criticised Creswell for instigating the international socialists' expulsion from the SALP. He was only seeking parliamentary seats for the SALP and being manipulated by capitalist masters. Therefore he was an 'incompetent' Labour leader. *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.⁴² In addition, the paper condemned the SALP's white labour policy and preference for the preservation of the industrial colour bar as being antiquated.⁴³

During the First World War and in an atmosphere of mutual bitterness 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.⁴⁴ *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.⁴⁵ *The International* also severely attacked the party's British imperial connection.⁴⁶

41. See *The International*, 15.10.1915, p. 2; *Ibid.*, April-December 1916; *Ibid.*, 19.1.1917, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 6.12.1918, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 19.11.1920, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 31.12.1920, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 17.2.1922, p. 1 and H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 257.

42. See *The International*, 10.9.1915, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 19.7.1918, p. 7; *Ibid.*, 5.9.1919, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 19.9.1919, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 9.4.1920, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 26.11.1920, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 25.3.1921, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 27.4.1923, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 7.12.1923, p. 1; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, pp. 175,208-209,216; W. H. HARRISON, *Memoirs of a socialist in South Africa, 1903-1947*, p. 28.

43. *The International*, 24.9.1915, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 12.10.1917, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 9.11.1917, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 14.3.1919, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 11.7.1919, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 12.11.1920, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 1.6.1923, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 21.9.1923, p. 1; E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, p. 79.

44. E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, p. 74; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, p. 176; B. HIRSON and G. A. WILLIAMS, *The delegate for Africa: David Iyon Jones, 1883-1924*, 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*, 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; *Ibid.*, 31.5.1918, p. 2.

45. *The International*, 17.9.1915, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 15.10.1915, p. 3.

46. *Ibid.*, 14.4.1916, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 12.11.1920, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 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.⁴⁷ *The International* blamed the party's losses on the deviation from its socialist principles:

We trust that the lesson will not be lost on these faithful Labour voters that Labour can never compete with the Unionists [a capitalist party] in Jingoism. We sincerely trust that the present landslide will make the Labourite realise, even if his party managers cannot, what the 'Star' [a capitalist newspaper] and its Capitalistic bosses realise only too well, namely, that if the Labour party is not International Socialist, it has no right to exist...What an opportunity lost! Labour has gone down in an attempt to out-Jingo the Jingos.⁴⁸

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.⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰

The revolutionary character of a party does not consist in abstaining from fighting Elections. It consists in fighting them on a revolutionary issue...The question for us is, shall the people be left to the false issues raised by the non-Socialist parties? (and among these must the Labour Party now be accounted)...it is our mission and our duty to present to them the alternative of the International and the vast revolution in human methods and outlook which that contains at all such times; and to make that change of outlook the issue in the occasional exercise of the people's will.⁵¹

4. Failed Efforts at Reconciliation

Towards the end of the First World War the SALP sank into political apathy.⁵² Active party propaganda was neglected. Even the Labour MPs became lethargic in their political activities. It was clear that the traumatic split of 1915 dealt the party a

47. T. BOYDELL, *My luck was in: with spotlights on General Smuts*, pp. 123-124; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, pp. 184-185; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, p. 177; E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, pp. 74-75; S. JOHNS: *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 56; S. FORMAN and A. ODENDAAL (eds), *A trumpet from the housetops: the selected writings of Lionel Forman*, p. 51.

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

49. H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 186; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, p. 177; S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 56; S. FORMAN and A. ODENDAAL (eds), *A trumpet from the housetops: the selected writings of Lionel Forman*, p. 51.

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

51. *Ibid.*, 2.11.1915, p. 1.

52. D. TICKTIN, "The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15" in *South African Historical Journal*, 1, November 1969, p. 72.

tremendous blow and divided the labour movement as a whole.⁵³ Trade unions, previously closely identified with the SALP, began to draw away, possibly because several of their leaders were anti-militarist, while the ISL attracted many Labour notables.⁵⁴

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-war radicals 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 black workers, 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.⁵⁵ *The International* derided the offer by the “Labour lieutenants of the capitalist class” as “amusing, if not impertinent”:

The sapient gentlemen who passed this resolution are quite wrong when they observe that the differences between the International Socialists and the political opportunists of the SALP cease with the signing of an armistice with Germany...The difference of outlook is far more fundamental than that...The failed at the testing time to maintain their ‘Socialist Objective’ and hounded down those who stuck to it when it was unpopular and even dangerous. What guarantee have International Socialists that they will not fail again when the final struggle between the workers and exploiters blazes up here as elsewhere?...The breach is final and fundamental.⁵⁶

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 “to present a united front to the forces opposing Democracy at the forthcoming parliamentary elections” D. I. Jones, editor of *The International* who apparently only received a ‘late invitation’, attended in a ‘semi-journalistic capacity’. However, the ISL’s attitude towards the SALP was still unyielding. Jones came to the conclusion that the conference consisted of “the same old rump of a Labour Party with the Socialistic guts taken out” and that “one spirit predominated, the spirit of getting into Parleyment [*sic*]”. The League disdained the

53. See *The Labour World*, 19.7.1918, p. 10; *Ibid.*, 20.9.1918, p. 7; *Ibid.*, 29.11.1918, p. 7; *Ibid.*, 6.12.1918, pp. 3,7; *Ibid.*, 8.2.1919, p. 5; *Ibid.*, 12.4.1919, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 30.8.1919, p. 7.

54. D. TICKTIN, “The War Issue and the Collapse of the South African Labour Party, 1914-15” in *South African Historical Journal*, 1, November 1969, p. 72.

55. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 79; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 215; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers’ leader*, pp. 206-207.

56. *The International*, 6.12.1918, p. 3. See also *Ibid.*, 4.1.1919, p. 3.

“mugwump unity of a pot-bellied Labour Party without the fire of the Social Revolution” and decided to contest the elections under its own banner.⁵⁷

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, industrial unionism, the colour bar, the use of Parliament for the destruction of capitalism, 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 workers as it became “a den of middle-class mugwumps falsely furthering middle-class politics under the name of Labour”. *The International* implied that the Labour Party consisted of ‘Commerce men’, ‘ex-Unionists’ and ‘editors of Unionist journals’. The ISL organ declared: “This middle class tendency will be the rock on which the SALP will perish”.⁵⁸

Economic circumstances favoured the labour forces 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.⁵⁹ In the face of the ISL’s poor performance to

57. *Ibid.*, 21.11.1919, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 28.11.1919, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 12.12.1919, p. 7; *Ibid.*, 9.1.1920, pp. 4,5; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, pp. 244-245.

58. See *The International*, November 1919 – February 1920; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, pp. 245-246; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers’ leader*, pp. 216-217; S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 104-105.

59. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 105; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers’ leader*, pp. 216-217; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, 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. Andrews’s reputation as a renowned labour leader probably favoured him receiving the most votes. That he was also regarded as a stalwart of the non-racial ISL seems to be an irony. M. ROTH, “Eddie, Brian, Jack and let’s phone Rusty: is this the history of the Communist Party of South Africa?” in *South African Historical Journal*, 42, May 2000, pp. 196-197, regards him as racist. A perusal of his views on the position of black workers published in *The International*, corroborates Roth’s criticism; S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 70-71; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers’ leader*, pp. 180-183; S. FORMAN and A. ODENDAAL (eds), *A trumpet from the housetops: the selected writings of Lionel Forman*, pp. 50, 60-61; *The International*, 29.6.1917, p. 4; 20.7.1917, p. 4; 13.2.1920, p. 4; W.J. DE KOCK (ed.), *Suid-Afrikaanse Biografiese Woordeboek*, Deel I, (RGN, Pretoria, 1976), pp. 17-18.

Labour's promising results at the polls *The International* ambiguously welcomed the SALP's electoral success, while simultaneously also criticising the influence of Creswell's 'imperialism' on the party:

The International Socialist League will welcome the advent of a strong Labour Party. We do not compete with the Labour Party. We are its successors. Revolution does not compete with reform. It supersedes it. The Socialist movement can recruit best from Labour ranks...Hence our role in the election has been to enter the most highly industrialised constituencies with the message of International Socialism, to gather in all the voices for that working class revolution which must follow the inevitable failure of Mugwump Labour. It has been our duty to warn the workers of that inevitable failure, pointing out the corrupt tendencies of a Creswellian Labour Party...a Labour Party led by Creswell and his Imperialist slogans is no menace to capitalist exploitation, nor is regarded as such...The capitalists are not afraid of a Creswellian Labour Party...It is not afraid of a Labour Party which says that the South African Party, the Unionist Party, and the Labour Party are united on the imperial connection. By this the Labour Party stands for Imperialism, Capitalism's Last Ditch. We warn the workers against mugwump Labour.⁶⁰

The ISL was not disheartened by the election results. *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:

We welcome the victory of mugwump Labour as a necessary step to the victory of Socialist Labour or International Socialism...The triumph of lower middle-class democracy as expressed by Labour in the towns and Nationalism in the country will form a political shield under which the Socialist movement will be able to recruit its strength for the final tussle...We hope by this Labour resurgence to have a wider field for our propaganda. Hence why we do not view with any dismay the small polls cast for the League. The work of the International Socialist League continues after the election just as during the election. The future is ours, and it is a very near future, too.⁶¹

The results of the 1920 general election created a hung parliament and politically a stalemate situation. Eventually, General 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 1921.⁶²

The SALP was not ready for another election which caught the labour movement in a state of disunity. Some 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

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

61. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

62. D.W. KRÜGER, *The age of the generals: a short political history of the Union of South Africa, 1910-1948*, pp. 112-115.

of difference between the Labour Party and the ISL were the colour question and the conception of the state. The SALP was still in favour of maintaining the colour bar and social segregation. However, 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.⁶³ On the gulf that existed between the two groups *The International inter alia* declared:

Mr. Creswell is right. There is a great gulf fixed. The SALP must be attacked, exposed, and driven to where it belongs, into the arms of reaction and the upholders of the capitalist regime. The ISL will continue its work of agitation and organisation of the working masses irrespective of race, colour, or creed, on class lines, to fight and destroy the system responsible for the present world misery – peacefully if possible, by force if needs be...in order that the Socialist Republic of South Africa may be inaugurated by the unanimous solidarity of all the workers.⁶⁴

The ISL advised all socialists to stay away from the polls except at Durban, where three League candidates had entered the lists.⁶⁵ Once again the SALP was targeted as its main election opponent. The ISL perceived electoral campaigns to have an essentially propagandistic role and to advocate revolutionary industrial socialism. In its election strategy the ISL would attempt to either defeat the Labour Party or force it to pursue more radical policies. The League's manifesto for the 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....⁶⁶

In its pre-election commentary, *The International* regularly attacked the SALP, accusing the party of becoming a 'political insurance society' of the 'petty bourgeois class' that exploited labour under capitalism. SALP's policy was anti-revolutionary, 'Imperialist dope and Creswellian opportunist dope'. The ISL organ also implied that the Labour Party was supported by the capitalist press, stating that "...Labour leaders have been getting quite good 'boosts' from the Corner House press lately...". It also declared that "a vote for the SALP is a vote for the Boss concealed behind his 'Labour lieutenants'".⁶⁷

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

63. H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 250; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, pp. 208-209; *The Labour World*, 20.11.1920, p. 6; *The International*, 12.11.1920, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 26.11.1920, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 10.12.1920, p. 2.

64. *The International*, 26.11.1920, p. 2.

65. B.L. REID, *op. cit.*, pp. 105-106; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 250.

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

67. *Ibid.*, 14.1.1921, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 21.1.1921, pp. 1, 2. The influential Witwatersrand mining house, H. Eckstein & Co., was also known as the "Corner House".

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.⁶⁸ *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".⁶⁹

5. 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.⁷⁰

The 1922 strike would have far-reaching political consequences. In Parliament General Hertzog, the Nationalist Party leader, denounced Smuts as someone whose footsteps "dripped with blood". 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 (the latter who made the white labour policy its own, and attracted Afrikaner workers by appealing to language, blood, and sentiment⁷¹), 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

68. D.W. KRÜGER, *The age of the generals: a short political history of the Union of South Africa, 1910-1948*, p. 115; A.G. BARLOW, *Almost in confidence*, 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*, p. 322.

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

70. See N. HERD, *1922 The Revolt on the Rand* (Blue Crane Books, Johannesburg, 1966), chs. 1-12; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, pp. 219-220, 227-283; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, pp. 271-299; I I.L. WALKER and B. WEINBREN, *2000 casualties: a history of the trade unions and the labour movement in the Union of South Africa*, pp. 93-127, 150-151; E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, pp. 91-94; S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 128-144.

71. H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 250.

series of by-election defeats, Smuts in 1924 decided to go to the polls to test his government's popularity with the electorate.⁷²

With regard to the general election of 1924 the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), established in July 1921,⁷³ found itself 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 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'.⁷⁴

Although some communists continued to criticise the SALP, and Creswell in particular, for 'reformism' and their segregation policies others, such as S. Buirski, M. Lopes, V. Danchin and D. I. Jones, 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 black workers would become active politically.⁷⁵ However, in order to soothe the Nationalists' fears of socialism the SALP, urged by Creswell, at its annual conference in January 1923 diluted its socialist objective. A compromise amendment to the party constitution spoke of "the ultimate achievement of a democratic and Socialist commonwealth". In addition, the Labour leaders denounced the united front and withdrew the party from its committees. This step evoked a lot of criticism from *The International*.⁷⁶

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

72. See A.G. BARLOW, *Almost in confidence*, pp. 174-175, 179, 182; D.W. KRÜGER, *The age of the generals: a short political history of the Union of South Africa, 1910-1948*, 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.

73. S. JOHNS, "The birth of the Communist Party of South Africa in *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 9(3), 1976, pp. 371-400.

74. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 147; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 302; *The International*, 26.5.1922, p. 1; *Ibid.*, 30.6.1922, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 7.7.1922, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 18.8.1922, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 10.11.1922, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 18.5.1923, p. 3.

75. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 146. See also *The International*, August 1922 – April 1923.

76. R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, p. 286; *The International*, 10.11.1922, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 5.1.1923, pp. 1,4; *Ibid.*, 26.1.1923, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 2.2.1923, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 18.5.1923, p. 3. The original socialist objective (See *Voice of Labour*, 30.10.1909, p. 4) of the SALP read as follows: "The socialisation of the Means of Production, Distribution and exchange, to be controlled by a democratic State in the interests of the entire community".

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:

We already see the result of the alliance between bourgeois Nationalism and Labour Imperialism in the refusal of the Labour Party to take in any demonstration in which the Communist Party is represented. Notwithstanding this and the obvious insincerity of the whole arrangement, we recognise that a general assault on the Smuts-Chamber of Mines combination must be made. Whether a purely Nationalist or Labour-Nationalist government comes into power does not matter much...The rank and file of both Labour and Nationalist parties must sooner or later refuse to follow their bourgeois leaders, and will form a real workers' party not to be side-tracked either by British Imperialism nor reactionary bourgeois Republicanism, but organised, drilled and determined to unceasingly work for the overthrow of the capitalist system.⁷⁷

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. S.P. Bunting, at that stage the CPSA's secretary-editor, took great pains trying to explain that this decision was not a backward step from the party's revolutionary principles towards reformism:

Of course it is not proposed that the Communist Party should surrender or compromise any of its principles or freedom of propaganda and criticism. Rather it is suggested that the Labour Party might well enlarge its scope so as to become, as it were, a federation somewhat on the lines of the British Labour Party, capable of including such bodies as the ILP or the CP...there is today, we feel convinced, among the rank and file of the workers of all races in South Africa as elsewhere, a widespread common determination to overthrow the rule of the capitalist production; and the consolidation of this sentiment affords a common ground broader and greater than our separate standpoints.⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹ But *The Guardian*, a SALP-orientated Durban newspaper, strongly lobbied against any CPSA affiliation to the Labour Party.⁸⁰ Therefore, the SALP's rejection of the CPSA's application for affiliation came as no surprise. Citing its adherence to

77. *The International*, 27.4.1923, p. 2.

78. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 148-150; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, pp. 286-287; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 309; *The International*, 4.5.1923, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 11.5.1923, p. 2; *Ibid.*, 18.5.1923, p. 3; *Ibid.*, 25.5.1923, p. 2.

79. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 150; *The International*, 15.6.1923, p. 3.

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

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.⁸¹

The SALP's rejection of the CPSA's rapprochement clearly underlined the latter's predicament regarding the election as is clear 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.⁸²

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.⁸³

Although the CPSA did not put up any candidates in the election,⁸⁴ in at least the Parktown constituency in Johannesburg there seemed to have been some controversy between the communists and the SALP. A close scrutiny of the columns of *The International* reveals that the SALP at first did not plan to put up a candidate in Parktown. The CPSA, therefore, apparently considered nominating its own candidate, C.F. Glass, to contest the seat, which also included a substantial working-class

81. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 150-151; *The International*, 27.7.1923, p. 4; *The Guardian*, 27.7.1923, p. 1.

82. See S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 151; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, pp. 313-316 and *The International*, June 1923 - June 1924.

83. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 151; E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, pp. 103-104; *The International*, 18.4.1924, pp. 4, 6; *Ibid.*, 16.5.1924, p. 6.

84. E.R. ROUX, *S.P. Bunting: a political biography*, p. 104.

component. *The International* accused the Labourites of having only resolved to put up their candidate once they learned about the communists' intentions. The paper declared that the SALP's behaviour was not aimed at attacking the capitalists in the constituency but to 'protect' it from the communists.⁸⁵

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 General J.B.M. Hertzog as Prime Minister. It consisted of eight Nationalists and two Labour ministers, Creswell and T. Boydell.⁸⁶

With the final 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. Two members in a cabinet of eight, over whose policy they would exercise no control, would be mere 'hostages' of the dominant party (the NP), whereas eighteen workers' representatives would hold the balance of power in their hands if they maintained their independence.

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 and a "commercial community's Party".⁸⁷ According to Cope, W.H. Andrews declared:

Individuals may gain by the coalition, but for the [Labour] Party and the workers' cause it means SHEER SURRENDER.⁸⁸

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 SALP as an independent working-class organisation". For *The International* the SALP changed into the "Creswell-Boydell Party".⁸⁹

85. See *The International*, 23.5.1924, p. 4; *Ibid.*, 30.5.1924, p. 1.

86. T. BOYDELL, *My luck was in: with spotlights on General Smuts*, pp. 206-207; O. PIROW, *James Barry Munnik Hertzog*, (Howard Timmens, Cape Town, n.d.), pp. 98-99.

87. S. JOHNS: *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 152; H.J. and R.E. SIMONS, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*, p. 323; R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, pp. 293-294; *The International*, 20.6.1924, pp. 2, 4, 5; *Ibid.*, 27.6.1924, pp. 3, 5, 6, 8 and pamphlet appendix; *Ibid.*, 11.7.1924, p. 2.

88. Quoted by R.K. COPE, *Comrade Bill: the life and times of W. H. Andrews, workers' leader*, p. 294.

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

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.⁹⁰

Therefore, Rob Davies argues that the white unions, personified by the SALP, were incorporated, institutionalised and bureaucratised within the state structures, thus eliminating them as a potential militant and political threat. According to Davis, the Pact government had succeeded in bringing about the almost complete political capitulation of the white labour movement to capital.⁹¹ Yudelman concurs with Davies's analysis by arguing that the interventionist state embarked upon a program to subjugate and pacify organized white labour by formally co-opting it into the structures of the state.⁹²

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.⁹³

Thus by 1924, in one of his last letters to his comrades in South Africa before his death, a somewhat disillusioned D.I. Jones, who had left Moscow in 1920 to work for the Third Communist International (Comintern), lamented the position of the white labour movement:

As a matter of fact, there is no room for a CP [Communist Party] in white South Africa except as the watchdog of the native, as the promoters of rapprochement, watching within the broader organisations, for every opportunity to switch the

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90. S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, p. 294.
 91. R.H. DAVIES, *Capital, State and white labour in South Africa 1900-1960*, (Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1979), pp. 179-181, 195-198, 231.
 92. D. YUDELMAN, *The emergence of modern South Africa: state, capital and the incorporation of organised labour on the South African Gold Fields, 1902-1939*, (Greenwood Press, Westport, 1983), pp. 9, 114-115, 186, 208-211, 221-233.
 93. See S. JOHNS, *Raising the red flag: the International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*, pp. 152-162.

white movement on right lines on this question and scotching every conspiracy to rouse race hatred and strike breaking of race against race.⁹⁴

6. Conclusion

From the preceding facts it is clear that political unity and co-operation within the ranks of the early labour movement were doomed to failure from the start. In the end the conflicting ideological principles of the right-wing, represented by the SALP, and those of the left-wing, represented by various revolutionary socialist organizations, such as the Socialist Society and the ISL, as well as the CPSA, were totally irreconcilable. The consequence was therefore an incessant and abrasive rivalry between the two groups vying for the political loyalty of the white working class. Race and socialist principles were central issues in this struggle. The white labour policy - to a great extent the result of the structural insecurity and proletarianisation of the white workers, linked with an inherent racism - posed an insuperable problem not only in the SALP's relationship with the revolutionary socialists, but even prominent socialists grappled with this problem in the early years of the ISL's existence.

A growing middle-class element within the SALP, personified by Creswell, eventually made co-operation with the CPSA impossible on issues such as the socialist objective and the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. Their middle-class policy principles gradually drew the SALP, as a workers' party, away from its class base. This, along with the fact that after 1924 white labour increasingly became a spent force politically due to incorporation by the state, institutionalisation and bureaucratisation, made the SALP increasingly irrelevant until it eventually succumbed to a slow death in 1958.

An early weakness of the socialists and the CPSA lay in their initial dependence on white labour support for political survival and growth. From 1925 onwards the CPSA focused more purposefully on the emerging black proletariat as their natural class base. In contrast to the SALP the CPSA experienced a slow growth. The communists' ideology of race and class equality offered acceptable alternatives to some black workers. The fact that the CPSA survived severe state oppression between 1950 and 1994 is proof of its durability.

Opsomming

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

Ná die ontstaan van die Suid-Afrikaanse Arbeidersparty (SAAP) in 1909 sou konserwatiewe, reformistiesgesinde regse elemente en militante

94. Quoted by B. HIRSON and G. A. WILLIAMS, *The delegate for Africa: David Ivon Jones, 1883-1924*, pp. 240, 251.

linksgesinde faksies 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. Vanaf 1915 het hierdie twee faksies van die blanke arbeiderbeweging mekaar al hoe meer lynreg en ideologies geopponeer aangesien alle pogings tot versoening misluk het – veral ná 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.