

THE UNITED PARTY AND THE 1953 GENERAL ELECTION

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Die Verenigde Party en die Algemene Verkiesing van 1953

Die primêre oorsaak van die Verenigde Party se neerlaag in die 1948-Algemene Verkiesing was sy swak organisasie. Ten einde die mag te herwin, het die Verenigde Party gevolglik klem gelê op organisatoriese hervorming terwyl noodsaaklike aanpassings ook aan sy paternalistiese rassebeleid gemaak is ten einde die ondersteuning van die randgebied-kiesers te behou.

Die neiging van die Verenigde Party om op sekere gebiede toe te gee, maar dan die beskerming van individuele regte en die eerbiediging van konstitusionele waarborge te eis, het egter van die Party 'n maklike teiken gemaak vir manipulasie van regeringskant. Die Verenigde Party se taak is verder bemoeilik deur die Wet op Burgerskap van 1949 wat hom potensiële kiesersondersteuning ontnem het asook deur die Nasionale Party se oorwinning in die 1950-parlementêre verkiesing in Suidwes-Afrika.

Teen hierdie agtergrond het die Verenigde Party se inisiatiewe om 'n Oudstryders-Fakkeldommando te stig om 'n verkiesingsooreenkoms met die Arbeidersparty te sluit en om aansienlike strukturele hervormings te implementeer as 'n uitvloeisel van sy informele alliansie met finansiële sektore en die mynbedryf misluk in sy poging om die marginale kiesers se swaai weg van die Party te stuit.

Na die Algemene Verkiesing van 1953 was daar 'n algemene gevoel dat die opposisiekiezers nooit weer tot so 'n gesamentlike poging gemobiliseer sou kon word nie. Die gevolglike demoraliserende effek het gelei tot die terugtrekking van finansiële bydraes tot die Verenigde Party.

The primary reason for the United Party's 1948 General Election defeat had been poor organisation. In order to regain power, therefore, the United Party stressed organisational reform while making expedient adjustments to its paternalistic race policy so as to retain the support of marginal voters.

But the United Party's tendency to give ground and yet demand the protection of individual rights and the observance of constitutional guarantees made the Party an easy target for government manipulation. The United Party's task was made even more difficult as a consequence of the Citizenship Act of 1949, which removed potential electoral support from it, and by the National Party's victory in the 1950 parliamentary elections in South-West Africa.

Seen against this background the United Party initiative in encouraging the establishment of the War Veterans' Torch Commando in reaching an electoral pact with the Labour Party, and in implementing considerable structural reforms as a result of its informal alliance with financial and mining interests, failed to halt the swing of marginal voters away from it.

After the 1953 General Election there was a widespread perception that never again could the opposition electorate be mobilised to mount such a concerted effort. The result was demoralisation and a withdrawal of financial contributions to the United Party.

Although clearly preferred by a majority of the South African electorate,¹ the United Party (U.P.) lost the May 1948 General Election. The primary reason for this outcome was poor U.P. organisation. Of particular importance in this regard was the

1. K.A. Heard estimated that the United Party - Labour Party alliance would have drawn about 53,3 per cent of the total vote in contested and uncontested seats in May 1948. K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa, 1943-1970* (Cape Town, 1974), p. 42.

Party's inability to adequately register voters or, where necessary, delete them from the voters' roll.² The consequent under-registration of urban voters, and the relative ease with which the Herenigde Nasionale Party (H.N.P.) was able to remove U.P. supporters from the roll,³ not only reduced the possible total of urban constituencies but also exacerbated the effects of the weighting of the urban vote, the geographic concentration of U.P.-Labour Party (L.P.) support in the urban areas and the mismanagement of the U.P.'s 1947 delimitation proposals.⁴ In order to regain power therefore, the U.P. stressed organisational reform while making expedient adjustments to its paternalistic race policy so as to retain the support of marginal voters.

The first significant indication of the latter was the issuing, in September 1948, of a "Re-statement of the Native Policy of the United Party." Unlike the previous policy, the "Re-statement" explicitly accepted social and residential separation and the avoidance of "race intermixture."⁵ The second was the November 1948 re-adoption, as Party policy, of Indian repatriation.⁶ Repatriation was a policy which Smuts had implicitly repudiated with the passing of the 1946 Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act.

The change of attitude which had allowed Hofmeyr to acquiesce in both of these policy changes was also reflected in his response to Smuts's late 1948 attempt to undo the consequences of the Party's 1947 repudiation of Havenga's offer of an alliance with the Afrikaner Party (A.P.).⁷ It appears that Hofmeyr, despite his earlier fear that such a "link-up would strengthen the reactionary elements in the United Party ...",⁸ was by November 1948 prepared "in the interests of the country, to stand down as second-in-charge to General Smuts in favour of Mr Havenga."⁹ Smuts too appears to have been willing to stand down. An intermediary between the U.P. and the A.P. reported: "As genl. Smuts saamreis ... sal dit bloot wees om finale reëlings vir sy uittrede uit die Politiek."¹⁰

Whatever thoughts Havenga might once have entertained of leaving the government were stillborn. It is likely that acutely aware as he was of the alienation of a considerable majority of the white Afrikaans-speaking electorate from the U.P., he had come round to the view that a more viable means of restoring power to the white political centre, and thus keeping the philosophy of Herzogism alive, would be via Malan's wing of the H.N.P.¹¹

Nevertheless, faced with the possibility of Havenga's defection and a March 1949 Provincial Election stalemate, the H.N.P. had to "abandon any thought they had of another quick appeal to the country and fall back on a defensive policy of "digging in".¹² An important element in this policy was a hardening of the H.N.P.'s determination, despite Havenga's reluctance to co-operate, to eliminate the coloured common roll vote.¹³

Although coloured voters constituted only 8,6 per cent of the total common roll electorate in the Cape Province, there were six constituencies in which they constituted over 20 per cent of the electorate, thirteen where they constituted between 10 and 20 per cent and fifteen where they constituted between 5 and 10

2. United Party Archives (hereafter U.P.A.) Pretoria: U.P. Papers (hereafter U.P.), Division of Information, Evidence for Delimitation Commission, 8/52.

3. *Ibid.*, Reports on Organisation, 1950-1958, Vol. 2, Electoral Laws Amendment Act, p. 2, n.d.

4. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition, 1948-1953' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Natal, 1989), pp. 58-61.

5. A. Paton, *Hofmeyr* (London, 1964), p. 514.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 510.

7. J.L. Basson, *J.G. Strydom: Sy politieke loopbaan van 1929 tot 1948* (Pretoria, 1980), p. 517.

8. William Cullan Library (hereafter W.C.L.), Wits, Johannesburg: J.H. Hofmeyr Papers, Box A1, Diary, 23-8-1948.

9. *Cape Argus*, 4-12-1948, p. 1.

10. Transvaal Archives Depot (hereafter T.A.), Pretoria: N.C. Havenga Papers, Vol. 27, Afrikaner Party 1941-1951, C.J. Uys to N.C. Havenga, 6-1-1949.

11. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', p. 105.

12. *Sunday Times*, 13-3-1949, p. 16.

13. D.M. Scher, 'The disenfranchisement of coloured voters, 1948-1956' (Unpublished D.Litt. et Phil. thesis, Unisa, 1985), p. 129.

percent.¹⁴ Had the coloured people's voting rights been repealed prior to the 1948 General Election, the H.N.P. would have won three Cape seats which it narrowly lost in May 1948 and March 1949, and it would also probably have held Paarl and Bredasdorp which it won in May 1948 but lost in March 1949. In all probability the government would also have emerged more firmly entrenched in five of the seats in which its majority was below 1 000 in May 1948.¹⁵

Furthermore, although the apportionment of parliamentary seats between the provinces was based on their total white populations, the delimitation of constituencies within the Cape Province and Natal was based upon the number of voters on the common roll. Removal of the coloured common roll vote would therefore have resulted in a substantial alteration in constituency boundaries.¹⁶ The Cape Peninsula, for example, which in 1949 was represented by one H.N.P. and thirteen U.P., M.P.s, would very likely have lost two seats as a consequence of coloured disenfranchisement.¹⁷

Although unable to launch an immediate assault on the coloured franchise until Havenga's agreement had been obtained, the H.N.P. was nevertheless able, through the introduction of bills to prevent "mixed" marriages, to "suppress" Communism, to provide for comprehensive commercial and residential segregation, to "register" the population and to amend the Immorality Act, to both prepare the ground and successfully alienate marginal voters from the U.P. It was able effectively to accomplish the latter because though the U.P. weakly professed to find no fault with the principle of any one of the bills, it nevertheless either because it questioned the viability of any attempt, as proposed in a number of the bills, to define the term "Coloured", or because it objected to the arbitrary powers which all of the bills proposed to vest in the state, put up a vigorous opposition to them.

The U.P.'s attempt to limit the damage which its opposition to the bills had provoked by taking cover in the call to "take the colour problem out of the political arena",¹⁸ merely brought it full circle, for the contradiction implicit in this strategem could not be concealed. It was clear that the proposal would find government approval only if the U.P. surrendered its support for constitutionality, the one area in which the Party was most clear in its opposition to the government.

Neither could the U.P. recover lost ground by focussing on such issues as economic development and the cost of living, for the economy, despite recurrent foreign exchange crises, continued rapidly to expand.

Seen against this background, the U.P.'s organisational reforms took place in a vacuum. While the reforms, particularly those which enabled the Party more effectively to register and delete voters, succeeded - as the 1953 election results confirmed - in bringing more of its supporters to the polls, they could not in themselves bring in converts to the Party. Moreover not only did the urgency and rapidity of its reorganisation inhibit the U.P.'s ability to provide continuous and effective support to its ally, the United National South-West Party (U.N.S.W.P.), in the crucial 1950 South-West Africa (S.W.A.)¹⁹ elections, it also involved an expansion of the Party's structure beyond its ability to finance itself without the assistance of the United South Africa Trust Fund. The logic for the establishment of this body lay in what Smuts considered to be "a major weakness"²⁰ of the U.P.: without the tight discipline of an ideological party with a mass, card-carrying membership, the Party lacked the means to ensure a constant and reliable flow of revenue.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 131.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Institute for Contemporary History (hereafter I.N.C.H.), U.O.F.S. Bloemfontein: J.G.N. Strauss Papers (JGNS), File 1/19/7/1, L.S. Steenkamp to J.G.N. Strauss, 19-9-1952.

19. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', p. 202.

20. U.P.A.: U.P., Division of Information, Internal Administration File 1950-1952, Brief Comments on Certain Aspects of the Party Organisation, 18-7-1950.

Building on proposals which Smuts had made in July 1948, representatives of mining and business interests, together with U.P. officials, drew up a blueprint to formalise relations between the Party and its traditional donors. The document, entitled "A National Campaign to Create a United South Africa through the United Party", and which provided for the establishment, by those interests, of a National Advisory Committee and a national network of regional sub-committees, was approved by the U.P. Central Action Committee on 30 August 1949.²¹ The latter committee had, as part of the Party's organisational renewal, replaced the cumbersome and ineffective Central Head Committee in November 1948.²² The National Advisory Committee's initial fund-raising drive in September 1949 proved to be, however, only a qualified success. H.F. Oppenheimer, member of both the U.P. Central Action Committee and of the National Advisory Committee, reported that because of the sensitivity of the issue businessmen "found it difficult to contribute direct to the Party and it had been suggested that it would be desirable to form a Trust to which people could contribute."²³

While the objectives of the subsequently established United South Africa Trust Fund were closely correlated to the declared policy of the U.P., the agreement with the Party stipulated that "the Trustees will, in each instance, be satisfied that the money (donated) will be well and effectively spent."²⁴ This stipulation was to assume major significance in both the formulation of U.P. strategy and in the manner in which the Party was reorganised because the Trust, originally envisaged as an additional agency which would collect only those donations which could not be given directly to the Party, became the sole recipient of all major donations.²⁵ It had, moreover, by 1951 evolved into an independent organisation collecting funds on its own behalf and able to expend such funds at its own discretion. While U.P. officials conceded that the Party itself "would not have been able to raise a fraction of the moneys which the Trust has, in fact, raised",²⁶ the existence of the Trust was not an unmixed blessing. It not only served to perpetuate the pre-1948 organisational cleavage between the Party and its grass-roots support but also exposed the Party to the damaging accusation that it was dependent upon "Hoggenheimer" money. When it is borne in mind that annual U.P. Head Office expenditure in the years immediately preceding the 1948 election had been about £40 000, the Oppenheimer's 1951 statement that the "Trust was assisting at the rate of £100 000 *per annum*, that it would continue to do so at approximately that rate, and it could, in addition, reasonably be expected to find £100 000 for the General Election,"²⁷ indicates the extent to which the latter accusation was justified.

Though the Trust was largely responsible for providing the revenue for the extensive elaboration of the U.P. organisation with the establishment of Divisions of Fund Raising, Organisation, Information and Publicity, all of which were administered on "business lines" by a Trust imposed Party "Director",²⁸ much of the credit for the Party's restructuring must also go to J.G.N. Strauss. The latter had, in the absence of any strong contender, and in some controversy,²⁹ assumed the Party's leadership after illness had forced Smuts to relinquish control in June 1950. Strauss, however, received little acknowledgement for his contribution to the U.P.'s reorganisation. Not

21. *Ibid.*, Central Head Office, Minutes and Correspondence 1951-1973, Leader's Executive, 30-8-1951.

22. *Ibid.*, Minutes and Annexures, 1948-1963, Vol. I, Meeting of the Central Head Committee, 23-11-1948.

23. *Ibid.*, Central Action Committee Minutes, 1949-1950, Meeting, 22-9-1949.

24. I.N.C.H.: J.G.N.S., File 1/19/9/7/1, National Campaign to Create a United South Africa through the United Party.

25. U.P.A.: U.P., Central Head Office, Minutes and Correspondence 1951-1973, Leader's Executive, 30-8-1951.

26. U.P.A.: U.P., Union Finance Committee, No. 143, Chairman's Introductory Survey of Party Finances, 30-1-1952.

27. *Ibid.*, No. 280, Meeting of the Central Executive Committee, 4-12-1951.

28. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', pp. 243-246.

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-192.

only was he in the unenviable position of being compared to Smuts, but his already questionable prestige as a former minister in Smut's war-time government suffered further as a consequence of his adopting Smuts's mannerisms and highly personal style of running the Party.³⁰ These actions, by provoking personal antagonism, fuelled the factionalism that was latent within a party which derived its cohesion not from ideology or ethnicity, but from the ability of its leader to align behind him a wide spectrum of political elements.

Thus, though in terms of the efficiency of its organisation, the U.P. of early 1951 was a considerable advance on that of May 1948, the realisation of its potential was stunted by both loss of confidence in its leadership and by its lack of positive achievement. During that time the government had deliberately drawn the U.P. into defending positions it knew to be unpopular with the bulk of the electorate. On no occasion had the Opposition been able even effectively to modify the torrent of divisive legislation, let alone prevent it appearing in the statute books. During the same period it had fought and lost eleven parliamentary by-elections against the H.N.P. It had also, in September 1950, failed to win any of the six S.W.A. parliamentary seats.

The assessment that the growth in 1951 of white extra-parliamentary political activity, a response to the first direct attempt by the government to repeal coloured common roll franchise rights, was a tacit vote of no-confidence in the U.P.'s ability to oppose the newly formed National Party (N.P.),³¹ is thus not entirely without validity. But such an assessment is an inadequate explanation for the establishment of the Torch Commando. It ignores the urgency of the U.P.'s need to establish a highly motivated, voluntary organisation which could match that of the N.P. It also ignores the significant role which the U.P. played in the formation, though the initiative in this regard lay with the Springbok Legion,³² and in the subsequent direction of the Torch Commando.³³

The urgency of the U.P.'s need to mobilise the Torch Commando during the course of 1951 and 1952 lay in the nature of the structural difficulties the Party faced in preparing for the new delimitation. Not only were the bulk of its supporters relatively mobile urban dwellers but single-member constituency boundaries are notoriously easy to gerrymander if a political party can easily identify its supporters. For the tightly controlled N.P., an ethnically-based party in close touch with its grass-roots support, this was relatively easily done. For the U.P., drawing its support from a broader base, identification was more difficult.

In an attempt to minimise the effect of these liabilities, U.P. spokesmen, in leading evidence before the Tenth Delimitation Commission,³⁴ tried to persuade its members to give due consideration in their deliberations to the Party's estimate that seats in the larger urban centres were from 8 to 12 per cent underregistered.³⁵ Supporting this contention, the spokesmen pointed out that the growth in the number of registered voters since 1948 had been almost wholly confined to these centres. They noted that between the time the Ninth Delimitation Commission first sat in mid-1947 and the General Election in May 1948, "the average increase in thirty urban divisions was not less than 1 392 voters per division. And this despite the difficulty in getting a voters' list in the industrial areas as complete as that in the rural areas... On the Witwatersrand alone, there were in 34 seats 360 157 voters in May 1948, four years later there were 383 096 voters registered, an increase of 22 939. Considering that in one year alone, between 1947 and 1948 this type of

30. Interviews: L. Gerber, Sir De Villiers Graaff, V. Raw.

31. G.M. Carter, *The politics of inequality: South Africa since 1948* (New York, 1977), p. 332.

32. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', pp. 261-263.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 264-273.

34. The Commission started its sittings in Pretoria on 30-7-1952. The last sitting was at Cape Town on 2-12-1952. *Government Gazette Extraordinary* Vol. CLXXI, No. 5009, 20-2-1953.

35. U.P.A.: U.P., Division of Information, Internal Administration, Evidence for Delimitation Commission, n.d.

division had shown an average increase of well over 1 000 per division, the present increase of 675 per division in almost four years, is definitely an indication that the Witwatersrand is very much under-registered.³⁶

As in 1947, the Party's spokesmen again raised the case of the Orange Free State to reinforce their contention that there should not be a wide divergence in the loading of urban and rural seats. At the most, only four of the thirteen seats in that province could be classified as urban. There was thus an insufficient number of urban seats to sustain a large enough loading so as to allow the rural seats to be unloaded to the same extent as the rural divisions in provinces where there was a better balance between rural and urban constituencies.³⁷

On this basis and, unlike the position in 1947,³⁸ with "complete unanimity"³⁹ having been reached between its urban and rural representatives, the U.P. in the Transvaal pressed for the implementation of a system of "graded" loading and unloading.⁴⁰ Overall, the Party's recommendations imposed an average load of 6,4 and 6 per cent on Witwatersrand and Pretoria seats respectively with an average unloading of 10,9 per cent on the rural seats. This relatively moderate arrangement also had the virtue of allowing at least one of the two additional seats to which the Transvaal was entitled under the new delimitation to be allocated to the Witwatersrand.⁴¹ Conversely the N.P. argued for a 10 and 3 per cent loading of the Witwatersrand and Pretoria seats respectively and a 13,5 per cent unloading of the rural seats. This arrangement would have allowed the allocation of both of the additional seats to the rural areas.⁴²

The Commission's final recommendations in regard to the Transvaal were largely a compromise between the plans suggested by the U.P. and N.P. One of the Transvaal's additional seats was allocated to the Witwatersrand. The resulting thirty-five constituencies in this region were given an average loading of 7,6 per cent and the eight Pretoria constituencies one of 5,4 per cent. The twenty-five rural constituencies were unloaded on average by 12,9 per cent.⁴³ Overall this was a slightly less favourable loading and unloading for the U.P. than had been the case in 1948. In that year the Witwatersrand seats had received a 7,1 per cent loading and the Pretoria seats a loading of 5,4 per cent. The Transvaal rural seats were unloaded by an average of 11,9 per cent.⁴⁴

In so far as the Orange Free State was concerned, Bloemfontein's two urban constituencies received an average loading of 10,2 per cent. The average unloading on the remaining eleven constituencies was a mere 1,8 per cent.⁴⁵ Changes to the boundaries of the sole U.P. seat in that province served to make it an N.P. certainty.

In Natal the eight urban constituencies received an average loading of 9,7 per cent while the seven rural seats were unloaded by an average 11,1 per cent.⁴⁶ The redrawing of boundaries consequent upon the province's loss of a seat to the Transvaal led to the disappearance of the N.P. - held seat of Klipriver and brought Newcastle within reach of recapture by the U.P. This left one safe N.P. seat, Vryheid, and thirteen safe Opposition seats.⁴⁷

36. *Ibid.*

37. *Ibid.*

38. *The Star*, 20-8-1947, p. 5.

39. *Ibid.*, 24-7-1952, p. 3.

40. *Rand Daily Mail*, 30-7-1952, p. 1.

41. *The Star*, 6-9-1952, p. 2. Both the Cape Province and Natal lost one seat each under the new delimitation.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, Vol. CLXXI, No. 5009, 20-2-1953.

44. U.P.A.: U.P., Central Head Office, Delimitation Commissions 1910-1965, Ninth Delimitation Commission, 13-2-1948.

45. *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, Vol. CLXXI, No. 5009, 20-2-1953.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *The Forum*, January 1953, p. 5.

With the U.P. sponsored appeal against the High Court of Parliament Act still pending, the Party in the Cape Province had taken the precaution of presenting two schemes to the Commission, one with coloured voters on the roll and another from which they had been omitted.⁴⁸ Although the Commission's loading of 10,5 per cent on the province's twenty-one urban constituencies and unloading of 7,2 per cent on the thirty-three largely rural constituencies⁴⁹ closely approximated the U.P.'s recommendations in both reports,⁵⁰ altered boundaries left the Party in the province with only twenty-three, instead of its previous twenty-seven safe seats.⁵¹

Despite the Commission's recommendations resulting in a weakening of the U.P. position in at least three of the country's provinces,⁵² English-language newspapers were surprisingly, or perhaps contrivly, positive in their assessment of the final report. A leader in *The Star* noted:

"Our general impression is that the Commissioners have acquitted themselves of an exacting task with success. The fact that no political party can claim any particular advantage, on balance, from the new demarcation is one proof of this. Another indication is that in the delicate work of loading and unloading constituencies ... the Commission has shown a conspicuous measure of restraint and moderation."⁵³

The U.P. had to confront sober reality however when it set about quantifying the challenge that faced it in the approaching election. By the end of January 1953 it had arrived at its assessment:⁵⁴

	Safe U.P.-L.P.	Marginal	Marginal Minus	Save N.P.
Cape	23	8	6	17
Transvaal - Urban	21	14	8	4
- Rural	0	4	5	12
Orange Free State	0	0	0	13
Natal	13	1	1	0
South-West Africa	0	2	1	3
	57	29	21	49

With only 57 safe seats and the support of the 3 Natives' Representatives on which to count, the opposition parties needed to win at least 22 of the marginal seats in order to secure a bare majority in the next parliament. Neither the effect of the new delimitation, nor the turn of political events during the previous year offered any prospect that such a degree of success could be achieved.

48. U.P.A.: U.P., Cape File, 1952 Delimitation Memoranda, Memorandum to Cover Plan of Delimitation for the Cape Province, n.d.

49. *Government Gazette Extraordinary*, Vol. CLXXI, No. 5009, 20-2-1953.

50. U.P.A.: U.P., Cape File, 1952 Delimitation memoranda, Memorandum to Cover Plan of Delimitation for the Cape Province, n.d.

51. *The Forum*, January 1953, p. 5.

52. There was no new delimitation in South-West Africa.

53. *The Star*, 15-1-1953, p. 10.

54. U.P.A.: U.P., Central Head Office, Central Executive Committee, Classification of Constituencies, 31-1-1953.

While the Torch Commando had undoubtedly revitalised the U.P.'s voluntary organisation, its utility beyond that particular purpose had been limited. Its members, and the issues which aroused them, had inhibited the organisation's role as a non-partisan defender of constitutionalism. The N.P. had been easily able to paint it as a mass-ex-servicemen's movement established to oppose a mass Afrikaner movement. The Torch Commando's role had thus by its very nature been limited to mobilising the traditional opposition vote. But even here the U.P. had suffered as a consequence of the separate agendas of a number of the Torch Commando leaders. The N.P. was, for example, able very effectively to use the Torch Commando led separatist movement in Natal for what it was: a vote of no-confidence in the U.P.'s ability to win the next General Election. The Torch Commando's National President, Louis Kane Berman's attempt to adopt a more militant opposition posture at a time when the A.N.C. was soon to launch the Defiance Campaign,⁵⁵ enabled the government to portray the U.P. as unfit to defend white interests.

It was considerations such as these which had played a major role in prompting the U.P., in an attempt to exert greater control over its ally, to agree to the formation, in April 1952, of the United Democratic Front (U.D.F.). But this Front had also involved the U.P. in a formal and politically embarrassing alliance with the L.P., a party which had since shedding its right wing in 1946, moved considerably to the left of the white political spectrum. The necessity for the L.P.'s inclusion in the alliance lay not only in the fact that it controlled the balance of power in at least eight Witwatersrand parliamentary constituencies,⁵⁶ but also because the Torch Commando executive had made support for the L.P. cornerstone of the Commando's policy. It had done this because it had become convinced that while Afrikaans-speaking working-class voters could never be persuaded to vote U.P., they might be persuaded to vote L.P.⁵⁷

But that the U.D.F. could avail the U.P. little became evident on 25 June 1952 when, in the Wakkerstroom parliamentary by-election, the N.P., in retaining the seat, received 4,9 per cent more votes than it had attracted in the 1948 election.⁵⁸ Summing up the reasons for the magnitude of the defeat, a U.P. memorandum stated that the N.P. was "able to lump as into a 'bonte opposisie' with the Torch Commando, the Labour Party, Kahn, Sachs, Carneson (and) the African National Congress ... and they claimed that the issue was, 'die siel van die Afrikaner' against all this."⁵⁹ Unable adequately to propagate the Party's line in rural constituencies because of the financial collapse in 1950 of the U.P.'s Afrikaans-language press,⁶⁰ the U.P. Executive at a 17 July meeting felt it had little choice but to move the Party's platform even closer to that of the N.P. The need to regain the support of Afrikaans-speaking voters, it was felt, "should condition all United Party propaganda."⁶¹ To this end, since N.P. propaganda portrayed the U.P. as favouring race equality, the Party's propaganda "should, therefore, be dominated by the aim of countering this line."⁶² For a not unrelated reason, it was also decided to pursue a "more specific anti-communist line."⁶³

These decisions had an immediate impact on the Executive's perception of the U.P.'s relationship with its United Democratic Front allies. Not only had they proved to be an electoral liability, but the constitutional crisis surrounding the coloured franchise issue, ostensibly the very *raison d'être* of the alliance, had not proved

55. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', p. 314.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 119.

57. Interview: L. Kane Berman.

58. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', p. 324.

59. I.N.C.H.: J.G.N.S., File 1/19/9/6/1, The Wakkerstroom By-Election, 15-7-1952.

60. Publication of both the Pretoria based *Die Volkstem* and the Cape Town based *Die Suiderstem*, had, due to declining circulation and financial mismanagement, been suspended during the course of 1950. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', pp. 214-222.

61. U.P.A.: U.P., Central Head Office, Minutes and Correspondence 1951-1973, Leader's Executive, 17 - 19-7-1952.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

to be a "vote catcher." A subsequent secret initiative by Strauss, H.F. Oppenheimer and Sir De Villiers Graaff effectively to absorb the Torch Commando by establishing a new party, the United National Democratic Party,⁶⁴ failed both because the Torch Commando wanted more "than a new signboard outside the old firm,"⁶⁵ and because once the initiative had become known, there was a consensus of opinion in the U.P. that rural supporters would be alienated.⁶⁶ This latter feat aptly illustrated the Party's difficulty, for the original initiative had been an attempt to prevent just such alienation from taking place. In a dilemma the Party fell back on a scheme to extend on a national scale Joint Election Committees which had been established with the Torch Commando in the Cape Peninsula and on the Witwatersrand.⁶⁷ At the same time it tried to depoliticise the Commando by requesting its Executive to stop issuing propaganda material and by attempting to secure the resignation of Kane Berman.⁶⁸ As part of its strategy the U.P. also distanced itself from the L.P. Despite Torch Commando protests the L.P., by being excluded by the U.P. from the Joint Election Committees, was in effect excluded from the U.D.F.⁶⁹ This did not however prevent the two parties arriving in November 1952 at a mutually convenient agreement to prevent three-cornered election contests on the Witwatersrand.⁷⁰

The L.P., which had a much narrower and more clearly defined support base than either the U.P. or the Torch Commando, had been able to adopt a much more consistent opposition than either of the other two to the N.P. government. This was particularly apparent in January and February 1953 when the U.P. as a result of the decisions taken by its Executive in July 1952 de-emphasised its support for the retention of the coloured common roll franchise and came out in support of the Public Safety Bill and the Criminal Law Amendment Bill. Publicly exposing the deep fissures in the U.D.F., the Torch Commando rejected the latter Bill though it did accept the principle of the former.⁷¹ The L.P. not only opposed both Bills but had also, in response to the Defiance Campaign, further liberalised its race policy.⁷²

At the dissolution of the Tenth Parliament on 25 February 1953 the N.P. held a majority of 13 seats over the U.P., L.P. and the 3 Natives' Representatives.⁷³ Nomination day, on 14 March, saw 20 unopposed nominations, 18 U.P.⁷⁴ and 2 N.P.⁷⁵ 276 candidates were nominated in the remaining 136 Union and S.W.A. seats. Of this total 135 represented the N.P., 130 the U.P.⁷⁶, and 6 the L.P. There were 5 Independent candidates as opposed to 55 in 1948.⁷⁷

The N.P. nominated candidates in every seat in the Orange Free State and S.W.A., in 47 of the 54 Cape seats, in 59 of the 68 Transvaal seats and, much to the U.P.'s surprise, in 12 of the 15 Natal seats.⁷⁸ The U.P. thus conceded only 19 seats as opposed to the 48 conceded by the H.N.P./A.P. in 1948.⁷⁹

The U.D.F. nominated candidates in all but two constituencies: Malan's Piketberg

64. J.W. Jagger Library (hereafter J.W.J.), U.C.T., Cape Town: War Veterans' Torch Commando Papers (T.C.P.), Findings of a Meeting held on Monday, 18-8-1952.

65. *Ibid.*, Essential Requirements in Event of Amalgamation, n.d.

66. U.P.A.: U.P., Central Head Office, Central Executive Committee, Vol. I, No. 328, Meeting, 28-8-1952.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', pp. 374-375.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 390-399.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 406.

73. The term of office of the Natives' Representatives was not affected by the dissolution of the House of Assembly.

74. Eight in the Transvaal, 7 in the Cape Province and 3 in Natal. *The Star*, 14-3-1953, p. 1.

75. J.W.J.: H.G. Lawrence Papers, The South African Parliamentary Elections: A General Survey, 6-4-1953.

76. There were no Torch Commando Representatives.

77. I.N.C.H.: V.L. Shearer Papers (V.S.P.), Press Digest No. 11. Of the 5 Independents, 4 were Independent Nationalists and one a liberal. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.* 3 H.N.P./A.P. candidates had been nominated in Natal seats in 1948.

79. K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa*, p. 56.

seat and Gordonia, the seat held by J.H. Conradie, Speaker of the House of Assembly.⁸⁰ While the latter's seat was not contested in deference to the parliamentary convention that the Speaker should refrain from party political activity,⁸¹ and to have contested Malan's seat would have exposed the U.P. to ridicule, the overall strategy was motivated by a number of considerations. The first was to tie down the N.P. organisation as much as possible.⁸² The second pertained to the unresolved question of the future of the coloured franchise, for it was an attempt "to obtain a true reflection of anti-Government strength in view of the statement by the Prime Minister ... that the nation would be asked to decide on the constitutional issue."⁸³

Surveying the opposition's prospects, O.A. Oosthuizen, who until the beginning of 1952 had been the U.P.'s General Secretary, wrote in his diary:

The Nats are very confident and so is a substantial section of our Party. As for myself? A miracle can save us but not we ourselves. Reasons: 1) No Government has ever been removed under two periods in office. 2) The Nats have an unbroken record of growth and Party progress since they took office. No reverses.⁸⁴

Despite an assurance by Strauss at the October 1952 Cape U.P. Congress that in the event of an Opposition election victory there would be no Torch Commando representatives in the U.P. Cabinet,⁸⁵ a Torch Commando delegation met De Villiers Graaff just prior to the election to discuss the possibility of such representation. Echoing Oosthuizen's view, De Villiers Graaff dismissed the matter as being entirely academic for he considered that the United Democratic Front stood no chance at all of winning.⁸⁶

On 15 April the electorate, 35 000 of whom were generally assessed as floating voters,⁸⁷ went to the polls. The full results which appeared two days later entirely validated Oosthuizen's and De Villiers Graaff's gloomy prognosis. The N.P. won 8 additional seats,⁸⁸ bringing its total of members in the House of Assembly up to 94. The U.P. lost 7 seats,⁸⁹ its number of members in the House sinking to 57. The L.P. lost one seat, bringing its total down to five.⁹⁰ The N.P.'s majority therefore rose from 13 to 29.⁹¹ Particularly noteworthy, as had been the case in the 1948 General

80. *The Star*, 14-3-1953, p. 1.

81. *Rand Daily Mail*, 3-1-1953, p. 5.

82. Interview: V. Raw.

83. *The Star*, 5-1-1953, p. 2.

84. U.P.A.: O.A. Oosthuizen Papers, Typed Version of Diary, 15-3-1953.

85. *Cape Argus*, 16-10-1953, p. 8.

86. Interview: Sir De Villiers Graaff.

87. *Die Transvaler*, 13-4-1953, p. 1.

88. The N.P. gained 9 seats from the U.P./L.P. but the U.P. regained Vereeniging from the N.P. I.N.C.H.: V.S.P., Press Digest No. 15, 23-4-1953.

89. Two U.P. Senators had resigned from the Senate in order to contest Assembly seats. Both lost. The Senate vacancies were subsequently filled by N.P. candidates. *Die Transvaler*, 30-4-1953.

90. John Christie, leader of the L.P., died on 10-4-1953. There was therefore no election in his Johannesburg City constituency. The L.P. won the 24-6-1953 by-election. B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre verkiesings in Suid-Afrika, 1910-1976* (Pretoria, 1977), p. 345.

91. House of Assembly Representation after the 1953 General Election (former strength in brackets):

	N.P.	U.P.	L.P.
Cape	30(28)	24(27)	-(-)
Transvaal	43(37)	22(25)	2(4)
Natal	2(3)	11(11)	2(2)
Orange Free State	13(12)	-(1)	-(-)
S.W.A.	6(6)	-(-)	-(-)
TOTALS	94(86)	57(64)	4(6)

Johannesburg City vacant. The 3 Natives' Representatives have been excluded. *Cape Argus*, 18-4-1953, p. 7.

Election, was its increased representation in urban areas. The N.P. increased its number of representatives from 8 to 13 on the Witwatersrand, from 6 to 7 in Pretoria, and from 1 to 3 in Cape urban seats.⁹²

The Total Union and S.W.A. electorate at the time of the election numbered 1 623 424. Those registered in the 135 seats actually contested numbered 1 383 138.⁹³ Of the latter 1 218 435 or an impressive 88 per cent voted.⁹⁴ In S.W.A. the percentage poll was a remarkable 91,4 per cent.⁹⁵ This turn-out can be ascribed not only to a politically aroused electorate, but also to the effectiveness of the electoral machinery of both major parties.

The large number of postal votes submitted was also a tribute to the efficiency of both the U.P. and N.P. The latter was the prime beneficiary. Valid postal votes in the 1948 election amounted to 4,26 per cent of the total vote; in 1953 the percentage was 13,8.⁹⁶ In 1948 the U.P. won 8 seats, the A.P. 1 seat and the H.N.P. 10 seats where the valid postal vote was larger than the majority of the winning candidate. In 1953 the U.P. won only 4 such seats while the N.P. won 34.⁹⁷

Of the total vote in the 135 contested seats, the U.P., L.P. and U.N.S.W.P. drew 610 268 votes while the N.P. attracted 598 357. The opposition parties thus received 11 911 more votes than did the N.P. in these seats.⁹⁸ Assuming that 87,9 per cent, the Union poll, of the 238 111 voters in the uncontested seats would have voted had they been able to then 189 366 votes can be allocated to the 19 uncontested Democratic Front seats and 19 933 votes to the two uncontested N.P. seats. Allowing the N.P. 1 500 votes per seat in the former and 2 000 per seat for credit of the Democratic Front in the latter,⁹⁹ provides a total of 765 113 Union votes for the Democratic Front and 629 485 Union votes for the N.P. The Democratic Front majority of 135 628 votes is reduced to 132 344 if the votes cast in S.W.A. are included.

Taking all of the Union and S.W.A. contested and uncontested seats into account, it can realistically be assumed that the U.D.F. was supported by about 54,9 per cent of those who either voted or would have cast their vote.¹⁰⁰ On this basis the Democratic Front won one Union seat for every 12 341 votes cast in its favour while the N.P. won each of its Union seats at a cost of 7 153 votes. In S.W.A. the U.N.S.W.P. drew 42,7 per cent of the vote but won no seats.

Although the system of loading and unloading contributed as it had done in 1948 to the distortion between electoral support and parliamentary representation, the effect was limited. Of the Democratic Front's total of 62 seats,¹⁰¹ 45 had over 11 000 registered voters compared with 25 N.P. seats in the same category. At the

92. I.N.C.H.: Pamphlet Collection, *Verkiesing van 1953*, pp. 51-54.

93. K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa*, p. 62. S.W.A. voters have been included in the total.

94. *Ibid.* In 1948 the percentage poll was 80,3 per cent. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

95. S.W.A.: Votes received

N.P.	13 305
U.N.S.W.P.	10 021
N.P. majority	3 284
N.P. percentage of total vote	57,3 per cent
1950 N.P. majority	2 401

P.S. Joubert, 'Partypolitieke groepering in Suidwes-Afrika sedert 1915' (M.A. manuscript, U.O.F.S., 1959), p. 284.

96. G.M. Carter, *The politics of inequality*, p. 147.

97. *Ibid.*

98. The balance of the votes was made up of 8 520 spoilt papers and 1 290 votes drawn by the Independents. K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa*, p. 62.

99. I.N.C.H.: J.G.N.S., File 1/8/1/1. A survey of Voting in the 1953 General Election, n.d.

100. The increase in support from the 53,3 per cent drawn by the U.P./L.P. in 1948 was very likely due to the absence of splinter parties in the 1953 General Election and to a decline in the number of Independent candidates.

101. Heard, excluding Johannesburg City, lists 61. K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa*, p. 67. Johannesburg City had 10 576 registered voters.

other end of the scale, 42 of the N.P.'s seats had fewer than 10 000 voters compared with only 6 Democratic Front seats in that category.¹⁰² Taking only contested seats into account, the N.P. won 30 of the 65 loaded constituencies while the U.D.F. won 9 of the 65 unloaded constituencies.¹⁰³ The ratio between the average quotas in these loaded and unloaded constituencies was 11 493:9 589 or 119,85:100. However, illustrating the limited effect of loading and unloading, the ratio between the average quotas in the Democratic Front loaded and unloaded constituencies on the one hand and the N.P. loaded and unloaded constituencies on the other, was only 11 188:10 210 or 109,57:100.¹⁰⁴

But, extracting the "victorious" votes and the "defeated" votes for each party in the contested seats, reveals a different picture:¹⁰⁵

	Democratic Front	N.P.
Victorious Votes	51,1%	80,5%
Defeated Votes	48,9%	19,5%

These figures show that the concentration of Democratic Front electoral support in the coastal urban areas and on the Witwatersrand was a major handicap in the alliance's quest for office. This phenomenon is revealed even more clearly when the estimated and actual votes for the Democratic Front and N.P. in 41 Democratic Front seats in five urban centres are compared:¹⁰⁶

Democratic Front votes	=	320 364
N.P. votes	=	<u>85 577</u>
Democratic Front majority votes	=	<u>234 787</u>

Geographically concentrated, the surplus Democratic Front votes were rendered ineffective during the next delimitation in making less vulnerable the thin surplus of 65 619 votes in the 21 U.P. constituencies in the rural and peri-urban areas.¹⁰⁷ With its support concentrated in predominantly urban constituencies containing primarily English-speaking voters, it became even more apparent than before that the only avenue to power for the U.P. lay via whatever inroads it could make into the Afrikaans-speaking electorate.¹⁰⁸

The predominantly Afrikaans-speaking coloured electorate could avail the U.P. little. In an 87,9 per cent poll, 42 059 coloured people voted or would presumably have done so had they not been registered in uncontested seats.¹⁰⁹ Of this total about 17 319 were registered in rural constituencies, where the vote was equally split between the parties, and about 24 740 were registered in urban constituencies. In the latter 90 per cent may have been expected to vote U.P.¹¹⁰ On this basis it may be calculated that the U.P. would have received 30 926 coloured people's votes while the N.P. would have attracted 11 134. In the contested seats the U.P.

102. *Ibid.*

103. U.P.A.: J.B. Bowker Papers, Memorandum on the 1953 Election, 20-1-1958.

104. *Ibid.*

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.* Cape Town, 13; Port Elizabeth, 3; East London, 3; Johannesburg, 14; Durban, 8. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.*

108. Percentage of Urban and Rural White Population who were Afrikaans or English-speaking.

	1951	
	<u>Afr.</u>	<u>Eng.</u>
Urban	50,5	45,8
Rural	81,9	15,8
Total	56,9	39,3

K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa*, p. 227.

109. I.N.C.H.: J.G.N.S., File 1/8/1/1. A Survey of Voting in the 1953 General Election, n.d. (Figures have been modified).

110. *Ibid.*

won only one, Hottentots-Holland, with a majority smaller than the total number of coloured voters registered in the constituency.¹¹¹

Afrikaans-speaking whites constituted about 61 per cent of the total white population of the Union. But because so many English-speakers were aliens or resided in urban areas where registration was not as comprehensive as it was in rural districts, Afrikaans-speakers, in fact, constituted about 66,3 per cent of the electorate.¹¹² On this basis, and estimating that about 5 per cent of the English-speaking electorate voted for the N.P., 305 883 white Afrikaans-speakers, or just over one-third of the white Afrikaans-speaking electorate, may be assumed to have voted for the Democratic Front.¹¹³

A feature of the election was the important role played by the younger voters. Allowing for deaths, about 215 000 white South Africans, about one-third of whom were English-speaking, turned 21 between May 1948 and early 1953.¹¹⁴ On an 87,9 per cent poll 189 000 voted or would have voted in 1953.¹¹⁵ Acknowledging, despite the establishment of a Junior U.P. in 1949,¹¹⁶ that the Party had failed to capture the imagination of younger voters, U.P. analysts assumed that approximately 85 per cent or 107 100 of the 126 000 Afrikaans-speaking whites between the ages of 21 and 26 voted or would have voted for the N.P.¹¹⁷ To this total they logically added 15 per cent, or about 9 500, of the equivalent English-speaking electorate's votes. On these assumptions they credited 116 550 of the 189 000 votes in the 21 to 26 years old category to the N.P.¹¹⁸ On a Union-wide basis this would have meant an increase in N.P. support between 1948 and 1953 of 777 votes per constituency. The corresponding Democratic Front increase would have been 483 votes.

However, a conservative estimate could be made that in 1953, 60 per cent of the young Democratic Front supporting vote, as opposed to 20 per cent of the young N.P. supporting vote, was tied up in uncontested seats. On this basis N.P. support would have increased by 691 votes per constituency between 1948 and 1953 in the 135 contested constituencies, while the corresponding Democratic Front increase would have been only 215.¹¹⁹ The differential is not inconsiderable when it is considered that it constituted 4,6 per cent of the total vote cast in the contested seats and that the N.P. held 18 seats with majorities of between 1 and 999 votes.¹²⁰

111. D.M. Scher, 'The disenfranchisement of coloured voters', p. 377.

112. I.N.C.H.: J.G.N.S., File 1/8/1/1. A Survey of Voting in the 1953 General Election, n.d.

113. The Organising Secretary of the U.N.S.W.P. reported that German-speaking voters in S.W.A. 'het weer blokvas teen ons gestem. Die oorgroot meerderheid Afrikaanssprekendes het wel vir ons Party gestem.' U.P.A.: U.P., South-West Africa, Vol. I, Organising Secretary. U.N.S.W.P. to J.L. Horak, 1-5-1953.

Both Neuman and Stultz failed to take the underregistration of urban areas into account when they estimated the support of white Afrikaans-speaking voters for the U.P.-L.P. in the 1948 General Election at 20-25 and 18 per cent respectively.

S. Neuman (ed.), *Modern political parties* (Chicago, 1967), p. 79; N.M. Stultz, *The Nationalists in opposition, 1934-1948* (Cape Town, 1975), p. 152. A more feasible estimate of such support would be 39,5 per cent. W.B. White, 'The South African parliamentary opposition', p. 430.

114. U.P.S.: U.P., Division of Information, The Mine Workers' Union and the U.P., 1948-1954, Memorandum: How did they Vote, 3-7-1953.

115. *Ibid.*

116. By mid-1952 there were 186 branches of the Junior U.P. *Ibid.*, Central Executive, Minutes and Annexures 1953-1957, Division of Youth Affairs, n.d.

117. *Ibid.*, Division of Information, the Mine Workers' Union and the U.P., 1948-1954, Memorandum: How did they Vote, 3-7-1953.

118. *Ibid.*

119. *Ibid.* (Figures have been modified).

120. K.A. Heard, *General elections in South Africa*, p. 68.

The difficulties which the U.P. faced after the 1953 General Election were infinitely more acute than those which it had confronted in May 1948. Not only had the limitations of the direct involvement of mining, financial and industrial capital in party politics been revealed, but there was also a general perception, the rapid disintegration of the Torch Commando providing tangible evidence, that never again could the opposition electorate be mobilised to mount such a concerted effort. The result was demoralisation¹²¹ and a withdrawal of financial contributions to the U.P.¹²²

With the benefits of its structural reforms largely negated by the effects of the sharp decline in immigration from 1948,¹²³ by the Citizenship Act of 1949,¹²⁴ by the N.P.'s S.W.A. representation and by that Party's ability to manipulate white fears and dispense patronage, it became clear that only policy changes significant enough to attract the support of substantial numbers of marginal Afrikaans-speaking voters would enable the U.P. to return to power. But, isolated in primarily urban English-speaking constituencies, how could it do so and yet retain the loyalty of its existing supporters? The intractability of this problem was to cripple and ultimately fragment the Party.

121. Symptomatic of the decline in U.P. fortunes was the rapid deterioration of its Youth Organisation, the number of active branches declining, between early 1953 and October 1954, from 155 to 74. The number of dormant branches rose, during the same period, from 26 to 98. U.P.A.: U.P., Central Executive, Minutes and Annexures 1953-1957, Memorandum on State of the Youth Organisation, Oct. 1954.

122. Annual Head Office income had sunk from the approximate amount of £100 000 in 1952 to only £38 572 for the year ended 30-6-1955. Only £16 213 of the latter amount was made up of donations. *Ibid.*, Central U.P. Fund, Financial Statements for the Year Ended 30-6-1955.

123. White Immigration to South Africa, 1946-50:

	Total White Immigration	Immigrants from the U.K.
1946	11 256	7 470
1947	28 839	20 603
1948	35 631	25 513
1949	14 780	9 655
1950	12 803	5 097

J. Barber, *South Africa's foreign policy, 1945-1970* (London, 1973), p. 51.

124. The Act had the effect of preventing 48 659 British immigrants from securing S.A. citizenship had they so wished, prior to the 1953 General Election. *Rand Daily Mail*, 20-9-1952, p. 5.