

HITLERISM IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THE STRUGGLE AGAINST IT

By A. WOODWARD

THE uplift in the economy of South Africa, the considerable expansion in trade and industry derives mainly from the boom in gold-mining, the basis of South African economy.

The abandonment of the gold standard in 1932 had the effect of raising the value of gold produce in 1935 from its nominal value of £45,765,005 to the realised value of £76,532,830. It resulted in a re-starting of several old low-grade mines and the investment of large sums in opening up new mines, etc., and together with the general improvement in world trade in a boom period in the building industry, especially on the Rand, increased revenue from railways and harbours, a considerable expansion of secondary industries and an increase in the trade balance for the year.

But who are to benefit from these higher profits and increased revenues? Certainly not the diggers of gold, neither European or native. The latter constituted, in 1936, approximately nine-tenths of the workers employed in the large mines, and thus wages are approximately two shillings per day for more than 300,000 of them. Nor has benefit come to the poor whites, numbering 400,000 of the European population, driven from the land by imperialist exploitation and the agrarian crisis that still continues, a crisis which is reflected in a landed indebtedness of £100,000,000. Many of these poor whites are employed on Government relief works at from 3s. 6d. to 5s. 6d. per day, or given employment in industry, in many cases, at wages very little above the native level.

With labour disunited and badly organised,, the employers are not slow to take full advantage of this so as to prevent the workers obtaining higher wages and better conditions. However, in spite of this disadvantage, with a willingness to struggle, the workers have made slight advances in several sections of industry, i.e., transport, textiles, railways, etc. But in the gold mines the workers failed to obtain their ten per cent. increase in wages for Europeans; the owners only conceding an annual holiday with pay and a yearly grant to the Provident Fund (out of which only a fraction of the miners can ever hope to benefit). With the failure of the leadership to lead an open struggle, the owners managed to deprive the miners of any but the smallest advance to meet the rising prices and increased rents.

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The growing Fascist movement constitutes the main danger in South Africa. The Nazis have not been slow to realise the strategic importance of South Africa in their war plans and their demand for colonies. Therefore, every support is given by them to the Greyshirt Fascists—the “National Workers’ Party of S.A., who no doubt are receiving direct material aid and personal guidance from Nazi agents and spies who have become very numerous. The Greyshirts are reinforced by the Nazi organisation in South-West Africa, the former German colony. Here the Reichs-Bund, under the guidance of the Nazi Consul at Windhoek, carry on systematic terrorism against former German citizens who refuse to give support to the plans of Hitler carried through in S.W.A. This became so great that the South African Government Commission appointed to investigate the political situation was forced to admit that this terror included even assassination.

A blow has been dealt at the activities of the Nazis in South-West Africa by the Proclamation published on April 2 curtailing the political activities in S.W.A. of non-British subjects and in particular aiming to prevent Nazi activities in S.W.A. and the recruitment of British or Union subjects for the German Army or volunteer bodies.

The Greyshirt movement was started about three years ago, mainly among the poor Afrikanders and farmers. Now they feel strong enough, with a weekly paper to support them, to come out openly in the large towns and have even commenced to break up meetings. They not only attack anti-Fascist meetings, but have also attempted to break up meetings of the United Party, when prominent members of the Government spoke.

Evidently the Nazi officials in Berlin are planning a further advance. This is shown by the departure of Admiral Foerster, who sailed recently for Tanganyika to “investigate the conditions of German citizens,” after which he will also visit South-West

Africa ostensibly for the same purpose. This indicates direct interference in South African affairs since the mandate of S.W.A. is held by the S.A. Government.

The Blackshirt Fascists differ in no wise from the Greyshirts. They have the same demagogic approach to the poor-white population and the intensity of their anti-Semitic propaganda is the same. They, while pretending to differ, relying more upon support from the British Blackshirts, have raised the question of the Afrikanders being of “pure Aryan” stock. Therefore, in a critical situation these two Fascist organisations will be united unless defeated beforehand by the forces of peace and democracy. Already the Blackshirts have entered electoral fights in the last provincial elections, polling over 3,500 votes in five small constituencies. But this does not end the Fascist danger.

The base for Fascist development has been widened by the adoption of an anti-Semitic programme by the Nationalist Party Conference under the leadership of Dr. Malan. The adoption of this potentially Fascist programme by the Party which constitutes the largest of the opposition parties in Parliament is a new departure.

A series of mass meetings followed the Woodstock Conference to popularise this new platform as one of opposition to the Government’s new Immigration Bill. Malan demanded that the Bill include prohibition of Jewish immigration and the withdrawal of the Jewish language as a recognised European language for emigration purposes. He tabled a motion in Parliament demanding that Jewish persons be excluded from certain trades and professions, making it an offence to change their names, or to receive employment in any industry when other Europeans were available for work, etc. Thus the Nationalist Party creates favourable ground for the extension of the influence of the Fascists. This is a most dangerous development for the working-class movement, and indeed also for British imperialism when related to Fascist aggression in North Africa and the Mediterranean. It is worthy of note that the Cabinet Minister, Pirow, in charge of the defence forces and the railways and harbour services, together with two other Ministers, Grobler and Fourie, have made distinctly Fascist utterances, the former being in favour of the “return of Germany to Africa.”

As the C.P.S.A. pointed out long ago, there are two roads open before the Nationalist Party: either the rank and file, who constitute a large section of the poor-whites and poor farmers, put an end to Malan’s demagogy which exploits their anti-imperialist and republican sentiments, their poverty and misery, force the leadership to bring forward an organised national demand for higher wages, relief for the unemployed at trade union rates of wages, land for the landless rural population and relief for the poor farmers, etc.,

unite with all other organisations prepared to defend peace, democracy and freedom as the only way to develop the Republican movement; or the Nationalist Party will go the inevitable road to Fascism already indicated by Malan's anti-Semitic line.

The Government, taking advantage of the economic uplift to claim all the "good things" to be a result of its own policy, is subsidising agriculture and exports, thereby winning large sections of the richer farmers away from the Nationalists and influencing backward sections of the population with their demagoguery and false promises, etc.

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This whole situation confronts the Communist Party of South Africa and the forces of Labour and Democracy with the urgent task of uniting and strengthening the disunited and rather weak Labour movement.

Out of 750,000 industrial proletarians, native, coloured, Asiatic and European, not more than 100,000 are organised. Therefore a tremendous field is open to developing trade unionism among the workers, especially among the natives employed in industry.

Every effort must be made, as a first step to this task, to get an understanding between the South African Trades and Labour Council—with between 50,000 and 60,000 members—and the Cape Federation of Labour—with approximately 15,000. The aim must be to establish one national T.U. centre, and one union for each industry. Having regard to the fact that every attempt is now being made by the Government and the Chamber of Mines to split existing organisations—organising withdrawal of Afrikaans-speaking members from the trade unions and creating their own unions, creating new movements among native and coloured peoples, etc.—the immediate issue becomes the need for unity within every trade union.

A magnificent contribution to the possibility of developing the mass movement was made by the organisation of the All-African Convention. This body is very representative of the native people. Fifty-two organisations attended the Bloemfontein Conference which created the A.A.C. as a permanent organisation. The representation amounted to 206 delegates from native trade unions, the African National Congress, farmers and religious societies, sports organisations, native Advisory Boards and communities, women, teachers and progressive bodies as well as the Communist Party—all native delegates representing African people.

This national movement can be given a wide mass basis by engaging the leadership of all its constituent parts in developing the national liberation movement of the native people. This can be done around the slogan: Work and Bread, Land and Liberty! Con-

cretely carried out this means to develop the fight against the oppressive anti-native laws and taxes, using the right to elect representatives to Advisory Boards and the Representation Council in a positive way, electing only those prepared to work for raising the miserable living standards of the natives and for their democratic and equal rights as citizens. In every location, township and reserve local A.A.C. Committees elected from the people must carry through the daily work of defending the natives and must actively engage in organising natives into trade unions, and create for the A.A.C. a proletarian reinforcement.

The most tragic feature of the Labour movement is the anti-native prejudices existing in its ranks. This assists employers to engage native labour at starvation rates of wages, and reacts upon living standards in general. Demagogically the Government raises the question of a "white civilised labour policy," when the whole economy of S.A. is based upon native exploitation, there being nine natives to one European employed in gold mines, with approximately 400,000 engaged. Thus the so-called Government's white labour policy is merely an attempt to overcome the political difficulties arising from the poor-white problem, an attempt to disarm its political opponents who constantly use this problem to politically attack the Government.

Anyone who does not see this will surely fall into the trap laid for them by Generals Hertzog and Smuts. The continued employment of poor-whites, who are constantly drifting into the cities at rates of pay so low as to leave only a small margin between them and the natives, will inevitably prevent the higher-paid workers from taking full advantage of a very favourable situation, and will finally bring down wages. This can be prevented by the Miners' Union organising the natives, whom they have hitherto refused to organise, and by the South African Trades and Labour Council, as well as its affiliated unions, engaging in the task of organising natives in every industry.

Such an effort, supported by the All-African Convention, will result in raising the living standards of the natives and rob the Government and the employers of the possibility of dragging down the wage levels of the white workers.

By uniting the organised natives within the Trades and Labour Council and the A.A.C. the gulf separating the native and European workers can be bridged. The creation of fraternal relationships between these two bodies and common action upon all questions of direct interest will make it possible to smash down these prejudices and enable a real united movement to emerge.

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All the necessary conditions exist for the establish-

ment of the People's Front on a mass basis. The rising Fascist danger is growing, supported by the Trotskyist gangsters, who recently united in an effort of the Greyshirts to smash up a Communist meeting in Johannesburg. The movement must be organised of all who are desirous of peace, of preserving and extending democratic liberties and satisfying the urgent needs of the poor people and landless farmers, the movement against Fascism and the war-mongers.

The perspective for such a united movement must be to obtain a Government really representative of the people, one which will make a complete break with a policy of harbouring Nazi agents on South African soil. Such a movement would commence by demanding that the Government take immediate action to put a ban on all Fascist organisations and their activity, demanding that Nazi diplomats cease their propaganda in South Africa and terrorism in South-West Africa.

Supporting such demands, the C.P.S.A. must raise the fight for the repeal of all anti-working-class and anti-native laws, restoring the right to strike, unhampered by the Industrial Conciliation Act, giving freedom of movement and democratic rights to native people now, unhampered by the Urban Areas Act and other laws; abolishing the slave conditions of natives under the Master and Servants Act and the Pass Laws, etc.

But naturally these proposals cannot be carried through without recognising that first and foremost there must be driven out of the Government all such supporters of Fascism as Pirow, Grobler and Fourie, coupled with a demand to clean the police and armed forces of all Fascists and their supporters.

Although the Labour Party Conference went on record not to affiliate to the People's Front Movement, nevertheless the supporters of the united and People's Front are not allowing things to rest at that and are anxious to come to an agreement upon even a limited platform, without giving up the right to criticise and expose the harm resulting from the unreserved support given by the Labourists to the Government's foreign policy, which is hooked-up to the policy of the British National Government, as well as their segregationist native policy.

The best representatives of the peoples of South Africa are rallying their forces to secure from the Government a change in its external policy, a change to a policy of collective security, mutual assistance and the indivisibility of peace, the abandonment of the non-intervention farce, the restoration of the full right of the Spanish Government to defend the interests of their people, and the lifting of the blockade on the Spanish Republic.

The best representatives of the South African

people are bringing pressure to bear on the members of the Government to ensure that they demand of the National Government that it change its policy of support for Fascist States.

Can the Cabinet, which is pursuing its present reactionary policy, be given the possibility of increasing armaments? Can increased military power be placed in the hands of Pirow, who has openly declared Fascist sympathies? Where are the guarantees that they will really be used to defend the South African people? Under the present policy of Hertzog-Smuts they can be used, and most likely will be used, on the side of Fascism and against the workers. This is why people are saying in South Africa that there can be no support for the armaments policy of the Government.

The Communists explain to the South African people, particularly the Labour Party members and the rank and file of the Malan Party, that collective security, under a mutual assistance Pact embracing all democratic peoples, based on the League Covenant, constitute the best guarantee for South African defence.

A united people's front built upon such a platform can rally large masses of the people, and obtain a government that will really defend democracy, peace and freedom, a step in the direction of bread and work for all working people. Such a government would make the rich pay by taking away their swollen profits with which they will supply the needs of the poor farmers, etc. Such a government would end Fascist activity and restore democratic liberties, and would have the support of the entire people, who would also defend South Africa against Fascist aggression.

Such an approach would produce a platform around which a formidable bloc could unite, that would definitely challenge the existing reactionary Government at the next General Election.

To secure the carrying through of such a programme what is demanded is a complete cleansing of the Labour Movement of all Trotskyist agents of Fascism in the first place and of all those provocateurs, adventurists and other enemies who are now doing all possible to prevent the movement from attaining the maximum unity both industrially and politically. However, great care must be exercised in dealing with each individual case so as to differentiate between avowed enemies of the working class and those who are merely influenced by them.

All traitors, those who seek to disrupt the Labour movement, and all Trotskyists must be definitely exposed upon their concrete anti-working-class deeds committed in South Africa. It is not sufficient to point out that they constituted a "fifth column" of Fascism within the Soviet Union, as brought out

clearly at the Moscow trial of the anti-Soviet "Trotskyist Parallel Centre," and as they do in Spain, France, etc. The workers will sooner understand their acts of treachery and treason in South Africa if they are shown examples of the connections between the Trotskyists and Fascism. Thus that part

of the Labour movement sincerely prepared to fight for unity will be able to take full advantage of this very favourable situation and confront Fascism with the forces of the working class gathered together in a powerful united front—the basis for the creation of a strong anti-Fascist people's front.