

# Divided union: South African nationalist opposition from 1939 to 1943



Mikuláš Touška<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

South Africa's participation in World War II was accompanied by a specific and, to some extent, paradoxical development. The declaration of war on Germany alongside Great Britain and other dominions was preceded by a government crisis that resulted in the collapse of Hertzog's cabinet. The new coalition government led by Hertzog's long-time political rival Jan Smuts had to face strong nationalist opposition. This opposition supported by Nazi Germany was extensive but fragmented, causing it to be defeated in the 1943 elections. However, this defeat led to a paradoxical result. The ultra-conservative and fiercely anti-British politician D.F. Malan became the undisputed leader of the opposition and capitalized on his position to clinch an electoral victory in 1948.

The goal of this paper is to identify the reasons for this paradoxical development based on the analysis of both the activities of various opposition groups and personal animosities among their leaders. The analysis is based on the existing literature as well as on archival materials, in particular the reports of South African counterintelligence.

## KEYWORDS

Union of South Africa, Second World War, United Party, National Party, Afrikaner Party, James Barry Munnik Hertzog, Jan Christiaan Smuts, Daniel François Malan.

## “WHITE UNITY”

The period after 1910 until the mid-30s in the Union's political development is characterized by Afrikaners' rising influence. Although English-speaking white South Africans represented about 40 percent of the Union's white population, their impact on politics gradually declined as they focused mainly on the economy.<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that there was no “British” political party on the South African political scene that might have constituted an adequate rival to the Afrikaner nationalists.

---

1 Mikuláš Touška, Department of Global History, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Náměstí Jana Palacha 1/2, 116 38 Prague, Czech Republic, mikulas.touska@gmail.com

2 A. STEWARD, *The British Government and the South African Neutrality Crisis, 1938–39*, in: *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 123, No. 503 (August 2008), p. 948.



Afrikaner nationalism was of particular importance to South Africa's political scene. However, this concept should not be confused with *Afrikanerdom*, a complex and eclectic phenomenon that combines the Christian values of Calvinism, pride in historical traditions, the Great Trek (*Die Groot Trek*), but also the republican tradition and the fight against British imperialism and, last but not least, linguistic and cultural exceptionalism.<sup>3</sup> While *Afrikanerdom* is essentially a homogeneous category, Afrikaner nationalism takes many forms that derive from specific goals and needs. Different and often hostile groups of nationalists have habitually claimed the position of the only true representative of Afrikaner values.<sup>4</sup> By the mid-1930s, three principal streams of Afrikaner nationalism gradually formed in the South African political landscape.

The first one was represented by Louis Botha and his South African Party (*Suid-Afrikaanse Party*), whose leadership was taken over by Jan Smuts after Botha's premature death in 1919. To call this party nationalist is somewhat misleading, because while its main theme was the equality of Afrikaners with the British, its political agenda was based on the Union's position as an integral part of the British Empire. As a result, the party also appealed to a large proportion of English-speaking voters. The belief in the Union's limited sovereignty and its dependence on Great Britain's foreign policies was fully reflected in 1914, when the government led by Louis Botha supported the declaration of war on Germany, suppressed the Boer rebellion against this move, and sent South African troops to fight the Germans in German-controlled South-West Africa (currently Namibia).

James Barry Hertzog and his National Party (*Nasionale Party*) formed in 1914 represented the second form of "nationalism". Hertzog, originally a prominent member of the South African Party, left Botha's government to protest the declaration of war on Germany. The National Party led by him was purely Afrikaner, and the aim of its policy was to strengthen Afrikaners' national identity and gain greater Union autonomy. General Hertzog became Prime Minister in 1924 and remained in office for 15 long years. Although he questioned the Union's dependent position within the British Empire and was a Republican<sup>5</sup>, his policies never departed from the constitutional framework of the Union as a dominion. Despite all his efforts in the field of Afrikaner culture and language, he also respected English-speaking South Africans' rights in the constitutional and political system of the Union.<sup>6</sup>

The instability of the coalition of the National Party and the Labour Party (*Arbeidersparty*) and the impact of the economic crisis in the early 1930s led Hertzog and

3 S. UYS, *Apartheid: Opium of the Afrikaner*, Transition, No. 19 (1965), p. 14; S. DUBOW, *Afrikaner Nationalism, Apartheid and the Conceptualization of 'Race'*, in: the Journal of African History, Volume 33, No. 2 (1992), pp. 235–236.

4 See for example D. O'MEARA: *The Afrikaner Broederbond 1927–1948: Class Vanguard of Afrikaner Nationalism*, in: Journal of Southern African Studies, Volume 3, No. 2 (April 1977), pp. 157–158.

5 In the South African context, the concept of republicanism is rather different from the general understanding and refers primarily to the former Boer republics. South African "Republicans" set South Africa's full independence from Britain as the ultimate goal, which was eventually achieved in 1961.

6 K. KIRKWOOD, *The Constitutional Crisis in South Africa*, in: International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944–), Vol. 28, No. 4 (Oct. 1952), pp. 433–434



Smuts to take a radical step for their parties, forming the United Party (*Vereenigde Party*) in 1934, which completely dominated the House of Assembly. In the last pre-war elections of 1938, the United Party won a total of 111 seats out of 150. The link between the two main streams of Afrikaner politics was the recognized need for so-called “white unity”. But there was still a fundamental contradiction in their conceptions of the Union’s position in the Commonwealth.

Hertzog’s emphasis on preserving South Africa’s then current formal status, as well as the issue of the British’s position in South African politics, and, above all, the plan to connect with his biggest opponent, General Smuts, led to a rift within the National Party and the emergence of a third mainstream nationalist party in the 1930s. This split culminated after the founding of the United Party when D. F. Malan and his allies from the National Party, especially from the Cape, rejected this “great experiment”, which Malan described as a bulwark of imperialism and capitalism, and formed the opposition Purified National Party (*Gesuiwerde Nasionale Party* — GNP).<sup>7</sup> This party, with its fiercely anti-British, nationalist and Republican agenda, as substantially re-structured in the 1940s, represented the main opposition force during the war.<sup>8</sup>

## ATTITUDES TOWARDS GERMANY

The United Party was the result of a compromise, so it is understandable that there were many contradictions between the two leaders. In addition to the relationship with the British Empire, there was no unity between Hertzog and Smuts on the fundamental issue of the relationship with Nazi Germany and the Union’s position in the event of a conflict between Germany and Great Britain. Like their constituents, the two wings of the United Party were divided on this issue.<sup>9</sup>

Both Smuts and Hertzog shared sympathy for Germany to some extent, but their views were vastly different when it came to the relationship with the Nazi regime. Smuts considered Nazism the dangerous consequence of an unfair post-World War I arrangement. Although he considered the Nazi regime abhorrent, he believed in the possibility of a permanent compromise between Berlin and London, until the rest of Czechoslovakia was occupied in March 1939.<sup>10</sup> Hertzog, on the other hand, had expressed some sympathy before the war for Nazism, in which he saw the legitimate reaction of the humiliated German nation, and was unreservedly opposed to the Union’s involvement in the war between Britain and Germany. But they both realized that a possible conflict with the Third Reich would inevitably mean a conflict within the Afrikaner population, part of which made no efforts to hide its sympathy for Nazi ideology and indeed also its antipathy to the British Empire. Smuts, who had long held pro-British positions, was convinced that, regardless of the risk of

7 H. GILJOMIE, *The Afrikaners — Biography of a People*, London, 2003, pp. 408–409.

8 E. A. TIRYAKIAN, *Apartheid and Politics in South Africa*, in: *The Journal of Politics*, Volume 22, No. 4 (November 1960), pp. 684–685.

9 R. DAVENPORT, C. SAUNDERS, *South Africa, A Modern History*, London 2000, p. 343.

10 J. VAN DER POEL, *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume VI*, Cambridge 1973, pp. 139–140; 155–156.



compromising the unity of South African society, it was essential that the Union entered the war alongside Great Britain and other dominions.<sup>11</sup> One specific fact played a key role in the consideration of its position on the war. Since 1915, the Union had been entrusted with the administration of the mandate territory of German South-West Africa, and the government did not want Germany to regain this colony as a result of a compromise with Great Britain or a victory in the war.

In addition, Germany was an important trading partner for the Union. Trade had resumed in the 1920s and Germany gradually became an important market for South African raw materials exports as well as a supplier of industrial products. Already in 1928, a trade agreement was signed, supplemented in 1934 by a so-called “Barter Agreement”, which facilitated the exchange of goods between the two countries.<sup>12</sup> The fastest growing export commodity was raw wool, a product important to Afrikaner farmers. Germany then exported industrial products with higher added value to South Africa, in particular locomotives, machinery, cars and aircraft for civil transport. As regards the latter, in the late 1930s, the German manufacturer Junkers essentially became almost a monopoly supplier of aircraft for South African Airlines. The planned import of German weapons was suspended as a result of increasing tensions between Britain and Germany.<sup>13</sup> In 1938, trade with Germany accounted for 18.8 percent of Union exports and 7.9 percent of its imports.<sup>14</sup> It is therefore clear that, in view of the importance of trade between them, there was also an economically motivated interest in maintaining neutrality in the second half of the 1930s.

## NEUTRALITY CRISIS AND THE FALL OF HERTZOG'S CABINET

Great Britain expected that if it declared war on Germany, its dominions (with the exception of Ireland) would join it without delay, as they had in 1914. This was indeed important not only for reasons of a military and economic nature, but, of course, also as a symbol of the unity of the empire and its strength in the conflict that looked likely to arise. Indeed, Canada, Australia and New Zealand met these expectations and their governments, and in the case of Canada and New Zealand, also their parliaments, encountered no controversy.<sup>15</sup>

11 DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, pp. 342–343.

12 However, it was not a typical exchange of ‘goods for goods’ arrangement, but a system that guaranteed the sale of a certain volume of South African wool and other raw materials and the possibility of offsetting the receivables from these transactions against the payment obligations arising from the purchase of industrial products from Germany. This contract was then amended five times, to the extent that just before the war its value was £3.7 million. W. KIENZLE, *German-South African Trade Relations in the Nazi Era*, in: *African Affairs*, Volume 78, No. 310 (January 1979), pp. 82–83.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

14 L. L. ILSLEY, *The War Policy of South Africa*, in: *The American Political Science Review*, Volume 34, No. 6 (December 1940), p. 1184.

15 The Parliaments of Canada and New Zealand, as well as their governments, decided unanimously to enter the war, see L. ROVNÁ, M. JINDRA, *Dějiny Kanady*, Praha 2000, p. 210; *The Times* (6.9.1939).



As far as the Union's position was concerned, the issue was far more complex, and it must be said that the British government had long been somewhat naive about the possibility that the Union could remain neutral. This is despite the fact that, for several years before the outbreak of the conflict, British officials had received reports on the anti-British attitudes of a number of politicians, as well as part of the Afrikaner public, and their sympathy for Nazi Germany. As indicated above, both the government and the Union parliament were divided into two groups of about equal number on the position regarding the possible war against Germany.<sup>16</sup> MPs from the former South African Party led by J. Smuts, and supported by the Labour Party and the Dominion Party, were in favour of the declaration of war, while a faction of the United Party, led by Prime Minister Hertzog, and backed by Malan's GNP, pursued neutrality.<sup>17</sup>

After Great Britain, together with France, in response to the attack on Poland, declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939, it became obvious that the Union had to decide on participation or non-participation in the conflict. The government met on this issue on the same day. However, contrary to Hertzog's expectations, there was a serious split during the session. While the Prime Minister, with the support of five ministers,<sup>18</sup> was in favour of neutrality, the second group, i.e. a total of seven cabinet members led by General Smuts, was in favour of the declaration of war. Hence on the same day the Prime Minister informed Governor General Patrick Duncan that the government was unable to reach a compromise on the issue of war and that he would submit this issue to the House of Assembly for a vote. He was also confident that his neutrality proposal would be supported by the necessary majority, but in the event that it was not, or if the majority was tight, he would resign as Prime Minister, ask the governor to dissolve parliament and call elections. However, the Governor-General left the question of the possible dissolution of parliament for a period after the vote.<sup>19</sup>

On the morning of 4 September 1939, General Hertzog, on behalf of the government, submitted a motion to the House of Assembly to approve the neutrality policy. In its justification, it referred to the fact that the Union, as a sovereign country should only be involved in war if the conflict affected its interests. However, as the state of war between the United Kingdom and Germany concerned European affairs, the Union should remain neutral, provided that it would honour all its obligations to Britain and other Commonwealth countries.<sup>20</sup>

The leader of the opposition group in government, General Smuts, put forward an alternative proposal that obliged the government to sever ties with Germany, to reject

---

<sup>16</sup> STEWARD, pp. 953–959.

<sup>17</sup> *The Times* (5.9.1939).

<sup>18</sup> These ministers were: Minister of Finance Nicolaas Havenga, Minister of Defence and, at the same time, Minister of Trade and Industry Oswald Pirow, Minister of Railways and Ports Adriaan Fourie, Minister of Lands General Jan Kemp and Minister of Education and Minister of Native Affairs and Minister of Social Affairs Henry Fagan.

<sup>19</sup> National Archives Repository, Pretoria (NAR), Volume No. 1126, Ref. 23/800A, Memorandum — Governor General of South Africa (4.9.1939).

<sup>20</sup> This included, in particular, the functioning and defence of Simon's Town used by the British Navy in protecting the sea route around Africa.



any form of neutrality in the conflict, and to honour all obligations to Britain and other Commonwealth countries. Furthermore, the government would be obliged to take all measures to defend the Union and its interests, on the condition that military units were not deployed outside South Africa, as was the case in the previous war. The proposal was based, *inter alia*, on the view that, if the Union were to stand aside in this war, it would breach its obligations to other Commonwealth members. The moral dimension of the whole issue was included in the last point of Smuts' proposal: "The House of Assembly is deeply convinced that the freedom and independence of the Union is at stake in this conflict and that it is its true interest to oppose the use of force as a policy instrument". Since even Smuts' proposal did not foresee an active deployment of the armed forces, the dispute was conducted on an ideological level rather than on practical issues.<sup>21</sup> However, as subsequent developments showed, the Union gradually became more involved in the war effort alongside Britain and its allies than Smuts' proposal had anticipated.<sup>22</sup>

The lengthy and tumultuous discussion of parliament resulted in a vote in which the House supported the declaration of war. The pro-British group, led by General Smuts, won by a tight majority of 13 votes. Only 66 United Party MPs supported by all Labour Party and Dominion Party representatives voted in favour of Smuts' proposal.<sup>23</sup>

General Hertzog tried to salvage the situation by appealing to the Governor General's office immediately after the vote and requesting the dissolution of the House on the grounds that the vote did not reflect the public's will. Sir Patrick postponed his official decision until the following morning, however it was obvious that the dissolution of the House resulting in a general election was not in the British government's interest. For this reason he told Prime Minister Hertzog that should general Smuts be able to form a new government that would gain confidence in the House of Assembly, he would not dissolve the House. Immediately after the meeting, the Governor General met with Smuts who asked him for a mandate to form a new coalition government supported by the Labour Party and the Dominion Party. The Governor General promptly complied with this request and informed General Hertzog of this fact the following morning in a letter.<sup>24</sup> Hertzog had no choice but to tender his resignation, which was accepted immediately after the creation of Smuts' first war cabinet on 6 September. From that day on, the Union was also at war with Germany.<sup>25</sup> Winston Churchill (then the First Lord of the Admiralty) demonstrated the relief that

21 NAR Volume No. 1126, Ref. 23/800A, Memorandum — Governor General of South Africa (4.9.1939), Continuation of Memorandum of 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939 — Governor General of South Africa (6.9.1939).

22 During the war, South African Armed Forces played an important role during various campaigns in Somalia, Ethiopia, North Africa and Italy.

23 NAR Volume No. 1126, Ref. 23/800A, (4.9.1939), Continuation of Memorandum of 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939 — Governor General of South Africa (6.9.1939).

24 *Ibid.*, Annexure A

25 *Ibid.*, Annexures B — E, Telegram — From Governor General for His Majesty the King (6.9.1939); NAR, Volume No. 1126, Ref. 23/800A, Order of Precedent of Cabinet Ministers, P.M. 92/22/3 (11.9.1939); Proclamation No. 197, 1939, Department of the Prime Minister and for External Affairs — Notice No. 1344, (6.9.1939).



certainly prevailed on the part of the British government in his telegram to General Smuts the following day, when he stated: "I rejoice to feel that we are once again on commando together".<sup>26</sup>

The dramatic developments around the vote to declare war marked the end of "white unity" whose main instrument had been the (now divided) United Party. Thus, the Union entered the war in a situation where both white South Africans and political representation were divided into two almost equal groups. Moreover, the anti-war camp may have had a legitimate feeling that the declaration of war on Germany and the formation of a war cabinet led by General Smuts had been unconstitutional, because there were certainly reasons for the dissolution of the House.<sup>27</sup>

The epilogue of the vote on neutrality was a parliamentary debate on 1 April 1940. General Hertzog accused Smuts and other members of the last pre-war cabinet of violating an alleged agreement that the Union would remain neutral in the event of war in Europe. He claimed that on 19 September 1938, he had formulated a memorandum which he had discussed with General Smuts, Finance Minister Nicolaas Havenga and Defence Minister Oswald Pirow, who had allegedly expressed their agreement with it. Thereafter, General Hertzog had allegedly had the memorandum approved by the cabinet at a government meeting on 28 September 1938, which dealt with the Sudetenland crisis. Both Smuts and the other members of the pre-war cabinet (R. Stuttaford, D. Reitz, and H. G. Lawrence) rejected these claims. General Hertzog had subsequently eased and relativized his accusations by stating that the proposed neutrality was approved by the cabinet tacitly in late September 1938 and he assumed that this consent was still valid in early September of the following year.<sup>28</sup> This debate may seem to have been pointless, but it illustrates Hertzog's relentless efforts to end the Union's participation in the war.

## HERTZOG'S EFFORTS TO END THE WAR

Thus, the Union entered the war against Germany in a very difficult position. Union Defence Forces (UDF) were in a disappointing state.<sup>29</sup> The government also had to take a number of economic and security measures, which were certainly not popular. However, in the autumn of 1939, the opposition to the war among South Africans was not as strong as the nationalists could have hoped for in the light of a close September parliamentary vote. Public opinion of the white population was essentially on the government's side. According to official estimates, around half of Afrikaners and the vast majority of English speakers (in total representing around seventy percent of South Africans of European descent) supported participation in

26 Churchill was most likely referring to his joint work with General Smuts in the War Cabinet during the First World War, VAN DER POEL, p. 191.

27 ILSLEY pp. 1181-1182.

28 VAN DER POEL, pp. 190-191.

29 At the outbreak of war, the ground forces had only 3,300 men, there was a deficit of 39,000 trained reserves, and the Air Force had only five modern aircraft imported from Britain, see J. MERVIS, *South Africa in World War II*, Johannesburg, 1989, pp. 7-9.



the war.<sup>30</sup> Regardless of the support of public opinion, the war cabinet had to pass two tests of the coalition's strength in a vote in the House of Assembly.

Despite his defeat in the vote on neutrality in September 1939, General Hertzog still believed that he could reverse the situation. Therefore, on 24 January 1940 he submitted to the House a draft of the following resolution: "The Chamber of Deputies is of the opinion that the time has come for the war with Germany to end and peace to be established". As expected, Prime Minister Smuts put forward an alternative proposal that the Union should remain in the war that Germany had begun and was continuing, with a unyielding disregard for international law and that the Union would seek peace, but not on a separate basis. Both arguments were very similar to those made by the opposing sides in September the year before.<sup>31</sup> However, not all opposition MPs agreed unreservedly with what General Hertzog presented, in particular a number of them did not identify with his open support for Adolf Hitler. The parliamentary debate was very emotional, with nationalist MPs accusing General Smuts of destroying "white unity", forcibly suppressing opposition views and illegally interning uncomfortable people. Before the vote, the House sat continuously for more than 24 hours. Despite all of Smuts' fears and pressure from the opposition, in the vote on 27 January the House approved Smuts' proposal by 81 votes (59 votes were against), a majority much more pronounced than in September of the previous year.<sup>32</sup> The government subsequently gained sufficient support for an important legislative measure granting it some extraordinary powers and immunity, which Smuts considered extremely important.<sup>33</sup>

Another test of support for the war effort was the by-elections and elections to provincial councils in the spring of 1940. While the Nationalists retained their majority in the Cape, the other two provinces were won by United Party candidates who supported Smuts' cabinet. This election only confirmed the trend that was evident back in January in the vote on ending the war with Germany.<sup>34</sup>

The military defeat of France in June 1940 led to increased pressure from the Nationalists to end the Union's participation in the war. The government, no doubt disappointed with the course of the war so far and blaming Britain for military and political failure, realized the surrender of France would have a certain impact on the mood of the Union's population. Moreover, it was also impossible to ignore the immediate change of course in the policy of the Vichy government's relations with Germany and the United Kingdom and its allies and the related change in the situation in the French colonies in Africa.<sup>35</sup>

---

30 As mentioned above, the share between Afrikaners and English speakers was approximately 3:2, ILSLEY, pp. 1184–1185.

31 *The Star* (25.1.1940).

32 VAN DER POEL, p. 211; *The Star*, *Rand Daily Mail* (24–27.1.1940)

33 This was War Measures Act No. 13 of April 1940, which authorized the government to issue so-called war measures with the power of law without the consent of parliament, VAN DER POEL, p. 211.

34 ILSLEY, pp. 1184–1185.

35 South African National Defence Force Archives, Pretoria (SANDFA), AI GP1, Box 19 File (10) I 18A, Censorship Report (undated).





Smuts tried to find a *modus vivendi* with the opposition that would eliminate extremism from both sides and called upon general Hertzog for consultation on 13 June 1940. Hertzog however refused this offer and on 17 June addressed Prime Minister Smuts in a letter urging him to take all necessary steps to end the state of war and ensure peace for the Union.<sup>36</sup> Hertzog's arguments were understandably primarily based on recent German military successes in Europe. The war seemed to be clearly evolving to the detriment of Smuts' war time policy. Notwithstanding the fact that Smuts was aware of the critical war situation and felt a certain fatalism, Hertzog's demands were resolutely rejected.<sup>37</sup> In his rather emotional response three days later, Smuts recalled that the former Prime Minister had submitted this "disrespectful proposal" to the House in January already, and that the House had rejected it. He added that the neutrality proposed by Hertzog could not guarantee the Union's independence, just as it did not ensure the independence of Denmark, Norway, Belgium and the Netherlands. Smuts also sent a copy of his response to the press.<sup>38</sup>

It became clear that no form of co-operation between Smuts and Hertzog was possible any longer. At the end of August 1940, the former Prime Minister made a last attempt to push for an end to the Union's participation in the war in the Chamber of Deputies. This time, he also supported his proposal by submitting a petition signed by nearly 150,000 women calling for an end to the war. In his speech in the House of Commons, he compared Great Britain to a boxer who is so shaken that he cannot grasp that he has already lost the match. He claimed the Union should throw in the towel for him.<sup>39</sup> However, even this time it was the former Prime Minister who was left defeated. His motion was rejected by a majority of 18 votes.<sup>40</sup>

In December 1940, General Hertzog retired in response to the failure of his plan to unify the nationalist parliamentary opposition. This ended the former Prime Minister's efforts to change the Union's position in the war.

While Smuts was unable to find a *modus vivendi* with the opposition during this period (or later), it showed that he could rely on both United Party MPs as well as his coalition partners when voting in the House.

## EFFORTS TO UNITE THE MALANITES AND HERTZOG'S OPPOSITION

After the declaration of war on Germany and the creation of Smuts' war cabinet with the support of the Labour Party and the Dominion Party, the United Party rapidly eroded. Although Smuts officially retained the party leadership and controlled its apparatus, 37 MPs who voted against the war switched to the opposition. This group around former Prime Minister Hertzog almost immediately left the United Party and formed a new People's Party (*Volksparty*).

<sup>36</sup> VAN DER POEL, pp. 231-233.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 227-230.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 237-238.

<sup>39</sup> *The Star* (30.8.1940).

<sup>40</sup> SANDFA, UWH Box 243 file B.I.5 — Telegram to the British Government (2.9.1940); *Rand Daily Mail and The Star* (27.8. -2.9.1940).



The fragile parliamentary majority, the unsatisfactory state of the UDF, unfortunate developments on the European battlefields and the resistance of a significant portion of the public against the war, had raised understandable concerns. On the other hand, it was favourable for the Prime Minister and his allies that there was no perfect consensus between opposition groups. Smuts himself was not very concerned about a strong coalition of the opposition forces represented by Hertzog and Malan supporters.<sup>41</sup>

Both Malan and Hertzog however hoped for a reversal by voting in the House, realising that in order to exert effective pressure on Smuts' cabinet, they had to work together, preferably within a single political party. While their supporters agreed from the outset that the Union must end its participation in the conflict without delay, there were contradictions in two areas in particular. The first was Malan's programme of constitutional changes, in particular the transformation of the Union into a republic, which was promoted mainly by the well-known Germanophile and former Defence Minister in Hertzog's cabinet, Oswald Pirow. For Hertzog and his supporters, the programme was too radical, although in the long run they would probably support such change.<sup>42</sup> The second area was the question of the exclusivity of Afrikaners and their relationship with the English-speaking part of the white South African minority. Hertzog advocated linguistic, cultural and political equality between the two groups, and his programme addressed both Afrikaners and the British. This was contrary to the views of the strong wing of the radical nationalists of the Orange Free State (*Oranje-Vrystaat*), who formed an important group that D. F. Malan relied on.<sup>43</sup>

Despite these fundamental differences of opinion, both Hertzog and Malan sought to unite their followers under the wings of a single party. The merger was completed on 29 January 1940 by setting up a new opposition party under the somewhat strange name of the Reunited National Party or People's Party (*Herenigde Nasionale Party of Volksparty* — HNP). Nominally, general Hertzog was the leader of this party, but this new grouping was very unstable. Though Hertzog had experience with a similar situation, gained after the formation of the United Party, this time the opposition to him was too strong.

On 5 November 1940, the HNP Congress opened in Bloemfontein, where its programme was to be discussed and approved. From the beginning, General Hertzog faced criticism from the Orange Free State representatives, who expressed particular concern about the consequences of granting rights to English speakers, as envisaged by Hertzog's programme. In the end, Hertzog's programme was not discussed at all despite all Malan's efforts to reconcile the two camps, to which the former Prime Minister responded with his resignation. On the second day of the congress, he and several of his supporters left the congress and in December founded a new so-called Afrikaner Party (*Afrikanerparty*). After Hertzog's resignation, D. F. Malan logically returned to the position of leader of the HNP.<sup>44</sup>

41 VAN DER POEL, p. 200.

42 ILSLEY, p. 1182.

43 DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, pp. 346–347.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 347–349; SANDFA — AI GPI, Box 69 File (10) I 4 Censorship Report (10.1.1941).



General Hertzog withdrew from politics shortly after these events and in December 1940 resigned his parliamentary seat. At the end of Hertzog's political career, Smuts made a generous gesture when, on 13 December 1940 in a personal letter sent to his long-term political rival, he offered to propose to the parliament a pension for Hertzog in connection with his departure from political life.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in January 1941, parliament granted it to Hertzog as an award for almost half a century of service to the country.<sup>46</sup> General Hertzog died in November 1942.

General Hertzog's departure from the political scene was a turning point for the nationalist opposition. Despite all the peripeteia of subsequent developments, the HNP, led again by D. F. Malan, established itself as the leading force of the Afrikaner movement. It is noteworthy that, unlike General Smuts' own assessment, this development was very accurately appraised in a January 1941 dispatch by Paul Trompke, the German Consul General in Mozambique and an important figure in German secret operations in the region.<sup>47</sup>

## MALAN AND PIROW

Further disintegration of the Afrikaner movement continued after the rift between the Malanites and Hertzog's supporters appeared. Malan's leadership was first and foremost complicated by the radical and pro-Nazi oriented opposition within the party, led by Oswald Pirow.

The programme of this group was primarily based on Pirow's pamphlet *New Order for South Africa (Nuwe Orde vir Suid-Afrika)* from 1940, which also gave the group its name. Although the original programme was inspired by the Salazar regime in Portugal, its starting point was anti-capitalist and Christian-Republican, but gradually the speeches of members of the New Order became increasingly inspired by national socialism.<sup>48</sup> But despite considerable support, especially in the Transvaal, Pirow (unlike other opposition leaders) did not question Malan's position as party leader, and Malan also tried to persuade Pirow that the New Order would only function as a platform within the HNP. But these efforts were considered empty gestures by the radical members of this opposition faction, and the ongoing tension between the New Order and Malan's HNP leadership led to the New Order's closer cooperation with the Ossewabrandwag (OB) mass movement.<sup>49</sup>

Pirow did not attempt to turn his group into a new political party, but he believed that with the support of the OB, of which he was a member, he would succeed in the elections planned for 1943. Gradually, the New Order became the group which formulated the ideology and programme of the OB.<sup>50</sup> The close connection between the

45 VAN DER POEL, p. 266.

46 The Special Pension Act No. 2 of 1941.

47 SANDFA, AI GPI, Box 69 File (10) I 44, Censorship Report (10.1.1941).

48 SANDFA, AI, GPI, Box 24, File (10) I 22, Union of South Africa Intelligence Records Bureau Summary (IRBS) No. 15 (10.2.1942).

49 SANDFA, AI, GPI, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 10 (14.10.1942).

50 SANDFA, AI, GPI, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 21 (September 3, 1942).



New Order and OB finally led to candidates of the New Order not being included in the HNP list of candidates, and to them running independently and eventually failing completely in the 1943 elections.<sup>51</sup>

## THE AFRIKANER BROEDERBOND

In analysing the Afrikaner opposition in this period, the somewhat mysterious phenomenon of the Afrikaner Broederbond cannot be avoided. The influence of this secret organization (since 1921) has so far been the subject of debate without a clear conclusion.<sup>52</sup> The prevailing and somewhat simplistic view that it was a secret part of the National Party was already held by Smuts.<sup>53</sup> However, it is clear that the phenomenon of the Bond's influence on the Afrikaner movement is more structured. The Bond was primarily an influence group that brought together Afrikaner elites to influence political concepts and coordinate the activities of diverse factions. It thus interfered with politics, the trade union movement and the Union's economy.<sup>54</sup>

It seems to be rather clear however that the Bond supported efforts to unify opposition to Smuts' war cabinet from the outset. An example of this support was the mass gathering organized by the Bond through the Federation of Afrikaner Cultural Associations (*Federasie van Afrikaanse Kultuurverenigin*) as early as on 9 September 1939. The event was welcomed as a symbol of the union of the opposition by 37 members of the United Party, headed by General Hertzog, who voted against declaring war on Germany. Notwithstanding the fact that one of the Bond's main themes was republicanism, to which General Hertzog stood at best reservedly.<sup>55</sup>

The Bond's efforts to integrate the opposition going into the 1943 elections were particularly evident in the person of one of its prominent members, Professor du Plessis, who was the inspiration behind and became the chairman of the Afrikaner Unity Committee (*Afrikaner Eenheidskomitee*). The committee was to reconcile Malan's HNP with the Ossewabrandwag and other nationalist factions. However, this effort was unsuccessful, which caused Du Plessis great disappointment and he publicly accused both Malan and the leader of the OB Van Rensburg of shattering Afrikaner unity.<sup>56</sup> But the Bond continued to influence the opposition so much that, as with the OB, the Smuts government decided to ban public servants from membership in the Bond.<sup>57</sup>

---

51 DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 351.

52 Membership in this organization was reserved for wealthy "white" Protestants who spoke Afrikaans fluently and regarded South Africa, as a nation with a unique language and culture, as their only homeland, see O'MEARA, p. 164; GILIOMEE, pp. 420–421.

53 VAN DER POEL, p. 499.

54 O'MEARA, p. 186.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 175–176; DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 346.

56 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 15 (10.2.1942); DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 352.

57 VAN DER POEL, p. 499.

## THE OSSEWABRANDWAG

A special chapter of the opposition to Smuts' war cabinet consisted of non-parliamentary nationalist groups and movements. Although the principal objectives of these groups, i.e. the defence of Afrikaner values, the cessation of participation in the war and the establishment of a republic independent of Britain were identical to those of Malan's HNP, they differed in their methods of achieving these objectives. The general scepticism of these groups towards traditional democratic forms of parliamentary struggle was crucial to their choice of methods.<sup>58</sup>

Among these groups, the OB had a special position. It was exceptional in particular in its mass character; in 1941 the number of members reached approximately 300 thousand, and also in the military format of the organization, which ensured the effective management of a movement whose members associated with simple nationalist slogans, rather than a real agenda.<sup>59</sup>

The main objectives of the movement can be characterized as follows: national unity replacing a multi-political party system with a concept called *volkseenheid*, ending participation in the war and declaring a republic.<sup>60</sup> The *volkseenheid* concept gained many supporters among Afrikaners when Malan and his supporters left the National Party in 1934, after the break-up of the United Party in September 1939, and then during 1940, when a group of Hertzog supporters separated from the HNP to form the Afrikaner Party.<sup>61</sup> These events led to the rejection of the traditional arrangement of plurality of political parties and the parliamentary forms of political struggle by a large portion of Afrikaners. The Union's participation in the war on the side of Great Britain was contrary to the national interests for many of them. *Volksseenheid* was to some extent inspired by fascism and Nazism, and an important part of it was the principle of leadership.<sup>62</sup> However, support for Nazi Germany was not only at an ideological level, but also strongly pragmatic. The path to an independent republic logically led through the victory of Germany and its allies, resulting in the collapse of the British Empire.<sup>63</sup>

The OB was a very heterogeneous movement, whose members were associated by discontent rather than a positive agenda. On the one hand, there were those for whom the HNP's programme and methods were too moderate (this was especially true of members from the Orange Free State), while on the other side of the spectrum there were a significant number of Hertzog's supporters who were dissatisfied with the way Hertzog had been ousted from the HNP in 1940. In addition to the mainstream nationalists, some members of the OB were also members of extreme right pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic groups, such as the Grey or Black

58 SANDFA, IRBS No. 10 (14.10.1941); DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 351.

59 The mass character of the OB is evidenced by the fact that approximately one in three adult Afrikaners was a member of this movement at this time.

60 MARX, C.: *The Ossewabrandwag As a Mass Movement, 1939-1941*, in: *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 20, No. 2 (June 1994), p. 196.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 198.

62 GILIOMEE, pp. 434-444.

63 *Ibid.*, p. 201; DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 341.



Shirts.<sup>64</sup> With such diversity, OB members found common themes in sharing Afrikaner values and traditions (especially the Great Trek) and in the anti-British and anti-communist attitudes demonstrated at frequent mass gatherings, rather than in some structured political agenda. However, this does not mean that the OB stood outside the political arena. With its growth of membership base since 1940, it sought to create pressure on the leadership of the HNP in favour of the New Order, though the OB's leadership wanted to create the perception that the OB was a supra-party movement.<sup>65</sup> The leadership sought to combine this pressure with other non-parliamentary activities, such as mass meetings and the publication of pamphlets.

A turning point occurred in 1941, when radical leader Hans van Rensburg took the helm of the OB. He took an irreconcilable attitude towards the HNP and, in particular, D. F. Malan. Although Malan tried to find a common approach through the so-called National Committee, which would bring together the HNP and other nationalist groups, Van Rensburg very quickly rejected this proposal.<sup>66</sup> While Van Rensburg accused Malan of betraying the idea of Afrikaner unity, Malan blamed his rival for allowing the OB to increasingly become a platform for national-socialist extremism.<sup>67</sup> This claim was fairly astute. The leader of the OB had repeatedly stated that he did not believe in the effectiveness of parliamentary struggle, but in a national-socialist revolution. According to him, Nazi Germany was not a danger to the Union in the war, but the spread of communism, and in the event of Germany's defeat, he expected not Britain, but the Soviet Union, to be the victor.<sup>68</sup>

At that time, in the context of the subversive activities (even sabotage and terrorism) of certain OB components and the generally hostile attitudes of its members, the government proceeded to prohibit civil servants from OB membership. From the summer of 1941, OB activities, assemblies and training camps also became subject to more systematic attention from the police and intelligence services.<sup>69</sup>

The ban on OB membership for civil servants meant not only a major decline in membership in cities, but also the loss of essentially the only members with higher education in local organizations in rural areas, when state school teachers and civil servants had to leave the OB ranks under this regulation. The loss of civil servants and the considerable differences of opinion of the remaining members caused the relatively rapid erosion and decline of the OB. Van Rensburg oriented the movement completely pro-Nazi, which led to a further deterioration in relations with the HNP.<sup>70</sup> Moderate members also abandoned the OB. On the other hand some radical groups such as the Stormtroopers (*Stormjaers*) focused on violent actions, which fur-

---

64 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 13 (10.12.1941); IRBS No. 14 (16.1.1942).

65 DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 351.

66 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 13 (10.12.1941); IRBS No. 14 (16.1.1942).

67 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 15 (10.2.1942); IRBS No. 16 (17.3.1942); IRBS No. 22 (9.11.1942).

68 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 21 (3.9.1942); IRBS No. 23 (28.12.1942)

69 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 7 (15.8.1941).

70 MARX, p. 216.



ther damaged the reputation of the OB.<sup>71</sup> This, together with the absence of a clear political agenda, led to the OB losing its influence on political developments in the Union.



## GOVERNMENT MEASURES AGAINST THE ACTIONS OF THE OPPOSITION

To ensure security, the government imposed some major restrictions on the rights and freedoms of Union citizens and other persons within its territory and in the Mandated Territory of South-West Africa.<sup>72</sup> It was forbidden, among other things, to oppose or not comply with any official regulations and measures issued in connection with the war, to encourage anyone to do so, to prevent recruitment to the UDF, to spread racial hate, panic or small-mindedness. The government also restricted freedom of speech and, of course, banned the dissemination of subversive propaganda.<sup>73</sup> Officials at the Ministry of Interior and Censorship were given the power to confiscate printed materials whose contents could threaten national defence and security. The government also gained the authority to determine that membership of certain organizations was incompatible with the civil service. Any riots and other activities aimed at disrupting permitted assemblies were prohibited; any unauthorized military training was also declared illegal.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, there was a prohibition on damaging official notices and sealed notices of an official nature. In addition, the government could restrict or prohibit the movement of persons in certain areas important for the defence of the Union. Members of enemy countries were not allowed to own radio equipment, and no one was allowed to listen to enemy radio broadcasts.<sup>75</sup> Strict restrictions were placed on the possession of weapons, ammunition and explosives. Citizens of enemy states in the Mandated Territory of South-West Africa (if they were not interned) had to in principle stay only in their usual residence and their movement was subject to a special permit issued by the local police.

Offences against security measures were dealt with by the courts in a summary procedure. Breaches of security restrictions were punishable by fines of up to £200 or jail time of up to five years. Sabotage activities committed using explosives were punishable with a minimum five-year sentence. In response to growing sabotage

---

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>72</sup> For example, State of Emergency Proclamation No. 201 of 1939, National Emergency Regulation 17 of 1939, National Emergency Regulation 19 of 1939, but in particular the comprehensive regulation provided by the National Security Regulations (War Measure No. 4 of 1941).

<sup>73</sup> It is therefore somewhat surprising that the government, especially in the early period of the war, was quite benevolent to the pro-Nazi propaganda of the nationalist opposition, which is described in more detail above.

<sup>74</sup> Both the OB and some paramilitary nationalist organizations had a tradition of military camps for Afrikaner youth.

<sup>75</sup> However, the effectiveness of this ban was questionable throughout the war, and a number of Afrikaners, including those who served in the UDF, regularly listened to the broadcasts of a German radio station Zeesen.



activity, sanctions were tightened and in severe cases of sabotage using explosives, the death penalty could also be imposed in proceedings before special courts.<sup>76</sup> But the courts mostly imposed sentences rather leniently, and death sentences (if any) were commuted by grace. Given that the vast majority of offences of illegal possession of weapons or explosives and, of course, sabotage were committed by Afrikaner nationalist extremists, the government's lenience often provoked resentment among English speakers.<sup>77</sup>

The introduction of censorship and the establishment of the Office of the Chief Censor were extremely important measures at the beginning of the war. Censorship covered not only all correspondence, but also all printed material and radio broadcasting and film production.<sup>78</sup> The police and other authorities were allowed to enter dwellings without a court order, carry out inspections and confiscate printed materials.<sup>79</sup>

For all military personnel, there were detailed censorship rules, which, among other things, prohibited the use of languages other than English or Afrikaans, ordered soldiers to send any correspondence only through designated censorship officers, and also to submit to them their private diaries and notes at specified intervals. Of course, soldiers were not allowed to provide certain military information in correspondence and other materials.<sup>80</sup>

Civilians located in the Territory of the Union or the Mandated Territory of South-West Africa also had to comply with the censorship measures. It was strictly prohibited to send mail other than through the official postal service, as well as to give information whose disclosure could jeopardize the security of the Union or its war effort.<sup>81</sup> However, censors recorded a significant number of infringements of these prohibitions, in particular as regards information relating to the movement of ships in South African ports, the location of troops in the Union and their transport to areas of overseas deployment. In most cases, however, it was sufficient to send a "Warning Card" to the persons concerned.<sup>82</sup>

Censorship of correspondence was not only a tool for ensuring the secrecy of sensitive information, but also served (among other means) to monitor the mood and morale of the population and soldiers. The government was then able to respond to these findings with targeted propaganda.<sup>83</sup>

---

76 War Measure No. 13 of 1942 (Emergency Regulations that Provide for the Trial of Serious Cases of Sabotage by Special High Courts).

77 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS (1940-1943) cited from above; SANDFA, Box 23, File(10) I 21(A), Military Censorship Summary No. 48, Deputy Chief Censor Durban (25.8.1942).

78 Proclamation No. 201, 1939 — National Emergency Regulations.

79 E.g. Proclamation No. 201, 1939 — National Emergency Regulations, War Measure No. 4 of 1941, War Measure No. 55 of 1942, War Measure No. 138 of 1942.

80 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 21, File (10) I 19, Important Notice (To Troops Embarking on Ships) — Censorship and Despatch of Correspondence (5.6.1940); Important Notice — Censorship and Despatch of Correspondence (25.6.1940).

81 See the regulations cited above.

82 SANDFA, Box 23, File (10) I 21(A), Military Censorship Summaries (Deputy Chief Censor Durban 1942).

83 Various reports of military and civilian censorship cited above.

## ENEMY ACTIVITY WITHIN THE TERRITORY OF THE UNION

The opposition movement was linked to the sabotage and subversive actions of opposition groups and German covert operations within the territory of the Union during the early part of the war. The German intelligence service, Abwehr, was, of course, aware that the pro-Nazi orientation of some Afrikaner groups represented an opportunity to destabilize the Union's war effort. And the conditions prevailing for this activity in the Union at the beginning of the war were favourable to these plans.

Moreover, Nazi Germany were able to follow up on intensive propaganda and information-gathering activities from before the outbreak of the war. The main tools of Nazi propaganda in this period were the press, various associations and organizations, the activities of missionaries and various exchange programmes of students and scientists. Representatives of German firms based in the Union were also active.<sup>84</sup>

Although the danger was obvious even before the outbreak of the war, as in other areas, the Union had entered into conflict with Germany completely unprepared for counter-espionage and defence against enemy secret operations and sabotage. It is likely that the efforts to create a counter-espionage service were sabotaged by the pre-war Defence Minister Oswald Pirow, who was known for his sympathies with Nazi Germany.<sup>85</sup> After the outbreak of the war, however, the situation began to change. The war cabinet was aware of the danger that the "fifth column" of German origin in particular in the Transvaal and Orange Free State and some other areas represented a risk to the security of the Union. Its actions were aimed not only at establishing a counter-espionage service within the UDF, but also at coordinating its efforts with the police forces and the creation of local units to monitor suspicious activity.<sup>86</sup>

Logically, the first measure against the danger of subversive activity was the expulsion of German diplomats and consular officials from the Union. They, naturally, represented a major threat to the Union's internal security.<sup>87</sup> Although it was not certain until 6 September 1939 whether the Union would declare war on Germany, there had been vigorous correspondence between the government and diplomatic missions in Germany and neutral states and, of course, with the British Foreign Office since the beginning of the month, on possible action against German diplomats and consular officials.<sup>88</sup> First, however, it was essential to ensure the safe return of diplomats and staff of Union consulates in Germany in the event of

84 F. L. MONAMA, *Wartime Propaganda in the Union of South Africa, 1939-1945*, Dissertation, Stellenbosch University (April 2014), pp. 5-19.

85 K. FEDOROWICH, German Espionage and British Counter-Intelligence in South Africa and Mozambique, 1939-1944, in: *The Historical Journal*, Volume 48, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 212-214.

86 *Ibid.*, pp. 215-216.

87 SANDFA, UWH Box 279, file B.I.30, Memorandum related to Nazi Activities in the Union of South Africa (28.10.1939).

88 NAR, REF. 72/13/9, Part. 1, Various correspondence (4.-6.9.1939).



the outbreak of war. The situation became more complicated when London asked Commonwealth governments, including the Union, to carry out reciprocal measures in their countries in response to the detention of British consular officials in Germany.<sup>89</sup> Such steps would however put South Africans at risk of internment in Germany, and therefore the Union government, in an attempt to buy time, responded to this request rather evasively, even though the Union was already in a state of war with Germany by that time and had severed diplomatic relations with it.<sup>90</sup> After prolonged negotiations, all German diplomats, consular officials, employees and family members were eventually expelled from the Union, however the Union government guaranteed them safe passage to Germany via neutral countries.<sup>91</sup> From that point on, German agents with diplomatic or consular cover operated against the Union from neighbouring neutral countries, in particular from Mozambique.

From 1940, police and military counter-intelligence also began to monitor the activities of various groups that could jeopardize internal security and the undisturbed operation of the war economy. Surveillance was not limited only to subversive groups suspected of preparing sabotage operations, but also extended to all opposition Afrikaner groups, including the HNP, OB and the New Order.<sup>92</sup>

In the context of the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, various communist groups were also the subject of surveillance, but after the Soviet Union entered the war, the risk of hostilities on their part was assessed as negligible.<sup>93</sup>

Another preventive measure taken by the government of the Union at the beginning of the war was the continuous internment of unreliable persons, not only foreigners, but also Union citizens.<sup>94</sup> However, many internees managed to escape with the help of OB sympathizers among the guard personnel of internment facilities, hiding for quite a long time, and some engaged in terrorist activities.<sup>95</sup>

Even in the early period of the war, the British Imperial Staff was aware of the importance of establishing structured ties with the UDF. In the field of counter-espionage, however, this effort encountered a number of problems that seemed to have originated on the South African side. The main problem was not only that Britain's MI5 regarded the Union's counter-espionage service (both police and military) as incompetent, but it also had serious doubts about the integrity of some high-ranking officers. Among them, Colonel Coetzee, a high-ranking police officer with a clearly anti-British stance, appeared to have "excelled" in this regard, and it was subsequently discovered that he was a member of the Bond. However, despite the initial problems, an MI5 branch was established as part of a British military mission under

---

89 NAR REF. 72/13/9, Part. 1, Telegram No. 377, Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London's Minister for External Affairs, Pretoria (8.9.1939).

90 NAR REF. 72/13/9, Part. 1, Telegram No. 452, Minister for External Affairs, Pretoria's Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, London (9.9.1939).

91 NAR REF. 72/13/9, Part. 1, Declaration by J.C. Smuts (26.9.1939).

92 SANDFA, AI, GPI, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS (1941 to 1943).

93 SANDFA, AI, GPI, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 7 (15.8.1941).

94 Proclamation No. 201, 1939 — National Emergency Regulations, Article. 15.

95 SANDFA, AI, GPI, Box 24, File (10) I 22 IRBS (1941-1943).

the command of Major Webster and his deputy Major Luke. Its main task was counter-espionage and anti-sabotage activities.<sup>96</sup>

From 1940, the primary target of South African counter-espionage and MI5 was the OB and its paramilitary division the Stormjaers. Although support for Smuts' cabinet grew among the population in the early 1940s, there was a perfectly justified concern that the Axis's military successes would not only encourage nationalist opposition, but that it could also cause those Union citizens who were still on the side of the war cabinet to join the opposition. The Stormjaers' sabotage activities, which focused mainly on transport and communication infrastructure, also reinforced this concern. Moreover, there was evidence that the leader of the OB Van Rensburg was a German agent directing this sabotage activity. Sabotage and terrorist activity peaked in early 1942.<sup>97</sup> However, a number of actions were thwarted, and even in cases where the attacks had been successful, the damage done, with some exceptions, was not significant.<sup>98</sup> Yet in response to increased sabotage and terrorist activity, the government decided to tighten sentences for the perpetrators caught and even impose the risk of the death penalty.<sup>99</sup> Later, only isolated cases of terrorist attacks were reported, while others were either prevented or caused minor damage.<sup>100</sup>

The increasing frequency of violence and sabotage perpetrated by extreme nationalists led Abwehr to prepare a bold plan to assassinate General Smuts. In June 1941, the former South African boxing champion Robey Leibbrandt landed on the Atlantic Coast of the Union.<sup>101</sup> His task consisted not only in carrying out this assassination, but also in organizing terrorist and sabotage activities, including bank robberies. Leibbrandt was betrayed, however, by the head of the OB Van Rensburg, who informed the police about the presence of this German agent in the Union. His likely motivation was probably that, to Van Rensburg's mind, Leibbrandt had jeopardized the position of the OB and, by his recklessness, he could have compromised other German agents in South Africa.<sup>102</sup> Robey Leibbrandt was arrested on 24 December 1941 and along with seven accomplices brought before a court on charges of high

96 FEDOROWICH, p. 219.

97 *Ibid.*, pp. 221–222; SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 15 (10.2.1942).

98 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 14 (16.1.1942); IRBS No. 15 (10.2.1942).

99 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 15 (10.2.1942); IRBS No. 21 (3.9.1942).

100 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 25 (1.3.1943); IRBS No. 31 (23.7.1943).

101 Leibbrandt, Robey (1913–1966) was a South African heavyweight champion who represented the Union, among other occasions, in 1936 at the Berlin Olympics. He decided to stay in Germany, signed up to the Luftwaffe after the outbreak of the war and successfully completed parachute and glider pilot training. He was subsequently chosen by Abwehr as an agent for action in South Africa. After his arrest, he was sentenced to death, but General Smuts, by grace, commuted the sentence to life imprisonment. After the 1948 elections, in which the HNP won, he and other wartime convicts were released from prison. He died in South Africa in 1966, see: [http://www.leibbrandt.com/leibbrandt\\_archive/Sidney\\_Robey\\_Leibbrandt/Boeke\\_waarin\\_RL.htm](http://www.leibbrandt.com/leibbrandt_archive/Sidney_Robey_Leibbrandt/Boeke_waarin_RL.htm), [cit. 30.5.2020].

102 Van Rensburg and other officials repeatedly distanced themselves from violent actions and denied any connection between the Stormjaers and other terrorist groups. However, these statements did not seem very credible to the authorities. See, for example, the



treason on 10 July 1942.<sup>103</sup> More arrests followed, including within the ranks of the police.<sup>104</sup>

Abwehr, however, had a number of other agents in South Africa. Their number is estimated to have totalled 100. They were recruited not only from among German immigrants who managed to escape from internment with the help of OB members, but also from among other foreigners within the Union. Among them were, for example, German communists released from concentration camps, as well as members of other foreign nations who lived within the territory of the Union.<sup>105</sup> Among these alleged agents were also Czech citizens from the diplomatic corps and employees of the company Baťa.<sup>106</sup>

The activities of its agents in the Union were managed by the German intelligence service through its Consulate General in Mozambique. These operations were considered so dangerous by the British that the Special Operations Executive (SOE) even considered the assassination of German Consul General Paul Trompke.<sup>107</sup>

The tasks carried out by German agents were primarily of an intelligence gathering nature. Among other things, with the help of OB sympathizers, they provided information on the movement of ship transports, which were then used to plan the attacks of German submarines in the area. Other activities of the agents focused on propaganda and support for sabotage. MI5, like the South African authorities, attempted to intercept these agents with varying degrees of success. The activities of German agents weakened from 1943 onwards due to the weakening of OB and the suppression of militant pro-Nazi groups.

## 1943 WAR ELECTIONS

The war general elections were held on 7 July 1943.<sup>108</sup> The internal political and international situation was relatively favourable to the United Party and its allies since the opposition entered the election year unconsolidated. Pirow's New Order, like the Afrikaner Party led by Nicolaas Havenga, had finally broken with Malan,<sup>109</sup> and the

---

commission's report on the use of information provided by the authorities. SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 15 (7.2.1942) and IRBS No. 20 (23.7.1942).

<sup>103</sup> SANDFA, Box 23, File (10) I 21(A), IRBS No. 20 (23.7.1942).

<sup>104</sup> FEDOROWICH, pp. 222–223.

<sup>105</sup> SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 2 (16.4.1941).

<sup>106</sup> SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 5 (26.6.1941).

<sup>107</sup> FEDOROWICH, p. 225. Paul Trompke was in touch with a number of opposition leaders and was informed in detail of their activities. See e.g. his report cited in footnote 47.

<sup>108</sup> The term of the House of Assembly was for five years and the government had no authority to alter this term by means of statutory measures (War Measures (Amendment) Act No. 32 of 1940, Art. 3 (b)).

<sup>109</sup> Nicolaas Havenga publicly accused Dr Malan that his goal is to become the sole leader of the Afrikaner opposition rather than winning the upcoming elections. Oswald Pirow did not even run in the elections and stated that he did not believe in parliament, but only in [national socialist] revolution, see SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 31 (23.7.1943).





OB had officially taken a neutral “cross-party” position, but its leadership had been highly critical of D. F. Malan. The militant groups took a totally hostile stance against the HNP after Malan condemned their sabotage and criminal activities. Plans to consolidate non-HNP political forces and create an alternative to the HNP failed in 1943, making the Malanites the only politically relevant opposition force in the upcoming election fight.<sup>110</sup>

Germany and its allies’ position in the war deteriorated rapidly. The Allies successfully ended their campaign in North Africa and were preparing to land on Italian soil, there was also a turnaround both on the Eastern Front and in the Pacific. It was therefore more than likely that the orientation of opposition forces to an Axis victory in the war did not have a realistic basis.

As the elections approached, it became increasingly clear that this would be a duel between Smuts’ United Party and Malan’s HNP. The coalition parties — the Labour Party and the Dominion Party — focused on retaining their current seats rather than competing for new seats in the House.<sup>111</sup> Given the fragmentation of the nationalist opposition, it was almost certain that the candidates of Oswald Pirow’s New Order and the Afrikaner Party led by Nicolaas Havenga did not have much chance. Election polls were more favourable to the United Party, which, unlike the HNP, appealed to a large proportion of English-speaking voters and predicted a similar gain to that in the last pre-war elections in 1938.<sup>112</sup> As expected, the main theme of the election was the ongoing participation in the war. However, the HNP also addressed voters with more general themes, such as the future of the Union as a racially segregated state independent of Britain, the need to improve the economic and social conditions of Afrikaners, and the dangers of the spread of communism. To some extent, anti-Semitic rhetoric also emerged.<sup>113</sup> The United Party and its coalition partners, on the other hand, appealed to voters with a call to support the war effort and a moral appeal to fight Nazism.<sup>114</sup>

The opposition suffered an expected defeat in the July 1943 elections. However, its defeat was far more pronounced than even Smuts himself had expected.<sup>115</sup> Nationalists won only 43 seats, while Smuts’ United Party won 89 seats and its coalition partners the Labour Party 9 and the Dominion Party 7. The Afrikaner Party of supporters of the late opposition leader General Hertzog, led by Nicolaas Havenga, received just under two percent of the vote and remained unrepresented in the House.<sup>116</sup> The New Order’s independent candidates also failed. This gave Smuts’ new war cabinet a comfortable parliamentary majority without the need for coalition partners. An

110 DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, pp. 352–353; SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 25 (1.3.1943).

111 Rand Daily Mail (26.4.1943)

112 The Star (31.5.1943)

113 SANDFA, AI, GP1, Box 24, File (10) I 22, IRBS No. 31 (23.7.1943).

114 SANDFA, Box 241, File (10) B.I.3, Rand Daily Mail (11.6.1943, 23.6.1943), The Star 31.5.1943, 1.6.1943).

115 VAN DER POEL, p. 446.

116 More detailed results available at: [http://africanelections.tripod.com/za.html#1943\\_House\\_of\\_Assembly\\_Election](http://africanelections.tripod.com/za.html#1943_House_of_Assembly_Election), [cit. 30.5.2020].



important factor in Smuts' significant victory was, among other things, the fact that UDF members, including those serving overseas, for the first time had the right to vote.<sup>117</sup> It is assumed that the majority of voting soldiers supported General Smuts in the election.

But the results of the 1943 elections can also be seen from a different perspective than the United Party's convincing victory. The opposition lost 23 seats in the House of Assembly in total, but those losses came at the expense of the Afrikaner Party and the independent candidates of Pirow's New Order. However, the HNP, as the successor to the pre-war GNP, won 16 new seats compared to the 1938 elections.<sup>118</sup> The HNP became the only opposition political party with representation in the House of Assembly and in the new parliamentary term it pragmatically dropped the topic of ending the state of war. It turned out that breaking with radical pro-Nazi groups such as Pirow's New Order and the OB, and its shift to broader issues, particularly appeals against the dangers of communism and the racial question, were the "right" choice.<sup>119</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Smuts' first war cabinet had to deal not only with the country's complete unpreparedness for the conflict, and the failures of the anti-Hitler coalition on the battlefield, but (unlike most warring states) also with a large, though fragmented, opposition sabotaging its war effort. All Smuts' attempts to re-establish "white unity" failed.

For the nationalist opposition, this was a period marked by the diversity of individual concepts and currents and the inability to agree on a common vision. It also failed to unite, but further developments led to the consolidation of nationalists under Malan's leadership and the marginalization of its competitors. The war elections of 1943 were marked by nationalist opposition against the United Party and Smuts' policies, the end of the stage when various opposition groups focused only on political struggle, and agitation against participating in the war against Germany (of course contrary to other countries for different than pacifist reasons), which in many cases even involved embracing violent actions threatening the war effort and cooperation with Nazi Germany. The development of the war in favour of the anti-Hitler coalition however diminished the hopes of defeating Great Britain and the immediate disintegration of the British Empire. After the war elections, Prime Minister Smuts might have considered the opposition totally defeated. Its representation in the House was so weak that it did not represent a serious obstacle to his second war cabinet.

However, this period of United Party dominance lasted only one parliamentary term. Further developments have shown that not only Smuts' complacency and mistakes in domestic and foreign post-war politics, but above all, the focus of Malan's

---

<sup>117</sup> Active Service Voters Act No. 37 of 1941 and War Service Voters Act No. 34 of 1943.

<sup>118</sup> More detailed results available at: [http://africanelections.tripod.com/za.html#1938\\_House\\_of\\_Assembly\\_Election](http://africanelections.tripod.com/za.html#1938_House_of_Assembly_Election), [cit. 30.5.2020].

<sup>119</sup> DAVENPORT, SAUNDERS, p. 353.

HNP on the issue of the future form of racial segregation, the improvement of the position of Afrikaners, and the danger of the spread of communism, appealed to voters better than anti-war and pro-Nazi rhetoric. Over the next five years, the HNP consolidated its status as the main opposition force, and in the first post-war elections in May 1948, it achieved (even for Malan himself) a surprise victory. And it maintained its position as the ruling political force until South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994.

