

Abstract

This thesis deals with the development of the political environment and society in the Union of South Africa between 1939 and 1948. This period is characterized not only by close cooperation with Great Britain during World War II, the temporary suppression of nationalist opposition and the dominance of the United Party led by Jan Smuts in the South African political scene, but also social tensions and escalating conflict between the mainly Afrikaner "white" populations in the Union and non-European ethnic groups. Regardless of the fact that the Union was in World War II on the side of the victors and the sacrifice that had to bring in comparison with many other belligerent countries was relatively small, Smuts and his United Party suffered a fatal defeat in the first post-war elections in 1948. These elections not only meant the actual end of Smuts' political career and departure of United Party to permanent opposition, but also the beginning of the rule of Afrikaner nationalists for more than forty years. This paper aims to analyse the changes in society and the political climate in the Union during World War II and in the first three years after the war and the reasons that led to long-term dominance of nationalists in South Africa.

Key Words

Union of South Africa, Second World War, Union Defence Forces, Jan Christiaan Smuts, James Barry Munnik Hertzog, Daniel François Malan