

SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL PARTY

The recent defeat by a decisive majority of the Head Committee of the Transvaal National Party, of the *verkrampte* (right wing) challenge to the *verhgte* (reformist) policy of Prime Minister Botha, marks a turning point in the balance of political power within the ruling party in South Africa. It has led directly to the formation of the new Conservative Party by Dr Andries Treurnicht and 15 other rebel National Party MPs at a rally of 10,000 people in

Pretoria. For, while the specific question on which the Head Committee voted was Botha's proposal, opposed by the Transvaal leader Treurnicht and the *verkrampte* faction, to make some changes in the political position of the coloured and Indian people, the whole reformist policy of the present government was at issue. The significance of the *verkrampte* defeat, in the most powerful and, hitherto, the most reactionary of the provincial parties, is that it reflects a new balance of power which, in turn, is related to changes in class formation and alliances within the party.

The NP has been conventionally seen as a monolithic organisation representing 'the Afrikaner' in South African politics. Such a static, undifferentiated, 'ethnic' view of the NP is profoundly misleading. The NP is, in fact, no single 'national' party, but rather a loose federation of four autonomous provincial parties, each with its own distinct social basis, party organisation, membership, leadership, press, constitution and political and ideological style. The 'regionalist' or 'provincialist' struggles which have always plagued Afrikaner nationalist politics rest, in a sense, on these four distinct party structures. More fundamentally, however, this regionalism and the, often wide, policy and ideological differences between the provincial political parties are bound up with the distinct class basis of each party; it is the institutionalisation of a specific form of class alliance which differentiates each of the provincial parties. The conflict between the provincial parties has been largely expressed in ideological terms as deep differences over the definition of the interests of the Afrikaner 'volk', and in policy disputes. Acute conflicts and struggles within Afrikaner

nationalist ranks has been a constant feature of South African politics since 1948 (and indeed before). The content and form of these struggles have shifted with changes in the social bases of the various provincial NPs.

In the Transvaal the party has organised the political alliance of the (almost exclusively Afrikaans-speaking) capitalist farmers of the Province, specific strata of white workers in the mines, construction, steel and transport industries, the large Afrikaans-speaking petty bourgeoisie in the state apparatuses and the professions; and finally, emerging out of this latter group, a small class of aspirant commercial and financial capitalists organised in the *Reddingsdaadbeweging* (literally, the movement for the act of rescue). It should be stressed however that alongside the NP, Transvaal Nationalist politics was dominated by a secret society known as the Afrikaner *Broederbond*. The Afrikaner Broederbond was effectively the institution through which the specific interests of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie came to be independently organised and articulated. In both the wider Afrikaner nationalist movement in the Transvaal, and in the NP in particular, an ideology of the Afrikaner volk was articulated which stressed a particular form of anti-imperialism and the interests of the 'small man' against the large (and predominantly English-speaking) monopolies which dominated the economy.

In the Cape, by contrast, the NP had long rested on an economic and political alliance between the wealthier Afrikaner capitalist farmers, particularly of the Western Cape, on the one hand, and a small group of Afrikaner financial capitalists on the other. The Cape party was always far more openly capi-

Botha



Treurnicht



talist in orientation and sympathies than that of the Transvaal. Its interpretation of what constituted the Afrikaner volk and its interests likewise differed considerably, laying far greater emphasis on the conditions to secure stable capitalist profit. Most significantly, the Afrikaner Broederbond was not a particularly important force in Cape nationalist politics. By 1960 the process of capital accumulation was rapidly loosening the economic dependence between Cape Afrikaner finance capital and agriculture. This vital shift in the alignment offerees organised by the Cape NP, had significant effects for the politics of the Cape Party. The Cape Party began to engage in increasingly open conflict with the provincial parties on precisely the basic question of the constitution of the Afrikaner volk and the nature of its interests. In the period 1960-66, the Cape NP was regarded in nationalist circles as 'the opposition party'. This conflict raged in all the organisations of Afrikaner nationalism, from business groupings, the Broederbond (itself used as a counter force to the Cape Party), churches, to parliament and cabinet. The main differences were over labour policy, with the Cape group favouring much looser restrictions on the mobility and training of African labour. But this was in many

respects the fundamental question around which Afrikaner nationalism as a class alliance hinged — these issues touched directly the interests of all the various class forces organised under Afrikaner nationalism. Two opposing tendencies — *verligte* and *verkrampte* — emerged. The *verligtes* were in fact advocating a new interpretation of the interests of the Afrikaner volk, one which concentrated particularly on the needs of the rapidly growing group of Afrikaner capitalists.

The *verkrampte/verligte* conflict was essentially a struggle between those who wished to preserve the class alliance of 1948, an alliance dominated by the interests of farmers and the petty bourgeoisie, against those who realised that the social base of Afrikaner nationalism had shifted profoundly, and wanted to transform the ideology and politics to suit the changing class composition of the volk. The *verligte* wing began to push for more general reformist policies particularly with respect to labour and state control of the economy. The Right was demanding a maintenance of tight influx control measures, restrictions on the employment of skilled African labour, no form of recognition for African trade unions and continued state control of the infrastruc-

tural sectors of the economy. This right wing position still rested on an alliance of capitalist farmers, white workers and sections of the Afrikaner petty bourgeoisie, particularly those employed by the state.

The vote in the Transvaal Head Committee signals a rupturing of this alliance, now formalised by the founding of the new Conservative Party, and a growing dominance, throughout the National Party, of the reformist tendency which was initiated in the Cape.

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