

# “A DECENT MAN, BUT NOT VERY POPULAR”: JGN STRAUSS, THE UNITED PARTY AND THE FOUNDING OF THE APARTHEID STATE, 1950-1956

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## *Abstract*

*JGN Strauss, leader of the United Party and the official parliamentary opposition between 1950 and 1956, was a flawed politician. His aloofness and inability to suffer fools meant that he lacked the popular touch, making it impossible for him to gain popularity. And yet, he never lacked courage and integrity. He was appalled by the ruthlessness of the National Party, especially its disregard for the rule of law and the entrenched clauses in the constitution protecting the Coloured franchise on the common voters roll, in creating the apartheid state. Against the wishes of a significant section in his own party he confronted the NP on these issues. A palace revolution in November 1956 led to his removal as leader of the opposition. And yet, despite the humiliating end to his political career, and the subsequent perception that he was a failure, Strauss was a shrewd and able politician who under challenging circumstances profoundly influenced white parliamentary politics.*

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**Slutelwoorde:** JGN Strauss; Verenigde Party, Kleurlingstemreg; grondwet, Nasionale Party; apartheid; progressiewes; sir De Villiers Graaff.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jacobus Gideon Nel (Koos) Strauss, leader of the United Party (UP) and the official parliamentary opposition between 1950 and 1956, was a cautious pragmatist. He believed that whites were the guardians of the black majority, assisting their political and economic development until they were responsible enough to secure full political rights in the distant future. In doing so he accepted the principle of political and social segregation. He was, however, appalled by the ruthlessness of the National Party (NP), especially its disregard for the rule of law and the entrenched clauses in the constitution protecting the Coloured franchise on the common voters roll, in creating the apartheid state. Against the wishes of a significant section in his own party he confronted the NP on these issues. Thereafter the NP vilified him as an underminer of white supremacy. He also outraged some UP conservatives who shared the racial prejudices of the apartheid state. On the

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other hand progressive minded UP supporters felt that Strauss was too timid in opposing the reactionary politics of the party's right-wingers. In addition he lost the backing of the editors of the English-language press as they regarded him as too aloof. A palace revolution in November 1956 led to his removal as leader of the opposition. And yet, despite the humiliating end to his political career, and the subsequent perception that he was a failure, Strauss was a shrewd and able politician who under challenging circumstances profoundly influenced white parliamentary politics. In the UP he created an environment that led to the strengthening of progressive political views on race. On the other hand his uncompromising stance on the Coloured franchise contributed to soul searching on the morality of apartheid among some Afrikaner Nationalists.

## 2. SMUTS'S PROTEGE

Strauss was born on 17 December 1900 on the farm Beestewater near Calvinia in the Hantam as the sixth of nine children. From an early age he had to work on the farm and was ten before he went to school. In 1919, after attending Calvinia High School, he won a scholarship to the University of Cape Town where he took the BA degree with distinction. In 1923 he became Prime Minister Jan Smuts's private secretary until the South African Party's (SAP) defeat in the parliamentary election of 1924. Strauss hero-worshipped Smuts and they developed such a close relationship that the Smuts family regarded him as an adopted son. In 1926, after completing the LL.B degree at the University of South Africa, he practiced as an advocate at the Johannesburg Bar, fulfilling a childhood dream of a legal career.<sup>2</sup> Strauss had no political ambitions, but Smuts pressurised him to stand in the Germiston parliamentary by-election of 30 November 1932.<sup>3</sup> The election took place against the background of the Great Depression with the South African economy being in a deep crisis. Strauss's victory over the NP, in a seat the SAP did not even contest in the 1929 parliamentary election, send shock waves through South African politics.<sup>4</sup> It led to Premier JBM Hertzog and Smuts agreeing to a coalition government. In 1934 the SAP fused with the NP to form the UP. DF Malan, as the leader of the Cape NP, however, rejected fusion and some NP members followed him into the ultra-nationalistic "Purified" NP.<sup>5</sup>

2 P Meiring, *10 politieke leiers. Manne na aan ons premiers* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1973), p. 186; JGN Strauss, "Generaal J C Smuts" in *So onthou ek ...* (Johannesburg, SABC, 1961), pp. 80-84; WB White, *The South African parliamentary opposition 1948-1953* (Unpublished D.Phil, University of Natal, 1989), p. 188.

3 WK Hancock, *Smuts: The fields of force 1919-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 244.

4 HJ May, *Red wine of youth* (London: Cassell, 1946), pp. 29-38.

5 H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a people* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003), pp. 407-409.

During his first few years in parliament Strauss continued to focus on his legal career. He distinguished himself as an advocate with his cool temperament, capacity for hard and painstaking work, and took silk as a King’s Counsel in 1944.<sup>6</sup> In March of the same year Smuts offered him the portfolio as Minister of Agriculture. He was an able and energetic minister under difficult war conditions. His ministerial career came to an end after the NP’s unexpected narrow victory in the May 1948 general election. The UP’s defeat was a consequence of the NP becoming a mass nationalist movement as a result of Afrikaner opposition to the decision to side with Britain in the Second World War. White unease about rapid black urbanisation and the subsequent rise in crime was also a factor. The NP based its election campaign on apartheid which aimed at stricter segregation on a territorial, political and social basis. In power the NP applied apartheid legislation to all levels of society. The presence of 45 000 Coloured men on the common voters roll in the Cape Province was especially ideologically unacceptable. The 1853 constitution of the Cape Colony made provision for a franchise with educational and age qualifications, which placed no bar on colour and advocated the principle of equal rights for all “civilised” (Westernised and educated) men. At the National Convention of 1908-1910 the Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal were opposed to the Cape franchise. This impasse led to a compromise in which the Cape franchise was accepted for that province and entrenched in the constitution, and could only be altered by a two-thirds majority vote of both Houses of Parliament sitting together. Membership of parliament was restricted to whites, while the Cape Provincial Council would be open to all races.<sup>7</sup> In terms of the Representation of Natives Act, passed by a joint sitting of parliament in April 1936 the black voters of the Cape Province were placed on a separate voters roll with the right to elect three white parliamentary representatives. DF Malan demanded that the Coloureds should also be placed on a separate voters roll. Hertzog refused to do so as he saw them as a political, economic and social appendix to whites, and promised that their vote was secure.<sup>8</sup> For the NP with its social engineering the Coloured franchise was a blot that had to be erased.

### 3. INHERITING SMUTS’S MANTLE

In June 1948 Strauss returned to the Johannesburg Bar, but his life took a dramatic turn on 3 December 1948 after the death of JH Hofmeyr, deputy leader of the UP

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6 *The Star*, 6 March 1944.

7 L Thompson, *The unification of South Africa 1902-1910* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), pp. 219, 223, 225.

8 D Joubert, *Die Kaapse stemreg. Verteenwoordiging vir swart en bruin in 1936* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1973), p. 49.

and Smuts's political heir. Smuts, appreciating Strauss's loyalty and integrity, turned to him as his new heir.<sup>9</sup> In 1949 he appointed him as acting UP leader while on a visit to Britain, full of confidence in his ability to lead the party.<sup>10</sup> His confidence was merited as Strauss was highly intelligent, able, dedicated and articulated and fluent in English and Afrikaans.<sup>11</sup> According to Scotty Haigh, the doyen of parliamentary reporters in the 1940s and 1950s, he was a "sophisticated, able and sometimes brilliant debater". But even more striking for him was Strauss's intellectual courage — he was unafraid to make unpopular, but just decisions.<sup>12</sup> On 9 June 1950, an ill Smuts, unable to attend parliament, requested OA Oosthuizen, General Secretary of the UP, to convey to the UP parliamentary caucus his wish that Strauss should take over as the leader of the party.<sup>13</sup> Strauss never aspired or expected to become the party leader, and made no secret that if it was not for Smuts's influence he would have devoted himself to a legal career.<sup>14</sup> He only accepted the leadership out of a sense of duty.<sup>15</sup>

Smuts's message was badly received by a significant number of MPs and after a heated discussion the caucus could not come to a decision and had to be adjourned.<sup>16</sup> Various factors made Strauss unacceptable to them. Envy was a factor as his former cabinet colleagues resented his close relationship with Smuts, but there was a concern that he was too young and inexperienced.<sup>17</sup> Strauss's appearance, he was slightly built and youthful looking, even at 50 he appeared in the words of the *Rand Daily Mail* (20 June 1950) "absurdly young for his years", fuelled this perception. Strauss personally saw his youthful appearance as his greatest handicap as it created the impression that he was too young for responsibility.<sup>18</sup> His shy and reserved personality was, however, the main source of misgivings. Among close friends and his family he was warm, outgoing and witty,<sup>19</sup> but outside this close knit group he was withdrawn and aloof. That he did not

9 H Collie, "The man who succeeded Smuts", *The Outspan*, 11 January 1952, p. 81.

10 University of Natal, Killie Campbell Manuscript Collections, Leif Egeland papers, JC Smuts – L Egeland, 30 May 1949.

11 R Swart, *Progressive odyssey: Towards a democratic South Africa* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1991), pp. 18-19; AG Barlow, *That we may tread safely* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1960), p. 93.

12 S Haigh, *Strangers may be present* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1951), p. 259.

13 University of South Africa (hereafter Unisa), United Party Archives (hereafter UPA), OA Oosthuizen collection, file 6.13.2, Oosthuizen's notes of his meeting with Smuts, 12 June 1950.

14 Collie, p. 81.

15 L Louw (ed.), *Dawie 1946-1964. 'n Bloemlesing uit die geskifte van Die Burger se politieke kommentator* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1965), p. 43.

16 G Heaton Nichols, *South Africa in my time* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1961), p. 361.

17 Interview with SS Lemmer, Pretoria, 11 February 2011; P van der Byl, *The shadows lengthen* (Cape Town: H. Timmins, 1973), p. 92.

18 *Cape Times*, 23 November 1950.

19 Meiring, p. 179.

smoke or drink made it even more difficult for him to be a mixer.<sup>20</sup> His aloofness was seen as coldness, self-centeredness and as arrogance, flaunting the fact that he was more intelligent than his fellow MPs. His parliamentary speeches, reminding Haigh of a clear-minded pleader trying to convince a dense judge, as well as his bored demeanor in the House of Assembly, did not endear him to his fellow MPs.<sup>21</sup> It was especially his inability to suffer fools which alienated many. Miles Warren, the MP for King William’s Town, never forgave him for his abrasiveness during a meeting when he was the Minister of Agriculture. Strauss, according to Warren, was the “most unpopular and genuinely disliked” person in the caucus.<sup>22</sup> It struck SS Lemmer, Strauss’s private secretary between 1953 and 1954 that he did not have a single friend in the UP parliamentary caucus.<sup>23</sup> Some MPs were so desperate to keep Strauss out that they asked the charming and popular 37 year old Sir De Villiers Graaff, who was only elected to parliament in 1948, to stand for the leadership. Graaff, however, refused. As there was no alternative the caucus eventually accepted the motion proposing Strauss as leader.<sup>24</sup>

From the first day of his leadership Strauss not only had to deal with a resentful caucus, but also with relentless and merciless personal attacks on him by the NP and its supporting press. Desperate to win the next general election the NP set out to demolish Strauss’s credibility. He was belittled as an inexperienced small-time politician who was of no account compared to the dour 76 year old Prime Minister Malan. Cartoonists such as V Ivanoff of *Die Vaderland* and Etam of *Die Transvaler* portrayed him as a child and school boy out of his depth.<sup>25</sup> Strauss was furthermore vilified that he was not a true Afrikaner. The fact that his wife, Joy Carpenter, was English-speaking, and that his four children attended English-medium schools,<sup>26</sup> fuelled the perception that he had turned his back on his Afrikaner identity. He was furthermore accused of undermining the interests of the Afrikaner by being a prisoner of anti-Afrikaner jingoes, and of Jewish dominated big-capital.<sup>27</sup> TO Honiball, *Die Burger*’s cartoonist, regularly pictured Strauss with

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20 Louw, p. 42.

21 Haigh, pp. 257, 259.

22 Unisa, UPA, Miles Warren collection, file 4, UP Affairs, “The O’Baas & the appointment of Strauss as leader of the party”.

23 Interview with SS Lemmer, Pretoria, 11 February 2011.

24 De Villiers Graaff, *Div looks back. The memoirs of Sir De Villiers Graaff* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1993), pp. 137-138; T Wilks, *Douglas Mitchell* (Durban: King & Wilks Publishers, 1980), p. 69.

25 B Schoeman, *My lewe in die politiek* (Johannesburg: Perskor, 1978), pp. 193-194; *Die Vaderland*, 3 February 1955.

26 *Cape Times*, 17 February 1951.

27 *Die Burger*, 21 June 1950; *Die Oosterlig*, 21 November 1952; *Die Burger*, 15 May 1952; *Die Volksblad*, 18 September 1952.

Hoggenheimer, an anti-Semitic caricature symbolising Jewish capital.<sup>28</sup> Strauss furthermore faced a coordinated campaign by NP MPs to intimidate him with interjections and howls of contemptuous laughter in the House of Assembly.<sup>29</sup>

The moribund state of the UP was another challenge for Strauss. The party was financially bankrupt with a decaying organization,<sup>30</sup> while regarding apartheid it was deeply divided between conservatives and progressives.<sup>31</sup> The conservatives, personified by Douglas Mitchell, the autocratic and dynamic ultra-conservative leader of the UP in Natal, the most influential wing of the party as it was the only province dominated by the party, were crude white supremacists, sharing the NP's racial prejudices.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand the progressives, a small but vocal group in the party, were outspoken defenders of the rule of law and advocates of a non-racial qualified franchise. According to RD Pilkington Jordan, the MP for Rondebosch, this gradual political assimilation would peacefully lead to a black majority government in the next hundred years.<sup>33</sup> As a result progressives viewed the Coloured franchise as an inalienable right to be defended to the bitter end. Aware that the vast majority of whites viewed liberals and their ideal of a non-racial society as being beyond the pale, the NP and UP conservatives labelled the progressives as liberals. Some of the progressives were liberals, but the majority were at most enlightened paternalists.

Strauss was of the opinion that the Coloured franchise had to be defended as the UP was honour bound by Hertzog's pledge of 1936.<sup>34</sup> With regard to the blacks he supported social and political segregation, but was more pragmatic and flexible than the conservatives. He based his "native" policy on the findings of the Native Laws Commission of 1948, the Fagan Commission.<sup>35</sup> After investigating black urbanisation and related problems the Commission concluded that total segregation was impracticable and that the influx of blacks to towns was a natural process that was impossible to prevent or to turn back. It stressed emphasis should rather be on the control thereof. It also recommended that urbanised blacks be accepted as permanent residents. Importantly, it also concluded that territorial separation was no guarantee for peace and that the future had to be built on the basis of the mutual

28 WD Beukes, *Oor grense heen. Op pad na 'n nasionale pers 1948- 1990* (Cape Town: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1992), p. 141.

29 J Lawrence, *Harry Lawrence* (Cape Town: David Phillips, 1978), p. 232.

30 Unisa, UPA, OA Oosthuizen collection, file 1, Diary 26 November 1950.

31 SL Barnard and AH Marais, *Die Verenigde Party: Die groot eksperiment* (Durban: Butterworth, 1982), p. 70.

32 Swart, pp. 31-32.

33 University of the Free State (hereafter UFS), Archive for Contemporary Affairs (hereafter ACA), JGN Strauss collection, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 1, RD Pilkington Jordan – Strauss, 25 May 1953.

34 UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss collection, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 4, Strauss's speech to the new parliamentary caucus after the 1953 election.

35 House of Assembly debates, 18 February 1954, col. 774-775.

dependence of black and white.<sup>36</sup> Strauss undertook that with the UP’s return to power its policies would be implemented through tactful consultation with blacks to create “a more pleasant political climate for the races of South Africa to work out their destiny”. In the process the UP would extend self-government in the “native” reserves under the authority of parliament, while they would also be economically developed to prevent urbanization. In urban areas, where social segregation would be strictly maintained, blacks would become increasingly responsible for governing themselves.<sup>37</sup>

## 4. THE AUTHORITARIANISM OF THE APARTHEID STATE

### 4.1 The rule of law

Strauss’s biggest concern with the apartheid state was its authoritarianism — the notion that white domination could be permanently maintained by sacrificing the rule of law. He was disturbed by the Suppression of Communism Bill of 1950 which banned the Communist Party and provided the government with powers to prohibit any organisation that encouraged communism. In effect the Act was a means to persecute organisations and individuals opposing apartheid. Strauss made it clear that he, although he was vehemently anti-communistic, could not support the Bill as it created a police state by excluding the law courts.<sup>38</sup> The rights of the individual also fuelled his opposition to the Population Registration Bill. He was of the opinion that the requirement to possess identity cards placed unnecessary and irritating burdens on individuals. The Act would furthermore encourage the state prying into the family history of persons.<sup>39</sup> Strauss’s ability to oppose the dismantling of the rule of law was, however, limited as was evident during the Defiance Campaign when the African National Congress (ANC) had sought to contravene apartheid laws with a massive display of passive resistance. In response the NP passed the Public Safety Act of 1953 which provided the government with powers to promulgate a state of emergency in any part of the country. Desperate to win the coming election Strauss condemned the Defiance Campaign as illegal and unconstitutional and supported the principles of the Public Safety Act.<sup>40</sup> At

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36 TRH Davenport, “The Smuts government and the Africans, 1939-1948” (London University, Institute of Commonwealth Studies. Collected seminar papers, vol. 5, 1974), p. 90.

37 *The Star*, 19 November 1952; WA Kleynhans, *South African general election manifestos 1910-1981* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1987), p. 360.

38 House of Assembly debates, 14 June 1950, col. 8933-8951 and 20 June 1950, col. 9529-9535.

39 House of Assembly debates, 16 May 1950, col. 6537-6543.

40 White, “The South African parliamentary opposition 1948-1953”, p. 394.

the same time, however, he accused the NP of provoking black violence with the reckless way it implemented apartheid.<sup>41</sup>

## 4.2 The constitution

With regard to the Coloured franchise Strauss, however, refused any compromise. On 8 March 1951 the NP introduced a Bill to place Coloureds on a separate voters roll to elect four white parliamentary representatives. The Bill was not introduced to a joint sitting as it was claimed that the constitutional developments giving South Africa independence in the 1930s meant that the entrenched clauses were no longer binding. This played into Strauss's hand to secure the support of Mitchell to defend the entrenched clauses. The NP's pro-German stance during the Second World War, and Malan's statement in 1948 that South Africa belonged to the Afrikaner, and his efforts after 1948 to loosen ties with Britain,<sup>42</sup> fuelled Mitchell's fear of an Afrikaner republic at the cost of the cultural rights of the English-speaking community. Strauss hammered on the fact that if the NP could circumvent entrenched clauses on the Coloured franchise, it could do the same to the clause securing English as an official language.<sup>43</sup> As a result Mitchell became a staunch defender of the entrenched clauses,<sup>44</sup> and a loyal supporter of Strauss.<sup>45</sup> He was, however, not prepared, if the NP should succeed in placing the Coloureds on a separate voters roll, and the UP was to return to power, to restore them to the common voters roll.<sup>46</sup> A number of conservative MPs were unhappy with the decision to confront the NP on the Coloured franchise, but were ignored. Strauss led the UP, as Smuts did, autocratically with the support of his lieutenants, the four provincial chairmen. Those MPs outside this inner circle had no say in the making of policy and strategic decisions.<sup>47</sup>

Strauss delivered a two and a quarter hours speech, in a "tense and highly strained atmosphere", opposing the introduction of the Separate Representation of Voters Bill as a violation of the constitution.<sup>48</sup> After the introduction of the Bill he argued with passion that the entrenched clause was a pledge that had to be honoured by succeeding parliaments and statesmen, and that the Bill was a breach of a moral obligation.<sup>49</sup> The NP responded by questioning Strauss's integrity, accusing him

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41 Kleynhans, p. 361.

42 Giliomee, p. 487.

43 House of Assembly debates, 25 April 1951, col. 5417-5418.

44 Wilks, pp 71-72; House of Assembly debates, 17 April 1951, col. 4688.

45 Unisa, UPA, Douglas E Mitchell collection, file 1.2.21, D Mitchell – EE Sturges, 18 March 1954.

46 J Strangeways-Booth, *A cricket in the thorn tree. Helen Suzman and the Progressive Party* (London: Hutchinson, 1976), pp. 99- 100.

47 Barlow, p. 93.

48 M Ballinger, *From Union to apartheid. A trek into isolation* (Cape Town: Juta, 1969), p. 262.

49 House of Assembly debates, 13 April 1951, col. 4466-4485.

of only defending the franchise out of expediency as Coloureds were nothing but *stemvee* (voting cattle) for the UP during elections.<sup>50</sup> Aware of the divisions in the UP he was also pressed on whether he would restore the Coloureds to the common voters roll if the official opposition should return to power. Strauss skillfully skirted these pitfalls by focusing on fundamental liberties being threatened by the Bill. He argued that if the NP was allowed to tamper with the constitution it could also undermine the rule of law and the freedom of the press. On 14 May 1951 parliament passed the Separate Representation of Voters Bill. Strauss played a leading role in initiating legal proceedings against the Bill. This was against the wishes of some UP members as they feared that it would play into the hands of the NP in the coming general election.<sup>51</sup>

In March 1952 the Appeal Court nullified the Separate Representation of Voters Act for ignoring the entrenched clauses. The NP, arguing that the court decision invalidated parliamentary sovereignty, promptly passed the High Court of Parliament Bill which turned parliament into a High Court to repeal the decision of the Appeal Court. The Bill was vehemently opposed by Strauss as an underhand fraud which smashed the constitution and damaged South Africa’s image abroad.<sup>52</sup> On the insistence of Strauss the UP again turned to the courts. On 27 August 1952 parliament constituted itself into a High Court and declared the Separate Representation of Voters Act valid. The UP boycotted the meeting. Two days later the Cape Supreme Court, to the fury of the NP and most Afrikaners, who were of the opinion that white survival was more important than the constitution, declared the High Court of Parliament Act invalid.<sup>53</sup> The NP would use this anger with great effect in the general election of 15 April 1953.

## 5. THE 1953 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The NP fought the election on three issues – apartheid, the dangers of communism and the Coloured franchise. Malan hoped to emulate the success in the Wakkerstroom by-election of 25 June 1952 when the NP succeeded in lumping the UP with communists and the Defiance Campaign. The NP portrayed Strauss as weak on patriotism, security and the protection of “white civilization”.<sup>54</sup> The NP held him responsible for the violence during the Defiance Campaign as his criticism

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50 Strangeways-Booth, p. 56.

51 DM Scher, *The disenfranchisement of the Coloured voters, 1948-1956* (Unpublished D.Litt.et Phil. Unisa, 1983), pp. 188, 205, 236-237, 250-251.

52 House of Assembly debates, 22 April 1952, col. 4136 and 5 May 1952, col. 4925-4934.

53 A Bekker, *Eben Dönges. Balansstaat. Historiese perspektief* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2005), p. 75; Scher, “The disenfranchisement of the Coloured voters”, pp. 104, 280.

54 Unisa, UPA, UP collection, file 14.10-14.12, Leaders executive: Johannesburg 17 and 18 July 1952, Report on the Wakkerstroom by-election, 25 June 1952.

of apartheid fuelled black grievances.<sup>55</sup> For blocking the removal of the Coloured franchise he was accused of frustrating the *volkswil* (will of the people), and the sovereignty of parliament.<sup>56</sup> These attacks were fuelled by the NP's intense loathing of Strauss. Visiting parliament after the election the editor of *The Star* was struck by the bitterness, amounting to hatred of Strauss, in the NP.<sup>57</sup> The NP furthermore made use of fear tactics, harping on the danger of being swamped by a growing Coloured population, and that the white man would be doomed if the UP should win the election.<sup>58</sup> Despite Graaff's warning that the UP had lost the Wakkerstroom by-election as its defence of the constitution was not a vote catcher,<sup>59</sup> Strauss insisted that the focus had to be on the NP's contempt for the constitution. The UP contested the election with the slogan "Vote for the right to vote again".<sup>60</sup>

In a bid to defeat the NP Strauss had formed the United Democratic Front with the small Labour Party, and the Torch Commando, an organisation of Second World War veterans formed in April 1952 to protest against the Separate Representation of Voters Bill. The Torch Commando provided the UP with an army of enthusiastic workers for the general election of 15 April 1953. Strauss fought a strenuous campaign, travelling close to 10 000 miles, addressing 30 mass meetings.<sup>61</sup> Despite his best efforts the UP was doomed to defeat. The reason for this was that Afrikaners formed 61 per cent of the total white population, but 66 per cent of the electorate,<sup>62</sup> and the majority of them were fervent NP supporters. In 1948 only 36 per cent of Afrikaners had supported the UP. The reason for this was that since the 1930s young Afrikaners had become supporters of the NP by upbringing rather than reasoning. Through their parents, teachers, Afrikaans-language newspapers, the Dutch Reformed Church and cultural events, such as the Day of the Covenant, young Afrikaners were indoctrinated with the belief that to be a good and true Afrikaner you had to be a supporter of the NP. In this way a blind obedience to the party and the acceptance that its leaders knew what was good for the *volk* developed.<sup>63</sup> The UP won the popular vote by securing 610 268 votes to the NP's 598 357, but Afrikaner support for the UP declined to 33 per cent.<sup>64</sup> This drop,

55 *Die Volksblad*, 25 August 1952 and 28 January 1953; *Die Burger*, 27 October 1952.

56 L Korf, *D.F. Malan: A political biography* (Unpublished D.Phil, University of Stellenbosch, 2010), p. 449.

57 *The Star*, 6 August 1953.

58 Scher, *The disenfranchisement of the Coloured voters*, pp. 366- 369.

59 Unisa, APA, UP collection, file 14.10-14.12, Minutes of the Leaders Executive: Johannesburg, 17 and 18 July 1952.

60 White, "The South African parliamentary opposition 1948-1953", p. 394.

61 *Daily News*, 5 May 1953.

62 White, "The United Party and the 1953 general election", p. 79.

63 Giliomee, pp. 489-492.

64 WB White, "The United Party's Afrikaans-language press, 1948-1953", *Kleio* xxiv, 1992, pp. 66-81.

combined with the first past the post system, and the weighting of the urban vote, which meant a reduction in urban seats in favour of rural seats, where the core of its support was centered, benefited the NP. Moreover, the increasing urbanization of Afrikaners meant that the NP captured seven UP seats. As a result the NP secured a comfortable victory.<sup>65</sup>

## 6. THE BAILEY BEKKER REBELLION

Strauss took the defeat badly as he felt that in power he could make a difference.<sup>66</sup> Salt in his wounds was that the defeat was seen as an opportunity by some MPs, resentful of his autocratic leadership style and aloofness, to start a rebellion.<sup>67</sup> Even in his inner circle there was some dissent. As a loner Strauss found collaboration difficult and he was unable to delegate.<sup>68</sup> Bailey Bekker, leader of the Transvaal UP, felt that Strauss “tried to run a Smuts machine without General Smuts”.<sup>69</sup> That Strauss adopted some of the mannerisms of Smuts was a daily reminder to his many critics that he was not the general.<sup>70</sup> The desire for a UP victory in 1953, and a ministerial career, meant that Bekker kept his discontent under wraps, but after the election he gave vent to his frustration. On 17 May 1953 he informed Strauss that he had no faith in his leadership, and that he wanted him replaced with Graaff.<sup>71</sup> According to Graaff, however, Bekker openly lobbied to be appointed as leader himself.<sup>72</sup> During a parliamentary caucus meeting on 21 May 1953 Bekker, supported by Abraham Jonker, Frank Waring, Blaar Coetzee and Arthur Barlow, criticised Strauss for his management of the election and his stance on the Coloured franchise. For Bekker the UP had done its best on the Coloured franchise, but it was a lost cause that had cost the party votes and would continue to weaken the official opposition if Strauss persisted in confronting the NP.<sup>73</sup>

Strauss did his utmost to reconcile with Bekker and his group, but they refused his hand of friendship.<sup>74</sup> The reason for this was a mixture of political conviction, opportunism and personal enmity to Strauss.<sup>75</sup> Bekker, a farmer and

65 White, “The United Party and the 1953 general election”, pp. 76-77.

66 Interview with SS Lemmer, Pretoria, 11 February 2011.

67 Barlow, p 93.

68 White, “The United Party and the 1953 general election”, pp. 71, 414.

69 UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss collection, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 1, B Bekker – Strauss, 18 May 1953.

70 Barlow, pp. 93-94.

71 UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss collection, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 1, B Bekker – Strauss, 18 May 1953.

72 Graaff, *Div looks back*, p. 142.

73 Swart, pp. 19-21.

74 Unisa, UPA, UP collection, Central Head Office, file “Rebels in the UP”, Resumé of events which led to the expulsion of Mr P Bailey Bekker, MP and others, from the United Party; UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss papers, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 4, Strauss’s memo on his clash with Bailey Bekker.

75 Unisa, UPA, UP collection, Division of Information, Graaff – AV Zinn, 3 February 1954.

tough character who had played provincial rugby for Transvaal and had worked as a deck hand on a sailing ship, loathed Strauss as a weakling.<sup>76</sup> The intensity of the rebels' loathing of Strauss is evident in a collection of essays, *Sticks and stones* (1969), by Joyce Waring, the daughter of Arthur Barlow, the conservative UP MP for Hospital, and wife of Frank Waring, MP for Parktown. Although published years after the rebellion the book oozes contempt for Strauss as a small and vain man. The personal ambition of the rebels, and the realisation that the political future lay with the NP, was another crucial factor. Barlow encouraged Joyce, a Johannesburg city councillor with parliamentary ambitions, to enter the political fold of the NP as the UP would never return to power.<sup>77</sup> To secure a warm welcome in the NP her husband Frank, a likeable former Springbok rugby player, went out of his way to prevent reconciliation with Strauss, whom he claimed was a prisoner of the liberals.<sup>78</sup> By September 1953 the attempts by rebels to reach a compromise with the NP on the Coloured franchise led to their expulsion from the UP. Waring, Coetzee and Jonker eventually became NP MPs, with Waring and Coetzee ending as cabinet ministers. The expulsion of Bekker's group did not end the sniping at Strauss, as many in the UP remained unhappy with his leadership. It struck Helen Suzman, elected to parliament in 1953, that Strauss was a "decent man, but not very popular".<sup>79</sup> Strauss attempted to keep the remaining conservatives in line by emphasising Hertzog's 1936 pledge.<sup>80</sup> This, however, did not convince Vernon Shearer, the ultra-conservative MP for Durban Point, for whom the national interest, meaning white supremacy, was more important than Hertzog's pledge.<sup>81</sup>

## 7. DIVISIONS IN THE UNITED PARTY

To add to Strauss's woes the English-language press, after initially lauding him to the skies as a great leader, turned on him. Bitterly disappointed by the defeat of 1953 the newspaper editors wanted to replace him with Graaff as he was seen as too aloof and colourless to be an inspiring leader. On 18 October 1953, under the heading "Off with his head", the *Sunday Express* took the lead by demanding his removal. Strauss aggravated the situation when in January 1954, at a public meeting, he mentioned that the Australian Prime, Minister RG Menzies, had told

76 Interview with K Viljoen, Pretoria, 22 February 2011.

77 Unisa, UPA, Joyce and Frank Waring collection, file 20.1.1, Barlow – Joyce, 7 November 1951 and 23 June 1953.

78 BM Schoeman, *Van Malan tot Verwoerd* (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau, 1973), p. 215; Barlow, p. 102; MC Botha, *Politiek en parlement* (Roodepoort: CUM, 1982), p. 65.

79 H Suzman, *In no uncertain terms* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1993), p. 21.

80 UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss collection, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 4, Strauss's speech to the new parliamentary caucus after the 1953 election.

81 UFS, ACA, Vernon Shearer collection, file 30, V Shearer – Strauss, 1 October 1953.

him that except for the premiership there was no more difficult job in politics than leading the official parliamentary opposition. The NP supporting press mockingly made big news about his “suffering”, and this encouraged the perception amongst the English-language press that he was not equal to the task.<sup>82</sup> The Standerton by-election of 12 May 1954, a NP held seat in which the UP did better than expected, intensified the feeling of discontentment with Strauss. The UP candidate was sore that Strauss did not do more to help his campaign.<sup>83</sup> *The Star* felt the same way and in a leading article on 14 May accused Strauss of being too lethargic and aloof, and urged that Graaff should play a bigger role to infuse energy into the party.

The pressure on Strauss increased as the internecine warfare between the conservatives and progressives, who vigorously opposed apartheid legislation, intensified. The progressives were bolstered in 1953 with the election of Swart, Helen Suzman, Clive van Ryneveldt, Jan Steytler, Owen Townley Williams, Zach de Beer, Strauss’s son-in-law, Sakkies Fourie and John Cope. Their election was made possible by Strauss’s attempt to modernise and revitalize the party by getting rid of political deadwood, creating an environment which did not hinder the nomination of progressively minded candidates for safe UP seats. In the process the Houghton constituency replaced Eric Bell, a conservative and critic of Strauss, with Helen Suzman, an outspoken progressive.<sup>84</sup> Conservatives concluded that Strauss went out of his way to secure candidates with extreme liberal views. Warren was furthermore outraged that Strauss made no attempt to clamp down on the progressives who, according to him, made any future electoral victory impossible.<sup>85</sup> Graaff, who was far more conservative than his public image and felt that the UP had gone as far to the left as possible without losing its hard core support, was also unhappy that Strauss was loath to repudiate progressive MPs.<sup>86</sup> Progressives were again unhappy that Strauss did not confront the reactionary stance of the conservatives.<sup>87</sup> Desperate to prevent a split in the party Strauss did his utmost to appease both factions. The writing of his speeches became a painfully laborious process to produce something that would satisfy the entire party.<sup>88</sup> Caucus meetings were also long and acrimonious to hammer out a party policy acceptable to both factions. The energy sapping efforts behind the scenes to maintain party unity meant that Strauss became an irregular attendee of parliamentary debates. Increasingly

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82 *Natal Witness*, 16 January 1954.

83 Unisa, UPA, JM Conradie collection, file 9, Correspondence 1950-1959, RP van Biljon – JM Conradie, 4 June 1954.

84 Strangewayes-Booth, pp. 57-59.

85 Unisa, UPA, Miles Warren collection, file 1, Autobiography c. 1959, pp. 3-4.

86 Graaff, p. 142.

87 Strangewayes-Booth, p. 113.

88 Interview with SS Lemmer, Pretoria, 11 February 2011.

Harry Lawrence, a respected former cabinet minister, had to lead the UP during debates in the House of Assembly.<sup>89</sup>

In an attempt to satisfy the two wings of the party Strauss came up with a policy of “White leadership with just recognition of non-European aspirations”.<sup>90</sup> In a House of Assembly speech on 18 February 1954 he argued that the UP accepted and welcomed the economic integration of white and black as it was in the interest of South Africa as a whole. He warned that the growing economic power of the black majority was a forerunner to claims for a say in the political set-up and that apartheid was no final blueprint for the racial situation. Apartheid with its aim of total segregation was an idle dream as white South Africa was dependent on black labour. The UP on the other hand was prepared to accept the possible extension of political rights to blacks if they accepted Western civilization and were prepared to learn and understand the demands of democracy. The first step in extending political rights to blacks would be to revive the Natives Representative Council, and to give it executive powers.<sup>91</sup> (The Representation of Natives Act of 1936 provided for a Natives Representative Council of 12 elected and four nominated members to advise the government on legislation affecting blacks. The Council was abolished by the NP in 1950.) Strauss made a forceful speech, listened to in silence, impressing even the hostile *Die Burger*,<sup>92</sup> but it led to a backlash in the UP. An outraged Warren confronted Strauss in his office, accusing him of being under progressive influence and damaging the UP with statements that did not reflect party policy. The meeting became so volatile that they nearly came to blows. Warren subsequently resigned from the caucus.<sup>93</sup> In September 1954 Shearer also resigned from the caucus, accusing the progressives of bringing about the decrease of public support for the UP, warning that they would lead to the destruction of the party.<sup>94</sup>

The struggle of keeping the UP together made Strauss more aloof and unapproachable.<sup>95</sup> Klasie Viljoen, a party organiser, was taken aback by Strauss’s refusal to socialise with party members after addressing a rural meeting in the Transvaal as he immediately wanted to return home.<sup>96</sup> In the UP there was growing unease about his reclusiveness. He increasingly refused invitations to speak at meetings and developed a habit of pulling out of meetings a day or two beforehand.

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89 Swart, pp. 23-25.

90 UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss collection, file 1/19/9/17/2, vol. 4, Strauss’s speech to the new parliamentary caucus after the 1953 election.

91 House of Assembly debates, 18 February 1954, col. 773-784.

92 Louw, p. 87.

93 Scher, “The loyal dissident”, pp. 122-123.

94 *The Natal Mercury*, 22 September 1954.

95 Swart, p. 29.

96 Interview with K Viljoen, Pretoria, 22 February 2011.

According to Lemmer the stress of addressing a public meeting affected Strauss’s stomach so badly that he was occasionally unable to deliver a speech.<sup>97</sup> Graaff concluded that the shock of the election defeat had shattered Strauss’s self-confidence. And yet, he concedes in his memoirs that Strauss was outstanding in the parliamentary debates on the Coloured franchise bills.<sup>98</sup> Not the behaviour of a shattered person.

Strauss remained determined to defend the Coloured franchise. Only 13 votes short of a two-thirds majority, Malan hoped to attract the support of conservative UP MPs with a free vote, meaning that MPs could vote according to their conscience and not the party line. Strauss opposed a free vote and in June 1954 the NP fell nine votes short of the two-third majority.<sup>99</sup> Eben Dönges, a leading government member, accused the UP of committing a crime against the future of white South Africa by refusing to vote for the removal of the Coloured franchise.<sup>100</sup> The UP paid a high price for Strauss’s stance. By hammering on the threat of the Coloured franchise in the provincial elections of 18 August 1954 the NP captured 12 UP seats.<sup>101</sup>

Strauss, because of a severe flu, and medical advice that he must have a complete rest for a month, did not participate in the provincial elections.<sup>102</sup> This, combined with the poor results, reignited the campaign by the English-language press to replace him with Graaff. Paddy Cartwright, editor of the *Rand Daily Mail*, approached Lawrence on behalf of other editors and prominent businessmen, to ask Strauss to stand down. Lawrence, who by then had come to the conclusion that Graaff would be a better leader, conveyed the message. Strauss admitted that he had given thought to resignation, but that “an overwhelming sense of duty” demanded that he continue in his post. Here the influence of Smuts was crucial. He drilled it into a young Strauss that a public figure had no right to place personal happiness before duty and responsibility, or to indulge in self-pity.<sup>103</sup> Another reason was his fear that Graaff did not have it in him to be a good leader, and that he might compromise on the Coloured vote.<sup>104</sup> At a Head Committee meeting in November 1954 Lawrence repeated his request that Strauss should reconsider his position. The

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97 Interview with SS Lemmer, Pretoria, 11 February 2011.

98 Graaff, pp. 138, 142, 144.

99 Schoeman, *Van Malan tot Verwoerd*, p. 73.

100 Bekker, pp. 78-79, 81.

101 Scher, “The disenfranchisement of the Coloured voters”, p. 511.

102 *Rand Daily Mail*, 15 July 1954.

103 Meiring, p. 180.

104 Lawrence, p. 231.

issue was swept aside when Graaff, who was reluctant to become leader because of the deep divisions in the party,<sup>105</sup> came to Strauss's defence.<sup>106</sup>

## 8. THE CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

In 1955 the leadership question faded into the background when the constitutional crisis took a drastic turn. Malan retired from politics in October 1954 and was replaced by JG Strijdom. Fed up with the long struggle to remove the Coloured franchise Strijdom introduced the Senate Bill in 1955. This Bill enlarged the upper house and made it possible to pack it with NP members to manufacture a two-thirds majority. Strauss, in a powerful speech, condemned the Senate Bill as a "monstrosity", an "inherently evil measure" and "far-reaching strides to a one-party, to a police state".<sup>107</sup> Strijdom's response was that if Strauss had his way it would lead to the destruction of the white race in South Africa.<sup>108</sup>

In the midst of the Senate Bill debate a dispute erupted in the UP over the reluctance of Strauss to commit the UP to restoring the Coloureds to the common voters roll should the NP succeed in removing them. Strauss, fearing that it would estrange the conservatives, felt unable to make the promise. For Dr Bernard Friedman, the MP for Hillbrow, Strauss's stance was one of opportunism, lack of principle and breach of faith. Under his guidance six progressive MPs threatened to resign if no categorical assurance was given. A compromise was reached when Strauss declared that the UP on return to power would set out to right the grave injustice done to the Coloureds in the best way open to the party, in a form which would serve the interest of the country as a whole. Friedman, however, refused to accept the compromise and resigned from the party and parliament to fight a by-election. In September 1955 he was narrowly defeated by Louis Steenkamp, a leading UP right-winger. The saga left the progressives, who had supported Strauss in his struggles against the conservatives, deeply disappointed.<sup>109</sup> Suzman concluded that he was the type of leader who chose to placate his enemies at the expense of his friends.<sup>110</sup> Disillusioned they became receptive to the idea of replacing him with the likeable Graaff.

With the enlarged senate the NP succeeded in placing the Coloureds on a separate voters roll in March 1956. Strijdom was emotionally lauded as a hero and

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105 Unisa, UPA, De Villiers Graaff collection, file 149.15.1, Graaff – N Boyes, 24 August 1955.

106 *Die Transvaler*, 11 December 1954.

107 House of Assembly debates, 23 May 1955, col. 6020 – 6030 and 6 June 1955, col. 7063, 7302 and 7309.

108 Scher, "The disenfranchisement of the Coloured voters", pp. 606-607.

109 Swart, pp. 34-35.

110 Suzman, pp. 21, 38.

a saviour of the white minority by the majority of Afrikaners.<sup>111</sup> And yet, despite his defeat, Strauss’s uncompromising stance on the constitution, forcing Strijdom to pack the senate, had a positive legacy. It encouraged soul searching amongst some influential Afrikaner Nationalists about the morality of apartheid. Piet Cillié, editor of *Die Burger*, and Schalk Pienaar, his deputy, were profoundly disturbed by the NP’s tampering with the constitution.<sup>112</sup> This discomfort, combined with the influence of the Afrikaner poet and philosopher NP van Wyk Louw, who argued that if the struggle for Afrikaner survival was not morally waged it would crumble from within,<sup>113</sup> led to Cillié and Pienaar becoming leading members of what would become known as the *verligte* (enlightened) movement. In the 1960s the *verligtes* initiated a debate in Afrikanerdom about the morality of apartheid, leading to reforms which helped to pave the way for FW de Klerk’s speech on 2 February 1990.

## 9. REMOVAL AS PARTY LEADER

The stress attached to the long and grueling struggle over the Coloured franchise had undermined Strauss’s health. In August 1956 he became ill with a glandular infection. It took some months to shake it off, only then to be incapacitated with hepatitis. As a result he was unable to attend any of the UP’s four provincial congresses.<sup>114</sup> His lengthy absence revived the discontent about his leadership in the UP supporting press. Ian Wylie, the respected political correspondent of the *Evening Post*, was of the opinion that the real reason for his absence was that he had never been happy as party leader, and that he had lost what heart he had for the tough political struggle against the NP.<sup>115</sup> Against this background Strauss requested the opinion of the four provincial leaders on his decision, on medical advice, to take three months of overseas leave for his health to recuperate. This meant that he would miss the national congress of November, as well as the first weeks of the 1957 parliamentary session.<sup>116</sup> The provincial leaders felt that it was imperative that he attend the congress in Bloemfontein, not to deliver a speech, but to show interest in the party and to obtain permission from the congress to proceed abroad. Strauss, however, ignored their advice and at a UP fete in his constituency announced that he would not attend the congress as he had to restore his health to continue as party

111 BJ Liebenberg and SB Spies (eds.), *South Africa in the 20<sup>th</sup> century* (Pretoria: JL van Schaik Academic, 1996), p. 343.

112 Interview with PJ Cillié, Cape Town, 26 March 1999; JC Steyn, *Penvegter: Piet Cillié van Die Burger* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2002), pp. 102-104.

113 JC Steyn, *NP van Wýk Louw, 'n lewensverhaal II* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1998), p. 643.

114 *The Star*, 22 October 1956.

115 *Evening Post*, 13 October 1956.

116 UFS, ACA, JGN Strauss collection, file 2/1/17/, vol. 2, Strauss – JM Connan, 6 November 1956.

leader.<sup>117</sup> The announcement was badly received by the English-medium press. The editors of *The Star* (12 November 1956), *The Cape Argus* (15 November 1956) and the *Rand Daily Mail* (17 November 1956) argued that it was urgently necessary for the UP to provide itself with alternative leadership as a need for dynamism in the party had never been greater. The message of the *Sunday Express* (18 November 1956) was a blunt “Strauss must go”.

For the provincial leaders Strauss’s insistence on a three month’s break was an indication that he could not carry the burden of the leadership, and they advised him to resign. Graaff felt that he had no choice but to take over the leadership as Strauss was seemingly in no physical state to lead.<sup>118</sup> Strauss, motivated as in 1954 by a sense of duty and concern about Graaff’s leadership abilities, refused. He, however, agreed to sign a letter, written for him by JL Horak, a senior party official, in which he stated his willingness to continue as leader, but gave the congress a free choice on the matter of leadership.<sup>119</sup> He left for the French Riviera on 16 November 1956. Five days later at the conference his letter, accompanied by two medical reports, was read. The four provincial leaders then addressed the conference with the message that it was in the interest of the party that Strauss be replaced. The 500 delegates, with only nine opposing votes, including two MPs, voted for the motion to elect a new leader. With the exception of Sakkies Fourie the progressives did nothing to defend Strauss. Graaff was unanimously elected leader with the enthusiastic support of both wings of the party.<sup>120</sup> Although more personable than Strauss, he would not fare any better as party leader. Under his leadership the UP made no real attempt to oppose the apartheid state’s relentless abrogation of civil liberties, and the party gradually withered away. According to Jan J van Rooyen, the parliamentary correspondent of *Nasionale Pers*, parent company of *Die Burger* and *Die Volksblad*, between 1948 and 1962, Graaff was not in Strauss’s class as leader. Observing them from the parliamentary press gallery he came to admire Strauss as a political fighter, a quality that, according to him, Graaff lacked.<sup>121</sup>

Strauss was hurt, but not bitter, by his removal.<sup>122</sup> During the 1957 parliamentary session he shared a parliamentary bench with Graaff, and gave him his full support. It was, however, an unhappy period for him. His presence was used by the NP to mock Graaff, while many of his old cabinet colleagues

117 Unisa, UPA, UP collection, file 14.7, part 3, Central Head Committee: Bloemfontein, 20 November 1956.

118 Graaff, pp. 144-145.

119 Unisa, UPA, WA Kleynhans papers, Strauss’s letter to the 20<sup>th</sup> national congress of the UP, 14 November 1956.

120 SL Barnard, “Die verkiesing van Sir De Villiers Graaff as leier van die Verenigde Party”, *Journal for Contemporary History* 5(1), December 1980, p. 42.

121 JJ van Rooyen, *Ons politiek van naby* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1971), p. 69.

122 Interview with SS Lemmer, Pretoria, 11 February 2011.

made it clear that they wanted him out of the way.<sup>123</sup> Feeling that by remaining in parliament he harmed the UP he decided in May 1957 to resign his seat.<sup>124</sup> In his farewell speech he pointed out that the NP was beset by such deep-seated fears and phobias that it was unable to apply remedies in the best interests of the country. He concluded that the country needed someone to come forward with a fresh approach to replace this sense of anxiety and fear.<sup>125</sup> In August 1959 he made front page news when he resigned from the UP when the progressives broke with the UP to form the Progressive Party (PP). Without the protection of Strauss, who had reined in the conservatives and protected the progressives, the UP lurched to the right. Ultra-conservatives, such as Warren and Mitchell, had a free rein to marginalise progressives with the aim of purging them from the UP.<sup>126</sup> Mitchell, in an opportunistic effort to turn the tables on the NP by portraying the government as doing too much for blacks, passed a motion at the national congress that the party would oppose spending any more money on the purchase of land for blacks as promised in the Native Trust and Land Act passed by the Hertzog government in 1936. Disgusted with Mitchell’s opportunism the progressives left the UP. The encouragement and protection that Strauss had provided the UP liberals over the years meant that they could secure a relatively strong support base, ensuring that the PP would be able to survive the setbacks of its early years. Strauss personally felt he could not stay in the UP as Mitchell’s motion was incompatible with the standard of conduct which he had tried to follow in public life.<sup>127</sup>

After August 1959 Strauss disappeared from the public eye and became a successful cattle farmer in the Krugersdorp district.<sup>128</sup> In the meantime his reputation as a political failure became entrenched. The UP made no attempt to defend his record. The party had no desire to remind the conservative white electorate that under Strauss it had opposed the banning of the Communist Party, and had fought to the bitter end to defend the Coloured franchise. Strauss, finding solace in his family and farming, made no attempt to defend or vindicate his political reputation. His break with his political past was so drastic that he not only avoided press interviews, but also refused to meet with historians researching parliamentary politics in his era. On 21 December 1976, in a rare interview with *The Star*, he admitted that he supported the Progressives, and predicted that in ten years there would be black rule in South Africa. (This indeed happened in 1994, eight years later than he predicted). He died of a heart attack on 7 March 1990

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123 Graaff, p. 154.

124 *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 May 1957.

125 House of Assembly debates, 6 May 1957, col. 5392-5393.

126 Interview with K Viljoen, Pretoria, 22 February 2011.

127 *Rand Daily Mail*, 27 August 1959.

128 *Rapport*, 16 February 1975.

while on a visit to Cape Town. As a forgotten figure his death, apart from superficial newspaper announcements, went unnoticed.<sup>129</sup>

## 10. CONCLUSION

As a party political leader Strauss was flawed. He lacked the popular touch. His shyness and reserve, seen as aloofness, and his inability to suffer fools, made it impossible for him to gain popularity. And yet, he never lacked courage and integrity. Through the strength of his personality he managed to get the conservative UP to defend the entrenched constitutional clauses on the Coloured franchise. That he refused to budge on this principle, despite his desperation to win the general election of 1953, and his hounding as an underminer of white supremacy by the NP and conservative UP supporters, emphasizes his moral courage and tenacity. In this he secured the grudging admiration of even *Die Burger* (22 November 1956) which acknowledged his resilience, according to the paper, his only true Afrikaner character trait. Strauss's integrity and resilience created a foothold for progressives in the hostile and conservative environment in the UP. In doing so he helped to lay a foundation which made possible the founding of the PP in 1959. On the other hand, his unbending opposition to the NP's tampering with the constitution encouraged soul searching amongst Afrikaners, culminating in the *verligte* movement. In the process Strauss contributed to the gradual political change which made possible the speech of De Klerk on 2 February 1990.

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129 *Die Burger*, 8 March 1990.