

This month marks the 75th anniversary of the defeat of Jan Smuts in the watershed election that ushered in apartheid. In this lightly edited excerpt from their book 'Spoilt Ballots: The Elections that Shaped South Africa', **Matthew Blackman** and **Nick Dall** remind us just how this tragedy came to pass

# Separate and unequal

**O**n May 28 1948, South Africa woke up to the shocking news that DF Malan, leader of the Herenigde Nasionale Party (HNP), had slunk into office with a nanoscopic majority in the House of Assembly. Prime minister Jan Smuts, who had invited the British royal family to South Africa in 1947 and become deeply unpopular among nationalist Afrikaners, had been toppled. And all the king's supporters and all the white men would never put the United Party (UP) back in power again.

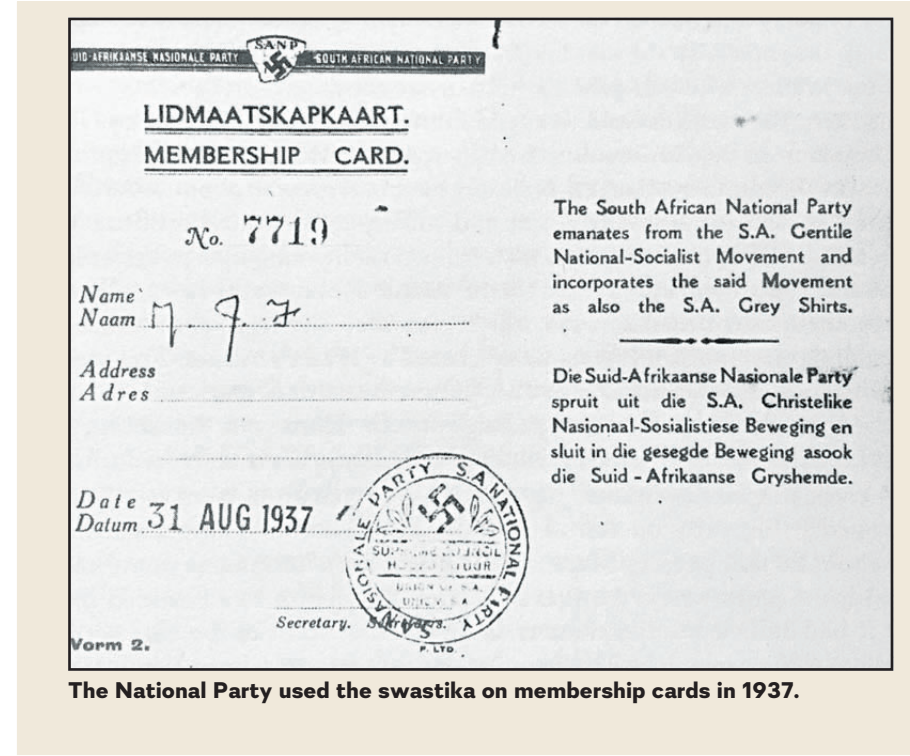
A multitude of issues had been stacking up against Smuts – known derisively as *Slim Jannie* (clever Jannie). He came out the day before the election to state that the nation faced a choice between "a fight for decency and justice and fair living conditions for all" and the "crazy concept" of apartheid. "Keep steady, vote right. Do not be confused," he declared. But the country was confused, and Smuts had been at the centre of this confusion for a few years.

Smuts had always been very wary of the Broederbond and during World War 2 he secretly established a special division of military intelligence to investigate its activities. These investigations were headed by Ernst Malherbe. Malherbe gathered evidence against the Broeders, and in March 1944 he issued an extensive report that analysed the Broederbond's aims, internal structure and economic operations, as well as its infiltration of the civil service and police. Its essential takeaway was this: "It will, at its present rate of growth, within a few years destroy South Africa. Thus did the Nazi system, also starting with a small but powerful underground group, gain ultimate control."

At the UP congress in early December 1944, Smuts began his public attack on the Broederbond, calling it "undemocratic, crypto-Fascist, deceitful and a plague on society". He banned the Broederbond as a political body and gave public servants 14 days to resign their membership. Failure to do so would lead to prosecution.

Thousands of members duly left the Broederbond, though others refused and resigned their jobs instead.

The Broederbond soon began to reconstruct itself while continuing to develop and spread its poisonous ideology of racist segregation and white Afrikaner supremacy. The most effective weapon against the Broeders was perhaps Malherbe's department of military intelligence. Malherbe, an educationist, not only investigated far-right activities during the war but also set up a highly effective education unit within the army. More than



The National Party used the swastika on membership cards in 1937.

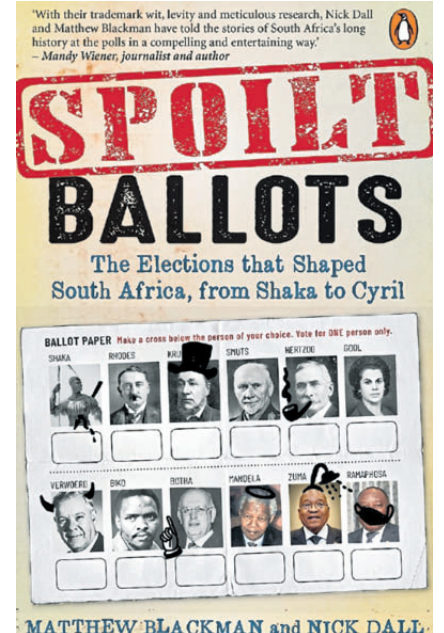
300 information officers gave lectures to the troops on subjects ranging from current affairs to economics and history.

Malherbe's information officers seem to have had a decided effect. In a survey at the end of the war, Malherbe discovered that the vast majority of the troops favoured a slow movement towards a nonracial solution to South Africa's politics. But it was those men who'd stayed at home that needed to be encouraged away from extremism.

The elections of 1948 were now fast being set up for a repeat of the 1929 *swartgovaar* election – except this time Malan's party added a "red menace" too. The communies were coming to reside under South Africa's beds with all the other *goggas*.

In early 1948 the HNP published a pamphlet titled "The Communist Danger". It stated that communists were atheists, that they believed in miscegenation and were therefore a threat to "white civilisation and Christianity". The pamphlet also stated that Smuts and Stalin were "comrades" (the proof being that the Soviet Union had fought with South Africa against the Nazis).

Bread-and-butter issues were also relevant. As historian Saul Dubow reflects, despite the often-noted nous of both Smuts and his deputy Jan Hofmeyr, the rest of their government was widely known for its incompetence. What was more, as political scientist Newell Stultz puts it, Smuts's government also became known for adding "obnoxious official regulations and controls". On top of this were lumped the



'Spoilt Ballots: The Elections that Shaped South Africa, from Shaka to Cyril' by Matthew Blackman and Nick Dall is published by Penguin Random House South Africa

post-war food shortages and a significant rise in the cost of living.

The cards were stacking up against Smuts. Even internationally, despite his role in forming the UN, he was pilloried for his racist policies and his desperate and illegal attempt to hold on to the then South West



Dr. en Mev. D. F. Malan.

DF Malan and his wife, Maria. When Malan's National Party defeated the United Party of Jan Smuts in 1948, he became prime minister of South Africa.

Africa. Painted locally as both a communist and a capitalist-imperialist, Smuts was running out of road.

In January 1947, the UP suffered a shocking blow. In a by-election, the decorated soldier and first-class cricketer Sir De Villiers Graaff – godson of Louis Botha – was hit for six in the Hottentots-Holland constituency by the unheard-of HNP candidate Hendrik van Aardt. Many people put the loss down to a speech the famously liberal Hofmeyr had made at a meeting the night before the election, where'd been asked by a Nationalist supporter where he saw the franchise going. Hofmeyr made the fatal error of speaking his mind: "Natives will eventually be represented in parliament by Natives and Indians by Indians."

In contrast to the clown car that UP politics had become, Malan and the Nats had a one-word plan: apartheid. As historian DW Krüger puts it: "The magic word 'apartheid' suddenly flamed into the headlines as the main election slogan." It was a new word in a relatively new language, explains Dubow, and Malan "deployed it for the first time in the South African parliament" in 1944. To the voter, "apartheid" was clear: it was not the piecemeal, patchwork approach that had characterised Botha, Smuts and even JBM Hertzog's segregation policies – it was total onslaught.

Some suggested at the time that the word was simply old wine in a new bottle. But this old wine had developed a kick like a mule. Apartheid, Malan argued, meant: "Outlawing marriages between whites and non-whites; abolition of the native representative council and African representation in the House of Assembly and the Cape Provincial Council; recognition of native reserves as the true African 'homelands' and strict control of African influx to the city; segregation of whites and non-whites to the maximum extent possible ... ; protection of European workers from the competition of Africans; and disallowance of African trade unions."

Coloureds would be removed from the

common voters' roll but would be handed their own toy telephone, a representative council. They would also be offered some protection from black labour. Startlingly, all Indians would be "repatriated" to India and Indian immigration would be halted.

Realising the fix that the UP was now in, Malherbe argued that Smuts should court Klasje Havenga's Afrikaner Party. But Smuts turned up his nose at this, sniffily stating that the party was "a lot of fascists". This was true – but it was a natural enemy of the Broederbond.

Malan was quicker to realise what was at stake and proved the more flexible, hooking

time". "It will do its best to lay a firm foundation for the future... but cannot entail the future. Generations to come will decide their own policy, and it would be folly for us today to impede what will be their great experience and riper judgment."

And then there was the man that the Nats characterised as a *gogga*, Hofmeyr, who had that worst of all things: liberal views. Despite his *blouboed* Afrikaner heritage, he was singled out for a torrent of foul language and was often openly referred to as "the arch-k\*\*\*\*boetie of the UP". Malan stated "a vote for Smuts is a vote for Hofmeyr". This was not intended as a compliment.

As historian Rodney Davenport points out, the Nationalist press was far better at spreading its poisonous and skewed message than the liberal newspapers ever were at spreading a pro-Smuts message. Still, the naive liberal press was generally optimistic that Smuts would win.

Hopes for a Smuts victory lasted one more day as the results dribbled in from the platteland. On the morning of May 28, however, all was clear: Malan and his party had won, increasing their seats from 48 to 70. The Afrikaner Party won nine seats, giving the right-wing coalition a majority of five over the UP coalition with the Labour Party. Smuts's defeat in his Standerton constituency by the almost-unheard-of WC du Plessis, by 3,750 votes to 3,535, was humiliating. Du Plessis was one of the civil servants who had been dismissed in 1945 for refusing to resign from the Broederbond. As Smuts lamented, "to think I have been defeated by the Broederbond".

As Stultz writes: "Smuts's political humiliation was complete, but Malan's victory was far from overwhelming." The UP won the popular vote by more than 120,000 ballots. But due to the first-past-the-post system, the Nats won. By hook or by crook, apartheid was now all systems go.

\*This is an edited extract from 'Spoilt Ballots: The Elections that Shaped South Africa', by Matthew Blackman and Nick Dall (Penguin Random House)

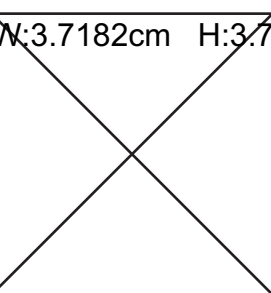
**The pamphlet also stated that Smuts and Stalin were 'comrades' (the proof being that the Soviet Union had fought with South Africa against the Nazis)**

up with Havenga to form an electoral pact. When Hofmeyr announced in parliament on March 24 that the election would take place on May 26, Malan agreed to support Afrikaner Party candidates in 11 constituencies. Havenga in turn agreed to uphold and promote apartheid.

In comparison with Malan's "apartheid campaign, the UP's manifesto looked "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable", as Hamlet might have put it. Smuts published a propaganda pamphlet unimaginatively titled "Election News" in which he said his party differed from the Nats "in that it does not arrogate to itself the power or the knowledge to lay down the policy for all

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