

FASCISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

By REGINALD BRIDGEMAN

DESPITE the period of prosperity in South African economy which began four years ago, assisted by the huge gold yield, the country is not without its difficulties, and the financial magnates are reminding each other of the inexorable economic law under which fat years are inevitably followed by lean.

Fascism is in process of becoming solidly established in the Union, and among the Resolutions submitted to the Annual Conference of the South African Trades and Labour Council at Port Elizabeth in March was one asking all affiliated bodies to warn their membership against the Greyshirts and other Fascist organisations.

Out of a white population of just under 2,000,000 in the Union of South Africa there are roughly 400,000 "poor whites." To control these the South African Government has established labour camps, the dole, and training centres, where unemployed workers are militarised at a relatively small cost and enrolled by the Minister of Defence, Mr. Pirow, in the Special Service Battalions, to be used if necessary against the workers in industrial disputes or for "defence" against the African inhabitants. These Special Service Battalions are in fact 1s. per day storm troop organisations which are available for the establishment of a Nazi-Fascist dictatorship in South Africa.

On April 15, the Minister of Defence announced that a physical education campaign throughout the country is to be undertaken.

The defence plan, which was announced in the House of Assembly a year ago, provided for the addition of 1,000 new air pilots in five years, and 3,000 mechanics, and the formation out of the civil aircraft in the Union of 12 squadrons of high-speed bombers, with five machines in each squadron.

According to "The South African Worker," South Africa is being militarised from top to bottom. A Military Board has been appointed and is taking a census of all factories—how quickly they can be converted to produce war materials. With the aid of British imperialism the Government has purchased 100 Hartebeest aeroplanes below cost price, and a flight of British fighters of the latest design has also been ordered. Every aeroplane serving the civil transport lines in South Africa to-day can be converted within 24 hours into a military war machine. To provide the country with sufficient steel for armament manufacturing

purposes in the event of overseas supplies being interrupted, a State Steel works has been built, and the Defence Department has arranged for the building of an ammunition factory at Pretoria.

In order to impress the efficiency of the British Navy upon the Union Parliament, a party of its members was recently conducted on board H.M.S. Amphion to witness a demonstration target practice. Since then the Government of South Africa has agreed that the important harbour at Simon's Town shall continue to be available for the British Navy—a base which might be indispensable if the Mediterranean were closed and the Cape route to India revived.

Wages in South Africa are no longer fixed by employers or workers, or even by the Wage Board, but by the Minister of Labour.

By an amendment to the Customs Tariff, for which the Minister of the Interior, Mr. J. H. Hofmeyer, was responsible, Customs officials are empowered to seize books and newspapers imported from overseas. The people's reading is thus controlled.

Anti-semitism is developing. There are in South Africa 95,000 Jews ; in 1936, 2,500 Jewish immigrants came from Germany ; 2,000 immigrants, mostly Jews, who landed recently in South Africa with temporary permits have been ordered to leave, and, under the Aliens Act which was hurriedly passed by the South African Parliament, a Board has been set up which is intended to keep out all immigrants from Eastern Europe.

Attempts are being made to split the South African Trade Union movement on racial lines by setting up Afrikaans Trade Unions, which are anti-Jewish and anti-Communist. In the Gold Mines an Afrikaans Union (the Mynwerkersbond) has been started as a rival to the Mineworkers' Union of South Africa. One Dutch lady gave £10,000 to this racialist movement, of which Dr. Hertzog, the Prime Minister's son, is a leader. It is supported by the Malan wing of the Nationalists.

While the South African Trades and Labour Council is taking a strong stand against this attempt to split the workers, the Chamber of Mines, representing important British mining interests, has announced that from June 1 it will adopt a "closed shop" principle by recognising the Mineworkers' Union of South Africa. This step is no doubt prompted by the desire to check the influence of the Malan extreme Nationalist Afrikaans, who are sympathetic to Nazi intrigues in Africa generally, but as a price of recognition by the Chamber of Mines the reformist leadership of the Mineworkers' Union has undertaken that its members: "shall not during working hours or when on mine premises engage actively in a trade union sense or otherwise in a manner in the opinion of the managers calculated to cause unrest or undermine discipline," which means that this union is on the way to becoming a company union.

Germans in S.W. Africa

On April 2, the Union Government, because of the character of German Nazi intrigues in S.W. Africa, issued a Proclamation excluding aliens in S.W. Africa from public affairs and prohibiting their membership of political organisations. This step was not taken, however, in any spirit of hostility to Germany, but only because the Germans in S.W. Africa, instead of co-operating with the Government, which is sympathetic to them and to their desire to see German the language of the country, called on the German Government to take over the territory. In his reply to a protest by the German Government, General Hertzog has once more shown the warmth of his Government's feelings towards Germany, reiterating their profound desire to promote the peaceful progress of S.W. Africa, and regretting that the Reich should have regarded the Proclamation as a combative measure against the German inhabitants of the territory. He repeated the Union Government's desire for friendly relations with the German community in S.W. Africa and hinted clearly that the Administrator of S.W. Africa will not use his powers under the Proclamation if German nationals in the territory voluntarily cease their interference.

This reply has been favourably received in Germany, and the manner in which Dr. Malan criticised the Proclamation proved that the German Fascists had not been in any way deserted.

It suited the British Government and the British imperialist press to invest this incident with more importance than it actually possessed ; this was because of the whole question in South Africa, which recently led a competent observer to write as follows :

I am more and more convinced that at a convenient moment the Union of South Africa would be handed over to Hitler Germany even by the so-called Imperialists, Smuts & Co. Of course the open antagonism to Britain, to the Jews, to the Communists, is carried on by Dr. Malan, the Dutch Opposition leader, but he has sympathisers in the Government camp, notably Pirow, Minister of Railways, Harbours and Defence. Of course, if England goes fascist nothing much will happen, but if Britain became Socialist or even brought in a government of the United Front, then the pro-fascist crowd here would show their teeth and would use the weapons, now being supplied by Britain, against a really democratic government. They would declare their independence, which would in effect, mean inviting Hitler to take the country.

The Government of the Union of South Africa has, of course, made it quite clear, by public declarations, that it regards its Mandate over S.W. Africa as co-equal with its right to the territory of S. Africa.

The Africans

The forthcoming elections in South Africa will be held under the Native Representation Act, 1936, which established the political segre-

gation of Black and White as the basic principle of the Native policy of the Union Government. This entirely reactionary measure abolished, in the Cape Province of South Africa, the franchise which had been enjoyed for 75 years by the limited number of the native population which was able to pass the stringent qualifications laid down in the Act of Union, viz., that voters must be able to write their name, address and occupation, and own property worth £75 or receive a salary or wages of not less than £50 a year.

It is true that the Africans retain their right to vote, but only on a separate electoral roll for three white representatives in the House of Assembly. At the same time a large number of Africans in the Provinces other than the Cape Province (Transvaal, Orange Free State and Natal) have the right of electing their own representatives to Advisory Councils for the Negro peoples, but as these Councils possess only advisory and not executive powers they are not of much use to the Africans. For the 32 elective seats in the Senate the Africans only have indirect representation. The Native Advisory Councils and the totally inadequate European representation in the Senate cannot bring about reforms which would be of real benefit to Africans, who number 6,000,000, but the coming elections are being made the basis for agitation amongst the Bantus in their struggle against the ruthless offensive of British finance capital and Afrikaaner landlordism.

The Europeans whom the Africans will have the opportunity of supporting in the Senate Election will be expected to support the programme of the African Convention.

Mr. H. M. Basner, a Solicitor, is receiving African support in the Senate Election and the main points of his election manifesto are : (1) Satisfying the land hunger, because there is sufficient unused land in South Africa to give each native peasant as much land as he can work ; (2) Equality of franchise ; (3) Abolition of taxes (Poll Tax, Hut Tax, etc.) specially imposed on Africans ; (4) Abolition of all Pass Laws ; (5) Abolition of the Masters and Servants Act and of the colour bar in industry, trade or commerce ; (6) Free primary education for all ; (7) Equal democratic rights for all races in South Africa.

A campaign is in progress in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State for the nomination of Mr. Edwin Thabo Mofutsanyana, Secretary of the Communist Party of South Africa and Transvaal Provincial Secretary of the All African Convention, as a candidate for the Native Representation Council.