

What the Progressive Party stands for

by Z. Nkosi

When the first session of the new Parliament met in August, Mrs. Helen Suzman, who as the only Progressive Party MP had held the flag of the Party aloft for 13 years, was joined by 6 colleagues who had been returned in the April 24 general election and the by-election in Pinelands on June 12. There are some who regard the Progressive Party breakthrough as a sign that South African whites are beginning to abandon their adherence to white supremacy. Moderates of all races have pointed to the Progressive victories as proof that apartheid can be brought down by a change of heart on the part of the majority of whites themselves.

There could be no greater mistake than to think that the Progressive Party road is the true road to a non-racial democracy in South Africa. It is nothing of the sort. An examination of the Progressive Party's record would show that its members, while opposed to the worst excesses of Nationalist apartheid rule, are as firm believers in white superiority as most other whites in South Africa. The implementation of every single item of their proclaimed programme would still leave whites firmly in the saddle in South Africa.

In saying this, we don't wish to take away one jot of the credit for the fine work which has been done by Mrs. Helen Suzman — and which may be done also in future by her colleagues — in exposing the atrocities of the Nationalist regime. Year by year she has battled away with single-minded intensity to oppose the restrictive laws and practices of the Government. Her unceasing flow of Parliamentary questions has been an invaluable weapon in penetrating the curtain of lies and silence with which the Government tries to surround its worst atrocities against the people.

But the world knows more about what Mrs Suzman and the Progressive Party are *against* than what they are *for*. Perhaps it is time to set the record right.

UNITED PARTY SPLIT

The Progressive Party was born out of a split which developed at the United Party congress held in Bloemfontein in August 1959, when a majority of the delegates voted for a resolution calling on the Government to halt any further purchases of land to implement the Government's policy of Bantustan. The UP minority held that this resolution was a violation of the undertaking made by the Government in the 1936 Land Act which, in return for the abolition of the common-roll franchise for Africans in the Cape, promised to purchase extra land for African reserves until they constituted about 13 per cent of the total land area of the country.

Coming after the removal of the Coloured voters from the common roll, the host of repressive laws introduced by the Nationalist Government since 1948, and the steadily swelling resistance of the black peoples of South Africa under the leadership of the Congress Alliance, this proved the last straw for the UP minority who felt a change of course was essential if the country was to avoid a revolution. Twelve MPs resigned from the United Party (though not from Parliament) in protest. They were joined by six MPCs and a number of other UP members who formed themselves into a group under the leadership of Dr Jan Steytler.

The Progressive Party as such was formed in November 1959 and held its first conference in Johannesburg during the same month. Its

main policy statement declared that the Party stood for the maintenance and extension of the values of Western civilisation, the protection of fundamental human rights and the safeguarding of the dignity and worth of the human person, irrespective of race, colour or creed. A constitutional commission was appointed under the leadership of Mr Donald Molténo, QC and former Native Representative, and its report was discussed at a conference on November 15 and 16, 1960.

The congress decided that South Africa should have a rigid constitution incorporating a Bill of Rights, but the essence of PP policy was contained in the franchise proposals, which immediately revealed that the PP did not stand for equal rights. The congress decided that all voters should be South African citizens of 21 years and over. There would be two voters' rolls, both non-racial – an A or ordinary roll and B or special roll. Qualifications for the A roll would be:

- (a) a Standard 8 certificate or
- (b) a Standard 6 certificate and an income of £300 a year or occupation of fixed property valued at £500, or
- (c) literacy in an official language (English or Afrikaans) plus an income of £500 a year or occupation of fixed property valued at £500, or
- (d) marriage to a person with the necessary income and property qualifications provided the applicant was literate, or
- (e) past registration on any list of voters for Parliament, which automatically included all whites.

B roll voters only had to be literate in one of the official languages, and could elect 10 per cent of the members of the House of Assembly, voting 3 months before general elections in especially delimited constituencies.

Party membership was to be open only to those who qualified for the A roll. B roll members would be organised in special branches and would have no say in the formulation of party policy.

On this policy, in the 1961 general election the Progressive Party won one seat (Mrs Suzman in Houghton) and polled 69,042 votes – 8.62% of the total.

The Government had in 1956 finally succeeded in removing the Coloured voters from the common roll in the Cape and placing them on a separate roll to elect four MPs and 2 MPCs. At first the Coloured voters returned UP candidates, but the Government was severely jolted when

in 1965 two members of the Progressive Party, Dr Oscar Wollheim and Mr W.J. van Heerden, won both Coloured seats in the Cape Provincial Council against United Party opposition. The prospect that four PP candidates might be returned to Parliament at the next general election was sufficient to induce the Nationalist Government to abolish Coloured representation in Parliament and Provincial Council and to pass the Prohibition of Political Interference Act of 1968 which prohibited multi-racial political parties. The Liberal Party, which claimed a considerable black membership, decided it had no option but to disband itself; but the Progressive Party, which had attracted very few blacks to its ranks, decided 'under protest' to continue functioning as an all-white party.

AGAINST EQUAL RIGHTS

From time to time — allegedly to take into account the depreciation in the value of the currency resulting from inflation — the Progressive Party has raised the qualifications for the franchise. Announcing plans to calculate such an increase in March 1970, Dr Steytler stressed: 'Certain politicians had tried to create an impression that the Progressive Party stood for one man one vote. This was most definitely not the case as the party held firmly to the principle of a qualified franchise which would ensure that only those with necessary sense of responsibility would be given the vote'. (*Rand Daily Mail* March 11, 1970.)

Even under the old conditions, the whites were in no danger. Dr E.G. Malherbe, a former Director of Census, in an article in the *Star* on April 4, 1970, said: 'I found that by applying the income qualification as well as the educational qualification, the relative voting strength of the various racial groups to be as follows:

'Whites, 82.8 per cent.

'Coloureds, 4.7 per cent.

'Africans (estimate), 10.3 per cent.

'In short, under this qualified franchise plan there will be at least four times as many white as non-white voters. It should be mentioned, too, that all existing voters will still be eligible to vote. This will tend to increase the proportion of whites still more.

'There is therefore not the slightest possibility (as has recently been claimed by a United Party Member of Parliament) that "if the Progres-

sives' franchise policy is adopted, it would lead to a non-white majority of voters in Natal right now".

'This won't happen in Natal or in any other province of South Africa'.

Just to make sure, all the same, the Progressive Party had by the 1972 congress of the Party raised the income qualification to R810 a year (formerly R600) and the property qualification to R1,350 (formerly R1,000). This increase was said to 'take into account the decline in the value of money up to 1970' (*Progress*, organ of the Progressive Party, September 1972). What with the galloping inflation in South Africa in recent years, it is likely the qualifications will be raised again, if this has not already happened.

The Progressive Party, no doubt conceiving itself to be 'realistic', has always aimed more to appease white opinion in South Africa than to attract blacks to its banners. During the April 24, 1974, general election, Progressive Party speakers tried to impress the white electorate that a vote for a PP candidate was not at all the same thing as a vote for a black majority or a sell-out to the communists.

Here are some relevant quotes:

'The Progressive Party leader, Mr Colin Eglin, said last night he could only see disruption for South Africa under a policy of one man one vote . . . In a tough speech he said that one man, one vote would lead to Black baasskap, which was as unacceptable as White baasskap, and a reshuffle of the whole economic situation'. (*Rand Daily Mail*, April 19, 1974.)

'Real power in South Africa was steadily passing into the hands of the Blacks, Mr Harry Pitman, the new leader of the Progressive Party in Natal, said yesterday . . . Mr Pitman said afterwards he was convinced that without the Progressive Party the future of the country would be decided totally by blacks. "It is becoming clear that the black man is finding his power and will increasingly dictate change in South Africa. The role of the Progressive Party will become more important as confrontation develops".' (*Star*, April 7, 1974.)

In an election dominated by the threat of 'terrorism' on the country's borders, the Progressive Party made it quite clear where it stood.

'What is desperately needed is a crash programme to develop the rural areas, to create the sort of society in which blacks will automatically side with whites' — Mr Peter Mansfield, PP candidate for Umhlanga, reported in the *Star*, March 26.

'The vicious attacks by terrorists over our northern borders, which are doubtless only an outward manifestation of insidious communist underground activity, are obviously only the beginning of a concerted intrusion across our borders' — Ray Swart, national chairman of the Progressive Party, reported in the *Rand Daily Mail* on March 26. He stressed that South Africa's security problem would reach crisis proportions if Portugal withdrew from Angola and Mozambique.

The PP leader, Colin Eglin, stressed that South Africa could play a key role in NATO and Western defence strategy only if it altered its race policies. 'As long as South Africa persists with its race policies, its strategic advantages to the West are offset by its political liabilities' — *Sunday Times*, January 27, 1974.

Natal PP leader Harry Pitman 'pointed out that the Tanzam railway was pointing "at the heart of South Africa", and the Chinese were building an unnecessary second airport in Mauritius. That airport would be used for military reasons, he suggested' — *Star*, March 21, 1974.

ANTI-COMMUNIST

The Progressives are as firmly anti-Communist as any other of the Parliamentary parties. In the House of Assembly on February 13, 1974, Mrs Suzman said: 'The Progressive Party and I are diametrically opposed to Communism. Everything we in the Progressive Party stand for — free enterprise, private ownership, individual rights and the rule of law — runs counter to communist theory and practice'.

However, said Mrs Suzman, she thought the Communist Party should be allowed to function legally. 'Provided the Communist Party obeys the laws and does not advocate violence or subversion, we would not ban it', she said.

However, this was purely her personal view and did not reflect official PP policy. On March 21, 1974, the Natal leader of the PP, Mr Harry Pitman, told a public meeting at Port Shepstone that he 'slightly disagreed' with Mrs Suzman on this issue. 'My personal view is that the Communist Party of South Africa was found guilty during the Rivonia trial several years ago', he said. The banned Communist Party had been tried in the courts of the land and found guilty and it should not therefore be allowed to function legally. (*Rand Daily Mail*, March 22, 1974.)

The Progressive Party also has delusions of grandeur about its role in Africa. It is official PP policy to bring about a 'Federation of Southern Africa', including semi-independent provinces, the Bantustans and independent neighbouring states.

'The Progressive Party does not believe South Africa's problems can be solved through partition on racial lines. But we could do something constructive with Bantustans in an advanced stage of development.

'The door would also be opened for independent states on our borders to join us. All would co-operate in a central parliament whose members would be elected by a qualified vote'. — 'Policy, Fact and Comment', an official PP journal, April 1969.

One can just imagine South Africa's independent black states falling over themselves to become subordinate to South Africa's white dominated Parliament elected by a qualified vote. Yet in pursuance of their dream of empire, PP leader Colin Eglin and Mrs Suzman toured seven African countries during 1971, and returned proclaiming agreement with Africa was possible on the basis of the Lusaka manifesto.

They had met five heads of state and other VIPs. 'Everyone we spoke to rejected race discrimination, in support of dignity of all races. And most agreed there should be a period of graduation to protect the interests of the white minority group'. (*Rand Daily Mail*, October 15, 1971.)

Last July Progressive Party leader Mr Colin Eglin made a similar 'fact-finding' and 'dialogue-promoting' visit to Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia.

Mrs Suzman had paid a visit to Lusaka on her own in 1970 to open a 'dialogue' with President Kaunda. On that occasion she had been severely criticised by African National Congress Acting President Oliver Tambo, who said: 'Mrs Suzman's visit was part of the campaign to persuade independent Africa to accept the fascist policies of perpetual domination of the Black man in Africa'.

Mr Tambo said the Vorster Government realised that no influential Government official dared set his foot in Zambia. It had been calculated that Mrs Suzman's visit would arm her with a passport of acceptability which she would display as she entered one state house after another in her African campaign. 'Mr Tambo said South Africa's plan was to buy Africa out of the freedom struggle so that Messrs Vorster, Smith

and Caetano could pursue their policies without interference'. (*Rand Daily Mail*, December 8, 1970.)

Typical of the PP's approach to Africa was Dr Steytler's statement to a meeting in Maritzburg in 1966 that he had 'no criticism of Dr Verwoerd's approach' on the Rhodesian question. 'He supported Dr Verwoerd's policy of "normal trade" between South Africa and Rhodesia. He, too, did not believe in boycotts and sanctions, he said.' (*Rand Daily Mail*, March 9, 1966.)

Mrs Suzman is another one who opposes boycotts and sanctions. During a tour of America and Britain in 1969 she said she told questioners: 'That I did not think there was anything anyone could do from outside, that the reforms must come from within South Africa. I have spoken against boycotts of any kind, be they economic or sporting'. (*Star*, October 25, 1969.)

In a front-page interview published in Wellington, New Zealand, on May 10 the following year, Mrs Suzman said: 'Boycotting South Africa will in no way change the situation inside. People who think that by withholding sport they are going to get reform are under a misapprehension'.

Four years later she had changed her tune. In a radio interview in Washington she called upon other countries to bring influence to bear on South Africa to change its apartheid policies.

'Subtle and overt pressure can be brought to bear on South Africa, as it does not like being the pariah of the world. There is no doubt about this. The sporting boycott was an effective punitive exercise in that it made many South African sportsmen talk out, who hadn't talked out before'. However, she was still against economic boycotts. Not only did they hit the wrong people, but 'I believe economic development is our greatest weapon against apartheid'. (*Rand Daily Mail*, May 21, 1974.)

ANGLO-AMERICAN INFLUENCE

In this Mrs Suzman is merely echoing the voice of the Progressive Party's paymaster Harry Oppenheimer, head of the giant Anglo-American Corporation whose world-wide assets now total about R5,000 million, and whose personal fortune is variously estimated

at between R200 and R400 million. Harry Oppenheimer is naturally against economic boycotts, which would interfere with his profit-making from exploited black labour in his South African mines and industries, not to mention those in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola, Mozambique and other African states.

Many people are inclined to think of Harry Oppenheimer as an enlightened tycoon with a bad conscience, when in fact he is adept at adopting a multi-lateral stance which makes it difficult to pin any label on him, and which would enable him to survive no matter what government came to power in South Africa under the present constitution.

Only a Harry Oppenheimer could in one breath condemn apartheid and in the next proclaim that 'contrary to his expectations and those of opposition political parties, the separate development policy of the Nationalists had helped create a better voice for the Africans. "This policy has resulted in important African leaders who cannot be regarded as political agitators", he said'. (*Star*, April 25, 1974.)

Naturally, Harry Oppenheimer doesn't want any agitators around. That is why he supports the creation of trade unions for blacks. Not black trade unions, mind you. 'Indeed', he said at a conference of the International Iron and Steel Institute in Johannesburg last year, 'the best thing in the circumstances that the Government could do would be to encourage the growth of racially mixed trade unions in order to prevent, if possible, political action on a racial basis by black trade unions'. (*Rand Daily Mail*, October 9, 1973.)

Not surprisingly, the manager of Anglo-American's gold division, Mr Dennis Etheredge, said last year that it was not the Corporation's policy to promote African trade unions on the gold mines. 'We are doing our best to meet the needs of the situation with works committees. The issue of trade unions is not in our minds at present.' (*Sunday Times*, December 9, 1973.)

Perhaps this helps to explain why Anglo-American's mines in the Free State and Transvaal have been the scene of so much violence and disturbance in recent months, with the number of African miners killed by the police after demanding higher wages running into double figures.

Why, it may be asked, waste so much time on Anglo-American in an article on the Progressive Party? The answer is that the PP looks more and more like the political wing of Anglo-American. Harry

Oppenheimer himself stumps PP electoral platforms. His ex-son-in-law, Gordon Waddell, an Anglo-American director, is now a Progressive Party MP. The Progressive Party MP for Pinelands, Dr Alex Boraine, is Anglo-American's adviser on Black industrial relations. Dr Zac de Beer, former United Party MP and a Progressive Party leader, is a top Anglo-American executive.

Not that it is only Anglo-American that is interested in the Progressive Party. In May 1971 it was announced that 'a group of top South African businessmen and economists has agreed to serve on the Progressive Party's newly appointed economics and manpower advisory committee, which is under the chairmanship of Mr Harry Oppenheimer. Those who are to serve on the committee are Mr B.L. Bernstein, chairman of the Anglo-Transvaal Consolidated Investment Company; Mr D. A.B. Watson, Chairman of the Johannesburg Consolidated Investment Company; Mr E.P. Bradlow, chairman of Bradlow's Stores; Mr Robert Kraft, economic adviser and assistant secretary of the Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA); and Mr A.H. Bloom, a director of Premier Milling Company. Mr Bernstein is also a director of Barclays Bank and a former President of the Chamber of Mines. (*Rand Daily Mail*, May 12, 1971.)

You might think you would find more progressive thinking among the Young Progressives, but you would be mistaken. A resolution calling on all Progressive Party-supporting employers to bring black wages up to the effective minimum level was defeated at the national congress of the Young Progressives in Cape Town in July 1973. A milder amendment calling on 'all employers' to 'move towards' reimbursements above the effective minimum level was also defeated. The majority took the typical employers' line that if they paid higher wages 'businessmen might go bankrupt, thus reducing employment opportunities for blacks'. (*Rand Daily Mail*, July 9, 1973.)

The congress also rejected almost unanimously a resolution calling on the party's national executive to reconsider the validity of the party's qualified franchise policy.

All this gives a clue to the quarters from which the Progressive Party draws its electoral support — the mining, industrial and finance houses which realise that if capitalism is to survive in South Africa, the restrictions on the flow and training of African labour must be eliminated. The pass laws must be abolished and a stable and trained African

proletariat created whose productivity will be far higher than the migratory labour force which is all that is available at the moment.

The Progressive Party is not a party of revolution but a party of accommodation and compromise, hoping to head off the incipient African revolution by coming to terms with it before it is too late.

Nor does the Progressive Party's April 24 election success represent the breakthrough that has been claimed for it. In the first place, the PP gained seats from the United Party, not from the Nationalists, whose overall strength in the House of Assembly was increased. The number of votes cast for the Progressive Party was 63,689, or 5.7% of the total number of votes cast – figures poorer both absolutely and relatively than those achieved by the PP in its first election in 1961. (These figures include the votes cast in the Pinelands by-election, which was part of the general election.)

Those hoping that the PP successes in the last general election are a step forward on the road to democracy must think again. If too many people think that, it could turn out to be a step backward because it diminishes support for the programme of struggle mapped out by the Congress movement and the Communist Party which represents the only road to real self-determination, freedom and equality for all peoples in South Africa.