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## THE LONG VIEW

— by Peter Brown

# Parliamentary Opposition: Final Surrender

**I**F A historian should ever consider it worthwhile to write the story of South Africa's White Parliament, one of the most unsavoury chapters in a generally unsavoury tale will be the one about the debate on the 1963 General Law Amendment Act.

Our historian would see that the people who found their way into the South African Parliament fell mainly into three groups. One—small, able and vocal—which expressed views compatible with the best traditions on which the Parliamentary system is based. At the other extreme would be a group notable for the viciousness of its racial attitudes. In the middle would be a group distinguished only by its more-than-ordinariness.

In 1963 the first group has shrunk to the point where it has only one voice in Parliament, that of Helen Suzman. The racist group, which contains all Nationalists and a fair number of United Party members, gets a new infusion of strength at every election. The centre group comprising most of the United Party members which never stood for much, now stands for nothing at all—except perhaps for getting back into Parliament at the next election.

**The 1963 General Law Amendment Act is the most indefensible security measure with which the South African Parliament has ever been confronted. It abolishes habeas corpus, introduces secret trials, plays into the hands of the potential torturer and deals a death blow to the Rule of Law. Yet only one member of Parliament could be found to fight it.**

Many tributes have been paid to Mrs. Suzman for her magnificent, lonely fight in the House of Assembly. She has deserved every single one of them. But Mrs. Suzman is not the only person who has been praised for the part she played in the Assembly debate, and it is these other praises which show just how sick White South Africa is and how abject is her official Parliamentary Opposition.

In the Senate debate on the General Law Amendment Act, Sena-

tor Pilkington Jordan of the United Party commended Minister Vorster for his patience and courtesy in the Assembly. But what reason was there for the Minister to be impatient or discourteous when the only other Parliamentary Party of any size had thrown in the sponge before the

**"If the United Party believes in Vorsterism—white supremacy at all costs—why doesn't it join the Nats.?" asks the National Chairman of the Liberal Party.**

debate on his Bill had even started? Mr. Vorster knew that he could rely on Senator Jordan and Sir de Villiers Graaff and the rest to see that his Bill would be through in time to prevent Robert Sobukwe leaving Robben Island and going home to his wife and family—and so he treated them kindly.

Senator Jordan went further. He said that the Minister had promised not to abuse his powers. He, the Senator, regarded this guarantee "as one of the highest value". Senator Jordan must forgive those of us who are more familiar than he is with the ways in which Mr. Vorster uses his powers, if we regard this guarantee as being of absolutely no value at all. Mr. Vorster has a background of National Socialist sympathies, the laws he passes are National Socialist laws, and he passes them because he likes to use them.

Senator Jordan spent his share of debating time praising the Minister. His colleague, Senator Sutter, spent his attacking people who were opposing the Minister. He attacked the Press and the Black Sash in the best Nationalist back-bench style. He said Black Sash members were running around like a lot of broody

hens protesting against something they knew nothing about. The Black Sash knew very well what it was protesting about. It was protesting about a Nazi law. Senator Sutter's Party probably knew this too, but it hadn't the courage to say so. Instead, by attacking anyone who did have the courage to say so, it tried to create a diversion which would hide from the eyes of the world the fact that the poor old United Party was down on its knees before the Nationalist jack-boot.

*For years now the guiding principle of United Party policy has been to win Nationalist votes at all costs. The cost has been the jettisoning of virtually every principle worth having and the return has been an increased Nationalist vote at every election. If the Party thought this latest and most complete surrender would win new support perhaps the overwhelming vote of no confidence passed in Sir de Villiers Graaff by the Stellenbosch students will already have shown it that it has miscalculated again.*

The only excuse for the United Party supporting such a law is a belief in the maintenance of White supremacy at all costs. The Nationalists do believe in this. It is their policy. If most of the U.P. believes in this too, then they should join the Nationalists.

**But if the United Party does not believe in Vorsterism—in White supremacy at all costs—it should realize that the three, main, long-term forces in South Africa at work against Vorsterism are Pan-Africanism, Communism and Non-racial Democracy—and it should make up its mind which it prefers.**

