

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-03366-4 - Selections from the Smuts Papers, Volume III - June

1910-November 1918

Edited by W. K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel

Excerpt

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PART IX

THE UNION UNDER STRAIN

9 JUNE 1910-24 DECEMBER 1914

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As in Part VIII the papers of this period are at times illuminating but historically disjointed. Again Smuts's own letters are sparsely scattered and he and his doings must be seen for the most part in the mirror of his friends' letters. He wrote often to his wife and sometimes to the older children when he was attending the parliamentary Sessions in the legislative capital, Cape Town, while they were at the home farm near Pretoria, the administrative capital. These letters are domestic—playful and affectionate; though sometimes they do contain comments on public affairs. Botha's absence in the early months of 1911, when he attended the Imperial Conference in London, produced a short series of his rare and charming letters to Smuts in which the quality of their friendship and the nature of their political partnership are apparent (498, 500–502, 539, 546).

The first two years of Botha's Government passed without overt crisis. Smuts at first held three portfolios—the Interior, Mines and Defence. In June 1912 he was relieved of the first two and became responsible for Finance as well as Defence (531, 534). When his colleagues fell ill or were on leave 'the willing horse', as he described himself, carried the extra load (536, 552). Scattered references to this life of 'penal servitude' reveal little except that it was arduous; the full record of it is locked up in official files. His first major task as Union Minister was the Defence Act, which took eighteen months to complete, and which he submitted in draft to Steyn (492, 512, 515–516, 529). But he found time to climb the Cape mountains and also to write and revise a book called *An Inquiry into the Whole*, which he sent to Wolstenholme for criticism in March 1912 (505, 519, 520). After June 1912 he became involved in a series of political crises and conflicts which went on, with hardly a peaceful interval, for the next seven years.

On all the main developments of South African politics between June 1912 and June 1914 the Smuts Papers contain valuable occasional material. The first Cabinet crisis of June 1912; the second Cabinet crisis of December 1912 when Hertzog was excluded and the tide of Afrikaner nationalism began to rise; the two strikes on the Witwatersrand; the Indian resistance movement under Gandhi's leadership—all these were topics of discussion and comment in the letters Smuts wrote to and received from his friends—shrewd and astringent comment from Merriman, comment that was often critical of his policy from his English friends.

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The supreme crisis—the outbreak of the First World War—and the Government's decision to take part in it, put upon Smuts, as Minister of Defence, the task of organizing forces for the invasion of German South-West Africa (584, 585, 589). It was interrupted by a superimposed crisis of rebellion and civil war—a brief and regional struggle, but decisive in its effects on the conflict between the English and Afrikaner sections of the South African people. There are a number of references to the rebellion in the Smuts Papers (593–597, 600–607, 609, 612–616) but little new evidence on this thinly-documented event.

478 To J. X. Merriman

Vol. 8, no. 108

Colonial Secretary's Office  
Pretoria, Transvaal  
9 June 1910

My dear Mr Merriman, May I drop you a line to tell you how often you have been in my thoughts in these days of trial and bereavement?<sup>1</sup> There are many things one feels but would not put on paper. I can only say in all sincerity that my heart has gone out to you in these days in a way I should not like to express bluntly. To you I shall always cherish feelings of the deepest attachment for what you have done for South Africa and even more for what you are. However, you will understand.

Our task is proving one of great difficulty. The new administrative machine moves with great difficulty, and some of the appointments are causing us much trouble. The Railway Board<sup>2</sup> is after weeks of negotiation not even yet constituted. But I hope we shall succeed. With kind regards both to you and Mrs Merriman, Yours very sincerely,

J. C. Smuts

479 From H. J. Wolstenholme

Vol. 8, no. 125

5 Oxford Road  
Cambridge  
10 June 1910

My dear Smuts, Today I have sent off: (1) Nicholson: *A Project of Empire*. This has been generally hailed as a conver-

<sup>1</sup> Refers to the death of his mother, Julia Merriman.

<sup>2</sup> By Section 128 of the South Africa Act a Board for railway and harbour administration throughout the Union was to be established.

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sion to protection of a free trader, but in regard to protection the author is on such a view a veritable Balaam. (2) Archer: *Through Afro-America*. The author is one of our best dramatic and literary critics, and was the author of that brilliant book which you will remember, *Let Youth But Know*. But his not very arduous study might very well have been brought out at half the price. (3) Stillman: *Father Crispi*, a very cheap 'new remainder'; the writer's name promises a book worth much more than its cost. (4) Low: *The Governance of England*. Though you have Lowell's larger work,<sup>1</sup> I believe this is quite worth having; it is now issued in a cheaper edition than the first. (5) *Sociological Review*, May, has been unduly delayed. I lent it to Professor Sorley to read Urwick's rather striking article,<sup>2</sup> and he did not return it promptly. But the quarterly reviews sometimes come out much later than the beginning of the month. (6) Jenssen: *Klaus Heinrich Baas*. I have not read this, I can't abide small German print, and myself find Jenssen rather stodgy, but a review praised it as free from the faults of Jenssen in former books, and worthy of the popularity of these.

The death of the King seems to be having the result I expected, of first postponing the constitutional issue,<sup>3</sup> and then leading to conference and compromise between the two parties. The financial veto will have to go; beyond that I do not think it would be safe to prophesy.

It is hardly necessary for me to express my congratulations on your place in the new South African Ministry; I so took it for granted, even to the particular portfolio. It seems regrettable that a fresh start could not have been made at the very beginning, in the formation of two parties on the natural lines indicated by real interests and opinions, without regard to the old party divisions, which seem in the main obsolescent and better left behind.

I read the other day a remark in *The Times* that one first principle in the new South African policy would be: rapid development of material resources, 'expansion', as they love to call it. No doubt energy and enterprise are wanted, to set the country on a satisfactory material basis, but it seems to me that

<sup>1</sup> *The Government of England* by A. L. Lowell.

<sup>2</sup> *Sociology and Social Progress* by E. J. Urwick.

<sup>3</sup> The reform of the House of Lords.

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experience in the U.S.A., which is being too much repeated in Canada, is showing more the deep-lying disastrous consequences than the benefits to human life or to civilization of the headlong, reckless, wasteful, politically and socially ruinous policy of 'rapid exploitation'. Not without need have the Americans just given precedence over other questions for legislation to the policy of 'conservation'. They may shut the stable door now, but a fearful lot of the horses have been already stolen, and it will be a long, weary business before the people ever get them back. Ever yours,

H. J. Wolstenholme

480 From A. B. Gillett

Vol. 8, no. 27

Millfield

Street

Somerset

10 June 1910

Dear Oom Jannie, I did not think of writing to congratulate you on your (new) official position, until some kind friend suggested it and as it made an excuse for writing to you I eagerly availed myself of the reason. I can't help feeling that all official positions are rather responsibilities than honours and of course that does allow of real congratulation that you are in a big place and can do things and are able to do them as all we your friends know. I think of you walking up and down our little garden saying 'What a world it is'. Yes it is. I am getting to love the sin and evil in it and to hate those wild dreamers who sigh for the millennium. All things in their time and now it is the world. What a time you are living in in South Africa, with all that great organized mass of capital so new and so much in touch with everything and then the huge question of races (not horses but men) it will increasingly become one of the leading world problems and one that our little Empire could break up upon.

'Our' little Empire; I really don't care a fig for it except in so far as it helps and supports a growing love of freedom and makes towards a raising up of all mankind. If it goes contrary towards man's good here's one who will not mourn its decease

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but only mourn the lost opportunities which our great position could have given us.

I am so glad that General Botha became Prime Minister, partly on your account of course and partly because all that you and Margaret told me about him makes me desire to see him in a great position of responsibility.

You see our constitutional trouble hangs. It is a comfort that the past years of waiting have made the problem so clear and simple; we can't go back; we must have our way or go under hopelessly and I think permanently. Some can be fierce and firm and yet wait—the other side are a disorganized rabble of self-seeking tariff reformers and silly, titled, landed gentry and a mob who can be won. Land is really the biggest problem of every State. Is it too late with you to get possession of the land or big parts of it for the public good ?

Women's suffrage slowly makes way and the logic of their position is unanswerable and all the frivolities and frailties of woman combined are not able to destroy it.

Good-bye; won't you and Mrs Smuts be coming once next year—representatives at a coronation ? Our love to you,

Arthur B. Gillett

I am staying a week-end here; we go to Scotland for a holiday next month.

481 From J. X. Merriman

*Private*

Vol. 8, no. 66

Schoongezicht

Stellenbosch

14 June 1910

My dear Smuts, Thank you for your letter. It was good of you to write mid all the thrutch of business.

Yes I have had many troubles public and private but *Aequam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem*<sup>1</sup> is very good advice.

My dear mother retained her intellect and her keen interest in public affairs to the very last. It is a satisfaction to me to

<sup>1</sup> Remember in times of adversity to preserve equanimity. Horace, *Odes*, II. iii.

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know that she died without learning my discomfiture.<sup>1</sup> The task is as you say a great one. I am sure you will pardon me for saying that in the Administrators<sup>2</sup> and in the Railway Board you seem to have departed from the ideals of the Convention; to fit noisy and troublesome politicians into well-paid billets will not make for efficiency. But *Ne sutor* etc.<sup>3</sup>

I am glad to see that there is a growing feeling in Canada and I think in Australia also against the 'tin pot navy' policy. I hope that wisdom in this respect will be justified of her children and that you and I at the Convention will prove to have been on sounder lines. Read if you can get it *The Valour of Ignorance* by Homer Lea, it is very striking and instructive. With kind regards, Believe me, Yours truly,

John X. Merriman

482 From E. Hobhouse

Vol. 8, no. 41

c/o Sebasti e Reali, Bankers  
20 Piazza di Spagna  
Roma—Italy  
29 June 1910

My dear Oom Jannie, It was good to have your nice long letter of 6 June and a chatty cheerful one also from Mrs Smuts. Many thanks. Since writing to you about Miss Colenso<sup>4</sup> I have made enquiries about what actually was done in England, and have had sent me Lady Schwann's<sup>5</sup> letter which I enclose. If this £300 a year from Natal is true then, added to the annuity she speaks of, she and her sister<sup>6</sup> will be nearly as well off as you have made Dinizulu (minus the farm).<sup>7</sup> But there remains the debt to be paid off and Mr Schreiner's fee,<sup>8</sup> and I suppose that mean Asquith won't do anything (what an improper way of writing!). He has had it in hand already many months. So

<sup>1</sup> His failure to become first Prime Minister of the Union.

<sup>2</sup> The Executive Heads of the Provinces.

<sup>3</sup> *Ne sutor ultra crepidam*. Let the cobbler stick to his last.

<sup>4</sup> Harriette E. Colenso.

<sup>5</sup> Lady Schwann, born Elizabeth Duncan; in 1876 married Charles Ernest Schwann, Liberal member of the House of Commons from 1886, created baronet, 1906.

<sup>6</sup> Agnes M. Colenso.

<sup>7</sup> In June 1910 the Union Government released Dinizulu (q.v.) from prison and allocated for his use a farm in the district of Middelburg, Transvaal.

<sup>8</sup> W. P. Schreiner defended Dinizulu in his trial for treason.

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it is to be hoped you people will help her. Do you know her? I have never met her, Miss Colenso I mean.

And so you are pleased with your Cabinet—at any rate it can't be a worse one than ours and perhaps it may be the best you could make, barring Mr Hull. He is a mistake. I think you should have got round Mr Merriman to take the Finance, and you tail off rather weak in Gubbins and Company. *One* from Natal would surely have been enough.<sup>1</sup>

I do trust you are not going to help the many who are trying to pick a quarrel with Germany just in order to show how good your defences are! I suppose most of your time will be spent riding up and down that border<sup>2</sup> in the Kalahari pretending to study locusts' nests but in reality thinking how to guard against German invasion. Let me tell you—urge England to give up building warships and that will be the best way of all, then you need spend no money on defence and save it for industries and arts.

You mention the weavers<sup>3</sup> for the first time since I left. I know nothing of it because Miss Knobel, the only person who could give me an accurate account of it was told it would be as much as her place was worth if she wrote to me!!! But I know the work could not really prosper under Miss Herd because she was placed in a post for which she was totally unfit. I am glad you like the man you have got, but I dare say his methods and his aims are quite different to those of his predecessors.

The closing of Ermelo and Belfast schools is a great grief to me. The Board made the huge mistake of starting far too many schools instead of building up and making permanent the work in a few chosen places. Their one idea was to be able to shew a long list of schools in a tabulated report. I knew many if not most were foredoomed, but they would not listen to me. To my mind it was a waste of public money—and it broke my heart to see my only child slowly murdered by ignorant officialism combined with officious ignorance. But let the dead past bury its dead.

Why on earth did you all let Sir Henry de Villiers take a

<sup>1</sup> C. O'Grady Gubbins was Minister without portfolio. The other member from Natal was F. R. Moor, Minister of Commerce and Industries.

<sup>2</sup> The border of German South West Africa.

<sup>3</sup> The schools of weaving established in the Transvaal by Emily Hobhouse.



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peerage? Surely the first Colonial who has ever done so. It is unworthy of him. As far as I can make out it *was* Sir Henry but it may have been Mr Jacob de Villiers of whom you say he has been placed at the top of the legal tree in the Transvaal. I expect anyhow he will end in a title; years ago I told him he would! But what then has become of Sir J. Rose Innes? Your changes are too many for me to follow.

I envy you having Olive Schreiner. There is so much I want to discuss with her. I hope you and she will go to the bottom of things.

Our Government! Even patient Lord Courtney writes to me this week with scorn of it—and I begin to feel more and more life is too short to worry with politicians, and I am glad to forget it all and read Italian. If Olive reads Italian I think she would be struck by the poems of Ada Negri<sup>1</sup> and so would Mrs Smuts.

Rome is very hot now, but I have no strength to move away, even if I had the means to travel, so I stay on and bear the Pope company in this dead season, as he also may never leave his Vatican.

The last six weeks I have been much weaker in myself, but the doctor says my heart is somewhat stronger; two months ago it hardly beat. I suppose on the other hand the long inactivity and seclusion begin to tell on health and spirits.

Your letters yesterday cheered me up very much. Tell Mrs Smuts I will write to her in a few days. This one will probably be lost on you as too long for a busy man to read!

Thanks for all the care and trouble and sympathy you bestow on me. It is nice to think of in lonely hours. What is your business in the 'Interior'? Ever yours sincerely,

E. Hobhouse

483 From H. J. Wolstenholme

Vol. 8, no. 126

5 Oxford Road

Cambridge

15 July 1910

My dear Smuts, I have today sent off the books catalogued in the last section of the half-year's account which I enclose.

<sup>1</sup> Italian poetess (1870–1945).

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*The Psychology of Thinking* is an excellent little book, an exposition, within its own self-limited scope, of the true 'pragmatism', which sets on one side equally all 'absolute' idealism, and materialism. The knowledge it treats of is that which is possible to the psycho-physical being, man, and what can he know or guess of any other? Sorley's address is I think one of the best things he has written, though like almost all else that he has written, it is almost purely negative in its scope. Sorley is one of those (of whom there are rather many in this generation, whose minds—in the broad sense—were formed under creeds and beliefs now crumbling) whose intellect is too clear to allow him to assert many things that he still clings to, though he is unable to contribute to their proof. In his public work he is cautious and reticent; in private his bias is clear enough. *The Old Order Changeth* is a curious but interesting book. The author has all the singular optimism of most Americans as regards the present course both theoretical and practical of government in their country. Evidently a good deal is going on, but is it all solid, real progress? The author's idea of democracy seems to be the application, to the complicated problems of a great modern empire, of the methods of the old Greek city-states, with their aristocratic 'democracy' of leisured and educated citizens. All legislation and administration are to be worked by the personal action and control of each individual 'average man in the street'. Much more far-sighted seems the view of the writer of an article in a recent number of the *North American Review*, that boss-rule with all its evils is a natural and inevitable result when every citizen and voter is (nominally) called upon to form a judgment and take political action by voting on all the separate issues, measures, appointments, etc. in his State and in the national Federation. The author puts an amusing climax upon all his strange lucubrations when he invites us to join with him in giving a blessing to the Supreme Courts as the highest representatives of democracy, sweeping away scornfully or merrily all legislation and administration that proves 'inconvenient' by the magic wisdom of 'interpretation'. Surely reform and progress lie on other lines than these. One hopes that the zeal and good will that the Americans have lately been showing in the much needed political reform may prove