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Edited by Jean van der Poel

Excerpt

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PART XVI

THE FUSION GOVERNMENT

10 DECEMBER 1934–2 SEPTEMBER 1939

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## THE FUSION GOVERNMENT

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Smuts's private papers provide valuable material on the working of the Fusion government and his own attitude to it. He did his best to make it work and had high hopes of the emergence, at last, of a united South African nation (438). His acceptance of Hertzog's Native policy, with amendments, is recorded (371, 374, 379, 380, 388, 414, 430) as is his support of the government even against some of his own followers (432, 439, 440, 443, 444, 464). On the other hand, the issue which was to smash fusion—neutrality or participation in a war involving the Commonwealth—can be seen moving from the merely 'academic' to dangerous actuality as international tensions grow (445, 462, 473, and *see infra*, pp. 190–1). Meanwhile Smuts kept a close watch on developments in neighbouring territories—East Africa, Rhodesia, the Protectorates, South West Africa (393, 395, 418, 427, 429, 431, 439, 448, 468).

Optimism about fusion was offset by pessimism about world politics. The whole headlong course to disaster, as seen by a passionately concerned statesman trying in vain to stop it, is vividly depicted in Smuts's correspondence. Letter after letter records his efforts to save the failing League, to induce the British government to take the initiative in Europe, to get some restitution for Germany, to draw the United States into a partnership of democracies. They record also increasing perplexity before intractable problems, growing awareness of the evil purposes of the dictators who are not open to fair settlement, anxiety lest British commitments on the Continent disrupt the Commonwealth. But he went on defending the causes he believed in—among them, the Zionist cause (401–3, 407, 419, 447, 459, 462, 463, 465).

In his personal life Smuts turned at this time to thought about religion and to what proved to be prolonged study of the Greek Testament. The 'struggle of the ideologies' seemed to him essentially 'a vast religious war' which could perhaps only be finally won through a new Christian vision—a fresh interpretation of the 'message of Jesus' (405, 410, 458, 460, 461, 469).

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371 To M. C. Gillett

Vol. 52, no. 190

Doornkloof  
Irene, Transvaal  
10 December 1934

This, I suppose, will be the Christmas mail, as it will reach you after 20 December and the next will be the New Year mail. So I send you all best wishes for Christmas. . . I shall spend Christmas either here or somewhere on the eastern mountains, where Jannie [Smuts] and I may go. It could not be as good as that time up the Mauchberg, or that wonderful Christmas we spent on the Mount Anderson mountains above Lydenburg.<sup>1</sup> But if the weather is good we may still have a good time without scaling those cliffs and heights of Being. . .

Last week Isie and I spent some days at Bloemfontein at our new party's congress. It all went quite well and I hope the future will be all right. We eliminated the colour bar and left membership to be decided by the congress of each province. Of course this means that it will be possibly introduced in some of the provinces, but at the Cape we shall be able to keep it out. I hate these useless colour distinctions which are no good and simply act as pinpricks to the Coloured and Native people. But it seems to belong to the very framework of our South African outlook to put things into colour lines. It is once more the fear complex and largely has unconscious sources. But to me it is often very distressing. Nothing isolates me more from my kind than this sort of thing. It is often most difficult to know what to do when you live in such a pervasive atmosphere of thought and outlook. The Natives are getting more and more suspicious and they think that Fusion means that they are now without champions and that the Nationalist viewpoint has won. At present they look to the so-called Dominion party of Stallard, perhaps unconscious of the fact that Stallard is the most reactionary of all on the Native question. Such is our tangle.

I have been spending some days since my return from Bloemfontein in going through my London papers and documents, arrived by the last mail. It will take me some days more to sort them, destroy the useless and file those that have to be kept. I suppose my English visit is by now clean forgotten, and this five weeks' wonder has sunk into the limbo of the forgotten past. It often makes me wonder whether these exertions are really worth while. There is no time to put up a sustained fight and one can only just touch the edge of great issues and then return to the obscurity whence one has

<sup>1</sup> Mountains to the east of Lydenburg in the eastern Transvaal. Both Mauchberg and Mount Anderson are more than 7,000 ft.

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for a moment emerged. And then a new stunt, and all is over and the ripples die away on the waters. But I have received a very large number of letters from old friends and unknowns to thank me most sincerely for what little I have been able to do to hearten them; and perhaps some lasting deposit remains from these floods of meetings and speeches and general busy-ness. I hope so, at least. But for me it means again very large numbers of letters that have to be answered, alas.

No mail letter from you last week. I suppose the letter failed to catch the air mail. No complaint, of course. It is always an event to get a letter from you or from Arthur. But sometimes (very seldom however) the routine is interrupted. I hope there is no bad news or worse cause. Everything here appears to be normal, and Doornkloof in its quiet, its natural movement and pleasant air of indifference is very soothing after all the strenuous and hectic days in London etc. I do love this sense of repose and absence of fuss and pressure. Life is too much with us.<sup>1</sup> And here—in my library or on the hills—I can be lonely in the sense of absence from the pressure of others. We had a huge crowd yesterday (Sunday; I write on Monday morning) but even that could be avoided by going to the bush. However, it is good to meet one's fellows once or twice a week. All from here send love and loving greetings to the dear ones at 102, of whom, alas, we have so little, so very little, nowadays. Ever yours,

Jan

372 To M. C. Gillett

Vol. 52, no. 191

Irene

[Transvaal]

14 December 1934

Your letter which arrived yesterday was doubly welcome because of a long silence. Thank you for it. I was most sorry to see that you and Arthur had been disappointed by not hearing from me *en route*. And he, poor dear, thought that I had parted at the Savoy Hotel with a severe look! As if I could ever look severely at him, my own dear soul's brother for whom I have nothing but unexpressed affection! I suppose I was a bit worried and strained by the final duties and calls of that hour of parting. You know from experience that I am a bad parter! I often awake at about 2 a.m. at night, filled with dismal thoughts and forebodings of failure and frustration. It is all nonsense as a rule, but there it is. Similarly at parting life always presents its most forbidding aspect to me, and I often feel as if the bottom has dropped out. I should never be judged by my

<sup>1</sup> 'The world is too much with us...' Wordsworth, *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, xxxiii.

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parting mood! I had very little opportunity for letter writing on the way as days are long in the air, and nights were often spent with the hospitality of the great on the way, which it was difficult to avoid. Even so however I perhaps had no real excuse. But it was an enjoyable flight. The late afternoon at the Acropolis once more proved a glorious interval. And the long flight in one day from Nairobi to Salisbury was on the whole quite enjoyable. And there was lunch at Mpika with that good Mrs Smith at the new hotel. I hope we shall stay there for a few days at some future time. From the air it appears that Mpika is situated in a series of hills, which must be very good botanically. By the way my last parcels have arrived, including your botanical specimens, which with my own are housed in the boys' old tool-house, which now serves as a herbarium. The library is restored to its original spacious openness and opulence of size.

I was amused at what you report of Mrs Lionel Curtis's conversation.<sup>1</sup> I am much interested to see from my correspondence and vast masses of cuttings which reach Isie from Durrant that my last speech has made a real impression. Well, both Hungary and the Saar have gone well so far;<sup>2</sup> and perhaps my heartening optimism has done some good in high quarters. But I have no desire for office in England—or anywhere! Oh could I dream and wander about and shake off all worldly cares! Is there no time of life when one retires on the score of age? Is sixty-five not enough? My last experience in England was really frightening, and I shall not be over-anxious to go into that sort of ordeal again!

Yes, the L.N.U.<sup>3</sup> has got itself into a bad tangle which may seriously affect its future. It is correct to say that Cecil has always hankered after some form of military or some such sanction. I have explained to him again how fatal I think any such development will be. It may be that in the far future public opinion will be ripe for such a change. But I am convinced it will not work now, except in limited areas and for specific defensive purposes. I am not moved

<sup>1</sup> She had said to Margaret Gillett that, after Smuts's speech at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, her husband had had many letters asking why Smuts was not foreign secretary or prime minister of Great Britain. *See* Smuts Collection, vol. 51, no. 126.

<sup>2</sup> The assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia in Marseilles on 9 October 1934 led to tension between Yugoslavia and Hungary, which was suspected of encouraging terrorist organizations. When the matter came before the League of Nations in December, Hungary submitted to censure. On 4 June 1934 the council of the League fixed the date of the Saar plebiscite (*see* vol. v, p. 392, note 5) for 13 January 1935. In October the French threatened military intervention to stop the intimidating activities of the local Nazi organization. On 5 December, at the instance of Mr Anthony Eden, the council agreed that an international force should be sent to the Saar to ensure order until the plebiscite should be held. Both France and Germany accepted this.

<sup>3</sup> The League of Nations Union. *See* vol. v, p. 246, note 3.

by the call of France or the Little Entente<sup>1</sup> for sanctions. Their lack of statesmanship during the last sixteen years has nearly ruined our prospects of future peace. And I for one am not going a step further than we went in 1919—on the contrary. Even article 16 may have to be toned down to carry the U.S.A. with us into the League. Article 10 is a dead letter.<sup>2</sup> Fusion is through; my colleagues have dispersed to their homes for the holidays. We have won handsomely two test bye-elections.<sup>3</sup> And I am not going anywhere for Dingaan's Day this year. I remain at Pretoria to sign papers for myself and colleagues and to be near in case of need. And I am reading and generally pottering about. We have had wonderful rains and the air is cool and fresh. With good companions I would run to Zoutpansberg or [Mount] Anderson or Lydenburg. But not now...

**373 To Lord Lothian****Vol. 53, no. 151**

20 February 1935

My dear Philip, I was very pleased to get your last letter with your report of your German visit and of your interview with Hitler.<sup>4</sup> You have done very important work there, and have evidently paved the way for the direct negotiations which may now take place between the British and German governments. I understand from the cables that these negotiations are likely to be conducted in the first instance through diplomatic channels. That is where the risk comes in, as from long experience I know that diplomats correspond at arm's length, and no real progress in understanding is made.

I wish it could be possible for you to remain 'on tap', as it were, and to keep in touch with these negotiations so as to prevent unnecessary suspicions and misunderstandings. You have been a member of the government<sup>5</sup> and should be sufficiently trusted in high circles to do what is best in this case.

<sup>1</sup> The Little Entente consisted of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Rumania. It had been completed in April 1921. Its main purpose was to maintain the national integrity of its members against a possible Hapsburg restoration and aggression by Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> Article 16 obliged the members of the League to impose sanctions in certain circumstances. Under article 10 they undertook 'to respect and preserve... the territorial integrity and existing political independence' of all members.

<sup>3</sup> At Uitenhage on 14 November 1934 G. Dolley won the seat from the Labour candidate by 742 votes. At Queenstown on 12 December 1934 E. W. Douglas beat the Dominion party candidate by 2,373 to 1,752.

<sup>4</sup> This letter is not in the Smuts Collection. For the interview, which took place on 29 January 1935, see J. R. M. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, pp. 330–7.

<sup>5</sup> Lord Lothian became chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in August 1931 and under-secretary of state for India in October 1931. He resigned in 1932 on the issue of imperial preference.

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I agree very much with Hitler where he says that no progress will be made by Franco-German conversations. The French are either too suspicious, or their government is too weak to come to any arrangement which requires courage and foresight. French policy has consistently queered the pitch ever since the peace. If any advance is to be made, it will have to be made by direct talks between England and Germany. It is only after a careful exploration of a possible settlement between these two, that a strong line can be taken with France, and she can be induced to acquiesce in a settlement. England has the advantage of support by Italy in any firm line that she might take, and I cannot believe that once there is the possibility of an advantageous settlement agreed on between England, Italy and Germany, that France will really stand out. But some such strong inducement will be needed by any French government to make them face up to public opinion which is manufactured by the Paris press. Any lead today will have to come from the British government. Her position is strong enough to weigh very heavily both with Germany and France, and if your initiative is followed up, the results may well be very far-reaching. I wish you not to leave your baby uncared for at this stage, but continue to hammer away, and push your effort a stage further on.

I received your letter in bed, to which I had been reduced by some troublesome gastric attack. This unfortunate illness prevented me from taking part in the reception to the Empire press conference, and all appointments I had made in that connection had to be cancelled. I had however written out the address which I was about to deliver to our local Institute of International Affairs, and as Curtis thought that this address might do a lot of good, I got Duncan to read it in my absence.<sup>1</sup> You will have seen from the cables that it was intended to reinforce the arguments which I used in my Chatham House speech,<sup>2</sup> and to promote solidarity between the Commonwealth and the U.S.A.

I have just received a letter from Mallory [W. H.]<sup>3</sup> of the foreign affairs committee, saying that my timely intervention in the Chatham House speech has been very helpful in bringing about better understanding between the two groups, and adding that the feeling towards us is better in the States than it has ever been before. It is all to the good, and it would almost appear as if the pro-Japanese intrigue has been definitely scotched for the present. Evidently a good deal

<sup>1</sup> The address, read on 9 February 1935, is entitled 'Some Features of the International Situation'. See Smuts Collection, Box I, no. 94. <sup>2</sup> 370.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Hampton Mallory, born 27 July 1892, Newburgh, New York; executive director, Council on Foreign Relations from 1927; editor, *Political Handbook of the World* from 1930.



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of spade work has to be done on both sides of the Atlantic before we shall be out of the wood. The lamentable decision of the senate in regard to the world court<sup>1</sup> shows that American opinion is still unripe for any real move forward. On the other hand, there must be a great deal of profound misgiving in America over developments in the Far East, and it may be that fundamentally the position is better than appears at first sight. Even from this point of view, a really friendly attitude of Great Britain towards Germany may have very far-reaching effects. The danger is that if Germany continues as a pariah in Europe, she may become associated with dangerous friendships in the Far East. But so long as Germany knows that England is really well-disposed towards her, she is not likely to become associated with England's opponents in the Far East. Of course there is a good deal in what Hitler says about Russia, and permanent lines of cleavage in the future. Still, he has always had a bee in his bonnet about Russia, and his fears may be very much exaggerated.

It is quite clear that world relations are in a fluid stage at present, and that resolute efforts by you and others may be most helpful in keeping the world out of dangerous developments in future. I think you have made a very good start, and hope that your initiative will be maintained.

I note what you say about the imperial conference next year. It will be an important occasion, and my mind is not quite free from fear about the whole matter. But it may be that by next year the position may have so far cleared up that the Commonwealth might be in a position to adopt a broad policy into which all can more or less fall into line. With kindest regards, and hoping to hear from you again, Yours ever sincerely,

s. J. C. Smuts

374 To M. C. Gillett

Vol. 53, no. 194

Tsalta

[Cape Town]

23 February 1935

I have just read your letter, this being Saturday morning when the weekly air mail arrives. There is now a second mail weekly, but

<sup>1</sup> In 1925 the senate adopted resolutions which prevented the adherence of the United States to the world court. In 1929, to re-open the matter, Senator Elihu Root submitted a compromise resolution but this was pigeon-holed by the committee on foreign relations until 1935 when it was rejected by 52 votes to 36.



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I think this is the more convenient one for us. I receive my letters here on Saturday, answer that day or Sunday and post on Monday. Your letter is full of good things and was most acceptable. Its cheerfulness and interest helps to buck me up, as I still feel feeble and aimless after the gastric bout of two weeks ago. More and more it takes time to pick up after these set-backs, and this last one was by no means negligible. It is pleasant to read of you once more by the fireside at Millfield, of your drive to York, to Burford, of Olney and Cowper<sup>1</sup> and many other good things and places. And how near your letters bring you! It is the tragic feeling of so near and yet so far. Space the great uniter is also the great separator, and we talk at 6,000 miles apart. Marion, Helen<sup>2</sup>—it is all very dear to read about.

You refer to my recent address<sup>3</sup> and the space *The Times* has given it. Of course I don't know how much has been cabled, and I am somewhat out of touch with the most recent developments. The speech was written the Saturday when I began to feel upset (Sunday I did not get up at all). You will remember a similar case in December 1918 when I wrote the League of Nations pamphlet in bed in that upper room<sup>4</sup> with a mysterious 'flu attack. I hope the speech will help to keep the government out of the Japanese influence which I hear is still going very strong on the quiet. McKenna [R.]<sup>5</sup> is now here and he says there is only one policy—to keep well with Japan.

You refer to my changed attitude on Locarno. Remember two points. Locarno<sup>6</sup> was a definite abandonment of diplomatic unity in the Empire, and made it impossible for the Dominions to continue as a brake on British foreign policy and keep Great Britain out of Continental entanglements. This seemed to me a bad business as I thought the Dominions were having a good influence on British foreign policy.

Then secondly, the original Locarno did at the time seem like a camouflaged Anglo-French alliance. Nobody ever took it seriously that England would fight for Germany against France: it was the *other* situation that was really contemplated. Here too a change has taken place in British feeling towards Germany which makes

<sup>1</sup> The English poet William Cowper lived at Olney in Buckinghamshire from 1767 to 1786.

<sup>2</sup> See vol. II, p. 255, note 2. The Gilletts' daughter, Helen, was then at school in York where Marion Wilkinson lived.

<sup>3</sup> See *supra*, p. 8, note 1.

<sup>4</sup> In the Gilletts' house, 102 Banbury Road, Oxford.

<sup>5</sup> Reginald McKenna (q.v. vol. IV) was then chairman of the Midland Bank.

<sup>6</sup> See vol. V, p. 258, note 2.

Locarno now appear less one-sided in fact. Also, Dominion influence has remained a powerful force with Great Britain in spite of the Locarno break. My qualms have thus been allayed. At the same time it is quite clear that Europeans will never come to rest until they have more of the old-fashioned security—and Locarno in a way helps them to feel more secure. Locarno has more and more appeared as a concession to this fear complex. So now I am a Locarno man. But at bottom I was originally right about the whole business. Briand's influence with Austen Chamberlain made me suspect the whole business and the underlying motives.

You write about the unemployment muddle. We have not heard much about it yet, as the air mail is so far ahead of the newspapers which will only arrive in two weeks' time. But I suspect it is not so much a change of policy as the difficulty of getting new machinery started without much upset and friction. It is quite likely that the new system will prove an improvement on the old.<sup>1</sup> Then again about India as a prospective Dominion. Here the whole difficulty is political. The Conservative party is already hopelessly broken over the bill,<sup>2</sup> and I daresay the formal mention of Dominion status had to be avoided to pass the bill at all. The whole Indian situation is becoming extremely confused. I gather from Willingdon's letters to me that he is far from optimistic. Indians have no practical political instincts or sense, and after all the new instrument is entirely one for their own handling. My own feeling is that the government should have gone farther and, in form at any rate, should have appeared bolder. But as a practical politician I know the sort of difficulty one is up against in these big matters. And the bill does really mean an enormous advance for India. If Indians can agree to work the new system, India will be a free Dominion at any time she likes. [C. F.] Andrews's letters and speeches about the Indian attitude almost seem to indicate that a great chance is going to be missed by India. Gandhi has for the moment turned to religious and social reforms, and perhaps he is wise there, and is taking the only line which will lead to solid results. The oriental mind is religious and real reforms will come along that path. Politics is a game which only Japan has so far learnt to play successfully. And I understand the Japs are not a religious people—but intensely political in their outlook.

Here we are again busy with the Native bills. It is clear that I am

<sup>1</sup> Under the Unemployment Act of 1934 the administration of relief to unemployed persons in Great Britain was transferred to the Unemployment Assistance Board. Widespread opposition to the board's scales of relief payments forced the government to suspend (5 February) the putting into effect of the scales.

<sup>2</sup> The Government of India Bill which became an Act in 1935.