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Edited by Jean van der Poel

Excerpt

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PART XVIII

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

27 AUGUST 1945–17 OCTOBER 1950

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

For almost three of the last five years of his life Smuts continued to bear, without respite, the responsibilities of a prime minister and leading statesman. After his defeat at the election of May 1948 he went once more into active opposition until struck down by the illness of which he died. His private papers for this period remain voluminous and the best of his own letters remain perceptive and forceful.

The end of the war did not decrease his anxieties about the state of the world nor ease his difficulties in his own country. The mood of his letters is more and more one of disillusionment, disappointment, almost despair. He soon saw that the attempts to conclude peace treaties were futile (681, 687, 706–8, 715). U.N.O., he feared, would prove a ‘broken reed’ (720, 745, 754, 757) and he was shaken at the harshness with which it impugned his South African policies (720, 729–31, 733, 735, 738, 742). He dreaded a future of atomic power rivalry between Russia and the United States (697, 699, 710, 720, 744) and hoped that ‘a third grouping based on Europe’ would emerge though he gave up the idea that Great Britain might lead it (757, 760, 774, 881, 882). When N.A.T.O. and ‘the very great move’ of the Marshall plan appeared they seemed to him ‘foundation stones of the future world structure’. But West Germany must, he insisted, be ‘integrated’ and not remain ‘a fatal vacuum in Europe’ (754, 816, 822, 824, 844, 845, 847, 868). Other matters that engaged his thought and moved him to such action as he could take were the weakening Commonwealth (760, 792), the anomalous position of India within it (842, 843, 846–9), the prospects of the restored monarchy in Greece (706, 735, 774, 823, 832), the hazardous birth of the state of Israel (693, 708, 747, 749, 789, 791, 801, 863). The statesmen to whom he most often wrote were Churchill, L. S. Amery, Weizmann and Wavell. Attlee and General Marshall were also approached and there were some sharp exchanges with Nehru.

In his latter years as prime minister of South Africa Smuts was chiefly occupied with ‘racial conundrums’, particularly with that bugbear—the Indian question in Natal and the Transvaal. He made a last considerable effort to reach a fair settlement in a situation where ‘both sides are unreasonable’. His measures were rejected by the South African Indians and castigated by the Asian Indians at U.N.O. (696, 700–5, 726, 750, 755). For the Africans in the Union he saw that the ‘trusteeship’ he had undertaken to provide was not enough and that the conditions of life of the urban African would have to be radically changed. The Native Laws commission was appointed to find out how this was to be done (720, 740, 743, 764). But

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the Native Representative Council rejected all compromise in advance (717, 724, 726) and the advent of the National party government killed the creative proposals of the commission.

Smuts hardly hesitated to move once more into 'the cold shades of opposition' although he would gladly have retired (797, 798, 819). At first he thought that his party would soon return to power and rejected advice to seek a coalition with the 'liberal' Nationalists (812-14). But the government grew stronger (827, 838, 850, 853) and Smuts fought a losing battle against its colour policies (810, 833, 834, 840, 843, 857, 858, 872, 885).

His personal life at this time was beset by adversity (818-20, 829, 830) but also sweetened by the conferment of notable honours (738, 774, 776, 777, 800, 801, 817). Botany and palaeontology remained lively interests; Shakespeare studies provided a new one. And almost to the end he found time for such extras as a tribute to Campbell-Bannerman (779, 780); eulogy of an Afrikaner hero (782); a philosophy programme for U.N.E.S.C.O. (758); criticism of a MS on reincarnation by an old college friend (752); carefully considered forewords to deserving books (884) and a special journey to London to speak in praise of Weizmann (862, 863).

678 To M. C. Gillett

Vol. 77, no. 259

Doornkloof

[Transvaal]

27 August 1945

A letter from you and another from Arthur—both welcome delightful chats. You write of . . . Aston in its last stages,¹ of a visit to the Murrays, with a short side glance at politics. Arthur writes of politics and the election, and other high stuff. It was amusing to see his reflections on the change, and its high promise. May he be right. It is and remains a grim world, whoever is in charge. We are all so helpless before such forces as the world war has let loose. We can but pray for those who have to control those forces. I saw what the last war led to; I shall not see what this one will lead to. But already I can hear the wail which goes up from large portions of Europe. In fact I am beginning to skip certain parts of the news, as one finds it very difficult to read without asking what has come to Europe, what is happening in the world in this twentieth century. I feel inclined to look the other way and pass on, like that Pharisee.² Why endure what one cannot cure.³ The feeling of helplessness is so demoralizing. It is better not to know what is happening. But

¹ The Gilletts gave up their cottage at Aston when they moved to Street.

² *St Luke* x.30-1.

³ 'What cannot be cured were best endured' (*Optimum est pati, quod emendare non possis*). Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium*, cvii, sec. 9.

I may not continue in this strain—it is no use, and it only lacerates your feelings also. I can understand what you say about Gilbert Murray's dread of Russia. The Europeans are so pitiless. The mercy of God has not visited their souls. They are cruel and pitiless beyond the African savages, or the beasts of the field, who kill and tear for food, but not like Europeans for mental satisfaction.

A real kettle of fish has been served up by Truman in the sudden repeal of lease–lend.¹ I claim no particular foresight, but by 1944 already I had got my suspicion about lease–lend and informed the Yanks that I preferred to pay in cash; and at the beginning of this year I squared all accounts, and since then have paid in cash for everything. They began by asking us to keep no accounts so as to destroy the dollar sign in this war² and leave no debts between Allies. Then they asked us to keep and render accounts—for satisfying the congress. Then they asked us what things and services we could render in return for lease–lend. Then they suggested that they should have a claim on our 'raw materials'. I did not know what that meant and how far it might go—minerals, wool, gold, diamonds: all were raw materials. I then became uneasy and since then asked for the privilege to pay in cash, which eventually was conceded. It is not a pleasant story, but at least I have not been completely surprised at a most awkward moment, like the English. I hope some arrangement will soon be come to,³ or otherwise a feeling may grow up between the two countries far worse than that created by our default in the old post-war years. Britain could not be hit harder than by this sudden change at this stage; and then to be asked for the surrender of the markets which are essential to her life as a people. It sounds like an outrage, although one knows it is not meant as such. One misses the hand of Roosevelt who was a big human, and not a dollar man.

Last week I spent some days in Natal where Durban and Pietermaritzburg gave me tumultuous receptions—really unbelievable functions. It was an expression of the pent-up feelings of the people after six years of war. This week I shall be at Johannesburg for its welcome and thanks. I suppose it will be the same. I shall

¹ See vol. VI, p. 353, note 1.

² When Roosevelt first put forward the idea of lend–lease he told reporters that he was merely trying to get rid of the 'silly, foolish, old dollar sign' (J. N. Burns, *Roosevelt, the Lion and the Fox*, p. 457).

³ On 7 December 1945 British negotiators in Washington arrived at an agreement by which the United States would lend Great Britain 3,750 million dollars at an interest of 2 per cent, the capital being repayable in fifty annual instalments from 31 December 1951. In addition the net lend–lease liability of Great Britain was reduced from over 31,260 to 650 million dollars, to be repaid simultaneously and on the same terms.

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be as good as dead when it is all over. For Cape Town and other big coastal centres are still to follow. After the long and almost unendurable strain of the war effort one has to undergo this emotional ordeal, so kindly meant, but in effect so pitiless as to leave one almost more dead than alive. It will be my last war; in all three I have had this emotional aftermath, although it has varied in every case: dumb misery after the Boer War; the despair of disillusion after the last war; the gratitude and deep poignancy of this war. What a drama, what a tragedy of history, far surpassing anything one finds in books. For me this will be the last; may it be so for this much tried race of man. Perhaps fear will do what high hope could not do—the atomic bomb may at last *frighten* man into more sensible ways of settling his disputes. . .

679 From C. R. Attlee

Vol. 76, no. 25

10 Downing Street
Whitehall

31 August 1945

My dear Field Marshal, I have given much thought to the message which you sent me through the South African high commissioner here in reply to my personal telegram of 1 August supplementing the final report of the Berlin conference. Needless to say, I welcome this expression of your views on a subject on which you are so well qualified to speak, and I am glad that you have given us such a clear exposition of the anxieties which you feel and which, to some extent, we naturally share.

I do not disagree with your diagnosis of the threatening situation in Europe, more particularly in the eastern countries. The growth of Anglo-Russian antagonism on the Continent, and the creation of spheres of influence, would be disastrous to Europe and would stultify all the ideals for which we have fought. But I think we must at all costs avoid trying to seek a cure by building up Germany or by forming blocs aimed at Russia. It is of course true that to depress the level of Germany's industry and standard of living below a certain point would do harm to Europe as a whole and to ourselves. We shall do everything in our power to prevent this, but any suspicion—and the Russians are not slow to form suspicions—that we were trying to deal softly with Germany, or to build her up, would be such an obvious threat to Russia that we could thereby harden the Soviet government's present attitude in eastern Europe and help to give actual shape to our fears.

I think that whether Europe remains 'unbalanced, lop-sided and depressed' is first of all an economic question. As you know, supply is short and distribution is difficult. But we are not blind to the vital necessity of finding a solution which will bridge over the danger period until next year's harvests are gathered in. Secondly, it is a question of restoring confidence among the liberated peoples and though we and the Americans may be able to assist in this by giving sound advice to their governments, the problem is very largely dependent on the re-establishment of a wholesome economy. Thirdly, it is a matter of allowing time for wounds to heal.

We believe that the only road to safety lies in the maintenance of trust and understanding between the great powers which will give some opportunity for the successful establishment and functioning of the world organization on which our hopes for the future are based. It is true that 'an effort to reach an accord between the present conflicting interests of the Allies and their partisans', if such an effort were to mean the sacrifice of a principle, would not suffice. It is also true that Russia's idea of 'sober realism' differs from our own and that during the Berlin conference, and the meetings of the reparations commission, we have not received the consistent and resolute American support for which we had hoped. Nevertheless, I think you will agree that the maintenance of Allied unity is of paramount importance. Subject to this, we for our part shall certainly do all we can to exercise a moderating influence in pursuit of the objectives that you and we both have in view.

I am sorry you cannot come to London during the meeting of foreign ministers. Your great experience in these matters and the reliance which we have always been able to place on your advice lead me to hope that you may find an opportunity during the next few months to pay us a visit here, giving us the benefit of your counsel. The coming of the atomic bomb means that we have got to consider from a new angle most of the problems of foreign policy and defence and that many principles hitherto accepted as axiomatic will have to be amended or discarded. For such discussions your presence among us would indeed be welcome. With all good wishes, Yours sincerely,

C. R. Attlee

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680 From L. S. Amery

Vol. 76, no. 17

112 Eaton Square

S.W.1

5 September 1945

My dear Smuts, Our good American friends have brought us up with a pretty round turn over lend-lease.¹ The amusing thing is the way in which genuine breadth of view and generosity in intention gets whittled down to meet the more selfish outlook of congress. That applies not only to the immediate short-term question of some sort of tapering off of lend-lease, but even more to economic policy generally.

I have no doubt that Cordell Hull and Roosevelt were quite sincerely, though mistakenly, thinking they were acting for the good of the world as well as for that of the United States when they tried to tie us down in the lend-lease agreement to what they called non-discrimination i.e. the enforcement of the most favoured nation clause and the abolition or whittling away of imperial preference.² When it comes to practice, however, what we shall be confronted by, if we agree to that policy in return for immediate financial help, is a tremendous American export and external investment push with no correspondingly adequate increase of American imports, which will create for the world at large all the dangers and difficulties of the great depression of fifteen years ago, and incidentally prove disastrous, not only to the United Kingdom, but to the economic expansion of the whole of the British Empire.

The fundamental mistake in the American outlook is to think that trade as such is expansion. What is really expansion is production, and the unregulated flow of trade may be as disastrous to the steady development of production in individual countries, and indeed in the world as a whole, as the unregulated flow of water. Soil erosion and deep-cut dongas can be economic as well as physical consequences of leaving things to immediate individual interest. For many reasons international trade, whether actually conducted by the state or by individuals, will be governed by considerations of national policy. That does not necessarily mean a rigid autarky, but it does mean that economic concessions will tend to be given for good value either bilaterally, or in nation groups. And they will naturally be given most readily within a group whose members have wider reasons for being interested in each other's welfare and strength than purely economic ones.

I enclose a copy of an article I scribbled for the *Sunday Times*

¹ See 678.

² See vol. v, p. 193, note 1.

on the subject¹ which may interest you. I am also sending a copy to Hofmeyr, in answer to a letter in which he very kindly congratulated me on my C.H. Yours ever,

Leo Amery

681 To L. S. Amery

Vol. 77, no. 192

Prime Minister's Office

Pretoria

27 September 1945

My dear Amery, I have two very interesting letters from you, as usual full of matter for thought and discussion—for which, alas, there is so little time. I note your interesting point about non-discrimination and most favoured treatment. Unfortunately the position is much complicated by the master agreement under lease-lend,² by which we are pledged to these principles. The only line left us now is to argue for effective scaling down of American tariffs, which also is covered by that agreement. Unless American markets are effectively opened to British and Dominion exports, we shall no doubt stand pat on our existing *status quo*.

I am deeply perturbed over the doings of the Council of Foreign Ministers,³ and especially the way the Mediterranean position and the Italian colonies are being dealt with. With *international* mandates over the Italian colonies, other powers get a footing across our vital communications, and I am not impressed by the argument that these concessions are merely an international organization. Russia is holding on firmly to all her conquered territory. Why should we complacently surrender colonies for which we paid so dearly? Unless we are admitted into the huge Russian enclave, we should refuse to surrender what we hold by right of conquest.

I fear this peace treaty will find the British group weakened financially, commercially, and in their essential communications. The United States of America is also holding on to her Pacific bases. Only we make the surrenders. Not merely our interest but also our prestige is involved, and the world will look upon us as no longer able to hold our own and as dominated by the greater powers.

I did not congratulate you on the C.H. which, of course, is

¹ Omitted by the editor.

² This was signed on 23 February 1942.

³ Established at the Berlin (Potsdam) conference. It represented the five chief powers and was set up to prepare the peace treaties with Italy, Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Finland, and to investigate other matters that might be referred to it.

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a very high honour. But there is no honour too high for you to have, so why worry?

My kindest and affectionate regards to you and dear Mrs Amery. I feel most deeply with you both over the sad vagaries of your son.¹ May all come right in the end. Ever yours,

s. J. C. Smuts

682 From L. S. Amery

Vol. 76, no. 18

112 Eaton Square
S.W.1

3 October 1945

My dear Smuts, I am afraid the big power talks have arrived at a hopeless deadlock.² The reason is perfectly simple if only we face it. Russia never came into this war for the sake of the good of the world. She was pushed into it by Hitler's anticipating what he believed to be Russia's aggressive intentions in south-east Europe. Having won a great victory, her leaders, whose mentality is after all some centuries behind us, mean to exploit it to the full. That is all there is to it and the only thing we can do is, in the interests of the world and of our own, to decide where we call a halt and how to make the best arrangements for what is left. That, so far as we are concerned, is western Europe, Africa, the Middle East and the Indian ocean zone. So far as the Americans are concerned it is the American continents south of Canada, the northern Pacific and the Far East. As between us and Russia in Europe and between the United States and Russia in the Far East there is no reason why there should not be a peaceful adjustment, but only on the basis of a mutual recognition of each other's strength and determination. As between the British Commonwealth and the United States the partition into two effective enlarged Monroe doctrines³ will be based on a natural division of labour.

As for the world security organization, to which you gave so much of your mind and heart, are the meetings of the Security Council likely to differ in any respect from those of the present meeting of foreign ministers? The Russian will always dig in his

¹ John Amery, born 1912, tried for high treason in 1945 and executed.

² The first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London in September broke up on procedural questions, that is, which powers should participate in the preparation of the various peace treaties. The Russian representative, Molotov, tried to exclude France and China.

³ See vol. III, p. 639, note 2.

toes under orders from Moscow and, whatever the rights and wrongs of a question, fight for Russia's interest. To expect anything else is just to deceive ourselves.

In the political sphere Russia's interest, as she conceives it, is to keep the nations of Europe outside her immediate tributary zone as broken up and divided as possible. That is why she so noisily opposes anything like a western European grouping, though there is in fact nothing she can do to stop it if we are firm on the subject.

So much on the political side. On the economic side the United States are essentially Russian in their outlook, that is to say they are determined to expand their economic power and for that purpose object violently to any economic grouping on the part of anybody else, whether by way of empire preference, or of mutual preferences among other groups of nations. There again they can do nothing if we go about our own business, except—and that is of course a serious matter for the time being—to refuse further assistance to this country. To my mind there is no other possible answer than to say that we cannot take this assistance if it means depriving us of our economic liberty. If we do so we shall no doubt have to keep our belts tightened for a while longer. For the rest of the Empire, at any rate the sterling area, it will mean a more rapid expansion of production and export.

You may be interested to read the enclosed address¹ which I delivered a few days ago to the Institute of Export. I am sure we shall only be up against another world disaster if we commit ourselves to trying to set the humpty-dumpty of nineteenth century economic internationalism on his wall again. Yours ever,

Leo Amery

683 To A. B. Gillett

Vol. 77, no. 262

Doornkloof

[Transvaal]

9 October 1945

I have just had a welcome air letter from you, arriving together with another by air mail from Margaret. I am glad you are now out of the Oxford bank and can give attention to some of your hobbies and beloved interests. When shall I be able to do likewise? Life is too much of a toil, instead of being that free and loving devotion to our dear hobbies. What does one care about distant

¹ Omitted by the editor.