

## GENERAL LOUIS BOTHA

unification. Mr F. S. Malan succeeded Jan Hofmeyr as leader of the Afrikaner Bond; it is interesting to note that he, too, was on the side of Botha. He was thus acting in the spirit of his recently deceased predecessor, who toward the end had pretty well lost interest in Mr Merriman's claims.

For two days South Africa was in suspense, mitigated by composure. The bulk of the people regarded either of the candidates as eminently acceptable, the good qualities of each being openly recognized. On May 21 the Governor-General called on Botha to form a Cabinet, which was to start work on June 1. After consulting F. S. Malan, the Premier wrote the following letter, addressed: "The Rt. Hon. John X. Merriman, Prime Minister, Capetown":

DEAR MR MERRIMAN,

I have just been entrusted by Lord Gladstone with the task of forming the first Union Government, and I take the first opportunity to ask you whether you will do me the honour to join it. Not only is it my strong personal wish that you may see your way clear to do so, but I feel sure that the people of South Africa, who value your life-long public services and unique experience, expect that you would continue to serve the country and assist in making a success of the Union, in the establishment of which you have taken so distinguished a part. As the time for forming a Government is now very limited, please let me know as soon as possible what your views are. If you prefer to talk the matter over with me, I shall be glad to see you at any time you may appoint.

Yours very sincerely,

LOUIS BOTHA

It is plain that Merriman was the very first person to be asked by the future Premier to join the Cabinet, and was left free as to the choice of portfolio. The answer came by return:

TREASURY, CAPETOWN  
21 May, 1910

DEAR GENERAL BOTHA,

I have to thank you for your kind and generous letter. I do not think that much good would be attained by my joining your Government, and it is possible that I may do more by

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supporting it from outside. It will be a good opportunity for me to take a much-needed rest. I must ask you therefore to excuse me.

Yours sincerely,

J. X. MERRIMAN

Botha's courteous—and, in the circumstances, correct—offer of any portfolio Merriman might desire was rejected. President Steyn and General Hertzog did their best to persuade him to join, though the premiership was not within his reach. At the same time they easily reconciled themselves to Merriman's decision to stand out, although the Governor-General's choice displeased them. On June 1 General Hertzog wrote, on assuming office at Pretoria:

It was with the greatest feeling of disappointment that I heard that you had finally decided not to join the Ministry . . . though you had decided wisely. My esteem for you is too great to have desired you to sacrifice your high standing by taking a subordinate position in the Ministry, however much from a more selfish point of view I would have been pleased to have you with us; and, I am sorry to say, even tried to get you with us. There are some men—the best, and therefore not always the most fortunate—whose good name and high reputation are not their own but that of their country; and who have, therefore, to take care that these are well preserved. From that point of view alone your decision must be justified even as that of President Steyn would have been justified, had he been asked to join and take a minor position.

It is a delicate question whether healthy patriotism requires a prominent politician to take office 'under' another such of the same complexion. Of premiers there can be only one, and if the country boasts other high-quality leaders are these entitled to send a curt refusal when they are asked to serve their people in a subordinate position? Or may individual susceptibilities be expected to yield to the public interest? Did not Abraham Fischer and Sir Frederick Moor lay down their position of premier in the Free State and in Natal and accept membership of the Union Cabinet 'under' Botha? Had not Merriman himself, after having been Premier, accepted office under Schreiner? How can leadership, in view of our party-

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government system, be practicable if the most prominent politicians shrink from accepting 'minor positions'?

*Merriman Disgruntled.*—Merriman's temperament did not permit him to hide his chagrin. At the outset he was annoyed by the fact that Botha's letter was in typescript, instead of manuscript. In an outburst of temper he told his friends that, much as he liked Botha and admired his soldierly qualities, the younger man's drawbacks as a politician riled him. He particularly mentioned the Jameson "intrigue" and the wicked political methods that had taken root at Pretoria: caucus, "steamroller," waste of public funds and other iniquities. He, Merriman, would be powerless against all these things if he joined, but as an independent Government supporter he might buckle on his armour against them! "He is going to humbug us, I am sure," Merriman now and then told his intimates about Botha. What hurt him beyond measure was the apostasy of two of his colleagues in the Cape ministry, and the supposed party manoeuvres for the purpose of keeping him out of the Assembly.

The septuagenarian's annoyance was not permanent. As early as June 14, 1910, Botha made a speech at Pretoria in which he told the public all about his relations with Jameson. As to the caucus, that was taken over by the Union Assembly, which moreover falsified the national illusions regarding reduction of expenditure. For many a year after 1910 Merriman continued to take his seat as a humble musket-bearer—his own term—in support of Botha's premiership. The time even came when he became reconciled with the attitude taken up by Sir D. Graaff and F. S. Malan, who openly showed their preference for Botha's leadership.

Wrongly, it has been asserted that Botha was nominated for his new position by a majority of members of the pre-Union Cabinets, and that the two Ministers mentioned tipped the beam against Merriman. What they did do was by their advice to facilitate Lord Gladstone's decision. They were, for the matter of that, under no obligation to

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shout from the housetops that they would refuse to serve under any premier except Merriman, as the latter apparently expected them to do.

The Government had but a small majority in the House, and it is questionable whether Merriman would have been able to keep it together. Botha's tact soon led to the 'independent' members from Natal joining his party, thus consolidating the Government's position. Nor was it long before Merriman publicly recanted the lack of appreciation for his rival. His conversion began when General Hertzog commenced to show that his allegiance was wandering; it became complete during the first stage of the Great War. The difficult days through which South Africa then passed induced Merriman to proclaim loudly and repeatedly that Botha was "the only man" who could, and did, keep the Union on the right track. Those were the days, too, when the old friendship between Merriman and Steyn ceased.

In connexion with Merriman's 1910 criticisms of Botha's policy, the tendency to look down on Transvaal men and methods was pretty strong at the time, not merely at Bloemfontein but at Capetown, where public affairs were far from being so involved as at Pretoria.

Steyn regretted Merriman's refusal to join the Botha Cabinet, yet could enter into his motives. On May 25, 1910, he wrote the disgruntled 'grand old man' the following letter of condolence:

My own feeling I can best express in the Dutch word *hartseer* (soreness). I cannot bear the idea that the first ministry should be formed without you, and yet though regretting your decision, I can understand and appreciate the reasons. I had so hoped that you would have placed South Africa's finances on a sound basis, for they require it badly. I am not at least surprised at the course events have taken, because from the moment that we arrived in London, I felt that the whole Imperial influence was thrown in the one scale. Of one thing you can be assured, that though you are not in the ministry, you are in the hearts of all true South Africans, who love straightforward, honest, and clean statesmanship.

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It is striking to notice here Steyn's implied disapproval of Botha's statesmanship, seeing that South Africa owed it to Botha, and to no one else, that within eight years of Vereeniging the old permanent *mêlée* gave way to an autonomous Union. Steyn was apt to reproach others with forgetting so easily—he himself occasionally displayed this human weakness. Within less than two years from the date of this letter, Steyn's *protégé*, Hertzog, began to agitate openly against "Imperial influence"; on Merriman dissenting, he irretrievably got into Steyn's bad books.

In the beginning the "support from outside," foreshadowed in Merriman's letter, remained problematical. From the very first he attempted to maintain his influence in the Cape. An Administrator had to be appointed for each of the four Provinces in order to carry out the Constitution. Botha laid it down that the Ministers from each Province should jointly recommend someone for appointment. Four Cape Ministers sat in the first Union Cabinet, two of whom favoured a pro-Botha candidate, while the other two supported a well-known pro-Merriman politician. The four had to visit Pretoria at the end of May, for the swearing-in ceremony. During the journey they tried to arrive at a unanimous choice, but one of the Merrimanites indicated that he for one would not take the oath as a Minister, unless his man were selected. F. S. Malan, one of the Bothaites, thereupon made his headstrong colleague understand that this would mean the latter's exclusion from the Cabinet. That clinched the matter: the Botha candidate was recommended unanimously, and both Merrimanites joined the Cabinet. There is no doubt that this earnest of Botha's determination to be the undisputed master in his own house irritated Merriman and his followers.

With his small retinue of faithful henchmen Merriman often harried the Government. When the extensive Hartebeestpoort (Transvaal) irrigation scheme came before the Assembly, the Merriman group opposed so persistently that Botha had to threaten resignation in order to maintain

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unity in his party on matters of State policy. Once, after an unusually virulent criticism in the Assembly by Merriman of some Government action, Botha pointedly invited those on his side of the House who had lost confidence in the Cabinet to cross the floor. Merriman, in the course of years, admitted that Botha's premiership had best served the national interest; by degrees his attitude in Parliament lost its harshness. Usually, his birthday came during the Session; when the Prime Minister rose, in order—by way of exception in the Legislature—to congratulate the Father of the House in felicitous terms, all those present recognized the sincerity of the tribute. Merriman's criticisms always were straight from the shoulder; he never hesitated to air either his views or prejudices. Frequently he upset Botha by his indiscretions, but he never lost the Prime Minister's esteem.

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GRANTED that history is determined by topographical features, it cannot be overlooked that variety of geological phenomena, too, has had its share in affecting biological evolution, *i.e.*, the difference in character—and therefore the political temperament—of the population. The formation of South Africa's soil assists us in an understanding of its history, and even in prognosticating the future.

In this connexion it is interesting to note the precariousness of Transvaal-Free State relations ever since the babyhood of both countries. Mutual estrangement and heartfelt fraternizing were forever alternating. How is such a switchback course to be explained? With the aid of geology? Whoever studies the results of the Union's geological survey must be struck by the sharp contrast between the two Provinces.

The Free State is an integral part of the extensive Karroo system, which occupies a large portion of the Cape Province. The western Free State belongs to the Ecca series of that system; its eastern districts form part of the Beaufort series, while a narrow strip on the Basuto border fits into the Stormberg series—all of them Karroo formation.

The Transvaal is radically different. Its geological map looks like nothing so much as a patchwork quilt or, rather, a wildly futuristic daub. Experts distinguish, in addition to the Pretoria series and the related dolomite measures, the Witwatersrand sandstone conglomerate, enclosed by the Ventersdorp and Waterberg systems, the whole variegated by independent rock, such as the Pilandsberg crater and the Norite complexes.

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The contrast between the uniform structure as found in the Free State and the complexity of Transvaal geology supplies the key to the difference in mineral resources as well as in social and political habits of thought. The Free State is made up of a fairly homogeneous, sedentary steppe zone. The Transvaal, on the other hand, consists of the High Veld, Bush Veld, Springbok Flats, Middle Veld, and Low Veld, each with its own climate, its flora, fauna, and corresponding conditions of mankind. The Free State metamorphosis from an antelope paradise into a tame sheep run was soon accomplished. The Transvaal, on the contrary, for a long time remained an *Ultima Thule* for peripatetic hunters and nomadic prospectors, as well as a mere experimental guinea-pig in the realm of agriculture. South of the Vaal River, farmers were among the early exporters of wool; on the northern side, ivory and other trophies of the big-game hunters were a stand-by for many years. Gold followed.

Having lost the turbulent Griqualand West diamond-fields, the Free State found it easy to develop into a democratic model State. Law, order, and prosperity were its goal. The Government was drilled into an obedient instrument of popular feeling. The Transvaal from the very beginning attracted a heterogeneous crowd that required at brief intervals the autocratic rule of strong men. Its people tarried in the—to many outsiders inferior—pioneer stage long after Free Staters had settled down to the respectable colonist type. A patriarchal form of parliamentary government suited the southern Republic, where the electorate bossed up its rulers, who were regarded as no more than superior officials.

Hence punctilious compliance with current views and prejudices, as cultivated by the average Free Stater, was an indispensable factor in the success of any public man, down South. 'Individual' politics seemed anti-democratic, and offended the multitude. Abraham Fischer, universally esteemed and trusted as a leader, nevertheless received a vote of no-confidence in his constituency at the end of his

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long career. This was owing to his attitude in the 1912 Cabinet crisis; the split between the old statesman—whose great merits were fully recognized—and his whilom supporters was (as regarded by Free Staters) a blot on the escutcheon, and a humiliation, for . . . the superior person who had ventured to assert his own conception of national affairs, as against the opinions that happened to prevail among his constituents!

When shortly before the Rebellion of 1914 the whole of South Africa was holding its breath, waiting for President Steyn to speak, that gentleman wrote to Merriman:

My own position is an awkward one. I cannot go about, meeting and addressing the people. All I can do is to use my influence quietly but, I hope, effectively. This I do not want to undo by newspaper polemics, before the time has arrived.

This characteristic anxiety for the preservation of influence was shared in those days by General Hertzog, who never forgot to consider what could either adversely affect or improve his own position.

“*Siamese Twins.*”—In the Transvaal strong individuality was a *sine qua non* in a leader, in order to distil from such a capricious set of people an adequate dose of public opinion or, if necessary, to flout it! Despite these Transvaal-Free State contrasts, President Steyn used to call them “Siamese twins,” and President Kruger, so it is alleged, aspired to the “emptying of Vaal River,” which forms the boundary between the two territories. Both Republics had, though differing in political method, subconsciously carried on an identical existence; their political ideals coalesced. The national soul continually pressed for harmony; the human element often caused divergence and distrust.

In 1865, during the Basuto trouble in the Free State, Kruger wrote to his Executive: “If possible, I wish to go and help the Free Staters.” And so he did. Again, when the Transvaalers were in danger, at the end of last century, the world witnessed a unique instance of faith being kept, by the Free State allies. The absence of a

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really intimate affinity between the two national families may be due to the totally different geological formations in their respective countries, leading to their biological idiosyncrasies.

And it is this antinom which forms the background against which the Botha-Hertzog dispute was fought out. Although General Hertzog was born in Cape Colony, and Botha had settled north of Vaal River *via* Natal, the Free State and the New Republic each embodied respectively the Free State and Transvaal mentality. It is only natural that a strong spirit of dormant ill-will against enforced annexation to the Empire had remained alive among Afrikaners in the ex-Republics. Whilst Free State leaders prided themselves on being in tune with this spirit, Botha's political school in the Transvaal did its best to confer on the events of the last few years a deeper significance. It brought to the whole of South Africa a new—and therefore, to many, a not only unintelligible but insidious—gospel of lasting peace among the white races.

It is true that both sections originally found it difficult to reconcile such teachings with their racial instincts

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PRESIDENT STEYN—the former head of the Free State Government, well deserving the honour, continued to be so called until the day of his death—was five years older than Botha. His early days were spent at and near Bloemfontein. It is not likely that they knew each other in their youth, or that Botha, as is alleged, should have visited the Free State President in 1899. The story goes that the Transvaal Volksraad member made a personal attempt to induce Steyn to do all he could in order to ward off war with England. They became acquainted during Steyn's State visits to Pretoria, shortly before the war, and again met after the occupation of Bloemfontein. During the war, as well as during the period of national reconstruction, they jointly attended many deliberations. He being outspoken with me in expressing his estimate of others, I know how Botha consistently respected Steyn, both personally and for his political achievements, not as a matter of calculation but as the outcome of spontaneous admiration. Steyn's absolutist conditions regarding the justification of wars of independence in general, and of the Boer war in particular, strongly differed from Botha's military views. As with the most famous soldiers in history, he believed in war only so long as a reasonable fighting chance remained.

It was an inestimable advantage to South Africa to possess two leaders with such varying characteristics during the Boer war. The very contrast explains why Botha, with his susceptible nature, conceived a lasting devotion for the other, who, however, did not reciprocate that affection. Steyn's querulousness prevented him from entering into Botha's political motives, which to him were

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complicated, or rather inaccessible. Steyn was unable to get over his resentment at the result of the long Anglo-Boer conflict, which to him seemed irretrievably tragic. Post-war conditions always appeared to him in the light of the period of suffering prior to 1902. The bulk of his compatriots were, at first, like him in this, groping their way amidst the darkling shadows of the past rather than fixing their eyes on the bright spots that beckoned in the future.

Strikingly this mood emerges in a letter from Steyn to Merriman, written on June 4, 1911, in connexion with the appearance of General Sir W. Butler's autobiography: "I still find it very painful to read books, or even articles, that remind me of the war. Some people seem able to forget easily!"

Botha's post-war way of looking at things was startlingly original, almost offensively so, and thus created suspicion together with annoyance, as all attitudes do that fail to conform to conventional ideas. His policy therefore was rejected as unnational and unpatriotic by many. The more it became apparent how seriously he took his conciliation doctrine, the more—originally—he was destined to feel his isolation among his fellows. Many regarded him as a fool or, worse, a rogue. His memory retained its vigour, but he deliberately obliterated his painful recollections of the war, for he wanted to re-create the South Africa that came after Vereeniging. In this endeavour he had to do without Steyn's assistance. Many a family in the former Boer States for years included in its evening devotions a fervent prayer for the restoration of the republican order of things.

*Where Division Began.*—On Steyn's return from Europe in 1905 he found Botha immersed in political affairs, seeking contact with the well-disposed members of the British community. The Transvaal Boer Premier's work two years later caused the Free State leader heartfelt joy. This was destined to be short-lived. The Cullinan diamond, General Smuts' Education Act, and a host of intangible factors—who can plumb the depths of the human soul?—

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marred Steyn's good impression. Even Afrikaners who were sympathetic to the gospel of conciliation sometimes felt that the indulgent yielding was consistently overdone! Among the Dutch at the Convention symptoms of division appeared; Botha called them "fairly deep-seated," and they arose from radically different views on the Anglo-Boer problem, *i.e.*, they were affected by imperial relationships, among other issues. The fact that Steyn for reasons of health was forced to abandon any ambition of becoming the Union's premier increased his numerous grievances, real and imaginary, against Botha. One has only to remember Botha's "objectionable intimacy" with Jameson, or the aggravating circumstance that Free Staters received their constitution fully six months later than Transvaalers, who had gone to some trouble to obtain theirs!

The deeply rooted divergence of temperament and outlook had already begun to manifest itself at Klerksdorp and Vereeniging in 1902. Twelve years later it culminated in an outburst, the traces of which can only gradually disappear. In 1910 the Free Staters looked upon themselves as 'National' *par excellence*. They made no secret of their Merriman preference and reluctantly accepted Botha's lead when the heavy burden of a unified administration had been laid on him. Although Fischer and Hertzog openly showed their scant sympathy with Botha's politics, it was a matter of course to them that they had to sit in his Cabinet: it was the price for the support expected by that Cabinet from the sixteen Free State M.L.A.'s. The extent of its practical value was soon to be demonstrated. One may well ask whether there ever was any real unity in the Government party, inaugurated at Bloemfontein in 1911 amid such a grand pyrotechnic display of oratory.

The ambition of Free State politicians kept alive their opinion to the effect that their Province was predestined to shape the course of South African history, through its Members of Parliament and Ministers. Theirs was to be the tail wagging the dog. When Steyn died the Rev. Mr Kestell with evident gusto boasted that "the Free State was

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the President's all-in-all. The whole of South Africa found a place in his heart, but the Free State came first." As time progressed, Botha became less exclusive, and he may justly be regarded as the prototype of the ideal South African. With enviable forbearance Botha bore Steyn's peevishness and even opposition. Perhaps he never fully realized how strongly Steyn was inclined to fault-finding.

Since the middle of 1910, when Merriman's obstruction began to annoy Botha, relations between himself and his equally self-opinionated Cape rival were never anything but formal. Steyn, too, no longer loyally supported him in 1910, but in spite of this Botha remained in constant touch with Steyn, either requesting advice or giving information.

Among politicians to ask for, or to give, advice usually is an empty show, deceiving no one. Repeatedly Botha saw Steyn's lack of sympathy; nevertheless, he always felt obliged to justify his policy with the President, of all people. He continued to recognize the sturdy Free Stater as a real factor in the evolution of our political life. In 1910 Steyn wrote to a Natal politician, pointing out that it will not do to suggest a policy, for the carrying out of which someone else is to be held responsible. In reality Steyn never ceased to interfere in national affairs. Botha, without ever knowing it, had become his *bête noire*.

*The Botha-Steyn Conflict.*—The first clash left no scars (the reference is to Steyn's support of Merriman as Premier). The second conflict—on the Hertzog crisis—left Botha regretful and, temporarily, aggrieved. He supposed, however, that the flaring up of the quarrel—which had so long been smouldering—must have come as a surprise to Steyn. They bombarded each other with long, circumstantial epistles on the crisis—naturally without the one convincing the other. In one of his last letters to Steyn Botha says:

"I have suffered much during the past few months. You, too, feel deeply. Possibly you can imagine more or less what I have had to go through. That, however, the day has come when I have to say to you (in my eyes the

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greatest contemporary Afrikaner, and at the same time my beloved friend), 'Thy ways are not my ways' is so painful an experience that I never dreamt it would occur during my political career. It is my deepest sorrow since the day when the independence of my country had to be surrendered."

The corresponding fragment in Steyn's reply reads:

With you, General, I have gone through deep waters. I have had nothing but affection and friendship from you. It is for this reason that the strife between you and General Hertzog, both of whom I esteem so highly, grieves me so much.

It may well be asked whether Steyn's timely intervention might not have avoided the breach. It would, however, be unfair to leave out of account the broken health of the hermit of Onze Rust, Steyn's homestead near the Free State capital. He never was a thorough-going supporter of the Botha policy, even though he did not hesitate to pose as one in public.

When Botha for the third time had to do without Steyn's support at a most difficult period, surprise could not count as an excuse. It was known at Pretoria that Steyn wanted to keep South Africa out of the threatening World War, although legitimate doubts as to the practicability of this aspiration existed. Early in August 1914, when British South Africa became a belligerent owing to England entering the lists against the Central Powers, General Smuts paid a visit to the President in order to explain matters to him. Mr N. J. de Wet, Minister of Justice, followed a few weeks later. Owing to the Maritz betrayal, and increasing ferment both in the Transvaal and the Northern Free State, martial law had to be proclaimed. Notwithstanding this, Steyn approved of the meetings of protest against the South-west campaign, convened by Generals Beyers and de Wet; he used the "safety-valve" argument.

He was living in comparative isolation; he had great physical difficulty in moving, and sometimes he could hardly talk. No improvement in his vital functions was

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noticeable since his medical adviser had, in 1909, dissuaded him from all professional political activity. His intellect was not affected, but his physical weakness, which sometimes assumed the proportions of paralysis, stood in the way of immediate and sound conclusions on which to act. Thus he was incapacitated from keeping in touch with the course of events. His biographer records that the final Botha-Hertzog breach in December 1912 (long expected by some people) came on him as a bolt from the blue. In 1914, Steyn himself tells us, "I first heard of the rebellion in the Free State as an accomplished fact." At the time, civil war was in full swing! During a critical period of our history, more was demanded of his mental powers than he was able to give.

*Botha's S.O.S.*—Immediately after the treason committed on the German border on October 11, 1914, the Prime Minister wired to Steyn, mentioning the impending proclamation of martial law, which would be accompanied by commandeering in places. The telegram concluded: "A word from you will go far." The sudden request for aid is only explicable by the speed with which Botha in those days of suspense had to act. This prevented him from approaching Steyn in his usual tactful manner. He hit on the wrong moment in Steyn's political moods, for it so happened that in those days the President preferred to use his influence "in a quiet way."

This quietude was the very thing Botha did not want. It may be questioned whether Steyn adequately recognized the strategic importance of the Windhoek wireless station as a potent instrument of war. In its time it had an exceptionally wide range, thus raising the German South-west Protectorate to a key position in overseas warfare and a danger to the Union. Putting an end to that position could therefore be considered a defensive as well as an offensive measure. Steyn had had no opportunity of noting that the Prime Minister had been reluctant to enter upon the South-west campaign. Botha had to choose between seeing the territory occupied by Australians

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(added to which the British section in South Africa would have resented his abstention) and conquering it himself, in which case he would incur the enmity of part of the Afrikanders!

As a matter of fact, Botha's urgent telegraphic appeal to Onze Rust was needless, being founded on an overestimate of the prestige enjoyed by a man who was respected as even Steyn was. Crises will come in a nation's life when wise words of persuasion, by whomsoever uttered, remain unheeded by many. Just as the pastoral exhortation, issued simultaneously by the Dutch Reformed Church, had but little effect on the multitude (which had become hysterical), the President would not have been listened to by General de Wet and his followers had he urged them to obey their Parliament and their Government and their own laws.

Steyn's reply to Botha's S.O.S. was to the effect that, if he addressed his people, he would have to advise against the South-west expedition; hence, he preferred to remain silent, all the more so "because I have not yet regained strength, and am already experiencing the ill-effects of the terrible times in which we are living." He had "hoped to be able to stand aside from the present conflict," and promised not to do anything that might render the Premier's position more difficult—nothing less, nothing more. He sent his son to Pretoria to hand over the letter. Shortly afterward father and son both tried to influence Beyers and de Wet in the direction of peace, but in vain: the psychological moment was past. General de Wet avoided all contact with the father of his people at Onze Rust.

Can it be that Botha afterward realized that his appeal had been too impulsive? Or did he consider it his duty, at the hour of national peril, to force the President to show his hand? However this may be, at Steyn's grave (a few years later) he gave expression to a sorrow that was undoubtedly intense as well as sincere. In his heart not a vestige of reproach or sense of estrangement remained. And now a second question arises: Did Steyn ever understand that,

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though he might have published his objection to the Windhoek campaign, his duty to himself and his people nevertheless obliged him to point out that a formal resolution of Parliament, embodying the national will, demanded unconditional obedience? At the great S.A.P. Congress, held at Bloemfontein in 1911, Steyn referred to the "hungry European nations, stretching out their grasping hands to parts of Southern Africa. We must be prepared for their energy." During the Rebellion he dictated a passage illustrating his past concern at South Africa's condition:

In case the threatened Anglo-German war breaks out, I understood that, if we remained apart as separate colonies, the state of affairs might easily lead to serious consequences.

This can only mean that Steyn, fearing that one Colony might be pro-British and the other pro-German, worked with all his strength for the establishment of a central authority invested with the legal power to lay down a policy to the whole of the country in case of war, to be respected by all alike. If this is the correct view, it is difficult to follow Steyn, when he quotes "the consternation among many of our people"—these are his words—as an excuse for an armed protest against "an Assembly resolution, ratifying by a large majority the Government's policy"—his own words once more.

The central authority of Parliament, called into being with the aid of Steyn himself, was not merely ignored, but flouted by him, at the very moment when civil war—which he dreaded so much—threatened South Africa, rendering obedience to the constitutional order an urgent necessity. Rightly Botha, in his correspondence with Onze Rust, drew Steyn's attention to the flagrant wrong committed in condoning active resistance to the Government's measures by the excuse that the recalcitrants would have preferred other steps! There were, at the time, people sufficiently muddled to shout loudly that the Government should resign, in order that a general election might decide! Steyn's amazing inconsistency can be explained only by his

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exhausted physique fatally affecting his otherwise normal intelligence.

*End of the Steyn-Merriman Friendship.*—How strongly the outbreak of the Great War disturbed people's minds in South Africa is proved by the sudden and complete break in the amicable relations of many years' standing between Steyn and Merriman. Toward the end of September 1914 the latter ventilated an opinion on the causes of the Boer war that proved so objectionable to Steyn that the reply put an end to any further exchange of thoughts. In 1910 he had estimated Merriman's administrative talents higher than Botha's—four years later the Cape politician, too, incurred the irrevocable displeasure of Onze Rust. It is insight into this general disruption of even social intercourse between leading South Africans that aids comprehension of the extremely awkward situation with which Botha had to contend. General Smuts subsequently described it as follows:

Days there were when the Rebellion took on such a dangerous aspect that the Government no longer knew whether it was standing on its head or on its heels.

Those who care to visualize the real depth of the anti-campaign movement in the Union, which reached its height in the civil war, will learn much from the following figures, indicating the result of the General Election of 1915; thanks to the intensity of the passions then aroused it supplied a correct image, more so than any other election, of the relative strength of the Union's deepest feelings. 77,000 votes were cast for Nationalist candidates, 95,000 for S.A.P. men, and 65,000 for Unionists.

At Steyn's death, in November 1916, Botha paid his tribute at the graveside as a personal friend rather than as Prime Minister. His words in praising the exceptional merits of the great Free Stater were: "During the Boer war he was the soul of everything; his figure will continue to inspire the people by his noble example for all time."

In the autograph manuscript of the funeral oration

## BOTHA AND PRESIDENT STEYN

Botha calls himself "cast down with grief," and Steyn "the father of the Convention; one of the creators of Union." At a time when Botha had become unsympathetic to Steyn, the former—in March 1910, when Bloemfontein had resolved on throwing its weight into the scale on Merriman's behalf and turning its back on the other "Siamese twin"—wrote to the President: "Sometimes, when troubles threaten to overwhelm me, it is a great relief to me to unbosom myself to you." A year later: "President, no one in South Africa to-day can advise us more collectedly or soundly than you can."

How are we to explain the contrast? Was it Botha's unconscious endeavour—inspired by exaggerated deference to a colleague, five years his senior and destined to the highest office of State, but broken by illness—to reconcile Steyn to his, Botha's, own prominent position? Was Steyn, just as unconsciously, devoured by a silent, gnawing pain at Botha's rapid promotion to be arbiter of South Africa's fate, so that he was inclined to confine his attention to Botha's alleged mistakes?

*Quién sabe?*

## XXVII

### BOTHA'S FIRST UNION CABINET

THE South Africa Act was to be a gift by the British Parliament; it was therefore practically a matter of course that the National Convention should have preferred the English style of party government, for our new organism, to the Boer Republican model, which suited our country better. The Executive as well as the Legislature was, in republican times, the direct product of the polls, functioning independently, both of them under the constant supervision of the electorate. When Botha, in May 1910, was called upon to form a Government for the time being, subject to the verdict of the electorate, he was not free to select whom he liked. He felt bound by his promises—in connexion with the rejection of the Jameson scheme—to recruit his colleagues from the four existing ministries. The best Minister, he once said to me, is the man you have to go down on your knees to, asking him please to sacrifice his personal interests on the altar of the nation's welfare—not he who insists on being invited, or who is forced on you by third parties, by reason of his alleged services, or alternatively as the price to be paid for the influence he is presumed to exercise.

In order to lend a constitutional basis to the provisional Botha *régime* a majority of partisans had to be got into the Assembly. For that purpose a popular platform required to be constructed, and a number of Ministers who would appeal to the popular taste selected in a bit of a hurry. Botha did not carry out his original intention of appointing in the first instance but six, instead of nine, colleagues (as provided in the Constitution), because the three vacant portfolios would be sure to cause offence to over-ambitious politicians; and that in its turn would create trouble during the elections.

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In three of the Dominions (not in Natal) existing party divisions allowed a joint grouping for electoral purposes. From the Transvaal the Premier selected his indispensable lieutenant, General J. C. Smuts, who took no less than three portfolios, viz., the Interior, Mines, and Defence. Then there was Mr H. C. Hull, who represented the moderate British, and had shown his ability as a Treasurer. Cape Province had four Ministers. Mr F. S. Malan acted on behalf of the Afrikaner Bond with authority and tact, and in the course of years became an ever more zealous supporter of the Botha policy. Sir David Graaff was among Ministers above all the man of affairs. Messrs Burton and Sauer were regarded as enriching the Cabinet with the excellent Merriman tradition. Natal was represented by Sir Frederick Moor—whose position among his fellow-colonists has already been elucidated—and the amiable Dr O'Grady Gubbins, Minister without portfolio. The Free State insisted on portfolios for Abraham Fischer and General Hertzog, the latter taking Justice.

These two were not exactly admirers of Botha's political antecedents or administrative methods; they were never towers of strength to the Cabinet. Opposition criticism on the composition of the Government as a whole may be condensed into Sir Drummond Chaplin's words at Germiston, in September 1910: it represented the countryside only, and it had dropped all those proposals which did not please the Hertzog section. Botha, Sir Drummond said, was busy putting on Hertzog's clothes.

"*Hertzogism.*"—The Minister who in 1910 was least presentable on election platforms was General Hertzog. In charge of Education in the Free State, he had become English-speaking South Africa's bogey-man, owing to his having made instruction in both official languages compulsory for all pupils in elementary schools. In the Free State Afrikaans was the home language of the great bulk of the people; they had no objection to their children being taught English. Among English-speaking Free Staters—and even more so in the other Dominions—there were

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many who suspected the compulsory character of the Hertzog Act; administrative incidents in connexion with its provisions led to agitation. The English-speaking section had expected the subjection of the Boer States to produce, among other salutary results (English), uni-lingualism for the whole of South Africa. After Vereeniging the language of the larger half of the population was prescribed in schools and Government offices throughout the sub-continent. The Transvaal Education Act, 1907, introduced by General Smuts, provided that every child would be taught in its home language, as the medium best suited to its instruction. Intelligent application of this principle gave universal satisfaction in the Transvaal, with its large British population.

In 1910 the English-speaking section—however greatly one may regret it—was so irritable on the subject of its children being taught Dutch that the slightest suspicion of compulsion caused red-hot indignation, reacting powerfully on the ordinary citizen's politics—and this on the eve of judgment having to be passed on the Botha Cabinet. Although less than twenty years have now passed since "Hertzogism" was an important, even critical, factor in our society, as the generator of ill-feeling and passion, it is hard to understand to-day how English-speaking South Africans could regard it as a humiliation that their offspring should be obliged to learn the other language.

Intended, without a doubt, as a boon to the Free State, and in theory perhaps an improvement on the Transvaal solution of the same problem, the Hertzog Act suddenly became a shibboleth that tore the abnormal nervous system of the South African nation to tatters. It should not be forgotten that, whereas the fathers of the Constitution accepted the absolute equality of both languages in all good faith, English-speaking South Africa never took the matter seriously. Bi-lingualism was regarded as a mere polite gesture toward the other section—neither more nor less. Educated Afrikaners put up with bi-lingualism as a necessary evil from which there was no escape. On the

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other hand, the average English-speaking South African of the period was inclined to regard every practical recognition of the Dutch language as a menace to the interests of those of his own race.

All this gave the figure of General Hertzog such prominence that President Steyn and other protagonists of "Hertzogism" would hardly have tolerated his exclusion from the Botha Cabinet. The neutrality of future Free State members of Parliament was foreshadowed in such a case, whereas on the other side of the account was the fact that if Hertzog were taken in a large number of English-speaking voters would secede. Unhesitatingly, Botha chose the second alternative. This meant not only the loss of several seats for his combined party, but also scant gratitude in the circles where "Hertzogism" was popular.

Botha did not lose any time in defining the following as his educational policy, Hertzog or no Hertzog: Equal rights for both languages, mother-tongue to be used as the medium, and no compulsion as to the second language. At the same time he refused to entertain the demand, frequently made in those days, that the Union Government should have the Free State Act repealed. In the end, the Government party got 66 out of 121 seats in the Assembly, the anti-Hertzogites capturing 44. About 148,000 votes were cast for Bothaites, as against 90,000 for all other candidates. It would have been a euphemism, however, to have spoken of a "Botha party," because shortly after the election Hertzog was secretly approached with the request to establish and lead a separate, anti-Botha, party. In 1910 Botha refused to let the Free State go; two years later the Free State let him go.

*Botha's Defeat.*—A couple of weeks after the construction of the Cabinet, Botha was nominated for Pretoria East. He opened an extensive campaign in that constituency with a speech promising equal treatment of all provinces. Scarcely amalgamated, the four ex-Colonies were already becoming jealous of one another with regard to favours

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conferred by the Government. Botha emphasized his policy of "conciliation, co-operation, mutual tolerance." We must prepare, he said, to recognize each other's traditions, history, languages. For the rest, he held that the time had now come for everyone to "take off his coat," *i.e.*, without delay work for his own personal as well as the general prosperity. "Platitudes," Merriman called all these things.

The General Election supplied but one sensation: Botha's own defeat in the constituency where he had lived during the last few years. He had spared neither platform energy nor individual persuasion in order to attract electors to his banner of freeing the white population from racialism. His ambition to win was sharpened by the fact that his opponent, Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, had centred his hopes on the "best-man government" feeling in the constituency. When the figures appeared, Botha was deeply disappointed. He had fought hard, and apart from his own personal defeat, the relatively small majority of his supposed supporters in the Assembly over all other combinations was not exactly encouraging. Just as Jameson, on realizing that his "best-men government" idea had to be jettisoned, suddenly lost his taste for politics, Botha experienced—almost at the same time—the temptation to resign the Premiership.

He was cast down by the fact that neither the atmosphere of goodwill in the Convention days nor the general satisfaction at South Africa's long-postponed unity was able permanently to affect the political outlook of his people. The desire to return to his favourite work as a stock-breeder, and only now and then to cut in as a counsellor, became particularly strong. As always, however, an irresistible sense of duty swayed him. The trend of recent events had not come up to his expectations by a long way. Not that he had ever indulged in millennial anticipations, but the thought that the progress made since Vereeniging might prove illusory was intolerable to him. He simply could not escape further sacrifices.

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During his premiership in Transvaal Botha had represented Standerton district at Pretoria; he now looked for another constituency, having replied to Sir Percy Fitzpatrick's teasing remarks that he would in no case return to his faithful Standertonians. Losberg district, to the east of Potchefstroom, then elected him for Parliament in Capetown. Although but forty-eight years old, he felt the effects of the continual tension, of which he, more than anyone else, was the victim. In November 1910 he left for Capetown, in order to attend the formal opening of Parliament by the Duke of Connaught. To Dr Bok, his devoted and talented secretary, he confessed that he had never faced a new departure with such a heavy heart. What would a little earlier perhaps have gladdened him as being a joyful occasion had become, now that it was within his grasp, nothing but a cause of embittered comment on the vexatious side of the statesman's profession.

To South Africa, however, he remained the leader above all others. The opinion of the well-known English publicist Basil Williams may be cited here. The impressions he formed of the Capetown festivities, as reproduced in the *Times*, were as follows:

Unquestionably General Botha is South Africa's chosen leader. He has proved himself a gallant, a resourceful and a courteous captain, during three long years of war. Though he won no overwhelming victories, he was great as the embodiment of that slow tenacity which served the Boers so well. The habit of command, which he acquired in war, he has never since abandoned, and all who approach him acknowledge it to be his right. It is not that he is brilliant or has ever expressed strikingly original ideas. But he is a man of sound judgment and extraordinary tact in weighing the human element in a problem. He is a farmer, and has something of the slow finality that comes to the best farmers from watching the slow and sure processes of nature. He has also some of the defects of a man long accustomed to command; he is impatient of opposition, and is apt to take it with childish petulance as an insult against himself. As a parliamentary leader this will prove his chief weakness, for parliamentary criticism being still new to him, he is more inclined to circumvent than to meet it. Besides his petulance he has a vein of almost childlike simplicity.

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When a great work is done, as in the last Convention, he rejoices like a boy at play. Childlike is also his loyalty to friends and causes, and his inability to understand what seems disloyalty in others.

Apart from the fact that there had not been time or opportunity for the welding of related provincial party organizations into one compact group, there was hardly any cohesion among those members of the Assembly who had been elected to support the Botha Cabinet. They scarcely knew each other, and easily fell a prey to prejudice, suspicion, and jealousy—qualities that had flourished in the past particularly among Cape politicians, even those of the same party. It was not easy to get one of their Ministers to assist a colleague with words of sympathy at a time of trouble or attack. The leaders of the same group harmonized so poorly that they avoided personal intercourse, or secretly criticized each other. "Our own people are the most awful crew," Jameson stated on becoming Cape Premier in 1904. It was not only his adherents who deserved the reproach.

Meanwhile the Cape Parliament had been enjoying a certain reputation because of the punctilious emulation of Westminster precedents and the high level of its debates. Capetown frowned on steam-roller and caucus methods, such as had brought the Pretoria legislative machinery into disrepute! To this should be added that the Transvaal's economic importance had long predominated. By its huge gold output the Province had become an indispensable factor in the economics of the world. Transvaalers had learnt, better than others in South Africa, to set about the business of State intelligently and with proper despatch.

*Intrigue.*—The Union Assembly soon began to be a hotbed of intrigue. At the first caucus of the Government party, where the choice of a Speaker had to be decided upon, Botha proposed General Beyers, a Cape-born lawyer, who had distinguished himself as an able and brave Boer commander. At Vereeniging he had presided over the

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meeting of delegates, and since 1907 he had made an exemplary Transvaal Speaker. His candidature would probably have been cordially welcomed by the Opposition.

Merriman, however, moved Mr J. T. (now Sir James) Molteno, the argument being that, as the Transvaal had already supplied the leader of the House, viz., the Prime Minister, it would be better to take Mr Speaker from some other Province. In those days many people feared that the whole of South Africa would find its way into Botha's 'pocket'! Did not General Smuts control three Departments and Mr Hull the Treasury! There were politicians who, although not antagonistic to Botha, did not like the idea that the prominent individuals should all be taken from the Transvaal! Mr Molteno's knowledge of Dutch was inadequate, nor had he General Beyers' parliamentary experience and prestige. Cape members imagined that the Free Staters as well as the Transvaalers would support the latter candidate, thus ensuring a majority. Many of them, while recognizing the superiority of the qualifications possessed by Botha's candidate, did not want to abandon their old leader, Merriman. The unexpected happened. The Free Staters, seized by their passion for equilibrium between North and South, took Merriman's part in the caucus, thus depressing the scales of South Africa in favour of the South: Mr Molteno became the Government nominee for the Speakership.

While Merriman, six months previously, had attempted in vain to get one of his friends appointed Cape Administrator, he was now able to deal Botha an effective blow—thanks to the assistance of the Free Staters, which surprised many people—even before the new Parliament had been *de facto* constituted. The episode conveyed a plain warning to the Prime Minister as to the quality of support on which he might count in the Assembly. When Botha publicly moved in the House that Mr Molteno do occupy the Chair, Opposition members were so disgusted that they refused to have the motion seconded from their midst. Without any doubt, the non-election of General Beyers had serious

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consequences for South Africa. Having been appointed Commandant-General at a later stage, he resigned his post in dramatic circumstances, shortly after the outbreak of the Great War.

The immediate significance of the Molteno incident was that the Government had to take into account the Merriman faction which, supported by the Free Staters, was only too much inclined to act the part of Opposition. While Botha was aspiring to the Union premiership, President Steyn— together with Abraham Fischer and General Hertzog— strengthened Merriman's candidature. The fact of General Beyers being less welcome than Mr Molteno was due to Transvaal recommendation. Anti-Botha tendency among Free State leaders has dominated our political history for years.

## XXVIII

### BOTHA AND THE DUTCH LANGUAGE

SOME years after Union the question was asked whether South Africa was ripe for it when it came. Leading politicians at the time were not pessimistic, so that eight years after Vereeniging the country was able to indulge in the most delightful of all surprises: jubilation at its own unexpected good fortune. The more closely they approached the day for its materialization, however, the more keenly did many people feel the disillusion that is the aftermath of every rhapsody. The Dutch-speaking section had come into its own in South African affairs by purely constitutional means. In theory, therefore, every cause of friction with the other portion of the population had been removed. Not so in actual practice. Discord remained.

The rapid triumph of the Afrikaner, due to Botha's political strategy and peaceful propaganda for conciliation more than to any other cause, inspired his compatriots, especially the younger set. These were galvanized into a frenzy of nationalism, of which turbulent haste and enthusiastic self-consciousness were powerful ingredients. Ordinarily, literary-social revival precedes national-political renaissance. In this instance the sequence was reversed; this fact did not affect either the timeliness or the usefulness of the movement. The quantity of scientific and artistic talent, suddenly produced by the Afrikaner element, was astonishing.

Ever since the defeat of 1902 this element felt the ignominy, linguistically as well as otherwise, of having to 'crawl' before the British domination. The Transvaal soon had its energetic leaders, who looked after the interests of their Dutch-speaking countrymen, protecting by the well-knit "C.N.O." organization the conquered popula-

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tion's language rights. Under the Vereeniging Treaty, the Afrikaner's language was barely tolerated. Clause five provided that Dutch was to be taught at public schools in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony wherever the parents might demand it; its use would be permitted in Courts of Law in so far as might be necessary for the better and more efficient administration of justice. Five years afterward the Transvaal Education Act put English and Dutch on a completely equal footing as mediums of instruction. Ultimately, Clause 137 of the South Africa Act established perfect equality in every respect, placing the Union permanently in the ranks of those interesting, though not uniformly enviable, countries whose system is a bi-lingual one.

The Dutch, who had heartily applauded this forward movement, rightly insisted that the opportunity should be utilized to the fullest extent. Ambitious, well-meaning zealots stood up for those who considered the achieved progress over-slow. It was they who reproached the Government with lack of sympathy for the inspiring cultural renaissance, especially the language movement. Was it a just reproach? As far as the bureaucracy was concerned, it was. Time and again, civil servants had to be spurred; it was the labour of a Sisyphus to goad them into cultivating at least that modicum of sympathy which would make them render bare justice. The uninformed language enthusiast, however, did not realize what it involved to apply the new 1910 ideas with the Milner inheritance of officialdom as instrument! The amalgamation of four existing administrations absorbed ministerial attention to begin with. Officialdom, to which the gradual organization of Union departments had been entrusted, would not permit of the immediate and draconic application of Clause 137!

“*Great Sacrifices!*”—Nothing could be more unjust than to accuse Botha of indifference toward his mother-tongue. When, in May 1902, five leading Afrikaners negotiated peace terms, Botha was the man who claimed from Lord



On the Veranda of Groote Schuur, Cape Town  
This photograph was taken shortly after Botha became Union Premier, in 1910.  
He was then nearly fifty years old.

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Milner a Dutch version of the draft treaty. Who was the first to raise the national banner after 1902?

On February 8, 1904, a large concourse met in the north-east part of the Free State for the reinterment of General Philip R. Botha, who was an elder brother of Botha and a trusty lieutenant of de Wet. He met his death after having been severely wounded on the battlefield. Botha made a speech, reported in the Press, exhorting his hearers to observe "loyalty toward our language, our Church, our customs."

"An Afrikaner," he continued, "who neglects his language is an enemy, not only of his people but of himself. Let us learn English; let the English learn Dutch—that will increase the chances of our forming one great nation. I beseech you, make great sacrifices for your language and education."

Three months afterward, when the political rebirth of his people was initiated by the formation of Het Volk, Botha said:

"Though we lost our independence, the nation survives. We fail to see, at present, why so much blood should have been spilled, but the God of our fathers does not slumber. In His own day it will all become plain to us. Meanwhile, let us show our new Government that we are a civilized people, and, while obeying it, hold fast before all things to our nationality and our own tongue."

Approximately five years later Steyn's dictum was: "The language of the conqueror in the mouth of the conquered is the language of a slave." The contrast between the two ways of putting the question is characteristic: Botha's words are conciliatory; Steyn is defiant. Botha used every opportunity of reminding Lord Milner that he should keep his promise of satisfactorily maintaining the Dutch language in education. As soon as unification had become practical politics, Botha assured Steyn (June 1908) of his support for equal language rights at the ensuing Convention. He did not neglect to move the Cape Government in the same direction, and it was he who created the

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exceptional atmosphere without which Clause 137 of the South Africa Act would never have come about.

Almost invariably his public speeches and official communications were made in Dutch. Only a few, not very happy, exceptions are on record. In his private circle, too, he used his mother-tongue. As regards the systematic use of Afrikaans, most of the intellectuals heading the language movement were not in advance of him. He had to yield to the majority of them when it came to a thorough knowledge of English. During his first term of office (1907) his political opponents openly derided the Prime Minister's English; the Johannesburg Press attributed his comparative reserve in the Assembly to his slight linguistic attainments. This always remained the same. Lord Buxton tells us: "Botha and I always, of course, talked in English. His unfamiliarity with the English language and with its idioms gave a graphic turn to common expression."

Botha knew that he could not be sure of his English; when, on occasion, he was forced to speak in it he read from manuscript, which usually lost him a good deal of the effect aimed at. His loyalty to Dutch was grounded in necessity—not in academic abstraction. It was sober sense, not fanaticism, that explained his uni-lingualism in public. He was able, however, to apply that fine, vigorous handwriting of his to good High-Dutch and racy Afrikaans.

*Not a Language Fanatic.*—The political aspect of the language question hardly appealed to Botha. He always preferred the "more haste, less speed" standpoint in such matters; it suited his antipathy to anything that might fan the racial flame. The language fanatic he feared just as much as he did the jingo in general. He was completely oblivious to the damage incurred by his prestige as Premier by the action of civil servants who, either owing to lack of judgment or deliberately, ignored the existence of Clause 137, in a direction detrimental to the Dutch community. When income-tax was first levied, circulars were sent out in English only; the countryside bombarded the Government with complaints, owing to the inability of the farmers

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to follow the complicated directions by the Treasury. I tried to bring it home to him that the head of the department concerned was irritating many voters, and should at the very least be reprimanded. My representations, however, made but a faint impression on him.

Once, after a visit to Rusthof, he and I were waiting on the station platform where an official placard told farmers how to be successful as mealie farmers. It was printed in English only, although the district was practically Dutch-speaking to a man. "Did you notice, General?" I exclaimed, naturally surprised. "Ay," he replied, "the Department of Agriculture is really doing good work." He completely missed my point. Where his ministerial instructions would have been instrumental in waking up a wrong-headed, innately conservative bureaucracy, teaching it the urgency of treating both official languages on a basis of equality, Botha eliminated Government action; the public, he seemed to think, had better act as constable in such cases. When the Dutch Press protested vigorously, and published numerous instances of the official neglect of Clause 137, under the heading of "The Lame Donkey again!" Botha could only stigmatize these as undeserved reproaches; the Government, he thought, could surely not be held responsible for the slackness or the refractoriness of its Civil Service!

Nor did he take much notice of the economic aspect. The special claims of applicants for the public service who either commanded both languages, or were determined to acquire them, implied an interpretation of Clause 137 that Botha was not prepared to make his own without further ado. He preferred to leave all such matters to the slow process of gradual recognition by the British section. Be it remembered that the latter's 1910 mood, as regards language, was identical with that of 1908, when Hertzogism had caused a panic. Bit by bit in the course of years their native timidity diminished.

People who insisted on mechanical equality, without being acquainted with office routine, easily got excited,

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intensifying discontent by their cavilling. During the Rebellion General de Wet was given a safe conduct to President Steyn which, owing to the stupidity of some subordinate official, had been made out in English. This ruffled his temper to such an extent that he found in it a welcome excuse for his refusal to go to Onze Rust. Equally well known is the case of the railway official who detained a parcel addressed "Kaapstad" (Capetown), because he recognized "no such station."

*Premier and Student.*—We get a clear insight into the position taken up by Botha on the language question from his correspondence with a Stellenbosch student on a demonstration, organized early in 1913 in honour of Clause 137. The student—afterward the Rev. Dr N. J. v. d. Merwe, M.L.A., the talented biographer of his father-in-law, President Steyn—published a letter in which he made the following reproach:

We felt that you were not inclined to encourage the nascent enthusiasm for our own language, and our own people, among the youth of the country. Instead of inspiring it to life, you were busy administering a sleeping-draught to your people, which could only end in eventual impotence and ruin.

Botha, in his reply, made it clear that his first objection to the demonstration was founded on the period:

"You wanted to celebrate the accomplishment of language equality immediately after the Assembly's decision—following an extremely bitter and warm debate as well as a division on purely party lines—to exercise those rights, *i.e.*, in the public service. The people at the moment were very excited. As leader I am compelled to take such things into account. I felt that we should avoid noisy bitterness, after having obtained that which we considered fair and just."

Botha further asked for facts in support of the charge against him of lukewarmness toward his language. The accuser, instead of supplying them, took refuge in the following: "It will do no good to rake up the bygones that induced us to form the opinion we did." In order to mask

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his discomfiture he puts a counter-question: "What is the meaning of your policy of conciliation?" That was the end of the language controversy, started by him.

Botha opposed the provocation of "noisy bitterness"; he had attained sufficient merit not to grudge either himself or others reasonable moderation regarding his mother-tongue. In September 1913 he addressed a Standerton rally, where he said, *i.e.*:

"There are those who, in these days, wax very eloquent on the language question. Not a few of them were completely unknown to fame when, amidst blood and tears, the people fought for its sacred rights. There are even language enthusiasts who speculated with that blood until they had become rich—men who know nothing of what it means to make great sacrifices for the people."

It was perhaps but natural that the efflorescence of Afrikaans literature came to be abused politically, which clashed with Botha's idea of good policy. It was inevitable, too, that the practical interest that might have been expected of him, as the Union's Premier, partly subsided when he noticed how the healthy enthusiasm for Afrikaans was used by many as an instrument for anti-British propaganda. In any case, experience has taught since 1910 that efficient reorganization of the Civil Service, for the benefit of Clause 137, cannot come about as if by magic.

## XXIX

### BOTHA AND THE EMPIRE

PRESIDENT WILSON, it is said, used to state when he was a young professor that love for his birthplace—the Southern States—made him rejoice at their defeat in the Civil War. Botha regretted, until the end of his days, the result of the Boer war. At no time, however, did he feel the desire to render the incorporation of the Republics into the Empire undone, once it had become an accomplished fact. In March 1918 he clearly stated his position on moving a resolution in the Assembly at Capetown, placing on record the House's appreciation of the valour and steadfastness of the troops under Sir Douglas Haig. Among them were South Africans. The Nationalists opposed; no one, they argued, could expect ex-burghers to support such a motion. Botha replied to their objections:

“I shall never condone what was done to the Republics. I shall condemn it all the days of my life. However, peace was born from that great crime, and on my part nothing will be done to outrage the Treaty by any action that would sully the national honour. Signing a document insincerely amounts to hypocrisy. United South Africa was born at Vereeniging. Whoever took the oath on the Constitution, granted by the British authorities, without intending to observe it, is a hypocrite. What the Empire has inflicted on me I shall continue to criticize, but United South Africa is the child of historical events. People are laughing at conciliation and co-operation, but unless we respect each other's interests, civil war is sure to come.”

Ever since unification, the interest taken by South Africa in the status of Imperial Dominions, and in international affairs generally, had become more intense. Lack of clear

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definition regarding status, coupled with the absence of an Empire Constitution, had given birth to divergent conclusions which, however, began to approach something like official uniformity. No one in South Africa any longer disputed the Union's title to the most complete internal autonomy, any more than is the evolution from Dominion status to international independence repudiated to-day.

Botha was not at all in love with casuistic interpretations of unwritten British Imperial constitutional law. According as the Empire glided from its 'second' into its 'third' phase, his views always squared with the most up-to-date conceptions of Dominion status. He personally played a part in the changes that came about. Without any legal training, and even without being well-read on the subject, he was among the pioneers of modern Imperial developments. Generally, he saw the position more clearly than did most statesmen, either within or without the Empire.

He never found it hard to proclaim that obligations, and even sacrifices, had to be undertaken in return for the advantages pertaining to the Imperial connexion. In November 1912 he told the S.A.P. Congress at Pretoria: "We are part and parcel of the Empire, on a basis of equality; we are a sister-State to England." Lord Buxton gives us a valuable vignette <sup>1</sup>:

Botha believed that it was in the interest of his country and of his own white race, as well as an obligation of honour, that the Imperial connexion should be maintained, and that the Union should remain an integral part of the British Empire; he was convinced that the Empire would only endure, if it were founded on the freest individual liberty of action of each component part. In his view to trammel and fetter by artificial bonds, under whatever specious or high-sounding name, was the surest way of bringing the marvellous Commonwealth to an end.

As recently as 1911 Botha had heard the echoes of the antiquated scheme for an Imperial Parliament, authorized to legislate and take steps, binding on either the whole of

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Botha*, by Earl Buxton (Murray).

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the Empire or on a part to be specified. In 1919 he was privileged, at Paris, to witness international recognition of the Dominions as co-equal with Great Britain within the comity of nations. Between these two dates falls the Great War, which revealed to Europe the virility of the British 'Colonies' across the seas. England woke up to the existence of an entirely new brand of Empire, such as had probably never existed before, with the possible exception of the Hanseatic League.

On May 23, 1911, Mr Asquith, as Britain's Premier, opened the Imperial Conference of fifteen prime ministers and other responsible statesmen from England, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and Newfoundland. The Union was represented by Botha and his colleagues Sir D. Graaff and F. S. Malan. A few introductory points—including the desirability of not publishing the debates—were soon settled. Botha was against publicity, quoting the salutary effect of secrecy in connexion with the South African National Convention. Without the strictly confidential nature of its proceedings, he said, Union as now existing would never have come to pass, and difficulties would have been considerably multiplied.

*Sir Joseph Ward.*—The New Zealand Premier, Sir J. Ward, elaborately introduced a motion that caused quiet amusement. He wanted an Imperial Council, consisting of representatives from all autonomous parts of the Empire. A memorandum, signed by a number of British Members of Parliament, supported the idea. The "Parliament for Defence," as conceived by Sir Joseph, was to have seventy-seven Dominion members (South Africa to supply seven), and 223 men to represent the United Kingdom. His basis was one white member to every 200,000 whites. A Senate was to consist of two members representing each Dominion, and two for Britain. This Parliament would be authorized to levy a Defence tax on the Dominions.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier (Canada) took the lead in condemning the scheme, root and branch. He was followed by Mr Fisher, Australian Premier, who remarked that his country

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already possessed the fullest military and naval powers. He considered other Imperial matters more urgent. Then came Botha, who opined, despite his ambition for drawing Imperial ties closer, that a central council would derogate from the autonomous powers of the Empire's component parts; no Parliament in the Empire, he said, would tolerate the idea. And, if the Imperial Council were to have purely advisory functions only, it would as likely as not develop into an unwanted busybody.

He pinned his faith to Conferences, which would serve Imperial interests much better, provided they were more efficiently organized. Centralization of authority clashed with traditional British policy, to which present conditions in the Empire owed so much. Decentralization, freedom of action, was the thing. An Imperial Council would render the common tie both distasteful and irksome to the Dominions. What they needed was co-operation, and always more co-operation, between the different portions of the Empire; that should be the goal.

The motion was withdrawn after Sir Edward Morris (Premier of Newfoundland) and Mr Asquith had spoken in opposition. The idea of a central parliament, with Imperial authority, ceased to be practical politics for good and all, nor did the Conference encourage other suggestions, made for the consideration of joint interests by a permanent committee of head officials or cabinet ministers.

*The Declaration of London.*—Early in June—the Conference lasted a few weeks, and did not adjourn until the 20th—Australia moved to express regret at the non-consultation of its representatives prior to ratification by the British Government of the Declaration of London. This was a recent international document concerning food as contraband in time of war, and compensation for sinking neutral merchant vessels. Fisher said:

Since we are now a family of nations, has not the time arrived for the overseas Dominions to be informed, and, wherever possible, consulted as to the best means of protecting the interests of all concerned?

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He was referring to negotiations with foreign powers in general. Had Australia had sovereign independence, England would have consulted her. Why not now, circumstances being what they were? In the course of the debate Botha expressed his conviction to the effect that, in the best interests of the Empire, Britain should not bind herself, either by way of promise or convention with any foreign power, without consulting such Dominions as might be affected. Nevertheless, he did not intend voting for the resolution, as the Declaration of London would be an improvement on previous conditions; South African trade and shipping—in both directions—would benefit, especially in case the port of Lourenço Marques remained neutral in a war involving the Empire.

Winding up the debate, the English delegates promised to meet the desire of the Dominions for consultation, provided time and circumstances warranted it. Thereupon the Conference unanimously supported ratification of the Declaration of London.

Botha continued to attend the sittings, without taking part in the debates on the Merchant Shipping Act, an Imperial Court of Appeal, lower cable rates, penny postage, etc. He was not successful with a motion asking that the British Premier, instead of the Colonial Office, was to attend to all business between his Government and the Dominions; Mr Asquith excused himself on the ground that the British Prime Minister was snowed under with routine work as it was.

The Conference showed an interest in the Imperial Defence sittings at Whitehall, Sir William Nicholson and Sir Douglas Haig discussing with Dominion delegates such matters as uniformity of organization, armaments, and the training of officers. Regarding liability of all units of Dominion forces to be considered part of the Imperial machine, and as such to be kept in readiness for service anywhere in the world, no definite conclusion was reached. Botha pointed out that the Union, as a young country, still

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had to organize its land defences. He and Sir Wilfrid Laurier chiefly attended to military matters. At the time there was intolerable tension on the Continent, and war appeared even then to be imminent.

Botha's 1911 views on Imperial relations were sublimated—as far as possible—in the course of years, and in the direction of increased sovereignty on the part of the autonomous parts of the British Commonwealth of Nations, as General Smuts called the 'third' Empire. On October 20, 1916, *i.e.*, five and a half years later, and in the midst of the world clash, Botha in an informal letter to Sir Wilfrid Laurier, wrote:

“I am writing to you to-day chiefly because it is quite possible that we shall meet at the next Imperial Conference. I am particularly anxious that you should make sure of attending, as the subject of closer Imperial Union is certain to be raised once more and on this occasion with far better chances of success. I do not know whether you have changed your views on this important subject since the last Conference in 1911, but I certainly have not. I still think that the scheme suggested by Sir Joseph Ward on that occasion is impracticable and would interfere with the self-government rights of the Dominions. In fact, I have rather the idea of increasing those rights and making the self-governing colonies even more independent, while at the same time strengthening the Imperial connexion by economic and treaty obligations, putting in fact the Dominions on an equal footing with the Mother Country and converting them into sister rather than daughter colonies.”

There was ground for his fear of seeing a *redivivus* of “closer Imperial Union.” In April 1917 General Smuts, at the Imperial War Conference in London, had to fight once more for the federal solution of the Imperial problem: “To attempt,” he said, “to run even the common concerns of that group by means of a central parliament and a central executive is, to my mind, absolutely to court disaster.”

Opinions on the degree of freedom the Union could claim, or actually enjoyed, by virtue of the South Africa Act

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1909 were many and varied. While the letter of the Act has suffered little change, the inter-imperial as well as international status of British sister-States has altered a great deal. Further, and radical, changes may still result from either voluntary agreements or inevitable developments, the effects of which frequently cannot be gauged until after the event. Without any cognate changes of text, Union Buildings at Pretoria and Downing Street are equally conscious of the fact that their relationship to-day greatly differs from that of June 1, 1910, when Union had become a tangible fact. Botha's actions as Union Premier necessarily have for their touchstone the universally accepted interpretation of Dominion status, for the time being. What that interpretation was during the Great War emerges eloquently from General Smuts' speech at the Imperial War Conference mentioned:

Too much, if I may say so, of the old ideas still cling to the new organism which is growing. I think that although in practice there is great freedom, yet in theory the status of the Dominions is of a subject character. Whatever we may say, and whatever we may think, we are subject provinces of Great Britain. That is the legal theory of the constitution, and in many ways which I need not specify to-day, that theory still permeates practice. The status of the Dominions as equal nations of the Empire will have to be recognized to a very large extent, far more fully than is done to-day, at any rate in the theory of the Constitution, if not in practice.

Canada moved a resolution embodying the spirit of these words, and the Conference accepted it. Complete constitutional equality between the Dominions and the United Kingdom was attained in 1919 in Paris. Even after that, some years had to elapse before the average person could realize what had happened. When England went to war in 1914, no one disputed the doctrine that the mere declaration by Downing Street sufficed in order to make the whole of the Empire belligerent; the manner of active participation, it is true, depended on the respective Dominion parliaments. Eight years later, Mr Lloyd George issued his 'clarion call' in favour of war against Turkey in con-

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nexion with Chanak. At that time, however, compliance with the aspirations of Downing Street was no longer self-evident. Canada's Premier declared that only his own Parliament was authorized to decide as to whether it wanted to become a party to a war affecting either some Empire country or an outside power.

Botha's actual practice consistently followed his theory, viz., that Imperial as well as Dominion interests would in the long run be best served by the widest imaginable liberty of action exercised by every single partner. Of the population of the Union, a good many aspired to complete sovereign independence; Botha traversed their views by emphasizing the advantages South Africa derived from partnership in the up-to-date British Commonwealth. As he was able fully to appreciate these advantages, he was prepared to assume corresponding obligations. Therefore, when a number of people in the Union preferred, in 1914, to adopt a passive and waiting attitude in the supposed national interest, Botha forced through a policy of active support for the Empire—equally in the interests of South Africa. The result was a heightened measure of Dominion independence, beyond the wildest optimists' dreams of 1910.

*Botha and his Silk Stockings.*—The conviction that South Africa's prosperity and security would be better served inside than outside the Empire was challenged by a group of turbulent politicians in the Union. Concurrent with the extension of the doctrine that the autonomous British States were by no means forced to remain within the Empire—but could leave it without any great difficulty, if they felt so inclined—the secessionists did not require much sharpening of wits in order to justify a constitutional agitation for a sovereign Republic, undertaken for consumption at the polls. How could South Africa better use its freedom, their hearers were told, than by a simple resolution of Parliament, proclaiming sovereign independence!

Botha's work at the Imperial Conference—accompanied by two colleagues who had been members of the Afrikaner

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Bond—incongruous as it was with the kind of logic indicated above, caused a great many of his countrymen anxiety and suspicion, as a matter of course. The Westminster deliberations were not published until a couple of months afterward. It was only the London festivities in honour of visiting premiers that stimulated attention in the Dominions. For example, the news that Botha, in Court dress—including silk stockings—had been the guest of King George had a remarkable effect on the temper of his compatriots, many of whom are always inclined to think the worst of their leaders. Those stockings gradually assumed the shape of a symbol of national treason!

Correct and careful in matters of dress and appearance generally, Botha was not at all fond of show. Sir Henry Lucy describes a reception, given by the Government shortly after the Conference began its sittings. The ex-Commandant-General of the Transvaal stood talking to Lord Kitchener and Sir Ian Hamilton. "These, in common with British officers, diplomats and others invested with the right of wearing insignia, displayed them; General Botha wore plain dinner dress."

At the same time he was far from neglecting the psychological value of clothes. Among the Boers it was accounted bad taste, even for a highly placed officer, to wear uniform. Field-cornets, commandants, and even generals were supposed to be personally known to burghers, and therefore not to require any insignia of rank. Botha was the first, during the Boer war, to break with this tradition. After his rapid promotion to a generalship he wore a simple tunic.

Once more, in 1911, he was an honoured guest in Great Britain. In addition to other distinctions he received honorary degrees at Cambridge, Glasgow, and Oxford. General Booth, the remarkable founder of the Salvation Army, noted in his diary a visit paid him by Botha in London: "Much pleased with him; he was most hearty. I think our talk will bring forth some important results in the future."

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A prominent personage, who in his official *entourage* had met Botha, and saw him again in June 1911, wrote to South Africa: "I saw Botha yesterday: looking well as far as clearness of skin goes, but not, I think, very strong. He goes off to Kissingen after the coronation. I find he creates a good impression."

Life on steamers and in palatial hotels was fatal to his constitution, affecting—as it had done previously on similar occasions—his digestive system. For the second time he underwent a stringent cure at Kissingen. In the autumn of 1911 he returned to his country.

### XXX

#### BOTHA AND GENERAL HERTZOG

SINCE the end of 1912 much has been heard in our country of the theory that General Hertzog, by the famous Cabinet crisis of those days, was "made a martyr owing to what he had done for the people." These words are President Steyn's, but the view they embody is not destined to hold water for very long in our historical records. It is incorrect to make it appear as if General Hertzog had become the victim of Botha's deep-laid scheme to "chuck him out." On the contrary, there are indications that the supposed martyr was the real aggressor, working to push Botha out of the premiership because of his "excessive weakness and lack of principle."

The expulsion of General Hertzog, sensational though it was, did not come at all as a bolt from the blue. It was the result aimed at by his deliberate provocation, calculated to make him "stronger than ever," as President Steyn rightly noted immediately after the event. No one may reproach a politician for turning his back on a fellow-worker with whose policy he never could sympathize, or, at any rate, could sympathize with no longer. That General Hertzog, sincerely desirous of saving the country, felt called upon to fight Botha and to sap his influence was no doubt true. His opponent was manœuvred into a step considered fatal by many—for in reality it was General Hertzog himself who brought about the crisis, thus becoming the father of schism—but that he took the step is something for which thousands will honour him. All the more reason, this, for an attempt to reduce the sensational event in question to normal proportions in order, *sine ira et studio*, to penetrate, through its dramatic wrappings, to the heart of the matter.

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*General Hertzog's Career.*—General Hertzog was Botha's junior by three and a half years. He had passed his boyhood in Kimberley and studied at Stellenbosch and Amsterdam (Holland). Plucky, independent, pushful and intelligent, he had many of the qualities necessary to a leader. Should one count among these the impressionability that on occasion would transform a considered line of conduct into passionate impulsiveness? He was not yet thirty when he was appointed to a judgeship in the Free State, where he had taken up his residence after a couple of years at the Pretoria bar. Four years had elapsed when the Boer war broke out. He received a command, and chiefly operated in the south-western districts of the Republic. His efforts to maintain himself in Cape Colony failed, although he at one time put a great distance between his commando and the Free State border. At Vereeniging he successfully opposed President Steyn's contention that delegates were bound by the mandate of their constituents on the question of war *versus* peace. During the negotiations on the Peace Treaty, he was one of the Big Five on the Boer side at Pretoria. Six years later, Steyn wrote to Merriman:

Allow me to thank you for the kind expression that you made in your letter about my good friend Hertzog. I am glad that you have learned to appreciate him; for, believe me, a nobler and a straighter man I have not met. The more you know him, the more you value him. To my mind he is one of the greatest assets of South Africa. It may be that I am too prejudiced in his favour, but I don't think so; for I learned to know him in dark days, and he always proved himself in the fullest sense a man.

As a politician General Hertzog only came into prominence when, as a Free State Minister, he pushed through an Education Act under which the ideal of language equality was carried so far as to make English as well as Dutch compulsory for all children. By his temperament Hertzog was driven to the aggressive side of the Afrikaner renaissance, that, following the restoration of political power to his people, engendered agitation, especially among the

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younger generation. Thus his "two-stream" formula came into being, contrasting with Botha's desire for the co-operation of both races in public life, which to many seemed not merely unintelligible but unnatural.

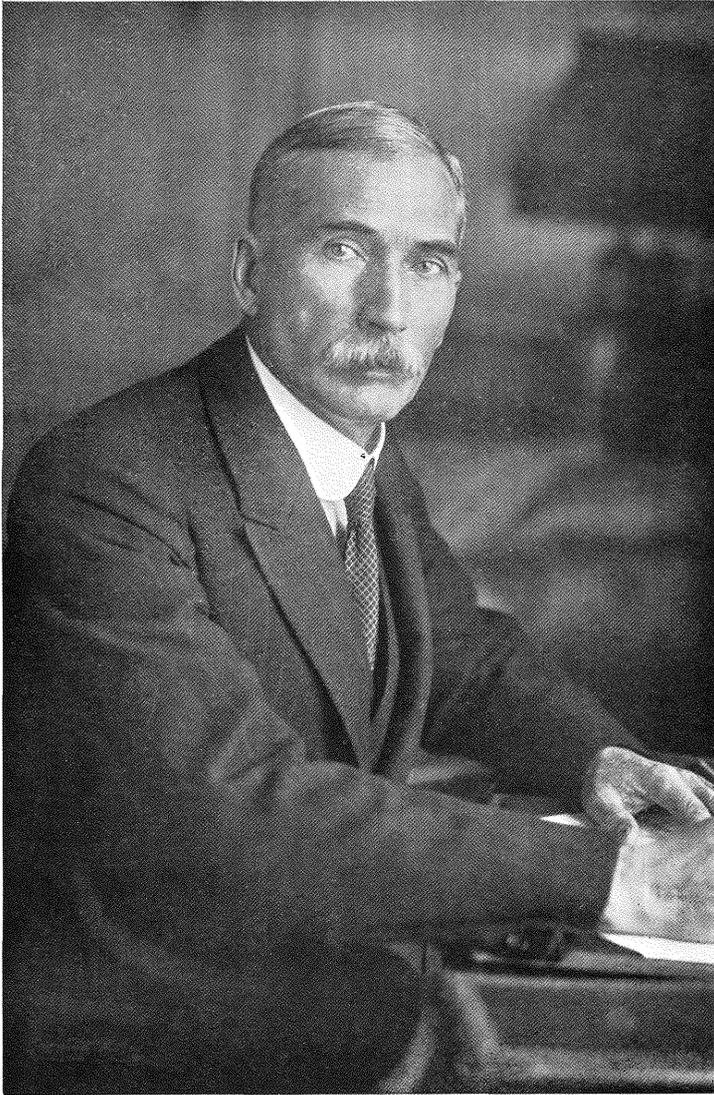
During the first Session of the Union Parliament the Opposition tabled a motion, censuring language arrangements in the Free State—a welcome opportunity to General Hertzog to expound his views. The skirmish left him fairly unscathed. Botha was subsequently criticized, not without cause, for having brought pressure to bear on the provincial administration at Bloemfontein in order to get the Free State Act watered down, in response to the violent condemnation in English circles; at a great election meeting held in Johannesburg on July 13, 1910, Botha had called it unfair and impossible to expect Government to interfere with Free State legislation.

*Wanted: A New Party.*—In the bosom of the Government party, which had not yet had an opportunity of developing traditions of discipline—and originally lacked all unity—the idea meanwhile arose that a new organization was called for. General Hertzog, Minister of Justice (and since May 1912 Minister of Native Affairs as well), was notified that a strong movement had arisen in that direction. On May 13, 1911, he wrote to President Steyn, informing him that he, Hertzog, had been asked to take the lead. Did he refuse? Not at all! His reply was that at least a year would have to go by before a start could be made. He assured Steyn:

I will not be disloyal to colleagues, but to continue for long as we have been going on during the past six months is impossible.

The reference evidently is to Botha's extensive election campaign throughout the Union, on the basis of conciliation. Further, Hertzog wrote to Steyn:

If they proceed in the old way to neglect and sacrifice the people's interests in order to curry favour with the Opposition, I shall have to refuse pertinently, one of these days, to remain a party to it.



GENERAL J. B. M. HERTZOG

*Photo Russell, London*

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That is, he would have to resign as a member of the unspeakable Botha Cabinet. President Steyn lost no time in coming to General Hertzog's assistance; in the course of a public speech, made at Bloemfontein on June 7, he said:

Our good General is being used as the bogey with which Unionists (the jingoes of those days) and the chicken-hearted among us are being intimidated.

And further:

The pinchbeck monster of the elections is dead. The slumbers of even the nervous jingoes among us, or of the most spineless jellyfish, are no longer disturbed by it.

There is no reason to suppose that Steyn did anything to correct Hertzog's conception of Cabinet loyalty, or to remind him how little evidence his inclusion in the first Botha Cabinet, with its tentative character, supplied of Botha's currying favour with his opponents; the Premier well knew at the time that this inclusion would mean a considerable loss in votes and seats!

For more than two and a half years Hertzog remained a member of the first Union Government, formed in May 1910. We have it on his own authority that at intervals he thought fit to carry through his own wishes by arguing strongly with the Prime Minister, and even by threats of resignation. Strangely enough, there was no longer even the faintest unpleasantness during the second half of his ministerial career. He did remain dissatisfied; his sense of grievance at the Government's policy increased progressively. All the time, however, there never was a summing-up of serious, concrete cases of dereliction of duty toward the nation; the sting of his charges was to be found in their very vagueness. During the second, quieter, phase he never once protested, either with the Premier or in the Cabinet Council, against any step taken. Can it be that gradually he had made up his mind that Botha and his men were hopeless? That the fight for South Africa's weal could more effectively be staged on the platform than