

PC11/7/9-10

SECRETAN LETTERS

'38 - '48



16.12.38

.....My resignation was of course inevitable, and I have never regretted it. I rejoice both in the freedom from Cabinet worries and unpleasantnesses and also in my independence. I don't think there can be much doubt that I have strengthened my position considerably both by my resignation and since. But the main point is that I shall

be free to take whatever line seems to be the right one if and when, as is almost inevitable, political changes come. Our Cabinet today is weak - held together, one might almost say, by bits of string. Hertzog is ageing and Smuts has lost much of his moral force. Havenga has little support in the country and does not enjoy good health; Pirow is profoundly distrusted, especially sine his peregrinations through the capitals of Europe. Before long our politics will be thrown into solution, and it seems almost inevitable that I shall have to take a hand in mobilising the resistance to the forces of repression and reaction. In the meantime things may be somewhat difficult for me. The PM dislikes me intensely, not being used to the experience of having a Minister stand up to him, and would like to jockey me out of the Party, which I don't want to leave unless and until a sufficiently big issue presents itself. If he remain in office very much longer, it is almost certain that he will do something reactionary of such a nature that I shall have every reason for breaking away. Meantime I am content to bide my time, and strengthen my position in the country.

To that end I have been travelling about a good deal for public function of all kinds with a view to establishing contacts, and am also writing weekly articles both for one of the Natal papers and for one really constructive weekly review.....

.....I have come down for a function in connection with the Voortrekker Centenary celebrations. (Bloemfontein). These have on the whole passed off better than at one time appeared likely, although there have been some unpleasant incidents and a wave of narrowly nationalistic sentiment has been set in motion which may not lightly subside. Still the general trend in SA continues to be in the direction of sanity and co-operation. I wish however that we were making more rapid progress in the liberalisation of generally prevalent conceptions in the sphere of race relations.....

.....I am beginning to see rather more of Toc H now. It is pretty active, but not yet what one would wish it to be - and the S---(?) business has been a nasty set-back.

20.12.45

.....I sent you a photograph as promised. Unfortunately I did not have your address available, and my memory failed me to the extent that I sent it to 212 instead of 215.

20.12.45  
(contd)

.....It was certainly very refreshing to be able to renew contacts after 16 years.

.....On the whole I liked your new Ministers, and got the impression that they were competent, if not brilliant. I thought that Bevin is the outstanding man amongst them. Attlee made a much better impression on me than I had been led to believe. I liked his courage and what one might call his resilience in facing his new job. (Not very impressed with Morrison or Cripps).

.....Please give my good wishes also to the couple who are attending to your domestic needs. Sorry I have forgotten their names.

...You may be interested to know that I did not like Ellen Wilkinson at first, but found that she improved tremendously on acquaintance.

20.7.47

.....I was particularly interested in what you had to say about the O.B.C. Jubilee Celebrations. When next I am in London, you must take me to visit Harmondsey again.

.....(about Attlee)...I think he has considerable spiritual resources.

.....The Parliamentary was not so strenuous...except during part of the Royal visit, when the PM and half of my colleagues were away from Capetown in attendance on the Royal party, and I was left to mind the Parliamentary baby.....The visit was extremely successful..... the main credit goes to the Queen who won all hearts. Again I think she has spiritual resources.....the Queen by no means well, but as gracious as ever and completely self-effacing.....I think it can also be said definitely that the Royal visit eased the local Indian situation considerably. The extremist Indian leaders wanted to boycott the tour, but proved to be quite unable to give effect to this, and there is now a growing body of moderate opinion.....(re coming general election)...the Nationalists persist in fighting it on colour questions, and that is likely to do irreparable damage both in the matter of its effect on world opinion, and also in driving deeper the wedge between the non-European and ourselves. The non-Europeans, especially the natives, are moving fast in their growing consciousness of their disabilities, and though European opinion is in some ways becoming more liberal, it is not moving fast enough to enable us to keep pace with developments on the non-European side - and in this respect an election fought on the colour issue cannot but mean a big set-back. In my own mind there is a growing sense of unsettlement. It would be difficult for me, if Smuts were to fall away, to lead the United Party, without either doing violence to my convictions or taking

line which would split the party.

I continue to hear regularly from Babu who writes as brightly as ever.

Alan Paton is back here again, very grateful for your kindness. He has brought back with him a novel which he has written during his tour and which Scribner's are publishing.

4.7.48 .....The result of the elections certainly came as a great surprise - also to our opponents - although I had warned our people on several occasions to be prepared for the unexpected. It was also a sad blow for Smuts - especially his own personal defeat - and for a few days he appeared to be reeling under it. He only appeared to find his feet again just before leaving to receive his academic honours in Cambridge and Leyden.....

The main factors in our defeat were, I think, the complex of grievances attaching to a post-war government, the colour question, and the "new voters", i.e. the young men and women taught in Nationalist orientated schools who had qualified for the vote for the first time.....From the personal point of view I have no regrets. I have never desired power on its own account, and any sense of deprivation that there might have been is neutralised by the relief of burdens. a real Seibachtheri (?) as far as I am concerned, but I am not happy about the position as far as the country is concerned. There is a real danger that the Nationalist may consolidate their position and increase their majority at a further election which will I anticipate take place in a year's time, and in any case a further deterioration in the relations between Europeans and non-Europeans is inevitable.....At the moment my own position is somewhat difficult. The UP lost ground almost entirely in the rural areas. As a result it is today very largely an urban and an English party. Quite naturally its tactical aim would be to recover that lost ground, so that it may become fully representative again. But it was in the rural areas that the colour prejudices, with the presentation of myself as the bogey man, was chiefly exploited, and so it is natural for some people in the party to say that, while I occupy a leading position in it, the desired recovery cannot take place. At the moment therefore there is something in the nature of a witch-hunt going on. My own line is however that the Party cannot outbid the Nationalists anyhow in the appeal to colour prejudice, that nothing short of my leaving the Party altogether would be of any avail from that point of view, and that any advantages thus secured would be more than counter-balanced by the withdrawal from the Party of the support it gets from Liberal elements today. I am therefore saying to them in effect - either you ask me to resign from the Party, in which case I shall do so and you must take the consequences, or I remain and retain my freedom within the Party to say the same things as I have said before, misrepresented though they have been by the Nationalists. I don't think that Smuts while he is the Leader can do anything but support me along the lines of the second alternative. I do not want on my own account to precipitate a break-up, because much as I would like to be free to take a fully Liberal line, I realise too the danger of the Nationalists being given an opportunity to consolidate their position.

20.9.42

.....I agree with you entirely when you speak.....of the necessity of our recapturing the light of divine revelation. I cannot help sometimes feeling disheartened by the apparent lack of signs of such a recapture. One had hoped for a moral and spiritual rebirth as a result of the world's present travail, but it does not seem to be coming. And that is what makes one view the future with apprehension.....With us, as with you, there is an insistent demand for radical social and economic changes after the war.....But social and economic changes will, I fear, not take us far, unless there are also moral and spiritual changes.

|| .....Generally Smuts remains as vigorous as ever. Last Sunday we went out to Irene. The Greek Crown Princess was there, and he took her and me for a two-hour walk over the farm. His only regret seemed to be that out of consideration for H.R.H., he had to walk more slowly than he otherwise would have.