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CHAPTER ~~XXXVI~~ ~~XXXVII~~ XXXI

1944



Hofmeyr entered 1944, as he had entered every year of the war, expectant of victory before December. Few people outside Germany now thought Hitler would win. Smuts had uttered what he called 'explosive thoughts' to the Empire Parliamentary Association in London. After saying that any new world organisation must provide not only for freedom and democracy, but also for leadership and power, he declared that this could be done only by giving due and proper place to the United States, Russia, and Great Britain with the Commonwealth; Germany would never emerge again in the old form. Smuts also asked whether Britain would not strengthen her position by working closely together with the smaller democracies of Europe. Smuts still had his blind spot; he wanted the African colonies regrouped into great regional dominions. He was unable to foresee what would soon be happening in Africa. Yet he said it would not be wise to look only to an Anglo-American Union as a solution for the future; 'we shall have to stick to the Trinity'.*

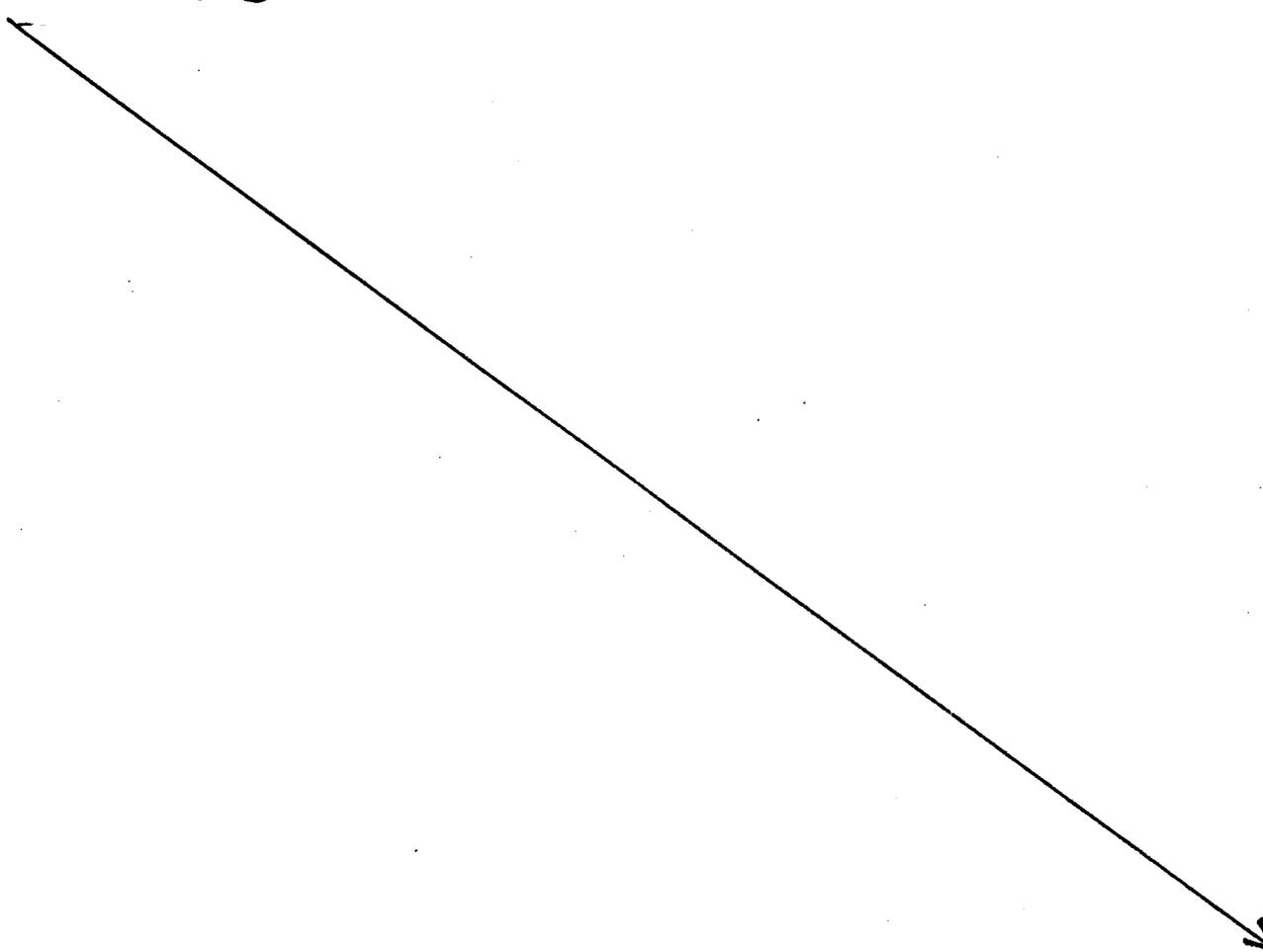
Lepkowsky was shocked by the explosive thoughts. In any event it made nonsense of his own vision, of a British Commonwealth absorbing friends, neutrals, and even ex-enemies, till it finally determined the peace of the world. But Hofmeyr was not shocked. He had known for a long time how Smuts was thinking, and had inevitably been influenced by him. It was consistent with the Smuts-Hofmeyr pattern that Hofmeyr never publicly, and to the writer's knowledge never privately, differed from Smuts on international affairs.

The Provincial elections of 1943 had been largely fought on the issue of dual-medium education. Encouraged by the success of South Africa's bilingual army, the Government proposed that in the white high schools, some subjects should be taught in English, and some in Afrikaans. The proposal was fiercely resisted by the Nationalists, who wanted mother-tongue instruction from kindergarten to university. Beside the mother-tongue school and the dual-medium, there was a third kind, the parallel-medium, where English-medium classes and Afrikaans-medium classes were housed under the same roof, and the children came together in the residences and the playing fields. There were some notable examples of such schools, but the plan failed when one language group enjoyed a higher standard of living than the other; this happened where rural Afrikaners had been forced into the towns to find a living. Such schools strengthened English feelings of superiority and deepened Afrikaner feelings of resentment.

*NATAL MERCURY, December 3, 1943.

Smuts had secured overwhelming victories in 1943 in the Cape Province, Transvaal, and Natal. Although the election was fought on dual-medium education, the real issue was the war.* The Government had faced Nationalist opposition over the war, but it would never have faced a Nationalist revolt against dual-medium education. Nor would Hofmeyr have tried to persuade it. He was not, as many supposed, a passionate supporter of dual-medium education. If one had made a list of the subjects on which Hofmeyr spoke frequently and passionately, the educating together of English- and Afrikaans-speaking children was not one of them. Nor was there except amongst idealists, any real public demand for dual-medium education. After the 1943 elections Smuts wrote from Europe to Hofmeyr to say the results were encouraging and would have to be followed by action. But in fact nothing was done.

Meanwhile the Nationalists tried to forestall any action. On February 22 of 1944 Swart moved that Parliament



*This is also the opinion of Krüger the historian in his AGE OF THE GENERALS, p. 208.

~~required, there was his letter to Gordon Watson. He wanted his views on separate and parallel-medium kept confidential; it would be most undesirable that what I have said should become known publicly.*~~

The Nationalists seized upon the dual-medium issue. They had lost the elections, but they were determined not to lose mother-tongue schools. On February 22 of 1944 Swart moved that Parliament declare itself in favour of mother-tongue education from kindergarten to university, with adequate instruction in the second language.

Smuts moved an amendment that the second language should be introduced at an appropriate stage as a medium of instruction. Malan said that Smuts would precipitate a third language-struggle; real bilingualism was attainable by few. He said that Smuts and Hofmeyr were exceptionably bilingual, but when Hofmeyr turned from Afrikaans to English, one always felt,

(Here is a fish which has been out of the water and now has been cast back into it.)

(3) In replying Hofmeyr said that he hoped Malan would pardon him for taking part in his faulty Afrikaans. He attacked that narrow Nationalism which wanted to keep children separate from one another, and which wanted to build a Boer nation and not a South African one. He attacked the Broederbond, which had stated,

(Brethren, our solution for South Africa's ills is that the Afrikaner Broederbond should rule South Africa.)

That was the spirit, said Hofmeyr, which had led the German nation to Nazism. He himself wanted to see children of different denominations and different languages educated in one and the same school.

(5) Strijdom wanted to know if Hofmeyr had favoured dual-medium when he was Administrator of the Transvaal, to which Hofmeyr replied that his policy had been the same then as in 1944. Strijdom was glad Hofmeyr had not contended that Afrikaans was his home language.

*To Gordon Watson, October 16, 1938.

(1) HANSARD, Vol. 47-50, Col. 1704.

(2) HANSARD, Col. 2878, et seq.

(3) HANSARD, Col. 2891.

(4) HANSARD Vol Col. 2893. Yet what did he mean? Parallel or dual-medium?

(5) Yet in his letter to the Administrator of Natal, the dual-medium theory is not mentioned.

□ Conradie: That is rather cheap.

□ Strijdom: It is neither cheap nor common.
He admits that English is his language.

□ Hofmeyr: I did not admit that.

□ Strijdom: I am thankful for that.

□ Hofmeyr: I did not admit it.

□ Strijdom: Then I want to tell him now that English is his language.

□ Hofmeyr: That is not so.

These exchanges are obscure, but part of their obscurity is removed when we remember that Strijdom fiercely claimed Afrikaans as his own language, whereas Hofmeyr would have claimed both languages. Hofmeyr did not like these exchanges; he did not like this probing into his private life, into what language he spoke at home, and what language he thought in. The facts will bear repeating, that the domestic language of the Hofmeyr home was Afrikaans, frequently punctuated by English, always switched to English if the visitor knew no Afrikaans. The language of study and of conceptual thought was English. Therefore, outside the domestic situation, Hofmeyr's English was more idiomatic than his Afrikaans, which was correct and stilted. He was no doubt sensitive about that, but he regarded open discussion of it, and especially in Parliament, as an impertinence.

~~The debate became a wrangle. Adolf Davis, M.P. for Pretoria City, and an eminent lawyer, thinking to strike a blow for Hofmeyr, said that Malan showed his contempt for English by never speaking it in the House. This angered Swart who said in his reply~~

~~The Jews in our country are mainly to blame for the racialism which exists between Afrikaans-speaking and English-speaking people. They foster racialism for their own gain, because while we quarrel they are making money out of us...I do not want a Jew when I speak my mother tongue, to tell me that I should speak the other language, least of all Jews who were born in Poland.*~~

~~*HANSARD. Col 8619 et seq.~~

Swart lost his motion, and



~~On this unpleasant note the debate ended.~~ Smuts's amendment was carried, but nothing was done. Dual-medium education was one of the strangest issues in South African history. As a political proposal it divided the electorate; as an educational proposal, ~~almost everyone was opposed to it~~ it was never carried out.

spell

1944 was a great Parliamentary year for Hofmeyr. He put through 19 of the 51 Bills passed during the session. Kilpin recorded it that his speech on the dual-medium proposal was a model of parliamentary oratory. He scored 32 against the Royal Navy cricket team at Fernwood for the Parliamentary Eleven, and was very proud of it. On March 20 he attained the age of 50, and Sarah Millin was among the many who congratulated him, ~~in~~ writing that he was runner-up for the highest at 50.* By now their friendship had lost its fervour, and she was losing hope. She was disturbed about the future of South Africa, and had said to Rayner Ellis of the RAND DAILY MAIL, 'Help Jan Hofmeyr, he's our only future hope.**' She was worried to death by anti-Semitism, and asked Hofmeyr why he did not make a solemn speech in Parliament about it, and speak as he did at the S.A.C.S. dinner in Johannesburg in 1936, which speech was the best speech I ever heard in South Africa.*³ In the second half of the 'thirties she had been the gadfly, but more than that, the believer in him; she had stung, praised, challenged, and loved him. Her thoughts had been for him, but now in her melancholy they were more often for herself. She did not know - she was not able to see - the great change that had come over him since 1938, when even he felt for a while that the great last door might open after all. They did not talk about such things any more.

Another big event of the session was the celebration on March 17 of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr in South Africa. About 150 members of the family gathered at the Woolsack, and there would have been more if one of the living Jan Hendrik Hofmeyrs had not made travelling so expensive, and his colleague, the Minister of Railways, had not made it so difficult. Mrs. Hofmeyr and her son received the guests on the wide lawns under the oaks, the eldest an 81-year-old Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr from Paarl, the youngest a 15-month-old Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr from Newlands. And of course the most illustrious Hofmeyr made a speech. He told the family that the first Jan Hendrik had arrived 200 years before in Table Bay as a soldier of the Dutch East India Company in the warship, DE STANDVASTIGHEID.* He became superintendent of the

ital

~~Millin to Hofmeyr~~
*March 16, 1944.

**Millin to Hofmeyr, July 8, 1944.

*³ " " " " July 22, 1944.

*⁴ ~~Standvastigheid means determination~~

(('Determination'))

(The Big Barn)

company's estate, De Grootte Schuur, after which Rhodes had named his famous house, and on which this beautiful house, the Woolsack, was later built. The superintendent had had to collect the tithes, and therefore, said Hofmeyr amidst laughter he was the first Jan Taks. Hofmeyr said, after recalling the contributions of many Hofmeyrs:

'The Hofmeyr family has distinguished itself by readiness to be of service to the country and its people. To us has been handed the torch of readiness to serve, and it is our duty to see that that torch is not extinguished.'**

Hofmeyr, though no lover of privilege and title, had a strong sense of family. He was proud of the Hofmeyrs and proud to be one of them. He identified himself completely with the country to which the first Jan Hendrik had come. He had been a great lover of the Cape and of the city under the mountain; now he was as great a lover of the highveld, and of its two cities, the restless, feverish Johannesburg and the quieter, more decorous Pretoria. No man was ever a truer South African. But the elect denied him the name of Afrikaner because of all the accidents of birth and circumstance, which themselves were as South African as any accidents could be, the bilingual home, the English school, the Rhodes Scholarship, the years at Oxford. He pooh-poohed this nationalism, but it could wound him none the less.

NP It was lucky he was able to enjoy so full a year. His health was better, he could play cricket again, and he wrote to Egeland that though busy, he was not so burdened as in previous years. Egeland had gone to Stockholm as South African Minister, and Hofmeyr was hurt that, although he was carrying so many of Smuts's burdens, the Prime Minister had never consulted him about it. So active was Hofmeyr, so magnificent in debate, that again the stories went round that his succession to the leadership was inevitable. Dr. R.H.W. Shepherd, Principal of the famous Lovedale Missionary Institution, wrote that

'we believe that the day will come when South Africa will turn to him, from a sheer sense that its supreme need is for a leader who will be true to himself, without regard to passing popularity - a leader who will strive to bring it into a condition of racial peace through a policy of fair dealing.*'

*~~De Grootte Schuur means The Big Barn~~

**CAPE TIMES, March 18, 1944.

~~Hofmeyr to Egeland~~
* February 2, 1944.

*⁴ THE LAYMAN'S BULLETIN, December 1943.

Hofmeyr replied to him,*



(If I have to make any comment, it would merely be that if there are people whose wish it is that I should be the next Prime Minister, I myself am not one of them.)

Yet Hofmeyr made no such public declaration. It would have been inappropriate, if not improper, for him to do so. Smuts, beyond designating him as Acting Prime Minister, said nothing about the future. Hofmeyr's private utterances to people like Shepherd and Underhill did not reach the public ear. Thus there was a considerable body of opinion in South Africa that believed, not only that Hofmeyr would succeed Smuts as leader of the United Party, but also that he wanted to do so.

The Parliament of 1944 had laid before it on January 31, an important white paper. This was the report of the Social Security Commission, recommending the spending of £35,000,000 on housing, food, education, and security, for the nation. ^{whole} Nothing like it had been seen before. It provided for old age and invalidity pensions, for unemployment, sickness, and maternity benefits, and special benefits for mothers and widows who had to devote their whole attention to children under 16. In accordance with the theory that different racial groups had different standards of living, the maximum consolidated benefit was laid down. In the cities, white people, £60 per annum; Coloured people and Asians, £36 per annum; Africans, £24 per annum. In the towns, white people, £54 per annum; Coloured people and Asians, £27 per annum; Africans, £18 per annum. In the rural areas, white people, £48 per annum; Coloured people and Asians, £18 per annum; Africans, £18 per annum.

~~Thus was established that city whites needed $1\frac{1}{2}$ as much as city coloureds, while rural whites needed $2\frac{1}{2}$ as much as rural coloureds. City and town coloureds needed $1\frac{1}{2}$ times as much as city and town Africans, but rural coloureds needed no more than rural Africans, while a country white needed twice as much as a city African. The scales took no account of the differences ~~between~~ within each group, and laid down arbitrary differences between group and group.~~

One may cavil at the racially discriminatory scales, but no suggestions of these kinds had ever been heard before. In addition to benefits there were grants for maternity and funeral expenses, family and dependants' allowances. These benefits and

*Hofmeyr to Shepherd, March 31, 1944.

**I used the word nation to mean all the people of South Africa.

allowances were to be available to every man, woman, and child in South Africa. It was estimated that in 1955 the cost of these services would be £160,000,000, practically the same as the entire budget for 1943. Citizens would pay into a Social Security Fund. A man earning £300 would pay 12%, a man earning £3000 would pay 50%, a man earning £20000 would pay 62%.

national
The Social and Economic Planning Council, criticising the White Paper, thought such taxes would shock the entire economy; it considered that they would reduce future capital supplies for development to a dangerously low level. Nevertheless the Council thought the White Paper set out the minimum requirements; but to meet them the income level would have to rise by at least 50%. Without development, the level could not rise. It was Hofmeyr's dilemma all over again, how to increase egg production without killing the goose. Yet such was the temper of the times, that the Economic Planning Council dared not condemn the scheme. It declared that the goal could not be shelved as unattainable. It said, The only possible solution is that production per head be raised sufficiently by unremitting effort.*

Every party in the House climbed on the social security bandwagon. Smuts made it clear that whatever was done, it would be on the basis of private enterprise. In any case, there was a more pressing problem, and that was to look after demobilised soldiers; even more important than to discuss the new world was to win the war. In the end, after a reasonably amicable debate, the whole matter was referred to a Select Committee.

Council
Hofmeyr took no part in the debate. There was no lack of social reformers. His judicial mind sided with the Social and Economic Planning Commission. Where was the money coming from? There was only one thing with which he was heartily agreed, namely that if there were to be benefits, they must apply to all, irrespective of race, even if the traditional discriminatory scale were to be employed. The Budget was not far away, but he could hardly be expected to provide social security all at once; in any event, the whole matter was going to a Select Committee.

In his Budget speech delivered some three weeks later, Hofmeyr had a good deal to say about social security. He repeated the dictum that in a society of private enterprise, the extent of social security depended on national income. He supported the opinion that the White Paper plan required an increase of 50% in the national income, and that meant increased production. Security could not be achieved merely by increasing taxation, for then development would be impeded. The Select Committee would consider what was known as the 1947 Plan, that is, the short term objectives set out in the White Paper. That did not mean that the Government felt

* NATAL MERCURY, February 1, 1944.

relieved of responsibility. In fact this 1944 Budget took some of the first steps towards greater social security.

Hofmeyr announced the first step. He set aside ^{£700,000} ~~£700,000~~ to make old-age, blind, and invalidity pensions applicable to Africans also, and £150,000 to make invalidity pensions applicable to coloured and Indian persons. Hofmeyr also modified the disgraceful tax on the assets of old-age and war pensioners, whereby a pensioner with assets of £400 and over had his pension reduced by 5% of his assets; Hofmeyr now increased this figure from £400 to £800. He also set aside £50,000 as the first instalment for health centres; the sum sounded laughable but it was in fact the precursor of a health service planned to cost several millions.

Hofmeyr made other provisions in his budget which indicated a slight shift in traditional values. In 1943 he had allotted the entire 'native general tax' to African education; he now proposed to allot a further £275,000 to African education, which would make a certain amount of development possible.* In addition to that, he allotted a further £148,000 to the Native Affairs vote. He foreshadowed a possible change in the control of African Education, which was administered by the Provinces although Parliament provided nearly all the money. Hofmeyr announced that the Labour, Social Welfare, Public Health, and Education vote would be increased by ~~£700,000~~ ^{£700,000}, partly to provide bigger unemployment benefits.

Hofmeyr made another important announcement. He not only decided to increase taxation no further; he also decided to forgo the gold realisation charges which the Government charged the Mines for the disposal of the gold, so that the industry could raise the wages of African miners. Underground workers received ~~two~~ shillings a shift, and according to the Landsdown Commission, had had no substantial increase since 1914.** The Commission recommended a rise for underground workers from $\frac{2}{4}$ to $\frac{2}{5}$, and for surface workers from $\frac{1}{9}$ to $\frac{2}{2}$. It recommended a cost-of-living allowance at a flat rate of 3d. a shift, and that overtime work should be paid at time and a half. It did not support the establishment of trade unions for African miners, for which it stated there was no demand. But it recommended the appointment of Welfare Officers.

The Government modified the recommendations. It proposed a 5d. rise for underground workers, and a 4d. rise for surface workers, with no cost of living, and it agreed that overtime should be paid at time and a half. These increases would cost £1,850,000 per annum, and would add more than 7d. to the cost of every ton of ore milled.

*HANSARD, Vol. ^{47-50,} Col. 1889 et seq.

** In full, the Witwatersrand Mine Natives' Wages Commission, which reported to Parliament, March 24, 1944.



Compared with the Defence Vote of £102,500,000. all these improvements seemed pitiful. While it was good news that the African blind would now receive pensions, the amounts would be £12 per annum in the cities, £9 in the towns, and £6 in the country. While it was good news that African education would receive an additional £275,000, only, about ~~£5~~ per head per annum was being spent on each

~~white child.~~ While African miners would receive a 20% increase, white miners were earning ten, twenty, thirty times as much per shift. Indeed there were threats that white miners would strike for a 30% rise in wages; such a strike could have crippled the industry, crippled the war effort, made budgetting a nightmare, and ended Hofmeyr's modest attempts to give greater social security. There were those who thought that it was less insulting to a blind man to give him nothing than to offer him ten shillings a month. Those who could think of nothing else than the promise of the new world, and the injustices of the old found Hofmeyr's budget heart-breaking. Sullivan said people had expected £10,000,000 for social security, and Hofmeyr had given them £1,000,000. Others like the Hoernles and the Rheinallt Jones, were grateful for any improvement. A forthright man like Molteno, the Native Representative, while criticising the lowness of the benefits, said also that those on his benches appreciated their extension to races which did not previously enjoy them.

Quite the opposite point of view was put by Strijdom. He asked whether the white population could afford to spend millions of pounds every year on old age pensions for natives.

'Are we prepared to do so - ~~xxxx~~ can we afford it, because the tax will be imposed on the white man and not on the native? ...I ask again whether we can afford in view of the poverty prevailing among the white population in South Africa to put a tax on the white man which is going to cost millions of pounds, in order to help old natives to get old age pensions.'

It is true that there were poor whites in the country, but the average standard of white living was then, as it always has been, three, four, five times as high as that of the African people. The Nationalist argument was that white poverty must be eliminated first; after all, the African was used to a different standard of living.

Hofmeyr replied to Strijdom,

'Which country in the world would tolerate a position under which the money for social

services for the poorest section of the population had to come from that section of the population only?)

A few days before his budget, that redoubtable man Hendrik van der Bijl, Director-General of War Supplies, delivered a direct attack on Hofmeyr's taxation policy. He said there could be no social security without employment, and taxation was restricting employment. It was true the Government was a big employer but it taxed other people to create the work. The gold mines could not go on paying heavier taxation and providing large-scale employment. The present system of taxation was stifling enterprise, and gave no incentive to the entrepreneur. Any major improvement in agriculture would be useless without industrial expansion.

He asked >
Hofmeyr hit back in Parliament two days later. He was cheered when he said van der Bijl had a right to express his views in the press, but that this was more conducive to publicity than helpfulness. *have* Why could van der Bijl not, consulted him before going into print? It would be interesting to know if van der Bijl had gone to Smuts before criticising Hofmeyr, and if Smuts had told him there was no harm in speaking out. Smuts was neither financier nor industrialist. He wanted money, and Hofmeyr gave it to him. He wanted equipment, and van der Bijl gave it to him. And here was van der Bijl saying that Hofmeyr was killing industry. In fact all three men were struggling with the same problem, how to reconcile the claims of the present and the claims of the future. All three of them had different solutions, but two of them, Smuts and Hofmeyr, were deeply influenced by the resolution of the British, who seemed to be ~~risking~~ risking their whole future in their struggle to save the present.

It would be quite foolish to suppose that Hofmeyr simply did not understand van der Bijl's criticism. He understood it very well. He said in his budget speech, speaking of social security,

To set the level of taxation too high, the development would be impeded which would give the country the increased national income the taxation of which was necessary for financing projects.*

Neither Hofmeyr nor van der Bijl was a Socialist. But Hofmeyr did not believe that the entrepreneur was the salt of the earth, without which there could be no savour, while van der Bijl came close to it. It was Hofmeyr who for all his withdrawnness, for

*HANSARD, Vol. ~~1884~~ Col. 1884. This badly constructed sentence was not composed by Hofmeyr. In 1944 he delivered the budget speech in Afrikaans.



all his faults that many saw so readily - it was Hofmeyr who saw the community clear and saw it whole. If van der Bijl had prepared the budget, it would no doubt have differed markedly from Hofmeyr's, and van der Bijl would no doubt have clashed headlong with Smuts. No one was better able than Hofmeyr to steer the difficult middle course between the claims of the future and the claims of the present. Yet for all that, he was hurt that van der Bijl should criticise him in public, as though he were a small boy posing as a Finance Minister.

If Hofmeyr was hurt by van der Bijl, he was irritated by Mushet. Mushet was Chairman of Public Accounts, M.P. for Maitland, President of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of South Africa, founder of the nation-wide firm of J.W. Mushet & Co., and he felt able to criticise Hofmeyr from within the Party, criticism which he delivered with considerable tact. He first said the budget was good. He said that the Minister had agreed that the burden on industry was too heavy, and that the Excess Profits Duty had at times fallen unjustly; he had further agreed that after the war was over, he would redress these inequities. Mushet urged Hofmeyr not to wait but to set up a committee forthwith to investigate the taxation of industry, and to give it some executive powers. He assured Hofmeyr that every pound he surrendered would soon be worth five. He concluded with an embarrassing tribute. He called Hofmeyr a great War Minister, one of the great Finance Ministers of the war period. He said,

(He has got us the money and when the bills fell due the cash was there to pay. I submit that this record of ours in South Africa is something that should make every true South African proud, proud, proud.)*

Werth, the Nationalist Party's shadow Minister of Finance, said that van der Bijl had shown courage in criticising Hofmeyr. He supported van der Bijl's contention that Hofmeyr was doing harm to the country's future. He told the joke about the English-speaking man who said that Hofmeyr was always going about with his conscience in one hand and his resignation in the other, and should be had up for indecent exposure.

□ (If I may be so bold as to give the Minister a modest piece of advice, it is this - don't try and always deliver sermons. If there is a good thing you want to do, do it. One just and good action is worth more than a hundred sermons.**

+*HANSARD, Vol ⁴⁷ 50 Col. 2343 et seq.
 **HANSARD, Vol ⁴⁷ 50 Col. 2327.



Hofmeyr might have snorted, but it would not have been with pleasure. He regarded such speeches as impertinent, as he did the speech of S. E. Warren, M.P. for Swellendam, who was annoyed with Hofmeyr for introducing a tax on fortified and sparkling wines, for his constituency was wine-producing. Warren said,

'The only consolation, the only light in the darkness, is the fact that the Minister is not married, so there is no likelihood of our having to put up with his offspring in days to come.*

Hofmeyr's reply was lengthy. He dealt particularly with the criticisms of the Excess Profit Duty. In the year ended March 31, 1941, the tax had brought in £2,600,000. In 1942 it had brought in £7,500,000, in 1943, £11,900,000, in 1944, £13,600,000. The figures therefore do not show a falling off in productivity, he said. Hofmeyr clearly thought that the country was expanding fast enough, and his critics thought that it should be expanding faster. They thought Hofmeyr should be raising money by other means, but they never were helpful in telling him what these were. Between Hofmeyr and them there was little hope of reconciliation, and they thought him arrogantly stubborn.

The inward truth did not come out. Hofmeyr was growing sick and tired of budgeting, he was sick and tired of being Minister of Finance. No man could hide from himself that some of these criticisms of his policies contained personal barbs. He had stood up for what he thought was right, and people suggested he was unctuous. He was physically tired too. In April Smuts went off to London again, and Hofmeyr again became the Acting Prime Minister.

*HANSARD, Vol 47-50, Col. 2338.

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In the heady air of London Smuts hatched a startling idea. He called to Hofmeyr:

□ 'In view of our manpower position and prospect of very heavy fighting in Italy where our 6th Division has gone, I have in principle agreed to Coloured fighting brigade being formed from our Coloured battalions in Middle East. That will largely solve our manpower problem in case war is unduly prolonged. Matter being examined by Defence Department and I hope my colleagues will give sympathetic political consideration)*

Thought
It is highly improbable that Smuts would ever have conceived in South Africa of such a plan. In the sober air of Cape Town his colleagues turned down the idea unanimously. Hofmeyr drafted a note to Smuts in his own handwriting. He wrote:

□ It is considered that we are bound by assurances given in Parliament not to arm non-Europeans save in last resort of direct threat to Union itself. Political repercussions of going back on that would be serious and it would probably be necessary to secure approval of Parliament for change of policy. Apart from that we feel that long-range consequences of Coloured men being asked to do fighting job for which we have been unable to find white men would be considerable. Any good done by making 5000 more fighting men available would be out of proportion to ultimate harm....

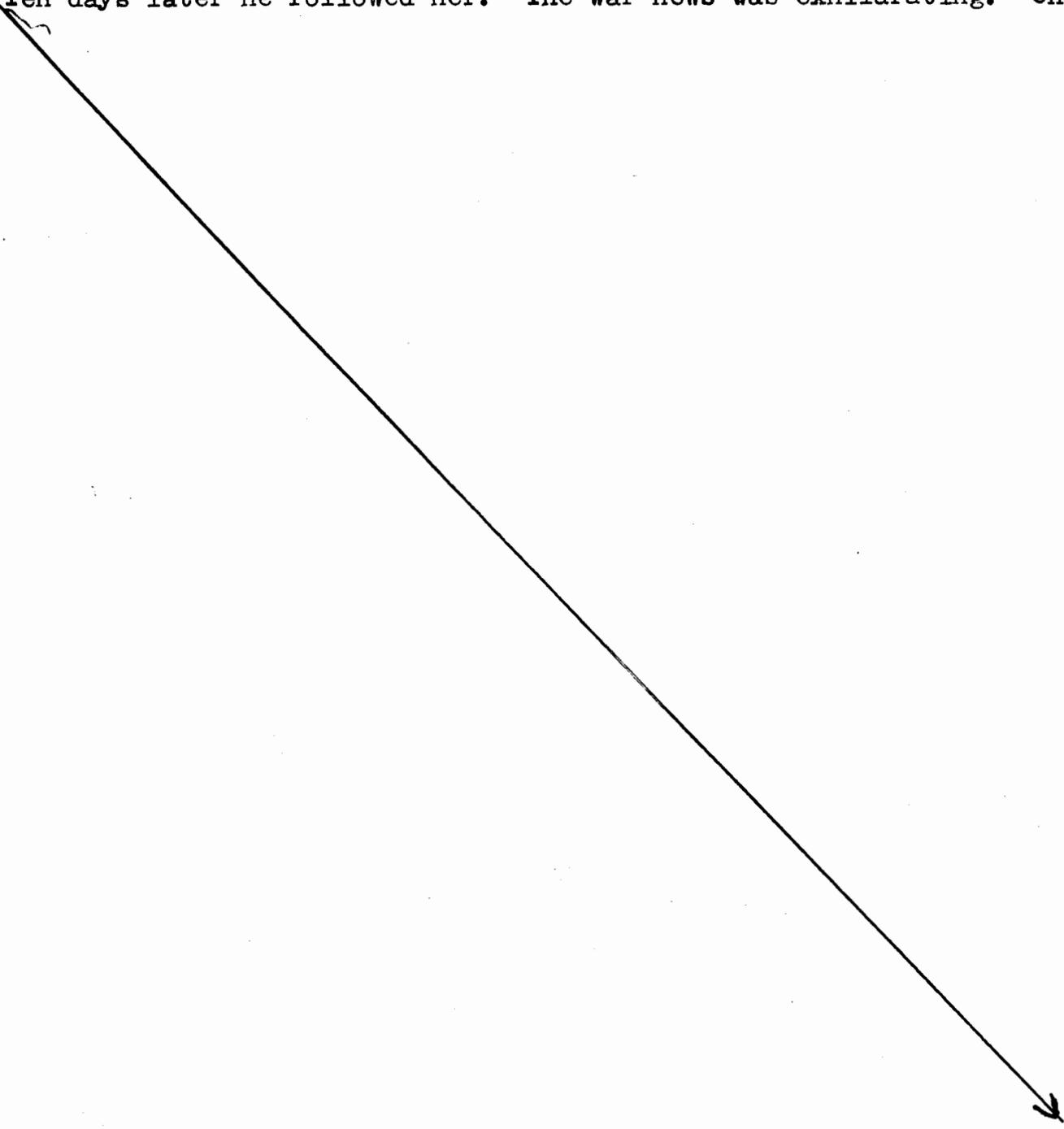
What did the Cabinet fear? They feared exactly what Malan feared, that if you let non-white men fight for the country, you would soon have to give them greater rights. And they feared something else too, that if a United Party Government armed Coloured soldiers, Malan would get more votes. Again one can see clearly the dilemma of both Hofmeyr and Smuts.

It was in the year of 1944 that many of Hofmeyr's friends noted a change in him, in that he appeared to grow more humble and approachable. Kilpin for one observed it, and noted that he was not now so easily offended if people went to Smuts when they should first have come to him, or if Smuts saw people alone when Hofmeyr considered he should have been there also. It was almost as though, now that he had decided that he would not lift a finger to become Prime Minister, he found no further need for manoeuvring. Kilpin also noted

*Telegram sent on May 1, 1944, *Hofmeyr papers.* ~~from High Commissioner, London to Secretary for External Affairs, Cape Town, but in fact from Smuts to Hofmeyr. This was as far as I knew the only secret official document among the Hofmeyr papers.~~

— that Hofmeyr seemed to be less inclined to jump on mistakes in that deflating way of his, not brutal, but definitely chilling.

The session dragged on, and for the first time Hofmeyr persuaded his mother to leave Cape Town early, and get away from the cold wetness of the Peninsula to the dryness of the highveld. He wanted to get back too, to their own home, and a less arduous life. Ten days later he followed her. The war news was exhilarating. On



June 16, Allied forces landed in Normandy; an attempt was made by Germans to assassinate Hitler. It looked certain that the Germans would soon be expelled from Italy, and the Japanese from the Philippines. These events were a tonic to Hofmeyr. What was more, the Pretoria weather was wonderful, and he reported to Underhill on July 23, that the sun had not been obscured for five minutes since the month began. Smuts wrote optimistically from London, confident that the war would end before the year was out. He also wrote sympathetically;*

□ 'Your session has lasted far beyond my worst anticipation as the opposition looked tired when I left. They must have got their second wind thereafter, and I felt sorry for you and my other colleagues who had to bear the brunt of this long session. However you got through all that lengthy programme of important measures and I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your patient endurance. I hope you will have a bit of a rest before plunging into the arrears of office work at Pretoria.'*

Strong words those - 'I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your patient endurance.' Yet they also had an ambiguity not intended by Smuts, like the testimonial written by a professor for a mediocre student, 'I cannot speak too highly of Mr. X.' Perhaps it was Smuts's weakness that he could not tell how grateful he was. Mrs. Hofmeyr, watching her son closely, thought Smuts was ungrateful. One thing she was thankful for - her son was much fitter than he had ever been in 1943. Hofmeyr began to look forward to the end of the war, and wrote to Underhill with great restraint:**

□ 'One of the things to which I look forward in the post-war world is the possibility of visiting your part of the world again. It is now more than 15 years since my last visit, and the old association could do with a little refurbishing.'**

King was still writing about Bicester, marriage, and the camp that he and Hofmeyr would enjoy at Wytham. He wrote:***

'You and I seem to be too loyal to home ties and too much of idealists to get married, probably a little too cautious as well.'

*Smuts to Hofmeyr, June 8, 1944; **Hofmeyr to Underhill July 23 1944

*** 20.4.1944.

But you are still comparatively young and very desirable to some South African belles and widows (beware of widows). I am looking to you to set a lead, being the elder, and I will consider flying to South Africa to act as best man (if you will forward the necessary fare).

Hofmeyr replied:

(I was glad to note your reminiscences of my visits to Bicester and Weston, also of our venturesome canoeings on the Thames, when I taught you to sing 'Mush, mush'. These reminiscences take us back 29 years now - we are getting old.)

As for matrimony, Hofmeyr wrote, they could both start considering it after the Wytham camp.**

Meanwhile speculation about the succession continued. At the end of the 1944 session Kilpin wrote in his diary that 'it was plain to all that if anyone had to take Smuts's place, it would be Hofmeyr'. There were persistent rumours that big business wanted Havenga brought into the United Party and into the Cabinet, so that he could take over from Smuts. Gerald Orpen, director of the CAPE TIMES, wrote to Hofmeyr asking whether the irrepressible Conroy, whose hobby it was to inflame the powerful Dutch Reformed Church, could not be stopped from saying that the CAPE TIMES wanted Havenga as the next Prime Minister. Otherwise, wrote Orpen, the CAPE TIMES would be compelled to attack Conroy, and thus bring the whole question of the leadership into the open, which would not be good for the party. J.A. Gray, the editor of SOUTH AFRICA, a review published in London, wrote to assure Hofmeyr that John Martin, the most powerful figure in the mining industry, was supporting him for the Prime-Ministership. Gray wrote, 'Havenga has been written off.'

Barlow announced as a fact in his paper ARTHUR BARLOW'S WEEKLY, that Hofmeyr would be the next Prime Minister, and that Colin Steyn would cordially support him. Barlow wrote an open letter to Hofmeyr, saying that while he was not the most wonderful politician (or financier) in the world, he was an outstanding parliamentarian, a genius of a kind, and a leader among men, and that he was quite suitable for the job. But he gave Hofmeyr a warning. He wrote:

□ 'But what of Commerce and Industry?

~~*King to Hofmeyr, April 20, 1944. **Hofmeyr to King, June 11, 1944.~~

~~Gray to Hofmeyr~~
* September 1, 1944.

- ☐ 'And what of Hendrik van der Bijl? Hennie still "owes you one" you know, and Hennie is a powerful Mandarin these days.
- ☐ 'But no one better than that Pooh Bah, that able Afrikaner (American Accent), Doctor of Escom, Iscor, I.D.C. and many other undertakings, knows how to play his cards well but if you stroke his fur the right way he will be loyal and will stand by you to the end.
- ☐ 'But look out for Hennie.*

Barlow's estimate of Hofmeyr's prospects as Prime Minister was very sound. He wrote:

- ☐ 'The Backveld will call you a Kaffir Boetie.
- ☐ Natal Indians will garland you....
- ☐ Natal Europeans will throw Stinkblaar bouquets, at you.
- ☐ The Churches will call you blessed.
- ☐ John Martin will smile upon you.
- ☐ And the Captains of Industry will -
- ☐ well what do you think they will do?
- ☐ Look out for them.**

Barlow ended with the promise, but we shall be by your side.

Smuts's talk of a break for Hofmeyr's proved not to be empty. When he returned from England he suggested that Hofmeyr should fly to Egypt and Italy to visit the South African troops, and incidentally get a bit of a break from the pressure of things here.³ There is no record of Smuts's reasons. Undoubtedly he wanted Hofmeyr to have a break. He probably thought that Hofmeyr ought to see something of the war effort for which he had worked so unceasingly. Some thought he wanted Hofmeyr to see something of the world, so that his academic approach⁴ could be enlivened by the spice of war,

*Arthur's Barlow's Weekly, August 5, 1944. The last sentence was in Afrikaans, ~~and read~~ 'Maar pasop vir Hennie.'

**The Backveld is the white farming countryside. A kaffirboetie is a negrophillist. A stinkblaar is a weed with an unpleasant smell. John Martin here stands for the Mining Industry.

³ Hofmeyr to Underhill, November 19, 1944.

⁴ Smuts's own words, according to Henry Cooper, though not used of this occasion.

masculinity, and a few oaths. It is unlikely that Smuts could have entertained so naive a hope; at times no doubt Hofmeyr irritated him, but no one knew better than Smuts his qualities of tenacity, courage, and integrity, and his sheer administrative brilliance. It was said - with no evidence but hearsay - that the Army wanted to make Hofmeyr a Brigadier-General for a fortnight, and that Hofmeyr snorted at the suggestion. He wanted to go North as what he was, a plain civilian, but the Army insisted that he should wear a khaki bush-shirt and long khaki trousers. For a man so indifferent to dress, Hofmeyr was remarkably upset about it. Cope went to wish him luck on the evening of his departure, and Hofmeyr kept referring disparagingly to the rigout. He was especially angry about his cap, which had a flap to protect the back of the head and neck. He kept flipping at it petulantly and saying, it makes me look like a monkey. While up North he took good care not to be photographed wearing it.

(See illustration facing page 100)

Hofmeyr wrote to Underhill 129 November.

I spent 4 or 5 days in Egypt, Cairo, Alexandria, and the Suez Canal, touching at Nairobi and Khartoum on the way up. Then I had 5 or 6 days in Italy, touching down at Malta on the way across, and incidentally, enjoying a splendid view of Syracuse from the air, which awakened memories of Thucydides VI and VII. I met a lot of interesting people, Nafhas Pasha and some of his Ministers in Egypt, also Lord Moyne, now unhappily no more, Prince Umberto, and one or two leading Italian officials in Rome. Harold Macmillan (with whom I spent a night in Naples - you remember him at Balliol, no doubt), L.S. Amery, Oliver Lyttelton, General Maitland Wilson, and General Alexander. In some ways I felt that Alexander was the greatest of them all - a man with a fine spirit and attitude of mind, and a great deal of strength on reserve.

Lyttelton

Hofmeyr was paying an extraordinary tribute to Alexander. He seldom spoke in such a way about any person. The writer does not remember anyone about whom Hofmeyr spoke so unqualifiedly. Nor was he usually so ready to pass judgment after so short an acquaintance. Nor was he usually so good an observer of persons. The fact -

~~*A bush shirt is really a jacket, with two side pockets, and two breast pockets, an open collar, and a belt.~~

~~**Hofmeyr to Underhill, November 19, 1944.~~



was that Alexander had the qualities that Hofmeyr could most easily recognise, because they were the qualities that he knew best; they were in fact the same that Smuts saw in Hofmeyr, tenacity, courage, and integrity. But Alexander had one other quality that Hofmeyr did not possess, a massive self-confidence, devoid of arrogance, some deep certitude of self that is mysterious, but certainly has something to do with childhood. One was not jealous of it, nor was one angered by it, because it had no element of aggressiveness; but

when Hofmeyr spoke of it, he was almost wistful.

Hofmeyr visited the Vatican, and could have been received by the Pope had he wished to; but this most tolerant of Protestants decided against it. Instead he went to see the Mayor. Wherever he could he visited the U.D.F.I., the Union Defence Force Institutes, and saw their recreation huts, their houses, and their travelling canteens. The U.D.F.I. was a semi-military organisation, controlled by the YMCA and Toc H in South Africa, and Hofmeyr was the National Chairman of both. He visited the 6th Division and the South African Air Force. For pleasure he visited Pompeii and Herculaneum, known to him from boyhood. He returned home on ~~September 23~~, having been away sixteen days, the longest holiday he had had since his trip to India in 1936. He had travelled 13,000 miles. He wrote to King that it was strenuous, with not much sleep, but that he was all the better for the change. He would liked to have flown another six hours, and visited England, but he could not have returned immediately. It would have added another four days to his holiday, and this man who had hardly had a holiday in eight years, and who had carried burdens as heavy as any other of his countrymen, decided that he must go back to his duties. He returned to find his mother fit and well; he wrote to King, She is very remarkable at almost 81.

30 September,

So ended a strange adventure. It was proof of a noble man's humility. Hofmeyr was not a soldier though there may have been times when he had wished he was one. He was perhaps the next Prime Minister, and if he were, he would follow three men who had all been generals. On his trip to the North he was surrounded by generals, whom he treated with respect; they in their turn treated him with respect, as indeed they should have done. The common soldiers did not ovate him, as they would have done to Smuts; but they knew he was coming, and they treated him with respect too. If they had ovated him, it would have been an experience without parallel in his life. What would he have done? Would he have taken it impassively, inwardly elated, or appalled? Or would the ovation have broken down the barriers of a lifetime, and released the flood of emotions of which men had only caught glimpses? Might it not have reduced him to uncontrollable tears? How fascinating and how useless to ask such questions! Yet some there were among those common soldiers who greeted him, whose hearts warmed to him. They were those to whom this war was only part of an unending struggle, to whom this short, heavy man in the khaki bush-shirt and the long trousers was the bravest general of them all.

B.J. Olivier, writing in that homely South African paper, THE OUTSPAN, paid him a tribute.

△ 'If he only knew it, this was the stiffest

~~*Hofmeyr to King, September 30, 1944.~~

examination of his career. He didn't know it - or if he knew it, he didn't show it - and the result was yet another First Class pass to put in the bag.*

And we can say, with perhaps a greater knowledge of him, that he did know it and he didn't show it.

*The OUTSRAN

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