

Last Of War Leaders Falls In General Smuts

His Defeat in Recent Elections Completes Elimination from Active Public Life of Every Considerable Figure in Group that Made Up Paris Peace Conference

By FRANK H. SIMONDS

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Washington, June 27.—The defeat of General Jan Smuts in the recent South African elections practically completes the elimination of the considerable figures of the Paris Conference of five years ago. Death or political disaster, and in the case of Mr. Wilson both, has overtaken practically every man of even inconsiderable rank in that momentous gathering.

Smuts was really important largely because he was an easy weapon at the hand of Lloyd George, who was eager to prevent Hughes of Australia from occupying anything like the role his contributions during the conflict seem to warrant. Thus very early in the Paris sessions it was Smuts who was called upon to do the important tasks, just as he had been sent on the notorious excursion to Switzerland during the conflict itself.

At Paris Smuts, despite the later renown, gave little evidence of any liberal spirit. He was responsible for the inclusion of war pensions in the sum total of reparations, one of the main causes for the undue expansion of this total, and he acquired his reputation for moderation, such as it was, after the treaty had been made by being one of its first outspoken critics.

Smuts's real importance, however, has lain in the fact that he, like Botha, accepted the results of the Boer War and entered into the task of making South Africa in a spirit of cooperation with the British population. A shrewd politician, although lacking the real charm and popularity of Botha, he was of utmost service in keeping South Africa in line during the war, when the Herzog rebellion threatened to rouse the Afrianders against British rule. Just how loyal to the empire Smuts has ever been is a matter of interesting conjecture. His British critics have more than once said that the chief difference between Smuts and Herzog lay in the question of time, that both wanted a South Africa free from British rule but Smuts believed in waiting until the obvious benefits of British association could be had, while Herzog was for immediate independence.

Many South Africans, on the other hand, that is, many of the Dutch, never forgave Smuts for joining the conquerors after the war and assisting the British in crushing De Wet and Herzog in the World War time. His political power rested upon the support of the British element and a minority of the Dutch. But this power was fatally compromised when the British element was divided by the creation of a Labor party. In the last South African Parliament Smuts barely held a majority, but it was too insecure to last.

Now the latest elections, once more dominated by fusion, by the bloc system, having given to the combination of the Dutch nationalists and the Labor party a decisive majority, the Dutch Party alone counting more seats than Smuts's group, and Herzog will replace the colleague of Lloyd George at Paris. Obviously the triumph of Herzog, who openly advocates complete separation from the British Empire, is a severe blow at British pride, as London comment shows.

How far it is a forecast of ultimate secession or separation of South Africa is open to question, since the fundamental basis of the Labor-Dutch combination was an agreement that the secession question should not be raised for five years nor ever save by a plebiscite. Moreover, Labor, which is largely made up of English speaking voters might be expected to break away from its present allies when that issue is raised.

The real factor, however, which divides Dutch on the issue of separation, or at least prevents any actual serious break between the Union of South Africa and the British crown, is the danger which threatens from the enormous black population,

which outnumbers the white elements in a proportion of three or four to one. A split between the British and Dutch factions might easily give the blacks an opportunity which there is no certainty they would not grasp.

Meantime South Africa, like Australia, like Canada, like Britain itself, like France and the United States for that matter, has broken away from the war time leadership and Smuts is one of the last victims of a world wide movement. Massey in New Zealand is almost the survivor of that group within the British Empire which included Hughes of Australia, Borden of Canada and, in a sense, John Redmond of Ireland.

Today Ireland is a free state, South Africa has chosen as its next premier a man who during the war took up arms against British rule, and Canada has not only dismissed Borden but is at the present moment in controversy with the Mother Country over the treaty of Lausanne, flatly refusing to ratify it because Canada had no share in the making of it. Since Britain, itself has a prime minister who in the war period was a pacifist and opposed British participation, the transformations in the Dominions are less significant, yet they must profoundly interest any student of the problem.

of British imperialism for the future.

I remember during the war, when the late General Botha led a South African contingent to the conquest of German East Africa, the late Colonel Roosevelt, with whom I was lunching said, with characteristic emphasis—"That means that in a future not very distant South Africa will be a Afriander." He meant that the campaign was a demonstration of the purpose of the erstwhile Boers, now fighting under the British flag, to conquer the German holdings, but to possess them when the war was over and when British aid would be no longer needed.

How accurate this forecast may prove, I do not venture to guess, but at least the overthrow of Smuts and the appearance of Herzog as prime minister, an open leader of the party which advocates secession as its major purpose, gives point to the Colonel's prophecy.

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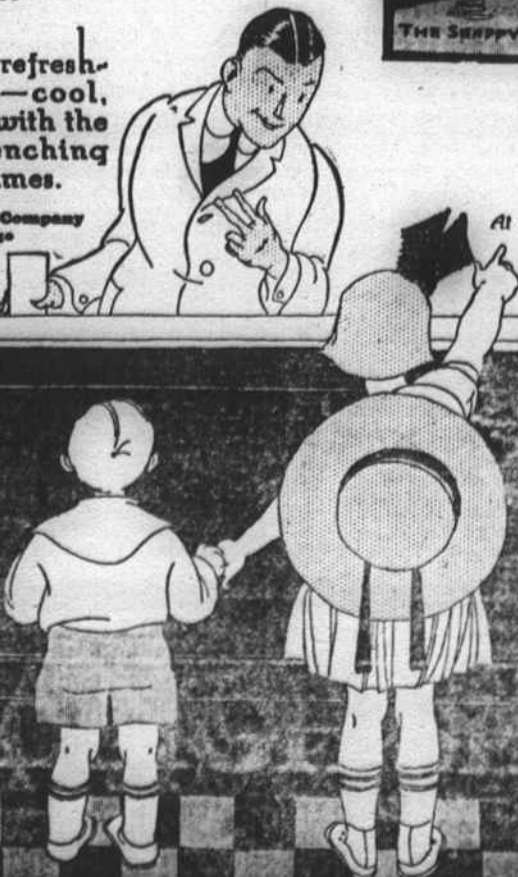
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